

Castle Howard: The Peak of English Baroque [C1]

Edificata nell'arco di cento anni, Castle Howard è una delle dimore signorili più iconiche del Regno Unito. Questa maestosa tenuta incorpora diversi stili e ha ospitato generazioni di una stessa famiglia per tre secoli.

Located twenty-four kilometres north of York, the [late-13th century](#) capital of England, Castle Howard is one of Britain's finest [stately homes](#). It is also the biggest private domain in England, and is surrounded by an enormous [estate](#) of 8,800 acres [3,560 hectares]. Created as a dynastic monument, it has housed the Carlisle branch of the Howard family for three hundred years. The Howard family are descended from Lord William Howard (1563-1640), the youngest son of Thomas Howard, the 4th Duke of Norfolk.

CREATING CASTLE HOWARD

Charles Howard, 3rd [Earl](#) of Carlisle (1679-1738), was the creator of Castle Howard, and eight generations of the Howard family have occupied the stately home since then. To find out more, Speak Up spoke to Georgie Sykes, marketing & PR manager of Castle Howard. She began by describing what makes the stately home different from others in the UK. **Georgie Sykes (English accent):** The key difference with Castle Howard versus other [stately homes](#) in the UK is that Castle Howard is a family home, and it's been a family home for three hundred years. So that means that lots of different things evolve, with the tastes and the styles of the current owners. It's very much a piece of kind of living and breathing history, because with each new owner that comes [to take on](#) Castle Howard as part of the family, they obviously want to put their own stamp on it and make changes, whether that's rehanging the pictures, whether that's repainting something, whether that's contributing to the wider strategic sustainability plan. There's something really special about that, I think, that it's very much a kind of living, breathing history, and a family home.

GENERATIONS

The building of Castle Howard began in 1699 but took over a hundred years, the lifetime of three earls. Charles Howard, the instigator behind the stately home, was completely new to this field, accustomed only to [living the high life](#), so he asked for help from his friend, dramatist John Vanbrugh, who had never built anything before. Vanbrugh then asked for help from the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, whose plans for the house and [estate](#) proved to be enjoyably eccentric. The house [itself](#) started with a [flamboyant](#) Italian Baroque design and finished, a hundred years later, with a conservative Italian-style Palladian wing, so the two wings do not match. The Guardian journalist Martin Wainwright called the house “magnificently mad.”

FASCINATING PARKLAND

Hawksmoor [scattered](#) symbols, [follies](#) and [statuary](#) around the grounds, producing the most fascinating parkland in the UK. The [estate](#) includes two lakes, five villages, a hundred and fifty [cottages](#) and a former private railway station. Highlights of the man-made landscape include a mausoleum — “the finest in England and a palace in [itself](#)”, according to one commentator — and the Temple of Four Winds, one of the most beautiful garden buildings in Europe. **Georgie Sykes:** My favourite monument on the ground is actually a temple, the Temple of the Four Winds. So this temple was completed in 1738, and it was originally built as a place for refreshment and reading. It’s a really grand, but miniature, structure of four walls with a [domed top](#), and it sits right at the top of a small hill with a beautiful view that looks towards the mausoleum, New River Bridge and the surrounding landscape. And it’s a place where people would go and have a hot drink and go read a book. And it’s meant to be a contemplative and relaxing space, which I just think is [charming](#).

HORACE WALPOLE

The 18th-century art historian Horace Walpole could not control himself when he first saw Castle Howard. He called the stately home “sublime”, and said the mausoleum “would tempt one to be buried alive.” The grounds included “the noblest [lawn](#) in the world [fenced](#) by half the horizon.”

PARK ATTRACTIONS

Apart from the towers, obelisks and pyramids, the grounds also have spectacular gardens. The 18th-century walled garden has a beautiful rose collection and an ornamental vegetable garden. The three-hundred-year-old Ray Wood woodland garden has one of the most extensive botanical collections in private hands in Europe. It includes a unique collection of rare trees and [shrubs](#). The most popular attraction in the park is, however, full of children rather than botany-lovers. **Georgie Sykes:** In our grounds we have an amazing and enchanting adventure playground called [Skelf](#) Island Adventure Playground. It's award-winning, and a group of local children helped us design it. It's on an island; you cross a [rope bridge](#) to get to it. It's a magical, mythical place where skelves, who are [elf](#), [fairy-like](#) creatures, live, and sometimes they come out during the school holidays, so children can meet the skelves.

