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Education Collaboration

Harris Museum uses numismatics to teach money-management skills.

The Harris Museum & Art Gallery in Preston, Lancashire, England, is using its extensive collection of coins, coupled with financial support from Friends of the Harris Museum & Art Gallery and the Esme Fairburn Collections Fund, to educate youngsters about the nuances of finance. Known as “Money Matters,” the project is a joint venture between the museum, the Debt Advice Foundation and its subsidiary Debt-Aware, a nonprofit that teaches primary-school students about money management.

“The Money Matters project has transformed the way the Harris Museum & Art Gallery uses its 12,500-item numismatic collection,” says Harris Museum History Curator James Arnold. As part of the innovative program, students study a fictional “money diary” written and researched by university students that describes the lives of two Preston families, one in 1815 and the other in 2015. “It brings into focus that our experiences of using money today...are common across centuries,” says Arnold. Students are introduced to a wide variety of numismatic objects from the museum’s collection, including 19th-century British pre-decimal pennies, which they are allowed to handle to gain a sense of the feel and size of the currency featured in the diary, and ancient Roman coinage.

The museum also is presenting a wide variety of exhibits that highlight numismatic rarities from its collection, such as a Viking silver specimen from the Cuerdale Hoard and money from the 1920s Weimar Republic. Arnold hopes the program and displays will continue to teach children the importance of numismatics from historical and financial perspectives.

To learn more about the Money Matters project and the Harris Museum’s numismatic holdings, visit www.harrismuseum.org.uk.