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## Towers of London

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Distance: 5½ or 6¾ km=3½ or 4¼ miles

easy walking

Region: London

Date written: 12-feb-2019

Author: Green

Last update: 20-dec-2024

Refreshments: throughout the walk

Map: London A to Z *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Medieval fortress, river, church towers, churches, historical sites, cathedral*

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### In Brief

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This walk is a grand tour of some of the most spectacular parts of the City of London, but linked by an interesting historical theme. It begins by taking you round the outer walls of the great Norman fortress of the Tower of London (with a chargeable optional visit). It then leads you on a quest for the remaining preserved towers of ancient churches.

Many churches were damaged in the Great Fire of London (“GFL”) in 1666. Sir Christopher Wren rebuilt or repaired fifty-one of these churches.

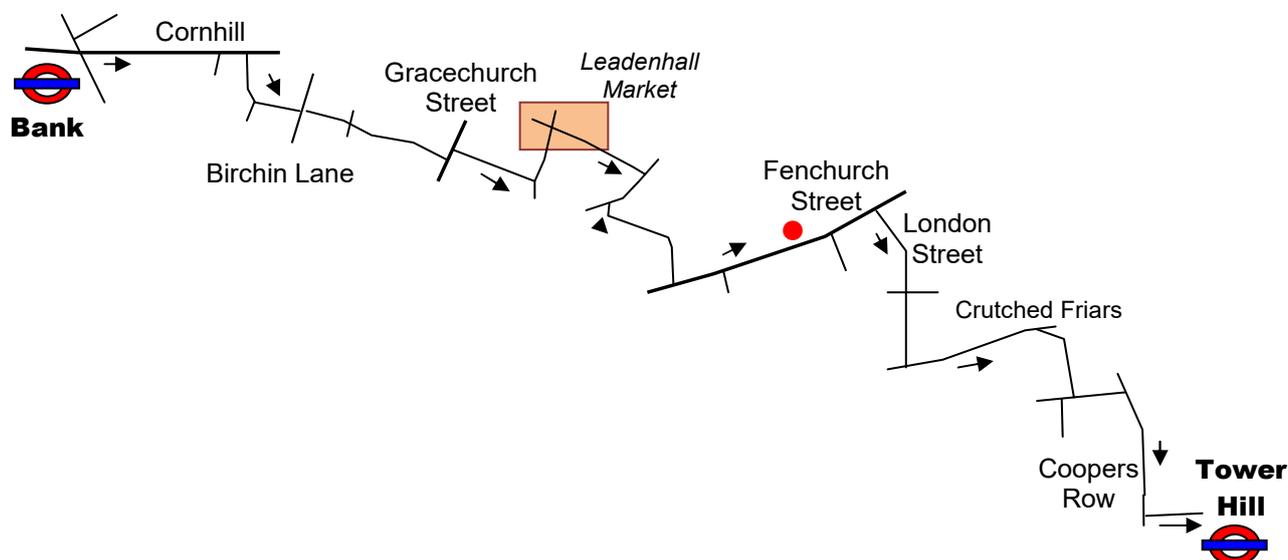
The circular walk begins and ends at **Bank Station** (Underground, DLR, Waterloo-and-City Line). You can also begin at **Tower Hill** Underground station (Circle and District lines) or at any point along the way. If you begin at Bank Station there is an interesting Walk to the Tower (not as fearful as it sounds), adding less than a mile to the total length. The route follows narrow lanes and stays off main roads as much as possible. A vast choice of places of refreshment is available.

This walk is best done on a **weekday** (Mon-Fri) when the City is lively. At weekends, some places mentioned in the text are closed, even on Saturday. Visiting on a Sunday is not a guarantee that churches will be open. Any kind of sensible attire is fine. Dogs are not permitted.

## The Walk

If you are beginning (or joining) the walk at **Bank Station**, you need to do the ominous-sounding (but adventurous) *Walk to the Tower*, described immediately below. To **begin** at the Tower, skip directly to Section [1](#).

