

Ely Cathedral

When visiting cathedrals it's easy to be overawed by their sheer scale, and by the quantity of remarkable religious artefacts on display. Equally, to those not versed in ecclesiastical and architectural expressions, it's easy to be baffled by unfamiliar terms, eg 'transept', 'lantern', 'presbytery' and 'quire'. I find it's best just to relax and allow yourself to be bowled over by the overall aesthetic impact of the buildings: that's clearly (at least in part) what they were intended for - to inspire awe, whilst being a tangible expression of mankind's devotion to God.



The West Tower

From whatever direction you approach Ely, the landscape is uniformly flat. Agricultural land stretches out endlessly, punctuated by small rural communities. The cathedral is visible from a great distance and is a prominent landmark. While it doesn't dominate the city to the same extent that say Lichfield, Hereford or Worcester cathedrals do, it remains one of the most beautiful examples of grand ecclesiastical architecture in England.

Entering the cathedral by the Galilee Porch, the first part of the cathedral you come to is the West Tower. There is an entrance fee of £6.50 per person, and a short tourist guide costs £2.50. It's not difficult to see where this money is spent, as the building must devour money for heating and maintenance.

We visited Ely on our way back from a short break to the area around King's Lynn, The Wash and the north coast of Norfolk and didn't have too much time to wander round. With less than an hour at my disposal I set about photographing some of the most striking aspects of the building.



