

Canterbury Cathedral

The Chapel of Prince Edward

otherwise known as the Chantry of the Black Prince

Celebrating a Marriage

Originally the chapel had the same style as the rest of the crypt – Romanesque arches survive in the south wall & 11th century stonework has been uncovered in the south-east corner with remnants of ancient paint still visible.

The twin altars were dedicated, at first, to saints of the Dark Ages.

The northern one honoured Northumbria's first apostle (before Aidan or Cuthbert) - **Paulinus** who accompanied Ethelburga, Princess of Kent, when she married King Edwin of Northumbria. In 633, following King Edwin's death in battle against the heathen King Penda of Mercia, Paulinus accompanied the widowed Ethelburga back to Kent, becoming Bishop of Rochester until his death in 644.

The southern altar was dedicated to a Frankish saint - from the land we now call France. He was called **Audoen** or Ouen, Bishop of Rouen (*perhaps known to his friends as Ouen of Rouen*) circa 600-84, some of whose bones, from around 960, the cathedral priory claimed to hold as miracle-working relics.

The chapel's modernisation took place at the instigation of **Prince Edward**, generally known as the **Black Prince**, eldest son of **King Edward III**. The Prince was expressing gratitude to God & to the Pope who authorised his marriage (in October 1361) to his half-cousin once-removed, **Joan** the so-called **Fair Maid of Kent**.

The couple were descended from different wives of **King Edward I**; they had grown up together at Court. Papal authorisation for the marriage was required because of their consanguinity, their high status & the complications from the bride's previous relationships. Described by a contemporary as "*the most beautiful woman in England - & the most amorous*" the new Princess of Wales had, some years previously, entered into concurrent contracts of marriage with two other men - a situation which had required the intervention of a previous Pope. One of the two men (by whom Joan had 6 children) had died. The other was still alive when Joan was authorised to marry the Prince of Wales.

As part of the Prince's post-nuptial revamp, one altar (the authorities disagree as to which one) was re-dedicated to the Trinity, to which, the Prince, having been born on Trinity Sunday, devoted special significance – hence the Trinity symbol on the tester board above his tomb “upstairs” beside the site of Becket's shrine. The chapel's other altar was re-dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The Prince arranged with the cathedral Priory for the twin altars to be manned in perpetuity by two chaplains, who, wearing apparel specified by the Prince, said Mass every day, one after another, each at his own altar. The Masses were for the repose of the souls of the Prince's grandparents &, after his parents had died, for theirs also. Before breakfast, the chaplains were also required to perform Matins lasting an hour with 7 penitential psalms, 15 graduals & commendations. Every day, in a similar manner, they had to observe all the other canonical hours at the altar of the Trinity, completing their daily routine with Vespers & Compline. The extent of these duties perhaps explains the generosity of their joint stipend. From endowments in London at Vauxhall & Lambeth, they received a joint annual sum of 40 marks (£26 13s 4d or, in modern money, £26.66) clear of all “reparations or otherwise” This daily rate of 8³/₄d (eight pence, three farthings) compared favourably with the rate of one penny per day offered to chantry priests by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester & Chancellor of England at the time.

The chaplains lived in King Street, at a house with an annual value of £1, its repair being the responsibility of the cathedral priory. The site having been excluded from the surrounding parish of St Alphege, the two houses now standing there are still named after the Chantry. The two priests often quarrelled (sometimes, it was said, using, bad language) & after a century had passed, the arrangements required strict revision. They ceased altogether at the Reformation.

