

Tour Times

A publication from Mary Valentine Tours January/February 2026



Dear Reader,

Happy New Year!

Every new year we are full of hope, and this year is no exception. News events may be distressing or upsetting, but through it all we need to reflect on what makes us happy – like time with our families and friends, or a good book, a great work of art, or looking forward to a vacation to somewhere special. Our 2026 trips are offering you a chance to experience all of these. Read on to see where we are going this year in May and again in September and find information on how you can join us.

In the meantime, we have some interesting articles about what is going on “over the pond” plus some movie and book recommendations to get you in the mood.

Hope to see you soon.

Cheers.

Mary



Practical & Important Travel Tips

We've included some of these before, but it always helps to be reminded.

Check your passport to be sure it is valid for the length of your stay in England and at least three months if you wish to visit any country in the EU. Since getting a new or replacement passport takes some time, plan ahead and start the process now if you need a new one.

England now requires that you have an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) before entering the country. It links to your passport, so you must apply before traveling. Apply at the GOV.UK website.

Electrical currency in England is 230V so you will need a plug adapter which you can purchase online or at the airport when you arrive. Most hotels provide hairdryers, but adapters for cameras and phone chargers are a must.

The financial currency is the Pound Sterling and if you decide to buy a few pounds ahead, be sure that it is a polymer note (plastic). The paper notes were taken out of circulation in 2022. You can still make an exchange of paper for polymer at a UK bank or post office, but you can't use them to buy anything. Most establishments prefer the use of a credit card.

The resurgence of chimney sweeps in London.



We have to admit, our image of the chimney sweep will probably always be Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*. His face covered in soot, exaggerated cockney accent, cheerful demeanor, and magical dances were charming if not a bit overdone. But chimney sweeps were once an essential part of British life and as a recent article in the *New York Times* informs us, the occupation is seeing a resurgence as more and more people are looking for more financially efficient ways to heat their homes. Coal is banned, but the burning of some smokeless fuels is allowed, and even though there is very little smoke, there is still soot and the government recommends that chimneys be professionally swept once a year.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, children were sent up the flues to do the cleaning, and some got stuck or suffocated during the process. Today, technology has made the work less dangerous. With the use of digital cameras, industrial vacuum cleaners and even drones, some of the grunt work has been taken away. The new chimney sweeps are described as “chimney technicians.”

Chimney sweeps have been in business in Britain since at least 1519, according to the *Times*. The practice of using “climbing boys” was outlawed in 1875 after the death of an 11-year-old boy. With the adoption of central heating as well as clean air regulations, open fires “fell out of fashion.” But there is still the romance of sitting in front of a fire, reading a book, having a glass of wine or a cup of tea that remains. As fuel costs began to rise, people reopened their fireplaces and that reopened business for the chimney sweeps.

Source: *New York Times*, January 18, 2026.

Coal was outlawed in 2023 in England for household use. And its use as a fuel source remains debated today. Margaret Thatcher’s government closed down many coal mines in 1984-85 and the closures continued for many years. In 2015, the last of Britain’s 173 working pits was closed. Join us as we tour a closed coal mine led by a former miner as part of our “Museums, Libraries, and More Tour” in May or September.

Museums, Libraries, and More Tour
May 15-24, 2026

and

Sept. 22—Oct. 1, 2026

Seeing the world through its museums and libraries.

Spend ten days exploring the UK discovering unique museums and tradition and contemporary libraries.

Sites include (partial list):

- ◆ *The British Library, London*
- ◆ *London's Garden Museum*
- ◆ *London's interactive Paradox Museum where nothing is as it seems*
- ◆ *Bodleian Library, Oxford*
- ◆ *The Young V & A Museum (2026 Best Museum in Europe Award)*
- ◆ *V&A East storehouse including David Bowie's archive*
- ◆ *Chained Library, Hereford*
- ◆ *An underground coal museum*
- ◆ *Nottingham's National Justice Museum*
- ◆ *The King Richard III Centre and the unearthed Roman village in Leicester*
- ◆ *The Beatles Story Museum in Liverpool*
- ◆ *And more!*

Cost: \$6650.00 Deposit \$500.00.

This covers 4- and 5-star hotels for ten nights, ten breakfasts, nine dinners, an afternoon tea, transportation, tickets and entry fees.

Not covered: airfare, airport transfers, lunches, incidentals, and tips for our driver.

About Our Tours . . .

For the past eighteen years, our tours have visited a variety of locations throughout England, Wales, and Scotland.

Led by retired college professor Mary Valentine, our small group tours are designed to visit the places that other tours don't.

This year's 10-day tour concentrates on the amazing variety of museums and libraries throughout the UK. In addition, we've added an optional three-day London tour for newcomers.

HOW TO JOIN US:

Send us a deposit (non-refundable) now.

\$500.00 for the Museums, Libraries, and More Tour

\$200.00 for the London 101 tour.

The balance for the May tours is due no later than February 15, 2026. For the September tours, the balance is due no later than July 15, 2026.

Send deposit to:

Mary Valentine Tours 15030 Ventura Blvd. #456 Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

Questions? Give us a call.

