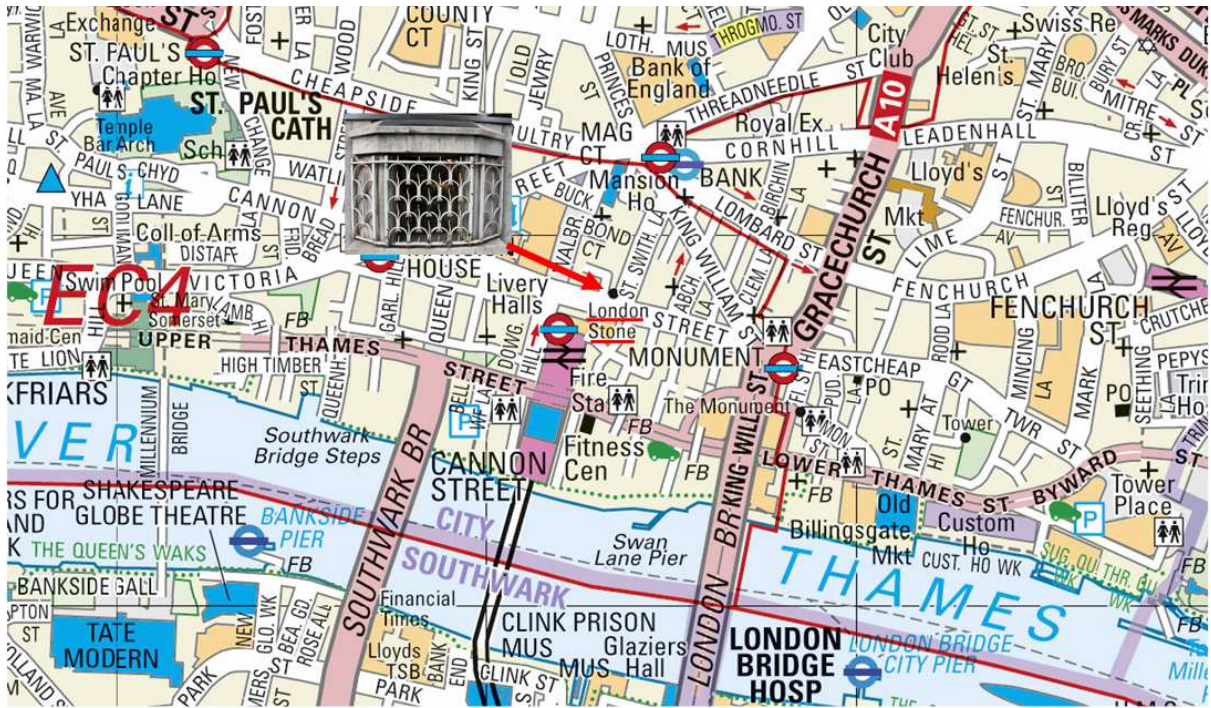




# City of London London Stone





London Stone is a block of oolitic (egg stone) limestone and measures approximately 53 x 43 x 30 cm (21 x 17 x 12 inches). This material does not occur naturally in London, its nearest source being in Kent. It is thought to have originally been much larger. Speculation in the 17th and 18th centuries suggested it was either a milliarium, marking the central spot from which all distances were measured in Roman Britain or an object of Druidic worship, suggestions that are now generally dismissed as lacking any evidence.

London Stone is sometimes called the Stone of Brutus, referring to the legendary Trojan founder of London in around 1,000 BC. Popular legends include the stone being the remains of an ancient stone circle that is alleged to have stood on Ludgate Hill and even the stone from which King Arthur withdrew the legendary "Sword in the Stone".

The earliest written reference to London Stone is in a book belonging to Æthelstan, King of England in the early 10th century. In the list of lands and rents of Christ Church, Canterbury, some places are said to be "near unto London stone". It was already a landmark in 1198 when it was referred to on maps as *Lonenstane* or *Londenstane*. The first mayor of London was Henry Fitz-Ailwin de Londonestone (meaning 'Henry, son of Ailwin of London Stone'), who served the city some time between 1189 and 1193, and was described as "the draper of London Stone".

There are no medieval sources to suggest that the stone had any symbolic authority or meaning during the medieval period. In 1450 Jack Cade, leader of a rebellion against Henry VI struck his sword against it and called himself "Lord of the City" although no contemporary accounts comment on the meaning of this. The event was dramatised in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 2* (Act 4, Scene 6) -- except that, in the play, the sword became a staff.

London Stone was originally situated in the middle of Cannon Street and was much larger than it is now. If it was Roman it might have been part of a Roman office building between the principle Roman Street and the Thames, the remains of which were excavated beneath Cannon Street Station. It is shown on the 1550s copperplate map of London, as a large block of stone in Candlewick Street (now Cannon Street) outside St Swithin's Church. The church was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666, and rebuilt by Christopher Wren, who encased the old stone in a larger protective carved stone. By 1742, the stone had become an obstruction to traffic, and was moved from the south side of Cannon Street to the north side. For similar reasons, it was moved again in 1798, and by 1828 was set into the south wall of St Swithin's Church, on the north side of Cannon Street. In 1941 St Swithun's church was gutted in the Blitz but the stone was left unscathed. In 1962 the Wren church was demolished and replaced by the current building at 111 Cannon Street, where the stone is placed in an alcove in the wall.

The stone and box, with iron grille, were designated a Grade II\* listed structure on 5 June 1972. A decorative grille to protect the stone had been provided by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society in 1869; it is clear from old photographs that the present grille is not the original, but a version made in similar style in 1962. There are current proposals to move the stone further down Cannon Street to allow the building into which it is built to be redeveloped.