

# Rochester Cathedral Audio Tour Transcript (English)

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## 1. The West Façade

Welcome to Rochester Cathedral. I'm Jools Holland and I'll be guiding you around the cathedral on your tour today. Now imagine you're back 900 years in the 1100s. It's a bright day in early Spring. As you cross the River Medway approaching the small huddled town of Rochester, its new Cathedral shines out in the morning sun, a blaze of colour towering over its surroundings, the whole of its west front brightly painted. Amazed, you continue closer and catch your breath as you step through its Great West Doors.

This site has welcomed worshippers, pilgrims and visitors for 1400 years. As we explore the Cathedral's past, we will also discover something about its present life and its community. I'll show you how to unlock the symbolism of the building and its decoration, and its Christian messages. You'll be able to use this knowledge to read other churches or cathedrals you visit. I hope you enjoy opening these doorways of discovery to the surprising and thought-provoking stories hidden in these ancient stones.

This façade of the Cathedral is truly remarkable. Despite the insertion of the big window in the 1400s, the whole front still looks pretty much as it did in the mid-1100s. This style of architecture is called Romanesque and is associated in England with the Normans. Key characteristics you can see here are the round tops of the arches and the rows of decorative arches and columns called blind arcades. Rochester has the only surviving cathedral front of this period and this is perhaps the finest example of Norman architecture of its time.

The man responsible for starting but not finishing the Norman Cathedral is in fact standing just above you. He is the carved figure up to the left on the top of the doorway. His name was Gundulf, a monk from Normandy who was appointed Bishop of Rochester by William the Conqueror. If you turn around and look across the road, you can see another of Gundulf's projects, Rochester Castle. It's mostly from after Gundulf's time that parts of his original building survive.

The Cathedral's east-west alignment is also an important part of its design. For Christians, having your back to the west means you're putting the setting sun, the dying day and your old sinful life behind you. Walking through the doors and facing east means embracing the new day and a new life, one in which a Christian accepts Jesus Christ as their saviour. So moving from west to east through the Cathedral symbolises a person's journey to a new life as a Christian.

## 2. The Nave

This area of the cathedral, the western end, is called the nave and is the main body of the church. Look at the steps in front of the double doors and then over to the right on the floor. Can you see a pair of curved lines cut into the floor? These mark out the apse, or rounded end, of an earlier Church, the remains of which lie buried beneath the present building. This earlier Church is probably the original Saxon Cathedral which was built in 604. It makes Rochester the second oldest Cathedral in the country, founded a few years after Canterbury. You can see a continuation of this outline outside.

Today, depending on when you come in you might find public worship happening here or music recitals and theatre performances, or simply visitors like you, enjoying this magnificent space. But the nave has not always been so tranquil. You would have been unlucky to come in 1137, for example, when a great fire broke out, an event recorded by Gervais, a monk of the time: 'On the 3rd of June, the church of St Andrew, Rochester was burnt and the whole city, together with the offices of the bishop and monks'.

In 1215, when rebuilding after this fire was almost complete, nearby Rochester Castle was besieged and King John sacked the cathedral and even stable his troops' horses here in the nave. Despite these turbulent times the nave endured, and it is the best place to see some of the surviving parts of the original Norman cathedral of the 1100s with its distinctive style known as Romanesque. Look at the massive sturdy pillars supporting the large rounded arches forming the aisles. There's a wonderful variety of designs of these pillars, matched up in pairs across the aisles. Some of the arches are decorated with a jagged chevron pattern, a key feature of Romanesque design. Above these large arches runs a beautiful arcade of smaller arches called triforium. Above that, the Norman cathedral ends. The top row of Windows is called a clerestory and is designed to let in more light. What you see dates from the 1400s. And these windows obviously don't line up with the Norman arches below.

The columns of the large Norman arches are covered in mediaeval graffiti. To explore some of this, press the yellow button. To find out about the symbolism of the nave and why it's actually like a ship, press the green button. And to discover some of the storeys carved around the font, press the red button.

