



Why History Matters - The Countess of Derby's History Study Days

The Life & Legacy of the 14th Earl of Derby - 16th October 2025

This study day is devoted to the two largely unknown travel journals, ‘A Grand Tour Journal 1820 - 1822’ and ‘A North American Journal 1824 - 1825’ of Edward Geoffrey Smith-Stanley, 14th Earl of Derby, later three times Prime Minister and the longest serving party leader in British political history.

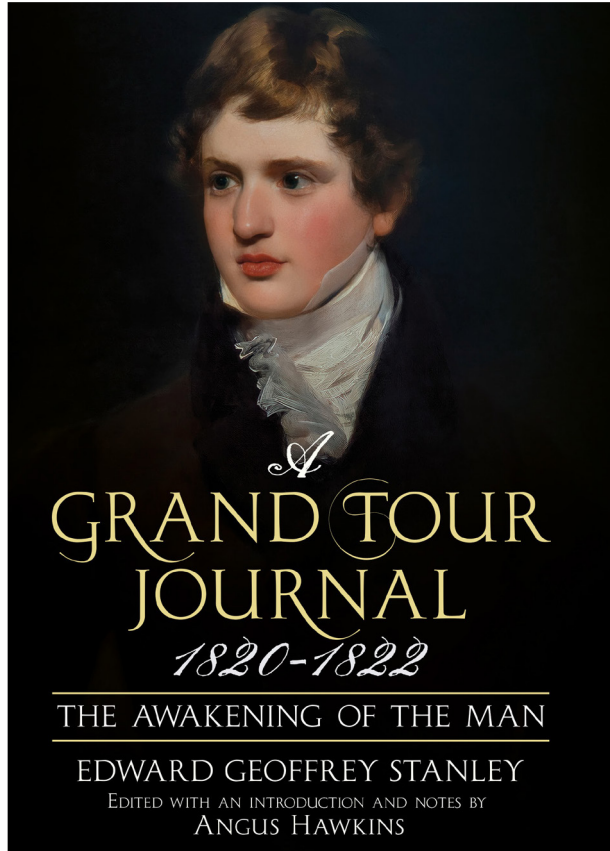
The first journal covers his intrepid trip by horse and by carriage from Knowsley to Naples. The second journal covers a period of eighteen months in 1824 - 25, during which Stanley travelled an estimated four thousand miles, visiting the eastern seaboard

of Canada and in the United States as far West as the Mississippi, including New York, Boston, Toronto, Quebec, Cincinnati, Lexington KY, New Orleans, Charleston and Washington DC.

Stanley’s decision to leave Britain was driven by his grandfather’s disapproval of his proposed bride and his break with the Whigs over the question of Ireland in the House of Commons. The pressure to go abroad gave him the opportunity to visit America, where he was eager, as were many British travellers of the time, to explore the society of a newly established republic. He was the most aristocratic and high-profile British visitor in Antebellum America. His family had played a major role in putting the Tudors on the throne, they had been patrons of Shakespeare, while his grandfather had founded the famous horse race, the Derby. Already a Member of Parliament when he visited America, Stanley was accompanied by three of his Eton and Oxford contemporaries, who were also members of the House of Commons.

A few years before the more famous visit by Alexis de Tocqueville, the twenty-four-year-old Edward Geoffrey Stanley departed for America, believing that the young republic would become a major country and that it represented “a bold experiment” in government. He saw it as sharing fundamental principles with his own country and as offering a fruitful source of comparison. Like De Tocqueville, he was interested in the equalizing effects of democratization with its tendency towards amalgamation and uniformity. Most contemporary British visitors interested in government and the republican experiment were radicals. Stanley by contrast favoured gradual change, a church establishment, and he regarded aristocracy as inevitable.

