



Norman Conquest & Plantagenet Power

Great castles and churches of south-east England

13–16 May 2025 (ML 694)

4 days • £1,490

Lecturer: Dr Marc Morris

Some of England's most magnificent Norman buildings, their historic significance and context.

England's medieval world view, through the prism of the populace, monarchs and bishops, merchants and knights.

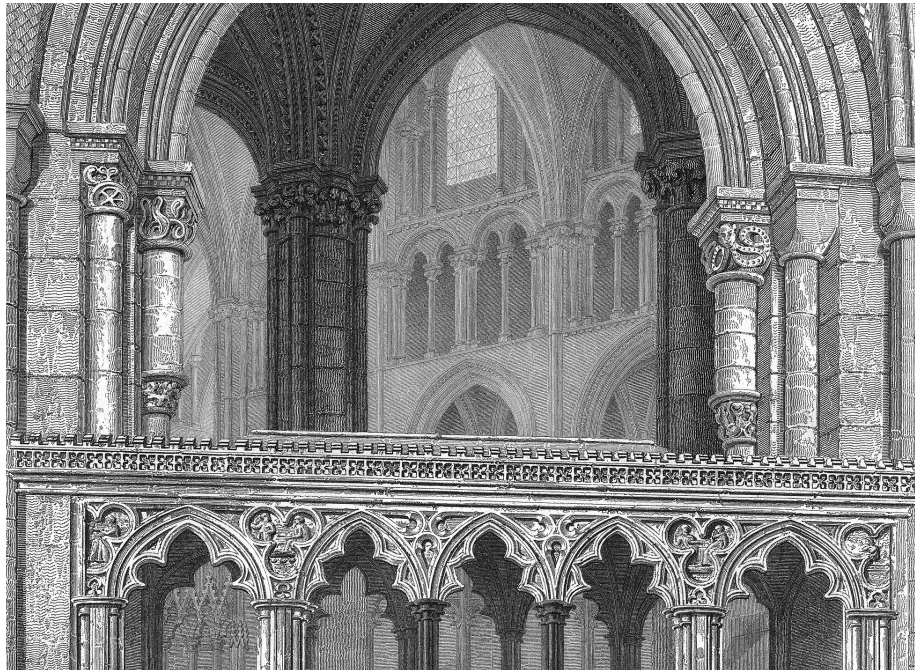
Breathtaking spring countryside, with two nights in Canterbury and a night in Rye.

The counties of Kent and Sussex contain some of the finest medieval buildings in Britain, including the world-famous cathedral at Canterbury and the indomitable castle at Dover, 'Gateway to England'. This rich legacy is no accident, for this region of England, lying between London and the Continent, has a dramatic history spanning the Norman Conquest until the end of the Middle Ages.

It was here that the Battle of Hastings was fought, Archbishop Thomas Becket was martyred, and the war between King John and his barons over Magna Carta raged most fiercely. This tour unfolds not only the architectural development of castles and churches across the Middle Ages, but also the stories of the people who built, besieged, lived and worshipped in them.

From 1066 to the end of the 14th century, we explore three interwoven narratives: the Norman Conquest, the rule of the Angevin kings (Henry II, Richard I and John), and the age of Geoffrey Chaucer. The itinerary takes in Pevensey Castle, the location where William the Conqueror first landed, and the site of the Battle of Hastings itself, where William later commanded a great abbey to be erected. At Tonbridge, we visit a giant motte-and-bailey castle raised in the Conqueror's own lifetime, and at Rochester a soaring stone tower, the tallest of its type in Britain, built in the generation after the Conquest, attacked by the notorious King John, and still bearing the scars of his terrible assault.

At Dover and Canterbury, the intimate but ultimately destructive friendship of Henry II and Thomas Becket is examined – the cathedral rebuilt in the wake of Becket's murder by Henry's knights, the castle reconstructed at the king's command as a royal response to the rising tide of international pilgrims.



Canterbury, cathedral, wood engraving c. 1880.

