**Canterbury in the 20th Century**

**Overview**

The 20th century map of Canterbury has to combine both the reconstruction of the inner core of the historic city, which was one third destroyed by World War II bombing raids, and also the enlargement of the city in response to the expansion of population, education, tourism and commerce in the latter part of the century.

A population of 24,899 in 1901 actually fell back over the next three decades to 24,446 in 1931. The First World War (1914-18) had a huge logistical impact on the garrison and in the loss of so many young men so soon after leaving school. By the sound of the guns the western front was not far, Canterbury suffered the terrible human cost but was not physically damaged. The small country town with relatively few industries remained a centre for rural commerce and business ancillary to the reception of visitors (pilgrims) to the Cathedral. This description of Canterbury still applied in the 1950 edition of the Chambers Encyclopaedia, although the dynamic growth of Canterbury arose from the wreckage of the Second World War (1939-45) air raids, most shockingly the Baedeker Raid of June 1st 1942. On recovery from the war the city’s population reached 30,415 in 1961. By the end of the century it had risen to nearly 45,000 and was accelerating.

The maps of late 20th century Canterbury therefore take in the phenomenal growth of Canterbury as a regional commercial, tourist and educational centre. The bombed part of the centre was twice rebuilt. Housing, schools and businesses were pushed out to new sites as the outskirts were developed. Vacant land pertaining to St Augustine’s College and Barton Manor estate became [Canterbury Christ Church University](https://www.canterbury.ac.uk) (founded 1962), Barton Court School (from 1945), Canterbury Technical College (from 1947) and the University for Creative Arts (from 1971). The abbey ruins have been beautifully enhanced by English Heritage.

Between the 1950s and ‘70s housing, private and public, took over the fields from Northgate to the army barracks and beyond, between the army range of Old Park and the Sturry Road, extending the city’s boundary by 1 ½ miles NE from the centre. From the time the [University of Kent](www.kent.ac.uk) was opened (1965) the slopes of St Stephen’s also became prime housing development land. By the 1990s Retail and Trading Parks set along the A28 axial route had expanded Wincheap and engulfed the Sturry Road. Canterbury became hugely attractive to new residents, students, visitors and retailers.

It was also in the 20th century that Canterbury’s maps of earlier centuries were drawn and redrawn. Excavations revealed layer upon layer of Canterbury’s Roman, Saxon and Medieval foundations. The transformational effects of the 20th century were not without their downside. Traffic congestion and air pollution on the incomplete ring road and Sturry Road passed into the 21st as an unresolved challenge.

Throughout the 20th century the Cathedral remained conspicuous and prominent as the major icon of Canterbury and most important pole of attraction. The 15th century Bell Harry Tower was unchallenged as the city’s tallest structure. The Cathedral, as ever, dramatically dominates views wherever it is approached. Floodlit at night the effect is absolutely stunning.

**From a country town to boom city**

**The First World War**

During the “Great War” of 1914-1918 Canterbury was mobilised as the garrison for the Royal East Kent Regiment (the Buffs) and the Kent and Sharp Shooters Yeomanry, with hospitals handed over to the army, and for the mustering and training of thousands of horses for the carnage of the western front. To commemorate those who paid the ultimate sacrifice the Canterbury War Memorial, erected in the Buttermarket just outside the Cathedral’s Christ Church Gate, was unveiled by Field Marshal Earl Haig and dedicated by Archbishop Randall Davidson on October 21st 1921.

**Suburban Development**

In the early decades of the century, inspired by the Tudor Village design featured in the 1910 Ideal Home exhibition, Canterbury’s suburbs expanded from the Victorian terraces in response to demand for the popular “Tudorbethan” style. In the interwar years the slopes to the north and south sides of the city were developed to build new semi and detached houses with two storey bay windows, bricks clad in hanging tiles, fake timbering and pebbledash. Suburban expansion with private and council housing continued after World War II, most obviously in the St Stephen’s area with the development of the former Hales Place estate.

Many old terraced houses in the main part of the city succumbed to bulldozers in the early post war years. Wincheap, by contrast, largely escaped this fate and retains terraced housing which from the late 17th century which has been lost elsewhere. Modern housing pushing out from the centre has respected the historic character and picturesque setting of St Stephen’s Church (which dates from the 12th century), the Green, 16th century almshouses and Olde Beverlie Inn. Since 1967 the designation of Conservation areas by character and appearance for built and natural heritage, helps us to admire the commitment of late 20th century planning to preserving Canterbury’s rich architectural heritage.

Probably the most visionary concept in Canterbury’s suburban development was the planned council housing development of the late 1940s originally called New Harbledown. Designed as a village on the outskirts and overlooking the old city, roads were named after Chaucer’s pilgrims and the development was complete with a village shop, a pub called “The Gentile Knyght” and a primary school. But in 1952 the council reneged on the name, New Harbledown, and gave the new village the name by which it has since been known, the London Road Estate. Land donated by a farmer and former mayor, Frank Hooker, made possible the adjacent building of the former high school now called the [Canterbury Sports Academy]( https://www.canterbury.kent.sch.uk).

**Bombing in World War II (1939-45)**

The destruction of World War II came to Canterbury in the night of 1 June 1942, the worst of a series of air raids, when high explosive and incendiary bombs rained down on the old city.

Known as the Baedeker Blitz (a name derived from German tourist guidebooks which were used to generate revenge attacks on English cities of historic and cultural interest) there was massive destruction to the eastern part of the old city, including Burgate, St George’s Street and the Whitefriars area, where the Simon Langton Grammar Schools were destroyed, with 2,500 properties and 6 acres left in ruin. St George’s Tower, the church where Christopher Marlowe was baptised in 1564, was virtually the only structure in this part of the city to survive the bombing.

The devastation was shown in the final scenes of the 1944 film, *A Canterbury Tale*, directed by one of the 20th century’s foremost film directors, Michael Powell. Born in nearby Bekesbourne and educated at The King’s School, Michael Powell was fascinated by the blessings and penance conferred by pilgrimage and knew every street and stone in Canterbury. The message of *A Canterbury Tale* for wartime Britain was that nothing represented by Canterbury in the historic and spiritual life of the nation can be destroyed.

The Cathedral was the Luftwaffe’s target, the Cathedral Library received a direct hit and 16 bombs fell on other parts of the Precincts. But how did the Cathedral so miraculously survive? Parachute flares had been dropped high above the Cathedral to guide the bombers which swept in low. But in a gentle breeze the flares drifted off target to cause most bombs to be dropped over the adjacent city. If spared the worst of the attack by the fortuitous breeze, the incendiary bombs which fell on the Cathedral were pushed off the roof by air raid wardens and firefighters inspired by the towering figure of the Very Reverend Dr. Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, to be extinguished on the ground.

The Regal cinema, now the Odeon (by the St George’s roundabout), was also fortunate. A high explosive bomb destroyed the side of the building. Rather than rebuild, the debris was cleared to widen the public footway and a new wall to the reduced building rendered up. This accounts for the cinema’s unsymmetrical appearance to this day. No-one was in the building at the time but that was the end of the film then showing, *Gone with the Wind.*

**Planners versus anti-Planners**

After the war fierce controversy raged over plans for the redevelopment of the city centre.

In 1945 the distinguished architect, Charles Holden, whose most famous building is the University of London’s Senate House, was commissioned to put forward an all-encompassing plan for Canterbury. Holden’s master plan proposed an inner ring road to take traffic out of the High Street, a Civic Way through the bombed area to link the Cathedral to new civic buildings to be built in the Dane John Gardens, transport hubs and a new shopping centre. Holden said he did not want to destroy the heritage of the past but in “the city of the future” to enhance Canterbury’s heritage for the future.

