

# Ashmolean Museum

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Ashmolean Museum** (in full the **Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology**) on Beaumont Street, Oxford, England, is the world's first university museum.<sup>[1]</sup> Its first building was erected in 1678–1683 to house the cabinet of curiosities that Elias Ashmole gave to the University of Oxford in 1677. The museum reopened in 2009 after a major redevelopment. In November 2011, new galleries focusing on Egypt and Nubia were also unveiled. In May 2016, the museum opened new galleries of 19th-century art.

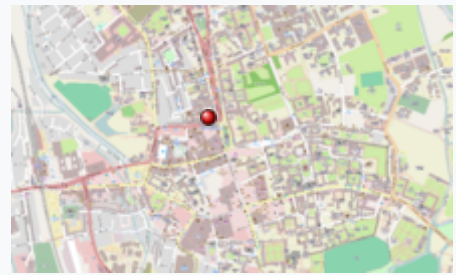
## Contents

- 1 History
- 2 Renovation
- 3 Collections
- 4 Collections gallery
- 5 Broadway Museum and Art Gallery
- 6 Major exhibitions
- 7 Keepers and Directors
- 8 In popular culture
  - 8.1 Comics
  - 8.2 Literature
  - 8.3 Stage productions
  - 8.4 Television
- 9 Theft
- 10 See also
- 11 References
- 12 External links

## Ashmolean Museum



Main Museum Entrance



Location in Oxford

**Established** 1683

**Location** Beaumont Street, Oxford, England

**Coordinates** 51.7554°N 1.2600°W﻿ / ﻿51.7554°N 1.2600°W﻿ / 51.7554; -1.2600

**Type** University Museum of Art and Archaeology

**Director** Dr Alexander Sturgis

**Website** www.ashmolean.org

## History

The collection includes that of Elias Ashmole, which he had collected himself, including objects he had acquired from the gardeners, travelers, and collectors John Tradescant the elder and his son, John Tradescant the younger. The collection included antique coins, books, engravings, geological specimens, and zoological specimens—one of which was the stuffed body of the last dodo ever seen in Europe; but by 1755 the stuffed dodo was so moth-eaten that it was destroyed, except for its head and one claw. The museum opened on 24 May 1683, with naturalist Robert Plot as the first keeper. The first building, which became known as the Old Ashmolean, is sometimes attributed to Sir Christopher Wren or Thomas Wood.<sup>[2]</sup>

After the various specimens had been moved into new museums, the "Old Ashmolean" building on Broad Street was used as office space for the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Since 1924, the building has been established as the Museum of the History of Science, with exhibitions including the scientific instruments given to Oxford University by Lewis Evans (1853–1930), amongst them the world's largest collection of astrolabes.<sup>[3]</sup>



Engraving of the Ashmolean c. 1845

The present building dates from 1841–45. It was designed by Charles Cockerell<sup>[4]</sup> in a classical style and stands on Beaumont Street. One wing of the building is occupied by the Taylor Institution, the modern languages faculty of the university, standing on the corner of Beaumont Street and St Giles' Street. This wing of the building dates from 1845–48 and was also designed by Charles Cockerell, using the Ionic order of Greek architecture.<sup>[5]</sup> The main museum contains huge collections of archaeological specimens and fine art. It has one of the best collections of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, majolica pottery, and English silver. The archaeology department includes the bequest of Arthur Evans and so

has an excellent collection of Greek and Minoan pottery. The department also has an extensive collection of antiquities from Ancient Egypt and the Sudan, and the museum hosts the Griffith Institute for the advancement of Egyptology. Charles Buller Heberden left £1,000 to the University, which was used for the Coin Room at the museum.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 2012, the Ashmolean was awarded a grant of \$1.1m by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to establish the University Engagement Programme or UEP. The programme employs three Teaching Curators and a Programme Director to develop the use of the Museum's collections in the teaching and research of the University.<sup>[7]</sup>

