



WADDESDON  
Rothschild Collections



# A Rothschild Treasury

Opens 7 September 2019

**More than 300 rarely seen objects spanning two millennia to be revealed in new, permanent gallery at Waddesdon**

From a 1st-century cameo of Augustus Caesar's grandson, to a microscope used by entomologist and flea expert Charles Rothschild, via jewellery given as presents from Queen Victoria, to objects bearing Nazi inventory numbers, gold boxes, silver and jewellery – a new gallery with a permanent display of items that celebrates the Rothschild family as collectors of extraordinary objects will open at Waddesdon Manor on 7 September 2019.

Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild built Waddesdon at the end of the 19th century in the style of a French Renaissance château, suggesting that he had a keen eye on the past. He was part of a long line of remarkable Rothschild collectors, a dynasty which continues to collect to this day.

The collections range from paintings and decorative arts to textiles, books and manuscripts - but this new, purpose-built gallery in Ferdinand's magnificent house in rural Buckinghamshire celebrates a different passion. It showcases over 300 precious objects dating from 100AD to the 20th century, all of which have personal connections to family members past and present.

More than three-quarters of them are on loan from the private collection and will be on public display for the very first time. All the objects have been cleaned and, in some cases, conserved as part of the gallery project, leading to a wealth of new knowledge and discoveries.

Densely displayed and beautifully lit, in bespoke museum-style cases, *A Rothschild Treasury* represents an intense and absorbing opportunity to enjoy and understand objects made from rare and precious materials, including spectacular jewellery and intricate clocks. All have a profound significance to the Rothschild family, and tell the fascinating story of its European history – indeed around 20 objects still bear the Nazi inventory numbers applied when they were confiscated from the French Rothschilds during the Second World War.

*A Rothschild Treasury* not only reflects the Rothschild passion for collecting, but also the tradition of the *Schatzkammer*. These treasure rooms which celebrated the riches of the earth and natural world, first created in European courts from the 16th-century onwards, so inspired Baron Ferdinand that he created his

own 'Renaissance Museum' in Waddesdon's Smoking Room (a collection which was subsequently bequeathed to the British Museum as the Waddesdon Bequest).

Visitors first catch a glimpse of *A Rothschild Treasury* (constructed in what were formerly the servants' quarters) through a stone archway and ironwork grille. A glowing wall of opulent, colourful, alluring objects, different shapes, different sizes, and different materials will greet them, some set against a backdrop of embroidered textile. The sense of sumptuousness builds inside the small gilded, barrel-vaulted room, lined on either side with lit cases containing a cornucopia of objects, precious and intriguing. It will be an intense experience – as if stumbling upon an Aladdin's Cave.

All the objects have an intimate connection to the Rothschild family, from Baron Ferdinand's watch chain and Miss Alice's seal, to classical coins collected by James de Rothschild and the microscope used by Lord Rothschild's grandfather, the naturalist Charles. Particular highlights include an amber casket made in the 17th-century in the Baltic, a mounted nautilus shell that belonged to the renowned collector William Beckford, an 18th-century Mughal jade vase encrusted with precious stones and the Nelme Cup, a unique gold standing cup made in England in 1727. The tradition of collecting extraordinary objects continues today, exemplified by pieces such as a rare Italian 17<sup>th</sup>-century silver basin, added recently by the present generation and on public display for the first time.

A shared passion amongst the Rothschilds was collecting gold boxes. With their exquisite design, craftsmanship and connections to the 18th-century French court (including one associated with Madame de Pompadour), the boxes also reflect the individual tastes of other members of the family beyond Ferdinand, whose collections have added to Waddesdon over the years. This includes Ferdinand's sister and heir, Miss Alice and their cousin Baron Edmond of the French branch of the family, part of whose collection was inherited by his son, James. Amongst the display in *A Rothschild Treasury* are the gold boxes that remained after an infamous burglary that took place in 2003 - this will be the first time that they have been on public display since.

