

12 November 2004

## Vital boost to campaign to save 'unique' Macclesfield Psalter from export

Efforts by the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge to save for the nation a unique East Anglian 14<sup>th</sup>-century illuminated manuscript have received a vital boost. Following an extension of the Government's export stop on the **Macclesfield Psalter**, a public appeal in support of the 'Save the Psalter' campaign was launched by the National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund) on BBC 2's new *Culture Show* last night. The Psalter - a spectacular example of late medieval art dating from the 1320s and containing exquisite miniatures and marginal scenes in gold and precious pigments - will go to the Getty Museum in California unless the Fitzwilliam can raise £1.7 million to keep it in the UK.

The Macclesfield Psalter was sold to the Getty at auction in June. However, the Government's Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art signalled it to be a heritage object of extraordinary beauty and importance and recommended that every effort should be made to keep it in the UK. This welcome extension to the export stop allows three vital extra months in which to fundraise to save it from export. £650,000 has already been pledged - £500,000 by the Art Fund, £100,000 by the Fitzwilliam Museum and £50,000 by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam - and a further £1 million must be raised before 10 February 2005. The Fitzwilliam has applied to the National Heritage Memorial Fund - the Government's heritage fund of last resort - hoping that they will add their support.

Museum Director Duncan Robinson said: "We are delighted that the Art Fund has launched an appeal to help us to raise sufficient funds to keep the Psalter in its country of origin and are grateful for the many expressions of support for the campaign; the public's response is clearly vital to its success. This wonderful manuscript provides an unparalleled insight into the world of late Medieval England and its East Anglian origins make the Fitzwilliam a fitting home for it. Here it may be enjoyed by the public and studied by scholars in the context of one of the finest collections of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts in Britain."

Illuminated manuscripts contain some of the best preserved examples of pre-Reformation art in England and provide the richest source of information on all aspects of medieval life. The 252-leaf Macclesfield Psalter measures just 170 x 108 mm and combines devotional images with an unparalleled array of humorous marginal scenes. Dogs, chickens and rabbits masquerade as bishops, kings, and jousting knights. Monkeys ape doctors, landlords meet their peasants, and courting couples disport themselves in improbable poses. In painting of the very highest quality, the medieval world is both presented and satirised by one of the most inventive of all illuminators. The content, techniques and materials employed are all vital to the study, understanding and appreciation of medieval English art.

- Ends -

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**For publication:** To contribute to the Art Fund's 'Save the Psalter' appeal visit [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org) or call the appeal hotline on 0870 848 2033.

For further information about the Macclesfield Psalter and the Fitzwilliam Museum, visit [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk).

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## Notes for Editors

### The Fitzwilliam Museum

- The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. It is committed to preservation, research, interpretation, learning, access and display.
- More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints.
- The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and **include one of the finest collections of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in Britain – over 1,000 spanning the period from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries and representing all major schools of European illumination.**
- The Fitzwilliam Museum offers public and educational programmes for all ages, including talks and lectures, courses and drop-in sessions as well as gallery teaching and wide-ranging provision through printed materials, on-line catalogues, web-based resources and hand-held computers offering audio and visual guides to highlights of the collections.
- The Fitzwilliam Museum attracts around 300,000 visitors a year. It is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, Sunday, 12.00 noon to 5.00 pm; closed Mondays. Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is free.

### National Art Collections Fund

The National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund) was founded on 11 November 1903, 101 years ago. It is the UK's leading independent art charity. It has 80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, the Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire over 850,000 works of art. In 2003 the Art Fund offered £5 million to museums and galleries and distributed 16 gifts and bequests. The Art Fund is independent of government and raises money from membership subscriptions, donations and legacies. Visit the charity's website at [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org) for daily updates on the appeal.

### The Culture Show:

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# Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

Lively, fast-moving and authoritative, *The Culture Show* is BBC Two's weekly arts and culture magazine show offering viewers an hour long culture fix every Thursday night. Featuring some of the UK's most passionate and out-spoken voices, the show offers a range of views, interviews and breaking news from the worlds of high art, popular culture and everything else in between. Brought to viewers from a different city or venue every week, *The Culture Show* explores the range and diversity of arts across the country.

## **National Heritage Memorial Fund:**

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was established in 1980 as a memorial to those who gave their lives for this country and it continues to operate as a fund of 'last resort', focusing on saving heritage which is under threat, whether from sale overseas, the break-up of collections, or, in the case of land, from unsympathetic development. The Fund's current budget is £5million per annum which comes from government grant-in-aid. Outstanding treasures that have been saved for the nation include the Sherborne Missal and the National Trust's Victorian country house in Bristol, Tyntesfield.

**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art:** see [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk) for further information

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