

Large print guide



Collecting and empire

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The British Museum was founded in 1753 and its history and collection are intimately linked to that of the British Empire. From around 1500 to the mid-20th century, a number of European countries established and maintained overseas empires – Britain's was the largest. A substantial part of the wealth of the British Empire came from the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial exploitation of people and resources.

This trail highlights objects predominantly acquired during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It shows the different, complex and sometimes controversial journeys of objects to the Museum. Often, objects were collected first by individuals or organisations, sometimes passing through several owners before coming to the Museum.

This trail takes in several galleries, most of which are on the Ground floor. Viewing all the objects, in

the order listed, will take around 60 – 70 minutes. When you visit each object you'll find more information there about how the Museum acquired it. That information is repeated here in this book in large print format.

Please look out for this graphic to help you find the objects.



Further objects will be added to this trail in the future as the result of ongoing collaborative work and research.

Please note that the Museum regularly lends objects to other institutions around the world. This means that occasionally some of the featured objects may be temporarily removed from display.

Room 4: Egyptian sculpture

Lion statues of Amenhotep III

These colossal granite lions were commissioned by pharaoh Amenhotep III (about 1390–1352 BC) for the Temple of Soleb in Upper Nubia (northern Sudan), then a colony of pharaonic Egypt.

Around 1,100 years later, when the powerful and independent kingdom of Kush ruled the area, these already ancient sculptures were shipped 420 km south up the Nile to a royal palace at Jebel Barkal.

Lord Prudhoe, the Duke of Northumberland (1792–1865), undertook a series of journeys to Egypt and further up the Nile into Sudan. In 1829 he visited Jebel Barkal and while there he arranged the shipment of the lions back to England, at a time when increasing numbers of Egyptian antiquities were being brought to Europe by private collectors. The British Consul General

in Cairo helped secure the necessary firmans (permissions) from the authorities. Lord Prudhoe donated the lions to the British Museum in 1835.

Colonialism: ancient and modern

Egyptian rulers tended to conceive of Northern Sudan as an extension of their territory, both in ancient times and during the 19th century. Lord Prudhoe's party was travelling into a Sudan recently conquered by Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt. This conquest ushered in over a century of Egyptian control, and then Anglo-Egyptian rule, interrupted by a period of Sudanese independence under the Mahdist state (1881–98). Lord Prudhoe described Kushite architecture as 'a very bad copy of Egyptian, bad in design and worse in execution'. For him, the presence of these Egyptian lions at Jebel Barkal reflected a Kushite desire to emulate Egypt. However, the lions are now understood as examples of Kushite creativity in incorporating aspects of Egyptian pharaonic

culture within the context of long established local traditions.

Human-headed winged bull

The Assyrian empire, which originated in the northern region of present-day Iraq, was a major power in the Middle East between 935-609 BC. This human-headed winged bull is one of a pair that flanked a doorway in the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II in his palace at Nimrud, an archaeological site located close to the city of modern Mosul. Like much of the Museum's Assyrian collection, it was excavated by Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) and Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910). They subsequently shipped it to England.

At the time of their excavations, most of the territory of present-day Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire. Layard was granted a permit by the Ottoman authorities allowing him to export

‘such stones as he may find useful’. Layard and Rassam’s Assyrian discoveries aroused great public interest. This winged bull, along other Assyrian sculptures, was acquired by the British Museum in 1850.

The Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate and independence

Many Assyrian, Egyptian and ancient Greek sites lay within the borders of the Ottoman Empire (dissolved 1922). During the 19th century permissions (firmans) were granted by the Ottoman authorities to a number of British, French and German archaeological expeditions to excavate these sites and remove objects.

Following the end of the First World War (1914-18), the partition of the Ottoman Empire led to the founding of the Kingdom of Iraq under British Administration, or Mandatory Iraq, in 1921. The English Gertrude Bell was appointed Honorary

Director of Antiquities in Iraq in 1922, and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad was founded in 1926. During the Mandate period archaeology in Iraq was dominated by Britain and a system of partage operated. The Director selected excavated objects for the Iraq Museum, allocating others to foreign archaeologists with permission to export them. The Kingdom of Iraq became an independent nation state in 1932. It became the Republic of Iraq in 1958.

