England & Wales 1994

England & Wales 1994: Back to England and Wales. York, north Wales, followed by a visit to St. David's and surrounds. Castles, cathedrals, and holy sites. I am using only photographs originally taken on the trip. They are somewhat special because these are among the very first photos I used for The Castles of Wales Website. Most were eventually replaced. Following some of the links included in the essay will take you to that site's main page, where you will find additional and better quality photographs. (20,500 words)

Places Visited:

England: York → York Minster → Clifford Castle → St Mary's Abbey → Sheriff Hutton Castle → Castle Howard → Scarborough, Town & Castle → Whitby → Selby Town & Abbey → Lincoln Town, Castle & Cathedral → Helmsley Castle → Rievaulx Abbey → Thirsk → Fountain's Abbey Brancepeth Castle → Raby Castle & St Mary's, Staindrop → Hadrian's Wall

Wales: Rhuddlan Castle → Conwy Castle → Beaumaris Castle → Caernarfon Castle → Dolwyddelan Castle → Harlech Castle → St David's: Cathedral & Bishop's Palace → St Non's Well & Chapel → St Justinian's Chapel → Pembrokeshire Coast Path → Fishguard → Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber → Llawhaden Castle → Laugharne Castle → Carew Castle → Manorbier Castle → Lamphey Bishop's Palace → Pembroke Castle → Nevern Cross & Church of St Brynach → Kidwelly Castle → Picton Castle → Cilgerran Castle → Roch Castle → Carreg Cennen Castle Raglan Castle → Tintern Abbey → Chepstow Castle → Hampton Court Palace

Part I: England, Yorkshire & Durham

In 1994 my wife and I returned to England and Wales. Out first visit there with my parents in 1992 made us realize that we would be revisiting here many times. Our 1992 trip was fast paced (one night here - two nights there) and that was OK. Dad wanted to pack a lot of different activities into our 10-day trip. This time we had a different strategy. For the two weeks we would have only three accommodations. In other words, we were going to take more time exploring in each of the areas we were staying, and use the car to visit further afield. I wasn't too worried about driving. It took a little getting used to driving on the left side of the road with the steering wheel on the right but I did OK. Actually it was a bit of a baptism by fire because I made the long drive from London to York after a long flight and no sleep. This was my first driving experience in Britain.

We arrived in York in the early afternoon. Our accommodation for this part of the trip was the Dean Court Hotel, well situated in the town very close to York Minster. Our room was small but we traded size for sight-seeing convenience. With the hotel close to the intersection of High Petergate and Duncombe Place, it made it easy to get in and out of town. We chose York because of its history and because we wanted to see some of the places associated with the Neville family, powerful English lords who helped shape the history of England during the reign of Henry V and the Wars of the Roses. I has begun investigating my wife's family history a few

years earlier and had come across a couple of genealogies that connected her 17th colonial Virginia ancestors with the house of Neville. Although the connection lacks primary source proof (and therefore must ultimately be rejected) it was enough for us to make a “Neville Trail” tour part of our trip. Also a site that was high on my agenda was Hadrian’s Wall in Northumberland, an easy trip from York. I had been reading about this remarkable remnant of Roman Britain and was really looking forward to seeing the site and hiking along the wall.

We spent a lot of time York just walking around, exploring the shops in “The Shambles” a collection of narrow-lane shops with Tudor-style overhanging first floors, visiting the ruins of St Mary’s Abbey, Clifford Castle, and (best of all) walking the wonderful city walls. The city walls are a great way to get an overview of the town. Much of the wall runs along the back gardens of houses so you get a peek at some of the resident’s impressive landscaping and beautiful flowers. We visited the York Minster, seat of the Archbishop of York, with its beautiful stained glass windows, one of Britain’s classic Gothic-style cathedrals. Some of the stained glass dates back to the 12th century. We marveled at the grandeur of North and South transepts with their soaring columns, and the Central Tower. In the south transept is a rose window with glass dating from about 1500 that commemorates the union between the royal houses of York and Lancaster. Despite The Minster's opulence and history, I found it interesting that there are no "famous-famous" individuals buried here; no kings or queens, or their descendants, and apparently none of the important players in the region's medieval history. Perhaps some would take issue with this, but...

Our first trip away from York was a visit to Sheriff Hutton Castle, located in the village of the same name. Sheriff Hutton was a once-substantial castle built by the Neville family in the 1380s. By the mid 17th century the castle had fallen into disrepair and much of its stone was used for buildings in the village. The castle was at one time owned by Ralph Neville, the first Earl of Westmorland, and later passed to his grandson, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the infamous "King Maker." The castle was eventually acquired by Richard III, making Sheriff Hutton a place of interest for those in the Neville family or the ill-fated king.

Before visiting the castle we met with the owners of Castle Farm, Richard W. Howarth and his wife. Mr Howarth had recently written a history of the castle which he then published as a guidebook. They were friendly and welcoming and Mr. Howarth's guide book proved very useful in our exploration of the castle. Although the remains of Sheriff Hutton are slight compared to other medieval castles, portions of the South West Tower, North West Tower, North East Tower, the slight remains of the South East Tower, and the Guard Room, survive. We were pleasantly surprised when we found the well-preserved emblems/arms of the Neville family on one of the towers. Nice. We spent some time here exploring each corner of the castle and inner ward before visiting the village church.

The church of St Helen and the Holy Cross lies in the village nearby, and features (what was thought to be) the alabaster tomb of Edward, Prince of Wales, the only son of Richard III and Anne Neville. Edward died in 1484 at nearby Middleham Castle, and with his death Richard's hope of an heir also died. More recently, the tomb has been dated to a later period. Like the

castle, the church was also built by the Neville family. It was Sunday when we visited the church, so we made sure we were respectful of the church and parishioners before entering. The church seemed to me of the same honey-colored stone of the castle and the inside was beautifully ornamented. The interior features fine vaulted arches, and a large stained glass window behind the alter. We were excited to have visited and explored a site important to the powerful Neville family, and there was more to come.

Our next stop was at majestic Castle Howard House and Gardens 15 miles North East of York. Castle Howard has been home to the Howard family for more than 300 years. Design and construction of the estate began in 1699 by the 3rd Earl of Carlisle, and was finally completed in the early 19th century. Both the front and rear facades of Castle Howard are really impressive and provide a hint of the opulence to come inside. We decided to begin our visit with a tour of the interior. The interior of Castle Howard is a feast for the senses. We began with Great Hall with its vaulted and decorated ceiling rising 70 feet above the floor. Then it was room after room of beautiful period decorations and furnishing in what was a dazzling display of wealth and power. Fortunately, rather than being herded into groups and hurried from one room to the next, we were allowed to explore at our own leisure with helpful guides along the way providing history of the estate and answering questions. The gardens and grounds at Castle Howard include lakes, follies, woodland, temples, and statues in including the Grade I listed Atlas Fountain, perhaps the estate's best recognized feature. The gardens surrounding the house and estate were beautiful, and just as impressive as the castle's interiors. We had visited Blenheim on our trip in 1992, but we enjoyed Castle Howard more. It's not as large as Blenheim, but seems more manageable and just as beautiful.

The next morning we got up early and began another busy day with lots of miles to travel. First on the agenda was the seaside town of Scarborough. A favorite among beach-goers, Scarborough is busy during much of the year and features a bustling collection of shops and places to eat along the beach. We parked the car, descended to the shops, walked around the beach and stopped in a few of the shops. Although it was quite chilly, there were a few hardy families on the beach, with some of the children braving the water. We also saw children's pony rides, and here about half-a-dozen kids were already astride their horses for what was to be just a short walk. We enjoyed fish and chips on the beach before heading back up for our visit to Scarborough Castle.

The castle enjoys a stunning location high on a cliff overlooking the bay. The site has long been recognized for its strategic importance. There is archaeological evidence that the cliff top was once the site of an Iron Age hill fort. The Romans built a signal tower station at the edge of the cliff, and the Anglo-Saxons built a chapel on the station site around the year 1000, the remains of which are still visible. The site is still dominated today by the large square keep built by King Henry II in the mid-12 century, and further improvements to the castle were made by subsequent kings. We climbed to the site where we took in the magnificent and commanding views. About half of Henry's shell keep remains and the Bailey extends all the way to the edge of the cliff. This was a large castle with an equally large bailey. Very impressive. We walked the length of the bailey to the edge of the cliff to take in the views once seen by Roman and Anglo-

Saxon forces. The views would have given more than adequate advance notice to anyone attempting to approach. We lingered here for a while. By this time it was mid-afternoon and we still had a bit of driving to do.

We jumped on the A171 and headed north towards Whitby. This was certainly one of the trips most scenic drives as we wound our way along the coast through the beautiful North York Moors National Park. We soon found ourselves surrounded by gentle hills of green moorland grass, and fields of heather and western gorse. Breathtaking. At times the road seemed pretty narrow for an A road. We had more than one close encounter with sheep along the way, one jumping from the road onto the high bank, and another jumping from the bank onto the road right in front of our car. Fortunately there was no harm done to either sheep or driver. We made a quick stop in Robin Hood Bay, a picturesque village about half way between Scarborough and Whitby.

We arrived in Whitby in the late afternoon. Unfortunately is was past 4 o'clock (or rather 16:00), so we had to be satisfied with taking a few photos of the abbey from behind the fence surrounding the site. One of the reasons I wanted to visit here is because Whitby Abbey (in pre-medieval times, not the ruins you see today) was the site of a watershed moment in the history of Christianity in Britain. In 664 the Synod of Whitby took place at the monastery to resolve the question of whether the Northumbrian church would adopt and follow Celtic Christian traditions or adopt Roman practice, including the manner of calculating the date of Easter and form of the monastic tonsure. There was a great debate put forward by proponents of both sides, with the Roman Church finally prevailing, and many feel that this was a fatal blow to the Celtic Christian Church.

After leaving the abbey we descended down a long flight of stairs from the parking lot next to the abbey to the town below. Very convenient! It was late in the afternoon and most of the shops were closed so we decided to stop at a pub for a quick pint and snack. I can't remember which ale but hopefully it was something local. That was it for the day. We returned to the car and began the drive back to York, once again enjoying the scenery provided by the North York Moors National Park. It was a long day's drive and we were in for more of the same the following day.

We got up the following morning, had breakfast at the hotel and headed out again for another's day's adventure. On the agenda was the town of Lincoln with its castle and cathedral, and Middleham Castle on the way back, another stronghold of the Neville family. First we stopped in the town of Selby just south of York. Selby is a market town with origins dating from the establishment of a Viking settlement on the banks of the River Ouse. It was market day and the town was full of people shopping the many stalls selling vegetables, fruit, meat, cheese, and various local crafts. Very interesting. We also enjoyed watching an intense game of lawn bowling with teams of elderly ladies squaring off. Their bowling form looked anything but "elderly". These women were good! Next we visited the abbey. Selby Abbey is a former Benedictine abbey and current Anglican parish church in the town dating from the mid 13th-century. The abbey has a long history but we were there to see the Washington window. It turns out that George

Washington, the first American president has English ancestry stretching back to the 12th century, and his family worshipped here (as well as other places). The window, containing the Heraldic arms of the Washington family, is to be found in the south clerestory window of the choir. It features the Washington coat of arms with three stars above red and white stripes, and is one of the first known representations of the stars and stripes pattern later used for the U.S. flag. Who knew!

Our primary objective for the day was the medieval city of Lincoln with its historic castle and cathedral. We arrived around lunchtime and decided to have lunch and a pint at the Victoria pub close to the entrance to the castle. The pub was busy with football fans enthusiastically cheering the match the day on the telly. It took me a while to make my way to the bar but I enjoyed (almost) participating in this lively scene. We found a place to stand and chatted with locals who filled us in on the match.

