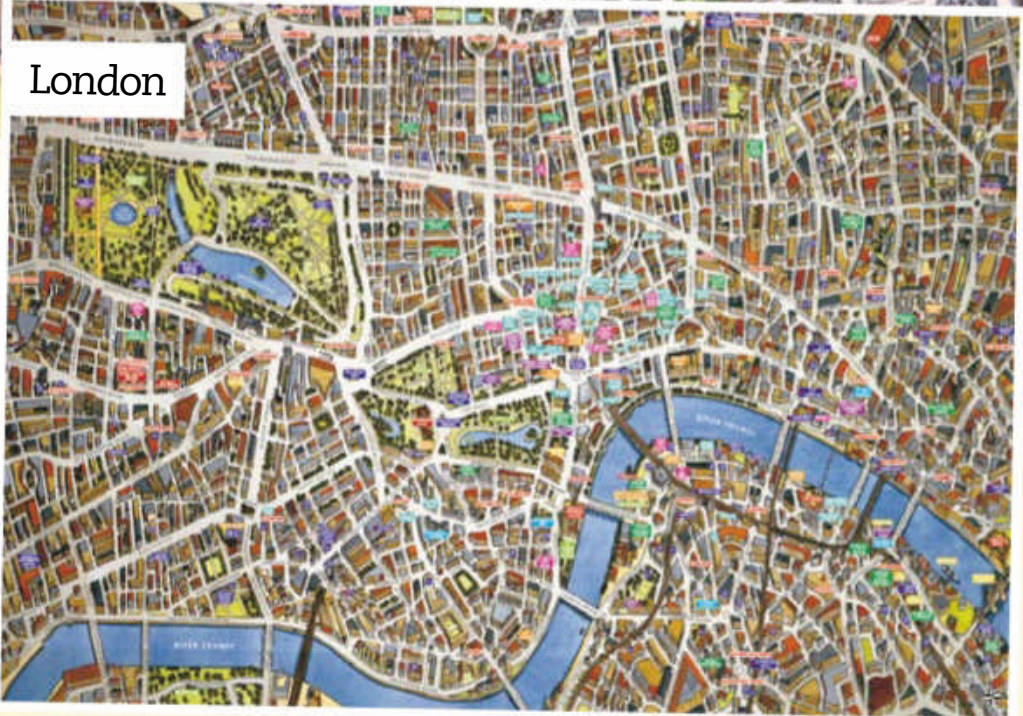
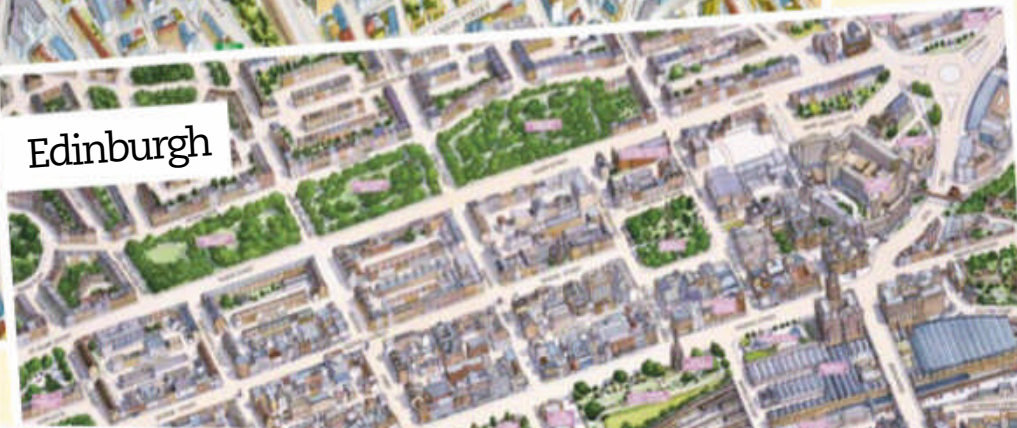


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EDITOR'S LETTER



As the nights draw in and we approach the end of this turbulent year, *BRITAIN* brings good cheer to warm your autumn and winter. We've fallen for the charms of North Norfolk, now that the summer crowds have left for the year (*Historic Norfolk*, p14); and we've found the cosiest countryside inns to stay in – fireside cheer guaranteed (*Winter warmers*, p48).

For a further dash of winter warmth, turn to *A royal Christmas* (p30), a nostalgic look at how monarchs through the ages celebrated the festive season.

As always, we have some fascinating life stories to absorb you: the (almost) explosive tale of Guy Fawkes (*Gunpowder, Treason & Plot*, p39) and the heart-stirring story of one of our best-loved authors (*The real Beatrix Potter*, p56).

Finally, we're proud to have been nominated as Best Consumer Travel Magazine in the British Travel Awards 2020! If *BRITAIN* is your favourite travel read, please vote for us and help us win the title – see page six to find out how.

Enjoy the issue!

Natasha

Natasha Foges,
Editor



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a historic cobbled street
in Norwich, Norfolk
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BRITAIN

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YOUR LETTERS

Write to us with your thoughts on the magazine and memories of Britain

STAR LETTER ADVENTURES IN YORKSHIRE

During this time of social isolation, it is just a pleasure to go for a walk. Today when I went into town and opened my post office box there was the latest edition of *BRITAIN* and my day was made! I could hardly wait to get home to read about North Yorkshire [Vol 88 Issue 4]. Two summers ago a friend and I did a driving tour of the moors to the shore and this article brought back so many memories.

We visited Castle Howard, rented a little cottage up on the moors, rode the steam

train from Goathland to Whitby and back and visited Robin Hood's Bay and traveled up the cliff lift at Saltburn-by-the-sea, as well as wandered the coastline at Ravenscar! We had so many adventures encountering sheep up on the moors as well as very atmospheric weather.

Thank you for bringing back those memories. I try to space out the reading of your wonderful magazine but it's hard to put down for sure.

Martha Sadler, Ontario, Canada



Our star letter wins the Joyously Busy Great British Adventure Map, which is peppered with quirky trivia (£14.99).
marvellousmaps.com



ON THE DICKENS TRAIL

I thoroughly enjoyed your article *A tale of one city* [Vol 88 Issue 3]. My partner and I were advised by a friend to visit Middle Temple in London because of its history and the link to Charles Dickens. When I read your article I was hooked. We had no idea as to the number of places we could visit in one city which related to Dickens. Thank you for giving us so many suggestions. We will need to plan a longer visit so we can take it all in from 48 Doughty Street, Holborn to the Trafalgar Tavern, Greenwich. We are now really looking forward to planning our Dickens tour.
Jeanette Thompson, Devon, UK

ROOTS IN THE ROSELAND

I was very pleased to read the article on the Roseland Peninsula in Cornwall [Vol 88 Issue 4]. It is a beautiful place and has special meaning to me. Going back in time from 1829 to almost 400 years ago my entire maternal line was born, lived and died in Roseland, and all were baptized at one of the two parish churches.

The last time I was at St Just church they were holding a wedding and the doors on the water side had been flung open to get the sea breeze, with the added attraction of being able to watch the little rowboats bobbing at anchor in the cove only feet from the graveyard. Very pretty. *Kirk P Lovenbury, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA*

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The BULLETIN

Spotlight on Turner, a spirited new film
and Christmas at Hever Castle

EXHIBITION

Turner's times

JMW Turner might be best known for his portrayal of nature's unpredictable, otherworldly power, as depicted in *The Shipwreck* and *Fishermen at Sea*, but he also had his feet planted firmly on earth, in a world that was changing at a frightening rate. Living and working at the peak of the Industrial Revolution, Turner faced up to the turbulence of his times when some of his

contemporaries glossed over it. A new exhibition at Tate Britain, *Turner's Modern World* (28 October to 7 March 2021), will explore Turner's fascination with politics, conflicts and new technology, as he turned his artistic eye to local elections, battlefields, steamboats and railways.

www.tate.org.uk



ART

Palace paintings

Spectacular works by artists such as Titian, Rembrandt, Vermeer, van Dyck and Canaletto can be enjoyed close up at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace in a new exhibition, *Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace* (4 December to January 2022). The 65 paintings included usually hang in the palace's Picture Gallery but have been removed as part of a ten-year project to overhaul essential services, including lead pipes and aging electrical wiring. A display charting the evolution of the Picture Gallery after the acquisition of Buckingham House by George III and Queen Charlotte in 1762 has been developed alongside the exhibition. www.rct.uk



FILM

Surrey scenes

A hilarious new adaptation of a classic Noël Coward play, *Blithe Spirit*, is set to be released on 26 December, featuring stunning locations in Surrey and West London. A star-studded cast including Dame Judi Dench brings to life this love story in quintessentially British surrounds, from Richmond Theatre to Norbury Park. The summoning of the eponymous spirit is made all the more atmospheric by its setting in Joldwynds house, a sparkling white Art Deco showpiece dreamt up by acclaimed designer Oliver Hill in the 1930s. www.studiocanal.co.uk



SHOPPING

Scented indulgence

As the elements turn harsher and staying cosy indoors becomes the norm, treat yourself to a bottle of Olverum Bath Oil (£36.50/125ml), the soothing answer to your aching muscles. Combining ten pure essential oils, this time-honoured formulation has remained largely unchanged for almost 90 years and is beloved by the Royal Family. Or, you could invest in one of the new collection of candles from British heritage-inspired perfumery company, Jo Malone. Entitled *Tales of Home*, the six ceramic-encased scents capture moments of life within a London townhouse; our pick is 'Glowing Embers' (£90/300g). www.olverum.com; www.jomalone.co.uk



ARCHAEOLOGY

Hidden treasure

A reroofing project at Oxburgh Hall, a moated manor in Norfolk, has led to some unexpected discoveries in the property's attic rooms. The star find among the centuries-old debris beneath the floorboards was a fragment of a 15th-century illuminated manuscript, possibly part of the Latin Vulgate Psalm 39 as printed in a Book of Hours – a prayer book for private devotion. Elsewhere 200 pieces of high-quality Elizabethan textiles shed light on the social status of the house's former inhabitants; while more recent artefacts include cigarette packets and an empty box of Terry's chocolates dating back to the Second World War. www.nationaltrust.org.uk



IMAGES: JOHANNES VERMEER, 'A LADY AT THE VIRGINALS WITH A GENTLEMAN' (THE MUSIC LESSON); EARLY 1660S © ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II/NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JOHN HAMMOND/HEVER CASTLE & GARDENS



HERITAGE

Christmas at the castle

While your Christmas celebrations might be slightly different this year, the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, Hever Castle, can always be relied upon to capture the spirit of a British Christmas. Immerse yourself in its magic with a visit between 21 November and 24 December when the castle will be beautifully decorated and welcoming visitors with roaring log fires and twinkling

Christmas trees. Between 27 December and 3 January wrap up warm and enjoy a walk around its stunning gardens and grounds, where the towering redwood trees will glow warm against the cool winter skies and any seasonal stress is sure to melt away. Check the website for up-to-date opening times before travelling.
www.hevercastle.co.uk



You can replace the Parmesan with good quality Cheddar or be extra indulgent and use both

RECIPE

Winter Vegetable Gratin

For the Love of the Land compiled by Jenny Jefferies celebrates British farming through a selection of recipes provided by farming families across the nation, using ingredients grown or reared on their land. This dish is one such favourite, straight from the dining table of South Farm in Cambridgeshire (Meze Publishing, £20; www.mezepublishing.co.uk).

Ingredients: FOR A LOAF TIN (900G/2 LB)

500g potatoes, sliced wafer thin

Pinch of salt

1 large parsnip, sliced wafer thin

1 tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped

1 large beetroot, sliced wafer thin

275ml double cream

1 large sweet potato, sliced wafer thin

150ml full-fat milk

3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced

60g Parmesan, grated

Method:

Preheat the oven to 180°C and butter a shallow ovenproof dish. Layer some of the potatoes, then parsnip, beetroot and sweet potato in the dish. At the halfway point, scatter over two of the sliced garlic cloves, a little salt and half the rosemary.

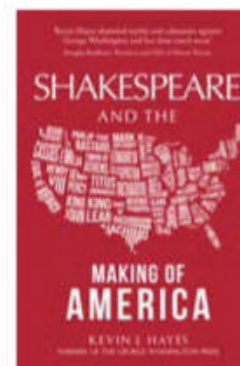
Keep making layers until you have used all the vegetables.

Pour the cream and milk into a saucepan then add the rest of the rosemary and garlic, half the Parmesan and a little seasoning. Gently heat for three minutes.

Pour the cream mixture over the layered vegetables. Sprinkle over the remaining Parmesan, cover the whole dish with foil and bake for 40 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for a further 15 minutes until golden and bubbly.

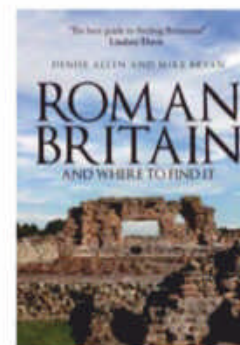
READING CORNER

Take inspiration for your British adventures from these great reads



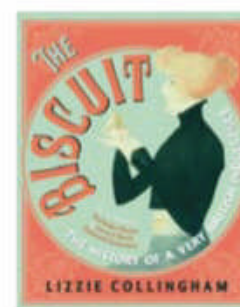
Shakespeare and the Making of America

by Kevin Hayes (£20, Amberley Books). From London's Drury Lane Theatre to South Carolina, this is how Shakespeare was applied in a new home across the Atlantic.



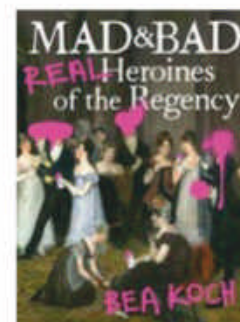
Roman Britain and Where to Find it

by Denise Allen and Mike Bryan (£20, Amberley Books). The history of Britain's best Roman villas, forts, walls and bathhouses, and some hidden gems you might walk right past.



The Biscuit: The History of a Very British Indulgence

by Lizzie Collingham (£18.99, Penguin Random House). The humble biscuit's transformation from a staple for sailors to the nation's comfort food.



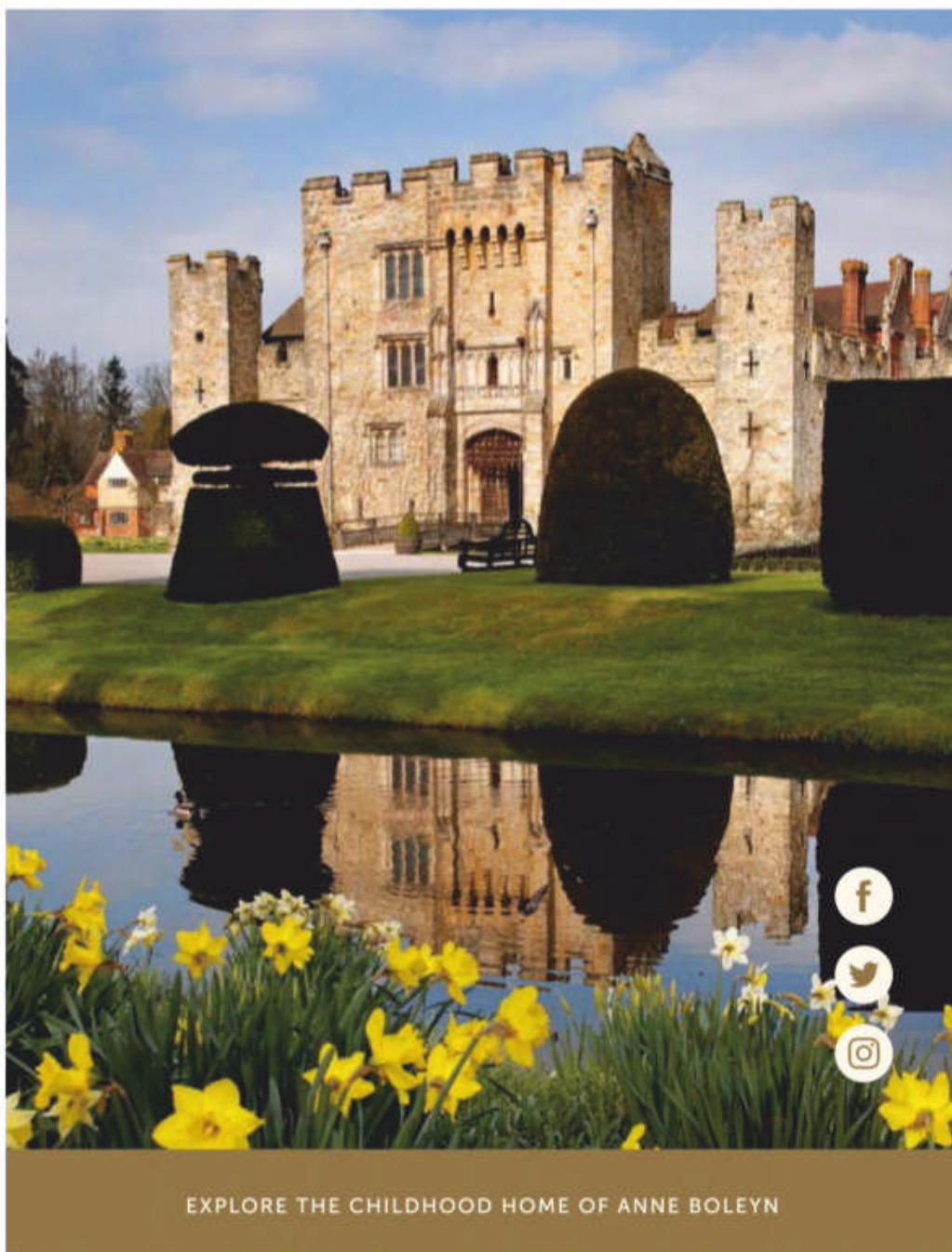
Mad and Bad: Real Heroines of the Regency

by Bea Koch (£13.99, Hachette). The independent-minded, real women of the Regency behind the fictionalised myth.



