

Our cathedral's history

Ten unusual things that you may not know about Portsmouth Cathedral. More on www.portsmouthcathedral.org.uk/visit

1 ORIGINS

Around 1180, Jean de Gisors, a Norman merchant, gave land in his new town 'at the mouth of the port' to the canons of Southwick Priory to build a chapel in honour of the martyred Thomas a Becket - now it's our cathedral.

2 ARCHITECTURE

The original chancel dates from 1185, and the style is transitional. The masons introduced a new pointed arch from France, but also built traditional rounded arches to ensure the Gothic arches would bear the weight.



3 MARY ROSE GRAVE

The Mary Rose sank in the Solent in 1545. Once the ship was raised from the seabed in 1982, the remains of an unknown sailor were buried here in 1984. Each July, a service is held to recall those lost at sea with no marked grave.

4 HMS VICTORY

You can see a fragment of the flag from Admiral Lord Nelson's ship HMS Victory. It was the ensign flown at the Battle of Trafalgar.

5 CATHEDRAL STATUS

The parish church of St Thomas became a cathedral only after our diocese was created in 1927. Plans to extend the building with a 12-pillared nave were half-completed when war broke out, and a 'temporary' redbrick west wall was created - and lasted 50 years.



6 THOMAS A BECKET

One of the supports in the chancel altar is supposed to contain a fragment of Thomas a Becket's skull.

7 HIGH STREET SHOPS

Until the late 1920s, the cathedral was hidden by a row of shops and houses between its south face and the High Street. Slum clearance and bomb damage revealed the cathedral.

8 ALTERNATIVE PLANS

In the 1960s, there was a suggestion that our cathedral could be extended using a contemporary design. Cathedral architect Lord Mottistone described the plans as a 'neo-Victorian Crystal Palace', with a semi-circular structure including much glass. Instead the more modest west front was completed in 1991 in the same style as the nave.



9 CATHEDRAL OF THE SEA

As the closest of all C of E cathedrals to the sea, ours has been styled the 'Cathedral of the Sea'. There's a naval presence at many services, including Sea Sunday and Remembrance, as well as many naval memorials.

10 CATHEDRAL APP

You can now go on a virtual tour of our cathedral by going to portcath.app. There's an audio guided tour of our cathedral, which you can use in the building or at home. And a virtual reality experience allows you to see the proposed 1960s designs for yourself.