

## CANTERBURY CROSS

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Canterbury city has lent its name to a wide range of unrelated objects - Canterbury bells, Canterbury Tales, Canterbury pace (and hence to canter), Canterbury hoe (hoe with angled slim prongs), and several pieces of antique cabinet furniture supposedly favoured by one Archbishop or another (including a sheet music stand and a supper tray). Yet another object derived from the city's name is the Canterbury Cross.



Canterbury cross (courtesy Canterbury Heritage Museum)

The Canterbury Cross has a square at its centre and distinctive curved arms that together form the partial outline of a circle. It gets its Canterbury name from a Saxon brooch of this shape which was dug up in 1867 in St George's Street, close to what is now just St George's tower<sup>1</sup>. Dated to around 850 AD, the original brooch is about 2½ inches in diameter made of bronze with silver panels (more strictly niello, a fusion of silver, copper and lead). It is currently held in the Heritage Museum in Stour Street. Look out for the triquetra (three cornered knot) pattern symbolizing the Trinity which is cut into each arm; also the wavy vine leaf pattern around each panel<sup>2</sup>.

So where can we look in the city for reproductions of this special Canterbury shape? We can start in the city streets, where it has been adopted from time to time for city bollards and railings. We can also look in the cathedral, on the nave wall just inside the South West entrance door. Here we can see the shape in bronze set in stone, and learn that in June 1935 copies were sent to 92 Anglican cathedrals throughout the world - 20 to Australia, 15 to Canada, 11 to South Africa, 6 to New Zealand, down to two in USA and one in The Gambia<sup>3</sup>. It also appears as emblem for the Heritage Museum. Another example can be seen on top of the obelisk and memorial to the 41 Kentish protestant martyrs burnt here 1555 to 1558. The memorial was erected in 1899 in Martyrs' Field Road, Wincheap. The choice of a Canterbury Cross did not please everyone - one writer to the local press pointed out that use of a cross, seen by many 16th century protestants as an idol, 'is the most glaring insult to the memory of the martyrs'<sup>4</sup>. Other uses are less visible - when in 1902 Archbishop Temple was buried in the cathedral garth, his coffin lid bore a simple depiction in oak of the Canterbury Cross<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Canterbury in the Olden Time by John Brent (2nd ed 1879) pg 47

<sup>2</sup> details provided by Canterbury Heritage Museum

<sup>3</sup> Whitstable Times 1 June 1935

<sup>4</sup> Whitstable Times 15 October 1898 Open letter to Dean Farrar

<sup>5</sup> Western Times 26 December 1902



street bollard at corner of Burgate and Lower Bridge Street



Canterbury cathedral nave (south wall)



Emblem of Heritage Museum



Martyrs' Field

Yet another example of the Canterbury Cross can be found on the grave stone at St Martin's of a local surgeon, Frank Wacher. Frank formed part of family that provided the city with successful doctors and surgeons over three generations<sup>6</sup>. He served as Medical Officer of Health for 50 years, and for this was made a Freeman of the city.



Frank Wacher Medical Officer of Health 1878-1928



Frank and Mrs Wacher outside the cathedral

<sup>6</sup> The Kent and Canterbury Hospital 1790-1987 by F Marcus Hall et al (Kent Postgraduate Medical Centre at Canterbury, 1987) pg 199-200



Frank Wachter grave at St Martin's churchyard



Wacher memorial in Dane John Gardens

A memorial in his honour stands in Dane John Gardens, in the form of a drinking fountain (sadly no longer functioning).

Frank's link to the original Canterbury Cross was strongly personal<sup>7</sup>. His brother-in-law, the Mercery Lane jeweller William Trimnell<sup>8</sup>, had purchased the original Saxon brooch and left it in his will to Frank's son, Dr Harold Wachter<sup>9</sup>. The latter, in turn, bequeathed it to the Beaney Museum on his death in 1949. His son David and Harold's wife presented it to the Museum in 1950. So we should thank the Wachter family - without them our museum would almost certainly lack its original Canterbury Cross.

To see the original brooch, ask at the Heritage Museum in Stour Street (open for Christmas period 20 December to 4 January, closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day). For more on the Canterbury Cross and the Wachter family see CHAS web site at <http://www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk>

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<sup>7</sup> Dover Express 26 August 1949

<sup>8</sup> William Trimnell (1836-1908) was son of William Henry Trimnell (born Canterbury 1809) - his sister Mary Ann Trimnell (1846-1938) married Frank Wachter (1850-1935) in 1875 at St Lawrence church Ramsgate

<sup>9</sup> Harold Wachter wrote his MD thesis "A Medical History of the City of Canterbury" in 1928; a summary, including a brief life of Harold Wachter, was published in 1993 by Edward Wilmot