Christ in Majesty, a fresco on the ceiling of the West Tower

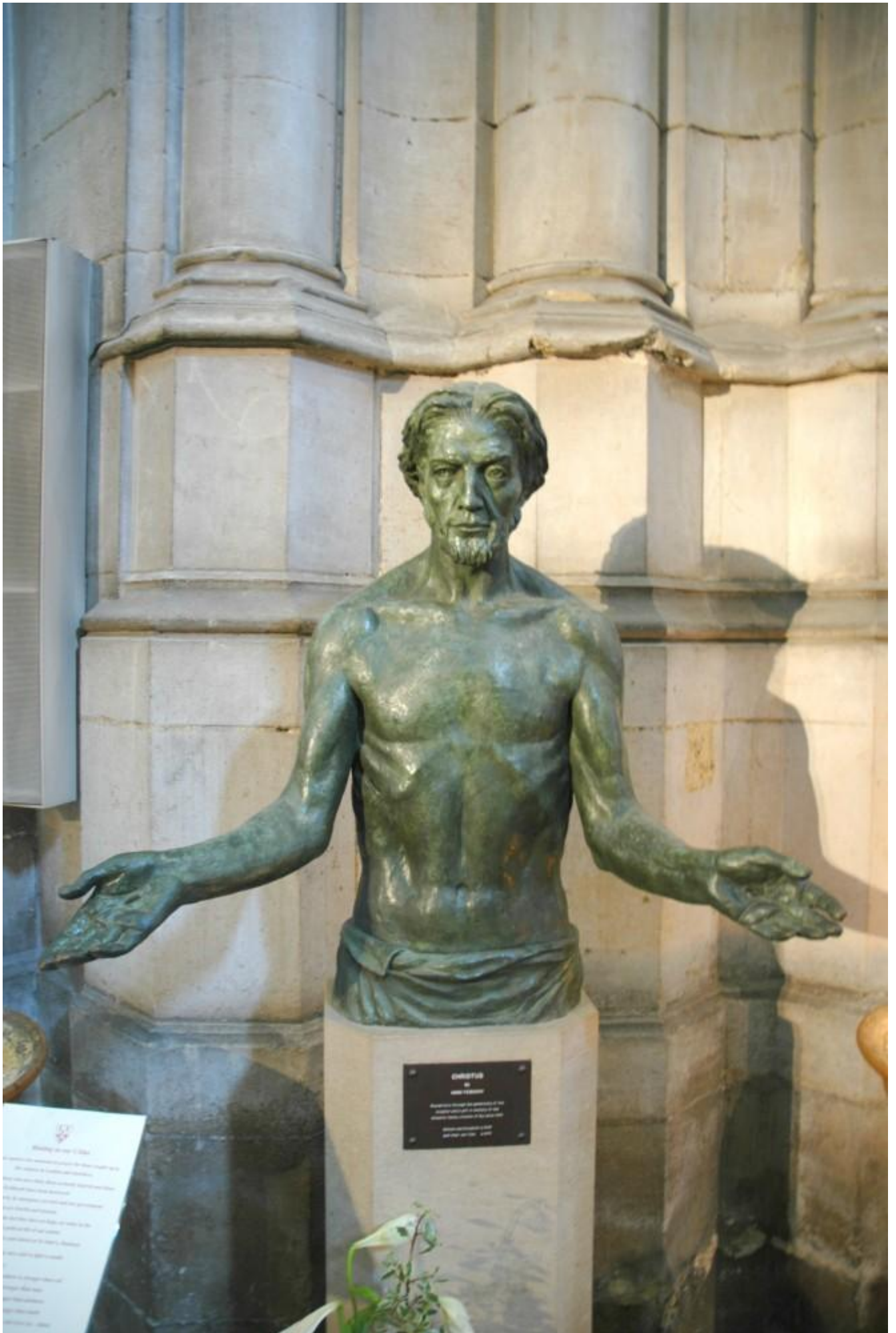


The labyrinth



The Way of Life

Looking upwards to the ceiling of the 215ft West Tower, there is an intricate fresco depicting Christ in Majesty. Under one's feet is a labyrinthine pattern installed in the 19th century. Walking the labyrinth is an ancient spiritual exercise - its twists and turns mirror the journey of life. On the same theme, there is a large sculpture on the north wall called The Way of Life by Jonathan Clarke. A path zigzags up the wall, ultimately ending at the Cross.



CHRISTUS
DE
MILANO

Statua in bronzo del Cristo Redentore di Milano, opera di Giovanni Stanetti, conservata nel Museo del Duomo di Milano.

Museo del Duomo di Milano

Il Museo del Duomo di Milano è un museo di arte e storia, che conserva e mostra le opere d'arte e gli oggetti di culto appartenenti al Duomo di Milano e alla sua storia.

Il Museo è aperto dal lunedì al venerdì, dalle 10.00 alle 18.00. Il sabato e la domenica, dalle 10.00 alle 17.00. L'ingresso è gratuito.

Per informazioni e biglietti, visitate il sito www.museo.duomo.org

'Christus' by Hans Febusch

At the entrance to the Nave there is a very imposing statue of Christ by Hans Febusch that greets visitors to the building. Unlike many statues of Our Saviour, he is depicted as an engaging charismatic figure, yet very much a real person.



