

# *An English & Welsh Country Christmas*

December 9–14, 2024

Tour Leaders: Gareth Williams and Curt DiCamillo



*Heritage Tours*  
by American Ancestors



DICAMILLO  
TRAVEL



## When winter beckons and Christmas is just around the corner, what could be better than spending time in England and Wales!

Join us for this special Yuletide tour where the varied topography of the ancient lands of the Welsh and English borders take on a whole new look, with hills glistening in frost and snow. Log fires and festive fayre bring an enticing magic to the interiors of the private country houses and estates that we will visit along the way. There will also be an opportunity to visit Shrewsbury, the birthplace of the father of evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin. Together with scenes and settings that inspired Charles Dickens, including the background of the recent filming of *Great Expectations*, there will be seasonal fare and local specialties, including gingerbread, a Christmas wine tasting at a 200-year-old wine merchant, Christmas music, and more! We'll be staying at Weston Park, one of England's grandest country houses, where we will be the only occupants. There will be crackling log fires in the library, invigorating warm beverages, holiday stories, art by Old Masters that tells the Christmas story, laughter amid crisp, cold walks in the ancient deer park, and Christmas gifts for everyone!



*Weston Park Orangery Garden  
Courtesy of Curt DiCamillo*



*Weston Park Dining Room*

### ***Weston Park, Weston-Under-Lizard***

Set on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, Weston Park was built in 1671 by Lady Elizabeth Wilbraham and was the seat of the earls of Bradford from 1762 until 1981. Noted for its warm and welcoming atmosphere, the house boasts an internationally important collection of paintings, including works by Gainsborough, van Dyck, and Stubbs. The house has also hosted a number of high-profile events, including the G8 Summit Retreat Day and the Northern Ireland Peace Talks, as well as exclusive groups such as ours! The park was landscaped in the 18th century by Capability Brown and is noted for its collection of follies. All rooms have private bathrooms and are equipped with minisafes, clothing brushes, and hair dryers. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available throughout Weston Park.



# Itinerary

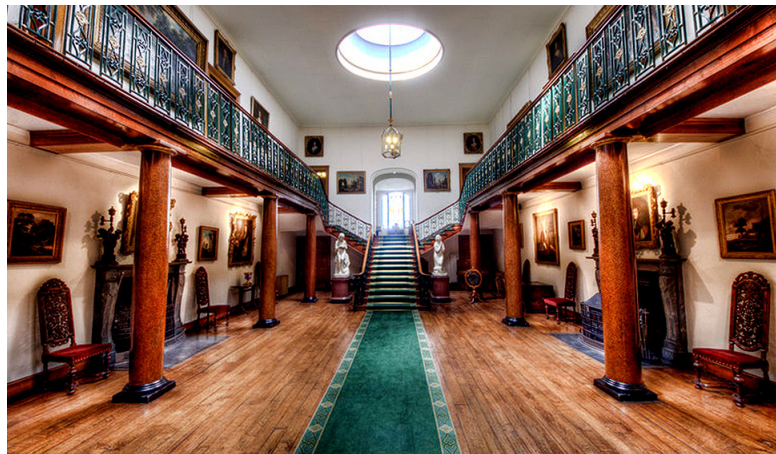
## Monday, December 9

Arrive independently in London (accommodation before the tour begins is on your own). Meet Curt DiCamillo and fellow tour participants at 10:00 a.m. at **The Rembrandt Hotel** in South Kensington. After meeting up, we'll depart London by private coach for our three-hour journey to Shropshire. Enroute we'll visit **Hagley Hall**, the home of Christopher Lyttelton, 12th Viscount Cobham, and wife Tessa. We'll have a light lunch upon arrival, followed by a tour of the house led by Lord Cobham. Set in a 350-acre landscaped park, Hagley Hall was built between 1753 and 1759 for the 1st Lord Lyttelton, an



*Hagley Hall  
Courtesy of Louis Freeman*

exceptional man who was a politician, historian, and poet. Admired by the literary giants of his time (Fielding dedicated *Tom Jones* to him and Dr. Johnson wrote his biography), Lord Lyttelton created a magnificent Palladian house that features some of the finest examples of Rococo Italian plasterwork in England. We'll arrive in the late afternoon at the divine **Weston Park**, our home for the next five nights, where we will be the only occupants of this lovely 17th century country house. After we meet our host and guide, Gareth Williams, there will be time to settle into the stunning bedrooms before we meet for drinks, a tour of the house, and dinner.



