

GREAT BRITISH HOUSES

The Anglophile's Guidebook to
Britain's Stately Homes



By
Anglotopia

GREAT BRITISH HOUSES

THE ANGLOPHILE'S GUIDEBOOK TO BRITAIN'S STATELY
HOMES

Other Books by Anglotopia

101 Budget Britain Travel Tips

101 London Travel Tips

101 UK Culture Tips

Anglotopia's Guide to British Slang

Londontopia's Guide to Cockney Slang

Great Britons: Top 50 Greatest Brits

Great Events in British History

Great British Houses

Other Books by Jonathan Thomas

Adventures in Anglotopia

Anglophile Vignettes

Visions of Anglotopia

End to End: Britain From Land's End to John

O'Groats

GREAT BRITISH HOUSES

THE ANGLOPHILE'S GUIDEBOOK TO BRITAIN'S STATELY
HOMES

By
Anglotopia

Copyright © 2024 by Anglotopia LLC
Cover Design by Anglotopia LLC
Cover Copyright © 2024 Anglotopia LLC

Anglotopia LLC supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact info@anglotopia.net. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Anglotopia Press - An Imprint of Anglotopia LLC
www.anglotopia.press

Printed in the United States of America

1st US Edition: April 1st, 2023

Published by Anglotopia Press, an imprint of Anglotopia LLC.
The Anglotopia Press Name and Logo is a trademark of Anglotopia LLC.

Print Book interior design by Jonathan Thomas, all fonts used with license.

All location photographs © Jonathan Thomas
All other photos and art used in this book are in the public domain in the USA or in the Creative Commons.

Print ISBN: 978-1-955273-34-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Goodwood House.....	15
Wollaton Hall.....	21
Abbotsford.....	27
Basildon Park.....	33
Burghley House.....	39
Anglesey Abbey.....	45
Kimbolton Castle.....	51
Wilton House.....	57
The Wardour Castle.....	63
Kedleston Hall.....	71
Forde Abbey.....	77
The Greenway Estate.....	83
Sudeley Castle.....	89
Dunham Massey.....	95
Polesden Lacey.....	101
Luton Hoo.....	107
Petworth House.....	113
Calke Abbey.....	119
Warwick Castle.....	125
Cliveden House.....	131
Bolsover Castle.....	137
Holkham Hall.....	143
Audley End.....	149
Beaulieu Palace House.....	155
Chequers.....	161
Brympton D'Evercy.....	167
Balmoral Castle.....	173
Bletchley Park.....	179
Waddesdon Manor.....	185
Leeds Castle.....	191

Chartwell.....	197
Osborne House.....	203
Hever Castle.....	209
Lyme Park.....	215
Woburn Abbey.....	221
Longleat.....	227
Dyrham Park.....	233
Stourhead.....	239
Highclere Castle.....	247
Castle Howard.....	253
Hardwick Hall.....	259
Blenheim Palace.....	265
Chatsworth.....	271
Wokefield Park.....	279
Alnwick Castle.....	283
Kingston Lacy.....	289
Knole House.....	295
Berkeley Castle.....	301
Wentworth Woodhouse.....	307
St Michael's Mount.....	313



INTRODUCTION

It's weird how you remember things and the assumptions you make about yourself. When I began brainstorming the introduction to this book, I thought that stately homes had played a big role in all my travels to England. It turns out that despite the oversized presence these great homes have in our public and private imaginations, I had not actually visited a proper stately home until my eighth trip to Britain. My first stately home was Blenheim Palace (though a day earlier, we visited Kelmscott, which is not a stately home, but a large house nonetheless). I could have sworn I'd visited a great house earlier than that!

Thanks to TV and movies, many of us associate the 'Great Country Houses' with England, and it helps us build our conception of all things English. Not only with great architecture but also with culture and history. An English Country House at the height of the British aristocracy was a microcosm of English life, much like a Royal Navy ship was a microcosm of England on the high seas. All human drama would take place in these houses, and there are thousands upon thousands of stories from the people who have worked, lived, and died in them.

So, of course, it's fertile ground for movies and TV shows.

The rise of Anglotopia in 2007 coincided with the rise of Downton Abbey soon after as the most popular period drama on the planet. We all became entranced by the trials and tribulations of the Crawley family, who inhabited a classic-sounding English house in Yorkshire called Downton Abbey. Highclere Castle, on the Hampshire/Berkshire Border, where the show was filmed, instantly became the most recognizable grand English house on the planet.

As Anglotopia developed, it made sense for us to commission a series of articles on Britain's great houses. Slowly, over a few years, we published fifty articles, each on what we considered the greatest and most important houses in Britain. When we started, fifty seemed like a lofty number, and we'd never reach it. By the time we got to the end of the first fifty, we realized the series could go on indefinitely! There are so many houses we haven't covered yet. However, the core of these fifty houses has remained on the website for almost a decade. Last year, in late 2023, we set about updating them and compiling them into this special little book.

So, before we dive into the fifty chapters of this book, I thought it would be fun to talk about four stately homes in England that have a special place in my heart.

First Stately Home - Blenheim Palace

My first stately home was Blenheim Palace, located in lovely, green Oxfordshire. While there are many excellent reasons to visit this magnificent example of Baroque architecture, my primary reason was simply that Sir Winston Churchill was born there, and I wanted to make a pilgrimage to where he was born (and subsequently, where he was buried nearby in Bladon).

Churchill's birth in this special place was not a coincidence. His father, Randolph Churchill, was the second son of the Duke of Marlborough, and Randolph and his young American wife Jennie, were frequent visitors. His birth there set a certain standard in his life and helped create his own conception of himself and his grand role in British history. It was the source of his family's history, its status in modern Britain, and his own sense of self. Blenheim Palace was England to Churchill. So, it made sense that he returned to it

all throughout his life, and important milestones took place there (such as proposing to Clementine in the gardens).

