

# Queen of South-East Wales

**BRITAIN AT ITS BEST: MONMOUTH**



PICTURES: MARTIN BACHE/ALAMY; PETE STILL/REDFERNS

IT MAY seem hard to believe – but next year marks the 50th anniversary of the release of Queen’s chart-topping Bohemian Rhapsody.

One way to celebrate is to visit Monmouth in South-East Wales. For Freddie Mercury’s rock classic was recorded in Rockfield Studios, just outside town. Every now and then the owners put on tours – check to see the latest tour days – allowing you to tread in the footsteps of Queen as well as Oasis, who recorded hit album (What’s The Story) Morning Glory? here too.

For music fans this is hallowed territory. Inside is the piano on which Mercury once played, as well as letters of thanks to the studio owners from Oasis, Coldplay and singer Annie Lennox. While near the main courtyard you can see the wall where Noel Gallagher was said to have sat while dreaming up the lyrics for the Oasis hit Wonderwall.

But what’s the story about the border town of Monmouth? This historic gateway to Wales lies at the meeting point of the River Monnow and River Wye. Its most famous landmark is

the Monnow Bridge, the UK’s last surviving medieval fortified bridge – built to protect the town from Welsh raiders when it was part of England.

In the Domesday Book, Monmouth is recorded as being in Herefordshire, though it’s officially now a couple of miles inside Wales.

The prosperous market town was established after the Normans built the now ruined 11th-century Monmouth

Castle, reputedly the birthplace of Henry V. Nearby Agincourt Square – named in honour of his 1415 victory – plays host to a small food and craft market on Fridays and Saturdays.

At the Shire Hall the three ringleaders of a Chartist march, which ended in bloodshed, were tried for high treason in 1840 and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered. It has been restored, including the tiny

holding cells for the trio, whose death sentences were (luckily for them) commuted to transportation to Tasmania.

At the Castle and Regimental Museum you can learn about the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia), formed in 1539 during the reign of Henry VIII and called upon to maintain law and order in the county of

Monmouthshire. And also about soldiers who were sentenced to up to 500 lashes in the 1790s for ‘crimes’ such as ‘being drunk and behaving in a riotous manner’.

The Georgian-era Nelson Garden is also worth visiting for its peace and well-maintained flowerbeds. It was here in 1802 that Lord Nelson and his mistress Lady Hamilton took refreshments in a summer house after dinner at the nearby Beaufort Arms.

The town centre boasts the delightful Savoy Theatre and welcoming independent coffee shops. For a special occasion, try the super nine-course evening tasting menu at The Whitebrook restaurant with rooms, just outside town.

With the big anniversary of Queen fast approaching, what better time to visit this charming town?

**YORK MEMBERY**

**TRAVEL FACTS**

DOUBLES at the Whitebrook from £440 including dinner and breakfast (thewhitebrook.co.uk); The next Rockfield Studios tours will be in June (rockfieldmusicgroup.com). More information: visitmonmouthshire.com.



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