Norman Walk: Hereford and Worcester: The City of Hereford

Introduction

Start: Broad Street, opposite library, by Hereford Cathedral
Finish: All Saints' Church
Distance: 1.5 miles, approx 2 hours

Welcome to this fascinating walk around the beautiful town of Hereford.

The terrain of the walk is flat, except for one banked path on Castle Green, which could be negotiated with care by wheelchair users. All of the route is on tarmac paths or pavements, with the exception of one very short gravel path.

Download audio version at:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/herefordandworcester/h/peopl_and_places/history/newsid_6780000/6780924.stm

Steps:

1. Broad Street
2. The Bishop's Palace, Palace Yard
3. Hereford Cathedral
4. The Moat, Castle Green
5. Castle Cliffe, Castle Green
6. The Saxon Wall
7. St Peter's Church
8. All Saint's Church

Map Keys:
- Walk Route
- Roads
- Rivers
Start your walk at Broad Street, which is opposite the library, by Hereford Cathedral. Hereford was a major Saxon city – and our walk starts at what was once an important crossroads. Standing at the front of the cathedral, you will be able to see that Broad Street makes a sharp right hand bend and becomes King Street. This road originally carried on, through where the cathedral now stands, and joined Castle Street. The original Saxon cathedral was much closer to the river. Broad Street, or Broad Way, continued down to the ford across the River Wye. Hereford’s name means “ford of the army”.

In 1065 the Welsh, with some dissident Saxons, burned the city to the ground, including the Saxon cathedral, or minster. They also slew some of the canons. This meant that when the Normans came to Hereford, they had the chance to extensively remodel the town, moving the cathedral to its current location, extending the city’s defences (presumably to prevent the Welsh repeating their sacking of the city) and creating a new marketplace, which you will visit later in the walk.

King Street was also known as the King’s Ditch, and had a small rivulet running down it. You can see the dip in the beams of Watkin’s the estate agent caused by this ditch. This ditch also marked one of the boundaries between the King’s estate and the church’s lands.

Next stop is to take a look at the Bishop’s Palace – a symbol of how powerful and important he was in Norman times.

With the cathedral on your left hand side, walk down Gwynne Street towards the gateway that leads to the Bishop’s Palace. The Bishop’s Palace is not routinely open to visitors, and is still a home and working office, as well as being part of a place of worship, so please act with respect at all times.

For larger parties to the cathedral or its grounds contact:
Address: The Visits Office, 5 College Cloisters, Cathedral Close, Hereford. HR1 2NG
Telephone: 01432 374202
E-mail: visits@herefordcathedral.org

Just inside the gateway to the present Bishop’s Palace is an original beam from the great Norman hall, which dates from 1190 – the beam is made from one enormous oak.

Looking at the Palace you can see the line of the original Norman hall by looking at the roof. The present day palace is one bay shorter than the Norman hall – the missing space is now occupied by Victorian offices. The original Norman entrance to the hall is still there (with its grey stone standing out from the rest of the building), though it has been moved and rebuilt. At the far end was the ‘solar’ block, where the Bishop had his apartments.

The Bishop in Norman times was very powerful, a Marcher Lord, and had his own prison, sited where the stables block is today, directly opposite the Palace. When the Bishop was allowed to marry, after the Reformation, the gateway was put up and the street, and access to the ford, was closed. People had to use the bridge to cross the river.

The Bishop’s Palace was one of the six great timbered halls of England. It was built entirely of local oak, and in design was similar to a church. It would have been used as a baronial hall, for dispensing justice. Alongside it would have had a big apartment block for visiting monks. The original timbers of the hall were encased in casements, when the main hall was reconstructed in the 18th century, and can still be seen by opening special panels in the walls.

