

September 2007

## Ethiopian Encounters

### A British expedition to Ethiopia in the 1840s

21 September 2007 to 20 January 2008

A fascinating world is brought to life in an exhibition of rediscovered watercolours opening at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge this week. ***Ethiopian Encounters: A British Expedition to Ethiopia in the 1840s*** features works depicting subjects virtually unrecorded in UK collections, executed by artist and explorer Sir William Cornwallis Harris who led a mission to the Court of Shewa in the Highlands of Ethiopia between 1841 and 1843.

By profession an engineer in the Indian Army, Harris earned early renown for his lively published account of a hunting expedition which he led, with one companion, into the interior of southern Africa in 1836-7. The success of this publication ensured his nomination in 1841 as leader of an expedition mounted by the British Government to establish relations with Sahla Sellasie, King of Shewa (in central and southern Ethiopia). By the end of that year Harris succeeded in securing a trade agreement between Great Britain and the King of Shewa, and remained there for the whole of the next year, observing, drawing, exploring, hunting, and writing. His three-volume account of his mission was completed while he was still at Ankober, in January 1843 and published the following year. Harris was knighted for his achievement.

The watercolours in this unique exhibition, lent by the executors of the explorer, film-maker and book collector Quentin Keynes, were for the most part those used for the final publication. Evidently executed on the spot, they preserve a freshness and spontaneity which are lacking in the published lithographs, and highlight Harris's sensitivity as a draughtsman. They combine images of extraordinary historical importance, such as the exceptionally rare portrait of Sahla Sellasie and representations of the highly diverse ethnic peoples – the Afar, Oromo, Amhara and Argobba – whom Harris encountered in the course of his mission.

A wide range of activities and events will accompany the exhibition, including talks by writer, traveller and anthropologist Philip Marsden, by Alexander Maitland, biographer of renowned explorer Wilfred Thesiger, and by Reverend John Binns, vicar of Great St Mary's and one of Cambridge's leading Ethiopian scholars. There will also be writing and body adornment workshops and, coinciding with Black History Month, an exhibition of photographs of contemporary Ethiopia and Ethiopians. For further details visit [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk), see the Museum's ***Encountering Ethiopia*** flyer, or contact Anna Lloyd-Griffiths (Tel: 01223 764362; email: [akl32@cam.ac.uk](mailto:akl32@cam.ac.uk)).

A fully illustrated catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Professor Simon Keynes of Trinity College, Cambridge, Dr Cedric Barnes of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and Jane Munro of the Fitzwilliam Museum will be available at £6.95 from the Museum shop, where travel guides and literature by Ethiopian and British authors, hand-woven Ethiopian scarves and shawls and coffee will also be available. Speciality Ethiopian coffees will be served in the Courtyard Café.

Coinciding with the celebration of the Ethiopian millennium, the exhibition has the support of the millennium committee of the Ethiopian Embassy in London and is supported by Journeys by Design, The Marlay Group and other anonymous donors.

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.../Exhibition details for publication; Further information and images

Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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Exhibition details for publication:

## **Ethiopian Encounters** A British expedition to Ethiopia in the 1840s

21 September 2007 - 20 January 2008

Shiba Gallery  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00  
Sunday: 12.00 - 17.00

CLOSED: Mondays, 24-26 & 31 December and 1 January

ADMISSION FREE

Further information and images from:

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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. 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 masterpieces by Titian, Canaletto, Stubbs, Constable, Monet, Renoir and Picasso, one of the world's foremost Rembrandt print collections, Handel music manuscripts and the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, one of the most significant collections of Korean ceramics outside South-East Asia, medieval illuminated manuscripts and outstanding collections of pottery, porcelain and medieval coins.

The Fitzwilliam Museum welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year, offers a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events, and has an award-winning Education Service. The Museum is open Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00.

Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is FREE.

Website: [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

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