



The Welsh Marches

Castles, abbeys and parish churches

1620 June 2025 (ML 719)

5 days • £1,820

Lecturer: Imogen Corrigan

Well-balanced survey of the outstanding medieval monuments of the Welsh Marches.

Churches and castles from Norman to late Perpendicular.

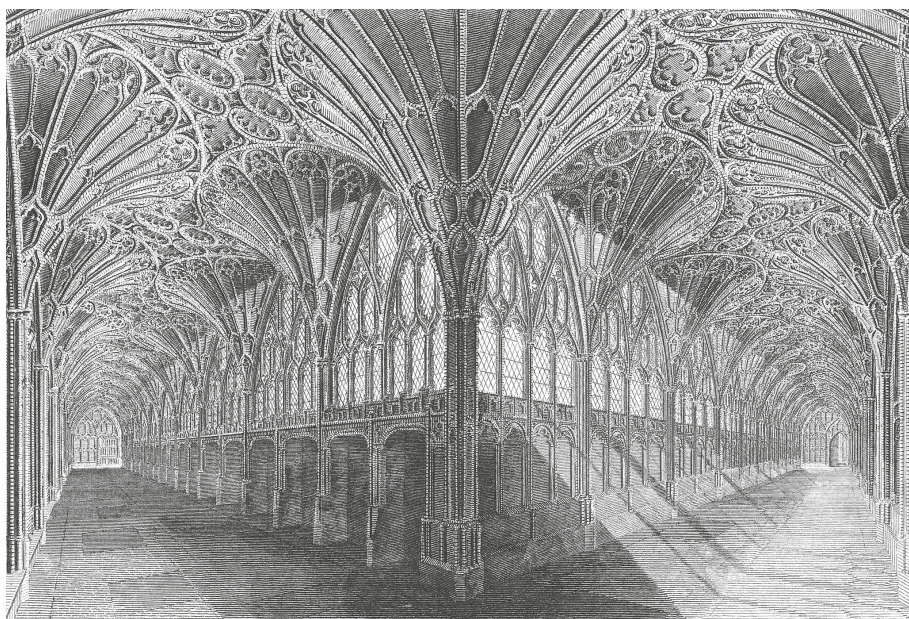
Beautiful drives through rolling verdant landscapes.

Led by John McNeill, architectural historian and specialist in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The Welsh Marches possess one of the richest collections of medieval monuments to survive in Britain – an area where one can pick out examples from every important post-Conquest phase of castle and church building, from the exceptionally early great hall at Chepstow castle to Sir William Herbert's stunning late 15th-century remodelling of Raglan.

As conceived by William the Conqueror, the March consisted of three earldoms – Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire – with William Fitz-Osbern, Earl of Hereford and Roger de Montgomerie in Shropshire being initially the most active of the earls. The Normans settled this land by creating an interlocking series of castles, markets and churches, exemplified in the great new towns such as Chepstow, along with a complementary network of monasteries at sites such as Monmouth, Brecon and Abergavenny. By the early 12th century, smaller castellans – sub-tenants like Hugh the Forester at Kilpeck and the Lacy family at Kempeley – were beginning to build stone parish churches, the survival of which constitutes one of the great glories of Herefordshire.

The tour concentrates on the southern March – namely Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and the Severn Valley – though a significant element of the tour is aesthetic, and concerned with the type of architecture developed by the new Norman settlers. As with much of southern England, the Welsh Marches experienced a large-scale rebuilding during the period c. 1080–c. 1200 – but the evidence is much stronger here than in, say, East Anglia. Indeed, the monastic churches of Gloucester and Tewkesbury, along with Hereford cathedral, constitute some of the most inventive buildings of medieval England,



Gloucester, cathedral cloister, engraving c. 1820.

immeasurably enhanced by the remarkable survival of their secular counterparts in the castles and manor houses of Chepstow, Goodrich, Raglan and Tretower.

Itinerary

Day 1: Gloucester, Abergavenny. The tour leaves from Gloucester railway station at 1.30pm. The procession of tall cylindrical pillars in Gloucester Cathedral's nave is unadulterated Norman, but, following the burial of Edward II in 1327, the eastern parts are exquisitely veiled in the first large-scale appearance of Perpendicular architecture. The east window, which retains its medieval stained glass, is one of the largest in Europe.

Day 2: Monmouth, Chepstow, Tintern, Raglan. A day along the river Wye beginning with Monmouth before moving on to mighty Chepstow whose planning crystallises the classic pattern of Norman conquest and settlement – a magnificently fortified castle towering over the priory and town. The afternoon juxtaposes Tintern – a dazzling amalgam of piers, tracery, dwarf walls and dispersed stonework – and Raglan, the most enthralling of late medieval Welsh castles.

Day 3: Kilpeck, Hereford, Castle Frome, Dymock, Kempeley. A great day for Herefordshire Romanesque, starting with

perhaps the best known of all English Romanesque parish churches at Kilpeck. Hereford Cathedral was substantially remodelled in the 13th and 14th centuries, during which time it acquired its famous Mappa Mundi. An afternoon of contrasts, with the greatest of the Herefordshire fonts at Castle Frome a wonderful foil to the Romanesque wall paintings and sculpture at Dymock and Kempeley.

Day 4: Tretower, Brecon, Abbey Dore, Rowstone. Drive towards the Black Mountains to the delightful castle and manor house at Tretower Court. Thence to Brecon Priory (now cathedral), Bernard of Newmarch's western bulwark and the first of the Norman Welsh churches. Return via the stunning choir at the Cistercian abbey at Abbey Dore and end the day with the tiny jewel-like Romanesque parish church at Rowstone.

Day 5: Goodrich, Tewkesbury. Start with the arrestingly-sited sandstone castle at Goodrich before winding down to the Severn at Tewkesbury. Long recognised as Gloucester's architectural twin, Tewkesbury is a fitting finale. Its stunning Norman nave and transept ravishingly transformed by 14th-century vaults. End at Gloucester railway station by 3.00pm.

The Welsh Marches continued

Lecturer

John McNeill. Specialist in the Middle Ages and Renaissance – John lectures for Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education. He is Honorary Secretary of the British Archaeological Association, for whom he has edited and contributed to collections of essays on medieval cloisters, chantries, Anjou, and King's Lynn and the Fens. In 2010 he established a biennial series of international conferences on Romanesque visual culture. His most recent effort in this field – *Romanesque Saints, Shrines, and Pilgrimage* – was published in 2020. He is also author of the *Blue Guides* to both Normandy and the Loire Valley.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £1,820. **Single occupancy:** £2,160.

Included: accommodation as described below; travel by private coach; all breakfasts and three dinners, with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and donations; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager. Members of English Heritage (with cards) will be refunded c. £30.

Accommodation. The Angel Hotel, Abergavenny (angelabergavenny.com): a former Georgian coaching-inn, now a 4-star hotel with comfortable rooms and excellent restaurant. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. The tour involves a lot of walking, sometimes where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing in churches. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. There is also a lot of driving on narrow lanes; average distance per day: 69 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: Lincolnshire Churches, 23–27 June 2025.