

## Cornelis de Heem painting to return to its historical home

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A vividly detailed 17th century still life painting, originally bought by a patron of the arts and a minister to King William III, has returned to its historical home.

Image



National Trust Images

Cornelis de Heem's A Still Life of Flowers and Fruit arranged on a Stone Plinth in a Garden

Now visitors to the National Trust's Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire will be able to enjoy a splendid example of a still life depicting flowers and fruit by Dutch artist Cornelis de Heem (1631-1695).

The painting has been secured thanks to generous grants and donations. It has been bought by the National Trust with funds from the National Heritage

Memorial Fund, the Mr and Mrs Kenneth Levy bequest, the Art Fund, a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury, the Royal Oak Foundation's Ervin-DesChamps Fund, and a private donation.

William Blathwayt (?1649-1717), the builder of Dyrham Park, was Secretary at War to King William III and frequently visited the Low Countries throughout the 1690s, accompanying the king on his military campaigns.

A connoisseur of art, as well as having interests in gardening, music, and architecture, Blathwayt used these overseas connections and travels to furnish his house. He probably acquired the de Heem painting, *A Still Life of Flowers and Fruit arranged on a Stone Plinth in a Garden*, on one of these tours.

The painting remained at Dyrham Park until 1956 when the family sold it at auction. Now, nearly sixty years later, it has come home to Dyrham.

The painting, in oil on canvas, with its striking colours and displays of fruit and flowers, is one of the best works of Cornelis de Heem, who studied under his father Jan Davidszoon de Heem.

The painting dates from the mid-1680s when the artist was living in The Hague and depicts a wide variety of flowers, such as viburnum, roses, lilies, carnations and peonies, foods such as peapods and physalis, and fruit such as peaches showing the first blooms of mould, and a large melon cut open to reveal the ripe flesh.

Blackberries, thistles, brambles, toadstools and mosses also feature in the painting alongside various creatures including snails, a slug and lizard, while butterflies carry the scene towards the light source at the upper left-hand corner.

Rupert Goulding, National Trust curator, said: "It is always exciting when an item from an original collection can come back to the place for which it was first acquired and we are indebted to those organisations and individuals whose generous donations have enabled us to bring the de Heem home to Dyrham.

"I am sure that our visitors will really enjoy discovering the details in this beautiful still life which is rich in its depiction of flowers, fruits, butterflies and other elements of nature. It has enabled us to reunite one of the finest flower paintings from Blathwayt's collection with its historical home.

"The flowers in de Heem's painting are echoed both by the Delft pottery flower pyramids which we already have in the collection, and the baroque garden

outside. We have displayed the painting in the Diogenes Room and have added silk flowers to the Delft pyramids, and bowls of potpourri to provide floral scent to complement the picture's theme."

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of NHMF, said: "This is a wonderful painting and it's clear to see why it's considered one of de Heem's finest works. Having been out of public view for such a long time, this vital funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund means it will now return to its original home at Dyrham Park where it can be enjoyed by visitors to the house for years to come."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "We are pleased to help return this significant painting to Dyrham Park after an absence of nearly sixty years. The work is evidence of the taste and collecting activity of William Blathwayt, Dyrham's first hero, and will be much enjoyed by its visitors."

Marilyn Fogarty, Interim Executive Director of The Royal Oak Foundation, said: "As the American partner of the National Trust, Royal Oak is pleased to contribute to Blathwayt's vision for his beloved Dyrham Park, built through his colonial American connections. The Ervin-DesChamps Fund, created by stalwart donors for urgent National Trust needs, made this grant possible. We are honoured to be a part of the effort to reinstate de Heem's still life to its historical home."

The painting was bought through dealer Johnny van Haeften for £574,000. Funds for the purchase included £163,303 from National Heritage Memorial Fund, £100,000 from Art Fund and \$100,000 from the Royal Oak Foundation's Ervin-DesChamps Fund.

For Dyrham Park opening times and further information visit the [National Trust's Dyrham Park page](#) or call 0117 937 2501.

## **Notes to editors**

### **About Cornelis de Heem (b Leiden 1631 - d Antwerp 1695)**

Cornelis de Heem was the son and pupil of Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1601-1683/84), one of the seventeenth century's greatest still life painters. Like his father, he devoted himself exclusively to still life painting. Both in his choice of subject matter and in his style he followed closely in his father's footsteps. In this still life, Cornelis has drawn inspiration from the outdoor still lifes that Jan Davidszoon de Heem, and more particularly his protégé Abraham Mignon (1640-1679), produced in the late 1660s and early 1670s, when Mignon was working in

Jan Davidszoon's studio in Utrecht. Although Jan Davidszoon de Heem only painted a few open-air still lifes, they became one of Mignon's specialities. Such compositions combine the more traditional flower piece with elements of a forest-floor still life.

Following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 cross-border travel and trade between the northern and southern Netherlands became easier, and Cornelis de Heem moved repeatedly between the north and the south, finally being buried in Antwerp.

In addition to the still life at Dyrham, the National Trust owns one other painting by Cornelis de Heem, entitled *A Still Life with Pewter Plate and Fruits*, c1655, at Tatton Park, Cheshire, from the collection of the Egerton family.

## **About A Still Life of Flowers and Fruit arranged on a Stone Plinth in a Garden**

Painted between 1686 and 1689, oil on canvas, the painting measures 921 x 775 mm (36 1/4 x 30 1/2 in).

This floral still life is one of the best works of Cornelis de Heem (1631-1695). Its outdoor setting and large size sets it apart from the small indoor still lifes the artist usually painted. Moreover, in this painting Cornelis de Heem reaches the same level of quality as his father.

