

## = Waddesdon Bequest =

In 1898 Baron Ferdinand Rothschild bequeathed to the British Museum as the Waddesdon Bequest the contents from his New Smoking Room at Waddesdon Manor . This consisted of a wide @-@ ranging collection of almost 300 objets d 'art et de vertu which included exquisite examples of jewellery , plate , enamel , carvings , glass and maiolica . Earlier than most objects is the outstanding Holy Thorn Reliquary , probably created in the 1390s in Paris for John , Duke of Berry . The collection is in the tradition of a schatzkammer or treasure house such as those formed by the Renaissance princes of Europe ; indeed , the majority of the objects are from late Renaissance Europe , although there are several important medieval pieces , and outliers from classical antiquity and medieval Syria .

Following the sequence of the museum 's catalogue numbers , and giving the first number for each category , the bequest consists of : " bronzes " , handles and a knocker ( WB.1 ) ; arms , armour and ironwork ( WB.5 ) ; enamels ( WB.19 ) ; glass ( WB.53 ) ; Italian maiolica ( WB.60 ) ; " cups etc in gold and hard stone " ( WB.66 ) ; silver plate ( WB.87 ) ; jewellery ( WB.147 ) ; cutlery ( WB.201 ) ; " caskets , etc " ( WB.217 ) ; carvings in wood and stone ( WB.231 ? 265 ) . There is no group for paintings , and WB.174 , a portrait miniature on vellum in a wooden frame , is included with the jewellery , though this is because the subject is wearing a pendant in the collection .

The collection was assembled for a particular place , and to reflect a particular aesthetic ; other parts of Ferdinand Rothschild 's collection contain objects in very different styles , and the Bequest should not be taken to reflect the totality of his taste . Here what most appealed to Ferdinand Rothschild were intricate , superbly executed , highly decorated and rather ostentatious works of the Late Gothic , Renaissance and Mannerist periods . Few of the objects could be said to rely on either simplicity or Baroque sculptural movement for their effect , though several come from periods and places where much Baroque work was being made . A new display for the collection , which under the terms of the bequest must be kept and displayed together , opened on 11 June 2015 .

## = = History = =

The collection was started by Baron Ferdinand 's father , Baron Anselm von Rothschild ( 1803 ? 1874 ) , and may include some objects from earlier Rothschild collections . For Mayer Amschel Rothschild ( 1744 ? 1812 ) of Frankfurt , who began the prominence of the family , his business dealing in coins , " antiques , medals , and objects of display " preceded and financed his banking operations , and most Rothschilds continued to collect art .

At least one of the objects now in the British Museum can be seen in a cabinet in the background of a family portrait from 1838 ( left ) , the year before Ferdinand was born . In his Reminiscences Ferdinand recalled his excitement as a child when he was allowed to help wrap and unwrap his father 's collection , which spent the summers in a strongroom when the family left Vienna for a country villa .

The period after the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars offered tremendous opportunities for collectors of the decorative arts of the medieval and Renaissance periods . These categories were very little valued by the art market in general , and metalwork was routinely sold for its bullion value alone . Some of the older objects in precious metal in the collection may have first been received by the family as part of banking transactions ; ownership of such pieces had always been partly a way to get some use from capital . Ferdinand records several complaints that his father did not make more use of his opportunities , but in his last years Anselm began to expand his collecting range , and it was he who bought both the Holy Thorn Reliquary and the Ghisi Shield . This golden age for collectors had passed by the time Ferdinand inherited his part of his father 's collection in 1874 , which was also the year he bought the Waddesdon estate and began to build there . Ferdinand continued to expand the collection until his death in 1898 , mostly using dealers , and expanding the range of objects collected . In particular Ferdinand expanded to around fifty the ten or so pieces of jewellery in his father 's collection .

The New Smoking Room built to hold the collection was only planned from 1891 , and the collection

was moved in there in early 1896 , less than three years before Ferdinand 's death . Good photographs allow an appreciation of how the objects were displayed , in glassed cases and on open shelves around the walls , over doors , and over the small fireplace , which had an elaborate shelved chimneypiece in wood above . Several objects , including the Casket of Saint Valerie , were on tables away from the walls . Comfortable seating was plentiful , some upholstered with pieces from medieval vestments , and there were framed photographs and houseplants . The room is now refilled with objects from the same period though of somewhat different types , and visitors to Waddesdon Manor can see it from the doorway .

