

ROSALIND SAVILL

Rosalind Joy Savill

12 May 1951 – 27 December 2024

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2006

by

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Summary. Rosalind Savill, director of the Wallace Collection, London, from 1992 to 2011, and scholar par excellence of the Vincennes/Sèvres porcelain factory, died on 27 December 2024 after a short illness. She is remembered for her decades-long devotion to the Wallace Collection, which she repositioned with great skill, for championing French decorative arts, for her ground-breaking publications examining in unparalleled detail the Sèvres porcelain collection at the Wallace Collection and that of the marquise de Pompadour, and for her joie de vivre.



Ros J. Sainc -

Born on 12 May 1951 in Lyndhurst, Hampshire, to Guy Savill (1912–2008), a consultant physician at several Southampton hospitals, and his wife Lorna (née Williams, 1916–2013), a physiotherapist, who first met at University College Hospital, London, where their son, Hugh, Rosalind's younger brother, was to train as a doctor. Ros, as she was known, spent her childhood from the age of four at Curdrige, Hampshire. Her upbringing in a rural setting inspired her love of animals and birds, which was to remain an important part of her life. In a lecture given in 2011 to the French Porcelain Society she reminisced about looking up marks on silver and ceramics kept at home, showing an early interest in objects which later became the focus of her career. Her early education was in a local school, from where she went to Wycombe Abbey School, Buckinghamshire, in 1964. After achieving a clutch of O-levels at good grades, she left school early and attended Le Châtelard School, Sur-Montreux, Switzerland, between 1968 and 1969. There she gained three A-levels. In 1972 she took a BA Honours degree in English and Fine Art at Leeds University.¹ The following year she moved to London, where for ten years she shared a house in Camden Town with her younger brother, Hugh, staying on there for the rest of her life. Arriving in London she enrolled at the Study Centre for the Fine and Decorative Arts, founded in 1964 by Erica O'Donnell, which held courses at the Victoria and Albert Museum taught by various tutors who were on the curatorial staff of the Museum. This period saw Savill's first introduction to ceramics under the tutelage of luminaries such as Robert Charleston, John Mallet, Michael Archer, John Cushion and Sir Timothy Clifford, all specialists in their different fields, apart from Cushion who published a number of books on ceramics for the general reader. They had an encyclopedic knowledge of ceramics, and by virtue of their long service knew much about the broader collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Savill's first post was as a Museum Assistant in the Ceramics Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where she worked under her earlier tutors. These Museum Assistant posts, which were a way into the Museum structure at a low level, were fought over, and the interviews searching, but her attendance at the Study Centre course and her knowledge of the Museum stood her in good stead. The period that she spent at the V&A was formative and set the scene for the tenor of her later career. Much of the work of the Museum Assistant grade consisted of handling objects, moving them from place to place, checking and washing pieces in the galleries, writing object labels and assisting senior curators at the daily 'opinions' sessions when members of the public brought in pieces every weekday afternoon for identification, as well as dealing with telephone enquiries of all kinds. Acquiring broad knowledge of the collections, especially but not exclusively of one's own Department, came with the

¹Here she may well have been taught by the painter and Professor of Fine Art, Laurence Gowing CBE RA (1918–1991). I owe this observation to the kindness of John Gash.

job. Close contact with objects was to prove a lifelong passion, and the technique of examining them carefully and in detail was later passed on to numerous trainee museum curators as well as to the many who sought her advice on pieces of porcelain, and was of key importance for her later scholarly work.

After less than two years at the V&A she moved to the Wallace Collection in 1974, where she was to spend the rest of her career. The Wallace Collection, based in Hertford House, Manchester Square in the centre of London, enjoys national museum status thanks to the bequest of Sir Richard Wallace Bt (1818–1890) of his collections and his house through his widow Amélie, née Castelnau (1819–1897) in 1897. Between 1897 and 1900 when it opened to the public as a national museum which is free to visit, various changes were made to Hertford House. These included the abolition of stabling and coach houses, as well as a smoking room and some first floor rooms. Further changes have been made subsequently, such as those carried out in the final years of the last century which were initiated by Savill under the name of the Centenary Project (see below) as it celebrated the anniversary of the opening of the collection. Somewhat secluded, Manchester Square is actually extremely close to Bond Street underground station and so is easily accessible on foot from there. Today the Wallace Collection has the status of a non-departmental public body of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. In the present twenty-five galleries, each named after its function when Sir Richard and Lady Wallace occupied the house in the 1870s, are displayed five and a half thousand works of art collected by five generations of the Seymour family, Marquesses of Hertford. The collections date back to the time of the 1st (1718–1794) and 2nd (1743–1822) Marquesses of Hertford who owned works by painters such as Canaletto, Reynolds and Gainsborough; the 3rd Marquess (1777–1842) purchased Dutch paintings, French furniture, gilt bronzes and Sèvres porcelain; but the most important of these collectors was Richard Seymour-Conway, 4th Marquess of Hertford (1800–1870). Most of the paintings in the collection were bought by him, as well as furniture, porcelain and an outstanding collection of non-European arms and armour. The 4th Marquess died without legitimate issue and bequeathed his untailed collection and property in France, England and Ireland to his probably illegitimate son, Richard Wallace. Wallace was to add medieval and Renaissance objects, then very much in vogue, and European arms and armour. The latter were mainly acquired in 1871 from two remarkable collections: that of the antiquary and scholar of arms and armour Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick (1783–1848), and that of the comte de Nieuwerkerke (1811–1892), director of the Louvre Museum and three other French museums in the reign of the Emperor Napoleon III. The Wallace Collection armour, although it had been thoroughly catalogued in the 20th century (see below), was given focus under Savill's regime when it was subject to a programme of conservation and cleaning prior to redisplay and to new photography of the entire collection of European arms and armour. This work led to a new summary catalogue (see below). The Wallace

