

Historical Overview of Canterbury Cathedral

🦋 Anglo-Saxon Times

The story began in 597 AD when a monk called Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory in Rome to re-establish Christianity in Britain. He, along with forty other monks, landed in Kent, converted and baptised the King Ethelbert, and was given a piece of land upon which to establish a Cathedral. Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury and the foundation was laid for the spread of Christianity throughout Britain.

🦋 Medieval Times

A year after the Norman invasion in 1066, the Saxon Cathedral was destroyed by fire. The new archbishop, Lanfranc, built a much larger Norman/Romanesque Cathedral in its place. Twenty year later, Archbishop Anselm built a Quire to the east, above a Crypt which survives today as the Western Crypt. Building continued over many years as the styles and needs changed (Norman/Romanesque in the Crypt, early Gothic in the Quire, Perpendicular in the Nave). The Cathedral, as you see it today, was finished in 1498 with the completion of Bell Harry Tower. There have been a few alterations in Victorian times, e.g. Norman North West Tower was demolished and re-built to match the Perpendicular tower on the South West side. Crenellations were added to the Corona tower, and renovation and renewal of the stones and carvings are still continuing today.

Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered in the Cathedral in the year 1170, after quarreling with King Henry II. His tomb was placed to the east of what is now the Western Crypt. Soon miracles began to occur and pilgrims came from far and wide to visit this much revered tomb. In early 1174, King Henry II came in penitence, and walked bare-foot through the city. Later the same year, a huge fire destroyed the new Quire which Archbishop Anselm had built. William of Sens was brought to Canterbury from France where he had just completed Sens Cathedral. The magnificent Quire you see today is his concept. In 1220, during a huge ceremony, Becket's body was translated from the tomb in the Crypt to a magnificent new Shrine in the Trinity Chapel. During the course of the Reformation this Shrine was destroyed and the Monastery was closed, but the windows around the location of the shrine still echo, in pictures of the miracles, the dress and the habits of that time.

🦋 Tudors and Stuarts

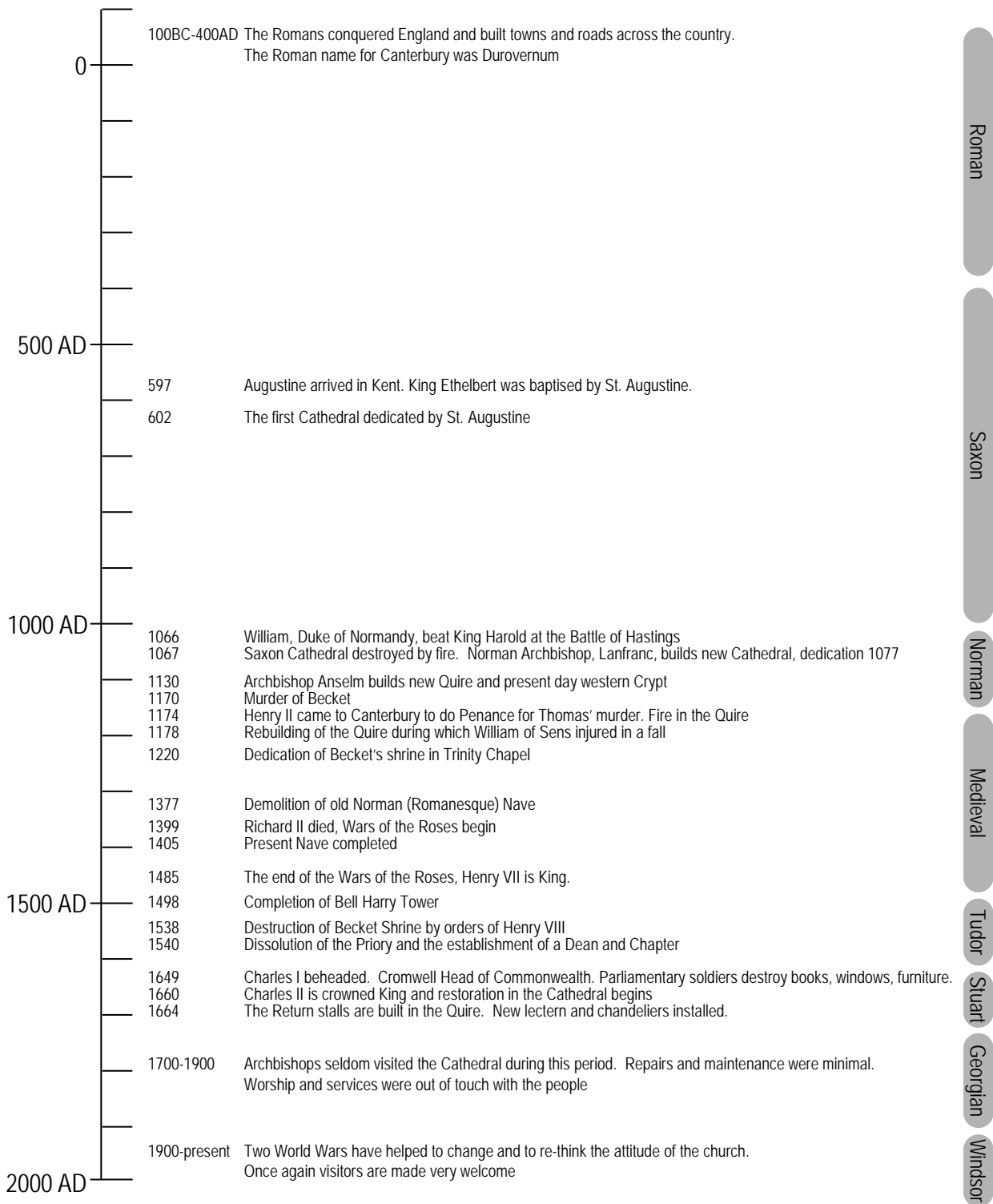
From the beginning royalty showed a great interest in the City and its Cathedral. Kings and Queens visited regularly and when Henry VIII came to Canterbury at the start of his reign there was no indication of the upheaval which was to follow. Later, in 1538, when he wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon, and the Pope would not acknowledge his claim, he destroyed Becket's shrine and in 1540 dissolved the monasteries. Many of the Cathedral treasures disappeared at that time. More destruction followed. During the Commonwealth period, Parliamentary soldiers rode into the Cathedral and wantonly broke the organ, the font and many monuments. They burnt the prayer books and smashed the windows. For quite some years afterwards the Cathedral became a desolate place.