Wartime Christmas

by Anthony Richards (£12.99, Imperial War Museum). An illustrated recollection of the festive period during wartime, from the museum's archives.



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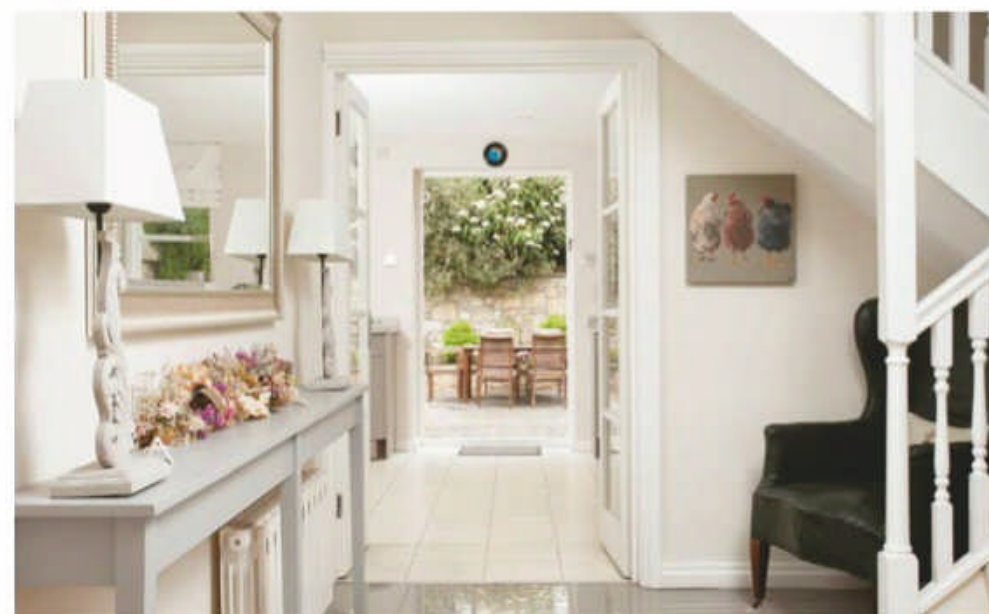
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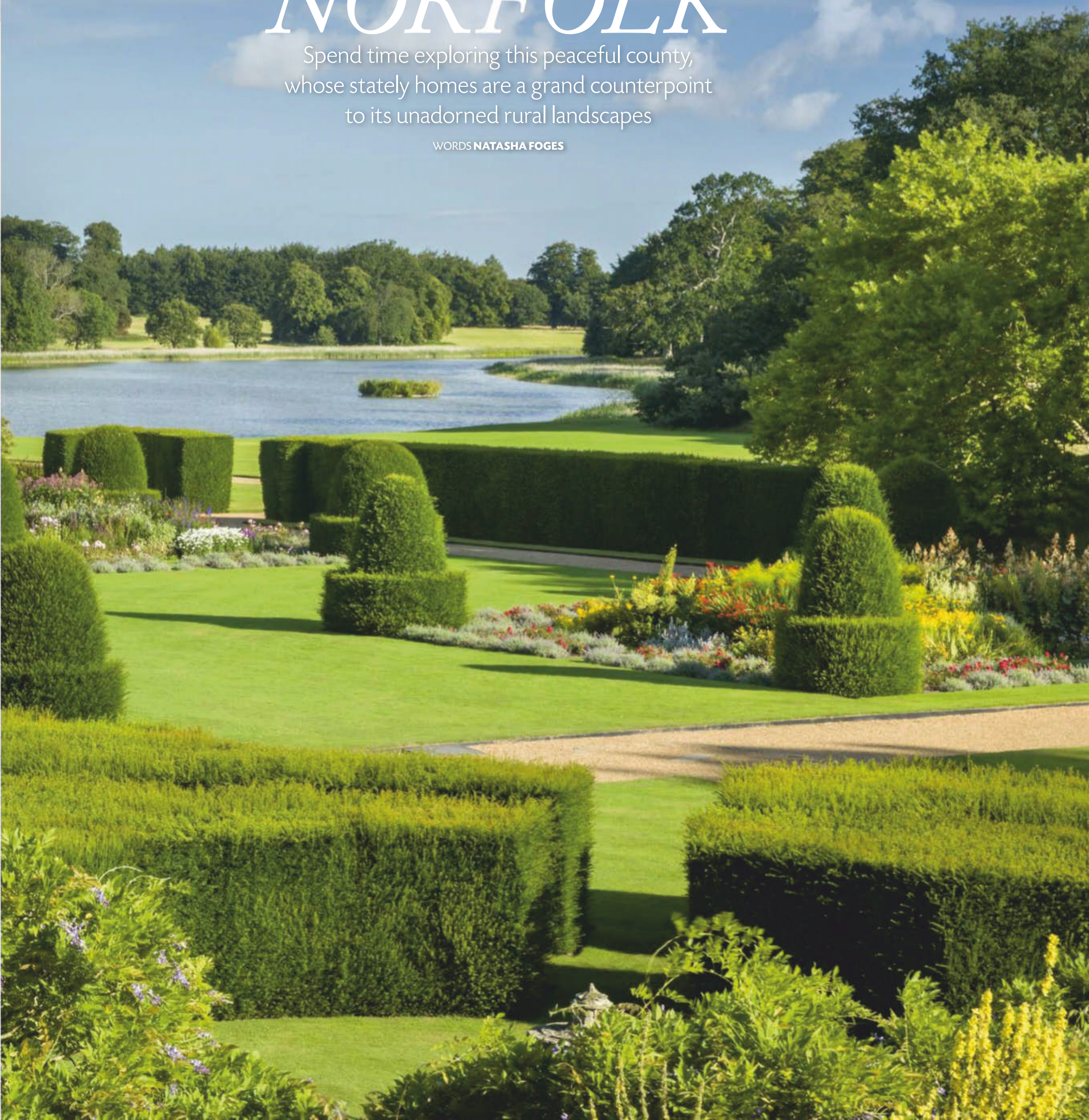


Jacobean Blickling Hall,
its pristine parterre
and the wider estate

HISTORIC NORFOLK

Spend time exploring this peaceful county,
whose stately homes are a grand counterpoint
to its unadorned rural landscapes

WORDS **NATASHA FOGES**



Travelling along the flat Fens under broad, open skies to Britain's easternmost county, you feel as though you're approaching the ends of the Earth. On the way to nowhere, North Norfolk is a place of windmills and watery vistas, of cosy pubs and flint-stone villages.

This sleepy region is less populated now than it was in the Middle Ages, when the capital Norwich was England's second largest city, a hub for the lucrative wool trade. The peaceful landscape is dotted with medieval church spires (Norfolk has the highest concentration anywhere in the world), remnants of the county's distant heyday.

These days, North Norfolk is famous for its beaches. The coastline, to which holidaymakers flock in summer, is head-turningly picturesque – which might explain why a wealth of historic attractions, tucked away inland, can get overlooked. Wait till the first brisk autumn breeze sends the beach crowds packing, and embark on a tour of the area's historic houses, each seemingly grander than the last.

This far-flung rural landscape holds not just an abundance of stately homes but four so-called 'power houses': in the 18th century, Norfolk was home to some of the country's most politically powerful men, who carved out vast estates as a reflection of their wealth and influence.

Holkham Hall, seat of the Earls of Leicester, is the best known of the quartet. This serene Palladian-style house a mere pebble's throw from the coast was built in the mid 18th century by Thomas Coke, the first Earl, who was Postmaster General of England. He chose William Kent, the leading architect and designer of the day, to create the house's grand interiors.

Star of the show is the triple-height Marble Hall, with a soaring plaster dome and alabaster walls (not marble after all – but the effect is just as sumptuous). A sweeping staircase leads to a remarkable art collection, with works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Gainsborough.

The hall is at the heart of a 25,000-acre estate, ▶



This image:
Holkham Hall,
seat of the
Earls of Leicester
Below: Burnham
Market, a typical
brick and flint-stone
village near Holkham



PHOTOS: © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/ANDREW BUTLER/SIMON WHALEY LANDSCAPES/ALAMY
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Wolterton Hall's
lovingly restored
Georgian interiors



incorporating a deer park, lake and walled garden; you can hire a bike to explore its hidden corners. Pine-backed Holkham beach is the most beautiful along this coast of famed beaches, and you don't need sunshine to appreciate its charms. Indeed, on a wintry day with the fog atmospherically rolling in and the eerie calls of seagulls passing overhead, it's spine-tingling.

Some 15 miles inland is another Palladian stunner, Houghton Hall, built in the 1720s for Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first Prime Minister. With a honeyed ochre facade and lavish interiors by William Kent, it was a fittingly grand abode (even though Walpole only visited twice a year). Alongside the tricky business of running the country, Walpole was an avid collector, amassing one of Britain's finest collections of European art, to which the ornate state rooms were a striking backdrop.

So extravagant were his tastes that when he died in 1745 Walpole was £40,000 in debt. His son, Robert, died a few short years later, and his grandson George inherited the house and its debts. George was forced to sell most of the house's prized paintings – 250 of them went to Catherine the Great of Russia for display in her Hermitage, more or less clearing the debt.

The Hall is now inhabited by Walpole's descendant, the Marquess of Cholmondeley and his family, who have restored the house and furthered its artistic legacy with installations by contemporary artists in the grounds.

While Sir Robert's builders were hard at work on Houghton, his brother Horatio was building another splendid Palladian-style house down the road, the little-known Wolterton Hall, using Houghton's architect, Thomas Ripley. A well-connected member of parliament himself, Horatio needed an impressive home in which to entertain; his godson Admiral Lord Nelson was a frequent visitor. The house is open for occasional tours and, its Georgian interiors having been meticulously restored, can now be rented as a holiday home.

"In all England there are few more beautiful houses



Top to bottom:
Cley Windmill;
the North Norfolk
Railway; Raynham
Hall's design was
influenced by
Italian architecture



PHOTOS: © LEIGH CAUDWELL



Clockwise from this image:
The Great Hall at Blickling;
the Dining Room at
Felbrigg Hall; beach huts at
Wells-next-the-Sea

Reliefs of Anne and her daughter,
Queen Elizabeth I, can be seen
on the staircase of the Great Hall



than Raynham,” opined the historian John Julius Norwich of the house that completes the quartet of ‘power houses’. Building started on Raynham Hall in 1619, to a design that was incredibly modern for the time: it was the first house in England to be heavily influenced by Italian architecture.

A century later the second Viscount Townshend, a key political figure at the court of Queen Anne and King George I – and brother-in-law to Sir Robert Walpole, yet another connection that binds these houses – engaged William Kent to work his magic on the interiors. Still inhabited by the Townshend family (and, allegedly, by the ‘Brown Lady’, the ghost of the second Viscount’s wife Dorothy Walpole), the house is open for occasional tours and music recitals.

The power and prestige of these houses still echoes through the centuries, and after so much richness, you might be in need of a palate-cleanser; a trip to the seaside should do the trick. The coast east of Holkham is a delight, from the colourful beach huts of Wells-next-the-Sea, backed by fragrant Scots pines, and onwards via sweeping expanses of salt marsh – the winter home of millions of migrant birds – to quaint Blakeney, with its grey seal colony; and then to Cley with its windmill and shops selling local pottery and smoked fish.

Further along the coast road, stop to lunch on the local speciality, dressed crab, at Cookie’s Crab Shop – in operation for over a half a century – before taking a nostalgic ride on the North Norfolk Railway. Also known as the Poppy Line, its enchanting steam trains puff and hiss their way through five miles of scenic countryside between the smart Georgian town of Holt and the Victorian seaside resort of Sheringham.

You can resume your tour with two red-brick Jacobean mansions nearby, which stand in contrast to the cool classicism of the ‘power houses’ further west.

Magnificent Blickling Hall, built in 1616, stands on the site of the home of the Boleyn family, where it is believed that Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII’s unfortunate second wife, was born. There’s no documentation to back up the claim, but legend has it that her ghost (headless, of course) makes an appearance every year on 19 May, the date of her execution.

Reliefs of Anne and her daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, can be seen on the staircase of the Great Hall. Don’t miss the Long Gallery, which has a staggering 123 feet of books on each side – the most prestigious collection held by the National Trust, including the first complete Bible to be printed in English and first editions of Jane Austen’s works. The romantic grounds are another highlight, dotted with yew topiary, a Doric temple and a walled garden.

Blickling so impressed a local family that they snapped up its designer Robert Lyminge to work on their own stately pile, Felbrigg Hall, just down the road; it was completed just four years later. Now looked after by the National Trust, it was home to the Windham family for 300 years.

The interiors are a wonderful mishmash of Jacobean, Georgian and Victorian styles, conjuring a curious blend of opulence and cosiness. The medieval Great Hall, for example, was turned into a Victorian sitting-room, whose windows still bear their 15th-century stained glass. The Chinese Bedroom, lined with hand-painted wallpaper, ▶

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*This image: The north front at Sandringham
Below right: The dovecote in the walled garden at Felbrigg Hall*

and the walled garden with brick dovecote are also not to be missed.

Anyone who does venture to Norfolk in the winter months will be in good company: from Christmas to February every year Her Majesty The Queen retires to her Norfolk home, Sandringham. The house was bought by Queen Victoria in 1862 for her son (later Edward VII), and has been home to four generations of sovereigns.

While grand, the eight rooms open to visitors are far from austere and have a cosy, unpretentious feel: squishy armchairs abound in the Saloon, where there's a jigsaw table (the Queen is reportedly fond of puzzles), and the house is dotted with family portraits. George V called it "dear old Sandringham", and it still feels like a much-loved family home.

Beyond the Christmas festivities (see page 30), Sandringham represents for the Queen a place of quiet refuge – a restorative pause before the year gathers pace. Spend time among Norfolk's tranquil landscapes of heath, wood, fen and coast, and you too will leave lighter and happier than when you arrived. 

THE PLANNER



GETTING THERE

Trains leave London Liverpool Street and King's Cross every hour, arriving in Norwich or King's Lynn in just under 2hr. From both towns there are local bus services. www.thetrainline.com



WHAT TO SEE AND DO

Holkham Hall is the grand seat of the Earls of Leicester, with lavish interiors and extensive grounds. www.holkham.co.uk
Houghton Hall, once residence of Sir Robert Walpole, has beautiful gardens dotted with contemporary sculpture. www.houghtonhall.com
The North Norfolk Railway travels a scenic route between Sheringham and Holt from April to October. www.nnrailway.co.uk
Blickling Hall is a magnificent Jacobean house surrounded by splendid gardens. www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Felbrigg Hall, home to the Windham family for 300 years, has a homely, intimate feel. www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Sandringham, the Queen's winter retreat, is partly open to the public from April to October. sandringhamestate.co.uk



WHERE TO STAY

The pretty Georgian town of Holt makes a good base. Book a room at Byfords, a luxury B&B in the heart of town. With exposed brickwork, wood beams and antique fireplaces, it has bags of character, and there's a restaurant downstairs. Alternatively, stay in the 18th-century Cley Windmill, whose gorgeous interiors are matched by the views; or at The Hoste in Burnham Market, a pretty brick and flint-stone village. www.byfords.org.uk; www.cleywindmill.co.uk; www.thehostearms.com



WHERE TO EAT

North Norfolk is renowned for its food, especially Cromer crabs, Brancaster oysters and Morston mussels. For a fine-dining treat, head to Michelin-starred Morston Hall near Blakeney. For a casual lunch, the charming Wiveton Farm Café, between Blakeney and Cley, serves simple food grown on the surrounding farmland. www.morstonhall.com; www.wivetonhall.co.uk



FURTHER INFORMATION

www.visitnorfolk.co.uk

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Portals to the Past

Scattered across London in stately prominence and secret corners,
the blue plaques scheme brings buildings to life

WORDS JESSICA TOOZE

On a quiet Chelsea street between the River Thames and the bustling King's Road, the odd passer-by pauses to ponder two small blue plaques set into the red-brick walls of numbers 30 and 34. Once home to the composer Philip Arnold Heseltine and wit and dramatist Oscar Wilde respectively, the circular signs serve as a reminder of these famous names and help us make the imaginative leap that connects us with the past.

Tite Street, as this particular street is called, was a fashionable location for those of an artistic disposition in the late 19th century, and its most famous resident, Wilde, moved into number 34 with his wife in 1884. The house's plaque, like others all over London, gives enthusiasts a tangible place to associate with the life and achievements of its most renowned occupant.

It is this that forms the main draw of the capital's blue plaques – they offer the opportunity to visualise familiar buildings as they would have been when some of the most influential, scandalous, creative or intelligent people in history called them home.

