Stop at the metal gate on the left and look to the left to see the earth banks and ramparts of an Iron Age promontory hillfort. This is a naturally strong defensive position, enclosed within a loop of the river. Recent excavations have found a Roman, possibly military, presence here in the 1st and 2nd centuries, suggesting this corner of the hillfort may have been annexed to build a signal station. This bank may be part of Offa’s Dyke.

In the 14th century the bank was widened and surfaced, with stones covering much of the area to the left. At least one marker stone was erected in the bank, suggesting there may have been a leper colony or infirmary close by at Spital Meend. Perhaps the bank was redefined to form a physical boundary, the marker and surfacing warning of diseased burials in this triangular area.

Continue back to the carpark where the short walk ends. Alternatively retrace your route back to Chepstow. Don’t miss a last look at the view from Wintour’s Leap (13). Legend has it that during the Civil War the Royalist Sir John Wintour escaped capture by the Parliamentarians by leaping down these precipitous cliffs and crossing the Wye. Little has changed in the view since the engraving below was made some 200 years ago. Can you spot the church?

There’s also an inscription to look out for on an archway a little further along the return route. See if you can spot ‘Donkey Lane’.

Follow the path above limestone cliffs where peregrines nest, to the lost medieval village of Lancaut and the ruins of St James’ church. The situation, on one of the crooks of the Wye, and just above the river is romantic in the extreme.

(Eleanor Ormerod, 19th century)

Leave the churchyard and walk down to the river passing the ruins of ‘Fish House Cottage’ on the left below the churchyard wall. Go through the gate and continue beside the river and up some steps. This mound may have been used to load trows with quarried stone and remains of the quarrying industry litter this area. You can see it in the old photo below to the right of the town. You can continue along the path to a bench (10) where you can sit and enjoy the views stretching down the Wye towards Chepstow. Look around for stonework and a chain here, more signs of the massive quarrying industry which employed many local men until the 1950s. Fallen scree now makes the old fisherman’s path back to Chepstow dangerous, so retrace you route back to the church (9)

As you follow the path uphill from the church look to the left to spot several flat terraced areas one above the other (11). These levelled platforms are the remains of building pits and in a few places the line of a wall can be seen. This is the deserted medieval village of Lancaut, a place where people lived, farmed, fished and worshipped.

Continue uphill through a kissing gate and keep climbing. At a T-junction turn right passing old lime kilns and, just after them on the left, evidence of where the lime burnt in the kilns was quarried. Continue up to a road and turn right to reach (12).

Saving St James’ Church

St James’ was abandoned in 1865, but it wasn’t until 1984, when the chancel collapsed, that interest in saving the church led to the establishment of the Lancaut Church Preservation Group who began a programme of repair. In 2013 the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust bought the church for £1 from the Queen (the Crown Estate) to secure its future and undertake restoration and conservation work with grants from Heritage Lottery Fund, Gloucestershire Environmental Trust and English Heritage to rebuild the chancel arch. They now care for this very special place.

The Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust saves buildings at risk in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley and raises funds to conserve them. Projects include Whitecroft Ironworks and Gunns Mill. Find out more at www.fodbpt.org


This leaflet has been produced by the Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust in partnership with the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit.

Discover the Lancaut Peninsular
Directions:

Turn left out of Chepstow Castle car park and walk downhill to and over the old bridge spanning the Wye (2). Follow the grassy path straight across the fields towards the kissing gate opposite. (4)

To your right is a large Victorian mansion called Pen Moel, which was rebuilt in the 1890s. Turn right at the kissing gate and continue to the road. Turn left to cross the road and walk uphill for a short distance. Cross the road again at the ‘Offa’s Dyke’ sign (on the left) and follow Offa’s Dyke Path uphill. Keep following Offa’s Dyke Path signs at the junction, from where there are good views of the old Severn Bridge.

The path now runs along the top of quarried cliffs (5) and after a short distance the view opens out so that on a clear day you can see your destination - Lancaut Church. The cliffs below held valuable resources of limestone and have been extensively quarried. The quarried limestone was loaded onto flat-bottomed river boats, called tones, from massive timber platforms. In the 1870s huge quantities of limestone went to Bristol to build Avonmouth Docks. Many local men worked here and there is evidence of this hidden industry all around, although the area is now covered with woodland. Peregrines nest here and the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest managed by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. The cliffs are also popular with climbers.

The path now runs near the cliffs (6) and you can see your destination: Lancaut Church. The cliffs below held valuable resources of limestone and have been extensively quarried. The quarried limestone was loaded onto flat-bottomed river boats, called tones, from massive timber platforms. In the 1870s huge quantities of limestone went to Bristol to build Avonmouth Docks. Many local men worked here and there is evidence of this hidden industry all around, although the area is now covered with woodland. Peregrines nest here and the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest managed by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. The cliffs are also popular with climbers.

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Keep straight on under the footbridge and through a kissing gate. At the road turn left and cross the road, walking along the roadside for a short distance. To avoid the road keep on the grass path and cut the corner off at Fox Hollies. Turn left at the ‘Lancaut’ sign and continue along this path, passing ‘Spital Mead’ on your right and soon after the peregrine sculpture and car park on the left (6).

Start of Short Walk (6)

Walk downhill, ignoring sign for Lancaut church on left, passing Ban y ger Nature Reserve (7) on the right, where a Roman lamp of North Africa, dating from the 5th century was found. Cross the cattle grid and at the junction (8) turn sharp left through the first gate into the field. Walk downhill diagonally to the right of the veteran oak tree where you can enjoy the lovely views of the cliffs surrounding the isolated Lancaut Peninsula. Continue in the same direction downhill to the right hand corner of the field. There are some levelled patches and bumps in this field which are probably the remains of the last medieval village of Lancaut. Go through the small wooden gate downhill to visit the ruined 12th century church (9).

The Wye provided an easy route inland for Viking raiders who, in 914, took the Bishop of Hereford prisoner for a ransom of £400! The Vikings may have destroyed the original church in 914, took the Bishop of Archenfield prisoner for a ransom of £400! The Vikings may have destroyed the original church, and by 1067 the present church was in use and the church tower was built. The church was largely rebuilt in the 1840s when it was decided to rebuild the church and the village. The church was dedicated to St Dyfnwal, and is known as ‘Llan’ as ‘Llan’ is the old Welsh word for a church or land consecrated to a saint.

We don’t know why the village died, maybe Black Death took its toll. By 1750 there were only 2 inhabited houses left. Despite the numbering of villagers, church services continued because of ‘the preceding increased attendance of the sport’, as Eleanor Orme ordered in the 1840s. The wealth of yellow daffodils and white narcissus, which grew by the Wye, close to the little church of Lancaut, helped greatly towards the decoration’ as the graves were dressed with flowers on Palm Sunday. Medieval plants such as Marjoram, Hellebore and Elecampane still grow in the churchyard around the stone base of the preaching cross, adding credence to the idea that there may have been a leper colony or infirmary close by. It is believed that the name of ‘Llan’ was derived from the Welsh for a church or a churchyard.

By the 1840s a local antiquary, George Orme and his family, made drawings which show the church of Lancaut in its last decades, furnished with box pews and a pulpit. The Vicar of Woolaston ordered the abandonment of Lancaut church in 1865 and the roof was dismantled and the internal furnishings removed. The 12th century font was not removed and can now be seen in Gloucester Cathedral.

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