

Armchair Travellers Guide to England

Great Britain is one of the best places to visit from the comfort of your armchair. Especially in the colder months of the year. When the days are short, the fields are muddy, and the sky is more than 50 shades of grey.

To make up for these dreary months, there have always been copious amounts of tea, humour and creative storytelling to get people through.

A favourite list of books and movies are listed here, divided into the past and present. This way you'll get a gist of the country as it was, and how it is today. All while allowing you to enjoy the journey from here to there without leaving the comfort of home.



So, let's get to it, and start with:

The Past: Endless Drama and Intrigue of

Kings and Queens

England's Kings and Queens are tricky to follow, there's always a I, II, III all the way to VIII fighting someone with a similar name who is equally treacherous. Heads come off more regularly than a visit to London Tower. Making books on the subject a jolly good read. Full of excessive drama, intrigue and best of all they are based on true events.

While your average textbook is as boring as a poke in the eye, writers like [Philippa Gregory](#) bring the stories to light in a most novel way (pun intended). Making them easy to read, leaving you on edge of your seat late into the night. Now, there might be an embellishment here and there, yet, Ms Gregory knows her history. My favourites are:

[**The White Queen:**](#) Elizabeth Grey married Edward the IV, against the wishes of his family and the Kingmaker. Not only was she a mere daughter of a knight, but also a widow with two children. Highly unusual and sensational at the time. Yet for many years their marriage was successful. Like most stories about love and power, there's also plenty of drama. She has a lot of children, including the two Princes, that went missing in the tower. If you prefer to watch it rather than read it, it is also available on [DVD](#).

[**The White Princess**](#) is a follow on about the eldest daughter of the [White Queen](#) who was forced to marry Henry VII. The family hoped that the union would bring peace, which it did for some time. She was also the mother of Henry VIII, so the story sets a good background on the Tudor era of England's History. You can also buy this book in the [Cousin's War Boxset](#) for anyone interested in the whole period. The [movie is available on DVD](#).



[The Red Queen.](#) Is a part of '[The Court Tudor series](#)', this series covers the queens and stories around the Tudors, such as Henry VIII and his many wives. The Red Queen is about his grandmother Margaret Beaufort, who doesn't often get much attention. Yet, she played quite a significant role and had a strong hand in the upbringing of her son and grandson. She is often believed to be behind the disappearance and likely death of Two young Princes locked in the tower.

Philippa Gregory's stories are told from a woman's perspective, which wasn't a popular angle put forward at the time. Yes, while many women at that time were simply a pawn in a larger game. There were intelligent strategists and survivalists among them and Ms Beaufort was among them.

[The Tudors](#) is a suspenseful TV mini-series that is based on the life and a few of the marriages of Henry VIII, as well as the establishment of the Church of England.

A series called '[The Spanish Princess](#)' covers the life of Katherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife. Katherine's earlier life and first marriage aren't often written about. She was left in the lurch when her first husband King Arthur died, and her mother the Queen of Spain refused to pay her dowry. It was a tough beginning, without a happily ever after. Yet her courage, grace and character make it a great story.



[Daughter of time –](#) Is set in the current day. The story is about a bedridden detective, who decides to uncover the unsolved fate of The two Princes in the tower. His investigation takes him deeper into the life of their uncle, Richard III. You'll find it presents an interesting hypothesis of what might have happened.

Time Travelling back to England's Darker Past

There are really more books that cover the United Kingdom's history than you can read in one lifetime. Obviously, I can't cover them all, but here are a few of the best:

Books like the '[Time Travellers Guide to Medieval England](#)' is fabulously funny and take a deep dive into what the era would have been like if you were sent back in time.

The further you travel back in time, the less factual stories become. Earlier tales border on myths and legends of the British Isles. One of my favourites of that period is [The Sevenwaters series](#) by Julliet Marillier. Who does a brilliant job of bringing stories back to life and weaving in an old myth or two at the same time.

Another author that can be harder to find as they are often out of print is [Morgan Llewelyn](#). She brings stories of Ancient Albion and Ireland to life. I especially enjoy The Bard and The Druid.



If this is an era that rocks your boat, there is also a new [TV series that looks at this period called Britannia](#). While there aren't any poetic bards, it does have the Celts, druids, magic and a few gnarly Romans. The period is the time of the first Roman invasion around 43AD. You can find it on Sky TV or [Amazon Prime](#).

