

# THE ROTHSCHILDS AT WADDES DON: The Jewish Heritage

Waddesdon Manor  
Nr Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP18 0JH  
[www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk)

With thanks to Rachel Kolsky for providing the text.

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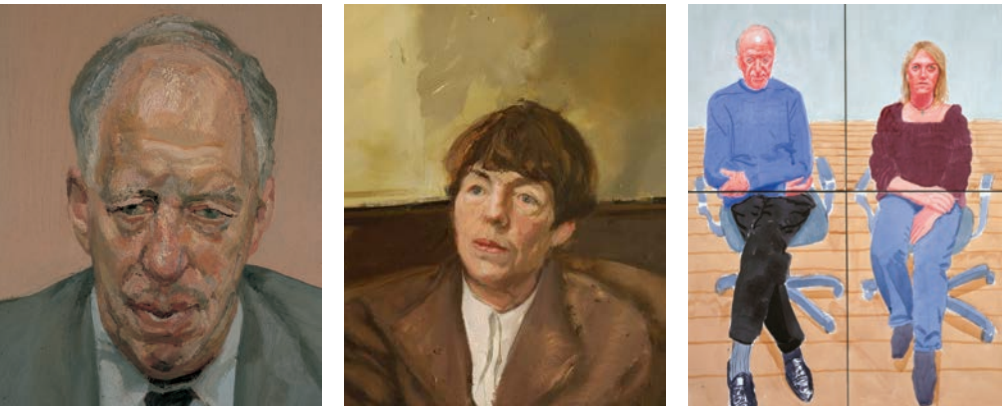
Photography: Nell Brookfield, Mike Fear, Chris Lacey, Tom Hatton, Peter Smith and Richard Valencia.

A Rothschild House & Gardens



WADDES DON

# Welcome to Waddesdon



This booklet is an introduction to the Waddesdon Rothschilds – the members of the pan-European family who created the Manor, and have been responsible for caring for it ever since – in their context as part of one of the most famous Jewish families in the world. The Rothschild name conjures up a vivid image of banking and financial achievement, of extraordinary houses, of exceptional collections of art, of wine-making and of successful breeding and racing of horses. There is also a long tradition of philanthropy and charity, civic and community support and political service, both in the context of their Jewish faith and outside it. At the end of the 19th century, there were over 40 houses across Europe belonging to the Rothschilds. Today, Waddesdon is one of the only examples open to the public with its collections intact where visitors can get a sense of how the family lived. It's an impressive legacy, but is only part of the story. Alongside the houses are the schools, the hospitals, the places of worship, the charities and the museums which were established or supported by the family.

Lucian Freud: Head of a Man 1991, 1991; oil on canvas; Waddesdon (Rothschild Family); on loan since 1995; © The Lucian Freud Archive / Bridgeman Images.

Michael Andrews: Serena Mary Dunn, the Right Hon. The Lady Rothschild (b 1935), 1989-1991; oil on canvas; Waddesdon (Rothschild Family); on loan since 1995; © The Estate of Michael Andrews, courtesy James Hyman, London.

David Hockney: Lord Rothschild and Hannah Rothschild, 2002; watercolour; Waddesdon (Rothschild Foundation); © David Hockney; on loan since 1995; photo: Prudence Cuming Associates.

# The Five Arrows

Taking their name from the house of their 16th-century ancestors, 'zum roten Schild', the story begins in Frankfurt, where Mayer Amschel Rothschild (b 1744) established a business dealing in antiquities and coins. In 1769 he became Court Agent to William, then crown prince of Hanau, but later Elector of Hesse. This created a springboard for success as the business expanded, and as a result, Mayer Amschel sent one of his five sons, Nathan Mayer, to live in England. Up to their father's death in 1812, three other brothers, James (Jakob), Salomon and Carl (Calman) established business houses in Paris, Vienna and Naples respectively, while Amschel took over in Frankfurt. This increased the Rothschilds' range and influence but also required a strong network of co-operation and communication, a family trademark. Their powerful unity was exemplified in the family emblem, which became their coat-of-arms in 1822 – the Five Arrows – and their motto, *Concordia, Integritas, Industria* (Unity, Integrity, Industry).

Famously, the family's success was ensured when they won the contract to fund the Duke of Wellington's army during the Napoleonic campaign leading to the Battle of Waterloo. By this time, the brothers were firmly established as financiers to governments and rulers across Europe. Their position was confirmed in 1822 when they were made Barons by the Austrian Emperor.



