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The Contradictions of Saint Paul's Cathedral: An Architectural Exploration of Its Relationship with the People of London

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Abstract

Saint Paul's Cathedral is a contradiction. Beautiful and majestic, it combines an almost Catholic shape with a Protestant soul. It is one of the most powerful symbols of England, and a reason for pride for any Londoner. This paper wants to explore the architectural variations of Saint Paul's, especially before and after the Great Fire in 1666, to unveil the peculiar relationship between the cathedral and the people of London. Although St Paul's has been a constant for the Londoners, its role in their lives has not always been the same. The progressive change in people's attitude towards the cathedral went at the same pace as the alteration of the architecture of the building, which mirrored the social, political, and religious changes of the country. From being a central point of commerce and medieval social life during its Norman period and its Gothic style, the cathedral evolved into the highest symbol of religion and power and reached its peak with the design provided by Wren. Looking at the different models of Saint Paul's, from its first consecration in 604 until today, it is evident that the building has been an active player in English history, adapting itself to necessity. It witnessed the Norman Conquest, the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, and the Great Fire, and it was the symbol of the English strength and resistance in World War II. Therefore, the study of the architectural changes of Saint Paul's is the study of the city of London, its people, and some of the most significant historical events that shaped England.

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Keywords:

St Paul Cathedral; Social changes; Architectural changes; London; History; People

1. Introduction

There are few artworks that better embody the idea of British imperial power like the *Heart of the Empire* by Niels Moeller Lund (Fig 1). The painting represents a moment of dynamic and almost chaotic activities of the people of London on one of the city's main streets. The Londoners here are framed by buildings that play an active role in their lives, such as the Bank of England, Mansion House, and St Paul's Cathedral. Artistically speaking, the latter represents the vanishing point of the painting, and the viewers' gaze almost accompanies the crowd from the street up to the magnificent dome of the cathedral itself. The painting is a masterpiece of imperial power. However, for the sake of this article, we will focus on another relevant element of the artwork. The *Heart of the Empire* indeed emphasizes the role of London as the main player in finance and trade, and it wants to create a visual link between the economic and spiritual power of the city, embodied by the glorious presence of St Paul's. The cathedral is indeed central in the daily life of Londoners: it is a symbol of belonging, a spiritual guide, and a reason for pride. As this article will show, the story of St Paul's is the story of London and its people. Through a historical and architectural lens, this paper wants to study the architectural variations of Saint Paul's, especially before and after the Great Fire in 1666, to unveil the role of the cathedral in shaping not only the aesthetic of London but also its history. Mostly, the article will focus on the relationship between the building and the people of London, and it will investigate whether

the architecture of St Paul's influenced the life of the citizens, or if they determined the ultimate key role of the cathedral in London.



Figure 1 Heart of Empire by Niels Moeller Lund (1904), Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London Corporation.

2. Pre-Norman History

The earliest history of St Paul's we can reliably draw from comes from Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of The English People*. The narrative that Bede constructs is one embroiled in the context of local political, social, and intellectual circumstances. However, Bede's skill as a historian allows him to place the religious oscillations of the East Saxons as a microcosm of the wider "English" relationship with Christianity and the Roman Church. Bede tells us of the consecration of Bishop Mellitus to London in 604. Mellitus arrives in the first rank of Pope Gregory's ministers and provides the first link between the established post-Roman Church and London (Bede, ca731/1994). Almost immediately then, St Paul's was involved in the center of religious and political convulsions at the heart of the "English conversion". Bede quotes from a letter from St Gregory, addressed to Mellitus, stating 'that the idol temples of that race (the English) should by no means be destroyed... For if the shrines are well built, they must be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God (Bede, ca731/1994, Book 1, Chapter 30). There is no way to tell if this refers to some pagan 'shrine' at the site of the original, Saxon, St Paul's, however it proves somewhat prescient to the fate of the historic see. This mention of 'change' by Bede mirrors the various transformations of St Paul's through the centuries as a site of religious, social, and political power and influence.

Any further conjecture surrounding a possibly pagan beginning to St Paul's is bound to end in failure. There is currently no archaeological evidence of the Saxon church, let alone anything which may have preceded this. As such, any link between architectural and social/religious change would lack the required evidence. Indeed, it is possible that the religious roots of St Paul's stretch back even further, towards an elusive Roman past, as evidenced by Bishop Restitutus representing London at the 314 Council of Arles. However, with no indication of what form any imagined structure would take, this study must base itself on more solid foundations. Despite this, it is important to note that, from the earliest recorded mentions of St Paul's by Bede, the building has been linked with conflicts between political and religious power. The dedication of this church to St Paul is a direct result of the preaching and conversion of the East Saxons by Mellitus (Bede, ca731/1994). It was built, however, by King Aethelberht of Kent, who according to Bede 'was the third English king to rule over all the southern kingdoms... but he was the first to enter the kingdom of heaven' (Bede, ca731/1994, Book 1, Chapter 5). After Aethelberht's death, however, the kingdom of the East Saxons reverted to their pagan faith. Bede then details how the East Saxons wished to partake in the offer of bread during the sacrament but refused to be cleansed in the 'font of salvation' (Bede, ca731/1994, Book 1, Chapter 5). Subsequently, they expelled the bishop from the realm. It would not be the first time the worlds of political and religious power clashed at the doors of the famous cathedral.

