NEW NATIONAL TRUST PUBLICATIONS
FOR 2018

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Nino Strachey
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Pitkin Press/Pavilion
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Edited by Rupert Goulding and David Taylor
With essays by Quentin Buvelot and David Taylor
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Paul Holberton Publishing
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Tessa Wild
July 2018 • £35 • 978-1-78130-055-8
Philip Wilson Publishers
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ABC Bulletin is produced quarterly as an online publication. If you would like to receive future issues, please email abc@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Commissioning Editor: Claire Forbes
Consulting Editor: Christopher Rowell
Copy edited and designed by Terence and Eliza Sackett

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Find previous issues at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1356393817247](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1356393817247). Please pass the link on to your colleagues.

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Published by The National Trust, Heelis, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2NA Telephone 0870 600 2127 Correspondence to abc@nationaltrust.org.uk

Front cover: *A Young Girl holding a Chaffinch* attributed to Cornelis de Vos (1584/5-1651), c.1620s, before treatment, oil on panel, 95.7 x 64.1cm.
GIRL WITH A CHAFFINCH

Nicole Ryder, Painting Conservator

The oil paintings at Cliveden House in Buckinghamshire are undergoing a programme of conservation and technical analysis. This first article on the programme’s findings describes the investigation and treatment of A Young Girl holding a Chaffinch, which is thought to have been painted by Cornelis de Vos (1584-1651), or an artist of comparable quality, in the 1620s.

Before its recent conservation, this charming 17th-century portrait was marred by yellowed varnish and unsympathetic restoration. It was structurally vulnerable: the panel joins were showing signs of weakness, and the delicate mid-18th-century German Rococo giltwood frame was providing inadequate support for the painting (Fig. 2).

The portrait is painted on three oak boards of unequal width, joined vertically. The size of the painting has probably changed; originally it would have been wider on the right – the child’s white costume would not have ended abruptly in the bottom right-hand corner as it does now, and the letter ‘A’ in the top right corner was almost certainly part of a longer inscription. It is likely that this small reduction in size was made so that the painting could fit a specific frame.

During preliminary examination, a collection of very interesting guild and panel-maker’s marks was discovered on the back of the painting (Fig. 3). During the 17th century, branding by a guild denoted the guild’s approval of the quality and construction of a panel; it was the authorisation needed before the maker could pass his panel onto the artist. These marks were shown to Dr. Jørgen Wadum, Keeper of Conservation, Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, Denmark, who kindly provided their identification.

The mark that can be seen at the top in Fig. 3 (it looks like a diving bird) represents a stylized castle, the brand for the Guild of St. Luke, Antwerp. Usually, the castle is shown with two hands, but in this case the left hand is only slightly visible as a darkening in the wood, while the concave depression on the right is the other hand. The incompleteness of the imprint may be due to the hot branding tool cooling down as it was pressed unevenly into the wood. This design has been classified as ‘branding iron 1’, which was used between 1617 and 1626 by the Guild of St Luke in Antwerp. Underneath the Antwerp castle brand is a small fleur de lys, a mark with a sharper outline. This looks as if it has been punched into the
panel without heat, presumably by the panel maker himself; it represents the personal monogram of the panel maker Hans Claessens, who was active between 1615 and 1622/23. Finally, the large ‘A’ seems to be a ‘year letter’, issued on panels between 18 October 1621 and 18 October 1622.

This information leads us to conclude that the artist obtained his panel sometime after 1621/2, after it had been approved by the Guild of St Luke in Antwerp, and that it was constructed for the artist by the panel maker Hans Claessens.

Removal of discoloured varnish and overpaint revealed passages of beautifully preserved paint, particularly in the face and figure of the child; it also exposed damage down the panel joins, significant abrasion in the sky, and blanching in the background browns. Natural ageing of the oil paint has resulted in an increase in its transparency, so that it is now possible to see lively black under-drawing in the child’s costume and *pentimenti* (changes by the artist) in the child’s forehead (Fig. 4).

During treatment, a few tiny paint samples were sent to Dr Tracey Chaplin for analysis so as to gain a better understanding of the materials used and how they have aged, and to inform any choices to be made during treatment. The analysis showed that the panel was prepared with a chalk-based ground covered in an oil-based brown priming layer. This translucent brown priming is obvious when a close look is taken at the thinner passages of the painting – for example, the sky and the bottom right of the dress. The sky is more worn than the rest of the painting; cross-sections showed that it was painted with mixtures of lead white, azurite and natural ultramarine. The azurite used is bright in colour, but coarse in texture with a large particle size - this may have made it more susceptible to loss during previous cleaning. The background paint behind the figure now looks slightly blanched, probably owing to a lack of medium rather than any fading of the brown pigment. The letter ‘A’ in the top right corner is likely to be the remnant of a longer inscription; analysis showed that it was consistent with the rest of the painting.

Over the last 400 years the painting has undergone many campaigns of restoration, as can be seen in Fig 5. This illustration shows the painting with its damages revealed after cleaning and structural work but before retouching. During previous treatments, the oak boards were mended incorrectly without proper alignment of the composition. Weakness and movement in the joins and splits required treatment from a structural conservator, so the painting was sent to Bobak Conservation Limited for the next stage of treatment. The two main joins were reopened, and the oak boards were re-glued correctly one at a time with a bridge re-joining jig. Small splits in the panel were also treated. A tapered fillet of wood was added to the right-hand side of the painting to even up the shape and to enable a safer fit in the frame.

The 18th-century frame was built up to accommodate the curvature of the panel and to strengthen the weak structure; in addition, a light and flexible system of back battens was created to hold and support the painting safely in the frame following treatment.
The painting returned to my studio for the final stage of treatment. Filling to the losses was carried out with chalk materials similar to the original ground, and these fillings were textured to mimic the surface texture of the original painting.

The painting was varnished with a natural resin Dammar varnish before retouching with Gamblin conservation colours (stable non-yellowing retouching paints). Care was taken when retouching not to cover open and transparent brushwork, or to mask pentimenti. A small concave depression in the breast of the bird was left without filling even though it remains visible, as filling would have meant covering original paint (Fig. 6).

