

British Museum to host special NHMF 25th anniversary exhibition

10 October 2005

A special exhibition at the British Museum will showcase six treasured museum objects from around the country, brought together for the first time to represent various fields of British heritage supported by the National Heritage Memorial Fund over the past 25 years.

The display will open on the 14 October in the Great Court of to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of a unique fund which has helped to enrich the heritage of the UK.

Image



Astronomical and musical pedestal clock by Henry Jenkins

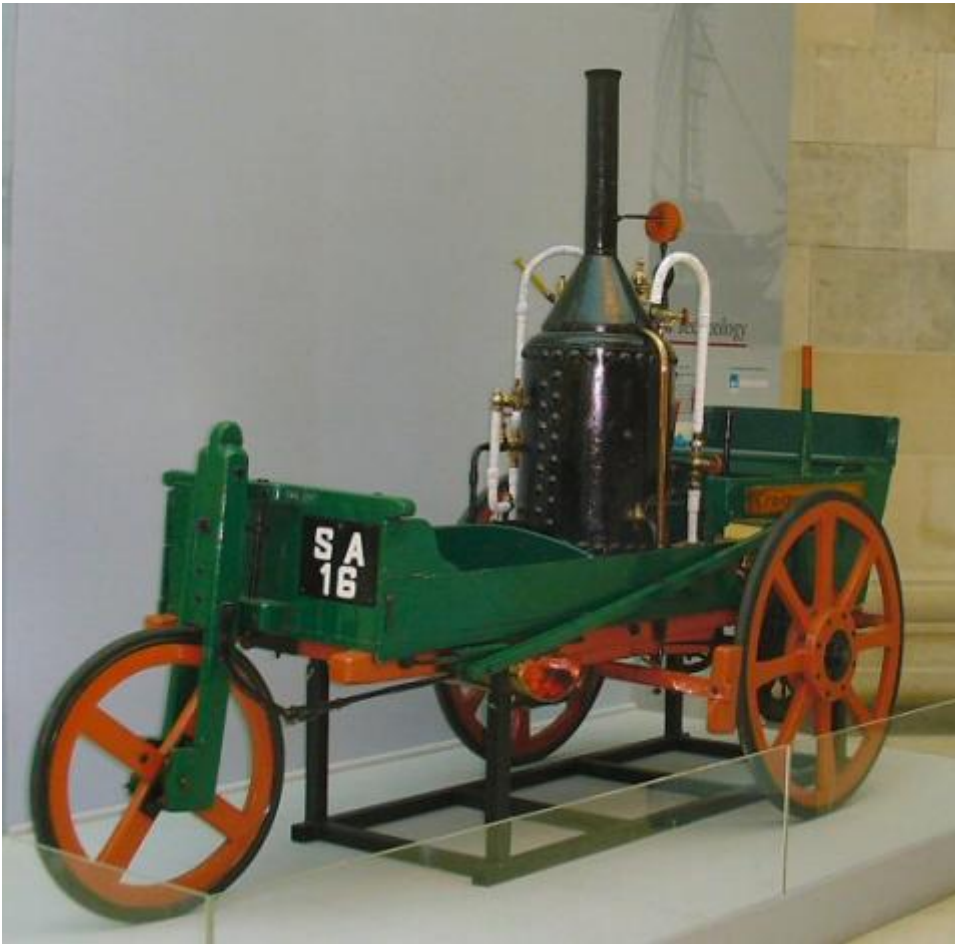
Image



The Corbridge lanx
Image



The Becket Chasse
Image



The Craigievar Express

For 25 years the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) has helped to save the very best of Britain's heritage, funding emergency acquisitions in memory of those who gave their lives in conflict for the UK.

Both the Flying Scotsman and Picasso's *Weeping Woman* would have been lost to the nation if it were not for grants from NHMF. In total, the NHMF has awarded £220million over the past 25 years to save these national treasures and is the only 'living' memorial of its kind in the UK.

