

St. Paul's Cathedral – February 6, 2018 – London, England

By Tom Allin

We avoided the U.S. flu only to be laid low by the London crud. Today Nancy is keeping Oslo the cat company and I am visiting St. Paul's Cathedral.

Although the location of St. Paul's Cathedral has been a place of worship for over 1400 years today's Cathedral is only 308 years old being completed in 1710. This church is Christopher Wren's most famous church design – he and his office is given credit for designing and building 52 churches after the Great Fire in 1666.

The first church was destroyed by fire in 675, the Vikings destroyed the second church in 962, the third church was again destroyed by fire in 1087 and the fourth church was destroyed by The Great London Fire in 1666.



I arrived about five minutes too late for the interior tour but signed up for the once weekly library and model tour.

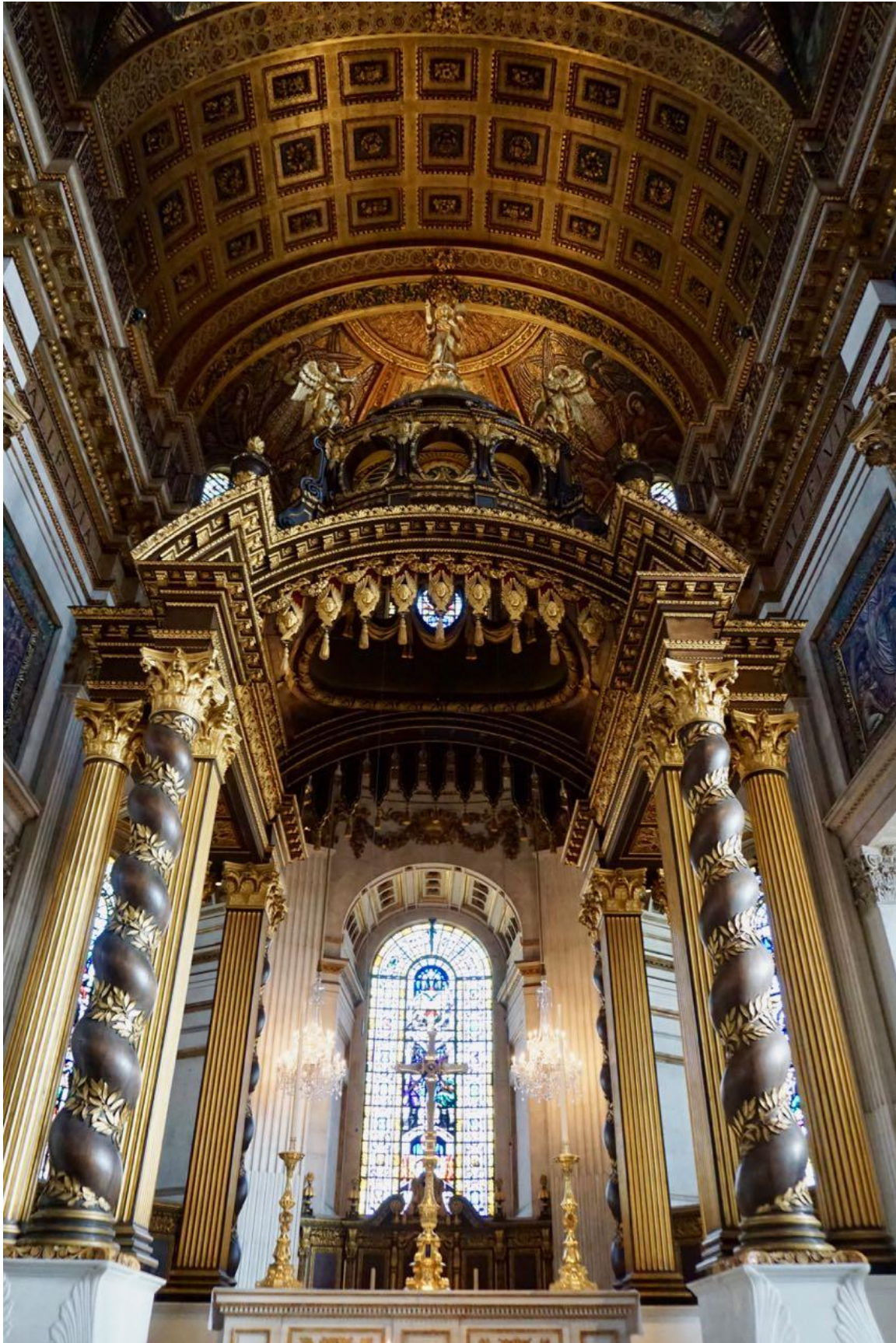
Having time to explore before my tour began I stepped into the church and clicked a photograph.



