

The Silver Swan

The Silver Swan was made in 1773. John and Joséphine bought it for £200 in 1872. At the time this was a lot of money.

The Swan is made of real silver. It is run by clockwork, which is hidden inside its case, and is wound up once a day with a large key. Look at the water the Swan is sitting on; it is made of glass. When the swan is wound up, the glass rods begin to turn and it looks like moving water. When the music plays, the Silver Swan comes alive and twists its head both ways. It sees a fish swimming in the water and bends its long neck to catch it. It then swallows the fish and the music ends. The Silver Swan's performance is very quick and only lasts about 40 seconds.

The Silver Swan was restored in 2008. During this time it was taken apart and cleaned.

Written with support of Emily Bonnet.



Cotherstone

John Bowes loved horseracing. His real interest was not in watching the races but in breeding the perfect horse which would win him lots of races and money.

The horse in this painting is called Cotherstone. Cotherstone was born in 1840 and belonged to John Bowes. He was probably born at Streatlam Castle, John Bowes' home near Barnard Castle. Cotherstone was a very talented horse which won lots of races including the very important Derby and 2,000 Guineas. Of the seven races run by Cotherstone he lost only one. As a famous horse, he was painted by six artists, including John Frederick Herring, who painted this picture. Have a look at the horse's rug beside Cotherstone; it has the initials JB on it. As John Bowes was so proud of Cotherstone he had his initials sewn onto the rug. Cotherstone retired at four years old, having got rather fat.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran and Dorothy Barker.



The Penny Farthing

This bicycle is called a Penny Farthing and was made around 1870. It is called a Penny Farthing as its wheels are similar to two old coins. A farthing was a very small coin, (point to the small wheel) and a penny was larger, (now point to the larger wheel).

The wheels are very strong and are made of iron and solid rubber. The pedals are attached to the front wheel.

Can you see the small mounting peg above the back wheel? To mount the bicycle, the rider had to put their foot on the peg. They would grasp the handlebars and then lift themselves into the saddle.

To ride a Penny Farthing you needed to have excellent balance as they were very unstable. Accidents were common as riders were thrown over the handlebars whenever they hit another bike, uneven pavement or even a tiny pebble! When riding downhill riders took their feet off the pedals and hooked them over the handlebars so that if they had a crash they would hopefully land on their feet.

The popularity of the Penny Farthing led to the beginning of cycling as a sport.

Written with support of June Wright.



A Fruit Stall

This is one of The Bowes Museum's biggest paintings and is almost 400 years old. It is called the Fruit Stall. It is an oil painting, painted by an artist called Frans Snyders.

Now, let's take a closer look at the painting ... can you see some mushrooms, carrots, apples and grapes?

Let's not forget the woman looking after the stall. She is holding her best fruit in the hope that she will attract people to come and buy. What would you like from the stall?

Look at the wonderful landscape in the top corner of the painting. Frans hasn't forgotten the countryside where the fruit and vegetables were grown to make sure that the stall was full of wonderful produce.

Written with support of Dorothy Barker.



Fountain Mask

Arrgghh! This very scary face is a fountain mask. He appears to be half animal, half man, with bushy eyebrows, moustache and beard. Imagine coming across him! He's looking straight at you as if he might catch you!

Originally the fountain mask would have been fixed to a wall, with water pipes behind, forcing water out of his large mouth. It would probably have been used as decoration in a French garden. This mask is very well modelled, and we think it was made by a famous French sculptor called Martin Desjardins around 1650-1670. If you have time, explore the front garden of The Bowes Museum; a copy of the mask has been put above the half-pond to demonstrate how it might have looked in a garden.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



Napoleon I in coronation Robes

This is a painting of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was the Emperor of France. It was painted by Girodet and shows Napoleon as being very powerful. Napoleon liked this painting so much he ordered Girodet to paint another 35 which he would give as gifts. Unfortunately, before Girodet completed the paintings Napoleon was beaten at the Battle of Waterloo. As a result, he lost all of his power and was exiled from France. We do not know what happened to the other paintings.

Napoleon was a short man, only about 5 feet 3 inches, but you wouldn't think it looking at Girodet's painting. He looks grand dressed in his rich velvet robes. Take a close look at the carpet and Napoleon's robes. Which insect can you see? There are lots of bees. Napoleon liked the bee as it was a symbol of the Ancient French kings and also showed that, similar to working bees, he worked hard for his country.

