

ST. CANICE'S CATHEDRAL

— AND ROUND TOWER —

TEACHER – STUDENT RESOURCE PACK



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Welcome Note

Welcome to St. Canice's Cathedral and Round Tower! We are excited to welcome you for a tour at this site of history, culture and heritage. Take a step back in time to learn about Medieval Kilkenny, the monks, who once lived here, the Bishop's that led the way to create the Cathedral that stands here today.

A tour of the Cathedral will lead pupils through the story of life, society, work and culture of the past, conflict within society during key historical moments as well as the idea of continuity and change over time. Visiting St. Canice's Cathedral and with the help of this teacher's pack, children will explore, investigate and develop a deeper understanding of Kilkenny's beginnings as a city, and within a broader historical context.

How this pack is divided:

This teacher's pack can be used before and after a visit to St. Canice's Cathedral. The pack is divided into **two parts** -

Part One: an introduction into the Cathedral, Round Tower, and key historical moments and figures.

Part Two: activity sheets to be completed on your visit to the Cathedral or in the classroom.

How to use this pack:

This pack has been designed with the primary cycle, history curriculum in mind

- This teacher - student pack has been carefully designed with the Irish Primary School History Curriculum in mind, particularly targeting the 8-12 age group. It supports key strands and strand units such as:

- **Local Studies** – with a focus on St. Canice's Cathedral as a significant local historical site
- **Story** – through engaging narratives about key figures and moments in the Cathedral's past
- **Early People and Ancient Societies and Life, Society, Work and Culture in the Past** – through further exploration of medieval life, architecture, and religion
- **Continuity and Change Over Time** – by encouraging children to consider how the Cathedral's role has evolved through the centuries

The included activities are fun, inquiry-based, creative, and designed to foster historical thinking, and curiosity — all central aims of the primary history curriculum. They vary in terms of difficulty, so a selection can be picked for the age group that suits.

Book Your Visit:

- Contact us on: (056) 7764971 or email explore@stcanicescathedral.ie
- We can discuss the type of tour you would like - see further down for pricing and choice of tours and activities.
- You can also visit our website for further information on bookings: www.stcanicescathedral.ie



Prior to Your Visit:

- Familiarise yourself with this pack, and introduce the children to the history of the Cathedral and some of the key figures as this will help to enhance their visit and tour of the Cathedral.
- The activity sheets at the end of this pack have been designed to be completed before or after a visit to the Cathedral. They are designed to be a fun way of processing some of the key historical moments and figures in the Cathedral's history.



Enjoy Your Visit:

- Allow us to guide you through the history, heritage and wonder at the splendour of St. Canice's Cathedral and Round Tower.
- The Round Tower can be climbed by children over 8 year's old. A teacher must remain at both the top and bottom of the tower at all times and only 12 people can be at the top of the tower at any one time.
- Facilities on site include a gift shop and public bathrooms

Post Visit:

- Leave us a review! If you have enjoyed your class visit to St. Canice's Cathedral, we would love if you could leave us a review!





OUR LOCATION

The Close, Coach Road, Kilkenny , R95 V63H

OPENING HOURS

May - September: Monday - Saturday, 9am - 6pm / Sunday 1pm - 6pm
October - April: Mon - Sat, 10am - 5pm / Sunday - Closed

Last admission is 30 minutes before closing

HOW TO BOOK

To book a tour please email Catherine at explore@stcanicescathedral.com or call us on **056 7764971**

ACCESSIBILITY & FACILITIES

ACCESSIBILITY

Located on Coach Road, Kilkenny, the Cathedral is accessible by foot from everywhere in Kilkenny city centre.

By Train: www.irishrail.ie / [+353 \(0\)1 8366222](tel:+353018366222)

By Bus: www.jjkavanagh.ie / [+353 \(0\)818 333222](tel:+35301818333222)
www.buseireann.ie / [+353 \(0\)1 8366111](tel:+353018366111)

Parking: There is available coach parking in the Abbey Quarter parking, for schools who may be coming with a bus. Please ring us for more information.

There is one disabled parking space on Coach Road, outside the gate of the Cathedral.

FACILITIES

The Cathedral has public toilets located at the back of the building. A code can be given at the ticket desk for access.

A gift shop is also located by the ticket desk on entry to the Cathedral.

The Early Beginnings of Kilkenny

The story of Kilkenny begins long before the great stone cathedral we see today. This location, was the beginnings of Cill Chainnigh, meaning the Church of Canice and has been a place of prayer for over 1,500 years. In early Christian times, monks and holy people built small monasteries here, surrounded by simple wooden buildings and stone churches.

Two of the most important figures in this story are Saint Kieran and Saint Canice.