Lincoln is one of Britain's earlier castles, having been built by William the Conqueror in the late 11th century. This is a large and well-preserved castle not too far from the cathedral. A square tower, the Observatory Tower, stands on top of a mound above the outer walls and dominates the city. A second mound is crowned by the 'Lucy Tower', and was probably built in the 12th century. There is also a complete curtain wall surrounding the castle. It was a Saturday and the castle was busy with a crafts fair set up in the inner courtyard consisting of about a dozen or so tents and a children's activity area. As we entered the courtyard we could see the tall spires of the cathedral looming overhead. We spent some time exploring the inner courtyard and both towers. The castle wall-walks are quite impressive here, providing wide views of the town and surrounding countryside. We also toured the Victorian prison. Lincoln is one of many British castles that served as a prison during Victorian times. Men, women, and children were held here from 1848 to 1878. We ended our tour of the castle by visiting the gift shop.

We were also in Lincoln to see the remains (stump) of an original "Eleanor Cross" found just outside the castle walls. Eleanor of Castile was the wife of King Edward I. Edward was devoted to his wife (reportedly a true love-match), and when she died in November of 1290 in Nottinghamshire, Edward erected a series of twelve crosses marking the nightly resting-places along the route taken as her body was transported to Westminster Abbey. Most of the crosses were eventually destroyed, however several were later restored to their former glory. Among these are "Charing Cross" that famous point in London that was named for the Eleanor cross erected there.

Next we spent time shopping the along Minster Yard, the street that connects Lincoln Castle with the cathedral. Here we stopped in a number of shops and purchased a couple of prints of the city from a local vendor who was set up on the street. We passed several lovely period buildings including a three story Tudor, half-timbered structure with a "To Let" sign on the front. Visiting Lincoln Cathedral was another stop on our "Neville Family" pilgrimage . The cathedral is the final resting place of Katherine Swynford, and her daughter Joan Beaufort. Kathrine was the third wife of John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III, and arguably one of the British Middle Ages most pivotal figures. Gaunt (through his first wife) was the founder of the Lancastrian dynasty

(Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI). John and Kathrine's daughter, Joan Beaufort, (buried here with her mother) married Ralph Neville, the powerful 1st Earl of Westmoreland. She was the grandmother of King Edward IV and King Richard III and her descendants also founded the Stuart dynasty. Her brother John Beaufort was the grandfather of Margaret Beaufort and therefore the great-grandfather of the first Tudor king, Henry VII. Not bad; one man - three English royal dynasties! Katherine died on 10 May 1403 at Lincoln. She was buried at Lincoln Cathedral in the choir of angels. Her tomb was made of Purbeck marble, and the lid contained heraldic shields surrounded by garters. The tomb was crowned with a brass canopy, on which Katherine herself was depicted in a widow's wimple, and above it rose a vaulted canopy. Unfortunately some of the tomb was destroyed during the English Civil War. We stayed here for a while, looking at the tomb and imagining the fine adornments that it once held, and pondering the importance of the two women interred here.

But certainly more notable that Kathryn Swynford's Chantry is that the cathedral holds one of the four original copies of the Magna Carta (which had since been moved to the castle). As a medieval enthusiast, being able to view the document that was arguably the blueprint for modern representative government, was a very special moment. Other highlights of the cathedral include two beautiful Rose Windows, the Vaults, the cathedral bells and Tower Clock, and the Wren Library. Of course the cathedral features other hallmarks of gothic cathedrals; flying buttresses and ribbed vaulting, beautiful stained glass windows, tall spires, and an elaborately carved 14th-century screen. We spent a lot more time here than the castle and by the time we finally left mid-afternoon had turned in to early evening. We decided that it was now simply too late to visit Middleham Castle on the way back. Instead we continued exploring the town and had dinner at a local restaurant. After dinner we started the long drive back to York. We had been absolutely enchanted by Lincoln, the town, the castle, and the cathedral, and what was supposed to be an early afternoon visit became an all day affair. I'm certainly not complaining!

We began the following day with a quick visit to the picturesque market town of Helmsley in the North York Moors National Park. We were here to see Helmsley Castle before embarking on our primary sites for the day, Rievaulx Abbey and Fountain's Abbey, two of Yorkshire's most impressive medieval ruins. Helmsley, originally a timber castle, was built by Walter l'Espec in the early 12th century. The castle is positioned on a rocky outcrop overlooking the River Rye, and features double ditches surrounding a rectangular inner bailey. Rather than the traditional English motte-and-bailey castle, Helmsley is a ringwork. We entered the castle by going through the South Barbican (still substantial), then across a drawbridge spanning the ditch below, through the South Gate, and finally into the inner ward. Although greatly ruined, portions of the castle remain substantial. The inner ward has the footings of the castle's kitchen, chapel and hall. Very little of the curtain well remains. We spent time here exploring the castle, accompanied by an energetic but well-behaved group of school boys. Actually the most striking thing about Helmsley were the multitudes of purple flowers that seemed to spring from much of the castle's masonry remains. It was beautiful.

We left Helmsley glad that we had taken the time to visit this sometimes overlooked, but beautiful castle and market town. Rievaulx Abbey is only three miles from Helmsley just off the B1257. Rievaulx was a Cistercian abbey and one of the great abbeys of England prior to Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. Its remote location in the North York Moors was well suited to the order's ideal of a strict life of prayer and self-sufficiency. We parked the car and found ourself facing one of the larger monastic ruins I have seen. We had visited Tintern Abbey in Wales on our first trip to Britain in 1992, and were stunned by its beauty. Rievaulx seemed a bit more complete, though perhaps more compact than Tintern. While Tintern may have a more expansive nave, Rievaulx seemed to have more complete interior structures. The Nave, Choir, and Transepts are still largely intact, and form the classic cruciform (cross) layout common to many abbeys, cathedrals and churches in Britain. Many of the large columns still support their arches and exhibit fine detail. The eastern end of the church is perhaps the most impressive part of the abbey, with its three-tiered walls and arcades of tall pointed arches. As impressive as Rievaulx is, it was difficult to not be distracted by the beauty of the surrounding countryside. There's a lot to see and enjoy here and the grandeur of the site combined with the pastoral setting makes this a remarkable place.

We left Rievaulx Abbey and started down the A170 on the way yo our next destination, Fountain's Abbey. First we made a quick stop in the market town of Thirsk, known for its associations with veterinarian and author James Herriot. His books based on his life as a Yorkshire had been turned into a beloved British series, "All Creatures Great and Small." Being the silly American tourists that we are, we just had to stop by, although, in our defense Thirsk was very much on the way to Fountains Abbey. Thirsk is an ancient and lovely market town with origins dating to 500-600 BC. The town also has connections to the Vikings and Anglo-Saxon Britain. We parked the car and began by visiting St Mary's Church near the town center. This is a large, well appointed church that almost seems like a cathedral, and dates to the late 11th century. The church is of the Perpendicular English Style of Gothic Architecture, and has a tall an impressive main tower. Highlights inside the church include the Nave with six arches supported by five lofty piers, the octagonal font with a decorated canopy on top , tracery windows with fine glass. We took out time exploring this time-capsule of local history before exploring more the town. And yes, we did find the well-photographed door of the James Harriot surgery, although there was no sign of Mrs. Hall.

It was about a 40 minute drive from Thirsk to Fountains Abbey via the A168 and B6265, passing first through the town of Ripon. Fountains Abbey is one of the largest and best preserved ruined Cistercian monasteries in England. Founded in 1132, the abbey operated for 407 years, becoming one of the wealthiest monasteries in England until its dissolution in 1539. We parked our car in the large parking lot and paid our admission. You have to make your way down a paved path a bit before you can really see much of the abbey. Eventually the abbey reveals itself in all its grandeur. While we were impressed with the style and size of Rievaulx, we were blown away by Fountains Abbey. According to the guidebook the abbey grounds covered 70 acres and was once surrounded by an 11-foot wall built in the 13th century. This is a huge complex with buildings that, even in ruin, remain massive and formidable. Fountains seemed to me more like a palace rather than an abbey, equaling or exceeding in size and layout most of the castles we

had visited. The builders of Fountains were obviously very wealthy. The abbey was founded in the 1130s and by the 1170s the abbey church had reached a length of 300 ft and had 11 bays in the side aisles. To me this was the most impressive part of the abbey and we lingered here admiring the wide open nave and the huge columns that framed the space. There is also a 160-foot-tall tower at the northern end of the north transept that seemed a bit out of place in an abbey. The square Cloister Court is found next to the abbey church near the center, and is also bounded by the Cloister, Chapter House, and Refectory. It took us a more than an hour to explore the abbey and grounds, and I don't think we managed to see everything. In addition, the entire abbey is part of the larger Studley Royal Park which features an 18th-century landscaped garden, a water garden, the ruins of a Jacobean mansion and a Victorian church. It would certainly take more than an afternoon to visit and explore the abbey and all the park has to offer. We did spend some time walking the portion of the park that was close to Fountains, but by then it was time for us to leave. During the walk back to the car and on the way home we had time to reflect on the places we had visited. Rievaulx and Fountains were certainly two of the more majestic ruins we had explored, and we wondered if there was anything left on out itinerary that could equal this day. (Don't worry...there was.)

The following day we returned to our exploration of the Neville family by visiting three sites associated with the family, Brancepeth Castle, Raby Castle, and St Mary's church at Staindrop. We began with a visit to Brancepeth Castle in the village of Brancepeth, County Durham. The first castle here was built by the Bulmers, however it was rebuilt by the Neville family in the late 14th century. The Neville's retained the castle 1569 when it was confiscated by the Crown following the family's involvement in the Rising of the North. Today there is a golf club surrounding the castle and the castle is privately owned. We arrived, parked our car and approached Brancepeth's impressive twin-tower gatehouse. Although access to the castle was limited, interestingly the village post office was located in one of the towers. Cool! We checked out the post office then visited the castle's inner courtyard. As I recall access to the rest of the castle was restricted. We next visited the village church in that was associated with the Neville family, St Brandon's, Brancepeth. St Brandon's was a lovely church with marvelous tomb effigies of the Neville family and other historic relics, and those effigies are what brought us here. A large stained glass window frames the alter and the church also features impressive woodwork. In the center of the aisle is the stone effigy of Sir Robert Neville (1319) known as The Peacock of the North (below). He fought at the Battle of Bannockburn, but was killed in battle when Scottish raiders attacked Berwick, England. It is said that he was killed by Sir James 'The Good' Earl of Douglas, in single combat during the battle. Today his stone effigy is unadorned but enjoys a prominent position in the church. The church also has a wonderful wooden carved tomb effigy of Ralph Neville, 2nd Earl of Westmorland and his wife, Elizabeth Percy (below). The head of the 2nd Earl rests on the head of a boar, the crest of the Neville family. Ralph raised troops for the Lancastrian side in the War of the Roses but did not take a major part if the fighting. This is one of two churches containing important effigies of the powerful Neville family. It was the perfect way to end our trip to Brancepeth.

By way of a very sad update, St Brandon's was largely destroyed by a devastating fire four years later in 1998. Almost all of the wood inside the church was destroyed, including the wooden

effigy of Ralph Neville mentioned above. The stone effigy of Sir Robert Neville survived but molten metal falling from the ceiling created yellow stains on the monument. Ironically the fire also uncovered a large, hidden collection of 12th to 13th century grave slabs buried in the walls of the clerestory. Forty of these have been kept in the church, which completed its restoration in 2014. My wife and I are thankful that we had the opportunity to see this important family church prior to the fire.

The following day we again jumped back on the "Neville Trail" visiting the site of "Neville's Cross," Raby Castle, and St Mary's Church in Staindrop. Raby Castle, principal seat of the powerful Neville family is about a 2 hour drive from York to Raby via the A1 and the B6275. Given the distance, these would be our only stops for the day. Our first stop was a quick visit to Neville's Cross, a town in County Durham, and site of the Battle of Neville's Cross. Here in 1346 an English force of 7,000 men successfully repelled a Scottish invasion force numbering 12,000. To commemorate the battle a monument was erected to the south of the battlefield by Ralph Neville, 2nd Baron Neville of Raby. The cross is now largely destroyed with only the base and the bottom part of the shaft surviving.

