



History of Canterbury Cathedral



Photo: Canterbury Cathedral

Founded by St Augustine in 597 AD, Canterbury Cathedral is the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a unique place of worship, a masterpiece of art and architecture, and a major pilgrimage destination.

St Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, was sent here by Pope Gregory the Great as a Christian missionary in 597.

He discovered indigenous Christians and worked with them to establish a larger Christian community. In time this became the principal seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior bishop in the Church of England.

Canterbury was already a site of pilgrimage, but the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170 elevated it to one of the most important in medieval Christendom.

Today, the Cathedral's community is drawn from local people and Christians from across the Diocese of Canterbury and the Anglican Communion, from visitors and tourists, to those cut off from society through exclusion, as well as thousands who join online for worship.



The Quire

For more than 1,400 years, people have worshipped in Canterbury Cathedral. The Quire is the eastern part of the chancel where many of the Cathedral's daily services, including Sunday worship, take place.

At the top of the steps behind the High Altar – and near to the candle that marks the site where Becket's shrine once stood – is the large stone seat referred to as Saint Augustine's Chair. Dating from the early 13th century, it is used during the installation of each Archbishop of Canterbury.



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