



Monuments of Our City

An excellent place to start would be 'The Monument to the Great Fire of London', more commonly known simply as 'the Monument' near the northern end of London Bridge, which commemorates the Great Fire of London in 1666.

Designed by Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke, it stands at the junction of Monument Street and Fish Street Hill, 62 metres tall and 62 metres from the spot in Pudding Lane where the Great Fire started on 2nd September 1666 at the bakery of Thomas Farynor. Another monument, the Golden Boy of Pye Corner, marks the point near Smithfield where the fire was stopped. Constructed between 1671 and 1677, it is the tallest isolated stone column in the World and was built on the site of St. Margaret's, Fish Street, the first church to be burnt down by the Great Fire.

This is an interest point in history to look at when considering the design of modern London. Year 2 study this event, enabling them to incorporate many aspects of the curriculum such as design technology, history and literature. With the loss of much of the old city planners looked again at London and how it could be rebuilt and improved.

Within a few days of the Fire, several proposals were put forward to King Charles and the City appointed Commissioners, including Wren, to regulate the rebuilding. Some streets were widened or straightened and bottlenecks eased.

All houses had to be constructed of brick, though some timber was allowed in practice (especially for the cornice at roof-level), and the external walls were to be of differing thickness depending on the type of house. The grander houses sometimes had doorways and windows in stone, but this would have been exceptional. There are a very few survivors today, but an example can be seen in the former Deanery off St Paul's churchyard.

Fifty-one parish churches were rebuilt under the general direction of Christopher Wren (knighted in 1673). Today there are 23 left fairly intact, and ruins or only towers of a further six.

Wren, of course, was principally concerned with St Paul's Cathedral. The first foundations, at the east end, were dug in 1675. The ruins of the west portico of Inigo Jones, in its day a noted piece of architecture, were regretfully removed by Wren in 1688. The choir was finished for a celebratory service in 1697, the dome was completed in 1708, and the cathedral declared finished in 1711.

Since then London has not stopped growing and in recent years a number of sky scrapers have appeared. Since 2010, the tallest structure in London has been the Shard at London Bridge, which reaches approximately 306 metres, making it the tallest habitable building in Europe.

The second-tallest building is One Canada Square in Canary Wharf, which rises 235 metres and was completed in 1991. It is the 19th-tallest building in Europe.

The Greater London area currently contains the most skyscrapers of any metropolitan area in the European Union. As of 2014, there are 18 skyscrapers that reach a roof height of at least 150 metres.

The history of tall structures in London began with the completion of the 27 metres White Tower, a part of the Tower of London, in 1098. The first structure to surpass a height of 100 metres was the Old St Paul's Cathedral. Completed in 1310, it stood at a height of 150 metres. St Paul's was the world's tallest structure until 1311, when its height was surpassed by Lincoln Cathedral in Lincoln. No other structure in London again rose above 100 metres until 1710, when the current St Paul's Cathedral was completed. At 111 metres the cathedral remained London's tallest building until it was overtaken in 1962 by the BT Tower, which was officially opened in 1965.

Few skyscrapers were built in London before the end of the last century, owing to restrictions on building heights originally imposed by the London Building Act of 1894, which followed the construction of the 14-storey Queen Anne's Mansions. Though restrictions have long since been eased, strict regulations remain to preserve protected views, especially those of St Paul's, the Tower of London and Palace of Westminster, as well as to comply with the requirements of the Civil Aviation Authority.

The lifting of height restrictions caused a boom in the construction of tall buildings during the 1960s. One of London's first notable tall buildings was the 117-metre Centre Point, completed in 1966. The National Westminster Tower (now called Tower 42) followed in 1980, which at 183 metres (600 ft) became London's first genuine "skyscraper" by international standards. It was followed in 1991 by One Canada Square, which formed the centrepiece of the Canary Wharf development. Following a 10-year gap, several new skyscrapers appeared on London's skyline: 8 Canada Square, 25 Canada Square (both also at Canary Wharf), the Heron Quays buildings, One Churchill Place, the Broadgate Tower and the gherkin-shaped 30 St Mary Axe.

With the precedent set by the towers of Canary Wharf, a renewed trend for building tall has been established in recent years. There are nine structures actively under construction in London that will rise at least 100 metres in height.

Another major architectural feature of London is its bridges. Most of these are river crossings and the most well-known are those across the River Thames. Taking their names from areas of London, some are high level road or rail crossings while others are pedestrian use.

If one counts footbridges more than 100 bridges span the River Thames from beginning to end.

Tower Bridge, Millennium Bridge and London Bridge, are widely recognized around the world.

London's bridges enable trains, cars, and pedestrians to cross quickly over the River Thames rush hour permitting.

London Bridge. A London Bridge has existed in more or less the same spot for almost 2,000 years. And just as the nursery rhyme explains, it kept falling down. The Romans built the first bridge shortly after they set up camp in London in 46 AD. Constructed out of wood, early versions of London Bridge were susceptible to fire, storms, and occasional invading armies. The first stone bridge was completed after 33 years of construction in 1209. King John was on the throne, and he permitted houses and shops as well as St. Thomas à Becket Chapel to be built on the span. A drawbridge permitted maritime passage. To secure the bridge at night, a gate was installed at both ends. It was from the southern gatehouse that the severed heads of traitors were displayed for macabre enjoyment and royal warning. William Wallace and Sir Thomas More were among the traitors so honoured.

The stone bridge lasted over 600 years and was finally put out of commission in 1831. The current London Bridge was formally opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1973. It accommodates both vehicles and pedestrians.

Tower Bridge. This bridge is so popular that some people think that it is actually London Bridge. Perhaps the most-photographed of all of London's bridges, Tower Bridge is comparatively young - it went into service in June 1894.

A busy port and docks east of London Bridge necessitated another span across the Thames, but it would take years of discussion, an open design competition, and eight years of construction to make Tower Bridge a reality. Tower Bridge is a bascule (the word means see-saw or rocker in French) bridge; the engineering design enables the bridge to be quickly raised to accommodate the passage of ships below.

Millennium Bridge. London's pedestrian-only Millennium Bridge - linking St. Paul's Cathedral to Tate Modern, Bankside - opened to great fanfare in June 2000. The steel suspension bridge was closed just days later. The problem - it wobbled. The designers had not allowed for the effect of large numbers of people walking across the span at the same time. Happily the problem was remedied and is now one of London's newest and most contemporary bridges.

Westminster Bridge. Westminster Bridge connects Westminster and Lambeth. Made of wrought iron, the current bridge was opened in 1862 (it replaced a notoriously wobbly and dangerous overpass that opened in 1750) and is London's oldest bridge. Open to both vehicles and pedestrians, the bridge matches some of the Gothic detailing of the nearby Houses of Parliament. Westminster Bridge is predominantly green to match the colour used in the House of Commons.

Hungerford Bridge. The Hungerford Bridge is actually one railway bridge sandwiched between two pedestrian walkways. The first bridge on the site was a suspension foot bridge designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, chief engineer of the Great Western Railway. The new pedestrian spans are often still called the "Hungerford Footbridges;" the new walkways were completed in 2002. Their formal name, the Golden Jubilee Bridges, honours that milestone of Queen Elizabeth II's reign.

Waterloo Bridge. The first bridge on this site opened in 1817, the name coming from the Battle of Waterloo during the Napoleonic Wars. The current bridge was completed in 1945 and is made of Portland stone. Both a vehicle and foot bridge, Waterloo Bridge leads to the many theatres and galleries along the South Bank.