And immediately one of the docents tapped me on the shoulder to tell me, “no photographs, please”.

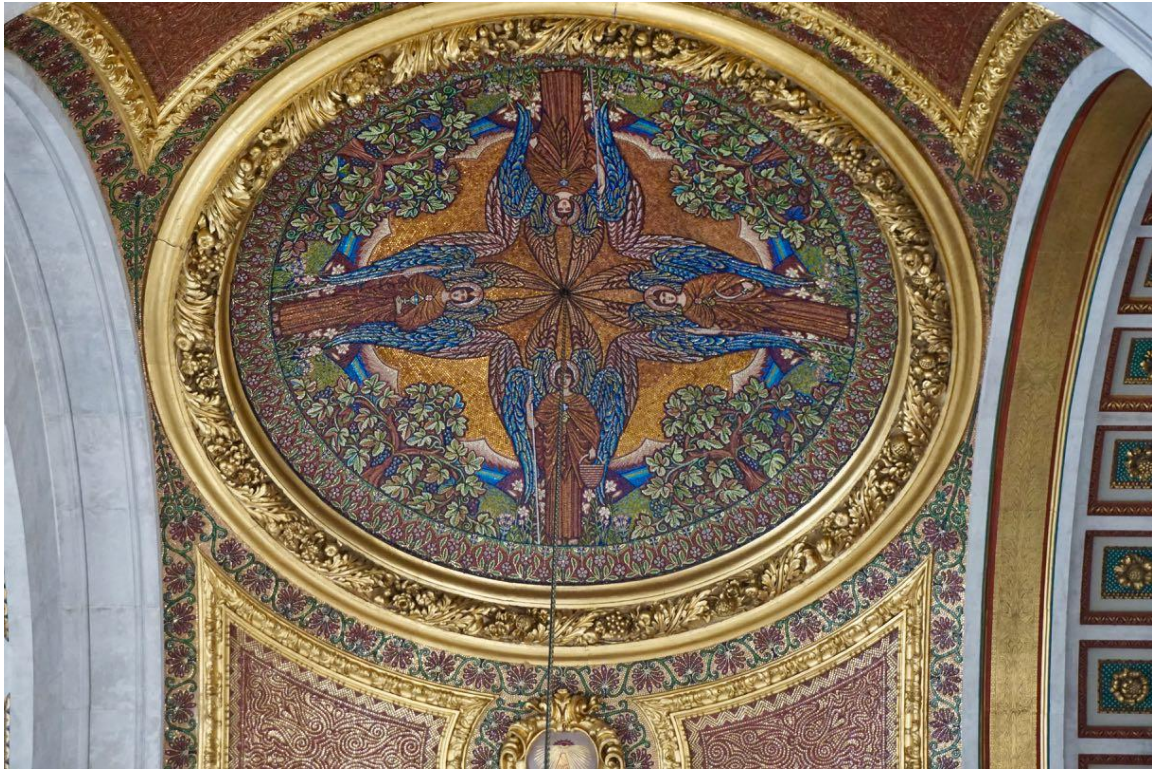
My memory isn't what it used to be and I took several more photographs.

The following photograph is of the High Altar. This High Altar was completed in 1958. The previous high altar was destroyed by German bombs during WWII.



