CONFIDENCE AND CORE PURPOSE
Part one of an interview with Director-General Helen Ghosh by curator James Grasby

James Grasby: The National Trust deals in places, artefacts and things, and that’s what the ABC Bulletin is primarily interested in. Our role is to present and articulate history as truthfully as possible. Our more prominent role, perhaps, is storytelling; we feel that the visitor won’t understand what is important about the properties we look after simply by looking at them. Take a painting of the Madonna and child, for instance. It’s a picture of a mother and baby; but in fact it is full of symbolism. In the same way, simply by looking at the interior of a great historic house you won’t understand the processes by which it was made. This links up with the lecture you gave at the University of Warwick on the value of studying history. I wondered if you could start by giving us a sense of why you are interested in history, and why you pursued it as a career, and then we might go on to how you think we might apply history in what we do.

Helen Ghosh: I think your Madonna and child is a very interesting example of something we can apply more broadly to storytelling and to history. In one sense everyone can respond to a Raphael or a Bellini Madonna. They remember, they know, they were a child, they are a parent, they see mothers and babies every day. The Madonna is an excellent example of how we can engage with our visitors on the terms that they want. We can enrich people’s view of the Madonna in a variety of ways. Some people will look at the painting and see the mother and baby, but they will also look at the landscape or the flowers and the animals and understand the symbolism; the picture will have an extra richness for them. I believe that the Trust should be there to say: If you want to go beyond just the mother and baby, look at that flower, look at that landscape. The visitors can choose to accept the information or not. If they want more information, they can be further engaged and enriched and excited by it, and if they

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NEW CHANNEL 4 SERIES ABOUT QUARRY BANK MILL, CHESHIRE

‘The Mill’ is a brand new drama series being broadcast now on Channel 4. The series is based on the lives of the mill owners, workers and apprentices of Quarry Bank Mill in the 1830s, as they try to navigate their way through a time of rapid change. The result is a dramatic blending of fact and fiction, invention and reality, a story of people’s lives.

Fallow deer, Charlecote Park (see page 4)

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just want to see the painting at the level of the mother and baby, then they can do that. I think when I’ve seen the best of our curators and room guides talk about objects in that way, that’s how we bring things to life.

You said at the beginning that we deal in places, artefacts and things. I think we also deal in time, and how we position all those things in time. I think perhaps that we’re not quite brave enough about that. For instance, I was at Hughenden the other day with a group of Trustees; the house had been transformed since the last time I was there. Now there’s much more access, and a real sense of Disraeli and Mary Anne being present. But in Disraeli’s study, where there were despatch papers on the Eastern Question and the Congress of Berlin in 1878, I thought: Why aren’t we relating Disraeli and Hughenden to what’s happening in the Middle East now? All the questions are exactly the same—the Russians, and the French and the British as colonial powers, carving out spheres of influence which still affect Western-Arab relations today. I think that all too often we don’t relate the history and the stories to things that people experience now. This comes back to History Matters, a great campaign we had a few years ago. We need that sense that time is not a frozen moment. We need to feel that Disraeli sitting at his desk in 1878 is not frozen. What he did matters now.

That was actually one of the main points I was making to the students at Warwick. I was talking in a philosophical way about history and its value, which underlies why I wanted to come to the National Trust in the first place. Having worked in government for 30 years, it became increasingly clear to me that government can only do so much to change society. If you look at how society, buildings, and people have changed in the 20th century, say, part of the reason for that is government and legislation—equal opportunities legislation, for instance, or the setting up of the NHS. But change in society as a whole is also due to a whole set of other factors—actions by individuals and groups, like the suffragettes or community and voluntary groups. The power that an organisation like the Trust has to change things and people’s lives is in many ways as powerful as the power of government. That sense of the reasons for change—a very complex process—is something that historians have. We are here to manage the process of change, not to preserve things in aspic.

JG: At Max Gate, Thomas Hardy’s house, the story goes that the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) thought that it was high time that he went to see Thomas Hardy, the most famous living novelist. The prince was not in the best of moods, and although Hardy was delighted that he had come, the conversation was faltering and awkward. At lunch the prince turned to the octogenarian Hardy and said: ‘My mother the queen tells me that you’re a novelist.’ ‘Yes, yes’, said Hardy. ‘My mother tells me that you’ve written a novel called Tess of the … erm … erm … Yes’, said Hardy. ‘I really ought to get round to reading one of your books’, said the prince. I suppose that all of us as visitors sometimes go somewhere without knowing enough about it. If you knew that you were going to have lunch with Thomas Hardy, you might do a little bit of homework. So do you think that our visitors would have more fun if there was a way of preparing themselves for a visit? Do you think we need some prior knowledge?

HG: I think that we shouldn’t be sniffy about helping people with basic information. I visited Nostell Priory a few months ago for a conference. I hadn’t prepared myself very well. I hadn’t read the guide book in advance, and I had just 20 minutes to go round the house in the lunch hour. I knew one thing about Nostell Priory: we had just bought Brueghel’s Procession to Calvary. I went in without speaking to the person at the door, who was talking to someone else, and I went round the house very fast and walked straight past the Brueghel. Then I went back and found it, and read the booklet explaining it; then I saw some Chippendale. I didn’t realise it was significant, and so I moved on. I looked at the guide book on my train home, and thought: Oh, I’ve failed. Later Christopher Rowell [Furniture Curator] sent me a note. The dolls’ house—had I seen it? No. Had I seen the Chippendale? Not really. Had I seen the Brueghel? Well, just, but only because I did happen to know it was there. This story shows that what I needed was some basic information. There are probably six things, say, in this house which you should go and see if you’ve only got 20 minutes. I wouldn’t have felt patronised, and I don’t think any of our visitors would have felt patronised, to have been told what they are. I would have thought: Good, there are wonderful things to see here.

Of course, what’s wonderful is a subjective judgment, and we’d have to build a bit of objectivity into it. It’s not always going to be the high art that seems wonderful to someone; it could equally be the notes that the butler wrote to the parlour maid. But there are wonderful things in all our properties, and we should identify them better. Those of us who are lucky enough to have some grasp of the outlines of British history or the development of Thomas Hardy’s novels can respond immediately to a place or a thing; other people would love to have that sort of information in their heads, and we should offer it to them, I think, in a very open kind of way.

JG: If you go for a walk round a wood, you enjoy the flutter of the leaves and the sound of the birds, and you don’t agonise about the name of the tree or the Latin name of the bird. But when you visit a house you feel that it’s necessary to have some knowledge. Do you feel that you can enjoy a visit to a place without understanding it?

HG: I sometimes wonder whether people who have an understanding of history are at a disadvantage. I was talking to people from the Prince of Wales’s Foundation for Building Community about their approach to architectural development, and in particular Poundbury in Dorset and Upton in Northamptonshire, and also about how the Trust should position itself as a champion of contemporary
architecture. How can we show that we’re both forward-looking and linked to the heritage of the past? Suddenly I realised why I find Poundbury so disturbing. As a historian, what I’m used to doing in a town is walking round and reading its story. I can see the medieval heart of the town, and then that a rich man came along and widened the main street, and then that there was a fire and Georgian re-building, and then that the Victorians built the suburbs, and I feel grounded. In somewhere like Poundbury there’s no story. It’s a lot of buildings which appear to represent a story which isn’t there. So I feel déraciné, and psychologically confused, because I like the story to be authentic. But the people living there love it, because it has that kind of humanity and human scale that old settlements have. The lack of an authentic story doesn’t bother them, and why should it?

So that’s why it could be a disadvantage to want to know when was this building built, who commissioned it, was it done all of a piece, and who decided to add that part, because you’re almost prevented from enjoying it as an aesthetic experience. As you say, it’s easy to enjoy a wood or a piece of moorland on a simpler level. I might know something, but much less than the local ranger would know. It’s still wonderful, the views, the smells, the colours—but one of the delights of this job is that I can learn more.

JG: Is there a degree of guilt as well? The feeling that it could be so much better if one did know more?

HG: No, I think there’s a sense of infinite possibility, of how much I can learn.

JG: The enquiry that you make as a historian, or whatever your specialism is, means that you acquire something more via the knowledge you carry. At the same time there’s a danger, I suppose, in that sometimes reading a label seems enough: I’m told that this painting is by Van Dyck, it was painted in 1620, so now I know everything. I wonder whether sometimes we do people a great disservice in writing guide books and labels because it gives the sense that there’s no more enquiry to be done.