On-Screen Period dramas that Whisk you back through Time

[Downton Abbey](#). Resistant at first, as the show seems a bit cliché, in all honestly it is well worth watching. A great cast of actors and characters brings this whole period drama to life. It has the right amount of humour, warmth and scheming to keep you captivated all the way through to the end. Even the [latest box office movie of the same name is a keeper](#).

Others that are also set in the period are [Poldark](#), which

takes you through the challenges of rural life in Cornwall. The series is based on the famous [Poldark books by Winston Graham](#).

[Outlander](#), will take you North and up into Scotland, and is a period drama with a modern twist. Outlander is set in Jacobian times, and despite the love, and drama of this wartime era. It is the landscape and its timeless features that really steals the scene.



For any of those out there who enjoy a bit of comical black wit, on which English humour is based. Then you'll love the [Black Adder TV series](#). Written by Ben Elton and starring Rowan Atkinson and many of the cast of the equally [funny and famous Monty Python movies](#), it is the most comical view of England's history.

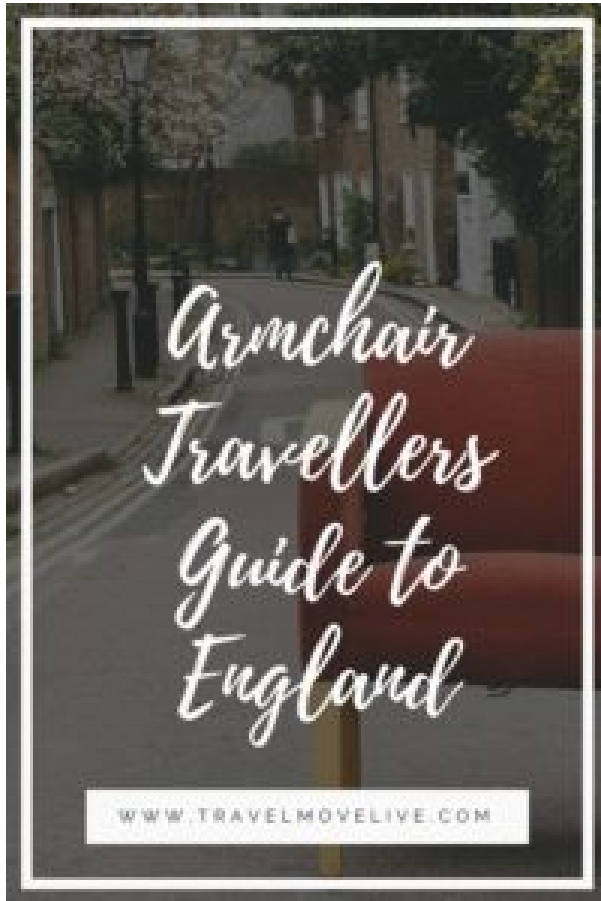
Modern Books and Movies of Great Britain

While the richness of England's history is never-ending, modern-day Britain has talent. As much as I like [Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes books](#), the [latest TV series Sherlock](#) makes London look so fabulous you'll want to visit immediately.

[Dare to be wild](#) is another perfect example. Based on true events, it contains a bit of romance, yet it is mostly about bringing a bit of wild nature back into English gardens. It's a story of a young gardener's dream to exhibit in the Chelsea flower show. It shows the English countryside and its magical landscapes in a most poetic light.



[Lad, A Yorkshire Story](#) – Such a touching story about life and death. It's often the ordinary everyday moments that become extraordinary. Most of us are touched by death, family issues and struggles. It's in these mundane moments we have the opportunity to uncover who we truly are.



This story is just that, every day that reaches out and touches us profoundly. It's a moving story, based on true events around the death of a boy's father and the effect it has on the family.

[Johnny English](#) – is what's needed after a serious movie. Good 'ole Rowan Atkinson, of Mr Bean fame, is a spy, and offers the is the best way to laugh off any and all sadness. Of course, the movie captures everything that is so quintessentially British and worth laughing at.

[Finding your feet](#) – The ideal feel-good movie. It's a view into everyday life in the UK, with a great acting cast of characters. It takes you through life turned upside down by events, the break up of a marriage, family and the magic that can come out of chaos.

