

COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT: 1926

2026 is a special year for Grundy Art Gallery and for Blackpool as a town. Not only is it 115 years since the Grundy opened its doors, but it is 150 years since Blackpool was incorporated as a Borough and it is 100 years since The 1926 Blackpool Jubilee, which celebrated the anniversary of Blackpool's incorporation with a civic parade and the opening of the award-winning Stanley Park.

The Grundy Art Gallery is funded to be a contemporary art gallery, and the collection is not on permanent display. Instead, throughout the year Collection Spotlight Exhibitions and Grundy Collection Engagement activity, provide an opportunity to bring items from the Collection to light and to tell and reinterpret their stories from a contemporary perspective.

The Grundy's first Collection Spotlight exhibition of 2026 takes the year 1926 as its theme and marks the milestone moments outlined above with a display of paintings brought into The Grundy Art Gallery Collection in 1926 alongside items on loan from the SHOWTOWN History Centre that relate to civic ceremony.

"The Illustrated Catalogue of the Permanent Collection in The Grundy Art Gallery" was published by "The Blackpool Corporation Library and Art Gallery Committee" in 1926. The purpose of the publication was to contribute to the 'Celebrations of the Jubilee Year' and to 'give Art its appropriate place in the corporate life of the Borough'.

The publication, a copy of which is presented here, documents all the paintings donated to or purchased by The Grundy Art Gallery in 1926.

Presented here in Gallery 1 are those paintings bought by Blackpool Corporation in 1926 in celebration of the Jubilee Year.

Including depictions of unspoilt coastal and riverside scenes, classical music and stories of mutiny and scandal, these paintings tell us something about the preoccupations of painters as well as the concerns of society at this time. While, upper classes are entertained by concerts in their living rooms, those working in their service entertain themselves with stories of scandal and intrigue. While the expansion of the railways and the increase in sailing routes at this time are providing greater access to faraway lands, concerns also abound about the bad faith actors who might be met on route, from sea-faring pirates to wayward ship hands inciting rebellion.

In the same way that we can 'read' these paintings to consider what messages they might be sending out into the world, the items on display from SHOWTOWN History Centre show the image that Blackpool was projecting during its Jubilee Year. From being a town 'Incorporated With Health and Happiness', to one driven by its motto of 'Progress', these items illustrate a Blackpool that is committed to celebrating the present, but with eyes firmly set on the future.