HG: This comes back to how you can layer the information that you offer people to fit what they want to know. At the connoisseur end of our market some people do just want to know who it’s by, when they did it, or if it’s just ‘studio of’, and they have in their heads enough to fill out the story. Equally, at the other end, there are people who know little or nothing about Van Dyck. Of course, when we present the outdoors or houses or their interiors we can give the precise title and date or taxonomy of everything for those who want that kind of information, but I also think there is a real purpose in selectivity, a less scatter-gun approach. I like the idea that we focus on one or two things. You did this very well at Kingston Lacy by picking a couple of pictures from that important collection and talking about their colourful story. At Ickworth we’ve done a fabulous job on the servants’ quarters; but the state rooms are a very ‘difficult’ set of rooms, which only someone with a reasonable amount of historical and aesthetic knowledge finds easy to appreciate. We could pick just one beautiful marquetry table and shine a light both literally and metaphorically on it, get people to look hard at it and engage with it, and then the next month we could choose a piece of china, or glass, or the chandeliers, and focus on them. And, of course, this would encourage repeat visiting—it makes each visit different. So I think we should be more selective, more discriminat-

One of the things I’m very interested in (and I’m not trying to sound elitist) is how we distinguish between the important parts of collections and the less important parts. In some places I suspect that the whole collection is regarded as having the same level of importance and significance, whether it’s a 2nd edition of an Enid Blyton book or a painting by Stubbs. I think we should have more confidence about saying what the most significant things are in the broadest sense, and really focus on them, and encourage the visitors to engage with them. I realise that this may well be a subjective judgment, and we have to be careful about applying a very particular set of subjective criteria.

JG: I was reading about Goethe on his Grand Tour: he builds up this image of what Rome is going to be like in his mind, and when he arrives he’s so appalled by the day-to-day banality that he has to turn around and leave. It’s not what he was expecting. I wonder if you’ve felt that as a historian. You know the story very well, but when you see the actuality of it it’s a disappointment, because that time is somewhere else. The artefacts are there, but the action has gone, the people have disappeared, the place has been diluted by time, it’s a sort of wreck site, not valid any more.

HG: If you say it’s a wreck site, you’re almost denying that time has to pass. One of the purposes of how we look after heritage is to help people understand how different the past was. We shouldn’t let people assume, as programmes like The White Queen perhaps do, that people in the past were just like us except that they wore different clothes. The medieval man and woman in Western Europe had a certain view of Christianity, and that shaped their world view and their understanding of science and society; actually they were very different from us, and we shouldn’t pretend they were the same. I think our presentations should point out how different things were, because that’s what interests people.

So I wonder what it is that we do now that people in the future will think is extraordinary. Gilbert White is an example. He believed that swallows spent the winter in in the mud on the bottom of ponds. Now, Gilbert White was an 18th-century ultra-rationalist, and very observant, yet he believed that. Today science and society have advanced enormously, but there will be many things about what we do and think that people 100 or 200 years from now will think were completely mad or socially unacceptable. I think we should help people realise that now is not necessarily perfect, now is not the complete answer, any more that 1878 or 1688 was the complete answer. People thought differently in the past. I realised that when I read Clare Tomalin’s biography of Samuel Pepys: Oliver Cromwell’s body was dug up, and people carried it through the streets of...
London and everybody threw things at it, and Pepys joined in. Yet we think of that time as an enlightened one, when the Royal Society was founded. White and Pepys weren't like us—I think we have a duty to explain difference.

But, of course, sometimes we need to identify sameness. Sometimes we need to say that these people were human like us, and they had to deal with the same problems (like my example of Disraeli at Hughenden). My husband, having studied 19th-century history, always cites our assumption that Victorian families wouldn't have got very upset about so many of their children dying—it was a common event, and they expected it. In fact, if you look at family archives, mothers and fathers were as devastated as we would be. There are some things that are eternal, and that's where you can make an emotional connection with the artefacts—the mourning rings, the black-edged paper. Some of our objects can make people realise how different the past was, some of them can connect people to how similar some things remain. It's a matter of picking the right things to convey those ideas.

JG: Can you tell us about your visit to Uppark?

HG: I went to Uppark when I was about 10, in the mid-60s. I vividly remember seeing a very shiny dining room table and being told the story of Emma Hamilton dancing on it. I was told when I went back there the other day that this is a true story. That object and its story really did bring the place to life for me. The other thing I remember was that the then guide would say about every single object: 'It's too lovely, and frightfully interesting.' This phrase sunk into my brain and became a family phrase ever after. The point is that the style in which stories are told can stick in your memory as much as the story itself.

Charlecote is a fascinating example. The story goes that Shakespeare was caught poaching in the deer park, and that he was taken up before the local justice of the peace, a very pompous fellow, and Shakespeare personified him—and made fun of him—as Justice Shallow in Henry IV and The Merry Wives of Windsor. The historian in me says: Was that really true? Where are the records from the magistrate's court? But part of me simply wants it to be true. We can feel that Shakespeare was a real person, not an almost mythic figure who never lived in a real place in a real time. The delight of that story is that he really was a young man who lived in Stratford and who went out poaching deer. That's why I want it to be true.

JG: At Hardy's Cottage a BT engineer turned up. We were closed, but he knocked on the door and we let him in. 'I love coming at this time of the year,' he said. 'I always come about the time of the anniversary to think about that great day in October when Nelson said to him'—Kiss me, Hardy'. I love to think of him, that great seafarer, coming from this little cottage. Of course he'd got the two Hardys completely muddled up, but he'd been coming here year after year, to stand in the room where his hero had stood. I didn't want to burst his bubble. The lovely thing is that when he left he said: 'With a naval career as busy as that, I don't know how he had the time to write those novels'. It's funny, but that's all right, isn't it?

HG: Yes, that's all right. What would be the purpose in correcting his understanding? Think of the emotional commitment he has to the place, and the amount of pleasure he's got out of it. But we shouldn't assume that people don't want to know, and not provide them with information. This really came home to me at Kensington Palace, where I went to see what our competitors do. It's been done up recently in a wonderfully imaginative and artistic way, and you see the young Victoria's apartments just at the time she came to the throne, and you see the apartments built by and for William and Mary, and all of it is presented I should say with a minimum of fact and a maximum of imagination, including audio and 3-D presentations. As we were walking through a beautiful 17th-century room, towards us came a very harassed-looking mother with two teenage children. She looked straight at me and said 'Can somebody just tell me, who was William III?' I've been walking around here all morning and I haven't got the faintest idea who William III is or how he relates to anything.' So as the historian in our group I was able to give her a potted version of English history between 1640 and 1688, and she looked relieved, because clearly her children had been asking her about it, and the place hadn't offered her enough basic information. This is what we have to guard against.

JG: Simon Jenkins has talked about getting the gist of a place in the first 50 yards.

HG: The first 50 yards for me is not necessarily literally that, but being able to explain clearly why the Trust owns this place. It's a matter of confidence. We have these wonderful landscapes or buildings or objects for a reason: because they are a wonderful example of something. Explaining to people why we have it all connects back to our core purpose. We need to constantly remind people that we are here to protect things and places of historic interest or natural beauty, and that is why this house or this object or this bit of land is something we think is worth having.

JG: Shall we talk about significant survival and decline and loss? The Duke of Buccleuch has been talking recently about inheritance as a living thing. Do you think that the Trust's purpose is not simply to conserve objects, but think about managing a place to allow more dynamic change to presentation? Can we change the way we manage an estate, alter the building fabric, add another layer? The Duke of Buccleuch wouldn't think twice about adding another room or changing a colour scheme.

HG: I come back to something I heard Fiona Reynolds say years ago: the Trust has to think in centuries. Let's take the example of Calke Abbey. When we acquired Calke in 1985 we chose to present it, in a very artful way, exactly as it was when its last owner handed

The Bird Lobby, Calke Abbey
it over to us. It’s wonderful, and very different from most of our other presentations. Is it conceivable that in 100 years’ time we will still be presenting Calke in exactly that way? Or, because we have to think in centuries, will we have evolved what we do? None of what we do now will be sustainable for 100 years. So I think we have to come back to a point that a number of people have made to me: we are here to manage change, not to set in amber how things were when we got them. When I talk to curators and house managers it becomes clear to me that we choose from a range of possibilities. We should have the confidence to move on and choose a different possibility, because there isn’t an absolute truth, there isn’t a moment when the house was perfect. Of course, there are exceptions to that where a house and its collection were conceived as a complete whole, like Kedleston—the equivalent of a Fabergé egg. It would be hard to present a house like that in different ways. But there aren’t many of our properties that are all of a piece; I think we have to be ready to move on.