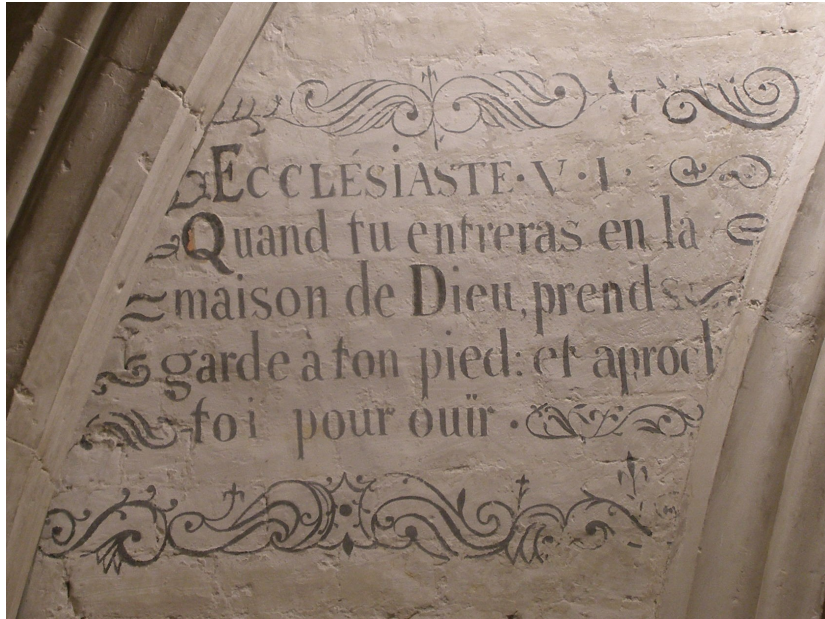
Prince Edward died before his father. He wished to be buried near his Chantry, but he was given a place of honour “upstairs” beside Becket's shrine. Though never Queen, the Princess of Wales became the mother of a king - her younger son succeeded his grandfather as **King Richard II**. Joan was buried at Stamford in Lincolnshire, at the church of the Grey Friars Minor (destroyed at the Dissolution).

The 14th century design of the chapel has been recognised by some experts as the work of the famous master-mason Henry Yevele &/or his lieutenant in Canterbury, John Box. Gathering elements from prominent buildings of the time, including St Stephen's, Westminster & St Paul's in London, it is thought to have been the prototype for the nave "upstairs". Hence it is of special importance in the architectural history of the building overall – ranking, it has been said, with the tomb of Pope John XXII in Avignon.

The vault – a seemingly infinite medley of crosses, octagons, lozenges, squares & stars – springs from the eight-shafted central pillar, with ornamental bosses where the liernes meet. Octagons were a novelty, soon copied elsewhere. Brightly painted, as it was originally, it would have looked rather different – garish to modern eyes.

