

A five-day trip in Wales

(13-17 May 2026)



Map of Wales: <https://www.mapsland.com/maps/europe/united-kingdom/wales/large-detailed-map-of-wales-with-relief-roads-and-cities.jpg>

Note: all photos are my own, unless otherwise specified.

Wednesday 13 May 2026

A few months ago, I had enrolled in a Rabbits' tour of Wales: [Discover Wales: Snowdonia, Tenby & the Cotswolds 5 Day Tour from London - Award Winning Small Group Tours](#). That morning, I left my hotel in Belgrave Road, London, to meet a little group of eight other tourists and Aileen, our guide and driver, around 9:00 in Bulleid Way, Victoria.

Leaving London, we drove west in the direction of Oxford, then towards Burford, the 'Gateway to the Cotswolds'. The name of this touristic area comes from Old English words, meaning "stone walls" (cots) and "rolling hills" (wolds). Once a prosperous market town thanks to the wool business and stagecoaches stop, Burford¹ declined slowly from the 1810s, until William Morris (1834-1896) and the Arts and Crafts Movement revived the whole area. Indeed, many artisans decided then to settle down into the Cotswolds. Burford is renowned for its picturesque High Street that sweeps downhill toward the River Windrush. "The medieval bridge and the impressive parish church anchor the town, while traditional honey-hued stone houses and historic shops line both sides of the street, offering a sense of timeless charm." St John the Baptist's is one of the large Cotswold 'wool churches' built between 1160 and 1475.



A lovely cottage on High Street.

¹ See more on <https://www.cotswolds.com/plan/towns-and-villages/burford/>



Shortcut leading to the Church of St John the Baptist, Burford.



A remarkable three-levelled church gate adorned with pinnacles



The Tanfield Tomb (17th century)

After this break, we took the direction of Hay on Wye, on the Welsh border, at the northern end of the Black Mountains. We reached “the capital of second-hand bookshops” around lunchtime. I briefly explored the castle, which underwent a massive 8-Million pounds renovation and hosts a museum/bookshop. Read more about Hay on Wye on: <https://www.hay-on-wye.co.uk/>. From it, I strolled into the streets of this charming village where would start the following week Hay’s annual art & literature festival: <https://www.hayfestival.com/hay-on-wye/home>



Entrance of Hay Castle

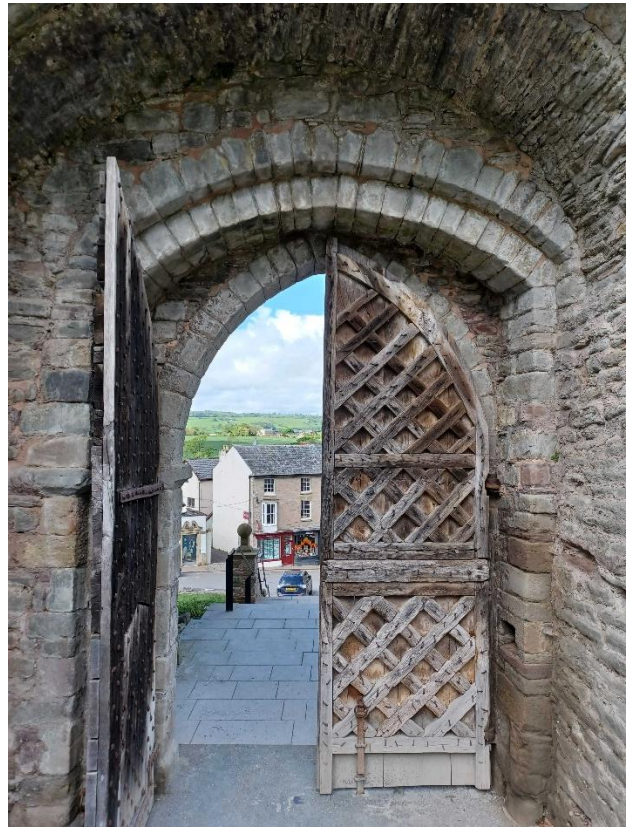


View from the village

From now on, all public signs and touristic information will be both in Welsh and English.



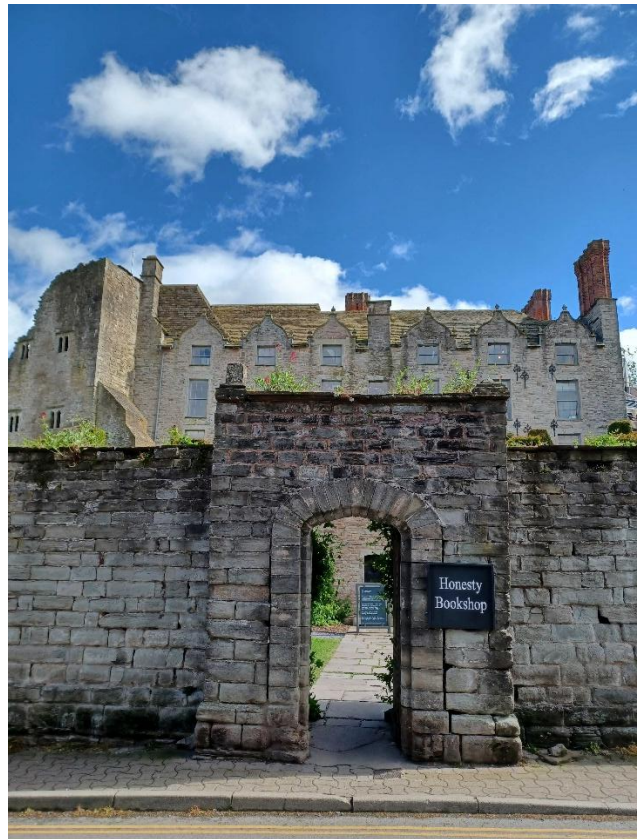
The entrance hall of the museum/bookshop