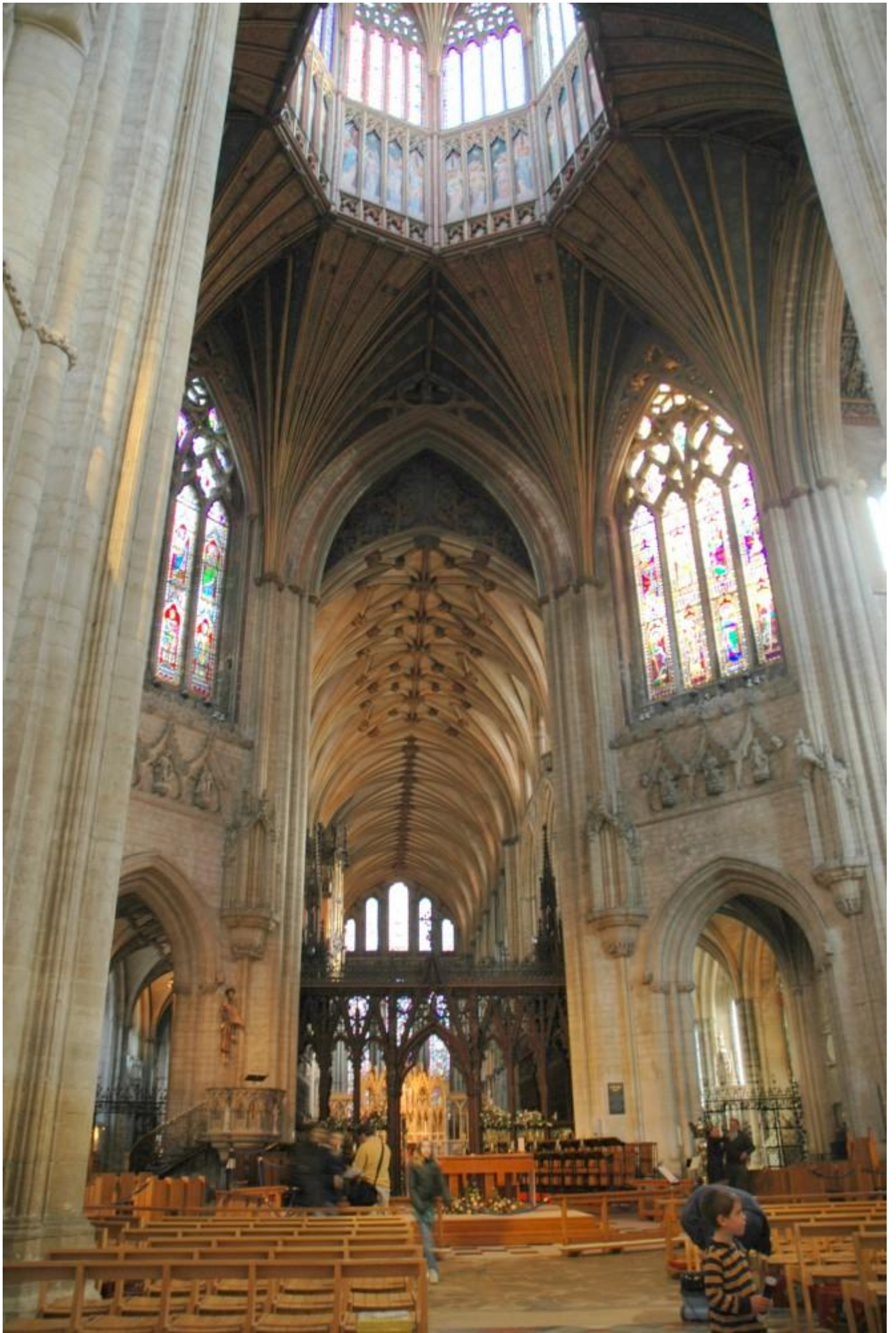
The ceiling in the Nave

On entering the Nave your eye is immediately drawn upwards to the magnificent ceiling, the work of two artists, Henry Styleman le Strange and Thomas Gambier Parry. The ceiling tells the story of the ancestry of Jesus, starting with Adam and continuing through Abraham and David to Mary.



The Prior's door

The Prior's door is on the right as you walk down the Nave. It used to connect the cathedral to the medieval cloister. It is an astonishingly 'busy' piece of sculpture, reminiscent of the elaborately ornate decoration at Kilpeck church in Herefordshire. Above the door is a tympanum, similar to the one at Rowlestone also in Herefordshire, and in the centre is an almond-shaped 'mandorla' with Jesus at its centre, symbolising the new life to be discovered by those who pass through the door.



