

## St Bride's Church, Fleet Street, City of London

The Grade I listed Church of St Bride, the 'Cathedral of Fleet Street', and regarded as the parish church of journalism, has survived plague, fire and war. With over 2,000 years of history, the story of St Bride's is inextricably woven into the history of the City of London, long associated with the development of the printed press and purported to be the inspiration for the tiered wedding cake. The church currently standing on Fleet Street is the eighth that has stood on this site, each reincarnation growing to reflect the City as it developed around it.

However, decades of pollution from the growing City have had an affect on much of the structure, particularly the famous Portland stone tower and spire, constructed between 1670 and 1684, by Sir Christopher Wren. At 234 feet tall it is Wren's tallest spire and was beginning to show serious signs of deterioration, including:

- Stonework on the tower and the spire show signs of staining and despoiling through pollution (it has been 40 years since the Church was last cleaned and carbon deposits were found to be an inch deep in some places).
- Sculptural elements were severely damaged and needed replacing.
- Previous repairs using cement for pointing and filling were damaging the structure.
- Stonework joints were disintegrating, in part due to rusting ironwork causing or exacerbating stonework cracks.
- The cornices and band course ledges needed protection before their condition became worse over time.
- The belfry louvers required conservation, as did the weathervane, which was suffering from severe deterioration and the lightening protection required upgrading



© Dave Lillywhite. Bakers of Danbury



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Much of the funding for the project to repair and clean the tower and spire has been raised through public fundraising appeals and grants from the City Churches Grants Committee. The current work is the first of three planned phases. The second phase will include the cleaning and repair of the remainder of the church walls. It is planned to also include the re-covering of aisle roofs, with provision of photovoltaic cells, and the restoration of spire illumination. The third phase comprises the cleaning and redecoration of the church interior. Current work on the tower and the spire is due to complete at the end of November 2013.

Working alongside the staff and volunteers at St Bride's, the London Diocese, the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the City of London Corporation, are organisations such as English Heritage and the Society for the Protection of

Ancient Buildings, providing advice on the work being undertaken. A number of experts have been employed to work on the site at different stages (and to oversee the work). The main contractors, Bakers of Danbury have over 100 years worth of experience working on historic sites, using methods in conservation and restoration work which remain very similar to those used over a century ago.

Craftsmen and women from Bakers have been trialling new techniques in building repair whilst working on St Bride's, developing their understanding of different repair and restoration techniques for use on future projects.

The improvements to St Bride not only benefit the church itself, but also provide an improved environment and outlook for local businesses and residences; as well as fuelling an interest in the progress of the work being undertaken and a greater desire for local community to make use of the facilities at St Bride's.

The work at St Bride's has fuelled a wide interest by the media, local businesses and others involved with the church's history, function and beauty and provided a much wider public understanding of the vital importance of major conservation work.

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