The Churchill family's history with Blenheim, of course, goes back much, much further. Blenheim Palace was built for John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, as a gift from Queen Anne and a thank-you for his victory over the French in the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. The palace was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, and it took 17 years to complete. It was intended to be a symbol of British power and prestige, and it remains one of England's most impressive stately homes to this day. It's the only non-royal, non-ecclesiastical Palace in Britain.

We visited in 2012 during a trip we took to Britain as a young family for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Visit Oxfordshire invited us to visit the Oxfordshire Cotswolds, and I knew immediately that I wanted to visit Blenheim Palace, so they were kind enough to arrange it. So, on a sunny June day, my wife and I visited with our six-month-old son in a stroller (I do not recommend doing this, you're better off using a baby wrap or other carrier).

Walking through the house and seeing the room where Churchill was born was a moving experience. I imagined young Churchill running around the hallways playing soldier. In a glass case at the entrance are his toy soldiers. The house is a monument to the 1st Churchill, John Churchill, but now it's also become a monument to this second, possibly more famous Churchill, who saved Britain in another foreign war. There's now an ongoing special exhibition dedicated to Winston; the house uses the connection of its most famous son in all its marketing and advertising. Churchill Society conferences have been held there.

On a future trip, my second to visit Blenheim, I took a private tour of the Duke's apartments and got a behind-the-scenes look at life in the great house. It was fascinating to see how the place still functions as a playground for the rich and famous, much as it always has. Despite still being a private home, the house is now owned by a trust, so it must be opened to the public. But it's such a massive house that large parts of it can still be walled off from the visiting hordes. On that same visit, I attended a Battle Proms concert that was set up on the lawn in front of the house. The estate is a center

of cultural life in Oxfordshire, and it's not uncommon for locals to visit several times a year (and you can usually get a yearly visiting pass for the price of one ticket).

My most recent visit to Blenheim was in 2022 when I visited for the first time since the pandemic. I was staying in Oxford for a summer course, so I decided to take the bus up on one of my free afternoons. The bus literally dropped me off at the gate, and I walked the almost one-mile-long driveway to the entrance. I toured the great staterooms once again and visited Churchill's birth room, where there was a special exhibition of his paintings, some rarely seen. I'll always take an opportunity to see his paintings as he was actually a very talented painter (you can't really say the same for other world leaders who've taken up the brush to imitate him).

After walking through the house and looking at the even newer exhibition dedicated to Churchill (with lovely artifacts on display), I walked the gardens and grounds around the house. It was a sunny, glorious July day, and that added to its splendor. I imagined Churchill running around these gardens as a child and playing hide and seek with his cousins or his nanny. Or I imagined him much older, gingerly walking through the grounds with the love of his life. Then, inevitably, thoughts turn to how he must have felt walking through these grounds during Britain's darkest times (if he had even had the time to do so). There are historical rumors that Hitler ordered Oxford protected from bombing by the Luftwaffe because he wanted to make it the capital of a conquered Britain. It's not clear if that is completely true, but it's believable enough. If it were true, then Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of their sworn enemy, would have made an interesting trophy.

But that didn't happen. All because of the man who was born in those walls. The man who led Britain to victory with his visionary leadership and his inspiring words. It made perfect sense that he wished to be buried there at the source of his British greatness rather than at his beloved Chartwell. I will visit again and again.

Stourhead - My Local Stately Home

Longtime readers of Anglotopia will know that I have a special connection to Shaftesbury, a small town in Northern Dorset (that's practically almost in Wiltshire), because of a poster I once had hanging on my wall. It's the one place in England that I have visited the most over the years. If I were to retire to an English cottage one day, it would be to one in this special place. There are several grand houses and castles in the vicinity of Shaftesbury, but the most important one internationally, and my favorite by far, is Stourhead.

We first visited on that same Diamond Jubilee trip, and I immediately regretted not visiting sooner on our previous visits to Shaftesbury; it was just down the road! Stourhead is most well known for its gardens. You will recognize the gardens if you're a fan of British period films because they have been in several films, most notably the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice* (the rain scene is at the Temple of Apollo in the gardens where Darcy and Elizabeth argue). The gardens are truly splendid. We go more into this in the chapter on the place, but they are an 'English Arcadia' - the perfect ideal English landscape, and people come from all over the world to look at them.

For many, the house is a bit of an afterthought. Many might not even realize there is a house there because it is set back from the gardens, and you can't really see the house when you're walking around the carefully planned landscape. It's not even open all the time, so often the gardens are open, but the house is closed. But I love the house, and it's one of my favorites. It's not a massive place like Blenheim Palace; it's more modest, but you can still call it a grand house. Built in the Palladian style by the wealthy Bankes family (a banking family, and when it was built, considered 'new' money), the house is a statement of Georgian wealth and power (the house was burned in the early 1900s but rebuilt almost exactly as it was).

All of my visits to this special place have blended together over the years. I've lost count of how many times I've been there, how many times I've walked through the house and the gardens. How many times have I had tea in the cafe or browsed the gift shop?



It is the one National Trust property in Britain that I have been to the most and will return to time and time again.

My favorite visit, though, was back when Anglotopia used to publish a magazine, and we were invited to take a behind-the-scenes tour of Stourhead House. We arrived before the place had even opened and got the distinct pleasure of knocking on the front door as if we were visiting someone there. The great wooden door opened, and we were greeted by a curation specialist at the house. She proceeded to take us on the most personal, memorable tour of a stately home you could ever ask for. Not only did they guide us through all the staterooms, but we got to go upstairs and visit the parts of the house that the public doesn't normally get to see. I'll never forget passing through the attic rooms filled with furniture and artifacts, ghostly covered in sheets, awaiting their day to go on display. The best part was going into the crypt of the house and exploring the basement. We even got to see the wine cellar, which had spoiled wine from centuries ago untouched in place.