HG: Does that mean standing in the place of the people who owned it, having the confidence to make changes?

HG: Yes, the confidence that they would have. I think that relates to spirit of place. You can see this in those of our properties that are managed in a very different way, as at Buscot. Although we are the freehold owner, Lord Faringdon manages it. I was there the other day at an event in his garden: he’d commissioned a new sundial and a new obelisk. He acts in the spirit of his predecessors, great art collectors, and he enriches the estate constantly. The visitors love the fact that they can see new acquisitions and changes. Of course, I’m not saying that you should take a Fabergé egg property or a property of enormous historic significance and change it all, but let’s not be afraid of changing and developing and presenting things in a different way. At Wallington some of the rooms are decorated in what I think are rather dull pastel colours. The curator told me that in Lady Trevelyan’s day in the 19th century the rooms had Morris wallpaper; then John Fowler came along and advised their redecoration. Now John Fowler’s work is considered worthy of preservation. We seem very flexible in some of our properties as to what is the magic moment is that we’re trying to preserve, and in that case we’re preserving John Fowler rather than Lady Trevelyan’s lovely Morris wallpaper—you can tell which I favour! But of course I would respect the wishes of the local curatorial team.

JG: Do you think that the spirit of place work that we’re doing now will help us to go in these new directions?

JG: You came to Kingston Lacy to look at the estate and the opportunities for building new houses in Shapwick.

HG: You came to Kingston Lacy to look at the estate and the opportunities for building new houses in Shapwick.

HG: When William John Bankes inherited Kingston Lacy in 1835 he recast his 1660s brick house in Chilmark stone and ripped out the interior partitions. Today, the Trust curator, English Heritage and the local planning officer would say no to that. Yet in 1906 when we took on Barrington Court we built estate buildings and a model farm (now Grade I listed), and Gertrude Jekyll made the garden. The Trust was collaborating with the tenant and some good designers to make big changes.

HG: Of course the planning system today would not allow us to do anything that was in any way ultimately destructive; and I suppose there is a feeling that we are conservative with a small ‘e’, that we revere the past and have a slight fear of change. I couldn’t pretend that our judgments about what we should preserve are anything but subjective. All the time we make subjective judgments about what to conserve and what to change, particularly in the case of decoration schemes, for example.

JG: Despite saying ‘for ever, for everyone’, we always recognise that decline and loss are inevitable. Some things must disappear—but we can look at ways of slowing down the decline, or preserve the objects in other ways. Do you think that loss becomes more tolerable if we work more with contemporary architects, artists and craftspeople to augment a beautiful place in a way that former owners might? Should we encourage and foster the arts more in our places?

HG: It’s clear to me that we need constantly to be coming back to our core purpose. Should we be large-scale commissioners of various kinds of modern art or architecture for its own sake? No. Do I think that it’s valid to encourage modern artists and craftspeople where it augments and enhances people’s understanding of places and buildings and the artefacts we have? I think it is perfectly valid. In the Royal Academy art exhibition last summer, Cornelia Parker showed a piece where she had taken silver tea services and squashed them—I think the idea was the impact of time. I thought how wonderful it would be to show a fine Georgian tea service at one of our houses with Cornelia Parker’s crushed tea service beside it; it would make you look hard, it would make you think differently about the three-dimensional tea service. We could use art to make people think differently about objects. For example, we have collaborated with the Goldsmiths’ Company, at Erdigg among other places: modern silversmiths show their work and explain how they create silver objects so that people will look at the silver we have through different eyes, and will understand more about its craftsmanship. The same is true of some contemporary art. We shouldn’t commission it as an end in itself, but as part of what we own already.

JG: Part Two will appear in the autumn issue of the ABC Bulletin.
When the spry octogenarian Donald Gimson moved out of Stoneywell Cottage in the days before last Christmas, he left his sixty years of idiosyncratic curatorship with a ‘You will look after the place, won’t you?’

This succinct request, or maybe order, belied the detailed help he had already given, as well as the assurance that I knew his advice would only be a telephone call or email away. I did, though, infer from it that he would never return home.

‘My work in the shoe industry in Leicester’, he told me, ‘was … well, it was just my job; Stoneywell’s been the important bit.’ And while official retirement called time on his job, actually leaving his home took a bit more resolution for someone with such sound Arts and Crafts genes. Foremost and most altruistic of his reasons for leaving was to ensure Stoneywell’s immortality, unaltered and with its contents undispersed. More practically, the prospect of further winters within the authentically spartan interiors of what was built as a summer house was weighing on the widower.

Donald’s, however, was not the first generation of his family to live full time at Stoneywell; his father and mother, Basil and Muriel Gimson, had done so too on Basil’s retirement from teaching at the progressively minded Bedales School in Hampshire, where in fact both Donald and his father had been educated and imbued with its Arts and Crafts philosophy of ‘head, hand and heart’ (a motto coined by Charles Voysey in 1896).

It was a generation earlier, in 1898, that Donald’s grandfather, Sydney, commissioned his younger brother, Ernest Gimson, to return from his work in the Cotswolds to build him a holiday house on a three-and-a-half-acre plot he had recently bought in the Charnwood Forest. Sydney was an industrialist in nearby Leicester, and had for many years been hiking out from the city with friends to explore the Charnwood Forest’s ancient landscape. And explore is not a hyperbole; it seemed so remote and unknown to them that, having slung hammocks in a stable loft they would obscure their candlelight to avoid being discovered by imagined brigands.

Elder brother-client Sydney’s choice of site for his cottage was at once overruled by younger brother-architect, Ernest Gimson, in favour of a rocky bank that enabled the structure to appear to emerge into the untamed setting of its grounds, seemingly newborn from its primeval geology. In the Arts and Crafts way of artisan-architects, Ernest Gimson instructed the young Detmar Blow to be his mason; and this mercurial character set about the individual selection of Stoneywell’s stones—a great many were taken from its grounds, but others were ‘liberated’ from nearby fields and walls, and brought on site in a borrowed cart.

Blow took particular care in choosing stones for the Cottage’s massive axial chimneystack, which appears so prominently in their friend F. L. Griggs’s drawing of Stoneywell reproduced in The Buildings of England volume for Leicestershire and Rutland. But similar solicitude was shown to the massive Swithland slate lintels (some weighing a ton-and-a-half) found on the refuse heaps of the abandoned local quarries—these were elegantly initialled and dated for successive generations of owners.

Sydney’s typed-up Random Memories of the Building of Stoneywell Cottage alludes to the need for some economies in the building, not least because the project rapidly began to run over budget, and by completion had more than doubled its original estimate of £500. Consequently, softwoods were used for studs, joists and beams, while chestnut was substituted for oak for the internal doors and some floors.

Nevertheless, there were funds to celebrate the cottage’s near completion towards the end of the winter in 1899, and for which Sydney provided a massive barrel of beer and employed local caterers to feed all who had been involved in the work. A table and benches of loose planks were improvised for supper in the big kitchen. Sydney’s Random Memories recall the ‘real wit’ of a tradesman from the nearby village of Woodhouse Eaves, and that Detmar Blow ‘contributed his full share to the fun’ and ‘was a very good performer on the violin’. Sydney’s account concludes with a description of the erratic footprints his departing guests left in the snow.

While as far as I am aware there was never anything especially bacchanalian about Stoneywell holidays and parties, there was nothing of the ‘primly “anti” all the divine follies of mankind which exuberantly manifest themselves in such things as lipstick and bars’, an accusation levelled by Edward Thomas’s biographer, John Moore, at the Bedales staff, and by implication all Arts and Crafts followers.
Instead, the house exudes that sense of fun in which it was marinated at its inception. Something was left behind by its creators, Ernest Gimson, that ‘kindly wizard’, as he was described by the Sapperton schoolmistress, of whom ‘little snorts of appreciation and of fun were characteristic … as we sat, listening and talking, by candles and log-fire light’, and by Detmar Blow, with his ‘charming irresponsibility and elastic conscience’ (Sydney Gimson: Random Memories) and just general childishness. The latter was clearly manifested when, having written a children’s play, he recruited its cast by stopping children in the street outside his London flat—a casting technique that would today probably lead to instant arrest.