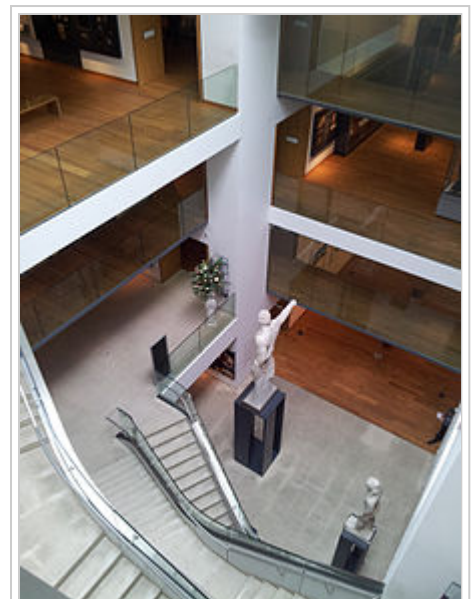
## Renovation

The interior of the Ashmolean has been extensively modernised in recent years and now includes a restaurant and large gift shop.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2000, the Chinese Picture Gallery, designed by van Heyningen and Haward Architects, opened at the entrance of the Ashmolean and is partly integrated into the structure. The gallery was inserted into a lightwell in the Grade 1 listed building, and was designed to support future construction from its roof. Apart from the original Cockerell spaces, this gallery was the only part of the museum retained in the rebuilding. It houses the Ashmolean's own collection, but is also used from time to time for the display of loan exhibitions and works by contemporary Chinese artists. It is the only museum gallery in Britain devoted to Chinese paintings.<sup>[9]</sup>

The Sackler Library, incorporating the older library collections of the Ashmolean, opened in 2001 and has allowed an expansion of the book collection, which concentrates on classical civilization, archaeology and art history.<sup>[10]</sup>

Between 2006 and 2009, the museum was expanded to the designs of architect Rick Mather and the exhibition design company Metaphor, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The \$98.2 million<sup>[11]</sup> rebuilding resulted in five floors instead of three, with a doubling of the display space, as well as new conservation studios and an education centre.<sup>[12]</sup> The renovated museum re-opened on 7 November 2009.<sup>[13][14]</sup>

On 26 November 2011, the Ashmolean opened to the public the new galleries of Ancient Egypt and Nubia. This second phase of major redevelopment now allows the Museum to exhibit objects that have been in storage for decades, more than doubling the number of coffins and mummies on display. The project received lead support from Lord Sainsbury's Linbury Trust, along with



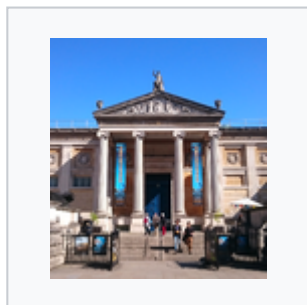
Renovated Ashmolean central atrium



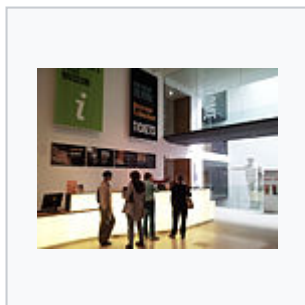
Ashmolean Rooftop Terrace 2014

the Selz Foundation, Mr Christian Levett, as well as other trusts, foundations, and individuals. Rick Mather Architects led the redesign and display of the four previous Egypt galleries and the extension to the restored Ruskin Gallery, previously occupied by the Museum Shop.<sup>[15]</sup>

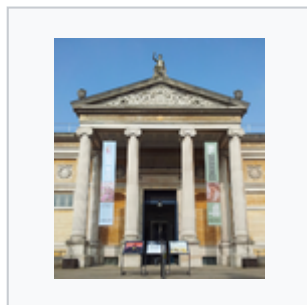
In May 2016, the museum opened new galleries dedicated to the display of its collection of Victorian art.<sup>[16]</sup> This development allowed for the return to the Ashmolean of the Great Bookcase, designed by William Burges, and described as "the most important example of Victorian painted furniture ever made."<sup>[17]</sup>



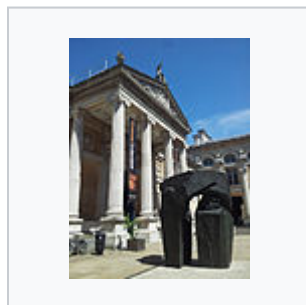
Ashmolean Entrance  
May 2016



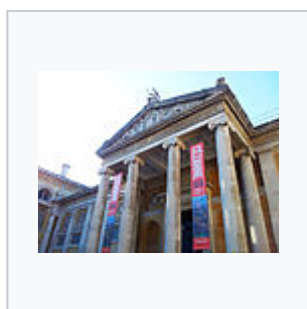
Ashmolean Information  
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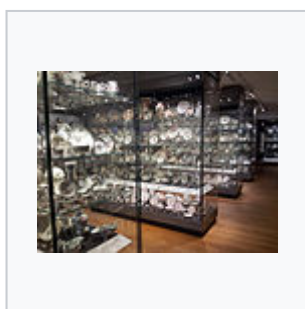
Ashmolean Entrance  
March 2015



