
ASHMOLEAN

NEWS RELEASE

17 January 2017, for immediate release:

DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund Grants £110,000 to Ashmolean for New Display of the Founding Collections



The Ashmolean is pleased to announce that it has been granted £110,000 by the DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund. Marking the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Ashmolean's founder, Elias Ashmole, the Museum plans to transform two central lower floor galleries to tell how the world's first museum was created.

When the Ashmolean was opened in 1683 by Elias Ashmole (1617–92), it was not just a repository and place for research and teaching but also a public museum. Ashmole's vision ultimately laid the foundations for museums as we know them today, yet this globally-important story is little known. The DCMS/Wolfson grant will be used to create a dramatic and theatrical permanent display in the large central gallery (gallery 2) of the lower-ground floor, evoking the 17th-century cabinet of curiosities. The double-height space will allow the Museum to show important portraits of scientists and thinkers of the 17th century; to show iconic treasures such as Powhatan's Mantle in a central location; and to bring out more of the founding collections into the larger space. A display about the Civil War (1637–60) will introduce Ashmole's connection to Oxford, while exploring the political background of the period.

New displays will highlight Elias Ashmole's vision for the Museum as a centre of practical research and learning, following the 'new philosophy' and scientific method of reasoning advocated by Francis Bacon (1561–1626). They will examine how this attitude transformed the Renaissance concept of 'cabinets of curiosities' into the modern museum, and will highlight other 17th-century collections that shaped the creation of the Ashmolean. Then, as now, the Museum intended to aid understanding of the world and our place within it through object-based research.

An existing gallery (gallery 8) will also be reconfigured as a flexible space for showcasing projects that resonate with Ashmole's original intentions for the use of collections. It will become a permanent laboratory space for innovative and collaborative projects and special displays.

Matt Hancock MP, Minister for Digital and Culture, says: 'Our museums and galleries are among the best in the world and we should be rightly proud of these institutions.'

'We want people to be able to enjoy world-leading culture wherever they live and whatever their background. These grants will make an important contribution toward increasing access to their wonderful collections and improving the visitor experience at museums right across the country.'

'I applaud the Wolfson Foundation's generosity in once again matching the Government's investment pound for pound in this important work'

Paul Ramsbottom, CEO of the Wolfson Foundation, says: 'This is a wonderful example of how a charity and government can work fruitfully together in partnership and we are grateful to government for matching our funding. The awards demonstrate the richness and variety of the country's museum collections. From Egyptian mummies in Leicester to a Roman fort on Tyneside, this is a

gloriously diverse set of projects - but all demonstrate excellence and all will improve the visitor experience.

'In announcing these awards I also want to pay tribute to Giles Waterfield. He was a brilliant advisor to the programme from its inception and sparked at an expert panel meeting in the very week in which he tragically and unexpectedly died. We all owe him a great deal.'

Dr Xa Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean, says: 'We are profoundly grateful to the DCMS/Wolfson Fund for this transformative grant. It will allow us to tell the story of the founding of the first public museum and why it is called the Ashmolean; what it was opened for in 1683; and why it is in Oxford.'

ENDS

▪ FURTHER INFORMATION:

Claire Parris, Press Officer
claire.parris@ashmus.ox.ac.uk
T+44 (0)1865 278 178 | M+44 (0)7833 384 512
www.ashmolean.org/press | @AshmoleanPress

▪ CAPTION:

John Riley (1646–91)
Elias Ashmole
Oil on canvas, 124 x 101 cm
Presented by Elias Ashmole, 1683
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

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▪ NOTES TO EDITORS

The DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund

This is the twelfth round of a joint fund which DCMS runs in partnership with the Wolfson Foundation. The fund aims to provide capital funding for museums and galleries across England to deliver projects in one or a number of the following key areas:

- Renovation and improvement of the display of exhibits in permanent galleries and exhibition spaces;
- Improvements to public spaces and access to the collection;
- Physical improvements to access and facilities for disabled visitors;
- Physical improvements to collection interpretation;
- Improvements to environmental controls in public access spaces and galleries.

For further information visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-culture-media-sport
Twitter: @DMCS | Facebook: @DCMSgovuk

The Wolfson Foundation

The Wolfson Foundation is an independent charity that supports and promotes excellence in the fields of science, health, education and the arts and humanities. It has awarded over £800 million (£1.7 billion in real terms) to some 10,000 projects across the UK, all on the basis of expert peer review. Established in 1955, the Wolfson Foundation celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2015.

For further information visit: www.wolfson.org.uk
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