The house also retains the personality of its client, Sydney Gimson, the beaming pater familias of family photographs, his children and grandchildren grouped about him on Stoneywell’s doorstep. It has the spirit, too, of childhood near bursting with excitement for the month’s holiday ahead—that having dashed down winding slate steps and out into the wilderness of the garden, chooses to turn one way to a stone fort, or the other to Hundred Acre Wood.

I was able to go ‘practical’ with my architectural history in the first days of the Trust’s ownership when I took my family to stay at Stoneywell. Young children never tire of the round-and-round races possible in houses with two staircases, but at Stoneywell they were also thrilled by the house’s sinuous shape and myriad levels. Their parents, though, were drawn to the window seats to spread the Sunday papers; mugs of coffee rested on the lime-ash sills, and then Bloody Marys.

It is a house composed of a few elemental parts; it is seemingly molecular, and only an age away from its primeval geology. And I believe this is why Sydney and Jean Gimson determined that ‘its furniture should suit and not be a lot of cast-outs from Glebe Street’ (their town house in Leicester). To this end, they visited Ernest Gimson in Pinbury, Gloucestershire, where he was sharing workshops with Ernest and Sidney Barnsley. There, amongst other bits, they chose the dining chairs made by Ernest Gimson, and the big refectory table by Sidney Barnsley, its top made of one vast piece of quarter-cut oak; and nearby, they had fire dogs and sconces made to Ernest Gimson’s designs by the local smith, Alfred Bucknell.

A proportion of that original furniture has, alas, over time passed to other members of the family, and a high back bow settle is in Leicester City Museum. Some pieces will eventually return, and a few other suitably similar ones by Gimson and the Barnsleys will, we hope, be borrowed from Leicester and Cheltenham Museums, and these will bolster the wonderful and near entire contents that we have on loan.

Stoneywell’s remaining original furniture has, however, been admirably augmented in the 1930s and 40s by later pieces from Edward Barnsley’s workshops in Froxfield, Hampshire; especially so by several commemorative desks and beds for marriages and twenty-first birthdays. There is a further remarkable piece of furniture, a walnut coffer, not in fact by Gimson or the Barnsleys, but by the architectural carver Joseph Armitage, who worked for a while nearby in Leicester. Its carved floriate bands include that familiar-looking oak leaf motif which, twenty years later, Armitage was to enter successfully in a National Trust competition.

Everything about Stoneywell is spare and distilled to exclude the otiose, and it is thus arguably the apogee of the Arts and Crafts movement. But that is also why it was so at risk in today’s world. Two of Sydney Gimson’s siblings subsequently also commissioned their brother, Ernest, to build them cottages close by in the Charnwood Forest. Both of these were sold in the 20th century, their contents dispersed, and their fabric drastically altered.

An even worse fate met the neighbouring pair of Ernest Gimson farm cottages this spring, when they were demolished for their valuable site. And the appearance elsewhere of electric gates and patterned driveways confirms that the sybarites have arrived on Charnwood, and that had the vulnerable Stoneywell been placed on the open market, its ascetic wonders would most certainly have been lost.

While I remain sure of the level of that threat, I was wrong to assume that Donald Gimson would not return; still, I suppose I hadn’t known quite what a hit he’d made with our then Director General! Fiona Reynolds had visited on a wet afternoon, only a week or two before she announced her departure from the Trust. Donald lent her a large umbrella with which to return to her car; but he understood only later why she’d paused to register its blue and pink Emmanuel stripes—and that must have been the seed of this September’s Emmanuel Tea Party at Stoneywell, at which Donald will be guest of honour.

Simon Chesters-Thompson, Curator, East Midlands
ATTINGHAM PARK
A painting by Ethel Sands (1872-1965) of the Boudoir at Attingham, probably painted in 1929, was purchased at auction at Christie’s, South Kensington, London, for £1,125 including buyer’s premium.

Between the two World Wars Teresa, Lady Berwick (1890-1972) entertained a cosmopolitan and artistic circle at Attingham, which included writers, aesthetes and artists such as L.P. Hartley, Cesare Visconti, Count of Marcignago, Albert (‘Bertie’) Landsberg and Angela Mond. Ethel Sands was a society hostess in her own right as well as a painter, and like Lady Berwick she had been a volunteer nurse during the First World War. Inv. no. NT2900061.

A pair of mid-19th-century gouaches of Neapolitan scenes with a provenance from Attingham was purchased at auction at Philip Serrell, Malvern, for £6,726 including buyer’s premium. Inv. no. 2900065.

CROOME COURT
A late 19th-century glass design representing the arms of the Earls of Coventry, painted in reverse by Albert Gammon, was purchased at Gorringes, Lewes, for £185 including buyer’s premium. Inv. no. NT2900064.

POLESDEN LACEY
A Sévres porcelain tête à tête tea service dating from the early 1920s, painted in red and black with garlands of roses within a red striped border and comprising a tray, teapot, sucrière, milk jug and two cups and saucers, was purchased at auction at Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury, for £1,264 including buyer’s premium. The service was allegedly given to Elsie M. Grant by Mrs Ronald Greville (1863-1942) of Polesden Lacey, who in turn received it as a gift from Lord Blanesburgh. Inv. no. NT2900066.

TYNTESFIELD
A painting by Giovanni Bellini (c.1430-1516) and workshop, The Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist, which had been accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax (settling £619,370 of tax), was allocated to the National Trust for display at Tyntesfield. The painting had been at Tyntesfield since 1880, as part of the collection assembled by the entrepreneurs and philanthropists William Gibbs (1790-1875) and his son Anthony Gibbs (1841-1907). It reflects the atmosphere of the house, which was intended as an expression of the Ruskinian synthesis of the spiritual and the aesthetic.

The picture had originally been offered in lieu of tax in 2002 with a wish that it be allocated to Tyntesfield, when the house had just been acquired by the National Trust with huge support from the public and an unprecedented grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. However, at that time the security arrangements at the house did not meet museum standards, and the Bellini was initially allocated to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Following an upgrade of those arrangements the painting has now been re-allocated to Tyntesfield. Inv. no. NT2900062.

WIMPOLE
A painting by the circle of Salvator Rosa (1615-1675), A Rocky Landscape with Figures resting at the edge of a Lake, was purchased at auction at Christie’s, King Street, London, for £17,500 including buyer’s premium. The painting had been sold from Wimpole by Charles (‘Champagne Charlie’) Yorke, 5th Earl of Hardwicke (1836-97), and was later owned by furniture historian Ralph Edwards (1894-1977). Inv. no. NT290063.
GODDARDS – BY THE ‘YORKSHIRE LUTYENS’
The opening of a stunning Arts and Crafts house in the city of York

Mention a Grade I listed National Trust-owned house in the city of York and most people would assume you were referring to the Treasurer’s House, adjacent to York Minster, and given to the Trust by Frank Green in 1930. But for nearly 30 years the Trust has owned a second architecturally distinguished Grade I listed house in the city, and since July last year visitors have been able to enjoy both its interior and its charming and surprisingly expansive garden.

Goddards was the family home of Noel Terry of the famous confectionery-making firm of Terry’s of York. The origins of the business, making sugar-based sweets, goes back to the 18th century, but it expanded rapidly in the Victorian era as it focused increasingly on chocolate. Noel Terry joined the firm in 1911 and after becoming joint managing director in 1923, a new state of the art factory opened on Bishopthorpe Road adjacent to the race course. (The impressive buildings with their landmark clock tower still survive, although the factory closed in 2005). Shortly afterwards Terry decided to commission a new home for his growing family; in the tradition of earlier entrepreneurs, he chose a site on the other side of the racecourse from which he could view the works from his study.

Terry chose as his architect Walter Brierley, Yorkshire’s leading practitioner of the day and successor to the partnership which traced its origins back to John Carr of York in the 18th century. The practice thrived in that great flourishing of architecture in late Victorian and Edwardian England, designing a wide variety of buildings in a range of architectural styles including banks, churches, schools, country houses and municipal jobs such as County Hall, Northallerton. It is no surprise that Brierley gained a reputation as ‘the Yorkshire Lutyens’ as his architectural style evolved: it included many of the elements which were prevalent in that free style of Edwardian England—Arts and Crafts, Gothic, Queen Anne, Classical.

