

EDITORS' NOTES

BOOK REVIEW

Cathedrals galore!

For those who love cathedrals (most of us), British publishers have helped sate interest with two major texts which prominently feature Winchester. The first to appear was Simon Jenkins' *Europe's 100 Best Cathedrals* in which Winchester is rated as a 4-star and one of the 25 Best.

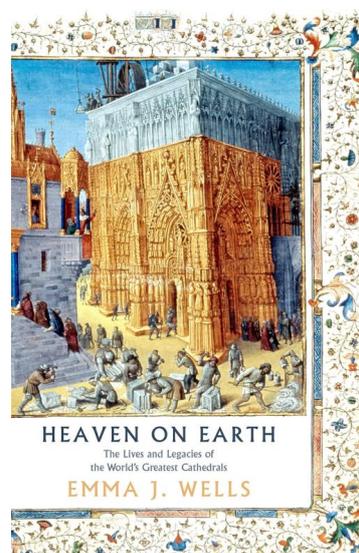
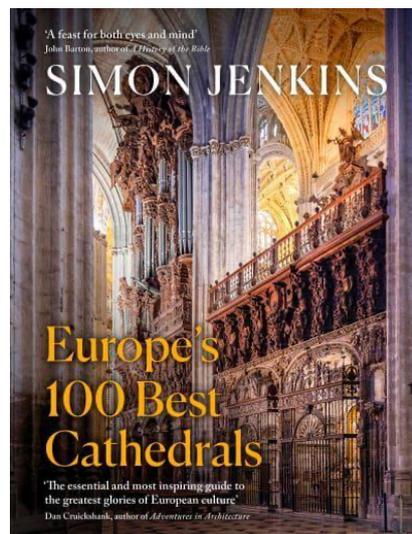
Jenkins' 5-star group is Amiens, Bourges, Chartres, Seville, Toledo, Venice – St Mark's and, sigh, Wells. Winchester is joined in the 4-star cluster by Canterbury, Durham, Ely, and Lincoln and other cathedrals in continental Europe.

As for Winchester itself, "The cathedral exterior is undistinguished ... (but) the interior, however, is breathtaking. Seen from the entrance an avenue of piers disappears eastward rising aloft to form a canopy of semi-fan vaults". In addition to a full-page photo of "Europe's longest nave", the article has photos of Gardiner's chantry and the Gormley statue in a flooded crypt.

Putting aside whether cathedrals need to be rated and given star ratings, the book has well written sections on each cathedral, supported by extensive colour photos. It is a book that readers will return to, again and again. Part of its enjoyment is revisiting cathedrals and planning visits to those you have yet to see. Your reviewer has seen twelve of the so-called "25 Best" and will spend time over winter on plans to visit many of the rest.

The second book, published in September this year, is Emma J. Wells' *Heaven on Earth* which focuses on a smaller group of the "world's greatest cathedrals" which includes Winchester as well as Canterbury, Salisbury and York in the English cluster. Her emphasis is on the evolution of cathedrals, starting with the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, now a mosque, and concluding with Prague's cathedral of Sts Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert and Florence's cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore which is Brunelleschi's masterpiece.

Winchester's story includes the Old and New Minsters and follows a well-known path through to the destruction of the English Reformation and the Civil War a century



EDITORS' NOTES

later. Wells notes that Winchester faded from national prominence and the state of the cathedral declined until the early 20th century. It is now “a rather quiet city” but the cathedral, “still one of the largest in Europe, remains a storehouse of treasures whose layers form a palimpsest of the lives, ambitions and egos of its bishops and masons ...”

Each of the sixteen chapters is an historical case study of a major cathedral and is very accessible to a variety of interests, ranging from expert guides to those who will while away the hours on imagined visits.

Simon Jenkins, *Europe's 100 Best Cathedrals* (London: Viking, 2021). ISBN 9780241452639. £30 but available at discounted price online and through booksellers.

Emma J. Wells, *Heaven on Earth* (London: Apollo, 2022). ISBN 9781788541947. £40, also available at discounted price online and through booksellers.