

# THE PAST IS NOW



**At its height in 1922, the British Empire covered a quarter of the world and ruled over 458 million people. The story of the British Empire can be told from many perspectives and people affected by it will view and remember it differently. No two countries had the same colonial experience; no two people experienced British rule in the same way.**

Empire was a bloody business. Many people lost their lives or were traumatised in the creation and retention of the Empire, or in fighting to gain independence from British

rule. Although it has officially ended, the Empire changed the way in which the modern world was constructed. Its' legacy exists in structures, such as museums, schools and governments, and affects individual and national senses of identity today. Britain still has 14 overseas territories, including six in the Caribbean. Some argue that the United Kingdom itself is made up of colonised states.

**The Past is Now** focuses on a few stories linked to the history of the British Empire. It explores their significance to Birmingham and how they remain relevant today.

We acknowledge that there is no neutral voice and so this complex story cannot be told neutrally. This gallery has been co-curated by six individuals with connections to Birmingham who are passionate about challenging the usual narrative told about the British Empire. They are: Abeera Kamran, Aliyah Hasinah, Mariam Khan, Sara Myers, Shaheen Kasmani and Sumaya Kassim. Their perspectives have led the interpretation and they have worked alongside museum staff to curate this exhibition.

#ThePastisNow

## Language

The gallery aims to encourage discussion about the British Empire. Below is a list of terms and definitions of how we are using them in this display.

**The British Empire:** the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates and other territories ruled or administered by Britain from the late 16th century to the 21st century.

**Colonise:** settle among and establish control over (the indigenous people of an area)

**People of Colour:** a new term of American origin, often used to express political solidarity amongst non-white people.

**Racialise:** to impose a racial interpretation on someone. To be racialised as white is to be understood or 'read' as being white. Racial identities are myths that have real effects on how we live.

**Exoticise:** to view and treat a person or thing as special or strange and different from oneself.

**Diaspora:** a movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland.

**Misogyny:** the hatred of, contempt for or ingrained prejudice against women and girls.

**Capitalism:** an economic, political, and social system in which property, business, and industry are privately owned, directed towards making the greatest possible profits for successful organizations and individuals.

# Capitalism

**Capitalism is a system that prioritises the interests of individuals and their companies at the expense of the majority.**

Although trade, exchange and slavery have long been part of human history, the relationship between European colonialism, industrial production and capitalism is unique in its brutality and lasting impact. One example of this is the transatlantic slave trade. Within this system, human beings were reduced to things to be bought and sold.

Birmingham was one of the manufacturing centres of the British Empire. The local impact of the British Empire on Birmingham was that of prosperity and opportunity. Objects manufactured here were shipped across the world including those used as trade items for

goods and people. While Britain profited from this system, the colonies were deliberately exploited and under-developed.

Modern day migration is the direct consequence of a colonial past. Migrants are often surprised to find Britain's inhabitants have forgotten their centuries-long relationship. To those who have forgotten, here is a reminder: "We're here, because you were there".

**Why were people in Britain still starving when the Empire was booming?**

#ThePastisNow

**Image:** Illustration showing cocoa production in Trinidad by Frank Newbould, 1931-35.

Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust



# Capitalism

We want to know what you think about these items.....

**How do they make you feel?**

**What do you think connects them?**

**How do they relate to capitalism and the British Empire?**

Let us know in the gallery and #ThePastisNow

## **1. Kissi pennies**

Iron currency used mainly in the West African countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea

from the late 19th century until replaced by colonial currencies.

## **2. Katanga cross**

Cast copper ingot once used as currency in parts of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## **3. Manillas, 19th century**

Manillas were made in Birmingham to be used as currency to trade for enslaved Africans.

Brass was one of Birmingham's most important industries.

## **4. Brass idols intended for the West African trade, made in Birmingham, early 19th century**

These figures were just some of the vast numbers of goods made in Birmingham to be traded in West Africa.



## **5. Commemorative tin, 1953**

A Cadbury's tin made to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

## **6. Booklet about The Bournville Village Trust, 1931-5**

The Cadbury family built the village of Bournville to house their Birmingham factory workers.

## **7. Tin for storing rice**

The tin is illustrated with images of African and Asian people.

## **8. 'The Story of Kojo', 1950s**

One of six Cadbury's educational posters depicting 'Kojo' and his family in Ghana. Cadbury's bought cocoa from Ghana. In the 1950s they produced a series of posters

about their production and manufacturing processes.



# Environment

**One of the central features of the British Empire was a desire to control and exploit natural resources.**

The availability of resources from the colonies drove demand for the creation of objects made from 'exotic' materials. This in turn increased Britain's demand for those natural resources. At first, the natural materials from the colonies seemed to be inexhaustible. However, it quickly became apparent that this was not the case.

