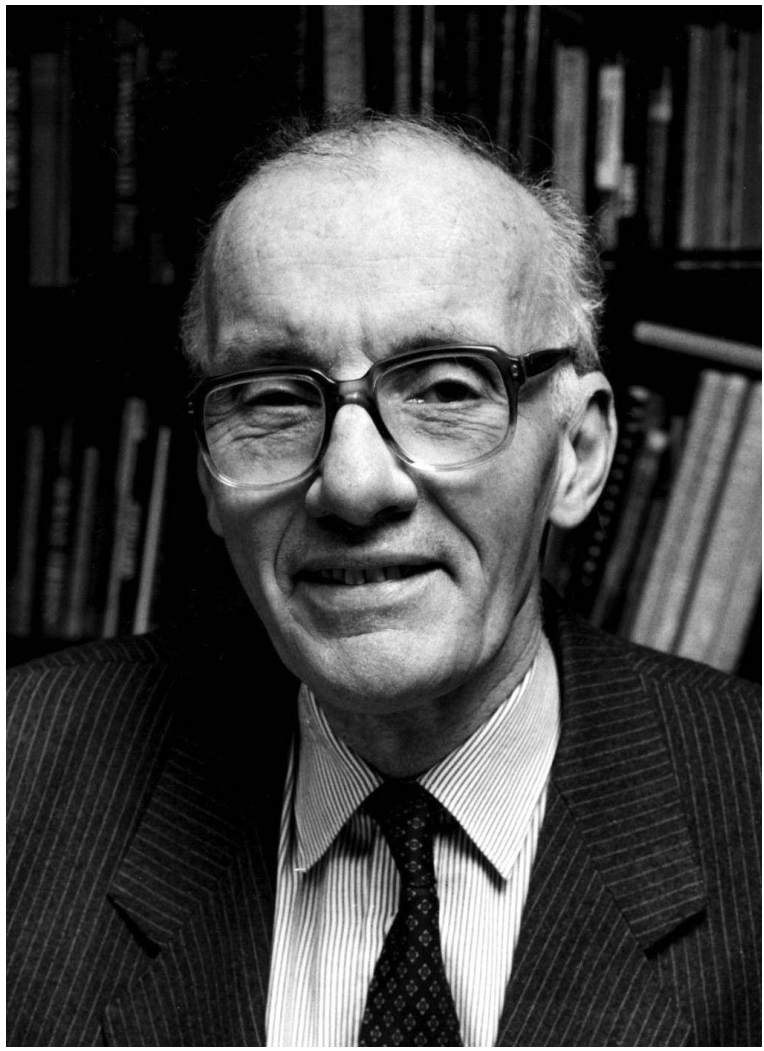

GEOFFREY DE BELLAIGUE

Geoffrey de Bellaigue
1931–2013

Geoffrey de Bellaigue, Director of the Royal Collection and, following retirement, Surveyor Emeritus of The Queen's Works of Art, who died aged 81 on 4 January 2013, lives on through his encyclopaedic, scholarly and inspirational legacy in the decorative arts of eighteenth-century France.

He and his identical twin brother Eric were born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, Paris, on 12 March 1931 to a French father, the Vicomte Pierre de Bellaigue (1902–95), and a Franco-Belgian mother, Marie-Antoinette ('Toinon'), née Willemin (1904–96). In 1936 the family emigrated to England and later took British citizenship.[1] His father had been a mining engineer and then served as French liaison officer with the British Expeditionary Force; after being evacuated from Dunkirk he returned to serve France, and eventually joined the Free French navy in England. Meanwhile his wife taught French, first in Wales and then to the daughters of King George VI's private secretary, and this led to her teaching the young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret from 1941 to 1948. They remained friends for the rest of her life, and so Bellaigue became acquainted with royalty at an early age. He attended Wellington College, Berkshire, did national service in the Grenadier Guards, and went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read Law, graduating in 1954 (MA 1959). At first he decided to be a banker, joining J. Henry Schröder & Co., where he spent five years

[1] For further information, see 'Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue', *The Times*, Register, Obituaries, 18 January 2013, p. 52.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy, XIV, 121–138.

from 1954 to 1959 (being replaced by his identical twin, so apparently no one realised he had gone).

As a young Guards Officer he had dreamed of studying Vasari and Renaissance Italy according to his early Commonplace Book (posthumously discovered by his wife) and so in 1959 he threw caution to the winds, abandoned banking and enrolled to study the history of art at the École du Louvre in Paris. Here he was tutored by the renowned French furniture scholar Pierre Verlet, who had transformed the understanding of history, techniques and documentary analysis of works by the great Parisian cabinet makers of the eighteenth century. Bellaigue recalled in his obituary for his mentor in 1988: 'It is said that a Verlet pupil, when lecturing, will always reveal his origins by harking back to the great tradition of Louis XIV and Versailles, and by stressing the dissemination of the French court style abroad.'[2] How proud Verlet must have been watching his *protégé* living this great tradition with such vigour and success, as eighteenth-century France (and its wider ramifications), not Renaissance Italy, finally became his passion.

