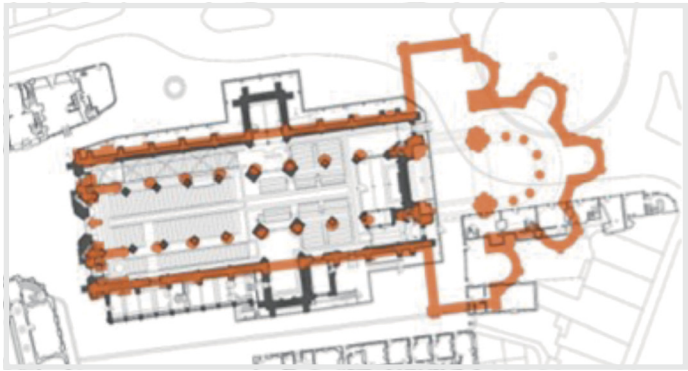
John of Tours

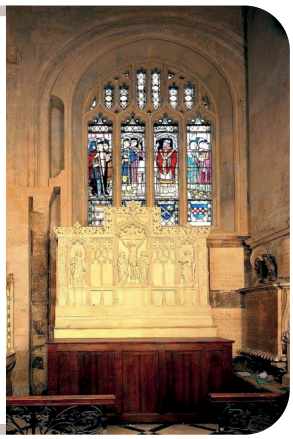
John of Tours was a Norman who had come from France in 1088 where he had been a clergyman in a place called Tours. He was previously the doctor for William the Conqueror. He was given the city of Bath by King William Rufus and in 1090 John ordered work to start on a grand new Cathedral to replace the Saxon Abbey. He demanded that the monks in the monastery helped pay towards the cost of building it.



John's Cathedral was very large and the Abbey we see today would fit inside it. The orange outline shows the Norman Cathedral and the black one shows the Abbey today.

John died in 1122 when only the lower level walls had been finished. It was finally completed in about 1170, 80 years after the work had started.

Most of the Cathedral has disappeared but some stonework has been dug up by archaeologists. This carving may show the Last Supper and could have been part of an altar. The curved arch over the window is also from that time, which makes it one of the oldest parts of Bath Abbey as it is nearly 1000 years old.



This window was made in 1952 to show John of Tours in his Bishop's red robes and hat, called a mitre. Some knights in armour are shown at the side because it was a difficult time – only 2 years before John arrived in Bath, there had been a violent rebellion against the King.

You can also see monks on this side because John was in charge of the Benedictine monastery which surrounded the Cathedral.

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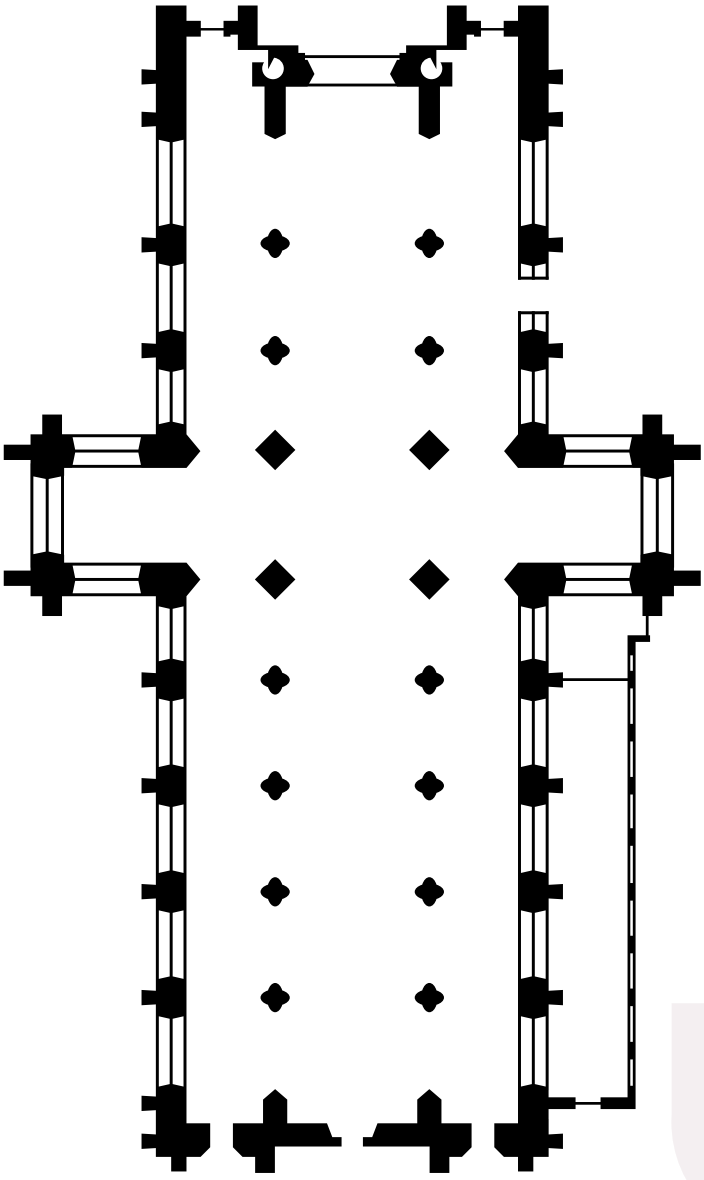
Activity ideas

1. The Abbey today is a different shape to the Norman Cathedral. If you look at it from above, you can see that, like many churches, it is designed to look like a cross which is an important Christian symbol. Turn to page 3 and try to remember the names of the different features of a church for 2 minutes. Then turn back to the outline below and see if you can label it with as many features as you can.
2. See if you can remember 3 definitions from the list on page 3 and tell a member of your family. For example, a nave is the main part of a church where people sit.
3. Draw your own design for a church. Which features will you include?
4. Below are famous churches from around the world. Can you discover their names and other facts about them?



