

The collecting tastes of Baroness Edmond de Rothschild

The seventy-fifth anniversary of Baroness Edmond de Rothschild's death in 2010 prompted a re-examination of the collections she bequeathed to her daughter-in-law, Dorothy, in 1935. They are now administered by the National Trust at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire. Rachel Boak discusses the life of a lesser-known member of the Rothschild family.



Adelheid, Baroness Edmond de Rothschild (1853–1935). Her daughter-in-law, Dorothy, described her ordinary clothes as 'drab but comfortable'. RAL 000/1586

Adelheid, Baroness Edmond de Rothschild (1853–1935) was the mother of James, who bequeathed Waddesdon to the National Trust in 1957. The granddaughter of Carl Mayer (1788–1855), founder of the Naples branch of the family bank, Adelheid was named after her grandmother, Carl Mayer's wife, Adelheid Hertz (1800–1853). She was born in Frankfurt where her father, Wilhelm Carl, ran the original Rothschild banking house until it was wound up at his death in 1901. Her mother was Hannah Mathilde (1832–1924), elder sister of Ferdinand and Alice of Waddesdon. Adelheid's parents maintained a strict Jewish orthodox household, and she retained a strong faith until the end of her life.

Baroness Edmond's childhood was entwined with the lives of the Rothschilds who created Waddesdon Manor, as her aunt, Miss Alice (1847–1922) was her senior by only six years. At her mother's death, Alice chose to live with her elder sister, Hannah Mathilde, and her family at the Grüneburg Villa, just outside Frankfurt.¹ Alice and Adelheid's close relationship had important consequences for Adelheid's son, James, and the inheritance of collections now at Waddesdon.

In 1877, at the age of 24, Adelheid married her cousin Edmond, from Paris. Invitations were sent from both Frankfurt and Paris for the ceremony on 24 October,² and the staff at the houses belonging to Edmond's parents received gifts in honour of the day. Edmond was the son of the youngest of the original five Rothschild brothers, Baron James (1792–1868), who established a French branch of the family business in 1812, and Betty (1805–1886), daughter of Salomon Mayer of Vienna, and Ferdinand and Alice's aunt.

Dorothy de Rothschild recalled that Baron and Baroness Edmond 'doted on each other and each gave to the other the perfect understanding which is the dream of married life'.³ While Edmond was fond of entertaining, his wife was of a quiet and retiring nature, preferring to be with her family.⁴ Dorothy described her as 'pretty, with an exquisitely fair complexion, which she kept all her life'.⁵ Edmond and Adelheid had three children: James (1878–1957), Maurice (1881–1957) and Miriam Caroline Alexandrine, (known as Alexandrine, 1884–1965).

In 1876, Edmond bought the palatial 41 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, and this became their Paris home. Adapted by Felix Langlais (1827–1889), the interiors showed that the prevailing Rothschild style was favoured by Baron and Baroness Edmond and fuelled by their collecting: eighteenth-century French panelling, alongside eighteenth- and nineteenth-century seat furniture, with Sèvres porcelain, French paintings and a proliferation of textiles.⁶

Photographs of the *Boudoir Baronne* show how Baroness Edmond decorated and used her private rooms, with textiles old and new.⁷ It is evident that historic patterns and techniques interested and inspired her, in both dress and decor. For example, a suite of seat furniture, circa 1780, was covered with silk from the 1880s, reminiscent of the Second Empire.⁸ Baron and Baroness Edmond's names appear in the order book of the Lyon silk-weaving firm, Tassinari

Below, from left
French tortoiseshell buttons, 1790–1810, inlaid with gold love mottoes and symbols from Baroness Edmond's collection.

Accession number 3509.1–44. Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust). Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor

View of Baroness Edmond's private sitting room, the *Boudoir Baronne*, from a late nineteenth century photograph album documenting Baron Edmond de Rothschild's house at 41 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, Paris. Waddesdon Archive, accession number 153.1997. Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust). Photographer unknown © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor



& Châtel (established in 1762), between 1884 and 1889.⁹ Baron Ferdinand also used this firm, re-weaving eighteenth-century patterns for furnishings at Waddesdon. Some of Baroness Edmond's furniture came to Waddesdon after her death, and is displayed in the Low White Drawing Room.

Baron and Baroness Edmond's other residences were at Boulogne-sur-Seine, on the outskirts of the Bois de Boulogne in western Paris, and Armainvilliers, at Getz, south-east of Paris, a house they built between 1877 and 1897. In 1894, they visited Waddesdon, where they were inspired by Ferdinand's grounds and the recently built Dairy, taking back several ideas to Armainvilliers.¹⁰ Their names appear in the Waddesdon visitors' book.