Goddards turned out to be Brierley’s final commission, as he died in 1926 before it was completed. At first glance it is in a free Arts and Crafts Tudor style with mullioned windows, leaded lights, patterned brickwork and great ornamental chimneys. The Gallery Hall and Stairs have fine oak fittings, and the splendid plaster ceiling in the Drawing Room was given a consciously irregular finish—it was the work of George Bankart, who wrote the authoritative The Art of the Plasterer in 1908. But all this was combined with an eclectic mix of varying elements including a Gothic oriel window and Queen Anne and Georgian-style paneling, chimneypieces and doorcases.

Noel Terry no doubt gave his architect a clear indication of the scale of the house he wanted, but the detailed design and style seems to have been very much left to Brierley. His own house, Bishopbarns, was nearby, and although 20 years earlier (dating from 1908) it must have been known to Terry, as there are such similarities between the two houses. So in many respects Goddards was a very old-fashioned house for its date. In particular the service wing, built in the traditional position at the north end of the house, is a reminder that generous provision for servants continued for upper middle class families well beyond the Great War. Apart from a flower room, pantry, kitchen, scullery and servants’ hall, there were day and night nurseries for the children and several maids’ bedrooms on the attic floor.

The pleasure of Goddards as a family home must have been greatly enriched by its garden. It is characteristic of the early 20th century in that it is compartmentalised, with different character

Goddards, from across the pond
areas. The formality of the main garden terrace and lawn with its axial pond is appropriately architectural for its setting near the house, but the design and planting becomes increasingly informal as the ground falls away towards the naturalistic Water Garden and Rockery. In the fashion of the time Goddards was not just a garden to look at, but to do things in, whether taking tea on the terrace or in the shade of the Sun Parlour, or playing either bowls or tennis in the enclosed lawned areas provided for the purpose.

The garden was designed not by Brierley, but an independent landscape architect, George Dillistone of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. Dillistone came from a family of nurserymen, and set up in private practice as a garden consultant in 1925. Goddards must have been one of his earliest independent commissions, as he was appointed in September that year. By January 1926, as his plans of the garden and his proposed terrace show, he had already developed the basic design, although elements continued to evolve over a number of years. The detailed design of the Rock and Water Garden was not completed until April 1931, and he was still producing designs as late as 1935. All this is recorded in a series of highly worked coloured drawings—copies of these are displayed in the house. In fact, the whole of the Goddards commission is firmly documented: many of Brierley's design drawings are retained at the house, and the wider archive of the architectural practice is deposited in the Borthwick Institute at the University of York.

The furnishing of Goddards evolved from Terry's great passion for 18th-century furniture and clocks; from the 1920s onwards he developed an outstanding collection. Following Noel's death in 1980 discussions were held with the National Trust on the feasibility of its taking on both house and contents. At that time the Trust felt unready to take on a 1920s house with a newly formed collection, but fortuitously, at the same time, York Civic Trust, of which Terry was a leading member, had just acquired and begun restoring Fairfax House as an outstanding example of an 18th-century town house. This house and Terry's furniture seemed a perfect marriage, and so since 1984 the Terry Collection has been on display in the centre of York in settings appropriate to its period.

The Terry Trustees now turned their attention to the future of an unfurnished Goddards, and as the National Trust was then looking for a new regional office, the Trustees generously sold the house to the Trust for that purpose. This office use continues to this day, and although the Trust kept up the garden and always encouraged visits from interested groups, access to the house has been very limited. But in 2011, when changing working practices meant that fewer staff needed to work at Goddards regularly, it was decided to open the principal rooms to visitors and tell the story of the Terry family, their confectionary business, and their prominent role in York city life. The story of the creation of the house and its garden is illustrated with copies of the superb surviving plans by Brierley and Dillistone.

No effort was made to recreate the feel of the Terry interiors —this would have been impossible with its superb furniture now gone—but visitors are encouraged to use the introduced furniture in the Drawing Room and have tea in the Dining Room. Members of the family and others have been very generous in lending various memorabilia which has greatly enriched the displays. And those visitors who recall the Terry family and the old factory are encouraged to share their memories.

Roger Carr-Whitworth, Curator, Yorkshire and North-East
THE METICULOUS CREATION OF A REPLICA COSTUME
An example of a partnership between NADFAS and the Trust at Uppark

Patricia Fay started the Chiltern Antiques Group (now the National Decorative and Fine Arts Societies) with two aims in mind: to educate and to offer practical help. The NADFAS emphasis today on education and conservation still reflects her original aims. Over the years the scope of the practical help has grown, and we work with other organisations that have the same ethos of preserving and conserving our heritage. NADFAS has been engaged with the National Trust in partnership in many projects, and its contribution has included guiding and stewarding; cleaning and preparing properties for opening (and closing for the winter); repairing or re-making curtains and bed hangings; cleaning and repairing books; and making replica costumes.

A recent project has been carried out at Uppark by Heritage Volunteers of the Solent Decorative and Fine Arts Society (Solent DFAS). NADFAS has encouraged partnership projects of this kind for many years, and this is a marvellous example. The outcome is the stunning addition of a replica costume to the house. The pooling of ideas and resources has enhanced and benefited the project both for the National Trust and for the Heritage Volunteers, who have put so much time and effort into this incredible piece of work.

Judith Wozniak and Jackie Wyatt from Solent DFAS went to Uppark to meet Sarah Foster, the House Manager, to discuss the possibility of the replica costume project in 2011. After viewing 18th-century portraits of the Uppark family and their friends, they chose one of Lucy Watson, painted in 1755 by Arthur Devis.

The groundwork carried out before the project began was extensive and invaluable. Exploration into the construction of the gown and undergarments included visits to the Fashion Museum in Bath, Chawton Library in Hampshire, and the V&A. Research into contemporary fabrics and how dresses and undergarments were made was thorough. Undergarments of the period included a laced and trimmed chemise of fine linen worn next to the skin, stays, and a petticoat made of coarse calico. A hoop petticoat worn over these layers gave form to the dress. Drawers were not worn until the 1800s.

A pair of pockets was tied around the waist over the petticoats; these could be accessed through slits in the side seams of the gown. Pockets held personal items such as needlework accessories, pencils and letters. The two pockets made by members of the team were embroidered in different styles of the time using patterns inspired by the research.

It was decided to dress two mannequins, one displaying the undergarments and the other the completed gown. One talented volunteer sewed the gown and the stays. She made two sets of stays by hand having attended an intensive corset-making course in London. The stays were made of three layers of linen, one fine and two coarse, with a fine linen lining. The channels in the stays were threaded with reeds and the edges bound with kid leather and silk. The stays were laced with cord made on a lathe (a two-pronged wooden device on which loops are formed to weave the cord), as it would have been in the 18th century. The stays took over 130 hours to complete. Other volunteers made undergarments and quilted the stomacher, the bodice insert behind the front of the lace collar.

An excellent match for the peach and turquoise silk taffeta of the dress was discovered in a specialist shop in Soho. A toile was made of the gown first to work out the intricacies of its construction. It was almost entirely hand-stitched. Two members of Solent DFAS generously donated antique lace for the collar and cuffs, and another member gave a beautiful old lace shawl to complete the ensemble.

A quarter-size version of the dress was made to fit a small model to see how it would look. The full size 'Lucy', having been so much a part of the lives of these amazing volunteers, will be missed greatly by them. However, 'Little Lucy' remains to serve as a reminder of this tremendous undertaking. The project took 18 months to complete, and the dress is now on permanent display at Uppark.

We in NADFAS are extremely proud of the volunteers who give so much of their time and skills to projects like this, and we hope that everyone who visits Uppark will appreciate their very fine work. We thank Sarah Foster for all her support in the project, and all those talented Heritage Volunteers. Without working together in partnership, this wonderful re-creation would not have been possible.

Sarah Foster, House Manager at Uppark, says: 'It has been a welcome opportunity to work with such a great team. The idea for the project had been with me for some time, but it was not until the Solent DFAS contacted me to offer their services that it started to fall into place. It has been a really great experience. If you are thinking of taking forward something like this, I would certainly recommend working with a NADFAS group.'

