RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

I Never Knew That About London

Christopher Winn

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About the Book

Discover hundreds of fascinating facts about London in this enthralling miscellany.

Travelling through the villages and districts that make up the world’s most dynamic metropolis, bestselling author Christopher Winn takes us on a captivating journey around London to unearth the hideen gems of legends, firsts, inventions, adventures and birthplaces that shape the city’s compelling, and at times, turbulent past.

Brimming with stories and snippets providing a spellbinding insight into what has shaped our capital, this beautifully illustrated gem of a book is guaranteed to infom and amuse in equal measure, and will have you exclaiming again and again: ‘Well, I never knew that!’

About the Author

Christopher Winn's first book was the bestselling *I Never Knew That About England*. Volumes on Ireland, Scotland, Wales, London, the English, Irish and Scottish followed and he has recently published books on the Lake District, Yorkshire and the River Thames alongside an illustrated edition of *I Never Knew That About England*. A freelance writer and collector of trivia for over 20 years, he has worked with Terry Wogan and Jonathan Ross and sets quiz questions for television as well as for the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*. He is married to artist Mai Osawa, who illustrates all the books in the series.

Also by Christopher Winn:

I Never Knew That About England

I Never Knew That About Ireland

I Never Knew That About Scotland


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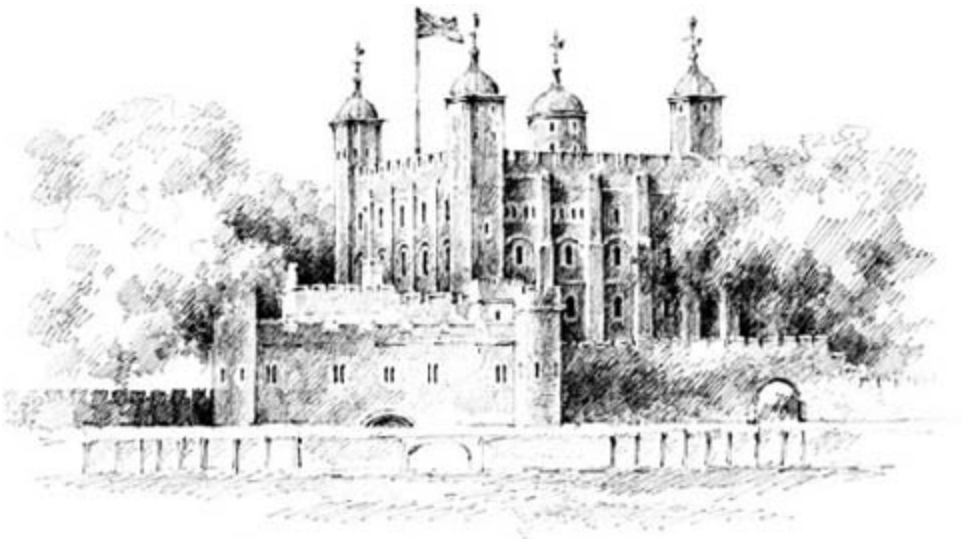
Christopher Winn

I Never Knew That ABOUT LONDON

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
Mai Osawa

This book is for Ryoji and Akiko.



Tower of London

Preface

LONDON IS WHATEVER you want it to be.

It is one of the greatest cities on earth. It stands on the Prime Meridian and draws in the best from East and West. It sits at the centre of Time and the world sets its watch by London's Big Ben.

London is built on commerce and trades with the world. It gave the world modern banking, the stock exchange and insurance and it remains the world's financial hub. London is home to the Mother of Parliaments and has given sanctuary to ideas, to freedom of speech and thought, to religions and refugees from across the globe. London has the best theatre, the greatest concentration of museums, opera and art; a musical and literary heritage second to none. London has the first underwater tunnels, the first and biggest underground transport system, the first international exchange, the highest Ferris wheel, the biggest dome, the loftiest church. London has over 2,000 years of history. It has survived pestilence, fire and war. It has Roman walls, Norman towers, Tudor palaces, Renaissance splendour, Georgian loveliness, Victorian grandeur, breath-taking modern wonders.

There is pomp and ceremony and spectacle, and yet London is also intimate with quiet corners, crooked cobbled streets, winding alleyways and sunny squares. It is the most liveable-in of all cities with more green spaces than any comparable metropolis, and gardens everywhere.

