When William Morris entered the architectural practice of George Edmund Street (1824-81) in Oxford in January 1856 at the age of 22, he little suspected that Philip Webb, Street’s chief assistant and senior clerk, who was assigned responsibility for his tutelage, would become both one of his most significant friends and also a life-long collaborator.

Philip Webb, Morris’s senior by three years, had begun working for Street in 1854. Like their mentor, both young men were passionate not only about the ancient buildings and medieval churches surrounding them but also the beauty of the wider English countryside. Webb’s biographer W. R. Lethaby (1857-1931) later recalled how Webb and Morris shared a ‘religious love for England ... [an] affection and even worship for the very earth, trees, fields, animals, ploughs, wagons and buildings —and yes, the weather too’. Webb had been born in Oxford and from a young age pursued his interest in drawing, being tutored by a Mrs Richardson, a local botanical artist. His later drawings show an aptitude for natural history, notably for birds and animals. At the age of just seventeen his ambition to become an artist was thwarted by the death of his father; he decided instead to pursue a career in architecture. Webb took inspiration from traditional, vernacular buildings, adopting local materials and combining these with his strongly-held principle that form should follow function.

Although great friends, Morris and Webb were entirely different in temperament—Morris passionate and rebellious, Webb measured and restrained. It was not long before Morris abandoned architecture in favour of life as an artist and designer, but both men shared many of the same values, including Socialism, which was to sustain their partnership over the next forty years. Webb’s stabilising influence on Morris should not be underestimated, often bringing practical solutions to Morris’s sometimes headstrong and impulsive ideas.

The apogee of their collaboration is William Morris: ‘The Forest’ tapestry, designed by Morris and woven at Merton Abbey in 1887.

Over 40 outstanding watercolours and drawings by John Constable are on display at Petworth. Many of the works were produced during Constable’s visits to the house in 1834 and have never before been exhibited as a group. Highlights include rarely seen views of the house, Chichester Cathedral, Cowdray House and Arundel Castle.

This extraordinary group of paintings is mainly on loan from the V&A and the British Museum. The exhibition is on at Petworth until 14 March.
perhaps Red House, which was built for Morris in 1859-60 and represents Webb's first independent commission after leaving Street's practice in 1858. Webb was initially intended to be responsible for its architecture and Morris its interiors. In reality the project was more complex: Webb also provided designs for furniture, metalwork, stained glass and table glass, Morris's other friends Burne-Jones and Rossetti collaborated to create mural decorations, and Jane Morris and Elizabeth Siddal contributed embroidered textiles.

Although Webb went on to establish an independent, and highly influential, architectural practice the creative energy expended on Red House and the artistic effort between friends to produce a unified interior, inspired by medieval images, encouraged the group to form a company specialising in the decorative arts. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. was established in 1861 with Webb as one of its seven partners.

Describing themselves in their prospectus as 'Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and Metals', the firm undertook to design and produce hand-made products. Webb not only contributed his practical knowledge of craft, including carving, illuminating and embroidery, but also played a vital role in getting designs produced and delivered. He acted as architectural adviser and as a designer of fittings, including stained glass, wallpaper and furniture. As Sheila Kirk points out, however, the extent of Webb's contribution to Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co and towards the improvement of the decorative arts in general, though recognised at the time, was played down by his friends, including Morris, because of Webb's intense dislike of praise and his equally strong desire to avoid publicity. ³

However, the firm was ‘under-capitalized and managerially disorganised’, and by 1875 balancing the books had become impossible. The company was dissolved and re-formed in Morris's sole ownership. Though Webb was owed a considerable sum in salary, he did not demand its payment, and loyally continued to work for Morris until the latter's death in 1896. Through his domestic and ecclesiastical commissions Webb also secured strong demand for Morris & Co. products between the 1870s and 1890s, in particular for its stained glass, for which his own designs for animals were particularly admired.

Amongst the enormous output of wallpapers, textiles and other items produced by Morris & Co. during this period were two important tapestries; they were designed by Morris and incorporated studies of birds and animals provided by Webb. The first, The Woodpecker (1888) is in the William Morris Gallery’s collection. ⁴ The second, known as The Forest, was woven at Merton Abbey in 1887. The design incorporates five animals (peacock, hare, lion, fox and raven) set against a narrow plane of swirling acanthus leaves and with a foreground of native flowers, reminiscent of those found in medieval tapestries. A text, ‘The beasts that be in woodland waste, now sit and see nor ride nor haste’, runs in two separate embroidered bands across the top of the tapestry.

Individual drawings of each animal were produced by Webb with great accuracy in pencil and watercolour in 1886 and each expresses his enduring love of the natural world. He had owned a copy of Thomas Bewick’s History of British Birds since boyhood,² and Bewick’s approach to bird portraiture is echoed in Webb’s The Raven. He also admired the work of Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), whose masterly draughtsmanship and observational realism is directly referenced in The Lion and The Hare.

The Fox and The Hare also demonstrate Webb’s familiarity with native flora: The Hare includes accurate depictions of the Wild Tulip, Daisy and Corn Camomile, while in The Fox Hawkbit, Oxford Ragwort and Japanese Anemone are drawn with the precision associated with John Ruskin and the early Pre-Raphaelites.

Webb’s gentle humour is also evident in the details which appear in the drawings. The Fox includes a sketch of the same animal running away with a goose in its mouth—the traditional fare for Michaelmas Day, the date on the drawing itself. The Hare also contains smaller images of the same creature, clearly observed from nature.

These highly finished cartoons, which also indicate the acanthus leaf background, were interpreted by the firm’s senior weavers William Knight, John Martin and William Sleath in the manufacture of the tapestry. Traces of pencil grid lines on the drawings show how they were scaled up by the craftsmen to create the finished work.

The tapestry was exhibited in 1890 at the London Arts & Crafts Exhibition and soon after purchased by Aleco (Alexander) Ionides, (1840-98), the son of a Greek textile and wheat-trading magnate and patron of the arts. Webb had enlarged and remodelled the family home, No.1 Holland Park, London, between 1879 and 1883 for Ionides’s father, and the house was subsequently decorated by Morris & Co. in collaboration with Walter Crane. The Forest tapestry was eventually sold to the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1926.⁷

Whilst the tapestry found a buyer relatively quickly the drawings appear to have been retained by Morris & Co., and following Morris’s death in 1896 they were in the custodianship of
Sydney Cockerell (1867-1962). Cockerell had met Morris in 1886, initially through their shared Socialist interests, but later through the work of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Invited by Morris to catalogue his library of manuscripts and early printed books, Cockerell went on to become his private secretary, as well as secretary to the Kelmscott Press from 1894 to 1896. He supported Morris during his final illness and was executor of his will. It was inevitable that he should also become a trusted aide and loyal supporter of Webb.

Cockerell showed great kindness to Webb during his later years. Following Webb’s decision to give up his architectural practice in 1899 Cockerell, together with the poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, supported him in finding a suitable place for his retirement. With few financial resources available owing to Webb’s life-long generosity and lack of acquisitiveness, Cockerell sought to liquidate whatever assets were available to supplement Webb’s modest income.