Saint Kieran

St. Kieran, often called Ciarán of Saigir, is said to have been one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland and considered the first saint born in Ireland, although it is unclear if he preceded St. Patrick. He founded the Diocese of Ossory, which later became the area served by St. Canice's Cathedral.

According to legend, when he built his first monastery, the wild animals of the forest came to help him - even a fox carried his hammer! Stories like this remind us that early Irish monks lived closely with nature and saw the hand of God in all living things.

Inside the Cathedral today stands a carved stone seat known as St. Kieran's Chair. For centuries, each new Bishop of Ossory has been enthroned in this chair, continuing the line of faith that began with Kieran himself. It is the only Cathedral in Ireland where a new Bishop has to be enthroned in two chairs; St. Kieran's Chair, and one dated to the Victorian era.

Saint Canice

About a century later, St. Canice founded a monastery at Aghaboe in County Laois. He became one of Ireland's best-loved saints, known for his learning, kindness, and friendship with other holy men such as St. Columba of Iona.

One story tells how, during a terrible storm at sea, St. Columba's ship was saved after St. Canice prayed for him, and the winds calmed at once. Because of his faith and courage, the people of Ossory named this site in his honour, calling it Cill Chainnigh - the Church of Canice - which in time became Kilkenny.

These two saints laid the spiritual foundations of the city. Their influence can still be felt today in the Cathedral, which stands on the very hill where monks once prayed and taught.

Teacher Prompt:

Invite pupils to imagine the early monastery here. What sounds might they hear? What would the monks' day have been like? How different would this place have felt compared to the busy city of Kilkenny today?

The Round Tower

Standing proudly beside St. Canice's Cathedral is a Round Tower; the oldest building in the city and one of only two towers in Ireland that visitors can still climb today. Rising nearly 30 metres high, it offers a sweeping view over Kilkenny and the countryside beyond.



A Tower from Long Ago

The Round Tower was built around the year 1111 AD, before the stone Cathedral existed. In those early days, monks lived and prayed here in a wooden church surrounded by a monastic settlement. The tower was the strongest structure in the area, built from carefully shaped limestone blocks.

The entrance door is high above the ground, once reachable only by a wooden ladder that could be pulled up for safety. This design tells us that the tower was built not only as a bell tower but also as a refuge and place of safety. During raids or attacks, the monks could climb inside, carrying with them precious books, chalices, and relics to protect them from harm. Bells, Prayer, and a look-out

Each day, the ringing of the bells from the tower marked the rhythm of prayer for the monastic community; dawn, midday, evening, and night. The sound could be heard across the valley, calling them to worship and for mealtimes.

In times of peace, the tower symbolised faith reaching towards heaven; in times of trouble, it served as a watchtower, keeping the settlement alert to danger.

Today, the tower still watches over Kilkenny, just as it has for more than 900 years. Visitors who climb its 121 steps can look down over the Cathedral roof, the city of Kilkenny, and the winding River Nore, with its many roof-tops and steeples, imagining the view as the monks once saw it.

Teacher Prompt:

Ask pupils to think about how the monks might have felt climbing the narrow stairs inside the tower. What could they see from the top? Why was it important for them to protect their bells, books, and sacred objects?

Building the Cathedral

When the Normans arrived in Ireland in 1169, they brought with them new ways of building strong stone castles, grand churches, and magnificent cathedrals in the Gothic style. It was during this time that St. Canice's Cathedral, as we know it today, began to rise on this ancient hill.



In 1202, Bishop Hugh de Rous, the first Anglo-Norman Bishop of Ossory, began the great work of rebuilding the old monastic church in stone. This was a time of great change in Kilkenny.

The powerful Norman lord William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster, had recently rebuilt Kilkenny Castle and strengthened the town walls. Under his protection, Kilkenny became a thriving Norman city, filled with merchants, craftsmen, and clergy.

The Cathedral took more than 80 years to complete, finally coming to completion in 1285. The builders used local limestone, giving the Cathedral its cool grey colour and solid strength. The design followed the shape of a cross, with a long central nave, side transepts forming the arms, and a chancel at the top where the high altar stands. The Gothic style, in which it was built, was starting to spread throughout Ireland at the time.

Stonemasons carved blocks by hand, carpenters shaped wooden scaffolding, and skilled artists decorated the windows and arches. Every piece of stone was lifted into place by muscle and rope, guided by the knowledge of master builders. The Cathedral we see today stands as a monument to their skills, and endurance.

From William Marshal's Norman city to modern-day Kilkenny, the Cathedral has remained the heart of the community. Its towers and spires have watched over the city for more than 800 years, linking past and present through faith and craftsmanship.

Teacher Prompt:

Invite pupils to imagine they are apprentices working on the Cathedral during William Marshal's time. What might they see and hear around them - stonecutters, horses, carts of limestone, and the sound of hammers ringing across the city?



