

Architecture Group's Visit to St Mary's Cathedral, Lincoln, on Thursday, 19 March 2015.



At 10 am on Thursday, 19 March, a large group of U3A members met at the West door of St Mary's Cathedral to take part in a guided tour led by Cathedral guide, Linda Tilbury. We were told that the name 'Cathedral' stems from the cathedra, or stool, that Bishops used to sit upon. A large, Saxon post hole has been found from an earlier Church and Bishop Remigius, had a Cathedral built over the Saxon Church, and surrounding houses, in 1088. The front wall of the Norman building is almost all that is left as an earthquake in 1185 destroyed most of the Cathedral. Bishop Hugh de Burgundy of Avalon, France, who became known as St Hugh of Lincoln, organised the rebuilding and expansion of the Cathedral. St Hugh's statue stands on top of the right tower and that of the Swineherd of Stow (who purportedly offered his life savings towards the rebuilding) stands on the left tower.

The main entrance to the Cathedral has a stone frieze which is being replaced due to weathering. Our guide explained that the left frieze depicts the Seven Deadly Sins, quite graphically, and Christ saving souls from purgatory. The right-hand frieze is covered to protect it until funding can be found to repair it. The friezes were brightly coloured and traces of very expensive blue lapis lazuli have been found on the stonework. Only two such friezes are known of, the other being on a Church in Italy. The centre of the front of the Cathedral is the original Norman façade which is flanked by later workings. The large window in the centre was put in at a later date to let light into the Cathedral, and a row of stone Kings, or Bishops, cuts through the top of the Norman door.

St Mary's Cathedral was reputed to be the tallest building in the world 1311-1549 and is the largest in Britain after St Pauls and York Minster.

The pillars in the nave are surrounded by Pirbeck 'Marble' columns, which are actually polished limestone. These originally glistened and, together with the highly decorated interior, the Cathedral would have looked very different to what we see today.

After the Restoration and the Civil War, Dean Honeywood was responsible for restoring the Cathedral and asked Sir Christopher Wren to design the Cathedral Library to house his large collection of books.

St Hugh's Choir holds one of the largest choirs in Europe. The names of different Prebendaries, or Canons' livings, are shown above the wooden misericords (mercy seats upon which Canons could 'perch', or sit upon if they were frail or unwell). The misericords are set in a 'stall' (like a horse in a stable) and above their heads were the 'hay bag' or provision/prebendium. Katherine Swinford's tomb nearby was the wife of Richard of Gaunt and the sister-in-law of Chaucer.

The Angel Choir at the east end of the Cathedral was rebuilt to house St Hugh's tomb in 1280.

Our tour was organised by Monika Burdon, who thanked our Guide for a fascinating and informative tour.



The report is by Jill Phillips and Photos by Jim Baker.