Cockerell was acquainted with Laurence William Hodson (1864-1933), a collector with a particular interest in the Kelmscott Press (he owned a complete collection of the publications produced by the Press between 1891 and 1898) and it was perhaps through this association that the drawings for *The Forest* tapestry were eventually purchased by Hodson for £100 in 1900.

Hodson was typical of many clients of Morris & Co. He was a rich industrialist from the Midlands whose income derived from trade, in this instance from the brewing industry in Wolverhampton, but who held wider interests, both artistic and philanthropic.

He was also an important patron of the arts and well acquainted with Morris. In 1890 he had inherited the family estate, Compton Hall on the western outskirts of the city.

Between 1895 and 1896 Hodson appointed Morris & Co. to refurbish Compton Hall, and he also commissioned several important works from the company. These included three tapestries from Burne-Jones’s *Quest for the Holy Grail* series in 1895. He also acquired the St. George cabinet, designed by Webb and decorated by Morris, created for the 1862 London International Exhibition. Hodson’s collection also included textiles, furniture and glass from Morris & Co. Morris had clearly considered him such a significant client that he named his final wallpaper design ‘Compton’ in 1896.

Hodson was therefore well disposed to Morris and his associates and probably sympathetic to Webb’s financial plight, as Cockerell anticipated. On 7 October 1900 he wrote to Hodson: ‘I want to settle up the matter of the Webb cartoons, though I shall be sorry to part with the Hare which now adorns my office.’ On 10 November he reported: ‘The packers have carried off the hare so I hope you will soon be rejoicing in the possession of your cartoons’. There was some delay in their delivery to Wolverhampton, since they had not arrived by 11 December 1900 when Cockerell wrote again: ‘I am disappointed to hear that the cartoons have not reached you … You will find a fifth subject with them, an exquisite peacock, which was also done for the tapestry. PW determined to throw this in in spite of my protestations (I should have liked to buy it for myself!) and
if you feel, as I hope you will, that you have got more than your 
money's worth, I can tell you how to be more even with him.'

It is interesting that in 1905 Cockerell mentioned in another letter that he had ‘... got a beautiful Webb drawing of a lion & so I am not so jealous of you as I was.’ This is likely to have been The Lion, which now forms part of this group, but the route by which it came into Hodson’s collection is as yet unknown.

In 1906 Hodson got into financial difficulties, perhaps as a result of his passion for collecting, and Compton Hall, as well as part of his collection, was sold at Christie’s. Cockerell would have been aware of this and on 18 July 1909 wrote to Hodson: ‘What about Webb’s beasts? Are you parting with them?’ Cockerell’s appreciation of the quality of the works was evident; however, despite the sales of 1906 the drawings remained in Hodson’s collection and those of his descendants, and were exhibited at the Morris Centenary Exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1914.

In 2013 the drawings were offered for sale by the Hodson family. With the generous support of the Art Fund, the Victoria & Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, the Monument Trust, the Mander Trust and contributions from many other donors, the works were purchased by the National Trust for Wightwick Manor.

Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, is one of three properties owned by the National Trust which contain excellent examples of the work of the principal members of Morris, Marshall & Faulkner and Morris & Co., as well as the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, notably Rossetti, Millais, Elizabeth Siddal, and Burne-Jones. Built in 1887, less than a mile from Compton Hall, it too was the home of a local industrialist, Theodore Mander (1853-1900), a paint and varnish manufacturer. The house was designed by Edward Ould (1852-1909) in the Old English style popularised by Norman Shaw and William Eden Nesfield, and like Compton was extensively decorated with wallpapers and textiles supplied by Morris & Co.

Laurence Hodson was a close neighbour of Theodore Mander—the Wightwick estate land bordered Compton’s—and work was being carried out at Compton Hall contemporaneously with the enlargement of Wightwick Manor in the 1890s. No evidence has been found, however, to indicate that the men were friends; Mander was a supporter of the Temperance movement and may not have shared social ties with the owner of a brewery. But they would have known each other professionally, particularly as Mander served as Mayor of Wolverhampton in 1899. Hodson also undertook civic and philanthropic duties, supporting Birmingham University between 1896 and 1906 and serving as Chairman of the Fine Art Committee for the Wolverhampton Art & Industrial Exhibition of 1902, to which the drawings of The Hare and The Fox were loaned.

Following Theodore Mander’s death in 1900 Wightwick was inherited by his son Geoffrey (1882-1962), later knighted in 1942, who, with his second wife Rosalie Glynn Grylls, Lady Mander (1905-88), considerably enhanced the house and acquired works by the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers to add depth and interest to its interiors. Wightwick Manor was presented to the National Trust in 1937; it was the first house to be accepted under the Country Houses Scheme, which Sir Geoffrey, through his work as M.P. for Wolverhampton, had been instrumental in supporting.

Sir Geoffrey and Lady Mander remained as tenants and custodians of Wightwick Manor until their deaths, and in collaboration with the National Trust continued enthusiastically to build up the collections, acquiring paintings, drawings and designs by the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as furnishings by Morris & Co. From the original 650 items in the house before 1937 the collection has grown to over 5,000 objects.

The collection remains an open one with a continuing collecting policy supported by the Mander Trust, which was set up by Sir Geoffrey to enhance Wightwick Manor. Acquisitions are still sought to reflect the Mander’s interest in William Morris, his associates and the Pre-Raphaelites. The significance of the acquisition of these drawings by Philip Webb is in particular due not only to their close association with Wolverhampton, which Sir Geoffrey and Lady Mander would have found highly significant for Wightwick, but also because of their very high quality and beauty and the hitherto under-representation of Philip Webb’s work in the collection. It is fitting that they should return to the city for permanent preservation and for the enjoyment of its inhabitants.

Jane Gallagher, Senior Curator, Midlands region

2 Kirk, S., op. cit., p. 33
3 McCarthy, F., William Morris, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online
4 Parry, L., William Morris Textiles, Victoria & Albert Museum Publishing, 2013, p.136. The author indicates that the birds were designed by Philip Webb, although others have attributed the complete design to Morris.
5 Kirk, S., op. cit., p.11
7 Victoria & Albert Museum, Accession No. T.111-1926
8 Bell, A., Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online
9 Sold back to Morris & Co in 1906 and purchased and presented by subscribers to Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery in 1907, Accession nos. 1907M129, 1907M130, 1907M131
10 Sold Christie’s, 1906 and acquired by the Victoria & Albert Museum, Accession no. 341-1906
11 See Drewarts, Donnington Priory Interiors, 27 February, 2013
12 Correspondence between Sydney C. Cockerell and Laurence Hodson, sold Bloomsbury Auctions, Books, Manuscripts, Prints, Drawings & other Artwork from the Collection of Laurence W. Hodson, 4 April 2103, Lot 257 (part); purchased by Houghton Library, Harvard University, (as yet un-catalogued).
13 I am grateful to William P. Stoneman, Florence Fearrington Librarian of Houghton Library and to Martin Levy for bringing this material to my attention.