Above: The Rothschild House in the Frankfurt Ghetto, c 1874; photo: Waddesdon (National Trust); gift of Dorothy de Rothschild, 1971.

Left: Rothschild Family Coat-of-Arms; photo courtesy of Liliane de Rothschild.

# The English Rothschilds

Nathan Mayer (b. 1777), the founder of the English branch, arrived in 1798 in Manchester as a textile merchant, moving to London in 1809 to concentrate on banking. Until 1825, No. 2 New Court, within a gated courtyard on St. Swithin's Lane in the City, was both Nathan Mayer's home and office, where he lived with his wife, Hannah whom he married in 1806. Her sister Judith married Moses Montefiore in 1812, and they lived next door at No. 4. Nearly 200 years later the family bank still operates from the same site, but in a new building.

In 1825 he moved to 107 Piccadilly, and other members of the family followed, giving the stretch of road opposite Green Park the nickname "Rothschild Row". One son, Mayer, moved into 107 after his father's death in 1836, while another, Lionel, built 148 Piccadilly, next door to Apsley House.

Alongside business success, the family embraced the lifestyle of the English aristocracy, and before long, all had country estates. The first and nearest to London was Gunnersbury, bought in 1835 by Nathan Mayer and later, home to Leo, his grandson, but Buckinghamshire soon became popular, owing to its pleasant countryside, proximity to London and excellent hunting. Mayer built Mentmore, near Wing. Anthony had Aston Clinton and in the next generation, Nathaniel rebuilt Tring Park, whilst Leo, Alfred and Ferdinand built Ascott, Halton and Waddesdon Manor respectively.



Above: Stair hall of Lionel's house, 148 Piccadilly, demolished in 1972.

Left: Mentmore Towers (above) and Halton. Details from J.M. Winckler's painting A Family Tree of Rothschild Houses, 1992-1996; oil on canvas; © The Rothschild Foundation.

Right: Walter Rothschild riding a tortoise, Waddesdon (Rothschild Family).

# A brief family history

Slowly but surely through the 19th century, the English Rothschilds became part of the political establishment. In 1858, following a long campaign, Lionel de Rothschild, representing the City of London, became the first Jewish MP to take his seat, without the obligation of swearing an oath as a Christian. He had first been elected in 1847 but, on principle as a practising Jew, had not been able to take his seat. His son Nathaniel de Rothschild, or 'Natty', was ennobled by Queen Victoria in 1885, and became the first Jewish peer. He was succeeded as MP for Aylesbury by his cousin Ferdinand. Mayer's son-in-law, Lord Rosebery, became Prime Minister although this was after the death of his wife, Hannah, Mayer's only child. Between 1868 and 1889, Alfred, Lionel's son became the first Jewish director at the Bank of England.

The family were members and officers of synagogues linked to the Anglo-Jewish elite. Lionel laid the foundation stone at Central Synagogue, Great Portland Street and Ferdinand and Leopold both held communal positions there. Nathan had been a warden at Duke's Place Synagogue. His son Lionel later became President and served on the council of the United Synagogue where his brother Anthony was President. Lionel was also a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

The family was acutely aware of the hardships experienced by the Jewish community in London's East End and devoted time and resources to improving schools, housing and working conditions. Hannah, wife of Nathan Mayer, began supporting the Jews' Free School in Bell Lane in the 1820s. Subsequent Rothschild funding included 'suits and boots', spectacles and scholarships. Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild, established the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company in 1885, (which still survives as the Industrial Dwellings Society) providing affordable housing for the working poor. Stepney Green Court, built in 1896, survives as the earliest example. Other Rothschild blocks, Evelina Mansions, Camberwell (1900), Navarino Mansions, Dalston (1905) and Mocatta House, Whitechapel (1905) also survive. Also in 1885, Connie, Lady Battersea, daughter of Anthony, founded The Jewish Association for the Protection of Women and Girls to prevent vulnerable young women from Russia and Poland succumbing to a life of prostitution.



Rothschilds were also active in the cultural sector. Alfred was a Trustee of the Wallace Collection. Walter, 2nd Lord Rothschild, famously established his own natural history museum in Tring to display the most important collection ever assembled by a private person (now part of the Natural History Museum). This interest in the natural world was continued by his brother Charles, who gained a valued reputation for ground-breaking conservation, founding the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves in 1912 which continues to this day as the Wildlife Trust. His daughter, Miriam, followed in his footsteps, carving out a distinguished career as a scientist, naturalist and champion of conservation.