3. Norman Cathedral: Old St Paul's

Thereafter came various iterations of the Anglo-Saxon St Paul's, all of which produced similarly lacking archaeological records (Schofield, 2011). The Normans eventually began construction of the version of the cathedral which would stand for almost 600 years, this came to be known as Old St Paul's. There is a certain historical irony that has meant that St Paul's has burned to the ground a number of times in its past, and on each occasion, rising to a new acclimatized context. This is also the case for Old St Paul's. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that in 1087, 'The holy minster of St. Paul, the episcopal see in London, was completely burned, with many other minsters, and the greatest part, and the richest of the whole city' (Swanton ed, ASC, 2000). The construction of a new cathedral at the site in Ludgate Hill could have proved to be an opportunity to impose royal authority on the freemen of London. The rebuilding of St Paul's in the Norman style of the time was supposed to be a strong statement of political power. The plan was an imposing building that would oversee the city by a hill: the Conqueror imagined a majestic cathedral whose shadow would scare the Anglo-Saxon population. However, the design of the building with its large open areas, the historical events of the time, and, mostly, the people of London, reshaped its character. This affected its role in the citizens' daily lives, and ultimately its relationship with the city.

London had emerged from the Norman Conquest relatively unscathed. After surrendering the city to William in 1067, the people of London received an uncharacteristically generous boon from the Conqueror, in the form of a Charter, significantly written in Old English. This Charter guaranteed 'that every child shall be his father's heir, after his father's days; And I will not suffer any person to do you wrong' (London Metropolitan Archives, *Royal Writ (The 'William Charter')*). Interestingly, this Charter begins by addressing both 'William the bishop' and 'Godfrey the Portreeve', placing religious and local power together, but within the overall authority of Royal supremacy. (London Metropolitan Archives, *Royal Writ (The 'William Charter')*). William's subsequent decision to build the Tower of London away from the city itself, and the subsequent Norman investment into the Palace of Westminster, further entrenched this diametrically opposed circumstance (Keane et al., 2004). This meant that the Royal seat of power could develop physically detached from the more commercial development of the City of London. It later became customary for the mayors of London to visit St Paul's and pray for the soul of 'William the bishop', due to his efforts in securing London's freedoms (Morrissey, 2021). An indication that the cathedral, and the clergy who it represents, have been seen as analogous to royal/state power, but also, key in London's further success. This absence of royal authority, compared directly to Westminster Abbey, led St Paul's to develop more organically. What began as an exercise in control and oppression, would eventually become the scene for dramatic challenges to royal and spiritual authority.

3.1. Old St Paul's Architecture

The story of Old St Paul's traditionally starts in 1087, after a great fire devastated London and the Anglo-Saxon Cathedral. The new construction was modeled following the Norman styles of contemporary churches in France and Italy (Cook, 1995). It had a cruciform design and included a short choir raised on a crypt on its east side, deep transepts on both sides and a long aisled nave (fig. 2). Following the words of the Anglo-Saxon historian William of Malmesbury, the Old Saint Paul's was a "magnificent church... [with]...an interior so vast that could accommodate an inconceivable number of worshippers" (Cook, 1995, 27). It is interesting to note that the big space provided by the cathedral will indeed play a key role in its relationship with the people of London, but not as a place of worship. The 13th century was a significant milestone in the development of Saint Paul's, and it witnessed an enormous number of changes that mirrored the early Gothic period of the time. Works began on the clerestories, the walls were carried up, and each bay was provided with lancet windows that would benefit the interior with natural lighting. The vault covering the nave was quadrupled, and a timber roof was built above it. Furthermore, 1256 marked the beginning of a project today known as the "New Work", which comprised the extension of the Norman choir, and the adjunction of a Lady Chamber in every important church in England due to the spreading of the cult of the Virgin (Cook, 1995, 28).

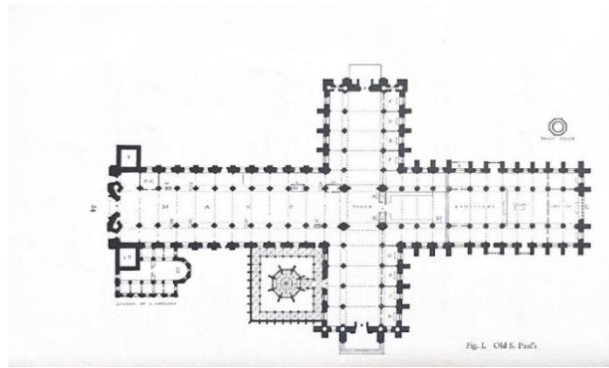


Figure 2 Old St Paul's plan. Cook, 24

In addition, two further parishes were destroyed by the fire of 1087. Both St Gregory's and St Faith's would be incorporated into the building of the cathedral, with St Gregory's attached to the south-western side of the cathedral and St Faith's located underneath the main building, in the eastern crypt (fig 3) (Schofield, 2011, 43). This established the cathedral as a meeting point between parishes. The ecclesiastical system of parishes was vital in the administration of all aspects of life in the Middle Ages (Harding, 2022). Old St Paul's became a place where locality and community diminished to a commonly shared collective space. As this intended place of worship evolved into a liminal zone, political and commercial interests took center stage and worship became supplementary. There is a question as to how much the architectural design fed into this situation. The question of whether this is a case of purposeful design, or an incidental determinism is an interesting one to ponder since St Paul provided such a vast space for gathering (Beresford, 1925).