- 1 Two heraldic shields, said to be England's oldest representations of the Royal Arms in stone. The lions on the shields (heraldic leopards) represent England. The fleurs de lys on the shields are for France, whose throne was claimed by King Edward III through his mother – a Princess of France. In response, the French invoked their so-called "*salic*" law which forbade female monarchs & hence inheritance of the Crown through females. Thus began the Hundred Years War. The King's shield has two supporters. The other shield, with one supporter, carries Prince Edward's heraldic label identifying him as the King's son.
- 2 The themes of the other bosses are marital & martial – male prowess, female beauty, fertility, maternal affection, heads ofrelations ? friends ?
- 3 Martial
 - a) Several lion heads – symbol of England – some solo, some quadruple.
 - b) Lion fighting with a griffin (note its "ears" & its lion-like back leg)
 - c) Lion locked in combat with a dragon – it seems to have 4 legs – a wyvern has 2
b) & c) presumably apply to the Prince's battles in France & Spain but which is which ?
 - d) For 100 years & more we have been told that this is Samson wielding a donkey's head – supposedly signifying his slaughter of Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass – referring back to the Prince's prowess at the battle of Poitiers where French bodies were piled high. However, with the help of a ladder, field glasses or a telephoto lens, details are revealed which raise unanswered questions: The "donkey" has a peculiar nose Is the man wearing a Phrygian cap ? If so, why ? Why has he a claw under his right foot ? On what are his left hand & foot resting ? Is it the scaly back of a defeated beast ? & what on earth is that between the man's legs ?
- 4 Marital
 - a) Green man – symbol of fertility.
 - b) Leaves – some gathered in wreaths or posies - & on the face of the lion in the southern apse & providing "bedding" for the supposed figure of Samson in the northern apse – perhaps more symbols of fertility. The oak leaves are said by some people to relate to Woodstock in Oxfordshire, birthplace of Joan's husband & her father.
 - c) Flowers – female beauty – the rose of England, symbol of love - & secrecy (*sub rosa*) - arranged here in rings "*ring a ring a roses*" The 5 petalled rose *rosa canina* - Rambling Rose – Dog Rose - was also adopted by the Tudors in the 15th century – viz the version painted on the crypt vault next door. It has been suggested that the rambling rose may be an obtuse symbolic reference to the background of the marriage, but this is surely unlikely; in those days, the public display of such saucy hints about the background & lifestyle of a Royal princess would be daring & dangerous. These flowers have also been identified as "sunflowers for purity" but the sunflower has many more petals - & was it known in 14th century England ?
 - d) Pelican in her piety, feeding her young with blood from her own breast.
- 5 Faces – some nestling in the rings of roses, unidentifiable & seemingly plonked at random, but doubtless with deep hidden significance.
 - a) The bride with her hair in a gilded snood. Upstairs, in the north aisle of the nave, is another boss also said to be Joan. Since the nave vault design followed the vaulting in this chapel, the "upstairs" boss would have been sculpted several years later. Though history tells us that the Princess put on weight in later years, the "upstairs" boss is rather more flattering.
 - b) Two women – perhaps the mothers of the happy couple, but neither is located near the carving of the bride. It is said that the Queen, though fond of Edward & Joan, did not wish them to marry. The woman near King Edward's shield is unlikely to be his own mother, Isabella (she-wolf of France) who died 3 years before the chapel make-over. Though it was through her that King Edward claimed the French throne, they were not on good terms.
There are no distinguishing features to suggest that either woman was a Biblical character.
 - c) A third woman – with a furrowed brow – in the northern apse. Any ideas ?
 - d) A man with pointed ears. Who knows ?

When occupying the western crypt, between 1576 & 1895 the French Walloon Church painted the arches with cartouches containing biblical quotations. Fragments can still be made out through the whitewash here & there, but above the crypt door in the chapel, is the only complete relic of those days, when the chapel served as an entrance lobby.



In English of the same period, (16th/17th century) as displayed on the walls of several churches across Kent, the wording translates as “*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God and be ready to hear*” Languages evolve & nowadays “*keep thy foot*” is more obscure than “*prend garde à ton pied*”.

The east windows (square frames, two perpendicular shafts in each, early examples of the Perpendicular style in England) now display badges of the present occupiers: the northern one carries the badge of the Walloons from the Low Countries, whilst the southern one has the badge of their Huguenot successors echoing the link with France. Reflecting this joint ancestry, the badge of the French Protestant Church of Canterbury combines the two.

Given the history & present use of the chapel, it is interesting to reflect on four facts:

- 1 King Edward III invited droves of Flemish weavers to live in Kent – for good commercial reasons so that our Kentish wool could be woven in this country rather being sent abroad.
- 2 Joan, Fair Maid of Kent, supported John Wycliffe & the Lollards, precursors of the English Reformation.
- 3 The chapel has for over 6 centuries been associated with a sworn enemy of the French. When he requested burial in the cathedral undercroft near his Chantry, the Black Prince could not have dreamt that precisely 200 years after his death, the entire western crypt would be occupied by thousands of refugees from France & the Low Countries.
- 4 Upstairs, far away from the sound of French hymns & French prayers, the Prince might rest more easily were it not for the occupant of a neighbouring tomb. On the opposite side of Becket's sanctuary, lies King Henry IV, who usurped the throne & murdered King Richard II – Prince Edward's younger son.

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