*Brynkinalt Hall  
Courtesy of Brynkinalt Estate*

## Tuesday, December 10

This morning we head northwest to Wales to visit **Brynkinalt Hall**, home of the Trevor family since 942. Here we'll have a tour and light lunch hosted by Iain and Kate Hill-Trevor. The current house, built in 1612, is a handsome gabled mansion of brick with stone dressings that commands a spectacular position looking out across its parkland and the Ceiriog Valley. In the early 19th century, Charlotte Hill-Trevor, Viscountess Dungannon, made a number of Regency alterations to the house, resulting in a sequence of handsome rooms that are grouped

around a galleried central hall. Brynkinalt has fascinating collections that reflect the family's links to the British royal family and to key historical figures such as the 1st Duke of Wellington. Continuing west, this afternoon we'll visit **Rhug House** in Denbighshire, the private family home of Lord and Lady Newborough. The house, a Neoclassical jewel designed by Joseph Bromfield, is set in a magical park designed by Humphry Repton—one of just a handful of landscapes that the garden designer (who was rendered almost immortal by reference in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*) created in Wales—which gazes out to the mountains beyond. Following a tour of the house, we will adjourn to the **Rhug Farm Shop**, a remarkable award-winning enterprise created by Lord Newborough that now has clients around the world. The estate, which has been visited by King Charles III and Queen Camilla, holds a royal warrant for its sustainable policies. We'll return to Weston Park and have dinner in a casual restaurant set within the walls of the Weston Park Estate.

## Wednesday, December 11

After breakfast, we will spend a leisurely morning at Weston Park, where Gareth will lead a handling session of exceptional pieces from the collection. After lunch at Weston, we'll visit **Wenlock Abbey**, the spectacular medieval house that was originally the prior's lodging and infirmary range of Wenlock Priory. Converted to a secular country house when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, the house has been admired and visited by Ruskin and many other artists, including Paul Sandby, Thomas Girtin, and J.M.W. Turner. In the 19th century, when it was the home of the Milnes-Gaskell family, Wenlock Abbey hosted the historian Henry Adams and the writer Henry James, among a litany of interesting guests. Wenlock was acquired in the late 20th century by the artist Louis de Wet and his wife, the actress Gabrielle de Wet, who worked tirelessly to restore the building and breathe new life into it. We'll return to Weston Park for drinks and dinner.



*St. Chad's Church, Shrewsbury  
Courtesy of Curt DiCamillo*

## Thursday, December 12

Today we'll drive west to **Shrewsbury**, Shropshire's atmospheric county seat. A market town located on the River Severn with a medieval street plan, Shrewsbury was the principal filming location for the 1984 movie *A Christmas Carol*, which starred George C. Scott as Scrooge. We will visit **The Mount**, the late 18th century house where Charles Darwin was born. Built for Darwin's father, Dr. Robert Waring Darwin, for years The Mount served as offices. Recently purchased by businessman Glyn Jones, this remarkable period-correct historic house is now coming back to life. Here we'll learn of Charles Darwin's Christmases past in Shrewsbury and discover the progress of

work on the house. We'll then continue on to the town center and arrive at **Tanners**, an award-winning, family-run wine merchant established in 1842; here we'll have a wine tasting with wine connoisseur Alix Chidley-Utley, followed by a buffet lunch. Afterward there will be free time in Shrewsbury to explore museums and churches and to indulge in Christmas shopping. This evening we'll have a special concert by a local chamber choir, who will perform Christmas songs for us at Weston Park, followed by dinner in the house.

## Friday, December 13

This morning we will head south to **Wightwick Manor**, a Victorian manor house just over the county border in the West Midlands. One of only a few surviving examples of a house built and furnished under the influence of both the Aesthetic and Arts & Crafts styles, Wightwick has been owned by the National Trust since 1937. The house is a grand version of the half-timbered vernacular style and is a notable example of the influence of William Morris, with original Morris wallpapers and fabrics, De Morgan tiles, Kempe glass, and Pre-Raphaelite works of art, including pieces by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Evelyn De Morgan, Edward



*Wightwick Manor  
Courtesy of Curt DiCamillo*





Chillington Hall  
Courtesy of Curt DiCamillo

Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, John Everett Millais, Elizabeth Siddall, and Leonard Shuffrey. After our self-guided visit here, we will travel north to **Chillington Hall**, the home of the Giffard family for over 800 years. Their current house is a handsome Georgian mansion that commands beautiful views across its Capability Brown-landscaped park. An avenue marches over a mile to the front of the house with its grand portico leading to a sequence of rooms grouped around a top-lit central hall. This core of the house was designed by the young Sir John Soane, incorporating a wing that had been designed a generation earlier by local architect Francis Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Giffard will welcome us with hot drinks, mulled wine, shortbread, and mince pies, followed by a tour of the house dressed in its Christmas finest, with lunch in the dining room. Drinks and a festive farewell dinner are at Weston Park.

## Saturday, December 14

After breakfast, we'll depart by coach for London, where participants will have a choice of being dropped off at Heathrow Airport or in central London.

## Tour Leaders



### Gareth Williams

Gareth Williams is a noted UK-based art and architecture historian who has lectured around the world on a variety of subjects and published widely, including for *Apollo* magazine and the *Georgian Group Journal*. He is also the author of *Masterpieces from the Ford Collection* (2011) and *The Country Houses of Shropshire*, which was published by Boydell Press in 2021. Gareth graduated with first class honors in the history of art from the University of Manchester in 1992 and completed his master's at the same university in 1994. Since 2006 he has been the curator and head of learning at the Weston Park Foundation. Before he came to Weston, Gareth was a curator for the National Trust and a regional director at Sotheby's. In October of 2022 he was appointed a deputy lieutenant of Shropshire by the lord-lieutenant, the representative in the county of King Charles III.



