

Pair of Charles II silver andirons saved for the nation

14 September 2016

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales has bought a pair of magnificent silver firedogs, thanks to funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), the Art Fund, the Goldsmiths' Company and a number of generous private donors.

Image



Dated 1680-81, these silver andirons were made to support burning logs in open fireplaces and demonstrate the importance of fireplace furniture during the period

This purchase by the Museum means the andirons - the best surviving examples of their kind - will remain in the UK rather than being exported overseas.

In January this year, the UK Government placed a temporary export bar on the 17th-century silver, providing an opportunity for an organisation to raise funds to buy them and therefore ensure they stay in the UK. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) recommended an export bar was placed on the grounds that the andirons were of

‘outstanding significance for the study of decorative art, furnishing and patronage.’

Dated 1680-81, these silver andirons were made to support burning logs in open fireplaces and demonstrate the importance of fireplace furniture during the period. They were a highly desirable luxury item, seen at the time as a fashion statement and a sign of wealth. They are adorned with figures of Cleopatra and Lucretia, iconic women from Roman history, and are engraved with the arms of Admiral Edward Russell and his second wife Lady Margaret Russell.

Andrew Renton, Keeper of Art, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, said: “We’re hugely grateful to the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, the Goldsmiths’ Company and the numerous private donors whose generous support has made this acquisition possible.

“These rare pieces really strengthen what is already an exceptional collection of silver and other applied art here at Amgueddfa Cymru. They are wonderful examples of late 17th century design and are in amazingly good condition, giving us real insight into fashionable living during the reign of Charles II.

“I am delighted that we’ve been able to acquire them and therefore stop them leaving the UK.”

Minister of State for Digital and Culture Matt Hancock, said: “These beautiful firedogs represent the height of luxury and decorative art during the 17th century. It’s fantastic news that they will remain in the UK for the public to admire and I hope many people will visit them at their new home at the National Museum Wales.”

Sarah Philp, Director of Programmes, Art Fund, added: “These silver andirons are an astonishing survival; fascinating both for their rich iconography and for the insight into women’s patronage in the 17th century. The Art Fund is proud to support National Museum Wales, who have acted boldly to ensure the andirons stay in the UK where they will become a centrepiece of their internationally renowned collection of silver in Cardiff.”

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of NHMF, concluded: “Whilst these are exquisitely beautiful pieces of silver, it is actually the rare glimpse they provide us into 17th Century home design that makes them particularly interesting and why we felt it important to help secure them.”

Notes to editors

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales operates seven museums across Wales including National Museum Cardiff, St Fagans National History Museum, the National Roman Legion Museum, Big Pit National Coal Museum, the National Wool Museum, the National Slate Museum and the National Waterfront Museum. Entry to all Museums is free, thanks to the support of the Welsh Government.

Further information

For more information and photographs please contact Catrin Taylor on tel: 029 2057 3185 or via email: catrin.taylor@museumwales.ac.uk.