Rochester has some of the best mediaeval graffiti in any English Cathedral. To find some good examples, stand with your back to the west doors and large west window at the end of the nave and look over to the row of pillars along the right-hand side. Now find the fourth pillar along, counting from the window end. You're searching for images of ships carved into the stone. There is one near the bottom of this pillar, if you look very carefully.

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You can find lots of carved drawings of Bible stories around the cathedral. They were sketches to guide the paintings that went on top. But these ships are different. They weren't carved here as sketches, but as votive drawings; offerings to a saint who was particularly connected with the sea and seafarers.

Mediaeval sailors who had to brave the dangers of the open sea would often leave a drawing or a model of a ship in a holy place before setting out on a voyage, in order to ensure a safe return to port. Mediaeval Rochester was a maritime town, full of sailors and people who made their living from the sea trade. Here in the nave was a shrine to St Nicholas, patron saint of mariners. Because there's so much ship graffiti in this part of the building, we think that the shrine may originally have stood near this spot.

Take a look up at the roof, what does the wooden beams that span it remind you of? It's like the upturned hull of a boat. The word nave comes from the Latin *navis* – meaning ship. You could imagine the people that come here to the nave to pray as being on a journey, traveling towards a heavenly home and the ship they are in represents Noah's Ark described in the Old Testament of the Bible. A place of refuge or sanctuary floating on the surrounding and threatening flood.

Other features of the nave reinforce the sense of spiritual journey. If you look at the pillars, you can see how the medieval architects and masons created them in pairs of different designs, drawing the eye down the nave along the route that leads on and up to the High altar.

If you walk towards the west end of the nave, the end with the large window, you'll see the font on the left-hand side between the last two columns. It's a large circular piece of carved stone standing on steps in the shape of a cross. A font is a basin that holds water used for baptism; the ceremony through which people become Christians. The early church used rivers, the sea, or a very large fonts to immerse people fully in water, but at this font water is poured on a person's head instead.

Water is a natural sign of life, death, cleansing and growth and its use in baptism signifies dying with Jesus Christ and being born again into his resurrection life. In this way, people celebrate their becoming Christian and are welcomed into Jesus's family, the church. As baptism is seen as the start of a Christian journey, fonts are generally placed near the doors of churches and so signify new life and new beginnings.

Around the sides of the font are four main biblical scenes at the north, south, east, and west points, interspersed with pairs of figures. All the scenes are associated with baptism. Look for the scene on the east side of the font, that is, the side furthest away from the doors of the nave. You can see John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River. You can recognise John by the camel skin poking out

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from under his cloak. This is a rough hair shirt worn next to his own skin and John is often depicted this way as this deliberate discomfort is a symbol of his dedication to God.

### 3. The Crossing

We are now at the crossing. Imagine the building laid out from above, it forms the shape of a cross and we're standing where the two lines of the cross overlap. This cross shape, or crucifix, is the prime symbol of Christianity, reminding Christians that Jesus Christ suffered and died for the world when he was nailed to a cross or crucified. Symbolism like this is fundamental to reading the cathedral. It was built for worship and prayer and everything in it is designed to assist or enhance this.

This carved stone screen, decorated with statues, is the pulpitum screen, or the rood screen. It separates the nave, historically the people's part of the Cathedral, from the quire, where monks continually offered prayers up to God.

[Missing portion]

Look up to the roof above the steps here. Can you see strange faces surrounded by leaves carved into the wood? These are Green Men, and if you look carefully you will see several stone versions of these at various places around the Cathedral. Green men are ancient pagan fertility symbols. So why are they here in a Christian Church? The answer is that the early Christians decided that the best way to convert pagans was to take their religious symbols and Christianise them. So by the time these green men were installed in 1840, their sprouting leaves had, for a long time, represented God's creation and therefore the resurrection; when Jesus rose from the grave after his death.

#### 4. The North Transept

Walk over to the wall painting or fresco to the left of the information desk. This is a modern fresco completed in 2004 to mark the Cathedral's 1400th anniversary. Once, the Cathedral was covered both inside and out with vibrant colours like this and would have seemed a very different place. But only some of this decoration was fresco painting. Frescos require a special technique that involves painting directly onto wet plaster, a difficult skill to master. The effects are stunning because the paint soaks right into the plaster, making the images last much longer than normal wall paintings.