# The Waddesdon Rothschilds: *Baron Ferdinand*



Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839 - 1898) was from the Austrian branch of the family. His grandfather was Salomon, who had set up the Vienna business. His father, Anselm, married an English cousin, Charlotte, daughter of Nathan Mayer. Ferdinand and his sister Alice were devoted to their mother and after her early death in 1860 moved to London to be near their English relatives. Through his friendships with the sons of Lionel de Rothschild, Nathaniel, Leo and Alfred, Ferdinand became a member of the circle surrounding the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and his friends included Benjamin Disraeli. In 1865 he married his cousin Evelina, Lionel's daughter, and moved to 143 Piccadilly, but their happiness was short-lived; Evelina died in 1866 in childbirth and their son did not survive.



Ferdinand was devastated. He established the Evelina Hospital for Sick Children in her memory, which opened in 1869 in Southwark, then a very deprived area of London. It is now part of St. Thomas's Hospital, reopened in a new building in 2004. Evelina's father, Lionel, took over the sponsorship of a school for girls in Palestine renaming it the Evelina de Rothschild School.

Despite the tragedy, Ferdinand remained in England. In 1866 he became a Justice of the Peace and the Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, then in 1883 High Sheriff. In 1885 he was elected to Parliament for Aylesbury. In 1896 he became a Trustee of the British Museum, to which he bequeathed his "Renaissance Museum", still displayed as the Waddesdon Bequest.

Like his Rothschild relations, he was active in the Anglo-Jewish community. He was Treasurer to the Board of Guardians of the Jewish Poor from 1868-75, Warden at the Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street, laid the foundation stone in 1864 at the North London Synagogue and funded a technical scholarship at Stepney Jewish School in the East End. While many of his relatives are buried at Willesden United Jewish Cemetery, Ferdinand and Evelina are buried at West Ham Jewish Cemetery.



Top: Baron Ferdinand painted by an unknown artist.  
Middle: Evelina de Rothschild.  
Bottom: A ward at the Evelina Hospital, c 1907.

# Waddesdon Manor



Waddesdon Manor, North Front; Aviary; the White Drawing Room.

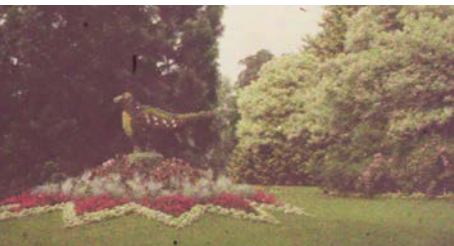
In 1874, on the death of his father, Ferdinand bought the Waddesdon estate from the Duke of Marlborough, and set about building a country house where he could entertain friends and family. He wanted a Renaissance château, so chose a French architect, Gabriel Hippolyte Destailleur, who had worked for other members of the family. The project was immense – the "Labours of Sisyphus", according to Ferdinand. The top of the hill on which the house stands was levelled, drives and terraces were cut and water piped in from Aylesbury, six miles away. The grounds were carefully landscaped and planted with mature trees. An aviary was built, and a huge range of glasshouses which provided exotic fruit and flowers. Once the house was completed, Ferdinand's "Saturday to Monday" parties quickly became legendary, attended by his social, cultural and political circle, including the Prince of Wales. Queen Victoria visited in 1890.

Besides his entertaining, Ferdinand, like other members of the family, was an avid collector. He had learned to love works of art as a child, describing how he had been allowed to help pack his father's treasures, and collecting became a passion. His taste exemplified what became known as "the Rothschild style" – English 18th-century painting combined with French decorative arts, encompassing furniture, porcelain, textiles, tapestries, sculpture and books, and set off by interiors lined with French 18th-century panelling. He also inherited part of, and added to, his father's collection of 16th and 17th-century goldsmiths' work.



## Miss Alice

Ferdinand's life at Waddesdon was shared by his youngest sister, Alice (1847 - 1922), who became his companion after Evelina's death. She had a house next door to his on Piccadilly and in 1874 bought Eythrope, the neighbouring estate to Waddesdon. Here, she built a small house, the Pavilion, and created a garden to rival that at the Manor. She was a passionate and knowledgeable gardener, usually seen with a tool in hand to remove weeds. Like her brother, she was also a collector, and in a similar vein, seeking out 18th-century porcelain and French furniture. When the childless Ferdinand died unexpectedly in 1898, she was the obvious choice as his heir.



Top: Miss Alice. Above: Carpet bedding at Waddesdon, c 1910, Autochrome. Below: Views of Alice's kitchen garden at Eythrope, as restored by Lord Rothschild.