Clearing forests for sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean rapidly altered the environment. The rainfall patterns changed and deforested land was vulnerable to erosion and landslides. Today this affects how the

Caribbean recovers from hurricanes and storms.

There is a growing awareness of the ethics around consumption but every day most of us still use objects that contain natural resources linked to the exploitation of people and land.

This history is often hidden in museum displays. Instead, museums often highlight the craftsmanship of objects and the stories of the people who made them or owned them.

**What's the true cost of the things you own?**

#ThePastisNow

## **Timeline**

- **Mid-17th century** - British harvesting of hawksbill sea turtles begins in the Caribbean. As they destroy local hawksbill populations, turtle fishermen move from one site to the next.

- **1724** - Mahogany first becomes a popular wood in Britain and the British colonies.
- **1774** - Mahogany is described as 'almost exterminated' in Jamaica.
- **1830s** - East India Company establishes the first tea estates in the Indian state of Assam, using tea plants brought from China.
- **Around 1900** - The population of wild African elephants is 3-5 million.
- **1989** - International trade in ivory is banned but domestic markets remain open, including most of Europe.
- **2008** - Slender Loris of Sri Lanka and Lion Tailed Macaque of India (both types of primates) are named endangered species, due to loss of habitat in deforestation associated with tea plantations.
- **2010** - Democratic Republic of Congo becomes world's largest coltan producer (a metallic ore used in mobile phones). Coltan mining has led to deforestation, water contamination, soil erosion and increased poaching.
- **2016** - Britain bans all sales of ivory not backed by proof that the object is over 70

years old, closing the loophole that allowed dealers to claim items were antique without providing documentary evidence to prove it.

- **2017** - Approximately 415,000 African elephants left in the wild. Over 3,000 sq.km of land in Assam is used for tea cultivation.

**Image:** This 1932 British War Office world map image shows the annual value of British Trade on various trade routes. Given the value of this crucial economic information, the map was originally classified and available only to a restricted official audience. Trade route chart of the British Empire, London, 1932.

Photo © The British Library Board, MOO 0808 3925a



# Environment

## **1. Turtle**

## **2. Tortoiseshell rattle, Africa, late 19th or early 20th century**

Tortoiseshell products are made from the shell of the marine hawksbill turtle.

Tortoiseshell is an extremely versatile material. It was used in a similar way to plastics today and can be easily carved and moulded into many shapes. The colours of modern plastic combs and glasses frames often imitate tortoiseshell.

Hawksbills are now the most endangered sea turtles. Despite being protected they are still illegally captured for their tortoiseshell or preserved whole and sold as tourist souvenirs.

### **3. Dinka Bracelet**

This ivory armlet was made by the Dinka people of South Sudan. It was collected by the Birmingham-born Missionary Reverend Archibald Straw during a 1906 Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission to Sudan.

### **4. Carved ivory tusks**

These ivory tusks were made in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. They depict an array of people whom were seen by the artists at the time. The characters can be interpreted as Portuguese, Arabian and African traders. An elephant is also included, a reminder of where the ivory has come from.

### **5. Billiard balls**

Ivory was used to make billiard balls from the mid to late 19th century. Eight tusks were needed to produce just one set of balls. It is



estimated 12,000 elephants were killed each year just to meet Britain's demand.

The high cost of ivory encouraged the development of early plastics as ivory replacements. These billiard balls were made by Birmingham firm Thomas Padmore & Sons using an ivory substitute called padmorine which they developed.

## **6. My phone**

This is one of our curators' old phones. New technologies create new demands for raw materials. The ore coltan contains the element tantalum, essential for high density capacitors. These are used in mobile phones, cameras and many of the other electronic devices which are an important part of modern life.

In the Congo, coltan mining has caused deforestation and contaminated water supplies. Miners in the national parks have killed many endangered gorillas for food. The

mining process is dangerous and many miners have died.

## **7. Wooden casket inlaid with ivory and tortoise shell**

Asian elephant ivory was used for carving in the Indian subcontinent until the 19th century. This casket was made in Gujarat or Sindh in the 17th century and so the carved ivory with which it is decorated was probably taken from an Asian elephant.

It was later adapted, possibly for use as a tea caddy. Tea exports were highly profitable for the British East India Company, which established estates of tea plantations using indentured labour.



**Mahogany longcase  
clock, made in  
Birmingham**

The Caribbean was the first part of the British Empire to be exploited for mahogany. At first it was a low value by-product of clearing land for sugar plantations. Mahogany furniture soon became a desirable status symbol and demand rapidly increased.

The slow growing mahogany trees were harvested at an unsustainable rate and quickly disappeared from the islands. Once Caribbean mahogany was exhausted suppliers turned to other tropical hardwoods with a similar appearance.