Since its inception in 1866, the blue plaques scheme has allowed London locals and visitors to discover where their favourite author, scientist, musician, politician or other well-known name lived or worked.

From grand residences that are open to the public to quirky and hard-to-find boltholes in unlikely locations, there are around 950 iconic blue plaques spread across London, with a few more in other cities around Britain.

Now thought to be the oldest of its kind in the world, the scheme has had several sponsors over the years; since 1986 English Heritage have been responsible for deciding who qualifies for a plaque and what it should look like.

Under the current rules, the person commemorated must have been dead for 20 years, have resided in London for a significant amount of time, and deserve national recognition or have made an important contribution to human welfare or happiness.

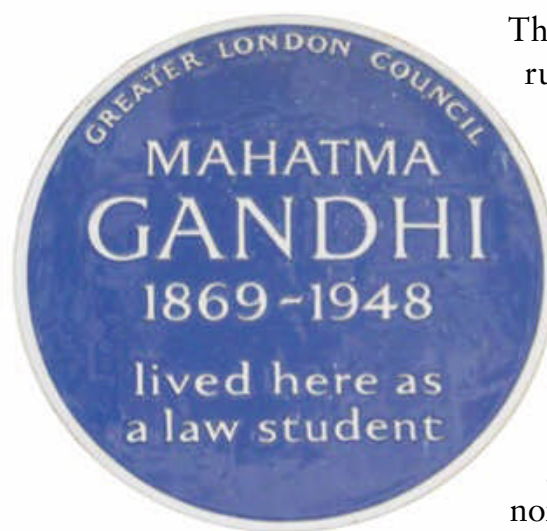
There are a few cases where the 100-year rule has been waived – Mahatma

Gandhi and Herbert Morrison were allowed plaques almost straight away – and others have had their applications refused at least once, including two notorious Sylvias, Pankhurst and Plath.

An August panel of fair-minded people decides on each plaque that goes up. Most new plaques are nominated by members of the public and the aim is to cover as many areas of human life as possible.

In 2018 English Heritage called on the public to nominate more women, as only 14 per cent of plaques celebrate female achievement. Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director and Secretary of the English Heritage Blue Plaques Panel, says: "Our efforts to address the gender imbalance within the London Blue Plaques scheme are starting to yield some strong results. There are now more women shortlisted than men."

2020 will see more plaques to women than have been unveiled in the last two decades, with six new plaques remembering secret agents Christine Granville and





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NOVELIST
died here

Left: Blue plaque to Mahatma Gandhi at 20 Baron's Court Road, Hammersmith
This image: Blue plaque to George Eliot at 4 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea



This image: Poet John Keats' former home is open to the public
Below: Blue plaque to Ivor Novello at 11 Aldwych, Westminster

Noor Inayat Khan, the artist Barbara Hepworth, the First World War leader and botanist Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, as well as the headquarters of two suffrage organisations.

London's oldest surviving blue plaque, erected in 1867, belongs to a Frenchman, Napoleon III, who lived just off St James' Square in the years before he became Emperor. There are also plenty of resident Americans who have been honoured with a plaque.

Indeed, the first batch that went up included Benjamin Franklin, who once owned a property on the corner of Cheapside and Friargate.

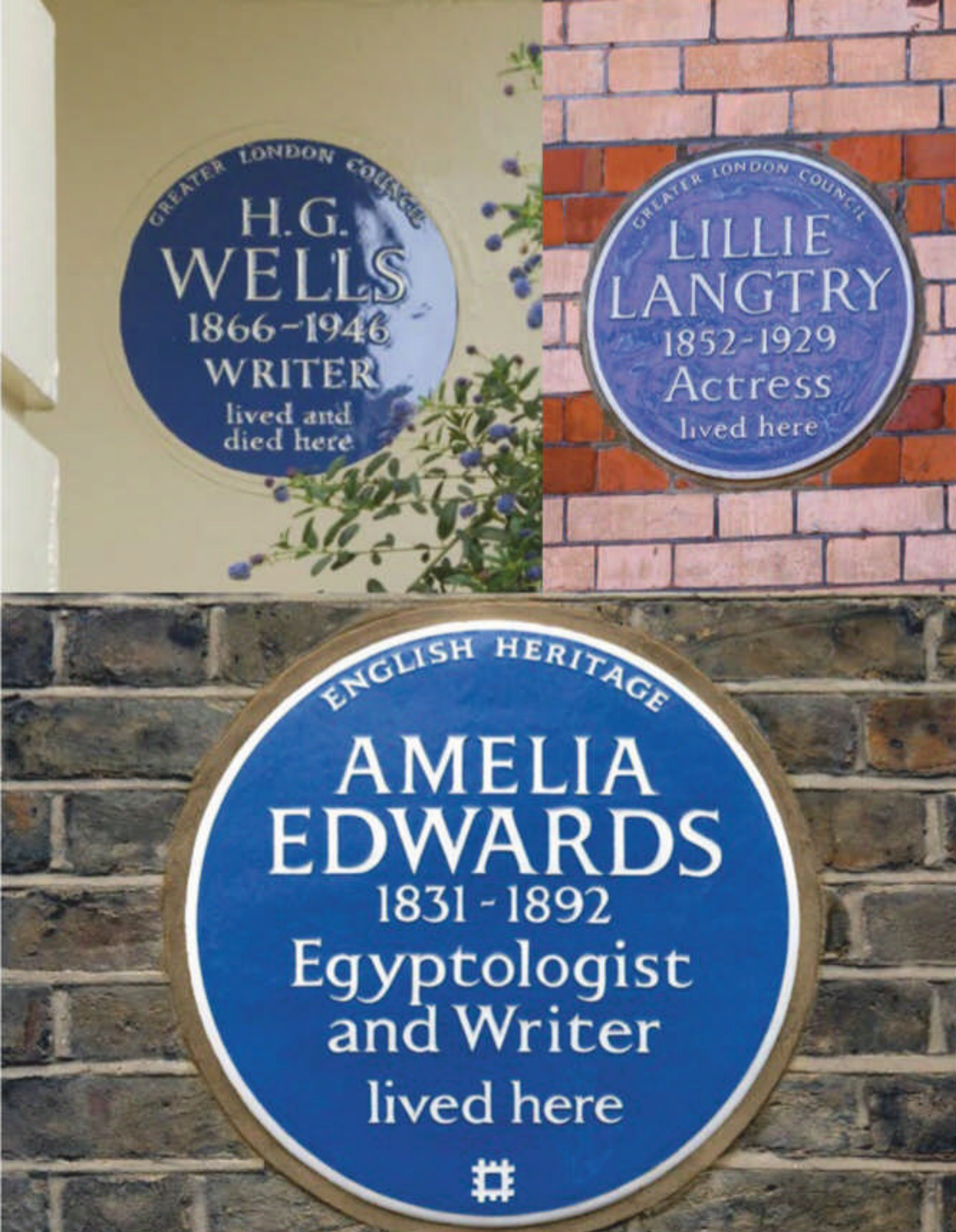
Then there are those famous faces who have moved around so much that they have multiple blue plaques. Dickens, Chamberlain, Rossetti and Gladstone all have more than one. On Essex Street in Covent Garden, the sheer

numbers of famous residents (including Charles Edward Stuart and Samuel Johnson) caused the committee to decide early on that one rectangular stone plaque would have to cover everyone.

The depth and diversity of London's past residents is quite remarkable; from scientists such as Michael Faraday (Larcom Street, Walworth) and Charles Darwin (University College, Camden) to novelists and playwrights including HG Wells (Hanover Terrace, Westminster) and JM Barrie (Bayswater Road, Westminster), some of the greatest names in history can boast a blue plaque among their many achievements.

Not every blue plaque bears an immediately recognisable name, however. "They are often the most interesting ones," says senior historian Howard Spencer. Amelia Edwards, for example – who has a plaque on her family home in Pentonville – is cited by Howard Spencer as someone many people may not have heard of but who is extremely deserving of recognition: ▶





Right: The Novello Theatre in Covent Garden
Left: Blue plaque to Sylvia Pankhurst at 120 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea
Other images: A few examples of the 950 iconic blue plaques that are dotted around London





“She helped to start the serious study of Egyptology at a time when most women struggled to even get an education,” he explains.

“And there are the Blackheath-based engineers William and William Heerlein Lindley – father and son – who were responsible for piping clean water to dozens of European cities, helping to make modern urban living possible.”


“These were fascinating figures to research,” says Spencer, “and they typify what, to me, makes the best kind of blue plaque: a strong connection to a particular area, a beautiful period building that survives much as they would have known it, and a historical figure who really helped to move the game on in whatever field of human endeavour they were working in.”

A select few of London’s blue plaque properties are open to the public, including John Keats’ and Sigmund Freud’s houses in Hampstead and the elegant Georgian villa, Ranger’s House, in Greenwich Park, which was once home to Philip, the 4th Earl of Chesterfield. Some of these properties now house museums, one of the most spectacular of which is the Leighton House Museum in the former home of the leading Victorian artist Frederic, Lord Leighton.

Located on the edge of Holland Park in Kensington, an unassuming facade hides a remarkable interior, extended and embellished by Leighton himself over

a period of 30 years to become what is now a private palace of art. From the stunning Arab Hall added in 1877, lined with hundreds of 16th and 17th-century tiles from Damascus and Syria and inlaid with Egyptian woodwork, to the grand studio on the first floor overlooking a large garden where Leighton painted most of his masterpieces, it is one of London’s hidden gems.

While the properties bearing blue plaques that are open to the public are few – and certainly Leighton House is unusual in its glorious interior – it’s the private houses that are often just as fascinating to those who walk by. The joy of them is to imagine these people in familiar places as you walk past – to see George Orwell creating his totalitarian world of Big Brother from an unassuming house in Camden for example, or Ivor Novello composing his show-stopping classics in the top-floor flat above the Strand Theatre (now the Novello Theatre), where he lived for 38 years.

Winston Churchill famously said: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us”. It’s easy to imagine him flashing his familiar victory sign from the window of the residence where his blue plaque now sits at 28 Hyde Park Gate. The innocuous plaques remind us that these historical heavyweights were there, and then leave us to form our own picture of their London lives. 





Clockwise from top left:
Ranger's House in
Greenwich Park; the
Narcissus Hall in the
Leighton House Museum;
a blue plaque to Winston
Churchill at 28 Hyde Park
Gate, Kensington

*This image: Osborne House's hallway decorated in a traditional Victorian style
Right: Queen Victoria spent her childhood Christmases at Kensington Palace
Far right: The Queen attends a Christmas service at St Mary Magdalene church, Sandringham*

A ROYAL CHRISTMAS

From the way kings and queens dressed their houses to their favourite pastimes, we explore the festive traditions dear to royals through the ages

WORDS FELICITY DAY



PHOTOS: © PHIL RIPLEY/ENGLISH HERITAGE TRUST/JAMES LINSELL-CLARK/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES/NEWSPHOTO/ALAMY

“I am not palace-minded,” once confessed the Queen’s father, King George VI. The unassuming Sandringham House was much more to his taste. With its weathered red-brick facade and croquet lawn, it was less splendid royal residence, more comfy country home – which perhaps explains why, like his father and grandfather before him, it was his favourite place to celebrate Christmas.

The Norfolk estate, which lies just north of King’s Lynn, was bought for the future Edward VII in 1862, and it was he and his wife Alexandra who first began retreating there for the festive season. The house had been completely rebuilt for the couple, and though it has been unflatteringly described as ‘frenetic Jacobean’ in style, it was nevertheless said to be one of the most comfortable in England.

It was not so much the house, though, as the parkland – and in particular, the hunting and shooting – that drew the King there at Christmastime. With his son, George V, and grandson, George VI, both keen sportsmen too, by the time our Queen was born in 1926 Sandringham was firmly established as the setting for the royal Christmas.

For a time, her Majesty made Windsor Castle the centre of her own family celebrations, but for the last 32 years ▶



she too has chosen to head to Sandringham, recreating the atmosphere of 'homely intimacy' that prevailed in the time of her parents and grandparents, when Christmas followed the 'routine of any country house' – when the King and Queen arranged the presents themselves and hosted local carollers; when there were 'enormous teas by the fire' and country walks; and 'crackers and much laughter' at the Christmas dinner table.

Of course, the festivities were never (and still aren't) exactly like those in any other home. 'Dickens in a Cartier setting' was how the Duke of Windsor once described them. The celebrations did perhaps seem overly formal,

fusty and Victorian to a man intent on modernising, though, in fact, a number of the traditions long pre-dated Victoria, Albert or Dickens.

Contrary to popular opinion, it was not the Prince Consort who introduced his British relations to the Christmas tree, nor to Heiligabend Bescherung – the German custom of exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve – but his wife's grandmother, Queen Charlotte. Like Albert, she was born and raised in Germany, where her family always decorated yew boughs at Christmastime, gathering round them to exchange gifts. She brought the

Clockwise from above: 'A Winter Day's Shooting at Sandringham', c.1902-1910; the west facade of Sandringham House; Victoria and Albert spent all of their Christmases at Windsor Castle; 'Christmas Morning, Sandringham', c.1936

PHOTOS: ©MICHAEL FOLEY/THE PRINT COLLECTOR/CHARLIE JERCILLA/ALAMY



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Right: Queen Charlotte, with George (left) and younger brother Frederick by Allan Ramsay, 1764
Below: As a widow Queen Victoria spent many Christmases at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight

custom with her to England on her marriage to George III in 1761, and by 1800 had begun decorating entire trees at court – the first, as far as we know, at Windsor Castle, in preparation for a party for local children.

It was a practice that the wider family soon adopted. Queen Adelaide set up a lavish tree each year at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, where she and her husband William IV kept Christmas during his reign – though on ‘a far less extensive scale’ than his brother, George IV. And at Kensington Palace a young Princess Victoria always had a Christmas tree on a round table, with her presents laid out underneath. She was only permitted to see them when her Mama rang a bell in the late afternoon of Christmas Eve.

After their marriage, she and Albert kept up the tradition in the lavish apartments at Windsor Castle, where they spent all of their 21 Christmases together. They had numerous trees – usually ‘Springelbaum’ firs ‘of immense size’ imported from the Prince’s native Coburg, decorated with delicate blown-glass baubles, and made to appear as if covered with snow.

There was a tree each, one for Victoria’s mother, one for the children, one for members of the household and one for the servants – all remaining unlit until Christmas Eve. “I never saw anything prettier,” said one of the Queen’s Maids of Honour.

Indeed, it was images of the twinkling royal trees that led to widespread adoption of the custom in Britain, the couple encouraging the trend by gifting trees to schools and army barracks. It’s a practice continued by her Majesty today – every year she presents trees grown on the royal estates to Westminster Abbey and other cathedrals in London and Edinburgh, and to schools and churches near Sandringham.

Unlike her great-great-grandmother, however – who even as an ageing widow, spending Christmas at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, still had a dozen richly





PHOTOS: © JAMES LINSELL-CLARK/SVNS.COM/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

decorated trees – the Queen has just two at Sandringham. There is one for the household and one – usually a 20ft fir – in the White Drawing Room, which the youngest members of her family help to finish decorating.

Family presents have migrated from under the tree to long trestle tables, though they are still exchanged at teatime on Christmas Eve. The gifts, however, are considerably less fancy than in centuries past. Where Victoria and Albert exchanged extravagant gifts such as specially commissioned artworks and opulent, personalised jewellery, and the Queen Mother received a Fabergé fan in 1939, the Queen is said to prefer her guests to give and receive practical gifts or jokey stocking-fillers.

BOOK AHEAD

Sandringham House and Gardens Visitors can explore all the main ground-floor rooms of the house, along with 60 acres of formal gardens. The Luminate Light Trail, a mile-long illuminated route, will take place 20 November to 20 December. sandringhamestate.co.uk

Windsor Castle A Christmas display lights up the castle in December; check the website for details. www.rct.uk

Osborne House An outdoor 'twixtmas trail' will take place in the gardens of Queen Victoria's Isle of Wight home. www.english-heritage.org.uk

Her Majesty goes to church when much of the nation is knee-deep in wrapping paper on Christmas morning – following in the footsteps of all of her predecessors from William the Conqueror onwards. For centuries the monarch worshipped in a private chapel, but by the 1870s, Queen Victoria was to be seen at St Mildred's in Whippingham, near Osborne, on Christmas Day; while Edward VII and his family joined packed congregations at St Mary Magdalene on the Sandringham estate. By 1936, the public appearance at the medieval church was a fixture in the royal festive timetable, regularly drawing huge crowds – as it still does today.

Yet, though there are long-standing traditions to be upheld, the Christmas break has always been a chance for the monarch to revel in some time off-duty. Arriving at Sandringham in 1946, one guest recalled being greeted by a scene of – to us – striking normality: the then Princess Elizabeth and friends were congregated around tables covered with jigsaw puzzles, while the radio “blared incessantly” in the background.

