

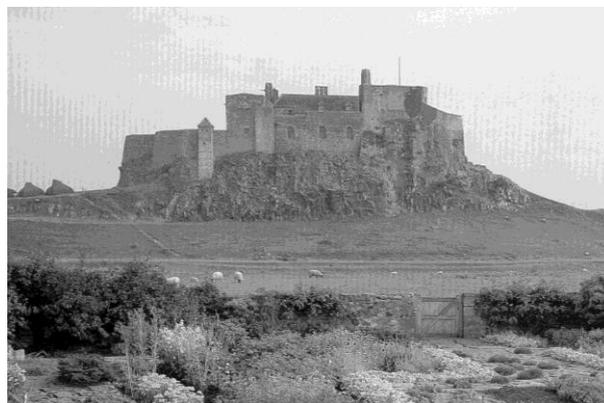
NORTHERN LIGHTS NORTHUMBRIA ILLUMINATED

SUNDAY 25 JUNE – SATURDAY 1 JULY 2017 (7 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£1785

- **Comprehensive introduction to a beautiful part of England**
- **Visits to a wide range of properties from Roman settlements to contemporary gardens**
- **Private visits to houses & gardens rarely open**
- **Comfortable family owned country house hotel with golf and spa facilities**



Lindisfarne Castle from the walled garden
by Gertrude Jekyll

OVERVIEW

Northumberland conjures up many and varied images: Roman soldiers toiling to construct the great wall ordered by the Emperor Hadrian; Irish monks bringing Christianity to Lindisfarne and elsewhere in Northumbria; ancient families such as the Percys defending the realm against the threat of marauding Scots; fine houses built on the profits of the area's abundant natural resources; and spectacular gardens created in the teeth of all that nature can throw at the unsuspecting. These are all aspects of a marvellous part of England which we shall spend the best part of a week exploring in leisurely detail.

If you have not seen Hadrian's Wall and the military settlements associated with its garrisons, our selection of Roman sites will come as a revelation: Vindolanda, scene of the ongoing excavations from where the famous letters emerged; the great fort at Housesteads looking out across windswept moorland; and the fort at Chesters, set in a quiet valley by the River Tyne. Following in the footsteps of those early Irish missionaries, we shall visit the great monastic island of Lindisfarne. Here St Aidan founded his monastery and from where the Gospel was spread far and wide. Although that original monastery has long gone, there is an impressive later church on site and an excellent museum run by English Heritage. St Cuthbert was at one time Bishop of Lindisfarne and we shall follow him to Durham, paying tribute at his shrine while marvelling at the magnificence of the vast Norman cathedral which now acts as his enfolding tomb.

Amongst the country houses to be included we shall visit privately Alnwick Castle, seat of the Dukes of Northumberland, before it opens to the public - it contains the best art collection in the north of England. Wallington is renowned for its decorative plasterwork and remarkable contents and again, we shall have a private tour. The chaste beauty of 'Greek Revival' Belsay Hall, abandoned to the elements and now the subject of a remarkable rescue, will amaze. The Browne-Swinburne family have been seated at Capheaton for many centuries and we shall be their guests for a private visit and dinner in what Pevsner described as "one of the most interesting houses of its date and character in England".

Horticulturally, the remarkable transformation of Alnwick Castle Gardens by the present Duchess of Northumberland is a dominant presence. However, there are smaller, more sophisticated gardens to be discovered: Whalton Manor is a gem; the quarry garden at Bide-a-Wee inspirational; the walled garden at Wallington and the nearby Herterton are essays in remarkable levels of creativity crafted from different ends of the design spectrum.

Our base will be Matfen Hall Hotel. This is a fine Victorian country house built for one of the prominent local families, the Blacketts. Sir Hugh, the present Baronet, and his wife have converted the house into a very comfortable hotel, with excellent food, complete with a spa, indoor heated swimming pool and a fine golf course. Situated in rolling countryside 20 miles west of Newcastle, it will be the ideal base for our explorations.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Sunday 25 June – Guests should arrive independently at **Matfen Hall Hotel** in the course of the afternoon. The hotel is happy for guests to arrive from 10.00 am to use the spa and golf facilities, but check-in is officially from 3.00 pm. Group dinner in the hotel - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Monday 26 June – We drive over to **Belsay** for a private tour with the Head Gardener to learn about the history of their magnificent 30 acres of both formal and informal gardens and the work being undertaken to preserve them. After coffee we continue south to **Durham** where we spend the rest of the day in and around the magnificent Cathedral. We have a group lunch on arrival, followed by a guided visit round the **Cathedral** and its precincts. We return to Matfen and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Tuesday 27 June – This is a day dominated by the first significant buildings to survive from the past – those built by the Romans. If you have not seen **Hadrian's Wall** and the military forts and settlements associated with its garrisons, our selection of visits will come as a revelation. We plan to include visits to **Vindolanda**, site of the ongoing excavations from where the now famous series of letters emerged; the great fort at **Housesteads** looking out across stunning moorland; and the fort at **Chesters**, set in a quiet valley by the River Tyne. There will be a simple group lunch in a hotel local to the Roman sites and the evening will be free.

Day 4: Wednesday 28 June – Today we drive north to visit the great monastic island of **Lindisfarne**. Here St Aidan founded a monastery from where the Gospel was spread far and wide. Although the original monastery has long gone, there is an impressive later church and an excellent museum run by English Heritage. Access allowing, we hope to visit **Lindisfarne Castle**, rebuilt by Sir Edwin Lutyens for Edward Hudson, the founder of Country Life – some, or all of the Castle may be closed for repairs in 2017. En route back to the hotel, we visit **Bide-a-Wee Garden**, near Morpeth, for a private visit. Set in a disused quarry, it is widely thought to be one of the best small gardens recently created in Northumberland. We have a group dinner at our hotel.

Day 5: Thursday 29 June – The day will start with a private tour of **Alnwick Castle**, before it opens to the public. It contains the best art collection in the north of England. The group will then have free time to wander back through the castle and make their way to the café in the garden for lunch (not included). A tour of **Alnwick Garden** has been arranged, to look closely at the new garden created by the present Duchess of Northumberland. There will then be some free time to explore the gardens further and to discover the charming market town of Alnwick, after which we return to the hotel and the evening will be free.

Day 6: Friday 30 June - Our first visit will be to **Wallington**. Renowned for its decorative plasterwork the group will have a private tour of the house before it opens to the public, followed by free time for coffee. There will be a tour of the famous walled garden followed by some free time for lunch (not included). The afternoon visit will be to **Hertford Gardens**, described by Robin Lane-Fox in the FT as one of the most thoughtful gardens he has ever visited in the UK. Frank & Marjorie Lawley have created a garden divided into five sections: Formal, Physic, Flower, 'Fancy' and a Nursery Garden. That evening we visit **Capheaton**, privately owned by William & Eliza Browne-Swinburne. It is described by Pevsner as "one of the most interesting houses of its date and character in England and far too little-known". Mr & Mrs Browne-Swinburne will host the group to a final dinner.

Day 7: Saturday 1 July – We depart after breakfast at the end of what should be a memorable week!

PRACTICALITIES

Price £1785 per person sharing a Classic Room **Deposit** £250

Single Supplement £165 (Double for Sole Use)

Upgrades £145 per room for a Deluxe Room, £325 per room for a Premier Room

Hotel 6 Nights with Breakfast at Matfen Hall Hotel

Price includes 3 Dinners & 2 Lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan

Not included Travel to/from Matfen, 3 Dinners & 3 Lunches



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