

u3a Bike Rides London Cathedrals Tuesday 27th February 2024

Today we are off to see six cathedrals in and around central London, a route planned by Denise and John.

There was a cold breeze and we were keen to get moving, setting off in two groups.

By way of Loughborough Junction and the Oval, we crossed Vauxhall Bridge, circling Vincent Square to arrive at our first stop, **Westminster Cathedral**.

This is the mother church of the Catholic Church in England & Wales, the largest Catholic church in the UK and the seat of the Archbishop of Westminster.

Construction was completed in 1903. It is designed in neo-Byzantine style and built almost entirely of brick. Sir John Betjeman called it "a masterpiece in striped brick and stone that shows the good craftsman has no need of steel or concrete."

Today, the dramatic striped, red-brick and Portland stone front dominates a view of Victoria Street. This was not so originally because the Cathedral was hidden by blocks of mansions.

So it was originally designed for the portal to be viewed at an angle. The piazza was opened up in the 1970s, revealing the view we see today. The Campanile Bell Tower featured in the Alfred Hitchcock film *Foreign Correspondent*.

Across Horseferry Road we headed for Smith Square to St John's Smith Square, a much loved venue for concerts, and our welcome coffee stop in the crypt. Described as a redundant church, it was sold to a charitable trust as a ruin following firebombing in the Second World War and restored as a concert hall.

This Grade I listed church was designed by Thomas Archer and was completed in 1728 and is one of the 'Fifty New Churches'.

It's considered to be one of the finest works of English Baroque architecture, with its four corner towers.



Sometimes it is known as 'Queen Anne's Footstool'; according to legend when Archer asked the Queen what she wanted it to look like, she kicked over her footstool and said 'Like that!'

Palace Yard was closed to the public and so we circled around to arrive at the front of **Westminster Abbey**. We were only able to admire it from outside today.

According to legend, the first Christian king of the East Saxons, Sæberht of Essex, established a church on a small island in the River Thames, then known as Thorney but later called the westminster (or monastery).

By about 785 CE there was a small community of Benedictine monks here. Edward the Confessor built a new church on the site, consecrated in 1065; The only existing depiction of Edward's abbey is in the Bayeux Tapestry.



In 1245 Henry III pulled down the whole of Edward's church (except the nave) and replaced it with the present abbey church in the pointed Gothic style of the period. The design and plan were strongly influenced by contemporary French cathedral architecture.

The rebuilding of the Norman-style nave was begun by the late 1300s. Building continued intermittently until Tudor times.

The chapel of Henry VII (begun c. 1503) in Perpendicular Gothic style is famous for its exquisite pendant fan vaulting. In 1987 Westminster Abbey, St. Margaret's Church, and the Houses of Parliament were collectively designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.



The western towers were the last addition to the building and were designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and John James (not by Wren) and completed about 1745. The choir stalls (1847) and the high altar and reredos (ornamental screens covering the wall at the back of an altar) were remodelled by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1867.

The abbey was heavily damaged in the bombing raids in World War II, but it was restored soon after the war.

From the Abbey, we headed for Birdcage Walk, around past Buckingham Palace and up Constitution Hill, Marble Arch and into Hyde Park and along South Carriage Drive.

Leaving the park at Princes Gate, we arrived at **Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God and All Saints**, the cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Surozh.



The building was erected as an Anglican Church to All Saints in 1848-49. The main (western) façade was remodelled in 1891 and is a very close copy of that of the Basilica of San Zeno, Verona. Its interior is largely unchanged from that of the Anglican church which was designed by the architect Lewis Vulliamy.

Re-entering the Park, we headed down Rotten Row, with the Serpentine on our left, and the original site of the Crystal Palace on our right, before retracing our route to Buckingham Palace. Up the Mall and past Horseguards Parade, on past the Palace of Westminster and headed along Victoria Embankment, under Blackfriars Bridge before turning up St Andrew's Hill to arrive at **St Paul's Cathedral**.

This Anglican cathedral stands on Ludgate Hill, the highest point of the City of London and is the seat of the Bishop of London. The original church was founded in AD 604 and dedicated in honour of St Paul the Apostle.



The Cathedral seen today was completed in 1710 as part of a major rebuilding work following the Great Fire of London.

It is a Grade I listed building designed in the English Baroque style by Sir Christopher Wren. The earlier Gothic cathedral (Old St Paul's Cathedral) was largely destroyed in the Great Fire.

The cathedral is one of the most famous and recognisable sights of London. Its dome, surrounded by the spires of Wren's City churches, dominated the skyline for over 300 years. At 365 ft high, it was the tallest building in London until 1963. The dome is still one of the highest in the world.

The cathedral survived the Blitz although struck by two bombs; the first destroyed the high altar; the second struck the north transept and left a hole in the floor above the crypt, then detonated and the force was sufficient to shift the entire dome laterally by a small amount.

On 12 September 1940 a time-delayed bomb that had struck the cathedral was successfully defused and removed by a bomb disposal detachment of Royal Engineers. Had this bomb detonated, it would have totally destroyed the cathedral; as a result of this action, Lieutenant Robert Davies and Sapper George Cameron Wylie were each awarded the George Cross.

There was a fine view of St Paul's near the Millennium Bridge.



Close by the Millennium Bridge was the International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, a modern building, mostly glass, and our lunch stop. This was an excellent choice, spacious and warm, and with a good food selection.

Continuing our journey along Thames Street, we passed the Monument on our way to London Bridge and so **Southwark Cathedral**.

Also known as "The Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St Saviour and St Mary Overie" it is the mother church of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark; Overie means "over the river".

It has been a place of Christian worship for more than 1,000 years, but only became a cathedral after the creation of the diocese of Southwark in 1905.



Between 1106 and 1538 it was the church of an Augustinian priory, Southwark Priory, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Following the dissolution of the monasteries, it became a parish church, in the diocese of Winchester until 1877, when several parishes were transferred to the diocese of Rochester.

The present building retains the basic form of the Gothic structure built between 1220 and 1420. The nave is a late 19th-century reconstruction.

Close by was seated William Shakespeare, busy with a quill pen.

Union Street provided a convenient quiet route though this part of Southwark to our final destination.



St George's Cathedral, Southwark (or to give it its full name, the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of St George) is the cathedral of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, and is the seat of the Archbishop of Southwark.

The cathedral is the mother church of the Roman Catholic Province of Southwark which covers the very large area of the Archdiocese of Southwark (all of London south of the River Thames, as well as Kent and north Surrey) - and the dioceses of Arundel and Brighton, Portsmouth, and Plymouth!

August Pugin was responsible for the original design. The building was erected in 1848, reopened after extensive war damage in 1958 and is listed Grade II.

There was much to learn about these familiar landmarks by means of the informative notes that Denise and John had compiled and shared with the group. A great lunch venue too! Thank you!!

Distance: 20 miles

Riders: *Agama Cunningham, Andrew Burke, Caroline Strallen, Chris Booth, Denise Davies, Jan Rae, Jane Andrew, Jane Antos, Joe Antos, John Clements, John Davies, Julia Carter, Mark Stones, Mary Burke.*

Ride leaders Denise & John

Report by John, 29th February 2024

Acknowledgement: *source material from Wikipedia*