

St. Paul's Cathedral: Sir Christopher Wren's Masterwork [B2]

Neanche la grandiosità dei moderni grattacieli della City può sfidare lo splendido capolavoro di Sir Christopher Wren, scomparso trecento anni fa. Questo eclettico inglese progettò una delle pietre miliari dello stile architettonico anglicano, un edificio che impose la sua presenza nell'orizzonte di Londra.



In the heart of London, surrounded by [skyscrapers](#), is the magnificent St. Paul's Cathedral, an Anglican place of [worship](#) designed by celebrated architect Sir Christopher Wren. The building is 158 metres wide and 111 metres high, and its gigantic [dome](#) is one of the world's [largest](#). It was built in the late 17th century on the site of a church largely destroyed in the Great Fire of London. At its completion, in 1710, the new cathedral had cost £1,095,556 (around £174 million today!)

OLD ST. PAUL'S

St. Paul's [stands](#) on Ludgate Hill, the highest point in the City of London. In 104, Pope Gregory, Saint Mellitus and Saint Augustine arrived from Rome

and established a Catholic cathedral there. In 1087, a more stable cathedral was constructed that stood for almost six hundred years. By the mid-14th century, it was one of the world's longest, had one of the tallest [spires](#) and some of the [finest stained glass](#). Some of the buildings in the [churchyard](#) were sold as shops or rented out to printers and booksellers.

UN-ENGLISH

Old St. Paul's was in severe [disrepair](#) even before the 1666 Great Fire [gutted](#) the city's medieval centre. Wren was thirty-three years old and near the beginning of his career as an architect when his office was [commissioned](#) to build fifty-one [replacement](#) churches and the cathedral. It was a divisive time in history; the Civil War placed Protestants and Catholics [at odds](#) with one another. So, when St. Paul's was finally completed, while some people loved it (as one commentator exclaimed, "Without, within, below, above, the eye is filled with [unrestrained delight!](#)"), others were suspicious: "There was an air of Popery about the gilded capitals, the heavy arches ... They were unfamiliar, un-English..."

ITALIAN INSPIRATION

[To be fair](#), there was quite a lot "un-English" about the building; [breathtakingly](#) modern for the time, it combined neoclassical, Gothic and baroque elements [borrowed](#) from Italian architecture. Wren incorporated Corinthian columns and towers in the facade, and the cathedral's innovative three [nested domes](#) — an [outer dome](#), [a steeper innerdome](#), and a hidden middle [dome](#) — were inspired by Renaissance trends in Catholic Italy. The [dome](#) has three galleries: the [Whispering Gallery](#), situated thirty metres above the cathedral floor; the Stone Gallery; and the Golden Gallery, which offers panoramic views of central London.

IN THE CRYPT

There were structural challenges in building a large cathedral on the [clay soil](#) of London. For support, Wren built an enormous crypt that extends

under the entire building. Eight [piers](#), double the usual number, distribute the weight [evenly](#) on the foundation. A team of designers, [craftsmen](#) and builders helped complete St. Paul's — from its design to the carpentry, the decorative flooring and the [ironwork](#). Sir James Thornhill was [commissioned](#) to paint eight scenes from St. Paul's life for the [dome's](#) interior. He worked while suspended more than fifty metres above the ground.

INTERIOR DESIGN

There are over six million pieces of mosaic in St. Paul's and sculptures dedicated to religious figures, as well as artists, writers, [clergy](#), military men and scientists of national importance. One commemorates former Prime Minister the Duke of Wellington, and another national hero of the Napoleonic Wars, Admiral Horatio Nelson; both men are [buried](#) in the crypt, along with artists Joseph Turner and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Nobel-Prize winning scientist Sir Alexander Fleming. The cathedral is also home to an enormous sixteen-tonne bell called Great Paul; a Grand Organ with 7,256 pipes, once played by composers Mendelssohn and Handel, and St. Paul's Cathedral [Choir](#), regarded as one of the best in the world.

ALL FAITHS AND NONE

Although it was the location for Prince Charles and Lady Diana's wedding in 1981, St. Paul's was never popular with royalty. Queen Victoria thought it "most [dreary](#), [dingy](#), and [un-devotional](#)". To make it more [sociable](#), the interior was [rearranged](#) to allow more people to participate in services underneath the [dome](#). More recently, St. Paul's has welcomed world leaders, politicians, thinkers and the public with the goal of creating a better society. Queen Elizabeth II's Golden, Diamond and Platinum Jubilees Thanksgiving services took place here; Martin Luther King stopped at the cathedral to speak before travelling to Stockholm to collect his Nobel Peace Prize in 1964; and the Dalai Lama received the Templeton Prize for philanthropy at St. Paul's in 2012. The cathedral is the [seat](#) of the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally. She emphasises its role as a space for everyone: "for reflection,

discovery, learning and debate [and] an [enduring](#) symbol of hope – for those of all faiths and none.”

BOMBINGS

St. Paul’s Cathedral was the [target](#) of two suffragette bombing attacks in 1913 and 1914 respectively, which nearly caused the destruction of the cathedral. It was damaged during the Blitz in 1940, with the first bomb destroying the high altar, and the second leaving a hole above the crypt. That the cathedral remains standing today is primarily due to the [strengthening](#) interventions carried out before 1930. In 2011, Occupy London, a global political pro-democracy movement, chose St. Paul’s as a place to camp when prevented from doing so outside the London [Stock Exchange](#). www.stpauls.co.uk

Glossary

- **unrestrained delight** = incanto infinito, godimento
- **finest** = di qualità migliore
- **gutted** = sventrare, calcinare
- **breathtakingly** = straordinariamente
- **borrowed** = prendere in prestito
- **a steeper inner dome** = una cupola interna più ripida
- **Whispering Gallery** = galleria acustica
- **clay soil** = terreno argilloso
- **ironwork** = ferro battuto
- **churchyard** = sagrato
- **disrepair** = cattivo stato
- **un-devotional** = empio
- **Choir** = coro
- **dingy** = squallido
- **commissioned** = incaricare
- **at odds** = in conflitto
- **craftsmen** = artigiani
- **dreary** = tetro
- **seat** = sede, diocesi
- **strengthening** = rinforzo
- **largest** = la più grande
- **stained glass** = vetrate
- **outer** = esterna
- **piers** = pilastri
- **enduring** = duraturo
- **target** = obiettivo
- **worship** = devozione, preghiera
- **dome** = cupola
- **Stock Exchange** = borsa valori
- **sociable** = gradevole
- **rearranged** = modificare
- **stands** = trovarsi
- **nested** = annidate, sovrapposte

- **evenly** = uniformemente
- **clergy** = clero
- **skyscrapers** = grattacieli
- **replacement** = in sostituzione
- **buried** = seppellire
- **spires** = di qualità migliore
- **To be fair** = esser sinceri