There are different stories here. At the top, Jesus is being baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. This is a defining moment in the Christian story, when the Spirit of God descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, which you can see above his head. God speaks to Jesus at this point addressing him as his son, and the angels you see on the bank of the river are there to watch over him as he begins his new life spreading God's word.

The stories below depict the establishment of Christianity over 500 years later, here in Kent. At this time, around 600, England was made up of a number of Saxon kingdoms. Ethelbert was king of Kent and he is the man in the water on the left, being Baptised by St Augustine of Canterbury, a missionary sent from Rome. This baptism marked the King's conversion to Christianity.

King Ethelbert gave the land to build the first Cathedral here at Rochester, and he appears again on the right wearing his crown this time and watching as his subjects emerge from their baptism in the River Medway that runs past the town. As they do, they're being given Holy Communion by Bishop Justus, the first Bishop of Rochester.

The style of painting used here is very special. You may think it looks a little bit odd, perhaps even cartoon-like, with some things out of proportion and everything quite two-dimensional. This is deliberate, as the flat nature of the scenes without perspective are part of its purpose. We're not looking into the scene, rather the people are looking out at us.

In this way, the fresco acts like an icon. Icons are a distinctive feature of the branch of Christianity called Eastern Orthodox, practiced mainly in Greece, the Balkans, Russia and the former Republics of the Soviet Union. You can see some examples of icons hanging in the nave. Having this unusual kind of decoration here is symbolic of Rochester Cathedral's open attitude to other Christian traditions. Icon painting follows particular rules and icon artist, called iconographers, must prepare themselves spiritually before working on their art. Sergei Fyodorov, the famous iconographer who created this fresco, described the work and his preparation for it in this way: 'The spiritual life of the Cathedral is reflected in these images. It is wrong to think of them as decorations. The images of this fresco are the result of my prayer.'

The fresco is a focus with visitors' meditation and prayer too. As you listen to this music, you may want to take a moment for your own quiet reflection.

## 5. The Pilgrim Steps

The steps here lead to a place of prayer and pilgrimage and have been climbed by countless people over the centuries. Most of these pilgrims pausing here to renew spiritual strength of their journeys were making their way to the shrine of St Thomas of Becket of Canterbury. Many would then go on to the port of Dover, on their way to Rome and the holy land.

From the early 1200s Rochester Cathedral also drew people to its own shrine, to William of Perth. William was a pilgrim himself and was buried here in the cathedral. After his death, miracles reported and he was made a saint. Look underneath the protective wooden boards of these steps now. Can you see the stone treads are badly worn away? But they weren't worn down by feet alone. The early pilgrims made their journey through the cathedral to William's shrine on their knees. This idea may seem strange to you; that people would travel so far and enjoy such hardship to visit a shrine. Imagine what it would be like to crawl up these steps on your knees. The people of all faiths still go on pilgrimages today, sacrificing physical comfort in their search for spiritual answers. You could compare it to an Olympic athlete training hard for many years at great personal cost to achieve a single goal.

St Augustine of Hippo, an early North African Bishop, captured the pilgrims overwhelming desire to seek God in this prayer: 'You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless 'til they find rest in you'.

In 1201, the pilgrim known as William of Perth, a baker from Scotland, was murdered as he made his way out of Rochester. A local woman who found his body appeared to be cured of her madness as a result, and the Rochester monks brought William for burial here in the cathedral where further miracles were reported.

A shrine soon developed in the area of his tomb. Money donated from pilgrims may have helped to fund the building work in the cathedral in the 1200s. Such money was seen as a gift of God. William's shrine, however, along with other shrines to St Paulinus and Ithamar (early Bishops of Rochester) was destroyed at the great religious upheaval in the 1500s called the Reformation, though it is possible the men's bones were hidden elsewhere in the cathedral.