This painting dates from the mid-1680s when the artist was living in The Hague. It displays the striking colour harmonies (including strong blues) which are characteristic of his mature work, as well as the more graphic style which had diverged from his father's more painterly manner.

The painting depicts a wide variety of cultivated flowers, such as viburnum, roses, lilies, carnations and peonies, alongside cultivated foods such as peapods and physalis. Cultivated fruit are strewn at the base of the display, with peaches showing the first blooms of mould, and a large melon cut open to reveal the ripe flesh. Wild flora also feature, including blackberries, thistles, brambles and an oak sapling as well as toadstools and mosses. Various creatures inhabit the scene, several snails, a slug and lizard occupy the darker corners, while butterflies carry the scene towards the light source at the upper left-hand corner.

The vivid use of colour and display demonstrates the influence of Cornelis de Heem's father Jan Davidszoon. The wooded garden setting suggests the influence of Abraham Mignon (1640-79), another of Jan Davidszoon's pupils, who

specialised in the forest floor sub-genre of still life. Other proponents include Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636-95), of which Dyrham has six works in its collection.

The subject matter of the painting conveys a notion of transience, hinting that all things will come to an end, as expressed through rotting fruit and wilting cultivated plants. The presence of wild plants growing through the cultivated display, for instance the entwining blackberries and the energetic oak sapling, suggest nature is gaining the upper hand over man's efforts. Together they offer a contemplation on the vanity of man's endeavour and point to the ephemerality of human existence.

## **About the history of the painting**

Probably acquired by William Blathwayt (?1649-1717) in the 1690s; 1839 inventory of Dyrham Park, when it was hanging in the 'Great Roome above Stairs' (then called the Cedar Drawing Room); JRW Blathwayt, Esq., of Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, his sale, Sotheby's, 29 February 1956, lot 44, sold for £1250, bought Leonard Koetser (dealer) and exhibited in 'On Land and Water' at Leonard Koetser Gallery, London, March 1965; private collection, England, 1965-2013; Johnny van Haeften (dealer), 2013; bought by the National Trust with funds from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Mr and Mrs Kenneth Levy bequest, the Art Fund, a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury, the Royal Oak Foundation and a private donation, 2015.

After being in the house for 260-odd years the De Heem was sold at auction by the Blathwayt family in 1956 together with a substantial number of other paintings from the house. The Ministry of Works purchased a number of items for transfer to the National Trust, but this de Heem still life was not selected. Ever since it has been the National Trust's policy to reacquire items associated with Dyrham, in particular high-quality seventeenth-century works of art associated with William Blathwayt.

## **About William Blathwayt and Dyrham Park**

Dyrham Park, near Bristol / Bath was built between 1692 and 1704 by Government and colonial administrator William Blathwayt who used his overseas connections to furnish the house. Some of the original Dutch-inspired interiors and a rare collection of furniture and objects collected by Blathwayt survive in the house, including superb Dutch art and ceramics of the period.

Blathwayt's salary was considerable and his wealth was supplemented by 'fees' for services rendered as part of his work. This was particularly so in his role as Surveyor & Auditor General of Plantation Revenues. Governors of the new colonies in the Caribbean and eastern America willingly provided money and payment-in-kind to Blathwayt so that their business with London might be expedited. The result was wealth and building materials for the mansion he was erecting at Dyrham Park.

William married wisely. In 1686, at the age of 37, he married 36 year-old Mary Wynter, heiress to the Dyrham estate. Sadly, Mary died after only five years of marriage. William was left with three surviving children: William, John and Anne.

Although William Blathwayt worked for all monarchs between Charles II and Queen Anne he was never ennobled. After inheriting the estate in 1688, he later built the mansion and constructed a garden to express his status and influence. Both mansion and garden were highly fashionable. The mansion was filled with beautiful furniture, pictures and decoration.

## **About Dyrham Park today**

Dyrham Park is currently wrapped in scaffolding undergoing a £3.8m programme of building work to replace the roof and other repairs. A fully accessible rooftop walkway gives visitors a unique chance to get onto the scaffolding and watch the builders stripping 46 tonnes of lead and 8,000 Welsh slates from the roof before repairing and rebuilding it.

Dyrham Park remains open through the roof replacement this year and during the work five ground floor rooms are presented, focussing on each of the five senses. Visitors are still able to see some of the original Dutch-inspired interiors and part of the priceless collection of furniture and objects collected by Blathwayt both in the newly presented rooms and in conservation tours where experts will show how the objects are being cared for and conserved during the work. Outside the house, Dyrham Park has a brand new family trail and a natural play area created using natural materials.

## **About the National Trust**

The National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 775 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For more information and ideas for great value family days out go to: [National Trust website](https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk).

## **About the Art Fund**

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, driven by the belief that everyone should have access to great art. In the past five years the Art Fund has given £34m to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. The Art Fund also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including ARTIST ROOMS and the 2013–18 Aspire tour of Tate's Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows by John Constable, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators.

The Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 117,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 230 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions. In addition to grant-giving, the Art Fund's support for museums includes the annual Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year (won by the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 2014), a publications programme and a range of digital platforms including a website and the Art Guide app, promoting a network of over 650 museums and galleries across the country. Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at the [Art Fund website](#). Please contact Madeline Adeane, the Press Relations Manager, on 020 7225 4804 or email: [madeane@artfund.org](mailto:madeane@artfund.org).

## **About the Royal Oak Foundation**

The Royal Oak Foundation is a US-based organization, with a mission to inspire Americans to learn about, experience and support places of great historic and natural significance in the United Kingdom, in partnership with the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## **Further information**

For further information contact Alison Dalby, Senior Press Officer, email: [Alison.dalby@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:Alison.dalby@nationaltrust.org.uk), mobile: 07824 418 351 or Allan King / Aimee Endsor, National Trust South West Press Office 01275 378 452.