Raby Castle in County Durham is set in a lovely 200-acre Deer Park and features, among other things, a beautiful 18th-century walled garden. The Neville family built most of the castle in the 14th century and retained it until the aforementioned "Rising of the North" in 1569. The castle is still a private home and remains the seat of the Vane family, the Barons Barnard. The 11th Baron carried out an extensive renovation and restoration after inheriting the barony in 1964. We arrived at the castle in the late morning on a gray day. We parked the car and first explored the exterior of the castle before venturing inside. Raby is an impressive and large castle, however the plan of the castle is a bit irregular with nine towers on the outer perimeter. We walked around the castle in order to see these towers, including the Clifford Tower, the castle's highest tower at 80 ft, Joan's Tower, the Octagon Drawing Room, which faces the lake, Bulmer's Tower, the Chapel Tower, and the Kitchen Tower. The five-sided Bulmer's Tower is the most impressive looking of Ruby's towers, while the Octagon Drawing Room with its large tracery windows perhaps the most handsome. A low, battlemented wall surrounds the perimeter of the castle some of which have small cannon, a nod to the castle's post-medieval heritage. There are wide views of the surrounding estate from here including the lake and Deer Park. Although it was a gray and chilly day we spend a lot of time outside taking in all the impressive views; castle and estate. Today, as in medieval times, the main entrance to the castle is through the "Neville Gateway" a four-storey tower with the Neville family's heraldic badges carved above the second floor window. We entered the castle and found ourselves in the large Inner Courtyard. We explored what we could but I seem to remember that on the day we visited the inside of the castle was closed to the public. Bad luck there. Also, due to the bad weather it was impractical to walk the grounds of the estate. Bad luck there too, but you can't have warm sunny days every day! We decided instead to leave the castle, grab a quick pub lunch (and a pint) before heading to our next destination.

St Mary's Church at Staindrop lies close to Raby Castle just off the A688. St Mary's is an ancient church with origins dating back to 8th-century Anglo-Saxon England. Later it became the

principal place of worship for the Neville family of Raby. From the St Mary's Church website we learn the following:

"The first Church dates from the time of Alhred, King of Northumberland, with a saxon building dating back to 771. Little is known of Staindrop in this period as its recorded history doesn't begin until the early 11th Century, when Staindrop was the home to a Manor of King Cnut (Canute II). The only very early piece of work left is the sundial now built into the wall above the chancel arch in the near the corner with the North arcade. In 1131 the Manor and lands were then granted to Dolfin or Dolphin the son of Uchtred. Following the death of Dolphin his son Maldred further enlarged the church around 1180. In turn Maldred was succeeded by his son Robert Fitz-Maldred who married Isabella Nevill a wealthy Norman heiress."

So it was the union of Robert Fitz-Maldred and Isabella Neville that essentially brought St Mary's into the Neville orbit. The Neville family tomb effigies here are both ancient and historic. The church is the final resting place of, among others, Ralph Neville, 1st earl of Westmoreland, a powerful noble who (along with his family) helped shape the dynastic landscape of England in the 13th and 14th centuries. This is another impressive, historic church to explore. As we went inside we immediately noticed the long nave flanked by arcades supported by large columns. This leads to the 14th-century wooden screen and eventually the alter with its large stained glass window. But we are here to see the Neville family tomb effigies, the most impressive of which is Ralph Neville, 1sr Earl of Westmoreland and his first wife, Margaret Stafford (below). Nelille's second wife was Joan Beaufort, and her connection with the Neville family is discussed in the Lincoln Cathedral portion of the essay above. Also here are the effigies for Isabel Neville Fitz-Maldred one of her children. The effigy of Euphemia de Clavering, wife of Ranulph Neville, is found under an elaborate canopy in the South Wall. There are other Neville family towns here as well, but we'll stick with this group for now. We explored as much of the church as we could because we soon realized that were in the presence of some pretty important medieval characters and history. Afterwards we returned to the car for the start of our long drive back to York. It had been another eventful day, the disappointment of Raby Castle being closed wiped away by what we explored at St Mary's Church.

Our time in England was almost over but we had one final day to explore a site I had been wanting to visit for years, Hadrian's Wall. I had studied a lot of Roman history in High School and College and had always been fascinated by the wall across England (Britannia) built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian beginning in 122 AD. The wall marked the boundary between Roman Britannia and unconquered Caledonia to the north. It ran 73 miles from Wallsend on the River Tyne in the east to Bowness-on-Solway in the west. Built along the wall were a series of forts where Roman troops were stationed, as well as smaller "Mile-Forts" at regular intervals along the course of the wall. There is some debate as to its original purpose. A barrier to keep out people from the north, or Romanized people in? A communications and transport system for messages and troop movement? A border? All of these? Probably.

It took us almost 3 hours to reach our destination from York, mostly along the A1. We settled on exploring the wall's best-known starting point, Housesteads Roman Fort, dramatically

positioned on the end of the mile-long crag overlooking sparsely populated hills. There are always lots of tourists here but it's still a good place to start if it's your first visit. We parked our car and visited a small on-site museum before exploring the ruins of the fort and then the wall itself. As the case with many Roman ruins, the fort here is mainly down to footings of buildings and low walls, and other below-ground structures, so you have to use your imagination a bit to envision what the fort looked like when it was complete. Exceptions include the northern granary still has its low walls and pillars that supported a raised floor, the latrines, and a few other buildings. After exploring the fort for a while, we hiked to the wall. As you walk Hadrian's Wall (in many places) you can either walk along a path next to the wall or on the top of the wall itself. We did both. We walked as far as we could while still staying is sight of the fort, before returning. We spent the rest of the after stopping by other places along the wall which tended to be less visited but are just as impressive, including a couple of Mile-Forts. By this time it was mid afternoon and time to head back to York. I was pretty satisfied on the way back, having crossed a big "bucket-item" off my list.

Our time in England was over. We got up the next day, checked out of our hotel in York and began the long journey to our next destination, Conwy, Wales. The first part of our trip had been a great success. We explored the ancient, historic cities of York and Lincoln, visited several castles, tracked down sites related to the Neville family, enjoyed the beauty and wildness of The North York Moors National Park, visited the marvelous abbeys of Rievaulx and Fountains, and did some hiking along Hadrian's Wall. Plus, I was turning out to be a pretty competent driver for my first time! We left York excited by what we had experienced on this part of our holiday, but also with great anticipation of what was to come next. Wales.

Part II: Wales, Conwy & St David's

It took us about three hours to drive from York into Wales, via several M-roads and finally the A55 once in Wales. Our accommodation in Wales was in just outside the historic town of Conwy, but we stopped first at Rhuddlan Castle. Rhuddlan was part of a chain of strong castles built by King Edward I (boo!) in the 1270s and 1280s as part of his conquest of Wales. Rhuddlan first appears in the historical record in the 8th century. Following the death of King Offa of Mercia in 796 the English won a battle at Rhuddlan, as they pushed their way further into northeast Wales. In the decades that followed Rhuddlan changed hands several times between English and Welsh (or British). By 1093 Rhuddlan was the royal seat of Welsh prince Gruffydd ap Llywelyn and the base from which he plundered English lands as far east as Oswestry, however in that same year Gruffydd was driven from Rhuddlan by Earl Harold (Godwinson) and his palace burned (Edwards 1991). The first motte-and-bailey castle at Rhuddlan was built by the Norman "Robert of Rhuddlan" the huge mound of which (Twthill Castle) is still prominent on the landscape next to Edward's later masonry castle.

Fast forward to the late 13th century when King Edward began his construction of the present day Rhuddlan Castle, overseen by Master Bertram, and later his master castle builder, James of St George. Rhuddlan was the first new fortress built as part of Edward's "Iron Ring" of castles in north Wales. Here he took extraordinary steps to make sure his new castle could be supplied by

water by diverting the course of the nearby Clwyd, bringing it next to the castle. To do this he conscripted hundreds of ditch-diggers to deepen and divert its course. Wow!

We parked the car and began our visit to the castle. Rhuddlan is a concentric castle with 5 towers connected by a high curtain wall. What stands out immediately is the large twin-tower gatehouse mostly complete and still quite impressive. The gatehouse towers, as well as others, are missing their finishing stone from the bottom portion of the tower, creating something of an odd appearance. Once inside the castle's inner courtyard I was struck by the thickness of the towers and curtain wall, now exposed after centuries of ruin. Modern metal stairs have been fitted into one of the towers of the east gatehouse which allows visitors to access the wall-walks on top the of the castle. From here there are expansive views of the surrounding countryside. There is a deep dry moat with high ditches near the North Tower that would have been a challenging obstacle to would-be attackers. Lying next to the river Clwyd are the ruins of the Dock Gate & Gillott's Tower that protected incoming vessels. This was the first opportunity I had to appreciate some of the genius behind the constructions of one of Edward's castles. Impressive. We spent time here both inside and outside the castle before departing for Conwy. Although Rhuddlan is not as well known or as impressive as some of Edward's later castles, it was enough to give us a good idea of what was to come.

Today, Conwy is approached from the east via the A55 through North Wales. The beauty of this section of the country rivals anything in Britain. Approaching Conwy, the castle seems to suddenly rise out of the hills. The majestic old suspension bridge connecting the castle with the main peninsula, depicted in many representations of the castle over the years, still guards the main approach to the castle. We arrived in Conwy late Saturday afternoon. We drove through the town several times trying to find our hotel, without success. We finally stopped and asked a local man if he knew of the hotel, and were promptly given friendly, accurate directions to our destination. We checked in to the Park Hall Hotel, which is about a half mile outside town, changed and rested a bit following our long drive from York. We then returned to town and immediately assaulted the castle. Probably the best, simple description of Conwy is found in the guidebook published by CADW, the Welsh Historic Trust, which states: "Conwy is by any standards one of the great fortresses of medieval Europe." Again quoting from the castle guidebook:

"Anyone looking at Conwy Castle for the first time will be impressed first and foremost by the unity and compactness of so great a mass of building, with its eight almost identical towers, four on the north and four on the south, pinning it to the rock on which it stands. Especially striking is the long northern front, where the tower's equidistant spacing divides the wall surface into three exactly similar sections, each pierced by a similar pair of arrowloops, and each rising to a common battlement line."

The fortress was designed by Edward I's master castle builder James of St. George, who built eight massive towers and high curtain wall to protect the castle. Construction began in 1283, the castle becoming an important part of King Edward I's plan of surrounding Wales with "an iron ring of castles" to conquer the Welsh people. The highly defensible wall Edward built

around the town was intended to protect the English colony planted at Conwy, because the native Welsh population were understandably violently opposed to English occupation of their homeland. Like Edward's other well-preserved castles, Conwy gives visitors the opportunity to walk top portions of the curtain wall, and ascend higher to the tops of the towers. From these vantage points you can begin to appreciate the layout of the castle interior - the Inner Ward, Great Hall and Cellars, King's Hall, and other associated buildings. To quote further:

"The Inner Ward is the heart of the castle, containing, as it does, the suite of apartments which Master James of St. George contracted to build for King Edward and Queen Eleanor in 1283. In each range of buildings the principal rooms were on the first floor, with heated but somewhat dark basements below them. All the floors are now missing."

Although the interior of the castle is not nearly as complete as Caernarfon, the rectangular shaped interior is unique among Edward's castles. The different sections rise to three distinct heights in a terraced fashion, reminding one a little of the Inner Ward structure at Chepstow Castle in southeast Wales. After our assault on the castle was complete, we decided to explore the town. Conwy is a small town with narrow one way streets. In the town square stands a statue of Llywelyn ap Iowerth, or Llywelyn the Great (d.1240) the founder of Conwy and one of Wales' most heroic and popular medieval leaders. The statue is painted according to Llywelyn's supposed heraldic colors, and forms part of a small fountain that serves as the centerpiece for the town square.