However, this meant clearing more old buildings, widening narrow streets and reorganising public spaces, with the general application of reinforced concrete. Holden’s scheme was opposed by an alliance of residents and business owners who formed the Citizen’s Defence Association (CCDA). Victory for the CCDA anti-planners in the municipal elections of November 1945 meant that no coherent scheme was carried through.

A compromise plan of 1948 removed the ring road to outside the city walls, where later as a dual carriageway it was built but never completed as a full circuit. Some parts of the Holden plan which were realised can be seen, for instance in the transformation of Rose lane from a narrow lane to a broad boulevard which Holden intended to be the central section of his “Civic Way”. As no plan was fully implemented, Canterbury has been left as it is found today, a mix of partially implemented plans. Since local government reorganisation in 1974, greater sensitivity has been shown, one excellent result being the pedestrianisation of the city centre.

**The building and Rebuilding of the bombed city centre**

The structures built in the 1950s and 1960s were at best mediocre and at worst a disgrace. The **Burgate,** the first street to be rebuilt, was an exception successfully retaining its historical character and interest. The poor post war developments, particularly in the Longmarket, St George’**s** Tower area and Whitefriars were demolished and rebuilt in the 1990s.

**Butchery lane** is now a wonderful example of how well the heritage of the past and present can be successfully brought together. One side of the historic lane survived the bombing intact while the other side was destroyed. The medieval timber framed buildings with jettied upper storeys to the west side are enhanced and echoed by the assortment of features of the modern Longmarket centre built to the historic street line to the redeveloped east side. Butchery lane consequently frames one of the most delightful views of the Cathedral’s Bell Harry Tower.

The new **Longmarket**, comprising shops and a first-floor terrace courtyard, successfully combines traditional and modern features. The plan was criticised as a bad case of film-set phoney medieval-looking facades, but the outcome, with the provision of the underground [Roman Museum]( https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/romanmuseum) is more successful than was feared. The Longmarket terrace affords views of the Cathedral and the attractive plaza area meets a need for public space, affording a view of the full length of the historic thoroughfare through the Parade, High Street and St Peter’s street to the Westgate Towers and the distant hill top vista beyond.

**The Whitefriars**, formerly the site of an Augustinian friary and later the Simon Langton Grammar Schools, though criticised for being oversized, is a model commercial centre of its kind. The bus and coach hub serves well where it was built on the only site in the city centre immediately adjacent to the primary retail development. A well concealed multi-storey car park replaced the 1960s monstrosity, built in the aptly named “brutalist” style. The Whitefriars incorporates residential apartments and has successfully created a new public square where the outline of archaeological excavations is etched into the paving.

Smaller scale developments in former bomb sites. The 1980s Regency development in Castle Way, the Templars in St Dunstan’s and the former Wool Store and attractive riverside restaurant, built in flint, stone, brick and weatherboarding adjacent to the Sudbury Tower, are successful rebuilds.

**St Dunstan’s Street**

St Dunstan’s Street is one of the finest streets in Canterbury. For centuries the principal entrance to the city by the West Gate Towers which stand at the southern end, many of the buildings are of historic and architectural interest. The Second World War however left bomb sites to either side of the railway crossing which bisects the street. At the junction of St Dunstan’s Street and Station Road West a corner had been a museum and swimming bath in a timber framed building. A local builder, Walter Cozens, had dismantled and moved the entire structure from Upper Bridge Street to St Dunstan’s in 1908. Destroyed in the bombing raids the site was filled by a petrol filling station and motor bike shop. On demolition of the garage a new Sainsbury’s Local, wrapped around by student residential accommodation, now rounds off the corner. At the junction with Roper Road a National Tyre Depot was built in the 1960s where before the war a terrace of four houses and an individual villa had stood. This site is now retirement housing known as Abbots Lodge. Both redevelopments have replaced negative post war features with buildings in style and character with the historic mix of residential buildings, shops and businesses of the street.

**Canterbury’s industrial heritage in the 20th century**

One of the largest upholstery tanneries in Europe prospered throughout the 20th century within the city walls until its closure in 2002. In the early part of the century the tannery, which took its name from the adjacent St Mildred’ church, expanded from Stour Street to the other side of the river.

The owners of the business, the Williamson family, were great benefactors of the city, giving their home, Tower House, the Westgate Gardens and the Tannery Field to the council in 1936. Catherine Williamson became the city’s first female mayor (1938-40) and earned huge respect for her civic dedication during and after the Second World War.

The motor car industry became a strong market for Canterbury leather, particularly for Rolls Royce cars, Bentleys, Daimlers and Jaguars, found its way into the Houses of Parliament and was used for the famous Mastermind chair. However, complaints about the stink of tannery processes grew exponentially with the expansion of the business and the site. Unloved because of the smells, from 1988 the business tried to mitigate the effects by concentrating on the dressing, softening and drying of hides. When it closed some of the tannery buildings were preserved for the new housing complex. A large warehouse on Stour Street near St Mildred’s church and, connected across the river by the tannery bridge, another building in the main site are successful conversions. With the stink gone the new housing and riverside apartments are attractive prospects. The development also recreates the line of the city wall where it had been destroyed during the 17th century English Civil War.

The sculptured figure of a cow standing alongside the ring road on the Tannery Field is a sadly symbolic reminder of the tannery. It is constructed of steel rails excavated from the tannery railway which before the war had transported waste to be disposed of in the field.

**The Canterbury and Whitstable Railway**, opened on May 3rd 1830, was the world’s first passenger steam railway. It became a branch of the London and South East Railway when in 1846 the main line reached Canterbury**. Canterbury West station** now comprises an impressive set of grade 2 listed railway buildings. [The Goods Shed]( https://thegoodsshed.co.uk) was about to be demolished in 1986, but was saved from the bulldozers by the City Council slapping on a preservation order. Restored as a farmers’ market, [the Goods Shed]( https://thegoodsshed.co.uk) has become a permanent and popular home for 12 independent local food and drink producers and a restaurant. The overhead signal box, unique of its kind in England, was also listed as a building of special railway heritage. The preservation of the railway buildings at Canterbury West matched the heritage-led regeneration of St Pancras Station in London, to which Canterbury West later became directly connected by high- speed trains. The adjacent goods yard, transformed in 1995-1997 into an attractive quarter of Georgian style terraced housing, includes the original buildings of the 1830 Canterbury and Whitstable Railway. The ticket office, Weighbridge Cottage, where the first season ticket was sold, is accessed by an old railway gate from North lane. The associated stable buildings and forge of the 1830 terminus had become semi derelict squats in the 1980s, but were also saved just in time.

**Education**

Education was at the heart of St Augustine’s mission to England in 597 and the great Benedictine monasteries of the Cathedral Priory and St Augustine’s were centres of teaching and learning in the middle ages. In view of the rich heritage of Christian learning it is not surprising that in the 20th century Canterbury became pre-eminent as a centre of education. Physically the expansion of schools and universities filled every vacant space in the city, pushed the physical boundaries to new limits and, in the maps of the Canterbury mind, took the example and influence of their alumni far beyond.

**Schools**

**[The King’s School](https://www.kings-school.co.uk),**

The tradition of education in Canterbury goes back to 597 when Augustine arrived to evangelize England. The education provided by the monastic foundation, and by the ancient school of the City of Canterbury, was in 1541 made the responsibility of the new Cathedral foundation of Henry VIII. Thanks to this the school became known as King’s School, but the school of Christopher Marlowe and William Harvey remained in the confines of the NW corner of the Precincts, in the Mint Yard, until the late 19th century. It was not until the coming of the railways that King’s was able to open its doors to a wider public, became a Public School, built boarding houses, set rigorous academic standards for boys to win scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge and embraced organised sport.

