



## The Plantagenet Empire

Rulers of England in Normandy and Anjou

**27 June–3 July 2024 (MK 339)**

7 days • £3,140

Lecturer: Dr Marc Morris

The history of a tumultuous period in Normandy and Anjou from the 11th to 13th centuries, which impacted not just Britain but much of Europe.

A wealth of monuments, from exquisite abbeys to formidable cliff-top castles, bear witness to the achievements of the Normans and Plantagenets.

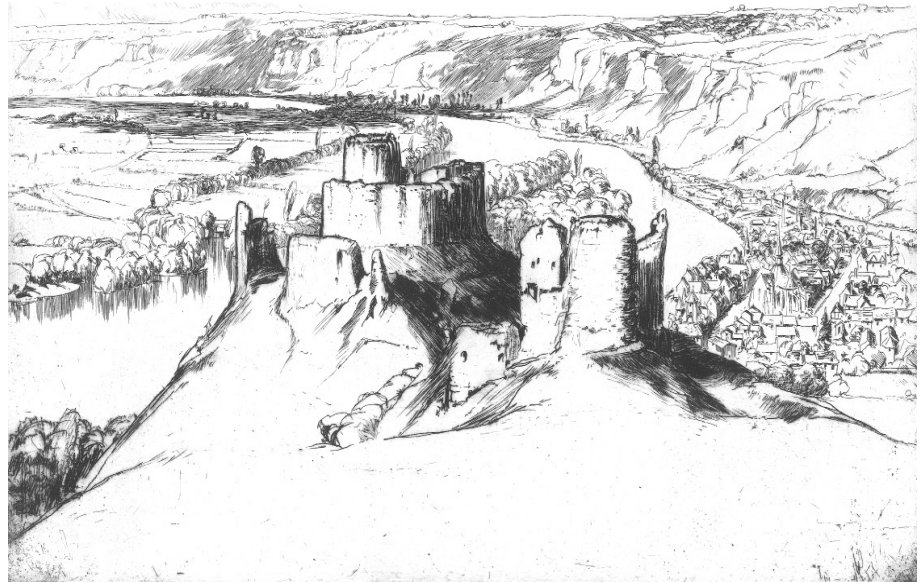
See also the Bayeux Tapestry, an object whose splendour and importance can scarcely be overstated.

Beautiful landscapes of the Seine and Loire valleys.

To understand medieval England, you must visit Normandy and Anjou. These three polities were yoked together as result of the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the accession to the English throne in 1154 of Henry Plantagenet, count of Anjou. Until the start of the thirteenth century, their aristocracies, economies and destinies were intimately linked, and their French-speaking kings spent far more time in their continental homelands than they did in England itself. This tour retraces the footsteps of those rulers, taking in the most important centres of their power – the castles and towns they constructed, the cathedrals they sponsored, and the abbeys in which they were laid to rest.

Normandy in the eleventh century was a place of dynamic change. Its rulers, the descendants of Viking colonists, were anxious to shed the ways of their ancestors and adopt the norms of their French neighbours. They not only built castles in huge numbers, but also churches, cathedrals, and abbeys, in an ostentatious new style now known as 'Romanesque'. The dominant personality in this period was, of course, William the Conqueror, and this tour explores the castle at Falaise where he was born, and his new town of Caen, including the abbey where he was buried.

Anjou was Normandy's southern neighbour and long-time rival. But the marriage of the Conqueror's granddaughter, Matilda, to Geoffrey Plantagenet in 1128 brought the two provinces together under the rule of their son, Henry II. Henry, along with his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their sons, Richard



*Chateau Gaillard, 20th-century etching.*

the Lionheart and King John, became the richest and most powerful family in Europe, but perhaps also the most dysfunctional. The era of their rule coincided with the birth of Gothic, and the monuments to their power, such as Chateau Gaillard and Rouen Cathedral, bear witness to the splendour of this new architectural style.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Château Gaillard, Rouen.** Take the Eurostar at c. 9.30am from London St Pancras to Paris, then continue by coach into Normandy. Visit Château Gaillard – a mighty castle constructed high above the River Seine in the late 1190s by Richard the Lionheart, along with the fortified town of Petit-Andely. Continue to Rouen where two nights are spent.

**Day 2: Jumièges, Rouen.** Morning visit to the abbey of Jumièges, one of the first churches in Normandy to be rebuilt in the new Romanesque style of the early 11th century. Return to Rouen to visit its vast gothic cathedral. Free time to visit Rouen's other historic sites.

**Day 3: Caen, Audrieu.** In Caen we visit the two abbeys of St Etienne, founded by William the Conqueror on the eve of the Norman Conquest, and Sainte-Trinité, founded by his wife, Matilda. The town's castle was badly damaged in World War II, but still boasts a splendid

hall constructed by the Conqueror's son and successor as king of England, William Rufus. Overnight at Château d'Audrieu.

**Day 4: Bayeux, Falaise, Angers.** Begin with a visit to the world-famous Bayeux Tapestry, an astonishing artistic survival, and arguably the most important historical source for the Norman Conquest. There is free time to explore Bayeux Cathedral and the streets of the medieval city. Proceed to Falaise, birthplace of William the Conqueror, and its splendid castle, constructed by Henry II. First of three nights in Angers.

**Day 5: Fontevraud, Chinon.** From Angers we head along the River Loire to the magnificent abbey of Fontevraud, with the tomb effigies of Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Richard the Lionheart. From there we proceed to Chinon, Henry's favourite castle, where he died in 1189. Return to Angers via Cunaault to see its splendid Romanesque church.

**Day 6: Angers.** Morning visit to Angers Castle, with its huge circuit of mighty walls, within which can be found the spectacular Apocalypse Tapestry, a masterpiece of late medieval art. Free afternoon to explore other sites in Angers.

**Day 7: Le Mans.** On our way back to Paris we stop at Le Mans, to visit perhaps the most important church in the Angevin dominions. It was here in 1128 that Henry II's parents

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were married, and Henry himself was baptised five years later. Take the Eurostar from Paris arriving at London St Pancras c. 8.30pm.

### Lecturer

**Dr Marc Morris.** Historian who specialises in the Middle Ages. He studied and taught at the universities of London and Oxford and is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He is the author of the Sunday Times bestseller *The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England* (2021), as well as *The Norman Conquest* (2012) and biographies of Edward I and King John. In 2003 he presented the highly acclaimed TV series *Castle* and wrote its accompanying book. He regularly writes for history magazines and contributes to programmes on radio and television.

### Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,140, or £2,930 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £3,630 or £3,420.

**Included:** train travel by Eurostar (Standard Premier), hotel accommodation as described below; private coach throughout; breakfasts and 5 dinners with wine or beer, soft drinks, water and coffee; all admissions and donations; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Accommodation. Mercure Rouen Centre**

**Cathédrale** (accorhotels.com): modern, functional 4-star hotel in the historic centre.

**Château d'Audrieu** (chateaudaudrieu.com): 18th-century château in the Normandy countryside, converted into a 5-star hotel.

**Hôtel d'Anjou, Angers** (hoteldanjou.fr): 4-star hotel in the centre of town.

**How strenuous?** The tour involves a lot of walking, some on roughly paved streets or uneven terrain, and a fair amount of standing around. A good level of fitness is essential. You need to be able to carry your luggage on and off the train and within the stations. On some days there is a lot of coach travel; average distance per day: 84 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.