



Medieval Oxfordshire

And the Southern Cotswolds

30 June–4 July 2025 (ML 730)

5 days • £1,770

Lecturer: John McNeill

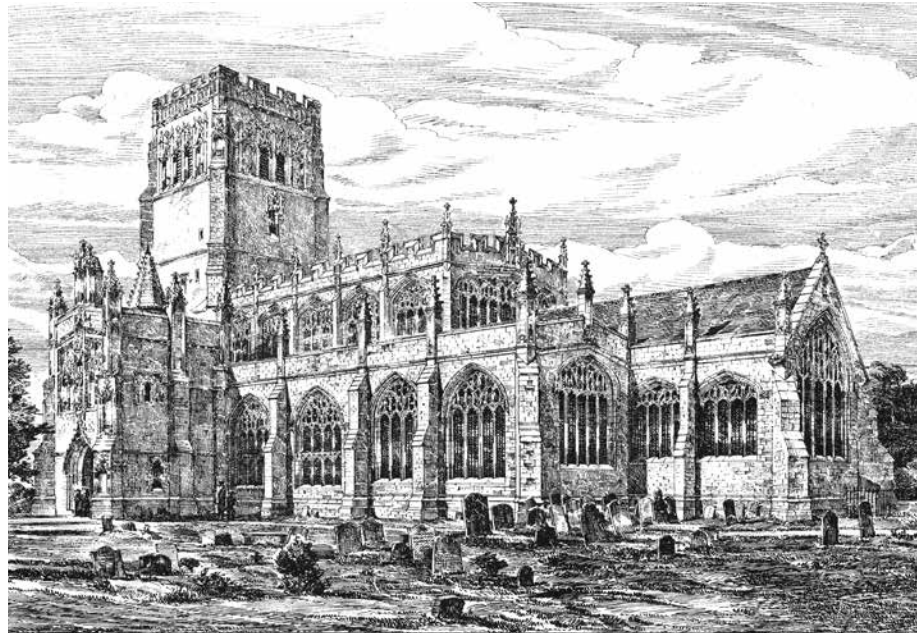
Varied survey of the major and minor medieval monuments of Oxfordshire and south Gloucestershire.

Beautiful drives through verdant landscapes.

One hotel throughout, a country inn in the historic market town of Burford.

Geologically varied and drained by the river Thames and its tributaries, Oxfordshire retains a remarkable group of medieval buildings. A bishopric was founded at Dorchester by St Birinus in 635, to be followed by the christianisation of the middle Thames valley over the next few decades. Monasteries were established at Oxford, Cirencester and Malmesbury, while significant religious sanctuaries were set up on the river islands. The preeminent centre is, of course, Oxford – famed not so much for its Anglo-Saxon past as for its university and colleges. The university never had more than a handful of buildings of its own over the Middle Ages, having adopted the parish church on the High Street for its assemblies, though the construction of the Divinity School and outstanding gift of books by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1390–1447), began a process which resulted in a spectacular series of buildings at the heart of the university area. The colleges, by contrast, invested in architecture on a huge scale from the outset, creating a series of set-pieces of which Merton and New College were to prove the most influential.

Outside the city, particularly to the south and west, Oxfordshire and the southern Cotswolds became hotbeds of architectural innovation, wonderfully embodied at great church level in the new choir and presbytery at Dorchester Abbey, and on a small scale at Ewelme and North Leigh. The area around Witney boasts a cluster of parish churches of national importance, while to the west lie the arrestingly well-preserved towns of Burford, Northleach and Cirencester.



Northleach, Church of St Peter and Paul, lithograph published by Vincent Brooks Day & Son c. 1875.

Itinerary

Day 1: Iffley, North Leigh, Burford. The coach leaves Oxford railway station at 2.00pm for the short drive to St Mary at Iffley, the most impressive of Oxfordshire's Romanesque parish churches. Continue to North Leigh to examine an engagingly piecemeal church, extended to the north by the exquisite 15th-century Wilcote chantry. First of four nights in Burford.

Day 2: Northleach, Cirencester, Malmesbury, Inglesham. An opportunity to venture into Gloucestershire, to the magnificent wool church at Northleach and thence to Cirencester, the attractions being the huge market church and important Roman collections in the nearby Corinium Museum. The afternoon will unfold in the great Benedictine abbey of Malmesbury before the wonderfully unrestored church of John the Baptist at Inglesham.

Day 3: Oxford. A day devoted to Oxford. Start with Christ Church Cathedral, a former Augustinian church built towards the end of the 12th century and variously enhanced (with some stunning stained glass) over the ensuing centuries. This we will follow with the late medieval University church of St Mary and the

show-stopping Divinity School. The afternoon highlights Merton College, the first of Oxford's colleges to be endowed and built on the scale of a Parisian academic college, and New College, William of Wykeham's foundation, beautifully constructed within a surviving angle of the city's medieval walls.

Day 4: Stanton Harcourt, Cogges, Ducklington, Witney, Bampton, Kelmscott. A parish church day measured out among the villages and small towns of south and west Oxfordshire. Begin with the 13th-century church of St Michael at Stanton Harcourt and let the day develop via two richly carved Decorated churches at Cogges and Ducklington, majestic Witney, the related cruciform church of Bampton, and tiny rustic Kelmscott.

Day 5: Ewelme, Dorchester. Morning drive to that marvellous conjunction of school, almshouse and church that makes Ewelme one of the most rewarding early 15th-century sites to survive in southern England. Continue to Dorchester, whose Romanesque church received the most imaginative, idiosyncratic and influential 14th-century choir of the middle Thames valley. Return to Oxford railway station by 3.30 pm.

Medieval Oxfordshire
continued

Lecturer

John McNeill. Specialist in the Middle Ages and Renaissance – 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: £1,770.

Single occupancy: £2,050.

Included: travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts and three dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions and donations; tips for restaurant staff and drivers; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The Bay Tree, Burford (cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk/the-bay-tree-hotel): located in a historic Cotswolds market town, bedrooms are spread between the main house, garden rooms, and cottages. Due to the nature of the building, there are lots of stairs and some floors are uneven. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This tour involves quite a lot of getting on and off coaches and standing around and should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 48 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.