Introduction

Start: The Mill Bridge
Finish: The Mill Bridge
Miles: 2 miles, approx 2.5 hours

Welcome to this fascinating walk around the beautiful town of Pembroke in south west Wales.

While much of the Norman fabric and buildings have gone, enough remains to capture the imagination. Pembroke was the most important Norman settlement in west Wales. After the castle was founded in 1093 (as a simple motte and bailey structure) the town grew rapidly.

It is a perfect example of a fortified artificial borough where settlers would have been brought in to work, living in houses built along the crest of a long limestone ridge with the castle at the end. Those settlers would be expected to work for the Norman lords and even help defend the town. In return they were presented with charters that gave them the right to hold fairs and markets.

A walk around Pembroke’s town walls will provide a fascinating insight into life in Norman Wales, on what is a relatively flat and gentle circular stroll.

Steps:
1. The Mill Bridge
2. Wogan’s Cavern
3. Monkton Priory
4. The West Gate
5. St Mary’s Church
6. Town walls and towers
7. The East Gate
8. Barnard’s Tower and north wall of town

Map Keys:
- Walk Route
- Roads
- Railways
- Rivers
- Railway Stations

Download the audio here: www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history

More Roman walks can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/history/normanwalks
1. The Mill Pond

Start your walk at the Mill Bridge, a few hundred yards to the north of the town. This was once the site of the North Gate, at the bottom of Dark Lane, leading up into the town itself – there were two other town gates to the west and east, huge structures that were locked at night-fall in order to allow the population to sleep safely in their beds.

The North Gate was pulled down in 1820 to provide easier access for carts and coaches and the Mill Bridge now crosses the Mill Pond, formerly a tidal inlet that defended the town and castle on their northern flank.

The Mill, an ancient corn mill powered by the tidal flow of the inlet, was built soon after the castle was founded and granted to the Knights Templars in 1199. The building was destroyed by fire in 1956 and now only the foundations are left. However, they do make an ideal viewing point for the castle and for the once-busy quays of Pembroke.

Once the Normans arrived this small but sheltered harbour enjoyed a thriving wine trade with France. From the Middle Ages until the 20th century lime, coal and other agricultural produce also passed through the warehouses that can still be seen on the northern side of the river. Nowadays they are used as cafés and shops.

More Roman walks can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/history/normanwalks

2. Wogan’s Cavern

The castle as we see it today dates from the years after the Earldom of Pembroke was created in 1138 when the first Earl, Gilbert de Clare, decided to extend and improve the fortress. Gilbert’s son Richard Strongbow, the man who first conquered Ireland, continued the work.

Follow the flat and even path around the walls of the castle, keeping the fortress on your left. You are barely a few hundred yards from the town centre but the walk is quiet and rural. Bird song is all that you hear. This must have been what Arnulph de Montgomery, son of Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, first experienced when he came here on a “commando raid” in 1093. Realising the defensive qualities of the area, he threw what the writer Giraldus Cambrensis later called “a slender fortress of stakes and turf” across the neck of the ridge and Pembroke’s history had begun.

Stop to view Wogan’s Cavern, a natural limestone cavern. This was never a dungeon, just a natural cave that the Normans used as a storehouse and, possibly, a boathouse. A ditch used to run down to the river to allow access. The name Wogan is not attributable to any particular person but probably comes from the Welsh word “ogof,” which means, simply, cave.

3. Monkton Priory

At the end of the path around the castle, cross Monkton Bridge, the site of another Norman quay and mill, and take the gently sloping hill into the suburb of Monkton.

Turn right up Church Terrace – a short but quite steep hill - and go past Monkton Old Hall. This is a privately owned house but was originally a guesthouse for the nearby Monkton Priory. Much of what is left today dates from the 14th century but a superb round Norman chimney still dominates the building. Continue up Church Terrace to the top of the hill. Here you will find the Priory Church of St Nicholas and St John. The church was once part of Monkton Priory, a Benedictine Priory granted to the Abbey of Seez in Normandy in 1098. The site was already in use before the Normans arrived - a Celtic Christian community having existed here for many years.

The Priory fell into disuse after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in the 1530s but some arches and the Priory Farmhouse, which might have been the Prior’s dwelling, can still be seen. Huge buttresses on the northern wall of the church date from the Victorian era but remain impressive pieces of architecture. The Priory buildings were destroyed in the years after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. When Oliver Cromwell besieged Pembroke in 1648 he established an artillery battery in the churchyard, the cannons firing directly over the river into the castle courtyard. The Parliamentarian soldiers caused more damage to the church, which was not fully renovated until the 1880s.
4. The Castle

Retrace your steps down Church Terrace (downhill now) and across Monkton Bridge. Take time to stop and gaze across the stream towards the undoubted gem of Pembroke Castle – and, indeed, of Pembroke itself - the superb Round Keep, built by Earl William Marshall in about 1200. It is one of the finest examples of a round keep in Britain, reaching up 100 feet into the air and remaining, almost to the end of its military life, virtually impregnable to attack or siege.