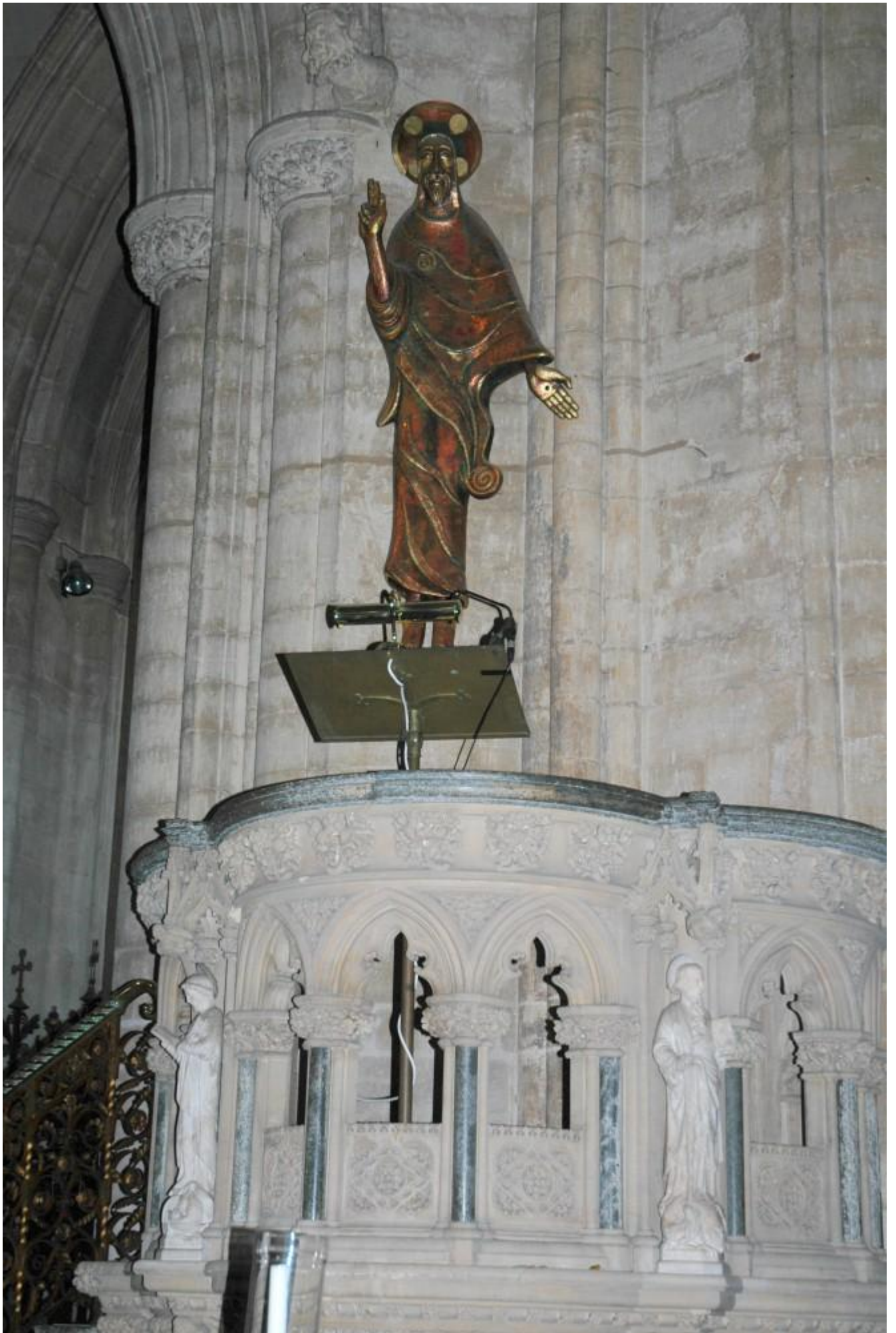
The Octagon and Lantern

Walking down the Nave to the central part of the cathedral, what is now an empty space was once a continuation of the Nave. On 13th February 1322, just after Matins, the Norman central tower collapsed. The noise was so great the monks thought there had been an earthquake, but no one was hurt. What replaced it was a masterpiece of medieval engineering that took 20 years to build - an octagonal structure surmounted by a 'lantern' (an openwork timber construction placed on top of a building to admit light and allow smoke to escape). Octagons are symbolic, standing for the 'eighth day', the time beyond our earthly time that is measured in units of seven days.



The lantern (top centre)

At the centre of the lantern, John of Burwell carved Christ in majesty, ruling over all.



Pulpit and figure of Christ

On the same theme, Christ in Glory by Peter Ball is displayed above the pulpit. It was commissioned to mark the millennium in 2000.