🦋 The Restoration and After

The Monarchy was restored in 1660 with the return of King Charles II. Treasures, vestments, utensils and written records previously removed from the Cathedral were returned or bought back. Repairs began on the damaged buildings. With the coming of the Victorian era, pride once again returned to the Cathedral as a building and a place of worship. Today it is administered by a Dean and Chapter and is the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion of which the Archbishop is head. Canterbury is once again a place of pilgrimage.



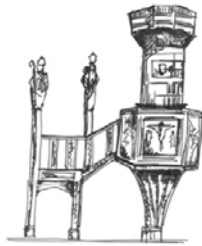
Chronology of Canterbury Cathedral



Around the Cathedral

🦋 Nave

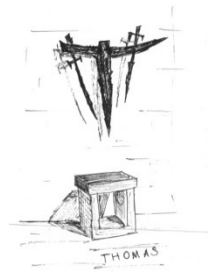
The present Nave was built in the 14th century under the guidance of the Master Mason, Henry Yeveley, in the Perpendicular style. Tall columns rise up like an avenue of trees to meet in delicate vaulted arches. Recent excavations revealed an Anglo-Saxon Cathedral on the same site.



🦋 Pulpit

🦋 The Martyrdom

This is where Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered by the four knights who thought that they were carrying out the orders of King Henry II. Note the modern sculpture marking the site which symbolises both the murder of Becket and the crucifixion of Christ



🦋 St. Augustine's Chapel



🦋 Font

🦋 The Pulpitum Steps

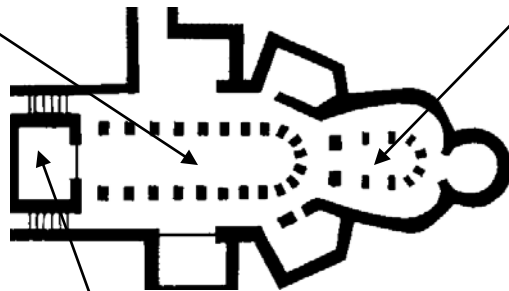
The pulpitum stone screen was built to separate the monks in the Quire from the peoples' church in the Nave. Above, rises the Bell Harry tower, the last major building before the monastery was dissolved in 1540. The tower is built of bricks, faced with stone. Look up at the fan vaulting, the circle in the centre is a trapdoor through which all the materials were taken up by means of a treadwheel.

