

An English Country Christmas at Knowsley Hall



December 10–16, 2025

Tour Leaders: Curt DiCamillo and Oliver Gerrish





When winter beckons and Christmas is just around the corner, what could be better than spending time in England, the country that virtually invented Christmas!

For our 2025 Christmas tour we'll be based at Knowsley Hall, the enormous Merseyside country house that has been home to the Stanley family since 1385. Here we will be the only guests of our hosts, Edward and Caroline Stanley, the 19th Earl and Countess of Derby, whose art-filled house will be glistening with Christmas for us.

From Knowsley we'll venture to Liverpool to see Impressionist paintings, ancient Roman sculpture, and the world's finest Wedgwood in some of the best

museums in Britain. There will also be visits to two of Liverpool's architectural gems, the Anglican Cathedral and St. George's Hall, as well as the Royal Liver Building, once the tallest in England and one of the first buildings in the world to be built using reinforced concrete.

And, of course, we will visit exceptional country houses bursting with festive fayre, including Tatton Park, Combermere Abbey, and the rarely opened Cholmondeley Castle.

Knowsley Hall

Knowsley Hall has been in the ownership of the Stanley family since the 14th century. It's believed that a building has been on the current house's site since the 12th century; however, today's house has a 15th-century core with Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian additions and alterations.

The stunning gardens and parkland were created by Capability Brown between 1775 and 1776. The gardens were extended in the 19th century, and the parkland was enclosed by a 9.5-mile stone wall featuring many follies along its length, including a wonderful Georgian Temple called the Octagon.

During its 1,000-year history, this much-loved estate also housed an Augustinian Priory, a racecourse, and, reputedly, a goldmine! Today, the beautiful, extensive, and exquisitely maintained grounds will provide a stunning backdrop to our exclusive stay.

American Ancestors has exclusive use of Knowsley Hall throughout our stay. There are 15 spacious bedrooms, each of which offers breathtaking views of the gardens and the surrounding parkland. Every bedroom has its own individual charm, antique furniture, original artwork, and luxurious linens.

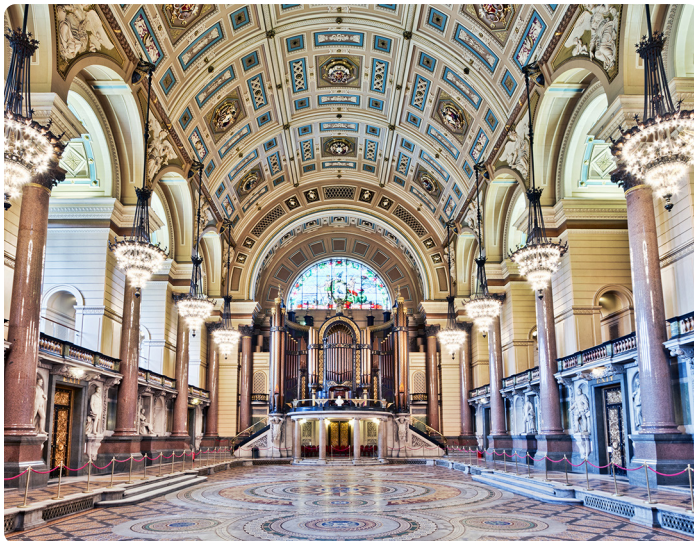
Above: Knowsley in the snow. Courtesy of My Big Day, Michael Harper.

Itinerary

Wednesday, December 10

Arrive independently at **Manchester Airport** (MAN) this morning or afternoon. From Boston, there are good connecting flights on Icelandair (via KEF), Aer Lingus (via DUB), American/British (via LHR), and Delta (via AMS). Individual airport transfers from Manchester Airport to Knowsley Hall (*approximately a 35-minute drive*) are included in the tour price and will be pre-arranged for each tour participant.

Upon arrival at **Knowsley Hall** box lunches will be available for those who check in between late morning and early afternoon. After arrival there will be time to settle into the stunning bedrooms before we meet our hostess, Caroline Stanley, Countess of Derby, at 5 p.m. Lady Derby will give us a guided tour of Knowsley Hall, complete with an introduction to the 600-year history of the Stanley family, as well as the history of the house, the park, and the estate. After the tour ends, we'll have drinks in the Walnut Drawing Room, followed by an early, light supper in the State Dining Room.



Top: Anglican Cathedral, Liverpool. Photo by Calfier001 / Wikimedia.
Bottom: St. George's Hall, Liverpool.

