

Media release
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The Bowes Museum Reimagines Founders' Galleries for a New Generation

Bowes Founders - Room 16



Designs of New Founders' Galleries © The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Designed by Creative Core.

A major transformation of the much-loved **Founders' Galleries** at **The Bowes Museum** is underway in a bold reimagining that will bring the story of the museum's visionary co-founders to life for a new generation of visitors.

Supported by the **Wolfson Foundation**, **Art Fund**, the **Headley Trust**, and the **Pilgrim Trust** this ambitious project combines innovative design, fresh storytelling and new research to reinterpret the lives and legacy of Joséphine and John Bowes. The three fully renewed gallery spaces will reopen to the public in early **April 2026**.

Since the 1960s, the Founders' Galleries have displayed the founders' portraits and have told the remarkable story of how The Bowes Museum came to be in existence. Now, for the first time in 40 years, the spaces are being completely refitted to reawaken the founders' vision and create a dynamic, engaging experience for today's audiences.

The new galleries will reveal fresh perspectives on Joséphine and John Bowes as individuals, as a forward-thinking couple and as visionary creators of one of the most distinctive purpose-built museums in the North of England. Drawing on **ongoing archival research** and **new discoveries**, the displays will celebrate the couple's achievements, showcase the stories and processes behind the creation of their vast art collection and the design and build of the museum itself — from Joséphine laying the foundation stone in 1869 to its public opening in 1892.

At the heart of this gallery transformation is co-production. The museum is working together with **local community groups, artists, volunteers** and **staff** alongside partner **Creative Core** to ensure the new galleries reflect the voices and creativity of the people in our wider area who know

and love the museum best. Through collaborative workshops and shared decision-making, these new spaces will be shaped by contemporary perspectives while honouring the founders' legacy.

Objects within the new gallery spaces will double, offering visitors the opportunity to explore both new and familiar stories and allow the museum to show more objects than before. During the transformation, many treasured objects from the galleries have been carefully moved to other parts of the museum or placed in safe storage.

In the meantime, the spaces have taken on exciting new roles:

- **Displaying designs of the new Founders' Galleries:** Sketches will be on show to help visitors envision the new spaces.
- **Behind-the-scenes conservation:** The galleries are also being used as a live conservation cleaning area, where visitors can glimpse the careful preparation of objects for future display.
- Showcasing creativity: Visitors can enjoy **artworks created by community groups from the Durham Dales**, made in collaboration with artists in response to the founders' remarkable story.

Vicky Sturrs, Director of Programmes and Collections at The Bowes Museum, commented:

"The reimagining of the Founders' Galleries is a defining moment for The Bowes Museum — a renewal of the founders' extraordinary vision through continuing research, object storytelling and amplifying our community's voices. This transformation isn't just about redisplaying objects; it's about reawakening stories, rekindling connections and inviting our communities to shape what the museum means for a today and into the future. When we reopen them fully in April 2026, visitors will encounter spaces that honour our past and embrace the future."

As work progresses, access to the galleries might be limited. Regular updates and behind-the-scenes insights will be shared through the museum's social media channels and [website](#) to keep visitors informed and engaged throughout the project.

-ENDS-

Note to editors:

Pictures of a community group from the Durham Dales conserving objects alongside plans for the Founders' Galleries can be found [here](#).

For photographs please credit © The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Photography by Claire Collinson.

For designs please credit © The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Designed by Creative Core.

A comprehensive press release with further details about the reimagined galleries will be issued closer to the opening date.

For film and photography requests and more information, please contact Marketing & Communications Coordinator and/or Head of Marketing, Engagement and Audiences:

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About The Bowes Museum

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. 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 £17.70 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £20.00 for members (residents elsewhere), £19.50 for a day ticket, £21.45 for a day ticket including gift aid. Under 18s, full time students and carers are free. As a registered charity (number 1079639) The Bowes Museum needs to generate more than half of its income each year to care for the historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to that work. Visit thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/ for more information.

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