

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release



Fairfax House

YORK

The finest Georgian town house in England

Enter the world of luxury shopping at Fairfax House

Consuming Passions, Fairfax House's latest ground-breaking exhibition, shines the spotlight on shopping for luxury in the Georgian age, and the precious, expensive, and quintessentially luxurious commodities that caught the eye of wealthy 'polite society'.

Press call: Tuesday 26 May at 2.00pm: In advance of the exhibition opening, there will be a photo opportunity to preview some of the most luxurious and unusual objects on display.



Exploring the exotic array and wealth of luxury goods newly available to a society obsessed with consumption, *Consuming Passions* showcases some of the most sumptuous and luxurious objects bought and sold in the Georgian age: magnificent silver, lustrous silks and textiles, beautiful vessels to hold exotic tea, perfumes and wines, brightly-coloured wallpapers, delicate porcelain, handsome leather-bound books, and even medicines.

Superlatives abound in an exhibition that celebrates the richness of consumables that Georgian society had at its disposal. This was an age of wealth, industry and empire that saw consumerism – the appetite to acquire, possess, and display - become a social and economic phenomenon. Browsing for, selecting and purchasing goods was transformed into a pleasurable pursuit and indulgent social activity in its own right.

In the same way that 18th century shops specialised in creating enticing spaces for shoppers, so too does *Consuming Passions* bring together a lavish array of treasures epitomising the meaning of luxury; goods to furnish and decorate homes in the latest taste, to clothe and accessorise, to entertain, or simply satisfy a desire for novelty. A wealth of loan material has been assembled from an impressive array of over forty museums (such as the V&A, British Library, National Trust, The Goldsmiths Company, Jane Austen's House Chawton, The Wedgwood Museum), collections, libraries, private specialist collectors and some of Britain's longest-operating family businesses in existence – Floris Perfumers of London, Henry Poole & Co. of Saville Row, Fortnum and Mason and Whiteley's of Sheffield.



The exhibition includes important pieces of silver by some of the greatest names in silver and goldsmithing such as Paul de Lamerie, Fredrick Kandler, and Paul Storr,



including opulent wine coasters, tea caddies and snuff boxes. French silks have come from Lord Rothschild's collection at Waddesdon and no story of shopping would be complete without porcelain and particularly the name of Josiah Wedgwood – the savvy proponent of sophisticated shop display, merchandising and marketing tactics and techniques aimed at encouraging

customers to part with their money. *Consuming Passions* also pays homage to the greatest cabinetmaker of the age Thomas Chippendale with a rare first edition of the *Cabinetmaker's Director* and hand-carved and gilded wall borders from his workshop.

Yet alongside this glittering array are also some of the more unusual objects that will surprise and amuse – a set of false teeth made from ivory, a footman's royal livery in gold thread from the household of George III, a collar for a pet squirrel, a mammoth goldbeaters shop sign in the form of an arm, and even a miniature tea and coffee service exact in every detail in silver.



Looking beyond the luxury commodities produced to feed the insatiable appetite of Georgian consumerism *Consuming Passions* also explore the realm of shopping and the retail experiences and practices that took place



within the shops, warehouses and emporia of London and regional centres of Georgian Britain such as Bath and most especially York. Drawing on rich material such as trade cards, pattern books, samples and bills this exhibition looks at how the shopping practices of today were forged during this period. It reveals some of the objects involved in the dispensing, display and sale of

luxury items - apothecary jars (for opium), tea chest, tailor's scissors and yard stick and most beautiful of all pattern and swatch books filled with samples of fabrics.

In provincial centres like York, shopkeepers were keen to attract a wealthy and genteel clientele, and prided themselves on providing a sophisticated retail experience which included excellent service in well-appointed surroundings.

Consuming Passions capitalises on Fairfax House's location in the heart of York, and the indelible connection between shopping in this city then and now. The eighteenth century inhabitants of Fairfax House, Viscount Fairfax and his daughter Anne, were discerning shoppers and Fairfax House is fortunate to have a rich archive of bills and accounts to draw upon which highlights the Fairfaxes' relationship with the retailers and merchants of York. Georgian York was a thriving centre for polite society in northern England, offering a myriad of shops, services and retail-related trades including cabinet-makers, book and print sellers, tailors, mercers, haberdashers, furriers, glovers, linen drapers, hatters and hosiers.

Hannah Phillip, Director: 'What could be a more resonant and relevant topic to today than shopping? It is a world we are all familiar with and will recognise. The aim is that this exhibition will challenge the notion that our passion for shopping is a modern phenomenon and shows how its roots were actually firmly established in the 18th century'.

'This exhibition is a testament to the generosity of our lenders and Fairfax House's expanding partnerships with museums and collections from around the country. We are delighted to have the support of these museums which enables us to bring such





exciting and rarely seen objects to York and put these on public display, often for the first time’.

Fairfax House launches this major exhibition on **Thursday 28 May**. It will run through until the end of the year closing on **31 December**. A launch party and reception will be held on **Wednesday 27 May at 6.30pm** to acknowledge and thank all lenders and contributors to this exhibition.

For more information visit the website at www.fairfaxhouse.co.uk

Ends

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Editor's Notes

Lending Partners to *Consuming Passions* include:

The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries
Bath Library Services
The Bowes Museum
J.B. Priestly Library, University of Bradford
The British Dental Association
The British Library
Broadfield House Glass Museum
Burton Constable Foundation
The Chippendale Society
The Charles Norman Collection
Clarks Shoe Museum
College of Optometrists
Derby Museums
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The Fan Museum, Hélène Alexander Collection
Floris & Co, Ltd.
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The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths'
Hampshire Cultural Trust
Henry Poole & Co.
Jane Austen House Museum, Chawton, Hampshire
Antique Boxes, hyga.com

Kendal Town Council
Leeds Civic Hall
Leeds Museums and Galleries (Temple Newsam House)
The Ferrier Family of Norfolk
Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery
The Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York
The National Trust, Polesden Lacey
The Peter Jackson and Valerie Jackson Harris Collections
Spode Museum Trust
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Victoria & Albert Museum
V&A Museum of Childhood
Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection
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