



Image from: [Thirty-two buttresses surround the drum...](#) in *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Summary Article: **St Paul's Cathedral**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Cathedral church of the City of London, the largest Protestant church in England, and a national mausoleum second only to Westminster Abbey. An earlier Norman building, which had replaced the original Saxon church, was burned down in the Great Fire of 1666. The present cathedral, designed by Christopher Wren, was built from 1675 to 1711.

St Paul's before the great fire Tradition ascribes a temple of Diana to this site, but authentic history begins with an early 7th-century cathedral built by Ethelbert, King of Kent, with Mellitus as the first bishop of London. This building was destroyed by fire in 1087. Its replacement was not completed until 1287, and combined Norman, transitional and Early English styles. It had the tallest spire and was probably the largest church in Christendom. In the last century or so of its existence the fabric deteriorated, and Inigo Jones carried out restoration, including a new west front with a vast portico. It was largely destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, which, however, merely hastened its inevitable end or complete reconstruction. This was the 'Old St Paul's' of history. 'Paul's Walk', as the nave was known, was a secular meeting place, frequented by merchants and wits.

Wren's church After the Great Fire, Christopher Wren at first thought that St Paul's should be restored, but later agreed that a new edifice was required. From the beginning he planned to dominate the city with a great dome. His first design was for a church of a single storey in the form of a Greek cross, but it was rejected, and he submitted another design based on the orthodox cruciform plan.

Building began in 1675, the plan undergoing considerable alteration before completion in 1711. Wren achieved a magnificently successful union of Gothic plan and classic detail, and the interior is of majestic proportions and beauty. The dimensions are: length 175 m/574 ft; width at transepts, 75 m/246 ft; length of nave, 68 m/223 ft; width of nave, 37 m/121 ft; length of choir, 51 m/167 ft; height to top of cross, 111 m/364 ft. Among those assisting Wren were Nicholas Hawksmoor, Grinling Gibbons, Caius Gabriel Cibber, and Jean Tijou, the Huguenot iron worker. The furnishings include carved stalls by Grinling Gibbons, and a number of famous tombs.

The dome of St Paul's The dome is a particular feature of interest, ingeniously constructed to give a more reposeful outline than that of St Peter's in Rome, whose steeply curving ribs help support the lantern. Wren's lantern is supported on a brick cone, concealed between the inner dome and the outer, which is of wood and lead, and curves almost hemispherically. The interior of the dome is decorated with paintings (1715–20) depicting scenes from the life of St Paul by James Thornhill.

Bomb damage The choir and high altar were damaged in the German raids of 1940–41, and Wren's chapter-house was destroyed, but the bombing also cleared away many surrounding buildings to the south and east, leaving wide unobstructed views of the building.

St Paul's Cross In the northeast corner of the churchyard is St Paul's Cross, a modern structure replacing the medieval cross destroyed by Parliament in 1643. Here in medieval times and later

sermons were preached, heretics made to recant, offenders punished, and papal and other pronouncements made.

images

chancel ceiling, St Paul's Cathedral

design for St Paul's Cathedral

St Paul's Cathedral, chancel

St. Paul's Cathedral

St Paul's Cathedral

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