Alice divided her time between London, Waddesdon and her villa in Grasse in the South of France, named after her friend, Queen Victoria, where she also created a magnificent garden. Renowned for her perfectionism, she introduced various horticultural novelties, such as three-dimensional carpet bedding, and a stringent set of housekeeping procedures, known as "Miss Alice's Rules". This regime, which included protecting furnishings from light and dust, is one of the reasons that the collections are so well preserved today.



© Tom Hatton

## Mr and Mrs James: *Supporting local and international causes*



Alice died in 1922, and Waddesdon passed to her great-nephew James Armand de Rothschild (1878-1957), son of Baron Edmond, of the French branch of the family. James married British-born Dorothy Pinto (1895-1988) in 1913, when he was 35 and she just 17. Her great grandfather had been adviser to the Khedive in Egypt and her father was a successful financier. During the First World War, while James fought in the French army, Dorothy lived in Paris, but the couple then moved to London when James became naturalised in 1920. Unusually for a Rothschild, James was not particularly interested in collecting – his passions were racing (he established the Stud at Waddesdon) and golf. James and Dorothy revived the art of entertaining, and guests included King George V and Queen Mary. There were frequent political gatherings at Waddesdon. James was the Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely from 1928-44.

Top: James leading his horse, Bomba, winner of the Ascot gold cup, 1909. Below: The Cedar Boys and Mrs Steinhardt, c 1945



Image courtesy of Mrs. Helga Brown

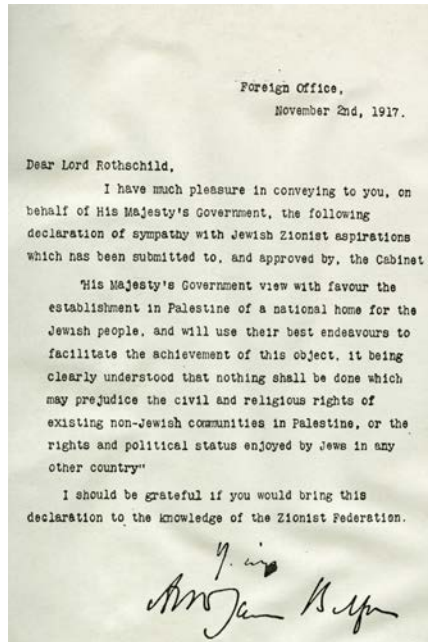
James and Dorothy de Rothschild at Wisbech on the Isle of Ely, campaigning for the 1929 election. © Lilian Ream

Both James and Dorothy were staunch supporters of local causes. Dorothy was a Justice of the Peace and a member of Buckinghamshire County Council. As war approached, and conditions for the Jewish community became intolerable during the 1930s in Austria and Germany, the British government made provision for 10,000 unaccompanied children to be given refuge. Known as the Kindertransport, each child was given a place to live provided they had a guarantor pledging £50.00. In 1939, the Jewish Refugees' Committee appealed to James to help a group of 30 orphans (28 boys and 2 girls) from the Frankfurt's Flersheim-Sichel Institute. James and Dorothy immediately offered a house in the village, The Cedars, for the children and their guardians, Hugo and Lilli Steinhardt. It was a last-minute escape. James and Dorothy maintained an active interest in the group, who became known fondly as 'the Cedar Boys', assisting with their education and employment after the war. Following a chance encounter in New York between two of the boys, 15 returned to Waddesdon in 1983 to reminisce and personally thank Dorothy for saving them. The visit is commemorated in a plaque in the garden at the Manor. At the same time, the Manor also became home to 100 evacuee children from Croydon, the first (and last) time that children have lived in the house.

# PICA and the creation of Israel



Above: James, Dorothy and Baron Edmond in Palestine.  
Right: Copy of the Balfour Declaration 1917; paper; Waddesdon (National Trust) Bequest of Dorothy de Rothschild, 1988.