As the cathedral finished construction in the late 14th century, Old St Paul's started to emerge as a temporal and civic space rather than a monastic institution. Mostly, it was used as a location for the formal conduct of legal business. St Paul's Cross, a preaching cross and open-air pulpit in the Churchyard, was dedicated to announcements, sermons, and political events enacted in front of the citizens of London (Keane et al., 2004). Interestingly, that same nave that Malmsbury glorified, soon became a place for gossip, trade, and social meeting, not too dissimilar from the ancient Roman notion of a *forum* (fig 4). Hence, it became a space meant for activities that had not much interest in the salvation of the soul. Bishop Braybrooke in 1385 tried to issue a formal protest against people's abuses of the sacred building. He forbade any ball playing inside or outside the cathedral, and crossbow activities that were damaging the parapets and towers, and he tried to stop any form of trade within the building (*Hist, MSS, Com Rep*). However, it was all in vain, and by 1554, one century before the Great Fire, the cathedral was already in a state of total neglect.

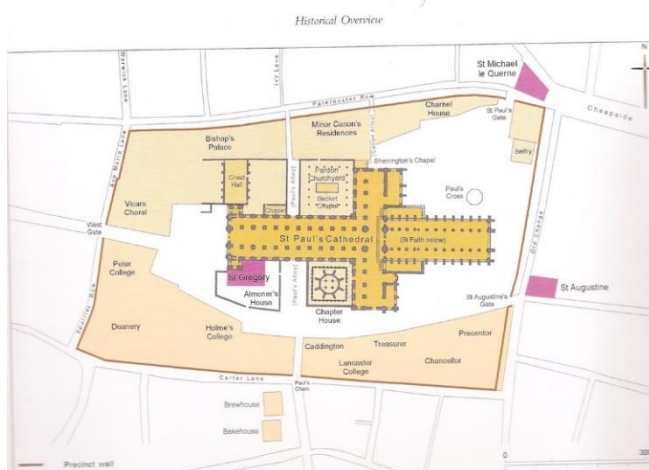


Figure 3 The St. Paul's precinct c. 1500. Keene, Burns, and Saint, 4



Figure 4 John Franklin's illustration of Paul's Walk for William Harrison Ainsworth's novel, Old St. Paul's, published London: Chapman & Hall, 1841

The scale of Old St Paul, and its vast spaces such as the Churchyard and the nave, played a significant role in the cathedral's relationship with Londoners. When William the Conqueror started the construction, the building was intended to be an overbearing and imposing shadow that overlooked the city. It had the purpose of scaring the Anglo-Saxon population, it was a symbol of power and oppression. By the end of the 14th century, St Paul's was a core element of people's everyday life. According to Caroline M. Barron and Marie-Helene Rousseau, the Londoners' sentiment towards St Paul's wavered between intimacy and indifference (Keane et al., 2004). As mentioned above, the space was used for practical activities. On the other hand, the absence of any sort of spiritual connection could be the reason for a detached feeling that led to the degradation of the building. However, regardless of the true sentiment of the people, we cannot deny that the initial intentions behind the building of Old St Paul's were largely ignored by the residents of London. Old St Paul's had a central role in London, it was far too familiar to Londoners to be an effective symbol of oppression and authority. It was a place to do business, not to be scared into submission. This was largely down to an unintended consequence of the desire to build something notable, impressive, and daunting; it had the opposite effect.

3.2. Reformation

In the 1530s, the fate of all monasteries and religious institutions in England changed forever. Henry VIII, after several disappointing years of marriage with Catherine of Aragon, from whom the king did not conceive any living male heir, decided to divorce her and marry Anne Boleyn. The Pope's refusal to allow the divorce led Henry to take gradual and confusing steps towards the final split from Rome and the establishment of the new Church of England (Wilson, 2009). The 1534 Act of Supremacy indeed officially made the monarch the Supreme Head of the Church, a title still in use today. Acknowledging that the actual abandonment of Catholicism and the establishment of Protestantism only happened under Elizabeth I, Henry VIII, together with Thomas Cromwell who at the time was Principal Secretary, made a radical visual step against Rome, the dissolution of the monasteries. A first act was approved in 1536, the Act of Suppression, whereby small monasteries with an income of less than £200 a year were closed, and their buildings, land, and money were taken by the Crown. The Second Suppression Act of 1539 allowed instead the dissolution of the larger monasteries and religious houses (Wilson, 2009). They were a strong reminder of the power of Rome, and therefore a threat to the new and still uncertain Church of England. Also, following Luther's influence on the matter, the king convinced himself that the old institutions were no longer relevant and that they were full of corrupt and immoral individuals who did not provide real help to the poor as much as their wealth indicated they should. On the other hand, the monasteries' wealth itself was probably the main reason behind their destruction. They were the richest institutions in the country, and they owned over a quarter of all the cultivated land in England. By destroying the monastic system Henry could acquire all its wealth and property whilst removing its Papist influence.

St Paul's, however, was not destroyed. The canons and priests there signed the 1534 Act and recognized the king as the Head of the Church of England. In 1535, St Paul's fell under the control of the Royal Supremacy and, significantly, Thomas Cromwell, who granted the cathedral the license to continue its spiritual mission (Keane et al., 2004). Nonetheless, St Paul's still suffered the effects of the Reformation. For example, in 1538, the Rood of Grace from Boxley Abbey in Kent was displayed at Paul's Cross and immediately destroyed. Furthermore, in the same year, Dean Sampson removed three of the cathedral's main pilgrimage attractions, the Rood of the North Door, the image of St Uncumber, and the image of Our Lady of Grace (Keane et al., 2004). After the death of Henry VIII, St Paul's faced troubling years. The brief reign of Edward VI, the proclamation of Jane Grey as a Queen, and the notorious ruling of Mary Tudor kept the country in a constant state of change, where religion was among the main causes of death. Eventually, the Catholic-Protestant issue was settled with Elisabeth I. The Protestant Queen, who witnessed the mistakes of her father and sister, had a new approach. To her, England's stability was a priority. Hence, although the country and the Queen herself were effectively Protestant, she did not care for the personal religion of her people, as long as the country was at peace (Guy, 1997). The Reformation, therefore, gave the English an opportunity to reflect on their cultural past. With the dissolution of the monasteries, the ruins of the institution of the Catholic Church provided a window into their architectural heritage which could then be reflected upon by the newly "protestant" hierarchy. This would become particularly relevant when arguments emerged over the designs of the new cathedral in the seventeenth century.