Their collecting passion was such that Baron and Baroness Edmond looked for antiquities and textiles as they travelled, to places such as Persia (Iran), Russia and Turkey,¹¹ often in their yacht, the *Atmah*, as well as acquiring items through dealers and shops in Paris. Some of these served as furnishings, but other collections were reserved for the connoisseur's gaze, displayed or stored in cases and portfolios.¹² Baroness Edmond followed the Rothschild taste for the French eighteenth century, but concentrated on costume and accessories: buttons, fans, lace, seals and textiles.

From the 1880s Adelheid supported Edmond in his work of settling Jewish people in Palestine, and they journeyed to the Middle East together several times.¹³ Baroness Edmond founded hospitals, schools and synagogues to serve the new Jewish colonies.¹⁴ She was similarly concerned with health and education, particularly for women and children, in her home city of Frankfurt, and in Paris.¹⁵ In her will, she named a number of charitable institutions and bequeathed generous sums to each.¹⁶

Baroness Edmond died a year after her husband. Their properties and collections were divided between their children. In 1913, James had married an Englishwoman, Dorothy Pinto. As he was the son of her favourite niece, Miss Alice left Waddesdon to James and Dorothy on her death in 1922, causing them to settle permanently in Buckinghamshire.

Dorothy de Rothschild recorded the first crates of objects from Paris arriving at Waddesdon in 1936, including furniture, paintings and porcelain.¹⁷ Baroness Edmond bequeathed the bulk of her collection of lace, buttons, costume, fans and textiles to Dorothy, but these were among items in store at the Banque de France from April 1939 and confiscated by the Nazis when Paris was occupied in 1940.¹⁸ The house on the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré was requisitioned by Hermann Goering for his staff, and they seized any remaining works of art.¹⁹ The confiscated objects were meticulously inventoried and numbered, and finally dispatched to Waddesdon between 1947 and 1969 following their recovery from the Austrian salt mines.²⁰

The formation of Baroness Edmond's collections during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with the economic development of Paris and its recovery from the Franco-Prussian war (1870–1871), a recovery in which the Rothschild bank had played its part.²¹ The spread of industry and the expansion of service trades, such as department stores and the larger fashion industry, cemented Paris's position as a commercial power, and the city to which the world would flock to do its shopping.²²

Baroness Edmond's tastes differ in character from some Rothschild collections in that she was not primarily acquiring items for use, although she did utilise textiles as furnishings, and historic buttons and lace as dress accessories. Dorothy noted that she 'liked to amass specific collections; once she had decided on collecting fans or buttons, seals or lace, for example, she would continue to do so over the years, whether or not she had any particular use for them'.²³ In the case of Baroness Edmond's large collection of textile fragments, Dorothy attributes their acquisition to her housewifely duty 'to have adequate spares for any eventuality',²⁴ but they include exquisite French eighteenth-century dress and furnishing silks, and more exotic examples from the Near and Middle East.

Opposite

Eighteenth-century fans from Baroness Edmond's collection.

Accession numbers 3356, 3361 and 3850. Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust).
Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor





In this sense, Baroness Edmond's collections fall into the category of feminine collecting, with their concentration on articles for furnishing or dress, more likely to be seen and used in the home, than exhibited outside it.²⁵ At a time when many women were forming such collections, Baroness Edmond had the means to acquire the very best of everything, and Dorothy records that Edmond 'always delighted in extolling his wife's taste and knowledge whenever textiles of any kind were concerned'.²⁶ Her treatment of and attitude towards her collections of buttons, costume, fans, lace, textiles and seals suggest both a practical mind and a love of beauty and ingenuity, influenced by the fashions of the day and her own interests.

The best-known group within Baroness Edmond's collections is that of nearly 600 buttons. She began collecting buttons in the late nineteenth century, at a time when it was fashionable to acquire French *bibelots* (ornaments) of the eighteenth century. Other Rothschilds, including Ferdinand and Alice, were similarly engaged, collecting gold boxes, jewellery, cane and parasol handles, and other small-scale metal objects.

However, Baroness Edmond was not only interested in buttons as glittering miniature examples of craftsmanship, but also as items of dress. She sought out colours – purples, blues, yellows – that suited her, and subjects – flowers, costume, classical scenes – that interested her.²⁷ She also acquired hat pins, which became necessary and extremely fashionable because of the large hat styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and seals, further evidence of her taste for eighteenth-century trinkets.

