

Bath Abbey





WELCOME TO BATH ABBEY

FOR WELL OVER A THOUSAND YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A place of Christian worship on this site. The existing 16th-century Abbey replaced a Norman cathedral and a Saxon monastery. Buried deep below are the foundations of a Roman temple. But Bath Abbey is not simply a museum of past treasures; it is first and foremost the home of a family of believers who gather every week to bring God their gratitude and praise, to find grace and forgiveness, and to draw inspiration for daily living. The Abbey is also Britain's most visited parish church outside London, welcoming over 350,000 visitors a year. As the largest church in Bath it is a natural focus for civic expressions of faith and celebration and it is host to special services throughout the year in addition to its regular worship.

In 2018, we began building work for the Abbey's Footprint Project. During these works to repair the Abbey's historic floor and install eco-friendly underfloor heating, some areas may not be accessible, but others will be revealed for the first time in 150 years.

Whatever your reason for visiting this beautiful building – you are welcome.



TOP The memorial to Fletcher Partis, situated in the north quire aisle, depicts the story of the Good Samaritan.

LEFT The Abbey choirs make a significant contribution to the worship on Sundays and at major festivals.





LEFT Watercolour "The West Front of Bath Abbey" by J. M.W. Turner c. 1793.

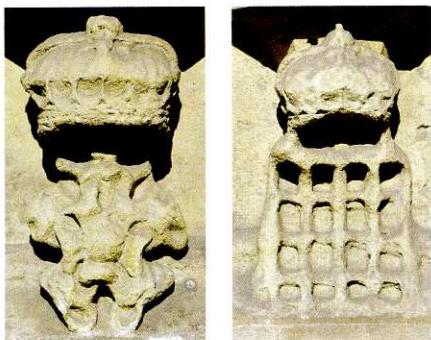
OPPOSITE The ladders, which are unique to the Abbey's west front, depict angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth.

THE WEST FRONT

THE FIRST SIGHT MOST PEOPLE HAVE OF BATH ABBEY is the west front, originally assembled to illustrate the convictions of the Benedictine monks who, at the end of the 15th century, set about entirely rebuilding their 400-year-old Norman cathedral.

The façade, with its unique ladders of angels, held clear messages for a medieval audience. Pilgrims – tourists of the Middle Ages – gazed up, as does the modern visitor, at a crowded symmetry with Christ in Majesty at the top and King Henry VII above the door, raised over other mortals. Medieval worshippers would have read explicit promises of salvation through the intercession of saints on either side of ladders leading to the afterlife; they may well have noticed how the rungs of the heavenly ladders reach down only as far as the *tops* of the doors, for they would have understood how their route to heaven had to begin *behind* the church doors and through the good offices of the clergy inside. That message was soon to be outmoded. The break with Rome and Catholicism came before the Abbey was completed and by then the Protestant conviction of a direct relationship with God meant the west front's statements in stone were fading in significance.

BELOW The statue of Christ in Majesty sits above the angels at the apex of the west front.



ABOVE Details of the original stonework showing the Tudor rose and portcullis.



