

## **FATHERS AND SONS: Five Generations and the Formation of a Collection**

A short distance north of Oxford Street, in the Marylebone area of London, lies Manchester Square, one of the smaller but better preserved eighteenth-century garden squares in London. The central section of the northern side of the square is occupied by a mansion built between 1776 and 1788 for the fourth Duke of Manchester, from whom the square takes its name. Purchased in 1797 by the second Marquess of Hertford, the house, which had been known as Manchester House, became Hertford House. With a major restyling undertaken in 1872-75, Hertford House took on its present outward appearance. Architectural commentators have been critical of the restyling. But it is not the architecture of Hertford House that draws us to Manchester Square. Rather, it is the incomparable collection contained within the House that warrants our attention. This collection was accumulated between about 1760 and 1880 by five succeeding generations of one family, the Seymour-Conways, and reflects not only the individual tastes and personalities of the five fathers and sons who formed it, but also the periods in which they lived.

The collection's genesis flows from Frances Seymour-Conway, who was created first Marquess of Hertford in 1793, the year before his death at age seventy-six. A loyal Tory, his diplomatic and court appointments included Ambassador in Paris, Lord Chamberlain, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, where he had extensive estates in Lisburn, near Belfast. The first Marquess was not a dedicated collector, but he occasionally bought pictures of characteristic English eighteenth-century taste for his various properties. Eight oil paintings now in the collection at Hertford House were acquired by him: portraits of two of his daughters, Frances and Elizabeth, which he commissioned from Sir Joshua Reynolds and six Venetian scenes by Canaletto.

The second Marquess, another Tory, followed a similar diplomatic and court career as his father, serving as Ambassador to Berlin and Vienna and holding positions in the Royal

Household, including, like his father, serving as Lord Chamberlain. Following the death of his first wife, after just four years of marriage, the second Marquess married the sixteen-year-old Isabella Ingram. Considered one of the reigning beauties of the day, Isabella soon caught the attention of the Prince of Wales, the future Prince Regent and George IV. The Prince's relationship with Isabella, which ran nine years, spawned a host of vitriolic rumors and many ribald political cartoons. Much of the public scorn was because Isabella was credited with shifting the Prince's political allegiance from Whig to Tory.

Like his father, the second Marquess appears to have been a casual purchaser of works of art. He did purchase some notable English portraits, including Reynold's charming 1760s study of Miss Nelly O'Brien, a famous courtesan. He also purchased George Romney's portrait of *Mrs. Mary 'Perdita' Robinson*, a noted actress, writer, and celebrity figure. In 1818, the Prince Regent, as the Prince of Wales had by then become, gave the Marquess another portrait of Mary Robinson. The Prince had commissioned the gracious full-length portrait from Thomas Gainsborough thirty-seven years earlier. It depicts Mary, holding a portrait miniature of the Prince, seated in a landscape with a dog, a symbol of loyalty, at her side. The then young Prince of Wales had become infatuated with Mary after seeing her on stage. He pursued her and she became his first mistress only after he gave her a bond for £20,000 to be paid when he came of age. The affair lasted less than a year as the fickle Prince transferred his affections elsewhere. And the bond? It was not paid.

The second Marquess died in 1822, age seventy-nine, and was succeeded by his and Isabella's only surviving child. As soon as he had come of age, the future third Marquess had married, against his parents' wishes, Maria Fagnani, the illegitimate daughter of the Marchesa Fagnani, a former Italian ballet dancer. No one really knows who Maria's father was, but William Douglas, the famously lecherous fourth Duke of Queensberry ("Old Q"), and the popular wit George Augustus Selwyn, each believed himself to be Maria's father, and left her the bulk of

their fortune on their death. As a consequence, the Seymour-Conway family, which already was wealthy, became exceedingly rich, Rothschild-like rich.

Other than financially and in the provision of an all-important heir, the marriage of the third Marquess and Maria was not a success. Soon after they visited Paris in 1802 the two became estranged and from that time on led separate lives. Maria remained in Paris, where she lived in some style and bore an illegitimate son in 1805. For his part, the third Marquess led a progressively dissolute life in London as the prototypical Regency Rake. He is said to have maintained a (non-exclusive) *ménage* with a married woman and all three of her daughters.

