

Gainsborough's genius to be celebrated

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The new centre will tell the story of Gainsborough's meteoric rise from merchant's son to high society portraitist Gainsborough's House

[Gainsborough's House](#) has been awarded £4.5m of National Lottery money towards a five-year project to transform the site into a national centre celebrating the life of 18th-century artist, Thomas Gainsborough.

Famed for his portraits of the late 18th-century's 'Great and The Good', Gainsborough was the son of a clothier who was brought up in the market town of Sudbury in rural Suffolk. His Grade I listed childhood home, a popular local visitor attraction, will build on its existing success with an ambitious project to renovate and extend the house.

The new centre will tell the story of Gainsborough's meteoric rise from merchant's son to high society portraitist - despite his preference for landscape painting – and a founding member of the Royal Academy.

[quote=Nicole Farhi, sculptor and Gainsborough's House supporter]"Gainsborough's House is a perfect National Lottery project."[/quote]

Nicole Farhi, sculptor and Gainsborough's House supporter, said:

“Gainsborough’s House is a perfect National Lottery project. Not only will it help disseminate the work of a great British artist, its ambition will bring both people and prosperity to Sudbury, the town of his birth.”

Gainsborough lived at his family home in Sudbury from his birth in 1727 until 1740 and returned to the town for another three years after his father’s death in 1748. The market town and Gainsborough family were intrinsically linked to the wool and silk industry; a spectacular 400-year-old mulberry tree in the garden pays tribute to this connection.

Originally, the silkworm breeding industry was unsuccessful due to the wrong kind of tree being cultivated. Eventually, this was rectified and the black mulberry tree was successfully established in England with Sudbury becoming one of the UK’s biggest exporters of silk goods.

Gainsborough’s House’s next door neighbours, [Vanners Silk Weavers](#), have produced silk since 1740. They have produced silk for royal weddings, Liberty of London and work with a number of international textile designers.

Once completed the centre will examine in much greater detail why Gainsborough and his friend, John Constable, took huge inspiration from the Suffolk landscape. This narrative will be illustrated through the museum’s impressive art collection, with works by Gainsborough, Constable and other important artists with links to the area.

The revamped museum will contribute around £5.4m to the local economy through an increase in visitors and the creation of 90 jobs - 60 temporary and nine permanent.

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “Gainsborough’s House tells the story of one of Britain’s most important artists within the environs of his family home. This investment of National Lottery players’ money enables a real step change in how it will be able to operate, and the impact that it will achieve, in the future.

“Once completed, The National Centre for Gainsborough will be a landmark tourist attraction, bringing a significant amount of income into Sudbury and beyond.”

Gainsborough’s House already has a reputation for working with the wider community. This will be enhanced with a programme of activities focusing particularly on the Cornward Wood area. There will be regular clubs for children – Artsmart – and adults with learning difficulties – Museum Club. An Artist-in-Residence will use the collection to inspire and work with youth groups, prisoners, young offenders and their families. There will be a community gallery and free visiting opportunities for National Lottery players – Gainsborough’s House has already initiated two special promotions, offering free entry to people who arrive with a National Lottery ticket.

Mark Bills, Director of Gainsborough’s House, said:

“This is tremendous news, not just for Gainsborough’s House, but for Sudbury, Suffolk and nationally. We are enormously grateful to National Lottery players and our supporters who have made this happen.

“We will be able to reach more people and be a regional hub for heritage and culture, offering nationally important exhibitions as well as serving the local community. The Suffolk landscape has inspired and continues to inspire artists and our project celebrates this heritage and culture and will drive the regeneration of Sudbury.”

Further information

- Katie Owen, HLF Press Office, on tel: (020) 7591 6036/07973 613820
- Mark Bills, Gainsborough's House, on tel: 01787 372 958



[Study session at Gainsborough's House Gainsborough's House](#)

[Painting a picture of artistic genius in Suffolk](#)