By 1900 the school had acquired Blore’s Field off St Stephen’s Road, named after George Blore (Headmaster 1873-86), where in 1990 the school’s Recreation Centre combining a swimming pool and sports hall with all the facilities of a municipal sports centre was opened. The King’s ‘Rec’ operates a membership scheme for the community. The school pushed out further from St Stephen’s road when in 1927 George Birley (Head Master 1927-35) bought 22 acres of farm land contiguous with the Canterbury West to Ramsgate railway. The playing fields known as Birley’s comprise six rugby pitches or three grass wicket squares and 26 cricket nets according to season, an artificial grass hockey pitch, hard courts for tennis and netball and a fine pavilion. Birley’s playing fields proved a farsighted acquisition when the surrounding land was sold for post war housing.

King’s scholars have included the novelists [Hugh Walpole]( /19c/19c-walpole-biography) (1884-1911) and [Somerset Maugham]( /20c/20c-maugham-biography) (1874-1965). Their contrasting experience of the school appears in Maughan’s semi- autobiographical \_*Of Human Bondage\_*, as the dismal place where Philip Carey endured his school days, and Walpole’s \_*The Cathedral\_*, which reveres the architecture and monuments around the only school where he felt happy. Walpole’s reputation as the bestselling author of the inter war years took a blow from Maugham’s \_*Cakes and Ale\_* (1930), in which a novelist of more pushy ambition than literary talent was widely taken to be Hugh Walpole. Despite Maugham’s depiction of his school and his emphatic atheism, his ashes were scattered in the Cathedral Precincts garden near the Norman Staircase.

The modern development of the school was largely the achievement of Canon Shirley, who became Head Master in 1935, acquired and built more boarding houses in the Precincts, expanded the school in numbers, started the festival of music and drama at the end of the summer term known as ‘King’s Week’, and whose eponymous assembly and concert hall is a grandiose legacy.

Modernisation and further expansion continued apace from girls joining the school in the sixth form. with the acquisition of St Augustine’s College next to the ruins of the medieval St Augustine’s Abbey and, in 1992, becoming fully co-educational as a school of 850. Today 13 boarding houses are scattered around the Precincts, Broad Street and St Augustine’s. In the process King’s has taken on the conservation and enhancement of the ancient buildings in the Precincts and St Augustine’s, which in 1988 were declared by UNESCO as part of the Canterbury World Heritage site. In addition the historic buildings of the Dominican Priory, St Alphege Church and, more recently, the Malthouse, a 19th century brewery converted into a state-of-the-art theatre, with the Shirley Hall, are made available by the school for community use.

**Simon Langton Grammar Schools**

The Simon Langton Boys Grammar School, founded with its sister school in 1881, succeeded the Blue Coat Boys’ School which had been housed in the Poor Priests’ hospital. The two schools were built on the site of the Whitefriars (now the shopping centre) and were named after Simon Langton, Archdeacon of Canterbury (1227 until his death in 1228) who left endowments bequeathed to the schools, which nonetheless were non-denominational.

No school was more tragically harmed by the two World Wars than Langton Boys. In the Great War (1914-1918) some 400 boys served on the western and eastern fronts, of whom 98 were killed. an exceptionally high proportion for any school. The house system is named after some of those boys who died in the service of their country. In the Second World War, while [King’s] was evacuated to a safe place in Cornwall, Langton boys and girls bore the brunt of the air raids. Following the severe damage to the Whitefriars buildings by the Baedeker Raid of June 1st 1942 schooling take place in shelters, huts and the open air. The Butler Education Act (1944) set out the future for selective state grammar school, technical and secondary education, which in Canterbury (as with the county of Kent) has prevailed in a modified version until today.

After the war the Langton schools were rebuilt on farm land beyond the Kent county St Lawrence cricket ground to the south east of the city, the Boys’ In Nackington and the Girls’ School on the [Old Dover Road]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road). For schools which aspire to a seemingly modest motto, *Meliora Sequamur* (May we follow better things), the devastating experience of two world wars has been followed by infinitely better things. These are expressed by the Langton values of academic excellence, ambition, independence and resilience.

**St Anselm’s, the Archbishop’s and Canterbury High**

Built off the [Old Dover Road]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road) on land between the Langtons, **St Anselm’s Catholic School** is a strong learning community, embracing the spiritual values of “Hope, Charity, Justice and Peace” for students of all academic abilities. Set in parkland at the foot of St Stephen’s hill, the **Archbishop’s School** (Church of England), also open to children of all abilities, became the Canterbury school in the post war decades which attracted most applications for places. By the London Road Estate, founded as a secondary school in 1952 on land donated by Frank Hooker, **Canterbury High School**, which today has outstanding facilities as a specialist Sports Academy, draws more than 1000 students from across the city. [Canterbury High School Academy](https://www.canterbury.kent.sch.uk) (as now) works in partnership with Simon Langton Boys and shares the spacious campus and modern facilities with the Canterbury Adult Education Centre.

**Barton Court**

**Barton Court Grammar School** started as the Girls’ Technical High. It occupied the site of the old hospital building in the grounds of St Augustine’s between 1937 and 1945 when the Technical High crossed the road to the grounds of the Barton Manor estate to re-open as Barton Court Grammar School for Girls. The 18th century manor house, gardens, playing field and lake, formerly used by the abbey as a fishery, must have seemed an idyllic place to learn. In the 1960s a brand new school building designed by city architect John Berbiers was built, part cantilevered over the pond. It was and still is called the ‘60’s Block’. In 1990 the school became co-educational and more buildings were developed around the lake as the school grew in numbers and ambition. Uniquely among Canterbury schools Barton Court took on the International Baccalaureate in place of A levels, with foreign languages a distinctive strength. Today the Barton Court Academy Trust is busy with further expansion, taking over the adjoining site of the former Chaucer School in order to create a new ‘free school’ for children aged 11 to 18.

**Chaucer Technology College**

The Chaucer was Canterbury’s best example of a Technical School under the provisions of the Butler 1944 Education act. Originally founded as the Canterbury Technical High School before World War II, the school moved to its Spring lane site in 1967 and was renamed the Geoffrey Chaucer School on becoming co-educational in 1973 and subsequently Chaucer Technology College. The Chaucer was a well-managed, happy and successful, mixed ability school and there are plenty of former boys, girls and staff who will tell you that it was a good school. But in 2009 the Chaucer was tarnished by a television news feature about the dangers of asbestos in school buildings, even though the school had dealt with the problem. Owing to dwindling pupil numbers and deteriorating academic performance Kent County Council closed the school in September 2015. To meet the increase in population and demand for school places in Canterbury a new school is under construction on the Chaucer’s site, to be run by the Barton Court Academy Trust.

**St Edmund’s School and Kent College**

Even with the array of educational excellence among Canterbury’s state schools, [King’s] is just one of three independent schools which have also developed and flourished over the past hundred years. Separated by just a few yards across the Whitstable Road, St Edmund’s School and Kent College have consistently enhanced their own educational identity.

The fine Victorian buildings of **St Edmund’s School**, built on parkland acquired in 1855 by the Reverend Dr. Samuel Warneford for the Clergy Orphans Foundation, overlook the city from the prominence of St Thomas’ Hill. In 1972 St Edmund’s took in the Cathedral Choristers Choir School which had existed as an entirely independent school within the Precincts. The choristers still live in the Choir School building by the Deanery known as Junior House, an enclave of St Edmund’s within King’s! The choristers are provided with minibus transport for main school lessons and activities. St Edmund’s as a day and boarding co-educational school combines all the best features of a caring, happy, successful academic community which is committed to educating the whole person, including some very talented members.