Stourhead is a special place in Anglotopia's heart, and I'll always be sure to stop by when I'm in the neighborhood. In fact, when I returned to Britain in 2022 after a four-year absence, it was one of the first places I visited after arriving in Shaftesbury.

Calke Abbey - My Favorite Stately Home

Despite visiting there so often, Stourhead is not my favorite stately home in England. No, my favorite is a place I've only been to once.

No place with an entry in the official National Trust guidebook is truly a secret, but when you arrive at Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, you very much feel like you're passing into another realm and into the pages of a legend. This treasure of Britain's national heritage is kept in a state of 'arrested decay' as it was when it was given to the Trust in the 1980s. What resulted was a time capsule of 20th-century aristocratic decline and a truly special place, a secret place, that we can all experience.

Arrival at Calke Abbey is down a long driveway, several miles in length. Past the gates to the estate, deep in the English countryside,



EXIT
ONLY

you're given a CD by the security guard at the entrance (this was in 2016; I'm not sure if they still do this). This CD tells you a story – it frames the secret place, and it's perfectly timed to the drive along the single-lane track leading to the house. Only you have no idea the house is actually there. Amongst fallen trees and endless rolling green hills, it's difficult to tell if there is a house here at all. And you begin to wonder if the National Trust is pulling your leg.

Eventually, you come around a bend, and there it is, sitting in the landscape, a silent sentry to history. Calke Abbey stands on the site of a 12th-century Augustinian priory and is a typical English Neoclassical state home built in the 1700s by the eccentric Harpur-Crewe family. Despite the word Abbey in its name, it was never an ecclesiastical building. It sits perfectly in the landscape, and for hundreds of years, the reclusive Harpur-Crewe family kept this view entirely to themselves, keeping the estate cut off from the world.

In their isolation, they filled the house with... well, the detritus that a family builds up for hundreds of years when it lives in the same building.

This house is *100 Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia-Marquez in actual reality. Every room is packed to the gills with stuff. Most of it left as it was when the National Trust took over the house in the 1980s. The family came to the end of the line in the 1980s, their isolation no longer tenable in a house that was crumbling around them. In lieu of crippling death duties, they gave the house to the National Trust.

Normally, when this happens, an army would descend upon the place and restore the house to its former glory, the way it was meant to be experienced in its golden age. The National Trust decided to do it differently with Calke Abbey, and they left it as they found it. It is in a state of permanent 'arrested decay' (though fear not, they still clean and preserve everything regularly). Walking through the house is to walk through a 300-year-old time capsule of English aristocracy. Rooms are filled with random things, wallpaper peeling off the walls, and paint chips on the ground.

The whole place has the most wonderful smell, a combination of dust, leather, and stale air. The clock has been stopped; the time machine has reached its destination. And now, this is a place that we



can enjoy, a sad, crumbling place that's a symbol of the decline of the British aristocracy in the 20th century. A sign in the café states that Calke Abbey is a 'secret place, where time stands still.' And it does. This is, by far, my favorite National Trust house.

Visit as soon as you can.

Stumbling Upon Darlington Hall

Have you ever been to a place that you've never been to before, but it looks very familiar to you - almost like you HAD been there before? A place that had become a part of you through a favorite book or film? And not realize what that place was until you were standing in front of it?

The Cotswolds in England are known for their picturesque countryside and quaint villages, but nestled amongst it all is a hidden gem: Dyrham Park. This stately home is a marvel of Baroque architecture, sitting comfortably in its landscape and showing its age with elegance. The honey-colored stone glows in the sunlight, and a stream runs fast alongside the driveway, creating a soothing atmosphere.

One winter day, my family and I stumbled upon Dyrham Park while searching for something to do. We were on the edge of the Cotswolds, and the National Trust app told us there was a stately home nearby. It was a stroke of luck that we found Dyrham Park, as we had no idea what to expect. As we walked down the drive towards the house, I had a feeling of familiarity. Had I seen this house before?

And then it clicked with me. This was the house from the film "The Remains of the Day," one of my all-time favorite British films. I was standing in front of Darlington Hall without realizing it. The sunny weather had perhaps led to my memory confusion, or maybe I never really gave much thought to Darlington Hall being a real place. But the house was there, and it was stunning.

The Remains of the Day is my favorite British film and one of my favorite books as well. I watch it several times a year. Its elegiac story about a butler in a great stately home in its final declining days is timeless and endlessly fascinating. It was quite something to be

standing in front of it. When I picked the place to visit in the app, I didn't realize I was going to Darlington Hall! I do love a bit of travel serendipity.

We were the only visitors that day, and it felt like we were trespassing on someone's private home. The house was closed due to the terrible storms that had hit Britain that winter, but we decided to have a wander around anyway as the grounds were open. Some of grounds were flooded, and the drains were overflowing, but the beauty of the place shone through. The view of the sublime green rolling hills beyond the house was breathtaking, even in the winter.

Dyrham Park may be showing its age, but it's well taken care of by the National Trust. The stonework has borne the weathering of time, and it looks like it has always been there. It was the epitome of an English stately home, not too grand, but perfectly at home in its surroundings. As we left, I half expected the butler, Mr. Stephens, to walk out of the front door and enquire as to why we were trespassing on Lord Darlington's property.

Dyrham Park is a hidden treasure in the Cotswolds, and I feel lucky to have stumbled upon it. It's a place of history and beauty, and I can't wait to visit again one day (in fact, I've been there since, and it was just as lovely the second time!). Now, I think it's time to rewatch *The Remains of the Day* this weekend!