### Walk to The Tower



From Bank Station, cross the road junction, heading just to the **right** of a prominent neo-classical building with eight columns, fronted by an equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington. This is the Royal Exchange, now a centre for bijou shops and restaurants. Continue along Cornhill. After a short distance, turn **right** under a building into Change Alley. Half way along, turn **left** and carry on to Birchin Lane. Cross over, a fraction left, to narrow Bengal Court, passing the *George and Vulture* set in a milieu of quaint alleyways. Continue through Bengal Court and directly ahead down George Yard and along Bell Inn Yard. This brings you to Gracechurch Street. Cross over, a fraction left, into Bulls Head Passage. Turn **left** at the end to enter the ornate historic Leadenhall Market. Turn **right** at the *Lamb Tavern* in the centre of the Market and along Leadenhall Place, passing the inside-out Lloyds building, to Lime Street. Turn **right** down Lime Street and **left** at Cullum Street (which is pedestrianised at first). *At the entrance to Cullum Street is a sculpture, part of the “Sculpture in the City” event and is at present (May 2022) an abstract work “Orphans”. This is an annual event so the sculpture will vary.* Zigzag your way into Fenchurch Street and turn **left**. Shortly, on your left is a precinct where you will see *The Garden at 120*.

#### ● Diversion no 1: The Garden at 120

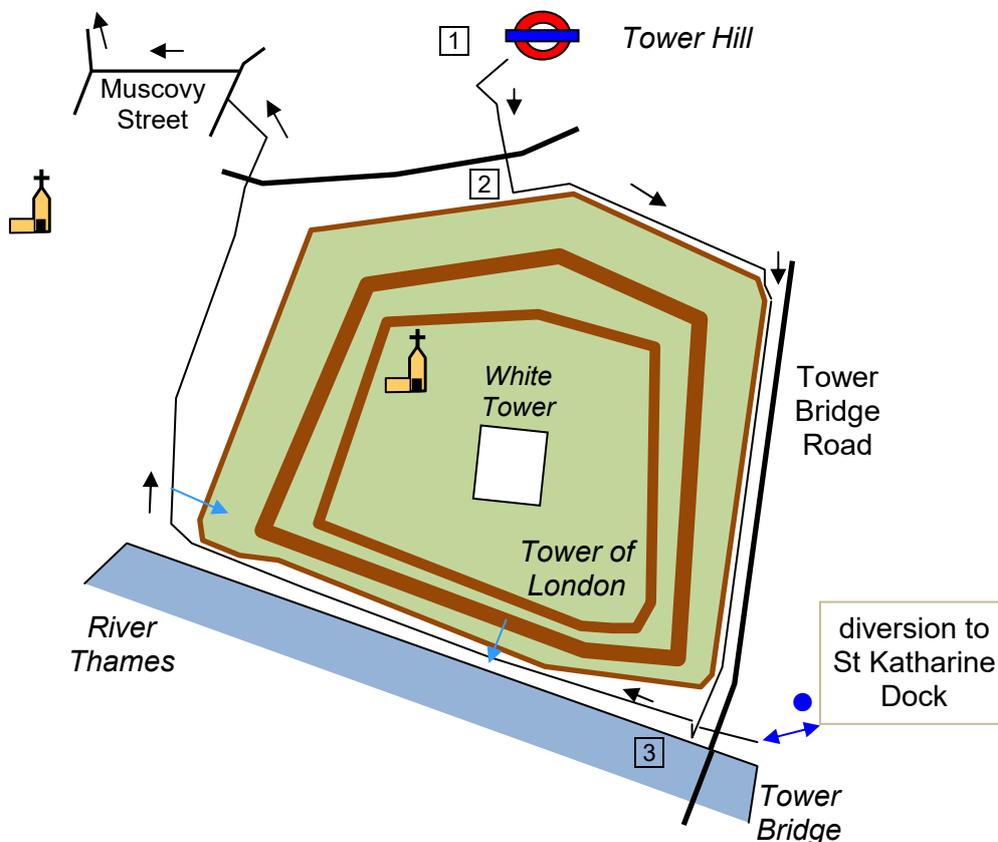


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This is a roof-top garden and entry is *free to the public* – and you do not need to book. (Just after the security check, look *up* to see the “water”.) At the top floor you can enjoy some quite dramatic city views in a charming location with a stream and flower beds. There are loos and a restaurant one floor below.