Collection arms and armour, built up from such famous sources, was regarded in its time as even more illustrious than other aristocratic collections such as that at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, or others which have been dispersed, including the collections of the Dukes of Hamilton at Hamilton Palace, South Lanarkshire, Scotland. It is highly distinguished and well represents British art collecting in the last three centuries when it was fuelled by relentlessly rising prosperity.

In the 1970s the Wallace Collection was a much different institution to the one it has now become, due in large part to Savill's vision, energy and commitment. When she arrived as the first-ever female curatorial staff member, it was dominated by male scholars whose main work was to publish the collections; responding to the needs of the wider public was not a priority. The galleries were often empty and visitor numbers low. During her apprenticeship, at the grade of Museum Assistant, her Director between 1974 and 1978 was the distinguished sculpture scholar Terence Hodgkinson (1913–1999), whom she revered, and who presented a fine example of administrative and scholarly excellence. He had spent his earlier working life in the V&A, serving as assistant to two notable Directors, Sir Leigh Ashton (1897–1983) and Sir Trenchard Cox CBE FSA (1905–1995). He had been Keeper of the Sculpture Department at the V&A, so was familiar with the display of works of art. He was no doubt a formative influence on Savill. Later she was to oversee the redisplay of many parts of the collections at the Wallace to great effect. Her promotion to Senior Museum Assistant, in charge of a team for the first time, came in 1977, followed soon afterwards by her appointment as assistant to the Director and curator of 18th-century French porcelain and goldsmiths' work. She retained the curatorial post, and her interest in porcelain and gold boxes, both represented by outstanding collections in the Wallace, when she eventually became Director herself in 1992.

As Director she had a clear vision of the Collection, based on the safeguarding of the objects under her care, with the help of her 100 staff, displaying its many masterpieces to their best advantage and disseminating knowledge about them to the widest possible audience, so that visitor numbers rose exponentially. The core work of the Collection was carried out by a small number of curators and conservators. Other staff members fulfilled essential administrative, commercial, domestic and gallery cleaning and security roles, all essential for the proper functioning of the Museum. During her tenure, visitor numbers increased from about 162,000 to almost 400,000 per annum. Innovative scholarship, curatorial excellence, support of conservation, educational programmes and the maintenance of the library and archives were her prime objectives, objectives shared of course by her fellow national museum directors. Her refurbishments of the galleries and the Centenary Project, completed in 2000, creating space for further galleries for exhibitions, conservation and storage, together with educational facilities, were also in line with other contemporary museum projects around the UK, but hers were conceived

on an imaginative scale that was exceptional. She fought hard for the creation of a restaurant in the glazed courtyard that was to provide much-needed revenue in straitened times. It was designed to attract new audiences in a city that was becoming increasingly interested in food and café culture, and had the means and leisure to visit those museums whose offering included social spaces. Savill's ability to attract funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund and from a roster of generous private donors² was much dependent on her cogent presentation of the changes she envisioned and her huge enthusiasm for and devotion to the world-ranking collections.

The building work carried out between 1997 and 2000, known as the Centenary Project, was extensive. In a talk she gave in 2011,³ Savill outlined her ten goals: to attract more visitors of a greater diversity, both national and international; to offer a range of facilities for all types of visitors; to inspire all ages; to make works of art in store accessible in spacious new galleries; to encourage visitors to learn about the collections; to improve facilities for disabled people and for babies and children; to increase self-generated income by creating a social space at the heart of the building; to reclaim accessible areas of Hertford House not currently weatherproofed or open to the public in order to achieve these aims; and to retain the integrity of the galleries so as to achieve the aims in a sensitive and enlightened manner. Proposals were submitted by a roster of architects in November 1994, and in January 1995 the architect Rick Mather (1937–2013) was appointed. Following a Feasibility Study completed within six months, applications were made for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Treasury, resulting in approval for grants in February 1997. Nine months were required to obtain planning permission before enabling works could eventually begin in summer 1998. Much excavation was required and not everything went to plan as it was discovered that the house had no foundations, necessitating underpinning for which further funds had to be found.

Savill insisted that at no time during the building work should the Wallace Collection be closed, so that parts of it at least could still be visited. The old basement rooms of Hertford House, formerly a rather forgotten space, were extended and completely transformed to encompass education areas, a lecture theatre, and additional space to house the library and archive. For many scholars the library and archive were both a quiet space for serious research into French decorative art, especially French porcelain, with the invaluable help of dedicated and knowledgeable staff. An open gallery to show parts of the collection normally kept in store, as well as a gallery dedicated to the work of the in-house conservation team, together with an area devoted to the illustration of construction techniques and materials used in the making of furniture and armour represented in the collections, added much-needed gallery space. This was a modern approach,

² Joe and Jane Lewis were major supporters of the project.

