



## Scottish Houses and Castles

History, architecture, artworks and gardens

**17–26 September 2025 (ML 791)**

10 days • £4,150

Speaker: Alastair Learmont

Splendid residential buildings, from 13th-century castles to Edwardian opulence.

Geographically, a grand sweep from the Moray Firth in the north to the English border.

A manageable pace with an average of two sites a day, often with free time for the gardens, woodland walks and refreshments.

Three excellent hotels and good restaurants.

Pass through exceptionally lovely landscapes.

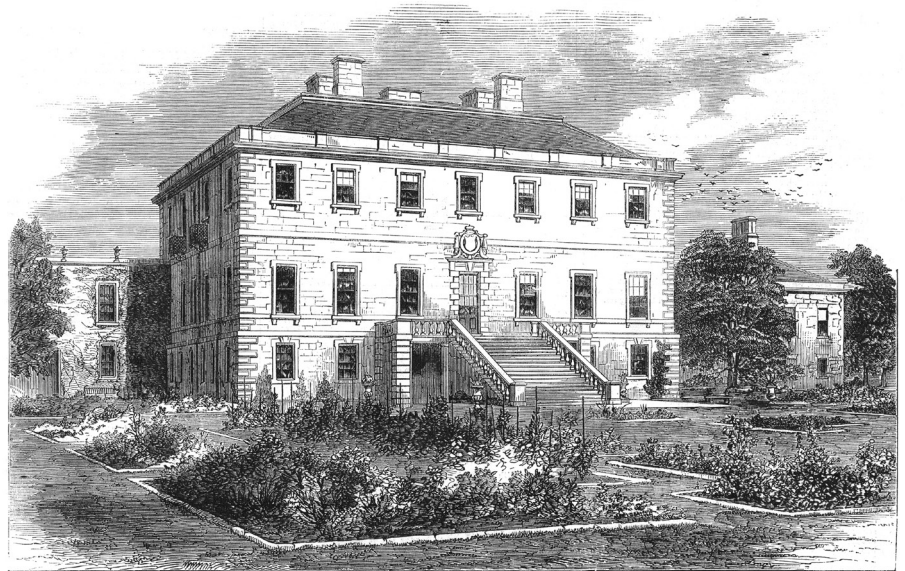
It needs to be said, and why not at the beginning: every journey, and all but a dozen of the miles travelled, passes through some of the most captivatingly beautiful landscapes in the British Isles. The variety of form, texture and mood is striking: high, heather-clad hills loom intermittently and there are glimpses of rugged coastline, but mostly you see hills and valleys green with pasture and broad-leaved trees, undulating sweeps of arable land, fields of sheep and cattle.

This is the uplifting backdrop to the sixteen castles and country houses visited on this tour, from Duff House on the Moray Firth to Paxton House a couple of miles from the border with England. Among them are some of the greatest in the British Isles, and again, diversity is a striking feature: a couple of medieval castles, an amazing Renaissance royal palace, several distinctive baronial fortified dwellings, a splendid set of Baroque and Palladian mansions, a sprinkling of Victorian extensions and overlay and an Edwardian pastiche.

Much of the architecture is distinctively Scottish, with one factor in particular differentiating it from elsewhere in Britain – the long alliance with France. On the other hand, there is a reason why some of the classical houses look like counterparts south of the border: the Adam family who so dominated architecture in England in the second half of the eighteenth century were Scottish. The buildings by William, father of James and John, will come as a revelation.

Most have fine rooms and are filled with ancestral collections of various sorts, especially of paintings and furniture, of which there are superb examples.

The tour has been carefully planned so that it does not tire or overload, and at most sites



Aberdeen, Haddo House, engraving from 'The Illustrated London News', 1857

there is time to relax, view on your own and explore the gardens and woodland walks.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Aberdeen.** Arrive in Aberdeen independently (see 'Practicalities' for further details). The tour begins with a talk followed by dinner at the Marcliffe Hotel on the outskirts of Aberdeen. First of three nights here.

**Day 2: Dunnottar, Craigievar.** The first excursion unashamedly includes two of the most picturesque and evocative sites in Scotland. Surrounded on three sides by the North Sea, the cliff-top ruins of Dunnottar Castle (chapel 1276, keep 1392) were witness to several key episodes in Scottish history. Craigievar Castle, begun around 1576 and virtually untouched since 1626, is among the best preserved and loveliest of the Scottish tower houses which are crowned with 'baronial' turrets and bartisans.

**Day 3: Haddo, Duff.** Home of Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen, Haddo is a Palladian composition of the 1720s with a pedimented principal block, quadrants and service wings – our first encounter with architect William Adam. The house was enriched in the 1880s and filled with fascinating items. Duff House is a monumental structure, again by William Adam but more Baroque than Palladian, with interiors much as they were in the 18th century.

The paintings are glorious: this is an outstation of the National Galleries of Scotland.

**Day 4: Dun, Glamis.** Another William Adam design, modest in size but large in ambition, the House of Dun has exceptional plasterwork inside. The rural setting is captivating, the gardens and woodland walks delightful. Home of the Earls of Strathmore since 1372, Glamis Castle is known from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and as the Queen Mother's childhood home. A soaring, formidable castle principally of the 16th and 17th centuries, further 'baronialised' in the 19th, it contains many treasures. First of two nights in Perth.