The Roof and Restoration

Over the centuries, St. Canice's Cathedral has faced times of great damage and renewal. Wind, fire, and war all left their marks on the building, yet each generation found ways to restore its beauty and strength.

The most serious damage came during the Cromwellian siege of Kilkenny in 1650. Oliver Cromwell's troops used the Cathedral as a stable, broke many of its tombs, and melted down its metal for weapons. The magnificent East Window was destroyed, and the great wooden roof was burned. For more than a decade afterwards, the Cathedral stood roofless and open to the weather.

Though repairs were made in later years, by the early 1800s the Cathedral had again fallen into disrepair. Its walls were damp, its windows broken, and parts of the building unsafe. Something had to be done to save this ancient place.

Dean Vignoles and the Great Restoration

The task of revival fell to Dean Vignoles, who became Dean of Ossory in the 1840s. Dean Vignoles was determined to restore the Cathedral with care and respect for its medieval heritage. He worked to raise funds, gather craftsmen, and oversee every stage of the restoration. The Cathedral underwent one of the most important conservation and archaeological projects in its history.

The Butlers of Ormond and the Redwood Roof

Dean Vignoles was greatly supported by the Butlers of Ormond, the powerful family who lived at the other end of high-town in Kilkenny Castle. The Butlers were generous patrons of the arts and devoted to the city's heritage. They helped fund the restoration and arranged for the Cathedral's new timber roof to be made from Canadian redwood, shipped across the Atlantic from British Columbia, along with enough redwood to build the roof of the long gallery at Kilkenny Castle. The roof, completed in 1863, is one of the Cathedral's most striking features. Its elegant hammer-beam design, similar to that of Westminster Hall in London, displays both strength and beauty. If you look carefully among the carved wooden beams, you'll spot figures such as the King and Queen of Ossory and the mysterious Green Man, an ancient symbol of nature's rebirth.

Teacher Prompt:

Invite pupils to imagine being part of the restoration in the 1840s. What roles might they have had during this period of restoration? What sounds and smells might they notice - hammers, sawdust, and the scent of redwood? Why do you think Dean Vignoles and the Butlers cared so much about the restoration and care of the building?



The Effigy Tombs and Monuments

As you move through the aisles of St Canice's Cathedral, you are surrounded by centuries of history carved in stone. The Cathedral holds one of the finest collections of medieval effigy tombs and memorials in Ireland. These effigies in carved stone show us how people were honoured and remembered hundreds of years ago. Some represent bishops of Ossory, wearing ecclesiastical robes, hands in prayer and face peaceful. Others are knights and noblemen, depicted in armour and with swords, often with shields or loyal dogs curled at their feet. These effigies, dating from the 14th to the 16th centuries, offer valuable insights into the dress, status, death and craftsmanship of their time.

Memorial Slabs

You will notice many memorial slabs set into the floor and walls of the Cathedral. These commemorate both clergy and laypeople, and inscribed with Latin or English. Some have detailed carvings such as crosses, coats of arms, and even skull-and-crossbone motifs, all showing various styles in memorial art.

Teacher Prompt:

Ask pupils: If you were carving an effigy for someone important today, what objects or symbols would you include to show who they were?

The Butler Tombs

Among the most significant memorials in the Cathedral are those of the Butler family, the powerful Earls and Dukes of Ormond. For centuries, the Butlers were patrons of St Canice's and protectors of Kilkenny. Their tombs are found throughout the building, each reflecting their lasting influence.

One notable effigy tomb is that of James Butler, 9th Earl of Ormond, who died in 1546. Known as James the lame, he is shown in full armour. At his feet, a dog growling and with hair standing on end, tells us that James' death was not a peaceful one.

Another beautiful example is the effigy tomb of Piers Butler and Margaret Fitzgerald, dating from the mid 16th century. The figures lie side by side, their faces peaceful and serene. Their tombs combine rich stone carving with a more personal, human expression of faith and remembrance.

These monuments remind us that history is not only written in books but carved in the very fabric of the Cathedral. Examine the tombs closely and you will see many images around the effigies, which all have meaning. A dog represented loyalty, a lion strength and power.

Teacher prompt:

Encourage pupils to "read" a tomb as if it were a story. What can the carving tell us about the person's life, their time, or what they believed?





Bishop Ledrede, the Red Book of Ossory, and the Kilkenny Witch Trials

The 14th century was a time of great change and challenge for both Kilkenny and St Canice's Cathedral. One of the most striking figures from this period was Bishop Richard de Ledrede, who served as Bishop of Ossory from 1317 to 1360. His long term as Bishop, left a lasting mark on the Cathedral, in both faith and controversy.

Bishop Ledrede was an English Franciscan friar, known for his strict religious views and his determination to strengthen church discipline. His strict and determined views as a church leader, meant that he often clashed with powerful local figures and even government officials, leading to disputes between church and state in medieval Kilkenny and resulting in Ledrede himself being imprisoned for a time in Kilkenny Castle.

