NEW NATIONAL TRUST PUBLICATIONS FOR 2018

Rooms of Their Own: Eddy Sackville-West | Virginia Woolf | Vita Sackville-West
Nino Strachey
April 2018 • £14.99 • 978-1-84165-788-2
Pitkin Press/Pavilion
Evocative, engaging, and filled with vivid details, this book explores the homes of three writers linked to the Bloomsbury Group. Bringing together stories of love, desire and intimacy, of evolving relationships and erotic encounters, with vivid accounts of the settings in which they took place, it offers fresh insights into their complicated interlocking lives. Complete with first-hand accounts, the book illuminates shifting social and moral attitudes towards sexuality and gender in the 1920s and 30s.

Prized Possessions: Dutch Paintings from National Trust Houses
Edited by Rupert Goulding and David Taylor
With essays by Quentin Buvelot and David Taylor
May 2018 • £25 • 978-1-91130-024-3
Paul Holberton Publishing
Published to accompany the first exhibition of Golden Age Dutch pictures in the collection of the National Trust, Prized Possessions celebrates the enduring British taste for collecting Dutch paintings from the 17th century. It explores why and how this particular type of art was desired, commissioned and displayed through the consideration of examples from a number of National Trust houses. It includes portraits, still lives, religious pictures, maritime paintings, landscapes, genre paintings and history pictures, painted by celebrated artists such as Rembrandt, Lievens, Hobbema, Cuyp, De Heem, Ter Borch and Metsu.

William Morris and his Palace of Art: Architecture, Interiors and Design at Red House
Tessa Wild
July 2018 • £35 • 978-1-78130-055-8
Philip Wilson Publishers
A comprehensive new study of Red House, Bexleyheath, this is the only house commissioned by William Morris and the first independent architectural work of his close friend, Philip Webb. Red House stands as the physical embodiment of Morris's youthful ambition, passionate medievalism, and creativity. From 1860-65, it was a place of halcyon days. Recent research has revealed that the original decorative finishes have survived to a surprising degree. Drawing on a wealth of new physical evidence, this book argues that Red House constitutes an ambitious and critical chapter in Morris's design history which reveals his early confidence and artistic breadth.

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Front cover: detail of a framed panel of early Georgian wallpaper at Greyfriars House, Worcester (NT Images/James Dobson)
TRANSITIONS IN TIME
Peckover House and Roland Penrose, Quaker surrealist

In later life, when asked what his biggest influences had been, Sir Roland Penrose answered ‘Quakerism, of course, and after that, Surrealism’.¹

Penrose was born into an extraordinary family (Fig. 1) whose great achievements, talents, philanthropy, courage and faith triumphed over discrimination. While the family’s Quaker faith gave his life a solid structure, Penrose’s later association with Surrealism seems, on face value, to be founded on concepts which were the polar opposites of Quakerism. When we scratch the surface, however, similarities and common values in Penrose’s life and work are revealed.

The Trust New Art project has used these connections as a catalyst for new creativity, ideas and research. A specially commissioned site-specific installation by Cambridgeshire-based artists Aid & Abet encourages viewers to think about this juxtaposition of values, reflect on their own experiences and, hopefully, find inspiration.

The Peckover family were wealthy Quaker bankers, forming the Wisbech and Lincolnshire Bank in the 18th century and running it from an annex of Bank House (now Peckover House) on the town’s North Brink until 1879. It then moved to larger premises in town and later merged with several other provincial banks into the Barclays partnership.

The Peckover family’s wealth, however, allowed them to follow their passions, driven by their faith. They had a hunger to find out about the natural world around them, engaged in philanthropic interest and associations in their local area and beyond, and travelled extensively – recording these travels in a series of watercolours. The Trust New Art project has drawn inspiration from this desire to collect and curate, and it reflects on the family’s wish to make their collection accessible for all to learn from.

Collecting for education and curiosity is a theme that runs through the Peckover family history, but it was William (1790–1877) and Algernon (1803–93) who amassed a collection and left a legacy that would benefit and shape the town in which they lived. The brothers gave generously to the town of Wisbech and were instrumental in the founding of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum in 1835, which still houses Peckover bequests.

Algernon also designed and financed the addition of a reading room to the library at the museum in 1887. The museum served as an extension of their personal collections, which by now had filled Bank House (Peckover House) and Sibalds Holme, where Algernon lived. Both brothers were active in the running of the museum (William served as its president from 1854 to 1869), donating substantial funds for upkeep and further collections.

The Wisbech and Fenland Museum continues to be a source of inspiration and curiosity today, and this was certainly the case for the artists commissioned for the project, Sarah Evans and David Kefford (Fig. 2), who work under the name Aid & Abet. They spent many days exploring the vaults and collections of the building, which still retains the feel of a wunderkammer (a ‘room of wonder’ or ‘cabinet of curiosities’).

This year marks the 70th anniversary of Peckover House coming into full National Trust ownership and the death of the last Peckover – Alexandrina (1860–1948). When the property was given to the National Trust it came without any contents, these having been
sold off in a two-day sale on the lawn during September 1948. The catalogue for the sale, conducted by local auctioneers Maxey & Son, featured over 1,000 items, ranging from silverware and furniture to a stuffed cat on a bamboo cane.

Although the house is now once again furnished with suitable non-indigenous contents, the Trust New Art project has prompted staff at the house to work towards making major changes to the presentation of the house to more accurately reflect how it would have been when in use as the Peckovers' family home.

What the house presents us with now is essentially a blank canvas with the potential for a deeper narrative. Aid & Abet has worked closely with the property to help unlock this potential. The artists were commissioned because they had worked in the town of Wisbech on a project called The Frontier Zone (2015), which promoted exchange, artistic experimentation and encounter in a town with some of the lowest contemporary art engagement statistics in the country.

Never before has the property’s archive and the Penrose side of the story been looked at in such detail, or with an eye which sees creative inspiration rather than historic record. The main installation for the project is in the Drawing Room, which has been emptied of its contents and filled with Aid & Abet’s work. Further smaller installations will follow in other rooms and Lord Peckover’s bedroom on the first floor will provide a space for further reading about the project as well as art, workshops, events and visitor feedback.

Childhood Inspiration

While visiting his grandfather Lord Peckover (1830–1919) as a small boy, Roland Penrose pulled a copy of Edward Young’s Night Thoughts, illustrated by William Blake, from the shelves of the magnificent library of Bank House. It was this encounter that first moved him to become an artist. The work of Blake was, as Roland’s son Antony Penrose states, ‘stimulating although sometimes terrifying. He could not know their nightmarish quality of dreamlike violence and intensely erotic images presaged the work of the Surrealists’. Roland later inherited the book, along with many others, from his grandfather and it formed the basis of an extensive resource from which he and his circle of artist friends could draw inspiration.

Although to the detriment of his own artistic work, Roland Penrose carried on his family’s trait of curatorship and became the driving force behind the establishment of the British Surrealist Group. For Roland, ‘art was something to be lived with total conviction. However, the basic principles of his Quaker upbringing were to remain beneath the surface as solid foundations’.

The Cabinet of Curiosities

The Morning Room at Peckover House is home to perhaps the most important family item remaining in the house, the Cabinet of Curiosities (a piece of furniture in this case, rather than a room, as the term was used historically). The cabinet displays both manufactured and natural treasures: mummies, a rhino horn, minerals, watches and even bottles of water from the River Jordan (Fig. 3). All were meticulously dusted and guarded by Alexander Peckover, whose commanding voice boomed out to Roland and his brothers, ‘Keep off dirty paws!’

It was this cabinet that first inspired Aid & Abet to home in on the narrative of the Peckover/Penrose story for this project. The two artists commented that they were fascinated by the items in the Cabinet of Curiosities and ‘by the associations and narratives that can be built through the use of “found objects” in artworks. This artistic interest in the object has a direct legacy from Surrealism’.

Righteous Outsiders

Surrealism, although not a religious movement, was far more a way of life than merely a style of art or prose. Surrealists believed in, and promoted through their works, human justice, understanding, freedom, peace and tolerance – also core qualities of the Quaker Faith. They were also linked by the common perception of both Surrealists and Quakers as outsiders or ‘different’: the Quakers were persecuted for their beliefs, while the art establishment of the period hated the Surrealist movement. The Peckovers and Penroses were not only united by family, but also by ‘difference’ – a different way of life that distanced them from social and artistic norms.

While the Peckovers would doubtless have found Surrealism strange or inaccessible in some way, they
too were artists who encouraged each other in their pursuit of knowledge, freedom of expression and philanthropy. Although the paint on the canvas or page is arranged differently, the ethos of those who applied it is very similar.