The gilded frame was restored by Ben Pearce, and the painting was refitted into the frame (Fig. 7).

The treatment of this painting drew on the advice of many National Trust staff members, including Christine Sitwell (Paintings Conservation Adviser), Victoria Marsland (Conservator, London and South East), Oonagh Kennedy (Curator, London and South East) and John Chu (Assistant Curator of Pictures and Sculpture). The National Trust ornithologist, David Bullock, corrected the identification of the bird from a bullfinch to a chaffinch.

A Young Girl holding a Chaffinch is on temporary loan to Upton House in Warwickshire (National Trust), where it will be displayed until the end of October 2018.

EXHIBITION: PORTRAITS BY OLIVER MESSEL

Oliver Messel was a world-renowned designer, enjoying huge success, predominantly in the theatre. This new exhibition at Nymans examines his lesser-known talent as a portrait painter, with a unique collection of portraits and archive material, including a number from members of the Messel family.

The exhibition includes intimate portraits of friends and family members, including Messel’s sister, Anne, Countess of Rosse, with portraits he painted during the time he spent living in Barbados in the 1960s.
Mount Stewart house and gardens sit on the shores of Strangford Lough, twelve miles outside Belfast. Home to the Londonderry family since the late 18th century, it has seen gatherings of friends, statesmen, artists and intellectuals. Yet Mount Stewart remains a family home, comfortable and welcoming, as well as housing a wealth of treasures, imbued with the unique sense of drama and unconventional use of colours that Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry (1878-1959) brought to it.

The Central Hall remained largely unchanged between the 1840s and the 1950s, although the wooden balustrade in the gallery was replaced with wrought iron. For most of this period the scheme was a cool off-white colour with a magnificent Scrabo sandstone floor (Figs. 1 and 2). In the 1950s, under the stewardship of Edith’s daughter Lady Mairi Bury, the pinky-red scheme for the walls was introduced to mirror the red iron oxide in the Chinese armorial ware that was housed in cupboards built into the niches of the hall.

Then, in the 1960s, Lady Mairi made a further change, and had black and white lino laid on the floor in order to save the maids scrubbing and maintaining the Scrabo stone (Fig. 3). In order to return the Central Hall to its earlier appearance, we carried out an extensive analysis of the paint schemes on the wall, along with tests to remove layers of unstable and yellowed varnish on the painted marble-effect columns. With this information, we commissioned building contractors and conservators to re-introduce the wooden balustrades and the faux double doors in the gallery, recreate the original paint colour, clean the columns, and reintroduce the sculpture lent back by the family.

From 2012, the house and part of the collection underwent a huge, three-year restoration project. Much structural work was carried out and was documented in a six-week television series ‘The big house reborn’. The project’s aim was to celebrate the time of Edith Londonderry and her husband, the 7th Marquess, capturing the spirit of place and the golden days from the 1930s to the 1950s. In order to return the Central Hall to its earlier appearance, we carried out an extensive analysis of the paint schemes on the wall, along with tests to remove layers of unstable and yellowed varnish on the painted marble-effect floor. With the funds in place, the right time to proceed came with the closed season of 2016-17.

Assessing the Hall Floor

We knew very little about the floor apart from images in Country Life. We knew the sandstone came from the Scrabo quarry near Newtownards in County Down, which was owned by the family. From the old photographs we could see that the stone in the centre is laid in a radiating pattern, whilst the stone at either end was laid in a pattern of octagons and squares.
We lifted the linoleum in seven trial areas to get a better idea of the condition of the stone. We chose various thresholds and walkways, the areas which would have the most wear and tear. Our National Trust Conservation Adviser on stone, marble and plaster, Trevor Proudfoot, and his company Cliveden Conservation Ltd, carried out trials to inform the specification. From these we estimated that about 20% of the stone beneath was defective. Samples of the bitumen used to adhere the lino to the stone floor were sent away for asbestos analysis and came back clear.

**Specification and Procurement**

Once we had the specification, we followed the National Trust’s Project Management Framework, working with the General Manager to produce a clear brief. We had to decide what resources, both human and financial, were needed, plan timescales that would fit with Mount Stewart’s busy event schedule, and set a budget. We decided that £300,000 was needed – this included a significant contingency to take into account the fact that there were many things that we did not know: What condition was the floor in? How much of the stone would need to be replaced? How complex was the design? What finish would we achieve overall?

At this point, we decided that whatever company we used would need experience in undertaking historic stone floor projects, and we felt that this expertise did not exist in Northern Ireland. However, we had direct experience of Cliveden Conservation, who worked at Mount Stewart during the earlier building work and had worked in other National Trust houses, and we knew that they had the skills, knowledge and experience we needed. So Cliveden were commissioned on a single action tender, which included the requirement to hold several open days with our local heritage construction companies to share methodologies, learning and best practice with them.

Half the budget was directly spent on stone conservation, and the remainder was spent on removing and reinstating the sculpture (Fig. 7), protecting historic surfaces, and getting the room ready for restoration. This was carried out by the art handlers Grallagh Studios working with Cliveden Conservation and the house team. So with everything in place, including Listed Building Consent, fire risk assessments, and an asbestos plan, work began in October 2016.

**Work Begins**

A team of four stone conservators methodically worked through the room in three phases, removing the lino first, followed by the screed and bitumen layer (Fig. 6). Then began the arduous task of cleaning the stone. A specific technique called ‘plucking’ was involved in removing the bitumen from the stone face: the correct shallow angle of the chisel was crucial, otherwise large amounts of stone could have come away with the bitumen (Fig. 8). The Cliveden conservators used brushes and sponges for cleaning, but it was the little diamond pads that were most successful in giving a uniform appearance to the floor (Fig. 9).

The work took the predicted five months, which included the house’s two successful Halloween and Christmas events. During this time over 5,000 visitors went through the house. We even managed to put a positive spin on the ‘clinking’ sound of the chisels, telling visitors that it was Santa’s elves working away in the background!

With the stone exposed and cleaned, we could ascertain how much stone needed to be replaced. Timescales were tight if we were to open the Central Hall on schedule, so we worked closely with the quarry (near Alnwick, Northumberland). They supplied us with Hazeldean sandstone, fine-grained and pale cream, visually and geologically a close match to the original. They ensured that all the stone they sent was of a high quality and even in colour.

