



SCOTTISH CIVIC TRUST

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Aberdeen in Africa, Africa in Aberdeen

Funding secured for new community co-curation project exploring Aberdeen's historic connections with empire in sub-Saharan Africa

The University of Aberdeen and The Scottish Civic Trust have been successful in receiving funding from the [British Academy's new SHAPE Involve and Engage Awards](#) for their project *Aberdeen in Africa, Africa in Aberdeen: Community Co-Curation in Decolonising Collections, Campus, and Community*. This project brings together academics, curators, archivists, teachers, students, heritage professionals, and community groups into a transformative public history project in North East Scotland.

In October 2021, the University of Aberdeen became the first museum in Europe to repatriate a Benin bronze looted in Britain's 1897 invasion of the kingdom of Benin. The restitution resulted in a high degree of international press coverage and placed greater attention on the origins of the University of Aberdeen's African museum collections. *Aberdeen in Africa, Africa in Aberdeen* takes the repatriation of the Benin Bronze as a starting point for an innovative public history project with schools, community groups and local history groups to explore the historic connections between Aberdeen and sub-Saharan Africa.

The Project's objectives include greater public awareness of Aberdeen's historic connections with empire in Africa; increased visibility for African collections in the University's museum stores; working collaboratively with teachers in Aberdeenshire to develop methods for teaching African histories; and furthering the unique potential of the University's Museum sources in teaching and public engagement. These ambitious aims will be achieved through a series of new collaborations with community and heritage organisations which will generate a range of outputs including walking tours, podcasts and a pop-up exhibition.

The Scottish Civic Trust will support the project through its Diverse Heritage programme, which encourages all members of Scotland's communities, especially people from marginalised groups, to take an active role in local cultural heritage. Since the programme's inception in 2018, it has engaged over 1,400 people in co-designed heritage activities that celebrate minority ethnic, LGBTQ+ and disabled communities, as well as refugees and people seeking asylum.

Neil Curtis, Head of Museums & Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen, said:

"I am very pleased that this project will build links between local communities and the African collections in the care of the university, bringing to light fresh stories about the collection and increasing awareness of the University's historic connections with Africa."

Joe Traynor, Director of The Scottish Civic Trust, said:

"I am delighted that The Scottish Civic Trust is working in partnership with the University of Aberdeen to engage Aberdonians in co-curating a pop-up exhibition on the region's ties to empire in sub-Saharan Africa. Our Diverse Heritage programme leads Scotland's civic heritage sector in tackling exclusion and ensuring that the stories we tell about our pasts are transparent, equitable and inclusive."

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Notes for editors:

About the University of Aberdeen

Founded in 1495, [Aberdeen](#) is Scotland's third-oldest University and the fifth-oldest in the UK. By virtue of its long and distinguished history, the University has accumulated outstanding collections, to support its current and future programmes of work. [Museums and Special Collections](#) is responsible for preserving, developing and promoting the University's collection of museum objects, scientific specimens, rare books, manuscripts and archives.

The collections include 230,000 rare books and other items, large collections of archives and manuscripts dating back to the 12th century, and important photographic archives. The entire museum collection is a Recognised Collection of National Significance with almost 300,000 items and includes Scottish history and archaeology, scientific instruments, coins and medals, World cultures, fine art, European and Mediterranean archaeology, herbarium, zoology, geology, anatomy and pathology.

About Scottish Civic Trust

[Scottish Civic Trust](#)'s mission is to celebrate Scotland's built environment, take action for its improvement and empower its communities. The vision which drives this is thriving, beautiful and well cared for buildings and places, which help to support and sustain a high quality of life.

Founded in 1967, the Scottish Civic Trust exists to help people connect with their civic heritage and take a leading role in guiding its development. In its infancy, it successfully campaigned for the restoration of Edinburgh's New Town and was instrumental in saving New Lanark – both now part of Scotland's network of six World Heritage Sites.

In addition to these major milestones, the Scottish Civic Trust initiated [Doors Open Days](#), now the largest free festival of architecture in the U.K. Doors Open Days celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019. Its annual My Place programme celebrates community and identity throughout Scotland. It is a founding partner of the Make Your Mark inclusive volunteer campaign and works to protect listed buildings and conservation areas nationally.

Further Information

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