

Rare Joseph Wright of Derby portrait of Richard Arkwright is acquired by London and Preston

17 November 2008

The National Portrait Gallery and the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, acquire a portrait of one of the giants of the Industrial Revolution not exhibited since 1883.

Image



National Portrait Gallery

Joseph Wright of Derby portrait of Richard Arkwright

The National Portrait Gallery and the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, are delighted to announce that they have acquired a portrait of the British engineer and inventor Sir Richard Arkwright by the painter Joseph Wright of Derby. The Galleries raised a total amount of £420,000, with the help of £132,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The appeal was kick-started by The Art Fund -

the UK's leading independent art charity - which gave £100,000 towards the purchase. The acquisition has been supported by the Headley Trust, PRISM (the Fund for the Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material), the Harris Trust and Friends of the Harris Museum, as well as a number of generous individuals.

This newly rediscovered portrait is a rare and compelling image of a fascinating self-made man who is one of the giants of the Industrial Revolution. Born in Preston, Arkwright invented a water-frame which was capable of spinning a vast number of threads. This enabled the large scale mechanisation of the cotton industry and led to Arkwright becoming one of the first of the 'Cotton Kings' and the father of the modern factory system. The portrait was painted by Joseph Wright of Derby at the height of his powers in the mid-1780s and brilliantly captures the man who was later described as a 'plain, almost gross, bag-cheeked, pot-bellied Lancashire man'.

The portrait has been acquired jointly with the Harris Museum & Art Gallery in Preston, Arkwright's birthplace with each Gallery raising half the funds.

The portrait will be on display at the National Portrait Gallery until January 2009 when it will then be displayed at the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston. The picture will alternate between the two venues allowing it to be seen in tellingly different contexts, but it will not be subject to frequent movement.

Joseph Wright of Derby is considered one of the most original and important artists working in eighteenth-century Britain. A portraitist, history and landscape painter, he eschewed the metropolis and Bath and spent most of his career in the North West of England. There he took a keen interest in industrial and scientific developments, particularly experimenting in lighting effects with his innovative 'candlelight' pictures of the 1760s.

The engineer, inventor and entrepreneur Richard Arkwright was one of the leading figures of the Industrial Revolution. The cotton-spinning frame, for which he is famous, was invented in Preston in 1768 and patented in 1769. In 1771, he established his first water-powered cotton mill at Cromford in Derbyshire. There he developed a major industrial empire and is acknowledged as the founder of the modern factory system. The year after this portrait was completed Arkwright was knighted.

The interest of this portrait is enhanced by the fact that it has only just re-emerged to public attention. It is listed in Wright's manuscript Account Book as 'Mr Arkwright half length £26.5' and was included in the National Portrait

Exhibition at the South Kensington Museum (former venue of the National Portrait Gallery) in 1867. Due to a misreading of the Account Book by the leading Wright of Derby scholar Benedict Nicolson it has, however, been overlooked in most of the modern scholarly literature on Wright. It was last exhibited in 1883 and only previously reproduced in 1867.

The National Portrait Gallery only has two portraits by Wright: Thomas Day (NPG 2490) and a self-portrait (NPG 4090). The Harris Museum & Art Gallery while renowned for its collection of British art dating from the eighteenth century to the present day currently has no original works by this artist.

Sandy Nairne, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London, says: "The Arkwright is an outstanding acquisition of a great pioneer, painted by one of the finest of British portraitists. I am delighted, with the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, that we have jointly been able to acquire this portrait and I am most grateful to all our generous supporters."

Cllr Christine Thomas, Executive Member for Community Services at Preston City Council, says: "This is a fabulous acquisition for Preston, the birthplace of industrial revolutionary Richard Arkwright. The Harris Museum & Art Gallery is the perfect home for the painting, enabling it to be shown as part of the museum's important collection of eighteenth century portraits and alongside the largest collection of objects which tell the story of the city and its place in the world. We would like to thank all of the organisations and individuals who enabled this to happen."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: "In over two hundred years since this unusually personal portrait of Sir Richard Arkwright was painted, it has only once been publicly exhibited. We are delighted that this portrait, of such a significant industrial pioneer in Britain's history, will now belong forever to our nation."

David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund, the UK's leading independent art charity, says: "This is an outstanding portrait of one of the leading architects of the Industrial Revolution – and its acquisition is a real coup for both galleries. Revealingly, it was considered by his children to be the best portrait ever painted of their father. It perfectly captures the private side of a formidable character who helped shape modern Britain."

Katherine Doyle, PRISM Fund Manager, says: "As the innovator of mass production, and fomenter of the Industrial Revolution, Richard Arkwright has left

an indelible mark on British history. The PRISM Fund is happy to support the Harris in this acquisition, and we are confident that the portrait of this controversial figure will help bring both the region's and the nation's industrial past to life."

Notes to editors

Sir Richard Arkwright (1732-1792) by Joseph Wright of Derby, ARA (1734-1797)

three-quarter length portrait

oil on canvas, circa 1783--1785

1260 x 1020 (49 5/8 x 40 1/8")

Inscribed on the reverse by C. M. Hurt, December 1852: "His son, Richard Arkwright, and his daughter the late Mrs Charles Hurt always considered this the best portrait of their farther [sic]".

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The Art Fund

[The Art Fund](#) is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections; campaigns on behalf of museums and their visitors; and promotes the enjoyment of art. It is entirely funded from public donations and has 80,000 members. Since 1903 the charity has helped museums and galleries all over the UK secure 860,000 works of art for their collections.

Recent achievements include: helping secure Anthony d'Offay's collection, ARTIST ROOMS, for Tate and National Galleries of Scotland in February 2008 with a grant of £1million; putting together a unique funding package to ensure Dumfries House in Ayrshire and its contents were secured intact for the nation in July 2007; and running the 'Buy a Brushstroke' public appeal which raised over £550,000 to keep Turner's *Blue Rigi* watercolour in the UK.

Further information

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, WC2H 0HE opening hours: Saturday-Wednesday: 10am – 6pm (Gallery closure commences at 5.50pm)

Late Opening: Thursday, Fridays:10am - 9pm (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm)

Recorded information: 020 7312 2463 G

General information: 020 7306 0055

Website: www.npg.org.uk

Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Market Square, Preston PR1 2PP

Opening hours: Monday – Saturday, 10.00am – 5.00pm except Tuesday 11.00am – 5.00pm.

Phone: 01772 258248

Website: www.harrismuseum.org.uk

Neil Evans, Press Office, National Portrait Gallery, Email nevans@npg.org.uk
or Hilary Machell, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, Email:
h.machell@preston.gov.uk

The Art Fund Press Office

Phone: 020 7225 4888