We drew up a plan to classify the stones into three condition categories, and the appropriate treatment for each:
Stone completely defective – replacement required. If part of the stone could be used elsewhere on the floor, Cliveden cut and dressed it for re-use.

Trip hazard – to be repaired or replaced. We assessed each stone with an eye to the health and safety of the 80,000 visitors each year, many of whom are elderly. We chose to replace those stones within the thresholds which were considerably worn down, as well as any others that presented an obvious trip hazard. Many stones were treated by minor repairs rather than replacement.

Wobbling/rocking – required re-bedding. Many of the original stones rocked when walked on, which had led to cracking and breaking. This was mainly the result of later interventions to introduce heating systems, which had disturbed the hard-core beneath the stone flags. Cliveden removed, re-bedded and then pointed these stones.

Checking for Asbestos

We had discovered asbestos in various parts of the building during the major building project. Therefore, before replacing or removing any of the stone, we spent a day lifting stones in areas where we knew there were pipe runs. With a fully developed procedure already in place, one of the Cliveden team worked in a tented area, wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment with a fitted face mask, and lifted the stones. Our Operational Risk Business Partner and an independent asbestos air sampling provider were both on site to supervise the procedure and take air samples. All the stones were found to be laid on a red brick substrate or on hard-core, with no visible evidence of asbestos. Air samples were taken within the voids and all returned clear.

Conservation of Paint and Woodwork

Paintings conservator, Ros Devitt, who had worked on cleaning the columns and pilasters during the building project, returned to clean and restore the skirting boards, which were in very poor condition. Ros worked alongside Fergus Purdy, a local furniture conservator, to remove and reinstate the boards (Fig. 10). We also brought back one of the project joiners to work with Fergus in removing, adjusting and re-hanging the eight sets of mahogany double doors in the Central Hall. Working with specialists and conservators we had used during the building project proved to be very successful, as they already knew the property and understood our conservation and curatorial standards, as well as the National Trust ways of working.

Communications

A crucial lesson from the building project was the necessity for effective communication; there needed to be one central point of contact for the contractors and the property team. This role was filled by Aileen McEwen, who was working at the property full-time on another project. She acted as my eyes and ears on the ground, checked with the contractors every morning, and was always at the end of the radio to answer their queries and requests, so that the project kept within its tight timeframe. Aileen was also the main point of contact on a day-to-day basis for property staff, referring to me if she could not answer any query directly.

The progress of the project was fully documented – our professional photographer, Bryan Rutledge, visited the site twice a week to build up our record of images on our Collections Management System (CMS). Taking photographs of whatever the conservators were doing and any interesting finds, three or four times a day, has allowed us to build up a picture of the various stages of the project, as well as attach a range of self-explanatory images to the CMS inventory and the conservation record created for a particular stone.

As part of our Heritage Lottery Fund bid, we undertook to hold six open days with stakeholders, supporters, and volunteers to keep them up to date with our progress. We also designed an interpretation leaflet for visitors, including a children’s version.

Another interesting facet of the project was its collaboration with local artists. We invited them along to see the project and gave them a tour of the house, after which they each produced a lino cut print using the discarded lino tiles. The resulting limited edition...
Maintenace

The maintenance of the floor is difficult, because the stone is very porous and vulnerable to dirt brought in on the feet of our many visitors. As part of the project, we worked with the house team to ensure that all possible preventive devices were installed on the way into the property: metal scrapers to remove stones and fine gravel, hedgehog brushes for muddy boots, coconut matting to remove dirt from visitors’ shoes, and protective overshoes for wet feet. We also commissioned a robust Axminster carpet for the Entrance Hall to remove any remaining dirt and moisture from visitors’ feet before they enter the Central Hall.

Working with the volunteer co-ordinator, we created a specific role for a dedicated team of volunteers to help us maintain and record the condition of the floor. Two training sessions, given by the house team and myself along with Cliveden Conservation, trained the volunteers in how to clean and care for the floor, as well as how to monitor patterns of wear and tear and any significant changes. This has proved very successful, in that it has eased the pressure on the house team and has shown how valuable our volunteers are – they happily undertake three-hour sessions on a daily basis. Many are so enthusiastic that they want to undertake similar monitoring of the floors elsewhere in the house.

Open on Time!

It was with great satisfaction that on St Patrick’s Day last year we threw open the doors of the Central Hall to hundreds of visitors. In the first eight weeks alone we welcomed 11,000 visitors through the house, and the floor bore up incredibly well.

The established band of volunteers continues to care for the floor and record crucial data to help inform plans for future events in the house. The feedback from visitors has been positive, even though many of them had loved the black and white lino that they associated with the room. The final piece of the restoration jigsaw has been fitted, and Mount Stewart continues to welcome friends, artists, statesmen and supporters alike to enjoy its fully restored glory (Fig. 11).

For information, please visit: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart


10. Ros Devitt, paintings conservator, retouching the worst-affected skirting boards in the conservation studio at Mount Stewart

11. The Central Hall after restoration

works of art were displayed in the gallery area of the Central Hall, and have proved very successful.
THE BOUDOIR AT ARLINGTON

Investigating the history of the silk wall hangings

Paula Martin, House and Collections Manager

The Boudoir at Arlington Court, Devon, is one of Arlington's three surviving original interiors (Fig. 3). The house was built in 1823 by Thomas Lee (1794-1834), a North Devon architect who trained briefly with Sir John Soane, for Colonel John Chichester (1769-1822), who died before he could enjoy his new house. The wallpaper in the Dining Room and the silk wall hangings in both the Anteroom and Boudoir were all thought to have been added by Colonel John's son, Sir John Chichester (c.1794-1851), in the 1830s. By the time the house was given to the Trust in 1945 the interior was in a poor state of repair, and there was evidence of dry rot in a number of rooms. The silk damask in the Anteroom and the Boudoir had deteriorated over the years, so as part of the research for a conservation project it was decided to bring together the information we had about the two rooms.