Room 17: Nereid Monument

The Nereid Monument, about 380 BC, Turkey

In the early 1840s, Charles Fellows, a traveler and antiquary, led two expeditions to Lycia (southwestern Turkey). He obtained the permission of the Ottoman Sultanate in Constantinople (Istanbul), to excavate at Xanthos. The Nereid Monument lay in ruins when Fellows discovered

it. Once a firman (permit) had been secured, Fellows began to excavate and remove the ruined monuments, with funding from the British Museum.

Fellows had the expert assistance of sailors from the Royal Navy to move and transport the heavy stone sculptures and architectural pieces, which were floated on rafts down the river Xanthos to the ship HMS Beacon. This transported the finds to Malta, before they were shipped onwards to Britain.

Antiquities and the Ottoman Empire

Within the Turkish Ottoman Empire lay many sites of Egyptian, Assyrian and ancient Greek monuments. Permissions (firmans) were granted to a number of British, French and German archaeological expeditions during the 19th century, to excavate these sites and remove objects and architecture. The first decree

legislating against the export of antiquities from Ottoman territories was issued in 1869. In the same year, the Sultan Abdulaziz ordered the creation of an archaeological museum in Constantinople. Now the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, it opened in 1891.

Ongoing excavations led by Turkish archaeologists are now providing new information on the ancient site of Xanthos, but the exact design of the Nereid Monument, and the positioning of its sculptures, is still debated.

Room 4: Egyptian sculpture

**Block statue of Ankhrenepnefer,
about 860 BC, Egypt**

In 1882, the British navy bombarded Alexandria to quell a nationalist rebellion, instigating 70 years of control over Egypt. That same year in London,

the novelist Amelia Edwards (1831–1892) founded the Egypt Exploration Society ‘for the purpose of excavating the ancient sites of the Nile Delta’. The Swiss Egyptologist Édouard Naville (1844–1926) was employed to direct excavations, using local workmen. He started at Tell el-Maskhuta, east of the Nile Delta, a site he interpreted as the ‘storehouses of Pithom’ built by the exiled Hebrews, as recorded in the Bible in the Book of Exodus. Subsequent work revealed it to be the remains of a pharaonic town. This statue was found in that first excavation season during 1883.

Diplomacy and scattered finds

The export of Egyptian antiquities was generally not permitted at this time. However, the Egyptian ruler, Khedive Mohamed Tawfiq Pasha (1852–92), and the French-run Antiquities Service, made an exception for this statue to come to the British Museum. It was effectively a diplomatic gift, as Tawfiq relied heavily on British support

and financing.

The formal partage (division) of objects discovered by foreign expeditions soon became commonplace. A share of any discoveries could be exported, though significant pieces were to remain in Egypt. Over 16,000 objects in the British Museum collection come from Egypt Exploration Society excavations, including excavations after Egyptian independence in 1952. The revised Egyptian Antiquities Law of 1983 banned the export of all antiquities.

Room 25: Africa

Ancestral screen from Nigeria, 19th century

At the request of Kalabari chiefs in 1916 a number of ancestral screens were placed under the protection of P. Amaury Talbot, a British district officer in southern Nigeria. This apparently

unusual appeal came in response to a period of religious persecution that swept the New Calabar towns of Bakana and Abonema in 1915 and 1916. This movement, initiated by the fundamentalist Christian leader and self-styled 'prophet' Garrick Braide, threatened the widespread destruction of Kalabari ancestral shrines. Talbot presented nine of these screens to the British Museum and a further two to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Today, ancestral shrines are still commissioned and honoured by Kalabari people.

Caption: Ancestral shrine of Amachree I, Buguma, Nigeria, late 1920s. Photographed by British administrative officer Edward Chadwick.