In 1924 the Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association, known as PICA, was established by Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934), with James as its President. Originally a branch of the Jewish Colonisation Association set up in 1891 to support Jewish settlers displaced from Russia and elsewhere, Baron Edmond turned his attention to Palestine and in 1899, donated land and considerable funds to the JCA. By 1903 he was subsidising 19 of the 23 settlements. After supporting the Yishuv (the original Palestine settlement) with agricultural projects including the famous vineyards at Rishon le Zion and Zichron Ya'akov, PICA was wound up in 1957 on James's death and its lands transferred to the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

Baron Edmond, and James and Dorothy were strongly supportive of Zionism and the move to create an independent Jewish state. Dorothy in particular played a crucial role in this, through her involvement in the delicate negotiations that preceded the writing of the Balfour Declaration. This letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Walter, 2nd Lord Rothschild in 1917 proclaimed the British government's support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It followed sustained petitioning by Russian chemist Chaim Weizmann who had been introduced to the parliamentary elite by Dorothy. Archives held at Waddesdon trace continued correspondence with Zionist leaders throughout her life together with a copy of the Balfour Declaration, now on display in the Goodwood Room at the Manor. Ultimately, these negotiations contributed to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

# After the Second World War



Top left: Laying the cornerstone for the new Knesset Building - Jerusalem, 1958; photo by Rudi Weissenstein, The PhotoHouse.

Left: Image from album *Erection of the Knesset Building - Jerusalem*; image taken 10 July 1964.

Paul Benny's 1992 preparatory sketch for a painting celebrating the commissioning of the Supreme Court captures the architects discussing the proposed building with members of the Foundation, including Yitzhak Rabin, then Prime Minister, Foreign Minister Shimon Perez and Lord Rothschild. © Paul Benny

In the years following the Second World War, James began to think of Waddesdon's future. He and Dorothy were childless, so, with the aim of preserving it for the future, he began negotiations with the National Trust. On his death in 1957, the House, Garden and the majority of its contents were bequeathed to the charity, together with a major endowment, and on the understanding that the family should continue to manage it. Dorothy therefore became the first Chair of the Management Committee, a role she continued to fulfil for nearly 30 years. She moved out of the Manor to live at Eythrope whilst preparing Waddesdon for public opening.

She remained deeply committed to Baron Edmond and James's Jewish causes, and in particular the charitable family foundation, Yad Hanadiv in Israel, which was created following the winding up of PICA. In Jerusalem both the Knesset (parliament building), built to honour Edmond's memory and the Supreme Court were funded by Yad Hanadiv and today its work continues with numerous educational, cultural and environmental projects. Most recently, it is supporting the creation of a new National Library for Israel.

# The present generation

Dorothy continued to run the Manor until her death in 1988, choosing the present Lord Rothschild (b. 1936) as her successor. A descendent of the English branch of the family, and son of Victor, 3rd Lord Rothschild, he began his career with the family bank, NM Rothschild and Sons, before establishing his own financial business in 1990. He is best known publicly for his support of and involvement in arts and heritage. He was Chairman of Trustees at the National Gallery between 1985 and 1991 and first Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the 1990s. He was instrumental in the regeneration of Somerset House. He was responsible for the complete restoration and rebirth of Spencer House. In 2002 he was awarded the Order of Merit in recognition of his significant contribution. Today, he heads the Rothschild Foundation which supports Waddesdon Manor and charitable causes in key areas of arts and heritage. Until recently he was Chairman of Yad Hanadiv. After 36 years in this position he is now serving as President, with his daughter Hannah following him in the role of Chair. These charities are involved with a variety of activities, from the National Library building in Jerusalem currently under construction, to funding local projects in Buckinghamshire, to supporting major lottery projects including those linked to specific Jewish sites in the UK, and funding a web portal linking to news and resources concerning European Jewish monuments and heritage sites.

During his time at Waddesdon, Lord Rothschild has steered the Manor through a major restoration of both the building and gardens, and has introduced numerous innovations, such as a contemporary art programme, new acquisitions through the Rothschild Foundation, exhibitions and events and an increase in visitor numbers to over 450,000 a year. He has also continued the great Rothschild tradition of architectural patronage through commissioning significant contemporary buildings, including a new Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill and the Flint House, which was the RIBA House of the Year in 2015.

Throughout his life Lord Rothschild was supported by his wife Serena (d. 2019). They married in 1962 and have four children. Their son Nat (b. 1971) lives in Los Angeles and their three daughters are all involved with the Manor: Hannah (b. 1962) has joined her father on the board of the Rothschild Foundation and Yad Hanadiv; Beth (b. 1964) masterminded the restoration of the Victorian garden and serves as a trustee of the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe; Emily (b. 1967) serves as a trustee of the Rothschild Foundation. Their eight grandchildren are already contributing to Waddesdon and live in houses on the Estate.