Although much of his time was given to the pursuit of pleasure, the third Marquess was a considerable connoisseur and the first real collector of the family. He devoted time and skill to acquiring works of art. He would study sale catalogs and was concerned with the condition and provenance of the works he bought. He was particularly discerning in acquiring seventeenth-century Dutch cabinet paintings, including Rembrandt's *Good Samaritan* and *Landscape with a Coach*. His passion, however, was for French eighteenth-century art, works of the *ancien régime*. Yet, perhaps his best known purchase was Titian's great *Perseus and Andromeda*, painted for Philip II of Spain in 1554-56. This painting depicts Perseus' dramatic rescue of the nude princess Andromeda from a sea monster. While it is now possible to acknowledge the third Marquess' achievements as a collector, when he died a contemporary scoffed that "no man ever lived more despised or died less regretted".

Richard Seymour-Conway, the fourth Marquess, was born in London in 1800, but brought up in Paris by his mother, Maria, the third Marchioness. He came back to England at age sixteen to complete his education and served briefly as an officer in the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars, an attaché at the British Embassies in Constantinople and Paris, and a Tory MP for Lisburn. Highly intelligent, he was considered by some a future Tory Prime Minister. But by the time he was thirty, he had renounced any public role in Britain and decided to settle in Paris, where he had

bought a large apartment on rue Laffitte. In 1835 he also acquired the eighteenth century Château Bagatelle in the Bois de Boulogne, and for the rest of his life seldom left Paris.

The fourth Marquess developed the reputation of being a recluse prone to lethargy and depression. His neurotic reserve contrasted with his father's zest for pleasure and social intercourse. While he sometimes ventured into Parisian society, the fourth Marquess lived, as an acquaintance later expressed it, "a withdrawn, invisible life, always seeming to be ill, only opening his door to a chosen few, and since he was absolutely indifferent to all movement and life, would not even have drawn back his curtains to see a revolution go by in the street below."

It was only as a collector that the fourth Marquess seemed to find any fulfilment, and he turned out to be the greatest collector of the family. Becoming one of the richest men in Europe on the death of his father in 1842, for the next twenty-eight years the fourth Marquess found collecting a wholly absorbing occupation. Unlike his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, the fourth Marquess did not buy just to furnish rooms, he collected-- collected on a grand scale. Confident and knowledgeable, the fourth Marquess usually bought at auction through agents. With virtually unlimited funds, when he bid for a work, the Marquess usually obtained it.

While he brought Dutch Golden Age paintings, including Rembrandt's *Titus* and Frans Hals's *The Laughing Cavalier*, many superb Old Masters, including Velázquez's beautiful *The Lady with a Fan*, and Poussin's magnificent *A Dance to the Music of Time*; and most of the nineteenth-century paintings now in the collection, the fourth Marquess, like his father, was particularly a collector of French eighteenth-century art. However, he acquired a broader range of objects and on a far greater scale than his father. He bought pictures by Watteau, Greuze, Boucher, and Fragonard; many fine pieces of Sèvres porcelain; furniture by the greatest French cabinet-makers, as well as miniatures, gold boxes, Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries, and sculpture.

His taste was for pleasing and sensuous works of art. He disliked portraits of old men, scenes of violence, and all "primitive" art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Consequently, he acquired very few depictions of martyrdoms, crucifixions, or acts of violence - but quite a large number of paintings of pretty women – eighteenth-century pin-ups – like Fragonard's *The Swing*. Although he lived in Paris from 1830 to 1870, one of the most eventful periods of French painting, he was not adventurous in purchasing art of the day. He neglected works of Daumier, Courbet, Millet and Manet, for example. He also rarely commissioned works and only bought his best-known nineteenth-century paintings, works by Delacroix, Vernet, and Delarouche, after the artists' reputations had been established.

Very rarely leaving Paris, the fourth Marquess used Hertford House to store many of the purchases he made in the London sale-rooms through his agents. This suggests that in shades of William Randolph Hearst and his cinematic alter-ego, Charles Foster Kane, acquisition, collecting, was everything and counted for far more to the Marquess than display. An example of this is perhaps the greatest of the fourth Marquess's Old Master acquisitions, Rubens' *The Rainbow Landscape*, which depicts a view from Rubens' manor house, Het Steen, over the surrounding countryside. Rubens painted this view and its companion piece, *A View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*, around 1636 for his own pleasure, and the two works remained with him until his death. In the eighteenth-century, the two paintings were looted and ultimately sold separately. When *The Rainbow Landscape* was sold in London in 1856, the National Gallery, which already owned the companion piece, made a determined effort to buy it and re-unite the two works. But the fourth Marquess had deeper pockets. Despite his success in acquiring *The Rainbow Landscape*, the Marquess never saw it after he bought it. He had the painting delivered to Hertford House, where it has remained, while he stayed in Paris until his death-fourteen years later.