Trade and politics in the Niger Delta

The Kalabari were active intermediaries in the slave trade, receiving in return European brassware, alcohol and firearms. Heads of trading houses accrued great wealth and

exerted influence locally. Following the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807) the Kalabari lost their position as independent traders. Britain implemented a policy of indirect rule in the region from the late 19th century, finally establishing an amalgamated Nigerian protectorate in 1914. At the time when this screen was acquired there was increasing local frustration at the restrictive administrative policy of the colonial authorities. Kalabari economic activity had been usurped by British-imposed bureaucracy and traditional beliefs and practices were being destabilised by the activity of mission churches. In this context Braide's fundamentalist movement generated enormous local support.

**Palace door and lintel from Nigeria,
about 1910–14**

In 1924 this door was displayed within the Nigerian Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London. It was selected for inclusion

by the exhibition's commissioner, Major C.T. Lawrence, who described it as 'the finest piece of West African carving that has ever reached England'. Lawrence borrowed it for the exhibition from the Yoruba ruler, the Ogoga of Ikere, Nigeria, who had commissioned it for his palace around 1910. It was carved by Olowe of Ise (1878–1938). The Museum eagerly petitioned to purchase the door and lintel following the Wembley exhibition. The Ogoga refused to sell the carvings, instead offering them as a gift 'free and absolute'. The Museum was advised to offer something in return for this magnificent donation. In 1925 a European-style throne was delivered to the Ogoga, presented by the British Museum. It remains in use in the palace at Ikere.

Caption: Onijagbo Obasoro Alowolodu, Ogoga of Ikere (1890–1928) seen here (veiled) with his son outside the palace at Ikere. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, Charles Partridge collection, 1909.

British-Yoruba relations

By the early 19th century Lagos island had become a major slave trading centre. Following the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, Britain was active in suppressing the importation of enslaved people to its colonial territories. In 1852 the British-installed Oba (king) of Lagos signed an anti-slavery treaty with Britain. Lagos was subsequently annexed by Britain and established as Lagos Colony in 1862, providing a base for the expansion of colonial jurisdiction across Yorubaland.

Images of Europeans were gradually incorporated into the works of Yoruba sculptors, reflecting the increasing influence of Britain in the region. This door records a historic meeting in 1901 between the Ogoga of Ikere and the British travelling commissioner for Ondo province, Captain William Ambrose.

Military tunic from Sudan, late 19th century

This appliquéd tunic (jibba), worn by a Sudanese soldier, formed part of the spoils of war taken by Anglo-Egyptian forces at the battle of Atbara, Sudan in 1898. The pocket decoration indicates that it probably belonged to a senior army officer. After their victory at Atbara, Anglo-Egyptian troops raided the Sudanese enclosure and, following established practice for both sides of the conflict at this period, took clothing and personal items. Major General Sir William Forbes Gatacre (1843–1906), who commanded the British Brigade at Atbara, appears to have taken this jibba to Britain. His widow, Lady Beatrix Gatacre, presented it to the Museum in 1909.

Caption: The Mahdist leader Emir Mahmoud following defeat at the battle of Atbara by Anglo-Egyptian forces, 1898.

Anglo-Egyptian involvement in Sudan

In 1819 to 20 Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman ruler of Egypt, dispatched his army up the Nile to occupy northern and central Sudan. This period of occupation was brought to an end by a Sudanese nationalist movement led by Muhammed Ahmad (1844–1885), an Islamic religious leader and self-proclaimed Mahdi ('rightly guided one'). The movement's capture of Khartoum in January 1885 and the creation of the Mahdist state (1881–1898) led to Anglo-Egyptian involvement in Sudan and the birth of the present Republic of Sudan. Many followers of the Mahdi wore tunics (jibba), with appliquéd patches of coloured cloth, as a uniform. This form of tunic was probably inspired by the everyday garments worn earlier by religious men in the region that were patched as they became ragged.

Room 26: North America

Potlatch Kwakwaka'wakw mask from Canada, about 1910

Since 2005 this mask (pictured above) has been on loan to the Kwakwaka'wakw run U'mista Cultural Centre on Alert Bay, British Columbia. The mask would have been worn and danced as part of a ceremonial celebration called a potlatch, in which rights and titles are publicly acknowledged. As a result of a potlatch hosted by Chief Dan Cranmer in 1921 this mask and many others were confiscated by the Canadian authorities.