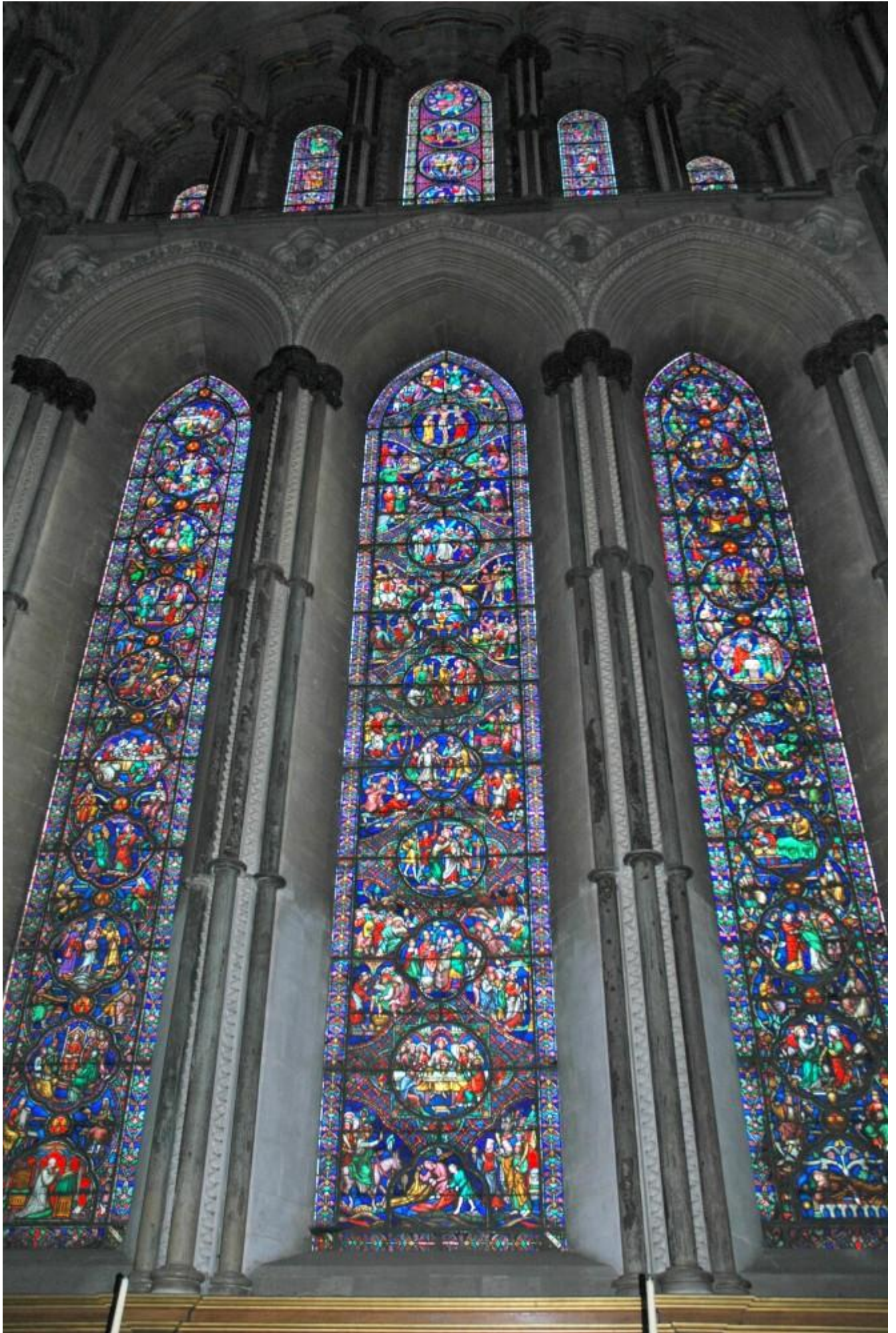


The organ

Walking on to the Choir, the organ case is by Scott and is modelled on the medieval organ at Strasbourg Cathedral.



Reredos



East Window

At the east end of the cathedral can be found the high altar and behind it a magnificent reredos screen. The East Window is equally impressive.



The stone that marks the place where St Etheldreda's shrine once stood.

In the thirteenth century Bishop Hugh Northwold rebuilt the whole of the east end to provide a magnificent setting for the shrine of St Etheldreda who founded a monastery here in 673, and to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims who came to pray there. The shrine was destroyed on the orders of Bishop Goodrich who ordered the destruction of all medieval statues in the aftermath of the Reformation - a black marble stone marks its position now.