As you go up the pilgrim steps, on the wall on the left there is a brass memorial plaque to Colonel J. R. M. Chard of the Royal Engineers. This is the Chard who as the younger lieutenant in 1879 won the Victoria Cross at the famous siege at Rorke's Drift in what is now South Africa. Chard was in command of the besieged British Army post there and was the character played by Stanley Baker in the film Zulu.

The circumstances of that battle, in which an overwhelming Zulu army finally ended their attack and saluted the steadfast resistance of the British defenders, highlight the delicate threads of humanity that can still be preserved in war. So to, do the regimental flags known as colours hanging overhead at the top of the steps. Now over a century old, they came to the cathedral when the Chatham



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division of the Royal Marines was disbanded in 1950. As an embodiment of the spirit of the division, they represent the sacrifice that its members have made for their country and for each other.

Beneath the flags, against the wall, you'll see two books of names in cases. These are memorial books kept by the Royal Marines. Every Saturday a group of ex-Marines gather here to turn the pages and to remember their fallen comrades in two world wars. It is another example of how the cathedral provides a special place for reflection.

## 6. The North Quire Transept

You're standing in an area for quiet reflection, a part of the cathedral where people have come for over 800 years to offer prayer. This is the North Quire Transept and was created as part of the extension of this eastern end of the cathedral in the 1180s.

Important characters from the cathedral's early history appear here in the later Victorian window glass up above us. On the left of the three large windows is Gundulf, the first Norman Bishop of Rochester and builder of this cathedral. He's holding a model of Rochester Castle, one of his other construction projects. In the middle window is St Paulinus, a much earlier Bishop here in the Saxon 600s.

Finally, on the right is Walter de Merton, a Bishop of Rochester who is also famous for having founded Merton College Oxford in 1264. You can see a couple of scholars wearing their traditional mortarboard hats at the bottom of the window. In fact, Walter de Merton is very much still here. If you look below the middle window you can see de Merton's tomb, with an effigy of him on the top made from a milky coloured stone called alabaster.

While you're looking at the tomb take a look at the stained glass just behind it to the right. The figure in the long blue robe is William of Perth, the pilgrim who was murdered and made a saint and whose shrine once stood very close to this spot. He's wearing a scallop shell in his hat, the traditional sign of mediaeval pilgrims.

A candle is a powerful and simple sign of life and prayer. It is alive and radiates light and warmth as its wax burns away. So often we find it hard to pray to find words to express our deepest thoughts and feelings. But the spirit of God promises to guide us as we simply light a flame. Many people light candles here to think of others, especially those who are the victims of violence war and oppression. If you have someone you wish to pray for, please do feel free to light a candle on the stand. You may find the following prayer resonates with you as you do so. It's called the world peace prayer:

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth, from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hatred to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts. Let peace fill our world. Let peace fill our universe.'

People often come to pray at this little side area, so if anyone is here now, you may want to come back later rather than disturb them. Otherwise do please step inside. As you do so, notice the old tiles on the floor. These are mediaeval, almost 800 years old, and remind us of the many, many people who have sought peace here before us. This little space is called an oratory. It's a small chapel originally dedicated to St John, where prayers are said. Around its walls, you can see monuments dedicated to members of the Warner family, including a previous bishop and archdeacon of Rochester. At the near end of the oratory, behind glass, is a tomb. It's remarkable because it still retains some of its original brightly painted colour, the result of it having been walled up for 400

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years and only rediscovered in 1825. The man it commemorates is John the Sheppey, Bishop of Rochester in the 1300s. Once, all the tombs in this Cathedral would have been as colourful as this.

We're looking for a very special door. If you stand facing Walter de Merton's tomb, and look over to your right, you'll see a small round-topped door tucked into the corner. Go over to take a closer look. It doesn't look like much from this side, but the door pinned to its other side is one of the oldest doors in England. Analysis of the wood through dendrochronology, the science of working out age from tree rings, suggests the door is over 900 years old.

Sometime after about 1075, the tree was cut down which made up at least part of this door. At that time, trees all over England were being felled to fuel the massive fortress and church building programme of the Normans. Its great architect was a monk called Gundulf, who happened also to be Bishop of Rochester. This door represents part of the original Norman cathedral that Gundulf built here.