He took an active interest in the music and worship of his Cathedral and left behind one of Kilkenny's greatest treasures; the Red Book of Ossory.

This manuscript, written in Latin and Anglo-Norman French, survives to this day and contains a collection of hymns that Ledrede himself composed or adapted. The Red Book also includes records of the Cathedral's finances, letters, and other official writings, giving us a remarkable insight into church life in medieval Kilkenny. The book also includes a copy of the Magna Carta, and the first known recorded recipe of Aqua Vitae. Visit the Red Book of Ossory exhibition while at the Cathedral and see if it is the original manuscript or the replica on display!



The Witch Trials and Alice Kyteler

Bishop Ledrede is also remembered, for his part in one of Ireland's most famous trials: the case of Dame Alice Kyteler.

Alice was a wealthy merchant's wife who lived in Kilkenny city. In 1324, Ledrede accused her of witchcraft and heresy; claiming that she and her household used spells, potions, and charms to harm others and to deny the teachings of the Church.

Alice Kyteler managed to escape, but her servant Petronilla de Meath was captured, tried, and executed and was the first recorded person in Ireland to be burned for witchcraft. This event shows the tension of the times: fear of superstition, struggles for power between church and citizens, and the difficulty of separating faith from fear and superstition.

Teachers Prompt:

Encourage pupils to think about how stories like Alice Kyteler's, have been told and retold over time. How might different people in the 1300s – a bishop, a merchant, or a **servant – have seen the same event differently?**

Teachers Prompt:

Ask pupils: Do you think Alice Kyteler was treated fairly? How might her story be told differently today? What does it teach us about justice and belief in the past?



Can you find the grave slab of Alice Kyteler's father - Joseph Kyteler? This memorial slab was found on High Street, Kilkenny in 1894. The slab is inscribed in Norman French and dates to c. 1285



Stained Glass Windows of St. Canice's Cathedral

The stained glass windows of St. Canice's Cathedral are an important part of the artistic and ecclesiastical heritage.

While the cathedral's original medieval glass has not survived, the current collection, dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries; offers a valuable insight into the religious, artistic, and cultural trends and development of these times.

During the 19th-century Gothic Revival, many Irish cathedrals underwent significant restoration and embellishment. At St. Canice's Cathedral, this included the installation of new stained glass windows, primarily between the 1850s and early 1900s. These windows were part of a broader effort to enrich ecclesiastical interiors with visual narratives that supported worship and biblical instruction.

The stained glass at St. Canice's typically depicts biblical scenes, saints, and moral lessons.





The East Window

One of the most noteworthy of the Cathedral's stained glass window collection, is the East Window.

This stained glass window, located at the far end of the nave and above the altar depicts scenes from the life and death of Christ.

The window was originally commissioned and installed in 1354 by Bishop Richard Ledrede.

On a visit to Kilkenny in 1645, the Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Giovanni Battista Rinuccini, was reportedly so taken with the quality of the stained glass that he offered Bishop David Rothe £700, (a considerable amount of money at the time) to have them transported to Rome. Bishop Rothe declined the offer.

In 1650, only five years after the Papal Nuncio's visit, Kilkenny fell to the forces of Oliver Cromwell's army. The cathedral sustained severe damage during the occupation. The substantial damage included the destruction of the stained glass windows; the lead of which was melted down and used as ammunition, the emptying out of the effigy tombs and destruction of the bells.

Key Dates to remember:

- 516 ● St. Canice was born in Derry
- 1085 ● First mention of St. Canice's in Kilkenny
- 1111 ● St. Canice's raised to Cathedral status, round tower added at this time
- 1169 ● Arrival of the Anglo Normans
- 1202 ● Work on building of new norman Cathedral begins
- 1285 ● Work finishes on new Cathedral
- 1324 ● Trial of Alice Kyteler for witchcraft
- 1354 ● Installation of East Window
- 1536 ● Henry VIII declares himself head of the Church of England
- 1609 ● Kilkenny granted city status
- 1650 ● Cromwell sacks Kilkenny and uses the Cathedral as a military base, destroying the East Window and leaving extensive damage in the process.
- 1756 ● Restoration works by Bishop Pococke
- 1843 ● Major restoration begins under Dean Vignoles
- 1875 ● Great East Window restored
- 1902 ● Cathedral assumes present form, with new stalls and throne

Activities & Worksheets

Spot the differences in the two images below, there are 8 to find.



