

Chartres Cathedral, also known as the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres is a Roman Catholic church in Chartres, France, about 50 miles southwest of Paris, and is the seat of the Bishop of Chartres. Mostly constructed between 1194 and 1220, it stands at the site of at least five cathedrals that have occupied the site since the Diocese of Chartres was formed as an episcopal see in the 4th century. It is in the High Gothic and Romanesque styles. The cathedral is designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, which calls it "the high point of French Gothic art" and a "masterpiece". The cathedral is well-preserved and well-restored: the majority of the original stained-glass windows survive intact, while the architecture has seen only minor changes since the early 13th century. The building's exterior is dominated by heavy flying buttresses which allowed the architects to increase the window size significantly, while the west end is dominated by two contrasting spires – a 349 foot plain pyramid completed around 1160 and a 377 foot early 16th-century Flamboyant spire on top of an older tower. Equally notable are the three great façades, each adorned with hundreds of sculpted figures illustrating key theological themes and narratives. Since at least the 12th century the cathedral has been an important destination for travelers. It remains so to the present, attracting large numbers of Christian pilgrims, many of whom come to venerate its famous relic the *Sancta Camisa*, said to be the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary at Christ's birth, as well as large numbers of secular tourists who come to admire the cathedral's architecture and historical merit.

On the night of July 10, 1194, a major fire devastated the cathedral. Only the crypt, the towers, and the new facade survived. The cathedral was already known throughout Europe as a pilgrimage destination, due to the reputed relics of the Virgin Mary that it contained. A legate of the Pope happened to be in Chartres at the time of the fire, and spread the word. Funds were collected from royal and noble patrons across Europe, as well as small donations from ordinary people. Reconstruction began almost immediately. Some portions of the building had survived, including the two towers and the royal portal on the west end, and these were incorporated into the new cathedral. The Second World War, in France, was a battle between the Allies and the Germans. In July 1944, the British and Canadians found themselves restrained just south of Caen. The Americans and their five divisions planned an alternative route to the Germans. While some Americans headed west and south, others found themselves in a sweep east of Caen that led them behind the frontline of the German forces. Hitler ordered the German Commissioner, Kluge, to head west to cut off the Americans. This ultimately led the Allies to Chartres in mid-August 1944. On August 16, 1944, during the intervention of the American troops in Chartres, the cathedral was saved from destruction thanks to the American colonel Welborn Barton Griffith Jr. (1901-1944), who questioned the order he was given to destroy the cathedral. The Americans believed that Chartres Cathedral was being used by the enemy. The belief was that the steeples and towers were being used as a range for artillery. Griffith, accompanied by a volunteer soldier, instead decided to go and verify whether or not the Germans were using the cathedral. Griffith could see that the cathedral was empty, so he had the cathedral bells ring as a signal for the Americans not to shoot. Upon hearing the bells, the American command rescinded the order for destruction. Notre-Dame de Chartres had been saved. Colonel Griffith died in combat action that same day, in the town of Lèves, near Chartres. He was posthumously decorated with the War Cross 1939-1945, the Legion of Honor and the National Order of Merit of the French government and the Distinguished Service Cross of the American government. In 2009, the Monuments Historiques division of the French Ministry of Culture began an \$18.5-million program of works at the cathedral, cleaning the inside and outside, protecting the stained glass with a coating, and cleaning and painting the inside masonry creamy-white with marbling and gilded detailing, as it may have looked in the 13th century.



Reputed veil of Virgin Mary

Labyrinth in the bishop's gardens

