Birmingham Museums awarded £675,000 to help acquire iconic Reynolds work

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The exquisite work, currently owned by Queen Elizabeth Birmingham Hospitals Charity, is on loan to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. This acquisition will secure the painting for the city, to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the masterpiece.

The portrait of Dr Ash by the celebrated 18th-century portrait painter Reynolds is valued at £900,000. Professor Sumner comments: “We are absolutely delighted that HLF has supported us in the acquisition of this significant work. The portrait is arguably Reynolds’ most elaborate and successful full-length institutional work. Its combined historic and artistic qualities make it one of the most important cultural icons of the city of Birmingham and a civic treasure. This is a great boost for Birmingham Museums, and we hope through a successful public fundraising appeal, we will be able to keep this impressive painting on display at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.”

In addition to the £675,000 from the HLF, Birmingham Museums has raised £175,000 through grants from organisations including The Art Fund, the Museum Development Trust and the Friends of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Professor Sumner continues: “We are now working to raise £50,000 though a public appeal in order to save the picture for the people of Birmingham.”

Reyahn King, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: “This painting has significant importance for the city’s heritage, and we are delighted to be able to help with this grant to keep it here where it belongs. In addition to funding the acquisition, we are also enabling Birmingham Museums to run an exciting programme of events and activities for people of all ages around the portrait, from talks and demos about 18th-century medicine to family storytelling, conservation and painting techniques workshops and site visits for schools so that everyone can learn the special place Dr Ash has in Birmingham’s history.”

Dr Stephen Deuchar, Director of The Art Fund commented: “This important painting is embedded in the culture and history of Birmingham and quite simply belongs with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. We really hope that people dig deep and support the appeal: it truly deserves to succeed!”

John Ash (1723 – 98) was an eminent physician who built up a successful medical practice from his house in Temple Row in Birmingham. Ash was a co-founder of the Birmingham General Hospital, and the portrait commissioned by the governors of the Hospital in honour of his services to the people of Birmingham. The first instalment of 100 guineas (half payment) was paid to Reynolds by George Birch on behalf of the governors in April 1788. The eleven sittings with Ash are recorded in the artist’s pocket book between 28 April and 7 July the same year.

To make a donation to Birmingham Museums call 0121 303 1966.

Notes to editors

Birmingham Museums has been established to govern and manage the museum sites and collections owned by Birmingham City Council and Thinktank, Birmingham’s Science Museum. The new independent organisation is focused on sustaining and developing key partnerships within the city and beyond, in order to deliver high quality, audience

focussed museum services, and meet the needs of Birmingham communities as well as its wider audiences.

The establishment of Birmingham Museums means that visitors to all venues can take advantage of even more educational and entertaining events and activities, ranging from arts and crafts to history and culture from around the world.

Supporters of the acquisition to date include: £675,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund; £100,000 from The Art Fund; £30,000 from Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery Development Trust; £30,000 from Public Picture Gallery Fund; £10,000 from Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, and £5,000 from the John Feeney Trust.

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums to buy, show and share art for all to enjoy. Over the past five years, the Art Fund has given £24m to help 227 museums and galleries acquire over £195m of art for their public collections. The Art Fund is funded by over 90,000 members who own a National Art Pass, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off many major exhibitions.

Arts Council England on 2 April 2012 published details of the final award amounts for its Renaissance major partner museums and the final transitional funding budget for museums exiting the old Renaissance programme. In the West Midlands Birmingham Museums Trust (Birmingham City Council and Thinktank) will receive £5,091,615, and Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust will receive £2,434,227 over three years. They are among 16 major partner museums in England to receive awards.

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2011 and 2015, it will invest £1.4billion of public money from government and an estimated £1billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

There is a wide range of new exhibitions and events at Birmingham Museum venues throughout summer 2012. These include:

- Thinktank Science Garden now open. This new outdoor discovery space will be packed with giant exhibits and fun activities for the whole family.
- Signposts to Middle-Earth Exhibition now open at Sarehole Mill. Visitors can explore the connections of J.R.R. Tolkien with the area around Sarehole Mill and find out how they inspired the Lord of the Rings trilogy.
- Curious Visitors open at Aston Hall on 30 June - 9 September 2012. Visitors are invited to take a fresh look at Aston Hall's beautiful interiors with contemporary sculpture, paintings and photography alongside 400 year old pieces.
- Pharaoh: King of Egypt Exhibition open at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery,14 July - 14 October 2012. Visitors can explore the UK's largest ever exhibition of ancient Egyptian artefacts on loan from the British Museum.

Further information

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For more information on Birmingham Museums, and the events and activities at the venues, visit the Birmingham Museums website.