747.998.5630 (office)

323.868.6394 (cell)



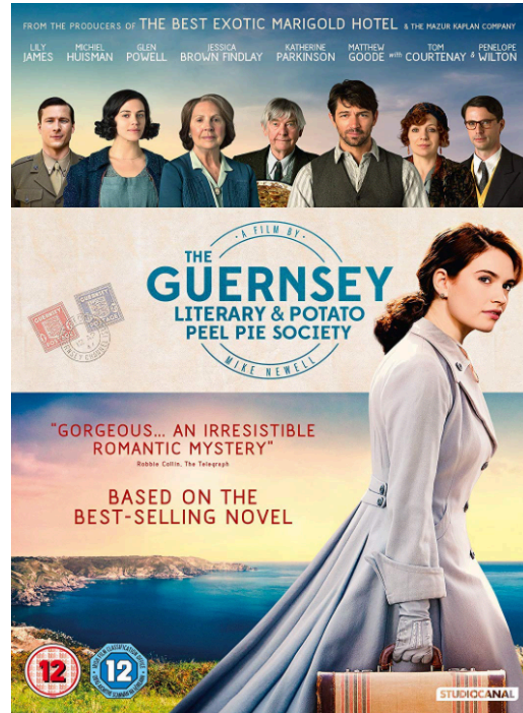
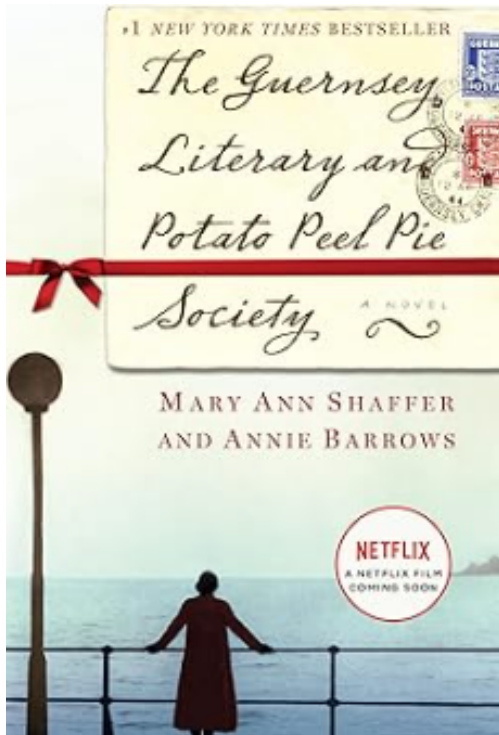
Book & Movie Corner

We have just finished reading a charming book called *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans, an epistolary novel using letters and emails to tell a story. It reminded us of other books that utilized this format and captured our hearts including these that take place in the United Kingdom. All three were subsequently made into films.

The first that came to mind was *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society* by first- (and sadly only) time writer, Mary Ann Shaffer, and Annie Barrows who finished the book after Shaffer's death. Have to admit we saw the film first on Netflix which had a lovely cast headed by Lily James, Matthew Goode, Michiel Huisman, and Penelope Wilton.

It tells the story of a London writer who bonds with a group of residents in Guernsey, an island in the English Channel. The movie and the book are full of Maryvalentinetours.com

humor and sorrow as a love story unfolds between the two main characters whose relationship begins with a letter. The book is written in letters. We highly recommend them both.



Jane Austen's novella, *Lady Susan*, an amusing tale of Lady Susan's schemes to marry off both herself and her young daughter "to the greatest financial advantage." More difficult to adapt to screen than many of Austen's other novels, it was finally made into a film starring Kate Blanchet entitled *Love & Friendship*.

And finally, we still swoon over the friendship portrayed in *84 Charing Cross Road*. This true story by Helen Hanff, told through letters, is of a friendship between an American writer and an English bookseller in London. The story was adapted into a stage play, a television play, and finally a movie. The film starred Anne Bancroft and Anthony Hopkins. The bookstore, Marks & Co., closed in 1970 which was a disappointment for those of us who made the pilgrimage, but there is a plaque to Ms. Hanff and the bookseller there today.

While we won't be able to see Marks & Co. on our London 101 Tours, look at what we will be up to on our new optional 3-day tour designed for those who

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have never been to London or those who want to revisit favorite spots. While you await your trip – read on and get inspired!

NEW! OUR LONDON 101 TOURS



An introductory three-day tour, designed for those who've never been to London or those who want to spend more time there.

WHEN: May 12, 13, 14 and September 19, 20, 21

WHAT WILL WE SEE AND DO? This fast-paced tour includes locations that have made London famous as well as a few surprises not found on traditional London tours. Here's a partial list of what to expect:

- A 2-hour double-decker bus tour that includes Big Ben, Parliament, the Tower of London and Buckingham Palace, and 30 other attractions
- An on-ground visit to the British Museum
- Stops at the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, Trafalgar Square
- Churchill's War Rooms
- An evening at the theatre

COST: \$1549.00. This fee includes

- Three nights at a 4-star hotel
- Three breakfasts
- Two dinners at one of London's best restaurants
- An afternoon tea
- All entry fees



- Group taxi rides in London
- Not included: airfare, airline transfers, lunches, and incidentals

HOW TO JOIN THE THREE-DAY TOUR: Send us a non-refundable deposit of \$200.00 to secure a reservation. The balance will be due later. Make checks payable to Mary Valentine Tours.

QUESTIONS? Contact us.

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Scenes from previous trips with Mary Valentine Tours



British Museum



Cathedral in Canterbury



The Pig Hotel Near Bath



"Kissing Gate" in Wales



A wonderful breakfast spread



Beautiful Bath



Punting in Canterbury

Join us on our next adventure!