Participating in potlatches was banned by the Canadian government in 1884 as part of wider national efforts to assimilate First Nations people. After discovering this potlatch, the Canadian authorities charged and sentenced 26 people to prison. They were offered lighter sentences

on condition that they surrender their masks and regalia and never potlatch again. Those charged surrendered around 400 items which were sold to North American museums. In 1938 one of these museums sold the present mask to an English collector named Harry Beasley. His wife donated the mask to the British Museum in 1944.

Caption: The mask as it is displayed today in the U'mista Cultural Centre. Photo © Trustees of the U'mista Cultural Centre.

The 'Namgis (Kwakwaka'wakw) First Nation and the British Museum

Daughter of Chief Dan Cranmer and Kwakwaka'wakw anthropologist, Gloria Cranmer Webster, identified this mask in a photograph of the surrendered regalia taken in 1922. This led to years of careful discussions between the U'mista Cultural Centre and the British Museum. Eventually the two institutions agreed a long-

term loan of the mask to Alert Bay. It is displayed with the other potlatch regalia surrendered at the time. This loan has strengthened the relationship between the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation and the British Museum and has led to productive collaborations.

This text was written in consultation with U'mista Cultural Centre, Canada.

West African drum, collected in Virginia, 1700-1750

This wooden drum is the earliest African-American object in the British Museum. It was made by Akan people in West Africa over 300 years ago. The first enslaved Africans arrived in North America in 1619 and we assume the drum crossed the Atlantic aboard a slave ship, but this is not known for certain. Drums were played during these journeys and captives were forced to dance for exercise in order to keep them healthier

amid the horrendous conditions. Around 1730, a Reverend Clerk acquired the drum in Virginia, then a British colony and now a state within the USA. The drum passed from him to Sir Hans Sloane in England where it became part of his collection, incorrectly recorded as a Native American drum. Recent scientific examination revealed that the main body of the drum is made from a variety of wood found in West Africa.

Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum

In his will, Sloane, a wealthy physician, offered his entire collection to the public in return for a payment of £20,000 to his heirs. Sloane's collection, with several additional libraries and collections, became the foundation of the British Museum, which was established on 7 June 1753 by an Act of Parliament.

Sloane's career as a collector began in 1687 when he became physician to the Governor of

Jamaica, then a British colony. Sloane worked as a doctor on plantations worked by enslaved people. With assistance from English planters and enslaved West Africans he assembled a collection of 800 plant specimens, animals and local tools and personal items. On returning from the Caribbean Sloane married an heiress to Jamaican sugar plantations worked by enslaved people, profits from which allowed him to greatly expand his collections.

Room 1: Enlightenment

Puppets and masks from Java, 1700–1816

These objects were collected by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), a British colonial official. Between 1811 and 1816 Raffles was Lieutenant-Governor of Java, infamously known for authorising an attack on the most powerful Javanese court. During his time there, he amassed collections and

reports on aspects of the island that appealed to early 19th-century European ideas about civilisation, particularly national history and antiquities. All of Raffles' papers were lost when the ship returning him to Britain in 1824 sank, so we will never know for certain how his objects were obtained. Stylistic features and the unused condition of the puppets and masks displayed here indicate that they were probably gifts or were purchased by Raffles, rather than being acquired through looting. Raffles' collection was donated to the British Museum in 1859 upon the death of his widow.

The British in Java

The French seized the island of Java from the Dutch in 1807 during the Napoleonic wars to gain access to local resources. After a successful military expedition by British East India Company troops in 1811, Raffles was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Java. He held the position until the

island was returned to the Dutch in 1816. Raffles wanted Britain to keep Java as a colony because he felt Southeast Asia was of particular strategic importance since it connected British colonies in India with trade interests in China. He wished to establish a centre through which goods, such as ceramics, textiles, tea, coffee, spices and opium, could be freely traded to benefit the British. Unable to develop Java, Raffles established Singapore as a British port in 1819.

