

Significant Eric Ravilious painting *Beachy Head* joins permanent collection at Eastbourne's Towner Art Gallery

25 January 2018

Eastbourne's Towner Art Gallery is delighted to have added the work *Beachy Head*, 1939 by Eric Ravilious (1903 – 1942) to its permanent collection.

Image



Eric Ravilious, *Beachy Head*, 1939

The acquisition of this important work, which has been in private hands since its making and only rarely shown, has been made possible at no cost to the local authority thanks to generous support from Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Arts Council England/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, The Monument Trust and Eastbourne Arts Circle.

Arguably the artist's most important peace time nocturne, *Beachy Head*, 1939, is an iconic Ravilious watercolour. It depicts the downland hills and white chalk cliffs of Beachy Head, the world famous landmark near Towner's home in Eastbourne which is one of the most iconic features of the Sussex coastline. The painting shows Beachy Head in the year of the outbreak of the Second World War, shortly before it was to be altered by the barbed wire military defences erected to secure

the cliff from enemy invasion. Alan Powers describes *Beachy Head* as one of Ravilious' 'most perfect compositions, uncluttered by objects or detail' in his highly regarded 2013 book *Eric Ravilious Artist & Designer*.

Born in London, Ravilious was a painter, designer, book illustrator and wood engraver. He moved to Eastbourne with his parents at a young age and went on to study at the Eastbourne School of Art, where his early talent was recognised. He was awarded a place in the Design School at the Royal College of Art (RCA), where he studied under Paul Nash, and met fellow students with whom he would form lasting personal and professional relationships, including Edward Bawden, Douglas Percy Bliss, Barnett Freedman, Helen Binyon, Enid Marx and Peggy Angus.

After the RCA he returned to Eastbourne to teach at the School of Art where in 1930 he married one of his students, the talented artist and engraver Eileen Lucy "Tirzah" Garwood. Ravilious was appointed an official war artist in World War II and received a commission as a Captain in the Royal Marines. He was killed in 1942 at the age of 39 while accompanying a Royal Air Force air sea rescue mission off Iceland that failed to return to its base.

Viewed by many as the home of Ravilious, Towner holds one of the largest and most significant public collections of works by the much loved and respected Sussex artist. The first acquisitions of Ravilious' work for the gallery's collection were made in 1936, while the artist was still alive, and Towner has continued to acquire his work ever since, assisted by generous loans and gifts as well as purchases.

Speaking about the acquisition, Towner's Head of Collections Sara Cooper, said: "We are absolutely delighted to have acquired *Beachy Head* for our Collection. Like many galleries, our acquisitions budget is becoming increasingly small and we are therefore incredibly grateful for the existence and support of organisations like Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Arts Council England/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, The Monument Trust and Eastbourne Arts Circle who make the purchase of major works such as *Beachy Head* a possibility for us. This acquisition will enable Towner to reaffirm the connection between Ravilious and the Eastbourne area which he so loved and returned to paint again and again."

Stephen Deuchar, Director, Art Fund, said: "We admire Towner's ongoing and ambitious development of its arts collections, and this latest acquisition is a work of great beauty and importance, which will be surely be loved and admired by the

gallery's audiences. Art Fund was happy to help."

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of NHMF, said: "Eric Ravilious is one of the 20th-Century's most important artists. His role as a Second World War artist cost him his life when he was killed in action in 1942, but also, poignantly, introduced his work to new audiences. *Beachy Head* is probably Ravilious's most famous work, a fine demonstration of his distinctive style. Saving this fine, evocative picture for the nation is a fitting tribute to Ravilious and to all those who have died protecting our nation - which is precisely what the National Heritage Memorial Fund exists to do."

Two years ago, with funding from the Eastbourne Arts Circle, Towner designated one room within its first floor gallery as a dedicated Ravilious Room, showcasing a changing selection of his finest watercolours, prints and ceramics. In 2017, Towner presented *Ravilious & Co: The Pattern of Friendship*, a major new exhibition exploring the significant relationships and working collaborations between Ravilious and an important group of friends and affiliates, including Paul and John Nash, Enid Marx, Barnett Freedman, Tirzah Garwood, Edward Bawden, Thomas Hennell, Douglas Percy Bliss, Peggy Angus, Helen Binyon, and Diana Low. *Beachy Head* was included in this exhibition, which is now on tour to Millennium Galleries in Sheffield and Compton Verney in Warwickshire.

Notes to Editors

About Towner Art Gallery

Founded as an art gallery for the people, Towner Art Gallery presents exhibitions of national and international importance to audiences across the UK and beyond. Showcasing the most exciting developments in modern and contemporary art, Towner develops and supports artistic practice, and provides a place for experiencing, creating and discussing art and culture. The gallery welcomes over 150,000 visitors a year and collaborates with individuals, communities and organisations to deliver an inclusive and accessible associated public programme and learning offer. Their acclaimed collection of 5000 works is best known for its modern British art – including the largest and most significant body of work by Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) – and a growing collection of international contemporary art. In 2014, Towner became an independent charitable Trust, supported by a Board of Trustees, chaired by David Dimbleby. Towner is supported by Eastbourne Borough Council and Arts Council England through its National Portfolio Programme. www.townereastbourne.org.uk

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 123,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by the The Hepworth Wakefield in 2017) and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org

About the Arts Council England/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund

- The Arts Council England/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund is a government fund that helps regional museums, record offices and specialist libraries in England and Wales to acquire objects relating to the arts, literature and history.
- It was established at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1881 and continues to be part of its nationwide work.
- The annual grants budget, currently £750,000, is provided by Arts Council England (ACE).
- Each year, the Purchase Grant Fund considers some 200 applications and awards grants to around 100 organisations, enabling acquisitions of over £3m to go ahead.
- Visit the website: www.vam.ac.uk/purchasegrantfund

About The Monument Trust

The Monument Trust is one of the eighteen Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. It was established by the late Simon Sainsbury, and has supported charities in the areas of arts and heritage, social welfare, AIDS, medical research and criminal justice. The Trust is now closed.

www.sfct.org.uk

About Eastbourne Arts Circle

Eastbourne Arts Circle is a charity that supports the arts in Eastbourne and raises much needed funds for Towner Art Gallery, as well as funding commissions for emerging artists. They do this by presenting lectures on art, music and literature in the Towner Auditorium.

www.eastbourneartscircle.org.uk