

# TRUST GAINS PRESTIGIOUS NEW STATUS AS AN ACCREDITED MUSEUM AUTHORITY

*We will continue to pursue our core goals of excellence in conservation and curatorship*

The National Trust has become the UK's largest accredited museum authority with over 149 properties formally registered as museums, representing nearly 8.5 per cent of the national total.

The Trust submitted a national application to become a museum authority last year and is now approved by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council – the governing body for the sector. The move is a public acknowledgement of the professional standards of curatorship and conservation that have long been an objective and hallmark of the Trust.

The geographical breadth of Trust properties and the wealth of its collections mean that no country in the world has so much art and artefacts spread so widely across its territory, throughout its regions and away from its cities. With remotely sited houses, the Trust extends the reach of fine art and collections across England, Wales and Northern Ireland far from London, Cardiff and Belfast. Eighty per cent of the population live within 20 miles of a Trust property.

Yet there has long been a debate within the Trust as to whether museum status was a desirable goal. That concluded when the Trust decided to lodge a national application for accredited authority status in order to streamline individual property applications and to ensure that Trust properties meet the exacting standards required.

Some 100 Trust properties were registered between 1992 and 1995, and a further 50 between 1995 and 2004.

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## MAKING FACES: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STYLE AT BENINGBROUGH HALL

The National Trust has been in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery at Beningbrough Hall, near York, since 1979, when over 100 portraits by some of Britain's most acclaimed artists were lent to the house. Thanks to more than £400,000 of HLF funding, the display is being refurbished for launch on 3 June. The innovative new exhibition *Making Faces – Eighteenth Century Style* will open rooms for the first time and use interactive galleries to help bring portraits to life.

## THE GREAT GOLD BUCKLE RETURNS TO SUTTON HOO

Revealed during the famous excavations of 1939, the gold buckle is one of the most intricately decorated artefacts discovered at the burial site of the Anglo-Saxon kings of East Anglia. Thanks to the British Museum, it returns to Sutton Hoo this year as a centrepiece of a brand new exhibition in the Treasury Room.

## DYRHAM PARK CREATING A NEW GARDEN

Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Land Fund buying Dyrham Park for the nation, the National Trust is undertaking a garden improvement project this year. Thanks to archaeological excavations, and a Kip engraving (1712), remnants of the former formal garden have been identified. Plans to improve the garden will embrace the formality of the early 18th-century garden juxtaposed with elements of later Victorian landscaping.

## TRUST LEADS CAMPAIGN FOR HISTORY, HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION

Leading heritage organisations are planning a mass public awareness campaign this summer aimed at getting the public to express its commitment to history, heritage and conservation.

A media campaign will be launched in late June and a climax is planned in or around the season of heritage events – the Trust’s AGM and the annual Heritage Counts dinner – at the end of the year. In between, hundreds of properties will be spreading the message of the importance of history to the nation’s quality of life in mass participation events.

In addition, the campaign will be linked to the annual Heritage Open Days in early September. The partnership involves the National Trust, English Heritage, the Historic Houses Association, the HLF and myriad other organisations grouped as Heritage Link.

## POPE’S CABINET CONSERVATION AT STOURHEAD

One of the most ostentatious items in the Trust’s furniture collection undergoes urgent conservation work in 2006. The façade of the Pope’s Cabinet is composed of intricate marquetry using coloured marble, porphyry, jasper and other rich materials. It is a 17th-century product of the Ducal Workshops in Florence. Intense anticipation surrounds the project, which offers the first chance to look inside the cabinet’s hundreds of hidden drawers since it was last moved over 100 years ago. The conservation work will be carried out in view of visitors at Stourhead.

## SKY TO SHOW TEN NATIONAL TRUST PROPERTIES

Sky’s highbrow satellite channel, Artsworld, is recording 10 programmes profiling National Trust properties under the title *National Trust: National Treasures*. The broadcasts, expected to air this summer, will be among the very first shown in the UK on High Definition Television.

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Under the requirements, the Trust needs to ensure that it meets criteria for governance including an approved forward plan, procedures for development of staff, and audited accounts. The Accreditation Standard also puts a strong emphasis on consultation with users, display and interpretation requirements, and active support for formal and informal learning. It also demands well regulated collections management criteria and conservation programmes.

