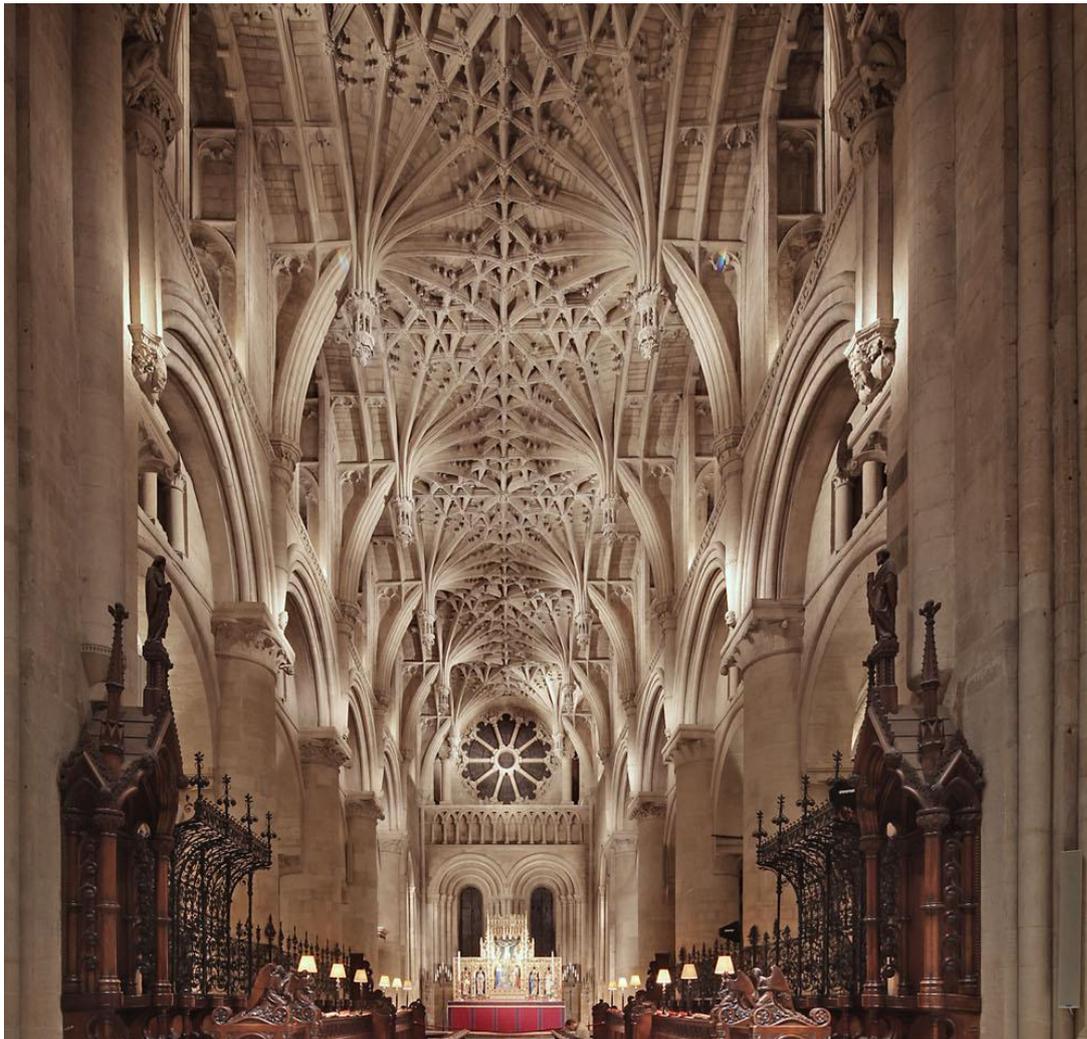




# *Christ Church*

## UNLOCKING CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL: FAMILY /SCHOOL RESOURCES

### A VIRTUAL VISIT ONLINE The Ceiling: A heaven made of stone



#### **Background:**

In many churches and cathedrals, special attention was, and is, given to the ceilings, because they can draw up the gaze of worshippers and help them to think about God, in Heaven, beyond time and space.

In our Cathedral, half of the ceiling is made of wood, but most of it is stone. Above the Chancel and Sanctuary, at the East end of the building, where the High Altar is located, the ceiling is very special indeed because of its fine arches and fan vaulting.

The Sanctuary is seen as the most sacred place in a Christian church. It is where the priests give people the Eucharist, a symbolic meal of bread and wine which is also known as Holy Communion. From far back in history, a person in danger, fleeing from his or her enemies, may seek safety and shelter in the Sanctuary of a church, chapel or Cathedral. To 'seek sanctuary' is to ask for protection.

People used to think this ceiling was the work of an Oxford stonemason and architect called William Orchard, but this heaven made of stone may have already been built before he was born. Opinions are still divided as to the exact age of the ceiling, therefore. It may have been designed and built in either the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. Although the name of the architect is in dispute, everyone agrees this is an amazing example of medieval engineering and design. The ceiling is quite flat but the stone ribs have created the sense of a very tall, arched space, thanks to the ribs of stone which spring from the pillars towards the centre, and also the stone pendants or lanterns which hang down, as if floating in the air.



