

Unique William Beckford survival saved for the nation

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The Beckford Tower Trust has successfully secured a rare coffer cabinet and stand made for the famous and eccentric 19th century collector, William Beckford (1760-1844).

Image



Coffer and stand created by William Beckford

It was saved thanks to £148,000 from National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), £110,000 from the Art Fund, the national fundraising charity for art, along with numerous personal donations.

Dating from the 1830s, this coffer and stand is the only known complete piece of furniture from a set of four originally created for the Scarlet Drawing Room at Beckford's Tower in Bath. Beckford was one of the most extraordinary men of his time, who inherited a vast fortune at the age of 10. He used his immense wealth to build Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire and create one of Europe's greatest collections of furniture books, objects and paintings. Beckford moved to Bath in 1822 and in 1827 built the Tower to house his collection. The coffer and stand was most probably designed by Beckford himself and the Bath architect Henry Edmund Goodridge (1797-1864) and was used as a display cabinet for items from Beckford's extensive collection.

Dr Amy Frost, Curator of Beckford's Tower & Museum, said: "The coffer and stand is a superb example of Beckford's impact on the history of furniture, design and collecting. Local support towards our campaign to purchase it has been wonderful and it is fantastic to return it to Beckford's Tower and put it on public display in the building it was designed for."

The coffer and stand was subject to a temporary export bar from March this year, following recommendation by the Reviewing Committee for the export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural interest (administered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council).

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said: "I am thrilled that the Beckford Tower Trust has managed to raise enough money to keep William Beckford's coffer in the UK. This is a great example of why we have a system of deferring exports, and also a triumph for the kind of small scale philanthropy that we are working hard to encourage. It is of course very fitting that this fine piece of furniture will be on display at the Beckford Tower and Museum and I offer them my warmest congratulations on securing its future in the UK."

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the NHMF, commented: "This is a unique survival. Beckford continues to be highly respected as an arbiter of 19th-century national taste and that is why the trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund - which was set-up to safeguard our most precious heritage at risk - felt it was crucial to step in to help return this heritage treasure to its original setting."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "This is a wonderfully quirky piece of furniture that beautifully illustrates William Beckford's tastes. The Art Fund is committed to helping museums and galleries buy, show and share art and we are delighted to have played an important role in not only keeping the work in the UK but returning it to its original home, where it can be seen and enjoyed by all."

The coffer and stand will be on display alongside other items once in the Beckford collection, at Beckford's Tower & Museum in Bath. The museum is now closed for the winter but will reopen at Easter 2012.

Notes to editors

[The Art Fund](#) is the national fundraising charity for art, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. Over the past five years, the Art Fund has given £24million to buy art and supported a range of projects and programmes

aimed at helping more people enjoy art. The Art Fund is independently funded and the majority of income comes from 85,000 supporters who purchase a National Art Pass, costing from just £37.50, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions.

Further information

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