Image © By Ian Stannard Wikipedia

GOODWOOD HOUSE

The Home of the Festival of Speed

Key Facts

- Goodwood Country House is located in West Sussex, England.
- The house was originally built in the year 1600 as a hunting lodge.
- Goodwood House was dramatically extended in 1800 by James Wyatt.
- Today, Goodwood House is owned by the Dukes of Richmond and Gordon
- Now home to the iconic Festival of Speed

Goodwood House is primarily a 19th-century regency-style palace that has gone through a series of major remodels and extensions since the year 1600. With an art collection that has its origins in the Royal House of Stuart and famously unusual and decadent interiors, Goodwood House is nevertheless a modern English country house complete with a golf course, cricket ground, and annual festival of speed.

The Jacobean Earl of Northumberland built the first Goodwood House in the year 1600. A fairly unremarkable Jacobean gentleman's house, it was acquired by Charles Lennox, the 1st Duke of Richmond, natural son of King Charles II, and his French mistress Louise de Keroualle in 1697.

This original 'old house,' as it is now known, was extended and improved throughout the 18th century. In 1730, the main hall

was redesigned by architect Roger Morris, known for his work on the Chichester Assembly Rooms, and between 1747 and 1750, the house was given a Palladian-style south wing by architect Matthew Brettingham, known for his work on Holkham Hall. In the early 19th century, a complementary north wing was added by architects James Wyatt and John Nash, who also added Regency State Apartments and towers to the south wing.

Goodwood House is now a villa-style regency palace built over two floors with picturesque domed towers and an exterior of grey stone and flint. The addition of these two wings and other major extensions carried out by Wyatt and Nash during the years 1800-1806 created Goodwood House's unique shape that resembles three sides of an octagon. The additional wing and ranges ordered by the 3rd Duke of Richmond were needed, in part, to house his extensive picture collection, most of which was salvaged from a fire at the family's London Home Richmond House in 1791.

Goodwood Country Estate reaches across almost 12,000 acres of beautiful Sussex Downs, and over the years, the various Dukes of Richmond in charge of the estate have modified and added to the gardens and estate. Cork oak trees and cedars of Lebanon planted by the 2nd Duke in 1740 still survive in areas around the house. The 3rd Duke added a thousand more trees to the gardens at Goodwood, a tennis court, and a walled garden before embarking on his most magnificent addition of a glamorous classical stable block designed by Sir William Chambers and, later, dog kennels designed by James Wyatt.

The rear entrance to Goodwood House takes the visitor through the Long Hall of the old Jacobean House, where Lion and Lioness by Stubbs and two of Canaletto's Thames landscapes, all formerly housed at Richmond House, hang. At the same time, the ambassador for France, the 3rd Duke of Richmond, acquired a set of magnificent Gobelin tapestries and had a room behind the hall built especially to house them. The Tapestry Room has been the setting of more Royal Privy Council meetings than any other private house.

Moving into the Wyatt wings, the music room features a fireplace by William Kent, also taken from Richmond House. The

English artist George Stubbs stayed at Goodwood for nine months in 1759 and painted prolifically during his stay. The fruits of his labor can be seen in the many hunting scenes on the walls of the front hall of Goodwood House.

The most famous room at Goodwood is undoubtedly its curious and extraordinary Egyptian Dining Room. In the late 18th century, Napoleon's Nile campaign led to an influx of Egyptian antiquaries and collectibles in Great Britain. Designed in 1802 by Wyatt, the Egyptian Dining Room is flamboyantly furnished, with statues, friezes, paintings, and even the fireplace, invoking ancient Egypt and the era of Cleopatra.

This room, amongst others, fell into decline and was drastically altered during the Victorian years, but the current owners, the Earl and Countess of March and Kinrara, completed a careful restoration of Goodwood's interiors, taking the home back to its original Regency appearance. One of the most spectacular examples of the Regency style is the Yellow Drawing Room, which features bright yellow silk drapes and royal portraits by the likes of Romney, Ramsay, and Mengs.

Horse Racing has been taking place at Goodwood for over two centuries. Goodwood Racecourse was established in 1802 and currently hosts the annual Glorious Goodwood meeting. Almost one hundred years after the racecourse was completed, a golf course designed by James Braid was commissioned and built on the grounds of Goodwood. Chichester/Goodwood Airport was built in the estate during World War II, and the internationally recognized Goodwood Motor Circuit was founded by the 9th Duke of Richmond in 1948. Goodwood House, its grounds, and Motor Circuit have hosted the annual Goodwood Festival of Speed since 1993.

What Makes Goodwood Famous?

Goodwood House is a historic English country house given a modern-day twist. Home to an annual 'Festival of Speed' and complete with a racecourse, golf course, cricket ground, and grandstand, Goodwood House is where the upper classes come to

play. An unusual house in design, Goodwood dates back to the year 1600 and has been the seat of the Duke of Richmond since 1697. With a family art collection that has its origins in the Royal House of Stuart and that infamous Egyptian Dining Room, Goodwood House is a fascinating historic building.

Goodwood House on Film and TV

Goodwood Racecourse and wider estate have featured in the following films and TV shows.

- The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (2015) Film
- Twice Around the Clock (2014) Documentary
- And When Did You Last See Your Father? (2007) Documentary
- Sports in Merrie, England (1913) Documentary
- Race for the Goodwood Cup (1908) Documentary
- Glorious Goodwood (1906) Documentary
- King Edward at Goodwood (1906) Documentary

Further Research

- James Peill (2013) The English Country House
- Jeremy Musson (2011) English Country House Interiors
- Rosemary Baird (2007) Goodwood: Art, Architecture, Sport and Family

Visiting Goodwood House

From 16th March to 13th October, Goodwood House is open to the public on most Sundays and Mondays. From the 4th to the 28th of August, the house is open five days a week, from Sunday to Thursday. Admission charges are £9.50 for adults, £4 for young people, and children under 12 go free.

Getting there by Train: There is a regular service from London Victoria to Chichester (1 hour, 40 minutes), plus the coastal

service from Brighton and Portsmouth. Buses or taxis are available at Chichester Station.