There is only one known image of the Boudoir in the Chichester's time (Fig. 2), and very little archival evidence about the building and decoration of the house. James Lees-Milne, in the first leaflet describing the house (1952), wrote: 'The drawing-room in three sections along the south front and the little boudoir facing west are of architectural interest. The last with its slightly coved ceiling and walls lined with red Spitalfields silk is a charming and elegant specimen of early nineteenth century taste in decoration.' A note in the inventory of 2004 states: '1838 / 40 WALL COVERING: crimson Chinese silk lining the walls, part of it netted for conservation purposes.' So it seemed that there was some confusion about where the silk had been made and at what date.

Documentary evidence about the silk was sadly lacking. The Chichester family papers are rather sparse, and the only evidence to suggest a date are letters from George Trollope and John Gregory Crace (1809-89, a prominent interior designer) to John Chichester,
Crace’s letter mentions that he knows ‘a place where the crimson velvet might be well introduced.’

John married Caroline Thistlethwaite of Southwick Park, Hampshire on 9 August 1838. She brought £10,000 to the marriage, more than enough to decorate the interior of her new home in grand style.

In a 1981 article in Country Life, John Cornforth (1937-2004), the architectural historian, thought that the silk might be from France: ‘Certainly the French style of the damask goes well with the vaguely Empire chimney-piece, which must be part of Lee’s work … ’ He goes on: ‘… the main rooms … have rarely been illustrated and [are] not satisfactorily dated. Unfortunately, the Chichester papers are not very illuminating, containing only a few scraps of information, but just enough to advance a theory on their completion.’

We asked La Maison des Canuts in Lyon (a museum devoted to Lyon’s silk industry) if they had any record of the pattern of Arlington’s silk damask. They sent an image of a pattern known as ‘lampas 6528’ (Fig. 1) – lampas is a complex weave, typically used for luxury fabrics and woven in silk. This pattern was originally a brocade used in the Queen’s Apartments at Versailles in 1784, and was still being woven as a damask in Lyon as late as 1892. It is remarkably similar to the Arlington silk; the only difference between the two designs is that lampas 6528 has cherubs, and the Arlington design has Pliny’s doves. This motif derives from a Roman floor mosaic discovered in Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli in 1737; it was described by Pliny the Elder in his Natural History, AD77. The visible width of each drop of silk is 23 inches; one of the standard widths for French industrial weaving was 24 inches, whereas the closest British standard width was 21 inches, providing further evidence to support the suggestion that the silk was woven in France.

The plot thickened when Ksynia Marko, of the Textile Conservation Studio, Norfolk, and May Berkouwer, of May Berkouwer Textile Conservation, Suffolk, visited in 2017 to prepare a conservation treatment proposal. They noticed that the silk has two fold marks running horizontally top and bottom along with tack holes, which suggest that it was hung first in the smaller Anteroom and then moved into the Boudoir. The fading is not noticeably different between the folded areas and the rest, so it cannot have hung there for long.

Given the date of 1784 for the original design for lampas 6528, it is not inconceivable that the silk was actually woven for the Chichester family’s former house at Arlington, which was extended in the 1790s and then demolished in the 1820s. Having spent a large amount on new silk, they may well have wanted to recoup some of their investment by saving the silk when the house was demolished. Certainly some furniture and at least one fire surround still at Arlington pre-date the current 1820s house. Further investigation is still needed; so far it has been interesting and illuminating to discover that what we thought we knew was actually incorrect.

1 Letter from John Crace to John Chichester, 3 November 1839, NDRO 50/11/108.
3 The Boudoir at Arlington as it looks today
IN THE DOG HOUSE…

Conserving the Kennel at Ightham Mote

Samantha Smith,
Senior House Steward

While there are over 9,000 Grade I Listed buildings in England and Wales, Ightham Mote, Kent has the distinction of possessing the only Grade I Listed dog kennel in the country.

Dating from 1330, Ightham Mote (an atmospheric moated medieval manor) is hidden away in a secluded location. A charming moat surrounds the four wings of the house, which in turn enclose a courtyard; it is here that the most distinctive of dog houses proudly stands (Fig. 1).

When Thomas Colyer-Fergusson (1865-1951) bought Ightham Mote in 1889, he set about turning it into the epitome of a Victorian gentleman’s home. He employed Walford & Spokes of Oxford to complete his renovations to the house, and as part of this transformation he commissioned an appropriate dog kennel for the courtyard. We still have the order entry for the kennel in the Walford & Spokes ledger (Fig. 2).

The first known occupant of the kennel was the Colyer-Fergussons’ St Bernard dog, Dido. The dog kennel measures 2m in length over its ridge, while its internal dimensions are 1.650m x 1.18m – ideally suited for such a substantial dog. It is amusing, perhaps, that Dido’s tenure was followed by that of two small Pekinese, Mr Ping and Mr Pong (Fig. 3).
The dog kennel is constructed from English oak; the external walls are timber framed with the studs close together, with dense cement render infill panels. The walls, floor and ceiling are lined internally with wide oak boards, and the ceiling is pitched following the line of the roof above. In addition, innovative damp-proof courses form part of each plinth. There is evidence that the internal walls had a coat of limewash in the past, although this has largely disappeared. The kennel has moulded and carved decorative barge-boards and a Tudor-style wooden façade. It was designed to complement the architecture of Ightham Mote, so its barge-boards are similar to the Tudor barge-boards on the house (Fig. 4).

From 1985, Ightham Mote was subject to a £10 million conservation project. During this time the kennel proved its resilience and high quality, for it was moved three times to temporary positions, only returning to its original location following the conservation of the courtyard in 2005 (Figs. 5 and 6).

Beloved by visitors, particularly children, from around the globe, the accessibility of the kennel means that it is the perfect place for photographs. However, its use today as a place for photographs destined to be ‘shared’ on social media should not detract from its significance as a symbol of Victorian life (and Victorian respect for Tudor architecture) at Ightham Mote (Fig. 7).
A WOMAN’S PLACE?
Researching Mary Booth’s book collection at Dunham Massey

Sarah Baldwin, House Steward

Although the house harks back architecturally to the 17th century, the Library at Dunham Massey, Cheshire dates from the 18th century, the period in which the room was created and when most of the books filling the shelves were acquired. This year the opportunity arose to delve deeper into the shelves, an exercise which has revealed the remarkable story of Lady Mary Booth (1704-72), who changed and transformed the culture of the estate she inherited (Fig. 1). During 2018, as part of Dunham Massey: A Woman’s Place?, visitors are invited to explore Mary’s story, alongside those of other prominent women who helped to shape Dunham’s rich history.

