

10 February 2005

Macclesfield Psalter comes home to East Anglia

Following the resounding success of the campaign to save for the nation the remarkable 14th-century Macclesfield Psalter, this unique medieval illuminated manuscript has, after many centuries, come home to East Anglia. It joins one of the finest collections of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in Britain at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, where it will go on display to the public for the first time on 15 February.

The Psalter was saved from export to the USA after a high-profile fundraising campaign - launched with a grant of £500,000 from the National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund) last autumn - reached its £1.7 million target at the end of January. This allowed the Fitzwilliam to match the Getty Museum's bid for the manuscript at auction in June 2004, ensuring that this exquisite national treasure would remain close to its roots for the benefit of present and future generations. In addition to the Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund played a crucial role, awarding a major grant of £860,000, the Fitzwilliam Museum and its Friends allocated £150,000 from their own funds and many other trusts and foundations generously added their support. An enthusiastic response to a public appeal launched on BBC 2's *Culture Show* raised a further £180,000, with donations ranging from £1 to an anonymous contribution of £15,000.

Completely unknown until last year, the Macclesfield Psalter is the most important English illuminated manuscript to be discovered in living memory. It was produced for a patron associated with Gorleston, Suffolk, in the 1320s at a time when East Anglia was one of the foremost artistic centres of Europe. Its 252 lavishly decorated pages contain a wealth of exquisite devotional images and highly bizarre and imaginative marginal illustrations embellished with gold and precious pigments. A jewel-like treasury, this tiny volume measures just 170 x 108 mm and yet contains some of the most remarkable examples of medieval English art in existence.

Dr Stella Panayotova, Keeper of Manuscripts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, said: "This spectacular and unique book sheds new light on a period from which little art survives. It combines the central devotional text of the Middle Ages - the Psalms of David - with the richest traditions of English manuscript illumination. In painting of the very highest quality it blends together pious imagery, charming depictions of every-day life, uninhibited humour and grotesque creations of the wildest imagination and will inform, fascinate and delight all who see it."

Initially, the Macclesfield Psalter will be on view to the public in the Museum's Medieval and Renaissance Gallery from Tuesday 15 February to Sunday 27 February 2005. After that the Psalter will be disbound and undergo urgent conservation to prepare it for *The Cambridge Illuminations* - a major exhibition of over 200 illuminated manuscripts from Cambridge collections - in which it will feature prominently. The exhibition will run from 26 July to 11 December 2005 at the Fitzwilliam Museum and the University Library. An entire gallery at the Fitzwilliam will be devoted to the display of a large selection of individual leaves from the Psalter, providing visitors with an unparalleled opportunity to enjoy the richness and variety of its illustrations.

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While disbound, the Psalter will be thoroughly examined and fully photographed for a wide range of publications. Lectures, educational material and public talks are being planned and will be announced on the Museum's website. The final conservation phase will provide the Macclesfield Psalter with a new binding, after which it will be displayed in the Museum's Medieval and Renaissance Gallery in rotation with other manuscripts from the Fitzwilliam's outstanding collections.

- Ends -

For publication: The Macclesfield Psalter will be on display at The Fitzwilliam Museum from Tuesday 15 to Sunday 27 February 2005 during regular Museum opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10.00 – 17.00; Sunday: 12.00 – 17.00. Admission is free. For further information about the Macclesfield Psalter and The Fitzwilliam Museum, visit www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

Further information and images from: Fiona Brown or Angela Metcalfe, Marketing and Press, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB. Telephone: 01223 332941/332900; Fax: 01223 332923; Email: fimb2@cam.ac.uk or am238@cam.ac.uk

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, committed to preservation, research, interpretation, learning, access and display. The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st 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 Museum attracts around 300,000 visitors a year. It is open Tuesday to Saturday: 10.00 to 17.00; Sundays and Bank Holidays: 12.00 to 17.00. Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is free. Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

National Art Collections Fund

The National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund) is the UK's leading art charity. It has 80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, the Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire 850,000 works of art. In 2004 the Art Fund offered £4.3 million to museums and galleries and distributed 11 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. Over the course of its history, the Art Fund has run several major campaigns and appeals, securing masterpieces like Velasquez's 'Rokeby Venus', Leonardo's 'Cartoon', the Becket Casket and the Macclesfield Psalter. For further press information about the Art Fund, please contact Alison Cole or Tanera Bryden on 0207 225 4820/22.

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.

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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. For further information contact Alex Gaskell on 0207 591 6047.

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