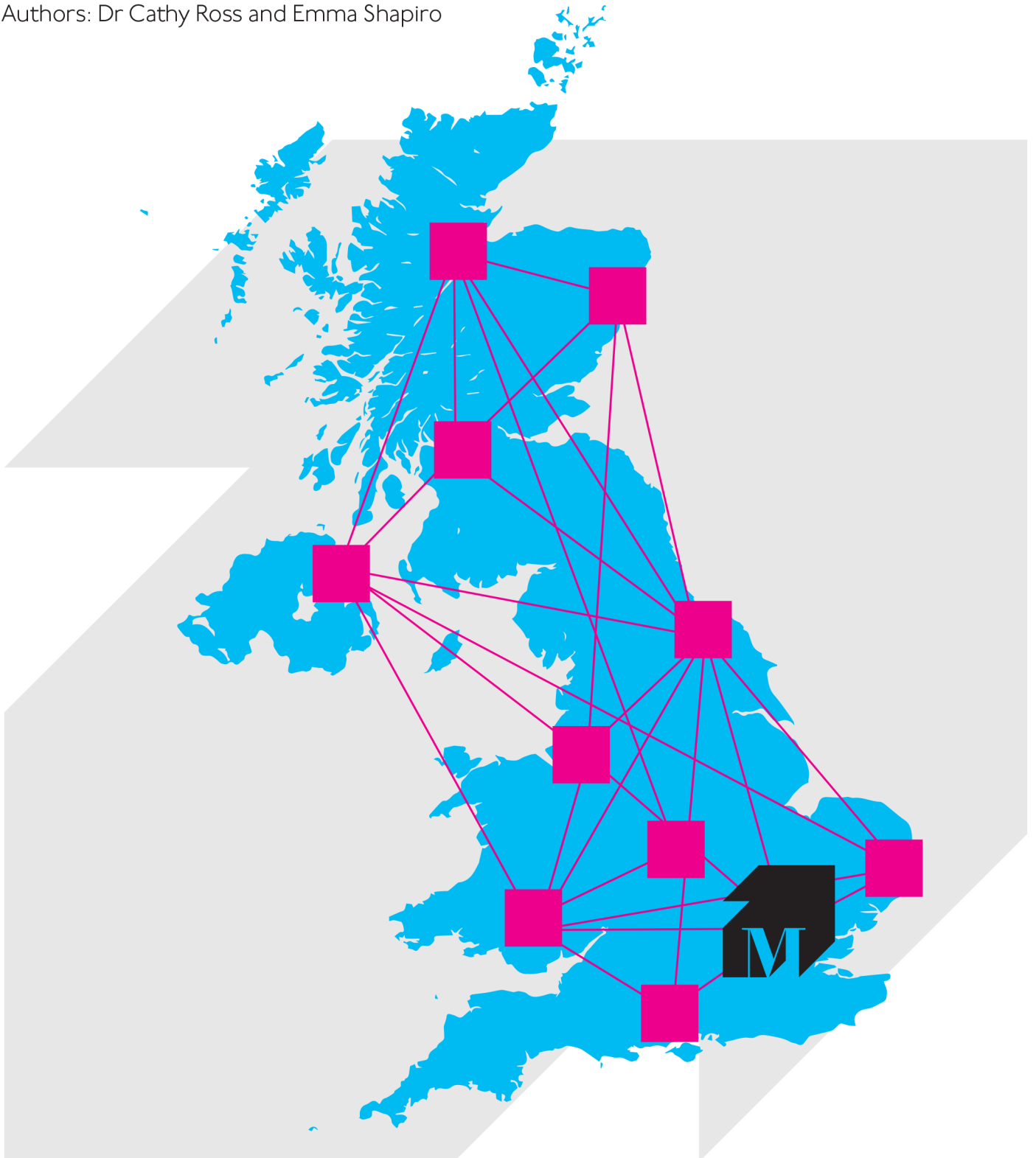


# MUSEUMS AND MIGRATION, 2009–17

**A report exploring the case for a national migration museum, and a migration museums network**

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## PREFACE

This report was completed just before publication of the Mendoza Review of museums in England. Mendoza's recommendation that the first call on public funding should be existing institutions and collections formed in the past is understandable, yet concerning for a sector that aims to respond actively to social change. The museum sector needs innovation.

This Migration Museum Project report argues that migration is already a powerful generator of innovation for museums but has the energy to do so much more in future. The pilot Migration Museums Network indicates what might be achieved: a new model of a 'national museum network' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - driven from the margins rather than the centre; new thinking about how 'museum partnerships' and 'dispersed national collections' might work co-operatively.

The Migration Museum Project is a small yet agile organisation which strives to deliver museum outcomes through creative thinking and practical action. Its call for a national museum of migration is not about a single institution, but about strategic innovation that recognises existing strengths alongside the possibility of doing things differently.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr Cathy Ross** is Honorary Research Fellow at the Museum of London, where she worked until 2013 as Director of Collections and Learning. More recently she curated the new museum for the London Charterhouse, and has undertaken research projects for the Centre for Philanthropy at the University of Kent and the Islington charity, Cloudesley. She has published widely on museums and London. Books include *London: the Illustrated History*, (Penguin, 2008); *Designing Utopia: John Hargrave and the Kibbo Kift* (Philip Wilson, 2015); *Revealing the Charterhouse* (Giles Ltd, 2016). She has a long-standing interest in museums and migration and has recently written on migration as a potential museum- disruptor, to be published in *Heritage Discourses in Europe: Responding to Migration, Mobility, and Cultural Identities in the 21st Century*, ed. Anna Catalani, Laia Colomer (2018).