Sarah Staniforth, Historic Properties Director at the Trust, said: ‘Accreditation is a real way of ensuring that our core goals of “deepening understanding of our cultural heritage” and “putting learning at the heart of everything we do” are fully achieved.

‘What is more, it also gives us independently fixed criteria and auditing to ensure that our high standards of conservation and curatorship are maintained.’

Taken together, the Trust’s collections represent the most diverse range of art works and artefacts. They range from Van Dycks to chamberpots, and from Samurai armour to the largest collection of lawn mowers, and include objects from all over the world, collected over seven centuries.

By housing these in unique locations, above all in the original places where they were gathered, the Trust remains determined to ensure that the eccentricities of their collectors and the singular and idiosyncratic qualities of the places they inhabit have been maintained. A prime example of this is Snowhill manor in the Cotswolds where the late Charles Paget-Wade had accumulated some 20,000 objects, from oriental costumes to childrens’ toys. These were recently cleaned and conserved and returned to their original locations in a conservation effort that lasted almost two years.

## acquisitions

### **Newton House, Dinefwr**

*Henrietta & George Rice as Children* by John Russell, a master of pastel painting, c1770.  
Acquired February 2006

### **Ham House**

Writing table, c1770.  
Will return to the Library, where it was located until about 1950.  
Acquired February 2006

### **Penrhyn Castle**

Two miniatures by Charles Basébé.  
One is of George Hay Dawkins-Pennant, who built the Norman-revival castle in the 1820s/30s.  
Acquired at auction December 2005

### **Charlecote Park**

Pair of silver salvers by Crouch & Hannam, 1787.  
Engraved with the arms of the Rev John Hammond, who inherited Charlecote in 1786.  
Acquired at auction October 2005

### **Adress**

Managaia adze & Maori quarter staff.  
Part of a dispersed ethnographical collection of George Ensor III, owner of Adress.  
Acquired at auction July 2005

### **Dunham Massey**

*Lord Grey of Groby & Sir Henry Mainwaring* by Nathaniel Dance, 1760.  
Commemorating their staunch relationship.  
Acquired July 2005

### **Knole**

64 piece Sèvres dessert service, 1770.  
Originally commissioned by the 3rd Duke of Dorset, a sophisticated collector.  
Acquired at auction June 2005

## soapbox

### A MODEST PROPOSAL: A FUTURE FOR THE NATIONAL TRUST

**Alain de Botton**

Philosophy teaches us that most lives and projects go wrong because of a lack of focus on one's goals. So, if I were, by magic, allowed to run the National Trust, it would make sense to begin by looking at what it is essentially for. My suggestion is that at heart, this is an organisation devoted to beauty. The Trust wants to preserve and ideally increase the amount of beauty, natural and man-made, that there is in our lives.



With the help of such a definition, we're in a position to audit what the Trust currently does – as well as suggest areas it should logically expand into (and get out of).

A key aspiration of the Trust is to allow lots of people to witness the beautiful things it administers. This generally means opening properties for a few hours on most days. But this approach crudely underestimates the depth of our interest in beauty. It's hard to make proper contact with a beautiful thing in a few hours. A residential stay can be key. I therefore propose that a great number of Trust houses be turned into hotels.

The Trust properties would eschew television or golf courses and instead focus solely on extending the happiness available through beauty. These hotels would be up-to-date in terms of comfort, and would, for a brief period, allow visitors to get in touch with the original purpose and charm of most Trust houses: residence. Converting Trust properties would quickly endow this country with what it has always lacked: a network of decent hotels.

Food should be looked at too. It must be a work of art, and therefore all places where one can eat should become beacons of culinary excellence in the regions in which they sit.

The shops are next on the list. Most people are drawn to the shops because they have been moved by the beauty around them. However, most items sold in Trust giftshops aren't the sort of things that the builders of the beautiful properties would ever have considered beautiful.

The Trust should therefore reconceive its giftshop arm as a retail business dedicated to offering the most beautiful objects of art, furniture and furnishings this age can produce. It should, for example, aim to take a large chunk of business away from Conran, Sothebys, Cork Street and David Linley.

If the Trust is rather mocked by the creative classes of this country, it is perhaps because it fails to see a connection between what creative people do now and what they did in the past. It overdramatises the value of the past – and so importantly demeans the present. It can,

without cruelty, be described as an organisation devoted to the dead. It should instead be less concerned with restoration and more with creation. The Trust should stop respecting things just on the basis that they're old.

