Sir Christopher Wren and the Building of St. Paul’s
A Cathedral has stood on this site in London since 604 CE. The present building was completed in 1710 according to the design of the great architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Daily Christian worship has taken place here for over 1400 years. Worship means ‘to show how much something is worth to you’ and this magnificent building is built for the glory of God and to show how much He means to us. As you look around the building, think about how the life of Jesus 2000 years ago has shaped the lives of millions of people today.
Map of the Crypt & Cathedral Floor

Cathedral Floor

Crypt

Main Entrance

Stairs

N
H
L
M
J
I
K
E
F
D
B
C
A

N
W
E
S
St. Paul’s Before St. Paul’s
There has been a Cathedral on this site in London since 604. Monks, led by St. Mellitus, were sent from Canterbury, to establish a church in what had previously been the Roman capital, Londinium. The site on what is now called Ludgate Hill was selected. Nearby, were the remains of Roman buildings.

Why do you think Ludgate Hill was selected as a good place to build a church?

No one knows what the first St. Paul’s looked like, although it was a very simple building like this one. It would probably have been made of bits of Roman stonework, taken from the ruined buildings around it. The job of the monks was to preach the Christian faith to the non-Christian people who lived in the area.

How do you think the monks may have felt arriving in the ruins of Londinium and setting about their task of preaching to people?

In 675, the church burnt down and had to be rebuilt by St. Erkenwald, now the Bishop of London. When Erkenwald died, his tomb in the Cathedral became a place of pilgrimage. Vikings destroyed the second building in 961.

People prayed to St. Erkenwald when they came on pilgrimage to St. Paul’s. What are the sorts of things they might have prayed for?
St. Erkenwald’s shrine was very popular with pilgrims. It meant that the Cathedral grew very rich as they always left offerings when they came to pray.

A third Cathedral was built to house the shrine, but this was destroyed by fire in 1087.

We know a lot more about the fourth Cathedral and have detailed designs and pictures of it.

Look at the model of Old St. Paul’s in the Crypt. Compare it with the model of the current building just around the corner.

List three differences between the two:

1. 

2. 

3. 

The model shows what is now known as Old St. Paul’s. This was the tallest church in the world, with a huge spire which reached 149m into the air. It was also bigger than the present Cathedral.

Why do you think churches often have very high spires or towers?
In 1631, King Charles I employed the famous surveyor, Inigo Jones to begin a restoration programme. Scaffolding was put up around the building and work began. Jones covered the Cathedral in Portland stone and build a new entrance portico with giant pillars. The King paid for it all, £101,330 4s. 8d. But in 1642, Parliament and the king went to war against each other in the Civil War, and the Cathedral was used to stable the horses of Oliver Cromwell’s troops. Untold damage was done to the interior of the Cathedral, particularly the tombs and statues. 

This effigy had its nose cut off!

Do you think money should be spent on restoring old churches today, or should they be pulled down and newer, more practical buildings put up? Explain your answer and show that you have thought about different viewpoints.
It is difficult to imagine what the Old Cathedral was like inside. It would have had huge stained-glass windows, only letting in coloured light. It was lit by candles, and would have been very busy. We know that it was used for ball-games, trading, and as a short-cut from the City to the river! It was also full of pilgrims and pick-pockets.

Do you think churches today should be used for more than just worship? Explain your answer and show that you have thought about different points of view.

All this activity meant that the Cathedral was getting rather run down. No one paid for its upkeep, and by 1588, when a great service to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada took place, there were cracks in the stonework, the roof leaked, and the spire had burnt down three times!

Even today, the upkeep of St. Paul’s is paid for by the entrance fees of the visitors and donations from charities. Who do you think should be responsible for paying for the upkeep of St. Paul’s? Explain your answer.
Christopher Wren was born on 20th October, 1632 at East Knoyle in Wiltshire. His Father was a clergyman who became Dean of Windsor, and Christopher was brought up near the Castle. He was very clever and after being home-educated until the age of ten, he went to Westminster School. In 1642, when the Civil war broke out, the family were turned out of the deanery, but Christopher was still supported by mathematicians in his family. When he was 17 he went to Oxford University and studied science and philosophy.

The young Wren was an inventor who came up with an instrument for writing in the dark, and a pen that could make two separate copies of a document at once. He was also very interested in astronomy.

What would you like to invent? Write or draw it here.
In 1657, Wren became Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College in London. He loved meeting important scientists and great thinkers. A few years later, after the death of Cromwell, King Charles II took the throne. He asked Wren to make him a model of the moon and the two men became friends.

By now, Wren was becoming interested in architecture as well as astronomy. His uncle, Matthew, asked Christopher to design a chapel for his old college, Pembroke in Cambridge, and the result was extremely beautiful. At that time, Wren was also asked to design the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford.

In architecture, Wren was able to put his maths skills into practice, and he began to read books on architecture and went to Paris to learn more.

In May 1666 he started to join in discussions for ways to restore Old St. Paul’s, and came up with the idea of replacing the tower with a dome, like those he had seen in Paris. On August 27th, his plans were approved.