London is its people and its characters who meet here from every corner of the planet. London cannot be tamed. All you can do is revel in its richness and enjoy the adventure.

I Never Knew That About London is like the city itself, packed, vibrant, disorganised, rambling, diverse, infuriating and endlessly fascinating. Treat this book as a fun companion, one who loves London and can tell you just some of its secrets, and you will soon discover, as Wordsworth did, that ‘Earth has not anything to show more fair …’

London’s River

I NEVER KNEW *That About London* follows the River Thames, that meandering silver thread of liquid history that runs through the heart of the city and gives it meaning and continuity.

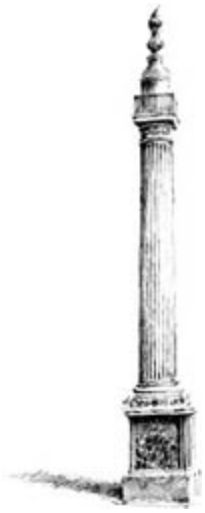
The book begins where London began, on the north bank of the Thames where the Romans built their bridge, then follows the river to the east, to the west and to the south.

Villages merge. Boroughs change their names. Post codes are indistinct. The river is the one constant. It links the many diverse communities that line its banks and bestows a unique quality on them. The river makes London breathe and feel the breeze. It gave life to London and may one day take it away again.

City of London

EC3 South

Monument – London Bridge – Billingsgate – Fenchurch Street



The Monument – the tallest isolated stone column in the world.

The Monument

Monumental

THE MONUMENT RISES above Fish Hill, close to where the Roman bridge came ashore and where London began. The view from the top is awe-inspiring. All around, a forest of spires and towers and turrets thrust upwards, striving for the light, a perfect metaphor for the struggle between God and Mammon. The godly spires more than hold their own, even as the towers of commerce grow ever higher and bolder.

The writer James Boswell came here in 1762 to climb the 311 steps to what was then the highest viewpoint in London. Half-way up he suffered a panic attack, but he persevered and made it to the top, where he found it ‘horrid to be so monstrous a way up in the air, so far above

London and all its spires'. After a rash of suicides the viewing platform was caged in 1842.

The Monument commemorates the Great Fire of London and is THE TALLEST ISOLATED STONE COLUMN IN THE WORLD, 202 ft (62 m) high. It stands 202 ft (62 m) away from where the Great Fire started, at a baker's shop in Pudding Lane, on 2 September 1666. The fire raged for five days and destroyed four-fifths of the City, including St Paul's Cathedral and 87 churches.

SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN, as well as designing the new St Paul's Cathedral also designed the Monument along with his friend Robert Hooke. Wren wanted to crown it with a statue of Charles II, but the king declined, pointing out, 'I didn't start the fire.' So a flaming urn of gilt bronze was put there instead. The two architects used the hollow centre of the column to suspend a pendulum for scientific experiments, but the vibrations from the heavy traffic on Fish Hill made the conditions unsuitable.

The Monument stands on the site of St Margaret's, Fish Street, the first church to be burned down by the Great Fire.

St Magnus the Martyr

Where fishermen lounge at noon
Where the walls of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold

T.S. ELIOT

AT THE BOTTOM of Pudding Lane, down by the river, stands the church of ST MAGNUS THE MARTYR, blackened by grime on the outside but still rich with white and gold inside. It is dedicated to the gentle Norwegian Earl of Orkney, killed by his cousin Haakon in 1116. There has been a church here since at least as early as 1067 and St Magnus was the

second church to be consumed by the Great Fire. It was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren in 1671–6, with the steeple, one of Wren's finest, added in 1705. It is 185 ft (56 m) high but only just manages to peep above the massive concrete bulk of Adelaide House (*see* opposite), which sits hard up against the church. The approach to the old London Bridge ran by St Magnus's, and when the bridge was widened in the 18th century the aisles of the church were shortened so that the pavement could pass directly underneath the tower, which then straddled the walkway. Some stones from Old London Bridge can be seen just inside the gates of the churchyard. Tucked in beside one of the tower's pillars is a wooden post from the Roman wharf of the 1st century, found on Fish Hill and as solid today as it was nearly 2,000 years ago.