**Emma Shapiro** developed her interest in the cultural geographies of postcolonial migration while studying for an MA in London Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Her research examined the representation of West Indian migrant dwelling in Sam Selvon's London fiction. She is currently working as a graduate trainee at Pembroke College Library, University of Cambridge, where she is curating an exhibition on the poet, historian and co-founder of the Caribbean Artists Movement, Kamau Brathwaite, working in collaboration with the George Padmore Institute.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report looks at the representation of migration in English museums since 2009. The report has been prompted by two questions:

- Would a national museum of migration make a useful contribution to the museum sector?
- Would a specialist network about migration make a useful contribution to the museum sector?

This report follows on from an earlier report by Dr Mary Stevens, published by the IPPR in 2009,<sup>1</sup> which concluded that migration was a subject of such fundamental importance to Britain's national story that it merited a new museum 'dedicated to telling the whole story'. Stevens saw Britain's 'collective failure to engage in an informed way with contemporary migration patterns' as deriving from 'our ignorance about this aspect of our history'. Moreover, Britain's 'carefully orchestrated amnesia' about migration contrasted with the situation in other countries. In short, 'our migration stories deserve a more prominent place in our national self-understanding and need to be more visible in our heritage institutions'.

This report seeks to provide a short update of developments in UK museums and galleries since Stevens' analysis. It looks at the visibility of migration stories in today's heritage institutions, many of which have seen significant change since 2009. It also discusses the museum sector's coverage of national history and the seeming reluctance to engage fully with big-picture national stories about our past, including migration:

*Neil MacGregor, the former director of the British Museum, has bemoaned Britain's narrow view of its own history, calling it 'dangerous and regrettable' for focusing almost exclusively on the 'sunny side'. Speaking before the Berlin opening of his highly popular exhibition Germany – Memories of a Nation, MacGregor expressed his admiration for Germany's rigorous appraisal of its history, which he said could not be more different to that of Britain.<sup>2</sup>*

This report has been commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE) from the Migration Museum Project (MMP) as part of the scoping work around a possible migration museums

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Mary Stevens (2009), *Stories Old and New: Migration and identity in the UK heritage sector*. London: IPPR. Available online on [www.migrationmuseum.org/output/publication/stories-old-and-new-migration-and-identity-in-the-uk-heritage-sector/](http://www.migrationmuseum.org/output/publication/stories-old-and-new-migration-and-identity-in-the-uk-heritage-sector/) The quotes in this paragraph are from p 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Guardian*, 'Britain's view of its history "dangerous", says former museum director', 7 October 2016: [theguardian.com/culture/2016/oct/07/britains-view-of-its-history-dangerous-says-former-museum-director](http://theguardian.com/culture/2016/oct/07/britains-view-of-its-history-dangerous-says-former-museum-director)

network (MMN).<sup>3</sup> Some of the report's data is drawn from a survey of museums (the MMN survey), carried out in 2017 as another element in the scoping work; a full report on the survey's findings will be published separately. This current report should also be read with the MMP's own brochure, *A Migration Museum for Britain* (2016),<sup>4</sup> which sets out further arguments for creating such a museum, together with the MMP's own aspirations and credentials.

ACE's funding means that the focus is primarily on museums in England, rather than the whole of the United Kingdom.

## **2. MUSEUMS AND MIGRATION, 2009–17**

### **2.1 LOCAL, REGIONAL AND CITY MUSEUMS**

In 2009, Dr Mary Stevens urged that migration stories should be more visible in heritage institutions. In 2017, it seems that the plea has been heeded, at least in place-based museums. An enormous amount of activity relating to migration, migrant communities and cultural diversity generally has taken place in local, regional and city museums. Most place-based museums have grasped the challenge of responding to the changing nature of their local populations, working with individuals and groups to present stories and build representation of 'newcomer groups' into their exhibitions, displays and collections. The catalogue of projects is impressive (see text boxes 1 and 2: the projects listed there are a small selection from a larger whole and have been chosen to represent the scope and flavour of current work).

Presenting a more inclusive and representative picture of 'heritage' has become essential for local and regional museums working in areas with significant migrant populations. Arguably, the challenging financial climate for local museums has encouraged institutions to work more closely with migrant communities as a way of demonstrating to funders, particularly local authorities, that museum services deliver to all parts of the local community and can foster community cohesion. This area of activity has also been encouraged by changing professional values around social justice and participation (see section 2.4).

The MMN survey found that talking about 'migration' was useful for museums generally, not just those concerned with representing a particular place. It is, after all, a familiar concept in

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<sup>3</sup> For further details, see [migrationmuseum.org/the-migration-museums-network/](http://migrationmuseum.org/the-migration-museums-network/)

<sup>4</sup> Migration Museum Project (2016) *A Migration Museum for Britain: All our stories*, Migration Museum Project. Available online at [migrationmuseum.org/about-our-project/](http://migrationmuseum.org/about-our-project/)

existing museum disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology and natural history. Despite the contentious political associations of the word, it also has many positive associations with family history and personal journeys, including diasporas, emigration and internal migrations between different regions of the UK. Some survey respondents saw migration as a useful way of refreshing old stories precisely because the term resonates with the new audiences they are seeking to attract into the museum.<sup>5</sup> Several people noted that migration is hardwired into the stories that museums tell.