**[Kent College](** **https://kentcollege.com)**, founded 1885 as the Wesleyan College, Canterbury, on land made available by a farmer, Edward Pillow, occupies a rural site on the Whitstable Road. As an independent day and boarding school Kent College more than kept pace with the 20th century in the expansion of buildings, facilities, and excellence in academic achievement, sport and music. The school also owns and manages the adjoining Moat Farm estate and students exhibit livestock each year at the Kent County Show. Sharing a common connection with the Methodist Church with thirteen independent “sister schools” in Great Britain and its own offspring, Kent College Dubai, Kent College aspires by its motto *Lux Tua Via Mea* (Let Your Light be My Way) to world class excellence.

**Universities**

By the end of the 20th century Canterbury was home to three universities, the **University for Creative Arts** (founded as the Canterbury School of Art and Architecture 1948), [**Canterbury Christ Church University](www.canterbury.ac.uk)** (formerly College of Education founded 1962) and the largest and first to be a university, the [**University of Kent](www.kent.ac.uk)** (founded 1965).

**[The University of Kent](www.kent.ac.uk)** The University of Kent at Canterbury opened its doors in 1965. Situated on the high ground between St Thomas’ and Tyler hills to the north of Canterbury within 300 acres of parkland the campus affords stunning views of the old city Canterbury and Cathedral. Designed to be a collegiate university with most students living in colleges with resident tutors, the four original colleges, Darwin, Eliot (named after the poet [T. S. Eliot ](/20c/20c-eliot-biography), who died on the same day that UKC was established, 24 January 1965) Keynes and Rutherford, were followed by three more colleges in the first decade.

Originally the university was named the University of Kent at Canterbury because the campus straddled the boundary between the old city boundary of Canterbury and Kent County Council. It was popularly known as UKC from 1965 to 2003 when the name was changed to the University of Kent by which time the university had spread its provision to other centres across Kent.

As numbers continued to increase the colleges were followed by additions to student housing to the point that in the mid ‘80s the university abandoned the collegiate concept to treat all accommodation as halls of residence. In 1989 a set of 26 student houses were built next to Darwin College, Becket Court was opened in 1990 next to Eliot College and Tyler Court comprising three blocks of residence was developed between 1995 and 2000. Parkwood, a mini student village comprising 262 two storey houses and an apartment complex was progressively built and occupied between 1980 and 2004. Between 1965 and 2000 student numbers grew from the initial group of 500 undergraduates who arrived in September 1965 to 15,000 undergraduates and 4000 postgraduates.

While this construction was going on apace the Cornwallis building was unwittingly built over the tunnel of the historic Canterbury and Whitstable Railway. At the cutting edge of technology in 1826 the half mile tunnel under the high ground at Tyler Hill had provided a direct route for the world’s first steam passenger railway. On the evening of 11 July 1974 the south-west part of the building sank into the ground when the tunnel beneath collapsed. The university had to demolish the sunken part which was rebuilt as another wing. The old tunnel was blocked up with concrete. It was noticeable in the 1990s that parts of the building were still uneven and that within the building some corridors went nowhere.

By the early 21st century the University of Kent had established superb facilities for its vibrant student population of around 19,000 in the refurbished Templeman Library, Gulbenkian theatre and cinema, sports centres at Park Wood, Collyer-Ferguson concert hall (2013) and student social venues and welfare services. It established the University of Kent at Medway in 2001 and enjoys strong links in Europe with universities at Brussels, Paris and Athens.

**[Canterbury Christ Church University](www.canterbury.ac.uk)**

Canterbury Christ Church College of Education was founded by the Church of England and opened its doors to 70 students and 9 teachers in 1962 for teacher training. In 1964 the college took over the purpose-built North Holmes Road site, built on part of St Augustine’s Abbey which had remained an open space and orchard. The roof to the chapel of Christ in Majesty, formed of four heavenwards pointing triangles in glass, is a distinctive landmark. A generally impressive ensemble of low-rise buildings (excusing Fisher Tower) are open to green spaces including an orchard and herbal garden. Although infilling has reduced the lawns, the sound of mowing still resonates outside seminars and lectures in the warmer months.

In 1976 the first non-teaching degrees were launched. Enlarged by the addition of health-related professional courses by 1988 the college had 1500 students. In 1995, awarded the power to award degrees for teaching its own courses, the name changed to Canterbury Christ Church University College. Full university status followed in 2005 in a ceremony at Canterbury Cathedral and the installation of Archbishop Rowan Williams as chancellor.

CCCU has grown exponentially in numbers as more accommodation has been built and other sites occupied around the city. The former church of St Gregory’s (North Holmes road) is a centre for music, the Sidney Cooper Gallery (close to the Westgate Towers) was CCCU’s arts school until 2020, Halls Place (Harbledown) was the university’s Enterprise Centre and a multi-million sports centre opened in 2009. Student accommodation flanks the ring road from Canterbury East station towards the [Old Dover Road]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road), where [Augustine House] (2009) is an award winning library and student services centre. CCCU spread its wings to take over the Salomons Centre (Psychology) in Tunbridge Wells (1996) and to establish the Broadstairs campus (2000) and Medway Campus (2005).

The motto of Canterbury Christ Church University, *Veritas Liberabit Vos* / ‘The truth shall set you free’, acquired additional significance on taking over the adjacent [Canterbury Prison and Law Court] (2014). The campus can now be accessed by the former Sessions Court House with the emblems of ‘Justice’and ‘Mercy’ over the entrance. With 15,000 students (75% full-time and 25% part-time) enlisted in all locations, CCCU has become a leading provider of higher education and is firmly committed to ‘the power of higher education to enrich individuals and to active engagement within the wider community’.

**University for Creative Arts**

The University for Creative Arts at Canterbury, which today counts 6,000 students, combines the former Canterbury School of Art (founded 1882) and School of Architecture (founded 1948). The UCA is located on part of the former Barton Manor Estate, farm land which as the medieval ‘borough” of Longport had pertained to St Augustine’s Abbey. Accessed from the [Old Dover Road]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road) the site is divided between UCA and Canterbury Technology College (established 1947).

The Canterbury School of Art, founded in 1868 by the landscape and animal painter, Thomas Sidney Cooper, came into formal existence in 1882 when Sidney Cooper presented his home in St Peter’s Street to the City of Canterbury. One of Cooper’s students in the 1890’s Mary Tourtel (1874-1948) became the creator of [Rupert the Bear]( /20c/20c-tourtel-biography), as a cartoon strip first published in the Daily Express in 1920. Four studios were added by the city council in 1911. By 1937 the Art School counted 137 pupils. After the Second World War the School gained an annex in St Peter’s lane. It remained housed in the building that had been Sidney Cooper’s home and studio until 1972.

The plans to combine the School of Art and School of Architecture as a purpose built college were designed by the city architect JL Berbiers. The new building was built on the Longport site which had been part occupied by the Technology College since 1947. It opened in 1971. In 1987 the college merged with the Rochester and Maidstone Colleges of Art to form the Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD), which in 2005 became the University College for the Creative Arts. In 2008 the UCA became a full university – a wonderful outcome for an art school of such humble origins. Alumni include the artist Tracy Emin and designer Zandra Rhodes. Ian Dury, front man of the 1970’s rock band, Ian Dury and the Blockheads, taught Fine Art at UCA Canterbury.

Fortunately the Sidney Cooper Centre also remains a place for teaching art. In 2005 it was taken over by Canterbury Christ Church University for its own fine art department. Not a bad ending for this piece of the Canterbury map.

