

News Release: 18th September 2006

MAJOR BRISTOL EXHIBITION ON THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE AWARDED LOTTERY FUNDING

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has today announced that it is to support an exhibition at the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum in Bristol on the subject of the slave trade and its abolition. The grant of £770,000 will enable Bristol to make a significant contribution to an international programme of events marking the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007.

The exhibition, 'Breaking the Chains', is being developed by the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum in partnership with Bristol City Council's Museums, Galleries and Archives Service. It will open in Spring 2007 as the centrepiece of Bristol's commemoration activities and act as the principal focus for the anniversary in the South West of England. The exhibition will run for two years.

The entire third floor of the Museum, approximately 500 square metres, will be devoted to the exhibition. Bold and vivid displays will tell the shocking and brutal story of Britain's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It will pay tribute both to the courage and resilience of those who were enslaved, and the tireless campaigning of ordinary British people, in bringing legally sanctioned slavery to an end.

The exhibition will also focus on how forms of slavery continue in the present day, and how the legacies of the Transatlantic Trade continue to play themselves out in modern society. The Museum aims to create an exhibition whose impact will be felt

beyond 2007 by conveying an understanding of an important chapter in British and world history that is still relevant today.

'Breaking the Chains' will be supported by an extensive programme of educational and community events. 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.

- 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.
- Britain's official involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was ended in 1807 after years of protest by the Abolitionist movement.

Over five hundred people attended a public debate at the British Empire & Commonwealth in May on the subject of Bristol's role in the slave trade and several thousand more joined in associated local television and radio polls.

Supporting statements

" The decision of the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the exhibition 'Breaking the Chains' commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, at the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, is wonderful news. The support and hard work put into the project by Bristol City Council, Bristolians and many people throughout the country over the past year has now been rewarded. This important episode of our past will in Bristol now be marked by a major exhibition and numerous education and community projects running throughout the year."

Dr Gareth Griffiths, Director, British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

“This exhibition will give local people and visitors a real insight to Bristol’s close ties with the slave trade that had such a big impact on the city economically and socially. Reminders of slavery can be seen today in Bristol’s buildings, street names and traditions, and the exhibition will unveil what was a key period in the city’s past for everyone to learn about.”

Adrian Tinniswood, South West Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund

“The support by HLF in establishing an international exhibition on slavery and its impact on this country, and in particular Bristol is tremendous news. It will allow Bristolians to revisit their city’s history and its complicity with the slave trade. The exhibition will challenge today’s perception of what slavery meant both to the city and the enslaved Africans, whose descendants are contributing so much to the everyday life of Bristol. It will be of huge educational benefit for all citizens of Bristol, regardless of their race, colour or culture.”

Paul Stephenson, Honorary President of the Bristol West Indian Parents and Friends Association

“It is excellent news that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded the whole grant in support of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum’s 2007 Exhibition to commemorate the bicentenary of the Parliamentary Act to abolish the Transatlantic slave trade. This Exhibition in Bristol, which was a major transatlantic slaving port, will explore the wider contexts of the parliamentary abolition of the slave trade that enmeshed Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. A major contribution of the Exhibition, which is reinforced by extensive historical and social science research, will be to highlight the rich cultures re-created by enslaved Africans and their descendants that have endured into the twenty-first century.”

Dr Jean Besson, Reader in Anthropology, Goldsmiths College, University of London and author of *Martha Brae’s Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-building in Jamaica* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2002).

"The HLF has made a wise investment in the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, which is the leading institution of its kind in the world. This Bicentenary exhibition will make an important, perhaps even enduring, impact on the cultural life of the nation in general, and Bristol and its region in particular."

Dr Richard Drayton, Senior Lecturer in Imperial History at the University of Cambridge

Press Conference

Time: Monday 10am

Date: 18th September 2006

Place: British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, Station Approach, Temple Meads, Bristol

Key spokespersons will be available for interview, including:

- Dr Gareth Griffiths, Director, British Empire & Commonwealth Museum
- Anne Lineen, Exhibition Project Manager, British Empire & Commonwealth Museum
- Adrian Tinniswood, South West Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund
- Julie Finch, Director, Museum of Bristol
- Paul Stephenson, Honorary President of the Bristol West Indian Parents and Friends Association

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Images relating to the Exhibitions are available for download from:
<http://www.empiremuseum.co.uk/downloads/slavery/slaveryimages.zip>

Audio extracts from 'Voices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade' are available for download from:
<http://www.empiremuseum.co.uk/downloads/slavery/slaveryaudio.zip>

Related links

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum
www.empiremuseum.co.uk

Bristol City Council Museums, Galleries and Archives Bristol City
www.bristol-city.gov.uk/museums

Heritage Lottery Fund
www.hlf.org.uk