

AMAZING & EXTRAORDINARY FACTS

# LONDON



STEPHEN HALLIDAY

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D&C  
David and Charles

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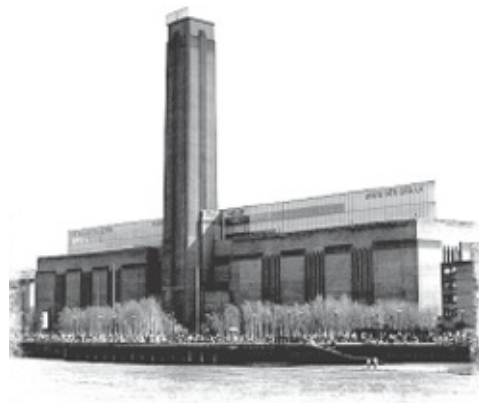
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# INTRODUCTION

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In 1901 London was, in a very real sense the capital city of the world. As Queen Victoria approached the end of her long reign (she died in January of that year) she reigned over the greatest empire the world had ever seen, comprising about a fifth of its surface area and a quarter of its inhabitants. 'Pax Britannica', enforced by the Royal Navy, ensured that no major international conflict on the scale of the Napoleonic Wars had taken place for almost a century. The Port of London was by some distance the busiest in the world with its forest-masted vessels bringing food and raw materials from every corner of the world and exporting manufactured goods from Britain, the workshop of the world. And the City of London, within the famous square mile that had first been bounded by its Roman Walls (still visible in many places), was the undisputed centre of world commerce and finance. In the course of a century London's population had grown from less than a million to more than six million, making it the most populous city on earth. This concentration of humanity had presented tremendous challenges to engineers, builders, social reformers and politicians who had struggled, with some success, to make London a safe place in which to live as well as a prosperous and busy one. It continued to expand up to the outbreak of World War II. Since that time the population of London has fallen as its inhabitants have moved to suburbs and new towns but although it is no longer the world's largest city it remains the one with the richest history. It is still possible, with little effort, to find traces of the city which was built by the Roman invaders and sacked by an enraged Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, reputedly buried beneath the feet of busy travellers as they hurry along platform ten of King's Cross Station. The Roman gates of the city are still remembered in names like Aldgate (home of Geoffrey Chaucer as he watched the Peasants' Revolt unfold in 1381) and Cripplegate, close to the lodging house of one William Shakespeare and to a small church, St Giles's, which was the scene of a turning point in which Britain fought for its life and that of the free world in 1940. And one cannot move far in London without being reminded of the personalities who made its history: Richard Whittington who helped make London the centre of the trade in wool; Thomas Gresham who ensured that London would become the financial centre which it remains in the 21st century; Prince Albert who, though his support for the Great Exhibition of 1851, left us not only the hall named after him but the Kensington museums which lie behind

it. Then there is Big Ben which caused its creator so much trouble that he died premature and the Underground Railway which would never have been constructed without the activities of a motley crew of fraudsters, bankrupts and gaolbirds as well as a few honest men. And whatever is that strange 'London Stone' almost hidden behind a grill attached to the bank in Cannon Street, not to mention the metal tube which passes above the trains with the Sloane Square Underground Station? Why, that's the River Westbourne of course. And what was John Snow who has a pub named after him just off Carnaby Street? Well, he was a teetotal doctor who found the cause of cholera. This book tells you about all these amazing people and events which helped to make London the world's most astonishing city, with a surprise around every corner.

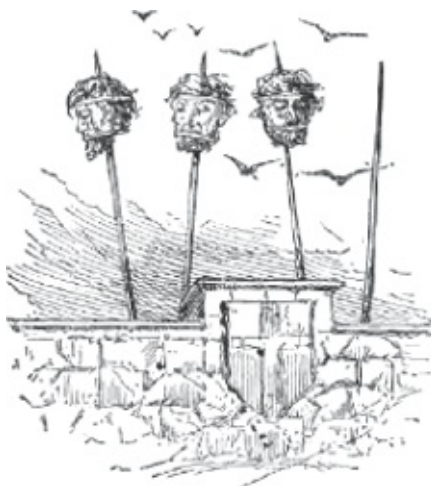
# The Stone of Brutus

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## *The mythical ancient heart of London keeps a low profile*

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Opposite Cannon Street station in the City of London is a small stone behind an iron grille set into the wall of 111, Cannon Street. Until recently the premises were occupied by a Chinese bank; now they are home to a sportswear store. The London Stone is easily overlooked by the casual pedestrian but this piece of limestone is at the centre of the legends which surround the creation of London. It is also known as the Brutus Stone and according to legend it was placed in London by a prince of Trojan descent called Brutus (no relation to Julius Caesar's assassin) who fled from Troy at the end of the Trojan War. Brutus's arrival is given as 1074 BC (about the time of the likely date of the destruction of Troy). He brought with him his followers – known as Brutons or Britons – and founded the city of New Troy on the north bank of the Thames. To establish his new kingdom Brutus and his followers had to defeat a race of giants led by Gog and Magog who appear in Christian, Jewish and Islamic literature and who have since come to be associated with the defence of the City.