Instead it should enter into a plethora of creative partnerships with modern-day architects, artists, writers, furniture makers, cooks and craftsmen: the sort of people to whom it pays enormous respect historically, but to whom it doesn't devote much attention now except in a restorative capacity. These creative partnerships would bring new life-blood to the organisation.

In practical terms, it would mean the most intelligent modern architects would be involved in renovating, remodelling and tinkering with the buildings of the past in the Trust's portfolio. Good quality furniture makers would be invited to study and learn from the great pieces in the Trust's collection. Its furniture collection would soon be highly coveted worldwide. Painters, especially landscape and figurative ones, would be invited to work around the properties and learn the right lessons from the collections. And writers would be allowed to have long residences at selected properties.

MY VISION IS THAT THE TRUST SHOULD FUNCTION AS THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST ACADEMY ON BEAUTY

Another function of the Trust has been to catalogue and write about beauty. However, in this task it has been hampered by a misplaced desire to seem democratic. Therefore, many brochures and publications engage in that most snobbish of all activities: attempting to sound normal. They should instead be unapologetically elitist and obsessive in their interest in beauty.

This has been an attempt to add some deliberately disruptive ideas to the mix and to persuade the NT to leave what business gurus awkwardly but usefully call 'the comfort zone'. My vision is that the Trust should function as the country's largest academy on beauty – working with scholars and writers and artists in all fields.

*Alain de Botton's new book 'The Architecture of Happiness' is published by Penguin on the 20th of April.*

◆ See letters on page 6. What do you think? ABC Bulletin solicits feedback to [abc@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:abc@nationaltrust.org.uk)

## arts

### TRUST PRESERVES PENRHYN CASTLE MASTER PAINTINGS FOR THE NATION UNDER THE GOVERNMENT AiL SCHEME

An outstanding collection of paintings on display at Penrhyn Castle, near Bangor in North Wales, has been acquired by the Trust under the government's *Acceptance in Lieu (AiL)* scheme.

The paintings, worth well over £4m, are amongst the very finest works in the Principality and are part of the largest private collection in north Wales. They include among others outstanding works by the Venetian Renaissance master Palma Vecchio, the important seventeenth-century Dutch master Willem van der Velde, Allan Ramsay, George Romney, John Rogers Herbert, and Carl Haag.

Joan Bayliss, property manager at Penrhyn Castle, said: 'We welcome this announcement as it's very important that paintings such as these are preserved forever for the nation. They could easily have been sold and gone overseas.'

The importance of the AiL scheme, part of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984, is underlined by the fate of another important work from the Penrhyn collection by the seventeenth-century Dutch master Jan Steen. After the Trust failed to raise the £8.1m asking price, the picture, which had hung for 150 years in the castle, was acquired by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in what is said to have been their most expensive acquisition.

Penrhyn Castle itself was sold to the nation shortly after the Second World War when the family – whose fortune came from Welsh slate and Jamaican sugar – were faced with large death duties. Lord Penrhyn's daughter Alice managed to catalogue the entire collection, providing what is still the main source of reference for the paintings. The Director of the National Gallery, Sir Walter Armstrong, advised Alice and was called in to help when George, 2nd Lord Penrhyn re-hung the paintings by school.

## buildings

### CRAGSIDE – TURNING THE LIGHTS BACK ON

The National Trust undertakes its largest ever electrical rewiring task at Cragside in Northumberland this year. Rewiring is just one part of a major five-year, £6 million regeneration programme at the ingenious home of Victorian inventor and industrialist Lord Armstrong. Built on a rocky crag high above the Debdon Burn, the house was a wonder of its age and the first place to be lit by hydro-electricity.

### DINEFWR RESTORATION

A £3 million restoration project is under way at Dinefwr Park in Carmarthenshire, one of Wales's most historic country estates. A partial shell for many years, the estate's mansion centrepiece Newton House is receiving a major refurbishment, with rooms being furnished to illustrate the property's distinguished history. A surprise discovery of original ceiling mouldings in the billiard room is helping conservators achieve an authentic recreation of the house's 17th-century interior.

## collections

### NATIONAL TRUST HISTORIC PROPERTIES PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

A comprehensive visual history of architecture in the National Trust's care will be available for study, free of charge, through a new website. Comprising over 72,000 images of houses, gardens, villages and landscape, the archive has at its roots dozens of 19th-century family photo albums, plus the collections of *Country Life*.

