

1 Brass plaque of Agban, the Ezomo



There was no written language in Ancient Benin, instead, brass plaques were decorated with beautiful symbols designed to tell stories and give extra meaning. This plaque shows Agban, a legendary army Ezomo (Deputy Commander), who declared war on the sky. Agban is surrounded by water hyacinth flowers. These show us that Olokun, god of the waters, supports him.

2 Brass plaque of Oba Orhogbua



This plaque reminds people of Oba (king) Orhogbua's God-given power. He is holding the royal ancestral staff and wearing coral, a material supposedly won from the god Olokun by an ancient Oba. Crocodiles, Olokun's water policemen, surround and protect the Oba, showing his strength.

3 Brass plaque of Oko'Oba



These plaques were displayed around the Oba's palace, so often show scenes of official business. Here, a war chief and a priest are presenting a box called an *ekpokin* to the Oba. *Ekpokins* were filled with soil from a captured land or even an enemy's head!

4 Manilla



Manillas are one of the oldest forms of money in the world. They were brought to West Africa by European merchants who traded them for goods. In Benin, brass manillas were used to make plaques. They were melted-down and poured into clay moulds as part of the 'lost-wax process'.

5 Brass plaque of Uwangué Osokhirikpa



The accessories and clothing worn by these people help us to identify them. Behind Chief Uwangué, Portuguese traders wear tall hats and one carries a brass manilla. The Chief is stretching-out the right hand of friendship, what might this tell us?

6 Brass figure of a cockerel



Statues of cockerels or 'Ebon', were placed on the altar of a dead Queen Mother (Iyoba). The Iyoba was believed to have strong magical powers that could influence her son's decisions and so, once he became Oba, she was never allowed to see him again.

7 Ceremonial paddle

This carved wooden paddle, or *ovbevebe*, might have been used by priests to chase away evil, and to protect the Oba. Whilst the Oba may have owned some wooden things, royal objects were usually made from everlasting materials like brass.



8 Ivory staff of office



A staff of office is held to identify an important person. This staff would have been carried by the head executioner (or his attendant). The carved figure on top of this staff is an executioner, and is wearing coral beads to show his importance. He also carries a bell, rung to announce executions, and a sword.