*[M]igration is a fundamental part of human history and to ignore this in museum practice would be absurd.*

*I don't know how you are defining migration. The whole of human history is the story of population movement and migration, so almost any display about human history is going to address the issue.*

#### Respondents to the MMN survey

Migration and migrant communities are particularly visible in the generation of large flagship galleries and museums which opened between 2009 and 2017 (text box 1). The content of these flagship developments has focused strongly on the interplay between place and people, expressing contemporary ideas about civic pride, purpose and identity. Without exception, all acknowledge population churn, diversity and migration as central characteristics of the places they seek to represent. Museums located in port cities place an extra emphasis on migration.

In addition to these large capital projects, much museum work around migration and migrant communities since 2009 has centred on temporary exhibitions or community engagement projects working directly with local people (see text box 2). Visual art, photography and oral history have all proved to be rich fields for such projects, doubly so when leaving a legacy of artefacts, images and recordings in the host museum's permanent collection. The list in text box 2 is a small selection of the many hundreds of projects that have taken place since 2009, but is fairly typical of the subjects and co-curation approaches that are now routine in museums, art galleries and exhibition spaces across England.

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<sup>5</sup> For example: 'We are committed to extending the diversity of narratives (people stories) within the museum to attract wider audiences. [...] Working with migrant communities and placing their voices within the museum will, we believe, help us to place traditional stories of Cornish migration in a relevant, contemporary and very human context.'

## TEXT BOX 1

### **SOME MAJOR CAPITAL DEVELOPMENTS, 2009–17**

These new permanent galleries and museums all include aspects of migration within their broader representations of place. In Southampton and Newcastle, migration is the lead theme.

#### **London: Museum of London, *Galleries of Modern London*, 2010**

In 2010, the Museum of London opened its new suite of three Galleries of Modern London, covering the period from 1666 to the present day. London's interaction with the world is one of two key themes foregrounded in these new galleries. Migration also features throughout the earlier permanent galleries, partly a legacy of the museum's landmark 1993 exhibition, *The Peopling of London*.

#### **Cardiff: Cardiff Story, 2011**

Opened in April 2011. One of Cardiff Story's first exhibitions was *Bangladesh → UK: The Stories of Food, Ageing and Migration* (Nov–Dec 2011), which explored the complicated interplay between migration, nutrition and ageing in a cross-section of Bengali women in the UK and in Bangladesh. Staff are currently working with local community groups on the 'Showcasing Cardiff Communities' project, to reflect on the city's history as one of the first multicultural cities in Britain.

#### **Bristol: M Shed, 2011**

The new museum opened in June 2011, with migration featuring throughout its permanent galleries, in particular in the Bristol Life section: 'discover how and why people moved to Bristol and the challenges they have faced'. Its current exhibition, *Somalis in Bristol: Where Are We From and Who Are We Now?* (2016–17) explores the diverse experiences of Somalis living in Bristol today.

#### **Liverpool: Museum of Liverpool, 2011**

Formerly the Museum of Liverpool Life (founded 1993), the Museum of Liverpool opened in a spectacular new waterfront building in July 2011. The museum is organised around thematic galleries, including *Global City* which explores Liverpool's overseas connections. The museum provides free museum trails on Black, Irish and Jewish Liverpoolian communities.

#### **Birmingham: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 2012 and 2016**

The new permanent gallery, *Birmingham: its People, its History*, opened in 2012. It was followed in 2016 by another migration-relevant permanent gallery, *Faith in Birmingham*, focusing on the six main faith groups in Birmingham: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. The gallery was developed in consultation with faith groups and communities across Birmingham.

Since 2012, BMAG has hosted a number of exhibitions examining migration themes. These include: *Fitting in and Getting Along* (2015–16), which documented the lives of second generation Birmingham Poles, born in the 1950s and 1960s; *Old Wives' Tales: Migration Journeys of Bangladeshi women to the UK* (2016), photographs of Bangladeshi women who moved to Birmingham between 1960 and 1980.

#### **Southampton: Sea City, *Gateway to the World*, 2012**

The *Gateway to the World* gallery in Sea City provides an overview of people movement through Southampton's port over the last 200,000 years. 'Using the city's unique historic collections, this permanent display recounts the stories of people who have departed from or arrived in the port of Southampton over the last 200,000 years, from the earliest settlers to the stories of people living in the city today.'

#### **Newcastle: Discovery Museum, *Destination Tyneside* gallery, 2013**

This dedicated immigration gallery within the Discovery Museum explores Tyneside's history as a major centre of migration over the past 150 years. The installation 'Sit with Me', which was added to the gallery in 2016, uses sensor-based technology to display archived photographic records of people who moved to the North East. Using 3D-camera technology, the installation reacts to the visitor's presence, and configures the display so that they make eye contact with the people depicted in the photographs.

## TEXT BOX 2

### SOME EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS, 2009–17

**Hackney Museum** prioritises migration in its community projects, notably working with Hackney's African and Caribbean communities on exhibitions based on oral history. These have included *What a Journey* (2014–15) on Caribbean nurses' experiences of moving to work in East London during the 1950s and 1960s; *Cambodian Recollections* (2015); and *African Threads – Hackney Style* (2015–16), which explored Hackney's historic ties with Africa through fabric and fashion.

