

The Year of the Dealer at The Bowes Museum

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The Year of the Dealer, a collaboration between The Bowes Museum and the University of Leeds, with Lady Lever Art Gallery, Preston Park Museum, Temple Newsam and the V&A Museum, has sought to lift the lid on the role of antiques dealers in the development of museums and gallery collections. Led by Mark Westgarth, Professor of History of the Art Market at the University of Leeds the collaboration has resulted in the creation of innovative digital film trails focused on a selection of ten objects at each museum, revealing their hidden histories as ‘antiques’. The project has been funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, one of the leading academic research funding bodies in the UK and is part of a much larger ongoing research project focused on the history of antique dealing in Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries based at the University of Leeds.



Each of the ten objects at The Bowes Museum, introduced by familiar gallery front-of-house staff, illuminate the fascinating, and sometimes dramatic stories behind the objects in the gallery, revealing the personalities behind them.

The role of antique dealers at The Bowes Museum has largely been unseen by visitors but has been crucial in creating the world class collection that can be enjoyed today.

Coupled to this, whilst the historical and artistic facets of the collections are naturally the main focus for curators, scholars and visitors alike, the stories behind their acquisition and journeys through the art market are themselves fascinating human stories worthy of greater attention.

You can watch all ten films of objects at The Bowes Museum via weblinks below and at the [Year of the Dealer](#) project website, where there is also information on how you can see all the other films at the other museums in the *Year of the Dealer*. Many of the dealers highlighted in the digital trail at The Bowes Museum also sold objects to the other museums featured in the *Year of the Dealer* trails, so do check out their stories too in the project website. There are 50 museum objects in focus across all five museums and more than 40 antique dealer histories to explore.

Joséphine and John Bowes acquired many items for their museum from the International Exhibitions in Paris in 1867 and London in 1862 and 1871. But their main collecting activities were through dealers, attested by hundreds of Bills of sale in the museum archive. During their travels in Europe, particularly in 1868, they purchased from dealers en route in Belgium, Austria, Germany and England. However, the majority of items were purchased from about five dealers in Paris, most of whom were based in the area near to their townhouse in rue de Berlin. Some, such as Amelie Basset, A.C. Lamer, Théodat Jarry and Madame Lepautre described themselves as purveyors of Curiosités and Objects d'Art. Outstanding among them was Benjamin Gogué, who worked for the couple until his death in 1870 and negotiated the sale of many paintings, including the acquisition of the works by El Greco and Goya which are treasures in the collection today. It is clear from the bills that from the mid-1860s, Josephine negotiated directly with the dealers herself as her confidence and her vision for the museum grew.

[*The Year of the Dealer Digital Trails at The Bowes Museum*](#)

The trails highlight 10 significant antique objects currently on display in the galleries at The Bowes Museum, telling the story of the antiques through the dealers that sold them

to the Bowes Museum. You'll hear some fascinating stories about antique dealing and the characters involved in the history of the antiques trade in Britain; hear about the role of the antique dealer Harry Emanuel in the sale of The Bowes Museum's most famous object, the Silver Swan; how S.J. Phillips was involved in World War II's 'Operation Mincemeat'; how Aberdeen-based antique dealer John Bell became one of the largest exporters of antiques in the UK; and how department stores such as Asprey & Co also became involved in selling antiques. You can also learn more about the changing market and desire for antiques through the prices that the dealers charged for these very special objects.

The dealers include famous London-based antique dealers such as Frank Partridge & Sons, H. Blairman & Sons, S.J. Phillips, Asprey & Co. and Temple Williams; some well-known regional antique dealers such as W.F. Greenwood & Sons and John Bell, as well as some antique dealers from the 19th century such as Tito Gagliardi; you can also hear about the important role that women have played in the history of antique dealing.

We hope you enjoy the digital film trails!

Antique Dealers at The Bowes Museum

[Asprey & Co.](#)

Asprey & Co. can trace their business into the 18th century as a silk printing business, but by the 19th century they had become a luxury emporium, making and retailing silver, luxury watches and jewellery. However, like many 'department stores' Asprey's opened an 'antique department' in the 1910s. The cabinet first came onto the market in 1968 when it was sold at Christie's by the Trustees of the Warwick Castle Settlement. Asprey displayed the cabinet on their stand at the world-famous Grosvenor House Antiques Fair in 1969, where it was bought by a private collector. It remained in that collection for 10 years, when in 1979 it was sold to The Bowes Museum for £80,000. You can hear about Asprey & Co. in the digital trail.



John Bell of Aberdeen

John Bell of Aberdeen was perhaps one of the most important antique dealers in Scotland. The business was established in 1905 in Aberdeen. Sadly, John Bell died in 1914 and the business was continued by his son W.S. Bell, who was only 16 years old at the time. Bell expanded the business, developing a substantial antique wholesale and export trade, becoming one of the largest antique wholesale dealers in the UK. Through strategic advertising Bell developed an extensive business selling to American and international buyers. John Bell sold this early 19th century bookcase to The Bowes Museum in 1962 for £195. You can hear about John Bell of Aberdeen in the digital trail.



