

Prince Charles and the queen of Spain open Bishop Auckland gallery

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The Prince of Wales greeted Queen Letizia of Spain as she arrives for a visit to Auckland Castle

Queen Letizia of Spain has joined the Prince of Wales to open a new art gallery in Bishop Auckland.

Prince Charles, 73, and the queen, 49, visited Auckland Castle, which is at the centre of an ambitious project funded by a local philanthropist.

The Auckland Project, founded by Jonathan and Jane Ruffer, has increased tourism to the County Durham town through art, faith and heritage.

The queen viewed life-sized works by Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbaran.



Spain's Queen Letizia visit Auckland Castle to view the Francisco de Zurbaran art collection

Zurbaran's 13 paintings date from the 17th Century and hang in the Long Dining Room of Auckland Castle, which is one of Europe's best-preserved bishop's palaces.

Once home to the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham, the 900-year-old building has recently reopened after undergoing major conservation work, which has transformed its state rooms back to their original Georgian Gothic splendour.



Queen Letizia and Prince Charles took time to view the Baroque paintings in Auckland Castle

Zurbaran's Baroque-era paintings of Jacob and His Twelve Sons were originally brought by Bishop Trevor in 1756.

They were saved in 2011 when Mr Ruffer donated £15m to the Church of England, which meant the artworks could stay in the castle.

Since then Mr Ruffer had financed galleries, gardens, parks and the outdoor Kynren historical re-enactment shows.

But he has since pulled the plug on backing the Auckland Project because of a dispute with Durham County Council.



Prince Charles and Queen Letizia view the Spanish Art Gallery

The Spanish Art Gallery is the only space in the UK dedicated to Spanish art and houses paintings including The Holy Family by El Greco and Cherubs Scattering Flowers by Bartolome Esteban Murillo.

Auckland Project volunteer Ann Turnbull, from Crook, County Durham, greeted the queen and remarked: "I thought she was wonderful, very classy and beautiful.

"I said 'welcome to Bishop Auckland' and she said the gallery was wonderful."

Rafa de Miguel, a reporter for Spanish newspaper El Pais which is covering the royal visit, said: "It is very impressive, the whole exhibition is wonderful."

It was Queen Letizia's first visit to Bishop Auckland, although the Prince has been before and has met Mr Ruffer several times.



The Queen Letizia spoke with schoolchildren after visit to the Spanish Art Gallery in Bishop Auckland.