Mary was born in 1704, the only child of George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington (1675-1758), and the heiress Mary Oldbury (d. 1740). The daughter of an unhappy marriage, Mary was brought up as heir apparent to her father’s fortune.

When research began into Mary’s life history, the library was an obvious place to start; the 18th-century book collection at Dunham was largely created by Mary and her father, and their books reflect their life and times. One of the most common questions asked by visitors to the Library is: ‘did anybody actually read any of these books?’ – and at Dunham the answer is most definitely ‘yes’. We can now show that the books were bought for a variety of reasons, some educational, some recreational, some practical, but all to be read. Fresh research has uncovered precisely when and how they were being used.

A particularly endearing feature of Mary’s collecting is her habit of inscribing her books. Often she simply added ‘Mary Booth, her book’ in her own immaculate, neat, flowing hand, but inscriptions in other books give insights into the giving, acquisition and use of her books, and the age at which she was reading particular texts. It is also possible to trace her reading habits throughout her life by examining the different bookplates pasted in the front of each book (Fig. 2). Her name and title vary according to her marital status, changing from Booth to Grey on her marriage to Harry Grey (1715-68) in 1736, and again when she became Countess of Stamford after Harry inherited the earldom in 1739.

‘On the shelves we can chart every stage of her life,’ says Ed Potten, Rare Books Consultant and the curator of the display. ‘Her books paint a vivid picture of a powerful, devout, intelligent and appealing character who changed the direction of the estate she inherited.’

The project to discover more about Mary, her life at Dunham, her upbringing, her education, her interests, and her family, provided the perfect opportunity to work with Dunham’s dedicated volunteers to research and gather primary source material. They delved into the books in the library, as well as the rich and extensive Dunham archive deposited at the John Rylands Library in central Manchester. It was also a chance to work with Ed Potten again, who has a long association with Dunham, and who has previously conducted research into Mary’s book ownership, both at Dunham Massey and at Enville Hall in Staffordshire, the seat of the Earls of Stamford. Enville, Dunham’s sister house, came into the family through Mary’s marriage in 1739.

This season, the Library and the adjoining Reading Room will be given over to displays presenting Mary’s life through her books. The books on show include Mary’s copy of Binet’s L’Arithmeticien Familiar (1714), a guide to business arithmetic, given to her by her father in 1719. It clearly shows her developing language skills and an early education in estate management; she was fluent in French by the age of eight and was able to translate by the time she was 13, and her arithmetic school books, also on display, demonstrate a natural ability with figures.

The library also shows Mary’s deep interest in natural history and science. She subscribed to a number...
of important works, including Benjamin Wilkes’s *English Moths and Butterflies* (1749) with its beautiful hand-coloured plates. This, and similar books, were more than mere objects of beauty to her; she annotated every insect pictured in Wilkes’s book with the month in which she had seen the actual insect. In Eleazar Albin’s equally beautiful *A Natural History of English Insects* (1720), the author dedicated one of the plates to Mary’s father, the 2nd Earl, who had subscribed to the book. He gave the book to Mary soon after its publication.

In the Writing Closet, Mary’s connections with the Manchester medical world are explored. The Booth family was closely linked to Dr Thomas White (1696-1776, surgeon and man-midwife) and his son Charles White (1728-1813, surgeon and obstetrician, and co-founder of the Manchester Royal Infirmary). In 1729, Thomas White performed a mastectomy on Mary’s mother at Dunham Massey, perhaps one reason why Mary’s books display a keen interest in surgery and medicine.

In the Tea Room Mary’s business activities and her management of the estate are examined. Here visitors can find out about her involvement in the negotiations with the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater (1736-1803) in order for him to gain the necessary permissions to construct the Bridgewater Canal, part of which runs through the Dunham Massey estate. This canal opened in 1761, and linked Runcorn, Manchester and Leigh. Here, too, the books from the Library help shape our understanding. Two books by Thomas Badeslade, dated 1735 and 1736, complete with hand-drawn maps by the author, discuss the prospect of a new navigation system being introduced in Chester, whilst the topics of canals and inland navigation crop up regularly in the Dunham pamphlet collection (see the article by Ed Potten in the Autumn 2017 issue of ABC), demonstrating the family’s keen interest in the creation of navigable canals.

Perhaps the most remarkable books in the collection, however, are Mary’s commonplace books. Commonplace books, personal notebooks in which their owners record their favourite quotations, poems, recipes, prayers, or indeed anything that interests or inspires them, gained popularity in the 17th century. Dunham Massey is fortunate in still retaining many of Mary’s commonplace books; they provide intriguing insights into her reading habits. Her literature commonplace book, compiled between 1720 and 1735, contains references to 35 different authors or texts, most of which are from books still present in Dunham’s library. One of the pages bears the imprint of a pair of needlework scissors, left in to mark a page and long forgotten. Her other manuscript books include one dedicated to poetry, an arithmetic book, a herbal, volumes of pressed flowers, and an extraordinary collection of recipe books.

Using the Library, the books, and other rooms at Dunham in a new way has been illuminating. The visitor will experience an entirely new perspective on Mary’s life, one which has not been explored at Dunham Massey previously. Many of these books will be opened and on display for the first time, allowing visitors to see Mary’s own writings, and how she annotated and used her library.

*Dunham Massey: A Woman’s Place?* provides a fascinating insight into the life of an 18th-century noblewoman, one who was born and brought up as her father’s heir. It questions our assumptions about the place and education of women in the country house, and returns the Library to the heart of estate life.
PRIZED POSSESSIONS
Dutch Paintings from National Trust Houses

Some of the finest 17th-century Dutch pictures from the National Trust's collection will be displayed together for the first time in an exhibition opening at the Holburne Museum in Bath on 25 May. The paintings, created during the Netherlands' so-called 'Golden Age', will be the most ambitious exhibition of the Trust's paintings for 22 years.