## **Gentleman's Hercules Bicycle**

Made in Birmingham, 1946

The invention of the bicycle revolutionised access to transport and expanded the world for both women and poorer community members. Bicycle manufacturing used technologies developed in arms manufacturing, with the steel tubing used for their frames emerging from techniques for making gun barrels. Hercules Cycle and Motor Co. Ltd was a Birmingham manufacturer that produced millions of bicycles between 1910 and 2003.

## **Rubber and Asphalt**

Bicycles can be used to understand how the British Empire and everyday life in Britain were intimately connected. The development of the bicycle industry was primarily dependent on two resources found in European imperial territories: asphalt from Trinidad used to lay roads and rubber sourced from Brazil and the Congo used to make tyres. Harvesting asphalt and rubber had a huge human and environmental cost. In the Congo, one person died for every 10 kilograms of rubber harvested. In Brazil it was one person for every 150 kilograms.



## Joseph Chamberlain: Colonial Secretary

**In 1895, Joseph Chamberlain, who is often celebrated today as the “radical” godfather of modern Birmingham, became Colonial Secretary of Britain: but he helped widen deep divisions in modern South Africa.**

The white colonists of Southern Africa had divided the region into separate states: those of the English-speakers, subjects of the British Empire, and the Dutch-speaking Boers. When the Boers discovered gold, the British took note. In 1895, with Chamberlain’s knowledge although not his official blessing, 600 armed men headed by the British official Leander Jameson entered the Boer territory in a failed attempt to overthrow their government.

Increasing friction led to the outbreak of the second Anglo-Boer War in 1899, nicknamed 'Joe's War'. In an effort to reduce the Boer combatants' access to supplies, civilians were imprisoned in poorly organised internment camps. At least 26,000 Boer women and children and 20,000 black South Africans died in the camps.

Chamberlain's modern Birmingham was built on imperial exploits across the globe. 'Good Old Joe' or 'Joseph Africanus', as he would become known, continues to be celebrated in multi-cultural Birmingham. Statues, memorials and street names installed during his lifetime can be seen alongside more recent commemorations. He is still revered despite his aggressive and racist imperial policy.

**How many references to Chamberlain can you find in Birmingham?**

#ThePastisNow

## Timeline

- **1806** - Cape Town seceded to Britain at the end of the Napoleonic wars.
- **1836** - Chamberlain born in London.
- **1867** - The discovery of diamonds in South Africa.
- **1873-6** - Chamberlain becomes mayor of Birmingham and is elected as Liberal MP for Birmingham.
- **1880-1881** - First Anglo-Boer war, South Africa. As a radical Cabinet minister, Chamberlain speaks against aggressive imperialism.
- **Mid-1880s** - Gold is discovered in the Boer republic of the Transvaal, triggering a gold rush.
- **1895** - Chamberlain becomes Colonial Secretary
- **1895** - Jameson Raid - failed British attempt to overthrow the Transvaal government.
- **1899-1902** - Second Anglo-Boer War.



- **1902** - Chamberlain visits South Africa in order to try to find a political settlement with the Boers.
- **1906** - Chamberlain suffers a stroke which ends his political career.
- **1909** - South Africa Act grants nominal independence to South Africa.
- **1913** - Land Act introduced to prevent black South Africans, except those living in Cape Province, from buying land outside reserves.
- **1914** - Chamberlain dies and is buried in Keyhill Cemetery in Birmingham.
- **1931** - Statute of Westminster abolishes the last powers of the British Government in South Africa.
- **1948** - Apartheid, a system of legally institutionalised racial segregation in South Africa, is established. The legislation was finally abolished in 1991.

**Image:** Satirical cartoon of Joseph Chamberlain as the Ancient Mariner, carrying the burden of the South African Republics around his neck. 'The Ancient Mariner Up To Date', From 'Truth' Magazine, 25 December 1901.

Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust



# Joseph Chamberlain: Colonial Secretary

**Joseph Chamberlain's eight years as Colonial Secretary were dominated by his work to expand British rule in South Africa. But even he understood that there would be long-felt repercussions. In 1896 Chamberlain addressed concerns that Britain was potentially on the brink of war, stating:**

**'A war in South Africa ... would be in the nature of a civil war ... it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations would be hardly long enough to extinguish'.**

## **1. Editorial Cartoon. ‘Really, this is very Orchid’, by F Lynch**

Chamberlain’s policies in South Africa were criticised for taking the relatively stable relationship between the Boers and the British to the point of war. Numerous satirical cartoons in magazines and newspapers documented the controversy around this series of events which lead to the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War.

This image depicts the stand-off between Chamberlain and Paul Kruger, the President of the South African Republic, over the Dutch-colonised Transvaal.

