



**WADDES  
MANOR**



## ***The Rothschild Story***

**Opens 22 April 2026**

**The remarkable lives and stories of members of the Rothschild family, who created and cared for Waddesdon Manor, are revealed in a new permanent exhibition at the historic Buckinghamshire house.**

It charts the extraordinary narrative of a family that emerged from Frankfurt's crowded Jewish ghetto during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and, within a single generation, had become one of Europe's leading banking dynasties. Designed by award-winning architects ZMMA, the new spaces use both traditional, digital and interactive interpretation and are fully accessible to all audiences. Even for those who know the Manor, the two rooms will offer a new perspective on a familiar story. The main family members are brought to life through photographs and character objects, which exemplify aspects of their personality or passions. The building itself can be explored in new ways through touch models and the themes of collecting show the full breadth of activity, from 18<sup>th</sup>-century art to natural history, wine and horseracing. The Manor is often seen as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century house, but here, the exhibition extends to today, with the later sections looking at the transition from private house to public visitor attraction, visited by over 300,000 visitors annually, and the vital role of the Rothschild Foundation in managing it on the National Trust's behalf.

As the exhibition vividly shows, the family were not only hugely important financiers, but distinguished collectors of works of art and renowned philanthropists. The display also reveals the role played by

women in the family, who whilst at first were not involved in the business, were none-the-less a quietly powerful influence behind the scenes, not only running their homes but in the wider community where their charitable projects included hospitals, education for girls and support for Jewish causes. Several of them later established themselves as leading horticulturalists and scientists, perhaps most famously Dame Miriam Rothschild, (1908–2005), a renowned zoologist, naturalist and academic, who was also a codebreaker at Bletchley Park during World War II and whose work in parasitology and environmental conservation was far ahead of its time.

The exhibition also explores the origins of the Rothschild family in the Judengasse in Frankfurt and the way in which the five sons of Mayer Amschel Rothschild established the business which was to become the international Rothschild bank. Mayer's wife, Gutle (1753–1849) remained all her life in the family house in the ghetto, and Ferdinand had fond memories of visiting his great-grandmother there. Visitors will be able to see and touch a model of the Judengasse and explore the Rothschild's extended family through an interactive family tree. They will also gain an understanding of the context of the family's wider world, which for a major Jewish family included the enduring challenges of antisemitism.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Rothschilds had moved an unimaginable distance from their restricted origins in Frankfurt. They owned over 40 great houses across Europe including seven estates in Buckinghamshire, which was sometimes referred to as 'Rothschildshire' as a result. The builder of the Manor, Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839–1898) settled in England in his 20s and married his English cousin Evelina, in 1865. She died in childbirth the following year, and Ferdinand never remarried. He devoted himself to art and collecting, buying the Waddesdon estate when his father Anselm died in 1874.

Here he built a country retreat, somewhere that he could entertain friends and family for weekends – his famous "Saturday to Monday" parties. Guests included royalty and aristocracy, amongst them Queen Victoria, her son Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) who was a frequent visitor, and several Prime Ministers, politicians, writers and artists. Later, Sir Winston Churchill visited and was said to have enjoyed smoking a cigar on the balcony of his room. Ferdinand died unexpectedly on his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday and left the house and its collection to his sister Alice de Rothschild (1847–1922).

Alice was a natural choice as Ferdinand's heir, and the exhibition recounts her influence. She had come to England to join him after Evelina's death and then bought the adjoining estate at Eythrope the year after he bought Waddesdon. Fiercely independent, like her brother, she was a highly discerning collector, with interests ranging from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to Renaissance art and objects to arms and armour and even pipes and matchboxes. She was also a passionate and knowledgeable horticulturalist and created two exceptional gardens at Eythrope and at her Villa Victoria in the South of France, as well as adding to the glories of the Manor garden, all of which exemplified her insistence on the highest of standards in everything she did.

It was during Alice's lifetime that the country experienced the tumult of World War I. The exhibition also guides visitors through the Manor's history during this time of social flux and military conflict. During World War I the ornamental flowerbeds were dug up and replanted with root vegetables. Prisoners of war were housed in the gardener's accommodation and hay produced on the estate was supplied to the Home Office. It was a particularly traumatic time for such a pan-European family, divided by national borders and the conflict but united by their family bonds.

By the time World War II broke out, Alice had died, in 1922, and had left the Manor and estate to her French great-nephew James de Rothschild (1878–1957) and his English wife Dorothy (1895–1988). The exhibition traces this period of history, and how James and Dorothy had to adapt their lives. They first offered the Manor as a hospital, but this was rejected due to fears that the elaborate interiors ‘would be a first-class harbourer of germs’. However, it was accepted as a temporary home for over 100 children, evacuated from Croydon in South London, to escape the Blitz. As awareness grew of the horrors of the Holocaust, James and Dorothy and other members of the family became increasingly focused on the plight of Jewish communities in Europe. Alongside James’s political influence as an MP, they also offered a home to a group of Jewish children from an orphanage in Frankfurt who came to safety in Waddesdon Manor, and retained their links with the Rothschilds throughout their lives.