Conwy is a town that time has simply chosen to pass by. Despite a few modern shops, Conwy still looks very similar to the town Edward envisioned some 700 years ago. The ancient town walls, castle and simple streets offer very little to remind the visitor of the modern world. Conwy is something of a paradox. Originally a symbol of English domination of Wales, in time the Welsh managed to reclaim the town, replacing English oppression with its own medieval character. Only at Conwy and St. Davids did we get the feeling of being transported back to ancient Wales.

After having dinner at a local fish & chips shop we decided to take on the town walls. The walls are remarkable for their state of preservation, forming almost a complete circuit around the town. Only a small section near the quay is inaccessible, and even here, the ruins of the wall have been incorporated into the existing buildings. The walls are 1400 yards in length and are flanked by twenty-one towers and three double tower gateways, a constant reminder of the mighty castle looming in the distance. Conwy Castle dominates the skyline from literally all points along the wall. The spur wall projecting 60 yards from the end of the quay offer some of the best views of the castle, including incredible floodlit nighttime views. It had been another interesting and exciting day as we came face-to-face with two of Edward's most impressive castles. We returned to our hotel, tired from the long day but eager to start again the following morning. We enjoyed dinner back at the Park Hall Hotel, where our hosts were a friendly husband, wife and son. After dinner we chatted for a bit and had drinks in the hotel bar where they told us a bit about Conwy and surrounds. We appreciated their hospitality and their willingness to help with some of our questions.

Our second and final day in north Wales was spent visiting additional castles in north Wales built by Edward I, Beaumaris and Caernarfon. Beaumaris was first. From Conwy we hopped on the A55 and sped across north Wales opting to cross over to Anglesey via the Menai Bridge rather than the bridge further west. We stooped in the town of Menai Bridge just briefly to stretch our legs and browse some of the shops along the high street. Then it was back in the car for the short ride to Beaumaris via the A545.

The town of Beaumaris is a lovely seaside town with pretty colored buildings, shops, pubs, and restaurants, nice public park, and, oh yes, the ruins of a 13th century castle. We parked our car in the large car park close to the castle next to the shore. Beaumaris is a handsome castle with almost perfect symmetry. The image most people associate with Beaumaris is one of swans swimming peacefully in the castle moat, framed by the castle's handsome checkered-stone exterior towers. This is the first striking aspect of Beaumaris: the castle's exterior beauty. Although never completed to their planned height, Beaumaris' large towers are impressive. Most of the castle is surrounded by a moat, next to park and playground complete with picnic tables. Families of ducks and swans swimming peacefully in the castle most add to the attractive setting. So, much of Beaumaris' beauty can actually be appreciated even before setting foot inside the castle. Construction of Beaumaris began in 1295 and a substantial workforce was employed in the initial years under the direction of James of St George. Beaumaris was never completed as planned, partly because funds for its construction were diverted to Edward's Scottish campaign.

We entered the castle via a wooden bridge and a substantial gatehouse complete with murder holes. The castles exterior towers are quite large but Beaumaris' six inner ward towers are even larger. Once inside the gatehouse the dimensions of these towers become apparent, if not a bit confusing. Confusing, because the concentric design of the castle means that one set of walls and towers looks exactly like the others as you make your way around the ward. After exploring the large inner ward we entered one of the towers and began exploring the castle's fascinating interior passageways running inside the walls of the castle. Beaumaris and Caernarfon are practically the only two Welsh castles that afford visitors an opportunity to explore significant sections of inner wall passageways. Although Caernarfon's are more extensive, the passageways at Beaumaris are darker, a bit rougher around the edges, and therefore more atmospheric (or a little bit scarier). These passageways were intended to allow members of the castle to move between the towers, accessing the guardrooms, sleeping chambers and the castle latrines. We worked our way along the passageway which eventually brightened and led to the Chapel Tower, one of two of the inner ward's large D-towers. We continued our exploration of the castle's passageways including the latrine chutes stationed along the way that emptied into the moat. Then it was back outside to explore the Outer Ward including the large towers and battlemented curtain wall. From this vantage point the Chapel and Middle towers are even more impressive, tall, stout structures that dominate the outer ward. This area of the castle also leads to the Llanfaes Gate, the dock that was used to resupply the castle from the water.

We also enjoyed the wonderful views afforded across the Menai Straight to the Snowdonia Mountains beyond; breathtaking scenery that can be enjoyed from within or outside the castle. Although Beaumaris lacks the spectacular siting of some of Edward's other north Wales castles, the beauty of the castle and surrounding countryside is undeniable. Beaumaris has been designated a "World Heritage Site" because it represents a significant accomplishment in the art of medieval castle-building. We lingered at the castle and in the town for quite a while, enjoying our usual pub lunch and a pint at the "Ye Olde Bull's Head on the high street, before returning to the car and heading back to the mainland and our final castle of the day, Caernarfon.

We headed back over the Meani Bridge and drove south on the A487 towards Caernarfon. The current masonry castle built by Edward I (boo!) replaced an earlier 11th century motte castle, and the castle and town established by Edward acted as the administrative center of north Wales. As a result the defenses at Caernarfon were built on a grand scale. Construction began in 1283 during the Second Welsh War of 1282-83 between Edward and Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. The large castle that Edward built here included a moat and set of protective town walls, similar in purpose to the ones he built at Conwy and Denbigh. Not a lot of the wall remains to be explored today.

The town of Caernarfon was pretty, but seemed busy and crowded with tourists on the day we arrived. As in other tourist destinations in Wales there are a lot of tacky tourist shops here, which is fine for some, but not our cup of tea. Instead we headed straight for the castle, parking in the lot next to the castle and the quay. The scale of Caernarfon is indeed grand, with banded colored stone in used for its walls and polygonal towers. Some historians feel that with this deliberate design, Edward was making a statement about the power of his castle as an administrative center or perhaps echoing the authority of Roman Britain. There was once a Roman fort at Caernarfon, Segontium, now ruined and located on the outskirts of the modern town. We entered the castle through the King's Gate and found ourselves in the upper ward. From here we could see all nine of Caernarfon's towers. The largest and most impressive of these is the Eagle Tower (below), crowned by its triple cluster of turrets. Most of the towers, halls and apartments here were built to a grand scale. The Queen's Tower is found in the lower ward, as is the aforementioned Eagle Tower, Well Tower and Hall. We explored all of these. There are several educational on-site exhibits here, including a history of the castle, to help visitors understand the important events that took place here. Caernarfon is also the home to the Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum. After spending some time in the upper and lower wards of the castle, we decided to explore Caernarfon's interior passageways. Here the passageways are more extensive, more complete and better lit than the ones found at Beaumaris. Lots to explore here. Then we made our way up the steps to the tower to spend time on the castle wall-walks. From here, the views of both the castle and surrounding countryside are fantastic.

In several ways, Caernarfon probably offers one of the best medieval castle experiences in Wales. It basically has everything. It's a large, impressive, and nearly-complete castle. Its towers are magnificent, as are its top-of-the-castle wall-walks and interior passageways. Caernarfon has an important and extensive history in the struggles between Welsh and English, and its on-site educational resources are good. The castle is a designated World Heritage Site, and I will

not argue with people who say Caernarfon is their favorite. Others, including me, prefer castles that are/were built by the native princes of Wales, are set in spectacular countryside or in impressive defensive positions, and take a bit of effort to reach. To each is own. By this time it was late afternoon and we headed back to Conwy. We were certainly impressed with the three castles we had seen on this part of the trip. Conway ranked number one followed by Beaumaris and finally Caernarfon, in somewhat of a distant third place.

Our last night in Conwy was special for a couple of reasons. After spending the day visiting Beaumaris and Caernarfon castles, we decided to try some local Welsh cuisine back in Conwy. We chose the Erskin Hotel, where we dined on grilled lamb steak, potatoes and vegetables. Finishing dinner at 10:30, we made our way back to the town wall to view floodlit Conwy Castle at night, and were rewarded with a spectacular sight. I had seen photographs of the floodlit castle, although they failed to prepare me for the real thing. All eight of the castle's towers were individually lit with spotlights, along with sections of the curtain wall and the old suspension bridge. Standing on the wall viewing the castle, I felt as though I finally understood Conwy's meaning and place in medieval Welsh history. I felt the ghosts of Llywelyn the Great, Owain Glyn Dwr, and all the Welshmen who died fighting against what the castle stood for, all still making their presence felt today in this historic medieval town.

We awoke the following morning, had breakfast, and checked out of the hotel. Conwy was ultimately a powerful reminder of why we came to this marvelous place called Wales. Our two days and nights in Conwy were probably my favorite part of the trip. Visiting Raby and Lincoln stirred Parthene's medieval roots, while Conwy and St. Davids had the same impact on me. Departing the area through the beautiful "Vale of Conwy," we were excited to finally be on our way to St. Davids, but still a little sad that we had only spent two days in the remarkable Welsh town of Conwy.

We left Conwy the following morning starting our long drive to St David's in southwest Wales. We had two places to visit along the way. The first was Dolwyddelan Castle and the second, Harlech Castle. From Conwy we headed south along the B5106 which takes you through the beautiful Vale of Conwy. Here dramatic green hills with their flocks of sheep are punctuated by stone farms and winding streams. We simply had to stop several times to admire the stunning beauty.

Dolwyddelan Castle is only about 4 or 5 miles south of Conwy, and like many of the native-built castles, is surrounded by spectacular countryside, in this instance southern Snowdonia. Before arriving at the castle you first pass through the pleasant village of Dolwyddelan. Once past the village, Dolwyddelan's lonely keep rises into view sitting majestically above the surrounding countryside. The castle and car park are on the right side of the road and there's ample parking. Chances are you'll be greeted by one of the many sheep that keep watch over the castle. One such ambassador served as our guide leading us almost all the way to the visitor’s center, her "bleating" seemingly welcoming us to the castle (or perhaps announcing our arrival). We an arrived in the morning and noticed a few camping tents pitched conveniently on the side of the

hill. There are wonderful walks all around Dolwyddelan, and the area is very popular with hikers. A castle, great walks, and a nearby village makes the area a great choice for a holiday.

In regards to the history of this important castle, Frances Lynch tells us that:

"Dolwyddelan is traditionally the birthplace of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, though the actual site was perhaps the vanished castle of the rocky knoll in the valley floor (above). There is no evidence for any building at the present castle site earlier than the early 13th century, when the area came under Llywelyn's control. The site covers two routes into Snowdonia, and admirably demonstrates Llywelyn's scheme of defence and control. Dolwyddelan remained an important stronghold for his grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, and its capture by the English, perhaps through treachery, on 18 January 1283 was a turning point of the Edwardian campaign."

We paid our admission at the farm just up the track from the car park and began our hike to the castle. We had not yet visited a castle built by the native rulers of Wales, so we approached Dolwyddelan with great anticipation. It's a bit of hike to reach the castle but that was OK, and is actually what I prefer. Our reward for the hike were wide views of the surrounding countryside, the rugged but still beautiful edge of southern Snowdonia. As we expected there were sheep all around us grazing the somewhat rough terrain. A set of stone stairs finally led us to the base of the keep. The square keep at Dolwyddelan is quite large and intact. We climbed the wooden stairs to the entrance and found ourselves in a large room with display placards mentioning the castle's history. Stone stairs from the display room lead outside to the top of the keep. Here the walls are battlemented with saw-tooth merlons. It was from this vantage point that I began to understand the strategic siting of the castle. With sweeping views in all directions there would have been plenty of opportunity to spot anyone (or any army) approaching the castle. We spent time here taking in the views before exiting the keep to explore outside. The smaller West Tower survives close to the main keep but is largely destroyed and reduced to footings with the exception of a single wall still with its ground level doorway and window. We were also able to trace the line of the castle's curtain wall, which has also been greatly reduced but is still recognizable. We continued to linger outside exploring the ruins and the perimeter of the castle, before making our way back down the trail and to our car.