**A Rich Legacy**

The research carried out by Aid & Abet has sparked a re-evaluation of how the house is presented and how it affects the wider property. Both artists came to realise that, "[t]he Peckover and Penrose generations shared a passion for inspiring others through education. Whether through philanthropic involvement in Wisbech or curating major international exhibitions, there is a familial trait of sharing and investing in the enlightenment of their wider communities."

The presentation of any house, including our own homes, is a matter of taste. The Trust New Art project and our resultant thinking about Peckover House’s future presentation are rooted in the property story, grounded in solid research and conducted in an engaging way. The Peckovers’ history of collecting and Roland Penrose’s creative energy have left us with a rich legacy with which to unlock the potential of Peckover House.

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**CHIPPENDALE REVEALED**

An online exhibition for everyone, everywhere

In celebration of the 300th anniversary of the baptism of Thomas Chippendale (1718–79), The Furniture Research Project has launched the online exhibition **Chippendale Revealed.** It is part of nationwide celebrations being staged this year by multiple partners, under the umbrella of the Chippendale Society, to celebrate his life and work. The exhibition will be a permanent feature on the National Trust Collections website.

The exhibition provides an intimate look at Thomas Chippendale’s work, using new photography to explore previously unseen features. Details of construction methods and unseen parts of furniture like feet, backs and recently discovered inscriptions help to reveal and establish the techniques used in Chippendale’s workshop.

Chippendale’s furniture is often viewed from a distance, where it is remote and static, or obscured by the equally beautiful context in which it is displayed. In this online exhibition, such constraints are shed and photography has been used to reveal its hidden secrets.

To learn more, visit [Chippendale Revealed](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/article/chippendale-revealed) at [http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/article/chippendale-revealed](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/article/chippendale-revealed)

*Chippendale Revealed* is curated by Megan Wheeler (Lead Collections Cataloguer, Furniture) and edited and produced by Gabriella de la Rosa (Lead Editor, Curatorial Content Online).
In an age of email, twitter feeds and social media posts, of instantaneous communications with a brutally short shelf-life, a well-turned letter on fine watermarked paper seems a thing of rare and special beauty. Reading 200-year-old private correspondence is also a revealing form of historical research, yielding insights into personal realms that were never intended to be exposed to public scrutiny.

The recent discovery of a cache of Georgian letters at Croft Castle in Herefordshire is shining a light not only on a poorly understood period of the property’s history, but also on the public and private lives of one of its more enigmatic residents, Elizabeth Johnes.

Croft Castle

Croft Castle (Fig. 1) is unique among the castles and fortified houses of Herefordshire: apart from an interval of 177 years, it has been the home of the Croft family since the Norman Conquest. Much of the historical research associated with the castle has understandably focused on the family that gave it its name, the Crofts. However, when letters from the turn of the 19th century recently came to light regarding the two other owners of Croft Castle, the Johnes and the Davies families, the focus of attention shifted.

A Brief History of the Johnes’s Ownership

The Johnes family officially owned the castle as their residence from 1749, after bankruptcy finally forced the Crofts to sell. This, however, is something of a simplification: it was not Thomas Johnes I who purchased the building but his new father-in-law, Richard Knight, who acquired it as a wedding present for his daughter and only heir Elizabeth. Sadly the Johnes family’s occupation lasted little more than a generation. When Thomas Johnes I died in 1780, his son Thomas Johnes II chose to sell the land and castle to cover the cost of improvements at another of his estates, Hafod.

The Letters of Elizabeth Johnes

The letters recently discovered at the castle (Fig. 2) appear to cover this tumultuous time and are mainly from Elizabeth Johnes, a widow in 1785, to her solicitor Benjamin Baugh. As a new find, the letters await detailed attention. The two large bundles, which contain at least 200 individual pieces of paper, have the potential to yield a wealth of new information.

Much of what they contain evidently relates to the detailed complexities of running large estates: collecting rents, securing a good price for the sale of raw products and keeping a weather eye on local society. We know from the indentures included in the collection that, on the death of her husband, Elizabeth retained joint ownership of much of the estate with her son. She had a very hands-on approach to her business affairs and frequently appears to have been one step ahead of...
her solicitor. In July 1798, with the sale of Croft Castle to the Davies family looming, Elizabeth wrote a letter to Baugh insisting he check that her tenants were up to date with their rents: ‘… you will be so kind as to see they are clear with me before they enter into any engagements with Mr Davies’.

We can also glimpse the fractured relationship she had with her eldest son. Her information about his comings and goings often appears to be third-hand. On his re-appointment as an MP in his chosen residence of Hafod, for example, she wrote (referring to him by his formal title of Colonel): ‘[I hear] from different hands that the Col: is likely to succeed in his Election’. On the sale of her beloved home, her letters report: ‘I hear the treaty between Mr Davies and Col: Johnes is still going forwards for Croft Castle, but in a very dilatory manner’.

These snippets confirm something suggested by earlier research: an estrangement between mother and son. It appears to have come about after Thomas Johnes’s second marriage, and his decision to live at Hafod rather than Croft Castle. This forced Elizabeth out of the home her father had given her and most of her letters of this period come not from Croft but from her London home or the homes of various acquaintances.

Collection not Content

At this early stage, the primary focus is on the letters as historic objects rather than on their contents, a fuller study of which will come later. The physical characteristics of the letters: how they were addressed and sealed, the type of paper used, and evidence relating to how they were delivered, are a rich source of information both about the letter-writers personally and about the period in which they lived.

Addressing and Sealing

One of the first things one notices about the collection is the absence of envelopes. As was typical of the time, all the letters that appear to have gone through the postal system (some handwritten bills and the indentures are examples of those that have not) are folded to allow the address of the receiver to be written on the outside. The letters have then been sealed with wax. Most of the letters only show the remains of where the seal once was – a red stain – and a tear in the paper where the letter was opened. A few of the letters, however, do have their seals intact and all of these appear to bear the impression of ‘EJ’. Elizabeth used black sealing wax in all cases, perhaps as a sign of mourning. Seen in the example above (Fig. 3), the impression is clear even after 200 years.

Most of the addresses are associated with Elizabeth and her solicitor Benjamin Baugh, but some of the letters are addressed to Thomas Johnes II or to...
Benjamin Baugh was based in Ludlow, this is the most frequent of the stamps identifiable, but anomalies help identify new letter writers joining the conversation. A rare letter from Elizabeth's second son Samuel can be identified by its '88 South' postmark; it was sent from Southampton in 1785. Others are harder to identify as Elizabeth moved about the country: 'AEE / 80t / 4', for example, we can only guess at.

**Watermarks**

Another avenue of interest opened up by the letters is that of watermarks. The watermarks revealed when the letters are held up to the light are both beautiful and varied. The most frequent motif is the depiction of 'Britannia', the seated female figure with helmet, shield and trident. This was one of the most common watermarks used by paper-makers in 18th- and 19th-century Britain. It is therefore pleasing to be able to specifically identify among the many marks, that of a local paper-maker. Two of the letters already studied bear the 'T.W. Botfield' watermark. The Botfield mills were situated in South Shropshire, just a few miles over the county border from Croft Castle and the Johnes estates.

**A Woman to be Reckoned with**

Reading the letters and seeing Elizabeth's handwriting offers a tangible link to the Johnes family and their ownership of Croft Castle. The letters are clearly important, then, for the light they shed on the history of Croft, but arguably this is outweighed by their significance as social history. They provide a tantalising insight into the private world of a Georgian lady of unusual independence and resourcefulness.

Elizabeth seems to have been a woman to be reckoned with. As her father's only heir she knew her own mind and the value of what she had inherited, and the letters show the tight grasp she maintained over her own affairs across the decades. This strength is intriguingly counterbalanced by the sensitivities that surround her relationship with Thomas. The estrangement between Elizabeth and her son was already known, but it is fascinating to see her maintaining, in letters to acquaintances, the illusion that she is more closely in touch with him than was actually the case. In letters to Benjamin Baugh, however, her distress at not knowing how her son's political career is progressing, and the uncertainty around the sale of Croft is clear.

It will be fascinating to see how much more the Croft Castle letters reveal in years to come, not only of Croft's long and complex history but also of the remarkable Elizabeth Johnes.

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TREASURES ON TOUR

Kizuna: Japan | Wales | Design

Karen George House and Collections Manager, Chirk Castle
Gareth Sandham House and Collections Manager, Powis Castle
Richard Pennington House and Collections Manager, Penrhyn Castle
Susanne Gronnow Senior House Steward, Erddig

The Trust is fortunate to be the custodian of an array of curious and unique items that reflect historical trading links and cultural influences from around the globe. This summer the Trust in Wales is very pleased to be loaning 10 of its key Japanese objects to Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd – National Museum Cardiff for a major exhibition of Japanese artefacts, ‘Kizuna: Japan | Wales | Design’. Running from 16 June to 9 September 2018, the exhibition celebrates what the Japanese call kizuna – ‘the bonds of friendship’.

