



# COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

JUNE 17, 2026

## Why the iris charmed Van Gogh

How Holbein survived Henry VIII

Making super salads by Tom Parker Bowles

Piers of the realm: the British love of the seaside



'Tis the Season: Edward John Gregory's *Piccadilly—Drawing Room Day, 1883*. With MacConnal-Mason

## Time after time

This year's Treasure House Fair spans 50 million years, from stone-encased fish to contemporary art, with pendants, chandeliers and ambassadorial silver in between

**M**ARCH marked 68 years since the last Drawing Room took place, at which debutantes were presented at Court to begin the London Season, and it is probably at least as long since a general and an admiral in full dress might have been met walking down Piccadilly. Edward John Gregory's 31in by 25¼in *Piccadilly—Drawing Room Day, 1883*, with MacConnal-Mason, shows the westward view from the end of Old Bond Street. With well-dressed shoppers and a bustle of carriages, but without the swagger of The Ritz and the Wolseley building, Piccadilly could almost be the high street of a country town.

However, there is still a Season of sorts, although it mostly consists of public events, rather than private balls and parties. Two of those now take place a month apart on the same site. Hardly has the green-fingered army retreated from the lawns of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, SW3, that the lush swards will be reoccupied by art-loving hordes for the Treasure House Fair (June 24–30). Here, then, is a small selection of the treasures that await them: exhibits range from three 50 million-year-old fish encased in a stone from Wyoming in the American West (Stone Gallery, The Netherlands) to contemporary pieces.

→ Martyn Downer, formerly a jewellery specialist at Sotheby's and now the leading expert in Nelson relics, has a record for remarkable discoveries. This time, his stand is themed as 'Death in the time of Shakespeare', but essentially focused on one thing, the 'Aston Deaths Hedde'. This long-lost *memento mori* jewel was known from a 1635 painting by the Cheshire artist John Souch (about 1593–1645), *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*, now in the Manchester Art Gallery. In it, the heart-shaped black and white enamel pendant with an attached tassel of blonde hair is worn on his breast by Sir Thomas. It is surrounded by diamonds and the back has a Latin inscription to their six-year-old son, who had died the previous year. I gather that the pendant's owners only realised what they had when they happened to visit the gallery



← Although there was hardly room on his chest for it, in 1900 Carlos María Fitz-James Stuart y Portocarrero y Palafox (1849–1901), descendant of James II and nephew of the Empress Eugénie, 16th Duke of Alba de Tormes and 9th Duke of Berwick, among many other titles, was invested with the Golden Fleece, the highest Spanish chivalric order. His wife (herself Countess of Siruela) commissioned the jeweller Chaumet to make him a diamond, sapphire and ruby full order collar badge with stickpin and medal miniature (with S. J. Phillips)



↑ Vienna Secession specialist Florian Kolhammer offers two pairs of chairs, each unique, designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich, executed in oak and brass by Friedrich Otto Schmidt and covered in fabric by Koloman Moser, 1899

Jon Stokes; Karen Bengali; Richard Ball; Getty; Charles Emerson



← A fine contrast to Fileman's chandelier (*right*) is provided by the 1930s 'Question Mark' floor lamp by the Danish designer Poul Henningsen, manufactured by Louis Poulsen, which is offered by Rose Uniacke. It is made of browned brass with Bakelite fittings



↑ There will be two specialists in contrasting Japanese metalwares, Laura Bordignon of Berkshire and A Lighthouse Called Kanata of Tokyo. The former has a Meiji period (1868–1912) bronze incense-burner (*koro*) inlaid with gold, silver and copper (*above*), and the second a *Mokume-gane* (wood grain metal) vase by Ryuhei Sako (b.1976)



↑ Fileman Antiques, formerly of Brighton, now Steyning in West Sussex, is moving into its fifth generation as specialists in lighting, particularly chandeliers. Here, it has a spectacular example by William Parker, who established himself in Fleet Street in 1762 and went on to illuminate Carlton House in London, Houghton Hall in Norfolk, Chatsworth in Derbyshire, the Bath Assembly Rooms and Beckford's House in Lisbon, Portugal. This one hung in Arbury Hall, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, the seat of the Newdigate family