3.3. Elizabeth I and the 1561 Lighting Strike

During Elizabeth's reign, St Paul's faced a catastrophe that would echo for decades. In 1561, lightning struck the spire, starting a fire that destroyed the steeple, the roof, and the bells, which crashed down beside the organ (fig 5). Although the inside of the cathedral did not suffer any permanent damages, and the fire was fairly contained, the event was not only seen as a matter of human negligence but of divine intervention (Keane et al., 2004). There were offers of funds and donations to repair the damage. This came from all around the country, from the Queen, who directed, "from her purse, a thousand marks in gold", all the bishoprics in the country, the greater numbers coming from London itself, but also significant contributions from Norwich, Lincoln, Exeter, and Hereford (Dugdale, 1658/1818). The largest donation actually came from the total funds of the "citizens", which accounted for almost half of the total (Dugdale, 1658/1818). The people had bought a stake in the cathedral, an indication that they viewed the cathedral as their own and could adapt it as they wished.

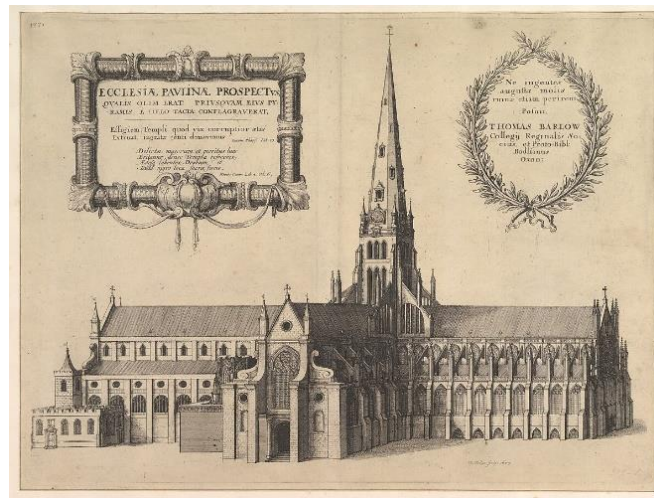


Figure 5 Saint Paul's from the South Showing the Spire (Ecclesiae Paulinae Prospectus...), from "The History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London", Wenceslaus Hollar, 1657

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336038>

The political role of St Paul's in the Elizabethan era found its peak in August 1588, when Dean Nowell preached a sermon for the first public recognition of the miraculous triumph of the English navy over the Spanish Armada (Keane et al., 2004). In November of the same year, the Queen, who just come back from the victory, visited St Paul's for the first and last time, and she found a huge crowd of cheering and proud citizens waiting for her. The post-Armada cathedral, however, faced the same destiny as Old St Paul's at the end of the 13th century. The building's hollow spaces were polluted by smoke and smells coming from the chimneys of sheds around it. Again, trade activities and children playing in the churchyard, profanities, and beggars contributed to the progressive degradation of the cathedral. On the other hand, St Paul's became, probably for the first time, a tourist attraction. Following the 1561 fire, visitors were encouraged to climb to the steeple to admire the view from the top regardless of the sermons of holy ceremonies happening at the same time (Keane et al., 2004). Therefore, the spiritual element did not seem to be a strong component in the shaping of people's relationship with the cathedral. However, unlike the 13th-century condition, it is plausible to assume that the citizens of London were developing a stronger feeling towards St Paul's. Many Londoners were living in properties that gave access to the cathedral's roof, and they all possessed the keys to St Paul's. One of today's most prestigious buildings was therefore accessible to the poorest, who could do as they pleased at any time of the day or the night. Looking back at the Conqueror's original plan for Old St Paul's, it is fair to state that his original idea failed. The building that was supposed to scare an entire population not only became the heart of people's lives but also their actual homes. The social contradiction of St Paul's, between sacred and secular, politics, and commoners, Catholic and Protestant, kept shaping the role of the cathedral throughout the centuries. At the same time, the development of new architectural designs mirrored the social changes of the time and simultaneously influenced people's relationship with the building. St Paul was therefore stuck between these two elements, which worked as external pushes from ancient times until today, and that gave St Paul's its final character.

4. A New Design

The relationship between St Paul's and Londoners began to shift towards the end of the sixteenth century. This is evidenced during an outbreak of plague in 1582. The Lord Mayor issued an order to restrict the number of parishes authorized to bury at the cathedral from twenty-three to thirteen (Porter, 2005). This was precipitated by a large uptake in shallow burials at the cathedral as Londoners rushed to bury their dead in a timely fashion. This ban did not extend to persons of 'honor or worship' (Porter, 2005). Meaning that the ban was essentially a separation between those of the elite strata of society and those outside. This may help to explain the increased feeling of indifference towards the cathedral. While the structure of the building became more and more dilapidated, the choir became the site of prestigious, assertive tombs of courtiers and high-ranking officials, further entrenching this division (Schofield, 2014). Therefore, it is the cathedral excluding the masses from participation, and literal inclusion in the space, in a way that was distinct from the previous history of St Paul's. Arguably, the cathedral moved away from Londoners, rather than the Londoners forsaking St Paul's.