The V&A have agreed to lend ‘The Forest’ tapestry to Wightwick and it will be on display there from May until October 2014.
SOME SEA MONSTERS AND DRAGONS
The painstaking redecoration of the Chinese-style Pagoda at Cliveden

The Chinese-style Pagoda at Cliveden, Buckinghamshire was made for the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867. It is a copy of a 1780s pavilion in the park of Château de Romainville, near Paris. The original architect is unknown; the most likely inspiration is from an illustration in Sir William Chambers’s Designs of Chinese Buildings, 1757. The Pagoda was purchased by Lord Astor in 1900 from Lord Hertford’s château in Parc de Bagatelle, Bois de Boulogne, near Paris and positioned in the Water Gardens at Cliveden.

A replica of the Cliveden Pagoda has since been made and is on display in Parc de Bagatelle. The Pagoda is a Grade II listed building; it is made from stone, with a wooden roof structure covered in lead sheeting and topped with a cast zinc dolphin, known locally as the sea monster. In 2009 the Pagoda was suffering from several defects including erosion of the stone pillars, flaking paint, and corrosion of the sea monster. The decay was due to a combination of infrequent maintenance, different paint applications and the Pagoda’s damp location on a small, low-lying island. In 2011 a programme of stabilisation, stone repairs and redecoration was initiated.

The project team reviewed the partial historical records and debated whether its approach should be one of preservation, conservation or restoration. A paint analysis report produced in 2002 by Lisa Oestreicher, our Architectural Paint Researcher, identified six paint schemes; the sixth, in bright red and blue, dated from 1981. The third scheme, of green and gold, was agreed upon as the most suitable one to reinstate—it is believed to have been applied shortly after the Pagoda’s arrival at Cliveden in 1900.

The decorative artist Saskia Huning, owner of Huning Decorations, was appointed to provide expert advice on paint type, colour matching, designs, and gilding, and to complete the paint scheme. This involved designing and painting the polychrome and gilded decoration running under the roof edges, painting trompe l‘œil fluting on the columns, and gilding and glazing the balusters, the handrails, the lantern, and the sea monster which sits on the roof finial.

The paint analysis indicated that the ground colour had been a deep green with deeper green glazes and gold leaf surface decoration. The report indicated dragon and flower decorations on the curved soffits and painted fluting on the columns. Historical photographs provided some details of the designs, but did not give complete information.

Before painting started it was agreed to review and sign off each painted element individually rather than the entire paint scheme. This ensured that we were constantly and methodically checking that the design elements worked cohesively together. Actual size samples were painted on card and taped on the Pagoda in situ. This proved a novel and invaluable approach when securing listed building consent to reinstate the earlier scheme. It gave a very realistic idea of what the completed scheme would look like without damaging the existing structure or committing to the design or colour.

The paint on the lower internal areas of the Pagoda had previously suffered from damage caused both by children and adults climbing on the structure. There was a concern that any new gilding would be immediately damaged. Preventing access was an option but the experience of standing inside the structure, admiring its decoration and looking across the water gardens, is fundamental to its purpose. The best solution would be to omit the lower gilding altogether. Here we restricted the painting to dark green glazes and gold lines, and only the inner pedestals were gilded. This gave enough weight to the base of the columns and carried the design through to the upper levels.

The archive images of the columns showed that the flutes had...
fine gilded edges. It was decided that this would not be recreated because the lower areas would be likely to suffer wear and tear, and that the gilding would instead increase visually towards the tops of the columns with the introduction of colour under the curved soffits and a crescendo of gilding on the polychrome roof edge panels and lantern.

A question arose about the fictive light source for the trompe l’oeil fluting to the columns. As there is no real front, the Pagoda would never be viewed from a single perspective. In addition, the source of natural light changes, of course, as the sun tracks around the structure. We had two options: to choose a single viewing point and therefore a single fixed light source, or a central light source for each column with the internal side being in shadow. The latter course was chosen, and has proved very satisfactory.

As the Pagoda had previously decayed thanks to water ingress, an oil-based paint, Sikkens Satura Plus, was selected as a durable exterior base colour. The first application was made in October 2012, but the paint developed a milky white bloom in reaction to the cold. The project was stopped until July 2013 when a second coat was applied in very warm, dry weather. The paint became tacky after a day, but took six weeks to completely cure, which remains unexplained. Even when dry, the formulation of the paint seemed to have changed: when we were gilding, the paint reacted like acrylic and attracted the gold, even where no size had been applied.

The reds, oranges and yellows used in the polychrome decoration under the soffits are solvent-based sign-writer’s paints which have enough pigment to cover the green base colour. All the areas to be gilded were pre-painted yellow with sign-writer’s paint. The gold was applied using an oil size. The gold itself was 23.5 carat double gold, slightly thicker than standard gold leaf.

Saskia planned to make a template for each column to ensure that the design was symmetrical. After measuring the columns it became apparent they were all slightly different sizes with a variance in circumference of up to 2 cm. Each column was painted carefully by hand with a darker tone selected from a Sikkens RAL colour chart.

The lower roof and soffit boards had been replaced in a previous campaign, but had been stored for future reference. Though in poor condition, they bore traces of dragon and flower decoration. These were dragons like no other: they had large pompom flowers on their tails and scaled, segmented worm-like bodies. Extensive research on their appearance was undertaken, and we obtained advice on them which included comparisons with Chinese, Japanese and European dragons from ornamental ceramics, paintings and textiles. The conclusion was reached that ours were probably uniquely floriated European dragons created by the original artist.

Dragon designs were drawn up which would fit on the soffit templates. On these areas colours were introduced. There were two dragons to each panel, their tails meeting in the middle of the panel on either side of a central flower. The dragons were to have painted scales on a solid gilded body. On the upper soffit the design of flowers and leaves relates to the flowers on the lower roof edge, and enhances the various motifs when they are seen collectively from below.

The zinc sea monster, exposed on top of the structure, had corroded from the inside thanks to condensation caused by heating and cooling. Its lower frilled fins were badly pitted and were repaired by the conservator Anna-Lena Adamson. The sea monster’s hollow tongue, which had been knocked off by a firework, was skilfully welded back on by Rupert Harris Conservation. When redecorating the sea monster, Saskia used light yellow on the scales with a solid gilded edge. The shadows cast by the sea monster, and the gilded edges of its scales, give it a great sense of flowing movement.

The next stage of the project will involve the replication of the painted ceiling panels and the restoration of the large brass hanging bells, which will be heard throughout the water garden when the breeze blows.

Stewart Wright, Building Surveyor, National Trust
Saskia Huning, Decorative Artist, Huning Decorations

For more information about the project please contact: Stewart Wright, Building Surveyor, stewart.wright@nationaltrust.org.uk
A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

The rediscovery and excavation of the Hermitage on the Island at Belton

Hidden on an island in the Wilderness at Belton House are the ruins of a lost garden building which has in recent years been known as the Summer House. This island was created as part of Viscount Tyrconnel's early 18th-century work in the Wilderness; his designs included the construction of the Gothick Ruin and the realignment of the River Witham to create several islands and an impressive cascade. Tyrconnel was delighted with the Wilderness that he had created, and in writing to his nephew claimed:

‘Belton never so Green and Pleasant; ye Ponds and Canal overflowing full, a grand Rustick arch finished with vast Rough Stones over ye Cascade of ye River, and two Huge Artificial Rocks on each side, Designed and executed, as I think, in a taste superior to anything that I have seen, either at Lord Gainsborough's or Lord Cobham’s.’

