



## **BOWOOD – THROUGH LANSDOWNE EYES**

As any visitor to Bowood will have experienced, this fabulous 4,000 acre estate steeped in history is a marvellous escape from everyday life. Yet, for the Lansdowne family who celebrated their 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary here in 2004, Bowood is home. Here, day-to-day life pans out within a house of tremendous character, surrounded by gardens and grounds blazing with beauty, as it has done for seven previous generations of their ancestors.

“The pleasures and rewards are innumerable,” says Charlie Lansdowne, the 9<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Lansdowne. “At the same time, the responsibilities and challenges can be extremely daunting. On a daily basis, you are staring directly at the legacy handed down to you. You also constantly have the eyes of numerous ancestors, who all played their part to create and develop the very fabric of Bowood, staring back, just checking to see how you’re doing!

“Certainly, what drives me on is my sense of responsibility to them and their estate workers who contributed so much to Bowood as well as to my own loyal team of staff and future generations of the family. It is essential that Bowood is preserved in all its glory while also safe-guarding it against whatever the future has in store. Increasingly, there are more and more economic challenges to face and constantly we have to consider imaginative and resourceful - yet financially sound - ways of maintaining and enhancing Bowood’s various attractions to a broad cross-section of audiences.

“That said, nothing must compromise nor diminish Bowood’s standing and integrity.”

*m/f*

### ***Bold progression into the future and the gene for collection***

Lord Lansdowne has been at Bowood's helm for 32 years now, taking over from his father when he retired to Scotland in 1972. Just three years later, he opened Bowood to the public for the very first time and since then he has steered some significant developments.

He converted what was a row of derelict stables and grooms' quarters into the Sculpture Gallery and exhibition rooms for the Bowood Collection in 1980 and also opened up a restaurant and shop. As visitors wander through the Sculpture Gallery (which, originally, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had been a private zoo), they can feast their eyes not only on important pieces from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lansdowne collection of classical marbles and work by 19<sup>th</sup> century sculptors but also on some remarkable tapestries. For not just content with improving parts of the House for better use as visitor attractions, Lord Lansdowne has also been in acquisitive mood over the years, realising the importance of adding to the Bowood Collection of antiques and heirlooms. In this vein, in 1979 he purchased two notable 16<sup>th</sup> century Brussels tapestries which depict the life of Cyrus of Persia and now cover one wall of the Sculpture Gallery.

Similarly, with the acquisition of paintings by John Varley, William Callow, Edward Lear and David Roberts, amongst others, he has expanded the core watercolour collection that was established by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess. Lord Lansdowne's purchase of a collection of amateur watercolours of India and Burma by Major-General Sir Matthew Gossett has also added to the collection of Indian artefacts brought home by his great-grandfather, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marquess who had been Viceroy from 1888-1894.

### ***Rooting for the future throughout the vast parkland – and for all ages***

A keen gardener, Lord Lansdowne has also been busy in the gardens and grounds. For instance, he has planted over 300,000 trees on the estate, had the plantings on the Upper Terrace in front of the House redesigned by Lady Mary Keen in 1996, commissioned the striking female nude that sits above the lion fountain on the west side of the Terraces and added considerably to the variety of rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas and in the expansive Rhododendron Walks that stretch out over 60 acres of woodland garden, two miles from the house and with their own entrance.

Eager that Bowood should appeal to all age groups and be viewed as a very family-friendly attraction, an Adventure Playground first saw the light of day in the Pleasure Grounds in 1976 – and has been evolving ever since. Annually, the playground draws in approximately 50,000 children whose imaginations can run riot around the gigantic timber Pirate Ship with its rigging and crow's nest.

The Soft Play Palace for younger children has also been provided, as have party facilities in a nearby converted bothy.

### ***From farming to golfing***

Probably one of his most enterprising projects, however, was to say goodbye to farming in 1986 and to embrace golf in its place. “Sadly, I realised that farming just wasn’t going to pay for much longer and, being extremely concerned about the long-term future of the estate, I considered ways that the corner of Capability Brown’s Great Park which up until then had been given over to farmland could become more profitable,” explains Lord Lansdowne. “In 1987, the late Peter Dobreiner, the Observer's golf correspondent, and I walked across and around this area – that is in a totally separate part of the estate from the House and Gardens - and he convinced me that this fabulous piece of land could be transformed into an outstanding course.”

Five years later, Bowood Golf & Country Club emerged with an 18-hole championship golf course (designed by the world-renowned Dave Thomas, who is also responsible for The Belfry) and a former Georgian farmhouse converted into a stylish clubhouse. Just two years after it opened, it was voted one of the ‘Top 10 New Courses in Britain’ by Golf World magazine which, a year later, included it in their ‘Top 50 Golf Destinations in Europe’. Sir Charles Barry’s ‘Golden Gates’ of 1840 provide one of the most impressive entrances to a golf course which is today widely recognised as among the finest of its kind in the south of England, weaving through 200 acres of Capability Brown’s mature woodland.

More recently in 1998, Lord Lansdowne oversaw the addition of the Kerry Suite onto the clubhouse, providing fabulous facilities for business meetings, civil wedding ceremonies, balls and other social events for up to some 200 people.

### ***A Lady’s Touch***

Alongside her husband, Lady Lansdowne’s involvement in Bowood is one that is extremely ‘hands-on’ too. Also running her own independent, interior design business, Lady Lansdowne has been very involved in the look of Bowood Golf & Country Club, designing the interiors for the Clubhouse, Queenwood (a Georgian manor house used as a golfing lodge, set between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> fairways) and the Kerry Suite. Together they head up, co-ordinate and inspire a team of some 75 full-time members of staff (plus the large temporary workforce, totalling some 200, during the months when the House and Gardens are open to the public).

“While steeped in history and stateliness, Bowood is a dynamic and highly diverse business with a considerable workforce that combines a wide spread of disciplines from forestry to banqueting and from curatorship to marketing, amongst many others,” emphasises Lord Lansdowne. “We all have to be business-savvy and entrepreneurial in approach, with a clear focus on service, standards and the minutiae of detail. While always honouring our fantastic heritage, we have to focus on the preservation of the estate well into the future – and so it’s imperative that we get it right when operating in the modern world.

“In all that I’ve set out to do since 1972, I’ve been keen to provide something that will appeal to all age groups. Also, while Bowood’s history must be honoured, I think it can be done in a manner that’s fun, exciting and intriguing. I want the warmth and friendliness of Bowood to be palpable from the moment a visitor arrives and I am truly proud that every member of staff adopts this attitude too.”

“Whatever the challenges and concerns, there is nothing more rewarding for us than welcoming visitors to our home, seeing them bask in Bowood’s beauty – whether indoors or outside and throughout the changing seasons – and knowing that they’re enjoying a real treat of a day out,” adds Lady Lansdowne.

***Bowood House & Gardens is open to the public from Saturday 31 March – Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007, from 11am-6pm daily – with last admissions at 5pm (closing one hour earlier after the autumn clocks go back).***

***Individual entrance tickets start at £4 per head for children aged 2-4 and go up to £7.70 per adult. Special rates for groups and senior citizens are also available, as are individual and company Season Tickets.***

***Entrance tickets for the Rhododendron Walks are priced separately from £4.45 per person (with children up to 15 being admitted free of charge). If visiting Bowood House, on the same day too, then entrance to the Rhododendron Walks is reduced by £1 per person.***

***For further details, log on to [www.bowood.org](http://www.bowood.org) or call 01249 812102.***

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