In 1960 Bellaigue joined the staff of the National Trust at Waddesdon Manor, becoming Keeper of Collections in 1962–63. This remarkable collection of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839–98), and other members of the Rothschild family, was bequeathed to the National Trust by his great-nephew James de Rothschild in 1957. It specialises in superb French eighteenth-century decorative arts which once belonged to the monarchs and courtiers of France, many of whom were swept aside by the French Revolution, and it was collected by the Rothschilds largely in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bellaigue arrived at a perfect moment: only the year before the ground floor was first opened to the public, overseen by James's widow Dorothy, and its great treasures were suddenly more available for study and discovery. A programme of research and cataloguing was soon embarked upon, and in this Bellaigue encountered the Danish scholar Svend Eriksen, who was to publish the Sèvres porcelain at Waddesdon in 1968, and Sir Francis Watson FBA, who had published the furniture in the Wallace Collection in 1956, later becoming its Director in 1963. Both were major influences on Post-War decorative arts' scholarship, reinventing the subject with special interest in provenance and sales history. Both were keen supporters of Bellaigue's first masterpiece, the two-volume catalogue of the Rothschild furniture at Waddesdon, beauti-

[2] G. de Bellaigue, Obituary: Pierre Verlet, *The Burlington Magazine*, 130/1022 (May 1988), 372–3.

fully produced in 1974.[3] He became the General Editor for the Waddesdon catalogues, a role he retained until the last in the thirteen-volume series was published in 2013.

In 1963 he joined the Royal Household as deputy to Watson, who was the Surveyor of The Queen's Works of Art (then almost an honorary title because he was also Director of the Wallace Collection). When Bellaigue succeeded him in 1972 he was the first full-time appointment to this office and he held the post until his retirement in 1996. In 1988 the Royal Collection was put on a more professional footing by the creation of a new Department of the Royal Household. Until this point, the care and management of the Collection had been the concern of the Lord Chamberlain's Department. Sir Oliver Millar FBA was appointed as its first Director, to be succeeded by Bellaigue in the following year. The Royal Collection, one of the most spectacular collections in the world, is held in trust by The Queen for her successors and for the United Kingdom. It comprises the entire contents of the great royal palaces—Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and Holyroodhouse, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace, Sandringham and other royal residences. As the Director, Bellaigue was responsible for the full curatorial gamut of display, research, acquisition, conservation, exhibitions, and publications, as well as managing the administration and staffing of an increasingly-impressive team of colleagues. An early and fundamental task was the creation of a single computerised inventory of this vast patrimony.

He became a much respected and admired figure within museum circles throughout the world and his curatorial advice was constantly sought and generously given, though always in the most modest of ways. Of necessity, and with a heavy heart, he became an expert on the aftermath and subsequent reconstruction of devastating fires in two Royal palaces: Hampton Court in 1986 and Windsor Castle in 1992. There is no more nightmarish scenario for a curator than this horrifying damage to the works of art in their care but with Sir Hugh Roberts, who would succeed him as Director, and teams of experts, he turned the Windsor Castle disaster, phoenix-like, into a triumph of refurbishment and redisplay. Their legacy also included the revival of building skills and crafts which were reinvented for the project, enabling young craftsmen to evolve into expert professionals who have since contributed widely to the conservation of historic buildings. Only five years after the fire, in 1997, and a year

[3] G. de Bellaigue, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor. Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes*, 2 vols. (Fribourg, 1974).

after his official retirement, Windsor re-opened to great acclaim. Another achievement was the creation in 1993 of the Royal Collection Trust, a charity which receives the income from admissions to the palaces and allocates funds for the proper management of the Collection. The Trust financed the construction of The Queen's Galleries in London and Edinburgh in 2002, and as it goes from strength to strength, managing not only the Royal Collection but also the public opening of all the official residences of The Queen without any recourse to public funds, Bellaigue's role in its founding is worthy of celebration.

As Director of the Royal Collection, Bellaigue occasionally advised The Queen on new acquisitions, notably three of Sèvres porcelain with intimate connections to the Royal family. The first is a tinglingly rare Vincennes covered bowl and stand of *c*.1748, bearing the arms of a Prince of the House of Stuart in exile, presumably the Young Pretender who spent many years in France; the bowl and cover were acquired in London in 1964, and fortuitously the matching stand appeared in Paris in 1997.[4] Then, following his article in the *Burlington Magazine* in June 1984, part of the extraordinary 'Huzza, the King is Well' dinner service was acquired in 2003. Commissioned by the Spanish Ambassador, the Marquis del Campo, for Queen Charlotte's use at Ranelagh on 9 June 1789, it celebrated King George III's recovery from illness.[5] Thirdly, in 2004 a three-vase garniture, bought by Queen Marie-Antoinette in 1779, was reassembled by acquiring the missing centre vase to join the flanking vases purchased by King George IV in 1817.[6] Bellaigue revelled in this living quality of the Royal Collection, its objects and its history, which for him was an infinite and joyful resource for exploration and discovery. He was the most brilliant courtier, curator and Director of the Royal Collection and, on his retirement in 1996, he became a lifetime Surveyor Emeritus of The Queen's Works of Art, with the brief to complete the Royal Collection catalogue of Sèvres porcelain.