One of Brutus's successors as ruler of the kingdom of the Britons was King Lud who decided to rename the city after himself as Lud's Town, soon to be shortened to London, and Londinium upon the Roman occupation. By the 11th century Brutus's London stone had given its name to a district of the City, marked on maps as Londenstane. The location is recorded in the name of the first mayor of London in 1192, one Henry Fitzailwyn de Londenstane. By that time it was believed that the stone had been used by the Romans as a point from which to measure distances in miles throughout the Roman province of Britain settled in AD 43. This is plausible since the site of the stone was close to the Roman governor's palace and Roman roads such as Watling Street (the present A5).

## LONG-DISTANCE LATIN

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*A Roman mile was one thousand paces, a pace being two steps and measuring five feet. So a Roman mile is about 5,000 feet, slightly less than the 5,280 feet of a modern mile.*

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Many other legends have become attached to the stone during its long history. The poet William Blake identified it as a place of ritual sacrifice, associated with the Druids. It is one of many stones which are claimed as being that from which King Arthur drew Excalibur. The stone became enshrined in the history and literature of the City so that possession of the stone came to be associated with possession of the City itself. In Shakespeare's play *King Henry V Part II* the rebel Jack Cade, calling himself John Mortimer, enters the stage, strikes his staff on London stone and declares:

Now is Mortimer lord of this city. And here, sitting upon London stone, I charge and command that, of the city's cost, the pissing conduit run nothing but claret wine this first year of our reign.

This event occurred in 1450. Jack Cade's head soon found itself on a spike on London Bridge but the stone survived. The stone was a place where deals were made, oaths sworn and rituals enacted for hundreds of years. The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers, a City livery company which received its royal charter in 1629, was entrusted with checking the quality of spectacles made. Any found to be defective suffered the fate recorded in a document of 1671: 'broken, defaced and spoyled both glasse and frame the which judgement was executed accordingly in Canning [Cannon] Street on the remaying part of London Stone where the same were with a hammer broken in all pieces'.

The stone has been moved several times. It survived the Great Fire of 1666 and was set into the wall of one of Sir Christopher Wren's finest churches, St Swithin's. The church was destroyed by bombing in 1941 but the stone survived unscathed and was moved to its present position. Like the ravens of the Tower of London the stone's safety is linked to that of the City, an ancient myth claiming that 'So long as the Stone of Brutus is safe, so long shall London flourish.' The stone itself is a Grade II\* listed structure and, almost inevitably, a nearby pub is named after it.

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## BASILICA BRITANNICA

*During the Roman occupation Londinium was the home of the Roman empire's largest basilica*

*north of the Alps. It stretched south from the site of Leadenhall Market along the line of what is now Gracechurch Street almost to London Bridge.*

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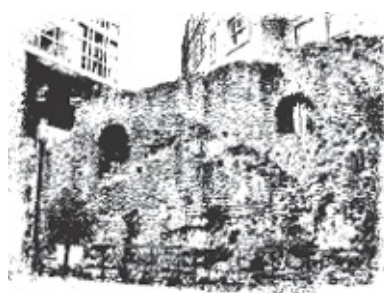
# Walls, amphitheatres and temples

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## *What the Romans left for us*

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The Romans occupied London in AD 43 and left in 410 but traces of their occupation linger. Remains of an amphitheatre have been found in front of the Guildhall and the shape of the structure is marked in granite stones in the forecourt. Leadenhall Market, off Gracechurch Street, stands on the site of the Roman basilica. In 1954 the remains of a Temple of Mithras were found in the vicinity of Walbrook, dating from the time of the Roman occupation and devoted to a Persian deity. The artefacts are on show at the Museum of London and a reconstruction of the temple's foundations has been created at 11, Queen Victoria Street close to the original excavation site. The most conspicuous remnant of Roman London is the Roman Wall which was built of Kentish ragstone brought by barge from the Medway and up the Thames.



