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Specialist conservation work to begin on Kedleston Hall's 120-year-old Peacock Dress.

- **The elaborately embroidered dress will be conserved, and a bespoke mannequin will be made to better support the 4.5kg dress.**
- **An initial assessment has revealed a hidden pocket and clues as to the original colour of the dress.**
- **Kedleston Hall is launching a fundraising campaign to support the conservation work.**
- **The dress will be assessed and conserved by the Trust's team of textile conservation experts.**

The Edwardian Peacock Dress, with its lavish zardozi embroidery, has been a visitor favourite at Kedleston Hall since it first came into the National Trust's care in 1997. After being on show for so long, the time has come for the dress to be taken off display so it can be cared for by a team of specialists at the National Trust's Textile Conservation Studio in Norfolk.

Kedleston Hall is launching a fundraising campaign to support the conservation work on the Peacock Dress.

The most striking feature of the dress is its extravagant zardozi embroidery - a highly skilled technique, originating in India, which is characterised by the use of gold or silver-wrapped threads and embellishments. In the case of the Peacock Dress, the zardozi forms the shape of gold peacock feathers, each with a tiny beetle wing case at the centre.

The elaborately embroidered fabric means the dress is very heavy, weighing an impressive 4.5kg. Keeping it displayed in an upright position, even on its mannequin, puts pressure on the overall structure. In addition, the metal-wrapped threads and beetle wings are vulnerable to deterioration, so the team at Kedleston have been working with the National Trust's leading textile specialists to better understand the dress's current condition and future needs.

Kedleston Hall's General Manager, Fiona Bridges says: "The Peacock Dress has always been a firm favourite of visitors; the dress still has the same captivating effect as it did the first time it was worn at the Delhi Durbar in 1903. However, no dress was designed to be worn, or displayed on a mannequin, for over 20 years. As with all our collection items, it is vitally important that we care for the dress in a way that ensures it will be around for future generations to see."

Ella Kilgallon, Property Curator at Kedleston Hall elaborates further: “A specially commissioned report by senior conservators at the National Trust’s Textile Conservation Studio has highlighted that to care for the dress properly we need to allow it to rest for a number of years so the fibres in the dress can relax. The dress also requires some remedial conservation work to stabilise the embroidery and layers of fabric.”

The report points out the need for a new mannequin to be purpose-built to support the dress’s specific design and weight when it is eventually returned to be displayed at Kedleston Hall.

Ella continues: “Textile with heavy beading or decorative detail can be very difficult to display without gravity putting strain on areas of the fabric. Textile Conservators have been advising the House and Collections team on how we can better customise the mannequin. A bespoke sculpted mannequin will more accurately recreate the silhouette of Mary Curzon, for whom the dress was designed. The improvements will support and remove tension from the waistband, caused by the weight of the skirt, and will show the dress as the design intended.”

The recent removal of the dress from its mannequin provided an opportunity to learn more about the design of the dress. New discoveries were made including a pocket at the back of the skirt as well as an indication that the embroidered zardozi fabric may have originally appeared much more brightly coloured than it does today.

Terri Dewhurst, Textile Conservator at the National Trust Textile Conservation Studio, Norfolk, talks about the colours of the original dress: “We think that the dress was more vibrant when it was originally made due to the presence of unfaded colours within the embroidered design. For example, there are coloured threads which hold the metal embroidery in place (called couching stitching.) These have faded over time, but we have now been able to see the stitching underneath this which hasn’t been exposed to the harmful effects of UV light and shows much brighter shades of pink and green.”

The dress will go back on display in the Hall at Kedleston along with its bespoke sculpted mannequin in several years. Exactly how many will depend on the amount of remedial conservation work required and the costs involved.

The cost of the conservation work will be determined when the Peacock Dress undergoes a detailed assessment at the National Trust’s Textile Conservation Studio. Early indications are that this will be in the region of £28,000, including the cost of a new, bespoke mannequin.

Without the support of National Trust members and supporters, the Trust would not be able to do this important and innovative work. Supporters can now text to donate specifically to the conservation of the Peacock Dress (text 70525 to donate £5 – 100% of the donation will go to this cause or visit <https://secure.nationaltrust.org.uk/donate/personal-details>)

For further information and visiting times see <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/kedleston-hall> or call 01332 842191.