13th-century gateway towards the town



A stroll in Hay streets



And for the first time, I saw one of the benches which, in Wales, commemorate the 80th anniversary of V-day. My eye was drawn to the French word appearing clearly in the shadow on the ground:



To reach our evening destination, Aberystwyth, we drove along the Elan Valley, where tranquil reservoirs (supplying water to Midlands's cities like Birmingham), rivers, and lush woodlands create a breathtaking scenery. Wood is now the second most important industry in Wales, after slate quarries, while agriculture is largely livestock-based, as testified the many flocks of sheep grazing the rich, green grass of the hills and mountains we drove through.



View of the sea front, the pier, and the Old College under scaffoldings, from the Castle hill

Early in the evening, we arrived in the Victorian seaside resort of Aberystwyth, where the university and its students swell the population above the 15,000 people who live here. The huge Victorian building, which hosted the University College of Wales, founded in 1872, is covered with scaffolding at present (see photo above). Aberystwyth Castle was built by Edward I in 1277, and is now a ruin with free access:



Castle gate



Monument to WWII's soldiers, on the castle hill



View of Marine Terrace, and on the far left, Cliff Railway on top of the hill.

I was lodging in a B&B near the South Marine Terrace: GwesTY, South Road (£105.00/night for a single ensuite and breakfast).

Thursday 14 May 2026: Snowdonia & Harlech Castle

That morning was quite cold and cloudy. Heading towards Harlech Castle² on the coast road, we quickly stopped at Barmouth, the closest seaside town from Birmingham. In Harlech, we visited the castle under a steady rain, and, after a comforting break in its café, we explored the little town.



View of Harlech Castle from the visitor centre.



View of the castle entrance from the yard

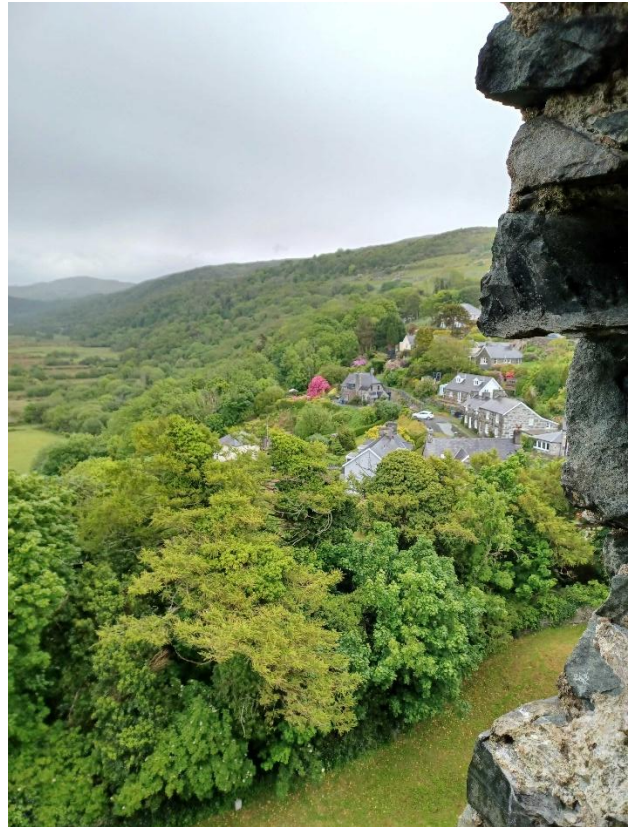


Inside towers and façade of the castle

² See more on <https://cadw.gov.wales/visit/places-to-visit/castell-harlech>



Drawing of the castle as built in the 13th century



View of the surrounding hills

This medieval castle was built in the 1280s by Edward I during his invasion of Wales, onto a rocky knoll close to the Irish Sea. Over the next few centuries, the castle played an important part in several wars. During the 15th-century Wars of the Roses, Harlech was held by the Lancastrians for seven years, before Yorkist troops forced its surrender in 1468, a siege memorialised in the song "Men of Harlech" (see Note below)... The fortification is built of local stone and concentric in design, featuring a massive gatehouse... The sea originally came much closer to Harlech than in modern times, and a water-gate and a long flight of steps leads down from the castle to the former shore, which allowed the castle to be resupplied by sea during sieges.³

Note: 'Men of Harlech' is important for Welsh national culture. Adapted versions are sung by fans of several Welsh football clubs and as school or college songs around the world. The song gained international recognition when it was featured in the 1941 movie *How Green Was My Valley* and the 1964 film *Zulu*. You can hear one its versions on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmckPVndITg&list=RDMmckPVndITg&start_radio=1