Inside, there is a memorial to MILES COVERDALE (1487–1569), who was Rector of St Magnus for a short while towards the end of his life, having previously been Bishop

of Exeter. Miles Coverdale oversaw the production of THE FIRST COMPLETE BIBLE IN ENGLISH, published in 1535, which he dedicated to Henry VIII with the words ‘this poor translation unto the spirit of truth in your grace’. Four years later he was responsible for THE FIRST AUTHORISED VERSION, the GREAT BIBLE, which was printed in London. Coverdale was originally buried in St Bartholomew by the Exchange, but when that church was demolished in 1840 to make way for the new Royal Exchange, his monument and remains were moved to St Magnus.

The church organ was built by Abraham Jordan in 1712 and was THE FIRST ‘SWELL’ ORGAN IN THE WORLD. A swell organ uses pipes set apart in a box that can be opened and closed to alter the volume, a system now used for organs everywhere.

Just inside the west door there is a fascinating 13 ft (4 m) long model of Old London Bridge.

Adelaide House

Early Skyscraper

LOOMING OVER ST Magnus at the north end of the present London Bridge, and obliterating the view of Wren’s tower and the Monument from the river, is ADELAIDE HOUSE. When this was built in 1925 it was THE TALLEST OFFICE BLOCK IN LONDON, 148 ft (45 m) high. Named in honour of William IV’s wife Queen Adelaide, who performed the opening ceremony for Sir John Rennie’s London Bridge in 1831, Adelaide House was THE FIRST BUILDING IN THE CITY TO EMPLOY THE STEEL FRAME TECHNIQUE. This technique was pioneered, in iron, by the Ditherington Flax Mill outside Shrewsbury in Shropshire, and was later widely used for skyscrapers in New York and Chicago. The discreet Art Deco design of Adelaide House includes Egyptian influences, popular at the time after the recent discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb.

Adelaide House was also THE FIRST OFFICE BLOCK IN BRITAIN TO HAVE CENTRAL VENTILATION and TELEPHONE AND ELECTRIC CONNECTIONS ON EVERY FLOOR. There used to be a golf course on the roof.

London Bridge

Where It All Began

LONDON BRIDGE IS where London began. The first bridge was built around AD 52 by the invading Roman army of the Emperor Claudius, somewhere near the site of the present bridge. About AD 80 a more permanent bridge, made of wood, was erected and Londinium began to develop at the northern end. After the Romans departed the bridge was left to rot and was replaced by a ferry and intermittently by a variety of makeshift wooden structures, until the middle of the 9th century when another more lasting wooden bridge was constructed. In 1014 the Danes held London and the Saxon King Ethelred the Unready, supported by King Olaf of Norway, sailed up the Thames, tied his boats to the bridge supports and rowed away, pulling the bridge down behind him and giving rise to the song 'London Bridge is falling down …'

The first stone bridge was begun in 1176, in the reign of Henry II. It was masterminded by a churchman called Peter de Colechurch, paid for by a tax on wool and took 33 years to complete. When it was finished in 1209 it was 20 ft (6 m) wide, 900 ft (274 m) long and had 20 arches. There was a gatehouse at each end, a drawbridge near the Southwark end that could be raised to allow ships to pass, and a chapel in the middle, dedicated to St Thomas à Becket, where Peter de Colechurch was buried in 1205. King John decreed that houses and shops should be built on the bridge to provide rents for its upkeep. This bridge became

one of the wonders of the world and was to last for over 600 years.

As the tide ebbed and flowed, the narrow arches of the bridge channelled the water into fast-running rapids, and ‘shooting the bridge’ became a dangerous and quite often fatal sport for young bucks. In 1212 fire broke out at both ends of the bridge, trapping thousands of sightseers and residents, and some 3,000 people died.

In 1305 a grisly custom was established when the head of Scottish hero William Wallace was stuck on a pole and placed above the southern gatehouse. Others who have met the same fate, their heads parboiled and dipped in tar to preserve them, include Wat Tyler, Jack Cade, St Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Bishop Fisher and Guy Fawkes.

By the 15th century, buildings lined the whole length of the bridge, some of them seven or eight storeys high and touching at the top, making the bridge into a tunnel.

In 1582 water from the Thames was pumped into the city by two water-wheels placed on the bridge arches to take advantage of the fast-running water. Pieter Morice, the builder of the water-wheels, gave a demonstration of their potential by shooting a column of water high over St Magnus’s steeple.