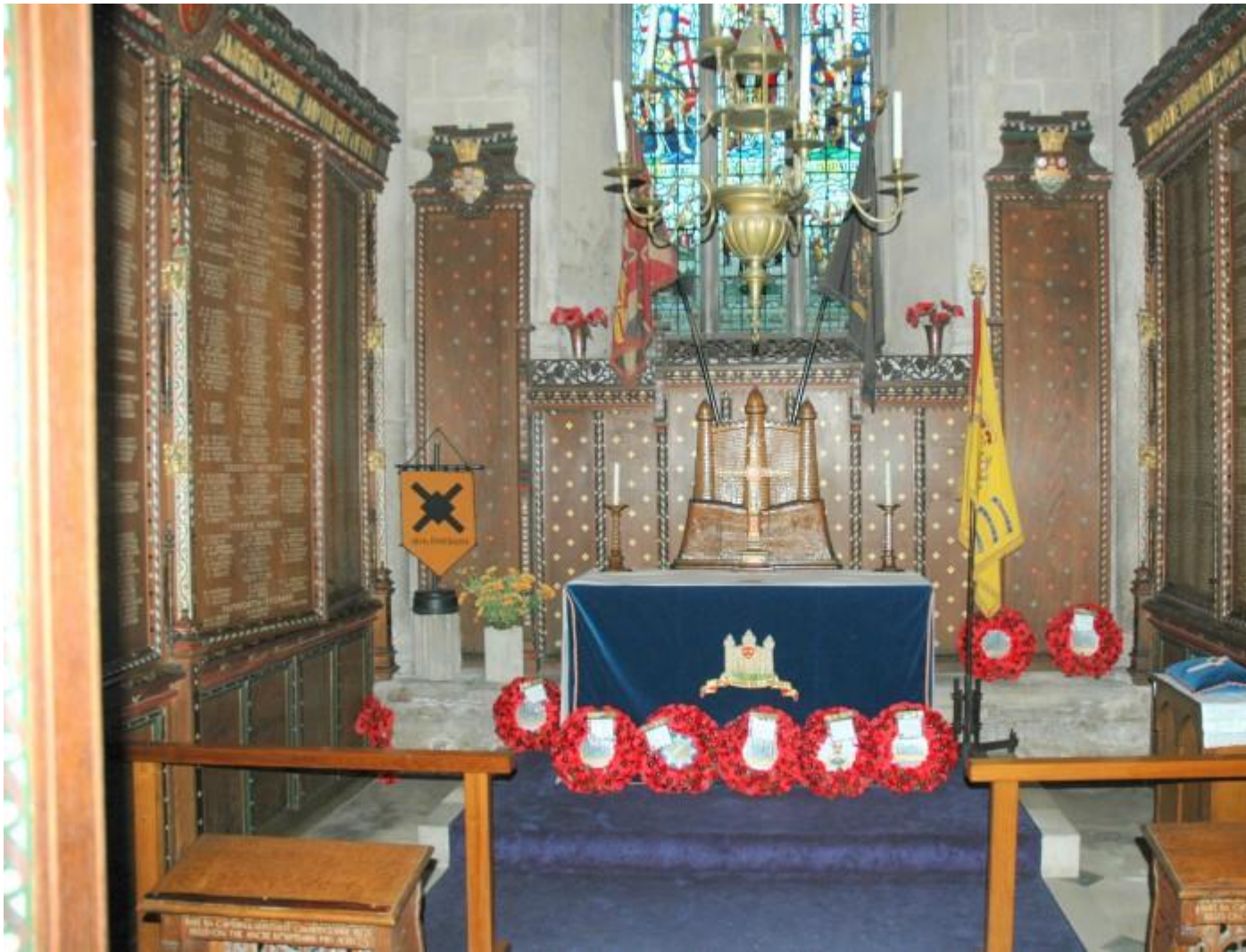
A knight buried with his two wives

In the South Choir Aisle is the tomb of John Tiptoft who died in 1470, who lies between his (two!) wives in 'pious' supplication.



