Turner painting of Malmesbury Abbey saved for the

J M W Turner, Malmesbury Abbey, Wiltshire, 1827

A watercolour of Malmesbury Abbey by J M W Turner has been acquired by Athelstan Museum in Malmesbury, thanks to National Lottery players.

The painting, which has not been seen in public for over 40 years, has returned to its home town in Wiltshire. It will go on display in spring 2020 in the Athelstan Museum, thanks to over £380,000 of National Lottery funding.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was inspired by the 12th-century abbey ruins on his first visit to Malmesbury in 1791 when he was just 16. He painted the watercolour over pencil in 1827 when he returned to the area, aged 52. The painting shows Malmesbury Abbey from the north on a summer morning, the foreground flooded with light and cattle warming themselves in the early sun.

> “It’s incredibly exciting that the painting's new home is Malmesbury, enabling people to see and explore this wonderful painting in the setting which inspired its creation.”
>
> *Stuart McLeod, Director of England, London & South, The National Lottery Heritage Fund*

Originally part of an exhibition of 66 Turner watercolours at the Moon, Boys and Graves Gallery at 6 Pall Mall, London, in 1833, the painting has been in private hands for over four decades.

Saved for the nation

Stuart McLeod, Director of England, London & South, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: “Thanks to National Lottery players, Turner’s Malmesbury Abbey now belongs to, and can be enjoyed by, the nation for the first time in decades. It’s incredibly exciting that its new home is Malmesbury, enabling people to see and explore this wonderful painting in the setting which inspired its creation.”

Portrait of J M W Turner by John Linnell. Credit: National Portrait Gallery, London

Sharon Nolan, Chair of Athelstan Museum, said: “I am very proud that we have managed to save this watercolour for the nation and, more especially, that it is returning to its rightful home of Malmesbury.”

Turner was born in London in 1775, the son of a barber. He entered the Royal Academy of Arts in 1789 at the age of 14 and became a member of the RA in 1802 and Professor of Perspective in 1807. His varied work included drawings, etchings, watercolours and oils. He died in 1851 and is buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

Over the next 18 months, the newly renovated Athelstan Museum is hosting a wide programme of art and creative activities based around the artist.

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