## 7. The Quire

What emotions did you feel listening to that music? It was recorded in the quire here, which is like a church within the church, built to enhance the acoustic experience of these devotional sounds. For Christians, music is a way to connect with the presence of God, something summed up by St. Augustine of Hippo, who said: 'whoever sings, prays twice'.

The cathedral's choirs who sing here in the very heart of the cathedral are continuing an unbroken tradition of sung worship at Rochester stretching back 900 years. Rochester's medieval monks worshipped here, separated from the general public who assembled for services down in the nave. The original walls of the quire from the 1080s still survive but are now hidden. If you look at the pointed arches and slender columns, you're looking at the remodelling work that was done in the 1200s in the Early English style. The choir stalls or seats here are largely Victorian, but some original parts from the 1200s still surviving in places, making them the oldest surviving choir stalls in Britain.

Can you see a much grander chair on its own at the end of the choir? It has a wooden canopy over the top like a throne. This is the bishop's chair, or cathedra, and it's from this that the word 'cathedral' comes; the place where the bishop has his seat.

The pattern you see on the walls today is a Victorian copy of the decoration painted in the 1340s. You can see the last original fragments if you look on the panels below the organ. It combines two heraldic symbols: the leopard and the lily, or the fleur-de-lis. These emblems had a political significance at the time they were originally painted here, as England, represented by the leopard, fighting France represented by the fleur-de-lis, in a series of conflicts known as the 100 Years War. At that time, church and state with much more closely intertwined, with many churchman also taking roles in the government of the country. This decoration could have been the cathedral's way of showing support for King Edward III who used the royal French emblem to advertise his claim to the French throne.

There are other coats of arms here, around the top of the walls, some with interesting symbols connected to the owner's name. If you look at the wall with the bishop's chair halfway along you should find a little shield with a fish and ears of corn on it. This fish-ear combination is a visual pun on the name Fisher. John Fisher was Bishop of Rochester and was executed by Henry VIII for refusing to accept him as head of the English church. Nearby is the coat of arms of another Bishop of Rochester, Nicholas Ridley, who was later executed by Queen Mary proposing her plans to return England to the Roman Catholic tradition. Rochester's two Bishop Martyrs, from opposite sides of the religious conflict of the English Reformation, reminders of the dangers of religious intolerance.

The organ is a profusion of pipes and colour. What you can see today was designed by Gilbert Scott and installed 1875, although based around an earlier organ of 1791. It was rebuilt in 1990, no mean task considering that it has just under 4000 individual pipes. Together, they create a sound big enough to match the vast space of the cathedral.

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On the 10th of April 1661, famous diarist Samuel Pepys recorded hearing the previous organ here at Rochester, where the cathedral had recently been restored after damage during the civil war: 'Then to Rochester, and therefore to the cathedral, which was fitting for use and the organ then a-tuning'.

This is one of the finest mediaeval wall paintings in an English church. It was created in the 1200s and is one of the cathedral's fascinating hidden stories. Only half the painting survives because it was literally hidden away behind a pulpit that once stood here. The other half was destroyed along with much of the vibrant medieval decoration of the cathedral during the civil war of the 1640s and its aftermath, a time when the nave was even used as an alehouse and a carpenter's shop.

The painting was only rediscovered during restoration work in the 1800s when the pulpit was moved. The painting shows the wheel of Fortune, a common symbol in medieval times, but a difficult one to understand today. The woman at centre of the wheel is Fortuna. She controls the spinning of the Wheel of Fortune. The three men on the edge of the wheel represent various levels of success in life. At the top is a man at the peak of his fortune. He is wealthy and powerful. We can tell this because he's sitting down – a sign of high status and to medieval viewers, his clothes were obviously of the best quality – there's fur on his robe and he's wearing a crown on his head.

What we can't see is the fourth man on the missing half of the wheel. But if we could, we would see him sliding downwards, falling from power and returning to the bottom of the pile. I hope it's becoming clearer what medieval visitors understood in this painting. It's a warning against craving money, power, and early success. We can all be knocked down by Fortuna, just as easily as we can be lifted up by her. So it's interesting that this image was placed here directly opposite the bishop's chair, perhaps it was supposed to be a warning to him, in case he got too big for his boots.

