

An Oasis of Calm: Canterbury Cathedral [C1]

Scopri la storia e nel mistero della Cattedrale di Canterbury, dalle sue origini come cattedrale cattolica romana al suo splendore iconico. Scopri l'eredità di Sant'Agostino, l'assassinio di Thomas Becket e i pellegrinaggi miracolosi. Un gioiello architettonico pieno di fede e fascino.



Legend has it that in the 6th century, two centuries after the Roman occupiers had left the country to defend their homeland, **Pope** Gregory the Great was walking in the now-peaceful marketplace in Rome. There he saw some **fair-skinned**, blue-eyed children that had been **enslaved**. He asked where they were from, and was told that they were “Angles”. He responded with a **pun**: “Well! They look like angels!” he said. The **Pope** then learned that Christianity had not **spread** through pagan Britain. So he made it his goal to bring Roman Catholicism to the country.

ENTER ST. AUGUSTINE

The **Pope** sent a monk called Augustine to England. Augustine **landed** in the southeast, in Kent: the nearest place to the rest of the continent. Luckily, the King of Kent, although he was a pagan, had a Christian wife. Ethelbert and

Bertha made Augustine welcome. He [preached](#) his [beliefs](#), and Christianity eventually [spread](#) through the country. Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. He built the first cathedral and an [abbey](#) there. Canterbury Cathedral was initially Roman Catholic, but Henry VIII changed it into an Anglican cathedral in the 16th century. It remains the mother church of the Anglican Communion today. To find out more, Speak Up contacted local guide Yvonne Leach, who gives private tours of Canterbury Cathedral. Leach began by talking about one of the great scandals of the medieval period: the murder of Thomas Becket. **Yvonne Leach (English accent): **And at that time, in the 12th century, we had two real major power factions going on: we had the monarchy, the king, and then we had the church. And the church was Roman Catholic. And so the monarchy wanted the power, the wealth, the jurisdiction. The church, a big [landowner](#), owned all the licenses for the [mills](#) and the [wool trade](#) and everything. And so when King Henry II could have an archbishop of Canterbury he thought that he could trust and work with he chose his friend, who was a Londoner and his [chancellor](#), and his name was Thomas, Thomas Becket. But when Thomas became the Archbishop of Canterbury, he changed. And he said, "No, my [allegiance](#) is to God through the [Pope](#) in Rome." Henry was very angry. And so Thomas was sent off into exile. And while he was away, King Henry II was planning all sorts of things that he could do to perhaps persuade other bishops like York and Durham. Thomas heard this, came back, and on Christmas Day in the year 1170, he [preached](#) in the cathedral a sermon all about how [awful](#) King Henry II was. So Henry II heard this and, "Oh, who will [rid](#) me of this [troublesome priest](#)?" And so four knights, I think that they didn't plan on murder, but they planned on [sorting out](#) this [troublesome priest](#). Came to Canterbury. 29th of December they found Thomas [at prayer](#) in the cathedral, tried to reason with him, but it wasn't going to work. There was a big [row](#). They went back outside, brought in their swords, and, very sadly, they murdered Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in his cathedral.

A REPENTANT KING

When King Henry II heard about the killing, however, he was not pleased.

Yvonne Leach: When King Henry II heard what had happened in his name, he thought he was going straight to hell. So down he came to Canterbury.

He did [penance](#), gave money to the poor and everything else. People started to come and visit the [shrine](#) of this newly-murdered person. And miracles happened. And so within three years, he was declared a saint. So pilgrims started to come to Canterbury, much as they would do to Rome or

Compostela or Jerusalem. If King Henry had wanted to stop the power of the church the [outcome](#) was the absolute opposite. It got wealthier, more powerful.

THE HIGHLIGHTS Canterbury Cathedral is breathtaking. We asked Leach to talk about its most prominent features. **Yvonne Leach:** Apart from the story, so you can see where Thomas Becket was killed, where his

[martyrdom](#) took place. You can see where his [shrine](#) was, but it was taken away at the time of King Henry VIII, because he didn't want any saints and

Roman Catholic icons there. There are two very special things. One is the stained glass. We've got the earliest stained glass to be found anywhere,

12th century, beautiful stained glass. And then also, Canterbury was a monastic cathedral, which means we had a community of Benedictine monks there.

And if you go behind the cathedral through the [cloisters](#), it's an oasis

of calm. It's quiet, it's peaceful. But then the gardens at the back, where the monastery was, are just very beautiful and tranquil. And the crypt, which has

got a beautiful little chapel with still frescoes and paintings on.

STAY FOR EVENSONG

We then asked Leach if she had any [tips](#) for when to visit the cathedral.

Yvonne Leach: Perhaps my tip might be to come, if you can, towards the end of the day, when people are tending to go home, and then stay for

[evensong](#), because then you really see it as it is. It's a cathedral which comes to life. You sit there, close your eyes and it could be a thousand years ago.

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Glossary

- **fair-skinned** = di carnagione chiara
- **landed** = sbarcare
- **chancellor** = cancelliere
- **cloisters** = chiostri
- **evensong** = preghiera serale
- **spread** = diffondersi
- **troublesome** = problematico
- **at prayer** = in preghiera
- **row** = litigio, rissa
- **shrine** = santuario, altare
- **outcome** = risultato
- **landowner** = proprietaria terriera
- **mills** = mulini
- **Pope** = papa
- **pun** = gioco di parole
- **beliefs** = credo, fede
- **abbey** = abbazia
- **wool trade** = commercio della lana
- **Legend has it** = la leggenda vuole
- **rid** = liberare, sbarazzarsi
- **sorting out** = sistemare
- **penance** = penitenza
- **martyrdom** = martirio
- **enslaved** = schiavizzati
- **preached** = predicare
- **allegiance** = fedeltà
- **awful** = terribile
- **priest** = sacerdote
- **tips** = consigli