The final selection of objects is the product of a series of property visits by experts from Japan led by Professor Yoshi Miki (Curatorial Consultant and Visiting Professor, National Museum of Japanese History, Sakura), conducted over a period of three years. The exhibits have been chosen to demonstrate the range of and contrast between objects made for the domestic Japanese market and those intended for European export. They include: an early 17th-century lacquer chest from Chirk Castle; a cabinet on stand, a knife-box and Imari vases from Powis Castle; Satsuma hexagonal vases converted into lamps from Penrhyn Castle; and two small cabinets from Erddig which are featured in the exhibition programme but not on display.

The Chirk Chest

One of the exhibition’s key pieces is from the Long Gallery at Chirk Castle, near Wrexham. This lacquer nanban chest (Fig. 1) is one of the oldest, largest and rarest of its kind on public display. Dating from c.1600, it may have belonged to Sir Thomas Myddelton I, a merchant-adventurer who purchased the castle in 1595. He was Lord Mayor of London, a member of Elizabeth I’s court, a founder of the East India Company and a financial sponsor of the expeditions of many of the great explorers of the time, including Raleigh and Drake. The nanban chest was made specifically for overseas customers (the Sino-Japanese word nanban means ‘Southern Barbarian’) and exported to Europe. Nothing resembling it was available on the domestic market in Japan.

Using the evocative Japanese terminology, the Chirk chest is a ‘fish-sausage-shaped coffer’ (kamaboko-bako) of lacquered wood of characteristic oblong rectangular form and hinged, semi-cylindrical upper lid. It has two lock plates on the front and four hinges on the rear and is decorated with shagreen (ray skin) and mother of pearl (raden) inlay, accompanied by cloud-shaped cartouches that contain many plant and animal designs (Fig. 2). There are four traditional Japanese crests (hyōmon) on each end of the coffer, each depicting a circle containing a three-leafed wood sorrel (katabami) and sword-blade design (Fig. 3). The origin and meaning of this crest is unknown and requires further investigation.

Preparing the chest for exhibition provided an opportunity to carry out fresh research and examination. This was conducted at the studio of Tankerdale Limited, the Trust’s advisers on furniture conservation, where Sophie Barton was responsible for analysing and documenting the materials, process and construction of the chest, as well as conservation treatment. Previous re-touching and remedial treatment is evident, some dating back as far as the 18th century. This may correspond with a period of refurbishment of the interiors of the castle state rooms, a fascinating narrative held within the surface patina that calls for further scrutiny.

Following an in-depth survey, conservators Sophie Barton and Gerlind Ritter identified the most vulnerable...
areas of the surface decoration of the chest, which were at risk of flaking or becoming detached. To prepare the chest for transport to the studio, these areas were held in place with pieces of thin facing tissue which are lightly secured to stable areas of the piece’s surface with a mix of starch paste and a cellulose derivative (Fig. 4). The chest and stand were wrapped in acid-free tissue paper and packed in a specially designed crate ready to travel.

Once at the Tankerdale studio, remedial conservation involved over 160 hours of work to consolidate the surface and carry out a light clean to remove surface dirt and a recent wax coating. Close-up photographs taken by Paul Highnam for the exhibition have captured in minute detail the layers of construction and surface finish. The new images have prompted keen discussion and will aid future analysis.

The Powis Collection

Powis Castle has an impressive collection of Indian and Far Eastern art, including lacquer furniture and oriental ceramics, mostly deriving from the collection of Robert Clive, ‘Clive of India’ (1725–74), whose son Edward (1754–1839) married Lady Henrietta Herbert (1758–1830), the heiress to the Powis Estate, in 1784. It appears that furniture was commissioned by Clive while in India or through his Indian connections, which was destined for his various houses, including 45 Berkeley Square, London and Claremont, Surrey.¹

The earlier date of some of the Imari ware in the Powis collection suggests that it was acquired by William Herbert, the 2nd Marquess of Powis (c.1665–1745). He continued his father’s work developing the terraced gardens at Powis and the grand sequence of state apartments, including the Great Hall (now the Blue Drawing Room) where much of the lacquerware is on display.

The ‘union suit’, consisting of a secretaire or dressing table and a vertical mirror, first appeared in England at the beginning of the 18th century. In the pair in the Clive Collection (NT 1180799.1-2), probably because of some misunderstanding due to the problems of commissioning an unfamiliar work at long distance and through a third party, the Japanese craftsman has made lacquered panels where the mirrors should go. Large-scale Japanese lacquers for export are very rare after about 1700, when the trade was taken over by the Chinese, and it is likely that these two tables are a special commission, possibly placed by Clive with a Dutch intermediary during his time in India. This pair may be the ‘Two Japan Dressing Boxes’ listed in Clive’s posthumous inventory taken in 1775. The stand, with gilded decoration of the cabriole legs, is a European addition.²

Although gold and silver foil are not used, the union suits are in other respects very similar in style and technique to the pair of knife cases (NT 1180801.1-2), one of which is on loan to the Cardiff exhibition, and which are probably contemporary, dating from c.1725–75 and probably around 1750.

The knife cases have decorative hinges and escutcheons, three brass handles and are lined with green velvet. They are presumably the ’2 lacquered Cases for Knives and Forks’ listed as seized by Customs in 1767, and which are described in the 1774 inventory as ’Two Knife-cases of the old black and gold Japan.’ In fact they are stylistically and technically rather different from the 17th-century pieces usually referred to as ’old Japan’ in later inventories. Knife-cases were first used in the middle of the 17th century and the style of the Powis cases accords with English knife cases dating between 1750 and 1770. A virtually identical example is in the V&A (W.14 1960).³

The Japanese lacquer, gilt brass mounted cabinet (NT 1180806) (c.1675) on stand (c.1750) with straight legs and cross stretchers has two cabinet doors which open to reveal 10 lacquer drawers in original unfaded condition and it is decorated with oriental landscapes and birds. The cabinet is part of the collection brought to Powis Castle in 1930 from Walcot Hall, which had been the home of Clive of India, his son Edward Clive and Lady Henrietta Herbert.

Finally, the two Imari baluster vases and four beaker vases (NT 1181035.1-8) date from c.1700 and are painted in red, blue, gold and black with phoenix and flowers and with ribbon-tie ornament. The shoulders of the baluster vases are decorated with butterflies and flowers, the domed covers with eagles, the finials formed as dark brown shishi (stylised oriental lions) holding balls.

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The display of Imari ware around the castle has recently been reinstated based on a photoshoot for a Country Life article in 1936.

Penrhyn Castle Vases

Penrhyn Castle, Bangor, North Wales has loaned a pair of Japanese Satsuma hexagonal vases (NT 1420463.1/2) to the Cardiff exhibition. The vases, on ormolu fretwork bases, have been converted for use as electric table lamps. They are usually displayed in the State Bedroom alongside the bed used by Queen Victoria on her visit in 1859. The conversion was probably done for Sybil, Lady Penrhyn, as she and her husband, the 4th Lord Penrhyn, were refurbishing the castle in the 1930s to modernise it after the death of the 3rd Lord.

The Erddig Cabinets

These two small 19th-century Japanese cabinets were used for the storage of small personal items. One cabinet is black and red lacquered, with two doors and five drawers (NT 1147239); the second is black with shades of gold, decorated with a continuous landscape, and has two doors and seven drawers (Fig.5) (NT 1146996). The cabinets belonged to Victoria Yorke (née Cust, 1823–95) and, excitingly, all the drawers are still packed with personal items associated with her. The contents include personal correspondence such as letters, precious mementoes of special occasions including wedding posies, a handful of 18th- and 19th-century coins, collections of shells and archaeological specimens, and other ephemera.

Further research is needed to investigate the contents of Victoria Yorke’s two small Japanese cabinets. Even at this early stage, however, it is clear that they offer a glimpse of the woman behind the objects and letters. Some of these are sentimental and recall significant events in her life. They are treasured mementoes and they show us that Victoria Yorke was interested in the world around her, from ancient history to the natural sciences. All were lovingly stored in the two small Japanese cabinets which were originally placed in her private boudoir at Erddig.

When we fully decipher Victoria’s very neat yet frustratingly impenetrable handwriting in her private correspondence, we will surely uncover a sense of her personality and character which will further inform how we perceive the collection of personal objects that were so precious to her.