Ashmolean Forecourt  
September 2014



Ashmolean Forecourt  
April 2014



European Ceramics  
Gallery

## Collections

Highlights of the Ashmolean's collection include:

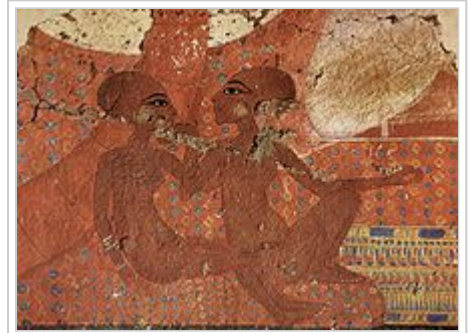
- Drawings by Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci
- Paintings by Pablo Picasso, Giambattista Pittoni, Paolo Uccello, Anthony van Dyck, Peter Paul Rubens, Paul Cézanne, John Constable, Titian, Claude Lorrain, Samuel Palmer, John Singer Sargent, Piero di Cosimo, William Holman Hunt and Edward Burne-Jones
- The Alfred Jewel
- Watercolours and paintings by Turner
- The Messiah Stradivarius, a violin made by Antonio Stradivari
- The Daisy Linda Ward bequest in 1939 of 96 still life paintings, including works by Clara Peeters, Adriaen Coorte, and Rachel Ruysch
- The Pissarro Family Archive, donated in the 1950s to the Ashmolean, consisting of paintings, prints, drawings, books, and letters by Camille Pissarro, Lucien Pissarro, Orovida Camille Pissarro, and other members of the Pissarro family<sup>[18]</sup>
- Arab ceremonial dress owned by Lawrence of Arabia
- A death mask of Oliver Cromwell
- A substantial number of Oxyrhynchus Papyri, including Old and New Testament biblical manuscripts



*Rive des Esclavons*, by J.M.W.  
Turner, ca. 1840



- Over 30 pieces of Late Roman gold glass roundels from the Catacombs of Rome, the 3rd largest collection after the Vatican and British Museum.<sup>[19]</sup>
- A collection of Posie rings.
- An extensive collection of antiquities from Prehistoric Egypt and the succeeding Early Dynastic Period of Egypt
- The Parian Marble, the earliest extant example of a Greek chronological table
- The Metrological Relief, showing Ancient Greek measurements
- The ceremonial cloak of Chief Powhatan
- The lantern that Gunpowder Plot conspiracist Guy Fawkes carried in 1605
- The Minoan collection of Arthur Evans, the biggest outside Crete
- The Narmer Macehead and Scorpion Macehead
- The Kish tablet
- The Abingdon Sword, an Anglo-Saxon sword found at Abingdon south of Oxford
- The Dalboki hoard of Thracian artefacts, central Bulgaria
- The Scythian antiquities from Nymphaeum, Crimea



Detail from a fragment of wall painting depicting Akhenaten and Nefertiti with their daughters

