

St. Paul's Cathedral, London: A Journey Through Time

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Some of London's most stunning architecture can be found in the beauty and glory of her cathedrals. And one of her most glorious examples is the St. Paul's Cathedral.

St. Paul's iconic dome rises high into the blue sky, serenely looking down on a bustling city. The current church is the fourth to stand on this site. It was designed by noted architect Sir Christopher Wren, and was built between 1675 and 1710. The beauty of this church is breathtaking, both inside and out.

The history of the church dates back to 604 A.D., when the first cathedral was built. Since then, it has seen many momentous events, including the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill, the marriage of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer, and the thanksgiving service for the 80th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II and the Golden Jubilee celebration.

Our visit was in May, and it coincided with the blooming of the spring flowers. As you approach the cathedral, you are surrounded by tulips in the most stunning colors. The cathedral looms ahead of you, causing you to look up into the brilliant blue sky at the finely sculpted facades. You feel a sense of welcoming peace, even before you enter the doors. As soon as you enter, the hustle and bustle of the outside world fall away, and you are in a quiet and reverent environment where you can sense the inner peace.

St. Paul's architectural design continues inside. The dome visible from the outside soars upward in a graceful curve of golden radiance. The mosaics, requested in the mid 19th century by Queen Victoria, are, to quote from the [cathedral's own web site](#), "magnificent." The polished tile floors, the crypts, the memorials, and the chapels all add to the power and glory of St. Paul's.

Once you are done taking in the main sacristy, you may climb the stairs for even more beauty. The first level, which is about 250 old stone steps up, takes you to the Whispering Gallery. This is a round walkway that overlooks the sanctuary. You can gaze down at the world below, or you can test the acoustics. In this fabled gallery, if you whisper just the right way into the wall, your voice and message will be carried around the wall to waiting ears. The guards who stand watch can do this with ease, while the tourists have a bit of a hard time with it.

The second level of the climb takes you to the Stone Gallery. This is an outdoor gallery that circles the dome. The view of London from up here is indescribable. Breathtaking and stunning only begin to describe the incredible 360-degree view of all points of the city.

If you are truly intrepid, there is a third level that takes you even higher. We did not attempt this climb.

Photography is not permitted in the church, as it is a working and active sanctuary. Services are held daily, including Matins, Eucharistic services, and Evensong. You may also be surprised, as we were, to learn that you can hire a room or a wing in the cathedral to hold an event, from a simple meeting to a sit down dinner for up to 250 guests.

St. Paul's is also a place where people feel free to come and debate current issues. This is taken directly from their [web site](#):

"For hundreds of years, people gathered at Paul's Cross in the cathedral's churchyard to debate the great issues of the day. Since 2002, thousands have gathered inside St Paul's to join in debates on key issues we face today.

Our vision is to stimulate dialogue on contemporary issues within the church and also to bring a theological voice to wider current debate.

Recent themes include global poverty, climate change, globalization, and contemporary childhood, with speakers including Gordon Brown, Jeffrey Sachs, Camila Batmanghelidjh, Michael Morpurgo, Rowan Williams, Kofi Annan, Shirley Williams, and David Attenborough. Events are open to people of all faiths and none."

This year, St Paul's is presenting a program called "For Richer, For Poorer, How money shapes our lives."

Admission to St. Paul's is 11 pounds for adults, 3.50 for children. The cathedral is open every day (except Sunday) from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

St. Paul's is a must see for every visitor to London. You will come away with a new respect for history and how important a role churches like St. Paul's shaped the very foundations of the city.

About The Author: Sue Kulick is a resident of the Pocono Mountains and an avid Disney fan. She and her husband, Steve, live in a log home with their Golden Retrievers, Cody and Belle and their cat Tigger.

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