*Prized Possessions* will highlight works by some of the most celebrated artists from this rich period in Dutch art, which is a particular strength of the National Trust's collection. The 22 works, from 12 National Trust houses, include a recently-discovered self-portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn; *View of Dordrecht*, a masterpiece riverside landscape by Aelbert Cuyp; Gabriel Metsu's *The Duet*, full of hidden messages; Jan Lievens's enigmatic *A Magus at a Table*; and the magnificent *Interior of the Church of St. Catherine, Utrecht*, by Pieter Jansz. Saenredam.

The National Trust cares for one of the largest and most significant collections of art in Britain, created over seven centuries by some of our most important and fascinating patrons. The paintings in the exhibition will reveal to visitors the taste for the collecting of Dutch pictures in Britain, and how these pictures were desired, commissioned, displayed and treasured by their owners, from the 17th century to the present day.

An accompanying multi-author catalogue, produced by the National Trust in association with Paul Holberton Publishing, will explore the themes of the exhibition in further detail (including how the pictures came to be cared for by the National Trust), and will act as a lasting legacy.

The exhibition will be shown at three venues:
SAVING SALTRAM’S SALOON

Conservation in the Great Room

Alison Cooper, Project Curator, South West

This year marks 250 years since Robert Adam (1728-92) was commissioned to design the interiors for Saltram’s Saloon, or ‘Great Room’, and its library (now the Dining Room). The Parker family set about remodelling Saltram House, Devon, a Palladian mansion on the edge of Plymouth, with no expense spared and to the highest standard of design and quality.

Many of Adam’s surviving 35 drawings for Saltram relate to the Saloon and the library.1 Saltram’s account books identify or infer payments for elements of the work and some items of furniture by Thomas Chippendale, showing that the Saloon was complete and furnished by 1772. With much of its original decoration, furniture and furnishings still in situ, this room is one of the finest surviving Adam interiors in the country (Fig. 1).

The installation of a biomass boiler and conservation heating throughout the house in 2016 created much improved environmental conditions for the collection and released central funding for the long-overdue conservation of the Saloon’s Adam-designed Axminster carpet and its ceiling.2 The work, which began in 2017, has been carried out on site, and thus offered the chance for Saltram to interest visitors in the conservation work and the history of the room and its contents.

The Parkers at Saltram

John Parker I (1703-68) and his wife Lady Catherine Poulett (1706-58, daughter of John Poulett, 1st Earl Poulett) succeeded to Saltram in 1743 and are credited with remodelling the house in the Palladian style. By the time John Parker II (1734-88, 1st Baron Boringdon) succeeded to his father’s estates in 1768, the evidence suggests that he would have found the main reception rooms (the Entrance Hall, the Morning Room, and the Drawing Room) completed with Rococo plasterwork ceilings, high quality joinery and carved marble fireplaces. When Robert Adam was first employed,3 the shells of both the Saloon and the library were already in existence with the doors and the floors in place. Thirteen known drawings for the Saloon exist, including designs for the ceiling, carpet, chimneypiece, mirrors and friezes. The acceptance of some of the proposals, and the rejection of or change to others, show that John Parker II and his wife Theresa Robinson (1744/5-75, daughter of the diplomat Thomas Robinson, 1st Baron Grantham), were discerning patrons with specific tastes that they were not afraid to exercise. For example, the Parkers rejected Adam’s design for a classical chimneypiece in favour of retaining the marble one already in place and attributed to Thomas Carter the Younger (d. 1795, one of a family of mason/sculptors).

The Ceiling – ‘The most beautifull I ever saw’

Four drawings survive for the ceiling, showing two designs; the option of an oval pattern was rejected in favour of the tripartite scheme with lozenges which was eventually executed. All four drawings share the design for the ceiling’s coving, which is embellished with griffins and sphinxes flanking medallions. In the final execution of this element, the plasterwork medallions were replaced by scenes in oil on paper by the painter Antonio Zucchi (1726-95). He also painted the other ceiling compartments around a central roundel of the goddess Diana.

Parker’s surviving account book records two cash payments totalling £434 in 1770 and 1772 to ‘Mr Rose’.4
This surely refers to the plaster coving and ceiling and to the celebrated plasterer Joseph Rose (1745-1799); along with Zucchi, he had worked with Adam on other projects – including the Library ceiling at Kenwood House, finished in 1769. Saltram's ceiling must have been completed or have been nearing completion by 1770 when Frederick (Fritz) Robinson (Theresa's brother) described it as ‘the most beautifull I ever saw.’

### The Carpet – ‘Very Beautiful Indeed’

Intended to echo the ceiling (though not to reflect it directly), the carpet, also designed by Adam, is a particularly rare component of Adam's Saloon. A partly coloured record drawing (now in Sir John Soane's Museum, Fig. 2) was the basic reference for the designers at Axminster Carpets, founded by Thomas Whitty (1713-92) in 1755. This was not the first Adam design that Axminster Carpets produced, but it was certainly the largest, measuring nearly 13.5m x 5.9m. Theresa Parker’s brother, Thomas, visited the factory in August 1769, perhaps to discuss the finer details or inspect the initial set-up of the loom. Just over a year later, the carpet, for which John Parker paid £126, arrived at Saltram. Frederick recorded in 1770 that ‘the carpet arrived this morning and was spread on the lawn – very beautiful indeed.’ Although the suggestion that we might lay the carpet on the lawn today was not seriously mooted, the anniversary was celebrated by a public event where a replica carpet was paraded through the garden and into the house, giving staff, conservators and volunteers the opportunity to dress up and mark the occasion.

### Ceiling Conservation

Conservation of the ceiling was undertaken by Cliveden Conservation in the summer of 2017, which included some structural strengthening work. Investigations into the paint scheme concluded that the ceiling colours are true to the original scheme and have only been repainted twice since. A workman’s signature found on the top of the entablature dated the last painting work to 1921. As the ceiling was generally in remarkable condition, the decision was made to preserve the existing paint as much as possible, focusing instead on consolidating losses to the plaster and paint and cleaning the whole ceiling in an attempt to brighten and enhance the original design (Fig. 3).