Complete the following Word Search:

K	I	L	K	E	N	N	Y	Z	O	L	A	A	H	E	K	M	H
O	L	K	R	L	M	Y	T	F	R	E	N	L	P	F	Z	O	D
B	K	T	B	Q	O	H	O	A	G	C	C	I	S	F	B	N	G
I	N	R	Z	M	N	W	W	I	A	T	H	C	A	I	A	U	S
S	I	A	Z	G	K	P	E	S	N	E	O	E	N	G	B	M	T
H	G	N	K	B	S	L	R	L	T	R	R	K	T	Y	H	E	C
O	H	S	B	Q	M	G	L	E	S	N	I	Y	U	T	Z	N	A
P	T	E	S	T	K	I	E	R	A	N	T	T	A	O	G	T	N
J	S	P	X	T	Q	G	U	F	Y	D	E	E	R	M	S	V	I
D	P	T	X	W	K	C	H	O	I	R	S	L	Y	B	B	C	C
Y	M	E	A	S	T	W	I	N	D	O	W	E	H	S	R	R	E
N	O	R	M	A	N	S	L	I	N	V	O	R	F	O	N	T	W

Find the following words in the puzzle.

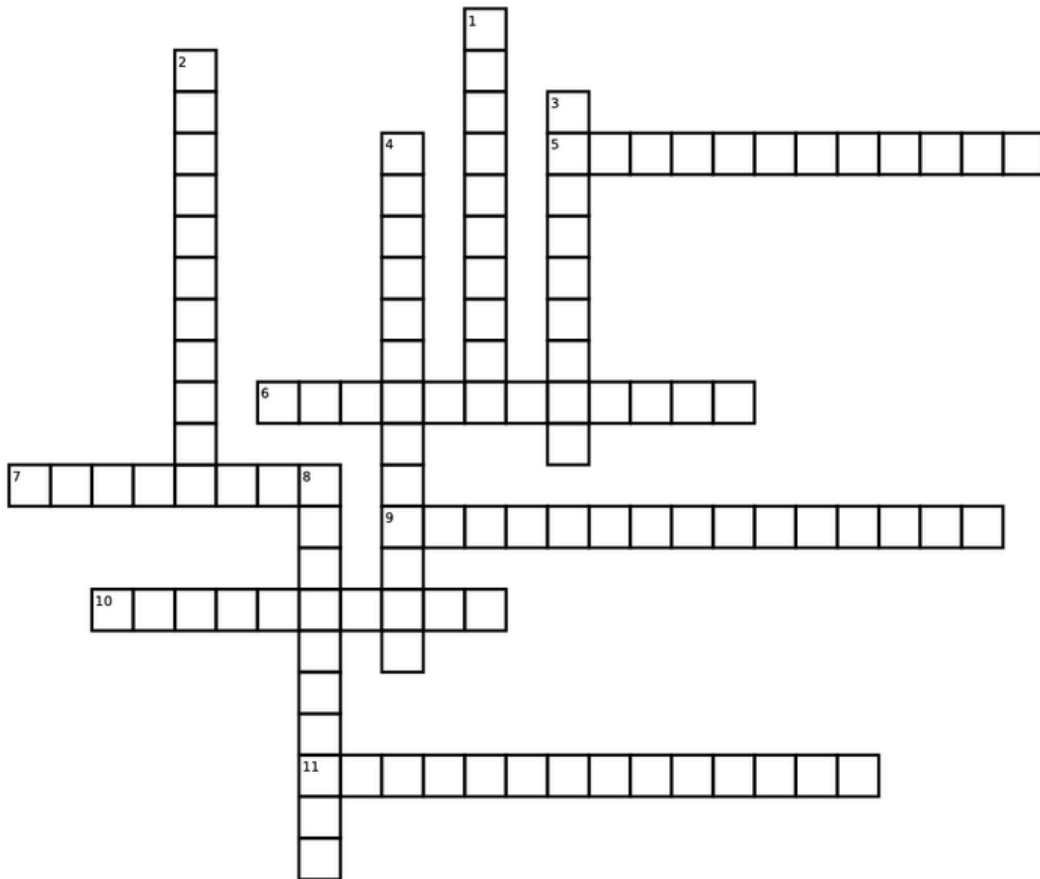
Words are hidden → ↓

ALICE KYTELER
EFFIGY TOMBS
EAST WINDOW
ANCHORITES
ST CANICE
MONUMENT
KILKENNY

TRANSEPT
ST KIERAN
SANTUARY
KNIGHTS
NORMANS
LECTERN
BISHOP

TOWER
ORGAN
MONKS
AISLE
CHOIR
FONT

Complete the following Crossword Puzzle:



Clues:

- 1) Tall, cylindrical structure often found in Ireland, historically used for religious, defensive purposes or as a status symbol.
- 2) The group of people who built St. Canice's Cathedral during the 12th century after the invasion of Ireland.
- 3) Large, important church, often the seat of the Bishop.
- 4) The bishop of Ossory who clashed with the people of Kilkenny during the early 14th century, particularly over heresy charges.
- 5) The wealthy noble woman accused of witchcraft in Kilkenny in the 14th century, known for being the first person in Ireland to be tried for witchcraft.
- 6) The influential Anglo-Norman family that played a key role in Kilkenny's history and was closely associated with the patronage and development of St. Canice's Cathedral.
- 7) The saint whose name is linked to both the cathedral and the round tower in Kilkenny.
- 8) A burial monument with a sculpted likeness, where the deceased is immortalised in stone.
- 9) A medieval manuscript containing religious and administrative records from the Diocese of Ossory, written by Bishop Ledrede.
- 10) The prominent stained glass window in St. Canice's Cathedral, often considered one of the most significant features of the church's architecture.
- 11) The English general whose forces captured Kilkenny in 1650, leading to the destruction of much of the city, including significant damage to St. Canice's Cathedral.

Colouring Pages:

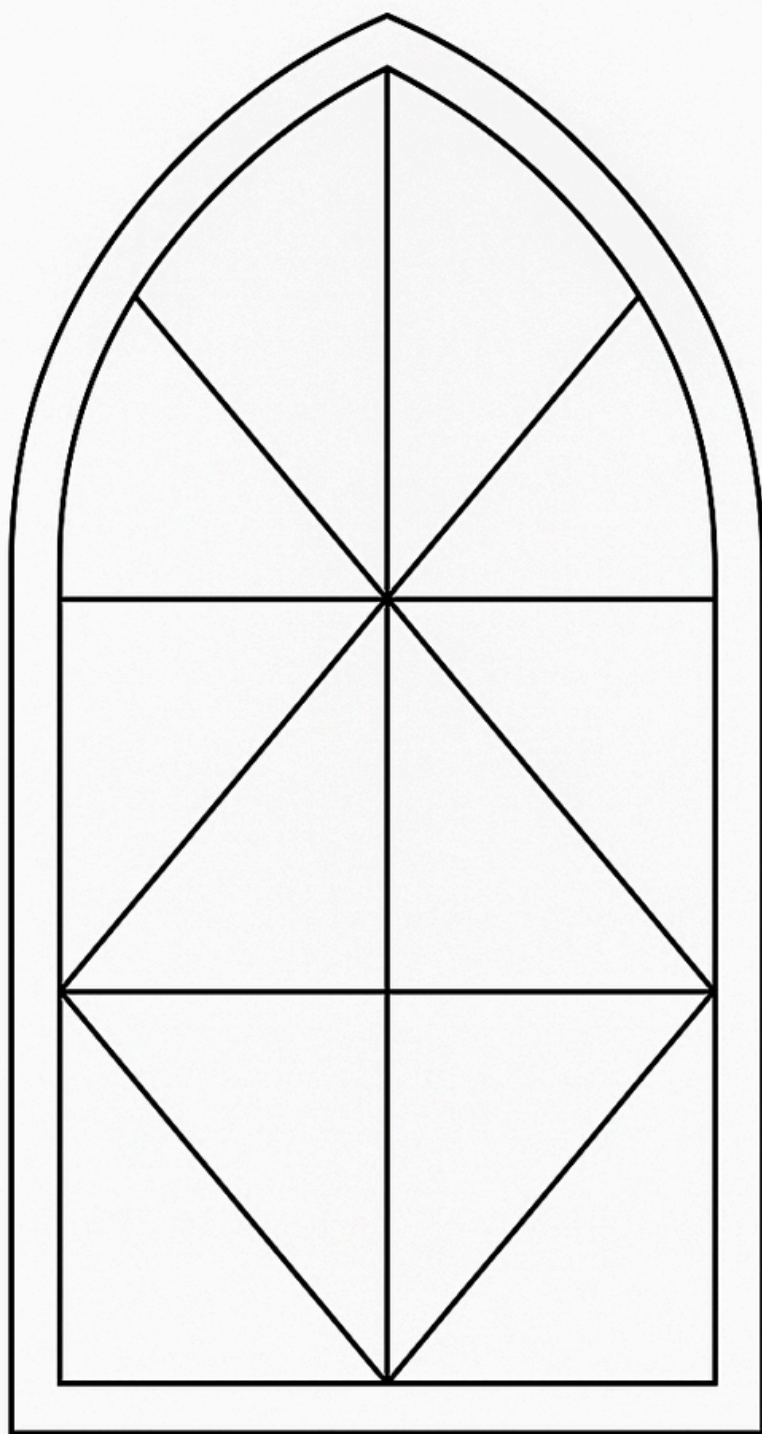


Rua the Knight

Milo the Monk

Design a stained glass window

Design your own stained glass window inspired by something you saw at St, Canice's Cathedral, such as an animal, saint, or Celtic pattern.



