



250 United by Language
Inspired by Liberty

Schedule Subject to Change

**ESU 2026 Founder's Award Gala
and
Tour In and Around London
July 12-16, 2026**

OVID IN LONDON:

**THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
OF THE UNITED STATES
ESU 2026 Founder's Award Dinner and
National Patron Tour**

**Ovid and Shakespeare's Metamorphoses
In and Around London
July 12-16, 2026**

Led by Dr. Catherine Loomis, Historian and Scholar
Lecture by Dr. E. Quinn Peeper on Metamorphoses as an Inspiration

HIGHLIGHTS

Sunday, July 12, 2026

Arrival in London
Hotel check-in at leisure
Optional tour of Spencer House

Monday, July 13, 2026

Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent
Our host, Vita Sackville-West's granddaughter, Juliet Nicholson

Tuesday, July 14, 2026

The National Gallery
Metamorphoses: Titian, Poussin, Laeroix
National Portrait Gallery
Kenwood House

ESU 2026 Founder's Award Dinner
Honoring Donald Best

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Day at Oxford – New College
Celebratory Lunch Honoring Donald Best

Thursday, July 16, 2026

Hampton Court Palace
Our Guide Assistant Curator, James Shemmonds
Apsley House
Cocktail Reception at the Oxford and Cambridge Club

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National Gallery: Metamorphoses: Titian

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Lectures led by:

Dr. Catherine Loomis

Dr. E. Quinn Peeper

HOTEL SUGGESTIONS WITH SPECIAL RATES

Washington Mayfair Hotel

Contact ESU for booking

<https://www.washington-mayfair.co.uk/>

Hilton on Park Lane

Contact marcia.pullen@hilton.com

<https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/lonhitw-london-hilton-on-park-lane/>

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Sunday, July 12, 2026

Arrival in London

Optional Visit: Spencer House

A short walk from the Washington Mayfair Hotel.

Ever since its creation for the First Lord and Lady Spencer between 1756 and 1766, Spencer House has been widely admired as one of the most beautiful houses in London. Here, successive generations of the Spencers made their home in the city during the months of the ‘Season’, hosting lavish entertainments, welcoming artists, politicians and royalty through its doors and adorning its rooms with magnificent works of art.

Monday, July 13, 2026

Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent

7:30 AM Depart by coach

9:00 AM Arrive at Sissinghurst Castle Garden

Deeply influenced by Shakespeare and other writers, poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicholson transformed a decrepit country pile into England’s premiere garden. As a woman, Sackville-West was legally forbidden from inheriting her family’s home, Knole, a great house visited by ESU patrons in 2024 and the setting for Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando*. But the loss of Knole metamorphosed into Sissinghurst. We will explore its ingenious series of unique garden “rooms” that Sackville-West planned and planted as she created an enduring symbol of the energy that drove her writing and her romantic life.

Introduction and Conversation with Juliet Nicolson

Granddaughter of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, Juliet Nicolson grew up at Sissinghurst and still shares her grandparents' cottage in the garden with her two daughters and their families.

Lunch on site

Return to London by coach

Evening at leisure



Tuesday, July 14, 2026

Metamorphoses

Kenwood House

9:00 AM Depart by coach for a full-day guided program

Guided tour of the National Gallery

The National Gallery is one of the world’s most renowned art museums, home to an extraordinary collection of European paintings dating from the 13th to the early 20th century. Paintings inspired by Ovid’s tales reveal how Renaissance and Baroque artists translated ancient poetry into richly detailed visual narratives filled with emotion and symbolism. The collection highlights the enduring influence of classical mythology on European art and its continued power to inspire audiences across generations.

Guided tour of the National Portrait Gallery

Founded in 1856, the National Portrait Gallery chronicles the story of Britain through portraiture, using art to connect people with the nation’s history and contemporary culture. Its collection features both celebrated figures and overlooked individuals whose lives have helped shape Britain’s identity. Home to the world’s largest collection of portraits, the Gallery champions portraiture in all forms by preserving, expanding, and sharing works from both historic masters and emerging contemporary artists.