*Roman amphitheatre*

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## A BARGE TOO FAR

*In 1962 building work in the vicinity of Blackfriars Bridge revealed a flat-bottomed barge which had sunk at its moorings carrying a cargo of Kentish ragstone which was intended for the Roman Wall. A coin dating from AD 89 and some recovered pottery enabled the barge, and the Wall, to be dated with some confidence to some time soon after AD 100. The remains of the barge and its contents are on display in the Museum of London.*

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The Roman Wall enclosed an area rather less than the 'Square Mile' of the medieval city. It was 6-9 feet wide and about 18 feet high, protected by a deep ditch. Parts of the wall may still be seen, notably those at Tower Hill, just outside the Underground station and those close to St Giles's Church, Cripplegate. Passage through the wall was through a number of gates which were usually closed at sunset.

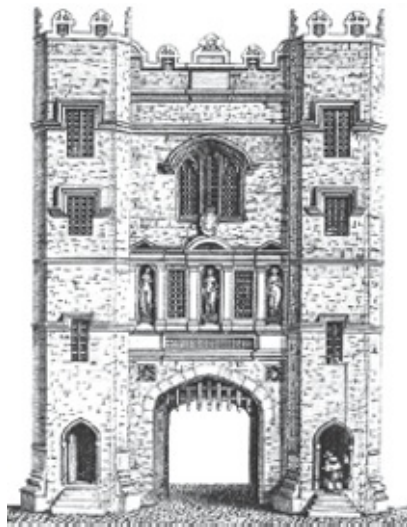
# Shut that gate!

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## *The doors to the City*

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None of the original Roman or medieval gates through the City Wall may still be seen though their names are commemorated in many street and station names, all of them post-Roman. It is not even certain when the gates were built. Each consisted of a gap in the wall, usually protected by a portcullis and a fortified tower which, like that at Newgate, could also be used as a prison. These towers were often used to display portions of the dismembered corpses of criminals, especially traitors. Beginning at the north-west of the City and working clockwise the first was Aldersgate which led onto Watling Street. It was certainly built by the Romans though it takes its name from a later Saxon noble called Ealdred. Next is Cripplegate, also Roman, giving access to a substantial Roman fort sited at this point. The true origin of its name is now obscure but may derive from a legend that some cripples were miraculously cured when the body of King Edmund the Martyr (who gave his name to the town of Bury St Edmund's in Suffolk) passed through it after his death at the hands of marauding Danes in 870.



*Newgate*

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### WIDE ENOUGH FOR AN AMBULANCE?

*This impressive gatehouse in St John's Lane, north of Smithfield, was built in the 12th century to give access to the Priory of St John of Jerusalem, ancestors of the St John Ambulance Service. It was rebuilt in the 16th century, extensively refurbished in 2010 and houses a fine museum dedicated to the Order of St John. It was at one time the home of the artist William Hogarth and of the **Gentleman's Magazine** whose contributors included Dr Samuel Johnson,*



*St John's Gate*

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The first medieval gate we encounter is Moorgate built in 1415 by a mercer called Thomas Falconer to give access to the marshy fields ('Moorfields') just beyond the city wall. Bishopsgate is Roman, leading onto Ermine Street though it took its name from a bishop of London who rebuilt it in the 7th century. The Roman-built Aldgate (Anglo-Saxon for 'Old Gate') led to the east towards Colchester, at one time the Roman capital. For a while the gatehouse was the home of Geoffrey Chaucer and his family when he worked as a collector of customs. In 1381 he watched the Essex men of the Peasants' Revolt as they passed through on their way to their fateful encounter at Smithfield where their leader, Wat Tyler, was stabbed by the Mayor of London, William Walworth, and the rebels dispersed.

Next, the 13th-century Postern Gate may still be seen close to the Tower of London; it remained in use until the 17th century. Nearby of course is the notorious Traitor's Gate, an entrance to the Tower from the river, built in 1279 during the reign of Edward I. It owes its name to the practice of ferrying condemned prisoners from trial in Westminster Hall to the Tower prior to their execution on Tower Hill. Billingsgate, which was a Thames wharf for fishermen, probably owes its name to a prominent local landowner. The famous fish market was first recorded in tolls regulations of 1016. The market itself moved to Docklands in 1981. There was at one time a Bridgegate which gave access to London Bridge but lay at the southern end of the bridge in Southwark as a defence against attack from that direction. Dowgate, another water gate, stood at the point where the little River Walbrook enters the Thames.