After a short distance along Fenchurch Street turn **right** into pedestrianised London Street, passing the entrance to Fenchurch Street Station. Go through the little square and down steps by a red pillarbox into

narrow New London Street. Go **left** at Hart street which becomes Crutched Friars. Just before the railway arch, turn **right** into Savage Gardens, **left** into Pepys Street and **right** into Coopers Row. Tower Hill station is at the end of the road on the left. Turn **left** to pass the exit point of Tower Hill Underground.



- 1 Exit Tower Hill Underground station using the *Tower Pier and Tower Gateway DLR* exit. **Immediately to your left (with more round the corner of the Citizen Hotel) is a section of the old London City wall, built around AD 200.** Turn **right**, go down the steps and through the subway. **Part way down, on the left, is a statue of a Roman Emperor, reputedly Trajan; the plaque bears a common epitaph “Dis Manibus” - to the spirit of the gods.** Continue to the end of the subway. **Beneath you, contained within a section of the city wall, is a medieval Postern Gate.** The Tower of London is immediately in front of you.



### The Tower of London

**The Tower is both a castle and a fortress, surrounded by a ditch or “moat”, built into the south east corner of the Roman city walls. It is named after the central White Tower, thought to have been started in 1078. The White Tower is the earliest stone keep in England. In 1097 King William II ordered a wall to be built around the White Tower. It was probably built from stone, replacing the timber palisade. The White Tower is surrounded by an inner and an outer wall. There are many towers incorporated into the inner wall. These will be pointed out as you walk around the outside of the Tower. There are fewer towers in the outer wall. These are: Devlin, Well, Cradle, St Thomas and Byward. The Tower currently houses the Crown Jewels as well as museums and**

**exhibitions. The towers in front of you (from the right) are [Devereux](#), [Flint](#), [Bowyer](#), [Brick](#) and [Martin](#).**

- 2 Turn **left** along the walkway above the moat on your right. **In 2014, the moat was filled with ceramic poppies to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.** At the first corner, turn **right** up steps to the road. Tower Bridge is straight ahead. **Tower Bridge is a steel bridge, clad in Portland Stone, finished in 1894, comprising a bascule (to let ships pass under) and two suspension spans.** Continue to just before the first arch of the bridge. **There are three more towers on the inner wall to your right: [Constable](#), [Broad Arrow](#) and [Salt](#).** Go down steps here, down to the river level.

● Diversion No. 2: St Katharine Dock



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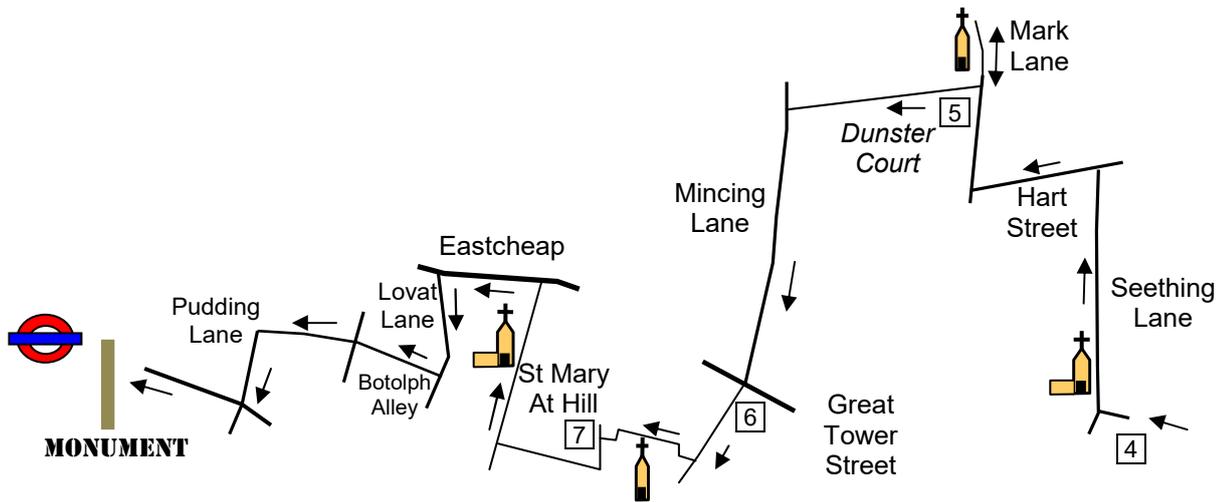
Facing *Costa*, by turning **left** and immediately **right** along Cloister Walk behind the much-reviled Tower Hotel, you reach St Katharine Dock, a huge marina / leisure complex, complete with its Bell Tower and Clock Tower, restaurants, novelty shops, art shops and loo (see the plan on display). It is possible to make a circuit of the West Basin. You can include the Central Basin (going over a long wooden footbridge) and even the East Basin.

