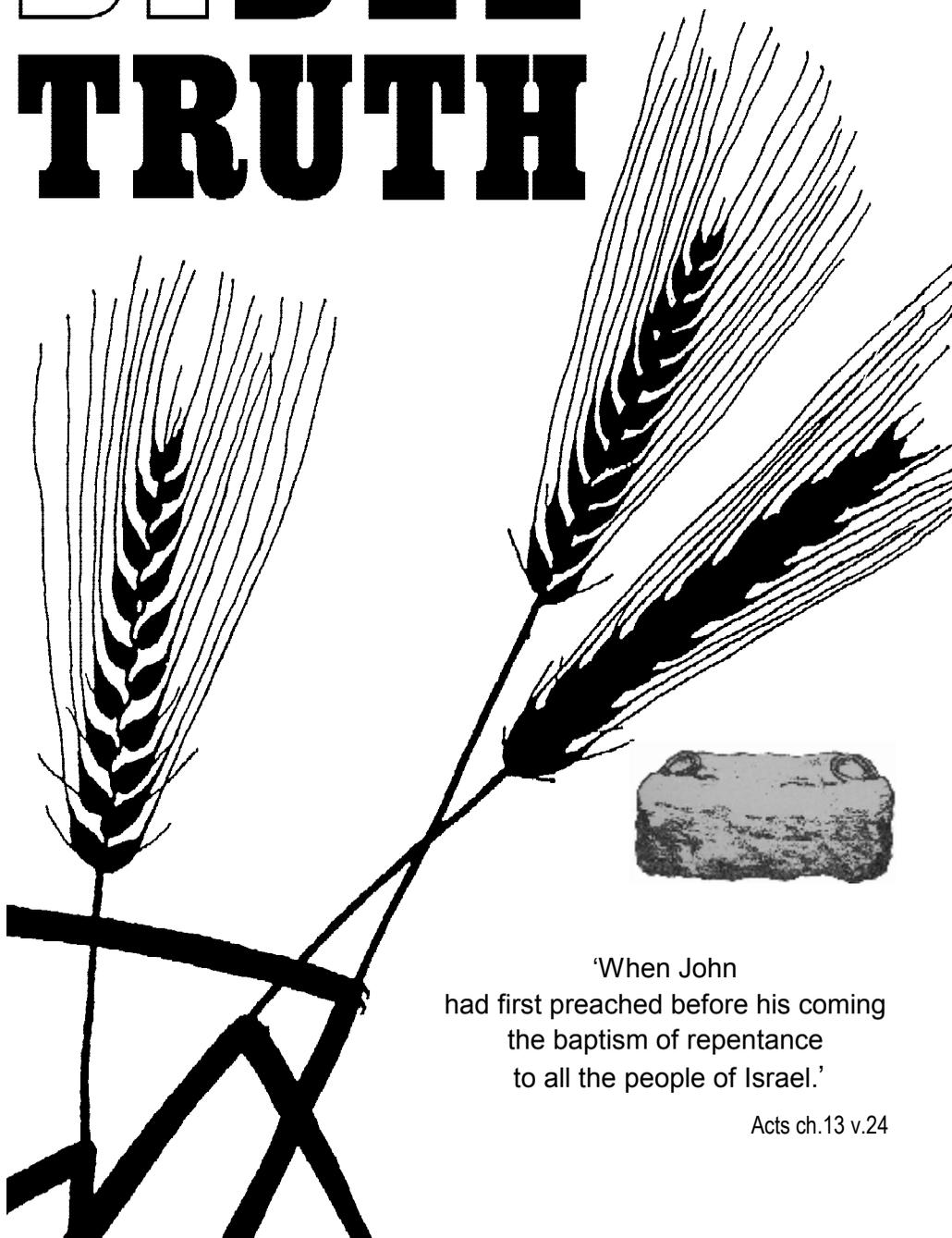


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‘When John
had first preached before his coming
the baptism of repentance
to all the people of Israel.’

Acts ch.13 v.24



The importance of St Peter's Cornhill, London and King Lucius

by Paul Boyd-Lee

In the 2nd century, according to legend, there was a certain King (Saint) Lucius who was one that introduced Christianity to Britain. Though there has been some dispute over whether he really existed in Britain, a number of records accredit him with this ministry.

'... the holy Eleutherus ruled the Roman Church, Lucius, a British king, sent him a letter, asking to be made a Christian by his direction. This pious request was quickly granted, and the Britons received the Faith and held it peacefully in all its purity and fullness until the time of the Emperor Diocletian.'

Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, ch.4

In a recap at the end of the same History, Bede states,

'In the year from the incarnation of our Lord 167, Eleutherius, being made bishop at Rome, governed the Church most gloriously fifteen years. Lucius, king of Britain, writing to him, requested to be made a Christian, and succeeded in obtaining his request'.
ch.24

William of Malmesbury in the early 1120s wrote of the same event in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum' Deeds of the Kings of England*) whilst also making mention of the ancient church at Glastonbury. At about the same time Llandaff Diocese wrote up the event in the *Liber Landavensis (Book of Llandaff)*, as well as mentioning two other contemporaries of Lucius who became Christians, namely Elfan and Medwy who became a bishop and a doctor respectively.

Another author, though perhaps not so reliable is Geoffrey of Monmouth who covered the event in his *Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain)*. Therein are mentioned another couple of names, both religious doctors, Faganus and Duvianus. In addition Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions Lucius' death and says he was buried in the church of his first See. Elsewhere manuscripts record that, as well as heading an early king list, King Lucius founded several churches including a cathedral on the site of where St Peter's church now stands. One might deduce therefore that at some time the king lay beneath the present St Peter's church.

Lucius is also described as a saint and perhaps this arises from a story telling how he later abdicated the throne and travelled to Switzerland as a missionary, where he won a martyr's crown.

Though these accounts make up a romantic story, nevertheless they do add weight to the idea that Christianity was followed in Britain at a very early date and the site of St Peter's is thought to be one of the places where the Gospel was proclaimed. Interestingly, the church stands on the



highest point of the City and so would have been prominent in olden times. It is found on the south side of Cornhill, one of the streets radiating out from the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange road junction. This site of antiquity is in the heart of the City of London and is easily missed because it lies behind the main facade of the street though its little steeple can be seen towering above the surrounding buildings. To reach it one needs to pass through St Peter's Alley which opens into a delightful landscaped courtyard within which sits the church. Beside the door a bench conveniently allows one to rest a while.

The earlier church was mostly destroyed in the Great Fire of London (1666) and the current building was based upon designs by Sir Christopher Wren. Inside is one particular feature of importance and that is an ancient framed bronze plaque relating the story of King Lucius. It is not easy to find as it hangs in the vestry which is rather dark. Unfortunately the church is only open for functions so the general public are unlikely to find this treasure. However, if you want to see it you may be fortunate to be granted access by enquiring at the church office situated at St Helen's Church, Bishopsgate.



The plaque is shown below but because some of the text is difficult to read a transcription follows.

'BE IT KNOWN TO ALL MEN THAT IN THE YEARE OF OUR LORD GOD 179 LUCIUS THE FIRST CHRISTIAN KING OF THIS LAND, THEN CALLED BRITAINNE, FOUNDED THE FIRST CHURCH IN LONDON THAT IS TO SAY THE CHURCH OF ST PETER UPON CORNHILL AND HE FOUNDED THERE AN ARCHBISHOPS' SEE AND MADE THAT CHURCH THE METROPOLITANE AND CHIEFE CHURCH OF THIS KINGDOME AND SO IT INDURED THE SPACE OF 400 YEARES AND MORE UNTO THE COMING OF ST AUSTIN THE APOSTLE OF ENGLAND THE WHICH WAS SENT INTO THIS LAND BY ST GREGORIE THE DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH IN THE TIME OF KING ETHELBERT AND THEN WAS THE ARCHBISHOP'S SEE ST PAUL REMOVED FROM THE FORESAID CHURCH OF ST PETER UPON CORNHILL UNTO DOROBERNIA THAT IS NOW CALLED CANTERBURY AND THERE IT REMAINETH TO THIS DAY AND MILLET A MONKE WHICH CAME INTO THIS LAND WITH ST AUSTIN, HEE MADE THE FIRST BISHOP OF LONDON AND HIS SEE WAS

MADE IN PAUL'S CHURCH AND THIS LUCIUS KING WAS THE FIRST FOUNDER OF ST PETER'S CHURCH UPON CORNHILL AND HE REIGNED KING IN THIS LAND AFTER BRUTE 1245 YEARES. AND IN THE YEARE OF OUR LORD GOD 124 LUCIUS WAS CROWNED KING AND THE YEARES OF HIS REIGNE WERE 77 YEARES AND HEE WAS BURIED (AFTER SOME CHRONICLES) AT LONDON AND AFTER SOME CHRONICLES HEE WAS BURIED AT GLOUCESTER IN THAT PLACE WHERE THE ORDER OF ST FRANCIS STANDETH NOW.

