



WADDESDON  
Rothschild Collections

## ALICE'S WONDERLANDS

23 March – 30 October 2022

The Manor, Coach House Gallery and Eythrope Walled Garden

**This spring Waddesdon celebrates the life, collections and legacy of Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922). The Buckinghamshire château is marking the centenary of her death with an exciting programme of exhibitions and displays that highlights her role in its history.**

Alice lived and entertained alongside her brother, Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898), who built Waddesdon, and inherited the Manor and its contents after his death. A passionate and expert gardener and great collector of Renaissance and 18<sup>th</sup>-century art, Alice's story has often been overshadowed by that of her brother. But not any more...

Alice was a unique figure during her lifetime. She remained independent and in control of her personal fortune, in contrast to and spite of contemporary expectations. She built a life around collecting and gardening, while successfully managing her multiple estates during a turbulent period of history. Her determination, intellect, generosity and sense of humour inspired loyalty in her friends and employees. Indeed, even Queen Victoria is said to have referred to her as 'The All Powerful'.

In short, Alice was a perfectionist; no detail, however small, escaped her notice and such were her preventative conservation methods that they became known unofficially as "*Miss Alice's Rules*", which are still recognised as good practice and in some cases still in use at the Manor a century after her death. It was even reported that she had told Edward VII to keep his hands off the furniture.

Alice was part of that final generation of country house owners in Britain who were able to enjoy high society before life changed irrevocably with the First World War. The conflict affected her, her staff and her estates deeply, not least as she was part of a European family and herself was born in Frankfurt.

The displays and exhibitions will explore how Alice put her own stamp on Waddesdon, both before and after the death of her brother Ferdinand. They will shed light on how she lived in her other properties at Eythrope and in London, and also Grasse in the South of France, where she built a villa and welcomed guests including Queen Victoria. They will include rare works of art from delicate textiles to paintings and Sèvres porcelain to early English earthenware and Renaissance enamels and maiolica.

Displays throughout the Manor will highlight Alice's contribution to the collection and its display, with a part-recreation of her sitting room, which no longer exists having been repurposed following her death in 1922. This will be a unique opportunity to experience a specific moment in time at Waddesdon, based on rare early colour photographs from c. 1910. This was where Alice gathered her favourite objects and the display will include treasures from her collection such as a chest of drawers by Jean-Henri Riesener, Sèvres porcelain and one of the 17th-century Savonnerie carpets, originally commissioned by Louis XIV for the Long Gallery at the Louvre, which has been in storage for almost 30 years.

In the Exhibition Room visitors will be able to gain an understanding of Alice as a collector, with a display in one space that brings together the breadth and variety of her interests, which included paintings, pastels, ceramics and objets de



vertu spanning from the Renaissance to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She assembled an important collection of arms and armour to decorate the Bachelors' Wing at Waddesdon, the part of the house used after dinner, which housed the Smoking and Billiards Rooms, as Ferdinand's furnishings of those spaces had been given to the British Museum as the Waddesdon Bequest.

The Family Room display provides an overview and exploration of Alice's life, family and friends, based on new research. It will include correspondence, sketchbooks, catalogues, estate management records and photographs.

Gardening was one of Alice's great passions. Her cousin and friend, Constance Battersea said '*at her call, the flowers seemed to spring from the earth*'. Alice's letters often demonstrated her deep horticultural knowledge, on matters ranging from soil types to plant diseases. She even pioneered new gardening techniques, such as three-dimensional carpet bedding, introduced innovative methods of animal husbandry and raised prize-winning stock on the estate farms.

Her horticultural legacy is explored in an exhibition in the Coach House and brings to life the principal gardens she created, in particular, her own gardens at neighbouring Eythrope, which embody her vision of productivity and beauty. It will include reproductions of an extraordinary set of colour diascopes of the Waddesdon and Eythrope gardens from around 1910, an early experiment with 3D imaging, as well as photographs of her estate in Grasse. The display features a three-dimensional planting frame alongside examples of her garden statuary.

The exhibition and displays will also have an online presence, with digital catalogue entries, blogs and a film. Waddesdon is also offering a programme of special tours, including an opportunity to visit the Walled Garden at Eythrope, which has been painstakingly restored by Lord Rothschild and gives a real sense of the perfection and horticultural standards which were so characteristic of Alice.

Pippa Shirley, Director of Collections and Gardens at Waddesdon says: "*Alice has long been a familiar part of Waddesdon's story, but one of the most exciting aspects of this exhibition is the new light we are casting on her life and influence. Less well known than she deserves to be, she was an extraordinary woman who stands out in an age dominated by men, intelligent, exacting, discerning and independent, and whose spirit lives on in a place which may have been created by her brother but which she made very much her own. From her gardens and her collecting to her friendships and her love of dogs, everything she did was characterised by energy, passion and a legendary attention to detail. The Centenary is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate her individualism and bring an intriguing personality to a wider audience.*"

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

Open Wed-Sun 23 March – 30 October 2022

*Alice's Wonderlands* – House & Grounds admission required, free for National Trust members, but booking essential for timed entry to the House. <https://waddesdon.org.uk/your-visit/tickets/>

**Alice Charlotte de Rothschild** was born in Frankfurt in 1847, the youngest child of Anselm and Charlotte von Rothschild. The family later moved to Vienna, but after the early death of her mother, when Alice was only 12, she spent the rest of her youth shuttling between different relatives. This peripatetic existence produced a self-reliant, determined character, who lived independently and never married. She moved to England when she nineteen years old. She and her brother Ferdinand, who had lived in England since 1860 were neighbours on Piccadilly in London, and purchased adjoining estates in Buckinghamshire. With Eythrope completed in 1879, and Waddesdon Manor in 1883, their country social lives were deeply intertwined. Alice died in 1922, in Paris, an independent perfectionist to the last.

**Waddesdon Manor** was built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 at <https://waddesdon.org.uk/about-us/press/notes-for-editors/>

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

**[HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING ON THIS LINK](#)**

Portrait of Miss Alice de Rothschild, 1866. Photo © Waddesdon Image Library, Josef Lowy

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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