Above, from left
Baroness Edmond in eighteenth-century fancy dress in the mid 1870s, wearing buttons, lace and holding a fan from her collection.
RAL 000/1586

Edging of Brussels bobbin lace, 1730–1740, from Baroness Edmond's collection.
Accession number 5804.
Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection (The National Trust). Photography: Mike Fear © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor

Sets of buttons were purchased through Parisian antique dealers and jewellers, and from other European jewellers with outlets in Paris. Alongside names such as *Gompers, A. Risler & Carré, Boin-Taburet* and *R. Lalique*, are J. Tostrup (1856–1890) and David Andersen (1843–1901), Norwegian silversmiths whose firms exist today.

The buttons were stored by set in small boxes within a seventeenth-century Japanese lacquer chest.²⁸ Baroness Edmond bequeathed them to Dorothy, writing, 'I give to my dear Dolly the Indo-Chinese coffer containing my collection of buttons. I also give her the antique buttons that decorate my dresses and coats'.²⁹ A surviving button box from *Boin-Taburet* shows a label bearing a Nazi inventory number, suggesting that the chest containing the buttons was amongst the items confiscated by the Nazis in 1940.

Baroness Edmond's collection of lace ranges in date from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. It includes cuffs, sleeve ruffles, dress edgings, flounces, stoles and a small amount of furnishing lace from major centres of production, such as Venice, Brussels and Alençon. Her personal taste veered towards delicate patterns of the 1700s, the largest group in the collection, rather than the more fashionable late seventeenth-century Italian lace.³⁰

The sources from which Baroness Edmond acquired lace are unknown. Unlike the buttons, not all of it is in good condition, or of the best quality. This suggests that she might have bought in lots. At Waddesdon, there are examples of blue ribbons from dealers' price tags and shop labels (such as *Au Bon Marché*) still attached to some textiles, giving a sense of how they came into her possession. Like her husband, who had chamois-lined boxes made for his porcelain and antiquities, Baroness Edmond had a velvet-covered, satin-lined chest in which the lace was kept, and in which it was seized in 1940.³¹

Just as there is no record of where and over what time-scale Baroness Edmond acquired the lace, there is no indication as to why she separated 17 lots from the main bequest to Dorothy at Waddesdon, gifting them to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.³² It may be that Baroness Edmond wished an element of her collection to remain in the city where she had passed most of her life.

Baroness Edmond's collections include a small group of costume. As no one piece provides a complete example of fashionable dress, it is likely that she acquired these items because she liked the cut or pattern of the fabric, rather than as perfectly-preserved illustrations of historical styles.

Dorothy commented that her mother-in-law's 'normal attire consisted of clothing which was drab but comfortable'.³³ However, surviving studio photographs show that Baroness Edmond occasionally dressed up in reproduction eighteenth-century costume. These ensembles were embellished with historic buttons, lace and fans.

Fans in the nineteenth century were different from their eighteenth-century predecessors, being larger in size and incorporating many mechanically-made elements. Still part of fashionable evening ensembles, and a requirement at Court, it was also possible to purchase antique fans from dealers, such as J. Duvellero, who supplied fans to the Rothschilds and to the British royal family. Earlier fans were often framed as decorations in bedrooms or dressing rooms.³⁴

The subjects depicted on Baroness Edmond's fans have parallels in many other objects now at Waddesdon, suggesting a unified taste across all types of artworks. For example, figures in historical and carnival costume echo Thomas Gainsborough's *Master Francis Nicholls*, known as *The Pink Boy* (1782), bequeathed by Baron Ferdinand to Baroness Edmond, and Antoine Watteau's *Arlequin, Pierrot et Scapin* (1719), acquired by Baroness Edmond and bequeathed to James.³⁵ The scene on the fan *The birdcage*, circa 1750, is taken from an engraving after François Boucher that also appears on a 1763 Sèvres *vase pot-pourri à feuilles de mirthe* from Baron Edmond's collection.³⁶ Nine fans were bequeathed to Dorothy, and were among the items seized by the Nazis, before their eventual arrival at Waddesdon.

Following their recovery after the war, Baroness Edmond's collections were displayed in former bedrooms in the west wing at Waddesdon, converted into display areas by the architect R. J. Page between 1968 and 1970.³⁷ Called the Store Rooms because they exhibited treasures from the stores, they included a large case full of costume, textiles, lace and fans (known as the Shop Window) as a tribute by Dorothy to her mother-in-law's collecting tastes.³⁸ The buttons were displayed in wall cases in the Blue Room (now known as the Goodwood Room) alongside additional cases of lace.