**The Horniman Museum and gardens** is particularly active with local refugee and asylum-seeker organisations. Migration is a primary theme throughout its exhibitions and community workshops: *Coal, Frankincense and Myrrh* (2010–11), a photographic exhibition, explored Yemeni migration to Britain; *Memories of China* (2015) was a display on the history and contribution of Chinese migrants in the UK, and on their relationship to their homeland; *Here, Now* (2016) was a collaborative photography exhibition on experiences of migration to south-east London. *Crossing Borders* is an annual event celebrating the area's diverse neighbourhood and inhabitants. Migration also features in the *Trading Sounds* section of the Horniman's Music Gallery.

**Manchester Museum's** *Memories of Partition* is an 18-month oral history, social research, documentary film-making project marking the anniversary of the partition of India in 1947 and designed to involve local communities. It culminated in an exhibition (2017–18). '*The partition of India led to the largest mass migration in human history, with an estimated 15 million people being displaced. The world-changing impact of partition remains relatively unexplored by museums across the UK. Memories of Partition will address this by revealing the untold stories of partition on local communities, multiculturalism and migration.*'

The **Impressions Gallery** in Bradford explores migration through its photography exhibitions. These include: *not Natasha* (2010), which documented the experiences of sex-trafficked women from Moldova; and *Making Space* (2012), which examined the re-use of spaces for the purpose of prayer by Muslim communities in Ireland. In 2013, the gallery exhibited *Studio Exhibition: Changing Bradford*, an intergenerational community heritage project which explored how South Asian culture, business, religion and arts have shaped Bradford since the 1950s. A six-month season of exhibitions on the long-entwined histories of the UK and China, *Views from China*, ran from 2016 to 2017.

The **Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts** in Bristol has engaged with Britain's history of migration through a number of projects. Past film screenings include *Piercing Brightness* (2013), a film directed by Shezad Dawood which used science fiction to reflect on race and migration in Preston, a town with the fastest-growing Chinese population in the UK; *Vertigo Sea* (2016), John Akomfrah's three-screen film on man's relationship with the sea and its role in the history of slavery, migration and conflict.

The **BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art** in Newcastle has also programmed projects about migration and refugees. *Disappearance at Sea – Mare Nostrum* (2017) was a group exhibition on the journey undertaken by migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean; it included several new commissions and a broad range of artworks by artists from Syria, Greece, Serbia, Denmark, Kenya and the UK. Also in 2017, the centre hosted *Refuge/e*, an installation by Amp Art of a shelter from Lebanon built from emergency shelter kits and local materials, and accompanied by the voices of refugees discussing their daily experiences.

In 2016, the **V&A Museum of Childhood** hosted *On Their Own: Britain's Child Migrants*. This exhibition, created in collaboration with (and shown in) the Australian National Maritime Museum and National Museums Liverpool, told the true stories of the child migrants who were sent from Britain to Canada, Australia and other Commonwealth countries between 1869 and 1970. An estimated 100,000 British children were sent overseas through migration schemes that were run by a partnership of charities, religious organisations and governments.

The **Southbank Centre** staged the multi-media exhibition *Adopting Britain* for six months in 2015 in collaboration with Counterpoints Arts, exploring the last 70 years of immigration to Britain (to coincide with the Centre's commemorations of the 1951 Festival of Britain). This exhibition, which occupied the Spirit Level gallery of the Royal Festival Hall, involved many contributors from across the UK, including the MMP, which contributed images from its *100 Images of Migration* exhibition and a case of *Keepsakes*, a community participation project and exhibition the MMP commenced in 2015.



## 2.2 SPECIALIST MUSEUMS AND SITES

The last eight years have seen significant capital developments for independent museums documenting particular communities. London's Jewish Museum (founded 1937) moved to purpose-built premises in Camden in 2010 and has recently partnered with the Jewish Military Museum to assume care of its collections. Manchester's Jewish Museum was awarded Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding in 2015 to develop plans for an extension to house new galleries, learning and event spaces alongside the museum's historic synagogue. Capital investments have included the digitisation of collections and archives. The Jewish Museum's online resources include *Jewish Britain: A History in 50 Objects*.<sup>6</sup> Similarly national in scope is the Wiener Library's *Refugee Family Papers: An Interactive Map*, part of the library's four-year outreach project *Keeping Truth Alive*, which gives users access to the library's collection of Jewish refugee family papers.<sup>7</sup>

Britain's only museum of Huguenot history opened in Rochester, Kent in 2015. The Black Cultural Archives (BCA) was founded in 1981 but moved into its current purpose-built premises in Brixton in 2014. The BCA is the first black heritage centre in the UK and consciously national in its scope: 'Black Cultural Archives is a national institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of diverse people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain.'<sup>8</sup>

Other specialist institutions have also refreshed their missions since 2009. The Ben Uri gallery (founded 1915) has extended its scope beyond its original focus on Jewish art and now sees its future as a multi-community Museum of Art, Identity and Migration, albeit one that deals only with the 20th century and onwards. Formed in the 1980s to preserve a historic synagogue in Spitalfields, 19 Princelet Street: The Museum of Immigration and Diversity launched a £4 million fundraising drive in 2016 designed to secure its site. Like the Ben Uri gallery, it also sees itself as having a multi-community remit and describes itself as Europe's first museum of immigration. Many of these specialist sites also run active temporary exhibition programmes (see text box 3).