Soup plate from China, 1740s

This soup plate was part of a uniquely painted porcelain dinner service commissioned by Commodore Lord George Anson of the British East India Company. The plate was bequeathed in 1892 to the Museum by Anson's relative, the politician Thomas George Anson, 2nd Earl of Lichfield (1825-92).

Chinese porcelains made at Jingdezhen for

the British market were sent to the port city of Guangzhou to be shipped to Britain, via India, on East Indiamen ships.

The British East India Company and China

European and American direct trade with China was dominated by the Honourable East India Company, which held a monopoly from 1672 until 1833. The East India Company traded many commodities including, in the early 19th century, opium grown in India and bought for recreational and medicinal use. The refusal of the Company to reduce this trade when challenged by Qing government officials led to the First Opium War (1839–42). The Treaty of Nanjing, which ended the war, forced the Qing emperors to open further 'Treaty Ports' for international trade.

Sculptures from the Macabi Islands

All these objects were found by a British company

during the removal of guano (layers of bird excrement) on the Macabi Islands off the coast of northern Peru in about 1870. The Moche ceramics show bound prisoners awaiting sacrifice. The wooden staffs depict officers, seated within a structure, who would most likely oversee these sacrificial ceremonies.

These objects are part of a larger, unique, collection of 41 diverse items thought to relate to the use of these islands as an important sacrificial ceremonial centre for the Moche people. Extensive mining on the Macabi Islands during the 19th century unearthed many archaeological objects, obtained by ships' captains and European collectors. The Museum's Macabi Islands collection arrived in three main lots towards the end of 1871.

British guano mining in Peru

During the 19th century Peruvian guano, a

high quality fertiliser, was exported to Britain in vast quantities. The firm Antony Gibbs & Sons started operating in Peru in 1822, shortly after the country had declared its independence from Spain. Peru's struggle for independence left the country economically disadvantaged, helping the British firm secure a monopoly from the Peruvian government.

Antony Gibbs & Sons extracted 192,300 tons of guano before 1850, fertiliser that was used throughout the British Empire and Europe. The growing global demand for fertiliser during the 19th century generated intense competition, international rivalry and imperialism. France, Germany, the UK and the USA are amongst the states who subsequently exploited guano rich islands.

Shield from New South Wales, Australia

This shield, of bark and wood (red mangrove), dates to the late 1700s or early 1800s. Broad

shields such as this were used as defensive weapons against spears. The size and shape of the hole in this shield suggest it was pierced by a spear.

Although once thought to have been collected in 1770 by James Cook or Joseph Banks at Kamay (Botany Bay, near Sydney), it may have been obtained from its owner between about 1790 and 1815 and sent to London by a colonial governor or other collector. It is the earliest known Aboriginal shield from Australia and has come to symbolise the first British colonization of Australia and its ongoing legacy, which still affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today.

The colonisation of Australia

Australia has been inhabited for at least 60,000 years. Although William Dampier visited the northwest coast of Australia in the late 1600s and

James Cook sailed up the east coast in 1770, permanent British occupation began in 1788 with a 'First Fleet' of ships carrying convicts to establish a penal colony at present day Sydney. In 1901, Australia became a country independent from the United Kingdom. Some Aboriginal people in central Australia remained out of contact with Europeans until the early 1980s.

The Eora people of the Sydney region suffered the first brunt of British colonisation from 1788. Despite loss of population due to disease and frontier violence as well as displacement, Aboriginal people continue to live in the Sydney region maintaining strong bonds with their traditional lands and culture.

Ritual wooden seat (duho)

This duho (or ritual wooden seat) was made by Indigenous Taino people from the Bahamas. Chiefs sit on duhos and aided by hallucinogens,

communicate with their gods, a practice that continues today in the Caribbean. Part of this object's collection history was inscribed on its underside in 1850 and reads:

‘This stool was found in a Cave in the Island of Eleuthera, The Bahamas, about the year 1820 by James Thompson, a Slave, and purchased of him by Theo[philu]s Pugh, Wes. Missy. in 1835. ... ’

James Thompson was one of many enslaved peoples forcefully brought to the islands to work on colonial plantations. Theophilus Pugh was a Methodist missionary who purchased the stool from him. It was donated to the British Museum in 1918.