### Curt DiCamillo

Curt is the Curator of Special Collections at American Ancestors. Before he came to American Ancestors he worked for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the National Trust for Scotland. Curt is a noted historian and a recognized authority on the British country house, about which he has written, lectured, and taught in the U.S. and abroad. Since 1999 he has maintained an award-winning database on the web, *TheDiCamillo.com*, which seeks to document every English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish country house ever built, standing or demolished. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, and is a member of the Council of the American Museum in Britain.

# Tour Prices

**Tour Price, Per Person Double:** \$6,795

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(includes single supplement)

*Tour price is per person, based on double occupancy, with a minimum of 14 paying participants.*

**Deposit & Final Payment:** A deposit of \$1,500 per person is required to reserve a spot on the tour. Deposits are payable to American Ancestors by check or credit card (MasterCard, Visa, or American Express). Final balance will be invoiced and is due on October 10, 2024. Final balance payments are payable by ACH payment or check only to Travel Muse, Inc. Registrations will be accepted beyond this date on a space-available basis.

**Activity Level:** Moderate; good walking ability is advised. Some of the visits require use of staircases, and there will be a limited amount of walking on uneven ground.

**Flights:** Airfare is not included in the tour price. Participants are responsible for all aspects of their round-trip air arrangements. Please do not purchase airline tickets until the operation of the tour is confirmed.

**Terms & Conditions:** Upon receipt of registration, Travel Muse will send registrant a Participant Tour Agreement detailing the full terms and conditions for this tour. This document must be signed and returned to Travel Muse before participant's registration is considered complete and any arrangements can be confirmed.

**Travel Insurance:** Travel Insurance is not included in the tour cost, but participants are strongly encouraged to purchase a travel protection plan in conjunction with this tour, including coverage of trip cancellation, trip interruption, emergency evacuation/repatriation, medical expenses, lost or damaged baggage, and other expenses and/or losses incurred due to unexpected situations. Should a participant cancel at any time after registering for the tour, American Ancestors and Travel Muse must strictly abide by the cancellation policy outlined herein. Travel insurance information will be sent upon tour registration.

**Tour Price Inclusions:** Accommodations for five (5) nights at Weston Park (reserved exclusively for American Ancestors); services of the House Butler; full English breakfast daily; five lunches; five dinners with wine; pre-dinner drinks for four of the

five dinners; curatorial services provided by Gareth Williams; transportation by mid-size coach throughout, including driver gratuity and bottled water on board daily; visits to private homes as indicated; and the accompaniment of Curt DiCamillo as Tour Leader / Lecturer and Cy Britt as Tour Director to manage logistics and ensure the comfort and safety of tour participants.

**Tour Price Exclusions:** Airline tickets, airline taxes and surcharges, and baggage fees; airport portage; airport transfers upon arrival and departure except for one transfer to London-Heathrow (LHR) on December 14th; passport or visa fees; meals other than those specified in the itinerary; gratuities for hotel housekeeping; personal items such as telephone calls, room service, valet service, à-la-carte orders, specialty wines and liquors, laundry charges, travel extensions, or tour deviations; entry or departure fees levied by local governments; travel insurance; any other items not specifically included in the itinerary.

**Cancellations & Refunds:** Cancellation by participant must be made in writing to American Ancestors and is effective only upon acknowledged receipt by American Ancestors. There is a non-refundable registration and planning fee of \$500 per person regardless of cancellation date. Written cancellation received by American Ancestors on or before July 5, 2024: full refund minus \$500 per person registration and planning fee. Written cancellation received by American Ancestors between July 6 and October 10, 2024: full refund minus \$1,500 per person cancellation fee (includes registration and planning fee). Written cancellations received by American Ancestors on or after October 10, 2024: no refund. Tour registration is non-transferable. In the case of cancellation, substitutions are not allowed. After the tour has commenced, no refunds will be issued for any reason including, but not limited to, unused portions of tour. If the tour is cancelled by American Ancestors or Travel Muse due to low enrollment, active registrants will receive a full refund of all tour payments.

**COVID-19 Policy:** American Ancestors and Travel Muse Inc. follow guidelines and mandates issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Tour participants are no longer required to wear face coverings during the tour. Proof of vaccination status is not required, nor is social distancing mandated. In line with CDC guidance, we advise anyone who is unvaccinated (and encourage anyone who feels more comfortable) to continue wearing a mask. We appreciate your adherence to this policy.

**For more information, please contact Cy Britt, Director of Heritage Tours,  
at [cy.britt@nehgs.org](mailto:cy.britt@nehgs.org) or 617-226-1267.**

American Ancestors is America's founding genealogical organization, the most respected name in family history, and one of the leading non-profit organizations in the field. We create enriching opportunities for members and the public to research their own family history, attend educational programs and tours, exhibitions, and other inspirational experiences that communicate the power and importance of family history. [AmericanAncestors.org](http://AmericanAncestors.org)

*Cover image: By kind permission of the trustees of the Weston Park Foundation*