Bellaigue has a distinguished and prolific publishing record. Between 1963 and 2009 he published more than sixty-six books, exhibition catalogues, articles, reviews and obituaries; nine of his articles were for the *Burlington Magazine*, where he also published nine book reviews, and two obituaries (for Pierre Verlet and Francis Watson). His first published

[4] G. de Bellaigue, *French Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, 3 vols. (London, 2009), pp. 933–37.

[5] G. de Bellaigue, 'Huzza the King is Well', *The Burlington Magazine*, 126/975 (June 1984), 325–31, and Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*, pp. 694–8.

[6] Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*, pp. 430–9.

research was on French furniture, then he embraced the wider arts of France and George IV's collections at Buckingham Palace and Carlton House,[7] and from 1979 Sèvres porcelain began to dominate his writings.

He was totally inspired by this French royal factory which was founded in 1740 at Vincennes to the east of Paris, moved to Sèvres, *enroute* from Paris to Versailles, in 1756, and became a wholly royal enterprise in 1759. It passed from Louis XV to Louis XVI in 1774, was nationalised in 1793, and has followed the fates of the French governments ever since; it is still in production today. The very name conjures up vases of sculptural form, decorated with brilliant coloured grounds, pictorial reserves and elaborate gilding, as well as sumptuous wares for use in the bedroom, the boudoir or at table. It is also famed for its extraordinary technical wizardry, its evolvement of design and decoration to serve the search for novelty in eighteenth-century Paris, and its influence on many other European factories. Following the confiscation of great collections during the French Revolution, eighteenth-century Sèvres became even more attractive to English patrons and collectors, most notably George IV who assembled what to this day is still the greatest collection of Sèvres porcelain in the world. Bellaigue also became a master of the factory's extensive, though incomplete, Archives such that his exquisitely-detailed research and analysis knew no equal. He always underestimated his achievement by giving the impression that these extensive documents are of a manageable size, ready to yield information at the turn of a page, while in fact they are exceedingly complex and not always rewarding, even to the most skilled researcher.

His exhibition *Sèvres Porcelain from the Royal Collection* at Buckingham Palace,[8] which opened in December 1979, was the first major exhibition of Sèvres ever to be organised, although the factory's early years at Vincennes had been celebrated in an exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris, in 1977–78.[9] On the cover of the catalogue was a pair of vases which exactly two-hundred years earlier, in December 1779, had been bought by Queen Marie-Antoinette for her apartment at Versailles

[7] See, for example, G. de Bellaigue, *George IV and the Arts of France* (Exhibition Catalogue, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London, 1966) and G. de Bellaigue, *Carlton House, the Past Glories of George IV's Palace* (Exhibition Catalogue, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London, 1991).

[8] G. de Bellaigue, *Sèvres Porcelain from the Royal Collection* (Exhibition Catalogue, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London, 1979).

[9] T. Préaud and A. Faÿ-Hallé, *Porcelaines de Vincennes, les origines de Sèvres* (Exhibition Catalogue, Grand Palais, Paris, 1977–8).

(for which he was to acquire the central vase in 2004). The exhibition was so fresh and new because of his masterful use of the Sèvres Archives to identify original titles of models, work practices and buyers from the factory. It was also innovative in that Bellaigue was probably the first curator in the Royal Collection to embrace a commercial opportunity (though he would smile at the very thought): he commissioned from Sèvres some reproductions of the plainer plates from the King Louis XVI service for sale in the exhibition shop, while also putting some on show beside the real plates inside a display case. He enjoyed challenging visitors to see if they were sufficiently observant to tell which was which.

Seven years later, in 1986, the same service became another of his publishing triumphs: *Sèvres Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen, The Louis XVI Service*. His extensive catalogue of this superb service, ordered by the King in 1783, and which was only half completed when he was executed in 1793, and now in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, is the most definitive work on any Sèvres dinner service.[10] It is unique in its documentation, decoration (for a service) and history, and the factory's reputation would be undiminished if it were the only Sèvres known today. Bellaigue revealed how of the proposed 422 pieces, only 198 had been made by the time of the King's death. The documentation includes a timetable of manufacture in Louis's own hand, a booklet itemising the pieces delivered from 1784 to 1790, and factory records (Painters' and Kiln Registers, Overtime Records, reports and drawings). It is decorated with a dark-blue ground, is painted with elaborate scenes of classical history and mythology (as many as five on a plate) and is richly gilded. As with the 1979 Queen's Gallery catalogue, the complexity of Bellaigue's research and his painstaking attention to detail was unsurpassed. Despite many of the pieces being unmarked and the documents riddled with inconsistencies, he produced a comprehensive analysis of the date of decoration and delivery of each piece, and convincingly identified (sometimes on stylistic grounds) the work of individual painters. The *tour de force* of this catalogue is Bellaigue's identification of over three hundred sources for the painted scenes. These include engravings after seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings (including works by Francesco Albani, Guido Reni and Angelica Kauffmann, but predominantly by French artists from Nicolas Poussin to François Boucher), the Abbé Banier's edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1767–71), and François

[10] G. de Bellaigue, *Sèvres Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen, The Louis XVI Service* (Cambridge, 1986).

Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (from 1773). In one instance, a guess as to the five engravings used for a plate still missing when the text was submitted was proved accurate on each count when the piece was traced in time for inclusion in an addendum.

Great though his work is on this service, his *magnum opus* is undoubtedly *French Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*.[11] This noble, mammoth and magnificent three-volume work finally appeared in 2009, thirty years after it had been heralded in his 1979 Queen's Gallery catalogue, and is, quite simply, breathtaking. Largely it describes the Sèvres collection of George IV (1762–1830), who began as a patron of the factory, his first purchase being a service in 1784. Despite being a great Francophile, he never visited France, so his acumen for sensational pieces of Sèvres was both instinctive and also guided by various dealers and advisors who, from 1787, helped him to furnish his elaborate, colourful and gilded palace of Carlton House, London. Bellaigue explains how the King collected for bravura and display and how Sèvres porcelain was perfect for these sumptuous interiors. The collection continued to grow throughout his life and, despite giving many pieces away in his lifetime, it was even larger at his death than it is now.

Bellaigue recorded how the evolution of this catalogue dated back to the reign of Queen Victoria. Following George IV's death in 1830, his passion for the opulent display of Sèvres had had its day. Neither King William IV nor his successor was interested and the importance of the collection was forgotten, except in one respect: Queen Victoria and Prince Albert recognised how its technical qualities could be useful for the teaching of improved design. So in 1852, having visited the Marlborough House exhibition of the Department of Practical Art, Sir Henry Cole (later first Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum) recalled how 'Her Majesty gave me permission to search Buckingham Palace for Sèvres china….we brought away Sèvres worth many thousands of pounds. No inventory of it could be found, and I took away many pieces, each now worth £1,000, from housemaid's closets in bedrooms. The exhibition of this china made a great sensation, and led afterwards to it being properly arranged in Buckingham Palace, and an inventory made.'[12] This inventory led in 1856 to Richard Redgrave being 'charged with the task of classifying the objects of *vertu* and cataloguing the pictures' in the Royal Collection.[13] While he

[11] Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*.
[12] Ibid., pp. 27–8.
[13] Ibid., p. 1.

completed the pictures in 1879, the French porcelain, no doubt under 'objects of *vertu*', has taken until the twenty-first century. Perhaps the first problem was the terminology, pictures were to be 'catalogued', while the decorative arts were merely to be 'classified'. Today such distinctions have all but disappeared and, as Bellaigue noted in the Preface, he followed Redgrave's rules for picture cataloguing for each object: 'size, inscriptions, provenance and authorship, supplemented by a description, a commentary and photographs'. He also mentioned how much the study of Sèvres has advanced since he had published his Royal Collection exhibition catalogue in 1979, with the appearance of eight other archival-based catalogues (and, it should be added, through his own publications). And he explains the importance of a collection being catalogued in depth as '…no two collections are identical. The justification, therefore, for producing yet another catalogue is precisely to highlight the individuality of the collection and to present it in its historical context.'[14]

Bellaigue achieved these aims by restricting his entries specifically to the item under discussion, rather than to too great a generic discussion of such areas as the history of the form or wide-ranging comparative examples. This enables him to concentrate in a different way, not—as is more usual—by dealing with the purity of the eighteenth-century object and then any nineteenth-century accretions like gilt-bronze mounts or alterations. He sees this final entity as the work of art, describing later gilt-bronze additions as integral to the whole object, rather than an unfortunate embellishment, because this was how George IV was happy to view his pieces. To the King the mounts were as much a part of the object as its original form and this was also true of his generation of collectors. This re-jigging of the integrity of the piece works well for this extraordinary and highly-individual collection, though it probably would not have done so for many other museum catalogues. In taking this approach, Bellaigue may yet set a new trend because, as the straightforward eighteenth-century work of art becomes catalogued and well known, interest may increasingly turn to the study of the more quirky and composite object with a different story to tell.

Bellaigue saw an individual object as a conduit to wider connections within the decorative arts, their design and manufacture, function and display, and patronage and collecting. This in turn he viewed within the historical, political, economic and social context of the time, so that a mere piece of porcelain becomes a hero of great significance. As a catalogue entry begins with an object, and not an idea, the basics about

[14] Ibid., p. 2.

material, size, shape and decoration need systematic and logical treatment before more creative and imaginative possibilities can be explored. Bellaigue co-ordinates both masterfully, but gains the most pleasure from the latter, especially when the Sèvres Archives are his source: for him even a humble cup and saucer can be studied from manufacture and production to technical innovations and solutions, from designs that are novel and fashionable to forms that are functional and decorative, from the individual designers, craftsmen and artists and their sources, techniques and achievements to their life-styles, payments, families and working conditions, and from the costs of different stages of production to its final price when bought by a patron of the factory. Along the way he sees it in relation to other pieces, for example as part of a tea or dinner service or a garniture of vases, it can be compared to or matched with other known examples, and it can be described in terms of its intended usability or display. Then it can be identified with its purchaser or subsequent collector, and their histories, and it can be traced in inventories, sales or exhibition catalogues or publications. Of course there are very few objects that can be followed through each of these processes, but those that can are a source of extraordinary fascination, and they confirm how brilliantly the decorative arts can influence and enliven an appreciation of history. Added to this is his extensive research in the Royal Archives, where the holdings of bills, receipts and inventories reveal the acquisition, display and subsequent history of each piece. These two archives provide such a rich and potent mixture of documentary sources that Bellaigue's entries become individual biographies of each piece of porcelain.