## **2. Postcard, Boer Life No.5 ‘On the Way to Market - - and Effect’, by Heinrich Egersdörfer, around 1905**

This upsetting image shows that there was a level violence against black South Africans that was normalised and trivialised. However popular literature about the period around the

Second Anglo-Boer war predominantly speaks of the Dutch and British perspectives. The impact on black South Africans, who make up the majority of the population, is very rarely referred to.

### **3. Address from the West Birmingham Women's Liberal Unionist Association, May 15 1903**

Chamberlain undertook a post-war tour of South Africa to assert British colonial dominance and to emphasise that the Afrikaans would no longer be independent but under British rule. Pro-imperialists across Britain and South Africa presented Chamberlain and his wife Mary Endicott with gifts commemorating the British victory. This address congratulated him on the resulting 'contentment and amity of all the races in South Africa'.

#### **4. Nutcracker and clay pipe in the form of Joseph Chamberlain**

Locally, Chamberlain was celebrated. His distinctive monocle and orchid buttonhole featured on countless souvenirs.

#### **5. Ceremonial trowel presented to Chamberlain, 17 June 1874**

This trowel commemorates the laying of this building's foundation stone by Chamberlain after his policies enabled the museum's creation. It is important for us to reflect on Chamberlain's legacy due to our historical connections.

## **6. Casket commissioned by the Constitutional Club and presented to Joseph Chamberlain by Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, designed by Henry Wilson, 1903**

This casket includes allegorical representations of the British colonial territories of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and India. The figure of Peace holds a globe. A cherub symbolising Love rests on Africa, celebrating the restoration of peace in South Africa.

Two thousand subscribers contributed towards the purchase of this gift. It is evidence of the high esteem in which Chamberlain was held by members of the British establishment.



# Eugenics

**Eugenics ('eu' = good, or true + 'genus' = birth, race or stock) is a movement founded on the theories of the Birmingham born scientist Francis Galton.**

In previous racist scientific theories, humans were categorised and placed in a hierarchy based on their physical characteristics. Such hierarchies were used to justify the colonisation of lands inhabited by other 'races'. Eugenics took these theories as scientific truths. Influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Galton's work focused on improving the quality of the population through controlled breeding, forced sterilisation and restricting marriages.

The term 'eugenics' was coined by Francis Galton in 1883. Before that time the practices of regulating breeding had horrific and



traumatising effects when used on enslaved peoples in the British colonies. In the 20th Century, the ideology of eugenics was adopted and championed by Winston Churchill. It was also used to justify the genocide of Jewish and other peoples in Nazi Germany.

Eugenics enforced racism, classism and discrimination against disabled people and its legacy has been used to uphold ideas of white supremacy. Today, eugenics continues to influence scientific and medical practices.

In some Communities of Colour there is a fear of Western Medicine because of historical racist practices. How far do you trust western medicine?

#ThePastIsNow

**Images:** Early 20th century postcards published by Hallis & Co., Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Printed in Saxony.

Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust



# Eugenics

Understanding and explaining the natural world by categorising it was a major development in science during the 18th century. The Eugenics movement took this impulse for categorising to an extreme and applied it to humans in a deeply flawed way. Categorisation leads to hierarchies. Subjective, prejudiced opinions about human physical characteristics were then presented as scientific fact. This display explores historical examples of how the Eugenics theory was applied to people of different races.

In these practices people become reduced to representations of a type, but are not given individual identities nor names.

**Who are these people and how did they come to be subjects of these artworks?**

**How did they feel when posing and did they know how their images might be used?**

### **1. Watercolour Portrait unknown artist, early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Anthropological artwork was used to capture images of people encountered through colonial expeditions. Used as evidence of 'discovery of peoples', these images are often annotated with a cultural group. This image simply states 'Zulu man' on its reverse. As with many other faces in anthropological collections, his name has been lost.

As such, I believe he should be referred to as 'Dingane', a Zulu name meaning 'one who is searching'.

## **2. Moorish Camel Driver 3. Head of a Dancing Girl, by Marguerite Milward (1873-1953), Sculpture, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century**

Marguerite Milward was a sculptor who studied painting and modelling at Birmingham and Bromsgrove Schools of Art. She produced busts of people which she believed represented different racial types. Between 1935 and 1945 she travelled across India. Her book 'Artist in Unknown India' (1948) is a record of the process of casting and sculpting racial busts, including finding the perfect male and female specimens of each racial group she identified.

In 1939, thirty of Marguerite Milward's busts were purchased by the British Raj for display in the Ethnographic Gallery of the India Museum in Calcutta. The museum, like many colonial museums installed within the colonies, had a strong scientific focus. These museums were renowned for cataloguing indigenous peoples as 'Flora and Fauna'. These busts would have served to reinforce hierarchies in place through the colonial regime.

