

# Kingdom of Benin

Objects 1–3, 5–8 and 10, are amongst the 72 objects at the Horniman that we believe were forcibly looted from Benin City in 1897 during a British military incursion. These objects were purchased by Frederick Horniman, and have been held in the Museum's collection for over 120 years. After detailed research and consultation, the Horniman has agreed to return ownership of these objects to Nigeria.



## 1 Brass plaque of Agban, the Ezomo

There was no written language in the Kingdom of 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 *ovbevbe*, 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.



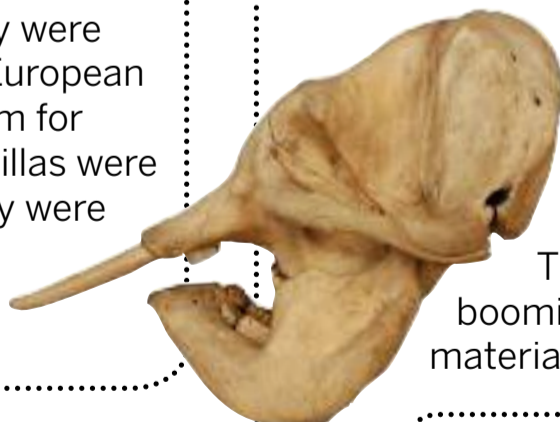
## 8 Ivory staff of office

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

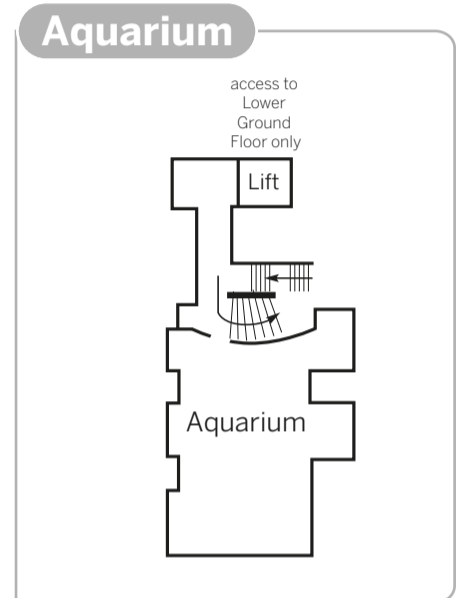