## 8. The Presbytery

You're now standing near a most significant part of the cathedral. This is a sanctuary, where the high altar stands at the cathedral's highest point, signifying the place where people approach being closest to God. Looking at the altar, we're facing east, where the light of a new day dawns. It is a place of hope and fresh beginnings. In front of the altar, above you on a long chain, hangs the Sanctuary lamp. A gift from the head, or patriarch, of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. Its flame is constantly lit, symbolising hope and eternal life. It's also small, almost unnoticed, but always there, and so represents God who is waiting for us to stop, to look for him, and to find him.

The altar symbolises the table at which Jesus ate his last meal with his disciples; his group of close followers. This Last Supper is shown in the stone carving behind the altar table called a reredos, designed by the Victorian architect Gilbert Scott as part of his 1870s restoration of the cathedral. Jesus sits in the centre of this meal, sharing bread and wine with his disciples for the last time. Christians remember Jesus at this meal in a ceremony known as the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Bread and wine are blessed on the altar table and shared. People receive the bread and wine kneeling in front of the rail you see here. It's an expression of the way Christians believe they receive God's life and spiritual nourishment through Jesus.

This eastern end of the cathedral was rebuilt in the 1180s in the Early English style of Gothic architecture, replacing the earlier Romanesque construction of the Norman period. Rochester is the only English cathedral not to have rows of columns or arches down either side of its sanctuary, which creates a great sense of space here.

The windows were remodelled in the 1870s by the architect Gilbert Scott to make them look more like those he presumed were here in the 1200s. He boldly removed a single large window in the late of Perpendicular Gothic style, in order to put in three upper windows. If you look to the right, you can see a row of three elaborate stone seats set against the wall. These are called sedilia and were put here in the 1380s for the priest to sit on when they were here conducting the special service of high mass. They're still used for this today.

If you believe in God, you might want to think about where you feel closest to him and why. The following prayer is taken from a book of prayers written in 1558 called *The Old Sarum Primer*:

God be in my head and in my understanding. God be in my eyes and in my looking. God be in my mouth and in my speaking. God be in my heart and in my thinking. God be at my end and at my departing.

## 9. The South Quire Transept

There's an elaborately carved doorway in this area. When Hamo de Hythe was Bishop of Rochester in the mid-1300s, he undertook a good deal of rebuilding work in the cathedral. This doorway is his most impressive legacy, and he's even in it. He's the tiny naked figure at the top of the arch. You might have to look carefully to spot him. This little figure represents his soul rising from Earth up to Heaven.

The mediaeval monks who lived in the priory next door used this doorway as an entrance into the cathedral. It was convenient for their night-time services, as it linked directly to their dormitory beyond. Today, it leads instead to the cathedral's library, called the Chapter Library.

The particular gothic style used here is called Decorated, and you can see why, as the carving is incredibly intricate. But perhaps the most interesting thing about this doorway is that like many of the features of the cathedral, it is packed full of symbolism. In this case however, the symbolism might make you feel a bit uncomfortable. To a mediaeval audience, the large figure of a woman on the left *ecclesia* represented Christianity. The woman opposite her, *synagoga*, represents Judaism, but not in a very positive light. *Synagoga's* blindfold, broken staff and downcast tablets of the law symbolises the Jews turning away from or being blind to God's true path, meaning the true path according to Christians. Today, it appears as a shocking image of intolerance once its meaning becomes clear, and it reminds us how easy it is to see prejudice but not stop to confront it.

Look to the left of Hamo de Hythe's doorway and you'll see a large brass plaque on the wall. This is a memorial to Charles Dickens, who lived near Rochester and knew and liked the town very well. So well, that he frequently borrowed its streets and buildings as locations for his novels, including the cathedral and its grounds. He even wished to be buried in the cathedral graveyard at the foot of the castle wall. However, he had become such a national icon when he died that he was actually laid to rest in Westminster Abbey in London. Nevertheless, a memorial service is held here each year to commemorate his life. The cathedral's starring role in Dickens work is in his final unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The very day before he died, Dickens was still working on the book and wrote a description of sunlight in the cathedral: 'changes of glorious light penetrate into the cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the resurrection and the life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm, and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings'.

