

Medieval England: Magna Carta to Shakespeare and More

with Dr. Carol Symes

October 10–18, 2026



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with Dr. Carol Symes

Join the Great Courses Journeys professor for an in-depth exploration of pivotal events and figures that defined one of England's most transformative periods. From the grandeur of the Tudor court to the rebellions that shook the Stuart dynasty, you'll uncover the power, drama, and intrigue that shaped this fascinating era.

Begin in London, the political and cultural heart of England during the Tudor era. Delve into the complex lives of monarchs such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth I with visits to Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London, and explore how these royal figures navigated power, authority, and intrigue. Visit the university city of Oxford, where centuries of learning have left a profound legacy, and experience Shakespeare's London as you trace his life through its historic streets to the iconic Globe Theatre. Continue to York, a key location in the Wars of the Roses, the English Civil War, and the ongoing power struggles between the Tudors and Stuarts. End in Lincoln, home to Magna Carta, a document that altered the course of history and continues to resonate in current discussions of legal and political liberty around the globe. This examination of the interplay of power, politics, and rebellions that changed the course of English history will provide a deeper understanding of how the actions of these commanding figures continue to shape our world today.

Your Journey Expert



Dr. Carol Symes is an Associate Professor of History, Theatre, Classics, and Medieval Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught courses extensively in Medieval England, Medieval civilization, Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's England. Professor Symes's research focuses on medieval and premodern media of communication, including histories and performance texts. She is the founding executive editor of the journal *The Medieval Globe*, on the interconnectedness of the Medieval world. An ongoing research project of hers, *Shakespeare in Chains*, explores how the experience of enclosure, vagabondage, criminalization, and incarceration shaped the

actors, audiences, and plays of Tudor-Stuart England. A professional actor and theater practitioner, she trained at the Old Vic Theatre School in Bristol, England. Professor Symes's book *A Common Stage: Theatre and Public Life in Medieval Arras* earned the American Historical Association's Herbert Baxter Adams Prize, among other honors. She is also co-author of the bestselling *Western Civilizations*. Professor Symes earned her PhD in History from Harvard University. For The Great Courses, she created *The Medieval Legacy*.

Highlights

- Explore the opulent halls of Hampton Court Palace, Henry VIII's favorite royal residence, and delve into dramatic tales of Tudor power, betrayal, and intrigue.
- Stand in the presence of history at Westminster Abbey, the iconic site of royal coronations and royal tombs.
- Discover the rich history of Oxford, from its medieval past to modern-day traditions, with a visit to New College where Dr. Bucholz will share his personal experiences as a student.
- Visit Burghley House, one of England's grandest 16th-century state homes, built to honor Queen Elizabeth I, and admire the stunning State Rooms, priceless art, and the enchanting Garden of Surprises.
- Explore the towering Lincoln Cathedral, once the tallest building in the world, and delve into the history of the Magna Carta at Lincoln Castle, gaining insights into its impact on modern democracy.

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Itinerary



Day 1: Welcome to London

Arrive on individual flights into London and transfer independently to your hotel. In the late afternoon, gather for an engaging introductory lecture on early modern London by your expert. This talk will set the stage for the days ahead, offering insight into London's transformation from a bustling Tudor capital to a global powerhouse. In the evening, get to know your fellow travelers during a Welcome Dinner in a local restaurant.

Included Meal: Dinner

Accommodations: Leonardo Royal London City

Day 2: A Royal Intrigue Unfolds

Begin with a deep dive into Tudor history at Hampton Court Palace, Henry VIII's favorite residence and a masterpiece of royal grandeur. Explore the opulent State Apartments, walk beneath the hammer-beamed ceiling of the Great Hall – still adorned with the king's original tapestries – and hear dramatic tales of the power, betrayal, and courtly intrigue that shaped the lives of England's most infamous royal family. Throughout the visit, your Great Courses expert will provide fascinating insights into the palace's role beyond the Tudor era and the expectations of 18th-century courtiers. After lunch at the Tiltyard Café, return to London for a guided tour of the Tower of London. Once a formidable royal palace and later a notorious prison, the Tower's notorious past includes the tragic story of the Princes in the Tower, and the imprisonment and execution of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, two of Henry VIII's doomed queens. Dinner and the remainder of the evening will be yours to enjoy at leisure.