#### Recent major bequests and acquisitions include:

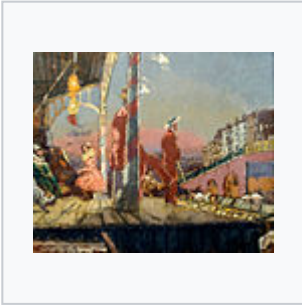
- In 2017 the museum acquired a group portrait by William Dobson painted in Oxford around 1645, during the English Civil War. The group in the painting are Prince Rupert, Colonel William Legge (Governor of Oxford) and Colonel John Russell (commander of the prince's elite Blue Coats). The painting was acquired for the nation through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, administered by Arts Council England.<sup>[20][21]</sup>
- In 2017 the museum acquired a Viking hoard that was discovered near Watlington in South Oxfordshire in 2015. It is the first large Viking hoard discovered in Oxfordshire, which once lay on the border of Wessex and Mercia. The hoard contains over 200 Anglo-Saxon coins, including many examples of previously rare coins of Alfred the Great, King of Wessex (871–899) and his less well-known contemporary, King Ceolwulf II of Mercia (874–879).<sup>[22][23]</sup>
- In 2015 the Ashmolean raised the money needed to acquire a major painting by J. M. W. Turner. With lead support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, a grant from the Art Fund, and a public appeal, the fundraising target was met to secure Turner's only full-size townscape in oils: an 1810 painting *The High Street, Oxford*. The painting was accepted by the nation through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme.<sup>[24]</sup>
- In October 2014 the Ashmolean acquired a painting by John Constable titled *Willy Lott's House from the Stour* (The Valley Farm). The painting was accepted by the nation through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. The farm building depicted in the painting is also seen from a different angle in *The Hay Wain*, painted 1821 and now at the National Gallery.<sup>[25][26][27]</sup>
- In October 2014 the Ashmolean acquired a collection of historic English embroideries which was given to the Museum by collectors Micheál and Elizabeth Feller. The gift comprises 61 pieces which span the whole of the seventeenth century.<sup>[28][29]</sup>
- In late 2013, art historian and collector Michael Sullivan bequeathed his collection of more than 400 works of art to the museum. The collection, which includes paintings by Chinese masters Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian, and Wu Guanzhong, was considered one of the world's most significant collections of modern Chinese art. The Ashmolean Museum has a gallery dedicated to Sullivan and his wife Khoan.<sup>[30]</sup>
- In 2013 the museum was given the sculpture 'Taichi Arch' by Taiwanese artist Ju Ming, which was installed on the Museum's main forecourt. It was given to the museum by the Juming Culture and Education Foundation in memory of art historian and collector Michael Sullivan.<sup>[31]</sup>



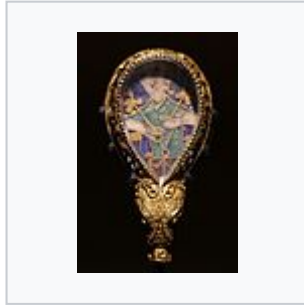
Taichi Arch on the museum's forecourt, a sculpture by artist Ju Ming

- In 2013 the museum was left a 500-piece collection of gold and silver objets d'art, including many pieces of Renaissance silverware, assembled by the antique dealer Michael Welby.<sup>[32]</sup> The bequest will be displayed in a new gallery.<sup>[32]</sup>
- In 2012 the museum acquired Édouard Manet's *Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus*, painted in 1868, after a public campaign to raise £7.83million while a temporary export bar was placed on it by the RCEWA. The campaign received £5.9m from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and a grant of £850,000 from The Art Fund.<sup>[33]</sup>

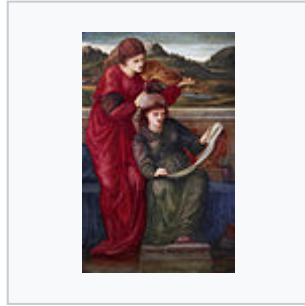
## Collections gallery



'The Brighton Pierrots',  
painted 1915 by Walter  
Sickert



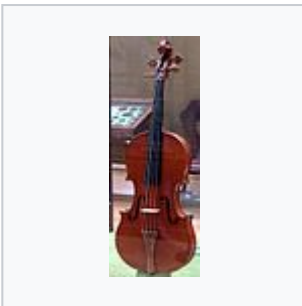
The Alfred Jewel



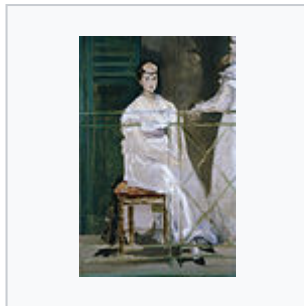
'Music' by Edward  
Burne-Jones



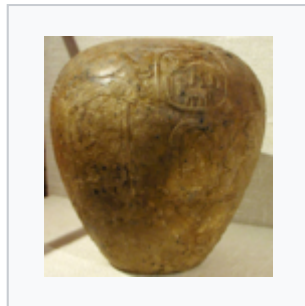
The "Two Dog Palette"  
from Hierakonpolis



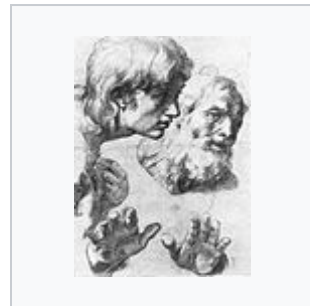
The Messiah  
Stradivarius violin



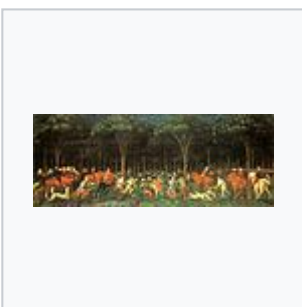
'Portrait of  
Mademoiselle Claus',  
by Edouard Manet