The Partnership

When asked what prompted the exhibition and gave him the confidence to go ahead with it, Professor Yoshi Miki responded:

Listening to the conversations visitors had in front of Japanese artefacts – lacquer furniture, ceramics and other objects – we learned that they were loved by visitors just as they were loved by owner-families in the past. Japanese objects have become part of the history of the people of Wales. It is an ongoing history because National Trust Wales (NTW) maintains the historic interiors once created and enjoyed by owner-families so that visitors can experience similar enjoyment from them today.

This experience and the Japanese artefacts which NTW has preserved encouraged us to move forward to develop the exhibition. It gave us the confidence to talk not only about Japanese art but about the ways in which the history and people of Wales and Japan are linked through objects. For example, the Chirk chest and the Myddelton family’s involvement with the British East India Company take us back to an encounter between the two countries and cultures in the 17th century.

The National Trust collection helps us to tell the story of the generations of people who have loved these objects – something that museum pieces can’t often do.

The Kizuna: Japan | Wales | Design exhibition will also include 100 other artefacts from major Japanese national museums, including costumes, ceramics and lacquerware. The exhibition aims to unite Japanese items destined for the export market with local pieces and to celebrate the global appeal of all of these objects. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it will create an opportunity to consider the historical and cultural exchange between Japan and Wales: the kizuna, or bonds of friendship, of the exhibition title.

For more information about the Kizuna: Japan | Wales | Design exhibition, please visit: https://museum.wales/cardiff/whatson/10055/ KIZUNA-Japan--Wales--Design/

1 For the history and a complete catalogue of the Clive Collection, see Mildred Archer, Christopher Russell, Robert Skelton et al, Treasures from India: The Clive Collection at Powis Castle, London 1987.
2 Ibid., cat. no. 194, p.129 (entry by Joe Earle).
3 Ibid., cat. no. 193, pp.128-9 (entry by Joe Earle).
THE TRIUMPH OF HOPE
An exhibition exploring three women’s creative legacy at Nymans

Dr Alice Strickland
Curator, LSE

The Triumph of Hope exhibition takes its title from a description of the gardens at Nymans, West Sussex (Fig. 1), written by Muriel Messel in A Garden Flora: Trees and Flowers Grown in the Gardens at Nymans (1918): ‘I think that the garden may fitly be described as the triumph of hope. It was always full of experiments, it gave endless pleasure, and if you walk through it, you will see the careful thought that was bestowed on each plant’.

Marking 100 years since the publication of A Garden Flora, the exhibition explores the lives of three members of the Messel family: Muriel, Maud and Anne. They are united by their shared passion for garden design and their interest in the cultivation of plants. Each played her part in the development of the garden at Nymans: Muriel in designing the borders in the Wall Garden, Maud through her collection of roses and Anne in her role as Garden Director (from 1960) following the acquisition of Nymans by the National Trust in 1953. All three were also part of a wide network of horticultural acquaintances and friends, which is explored in the second room of the gallery.

Muriel and the Edwardian Flower Garden

Muriel Messel (1889–1918) was the youngest child of Ludwig and Annie Messel and a baby when her father purchased Nymans in April 1890. Together, father and daughter developed a shared enthusiasm for the garden.

Muriel’s greatest legacy is A Garden Flora, a catalogue of trees and shrubs at Nymans covering more than 2,000 plants, listed alphabetically. Writing to the influential gardener and botanist E.A. Bowles in January 1918, Muriel described it as: ‘... a little book I have arranged for The Nymans Garden – just a catalogue of plants with notes. I hope it may be of interest to garden lovers.’

Bowles wrote hugely popular books about his garden at Myddleton House, Enfield, where he successfully grew all manner of rare and difficult plants. Muriel’s recently discovered letters to him are held by the Royal Horticultural Society’s Lindley Library in London.

By family tradition, Muriel planned the Spring Border and the Summer Border in the Wall Garden, which she did between 1904 and 1915, under the tuition of William Robinson of nearby Gravetye Manor. According to Muriel’s niece (and daughter of Maud) Anne, Countess of Rosse: ‘The very heart of Nymans is the Wall Garden. Intimate, secluded and near the house, it is perhaps the most romantic part of all … Old fashioned herbaceous borders run on either side from end to end, designed years ago by my aunt and Mr Robinson.’

The famous Arts and Crafts garden designer and writer Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) was a friend and collaborator of Robinson and she is believed to have visited Nymans. Muriel writes in A Garden Flora: ‘Miss Jekyll once said that Nymans belonged to the Forest Ridge of Sussex, which apparently is the cause for success.’

Muriel’s horticultural interests ran alongside her involvement in the Girl Guide Movement. She was County Secretary for Sussex and Divisional Commander for East Grinstead. Almost 100 years ago, in November 1918, Muriel wrote an article for The Girl Guides’ Gazette, ‘When the War is Over.’ ‘The years of war’, she wrote, ‘have brought great change to the women of England. They have brought even greater responsibilities. It is for us now to reap where others have sown; but may it never be forgotten that others will reap our sowing.’
The following month Muriel died during the Spanish influenza epidemic at the age of 29.

Maud Messel: My Garden

Maud (1875–1960) was a talented artist. Daughter of the Punch cartoonist Edward Linley Sambourne, she retained a deep love of music and the theatre throughout her long life. Maud's husband Leonard inherited Nymans in 1915. Together they embarked on remodelling the house and garden. Maud's sketches in her notebook, which is on display in the exhibition, show her designs for the Forecourt Garden and Knot Garden surrounding the house. In a dedication by E.A. Bunyard (1878–1939) to Maud in his book Old Garden Roses (1936), he wrote: ‘… in memory of many happy days at Nymans where old friends and new are made welcome both indoors and out’.

Over 25 years at Nymans (1922–47), Maud kept a garden diary (also on display). In it she recorded the visits she made to gardens to collect plants, detailed plant lists and garden design ideas. Despite the devastating fire at the house on 19 February 1947, Maud wrote in her diary later that year: ‘The Roses at Nymans and Hill Lodge [are] most beautiful and many of the cuttings are now vigorous plants with large flowers. The roses look very healthy this year. The musks are glorious in every place in the garden at Hill Lodge and the scent of them fills the air’.

Anne, Countess of Rosse

‘She had a way with flowers and they had a way with her’, commented the architectural historian John Cornforth at Anne's memorial service. Anne (1902–92) was a frequent visitor to Nymans as a child. She was trained by Head Gardener James Comber, whom she described as a terrifying Mr MacGregor: ‘I can remember him making me spend a whole day tying and retying a wall-plant in order to get the job perfect, reef knots and all. There was a reason why each thing had to be done, just so, and you have to learn it’. Anne also learned from her aunt Muriel, only 13 years her senior.

Anne was a keen garden designer and her plans include Plans for Spring Border (Fig. 2) and a design for a garden seat, both on display in the exhibition. After the fire at Nymans in 1947, Anne and her second husband Michael (6th Earl of Rosse) established a base in the restored section of the house, which they used between visits to their other houses including Birr Castle, Ireland.

‘A garden', Anne wrote in 1954, 'should also be a home, reflecting the personalities and whims of those that have trod its paths and the aspirations of its makers and improvers; mirroring a glimpse from each generation, that time and growth have moulded into a harmonious whole'.

The Messel Dress Collection

Also on display in the exhibition are two dresses from the collection (Fig. 3). Maud's Spitalfields silk dress (1780s) of cream silk brocaded with rosebud motifs, worn as fancy dress, and Anne's Irene Gilbert designed dress (1960s) of white silk embroidered with deep pink carnations (kindly on loan from Brighton Museum and Art Gallery).

The collection consists of over 500 items, most of which were worn and collected by Anne and her mother Maud. The collection includes couture garments, ready-to-wear and original examples of late 18th-century garments worn as fancy dress. The work of couturiers Charles James, Norman Hartnell and Irene Gilbert is represented in the collection.

The majority of the collection is housed in Brighton Museum and Art Gallery on long-term loan from the family and Linley Sambourne House Museum (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea).
ILAM PARK  A near-perfect landscape

Simon Chesters Thompson
Consultant-Curator (Buildings and Landscapes)

After some years as curator to the National Trust’s properties in Warwickshire and Worcestershire, I returned last summer to the East Midlands region, allowing me to work again at Ilam Park in the Staffordshire Moorlands area of the Peak District. More than that, it was a chance to revisit landscapes that were familiar from childhood outings in the 1970s.

I remember from that time the sparkly silver grayling in the River Manifold, and wanting to go fishing; but also I recall the special atmosphere – near feeling – of the landscape, and that it reminded me of the backgrounds of Gainsborough’s The Blue Boy and Lawrence’s The Red Boy.

This makes me sound like some precocious child art historian, destined from infancy to work for the National Trust. The real reason, though, was simply that my grandparents, who used to take me to Ilam, owned a set of table mats with these pictures on them, and I’d imagine myself into the scenes during long Sunday lunches.