12:00–1:00 PM Lunch (location to be confirmed)

Kenwood House

1:00–2:00 PM Coach to Kenwood House

2:00–4:00 PM Guided tour

Kenwood House is one of London’s hidden treasures. Its art collection includes works by Rembrandt,

Vermeer, and Turner. There are many intriguing portraits, including those of Richard Sackville, the owner of Knole during Shakespeare’s lifetime, and of great actresses posing as characters from Shakespeare’s plays.



4:00–5:00 PM - Coach to hotels

ESU 2026 Founder’s Award Dinner

Honoring Donald Best

Donald Best is a devoted internationalist whose lifelong curiosity has taken him across the world, forging connections across cultures and championing global exchange. A generous benefactor and steadfast supporter of the English-Speaking Union, he has strengthened the organization’s international mission through visionary philanthropy and deep commitment to U.S.-British relations.

6:30–9:00 PM

Oxford and Cambridge Club

71 Pall Mall, London

Designed by Sir Robert Smirke and opened in 1838, the Oxford and Cambridge Club’s Greek Revival-style clubhouse on Pall Mall stands as one of London’s distinguished architectural landmarks, long associated with the intellectual and social life of Britain’s great universities.

**Cocktail Attire (Jacket/Tie required) **

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Oxford – New College

In partnership with the ESU of the Commonwealth

Morning - Meet at Dartmouth House (exact time to be confirmed)

Depart by coach for Oxford

New College, Oxford

Despite its name, New College is one of the oldest of the Oxford colleges; it was founded in 1379 by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, as "Saint Mary College of Winchester in Oxenford", with both graduates and undergraduates. It became known as "New College" because there was already a college dedicated to St Mary in Oxford. As Shakespeare traveled between London and Stratford, he would have passed through Oxford and possibly stopped for the night.

Guided tour of New College

Celebratory Lunch at Oxford

Hosted by the ESU of the United States

In honor of Founder’s Award Recipient Donald Best

Free time to explore

3:00 PM – Coach to London

Dinner independently



Thursday, July 16, 2026

Hampton Court Palace

8:30 AM Coach to Hampton Court

11:00 AM–2:30 PM Tour and lunch

An archbishop built it. Henry VIII lusted after it. Queen Elizabeth almost died of smallpox there. King James summoned Shakespeare and his acting company to perform in its great hall. William III tried to turn it into Versailles. Hampton Court, its art, its garden, its maze, its tennis court, and its history of being rebuilt will give us a day of stunning transformations. From Tudor to Stuart to Baroque, from comedy to tragedy, from 1514 to 1694, we will see the changes that Shakespeare and England itself have undergone.



The tour will be guided by Hampton Court Palace Assistant Curator James Shemmonds and will focus on the Tudor history of the palace and Charles II's restoration.

Apsley House

TIME PM Tour



A historic Georgian townhouse in London, best known as the former home of the Duke of Wellington and often referred to as “Number One London.” Now operated as a museum, it preserves its original interiors and showcases an important collection of fine art, historical artifacts, and personal items linked to Wellington. The house offers visitors a detailed glimpse into aristocratic life and the legacy of one of Britain's most influential military figures.