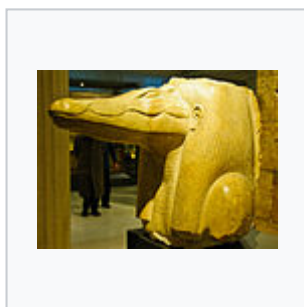
The Narmer Macehead



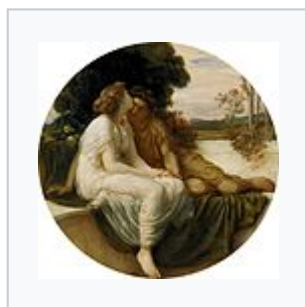
'Studies of the Heads of  
two Apostles and of  
their Hands', by  
Raphael



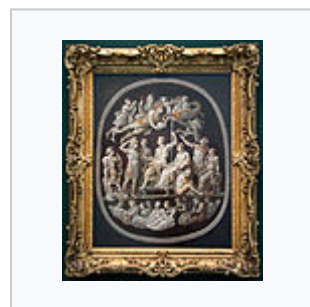
'The Hunt in the Forest'  
by Paolo Uccello



Statue of Sobek, the  
crocodile god, from the  
pyramid temple of  
Amenemhat III



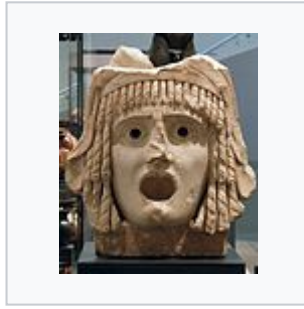
'Acme and Septimius',  
by Frederic Leighton,  
1st Baron Leighton



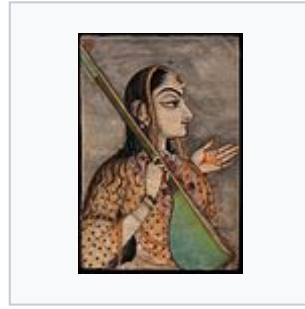
The 'Apotheosis of  
Germanicus', a copy  
after an antique Cameo  
painted in 1626 by Peter  
Paul Rubens



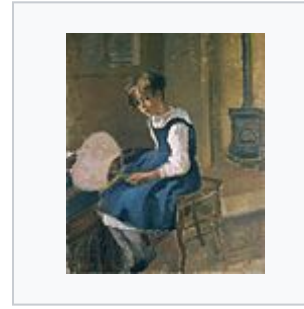
The Return of the Dove to the Ark, by Sir John Everett Millais



A Greek tragic mask dating to the 1st century BC or 1st century AD. See Theatre of ancient Greece.



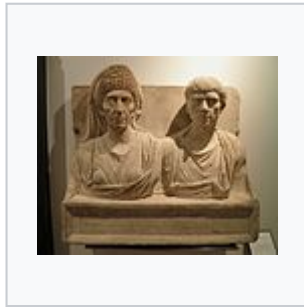
'A lady singing', gouache painting with gold on paper 1740-45, Rajasthan, artist unknown



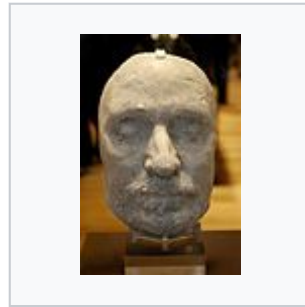
'Jeanne Holding a Fan', an oil on canvas painting by Camille Pissarro, c.1874



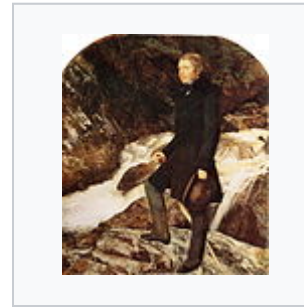
'The Holy Family with St John the Baptist', brush and brown wash on panel by Michelangelo



