



## Portrait of the Month: April Revd. Peter Lorimer (1812-1879)

by John Pettie (1839-1893)

As first Principal of the English Presbyterian College in London, 1878-1879, Lorimer taught Hebrew, Chaldee, Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Biblical Exegesis - on a salary of £300 a year.



Peter Lorimer, by John Pettie

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The eldest son of a master builder, Peter Lorimer was born in Edinburgh in 1812 and educated at George Heriot Hospital and then at the University there – his classes being taught by the famous Dr Chalmers.

He was called by the congregation at River Terrace in Islington, London, in 1837. When he moved to London, although he was only 24 years old, Lorimer quickly became an influential and respected figure in the Church. WB Shaw describes how, as the Free Church broke away from the Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843, “the commanding figure of Lorimer, assisted by his great physical strength, [...] cowed the Moderate clerk” so that Lorimer could physically “wrest from him the records of the Scots Presbytery of London”.

In 1842, the Synod of the newly-formed Presbyterian Church in England asked

that a College be established “as speedily as possible”, where men could receive, “at a moderate charge, the benefits of a literary, philosophical, and theological education, to qualify them for the office of Holy Ministry in the Presbyterian Church” (1842, p33).

The new English Presbyterian College (which later became Westminster College) was formed in 1844, and in 1845, Lorimer was appointed one of the two first Professors: Professor of Hebrew and Biblical Criticism, teaching Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac (an offshoot of Aramaic, and a major Biblical literary language), and Chaldee (the language of the Chaldeans, not

dissimilar to Aramaic) – and also exegetical theology, or the critical analysis of texts. His salary was £300 a year.

He was elected Moderator of the Synod in 1851, and was appointed first Principal of the College in 1878. He died suddenly in Whitehaven, where he had travelled to preach, in July 1879; and was buried in Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh.

Portrait by [John Pettie](#) (1839-1893).

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Helen Weller, Archivist  
2020

#### **Bibliography and Further Reading:**

“A Biography from the Fasti of our Church”, by WB Shaw, *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 1914-19, p135-6

*Minutes of the Proceedings of the 1842 Synod of the Presbyterian Church in England* (Manchester, 1842)

“Chapter VII: The College” in *Digest of the Actings & Proceedings of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church In England 1836-1866*, by Leone Levi (c.1869) p101-26.

With thanks to Diana Paulding for additional research.