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<sup>6</sup> [jewishmuseum.org.uk/jewish-britain-home](http://jewishmuseum.org.uk/jewish-britain-home)

<sup>7</sup> [wienerlibrary.co.uk/interactivemap](http://wienerlibrary.co.uk/interactivemap)

<sup>8</sup> [bcaheritage.org.uk/about/](http://bcaheritage.org.uk/about/)

### TEXT BOX 3

#### SPECIALIST MUSEUMS AND SITES: SOME EXHIBITIONS 2009–17

The exhibition programme of the **Jewish Museum** in London has explored the life and work of British Jewish artists, such as ceramicist Lucie Rie, writer and illustrator Judith Kerr, graphic designer Abram Games and singer Amy Winehouse. In 2016, the museum exhibited *Scots Jews*, a digital display by Judah Passow about Scotland's Jewish community. In 2012, *World City: Refugee Stories* presented the stories of nine individuals who came to London to find refuge from the 1930s to the present. *Sephardi Voices: Jews from North Africa, the Middle East and Iran* (2017) is an audio-visual exhibition on the Sephardi Jewish community and their experiences of migration to the UK from Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan.

**The Wiener Library** has held a number of exhibitions on the history of Jewish refugee migration to Britain. In 2013, the library held an exhibition on the Kindertransport, *Child Refugees: Five Portraits from the Kindertransport. A Bitter Road* (2016–17) reviewed Britain's response to Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 1940s. *One Family, Three Cities, Six Years of War* (2017) traced the story of one family's experiences of separation, persecution and survival during the Second World War and the Holocaust.

**The Ben Uri Museum and Gallery** has a number of migration-themed exhibitions planned for 2017. These include *Refugees – The Lives of Others; Thirty Six Pounds and Ninety Five Pence;* and *Polish Exhibition: A Century of Polish Artists in Britain.*

The **Black Cultural Archives'** exhibitions in its new building have included *Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience, 1950s–1990s.* This partnership with the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum was funded by the HLF and aimed to enrich simultaneously the V&A's photograph collection and the BCA's oral history collections. The project culminated in a 2015 exhibition, divided between the two institutions.

**Autograph ABP** (The Association of Black Photographers), based in London, programmes photography and film exhibitions around themes of migration, politics and cultural identity. *You Get Me?* (2017) showed the work of Mahtab Hussain, who photographs young working-class British Asian men in Birmingham, London and Nottingham. In 2015, a partnership with the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) produced the exhibition *Black Chronicles: Photographic Portraits 1862–1948*, shown at the NPG and at Rivington Place, co-curated with Autograph.

## 2.3 NATIONAL MUSEUMS

In terms of national history, activity around migration is thinner and arguably less impressive. Since 2009, museums with a national scope have not been conspicuously active participants in public conversations about Britain's past and present character. There are of course exceptions but these have tended to be one-off exhibitions (for example, Tate Britain's 2012 exhibition *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* or the V&A's *Black British Style* exhibition in 2014). Generally, England's larger 'national' museums have looked outwards in their programming, exploring subjects of global or international reach in block-buster exhibitions designed for international touring.

Exhibitions about matters closer to home (the England–Scotland relationship, for example) have not been that visible. National Museums Liverpool (NML) have been active in the arena of museums and human rights, particularly through the International Slavery Museum. But the

focus of NML's work has also tended to be international and contemporary, rather than national history and identity – beyond, of course, the legacy of British involvement in the slave trade.

Furthermore, museum projects aspiring to bigger-picture narratives of national history have seen mixed fortunes since 2009:

- The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum was wound up in 2013.
- In 2009, the museum sector's response to the proposed national museum of British History was to put forward an alternative 'Centre for British History' described as 'a UK-wide federated programme that involves all public collections, . . . complemented by digital resources and . . . led by a small planning and coordination hub'. No such centre has appeared.
- The 'federated-programme' model successfully delivered a co-ordinated nationwide programme marking the centenary of the First World War (2014–18). The programme was led by the HLF with the Imperial War Museum, and built on a similar HLF programme marking the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade (2007). For both programmes the HLF made dedicated funding available to participating museums.
- The People's History Museum in Manchester positioned itself as a national museum of democracy when it relaunched in 2010. This institution provides a national perspective on the past which actively values themes of migration and cultural encounters, as is also the case with the Imperial War Museum and the Museum of London. But, here again, each museum's account is limited in scope, given its respective core subjects.
- The MMP was founded in 2013 with aspirations to national scope: 'we want to create . . . a moving and inspiring institution that puts Britain's important migration story at the forefront of our national consciousness'. Since 2009, the MMP has established a presence in the sector and delivered a number of acclaimed projects. But its 'start-up' nature means that its work has also been limited (see text box 4 for more details).

#### TEXT BOX 4

##### THE MIGRATION MUSEUM PROJECT 2013–17

The MMP aims to establish a permanent Migration Museum for Britain reflecting the important role that migration (both to and from the country) has always played in the national story.

Since 2013 the MMP have hosted a variety of exhibitions: *100 Images of Migration*, generated from a call to the public via *The Guardian*; *Germans in Britain* looking at the long history from Anglo-Saxons to the Royal family; *Keepsakes*, featuring personal objects that speak of migration and identity; *Call Me By My Name: Stories from Calais and Beyond* looking at the highly topical and now demolished 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais and *No Turning Back: Seven migration moments that changed Britain*, that considers 'moments' in history when Britain has taken a decisive turn, from a migration point of view. The MMP has also had the opportunity to make significant contributions to exhibitions curated by organisations such as Counterpoints Arts, Southbank Centre and the National Maritime Museum.

