



Walking Tour of Rye

By Jonathan Copeland

RYE

the most beautiful town in England

by

Jonathan Copeland

Copyright 2012 Jonathan Copeland

Smashwords Edition

First published in 2012.

Copyright Text and Photographs © Jonathan Copeland, 2012.

The right of Jonathan Copeland to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

For Murni
who told me in 1990 that I should buy a cottage in Rye, and she was right.

Table of Contents

[RYE](#)
[PROLOGUE](#)
[WALKING TOUR OF RYE](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Railway Station](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[Cinque Ports Arms](#)
[Rye Baptist Church](#)
[Gandhi Tandoori Restaurant](#)
[Regent Motel](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Town Wall and Gazebo](#)
[The Waterworks](#)
[Conduit Hill](#)
[Turkey Cock Lane](#)
[Landgate](#)
[Rye Lodge Hotel](#)
[Look-Out](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Town Salts](#)
[Ironmongers Extraordinary](#)
[King Charles II House](#)
[Britcher & Rivers Sweetshop](#)
[Rye Art Gallery: Stormont Gallery and the Easton Rooms](#)
[Monastery Restaurant](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Augustinian Friary](#)
[Adams of Rye](#)
[The Apothecary's Shop](#)
[East Street](#)
[Herald & Heart Hat Shop Clock](#)
[Ashbee & Son](#)
[The George Hotel](#)
[Old Grammar School](#)
[Lion Galleries](#)
[Old Rye Library and Rye Community Learning Centre](#)
[Simon the Pieman](#)
[Fletcher's House](#)
[The Town Hall](#)
[Flushing Inn](#)
[The Waterhouse or Cistern](#)
[The Methodist Church](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)

[Ypres Tower or Rye Castle](#)
[The Gungarden](#)
[Ypres Castle Inn](#)
[Cross of Sacrifice](#)
[Hucksteps Row](#)
[Old Rye Police Station](#)
[Victorian Letter Box](#)
[Friars of the Sack](#)
[St. Anthony](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin](#)
[The Old Vicarage](#)
[Murder in the Churchyard](#)
[St. Anthony of Padua Church](#)
[Doors of Watchbell Street](#)
[Watchbell Look-Out](#)
[The Hope Anchor Hotel](#)
[Traders Passage](#)
[Mermaid Street](#)
[Oak House](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[Jeake's House](#)
[Quakers House](#)
[Elder's House](#)
[Rye Boys' Club](#)
[Hartshorne House \(The Old Hospital\)](#)
[Robin Hill](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Mermaid Inn](#)
[Cobbles Tea Room](#)
[Norman House](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[Lamb House](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Old Customs House](#)
[Thomas House](#)
[The Martello Bookshop](#)
[The White Vine Hotel](#)
[A Brief History Lesson](#)
[The Mint](#)
[Ye Old Bell Inn](#)
[Marino's Fish Bar](#)
[The Standard Inn](#)
[Needles Passage](#)
[The Strand](#)
[Ship Inn](#)

[Strand House](#)

[Rye Heritage Centre](#)

[Kettle of Fish](#)

[Gibbet Marsh Windmill](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER](#)

[What they said about Secrets of Bali, Fresh Light on the Morning of the World](#)

[What they said about Murni's Very Personal Guide to Ubud](#)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY](#)

[RYE MAP](#)

Prologue



View of Rye from the Railway Station.

I first went to Rye in the 1970s and was captivated by its unique charm. I visited often in the 1980s and bought a cottage in 1990 in the old part of town. I've walked the streets a million times at all hours of the day and night and it still takes my breath away.

I was surprised in this digital age to discover that there is no ebook of a walking tour of Rye and this is my attempt to fill the gap. I have tried to put the buildings into an historical context. If you are short of time, the brief history lessons could be read later.

Rye is in the minds of many the most beautiful town in England. It could be lifted straight out of a book of old English postcards. It is about 70 miles south east of London and on the top ten list of places visited by tourists. It is undoubtedly picturesque and attracts artists, standing on a sandstone rock, crowned by the pointed roof of St. Mary's Parish Church, covered by cobbled streets, cobbles which must be of a similar size and colour, half-timbered houses and contrasting building styles.

It has quintessentially English symbols, such as the classic red letter and telephone boxes.

Originally Rye was an island bounded by the sea, which over time, became three rivers, the Tillingham, Brede and Rother.

There are three main east-west streets. Lanes run north to south connecting them. Old walls and three main gates protected the medieval town, the Landgate, the Strand Gate, the Baddynges Gate and the pedestrian Postern Gate. This small market town now has about 4,000 inhabitants. The census figures are 4,284 (1981 Census), 4,207 (1991 Census) and 4,009 (2001 Census).

The original name of Rye *La Rie* means 'waste spot' in old French, but Rye is well catered for.



John Fletcher's House sign.