³ The text of this has kindly been communicated to me by her daughter Isabella Calkin.

paralleled in a small number of museums at home and abroad. A new gallery for wide-ranging temporary exhibitions also occupied this basement level, obviating the need to disrupt the galleries upstairs. Some of these exhibitions, which were a totally new departure, were crowd-pullers, such as the one in 2004 dedicated to the work of the painter Lucian Freud (1922–2011). Exhibitions of contemporary art were hugely popular, resulting in massively increased visitor figures. Other themes included Renaissance silver and ceramics, and the life and work of the novelist Anthony Powell (1905–2000), celebrating his centenary,⁴ and of Sir Osbert Lancaster CBE (1908–1986), best known for his cartoons. An important exhibition of the work of the French painter François Boucher (1703–1770), so well represented in the Wallace Collection, was held in 2004 when the pictures were rehung in the Great Gallery so that they could all be seen together. Pictures from the Great Gallery were also displayed in new and intriguing contexts. The most revolutionary temporary exhibitions followed the trend for siting contemporary art in the context of a museum rather than in its customary setting in an art gallery. This initiative has been continued, as in 2025 there has been an exhibition dedicated to the artist Sir Grayson Perry. The world-leading position of British art is thus represented not only in picture galleries of contemporary art such as Tate, but is shown in the context of both earlier Old Masters with which the painters were familiar and which no doubt inspired them, and in the case of the Wallace Collection in the context of sculpture, armour and furniture of earlier eras, to encourage meditation on broader themes, as well as to encourage art-loving visitors to see the permanent collection.

The refurbishment of the permanent galleries brought new life to the displays which had become tired. In general, museum galleries need to be renewed at intervals of two to three decades at the least, since fabrics used in showcases, or on walls as in this town house where the family collection is still *in situ*, become dirty, fade or even degrade so far as to shred, usually because of the effects of daylight, allied to pollution and dirt brought in from the busy London streets. All the contents of galleries, from pictures, to furniture, silver, ceramics and glass, are affected by pollution and can require cleaning and conservation, but replacing them in their old positions is not always successful, especially as knowledge advances and display techniques, particularly lighting, evolve. Savill decided on a comprehensive programme, which began in the 1990s, to highlight the decorative arts of 18th-century France which distinguish the Wallace Collection from other national museums in Britain. In her lecture given in 2011 to the French Porcelain Society the greatest space is devoted to the considerations underlying the progressive upgrading of the galleries. She called the Wallace ‘the most intimate museum in

⁴The title of Anthony Powell’s twelve-volume novel *Dance to the Music of Time*, published 1951–1975, was inspired by the painting of the same title by Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665) which hangs in the Wallace Collection. I thank John Gash for reminding me of this.

the world' where there were no barriers, no ropes, no plinths, but clocks could be heard to chime and parquet floors to creak. Careful study of photographs taken in the 1890s enabled the recreation of a setting which is essentially domestic, harking back to the days when the house was lived in. To this had to be added modern fire protection and security systems, improved environmental monitoring to safeguard the works of art, and updated lighting. One significant change was new fabrics for the walls. Silk used in the French King's Games Room at Fontainebleau, made in 1786 by the firm of Boulard, was rewoven for the Collection in 1980, a mauve-grey silk was used in the Small Drawing Room, crimson velvet was used in the Back State Room, all to create a sumptuous and sensual atmosphere. Twelve refurbished rooms were largely financed by private individuals,⁵ as sponsorship became increasingly important in the museum world.

In 2000 Savill established a new management structure for the Wallace Collection, broadly corresponding with changes made at other national museums. Three departments came into being: Collections, Finance and Operations, and Development and Marketing. This marked a new professionalism in running the Museum, and progress in fundraising, publicity and the expansion and modernisation of the Museum shop followed rapidly. Enticing products, most at the luxury end of the market in keeping with the contents of the house, were now on sale and revenues increased accordingly. The use of Museum space for events which brought in much-needed funds became commonplace, in line with trends at other major museums, especially those in central areas of London well served by transport links.

There have been relatively few Directors of national museums who have served as curators, although of course there are notable exceptions: Terence Hodgkinson, Sir John Pope-Hennessy CBE FBA (1913–1994), Sir Timothy Clifford and Sir Mark Jones, all except Jones, Director 2001–2011, serving at some stage of their careers as curators in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Sir Gabriele Finaldi of the National Gallery, London, are examples in recent times. Savill was perhaps unusual amongst them in taking an exceptionally close interest in the conservation of objects in the Wallace Collection, especially of the furniture and the arms and armour. In recent times the arms and armour, which had been catalogued by Sir James Mann in 1962 with a supplement to the catalogue by A.V.B. Norman published in 1986,⁶ had hitherto received relatively little attention as compared to the paintings, the conservation of which is outsourced to trusted private conservators, and was in need of redisplay. The result of the Director's involvement and support of the in-house conservation staff – there had been some

⁵The Wolfson Foundation, the Monument Trust, Lord Wolfson, Sir John Ritblat, Manny Davidson and many others all generously supported the gallery refurbishments.

