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A House that Inspired *Jane Eyre*
NORTON CONYERS

Announced as
**Winner of The Historic Houses Association & Sotheby's
Restoration Award 2014**

**Eight-year Restoration Project Uncovers Fascinating Layers of History and
Gives new Life to the North Yorkshire 17th Century Manor House**



*"It was three storeys high, of proportions not vast though considerable:
a gentleman's manor house (...)." Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (1847)*

London, **XX** August 2014 - **The Historic Houses Association** and **Sotheby's** are delighted to announce that the 2014 Restoration Award has been awarded to **Norton Conyers**, near Ripon, North Yorkshire, home of Sir James and Lady Graham. The late medieval house, extensively rebuilt in the 17th century¹, has been the home of the Graham family since 1624. It is perhaps most famous for being an inspiration for Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë's celebrated novel *Jane Eyre*. The novelist is believed to have visited Norton Conyers in 1839 and the family legend of a "madwoman" secretly confined to an attic room might have given her the idea for the crazed Mrs Rochester.

¹ Recent research has revealed that the landscape in which Norton Conyers stands dates from the prehistoric period, and the origins of the house are Anglo-Saxon.

Sir James and Lady Graham, a former museum curator, began the restoration of **Norton Conyers** in 2006. Their assiduous work over the past eight years revealed fascinating layers of history, which visitors will be able to discover in July 2015, when this Graded II*-listed house² reopens to the public.

Richard Compton, President of the Historic Houses Association comments: *"Norton Conyers is a very special house, steeped in history. It has been so sensitively and painstakingly restored in recent years by its very knowledgeable owners, Sir James and Lady Graham. I always look upon Norton Conyers as a classic HHA Member property whose owners are so dedicated towards the maintenance of this special place. Great care has been taken to respect the history and development of this historic house and in so doing, over the past eight years, successive layers of history have been uncovered. The HHA is delighted that this award is being made to mark and celebrate the Grahams' remarkable achievements".*



Sir James and Lady Graham in Norton Conyers' Great Hall
© Xavier Desmier

Harry Dalmeny, Chairman, UK Private Clients said: *"The Grahams have achieved an heroic restoration. Their passion, extensive research and great attention to detail have lifted the veil on over 1000 years of history, while retaining Norton Conyers' impenetrable mystery. Almost 200 years after Charlotte Brontë, visitors will with no doubt be mesmerised by this fascinating house".*

The restoration works have enhanced many features of Norton Conyers that Charlotte Brontë mentioned in her description of Thornfield Hall: the battlements around the roof, the lawn, the



The "Mad Woman's Room" in the attic © Xavier Desmier

rookery, the broad oak staircase lit by a high latticed window, the high square hall covered in family portraits and, of course "the Mad Woman's room" in the third storey attic where, in the 18th century, the inspiration for Mrs Rochester is rumoured to have been confined³.

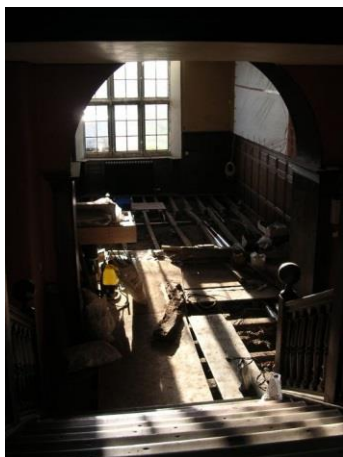
Following the discovery of a staircase leading to the attic, a "secret" door has been created in the 19th century panelling, opening the space to the public for the first time. The library has also been

² Grade II* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest; 5.5% of listed buildings are Grade II* www.english-heritage.org.uk

³ See Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, *English Manor Houses* for further details.

restored and furnished to resemble Mr Rochester's study in Brontë's novel. Further finds made during the restoration process include Tudor painted boards hidden behind 18th century plaster and a 1760s wallpaper, a rare survival, discovered in the main staircase passage.

THE STAIRCASE



Before



After

THE GREAT HALL



Before



After

THE HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION AND SOTHEBY'S RESTORATION AWARD 2014

THE HHA/Sotheby's Restoration Award recognises and celebrates the restoration work that is continually being undertaken by members of the HHA throughout the United Kingdom. These projects reflect the dedication of owners to the care and sympathetic restoration not only of the principal houses but also of the gardens, parks and estate buildings. The Award seeks to generate publicity for the winning properties, to encourage more visitors to them and to stimulate increased interest in historic houses and support for the role of the private owner.

This year, from a short list of applications which included Bruisyard Hall in Suffolk (Paul Rous), The Orangery at Burton Constable Hall in East Yorkshire (The Burton Constable Foundation), Cogeshall Abbey in Essex (Roger Hadley), Elmore Court, Gloucestershire (Anselm Guise), Great Fursdon in Devon (Francis Fulford) and Pentillie Castle, the judges commended the following three:

COMMENDED PROPERTIES

THE GROTTO, PAINSHILL PARK, SURREY

-Painshill Park Trust -



Dating from 1860, the Crystal Grotto at Painshill was rescued from near dereliction and restored to its crystal glory. This magical cave on an island in the lake of Painshill Park was designed and laid out by Charles Hamilton in the late 18th century.

THE ORANGERY, WESTON PARK, SHROPSHIRE

-The Weston Park Foundation-



200 glass panels of the Orangery have been restored and the building has been generally refurbished and returned to use.

ENCOMBE HOUSE, DORSET



James Gaggero has carried out a fantastic restoration of this Grade II*- listed house by John Pitt (1770).

THE HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION

The Historic Houses Association (HHA) is a not-for-profit organisation that represents 1,550 of the UK's privately and charitably owned historic houses, castles and gardens. Around 500 of these properties open their doors to visitors for days out, special tours, school visits, film locations, weddings and events, or as memorable places to stay. Members range from iconic stately homes such as Blenheim Palace, Highclere Castle (TV's Downton Abbey), Castle Howard (TV's Brideshead Revisited), Knebworth House, Longleat and Burghley House, to more intimate houses such as Traquair in Scotland, Treowen in Wales and Belle Isle in Northern Ireland. Most are still private family homes. The Association was established in 1973 to help owners conserve these wonderful places in the interests of the nation and carries out lobbying, advisory and marketing work on behalf of Member properties.

Visit www.hha.org.uk for more details of the HHA and HHA Member properties

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