Getting there by Road: Follow the A3 (Junction 10 on the M25) south towards Guildford. About 3 miles past Guildford, at the Milford turning, take the A283 to Petworth, then the A285 to Chichester for about 6 miles. Just beyond Upwaltham, turn right at the brown Goodwood sign. At the next Junction, turn left, following the brown sign to the hotel. The hotel entrance is a further 2 miles along on the right.

For more information, see the website www.goodwood.co.uk



WOLLATON HALL

A Home Fit for Batman

Key Facts about the House

- Wollaton Hall is located in Wollaton Park, Nottingham, England.
- Completed in 1588, Wollaton Hall was designed by architect Robert Smythson and built for Sir Francis Willoughby.
- Wollaton Hall opened to the public in 1926 and is home to Nottingham's Natural History Museum.

At the time Wollaton Hall was built, it was an architectural sensation. A decadent Elizabethan palace that showed stark Tudor England how to embrace the excesses of the Renaissance, Wollaton boasts the most dramatic facade of any English house built in the 16th century. Owned by the Willoughby family for 345 years, Wollaton Hall is now a Natural History Museum and is known for featuring in the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises* as the exterior of Wayne Manor.

Wollaton Hall was built between 1580 and 1588, and the plans for the design were drawn up by architect Robert Smythson, who was heavily influenced by Dutch and German architecture. Smythson's floor plan for Wollaton is said to be inspired by da Majano's Villa Poggio Reale near Naples and de Lyra's reconstruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Smythson's creation was a monster of parterres and terraces, an experimental palace that set the bar

for the Baroque designs that were to follow almost a century later.

The man of the house, Sir Francis Willoughby, made his fortune in Nottinghamshire Coal. Legend has it that Willoughby was an eccentric man, an exacting and temperamental tycoon who had a habit of paying his workers in carts of the black stuff. It took eight years to build Wollaton Hall, which is situated at the top of a small hill that overlooks Willoughby's modest ancestral home. The material of choice for Wollaton was Ancaster stone from Lincolnshire, and it is thought that the master masons who worked on the building were brought over from Italy.

The central hall at Wollaton is cavernous and features a painted ceiling and wall by Antonio Verrio or possibly his assistant, Laguerre. Four towers guard each corner of the hall that rises to a glass-sided gallery where Nottinghamshire's oldest pipe organ can be found. The organ is thought to have been made at the end of the 17th century by builder Gerard Smith. The belvedere that rises above the medieval, yet flamboyant, hall offers views across Wollaton's five hundred acres of gardens and parkland to the city beyond.

A fire at Wollaton in the early 17th century caused extensive damage to Smythson's interiors. Under Lord Middleton, Wyattville was employed in 1801 to remodel Wollaton's interiors in his Windsor Castle style, a task he undertook intermittently for the next thirty years. Wyattville's central hall survives, featuring a classical stone screen and fake hammer-beam roof. Only one other room has been restored to the glory of the Wyattville design, and that's the Regency Dining Room, where visitors can enjoy a video of a former Wollaton housekeeper.

Other restored rooms include the kitchens, which have been fitted as a working Tudor kitchen using an inventory that dates to 1601, and the Regency Salon, which is presented as it would have looked in 1862 when Lady Jane Middleton was still in residence. From the date it was completed in 1588 until the year 1811, Wollaton Hall passed down through generations of the Willoughby Family. By 1881, the current owner of Wollaton Hall, Digby Willoughby, 9th Baron Middleton, decided that the growing city of Nottingham had expanded too close to his property. Seeking a more countryside

location, Baron Middleton moved out and let the house to tenants.

Following a period of vacancy, Wollaton Hall was sold to Nottingham Council in 1924 and opened to the public in 1926. The council transformed Wollaton Hall into a Natural History Museum, housing some three-quarters of a million specimens related to zoology, botany, and geology. The house is segmented into six main exhibition areas: the National Connections Gallery, Bird Gallery, Insect Gallery, Mineral Gallery, Africa Gallery, and the Natural History Matters Gallery.

In 2007, Wollaton Hall reopened following a massive refurbishment, funded partly by the European Union Regional Development Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of the renovation, the gardens and deer park were also landscaped and modified. Now, Wollaton Hall Park is regularly used for large outdoor events like festivals and concerts, and the exterior of the house has been used as a filming location for the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises*.

What Makes Wollaton Hall Famous?

Wollaton Hall is famous for its flamboyant and imposing facade. An experimental and highly decorative Elizabethan mansion, Wollaton Hall was a sensation in its day. After spending nearly 350 years as the family home of the aristocratic Willoughby family, Wollaton Hall is now known for being Nottingham's Natural History Museum and features reconstructed historical rooms.

Wollaton Hall in TV and Film

- Heart of Chaos (2015)
- The Dark Knight Rises (2012)
- Crossroads (2001 TV series)
- Treasure Hunt (1982)

Further Research

- Sheila Strauss (1978) Short History of Wollaton and Wollaton Hall
- Robert Cullen and Pamela Marshall (1999) Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family
- Friedman (1988) House and Household in Elizabethan England: Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family

Visitor Information

Wollaton Hall and Natural History Museum is open to the public all year round. In high season, which runs from February to November, Wollaton Hall is open every day from 10 am until 5 pm. During low season, the hall and museum are open from Friday to Tuesday from 11 am until 4 pm. Entry is free, but there is a charge for tours.

Wollaton Hall is three miles west of Nottingham City Center. To travel to Wollaton Hall by train, go to Nottingham Central Train Station and take a local bus from the city center. If traveling by car from Nottingham City Center, follow the brown tourist signs from the A52 or A6514, or if arriving via the M1, take junction 25 and follow the signs.