## **“Effecting the improvement of the race” – The Eugenics Society**

In its heyday of the 1930s, the Eugenics Society had 800 members, many of whom were influential people. Eugenics was not the process of finding the best example of a race, but the desire to improve the human race. It was divided between 'positive eugenics' - encouraging those with desirable characteristics to have more children - and 'negative eugenics' - preventing people with undesirable characteristics from breeding. This process aimed to enforce the hierarchies established by a few individuals on the majority of the population.

# Guns in Birmingham

**Birmingham's manufacturing industry was at the heart of Britain's colonial project. One of Birmingham's major exports during the height of the British Empire was guns.**

Between 1698 and 1807, Birmingham guns were used in the Triangular trade. In that trade, guns were exchanged for enslaved people on the West Coast of Africa who were then transported to the Americas and exchanged again for raw materials such as sugar and tobacco. The guns sent for trade were the cheapest type, painted bright colours, and were renowned for exploding when they were used by African traders.

Most of the Birmingham guns were used for purchasing enslaved women. Enslaved men

were purchased using higher quality weapons such as old British Army service muskets. In December 1754 alone, the Birmingham firm Farmer & Galton received orders for 2,750 guns to be used for slave trading. The Galton family were perhaps the most well-known gun manufacturers to make their profit from the slave trade. The resulting investments they made in the development of Birmingham's canals and railways were used to support this trading infrastructure, with guns sent across the country to reach Britain's ports.

Can you see the legacy of the gun trade in Birmingham today?

#ThePastisNow

## Timeline

- **1689** - Birmingham had become an important gun manufacturing centre.
- **1698** - The first order for African Flintlock muskets was made.

- **1707** - Birmingham manufacturers write to the House of Commons noting that the livelihood of Birmingham residents and the future of the industry's progress was dependant on the African trade.
- **1721** - An enslaved man was purchased for 8 guns, 2 cases of distilled liquor and 28 cotton sheets.
- **1746-1818** - The Galton family manufactured guns and sold them as part of the Triangular trade.
- **1754** - Farmer & Galton producing up to 600 guns a week.
- **1807** - The slave trade is abolished. Guns continue to be traded for various products, such as palm oil.
- **1865** - Guns traded were valued at maximum 2 shillings.
- **1866** - 100,0000-150,0000 firearms annually exported from Birmingham.
- **1868** - It became a legal requirement to Proof firearms for safety.
- **1921** - Trade of guns from Birmingham to Africa ended.
- **2016** - The West Midlands overtook the London Metropolitan Area as the gun crime capital of Britain.



**Image:** Lewis automatic machine gun from the First World War manufactured by The Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSA) in the early 20th century.

Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust

# Guns in Birmingham

## **1. Matchlock Sporting Gun, produced in North West India, possibly Lahore, 19th century.**

The gun, which was used for sport hunting, is made from wood and inlaid with painted ivory. 19th century sport hunting in India was a showcase of power and wealth. Members of European royal courts engaged in hunts for 'big game' which included tigers and cheetahs. Between 1875 and 1925 over 80,000 tigers were slaughtered. Hunting was only outlawed in 1971. This gun represents the enormous environmental impact of these activities.

## **2. Flintlock Musket Trade Gun, proofed in Birmingham, around 1835**

Due to Birmingham's proximity to coal and iron ore mines, and existing metalworking skills in the city, it became a leading manufacturer of guns from 1689. Many of the guns were used to trade for people in West Africa.

After the abolition of the slave trade the success of the industry in Birmingham became dependant on Britain's military engagements. By 1939 flintlock muskets were being converted into percussion action guns which made them more reliable.

## **3. Rifle, Snider Conversion with Sword Bayonet, BSA Co., 1866**

The Birmingham Small Arms Company Limited (BSA) was a group of businesses who manufactured military and sporting firearms. By 1868 BSA had become the largest armament company in the world. This was largely due to influential contacts with the

British government who helped BSA to gain contracts between wars.

One such contract was to build and supply Snider conversions. BSA's government work continued through both world wars, producing Lewis machine guns and the Lee Enfield rifle.

**Manual of Field Artillery Training, 1914, showing the use of the Lewis machine gun.**

Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



# Kenyan Independence

**The people of Kenya fought against British colonial rule from the late 1800s, and until independence in 1964.**

One example of this is the so-called 'Mau Mau' uprising in 1952 – 1960. The conflict mainly involved the Kikuyu community, white settlers, and the British army. Due to the British policy of divide and rule, the movement didn't gain popular support amongst Kenyans and the uprising was quashed. Many Kenyans were labelled as terrorists, moved to concentration camps and tortured.

