

Tour Times

A publication from Mary Valentine Tours

June 2026

Dear Reader,

I've recently returned from ten days in England where I scouted locations for our September 22-October 1 tour.

To those of you joining us, I can promise ten days of fascinating experiences that may make you reconsider your impressions of England - you will be struck by how much England has become an example of a culture embracing both the old and the new, the traditional and the innovative.

England is still a place steeped in history. In September we'll be experiencing the historical importance of England as we go to Kew Gardens to see "Revolution 250: the Making of the USA," an exhibit which tells the story of the American Revolution from a British perspective. (They call it the "war of independence.") Our stop at the National Justice Museum will provide a glimpse of how trials were conducted hundreds of years ago. We hope to get tickets to the Bayeux Tapestry, which is returning to England after a thousand years in France, as its 210 feet of embroidered fabric tell the story of the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Our stop at the Bodleian Library in Oxford will illustrate the role of libraries in history. And our time in Leicester will tell the story of finding the grave of King Richard III after 500 years.

We'll balance the historical approach with examples of England's increasing focus on the modern, the innovative, and the future. These include the Victoria and Albert Museum's three new museums in East



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A sample schedule of our September 2026 tour.



Beautiful Bath - one of the stops on our September Tour.



We will also be visiting the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

London: The V&A East which focuses on the culture of London's East End; the V&A East Showhouse, which I wrote about in the last newsletter; and the Young V&A, designed for children. In addition, we'll check out the People's Museum in Manchester as well as MOCO, the new immersive art gallery displaying more than 100 works by contemporary artists including Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, Banksy, and Yayoi Kusama.

England is still the land of castles, tea cozies, and cathedrals, but it's also the ever-expanding home of growing technology and digital immersive art.

We have two spaces left for the September tour. If you want to see for yourself England's on-going evolution, join us.

Mary



And we will see Beyoncé's dress designed by Molly Goddard at the V&A East.

Read on for details on page on how you can join our tour!



Here's an overview of our 10-day 2026 tour (subject to minor adjustments)

Day 1 London

- The 1000-year-old Bayeux Tapestry at the British Museum (tentative)
- Opening night group dinner
- Tour orientation

Day 2 London

- Churchill's War Rooms
- MOCO Interactive art museum and gallery

- British Library
- The Postal Museum
- Group dinner

Day 3 London

- Foundling Museum
- Young Victoria and Albert Museum
- V&A East and V&A East Storehouse
- Group dinner

Day 4 London and Bath

- Garden Museum (London)
- Revolution 250 (London)
- Apartment 1 Royal Crescent (Bath)
- Group dinner

Day 5 Coventry, Cirencester, and Birmingham

- Cerney House Gardens (Cirencester)
- Saint Michael's Cathedral (Coventry)
- Blitz Museum (Coventry)
- Group dinner

Day 6 Birmingham

- Coffin Works
- Black Country Museum
- Group dinner

Day 7 Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent

- Emma Bridgewater Pottery
- Afternoon Tea
- Sarehole Mill
- Dinner on your own

Day 8 Liverpool and Manchester

- Museum of Liverpool
- The Beatles Story tour
- Liverpool Central Library
- Group dinner

Day 9 Manchester and Nottingham

- People's Museum/National Museum of Democracy (Manchester)
- John Rylands Library (Manchester)
- National Justice Museum (Nottingham)
- Group dinner

Day 10 Leicester, Oxford, and London Heathrow

- Richard III Center and the Roman civic buildings (Leicester)
- Bodleian Library (Oxford)
- Check in at London Heathrow hotel
- Final group dinner. Tour ends.

We hope you can join us!



HOW TO JOIN US:

Cost: \$6650; deposit: \$500. This covers 4- and 5-star hotels for ten nights, ten breakfasts, nine dinners, an afternoon tea, transportation, tickets and entry fees plus a photo album of our adventures from the tour.

Not included: airfare, airport transport, lunches, incidentals, and tips for the driver.

To reserve a spot, send us a \$500 deposit (non-refundable) now to hold your space. The balance is due no later than 20 days before the tour begins.