⁶James Mann, *Wallace Collection Catalogues, European Arms and Armour* (London, 1962). This is the latest edition of a series of earlier catalogues by the same author. See also A.V.B. Norman, *Wallace Collection Catalogues Supplement European Arms and Armour* (London, 1986).

pressure to outsource the work – was to result in the conservation of arms and armour and of French furniture, in which Savill took a particular interest, in the Wallace assuming a world-leading position in those fields.⁷ She supported the development of new techniques for the restoration of marquetry on the French furniture in the collection, and as a result new methods were developed when she was in charge.

Two major publications on Sèvres porcelain – *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of the Sèvres Porcelain*, three volumes, 1988 (completed the year before the birth of her daughter Isabella), and *Everyday Rococo: Madame de Pompadour and Sèvres Porcelain*, two volumes, 2021 – are monuments to Savill's scholarship and testify to her deeply-felt love of Vincennes/Sèvres porcelain. They are both highly original in conception and the fruit of meticulous research and painstaking writing of great precision, accompanied by telling illustrations of both the objects and their makers' marks.

The Wallace Collection catalogue of the extensive collection of Sèvres, which can be considered as amongst the largest and most significant, along with the Royal Collection, had been on the stocks for some years, and indeed Savill's predecessor, Robert Cecil, had done some preliminary work on it. With the encouragement of her Director, John Ingamells (1934–2013, who had also worked as a curator before becoming Director at Manchester Square) under whom Savill worked from 1978 to 1992, she was able to undertake the mammoth task of cataloguing this highly important group of Sèvres porcelains. It consists of 137 vases, 80 teawares, 67 useful wares, three biscuit figures and 130 plaques for furniture or gold boxes. To organise such a large group of pieces Savill abandoned the conventional chronological approach and arranged the catalogue in five sections corresponding to the types listed, with an introduction to each section. In her general introduction Savill traced the development of the collection from the 2nd Marquess of Hertford (1743–1822), who owned just a handful of pieces, to the last of the line, Sir Richard Wallace (1818–1890). The most active collectors were the 3rd and the 4th Marquesses (1777–1842, 1800–1870), both acquiring in the heyday of aristocratic collecting of Sèvres. Both displayed their collections: the 3rd Marquess at St Dunstan's Villa, The Regents Park, London, and at the Dorchester, Park Lane; his son at Hertford House, and at his homes in rue Laffite, Paris, and at the château de Bagatelle, Paris. Richard Wallace made additions to the collection through dealers, but was a less active collector of Sèvres porcelain than his father. Although the collection has survived largely complete, some pieces were inherited by Sir John Murray Scott (1847–1912), who had been a friend of Richard Wallace and advised his widow,⁸ particularly in regard to the establishment of the collection as a national museum. The catalogue, which runs to 1272

⁷Advances in the conservation of armour at the Wallace Collection under the Head of Conservation, David Edge, were saluted in his *Festschrift, Arms and Armour, History, Conservation and Analysis: Essays in Honour of David Edge* (Archetype Press, 2021).

⁸He inherited the lease of Hertford House, considerable financial resources and the properties in Paris.

pages, includes detailed descriptions as well as several views of each piece, most in colour,⁹ and clear illustrations of their marks. Taking each separate shape, whether of a vase or a domestic item, she traced its genesis, authorship and production details such as the number of different sizes of each object, as well as discussing its use at its time of manufacture. This was a new departure, and was based on close study of documents preserved in the factory archive which had not long since become available for study, and of which microfilms were being made. Customers for the pieces in the collection were also recorded where they could be discovered from surviving archival documents or other sources. She also illustrates surviving plaster models and drawings in the Sèvres factory archive, as well as source engravings and some paintings that were sources or that cast light on their contemporary use. The third volume is devoted to workers' biographies, covering not just the painters, whose marks were illustrated, but every member of the workforce concerned with the design and production of the catalogued pieces, notes on incised marks used by workmen involved in the manufacture of pieces rather than their decoration, illustrations of gilt-bronze stands for vases, details of acquisitions where known, an essay on the redecoration of Sèvres in England in the 19th century, a difficult subject which had hitherto received little scholarly attention,¹⁰ a glossary, a bibliography and an index, together with some telling black and white photographs preserved in the Museum archive of the rooms at Hertford House in 1897. Savill's interest in how pieces were used when they were sold from the factory and the details of the everyday life of their owners, to be pursued in her study of Madame de Pompadour, are evinced in one entry in the Appendix which is devoted to Madame Menjaud's recipe dating from around 1750 for pot-pourri, clearly much used and much needed in the absence of proper sanitation. The number of vases for pot-pourri in the Wallace Collection catalogue had clearly piqued Savill's keen curiosity and resulted in her investigation and publication *in extenso* of a contemporary pot-pourri recipe.

The catalogue received the National Art-Collections Award for Scholarship in 1990, the first book on decorative arts ever to be chosen. Both titles (*Everyday Rococo* is discussed below as it was written in retirement) will undoubtedly stand the test of time and are considered indispensable works of reference. Marked by their high standard of presentation with great care given to colour photography and to design, they are widely admired.

Over the years whilst at the Wallace Savill published a series of articles on Sèvres, including studies of the Buccleuch Collection at Boughton House, one of her earliest

⁹Thanks to the generosity of The Monument Trust.

