

A Rothschild Pleasure Palace: Waddesdon Manor

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By Shane Carmody

Just outside Oxford, on a hill overlooking the Vale of Aylesbury, is one of the most remarkable Country Houses in all of England. At first glance you could be forgiven for thinking you were in the Loire Valley as the architecture is a fantasy of luxury French Gothic chateaux. The ancient aesthetic is all an illusion, for this is a pleasure palace built in the 1870s for a member of the richest family in Europe.

A Great Legacy of a Gilded Age

Baron Ferdinand Rothschild was part of the Viennese branch of the family and came to [England](#) to work in the London office of the business. He fell in love with his cousin Evelina and they married, but her tragic death in childbirth left him bereft. On inheriting his father's fortune, he purchased Waddesdon Manor from the Duke of Marlborough, and set about clearing the top of a prominent hill on the farm and building his fantasy palace.





No expense was water main and gas plant was built for the site, huge trees were dragged into place, great glasshouses were built and gardens laid. When the house opened, it looked as though it had always been there, and Ferdinand filled it with an astonishing collection of art, fine furniture, tapestries, carpets and books. For all its opulence, it was only opened in the summer months and for weekend parties, where the rich and famous of the day enjoyed extravagant hospitality. Queen Victoria was intrigued enough to visit and found among all the treasures the most fascinating thing to be the newly installed electric light. When the Shah of Persia visited, all the paintings and art objects held no interest compared to an extraordinary Elephant automaton.

For all his wealth Ferdinand was lonely in his gilded cage and died bereft, still mourning Evelina. The family has preserved this remarkable time capsule, a great legacy of a gilded age.



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Some interesting videos relating to Waddesdon Manor:

'A Marvellous Elephant - Waddesdon Manor': To watch please visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YEPhe2Gp0Y

'A mania for collecting: the Rothschilds and the Waddesdon Bequest' from the British Museum: To watch please visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEcQscUDnmQ

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Dining Room, courtesy Matt Poole

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