

St Dunstan-In-The-West

VOL. 1 - No. 14

THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

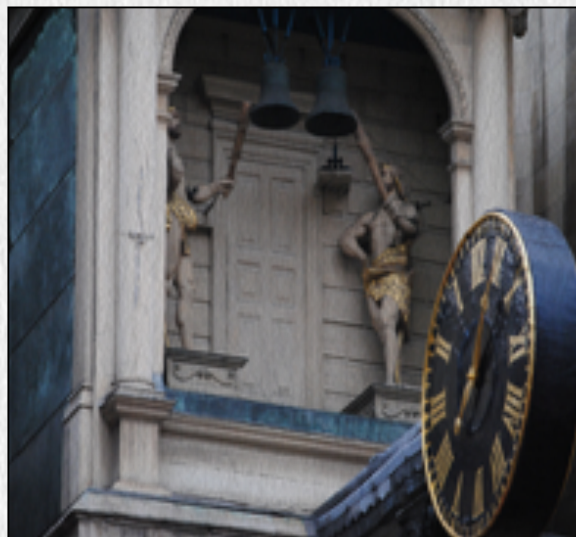
LONDON 2022

The church of St Dunstan-in-the-West is dedicated to the Anglo-Saxon saint who achieved high status in the Church as Archbishop of Canterbury but was also a renowned scholar and metalworker and became the patron saint of Goldsmiths.

As its name suggests, this is not the only City church dedicated to Dunstan. Its counterpart in the east, near the Tower of London, was gutted by bombs in World War 2 and its ruins now shelter a tranquil garden for residents and workers.

Situated at the western end of Fleet Street, St Dunstan-in-the West was originally built in the late 10th/early 11th century. It narrowly escaped the Great Fire of London in 1666, largely due to the boys of the nearby Westminster School being roused by the Dean of Westminster in the middle of the night to help extinguish the fire with buckets of water. By the 19th century, though, the church was looking a little care-worn and it was decided to rebuild. This coincided with the widening of Fleet Street to give greater ease of access to the burgeoning traffic, another victim of which, a few years later, would be the last remaining of the City's gates at Temple Bar. The new church, designed by the architect John Shaw and by his son, also John, after his death, was therefore built a little to the north of the original. It was not too badly damaged in the Blitz of 1940/41, but was restored in 1950.

The church is an octagonal building, aligned on a north-south axis, with a distinctive octagonal lantern above the square tower which still dominates the view of Fleet Street from the east. There are several other interesting features on the exterior, notably a wonderful projecting clock by Thomas Harris – said to be the first public clock in London with a minute hand – installed in 1671 to mark the church's survival of the Great Fire but removed when the church was rebuilt. It was returned in 1935 by the press baron Lord Rothermere



who rescued it after buying the former home of Lord Hertford, St Dunstan's Lodge in Regent's Park. Rothermere co-founded the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror with his brother, Lord Northcliffe, whose bust can be seen to the right of the church entrance. Above the clock, in a wooden shelter, are the figures of London's mythical giants, Gog and Magog, who strike the bells and turn their heads every quarter hour. A statue of Queen Elizabeth I, one of the oldest outdoor statues in the City and carved in her lifetime, can be seen above the vestry porch. It came from the west wall of the old Ludgate after it was torn down in the 18th century. Also from that gate and now inside the porch are the figures of the mythical sovereign, King Lud, and his two sons.

St Dunstan-in-the-West has many interesting connections with famous historical figures. William Tyndale, the translator of the Bible, preached here and the poet, John Donne, was rector while he was Dean of St Paul's. Izaak Walton, author of the 'Compleat Angler' worshipped at the church and his book was published, as was John Milton's Paradise Lost, by the printing press in the church yard. Samuel Pepys visited a number of times and records in his diary fondling the knee of a young girl sitting next to him, who responded by pricking him with a hatpin!

The church interior is a lovely surprise. Many of the old monuments from the original church still adorn the walls, but one is immediately struck by the seven recesses and particularly the elaborate Romanian iconostasis which was brought from Bucharest by then Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, in 1966 following his visit there. It reflects the Romanian Orthodox Church's adoption of the church as its London home, and altars in some of the recesses are dedicated to other Eastern European churches. The high altar in the north of the church is surmounted by stained glass windows that show St Anselm and Archbishop Langton with King John at the signing of Magna Carta; Archbishop Lanfranc; and St Dunstan himself beside a roaring fire ready to tweak the Devil's nose with red-hot tongs.



St. Dunstan-in-the-West

Additional notes

Prepared by: Anne Wightman (City of London Green Badge guide), 2022

Copyright: All material on this website is subject to our copyright. You may use any of our material under the terms of our Creative Commons – Attribution – Share Alike licence. This permits you to distribute, adapt, or build upon our work, for any purpose including commercially, as long as you (1) credit www.fleetstreetheritage.com (2) include a link where possible and (3) licence your new creation under identical terms to this.

Further Reading: Millar, Stephen, London's City Churches, 2013

Additional notes: Many of Carlile's books and pamphlets are held by the British Library.