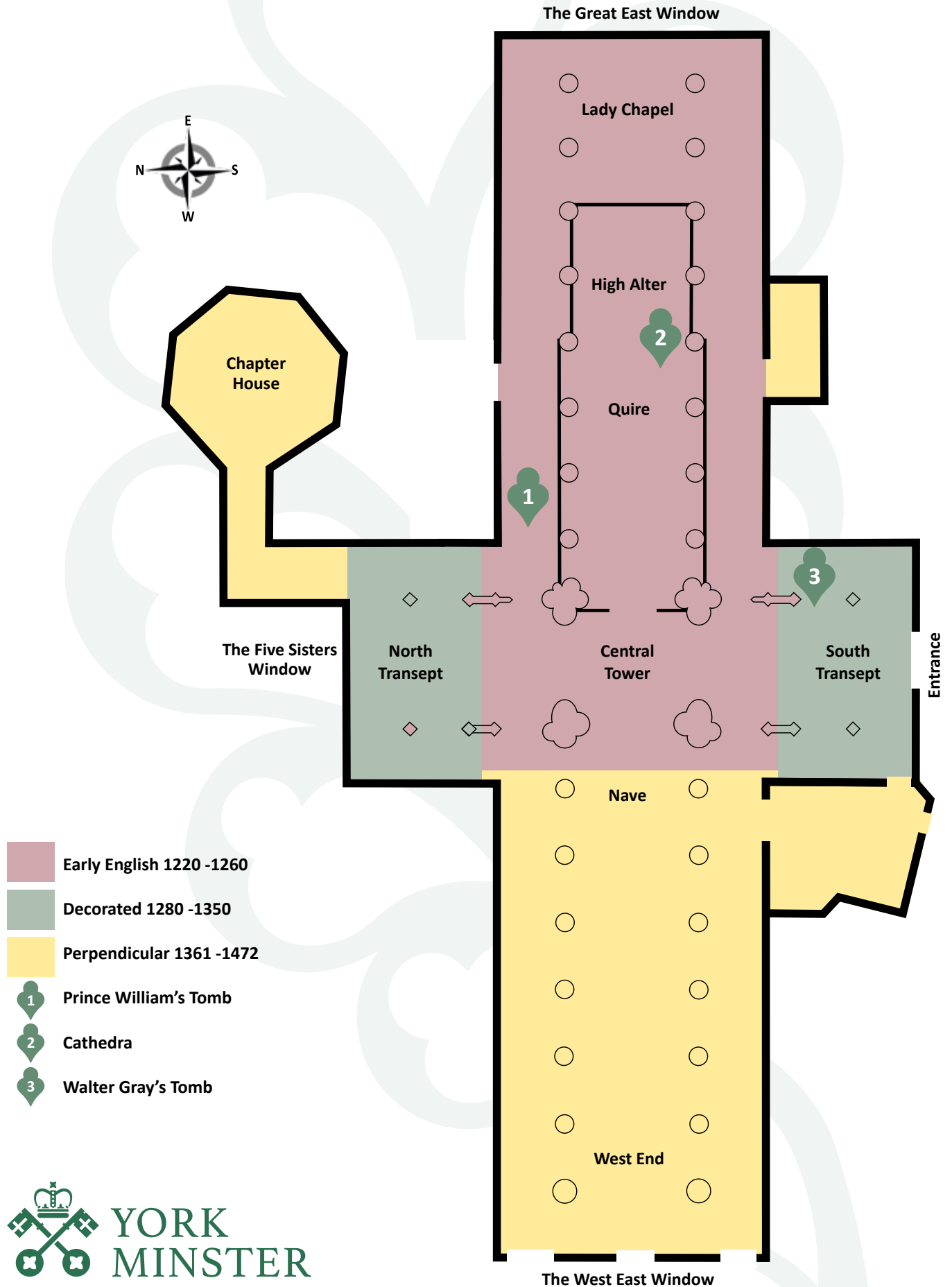


# A MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL



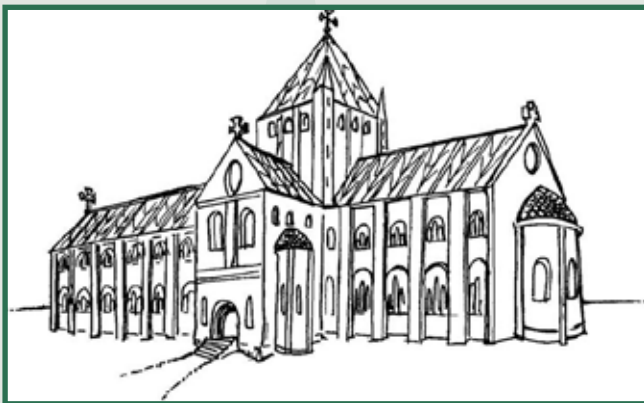
# A MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL

KS3: ENGLAND  
1066 – 1500

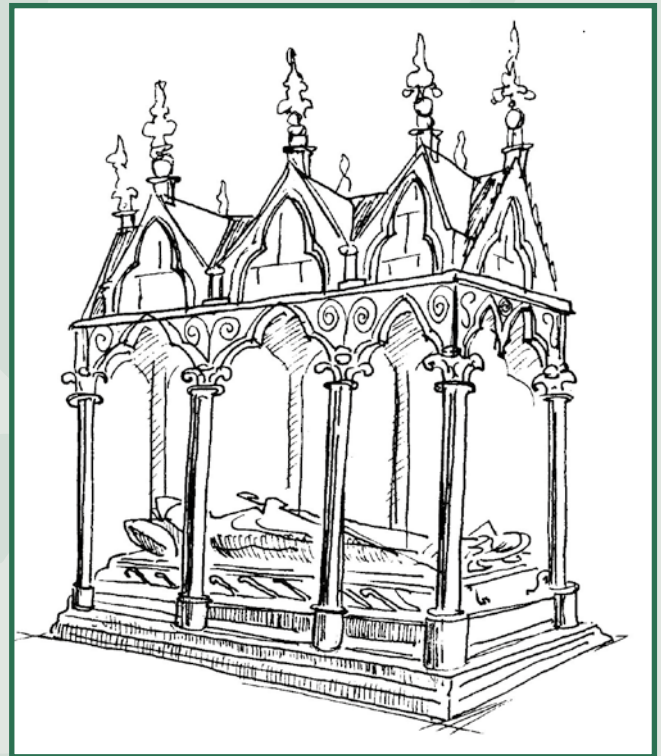
York Minster is the largest authentic Gothic church in Northern Europe. York's original (Anglo Saxon) Minster was severely damaged in 1069, during the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. The new Norman Archbishop (Thomas of Bayeux) tried to repair it, but a Danish raid in **1075** seems to have destroyed it completely. The exact site of this building is unknown.

In about **1080**, however, Thomas started building on the present site. His foundations survive below our later cathedral, so we have a good idea of its size and shape. It was built in the Norman style, with round-topped arches, windows and doors. This building was enlarged by a later Archbishop, Roger of Pont l'Eveque, but it was still quite different from the church we see today. Parts of the Norman cathedral may still be seen in the Undercroft and Crypt, but very much altered with the passage of time.

In **1215**, Walter Gray, the wealthy bishop of Worcester and King John's Chancellor, was made Archbishop of York by Pope Innocent III. In about **1220**, Walter started to reconstruct the old South Transept in the new, "Gothic" style. By the time he died in **1255**, the transept was finished, so this is where he was buried and where his tomb may still be seen. In 1968, the tomb was opened and a painted coffin lid was found over the bones. A silver-gilt chalice and plate, an ivory crozier-head and a large gold ring set with a sapphire were also discovered. These treasures may now be seen in the Undercroft.



Thomas' Minster: c. 1100



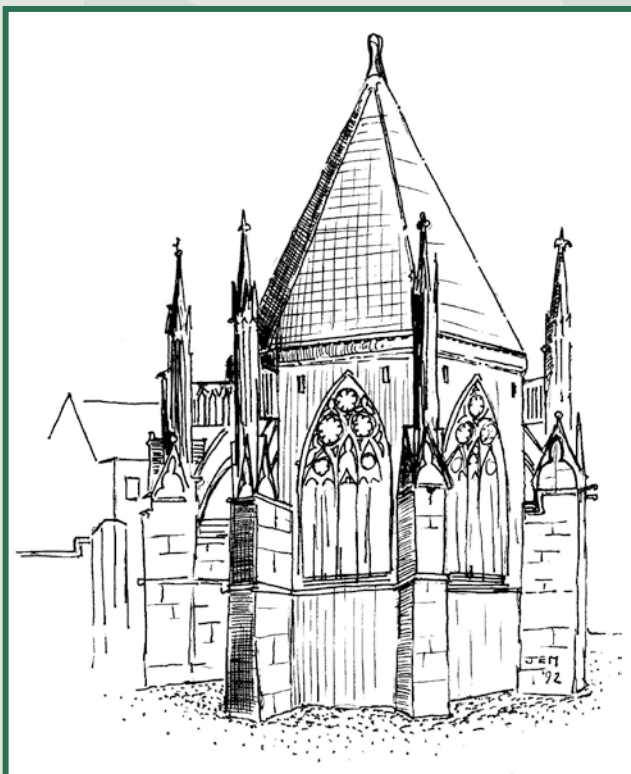
# A MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL

KS3: ENGLAND  
1066 – 1500

## Transepts and Chapter House

Both transepts are built in the first, or Early English phase of the Gothic style, with narrow windows and dark, “Purbeck Marble” shafts clustering around the magnesian limestone pillars. Note the Five Sisters Window, with its “grisaille” glass of **c.1260**, forming complex geometric patterns.