A guest of Victoria and Albert had witnessed similarly relaxed scenes in 1860, concluding that the celebration of Christmas really was “Royalty putting aside its state and becoming in words, acts and deeds one of ourselves”. **B**

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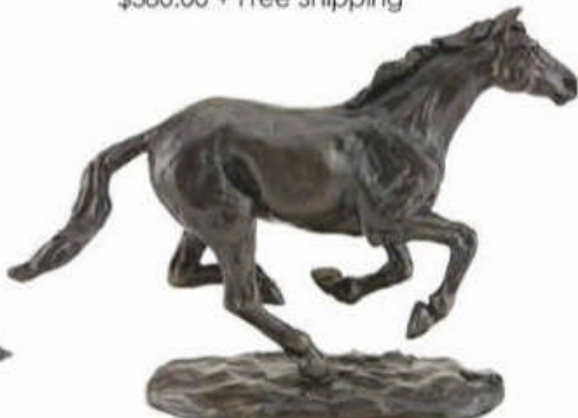
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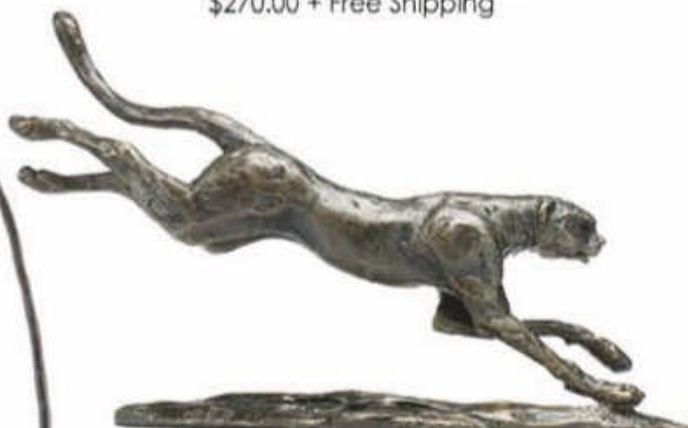
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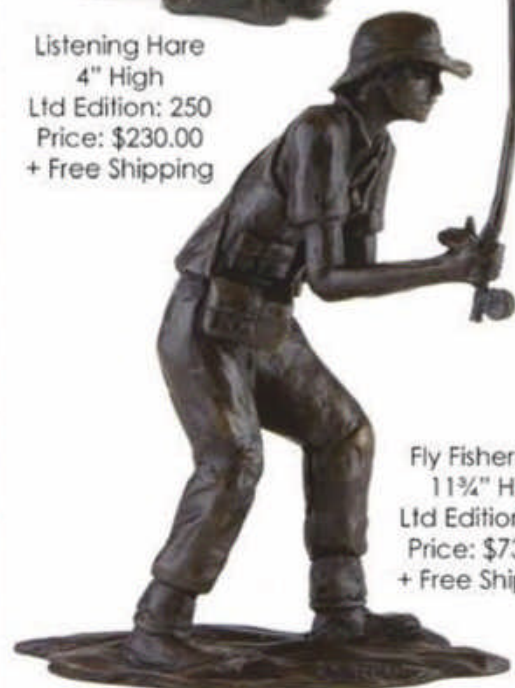


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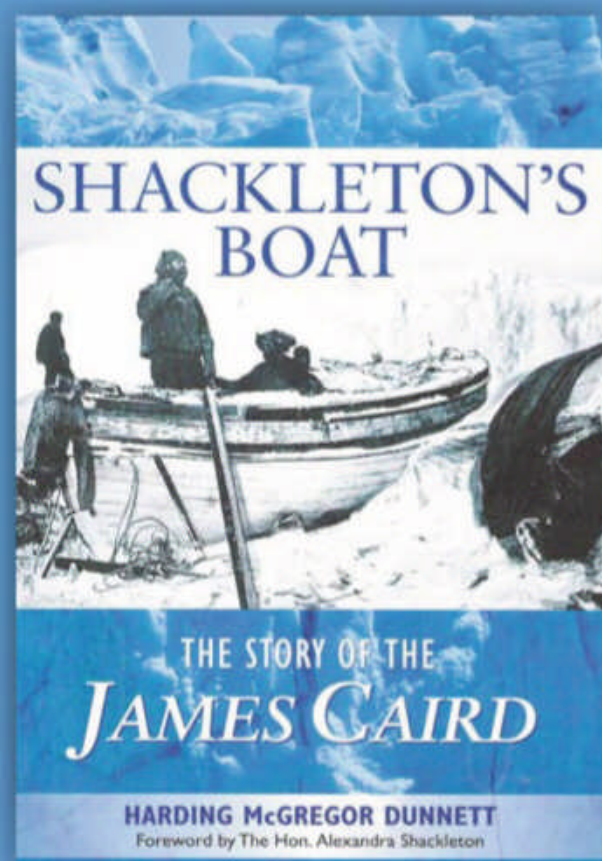
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GUNPOWDER, TREASON & PLOT

Remember, remember, the fifth of November, so the poem goes, but what was the true story behind the Gunpowder Plot – and was its protagonist Guy Fawkes really a freedom fighter or a fool?

WORDS NEIL JONES

A clerk noted in the margin of the journal of proceedings of the House of Commons, 5 November 1605: “This last night the Upper House of Parliament was searched by Sir Tho. Knevett; and one Johnson, servant to Mr Thomas Percy, was there apprehended; who had placed 36 barrels of gunpowder in the vault under the House, with a purpose to blow King and the whole Company, when they should there assemble. Afterwards divers other gentlemen were discovered to be of the Plot.”

It is a remarkably dry, bureaucratic record of a conspiracy that came within a whisker of blasting

King James I, the Lords and Commons to high Heaven, and later a shocked Parliament would rage over the “most barbarous, monstrous, detestable and damnable Treasons.” They would also discover that ‘Johnson’ was in fact Guy Fawkes, and in the cloak-and-dagger world of 17th-century intrigues there was much more to untangle. Even now people differ over whether Fawkes – burnt in effigy atop bonfires every November – was a freedom fighter or foolhardy fanatic. In the 450th anniversary of his birth in 1570 in York, it’s timely to look again at his story.

Guy was the second of four children of Edward Fawkes, a lawyer in York’s ecclesiastical courts, and ▶

Above: Copperplate engraving of ‘The Gunpowder Plotters conspiring’ by Crispijn van de Passe, 17th century



Left: The Guy Fawkes Inn, York is the birthplace of the gunpowder plotter
Above: Coughton Court in Warwickshire
Right: King James I by unknown artist, c.1650
Far right: Princess Elizabeth by Marcus Gheeraerts, 1612

IMAGES: © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/BILL ALLOWAY/EYES STOCK/ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



was raised a Protestant. However, when he was eight his father died and his mother Edith subsequently married a Catholic, Dionis Baynbrigge: influencing Guy, despite widespread persecution of Catholics at the time, to convert to Catholicism too.

Apparently his new faith ran deep and in 1593 Fawkes enlisted as a mercenary fighting for a Catholic Spanish army against Protestant Dutch forces in the Netherlands. Gaining a reputation as “highly skilled in matters of war”, he was also described as very devout; he certainly grew into a striking presence, tall with reddish-brown hair, a bushy beard and a flowing moustache.

Back at home, following the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded as King James I of England, but for the country’s Catholics there was no change for the better. Shadowy diplomatic machinations abroad, including by Fawkes to encourage Spain to invade, also came to nought (instead Spain and England signed a peace treaty in 1604). A handful of Catholic gentlemen, largely from the Midlands, decided to take action.

At the centre of the web – there would be 13 conspirators in all – was charismatic Robert Catesby, a known Catholic troublemaker. He was joined by his cousins Thomas and Robert Winter, and hot-headed Thomas Percy. Fawkes was recruited after a meeting in Ostend with Thomas Winter, and brought expertise in gunpowder and tunnelling to the party. Others included Sir Everard Digby (whose story can be explored at Coughton Court in Warwickshire) and another Catesby cousin, Francis Tresham (whose ancestral family home, Rushton Hall in Northamptonshire, is now a luxury hotel). Two more, Percy's brothers-in-law Christopher and Thomas Wright, had coincidentally been Fawkes's contemporaries at St Peter's School in York.

The plot, hatched in early 1604, proposed to blow up King James, his sons and Parliament, and to kidnap the nine-year-old Princess Elizabeth (lodged at Coombe Abbey in Warwickshire, today another luxury hotel); to enthrone Elizabeth as a puppet Queen, and marry her off to a Catholic peer, thus putting Catholicism back in the ascendancy. What could possibly go wrong?

Percy rented a small residence next to the House of Lords in May 1604 and installed Fawkes there masquerading as his servant John Johnson. But their plan of digging a tunnel in which to plant gunpowder proved excessively difficult and instead, in March 1605, they managed to rent a House of Lords basement storeroom where they proceeded to stash 36 barrels of gunpowder hidden beneath firewood.

By the by, in a couple of twists to the plot, Percy had been appointed as one of the King's bodyguards in June 1604, while in December it's claimed Fawkes had attended a wedding in Whitehall where he came within a sword's length of James: if any impetuous thoughts had crossed his mind, he suppressed them.

After several postponements, the opening of Parliament was set for 5 November 1605. Imagine, then, the horror of the conspirators when they heard that an anonymous letter had been delivered to the Catholic Lord Monteagle on 26 October, warning him of impending danger and to stay away. They suspected Francis Tresham, Monteagle's brother-in-law, had betrayed them – he denied it – but observing that the Government seemed to dismiss the letter, they pressed on with their plans.

So it was that Guy Fawkes found himself with his lantern (now an iconic exhibit at Oxford's Ashmolean Museum) sitting in the Lords' basement storeroom on 4 November. Approached by passing government officials, he maintained the bluff that he was guarding his master's firewood and provisions.

**The plot, hatched in early 1604,
proposed to blow up King
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and to kidnap the nine-year-old
Princess Elizabeth**





IMAGES: © MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY/ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Left: Guy Fawkes, masquerading as servant John Johnson, is discovered and apprehended by Thomas Knyvett
Above: Guy Fawkes's lantern is part of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum's collection



The men went away and Fawkes continued to wait, watching the hours slowly pass on a pocket watch given to him by Percy.

Then suddenly, around midnight, another search party appeared, led by Sir Thomas Knyvett, keeper of Westminster Palace. A fierce struggle saw Fawkes overpowered and he was dragged before the King in his bedchamber where, with astonishing sang-froid, he boldly admitted that he had intended to blow up Parliament and everyone in it.

Cast into the Tower of London and still maintaining his John Johnson identity, Fawkes answered "interrogatories" with defiance: if the Queen and royal children had been caught up in the blast, "he wuld not have helped them"; if King and Parliament were destroyed, "the people of themselves would decide a head".

He refused to reveal his co-conspirators and so James ordered: "If he will not other wayes confesse, the gentler tortours are to be the first usid unto him..." According to the official government account, *The King's Book*, the mere sight of the rack was sufficient to make Fawkes spill names; the almost illegible 'Guido' (Guy) signature on his confession of 9 November

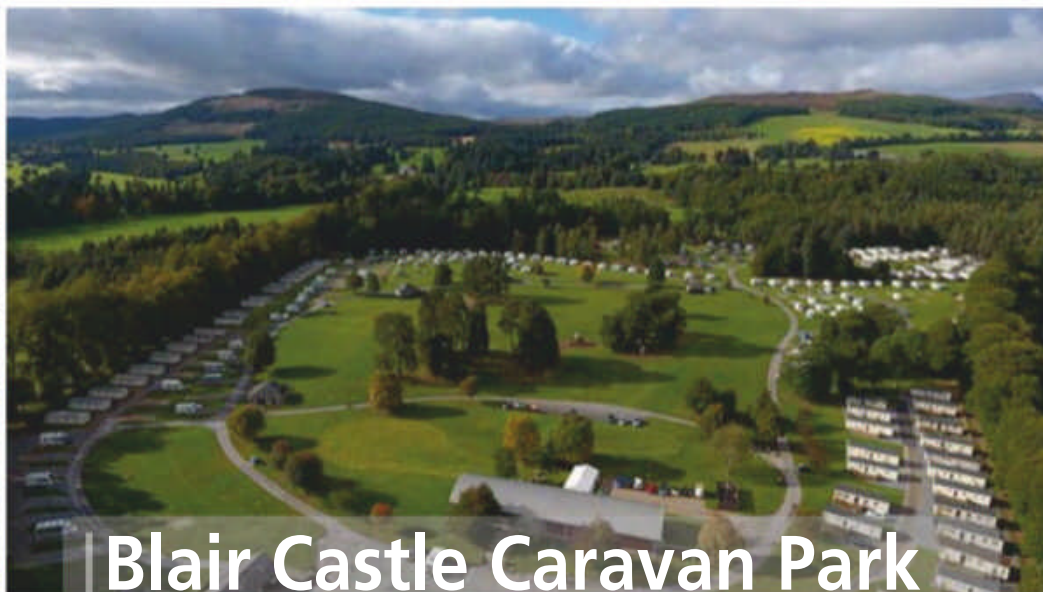


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suggests he had been sorely tortured.

In the following weeks the other conspirators, who had fled, were either killed in combat or rounded up for trial and execution. Fawkes was hung in Westminster's Old Palace Yard on 31 January 1605 and his quartered body parts publicly displayed "to become a prey for the fowls of the air."

Curiously, Francis Tresham was 'saved' from such a violent fate, having reportedly died of natural causes in the Tower, which fuelled suspicions that he had indeed been some sort of double agent. It has been argued that the Government, knowing about the conspiracy, had engineered its dramatic 'last-minute discovery' as propaganda to ignite a public backlash against Catholics. Whatever the truth, the Gunpowder Plot made life for English Catholics uncomfortable for years to come.

A Thanksgiving Act (1606) declared 5 November an annual celebration of "the joyful day of deliverance" and, although the Act was repealed in 1859, we still mark the date up and down the land with a jolly pageant of fireworks and bonfires. Sitting in effigy

Above: Guy Fawkes is interrogated by James I and his council in the king's bedchamber
Below right: Yeomen of the Guard ritualistically search Westminster's cellars to this day

on top of the flames Guy Fawkes, the man caught with the gunpowder, has become a historical scapegoat. But there should never be any doubt over his fiery belief in the plot's explosive aims, or that he so very nearly succeeded in lighting the fuse. **B**

For more key events in British history, go to www.britain-magazine.com/history



DID YOU KNOW?

Yeomen of the Guard (royal bodyguards), with lanterns in hand, ceremonially search the cellars of the Palace of Westminster before any State Opening of Parliament.



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you marvel at England's natural landmarks from here – including Durdle Door on the Jurassic Coast and Cheddar Gorge in Somerset – but you are also within reach of many of the historic destinations that have been proudly featured in *BRITAIN's* pages.

Alongside the medieval city of Wells [see page 66], Downton Abbey's real-life double Highclere Castle, Longleat House and Gardens, Salisbury Cathedral, the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and Glastonbury Tor are just a few of the many iconic attractions a short drive away. The best part? You won't have to lift a finger during your stay. There is the option to have a personal chauffeur and private car, and all your trips and tickets to these famous attractions and historic cities arranged by Nathan and Laura, included in the price of your stay. Rather drive yourself? No problem. Excursions and transport can be cut from the price.

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A detailed photograph of a traditional British country inn interior. The central focus is a large, ornate stone fireplace with a dark metal arched opening. A bright, crackling fire burns within the hearth, which is filled with logs. To the right, a portion of a plush armchair with a multi-colored plaid fabric is visible. The mantelpiece above the fireplace is decorated with several small, framed landscape paintings. To the left of the fireplace, a large, dark metal bucket sits on the floor. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

WINTER @ INNERS

There's nothing quite as quaint and cosy as a traditional British country inn, whose snug rooms and fireside cheer warm even the chilliest of days

WORDS ROSE SHEPHERD

Banish the winter blues with a break at a cosy inn deep in the countryside, by the sea or in a quaint village or country town. There is something so delicious about stepping inside after a bracing walk, to the smell of wood smoke and the hum of chatter. Draw a chair up to a real fire before dining on tasty seasonal fare, then sleep between crisp sheets and wake to a lazy breakfast.