**Canterbury College**

Formerly a College of Technology, Canterbury College for students aged 16+ has grown in numbers and buildings on its Longport site since 1947. One of the largest Further and Higher Education Colleges in the south east, the colleges provision ranges from vocational and diploma qualifications across a range of subjects to day-release courses and in-house training.

Most of the original and 1960s buildings have been demolished in an impressive redevelopment programme, which has won building excellence awards. The smoking area which was a common sight on the adjacent New Dover Road has been relocated to the back of the college.

**Museums, Visitor Experience and the Cathedral**

Tourism, for centuries a source of canterbury’s livelihood, brings a million visitors to the Cathedral each year. Organised school and educational visits come not only from London, but from far beyond, including the near Continent. With the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1993, Canterbury became even more accessible for foreign travellers. Visitors became increasingly sophisticated, expecting higher standards of provision and presentation of the city’s heritage. By the end of the 20th century Canterbury had gained the ‘X factor” as a visitor experience.

**The Westgate Towers**

Completed during the Hundred Years War in 1381, the Westgate consists of two 60-foot circular towers enclosing the gateway and a chamber used for until 1829 as a prison for criminals and condemned persons. Situated on the river, the gateway was complete with drawbridge and portcullis, arrow slit windows and gun ports. In 1870 the West Gate housed the Police Station with an extension along Pound lane built in 1907, until relocation in 1966. The entire Gateway and former prison are now an exhibition and education centre, upgraded as a heritage complex by the owners of the enclosed Pound café. Access to the roof provides marvellous views over the rooftops of Canterbury.

Nest to the West Gate, in a lovely setting by the river, **Holy Cross church** built in 1380 has served since 1972 as the council chamber for Canterbury City Council.

**Eastbridge Hospital and the Greyfriars**

Situated at the centre of the town **The Eastbridge Hospital, Greyfriars chapel and Franciscan gardens** are managed as one for visitors. Founded as the Eastbridge Hospital of St Thomas the Martyr and one of the oldest buildings in Canterbury, the entry through a Norman arch leads to a 12th and 13th century time capsule in the chapel, refectory and other chambers. Steps lead down to a 12th century stone crypt where pilgrims slept on rushes in the bays. A place of hospitality since 1190, the Eastbridge is in part an almshouse and visitors are asked to respect the peace of the residents, known as Indwellers, who live in eight self-contained flats.

A short walk along Stour Street leads to the adjoining properties of the Greyfriars and Franciscan Garden. Standing on the island of Binnewith, formed by branches of the Stour, the stone and flint Greyfriars chapel is the oldest Franciscan building in Britain (c 1267). It is difficult to imagine a more peaceful place within a minute’s walk of the High Street. Although known to be one of Canterbury’s hidden secrets, for most of the 20th century access to the the Greyriars was restricted. The gardens are now open to visitors in the summer months.

**The Canterbury Heritage Museum (1986-2018)**

The Canterbury Heritage Museum, opened in 1986 by Queen Elizabeth II, was housed in the 12th century Poor Priests Hospital, to tell the history of the city. The magnificent medieval interior, with an oak-beamed roofs, a great hall and labyrinth of period rooms was the perfect place for displays in a ‘time walk” from the earliest to latest times. The displays on 20th century subjects included a Canterbury wartime Blitz experience, a [Rupert Bear]( /20c/20c-tourtel-biography)exhibition, celebrating both Rupert and the comic bear’s creator Mary Tourtel (1874-1943) who was born and lived in the city, and a Bagpuss and Clangers display, in tribute to Oliver Postgate (1925-2008). Working in his studio at the nearby village of Blean with his associate Peter Firmin, Oliver Postgate produced the most wonderful children’s animation programmes, Ivor the Engine being my favourite, all greatly loved by anyone who grew up in the 1960s, ‘70s or ‘80s.

The Museum was closed in 2018. Most displays were transferred to the redeveloped Beaney Institute on the High Street or, in the case of Roman exhibits, to the Roman Museum. A wonderful 20th century museum, the closure of the Canterbury Heritage Museum was a sad loss for heritage and for the 21st.

**The Beaney**

The amazing **Beaney Institute** in the High Street, now redeveloped as the **Beaney House of Art and Knowledge,** was opened in 1899 thanks to the generosity of an Australian, Dr James Beaney, who was born in Canterbury. The Beaney served as Canterbury’s Royal Museum and Free Library throughout the 20th century. In recent years the building has been impressively enlarged and completely refurbished to transform this part of the city into “a vibrant, cultural quarter”, in conjunction with the rebuilding of the nearby Marlowe Theatre.

The Beaney has long been the place to admire the life sized paintings by Thomas Sidney Cooper (also known as “Cow Cooper”) of cattle and sheep, the huge painting of “Separated but not Divorced” or “Charlie the Bull” ruling the herd. It also houses the East Kent Regiment, the Buffs, museum. The redeveloped building now hosts exhibitions, provides a new home for the [Rupert the Bear]( /20c/20c-tourtel-biography), Bagpuss and Clangers displays, and runs a lively educational programme.

**The Marlowe Theatre**

The history of the **Marlowe theatre** in Canterbury began when a small theatre opened in St Margaret’s Street, just before the Great War (1914-18). Between the wars it became a cinema and then a theatre again. It became the city’s first Marlowe Theatre in 1949 and ran as a repertory company until closure in 1981 to make way for redevelopment as the Marlowe Arcade. The city council purchased the former Odeon Cinema in the Friars, converting it into a theatre bringing the Marlowe to its present site. The building operated successfully for 25 years, but by the 2000s owing to the deficiencies of the converted cinema the council took the bold decision to re-build the theatre. The 3rd Marlowe theatre opened on 4 October 2011. This superb theatre brings world-class theatre, ballet and orchestral companies to the 1200 seat auditorium, as well as providing superb studio and workshop spaces for artists.

The Marlowe Memorial statue, dubbed “Kitty Marlowe” by locals, originally located in the Buttermarket but moved after the First World War to make way for the War Memorial, suffered neglect in the Dane John Gardens and was blown off her pedestal in the air raid of 1 June 1942. Fortunately “Kitty” was rescued from recurrent vandalism and in May 1993 (the 400th anniversary of Marlowe’s death) was rededicated by Sir Ian McKellen in the appropriate setting outside the Marlowe theatre. To the other side of the theatre the statue of a local star of the Marlowe pantomime, David Legge (1947-2012), known as Dave Lee, who did wonderful work for disadvantaged children, is seated on his panto bench, enhanced by the special charm of the riverside setting at the Friars bridge and overhanging willow.

**Roman Museum**

Each step down into The Canterbury **Roman Museum** from the entrance in Butchery lane to a subterranean world beneath the Longmarket represents 100 years of archaeological excavations. Although Victorian engineers building sewers had encountered the impassable foundations of the Roman ampi-theatre beneath St Margaret’s Street, It was not until World War 11 and the bombing of the area that large scale excavations in the city centre became possible.

Excavations in 1946-47 under the direction of Sheppard Frere and Audrey Williams exposed the Roman city that Canterbury people had always known lay unseen beneath the surface. The Roman theatre, forum, temple precincts and hypocaust heated houses were revealed. Further excavations by Dr F Jenkins and the discovery of a Roman silver hoard during road works, provided more material for the Roman Pavement Museum, first opened in 1961 and refurbished for greater visitor provision in 1994.

Canterbury’s Roman Museum sets out the map of ancient Durovernum. The Mosaic pavement (c 300 AD) to a Roman house courtyard is still the central feature.