Round his neck is the Légion d'honneur. This is France's highest honour, invented by Napoleon and awarded to himself. His hand hovers over the orb of kingship, he wears a laurel wreath and holds a sceptre with an eagle on top. All of these are symbols of power and authority.

Written with support of Debbie Warwick.



Mechanical Mouse

This little mouse was bought by Joséphine in 1871. It cost £22, which was a lot of money in those days. The mouse is tiny, only 11cm long, and made of gold with seed pearls. The mouse's whiskers are gold wire and the eyes are polished garnets (a red stone).

It is very rare, as there are less than 10 officially recorded automata mice in the world.

Like the Silver Swan, this is a clockwork mouse. When wound, the mouse runs about and twitches its whiskers.

The mouse was stolen from The Bowes Museum in 1994. In 2000 someone at the Victoria and Albert Museum spotted it after an application was made to export it abroad. There was a court case and experts were called in to prove the mouse's identity. They confirmed that it was the Bowes' mouse even though the tail has been shortened and the whiskers replaced. Eventually, the judge ruled that it was the Bowes' mouse and it was returned in February 2002.

Written with support of Debbie Warwick.



Snow Scene in the South of France

After Joséphine married John Bowes she focused her time on painting. Joséphine was very talented and had paintings accepted for the Salon in Paris and the Royal Academy in London. This was a great achievement as women artists had great difficulty in getting their artwork displayed. Many of Joséphine's paintings now hang in the Museum.

When you look at the painting you can almost feel how cold it is, the lake has frozen over and people are skating on the ice. The girl on the right looks very confident, but the boys look nervous and one has fallen over!

You can see in the distance a building, which at first glance looks like a church, but could be a large farmhouse. People are moving away from the building towards the lake. Perhaps they want to join in the fun!

We can also see a cart drawn by two oxen. The cart is loaded with hay which will be needed to feed the cattle whilst the snow is on the ground.

This painting depicts a happy scene, but look at the ice, it is beginning to crack. I hope it won't continue across to the skaters. What do you think will happen next?

Joséphine did not sign all of her paintings but you can see her signature in the right hand corner. Maybe she was very pleased with this painting.

Written with support of Win Glover.



Meissen Scent Bottle (Monk)

This very unusual object is a scent bottle. What do you think it would have been used for? Originally it would have contained wonderful smelling perfumes. The designer of the bottle has been very clever and has made it look like a monk. A monk is a religious man. Have a look at the monk; he is carrying a roll of sheepskin on his back. Now look closely, what do you see peeking out of the top of the sheepskin roll? Yes, a lady is rolled up inside. Where do you think he is taking her?

Written with support of Sheila Kilgarriff.



Statue of Sappho

This is a statue of Sappho and it symbolises love. She was a poet and was born on the Greek island of Lesbos. In her hand you can see a scroll with some words written in the Greek language. It translates as, "Come to me even now and put an end to troublesome care". Sappho is writing to Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of Love, requesting her help with writing a poem to a lady she loves. The word lesbian means the love between two women and came into our language because Sappho was born on the Island of Lesbos. John Bowes bought this statue of Sappho. It is made of silver.

Written with support of Sue Longridge.



Canaletto

Canaletto was born in Venice, Italy. He was very famous for painting landscapes of Venice. He sold them to tourists who took them home as a souvenir of their visit. The two large paintings in front of you are by Canaletto. They are amongst the largest and finest examples of his work.

Look at all the water in the painting! Venice is famous for its canals and people travel around Venice on small boats called Gondolas. Can you see any Gondolas in the painting?

Take a look at the painting called '*Regatta on the Grand Canal*'. Regatta is a Latin word which means boat race. On the left of the painting is a floating stand where flags were awarded to the race winners. The flags can be seen in the foreground with '*primo*', '*second*' and '*terzo*' inscribed upon them. Look at the people watching the race; they are wearing carnival-time white masks and black capes. The canal is also lined with boats which belonged to very rich Venetian families.



Noah's Ark

Can you recognise any of the animals marching into Noah's Ark? Look closely and you might be able to see Noah and his wife! This toy is made of wood. Years ago, on Sundays children were only allowed to play with religious toys. Noah's Ark is a story which appears in the Bible. Listen to the story...