Word Scramble

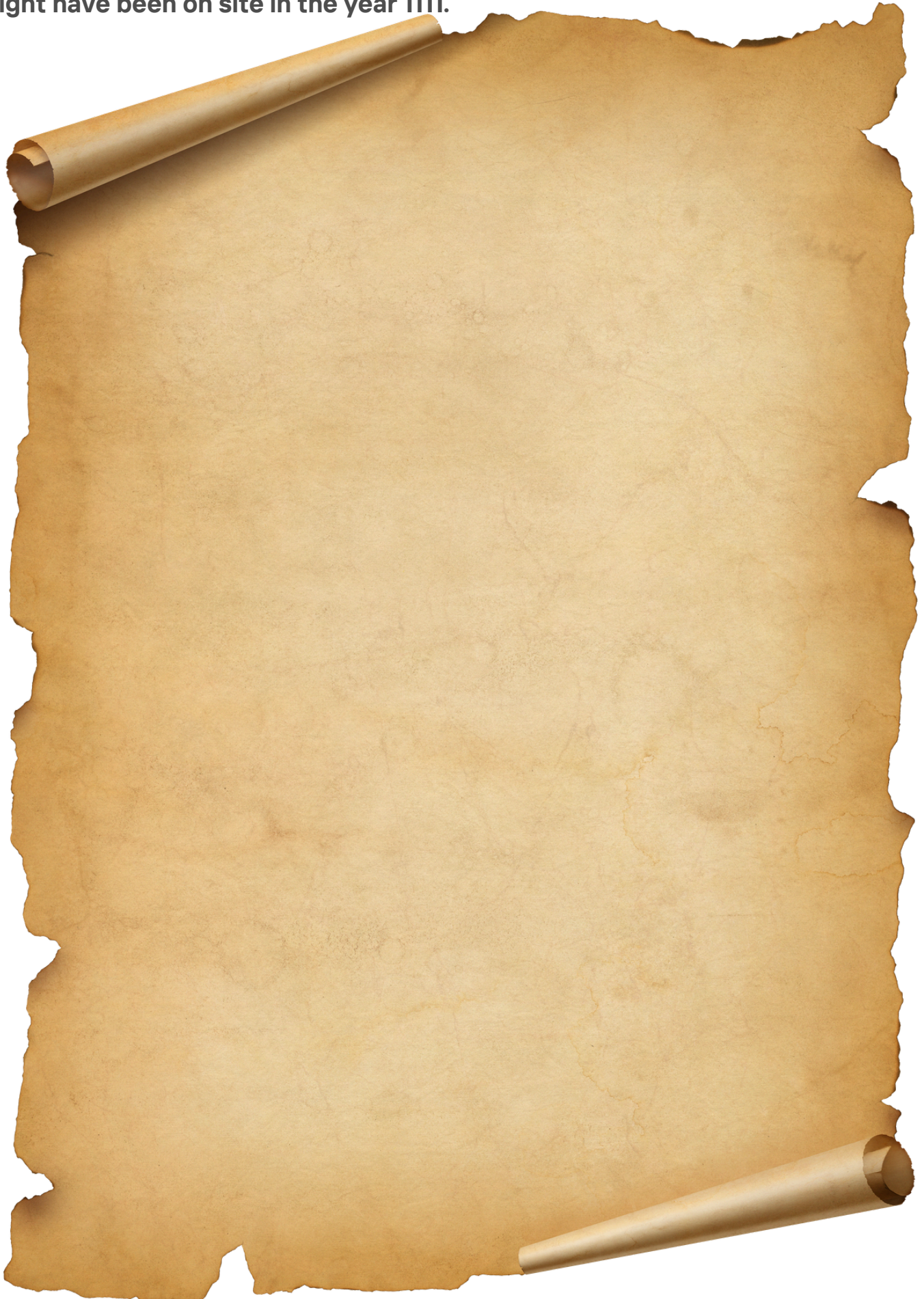
All of the scrambled words below, relate to the Cathedral. Can you unscramble these words? Two of the 'words' are actually two words!

thdraleca	
dilaveem	
twreodunor	
neiaccts	
rkaeints	
gfifeise	
hpsuib	
gsasleidnsta	

Help Bishop Ledrede escape from his prison in Kilkenny Castle and return to the Cathedral...



