

# **“Axe heads with silk shoes and very old gold rings... these are a few of our favourite things”**

## **A Few of my Favourite Things Exhibition Opening Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February at Colchester Castle Essex**

This spring sees Colchester and Ipswich Museums open a unique exhibition that spotlights favourite objects from the collections of the archaeology, community history, fine art, costume and natural history. Visitors can discover how they came to be in the collection and how these objects and stories from the past and the present connect to life today. The exhibition will go on display at **Colchester Castle from Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February** until 26<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

The museum staff work intimately with the objects in the collections and each department brings a unique insight into our past, our present and even our future.

The human instinct to create and express our emotions and our imaginations is a timeless one. From the earliest hand prints on cave walls to modern art and design, humans have always left this mark on the world. Art is not just something created by talented individuals whether, from your doodles to the pictures on your mobile phone, the simplest of images can be a creative response to our environment and a visual record of our lives. In the exhibition visitors can discover the life and energy in David Vinckboons (1576-1633) painting 'Flemish Village Merrymaking (The Archer's Feast)' which comes to the exhibition from Colchester's Town Hall and see 'A View of Sheepen' by Lucien Pissarro, showing Jumbo in the background.

Philip Wise, Heritage Manager at Colchester and Ipswich Museums said, "Many of us collect objects, whether these are postage stamps, cuddly toys or even family photographs. This exhibition looks at why museums collect and how the nature of collecting has changed over time."

Creativity is not only limited to art, our instinct for colour and design can be found in many more everyday things. Our clothes tell stories about us. The history of clothing is nothing less than a history of how society has changed and developed. In the exhibition visitors can admire the ceremonial robes worn by Charles Abbot when he became the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron of Colchester in 1817. Also see fashion accessories such as a powder compact which shows how simple accessories can provide an insight into the changing role of women in society.

In both art and clothing human society has often been influenced by the natural world and like society itself the world around us is always developing. Through the collection the Natural History Department has been cataloguing these changes. Whilst nowadays it is more focussed on British specimens, in earlier times it gathered examples of plants and animals from the world over and not just living ones. In the exhibition visitors can see the bones of the now extinct giant Moa, a huge flightless bird from New Zealand, the beautiful Chinese Gold Pheasant and a Cherry Weevil which was once thought to be extinct - this amazing insect was re-discovered by Colchester and Ipswich Museums Assistant Curator, Nigel Cuming, at Abberton Reservoir in 2005. Proof that there are discoveries waiting to be made all the time, even on our own doorstep!

Of course mankind itself has been responsible for much environmental change and the extinction of species. The Archaeology Department holds many examples of our earliest interactions with the living world, from stone tools, flint arrowheads and scrapers dating from

over 15,000 years ago to the more intricate metalwork of bronze weapons and jewellery. Local people have always been instrumental in supporting the work of the museum and on display visitors will find many examples donated to the museum from the private collection of the late Eric and Gordon Hazelton, two of the most outstanding amateur collectors of their generation. They explored the coast of Dovercourt in their own boat and carefully excavated and made detailed notes. Some of the items they discovered had not been disturbed since prehistoric times and have a remarkably fresh appearance, as though they had been made only yesterday.

The museum service is not only about the past; tomorrow's archaeology is all around us now and the Community History Department seeks to show how the everyday items that survive show us how people lived their lives, creating a link to the past and offering hints of what may be. Be absorbed by the story of a woman who used lipstick to help her communicate with her visually impaired daughter and see how our relationship with toys has evolved over time.

Cllr. Nick Barlow, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Portfolio Holder for Colchester Borough Council said, "This exhibition demonstrates the wealth and breadth of Colchester's history and it is a fantastic opportunity to give access to parts of the collections that are not normally on display."

This is a varied and inspiring display of objects from our past, some much more recent than you many expect. Come along and discover the stories for yourself.

### **Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service**

Our vision is to create a museum service that is a source of pride, inspiration and fun.

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