



Interior of St Paul's

£11m renovation restores cathedral to a standard not seen since it was built

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The interior of St Paul's Cathedral gleamed whiter than its architect Sir Christopher Wren ever saw it yesterday, as a four-year renovation project that has cost nearly £11m was completed.

With bright early summer light streaming through the windows, the cathedral's great interior was revealed in all its shining glory, including some details scarcely seen since the building was completed and others shown for the first time since the Victorians painted them over.

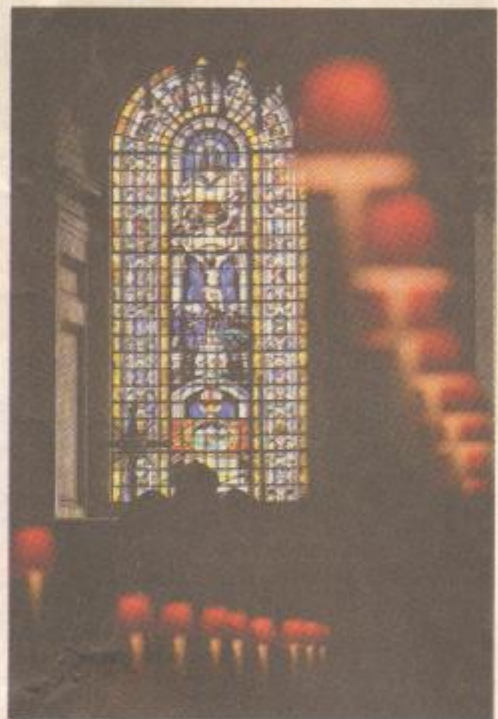
"When it was murky you could not see the differences in the architecture or the carving as Wren intended," said Sir Christopher's successor as surveyor to the fabric, Martin Stancliffe, who has supervised the project, eight years in the planning and four years in the execution. "We have now installed new chandeliers and more lights but they are still using less energy than we used to need."

Not even the great Wren saw it like this. During the 35 years of its original building the architect had the Portland stone coated in several thick layers of oil and paint to protect it from the elements before the roof was put on, so it never was as white as now.

That sticky surface absorbed the dirt and smoke of the surrounding city for several hundred years, not least because the authorities kept the west doors open all day, and although there have been several attempts at cleaning — the Victorians got to work with abrasives and there was



Restoration has brightened the interior of St Paul's, left. A view of the dome, above, and a stained glass window, right
Main photograph: Jane Mingay/PA



brighter than even Wren saw it

another renovation in the 1930s — none had been successful until now.

The cathedral's conservators used a newly developed Belgian technique for the first time in Britain, employing a latex paste, sprayed on overnight when the cathedral was closed and peeled off during the day, to remove the ground-in dirt.

They have also hand-cleaned and restored the Victorian mosaics under the dome and above the choir — the large, triangular, pendentive mosaic of St Mark hanging high above the nave was found to have become largely detached from its brickwork base and had to be completely removed and reset.

The work also uncovered details of the original 18th century paintings inside the dome by the largely forgotten artist Sir James Thornhill, which had been disintegrated over in the 19th century but which have now been restored in the expectation that modern visitors will be more appreciative of them than Wren was.

The restoration of one of the most familiar and famous buildings in Britain, which will cost £40m in total, should be completed in time for the 300th anniversary of its original completion in 2008.

The organ remains to be restored and the south exterior facade has still to be cleaned.

Most of the money has come so far from individual large donations, rather than a whip-round among the City institutions: the late Sir Paul Getty paid for the £5m cleaning of the west front, completed last winter, and the Fleming banking family has paid for the interior.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has refused funding for one of the most distinctive landmarks in the country.

Sir Roger Gibbs, a former stockbroker who is the chairman of the cathedral's foundation, said: "Thirty years ago you could go to the chairman of a City bank and he would come up with some money and make sure his colleagues matched it, but you can't do that today — they seem

to feel that it is up to their shareholders to decide where their donations should go."

"And quite a few say they won't support religion," chipped in Canon Phillip Buckler, the cathedral's treasurer.

"We are religious, but we are also part of the national heritage. It is a place where people can turn in times of trouble, as with the memorial service three days after 9/11 and the tsunami service last month."

Surveying the nave, the man who has conducted most of those services, the cathedral's dean, the Very Rev John Moses, said: "The great thing about this cathedral is that it cuts you down to size. It is one of the great, unambiguous statements about God.

"There is a new energy in this building now and the question is whether that energy can be translated into what we do here."

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