

## Victorian Dramas

### History to capture the popular imagination.

The paintings and objects in this room show the Victorian fascination with the past. History here unfolds like a story with narratives drawn from novels and plays as well as immensely popular history books. The themes chosen present issues and dilemmas that would have been relevant to contemporary life: heroism, morality, religion, democracy and monarchy.

Artists carefully researched costume and setting as accurate detail helped to make scenes seem real. Viewers could feel touched by events long gone, drawn in by the artist's choice of dramatic moment. Subjects like *The Chariot Race* and *Funeral of a Viking* involve the viewer directly by putting them 'in the picture'. Devices like this are forerunners of the cinematic image.

At exhibitions, dramatic history was a crowd-puller, increasing popularity and sales. Capitalising on this, sentimental or domestic scenes were dressed up using props and costume from the past. These sold in large numbers as cheap prints: a hint of history made some artists extremely wealthy.