The room , with the adjoining Billiards Room , is the only reception room at Waddesdon Manor to follow the French Renaissance style of the exterior ; the other rooms are in broadly 18th @-@ century styles , and contain a magnificent collection of paintings and furniture centred on that century . The segregation of the collection was part of the concept of what has been called the " neo @-@ Kunstkammer " , adopted by some other very wealthy collectors of the period . The Renaissance Room at what is now the Wallace Collection and the collection of Sir Julius Wernher were other examples formed in England over the same period . The neo @-@ Kunstkammer aimed to emulate the collections formed during the Renaissance itself , mostly by princely houses ; of these the outstanding survivals were the Habsburg collections in Vienna , Prague and Ambras , as well as the treasuries of the Grünes Gewölbe in Dresden , the Munich Residenz and Kassel . Unlike those collections , contemporary and recent objects were not included .

Baron Ferdinand was a restless and , by his own account , unhappy man , whose life was blighted by the death of his wife after giving birth to their only child , who was stillborn ; this was in 1866 . Thereafter he lived with his unmarried sister Alice . As well as filling positions in local public life , he was Liberal MP for Aylesbury from 1885 until his death , and from 1896 a Trustee of the British Museum , probably at the instigation of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks .

Ferdinand recognized and welcomed the drift of high quality art into public collections , which had begun in earnest during his time as a collector . While most of his assets and collections were left to his sister Alice , the collection now forming the Bequest and , separately , a group of 15 manuscripts now in the British Library , were left to the British Museum . He had already donated some significant objects to the museum in his lifetime , which not are not counted in the Bequest .

Baron Ferdinand 's bequest was most specific , and failure to observe the terms would make it void . It stated that the collection should be

placed in a special room to be called the Waddesdon Bequest Room separate and apart from the other contents of the Museum and thenceforth for ever thereafter , keep the same in such room or in some other room to be substituted for it .

These terms are still observed , and until late 2014 the collection was shown in the rather small room 45 , in a display opened in 1973 . In 2015 the Bequest was moved to Room 2A , a new , larger gallery on the ground floor , close to the main entrance on Museum Street . Until the Chinese ceramics collection of the Percival David Foundation moved to the British Museum the Waddesdon Bequest was the only collection segregated in this way .

= = Renaissance metalwork = =

Much of the collection consists of luxury objects from the 16th century . Large pieces of metalwork in silver or silver @-@ gilt make an immediate impression in the display , and these were designed to dazzle and impress guests when used at table , or displayed in rows on a sideboard with shelves like a modern bookcase or Welsh dresser . Many are very heavily decorated in virtuoso displays of goldsmiths ' technique ; rather too heavily for conventional modern taste . They are certainly ostentatious objects designed to display the wealth of their owner , and in many cases were designed to be appreciated when held in the hand , rather than seen under glass .

There are a number of standing cups with a cover , many from Augsburg and Nuremberg ; these were used to drink a toast from to welcome a guest , and were also a common gift presented in politics and diplomacy , and by cities to distinguished visitors . Their decoration sometimes reflected the latest taste , often drawing from designs made as prints and circulated around Europe , but there

was also often a very conservative continuation of late Gothic styles , which persisted until they came to be part of a Neugotic ( " Neo @-@ Gothic " ) revival in the early 17th century . The largest object in the bequest with a specifically Jewish connection is a silver @-@ gilt standing cup made in Nuremberg about 1600 , but by 1740 belonging to a Jewish burial society in Bratislava , as a Hebrew language inscription records .

Apart from pieces purely in metal , a number are centred on either hardstone carvings or organic objects such as horns , seashells , ostrich eggshells , and exotic plant seeds . These " curiosities " are typical of the taste of the Renaissance " age of discovery " and show the schatzkammer and the cabinet of curiosities overlapping . A different form of novelty is represented by a table @-@ ornament of a silver @-@ gilt foot @-@ high figure of a huntsman with a dog and brandishing a spear . There is a clockwork mechanism in his base which propels him along the table , and his head lifts off to show a cup , and he would have been used in drinking games . There are separate figures of a boar and stags for him to pursue , though not making a set ; these can also function as cups .