Following Tyrconnel’s tenure, little further development was undertaken in the Wilderness. It would seem that by the late 18th century areas of the Wilderness had fallen into disrepair—in The Torrington Diaries (1791) the Honourable John Byng recorded: ‘and for the water works (now destroy’d) I repine, as they must have been curiously imagined’.

When the second Baron Brownlow (first Earl Brownlow) inherited the estate in 1815 he embarked upon a programme of landscape reinvigoration. Brownlow undertook various works in the Wilderness, including tree planting and the repair of the cascade. Also at this time the Gothick Ruin was enhanced and elaborated, with the addition of a 14th-century window from Normanton Church. It is during this period that the building which we have known as the Summer House was added to the Wilderness.

During 2013, a keen and very willing team of Belton volunteers and staff, along with myself, set out to excavate the ruins of the Summer House and explore the Island. Until recently the Island was very rarely visited except by Belton’s herd of fallow deer. The causeway over to the Island had been lost to the overgrowth, and what was once an open body of water had silted up to form a swampy bog.

The first stage of the excavation was the clearance of brambles, nettles and self-sown trees that had claimed the area. After a hard morning of toil the team revealed the foundations of the building. We had, however, only scratched the surface. The years of decomposing leaf litter meant that much more excavation was needed. Work began on cleaning up the ruins and revealing them further. Eventually by the end of the day the plan of the building emerged. To our surprise the clearance works had revealed two stepped porticos. The structure was already beginning to seem more elaborate than we had previously supposed.

This construction design would allow floodwater to collect in the void below the floor without flooding the building.

During day two of the excavation we began to clear the debris that had accumulated within the building’s interior. The excavation revealed assorted building materials including thatching pins, a small square lead sheet, brick, roof tile, and a substantial quantity of cut nails. We were very interested to find that the actual base of the building was a metre below the level of the floor. This was perhaps to make allowances in case of flooding—the River Witham has regularly flooded within the grounds of the Wilderness, and still does so.

This island was created as part of the 1815-1820 years of landscape reinvigoration. Brownlow undertook various works in the Wilderness, including tree planting and the repair of the cascade. Also at this time the Gothick Ruin was enhanced and elaborated, with the addition of a 14th-century window from Normanton Church. It is during this period that the building which we have known as the Summer House was added to the Wilderness.

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Salvin’s design and the accompanying images were a great help in the analysis of the results of the excavations. The huge quantity of nails, for example, could now easily be accounted for as the building had been constructed in timber and had sat upon brick foundations and a stone plinth. In addition, the mystery of the missing portico pillars was solved: it was clear that these had been tree trunks, perhaps yew because of its hard-wearing quality. The supposition of a thatched roof because of the numerous thatching pins was confirmed, and the lead sheet fragment perhaps formed part of the cupola that is shown on the plan, watercolour and photograph.

A second phase of excavation took place during the early autumn of 2013. This time the focus was on the garden associated with the Hermitage and the bridge that would have provided access to the Island. Excavation soon revealed that alongside the Hermitage was a small garden with a planting bed that was bounded by rough stones set on end. A rockery of specimen stones including quartz, agate and tufa was revealed, defined by large river-rounded cobbles. The now untamed box and yew would have provided the backdrop for the Hermitage.

The excavation of the bridge abutment on the Island provided other revelations about the activity here. As fallen and cut trees were cleared away from the bridge abutment it became clear that several of the yew tree trunks and branches were in fact part of a structure. Yew branches had been nailed together to create roughly-shaped uprights, and a door latch had been fitted into one of these. Further clearance of the area revealed two large postholes. From the material remains and the archaeological evidence it was clear that upon traversing the bridge, the visitor would have entered the Island by a rustic gateway. The gateway, along with the positioning of the building on the Island, would perhaps have helped to increase the sense that the Hermitage was a place for quiet contemplation and reflection.

To complete our 2013 excavations, and to help us find the pathway that led from the bridge to the Hermitage, we were joined by the Belton Archaeology Club Family Volunteers. Through their endeavours the pathway was soon revealed. Curiously, the pathway did not take a line through the avenue of yews but was instead offset from it.

There is no doubt that during the 19th and early 20th century the Wilderness at Belton would have been a landscape of intrigue and fascination for visitors, with its wonderful specimen trees and various incidents that visitors could delight in as they walked through. In 1905, for instance, a journalist wrote: ‘Here Box and Golden Yews flourish, and Dogwood grows on the banks of the Witham, which runs through the grounds; and here, too, in profusion are Saxifrages and wild Turkey Rhubarb. Even more ornamental than the rustic bridges or the summer-house, with its floor of knuckle-bones of fallow deer, is the remarkable collection of weeping beeches.’

Our previous excavations in 2012 (see ABC Bulletin, October 2012) had shown that the fallow deer knuckle-bone floor mentioned by the journalist was in fact made of sheep knuckle-bones. In 2012 we had mistakenly assumed that this structure was the Hermitage in the Wilderness; however, of course, we now know that this is not the case.

The annual archaeological investigations of the gardens at Belton are proving to be particularly exciting and enjoyable for all involved, and the discovery of the Hermitage has been particularly rewarding. In future years we hope to be able to continue to piece together more of the jigsaw puzzle that is the changing landscape of the estate throughout its life.

Rachael Hall, Archaeologist Midlands (East)

The excavations could not have taken place without the enthusiasm and hard work from all the staff and volunteers at Belton House, with extra special thanks to Emma Lockwood, Melissa Maynard and Liz Thomsen.
STANLEY SPENCER: HEAVEN IN A HELL OF WAR
A major exhibition of the Sandham Memorial Chapel canvases

Sandham Memorial Chapel in Hampshire, an early 20th-century red brick building commemorating a dead soldier and dedicated as an Oratory to All Souls, is somewhat of a rarity amongst the National Trust’s broad portfolio of properties. It is best known as the location of a masterpiece by the celebrated English painter Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), a painted decorative scheme influenced by Giotto’s Arena Chapel in Padua; this work of art is similarly unusual within the Trust, and a highlight of our important and often overlooked 20th-century art collection.

The undertakings of a conservation programme at the chapel meant that the building itself would be closed to the public for a time, which in turn allowed for the sixteen removable canvases by Spencer to be taken out of their niches and exhibited elsewhere.

To make the most of this rare and exciting opportunity, we decided that ideally the canvases should be exhibited in London and at a second venue outside the capital, along with other works that would help to illustrate the story behind the commissioning of the chapel paintings by the enlightened patrons John Louis and Mary Behrend. After a very short lead-in period in exhibition programming terms, two suitable venues were found for the exhibition: Somerset House in London and Pallant House in Chichester.

The exhibition, entitled Stanley Spencer: Heaven in a Hell of War, co-curated by David Taylor and Amanda Bradley, is currently on show in the Terrace Rooms at Somerset House, having opened on 7 November 2013; after it closes there on 26 January 2014 it will move to Pallant House, where it will be displayed from 15 February to 15 June.

Surprisingly, this is the first major exhibition of National Trust pictures to be shown in London for eighteen years—it was back in 1995 that In Trust for the Nation was held at the National Gallery to celebrate the Trust’s centenary. Likewise, it is only the second time that the removable canvases have been taken out of the chapel and exhibited elsewhere; the last time was for the retrospective Spencer exhibition at the Royal Academy, London in 1980.