↑ → Apparently, the 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire (1723–93) made a considerable impression on Catherine the Great during his three-year tour as Ambassador to Russia in the 1760s and she showered him with favours. His ambassadorial silver probably lived up to them, judging from the pair of wine coolers marked 1763 by John Parker and Edward Wakelin, London smiths based in the only recently demolished King's Arms, Panton Street, near Leicester Square (with Koopman)



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# Art market



↑ Edwin Maxwell Fry (1899–1987), a fine architect now somewhat overlooked, evaded the egotism of some starchitects, perhaps because he was also an engineer and he related to humanity. He was also a writer and painter, and James Hyman has a 44½in by 178in four-panel frieze of forest deer that he painted for the West Sussex house of a friend, the Iranian film-maker Ebrahim Golestan. There is a kinship to David Hockney's woodland works



↑ The American Long-Sharp Gallery (currently without a physical base), specialises in works on or of paper by modern masters. One of its artists is the well-regarded Jordanian-British Julia Ibbini (b. 1980), whose 8½in-high *Symbio Vessel (Fragile Frequencies 1.0)*, 2025, is made of layered papers and card



↑ A pair of red, green and gold *verre églomisé*—back-painted—wall lights with Ronald Phillips is rather multicultural. With chinoiserie decoration, the lights were designed by the cabinetmaker, japanner and looking-glass seller Philip Arbutnot (d. 1727) of The Great Looking-Glass Shop, Strand, for a diplomatic gift from Queen Anne to the Emperor of Morocco in 1705

**Next week Turn your own gavel**

## Pick of the week

Ninety years ago on June 11, the London International Surrealist Exhibition opened at the New Burlington Galleries in Burlington Gardens, opposite what is now the back entrance to the Royal Academy. It was conceived by David Gascoyne and Roland Penrose, who had met the leading Surrealists in France, and the committee included Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Herbert Read, André Breton, Man Ray and Salvador Dalí. Dressed in a deep-sea diver's suit and helmet for his lecture 'Fantômes paranoïaques authentiques', Dalí was saved from suffocation by Gascoyne with a spanner. The opening, by Breton, attracted 2,000 people and the daily average was 1,000. Although the term 'performance art' was invented only in 1969, the concept went back to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Futurists in 1910 and it was an eye-catching feature of the Surrealist show. Before the opening, the artist Sheila Legge (1911–49), in a white wedding dress and with her head encased in a flower arrangement as a Dalíesque *Surrealist Phantom*, was photographed by Claude Cahun in Trafalgar Square (above).

Treasure House commemorates this anniversary with a Surrealist exhibition of 40 works from the remarkable collections of the Southampton City Art Gallery, unseen during a major restoration project supported by the city council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport MEND fund, administered by Arts Council England. When this exhibition was announced, the council leader Alex Winning noted that the city is 'incredibly proud of its fantastic art collection and we are delighted to be sharing and celebrating these Surrealist works, inspiring visitors



to the Treasure House Fair and showing what Southampton has to offer. As part of our long-term growth plans, we will be looking to secure more investment in Southampton's cultural infrastructure, which plays such an important role in the vitality of the city'. What an admirable contrast to the many councils that regard their art holdings as short-term cash cows.

Together with major works by Paul Delvaux and Giorgio de Chirico, this display will present well- and lesser-known British Surrealists, including Penrose, Nash, Eileen Agar, John Banting, Ithell Colquhoun, Sam Haile, Conroy Maddox, Reuben Mednikoff, Desmond Morris and Peter Rose Pulham.

There will also be Surrealist and neo-Surrealist works on dealers' stands. I am rather taken by *Blood Sweat and Tears, with a Twist of Lemon (left)* by a British artist, Alex Chinneck (b. 1984), in ashwood and bristles, and an edition of 25, offered by Robert Young Antiques. Also, Peter Harrington has a first edition of the 1936 catalogue with its foreword by Breton. Undoubtedly, it will be priced at rather more than the original 6d (£2.30 today).