Christopher Wren was a very talented person who was good at many different things. What things are you good at? Try to think of all of them: things you do at school, and things you do at home. (For example, you might be really good at a particularly computer game!)
Some time after midnight, on Sunday 2nd September 1666, a fire started in a baker’s shop on Pudding Lane, near London Bridge. By the morning, it had caught hold, fanned by the strong wind and fuelled by the wooden and thatched houses.

By Monday, it was making its way along the streets to the Cathedral. People rushed to save what they could from their threatened homes, and left the city on foot and by boat on the river.

If you had to rescue something from your home, what would it be? Why?

The churchyard around St. Paul’s was a natural fire-break, and people thought that their possessions would be safe in the stone Cathedral. Many booksellers and stationers put their goods in the Cathedral crypt, and when that was full, they piled them up against the walls.

At about 8pm on Tuesday evening, the fire reached the Cathedral. The goods outside were the first to burn. Then the lead roof began to melt in the heat, and the wooden boards patching up the holes caught fire.

How can you tell that this effigy has been in the Great Fire of London?
By the time the Great Fire had died down, on Wednesday evening, it had destroyed over 13,000 houses and 87 churches. Within a week, Wren had come up with a plan for a new London, with St. Paul’s at the centre! The plans were rejected as the rebuilding had already begun in earnest, using the existing street plan, but in stone rather than wood.

Why do you think Wren wanted St. Paul’s to the centre of the new London? Think about the message he was trying to give about the relationship between the faith of the Cathedral and the money of the City.
Because Wren was first and foremost a mathematician, he was determined to rebuild St. Paul’s according to mathematical principles. He believed that in maths was perfect beauty: a building built according to mathematical principles would be beautiful forever and would outlast building fashions.

He believed that the most mathematically perfect shapes would be eternally beautiful.

Look at the view down the Cathedral from the West End. What shapes do you think Wren tried to use most in his designs? Which shapes do you think he considered are the most mathematically perfect? Why?
Using his mathematical principles, Wren designed what he thought was the most beautiful building. In order to show what it was like he had a model built, at the huge cost of £600, the same price as a London house! It is known as the Great Model.

This is a diagram of the Greek Cross design which was used to make the Great Model. Draw in the lines of symmetry you can see. One is marked for you.
Section K: The Warrant Design

The Great Model/Greek Cross design was rejected by the Cathedral authorities. Firstly, it was not practical for Protestant Christian worship and secondly, it could not be built in stages and therefore could not open for worship until the whole building was completed. Since a Cathedral was needed as soon as possible, it was felt that it needed to have a section that could open up within a few years.

So Wren designed another building, taking into account these criticisms. He wasn’t very happy, considering the previous design to have been his best ever work.

Why do you think Wren considered this version to be less \textit{beautiful} than the Greek Cross design?

The King wanted to give Wren freedom to design something of which he could be proud. This design was accepted, and is called the Warrant Design, but Wren was allowed

\textit{‘to make some Variations, rather ornamental, than essential, as from Time to Time he should see proper.’}
With permission from the King to make ‘alterations’, Wren came up with a third design which was much like the Cathedral we see today.

The old site had to be cleared of charred rubble, and new foundations set out. One day, Wren was on site and needed to make a particular spot. He sent a labourer to fetch a stone to use as a marker. The man came back with a fragment of broken tombstone with on Latin word carved on it: RESURGUM—I shall rise again. He placed the stone above the door of the South Transept.

Why do you think Wren never forgot that moment?

The foundation stone was laid on 21st June, 1675.

It had taken nine years to clear the site, select a design, employ masons, and determine how to finance the project.

Money was raised by taxing coal which was imported to the City. A nationwide appeal was also launched, and money came in. In total, the building cost about £1 million, which in modern money is about £1,665,770,244 (over a billion pounds!)

The first service was held in the Quire in 1697.

The Cathedral had an architect, but what other skills were needed to build it? Do you think one skill was more important than any of the others?
With most of the Cathedral completed, thoughts began to turn to the decoration of the interior. Christians at that time believed in simple decoration, and Wren’s plans for elaborate mosaics in the dome and a grand High Altar were not acceptable. A competition was held to find an artist who could decorate the Dome. Sir James Thornhill won, and painted eight scenes from the life of St. Paul.

This scene shows the conversion of St. Paul. Why do you think many Christians thought that church decoration should be rather simple?

Places of worship should not have bright colours or paintings as these are a distraction. Do you agree? Explain your answer.
Section N: Wren’s Old Age

Sir Christopher Wren was able to see the completion of his Cathedral. In 1708, on Wren’s 76th birthday, his son laid in final stone on the lantern in the presence of the masons and labourers who had worked for so long. Wren retired to a house near Hampton Court, but from time to time he would visit his Cathedral and sit under the Dome. He died when he was 91 and was buried in the Cathedral, near the place where the Foundation stone had been laid all those years ago.

Return to the OBE Chapel in the Crypt for this section.

The year of Wren’s death is marked here in Roman Numerals: MDCCXXIII
M= 1000, D=500 C=100 X=10 I=1

What was the year of Wren’s death?

Sit under the Dome yourself. What thoughts do you think went through Wren’s mind when he visited the Cathedral in his old age? What are your own thoughts?