

Hereford:

Rural England At Its Best

Derick McGroarty visits Hereford, with its historic collection, the River Wye with scenic gorges and a town of book shops. Herefordshire has a reputation for quiet roads, busy market towns and pretty villages. Valleys, castles and black and white villages are contained within an area between the Malverns, the Brecon Beacons and the Welsh Black Mountains, giving stunning views of the English countryside.

In the city of Hereford the Cathedral dominates the scene. Built on a place of Christian worship since Saxon times it contains fine examples of architecture from Norman times to the present day. A modern extension contains the award winning exhibition of the chained library and the "Mappa Mundi".

Hereford's 17th century Chained Library is the largest to survive with all of the chains, rods and locks intact. The collection of 1,800 rare books dating from the 8th century includes 229 medieval manuscripts. It is still a working library for approved researchers. Framed in a wooden cabinet is the original Mappa Mundi.

On a single sheet of vellum, a 52 inch diameter circle is divided into land masses with Jerusalem at the centre, East at the top, Europe lower left and Africa lower right. It is not a navigation map but represents a compilation of knowledge at that time. Five hundred thumb nail size drawings depict 420 towns, 32 plants, many

animals and pictures of mythology. Mountains and rivers are labelled. Needless to say Hereford is marked on an elongated island of England. The Mappa Mundi is regarded by scholars as "the greatest extant 13th century pictorial manuscript".

Also on display one other major artefact is an original (one of four) 1217 version of Magna Carta, the final version of that authorised by King John in 1215 – part of the British constitution and an early version of "human rights".

Within the cathedral close is a life size statue of Sir Edward Elgar, one of Britain's greatest composers, who spent some of his most productive years in Hereford. The bicycle, his favourite way to travel through the countryside, is still a popular form of transport for visitors, along traffic free trails.

The Hereford Museum and Art Gallery displays all aspects of Hereford's history and life with

hands-on elements for all ages. Nearby the "Old House" is a fine example of a black and white building.

The River Wye winds a twisted course through much of Herefordshire. Poets including Coleridge and Wordsworth have praised the spectacular scenery. For a river cruise, go to Symonds Yat where Kingfisher Cruises operate 40 minute round trips. Tony Gardiner gives an interesting commentary telling of the natural history of the area and many anecdotes of famous visitors based on contemporary newspaper reports with personal experience of his family which has operated cruises for three generations.

Hay-on-Wye is a paradise for book lovers in a peaceful market town that has become a world famous second hand book centre. Almost every building bulges with book bargains – more than a million titles! The International Literature Festival held there in May attracts many writers and celebrities

About 8 miles east from Hay-on-Wye is Arthur's Stone, said to be the country's oldest man-made structure which takes its name from a battle thousands of years later by King Arthur. It offers breath taking views of the surrounding countryside. ■

CONTACTS

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Hereford Cathedral

كاتدرائية هيريفورد



Mappa Mundi

خارطة العالم