The historian Simon Schama has described Spencer’s chapel paintings as ‘the most powerful art to emerge from the carnage of the Great War’, which emphasises the fact that they should be seen as works of art in their own right, not necessarily as an integral part of their intended setting, and on an equal footing with any other paintings outwith the context of the chapel and the complete narrative displayed in it. While the notion of taking the paintings out of a dedicated commemorative chapel might seem odd to some, we have to remember that Spencer himself wanted them to be seen (occasionally) in a gallery environment, and specifically in London. In 1932 he wrote: ‘I think the arched and predella pictures arranged … round a gallery would be impressive … they would blow the ‘Gallery’ atmosphere to the four corners of the heavens’. Similarly, it is worth noting that Spencer was still a jobbing artist in the 1930s; he realised that showing the paintings in London would generate new and lucrative commissions (he wrote to Mary Behrend that ‘a lot of people … might give me a job if they saw these pictures in London’).

The chapel and its paintings was an expensive and brave commission from the Behrends. After its completion a visitor rudely exclaimed: ‘It smells of money here, doesn’t it?’ to which Spencer replied: ‘No, only courage’.

The canvases took six years for Spencer to paint. Completed in 1932, they, along with the altarpiece, The Resurrection of the Soldiers, and the two spandrels (these last three cannot be removed from the chapel) are considered his finest work. Typical of his figurative painting at this period, they combine realistic depictions of the humdrum everyday life of soldiers (at the Beaufort Military Hospital in Bristol, the Tweseldown training ground in Surrey, and at war in Macedonia), hybridised within the visionary and dreamlike world of Spencer’s imagination. By visually describing
the menial, everyday tasks of the soldiers, such as filling tea urns, sorting laundry, making piles of bread and jam, and scrubbing floors—the ‘symphony of rashers of bacon’ and ‘tea-making obbligato’, as Spencer said—he overcame his own, horrible experience of war. The process of painting the Sandham pictures appears to have been a cathartic experience for an artist who had once revealed: ‘I had buried so many people and seen so many dead bodies that I felt that death could not be the end of everything’. After the completion of the chapel he stated: ‘The Burghclere memorial redeemed my experience [of war] from what it was, namely something alien to me. By this means I recovered my lost self’.

As well as being one of Britain’s most important and innovative war artists, Spencer was also, of course, a key figure in the development of 20th-century British painting; this exhibition provides an ideal opportunity to view closely some of his most accomplished work. The sixteen canvases from the chapel are displayed in the middle room of Somerset House’s Terrace Rooms, where the stark white walls allow the busy compositions to speak for themselves without the hindrance of over-interpretation (a booklet was designed with texts on the individual canvases, replacing labels, which would have been intrusive and distracting). The paintings are hung lower down on the wall than they are at Burghclere, and they are brightly lit. This combination of artificial light and a lower hang means that viewers can see the canvases properly; and even those who know them well are left feeling as if they are looking at them for the first time, almost as if Spencer had painted another set of Sandham Memorial Chapel pictures which are now being shown instead. The effect on visitors is extraordinary—no matter how busy the room is, they stand back and view the canvases with hushed respect, appreciating the subliminal undertones of Spencer’s masterly scheme despite the large numbers of fellow viewers.

The first of the three rooms tells the story of the commissioning of the chapel, and the involvement of Spencer’s friend the Australian-born painter Henry Lamb (1883–1960). Highlights include two particularly important loans, Lamb’s remarkable Irish Troops in the Judean Hills Surprised by a Turkish Bombardment (Imperial War Museum) and his 1923 portrait of Spencer (National Portrait Gallery), as well as the screening of a short 1956 BBC film of Spencer at the chapel discussing his paintings. The last of the suite of three rooms shows a projection of the chapel’s wall-mounted altarpiece painting, The Resurrection of the Soldiers, an astonishing clutter of crosses, people and recumbent mules at the moment of the realisation of eternal peace. Despite the Salonikan setting the top of the canvas shows a distant track over the hills, presumably leading to heaven, that looks very like the countryside around Spencer’s beloved Cookham.

The painted depictions of various banal tasks become an antidote to the horrors of battle and its aftermath; the beauty, serenity and pensively recollected observations in Spencer’s canvases illuminate the viewer with the artist’s own sense of ‘heaven in a hell of war’. This war memorial shows, instead of heroic battle scenes (as Horace put it, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*), ‘it is sweet and honourable to die for one’s country’), visual representations of soldiers undertaking everyday tasks that Spencer himself described as ‘essentially pacific’. And yet these paintings stand out proudly amongst all the most moving of Great War memorials, a testament to Spencer’s visionary brilliance as an artist and to the ever-poignant shared memory of an increasingly distant war, now a century old.

The exhibition has clearly been a success, averaging a thousand visitors a day and receiving wide press coverage and positive reviews: it is included in a list of the best events commemorating the First World War in *The Telegraph*, 7 January 2014, and Brian Sewell wrote: ‘This exhibition is the first of many to commemorate the Great War. It may well be one of the best’ (*Evening Standard*, 5 December 2013). This gives the Trust huge encouragement to continue programming external exhibitions and publishing associated exhibition catalogues.

David Taylor, Curator of Pictures and Sculpture, National Trust, co-curator of the exhibition with Amanda Bradley, Assistant Curator of Pictures and Sculpture, National Trust

Stanley Spencer: Heaven in a Hell of War is on show at Somerset House in London until 26 January 2014, and then at Pallant House in Chichester from 15 February until 15 June 2014.
RICH, SUMPTUOUS AND INSPIRATIONAL

New catalogues of the oil paintings in National Trust properties

Throughout its properties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland the National Trust has the largest collection of paintings—over 12,500—owned by a single organisation. Now the Trust, in partnership with the Public Catalogue Foundation, has produced six catalogues of the oil paintings in its care. It is the first time that the paintings have been shown all together and in colour, each one illustrated, and in every volume at least 40 full-page plates. The immense task of photographing the paintings in all the Trust’s properties, including those currently closed or only infrequently open to visitors, like the beautiful Derwent Island House, was undertaken by the PCF. Many paintings on loan from donor families and tenants but on public display, as at Antony in Cornwall and Hatchlands in Surrey, are also included. There is a superb variety of international and British Old Masters and a surprisingly large number of modern works of art.

The catalogue volumes each cover a geographical area, and can be bought individually or as a complete set. Each property, whether a cottage or a mansion, a castle or a mill, has a lively foreword by Alastair Laing (the recently-retired Trust’s Curator of Pictures & Sculpture for the last 26 years) and his assistants, which adds insights into the families associated with them. There is also a lengthier introduction which sets the National Trust’s acquisition of pictures into the historical, social, and political context of the 20th century.

Following punitive taxation and two World Wars, fine art collections in historic houses in Britain were under threat of dispersal; but as a result of favourable legislation many came to the Trust in the 1940s and 1950s, including the collection at Waddesdon Manor. Over 40 years ago the Trust’s first Adviser on Pictures, St. John Gore, who had compiled some dozen catalogues in the 1960s, suggested there should be a complete survey. This has finally been achieved.