THE INN AT WHITEWELL, LANCASHIRE

Third-generation owner Charles Bowman combines absolute professionalism with a sense of fun at this friendly country-sports inn on the River Hodder. After a day's fishing, or a walk in the Forest of Bowland, you can warm yourself by a blazing log fire in one of the flagstone-floored public spaces adorned with prints, paintings and memorabilia. There are even open fires in many of the bedrooms, which are furnished with antiques. The Queen came here for her 80th birthday lunch on a visit to the Duchy of Lancaster estate – although whether she had the celebrated fish pie or roast cannon of local lamb is not recorded.

innatwhitewell.com



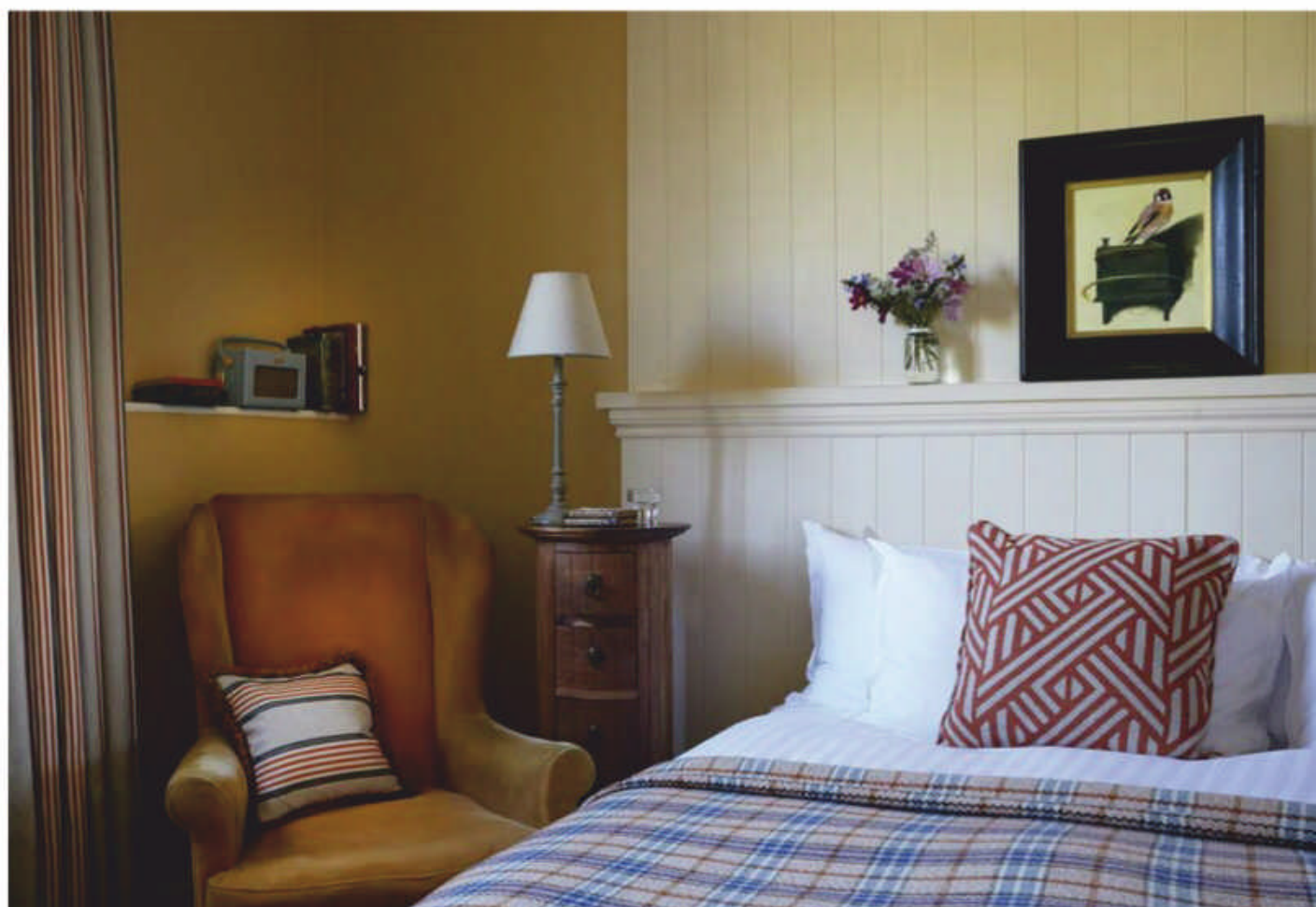
PHOTOS: © GILLIAN SINGLETON/ALAMY



FELIN FACH GRIFFIN, POWYS

One of the Inkin brothers' three dining-pubs-with-rooms, The Griffin in the Brecon Beacons makes a virtue of simplicity, with shabby-chic interiors and an unstuffy, free-and-easy feel. You can eat locally sourced dishes such as lamb breast with white bean mash, salsa verde and sweetbreads, or hake with triple-cooked chips. Breakfast is a treat of smoked salmon with scrambled eggs, fruit from the kitchen garden and home-made soda bread. Bedrooms feature Roberts radios, fresh flowers, local artworks, home-baked biscuits and warm Welsh blankets.

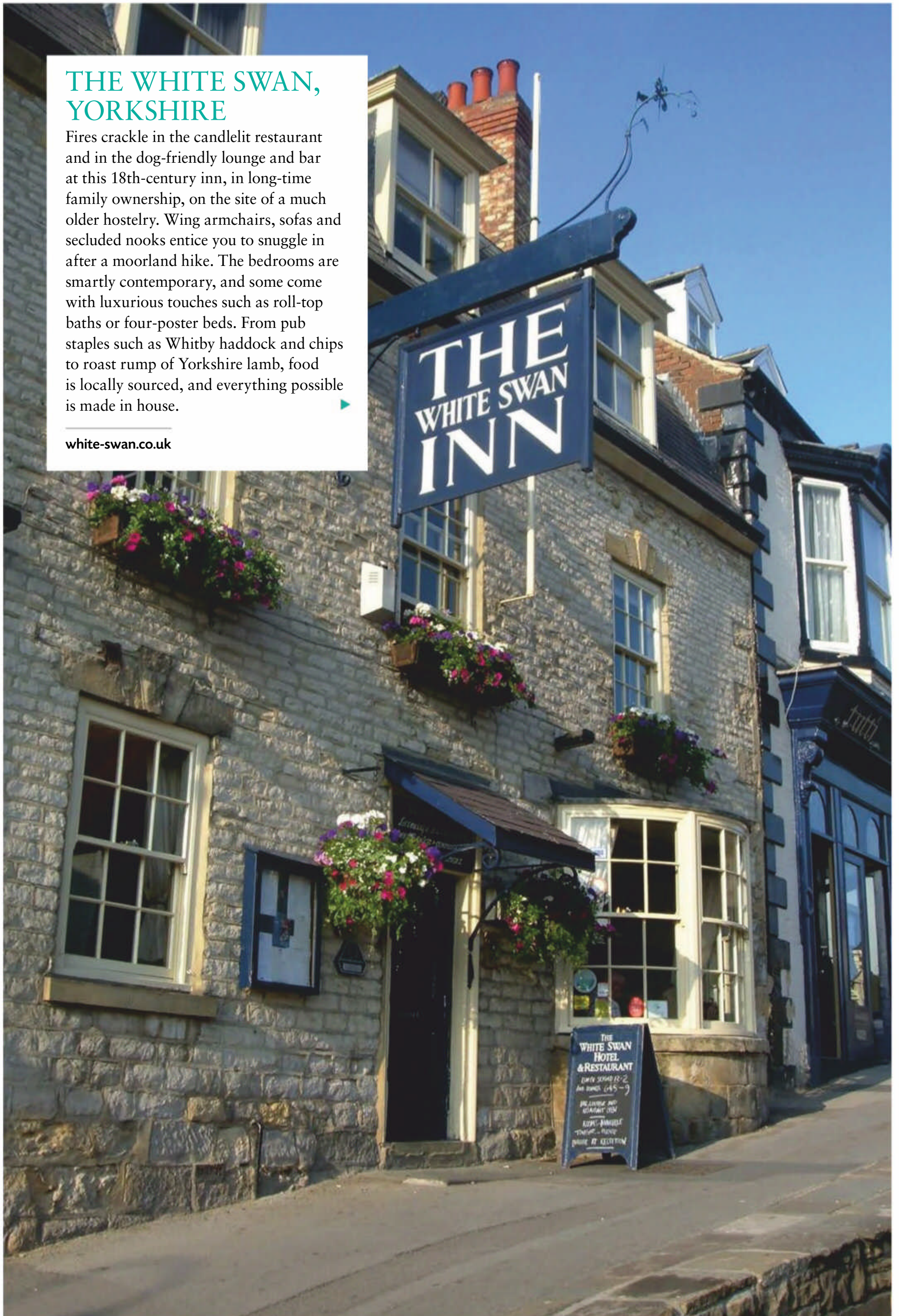
eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk



THE WHITE SWAN, YORKSHIRE

Fires crackle in the candlelit restaurant and in the dog-friendly lounge and bar at this 18th-century inn, in long-time family ownership, on the site of a much older hostelry. Wing armchairs, sofas and secluded nooks entice you to snuggle in after a moorland hike. The bedrooms are smartly contemporary, and some come with luxurious touches such as roll-top baths or four-poster beds. From pub staples such as Whitby haddock and chips to roast rump of Yorkshire lamb, food is locally sourced, and everything possible is made in house. ▶

white-swan.co.uk





SIGN OF THE ANGEL, WILTSHIRE

In the heart of Lacock, an old-world National Trust village that has appeared in TV dramas including *Cranford* and *Downton Abbey*, this grade II-listed, 15th-century coaching inn is as traditional as you could wish, with nicely judged fabrics and paint finishes to complement original features. Beyond an entrance passage and plank door, you find beams, bare stone, dark panelling, comfy sofas, roaring log fires and bonhomie. Modern-rustic menus run from pub classics to more imaginative dishes such as seafood cassoulet. Bedrooms are supplied with home-baked cookies, and cosy duckfeather and down bedding makes for a sound night's sleep.

signoftheangel.co.uk





THE LAMB, OXFORDSHIRE

On the edge of a picture-postcard wool town on the River Windrush, this 18th-century coaching inn started life as a row of weavers' cottages. You can snuggle down in one of a jumble of cosy public spaces, with a merrily burning fire, squashy sofas, books and board games, and choose from simple pub grub in the flagstone-floored bar or steaks and fish from Cornwall in the more contemporary restaurant. Bedrooms have antique furnishings, smart fabrics, luxury toiletries and, on the pillow, a little jar of Cotswold lavender. ►

cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk

PHOTOS: © MARC WILSON/EYE35 STOCK/ALAMY



HOWARD ARMS, WARWICKSHIRE

This 400-year-old stone inn on the village green was in the doldrums when two families came to its rescue. It is adorned with hanging baskets and feels truly cherished. Within, it is a tasteful blend of old and new – flagged floors, bare stone, wooden settles, rich fabrics and wall coverings. Food is locally sourced: home-baked bread, roasts and real ales the very stuff of a British Sunday. Characterful bedrooms are supplied with gingerbread and a coffee percolator. You can hunker down by the fire in a leather armchair after a visit to Shakespeare’s Stratford, while your dog can join you in the bar, but must not stray into the eclectically furnished dining area (out, damned Spot!).

howardarms.com




THE NOBODY INN, DEVON

Reflected firelight flickers on horse brasses in this 17th-century former dwelling and unofficial parish meeting house, a pub since 1837, infused with the personality of landlady Sue Burdge. Today it is the very epitome of a welcoming village local, with low beams, low lighting and carved oak settles, while the sight of more than 240 whiskies behind the bar will warm the cockles of any aficionado's heart. In the restaurant the menu features such dishes as hearty soup, venison stew and steak pie. Bedrooms vary in size but are spruce and very affordable; the en-suite rooms come with a welcome decanter of sherry.

nobodyinn.co.uk



THE CAT INN, SUSSEX

In a Wealden village on the edge of Ashdown Forest, this beamed and tile-hung 16th-century pub is much loved by walkers, who can warm themselves by a log fire and fortify themselves with a pint of Harvey's, brewed in nearby Lewes. There are four good bedrooms (one a suite), some with views over the village church and the Downs. You can eat in the happy hubbub of the dog-friendly bar, or in the dining room, where menus run the gamut from such pub fare as fish and chips to venison haunch with bacon, Savoy cabbage and sweet-and-sour beets. Breakfast, with freshly baked bread, will set you up for a hike – or a gentle game of Pooh Sticks, if that's more your thing. 

catinn.co.uk



The real BEATRIX POTTER

Her books are loved the world over, but the author's unconventional life choices and passion for the Lake District make her own story a fascinating tale in itself

WORDS **NADIA COHEN**





Above: Beatrix Potter outside her first home, Hill Top
Left: Modern-day Hill Top

PHOTOS: ©NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JAMES DOBSON/BEATRIX POTTER GALLERY, CUMBRIA/NATIONAL TRUST/ROBERT THRIFT

Say the name of Britain's best loved children's author in almost any corner of the world and it immediately conjures up enchanting images of mischievous animals scampering through the pages of those instantly recognisable little white books.

Beatrix Potter's classic tales of Peter Rabbit, Jemima Puddle-Duck and Mrs Tiggy-Winkle have been firmly established nursery favourites for generations.

But what is less well known about the whimsical children's author is that she was also a shrewd businesswoman, a canny marketing expert and a hardworking, often irritable, farmer who strategically bought up great swathes of land. She bequeathed thousands of acres of Britain's picturesque Lake District to the nation, to protect it forever from the onslaught of modern development.

Beatrix was a passionate environmental campaigner, an eco-warrior and a trailblazing feminist many years before such terms had even been coined.

Born with a fiercely rebellious streak, Beatrix endured a stifling childhood, frustrated by the rigid confines of her privileged upbringing in Victorian London. From an early age her mother drummed into Beatrix that her sole purpose in life was marriage and motherhood. But it soon became abundantly clear that Beatrix was never going to be interested in either.

At a time when it was rarely considered worthwhile to ►



send girls to school, Beatrix longed to learn something more fulfilling than piano and embroidery. And left with no choice but to educate herself, that is precisely what she did.

Left alone in the nursery, Beatrix consoled herself with studying the anatomy of animals, plants and fungi, and taught herself to draw with remarkable accuracy. She would pass her time dissecting frogs, mice and hedgehogs, which she kept hidden in her bedroom.

By the time she reached her teens Beatrix was entirely self-taught in a wide range of subjects, and confided in her intricately coded diaries: "I must draw, however poor the result. I will do something sooner or later."

She defied the genteel social conventions of the day, refusing to settle down and churn out children. She had no interest in being paraded around high-society balls, where she was expected to secure herself whichever wealthy and well-connected man her parents Rupert and Helen deemed a suitable match.

To pass the empty hours until she could escape her parents' Kensington townhouse, Beatrix would send lavishly illustrated letters to her friend's children, and wondered if her homespun stories might earn her an independent income. But her first attempt at a children's story, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, was rejected numerous times by various publishers who all failed to spot its enormous potential. When it did eventually appear in print – after she paid to publish it herself – Beatrix was astonished to find herself in great demand.

Soon she had an eager publisher, Norman Warne, who was not only clamouring for more stories, but wanted to marry her too. Suddenly, life was not so dull after all, and



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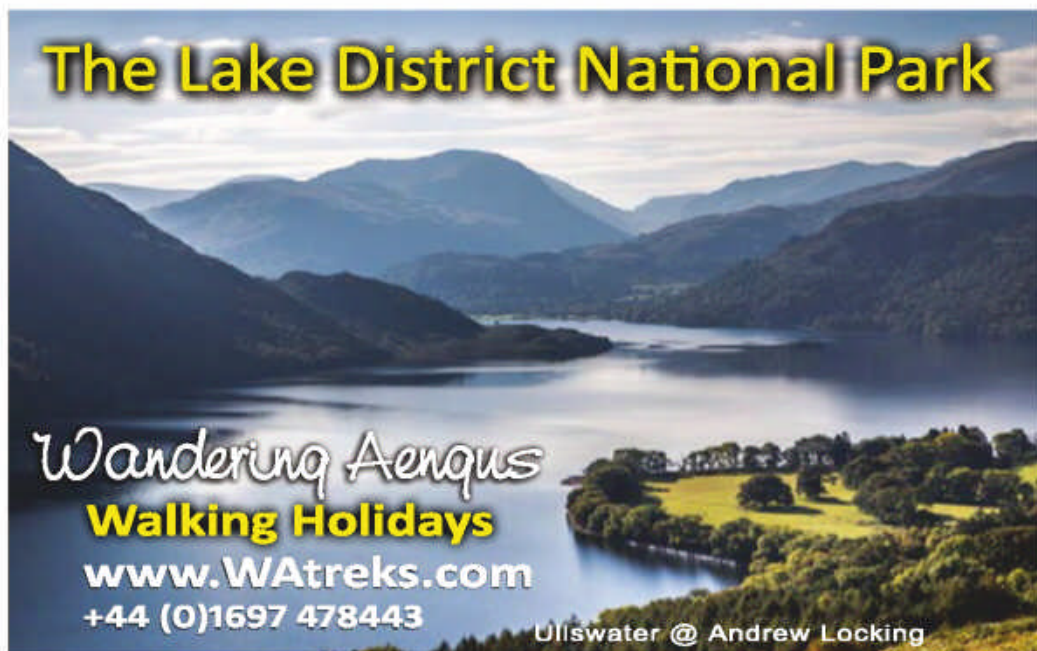
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Clockwise, from left:
The beautiful
Buttermere Valley
is now owned by the
National Trust; the
bedroom at Hill Top;
the range in the
entrance hall at
Hill Top

PHOTOS: © NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JAMES DOBSON/PAJOR PAWEL/SHUTTERSTOCK





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Above: Yew Tree Farm in Coniston was sold to the National Trust by Beatrix Potter
Below: Peter Rabbit

they planned to start a new life together in the Lake District.

The Potters had spent many family holidays in Cumbria, and Beatrix used her first royalty cheques to buy a bolthole for her and Norman to share after they were married.

Tragically her happiness proved short-lived. Beatrix's fiancé died barely a month after he proposed and she fled to the Lake District to grieve in private. Retreating to their cottage, Hill Top, to nurse her broken heart was a decision that would change not only her own life but also the shape of the English landscape forever. "There's nothing like open air for soothing present anxiety and memories of past sadness," she wrote.

A steady stream of phenomenally popular children's books followed *Peter Rabbit*, but publishing no longer brought Beatrix satisfaction once she discovered a new way of life in the rugged Cumbrian hills and fells.

She only ever felt motivated to write when she needed money to buy more farms and cottages in order to thwart ruthless developers who were eager to capitalise on the newfound popularity of the Lake District.

