



Great Houses of the South West

Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon

28 May–4 June 2024 (MK 302)

8 days • £3,430

Lecturer: Anthony Lambert

Great country houses, historic gardens and parks in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Dorset and Devon.

Major examples of a huge range of styles from the twelfth century to the twentieth.

Many houses contain outstanding picture collections and exceptional furniture.

Special arrangements and out-of-hours visits.

The landscapes seen on this tour are immensely varied and endlessly alluring – the noble chalk downs of Wiltshire, the evocative Levels of Somerset, the enchanting patchwork fields of Devon, the verdant hidden valleys of Exmoor, the little hills of Dorset.

The houses seen are equally varied. Lacock and Longleat and Montacute are among the finest of Henrician and Elizabethan mansions in England. The Stuart era is superbly represented by the incomparable Wilton House, star of the first phase of Palladian classicism in England, and by the Dutch classicism of Dyrham, while the eighteenth century is wonderfully exemplified at Stourhead and by the delicious Adam interiors at Saltram. Victoria's reign has a magnificent ambassador in Tyntesfield, and the Edwardian continuation is beautifully if eccentrically demonstrated at Castle Drogo. Real castles are represented by the extraordinary Berkeley, still a family home, and, if now more picturesque than defensive, at Dunster.

A first-rate country house is more than a house. Clustering around are gardens, auxiliary buildings and a park – at Stourhead, perhaps the most influential one in the world – and beyond lie working farms and enterprises of all sorts. And of course inside the houses there are furnishings and works of art and gadgets and utensils and curios: in many of the houses on this tour these moveables are of a quality and a quantity which surpass the collections of all but a couple of dozen of Britain's museums. Corsham and Kingston Lacy in particular are renowned for their picture collections.

Itinerary

Day 1: Highclere Castle. Leave London at 11.00am and drive to Hampshire, arriving at



Dunster and its Castle, Watercolour by Walter Tyndale, publ. 1913

Highclere in time for lunch. Begun in 1838 by Charles Barry (architect of the Houses of Parliament) for the Earl of Carnarvon, it is one of the grandest and most opulent houses of the age. (Now known to millions as Downton Abbey.) The Egyptian antiquities here are of international importance. Spend the first of three nights in a country-house hotel in the village of Bishopstrow, Wiltshire.

Day 2: Wilton, Kingston Lacy. Inigo Jones contributed to the design of Wilton House, the outstanding achievement of the first phase of Palladianism in England. The double-cube room, with paintings by Van Dyck, is the most sumptuous English interior of the Stuart period. Also of the 17th century, Kingston Lacy is noted for its lavish interiors and outstanding art collection of Spanish, Italian and Flemish Old Masters. Both houses have important gardens and parkland.

Day 3: Longleat, Dyrham. Longleat was one of the largest and architecturally most progressive of Elizabethan houses, and is set in a 'Capability' Brown park. Transformed from a Tudor mansion at the end of the 17th century and scarcely changed since, Dyrham Park externally is mild Baroque in golden Bath

stone, and inside exquisitely Anglo-Dutch with pictures and furnishings to match.

Day 4: Stourhead, Montacute. Though built in two phases, 1720s and 1790s, Stourhead is the perfect classical villa. The landscaped park of the 1740s is the most important of its kind, with a lake, temples, careful planting and contrived, if seemingly natural, vistas. Montacute is a magnificent Elizabethan house with the longest long gallery in England. An outstation of the National Portrait Gallery, it is hung with 16th- and 17th-century pictures. Garden layout and architecture survive. First of two nights in Taunton.

Day 5: Saltram, Castle Drogo. Drive across Devon to Saltram, a largely 18th-century house with lavish Robert Adam interiors and fine pictures and furnishings. There are dramatic views of the Plym Estuary. A rugged Dartmoor setting overlooking the Teign Gorge matches Sir Edwin Lutyens's imaginative exercise in mediaevalism at Castle Drogo, though inside there are all the latest in early 20th-century comforts. A 9-year restoration programme costing £15.5m has put an end to the water ingress that exasperated owners since the

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castle's construction. All rooms are open again. Fine Arts & Crafts garden.

Day 6: Dunster, Tyntesfield. Drive between the Quantocks and Exmoor to the famously picturesque village of Dunster. Atop a wooded hillock, the castle of Norman origin long ago domesticated its defensive features, notably in the Carolean age. The great Gothic Revival mansion of Tyntesfield has hardly changed since the nineteenth century, caught in a time warp and stuffed with the authentic bric-a-brac of a Victorian country house. First of two nights in Corsham, Wiltshire.

Day 7: Berkeley, Lacock. The keep of Berkeley Castle dates to 1117, the bulk of the rest to 1340–61. Little has been altered since, and yet it is still the private home of its builders, a family that served Edward the Confessor. The contents – tapestries, paintings, furniture – are magnificent. In one of the loveliest villages in England, Lacock Abbey retains a cloister from the nunnery dissolved by Henry VIII and given to a courtier. There are Georgian modifications and, being the home of William Henry Fox Talbot, a window which was the subject of the first ever photographic negative.

Day 8: Corsham. Corsham Court is an Elizabethan mansion enlarged in the 18th century and again in the 19th to display a collection of Old Master paintings, still *in situ*. Return to central London c. 4.30pm.

Please note that some appointments cannot be confirmed until the end of 2023.

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 has written regular profiles of country houses for the Historic Houses Association magazine. He has written numerous travel and guide books, and contributes to a wide range of newspapers and magazines.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,430. **Single occupancy:** £4,170. National Trust members (with cards) will be refunded c. £140.

Included: hotel accommodation; breakfasts and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; transport by private coach; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Bishopstrow House (bishopstrow.co.uk): the house dates from the early 19th century and has been a 4-star hotel for 40 years. **The Castle Hotel, Taunton** (the-castle-hotel.com): an award-winning family-run 4-star hotel, pleasingly decorated and with excellent service. **The Methuen Arms, Corsham** (butcombe.com): a Georgian coaching inn with an excellent restaurant. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? Unavoidably, there is quite a lot of walking on this tour and it would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Coaches can rarely park near the houses, many of the parks and gardens are extensive, the houses visited don't have lifts (nor do all the hotels). Average distance by coach per day: c. 95 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with *Great Swedish Houses*, 20–26 May 2024; *Medieval Burgundy*, 8–15 June 2024.