Also alongside the hall was a two storey chapel, dedicated to St Catharine and St Mary Magdalene, in the style of the famous Aachen chapel, built by Charlemagne in the Rhine valley. One wall still stands in the garden of the Bishop’s Palace. It is built in part with a favourite stone used by Norman builders called Tufo – this is spongy and easy to carve, and is deposited in limestone springs.
Retrace your steps back to the cathedral, and pass along the right side of the building, with the Mappa Mundi building on your right. There is a blue board pointing to the Cloisters Café, Cathedral shop, and Mappa Mundi and Chained Library exhibitions – stop to look at the south transept, before entering the building itself.

Looking at the outside of the cathedral’s south transept you can see some of the original Norman windows, now bricked up. They are much smaller than the present windows. Inside the cathedral you can see the great pillars of the Norman cathedral, which may look strong, but are filled with rubble. This probably contributed to the collapse of the west end of the cathedral, and its tower, on Easter morning in 1786.

The original Norman font is still in the cathedral, and is a large stone bowl for the total immersion of the infant. It has a lid, to stop the holy water being stolen for use in witchcraft. By the altar you can see the chair that King Steven, the forth Norman King of England, sat on to be crowned on Whitsunday, around 1135. He was crowned during one of the many unstable periods in English history, where the succession to the throne was being disputed – Steven was fighting a bitter war against Queen Matilda. During the war the cathedral and the castle were on opposite sides, and flung missiles at each other from their towers.

Leave the cathedral by the north porch, cross College Green and turn right, passing the statue of Elgar with his bicycle on your right, and a distinctive black and white building on your left. Follow the path to the right, and then turn left at the sign for Castle Street and the Cathedral School. Turn right into the narrow Quay Street, and follow this to the bottom, where there is a sign pointing to Castle Green, Keep to the left hand side of the green up a narrow road. St Ethelbert’s Well is set into the wall on your left. After looking at the well continue up the road, towards the house with the distinctive conservatory on its first floor. Opposite this house, called The Fosse, and built in 1825, is Castle Pool.

On Castle Green is St Ethelbert’s Well, a holy well, which supposedly sprang into life when the funeral cortège of St Ethelbert stopped there, while on its way to the cathedral for the burial service. It’s more likely to date well back into Celtic times. In the 1800s it was excavated, and silver pins were found, probably votive offerings, because the well’s water was supposed to cure blindness.

http://www.archenfield.com/history_kingoffa.htm

Hardly a stone remains of the great Norman castle at Hereford, built in the 11th century by the Normans to defend the city and its important river crossings. This is amazing, considering its size and splendour. It had ten towers and a bridge across the massive moat, and was considered second only to Windsor Castle in scale. After the middle ages it fell into disrepair and the English civil war sounded its death knell. It was sold off after the civil war for £80 (£13,000 approx in 2010), and most of the stone went either into Hereford’s streets, or into buildings like The Tolsey or the College Hall.

Castle Pool gives an indication of the scale and size of Hereford castle, being a small part of the enormous moat which surrounded the castle, and joined the River Wye. There was an impressive gateway and bridge into the castle, where the Castle Pool Hotel is today.

At the centre of Castle Green is the other Nelson’s Column – far less impressive than its London namesake, and with an urn at the top, rather than a statue of the great admiral, because the builders ran out of money:

More here:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/herefordandworcester/content/articles/2005/10/18/nelsons_column_feature.shtml
Walk across the green towards the river, on the broad pathway, keeping Nelson’s Column on your left. You’ll pass some public toilets on your right. The Cliffe is a grey stone building on the right, surrounded by trees.

Castle Cliffe was built in the 13th century, and has been used for many purposes during its long history. It was the original water gate of the castle. Boats would unload on the quay below, bringing many different items to the castle, including iron from the Forest of Dean, which was used to make arrowheads.

A survey of the castle, in 1652, described the building as the “Governour’s Lodge” (sic). Later the building became the city’s woman’s prison, or Bridewell, where inmates would have endured very harsh conditions.