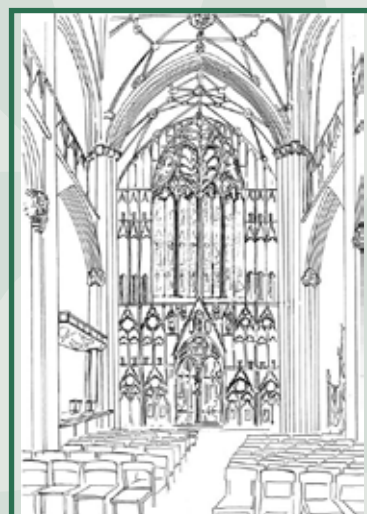
The octagonal Chapter House (a meeting room for the Canons, who make up the Minster’s governing body, or Chapter) was possibly completed by **1285**. This is the widest octagonal Chapter House anywhere without a central column to support the vault. Note the strange heads and animals carved into the canopies above the Canons’ stalls. Parliament occasionally met here if the King was in York. The Chapter still does.



## Nave

The pillars in the present Nave stand on the foundations of Thomas’ outer walls, so you can see how much narrower the Minster used to be. Enlargement began in 1291, and work was presumably complete by 1338, when Archbishop Melton paid for the Great West Window. We call this second phase of the Gothic style Decorated. If you look at the Great West Window with its “Heart of Yorkshire” tracery, you can see why!

It is unlikely that the Nave was much used for services in the Middle Ages. Its great space was really designed for spectacular processions – and perhaps even fairs and markets – on the great feasts and festivals of the Christian year. The red and gold dragon’s head (high up, North side) may have been a hoist for raising a font-cover, so perhaps baptisms, at least, took place here. The painted shields between the arches are mostly the coats of arms of noblemen who contributed to the building fund. Many of them had passed through York with Edward I during the invasion of Scotland in 1296.



# A MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL

KS3: ENGLAND  
1066 – 1500

## The East End and Quire

In 1361, Archbishop Thoresby laid the foundation stone of the new Quire. It appears that the Lady Chapel, and perhaps much of the rest of the East End, was built around the older Quire, so that daily worship could continue under cover for as long as possible. The Lady Chapel is dominated by the Great East Window, glazed by John Thornton of Coventry from **1405** to **1408**. He was paid £56, which included a £10 bonus for finishing within three years! (It depicts the creation and destruction of the world, as described in Genesis and Revelation.) By now the Gothic style has entered its final *Perpendicular* phase: note the emphasis on vertical lines in the window tracery. (This window is currently undergoing major restoration.)



Eventually, the old Quire was demolished and replaced, but the present furniture, organ and roof all date from after a fire of 1829. This area was always the spiritual focus of the Minster, with the High Altar, Archbishop's throne (*Cathedra*) and the Canons' stalls. Although the Minster was **never** a monastery, the pattern of worship was similar; the daily offices being sung by the Canons or – more usually – their deputies, the *Vicars Choral*.

In the Middle Ages, the High Altar was further forward. Behind it stood the magnificent shrine of St William of York. William was a late Norman Archbishop who died (possibly murdered) in **1154** and was later canonised. He was never as popular a saint as Thomas Becket of Canterbury, but the Minster was certainly a place of pilgrimage until shrines were destroyed during the Reformation. The North Quire Aisle contains the Minster's only royal tomb, that of Prince William of Hatfield, the second son of Edward III and Queen Philippa, who were married in the Minster in **1328**. He is shown as an adolescent, but is now thought to have died as a baby.



# A MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL

KS3: ENGLAND  
1066 – 1500

## The Central Tower

The Norman tower was altered about the same time as the transepts. We know it was given a belfry, and possibly a spire, but this version collapsed in **1407**, and work on the present structure could only begin once the four massive piers had been strengthened. It was certainly intended to be taller, but it soon became clear that the foundations were unstable and it was capped at its present height of sixty metres in about **1470**. Meanwhile, the two western towers were also being finished, and the whole cathedral was declared complete in July, **1472**. Below the Central Tower stands the magnificent Quire Screen, mounted with fifteen statues of Kings of England from William I to Henry VI, emphasising the link between Church and State, *and* the legitimacy of the Lancastrian succession. The figures are all fifteenth century, except for that of Henry VI, which is a much later replacement.

Despite the momentous changes of the Reformation era, the basic organization of the English church remained much the same. The Pope may no longer have been in charge after 1534, but English bishops and archbishops continued to rule their dioceses and provinces as before. Indeed, a number of new dioceses (such as Peterborough) were created, and some suitably large parish churches or exmonasteries elevated to cathedral status. Thus York Minster continued to fulfil its original role as the *Metropolitan* cathedral of the *Archbishop* of York. (See KS 3 RE: A Christian Place of Worship.)