Many pieces of personal jewellery on display for the first time are included in *A Rothschild Treasury* from both the English and French branches of the family, including a pearl tiara from the Parisian jewellers Boucheron, commissioned by Baron Edmond for his daughter-in-law Dorothy de Rothschild's wedding basket in 1913. Some of the emeralds were probably acquired by the Baron at the sale of Empress Eugenie of France's personal jewellery in 1872.

The Rothschilds were, and continue to be, active in sponsoring archaeological excavations. Following expert conservation work, a small but important collection of ancient jewellery and glass from the Middle East, acquired by Baron Edmond in the late 19th century, will form part of the displays. Included in this section are an exceptional 1st-century cameo of Augustus Caesar's grandson, Gaius, and a 2nd-century openwork gold engagement ring excavated in Tienen, Belgium. The most important objects from this excavation were sold to benefit the poor of the town, and Baron Edmond purchased these two objects.

For horologists, *A Rothschild Treasury* also devotes a section to showing how time can be mastered through scientific knowledge. Two astronomical clocks combine complex mechanisms with skilful metalworking and precious materials, and include the earliest known clock by Jeremias Metzger (1563). A clock by the renowned watchmaker Abraham-Louis Bréguet (1747-1823), owned by Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836), founder of the English branch of the family, is also on display for the first time.

The Rothschilds as a family were discerning collectors of 16th and 17th-century silver and silver-gilt –

indeed Baron Ferdinand's 'Renaissance Museum' contained many extraordinary examples. But subsequent generations continued to explore this vein, including Miss Alice's silver toys, and an extensive collection of silver for wine assembled by the present family, which complements the Rothschild's association with the great Rothschild vineyards in Bordeaux.

The mastery of turning minerals into fantastical shapes and man's ability to harness the beauty of nature in inventive and innovative ways held a particular fascination for the Rothschild family, and is well represented in *A Rothschild Treasury*. The art of shaping stones that are incredibly hard and difficult to carve is reflected in a magnificent table centrepiece in the form of a temple attributed to Valadier, with rock crystal Solomonic columns. Also in the spotlight is a rock crystal cup and onyx ewer, and several pieces of Chinese carved jade. The richness of the natural world is also reflected in objects made from amber and lacquer, mounted in gold or gilt-bronze.

Lord Rothschild says: *"I am truly delighted that the Treasury, the culmination of a long-held family ambition to extend the displays at the Manor, is opening this autumn. Many objects from my family's collections, all with significant and personal connections, are being put on show for the first time.*

*The display is a homage to the Rothschilds who created and have cared for Waddesdon, and an expression of the ties which bind earlier generations to the present. I also hope that this new room, with its extraordinary and varied contents, will surprise, delight and intrigue our visitors as they explore. Even for those who think that they know Waddesdon and its collections well, there is much to discover."*

Pippa Shirley, Head of Collections at Waddesdon Manor, says "The Rothschilds were collectors extraordinaire, and this small, intense room is a microcosm of an aspect of their taste, curiosity and discernment. But behind the beauty of the objects themselves is something more. Baron Ferdinand described how what drove him as a collector was what he called 'association' – the histories and connections of everything he acquired. This is nowhere more true than in *A Rothschild Treasury*, where every object tells a story – of its making, of its passage through time and of the family thanks to whom we can now enjoy it."

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

Waddesdon Manor was built at the end of the 19th century by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in the style of a French early 16th-century château. Baron Ferdinand was an inspired collector and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, English portraits and other decorative arts. When Ferdinand died in 1898, he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice. Upon her death the house passed to her great-nephew, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father Baron Edmond's great collection. In 1957, in order to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run Waddesdon through a family charitable trust under the chairmanship of Lord Rothschild. [More here.](#)

For more information visit [www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk), like WaddesdonManor on Facebook, follow @WaddesdonManor on Twitter and waddesdonmanor\_nt on Instagram.

#### **IMAGES**

**Two-handled cup** c 1675-c 1700. Waddesdon (Rothschild Family). Photo ©Waddesdon Image Library, Mike Fear  
**Amber Casket**. Schreiber, 1660. Photo © Waddesdon Image Library, Mike Fear  
**Boucheron Tiara** 1913. Waddesdon (Rothschild Collection). Photo © Waddesdon Image library, Mike Fear

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