In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, prior to the building of the Victorian embankments, the river was

shallower and the narrow arches of the bridge slowed the flow of water upstream so that the river froze, allowing Frost Fairs to be held on the Thames, most famously in 1683–4 when Charles II attended.

London Bridge escaped the Great Fire of London thanks to a gap between the buildings at the northern end, caused by a previous fire in 1633, that acted as a fire break.

As the narrow bridge road became more and more congested it became necessary to create some rules of the road to keep the traffic flowing smoothly. In 1722 the Lord Mayor ordered that bridge traffic should keep to the left, THE FIRST TIME THE RULE HAD OFFICIALLY BEEN MADE COMPULSORY IN BRITAIN.

By 1763 all the houses had been removed from the bridge and the two central arches were replaced with a single wide arch.

In 1831 the first completely new London Bridge in over 600 years was opened by William IV and Queen Adelaide, 180 ft (55 m) to the west of the original. It was built by Sir John Rennie to the designs of his father John Rennie (1761–1821), who had been responsible for Waterloo and Southwark bridges. When the old bridge was being demolished the bones of Peter de Colechurch were found and unceremoniously thrown into the river.

By the 1960s the bridge was no longer able to cope with modern traffic, and the Government let it be known that they were putting London Bridge up for sale. Robert McCulloch from Arizona in the USA bid $2,460,000 for it, apparently under the impression that he was buying the rather more picturesque Tower Bridge. If, as some claimed, he was bitterly disappointed, McCulloch didn’t show it. As Rennie’s bridge was dismantled section by section, the American had the pieces shipped across the Atlantic and transported to Arizona, where they were put back together at Lake Havasu City on the Colorado River. Sir John Rennie’s London Bridge opened in America in 1971, as THE

LARGEST ANTIQUE EVER SOLD, according to *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Keep Left

The British custom of keeping to the left had developed from jousting when competitors needed to keep their javelin or sword hand free to meet the oncoming horseman. As most people were right-handed this meant passing each other on the left. The Continental custom of driving on the right was introduced by the Emperor Napoleon, who was left handed. Since it was he who established the first road system across most of Europe, right-hand drive was adopted on the Continent.

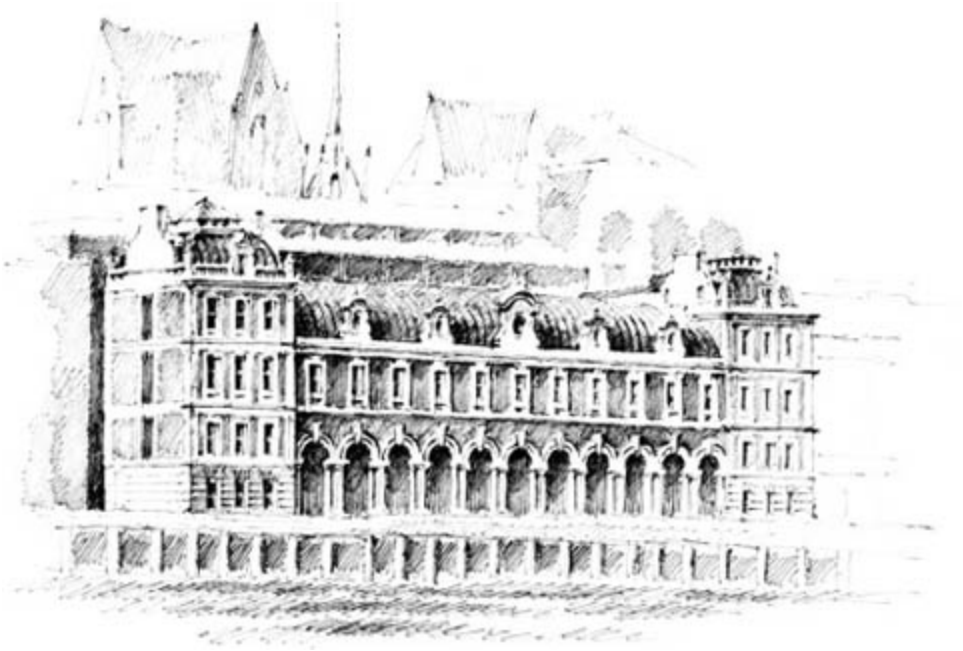
Its replacement in London was opened by the Queen in 1973. The latest London Bridge is made from concrete and is designed with hollow caissons suitable for carrying essential services across the river, making it THE ONLY HOLLOW BRIDGE OVER THE THAMES. The pavements are heated during cold spells to prevent icing.

