

The conservation work to Grade I listed Knole house and its world-class collection is now complete thanks to National Lottery funding.

Six-hundred-year-old Knole has an illustrious history. In its time it’s been a medieval palace for archbishops, a favourite deer-hunting spot for Henry VIII and the inspiration behind Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando*.

But by 2013 the grand estate house in Kent had fallen into decline. Rain, damp, mould, even nibbling insects had taken their toll on the building and its prized collection of furniture and textiles.

No one quite knows how many rooms there are in the labyrinthine house – a popular myth has it at 365. Now some of its most splendid rooms are ready to host visitors, schools and community groups thanks to £7.75million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said, “Despite its weighty history and imposing size, Knole house is never oppressive. It entices visitors in with its stateliness and keeps them there with its beguiling collection, now beautifully conserved.

"National Lottery money has brought one of Britain’s largest houses back from rack and ruin and transformed it into an inspiring hive of community activity."

Huge conservation project

Experts have used cutting-edge techniques to conserve 15 showrooms, the house attics, Gatehouse Tower and the exceptional range of furniture, textiles and paintings on display inside. They have been supported by hundreds of volunteers in this huge endeavour.

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Among the vast collection is the stunning 17th-century Spangled Bed. The bed is sewn with thousands of gold, silver and silver-gilt sequins, now barely recognisable from the dusty, worn fabrics taken down four years ago.

Hidden secrets

The conservation has revealed many of the house’s long-hidden secrets, ranging from the mystical to the everyday.

Witch marks carved to ward off evil spirits were discovered above the bedroom intended for King James I. The monarch, who in the end did not stay in the room, had recently been targeted by the foiled 1605 Gunpowder Plot.

And a 1633 letter appealing for domestic items was found under the attic floorboards, beginning: “Mr Bilby, I pray p[ro]vide to be sent too morrow in ye Cart some Greenfish”.



Sun streaming through a stained glass window



Witchmarks found at Knole



One of the grand rooms at Knole

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