



## COWPER & NEWTON MUSEUM

### Press release

## Cowper and Newton Museum wins National Lottery support

The Cowper & Newton Museum in Olney has been awarded a £93,800 Heritage Lottery Fund grant National for the next step in its refurbishment programme, it was announced this week. The Our Heritage grant will cover almost 85% of the projected cost of £112,000, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players. Milton Keynes Borough will contribute an additional £5,000, with the remainder to be met from the museum's budget and local fundraising.

The project will allow for improvements to the presentation of the main historic rooms, a new permanent display on life in Georgian times, and the creation of an accessible visitor orientation area in the historic Viper Barn.

The National Lottery grant will also cover the appointment of a Heritage Manager to research and oversee the changes. The Museum's House Manager continues in place to co-ordinate the day to day running of the museum and the existing team of almost one hundred museum and garden volunteers. The project will also allow for some much-needed improvements to lighting and electrical services.

This project has come about after lengthy discussions between the Museum's trustees and external experts to find a way of refreshing the displays while preserving the quiriness of the building that so delights local and international visitors. Shane Downer, Heritage Officer for Milton Keynes, has also encouraged the project since its start. The museum has unique collections of material that belonged to the two men it celebrates, John Newton, ex-slave trader, preacher and author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, and William Cowper, Jane Austen's favourite poet, who moved to the house almost two hundred and fifty years ago, in 1768, and remained until 1786.



**LOTTERY FUNDED**





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Paul Collins, Chairman of the Trustees and spokesman for the museum said, 'I am delighted that this National Lottery funding will help us fulfil the expectations of our growing number of visitors. Our plan is to develop our visitor experience to match twenty-first century display standards, but within the constraints set by our historic building and garden'. Liz Gifford, Milton Keynes Cabinet member for Place also welcomed news of the grant. 'Milton Keynes celebrates its fifty years as a new town this year and is bidding to become a European City of Culture in 2023. Heritage is important to us and we are delighted that this National Lottery funding will fuel an exciting new lease of life for The Cowper and Newton Museum, the oldest museum within the borough'.

Volunteers celebrated the museum's successful bid with the first-ever marathon reading of *The Task*, the 5,000-line poem which made Cowper's reputation. A team of readers, including Mark Lancaster MP for Milton Keynes North and weekend visitors to the museum, took it in turns to read the entire poem aloud. The organisers reckon they have set a record of six hours excluding breaks, but would welcome challenges from any other group keen to explore Cowper's masterpiece.

### Notes to editors

**About the Cowper and Newton Museum** The museum was founded in 1900 in the market town of Olney, in north Buckinghamshire, in Orchard Side the house where the poet and letter writer William Cowper lived for almost twenty years. Cowper became the best-known poet of his day, and is still loved for poems such as 'John Gilpin'. Cowper's friend John Newton, ex-slave ship captain, curate and author of the world's most famous hymn 'Amazing Grace', lived in the vicarage, a building which still stands to the rear of Cowper's garden. The two men were to become significant figures in the campaign to abolish slavery.

The Museum's collections include pictures, furniture and other artefacts owned by Cowper and Newton and their contemporaries, manuscripts and books, and material relating the slave trade.





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The Museum is open Tuesdays to Saturdays for most of the year – visitor information and news of special events at <http://www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk>.

**About the marathon reading of *The Task*** Cowper's long poem *The Task*, in six books and written in blank verse, was the poem which made him famous among contemporaries. It was written at Orchard Side and first published in 1785. Its six books are called "The Sofa", "The Timepiece", "The Garden", "The Winter Evening", "The Winter Morning Walk" and "The Winter Walk at Noon". The museum has a set of reading copies to lend out to any other groups who want to take on their challenge.

### **About the Heritage Lottery Fund**

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk). Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #HLFsupported.

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