Billingsgate

Something Fishy

A LOVELY RIVERSIDE path runs east from London Bridge past the long, yellow, French Renaissance façade of the building that once housed Billingsgate fish market. Dating from 1877, it was converted into smart offices by Sir Richard Rogers after the market moved to the Isle of Dogs in 1982, but still proclaims its heritage with a fish on top of the weather-vane at each end. This was the site of the Roman wharf and original port of London, and was a landing-place and market for all kinds of goods until 1699, when it was

made a free market for fish. Passengers also used to pass through Billingsgate, heading for Gravesend where they would transfer on to ocean-going vessels, no doubt stopping their ears against the foul and abusive language for which Billingsgate was a byword. The writer George Orwell worked at Billingsgate in the 1930s, as did the Kray twins, Ronnie and Reggie, in the 1950s.



Across Lower Thames Street from Billingsgate a modern office block now stands on the site of the old Coal Exchange. The Coal Exchange was one of the first cast-iron buildings in London and boasted a rotunda and 100 ft (30 m) high tower. When Prince Albert opened it in 1849, he came by river on THE LAST OCCASION THE STATE BARGE WAS EVER USED. During the excavations a complete Roman bath house was found with 3 ft (1 m) high walls still standing and all the different hot and cold rooms distinctly visible. Although the bath house is now hidden away in the basement of the new office block, it is sometimes possible to view the remains, which are among the best-preserved Roman remains in London.

In 1275 the first Custom House was built beside Billingsgate market to process the duties that Edward I imposed on exports of wool, leather and hides, a practice which laid the foundations of our modern customs system. Between 1379 and 1385, Geoffrey Chaucer worked here as Comptroller of Petty Customs for the Port of London. The imposing 1,190 ft (363 m) long façade of the present Custom House, designed in 1825 by Sir Robert Smirke, architect of the British Museum, is best viewed from the river. As a young man, the poet and hymn writer WILLIAM COWPER (1731–1800) came to Custom House Quay to drown himself, while suffering from a severe bout of depression. Fortunately, the water was too low and he survived to write his inspirational poetry.

All Hallows by the Tower

Oldest Church

SHAMEFULLY ISOLATED ON Tower Hill, between a busy road and an appalling modern shopping precinct, is THE OLDEST CHURCH IN LONDON, All Hallows by the Tower. It was founded in 675, as a chapel of the Great Abbey of Barking, and hence is sometimes known as All Hallows Barking. Inside, a 7th-century Saxon arch containing recycled Roman tiles stands at the south-west corner, THE OLDEST SURVIVING PIECE OF CHURCH FABRIC IN LONDON.

Half-way down the stairs to the medieval Undercroft is a tiny, barrel-vaulted chapel of bare, crumbling stone, dedicated to St Clare. Though only yards away from the uproar of Tower Hill it is one of the most peaceful places in London to sit and think. On entering the Undercroft you can actually walk on a remarkably well-preserved section of tesselated Roman pavement laid down here in the 2nd century. At the east end in the Undercroft Chapel is an altar made of stones from the Templar church of Athlit, in Israel, and brought back from the Crusades. Recesses in the walls hold boxes filled with the ashes of the dead. Charles I's Archbishop, William Laud, was buried in a vault in this chapel for over 20 years after his beheading in 1645. At the Restoration his body was moved to St John's College, Oxford.

In 1535 the bodies of St Thomas More and Bishop Fisher were brought into the church after their execution at the Tower for refusing to sign Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy.

LANCELOT ANDREWES (1555–1626), the scholarly Bishop of Winchester, was baptised at All Hallows in 1555. He was

the last occupant of Winchester Palace in Southwark and is buried in Southwark Cathedral.

In 1650 some barrels of gunpowder that were being stored in the churchyard exploded, destroying some 50 houses, badly damaging All Hallows and causing many fatalities. In 1658 the church tower was rebuilt, THE ONLY EXAMPLE OF WORK CARRIED OUT ON A CHURCH IN THE CITY DURING THE COMMONWEALTH (1649–60).

