



Celebrating the Centenary of Peter Thornton Symposium – 8 May 2026

Context

Peter Thornton was Keeper of Furniture and Woodwork at the V&A (1966-1984), where he was known for his expertise, flair and imagination in the presentation of historic interiors at Ham House, Osterley Park and Apsley House, all at that time managed by the V&A. His work at the V&A also encompassed research into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century silks; musical instruments, and the distinctive, innovative redesign of galleries including the V&A's Costume Court.

Thornton is also remembered as Curator at Sir John Soane's Museum (1984-1995) and for his many highly influential books, including *Seventeenth Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (1978) and *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920* (1984). As a historian of British and European interior decoration, he pioneered an approach to the presentation of the historic interior that was rooted in research, drawing on house inventories and other archival sources to inform the representation of interiors and his publications.

Date	08 May 2026
Time	10:30 – 17:15
Venue	Hochhauser Lecture Theatre, V&A South Kensington

Timings	Activity
10:00 – 10:30	Arrivals and Coffee
10:30 – 10:35	Welcome and Housekeeping Dr Oliver Cox (Head of Academic Partnerships, V&A)
10:35 – 11:20	Keynote Address: Peter Kai Thornton, Keeper and Scholar. Simon Swynfen Jervis FSA
11:20	Panel One: Museum Work Panel Chair: Christopher Wilk (Keeper, Performance, Fashion, Textiles and Furniture Department, V&A).

Timings	Activity
11:25	‘Suitable...for the display of hydrogen balloons and early airships’: Peter Thornton and the 1962 Costume Court Dr Cassie Davies-Strodder (Curator, Fashion and Textiles since 1900, V&A)
11:40	Textiles and Upholstery: Recollections working with Peter at Ham, Osterley and the V&A Annabel Westman MBE (Independent Textile Historian, Lecturer and Consultant)
12:00	Peter Thornton at the Soane Helen Dorey MBE (Deputy Director and Inspectress, Sir John Soane’s Museum) and Jane Wilkinson (Head of Conservation)
12:20	“Playing our ancient and delicate instruments”: Peter Thornton and V&A gallery concerts in the 1970s Hugo Craft-Stanley (Archives Assistant, V&A)
12:40	Q&A
13:00	Lunch Break
14:30	Panel Two: Country House Work Panel Chair: Sophie Chessum (Senior Curator, Clandon Park)
14:35	Peter Thornton’s Legacy at the National Trust James Rothwell (National Curator, Decorative Arts and Historic Interior, National Trust)
14:55	Case Study: Ham House Dr Hannah Mawdsley (Property Curator, Ham House, National Trust)
15:15	Case Study: Osterley Lucy Porten (National Curator, National Trust)
15:35	Q&A
15:45	Comfort Break
16:00	Roundtable Discussion: Legacy and Influence Panel chair: Dr Oliver Cox (Head of Academic Partnerships, V&A)
16:05	‘Peter Thornton’s drawings of his own domestic interiors’

Timings	Activity
	Dora Thornton (Head Curator, The Goldsmith's Company)
16:15	<p data-bbox="336 271 1430 344">Teaching and Researching Historic Interiors: New Themes and Approaches</p> <p data-bbox="336 376 1430 450">Dr Lindsay Macnaughton (Programme Director, MA Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors, University of Buckingham)</p>
16:25	<p data-bbox="336 486 1430 560">Curating Historic Interiors: New Themes and Approaches - the view from English Heritage</p> <p data-bbox="336 591 1430 665">Dr Emily Burns (Curator of Collections and Interiors (West London), English Heritage).</p>
16:35	Discussion
17:00	Concluding Remarks
17:15	Event Concludes