The MMP also runs events on migration themes: *Great Minds* looking at ways in which migrants have enriched British intellectual life, *Migrants mean Business*, a series of conversations with business leaders, an annual lecture, *Imprints*, a guided walk through London, and a host of performances, workshops, talks, academic discussions and more.

The MMP has an education programme that has directly reached over 4000 school children so far, providing interactive workshops connected to their exhibitions and in schools. Frequently these workshops are co-delivered with a young refugee. Migration now features significantly as a topic at GCSE History and the MMP is running a competition with examination board OCR for pupils to design a Migration Museum exhibit.

The MMP seeks a permanent home for the Migration Museum, based in London, but with national reach and relevance. The MMP is currently in a temporary home in Lambeth until at least May 2018, hosting exhibitions and events and working in various partnerships.

## 2.4 MUSEUM PRACTICE

Since 2009, the UK museum sector has seen a noticeable shift in professional values and methodologies. Ethics and social justice have now moved to the centre of professional concerns – see, for example, *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, edited by Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (2012); the Museums Association's (MA's) papers 'Museums 2020' (2012), 'Museums Change Lives' (2013), the MA's revised *Ethics Code of Conduct* (2015); Paul Hamlyn Foundation's 'Our Museum' strategic grant programme (2012–15), which foregrounded community participation; and new networks around activist curatorship, such as the Federation of International Human Rights Museums (2010) and the Social Justice Alliance for Museums (2013), both led by National Museums Liverpool.

Hallmarks of this new approach are a focus on social impact, active public participation, seeing audiences as creators as well as consumers of knowledge; engagement with contemporary issues sometimes with an explicitly campaigning agenda; respect for diversity and positive efforts to make museums as inclusive as possible in all parts of their work.

This new climate has proved fertile soil for museum activities around migration and cultural diversity. A sense of professional and personal mission has undoubtedly fuelled some of the work carried out in local and regional museums. The MMN survey found that many respondents expressed a strong personal commitment to working with migrant communities, and this was particularly apparent when staff spoke about projects with refugees (see text box 5):

*First and foremost, we did this because we felt it was the right thing to do – after the hellish conditions the refugees had been experiencing, the very least we could do was provide a proper welcome . . .*

*It is very important to increase knowledge and awareness of the history of migration, the norm of migration in humankind and to highlight injustice and curate experiences that create a more kind and compassionate world. Promoting commonality and the rich intermixing of shared heritage is a responsibility and a role museums should and can take.*

*We are strongly values-driven and believe in tolerance, diversity and equality.*

Respondents to the MMN survey

## 2.5 THE WIDER HERITAGE SECTOR

Since 2009, other parts of the heritage sector (libraries and archives as opposed to museums) have demonstrated a growing interest in 'telling the nation's story' in ways that highlight the presence of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. As with the work of local museums, this explosion of interest responds not only to Britain's changing demography but also to the specific demand for access to archive and library resources as 'black history' becomes more visible in scholarship. Much work has been done in providing learning resources for archives relevant to black and minority ethnic history:

- The British Library has produced a series of exhibitions and online resources about citizenship, rights, and Britain's broad political and social history. Its most recent migration-related project, *Asians in Britain*, is a collaboration between the British Library and the Open University that has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

- The National Archive has built on its *Moving Here* project (now an archived website) by significantly expanding its online resources designed to help researchers and citizen historians interested in black or Asian history, migration and refugees.
- In London, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) acquired the important archive of Eric and Jessica Huntley, and worked with the George Padmore Institute to mount the *No Colour Bar* exhibition in 2015. Like the National Archives, LMA has made enormous strides in making its resources more accessible to researchers tracing the lives and experiences of black Londoners.

The HLF has been a key supporter of this work to unearth 'hidden histories' and open up heritage more generally to new audiences. Its funding has helped many local cultural bodies and has been a significant help to community specialist organisations such as the BCA, Autograph ABP's photography archive and the Jewish Museum:

*We have funded projects that celebrate cultural diversity, share untold stories of migration and settlement, and reveal how diverse communities have influenced and contributed to the UK's heritage over the centuries.*

*HLF web feature, 'Be inspired by black British heritage projects', 2016*

Broadcasting has also seen a noticeable shift towards telling national history from diverse perspectives. Among many examples from the BBC is the Black and British season of November 2016, the centrepiece of which was David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. This series underlined the point that British history contains much that is hidden not because it was never known but because it has been forgotten – and that Britain's colonial and imperial past is a central thread in British history and not just of interest to those of African or Caribbean descent.

## 2.6 UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOLS

Since 2009, academic interest in migration has generated a growing body of academic literature about museums and migration. One of the largest projects during the last eight years has been the EU-funded programme 'European Museums in an age of Migration (MeLA)',<sup>9</sup> 2011–15, which had a strong UK component, led by Newcastle University. The

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<sup>9</sup> [mela-project.polimi.it/](http://mela-project.polimi.it/). Also see [museumsandmigration.wordpress.com/](http://museumsandmigration.wordpress.com/) and the website [thinkingthroughmigration.com/](http://thinkingthroughmigration.com/) run by Professor Chris Whitehead and colleagues at Newcastle University.

multiple outputs of this project all underlined the point that migration is a headline topic in policy and cultural agendas across Europe (even more so following the more recent migration 'crisis') and that representation of place, movements of peoples and intercultural exchange are themes of growing importance in 21st-century museums.