The earliest images date from the 1860s, but the largest part of the collection is a photographic survey of every building belonging to the Trust, undertaken over the past twenty-five years.

The archive is a vital resource for Trust curators, and is used to inform conservation, to document changes and to record discoveries made in historic properties – it passed its first major test in aiding the restoration of Uppark after the catastrophic fire of 1989.

A first, limited version of the archive will be available from [www.ntarchive.org.uk](http://www.ntarchive.org.uk) from April and the full archive should be online by the end of the summer.

## lacquer

### CHRISTOPHER ROWELL ON 17th– AND 18th–CENTURY LACQUER AND JAPANNED FURNITURE IN NATIONAL TRUST HOUSES

The National Trust owns many important pieces of Eastern and Western furniture and other objects, which are wholly, predominantly or partly made up from Oriental lacquer. There are also numerous japanned pieces in imitation of lacquer. There is only space here to skim the surface of this exotic aspect of the Trust's vast furniture collection.

As one of the early exports to the West from China and Japan – and as part of a craze for things Oriental – lacquer became popular in the 17th century. It was first imported from Japan in 1542, and was imitated in Europe from the early 17th century. *Urushi*, which is sometimes called 'true' lacquer, is the Japanese name for the resinous sap of *Rhus vernicifera*, but there are other species with similar properties.

As for imitation lacquer, the first book on the subject, *Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing*, was published in 1688 by John Stalker and George Parker, and in 1730 the Martin brothers of Paris patented *Vernis Martin*, which, owing to the clarity, brilliance and toughness of its finish, became the most famous of the European *faux* lacquers.

The earliest collection of lacquer furniture in Trust hands is at Ham House, Richmond, one of the best, most complete, and well documented 17th-century collections in Europe. Two Japanese cabinets are among the first known imports into England. Probably made in Kyoto c1630, they are of superb quality, almost rivalling the famous Van Diemen box in the V&A. They were listed in the Green Closet in 1679.

This is a unique survival of a Charles I cabinet room for the display of small pictures, miniatures and other treasures, and the cabinets may have been there since its creation (1637–9).

TWO JAPANESE CABINETS ARE AMONG THE FIRST KNOWN IMPORTS INTO ENGLAND. PROBABLY MADE IN KYOTO c1630, THEY ARE OF SUPERB QUALITY

The exteriors are decorated with black floral lacquer highlighted with mother of pearl. The exquisite black and red lacquer interiors are unfaded, and the insides of the small drawers are sprinkled with gold, in the *Nashiji* ('pear skin') manner.

Another larger Japanese (?Kyoto, 1650–70) cabinet of very high quality is supported on an elephantine Dutch giltwood stand of c1660. At Ham too are a cabinet, pier glass, table and stands made up in England in the 1670s from Chinese incised lacquer (where the design is carved out of the solid).

Ham also has its fair share of imitation lacquer furniture, underlining the fashion for *Chinoiserie* and *Japonaiserie* throughout the century.

Many National Trust houses have at least one 17th-century Japanese lacquer cabinet, the stands varying in date or type. There are several at Petworth, which would have been surmounted by garnitures from the Duchess of Somerset's collection of Chinese blue and white baluster jars and covers. Another common form is the lacquer chest, again usually with a (low) European stand.

The finest of these is at Chirk Castle. Inlaid with shagreen (sharkskin) and mother of pearl, it was made in Japan, c1600. Powis Castle has an elegant black lacquer chest bearing the gold cipher and ducal coronet of the 2nd Marquess (titular duke) of Powis. Powis also has a rich seam of Chinese and Japanese export lacquer pieces dating from c1750–1803, products of empire building in India by Clive of India and his son.

No brief account of the Trust's holdings of lacquer would be complete without a mention of Robert Adam's and Thomas Chippendale's contribution to the later 18th-century fad for *Chinoiserie*. In the Chinese-wallpapered State Bedroom and Dressing Room (1769–71) at Nostell Priory is a complete set of furniture in green English *faux* lacquer, incorporating beds hung with painted 'Chinese' silk, chairs, chests of drawers, wardrobes, mirrors, and window pelmets, supplied by Chippendale in 1771.

At Osterley, there is a superb lacquer commode (c1775) designed by Adam and probably made by Chippendale, the neo-Classical version of an earlier form of *bombé* lacquer commode of c1760, represented by the magnificent pairs at Powis and Uppark, attributed to Pierre Langlois.