The reformation and its subsequent release of mass religious and political dissent had both an effect on, and was influenced by, the architecture of St Paul's. Paul's Cross in the courtyard of Old St Paul's became the setting of increasingly fiery sermons, the subjects of which could be the topic of its study. This had been used as a location for proclamations, both civil and religious, to the people of London since Henry III's reign in 1236 (Beresford, 1925). William Dugdale's influential writings on St Paul's in the 1650s established the narrative that Paul's Cross was dismantled during the Civil War, under the puritanical Parliamentary regime (Dugdale, 1658/1818). This was the predominant thought until recent historians began to challenge this assertion. Mary Morrissey has written that the Paul's Cross sermons were administratively independent of the cathedral and staff, as such they had become the political domain for criticism and embarrassment of the civic authorities (Morrissey, 2021). The pulpit from which the sermons were delivered was torn down during renovations which began in 1633, however, the sermons themselves continued inside the cathedral, in the choir, until the Restoration. This becomes an interesting question about the impact of the space and setting of the sermons on the audiences, as well as the content, nature, and purpose of what is being said. Morrissey details the various adornments that were paid for by the City of London Corporation, as well as various guilds, which decorated the interiors of the choir (Morrissey, 2021). Increasingly, this space was becoming a symbol of secularity, commerce, and displays of wealth. This is reflected by the offers by these wealthy 'citizens' to maintain and repair the cathedral, as evidenced previously, rather than by the Church or Royal funds. St Paul's itself was becoming a monument to the emerging middle classes. Mercantilism, business interests, and industry are reflected in this shift in contemporary nationalistic imagery.



Figure 6 Views of Old St Paul's, London, cording Inigo Jones's refurbishing. Engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar from William Dugdale's *the History of St Paul's Cathedral in London* (1658)

4.1. Civil War

The early seventeenth century was a tumultuous period for Britain, London, and St Paul's. The Puritan restrictions in London were in action long before they were at the heart of the governance of the country after the Civil War. Concurrent with the shift in self-perception of English national character, were the convulsions within the political and religious landscapes of the Stuart era. The poet Thomas Randolph satirized this paradox of Puritan control with the reality of the City's moral and physical corruption. He specifically uses St Paul's to do so, writing:

Divinity means to cure all souls,
And charity means repairing old Paul's.
The clergy and laity lovingly meet;
Th'one sweeps the conscience, the other the street,
In the cleanly city of London.

(Randolph, 1629)

There is clearly an established link between the funds to repair St Paul's, the conflict of Puritan 'charity means, and the dripping sarcasm of the "cleanly" City of London. In this way, we can see how St Paul's became synonymous with this new regime of London, almost to the point of mockery. This contradiction pre-empts the most significant restoration of Old St Paul's which began in 1633, by the greatest English architect of his age, Inigo Jones (Schofield, 2011). From Jones' (and later ones based on originals) drawings, we can see that two significant modifications to St Paul's were carried out (fig 6). These were, work on the main body of the cathedral, including the nave, and the construction of a classically inspired portico at the western end. The works were initiated by the royal commission, paid for by Crown funds, but carried out under the auspices of London's Puritan governance. The "heroic" nature of the reconstruction seemingly flies in the face of Puritan sensibilities (Schofield, 2011). However, they were carried out to halt what the Puritans would see as the physical, and moral, decay of this major symbol of Christianity in England (Schofield, 2011). They were an attempt to impose authority once again on the ancient Cathedral and provide an insight into the clash of ideals at what would soon become the heart of revolutionary England.

The City of London was at the epicenter of this simultaneous transformation. The commercial landscape fostered by the City led to the increased prominence of men whose wealth didn't depend on how much land they possessed (Baron, 1997). This new, "middling sort" drove the revolutionary waves of the mid-seventeenth century, the very same individuals who were paying for the renovations and gildings of St Paul's. This view is summarised by an anonymous English newsletter, clearly sympathetic to the Crown, published in 1643, 'who broke down the bounds to those streams of blood than have stained this earth... twas the proud, unthankful, schismatical, rebellious, bloody City of London' (Anon, 1643). The outbreak of civil war in 1642 had a direct impact on St Paul's, halting the extensive restoration works (Schofield, 2011). Then, in 1643, a Parliamentary ordinance ordered the removal of all church icons of idolatrous nature. The following chapters in St Paul's history seemingly resemble a departure from the clashes between royal/religious authority and the secular use of the cathedral. However, during the Commonwealth, St Paul's was used variably as a barracks, stable, and congregational meeting place (Schofield, 2011). In fact, it was the site of the typical Christian upheaval characteristic of the period, including a sermon by John Biddle, an anti-Trinitarian, who questioned the divinity of Christ (Smith, 2006). Clearly, St Paul's was once again having an impact at the forefront of England's spiritual uprising. This may have been the reason why, with the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the work to restore St Paul's seems to have stalled. However, the site around Jones' portico became home to a number of shops, reducing the gap between the street and the cathedral (Schofield, 2011). It is possible that this latest narrowing of the secular and religious spheres contributed to disastrous consequences for Old St Paul's, during the Great Fire of 1666.