There are bakers, butchers, greengrocers, delicatessens, a health food shop, wine merchants, newsagents, bookshops, ironmongers, flower shops, jewellers, stationers, chemists, clothes and shoe shops, carpet shops, printers, computer services, photographers as well as hairdressers, a tattoo artist, art galleries, antique shops, funeral directors and garages. There are banks, solicitors, accountants, estate agents, building societies and travel agents. There are lots of hotels, guest-houses, restaurants, pubs and tea shops.

Much of Rye's interest is above ground level. Look up and admire the gables, signs, tiles and old lamps.



Old lamp.

Rye also has history.

I would particularly like to thank Jo Kirkham, Mayor of Rye, 1979 – 82, for her help and advice in connection with an early draft of this book. Her comments have been invaluable. Of course, any mistakes are my fault, and if you find any, please let me know, so that I can correct them in future editions. I have adapted the free map of Rye for places mentioned in this guide.

I hope that the narrative adds to your enjoyment as you walk around. I will be delighted to receive comments.

Jonathan Copeland
Rye, East Sussex
jonathan@murnis.com

Walking Tour of Rye



The way to see the town is on foot.

Arrive by car, bus or rail, but the best way to see the town is on foot. This guide will start at the Railway Station. Walk away from the station straight ahead to Cinque Ports Street. Turn around and admire the station.

A Brief History Lesson

Rye is in 1066 Country. 1066 is the most famous date in English history: the date of the Battle of Hastings. It was a property dispute: the property in question was the Crown of England and the outcome changed the course of English history forever. Its origins are, like all disputes, a bit murky.

Edward the Confessor (1042-1066)

When Edward was crowned King of England at Winchester, he was nearly forty and childless. He was destined to become a saint known as Edward the Confessor.

Edward invited his nephew, the twenty-three year old William, Duke of Normandy, to England in 1051 and allegedly and even possibly promised him the throne after he died. There is no record of the conversation. That's the murky bit. Harold, Earl of Godwin's son, was Edward's right-hand man. When Edward lay dying in 1066, at about the age of sixty, he promised Harold the country and Harold was crowned king although he was not a blood relative. William was not best pleased.

Harold (1066-1066)

Harold had two problems to deal with. He was successful with the first but not the second. The first was his brother Tostig, his deadliest enemy, who joined up with Harold Hardrada of Norway. Hardrada landed a huge armada of 300 ships, met up with Tostig and set up camp at Stamford Bridge, seven miles to the east of York. Harold took them unawares and Tostig and Hardrada were both killed. The second problem was that he had to contend with William of Normandy.

William of Normandy (1066-1087)

William of Normandy was the grand-nephew of Emma, who was the wife successively of two English kings, Ethelred the Unready and Canute. William felt entitled to the English throne and claimed it. He bribed his barons with land in England to persuade them to fight and recruited mercenaries. They landed at Pevensey shortly after Harold had won at Stamford Bridge.

Harold marched south towards Hastings and they fought on the hill at Battle about ten miles from Rye. The English fought on foot with spears but the Normans wore armour, attacked on horses and had archers. The sides were evenly matched but Harold got shot in the eye with an arrow and was cut down by a sword to the thigh. He died and was buried at Waltham Abbey, north of London. The English fled.

William won and the country was transformed forever. English history could easily have been so very different. England had new rulers and a new ruling language: Norman French. William founded Battle Abbey in gratitude for his victory. He was crowned King of England at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. The story is set out in the Bayeux tapestry, probably commissioned by William's half-brother, Bishop Odo.

William the Conqueror was a bastard, both figuratively and literally. His parents, Robert, the younger brother of Duke Richard III of Normandy and Herleva, daughter of a tanner, never married. William succeeded his father as duke when he was eight. After landing in England, one of his first acts was to build a castle at Hastings to secure his camp – about ten miles from Rye. The second castle was in Dover, about twenty-seven miles from Rye. These were to secure communications with Normandy. The third was in London on the site of The Tower to overawe the inhabitants.

He completely Normandized the English state and put down rebellions with immense terror. The great survey of land, peasants, ploughs, livestock and goods known as the Domesday Book was completed within seven months in 1087. Rye is not mentioned, which suggests that it was very small, if it existed at all.

Within a month William was dead. He was campaigning against Philip I, King of France, when he fell off his horse and suffered fatal abdominal injuries from the saddle pommel. He was taken to Rouen. On his deathbed, he divided his lands between his sons: his eldest son Robert received the Duchy of Normandy, his middle son William Rufus got England and became William II and the youngest son Henry received a large amount of cash. William I was fat and his corpse was large, too large for the sarcophagus, and his body burst as they forced it in. The stench was so bad that they had to rush the funeral service. It was not a fitting end.

The Railway Station



The Railway Station.

Rye was very isolated for much of its history. Until 1770 there was just one road along which carts could run – it ran from Rye Hill to Landgate. There was no stage-coach until 1778 and it took 15 or 16 hours to get to London. The coming of the railway changed all that. The station was built in 1850, designed by William Tress, in fine Italianate style, with projecting wings and recessed portico, supported on Tuscan columns, plain, without carvings or ornaments. It is now a Grade II listed building and protected.



Rye Railway Line.