- 3 At the bottom of the steps, walk under the road with the river on your left. You pass on your left two British cannons dating from about 1800. **Across the river are the domed building of City Hall (HQ of the mayor of London and the London Assembly), *HMS Belfast* and the tallest “tower” in Western Europe: the [Shard](#).** **Along this section of the wall on your right, you will come to [St Thomas’ Tower](#) with *Traitors Gate* underneath. Behind these, on the inner wall, is the [Bloody Tower](#).** Carry on to the corner and turn **right** at the Tower of London shop. **The pair of towers at the gate to the bridge over the moat is [Middle Tower](#); this bridge connects to [Byward Tower](#).** Go through the black iron gates and towards the main road. You pass on your left two fish-and-chip shops, loos and the Tower ticket office.

Though not part of this walk, a visit to the Tower itself is an unmissable experience. The Battlements Walk takes you through many of the towers listed above. You can have a tour, given with great aplomb by a Yeoman Warder, and meet the ravens: *Jubilee, Harris, Gripp, Rocky, Erin, Poppy and Merlina*. (It is said that the kingdom will fall if the six resident ravens ever leave the Tower.)



**On your left, the church with the tall distinctive green spire is [All Hallows by the Tower](#), the oldest church in the City of London, the temporary resting place for bodies after beheading on Tower Hill.** Cross the main road into Trinity Square Gardens. **The memorial here is to the merchant navy seamen who lost their lives in WW2.** Go out through the gate to your **left** and walk down Muscovy Street.



- 4 At the end of Muscovy Street, turn **right** by the *Seething Tap* pub, into Seething lane (with a closer view of All Hallows on your left). You pass the medieval church of St Olave on your left. **St Olave, one of the smallest in the City, survived the GFL, thanks to Sir William Penn who rallied the naval workers into creating a fire break.** Turn **left** into Hart Street, then second **right**, by the *Ship Inn* (the smallest in the city), into Mark Lane. After you go through the black City of London bollards, on your left is the tower of All Hallows Staining. Your route after viewing the tower is **left** immediately *before* it, into a wide passageway.

### All Hallows Staining

**“Staining” means stone, thus avoiding any confusion with other churches of the same name which were made of wood. The first mention of a church here was in the late 12th century. The tower is all that remains. It was built around 1320 as part of the second church on the site. This church survived the GFL but collapsed in 1671. It is thought that this was caused by too many burials being carried out too close to the church walls. The church was again rebuilt in 1674.**

- 5 Dunster Court is closed out of hours and at weekends, in which case: just *after* the church tower, turn **left** down narrow Star Alley which shortly elbows **right**; turn **left** into Fenchurch Street and **left** again into Mincing Lane to meet the other end of Dunster Court; otherwise .... Having turned **left** just before the church tower (that is, **right** after returning from viewing the tower), go through black iron gates into Dunster Court. The livery hall of the of the *Worshipful Company of Clothworkers* is over on your right [2024 concealed by a hoarding]. Exit Dunster Court through more iron gates and turn **left** into Mincing Lane.

**On your left is the entrance to the postmodern-gothic Minster Court with its three large bronze horse sculptures. These have been nicknamed Dollar, Yen and Sterling. Minster Court consists of three office buildings, completed around 1992. Completion was delayed due to a fire in the atrium of no. 3 whilst the final fitting out was done. The building appeared briefly in Disney’s *101 Dalmatians* film of 1996.**

**On your right (not on this walk), you can see the tall slender spire of the Guild Church of St Margaret Pattens, rebuilt by Wren after the GFL.**

- 6 At the end of Mincing Lane, cross Great Tower Street into St Dunstan's Hill, with a good view of the Shard. **To your right you will see another skyscraper: 20 Fenchurch Street, nicknamed the Walkie-Talkie; at the top is the Sky Garden with great views of London; entry is free but you need to book on-line.** (For more details, see another walk in this series: "London Skyscrapers".) As you near the bottom of St Dunstan's Hill, go **right** through a gate, **right** again up a few steps and **left** to walk along the paved upper church yard of St Dunstan-in-the-East. The lower church yard and the church tower are on your left. The surrounding gardens are pleasant to stroll through for a rest break.

