



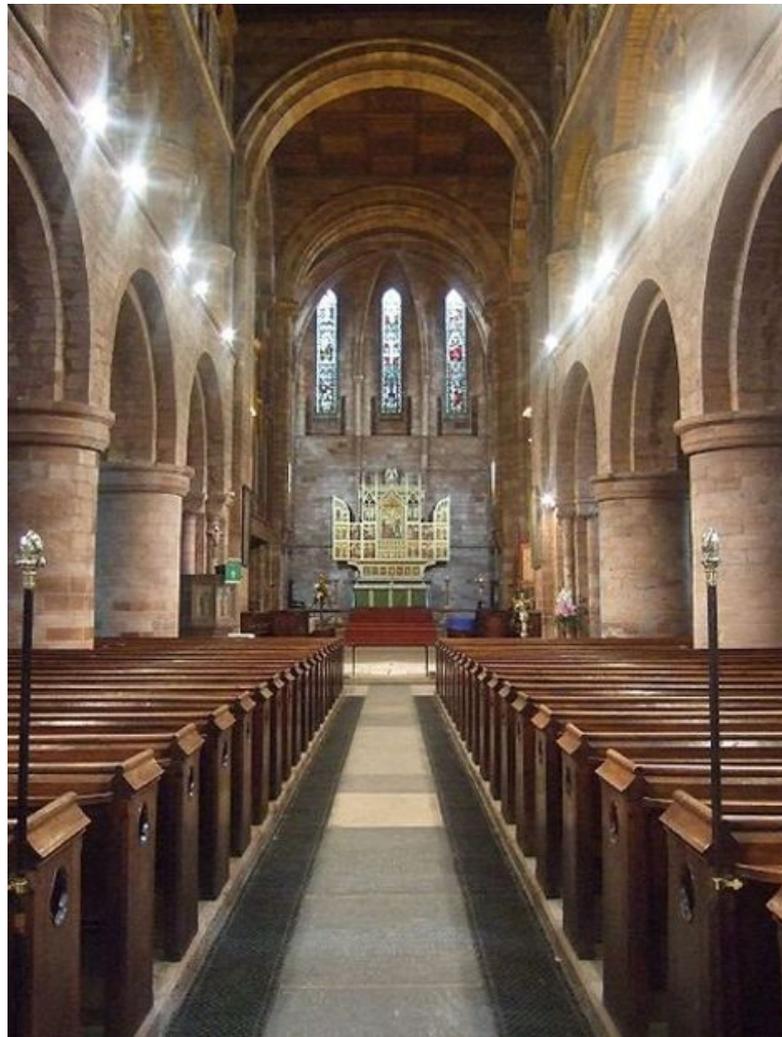
Shrewsbury: A Place to Visit Outside London

London is a wonderful, fascinating city to visit but its vast cosmopolitanism means that you haven't really visited England when you only tour the capital. To fully understand that quirky, idiomatic, bucolic, urbane and baffling country you should travel to some of the lesser known tourist spots; I would recommend Shrewsbury, an historic town in a beautiful setting. Shrewsbury was founded about 1200 years ago by the Saxons who called it Shrubbs Bury or the town of bushes although the place was known as Pengwern, or Alder Hill by the ancient Britons. Situated 140 miles from London and a mere 9 miles from the Welsh border, the town sits astride the Roman road of Watling Street, now the A5 trunk road, running straight as an arrow just as it was 2000 years ago, and the gently flowing upper reaches of the River Severn.

When the Normans, under Duke William, conquered England in 1066, the first thing they did was to parcel out land to the victorious nobility. Robert de Montgomery was made Earl of Shrewsbury and, in 1074, he built Shrewsbury Castle, a massive stone donjon standing on the site of the wooden Saxon fort. Strengthened and extended with a series of towers by Edward I the castle has seen plenty of action from the siege by King Stephen to the Civil War when it was captured by the Parliamentarians. The object of the giving of domains was twofold, both a reward and a means of first defence against the marauding Welsh just across the border.

Soon after the castle the other pillar of Medieval society, the church, built a large Benedictine Abbey in Shrewsbury, made famous today by the author Ellis Peters with her wonderful series of Medieval mysteries featuring Brother Cadfael. Built by Robert de Montgomery in 1083 much of the monastery was destroyed during the Tudor dissolution. The church and several other buildings still stood, however and much restoration work has been achieved. Both the castle, now the home of the Shropshire Regimental Museum with artefacts from their deployment in the American Revolutionary War (as the British call it) to other more recent engagements, and the Abbey are open to the public and are fine examples of their ilk.

Given the town's setting amongst the rolling March hills and ease of transport both to Bristol and London, Shrewsbury soon became a burgeoning centre of the wool trade. The town contains 660 buildings listed as of historic importance including many Medieval streets, most still retaining their original, evocative names such as Dogpole, Grope Lane, Gullet Passage and Bear Steps. Wandering along Butcher Row is like stepping back in time and is one of the finest examples of a row of Tudor houses. The Old Market Hall in the square was originally built as a vending place for the woollen merchants to sell their fleeces, the interior was refurbished and now houses an arts cafe and showcase for digital media.



This was also the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Just outside of Shrewsbury lies the town of Ironbridge, named for the first iron bridge (nomenclature was pretty straightforward in those days) in the world, forerunner of the Golden Gate and Bosphorous Bridge; a number of museums in the area document and display these first tentative steps towards the modern world. Ironbridge Gorge and the surrounding area is a World Heritage Site. Soon surpassed in industrialization by the Yorkshire and Lancashire mill-towns Shrewsbury has another claim to fame as the birthplace of the naturalist Charles Darwin, especially in this year, his bi-centennial. Born in Mount House on February 12th 1809, the house still stands; today it is the Valuation Office and may be visited during office hours. He attended Shrewsbury School, itself a venerable and acutely English institution founded in 1552.



Shrewsbury is also home to the longest running flower show in the world (Guinness Book of Records). Held in early August in the Quarry, a famous recreational area on the site of a disused quarry, it features flower displays, fruit and vegetable competitions, military bands and equestrian events. To celebrate the 120th anniversary of the show, children, 16 and under, will be admitted free this year. Even when the show is not *in situ* the Quarry is an abundance of color with some of the most beautiful gardens in England.

Accommodation in the area is plentiful from the exclusive Prince Rupert on Butcher Row featuring three elegant restaurants, to either the Lion Hill Hotel, set in the immortalized Abbey Foregate, or the venerable 16th century Lion Hotel close to the Old Market Hall. There are also innumerable farmhouses and bed-and-breakfast establishments both in town and in the surrounding, verdant countryside. The rail journey, the best way to travel, takes just over 3 hours from London's Marylebone Station with frequent departures at the incredibly low price of \$16. Have a great time!

Source : "[History of Shrewsbury Abbey](#)". *ShrewsburyAbbey.com*

"Shrewsbury". JRANK Encyclopedia.

["History of Charles Darwin"](#) (PDF). Ondix.com

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In rebuttal of Chicago's claim to be the home of the skyscraper, the Ditherington Flax Mill, built in 1796 near Shrewsbury, was the worlds first iron framed building and is known as the 'grandfather of the skyscraper'.