Thursday, December 11

This morning we will head to **Liverpool**, Britain's fifth largest city, where our specialist Blue Badge guide will give us a tour by coach that focuses on the development of the city, largely built upon maritime trade with America. We will see remarkable architecture that runs the gamut from Bluecoat Chambers (Liverpool's oldest surviving building) to the striking modernist Catholic Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (completed in 1967) as we make our way past streets and squares laid out by affluent merchants in the University Quarter and the Georgian Quarter in the 18th and 19th centuries. We will stop to visit the towering Anglican **Liverpool Cathedral**, the largest cathedral in Britain, after which we'll continue to the Cultural Quarter and its collection of Victorian civic cultural buildings funded by the successful mercantile trade. Among them is **St. George's Hall**, recognized as one of the finest and largest Neoclassical buildings in the world, where our guide will take us through its stunning interior. Following lunch nearby, we will arrive at the **Walker Art Gallery** for a guided tour of the museum's masterpieces. Home to one of the UK's most important collections of paintings, the Walker features masterpieces by Rubens, Rembrandt, Turner, and Stubbs; Pre-Raphaelite artworks by Rossetti and Millais; Impressionist works by Monet and Degas; and contemporary works by Hockney and Wylie. The museum also has an impressive collection of Roman sculpture and British and European decorative arts from the 14th century to the present day. Next, we'll continue by coach to the waterfront at Pier Head to take in the city's iconic Three Graces: the Royal Liver Building, the Cunard Building, and the Port of Liverpool Building—all conceived and constructed as visible symbols of Liverpool's international prestige and as proud emblems of its commercial success. We'll end our time in Liverpool with a tour of the **Royal Liver Building**, which will finish with a glass of bubbly in the historic boardroom. We then return to Knowsley Hall, where there will be time to relax, followed by drinks and dinner in the State Dining Room.



Meols Hall. Photo by Gareth Williams.

Friday, December 12

Today we'll venture northwest of Knowsley for a morning visit at **Meols Hall** with owner Catherine Hesketh. With parts that date to the 12th century, Meols Hall is Southport's oldest manor house. The primarily 17th-century house that we see today, with later additions, has been in the Hesketh family for 27 generations and contains an interesting collection of paintings and furniture. Not to be missed is the 16th-century tithe barn, one of the finest examples of its kind in England. We will have a cozy lunch at Meols before we depart for the short drive to **Lady Green Garden Centre** for a shopping opportunity for treats and stocking stuffers. After we leave the garden center, we'll head home to Knowsley, where we will have a guided five-mile-long coach tour through **Knowsley Safari Park**, where we'll see tigers, lions, elephants, zebras, baboons, and rhinoceros. After our coach tour ends, there will be mulled wine and mince pies in the safari coffee shop, which will be open just for us. Then we'll walk through Knowsley's **Enchanted Light Show** before we return to the house for time to rest, followed by drinks and dinner.



Saturday, December 13

Lady Derby will accompany us for today's visits, which begin with a drive north to Lancashire, where we will be welcomed at **Gresgarth Hall** by owner Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd, one of Britain's most important garden designers. During a career that spans 30 years, Lady Arabella has undertaken 400 commissions all over the world, from small town gardens to large historic landscapes. Her client list includes Sting, the Duke of Westminster, and Queen Paola of Belgium. At Gresgarth we'll see the mansion's Gothic interiors and the garden's outdoor rooms, which are glorious even in winter. Next, we will head into Lancaster, the city that is the cultural hub of the county of Lancashire, where we'll have lunch before we visit **Judges' Lodgings**, a beautiful Georgian townhouse set in an old area of cobbled streets near the medieval castle. The townhouse was built around 1625 by Thomas Covell, keeper of Lancaster Castle, famous for locking up the Pendle witches during the infamous Lancashire Witch Trials. Beginning in 1826 the house became a lodging for the traveling "Red Judges" of the Assizes Courts. Dressed in scarlet robes, the judges decided the fate of murderers, forgers, and highwaymen at Lancaster Castle. Today Judges' Lodgings is a museum famous for its elegant period rooms that display one of the finest collections of Gillows furniture in the world. After our return to Knowsley there will be the traditional time to rest before we gather for drinks and a **fireside talk** about the history of Knowsley and the Stanley family by Lady Derby, followed by dinner.



Left, top: Port Sunlight Post Office. Photo by Phil Nash / Wikimedia.

Left, bottom: Tatton Park. Courtesy of Tatton Park.



Sunday, December 14

Today we return to Liverpool, this time crossing the River Mersey to **Port Sunlight**, where we will have a Blue Badge guide give us a tour of the model village created by industrialist William Lever (founder of Lever Brothers, later Unilever) for the workers of his soap factory. A connoisseur of architecture, Lever commissioned 30 different architects to design and build 900 workers cottages in the Arts & Crafts style. An enlightened employer, Lever provided much to improve the lives of his workers, including the beautiful **Lady Lever Art Gallery**. We will have a highlights tour of this national museum, which boasts the best collection of Wedgwood jasperware in the world, as well as an internationally renowned collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Following lunch nearby, we'll drive east to **Tatton Park**, where we will have a tour of this treasure-filled house that will be decked out for Christmas. Set amidst more than 50 acres of gardens within a 1,000-acre parkland, the mansion was home to the wealthy Egerton family from the 18th century until the last Lord Egerton died in 1958 and left the house to the National Trust. After we return to Knowsley there will be time to relax, followed by drinks and a **concert of Christmas songs** in the Stucco Ballroom performed by our very own countertenor, Oli Gerrish, who will be accompanied by lutist Sam Brown. After the concert, there will be a grand Christmas Dinner in the State Dining Room.