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Notes for Editors:

About Kedleston Hall

Kedleston Hall was designed not as a family house, but to be a show palace for lavish entertaining and for displaying extensive collections of paintings, sculpture and original furnishings. Kedleston is a stunning example of the work of the 18th-century architect Robert Adam. Kedleston is surrounded by over 800 acres of naturalistic parkland including a lake, cascades and original Adam features. The parkland is full of wildlife, woodlands and walks for all to enjoy. The Curzon family have lived here since the 12th century and continue to live at the Hall.

About the Peacock Dress

The Peacock Dress, worn by Mary Victoria Leiter, Lady Curzon (1870-1906), Vicereine of India, at the Delhi Durbar in 1903.

This dress tells us a story of our colonial past. It was worn by Mary Curzon (1870–1906), the wife of George Curzon, the Viceroy of India (1859–1925), at a ball in Delhi on 6 January 1903 to mark the coronation of King Edward VII (1841–1910) as Emperor of India. The ball took place at the Red Fort, lit with electric lighting that made Mary’s dress sparkle. The spectacular and lavish event was full of pageantry and royal ceremony, and was designed to entertain and impress Indian princes and dignitaries, while underlining the power of British rule. The design of Mary’s dress was not only highly fashionable but also subtly political. Made of fabric traditionally worn by Mughal court rulers, it appropriated the motif of a peacock feather (an important Hindu symbol, particularly associated with Lord Krishna and the goddess Saraswati). The intention was perhaps to present a visual sense of continuity, aligning British rule with Indian courts of the past as a statement of dominance. The richly decorated fabric, which includes hundreds of beetle-wing cases, was made by male Indian embroiderers in the workshop of Kishan Chand, while the dress (a two-piece of a bodice top and skirt) itself was made in Paris by Jean-Philippe Worth (1856–1926).

NB. Cathy Hay, an independent Dress Historian and Maker, discovered the name of the embroidery firm, Kishan Chand, in a feature in the Illustrated London News.

How long will the dress be away?

We anticipate that the dress will be off display for several years, both for conservation treatment and to rest it, to aid its long-term preservation. Exactly how many will depend on

the amount of remedial conservation work required and the costs involved. When we have a clear idea of timescales, we will publicise this information to our members and supporters nearer the time via our website.

Where will the dress be moved to?

The dress will be moved to the National Trust Textile Conservation Studio in Blickling, Norfolk (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/the-textile-conservation-studio), where it will be cared for by a team of expert textile conservators. The Conservation Studio will be able to provide access for specialists during this time.

What will be happening to the dress whilst it is at the conservation studio?

As well as lying the dress flat in its bespoke box, the dress will undergo some essential conservation work. This includes:

- Full assessment of the dress, its structure and how it was made
- Measurements and detailed report – from which a toile can be made that will then be used to create a bespoke sculpted mannequin
- Detailed photographs will provide information for staff, volunteers and for researchers
- Conservation treatment to stabilise the structure and the embroidery (exact details to be confirmed following a full assessment)
- Lying flat in a bespoke box where light levels and humidity levels can be tightly controlled. (NB. Museum practice would stipulate rotation of garments to increase their lifespan.)

We aim to update the website to highlight the work we do. We have a dedicated web page providing information on the Peacock Dress <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/kedleston-hall/features/lady-mary-curzons-peacock-dress>

How much will the conservation cost?

We won't know the exact cost of the remedial conservation to the dress until after it arrives at the Textile Conservation Studio, but early indications are that this will be in the region of £28, 000. This includes the cost for a new bespoke mannequin, which will help to support the (incredibly heavy) dress when it is ready to be displayed again at Kedleston Hall.

About the National Trust

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people, Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces, and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy.

The Trust has committed to achieving carbon net zero emissions by 2030, and establishing 20 million trees to help tackle climate change, creating green corridors for people and nature near towns and cities, running a year-long campaign to connect people with nature and continuing investment in arts and heritage. Ensuring everyone who visits feels welcome, and more people can access its places continues to be another key aspect of the charity's work.

Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.