

CONVOCATION JUNE 2013

Presentation speech for Dame Rosalind Savill for the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters of the University *honoris causa*

Vice-Chancellor, when Rosalind Savill began her career as a historian of art and a museum curator, the decorative arts were something of the Cinderella of art-related scholarship. Always on the invitation-list for the ball were the ‘fine arts’ of painting, drawing and sculpture. Left at home in the scullery, always under-appreciated and often unseen, were the merely ‘decorative arts’: furniture, textiles, and, loveliest of all, eighteenth-century French porcelain – the specialism that Rosalind Savill made her scholarly life’s work.

That work has been transformative. Thanks to Dame Rosalind’s meticulous research and the persuasiveness of her advocacy, the genius of the great porcelain-makers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is appreciated as never before; and the outstanding creations of the royal manufactory at Sèvres have taken their rightful place as among the very great artistic creations of European culture. Appropriately, she was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2009 in recognition of her contribution to scholarship. We are honoured, too, that Dame Rosalind is a Professorial Research Fellow of the University of Buckingham’s Humanities Research Institute.

To have transformed one's subject – and received the international recognition of one's peers – would usually be enough to satisfy the most scholars. But Dame Rosalind also managed a second transformation – and a parallel career – at London's loveliest museum, the Wallace Collection.

Dame Rosalind became Director of the Wallace Collection in 1992. It was an inspired appointment. Over the next two decades, in creative partnership with Sir John Ritblat as Chairman, Ros Savill rejuvenated the Wallace Collection, restoring each of its magnificent rooms, sensitively cleaning and rehanging its pictures, and re-presenting its own superlative collection of French furniture and Sèvres uollet

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