

Church architecture in England

In England there were several different periods of church architecture.

The **Saxon period** (700-1050) was a time when churches were very simple. The end of the church was generally rounded. The remaining Saxon churches usually have a west or central tower and two or three internal spaces. Generally the buildings are small, and are tall and long relative to their width. They have thick walls, often made of squared stones. Doors and windows are small and narrow with straight lintels, arches, or triangular heads. Paired windows can be separated by squat pillars with banding and crude capitals, and often have an arch cut from a single piece of stone.

The **Norman period** (1050-1190) came from the style called Romanesque which was popular in Europe. The arches had ornaments which were called "mouldings". The tops of the pillars looked like cushions, so they were called "cushion capitals". The windows were narrow and rounded at the top. The Norman churches were small but solid, sometimes they just consisted of a square chancel separated from the nave by an arch. Sometimes there would be a squat tower and a round headed doorway for the congregation.

Early English or Gothic architecture (1190-1280) was not as solid and heavy as Norman architecture. This period is also called "Lancet", referring to the pointed lancet windows (narrow, untraceryed) that characterise it. Form is still austere and proportion is simple. The main points of Early English are: quadripartite ribbing in vaults, slender towers topped with spires, lancet windows – both single and grouped – and piers with narrow, clustered shafts. The finest example of Early English architecture is to be found at Salisbury Cathedral.

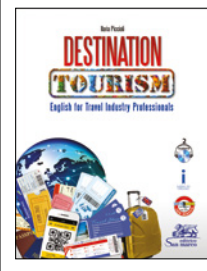


Salisbury Cathedral

The **Decorated** style of architecture (1280-1360) was popular at a time when the plague was raging and a third of the people in England died. That is why not so much building was done then. A lot of stone carvings were made in churches at that time. Windows were wider than the earlier lancet openings. Exeter Cathedral contains some of the best examples of this style.

Exeter Cathedral





The **Perpendicular** style (1360-1540) was very grand. As its name suggests, the chief characteristic of Perpendicular architecture is the emphasis on strong vertical lines, seen especially in window tracery and wall panelling.

Towers in particular were elaborately decorated and pinnacled, and windows became massive, traceried spider-webs of stone. Wall space was at a minimum, which had the effect of introducing a wonderful feeling of light and spaciousness into the interior of these buildings. Selworthy church has beautiful Perpendicular architecture, and Luccombe church has particularly ornate Perpendicular windows. Many churches that can be seen in England were built in this period.

In the 1600s churches were built in a variety of styles. Often they copied some of the older styles. After the Great Fire of London (1665) many new churches were built by the architect Sir Christopher Wren. They were built in the classical style. Churches continued to be built in later centuries like this, but also the Gothic style continued to be used.

Modern churches often do not have the traditional cross-shape. It is difficult for the congregation to see and hear what is happening in the chancel.

Modern churches bring the congregation, choir, and priests in closer touch.

An example is the round design for the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes. Modern churches are often simpler but with a warmer character than the Gothic churches. Many have beautiful mosaic glass windows. Coventry Cathedral is another famous example of a modern church building.



Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes

ACTIVITIES

1 Answer the following questions.

- What are the main features of Saxon architecture?
- What does the Norman style correspond to in the rest of Europe?
- What are the main characteristics of Early English architecture?
- When did the Decorated Style become popular in England?
- What is the main feature of the Perpendicular style?
- Mention some examples of modern churches in England.

2 Match each term with the Italian equivalent.

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|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1 Squared Stone | A Costolatura |
| 2 Lintel | B Coro e presbiterio |
| 3 Pillar | C Guglia |
| 4 Romanesque | D Pietra squadrata |
| 5 Chancel | E Architrave |
| 6 Lancet Window | F Traforo |
| 7 Shaft | G Romanico |
| 8 Ribbing | H Pilastro |
| 9 Spire | I Finestra ogivale |
| 10 Tracery | J Fusto di colonna |



Coventry Cathedral