Juanita Sharman, Heritage Volunteers Chairman, NADFAS
Jackie Wyatt, Chairman, Solent DFAS
Contact: volunteering@nadfas.org.uk for more information about NADFAS Heritage Volunteers. Website: www.nadfas.org.uk
‘OBJECTS OF DESIRE’: A DISPLAY REFASHIONED

The (sometimes worrying) creation of a successful exhibition

Since 1977, Killerton has been the home of the Paulise de Bush collection of costume, and now contains around 10,000 examples of dress and accessories dating from about 1700 to 1970.

Atherton Harrison brought her late friend Paulise’s collection to Devon, as well as her own ideas on the decoration of the first floor of the house, where most of the dress displays were laid out. Theatrical in nature, they were modelled on Paulise’s own private museum displays at Edlins in the village of Aston Upthorpe, Berkshire.

After Mrs Harrison’s retirement in 1994, a number of improvements were made. A basic dress form began to replace the scary old mannequins, and a widely accepted preventive conservation technique of mounting was introduced. Gradually there was a move away from the period room settings and ‘conversation pieces’ that had been in place since the late 1970s.

After more than 34 years the display floor at Killerton badly needed redecoration, having had little more than a new coat of paint on the woodwork. The rooms, with their reproduction period wallpapers and old curtains, looked gloomy and tired. All but three of the display areas were glazed in, with a gold-painted ‘picture frame’ around the display windows. Although the lighting had been upgraded during a re-servicing project in the house in 2001-02, there were only a limited number of spotlights. All in all it was rather like a lovely but faded old friend in need of a facelift.

One of our aims for the 2013 exhibition, we felt, was to cheer up the look of the displays. We also wanted to raise the profile of the collection, and in order to do this we had to ensure that our new exhibition was not only interesting enough to attract national publicity, but also exciting enough to attract a younger audience.

All of these elements had been considered by the time a meeting was called in May 2012. After initial discussions with James Grasby (Regional Curator with responsibility for Killerton) and Alison Dalby (Senior Press Officer) we decided that we needed a display with high visual impact which communicated a sense of luxury through the exhibits. Our original idea was to bring in a contemporary fashion designer or influential commentator to help select objects and design the exhibition, but soon the name of Russell Sage came up. Russell is a London-based interior designer who has worked on many prestigious projects including the National Trust’s Avebury Manor. Russell was perfect for this project: he is familiar with the National Trust, he has a background in fashion, and an impressive career in interior design.

Russell generously agreed to give his time for free. He was invited to come down to meet us at Killerton and view the display space and the selection of dresses and accessories which I had already made to fit the Objects of Desire theme. We were already into the summer of 2012, and needed to proceed with the usual round of gathering conservation estimates and mounting the garments. Unfortunately the initial idea—to invite Russell and a series of designers to select objects for each of the display rooms—proved to be unworkable within the given timescale. We were also aware that Russell himself had had little time to devote to the planning stages of the project.

Russell’s part in the exhibition and his requirements and budget were to be project managed by Killerton’s Assistant Property Manager, who also channelled communication with Russell Sage Studio.

The Brief
We asked Russell to create a series of backdrops for the collection, generally refreshing the space and rethinking the layout.

After discussing the budget and having approved the selection and colour range of the exhibits, Russell photographed the display space; he listened very carefully to what we wanted. He talked about bringing in film and sound, and involving a younger, cutting-edge aspect of fashion. An initial press release was sent out in the late summer, and a piece prepared for the autumn regional newsletter. Our opening date was February 2013.

During the last few months of 2012 we continued working towards the exhibition, mount-making and preparing captions for the objects from the Killerton collections, although Russell had suggested that he might find an alternative way of communicating information about the exhibits to the visitors. By December we had still received no visuals of the layout or ideas for redecoration of the display areas, but we had been warned by James and Alison that this might happen and advised to keep the faith.

We were very excited to have a meeting with Modus, a fashion PR company with whom Russell has close links. They seemed extremely enthusiastic about helping us not only to promote the Objects of Desire exhibition, but also to raise the profile of the collection as a whole. However, we did end up staging our usual photo-call, arranging for a press photographer to capture some great images to launch the exhibition.

Installation
The exhibition began to come together during an intense period of work in early February. The annual display had been taken down and put away immediately after Christmas as usual so that the rooms could be deep cleaned and sprayed against insect pests, and the mounting was finished by January.

Although we would normally prefer to plan and carry out the work much earlier it all began to come together very quickly, thanks to Killerton’s stalwart team of staff and volunteers, and especially
building manager Jamie and the skilled estate team headed by Bill Baker, who patiently overcame some of the problems that came up.

Russell aimed at bringing a sense of the excitement of the London catwalks to Killerton. He achieved this in more ways than one. With less than two weeks to go redecoration began. Russell engaged a decorative artist to paint the room which was to house a printed silk dress by Christopher Kane, one of the most successful aspects of the exhibition. The print inspired the decoration of the room, and the choice of furniture within it that Russell provided from his warehouse. The walls were painted black and white by Killerton staff and volunteers with paint supplied by Russell, while Bill organised the installation of modified furniture hired from Russell and the construction of a new screen to protect an 18th-century gown. Glazing was removed from one of the rooms, and an entire wall moved back in one of the largest display areas. Our usual lighting contractor was put in touch with Russell to discuss the installation of extra tracks, lighting and effects.

It was somewhat worrying that we did not know the content of the DVDs and the number of garments by contemporary designers until the day before the exhibition was due to open. The captions were displayed on digital photo frames, and at the last minute the studio decided that information panels were necessary after all. Temporary information sheets were drafted, which we then had to rephrase and have designed and printed as small graphic panels together with an information leaflet of highlights which visitors could carry around with them.

Time and again throughout the preparatory stages of the show I was reminded of the wise thoughts of a former colleague that when dealing with temporary exhibitions, communication and candour are essential.

**Things that worked**

- Our late 18th-century embroidered linen gown probably started life as bed curtains in about 1700. This struck a chord with Russell: he had used antique furnishing fabrics in his own work in the early 2000s, most famously his up-cycled Union Jack garments
- Second-year students from Falmouth University’s Fashion and Textiles and Sports Performance Wear courses were invited to create new pieces from vintage fabrics, offering visitors the chance to see something new on display over the first four months of the show
- Killerton objects were shown together in one room to create greater impact, with the opportunity to rotate smaller pieces in the display throughout the season
- The selection of contemporary fashion was displayed with silhouettes, fabrics and decorative techniques echoing the cut and flavour of vintage clothing, but also introducing new and exciting ideas
- Well-known and new young designers were represented through Russell’s contacts with the fashion world; they lent directional clothes from 2011 and 2012 collections from his own archives
- We focussed on current fashion star Christopher Kane (who previously studied with Russell at St Martin’s School of Art and Design, and worked as his assistant), within a specially decorated space
- Russell Sage made his own ‘designer room’, recreating the vintage Union Jack club room designed for London’s Zetter Townhouse, including a version of Russell’s iconic Union Jack jacket specially made for *Objects of Desire*
- ‘Through the Wardrobe’ was a dressing-up area for all ages using existing replica garments, incorporating an inspired use of an old wardrobe as the entrance to the room. This was fondly called ‘Narnia’ by volunteers and visitors
- Film provided the rare opportunity to see the work of designers and cutting-edge film-makers, including Julian Roberts and Anna-Nicole Ziesche
- Without an increase in the budget allocation we would not have been able to achieve the positive changes made

**And things that didn’t**

- We are still waiting for the press coverage promised by the fashion PR company. However, our vintage festival weekend held at the end of June brought us great national and local press
- The Cutting Room, while a great concept, has been the hardest to explain to visitors. The film played in the room shows the inspiration for the subtraction cutting method devised by Professor Julian Roberts, as well as showing Julian and his students at work. We were excited to hear that Julian would be coming to Killerton to transform the curtains and cloths into garments, but disappointed that so far the visit has not been confirmed. A few other ideas that were wonderful on paper did not happen in practice
Alternatives to traditional captions have not worked. Recorded information did not arrive, and digital photo frames have frustrated visitors, who prefer to have an information sheet to carry around with them or a straightforward label to read located near the exhibits. Early on we had to rewrite and print graphic panels, which are still rather on the small side, and to provide laminated information sheets which we had hoped to avoid. Lighting bright enough to read by had not been accounted for.

Titles in vinyl lettering have recently been added to the walls and glazing in each room to give a clearer message to visitors about the contents, and help to dress the plain walls.

