

Christopher Wren Biography

Christopher Wren

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Biography

Christopher Wren, best known as the architect who restored most of London's churches after a devastating fire, was also a skilled geometer, and did valuable work in the study of speed and the cycloid.

Wren was born on October 20, 1632, in East Knoyle, Wiltshire, England. His father, also named Christopher, was chaplain to Charles I. Even as a child young Christopher showed an aptitude for science, drawing, and building mechanical objects. He went to Westminster School and then to Wadham College, Oxford. He received his B.A. in 1651 and his M.A. in 1654. He excelled in his studies, including anatomy and astronomy. After graduation he was appointed a professor of astronomy in 1657 at Gresham College.

Wren's achievements were numerous. As a mathematician, he ranked with **Christiaan Huygens**. In 1658, he rectified the cycloid; that is, he found a straight line equal to an arc of that curve. He conducted experiments with pendulums and also devised a way in which to calculate the final speed of an object after impact, given its size and initial speed before impact.

His work with **geometry**, as well as his skill as a draftsman, made Wren an ideal architect, although he was not interested in architecture until he was over 30. His only journey out of England was in 1665, when he traveled to France to study building designs.

The following year a great fire destroyed much of London, including 87 churches. Wren was given the job of designing new churches, including the great Cathedral of St. Paul. He created a variety of ingenious designs for the new buildings, in which he used the baroque designs he had seen in France but adapted for English taste.

Wren was named surveyor general in 1669. That year he married Faith Coghill; together they had two sons, and after her death he remarried Jane Fitzwilliam, with whom he had another son and a daughter. Wren was knighted in 1673, and was among the founders of the Royal Society.

Wren died February 25, 1723. He is buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.