### St Dunstan-in-the-East

**There has been a church here from ancient times. The church was damaged in the GFL. It was repaired by Wren between 1695 and 1701. The tower and steeple were added during this restoration. The church was destroyed in WW2. The spire was reconstructed in 1953 and last restored in 1970/71.**

- 7 At the far end of the church yard of St Dunstan, directly under the tower, turn **right** through an opening in the wall. Turn immediately **left** and **left** again to go out through a small metal gate. Turn **left** on Idol Lane. At the corner, turn **right** along narrow St Dunstan's Lane. At the end, turn **right**, passing an entrance to the church of St Mary At Hill, on a road of the same name. **Note the skull and crossbones on the door pediment and the great ornate clock above your head.** You can enter the church via an iron gate shortly on your left and a courtyard. **St Mary At Hill is 12th-century but much restored after a woeful history (although it survived WW2 unscathed).** Turn **left** into Eastcheap and, opposite the extravagant gothic-style no. 31-35, go **left** into Lovat Lane. Opposite the west door of St Mary At Hill, turn **right** into narrow Botolph Alley. At the end, cross Botolph Lane into St Georges Lane and go **left** down a rather austere road, soon revealed to be Pudding Lane, famous as the site of the King's baker's shop where the GFL started. Turn **right** into Monument Street. *There are loos here. To your right is the entrance to Monument Underground Station.* Dominating the site is the historic tall column: The Monument.

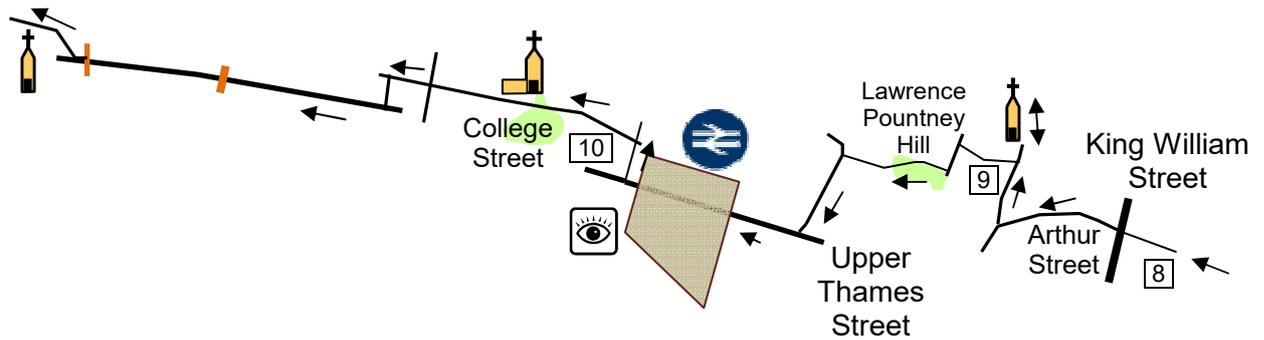
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### The Monument

**This Monument to the Great Fire of London of 1666 is generally known just as *The Monument*. The height of the Monument (202 feet=62 metres) is the same as the distance you just walked from the site of that infamous baker's shop. It took about 6 years to build and is on the site of a lost church, St Margaret's, New Fish Street. You can visit the viewing platform at the top – only 311 steps to get there. There is an admission charge.** *The Monument is also described in the "City Skyscrapers" walk.*

As you carry on along Monument Street, a glance to you left shows a rotund church tower and clock. **This is St Magnus-the-Martyr, the first church to be destroyed in the GFL, now well restored. It stands on the site of the roadway that used to lead to the old London Bridge.**



- 8 Cross King William Street to Arthur Street. (Owing to building works, Arthur Street is not obvious: it is on the left of the *Be At One* cocktail bar. It is easiest to shift **right** first to cross using the lights.) About half way along Arthur Street, turn sharp **right** into St Martins lane, past the *Olde Wine Shades* wine bar. As you go up St Martins Lane, you will see, on the right, a black clock on a tower, this is St Martin Orgar. Your route after viewing the church tower is **left** through an alley, *before* the churchyard, with number 5 on your left and the One Personal Training gym on your right.