Photos: David Iliff (top), C Messier (middle), Peter de Vink (bottom), via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

Answers: St Paul's Cathedra, La Sagrada Familia, the Vatican

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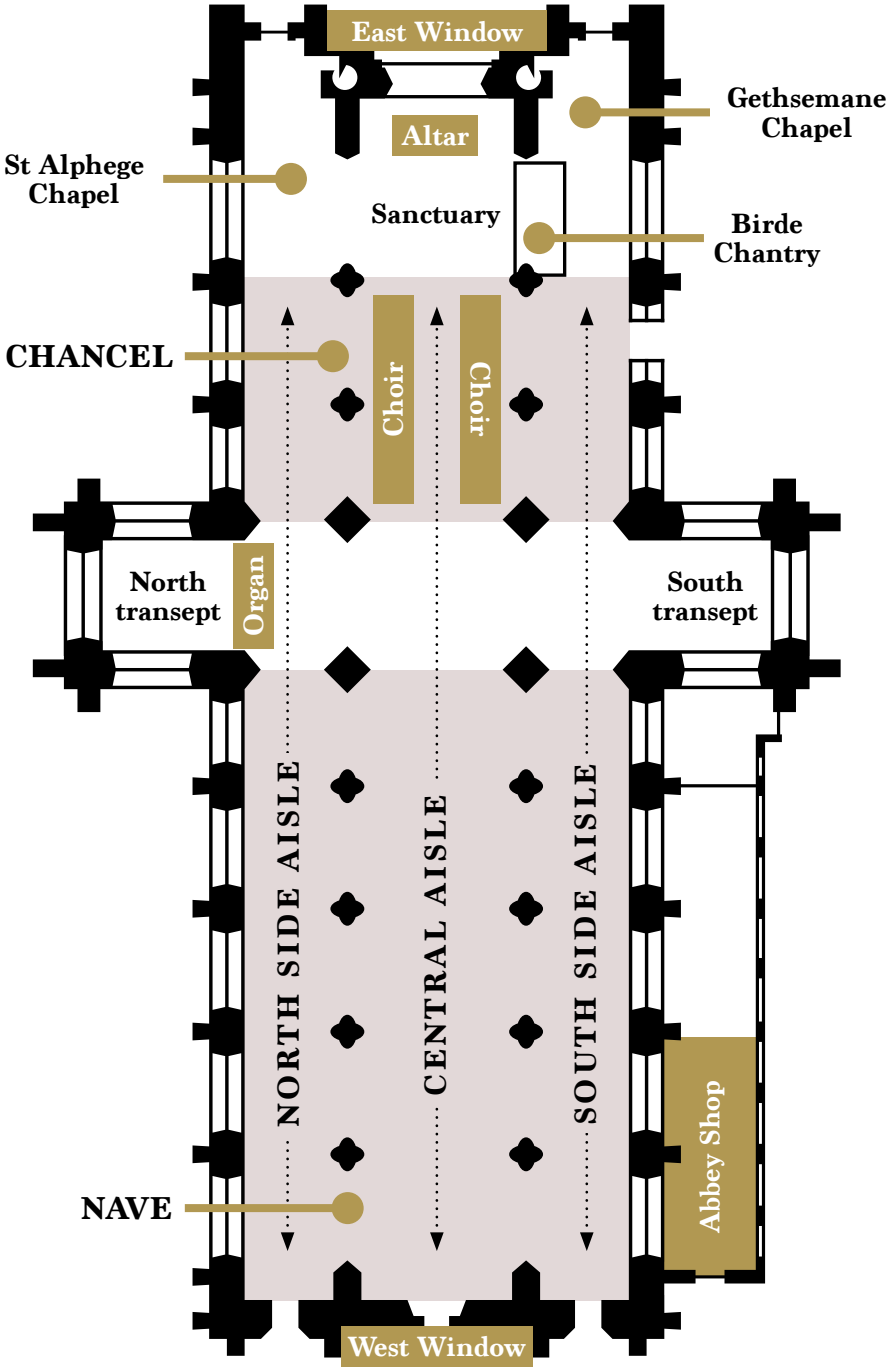

WEST FRONT

Definitions

Nave: the central part of the church where the congregation (people who come to worship) sit.

Chancel: the part of the church kept just for the clergy and the choir (singing members of the church).

Choir: where the choir members sit.

Aisle: the space between the chairs to allow people to enter and exit.

Chapel: small rooms with their own altars which are used for worship and often, quiet prayer.

Transepts: the parts of the church jutting out on either side which help form the cross shape.

Altar: the table where the bread and wine are consecrated (made holy) during church services.

Sanctuary: the area round the altar which is a particularly special and holy place, dedicated to God.

Chantry: a chapel dedicated to the memory of a person or family, who often gave money to build it. Bath Abbey's Birde Chantry was built by William Birde 500 years ago.

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