## 10. South Quire Aisle

This area was, and is, a crossroads, connecting various parts of the cathedral. For example, the large doorway leading outside opens to the cloister of the medieval priory, built at the same time as the Norman cathedral, and where Rochester's monks lived. The steps leading downwards, by the opposite wall, are the entrance to the crypt. Above them, the odd-looking wooden screened-off area is a vestry constructed in the 1200s to provide space where priests could change into the special robes they wear for conducting services. If you look over to the right of the vestry, on the other side of the steps you can see the Kent Bell. So called because it is the ship's bell used on two main cruisers, both named HMS Kent. It is rung every Saturday morning as the page is turned in the Book of Remembrance of the Royal Marines.



## 11. The Crypt

The atmosphere down here immediately strikes you. Crypt means hidden, and this secluded area has two sides to it as a result. On the one hand, it is sometimes a good place to host noisier activities, like school children learning about the mediaeval Cathedral for example. But on the other hand it can be the quietest part of Cathedral, a refuge of calm, silence and private prayer.

Most of us have at some time need to take a break from the bustle of daily life, or to quietly things through a problem, or to be alone with our thoughts. Just a moment to take a deep breath. People often come here to do that, and during special services after dark, the powerful atmosphere down here really helps people feel the presence of God. Imagine the place in pitch blackness, but lit by people holding candles and you can see why spiritual searching is often compared to looking for a light in the darkness.

But while it is still light, you can see you're standing amidst the foundation stones of the cathedral. The columns here raise up the higher east end of the building and originally provided extra space for seven small chapels where the mediaeval monks celebrated mass daily. If you look at the section to the left and set back from the doorway where you came in, you're looking at the earliest part of the crypt, part of Bishop Gundulf's original Norman cathedral of around 1100. You'll notice the columns and arches here are plainer than elsewhere. The rest of the crypt dates from about a century later, created when the east end of the cathedral above was rebuilt.

Stand facing the glass doors that lead into the little chapel here, then turn to your left and walk around into the corner of the crypt. Just pause the commentary until you're there. On the ceiling in this part, you should be able to see the traces of the mediaeval painting that once covered the whole of the space here. What a difference that must have made an impression of the crypt, like walking down into a colourful picture book.

Now go back to the chapel doorway and look at the stonework on either side protected by glass. You might wish to pause the commentary whilst you find the right spot. Can you see the outlines of some faces? They're quite hard to make out. No one is certain what they represent. They might mark the location of the tombs of St. Paulinus and Ithamar. These were two of the earliest Bishops of Rochester whose tombs originally thought to have laid above us, near the quire. They may have been moved down here when saints tombs were being destroyed during the religious upheavals of the period called the Reformation.

The chapel through the glass doors is dedicated to St. Ithamar, the first Saxon Bishop of Rochester. Feel free to go in but bear in mind this is a special space usually reserved for quiet prayer. You may want to take a moment to reflect here, surrounded by these ancient stones, on the 1400 years that people have been coming together to worship on this site.

These words of the prayer of St Benedict, by who's guidelines the monks here at Rochester live their lives: 'Gracious and Holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive you, intelligence to understand you,

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diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and a life to proclaim you. Through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

## 12. Cloister Garth

The ruined buildings around this green square are all that remains of the Priory of St Andrew, founded here in 1083 by Gundulf, the first Norman Bishop of Rochester. The monks who once lived here have long gone, but this cloister remains a peaceful place for quiet outdoor strolling, reading or contemplation, and you can still make out various parts of the priory today. Can you see where the ruins join onto the end of the cathedral, where two rows of rounded arches are still standing, one on top of the other? This was the Chapter House. Walk over there now if you like, just pause the commentary until you're there.

