Chartres Cathedral Essay, Research Paper

Chartres Cathedral is the cathedral church of Notre Dame (Our Lady) in the city of Chartres in northwestern France. It is one of the foremost examples of High Gothic French architecture, and is widely noted not only for its innovations in architecture, but also for its many sculptures and celebrated stained glass.

The oldest parts of the cathedral are taken from a Romanesque church, which was destroyed by a fire in 1194. The present day cathedral was constructed on this church?s foundation, with construction beginning in this same year. It was completed around 1220, and consecrated in 1260, although decorative and other additions were made for several hundred years thereafter. Built of limestone, it stands 112 feet high and 427 feet long. Chartres is the first Gothic cathedral for which the original plans included flying buttresses for structural support. These were used due to the fact that the cathedral displayed tall arcades, unusually narrow triforium and huge clerestory.

Chartres Cathedral is also well known for its 176 stained glass windows which are mostly originals and date from about 1210 to 1260. They cover a surface area of 21,500 square feet. The five windows of the choir hemicycle relate to the Virgin Mary. The rose window in the north transept depicts figures from the Old Testament. The south transept has a rose window depicting the Apocalypse. The cathedral also contains an immense amount of sculpture (over 2000), especially figure sculpture, ranging from giant statues to detailed miniatures. These statues mostly depict scenes from the Old and New Testament. These sculptures are among the first since classical Roman times when carved figures had individualized features. Most of the sculpture in the entryway, called the royal portal, was carved between 1145 and 1170.

Several additions have been made to the cathedral. The most prominent of the later additions is that of the northwest spire, the Clocher Neuf, completed in 1513. Chartres suffered little damage from political and religious wars of the sixteenth century, and less damage than most other cathedrals during the French Revolution. Several restorations were carried out in the 19th century after a fire damaged the roof of the church. In 1979, Chartres Cathedral was dubbed a UNESCO heritage site. During the late 20th century, preservation efforts were made to protect the cathedral?s stained glass from damage by air pollution.