There was something very different about visiting Dolwyddelan, and I was surprised that I enjoyed this castle experience just as much as visiting Edward's large castles in north Wales. Maybe it was the history; the fact that this castle was built by the native rulers of Wales trying to defend their homeland against the Norman invaision. I also felt that away from the crowds, engulfed by the peace and quiet of the countryside, it was easier to hear the voices of those who were once here.

We left Dolwyddelan and headed southwest on the A470, then the A496 thru Blaenau Ffestiniog, and finally the B4573 to reach Harlech, a short trip of less than an hour. We had visited Harlech on our first trip to Britain with my parents in 1992 and I was anxious to get back explore the castle further. So much has been written about Harlech that it's difficult to know where to begin. Harlech is yet another concentric castle built by King Edward I (boo!) that could

be supplied by the sea. Unlike Conwy and Caernarfon, Harlech is far more remote. The castle sits on a rocky knoll close to the Irish Sea. Construction began in 1282 during the Second Welsh War of independence. Harlech also played a part in several additional wars, including the siege of Madog ap Llywelyn between 1294 and 1295, and fell to Owain Glyn Dwr in 1404 before being retaken by the English in 1409. In the 15th century it was involved in the struggles between the houses of Lancaster and York during The Wars of The Roses, and was occupied by Royalist forces during the English Civil was in the 1640s.

We pulled into in the parking lot in front of the castle. We decided to first have lunch (and the mandatory pint) at the Castle Hotel next to the car park. Some of the tables here provide nice views of the castle. Afterwards we paid our admission at the gift shop and headed for the castle. Harlech's gatehouse is massive, its large round towers fronted by smaller twin corbelled towers. Before entering we took a look at Harlech's much-reduced curtain wall that stretches all the way around the castle. These certainly would have been impressive when complete. We passed through the portcullis gates and under the murder holes directly above our heads. Not much chance of getting through alive here. The gatehouse complex at Harlech is massive, something that is better appreciated from the castle courtyard looking back towards the rear of the gatehouse. The gatehouse has two upper floors with various rooms, windows and fireplaces. We spent time in the inner ward admiring the four large circular tall towers protecting it. We explored the remains of the Chapel and the West Range before exiting the castle via a rear gate to see Harlech's "way to the sea". The gate brings you to an area outside the main castle but still protected by the curtain wall. A passage through the wall leads to series of stone steps that at one time led down to the sea, the castle's means of resupply. Next it was up to the top of the castle to view the surrounding countryside from Harlech's wall-walks. This time we took the interior tower stairs rather than the external staircase. A lot of visitors to Harlech don't explore this part of the castle. It does take some effort to climb the stairs and there are basically no handrails along the low walls at the top (see below). We were OK with both and were again rewarded with some of the best castle-top views in Wales. Up here you can really appreciate the remote location of the castle enjoys. (If you can ignore he caravan park.) We spent some time here before climbing back down. We explored a bit more of the castle, the exhibit room and the area between the castle and curtain wall before getting back in the car and heading for St Davids. We had visited two remarkable, but very different castles providing very different experiences. Both were rewarding and we would revisit both on subsequent trips.

We took our time getting to St David's; about a 5-hour drive straight down the A487 from Harlech. We had booked a one week time share exchange at the St. Davids Vacation Club, situated on High Street in the center of the city. We had a very nice upper floor two-bedroom unit that included a small kitchen, dining room table, and seating area with a sofa and chairs. All the rooms were off a nicely-landscaped inner courtyard which gave the accommodation a sense of privacy. Nice! It was late in the day when we arrived so we checked in, unpacked and spent some time walking around the city. Since we had a self-catering unit we stopped by a nearby shop to purchase what we needed for the next couple of days (especially coffee). The next morning we got up early and explored the city a bit further, enjoying Welsh Cakes and coffee at

a local bakery. We decided to devote most of this first day exploring the area on foot. (I needed a break from driving.)

St. David is the patron saint of Wales. Legend claims he was born around 500 A.D. on the rugged Pembrokeshire coast near the city. He was the founder of a strict monastic order in the town that bears his name, and was the most influential clergyman in all Wales during the "Age of Saints." His place of birth and the cathedral built in his name became one of the most important shrines of medieval Christendom; two pilgrimages to St. Davids equaling one to Rome. Important sites at St. Davids include the cathedral and ruined Bishop's Palace, along with St. Non's Church and Well. St. Non was St. David's mother. The current St Davids Cathedral dates from 1176.

We decided to begin by heading to the beautiful Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Path near the city to visit St Non's Chapel and Well. It took us about 40 minutes down a well-marked path to reach the site. Along the way we passed farmlands but very few people as we made our way towards the coast. Before reaching the chapel we encountered St Non's Well, a holy well believed to possess curative powers and a destination for pilgrims for many centuries. A little further along we arrived at the ruins of St Non's Chapel (below) overlooking beautiful St Non's Bay. The chapel is small and mostly ruined with only scant remains of the four walls, and no roof. The chapel is also a significant holy and cultural site visited by pilgrims. A modern chapel was built in 1934 near the original ruins that gave us a good idea of how St Non's Chapel may once have appeared. We continued down the path to view the rugged and beautiful Pembrokeshire coastline, the bright blue water of the bay framed by green hills and blooming yellow gorse. Beautiful. It was easy to see why coastal walks here are so popular. We walked further along the path until we came to a point where we could see Ramsay Island across the bay. Today the island is a popular nature reserve and an important breeding ground for seabirds, including Puffins, with spectacular cliffs providing nesting. There are two daily boat trips to the island from St Justinians harbor but we failed to take advantage of this and opted instead for enjoying our picnic lunch along the path and simply taking in the scenery. After lunch we walked back to St Davids and picked up the car for our final visit of the day, St Justinian's Chapel. St Justinian was a contemporary of St David and is said to have been St David's confessor. Tradition says that Justinian was murdered on Ramsey Island, and his remains lie in St David's Cathedral. Like St Non's Chapel, the ruins of St Justinian's Chapel are a roofless shell. It is thought that the chapel was built in the 16th century possibly on foundations of the 6th and 7th centuries. There wasn't much to see here but I was determined to see as many sites associated with St David's as possible.

We had finished our coastal walk by mid afternoon and decided to spend the rest of the day exploring more of the Pembrokeshire coast. After resting up a bit at our hotel we hopped back in the car drove 30 miles up the A487 to the little village of Fishguard, a typical fishing village with a short tidal quay. There is an upper and lower Fishguard, the lower being the old town and the upper being the modern. We were here not only to explore this pretty village, but to have dinner at the famous Royal Oak pub. The pub was the place where in 1797 1,400 French soldiers surrendered after an unsuccessful and ill-advised British invasion. The "Battle of

Fishguard" lasted barely two days and is considered the last invasion of mainland Britain. When you read about the battle it really was a comedy of errors. I believe there is some kind of story, or legend, that has the angry women of the village marching out and successfully confronting the invaders. How embarrassing! To quote from the Royal Oak website:

"The Royal Oak is located in the centre of the Pembrokeshire town and fishing ferry port of Fishguard. The pub is famous for its place in history as in 1797, the French unsuccessfully attempted an invasion on the west coast of Wales only to be thwarted by the locals, this was the last invasion attempt on Britain. A peace treaty was signed between the British and French in the bar area."

We explored the village shops for a while, taking in the views across the quay before heading to the Royal Oak for dinner. Fortunately the food was very good and they had real ale on the hand pump so I was pretty happy. After our meal we headed back to St David's for a good night's sleep, and in anticipation of the next day's adventures.

The next day we took the short walk from our hotel to visit St. David's Cathedral and Bishop's Palace. St David's is one of the great historic shrines of Christendom. St David chose this wild, beautiful region as the site of his monastery in the 6th century and you will find his shrine in the purple-stoned cathedral, which nestles inconspicuously in a grassy hollow beneath the rooftops of the tiny city. As we approached we notices that the cathedral is surrounded by a high wall which we thought was somewhat unusual. We looked at several of the ancient grave markers just outside the entrance to the cathedral and wondered about their age. Once inside we were impressed by the large Nave with its breathtaking beauty. There were also a large number of interesting tombs and effigies lining the aisles of the cathedral. Most are the tombs of past Bishops of St. Davids and effigies of notable Welsh figures. The most grand of these is the tomb effigy of Bishop Henry Gower (1328-47) an important builder of both the cathedral and the Bishop's Palace. Not far behind in splendor is the tomb of Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, father of King Henry VII, the founder of the Welsh-born Tudor dynasty. His tomb is elaborately decorated with brass figures and heraldic emblems, occupying a place of great honor in the middle of the high alter at St. Davids. Also here is the tomb of Welsh prince Rhys ap Gruffydd the powerful and resourceful medieval ruler of the Kingdom of Deheubarth in south Wales. There are superb examples of the woodcarving in St Davids. Just gaze upwards at the decorative roof of take a look at the choir stalls dating from the late 15th century. The whimsical carvings on the hinged seats in the choir represented a movement away from the decorative conformity of earlier times. Another marvelous piece of history is the "Abraham Stone," a grave-marker that was embedded in an interior wall of the cathedral. The stone is a fine example of 11th century Celtic art, with its Christian cross interwoven with Celtic knot-work and inscriptions. The stone once marked the graves of Hedd and Issac, sons of Bishop Abraham who was killed by the Vikings during a raid in 1080. Another remarkable spot is the original pilgrim's recess in a part of the cathedral known as "Holy Trinity Chapel." The former 12th century exterior wall is now inside the cathedral, and houses an oak casket reportedly containing the bones of both St. David and St. Justin. Other highlights include the cathedral's large stained glass windows and

decorated vaulted ceilings. After spending about an hour in the cathedral we moved to the Bishop's Palace, an intriguing ruin right beside the cathedral.

Although ruinous, the Bishop's Palace at St. Davids is a substantial complex of buildings that still displays fine architectural details testifying to the power and money of the men who lived here. The site dates back to the 6th century, although the building that stands today dates largely from the late 13th and 14th centuries. The man responsible for much of the site that can be seen today was Bishop Henry de Gower (1328–47). Like the cathedral, the palace was surrounded by a town wall much of which remains on the south side. Although all the buildings here are roofless, and have been for centuries, most of the buildings themselves are intact. We entered the site and found ourselves in the wide open spaces of the palace courtyard. We immediately noticed the arcaded parapets that adorn some of the walls, making the Bishop's Palace feel like part palace and part fortress. We began by exploring the buildings of the East Range, including Bishop's Hall, before moving to the South Range. Here we found Bishop de Gower's Great Hall with its beautiful wheel window in the east gable, a distinctive arcaded parapet, and the majestic porch. There seemed little doubt that by the late 14th century the magnificence of the palace perhaps rivaled that of the cathedral. We finished here and headed back to town for our usual pub lunch. Visiting the cathedral and the Bishop's Palace was a valuable and educational experience as well as a feast for the senses. It's easy to understand why St David's still draws so many people.

After lunch we decided to drive the reasonable 30 miles or so to visit the Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber, a neolithic tomb in Pembrokeshire. Archaeologists date the tomb from around 3500 BC, and generally view the site as a communal burial place. According to Cadw:

"Pentre Ifan takes us back to Neolithic (New Stone Age) times, when our ancestors buried their dead in tombs such as this. What we see before us today are the bare bones of a chambered tomb that would originally have been covered with an earthen mound. The giant 16½ft/5m ‘capstone’ appears to be precariously balanced on three ‘uprights’, though it has remained in place for over 5,000 years."

There are a total of seven stones here, the capstone and its three supports, and two additional upright stones that may have marked the site of the passageway into the tomb. The capstone was indeed large and the three tall support uprights allowed us to duck underneath the capstone (at least I did). Pentre Ifan felt like a very isolated place, although the monument is surrounded by beautiful hills. We lingered here for a while before returning to St. Davids.