Here, the monks gathered every day to hear read to them one of 73 chapters from the rule of St Benedict. This book detailed how they should live their lives as a community and how they should fulfil their spiritual potential. This is a small flavour of it: 'Let the brethrin' serve each other, so that no one be excused from the work in the kitchen except on account of sickness or more necessary work, because greater merit and more charity is thereby acquired.

Next to the Chapter House was the Dormitory at first floor-level, where the monks slept, and along the side of the green opposite the cathedral was the Refectory where they ate together. Next to that was the Lavatorium where they washed themselves. All these buildings now stand in ruins because the monks centuries of quite life here came to an abrupt end in 1540 in a process called the Dissolution. King Henry VIII was breaking up monastic orders and taking over their property. He planned to turn the priory here into a royal palace, although this never happened.

The statue was made by the sculptor John Doubleday as part of the commemoration of the 850th anniversary of the consecration of the cathedral in 1980. The woman and child represent Jesus as a boy and his mother Mary. They're looking ahead in the same direction as if looking to the future, but a future that is unknown. Mary's arms, while protective, are at the same time letting the boy Jesus go, willing to trust him to his uncertain future.

In the time of Bishop Ernulf, the early 1100s, an unknown monk wrote down a collection of writings known as the *Textus Roffensis*, or the Book of the Church of Rochester. It was partly a law book and partly a book of notes about events and records of the cathedral and contains lots of important information about how Saxon England was changing under its new Norman rulers. *Textus Roffensis* also contains possibly the first written record of what we now know as the English language.

Compiled from much earlier writings of 604. Here's an example, the first words from the laws of King Ethelbert of Kent: 'Godes feoh, and churchen'. This means 'the property of God and of the church'. It doesn't sound much like modern English but without it, the people of England might actually now be speaking a form of German.

### 13. The Lady Chapel

This soaring music seems to match the soaring windows, so full of hope and joy. What we see in this area is the result of rebuilding around 1490, when a new chapel was created here. This is known as the Lady Chapel, as it was dedicated to St. Mary, mother of Jesus. Architecture here has a very distinctive gothic style known as Perpendicular and features strong vertical lines with towering window arches, very thin stonework around the windows, and an emphasis on lightness and space. In fact this chapel, at a mere 500 years old, is the newest of the major pieces of building in the cathedral's history. If you look back through to the nave, you can see how different this part of the building is that built centuries before. You can see the Early English pointed arches as well as the chunky columns and rounded arches of the Norman period.

Back in the chapel here are features of a much more recent design, the stained glass, which is from the early 1900s, and the modern altar, seating and tapestries. These layers of history remind us of the mix of tradition and change that marks the life of the cathedral today. On the foundations of this long past, still thrives a living place of worship, prayer and encounter with God.

The stained glass tells the story of Jesus through his mother's eyes, following a sequence from left to right. In the far left window Jesus is born in a stable. You can see the animals of the stable behind the baby Jesus with angels and shepherds around him. In the next window three kings are shown bringing gifts for the infant Jesus. The next window depicts Mary taking Jesus to the temple. Moving round to the other wall, the story fast forwards to the adult Jesus dying on the cross. The final scene shows Jesus after he rose from the grave, ascending to heaven.

If you look back to the longer wall, under the windows you can see a set of small tapestries with abstract designs. These were made by Bobbie Cox in 1991 and evoke various points of meeting between the earthly and the divine. The patterns, colours and textures are all contrasted to suggest this sense of different people, ideas and forces meeting together.

Have a final look around you and take a moment to absorb everything you've seen and heard and felt here today. Please do take a seat in the Lady Chapel or out in the nave if you wish. We've seen how even after the upheavals of 1400 years, this fantastic building is still the setting for daily worship, and a vibrant mission that extends into the city of Rochester and beyond. It endures as a place where all are welcome, whether they come here to worship, to seek God, or just to explore these inspiring buildings.

Whatever brought you here today, I hope that what you've discovered helps you to look at the cathedral with fresh eyes. Perhaps exploring the buildings many real and symbolic doorways has opened up a new doorway inside you, to a new understanding of yourself and maybe even your relationship with God. I leave you now with some words from the poet TS Eliot: 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time'.