

## National Trust Press Release

Images are available here [☐ Lanhydrock Long Gallery ceiling conservation project](#)

### Masterpiece Jacobean plasterwork ceiling depicting the Book of Genesis to get a new lease of life after 400 years

- The 17<sup>th</sup> century Long Gallery at Lanhydrock in Cornwall is among the most spectacular in Europe
- Conservation of plasterwork ceiling depicting Biblical scenes, birds, exotic animals and mythical beasts will take months to complete
- Visitors are invited to join conservators on the scaffolding and see the historic plasterwork and designs close-up
- Plymouth University has used latest technology to capture images of ceiling in minute detail including a fingerprint of an original craftsman

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For the first time in its 400-year history, one of Europe's most spectacular historic ceilings, depicting dozens of Biblical scenes, birds, and mythical beasts, is undergoing full conservation and repair.

At 35 metres (116 feet) long, the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the Long Gallery at the National Trust's Lanhydrock in Cornwall will take experts months to clean centuries' worth of dirt and discolouration and to carry out intricate repairs.

Instead of doing so behind closed doors, however, they are inviting visitors to climb a purpose-built scaffold to see the full length of the Long Gallery ceiling up close and watch the conservators at work.

Created for Lanhydrock's former owner, John Robartes, between 1620-40, the ceiling is a masterpiece of Jacobean plasterwork, thought to be the work of the Abbott family of Frithelstock near Bideford. It is likely that John Robartes and the craftsmen took inspiration from manuscripts in his library and from printed drawings. [1]

Comprising 24 panels with scenes from the Old Testament Book of Genesis, including Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, the Life of Jacob, and David and Goliath, they are surrounded by more than 350 different species of animals, as well as intricately moulded plants and mythical beasts. [2]

**Charlotte Newman, Lanhydrock's Collections and House Manager, explains:** *"The Long Gallery ceiling is an extraordinary progress through some of the most familiar scenes in the Old Testament, surrounded by dozens of birds, snakes, fish, plants, and all manner of exotic and mythical creatures: crocodiles, porcupines, centaurs, unicorns. That all this is still here today is remarkable because the ceiling miraculously survived a devastating fire that destroyed two wings of the house at Lanhydrock in 1881.*

*"With many years of monitoring it, however, conservation work is now needed. The plaster has been showing cracks, flaking and discolouration. Specialists from Cliveden Conservation will repair the intricate plaster by filling cracks, replicating any lost plaster, washing off the old and discoloured distemper, and reapplying a new layer of distemper to restore the ceiling to its original appearance."*

**Peter Bokody, an Associate Professor of Art History at Plymouth University,** has been working with the team at Lanhydrock to research and document the ceiling.

**He says:** *"The ceiling is an extraordinary example of craftsmanship. Very little of its age, scale and intricacy survives anywhere in Europe, so it's a joy to be able to work on it. Although we don't have written evidence for who made it, it is highly probable it was crafted by the Abbott family workshop, and really is an incredible reflection of the skill and creativity of local people in the 17<sup>th</sup> century."*

Peter has worked as part of a team from Plymouth University to use the latest technology to scan and photograph the ceiling.

*"We can capture an amazing level of detail in these scans," he adds. "We've taken hundreds of photos to create a 3D model of the ceiling, as well as using LiDAR, which uses lasers to capture minute details, even down to the fingerprint left on a mould by one of the original craftsmen."*

The Long Gallery, which contains the National Trust's most important library, was emptied of furniture and over 3400 books so that work could start on the ceiling. These objects are now stored along the route to the Long Gallery, giving visitors a unique chance to see the collection more closely.

An exhibition has been created through the house at Lanhydrock, where visitors can discover what it takes to start a conservation project on this scale, see the LiDAR

scans, and how the property's extensive collections are cared for while the work takes place.

**Charlotte Newman continues:** *"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for visitors to witness such a large-scale conservation project in action. Whether you are on the scaffold or enjoying it from ground level, you can be sure few people have seen this Jacobean plasterwork in as much detail since the talented craftsmen first completed it four centuries ago."*

The Long Gallery, scaffold tower and exhibition open to visitors from Friday 1 March.

For further information and opening times visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lanhydrock](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lanhydrock)

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**Images:**

Images can be downloaded  [here](#). Only to be used in conjunction with this press release. Credit and caption as per file name.

[1] Most scholars attribute the work of Lanhydrock's Long Gallery ceiling to the Abbott family from Frithelstock in Devon. The surviving Abbott notebook contains sketches influenced by 16th and 17th century printed drawings from continental Europe. The sketches in the Abbott notebook resemble the plasterwork at Lanhydrock. It is likely that John Robartes and the craftsmen took inspiration from manuscripts in Robartes' library and from printed drawings. Scholars have suggested that designs were sourced from a volume of prints by Jan Collaert and Maarten de Vos (Antwerp, 1579).

[2] The craftsmen used press moulds to produce plaster casts as well as modelling decorative features by hand. They used a wooden sledge to 'run mould' the decorative features like cornices onto the ceiling.

**About Lanhydrock**

In 1620, the land at Lanhydrock was sold to Sir Richard Robartes. Richard was regarded as the 'wealthiest in the west', having inherited a fortune of £300,000 from his father. Richard planned and began work on a large manor house but died soon after. His son John continued the project including the Long Gallery ceiling, the whole house being completed by 1651.

Lanhydrock is a quintessential country house and estate, with the feel of a wealthy but unpretentious family home. After a devastating fire in 1881 the Jacobean house was refurbished in high-Victorian style, with the best in country house design and planning and the latest mod-cons. Discover two sides of Victorian life: from the kitchen which offers a thrilling glimpse into life 'below stairs', to the luxurious family areas, elegant dining room and spacious bedrooms which reveal the comforts of 'upstairs' living.

The extensive 30-acre garden enjoys year-round colour. There are beautiful herbaceous borders, a fabulous formal parterre and colourful higher gardens filled with camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons. The estate is well worth exploring too, with ancient woodlands and tranquil riverside paths. There are also off-road cycle trails, with special routes for families and novice riders, and you can even hire a bike from us to make the most of this opportunity.

**About the National Trust**

The National Trust is an independent 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. Today, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we continue to look after places so people and nature can thrive.

We care for more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline, 1 million collection items and 500 historic properties, gardens and nature reserves. In 2022/23 we received 24 million visitors to our pay for entry sites. The National Trust is for everyone - we were founded for the benefit of the whole nation, and our 5.7 million members, funders and donors, and tens of thousands of volunteers support our work to care for nature, beauty, history for everyone, for ever.

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