

# Exhibit covers five centuries of English history

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Associated Press

**NEW YORK** — A remarkable collection of art and historical objects dating to Elizabethan England is touring the United States.

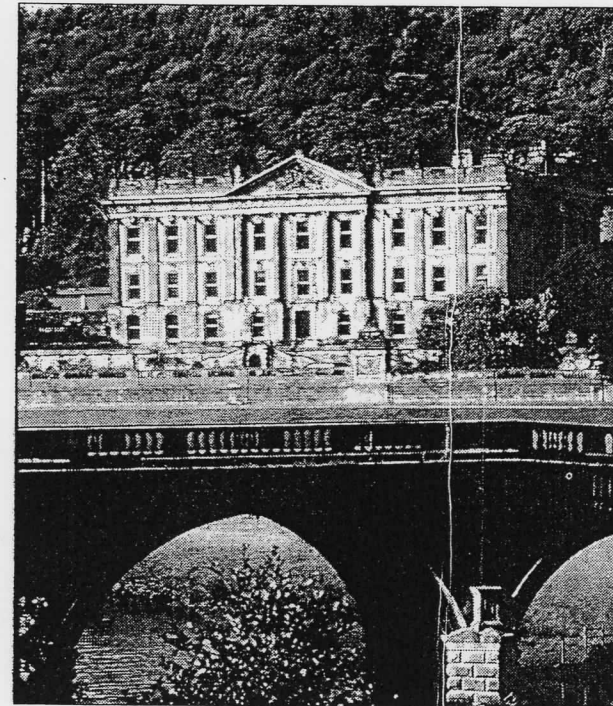
The collection is a 500-year chronicle of a country estate. Among the Cavendish family treasures are King Henry VIII's rosary, a letter from Queen Elizabeth I, Old Master drawings by Rembrandt, Rubens and Titian, John Smith's 17th-century map of Virginia and bejeweled tiaras.

The 223 items in "The Devonshire Inheritance: Five Centuries of Collecting at Chatsworth" went on display at the Bard Graduate Center in Manhattan on March 17 and remain until June 20. Stops at four more American galleries are scheduled through 2005.

The exhibit documents the opulent lifestyle and eclectic tastes of generations of the Cavendish, whose vast stone palace and surrounding lands go back to the mid-16th century.

Billed as the "National Gallery of the North of England," Chatsworth draws up to a half-million visitors each year to 30 public rooms filled with art, a 40,000-volume library and 1,100 acres of gardens and parks.

The touring collection is almost exclusively from the family's private holdings and is rarely put on public display. It illuminates Cavendish ties to the Eng-



This is an undated photo of Chatsworth, the family seat of the Cavendish family in northern England which houses their treasures.

lish monarchy, family marriages and shrewd acquisitions and arts patronage to promote "the noble tradition and pastime of collecting" at country estates.

"The deep cultural respect for legacy and ancestral roots has resulted in the remarkable survival, care and expansion of family collections over successive generations," the book notes.

Bess of Hardwick, who launched Chatsworth's construction in 1552 with the first Sir William Cavendish, is shown in an oil portrait that captures her imperious

demeanor. Outlasting three husbands, Bess walked out on her fourth, the Earl of Shrewsbury, after a quarrel over marital property, prompting Queen Elizabeth I to intervene.

Bess defied the royal directive to reconcile with her husband. She had held long a grudge against Elizabeth for appointing Shrewsbury custodian of Mary, Queen of Scots. The doomed queen was kept prisoner at Chatsworth before her eventual beheading at Fotheringhay Castle, Northamptonshire.

When Shrewsbury died in 1590, Bess became England's second-richest woman, surpassed only by Elizabeth. At her death in 1608, Chatsworth went to her son, William, who became the First Earl of Devonshire. He obtained the rare copy of Capt. John Smith's Map of Virginia from 1612, having invested in the colony.

Philosopher Thomas Hobbes is one of the renowned Englishmen represented in the collection. He compiled the first catalog of the family's library in the mid-17th century, while tutoring a Cavendish youth at Chatsworth.

The dukedom dates from 1694, when the fourth earl was named Duke of Devonshire for supporting Prince William of Orange in the "Glorious Revolution."

The second duke showed his collector's acumen starting in 1723 by acquiring Old Master drawings of Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, Albrecht Durer, Annibale Carracci, Peter Paul Rubens, Inigo Jones and others. Several dozen originals are shown in the collection.

Family fortunes got a huge boost in 1748 when the fourth duke married Charlotte Boyle, daughter and heiress of the Earl of Burlington. The earl's death five years later doubled the Cavendish holdings, adding estates in Ireland and England, homes in London and the earl's "unparalleled collection of architectural books and drawings," the guide-

book notes.

Burlington had promoted the Palladian style of architecture and revived the reputation of Inigo Jones, the 17th-century architect who specialized in the Italian style. More than a dozen drawings by Jones, most of them characters in his court masques, are in the display.

Sir Joshua Reynolds's luminous 1780 oil portrait of Georgiana Spencer, the Duchess of Devonshire, is another highlight. A famous beauty, she attracted social and political personalities to Chatsworth and held the first public viewings of the Chatsworth collection.

King Henry VIII's rosary came to Chatsworth in the 19th century. Carved from Flemish boxwood with microscopic precision, the early 15th-century rosary was the greatest acquisition of the sixth duke (1790-1858), who spent lavishly to expand Chatsworth even as he added to the collection.

In 1886, Queen Victoria wrote to Lord Hartington, later the eighth duke of Devonshire, asking him to become Liberal Party prime minister of a coalition government. Although the offer came to naught, Victoria's letter is another cherished memento.

Lucian Freud's oil portraits of the current 11th Duke of Devonshire and his wife, Deborah, the youngest of the famous Mitford sisters, bring the collection into the late 20th century. Both are now in their early 80s.