I suppose I was just responding to what has brought so many people over time to Ilam (many of them quite famous, like Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson) and continues to draw over 200,000 visitors each year. For as the 1908 Thorough Guides volume, The Peak District of Derbyshire and Neighbouring Counties says: ‘Nature has been profuse of her charms to Ilam, and Art has well supported her.’

Ilam is a very ‘picturesque’ place in the original and literal sense of that word, from the Italian pittoresco: like a picture. It looks as if it’s out of a painting and (my grandparents’ table mats aside) a painting by the 17th-century French painters Claude or Poussin, with their imagined Arcadian landscapes.

Those scenes were mountainous and forested, peopled by shepherds, pastoral folk and assorted mythological figures. Ilam’s modern visitors are, admittedly, more likely to be sporting hi-vis fleeces and Gore-Tex than animal skins (or, for that matter, nothing at all), but the landscape in which they roam does bear comparison.

Consider the 1751 engraving of a painting by Thomas Smith of Derby (Fig. 1): Ilam even has its own version of Vesuvius, Thorpe Cloud. It may be made of limestone, but it’s still just what the philosopher Edmund Burke meant by ‘the sublime’ – that sheer power and awesome grandeur in the natural world that can engender a frisson of fear in the human viewer.

Thomas Smith had been commissioned to paint Ilam by George Port, whose family owned the estate for about 250 years. The painting is unfortunately lost, but two engraved versions of it survive which differ slightly from each other. This one, with shameless hyperbole, is titled: A View of Thorpe Cloud a Mountain in Derbyshire.

But note the calm bucolic scene: the milkmaid with her coopered bucket in the foreground, and the cows and sheep. Beyond is the meandering river and path alongside the rocky-looking cliff which runs out towards Thorpe Cloud, now as threatening as any Italian volcano, especially flanked by those menacing, smoke-like clouds.

It must be recalled, though, that the second half of the 18th century was a very promising time for the discovery, marketing and appreciation of the ‘picturesque’ wonders of Britain. There were, after all, at least relative improvements in communications. Besides, by late in the century the continent was largely out of bounds because of the Napoleonic Wars.

The great promoter of the appreciation of the picturesque in Britain was the New Forest clergyman-schoolmaster William Gilpin (1724–1804), who travelled extensively in search of suitably picturesque views during his summer holidays of the 1760s and 70s, even producing several books on the subject. He came to Ilam in the summer of 1772.

Gilpin was possibly something of a preposterous character, he was certainly mercilessly caricatured by Thomas Rowlandson and William Combe in the Tour of Dr Syntax in Search of the Picturesque (1812). In it, the pompous curate Dr Syntax finds his quest for the picturesque repeatedly thwarted by angry bulls, highwaymen and other inelegant mishaps in a countryside that falls comically short of his idealised landscape.

Gilpin would have particularly liked Ilam because it was a naturally beautiful landscape, rather than one designed by the likes of Brown or Bridgeman. However, he still made some critical suggestions, accompanied by a couple...
of rapid explanatory sketches, when he visited that summer. These sketches, which are in pen and ink, rough and far from to scale, have nonetheless proved unexpectedly helpful to the recent Historic Landscape Assessment, which was commissioned to improve our understanding of this landscape’s development. Most notable is a reference to and sketch of Ilam’s famous Boil Holes, where its rivers emerge from underground. Gilpin reveals that the features were then some yards from the main river, which had a marginally different course to today’s.

This proves, surprisingly, both that Ilam is not entirely natural, and that Thomas Smith’s view is of something that did not yet exist, and was thus merely of a proposal to redirect the river to appear beneath Thorpe Cloud, as it does now. Especially puzzling is that Gilpin was visiting more than 20 years after Smith had painted what we now understand to be a planned improvement to the view.

But the Port family, while undoubtedly well-connected, were nevertheless frequently indigent. They even had to move out of Ilam Hall for a while in the 18th century and let it, before finally selling-up early in the 19th. So does a lack of funds explain their doing so little overall, as well as that long delay in implementing what they did actually get around to doing?

It seems that it might in part explain at least the delay, but recent research for the Historic Landscape Assessment suggests that the lack of significant improvement was probably down to the fact that Ilam was already so naturally beautiful. Consequently, the Ports’ aspirations were no more than a sophisticated and restrained scheme to highlight and interpret this near perfection.

This would definitely make Ilam a highly important and seminal picturesque landscape. It would have been one in which the Ports enabled visitors to wander to experience the sublime from carved-out rocky paths and riverside meadows – marvelling at the turbulent waters of the Boil Holes, and in awe of the distant Thorpe Cloud and Bunster Hill.

Nevertheless, it is now known for certain from a most interesting reference in the correspondence of the peripatetic Mrs Delany to her niece Mary Port, mistress of Ilam, that the crucial length of river was at last diverted within a couple of years of Gilpin’s visit. This work enabled it to incorporate the Boil Holes at its edge and show Thorpe Cloud to best advantage above the water.

In June 1774 Mrs Delany had been to view Wedgwood’s Green Frog dinner service at the company’s London showrooms. This enormous service had recently been produced for Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, and had been put briefly on display before being shipped to her Gothic summer palace south of St Petersburg (the castle was originally called Kekerekessinen, meaning ‘frog marsh’ in Finnish, hence the frog motif).

Its many pieces were decorated with English landscape views of which the prettiest, commented Mrs Delany, was the one with the view of Thorpe Cloud that had been taken from the engraving of Thomas Smith’s painting (Fig. 2). The view shown, Mrs Delany went on to say, was ‘as it appears at the end of the improvements at Ilam’ – in other words, the same view we see today.

Arguably, the picturesque is the most important British aesthetic to influence architecture, too. But it was Ilam’s next owners, the Watts Russell family, who demolished the Ports’ smaller old house to build their great romantic Tudor Gothic hall, with its towers and crenellations. And it is, of course, the truncated remains of this building which are now let by the National Trust to the Youth Hostel Association.

The Watts Russells’ architect for their new Ilam Hall was John Shaw Sr (1776–1832), a London architect perhaps best known for his development of semi-detached villas in St John’s Wood. But he was able to use the Gothic style, too, and to great picturesque effect here, as well as at Newstead Abbey and at probably his best known and last work, the rebuilding of St Dunstan’s Church in Fleet Street.

Shaw was also to design the Pike Watts Memorial Chapel, at Ilam’s Church of the Holy Cross, to house the wonderful 1827 memorial to Mary Watts Russell’s father by Sir Francis Chantrey (1781–1841). He wasn’t, however, to design Mary’s own memorial, the Ilam Cross in the village. Nor, despite his Ilam estate cottages and lodges or the memorial’s similarity to that for the Oxford Martyrs, was George Gilbert Scott. The commission went instead to John Macduff Derick (1810–59).

Of much more recent note is Ilam Cross’s HLF-funded conservation, which was runner-up for an English Heritage award in 2011. The conservation project was the outcome of a last, lengthy campaign by a great lover and champion of Ilam, Phil Mottram. Having been evacuated nearby during the Second World War, Phil returned at least annually to pursue his Ilam research and generously advise the Trust; and then finally, in 2014, to have his ashes spread there.

Like so many others, he was very deeply affected by this landscape that had needed only the slightest of adjustments to perfect it, and which is soon to be lightly worked on again to restore its now slightly overgrown perfection for another century’s visitors.

1. The Blue Boy by Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88), 1770. Oil on canvas, 179.4 x 123.8 cm. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and Charles William Lambert (subsequently known as The Red Boy) by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), 1825. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 111.8 cm. Private collection.
Beningbrough Hall is situated north west of York, just above the level of the Ouse floodplain. The Baroque house has a façade of red brick ornamented with stone, and the interiors contain fine woodcarvings and rich decorative finishes. It was built for John Bourchier after his return from Italy on the Grand Tour and its architecture exhibits pronounced Italian influence. Construction began c.1710 and was probably substantially finished by 1716.

The house passed through the ownership of three families after the Bourchiers: the Earles, the Dawnays and the final incumbents, the 10th Earl of Chesterfield and his wife, Enid.

The Chesterfields moved from their ancestral seat of Holme Lacy in Herefordshire to Beningbrough in 1917, bringing stylish furnishings with them for their new home. After the death of Lady Chesterfield with no direct successor in 1957, Beningbrough came to the National Trust in June 1958, accepted by the government in lieu of death duties. A four-day sale of its contents was held in the same year, but because the Trust had limited funds and regarded the Chesterfield collection as having little significance in relation to the history of the house, most items were dispersed.