One of the most important objects in the collection is a parade shield , never intended for use in battle , designed and made by Giorgio Ghisi , who was both a goldsmith and an important printmaker . It is signed and dated 1554 . With a sword hilt , dated 1570 and now in Budapest , this is the only surviving damascened metalwork by Ghisi . The shield is made of iron hammered in relief , then damascened with gold and partly plated with silver . It has an intricate design with a scene of battling horseman in the centre , within a frame , around which are four further frames containing allegorical female figures , the frames themselves incorporating minute and crowded subjects on a much smaller scale from the Iliad and ancient mythology , inlaid in gold .

Other major pieces are sets of a ewer and basin , basin in this context meaning a large dish or salver , which when used were carried round by pairs of servants for guests to wash their hands without leaving the table . However the examples in the collection were probably hardly ever used for this , but were intended purely for display on sideboards ; typically the basins are rather shallow for actual use . These were perhaps the grandest type of plate , with large surfaces where Mannerist inventiveness could run riot in the decoration . They were already expensive because of the weight of the precious metal , to which a huge amount of time by highly skilled silversmiths was added . The Aspremont @-@ Lynden set in the bequest is documented in that family back to 1610 , some 65 years after it was made in Antwerp , and weighs a little less than five kilos .

= = Renaissance enamels = =

Though the Waddesdon Bequest contains two very important medieval objects with enamel , and much of the jewellery and decorated cutlery uses enamel heavily , the great majority of the items that can be called " enamels " are in the French 16th @-@ century style that was led by painted Limoges enamel , rather than the champlevé enamel for which Limoges was famous in the Romanesque period . The new technique produced pieces painted with highly detailed figurative scenes or decorative schemes . As with Italian maiolica , the imagery tended to be drawn from classical mythology or allegory , though the bequest includes some Old Testament scenes , and compositions were very often drawn from German , French or Italian prints . Enamels were produced in workshops which often persisted in the same family for several generations , and are often signed in the enamel , or identifiable , at least as far as the family or workshop , by punch marks on the back of panels , as well as by style . Leading artists represented in the collection include Suzanne de Court , Pierre Reymond , Jean de Court , Pierre Courtois and Léonard Limousin .

Enamels were made as objects such as candlesticks , dishes , vessels and mirrors , and also as flat plaques to be included in other objects such as caskets . The collection includes all these types , with both unmounted plaques and caskets fitted with plaques . The jolly grotesques illustrated at right are on the reverse of a large dish whose main face shows a brightly @-@ coloured depiction of the Destruction of Pharaoh 's army in the Red Sea . Both designs are closely paralleled , without being exactly copied , in pieces in other collections , notably one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

in New York . The designs are also based on prints , but adapted by the enamellers for their pieces .

The Casket of the Sybils is an elaborate small locking casket with a framework of silver @-@ gilt and gems , set with grisaille panels with touches of gold and flesh @-@ tints . It represents the sophisticated court taste of about 1535 , and was probably intended for a lady 's jewels . Most such sets of enamel inserts have lost the settings they were intended for .

= = Jewellery = =

The emphasis of the jewellery is very firmly on spectacular badges and pendant jewels of the late Renaissance in what is known as the " Spanish Style " that was adopted throughout Europe between about 1550 and 1630 , using gems together with gold and enamel to create dazzling tiny sculptures . These were originally worn by both men and women , but as a collection the Waddesdon group was chosen for display ( and in a specifically male setting ) rather than for wearing , except at the occasional fancy @-@ dress ball , a fashion at the time . The group demonstrate little interest in gemstones and pearls for their own sake . Although such pieces have survived more often than styles emphasizing gem stones and massy gold , which were typically recycled for their materials when fashion changed , the demand from 19th @-@ century collectors greatly exceeded the supply of authentic survivals , and many pieces include much work from that period ( see below ) .

For many of the pieces though it is not easy to place the date or country of manufacture . There is no such difficulty with the most famous jewel in the collection , the Lyte Jewel , which was made in London and presented to Thomas Lyte of Lytes Cary , Somerset in 1610 by King James I of England , who loved large jewels , and giving them to others . Lyte was not a regular at court , but he had drawn up a family tree tracing James 's descent back to the legendary Trojan , Brut . The jewel contains a miniature portrait of the king by Nicolas Hilliard , though for conservation reasons this is now removed from the jewel . Lyte wears the jewel in a portrait of 1611 , showing a drop below the main oval set with three diamonds , which had gone before 1882 . The front cover has an elaborate openwork design with James 's monogram IR , while the back has very finely executed enamel decoration .