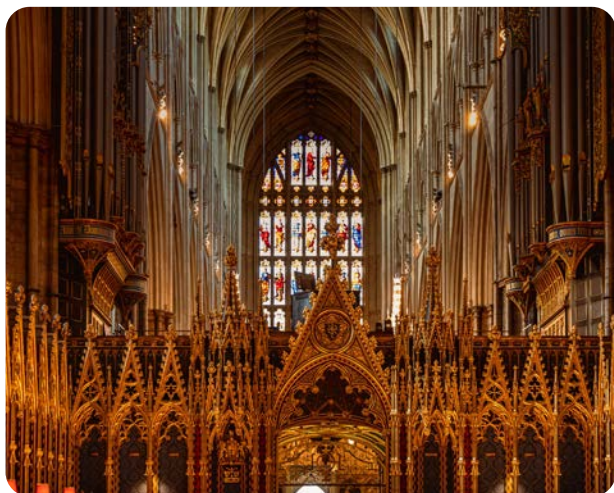
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Leonardo Royal London City

Day 3: Stand in the Presence of History

Visit Westminster Abbey, the site of every coronation since William the Conqueror as well as the final resting place for many monarchs, including Mary, Queen of Scots; Queen Elizabeth I; and King James I of England and Scotland. Afterward, indulge in a quintessentially





British tradition – a traditional English tea at the Cellarium Café, nestled within the Abbey’s historic precincts. Savor delicate finger sandwiches, warm scones, and rich clotted cream, and enjoy a tutorial on “proper” tea etiquette. Continue to the National Portrait Gallery, where portraits of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, and Queen Elizabeth I offer a glimpse into their personalities, power, and enduring mystique. The rest of the day will be free to explore London at your own pace.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Afternoon Tea

Accommodations: Leonardo Royal London City

Day 4: Scholars and Spires – A Day in Oxford



Enjoy a full day excursion to the historic university town of Oxford, a place of learning and tradition for over nine centuries. A guided walking tour will uncover the complex layers of Oxford’s medieval past, from the women who helped build the city’s reputation as a university town to the often-tense relationships between scholars and townsfolk, to the historic Jewish quarter where remnants of the old city can still be seen today. Step back in time during lunch at Turf Tavern, a former malt house and public house that has been a favorite haunt of students and professors alike since 1382.

In the afternoon, visit one of the University of Oxford’s storied colleges, where centuries-old quadrangles, chapels, and libraries remain enduring symbols of the university’s intellectual life. Return to London, where dinner and the rest of the evening will be yours to enjoy.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Leonardo Royal London City

Day 5: All The World’s a Stage in Shakespeare’s London



Step into the world of Shakespeare’s London with a walking tour that brings the Bard’s era to life. Trace his life and legacy from Guildhall and Leadenhall to the innerworkings of Shakespeare’s Globe, the faithful reconstruction of the original Elizabethan playhouse where Shakespeare’s works were first performed by



the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599. Lunch today will be at The George Inn, London's last remaining galleried coaching inn, where weary travelers once stopped for a pint and lively conversation. In the afternoon, a local historian will offer a glimpse into the lives of figures both famous and forgotten from the Tudor era. Dinner and the rest of the evening will be at your leisure, where you may choose to attend a performance of a Shakespeare play. *(This experience will be offered at an additional cost; details on the production and location will be announced at a later date.)*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Leonardo Royal London City



