



## Cornish Houses and Gardens

Landscapes, flowers, buildings and art

**22–30 April 2025 (ML 668)**

9 days • £3,640

Lecturer: Anthony Lambert

A highly distinctive county of beautiful scenery, rugged coastline and picturesque towns.

Country houses spanning a range of periods and styles, and several exceptional gardens, seen in their springtime glory.

A significant centre in the history of British art, as viewed in the museums and galleries.

Several special arrangements including owner-led visits and a private lunch in a stately home.

Cornwall is a land beyond England, in Simon Jenkins's happily ambiguous phrase. First, it protrudes: with a coastal path of 300 miles and with no village more than 16 miles from the sea, the Cornish peninsula extends mainland England far to the south and west. Second, in some less definable way, it feels palpably distinct. Much of the landscape and streetscape is unmistakably English yet is suffused in a pervasive all-enveloping Cornishness.

Its individuality is reflected in the sturdy stone mansions which span the centuries and the families that created them – a surprising number of whom owed at least part of their prosperity to the mining that made the county a harbinger of the Industrial Revolution. The oldest house is Cotehele, begun in 1485, its low granite ranges set around three courtyards overlooking the Tamar Estuary. Trevice is the perfect Elizabethan manor house, and the Palladian style is elegantly represented by Pencarrow. A highpoint of Victorian organisational sophistication can be witnessed at Lanhydrock.

A warming Gulf Stream and the temperate climate has allowed the owners of Cornish great estates to create lush and magnificent gardens, using some of the rarest plants and trees in the British Isles. Magnolias, camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons thrive here – spring is said to have arrived when all six of the Champion Magnolia *campbellii* trees have at least 50 blooms; we visit four of them.

Cornwall has a special place in the history of British art. Drawn by scenic beauty, rural simplicity, the drama of the sea and the special quality of light, artists have come to live and work here from the 1880s to the present day. The fishing villages of Newlyn and Falmouth were at first the most important colonies, but



in the 20th century St Ives became a significant outpost of the avant-garde. Bernard Leach, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Patrick Heron and Terry Frost are among the artists who settled here. The legacy is a collection of art galleries whose works are tied to the county in a unique way.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Port Eliot.** The tour leaves Plymouth railway station at 1.30pm. Both the house and the park at Port Eliot are listed Grade I, a rare distinction. Created from a 12th-century priory, the house was remodelled in the 17th and 18th centuries, most notably by Sir John Soane. The adjacent church, site of a Saxon Cathedral, is one of the finest in Cornwall, Norman and Perpendicular with Burne-Jones windows. First of two nights in Padstow.

**Day 2: Lanhydrock, Pencarrow.** Within a Jacobean shell, Lanhydrock provides an insight into the late Victorian technical advances in country-house design and operation. The house is approached through one of Britain's most enchanting gatehouses, and the magnolia trees are magnificent. Secluded in a wooded valley, Pencarrow is a beautiful Palladian building, the interiors embellished with ornate panelling and ceilings. It has been the Molesworth family

home for 500 years. Arthur Sullivan wrote the music for *Iolanthe* here.

**Day 3: Padstow, Prideaux, Trevice, Trewithen.** Begin with time in Padstow, a highly picturesque little fishing port sheltered in the Camel Estuary. Prideaux Place, a charming mix of Elizabethan, Strawberry Hill Gothic and Georgian. Trevice is a modest Elizabethan mansion with Dutch gables and rich plasterwork. The garden at Trewithen is internationally known for rhododendrons and magnolias and rare flowering shrubs. First of three nights in Falmouth.

**Day 4: Trelissick, Falmouth.** The head of the River Fal estuary provides a spectacular setting for Trelissick and its famous garden, renowned for flowering cherries and exotics such as ginkgo and palms as well as azaleas and rhododendrons. Falmouth was important for long-distance trade, the packet mail service and the Royal Navy. Its architecturally fascinating main axis cranks along the irregular line of the waterfront to the Art Gallery whose collections encompass Pre-Raphaelites and British Impressionists to contemporary.

**Day 5: Caerhays, Heligan.** Caerhays Castle is an outstanding example of a picturesque, castle-style Regency house, designed by John Nash, master of the style. The park has the

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largest collection of magnolias in the UK as well as azaleas and camellias among its 600 plant varieties. Private lunch in the castle dining room. The 200-acre Lost Gardens of Heligan are the result of an extraordinary horticultural resurrection, from utter dereliction to National Collection status for its pre-1920 camellias and rhododendrons.

**Day 6: Kestle Barton, Helford, Glendurgan, Carbis Bay.** Kestle Barton, an ancient farmstead, has an elegant gallery and charming garden. Walk through the lovely estuary scenery of Helford village and take the ferry across Helford River. After a pub lunch, walk the coastal path to Glendurgan Garden, described by its Quaker creators as a 'small peace [sic] of heaven on earth'. Its three valleys are ablaze in spring with camellias, magnolias, primroses, bluebells and rhododendrons. First of three nights in St Ives.

**Day 7: St Ives.** A granite knot of narrow streets, the fishing village of St Ives was an important outpost of 20th-century British art. Barbara Hepworth's home and garden, packed with her sculptures, is superb. The excellent Tate St Ives has changing exhibitions and a permanent display of 20th-century British and international art. Free afternoon: there is plenty to enjoy including the Leach Pottery (essential for lovers of ceramics), the Society of Artists and many commercial galleries.

**Day 8: Penzance, St Michael's Mount.** From the 1880s, painters were attracted to Newlyn by the distinctive light and the ancient rhythms of life of the fishing community. Works of the Newlyn School are in the Penlee Gallery in Penzance, a harbour town full of architectural interest. Reached by a causeway, St Michael's Mount, daughter house of the monastery at Mont St Michel in Normandy, was converted to a home – one with a 14th-century granite church and Chippendale furniture.

**Day 9: Cotehele.** Perched high above the River Tamar, Cotehele is a Tudor house with arms and armour, old oak furniture and one of the National Trust's largest collections of tapestries; unmodernised, it remains unlit by electricity. The gardens include formally planted terraces, the Valley Garden, and orchards with local apples and cherries. The tour ends at Plymouth station by 3.00pm.

## Lecturer

**Anthony Lambert.** Historian, journalist and travel writer, he has worked for the National Trust for many years. His books include *Victorian & Edwardian Country House Life*, he writes regularly for the Historic Houses Association's magazine, and he has written several travel and guide books, including over 20 on railway history and travel.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person.** £3,640. **Single occupancy:** £4,430. Please contact us to request a quote for a sea view room.

**Included:** hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; travel by private coach; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Accommodation. Padstow Harbour Hotel** (harbourhotels.co.uk). Recently renovated Victorian hotel with contemporary décor and excellent views of the estuary. **The Greenbank Hotel**, Falmouth (greenbank-hotel.co.uk). A comfortable family-run 4-star hotel overlooking Falmouth harbour. **St Ives Harbour Hotel** (harbourhotels.co.uk). A historic hotel with views across the seafront. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** Unavoidably there is quite a lot of walking on this tour and it would not be suitable for anyone with difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Coaches can rarely park near the houses; many of the gardens are extensive with uneven ground or steps to reach different levels. Average distance by coach per day: 44 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.