Survivors from the concentration camps have taken the British Foreign Office to court over

human rights abuses in Kenya during colonial rule. In May 2016, a lawsuit was put to the British Government for compensation for 40,000 Kenyans for torture, rape, wrongful detention and forced labour. The case is still ongoing. As a result of the court case, letters from a secret colonial archive have been made public. They reveal colonial cover-ups, including the torture and mass slaughter of Kenyan prisoners of war.

Birmingham's collection includes artefacts that support the British view of the uprising – a gun, knives and a painting. These favour the British perspective over that of the freedom fighters.

**Can objects collected under colonial rule be used to tell a fair story?**

#ThePastisNow

**Timeline**

- **1895 - Early 1900s** - Formation of the British East African Protectorate. British settlers move into the highlands.
- **1920** - The area becomes the crown colony of Kenya, administered by a British governor.
- **1944** - Kenyan African Union (KAU) formed to campaign for Independence.
- **1952** - Kikuyu guerrilla group known as 'Mau Mau' begins violent campaign. State of emergency declared.
- **1956** - Mau Mau uprising put down after thousands are killed, mainly Africans.
- **1960** - State of emergency ends.
- **1963** - Kenya gains independence.
- **1964** - Republic of Kenya formed.
- **2012** - Secret colonial records made public after a group of Kenyans won the right to sue the British government for human rights abuses.

- **2016** - Lawsuit for compensation for 40,000 Kenyans came to court and is still on-going in 2017.

**Image:** British army soldiers come upon a Mau Mau encampment during a patrol. A suspect, caught by surprise, is searched and questioned. Photo © IWM (MAU 554)



# Kenyan Independence

## **1. William Gear (1915–1997), Mau, Mau, Oil Painting, 1953**

Gear made this work during the military action in Kenya. This response to the so-called Mau Mau Uprising was to be seen through 'the eyes of the rather nervous, somewhat terrified young National Service man in the Kenya jungle.'

Gear was a significant abstract British painter and a veteran of the Second World War. He acted as head of the department of Fine Art at Birmingham College of Art between 1964 and 1975.

## **2. Handmade rifle with a carved wooden handle, copper pipe barrel and door bolt firing mechanism.**

Improvised guns are objects created out of necessity. They are evidence that the fighting group does not have sufficient funding or the connections needed to purchase professionally manufactured weapons.

Because they are handmade, these objects were extremely unsafe to fire and would likely be used as a blunt object or as a scare tactic.

## **3. Bayonet**

Bayonet blades are accessories designed to fit in, or on, the muzzle of a rifle or similar weapon. It transforms a firearm into a pike,

and makes it a close-range as well as a distance weapon. This object is an ex-army bayonet, donated alongside the other weapons associated with the Mau Mau Uprising. It is assumed to have been used by a Kikuyu soldier, and to have been confiscated by British Army personnel.

#### **4. Kukri and Sinie Machetes**

These varied machete types were confiscated from Kikuyu soldiers. These are extremely useful blades which were probably used as agricultural tools, and re-appropriated as weapons. While the original museum documentation notes that these items are blood stained, they now appear rusted but clean. The blade of at least one of these machetes was made in Birmingham. This symmetry in the object's life shows the connection between Birmingham's manufacturing history and these events.

## **5. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery collection archives**

Noting that blood stained knives would be an 'amusing addition' to the museum's African collection shows how dehumanised the Kikuyu had become in the consciousness of the British public.

The perspective of the Uprising collected represents the majority of Birmingham's objects relating to the Kikuyu. This means that a single perspective on not only the events, but the cultural group whom it affected, has been collected by this museum.

# Representation

**If you aren't (racialised as) white it is difficult to see yourself fairly represented in popular culture, media and government policy.**

During the British Empire, artists created works which helped to create a fantasy version of what the colonies were like. The colonised people were represented by the colonisers for a white European audience. Images of colonised people, often shown as unclothed and uncivilised, reinforced ideas of them as subhuman. Today racist stereotypes of diaspora communities as threatening or dangerous echo these exoticised images in historical art collections.

How people are represented in popular culture changes how society feels about them.

Black and Asian artists often use art as a tool to resist, explore and challenge questions of representation. Here, the artworks represent People of Colour as subjects. Some are self-representations, and others are representations from a white perspective.

Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore said that “In Art, man reveals himself and not his objects.”

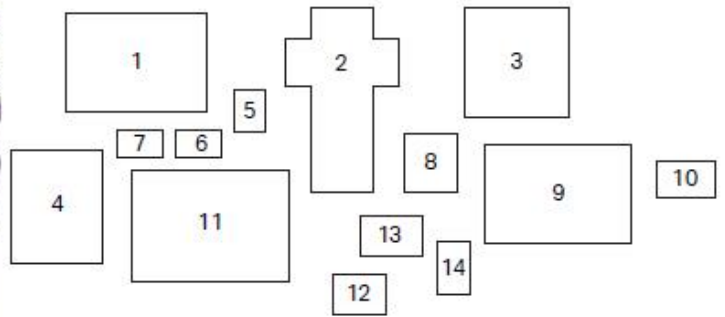
**From these representations, how much do we learn about the people in them?**

**How much do we learn about the people who created them, their views and the dominant culture in which the artworks were created?**

#ThePastisNow

**Image:** Handsworth Self-Portrait - Afro-Caribbean Group. From a project organised by Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon. Ten 8 Ltd, 1979.

