

Acquisition of Portrait of D H Lawrence for Museum Collection

Briefing Document

David Herbert Lawrence [1885 – 1930]

Lawrence was born in Eastwood and he studied to be a teacher at the (now) University of Nottingham. He was a controversial figure from the outset of his literary career, exploring the human impact of industrialisation and the brutalities of life inflicted upon the working people of his native land. His controversial status was affirmed by many at the time, as he explored female sexuality within works such as *The Rainbow*, and his private life, was to prove no less unorthodox. In 1912, he met and subsequently eloped with the German wife of his former University professor, Frieda von Richthofen. With the outbreak of war in 1914, their position grew increasingly untenable in the United Kingdom and they subsequently travelled worldwide, returning to Britain on occasion. This was what he termed his “savage pilgrimage”. He suffered from ill health throughout his life and suffered especially from malaria and tuberculosis which resulted in his death in Vence, France, on 2nd March 1930.

Lawrence was, therefore, a writer of international stature and an important figure within the culture, literary heritage and history of the area. He was also an artist and exhibited his work at Nottingham Castle Open Exhibition of works, captured in a cameo scene within his novel *Sons and Lovers*. Like his literary works, many of these gave strong impressions of his ethos and were banned from public exhibition on the grounds of indecency.

The Portrait

The portrait has not yet been exhibited in the UK, having spent its life between mainland Europe and the USA. In celebration of its arrival in Nottingham, its new home, a five month programme of events and activities at Newstead Abbey and in Nottingham City Libraries will be organised, to support and promote the acquisition and to reach out to audiences unfamiliar with Newstead Abbey or with Lawrence.

Letters in support of the acquisition of the portrait have been provided by: Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature; the Friends of Nottingham City Museums the University of Nottingham; DH Lawrence Society; the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum, while grant aid has been received from a number of sources to enable the purchase to be made.

Relevance of Work

As a local author and one of international repute, Lawrence has a close association with the City of Nottingham. In addition, the themes suggested by the portrait and the work of DH Lawrence offer great potential for engaging with groups of young people, informal adult learner groups and special interest groups. The portrait would also enhance several themes across the collections of Nottingham City Museums (Fine Art, social, cultural and literary history, radical thinkers, local people who had an impact in and beyond Nottingham).

This proposed acquisition meets the quoted criteria within *Nottingham City Museums & Galleries Collections Development Policy 2013*, as indicated below. (The Policy is a requirement of the *Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom*, published by Arts Council England December 2011):

"To stimulate, inspire and educate, to increase understanding and appreciation of the Fine Arts and their history. To provide a resource for the study and enjoyment of Nottingham's history, artistic heritage and the local, natural and man-made environment."

- Portraits are a strength of the Fine Art collection and in the displays at Newstead Abbey; this includes portraits of Nottingham/Nottinghamshire writers and poets (sculptures of local writers from history are a feature of the Walled Garden at Newstead Abbey).

"The Social History collections should develop a sense of pride, sense of place and sense of identity in the diverse communities which make up Nottingham and have contributed to its history."

- Collections relating to people who have made a significant contribution to the cultural life of the area makes a major contribution to this. The proposed purchase would be a very rare opportunity to acquire a portrait of such an outstanding local figure at the climax of his literary career but at the point of his imminent death.

"A particular priority for the current policy is to collect work which explores themes of rebellion, protest and civil rights' across all the collection disciplines."

- DH Lawrence was a contentious and radical figure, challenging societal expectations throughout his life and career. His story, and his writing relate well to the themes of displays and learning programmes at Newstead Abbey.