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Cambridge Heritage Research Centre

05 December 2023

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NEWS

Michaelmas Term comes to an end

Friday 1st of December marked the end of another exciting term here at Cambridge. Throughout the Michaelmas Term we welcomed five speakers, Dr. Vanessa Paloma Elbaz, Dr. Miriam Saqqa Carazo, Dr. Domenico Sergi, Prof. Sybille Frank and Prof. Caitlin DeSilvey to present their research on a variety of heritage-related topics. Click [here to read about this term's lunchtime seminars](#) and access the list of past CHRC events. We look forward to 2024, where we will be hosting another season of Lunchtime Seminars, our Heritage Fair and the 24th Annual CHRC Heritage Symposium. Details on these upcoming events will be announced on the [CHRC website](#) at the beginning of the new year.

COVER STORY

Thinking Beyond Repatriation through Digital Curation

The University of Cambridge has recently agreed to the transfer of all 116 artefacts taken from Benin City in 1897 to the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). Considering the Bronzes that will be returned to Nigeria, how can visitors interact with them, or any repatriated object for that matter, once they are returned? Does repatriation have to mean a loss for the museum? Can we even think of repatriation as a loss given that the museum should not have had authority over repatriated objects? Recent MPhil Heritage Studies graduate Alyssa Walton addresses these questions in this issue's cover story.

*(Read more on **Page 2**)*

COVER STORY

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Alyssa Walton

I must admit, I did not notice the three cases making up the Benin Bronze display my first time visiting MAA. It was once I started volunteering, and saw them while perusing the second floor, that my curiosity around these objects ignited. The Bronzes had been discussed in several of my Heritage Studies classes at Cambridge, but it was seeing them in person, and particularly knowing that Uhunmwu-elao, a commemorative head of an Oba, was due to return back home to Nigeria, that made a significant impact on me. This process of repatriation, and how we as museum visitors can engage with objects, got me thinking: what comes after an object like this Bronze leaves the museum? It seemed to me then, and still does today, an exciting problem to solve.

To provide context to the Benin Bronzes, it is essential to understand the history of the Benin Kingdom. Dating back to at least 1,200 BCE, this kingdom's territory expanded across modern-day Nigeria, specifically the Edo state. The Benin Kingdom was multicultural and multilingual, eventually forming the Edo people. It was led by an Oba, or king; this period, beginning in the 15th century, saw increased social stratification, building of new palaces, and the solidification of spiritual,



Uhunmwu-elao, lost-wax cast commemorative head of an Oba, used to support a tusk on an ancestral altar. Benin Kingdom, Edo State, Nigeria. 18th-19th century. MAA E 1900.98.2.

ritual, and legal practices. By the late 19th century, Britain steadily colonised West Africa. By 1896, Captain James Phillips sought to bring the Benin Kingdom under British rule. In January 1897, while leading a party to conquer Benin City, Phillips and

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his men were ambushed by Edo soldiers, leaving Phillips and a majority of the party dead. In quick retaliation, approved by the British Foreign Office, British soldiers violently attacked Benin City, leaving hundreds of soldiers and civilians dead, the ruling Oba Ovonramwen exiled, and the Edo people, were colonised by Britain.

After the invasion, thousands of bronze, ivory, and wooden objects, known collectively as the Benin Bronzes, were looted from the city. They were sent to England and subsequently displayed, or sold to Western collectors and museums, primarily in the UK, Germany, and the United States. Since 1960, after gaining independence, the Nigerian government has requested the return of the Benin Bronzes. The return of the first Bronzes happened just two years ago when [Jesus College, Cambridge returned the Okukor, a brass cockerel](#), to the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), and the University of Aberdeen handed over a Uhumnwun-elao the following day. Since then, multiple universities and museums across the UK, Germany, and the US, including MAA, have completed or begun repatriations of the Bronzes.

This brings us to the present. The University of Cambridge has [agreed to the transfer](#) all 116 artefacts taken from Benin City in 1897 to the NCMM. The Uhumnwu-elao pictured previously is

one of a selection of objects proposed to return to Nigeria. The Oba of Benin and the NCMM are keen for some Bronzes to remain in Cambridge as ambassadors for Benin. This means many of the objects will remain at MAA, at least for some time.