Once back at the hotel we decided to visit the local butcher in the center of town and see what we could find for dinner. I like self-catering accommodations because I don't mind cooking while we're on holiday. We had breakfast almost every morning in our apartment, everything from bacon and eggs and cereal, to Welsh Cakes from the local bakery. Local butcher Gwyn Davies & Sons was right on the High Street near our hotel and we visited there more than once during the week. On this night we picked up some local sausages for dinner. They were really good!

During our week in St Davids we kept noticing these decorative signs on houses with the name of the cottage carved in slate. Most of these were rendered in lively colors and we thought they were beautiful. I asked around and found out that the sign maker was a local slate carver. His shop was located nearby and my wife and I decided to pay him a visit. Unfortunately I can't remember his name or the name of his shop. In any case, we met and I expressed interest in having a slate sign made featuring my surname. He suggested a couple of different designs and we settled on a piece with my name next to a Welsh dragon, carved and finished with gold leaf. We settled on a price but he refused to take any type of downpayment, and said we could just mail him a check when we received the sign. I thought that was very generous. We gave him our details and about two months later the sign arrived. It was absolutely beautiful, exactly what I wanted, and has been proudly hanging over the bar in our club room ever since. It's by far the best thing I've ever purchased in Wales.

We began the next day by continuing on our "St David's Trail" agenda and visiting nearby Llawhaden Castle. It took us a little more than an hour to get there via the A487, switching to the A40 at Haverfordwest. The castle stands on a hill overlooking the River Cleddau, and most of the ruins date from the early 13th century. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the castle was completely abandoned, fell into disrepair, and was subsequently quarried for building stone. Cadw tells us that:

"Occupying a commanding location amongst serene forest and rolling farmland, Llawhaden's unconventional mix of military and decorative features reveal its main purpose in life: that of a fortified mansion more than out-and-out castle, designed as a residence for the wealthy bishops of St Davids who liked their home comforts."

Exactly. What is called a castle and very much looks like a castle was actually a fortified residence. It seems like the Bishops of St David's had it pretty good; a cathedral and palace at St David's, this impressive retreat, plus the Lamphey Bishop's Palace, which we would visit later. The first thing we noticed about Llawhaden was that the castle sits atop a wide mound surrounded by a ditch. Only the facade of the twin-tower gatehouse remains but survives to its original height. About a quarter of the curtain wall remains, connecting a series of still impressive fortified towers, including the Closet and Chapel Towers. The undercrofts beneath the Great Hall, Kitchen and Chambers survive, although the structures above are gone. The Inner Courtyard is large and here we found a well used to supply the castle with water. This was a very interesting site, well off the beaten path, but still very much worth visiting. We took our time exploring the castle and enjoying the views of the surrounding countryside before heading to our next destination.

Next it was onto Laugharne Castle. Laugharne is sited on a low cliff overlooking the Taf estuary. Laugharne may be the castle mentioned in about 1116 as the castle of Robert Courtemain, but the first definite reference to the Norman castle is in 1189 when, after the death of King Henry II, it was seized by the Lord Rhys, prince of Deheubarth. It attracted further hostility from the Welsh in 1215 when it was destroyed by Llywelyn the Great and later, in 1257, when it was again taken and burnt. In 1584, Elizabeth I granted Laugharne to Sir John Perrot, said to have

been the illegitimate son of Henry VIII. Perrot drastically altered the castle by converting it into a substantial Tudor mansion. We arrived at Laugharne and found it to be far removed from its Tudor glory days. What we found was a bleak and somewhat drab ruin with unfortunately not much to recommend. All we could do was view the exterior of the castle and part of the ruined interior. None of the towers were accessible and it was not possible to access the top of the castle. We spent some time here and visited the Dylan Thomas Boathouse before departing.

Update: We revisited the castle in 2002 following an extensive restoration. The castle had been cleaned up, consolidated and parts of towers had become accessible to the the public. Signposts and stairs have been added and a lovely garden planted in front of the castle. Because of these additions it is now possible for visitors to see some of Laugharne's surviving interior details, including close-up views of the castle's fine windows and fireplaces. We were very pleased that the restoration work has finally made Laugharne a castle well worth visiting.

Next we visited magnificent Kidwelly Castle in south Wales. What a difference from Laugharne! What makes Kidwelly special is its current state of preservation, its long building history, and its the role it played in the Welsh-English struggles that engulfed much of Wales during the Middle Ages. The Cadw guidebook for the castle explains:

"Kidwelly is a mighty and imposing monument of Norman power. It is also a beautiful example of castle development, as the castle was dramatically altered on a number of occasions to conform to the latest thinking in military science. The ringwork at Kidwelly was constructed on a steep ridge overlooking the River Gwendraeth at its upper tidal limit. In the mid-13th century the de Chaworth family gained possession, and began a long work of building the mighty stone castle that we see today."

We parked in the car park next to the castle, paid our admission and headed towards the castle massive gatehouse complex. Although Kidwelly is not as large as some of the Edwardian castles, the fortress is compact, well positioned, and very well fortified. As we began exploring the castle we soon realized that Kidwelly is one of the most intact castles we had visited. No curtain walls with gaping holes, or half-destroyed towers here, the castle also features access to interior passageways, towers, and castle wall-walks. That in addition to some fine surviving detail, including fireplaces, windows and arrow loops. And, its not just the castle that was well fortified. The town was fortified too, and retains one of its medieval gate passages which you can still drive under (very cool). Although for some Kidwelly Castle is something of an afterthought, the is absolutely one of the best castle in all of Wales. After our visit we decided that we had had enough for the day and headed back to St. David's.

The following day we continued visiting some go the castles of southwest Wales. We began with lovely and stately Picton Castle. It was about a 45-minute drive from St David's to Picton, again east on the A487 and then the A40 at Haverfordwest. According the Picton Castle website: "The Castle was probably built by Sir John Wogan, who was Justiciar of Ireland between 1295 and 1308. The plan is unusual. The castle has no internal courtyard, and originally the main block was protected by seven projecting circular towers: the two at the east end were linked to form a

gatehouse, and the entrance led straight through a portcullis into the undercroft of the hall, a very unusual feature." The castle is a private home administered by The Picton Castle Trust and the castle itself was not open to the public. Instead we spent time exploring the lovely gardens surrounding the castle admiring, in particular, large rhododendrons in full bloom. The gardens are over 40 acres and are recognized by the Royal Horticultural Society. We walked around some of the gardens but our time was a bit limited here because what we had planned for the remainder of the day.

From Picton Castle it was only a half-hour drive to our next destination, Carew Castle. Carew is described by many as the "most handsome in all South Wales. The present structure was begun in the 13th century by Sir Nicholas de Carew. Carew's three towers, the massive west front and the Chapel, were probably built by Sir Nicholas. The castle was remodeled by the aforementioned Sir John Perrot during the Tudor period, and it is his styling that transformed the Welsh fortress into a showcase of beauty and elegance. His rebuilding concentrated on the north front of the castle and included the Long Gallery, famous for its graceful windows. The striking north front, showcasing Carew's famous windows is the view most often used to depict the castle.

We began our visit by admiring the magnificent Carew Cross found on the land leading to the castle. The magnificent sculptured cross is a royal memorial to Maredudd, who, in 1033, with his brother Hywel, became joint ruler of the early medieval kingdom of Deheubarth. After viewing the cross we made our way through a gate and down the path leading to the castle, surrounded by grazing sheep. What stands out immediately as you approach the castle are a series of large decorative windows seemingly cut into the middle of Carew's outer towers. Clearly these were added after the castle ceased most of its defensive functions. The decorative windows continue inside the castle, including those of the Chapel, Long gallery, and apartment blocks. There is a lot of castle to explore here including interior halls and apartments. Later we walked the short path to the Tidal Mill and viewed the exhibit there before ending our visit to this stunning castle. We had one final site left to visit, and that too would prove to be a place of great beauty and history.

It was only about 6 miles from Carew to our final destination of the day, lovely Manorbier Castle, located off the A4139. The castle was the birthplace of Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales, the famous 12th-century Welsh cleric who traveled through the land recording his journeys. His chronicle, "Journey through Wales" (1188) gives us important insights into the places he visited and the people he met. The chronicle also records many of the castles he encountered, including several long-lost 12th century fortresses. His is a story worth investigating. We parked in a lane close to the castle in the small village. We paid our admission and stepped into the large grassy inner ward which was filled with flowers springing from the ground, walls and towers of the castle. Although Manorbier is one of the older castles in Pembrokeshire, much of it remains intact, including a sturdy battlemented curtain wall, the gatehouse complex, the great hall, the chapel, the spur tower, and the watergate. According to Davis (1992), the great hall dating from 1140 is very possibly "the earliest stone building surviving at any castle in west Wales." Fortunately Manorbier withstood the turbulent times of

Welsh-Norman warfare in the 11th and 12th centuries. Although it was attacked and slighted during the English Civil War in the 1640s, the castle underwent an important restoration in the late 19th century spearheaded by castle enthusiast J.R. Cobb. We spent some time here exploring the extensive castle, in particular several of the nearly-complete towers, and a set of buildings near the Watergate Passage, including the Hall Block, Buttery and Sub-Chapel. We found two sets of hearths and ovens, one of which lies next to a modern hose near the front gate. By this time it was late in the day and we were ready to return to St. David's. Making our way back we reflected on the beautiful and historic castles we had visited. Picton, Carew, and Manorbier all have compelling reason to visit and explore and should be on any castle enthusiast's short-list when visiting this area of Wales.

The next day we had another two sites on the agenda, the Lamphey Bishop's Palace and Pembroke Castle. We began with the 30-mile trip from St David's to the Bishop's Palace via (again) the A487 to Haverfordwest and then the A477. (We had been through Haverfordwest several times during the week and we should have stopped here and visited the medieval castle, but...) We arrived at the palace which, like so many historic sites in Wales, is surrounded by wide open countryside. Lamphey, once luxurious but now ruined, is a complex of buildings primarily the project of the aforementioned Bishop Gower of St David's. (Man, did he build stuff!) The complex originally featured over 20 rooms as well as fishponds, orchards, fruit and herb gardens, and a parkland with grazing deer. Not bad. Basically this was a peaceful retreat far from the religious and secular affairs administered by the Bishops of St David's. Although greatly ruined there is plenty here to explore. We started with the Inner Gatehouse, today a solitary tall structure that once guarded the entrance to the palace (below). The Gatehouse features three sets of arched windows on each side and a crenellated top with sawtooth, (merlons) battlements. We moved next to the Western Hall, the site's largest surviving building. Although roofless the exterior of the hall is nearly complete. There is an undercroft here to explore (for storage?), a nice cool spot on a hot day! Just beyond the Western Hall is De Gower's Hall, longer than the Western Hall but not as wide. Here we found a set of arcaded parapets on both sides of the hall, similar to the ones at the Bishop's Palace in St David's. In between the two halls are the remains of a wall featuring a large, beautiful arched window that was once part of the now destroyed Chapel. Some of the window's fine tracery remains. We took about an hour here exploring the grounds before taking our leave of this interesting site. We were on our way to visit one of the largest and most historically significant castles in Wales.

Mighty Pembroke Castle impresses by its sheer size and dominance of location. Pembroke is a Norman stronghold dating to the time of William the Conqueror, however most of the present castle dates from the 13th century. Historically, the castle is probably most closely associated with two strong Welsh Marcher Lords, Richard de Clare and William Marshal, the powerful earls of Pembroke. The earl's ruthless suppression of the Welsh population caused great hatred among the local people. Pembroke is also famous as the birthplace of Henry Tudor, later King Henry VII. There are on-site exhibitions, including a video, tracing the history of the castle and its owners, as well as an exhibit dedicated to King Henry.