It portrays hidden parts of London we don't often see on the big screen. Yes, you can swim in the ponds at Hampstead Heath and live on a canal boat. There are unknown suburbs, all worth a gander should you ever visit the city.



[Miss potter](#) – We all know the darling drawings by Beatrix potter but few of us know the author. This movie looks at how it all started out for Beatrix and how her little animals came to life.

It was quite rare at the time for women to have such freedom to create. While she did eventually marry it wasn't until she was much older. Overall its a great story of how nature can inspire us in the most charming of ways.

[Anonymous](#) – Who doesn't love a conspiracy theory? This one takes us on a deep dive into who the real Shakespeare might have been. Putting forth the most popular option of Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford.

Super actors really bring this movie to life and give us plenty of food for thought.

Personally, I am a fan of thinking it might it have been either [Mary Sidney](#) or [Amelia Bassano Lanier](#). Both of whom are better contenders than the Bard of Stratford.

If you are a Shakespeare fan, [Upstart Crow](#), is a comical series made in the same vein as [Black Adder](#) and is a very

funny view into what the real Shakespeare may have been like.



[Jam and Jerusalem](#) – This isn't a very well-known series, but it should be. It's a riot a comical take on country life written by Jennifer Saunders. Pure British humour at its best.

Timeless books about England. Warning: May increase the desire to travel

So many incredible writers come from England and weave wordy magic around this fair Isle of Albion. The top of the list are:

[The Shepherds life](#), A tale of the Lake District.

An old classic is pretty much as it sounds. A humble, honest and poignant view into the life simple life of a shepherd set in one of the most stunning parts of the country: The Lake District.



[The Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd](#)

A short but poetic book about the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland. It captures so beautifully the author's love for and relationship with them. The Living Mountain is a magical book written about and for nature.

"So simply to look on anything, such as a mountain, with the love that penetrates to its essence, is to widen the domain of being in the vastness of non-being. Man has no other reason for his existence."

– Nan Shepherd, [The Living Mountain](#)

[A Croft in the Hills](#), Katharine Stewart

Another bookshelf classic, it covers the tale of Katharine and her partner buying a croft (small countryside house) in the Scottish Highlands. It covers the simple, day-by-day challenges of life without luxury. Yet it does so in the purest form.

It is both romantic and honest in its simplicity and yet shows us that living a modest rural life can have more bite than a Rhodesian ridge-back with rabies.

Obviously, this lifestyle isn't for everyone, which is why

reading about it and experiencing it from your armchair is all the more entertaining.

[The Old Ways, Robert McFarlane](#)

Robert McFarlane's books are spellbinding, they'll carry you through highways, byways and countryside paths, stories and memories. So vividly engaging you may confuse their reading with your own future memories of adventures yet to come.

I started copying down phrases that resonated with me, only to realise I was copying the whole book, word for word. Eventually, I simply bought a copy for myself. I will inspire a long list of places to see and visit. It motivates us to a deeper exploration of the countryside. Leading to the article on why '[The Best way to see Britain in on Foot](#)'.



From here to there and everywhere, Get down, get cosy...

Kick back with your favourite beverage of cocoa or wine. Make popcorn, get comfortable and let yourself be transported both near and far by the greatest storytellers this country has

ever known.

This fair land of Albion is worth visiting anytime from the comfort of your armchair, or via plane, train or boat.

If you'd like to be transported to other countries through books and movies, check out my ['Armchair Travellers guide to Argentina'](#).

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The best way to see Britain is on Foot

There are many ways for us to travel in this modern day and age. Yet, a timelessness lives here in Britain, where the old ways and new ways collide.

Here in the United Kingdom modern modes of transport are a means of getting from A to B, these are not my preferred form of getting around. Driving is hectic, busy and stressful. Trains are expensive, overloaded and rarely on time. While buses are affordable, they also crawl through the countryside at a snail's pace and rarely connect through to, or stop at any worthy destination.

Biking is another option but needs to be undertaken at your

own risk, health and accident insurance is advised. Yet, amongst all the pitfalls of modern travel, there seems to be an overwhelming trend during the weekend for walking/ hiking.