In the 1990s, when the Manor was closed for four years of restoration, Baroness Edmond's collections were carefully packed away because of the fragile nature of the material, re-appearing for temporary displays in 2001 and 2004. Since 2006, there have been permanent displays of buttons and lace, with the lace display regularly changing. In 2010, a special exhibition on Baroness Edmond as a collector was mounted to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of her death, featuring buttons, costume, fans, lace, seals, textiles and furniture. More research is necessary to understand Baroness Edmond's tastes and to explore the origins of the items she acquired. However, the pleasure given to visitors at Waddesdon by her bequests would surely delight the woman who looked for usefulness, ingenuity and beauty in all that she collected.³⁹

Rachel Boak is a Curator at Waddesdon Manor with responsibility for the collection of costume and textiles, including the original furnishing textiles chosen by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild for the house, and additional items given or lent by other members of the Rothschild family. She is currently working on the documentation of the costume and textiles in store.

NOTES

- Mrs James de Rothschild, *The Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor* (London: Collins, 1979, pp.67–68).
- Actes de l'Etat Civil concernant Monsieur le Baron Edmond James de Rothschild et Madame la Baronne Adelaïde de Rothschild, son épouse and leurs enfants*, [n.d.] RAL 000/1037/80/1. *Mariage de M le Bon Edmond, October 1877*. RAL Lafite OE 435.
- Mrs James A. de Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at Waddesdon', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, ed. Denis Sutton (London: The Financial Times Ltd, 1977), p.18.
- Derek Wilson, *Rothschild: A Story of Wealth and Power* (London: Mandarin, 1995, p.292).
- Draft notes by Dorothy de Rothschild about Baron Edmond, written in 1974, www.rothschildarchive.org/research/?doc=/research/articles/wmEdmondDdeR
- Pauline Prévost-Marcilhacy, *Les Rothschilds, bâtisseurs et mécènes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995, pp.319–320) and Ulrich Leben and Robert McDonald Parker, *Connaissance des Arts, La Résidence de L'Ambassadeur Américain à Paris* (Paris: Société Française de Promotion Artistique, 2007, pp.12–15).
- Photograph album documenting Baron Edmond de Rothschild's house at 41 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, Paris, early twentieth century. Waddesdon Archive, accession number 155.1997.
- Geoffrey de Bellaigue, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes, Volume II* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1974, pp.606–607, 637–640), catalogue numbers 129, 141 and 142; accession numbers 3023.1–5.
- Natalie Rothstein, 'European Silks – Historical and Domestic', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, pp.71–72.
- Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: The Heritage of a Rothschild House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002, p.213).
- Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.213.
- Michael Hall argues that Edmond stands apart from other members of the Rothschild family in forming collections inspired by academic and aesthetic interests, rather than primarily as furnishings or investments. For example, his collections of antiquities, drawings, prints and engravings, now divided between the Musée du Louvre and Waddesdon. Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.212 and p.234.
- Virginia Cowles, *The Rothschilds: A Family of Fortune* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979, p.183). For a discussion of Edmond's activities in Palestine see Yoram Mayorek, 'Between East and West: Edmond de Rothschild and Palestine', in *The Rothschilds: Essays on the History of a European Family*, ed. Georg Heuberger (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1994), pp.129–145.
- Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at

- Waddesdon', p.18.
- Hans-Otto Schembs, "For the Care of the Sick, the Good of the Community, the Embellishment of Their Home Town": The Charitable Rothschild Foundations in Frankfurt on Main', in *The Rothschilds: Essays on the History of a European Family*, pp.216–217. See also Uwe Schnellinger, 'Adelheid de Rothschild (1853–1935): The Foundation of the M.A. de Rothschild's Sanatorium for Consumptives in Nordach', in *Die Ortenau: Public Announcements by the History Society for Mittelbaden*, ed. Martin Ruch (Offenburg: Publishing House for the Historic Society of Mittelbaden, 82. Annual Edition, 2002), pp.4–7.
- For example, in a codicil to her will dated 3 April 1933, Baroness Edmond made bequests to institutions including La Fondation Rothschild at 76 Rue Picpus; l'association israélite pour la Protection de la Jeune fille at 15 Boulevard Magenta; les Patronages de la jeunesse israélite at 5 Rue de la Durance and 56 Rue Nationale; les patronages de la jeunesse féminine at 21 Avenue du Général Michel Bizot and 234 rue de Tolbiac; l'Union française pour le Sauvetage de l'Enfance at 108 Rue de Richelieu; la crèche israélite at 16 Rue Lamarck. Some of the sums bequeathed were changed in subsequent codicils. Baroness Edmond's last will is dated 9 June 1935. *Baron and Baronne Edmond's wills from Dorothy's papers*, date? Waddesdon Archive.

- Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.234. See also *Mrs James A. de Rothschild's Lecture to Guides*, March 1970, p.6. Waddesdon Manor, 77/01/01.
- Liste des DENTELLES léguées par la Baronne Edmond de ROTHSCHILD à Madame James de ROTHSCHILD* (not dated, but presumably 1935). The lace appears as a group, with the buttons, parasol handles and a portfolio of engravings, photographs and aquatints on the *LISTE DES OBJETS DEPOSES A LA BANQUE DE FRANCE LE 25 AVRIL 1939 ET APPARTENANT A M. JAMES DE ROTHSCHILD*, in cases 9 and 10. It is also found on a later list, dated March 1951, *Objets à envoyer à Mr JA par Chenu*. Waddesdon Archive. *Chenu* labels survive on some objects and crates at Waddesdon.
- Leben and Parker, *La Résidence de L'Ambassadeur Américain à Paris*, pp.16–17.
- Rothschild, *The Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor*, p.155 and Cowles, *The Rothschilds*, pp.243–246. Both Dorothy de Rothschild and Virginia Cowles attribute the rediscovery of many confiscated Rothschild treasures after the war to James Rorimer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, attached to the American Seventh Army as Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Officer. Nazi inventory labels survive on some objects and storage boxes.
- Wilson, *Rothschild*, pp.205–216.
- Godfrey Hodgson, *A New Grand Tour: How Europe's Great Cities Made Our World* (London: Viking, 1995, p.51).

- Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at Waddesdon', p.19.
- Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at Waddesdon', p.19. Dorothy first made this suggestion in her *Lecture to Guides*, March 1970, and repeats it in *The Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor*, p.155.
- Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Limited, 1999, p.11 and p.89). See also Sue Herdman, 'Buttons and the Baroness', *BBC Homes & Antiques Magazine* (November 2000), 12–13.
- Rothschild, *Lecture to Guides*, p.5.
- Madeleine Ginsburg, 'Buttons: Art and Industry', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, p.62.
- John Ayers, 'A Japanese Namban Lacquer Chest', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, pp.74–75.
- Note from Baroness Edmond de Rothschild to Mrs James de Rothschild, 1935? Waddesdon Archive, accession number 544.
- Santina M. Levey, 'Baroness Edmond de Rothschild as a Collector of Lace', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, p.40.
- It is described as a 'coffre en bois garnis tissu' in *Mr James de ROTHSCHILD / Liste complète des Objets à envoyer en Angleterre*, (no date, but probably 1935). Waddesdon Archive. The chest is in store at Waddesdon, accession number 3723.
- I am grateful to Véronique Belloir at the Musée des Art Décoratifs for her assistance with my research on Baroness

- Edmond's lace. Also to Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros at the Paris Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, who drew my attention to a robe of the order of Saint Esprit, donated by Baron Edmond to the Musée Carnavalet in 1906, and to a selection of 142 ribbons and a German carnival costume donated by Baroness Edmond to the Musée des Art Décoratifs in 1908. I would also like to thank Anna Ellerton and Ulrich Leben for their help with my research on lace.
- Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at Waddesdon', p.19.
- Hélène Alexander, 'The Pleasures of Fans', in *Aspects of the James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor*, p.58.
- Ellis Waterhouse, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Paintings* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1967, pp.44–45, 286–287) catalogue numbers 8 and 135.
- François Boucher (1703–1770), *Le Pasteur Complaisant* (1738), originally an over-door at the Hôtel de Soubise in Paris. The painting, and its pair, were engraved by André Laurent (Andrew Lawrence, 1708–1747) in 1742 and featured in Baron Edmond's collection of engravings, bequeathed to the Musée du Louvre on his death in 1934.
- Rothschild, *Lecture to Guides*, pp.1–2.
- John Cornforth, 'The New Store Rooms at Waddesdon', *Country Life* (June 18, 1970), 1154–1158.
- Rothschild, 'The Feminine Line at Waddesdon', p.19.

The large case, known as 'The Shop Window' in the Store Rooms at Waddesdon, displaying costume, textiles and lace from Baroness Edmond's collections, circa 1970. Photographer unknown © The National Trust, Waddesdon Manor

