



PRESS RELEASE

No: 129/2019

Date: 26th February 2019

Henry Cowper Watch Acquired by the Gibraltar National Museum

An 18th Century gold watch signed by Henry Cowper has been acquired at auction by the Gibraltar National Museum. There was significant interest in the piece but the museum was able to secure it for £5,334.

Henry Cowper is listed in the 1777 List of Inhabitants commissioned by General Boyd as a Goldsmith born in Gibraltar, yet the legacy by which he is probably best known locally is that he was the owner of the theatre in what is now Cornwall's Parade which gave the area its Spanish name of La Calle Comedia. He left Gibraltar during the Great Siege, and in March 1783 was one of the signatories of a "Humble Petition and Memorial of the Inhabitants and Proprietors of Houses in the Town of Gibraltar" to the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury, which applied for compensation for the losses during the siege. He died in Gibraltar on 10 September 1803 and was reported in *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle* for 1803 as having been the oldest British Inhabitant at the time.

However, his work as a goldsmith and silversmith is well known in the antiques world, and his work is highly sought after together with that of John Catton.

The outer case of the watch bears testament to having been used regularly on the back where it would have been in contact with the owner's clothing, and where the gilt has worn away. While the outer case is embossed with classical figures surrounded by the typical C-scrolls of the 18th century, and the elegant white enamelled dial bears Arabic and Roman numerals, it is the inside with the intricate movements inscribed Henry (Henry Cowper) Gibraltar that are the most beautiful.

It is the policy of the Gibraltar National Museum to acquire, wherever possible, items of heritage value to Gibraltar. Repatriation is possible by a number of means, purchase at auction being one option available. The intention is to exhibit this new acquisition for the first time at this year's Museum Open Day on Saturday 18th May.