Colonisation, slavery and independence

At the time of European colonisation of the Caribbean in the late 1400s, Taino peoples were the principal inhabitants of the Bahamas.

The Spanish removed the majority of Taino and enslaved them on the island of Hispaniola. The Bahamas became a British crown colony in 1718 and plantations, fueled by the labour of enslaved peoples brought from Africa, were established. In the 1780s, Methodist missions came to the islands. When British missionary Theophilus Pugh visited Eleuthera and purchased this duho from James Thompson, emancipation had brought a formal end to slavery in the British Empire. Thompson was enslaved when he found the duho but by the time he sold it to Pugh he was a free man and a local leader.

On 10 July 1973 the Bahamas became independent. The repercussions of colonialism are still acutely felt today.

Room 2: Collecting the world

Figure from the Cook Islands

This sculpture is from Rarotonga, one of the Cook Islands (*Kūki 'Āirani*) in the South Pacific Ocean. Associated with traditional religious practices, the figure was acquired by the London Missionary Society in the 19th century during their efforts to convert islanders to Christianity.

The London Missionary Society was founded in 1795 and began to work in the Pacific in 1818. More information about the London Missionary Society, and how its collection subsequently came to the British Museum, is given in the labels in this case (below).

The Pacific Islands and European colonisation

Britain was one of a number of European countries involved in the colonisation of Pacific

Islands during the 19th century. The Cook Islands were given their name by the Russian navy, in honour of the British navigator Captain James Cook (1728 –1779). During the 19th century, the islands were a popular stop for whaling ships from Britain and Australia.

The Cook Islands became formally aligned with the United Kingdom in 1890. In 1901 the islands were incorporated within the boundaries of New Zealand, at that time a self-governing British colony (now independent). Today the Cook Islands are self-governing in free association with New Zealand (Aotearoa), and King Charles III is head of state.

Room 24: Living and Dying

Pukara, a painting from Western Australia, 2013

This painting by senior men of the Spinifex people depicts important Ancestral Beings who created the landscape, people and the law which they abide by. Before beginning to paint on canvas, Spinifex people made ephemeral paintings on the body and on the ground. A series of major paintings created in the late 1990s demonstrated their customary law and helped to achieve recognition of native title.

Men and women of the Spinifex people also paint their stories and country in a form suitable for sale to outsiders. Their art can now be bought at art galleries in Australia and around the world. This painting was created under the aegis of the community-based Spinifex Arts Project, and purchased in 2013 by the British Museum from

the Outstation Gallery in Darwin, Australia.

The colonisation of Australia

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Some Aboriginal people in central Australia remained out of contact with Europeans until the early 1980s. The Spinifex people were moved off their ancestral lands when Britain used it for the testing of atomic weapons in the 1950s and 1960s. After a long struggle, their claim for native title was recognized by the Australian courts in 2000.

Dance costume from Kiribati, 1987-2017

This display was co-curated with members of the Kiribati community in the UK. In the Kiribati islands dance is a way of storytelling, remembering and passing on cultural knowledge. The community members were keen that dance should be a prominent element of this display. One of the participants, Victoria Burns, created the film nearby which shows a dance performance. When work began on this project during 2016 the Museum's collection did not include a complete dance costume, but only some of the elements that you can see here. The rest of the costume was acquired in 2017 through the contacts of the Kiribati community. Some of the additional items were donated, others were newly commissioned and made in Kiribati especially for this display.

Kiribati

Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas) is a group of islands

that straddle the equator in the central Pacific Ocean. Spread over a vast area spanning almost 3,000 miles, they lie approximately halfway between Australia and the Hawaiian islands. Formerly known as the Gilbert Islands, they were part of a British colony, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, until independence in 1979. The name Kiribati, the local pronunciation of Gilberts, was adopted at independence. The Republic of Kiribati is a member of the Commonwealth, a political association of 53 states, most of them former territories of the British Empire.

