



NEWS RELEASE: 17/04/07

**HRH THE PRINCESS ROYAL TO OPEN MAJOR SLAVE TRADE EXHIBITION
ON MONDAY 23RD APRIL**

'Breaking the Chains', a landmark exhibition about Britain and the slave trade, is to be opened by HRH The Princess Royal at the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum on Monday 23rd April 2007. The exhibition is the centrepiece of Bristol's programme to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.

'Breaking the Chains' has been developed in partnership with Bristol City Council's Museums, Galleries and Archives and is supported by a grant of £770,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The displays, contained within six themed galleries, use authentic artefacts, film, music, photography, video and personal testimonies to tell the story of Britain's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The entire third floor of the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum is devoted to the exhibition.

Exhibition facts and figures:

- 'Breaking the Chains' has cost approximately £1 million
- It has six galleries covering 500 square metres of exhibition space
- There are 260 authentic artefacts sourced from institutions and collections around the world
- The exhibition contains eight interactive stations with touchscreen technology and hands-on displays

- There are eighteen new and uncensored filmed artistic responses to the bicentenary, with themes ranging from Edward Colston, race relations in Bristol, identity, wealth & poverty and people trafficking.

Britain and the slave trade:

- Between 1450 and 1850 over 10 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean – with another 10 million perishing in the process of capture
- British ships carried over 3 million Africans to slavery in the Americas between 1662 and 1807
- Over 2000 slave voyages left Bristol alone between 1698 and 1807, by which time over 60% of the city's trade was directly related to slavery
- Over 400,000 Britons signed petitions against the slave trade in the 1790s, a greater number than could vote
- British plantation owners were granted £20 million (worth billions at today's prices) in compensation for the loss of their slaves following emancipation in the 1830s

'Breaking the Chains' examines what made the Transatlantic Slave Trade so much more destructive than previous forms of slavery. It focuses on the damage the trade inflicted on relationships between Africans and Europeans, the brutal reality of the Atlantic Crossing and plantation life in the Caribbean. It charts the emergence of what became the world's first mass human right's movement and shows how, combined with continual resistance and rebellion by enslaved Africans, abolition was achieved. It presents the many heroes, both black and white, who have fought and continue to fight against all forms of slavery.

Examples of artefacts include:

- Child's dress made from the bark of a tree by Jamaican slaves in 1820
- Early 19th century wooden shackles manufactured for use on children
- Bill of sale for the purchase of an enslaved African in 1749 accompanied by a display of trade items representing the value of one human being

- Sculptures representing Caribbean culture and survival by the internationally celebrated Jamaican-born artist Ronald Moody
- Pro-emancipation stained glass window made in the early 19th century by a West Country Quaker

The exhibition aims to challenge our perception of the slave trade and its legacy. Based on community consultation many of the displays incorporate new ways of interpreting the evidence, particularly through the use of music and oral history using interactive stations. Newly commissioned music illustrates the use of traditional African instruments and a unique music interactive traces the musical journey from West Africa via the Caribbean to today's UK Dancehall sound.

The Me Deya film theatre acts as the finale to the exhibition offering a multimedia gallery of uncensored artistic responses to the contemporary legacy of the slave trade and attempts to commemorate this year's bicentenary. Visitors are then invited to record their own audio-visual response to the exhibition in an accompanying vox box installation.

A special learning pack is being developed to help families visiting the exhibition, including trails and activity sheets. 'Breaking the Chains' is also supported by an extensive programme of educational and community events. A full curriculum-based education pack for schools is now available. Elements of the galleries, and the public response to them, will then form the basis of a permanent display within the new Museum of Bristol, scheduled to open in 2009.

The exhibition will run for two years. Entry is included with normal Museum admission. All full paying visitors are eligible for a free Annual Pass allowing unlimited Museum re-entry for one year.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

See supporting statements below. For the full press pack including images, audio visual material and details of how to view the exhibition in advance, please contact the Press Office:

Lucy Edwards 0117 925 4980, Ext. 230 (Mobile 07977 50 66 55)
lucy.edwards@empiremuseum.co.uk

Feisal Khalif 0117 925 4980, Ext. 204 (Mobile 07751 111594)
feisal.khalif@empiremuseum.co.uk

Please note, due to the sensitivity surrounding the major bicentenary events we are required to ask that all press and media wishing to attend the official Royal opening of the exhibition notify the Museum press office by Friday 20th April. Official press accreditation must be presented on the day.

Photo Opportunities

Please contact the Press office for details of photo opportunities on the day and relevant advice on protocol.

Supporting statements:

"This exhibition tells us much about Britain - about its image of itself and its impact on the world. It bears witness too to the role, which enslaved Africans played in their own liberation and to the power of popular campaigning against injustice."

Madge Dresser F.R.Hist.S., School of History, University of the West of England

"The 'Breaking the Chains' exhibition is the flagship for this year's commemorations. It will play a very important role in informing people about slavery and what it meant. Thanks must go to all those who have worked hard putting it together to achieve this outstanding exhibition."

Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Peter Abraham

"This exhibition on the impact that transatlantic slavery had on Bristol and the rest of the country during the 17th and 18th centuries is a dire reminder of the level of man's inhumanity to man for the sake of wealth and power. 'Breaking the Chains' is not an exhibition devoted to the promotion of victimhood of millions of enslaved Africans two hundred years ago, many who fought for their freedom at every opportunity against their slave masters. The exhibition provides a unique opportunity and challenge to the

citizens of Bristol, whatever their race or cultural background, to revisit the City's history and the price paid in terror, humiliation and death.

I hope every Bristolian, schoolchild and college student makes the effort to visit the exhibition in a determined effort to gain a clear vision of the damaging legacy transatlantic slavery has left us with today."

Paul Stephenson, President of the Bristol West Indian Parents Friends Association. Mr Stephenson is also a member of the Community Advisory Group for the development of 'Breaking the Chains'. He led the 1963 boycott of Bristol's buses, which was at that time was operating a colour bar.

"The opening of 'Breaking the Chains', in the year of the Museum's fifth anniversary, is a tremendous achievement by the small Museum staff and the dozens of community and academic advisors in response to the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade on behalf of the city of Bristol and the South West. The Museum Trust is proud of its contribution in leading the way in the presentation of 'difficult histories'."

Dr Gareth Griffiths, Director, British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

An independent museum and a registered charity, the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum is committed to examining the evidence of Britain's colonial history and to exploring its present-day legacy. Since opening its permanent galleries in 2002 it has earned numerous awards including a nomination for European Museum of the Year. www.empiremuseum.co.uk



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