9 Elephant skull and tusk

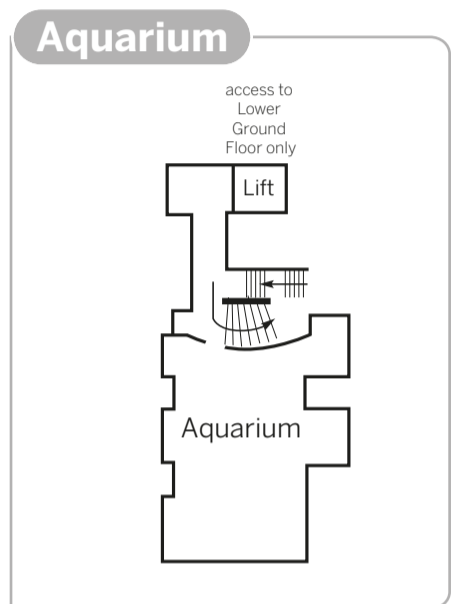
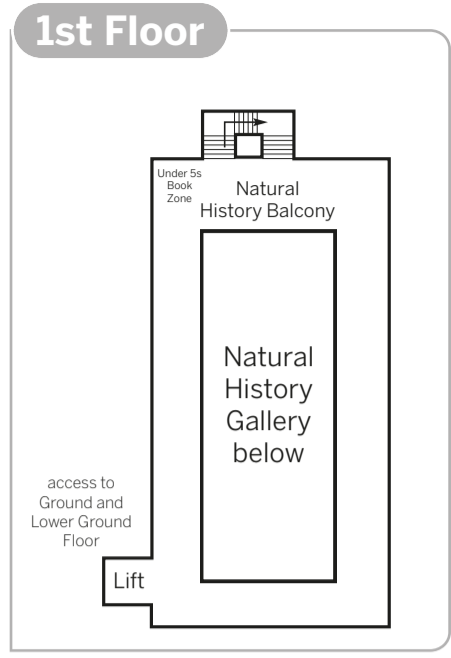
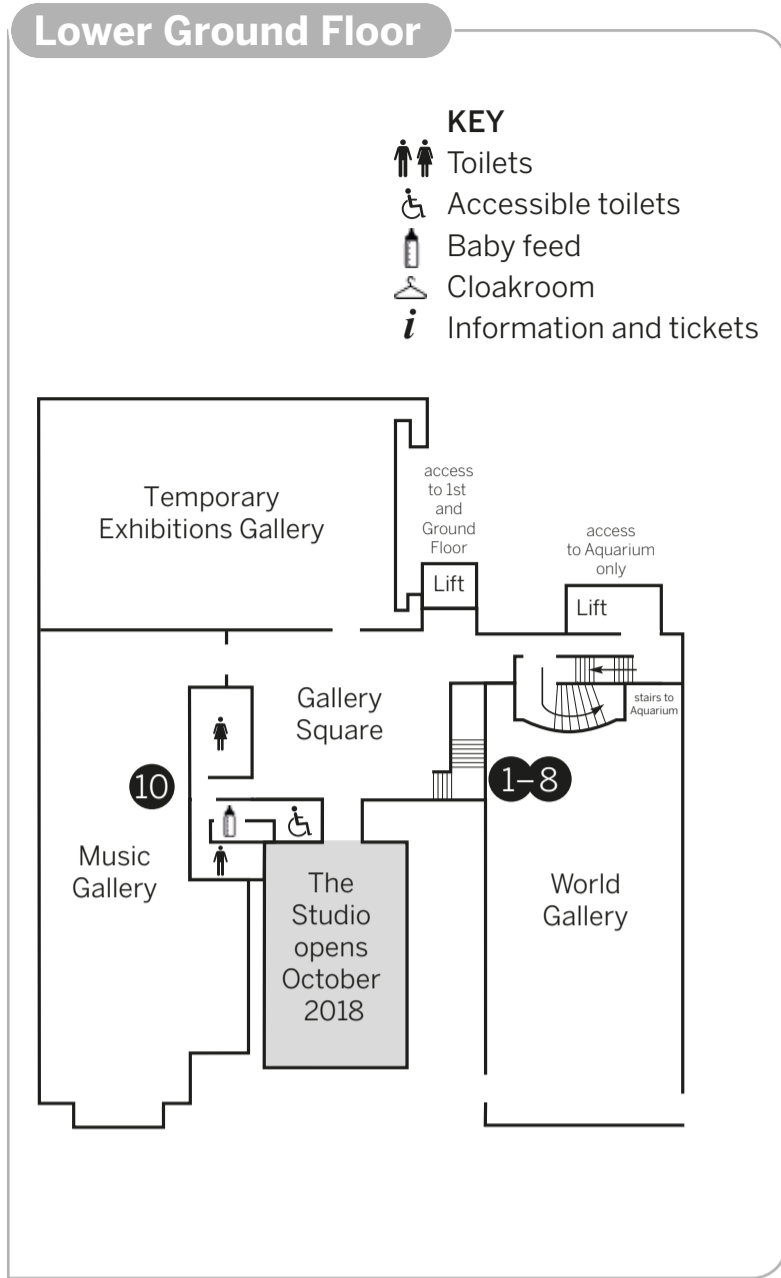
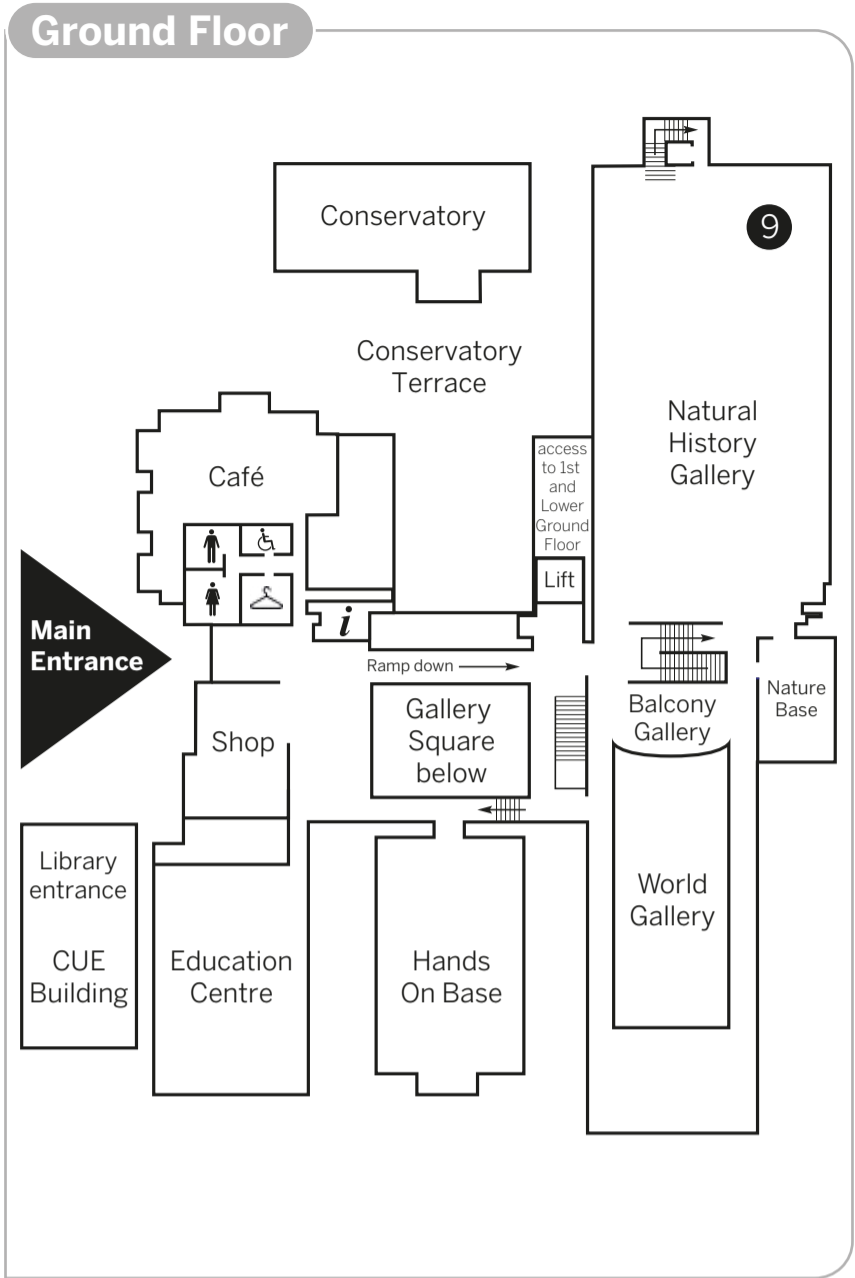


In Ancient Benin, elephant ivory was considered a royal material. Every time an elephant was killed, one of its tusks had to be given to the Oba, and the other offered to him for purchase. This gave the Oba control of the booming ivory trade. Coral was also a royal material, can you find some in this gallery?

10 Clapper bell



The Benin army's soldiers wore these heavy brass bells around their necks. As they marched, the clanging sound would give the soldiers courage whilst intimidating enemy armies! Side-blown horns were also played by soldiers; can you find one in the Music Gallery?



ANCIENT BENIN OBJECTS

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