In the post-war period, James and Dorothy recognized that the world, and society, had changed, and that they were not immune to the pressures of running a historic house. The displays explore how in 1946, James started negotiations with the National Trust. Although his generous offer was not immediately embraced, it was finally accepted on James’s death in 1957. Dorothy oversaw the transition from private home to a house open to the public, and chaired the first Management Committee, thus laying the foundations for the management of the Manor today by the Rothschild Foundation. And it was Dorothy who chose Jacob, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Rothschild (1936–2024) the distinguished financier, philanthropist and cultural leader to take over from her as Chair, ushering in another period of great change for the Manor, beginning with the Centenary Restoration in 1992–6 when the house was entirely refurbished, rewired and re-plumbed, new spaces created for displays, exhibitions and events and the magnificent 19<sup>th</sup>-century garden restored.

The final sections of the display take visitors up to the present day. They examine the role of the Rothschild Foundation, now chaired by Jacob’s eldest daughter Dame Hannah Rothschild, DBE, both in running the Manor but also in its wider philanthropic work and its grant-giving in arts and culture, the local community in Buckinghamshire and in nature and the environment. It also offers an insight into the Rothschild Foundation’s sister charity, Yad Hanadiv, and the role that the family has played both now and historically in Israel.

Waddesdon today is still a dazzling showcase for an extraordinary collection of art and antiques, but it also represents the ambition, resilience and dynamism of the family over more than two centuries.

Dame Hannah Rothschild, CBE, Chair of the Rothschild Foundation says: *“Next year, the Manor celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of its foundation stone, marking the building of a great house and an enduring commitment to stewardship and philanthropy that continues to this day. I am immensely proud of my family’s part in this and that the Manor now stands as an emblem not only of our history but of the work of the Rothschild Foundation and its support of art and culture, community and the environment, causes which have been close to our hearts and are more important now than ever.”*

Pippa Shirley, Director of Waddesdon says: *“The story of Waddesdon is one of extraordinary family vision and commitment. Ferdinand’s in creating it, Alice’s in adding new dimensions to it, James and Dorothy’s in preserving it through challenging times and setting it up for its new public life in partnership with the National Trust, Jacob’s for reinventing and reimagining it and opening its doors to wider audiences and now Dame Hannah to lead it into the future. This Rothschild spirit and energy has been constant from the beginning and I hope that these newly redisplayed rooms give our visitors a sense of not only the history and personalities but the present and wider context and influence of the family and gives them a glimpse into their varied worlds.”*

[Please find hi-res images for the exhibitions here](#)

Opening at the same time as The Rothschild Story is the exhibition **Saved for the Nation; masterpieces by Sir Joshua Reynolds** and **American Connections**, a trail through the house celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

**Saved for the Nation** is a celebration of the transfer to the National Trust of two of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s (1723–1792) greatest masterpieces – the portraits of *Joanna Leigh, Mrs Richard Bennett Lloyd* (1175–1776) and the impresario and actor *David Garrick, torn between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761). These great paintings have both been on loan to the Manor from the Estate of the late Lord Rothschild but now belong to the National Trust thanks to the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. This generous gift has prompted a new look at both paintings and exploration of stories which have not been told before at Waddesdon Manor, including David Garrick’s heritage as a Huguenot refugee and the Lloyd family’s background as owners of plantations in America worked by enslaved people.

[Saved for the Nation Hi-res images can be found here](#)

**American Connections** – this fascinating new exhibition trail marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence – the founding document of the United States of America. The trail explores aspects of American history and culture through a selection of objects from the Manor’s collections, including paintings, sculpture, books, ceramics and silver. It also explores some of the long, complex, sometimes contested, histories which inform the present-day United States and its position in the wider world.

[American Connections Trail hi-res images here](#)

**Waddesdon Manor** – The Manor is a world where art, history and nature meet. Created from 1874 by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, the French-inspired chateau was built for beauty, for a collection, and for entertaining. Today its doors open wide to reveal masterpieces and curiosities, sweeping gardens, and hidden corners, stories that surprise and details that delight.

The Manor is a living emblem of the work of the Rothschild Foundation: a family charitable trust active in the arts, community, nature and sustainability. In partnership with the National Trust, Waddesdon Manor is more than a historic house: it is a place of imagination and encounter, sustained and kept vibrant for each generation. A place to escape the everyday – a home for discovery and an inspiration for the world – where you can truly experience the extraordinary. 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.

**ZMMA** is a multidisciplinary creative practice which draws on its expertise in architecture, exhibition design, graphic design, interpretive planning and storytelling. We create transformational projects for historic and heritage sites, museums, galleries, cultural organisations and their diverse collections. We engage deeply with architecture and objects, exploring their history and narrative threads to provide richly immersive and inspiring visitor experiences. ZMMA works in a contemporary and sustainable language with space, materials and light to connect audiences with art and heritage in innovative, atmospheric and engaging ways. We create new buildings, renew and regenerate historic buildings, rediscover and transform spaces, display and interpret collections, making them accessible, enjoyable and memorable for all. Contact: [ZMMA](#)

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Please contact Tracy Jones at Brera PR - [tracy@brera-london.com](mailto:tracy@brera-london.com) / 01702 216658 / 07887 514984 / [www.brera-london.com](http://www.brera-london.com)