Finally, there are the two wardrobe chests in blue and white *faux* lacquer at Anglesey Abbey and Blickling, c1775, which may have belonged to the legendary 18th-century actor, Thomas Garrick.

(From 'Views' 2006, the NT's internal staff magazine)

## insider

### THE INFORMATION GAP THAT *ABC Bulletin* HOPES TO FILL

'Not another newsletter ...' I am afraid so, but in part at least as a result of popular demand.

For some time, the Trust has noted that our most knowledgeable supporters – fine arts scholars, the art market, architectural historians, conservators, museums and galleries, collectors and connoisseurs – want more information on our core activities.

While the National Trust magazine targets a mass membership, now of around 3.4m, those who want more in detail on our conservation and curatorial work have been less well served. Some have even questioned, erroneously, whether we still care for scholarship and skills in the way we did.

Of course we do. As the critically acclaimed 1,000-page *Manual of Housekeeping* proved at its publication last year, our standards are probably higher than they have ever been. And all of the strenuous efforts of recent years to put our administration in good order – now thankfully completed – have been made precisely in order to ensure that the highest possible quality of work remains the

hallmark of the Trust. As a result, next year there will be an extra £10m available for conservation.

So what does the *ABC Bulletin* plan to do? First, we want to report some of the highlights of our day-to-day work, news of our acquisitions, our thinking about key issues like interpretation, our partnerships with sister organisations, and news of forthcoming scholarly work including publications and lectures.

We do not intend to publish long, scholarly papers – that is for elsewhere – though we will tell you where to find them. The principal aim is to give you plain, easily digestible information about the range of our work.

Finally, we want to foster debate. Hence *Soapbox* will allow our constructive critics an opportunity to advise, warn or recommend. I hope our letters page will expand and that you will write to tell us what you would like to see more of. Please encourage colleagues and friends to send us their email addresses and we will get the *Bulletin* to them. It can also be downloaded from the Trust's website.

**Ivo Dawnay**

## letters

Dear Sir

*Devotion to beauty is certainly one of the National Trust's purposes, and promoting this for the benefit of the nation is another. But the question that Alain de Botton raises is for how many, and for how long?*

*His proposition to turn 'a great number of Trust houses into hotels' would enable a few people to experience beauty and the use of houses for their original residential purpose. There are two houses where this is already possible: Cliveden and Ickworth which are both leased as hotels.*

*The real question is what is the place of exclusivity in an inclusive world? Looking to the original purpose of the Trust, and Octavia Hill's aspiration to create 'green rooms' by making available land of natural beauty near cities, we have already made the decision to make beauty, natural or man-made, available for as many people as possible. So we have no plans to turn any more of our houses into hotels.*

*But where I am at one with Alain de Botton is with his words about the need for the Trust to make creative partnerships. These already exist with cooks creating delicious food from local produce, and craftsmen and women who carry out conservation work to the highest standard at our properties. We should do more to find artists and craftsmen to make beautiful things to sell in our shops. And I agree with the desirability of commissioning new work.*

*There are a few recent examples, like Carl Laubin's Capriccio of National Trust properties, painted to mark the centenary in 1995, and the cob summerhouse at Marker's Cottage in Devon, built as a millennium project. Artists, craftsmen and writers in residence is an inspiring suggestion which the Trust will take seriously. They, and we, can show that beauty is neither elitist nor exclusive.*

**Sarah Staniforth**

Historic Properties Director

◆ We welcome letters on any subject

## what's up

### 19th-Century Interiors – study day

10 May – Waddesdon

Waddesdon's head of collections Pippa Shirley and National Trust furniture curator Christopher Rowell host this annual joint seminar on country house collections and their display.

### This is tomorrow – at 2 Willow Road

4 May through season – at 2 Willow Road  
Exhibition profiling the part played by Goldfinger and his collaborators, Victor Pasmore and Helen Phillips, in the seminal Modernism exhibition of 1956 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

### It is simply not dusting!

6 April – Ightham Mote, Kent

Expert lecture and demonstration offering an insight into the planning and management of conservation cleaning, specialised housekeeping.

### Apollo's National Trust edition

The annual National Trust edition of *Apollo*, the fine art magazine, is available now; please contact *Apollo* to purchase a copy.