The Saloon ceiling was first cleaned with dry Rubgum (a non-abrasive gum eraser) and then with deionised water and smoke sponges (special sponges to remove soot and smoke damage). The visual improvement was immediate and the effect was particularly pleasing. The opportunity to clean the Zucchi paintings was taken at the same time so that they would not stand out against the anticipated brightening of the ceiling (Fig. 4).

Rather than closing the Saloon during the project, visitors were encouraged to watch the conservation work and to book one of the scaffolding tours to enjoy the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of seeing the ceiling at close quarters. Over 3,000 visitors attended scaffolding tours led by staff and volunteers, and ‘emotional engagement’ scores at the property soared.

### Carpet Conservation

Whilst conservation work continued on the ceiling overhead, Saltram’s Axminster carpet was worked on beneath it in an impressive show of dual conservation.

Owing to the size and fragility of Saltram’s carpet, it was decided to undertake the conservation in situ. This in turn provided many opportunities – and problems – for the team, who had to devise and adapt a two-roller system enabling the carpet to be worked on front and back and to be moved around when required (Figs. 5 and 6). Saltram has benefited from the availability of a number of local textile conservators, headed by the expertise of Nicola Gentle, a freelance conservation consultant.
in Devon and Cornwall. The project was under the overall control of Kaynia Marko, the Trust's Adviser on Textile Conservation.

Initially the carpet was divided into segments before controlled conservation vacuuming and wet cleaning were undertaken. Next, the carpet was given a total backing of prepared linen for support and stability. Once this was complete, the whole carpet was turned, ready for remedial conservation stitching to be carried out from the top using laid-couching in polyester threads and occasional brick-couching in wool yarns (couching is a technique where threads are laid and then stitched into place; 'laid' and 'brick' are stitches used for securing the threads). This work was completed at Easter 2018.

An extensive number of old over-stitched repairs to the carpet still hold good, but have discoloured over the years. Rather than remove these and risk damaging the carpet further, the decision has been made to pioneer a new technique whereby the repair stitches are retouched with paint. This treatment has been developed and tried out by conservator Mieke Albers from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, who recently visited Saltram to train conservators in the technique. The intention is to paint the misleading 19th-century infills, bringing back the darker potential for improved lighting and researching the treatment of the silk wall hangings, the curtains, and the giltwood silk-covered seat furniture attributed to Thomas Chippendale, and also exploring the potential for improved lighting and researching the original picture hang.

With thanks to Louise Ayres, Mike Ford, Nicola Gentle and Neil Wressell.

The Saloon in the future

Far from being complete, the ceiling and carpet conservation project heralds the beginning of longer-term thinking and plans for Saltram's Saloon. The intention is to research and plan for the conservation and re-presentation of the room in a way that enables Saltram's visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the original intention of Robert Adam, how the Parkers developed and furnished their house, and the entertainment that went on within it. The Saltram team is looking at the treatment of the silk wall hangings, the curtains, and the giltwood silk-covered seat furniture attributed to Thomas Chippendale, and also exploring the potential for improved lighting and researching the original picture hang.

1 Sir John Soane's Museum, London holds 33 designs and Saltram a further two. The designs are both executed and unexecuted, and include proposals for estate buildings, gates and a Triumphal Arch.
2 Funds for the conservation work were allocated by the Trust via the Collections Conservation Prioritisation process (£153,586) and the Wolfson Foundation (£100,200).
3 The extent to which Robert Adam was personally involved in the drawing of designs for Saltram is unclear. It has been suggested that his employees Joseph Bonomi and William Hamilton were more likely to have been responsible, although Robert Adam or his brother James would have signed off the designs.
4 John Parker II account book, 1770-1777, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, Acc.3102, Box 1.
5 Frederick Robinson to Thomas Robinson, 14 September 1770, Bedfordshire Record Office, L30/14/333/62.
7 'Paid Whitty for Axminster carpet for the Great Room', John Parker II account book, 1770-1777, 2 October 1770, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, Acc.3102, Box 1.
8 Frederick Robinson, Letter to Lord Grantham, 28 September 1770, Bedfordshire Record Office, L30/14/333/63.
9 James Finlay, Saltram Saloon Ceiling project notes, 8 September 2017, with reference to paint analyses by Jane Davies (April 2009) and Catherine Hassall (August 2017).
CLOSING HUGHENDEN MANOR FOR CONSERVATION

Hughenden Manor, Buckinghamshire, receives 150,000 visitors a year. With so many people coming through the former home of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81, Conservative politician and twice Prime Minister), it is not surprising that some of the interiors had begun to look a little tired.

Hughenden is not alone. Every National Trust property has to find a balance between welcoming visitors and preserving and conserving the house and its contents. This article was written to give a typical example of how the Trust tackles this problem, and to show in detail the procedures that a Trust property's staff undertake to keep their properties in good trim while not excluding visitors.

At Hughenden, the staircase needed to be repainted. We decided to close our doors to the public for a fortnight while this was done, and at the same time to perform essential conservation work on some of our paintings and to give the house a deep clean. We needed to work out a way of continuing to welcome visitors, despite the closure of the house.

Our Interpretation

Closing Hughenden Manor could seem like an inconvenience to our visitors, but the House Team made sure that a trip to Hughenden while the conservation work was taking place was not a wasted one by offering visitors the chance to 'Take a Peek!'

This involved setting up a noticeboard outside the house which explained to visitors why we had decided to close Hughenden (Fig. 2), and it encouraged them to 'peek' through the windows along the Entrance Hall and Inner Hall. We also explained what we were doing during the closed period.

The Staircase and Portraits

To prepare the staircase for painting, the House Team removed all the portraits from Disraeli's 'Gallery of Affection' (paintings of his family, friends and political allies). This involved very carefully unhooking the paintings from their wall chains, carrying them up the stairs (Fig. 3), and storing them on the top floor using specially made T-bars and plenty of bubble wrap and acid-free tissue paper (Fig. 4). We also took the opportunity to give the picture frames a light dust with a pony-hair brush and to dust the staircase skylight and walls with an ostrich-feather duster.
On 8 January, Hughenden’s Direct Labour Team came in to erect the scaffolding that would allow the specialist painters to reach the highest sections of the staircase walls. The Labour Team has erected similar scaffolding at other National Trust properties – The Vyne, for instance. Working from top to bottom, the Labour Team started by protecting the staircase from damage from the metal scaffolding and potential paint splatters by attaching Correx (a form of corrugated plastic) to the banisters on either side and along the outer edges of each step, and this was sealed down with clear sticky-backed plastic.

