

For immediate release

Issued 8 August 2022



## **Horniman to return ownership of Benin bronzes to Nigeria**

The Horniman Museum and Gardens has agreed to return ownership of its Benin bronzes – looted in 1897 – to Nigeria.

Ownership of 72 objects, which were forcibly removed from Benin City during the British military incursion in February 1897, will be transferred to the Nigerian government, following a decision by the Horniman's Board of Trustees.

The collection includes 12 brass plaques, known publicly as Benin bronzes. Other objects include a brass cockerel altar piece, ivory and brass ceremonial objects, brass bells, everyday items such as fans and baskets, and a key 'to the king's palace'.

Prof Abba Tijani, Director-General of Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), says: 'We very much welcome this decision by the Trustees of the Horniman Museum and Gardens. Following the endorsement by the Charity Commission, we look forward to a productive discussion on loan agreements and collaborations between the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Horniman.'

The Horniman received the request from the NCMM in January 2022 and has since undertaken detailed research of its objects from Benin to establish which are in the scope of the request. The Horniman has also consulted with community members, visitors, schoolchildren, academics, heritage professionals and artists based in Nigeria and the UK. All of their views on the future of the Benin objects were considered, alongside the provenance of the objects.

Eve Salomon, Chair of the Trustees of the Horniman Museum and Gardens, says: 'The evidence is very clear that these objects were acquired through force, and external consultation supported our view that it is both moral and appropriate to return their

ownership to Nigeria. The Horniman is pleased to be able to take this step and we look forward to working with the NCMM to secure longer term care for these precious artefacts.'

The Charity Commission, as the regulator of the charitable sector, endorsed the decision of the Horniman trustees on 5 August.

The Horniman will now discuss with NCMM the process for the formal transfer of ownership, and the possibility of retaining some objects on loan for display, research and education.

### Ends

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#### Notes to Editors:

- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** opened in 1901 as a gift to the people in perpetuity from tea trader and philanthropist Frederick John Horniman, to 'bring the world to Forest Hill'. Today the Horniman has a collection of 350,000 objects, specimens and artefacts from around the world. Its galleries include natural history, music and an acclaimed aquarium, alongside a World Gallery of anthropology and a flexible arts and exhibition space, The Studio. Indoor exhibits link to the award-winning display gardens – from medicinal and dye gardens to an interactive sound garden, Butterfly House and an animal walk – set among 16 acres of beautiful, green space offering spectacular views across London. [horniman.ac.uk](http://horniman.ac.uk)
- The Horniman Museum and Gardens has won **Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022**, the world's largest museum prize: [horniman.ac.uk/moty2022](http://horniman.ac.uk/moty2022)
- **Coronavirus impact: Every month the Horniman was closed cost around £150,000 in lost income** from ticket sales, memberships, the shop and café. In recent years, the Horniman has increasingly relied on this vital income to help care for the Gardens, animals and Aquarium residents, to run events and to look after the collections. The support of returning visitors, our supporters and their generous donations are more needed than ever. [horniman.ac.uk/support-us/](http://horniman.ac.uk/support-us/)
- The **Horniman Museum and Gardens** is core-funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and since 1990 has been governed by an independent charitable trust, registered charity no. 802725. The Horniman Museum and Gardens also receives funding from Arts Council England as one of its National Portfolio Organisations.
- On 29 July 2019 the **Horniman Museum and Gardens declared an ecological and climate emergency**, pledging to place carbon reduction and environmental issues at the heart of its work. The declaration – and the subsequent **Climate and Ecological Manifesto**, published in January 2020 – is a consolidation of existing work and a commitment to renewed ambitions to reduce the Horniman's environmental and pollution footprint, increase biodiversity, and inspire others to do so. Find out more about the Horniman's manifesto commitments and progress so far at [horniman.ac.uk/climate](http://horniman.ac.uk/climate).