Canterbury was also a destination for domestic pilgrims, of the kind brought to life in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Following their route from London, we engage with the stories of real-life merchants and knights, visiting the late medieval town of Winchelsea, with its well-preserved houses and wine cellars, and the beguiling moated castle at Bodiam, built by Sir Edward Dallingridge – like Chaucer himself, a courtier to Richard II.

Itinerary

Day 1: London, Rochester, Canterbury. Leave central London by coach at 9.30am. Standing next to the wide estuary of the River Medway, Rochester Castle was established soon after the Norman Conquest, and some of its early masonry still remains. The castle's crowning glory, however, is its massive, 125ft great tower, built from 1127. The cathedral was rebuilt around the same time, has one of the finest Romanesque doorways in England. In the priory scriptorium, the *Textus Roffensis* [Book of Rochester] was produced in 1123. First of two nights in Canterbury.

Day 2: Canterbury, Dover. The morning is spent exploring the medieval parts of Dover Castle. Henry II, whose 'Angevin Empire'

included half of modern France, as well as most of Britain and Ireland, built a magnificent great tower here from 1180, on a scale to rival the Tower of London. This mighty donjon is still floored and roofed, and its rooms have been redecorated to reflect their 12th-century appearance. In the afternoon, we return to Canterbury to visit the cathedral. A church has stood on this site since the time of St Augustine's mission to the English in the late sixth century, but the present architecture is all post-Conquest.

Day 3: Winchelsea, Pevensey, Battle, Rye. 'New' Winchelsea was built on a hill to a rigid grid pattern during the reign of Edward I, after its previous incarnation was engulfed by the sea. The king visited regularly during its construction. Much of the medieval fabric remains, including the gatehouses and over 50 vaulted wine cellars. William the Conqueror and his army landed at Pevensey in 1066. They occupied an existing Roman shore fort, the walls of which still stand to their original height. Within them stands the later medieval castle, besieged in 1264 by Simon de Montfort. William built Battle Abbey to commemorate the site of his victory against Harold Godwinson in October 1066, and to atone for the blood shed on that day. Parts of

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continued

the abbey date to the 11th century, and the site of the church's high altar marks the spot where Harold fell. Overnight in Rye.

Day 4: Bodiam, Tonbridge. In 1385, having obtained a 'licence to crenellate' from Richard II, an up-and-coming knight, Edward Dallingridge, began to build the castle at Bodiam. Dallingridge was a veteran of the Hundred Years' War, but his castle has little genuinely warlike about it – rather it is one of the most beautiful of all English castles, a country seat nestled in the Sussex countryside for a rising star at the royal court. Tonbridge's giant motte-and-bailey castle was established soon after the Battle of Hastings to guard the upper reaches of the Medway. In the mid 13th-century it was expensively rebuilt in stone by the earls of Gloucester, who added a formidable twin-towered gatehouse, creating a castle like the ones being built by Edward I in Wales. Return to central London by c. 4.30pm.

Lecturer

Dr Marc Morris. Historian and broadcaster with a specialisation in the Middle Ages. He studied and taught history at the universities of London and Oxford, and his doctorate on the 13th-century earls of Norfolk was published in 2005. He presented the highly acclaimed television series *Castle* and wrote its accompanying book. His other books include *The Norman Conquest* and *A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain*, his latest release is *King John: Treachery, Tyranny and the Road to Magna Carta*.

Practicalities

Price per person. Two sharing: £1,490. **Single occupancy:** £1,670.

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 dinners and 1 lunch with wine, water, coffee; all admissions, tours; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The Abode, Canterbury (abodecanterbury.co.uk): centrally located 4-star, with a mix of contemporary décor and charming period interiors. **PowderMills Hotel, Battle** (powdermillshotel.com): 4-star hotel in a characterful, historic building with extensive grounds. Not all rooms are in the main building; some rooms involve a substantial amount of steps in order to access them. There are no lifts but portage is available.

How strenuous? The tour involves quite a lot of walking and many steps, uneven paving and muddy paths. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair climbing without difficulty and are reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: c. 69 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.