More generally, the male voice choir, or Côr Meibion, is a world-famous emblem of Welsh identity: the choral men's singing groups flourished in Welsh coal mining towns during the 20th century, where they provided camaraderie to workers and free entertainment when the gruelling workday was done. Though coal mining largely came to an end in Wales in the 1980s, the choirs did not fall flat, and today, singing in a male voice choir remains a popular pastime around the country, aiding in establishing Wales's reputation as the "Land of Song". For example, here below is another YouTube link to hear an interpretation of 'Bread of Heaven':

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1fLiDjLf5c&list=RDU1fLiDjLf5c&start_radio=1

³ See more on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlech_Castle



Delightful chapel built in Wales's characteristic grey stones



Bakery and ice-cream shop (below) in Harlech



In the afternoon, we travelled north to explore the mountainous Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park. “This is a land of stunning beauty and ancient legends where rugged peaks, serene lakes, and lush valleys have inspired awe for centuries. Nestled in the heart of the national park is the charming village of Beddgelert. Surrounded by rugged mountains and lush forests, it offers picturesque streets lined with traditional stone cottages” (Rabbies’ brochure).





Walk along the river flowing through Beddgelert





Holiday cottages: who wouldn't dream of spending a few days here?



The tiny train station of Beddgelert

Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways operate several touristic lines in Snowdonia. The Snowdonia Star runs for 25 miles from Caernarfon to Porthmadog. "The trains climb from sea level to over 650ft on the foothills of Snowdon, before zig-zagging dramatically down the steep hillside to reach Beddgelert, nestling in the heart of the National Park, then through the magnificent Aberglaslyn Pass and on to Porthmadog". See more on <https://www.festrail.co.uk/>



When we left Beddgelert to reach a specific viewpoint nearby, the weather had cleared a little, but not enough to allow us to see the top of Mount Snowdon without its crown of clouds...



A breathtaking view of the valley...



The top of Mount Snowdon hidden in the clouds...

On our way back to Aberystwyth, we stopped half an hour in Betws-Y-Coed, another typical village of Snowdonia with its stone houses:



Railway station of Betws-Y-Coed

When we arrived in Aberystwyth, the weather had cleared up, and a walk on the promenade along the sea was quite refreshing after these long hours of driving. As I had not booked a table in advance, I could not have diner at Baravin, an Italian restaurant on Marine Terrace, so I ended in a lively pub, the Whitehorse⁴, where a karaoke had been organized later in the evening!

⁴ The Whitehorse, Upper Portland Street, Aberystwyth.

Friday 15 May 2016:

Leaving Aberystwyth, we travelled around the coast of Cardigan Bay to New Quay. With its sandy harbour and whitewashed houses, New Quay is a picturesque, popular seaside resort and a traditional fishing town. It also advertises strong connections with the poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) and his play, *Under Milk Wood*.





View of the village from the jetty

From New Quay, we travelled inland on narrow roads, through rolling hills and moors, where thousands of sheep were grazing in liberty, to reach the Dinefwr Estate (Newton House) and its ruined castle near Llandeilo. Though its construction started in the 17th century, Newton House was transformed into a grand Georgian mansion, with a matching landscape garden, during the 18th century (see below photos of the garden and its ah-ah). Read more about the history of the estate on: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/dinefwr/history-of-dinefwr>



The house front and main entrance



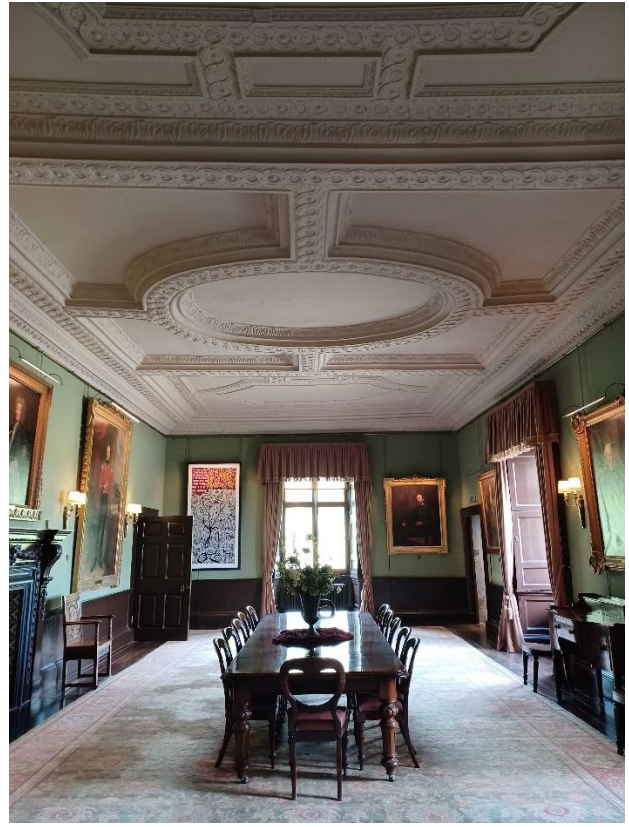
View of the back of the house, looking on the formal garden and the deer park



View on the formal garden (ending with the ah-ah) and the deer park from the loggia on the first floor of the house.



Grand oak staircase (17th and 19th centuries)



Dining room (restored ceilings from the 17th century)



Back porch in Gothic style (19th century)



The ah-ah (18th century)

In 18th century landscape gardening, the ah-ah was a type of sunken fence, giving the viewer of the garden the illusion of an unbroken, continuous rolling lawn, whilst providing boundaries for grazing livestock.

