



UNLOCKED

THE SYDNEY LIVING MUSEUMS GAZETTE
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REVIVING VAUCLUSE HOUSE

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Thanks to the generous support of Sydney Living Museums' Foundation, the refurbishment of the drawing and orientation rooms at Vaucluse House is almost complete.

Two significant projects are coming to fruition at Vaucluse House. The drawing room refurbishment draws upon authentic sources and traditional trades to re-create a room that the Wentworths might have known, while the orientation room is being redesigned to enhance visitors' understanding of the site's complex history. The results will be unveiled in April. It is through the generous financial support of the SLM Foundation and our donors that we are able to continue our important work in preserving our heritage for future generations.

The drawing room – now considered one of the finest surviving colonial interiors in Australia – was built and furnished by William Charles and Sarah Wentworth in the 1840s. In 2017, we see it transformed by experts for the next generation of visitors. The refurbishment has been a labour of scholarship, dedication and care.

No pictorial evidence of the original drawing room survives, so our only snippet of information is an auction advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1853, when the family was preparing to leave Australia for England. It listed a variety of furniture for sale, comprising ottomans, sofas and easy chairs in 'elaborately carved rosewood' and upholstered in crimson silk damask. Without a fragment of this original upholstery, SLM worked with Richard Humphries from Humphries Weaving in Suffolk, England, to source damask of an appropriate design, colour and quality. As a significant original finish, the colour and design of the floral wallpaper frieze was an important reference point and guided the decision-making process. Midway through 2016, over 200 metres of this splendid custom-woven crimson damask was shipped to Sydney.

The furniture – including two single-ended sofas, stools, a pair of ottomans and five Wentworth-provenanced chairs – was expertly reupholstered by Carlos Rodrigues. Conservator Ben Stoner treated much of the furniture, including recarving a section of rosewood previously lost from one of the single-ended sofas. The window furnishings were created by Chrissie Jeffery, creative director of Stitches Soft Furnishings, and her talented team, using 19th-century sources and with input from architecture and interiors specialist Dr James Broadbent AM.

Essential to any historical furnishings project are the passementeries, or trimmings – bullion fringes, ropes, gimp, hangers and tassels. Some of the trimmings for this project were imported from France, while many others were custom-made for us by artisan Morrison Polkinghorne in Cambodia. The tassels for the box ottomans were meticulously copied from an example in the Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection. Our Soft Furnishings Group of volunteers painstakingly handstitched silk hangers into the wool bullion fringe for the window furnishings.

Orientation room

Another exciting interpretation project is the creation of a display, orientation and rest area for visitors. The ground floor room, which may have been Wentworth's estate office, has been redesigned to share the stories of the site, from its enduring Aboriginal connections, its ownership by Sir Henry Browne Hayes and occupation by the Wentworth family to its transfer into public ownership and the creation of a museum, including the important role played by SLM. The multi-layered display is a mix of bespoke joinery, interpretative panels and audiovisual components.

Rarely seen treasures

The refurbished orientation space has given us the opportunity to conserve and display rarely seen treasures from the Vaucluse House collection. Objects once belonging to the Wentworth family jostle with more idiosyncratic material from the property's early museum phase. A selection of these objects appears overleaf.

