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Funding win for Silver Swan conservation work

The Bowes Museum has been awarded funding by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to carry out conservation work on the Museum's Silver Swan.

The Silver Swan is one of the finest examples of 18th century automata in the world, a life-size, solid silver, replica of a female Swan containing 2,000 moving parts and three clockwork mechanisms. It is a product of the Enlightenment mind, significant to the international historical, horological and scientific sectors.

2023 marks the 250th anniversary of the Silver Swan first being exhibited in James Cox's Museum of Mechanical Marvels in London 1773. The Silver Swan has a very special place in public hearts and memories, holding magic and fascination for visitors of all ages.

The Silver Swan performed daily until 2020 when Museum closures and reduced operations due to the pandemic stopped the Swan's performances. Conservation and restoration are required, to conserve elements of the Swan's mechanisms, before it can perform again.

Research showed the cost of the full restoration project to be more than £400,000. The Museum decided to focus on the most urgent elements within the 2023 Swan Conservation project and is delighted to have been awarded £146,342 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, a significant contribution towards total costs of £199,142, for this project. The Museum will be fundraising for the remaining balance throughout autumn/winter; this includes a public crowdfunding campaign prior to Christmas.

Hannah Fox, The Bowes Museum's Executive Director said "Thank you to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for supporting this project, we are delighted with the outcome of our grant application! The Silver Swan is incredibly important to our communities. We can't wait to get started and inspire the next generation of artists, makers, designers and inventors."

Helen Featherstone, Director, England, North at The National Lottery Heritage Fund said: "It's wonderful news that, thanks to National Lottery players, we're able to support The Bowes Museum with this project to restore the unique Silver Swan. It will be incredibly exciting to see this amazing example of automata heritage brought back to life so that local people and visitors from further afield can enjoy its magic for years to come."

The 2023 Swan Conservation project is another stage on the Silver Swan's fantastic journey. It follows work in 2008 that saw each of the Swan's hundreds of parts cleaned, inspected and condition checked, measured, photographed and given a unique accession number. In 2021, the Museum conducted an extensive investigation into the Swan's mechanism to identify what future action to take to preserve the mechanism and eliminate faults that could lead to breakdown.

The 2023 Swan Conservation project will take place from September to December 2023. Conservators will dismantle and remove the neck/head assembly, as 12 neck rings require attention. The drive units will be fully disassembled and serviced. The neck assembly, music box and glass rods will be serviced, and the operating mechanisms will be dismantled and cleaned before minor repairs, lubrication, and re-assembly. The Museum will receive a full conservation report, a 5-year service plan, an operations and maintenance manual as well as the mechanical details of the neck, head and beak. Following this work, the aim is for the Silver Swan to perform again, sustainably.

The Cumbria Clock Company, which has previously worked on Big Ben and the astronomical clock at Hampton Court Palace, has been appointed to undertake the specialist conservation and repair work alongside the Museum's conservation team and conservation interns from Birmingham City University and West Dean College. Where possible, the work will take place inside the Museum and visitors will be able to watch the expert horologists in action.

The public will have the opportunity to get involved in the 2023 Swan Conservation project through a programme of public engagement; conservator talks, a Creative Heritage Residency, workshops for young people, families and schools, webcam access allowing access to the work that can't take place in the public galleries and there will also be volunteers available to answer questions in the gallery while the work is ongoing.

The Bowes Museum's Director of Programmes and Collections, Vicky Sturrs said: "It is fantastic that we have received this funding allowing us to bring the Silver Swan back to life. It's only fitting that as an automaton, we should ensure that it continues to operate otherwise we risk it becoming just another object - albeit a very beautiful one but not the kind it was intended to be. We also have to be mindful that as a delicate, fragile and old machine we must ensure that the work is carried out sympathetically and sustainably to allow future generations to enjoy it operating for another 250 years."

Should you wish to support the fundraising campaign for conservation and restoration of the Silver Swan, please contact kelly.smith@thebowesmuseum.org.uk



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Notes to editors:

- The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Josephine & John Bowes 150+ years ago, this purpose-built Museum brings together an extraordinary, Designated collection of European fine and decorative art as a cultural resource for the people of Northern England, where today we celebrate artists, designers and makers.
- The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. www.artscouncil.org.uk
- The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. discoverdurham.co.uk
- Admission to The Bowes Museum is £13.50 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £15.50 for members (residents elsewhere), £18.00 for a day ticket, £19.80 for a day ticket including gift aid. Under 18s, full time students and carers are free.
- As a registered charity (number 1079639) we need to generate more than half of our income each year to care for our historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to our work. Visit <https://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/> for more information.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by The National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

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Since The National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised over £43 billion for projects and more than 635,000 grants have been awarded across the UK. More than £30 million raised each week goes to good causes across the UK.