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#### YEOMEN WARDERS – COWS BEWARE

*The Queen's Body Guard of the Yeomen of the Guard was established in 1485 as a bodyguard for King Henry VII following his victory over Richard III at Bosworth. They lay claim to being*



*the oldest military unit in the world and attend the monarch on ceremonial occasions such as investitures at Buckingham Palace when they wear a distinctive Tudor costume in red. The Yeomen Warders of the Tower of London are a separate body, created by Edward VI as gaolers at the Tower of London, where they normally reside in their distinctive blue uniforms, guiding tourists. The two bodies are often confused and referred to as Beefeaters, an expression attributed to the Grand Duke of Tuscany who described them as ‘eaters of beef, of which a considerable portion is allowed them daily’.*



A 'Beefeater'

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The last two gates were used as prisons. Ludgate, at the foot of Ludgate Hill, despite its legendary association with King Lud, owes its name to Anglo-Saxon words meaning ‘opening gate’ and from 1378 was used as a prison for freemen of the City who were debtors. More serious criminals were kept at Newgate which had been used for this purpose since the 12th century. Roman in origin, the road passing through it led to important Roman towns to the west like Bath, Cirencester and Silchester. It probably owes its name to the fact that it became the principal western exit from the City during the construction of the medieval St Paul’s Cathedral in the 12th century when building works obstructed the access to Ludgate.



*The church of St Mary-le-Bow*

In medieval times the gates would have been closed at dusk, this being signalled by the ringing of the bells of the church of St Mary-le-Bow.

## At sixes and sevens

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### *The City livery companies*

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The origins of these strange institutions are to be found in Anglo-Saxon times. In the 960s King Edgar granted a group of young men the right to use waste land in the vicinity of Aldgate in return for their services, probably in a military capacity. They were called the Cneughten Guild, the word 'cneughten' meaning young men and the word 'guild' deriving from 'geld' meaning money or payment. Edgar's grant began a long process by which the citizens of London bargained with their sovereigns, raising money for kings at a time when the machinery for collecting taxes was rudimentary. By the 12th century certain groups like the bakers had gained the right to collect taxes from amongst themselves on behalf of the king and it was becoming common for trades to be associated with certain streets or areas. These may still be detected in familiar names like Milk Street, Bread Street and Ironmonger Lane. These associations, called guilds or companies, were also beginning to administer their own rules: checking weights and measures; fixing wages and prices; defending their interests against rival bodies; and, above all, controlling entry to their professions. An apprentice had to serve a master for a period of about seven years before he could become a full member of his company or 'freeman'. The freeman survives in the 21st century, the rank being gained in one of three ways: by servitude, involving a period of apprenticeship; by patrimony, reserved for sons or daughters born while their father is a serving freeman; or by redemption, that is upon presentation by one of the City livery companies and payment of a fee.

Relations amongst companies were often strained. In 1226 the Goldsmiths engaged in pitched battle with the Taylors. Over 500 men were involved, smiting one another with staves and swords. A sheriff had to be summoned to restore order, following which 12 offenders were hanged. In 1431 the Brewers company resolved that each member should send a barrel of ale to comfort the king's army in France. A brewer called Will Payne, of the Swan in Threadneedle Street, refused to comply. Perhaps he was an early Eurosceptic who disapproved of foreign entanglements. Attempts at persuasion failed. He was taken before the mayor by the Master of the Brewers Company and threatened with gaol. The troops got the ale.

There are now 108 livery companies, the newest being the Company of Security Professionals, admitted to Livery in 2008. Many of them have magnificent halls, notably the

Mercers in Ironmonger Lane, the Goldsmiths in Foster Lane and the Barber Surgeons in the Barbican. Their activities are now mostly social and charitable but they still play a part in the government of the City in electing the Lord Mayor and taking part in the procession which accompanies the Lord Mayor's Show each November, an order of precedence being carefully observed on such occasions.

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## FORTUNE FAVOURS THE PHARMACISTS

*Most of the livery halls were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and, having been rebuilt, were destroyed again by bombing in World War II. The exception is Apothecaries' Hall, Blackfriars Lane, which was rebuilt in 1688 and survived the Blitz. Besides being a magnificent example of late 17th-century architecture it has accommodated such famous members of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries as Edward Jenner who introduced vaccination against smallpox, and Humphrey Davy, inventor of the safety lamp.*



*Apothecaries' Hall*

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In 1515, following disputes amongst the livery companies, the Court of Aldermen established an order of precedence based upon the antiquity and financial strength of each. This led to the emergence of the Great Twelve which continues to the present day. They are, in order of precedence, the Worshipful Companies of:

1. Mercers
2. Grocers
3. Drapers
4. Fishmongers
5. Goldsmiths
6. Merchant Taylors
7. Skinners

8. Haberdashers

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9. Salters
10. Ironmongers
11. Vintners
12. Clothworkers

The Merchant Taylors and Skinners alternate in precedence, changing each Easter, practice which accounts for the expression at 'sixes and sevens'.