Long, long ago there was a very good man called Noah. God spoke to Noah and told him to save himself, his family and animals from a large flood he was sending to destroy all of the evil in the world. God told Noah to build an ark, which is a type of boat. Noah worked very hard building the ark. Noah sent all of his family and two of every kind of animal onto the ark. As the boat doors shut, the rain started to pour; it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. The water rose and covered all of the land. But Noah, his family and the animals were safe on the ark. After 40 days and 40 nights the rain suddenly stopped. The water started to disappear. When all of the water had vanished, Noah, his family and the animals left the ark and lived happily ever after. They were all very thankful to God for keeping them safe.



Loom

This is a loom. A loom is used to weave carpets. This loom is very rare and although it is more than 100 years old it is still in working order and is used for occasional demonstrations. Take a look at the carpet hung on the wall. It was made by this very loom.

Electricity was not used to power a loom. Look underneath the loom. Can you see a wooden pedal? The person using the loom would press the pedal with their feet and this would make the loom work. Can you see the colourful threads; they are woven together to create a wonderful patterned design.



Two Headed Calf

This two headed calf was born near High Force, only 15 miles from The Bowes Museum. Despite its unusual appearance, this is a real calf. When the calf was born it was exhibited to people as a 'Freak of Nature'. People paid to see the unusual animal. If you look closely the calf has 7 legs, 2 heads, 2 tails, 2 breasts, 2 backbones, 4 ears, 4 eyes and 2 mouths.



Norimono

A Norimono is like a car with no wheels, once used in Japan as a form of transport. There was only enough room for one person inside, and they had to climb in through a sliding door. It would be carried by a strong man at either end, each using his shoulder to lift the chair off the ground. If the men moved quickly it would be a very bumpy ride.

This Norimono is made of wood and is painted in black lacquer which makes the chair waterproof. The Norimono also has gold metal mounts which has created a floral design.

John and Joséphine bought the Norimono in the 1860s when Japan began trading with Europe.



Fish Swimming in their own Definitions

This is a piece of modern art created by an artist called Jack Milroy, in 1997. His work has been displayed in the UK and America. Jack Milroy uses different materials to create 3D artwork. Look at the top of the case, can you see what Milroy has used in this piece? Yes, it is a book. Milroy has cut the book using a sharp scalpel. He has released the pages and they appear to be falling like water. Look closely, what is hidden in the curls of paper? Yes, Milroy has hidden colourful fish. Jack Milroy called this piece of art, '*Fish Swimming in their Own Definitions*'. He wanted his artwork to be colourful and fun but also serious.



Amphora

This unusual pot is called an amphora. As you can see the amphora has been broken into two pieces. If you look closely you can see where we have stuck pieces of the amphora together using special tape. The amphora was used by the Romans to store and transport grapes, olive oil and wine. The amphora is made from clay and has two large handles to carry the pot. An amphora is stored in an upright position. Look at the bottom of the amphora. It has a point, it is not flat. How do you think the Romans would make it stand up without falling over? Yes, they used to dig a hole and place the amphora safely in the ground to make sure the contents would not spill out of the container. Weren't they clever?



Reliquary

This is a reliquary. A reliquary is a decorated box which contains the physical remains, or relics, of a Saint, such as their bones or clothing. A saint is a holy person. Reliquaries range in size and shape but are often light as they were carried to different churches. People believed that if they touched a reliquary that contained a Saint's remains, they would be closer to God.



Gainford Stone

This stone was found in a private garden in Gainford, in 1932. If you look closely you can see a 'cup and ring' mark. A cup is a small shallow circle and the rings surround the cup. The design would have been carved into the stone using a chisel and mallet approximately 4,000 years ago. We do not know what the pattern shows but people believe it could be used as decoration or even a map of the stars!

Written with support of Samantha Belcher.



Toy Lead Soldiers

Over 100 years ago, toy soldiers were very popular. They were mass produced to meet the demand. To keep the price down, they were made of cheap metal, which could easily be moulded and would not rust. Therefore the toy soldiers tended to be made of lead. Lead is a grey metal. Often, the toy soldiers were painted in different colours. Unfortunately, lead is poisonous. If small children bit or sucked the soldiers, they would become ill from lead poisoning. As a result, toy makers stopped making soldiers from lead, and started using plastic instead.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



John Bowes' Portrait

This is a portrait of John Bowes. He is the founder of The Bowes Museum. This means that he paid for the Museum to be built, along with his wife, Joséphine. Can you guess how old John is in this painting? He is 52 years old. He chose a French artist called Eugene Feyen to paint this portrait ... look very closely and you will see the artist's name in the painting.