It was in August 1870, that the fourth Marquess died at Château Bagatelle, as the Prussian army advanced on Paris. Because the fourth Marquess was unmarried, his Marquisate and entailed property went to a second cousin. But his un-entailed property, which included the rue Laffitte apartment, Château Bagatelle, the estates in Ireland, Hertford House,

and, most importantly, the Marquess' great collection, was bequeathed to Richard Wallace, the fourth Marquess' fifty-two-year-old illegitimate son by an English woman named Mrs. Agnes Jackson, née Wallace.

Richard Jackson was born in London in 1818, when his father was eighteen and serving with the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars. His mother was a kind of "*fille du regiment*." Richard was brought to Paris at age six and raised by his father's mother, Maria, the third Marchioness. With the death of the third Marquess in 1842, Richard changed his surname to his mother's maiden name, Wallace, and thereafter acted as agent and confidential secretary to his father, assisting him with his collecting.

In contrast to his father's and grandfather's indifference to their fellow-men, Wallace funded charitable works. During the Prussian siege of Paris and the ensuing strife of the Paris Commune, he established a hospital, provided numerous field ambulances, and furnished welfare funds to the beleaguered citizens of Paris. In recognition of his philanthropy, Queen Victoria made him a Baronet in 1872. The year before, Wallace had married his mistress, Julie Castelnau, the mother of his then thirty-year-old, illegitimate son, Edmond.

After the upheavals of the Paris Commune, Wallace decided in 1872 to relocate to Hertford House, bringing a substantial amount of his Parisian collection with him. Some twenty-five train cars were required to convey the items. In all 736 paintings, 227 miniatures, 446 pieces of furniture, sculpture and decorative bronzes, 240 porcelain objects, 141 pieces of majolica, and 200 items of jewelry were moved from Paris to London.

In general, Wallace's taste in paintings, furniture and porcelain was similar to that of his father and grandfather. His approach to collecting, however, differed from them in that he bought whole collections. He also had a fondness for medieval and Renaissance works of art and European arms and armor. In collecting fourteenth and fifteenth-century works and arms and armor, Wallace was a man of his time. A taste for these subjects had developed in the late nineteenth-century, awakened by the novels of Scott and Dumas.

In the short space of two years following his inheritance, Wallace had risen from relative obscurity as a private secretary to become one of the most famous men in Britain. But all was not well. Lady Wallace, who spoke no English, was unhappy in England and made those around her unhappy. Wallace's hopes centered on his son Edmond, whom he wished would found an English family by marrying into an English titled family. But Edmond also disliked living in England. He was essentially a Frenchman and preferred life in Paris, where he had a mistress and four children. Things came to a head when Edmond told his father of his intention to return to Paris. Father and son became estranged and never saw each other again. Edmond died in Paris, in 1887, at the age of forty-seven, still unmarried. Grief-stricken, Richard Wallace returned to Paris and began living at Château Bagatelle, where he followed the example of his father, and became a recluse. Lady Wallace, who had found a new interest, her husband's secretary, John Murray Scott, remained at Hertford House.

Towards the end of his life Wallace discussed the possibility of leaving his collection to the British Nation, but was unable to reach an agreement with the Government of the day. When he died in 1890 at Château Bagatelle, in the same room as his father, Wallace bequeathed his entire estate to Lady Wallace, who lived on at Hertford House, attended by John Murray Scott, until her own death seven years later.

On her death, Lady Wallace, who doubtlessly was following her late husband's wishes, bequeathed to Britain the paintings, works of art, and arms and armor "placed on the ground and first floors and in the galleries at Hertford House". Lady Wallace also specified that the Government should provide a site in central London to build a new museum to house the collection. Rather than build a new museum, the Government purchased Hertford House from Lady Wallace's residuary legatee, John Murray Scott, who had also inherited the Paris properties and the considerable collection which remained in them. After three years of renovations, the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, opened Hertford House to the public on June 22, 1900.

In a desire to honor her husband's important role in the formation and preservation of the collection, Lady Wallace's bequest also provided that the collection shall be styled "The Wallace Collection". Her bequest further stipulated that the Collection shall be kept together, unmixed with other objects of art. This means that The Wallace Collection does not add works to, or make loans from, the Collection. Nor does it ordinarily display works from other collections alongside works in the Collection. Thus, visitors today to Manchester Square and Hertford House are able to appreciate and enjoy, in essentially its original form and location, one of the greatest art collections ever assembled – a collection assembled by five generations of fathers and sons.

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## SOURCES

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