In Britain, interest in black and Asian history has grown in university history departments, as well as in schools. A significant milestone for the latter was the launch in September 2016 of three new GCSE history modules from two national exam boards: 'Migrants to Britain 1250 to present', 'Explaining the modern world: migration' (both OCR) and 'Migration, Empires and the People' (AQA). The first two of these were described as enabling students 'to learn how the movement of people – European, African, Asian – to and from these islands has shaped the story of this nation for thousands of years'.

Finally *Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain* is another exciting development in the migration education scene. It is an AHRC-funded collaboration between the Runnymede Trust and academics based at the universities of Cambridge and Manchester. It draws on the research of over 60 historians based in universities and historical institutions. The result is a website and teaching resources that present the often untold stories of the generations of migrants who came to, and helped to shape, the British Isles.

### 3. THE FUTURE

#### 3.1 IS THERE A ROLE FOR A NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MIGRATION?

*The museum would also show how over hundreds of years we have absorbed peoples from all races and all religions and how they have enriched our country. They came to us because they liked freedom, fair play, tolerance and the respect for others' opinions and rights. That's something to be proud of.*

Kenneth Baker<sup>10</sup>

*I want us to be able to understand better the contribution that all nations have made to the evolution of the United Kingdom.*

Gordon Brown<sup>11</sup>

The hostile reception given to the idea of a Museum of British History in 2000, 2007 and 2009 cannot disguise the fact that British history still has no 'museum mothership'. As Kenneth Baker remarked in 2009, when his idea was last dismissed by the museum sector, 'UK museums tell part of the history but no institution pulls it all together'.

Museums of national history have long been established in Scotland and Wales, but not in England. Here, national history has been 'covered' by museums in a more fragmented way: with local museums covering local history and new national institutions, devoted to specific topics, only emerging opportunistically. These topic-driven national museums (as opposed to collections-driven national museums) reflected the concerns of their age. Thus in the early 20th century, national museums were formed around cities (London Museum, 1912), war (Imperial War Museum, 1917) and sea power (the National Maritime Museum, 1927). In the 21st century, new national museums have been formed to reflect on slavery (International Slavery Museum, 2010) and democracy (People's History Museum, founded 1975 as the Museum of Labour History but relaunched in 2010 with an extended scope<sup>12</sup>).

Such topic-based national museums have undoubtedly helped the museum sector move with the times, encouraging new ways of looking at the past and new categories of heritage to be preserved. A new national museum about migration, surely one of the most prominent concerns of the 21st century, would fit into this existing pattern as a legitimate and logical

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 2007. 'It's time for a museum of British History'.

[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1572148/Its-time-for-a-museum-of-British-history.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1572148/Its-time-for-a-museum-of-British-history.html)

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 2007. 'Why I support British History Museum'.

[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1572265/Brown-Why-I-support-British-history-museum.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1572265/Brown-Why-I-support-British-history-museum.html)

<sup>12</sup> 'The People's History Museum in Manchester is the national museum of democracy. We aim to engage, inspire and inform diverse audiences by showing 'there have always been ideas worth fighting for'

[phm.org.uk/about-us/](http://phm.org.uk/about-us/)



national museum project for Britain. The extent of regional work is undeniably impressive but also underlines the fact that the national picture remains as fragmented as it was in 2009 when Dr Mary Stevens lamented not just the 'piecemeal and patchy way in which migration is represented',<sup>13</sup> but also the loss of complexity when the story of migration is reduced to an accumulation of separate stories. Even now, no institution 'pulls it all together'.

What does seem clear is that, if a museum exploring migration at the national level was to emerge, it would have to define its remit carefully. Any such new museum would have to deliver its 'offer' in a way that worked in partnership with local and regional museums, many of whom will be larger, better resourced and with more solid expertise to draw on than any new institution starting from scratch. The model for a new museum might be more of a sector-supporting institution or one that added value to, or extended the life of, existing projects. The scope for reinventing inter-museums relationships is immense.

### 3.2 IS THERE A ROLE FOR A MIGRATION NETWORK AMONG EXISTING MUSEUMS?

The MMN survey was designed to find out whether or not a new specialist network would be useful. The 119 respondents represented a variety of organisations and individuals, across all areas of museum work. Overall, respondents were enthusiastic about the prospect of a network. Many were personally committed to the topic, expressing a strong personal sense of mission and empathy for working with migrant groups, particularly refugees. They wanted more opportunities to discuss their own experiences, share knowledge, resources and case studies.

One of the survey's most interesting insights was that 'migration' – defined broadly to include internal UK migration, emigration and diasporas – was a relevant and useful concept for museums of different types, serving different audiences in a variety of places:

*Our area is one of the least ethnically diverse in the UK (less than 5% but increasing from less than 1% in the last few years) but has large-scale migration from the rest of the UK, some of whom seem to be fleeing areas of greater diversity. We feel a need to increase understanding among our local population and promote community cohesion as part of our mission to improve quality of life [here] as well as encouraging migrants to learn more about our local area.*

Respondent to the MMN survey

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<sup>13</sup> Stevens (2009), p 24.