5:00–5:30 PM Coach to hotels

Cocktail Reception

Hosted by Dr. E. Quinn Peeper and Michael Harold

6:00–8:00 PM

Oxford and Cambridge Club

Dinner independently

MEET THE EXPERTS

Dr. Catherine Loomis

Dr. Catherine Loomis holds a PhD in Renaissance Literature from the University of Rochester, and an MA in Shakespeare and Performance from the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. From 1997 until 2017 she taught Shakespeare and other literature courses at the University of New Orleans, leaving as a tenured full professor. She has also taught at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Dr. Loomis is the author of *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Volume* (2002), a collection of the documents we use to construct Shakespeare's biography, and of *The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Reconstructing the Virgin Queen* (2010), a study of the literary response to the death of Queen Elizabeth I. With Dr. Sid Ray, she is the co-editor of *Shaping Shakespeare for Performance: The Bear Stage* (2015), a collection of essays on the staging practices used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Dr. Loomis has published numerous scholarly essays on Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth I, and serves as president of the Queen Elizabeth I Society, a group of scholars dedicated to the study of Elizabethan history, art history, and literature.

Dr. Loomis has long served as a judge for the ESU National Shakespeare Competition, delivered lectures and courses in Shakespearean history, and led the ESU National Patron Tours aboard the Queen Mary II and throughout the Veneto region of Italy.

Juliet Nicolson

Juliet is a British writer, historian, and memoirist whose work explores the social and cultural life of the 20th century. She is the granddaughter of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, the creators of Sissinghurst Castle Garden, and the daughter of writer and diplomat Nigel Nicolson. Drawing on this remarkable literary lineage, she has written acclaimed books including *The Perfect Summer*, *The Great Silence*, and her memoir *A House Full of Daughters*, which traces seven generations of her family's history. Her latest publication, "*The Book of Revelations: Women and Their Secrets*," explores the changing nature of secrets held by three generations of women. Nicolson's writing is praised for its ability to transform complex historical moments into engaging narratives that feel both personal and educational. Nicolson is also a former publisher and journalist, and she continues to be an eloquent interpreter of the world shaped by her celebrated forebears.

James Shemmonds

Assistant Curator of Historic Buildings
Historic Royal Palaces

James Shemmonds is an architectural historian who specializes in the development and use of Hampton Court Palace from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. He initially joined the curatorial team to investigate the lodgings built for Henry VIII's son, Prince Edward. Since then, his research has encompassed a wide range of structures across the palace estate, including the Great Gatehouse, the Royal Tennis Court, a canteen built for bus drivers and early twentieth-century lavatories.

Before this, James Shemmonds worked in Hampton Court's front-of-house team for almost eight years. He gained an MA with distinction in architectural history from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2018 and, the following year, his research paper on Sir John Vanbrugh's 1717 proposals for remodeling Hampton Court won the SAHGB's Hawksmoor Essay Medal. Between 2020 and 2022, James worked as an Architectural Investigator for Historic England, researching vernacular buildings as part of the government's project to rejuvenate historic high streets.

TOUR FARE

ESU 2026 Founder’s Award Dinner and Tour in and around London	ESU Founder’s Award Dinner Only
<p>\$5,000 per person Including a \$3,800 tax-deductible contribution to The English-Speaking Union in honor of Donald Best</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunch Monday through Thursday • Cocktail Attire ESU Founder’s Award Dinner, July 14, 2026 (Jacket/Tie Required) • Farewell Cocktail Reception, July 16, 2026 • Transportation to all venues and lectures • Entry to all venues • All lectures and guided tours <p>• Not included: Lodging, round-trip airfare, hotel transfers, two dinners, and breakfast.</p> <p>For questions or to reserve your place, please contact: Rossana Ivanova — rivanova@esuus.org, (862) 224-4244</p>	<p>\$3,000 per person Includes a \$2,500 tax-deductible contribution to The English-Speaking Union in honor of Donald Best</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cocktail Attire ESU Founder’s Award Dinner, July 14, 2026 (Jacket/Tie Required) <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESU 2026 National Patron Tour in and around London • Lodging, round-trip airfare, hotel transfers. <p>For questions or to reserve your place, please contact: Rossana Ivanova — rivanova@esuus.org, (862) 224-4244</p>

The tax-deductible portion of your contribution is calculated on the basis of the fair market value of goods and services provided. Fair market values are good-faith estimates and may be adjusted after the event to reflect the actual costs.