¹⁰Although Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue had studied the work of Edward Holmes Baldock (1777–1845) in the context of the Sèvres porcelain in the Royal Collection.

articles.¹¹ Porcelain at Upton House, the Bearsted Collection,¹² Belton,¹³ the Wernher Collection,¹⁴ and the collection of Viscount Gage at Firle Place, Sussex,¹⁵ all absorbed her attention. From the long list of her publications of pieces in the Wallace Collection which arose from her catalogue, two are of special interest: ‘Francois Boucher and the porcelains of Vincennes and Sèvres’,¹⁶ and ‘Cameo Fever: six pieces from the Sèvres porcelain dinner service made for Catherine the Great of Russia’.¹⁷ This last supplemented a long catalogue entry on the pieces, about which there is much to say. Savill’s study of a Sèvres service, ‘A Sèvres treasure house at Waddesdon: Re-assembling the *Starhemberg* service’,¹⁸ explored in detail this diplomatic gift from King Louis XV to Georg Adam, Fürst von Starhemberg, Austrian ambassador to France, now on loan to Waddesdon Manor from the Rothschild Foundation. Her early love of French gold boxes resulted in an article in *Apollo* in 1980 and a booklet in 1991, but she was wise enough to enrol her colleague, the late Charles Truman, to publish the full-dress catalogue *The Wallace Collection of Gold Boxes* in 2013, taking advantage of his lifetime of close study of the field of gold boxes.

During her Directorship the ongoing task of cataloguing the contents of Hertford House continued at pace: the catalogue of furniture by Peter Hughes was published in 1996, that of miniatures by Stephen Duffy and Joanne Hedley in 2010, glass and Limoges painted enamels by Suzanne Gaynor in 2011, gold boxes by Charles Truman in 2013, and Italian sculpture by Jeremy Warren in 2016. Tobias Capwell, David Edge and Jeremy Warren published *Masterpieces of European Armour in the Wallace Collection*, a selection from the collection, in 2011. It was accompanied, as seemed best at the time, by a summary catalogue on a memory stick, enabling 7000 illustrations of the objects. Although several of these scholarly studies postdated Savill’s retirement in 2011, they were all the fruit of a long period of research, writing and the complex process of publication which in general lasted well over a year, if not very much longer, so all were conceived and authorised by her whilst she was serving as Director. Each reached the highest possible standard. All except the catalogue of gold boxes are the work of long-standing Wallace Collection curators. A number of other junior curators served in

¹¹ ‘Two pairs of Sèvres vases at Boughton House’, *Apollo*, 110 (August 1979), 128–33.

¹² With Anthony du Boulay, John Whitehead, Adrian Sassoon and David Peters, *Upton House: the Bearsted Collection: porcelain* (The National Trust/French Porcelain Society, 1992).

¹³ ‘Sèvres porcelain at Belton’, *Apollo*, 141 (May 1995), 11–12.

¹⁴ ‘Sèvres porcelain in the Wernher Collection’, *Apollo*, 155 (May 2002), 40–3.

¹⁵ ‘Sèvres porcelain in the collection of Viscount Gage at Firle Place, Sussex’, *The Oxford Ceramic Circle Newsletter*, 512 (October 2021), 17–21.

¹⁶ *Burlington Magazine*, 115 (March 1982), 162–70.

¹⁷ *Burlington Magazine*, 116 (November 1982), 304–11.

¹⁸ *Apollo*, 139 (April 1994), 25–33.

the collection during Savill's directorship, and have subsequently made their own varied and distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life.

The establishment of an Education Department at the Wallace Collection in the 1990s was an important step forward, providing a forum for introducing children at different ages to the collections. In addition the scope of educational activities that were introduced over the years embraced three graduate courses on the decorative arts, study days, and conferences for adult audiences including curators, museum educators, trainee conservators and museum visitors. Remarkably, refugees, the elderly in care homes, the homeless, deaf people and those suffering from mental illness could all take part in enjoying and learning about the museum and its collections in specially arranged sessions. At the time these initiatives were introduced they were ground-breaking, and even today opportunities for all those groups to visit museums are restricted, no doubt on grounds of cost. The University of Buckingham and the Courtauld Institute University of London and the University of Warwick all collaborated at her instigation with the Wallace Collection¹⁹ in the teaching of the decorative arts and its history, and benefited from Savill's regular involvement on their courses at degree level.

Teaching had been a major focus of Savill's work from the beginning of her career when she lectured to adult education evening classes then run by the Local Education Authority (LEA), offering learning about a wide range of subjects at very reasonable cost. The classes were a favoured route in the early 1970s for gaining experience in the art of speaking and disseminating information to an audience whose background was unknown to the lecturer. Finding the correct 'tone' for each class was a skill Ros learned early. During her long career she gave lectures, seminars and keynote addresses in many museums, especially in the United States, Canada, Ireland and France, in her inimitable lecturing style which was highly engaging. Those who heard her will remember in particular her mellifluous voice, clarity of diction and her wit, allied to her exceptionally sure grasp of the detail of her chosen topic. Her particular emphasis was on her specialist field of French 18th-century art, Sèvres porcelain, goldsmiths' work, and on the Wallace Collection in all its aspects. Her knowledge of the Vincennes-Sèvres porcelain factory was unrivalled, except for that of the factory's erstwhile archivist, Madame Tamara Préaud, and the late Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue FBA, Surveyor of the Queen's Works of Art,²⁰ and gave her meticulously prepared talks a particular fluency and precision.

