



the London Ritz.

French, Italian and Dutch masters, fine furniture and porcelain decorated rooms; a salvaged wood-panelled central hallway made for grand entrances down the stairs; a personal lift, possibly the first in any country house, was built for Margaret's use, and a games room created to entertain male guests with billiards and cards.

Ronald Greville's death two years later from pneumonia didn't interfere with Margaret's self-appointed society duties, as she developed a reputation as one of the Edwardians' foremost hostesses, providing lavish entertainment to the music of Noel Coward and doubtless mischief.

Conservative politician Chips Cannon who often enjoyed her hospitality wrote in his diaries that there was 'no one on earth so skilfully malicious as old Maggie'.

Maharajahs and viceroys, ambassadors and aristocrats, heads of state, politicians including Winston Churchill and other notables were invited, as was royalty whom she courted extensively.

King Edward VII, as Bertie became after his 1901 coronation, attended her very first par-

**Saloon (above) at Polesden Lacey, near Dorking, Surre (photo: National Trust, ©NTPL/Andreas von Einsiedel)**

**Wonderful piece (right) of pottery (photo: National Trust)**

ty in 1909; and she befriended both the King's latest mistress, Alice Keppel, who is the great-great grandmother of the Queen Consort, and later on Queen Mary who was wife to George V.

Greville also encouraged the courtship between the young Lady Elizabeth Bows-Lyon and George V's second son Prince Albert, who was fated to become George VI. The two even honeymooned at Polesden Lacey after their marriage in 1923.

Such connections aided Greville's elevation to Damehood in 1922.

Her relationship deepened with widowed Queen Mary, when George V died in 1936, and the new Queen Elizabeth, whose husband unexpectedly became King the same year when Edward VIII abdicated after only eleven months to marry twice divorced American, Wallis Simpson.

Dame Greville and Queen Elizabeth often wrote to each other, one rather gossipy letter included a joke at Wallis Simpson's expense, referring to a new hat called Wallis, because it was "shady, without a crown".

She declined further proposals of marriage and died without having children in September 1942.

Her will left £20,000 to Princess Margaret, and £12,500 to another close friend, Queen Victoria Eugenie of Spain, but disappointed Queen Mary, who had expected to be given Polesden Lacey, which instead went to the trust.

Greville did though bequeath the Windsors her jewellery, whose extent remains unknown even today, so that her gems would always be worn by queens.

Queen Elizabeth, who eventually became The Queen Mother, in turn gave a pair of Greville's diamond ivy clips to her daughter, the young Princess Elizabeth, who became Queen Elizabeth II, as a 21st birthday gift.

Polesden Lacey has become one of the most popular of all National Trust properties, which boasts extensive grounds with breath-taking scenery of the North Downs and formal gardens now in late summer colour.

More details of this exhibition, which runs until the end of this month and resumes next March, can be found at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/polesden-lacey/features/treasured-possessions-riches-of-polesden-lacey-website>.