### St Martin Orgar

**The name arises from a deacon called Ordgarus who owned the church. He gave it to St Pauls around 1181. The church was the nearest to the source to the GFL, in which it was damaged. It was in ruins by 1820 when all but the tower was demolished. The tower was rebuilt in 1851. The site of the old church was used as a burial ground for the parish of St Clement, with the tower at the entrance. The church is referred to in the nursery rhyme “Oranges and Lemons”, in the line “you owe me five farthings say the bells of St Martins”. The former churchyard is now a private garden.**

- 9 Having turned **left** through the alley (that is, **right** after returning from viewing the church tower), pass Shannon House and turn **left** into Laurence Pountney Lane (unsigned at this point). Go down the hill, then **right** up a passageway called Laurence Pountney Hill. **On your left, no. 7a is a merchant's house, a precious 17th-century survival.** At the junction, with *The Listing* bar on your right, turn **left** down Suffolk lane, then **right** on Upper Thames Street. Go under the bridge beneath Cannon Street station. A glance down the lane on your left pinpoints the residential Strata Tower at Elephant and Castle with its three integrated wind turbines.
- 10 Immediately after the station turn **right** into Dowgate Hill, then **left** into College Street. The church of St Michael Royal (the mission to seafarers) is on your right. At the end of College Street, cross Queen Street to Skinners Lane. Follow Skinners Lane until it becomes Little Trinity Lane. Just after *Virgin Active* (on the right) there is an elevated footway on the left, over Upper Thames Street. Go under this footway and continue along Upper Thames Street to meet the tower of St Mary Somerset in front of you, at the junction with Lambeth Hill.

## St Mary Somerset

The first records of a church here was in the 12th century. The church was destroyed in the GFL and rebuilt by Wren. The rebuilt church was completed in 1694 at a cost of £6,579. (Before the GFL there were 14 churches named after The Virgin Mary, six of which were rebuilt after the fire.) The body of the church was demolished in 1871 leaving the tower. It is uncertain where the name Somerset comes from.

- 11 Fork **right** up Lambeth Hill (unsigned at this point) to Queen Victoria Street. Cross the road into the churchyard of **St Nicholas Church**, and go **left** and **right** over to Old Change Court, going up steps on your right. **The ornate Victorian drinking fountain here depicts St Lawrence and Mary Magdalene.** **St Pauls Cathedral** is directly in front of you. To your right there is a black phone box with some nearby lights where you can cross the road. The tower of **St Augustine Watling Street** can be seen across the yard in front of you.

### St Augustin Watling Street

The earliest recorded mention of a church here was in 1148. It was partly rebuilt in 1630 at a cost of £1200. The church was destroyed in the GFL and rebuilt by Wren. Again it was destroyed by bombs in WW2. The remains now form part of St Pauls Choir School.

Continue straight ahead using the pavement, with a garden and water feature on your left. In around 75m turn **left** into New Change.