*Disclaimer: I see hiking and walking as the same thing given there are not excessively large mountains, so I'm going to use the word walking to cover them both.



People in England have The right to roam

England is ideal for walkers. Endless green valleys, sloping hills, roving rivers and pockets of forests beckon anyone ready for some greenery and fresh air. Walkers also benefit from the Rights of way act, that [‘The right to roam’](#).

This means that the general public may access land without the use of paths.

Note: Although private areas do exist, you can find them on [maps via Natural England](#). Landlords of private property will in many cases put up a notice; *Private land*, or *Do not*

trespass – so be sure to respect their wishes if you do come across these signs.

On top of this, there are [plenty of right-of-way paths](#) for walkers to use, which are mapped out and easily accessible. If you are curious about what this means or have questioned the [Ramblers walking organisation has a great FAQ \(frequently asked questions\) which covers walkers and landowner rights in detail](#).

On the rights of way paths, farmers and landowners are asked not to obstruct the path or block access to it. Nor should they let aggressive bulls into the field alone. One exception is made for non-dairy breeds, which can be in a field if accompanied by cows. Apparently, the dairy bulls are more aggressive. As many of us might not be able to decipher one breed from another if you see a bull and are worried simply play it safe and find another route.

In return, it is expected that walkers also respect the landowners, and their lands by following the [countryside code of conduct](#). It is generous of farmers to allow the public access to the land that is their means of living.

If you bring your dog, have them on a leash when on farmland with livestock. If concerned there are also plenty of other farms, forests and fields without livestock that you can enjoy.



The Pilgrimage Revival

You may have also noticed a revival in ancient pilgrimages. There have been some great articles published that feature the [British Pilgrims' trust](#). An organisation that has done a stellar job in the last few years of not only promoting pilgrimages but also organising pilgrimages and bringing ancient pathways back to life for people to enjoy.

One such pathway is aptly named the [Pilgrims' way and will take you from Canterbury](#) to London's Southwark Cathedral. Travelling in true Pilgrim fashion on foot and staying in wayside houses or churches along the route.

Anyone looking for an inspirational book to read along the way, I highly recommend either the [Art of Pilgrimage](#) by Phil Cousineau or [The Old Ways](#) by Robert MacFarlane.

"Pilgrims are poets who create by taking journeys. Niebuhr"

On top of the old Religious Pilgrim routes, there are even more ancient pilgrimages to sacred sites such as Stonehenge, [Glastonbury](#) or [Standing stones of Avebury](#).

While not every walk is a pilgrimage, there are many other groups that you can join for a hike or a stroll:



Walking Associations and Groups

Whether you're a traveller from distant shores, or a local who would like to get out and about more – there are endless walking groups and options here in the UK.

[Meetup has a wide choice of walking groups](#) for all ages and has walks you can join in all areas and at weekends.

There are also established national and [local walking groups, such as the Ramblers](#). It's a great way to motivate oneself into doing longer countryside walks – while promoting a good cause.