We entered the castle through the mighty gatehouse tower and were immediately impressed by its size. Pembroke's high curtain wall is connected by a series of well-preserved towers. The castle's towers and walls are complete due to extensive restoration efforts. The central courtyard is a huge space of green grass and park benches, dominating the center of the castle. To illustrate just how big the courtyard is, consider that all of Harlech Castle could probably fit neatly into Pembroke's courtyard!

Climbing to the top of Pembroke's towers allows visitors to walk sections of the wall. Although the Henry Tower, named after King Henry VII, and Northern Hall are impressive, complete structures, it's William Marshal's massive Keep that dominates Pembroke Castle. The Keep was built by Marshal in 1200 and was the last place of refuge for soldiers defending the castle. The walls are 19 feet thick at the base of the keep, and rise to 75 feet in height, crowned with a stone dome, set as a centerpiece in a triple crown of parapet and turret. The Keep is roughly twice the size of Conwy's impressive towers. Having seen many Welsh and English castles in the last two years, I can think of no one castle structure more impressive that William Marshal's great Keep at Pembroke. The view of the surrounding countryside from the top of the Keep highlights the tremendous defensive position enjoyed by the castle, which dominates the landscape from all approaches. Although it was the longest and most difficult climb of the vacation, the view from the top of the Keep more than justified the effort! In some ways Pembroke is similar to Caernarfon Castle because it very much offers a complete castle experience; halls and towers with their roofs and floors restored, a complete curtain wall, interesting interior passageways, educational exhibits, and of course The Great Tower. Yep...we were absolutely blown away by this massive castle and hope to return here again. We explored the town a bit and enjoyed a pub lunch (our usual Fish and Chips) before departing. We decided to spend the rest of the day exploring in and around St David's, again walking along the Pembrokeshire coast.

Later that afternoon we took another walk along the Pembrokshire Coast Path. It was again a sunny, blue sky day as we found ourselves in the beautiful countryside that surrounds St David's. We then revisited the cathedral and the Bishop's Palace, this time exploring the exteriors of these two marvelous buildings/complexes. I recommend this because it gives you different and interesting perspectives of both buildings. We also spent time in the cathedral cemetery admiring the ancient markers, especially the ones close to the cathedral entrance. Afterwards took the car and drove 20 miles east via the A487 to visit Roch Castle. I wanted to see the castle because they offer accommodations and I'm always keen for a stay in a nice medieval castle (in the future, perhaps). We didn't visit the castle but simply pulled off the road and snapped some photos. Roch is something of an oddly-shaped castle resting on a large outcrop of rock, and features an impressive D-tower attached to a hall. According to Alan Ried (1973):

"The castle was founded in the 2nd half of the 13th century, although the lordship de Rupe (rock) can be traced back to about 1200. An earlier fortress may have existed here, but the prominent D-shaped tower on this isolated rocky outcrop is thought to have been built by Adam de Rupe. The family had played an important role in the English settlement of Pembrokeshire and owned considerable territory in the northern areas. Roch Castle was doubtless built as one

of the outer defences of "Little England" or "Landsker" for it is near the unmarked border for which centuries has separated the English and Welsh areas of Pembrokeshire."

After visiting here it was back to St David's where we enjoyed dinner at a local pub near the center of the city.

The next morning we had coffee and Welsh Cakes at our local bakery before heading out for our final day in St David's. We headed north to visit The Church of St Brynach near the village of Nevern, and Cilgerran Castle. The village of Nevern is on the River Nyfer which winds to the north of the Presceli Hills. These hills have been inhabited for thousands of years, and Nevern is not far from the prehistoric Pentre Ifan burial chamber we had visited earlier. The Church of St Brynach is only a mile or two south of the village and has spectacular views across the hills to Cardigan Bay. Saint Brynach was a 6th-century Welsh saint who is traditionally associated with Pembrokeshire. Most people visit the church to view the ancient Nevern Cross which stands some 13-feet tall in the churchyard and is in remarkable condition. This large and impressive cross is related in style to the cross at Carew, and is of a similar, late 10th or early 11th century date. Like the Carew Cross, it is inscribed on the shaft. Another early Christian stone stands in the churchyard near the high cross. It is much smaller and has a Latin inscription of the 5th or early 6th century. The churchyard itself is framed by ancient Yew trees that seem to hover over the site adding to the ancient feel here. Going inside the church we felt like we were stepping back in time to an age long before castle building began in Wales. The Nave is framed by a tall stone arch beyond the pews, with a wooden screen and the alter behind the screen. Above the alter is a large three-panel stained glass window. Beautiful. Built into the sills of the southern transept windows, are two remarkable stones. One has a Latin inscription and carved cross probably dating from the 10th-century, while the other is carved with ancient Ogam script and likely dates from the 5th or 6th centuries. After exiting the church we spent more time in the churchyard, admiring the cross and walking the cemetery with its ancient Yews, imagining that some of these trees probably witnessed events that took place here many centuries ago. We had already experienced the magic of "The Age of Saints" while in St David's and we felt we were experiencing the same here. This was yet another "difficult to leave" site for us. I should also mention that the historically significant native-built Nevern Castle lies close to the church, and was once the principal seat of the great and powerful prince Rhys ap Gruffydd of Deheubarth. Unfortunately we would have to save that site for another visit.

Our next destination was Cilgerran Castle. We arrived in the early afternoon and located the castle on the outskirts of town perched on a precipitous, craggy promontory overlooking the river Teifi. There was an earlier earthwork castle here that was captured by Rhys ap Gruffydd in the 1160, recaptured by Marcher Lord William Marshal in 1204, but captured again by the Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in 1215. A few years later the castle changed hands again as it was taken by William Marshal's son, also William. It is thought that this William fortified the castle in stone. That's a lot of capturing and recapturing, but that scenario was played out at many other Welsh castle during the turbulent Middle Ages. We parked the car and decided to have lunch at a local pub before assaulting the castle. Following lunch we went back the castle and soon found the modern entrance which brought us into Cilgerran's Outer Ward. The

original gatehouse was to our right, and in front of us were the stout West and East towers that protect the Inner Ward. These strong, plain round towers protrude well beyond the curtain wall and are massive structures. We then entered the Inner Ward over a drawbridge spanning the outer ditches that surround the castle. Here we explored the Gatehouse complex, the Lime Kiln, and the remains of the castle Kitchen. The portion of the castle facing the cliff between the East and Northwest towers provide views of the river Teifi below. With Cilgerran being protected on one side by an outer ward, two large towers, a rock-cut ditch, strong gatehouse, curtain wall, and a steep cliff on the other, it certainly seemed like well-protected stronghold. By now it was late afternoon and time to head back to St David's. Our time here was coming to a close.

It's difficult to describe the strong impressions St. Davids imparts to those who bother to visit this often overlooked corner of Wales. I guess it's a feeling that you've arrived at the very essence of Welsh history and culture. I had read that St. Davids was a "land of magic," but failed to understand why until spending time here. I think some of the city's mystique comes from the fact that so little is known about the times in which St. David lived. Since St. David is one of the first identifiable figures of Welsh history, he provides an important link to the country's Celtic past. Historians can only guess about life in Wales during the Dark Ages - the "Age of Saints" - and this mystery is part of what makes St. Davids so irresistible. Another piece of the "magic" is the site's importance as a place of religious pilgrimage. That aspect of St. Davids cloaks the city in a special kind of reverence that no other site in Wales can claim. Add to this potent mix of history and reverence, memories of the power wielded by the medieval bishops of St. Davids, commanding their vast estates in Wales from the comfort of the Bishop's Palace and cathedral. Finally, consider all this taking place within the natural beauty of the Pembrokeshire coast. It's not any one element then, but rather a combination of elements that make St. Davids a uniquely special experience. Although throughout the land you can still catch faint echoes of the country's ancient history, the voices at St. Davids positively shout in celebration of Wales' Celtic past.

We departed St David's the following morning (somewhat sad) and began the long journey back to London. We had decided that the trip from St David's to London was a bit too far to do in a single day (I had been doing a lot of driving) so we had made plans to break up the final two days by booking a 1-night accommodation in southeast Wales. So...we still had some castles to see! It took us about two hours (we were in no hurry) to drive the 65 miles from Saint David's to our first destination of the day, Carreg Cennen Castle near Llandelio in Carmarthenshire. Historian and author Lise Hull tells us:

"The story of Carreg Cennen Castle is a long one, going back at least to the 13th century. There is archaeological evidence, however, that the Romans and prehistoric peoples occupied the craggy hilltop centuries earlier (a cache of Roman coins and four prehistoric skeletons have been unearthed at the site). Although the Welsh Princes of Deheubarth built the first castle at Carreg Cennen, what remains today dates to King Edward I's momentous period of castle-building in Wales. While the exterior face of the castle presents an impression of strength and defiance, much of the interior of Carreg Cennen is considerably ruined, the result of demolition in 1462 after the Wars of the Roses. Nevertheless, we can still gain an accurate image of how

the medieval fortress would have appeared. What we can see are the remains of several buildings, spaced along the walls of the inner ward."

Admission to the castle is at a working farm with tea room and gift shop located at the base of the hill leading to the castle. We paid our admission and started along the winding path leading to the summit. Following an invigorating climb we reached the formidable twin-towered gatehouse on the north wall, the main entry point into the castle. Although the inner courtyard is ruined, Carreg Cennen still qualifies as a castle with significant remains. Portions of the gatehouse, curtain wall, towers, apartments, and domestic buildings still survive to significant heights, along with details of finely carved windows and fireplaces. After spending time exploring the buildings of the inner ward, we decided to brave one of the the caste's most interesting features; the vaulted passage near the King's Chamber leading to an underground cave. Here you'll need to bring your torch (flashlight to us Americans). The vaulted passage is lit by narrow windows until it begins diving underground, at which pint you descend into total darkness. The footing can be a bit slippery here. The purpose of the cave was to serve as a well or water source for the castle. We eventually reached the bottom and I snapped a few photos before heading back out. Although this part of Carreg Cennen is interesting, I found myself being thankful when finally emerging into the blue skies above. Then it was back down the track to the castle farm, where we browsed the gift shop before departing. It's easy to see why some name Carreg Cennen as their favorite. Both Welsh and Norman, the castle offers visitors an exciting experience along with a visual feast for the eyes and senses. One of the best? Certainly!

We departed Carreg Cennen and headed for our final destination for the day, Raglan Castle located in Monmouthshire. We departed Carreg Cennen and headed for our final destination for the day, Raglan Castle located in Monmouthshire. How does one begin to describe the handsome majesty that is Raglan Castle? Raglan, with its great multi-angular towers and Tudor-styling, is unlike any other castle in Wales. There were only three times during our vacation, when visiting a site, I said to myself, "this is why we came to Wales." The first time was while viewing Conwy Castle from the spur wall near the Quay. The second was upon seeing the cathedral and Bishop's Palace at St. Davids, and the last was while standing in front of the double-towered gatehouse at Raglan.

The main stone used in construction of the castle is sandstone, but of two different types. The 15th century castle is characterized by pale, almost yellowish sandstone from Redbrook on the Wye river, three miles away. The other sandstone is local Old Red Sandstone, red, brown or purplish in color, used in the Tudor work. A paler stone was also used in the fireplaces. From a distance, Raglan seemed to have a reddish cast, although on approaching the gatehouse, the castle's yellow sandstone becomes obvious.

The castle is probably most closely associated with William ap Thomas, who fought with King Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. In 1426, ap Thomas was knighted by Henry VI, becoming known to his compatriots as "the blue knight of Gwent." Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, was the next owner of the castle, and it is Herbert who is responsible for Raglan's distinctive Tudor-styling. The castle was also the boyhood home of Henry Tudor, later King

Henry VII. As a boy he bided his time at Raglan, while his uncle Jasper agitated a Lancastrian return to the throne in the person of young Henry.