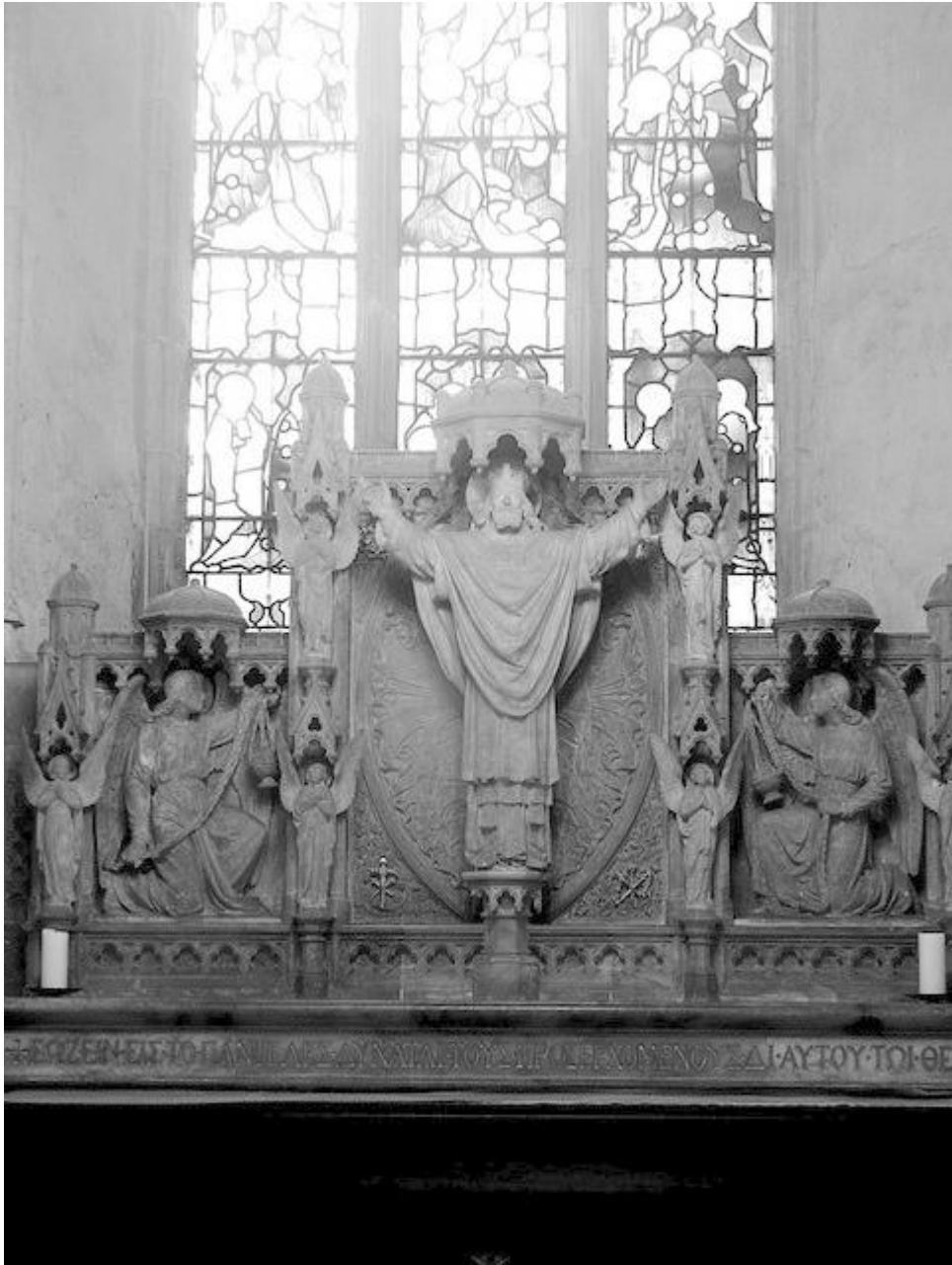
Memorial to Bomber Command

There is a memorial to the men and women of RAF Bomber Command in the North Choir aisle. In the latter stages of World War Two there were many airfields in the area, flying long-range bombing raids over Germany.



St George's military chapel

In the North Transept there is a military chapel dedicated to St George, belonging to the Cambridgeshire Regiment, with panels on either side commemorating the dead of two world wars.