**Day 5: Doune, Stirling.** Built by the Duke of Albany, king in all but name 1388–1420, Doune Castle was luxurious as well as militarily formidable. Stirling Castle was one of the most important sites in Scottish history, a highly defensible royal palace and garrison dramatically situated on a volcanic outcrop. The 1503 Great Hall and the extraordinary Renaissance palace of James V are of the highest architectural interest. The latter was built and decorated 1538–42 and recently thoroughly and colourfully restored.

**Day 6: Scone, Hopetoun.** Site of medieval royal enthronements, the palace and abbey at Scone was largely destroyed during the Reformation. The present 1803 Gothic Revival house was rebuilt by William Atkinson, and is filled with

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continued

treasures. A magnificent pile sitting in majestic grounds overlooking the Firth of Forth, Hopetoun was built 1699–1701 to designs by William Bruce, extended by William Adam and completed by his sons John and Robert. Artworks and furnishings are superb. First of four nights near Kelso.

**Day 7: Manderston.** Free morning at Schloss Roxburghe where hotel facilities include swimming pool, spa, golf course and 300 acres. Manderston was one of the last grand country house in Britain. In 1903–5, new money and an unlimited budget replaced an 18th-century mansion with another in an 18th-century style. Extraordinary craftsmanship was lavished on decoration including silver stairway railings.

**Day 8: Abbotsford, Mellerstain.** Abbotsford was the home of Sir Walter Scott. Beginning in 1817, with architect William Atkinson he co-created an early and influential Picturesque building characterised by asymmetry and medievalisms. Lovely gardens and prospects of the Tweed. Free time for lunch in the charming town of Melrose. Mellerstain is one of Robert Adam's supreme country-house creations, the finest exemplar of his castle style and a showcase for some of his most splendid rooms. Good gardens and pictures.

**Day 9: Floors, Traquair.** Home to the Duke of Roxburghe, Floors Castle is the largest inhabited house in Scotland. The 1720s core (William Adam) was enlarged a century later (William Playfair) and provided with a battalion of tourelles and ogival caps. Grand rooms, superb works of art, wonderful gardens. Traquair is probably Scotland's oldest continuously inhabited home and has scarcely changed for three centuries. Bewitchingly beautiful façade, eccentric and evocative rooms and collections, informal gardens and woodland walks – a magical place.

**Day 10: Paxton.** One of the finest Palladian houses in Britain, Paxton was begun in 1758 by John and James Adam and the interiors were provided by cabinetmakers Thomas Chippendale, father and son. Regency additions include the Library and grand Picture Gallery, and the original art collection has been augmented by paintings from Scotland's national collection. The tour finishes by 2.00pm at Berwick-on-Tweed railway station, from where there are regular services to Edinburgh and London.

*Note on the itinerary: repairs, restoration, and other exigencies may cause the loss of one or two of the places listed. We would endeavour to find substitutes.*

## Lecturer

**Alastair Learmont.** A social and cultural historian, Alastair is currently researching the legacies of slavery within Scottish institutions and editing the letter books of two Border Scots who made their fortunes as doctors and sugar planters in late 18th century Jamaica. Alastair is an experienced lecturer who has devised and presented numerous courses reflecting the diversity of Scotland's rich cultural heritage. Since 2017 he has been a Teaching Fellow at the Centre for Open Learning at the University of Edinburgh. For the National Galleries of Scotland he has developed *Inside Out*, a series of talks and walks seeking to contextualise artwork within an immediate geographical setting. Alastair is a Classics graduate and former practising member of the Scottish Bar.

## Practicalities

**Prices, per person. Two sharing:** £4,150.  
**Single occupancy:** £5,160.

**Included:** travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 7 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and donations for gardens and houses; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Transport to Aberdeen and from Berwick is not included in the price of the tour. Both are easily reached by flights and trains from all parts of Britain.

**Hotels.** All three hotels provide excellent service with friendly, capable staff, and all have good restaurants. **Aberdeen (3 nights): The Marcliffe ([marcliffe.com](http://marcliffe.com)).** 5-star, a Victorian house located in salubrious suburbs extended with purpose-built bedrooms and function rooms. **Perth (2 nights): Parklands ([theparklandshotel.com](http://theparklandshotel.com)).** 4-star boutique hotel, the core being a house of 1840, central but quiet location overlooking South Inch Park, winner in 2019 and 2022 of Prestige Hotel Award for Best City Hotel. **Near Kelso (4 nights): Schloss Roxburghe ([schlosshotel-roxburghe.com](http://schlosshotel-roxburghe.com)).** at its core a late Victorian country mansion, re-opened 2023 after thorough refurbishment and the addition of swimming pool and spa, rural location with 300 acres (200 for the golf course).

**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. Some days involve a lot of driving – average distance by coach per day: 72 miles.

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

**Combine this tour with:** Classical Greece, 6–15 September 2025; Castles of Wales, 8–12 September 2025.