Milk vessel from Somalia, early 20th century

This vessel was purchased by Diana Powell-Cotton during a visit to Italian Somaliland (modern Somalia) between 1934 and 1935. She travelled with her father, Major Percy Powell-Cotton, but stayed on after he returned to the UK. Her background, social class and gender helped her gain a level of access to spaces and people that

was unusual for the time. She formed close local relationships that helped her to collect everyday objects and to take photographs. The Powell-Cottons donated around 300 objects from Somalia to the British Museum in 1935.

From colonial Somaliland to independence

European colonial powers were interested in Somalia because its coast was strategically important in controlling commercial sea routes around the Indian Ocean. In the late 19th century, Britain and Italy colonised parts of Somalia, establishing British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland respectively. In 1960 Somalia gained independence as the United Republic of Somalia, incorporating the former territories of the Italian colony and the British protectorate.

Betel-nut cutter from Sri Lanka

Many of the objects displayed here were collected

by Hugh Nevill (1847–1897), a British colonial official in the Ceylon Civil Service. During the 30 years he spent living and working in Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), Nevill amassed a large and wide-ranging collection. While he wrote extensively about his natural history specimens, and prepared a catalogue of his manuscripts, he left little information about the historic and contemporary objects he acquired. Nevill was one of the founding members of the Kandyan Society of Arts which was set up to support the manufacture of traditional crafts by local artisans in Kandy. It is likely that most of the wood and metalwork in his collection, including this betel-nut cutter, was made by this Society. The Society still exists and is now called the Kandyan Art Association.

The British in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)

Sri Lanka has long been an integral part of Indian Ocean trade. As an important trading hub and

rich source of natural resources, the island was invaded by Indian and European powers. During the Napoleonic wars the British first occupied the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, before taking control of the rest of the island, including the Kingdom of Kandy, in 1815. The Ceylon Civil Service, of which Hugh Nevill was a part, was established to administer this British Crown Colony. After decades of agitation the island was granted independence from British colonial rule as the Dominion of Ceylon in 1948. In 1972 Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka. Independence Day is celebrated on 4 February every year.

Sword from India

This sword came from the palace of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore (ruled 1782–99) who fought four wars against the East India Company, resisting British expansion. The sword was seized as a trophy in 1799 after Tipu Sultan died defending his palace against British forces. It was

donated to the Museum almost 80 years later by the army officer and collector Lieutenant-General A.W.H. Meyrick. The gold ring nearby is said to have been taken from Tipu Sultan's finger after the battle and brought to England by Arthur Henry Cole (1780–1844), Resident at Mysore. It was given to the Museum in 1997 by the wife of Cole's great-great-great nephew.

The British army in India

By the time Tipu Sultan became ruler of the powerful kingdom of Mysore, the British had established themselves as a rival power in India through the East India Company. The Company was a trading organisation, but by the mid-1700s it had taken control of vast areas of India to protect and expand its business interests, as well as to extend British rule. The British government took over direct rule of India after the Great Rebellion of 1857. This was partly a military mutiny against the Company, which began among Indian

soldiers from the Bengal army and soon escalated with civilian uprisings. The British army maintained a sizeable presence in India after 1858.

Thuggee model from India

This model is part of a set representing 'Thuggee', or the strangling and robbery of travellers.

Although banditry occurred as a result of economic instability, worsened by colonial taxation policies, the British sensationalised 'Thugs' as an ancient cult of stranglers, enabling them to impose stricter controls over the local population. This set was commissioned by Benjamin Worthy Horne (1804–1870), a coach and railway proprietor, and his wife Catherine. They paid 14 guineas to have it made in Madras (present-day Chennai) by a local craftsman, subsequently giving it to the British Museum in 1847.

On display at the British Museum

We know the models were displayed in the British Museum after they were acquired, because in 1857 the Chaplain of Newgate Prison made a complaint about them in *The Times*. He felt they were corrupting British audiences and inspiring young men to commit crimes around London: 'I have often thought, and still think, that the origin of garotte robberies took place from the exhibition of the way the Thugs in India strangle and plunder passengers, as exhibited in the British Museum'. Reflecting on these models today allows us to identify the colonial anxieties that fed into these kinds of representations.