One of the few exceptions was Lot 850, ‘an early 18th-century giltwood shaped console table, the apron and frieze boldly carved with leaf scrolls, acorns and floral motif, on shaped supports and massively carved stretcher rail, with grey veined marble top’ (NT 1190840). This was acquired by the Trust at a cost of £200. An ‘Italian gilt frame console table with marble top’ of the same dimensions features in a 1910 auction catalogue of the contents of Holme Lacy.1 The description of the table as ‘Italian’ is interesting. It is certainly not English. The Chesterfields seem to have liked Continental furniture and another piece from Holme Lacy at Beningbrough, a gilt bronze mounted mahogany bombé commode (chest of drawers) has recently been attributed to the great German cabinet-maker Abraham Roentgen (1711–93). It is also in a pronounced Rococo style (c.1756–60; NT 1190873).2 The table under discussion here is very similar to one made in Mannheim c.1750–60, also with a shaped marble top, now in the Zähringer Museum, Baden-Baden.3

Other items in the Holme Lacy sale, including one of the state beds and a pair of walnut pier-glasses and tables, now form part of the Beningbrough collection, so there is a strong possibility that the console table was similarly transferred from Holme Lacy to furnish Beningbrough. It is especially significant because it is one of the few objects on display that has a direct connection with Beningbrough’s story and its former occupants.

Conservation First

Following the property’s most recent furniture report, the console table (Fig. 1) became a priority for conservation. In 2017 the project was awarded funding through the Collections Conservation Prioritisation process.

Although the basic structure of the piece was stable, shrinkage at the joints and between the wooden components had resulted in cracks in the gesso (a mix of binder, chalk and white pigment used to prime or build up a substrate) and associated losses. Breaks in the scroll-work meant that the affected sections were subject to movement. There were areas of loss to the oak leaves and stalks; losses to the gesso on the tips of the scrolls, leaves and edges; and areas of flaking and lifting gesso repeated across most of the table. There were also some rather inelegant additions to the feet.

Examination of the existing oil-gilt surface revealed that it was in good order, that the oak leaves and acorns seemed to be gilded with a slightly greener gold, and that a great deal of dirt and dust was evident on the upper surfaces of the scrolls. On the tips of some of the scrolls, an earlier water-gilt surface was visible. This suggested that the table had been re-gessoed over the earlier original water-gilt surface then oil gilded, probably in the 19th century. The marble top was cracked in several places and there were a number of historic repairs. A small section of the marble had become detached.
Treatment of the table frame was carried out by furniture conservators Peter Hall & Son Ltd. The work consisted of patching losses to carved decoration such as the oak leaves, stalks and central scroll-work. Minor losses were built up with gesso. Where losses were significant, the decision was taken to ‘patch in’ wood, which was carved to match and then gessoed (Fig. 2). Areas of flaking and lifting gesso were consolidated. In addition, the outer faces of the feet required building up with gesso.

Patched sections were gessoed. These and areas where small losses had been built up were then covered in yellow bole (finely ground clay and animal-skin glue) and finished by water gilding, which is easily removable without loss to the existing oil-gilt surface. The surface of the new gilding was toned down with moistened cotton buds and a thin application of aniline black water stain. The whole surface was then cleaned with de-ionised water and cotton buds to remove the cemented dust. The inner faces of patches were toned in with watercolour paint.

Traditional materials were used in the treatment of the table: fish glue, rabbit-skin glue, whitin for making gesso, yellow clay, beech wood for patch repairs and 23.5 carat gold leaf, with 'Lemon Gold' used for the greener hue of the leaves and foliage. The only exception was the use of a modern, conservation-grade adhesive for consolidation treatment.

The marble top had been subject to a series of historic interventions, with ferrous ‘stiffening straps’ ground into the underside of the marble and set with gypsum plaster and shellac. The straps were beginning to leach ferrous stains through the plaster, and two of the straps had been lost entirely as the corroding iron expanded and disintegrated.

There were two principal fracture lines: one running perpendicular to the length of the table, the other at approximately 90° to this. The fractures, which may date from the production of the top, appeared stable. However, any fill material had been lost and the joints were open.

The treatment of the marble top, which was carried out by Cliveden Conservation, began with the removal of the corroding ferrous fixings and correction of the ‘flex’ in the table top. The small restraint fixing and remaining adhesive and plaster were then removed from the underside, and new stainless steel fixings were designed, fabricated and fitted. Small detached fragments and surface fill were re-set. Finally, there was an application of microcrystalline wax.

Owing to the level of intervention required, the conservation treatment of the marble top was workshop-based. However, house staff felt strongly that the final element of the project, the gilding work, provided an ideal public-engagement opportunity.4

**Linking Conservation and Engagement**

To celebrate the homecoming of the table in October 2017, it was temporarily installed in the largest and best-lit room in the house, where two conservators from Peter Hall & Son carried out the final work in situ and explained the process to visitors. The table was elevated, allowing people to walk around it and fully appreciate its intricacies. Next to the table was a display about gilding tools and methods. Staff and volunteers were briefed about the painstaking work that had been undertaken so they could explain it in detail as they discussed the project with visitors.

Visitors of all ages were encouraged to try their hand at oil gilding. Participants were given small wooden tokens to prime and apply gold leaf to, creating their own unique designs. Over the course of two days, approximately 140 people took part in the activity. Visitors, staff and volunteers demonstrated a real appetite for this type of engagement and visitor numbers to the house were significantly increased over the two days (up by 40% and 43% respectively).

The conservation of the console table also inspired another engagement initiative: the creation of a visual record of the specialist work that takes place out of sight of the public in conservation studios and workshops. This was achieved by commissioning freelance film producer Patty Kraus (Klaxon Media) to make a short film featuring footage of work under way at the studio of Peter Hall & Son and interviews with the conservators. The film captures the intense focus and dedication of the craftsmen and the beauty of the finished work. It also provides a lasting legacy of the project, and visitors can now view it on an iPad beside the restored table.5

Staff and volunteer feedback has been extremely positive. Many respondents commented that the insights they gained from the conservators, and from trying the technique for themselves, transformed the way in which they viewed other gilded items in the collection.

The linked conservation and visitor-engagement projects have stabilised and revived an important piece of Beningbrough’s collection, while increasing awareness of the core work that the Trust undertakes on a daily basis.

2. Christopher Rossell, ‘Magic boxes for princes’ (Roentgen Furniture in Britain), Country Life, 3 October 2012, pp.94-8; the Beningbrough commode was attributed to Roentgen on the advice of Wolfrum Koeppel of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
4. The treatment details in this section are based on reports by Peter Hall & Son and Cliveden Conservation.
5. The short film is also available on North National Trust’s YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VucjS10tBM.

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Early wall coverings at Greyfriars House, Worcester

Greyfriars House, Worcester, lies on Friar Street, a busy thoroughfare down the hill from the cathedral, now filled with artisan and boutique shops. At first glance this half-timbered building seems an unlikely site to study late 17th- and early 18th-century wallcoverings, but the interiors tell a different story. The building was bought by Worcester Archaeological Association in a ruinous state in 1943, and in 1945 The Greyfriars Trust was set up to preserve it. By 1947 it was rented to John Malcolm Matley Moore (d. 1982), known as Matley, and his sister Elsie (1900–85). Matley, a member of the Archaeological Association himself, offered to complete the restoration begun by another member and previous High Sheriff of the county, Major W.J. Thompson of Harborough Hall, Blakedon. Matley undertook to 'furnish it, live in it and maintain it, giving the Society the use of the hall for their meetings', opening to visitors on one afternoon a month.¹

Matley and Elsie undid the divisions of the 15th-century building into tenements, redecorating and refurnishing the interiors at their own expense and living in the house for over three decades. The interiors not only provide an opportunity to explore the Moores’ taste, but also provide an unexpectedly rich resource for the study of the leather, flock and paper hangings which they acquired as part of the redecoration. This article explores this aspect of their collecting and its links to a growing appreciation of historic wallpapers.

The uncovering of flocked and leather panels in a room at Ivy House, Chapel Yard, Worcester, during refurbishment in 1931 may have stimulated the Moores’ collection of wallcoverings, since they acquired examples of both. Indeed, an early National Trust guidebook to Greyfriars claimed it was Matley who recognised the scheme’s worth and rescued the panels. He would certainly have had the necessary knowledge, since the Moores’ library included books by the pioneering historians of interiors, Margaret Jourdain (also a furniture historian) and MacIver Percival, as well as by the furniture historians R.W. Symonds and Percy Macquoid, and a run of Old Furniture: A Magazine of Domestic Ornament. During 1927 this magazine ran a series of articles by C.C. (Charles) Oman of the V&A on ‘Old Wall-Papers in England’, including one entitled ‘Early Coloured Papers’ which illustrated a flock from Saltfleet Manor in Lincolnshire of the same design as the Ivy House flock.²

The pair were also closely connected with the embryonic world of heritage preservation in Worcester: Elsie was involved in the cleaning and repainting of monuments in the cathedral, including a reredos for St John’s Chapel, while Matley played a role in the saving of many historic buildings. He corresponded with Ralph Edwards, Keeper of Furniture at the V&A and co-author with Percy Macquoid of The Dictionary of English Furniture. Matley also purchased furniture from, among others, Cecil Halliday’s in Oxford and, closer to home, A. Taylor in Worcester.

