

1 August 2008

# 'I found it a pigstye; I turned it into a palace'

A rare chance to view many of The Fitzwilliam Museum's most spectacular treasures gathered together for a new exhibition

## 'I turned it into a palace'

Sir Sydney Cockerell and The Fitzwilliam Museum

4 November 2008 – 17 March 2009

The Fitzwilliam Museum's most spectacular treasures are brought together for the first time in a major new exhibition celebrating one of the most dynamic periods in the Museum's history: the Directorship of Sir Sydney Cockerell from 1908 to 1937.

*'I turned it into a palace': Sir Sydney Cockerell and The Fitzwilliam Museum* explores the life and work of scholar, collector and Director Sir Sydney Cockerell (1867-1962), who boasted that he found the Museum 'a pigstye' and 'turned it into a palace'. Cockerell's connoisseurship, ambition and innovation transformed not just the Fitzwilliam and its collections, but the display and interpretation of art in museums and galleries all over the world.



Presenting a fascinating portrait of Cambridge at the beginning of the twentieth-century, the exhibition examines Cockerell's remarkable journey from his family's coal business to become the confidante and associate of such leading artists, writers and collectors of the period as John Ruskin, William Morris, George Bernard Shaw and the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Cockerell's indomitable character, his reforming principles and his notorious determination in forcefully pursuing only the finest acquisitions was responsible for the Fitzwilliam's astonishing renaissance from an antiquated, cluttered miscellany with limited opening hours to the world-class public art museum it is today.

A great number of the Museum's most remarkable acquisitions were secured under Cockerell's leadership, including Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* and some of the finest ancient Greek vases, which are among the Museum's iconic permanent exhibits. *'I turned it into a palace'* will offer the opportunity to view those treasures more rarely seen by the public, with an astonishingly broad and diverse array of exhibits: works by William Blake and Samuel Palmer, William Morris' Kelmscott Press books, Keats' autograph manuscript of *Ode to a Nightingale*, works by the Pre-Raphaelite circle (including Dante Gabriel Rossetti's unfinished *Joan of Arc*, found by his deathbed), prints by Dürer, and drawings by Botticelli and Rubens. These fascinating objects are displayed alongside Ancient Roman and Greek antiquities, extracts from the Ancient Egyptian papyrus of the Book of the Dead of Ramose, literary autographs by Thomas Hardy and Siegfried Sassoon, original scores by Mozart and Scarlatti, and an exceptional selection of drawings by Turner.



*'I turned it into a palace'* also celebrates Cockerell's life-long passion for manuscripts with a selection from the Museum's superb collection of medieval illuminated manuscripts. One of the exhibition's undoubted highlights will be the chance for the public once more to view the Macclesfield Psalter,

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the remarkable fourteenth-century East Anglian illuminated manuscript secured for the Museum by a high-profile fundraising campaign in 2005.



The exhibition also marks the centenary of the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum– the group founded by Cockerell in 1909 to support the Museum, and the first organisation of its kind in Britain – and celebrates their role in expanding the Museum’s collections. Friends’ subscriptions are devoted entirely to supporting the acquisition of works of art and are vital in helping to secure new treasures; some of the most significant will be on display.

Offering the unique opportunity to enjoy a wealth of The Fitzwilliam Museum’s foremost and unusual masterworks gathered together in one exhibition, *‘I turned it into a palace’* is a fascinating testament to the talent of Sir Sydney Cockerell as a scholar, collector and museum director. The exhibition will be accompanied by a wide-ranging programme of events and a three day conference exploring the complex relationship between scholarship, the public display of art, private collecting, and the auction room in the early twentieth century.

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## Exhibition details for publication:

**‘I turned it into a palace’  
Sir Sydney Cockerell and The Fitzwilliam Museum**

**4 November 2008 – 17 March 2009**

Mellon 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

FREE ADMISSION

## Further information and images from:

Marketing and Press Office  
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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, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00. Admission FREE.

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

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