Volunteer and visitor reactions have been fairly black and white. Some aspects of the exhibition, particularly the contemporary film, have not gone down well, while a few visitors have been disappointed not to see 18th- and 19th-century costumes on display. On the other hand, many visitors love the refreshing new layout and have enjoyed the mix of contemporary and period fashion in the displays.

The exhibition will continue to evolve to meet the needs of visitors. Over the summer the Cutting Room will become the focus of family activities, but we still hope that we will see the room transformed by Julian Roberts before the contemporary element of the exhibition comes down in November.

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of monthly Focus on Fashion events which offers visitors the opportunity to see objects close up, and a very successful vintage weekend, concert and fashion show which we hope will become an annual event.

Shelley Tobin, Costume Curator

The exhibition is on at Killerton until 3 November 2013.

FAVOURITE DRESSES FROM ‘OBJECTS OF DESIRE’

A linen dress embroidered with wool threads which belonged to Susannah Courtenay, an ancestor of ‘Q’, Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, was collected from one of ‘Q’s descendants in about 2001. It had been displayed in 2012 and inspired the fashion students’ catwalk of pieces made from vintage furnishing textiles. The assistant to the Costume Curator, Charlotte Eddington, and volunteer Julia Hanus explain why it is their favourite piece on display:

Charlotte Eddington
The majority of this amazing collection of some 20,000 items is stored between two purpose-built, environmentally controlled stores, one on site and one off site. It was whilst working in our off site store that I found my favourite piece (so far) in the collection, my chocolate box dress! With such a large collection it’s not unusual to open a box and discover something you’ve never seen before. When I opened this box to reveal an embroidered 18th-century cream linen open robe, embroidered with fruits and flowers in vivid jewel-coloured wools and in pristine condition, it gave me the same delight as opening an expensive box of chocolates.

Julia Hanus
My favourite object in the exhibition is the embroidered 18th-century dress. The embroidery is just so bright and colourful, and I especially love the strawberries in it. I’m also fascinated by the cut of the dress. The bodice is perfectly fitted to the body, while the heavily pleated skirt creates a fullness that allows the embroidery to show off its entire beauty.

Costume Curator Shelley Tobin
We often tend to associate skilled work and craftsmanship with earlier periods. For me, the leather dress designed by fashion team Fyodor Golan which they have lent to this exhibition goes beyond fashion and demonstrates amazing skill and the understanding of the potential of materials. Both of these talented young men came to fashion from a fine art background, founding their label in 2010. Their interest in manipulating materials like leather to create strong shapes with intriguing embellishment comes across in this very special piece. The raised decoration is reminiscent of the ritual scarring on the faces of African peoples.
This spring and summer, there has been every opportunity to visit and participate in a great variety of festivals devoted to literature, music and history, as well as many others too numerous to mention. Last year the Trust dipped its toes into the festival frenzy and presented 7 Days at two properties, Attingham Park and Calke Abbey. For one week, there were a number of events which enabled the National Trust and external experts to provide in-depth talks and walks on a wide variety of subjects which explored various aspects of each property. The purpose was to highlight the wide range of conservation expertise within the Trust and to provide a stimulating experience for those of our visitors who wished to delve more deeply into the history, industrial archaeology, collections, natural and designed landscape, woodlands and environmental concerns of the properties.

Based on last year’s success, the Trust decided this year to increase the number of participating properties and to explore an overarching theme—the landscape. The landscape and countryside have been an integral part of the National Trust since its inception. As John Gaze records in his book, Figures in the Landscape, for centuries man has wanted to tame and civilise it, to control its use for agriculture, to convert the land into parklands and pleasure grounds surrounding great houses, to alter scrublands into tiny woodlands for fox coverts and game birds, and to plant larch and pine timbers for the new demands of the improved estates. Our landscape has also influenced the creativity of artists or writers who sought to capture the sublime majesty of the landscape. For some, the moulding of the countryside has been to create a sanctuary, a place of retreat and respite for the soul. Powerful forces of nature formed the landscape and habitats, its importance as a high tide plays a crucial role in the understanding of coastal management and other marine issues such as the survival of the oyster beds. In addition to the understanding of how the forces of nature have changed the landscape and habitats, its importance as a high tide roost for over wintering birds and its historic role in the defence of England against Viking invasions will be explored.

For Churchill, the landscape of Chartwell served as a respite and place of reflection, as we can see in his paintings—these helped to combat his periods of depression. His reworking of the landscape and alterations to the architecture of the house to open vistas, as well as his interest in butterflies, provided spiritual refreshment for his ‘wilderness years’.

Attingham Park provides an opportunity to reveal how the perception of the untamed, bleak wilderness was re-created by artists, writers, musicians and travellers to one of romantic inspiration revealing its grandeur and beauty. From this majestic setting, the beginnings of the conservation movement and the National Trust were firmly established.

Sheringham, ‘the favourite and darling child of Norfolk’, as described by Humphrey Repton, will be the focus of discussions related to Repton’s designed landscape and the important role of the woodlands, not only in terms of the landscape and biodiversity but also the impact of fungal diseases and browsing animals on their survival.

At Ham House, the theme will consider the importance of Ham’s relationship with the Thames, not only as a setting for pageantry, grandeur and politics, but also as an example of the conservation of the river landscape; as well, the sheer size and beauty of the formal gardens and landscape served as a respite for those venturing into the countryside from the city.
The first official guide to the Lake District for intrepid new tourists, written by Thomas West in 1778, opened up a region of the country previously unknown to the educated tour taker of the 18th century. With this interest came a whole wave of artistic responses to the sublime landscape, leaving a rich legacy of material and a continued vibrant sense of inspiration and range of responses today.

On 7 and 8 September this year you too can walk in the footsteps of the earliest tourists and share in the inspiration this brings with a range of journeys around Derwentwater. The places are linked together by short boat trips across and down the lake, making a journey on water part and parcel of the experience. The weekend will enable you to visit key points on Thomas West’s tour marked out on Crosthwaite’s map of the lake with its stations for viewing.

The project team here is immersed in the research and investigations to bring this together. We have made new connections with fellow researchers and enthusiasts on this subject, and have started to shape a programme which we hope will bring an enjoyable and deeper understanding of this beautiful place and its impact on our emotions.

At each place (and a few others besides) there will be something to inspire you. An a capella choir will be singing music written specifically about the place at Lodore Falls. A walk up Cat Bells with an artist inspired not only by the landscape but by his artistic ancestors will (weather permitting) give panoramic views of the valley, said by Crosthwaite to be ‘the most delightful vale which perhaps ever human eye beheld’. Alternatively you can take a walk up Latrigg Fell and talk with an author whose subject is the birth of the conservation movement in the Lake District, or walk to Ashness via the waterfall to talk about the Grand Tour and its influence in the Lakes.

In addition to the outdoor events there will be a chance for a few to join a lunch party at Derwent Island House, once home to Joseph Pocklington, son of a Newark banker and keen fan of regattas, cannon fire and battle re-enactments on the lake. In the evening you can sit by the fire at Wordsworth’s house and discuss the childhood influences of the Lakes on William Wordsworth with the Curator of Dove Cottage, and to finish the day you can see the sun set at Castlerigg stone circle and muse on the prehistory of this beautiful place with our archaeologist. What could be better?

To join in or register your interest:
Email: Borrowdale@nationaltrust.org.uk
Website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/borrowdale
You can also turn up at our shop near the theatre on Derwentwater foreshore by the lake in Keswick at 10am on 7 or 8 September where we will greet you, share the programme and help you on your journey of discovery.

Sarah Woodcock, Curator
SIR WILLIAM SHARINGTON’S TOWER
A tale of two tables at Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire

Of the architectural works undertaken by Sir William Sharington (c.1495-1553) at Lacock, following his purchase from the crown in 1540 of the manor and dissolved abbey there, the three-storied octagonal tower at the south-east corner of the house and the pair of extraordinary stone tables within it perhaps best represent his advanced tastes. There are several other aspects of his work at Lacock—for example the distinctive four light windows decorated with a circular device at the crossing of the central transom and mullion, whose model appears to be those in the François I wing of the château of Blois, or the roof trusses in his courtyard ranges which anticipate Inigo Jones’s use of Italian structural forms—that reveal his precocious interest in and knowledge of continental Renaissance ideas.