4.2. The Great Fire

The Great Fire came to be known as the milestone that forever changed the character of the cathedral. The fire began in the eastern side of London, but it quickly spread due to the wind and the quantity of combustible materials in the riverside warehouses. It hence reached Old St Paul's. The building at the time was going through some restoration processes and it was surrounded by wood scaffolds. They rapidly assisted the fire's spread (fig 7): the roof collapsed, heavy blocks of stones smashed the floor, and the cathedral burnt for an entire week (Keane et al., 2004). People's reaction wavered between those who believed in the providential purpose of the fire in cleansing the contamination of the Civil War and those who were instead badly shaken by the fire, as Old St Paul's represented the measure of their entire worldview (Keane et al., 2004). In the 17th century, London was not only the largest city in Britain but also the center of trade and finance. The damages caused by the Fire were a challenge to the city's status in Europe.

London had to be rebuilt, as fast as possible, or a new modern city would take its place. The construction of a new St Paul's was part of this process, and Wren was the man granted the task of framing "a Design handsome and noble, and suitable to all Ends of it, and to the Reputation of the City, and the Nation" (Summerson, 1993).

4.3. Wren's Designs

The process that led to the final construction of St Paul's was long and characterized by several designs and adjustments. However, the common element was something still estranged from English architectural tradition: the dome. In the summer of 1673, the center of the dome was marked out, among the ruins of the old cathedral, on a gravestone "with nothing remaining of the Inscription but this single Word in large Capitals, RESURGAM" (Royal Academy of Art, 1991). That same stone was years later re-carved in one of the tympanums, under a phoenix. Both elements then became symbols of the new cathedral and the new London itself (Royal Academy of Art, 1991). The decision to build a new modern cathedral led to the preparation of the First Design. The latter was characterized by a rectangular choir with a large domed vestibule, which was probably influenced by the design of Temple Church, just a few minutes away from St Paul's. The choir had a simple arcuated outline and it presented two external orders, which were inspired by the Theatre of Marcellus in Rome (Summerson, 1993). Although the contribution of the new cathedral was only just starting, Wren already showed his interest in the connection between English tradition and Rome, both ancient and modern, which will be highly evident in his next projects. The First Design was approved by the king in 1670. However, the following two years witnessed a vast and rapid prosperity in London, which made Wren's model look too modest if compared to the city.



Figure 7 Etching depicting St Paul's Cathedral burning in the Great Fire of London, by Wenceslaus Hollar, 1666 © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 8 Great Design. Studies for transept wall and entrance for the central recess. Drawn by Wren, c. 1673 (Ref. No. WRE/1/3)

Wren thus offered an alternative, today known as the Great Design, which was approved by the king in 1674 and had to be recorded as a "perpetual and unchangeable rule" in a wooden model (Royal Academy of Art, 1991, 10). Wren here introduced a Greek-Cross plan with a central space characterized by the dome supported by eight equal, but not equally spaced, piers (fig 8). The interior was to have a major Corinthian order and a subsidiary order, while the exterior had one single Corinthian order and seemed to echo Inigo Jones' model (Summerson, 1993). There is not much evidence about the rejection of the Great Model. Following the words of Wren's son in *Parentalia*, some of the clergy thought the design was "not enough of a cathedral fashion" (Royal Academy of Art, 1991, 11). The reason behind this statement is both financial and symbolic. The approval of the Great Design was indeed a commitment to a building that would have been usable and stable until it was finished. Hence, it was a "commitment to completion and taxation" (Royal Academy of Art, 1991, 11). On the other hand, the domed central plan of the model invited an inevitable comparison to St Peter's in Rome, the iconic symbol of Catholicism and Papal authority. The Reformation happened merely a century before, and, as it has been examined in the previous paragraphs, religion kept being a reason for concern through the Elizabethan period and the Civil War. It is safe to assume that the clergy did not want to risk challenging either the king or the people by giving a Catholic look to what was supposed to be a symbol of unity for the country. As it is reported by Summerson, the Great Design was an intellectual exercise that was appreciated by connoisseurs and intellectuals, but incapable of gaining national approval (Summerson, 1993).



Figure 10 Warrant Design. The Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.

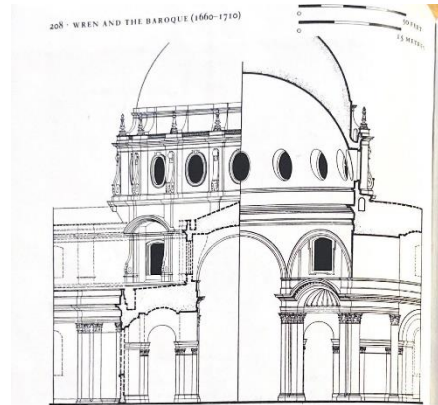


Figure 9 Penultimate Design. Summerson, 208.

To please the clergy, the king, and the people of London, Wren started working on a new design that would include a cruciform model that would have a “cathedral-form but so reflective, as to reconcile, as near as possible, the Gothic to a better Manner of Architecture” (Royal Academy of Art, 1991, 15). This project, in 1675, came to be known as the Warrant Design (fig 9). Although it was never built, not even on a wooden model, the drawings showed Wren’s intent to build a sort of classic equivalent of a Gothic cathedral. The design had a Latin cross plan with an octagonal central space, a traditional long aisled nave, and a tall spire, which perhaps wanted to embody a symbol of rebirth after the 1561 fire. Despite Wren’s intention to satisfy English taste for their architectural tradition, he still added elements of Roman influence. The Warrant Design meant to have an internal dome, based on the one at the Pantheon, that was supported by eight arches, and that would have worked as the base for an eight-sided tower. Looking at the drawings, the final result would have been rather bizarre, and not particularly appealing to a modern audience. As mentioned, the Warrant Design was never built, and Wren continued to modify his ideas.