The Ivy House scheme’s discovery was worthy of note in national circles. Under the heading ‘Old Wall Coverings’, ‘M.W.’ (perhaps Mortimer Wheeler) explained to readers of Country Life in July 1932 that it had been found under ‘a great number of layers of paper’, and that ‘The most curious feature is that there are alternate strips of a flock paper in red … and of stamped leather of the kind that came from Holland at the end of the seventeenth century’. Although no photographs of the panels in situ have come to light, it must have been a striking scheme: painted and silvered embossed leather panels patterned with tumbling cherubs, swags, and fruits alternated with lengths of a vibrant castellated pattern in crimson flock on an off-white ground glazed with mica, which caught the light and accentuated the contrast with the matt flock (V&A E.337-1932).
Charles Oman, who had then recently published the V&A’s first catalogue of wallpapers (1929), followed up with an article in The Connoisseur in October 1932, celebrating the gift to the museum of lengths of each design and noting that the scheme had a canvas backing over un-plastered brick, and that the flock had been hung overlapping the leather. Rather uncharitably, he described the combination of flock and leather as ‘the freak of some eccentric individual’. However, it is more likely that the hang reflected a cross-over between the trades in paper and leather hangings since, as the trade in leather declined, London leather gilders looked for new products and many turned to the supply of wallpaper, known as paper hangings. Thomas Bromwich was among them and went on to become a leading supplier.6

The Ivy House leather hangings, like the flock, were therefore made in London, not Holland. They were almost certainly installed by John Price (d.1705), who was given permission to build a house on the chambers of the priest of the Charnel House in 1679, a house he extended in 1690. Price was chapter clerk, notary and later Chancellor of the Diocese of Worcester, so he would have had the necessary funds to commission this striking scheme.7

Although Ivy House is the only location where this flock pattern has been found hung alternating with leather, it was used on its own elsewhere. Oman noted that the Saltfleet Manor flock consisted of small sheets tacked up, in other words pre-dating the use of the ‘piece’ or length of wallpaper made up of sheets pasted together before colour and pattern were applied, and the Worcester hang also consists of individual sheets. Both the Saltfleet and Worcester papers were flocked in crimson on an off-white ground, but in 1933 the pioneering wallpaper historian E.A. (Eric) Entwistle discovered fragments of a green flocked version of the same pattern in Gwernhaylod, Overton-on-Dee.8 The use of the same pattern, flocked in different colourways, at different sites across the country reflects a wider trend in flocks which were available in a restricted number of designs and colours – often red, green, yellow and blue. This particular flock design is associated with the Blue Paper Warehouse on Aldermanbury in London, as a length is shown in the firm’s trade card of c.1720.9

Paper hanging warehouses were among the earliest specialist retailers of wallpaper. These were not just sites where wallpaper was made but also showrooms where consumers could view and select papers. Aldermanbury was an early centre of the trade, with warehouses owned by Dunbar and Colburne as well as Abraham Price’s Blue Paper Warehouse, which advertised that it could supply flocked hangings imitating cut velvet and ‘caffoy’, a textile associated with East Anglia which copied continental silk velvet or damask.

The Ivy House patterns acquired something of a second life after their discovery in the early 1930s. The V&A flocked and leather panels are still on display today (in the British Galleries). However, a number of decorative objects were created from other fragments, suggesting the desire to memorialise these designs. They included a four-leaf screen made up of 12 leather panels (Fig. 2), as well as individual framed panels of the leather and the flock, all now at Greyfriars (NT 443594, 443502); a reversible glazed firescreen consisting of two panels of each design (the flock and the leather) in the Great Hall of The Old Palace at Worcester Cathedral; and another two-fold screen of the flock alone, now at Harlbury Castle, formerly the Palace of the Bishop of Worcester.

Matley probably had a hand in making up some of these objects, while another (unrelated) six-panelled leather screen on the staircase was also described as ‘made up by Mr. Matley Moore’. Moreover, ‘oddments’ from the Ivy House screen’s creation were used by Matley to cover two identical coffers with domed lids set on wooden stands, one for Elsie to house her sewing equipment, the other for his own use to store documents (Fig. 3). On the outside of the coffers the pattern is carefully cut to enhance the domed shape. The two pieces are decorated slightly differently. On Matley’s a single swag was applied to the front, spliced sections of swags cover the ends and cherubs are carefully aligned on either side of the lid, while a block-printed paper lines the interior. On Elsie’s the motifs
are reversed, with the cherubs applied to the front, and fruit and swags to the lid. A box of scraps of leather and 'fake leather' (strips of which were used on Greyfriars' Ivy House leather screen to hide where the flock had overlapped and to edge the boxes) remained in a cupboard in the studio at Greyfriars, along with pieces of leather from Plas Newydd, Anglesey, also made up into a box by Matley (NT 443484).

It seems that the Ivy House discoveries may have stimulated the Moores' taste for leather screens. In 1947 £10 was paid for a gilt leather Chinoiserie screen (Fig. 4) at the Brockhampton sale held after the death of Colonel John Talbot Lutley (who bequeathed Brockhampton Estate, in Herefordshire, to the National Trust). Signed ‘T.T.’ (active 1766–67) and dated July 1767, this six-leaf screen reflects English gilt leather makers' speciality in Chinoiserie designs. Borders on three sides consist of vignettes of birds and flowers, while the central landscape scenes of flowering trees and birds are divided by fictive bamboo, a design which resembles another six-leaf Chinoiserie screen by George Footman dated 1766 and now at Huis Doorn, The Netherlands. The architect J. Homery Folkes (employed by Elsie to restore shops adjacent to Greyfriars in the early 1960s) also described a visit in January 1957 for the Moores' annual tea party, where he 'fell in love with a leather screen of Matley Moore's. He has bought it for his sister's bedroom which has just been panelled and enlarged with a 4-poster bed installed'. However, Folkes was told the screen was too large for the room and Matley agreed to sell it to him 'for the price he paid for it', £15. When it would not fit into his car, Matley agreed to deliver it, which he did when Folkes and his wife were out shopping. Mrs Griffiths, their 'daily', reported that he was 'a lovely gentleman, adding that 'you could see he didn't want to part with it'.

Nor was it just gilt leather patterns which inspired the production of decorative objects and further purchases: an armchair's seat and back were also worked by Matley in needlework, copying the Ivy House flock's design and colourway (Fig. 5). This provides an example of how a textile pattern was imitated in flocked wallpaper before, in turn, being translated into needlework. It is possible that this was the armchair Matley purchased from John Norton's auction rooms in Ludlow in 1945.

Flocked and leather patterns were not the only wallpaper designs used as part of the furnishing and decoration of Greyfriars. The Yellow Parlour (Fig. 6) was hung with what were described in an annotated inventory of c.1970 as '6 panels of Geo 1 [George I] wall-paper ... very early wall-paper and unique with duty-stamp on the back. This time it was not Matley but Elsie who was associated with the installation, since the wallpaper was said to have been discovered by her as unused rolls in an attic at the Old Rectory in Birlingham near Pershore (Fig. 1). One piece left over from the scheme was, like the off-cuts of leather, kept at Greyfriars and is stamped with the Georgian excise duty stamp (Fig. 7). The subject matter of repeating scrolling foliage with images of the hunt (huntsmen blowing horns, leaping deer and dogs) intertwined, may be related to a group of slightly earlier papers incorporating scenes of the hunt in imitation of tapestry.

James Lees-Milne illustrated the wallpaper in his...
article on the house in *Country Life* in November 1969, describing it as giving this winter eating room ‘an early Georgian air’. Elsie’s interest in the conservation of wallpaper extended beyond the country house to the homes of historic house enthusiasts.

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1 Information from pasted note on reverse of photograph of the hall by R. Winstone, 1953 (28274), Historic England Red Books.

Women Artists, Collectors and Patrons
National Trust Historic Houses & Collections Annual 2018

The National Trust collections include some outstanding works of art that were commissioned, painted or made by women. As part of the National Trust’s ‘Women and Power’ theme, this year’s *Historic Houses & Collections Annual*, published in association with *Apollo*, presents new insights into the creativity and ingenuity of these inspirational women.