Considering the Bronzes that will be returned to Nigeria, how can visitors interact with them, or any repatriated object for that matter, once they are returned? Does repatriation have to mean a loss for the museum? Can we even think of repatriation as a loss given that the museum should not have had authority over repatriated objects?

My answer to the second question is – not at all. Finding new ways for public audiences to engage with objects presents an exciting opportunity for museums to expand their reach. One potential solution I see is creating an online, or digital, curation platform for the general public's use. The role of digital tools is becoming increasingly vital to museums' identities and successes. Museums are now embracing their digital potential to not only maintain relevance, but also to create diverse and well-rounded experiences for visitors and curators alike (Mutibwa et al., 2020). Lopes (2020: 131) goes further and argues that *“from a museum visitor perspective, the digital content on museum websites, mobile apps or social media platforms is now as relevant as the physical collections and museum space because it contributes to giving*

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visitors a real sense of ownership of cultural heritage". In this way, digital and online engagement with museums is the future of the field, and therefore is a realistic way for the MAA to bolster their audience interaction through this potential digital curation tool.

Similar to the Smithsonian Learning Lab and Art UK Curations, this tool would offer a space for visitors to access the collections in MAA's care, upload their own files, and link relevant texts or videos. Even if an object has been repatriated, the tool would allow visitors to continue engaging with it. This idea of digital engagement is more accurately labeled "digital curation". While there are varying definitions, for this piece I've adopted the Smithsonian's version of: "across the cultural heritage sector, digital curation encompasses the selection, acquisition, preservation, maintenance, and delivery of digital data" (Smithsonian Institution Archives, 2017). A vital partner to digital curation is the concept of co-curation, or when public audiences collaborate with museums in the otherwise behind-closed-doors process of curating.

This tool, were it to be created for the MAA, would allow visitors control over what they consider to be important (and relevant) collection of museum objects. Allowing visitors access to such objects after they may be repatriated extends this partnership between museums and the public

beyond what is simply "owned" by the museum.

The example below illustrates what digital curation on the Benin Bronzes could look like. Here, the pictures show objects in MAA's care, both on display and in-store. Visitors can interact with objects they may not have known existed, and can put them in the context of different news articles and videos sourced from outside MAA. As a result, even when objects are repatriated and no longer physically present at the museum, they can still be accessed by people using MAA's website. This tool not only enables more people to engage with the objects but also empowers them to curate their own mini-exhibits, allowing individuals to highlight what they find interesting or relevant. One fantastic example of how the Benin Kingdom is already being engaged with online is through Digital Benin website. This resource offers online collection of 5,246 objects from 131 institutions worldwide, and would be an amazing place for users of the digital curation tool to engage with the Benin Kingdom.

The screenshot displays the MAA website's digital curation interface. At the top, the MAA logo and navigation menu are visible, with 'Curate' highlighted. Below the navigation is a toolbar with options like 'Import from Collections', 'Import File', 'Insert Shape', and 'Insert Text'. The main content area features a central diagram of the Benin Kingdom, surrounded by various related terms and images. On the left, there are images of Benin Bronzes with captions. On the right, there are more images and a 'Literature' section with a video link.

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Of course, this digital curation tool is not a one-size-fits-all solution for post-repatriation displays. Curators and museum staff responsible for this tool still need to be completely transparent about the colonial history often associated with repatriated objects. Without this context, the importance of the act of repatriation, and the roles both museums and source communities play, lose their meaning. Additionally, creating an open space for public audiences raises concerns about the potential violation of MAA's codes of conduct. Inappropriate or offensive language, images, or links could find their way onto this platform. As such, MAA would need a group of people monitoring any digital collections posted by the public to make sure they are appropriate and respectful.

Beyond problems of the usage of this tool comes the question: who would be its primary users? Creating a whole separate division of the MAA's Digital Lab or museum website would take a lot of time and effort. Figuring out if groups such as museum visitors, school groups, university staff, the general public, etc. would use this tool is therefore important before taking the considerable effort to build it.

Finally, I must say, as innovative and useful as I believe this digital curation tool could be, I don't think it can completely erase in-person museum displays. Having a visual, or possibly tangible,

connection to objects in a museum setting creates important emotional and learning outputs for visitors. Even more, having a physical space where the repatriation of an object is addressed and explained by a museum cannot be replaced by this online tool. Anybody who visits the Benin Bronze display should be aware of the colonialist history of the Bronzes' collection, the decolonial work that MAA is doing while repatriating the Bronze, and the power modern Nigerians hold by choosing to keep other Bronzes in institutions worldwide. In this way, visitors can understand the history of the Benin Kingdom, the colonisation of the Edo people, and what Nigeria today wants MAA's audiences to know about its past, present, and future.

