

Heritage science investment to unveil secrets of Cambridge University museum collections



XRF Analysis of an Illuminated Manuscript at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.

The University of Cambridge has been awarded £3m from the [AHRC's Capability for Collections Fund](#) to invest in equipment and refurbishment that will enable researchers from across the UK and worldwide to undertake new research into its heritage collections. The University is home to the highest concentration of internationally important collections outside London, which span the full spectrum of natural and cultural diversity over time and across the world. This includes paintings by Titian, Monet and Picasso; early hominid tools discovered in East Africa by Louis Leakey; international archaeological and natural history collections; as well as books, maps and manuscripts spanning over 4,000 years of human history and in more than 2,000 languages.

A consortium of five institutions - the Fitzwilliam Museum, Hamilton Kerr Institute, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and Cambridge University Library - will benefit from this investment. This cross-departmental collaboration was developed within the context of the Cambridge Heritage Science Hub (CHERISH) initiative, recently launched within the Materiality Research Growth Network of the University's Research and Collections Programme.

Fitzwilliam Museum Director Luke Syson said: ***'We're absolutely delighted that the AHRC has recognised the truly extraordinary opportunities we have to pursue heritage science within Cambridge University. Our CHERISH initiative draws together our collections and research methodologies to investigate the making and histories of art and artefacts from prehistory to the present day and from all over the world. The University's collections, at the Fitzwilliam, the University Library and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, span all human history, with objects of a range unmatched by any of the great museums in the capital. The records in conservation, technical art history and archaeological science research and teaching at the McDonald and Hamilton Kerr Institutes, drawing upon the acclaimed scientific expertise of the larger University, have already made them world leaders. This significant investment in Cambridge's new network will provide the tools and facilities for further, and even more effective, collaborative research that will ensure fascinating new insights into our material past. It's very exciting indeed.'***

‘It is the convening power of Cambridge’s extraordinary collections that makes an ambitious project such as CHERISH possible,’ says Dr Jessica Gardner, University Librarian. ‘Through this funding, CHERISH can strengthen its foundation for world-leading, innovative Heritage Science research that will be more accessible both to the Cambridge and wider community.’

The project will be led by Dr Paola Ricciardi, Senior Research Scientist at the Fitzwilliam Museum, with Professor Marcos Martín-Torres, Pitt-Rivers Professor of Archaeological Science at the Department of Archaeology. They will work with a cross-departmental, interdisciplinary team, including Dr Suzanne Paul, Keeper of Rare Books and Early Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library; Professor Nicholas Thomas, Director and Curator at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; and Dr Lucy Wrapson, Senior Conservator at the Hamilton Kerr Institute.

The AHRC’s investment in the CHERISH infrastructure will invigorate the existing strong potential for heritage science and materiality research to bridge Cambridge’s collections, disciplines and departments, ultimately supporting wider arts, culture and STEAM agendas through scientific approaches to the understanding of our cultural heritage.

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Notes to Editors

About the Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816, the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation funded programme.

It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of coins, Asian arts, ceramics and other applied arts. The Fitzwilliam is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk / <https://beta.fitz.ms>

The Fitzwilliam Museum is closed to the public during national lockdown.

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB | Free admission

NORMALLY OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00; CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January, Good Friday

Business Partners The Museum is supported by our Business Partners during 2021; TTP Group & Brewin Dolphin.