🦋 South West Transept

To the east is St. Michael's, or the Warrior's Chapel. Here at 11 o'clock each morning, prayers are said and pages of the Book of Remembrance turned in memory of members of the Armed Services killed in action. In the centre of the chapel is the tomb of Lady Margaret Holland with her two husbands, one on either side of her. In order to build this monument, the tomb of Archbishop Stephen Langton had to be moved under the altar. Outside you can see the end of the tomb sticking through the wall.

🦋 The Western Crypt

This is the oldest part of the Cathedral and the largest of its kind in the country. It dates back to the 11th century, and is Norman/Romanesque in style. Note the rounded arches and pillars with carved capitals. At the extreme east end of this crypt Becket's tomb stood for fifty years after his murder.



🦋 The Treasury

🦋 The Eastern Crypt

This was built later after the fire in 1174. The arches are pointed and the pillars taller and sturdier to support the new Trinity Chapel above. Note the 'Wax Chamber', or watching room, from where the monks could look down on the pilgrims visiting the tomb which was just below, in an extension of the older Western Crypt.

The Quire

Re-built and extended in the 12th century in the early Gothic style, it was designed and started by William of Sens, a Frenchman, who was unable to continue the work because of a fall. The eastern section was completed by William the Englishman. Look for the gradual elaboration as it extends eastwards, in particular for rounded and pointed arches side by side. Look up for a lamb and flag at the centre of the arches, which is where William of Sens was working when he fell in 1178. The "Cathedra" or Bishop's Throne is the decorated canopied dais on the right.

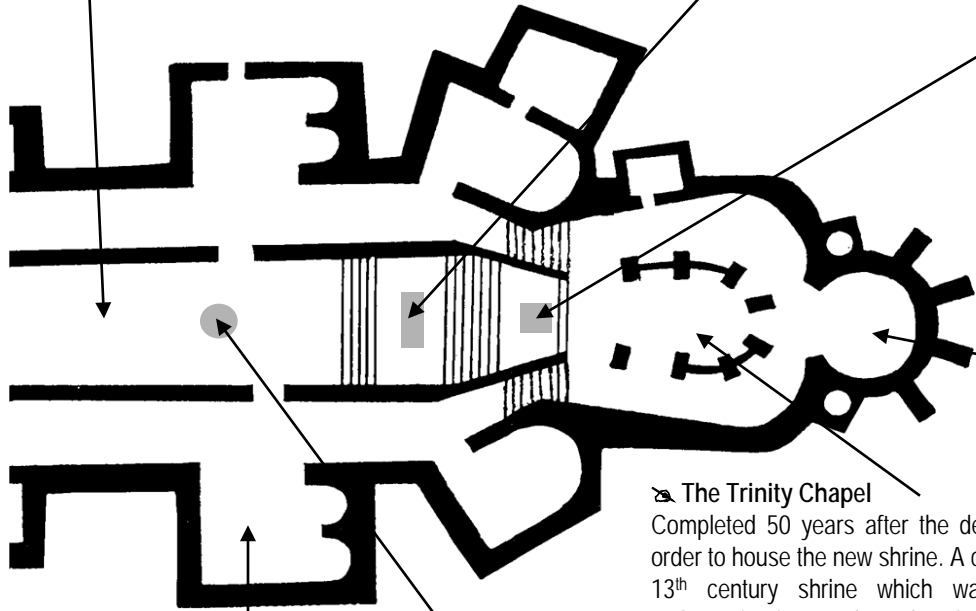


High Altar



St. Augustine's Chair

The stone seat on which the Archbishop is enthroned, is at the top of the steps.



Corona Chapel

The Trinity Chapel

Completed 50 years after the death of Thomas Becket in order to house the new shrine. A candle marks the site of the 13th century shrine which was destroyed during the Reformation in 1538 by order of Henry VIII, who removed all the gold and jewels to the Royal Treasury. All around the Trinity Chapel are the miracle windows, so-called because they illustrate stories associated with Becket. On the north side is the tomb of the only King to be buried in the Cathedral, Henry IV, with his second wife Joan of Navarre. The Black Prince's tomb is on the south side of the Trinity Chapel; above hang replicas of his clothes and armour called 'Achievements'. He was son of Edward III. One of the oldest tombs in the Cathedral, that of Archbishop Hubert Walter, Archbishop at the time of Richard I, is on the south wall opposite the Black Prince.

South East Transept

The four modern windows were designed in 1952 by a Hungarian artist, Erwin Bossanyi, to replace windows destroyed in World War II. The two large windows, Peace and Salvation, contain many symbolic figures, creatures and objects.

Lectern