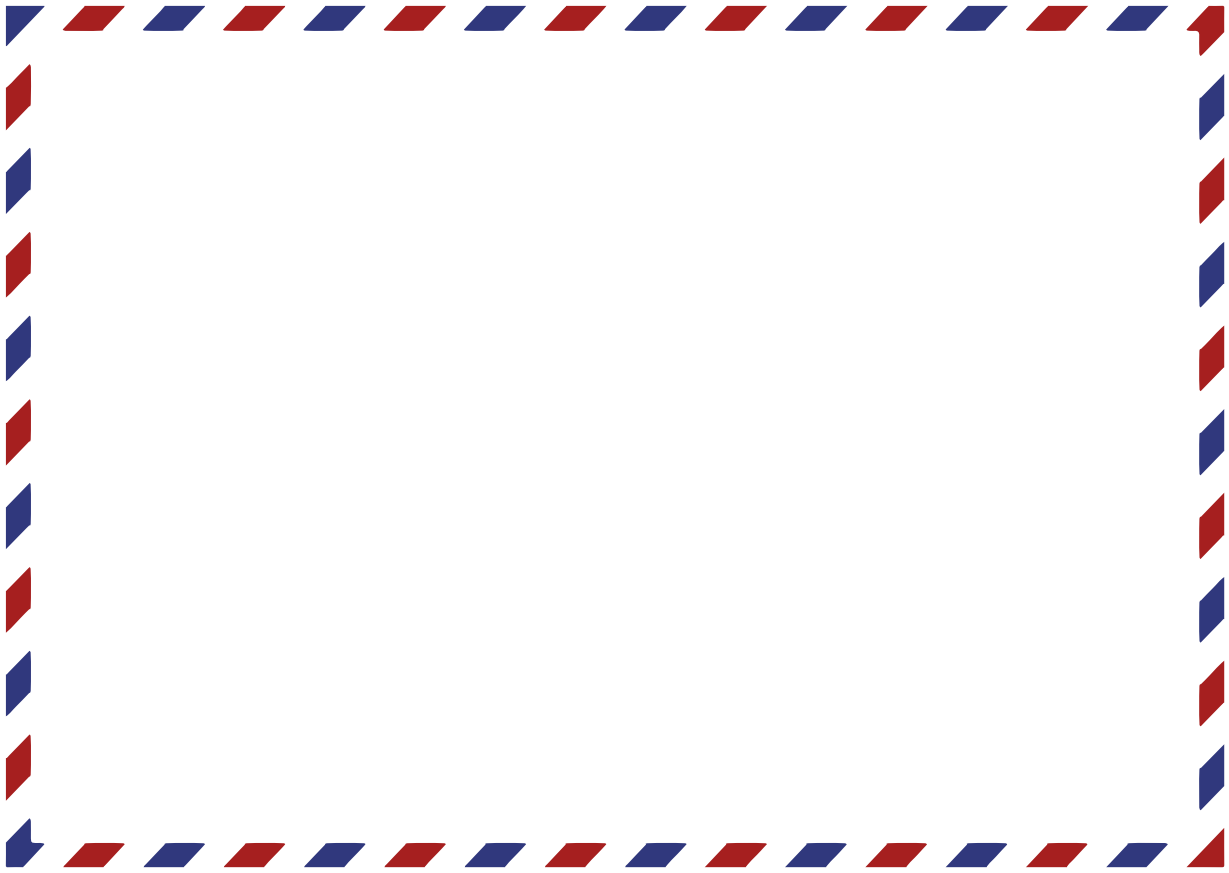
Imagine you are a monk living on the site of the Cathedral in the year 1111. Write a diary entry to describe what an average day might look like and what things are worth noting that might be happening around you... think back to what might have been on site in the year 1111.



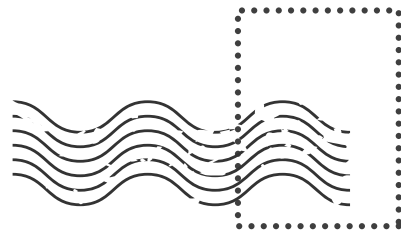
Postcards from St. Canice's Cathedral

Choose an item from the Cathedral - an effigy tomb, the organ, the east window, or even the Round Tower or Cathedral itself - draw this on the front of your postcard.

On the back of your postcard, choose an event or a person from the Cathedral's past and write to a friend about them/ it.



POSTCARD



The below timeline is all muddled up! Help to put the key moments in order with the correct dates! You can cut them out and place them in the correct order, or you can draw a line from the correct date, to the correct moment in history.

516	Great East Window restored
1085	Work finishes on new Cathedral
1111	Cromwell sacks the city of Kilkenny and uses the Cathedral as a military base
1169	Installation of East Window
1202	Restoration works by Bishop Pococke
1285	St. Canice was born in Derry
1324	Kilkenny granted city status
1354	Arrival of Anglo Normans
1536	Major restoration begins under Bishop Vignoles
1609	Trial of Alice Kyteler for witchcraft
1650	Cathedral assumes present form with new stalls and throne
1756	Work on new norman Cathedral begins
1843	St. Canice's raised to Cathedral status. Round Tower built at around this time
1875	First mention of St. Canice in Kilkenny
1902	Henry VIII declares himself head of the Church of England



**From the list of important dates and events above,
choose two to illustrate in the frames below:**