H. Blairman & Sons

H. Blairman & Sons was also established in 1884, in Llandudno, on the North Wales coast and became one of the most well-known antique dealers in Britain, counting many leading antique collectors and world-famous museums as their customers. This mirror had been shown in the Paris 1867 exhibition where it was bought by Lord Dudley. It subsequently came up for sale at an auction in the West Country, where it was bought by H. Blairman & Sons. Blairman sold the mirror to The Bowes Museum in 1992 for £110,000. You can hear about H. Blairman & Sons in the digital trail.



Frank Partridge & Sons

Frank Partridge was one of 5 brothers who all worked in the antique trade. Frank opened his own antique shop in London in 1904, with the help of his brother Robert, who loaned him £1000. Frank's business expanded rapidly, driven by wealthy British and American collectors. The business was floated on the London Stock Exchange in 1989 but went into liquidation in 2009. Frank Partridge sold this 18th century writing table, which formerly belonged to Marie Antionette, to The Bowes Museum in 1950 for £3,000. You can hear about Frank Partridge in the digital trail.



Tito Gagliardi

Tito Gagliardi Tito was a dealer in paintings and curiosities based in Florence in the mid-19th century. He was described as the best dealer in Florence and had connections all over Europe. His clients included the wealthy Rothschild family and the daughter of Czar Nicholas I in Russia. Gagliardi was also well known for selling antiques to museums. Gagliardi sold this 17th century cabinet to John Bowes in 1875 for £175, along with a parcel of other antique objects. You can hear more about Tito Gagliardi in the digital trail.



Briquet & Samper

Briquet & Samper were famous jewellers in Paris in the mid-19th century. The Bowes silver swan automaton was made in about 1770 in London was sold several times before it was bought by at auction at Christies in 1864 for £155 by the London diamond merchant Harry Emanuel. Emanuel showed the swan at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1867 where it was probably bought by the jeweller Briquet & Samper of Paris. Briquet & Samper sold the swan to John Bowes in 1872 for about £200. You can hear more about Briquet & Samper in the digital trail.



W.F. Greenwood & Sons

W.F. Greenwood & Sons trace their history back to 1829. They were established in York, and like many early antique dealers, they started life as cabinetmakers. They had a very extensive antique dealing business by the late 1800s, with several shops in Yorkshire - in York, Scarborough and Harrogate. The paneling came from Gilling Castle in Yorkshire; it seems to have been removed sometime in the early 1930s. It was bought by Arthur Greenwood of W.F. Greenwood & Sons in 1958, who advertised it for sale and sold the panelling to The Bowes Museum in 1962 for £1,000. You can hear about W.F. Greenwood & Sons in the digital trail.



Temple Williams

Temple Williams was a leading figure in the British antiques trade. He was elected President of the British Antique Dealers' Association in the 1960s. Williams gained expertise in the antique trade whilst working as a Director at the London based antique dealers H. Blairman & Sons in the late 1930s, before establishing his own antique dealing business in 1955. The cabinet belonged to John Bowes' grandmother, Lady Mary Eleanor Bowes, and remained part of the Bowes family private collections until the 1920s; it was sold at an auction in London in 1927. Temple Williams appears to have acquired the cabinet in about 1960 before selling it to the Bowes Museum in 1961 for £1,200. You can hear more about Temple Williams in the digital trail.



Women antique dealers

This antique lace was previously owned by Jane Clarke, one of the earliest women antique dealers. Clarke was also one of the first specialist dealers, trading as 'dealer in antique lace' at 154 Regent Street, London in the late 1840s. She made a fortune selling rare antique lace, as well as retailing fashionable modern lace. Clarke died in 1859 and stock of antique lace was acquired by the lace merchant Anthony Blackborne who donated the collar to The Bowes Museum. You can hear more about women antiques dealers in the digital trail and can also find more about women antique dealers in the other Year of the Dealer trails at The Victoria & Albert Museum in London and at Preston Park Museum in Stockton.



S.J. Phillips

S.J. Phillips was established in London by Solomon Joel Phillips in 1868. He trained as a silversmith and he came from a long line of silversmiths, going back into the 18th century. In the 20th century the firm counted many famous people as their clients, including Royalty, film stars and many major museums. S. J. Phillips are also famous for their role in 'Operation Mincemeat' during the Second World War staged in 1943 and devised to deceive the Nazi's about the Allies plan for an invasion of Sicily. A fake invoice from S.J. Phillips, for a £53 engagement ring, was stuffed into the pocket of the body of a fictional British officer, to give the deception an extra layer of authenticity. S.J. Phillips sold this 19th century snuff box to Josephine Bowes in 1874 for £45. You can hear more about S.J. Phillips in the digital trail.



Links for further information:

[new curated digital film trails](#)

[Year of The Dealer project](#)