

Hannah Fox, Bowes Museum: *Our Vision for the Future*

Hannah Fox, new Executive Director of the Bowes Museum, started her talk with a description of her childhood and working background and how it relates to her new role.

Born in North Wales, she experienced a transient childhood which ended in a family breakdown, and by the age of 17, she was truly unhappy. Walking out of an unfinished English A-Level exam changed her life. A teacher, Vernon, asked her a simple question: 'What do you need?' This enquiry focused her not on what 'other people' provided or considered acceptable, but on finding out who she was and what she wanted out of life. She travelled and worked in Europe whilst her school art teacher submitted her art work to the A-Level Board to gain her a certificate and subsequently a place at University of Derby, despite her lack of qualifications.

She went on to work in advertising and then as a consultant and designer for educational providers, hospitals, etc. She was involved in strategic programmes such as *Design Thinking* with people who want to affect change. Put simply, *Design Thinking* identifies the problems you wish to solve before searching for solutions.

This appears to be the strategy that she is employing at the Bowes Museum and they are currently in the feasibility phase although the projected strategy reaches 2092. The focus is on strengthening foundations, making the museum financially robust, and on purpose-led provision for international and regional visitors so that their experience is a personal one - they can be involved and be themselves at the museum. For example, they are rethinking how some areas might encompass people's need to express themselves and make noise. The new management team are also re-appraising the patchwork investment in building works to maximum impact; the very spacious, prominent and accessible grade-listed gatehouses' refurbishment will cost between £750,000 to £1 million.

Like most museums, they have about 5-7% of their acquisitions on display, and they are discovering untold stories in their archive. Josephine Bowes was a significant painter in her own right, influenced by impressionist artwork before the 1st Impressionist Exhibition in 1874, the year she died. The museum receives frequent requests for loans of her and other's work. Hannah wishes to expand the loan system between museums to a two-way one so that major pieces are on display at the Bowes. She has also discovered an archived painting by Caterina Van Hemessen, the first artist to produce a self-portrait of an artist at work at the easel.

Celia Chapple