In the academic sphere she taught regularly for the University of Buckingham / Wallace Collection MA in the Decorative Arts, which she had co-founded in 1999.

¹⁹ These courses were not under the remit of the Museum's education department but were a separate initiative, similar to others in some national museums.

²⁰ The British Academy obituary of Sir Geoffrey was written by Savill, who knew and worked with him for many years and held him in great affection and respect: Rosalind Savill, 'Geoffrey de Bellaigue, 1931–2013', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 14 (2015), 121–38.

It migrated to Birkbeck College, University of London, before reverting once more to the University of Buckingham in 2013, without affecting her teaching commitment over a decade and more. She also co-founded and taught the MA course on Eighteenth-Century French Decorative Arts at the Courtauld Institute, the University of London / Wallace Collection, continuing the process of bringing the study of the decorative arts into the university syllabus that had begun in the last decades of the 20th century. The involvement of museums in this endeavour was a political imperative, designed to encourage greater contact with the educational system. For over a decade she also taught on a course based at Warwick University and the Institut d'Etudes Supérieures des Arts, Paris. A school governorship at Camden School for Girls from 1996–2008, and her role in examining MA, MPhil and PhD dissertations, were further demonstrations of her dedication to education at every level.

One of her most important contributions to education in the curatorial field was her involvement with the Attingham Summer School over a fifty-year period. The Attingham Trust for the Study of Historic Houses and Collections, established in 1952 by Helen Lowenthal and Sir George Trevelyan, Warden of Attingham Park, Shropshire, its home for many years, studies the history of the country house, its contents, its gardens and its landscape setting. It was initially set up to help American curators understand the background to the objects in their collections, but it later embraced a much broader intake of heritage professionals, and has expanded its courses over the years to meet a growing demand for education in the decorative arts which in general has remained largely beyond the scope of most university syllabuses in this and other countries. In 1975 Savill first attended the Summer School supported by a Leverhulme Scholarship, and went on to assist with administration, give lectures and become a member of the Advisory Council from 1980 to 1992. She was a Trustee from 1992 to 2024. The Attingham Trust has benefited greatly from her strategic direction and the ideas that she put forward to the committee. Her extraordinary contribution during a fifty-year association has been recognised by the foundation of a scholarship in her name, honouring her long association and her founding role as chairman of the Scholarship Committee.

As a former member of the Ceramics Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Savill was particularly keen to advance knowledge and appreciation of 'the arts of fire'. For over forty years she was involved with the Ceramics Fair and Seminar, the brain-child of the dealers Brian and Anna Haughton. Established in 1982, it initially took place at the Dorchester Hotel on Park Lane, London, and combined a series of booths in which major dealers from the United Kingdom and abroad exhibited their pieces for sale, together with an extensive lecture programme on all aspects of ceramics currently collected by individuals or institutions. The speakers were drawn from staff of the major museums along with leading dealers and specialists from a wide range of countries. Ros

was a lecturer at the first Fair and on many later occasions. She became a member of the Vetting Committee which ensured that only genuine objects were on sale, and in more recent times expanded her involvement to encompass Face to Face *conversazioni* with the 10th Duke of Buccleuch, the 9th Duke of Wellington and with the late Jacob Rothschild OM (1936–2024), with all of whom she was in close contact. A visit to Boughton, Northamptonshire, one of the seats of the Dukes of Buccleuch, early in her career which resulted in her first article in 1979, ‘Two Pairs of Sèvres Vases at Boughton House’ (published in *Apollo*, August 1979), set the stage for a long involvement with three generations of the family²¹ and her trusteeship of the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust from 2010 until her death. She had had a fruitful relationship since 1994 with the late Lord Rothschild who established the Waddesdon Foundation to manage Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, where the collection of French decorative art including Sèvres porcelain, together with Renaissance works of art, assembled by his forebears is of outstanding importance. These informal, although scripted, conversations were a new and unique departure for the Ceramics Fair. The first interview was with Peregrine Cavendish, 12th Duke of Devonshire in 2014, followed in the next year by one with the 9th Duke of Wellington on Waterloo Day. In 2016 she interviewed the 10th Duke of Buccleuch; in 2019 she interviewed The Lord Rothschild at the British Academy. Her final ‘Face to Face’ was in 2022 when she interviewed Brian Haughton to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Ceramics Fair and Seminar. At the end of the conversation Haughton was presented with a volume of essays by a roll-call of ceramic historians on objects that had been through his hands, *The Man with the Butterfly Tie: Essays in Honour of Brian Haughton*.²² Ros’s many contacts in the museum and ceramic world were shared with the Haughtons, so that she contributed towards the success of the Fair which effectively abolished barriers between the commercial and academic art world, as well as attracting an international group of scholars and dealers at a key moment in the London June calendar.

At around the same time as the International Ceramic Fair and Seminar came into being, the French Porcelain Society was established in 1994 by Kate Foster (great-great-great-granddaughter of William Wilberforce, later Lady Davson, 1938–2020), a ceramic dealer of an academic cast of mind. Its aim was to bring together all those interested in the history and study of French porcelain, whether dealers, curators or scholars. Ros Savill was one of the founding members. A committee member from 1984 to 1988, she became Chairman in 1988 for six years, and was President from 1998 to 2023, following Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue. The Society went from strength to strength, attracting an

²¹ See also ‘The Sèvres porcelain collection of Fifth Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch’, in Tessa Murdoch (ed.), *Boughton House, the English Versailles* (1992), 142–7.