# Representation



## **1. John Frederick Lewis (born London 1804, died 1876)**

The Harem, Oil Painting, 1876

## **2. Keith Piper (born Malta 1960, family moved to Birmingham when he was a child)**

The Ghosts of Christendom, Computer Montage, 1991

## **3. Shanti Panchal (born India 1950s, moved to Britain 1978)**

Portrait of Laxmi, Narayan and Son Maldon,  
Watercolour, 1987

**4. Keith Piper (born Malta 1960, family  
moved to Birmingham when he was a  
child)**

An English Queen, Print, 1991

**5. John Frederick Lewis (born London  
1804, died 1876)**

The Pipe Bearer, Oil Painting, 1856

**6. Vanley Burke (born Jamaica 1951,  
moved to Birmingham 1965)**

The Sugar Cone, Aston Hall, Photograph,  
1991

**7. Vanley Burke (born Jamaica 1951,  
moved to Birmingham 1965)**



Portrait of James Watt, Photograph, 1991

**8. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (born London 1828, died 1882)**

The Beloved - Study of a Black Boy, Pencil Drawing, 1865-66

**9. Chila Kumari Burman (born Liverpool 1957)**

Autoportrait 28 Position in 34 years, Laser Print, 1992

**10. Barbara Walker (born Birmingham 1964)**

17, Oil painting, 2012

**11. Lubaina Himid (born Zanzibar 1954, moved to Britain 1954)**

My Parents, Their Children, Mixed Media  
Painting, 1986

**12. Sir Jacob Epstein (born USA 1880,  
moved to London 1905, died 1959)**

Two Studies of a Pregnant Woman, Pencil  
drawing, 1930-32

**13. Sir Jacob Epstein (born USA 1880,  
moved to London 1905, died 1959)**

Reclining Pregnant Negress, Pencil Drawing,  
1936-40

**14. Harry Brockway (born Newport, South  
Wales 1958)**

Huck and Jim on the Raft, Wood Engraving,  
1993

## **Land of Milk and Honey II, 1997**

**Donald Rodney (1961 – 1998)**

Born in Smethwick, founding artist in the Blk Art Group in Wolverhampton in 1979.

Wood, glass, copper coins, congealed milk

Gifted by the Estate of the artist through  
the Contemporary Art Society, 2014

‘Land of Milk and Honey II’ was originally exhibited by the artist for the solo exhibition ‘9 Night in Eldorado’ (1997), which was dedicated to the memory of his father. ‘9 Night’ refers to the Caribbean funerary tradition in which loved ones remember the deceased by sharing food, songs and memories over nine evenings leading up to the church service.

This piece will constantly congeal and decay, which can be read as a reflection on the fragility of the artist’s own body. A year after this piece was completed, at the age of 36,

Rodney would die from complications related to Sickle Cell Anaemia. Throughout his career Donald Rodney used his illness as a metaphor for the illnesses in society. This piece refers to the disillusionment of immigrants, particularly those of his father's generation. They encountered segregation and racism when they moved to Britain, despite being sold a dream of prosperity and promise in the 'land of milk and honey'.

# Indian Independence

**The stroke of midnight on 14/15 August 1947 marked the end of British colonial rule in South Asia, creating the independent states of Pakistan and India. This partition resulted in one of the largest displacements of people in modern history. Over 12.5 million people were forced to leave their homes and 1 million were killed.**

Women in particular experienced the full force of this violence as huge numbers were raped, abducted or killed. Many were forced to commit suicide to escape such a fate. The extensive violence of Partition marked the culmination of complex processes, which

pitted Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities against each other, with British policies of divide and rule playing an important role in widening differences. But for centuries, people of different religions had often intermingled, shared language, food, cultures, music and ways of life.

Britain's hasty departure from India remains an important factor in the politics and social life of South Asia today. Trauma can be inherited across generations; communities are still dealing with colonial legacies of religious identity formation, distrust and misogyny today.