One pendant , shaped like a lantern with a tiny Crucifixion inside , was made in 16th @-@ century Mexico , and from comparison with other pieces may originally have included Mexican feather work , a Pre @-@ Columbian art whose craftspeople the Spanish missionaries employed in workshops for export luxury objects .

= = Objects from before the Renaissance = =

The collection includes an eclectic group of objects of very high quality that predate the Renaissance . The oldest objects are a set of four Hellenistic bronze medallions with heads projecting in very high relief , and round handles hanging below . These date to the century before Christ , and came from a tomb in modern Turkey , and were fixtures for some wooden object , perhaps a chest . The heads are identified as Ariadne , Dionysos , Persephone and Pluto . The carved agate body of WB.68 may be late Roman , and is discussed below .

The Palmer Cup is an important early Islamic glass cup , made around 1200 , in Syria or perhaps Egypt , and painted in enamels . In the same century it was given a silver @-@ gilt and rock crystal stem and foot in France . Below a poetic Arabic inscription praising wine @-@ drinking , a seated prince holding a cup or glass is flanked by five standing attendants , two playing castanets and the others holding weapons . As an early enamel @-@ painted image the cup is extremely rare in Islamic glass , although similar images in Islamic pottery of the period are found . There are a handful of comparable early Islamic glass cups with enamel that have survived in old European collections , such as the Luck of Edenhall in the Victoria and Albert Museum , and others in the Grünes Gewölbe in Dresden and the Louvre , and others are recorded in old inventories . Often these were given a new foot in metalwork in Europe , as here . There is also a large mosque lamp

with enamelled decoration from the late 14th century .

Romanesque art is represented by an unusually large Limoges enamel reliquary in the common chasse shape , like a gabled house . This was made in about 1170 to hold relics of Saint Valerie of Limoges , a virgin @-@ martyr of the Roman period who was the most important local saint of Limoges , a key centre for Romanesque champlevé enamel . Her highly visual story is told in several scenes that use a wide range of colours , with the rest of the front face decorated in the " vermicular " style , with the space between the figure filled with scrolling motifs on a gold background . St Valerie was a cephalophore saint , who after she was beheaded carried her own head to give to her bishop , Saint Martial , who had converted her .

There are many more objects in a Gothic style , and as is typical for northern Europe several of these come from well into the 16th century , and should be considered as belonging to the Northern Renaissance . However the most important medieval object , and arguably the most important single piece in the collection , though from the late Gothic period , has nothing strictly Gothic in its style , and represents a very advanced court taste in this respect . This is the Holy Thorn Reliquary , which was probably created in the 1390s in Paris for the Valois prince John , Duke of Berry , to house a relic of the Crown of Thorns . It is one of a small number of major goldsmiths ' works or joyaux that survive from the extravagant world of the courts of the Valois royal family around 1400 . It is made of gold , lavishly decorated with jewels and pearls , and uses the technique of enamelling en ronde bosse , or " in the round " , which had been recently developed when the reliquary was made , to create a total of 28 three @-@ dimensional figures , mostly in white enamel .

In contrast , two highly elaborate metalwork covers for the treasure bindings of the Epistle and Gospel books for the high altar of a large church , probably Ulm Minster , were made around 1506 but are full of spiky Gothic architectural details , although the many figures in high relief are on the verge of Renaissance style .

There are two German statues of saints in wood , about half life @-@ size , from the decades around 1500 , and a larger number of miniature boxwood carvings . These include " prayer nuts " of superb quality from around 1510 to 1530 . These are small wooden " balls " which open up to reveal carvings of religious scenes that fit dozens of tiny figures into a space two or three inches across , and were a fashion among royalty and the wealthy ; they were apparently made in the northern Netherlands . They seem to have often been suspended from belts , or formed part of a rosary ; others still have copper carrying cases . A trick of technique in making them is that the main carved scene is made on a smaller hemisphere , allowing access from behind , which was then set into the main hemisphere .

= = Rock crystal and hardstone pieces = =

There are seven glass vessels in the collection , but a larger number of pieces in transparent rock crystal or quartz , a mineral that might easily be taken for glass . This was always a much more valuable and prestigious material , qualifying as a semi @-@ precious stone . Needing very patient grinding and drilling , it is much harder to work than glass ( though correspondingly less easy to break once finished ) , and the pieces include mounts or bases in precious metal , which none of the actual glass has ; nor are the rock crystal pieces painted . Read 's catalogue groups these and other pieces in semi @-@ precious stone with the objects in gold , as opposed to the " silver plate " , which probably reflects how a Renaissance collector would have ranked them . There are ten pieces in crystal and nine in other stones .