Sharington’s association with similar works at Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire, Dudley Castle, West Midlands and Longleat, Wiltshire, and his correspondence with their respective owners—Thomas Seymour, Baron Seymour of Sudeley (c.1509-49), John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland (1504-53), and Sir John Thynne (1512/13-80)—about the loan of a master carver, John Chapman, who was in his employment at the time of his death in 1553, and who we know carved chimney-pieces and ‘beasts’, reveal that he had command of exceptionally skilled and much sought after craftsmen, some, as Chapman was, perhaps from the Office of Works of the Royal Household, others foreign.

The double height middle chamber of the tower, with finely jointed ashlar walls, and a rib-vaulted ceiling with extraordinary pendant elements, their terminations bearing Sharington’s scorpion device, has small deeply recessed windows and a massive iron-bound door. How was the room used? As a place in which to write (the table would have made an impractical scrittoio) and study, a studiolo in which confidential business could be conducted; a muniment room for the safe-keeping of associated papers; a Kunstkammer in which rare and precious objects might be hoarded, displayed and studied (the high shelves supported on consoles suggest this), or a hybrid of all or some of these functions? In the early 17th century Richard Brathwait recommended that an earl should ‘have in his house a chamber very stronge and close, the walls should be of stone or bricke, the dore should be overplated with iron, the better to defend it from danger of fire’. He stressed too the value of records: ‘the Earle ought to have more care for the safe keeping of his Evidence, than either of his plate or Jewells’. Caught up in dangerous high-political intrigue and fraudulent activity, Sharington would have felt all too keenly the need for such security.

At the centre of the room is the first of the two tables. Four crouching fauns, in the tradition of Greek Atlantes or Telemones, bound for ever to bear great weights on their shoulders like Atlas, support the marble table top (above right). As attendants of Bacchus, the fauns have suitably lecherous faces, beards, hairy legs and cloven hoofs, while the baskets of fruit that they carry on their heads and which cushion their burden allude to fertility. Fruit and vegetables as erotic metaphor appear frequently in Renaissance art and, at both a bawdy and higher-minded level, in contemporary literature.
have given to Henry VIII at New Year 1534 (Öffentliche Kunst-
sammlung, Basel). Sharington was one of a number of courtiers
who sat to Holbein, and the chalk drawing made of him survives
in the Royal Collection.

The chamber immediately above, accessible only from the
balustraded parapet walk which runs along the south side of
the house, is of a surprisingly different character. Larger in plan
than the middle chamber (the walls are less massive), it is flooded
with light. A panoramic view of the surrounding land, once
Sharington's land, can be enjoyed from the paired windows set in
all but one of its eight sides. There is a similar belvedere room
in an octagonal tower at Melbury House, Dorset (c. 1530-40).
The top of the central octagonal table at Lacock is supported
by four caryatid-terms (a Renaissance hybrid that conflated two
distinct ancient types), two bearded and which perhaps represent
philosophers (or Persians) and two part-veiled female figures with
their hands clasped above their waists (page 16, below right). In
each of the four remaining sides is a standing figure set within an
arch-headed, apsidal niche. Above each niche, garlanded with
swirling ribbons, is a reprise of the faun's face, capped by the same
basket brimming with fruit.

Three of the standing figures have inscriptions at their feet, but
their letters, of an elegant Roman form, are carved in relief rather
than being incised and have as a consequence sustained damage
during the last four and a half centuries. The second figure is
identified as 'CERES'. By her left foot stands a corn stook, and
she is shown holding in her left hand the remains of an attribute,
presumably a sickle. Her hand rests on a horn which hangs from
her left shoulder, further sickles hover above each shoulder, and in
the arch above her head are carved ears of wheat. The third,
pot-bellied, figure who stands on a sphere, is entitled 'BACCHVS' and
is shown with a flagon on his left side which he presumably held
before this arm and hand fell off. To his right is a vine and carved
in the niche above his head are vine leaves and grapes. The first
of the four figures—unlabelled—depicts a young woman dressed
as a shepherdess. She cradles a cornucopia of flowers in her arms,
and has a lamb at her feet.

Clearly these first three panels are personifications of the
Seasons: Spring, who may once have been labelled Flora, goddess
of flowers, or perhaps Venus; Summer in the form of 'CERES',
goddess of agriculture and grain; and 'BACCHVS' god of wine and
intoxication. The identity of the fourth figure has not, as far as I
am aware, been commented upon before. Its label is fragmentary,
with only the first two and last two letters—'AP' and 'VS'—surviv-
ing (see left).

Of all the Four Seasons, Winter has through the centuries
been represented in the least consistent way, sometimes as an
elderly man shivering against the cold. At Lacock, however, in the
context of the other Roman deities, we might have expected
to find Aquilo, the North Wind, whose Greek equivalent is
Boreas, or perhaps Vulcan who represents the element Fire. The
mystery figure, whose lower half is missing, is depicted in 16th-
century dress wielding a large knife in his right hand and is in
the act of cutting or trimming whatever it is that he has in his
left. A footed cauldron—a miniature version of Lacock's giant
one of 1500—stands on the floor to his left while to his right is
the carcass of an animal or bird (perhaps there are two) spitted
and ready for roasting. In the niche above his head are crossed
implements—another cranked spit and what may be a paddle for
loading in and retrieving loaves from a bread oven. This image is,
equivocally, of a cook. He might have stepped straight out of a
16th-century woodcut print such as that by Hans Baldung Grien
(1484/5-1545) which shows a cook in slashed doublet and apron
gutting a rabbit (below). Surely this must represent the Roman,
Apicus? The letters 'ICI' would fit exactly in the gap between the
letters 'AP' and 'VS'.

Relief figure of Apicius, upper chamber

Woodcut showing a cook by Hans Baldung Grien
Thanks to modern scholarship Apicius’s name is associated with a confusion of different figures, but in the 16th century it signified only one thing: the celebrated Roman cook and gourmet who it was assumed was the author of the late 4th and early 5th century AD manuscripts—compendia of recipes—that remarkably had survived, like Vitruvius’s advice on architecture, to reveal a lost world of haute cuisine and high living. These were first published in printed form in Milan in 1498 as De Re Coquinaria, ‘On Cookery’; five further editions followed in the first half of the 16th century.

Sharington was a highly cultured though, as a notorious embezzler, deeply dishonest man and it seems inconceivable, given his scholarly interests and the exceptional quality of the carved work at Lacock, that any of its imagery could be casual. Why would a coherent representation of the Four Seasons be compromised by supplanting Winter with a representation of a cook? While the blazing fire in a (great) kitchen is occasionally used to represent Winter or at least defense against its icy blast, it seems likely that here the panels allude to the bounty of the three growing seasons and to its preparation and near magical transformation in the kitchen into delicious fare that could be shared in an act of hospitality. Sharington and his guests would have relished the prospect of an after-dinner walk to the rooftop, an intimate banquet or dessert served in this belvedere room and the panorama afforded from its windows. Would it be too far-fetched to imagine that the unfailing sign of provincial masons having a go’. He suggested that John Chapman might have been responsible for the work in the upper chamber, while some itinerant alien craftsmen could perhaps have produced the superior work in the middle chamber. This is perfectly possible, but is the distinction between the work so clear cut? Certainly Sharington’s tomb, though loaded with ornament, is of much lesser quality than the faun table, but it bears a date of 1569, some sixteen years after Sharington’s death and is not of the same campaign. The conjoined ciphers of Sir William Sharington and that of his third wife, Grace Paget, carved on the plinth of the middle chamber table, date it to c.1550-53; the upper table is presumably contemporary. It seems to me, at least, that the caryatid-terms, properly classical and more than competently carved, together with the faun faces and their accompanying ribbon decoration, though architectural rather than sculptural, may be by the same sophisticated hand as the carving in the room below—their iconography conceived in tandem—but that the arch-framed relief panels, admittedly much damaged, could be the work of a lesser craftsman.

This note is brief and speculative, prompted by a recent visit to Lacock of the National Trust’s Arts Panel, but a full scholarly study clearly needs to be made of Sir William Sharington’s work at Lacock, for though it attracted much antiquarian interest in the early 20th century, from the likes of Canon Jackson, the Rev. Clark-Maxwell, C. H. Talbot, and Sir Harold Brakspear, much remains to be investigated, though answers are likely to be elusive. Such a reappraisal should include Sharington’s tower and its incomparable tables, very rare survivals of England’s early Renaissance during Henry VIII’s and Edward VI’s reigns.

David Adshead, Head Curator