ABBOTSFORD

The Ancestral Home of Sir Walter Scott

Key Facts about Abbotsford

- Abbotsford is located near Galashiels in the town of Melrose on the south bank of the River Tweed, Scotland.
- A category A listed building, Abbotsford belonged to Scottish novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott and was built in stages throughout the early 19th
- Abbotsford remained in the Scott family until 2004 and is now a popular historic country house and visitor attraction run by a charitable trust.

The ancestral home of Scotland's most famous literary son, Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford is a popular tourist attraction in the Scottish borders. Abbotsford grew from humble beginnings into a grand, romantic mansion, an icon of 19th-century Scottish Baronial architecture. Once Sir Walter Scott's most cherished possession, his 'conundrum castle,' Abbotsford is now a museum and shrine to the great writer's life and work.

At first, Abbotsford was nothing more than a farmhouse and a modest estate of 100 acres known locally as Clarty Hole, a play on its official title of Cartleyhole. Sir Walter Scott purchased the scenic spot in 1811 to serve as his countryside home outside of Edinburgh. Initially, Scott built a small villa and named it Abbotsford after the abbots of Melrose Abbey, who used to cross the river Tweed via a nearby Ford. In his first few years at Abbotsford, Scott was preoccupied with acquiring more land and managed to increase his estate from 110 acres to 1400.

Soon, though, Scott's literary career and the fame and fortune that came with it gave him the funds to transform his humble farmhouse into a country mansion where he could live, work, and entertain in style. Scott never seemed to harbor dreams of building a grand mansion; rather, the Abbotsford we see today grew in gradual stages with the input of Scott's many friends, including some of Scotland's finest architects, craftsmen, and designers.

At first, Scott expanded his farmhouse with the help of architect William Atkinson and designer David Ramsay Hay, adding a study, a dining room, an armory, and a conservatory, with bedrooms and attic rooms on the floor above. Both architect and designer were to go on to do magnificent things as Atkinson was later responsible for the remodeling of Chequers and Ramsay Hay redecorated the Palace of Holyroodhouse for Queen Victoria.

This arrangement served the Scott family well for a few years, but by 1920, Scott was making more money than ever and began planning extensive building works with Atkinson. In 1822, the existing Abbotsford House was torn down to make way for the building of a new, large, rectangular house. Scott hired a local stonemason, Smiths of Darnick, to be the principal builder of the new Abbotsford and insisted that he integrated carved stones and wooden paneling from ruined abbeys and castles around Scotland to give it a strong link with the past. In the great entrance hall at Abbotsford, there is a stone fireplace carved by Smiths of Darnick and inspired by Scott's poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The ceiling and walls in this room are dominated by suits of armor, carved oak paneling salvaged from Dunfermline Abbey, and the coats of arms and shields of Scott's ancestors.

Anyone familiar with Scott's work will be thrilled to take a look inside his study. The last room to be completed in Abbotsford, it is in this atmospheric, book-lined room that Scott penned his later novels including the nine-volume biography *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*. The drawing room at Abbotsford features beautiful Chinese hand-painted wallpaper, a gift from a relative of Scott's who worked for the East India Company, as well as the latest in domestic engineering; Abbotsford was one of the first homes in Scotland to be gas-lit and had air-bells fitted for summoning servants. Although

a lover of technology, Scott was an antiquarian at heart and housed a large collection of arms, including his own military and sports weapons, in his purpose-built armory.

Scott's library at Abbotsford is one of Scotland's great treasures. Containing books and manuscripts that are completely unique, including several incunables (books written before 1,500) and almost 5,000 chapbooks, Abbotsford Library is the most impressive room in the house. The shelves at Abbotsford Library are a testament to the intellect and curiosity of the man who filled them, with sections devoted to history, geography, folklore, practical reference, and versions of Scott's own works in multiple languages.

Other rooms at Abbotsford that are open to visitors include the exhibition room, used as a breakfast parlor, the dining room in which Scott died following a series of strokes, and the unique religious corridor and Catholic chapel. Already a popular place of literary pilgrimage, just 20 years after Scott's death, Abbotsford was remodeled in the 1850s by Scott's granddaughter Charlotte. Charlotte married James Robert Hope, and the newlyweds created a dedicated tourist route through the most historic parts of the house in an attempt to separate their own private living space from Sir Walter Scott's many curious fans.

The last of the Scott clan to live in the house, Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott and her sister Patricia turned Abbotsford into one of Scotland's best tourist attractions during the years they looked after it and, on Dame Maxwell-Scott's death in 2004, passed it on to an independent charitable trust.

What Makes Abbotsford Famous?

Abbotsford House is one of the most famous houses in the world, particularly for lovers of literature. A monument to the life and work of the man who created it, the house at Abbotsford was the bricks-and-mortar love of Sir Walter Scott's life. Full of Scott's own antiquarian collections, Abbotsford is a museum, shrine, and iconic example of 19th-century Scottish Baronial style.

Abbotsford in TV and Film

- A History of Scotland (2008 TV series)
- Antiques Roadshow (1979 TV Series)
- Further Research
- Anonymous (2015) Abbotsford: Beautiful Britain Series
- Sheila Scott (2014) Abbotsford: building by numbers
- N. Wilson (2002) A Life of Walter Scott: The Laird of Abbotsford
- Mary Scott and William Gibb (1983) Abbotsford; the personal relics and antiquarian treasures of Sir Walter Scott

Visitor Information

Abbotsford's visitor center, restaurant, and estate paths are open to the public seven days a week, all year round. Abbotsford House and Gardens are also open all year round, but opening hours differ depending on the season. Entry fees apply, so visit the website for more information on opening times and prices: <http://www.scottsabbotsford.com/visit/>.

To get to Abbotsford from Edinburgh, take a bus to Carlisle via Galashiels. At Galashiels Bus Station, transfer to a local bus for Galafoot Bridge, 10 minutes walking distance via a public footpath to Abbotsford.