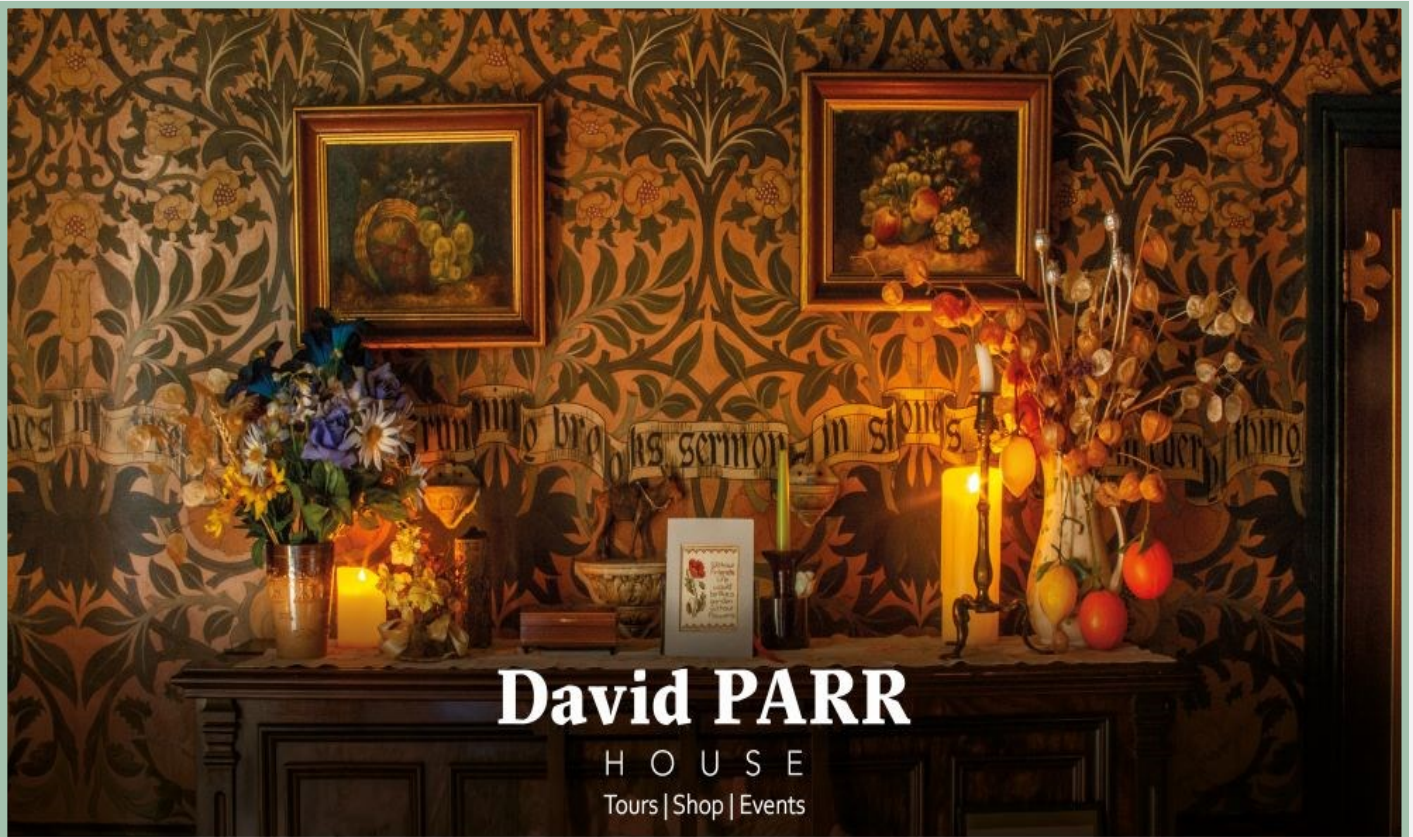
References:

Mutibwa, D.H., Hess, A., Jackson, T., 2020. Strokes of serendipity: Community co-curation and engagement with digital heritage. *Convergence* 26, 157–177.