*Below: Family group, 2014. Right clockwise from top left: Hannah, Beth, Emily and Nathaniel.*



Windmill Hill Archive



Flint House

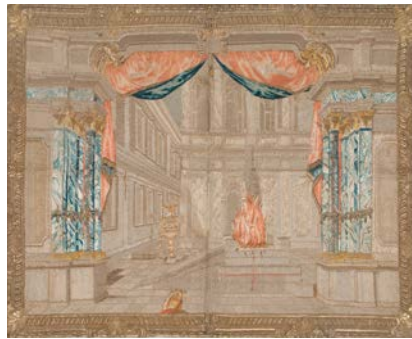


Spencer House

# Highlights at Waddesdon



The James and Dorothy de Rothschild Room on the First Floor contains much of interest. Here you will find a copy of the Balfour Declaration, correspondence between Dorothy and Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres relating to the building of the Supreme Court and the Knesset, and a **model of the Supreme Court** (above) on a block of Jerusalem stone.



Also in this room are the set of **embroideries**, probably made in Italy in the early 18th century for a private synagogue, which depict the First and Second Temples. They are in excellent condition, made with untarnished gold and silver thread, and are an acquisition by the Rothschild Foundation.

Embroidered hanging, 1700-1770; silk, metal, linen and cotton.



Next door in the **Bakst Room** are the set of **panels** by the Jewish émigré artist Léon Bakst, a commission by James de Rothschild for his London house in 1913. They tell the story of the Sleeping Beauty, and members of the family including James and Dorothy, and Baron Edmond as well as various friends were used as models.

Léon Bakst: The Sleeping Beauty: The Prince Discovers the Princess and Wakes Her with a Kiss, 1913-1922.



The **State Dressing Room** off Bedroom Corridor is full of miniatures, photographs and other memorabilia relating to many members of the family.

Frederick Tayler, Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, Hunting, 1870; watercolour on paper.



In the centre of the room is the **model of the National Library of Israel**, currently under construction, made by its architects Herzog de Meuron. Here you will also find **A Family Tree of Rothschild Houses**, commissioned by Lord Rothschild in 1994 from Jean-Marc Winckler.

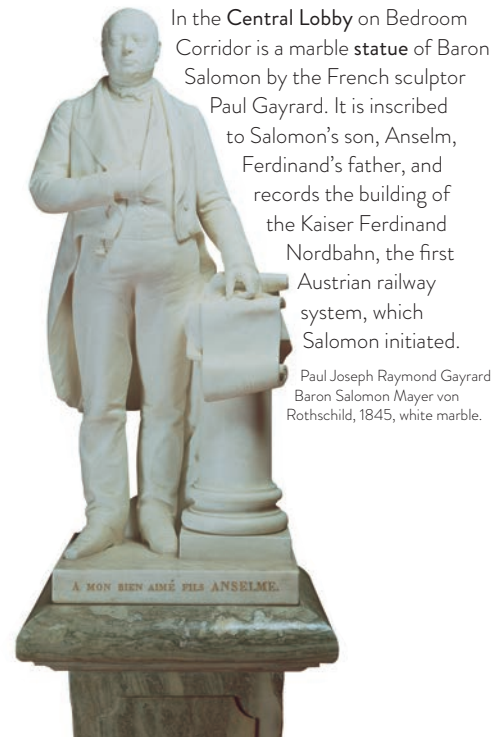
The visualisation of National Library of Israel. © Herzog & De Meuron.



The **Family Room** also on the First Floor contains much information about the Waddesdon Rothschilds, and changing displays of archival and other material relating to the family. The displays include a **portrait of Lionel de Rothschild**, Ferdinand's uncle and father-in-law, driving a gig, by Alfred de Dreux, painted in 1835.

Alfred de Dreux: Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879) in a gig drawn by a chestnut stallion, 1850s; oil on canvas.

Waddesdon (National Trust) Accepted in lieu of tax by HM Government and allocated to the National Trust, 2012



In the **Central Lobby** on Bedroom Corridor is a marble **statue** of Baron Salomon by the French sculptor Paul Gayraud. It is inscribed to Salomon's son, Anselm, Ferdinand's father, and records the building of the Kaiser Ferdinand Nordbahn, the first Austrian railway system, which Salomon initiated.

Paul Joseph Raymond Gayraud: Baron Salomon Mayer von Rothschild, 1845, white marble.



From September 2019, you can visit the **Rothschild Treasury** on the Second Floor, to see a number of precious objects of great significance to the family, including this amber casket, thought to have been purchased by the founder of the dynasty, Mayer Amschel.

Circle of Jacob Heise: Casket, c 1660; amber, ivory, wood, brass and string.