Within easy reach of the major industrial towns of the north, the area was becoming besieged by factory workers who were enjoying paid holidays for the first time, as a result of the new Bank Holiday Act, but

Beatrix feared hotels, pubs and amusements would destroy the area's natural beauty.

She campaigned vociferously against the march of modernisation and deliberately snapped up chunks of land next to roads to ensure they could not be widened to allow more traffic to rumble through the peaceful villages.

As soon as farms came on the market she pounced, ensuring that traditional methods were preserved too. Her portfolio of properties quickly grew to over four thousand acres, and together with her friend Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, Beatrix planted the first seeds of the National Trust.

Beatrix shared Rawnsley's fear that the influx of visitors would inevitably start to erode, and ultimately destroy, the region. Rawnsley confided to Beatrix that he had a masterplan to save the Lake District, and she joined his passionate crusade to create a nationwide charity. His aim was to secure funds to purchase areas of outstanding natural beauty under threat of ruin, as well as protecting stately homes and other places of historical interest which faced demolition.

Beatrix and Rawnsley dreamt that one day their charity would preserve these endangered places in perpetuity on behalf of the entire British



For more on the
Lake District, see
www.britain-magazine.com



PHOTO: © NATIONAL TRUST/PAUL HARRIS

nation. Their vision meant that beauty spots and stately homes would become accessible to everybody, not just the wealthy aristocracy and their private visitors.

Beatrix was impressed by Rawnsley's sense of altruism and the way he travelled tirelessly, storming planning meetings, terrifying council committees and tackling anybody who dared to propose plans for an ugly or unsympathetic development.

Of course it was highly unusual for a single woman to buy property at that time without the help of a husband or father, but Beatrix found an ally in a local solicitor named William Heelis, who cheerfully helped smooth the sales through. Slowly they fell in love and she finally married at the age of 47 – far too late to start a family – and became known locally as Mrs Heelis, his rather stout wife.

The couple lived frugally in two neighbouring cottages, and Beatrix described herself and William as being “like two horses in front of the same plough, walking so steadily beside each other.”

Beatrix also cared deeply about the welfare of women. When she realised that mothers in remote locations were dying in childbirth she paid for a District Nurse, and always insisted on paying her workers' wages directly to their wives. She feared that men were liable to spend the cash “inappropriately”.

Tant Benson, a shepherd at one of her vast estates, Troutbeck Park, recalled: “I was there 17 years and she never paid me once. She always gave the money to


Above: Troutbeck Park Farm was left to the National Trust by Beatrix Potter in her will

the missus. ‘That’s where it should be,’ she would say, ‘for the housekeeping’. She never paid me – not once.”

Although Beatrix's books and accompanying merchandise led to global fame and a vast fortune, she always kept her status concealed in the close-knit rural community where she retreated for the rest of her life. She refused to travel abroad to promote her books, and never gave interviews.

By today's standards Beatrix would have been a millionaire many times over, but she cared so little for the trappings of wealth that she was often mistaken for a vagrant as she stomped through the lanes. She did not even have electricity installed in her house, although she insisted it ran through all her barns to boost productivity.

Beatrix relished being reclusive, indeed most of her neighbours only discovered her true identity after reading her obituaries, but her extraordinary legacy lingers to this day.

Not only did Beatrix alter the landscape of children's literature, but she also left a remarkable gift to the British people when she bequeathed thousands of acres of farmland to the National Trust, to be protected and cherished in her memory forever. 

Nadia Cohen's book, *The Real Beatrix Potter*, is out now (£14.99, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk).





WIN

A SERENE STAY IN THE STUNNING LAKE DISTRICT

Ever since William Wordsworth wrote *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England* 200 years ago, this dramatic landscape of tranquil low-lying lakes and thrilling high-flying peaks has held a special place in the nation's heart.

Now we're giving you the chance to win a two-night stay at Linthwaite House, a charming country house hotel that enjoys an enviable position above Lake Windermere, right at the heart of the Lake District National Park.

Linthwaite House has been sumptuously refurbished and now offers all the luxuries and style of a contemporary boutique hotel while retaining its original identity as a comfortable family home dating back to 1901.

There's plenty of room to roam outdoors within its 14-acre landscaped gardens, which even include the hotel's very own tarn. Explore further and you'll happen across a boules pitch, croquet lawn and outdoor chess set to keep you entertained. Or take a seat in the cosy conservatory and admire panoramic views over the awe-inspiring expanse of Windermere.

Our winner and their guest will also be treated to dinner on one night at the hotel's on-site restaurant, Simon Rogan's Henrock, where the Michelin-starred chef rustles up exquisite dishes

influenced by his global travels, using local ingredients from his own farm. Informally elegant and authentic to its surroundings, at Henrock you can sample the true flavours of the Lake District.

Perfectly placed, Linthwaite House is the ideal spot from which to share in the passion of Beatrix Potter and William Wordsworth for this distinctive corner of the English countryside.

www.leeucollection.com/UK

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Closing date for entries is 12pm GMT 29 January 2021. The prize is for a maximum of two people and cannot be exchanged for cash. Dates are subject to availability, excluding Christmas, New Year and Easter and must be booked in advance. The prize must be redeemed by 28 January 2022. For full terms and conditions, go to www.britain-magazine.com/competitions/linthwaite

HOW TO ENTER

For your chance to win this fantastic prize go to **www.britain-magazine.com/competitions/linthwaite** to apply online or fill in the coupon below with the answer to the following question:

Q: Which Michelin-starred chef runs the on-site restaurant at Linthwaite?

- a) Simon Rogan
- b) Gordon Ramsay
- c) Nathan Outlaw

ENTRY FORM

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UK and Rest of World readers – Linthwaite Competition, *BRITAIN* magazine, The Chelsea Magazine Company, Jubilee House, 2 Jubilee Place, London SW3 3TQ, UK

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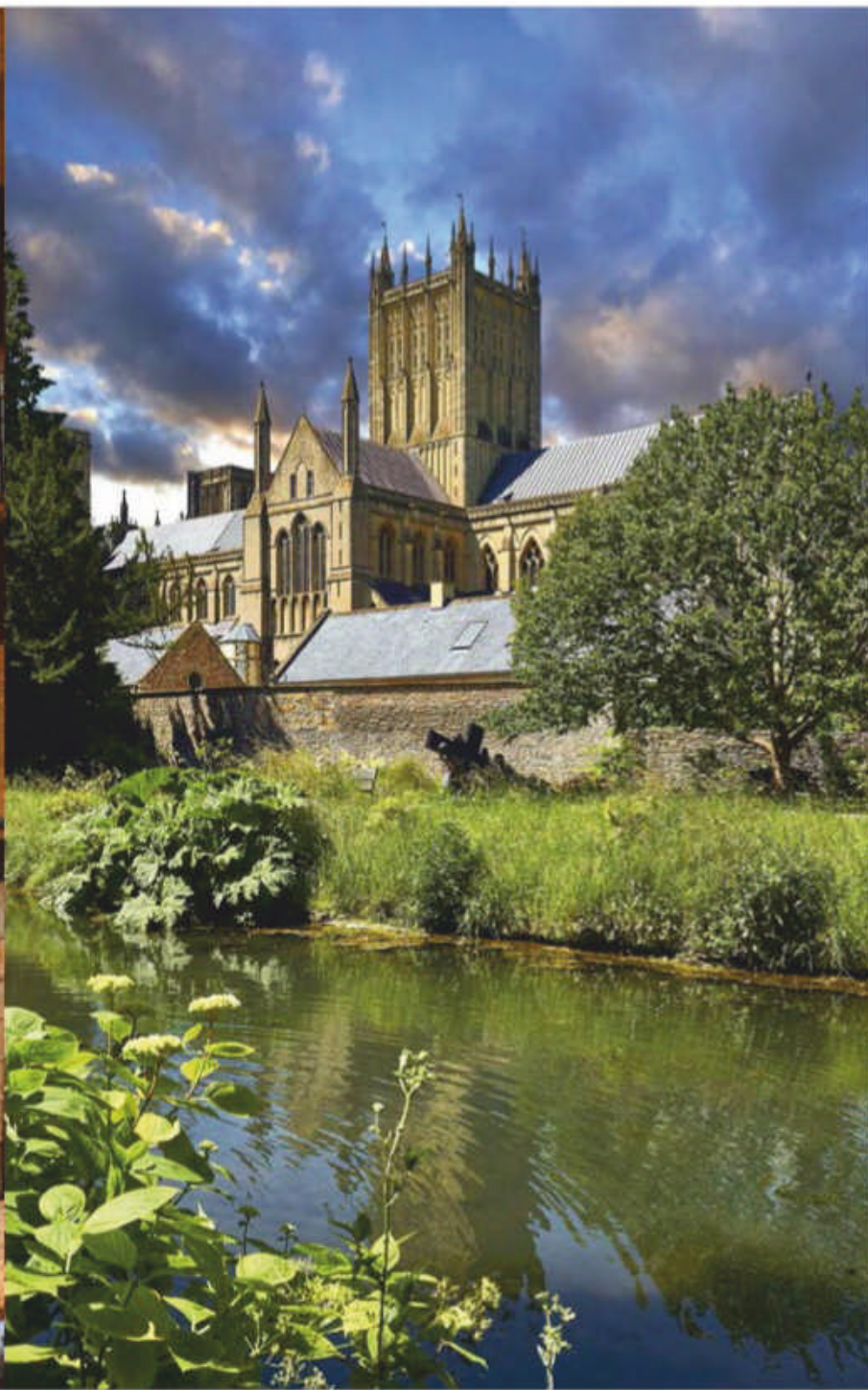
July



September



*Left to right: The Chained Library; Wells Cathedral; the Chapter House steps; Vicars' Close; the moat and gatehouse at the Bishop's Palace
Below: Swans ring to be fed at the Bishop's Palace*



Wells may be lesser-known compared to the Roman spa city of Bath just a 45-minute drive northeast, and Somerset's town of cheesy renown, Cheddar (25 minutes northwest), yet it warrants just as much attention, as a visit to its magnificent Bishop's Palace will quickly attest.

Today's Bishop of Bath and Wells can still call the 800-year-old Bishop's Palace home, albeit only a small section of it. The vast majority of the palace (and it is vast) is open to the public thanks to the Palace Trust and offers an atmospheric insight into the lives of its earliest inhabitants.

Passing beneath a medieval archway known as the Bishop's Eye, you are greeted with the less than welcoming but nonetheless impressive sight of the palace's ramparts, complete with a moat, drawbridge and portcullis. Built by Bishop Ralph in c.1341, its fortifications announced the church's political influence and authority.

Inside, the grandeur continues, with a large episcopal chapel and the ruins of the Great Hall, both built for Bishop Burnell, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer under

WELLS

A compact cathedral city suspended in amber, Wells boasts some of the finest examples of medieval architecture in Europe

WORDS **JENNY ROWE**



Edward I, at the end of the 13th century. The latter is the third largest secular hall in England after Canterbury and Westminster Palace, highlighting the great power once wielded by England's littlest city.

Within its grounds, the palace's 14-acre RHS partner gardens harbour the flowing springs, or wells, from which the city earned its name. Look out for the pair of mute swans that have been resident since the 1850s (in various incarnations) and who are trained to ring a bell at the gatehouse when they want to be fed.

Of course the erection of the palace by Bishop Jocelin Trotman in the early 13th century was only licensed because of the nearby and no less spectacular Cathedral of St Andrew. Enter through Penniless Porch – another medieval gateway – onto the site where the original cathedral was built in 1175. It was Bishop Bohun in 1191 who orchestrated the cathedral's intricate Gothic-style West Front. It took 80 years to complete and is one of the most important galleries of 13th-century sculpture in northern Europe.

Further delights await inside: the green

PHOTOS: © MANOR PHOTOGRAPHY/FUNKYFOODLONDON – PAUL WILLIAMS/ALAMY/IMAGEBROKER/AVL IMAGES/NICK CABLE/LOOP IMAGES

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to see and do in
Somerset, see
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-and-gold glowing Jesse Window dates from 1340, having narrowly missed ruination during the English Civil War; and the Wells Cathedral Clock is believed to be powered by the second oldest and still functional clock mechanism in Britain (possibly in the world). Wait to watch it strike one, two or three quarters of the hour, when a merry-go-round of knights race into action.


In a 'High Parts' tour of the cathedral – ordinarily a regular occurrence – you can explore behind the clock face and even inside hidden roof spaces. The cathedral also offers tours of its Chained Library, one of the few remaining in Britain.

Indeed Wells has carefully preserved many rare survivals of British history, from traditional examples including clocks and books to the more idiosyncratic phenomenon of trained swans. And that's not all – you don't have to leave this medieval bubble of enchantment just yet. Also within the Liberty of St Andrew (the name given to the historic parish) is the oldest continuously occupied medieval street in Europe: Vicars' Close, a 42-house street (originally arranged around a quadrangle as if it were a university

college) still accommodates members of the Vicars Choral, just as it did 650 years ago.

Although decreed by Bishop Ralph to keep the choir away from the temptations of the town, it was Bishop Bekynton who took it a step further and built a high-level passage into the cathedral itself, so residents didn't even have to get their feet wet on their commute.

If you're lucky, you'll visit on a Wednesday or Saturday and see the medieval Market Place buzzing with business. Sandwiched between the two architectural masterpieces of the cathedral and palace, it's a special spot worth a look even if there's no local cider or cheese to sample while you're there.

Although a weekend might suffice for the little city itself, Wells also provides the ideal anchor for extended exploration of the West Country. Pop into the Mendip Hills, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty upon whose southwesterly edge Wells perches. The Ebbor Gorge National Nature Reserve is nearby, a Cheddar Gorge in miniature with far fewer tourists. Closer still is the village of Wookey Hole, famous for its limestone caverns, and you're not far from Glastonbury and its beautiful 8th-century abbey either. 

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS



GETTING THERE

The best way to get to Wells from London is to get a train to either Bristol or Bath, and then catch a bus. Great Western Railway operates regular trains from Paddington Station to both Bristol (approximately 1hr 30min) and Bath (approximately 1hr 20min). Bus no. 376, the Mendip Xplorer, can then get you to Wells in around 50min from Bristol, and from Bath you can catch the no. 173 (1hr 10min). www.gwr.com; www.bustimes.org



EAT, DRINK, SLEEP

Beryl Country House is just a mile from Wells Cathedral, yet blissfully secluded in a leafy nook of the Mendip Hills. Channelling its history as a quintessentially English country home, its 12 rooms are elegantly furnished and there's a self-catered cottage option on-site. For tea, coffee, cake, freshly prepared quiche, hearty soups and tasty salads, try The Good Earth café, which has been going since the 1970s. They also have a shop selling antiques, homeware and works by local artists. www.berylcountryhouse.com; www.thegoodearthwells.co.uk



FURTHER INFORMATION

www.wellssomerset.com

A full-page background photograph of a Scottish landscape. In the foreground, a calm lake reflects the sky and the surrounding green fields and trees. The middle ground shows rolling hills with patches of green grass and some trees with autumn-colored foliage. In the background, dark, forested mountains rise against a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

HEART & SOUL

A spectacular new touring route links
a string of historic sights, and takes in some
of Scotland's most heart-stirring scenery

WORDS **HELEN OCHYRA**



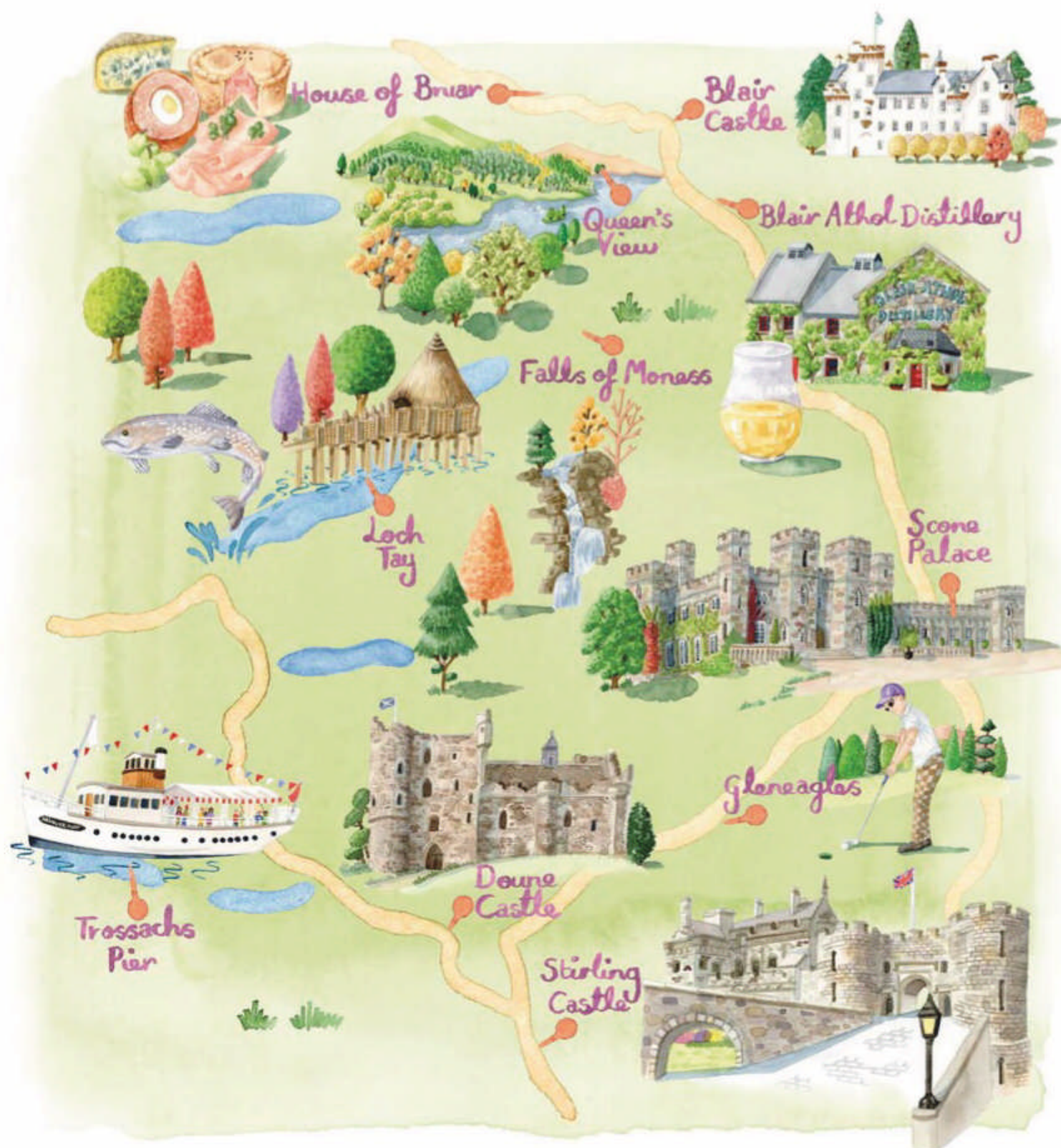
Loch Tummel as viewed from
Queen's View in Tayside

Think Scotland, think ancient castles. Mountains too, of course, and perhaps an osprey wheeling above a Highland stream. Whisky probably comes to mind, along with golf, a side of leaping salmon, or maybe a glassy loch or thundering waterfall.