With a catalogue of the sheer scale of this publication (it weighs 23 pounds), it is hard for the cataloguer to know where to begin, and how to pace such a huge and varied collection. The word catalogue is problematic nowadays, used of curt on-line reference lists (perhaps rather like Redgrave's word 'classifying'), to veritable research essays taking a subject to new heights, as in this case. Here Bellaigue's three volumes of 1,291 pages begin with 85 pages of seven introductory essays, then almost 1,100 pages of entries, and there are 90 pages of appendices. The introductory essays contain as much invaluable information and research as an entire book. They cover the formation of the collection (divided into chapters on George IV's friendship with France, his reliance on friends, agents and dealers, his taste for Sèvres and its display at Carlton House, his sense of history, and his collection after his death in 1830), then there are five on aspects of Sèvres porcelain—figure painting, bronzes, later-decorated pieces, plaques and sculpture—and finally one on Paris porcelain.

This stupendous catalogue almost had a sense of finality about it when it appeared in 2009, as if it brought to an end the most spectacular Sèvres era in this country which George IV, his mother Queen Charlotte and their contemporaries began. The English are especially fortunate to have the three greatest collections of Sèvres porcelain in the world (the Royal Collection, the Hertford collection in the Wallace Collection, and the Rothschild collection at Waddesdon Manor), all assembled by private individuals and remaining together in publicly-available collections in properties owned by their families. But Bellaigue has discovered how the wealth and acquisitive gusto of these collectors made museum acquisitions difficult, as noted by Sir Henry Cole as early as 1854 in a letter asking if Sèvres from the Royal Collection might be borrowed to circulate to 'provincial Schools of Art' because Sèvres is a porcelain 'which at present the nation cannot afford to buy'.[15] The nation has always relied on these three great non-museum collections, but interestingly they have slightly skewed the British understanding of Sèvres since they are deprived of the earlier, simpler Vincennes pieces in favour of the grandest collections of vases and dinner wares. All three are now catalogued, the first by the pioneering Svend Eriksen for Waddesdon Manor in 1968, then the Wallace Collection in 1988 and finally, the best of them all, the Royal Collection catalogue in 2009.[16] Not only did these great families make available the Sèvres porcelain that the nation could not afford, they also chose to collect the furniture and other decorative arts contemporary with the porcelain so that there is an all-embracing sense of eighteenth-century France in England today. Bellaigue's involvement with all three collections, as curator, cataloguer or trustee (see below), has been a unifying factor in their respective histories for the last fifty years.

His exceptional work on French furniture has also benefitted these three collections and the wider world of collections, especially in France and the United States of America. This began with his three articles on furniture in 1963,[17] and was followed by his 1974 Waddesdon Manor catalogue, which still has biblical proportions in French furniture studies.[18]

[15] Ibid., p. 28.

[16] S. Eriksen, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Sèvres Porcelain* (Fribourg, 1968); R. Savill, *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Sevres Porcelain*, 3 vols. (London, 1988), and Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*.

[17] G. de Bellaigue, '18th-century French furniture and its debt to engravers', *Apollo*, 77/11 (January 1963), 16–23; 'A supplement', *Apollo*, 78/19 (September 1963), 216–17; and 'Intimacy of 18th-century French furniture, *Country Life*, 133/3458 (13 June 1963), 1368–70.

[18] Bellaigue, *Waddesdon Furniture.*

At his memorial service at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, on 18 April 2013, Sir Hugh Roberts envisaged how exciting it must have been for a young curator in his late twenties to gain access to the extraordinary treasure trove of furniture at Waddesdon, praising the catalogue thus:

> What made this brilliantly illuminating study, distilled in Geoffrey's spare and elegant prose, so absolutely engrossing was the author's ability to look over the shoulder—as it were—of those responsible for commissioning and making these great works of art, so as to give the reader a much more vivid understanding of the way they had come into existence, but always—and this was ever a hallmark of Geoffrey's scholarly integrity—with an appropriate caution against making the least assumption unsupported by fact.[19]

Indeed furniture scholars miss him just as much as ceramic scholars, especially the Furniture History Society and the French Porcelain Society, both presenting him with Festschrifts in 2007. At the launch of the Furniture History Society's Festschrift, Sir Nicholas Goodison FBA could have spoken for both societies when he said: 'Since the earliest days of the Society he has been an inspiration to us all.'[20]

Bellaigue's publications viewed overall reveal his unusual and infectious fascination for the links between France and England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (a link which mirrored his own life). A study he made his own was the relationship between English and French dealers and their clients, with his unique detective work identifying two early-nineteenth century dealers-cum-fakers: Edward Holmes Baldock in England, published in 1975,[21] and then Philippe-Claude Maëlrondt in France, published in 2004.[22] He has proved that they were separately responsible for causing much of the confusion among collectors and academics as to what is an original eighteenth-century piece of porcelain or furniture and what has been altered or 'enhanced' following the French Revolution. The impact of his writings over the years has met with respect and admiration from curators, academics, collectors, auction houses and dealers; in fact it has done much to break down the old rivalries between them and fostered the new collegiate way that decorative arts specialists work together today.