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#### THE CITY ELDERS

*As the governing body of the City, the Court of Aldermen was established by King John in 1200. It was presided over by the mayor. In 1377 the principle was established that Aldermen were elected for life by one of the City's 'wards', an arrangement which continued until 1975 when a retirement age of 75 was imposed. The role of the Court of Aldermen is now largely ceremonial though it still exercises some responsibilities in connection with the City livery companies and the City police force, which remains independent of the Metropolitan Police.*

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# Dick Whittington

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## *London's pantomime perennial – truth or fiction?*

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Richard Whittington was Mayor of the City of London three times – in 1397, 1406 and 1419 (the term Lord Mayor was not made official until 2006 though it was in common use from the 16th century). He was born in the hamlet of Pauntley, near Gloucester, in about 1359, the year his father, Sir William Whittington, died – hence the ‘orphan’ story which became attached to him. As a younger son he inherited little but, as was common practice at the time for the sons of the gentry, he was apprenticed to a London entrepreneur in the 1370s and soon established himself as a successful and wealthy cloth merchant. In about 1385 he married Alice Fitzwarren, the daughter of a Gloucestershire knight, and later became a confidant of King Henry V who entrusted him with funds to pay for the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey and for improvements to the City’s sewerage and water supply.



*Dick Whittington*

Whittington was also responsible for one of the earliest records of the City’s customs and procedures. This is the *Liber Albus*, or *White Book*, which was compiled by John Carpenter in 1419. Carpenter was a lawyer who, in 1417, became Clerk to the City and was later appointed by Whittington as one of the four executors of his will. His introduction records that ‘A volume of this nature, by favour of our Lord, is now at length compiled, in the Mayoralty of that illustrious man Richard Whittington, in the month of November, in the year of our Lord’s incarnation 1419.’ The book remains one of the most valuable sources of information about medieval London. Richard also left money for the rebuilding of Newgate prison which, until its destruction in the Great Fire of 1666, was known as ‘The Whit’.

The link with the cat is harder to prove but persistent. A statue in one of the niches on the front of the rebuilt Newgate prison was reported as having a figure of Whittington accompanied by a cat – as was a portrait, now lost, in Mercers Hall. In 1946 builders carrying out restoration work in the church of St Michael Paternoster Royal discovered the mummified remains of a cat walled in behind a cornice of the tower, close to the tomb of Richard Whittington who was buried in 1423. By the terms of Whittington's will the church had been rebuilt in the 15th century. It was rebuilt for a second time by Wren following the fire of 1666 and the cat was evidently re-interred there. Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the cat legend is to be found in a museum. In 1862 some building work was undertaken on some dwellings in Westgate Street, Gloucester which are known to have belonged to the Whittington family in the 15th century. One of the buildings was found to have a bas-relief in stone which showed the unmistakable figure of a man with a cat, dating from Richard Whittington's time. This strange artefact is now a prized exhibit in the Gloucestershire folk museum.

The Highgate Hill story is harder to swallow. If, as we are encouraged to believe, Whittington was heading back to Pauntley in despair when he was summoned back by Bob Bells, then he must have had a very poor sense of direction if he passed through Highgate. There is, however, a Highgate connection since the almshouses which were established under the terms of his will were situated there until the 19th century when they were relocated to East Grinstead, where they remain.

# A Tale of Two Cities

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## *And one salmon*

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London is really two cities: the settlement that the Romans called Londinium and the separate community of Westminster whose name derives from its location west of the City of London. A minster was a community of clergy whose services would be offered to worshippers who did not have their own resident priests. Legend attributed the foundation of the first Westminster Abbey to Sebert, King of the East Saxons in about 616, an event supposedly attended by miraculous events including the appearance of St Peter who was said to have consecrated the building himself the night before the Bishop of London was due to perform this office. St Peter also presented an undoubtedly surprised Saxon fisherman, Edric, with a miraculous draught of salmon. In memory of Edric's good fortune Thames fishermen presented a salmon to the abbey each year until the custom lapsed in 1382. In 960 King Edgar granted the abbey to St Dunstan, Bishop of London.



*London: A tale of two cities*





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