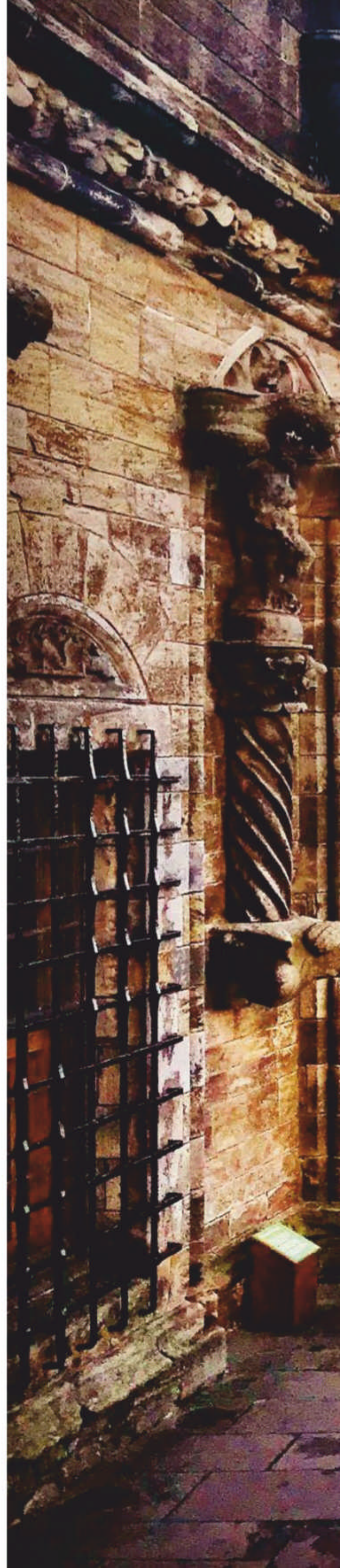
These things are quintessential Scotland, and all can be experienced on the recently launched Heart 200 touring route. This 200-mile road trip around the heart of Scotland runs in a loop from Stirling, out into Highland Perthshire, the Trossachs and as far north as the Cairngorms. It links Scotland's two national parks and demands at least a week of your time to do it justice. Even then, you'll be spoiled for choice.

Start on a high in Stirling, touring the battlements and buildings of Stirling Castle and peering down over the city from a sheer-sided volcanic crag that has been fortified since the Iron Age. The castle has long guarded the lowest crossing point of the Forth river and it became the preferred residence of most of Scotland's later medieval monarchs including James V, whose daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, was crowned here in 1543. Tour the royal apartments, now returned to their mid-16th-century glory, see the vast fireplaces of the Great Hall and stroll through the Douglas

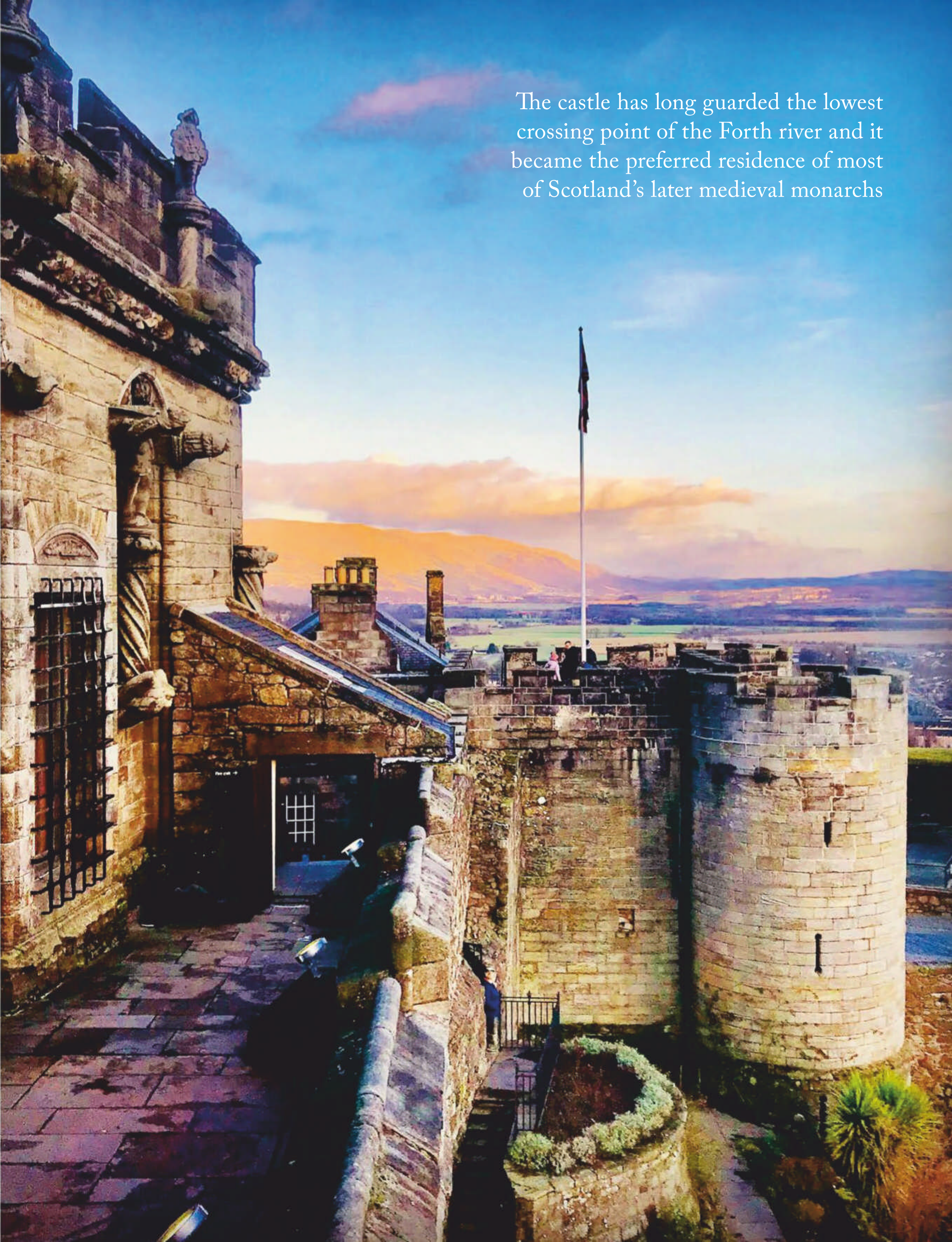
Right: Stirling Castle makes a statement at the start of the Heart 200 tour



PHOTOS: NAGELESTOCK.COM/ALAMY/ALLEENGRHAM/STOCKIMO/ILLUSTRATION: © LAURA HALLETT



The castle has long guarded the lowest crossing point of the Forth river and it became the preferred residence of most of Scotland's later medieval monarchs



Gardens, from which there are splendid Highland views.

Stirling's strategic importance led to many a battle in the castle's environs. By far the most famous is Bannockburn, commemorated in inimitable style at the Bannockburn Heritage Centre with an engaging 3D game. You'll learn about weaponry and tactics before being cast as either English or Scottish to fight it out with your fellow visitors in a simulation of the 1314 battle. The fact that England almost always wins proves just how incredible a military strategist Robert the Bruce was.

From Stirling hit the route anti-clockwise, perhaps stopping at Gleneagles for a round of golf, or pausing for a stroll around Loch Leven, a freshwater loch home to hundreds of geese. You'll cross the river Tay at Perth, Scotland's ancient capital, and should make time for a half-day visit to Scone Palace. Far from a musty museum piece, the Georgian Gothic house is still very much a family home (for the Earl and Countess of Mansfield) and there's a fine collection of porcelain, carved ivories and antique furniture to discover.

Just 20 miles further north, Loch of the Lowes nature reserve is ideal for a short stroll. You can see red squirrels and deer here year-round but time your visit for sometime between April and August and you're also in with a chance of spotting ospreys and beavers.

The northernmost part of the Heart 200 dips into the Cairngorms National Park, Britain's largest. The Highland scenery here is breathtaking and there are several interesting wee stops along the route including Pitlochry dam, where you'll find a fascinating museum on hydroelectricity and a salmon ladder, and Blair Atholl distillery, for a tour and

tutored tasting of four whiskies including the Distillery Exclusive Bottling.

A few miles on is Killiecrankie, where you can spot woodpeckers and pine martens as you walk along the wooded river gorge and visit Soldier's Leap, said to be where a redcoat leapt 18 feet across the River Garry to escape the Jacobites during the gory Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689. Take a look at that distance and make up your own mind about how true this story might be.

Fancy a spot of shopping? At the route's northernmost point is the House of Bruar, Scotland's leading country clothing specialist. Browse the merino and cashmere knitwear and don't miss the food hall, which sells wonderful hampers stocked with the likes of smoked salmon and venison, Strathdon blue cheese and wild boar pâté.

It's also worth making time for Blair Castle. Tours of this whitewashed and turreted ancient stronghold take in the Scottish baronial architecture and tell the story of the Atholl family over seven centuries. Highlights include the wood-panelled entrance hall and timber-roofed ballroom, while the surrounding parkland is ripe for a stroll, spotting Highland cattle, red squirrels and peacocks along the way.

Your next stop is south at the Queen's View on Loch Tummel, one of Scotland's finest viewpoints. You'll gaze out along the water towards Schiehallion, a beautifully conical mountain popular with hikers, and can take a short walk through the unspoiled woodland.

Save some energy though for the circular one-and-a-half-mile walk on the outskirts of nearby Aberfeldy to see the Birks of Aberfeldy. Immortalised in Robert Burns' 1787 poem, the birks (from the Scots for birch trees) lead out to ►

For more on
beautiful Scotland,
go to
www.britain-magazine.com

Clockwise from right:
The prehistoric
dwelling on Loch
Tay at the Scottish
Crannog Centre;
the Queen's
Bedchamber inside
Stirling Castle;
Scone Palace
near Perth

PHOTOS: © ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/IAN MASTERTON/ALAMY/VISIT SCOTLAND/KENNY LAM





THE PLANNER



GETTING THERE

ScotRail operates rail services between Stirling and all other major Scottish cities, while the Caledonian Sleeper currently arrives daily at 4.57am, having travelled overnight from London Euston. www.scotrail.co.uk; www.sleeper.scot



WHERE TO STAY

Grand country house hotel Cromlix stands in 34 acres of woodland and gardens just outside Dunblane and has its own loch as well as a fabulous Chez Roux restaurant and spacious suites.

Slightly further north, Gleneagles is perhaps Scotland's most famous hotel, a "glorious playground" that has everything from a world-famous golf course and two Michelin-starred restaurants to horse riding, fishing and falconry. There's also an indoor-outdoor heated pool. www.cromlix.com; www.gleneagles.com



WHERE TO EAT

Scotland's only two-Michelin-starred restaurant is Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles, where the fabulous tasting menu features home-smoked Scottish lobster, roast Highland lamb and local girolles. A more memorable meal would be hard to find.

Just outside Stirling in Kippen, the cosy Cross Keys inn serves gastropub food. Try the village butcher's sausages, served with mash and washed down with real ales from local brewery Fallen of Kippen. www.andrewfairlie.co.uk; www.kippencrosskeys.com



FURTHER INFORMATION

For more on attractions along the route, see heart200.scot. *Beyond the Bagpipes* by Helen Ochyra (Book Guild, £9.99) is out now.

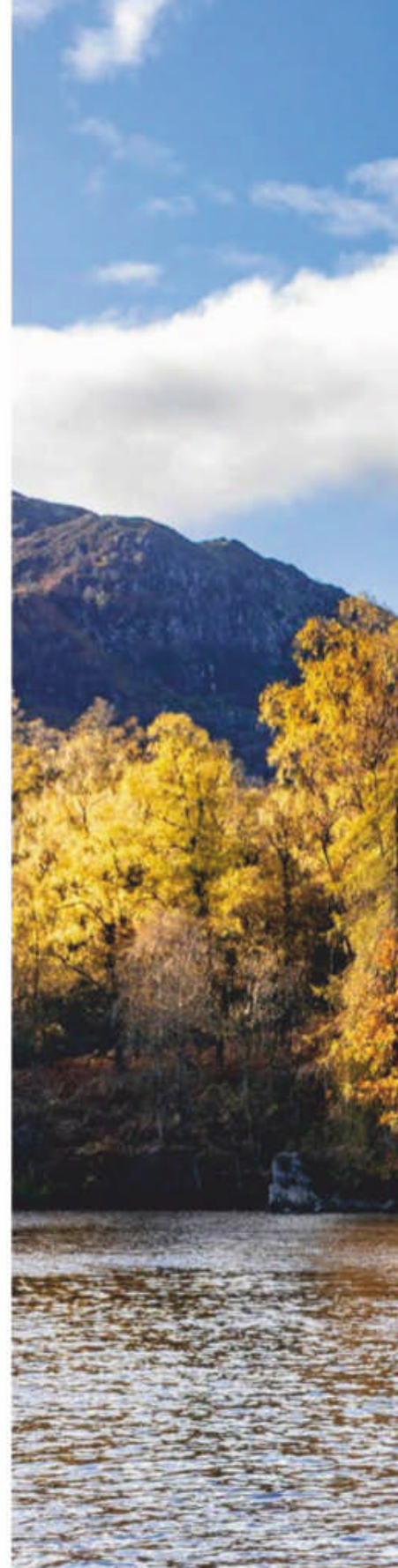
the Falls of Moness, a ribbon of raging white water that thunders down the Moness gorge and is at its best in the cool, rainy days of autumn.

From here it's a short drive on to Loch Tay, a magnificent 15-mile stretch of dark water that is one of the deepest lochs in Scotland. Visit the Scottish Crannog Centre at Kenmore and you'll walk out over the water to an authentic recreation of an Iron Age loch dwelling. Enthusiastic guides lead tours of the crannog, a roundhouse made from timber, before demonstrating ancient crafts and primitive fire making.

The westernmost section of the Heart 200 runs through Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, a glorious area of sleepy wooded glens and rumpled hills. The highlight of a visit is a boat trip out from Trossachs Pier on the 120-year-old *Sir Walter Scott* steamship. Currently being refurbished, it will be sailing again in 2022; in the meantime its sister ship the *Lady of the Lake* cruises the waters of Loch Katrine, a freshwater loch so beautiful it prompted Scott to write his poem *Lady of the Lake* in 1810, and is also said to have inspired both Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth.

En route back towards Stirling call in to Argaty Red Kites. Afternoon is the best time to visit, when the rangers feed the birds, bringing hundreds of them down to a low enough level for up-close sightings and photography. You'll also hear the story of how these magnificent birds were brought back from the brink of extinction in one of the UK's most successful ever conservation efforts.

Your trip started with an imposing castle and it ends with one too. Doune Castle in the eponymous village has a fantastically well-preserved gatehouse which dates back to the 14th century and has been seen on screen in both *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Outlander* – which makes for a unique audio tour you won't forget in a hurry.