Left, top: Port Sunlight Post Office. Photo by Phil Nash / Wikimedia.
Left, bottom: Tatton Park. Courtesy of Tatton Park.



Monday, December 15

Our Monday will be spent to the south of Knowsley, on the border between Cheshire and Shropshire. Our first visit will be to **Combermere Abbey**, which began life as a Cistercian monastery in 1133. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536, the abbey and its land were gifted to Sir George Cotton, whose son Philip built a Tudor manor house here that incorporated the former Abbots Hall. Today Combermere is the home of Sarah Callander-Beckett and husband Peter, who have undertaken a substantial restoration to bring the historic house, altered in the Gothic style in the early 19th century, back into use. We will be welcomed by Sarah, who will share the history of the house and her family over coffee, tea, and homemade cakes before she gives us a tour of the house. We'll then hop on the coach for the short ride to **Cholmondeley Castle**, a seat of David, 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley, and his wife Rose. We will begin with lunch, followed by a tour of the house (a rare privilege, as Cholmondeley's interiors are never open to the public), with time afterward in the award-winning garden. Though the Cholmondeley family has been here since the 12th century, the current mansion was completed in the early 19th century in a mock castle style. After time to relax at Knowsley, we will again have the pleasure of one of Lady Derby's **fireside talks** during drinks, followed by a farewell dinner in the State Dining Room.

Tuesday, December 16

Following breakfast, cars will be arranged to transport each participant to Manchester Airport to meet their flight times (included in the tour price).



Top: Combermere Abbey.
Bottom: Cholmondeley Castle. Courtesy of Cholmondeley Castle.

Tour Leaders



Curt DiCamillo

Curt is the Curator of Fine Art 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 histo-

rian 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.



Oliver Gerrish

A native of Derbyshire, Oliver Gerrish is a Cambridge-educated architectural historian, a trustee of the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust, and was one of the youngest feature writers to appear in the

pages of *Country Life* magazine. He was chairman of The Young Georgians (the under-35 wing of the national architectural charity The Georgian Group), which he retired from in 2016 at the grand old age of 34, after nearly 15 years at the helm. While Chairman of The Young Georgians, Oliver planned and led more than 100 tours and events on behalf of The Georgian Group. He is half of *Historic Decoration*, a series of study days on the history of British interiors, which Oliver founded, together with Lady Caroline Percy. The study days take place at the Percy family's London seat, Syon House. Oliver is also a professional countertenor.



**For more information,
please contact Kelly Neagle at
kelly.neagle@americanancestors.org,
or 617-226-1215.**



Above: Royal Liver Building.

Cover image: Knowsley at Christmas. Photograph courtesy of Knowsley Estate.



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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

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TOUR PRICES

Tour Price, Per Person Double: \$8,500

Tour Price, Per Person Single: \$9,500 (includes single supplement)

Tour price is per person, based on double occupancy, with a minimum of 18 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 3, 2025. 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, unassisted walking ability is advised. Some of the visits require the use of staircases, sometimes winding, and there will be walking on uneven, sometimes wet, 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: Airport transfers upon arrival to and departure from Manchester Airport (MAN); accommodation for six (6) nights at Knowsley Hall (reserved exclusively for

American Ancestors); served hot breakfast and cold breakfast buffet daily; six lunches; six dinners with pre-selected wines and pre-dinner drinks served 30 minutes prior to dinners; curatorial services provided by Knowsley Hall; transportation by mid-size coach throughout, including driver gratuity and bottled water on board daily; visits to private homes as indicated; and the accompaniment by two staff as Co-Leaders / Co-Lecturers: Oliver Gerrish and Curt DiCamillo.

Tour Price Exclusions: Airline tickets, airline taxes and surcharges, and baggage fees; airport portage; airport transfers, other than the ones indicated above; drinks from the Honesty Bar, which may be charged to your room; passport or visa fees; meals other than those specified in the itinerary; gratuities for 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 June 4, 2025: full refund, minus \$500 per person registration and planning fee. Written cancellation received by American Ancestors between June 5 and October 8, 2025: full refund, minus \$1,500 per person cancellation fee (includes registration and planning fee). Written cancellations received by American Ancestors on or after October 9, 2025: no refund. Tour registration is non-transferable. In the case of cancellation, substitutions are not allowed. Also, in the case of cancellation, if travel insurance was purchased, no refund will be issued. After the tour has commenced, no refunds will be issued for any reason, including, but not limited to, unused portions of the 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. All tour participants have the right to a safe, respectful experience and we appreciate your adherence to this policy.

**For more information, please contact Kelly Neagle at
kelly.neagle@americanancestors.org, or 617-226-1215.**