



Great Irish Houses

Country houses both sides of the border

14–22 June 2024 (MK 321)

9 days • £4,810

Lecturer: Anthony Lambert

Includes many of the finest country houses in Ireland, both north and south of the border, selected with a bias towards the Georgian era.

Outstanding architecture and decoration, excellent furniture and pictures, fine gardens and fascinating historical context.

Special arrangements at nearly every house (several are still private homes), from out-of-hours openings to dinners in state rooms.

Exceptional countryside accommodation including two nights at a stately home.

An itinerary that is full, but with time to absorb, rest or explore independently.

Itinerary

Day 1: Marino Casino. The coach leaves Dublin Airport at 2.15pm. Designed by Sir William Chambers in 1757, the Casino at Marino is one of the most intriguing and beautiful houses of its time, Europe-wide. The hotel for the first three nights is Carton House, which has superbly decorated state rooms with figurative plasterwork by the Lafranchini brothers.

Day 2: Russborough, Castletown. Both are among the finest and best-preserved Palladian houses in the British Isles, with the classic composition of central range linked to lower side pavilions by quadrant colonnades. Both are encrusted internally with magnificent stucco sculpture, and both, having suffered denuding and neglect, are again well stocked with excellent and appropriate furniture and paintings. Castletown is the larger, with a façade more Roman Baroque than Palladian, a breathtaking double-height hall, brass balustrade and a splendid long gallery.

Day 3: Emo Court, Charleville House. James Gandon and Lewis Vulliamy were the architects in the 1790s and 1830s of Emo Court, a Neo-Classical masterpiece with a spectacular circular salon. Private visit to Charleville House, a Palladian villa in a woodland setting with Regency interiors. Built in 1797 by Charles Monck and designed by Whitmore Davis.

Day 4: Newbridge, Beaulieu. Built in 1747, Newbridge is the only example of a James Gibbs



Illustration: Castle Coole, a chromolithograph of the late 19th century.

house in Ireland; excellent stucco work and an important art collection. Beaulieu is an utterly charming house from the beginning of the 18th century, hipped roof, carved red brick window surrounds and a walled garden which runs down to the fields beside the Boyne estuary. Inside there is the lived-in patina unique to family homes and a couple of outstanding paintings. Cross into Northern Ireland for three nights at Belle Isle Castle, Co. Fermanagh.

Day 5: Baronscourt. Deep in County Tyrone, Baronscourt is perhaps as remote as any major house in the UK. Still occupied by the family who commissioned it in 1779, the leisurely visit is by kind permission of the Duke of Abercorn. There is a tour of the estate, and lunch is in the mansion house. The sequence of superb rooms was brilliantly redecorated by David Hicks in the 1970s, and the picture collection is among the finest of any house in Ireland (Lawrence, Reynolds, Van Dyck).

Day 6: Castle Coole, Crom. A superb 1790s Neo-Classical house, Castle Coole is the masterpiece of English architect James Wyatt, and has scarcely changed since its completion for a royal visit in 1821. After a few hours of free time at Belle Isle, drive to Crom Castle, where

we stay for dinner. Splendidly sited overlooking Lough Erne, and again in the same family as its original patron, Crom was begun in 1834 in a Gothic Revival style by Edward Blore. The interiors include a cathedral-like stair hall.

Day 7: Hillsborough, Ballywalter. Hillsborough Castle is the Northern Ireland base for the Secretary of State and visiting royalty. Largely 18th-century, the handsome two-storey L-plan building has pictures from the Royal Collection and 96 acres of magnificent gardens. We continue to the Ards Peninsula in Co. Down and reach Ballywalter Park for tea and a tour. For the next two nights we stay here as guests of Lord and Lady Dunleath. Ballywalter has a 1730s core but was enlarged in a final flourish of grand Italianate classicism in the 1840s. First of two nights here.

Day 8: Mount Stewart, Castle Ward. The National Trust has invested heavily in Mount Stewart, an early 19th-century mansion which is amply furnished, has good paintings and extensive formal and woodland gardens. Castle Ward, begun 1762, is distinguished by being conventional Classical one side and rather risqué Gothic the other, internally as well as on the façade; marital disagreement resolved by

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innovative compromise. The charming result is enhanced by an excellent site on Strangford Lough. Dinner and second night at Ballywalter.

Day 9: Grey Abbey. Grey Abbey House, also built in 1762, remains in the family which has owned the estate since 1607. The temperate climate in the environs of Strangford Lough allows a wide variety of flora to flourish in the gardens. We have an early lunch here before driving to Belfast City Airport, arriving by 2.00pm, and then drive on to Belfast International Airport arriving at 2.40pm.

all rooms have private bathrooms but not all are en suite and bathrooms at Ballywalter have baths, not showers. Some rooms are proper twins without double beds.

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking on this tour – walking from drop-off points, touring the houses, enjoying the gardens. Stairs are unavoidable as only one of the places visited has a lift. Average distance by coach per day: 70 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 18 participants.

Lecturer

Anthony Lambert. Historian, journalist and travel writer. He has worked with and for the National Trust in various capacities for almost 30 years. His books include *Victorian & Edwardian Country House Life* and he writes regular profiles of country houses for the Historic Houses Association magazine. He has written numerous travel and guide books, including over twenty on railway history and travel, and contributes to a wide range of newspapers and magazines.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,810.

Single occupancy: £5,360.

Included: hotel accommodation as described below; private coach throughout; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 6 dinners with wine, water, coffee (of these, 2 lunches and 3 dinners are in private houses); all admissions and donations; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Flights. Several airlines link Dublin and Belfast with many UK and other airports, so flights are not included in the tour. You are free to choose flights which are the most convenient for you.

Accommodation. Carton House (cartonhouse.com) is a comfortable 5-star country house hotel in County Kildare. **Belle Isle Castle** (belle-isle.com) is a pair of adjoining houses dating to c. 1900 and earlier on the shore of Lough Erne. It is not a hotel but has been beautifully converted for private hire and features very comfortable bedrooms, lounges and dining room. **Ballywalter Park** (ballywalterpark.com) is a stately home (see above), and our residence here is as guests of the resident owners – it is very much not a hotel! Bedrooms are very comfortable. *Being historic properties, none of the accommodation on this tour has lifts. At Belle Isle & Ballywalter,*