²² This interview is available online, as is the interview with Lord Rothschild. The others are all mentioned online but were not recorded.

international membership, meeting annually for a convivial dinner, held for a number of years in the new café at the Wallace Collection. It issues a regular journal to which Savill was a contributor in 1999, 2005 and 2007. In 2012 the Society held a two-day symposium in honour of its President which resulted in a volume of the journal dedicated to her.²³ The proceedings included her own contribution to the history of Sèvres porcelain in England, a theme which had engaged her attention for most of her career.²⁴

After retiring from the Wallace Collection in 2011 Ros continued to lecture, and as covid arrived she decided to publish all the knowledge she had gathered about the life of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764), who was so closely connected with the Vincennes/Sèvres factory from its earliest days. Her intimate knowledge of Louis XV's mistress, her collections and her way of life, built up over many decades of study in between her Directorial responsibilities, resulted in her groundbreaking two volumes published in 2021, *Madame de Pompadour and Sèvres Porcelain*. In a unique approach she used the objects identified as belonging to King Louis XV's mistress to shine a bright light on where and how she lived year by year, in the most intimate detail. It is difficult to imagine any future scholar tackling a similar project, as every aspect of Pompadour's life is examined, including the progress of her relationship with the monarch, her various properties and their furnishing, and her day-to-day health. Embedded in her text is a close study of the Sèvres factory and Madame de Pompadour's relationship with it, all based on essential documentary evidence. Her work has demolished several long-held beliefs about Pompadour's role in the very early years of the Vincennes/Sèvres concern, whilst demonstrating her extremely close contact with it and her lavish patronage of it as she surrounded herself with an enormous variety of its products, from grand vases to pieces for strictly personal use which were to be found in her many properties.

In a life embracing a deep concern for education, an enduring love and appreciation of the decorative arts and in particular of ceramics especially of Sèvres, Savill found time to serve on a number of trusts in addition to those already mentioned. During her career as Director of the Wallace Collection, she acted as a Trustee of the Holburne Museum Trust during the period 2004–2009 when the former Holburne of Menstrie Museum, Bath, was undergoing radical change. It was a gift to Bath from a 19th-century collector, named Sir William Holburne (1793–1874), comprised paintings and works of

²³ Oliver Fairclough & John Whitehead (eds), *Three Centuries at Sèvres: Papers in Honour of Dame Rosalind Savill, Director, The Wallace Collection 1992–2011*, *The French Porcelain Society Journal*, 5 (2015).

²⁴ 'The Earl of Coventry's purchases of Sèvres porcelain in Paris and London 1763–69', *The French Porcelain Society Journal*, 5 (2015), 7–11. Many years earlier she had earlier studied the collection of the 2nd Earl of Lonsdale: "A profusion of fine old Sèvres china": the collection of the 2nd Earl of Lonsdale (1787–1872)', *The French Porcelain Society Journal*, 3 (2007), 253–71.

art, and was housed in a building of distinction, but had ceased to keep up with modern developments in museum display and function. To the endeavour of giving it new life she brought her experience of repositioning the Wallace Collection, as well as her knowledge of raising funds and her wide contacts in all aspects of museums and galleries. Between 2008 and 2019 she was a member of the Samuel Courtauld Trust which is responsible for an outstanding collection of medieval decorative arts, Italian Renaissance maiolica, as well as its world-renowned pictures of which its outstanding Impressionists are the best known. She was a Syndic of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge from 2015 to 2023, and served for six years as a Trustee of the Royal Collection Trust from 2012 to 2018. In the words of His Majesty the King in a letter of condolence to her daughter: ‘In that role she was a knowledgeable, calm and greatly respected figure, and a constant source of advice and assistance to others’.²⁵ Her annual presentation of pieces from the collection of Sèvres porcelain during that time was one of the high spots for the members of the Royal Collection Studies Course on their visits to Windsor Castle, when specially-chosen objects were laid out for examination and discussion. This was a format in which she excelled and which she clearly relished, as can be seen from images of her with a piece in hand on excursions of the French Porcelain Society to numerous private and public collections, both in the United Kingdom and abroad. As a curator of a national museum and specialist, she acted from early in her career as an occasional expert advisor to the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, a government body that is part of the Department for Culture Media and Sport. In brief, if an art work above a certain value is sold to a foreign buyer, the Reviewing Committee, which is advised by experts from museums and elsewhere, counsels the Minister on whether to delay the issuing of an export licence to allow for a British buyer to purchase the work so as to keep it in the United Kingdom. All these activities, of which the above is but a sample, carried out both when Savill was in post and then in retirement, demonstrate the strong and continuing commitment to public service that was the guiding light of her life.