In 1644 WILLIAM PENN, the founder of Pennsylvania, was baptised at All Hallows. Twenty-two years later in 1666 Penn's father, Admiral William Penn, saved All Hallows from the Great Fire of London by ordering his men from the nearby naval yards to blow up the surrounding houses as a fire break. Samuel Pepys climbed 'up to the top of Barking steeple' to watch the fire and there witnessed 'the saddest sight of desolation' before he 'became afeard to stay there long and down again as fast as I could'.

The following year, 1667, JUDGE JEFFREYS, James II's notorious 'hanging judge', was married at All Hallows. In 1797 JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, later to become 6th President of the United States, married Louisa Catherine Johnson, daughter of the US consul in London, in All Hallows.

From 1922 to 1962 the Vicar of All Hallows was the REVEREND PHILIP 'TUBBY' CLAYTON who, as an Army chaplain in 1915, ran a rest-house and sanctuary for soldiers of all ranks at Poperinge in Belgium. It was named Talbot House in memory of Lieutenant Gilbert Talbot, brother of Army chaplain the Revd Neville Talbot who had set up the rest-house. Talbot House became known by its signals code name of TOC H. After the war Clayton fostered the spirit and intent of Talbot House through the Toc H movement and encouraged the setting up of Toc H branches in cities across Britain.

Among the surviving treasures of All Hallows are a wonderful collection of medieval brasses, a rare 15th-century Flemish triptych and what many regard as THE

FINEST WOOD CARVING IN LONDON, a font cover carved in lime-wood by Grinling Gibbons in 1682.

St Olave Hart Street

'*… a country church in the world of Seething Lane*'
SIR JOHN BETJEMAN

ACROSS THE ROAD from All Hallows, at the top of Seething Lane, is the mainly 15th-century church of St Olave Hart Street, described by Samuel Pepys as 'our own church'. In 1660 he had a gallery built on the south wall, with an outside stairway leading from the Navy Office in Seething Lane, where he worked, so that he could go to church without getting rained on. The gallery is gone but there is a memorial to Pepys marking where it used to be. Pepys's home was also in Seething Lane, and it was while living here that he wrote his diaries. His next-door neighbour was Admiral William Penn (*see* All Hallows). In 1669 Pepys's beloved wife Elizabeth died of a fever at the age of 29, and he commissioned a marble bust of her to be placed on the north wall of the sanctuary, where he could see it from his pew. On his own death in 1703 Pepys was buried alongside his wife in the nave.

Font cover by Grinling Gibbons in All Hallows

In the tower there was a memorial, damaged in the blitz, to Monkhouse Davison and Abraham Newman, whose grocery business in Fenchurch Street sent out the tea that was seized and jettisoned in the Boston Tea Party in 1773, catalyst for the American War of Independence.

St Olave was the Norwegian King Olaf who helped Ethelred the Unready to pull down London Bridge in 1014. A church was built here in his memory not long after his death in 1025. The present St Olave's dates mainly from 1450 and was one of the few London churches to escape the Great Fire in 1666. It was damaged in the Blitz, but sensitively restored in the 1950s.

A plaque in the churchyard informs us that MOTHER GOOSE was laid to rest there in 1586. In 1665 many of the victims of the Great Plague were buried in the churchyard, including Mary Ramsay, who is said to have brought the Plague to London. No doubt in reference to this, a set of skulls are carved in stone above the gateway to the

churchyard, which inspired Charles Dickens to refer to St Olave's in *The Commercial Traveller* as St Ghastly Grim.

Well, I never knew this
ABOUT
EC3 SOUTH

The heart of Richard I (the Lionheart) is said to be buried somewhere in the north part of the churchyard of All Hallows by the Tower, beneath a chapel built there by Richard in the 12th century. The chapel is long gone.

FENCHURCH STREET STATION, one of four stations to feature on the Monopoly board, opened in 1841, and was THE FIRST RAILWAY STATION TO BE LOCATED WITHIN THE CITY OF LONDON. It was the location of THE FIRST RAILWAY BOOKSTALL IN THE CITY, operated by William Marshall. Fenchurch Street Station is the only central London station not to have its own underground link. A clothing brand, Fenchurch is named after it.

ST MARGARET PATTENS on Eastcheap gets its name from 'pattens', a type of shoe that was made in the lane that runs by the side of the church. It was burned down in the Great Fire and rebuilt by Christopher Wren. Inside are THE ONLY TWO CANOPIED PEWS FOUND IN ANY WREN CHURCH. One of