Oliveira Lopes, R., 2020. *Museum curation in the digital age*, in: *The Future of Creative Work*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 123–139.

[Alyssa Walton](#) is a recent graduate of the [MPhil Heritage Studies](#) programme at the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

EVENTS



David PARR HOUSE Tours | Shop | Events

An ordinary terraced house with an extraordinary hand-painted interior. Home to the Victorian working-class artist, David Parr and his family, David Parr House is an example of Arts and Crafts workmanship layered with 20th-century social history.

For more information and to book a guided tour, please visit: davidparrhouse.org

Thursdays, Fridays & Saturdays, 9.30 am-5 pm*

184/186 Gwydir Street, Cambridge, CB1 2LW

@davidparrhouse

*check website for seasonal opening hours

House Tours of the David Parr House (Gwydir Street, Cambridge)

In 1886, 186 Gwydir Street was bought by David Parr, a working-class Victorian decorative artist who worked for the Cambridge firm of artworkmen, F R Leach & Sons. David Parr learnt his many skills there, painting houses and churches with designs created by some of the best architects and designers in the country, including George Frederick Bodley, William Morris and Charles Eamer Kempe.

The Visitor Centre is a space for workshops, events and the DPH shop, stocked with objects reflecting David's values of workmanship, skill and sense of place.

House tours start at 9.30am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm between Thursday–Saturday. Bookings can be made for 1-6 people and tours last 1 hour 30 minutes .

Further information about visiting the David Parr House can be found here: [Visit David Parr House](http://davidparrhouse.org)

EVENTS

Mr Pye's Granta Works: From garden shed to assembly lines

Speaker: Dr Mike Kemp

Date: Monday 11th December 2023

Time: 7.30pm

Location: The Pye Building, Cambridge Museum of Technology

Duration: 40 minutes plus question time

The Cambridge Phenomenon began in 1960, but Cambridge was already home to Pye, a company which had put the town on the map as a centre for technology and innovation. But where did Pye begin?

In 1896 William George Pye started making scientific instruments in his garden shed. By the 1930s the business had become the largest in Cambridge. Based on new research by Dr Mike Kemp, the talk charts the development of the company over this period, through its factories, management, workers and manufacturing methods - from small batches of instruments to the mass production of radios for homes across the country.

Dr Mike Kemp is a scientist and engineer who has lived and worked in Cambridge for most of his life. Interested in radio from an early age, he began collecting early radios in the 1970s while a research student at the Cavendish Laboratory. Some of his collection is currently on display at Cambridge Museum of Technology as part of the Radio Enters the Home exhibition. This exhibition celebrates the

centenary of the BBC's first radio broadcast. The exhibition ends on Sunday 17th December so this will be a last chance to see the display.

The talk will take place in the Pye Building at Cambridge Museum of Technology. Entrance on the night is via the Museum's Cheddars Lane gate. There will be free light refreshments courtesy of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMECHE)

Tickets for the talk are available on the door for £5 a head, £3 for students. Members and Volunteers of Cambridge Museum of Technology can attend for free.

Cambridge Industrial Archaeology group organises a programme of talks on industrial heritage at Cambridge Museum of Technology. Talks usually take place at 7.30pm on the second Monday of each month. For further information about Cambridge Industrial Archaeology Group contact Robin Chandler robin.chandler@btinternet.com

Cambridge Museum of Technology is the home of Cambridge's industrial heritage. For further information on the Museum contact Nick Plaister nick.plaister@museumoftechnology.com

CALL FOR PAPERS

ICOM International Committee for Museology: Transnational Island Museologies

Link: [ICOM International Committee for Museology](#)

University of St Andrews, 5-7 June 2024

Submission deadline: 1st January 2024

While islands are conventionally associated with romantic ideas of local distinctiveness and isolation, many small islands share the growing problems of coastal erosion through rising sea levels and storm intensification, as well as economic recession, depopulation and inappropriate tourism development. This conference takes its cue from the theme of the research project Shared Island Stories between Scotland and the Caribbean: Past, present, future to unearth hidden stories and entangled spaces in emerging transnational island museologies. The conference will also host the [47th ICOFOM Annual Assembly](#) on Friday, 7 June 2024.