[19] Sir Hugh Roberts, Address, A Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of Geoffrey de Bellaigue, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, 18 April 2013 (text kindly supplied by the author).
[20] Quotation kindly supplied by Lucy Wood in an email on 4 April 2013.
[21] G. de Bellaigue, 'Edward Holmes Baldock, Part 1', *The Connoisseur*, 189 (1975), 290–99, and 'Edward Holmes Baldock, Part 2', *The Connoisseur*, 190 (1975), 18–25.
[22] G. de Bellaigue, 'Philippe-Claude Maëlrondt, supplier to George IV', *The Burlington Magazine*, 146/1215 (June 2004), 386–95.

Bellaigue's scholarship is practical, instructive and enduring, not vague, self-indulgent and easily dated, based as it is on an understanding of objects and archives within the context of history, and it appreciates the wonders of production not only though the collectors' but also through twenty-first century eyes. His intellectual fastidiousness and self-discipline made him such an excellent researcher who avoided irrelevant flights of fancy, and his own research methods were singular and wonderfully productive. He once quoted Oswald Barron's 1914 tribute to Guy Francis Laking (who published a book on the Royal Collection Sèvres in 1907[23]), 'His knowledge was in his wits and memory and fingers rather than in paper and notebook,'[24] but Bellaigue's success was that his knowledge combined all these resources, especially in his diligent paper records which were extraordinarily meticulous. His research, much of it undertaken in Paris, was recorded in long hand on irreplaceable small index cards, which he carried around with him and could draw on instantly to double check an idea or a reference. But this once led to disaster when following a flight back to London his suitcase, filled with all the card indices and some pungent French cheeses, failed to arrive. It was missing for many months until one day, out of the blue, it reappeared with, miraculously, the research still intact and, luckily, the cheeses removed. He also was thrilled by the tactile delight of studying objects up close, looking at every possible detail with an enquiring eye and a steady hand. And he was always accompanied by a very neat torch which would be whipped out of his pocket to get a clearer view. When it came to examining furniture he never stood on ceremony, but would lie down on the floor and sometimes slide underneath a piece to check for features of construction or labels, which was dangerous for such an elegantly tall and slim man when one day he injured his back in the process.

Bellaigue gave scholarship in French decorative arts the same attention and intellectual rigour as previously had been reserved for paintings. While Pierre Verlet played an inspirational role in this in France in the 1950s and 1960s, it is Bellaigue who fostered and encouraged a new generation of British curators since the 1970s, whose publications constantly acknowledge their immeasurable debt to him. He warmly and widely shared his zest for scholarship, not as a top-down imparting of knowledge, but as a partnership whereby he proffered information and expected a parrying reply; for him a passive listener was dreary, he wanted

[23] G. F. Laking, *Sèvres Porcelain of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle* (London, 1907).
[24] Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*, p. 1.

encounters to be fun. His lectures were always carefully crafted and prepared and he lectured widely. Once at a conference held by the Bard Graduate Center in New York in the mid–1990s he revealed that he had recently discovered a letter from George IV to Napoleon, urging him to instruct the French customs to expedite the granting of an export licence for a clock he had bought in Paris. This he delivered so nonchalantly, as if it was perfectly normal for a Prince of Wales and an Emperor, on opposing sides, to correspond on such a personal matter when their two nations were at war with each other, that it took a few moments for his audience to gasp at the sheer audacity of George IV's request. His students cherished his combination of erudition with empathy and his irreverent turns-of-phase: for example at a Royal Collection Studies Sèvres session in 2008 he reminded them 'that Sèvres porcelain is not everyone's cup of tea' (subtly acknowledging that he did not expect them to like it), but he then dazzled them with his knowledge, endearingly embellished with references to Ambassador del Campo being a 'giddy, merry mortal' and dubbing the faking and redecoration of Sèvres in the nineteenth century as 'bogosity'! His enjoyment of expressive words also appears in his obituary for Marcelle Brunet, the Archivist at Sèvres, in 1987 when he recalled that her word for such pieces was '*tripatouillé*'.[25]

This spoken style also appears in his written commentaries, which are conversational and pleasingly readable and, despite the complexities of his arguments, reveal a very human side to him. From his touchingly self-deprecatory caution in analysis, to personally-revealing views and humorous touches in his opinions, there is an ease of writing that many a younger cataloguer taught to avoid value judgements and informality could only envy. To take some examples from his Royal Collection catalogue: 'On balance the compiler, not withstanding the uncertainties and the ambiguities, inclines to the view …,'[26] or 'Although mistakes were sometimes made by the clerks at Sèvres, it would be rash to postulate such an error in order to suit the facts in this instance, particularly as there are many other uncertainties,'[27] or 'At first sight there is little that can be said in favour of this service. The overall effect is displeasing …,'[28] to a 'litany of infelicities',[29] or 'Of particular beauty is the richly tooled and burnished