Later, I climbed up the hill to visit the rugged castle ruins of Dinefwr Castle, the medieval fortress that once served as the home of Welsh kings:



View on Newton House from the castle



Castle ruins uphill seen from a bluebell field

In the afternoon, we drove through Carmarthen to Laugharne, nestled along the River Tâf estuary. Aileen dropped us on the car park, nearby the romantic ruins of Laugharne Castle:

<https://cadw.gov.wales/visit/places-to-visit/laugharne-castle>



Walking along the estuary, we went to visit Dylan Thomas's Boathouse, where the poet spent his final years and wrote the famous play *Under Milk Wood*.



It was time to drive to Tenby and check in in our respective accommodations for the next two nights. My B&B was The Southcliff, in Victoria Street (£ 95/night for an ensuite room and breakfast). I strongly recommend it; the room was comfortable and the owners very friendly.

I took a stroll on the esplanade and within the old town, lying behind its 13th-century medieval town walls—including the Five Arches barbican gatehouse—and noted several interesting buildings worth a visit on the following afternoon. I found a table in an Italian restaurant looking on the harbour: <https://www.florentinos-italian-tenby.com/>. Though it was a little expensive, I ate a delicious dish (a whole sea bass and fresh vegetables, baked in pizza oven) with a glass of prosecco.



Tenby's famous sandy beaches



View of St Catherine's islet from the esplanade



The Five Arches Gatehouse, seen from inside (left) and outside (right) the medieval town walls

Saturday 16 May 2026 - Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

That day, we drove through Pembroke and across the river: from the bridge we saw Pembroke Docks. The road then followed some gorgeous coastlines at the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. This stunning region was the birthplace of the Twdyr (anglicised to Tudor) royal dynasty. After driving through Solva, we arrived at St Davids, the “smallest cathedral city in Britain”, named after St David, the patron saint of Wales.



The fortified gate towards the Cathedral

Once we pass through the fortified gate, the view on the Cathedral and the Bishop Palace is quite impressive. Both are stunning examples of medieval architecture, but the Cathedral is much more than a splendid monument, it remains a living church offering a place for prayer and meditation:



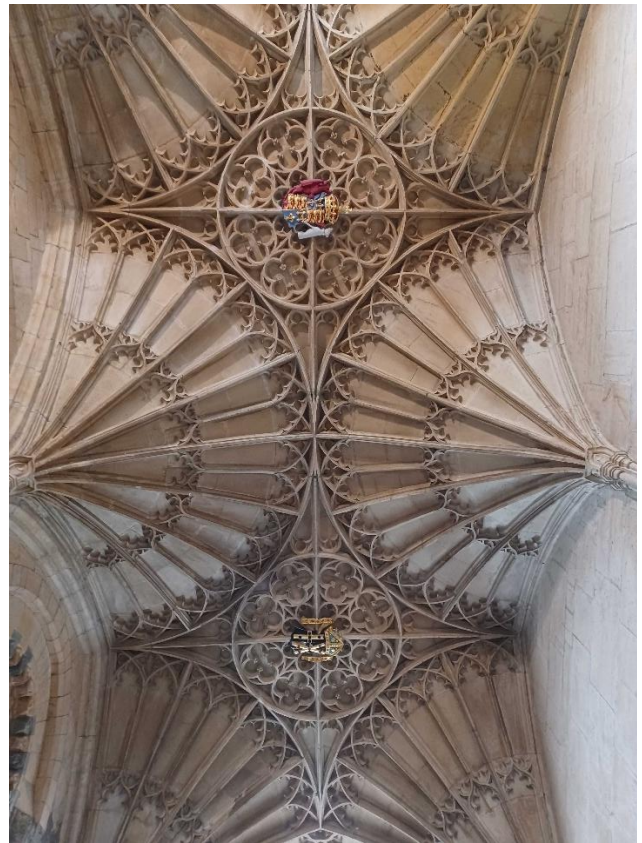
The Nave: 16th century carved ceiling and 14th century carved stone screen



High altar: tomb of Edmund Tudor, grandfather of Henry VIII



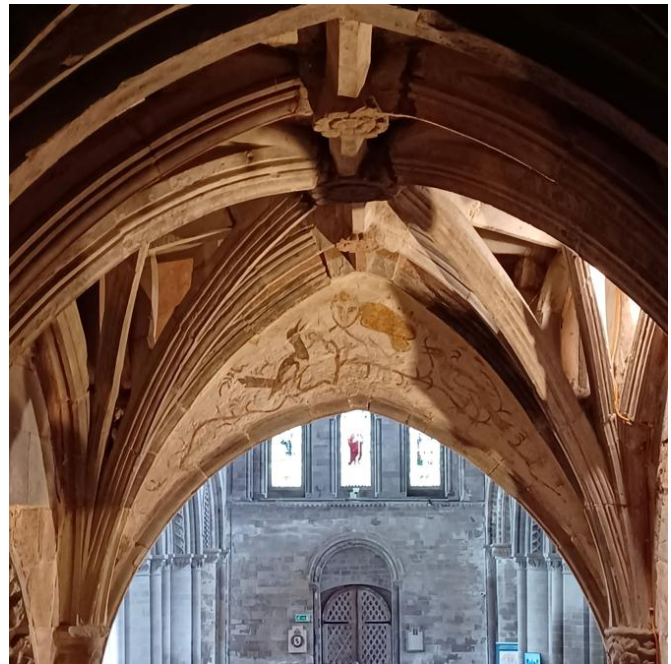
Decorated ceiling of the High Altar



Ceiling of the 16th century Holy Trinity Chapel



The cross niche in the old exterior wall on the 12th-century cathedral



A medieval painting which escaped the Reformation's whitewashing of the cathedral