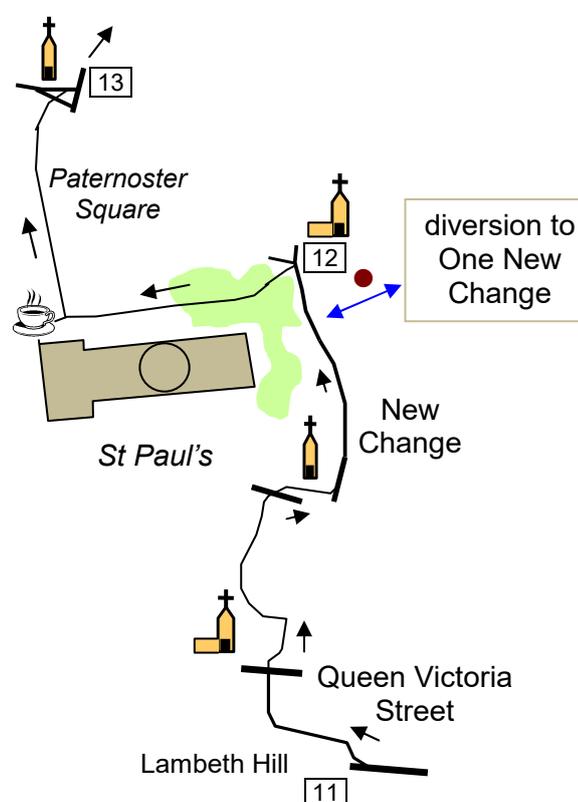
#### ● Diversion No. 3: One New Change



For refreshments with a view, you can cross the road and go between the two glass fronted buildings into the *One New Change* Shopping Precinct. Take the lift to the 6th floor where there is a roof terrace with bars, restaurants, loos and a stunning view of St Pauls. Retrace your steps to resume the walk.

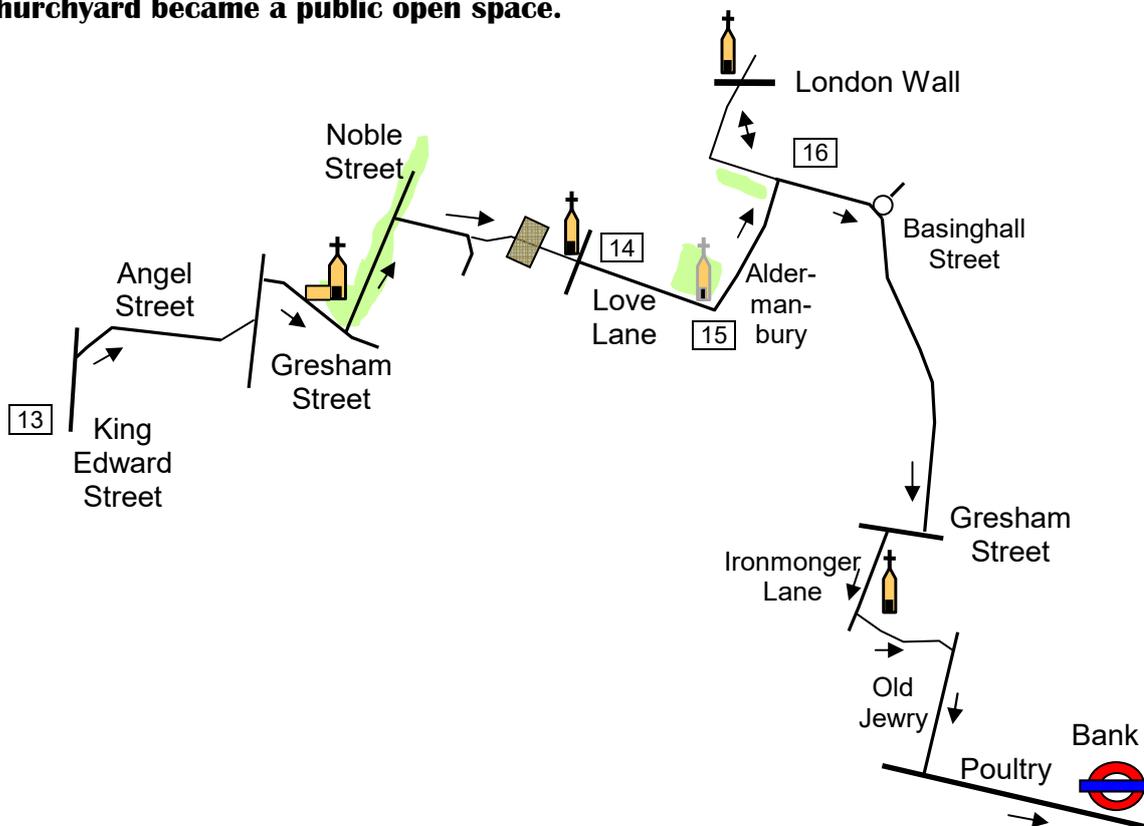


- 12 **At the next junction, across to the right, you can see the baroque spire of St Vedast Foster Lane, partly destroyed in the GFL and restored by Wren, gutted in WW2 and restored.** At Paternoster Row, turn **left** and keep **left** through gates into St Pauls Churchyard, keeping the cathedral on your left. *As you come out of the churchyard, over to the left you will see an entrance to St Pauls Crypt. Here you can find free toilets, and some years there has been a café here too.* Go **right** through a stone arch, **the historic Temple Bar which once stood over Fleet Street**, into Paternoster Square. Traverse the square, keeping a tall column on your right. **This Corinthian column is similar to the Monument and commemorates the fires of WW2.** Go straight ahead down Rose Street to come out at Newgate Street. **Christchurch Greyfriars** is across the road in front of you. The churchyard is to the left and the ruins of the church are to the right of the tower.



