

UK

Painting with hidden portrait of Mary Queen of Scots among National Trust treasures to benefit from £3m gift

More than 100 works in need of conservation will undergo restoration and investigation following the seven-figure donation from the National Trust's American charitable arm



A portrait of Sir John Maitland, which usually hangs at the National Trust’s Ham House in Richmond, being conserved at the conservation studio in Kent thanks to £3 million funding from the Royal Oak Foundation. (Photo: National Trust Images/James Dobson/PA Wire)



By Cahal Milmo

February 10, 2021 12:01 am

A 400-year-old portrait painted on top of an abandoned picture of Mary Queen of Scots is among dozens of **art works** and artefacts that will be restored and investigated following a seven-figure donation to the **National Trust**.

The £3m gift from the American charity set up by the trust to promote its work on the other side of the Atlantic will fund five years of urgent **conservation work** for more than 100 objects at risk of damage by foes from age and damp to insect infestation.

Samurai armour

The Trust, which is responsible for the upkeep of more than a million objects held at its 200 properties, said it lacked the resources to fund the restoration of every item in need of attention. The money from the Royal Oak Foundation will initially be used to conserve art works including one of 27 suits of Samurai armour gathered by 19th-century architect and avid collector Charles Paget Wade and a portrait of Sir John Maitland, a hugely influential courtier to James VI of Scotland.

The i newsletter latest news and analysis

ENTER YOUR EMAIL	Sign up
------------------	---------

Samurai armour being observed by conservators from the charity's Snowhill Manor in Gloucestershire, the former home of avid collector Charles Paget Wade. (Photo: National Trust Images/James Dobson/PA Wire)

The painting by an unknown artist, which normally hangs at Ham House in west London, needs structural work and the careful removal of varnish and overpaint. In so doing, conservators hope to learn more about the work behind which an x-ray analysis in 2017 revealed a secret unfinished portrait of a noblewoman believed to be Mary Queen of Scots.



Read More

National Trust is right to be 'woke' – it's good to shine a light on historic slavery and injustices

The picture of Maitland, which was finished around 1589, is thought to have started life as a representation of the ill-fated Scottish queen prior to her execution in 1587, suggesting that portraits of her were still being copied and displayed – at some risk to their owners – during her imprisonment and subsequent death. It is thought the painting of Mary was abandoned after her death and panel used, mostly likely by an Anglo-Dutch artist, to depict Maitland.

Funding

The National Trust said the £3m donation, the largest ever given by the 48-year-old Royal Oak Foundation, would play a vital role in allowing it to conserve its treasures in the face of funding restrictions exacerbated by the drop in visitor numbers due to the coronavirus outbreak.





Nine early 17th century chairs from Petworth House, west Sussex, which are being conserved by the National Trust. (Photo: National Trust Images/James Dobson/PA Wire)

Advertisement



Read More
Second Culture Recovery Fund needed to keep arts alive, Government told

“Our collections need conservation and repair for a multitude of reasons. They risk deterioration from the effects of ageing, light and damp to potential damage from insect pests such silverfish and moths... This funding will provide some of the critical investment we need to care for our world-class collection.”

Look, don’t sit

Alongside the conservation of the Samurai suit, held at Snowhill Manor, Wade’s purpose-built home in the Cotswolds, the Trust will also undertake the restoration of nine elaborate Italian-style chairs dating from 1636, currently residing at Petworth House in West Sussex. The chairs made of elm and oak were made to furnish a court gallery, and were therefore made more to impress than to be sat on.

The restoration work will begin in March at the Trust’s conservation workshop at Knole House in Sevenoaks, Kent.

Topics
[Art](#) / [Conservation](#) / [Heritage](#) / [National Trust](#)

Promoted Stories

Getting this Treasure is impossible! Prove us wrong

Hero Wars | Sponsored

Do You Have Dental Blood? Your Last Name May Tell You