The essays collected in this edition range from biographical encounters with female artists and their circumstances, to explorations of the patronage, commissioning and collecting through which influential women shaped some of the Trust’s finest architectural interiors. Against the backdrop of national cultural events celebrating 100 years since the Representation of the People Act, a political milestone for the suffrage movement, this volume reminds us that women’s contribution was integral to making National Trust houses the remarkable places they are today.

Available to purchase online from 12 September. Please visit: https://shop.nationaltrust.org.uk
THE GEOLOGICAL GALLERY AT BIDDULPH GRANGE GARDEN
The restoration of a ‘known unknown’

Helen Wilshaw
Volunteer and Visitor Services Manager

The Geological Gallery at Biddulph Grange Garden in Staffordshire is a curiosity of the Victorian age and once formed the entrance to the garden, the horticultural masterpiece of the botanist and garden designer James Bateman (1811–97). At its height in the 1860s, the Gallery was the physical expression of a popular belief expounded by the geologist and lay theologian Hugh Miller (1802–56) in The Testimony of the Rocks (1857). Miller theorised that geological and palaeontological discoveries were proof of God’s existence. The Gallery captures a moment in time when efforts were being made to harmonise theology and science, rather than relying on religion alone to explain the natural world.

Architecturally understated, the Gallery consists of a corridor separated into bays numbered according to the days of creation. Built between 1857 and 1862, it was at that time lined with rock strata, specimen fossils and geological maps, which were arranged in a notional chronology informed both by the geological knowledge of the period and the Christian account of the creation in Genesis. Like much of the garden, contemporary references to the Gallery’s use, design and construction are limited. The most complete account of it can be found in a description in The Gardeners’ Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette of 7 June 1862 by E. Kemp: ‘the geological gallery which is upwards of 100 feet long … is quite unique, and is singularly illustrative of the great geological facts of the globe.’

Unique but Neglected

The original acquisition of Biddulph Grange by the National Trust did not include the house that forms the backdrop to the garden or the Geological Gallery, which was concealed behind an orthopaedic hospital built in the grounds in the 1930s. The Geological Gallery was acquired later, in 2002, 24 years after the original acquisition of the garden. Once it was in National Trust ownership, and despite the demolition of the hospital buildings, the Gallery nevertheless remained largely untouched and periodically inaccessible to the public until 2012. During the long years of hospital ownership (from the 1920s through to the early 1990s), Biddulph’s
Geological Gallery had faded from popular memory, its uniqueness and importance lost to all but a handful of people.

The acquisition of the Gallery had left the National Trust with a unique yet neglected building and limited knowledge or understanding of its original purpose. Only one of the fossils remained; the rest were either missing or in private collections. Less than one-third of the rock strata survived in situ and only two of the seven hand-painted geological cross-sections in their imposing oak frames remained in the collection, alongside the Roman marbles from the gallery vestibule.

The hospital development had been the catalyst of much of the decay and damage to the Gallery, which had been truncated to accommodate new wards and later turned into a plumbers’ workshop. During harsh winters it had even been used as a temporary mortuary. This long-term neglect led to the loss of both artefacts and building fabric, from fossils and rock samples to elements of the Minton tile and limestone flooring its striking pattern had served to guide Victorian visitors through the Gallery to the garden beyond. The installation of work benches had caused damage to the stone walls, and cabling and pipework had been fixed to the timber arches which span the Gallery.

New Impetus

One of the early champions and pioneers of the restoration of the Gallery was Dr John Stanley of Keele University, who was later joined by Professor Hugh Torrens and Dr Ian Stimpson. Dr Stanley became involved in the early 1970s, identifying and rescuing some of the most significant fossils, including a complete juvenile ichthyosaur, an adult ichthyosaur head, and a delicate fossilised dragonfly. These pieces became part of an adult education collection at Keele University. The support of these three academics was crucial to the success of the Gallery restoration project. However, it still remained to find the necessary funding and to develop a complete understanding of the building and its ‘known’ and ‘unknown’ collection.

Funding for the restoration of the Gallery came unexpectedly in the shape of a generous donation from a regular visitor to the garden; this was completely unsolicited, because no restoration project had then been identified as viable. This initial gift triggered further donations from the Geologists’ Association Curry Fund, visitors and volunteers. In all over £200,000 was raised – enough to get the project under way. The speed with which the fund raising was developing demanded action, and a project team of property staff, consultants and external partners was quickly assembled. This new impetus afforded the property the opportunity to re-establish links with previous partners, to develop new working relationships in the wider academic and natural science communities, and to build confidence in the future of the Gallery.

The first priority was to re-connect with the academics from Keele University – Professor Torrens, Dr Stimpson and the now-retired Dr Stanley – and to commission a research study into the Gallery with their support. The study was tasked with achieving a better understanding of the building, its purpose, and its place in history; of the key historical figures involved (from the palaeontologist Sir Richard Owen to the sculptor Benjamin Waterhouse-Hawkins); and of the Gallery’s significance in relation to the rest of the garden. Daniel Atherton, a freelance Historical Research Consultant and Interpretations Officer for the National Trust, was commissioned to bring the fragmentary evidence together from myriad sources (summarised in his article for ABC Bulletin, Summer 2015). Without this key research, any attempt to restore and interpret the Gallery would surely have done a disservice to Bateman.

Restoring the Gallery

The restoration project was scheduled as a five-year plan. Reconstruction of the truncated end of the Gallery was considered, but soon dismissed because no architectural records or images of the Gallery were known to exist. (The absence of photographic evidence was particularly surprising because the garden and house were photographed on many occasions between the 1890s and the early 20th century.) The Gallery appears tantalisingly close in photographs of other parts of the site: sections of skylights and hints at roof lines can be discerned, but never a complete and reliable indication of how it would have looked. Ultimately, the research findings supported the conclusion that this missing section did not play a significant role in the Gallery’s story.

The focus moved to structural work. However, the simplicity of the building’s construction did
not mean that its restoration would be simple. The Gallery sits high above ground level, built on top of an existing stone structure which is part of a complex of 15th-century farm buildings. This meant the stabilising of any movement in the floor, below which there is a long space with a brick vaulted ceiling. This became the structural priority, followed by remedial work on the stone of the walls and ceiling. Work on the floor led to months of delays and interventions by surveyors and archaeologists when the apparently straightforward task of replacing one of the tiled floor sections revealed that the truncated end of the Gallery was cantilevered and hung above what appeared to be evidence of the original heating system. This required recording before work could continue. However, the discovery did create an unexpected opportunity for the archaeologists to explore the surrounding area to establish whether any part of the foundations of the truncated section of the Gallery survived. Unfortunately, this work proved fruitless, and the Gallery’s full original length can still only be estimated.

Concurrent with the structural restoration was the need to make a decision about the fossils and the rock strata. The wall of the Gallery was once home to a collection of over 60 fossils, but only a handful remained in the collection, with a further six split between Keele University and the private collection of Dr Stanley. The condition of many of these fossils was fragile, and returning them to the walls of the Gallery would prove structurally difficult and put them at risk. As the restoration progressed and partnerships developed with the Keele academics, the fossils in the Keele collection and those preserved by Dr Stanley were given back to the property.

The Shropshire-based palaeontologist Nigel Larkin was commissioned to conserve and record the fossils in the collection and then replicate them in resin, installing the replicas along the north face of the Gallery in the wall cavities left by the missing collection. The conservation of the original fossils provided an opportunity to learn more about them, not only as important independent specimens, but also in terms of the role they played in Bateman’s narrative of theological and scientific harmony.

Finding fossils for the two-thirds of the Gallery where there were no original specimens – the Gallery’s ‘known unknowns’ – was a lengthy process. For historical authenticity, the specimens needed to be of a type known at the time of the Gallery’s construction, while also being the right size to fit the existing wall cavities. Nigel Larkin’s research, and his knowledge of sources at Manchester Museum, the Lapworth Museum of Geology in Birmingham, and Angweddifa Cymru – National Museum Wales, made it possible to locate suitable fossils from which to make casts for replication.

The final part of the restoration, still under way at the time of writing, concerns the rock strata. Research identifying the missing sections was conducted early in the project by Dr Stimpson and Professor Torrens. As in the case of the fossil research, while many samples had been successfully identified, there were significant gaps. The professional expertise of the academics was brought together in a working document – a shopping list of the rocks that were needed. At this stage the project has come to a halt because access to some of the quarries where the rocks originated is restricted by closure or change of use. Cliveden Conservation has been commissioned to complete this part of the project.

The restoration project has transformed our understanding of the Geological Gallery, the man behind it, and its significance in the context of changing and challenging times in Victorian Britain. It has also afforded an opportunity to re-evaluate the relationship between the Gallery and the garden, Bateman’s new Eden. Once again it is a curiosity for the visitor to discover, a safe haven for debate, and a place to discuss and share ideas.
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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