PHOTOS: JOHN DAVIDSON PHOTOS/SCOTTISHCREATIVE/ROB SHENNAN/ALAMY

Clockwise from above:
The Lady of the Lake
on Loch Katrine;
statue of Robert
Burns in the Birks of
Aberfeldy;
Blair Castle in
Perthshire



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TOP 10 CANTERBURY

This beautiful city of narrow medieval alleys and soaring spires is a key player in Britain's history

WORDS **MONICA WOODS**

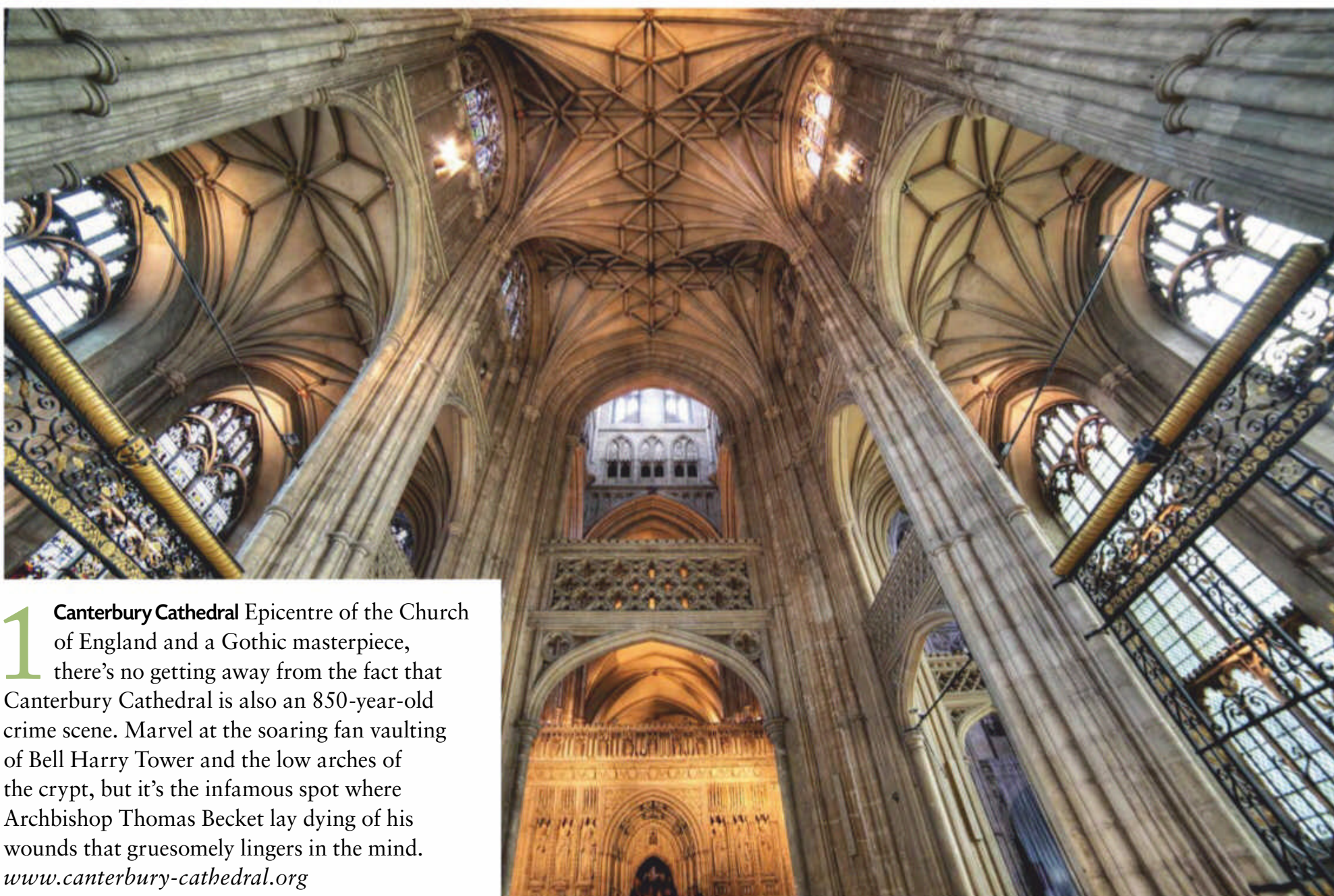
Home to one of England's oldest and most renowned cathedrals and a key player in the country's history, contemporary Canterbury draws in crowds to match the flocks of pilgrims of yesteryear. But the city wears its historical heavyweight status lightly. A wander round this medieval web of alleys, lopsided Tudor buildings and riverside gardens, encircled by ancient city walls, represents a very agreeable form of time travel. As you tread the lively cobbled streets, you'll be conscious of retracing past pilgrims' footsteps, notably the rambunctious lot depicted in Geoffrey Chaucer's late 14th-century *Canterbury Tales*.

Millions used to journey across late medieval Europe to visit the shrine of Archbishop Thomas Becket, assassinated within his own cathedral in 1170 on the apparent orders of King Henry II, following a long dispute



between Crown and Church. A striking modern sculpture now marks the spot, known simply as The Martydom, where Becket met his grisly end. Scenes from his life, and miracles the saint was said to have performed (he was canonised in 1173), are shown in exquisite stained glass in the Trinity Chapel, and the cathedral is crammed with other notable monuments and tombs.

A series of events to commemorate Becket's life and legacy was planned for 2020, 850 years after his death and 800 years since his remains were moved from the crypt to a resplendent shrine in the cathedral. With restrictions in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, many of these have had to be postponed. As the cathedral instigates a phased reopening, the hope is that the commemorations can be rescheduled. ►



1 Canterbury Cathedral Epicentre of the Church of England and a Gothic masterpiece, there's no getting away from the fact that Canterbury Cathedral is also an 850-year-old crime scene. Marvel at the soaring fan vaulting of Bell Harry Tower and the low arches of the crypt, but it's the infamous spot where Archbishop Thomas Becket lay dying of his wounds that gruesomely lingers in the mind. www.canterbury-cathedral.org

PHOTOS: © IVAN VDOVIN/AWL IMAGES/PADMA YOGINI/SHUTTERSTOCK/THE BEANEY HOUSE OF ART AND KNOWLEDGE/CANTERBURY ROMANT MUSEUM/MAURICE CROOKS/ALAMY/ ENGLISH HERITAGE TRUST/JIM HOLDEN/VISIT CANTERBURY/ALEX HARE



3 The Westgate Passing beneath the arch of the country's largest surviving medieval gate represents another step back in time. The 60ft-high gatehouse was built to defend against French invasion during the Hundred Years' War. It later served as a jail and played a role in both world wars. Enjoy battlement views from the on-site museum. www.onepoundlane.co.uk

2 St Augustine's Abbey The Abbey, with the cathedral and St Martin's Church (the longest serving parish church in the English-speaking world), makes up Canterbury's UNESCO World Heritage Site. Founded in AD 597 as a burial place for Anglo-Saxon kings, it was reduced to rubble from 1538, but a virtual reality tour helps bring the past back to life. www.english-heritage.org.uk

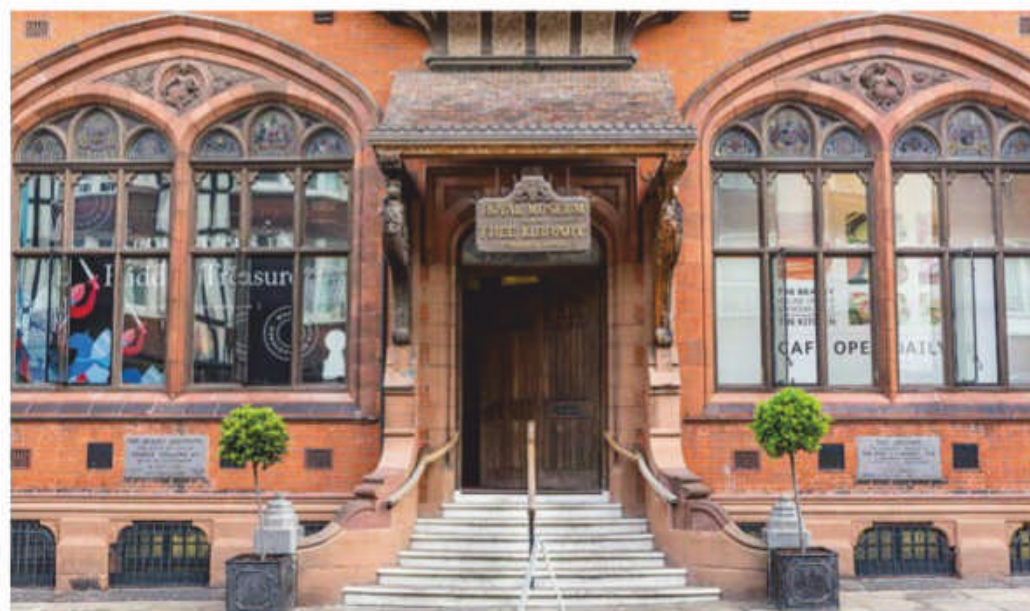




4 Westgate Parks An attraction in themselves, the Westgate Towers also mark the entrance to the delightful Westgate Parks, a quartet of green spaces that offer picnic spots, wildlife watching and children's play areas. Iron Age settlers identified this as a prime place to cross the River Stour. Today, the pretty riverside location simply provides a relaxing backdrop to one of England's oldest parks. www.explorekent.org



5 Canterbury Roman Museum Victorian workmen and then wartime bombing raids helped reveal the remains of a Roman town house, the focus of this absorbing subterranean site. No expense was spared, with the erstwhile residents enjoying underfloor heating, wall paintings and elaborate floor mosaics. canterburyromanmuseum.co.uk



6 The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge There's a wealth of engaging exhibits behind this striking mock-Tudor facade on Canterbury's bustling high street. It houses the city's tourist office, main library, a museum and art gallery and a top-notch café. From a mummified Egyptian cat to 1970s British TV star Bagpuss the cat, surprises are in store. www.thebeaney.co.uk



7 Canterbury Historic River Tours The River Stour helped put Canterbury on the map in Roman times, connecting the settlement of Durovernum to the rest of the empire. These days, commerce extends to entertaining guided tours by boat or punt, usually operating from March to November. Sticking to dry land, you can walk or cycle along the riverbanks on the three-mile Great Stour Way. www.canterburyrivertours.co.uk; www.explorekent.org



8 Kent County Cricket Club The historical showpiece city of Canterbury seems to go in for superlatives and firsts. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that the Spitfire, St Lawrence, the home of Kent County Cricket Club, is one of the oldest cricket grounds in the world. The game itself was first played in 16th-century southeast England. www.kentcricket.co.uk

9 Chilham Castle For a glimpse of the Garden of England, head to the splendid, russet-brick Chilham Castle, only a 15-minute drive from Canterbury. The manor has offered shelter to kings and aristocrats over the centuries but is today a private home set in stunning landscaped grounds, formerly a medieval deer park. Check ahead for garden open days and group tours of the house. www.chilham-castle.co.uk



10 Sir John Boys House Another building that will catch your eye, 17th-century Sir John Boys House is stacked like an unsteady, two-tone layer cake (it's also known as the Crooked House). It's just as unique inside, crammed with a collection of secondhand books, which are sold to raise funds to help the local homeless population. www.catchinglives.org/catching-lives-bookshop

THE PLANNER

GETTING THERE

Canterbury is well connected to London by coach and train. The rail journey from London St Pancras can take as little as 50 minutes; it's just over 1hr 30min from Victoria station. www.thetrainline.com

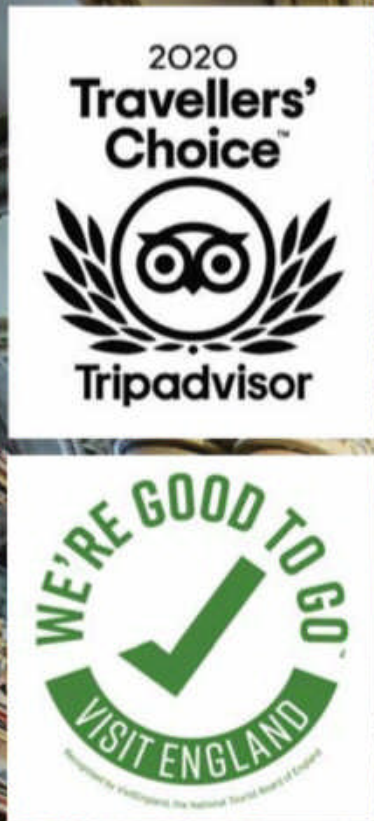
WHERE TO STAY

A stone's throw from the Westgate, The Falstaff is a charming boutique hotel which gets top marks for location and extra credit for the period features in some of its rooms. www.thefalstaffincanterbury.com

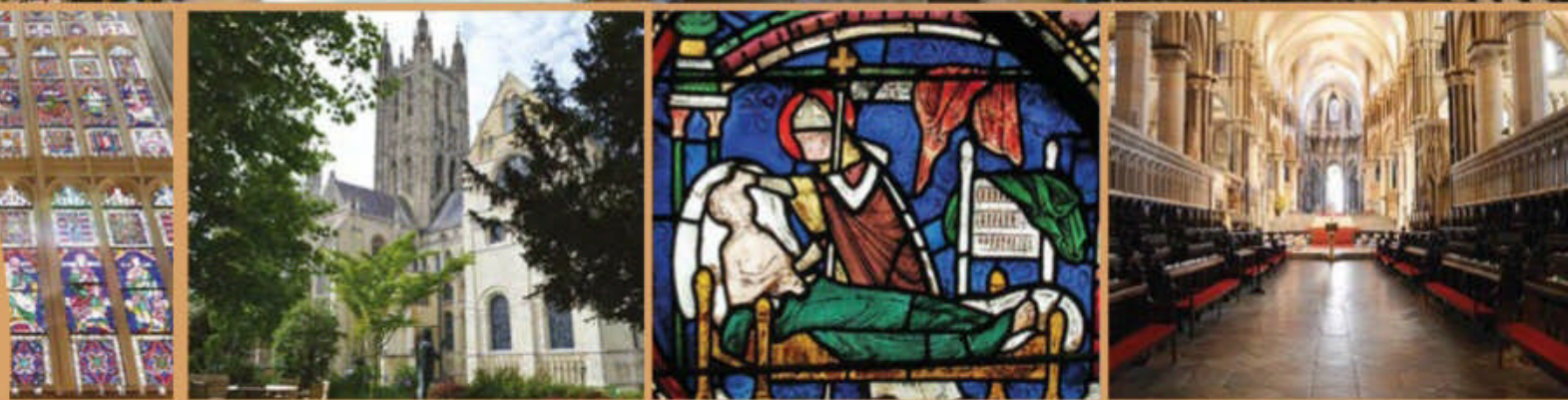
WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Make a beeline for The Goods Shed farmers market and food hall to stock up on fresh local ingredients for the perfect riverside picnic. Alternatively, stay put for cocktails and dinner in the on-site restaurant. Be sure to pause for an obligatory afternoon tea at the family-owned Tiny Tim's Tearoom. www.thegoodsshed.co.uk; <https://tinytimstearoom.com>

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Hall Place

This marvellous mishmash of Tudor, Georgian and other eras is surrounded by equally eclectic gardens

WORDS **LAWRENCE ALEXANDER**

Hall Place is a charming chameleon of a building. Approached from the east, this Kent manor is a solid Tudor edifice, complete with hefty oaken door and sober features. From the south, a tasteful Stuart facade with understated doorway announces the seat of a true country gentleman. From the west, black and white chequers recall medieval fantasy, while two enormous Tudor windows take up much of the north side. These same windows allow for a magnificent, double-storey, light-filled Great Chamber, complete with minstrels' gallery and sturdy fireplace. Yet much of Hall Place's timeless elegance is thanks to an unlikely building material: rubble.

It was begun in 1537 by Sir John Champneys, Lord Mayor of London, using stone reclaimed from nearby Lesnes Abbey, in a cunning chequerboard pattern of flint and rubble. Just over a century later, in 1649, another London merchant, Sir Robert Austen, enlarged Sir John's manor house with an entirely new wing. He made no effort to blend the extension with what was already there, giving Hall Place distinctly multiple personalities.

The estate passed between various owners, several of whom were largely absent, including Francis Dashwood of West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire, too busy in his notorious Hellfire Caves in the Chilterns to bother with yet another property miles away.

By the late 19th and early 20th century, the house was let on several short-term leases. The last tenant, Lady Limerick, from

the 1920s to 1943, enjoyed her home to the full, adding 'Tudor' fireplaces and holding fashionable community pageants in the grounds. For scenery she planted up topiary 'characters' in pots, which could be moved around an outdoor stage.

During the Second World War Hall Place (codenamed Santa Fe) was commandeered by American GIs, tasked with intercepting enemy signals and sending them to Bletchley Park for decoding, so the departing gardeners planted the topiary shapes in a temporary bed by the house. They are still there, a mysterious, cramped 'chess board' of oddities, including a teapot, church and peacock.

They are by no means, however, the only curiosities in Hall Place's gardens, created after the war using rubble from local bomb damage. 'York stone paths' turn out to be sunken stone sinks, complete with plugholes. House bricks, smashed concrete and kerb stones form crazy paving while an old millstone makes a convincing centre roundel in a grand terrace. Secret gardens hide behind high hedges; a turf labyrinth lurks in the shadows of an ancient tree.

Quirkiest of all, ten topiary Queen's Beasts, planted in 1953 to celebrate the coronation of HM The Queen, are based on fearsome statues at Kew Gardens. Over the years, they have, like so many of us, succumbed to middle-aged-spread. Now resembling tubby, eager puppies, tongues hanging out of happy grins, they are a cuddly delight, but unlikely to be scaring anyone soon. **B**

www.hallplace.org.uk

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