**Do you believe Partition affects relationships between communities in Birmingham today?**

#ThePastisNow

## Timeline

- **1600** - Establishment of East India Company by English, followed by similar companies of Dutch and French merchants.
- **23 June 1757** - Battle of Plassey marks beginning of the British conquest of Bengal.
- **1848** - Anglo-Sikh War leading to the annexation of the Punjab to British control.
- **1857-58** - First War of Independence (also referred to as a Revolt or Mutiny), East India Company abolished and assumption of direct Crown rule by the British.
- **20 February 1947** - British Prime Minister announces the intention to grant Indian independence no later than June 1948.
- **14/15 August 1947** - End of British rule.
- **21 November 1947** - Numbers of evacuation in Punjab exceed 8 million people.
- **6 December 1947** - Inter-dominion Conference at Lahore sets up the agreement between India and Pakistan to 'return' women to different religious communities.

- **30 January 1948** - Mahatma Ghandi assassinated by Hindu nationalist in New Delhi.
- **28 February 1948** - Last British troops depart India without any intervention in the crisis.
- **1971** - Bangladesh War in East Pakistan, leading to the formation of Bangladesh.
- **14-15 August 2017** - 70th anniversary of the Partition of India

**Image:** Young girls, among them some mothers, photographed at a refugee camp in Punjab, Pakistan, after the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent.

Donated By: F.E. Chaudhry, the only known local Pakistani photographer who captured the events at the time.

Courtesy of The Citizens Archive of Pakistan.



# Indian Independence

**The struggle for independence from British rule in South Asia gained momentum in the 19th century. As conflicts with the British led to the rise and fall of dynasties and princely states, the political and social landscape of the region changed forever.**

Here that shift is told through objects associated with Sikh, Muslim or Hindu kingdoms and states. Through them over 120 years of South Asian history can be traced.

**Image:** Map showing the borders of India, Pakistan and East Pakistan after Partition in 1947.

## **1. Shield**

The Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh is depicted on this shield alongside his son and generals. Known as the 'Lion of the Punjab', his army was famed for its military might. Less than ten years after his death in 1839, the British annexed the Sikh kingdom in the Punjab.

Made at Lahore, capital of the early 19th century Sikh kingdom, this steel shield is decorated with gold thread overlay. It demonstrates the great skill of the city's craftsmen.

## **2. Scales**

These scales were owned by a British man working for the East India Company during a pivotal moment in its history. In 1857, Hindu and Muslim soldiers, or sepoy, working for the Company revolted in what is sometimes called 'the First War of Independence'. That

conflict was an important watershed in the struggle against the British rule.

Founded in 1600, the Company grew to become an aggressive power in India. Its army controlled large areas, forcibly monopolising trade and draining local wealth, with brutal consequences.

### **3. Bejewelled Hat**

According to rumour, this hat belonged to Bahadur Shah II. He was last in line of the Mughal Emperors who controlled large areas of South Asia from the 15th century.

In 1857, Bahadur Shah II was the figurehead of what is sometimes called 'the First War of Independence'. By 1858, British forces were victorious but the authority of the East India Company was transferred to the British crown. Bahadur Shah II was exiled to Rangoon where he died in 1862, aged 87.

Bahadur Shah II was also a notable Urdu poet. Under his rule Delhi was revived as a centre for arts and culture.

This is the concluding couplet from a very moving ghazal Bahadur Shah Zafar wrote while jailed in Rangoon by the British Raj:

لیے کے دفن ظفرِ نصیب بد ہے کتنا  
میں یار کوئے ملی نہ بھی زمین گز دو

kitnā hai bad-nasīb 'zafar' dafn ke liye  
do gaz zamīn bhī na milī kū-e-yār meñ

#### **4. Printed Textile**

This textile depicts the Hindu God, Krishna, defeating the serpent demon Kaliyah. It symbolises patronage of the arts by South Asian princes, including re-enactments of the great Hindu epics. After 1858, these princes

were essentially figureheads and subjects of the British Crown. Largely excluded from formal politics, such patronage provided an opportunity to build a base of support.

Purchased in 1890, this textile also represents a history of the British promotion of traditional Indian art forms, at the expense of technical advancement.

**Head of Rabindranath  
Tagore (1861-1941),  
1926**

Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959)  
Bronze sculpture

Born in Kolkata, Tagore is amongst the world's greatest writers. In 1913, he was the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel prize, making him a global superstar. In 1926, he sat for the sculptor Epstein in his London studio.

Under Partition, Bengal was divided. West Bengal including the capital Kolkata, became part of India and East Bengal formed East Pakistan, later Bangladesh. Urdu became the national language of Pakistan. In 1971, Tagore's Bengali poetry helped to inspire the Bangladeshi liberation struggle.

আমার সোনার বাংলা, আমি তোমায় ভালোবাসি

Aamar sonaar baangla, aami tomay  
bhalobasi.

My Golden Bengal, I love you

First line of 'Amar Sonar Bangla' by  
Rabindranath Tagore, 1905.

Adopted as the national anthem of  
Bangladesh in 1971.