Close to her heart was Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, built by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839–1898) in the style of a French Renaissance château and housing important collections of French 18th-century decorative art, English paintings, arms and armour and much else. Once more, this key institution, like the Wallace Collection, a closed collection to which nothing can be added, and which can perhaps be described as the jewel in the crown of the National Trust, has been brought into the 21st century. At the same time its scholarly work has been much extended from the original enterprise of catalogues of the collection which was specified in the bequest made by James de Rothschild in 1957. Activities at Waddesdon now include temporary exhibitions

²⁵ Quoted by gracious permission of His Majesty King Charles III.

as well as the occasional display of contemporary works of art in the context of the existing holdings. In 2012 Savill was invited by Lord Rothschild (see above) to be a member of the Academic Committee at Waddesdon. Although, as the great-nephew of Dorothy de Rothschild (1895–1988), he had inherited her property and land adjacent to the Manor and its surrounding land, it was some years before Lord Rothschild began to actively manage the Manor and make many changes to its remit and activities. Savill's role on the Academic Committee was to assist in guiding the strategic direction and work of the curatorial, collections and archive. The scope of the committee embraces research and academic matters, exhibitions (which have been a new departure under Lord Rothschild), publications, display and conservation planning. In all the respects mentioned, the thrust was to bring the collection into the modern world and greatly expand its activities, especially concerning its academic profile and the care and display of its collections. To this end, Savill brought her wealth of experience in the later years of her life.

Elected to the British Academy in 2006, Savill joined its Pictures Committee – subsequently called the Art Committee – as a curatorial Fellow. The committee had been established in 1998 when the Academy left Regent's Park for 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, which offers large spaces in an architecturally distinguished Grade 1 setting. Consisting of around twelve members and now reporting to the Heritage Committee of the Academy, the Art Committee would meet three times a year. The committee also approves acquisitions made through bequests, considers loans, both in and out, and acquisitions made thanks to a small budget. As the Wallace Collection is a closed collection and does not acquire, this would have been a new challenge.

Savill was the only curator on the Art Committee who was familiar with both paintings and works of art, including sculpture and textiles, had worked in the museum field, and had engaged at the Wallace Collection with contemporary art, the current focus of the British Academy's collecting policy. She made a signal contribution to the housing and hanging of paintings and display of works of art in the collection. In particular, on account of her work at the Wallace Collection, she was able to collaborate with the architects Wright and Wright responsible for the recent transformation of the Academy's premises and with the Committee in the creation of a recess in the wall for the repositioned display within the new spaces of Patrick Hughes's *A Study of the Studiolo*, commissioned by the Academy, completed in 2013 and delivered in 2015: her tact in liaising with the architects and builders on the creation of the recess is still remembered at the Academy.²⁶ She also advised on the acquisition of a glass cabinet for the display of the

²⁶The painting, a version of a study of an intarsia *studiolo* in Gubbio, Umbria, north-east Italy, a reversed perspective depiction of the construction of the *studiolo*, has been discussed by the art historian Professor Martin Kemp FBA in 'A study of the studiolo', *British Academy Review*, 25 (February 2015), 37–9.

distinguished collection of contemporary ceramics bequeathed in 2016 by Sir Nicholas Goodison Hon FBA (1934–2021) and his wife Judith, which required careful positioning and lighting to show the pieces to their best advantage. Deciding on the materials and dimensions of a showcase and the position of the shelves is not an easy matter. In making these decisions, her many years of displaying collections to their best advantage was a particular asset to the Academy.

Savill was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1990 and a Fellow of the Society of Arts in the same year. In 2000 she was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire for Services to the Study of Ceramics, and in 2009 became a Dame of the British Empire for Services to the Arts. Much loved in France, where she was an occasional consultant at the Château de Versailles (1993–4), at the Louvre Museum (2006–7), and subsequently at Sèvres Cité de la Céramique, she was created Officier dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2013. She was also a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, more commonly known as the Goldsmiths' Company: it is one of the twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London, established by royal charter in 1327, and safeguards the interests of the goldsmiths' trade.

Always conscious of her role representing the Wallace Collection as a glamorous destination, she fashioned her own image in a series of portraits, the earliest of which is a photograph of her in a lilac outfit standing in the long gallery at Hertford House taken by Lucy Ann Dickens in 2001.²⁷ A fine portrait in oil on panel by Dean Marsh (b. 1968), a young artist employed as a gallery attendant at the Museum, was commended in 2002 in the BP Portrait Award.²⁸ Her refusal to be painted in the nude by Lucian Freud in 2004 was no surprise. Her own favourite portrait was commissioned by Rory Hutton who had designed a scarf for the French Porcelain Society in 2021 to celebrate the publication of her book about Madame de Pompadour. Savill had not purchased a scarf and as the edition had sold out, Hutton had one specially remade for her. He styled the shoot in an informal style in her study at home seated by her fireside surrounded by her books and porcelain. The photograph was taken by Anne Schwartz. In all her photographs, both official and private, she radiates a great sense of fun which she brought to both her professional and her personal life, together with great kindness and tremendous energy and dedication to public service. Despite her commitment to the public cause, she enjoyed a vibrant social life outside her official duties, had an exceptional number of friends, most of very long standing, and was blessed with a daughter, Isabella, to whom she was devoted. Her daughter's wedding to Harry Calkin in 2023 which took place at the Chapel

²⁷National Portrait Gallery, NPG P948(37).

²⁸The present whereabouts of this painting is unknown to the writer although it can be seen online under the name of the artist.

Royal brought her immense happiness, and she saw the birth of her grandchild Edward and his very first Christmas.

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