The sparkling mosaics were for the most part added in the late 1800's because Queen Victoria believed the Cathedral was too plain. Therefore the High Altar side of the Cathedral is decorated throughout with mosaics but the West Door side (opposite the High Altar) of the Nave is left unadorned as designed by Wren.





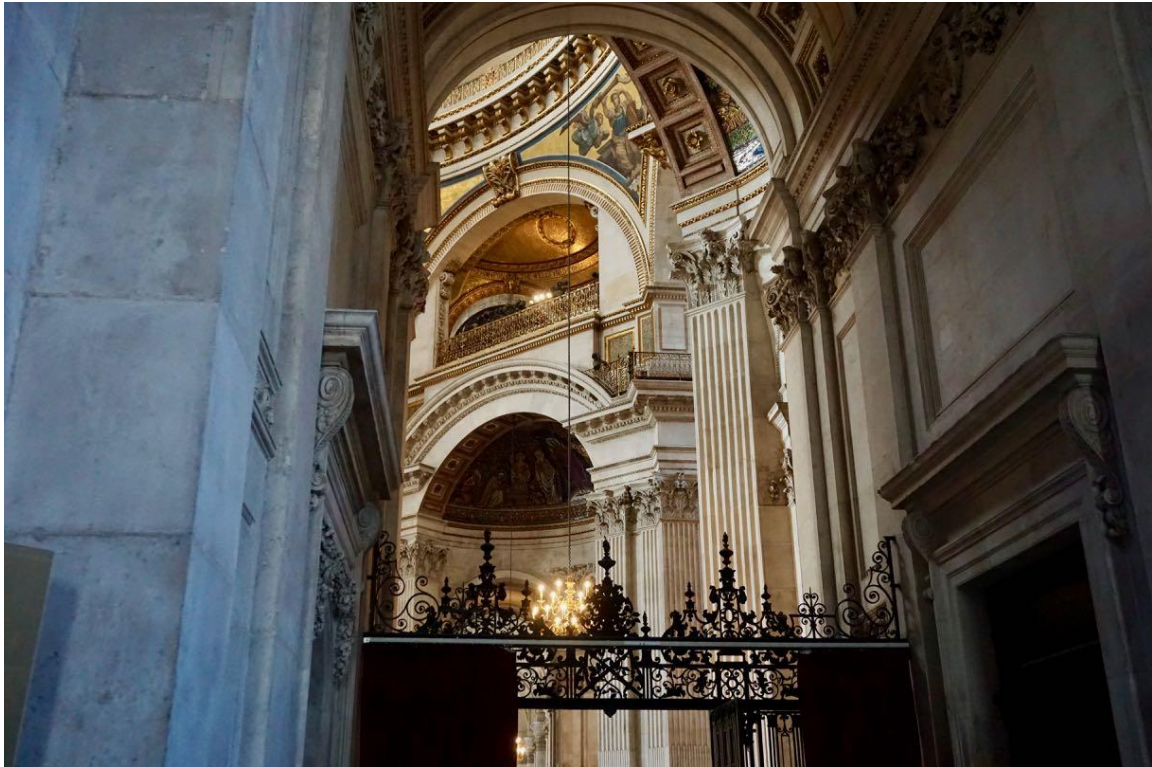
The next section of the Cathedral I remember from my first visit 40 years ago. Behind the High Altar is the American Memorial Chapel. This section of the Cathedral was destroyed during the German bombings of London. The British people decided to rebuild it to commemorate the 28,000 Americans who during WWII served in Britain or passed through Britain to other battlefields and died in their efforts.



Above the floor are three bays containing stained glass. Each of the 50 states of the United States is a separate pane of stained glass.

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More of the Cathedral.

