

Exeter Medieval Trail



Exeter City Council



The Church of St. Peter

In the Middle Ages religion was at the centre of all life. The Cathedral was not just a splendid building but an offering of praise demanding the very best work from skilled craftsmen.

To create such magnificence required time and the Cathedral Church of St Peter was built in two main stages. The first, in Romanesque style, was begun in 1114 by Bishop Warelwast, William the Conqueror's nephew, on the site of the earlier Saxon Minster. Although little else remains, Warelwast's magnificent twin Norman towers still dominate Exeter's skyline today.

Inspired architects

Bishop Bronescombe's rebuilding programme begun in the 1270s extended the cathedral to the east, while the nave was completely rebuilt in the 'Decorated Gothic' style. When it finally reached completion over 80 years later under the equally visionary Bishop Grandisson the result was 'a church to rival all the cathedrals of England and France' and was on the cutting edge of gothic design.



The Cathedral's Nave
(© Angelo Hornak courtesy of Exeter Cathedral)



The image screen on the West Front was originally brightly painted
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Roof boss depicting the murder of Thomas Becket (© Angelo Hornak courtesy of Exeter Cathedral)



Misericord with a carving of an elephant (© Angelo Hornak courtesy of Exeter Cathedral)

Exploring the medieval Cathedral

Take time to stop and admire the great West Front; ascending tiers of beautifully carved figures of kings, prophets and the twelve apostles.

Inside the Cathedral is a treasure house of medieval craftsmanship. Look out for:

- The nave's glorious uninterrupted span of Gothic vaulting, the longest in Europe
- The 14th century stained glass Great East Window
- The majestic Bishop's Throne (1312)
- Effigies of knights and bishops
- The 15th century astronomical Exeter Clock
- The comically inaccurate Exeter Elephant with misshapen cow hooves – a carving from one of 49 medieval misericords (seats for the clergy)

- Roof bosses – a profusion of kings, queens, Green Men, animals, birds, flowers, biblical and historical scenes
- The minstrels' gallery with pierced stonework for better acoustics

Cathedral life

The precinct was home to the Cathedral clergy. Accommodation ranged from the Bishop's grand palace to large hall houses for the Dean and other key figures, and shared halls for lesser members such as the vicar's choral.

Jobs for Cathedral employees were not all spiritual though; the dogwhipper chased out animals that had strayed inside the Cathedral before each service!

Which animal was on the Cathedral's payroll?
A: Dog B: Cat C: Sheep



Exeter Cathedral's Third Millennium Campaign

The aim of the Third Millennium Campaign is to ensure that the Cathedral and its mission are sustained for future generations. By preserving and conserving its past, and to seek new ways to enrich the experiences of all who visit. To make a donation visit www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk/campaign or call 01392 285974.

Visitors are welcome to the cathedral throughout the year. For information on opening times and entry costs visit www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk or call 01392 285983.