Next door is the chapel of St Edmund, King of East Anglia in the ninth century. A medieval wall painting depicts Edmund's martyrdom at the hands of the Danes, when he was used as target practice by the Danish archers, whilst repeatedly refusing to deny his faith. He is often depicted pierced by arrows. [See separate article](#)

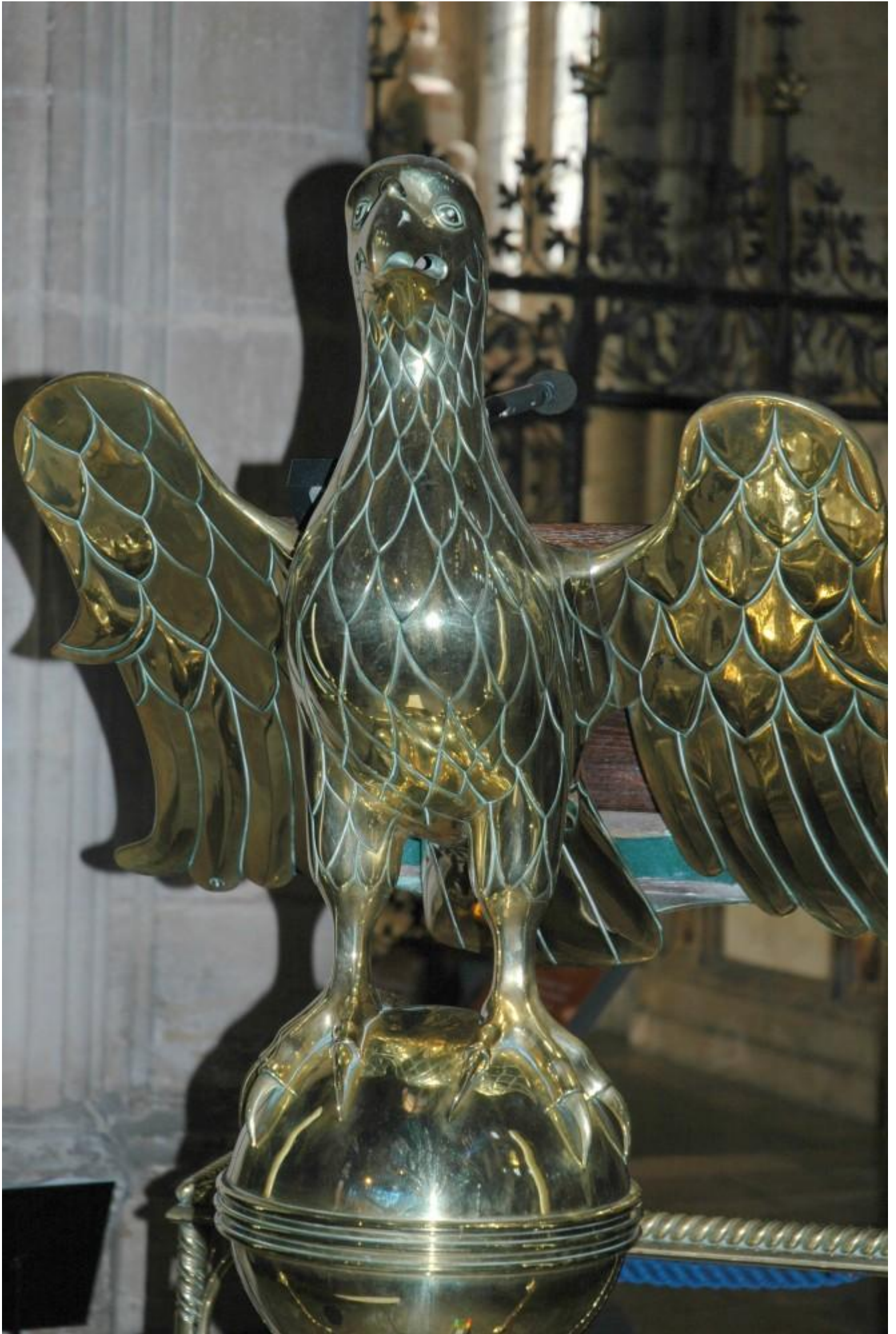


A former Bishop of Ely



A seemingly 'bored' knight!

In the South Choir aisle can be found a number of effigies of medieval knights and former bishops of Ely.



The eagle lectern

Finally, a reminder of Sedgley can be seen in the Octagon, where there is a brass eagle lectern much like ours at All Saints'.

Credit: information for this article was derived from 'Ely Cathedral, A Short Tour', text by Canon Peter Sills. ISBN: 978-1-85759-609-0