

Edwardian society pomp and party life, rich with gambling and seduction!

History journalist Andrew Southam considers "Treasured Possessions" housed in Mrs Ronnie's home, currently featuring in a fascinating National Trust exhibition.

Edwardian society extravagance, gambling and even seductions characterised Margaret Greville's weekend parties at her 1500-acre Surrey country estate Polesden Lacey.

The present generation of the Windsors even continue to wear her jewellery, Princess Eugenia wearing the Greville Emerald Kokoshnik tiara made by the Parisian jewellery house Boucheron in 1911 to her wedding, the Queen Consort favouring one of her diamond necklaces.

Some 80 years ago Margaret relinquished her estate and priceless art collection, including one of the largest collections in any British country house of Peter Carl Fabergé's gold craftsmanship, to the National Trust.

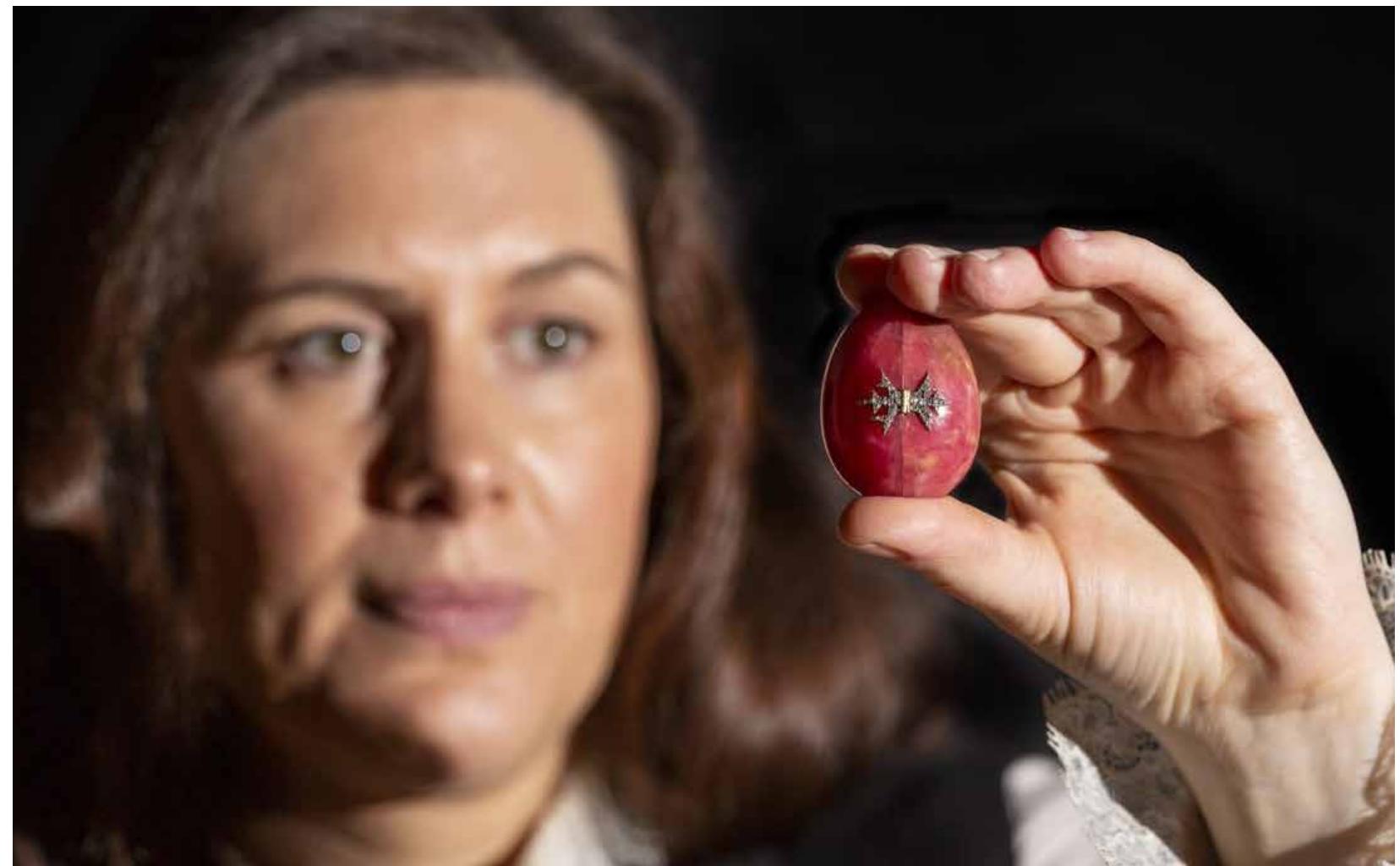
This anniversary is being marked by the trust in exhibition Treasured Possessions: Riches of Polesden Lacey, displaying Greville's wonders such as paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, Staffordshire porcelain, pottery horse heads from Imperial China and Fabergé egg made for the assassinated Russian Imperial family.

Margaret's status as one of six prominent society hostesses competing to outdo each other in grandeur belie her origins, born the wrong side of the bed-sheets.

Her father was Scotsman William McEwan who founded a prominent beer factory in Edinburgh, which brewed today's well-known drink, and had an affair with his house servant, Helen Anderson, in 1860s Victorian Edinburgh.

McEwan sent Helen to London in 1863 to have their illegitimate daughter, Margaret Helen Anderson, escorted by a trusted employee William Anderson.

Good fortune had given both employees the same surname creating the pretence of husband and wife; they lived together as such until William Andersen's death in 1885, when McEwan, now financially secure, married Helen, he aged



58, she 55 and Margaret 21, and eventually became a liberal MP for Edinburgh.

His wealth opened up London society for sophisticated, social-climbing Margaret, who became the mistress and then in 1891 the wife of Baronet Captain Ronald Greville, the eldest son of Lord Greville.

Ronald was close to the bacchanalian loving Prince of Wales, Albert Edward, known as 'Bertie', whose life was a merry go round of parties, baccarat, races, dinners, balls and affairs.

Bertie, Queen Victoria's son and heir, attracted a group of raucous friends who gained the moniker of the 'Marlborough House set' after his London residence in Pall Mall and were never far from scandal.

Wonderful Fabergé egg (above)

Portrait (right) of Margaret Greville (photos National Trust)

One of the prince's own mistresses, Diana Lady Brooks, even had an affair with Lord Beresford and became furious on learning that Lady Beresford had become pregnant by her husband!

Mrs Ronnie, as Margaret became known, entertained these friends and other Edwardian celebrities at her Mayfair residence.

In 1906 her father bought her and Ronnie Polesden Lacey a 17th century house in the Surrey Hills, rebuilt in partly Edwardian style at the start of the 20th century.

The site was transformed into a sumptuous weekend place of entertainment, using architects Charles Mewès and Arthur Davis, who'd redesigned

