

The Medieval churches of Herefordshire

Herefordshire has an incredible collection of Medieval churches, including majestic Hereford Cathedral and the Norman church at Kilpeck, famous for the carved faces that are inside and out.

This four-day tour, led by ecclesiastical historian Dr Samantha Harper, takes you to a wonderful selection of churches, cathedrals and abbeys to discover the incredible stories of Benedictine and Cistercian monks, the Templars of the Welsh Marches and religion and society on the unruly border of England and Wales.

Each church is captivating in its own way, and Samantha will help you explore and admire the amazing array of architecture, intricate decorations and craftsmanship, and the secrets hidden throughout these awe-inspiring buildings.



Guests enjoying Hereford's Medieval churches with Dr Samantha Harper



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Reviews

"We visited a great selection of beautiful churches. The lovely small group meant there was lots of personal attention and the programme was designed well to give lots of time to enjoy each church. At no point was the tour and everything, including after-dinner conversation, was stitched together seamlessly by Sam Harper, who was more than generous with her knowledge."

The expert leading your tour

[Dr Samantha Harper](#) specialises in late Medieval political British History and has a particular interest in lay religion pre and post Reformation. She has published a range of academic articles in prestigious journals and her book, 'London and the Crown, 1461-1529', will be published by the Oxford University Press in 2022. Samantha recently worked on the 'Tudor Chamber Books' project which transcribed and published these valuable documents online for both general and academic use.

She has more than 10 years of university teaching experience at Winchester and Bristol universities and currently works for Oxford University, advising academics on how to ensure that their research has a 'life beyond the shelf' and is accessible to general audiences.

Locations you'll visit on this tour

- Hereford Cathedral
- Abbeydore, founded by French Cistercians
- St Michael's, an intriguing 13th century church
- Garway Church, the most powerful Templar church in the Welsh Marches
- Kilpeck Church, the most famous church in Herefordshire
- Ledbury Church, mixing architecture from all ages
- St. Bartholomew's, home of the 'sleeping beauty'
- St. Dubricius Church, a beautiful church on the banks of the Wye

Included in your holiday

- Expert guide
- Luxury hotel accommodation
- Entry to all churches, including some exclusive access
- Breakfast and dinner each day



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Book this tour

This four-day tour costs from £1,319 per person, based on two sharing if you are taking part in the tours, and from £1,099 if you are not taking part in the daily tours.

There is no single supplement for individuals staying in single rooms, and a small extra charge for individuals in twin or double rooms.

Available dates

This tour departs on 21 August 2023. Reserve your place with a low 10% deposit.

Please note, that we require a minimum of five guests for this tour to go ahead. If this number is not reached within four weeks of the departure date we reserve the right to cancel the tour and will offer you a full refund or the chance to move your booking to a later date.

Itinerary

DAY 1

The best place to view All Saints Church, in Hereford, is from a table in a coffee shop at the west end of the church. This 13th century church will provide the ideal backdrop for a brief overview of the tour, as we look ahead to the sites we will visit.

After this introduction, we head to Hereford Cathedral for our first tour.

DAY 2

We start the day with the spectacular, austere, Abbeydore. Founded in 1147 by French Cistercian Monks from Morimond, the nave has gone, but the footprint of much of the old abbey church remains, most of which dates from 1180. The architecture of the transepts, crossing and chancel reflect the change in fashion at this time, from Romanesque and Norman to Early Gothic.



After lunch, we go to St Michael's Church and Garway Church. St Michael's is an intriguing 13th century church on a rectangular plan, created from an earlier 12th century round church built by the Knights Templar. The Templars built their churches on a circular foundation, in emulation of the Temple of Solomon (Al Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem. The rounded foundations of the earlier Templar church were uncovered by excavations in the 20th century and can be viewed to the north of the current nave.

At the time of its foundation, Garway was the most powerful Templar church in the Welsh Marches and today is only one of six Knights Templar churches left in England. The chancel arch of the round Templar church was used as the chancel arch for the 13th century building. The church that stands today is composed of a nave, chancel, and south chapel, joined to a detached 70 foot high tower by a 17th century passage.

Our final stop for the day is Kilpeck Church, which is probably the most famous church in Herefordshire thanks to the quality of its exquisite, intricate and wonderfully preserved Herefordshire School of Romanesque carvings. The Book of Llandaff, the Chartulary of the church of Llandaff, suggests a church existed at Kilpeck in the 8th century.

The present church was built perhaps in 1134 when a priory cell of Benedictines was established.



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DAY 3

Our busiest day starts with Leominster (pronounced 'Lemster'). Though much of the priory church has disappeared over the centuries, what remains is magnificent. The church comprises of three large chambers and a Norman north nave and aisle, each dating from a distinct era of English architecture. The Norman tower displays arched windows and carved doorway of the Herefordshire school, which we met at Kilpeck the previous day. Fun fact – Leominster possesses the last ducking stool to be used in England. In 1809 Jenny Pipes was ducked in the local river, though quite for what crime is sadly not recorded.

On to St. Michael's at Ledbury. Set in a pretty little Georgian town, with the odd medieval building thrown into its rabbit warren streets, is this gem of a church.

Built initially as a collegiate church, then as a minister, and ended up as a parish, it is of impressive size with some interesting features. A church of all periods, with a Norman west front, 12th century chancel, 13th century nave, 14th century chapter house – one could go on, but suffice to say that each successive age left its mark. The medieval tower, topped with a spire in the 18th century, sits detached from the church to the north. We shall pause in Ledbury to look around the town and eat lunch.

Much Marcle's church of St. Bartholomew is famous for its 'sleeping beauty' effigy of Blanche Mortimer. Other tombs in the church allow us to contemplate how the rich medieval gentry wished to be seen; a local gentleman in civilian dress dates from c.1360, and a 14th century knight and his lady lie north of the chancel. Contrast these medieval tombs with the central 17th century tomb of Sir John Kyrle and his wife – a magnificent tomb for a Parliamentarian supporter of Cromwell.



Lastly, Kempsey's St. Mary's church is the interloper on our list, as it is actually in Gloucestershire rather than Herefordshire, but it would be a crime to miss seeing its Norman wall paintings as we are so close. The nave murals are 14th century fragments, including St. Michael weighing souls, a vivid wheel of life and, over the arch, a Doom. The paintings in the chancel are in a different class, and are the most complete set of Romanesque wall paintings in England in an unrestored state.

They cover the entire chancel and give a hint as to what medieval churches were meant to look like. Painted 1130-40, they were whitewashed at the Reformation and uncovered and varnished over in 1872. The destructive varnish was removed in 1955.

DAY 4

We finish where we began – at All Saints in Hereford town centre. This large church has been repurposed as a community space and café, but still retains features that make it worth a visit – medieval wall painting fragments, medieval choir stalls and misericords, and cheeky medieval carvings (Google that if you want a giggle). One hopes that revisiting this church, you will see it with new eyes and have the opportunity to apply your new knowledge, and 'read' the church.

There is the option of a walking tour of the city afterwards, or you can take the time to explore this beautiful little city by yourself on market day.

Where history comes to life

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