



I Never Knew That About London

By Christopher Winn

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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, Christopher Winn takes us on a captivating journey around London to unearth the hidden gems of legends, firsts, inventions, adventures and birthplaces that shape the city's compelling and at times turbulent past.

See the Chelsea river views that inspired Turner and find out where London's first nude statue is. Explore London's finest country house in Charlton and unearth the secrets of the Mother of Parliaments. Discover which church steeple gave us the design of the traditional wedding cake, where the sandwich was invented and where in Bond Street you can see London's oldest artifact. Visit the house where Handel and Jimi Hendrix both lived. Climb the famous 311 steps of the Monument and fly the world's biggest Ferris wheel. Brimming with stories and snippets providing spellbinding insight into what has shaped the city, *I Never Knew That About London* is a beautifully illustrated gem of a book that informs and amuses in equal measure.

"Will not fail to enhance months, even years, of gentle urban exploration...Any number of morning or weekend outings can be constructed from these rich pages... the selections and observations remain unfailingly interesting." --*The Guardian* (UK)

I Never Knew That:

Tucked away below Clive Steps at the end of King Charles Street can be found the small underground rooms where Winston Churchill and the War Cabinet met during the air raids of the Second World War.

The first-ever Valentine Card was written from the Tower, where in 1415 the recently imprisoned Duke of Orleans composed a love poem to his wife.

The measurement of one foot comes from the length of the foot of St. Algar's statue, carved on the base of one of the columns near the entrance of St. Paul's Cathedral.

The design for the traditional wedding cake is drawn from the steeple of St. Bride's church in Fleet Street.

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

CHRISTOPHER WINN is the author of the bestselling *I Never Knew That About Ireland* as well as *I Never Knew That About the Irish*. He is a writer, quiz master and producer for theater and television who has written for many of England's most prestigious papers. He lives in London with his wife, who is also his illustrator.

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I Never Knew That About London

City of London

EC3 SOUTH

MONUMENT - LONDON BRIDGE - BILLINGSGATE - FENCHURCH STREET

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...

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From reader reviews:

Evan Hinson:

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