The City Council minutes of 1847 show an order for “ye treasurer to sell the house and garden to ye highest bidder”. The building is still in private hands, so please only look at it from outside the surrounding wall.

If you look over the hedge that borders Castle Green, and look down the Wye, you can see how shallow the water is at the old ford, just past the footbridge.

Walk along the path, with the river on your right, and Nelson’s Column on your left. The path goes down a small bank, and you need to turn left, with the bank on your left and the broad swathe of grass that runs alongside Mill Street on your right.

The high bank was once part of the castle walls, and the broad strip of grass was once the moat, now filled in.

At Cantilupe Street there is a splendid view back up Castle Pond towards The Fosse. Cross the road here, and turn right, and then immediately left into Mill Street. Keep on the left hand pavement, and pass Mill Street Stores. Just past this shop is a brick archway, through which you will be able to see a car park, with the remains of the Norman city walls. Walk in here and turn right, and follow the narrow gravel path that runs alongside the garden. The old Saxon walls are on your left, with a plaque explaining their history.

The excavated remains of the Saxon city defences can be seen here, they were originally made of stone, with a timber riveting on top. They were built as part of Our Lady of the Mercian’s scheme (she was the daughter of King Alfred) to defend the city against the Danes. These were still in existence in Norman times, and were buttressed up to their defences, giving a kink in the wall at this point.

Come out of the car park and turn left into St Owen’s Street. You will be able to see the spire of St Peter’s Church in the distance. As you walk up St Owen’s Street, towards St Peter’s Church, you will see many narrow alleys on the left, including the distinctive Barroll Street. These were originally planks across the ditch of the Saxon defences, and became alleys and streets when the Normans extended the city, and built the new market place.

At the end of St Owen’s Street is St Peter’s Church, built at the site of the low cross of the great Norman market place in Hereford. The old Saxon market was where the cathedral now stands, and the new triangular shaped market was laid out by William Fitz Osbourne, the first Norman Earl of Hereford.

St Peter’s Church was built at one end of the market by William De Lacey, who had a sad and unusual end to his life. He was inspecting the finished church when he fell from the roof and was killed. He is buried in Gloucester cathedral. The church later became the home for the monks of St Guthlac’s, who moved there, temporarily, after they claimed the ground of their monastery had been despoiled with blood, in the war between Stephen and Matilda. They eventually moved to a new priory outside the city walls. The choir stalls inside the church are said to have belonged to the monks.
William Fitz Osboure re-planned the city to encourage trade, setting out the triangular market place with roads channelling into it, just as they did in his home town in Brittany. He offered his French friends a cheap rent of 12d a year to get them to set up homes around the market. They settled in the area of All Saints’ Church, in an area known as Frenchman’s Lane, which may be Bewell Street.

Behind the market in the 12th century was the Jewish quarter, known as Jewry. They moved into the area to provide the money to build all the Marcher castles, built by the Normans to defend their conquests. They built wonderful stone houses, and their accounts are well recorded. They were persecuted throughout their stay, and were finally exiled in 1290 by King Edward I.

The Normans brought prosperity to Hereford - by 1200 the city was one of the wealthiest places in the UK. It was rated ninth in the country for taxation purposes, which made it wealthier than Worcester or Shrewsbury – and the king regularly visited the city.

Walk across High Town towards the spire of All Saints’ Church, which leans backwards and has a distinctive kink at the top. It also has a café, if you want a drink or something to eat at the end of your walk.

At the other end of the market, by the high cross, is All Saints’ Church. It’s probable that there was a Norman church there, but the first known church on the site was built around 1200, the remains of which can be seen in the present day church, by the chancel arch.

The 1260 church has been built around it. At this time monks of the order of St Anthony of Vienne came to the church to start a hospital for people who had a skin disease called St Anthony’s fire. There were 12 brethren and a master, and you can see evidence of their presence in the choir stalls, each of which is carved differently. After the 100 years war the church was taken over by the King and given to St George’s chapel in Windsor.


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