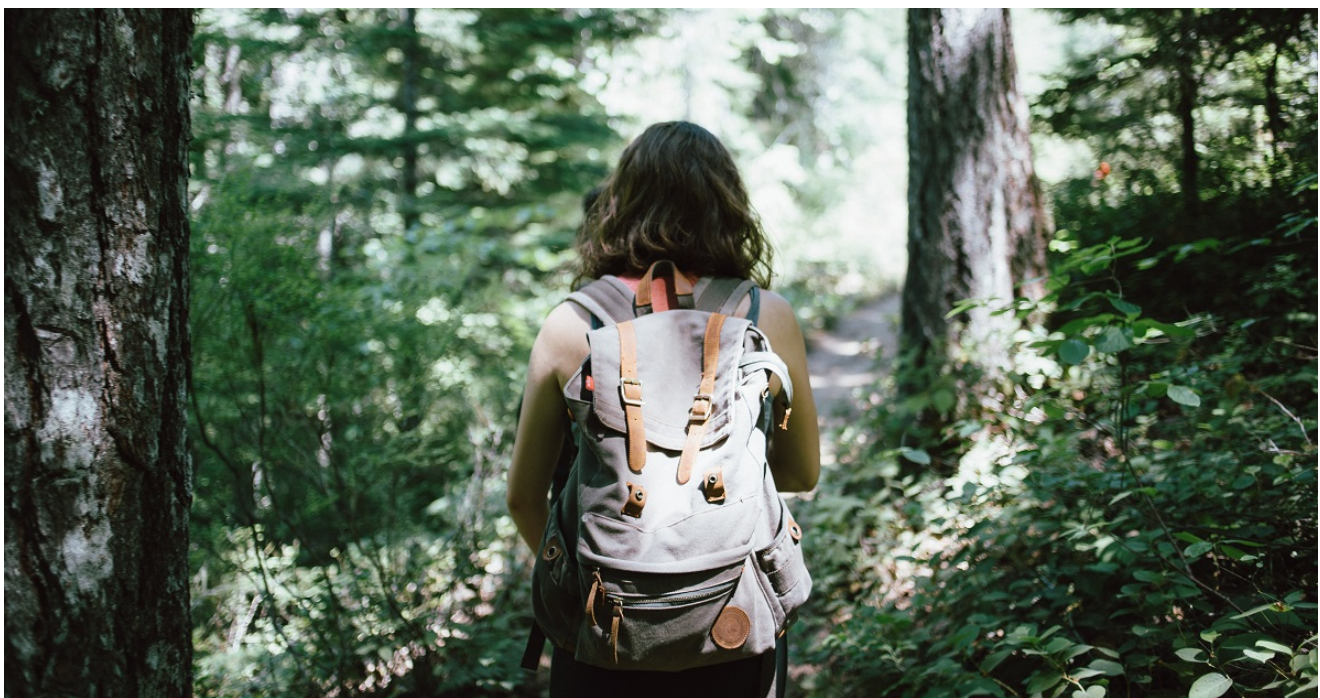
The Ramblers is a non-profit and as well as receiving a quarterly magazine, maps and free access to lead walks, they actively campaign and support walkers' interests in England.

Currently, they are in the process of lobbying with landowners and the government, to create the 'England Coast Path'. Set to open in 2020, it will cover 4.500 km of Britain's coastline, making it the longest coastal walk in the world.

On top of this, they are putting out a call to members of the public to go through old maps, to locate old pathways, so that they can be noted and reclaimed before the due date in 2026.

More than that though they offer a great range of routes throughout the country via their website or app. You can choose either independent or led walks, short or long, and easy to hard – there really is something to suit everyone.

There is nothing quite like joining a group of like-minded individuals for an afternoon of sturdy walking. You can find them online at [Ramblers.org.uk](https://www.ramblers.org.uk)



Well-known routes through the

English country

While most everyone has heard of the [Camino de Santiago de Compostela](#), and the Appalachian Trail. Britain also has its fair share of stunning trails, which may not be as famous but thankfully quieter, and equally stunning that you can enjoy if you'd like a walking holiday.

Here are just a few worth mentioning:

[Cotswolds Way:](#) This is one of the most picturesque walks. It spans the length of the Cotswolds from North the South. Covering over 100 miles, it snakes along the upper escarpment of the region and passes ancient long burrows and ruins left by prehistoric man. Being in the Cotswold it also passes through quaint villages and runs either to or from Bath, which is one of the most beautiful cities in England.

[Hadrian's Wall:](#) This is the famous wall that the Romans put up in the hope of keeping the unconquered and unruly Scots out. While I like to think of it as 'The Wall' from the Game of Thrones, the reality is that it's not half as high or fearful. Listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, it runs along the thinnest part of England. So, you can make it from the East to the West coast in under 8 days. It's a trail where you really do follow Romans' footsteps, passing by historic Roman ruins set amongst the breathtaking countryside.

[The Pilgrims Way:](#) This is an old Pilgrimage route, and you can either walk to or from London or Winchester to Canterbury, there are a few options available for the route. Canterbury was an old stopping point for pilgrims on their way to Rome. Back in the day, it was normal for most of people to try to do at least one pilgrimage in their lifetime. In doing so, and by giving alms to the church they felt more likely that they could gain, if not buy a spot in heaven.

While it did fall out of favour for a few centuries thanks to

Henry VIII, it is thankfully back in style and much of the old pathways have been given a new life for a new set of walkers and modern pilgrims.