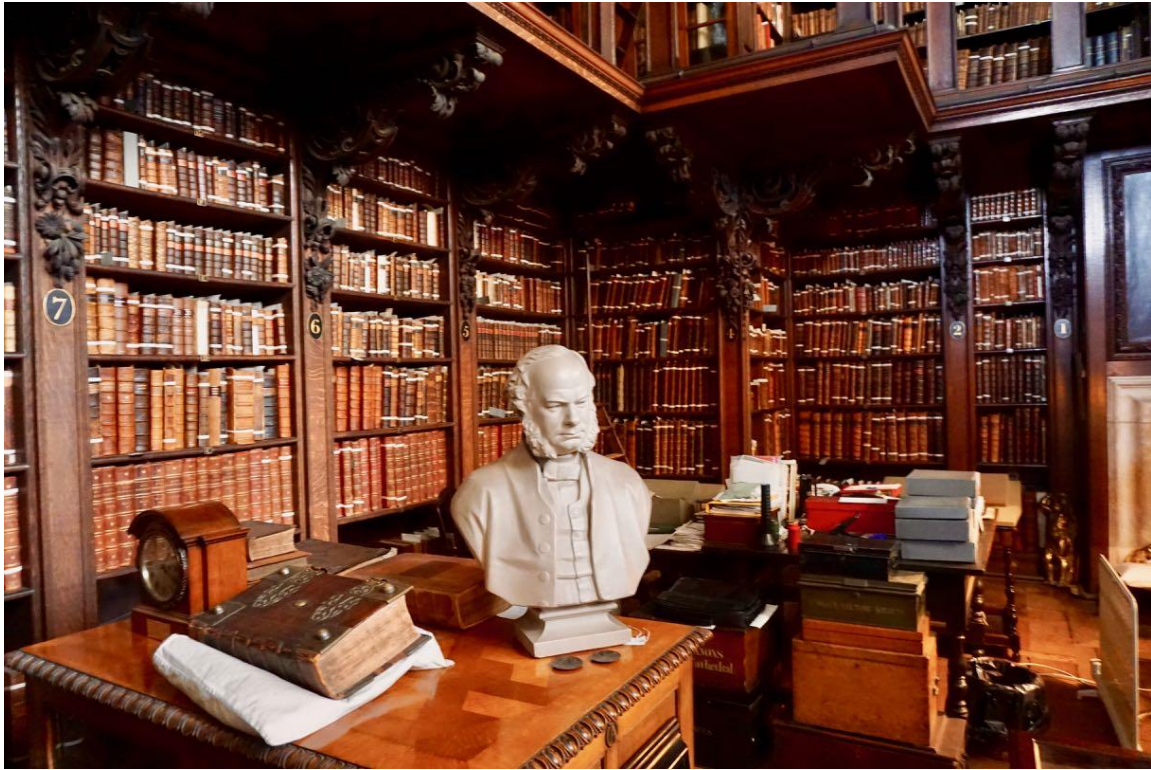


I joined the tour of the Library. Before you see anything you must climb stairs. At least this set of stairs is wide and easy to climb. Yes, that is an elevator control panel to the left and no I didn't see anyone using it.



Only 257 steps to the Whispering Gallery where the Library and Model rooms are located. I have to note the gentleman who led our tour appeared to be older than me and never even came close to stopping for a rest but instead marched straight up the 257 steps talking the entire way.

The library contains more than 21,000 volumes. Currently the library is reviewing and noting the condition of each book. Once this first step is completed they will then attempt to raise money to make necessary restorations to those books requiring repair.



One of the members of the tour asked the chief librarian if photographs were allowed. He said, “yes” and everyone took out their cameras.



As we walked from the library side of the Cathedral to the Model side we stopped for photographs and more history about St. Paul's.



The Model room is so named because this is where the original model of Wren's design for St. Paul is kept.



Wren had a strange interpretation of his contract's definition of changes. The contract gave Wren the freedom to "make some variations, rather ornamental than essential, as from Time to Time he should see proper". Wren made the unilateral decision that any and all changes were "rather ornamental"! Wren changed the proportions of the building and abandoned the idea of a spire on the top of the dome among many of his ornamental changes.

It is better to beg forgiveness than ask permission was a saying I've always kept in the back of my mind.