



Medieval West Midlands

Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Oxfordshire

24–28 June 2024 (MK 330)

5 days • £1,640

Lecturer: John McNeill

Balanced and varied survey of the outstanding medieval monuments of the West Midlands.

Beautiful drives through verdant landscapes.

Stay in the charming town of Stratford-upon-Avon throughout.

Led by John McNeill, a medieval architectural historian.

Geologically varied and approximately bounded by the Trent, Severn and upper Thames valleys, the West Midlands retains a remarkable group of medieval buildings. A bishopric was founded at Lichfield by St Chad in 669 to be followed by a second bishopric at Worcester around a decade later. Major Benedictine monasteries were established along the river Avon at Evesham and Pershore, while significant religious sanctuaries were created in the Trent Valley at Repton and Breedon-on-the-Hill. The pre-eminent buildings are, of course, the cathedrals of Lichfield and Worcester – the former having been the subject of a spectacular excavation in 2004 that uncovered the ‘Lichfield Angel’. The resulting reappraisal of the vanished Anglo-Saxon cathedral and its furnishings is ongoing, but the 2004 excavation was the climax of a series of works that have collectively transformed our understanding of Lichfield, leading to a much clearer understanding of how such splendidly quirky architectural set-pieces as St Chad’s head-chapel and the strangely elongated polygonal chapter house relate to Lichfield’s superb and oddly underrated nave.

Worcester has also received much recent scholarly attention, the better to understand its epoch-making centrally-planned chapter-house – the earliest in England – and its stunning late medieval cloister. As one moves into the later Middle Ages, the West Midlands became a hotbed of architectural innovation, wonderfully embodied in the work undertaken for John of Gaunt at Kenilworth and in both the choir and Beauchamp Chapel at St Mary’s, Warwick. To the north is the remarkably well-preserved royal chapel built for Henry I at Melbourne, in Stratford-upon-Avon the late medieval guild chapel still stands, replete with wall paintings of c.1500, while the area to the south of Stratford boasts an unusual



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

density of churches of national importance. With Pershore, Adderbury and Evesham there is no shortage of opportunities for insights into medieval design.

Itinerary

Day 1: Oxford, Adderbury, Bloxham, Halford, Stratford-upon-Avon. The coach leaves Oxford railway station at 1.30pm for the arrestingly accomplished 14th-century churches at Adderbury and Bloxham, and Romanesque Halford, proud possessor of an unusual and lovely angel tympanum. Continue to Stratford-upon-Avon where all four nights are spent.

Day 2: Worcester, Evesham, Pershore. An opportunity to venture west, the morning’s attraction being the great monastic cathedral at Worcester. Rebuilt following the Norman Conquest under saintly Bishop Wulfstan, Worcester cathedral retains a stunning Romanesque chapter-house and crypt, while its choir and presbytery offer a compelling essay in 13th-century Gothic. The afternoon is spent back up the river Avon, in the ambitious, if ruinous, precincts of Evesham Abbey and that glorious survival of a Midlands monastic church at Pershore.

Day 3: Melbourne, Repton, Lichfield. Visit a showstopper of a Romanesque parish church at Melbourne and the important Anglo-Saxon crypt at Repton. An afternoon in Lichfield is animated by some wonderful architectural set-pieces in its cathedral, in particular its elongated chapter-house, superb nave, and dramatic early 14th-century lady chapel.

Day 4: Stratford-upon-Avon, Chipping Norton, Bledington, Northleach. Begin in Stratford with its remarkable late medieval painted guild chapel and famed parish church. Then venture out to the villages and small towns of the Cotswolds. Start with the majestic Chipping Norton and develop via the delightfully ramshackle silhouette of Bledington before winding up at Northleach, perhaps the greatest of all of England’s late medieval wool churches.

Day 5: Wootton Waven, Kenilworth, Warwick. St Peter at Wootton Waven is archaeologically the most enthralling of Warwickshire’s parish churches. Continue to mighty Kenilworth Castle, its magnificent ruins still a showcase for the transformation of the castle under John of Gaunt and Robert Dudley. In Warwick visit the collegiate church of St Mary, a dazzling amalgam of late medieval tracery, vaulting and screenwork centred around two of the greatest tombs to survive from medieval England. Return to Warwick Parkway railway station by 3.00pm.

Medieval West Midlands
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 Patrons and Processes* – was published in 2018.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £1,640 **Single occupancy:** £1,840.

Included: transport by private, air-conditioned coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts and 3 dinners, with wine; all admissions; tips for restaurant staff, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The Arden Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon (theardenhotelstratford.com): a comfortable, 4-star, waterside hotel situated opposite the RSC theatres. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This tour would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking, getting on and off the coach regularly and who cannot stand for the many church visits. Average distance by coach per day: 62 miles.

Group size: the tour will operate with between 10 and 22 participants.