



At Home at Weston Park

Country Houses of Shropshire

17–22 June 2026 (MM 992)

£4,080 • 6 days

Speaker: Gareth Williams

Stay exclusively at Weston Park, a 17th-century house set in 'Capability' Brown parkland on the border of Shropshire and Staffordshire.

Nationally significant houses, most still in family ownership, with fine collections of paintings, furniture, silver and porcelain.

Led by Weston Park's curator, the country house expert, Gareth Williams.

Special arrangements, private access and out-of-hours visits.

Shropshire is one of the least-known counties in England and yet it is one of the largest and most beautiful, with delightfully varied topography. The minerals beneath its surface gave birth to the Industrial Revolution, although it remains essentially rural and home to some outstanding but little-known country houses, many of which are still in private family ownership.

A delightful aspect of this tour is that our home throughout is Weston Park, the historic former residence of the earls of Bradford. The group has exclusive access to this great country house, now vested in an independent charitable trust. With its internationally important collections of fine and decorative art, you are free to wander through its rooms and grounds at leisure. Weston Park's curator, Gareth Williams, author of the definitive book on the county's houses, is our host and tour leader.

From this exceptional base, we explore the architectural highlights of the region, considering their origins, evolution and ongoing conservation. Earliest is the 13th-century fortified manor house Stokesay Castle. Pitchford Hall is one of the country's finest timber framed houses, while its 17th-century tree house is a rare survival. Acton Scott Hall dates from 1580, while the influence of classical architecture becomes apparent at Acton Round and in the large-scale building of Attingham. As the influence of the Picturesque movement grew, so the planning of houses became influenced by their landscape settings. This is seen with dashing originality at Longner Hall, at Millichope Park, and in the magnificent mansions of Willey Park and Oakly Park.



Weston Park

Few of these houses are normally accessible to the public, while the visit to the National Trust's Attingham is a private one.

Itinerary

Day 1: Stafford, Weston Park. The coach leaves Stafford Railway Station at 1.45pm. Weston Park, in its current form, dates from 1671, with 18th-century alterations and further works throughout the 19th century. Its beautifully decorated interiors contain a collection of 30,000 indigenous items, ranging from portraits by van Dyck, Gainsborough and Reynolds to silver, porcelain and furniture by Morel & Hughes, Gillow and Chippendale. Welcome tea, and an orientational tour.

Day 2: Stokesay Castle, The Lodge, Acton Scott Hall. Built for wool merchant Laurence de Ludlow in the late 13th century, Stokesay Castle marks the turning point from fortified castle to country house. The Lodge is the late 18th-century home of the Salwey family – a classical house that enjoys a Picturesque setting which is said to have been the inspiration of Milton's *Comus*. Acton Scott Hall was one of the earliest of double-plan houses – Elizabethan and yet with 19th-century alterations for Mrs Stackhouse Acton, its antiquarian author owner, whose descendants still live here.

Day 3: Attingham Park, Longner Hall, Pitchford Hall. The great neoclassical Attingham Park was designed by George Steuart for the 1st Lord Berwick. John Nash added the picture gallery – the very first to be lit with cast iron framed top-lighting – while the park follows designs illustrated by Humphry Repton in his 1797 Red Book. Longner Hall also employed Nash and Repton, yet here the result is a startling Tudor Gothic house of compact plan. Timber framed Pitchford Hall dates from the 15th century. It was well restored in the late 19th century and welcomed the young Princess (later Queen) Victoria.

Day 4: Weston Park, Acton Round. This morning there is a guided tour of the gardens at Weston Park, which represent the combined efforts of 'Capability' Brown, John Webb, William Brodrick Thomas, and, more recently, rosarian Michael Marriot who recreated the rose garden with stock from nearby David Austin Roses. Acton Round Hall is a handsome baroque house, attributed to the Smith family. Return to Weston Park for some free time.

Day 5: Millichope Park, Ludlow, Oakly Park. Millichope stands in the Corvedale and was designed by the Shrewsbury architect Edward Haycock in collaboration with its owner, the Rev. Robert Norgrave Pemberton. The house was restored by the present owners. Stop

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continued

in Ludlow, one of the most architecturally satisfying of all English market towns, before a visit to Oakly Park. Purchased by Robert Clive 'of India' in 1771, the house was rebuilt by his grandson with the architect C.R.Cockerell. It now presents a remarkable series of archaeologically-influenced interiors.

Day 6: Willey Park, Hatton Grange. Willey Park is the masterpiece of its architect, Lewis Wyatt, and has strong architectural echoes of Carlton House, the lost London residence of George IV as Prince of Wales. Willey was built on the proceeds of the Industrial Revolution and yet its vast landscape park speaks only of arcadian delights. Hatton Grange was also a house with links to the distant industrial interests of the Slaney family and its architect, Thomas Farnolls Pritchard is also known for his hand in the design of Abraham Darby III's cast Iron Bridge. The house is well documented from designs in Pritchard's drawing book (American Institute of Architects). The tour ends at Stafford Railway Station at c. 4.00pm.

Lecturer

Gareth Williams. Curator and Head of Learning at Weston Park, Shropshire. Gareth is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a leading authority on the English country house as well as on fine and decorative art. He has worked for Sotheby's and the National Trust and sits on the Heart of England regional committee of Historic Houses as well as being a Deputy Lieutenant of Shropshire. His books include *The Country Houses of Shropshire* (Boydell Press, 2021), and *Weston Park: The House, The Families and The Influence* (Boydell Press, 2022). He has also contributed to the *Georgian Group Journal* and *Apollo*, among other publications.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £4,080. **Single occupancy:** £4,280.

Included: travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and donations for houses; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Weston Park, Weston-under-Lizard (weston-park.com): set in 1,000 acres of 'Capability' Brown parkland. A country house where one may stay, rather than a hotel, offering the experience of being a guest while the family is away. *Single occupancy 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 who has difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Coaches can rarely park near the houses, many of the parks and gardens are extensive and the houses visited don't have lifts. Average distance by coach per day: c. 60 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 24 participants.