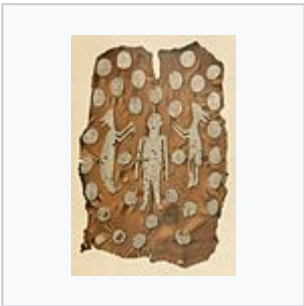
Tombstone, the doctor Claudius Agathemerus and his wife Myrtale, from Rome, about AD 100



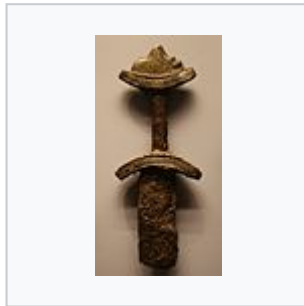
A death mask of Oliver Cromwell



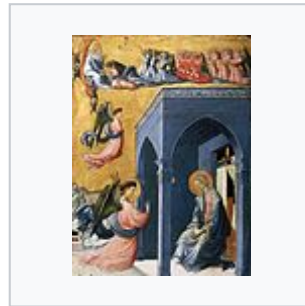
Portrait of John Ruskin by John Everett Millais



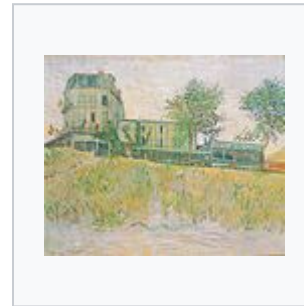
The Mantle of Chief Powhatan



The Abingdon Sword



'The Annunciation', attributed to Paolo Uccello

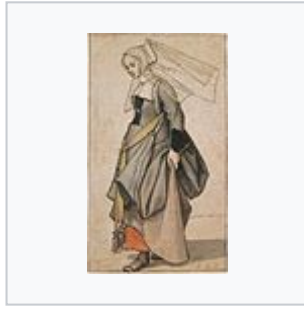


'Restaurant de la Sirène, Asnières', by Vincent van Gogh

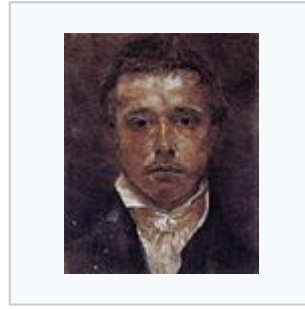




A Garden in Montmartre by Pierre-Auguste Renoir



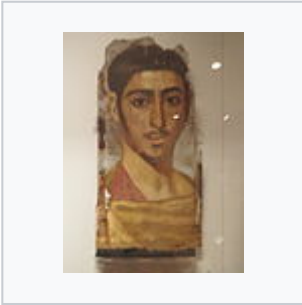
'Young Englishwoman', a costume study by Hans Holbein the Younger



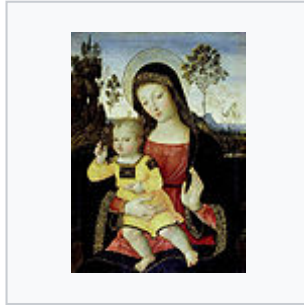
A self-portrait by Samuel Palmer



A coin of Domitianus II



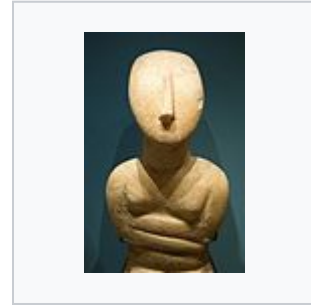
Egyptian Mummy Portrait



The Virgin and Child, by Bernardino Pintoricchio



Maharaja Bakhat Singh of Nagaur, ca. 1735



Early Bronze Age Cycladic art figurine, 2800–2300 BC.



The Kish tablet

## Broadway Museum and Art Gallery

In 2013 a museum was opened in the 17th-century "Tudor House" at Broadway, Worcestershire, in the Cotswolds, in partnership with the Ashmolean Museum. In 2017 the museum became known as the Broadway Museum and Art Gallery. The collection includes paintings and furniture from the founding collections of the Ashmolean Museum, given by Elias Ashmole to the University of Oxford in 1683, and local exhibits expand upon elements of the timeline of the village.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Major exhibitions

Major exhibitions and temporary displays in 2017 include:

- **Raphael: The Drawings:** Open from June 2017 until September 2017 this exhibition brings together over a hundred works by Raphael from international collections and aims to transform public understanding of Raphael through a focus on the immediacy and expressiveness of his drawing.<sup>[35][36]</sup>