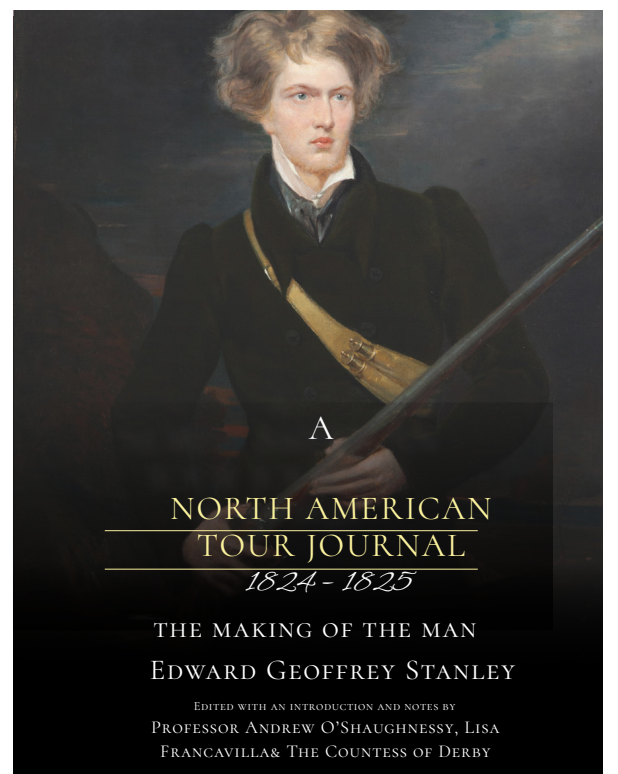
Although the journal contains more descriptions and more of a narrative than De Tocqueville’s Democracy in America, it also shares sociological insights about America. Stanley was one of the more intellectual and literary of British Prime Ministers. While still at school at Eton, he wrote some impressive poetry, and was versed in five languages. Between his administrations as Prime Minister, he translated into blank verse and published Homer’s Iliad, the first such translation since Alexander Pope. The journal reflects the breadth of his intellectual interests ranging from the treatment of African slaves, indigenous peoples and Irish emigrants as well as universities, agriculture, roads, bridges, religion, prisons, geography, factories, demography, the legal system, government, prices, standards of living and the social structure.



Introduced to many of the same individuals and hosts as De Tocqueville, Stanley arrived with a remarkably unprejudiced attitude in the midst of what historians have called the “paper wars” between Britain and America. There was still antagonism between the two countries following the war of 1812, and America was about to celebrate the fiftieth jubilee of the Declaration of Independence.

In addition to his more sociological insights, the journal offers glimpses of people and events of the time: it contains firsthand accounts of meeting Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, as well as other luminaries such as Henry Clay, George Ticknor, John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and the Marquis de Lafayette. It discusses the constitutional arrangements and the presidential election of 1824. He introduced James Fenimore Cooper to Lake George, and Cooper credited the event as inspiration for writing his famous novel The Last of the Mohicans. Stanley observed the deliberations of Congress, as well as several state legislatures, including Kentucky and South Carolina. He was determined to witness both the presidential election and the inauguration of President John Quincy Adams in March 1825, before returning to Britain.

The journal rivals the best British travel accounts in Antebellum America, and can rightly take its place beside those better known accounts by De Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau, Fanny Trollope and her son Anthony. Its scope and its keen insights will interest readers on both sides of the Atlantic, as it addresses issues that are still relevant today.



SPEAKERS AND TIMINGS

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| 09.30 | Opening remarks by Lady Derby - The European Grand Tour of Edward Stanley 1820-1822, Knowsley Hall to Naples |
| 09.45 | Professor Andrew O'Shaughnessy - The content and importance of the North American Travel Journal's eye witness reports and their analysis of contemporary democracy in America |
| 10.30 | Patrick Dallaire - The importance of the American Journal to the analysis of the Evolution of the Canadian Constitution 1822-1840 |
| 11.15 | Refreshments |
| 11.45 | Dr Geoffrey Hicks - The later political career of the 14 th Earl of Derby |
| 12.30 | Lunch and Guided Tour |
| 14.00 | Anne Somerset - Queen Victoria and her Prime Minister the 14 th Earl of Derby |
| 14.45 | Professor Christopher Leslie Brown - The Antislavery Career of the Earl of Derby |
| 15.30 | Refreshments |
| 16.00 | Professor Jeanie Grant Moore - The 14 th Earl of Derby and Charles Dickens |
| 16.45 | Closing remarks by Lady Derby |