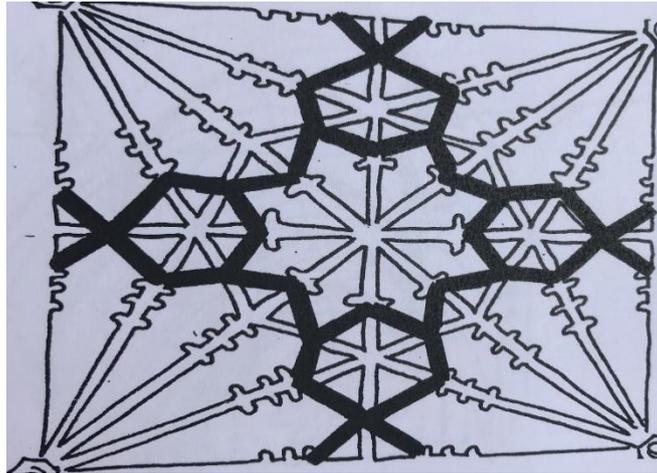
Along the central spine, there are five stone carvings, called bosses. They show the following people, in order of importance, moving from the altar (most important) towards the nave crossing. These bosses show: Jesus with a beard; Mary and baby Jesus; St Frideswide and angel; an Archbishop; and, lastly, a Bishop.

There are lots of other stone carvings on the ceiling and we give school visitors binoculars so they can see them more clearly!



## Introduction:

The ceiling is a very special kind of construction. It is called a fan vault because the ribs of stone seem to spring from their supporting pillars like an open fan. It is also called a stellar vault because each section is based upon a four-pointed star. However, inside the larger star, there are other stars and geometrical shapes, including hexagons, triangles, octagons, and rhombuses.

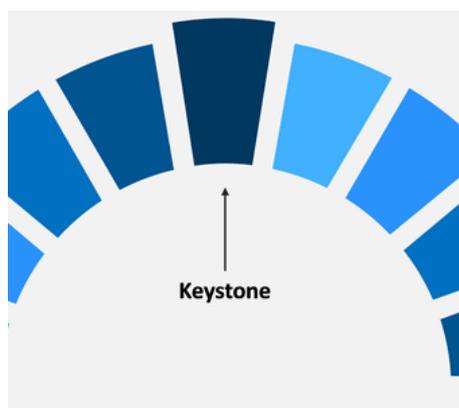


**The star shape in black is why the ceiling is called a stellar vault.** (Drawing by Jim Godfrey)

Hanging down from each arch are lanterns made of stone, delicately carved and pierced to allow light through. Because they are so high up, these hanging lanterns look small but, in fact, they are child height and must each weigh a great deal.

The combined weight of the stones in the ceiling would be similar in weight to a small whale! But the stones remain suspended in the air, thanks to the strong pillars on either side and the clever design of the fan vaulting.

In any arch, the most important stone is known as the KEYSTONE. It takes the weight of the arch sides and prevents the whole arch from falling apart. If you remove the keystone, the arch will collapse.

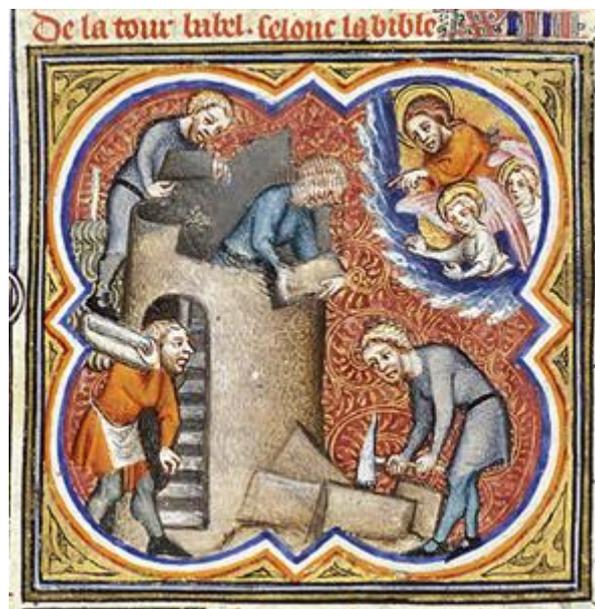


The first century missionary St Paul, in his letter to the people of Ephesus, the Ephesians (Chapter 2: verse 20) calls Jesus the keystone, to remind them how important he was and will be. He says, "Christ Jesus himself being the chief keystone...."

This echoed the Old Testament Prophet, Zechariah (Chapter 10:4) who said that a corner stone would come from the line of Judah: "From them (Judah) shall come the Cornerstone; From them the tent peg; From them the bow of battle; From them every ruler, all of them together."

### Things to do at home- a few ideas

- Find out about **medieval cathedral builders** and what they used to construct these magnificent buildings. Look up Google images to see pictures of builders from medieval manuscripts. Can you see any tools or machines which are still used by today's builders?



**Medieval builders (Courtesy Durham Cathedral)**

- Sometimes, architects are asked to design **modern Cathedrals**. In the UK, you may like to learn more about the Cathedrals in the following cities: **Truro, Liverpool, Coventry and Guildford**.
- Have you heard about the **Cardboard Cathedral**? In 2011, a terrible earthquake struck New Zealand, and destroyed a large part of the city of Christ Church and its Cathedral. As a temporary replacement, the Japanese architect, Shigeru Ban, was asked to design a Cathedral which could be erected quickly, cheaply and yet be beautiful. He came up with the idea of a cardboard cathedral. Try to find pictures of it on the internet by typing in Christ Church cardboard cathedral, New Zealand. How does it compare it with Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford?!

