



## **Six objects to return to Nigeria as Horniman formally transfers ownership of 'Benin Bronzes'**

Six objects looted from Benin City are set to return to Nigeria from the Horniman Museum and Gardens in south London.

The objects – including two 'Benin Bronze' plaques from the royal palace – will be handed to Nigerian officials this evening (Monday, 28 November 2022) at a ceremony marking the transfer of ownership of 72 items taken by force from Benin City in 1897. The Horniman's Trustees agreed in July to transfer ownership, as the 'moral and appropriate' response to a request from Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM).

The six objects are:

- a brass plaque depicting Oba Orhogbua (circa 1550-1578) holding a staff representing authority and power, and with Iwu, royal tattoos
- a brass plaque depicting Agban, the Ezomo (Deputy Commander in Chief of the Benin army), towards the end of the reign of Oba Orhogbua (circa 1550-1578) and the start of the reign of Oba Ehengbuda (circa 1578-1608)
- a brass hip ornament depicting a face or mask
- an ivory staff of office depicting a carved relief figure of an Oba
- an ivory arm cuff carved with heads and abstract shapes, part of royal regalia
- a carved wooden box frame, likely for holding a mirror.

Museum founder Frederick Horniman bought the ivory objects and the wooden frame from Mr. W. J. Hider, C.B.S Royal Navy, in March 1897. Hider accompanied General Rawson's military incursion into Benin City in February 1897, and was personally involved in the looting.

Richard Quick, the Horniman's first curator, purchased the plaques and hip ornament on 4 October 1899 as part of a collection of high status Benin City objects including a key from the 'Kings House'. The seller, James Tingley, was a resident of Forest Hill, close to the Horniman; how he acquired the objects is unclear.

## More

The six objects – selected in consultation with the NCMM as being representative of the collection of 72 items – form the first wave of physical repatriation of Benin objects from the Horniman. A new agreement between the NCMM and the Horniman will allow the remainder to stay in the UK on loan for now, with a second phase of physical repatriations to follow in due course.

Four of the six items returning in November were previously on display in the Horniman's World Gallery. Their former places in the display case are now marked by their empty mounts alongside labels explaining they are to return to Nigeria.

Michael Salter-Church, Chair of the Trustees of the Horniman Museum and Gardens, says: 'The decision of the Horniman trustees to return the objects looted from Benin City in 1897 culminates today in the signing over of ownership to Nigeria. However, it does not represent the end of the process. We hope that actually it marks the beginning of a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship between the Horniman and colleagues in Nigeria.'

Prof. Abba Tijani, Director-General of Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), says: 'The National Commission for Museums and Monuments is delighted with this signing of the transfer agreement to Nigeria and looks forward to mutual collaborations with the Horniman Museum and Gardens, including loans of objects, circulation, touring exhibitions, research, etc. I call on other museums to emulate from the Horniman's example.'

## Ends

**Pictures available on request to the Press Office.**

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Key dates**

2021 – the Horniman published its [Restitution and Repatriation Policy](#).

January 2022 – the Horniman received the request from Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM).

January to June 2022 – the Horniman undertook detailed research of its objects from Benin to establish which were in the scope of the request. The Horniman 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.

July 2022 – the Board of Trustees of the Horniman voted in favour of transferring ownership of the 72 Benin objects.

5 August 2022 – the Horniman’s decision was endorsed by the Charity Commission, as the regulator of the charitable sector.

August to November 2022 – the Horniman and the NCMM worked together to prepare the transfer of ownership documentation and loan agreement, and to identify and prepare the first six objects to be returned.

28 November 2022 – the transfer of ownership was signed, and the six objects handed over to the NCMM.

- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** has won [Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022](#), the world’s largest museum prize.
- **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)
- **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).