The railway line opened on 13 February 1851. The ladies of Rye watched the first train come into town from the top of the Tower in the garden of Tower House in West Street. It had been built in 1760, it is said, for the owner to spy on his wife when she went to visit her lover in Winchelsea. Rye was and is on the Ashford to Hastings line. When it opened the average time from Hastings to Ashford was 1 hour and 15 minutes. A semi-fast train took 40 minutes.



The Signal Box.

Saxby and Farmer were one of the biggest signalling contractors who designed and constructed the typical South Eastern Railway signal box with the heavily overhanging roof in 1894.



Rye Railway.

The train put the stagecoach out of business. Market and cattle yards quickly formed around the station and Rye became one of the largest and most prosperous markets in the south east of England. There is still a market on Thursdays in front of the station. Rye's fortunes were transformed by the railway as Victorian sightseers started to visit.



Rye Railway Station.

There is still no direct train from Rye to London. It is necessary to go to Ashford and change trains. The new high-speed train known as HS1 (which stands for High Speed One) from Ashford to St. Pancras opened in 2009, travels at 140 mph and takes just 37 minutes.

Walk ahead along Station Approach with the station behind you and turn left into Cinque Ports Street.

A Brief History Lesson

The Cinque Ports

As an important shipbuilding centre, Rye became one of the Cinque Ports. The early history of the Cinque Ports is unknown but it's likely that Edward the Confessor, who was King of England from 1042 to 1066, granted charters to the five ports of Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich before they were unified into a Confederation.

The Confederation of Cinque Ports was formed around 1050. The arrangement was that in return for providing the Crown with ships and men for fifteen days a year the towns received valuable privileges.

The privileges were exemption from tax and tolls, self-government, permission to levy tolls, punish those who shed blood or fled justice, punish minor offences, detain and execute criminals both inside and outside the port's jurisdiction, and punish breaches of the peace; and possession of lost goods that remained unclaimed after a year, goods thrown overboard, and floating wreckage.

By the 12th century the original five ports were unable to carry out all the services and the Confederation was increased in size. Rye and Winchelsea joined and the new title became 'The Cinque Ports and two Antient Towns'. Antient means worthy of veneration. Other towns were allowed to join as 'limbs' or 'members' under a head port.

The fleet comprised fifty-seven ships and that was the English Navy until the 15th century. The Cinque Ports reached the peak of their power in the 13th century. In the 14th century they began to decline as changes in the local coastline caused many of the harbours to become unnavigable.

Ceremonies associated with the Cinque Ports are still performed, including the installation of the Lord Warden. The position of Lord Warden was created in an attempt to control the activities of the Portsmen. Appointed by the King the Lord Warden had to represent both the King's and the Portsmen's interests. In modern times the title is an honour bestowed in recognition of long service to the Crown.

William Pitt, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Winston Churchill and Sir Robert Menzies have held the position. Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother was the first woman to hold the office, and was installed as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in Dover on 1 August 1979. The current Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports was appointed in 2004 and is Admiral Sir Michael Boyce (retired Chief of the Defence Staff).

Cinque Ports Arms



Cinque Ports Arms.

The Cinque Ports Arms is on the corner. In 1859 there was a pub on the site called The Horse and Groom. Around 1867 the pub was demolished, rebuilt and renamed The Railway Hotel to attract the burgeoning new trade generated by the coming of the railways. Before the train people travelled by stagecoach. The first stagecoach ran from Rye to London in 1778. The stagecoach provided a flourishing business for inns in the town, for example, the George and the now gone Red Lion. The inns were places of entertainment. The Railway Hotel even had a stage. In the 1980s it was still referred to as The Railway Hotel. The current owners Shepherd Neame bought it in 1996 and renamed it The Cinque Ports Arms.

Continue along Cinque Ports Street and on the left is Rye Baptist Church.

Rye Baptist Church



Rye Baptist Church.

In 1909 the Baptists bought the site. It was a former theatre from around 1790 to mid-Victorian times. Rye Baptists met for the first time on 8 November 1750 in premises in Mermaid Street, which they bought from the Quakers for £60, and which the Quakers had owned since 1701. The Baptists moved into the present building in 1910.

Walk past the Gandhi Tandoori Restaurant on the left.

Gandhi Tandoori Restaurant



Gandhi Tandoori Restaurant.

The Gandhi Tandoori Restaurant is one of three Indian restaurants in Rye. Like the majority of the roughly 8,000 Indian restaurants in Britain, Bangladeshis own it. Bangladesh is an independent country, but its cuisine is Indian and belongs to the culinary world of Bengal. Bangladesh was East Pakistan, which was part of Pakistan. Prior to that it was part of the British Raj, which was partitioned on independence in 1947. The Muslims wanted a separate country, hence partition, but that split in 1971 and Bangladesh came into being.

Amongst many dishes, the restaurant serves dishes which are British Indian inventions, such as chicken tikka masala, which Foreign Minister Robin Cook claimed was the new national dish of Great Britain in 2001. Indian food in Britain has a life of its own. Pakistani restaurants in Birmingham invented the balti in the 1980s, also served in this restaurant.

Walk past the Regent Motel on the left.