EXHIBITIONS, DISPLAYS AND ART

Castle Howard as a building is fundamental in attracting the 250,000 visitors who arrive at the stately home every year. Apart from the architectural interest, there are constantly-changing exhibitions and displays, based on the history of the stately home and the surrounding area. Interest reaches [fever pitch](#) in December, when the house looks spectacular with its Christmas decorations. There is also the world-famous private art collection, amassed over three centuries. The hundreds of paintings include numerous Italian Old Masters and English artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough.

FEROCIOUS FIRE

The paintings that the visitor can see, however, are only part of the original collection. On 9 November 1940, a fire [broke out](#) in Castle Howard, destroying twenty rooms, along with their [furniture](#) and paintings, and provoking the collapse of the dome into the Great Hall. The fire was eventually [put out](#) by the fire service with the help of schoolgirls, who had been evacuated to the stately home because of the war. The destruction left one-third of the building open to the skies. Twelve years later the house was opened for the very first time to the public, with the building still in its burnt-out state. Restoration work began in 1960. It was so successful that Castle Howard quickly became a major [heritage](#) attraction. Then help with funding the restoration came from an unexpected [quarter](#): In 1981, the BBC was planning to make a dramatisation of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited*. They asked for permission to film in Castle Howard, which was [granted](#). The TV series would become one of the most famous costume dramas of the 20th century. **Georgie Sykes:** *Brideshead Revisited* really put Castle Howard on the national stage in the 1980s. It broadcasted our opulent, splendid, beautiful interiors and exteriors to millions of people's homes, and was the [backdrop](#) to so many much-loved characters and all of the dramas that played out during that show. So for Castle Howard as a visitor attraction, that was really important and exciting, and a really brilliant moment to put our kind of small portion of Yorkshire out to the rest of the UK.

WORLD FAMOUS

In fact, *Brideshead Revisited* put Castle Howard on the global stage, as the series became a hit around the world. It also helped the house in a physical sense, as money from the drama paid for the rebuilding of the Garden Hall, destroyed in the fire. Following the success of *Brideshead Revisited*, Castle Howard has been used in the last forty years as the setting for countless films, TV series and documentaries, most recently the Netflix so-called 'bonkbuster' series *Bridgerton*. This series, and others, have provided a bridge to the past. They have also helped make Castle Howard the most famous stately home in the world.

CHRISTMAS AT CASTLE HOWARD

During the festive season, the stately home is seen at its most spectacular. Hanging the Christmas decorations starts in November, as the house is so big. There are thirty Christmas trees decorated with three thousand lights and four thousand [baubles](#). The family need a week to decorate them all and spend an entire day on the six-metre-high tree in the Great Hall alone. This tree [boasts](#) a thousand [fairy lights](#) and requires the use of [scaffolding](#) to decorate. Candles and fires are [lit](#) all around the house. About thirty thousand visitors come in the month before Christmas, specifically to see the decorations. In 2024, the festive theme is Alice's Christmas Wonderland, with beautiful installations, soundscapes and digital projections offering an immersive, enchanting experience.

Glossary

- **to take on** = farsi carico di
- **follies** = pazzie
- **fever pitch** = massima intensità, frenesia
- **estate** = tenuta
- **charming** = incantevole
- **furniture** = mobili
- **lit** = illuminare, accendere
- **fairy lights** = fili di luci
- **late-13th century** = fine del XIII secolo
- **statuary** = collezione di statue
- **lawn** = prato
- **shrubs** = arbusti
- **granted** = concedere
- **backdrop** = sfondo
- **boasts** = vantarsi
- **stately homes** = dimore signorili
- **living the high life** = fare la bella vita
- **cottages** = villette
- **domed top** = soffitto a cupola
- **fenced** = recintare
- **fairy-like** = fiabesco
- **rope bridge** = ponte di corda
- **broke out** = scoppiare
- **heritage** = patrimonio
- **quarter** = parte
- **baubles** = decorazioni di Natale
- **Earl** = conte
- **flamboyant** = appariscente, vistoso
- **scattered** = sparpagliare
- **elf** = elfo
- **put out** = spegnere
- **scaffolding** = impalcatura