Then the scaffolding went up. This involved the careful placement of horizontal and vertical metal struts and supports that connected together to form the solid base and support for the structure. Next, the platforms that would allow the painters access to the high staircase walls were added. These were attached to the struts with hook connections, and provided access to the top levels from the top floor corridor and via a trap door on the first floor (Fig. 5).

The next problem was the bust of Disraeli by John Adams-Acton (1830-1910) that sits at the top of the staircase and which had to be left in situ. How could we prevent it from being accidently damaged as work went on? Our regional conservator Rebecca Ellison decided that it would be best to dust and clean the bust, wrap it in bubble wrap and acid free tissue paper, and then label it with warning signs to alert the painters to be careful when working round it (Fig. 6).

On 16 January, the Assistant Paintings Conservation Adviser, Katya Belaia, came to Hughenden to help the House Team survey the condition of the staircase portraits. All of these portraits were dusted by one of our conservation volunteers using a pony-hair brush into a low-suction museum vacuum. Katya, along with Katarina Robinson (Hughenden’s House Steward), checked the condition of each of the portraits to assess the need for further conservation. They did this by visual observations of each painting’s canvas, frame and back. Raking light (a technique in which a painting is illuminated from one side only, at an oblique angle in relation to its surface, in order to reveal the surface texture of a painting) was used to show any surface abrasions, dust or mould that might be present on the paintings. Each of the portraits was then given ratings to assess its condition (either good or bad) and stability. Katya also re-touched some of the portrait frames using watercolour to match the gilding, ready for Hughenden’s reopening on 22 January.

David Herridge and the Painting Team

On 9 January, David Herridge of Herridge Decorators and his team of specialist heritage painters and decorators arrived to begin filling in the damage to the staircase walls before repainting. They began by filling in the chinks and chips caused by years of scratching by the portrait chains – the stairs are narrow, so inevitably people sometimes nudge the portraits. This created an even surface for the repainting.

The next day, they applied a buttercup yellow undercoat. This colour was surprising and made the staircase seem far more Georgian than Victorian. But this undercoat is an important part of the painting process: it helps to bring out the warm red colour of the paint, and also provides a protective layer to ensure that the paint will last for many years. Plenty of lights were used to ensure that the undercoat had been applied evenly, and also thickly enough for the previous paint and any new plaster not to show through (Fig. 7).

Then Hughenden’s characteristic red paint began to appear on the walls. Working from the top of the staircase down, the painters slowly added several layers of the red paint over the yellow undercoat to bring the staircase back to its full glory (Fig. 8).
Deep Cleaning

While the house was closed, Hughenden’s House Team and volunteers undertook the Manor’s annual deep cleaning programme, starting with the Arcade. This involved dusting the ceiling and walls using our ErGO microfibre cleaning equipment and museum vacuum cleaners, which are special portable vacuums with adjustable suction. The statues were all dusted and wet-cleaned to remove some of the mud that had accumulated on them from visitor footfall nearby, and the metal plaques by the front door and on Disraeli’s post box were polished with Peek metal polish. The floor was then hoovered, dusted, and waxed with Renaissance wax to give it a protective layer.

The next rooms to be tackled were the Entrance Hall, Inner Hall and Garden Hall. The skill and diligence of all involved helped make quick work of these rooms. Two volunteers, Heather Matthison and Pauline Smith, began by dusting the portraits and furniture in the Inner Hall and making individual condition reports for each item. Chris Boyce, Angie Rolfe and Elizabeth Lyons dusted all the objects in the Entrance Hall and the Garden Hall. They also hoovered, dusted, waxed and polished the Entrance Hall fireplace so that it would sparkle again when the fire was next lit. Later in the week there was even time to clean the Basement and the Ice House, removing all the dust and grit by hoovering and brushing down all the ceilings, walls and skirting and giving all the cabinets and objects a thorough dust with different conservation brushes (Fig. 9).

In the final week, the House Team and volunteers deep-cleaned the Garden Hall, the Stewards’ Corridor and the Staircase. House Team members Rebecca Haines and Katarina Robinson began by scaling their ladders with museum vacuum cleaners and dusted the ceiling and walls of the Garden Hall. The portrait frames and canvases were next, and each was dusted with a pony-hair brush into a museum vacuum. They were checked for signs of mould, wear and light damage. The curtains were also checked for pests, and hoovered to remove all the dust. Once the scaffolding was taken down, cleaning began on the staircase. This involved vacuuming the carpet and wooden sides of the stairs and dusting the banisters and rails with hogshair brushes into museum vacuums. The stair rods were then removed, and the underside of the carpet was vacuumed to remove residual grit and dust. The stair rods were polished with Peek metal polish before being put back into their brackets. The sides of the stairs were then waxed to prevent wear and tear from visitors climbing the stairs each day.

This has been a very worthwhile endeavour, giving our visitors a vignette of the kind of remedial work that is necessary on a regular basis. Hughenden Manor’s staircase is now resplendent and each of the ground floor halls has been cleaned and refreshed, ready for the 2018 opening season.
William Blake in Sussex
Visions of Albion
Accompanying the first exhibition devoted to the subject, William Blake in Sussex considers the collective significance of the English county to the life and work of the celebrated artist and writer. The only place outside of London where Blake ever lived, Sussex inspired a wide body of extraordinary work, done for new and existing patrons and ranging from the familiar to the rarely considered.

Disillusioned with London life and struggling to make a living, Blake and his wife Catherine went in 1800 to live at the coastal village of Felpham, which the artist soon described as “the sweetest spot on earth”. Providing his principal encounters with both English rural life and the coast, the artist’s three years “on the banks of the ocean” informed his two greatest illustrated epic poems, Milton and Jerusalem, and continued to be reflected in his work for the rest of his career.

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