

03 December 2009

Brand new look for world-class collection of Greek and Roman antiquities

'Rediscovering Greece & Rome': Museum's newly-redisplayed gallery opens 30 January 2010

From 30 January 2010, visitors will experience The Fitzwilliam Museum's collection of Greek and Roman antiquities in a completely new light, thanks to a £950,000 gallery refurbishment.

The Greek and Roman Gallery, one of the Fitzwilliam's most popular spaces, has been the focus of an intensive eighteenth-month period of conservation, research and redisplay, during which time it has been closed to the public. The gallery had remained fundamentally unchanged since the 1960s, and the Museum's redisplay will bring this world-class collection of antiquities into the 21st century - creating a new modern setting that complements the gallery's 19th-century architecture and vastly enhancing the visitor experience with improved object display, lighting and layout.

The Fitzwilliam Museum's collection of Greek and Roman antiquities boasts superb Greek vases, sculpture, sarcophagi and figurines, as well as funerary items and everyday objects from ancient times, from dress pins to helmets. These treasures - many of them specially conserved for these displays - will receive new prominence in their completely refurbished surroundings, where less well-known areas of the collection will also be showcased.



Conservator Julie Dawson examines a piece of funerary sculpture



Members of the Greek and Roman gallery team clean a Roman sarcophagus for redisplay

The primary focus of the new displays is upon people - the figures who, across the centuries, have given these objects their appearance and shaped their history. New object information aims to build up an illuminating picture of the artists and craftsmen who created the works, the customers who commissioned or used them, and the collectors, restorers and conservators who have affected the way they look today.

The new gallery has been redesigned in collaboration with historians and classical archaeologists from the University of Cambridge's Classics Faculty, and reflects some of the questions that are being currently asked about the ancient world. The new display, arranged in a loosely chronological order, explores such issues as: what did people do at drinking parties? How did they relate to their gods? How did they remember the dead? The display also reveals the more recent history of the objects - how did they come to Cambridge, and what has happened to them since? A map and timeline will show gallery visitors the close relationship between the Greek and Roman worlds, giving visitors a greater sense of the time and place these objects came from.

The refurbishment itself has also uncovered some surprising finds. When museum staff removed a series of

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ancient stone inscriptions from one of the gallery's false wall, they discovered a 'time capsule' placed there by their predecessors who had carried out the previous gallery refurbishment in the 1960s. Within this secret hiding place - which has stayed undiscovered in the Museum for nearly 50 years - staff found an edition of the Cambridge News dated Friday 10 May 1963 and a selection of contemporary coins, alongside the names of the 1960s team, which had been carved into the cement surround.

The gallery redisplay is the first result of an ongoing research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to explore and publish the Museum's Greek and Roman collection.

- ends .../ Notes to editors

Details for publication:

'Rediscovering Greece & Rome'

Gallery reopens 30 January 2010

This major refurbishment has been made possible by the generous support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the J.F. Costopoulos Foundation, the DCMS / Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund, the Greek Ministry of Culture, the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Renaissance East of England, the Schilizzi Foundation, Denis and Minouche Severis, Trinity College, Cambridge, and other individual benefactors.

Please note: the A. G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot Antiquity (gallery 22) has also been closed since August 2008 to allow for the refurbishment, and will re-open alongside the neighbouring Greek and Roman gallery.

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00

Closed Mondays, Good Friday and 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 21st 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. Free admission. Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk



An item from the Museum's superb collection of Greek vases is examined by Cristina Rozeik

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