Brighton & Hove successfully bids to bring Turner watercolour to the city

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The Royal Pavilion & Museums service – part of Brighton & Hove City Council – successfully bid for the watercolour, The Chain Pier at Brighton, at an auction at Christie's in New York.

The painting was purchased for $352,500 (£225,000). A significant grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) helped secure the picture for the city and the nation; along with an award from the Art Fund, the national fundraising charity for art, and a donation from the Royal Pavilion & Museums Foundation, a registered charity that raises funds to support the Royal Pavilion & Museums.

The watercolour, believed to have been painted in 1824/5, has been in private hands and unseen by the public for more than 100 years. It will go on show at the Royal Pavilion soon after it arrives in the city and will be the star attraction of a new exhibition at the historic royal palace next year.

The painting depicts Brighton from the sea, with the newly constructed chain pier on the right of the picture and the Royal Pavilion at the centre.

Cllr Geoffrey Bowden, Brighton & Hove City Council's cabinet member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism, said: "This is fantastic news – it is a once in a lifetime opportunity to add a work of this significance to our public collections, and to present a piece of our nation's heritage to the city it depicts so well. The painting by one of our most famous artists captures all the characteristics of Brighton in a single, wonderfully detailed view and is Turner's only known painting to include the Royal Pavilion. It is regarded as the THE defining image of Brighton in the 1800s and we are thrilled local residents and visitors from this country and across the world will now be able to enjoy it, rather than have it disappear again into a private collection. I am certain that it will prove to be a significant cultural attraction in the city’s tourist offer."

He added: "Our Pavilion & Museums staff have worked hard to secure funding to buy this important picture at no cost to the council, and we are extremely grateful to members of the public who have contributed through the Royal Pavilion & Museums Foundation, and to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund for their generous grants, which have made this purchase possible."

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East, said: "We are delighted to have been able to help the Royal Pavilion Museum purchase this exceptional painting by Turner. Thought lost for so many years it will now be returned to the people of Brighton where it will provide a fascinating insight into the town's early 18th century history."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "The Art Fund is delighted to have supported the purchase of this Turner watercolour by the Royal Pavilion & Museums in Brighton. The artist presents an evocative and fluid description of the town at the very moment it became a fashionable and exciting destination. Given that the work depicts the Royal Pavilion, it now has a particularly apt permanent home where everyone visiting and living in Brighton can enjoy it."

Philip Taylor from the Foundation said: “It’s great that we can contribute towards this success. I know our Patrons and members will take great pleasure in seeing this great work on display at the Royal Pavilion.”

Jenny Lund, Curator of Fine Art at the Royal Pavilion and Museums, said: "The watercolour *The Chain Pier, Brighton* will be a tremendous asset for the Royal Pavilion & Museums and its fine art collection. It will highlight the international importance of the collection as it will strengthen our current holdings of artworks relating to the cultural history of the Pavilion and the historical development of Brighton & Hove. Its whereabouts were unknown for so long, and we did not want it to disappear into obscurity again."

Note to editors

Description of the painting
The Chain Pier, Brighton measures 15.2 by 22.9cms and is pencil, pen, black ink and watercolour.

It represents a significant and important period in British and Brighton's history and reveals a great deal about the social, economic and cultural conditions of Britain in the 1800s.

The composition emphasises what was new in Brighton and wonderfully captures the bustle and excitement of the town. Turner has placed the Royal Pavilion in the centre of the picture, emphasising the contribution made by George IV to the establishment of Brighton as a pleasure resort. The right hand side of the image is devoted to the recently built Chain Pier, a bold statement of technology and engineering and the country's first pleasure pier. Besides this modern wonder, Turner depicts traditional Brighton fishing boats, juxtaposing the old and the new.

Future exhibition

Once the painting is brought back to Brighton, it will be placed on display in the Royal Pavilion for a short period. Following this, in 2013, the watercolour will be the centrepiece in a new temporary exhibition at the Royal Pavilion. The exhibition will explore the town's development in the early 19th century and the important relationship played by the Pavilion in Brighton's development. It will also explore the changing relationship Brighton has had with the sea: from its humble beginnings as a fishing town to its fashionable status under George IV as a seaside resort and latterly as a tourist attraction. Complementing the exhibition, the picture will form the centre piece of learning programmes for schools, community groups and adults.

The Royal Pavilion
Admission fee payable
Brighton BN1 1EE Tel 03000 290 900

Open daily Apr-Sep 9.30am-5.45pm (last admission 5pm) Oct-Mar 10am-5.15pm (last admission 4.30pm) Closed 23 Jan to 3 Feb for essential maintenance

Postcodes BN1 BN2 BN3 & BN41 enjoy half price admission to the Royal Pavilion all year and Preston Manor (April to September) with up to four accompanying children free. Proof of residency required.

The Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national charity for art, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24 million to buy art and supported a range of projects and programmes aimed at helping more people enjoy art. It is independently funded by 89,000 supporters who purchase a National Art Pass, costing from just £37.50, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions. Find out more about the Art Fund and how to buy a National Art Pass at www.artfund.org. Media contact 020 7225 4888, media@artfund.org

Further information

Brighton & Hove City Council press office 01273 291 035.