Two crystal pieces are plain oval plaques engraved with figurative scenes , a different tradition going back to pieces such as the Carolingian Lothair Crystal , also in the British Museum . In 1902 Read 's catalogue suggested that " It is to this section that in all probability most eyes will be attracted , as well for the beauty of the specimens as for their rarity and consequent cost " ; if this was the case then , it is probably not so a century later . Some pieces are now regarded as 19th century , or largely so , and Reinhold Vasters , the Van Meegeren of Renaissance metalwork , is now held responsible in several cases .

A wide low crystal vase with cover is engraved with the name of the Mughal Emperor Akbar , and

was long thought to have been German , but sent out to India as a diplomatic gift , as the metalwork mounts are clearly European in style . It is now seen as an original , and exceptionally rare , Mughal crystal carving , to which the mounts were added in the 19th century , perhaps in Paris . However the cartouche with Akbar 's name does not seem to specialists correct for a contemporary court piece , and the vase in India was probably carved after his reign ( 1556 ? 1605 ) , and the name perhaps added even later .

= = Renaissance glass = =

Apart from the two pieces of Islamic glass described above , there are five Renaissance or Baroque glass vessels , all unusual and of exceptional quality . Most are Venetian glass ; one is moulded opaque Bohemian glass ( WB.56 ) with a Triumph of Neptune , and is now dated to the late 17th century ; it is also dichroic glass , which changes colour depending on whether it is lit from the front or behind . There is a very rare goblet in opaque turquoise glass with enamels ( WB.55 ) ; this was to imitate or suggest a vessel in even more expensive semi @-@ precious stone . The late 15th @-@ century Deblín Cup with its cover is one of a small group of vessels made in Murano , Venice in a German or Central European taste , drawing on metalwork shapes used there . It carries a later inscription in Czech urging that the health of the Lords of Deblín , near Brno , be drunk , and was probably the " welcome cup " of the castle there .

= = Italian maiolica = =

The six pieces of painted Italian maiolica , or painted and tin @-@ glazed earthenware , are all larger than the average , and there are none of the dishes that are the most common maiolica shape . The earliest piece is a large statue of Fortuna standing on a dolphin , holding a sail , by Giovanni della Robbia , made in Florence about 1500 ? 10 . This is a rare representative of the Early to High Italian Renaissance in the bequest .

The other pieces are from later in the 16th century . The most important are a pair of large snake @-@ handled vases , nearly 2 foot ( 60 cm ) high , painted with mythological scenes , to which French ormolu bases and lids were added shortly before they were bought in Paris by Horace Walpole for the " Gallery " at Strawberry Hill House in 1765 ? 66 . Ormolu mounts were often added by 18th @-@ century collectors to such pieces , but few have remained in place .

= = Other types of object = =

The collection includes a number of other objects , with a few guns , swords and military or hunting equipment . There is also a German brass " hunting calendar " with several thin leaves that unfold . These include recessed lines filled with wax , enabling the keen hunter on a large scale to record his bags of wolf , bear , deer , boar and rabbit , as well as the performance of his dogs . There is a small cabinet with 11 drawers ( plus other secret ones ) made as a classical facade , or perhaps a theatre stage with scenery ; the decoration is mostly damascened iron , and is 16th @-@ century Milanese work .

Apart from the older woodcarvings discussed above , the bequest includes a number of small mostly German Renaissance portraits as carvings in wood , either in relief or in the round . These are of very high quality and include two miniature busts by Conrad Meit of Philibert II , Duke of Savoy , who died young before the bust was made , and his Habsburg wife , Margaret of Austria . There are also some medallion portraits in very soft stone , that allows fine detail , and one allegorical scene attributed to Peter Flötner .

= = Fakes and revised attributions = =

Any collection formed before the 20th century ( and many later ones ) is likely to contain pieces that can no longer sustain their original attributions . In general the Waddesdon Bequest can be said to

have held up well in this regard , and the most significant brush with forgery has been to benefit the collection . In 1959 it was confirmed that the Waddesdon Holy Thorn Reliquary had been in the Habsburg Imperial Schatzkammer ( " treasure chamber " ) in Vienna from 1677 onwards . It remained in Vienna until after 1860 , when it appeared in an exhibition . Some time after this it was sent to be restored by Salomon Weininger , an art dealer with access to skilled craftsmen , who secretly made a number of copies . He was later convicted of other forgeries , and died in prison in 1879 , but it was still not realised that he had returned one of his copies of the reliquary to the Imperial collections instead of the original , and later sold the original , which is now in the bequest . One of the copies remained in the Ecclesiastical Treasury of the Imperial Habsburg Court in Vienna , where the deception remained undetected for several decades .