The first picture to come into the Trust’s care for preservation in perpetuity was actually acquired in 1913. The circumstances were unusual: it was offered by the artist Frank Bramley to the village of Grasmere in the Lake District, funded by public subscriptions from local people. Because of the connection with one of the founders of the then relatively recently-formed organisation, Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, who lived at Allen Bank in Grasmere (now owned by the Trust), it was agreed to accept the gift.

The Trust continues to seek out and acquire works of art that are indigenous or historically significant to its places and people at auction or by private treaty sale. With the help of the Government’s acceptance in lieu scheme (AIL) and support from bodies like the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant, it has acquired whole houses with their contents —examples are Tyntesfield in Somerset, with Bellini’s Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist, and Seaton Delaval in Northumberland. Further paintings have returned to Mount Stewart in Northern Ireland and Nostell Priory in Yorkshire, including Brueghel’s Procession to Calvary, and others came from the Iliffe family estate for Basildon Park. Gifts, bequests and new long-term loan arrangements have recently included the properties and contents of Nuffield Place, Tredgar House and, more unusually, the Historic House Hotels of Hartwell House, Middlethorpe Hall and Bodysgallen Hall. Some private rooms and houses with important paintings, like Goddards in Yorkshire, which doubles as one of the Trust’s offices, have recently opened to the public.

As a charity, the Trust looks after and protects fine works of art. It cares for, conserves and interprets them for the enjoyment and education of everyone. In contrast to most museums and galleries, more than 80 per cent of the Trust’s paintings are on permanent display. The proceeds from the sale of the catalogues will go towards the costs of our continuing work to preserve and provide access to the pictures.

I travelled all over the country gathering together information about the paintings. There were no ‘masterpieces-in-the attic’ discoveries, but thanks to this collation of data and the latest research it has been possible to give many of the paintings a definite attribution—in some cases the artist’s signature was discovered. Also, labels put on the backs of the pictures by their previous owners gave us many clues, and the identities of some sitters have been re-established.
Many of our volunteer room stewards were curious to see me closely scrutinising the paintings with torch and magnifying glass. They often told me that not many of our visitors look at the pictures. However, since the beginning of our nationwide project with the PCF in 2009 many barriers have been removed in the rooms of the Trust’s houses in order to make them more accessible and to enhance the enjoyment of a visit. It is now possible to get up close to paintings and look hard at them. The Trust owns an astonishing variety of different types, techniques and styles of painting; these splendid catalogues will encourage everybody to go and see them in the flesh.

Tania Adams, Pictures and Sculpture Cataloguer and Project Lead for partnership projects with the Public Catalogue Foundation (PCF)

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**ACQUISITIONS**

Arts Council England recently announced the allocation to several National Trust properties of the following items that have been accepted in lieu of inheritance tax:

**KNOLE**

Seven portraits, an antique bust and two sets of English silver candelabra were allocated to Knole. The items comprise a Flemish School portrait of a man, c.1525, previously thought to be Martin Luther; an Anglo-French School portrait of the brothers Coligny, c.1620; a portrait of Sophonisba Anguissola (1532-1625) in old age by Sir Anthony van Dyck; a portrait possibly of Sir Anthony Cope after van Dyck; a portrait of James, 2nd Marquess of Hamilton (1580-1625) by the studio of Mytens; a portrait of King George III by the circle of Sir Joshua Reynolds; a portrait of King George IV by the studio of Sir Thomas Lawrence; a Roman marble portrait head of a statesman or litteratus, late 1st century BC to early 2nd century AD; a set of five silver two-branch candelabra by Augustine Le Sage, London, 1766, after a design by William Kent; and a pair of silver-gilt six-light candelabra and a matching eight-light candelabrum by Paul Storr, London, 1813.

**MONTACUTE**

A group of furniture from Chicheley Hall was allocated to Montacute, where it had been on long-term loan. Most of the items in this group were acquired for Chicheley Hall at the time of its rebuilding and refurbishing by Sir John Chester, 4th Bt (1666-1726) and his son Sir John Chester, 6th Bt (1693-1748). The single most important item is a giltwood and gilt gesso side table incorporating the Chester arms. The group also includes a screen, sofa and ten chairs upholstered with embroidery depicting scenes taken from Ovid.

**MOUNT STEWART**

A group of over 700 items previously on loan has been allocated to Mount Stewart. This includes a portrait of Charles Vane-Tempest-Stuart, 7th Marquess of Londonderry (1878-1949), by Sir John Lavery, a portrait of his wife, Edith, Lady Londonderry (1878-1959), by Philip de Laszlo, two pairs of prehistoric giant Irish deer antlers dug up from the bog on the estate, a Greek stele (450 BC) and the contents of the chapel.

**WADDESDON**

A portrait of Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1808-79) in a gig drawn by a chestnut stallion, by Alfred de Dreux, 1838, has been allocated to Waddesdon Manor. The sitter became the head of the London branch of the Rothschild business empire upon the death of his father, Nathan Meyer Rothschild, in 1836. He also became the first Jewish member of the House of Commons.
SHOES: THE MUSEUM CURATORS’ NIGHTMARE
The Cinderella Project at Canons Ashby explores methods of display

The Shoe Collection belonging to Northampton Museums and Art Gallery (NMAG), Northampton Borough Council (NBC), is the largest collection of shoe heritage in the world. It is designated as being of national and international significance, with more than 12,000 shoes, ranging from Egyptian footwear to contemporary British design, and includes documentary footage and fine art.

However, while the shoe galleries at NMAG are popular, there are often complaints about the light levels. Visitors often find it hard to understand the underlying conservation issues. Shoes form a significant part of the costume collections of a number of museums and art galleries, and their display presents a number of challenges. In the seminal publication *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers* (Riello, Giorgio and McNeil, Peter, 2011: 9) the authors noted:

‘Shoes are a nightmare for museum curators and provide a challenging experience for window dressers. As worn shoes soil very easily, and as their materials (such as leather) tend to corrode more swiftly than woven textiles, the ‘worn’ shoe in the museum can have a slightly forlorn appearance. Even when their provenance is famous, such as the shoes in the Marlene Dietrich Archive in Berlin, they will most likely be abject items of clothing.’

The Shoe Heritage Development Officer at NMAG, Jane Seddon, was interested in addressing these challenges, and initiated discussions with the public, museum professionals, and academics.

A new strategic development plan for the Museum highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the collection both with high profile fashion audiences and with disenfranchised local ones. The Museum sought to learn more about how best to display shoes in order to engage their target audiences, and to embed that learning into the strategy for the shoe collection before a redisplay of the permanent galleries at NMAG in the future.

The NMAG set up the Cinderella Project, and was awarded £47,000 from Arts Council England (ACE) to develop ways to raise the profile of the shoe collection. There were two key goals: firstly, to explore the issues of displaying shoes in engaging ways, and to see whether it would be possible to use these display methods beyond the life of the project; and secondly, to explore the value of raising the profile of the collection with targeted audiences in non-museum contexts, and to assess what impact this might have on the overall long-term support for and interest in the collection.