Offa's Dyke way: Follows most of the border between England and Wales and is named after the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia. It snakes through the historic Welsh countryside all the way from Chepstow in the South to the Northern shores.

Heart of England Way: This as it sounds leads you through the heart of England and through the West Midlands countryside. It's about 100 miles long and goes from Milford down to Bourton-on-the-water, one of the Cotswolds' quaintest if not most popular villages.

You can get booklets and trail passports as well as advice on the route, and places to stay along the way from the [National Trail website](#).



Transformation of Unexpected Pathways

Recently alternative routes are being uncovered. Such as old railway lines and towpaths are easy to walk along and have been revived and lovingly restored and transformed.

Towpaths, for anyone unaware, is the old route that was laid alongside the man-made waterway canals. These were built back in the industrial age before motor cars so that donkeys could pull the narrow boats containing wares through to their final destination.

Canals were eventually replaced with the railway. However, thanks to locals, volunteers and organisations such as [the canal and river trust](#) have put in a serious amount of effort to do restoring many canals to their former glory. As a result, the towpaths alongside them offer both picturesque and relatively easy walking paths.

The same is being done with older railway lines that have become overgrown through time. There is a TV show on Channel 5 in England called: Walking lost railways, and a [book Lost Railway walks](#), that highlights them. As such there are also a few [websites promoting lost railway routes](#) and sharing them so that we can all enjoy them.

It's great to see that even an old railway line can be recycled and put to new use.



Benefits of Walking

Yes, England really is the perfect country to explore on foot, but there are a lot of side benefits to doing so. Of course, exercise and an improvement in overall health are a given.

But my favourite benefit is that I am travelling at a pace that is right for me, I can stop, sit or walk fast at whichever point I like. If the view has become exceptionally stunning, you can stand or sit in awe for as long as you like.

It's flexible so that you can choose a different pathway, or do a circular route a linear route or makes one of your own – there are no time schedules or anything to abide by other than common courtesy and respect for others on the path.

In the meantime, science has proven what many of us already knew spending time in nature, with trees and fresh air has a positive effect on the heart, organs and mental health. This is why [the art of forest bathing is so popular in Japan](#) and has been taking off everywhere.

Personally, I believe that spending time outside in nature, in a disconnected world is healing for the body and soul. It leads us to appreciate the world around us, and feel connected.



Appreciating the natural world

Anyone who has spent hours walking through forests, over hills and small creeks can't help but to spend some of that time in awe of the landscape around them. The birdsong that fills the air, squirrels foraging for nuts.

[Red Squirrels are even being re-introduced](#) in areas of Snowdonia in Wales and Caledonia in Scotland. If you have a keen eye you may even spot the elusive badger or friendly otter. Or a peaceful forest floor filled with bluebells or snowdrops.

The change of the season, the fresh air or crystal-clear springs and canal towpaths. It's as healing as it is magic and touches us as humans deep in the soul of our being.

Protecting that which we love

Once we start to walk more – we can't help to connect, it brings us back to our natural state being and hence to the natural world around us.

I've not yet seen a walker with headphones, they're too busy listening to the birds, a burbling brook or the rustle of leaves through the trees. They'll stop to enjoy the views, breathing in the fresh air and reaching a deeper state of calm.

In the pure enjoyment of time spent in nature, we become more naturally inclined to want to protect it, and care for it, as it should be respected and cared for.

You can see this reflected in the number of efforts local walking organisations have to protect these areas and pathways. It's also why I appreciate upcoming organisations such as [Rewilding Europe](#), [Rewilding Britain](#) and the [woodland trust](#).

These types of organisations are going above and beyond to restore ancient woodlands and areas that are safe havens for local wildlife, birds and insects that are so critical to these natural habitats.

It's scary to think that some countries have no ancient woodland left, the ecological structure that they host so much more than just a selection of trees or a simple place for us to enjoy our daily stroll.

If you have the opportunity to look into them if you are in the UK for a while why not also support them with your time as a volunteer or purchase a membership?



Get your boots on and start walking

If nothing else, your feet are made for walking. Endless pathways that cross the United Kingdom are calling you to walk upon them.

So, let's get our walking shoes on, and they say in one of my favourite Celtic Proverbs:

"Your feet will bring you to where your heart is".