The first alternation, in 1675, was the replacement of the Gothic tower and spire with a classical dome resting on a drum that would contain sixteen oval windows. At the same time, Wren kept the interior of the dome that he planned in the Warrant Design. He replaced the octagonal plan with a cylindrical one, introduced diagonal semi-domes at the level of the aisles, and, above them, included large windows that would diagonally lighten the central space. To make room for the semi-domes, Wren eliminated the plinth of the main order, which was lowered to floor level, and he included an attic storey where the semi-domes could rise. The design was therefore stabilized, and it looked almost perfect (fig 10). Nonetheless, in comparison to the magnificent structure, the dome appeared too modest and not fit to provide the great landscape that London deserved. St Paul’s needed a new, bigger, and majestic dome that would not damage the building. This stage is known as the Definitive Design, and it led to the building of “complex unity” that today we are all familiar with (fig 11) (Royal Academy of Art, 1991, 16).

In this final design, Wren proposed to add screen walls that would rest on the aisle walls of the cathedral. The effect would be bi-fold. On the one hand, they would render the exterior of the building a visually adequate “voluminous mass” (Summerson, 1993, 211). At the same time, the screen walls could work as counterforts to any excess weight of the new dome. To match the glorious massiveness of the new St Paul’s, the new dome had to be enlarged. Wren based his design on the French example provided by Hardouin Mansart for the dome of the Invalides in Paris in 1683. The model offered by Wren was approved in 1701, and by that time it showed a combined influence of Mansart, Bramante’s *tempietto* of S. Pietro in Montorio and Michelangelo’s St Peter’s Basilica. The visual effect of the dome, although it is essentially Baroque, presents a strong resemblance with Bramante’s example. Wren kept the buttresses terminating in twinned columns, which were present in both Mansart and Michelangelo’s domes. However, in St



Figure 11 St Paul's Cathedral, 1896, by Cassell & Company, London.

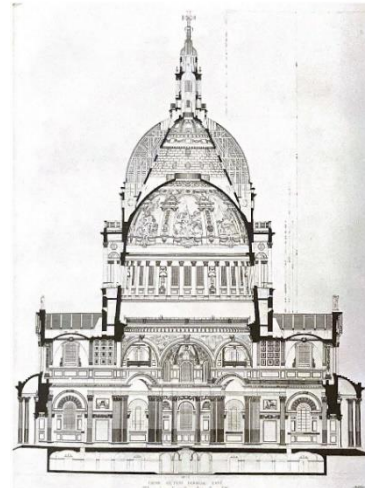


Figure 12 Paul's double dome. Summerson, 215

Paul's this device is used eight times, and it fills every fourth intercolumniation with masonry. In addition, Wren introduced a second internal dome, influenced not only by Michelangelo but also by the Pantheon. St Paul's was hence characterized by a smaller dome with an open oculus, and a bigger majestic one right above it (fig 12). By doing so, Wren combined his stylistic taste with architectural necessities and produced a dome that mirrored the grandeur of London and the country. The building of St Paul's therefore required changes, adjustments, and compromise. Despite the clergy's initial resistance to any sort of resemblance between the cathedral and St Peter's in Rome, by the beginning of the 18th century, the comparison was inevitable. It was however important that the differences between the two buildings would outweigh the similarities, and Wren successfully accomplished the task. The new St Paul's is two buildings in one. Architecturally speaking, the double dome and the interior serve the purpose of the church and its structural needs. On the other hand, the exterior mirrors the greatness of the country and represents the perfect ornament of the city. St Paul's duality also rests in its two souls. The long aisled nave and the two-sided gothic towers combined with a classical dome and the cylindrical plan are the perfect syntheses of Protestant and Catholic elements in the country. Therefore, Wren was able to embody the history, the tradition, and the future role of the cathedral by incorporating different architectural elements. He did not choose one religion over the other, he acknowledged English history and religious struggles, and he created an architectural masterpiece.

5. St Paul's as A Symbol

Following the official completion of St Paul's on 25 December 1711, the life of the cathedral continued to shape, and be shaped, by events and people surrounding it. It would, of course, be an exaggeration to say that religion had left the daily life of Londoners in the years of the reconstruction. However, Old St Paul's had burnt down in one era, and risen again at the beginning of a new one. The Catholic Stuarts had been ejected from the throne of England, to be replaced at Parliament's will by their Protestant relatives. William and Anne, and later, the Hanoverians would be granted the same opportunity. The commercial and civic sensibilities that had begun to emerge and show themselves in Old St Paul's were now firmly entrenched in the systems of power in this new United Kingdom. It is not then incidental that the construction of St Paul's had begun under Royal prerogative, and officially finished by parliamentary declaration. This new St Paul's was meant to symbolize a different nation, not one of a conquered people, but one confident in their imagined sense of moral, mercantile, and imperial superiority. The symbolization of St Paul's would continue in the centuries after, constantly being adapted to the social conditions of the nation.