**Canterbury Tales**

For a family seeking an experience trip, the **Canterbury Tales Centre**, established as a visitor attraction in the 1980s in St Margaret’s Church on the lines of the Jorvik Viking Centre at York, offered the sounds, sights and smells of Chaucer’s nine-and-twenty pilgrims. The Miller’s Tale of a fart “as greet as it had been a thunder-dent” was among the experiences to be savoured. After 35 years the time came to close the attraction, though the stories live on in Chaucer’s immortal tales.

Promoted by the Canterbury Commemoration Society, a larger than life statue of Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1342-1400) was unveiled in October 2016 on the corner of the High Street and Best lane. Chaucer faces the Eastbridge Hospital where many pilgrims were given lodging and holds the writing on vellum of the opening lines of the Canterbury Tales. The figures depicting the story tellers round the plinth were modelled on local characters, with Canterbury-born actor Orlando Bloom (born 1977) as the Young Squire.

**St Augustine’s Abbey**

In 1901 St Augustine’s College, founded in 1844 as a missionary college, owned or rented the greater part of the grounds of St Augustine’s Abbey, apart from land occupied by the Kent and Canterbury Hospital (built 1793) adjacent to the Longport. The College commissioned, under the direction of the Kent Archaeological Society, the systematic excavation of the abbey church (1901-03), followed by excavations of Wulfric’s 11th century Rotunda, portions of the Saxon church, the burial place of early Archbishops, and part of the north aisle of the Romanesque church (1903-14). Excavations continued between the wars and a complete plan of the abbey church and monastic buildings was published in 1934. Although the hospital moved to new buildings in 1937, the austere and ugly building was used to house the Technical School for some years and was not available for demolition until 1971. It was then possible to create a public garden on the former hospital site and make the ruins of St Augustine’s Abbey accessible to the public by an entrance to the grounds from the Longport.

In 1976 the abbey grounds were taken over by English Heritage and in 1989 UNESCO declared St Augustine’s Abbey together with the Cathedral and St Martin’s Church to be a World Heritage Site. In 1997 as part of the 1,400th anniversary of St Augustine’s arrival in Kent, the new Museum and Visitor Centre were constructed at the abbey. With the aid of an audio guide, visitors can explore at leisure the ruins of the largest Benedictine abbey and the most impressive collection of shrines to have existed in medieval England.

**Canterbury Cathedral**

The 20th century saw a huge increase in the number of visitors to Canterbury Cathedral and in the corresponding Welcome imparted by the Cathedral to modern pilgrims. George Bell, Dean of Canterbury, 1924-1929, was responsible for making the Cathedral more accessible to visitors and for promoting the arts. The first service broadcast from the Cathedral was in 1925. Dean Bell started the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, which commissioned John Masefield, the Poet Laureate, to write a nativity play, \_*The Coming of Christ\_*, with music by Gustav Holst. This was a great innovation in church life and led in the 1930s, to the commissioning of new plays, including T.S. Eliot’s masterpiece, \_*Murder in the Cathedral\_.* The Friends carried out restoration work to the Water tower, the Great Cloister, reproducing the heraldic shields on the vaulted roof, and Christ Church Gate.

One of Dean Bell’s achievements was to stage-manage the enthronement of Archbishop Lang in 1928, in the chair of St Augustine, which was placed in full view at the east end of the Cathedral, where all enthronements have since been made. Broadcast on the radio, the service of enthronement was deemed a great success. The music for the service was composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Dick Sheppard (Dean, 1921-310) was one of the 20th century’s greatest communicators and in his two years helped to bring the Cathedral to terms with the 20th century. One of his first actions was to discard gaiters, much to the dismay of other priests in the Chapter! Communicants quadrupled within a year of his arrival, and on Sunday evenings he preached to congregations of two thousand people, Sadly, ill health took its toll and his doctors ordered him to resign, but he continued the social work he had started in London St Martin’s-in-the-Fields. When his coffin lay at St Martin’s a hundred thousand people passed by. Dick Sheppard is buried in the Cathedral Cloister.

Although Canterbury Cathedral was the primary target of two air attacks in World War II, the building escaped significant harm. But as high explosive bombs fell to either side, buildings in the Precincts were heavily damaged. Part of the medieval monastic Great Dormitory is now the Cathedral Library, rebuilt after World War II, when the building received a direct hit. The names of the 121 civilians who were killed in the bombing raids on Canterbury are recorded in the Cathedral’s Book of Remembrance, displayed in the south-west transept.

The Cathedral Visitors Book, which runs from 1902 to 1996, contains the signatures of royalty, Prime Ministers and other leaders who attended major events. On the visit of King George VI for a Service of Thanksgiving for “The Preservation of the Cathedral from Destruction During the Late War”, held on 11th July 1946, the signatures of the King, Queen Elizabeth and Princess Elizabeth, the future Queen, appear.

Among the visitors invited to Canterbury by Dean Hewlett Johnson (1931-63), aka the “Red Dean” on account of his pro-Communist views, was Mahatma Gandhi in 1931. Gandhi travelled to Canterbury with his handloom and a goat provided milk for him to drink. On Easter Day, 1956, George Malenkov, the former Soviet Prime Minister, had lunch at the Deanery. A little later the Dean received a furious letter from Archbishop Fisher for bringing an unbeliever into the Cathedral on Easter Day. But at the time Malenkov had been heard to say to the Dean, “You take this all for granted. To me it is all entirely new and wonderful.” While the Red Dean aroused many emotions, none could criticise his commitment to Canterbury during the war, when he remained in the city despite severe bomb damage to the Deanery. He too is buried in the cloisters.

Also shown in the Cathedral Visitors Book, are the signatures of the Pope Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie for a service entitled “A Celebration of Faith” on the Pope’s visit. The event on 29 May, 1982 was held on the eve of Pentecost. Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, knelt together in prayer at the place where Becket was murdered. The place where Becket fell was marked by a striking memorial, known as the Altar of the Sword’s Point.

The 14th century Chapter House was the setting in June 1935 for the first performances of T. S. Eliot’s drama on the death of Becket, \_*Murder in the Cathedral\_.* Fifty years later, also in the Chapter House, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Mitterand of France signed the treaty for the construction of the Channel Tunnel (12 February 1986).

On October 1990 the Archbishop of Canterbury unveiled the statue of a ‘Welcoming Christ’ in the central niche of Christ Church Gate, the main entrance to the Cathedral. The original statue was destroyed by the Puritan onslaught during the Civil War and for nearly three hundred and fifty years had remained empty. The bonze figure is the work of the German sculptor Klaus Ringwald, shows an enthroned Christ, Ruler of the World, with His hands outstretched in welcome.

The Cathedral Lodge, a hotel and conference centre built within the grounds of the Cathedral, was opened in 2000. A 250 seat Auditorium is complemented by a Refectory, Library and other function rooms, affording access to the Campanile Garden and stunning views of the Cathedral. A new Visitor Centre has also been built next to the Christ Church Gate. With a million visitors a year Canterbury Cathedral is truly the mother church of England.

**Transport Commerce and Congestion**

**Roads, Railways and 007 National Express**

Between 1900 and 1962 all traffic on the A2 from London to Dover passed through the High Street. At the mid-point of the pedestrianised High Street the 1950s traffic signs, pointing in opposite directions to the destinations of Dover and Chatham, can still be seen. From 1962 when the Rheims Way and ring road around the southern part of the city were completed, A2 traffic could go around the city walls. It was not until 1981 with the completion of the Canterbury by-pass that east-west traffic was taken out of Canterbury altogether.

No plans for a north-south bypass to relieve flows on the A28 Ashford to Thanet radial were realised. Despite the provision of three Park and Ride sites at Wincheap, the [[Old Dover Road]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road)]( /dickens/david-copperfield-dover-road) and Sturry Road, Canterbury’s road network in the late 20th century came under constant pressure, with up to 160,000 vehicles per day travelling to and from the city. In addition to peak hour commuter congestion the expansion of secondary and higher education generated additional traffic. The problem of unlocking the gridlock, particularly around the Wincheap roundabout, has so far defied the planners.