A second insight was that respondents saw the contemporary associations of the word 'migration' as a positive. Despite the perception that 'migration' is a problem subject, it was striking how many museums felt that the opposite was true. The contemporary associations were seen as a useful catalyst for refreshing old stories and building new audiences:

*[Our town] has a substantial eastern European community but they traditionally do not engage with local heritage/museums very much. They are in some ways isolated from the wider community and sometimes face discrimination and xenophobia. However, the Hanseatic heritage of the town is actually a shared history which is very relevant to them as well as the native population. It is hoped that celebrating this shared heritage will encourage social cohesion and understanding . . .*

Respondent to the MMN survey

#### 4 SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

This report is not a comprehensive survey of the way migration has been represented in museums since 2009; rather, it is a short overview, commenting on some general trends. Overall, there seems little doubt that the topic of migration has greater visibility in English museums in 2017 than it did in 2009. As outlined above, this partly reflects the activities of local, regional or city place-based museums where, despite the squeeze on local-authority revenue funding, representations of place have responded to demographic and cultural changes with impressive vigour. Independent museums focused on specific communities have also strengthened their presence. Further encouragement has come from developments in professional practice, including a new awareness of audiences, ethics and social impact.

Although not elaborated in this report, the growing visibility of migration in news and current affairs since 2009 has almost certainly influenced museums in their choices. Many museums seek to actively contribute to current public conversations, as do institutions in other parts of the heritage sector. Libraries and archives – and also universities and broadcasters – are placing a growing emphasis on migration and cultural diversity as central themes in British history, The GCSE history national curriculum now contains modules on migration to Britain from the 11th century onwards. Science museums and centres are reflecting the new interest in genetics as a way of exploring population movements.

Nationally, there is still no museum institution that offers a comprehensive narrative of migration as a constant in Britain's past. At the national level, migration is still represented in the 'piecemeal and patchy way' that was noted in 2009. As a consequence, the case for a migration museum telling a national story for Britain as a whole is probably stronger now in 2017 than it was in 2009 when Dr Mary Stevens' report saw the complexity of Britain's migration story as something more than just the sum of many separate stories:

*Britain's migration history, with its continual interweaving of narratives of immigration, emigration and forced migration, sometimes even in the course of a single individual's or family's life, is unusually complex. Heritage sites, as places where these threads can be untangled, examined and rewound, can play a unique role in helping us as a nation come to terms with this unstable and intricate past.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Stevens, 2009, p 9.

As an aside, it is also worth noting that a new migration museum would fit into the 'tradition' of new national museums emerging opportunistically to represent topics of critical current interest when and where the UK had a rich historical story to tell.

Finally, in answer to the second question at the head of this short report, a migration specialist network would indeed be welcomed by museum professionals, as evidenced by responses to the MMN survey. The survey underlined that many individuals feel a strong personal commitment to working alongside migrant groups, and many are fuelled by their own beliefs about museums and social good. A migration network would foster and strengthen this already invaluable resource of energy and effort:

*There are increasing ethical reasons for this work based upon the contemporary social and political context. The Museum aims to reach the widest possible audience and as it is based in such a diverse city (although this would also be the case if the Museum was situated anywhere in the UK) to reach this aim it must engage with individuals who have migrated and make itself relevant to them. The community partnerships and ESOL programmes have been increasing the Museum's reach in this sense for around 10 years. The Museum's collections don't make sense without stories of migration. The Museum is a place where objects from throughout human history and from all over the world have been brought together. The collections can only be explained with the stories of the humans who made, used, traded, coveted and journeyed with them.*

Respondent to the MMN survey

TEXT BOX 5

**REFUGEE WEEK ACTIVITIES, 2009–17**

Since it was first launched in 1998, many UK museums and galleries have participated in Refugee Week, held in June and intended to combat media hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee Week is coordinated by Counterpoints Arts each year. This section gives an account of a small selection of events from 2009 to 2017.

In 2011, **Cardiff Story Museum** celebrated Refugee Week with a programme of events that included *Safe Haven*, an exhibition on refugees and asylum seekers in Cardiff, an exhibit based on a UK British citizenship test, a Cardiff Story world map, and a Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group storytelling session.

In 2014, the **People's History Museum** in Manchester created a Migration Tour to mark local places associated with refugees.

In 2016 and 2017, the **British Museum** presented *Moving stories: a Refugee Week special event* in collaboration with Counterpoints Arts, who coordinate all Refugee Week activities each year.

As part of its Centre for Childhood Cultures partnership with Queen Mary, University of London, the **V&A Museum of Childhood's** events for Refugee Week 2017 centred on film screenings and discussions. These included Eithne Nightingale's research on Child Migrant Stories; films made by Another Kind of Girl, a film collective of Syrian girls living in refugee camps; *The First Movie*, an award-winning documentary that included videos made by children in Kurdish Iraq; and Janetka Platun's film on the Kindertransport.

**The Horniman Museum** works on an ongoing basis with a number of local refugee charities to create its programme of events for Refugee Week and Crossing Borders festival: Action for Refugees, Lewisham's Rainbow Club, Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, and Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network.

In 2017, the **Victoria and Albert Museum** had an ambitious programme of events for Refugee Week, including a sector-focused mini-conference on how museums can respond to the migration 'crisis' (the Migration Museum Project and Counterpoints Arts were contributors), a 'Living Library' in the courtyard with the Migration Collective and various musical and cultural events. The communities team plan to build on this for June 2018.