Major exhibitions in recent years include:

- ***Degas to Picasso: Creating Modernism in France***: Open from February 2017 until May 2017, and featuring works by Matisse, Manet, Chagall, Braque, Delacroix, Renoir, Metzinger, Degas, Léger and Picasso, this exhibition tells the story of the rise of Modernism through works from a private collection that have never been seen in Britain before.<sup>[37][35][36]</sup>
- ***Power and Protection: Islamic Art and the Supernatural***: Open from October 2016 until January 2017, this is the first major exhibition to explore the supernatural in the art of the Islamic world. The exhibition includes objects and works of art from the 12th to the 20th century, from Morocco to China, which have been used as sources of guidance and protection in the dramatic events of human history. These include dream-books, talismanic charts and amulets.<sup>[38][39]</sup>
- ***Storms, War and Shipwrecks: Treasures from the Sicilian Seas***: Open from June until September 2016, this exhibition will explore the roots of Sicily's multi-cultural heritage through the discoveries made by underwater archaeologists – from chance finds to excavated shipwrecks.<sup>[40]</sup> The exhibition will also feature what has been described as a "flat pack" Byzantine church interior, intended for assembly at its destination, with marble items raised from a wreck off the southeast coast of Sicily in the 1960s by archaeologist Gerhard Kapitan.<sup>[41]</sup>
- ***Andy Warhol: Works from the Hall Collection***: Open from February until May 2016, this exhibition will feature over a hundred works, by Andy Warhol, from the Hall Collection (USA), plus loans of films from The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh. Curated by Sir Norman Rosenthal, the exhibition spans Warhol's entire output, from iconic pieces of the 1960s Pop pioneer to the experimental works of his last decade.<sup>[42][43]</sup>
- ***Elizabeth Price: A RESTORATION***: Open from March until May 2016, this two-screen video installation by British artist Elizabeth Price is a newly commissioned work in response to the collections and archives of the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers museums, in partnership with the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, and funded by the 2013 Contemporary Art Society Award. The main focus are the records of Arthur Evans's excavation of the Cretan city of Knossos.<sup>[44][45]</sup>
- ***Drawing in Venice: Titian to Canaletto***: Open from October 2015 until January 2016, this exhibition will feature a hundred drawings from The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Ashmolean, and Christ Church, Oxford. It will be based on new research tracing continuities in Venetian drawing over three centuries, from around 1500 down to the foundation of the first academy of art in Venice in 1750.<sup>[46]</sup> The exhibition also features 20 works on paper and canvas by contemporary artist Jenny Saville, produced in response to the Venetian drawings in the exhibition.<sup>[47]</sup>
- ***Great British Drawings***: An exhibition open from March until August 2015 showing more than one hundred British drawings and watercolours from the Ashmolean's collection, spanning three hundred years.<sup>[48]</sup>
- ***An Elegant Society: Adam Buck, artist in the age of Jane Austen***: Open from July until October 2015 this exhibition will explore the work of Adam Buck, Irish Regency era portrait and miniature painter.<sup>[48]</sup>
- ***Love Bites: Caricatures by James Gillray***: An exhibition in 2015 to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of British caricaturist James Gillray (1757–1815). The caricatures on display will be from the collection of New College, Oxford.<sup>[48]</sup>
- ***William Blake: Apprentice and Master***: Open from December 2014 until March 2015, this exhibition celebrates the work of William Blake.<sup>[49]</sup>
- ***Discovering Tutankhamun***: a special exhibition, open from July until November 2014, explored Howard Carter's excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922. Original records, drawings and photographs from the Griffith Institute were on display.<sup>[50]</sup>
- ***The Eye of the Needle: English Embroideries from the Feller Collection***: a special exhibition, open from August until October 2014, of 17th-century embroideries from the *Feller Collection*, together with examples from the Ashmolean's own holdings.<sup>[51]</sup>
- ***Cézanne and the Modern***: a special exhibition, open from March to June 2014, displaying Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and sketches from the Henry and Rose Pearlman Collection<sup>[52]</sup>