While I was admiring the quire and its magnificent ceiling, a guide pointed me towards the delicate painting on the arched passage to the nave, which escaped the whitewashing of church frescoes and painting during the Reformation in the 16th century. I ended the visit of this inspiring place with the visit of its exhibition space, "The Treasury", before a welcome break in the Refectory Café, where I ate a traditional Welsh Cake with a delicious double espresso!

Leaving the Cathedral, I turned my steps towards the Bishop's Palace, now a ruin which remains captivating by its sheer size and architecture.

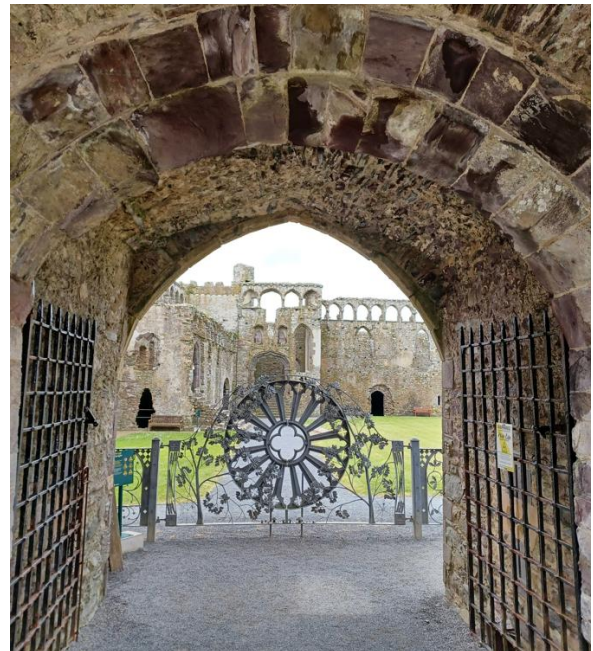
The site dates back to the 6th century, although the building that stands today dates largely from the late 13th and 14th centuries. However, "the beginning of the Reformation heralded the decline of the Bishop's Palace. In 1536 Bishop William Barlow stripped the lead from the roof. In 1616, Bishop Richard Milbourne applied for a licence to demolish some of the buildings. By 1678, when another licence for demolition was sought, the palace was considered beyond repair".⁵



General view of the Palace



The pattern of the delicate rosace in the palace ruins...



... is echoed in the iron gate to the visitors' entrance

I have been highly impressed by the atmosphere of this site, a place of devotion to St David since the sixth century, and I particularly enjoyed the visit of the cathedral. To me, it remains the climax of this tour in Wales.

⁵ Read more on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_David's_Bishop's_Palace



A view of the palace's interior as seen from the visitors' entrance

We still had time to stroll into the main street of this “city”: though the smallest in Britain, it is very touristic and its High Street displays many shops selling local products and souvenirs.



St David's main street



Another bench commemorating the 80th anniversary of VE day

In the afternoon, we had the choice between exploring Pembroke Castle or going back to Tenby. As I wanted to visit a few places I had only scouted the previous evening in Tenby, I chose to go back there and explore the little town more in depth. Thus, despite the persistent rain which complicated taking photos — fortunately I had bought a rain poncho especially for this trip! — I started walking into the old town streets overlooking the beach, then turned into St Julian Street and Castle Hill:



St Catherine Islet and Castle Beach



View of Harbour Beach, Crackwell St and The Norton from Castle Hill



Top of Castle Hill

I did not pay a visit to Tenby Museum and Art Gallery, on Castle Hill, but after a tour of the hill, from which I captured another great view of St Catherine Islet and its 1869 fort (see photo next page), I directed my steps towards the town centre.

First, I visited the Tudor Merchant's House, which is managed by the National Trust, then went to the medieval church of St Mary.



The Tudor Merchant's House: front door (left) and back façade showing the chimney stack on the left.

This narrow town house was once lived in by a local merchant, when Tenby was a thriving port in the late Middle Ages. “It consists of three levels and is built from lime and sandstone rubble. It has a circular chimney stack and original exposed roof trusses. Today the house is filled with a remarkable collection of locally made reproductions. The furniture, pewter, wall hangings and ceramics have been expertly copied from existing Tudor pieces commonly used in the area.” Read more on: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/tudor-merchants-house/visiting-the-tudor-merchants-house>



The bedroom on the second floor



Dining room on the first floor

The guide in the house was very helpful and told me a lot of details and anecdotes about living in 15th-century Tenby. Here below is a cropped drawing representing the town at that time:

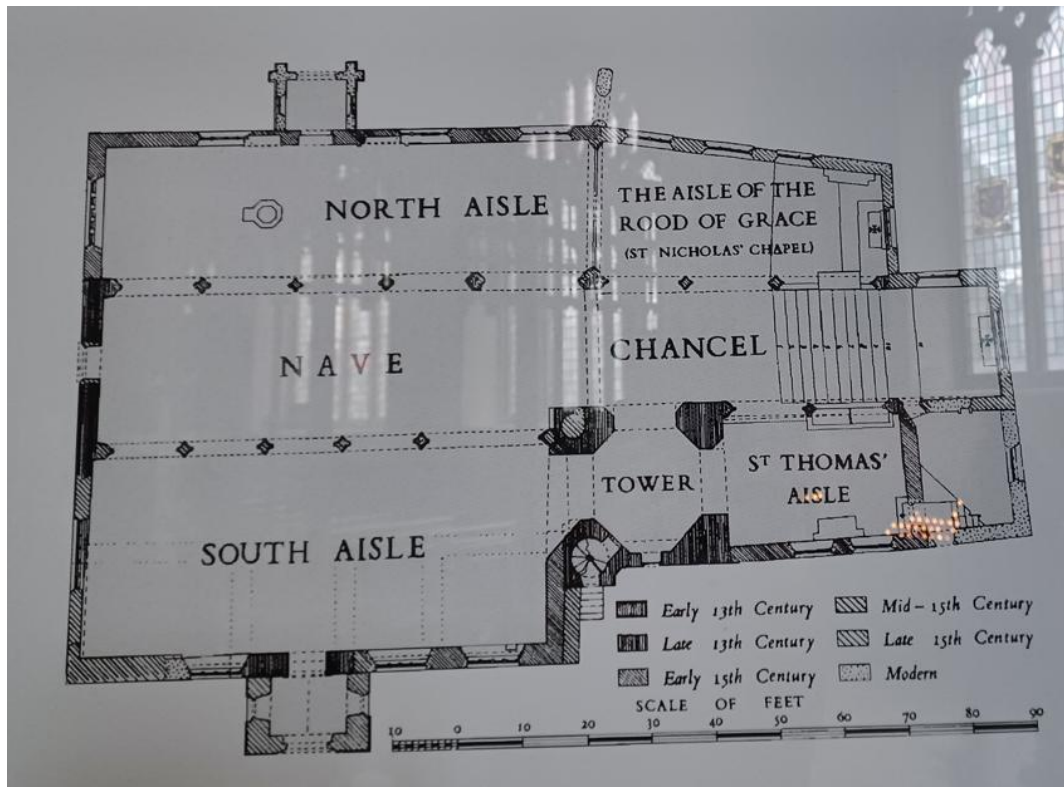


Inside the town walls, the spire of St Mary's Church is a useful landmark today as it was five centuries ago:



St Mary's Church (photo taken on the previous evening)

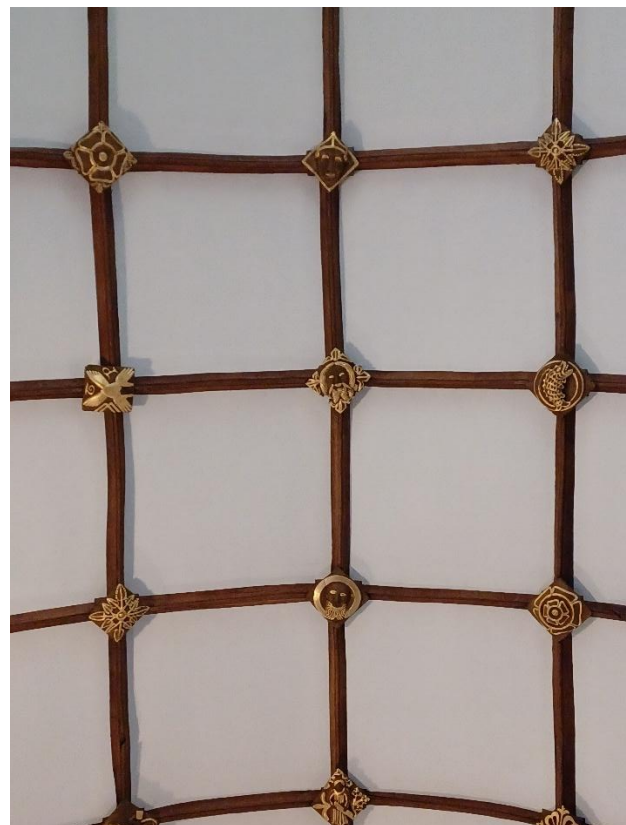
St Mary is the largest medieval parish church in Wales. This multicell church was mostly built between the 13th and the late 15th centuries.



Map explaining the various phases of the church building through the centuries



Nave and chancel in the background



Detail of the late 15th century nave ceiling

Both the nave and the chancel ceilings date from the late 15th century and were renovated in the 1960s. Amidst the architectural treasures of this church, I noticed two monuments particularly important for my present research:

- a monument commemorating William Risam, a wealthy merchant and mayor of Tenby who died in 1633, and
- a Jacobean chest tomb, with the recumbent effigy of Margaret Mercer, d.1610, and the kneeling figure of her husband Thomas ap Rees.



Monument of William Risam (dead in 1633)



Jacobean chest tomb (1610s)

I thought I had harvested many interesting information and photos for my present research that day, but the next day would also provide me with a wealth of architectural testimonies of the Tudor Era!

