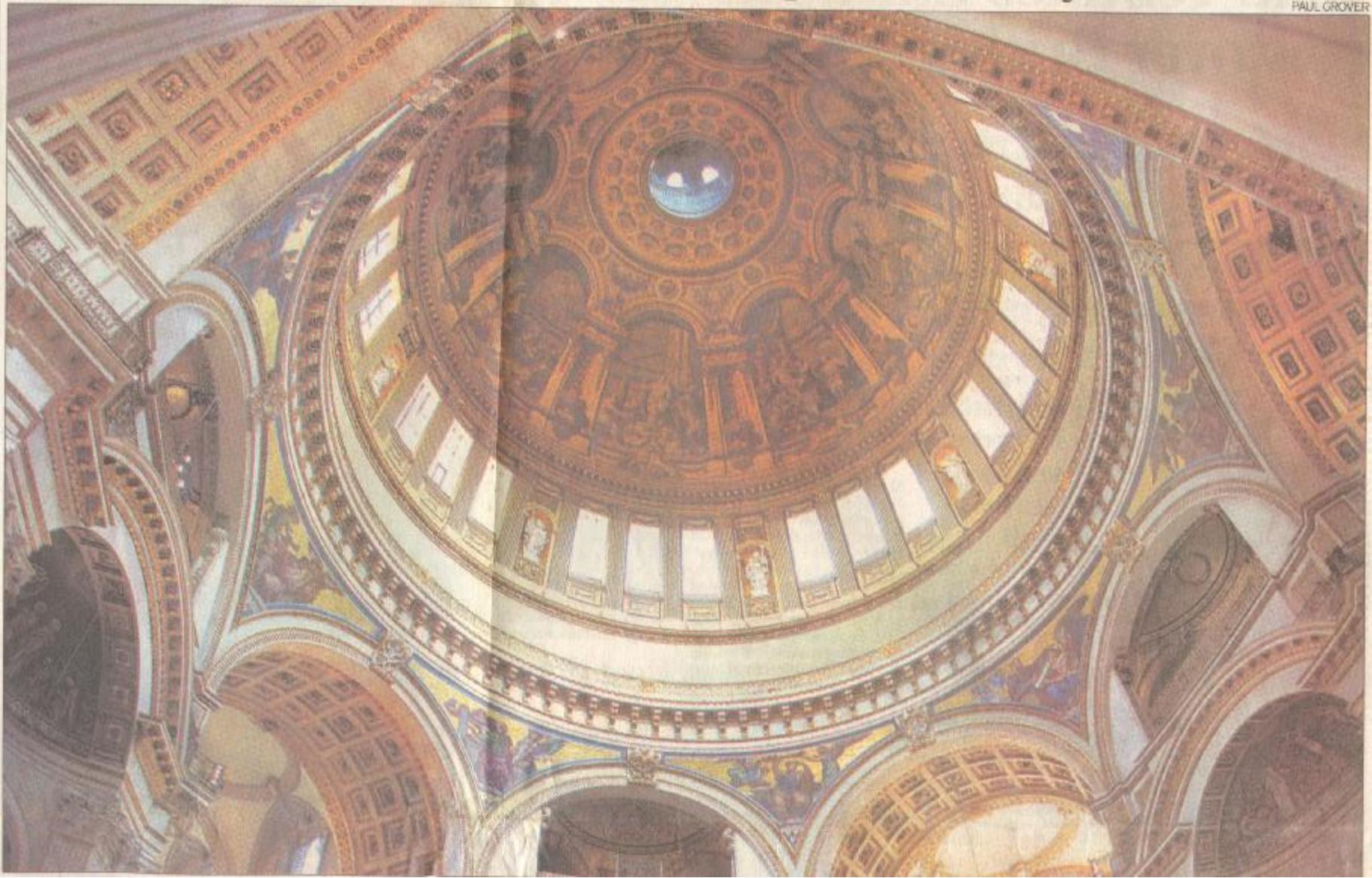


Restoration drama St Paul's emerges triumphant from four-year makeover

PAUL GROVER



The glory of St Paul's is unwrapped

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SIR Christopher Wren's mighty St Paul's Cathedral has been covered with scaffolding and polythene for so long that it has been compared to a parcel lost in the post.

Some of the wrapping came off yesterday when a bright, light, clean interior was revealed after a £10.8million wash and brush-up. The look was likened to the lustre of a cheerful spring lamb by one observer.

The four-year restoration project – cleaning 15,500 square metres of stonework, paintings, mosaics, gildings, tombs and sculptures – has been paid for by Robert Fleming, the retired Scottish investment banker, and his family.

Modestly, he has declined to talk publicly about his gift other than to say that his family is delighted to help such an important project.

And what a project. Though the nave, aisles and quire are now scaffold and workman-free, cleaning the interior is only part of a monumental undertaking.

Starting in 2000, the cathedral authorities have set out to clean and restore Wren's entire masterpiece, built from 70,000 tons of Portland stone.

The £40million project – some £39.2million more than it cost Wren to build his cathedral – is due to be finished just in time for the building's 300th birthday in 2007. The west facade has

already been scrubbed clean, as has the east end.

Scaffolding is now up on the south side – it is particularly blackened because of drifting soot from the former Bankside power station – and the north side will be tackled soon. Inside, more than 1,000 cubic yards of dust has been removed from the walls.

After the Great Fire of 1666, Wren completed his masterpiece in 35 years, becoming the first British architect to start and complete a cathedral. But he left a problem for future generations.

He decided to paint his interior "three times in oyle". Though the Victorians scrubbed it off with caustic paste – leaving the surface rough – Wren's linseed oil had seeped deep into the stone and sucked in the dirt.

The exterior blackened and the interior turned a dirty brown. The smoke from 100,000 hearths in London discoloured the stone in Wren's lifetime.

Records show he ordered hoses to try to clean the outside before Queen Anne attended a service.

To remove the filth from the interior, a paste called Arte Mundi, an alkali solution mixed with latex, was sprayed on to the walls, left for four days and then peeled off like a face pack.

Mosaics from the 19th century have been painstakingly cleaned with cotton buds and monuments to Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington have been buffed up, but the *piece de resistance* is St Paul's refurbished dome.

Suspended from the pinnacle of the cathedral, workmen built a rotating cradle of scaffold 200 feet above ground to clean a series of Raphael-like paintings of the life of St Paul.

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Christopher Wren's masterpiece, built from 70,000 tons of Portland stone

