



‘Putting the house to bed’: Waddesdon’s unique Christmas tradition

Saturday 16 November 2019 – Sunday 5 January 2020 (11am-6pm, Wednesday to Sunday)

Step into a world of festive, musical splendour, as Waddesdon - the Rothschild house and garden in Buckinghamshire - is transformed, inside and out.

While the rest of the country begins unearthing dusty boxes of decorations from the attic, preparations for Waddesdon’s Christmas visitors start in a less conventional way; by ‘putting the house to bed’.

Waddesdon’s unique festive preparations begin in October, when rooms throughout the house are meticulously cleaned and packed away, ready for essential conservation work to take place. As part of this annual process 54 shutters are closed, 349 plates, knives and forks are packed away, and 140 light switches are turned off.

Light, dust and humidity are the main challenges for the preservation of the outstanding art collections at Waddesdon. Light fades organic materials such as textiles and veneered furniture, changes in humidity can cause shrinkage and cracking, and dust sticks to objects it covers, meaning more surface-damaging effort is needed to remove it.

Rooted in tradition, Waddesdon’s long-standing conservation practices stem from ‘Miss Alice’s Rules’, housekeeping standards that were introduced by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild’s sister, Alice, in the early 20th century. Forming the basis for the National Trust’s conservation guidelines, it is thanks to these painstaking practices that Waddesdon’s collection remains in such an excellent condition, although the routines have changed somewhat in recent years, given the scale of the Christmas celebrations that take place today.

Jane Finch, Head Steward at Waddesdon, says, *‘Until 2003 Christmas wasn’t a big affair here at Waddesdon. We closed for five months each winter, allowing a team of 15 housekeepers several weeks to pack the collection away for vital conservation and cleaning.*

Today, we welcome around 190,000 visitors during the festive period, meaning processes have to be much more streamlined to ensure everything is ready. We now pack up the House in two days, then set about transforming the interiors with 13 Christmas trees, 3,000 baubles and 30,000 pea-lights to bring festive sparkle to the Manor.’

Christmas at Waddesdon

Waddesdon has many connections to the world of music, and this Christmas visitors will be welcomed by the smell of pine and the sound of classic carols, as they step into decorated rooms inspired by traditional tunes and memorable Christmas hits.

Once inside, visitors will be greeted by the glowing colours of illuminated manuscripts and a sparkling 15ft fir tree, while the familiar tune of 'O Christmas Tree' fills the air. A magical moving star, accompanied by 'We Three Kings', will guide visitors through the East Gallery and past the famous musical Elephant Automaton, towards rooms filled with festive surprises.

After wandering up a winding staircase bedecked with seasonal greenery, visitors will discover a tree made from sheet music - carols old and new. Waddesdon's three Sèvres porcelain ship vases, of which only ten exist in the world, take centre stage in the White Drawing Room, themed for 'I Saw Three Ships', while a full Christmas feast, complete with a flaming figgy pudding, will be laid out in the Billiard Room.

Outside, the gardens will be illuminated with sparkling lights and colour, as Waddesdon's longest ever Winter Light trail fills the grounds. Beneath coloured tree canopies and bushes draped in sparkle, stroll under the stars and be dazzled by playful light features such as floodlit disco balls and a cascading river of light. The Manor's façade will come to life, with coloured lights dancing in time to much-loved Christmas classics, illuminating the building's distinctive architectural features and roofline.

New for this year are giant fairy-light baubles at the Stables Courtyard, providing a unique Instagram frame. Inside the Coach House, an immersive light installation with orbs of light rising and falling from floor to ceiling will entertain the whole family.

Christmas Fair

Saturday 16 November - Sunday 22 December 2019, 11am-6pm Wed-Sun

Longer than ever before, Waddesdon's spectacular Christmas Fair, with over 80 wooden chalets, is a shopping experience not to be missed. Artisan producers, makers and craftsmen will offer the very finest and, in many cases unique, gifts.

The fair will be set against the backdrop of the floodlit North Front of the Manor, decorated with 20ft tall Christmas trees. Visitors will be able to browse gifts and enjoy seasonal delicacies as festive melodies fill the air.

Pippa Shirley, Head of Collections & Gardens says, *'Christmas is a magical time at Waddesdon, as the house, its collections and beautiful grounds come to life in an entirely different way. We love seeing families and children enjoying its unique atmosphere, sparkle, glamour and fun. The Manor looks like a fairy-tale castle at the best of times, so at Christmas it is truly enchanting. The great Rothschild traditions of hospitality and attention to detail are very much to the fore, from the welcome at the front door to the care and attention that the chefs put into making our own mincemeat.'*

For more information about Christmas at Waddesdon Manor, visit www.waddesdon.org.uk and follow @WaddesdonManor on Twitter and Facebook, and @waddesdonmanor_nt on Instagram.

OPENING DATES, TIMES AND TICKETS

Christmas at Waddesdon, Sat 16 Nov 2019 – Sun 5 January 2020. Closed 23-26 December.

Christmas Fair, Sat 16 Nov – Sun 22 Dec 2019.

Grounds and Fair 11am-6pm, Wed-Sun

Prices: £11 Adult, £5.50 Child, £27.50 Family (up to 2 adults + 3 children)

National Trust members & Under 5: Free

Decorated rooms in the House, open 11.30am-6pm (last entry 5.30pm)

Wed – Fri House + Grounds: £26 Adult, £14 Child, £66 Family (up to 2 adults + 3 children)

National Trust: £5 Adult, £2.50 Child, £12.50 Family (up to 2 adults + 3 children)

Sat & Sun House + Grounds: £28.50 Adult, £15.25 Child, £72.25 Family (up to 2 adults + 3 children)

National Trust: £7.50 Adult, £3.75 Child, £18.75 Family (up to 2 adults + 3 children)

Under 5: Free

Advance booking of timed tickets is essential for all house visitors.

Bookings 01296 820414 or www.waddesdon.org.uk

[Media images can be downloaded here](#)

Watch or embed: Christmas at Waddesdon YouTube <https://youtu.be/jrOkxwojLbU>

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NOTES TO 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, as a weekend retreat where he could entertain friends and family. Baron Ferdinand was an inspired collector and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of English and French paintings, French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, and other decorative arts. When Ferdinand died in 1898 he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice. Upon her death the house passed to a French cousin, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father, Baron Edmond's, great collection. In 1957, to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run Waddesdon on behalf of the National Trust through the Rothschild Foundation under the chairmanship of Lord Rothschild. More at www.waddesdon.org.uk/about-us/press/notes-for-editors/

IMAGE CAPTIONS

Waddesdon Manor at Christmas. Image © National Trust, Waddesdon Manor/ Hugh Mothersole
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