Resources

[Government Right of way, Right to Roam](#)

[British Pilgrimage Association](#)

[National Trails](#)

[Railway Paths](#)

[National Trust: A beginners guide to forest bathing](#)

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To save as a desktop wallpaper, right-mouse click on the image and save.

Ledbury, Small Town Big Heart

Whether you are visiting England from abroad or on a weekend getaway. Ledbury in Herefordshire has a little something for everyone.

Ledbury, is more than an old market town with a colourful history, photogenic

streets, and Tudor buildings. It has heart.



You can visit many of the historic buildings for free, and find them manned by volunteers who are both passionate and knowledgeable. They'll be happy to guide you around and answer questions.

It also home to Church Lane, one of the most photogenic streets in the UK, that you can visit in real life rather than on Instagram.

If you also look very carefully you may even see the little fairy doors. There is a fairy door map and trail in the shops around town. [Here is a page and map to help you out.](#)

The village is also well-known for its [Poetry festival](#) that held each year in June and July. That brings in poets from all over the country and world.

Recommended spots to see and visit in Ledbury:

Market house

This old Market house takes the center stage on the town's main street. It's unique in that the stilts are exceptionally high. Completed in 1658 and built in Tudor style. The original use was for storing crops, after that, it was the town hall. Today it still plays the role of meeting house and hosts a small Saturday market.



Butchers house

Was built in 1581 and was originally located on the main street. Yet, they moved it to make the street wider in 1979.



It now houses a museum rather than the Butchers shop. In the museum, you'll find a Shoe bath, which I had never seen or heard of before. It was for inhabitants in Ledbury that didn't have a bath at home. Men would carry this bath from house to house, so the inhabitants could bathe.

Address: Church Lane, Free Admission Open daily, including Sundays from 1st April to 31st October from 11am to 5pm. Outside of these dates, please make an appointment via [Ledbury Civic Society](#).



Old Grammar School

Across from the Butchers house, you'll find the Old Grammar school. Interesting for kids to have an insight into schools

of the past.

I liked the wattle and daub, display. An insight of the inside of a Tudor style building wall.

Church Lane, Free Admission

The Painted Room



The wall paintings go back to the 1560's, at the time they were a cheap alternative to tapestries.

The paintings were colourful and included religious inspirations (threats) of the day. The volunteers can tell you the whole story and explain the context.

Church Lane, Free Admission

The Masters House

This refurbished historic house is now home to the local library. Be sure to check the website before you go, as there are free tours available every so often. They also host talks from historians, writers, and

poets. Adam Horovitz was the poet in residence Ledbury in 2015, and he wrote a few great poems about the building. [They can be found here](#).

St Katherine's, Bye Street, Free Admission

Hellens Manor



While this isn't in Ledbury, it is close enough to warrant a visit. Now, I am not the 'let's do a tour', type of traveler. As the Manor is still in use today, the only way to visit the manor is with a tour.

Which is well worth it. There is so much history here that you would never get the full story on a simple plaque.

The guide lives on the property and has an in-depth knowledge of the history of the house, as well as being an incredible storyteller.

My two favorite stories were that of the ghosts. The first being Hetty, who ran away with the stable boy who she'd fallen in love with. When he died she returned to the house. Due to the family's shame, they kept her room locked in her room for

the next 30 years. Here she etched "It is a part of virtue to abstain from what we love if it should prove our bane", into the window with her diamond ring.

The second death took place in 'Bloody Mary's' room. Here a priest was running g to



escape from soldiers but instead, he ran straight into the second group and was brutally murdered. If you look carefully, you'll find the marks of the attack on the wall and floor.

People who have stayed in the room have claimed to see his ghost, running back and forth in a panic.

The building itself is also fascinating, in how it carries the living history of its past and present owners over the different time periods. It was one of the best tours I've been on, and the highlight of my time in Ledbury.

Address: Much Marcle, Herdforshire
Website <http://www.hellensmanor.com/>
Admission costs: £9

Recommended places to Eat:

[The Malthouse cafe and Gallery](#), Church Lane: Home cooked

quality food.

Ice Bytes, 38 the Homend: Ice cream parlor

Recommended Places to Sleep:

[The Feathers Hotel](#), 25 High Street

[The Talbot Hotel](#), 14 New Street

[The Bullshed](#), While it's not in Ledbury, it is nearby. Its boutique style and comfort is worth experiencing if you are escaping the city for a few days and looking to treat yourself.