One lesson of the 20th century was that the more provision was made for cars the more congestion followed. A million passengers use Canterbury’s Park and Ride facilities each year, but this has not reduced congestion around the centre; the multi car parks built at Castle Street and Whitefriars were, of course, designed to bring traffic in. A third multi-storey car park at Canterbury West opened in 2020 will bring in even more. If the solution (imposed by the 2020/21 coronavirus epidemic) will come from more people working and studying from home, and with the replacement of petrol by electric engines to reduce air pollution, new strategies for dealing with the legacy of this very 20th century problem may hopefully prevail.

Main line train services in the 20th showed little improvement in journey times on switching from steam to electric power in the 1950s; nor did nationalising the railways in 1948 or denationalising in 1994 make the trains run faster. Journey times between Canterbury and London were constrained by the circuitous routes of Victorian built railways in Kent and by the suburban services in the London area. For a straightline distance of 55 miles, journey times were typically 1 hour 50 minutes from Canterbury West to Charing Cross and 1 hour 37 minutes from Canterbury East to Victoria. Rail travel did however become cleaner and safer with electrification, the safest form of transport. Following the construction of the Channel Tunnel high speed route, the start of fast train services in 2007 brought the journey time between Canterbury and London down to 55 minutes. The conventional services are still available for shorter journeys or for passengers happy to take the extra time traveling to or from London.

Canterbury’s branch lines were phased out some years before the importance of railway preservation was acknowledged. The Canterbury and Whitstable Railway (opened 1830) was closed in 1951, though briefly reprieved in 1953 when flooding cut off Whitstable’s main line. At Whitstable the original Stephenson bridge, though perfectly sound, made way for road widening in 1964 and at the Canterbury end the tunnel, the world’s first tunnel, collapsed when the University of Kent built on it (1974). Parts of the disused line are now the ‘Crab and Winkle’ cycle route. The Elham Valley line (1889 – 1947) was used for military purposes in the Second World War. A massive ‘Boche Buster’ rail transported howitzer gun was housed in a tunnel. It was used only for test firing half-way across the channel. The blasts smashed windows in the villages of Kingston and Barham.

The 007 coach route from London to Canterbury and Dover was taken over by National Express in 1973. The nine services each day proved popular especially with Canterbury’s fast increasing number of students. There is good reason to believe that the author Ian Fleming took the 007 prefix for James Bond from the service. When living at St Margaret’s Bay, near Dover, it is said that Fleming was inspired by the panel on a London bound coach. As Fleming’s London home, 22b Ebury Street, lay directly behind the newly opened Victoria coach station, he was also familiar with the 007 service from the other end of the route. Fleming’s familiarity with the route helps to explain the car dash in *Moonraker* from Canterbury to Dover in 15 minutes. But this did not involve a coach. James Bond drove a 4.5 litre Bentley convertible, ‘the fastest genuine four-seater in the world that could top 120 mph with ease’.

**Commerce**

In 1900 Canterbury had few small industries and was primarily a centre for rural commerce, to which the famous Cathedral attracted visitors. Between 1900 and 1950 this characterisation changed very little as the population remained virtually static at 24,000 in 1900 with an increase of just 3.5 % to 24,850 in 1947. Well into the 1950s farmers were driving cattle to market, twice weekly, in Upper Bridge Street. A number of Canterbury businesses nonetheless grew from small beginnings in line with the advance of 20th century technology and production.

**Parker Steel**

The growth of John Parker and sons to a multi-million business started in 1904 when John Parker, a devoted churchgoer who had moved from Whitehaven to the Cathedral city, opened his ironmongers shop at 18, The Parade. Parker diversified into stockholding iron to cater for the local farming community, acquiring a yard in Watling Street. Under the direction of the following two Parker family generations the business expanded. In 1970 Parker’s grandson moved Parker Steel to its premises in the Vauxhall Road Industrial Estate. By then the company supplied steel and aluminium products to industries across the south of England. John Parker’s great grandson, Guy Parker, is now a director of the £55,000,000 turnover business employing a staff of 60.

**Barretts of Canterbury – from a Cycle shop to Cars, Electrical goods and Toys**

Barretts of Canterbury (‘values of the past, cars of today’) became the most prominent and successful of Canterbury’s family businesses. In 1902 George R Barrett (1871-1943), a keen cyclist, started selling bicycles from a garage at the west end of St Peter’s Street by the Westgate Towers. In the 117 years which followed, Barretts experienced booms, slumps, fire, bombs and planning blight, as it weathered the events of the 20th century.

By the First World War GR Barretts had become ‘The West End Garage and Motor Works’, utilising a large garage in the yard to the rear accessed from Pound lane. George was well regarded for raising charitable funds after the Great War and, elected Mayor of Canterbury in 1927, started the Mayor’s Fund, which was first used to support people made homeless in the floods of that year. In the 1930s, on purchasing adjoining properties, George’s sons, Reg and John, took over a new Radio Shop. Barretts were then retailing and servicing the two most advanced technologies available – the internal combustion engine and radios.

The radio and electrical side of the business became established in Rose lane, becoming ‘Barretts Sound and Vision’ in the 1980s. In 1998 it became ‘Digital World’ as a superstore at Maynard Road in the Wincheap Industrial estate.

Following a catastrophic fire in 1937 the premises in St Peter’s Street had to be rebuilt, but then the Second World War came to Barretts in 1940. To help a fund-raising project Barretts put a Messerschmidt 109, which had crash landed intact, on display for three weeks. The aircraft was then put in store to await disposal. On 14th October a German raider dropped bombs on the street. A bomb crashed through the garage roof, destroyed two buses and blew up the ME109. Barretts was not damaged in the Baedeker Raid of 1st June 1942. But it was bombed again in one of the last Luftwaffe strikes of the war. On 22nd January 1944 Barretts was totally destroyed by a single high explosive bomb.

The 1950s brought more prosperous times as Barretts became the distributor in East Kent for Rover and Austin cars and car sales took off. To expand car servicing and the works area, Barretts acquired the former Malthouse brewery site, off Stephen’s Road, However, the rebuilding of a permanent showroom at St Peter’s Street was held up for years as a result of the planning controversies over proposed routes for the ring road at the Westgate Towers. In 1980 the new building was finally opened to much praise for its architectural design. A modern car showroom was successfully accommodated within a building which replicated the historic streetscape. The opening happily coincided with the launch of the Austin Mini Metro. By the mid ‘80s Jaguar and Land Rover had taken pride of place. For other dealerships, including BMW and Citroen, Barretts acquired facilities on the Broad Oak road.

On vacating St Peter’s Street in 2019, the 4th generation of the family, Paul and Shaun Barrett, directors since 1984, Barretts finally left the premises which their great grandfather had purchased in 1902. The car business, under the direction of Paul Barrett, now has two centres, in the showrooms on Broad Oak Road site and at Ashford in the Waterbrook Park. Shaun Barrett is today the director of the Digital World and electronic business.

**Lefevre’s and the coming of Canterbury’s department stores**

The first retail department store in Canterbury, Lefevre’s, opened in 1926. The 20th century had arrived! It was a modern, new, store in Guildhall Street, which combined the Lefevre family drapers shop with buildings comprising the former Philosophical and Literary Institute, the Theatre Royal and its neighbouring Guildhall Tavern. The brainchild of Charles Lefevre (1879-1945), his father William, born 1847 in Canterbury and of Huguenot descent, had established the family’s shop in the drapery trade. Lefevre’s became a model for a large retail space, embellished with a sweeping staircase, Egyptian style windows and art deco style exterior. The business was such a success that Charles Lefevre sold it to Debenhams who continued to operate the store under the Lefevre name until 1973.