Shared Island Stories is a five-year research project selected by the European Research Council (ERC) and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It is coordinated by the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews and aims to investigate relationships between the archipelagos of Scotland and the Caribbean. Drawing on history, heritage studies, sustainable development, art history and memory studies, the project asks: Which collections from the islands tell unfinished

stories of Empire? What is the role of heritage communities in sustainable development? How can island community museums partner with NGOs, policy and local organisations and businesses for climate action? How can health and well-being be understood in relation to community heritage, traditional ecological knowledge and island life? What does this new knowledge bring to debates on climate justice, especially as they relate to the role of youth?

We invite proposals for papers on the two sub-topics of:

- (1) *Indigenous and traditional knowledge, environment, and intergenerational transmission*
- (2) *Hidden stories, entangled spaces: thinking through trans-national coastal and island museologies*

If you would like to submit a paper, please [send a brief abstract](#) of about 2000 characters for a 15-minute presentation by **1 January 2024**. Applications can be submitted in one of the three languages of ICOM (English, French and Spanish).

The full Call for Papers (which includes detailed instructions) can be accessed here: [Transnational Island Museologies Call for Papers](#)

General information about ICOFOM can be accessed here: [ICOFOM Homepage](#)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Geocarto International: GIS Applications for the Study and Management of Cultural Heritage Sites

Link: [Taylor and Francis Geocarto International](#)

GIS (Geographic Information System) technology has revolutionized the way in which cultural heritage is managed and studied. It allows for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of spatial data, not only facilitating mapping but also developing spatial models and evaluating scenarios. GIS may be used for the documentation, preservation, and management of cultural heritage sites, along with facilitating research and engagement between the public and scholars.

Mapping technologies, geospatial analysis, and digitization processes empower researchers, developers, and heritage managers to evaluate physical conditions, understand the context and spatial relationships between sites, and forecast the potential impacts of development and climate change. The application of GIS technology in cultural heritage has transformed the approach that is being taken towards heritage management, by converting information into digital data and then facilitating significant advancements in cultural heritage study and preservation. The integration of GIS technology into the field of cultural heritage allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the interrelated aspects of cultural heritage, such as historic structures, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes.

In this Article Collection, we aim to explore the various ways in which GIS is being used to support the protection and management of cultural heritage. We invite submissions of research articles and scientific and technical reviews that explore the intersection of GIS and cultural heritage. Articles may include interdisciplinary research from fields such as archaeology, history, geography, architecture, and environmental studies. We also welcome papers that discuss innovative GIS techniques and data management strategies in the context of cultural heritage research.

Subtopics within this Collection include:

- GIS applications in the documentation and inventory of cultural heritage sites
- Spatial analysis and mapping of cultural heritage landscapes
- GIS and archaeology: mapping and analyzing excavation data
- GIS and historic preservation: integrating GIS into the planning and management of heritage sites

The deadline for submitting manuscripts is **15th May 2024**.

For further information about this journal, please visit: [Geocarto International](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

Coordinator: Collections - Connections - Communities (Fixed Term)

Link: <https://www.jobs.cam.ac.uk/job/43988/>

Botanic Garden, University of Cambridge

Salary: £33,966-£44,263 per annum, (fixed term, 1 year)

The University's collections, across its museums, galleries, libraries, archives, Departments and other research centres, are a superb yet under-used resource. Together, these collections offer new ways to analyse, understand and help solve some of the greatest societal challenges we face today. *Collections, Connections, Communities* (CCC) is a Strategic Research Initiative of the University, which draws together expertise to promote innovative collections-based research for, and with, communities in our region and beyond.

As CCC Research Coordinator, you will help set our strategic goals and ensure they are met. You will undertake pro-active engagement with potential research collaborators, communities and audiences; you will coordinate a programme of events and manage and develop our website and social media content; map collections and contribute to scoping of a cross-Cambridge collections discovery portal.

You will support the governance and administration of the Initiative, including convening and coordinating the meetings of our Steering Group.

Working closely with colleagues within the University of Cambridge, as well as with partners nationally and internationally, you will support the development of projects, including through the workshopping of ideas to identify priority themes and partnerships, contribute to funding applications, and assist with subsequent reporting requirements, including around budgets and impact. Current programmes include the new AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Programme (Collections and Communities in the East of England (CC-EE)); a funding scheme for Participatory Research Grants; and the project African Collections Futures, which is producing a strategic assessment of University of Cambridge collections from, and pertaining to, Africa.