[25] G. de Bellaigue, 'Obituary: Marcelle Brunet', *Apollo*, 125/302 (April 1987), 316.
[26] Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*, p. 395.
[27] Ibid., p. 801.
[28] Ibid., p. 741.
[29] Ibid., p. 342.

gilding',[30] and 'the vase is among the most aesthetically satisfying wares made at the Vincennes manufactory'.[31] One can sense his pleasure in the object, and his delight in assessing its strengths and weaknesses, and these qualities give his writing its energy, passion and individuality. His correspondence was also often fun and tongue-in-cheek, including some from the 1980s, now in deep storage in the J. Paul Getty Museum, concerning an elusive ground colour referred to in the Sèvres Archives as '*merde d'oie*'. The Curator Gillian Wilson had hoped that this was the 1780s title for a brown ground on a cup and saucer that she had recently bought and was trying to identify in the Archives, but Bellaigue, who walked through Green Park to his office in St James's Palace each day, was adamant that on his first-hand experience of the geese there that the colour had to be green, not brown. His mischievous sense of humour, combined with immense charm and a deep humanity, belied his formal and quiet exterior as a respected courtier (proved, as John Ingamells, Director of the Wallace Collection 1978–92, used to say, by his never getting doughnut jam down his tie at Wallace Collection office celebrations when doughnuts were provided as a treat). Such surprising informality from such a superlative expert made him a much-loved colleague, who also touched those who barely knew him. One day he arrived at the Wallace Collection announcing himself to the Attendant at the front desk simply as 'de Bellaigue' in his gentle clipped voice; but when relayed over the phone to the curator upstairs it became 'Mr Bill Haig is here'.

In 1971 he married Sheila Russell, who worked as an Archivist in the Royal Archives. It was often said that at their wedding there were a number of weeping single ladies who could not believe that their hero was now no longer attainable. Their two daughters have followed in their parents' footsteps with their love of history and objects, the elder, Christina Willmore, being an Associate Professor in History at Exeter College, Oxford, and the younger, Diana Challands, a Conservator at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. His daughters wrote their own obituary for their father in *The Guardian* on 24 March 2013 which gives a touching intimacy to his life:[32] 'Geoffrey was a lifelong *Guardian* reader and much less conservative in his opinions than his appearance suggested (he was rarely seen without a tie). He read widely, kept abreast of politics and literature. One of his great pleasures was wandering the streets of London

[30] Ibid., p. 164.
[31] Ibid., p. 129.
[32] C. Willmore and D. Challands, 'Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue Obituary', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2013.

and Paris, spotting architectural features and enjoying the scenes of life around him;' they mention how as a 'modest man, he never pontificated but was unfailingly generous with his knowledge. He took seriously the duty to foster the careers of young scholars and was distressed by the prohibitive price of his catalogues, which put them beyond the price of many.[33] His own career was marked by his commitment to understanding and making known the collections of which he felt himself privileged to be the custodian.' They describe how his wife's 'love, loyalty and intelligence were invaluable to him, especially when he became Director of the Royal Collection in 1988, a position for which in some ways he was temperamentally unsuited but that he considered it his duty to accept. Nevertheless his period as Director was marked by a major success: the establishment of a computerised inventory of the vast collection. To this he adopted a characteristically hands-on approach, abandoning his beloved index cards and researching and entering the data on many of the objects himself.' And they recall how 'On one occasion at a poolside party he attended while a visiting scholar the Getty Institute, he was asked whether he had any valuable objects about him. Guessing what was up he jumped straight into the pool, leaving his baseball cap (his one concession to the California weather) floating on the surface.' For those who knew him professionally he is instantly recognisable from their description, except perhaps for the baseball cap which would have dumbfounded most of his colleagues, who associated him more with the vagaries of the Scottish weather on his cherished walks in the Highlands.

At his memorial service Chaucer's words 'He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight' were brilliantly chosen to be printed on the service sheet, and he was remembered for these quintessential qualities:

> For his long life lived out with great honesty, tenacity of purpose, dignity, and discretion;
> For his erudition and scholarship, the integrity of his research and the spare elegance of his writing;
> For his love of beautiful things and places;
> For his deep affection for the country of his birth;
> For his loyalty to the Crown and his sense of privilege and duty bestowed by his work;
> For his wisdom and kindness, which brought many friends to seek his advice, knowing that they had his unfailing support;

[33] He would have been very happy to know that in the summer of 2013 the Royal Collection Trust made available, free of charge, a copy of his 2009 catalogue to every member of the French Porcelain Society. It was originally priced at £500.