Church Lane



Bloody Mary's
Room, Hellens
Manor



Bloody Marys room



Bloody
Marys Room



Hellens Manor



Hellens Manor



Ledbury



Ledbury Clock Tower



The Butchers House, Ledbury



Ledbury Countryside



Hetty's Room

Tour of Ebley Mill: a Historic walk through England's Industrial Wool Trade



Cathedral of Cloth, Ebley Mill Walking Tour

Do you ever have those moments, when you see an antiquated building, and have a curiosity to peek inside?

I do. I love old buildings. I love the architecture that has weathered time, and societal fluxes. As much I as I love the outside, I am always curious about what they look like inside too. So, I jumped at the chance to do a free tour of the Ebley Mill in Stroud.

Richly woven tales by our guide brought the old mill to life. In our imagination, we strode through its various incarnations. Imagined ourselves surrounded by the clamorous sounds of the mill in action. The same sounds that would have echoed through the valley, followed by the wafting scent of wet wool.

We got to hear the stories of its heyday and slow demise.

The origins of Ebley Mill:

The exact dates aren't too sure. However, there are mentions of two mills being near this site as early as the 1300's.



One mill was for milling corn, and the other for fulling the wool. Which was a process of beating the wool down so that the fibres would further entwine. Resulting in a sturdier and weatherproof fibre.

The Mills brought prosperity to the owners and being a clothier at the time was good business. While the business boomed and ebbed the company grew. When the original owners sold it off, it was perfect timing for the following owner.

As the French civil war broke out, the army's need for uniforms made from quality English wool was in demand.

How the war lead to a boom in the Wool trade

Half the wealth of England rides on the back of the sheep

An Old English saying, that serves to remind us of the prestigious history of wool. Romans also wrote home about the high quality of the wool when they arrived at the British Isles.



The wool was as much for survival in a cold and rainy climate, as it was for fashion. There is nothing as sustainable, warm & weatherproof.

Which is why the fabric is popular for military uniforms, leading to a boon in orders. The profits of which financed the first building of the Mill that we see here today.

While a later war paid for the extension of a second building, which was originally 7 stories high. An epic explosion in the boiler room blew 5 of those floors. It was rebuilt and then damaged by fire damaged before it was rebuilt once more.

Peace and the changes in the Textile industry

As peace reigned, without uniforms to make, orders declined. The Mill had an equal measure of tough times in it's past.



By the 1960's it was struggling, and the introduction of

synthetic fibres didn't help. The mill innovated with the times, creating new products by blending fibres with the wool. Yet, in the end, it couldn't compete with other manufacturing costs and processes.

Sadly, by the late 1980s, it went bust and Ebley Mill's grandiose buildings left to ruin.

A New life for the Mill and Local council



In the 1990s the building's were bought and refurbished. It now houses the Stroud local council and its local departments.

Restored, it stands to watch over this Cotswold valley as majestically as it's always done. A nod to its heyday, Ebley Mill was a state of the art building, the first Mill in the area of that style and size. Although, many other mills soon followed suit.

A walking tour of the Mill through time:



The tour put on by the Stroudwater Textile Trust, gives us the opportunity to see the behind the scenes. We got a wander through the building and see the touches of the mills past. A past etched into the beams and walls.

It's as though the Mill reaches out and tells us its story, of all the architects and owners past and present.

While the mill no longer processes wool. The richness of the stories, history and its beautiful buildings remain.

A reminder of the past that lives on and is spun into the days and lives of the council and local residents today.

A Thank you for the walk down memory lane:

I'd like to finish with a heartfelt thank you to our guide, and her memorable stories. To the [Stroudwater Textile Trust](#) for organizing and promoting the tours. To Stroud City Council for preserving the old mill, and allowing us to wander about and learn it's rich history.

The exhibition 'Cathedral of Cloth, that was also on site, there is also a book available on the subject.

There are likely to be other tours in the future. If you are visiting or living in Stroud, keep an eye on the website of the [Stroudwater Textile Trust](#) for dates. It's well worth a visit.



Resources:

[Stroudwater Textile Trust](#)

[Stroud city Council](#)

[British History](#)