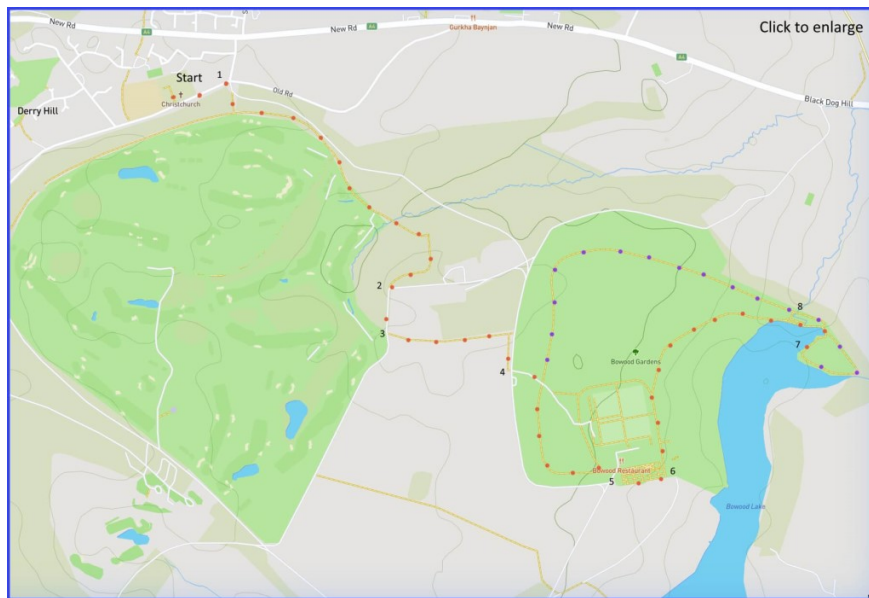




Bowood

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A 3-mile easy Wiltshire walk along a wooded path starting in the village. Followed by a walk around the Bowood estate (there is an entrance charge). Parking is possible in a layby opposite Derry Hill church. Click [here](#) for an arial view. Click here for printable [PDF download](#).



(Routes suggested from each map point + metres to next point)

From **Start**, walk away from church towards road bend. Through gates on right towards House 30m

1: Pick up footpath entrance ahead ignoring arrow to 'Bowood house'. Turn left at path junction and follow fenced path **[A]** around wooded edge **[B]** of golf course (signage keeps you off it). 900m

2: Enter paved road at sharp bend. Walk forward **[D]**. 160m

3: Leave lane and follow footpath towards house entrance and car park. 415m

4: Enter grounds (pay) and veer right towards House terrace. 425m

5: Walk across front of terrace **[F]**. 120m

6: Follow path round to classical garden pavilion **[I]**. 900m

7: Follow path to entrance (inspecting cascade/grotto). 1.4km

The pictures below are in the order things were seen on this walk. Clicking on any one will enlarge it (and the slideshow)



[D]



[E]



The starting point for this circular walk is Derry Hill: a village that emerged in the 19th century through amalgamating a number of small settlements on the edge of Bowood Park. But it is that park that is the real circle of the walks. Although – be warned – to complete it you have to pay [an entrance fee](#) (unless you are a National Trust member). The village traditionally provided houses for estate workers, but it has grown beyond that. Its two most notable features for a passing visitor are the Victorian Gothic [Christ Church](#) and those monumental gates that are the official entrance to the Bowood estate. As a walker you may not use the gates. But you might take refreshment in the [Lansdowne arms](#) adjacent to them.

House and Park

What you find now is a shadow of the original Bowood House. In fact, the present building was once called the “Little House”, because it was an attachment (by a long drawing room) to a grander “Big House”. The Big one lasted until the 1950s by which time it had become variously a school and an RAF camp. Finally, the 8th Marquess of Lansdowne had it knocked down. On the East side of the present Little House you will see a large rectangle of grass that defines the footprint of this once grander dwelling.

However, the existing building is worth a visit (besides, you have paid to get into the Park!). On the upper stories there are some interesting artefacts of travelling and of an earlier form of domestic living. Of particular interest is the role of Bowood as one gathering place for that generation of ‘gentleman scientists’ who flourished in the 18th century. One of the more interesting rooms is that which served as the laboratory of [Joseph Priestley](#), who [discovered oxygen there](#) in 1774 (he also invented carbonated water and the rubber eraser – but perhaps not at Bowood). Of course, although Priestly’s reputation for determining the composition of air seems firmly established, these “first to discover claims” always throw up [competing authorities](#). But why spoil a visit?

Yet much of your time will probably be spent exploring the undulating landscape of the 1000-acre Park. It has all the elegance of design that is associated with its architect – Lancelot “Capability” Brown. Perhaps the terraces [\[F\]](#) around the house are at odds with Capability Brown’s principles, but they are attractively planted in a manner intended to remind the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne of his trips to Italy. The wider grounds involve many of the romantic features admired by owners of large 18th and 19th century houses: a lake (contains a submerged village), the pleasure gardens, a mausoleum, a Greek temple, a hermit’s cave, water-worn rock cascades – but not to forget carefully located oak and beech trees. Perhaps just a little too picturesque? ... but it still makes a very good walk.

People

A visit to a place like this is not just about buildings and gardens, there will always be a story about those *people* who owned and lived there. In this case tracing a lineage turns out to be a rather challenging cocktail of names – including both titles (Shelburne, Lansdowne) and surnames (Bridgeman, Petty, Fitzmaurice, Petty-Fitzmaurice). The two significant family trees are displayed in the House (sadly, not adjacent) – in case you want to have a go at fully understanding the genealogy.

Perhaps the figures of most interest will be those at each end of the estate history. At the present end is Charles Maurice Petty-Fitzmaurice (b. 1941) who is the 9th Marquess of Lansdowne (one of the hereditary peers excluded from the House of Lords by the 1999 exclusion act). He had a military career, before unsuccessfully contesting a parliamentary seat for Coventry as a Conservative, But most of his political identity has been invested in various organisations functioning at county level.

At the distant end of the family tree is Sir William Petty (d. 1687). He managed to serve both Cromwell's Commonwealth and the Stuart monarchy – as surveyor and economist. But he was also an eminent physician, natural scientist, inventor, merchant, and philosopher – even one of the founders of the Royal Society. So distinguished was William Petty that he was commemorated by the Lansdowne Monument: commissioned by Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne (a worthy politician, supporting the abolition of slavery and repeal of the Corn Laws). That notable county landmark could form the basis of [another Wiltshire walk?](#)

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