

Rare find at the Central Library



A rare Japanese handscroll painting, dating back to the early 1700s, has been discovered in the special collections of Edinburgh's Central Library.

Gifted to Edinburgh City Libraries in the 1940s by a relative of Henry Dyer, a Scottish engineer who played a major part in the industrialisation of Japan, the scroll has only recently been realised to be of particular significance.

Now Edinburgh City Libraries and National Museums Scotland have submitted a joint application to the Sumitomo Foundation for conservation funding with the result expected in March.

Councillor Richard Lewis, the city's Culture and Sport Convener, said: "For many decades this scroll has been held in the Central Library special collections without anyone realising its true significance. It is only through the passion of our library staff and the knowledge of National Museums Scotland experts that this beautiful work has been brought to light. If we are successful in getting funding to restore this painting to its former glory, then we are very much hoping that it can go on display to the public in Edinburgh at a later date."

The scroll, by Japanese painter Furuyama Moromasa, is over 44ft in length and depicts an extended street scene in 18th century Edo, or Tokyo, showing the shops and theatres and domestic detail of life at that time.

Two of Furuyama Moromasa's paintings are currently held by the British Museum, but this is thought to be the largest of his works discovered anywhere in the world.

Dr Rosina Buckland, Senior Curator of National Museums Scotland's Japanese collections, has worked with Edinburgh City Libraries to help interpret the scroll using her knowledge of the period.

She said: "This handscroll is a fascinating and important work. It presents a wealth of amusing and entertaining scenes of life in Edo (today's Tokyo) around 1700, as well as plentiful information on the lively world of the popular theatre, and is the only known large handscroll painting by this artist.

"We very much hope that our funding application for specialist conservation work will be successful, so that the painting can be enjoyed by many people in Scotland, and beyond."