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Media release

15th May 2024

Stories in Stitch: Embroidered treasures of The Bowes Museum.

18th May – 29th September 2024

Stories in Stitch (18th May – 29th September 2024) presents an eclectic collection of rarely seen samplers and embroidered pictures dating from the 17th to the 20th centuries in The Bowes Museum's latest textile exhibition. This one-of-a-kind display shows different representative styles of stitching side by side for the first time and explores the development and popularity of domestic embroidery in Britain, a must-see display for lovers of textiles and history.

Items from The Bowes Museum's collection have been brought out of storage after decades and some have never been on show before, making this an exclusive opportunity for sewing enthusiasts to see more of the Museum's textile collection up close. Loans from private collections complement the display and offer a moment for visitors to compare, discuss and appreciate the skills and techniques of amateur makers as young as 11, to the work of professionals, in this unique presentation.

A highlight of the display includes the work of Mary Linwood, an artist with an international reputation. From the late 1770s, Linwood produced 'needle paintings', embroidered pictures copied from Old Masters and contemporary British artists such as Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough and John Russell. Drawing inspiration from work she owned or saw on show at public exhibitions or in private collections, Linwood used crewel wool and silk highlights to produce images in long and short and satin stitches, imitating brush strokes.

Presented alongside Linwood's 'needle paintings' is the work of local makers. Dorothy Ann French (1858 -1900) of Middleton-in-Teesdale won an array of prizes at local agricultural shows in the 1890s for crazy work (patchwork), crochet, knitting and wool work pictures. French's family also had a close connection to the Bowes family, as they lived on the Streatlam estate near Staindrop, the ancestral home of John Bowes, where her father was the Estate Joiner. Five of Dorothy Ann's embroidered pictures were bequeathed to The Bowes Museum, perhaps because of this association.

The founders of The Bowes Museum, Joséphine and John Bowes, acquired embroideries from both professional and domestic settings. While these purchases formed the foundation of the Museum's textiles collection, hundreds of donations throughout the 20th century have enriched the Museum's holdings, bearing names, dates, stories or meanings, of people, places, and events. These local and personal perspectives present a valuable insight into the social and historical importance of needlework to girls and women as part of their education, a hobby or pastime, or, for some, in their profession as an artist maker.

Today, The Bowes Museum's collection shows what a rich seam of material there is in the North East of England and how many stories are expressed in stitches.

Rachel Whitworth, The Bowes Museum's Curator of Fashion and Textiles commented: "The exhibition is unusual in bringing together embroidered pictures and samplers across a period of nearly 300 hundred years. It includes items that would have been worked on at home for domestic display, and pictures that were exhibited to paying audiences or entered in competitions.

"It allows visitors to compare styles, techniques and influences from the wider world, and celebrates the taste and talent of the Museum's founders, Joséphine and John Bowes, along with the other makers and collectors whose work features in the exhibition. Everything on view has been brought out of store, and some items have never been on show before. This is an exciting opportunity to see some of the unsung treasures of The Bowes Museum's collection."

Stories in Stitch opens on Saturday 18th May and runs until Sunday 29th September.

Note to editors:

For all press images, filming, photography and media enquiries, please contact our Marketing & Communications Coordinators Sarah Webster sarah.webster@thebowesmuseum.org.uk or Alison White alison.white@thebowesmuseum.org.uk.

The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Joséphine & 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.