Small wonder Edmund, Earl of Richmond, chose Pembroke as a sanctuary for his young wife, Margaret Beaufort, during the Wars of the Roses. She may have been only 15 years old but in 1456 Margaret gave birth to a son, Henry Tudor, later King Henry VII, in a tower room in Pembroke Castle.

The foot of Westgate Hill is the site of the town’s old West Gate. The remains of the gate can be seen in the wall of one of the houses on your right. There is a short, sharp climb, past the castle Gate House – a car park on the right, called Long Entry, was originally the location of one of the town’s two preaching and market crosses. The other stood outside the Old Cross Saws public house in the eastern part of the town.

5. The Main Street

Past the castle, at the top of Dark Lane, is the parish church of St Mary. Originally a 12th century building, the oldest surviving parts are two 13th century windows in the south wall. Local legend says that Henry Tudor was baptised here but there is no documentary evidence to prove this claim.

St Mary’s sits in what was known as the West Ward, the earliest part of the town to be developed. When the castle was still a motte and bailey, the houses here would have been built of wattle and daub. When the alarm bell was rung the people would run to the castle for safety.

Walk down the Main Street of the town. Most of the buildings date from the Georgian and Victorian era. The building alongside the Clock House Tower (now a nightclub and shop), was originally the town’s Assembly Room. Later it was the site of Haggar’s Cinema. William Haggar was a pioneer filmmaker whose “Life and Death of Charles Peace” – filmed largely in nearby Pembroke Dock – is now regarded as a classic of early silent film making.

A dip in the road beyond Orielton Terrace – known locally as the Chain Back – may have been the location of an early defensive ditch but this became redundant when the town walls were built. Behind the York Tavern is a medieval building said to have been used by John Wesley when he was preaching in the area.

6. The Town Walls

Turn to the south, down the steep slope of New Way. This that part of Pembroke is known as Orange Town. Much of this is 19th century but this was also the area where the town’s tanneries, slaughter house and gas works were located. Several of these buildings still survive.

Walk east along the bottom of the slope. Here you will find several sections of the old town wall and one or two defensive towers. One of them has a 19th century gazebo built onto the top – incongruous but recently restored. The town walls sit at the foot of the ridge and the advantages of this are obvious. Any attacking force would, first, have to scale these walls and then have to struggle up the steep slope to gain the level of the Main Street – all the while with defenders firing down on them.

The open land was known as The Commons, an area that flooded when the tide came in. The town was protected on three sides by water – yet another problem for any attacking forces. Stories of early sieges come, in the main from the pen of Giraldus Cambrensis and should be taken with “a pinch of salt.” In 1096, he says that the town and castle almost fell to the besieging Welsh. Only the desperate ruse of throwing four dead pigs across the wall and dropping a letter to say that the castle was plentifully supplied – saved the day. The Welsh lost heart and lifted the siege! It’s a lovely story but hardly credible.

More Roman walks can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/history/normanwalks
7 . The East Gate

Turn up Gooses Lane, past a well-preserved medieval defensive tower, and climb the sloping ridge - back to the Main Street.

You are now in the East Ward, the newer part of the town. This area was devastated by the Black Death after 1349.

Pembroke's East Gate used to straddle the street here. It was the most significant of the town's three gates but was destroyed on the orders of Oliver Cromwell in 1648. None of the gate remains.

In the complex and complicated history of the English Civil War, Pembroke – under the control of its Mayor John Poyer – declared first for Parliament and then, in 1647, for the King. Following the Royalist defeat at St Fagans, the remaining forces under Poyer and Rowland Laugharne took refuge in Pembroke. The siege lasted for seven weeks and only ended when Oliver Cromwell himself appeared.

Poyer, Laugharne and Rice Powell (who had held the town of Tenby for the king) were found guilty of treason and condemned to death. In the end Parliament decided on leniency. Only one man would die. Poyer was the unlucky one and was shot by firing squad on 25 April 1649.

Many of the houses in this part of the town are Georgian in origin. The town's second important church, St Michael's, is also here. Originally a Norman church with a "stunted tower," it was rebuilt in 1835 and again in 1887.

More Roman walks can be found at [www.bbc.co.uk/history/normanwalks](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/normanwalks)

---

8 . The North Wall and back to the Mill Pond

Take the path alongside the Coach House Inn and walk down the slope on the northern side of the town. Barnard's Tower sits a little way down the ridge. It is one of several defensive towers located around the walls at strategic points like the corners or junctions of walls, and has been sympathetically restored.

The town walls are well defined and maintained on this northern flank. Your walk takes you along the Mill Pond, formerly a tidal river and one of three stretches of water that helped defend the town.

Across the Mill Pond is a building that is now an old people's home. It was originally the infamous Golden Prison where French prisoners were held after the abortive landings at Fishguard in 1797 – the last time that mainland Britain was ever invaded. 25 of the prisoners persuaded two local Welsh girls to help them and, using bones from the food brought in by the girls, dug a tunnel under the prison walls. They escaped and made their way to the quay where they commandeered Lord Cawdor's yacht and sailed away to France and freedom.

Your walk finishes where it began, on the Mill Bridge with the remains of the castle standing tall and proud in front of you.