



Samurai warrior model in real armour, one of 26 on guard at Snowhill in the Cotswolds

THE GREAT ECCENTRIC

# Standing room only

Imelda Marcos's weakness for designer footwear may have famously filled a few wardrobes but her collecting efforts were as nothing compared with those of Charles Paget Wade. This remarkable man – architect, poet, artist but, above all, collector – managed to cram an entire three-storey manor house with more than a few of his favourite things. In fact, so successful was he at moving in his objects of desire, that he, the owner, had to move out.

The house in question is Snowhill Manor, a typical traditional Cotswold manor house, the core of which dates from around 1500. Wade gave this warm, atmospheric house to the National Trust in 1951, 30-odd years after he first saw the property for sale. He was serving in the Royal Engineers



The Idiosyncratic Wade

during the First World War when he saw the house of his dreams: he came across it as he was leafing through the pages of *Country Life* magazine in the field canteen. To his delight Snowhill was still for sale when he returned from war duty in 1919. Using money from his family's sugar plantations in the West Indies, he snapped the estate up at once.

The house was in a ruinous state, but as a trained architect Wade was able to take a gang of 28 workmen and set about a huge rescue operation, taking care to preserve as much of the original panelling and stonework as he could. Once the house was restored, he set about filling it with his extraordinary collection.

He was first inspired by a Chinese cabinet in his



grandmother's silent drawing room. It was full of fascinating objects – a wax angel with golden wings and a bone model of a spinning jenny, to name but two – and held the young Wade's active imagination in thrall. By the tender age of seven, he had started buying small curios out of his pocket money.

Once his inheritance was in the bank, though, Wade's collecting moved up a few notches. Fine ceramics, glassware, boneshaker bicycles – in this pre-antiques shop era, all were hunted down in dusty attics and narrow back alleys the length of Britain.

Wade loved to dress up, and would often startle guests by appearing suddenly, out of a dark corner, in full costume. Most people would settle for one suit of Samurai armour in the corner of the room as a talking point: Wade opted for 26, discovering some in a plumber's shop in Cheltenham and others in a cellar off London's Charing Cross Road. Small wonder, then, that Wade eventually had to move out of his wonderful manor house – and into a small workman's cottage in the garden.

He died in 1956. Almost 50 years on, Snowhill is celebrating the man and his collection with an exhibition of photographs in the house's restaurant and visitor centre.

And if the Samurai armour doesn't impress you, Wade's terrifying Javanese Rangda masks (top) certainly will.

*The exhibition runs until 4 November. Telephone Snowhill Manor on 01386 852410*