An Academic Consultant, Dr Natalie McCreesh from the University of Manchester, was appointed to research the theoretical and practical methods of shoe displays in both museum and retail contexts. Natalie worked alongside the Project Officer, Ellen Sampson, who designed and curated three pop-up shoe exhibitions. The project benefited also from external objective evaluation conducted by Finbar Lillis from Credit Works. An evaluation report and film, together with the academic study, are legacies of the project.

The pop-up exhibitions aimed to take the shoes outside the usual constraints of the museum to reach new audiences and engage with different types of visitors; to raise the profile of NMAG; and to work with the pop-up venues to create something new for their visitors. They were created in collaboration with Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire (a National Trust property), Westfield (a large retail centre in London), and the Royal Exchange, London.

The first pop-up, ‘Footsteps through History’, was created in collaboration with Canons Ashby. This property tells the story of the life and times of Victorian Sir Henry Dryden, known as ‘The Antiquary’ because of his fascination with the past; the link with NMAG was particularly appropriate, as he was one of the founders of Northampton Museum. The interiors at Canons Ashby reveal the interests and domestic life of the Vernon family and the wider household. Visitor Operations Manager Laura Malpas made it
clear that the exhibition had to enhance this story. Therefore, the exhibition was designed to have four clear stages.

A cabinet of shoes was set up in Sir Henry Dryden’s Museum Room showing the shoes he had collected himself on his travels as curios. These shoes had been donated to NMAG by the Dryden family, but are now on permanent loan at Canons Ashby.

A trail around the house was created linking portraits of the family with shoes chosen to represent them, using exquisite examples from the 17th century onwards. These shoes were displayed in modern perspex cases below the paintings.

An interactive display was created at a halfway stage in the visitors’ route, a social space in which to reflect on what had been seen so far. This contained two main displays of shoes representing family members and their servants, with an area for children to try on shoes and to draw them, and a place for adults to sit down. This was particularly popular with ‘explorer families’; it generated hundreds of shoe drawings by children which were displayed on a purpose-made board. The evaluation was collected at this point, both on feedback cards which visitors completed, and with face-to-face interviews.

There have always been a few shoes in the house as ‘set dressing’. More were added; for example, period slippers were placed by the fire and shoes left out in the bedrooms. This idea brought life to the characters of the house—it was ‘as if they had just stepped out of their shoes’, said Laura Malpas. For the Christmas opening NMAG lent ice skates and snow shoes to add a seasonal touch.

The theories and findings from the academic research study combined with the visitor feedback were used to evaluate the success of ‘Footsteps through History’. Overall the exhibition was very successful. The Arkenford visitor survey showed a 6% increase in ‘Very Enjoyable’ scores, which was probably directly attributable to the exhibition, as the increase coincided with the exhibition dates. Of the visitors surveyed, 72% indicated that the pop-up would encourage them to visit NMAG itself, a very promising result for raising the exposure of the museum.

Staff and volunteers were well briefed and actively engaged in the integration of shoes from the NMAG collection into Canons Ashby House and the Dryden family story. The volunteers reported that they enjoyed the training workshop and talking to visitors about the shoes, and felt that the shoes added depth to Canons Ashby’s story. This may have contributed to raising Canons Ashby’s ‘volunteer recommendation’ score, which also increased by 6%.

The local media were excited by the exhibition: BBC Radio Northampton presented both live and recorded broadcasts from Canons Ashby, and there was significant local print media and online press coverage, as well as much social media activity. This resulted in increasing visitor numbers well ahead of the property’s target, and enhanced sales in the shop and tea rooms.

In the academic study, the key results were those relating to how the shoes were displayed and the type of display that visitors found most engaging. When asked which of the different shoe displays they preferred, visitors reported that the displays linked to the portraits and those placed in situ around the house were most popular. Visitors felt that these shoes helped to develop the characters and personalities in the story. For example, Sir Henry was a keen gardener and kept gardening equipment handy in his book room, expecting his visitors to join in with a little light gardening in any spare moment. ‘His’ boots were placed in this setting on top of a Victorian copy of The Times.

The visitors surveyed were also asked if they might have liked to have worn any of the shoes. Over half of the responses had an emotive element, either specifically relating to how it might feel to wear the shoes, or relating the shoes back to the character they were representing. This is particularly interesting in relation to a theory that suggests that visitors forget context but remember things tied to their own biographies or personal agendas (Falk, J.H., and Dierking, L.D., Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning, AltaMira Press, CA. 2000). For visitors to answer emotively indicates that they considered how it would feel to wear the shoes, thus translating the information presented to them back into something they could relate to and understand. Most visitors would not have had direct experience as being the Lady or Lord of a great house, nor indeed the life of a servant, but most people will have had the experience of wearing comfortable and uncomfortable shoes. Interestingly the Arkenford ‘emotional impact’ score also showed an increase over the period of the exhibition.

This collaborative exhibition between Northampton Museums and Arts Gallery and a National Trust property was wholly beneficial to both parties, raising visitor and volunteer satisfaction at Canons Ashby and highlighting the profile of NMAG and its collections. The exhibition also provided the academic research study with some vital findings that can be applied in other museum and historical house contexts. For example, the provision of a social space where visitors can ‘step out’ of their tour to relax and consider what they are looking at has proved to be a valuable element of their visit. But at the heart of visitor engagement is a desire to be hooked in with a fascinating story. Adding personalities and characters brings a historic house to life. Using visual objects, such as shoes, gives a sense of familiarity, allowing visitors a way of connecting to concepts that may otherwise be alien to them.

Dr Natalie McCrach PhD
Laura Malpas, Visitor Operations Manager, Canons Ashby

A full copy of the evaluation is available. Please contact: Laura.Malpas@nationaltrust.org.uk, or view it at www.northampton.gov.uk/homepage/4941/case-studies
The impact of the great chamber at Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, owes much to the highly unusual space that was created in the early 17th century. A pre-existing barrel vault was replaced with a soaring quadripartite vault, a design highly unusual in an English country house, although not dissimilar to contemporary Scottish examples such as Craigievar or Moray House, Edinburgh. A plethora of decorative plasterwork covers the entire surface of the ceiling in typically Jacobean fashion and the centre of the ceiling tapers downwards, finishing in an enormous open-work pendant. So large is this feature that it could not have been possible to make it from plaster; the elaborate volutes terminating in human heads must have been carved in timber.

The ceiling design, made up of interlocking squares and barbed quatrefoils, is laid out in broad ribs enriched with running ornament. Tiny animals, real and imaginary, birds, and even a mermaid, can be seen among the looping stems that blossom with leaves, flowers, seed-pods and acorns. Most of the available space between the ribs is filled with floral sprays whose thin scrolling tendrils bear both pomegranates and thistles, the latter in recognition of the arrival of the Stuart monarchy in England in 1603.

All this detail is not easy to appreciate immediately because above the fireplace a huge coat-of-arms, now tinctured, tends to dominate and distract the eye. The arms of Sir John Dryden and his third wife Honor Bevill are displayed in the barbed quatrefoil above the fireplace on a thicker layer of plaster, suggesting that the coat-of-arms was inserted after their marriage in 1632.

