

Topic Page: [Canterbury Cathedral](#)

Summary Article: **Canterbury Cathedral**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Cathedral in Canterbury, Kent, England. It is in the form of a double cross, with a central and two west towers. The total length is 160 m/525 ft, the east transept measuring 47 m/154 ft. The finest work of four centuries of medieval English architecture, from Norman to Perpendicular, is represented in the building. It is difficult to say how many churches have previously stood on the site of the present cathedral, though Bede mentions that St Augustine 'recovered' a church at Canterbury which had been built during the Roman occupation. Certainly a great fire in 1067 caused Archbishop Lanfranc (1070–93) to rebuild the church then existing.

History and construction Lanfranc's new nave was identical in size to his former church in Caen in northern France. His choir was small, but his successor Anselm enlarged it to a size greater than the nave. Thus when the fire of 1174 gutted the choir, the dimensions of the cathedral had already been established, only to be enlarged by the Trinity Chapel (1179–84). Some of Lanfranc's masonry survives but is hidden. Anselm's choir transepts and chapels were retained and encase the later building, and the Norman crypt remains in its entirety, with exceptionally fine carvings.

A French architect, William of Sens, began rebuilding after 1174. His beautiful choir is in the nascent Gothic style, with some pointed arches, carved capitals, and a ribbed vault. He had a near fatal fall from the scaffolding in 1179, after which the choir was completed by William the Englishman who built the Trinity Chapel and Corona to his own design.

About 1370 it was decided to rebuild Lanfranc's nave. The main work was carried out from 1391 to 1405 under the active Prior Chillenden and his master mason Henry Yevele. The nave of Canterbury is a masterpiece of Perpendicular style, with lierne vaults and strikingly lofty aisles. The southwest tower was designed by Thomas Mapilton and built between 1424 and 1434 (the matching northwest tower was built in 1832 upon demolition of Lanfranc's tower). Finally, the magnificent tall and slender crossing tower, 'Bell Harry', was erected from 1496 for Cardinal Morton, by John Wastell.

Shrines and relics The numerous chapels originated from the great wealth of relics possessed by the church, and the necessity of finding shrines for them. These relics included those of the saints Blasius, Dunstan, Wilfrid, Alphege, and the most important, Thomas à Becket, whose shrine stood in the Trinity Chapel immediately behind the high altar. In the Middle Ages, Canterbury Cathedral owed much of its European fame and great riches to this shrine. But in 1538 Henry VIII solemnly issued a writ of summons against Becket accusing him of treason and contumacy, and the shrine, which from the early 13th century had been enriched by many costly gifts from royal and other pilgrims, was dismantled. Further destruction was wrought by the Puritans, who destroyed some of the stained glass at the time of the Civil War. In monastic times the nave was the people's church. The monks' choir was entirely enclosed to separate the noise and the bustle of pilgrims.

Architectural detail Owing to the crypts, the choir is raised well above the level of the nave, which is very high in proportion to its breadth. The unusual font dates from 1639. The piers supporting the central tower are the original piers of Lanfranc's building encased with Perpendicular works by Prior Chillenden. The choir is the most important specimen of Transitional-Norman work in England, using

both the pointed and the rounded arch. Gervase of Canterbury, in chronicling the difference between the new work and the older Romanesque choir of Conrad, describes the changed mode of workmanship and design: the pillars were elongated and the new capitals exquisitely sculptured; the vaults in the circuit around the choir were now arch-ribbed with keystones; and replacing the old wooden ceiling was a beautifully constructed stone vault. The single triforium (an shallow arcaded wall passage above the aisle and below the clerestory) gave place to two in the choir and a third in the aisle of the church. The Decorated screen which surrounds the choir was constructed by Prior de Estria in 1304–05; its carving is miraculously well preserved.

The stained glass of Canterbury is among the finest and oldest surviving in quantity. Many windows, although moved from their original positions, date from around 1200, or earlier. In the aisle windows of the Trinity Chapel are represented miracles of Thomas à Becket (after 1220).

North of the presbytery is the chapel of St Andrew, corresponding to that of St Anselm on the other side of the choir, and one of the oldest parts of the building. Both the east transepts are notable for the skill with which William of Sens adapted the work of Ernulf, and that of Conrad which succeeded it, to make it harmonize with his own choir. In the crypt, the Norman portion leads into William the Englishman's crypt under the Trinity Chapel. Here Becket's body was placed for 50 years before its translation to the shrine in Trinity Chapel in 1220.

Tombs and monuments The monuments in the choir are nearly all of ecclesiastical dignitaries, the most conspicuous being that in memory of Henry Chichele, archbishop from 1414 to 1443, and founder of All Souls College, Oxford. Behind the high altar is St Thomas's or Trinity Chapel, built to receive Becket's tomb. The site of the shrine is shown by the marks worn in the stones by many generations of pilgrims. The curious mosaic pavement resembles that round the shrine of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey. Near this site is the tomb of Edward the Black Prince (1376) and facing it is the tomb of Henry IV and his consort, Joan of Navarre. The circular chapel at the east end of the cathedral is known as the Corona, or Becket's Crown. Near by, against the north wall, is the tomb of Cardinal Reginald Pole, the last archbishop who acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope. In the centre of the Corona is the marble chair known as the 'Chair of Augustine' (13th century), in which each Archbishop of Canterbury is seated at his enthronement.

Other buildings The monastic buildings stood on the north side of the cathedral, and were extensive, comprising quarters for the monks and for the prior, and a separate palace for the archbishop, the domestic offices necessary for maintaining a great monastic house, the infirmary with its own chapel and cloister, accommodation for guests, and the great cloister, rebuilt by Prior Chillenden at the same time as the nave, and incorporating some parts of Lanfranc's earlier building. The cloister is complete, the north wall retains some beautiful Early English arcading, and the vaulting is enriched with a display of heraldry. Lanfranc's chapter-house, in the east alley of the cloister, was rebuilt about 1304 and the roof renewed in 1405–06. It was restored and reopened on the 13th centenary of the landing of St Augustine (1897).

images

Edward, the Black Prince

APA



Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Canterbury Cathedral. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/canterbury_cathedral



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

APA

Canterbury Cathedral. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/canterbury_cathedral

Chicago

"Canterbury Cathedral." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/canterbury_cathedral

Harvard

Canterbury Cathedral. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/canterbury_cathedral [Accessed 15 September 2019].

MLA

"Canterbury Cathedral." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/canterbury_cathedral. Accessed 15 Sep. 2019.