Sunday 17 May 2026: St Fagans and Lacock

That day we travelled through the south of Wales to visit St Fagans National Museum of History on our way back to London. Since opening in 1948, St Fagans has moved over 40 original buildings from all over Wales. There the visitors wander through centuries as they explore how people have lived, worked and spent their leisure through the ages: see more on <https://museum.wales/stfagans/>. In the main building I bought a map for 50p. The many buildings are scattered on such a vast area, and we stopped there only for a limited time, so I asked at the desk to point me towards the buildings dating from the Tudor and Jacobean Eras. Unfortunately, the Elizabethan castle of St Fagan was under scaffoldings and closed to the public, I could only visit its gardens.

Here is only a small selection of the historical buildings I visited that day.

- 1) Kennixton Farmhouse: the oldest part of this farmhouse from the Gower peninsula was built in 1610. The red colour of the walls was thought to protect the house from evil spirits. The interior of the house, though, is decorated as it would have been in the late 18th century.



Views from the yard and the back of the house.



- 2) Hendre'r-ywydd Uchaf Farmhouse, built in 1508. The family shared their home with the cattle, which were kept in the two lower bays (see photo next page, on the left-hand side). The three upper bays formed the family home. Originally, there was no chimney: the smoke from the fire would escape through the open windows and the roof.



The front entrance of the house

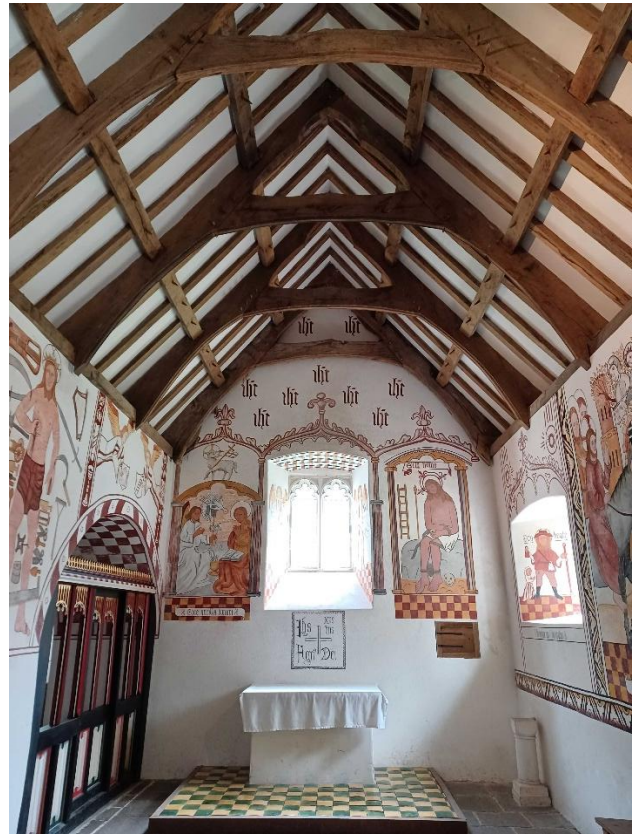


The central fire and open wood windows

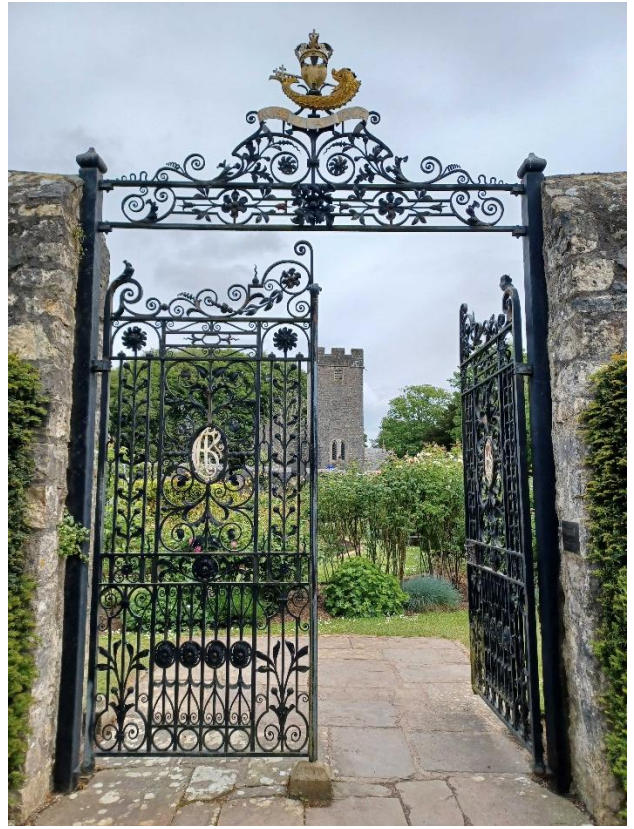


View of the three bays of the family home

- 3) St Teilo's Church. A Christian church may have stood at the original location at Llandeilo Tal-ybont, over 40 miles west from this site, from very early times. They have reconstructed and refurbished the church as it might have appeared around 1530 in its pre-Reformation splendour, containing all the elements of a late medieval Catholic church. The stunning replica wall paintings include copies of originals found in the church.