BASILDON PARK

A Georgian Masterpiece Saved from Wreck and Ruin

Key Facts about Basildon Park

- Basildon Park is located in Berkshire, England, between the villages of Upper Basildon and Lower Basildon.
- Designed by John Carr, Basildon Park was built between 1776 and 1783 for Sir Francis Syke.
- A Grade I listed building, Basildon passed into the ownership of the National Trust in 1978.

Used by the British army during both world wars, left derelict numerous times in history, and almost sold piece-by-piece to America, Basildon Park is a true survivor. Reborn in the 1950s, thanks to a loving and painstaking restoration by Lord and Lady Iliffe, Basildon Park is an authentic Georgian mansion that has managed, against all odds, to forge a place for itself in the 21st century.

Sir Francis Sykes was an ambitious man. Having made a vast fortune in India with the British East India Company, he returned to England determined to make his name in British politics. After buying two large estates and becoming a Member of Parliament, Sykes set his sights on the estate of Basildon and commissioned the building of a grand mansion designed by renowned architect John Carr of York.

In 1771, work on Basildon was due to begin, but Sykes's life took a dramatic turn for the worse, financially and politically, when

East India shares collapsed, and he was embroiled in a scandal over his work as a tax collector in Bengal. Work on Basildon did not begin until 1776 and, due to cash flow issues, lasted for the entirety of Sykes's life.

The architect in charge of the building of Basildon, John Carr of York, was heavily influenced by Palladian architecture. His layout of a central block flanked by pavilions and a long, three-storied west front is thought to have been based on drawings of Palladio's Villa Emo. At the time Basildon was being built, neoclassicism, typified by the work of Robert Adams, was rising in popularity, and Carr employed the austerity of this style in Basildon's east front.

Carr's interiors are a refined yet dramatic homage to Robert Adam, with whom he had previously worked on the interiors at Fairfax House. The hall, which remains to this day as Carr left it, features Etruscan ceiling panels and wall medallions with delicate plasterwork picked out in pastel shades. An entrance hall leads to a staircase that opens out into the Octagon Saloon with large Venetian windows that complement the vista of the park beyond. It is in the dining room that we can most clearly see Carr's admiration of Adams; a screen of columns dominates one end of the room, and the ceiling is decked out with a wheel of tendrils featuring the heads of Roman emperors.

On Sykes's death in 1804, Basildon passed into the hands of his son, who died within weeks and passed the house on to his son, five-year-old Sir Francis Sykes. As a child, the third Baronet was an acquaintance of the Prince Regent, a friendship that proved to be incredibly costly as, at the age of just 14, Sykes entertained the Prince at Basildon.

In 1834, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli was a houseguest at Basildon. The arrangement was a peculiar one as, at the time, Disraeli was in the throes of a romantic affair with Sykes's wife Henrietta, a relationship he even wrote a book about, *Henrietta Temple: a Love Affair*. During this period, Basildon was on the market but not yet attracting any serious buyers.

Finally, in 1838, Basildon was sold to MP James Morrison, an old-fashioned self-made man who began his career as an assistant in a London Haberdashery. The property was passed down to his

daughter, who was unmarried, and in 1910, it was passed to her nephew, also named James Morrison. A World War One veteran who served with distinction, Morrison lived in Basildon until 1929, when he was forced to sell for financial reasons.

In the succeeding years, it seems no one really knew what to do with old Basildon. The 1st Lord Iliffe purchased the estate only to remove the doors and fireplaces and put it straight back on the market. Property developer George Ferdinando came next. His master plan was to sell Basildon to a wealthy American, have the whole building deconstructed, shipped to America, and re-built in a location of the new owner's choosing. Thankfully, this never happened, but the dining room fittings did make their way to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York to decorate their 'Basildon Room.'

During the Second World War, things only got worse for Basildon as the house was used as a soldier's billet and training ground and suffered a great deal of damage to its interiors and grounds, but salvation was just around the corner. In 1952, the 2nd Baron and Lady Iliffe purchased Basildon and set about a massive restoration that would take 25 years to complete. When Lady Iliffe arrived, army graffiti covered the walls, almost all of the windows were broken, the lead tiles had been stolen from the roof, and the whole property was in a sad state of disrepair.

Slowly and carefully, Lady Iliffe restored Basildon with salvaged 18th-century fixtures and fittings and purchased antique furniture and paintings to replace all that had been lost or destroyed, including a large collection of works by Batoni. In 1978, the Iliffe's passed Basildon into the hands of the National Trust and it has been enjoyed by visitors and used regularly as a historic filming location ever since.

What Makes Basildon Park Famous?

Basildon Park is famous for being one of the few houses of its kind to survive the impact of the 20th century on aristocratic life. A Georgian mansion that survived bankruptcy, two world wars, and the attentions of a wealthy American, Basildon Park was brought

back from the dead as recently as the 1950s. Now a popular filming location and visitor attraction, Basildon Park is a truly great success story for English houses.

Basildon Park in TV and Film

- Downton Abbey (2013 TV series)
- The Royal Bodyguard (2011 TV series)
- Dorian Gray (2009)
- The Duchess (2008)
- Marie Antoinette (2006)
- Pride & Prejudice (2005)

Further Research

- National Trust (2002) Basildon Park.

Visitor Information

Basildon Park is maintained by the National Trust and is open to the public all year round. Visit the website for more information on opening times and entry fees. <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/basildon-park>

If visiting Basildon Park by train, the nearest train stations are Pangbourne train station and Goring train station. The park is around a 5-minute taxi ride from either of these stations. To get to Basildon Park by car, leave the M4 at exit 12 and follow signs for Beale Park and Pangbourne. There is parking available on site.