> For his modesty, charm, wit, and considerable silliness;
> For his loyalty to his friends and colleagues, particularly in times of difficulty;
> For the happy complicité which he enjoyed with his brother and which was such a source of strength;
> For his pride in and love for his wife and family, and the pleasure he took in his grandchildren.[34]

Bellaigue was also loved and admired in France, where he was well known in the museums and archives in Paris, Sèvres and Versailles. He began working in the Archives at Sèvres before the retirement of Marcelle Brunet in 1968, and under her successor Tamara Préaud he relished the wonderful atmosphere she created there, which suited him perfectly. The vast study room was shared by international and local researchers and by the factory's own artists and designers, and Bellaigue was never happier than when one of them came in and everyone stood up and shook hands and discussed their work on Sèvres. Lunch would be a quick dash to a café across the road for a sandwich and a glass of red wine (always called a *ballon de rouge*), then back to the desk until the last-possible moment before closing. Then in the evenings he occasionally met other researchers from the Archives for a night cap at the La Rhumerie in the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where he encouraged them to drink a *lait chaud* laced with rum, or at the Brasserie Lipp where he loved the ambiance with its stylish décor and the waiters in floor-length aprons. (In England, conversely, he used to enjoy a pub lunch in Gordon's Bar in Villiers Street, relishing the damp and decay of this dark, vaulted and eccentric basement.) Tamara Préaud once said Bellaigue was held in such esteem in Paris that he was considered synonymous with The Queen, in their eyes regal, grand and aloof, until they heard him speak and then they realised how human and engaging he was. He will also be much missed at Versailles, where the former Director General of the Palace and Museums, Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, wrote of him in *Versalia* in 2014: '*Désormais sir Geoffrey, il était devenu la quintessence du Britannique*', recalling how he valued him on two separate committees at Versailles, firstly because by being a highly-esteemed foreign scholar he could show how Versailles is not just for France but for the whole world, and secondly, on a new acquisitions committee, where '*Il y trouva naturellement sa place, et son aura de grand spécialiste y fut suprêmement importante, s'agissant de l'enrichissement de collections qu'il connaissait comme nul autre. Je me souviens de ses questions pertinentes et précises sur tel coffre à bijoux de Carlin orné de*

[34] Roberts, Address…

plaques de porcelaine de Sèvres, qu'un don magnifique à Versailles avait permis de faire entrer dans les collections nationales.'[35]

Bellaigue's honours are deservedly extensive. He became an FBA in 1992; his royal distinctions included the LVO in 1968, CVO in 1976, KCVO in 1986 and GCVO in 1996; he was made an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres (France) in 1987 and an Officier, Légion d'Honneur in 1999. He was a welcome and admired member of many advisory committees, including being a Member of the Executive Committee of the National-Art-Collections-Fund/Art Fund (1977–2013), a Trustee of the Wallace Collection (1998–2006, apparently after having been rejected years earlier by Mrs Thatcher, which amused him greatly), President of the French Porcelain Society (1985–99), a Founding Member of the Academic Committee of Waddesdon Manor (1993–2013), a Member of the Consultative Committee of the *Burlington Magazine* (1985–2013), and twice on the Council of the Furniture History Society (1969–72 and 1981–84). The French Porcelain Society honoured him with a three-day conference in 2005 and a Festschrift in 2007, and the Furniture History Society also published a Festschrift in 2007.[36] The two committees he sat on at the Palace of Versailles were Le Conseil scientifique de l'établissment public and the Commission des acquisitions du musée [de Versailles], of which he was a founder member. His photograph, taken by Lucy Dickens in 2000 at his home in Store Tower, Windsor Castle, in her series The Art Establishment, was acquired by the National Portrait Gallery in 2001 (NPG P948(12)). Yet he wore these accolades so lightly: he was, as William Shawcross wrote in *The Spectator* in 2013 'The cleverest and sweetest of men.'[37] In 2010 he presented his research papers and archival notes to the Library of the Wallace Collection, London.

Bellaigue's academic legacy sets new horizons for decorative arts scholarship. The May 1985 editorial of the *Burlington Magazine*, 'Of Meissen men: ceramics and academics', stated: 'It is nonetheless undeniable that the serious study of ceramics has, as yet, had little impact on the wider study of art history;'[38] but Bellaigue's expertise of a lifetime has finally disproved this statement and provided a much-needed catalyst for

[35] P. Arizzoli-Clémentel, 'In memoriam Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue (1931–2013)', *Versalia*, La Société des Amis de Versailles, 17 (2014).
[36] *The French Porcelain Society Journal*, The French Porcelain Society, London, 3 (2007), and *Furniture History*, The Furniture History Society, London, 43 (2007); both publish Bellaigue's bibliography.
[37] W. Shawcross, 'Diary', *The Spectator* (20 August 2013), 11.
[38] Editorial, *The Burlington Magazine*, 127/986 (May 1985), 275.

the decorative arts as a whole. He wrote that 'George IV had an eye, he had taste and he had flair';[39] in fact this is true of them both, but he had something more: great scholarship, and through this he anchors the study of the decorative arts securely in the harbour of the history of art. His reputation and influence will continue to be revered among those who share his passion for eighteenth-century France such that in the history of art's Hall of Fame his bust will preside over an unusual pedestal: one dedicated to the decorative arts.

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Note: The author is grateful to Sheila, Lady de Bellaigue, and to Jonathan Marsden, Director of the Royal Collection, for their help with this memoir.

[39] Bellaigue, *French Porcelain*, p. 26.