4) St Fagans Castle is a Grade 1 listed building and one of the finest Elizabethan manor houses in Wales. As the castle's roof has reached the end of its life, the museum is embarking on an ambitious two-year project to replace it in its entirety thanks to funding from Welsh Government, hence the large scaffolding erected on all sides of the Castle. Read more on: [St Fagans Castle Project](#) | [Museum Wales](#)





The gardens were open to visit, however, and I enjoyed taking a stroll in some of them. This open-air museum is a fantastic place where we could spend the whole day. But it was time to go back to the main building and grab a sandwich at the cafeteria to eat in the minibus!

Aileen, our driver and guide, took the M4 near Cardiff in the direction of London. She drove out of the M4 just once for a stop in the delightful village of Lacock, located about 5 km south of the town of Chippenham, and about 6 km outside the Cotswolds area. The village is owned almost in its entirety by the National Trust and attracts many visitors by virtue of its unspoiled appearance. Indeed, most of the surviving houses in the village are 18th century or earlier in construction, like the 14th-century St Cyriac's Church.

The village has been used as a film and television location, notably for the 1995 BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice* and the 2007 BBC production of *Cranford*. It also made brief appearances in the Harry Potter films *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. In 2015, Lacock was used for an episode of the *Downton Abbey* TV series, portraying a livestock market of the 1920s, and in late 2018, scenes for the film version of *Downton Abbey* included a royal parade. The village was also featured in two episodes of the *Wolf Hall* series, based on the novels by Hilary Mantel, and scenes for the 2017 film *Beauty and the Beast* were shot here.⁶

Here below is a small selection of photos taken during a quick stroll in the village streets, where various architectural styles coexist. I also had a peep into St Cyriac Church:

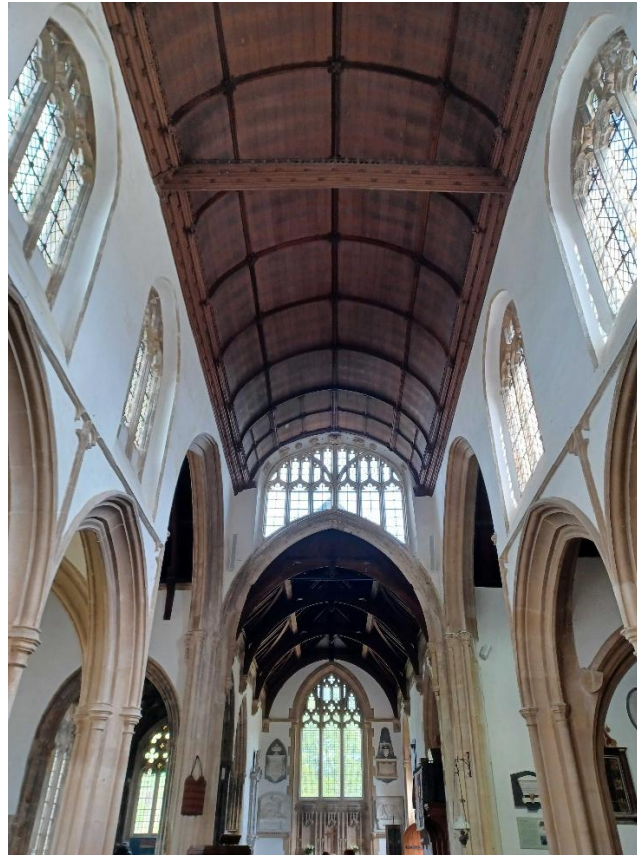
⁶ Read more on: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacock>



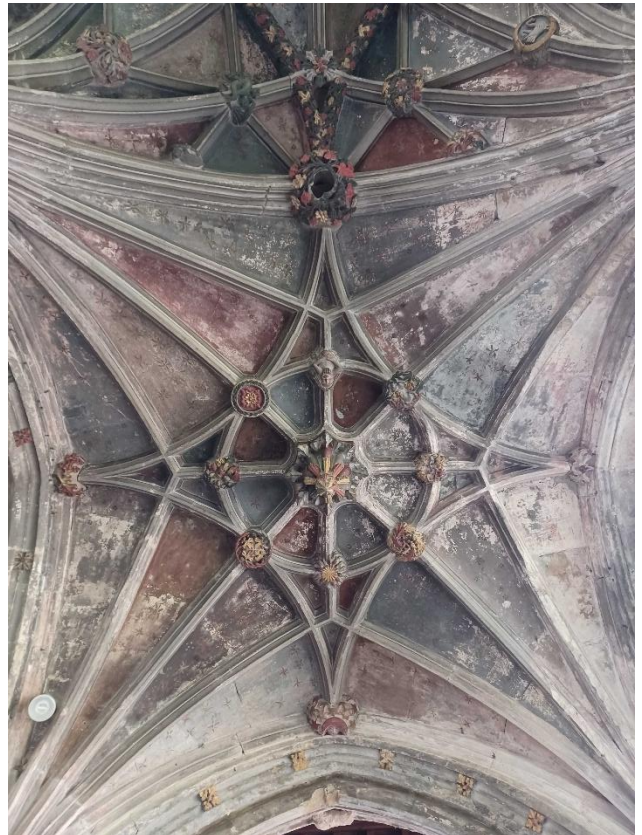




St Cyriac Church



The nave



Details of the ornate pillar and ceiling of the chapel inside the church

After this amazing trip into the past, our guide then drove us back to reality and the minibus back on the M4! We reached London, Victoria, around 19:00, safe and sound. Thank you Aileen!