In spite of their lack of colour, the full-face female busts who stare down at us from the other three barbed quatrefoils around the central pendant are quite as well-deserving of our attention (Fig. 1). Their highly ornate head-dresses and bejewelled apparel indicate that they are women of distinction, but it has not so far been possible to identify them precisely. Until the engraved source from which they were copied has been tracked down it is difficult to be certain whether they are taken from a set of female warrior queens, Nine Female Worthies, goddesses, or sibyls.

Whoever they are intended to represent, their appearance is striking and highly individualized in terms of coiffure, head-dress, jewellery and costume. Once encountered they are not easily forgotten; and those who have visited Hardwick House, Oxfordshire or Dorton House, Buckinghamshire (1626) will experience an instant shock of recognition. The three faces are unmistakably identical, although the roundels are set in varied surrounds, and their presence at Hardwick House provides a possible clue to their group identity. At Dorton and Hardwick...
the awesome females are accompanied by profile heads of males dressed in armour. They do not all seem to belong to a single set, as the surrounds are different, but at Hardwick these men are helpfully labelled, their names having been added by more than one chisel. Joshua and Julius Caesar are familiar as two of the Nine Worthies, but Jeroboam (Jeroboam) makes an unexpected appearance. Even more surprising is the identification of a fourth head as Fama: the personification of Fame is typically shown as a female figure. But if one regards Joshua, Jeroboam and Julius Caesar primarily as victorious generals from the Bible and classical antiquity, Fame could be lauding them as exemplars, celebrating their military exploits. If this reading seems plausible, then the three women might also be notable warriors, perhaps biblical, mythological or historical, such as Judith, Penthesilea or Artemisia, maybe a retrospective homage to Elizabeth I’s success in the war against Spain.

Although the roundels have been cast from the same moulds one should not rush to the conclusion that the same plasterer’s workshop was responsible for all three sites. The wooden moulds used to produce such casts were expensive to produce and had a long life, frequently outlasting more than one owner. Moreover, the same carver might produce repeat moulds of the same design for different plasterers. However, a closer examination of the plasterwork at the three houses reveals many additional connections, suggesting that there was a single plastering workshop in the South Midlands in the early decades of the 17th century that was responsible for them all.

A design based on barbed quatrefoils and squares was one of the most popular formats for a decorative plaster ceiling during the Jacobean period, whether the ceiling was flat (Hardwick), coved (Dorton), or vaulted (Canons Ashby). Roundels could sit happily in the centre of such an arrangement, leaving room for a variety of surrounding ornament. At Hardwick a border of enriched rib encircles each bust, with winged cherub heads placed at the cardinal points (Fig. 2, page 15). Highly ornamented, chunky strapwork cartouches, each one different, provide the setting at Canons Ashby, while at Dorton the framing cartouches have become frillier but more repetitive.

The winged cherub heads at Hardwick have already been mentioned; at Dorton and Canons Ashby they are used to fill the half-quatrefoils around the edges of the ceilings, although at Dorton their wings have had to be clipped to fit the space available (Fig. 2, page 15).

At all three houses an attenuated stem waves its way along the ribs, providing shelter for a great variety of flora and fauna (although at Dorton these appear on a different ceiling from the roundels). Repeated items include a bushy-tailed hound bounding towards a hare (Fig. 3, page 16), while a (?winged) fox is about to pounce on a feathery-tailed bird (Fig. 4, page 16). The tiny
mermaid with comb and mirror sitting opposite a sea monster (Fig. 5) is not repeated at Dorton, although various sea-dragons are introduced there.

Despite the re-use of moulds it is striking how the skill of the plasterer produced ceilings that look quite different, so that each client could be satisfied that his plasterwork was unique.

One aspect of the carving of the moulds appears highly individual. All three female busts have different hairstyles but the treatment of their thick, wavy tresses is distinctive. It is just as obvious in the tight, bunched curls of the cherub heads, which leads one to think that it is a stylistic idiosyncrasy of the carver rather than something copied from the engraved sources from which he was working. This certainly suggests that many of the wooden moulds were supplied by a single carver, whether or not he was a permanent member of the workshop team.

Such an accumulation of repetitions between houses that are geographically quite close certainly seems to point to there being a single plastering workshop within the South Midlands in the early decades of the 17th century. It probably consisted of different personnel over the years, which would account for the disappearance of some motifs and the introduction of others. Setting the plasterwork at Canons Ashby within the context of similar work in the region allows one to appreciate the skill and ingenuity with which plasterers of the day were able to combine a variety of cast elements to such imaginative effect that every ceiling looked different.

Dr Claire Gapper, Independent Scholar

Photographs of the plasterwork at Hardwick are included courtesy of Sir Julian Rose, and those of Dorton by kind permission of Ashfold Preparatory School, the current owners of Dorton House.

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**ACQUISITIONS**

**CASTLE COOLE**

Two portraits in black, white and red chalk of Anne Elizabeth Honoria Gladstone (1841–1919), later Countess of Belmore, have been donated to Castle Coole, where they had been on loan since 1971. The first shows the sitter as a girl and is inscribed ‘E.U. Eddis 1847’ (inv. no. 227843). The second, by the circle of George Richmond, shows her as a young woman (inv. no. 227844).

**CROOME COURT**

A late 19th-century glass design representing the arms of the Earls of Coventry, painted in reverse by Albert Gammon, has been purchased at auction at Gorringes, Lewes, East Sussex.

**NYMANS**

A watercolour costume design by Oliver Messel (1904–78) for the cook in the Masterson and Twain production of Jean Anouilh’s play *Traveller Without Luggage*, staged at the ANTA Theatre, New York, 1964, has been donated to Nymans by Sandra Church via the Royal Oak Foundation. The theatre designer Oliver Messel was the second son of horticulturalist Lieutenant-Colonel Leonard Messel, who bequeathed Nymans to the National Trust.

**TRELISSICK HOUSE**

At the July 2013 auction organised by Bonhams of the privately owned contents of Trellisick House the National Trust purchased 125 lots in order to give visitors to the house an impression of the Copeland family’s interests and activities—they were the owners of the Copeland-Spode ceramics works in Stoke-on-Trent—and to provide a flavour of life at Trellisick during the 19th and 20th centuries. The lots purchased comprise 14 portraits, 27 other pictures and works of art, 28 ceramic items, 3 items of silver, 32 pieces of furniture and other household objects, 3 textile items and 18 lots of books. The garden and the house at Trellisick were donated to the National Trust by Ida Copeland (1876–1964) in 1955. Work is now under way to determine how best to show Trellisick to the public and to integrate the house and the new acquisitions with the well-known garden.

**WALLINGTON**

A collection of items with a Wallington provenance, including furniture, a piano, ceramics, silver, Punch and Judy puppets, bronze busts, and watercolours has been purchased by private treaty.

**WIMPOLE HALL**

A collection of 19th-century books and ephemera associated with Wimpole and in particular with Charles Yorke, 4th Earl of Hardwicke (1799–1873), has been purchased at auction at Cheffins, Cambridge. The collection includes a copy of *The Court of Oberon … A Drama* (1831), with an inserted list of members of the Yorke family who acted in this play at a private theatrical performance, the *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition* (4th edition, 1851), as well as an invoice from Mr Scott to Lord Hardwicke dated 26 July 1871 for a large quantity of Château Margaux.

Emile de Bruijn, Registrar (Collections & Grants)