Secrets of the Dead: Building Notre Dame

Premieres Tuesday, April 28 at 8 p.m. on PBS (check local listings), pbs.org/secrets and the PBS Video app

Synopsis
How did the Notre Dame cathedral emerge over the centuries as one of the world’s most celebrated and beloved buildings? Secrets of the Dead: Building Notre Dame takes viewers on a major historical and scientific investigation into the construction of Notre Dame de Paris, which began in the 12th century and was completed several hundred years later. Standing alongside the builders of yesterday and today, uncover the vast architectural, technical, human, financial and political challenges experienced throughout the cathedral’s turbulent history.

Short Listing
Follow an in-depth investigation into the centuries-long construction of Notre Dame de Paris.

Long Listing
Follow an investigation into the centuries-long construction of Notre Dame de Paris, uncovering the vast architectural, technical and human challenges experienced throughout the turbulent history of one of the world’s most celebrated buildings.
Running Time: 60 minutes

Film Interviewees
- Ken Follett - Novelist; Author of “The Pillars of the Earth”
- Yann Potin - Historian, French National Archives
- Caroline Bruzelius - Historian, Duke University
- Dany Sandron - Historian, Sorbonne University
- Philippe Villeneuve - Chief Architect of France’s Historic Monuments, in charge of Notre-Dame de Paris
- Stephan Albrecht - Historian, University of Bamberg
- Olivier de Châlus - Historian, Sorbonne University
- Jean-Michel Leniaud - Architectural Historian
- François Icher - Historian, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)
- Florian Renucci - Master Mason, Guédelon Castle Building Site

Noteworthy Facts
- Following his election in 1160, Maurice de Sully, bishop of Paris, set his sights on constructing a new, grand cathedral. Pope Alexander III and King Louis VII blessed the first stone of the new cathedral in the spring of 1163.
- Notre Dame de Paris was named in honor of the Virgin Mary, who was becoming an increasingly popular figure in Catholicism.
- The construction of Notre Dame took full advantage of the technical innovations that defined Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages, including arches that allowed the cathedral’s vaults to rise higher and made it possible to install large bays of windows that rivaled the architecture of other churches of the time.
- Construction of Notre Dame entered a second phase under the reign of King Philippe Auguste, who decided to make Paris the capital of France. During his reign, France became a European power and the population of Paris doubled.
- To construct the complex vaulted ceiling, the builders built a wooden framework on pillars; then stone blocks were placed on top of the framework one by one. These “ribs” of stone blocks came together to lock with the keystone, allowing more stone blocks to be used to enclose the vaults.
- In the early 13th century, the builders realized they needed a system that would carry rainwater away from the cathedral’s exterior stone walls to prevent erosion and damage. They hollowed out the tops of the flying buttresses and connected them to form a network for water collection, with the water shooting out of the mouths of gargoyles that cap each of the flying buttresses.
By the mid-13th century, after 70 years of construction, the general form of Notre Dame de Paris was finished, complete with heavy bronze bells that marked the rhythms of daily life for Parisians.

As the Renaissance blossoms in the 14th century, the architectural style of Notre Dame, now known as Gothic, begins to fall out of favor. As centuries pass, Notre Dame takes on an increasingly larger role in civic life because of its ability to host massive crowds due to its size.

In 1831, the release of poet Victor Hugo’s history-making novel “The Hunchback of Notre Dame” gives new life to the cathedral, with Parisians now viewing it as a national treasure.

Restoration of the cathedral began in 1843 under architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

Series Overview
Now in its 18th season, Secrets of the Dead continues to captivate PBS viewers on air, online and beyond, using the latest scientific discoveries to challenge prevailing ideas and share fresh perspectives on historical events. Secrets of the Dead is available for streaming simultaneously on all station-branded PBS platforms, including PBS.org and the PBS Video app, which is available on iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV and Chromecast. PBS station members can view episodes via Passport (contact your local PBS station for details).


Production Credits

Underwriters
Funding for Secrets of the Dead is provided by public television viewers.

About WNET
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presents a wide range of acclaimed PBS series, including *Nature, Great Performances, American Masters, PBS NewsHour Weekend*, and the nightly interview program *Amanpour and Company*. In addition, WNET produces numerous documentaries, children’s programs, and local news and cultural offerings, as well as multi-platform initiatives addressing poverty and climate. Through THIRTEEN Passport and WLIW Passport, station members can stream new and archival THIRTEEN, WLIW and PBS programming anytime, anywhere.

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