Send deposit to:

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What is immersive art?

An increasing number of galleries and museums in England, including some we're visiting on our September tour, now describe themselves as centers for "immersive art." What does this term mean?

Immersive art is a term describing artworks designed to envelop the viewer in a 360-degree environment that blends art and technology.

Examples include an artwork where participants "step inside" and interact with the piece, or an installation that may include sound, vibrations, interactive lighting and scents.

These new interactive experiences are made possible by computer-generated imagery, such as CGI, LEDs, robotics, and complex algorithms.

Our tour is scheduled to visit London's MOCO, a new gallery with more than 100 immersive artworks.



Book Corner

Looking for a book to get you in an “England State of mind?” Here are a couple of recommendations from Mary.

I chose this month's two recommendations while I was hoping to find some “escapist” reading material. Both succeeded in taking my mind off the current state of the world while I was reading them.

The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street by Helene Hanff

I first discovered Helen Hanff when I read **84 Charing Cross Road**, the story of the author's decade-long correspondence with a British book seller. If you haven't read it, you should. Or, if you prefer, watch the film version with Anthony Hopkins, Judi Dench, and Anne Bancroft.

The success of *84, Charing Cross Road* enabled New Yorker Helene Hanff to finally travel to London. **The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street** is her memoir of that visit. The reader meets a cast of wonderful and often eccentric characters as she ticks the items on her bucket list.

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day by Winifred Watson

When a placement agency sends unemployed Miss Pettigrew to the wrong address, she spends the day with a glamorous nightclub singer, extricating her hour by hour from one scrape after another. **Miss Pettigrew** is light, charming and utterly delightful.

One critic wrote ‘The sheer fun, the light-heartedness’ in this wonderful 1938 book ‘feels closer to a Fred Astaire film than anything else’. Another described the book as ‘the sweetest grown-up book in the world.’”

In 2008, the book was made into a film of the same name, starring Amy Adams, Frances McDormand, and Ciarán Hinds.

Book Club

Book Club News

Designed with the idea that we select books set in the places we visit on our tours (you are welcome whether you're on the tour or not), our May selection, *The Last Garden in England* by Julia Kelly, was set in the Midlands of England, .

Our discussion attracted participants from California, Texas, and Maine. For an hour members took on questions and topics such as:

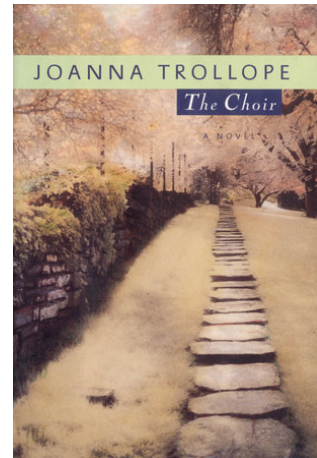
- What gardens mean to each of us
- Garden designs
- Gardens with “rooms”
- Favorite characters in the book
- The importance of the English class system in the story
- The viability of the plot structure
- Can a book have too many characters?

Our next Book Club Zoom meeting: July 18 at 2:00pm Pacific, 4:00 pm Central and 5:00 pm Eastern.

We'll discuss *The Choir* (1994) by Joanna Trollope.

Here's a brief description of the book:

Set in the 1980s in an English “Cathedral town,” *The Choir* paints a picture of a complex power struggle over the future and use of resources in the cathedral. As readers, we're soon aware of the battle between the Dean who is in conflict with the headmaster, the organist, and the mother of an 11-year-old prodigy with an extraordinary voice. We're soon caught up in personal and professional drama as the parties war over money, tradition, and community.



Read it, join us, and decide whose side you're on.

If you'd like to participate in our book club, just drop us a line at maryvalentinetours@gmail.com. We'll add you to the mailing list and send a Zoom reminder the day before.

About Mary Valentine

Tour leader Mary Valentine has been a Sociology professor and a life-long Anglophile. For more than 35 years, she has traveled extensively throughout the UK and led tours there since 2007.



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