In the 19th century a number of types of objects were especially subject to major reworking , combining some original parts with those newly @-@ made . This was especially a feature of arms and armour , jewellery , and objects combining hardstone carvings and metal mounts . This was mostly done by dealers , but sometimes collectors also .

Another object with a complicated and somewhat uncertain history is a two @-@ handled agate vase with Renaissance @-@ style metal mounts , which was acquired , with other similar pieces , for Waddesdon from the Duke of Devonshire 's collection in about 1897 , not long before Baron Ferdinand 's death . Sir Hugh Tait 's 1991 catalogue says of the vase :

" Origin :

( i ) Carved agate : authenticity is uncertain ; since 1899 loosely described as " antique Roman " or " antique " , but recently attributed to the late Roman period , c . AD 400 .

( ii ) Enamelled gold mounts and cover : previously described as " Italian , 16th century " and , subsequently , attributed to Benvenuto Cellini ( 1500 ? 71 ) but now attributed to the hand of an early 19th @-@ century copyist ? before 1834 ? perhaps working in London . "

As he describes , it was Tait who overturned the attribution to Cellini in 1971 .

In a collection of Renaissance metalwork Benvenuto Cellini ( 1500 ? 71 ) represents the ultimate attribution , as his genuine works as a goldsmith are rarer than paintings by Giorgione . In his 1902 catalogue Charles Hercules Read mentions that many of the pendants had been attributed to Cellini , but refrains from endorsing the attributions . A small silver hand @-@ bell ( WB.95 ) had belonged to Horace Walpole , who praised it extravagantly in a letter as " the unique thing in the world , a silver bell for an inkstand made by Benvenuto Cellini . It makes one believe all the extravagant encomiums he bestows on himself ; indeed so does his Perseus . Well , my bell is in the finest taste , and is swarmed by caterpillars , lizards , grasshoppers , flies , and masques , that you would take it for one of the plagues of Egypt . They are all in altissimo , nay in out @-@ issimo rilievo and yet almost invisible but with a glass . Such foliage , such fruitage ! " . However Baron Ferdinand had realized that it was more likely to be by Wenzel Jamnitzer , goldsmith to the Emperor Rudolf II , to whom it is still attributed . Another piece no longer attributed to Cellini is a large bronze door @-@ knocker , with a figure of Neptune , 40 cm high , and weighing over 11 kilos .

One category of the bequest that has seen several demotions is the 16 pieces and sets of highly decorated cutlery ( WB.201 ? 216 ) . Read dated none of these later than the 17th century , but on the British Museum database in 2014 several were dated to the 19th century , and were recent fraudulent creations when they entered the collection , some made by Reinhold Vasters . Doubts have also been raised over a glass cup and cover bearing the date 1518 ( WB.59 ) , which might in fact be 19th @-@ century . Eight pieces of silver plate were redated to the 19th century by Hugh Tait , and some of the jewellery .

= = Displaying the Bequest = =

The Bequest was on display at the British Museum from 9 April 1900 , in Room 40 , which today contains the later medieval displays . An illustrated catalogue by Charles Hercules Read , who had replaced Franks as Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities , was published in 1902 . Photographs in the catalogue show a typical museum display for the period , with wood and glass cases spaced around the walls and free @-@ standing in the centre , the latter with two levels . In

1921 it was moved to the North Wing .

In 1973 the new setting in Room 45 aimed " to create an element of surprise and wonder " in a small space , where only the objects were brightly lit , and displayed in an outer octagon of wall cases , and an inner one of partition walls , rising to the low ceiling and set with shallow display cases , some visible from both sides . In the centre the Holy Thorn Reliquary occupied its own pillar display .

The new ground floor room at the front of the museum , opened in June 2015 , returns the Bequest to a larger space and a more open setting . It is in the oldest part of the building and some later accretions to the room have been removed as part of the new installation . The design is by the architects Stanton Williams , and the project received funding from The Rothschild Foundation .