The deadline for applications is **17th December**. For any questions relating to this recruitment please contact admin@botanic.cam.ac.uk

Further information about this role can be accessed here: [Collections, Connections, Communities](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

Curator / Senior Curator: National Museums of Scotland

Link: [Curator / Senior Curator—NMS](#)

Chambers Street (Edinburgh), National Museum of Scotland

Salary: £35,856 to £44,710 per annum (37 hours per week, plus membership of Civil Service pension scheme)

[National Museums of Scotland](#) are seeking an exceptional candidate to lead the curation of the Americas collections within the Department of Global Arts, Cultures and Design. The successful candidate will be responsible for the curation, research, development and display of 7,700 cultural belongings from South, Central, and North America.

With a degree in a relevant subject or equivalent experience of working with cultural belongings from the Americas, you will be able to demonstrate specialist knowledge relevant to the collections. The successful candidate will have responsibility for all Americas collections but a specialism in North American collections is desirable, as is lived cultural experience and/or relevant Indigenous language skills.

The deadline for this job opening is **31st January 2024**

Responsibilities:

- Research the history, provenance and cultural meanings of the collection
- Develop strategic partnerships with descendent communities
- Develop the collection through contemporary acquisitions
- Develop new display and exhibition proposals
- Support storage improvements and collections care

Requirements:

- A relevant first degree or equivalent experience
- Experience of working with Americas collections
- Experience of undertaking research
- Experience of working with descendent communities
- Knowledge of and commitment to collection management best practice

Additional Benefits:

- Generous Annual leave (28.5 days – rising to 33.5) as well as an additional 8 days public holidays
- Cycle to Work scheme
- Free access to national (and international) museums and exhibitions
- Exclusive discounts on both local and national Highstreet and online retailers
- Hybrid working

OPPORTUNITIES

UNESCO Internship: Culture Sector

Link: [Culture Sector Internship—UNESCO](#)

Various Headquarters, Field Offices and Institutes (1-6 month duration)

The UNESCO Culture Sector aims to promote culture and the creative economy and safeguard cultural and natural heritage in response to the global challenges addressed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as conflicts, disasters and emergencies, by implementing the six UNESCO Culture Conventions and the recommendations associated with them, and supporting Member States in translating their provisions into national policies and strategies. Internships with the Culture Sector can be undertaken in the following entities:

- *World Heritage*
- *Living Heritage*
- *Diversity of Cultural Expressions*
- *Communication, Cities, Events*
- *Culture and Emergencies*
- *Cultural Policies and Development*

Duties and responsibilities:

- *Assist in the implementation and monitoring of Culture programmes and activities.*
- *Contribute to the preparation of documents, reports, work plans and communication content including briefings, talking points, speeches and online content for the Sector.*
- *Assist in conducting research, compiling data and carrying out analysis, drafting and preparing*

materials pertaining to the implementation of the UNESCO Culture Conventions.

- *Participate and assist with upcoming meetings, training workshops, events, webinars and conferences organized by the Sector, taking notes and preparing minutes.*
- *Assist in building and maintaining working relationships with other Sectors/Entities, donors/partners, relevant national and international organizations, etc.*
- *Contribute to any additional tasks and responsibilities as assigned by the Unit/Entity within the Culture Sector.*

Requirements:

- *Over the age of 20 years old*
- *Currently enrolled on a graduate programme (Master's degree, PhD, or equivalent, second university degree or higher)*
- *Recently graduated with a Master's degree or PhD (or second degree as defined above), 12 months prior to the start of the internship.*
- *Excellent command, both written and spoken, of English or French. A working knowledge of the other language (English or French) is an asset, and may be required for internships in secretarial and assistantship assignments at the Headquarters*

Application Deadline (Midnight Paris Time) : **30 June 2024**



CONTRIBUTE

We would be especially interested in hearing from you about events and opportunities. Contributions in the form of short reviews of conferences, exhibitions, publications or other events/material that you have attended/read are also welcome. Please note that advertisements for any non-CHRC events, jobs, or programs do not imply endorsement of them.

Bulletin Editor

Kieran Gleave (*PhD Researcher*)
Cambridge Heritage Research Centre
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