Day 6: Tudor Splendor at Burghley House

Bid farewell to London and depart for the historic walled city of York. Along the way, stop for a visit to Burghley House, one of the largest and most opulent 16th-century state homes still standing. Built to honor Queen Elizabeth I, this grand "prodigy" house was designed to showcase the wealth and ambition of the elite with magnificently decorated State Rooms, priceless works of art, gilded furniture, and an enchanting Garden of Surprises inspired by Elizabethan fascination with astrology, astronomy, and Classical civilizations. Arrive in York and gather for dinner at a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hilton York



Day 7: York's Timeless Tapestry

Begin with a guided walking tour of York, a city that has witnessed more than 2,000 years of history, from its Roman origins to its time as a Viking settlement, and later as a key battleground for the Anglo-Saxons, Normans, Tudors, and Stuarts. Weave through cobblestone streets and hear stories of how the city played pivotal roles in both the Wars of the Roses and the English Civil War, where the country was divided in a struggle for power. Visit York Minster,



an awe-inspiring Gothic cathedral that ranks as one of the largest in Europe. After lunch in a local restaurant, gather at the Priory Street Centre for a lecture on Tudor royal propaganda and learn how the monarchy used art, rhetoric, and ceremony to shape public perception and secure political power. Dinner and the rest of the evening will be at your leisure in York.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hilton York

Day 8: Cathedrals, Castles, and Charters in Lincoln



Travel to Lincoln, an historic city in England's East Midlands region. The day begins with a visit to the Lincoln Cathedral, which held the title of the world's tallest building for more than two centuries. Continue to Lincoln Castle, and follow in the footsteps of former inmates in the Victorian Prison and view Magna Carta, the iconic document that paved the way for modern democracy. As you explore, your expert will share insights into Magna Carta, explaining why its influence still resonates today. There will be time for those who choose to walk along the castle's great stone walls for panoramic views of the city and countryside. *Please note that access to the castle walls requires climbing a spiral staircase with 64 steps.* Return to York and raise a toast to your journey through England's history during a Farwell Dinner in a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hilton York

Day 9: Departures



Transfer to the airport (Manchester Airport – MAN) and depart England on individual flights for your journey home. The drive to Manchester will take approximately 1 hour, 30 minutes.

Included Meal: Breakfast

Accommodations



Leonardo Royal London City

London

The Leonardo Royal London Hotel offers a stylish and comfortable stay in the heart of the city, blending modern amenities with a welcoming atmosphere. Its prime location is just across the bridge from Shakespeare's Globe and Borough Market and within walking distance to major attractions like the Tower of London, Tower Bridge, and St. Paul's Cathedral, and is surrounded by a myriad dining choices from casual eateries to upscale options. **(5 nights)**



Hilton York

York

Ideally located inside the historic city walls and across from Clifford's Tower, Hilton York's contemporary rooms are outfitted with flat-screen televisions, a writing desk, tea and coffeemaking facilities, and luxury toiletry products. A fitness center offers a range of free weights and cardio equipment, or guests may choose to relax with medieval views and local gins at the onsite Tower's Bar and Restaurant. **(3 nights)**



Pricing:

Departure	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy	Deposit	
October 10-18, 2026	\$8,995	\$10,695	\$500	BOOK NOW

What's Included:

- All accommodations for the duration of the tour
- Meals, as noted in the itinerary
- All sightseeing and visits as noted in each itinerary
- Expertise of The Great Courses Expert, travel director and local guides throughout the tour
- All gratuities for on-tour guides, drivers, hotel and restaurant staff as part of the group program
- All on-tour transportation, including ground transfer to departure airport, unless otherwise noted
- Quietvox listening devices to facilitate audibility and social distancing on tour
- The assistance of an ATA professional travel team to assist with pre-trip questions, travel arrangements, including flights, extra hotel nights and other services
- Comprehensive pre-departure mailings and materials with information about the destination and what to expect on tour, including a suggested reading list
- Emergency evacuation insurance