

# Fake or Fortune comes to Barnsley Museums

Tracey Hebron, Barnsley Museums Collection clerk tells us about some very special visitors who have been filming on site at Barnsley Museums.

In December 2020 we had a very notable visit from the BBC One programme 'Fake or Fortune'. Philip Mould and a television crew came to the Cooper Gallery on Church Street to look at some sketches purchased by Samuel Joshua Cooper. They also visited Barnsley archives in the Town Hall to view Mr Cooper's notebook, all as part of an investigation into a work which is possibly by the French artist Jean Leon Gerome.

'Fake or Fortune' is now in its ninth series and follows art expert, Philip Mould and presenter, Fiona Bruce as they investigate thrilling cases of art world mystery. It has audiences in the United Kingdom of over 5 million and many more tuning in internationally. Mould and Bruce travel the world tracking down the provenance of works of art with the aim of proving their authenticity. Helped by evidence from family collections, museums and archives, the work is then presented to the relevant authorities for the final verdict.



TV presenter Philip Mould filming in the museum stores.

We have been keeping this investigation and our part on the show a secret for well over a year. The show first contacted us at the beginning of 2020 and we have been working closely with the team virtually during lockdown. Once restrictions were lifted, we were thrilled to welcome the team on site. We are now excited to reveal that the show has now aired (no spoilers here) but can still be found on iplayer. We thought we would introduce you to the artist and his works that were the reason the show came to Barnsley Museums.



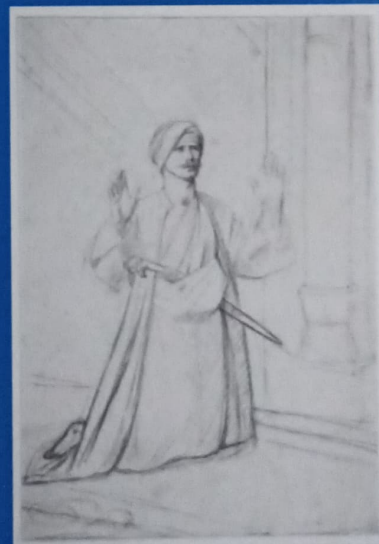
**Tracey Hebron**

COLLECTION CLERK, Barnsley Museums

## The artist

Samuel Joshua Cooper and his wife Fanny were a wealthy couple from Barnsley who bought paintings and sculptures on their travels across Europe. Each spring, from 1873 onwards they would travel to Paris for two months. The receipts and notebooks that they kept show that they purchased pictures, sculpture and furniture. The paintings they collected formed the start of the Cooper Gallery collection. The artworks included sketches by French artist Jean-Leon Gerome.

Gerome was born on 11 May 1824 in Vesoul in the Eastern region of France known as the Franche-Comte. Gerome enjoyed the rural life as a child. At 16 he persuaded his father to let him try his hand at becoming a painter, his father gave him permission to study with Paul Delaroche in Paris on a trial basis, this was the beginning of his lifelong passion for art. In 1843 Gerome moved to Italy. He was interested in the ruins of Pompeii and eventually began to incorporate many design elements of the ancient Roman fresco styles in to his paintings. His work received very positive critical attention and he went on to submit work for the Prix de Rome competition. In 1853 Gerome travelled to Istanbul with Edmond Got, in preparation for a large project called The Age of Augustus. There he discovered the world of the Middle East. From that date forward he studied classical themes in art to improve his own style of painting.



Sketch thought to be by French artist Jean-Leon Gerome ©Barnsley Museums, Trustees of the Cooper Gallery.

The late 1850s was a period when Gerome's work brought him public success. He was honoured to design interiors for Prince Napoleon Jerome Bonaparte's Paris home. Then in 1861 he received a commission to paint interiors and paintings for the palace at Versailles. Later he was appointed a professor of painting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a position he would hold for thirty-nine years. He continued to create his own work alongside teaching. In the late 1870s he surprised many by moving into sculptural work. He exhibited a large bronze of a gladiator at the 1878 salon. He died on 10 January 1904 in Paris, just short of his 80th birthday.