- **Francis Bacon / Henry Moore: *Flesh and Bone***: a special exhibition, open from September 2013 until July 2014, displaying paintings by Francis Bacon and sculptures and drawings by Henry Moore.<sup>[53]</sup>
- ***Stradivarius***: a special exhibition, open from June until August 2013, exploring the life and work of Antonio Stradivari. It was the first time twenty-one of his instruments, from guitar to cello to violin, were on display together in the UK.<sup>[54]</sup>
- ***Master Drawings***: a special exhibition, open from May until August 2013, displaying a selection of the Ashmolean's on western art collection. The exhibition surveyed drawings of all types by some of the biggest names in art history, including Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael, as well as Gwen John, David Hockney and Antony Gormley.<sup>[55]</sup>
- ***Xu Bing: Landscape Landscript***: a special exhibition of the work of Xu Bing, open from February until May 2013. It was the Ashmolean's first major exhibition of contemporary art.<sup>[56]</sup>

## Keepers and Directors

Keeper	From	To
Robert Plot	1683	1691
Edward Lhuyd	1691	1709
David Parry	1709	1714
John Whiteside	1714	1729
George Huddesford <sup>[57]</sup>	1732	1755
William Huddesford <sup>[57]</sup>	1755	1772
John Shute Duncan	1823	1829
Philip Duncan	1829	
John Henry Parker	1869	
Sir Arthur Evans	1884	1908
David George Hogarth	1909	1927
Edward Thurlow Leeds	1928	1945
Sir Karl Parker	1945	1962
Robert W. Hamilton	1962	1973

Beginning in 1973, the position of Keeper was superseded by that of Director:

Director	From	To
Sir David Piper	1973	1985
Professor Sir Christopher White	1985	1997
Dr P.R.S. Moorey	1997	1998
Dr Christopher Brown	1998 <sup>[58]</sup>	2014 <sup>[11]</sup>
Dr Alexander Sturgis	2014	

## In popular culture

### Comics

- The 21st book in the Belgian comics series *Blake and Mortimer*, titled *The Oath of the Five Lords*, centres around a series of burglaries at the Ashmolean and their connection to T. E. Lawrence.

## Literature

- Philip Pullman's novel *The Subtle Knife*, in the *His Dark Materials* series, references the Ashmolean Museum. The two main characters, Lyra and Will, pretend to be looking for the Ashmolean in order to fool a pair of police officers because half of the story is based in Oxford.
- In *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* within the short story *the Mezzotint*, M.R.James makes reference to the Ashleian Museum which is clearly a reference to the Ashmolean Museum.

## Stage productions

- The musical *Where's Charley?* (1948), written by Frank Loesser based on the play *Charley's Aunt*, includes a song called "The New Ashmolean Marching Society and Students' Conservatory Band".

## Television

- The Alfred Jewel was the inspiration for the *Inspector Morse* episode "The Wolvercote Tongue" (1988), in which the museum's interior was used as a set.<sup>[59]</sup>
- The Ashmolean also figures prominently in several episodes of the successor series *Lewis*, particularly the episode "Point of Vanishing" where the painting *The Hunt in the Forest* (ca. 1470) is a key plot element; the characters visit the painting at the museum and are instructed on its features by an art expert before solving the case.

## Theft

On 31 December 1999, during the fireworks that accompanied the celebration of the millennium, thieves used scaffolding on an adjoining building to climb onto the roof of the Ashmolean Museum and stole Cézanne's landscape painting *View of Auvers-sur-Oise*. Valued at £3 million, the painting has been described as an important work illustrating the transition from early to mature Cézanne painting.<sup>[60]</sup> As the thieves ignored other works in the same room, and the stolen Cézanne has not been offered for sale, it is speculated that this was a case of an artwork stolen to order.<sup>[61][62]</sup>



*View of Auvers-sur-Oise* by Paul Cézanne

## See also

- Elias Ashmole, the Ashmolean's founder
- Oxford University, of which the museum is a department
- Museums of the University of Oxford
- Museum of the History of Science, Oxford
- Oxford University Museum of Natural History
- Pitt Rivers Museum
- Bate Collection of Musical Instruments
- Christ Church Picture Gallery
- The city of Oxford
- Donation by Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud

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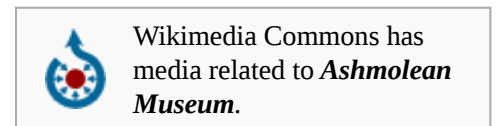


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## External links

- Official website
- Sackler Library
- The Griffith Institute
- Virtual Tour of the Ashmolean Museum, photography from 2003
- Powhatan's Mantle—pictures, description & history
- Works by or about the Ashmolean Museum in libraries (WorldCat catalog)



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