## Christchurch Greyfriars

**Wren's tower is all that remains. A priory was founded here in 1225 by Franciscan monks from Italy. The name Greyfriars arises from the colour of the monk's robes. The original church was destroyed in the GFL. Wren's new church was completed in 1704. In 1872 the churchyard became a public open space.**



- 13** Go to the right of the tower. If you turn round here and look back to the building on an island in the road, you will see the very unconventional **Newgate Street clock**, designed in 2015 by the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. Now go **left** beside the garden into King Edward Street and **right** into Angel Street. At the end of Angel Street, go **left** and **right** into Gresham Street. Take the first **left** into Noble Street with the church of St Anne and St Agnes on your left. **Just after the church, on your left, you will see remains of a Roman fort and city wall.** Turn **right** into Oat Lane. Ignore the right turn into Staining Lane by keeping straight on, veering **left** and **right** under a modern building on buttresses, to reach St Alban's Court. At the end you meet the lonely tower of St Alban Wood Street.

### St Alban Wood Street

**It is thought that the church may have originated as an 8th century chapel built by King Offa, the founder of St Alban's Abbey. The church was rebuilt in 1633/34, damaged in the GFL and rebuilt by Wren around 1685. After WW2 bomb damage, all except the tower was demolished.**

- 14** Continue straight across down Love Lane next to the police station. The site of St Mary Aldermanbury, with its garden and bust of Shakespeare, is on your left, behind the police station.

## St Mary Aldermanbury

**There was a church here from at least 1181. It was destroyed in the GFL and rebuilt by Wren, sustained bomb damage in WW2, after which only the walls remained. The remains of the church were shipped to Fulton, Missouri, USA, in 1966. In Fulton the restored church is a memorial to Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech made there in 1946. The site was made into public gardens around 1970. The foundations of the 15th century church, over which Wren had built, remain in the lawn.**

- 15 Keep **left** round the corner of the garden into Aldermanbury, passing a glass sculpture on your right. At the corner, by Aldermanbury Square with its lines of trees, your route will be **right** on Basinghall Street, but first there is another tower to see. Zigzag **left** and **right**, following a tourist signpost, and go through Brewers Hall Garden. The site of St Alphage London Wall is across the road, London Wall, in front of you.

## St Alphage London Wall

**This is in the worst bombed area of WW2. There was a scheme drawn up in 1954/5 for the remedial works to the area incorporating residential and commercial properties. The remains of the church tower of St Alphage, together with parts of the old Roman city walls were incorporated into the redevelopment. The church tower was on the site of the 14th century priory church of Elsing Spital. The old church yard had become a public open space by 1872.**

- 16 Retrace your steps through Brewers Hall Garden and go **left** along Basinghall Street. At a mini-roundabout, follow Basinghall Street around to the **right**, past buildings of the Guildhall. At the end, cross Gresham Street, a fraction right, into Ironmonger Lane. The churchyard of St Olave Jewry is on your left.

## St Olave Jewry (aka St Olave House)

**The tower of the church of St Olave Jewry is now St Olave House. After the GFL Wren's church replaced the original medieval church. In 1892 Wren's church was demolished, apart from the tower. Since 1890's the gardens have been open to the public. The surgeon to Henry IV, V and VI, Thomas Morsted, is buried here.**



Turn **left** into St Olaves Court\*\* then **right** into Old Jewry. [**\*\* 2022: blocked by building works; instead, at the side of the builder's hoarding, turn **right** into Prudent Passage. At the end turn **left** into King Street, then **left** again into Cheapside. Continue until it becomes Poultry and thence on to Bank station.] At the end of Old Jewry is the junction of Poultry and Cheapside. Turn **left** along Poultry to Bank underground station where the walk began.**

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