

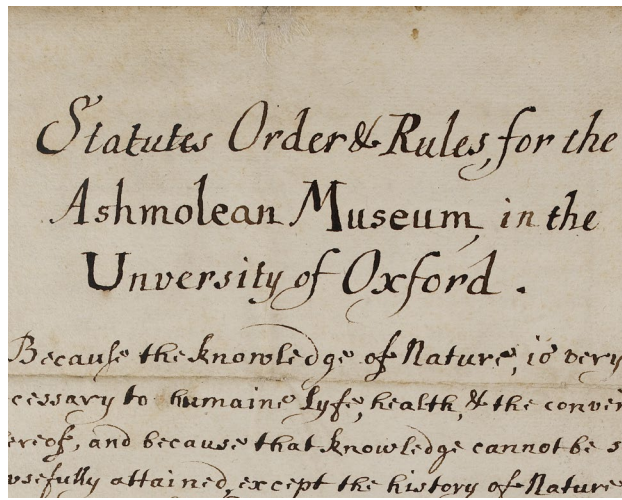
ASHMOLEAN

PRESS RELEASE

12 May 2017, for immediate release:

CELEBRATIONS FOR THE 400th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF ELIAS ASHMOLE FOUNDER OF THE WORLD'S FIRST PUBLIC MUSEUM

ASHMOLEAN LIVE FRIDAY: HAPPY BIRTHDAY MR ASHMOLE, Friday 19 May, 7–10.30pm



In May 2017 the Ashmolean will launch a new programme celebrating the 400th anniversary of the birth of Elias Ashmole, founder of the world's first public museum. The Birthday Programme will include events and activities exploring the origins of the Museum and Ashmole's connections with the City of Oxford which, during his time here, was the Royalist capital in the English Civil War. The Museum is delighted to announce that it has received a National Lottery grant of £90,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to share the stories of Oxford in the Civil War during a year-long programme which will be launched with an **Ashmolean LiveFriday** on 19 May.

Made possible by money raised by National Lottery Players, the evening will begin with a **Civil War Procession starting in Broad Street at 6.30pm**. Featuring **King Charles I on horseback leading his army into Oxford**, the parade will arrive at the Ashmolean at 7.00pm for Elias Ashmole's birthday party where the cast of characters and guests will bring to life **Ashmole's surprise 400th birthday present**. The LiveFriday events will be themed around Civil War Oxford and will be animated by re-enactors from The Earl of Manchester's Regiment of Foote; the Passamezzo company of singers and players; historical interpretation company, Past Pleasures; and of course Elias Ashmole himself. **Tickets** are available at www.ashmolean.org/livefriday.

Born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, Elias Ashmole (1617–92) trained as a lawyer but he was better known for his wide-ranging interests. He was a collector and antiquary; an alchemist, astrologer and botanist; and an early adopter of freemasonry. A staunch Royalist, Ashmole left London at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 and moved, in 1644, to Oxford, the new Royalist capital and Cavalier stronghold where he was made an ordnance officer for the King's forces. The following year he was admitted to Brasenose College to study natural philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and astrology.

Today Ashmole is perhaps best known as the man who founded the Ashmolean. Although the museum was named for Ashmole, the collection which he bequeathed to the University of Oxford in 1677 had been largely assembled by the noted gardeners and collectors John Tradescant and his son who displayed their treasures at their house in Lambeth known as 'the Ark'. It is thought that John Tradescant the younger bequeathed the collection to Ashmole in 1659 who then combined it with his own collection of coins and a magnificent library of books and manuscripts. In 1683 he transferred the collection to Oxford, sending it by barge in twenty-six large chests to be installed in a custom-built museum in Broad Street – now the Museum of the History of Science.



When the Ashmolean was opened in 1683 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. Thanks to grants from the DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund, the Linbury Trust and a private individual, a new permanent gallery devoted to the history of the Museum is planned to be opened in the autumn in the central space of the Ashmolean's lower-ground floor. Further information on the new gallery is available [here](#).

Dr Xa Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean Museum, says: 'Elias Ashmole is a character who should be better known and the 400th anniversary of his birth is an opportunity to tell his story. The precise circumstances by which he came to own to the Tradescants' collection are the subject of much speculation, but the gift he made to the University of Oxford and the establishment of the world's first public museum were acts which have resonated down the centuries.'

'We are profoundly grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund and National Lottery players, and to DCMS/Wolfson, the Linbury Trust and private individuals for supporting the 400th anniversary programme which will help bring the story of the Ashmolean to a wider audience.'

ENDS

- **FURTHER INFORMATION:**

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- **PRESS IMAGES:**

Images for editorial use are available to download at:

<http://bit.ly/2q5STuo>

- **CAPTIONS:**

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

The Statutes of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Craig Hamblyn playing Elias Ashmole at the Ashmolean Museum
© John Cairns, 2017



LOTTERY FUNDED

▪ **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife.

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

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The DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund

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

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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.

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