The impact of the symbolization of St Paul's by the people is clearly seen in one of the most famous images of the dome from the Second World War. 'St Paul's Survives' was taken on the night of 29 December, one of the deadliest of the London Blitz between 1940-41. However, away from the inevitable sentimentalism associated with such an image, we can explore how the social impact had affected the way the cathedral was viewed. First-hand accounts of the 29 December describe the dread and sorrow for the famous building, American correspondent Ed Murrow

reported live that, ‘The church that means most to London is gone. St Paul’s Cathedral is burning to the ground as I talk to you now.’ (Bliss ed, 1968). As he spoke, multiple incendiary bombs had fallen in or around St Paul’s, one lodging itself in the rafters near Wren’s beloved dome. By the end of the night, virtually every building surrounding the cathedral had perished, apart from Wren’s masterpiece itself (Hastings, 2010). Many saw this as a miraculous intervention from God, reflecting the opposite religious condemnations from the previous Great Fire. In a less religious age, it still helped to feel like God was on your side. This night later came to be known as “the Second Great Fire of London”, such was the destruction wrought by the Luftwaffe. The parallels that can be drawn here are almost too obvious to state. Winston Churchill knew the power of this impression and it was not a mere accident that the cathedral survived. A member of the London Fire Service later remembered that Churchill had said to her that ‘He wanted us to save St Paul’s Cathedral... at all costs.’ It is the image of the dome that provided the most powerful propaganda, the aim of which would inspire the people with something they were inherently familiar with (Clampin, 2014). The exterior of the building was saved and broadcasted, despite extensive damage to the interior. This symbolizes how St Paul’s has been warped into a perfect image of a cathedral and a symbol for London and what it represents, rather than a practical, religious building. This had happened organically, not through imposition, but from Londoners adopting St Paul’s as their own, something that belonged to them.

The power of this symbolism endured the decline of the Empire and Britain’s identity crisis of the tumultuous later twentieth century. The architectural landscape of the City saw the arrival and subsequent decline of Brutalism in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the construction of challengers to St Paul’s vertical domination (White, 2008). The office blocks, communication towers, and council flat blocks meant that St Paul’s was no longer the singular, overriding frame in the cityscape of London. By 1991 Pelli’s One Canada Square, a monument to a different, less exalted, form of consumerism, stood at twice the height of St Paul’s cathedral (White, 2008). However, St Paul’s still managed to retain the aura of its past and stand as the venue of various national and international events. King George VI opened the Festival of Britain at the cathedral in 1951, Martin Luther King preached from the famous pulpit in 1964, and in 1980, St Paul’s was chosen as the site of the most famous wedding of the century, Lady Diana Spencer and Charles, Prince of Wales. Despite the newer, overbearing construction of various monoliths and barbicans of the post-war world, St Paul’s still belongs to the people of London, without imposition from above. Indeed, the City of London Corporation still maintains the statutes laid out in the St Paul’s Heights legislation in 1937. This maintains protected views of the cathedral from all cardinal directions. A report from 2015 found that while some elements of St Paul’s had been obscured, particularly the main body of the cathedral, the dome itself remained visible and distinctive (City of London Corporation, 2015).



Figure 13 St Paul’s Survives taken by Herbert Mason (1940), taken on December 29, 1940, published on December 31, 1940, in the Daily Mail.

6. Conclusion

The social status of St Paul's Cathedral today is unquestionable and maintained via direct action. The building speaks of power, religion, and greatness. It is a symbol of London, of England, and a point of reference for visitors from all around the world. From ancient Roman times until today, St Paul's has had a direct relationship with the people of London, who are responsible for its contemporary perception. This research wanted to explore the dichotomy of architecture-people, and which element influenced the other. After a careful analysis of both primary and secondary sources, it is plausible to conclude that the people hold the main responsibility for the architectural changes. Although the variations in the designs also follow the style and tradition of the centuries, the major role of the people of London cannot be ignored. The initial intended dominance of Old St Paul's, in 1087, was meant to be a symbol of oppression, which led to the impressive size of the cathedral: the Anglo-Saxon population had to be scared of the big black shadow of the building. However, the literal space created by this will to over-awe externally, unwittingly formed a space for the communal internal use of the building. Due to the access to the space allowed by St Paul's role as the church of the City of London, as well as various local parish shrines, the consequence was the antithesis of an imposing building. Therefore, the people turned the cathedral into something they needed, regardless of its original purpose. From then on, St Paul's began to be shaped by the populace of London. The social developments of the city had a direct impact on the transformation and aesthetic of the building. The mixing of the commercial and the religious began, at first, almost as a convenience. It soon became the driving force in the adaptation and maintenance of the cathedral. In fact, even the times of neglect and distance from St Paul's reflect the contemporary social conditions. The growth of the City's commercial and financial interests was directly mirrored in the interior of the most public spaces of St Paul's, and the dramatic losses to the exterior only reinforced this shift in the balance of power. The most obvious physical change occurred following the mass destruction of the medieval structure. However, these themes of commercialism and mercantilism continued with Wren's masterpiece of design, which contributed to the final transformation of St Paul's. Considering the political climate, it could have been another statement of the reinforcement of royal power. Instead, it became the center of the worldwide trade networks at the heart of the Imperial system. Furthermore, the building officially became an architectural masterpiece of religious embodiment; however, it would have not been possible if it were not a house of prayer for the people of London. St Paul's is therefore a perfect combination of practicality and sensitivity, which adapted itself to the needs of its citizens, and reflects and exemplifies how the people of London see themselves. They took the original cathedral and made it their own and kept shaping it throughout history into what today is one of the most powerful symbols of London. This is a consequence of the relationship between the cathedral and the populace. London is St Paul's and St Paul's is London.

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