Both William ap Thomas and William Herbert fought in France, and undoubtedly, the castles that they saw in that country influenced their work at Raglan. The elaborately decorated polygonal keep, as well as the double-drawbridge arrangement of the keep, unique in Britain, demonstrate French influence. In 1492, Elizabeth Herbert married Sir Charles Somerset, a natural son of Henry Beaufort, third duke of Somerset, and it is to the Somerset family as earls of Worcester that we owe the final architectural touches of the castle.

On approaching the gatehouse, we passed Raglan's Great Tower, surrounded by its apron wall and beautiful moat. Pink wildflowers spring from the apron wall, creating an unforgettable image. The wall has six corner turrets, one of which has a postern door to the moat. The Great Tower, known as "The Yellow Tower of Gwent," is the most striking feature at Raglan. It was begun by Sir William ap Thomas and was designed very much in contemporary French style. Unfortunately, the tower was largely destroyed by Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War. The tower and moat are outside the main body of the castle. The Great Gate leading to the Pitched Stone Court lies next to The Great Tower. It was raised by Sir William Herbert, and served as the main entrance to the castle after 1460, however, we chose to continue surveying The Great Tower from the outside, via the park surrounding the moat, finally entering the castle from the South Gate.

Through the South Gate, we entered the main Apartments. The porch and Grand Stair lead to the apartments in the Fountain Court. The Grand Stair reminded us of a similar structure at Carew Castle. The two most impressive rooms at Raglan are The Hall and Long Gallery. The hall is the finest and most complete of the castle's surviving apartments. A plaque over the dais in the hall bears the distinctive arms of the third earl of Worcester, as Knight of the Garter. Viewing the Great Tower from the apartments, we saw a finely carved shield and badge over the first floor chamber, a good example of the castle's surviving detail. The Long Gallery has been called one of the finest rooms of Tudor rebuilding in Britain. Once a showcase of Tudor elegance, the gallery contained handsome paintings, tapestries and sculptures. During this time, Raglan was one of Britain's social centers. Important guests were entertained until the early hours of the morning. The gallery had a series of windows overlooking the Fountain Court, and an ornate Renaissance fireplace. The remains of the fireplace, clearly showing two carved human figures, are a major highlight of the castle.

Re-entering the castle through the Great Gate, we entered the Pitched Stone Court, a large cobblestone area. Standing at the end of the court gives a magnificent view of the rear of the gatehouse and the Attic. The Attic, with its stunning Tudor-style windows, housed another gallery running along the rear of the gatehouse range. The building once held the castle's extensive library, which was also destroyed by Cromwell's soldiers. The wonderful thing about Raglan is that there are so many parts of the castle retaining detail and beauty, that you could spend an hour or so just admiring the beauty of any one area. A green park with benches surrounds most of the castle, giving visitors the chance to sit and contemplate the magnificence

before them. There are several on-site exhibits explaining the history of the castle, and an extensive giftshop is planned for the future.

We could have easily spent a half day at Raglan, to properly survey the castle. By the time we finished looking at the exhibit rooms, it was late afternoon and time to find lodging for the night. Still, I had to take just one more walk around the moat and Great Tower. I used the excuse that I had not yet seen the back of the castle to prolong our stay. As I took my final walk around the moat, my eyes were fixed on the castle, not on the ground before me. I knew it would be quite some time before I'd experience a site such as this. I was probably lucky I didn't fall into the moat! Raglan was like a fairy tale castle I was afraid would disappear if I looked away. Carew had its aspects of beauty, but stately Raglan is a handsome, unique structure in every detail. I knew that our trip to Raglan would be a highlight of the trip, but if I had known just how magnificent the site was, I would have certainly set aside more time than the two hours we were there. If you ever travel to south Wales, make seeing Raglan Castle your number one priority. If necessary, drop all other plans, just don't miss seeing Raglan! Once you visit this wonder of medieval architecture, you'll understand why.

By this time it was mid-afternoon and we decided to check into our accommodation for the night; a small hotel right across the road from marvelous Tintern Abbey. We checked in and later enjoyed dinner at the pub right next to the abbey. As we walked back to the room the abbey was in view the entire time, and we couldn't wait to explore here again the next day. We got up early the following morning on what was to be another long day and had breakfast in the hotel cafe. The abbey doesn't open until 10am so we had some time afterwards to walk around outside of the abbey. Tintern has always been my favorite abbey. Part of what makes Tintern so special is its picturesque setting. Founded by 12th century Cistercian monks, the abbey sits serenely amid the hills of the Wye river valley. Framed by rolling green hills on all sides, Tintern is easily the most beautifully situated of the abbeys we visited. The village of Tintern is tiny. A few small shops, alpine-like cottages and a small church lie close to the abbey. The river Wye runs directly behind the abbey and played an important role in sustaining its occupants. The surrounding countryside is broken only by an occasional hiking trail. The peaceful setting gave us a feeling of isolation different from the other abbeys we visited.

The abbey and grounds are surrounded by a 4ft stone fence. At the front of the grounds next to the road, grazing cattle seem oblivious to the imposing structure dominating their pasture. Although smaller than Fountains, the wide-open interior spaces of the chapel and nave at Tintern are more captivating. The great lancet windows at each end of the chapel serve as breathtaking picture frames for the green hills beyond. The floor of the chapel is covered in a carpet of tall green grass, broken by tall, decorated columns reaching toward the sky. The floor is also dotted with giant corbels that once adorned the tops of Tintern's massive pillars. The highly decorated corbels now mark the places missing columns once stood, and are one of the abbey's unique features. The corbels and surviving columns set against the wide-open spaces of the chapel floor, are a marvel to behold. While walking the floor of the chapel the symmetry and spacing of these huge pillars create vast sectioned views of the interior, making this part of the abbey the most memorable.

Tintern also has an abundance of delicate window tracery work still in evidence. The North Transept, Great East Window, and West Front Window all retain some degree of this finely carved work, reminding visitors of the abbey's former days of glory, when huge panes of stained glass filled these giant windows. Another fine example of window tracery is found in the Monk's Dining Hall, a large room next to the main chapel. An enlarged photograph I took at here on our 1992 trip to Britain, reveals the subtle attention to detail that make these series of smaller windows one of the abbey's best surviving features. There are also extensive support building foundations to explore at Tintern, but these never seem to be as interesting as the abbey itself. I usually devote most of my time to wandering the great spaces of the main sanctuary.

Tintern strikes me as the perfect ruined abbey. It's the right combination of size and beauty. I was not concerned that we had visited Tintern just a year and a half earlier. I remembered how absolutely awestruck I had been upon first setting foot in the immense open spaces of the chapel, viewing those massive pillars for the first time. I knew that another visit so soon would not disappoint, and therefore did not hesitate to add Tintern to our 1994 agenda. We checked out of our hotel and drove the short 4 miles south to reach our final destination in Wales before heading to London, Chepstow Castle.

If there is a castle that comes close to matching Harlech in historical importance, that castle is surely Chepstow. Chepstow is a Norman castle perched high above the banks of the river Wye in southeast Wales. Construction began at Chepstow in 1067, less than a year after William the Conqueror was crowned King of England. While Edward had his master castle builder in the person of James of St. George, the Conqueror, some 200 years earlier, had his equal in the person of his loyal Norman lord William FitzOsbern. FitzOsbern's fortresses were the vehicles from which the new king consolidated control of his newly conquered lands. Chepstow Castle became the key launching point for expeditions into Wales, expeditions that eventually subdued the rebellious population.

We arrived at Chepstow after visiting nearby Tintern abbey on our last full day in Britain. We enjoyed bright, sunny weather the day before, and our final day proved to be equally spectacular. Chepstow's massive twin tower gatehouse set against a cloudless blue sky, provided excellent photo opportunities. Our previous visit was in October of 1992 on a cold cloudy day, so the change in weather was welcomed. Like Caernarfon, Chepstow has excellent on-site exhibits, better than those found at most other castles. Printed placards explaining the castle's history are supplemented by videos, wax figures and reproductions of medieval weaponry and siege machines. Having seen the exhibits in 1992, we chose to skip this portion of the tour and get straight to the castle.

Chepstow's Great Hall (Shown left), begun in 1067, is the oldest surviving stone castle in Britain. Because of this, the site has a special significance to British history. At other castles built during the Conqueror's reign, original Norman structures have long since disappeared, but at Chepstow it's still possible to see and touch the remains of FitzOsbern's first great building project in Wales. The Normans weren't the first to recognize the strategic position of Chepstow.

The arch above the main doorway to the hall is made from brick brought from a Roman fort that once stood nearby. The hall was always the heart of the castle, and originally stood alone. Over the years, the castle was enlarged by a series of builders. Today, the castle takes the shape of a long rectangle perched high above the river Wye. Inside the hall, powerful men mapped out strategy with other Welsh "Marcher Lords," planning invasions to wrest control of Wales from groups of powerful princes still holding most of the country. Besides William FitzOsbern, earl of Hereford, Chepstow's other famous lords include William Marshal, earl of Pembroke, and Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk. Depending on your perspective, these are some of the most important (or hated) men of Norman-Welsh history.

The Great Hall and dramatic cliff-side at Chepstow are the castle's two most interesting features. The rest of the castle is a typical Norman structure - a large gatehouse with high curtain walls connecting a series of tall towers. Because Chepstow was built in stages along the river Wye, the castle is constructed in a long, terraced fashion as opposed to a concentric layout. This unique construction is another reason the castle is so memorable.

Chepstow's strategic position allowed defenders to supply the castle via the river during times of battle and siege, while defending it against attack. Because of its history, the Great Hall evokes a kind of respect not shared by other Welsh castles. Though I had already seen the hall less than two years earlier, the impact on this occasion was no less dramatic. It's a feeling that is difficult to describe. While it's a treat to visit any Welsh castle, only a handful retain the ability to stir emotions hundreds of years following their demise. To stand in Chepstow's Great Hall, a symbol of the Norman victory over the Saxons and the conquest of England - a turning point in world history - is a special kind of thrill.

We left Chepstow knowing we had made the right decision in adding the site to our 1994 agenda. There were several sites we could have chosen to revisit on this vacation, but only Harlech and Chepstow castles, along with Tintern abbey, left strong enough impressions during our first visits to merit seeing them again so soon. Raglan, Tintern, and Chepstow, all lie within twenty miles of one another, and together make a powerful argument for not overlooking this part of Wales. The beauty and unique history of each site all but guaranteed our return.

The following morning had breakfast at the hotel before departing for Heathrow and our flight back to Baltimore. We had a late afternoon flight so we had some time to kill before returning our car to the airport rental terminal. We decided to visit Hampton Court Palace just outside London. Once the home of Cardinal Wolsey it was turned into a "palace" by King Henry VIII. We parked the car and walked towards the Tudor Great Gatehouse. Passing through into the courtyard we were met by a forest of Tudor chimneys the were seemingly everywhere. When we exited the opposite entrance to the palace, we moved forward in time to view alterations made by Stuart and Hanoverian monarchs. Very impressive. Of course the stunner here was the Chapel designed by Christopher Wren and its beautiful ceiling and carved wood. We then headed to Heathrow. Everything went smoothly at the airport and on the flight back home, during which we reflected on all we had seen during the previous two weeks.

It had been an incredible two weeks and it was hard to believe we managed to see as much as we did. By limiting our accommodations to just three places, we were able to take short day trips and therefore take our time. We had a set but flexible itinerary that allowed us to spend more time at certain places we found beautiful or interesting. This would be our travel more from this point forward. It's difficult to choose a favorite moment because I enjoyed everything we did. Each was a journey of discovery. In England the Yorkshire abbeys certainly stand out, although I'd still probably rate our visit to Hadrian's Wall as my favorite. Although there were so many great moments in Wales, simply being in St David's and exploring the surrounding countryside was probably my favorite activity, with walking the town wall at Conwy at night, and Raglan Castle a close second. Either way, this was the trip that caused to return to Britain again and again, for a total of six times in the 1990s. Each trip was special and each left us longing to return.