Feyen wanted to show that John Bowes was an English country gentleman. He believed that all countrymen liked shooting game. As a result, John Bowes is sat with a gun and a bagful of newly shot game. This is quite funny really, because John Bowes didn't like shooting at all! His favourite sport was horseracing.

Now look in the top left hand corner of the painting. Can you see a big building? This is a view of Streatlam Castle, which was John Bowes' family house in Teesdale. Unfortunately, Streatlam Castle no longer exists as it was demolished in the 1960s.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



Joséphine Bowes' Portrait

Joséphine came from a poor family. When she fell in love with John Bowes he bought her a lovely house, off one of the most fashionable streets in Paris. Joséphine furnished her house with the best furniture and fabrics. She dressed in the latest styles, she even had the newest breed of dog ... the Labrador! This portrait was painted in 1850, when Joséphine was only 25 years old.

Imagine this portrait hanging in the entrance hall of Joséphine's house. She seems to welcome her guests. Both she and her dog are looking straight at the visitors. Joséphine's hand reaches out in a shy welcome. Her dog, called Bernadine, seems ready to jump to its feet. Joséphine is dressed in a simple white morning gown, her long hair is gathered up in a smart red hair net. The visitors seem to have disturbed Joséphine while reading her scripts, which lie on the table beside her. Joséphine was an actress at the Variety Theatre, which was owned by John Bowes.

Two years later, Joséphine married John Bowes and gave up acting. She did achieve her ambition to become a patron of the arts after all, by founding, with her husband, The Bowes Museum.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



Bowes Coats of Arms

If you stand outside The Bowes Museum, facing the entrance door, and look up to the right and left, you will see two carved stone shields with symbols on them. The one on the left shows three bows. The one on the right shows a mountain peak. These are the Coats of Arms of John and Joséphine Bowes, the couple who built the Museum.

Coats of Arms were invented in the Middle Ages to help identify people. The Bowes family was given its coat of arms a very long time ago.

Joséphine's family didn't have a coat of arms, so John arranged for her to have one. It shows a white (snow covered) mountain. In words, this was called Mont (for mountain) and Albo (for white) – Montalbo. Joséphine became Countess of Montalbo. In Barnard Castle this name has been given to Montalbo Road and Montalbo School.

You can see coloured versions of both coats of arms on Joséphine's portrait. The Bowes coat of arms can be seen on furniture, porcelain and glass around the Museum. See if you can find them!

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



Sedan Chair

Sedan chairs were invented in the 16th Century in the French town of Sedan. They were very popular. A Sedan Chair is a chair enclosed in a waterproof box, with two poles at the front and back. Two men would stand between the poles, lift the chair and its passenger directed them.

In those days, streets were very dirty. There was horse poo from the many horses travelling on the roads. There were chamber pot contents and muddy, smelly water lying in the streets whenever it rained. The Sedan Chair was a brilliant invention for travelling short distances in towns; it was like the present day car or taxi. If you were rich, you could keep a Sedan Chair in the entrance hall of your house, and use your servants to carry it. If you were poorer, you could hire a Sedan Chair for a single journey. If you were poorer still, you had to walk!

This Sedan Chair is big and heavy. It may have needed four men to carry it. It is smartly decorated in black and gold and would have drawn attention to its passenger.

Written with support of Elizabeth Conran.



Vionnet Dresses

Look at these three wonderful dresses. They were made by the famous French fashion designer Madeleine Vionnet in the 1930s. The dresses were worn by British socialite Lady Foley. A socialite is a rich person who attends a lot of parties. The Bowes Museum raised nearly £125,000 to buy the three gowns. They are made of expensive and luxurious fabrics.

Written with support of Sheila Dixon.



Meissen Cup and Saucer

This is a Meissen cup and saucer. Meissen is a place in Germany which is famous for its porcelain. Porcelain is fine quality clay which is made hard by baking it in a kiln. Look at the design. It is very pretty; the cup and saucer are white with a delicate red, blue and yellow floral design. Originally the Museum only had the saucer, but Howard Coutts, Curator of Ceramics spotted a cup of the same design, decoration and number for sale at auction in London. The Museum has finally reunited the cup and saucer after 200 years!

Written with support of Sheila Dixon.

