

The Millais Circle

An invitation to join supporters in bringing Millais home to Perth
2027 — 2029



CULTURE
PERTH & KINROSS

Perth Art Gallery
Perth & Kinross

An invitation

In 2029 Perth Art Gallery will stage a major exhibition devoted to John Everett Millais.

It will represent the most significant exhibition of his work in Scotland, taking place in the city where his life changed course. We are inviting you to join us in making this happen.

The Millais Circle is not a membership scheme. It is a small group of supporters who will fund the exhibition and follow it being made — from the first loan requests to the moment the doors open. Over three years you will have the opportunity to join the curators at key moments as the show takes shape, hear which artworks we are persuading and why, see conservation work in progress, and walk through the finished galleries before anyone else.

“It seems appropriate that this collection finds its home in Perth, where my great-grandparents’ story began.”

Sir Geoffroy Millais



The Millais family, 1880

Why Perth?

Millais was a child prodigy and founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the youngest ever student admitted to the Royal Academy Schools, and by the end of his life its President. Alongside his fellow Brothers he re-invigorated British art in the mid-nineteenth century, overturning settled ideas about what a painting should depict, how it should be composed and how it should be made. He went on to become one of the most successful figurative, portrait, and landscape painters of his age.

He was also, for four decades, a Perthshire painter.

Born in Perth, Effie Gray was the daughter of the prominent Grays family of Bowerswell, an estate located above the town on Kinnoull Hill. It was in the drawing room at Bowerswell, in 1855, that she married Millais after the annulment of her marriage to John Ruskin, and the couple made their first home nearby at Annat Lodge. Effie is buried at Kinnoull Churchyard cemetery.

Look closely at the masterpieces from these those early married years and Perth is everywhere in them. *The Vale of Rest* (1858–9, Tate) sets two nuns in a twilight composite of the Bowerswell garden and Kinnoull Churchyard. *A Dream of the Past: Sir Isumbras at the Ford* (1857, Lady Lever Art Gallery) brings its ageing knight across the river beneath the old Bridge of Earn, long since demolished. For *Autumn Leaves* (1855–6, Manchester Art Gallery), Millais drew his sitters from his own family and local Perth children.

As his career matured Millais turned increasingly to landscape, and his landscape was Perthshire. For years he came north between August and January to paint, shoot and fish around Dunkeld and Dalguise, and the canvases that emerged from those seasons — wild, cold, unsentimental views of the Tay and the country around it - are among the most original works he ever produced.

The best known is *Chill October* (1870), painted on a backwater of the Tay near Kinfauns. Millais worked from a platform moored among the rushes, and left the canvas each night in a railwayman's hut. When it was shown in London priced at several hundred pounds, the porter who had helped him carry it is said to have remarked that he would not have given half a crown for it. Others saw more: Vincent van Gogh kept a reproduction of the painting, and for more than half a century, from 1937 to 1990, it hung on loan at Perth Museum and Art Gallery before selling at auction for what was then a world record for the artist.

Why Perth?

Perth is where the story comes full circle. The city's collection includes *Portrait of Effie* (1873), *Waking* (1865) and Millais' portrait of Sir Robert Pullar (1896), the celebrated Perth businessman, commissioned by public subscription to mark his knighthood. It marked the last painting Millais completed before his death. From his wedding day to his final canvas, Perth runs through the whole of his working life.

In 2025 Perth Art Gallery received the collection of Sir Geoffroy Millais, the couple's great-grandson, on long-term loan; more than three hundred works and personal objects, most unseen in public for thirty years. Including drawings made when Millais was seven, early oils, and letters.

Perth is uniquely placed to tell this story. Through its collections, connections and history, the 2029 exhibition will offer a perspective that cannot be found anywhere else. That is what the exhibition will do, and that is why Millais Circle exists: to help make it possible.



Bowerswell House, Kinnoull, Perthshire

Birth place of Effie Gray (1828) and the location of the wedding between Effie and JE Millais (1855)

The Circle

Members of the Millais Circle commit over three years — 2027, 2028 and 2029 — with the Circle closing on the day the exhibition opens. You may give in a single gift or in three annual instalments.

Millais Circle	<p><i>£3,000 in total £1,000 a year for three years</i></p> <p><i>Benefits represent a value of £70 with the remainder eligible for Gift Aid</i></p>	<p>A private curatorial briefing each year as the exhibition takes shape in Perthshire</p> <p>Two places to view the exhibition privately shortly before the opening night private view</p> <p>Your name among the Millais Circle in the catalogue</p> <p>A copy of the catalogue</p> <p>A named contact in the Development Team</p>
Millais Circle Founder	<p><i>£10,000 in total £3,333 a year for three years</i></p> <p><i>Benefits represent a value of £290 with the remainder eligible for Gift Aid</i></p>	<p>All of the above, and:</p> <p>Two places at the Circle dinner with the exhibition's curators</p> <p>Four places to view the exhibition privately shortly before the opening night private view</p> <p>A private curator-led walkthrough of the exhibition at a time to suit your party (separate to opening night)</p> <p>Your name credited individually alongside the Circle</p>
Millais Circle Commissioner	<p><i>£25,000+ in total From £8,333 a year for three years</i></p> <p><i>Benefits represent a value of £290 with the remainder eligible for Gift Aid</i></p>	<p>All of the above, with the additional support directly enabling the exhibition, and:</p> <p>Your name credited as one of the Commissioners of the exhibition.</p>

Gifts to the Circle are restricted to the exhibition and its accompanying programme. If you are a UK taxpayer we can claim Gift Aid. US Taxpayers can support the Millais circle via CAF America and by recommending Culture Perth and Kinross as your Scottish charity.

Three years

The Circle is designed around the making of the exhibition rather than around a list of benefits. Each year has its own character.

2027	The founding briefing. The curatorial argument as it currently stands, the Perth and Effie Gray material, and the loans we intend to pursue. The Circle is formed and named.
2028	Loans and conservation. What has been secured, what is still being negotiated, what is being worked on and why. The Circle are invited to spend a day in Millais’ Perthshire.
2029	Install and open. The Founders’ dinner with the curators, a walkthrough of the finished galleries before the public are admitted, and opening night.

Circle members will always hear news of the exhibition before it is announced publicly.



A collection of Millais’ personal belongings, currently exhibited at Perth Art Gallery

Joining the Circle

Places are offered by invitation and are limited. If you would like to join, or simply to talk it through first, please contact:

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Perth Museum and Perth Art Gallery are managed by Culture Perth and Kinross, a Scottish charity (SC046353), AK Bell Library, 2–8 York Place, Perth, PH2 8EP.