BURGHLEY HOUSE

An Elizabethan Marvel

Key Facts about Burghley House

- Burghley House is located near Stamford, Peterborough.
- Built between 1558 and 1587, Burghley was built for Sir William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth I's chief advisor and Lord High Treasurer.
- Burghley House has remained much as it was in Elizabethan times and is now owned by a preservation trust set up by descendants of Lord Burghley.

Burghley House is truly spectacular. An Elizabethan palace to which only actual royal residences can compare, Burghley House is the most magnificent house built during Queen Elizabeth's reign. Only the best for Queen Elizabeth's most faithful and long-serving advisor, Lord Burghley, who rose from the status of lawyer to become Queen Elizabeth I's chief advisor for most of her reign, Secretary of State, and Lord High Treasurer. Burghley House has been owned by the Cecil family since Elizabethan times.

Sir William Cecil began his career as a lawyer and, under the Protector Somerset, came to occupy one of the highest-ranking positions in Queen Elizabeth I's inner circle. Designed by Cecil himself, Burghley House came to symbolize all of the might and splendor of the Elizabethan court. Less a family home, more a small kingdom, Burghley was built to house the Cecil descendants, a powerful dynasty that has, since 1801, included the marquesses of Exeter.

Burghley's exteriors are a perfect example of sixteenth-

century Elizabethan architecture, with its three facades reflecting the perfect symmetry of 16th-century design. The plan for Burghley began as an almost modest, by Elizabethan standards, medieval manor house with a courtyard following from a gatehouse and a porch giving access to the Great Hall. Soon, these plans were overwhelmed, and the floor plan of the house grew to create a letter E in honor of the Queen, while the main part of the house swelled to include 35 main rooms on the ground and first floors. There are also over 80 smaller rooms and scores of halls, bathrooms, and service areas in the rest of this sprawling palace, whose exterior is adorned with ostentatious porches and pennants and roof with a multitude of cupolas, pavilions, and chimneys.

Burghley was built gradually over the course of Lord Burghley's long career, and upon his death in 1598, most of the interiors were still undecorated and unfurnished. Most rooms remained bare until the house passed into the hands of the 5th Earl of Exeter and received its sensational makeover. The 5th Earl and his wife, Lady Anne Cavendish, were a well-traveled pair, and throughout the 1680s and 1690s, while Britain tried to remake itself following the Restoration, they indulged themselves in four Grand Tours of Europe. The seventeen rooms on the principal reception floor of Burghley are filled with the treasures amassed by the Earl and Lady Cavendish during this time. The rooms feature over 300 paintings, as well as tapestries, fine furniture, and sculptures. The overall effect of these lavish rooms is on par with one of Europe's finest museums or the state rooms of Windsor Castle itself.

In the rest of the house, the Grand tour collection continues with the chapel decorated with a work by Paolo Veronese, taken from a church on the Venice island of Murano. Similarly, the chapel's marble fireplace once adorned a church somewhere in Portugal. The state dining room marvels with an Anthony and Cleopatra wall mural by Laguerre, the brown drawing room features portraits by Gainsborough, and the black-and-yellow bedroom is home to exquisite carvings by Grinling Gibbons. For a look at the relationship that made all of this possible, wander to the Pagoda Room to see two paintings by Gheeraerts depicting Burghley and his Queen. Of course, Queen Elizabeth had her own bedroom in case she ever

chose to come and stay, with the finest tapestries and bed hangings in the whole palace, but her only planned visit was prevented by an outbreak of smallpox in the area.

There wasn't much that could be done by subsequent generations to improve on what the 5th Earl did at Burghley, and little changed until the 9th Earl took control. By now, it was the mid-eighteenth century, and the 9th Earl of Exeter, Lord Burghley Brownlow Cecil, had furnished the official state rooms at Burghley House in honor of the first of the Hanoverians. Old Master paintings adorn the walls of what is often referred to as the George Rooms, which contains furniture by Boulle and a Piranesi fireplace. The two really unmissable rooms at Burghley House are, of course, Heaven and Hell. In one, a Roman temple shows us views of a beautiful sky, and in the other, the floor disappears into a dark staircase. The 9th Earl also enlisted Capability Brown, the leading landscape gardener of the day, to lay out the gardens at Burghley.

Today, Burghley House is run by a charitable trust headed by members of the Cecil family, but the Burghley title is currently held by the many-titled Michael Cecil, 8th Marquess of Exeter, 17th Earl of Exeter and 19th Baron Burghley.

What Makes Burghley House Famous?

There is nowhere quite like Burghley. The only great houses that can compare with Burghley's grandiose Elizabethan architecture and world-class grand tour collection are those that were built to house kings and queens. The treasures amassed by the 5th Earl of Exeter and Lady Cavendish during their multiple Grand Tours of Europe elevate Burghley from being just another fine country house to one of the most spectacular houses in England.

Burghley House in TV and Film

- Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007)
- Da Vinci Code (2006)
- Pride & Prejudice (2005)

- Bleak House (2005 mini-series)
- The Curious House Guest (2005 TV series)
- Middlemarch (1994 mini-series)

Further Research

- Lady Victoria Leatham (2000) Burghley House (Great Houses of Britain)
- R.Impey (1998) The Cecil Family Collects: Four Centuries of Decorative Arts from Burghley House
- Hugh Brigstoke (1995) Italian Paintings from Burghley House
- Lady Victoria Leatham (1999) Burghley: The Life of a Great House

Visitor Information

Burghley House is open to the public every day except Friday during the summer months. Admission charges as of 2015 are £13.50 for adults and £6.70 for children; for more details on opening hours and admission fees, see the website www.burghley.co.uk.

If visiting Burghley by train, the nearest train station is Stamford, a short taxi ride or a 30-minute walk to the entrance. Stamford station can easily be accessed from the London to Edinburgh mainline. If traveling by car, exit the A1 at Carpenters Lodge and follow the signs to Burghley House.