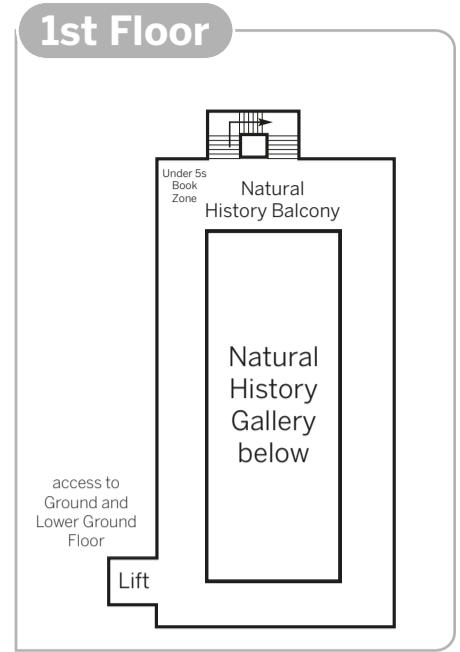
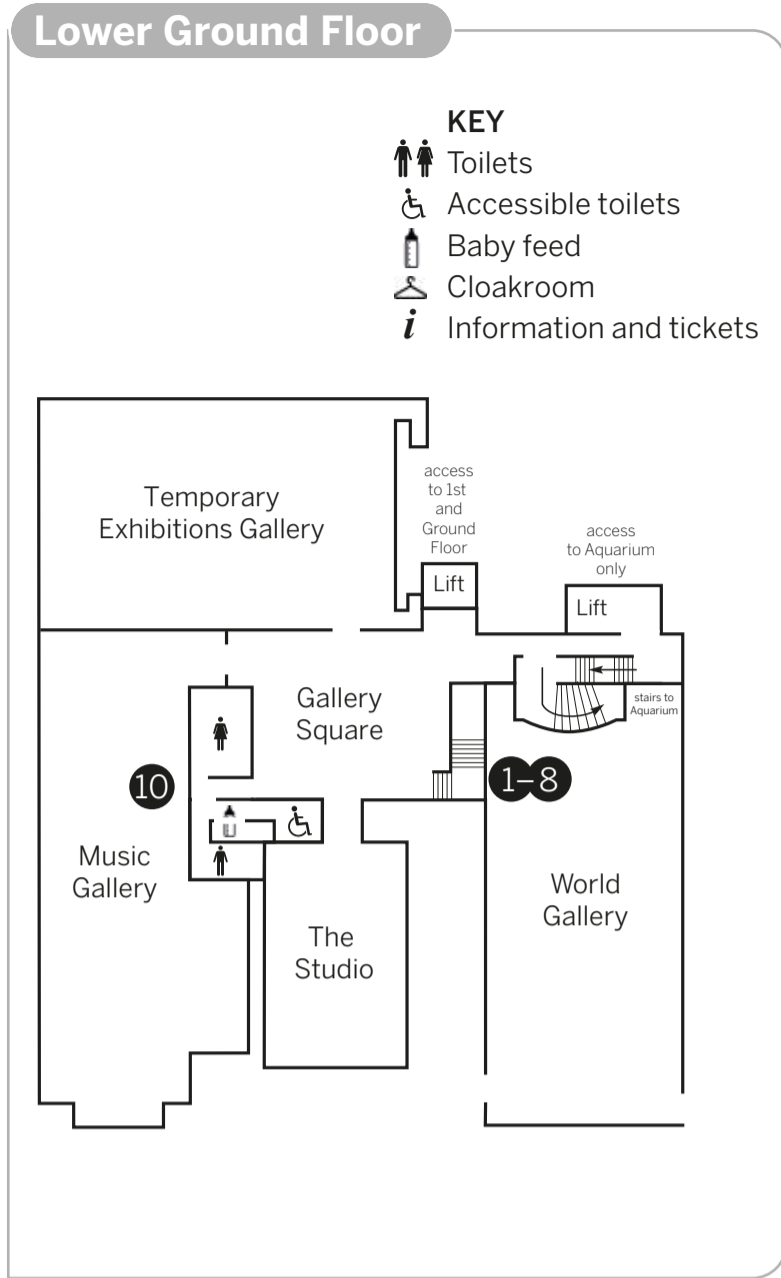
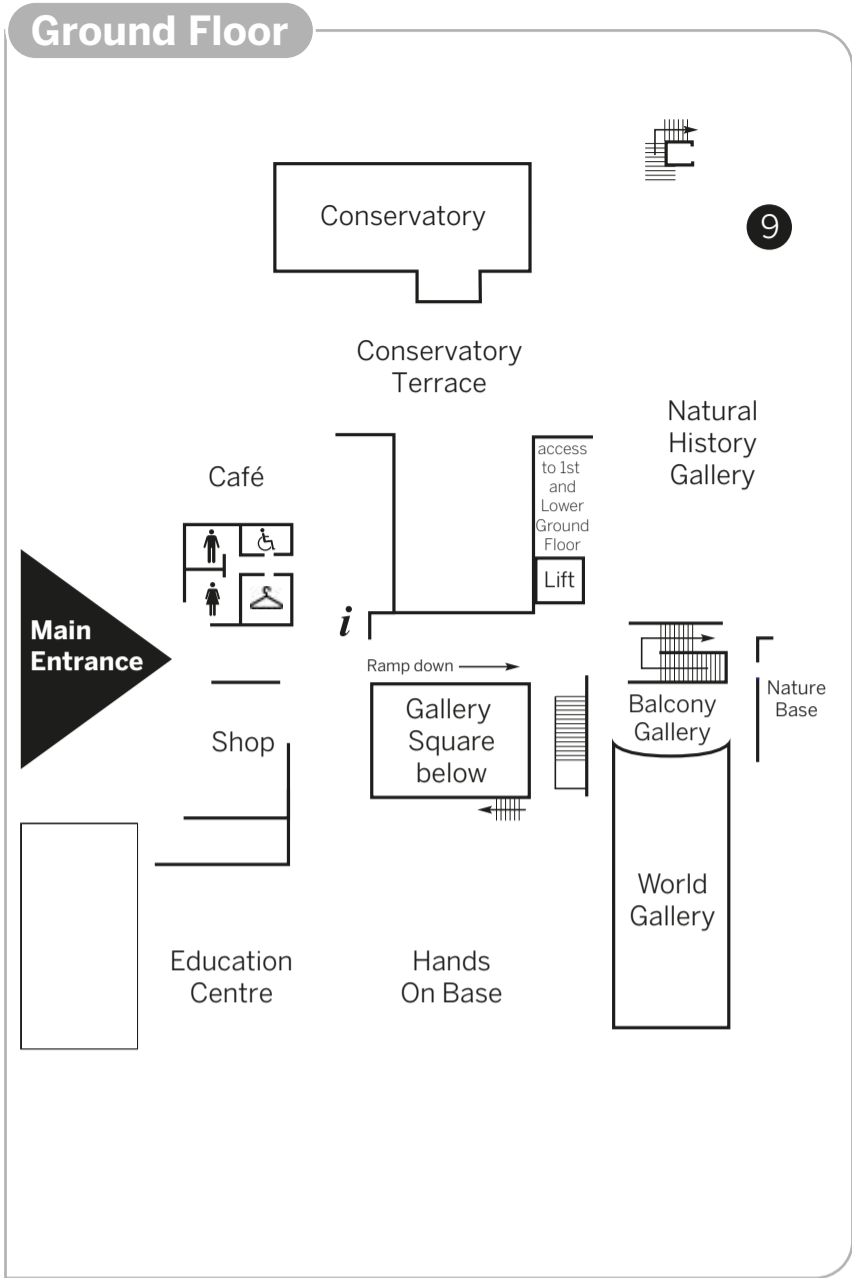
In the Kingdom of Benin, elephant ivory was considered a royal material. Every time an elephant was killed, a tusk was given to the Oba, and the other offered to him for purchase. This gave the Oba control of the booming ivory trade. Coral was also a royal material, can you find some in this gallery?



## 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**

- 1 Brass plaque of Agban, the Ezomo
- 2 Brass plaque of Oba Orhogbua
- 3 Brass plaque of Oko'Oba
- 4 Manilla
- 5 Brass plaque of Uwangue Osokhirikpa
- 6 Brass figure of a cockerel
- 7 Ceremonial paddle
- 8 Ivory staff of office
- 9 Elephant skull and tusk
- 10 Clapper bell