In 1933 Reg Barrett opened a store in St George’s Street which brought together bicycles, his father’s first interest, electrical goods, records, prams and toys. All of this stemmed from the Barrett family’s original interest in cycles, since bike owners use lamps and batteries, and the prams and toys, especially toy trains, have wheels. The shop developed as one of the largest toy departments outside London, second only to Hamleys. Canterbury people today who were young in the 1960s remember the wonderful electric train sets in the Barretts’ St George’s shop window at Christmas. Sadly the toys emporium did not outlive Hornby model electric trains, was sold to C and H Fabric and today the building is Metrobank.

The success of Lefevre’s and the Barretts’ stores in the 1930s heralded Canterbury’s phenomenal development after the Second World War as East Kent’s major shopping centre.

Canterbury’s prime retail area in the St George’s Street, Longport, Whitefriars quadrant of the city arose from the devastation of the area by the 1942 bombing. The townscape of the area has changed architecturally twice with the rebuilds of the 1960s and 1990s (completing the Whitefriars in 2008), but with the consistent purpose of making Canterbury the premier shopping centre for East Kent.

A secondary retail area, mixed with banks, restaurants, pubs, museums and charity shops extends from St Margaret’s Street through the historic thoroughfare of the High Street and St Peter’s Street to the Westgate Towers, with a branch down Palace Street to Northgate (today “King’s Mile”). Between the 60’s and 80’s attitudes about commercial development changed from replacing the old with the modern to preserving the old by being modern. Ever since the destruction of Canterbury’s Guildhall in 1950, there were those who challenged the view that this was progress.

The Canterbury Guildhall had stood on its site at the junction of Palace Street with the High Street for 750 years. Parts were in poor condition and the costs of rebuilding in 1950 were put at £18,000. The City Council decided on demolition. If as John Boyle, the Canterbury Town Clerk, wrote ‘“no one can build an old building’, conservationists were determined to show that wonderful old buildings do not stand in the way of progress, but enhance it. In the late 20th century the consensus developed that in a historic city the protection of heritage was attractive to residents, students and visitors and a huge gain for Canterbury’s traders. By the year 2000 the pedestrianised High Street area was buzzing as never before.

Commerce has been combined with conservation. Conquest House, in Palace Street, a building of outstanding interest with an 11th century stone cellar, reputedly where the four knights armed themselves before seeking out Thomas Becket, and a splendid, timber-framed 13th century gallery, has been an antiques and upholstery shop.

Zizi’s Restaurant or Cogan House, in St Peter’s Street near the Westgate Towers, is one of the greatest architectural delights in Canterbury. Concealed behind the 19th century red brick façade is an aisled timber-framed hall dating from 1160. The stone walls are over 2 feet thick. Cogan House is one of very few stone houses in England surviving from Norman times, unique in Kent and the only urban example of its early medieval type. Its wood panelling, staircases, and stuccoed plaster ceilings are of superb 16th century craftsmanship, while the first floor preserves the 12th century ambience. Why is this building featured in a 20th century map of Canterbury? Because it was only in the late 20th century that conservation grants were available and as a restaurant Cogan House was open to customers to enjoy.

Does internet shopping and the closures accelerated by coronavirus signal the end of retailing? In Canterbury first Nason’s and then the High Street’s biggest store, Debenham’s, have become redundant, though plans to revive the sites remain on the table. The list of casualties in 2020/21 for Canterbury includes Burton, Dorothy Perkins, Topshop, Café Rouge, TSB bank and Poundland. Other units in Whitefriars and the Marlowe Arcade stand empty. Historians of the future may see the late 20th century as the final flourish of shopping mania.

**Canterbury’s Trading Estates**

Since the 1960s the map of Canterbury reflects the development of commercial retail and trading estates built outside the city centre. These sites are mostly attached to the A28 Radial route through Wincheap and the Sturry Road.

**Wincheap Industrial Estate**

The medieval suburb of Wincheap (Old English *Waegnceap*, indicating a wine or wagon market), has always served as a market place where rural folk meet the town outside the city walls.

The Wincheap Industrial Estate was the first and remains the largest of Canterbury’s trading parks, laid out on a grid basis with three parallel roads, Cotton Road, Maynard Road and Simmonds Road connected by cross roads. In the late 20th century the term “Industrial Estate” became a misnomer as this commercial estate had no manufacturing industry of its own. About 70 trading units supply industrial and domestic tools, carpets, beds, electrical and digital goods, paint, frozen food, drinks, gardening equipment, printing and a multitude of services, including welfare services. In 1996 an extension opened in a retail park next to the A28 / A2 junction which comprise an out-of-town Boots, Mothercare, Morrison’s superstore, Carpet Warehouse, Argos Extra, Staples and Pets at Home.

**The Sturry Road**

To the NE of the city centre, the first landmark is the main Sainsbury’s store opened in 1984. Very different in appearance from most supermarket barn or warehouse designs., the building relies on steel masts, from which the roof is suspended by cables. Some commentators joked that it would look good when the roof was put on. It was awarded the Civic Trust Award in 1986 and the Structural Steel Design Award in 1996.

Across the road from Sainsbury’s and contiguous with the Sturry Road (A28), the city’s first large development of the 21st century is going up, the Riverside Centre. The centre will combine leisure facilities, including a multiplex cinema, with residential accommodation and promises high quality and specialist retailers, cafés and restaurants. If the Riverside successfully appeals to resident and visitor markets, will it release pressure on the commercial centre or hasten its end?

The ASDA superstore on the Sturry Road is by far the biggest in Canterbury. It replaced a smaller Keymarkets in the early ‘90s, has an ancillary petrol station, a vast car park and the vast warehouse occupies 11,648 square metres of floor space. This compares with Morrison’s, 5,760, and near rival Sainsbury’s, 4,723 square metres. (Waitrose in the central location of St George’s Place has an underground car park, being Waitrose it would, wouldn’t it?) The ASDA roundabout also gives access to B and Q and Liddle stores on the other side. To the side of ASDA, Marshwood Close Trading estate includes an Argos store, B&M furniture, Poundstretcher Cleaning, building merchants Travis Perkins ,and car parts and electrical units, compactly sited within the Northgate ward of Canterbury.

The 1970s Vauxhall Road Industrial Estate includes Parker Steel, a number of car dealerships and the council’s recycling centre. At the junction of Vauxhall Road and Sturry Road the **Canterbury Retail Park** (1997) incorporates Curry’s PC World, Carpetright and the Range (which replaced Toys R Us). The more recent **Maybrook Retail Park** (2005), on the other side of the Vauxhall Road, comprises a M&S food store, Halfords, DW Sport Fitness, Maplin, a gym, Curry’s and a KFC. The Vauxhall road marks the boundary of the Northgate ward of Canterbury. The **Sturry Retail Park**, accessed from the Sturry Road opposite the Vauxhall Road, on the site of a former Mother’s Pride bakery, strings together TK Max, Sports Direct and Matalan stores, capped by McDonalds.

Both the Sturry Road and Wincheap trading estates have the benefit of Park and Ride sites and the development of out-of-centre shopping works well for people coming in to town from the surrounding rural areas. However, a lethal combination of traffic tailback pollution and vibration causes unrelenting damage to the pre-existing housing and older buildings along this ancient thoroughfare. Within living memory Wincheap residents recall the bellowing of cows from Chartham driven along the street to market (and not in motorised vehicles) – twice a week.

**Articles by Richard Maltby**