Stephen Johnson, Head of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: "The treasure trove of heritage that the NHMF has saved for the nation acts as a lasting reminder of the UK's rich history and a poignant memorial to those who gave their lives for this country. Every item saved is part of our shared inheritance - whose loss would be a national tragedy."

Andrew Burnett, Deputy Director of the British Museum, said: "The British Museum is delighted to be able to help the NHMF celebrate their Silver Jubilee. The Museum has benefited enormously from the Funds generosity in the past and with their help has been able to save some masterpieces of our history for the nation."

Commenting on the wealth of heritage saved by the NHMF, Adam Hart Davies, historian, broadcaster and supporter of the UK's heritage, said: "Could we really have lost national icons like the Flying Scotsman or the Mappa Mundi? Without the National Heritage Memorial Fund, we might well have. This lifeline for the nation's heritage has created a tremendous legacy for future generations."

David Lammy MP, Minister for Culture, said: "The NHMF has done a fantastic job of saving some of our very best heritage over the last 25 years. It is particularly fitting to celebrate this legacy in the year of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II."

The special exhibit will showcase six treasured museum objects from around the country, brought together for the first time to represent various fields of British heritage supported by the Fund.

The display includes the fantastically complicated 'Henry Jenkins Astronomical clock' dating to 1778 from the British Museum's collection. The clock is one of the most unusual and beautifully crafted of its kind. Also exhibited is the Corbridge lanx, again from the Museum's collection, this 'picture-plate' is one of the finest pieces of Late Roman silver ever found. The exhibition will feature loan material including a dinner gong inspired by the Gothic carvings in Bristol Cathedral from Tyntesfield House in Somerset and the famous Becket Chasse, the earliest known casket to illustrate the murder and burial of Thomas Becket, on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Mary Rose Trust in Portsmouth has lent the only surviving example of a medieval still shawm (musical instrument) which was recovered from the wreck of the vessel in 1980. Finally, the display will include the Craigievar Express from the Grampian Transport Museum in Aberdeenshire. This steam-powered tricycle car capable of speeds of 10 mph was built by Andrew Lawson, an inventive postman, to help him on his daily rounds in 1895 (more details in Notes to editors).

Notes to editors

The exhibition is supported by Axa Art, Christie's, and Farrer & Co.

NHMF grants awarded to the British Museum in the past 25 years total over £8million. The most recent grant was £75,000 for the acquisition of Thomas Lawrence's of a portrait Mary Hamilton, 1789 (chalk drawing).

In the quarter century of its existence the NHMF has awarded 1,200 grants to 371 heritage organisations worth in total £220million.

Additional events that will celebrate the NHMF Silver Jubilee include special exhibitions at the National Gallery and the British Library in London.

NHMF grants to save the heritage highlighted in the exhibition were awarded as follows:

- The “Henry Jenkins Astronomical” clock: NHMF awarded a £28,952 grant to help the British Museum acquire this piece.
- Corbridge lanx: NHMF awarded a £1.5million grant in 1993 to help the British Museum acquire this Late Roman rectangular silver dish (Lanx) decorated with a chased low-relief scene depicting to the shrine of Apollo on Delos. It was found by chance in 1734 and measures 50 x 38 cm and weighs over 10lbs. It is one of the very finest surviving Roman silver 'picture' plates.
- Tyntesfield Estate, Somerset: NHMF awarded a £17,425,000 grant in 2002 to help the National Trust acquire the 540 acres of park, woods, gardens and farmland, that centres on the gothic revival mansion containing c 40,000 objects.
- Becket Chasse, Victoria and Albert Museum: NHMF awarded a £6,941,575 grant in 1998 to help the V&A acquire the Chasse – or Casket – which shows the murder of Becket, his burial, and the raising of his soul to heaven.
- The Mary Rose Trust, Portsmouth: NHMF awarded a £442,297 grant in 1981 for the excavation, conservation of the hull and artefacts of the 16th century warship.
- The Craigievar Express, Grampian Transport Museum, Aberdeenshire: NHMF awarded a £5,836 grant in 1985 to help the museum acquire the unique steam tricycle.

Further information

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Media previews available from 11 October.