

Press release

**The Asahi Shimbun Displays *Collecting histories: Solomon Islands***

20 June – 1 September 2019

Room 3, Free

Supported by the Asahi Shimbun

**Press images:** [**https://bit.ly/2x3LJcL**](https://bit.ly/2x3LJcL)

The British Museum has one of the world’s largest collections of objects and photographs from Solomon Islands - around 4,000 items - which have been acquired in a variety of ways over the past 250 years. A new display opening today, explores some of the colonial relationships which led to a number of these important objects arriving at the British Museum.

*The Asahi Shimbun Displays Collecting histories: Solomon Islands* focusses on how five objects from Solomon Islands came to be in the British Museum’s collection in London. They have been chosen to each represent a key aspect or consequence of colonialism that ultimately led to their acquisition. These interactions include the activities of colonial officials and Christian missionaries, as well as the development of a new economy post-independence. The display has been created in consultation with Solomon Islanders who live in the UK.

The five objects on show arrived at the British Museum over a one-hundred year period, from the early 20th century to the early 21st century. They include a figure of an ancestor taken in 1891 from a shrine by the captain of HMS Royalist during an attempt to impose colonial authority on communities in Roviana, and later sold by him to the British Museum; a ‘bird net’ float used to catch fish which was given to a missionary in 1903 who regarded it as a trophy in his campaign against the religion of the Islanders; and a string of shell-money presented to HRH the Duke of Gloucester in 1978 during independence celebrations. The display is supplemented by archival and contemporary photography.

*The Asahi Shimbun Displays* *Collecting histories: Solomon Islands* will help the British Museum explore how it could better tell the stories behind the acquisition of objects in its collection, including in its permanent galleries and for future major exhibitions. With 8 million objects in the Museum’s collection - from the UK and across the globe, and from the ancient world to the modern-day - there are many nuanced and diverse ways in which items were, and are, acquired.

**Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum**, said: “The British Museum has always actively researched its collection, and it continues to do so to better understand how we should present collecting histories for our visitors. *The Asahi Shimbun Displays Collecting Histories: Solomon Islands* allows us to test out ideas that will inform what we will do in the future.”

The British Museum has strong links to Solomon Islands today. It is a country in the southwest Pacific and consists of six major islands and many smaller ones, and is home to about 80 local ethnic groups. The islands have been inhabited for thousands of years, and the first European to visit them was Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña who arrived in 1568. The islands were claimed by Britain as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in the 1890s. During the 20th century, colonial government, plantation businesses and Christian missions transformed Solomon Islands, shaping a country that became independent in 1978 and joined the Commonwealth.

Launched today alongside the display is a new *Collecting histories* visitor trail, which highlights some of the different ways a further 15 objects came to the British Museum from across Africa, Asia, North America and Oceania. Visitors can pick up a self-guided trail for free, and each object has an expanded text describing the history of its acquisition and the wider colonial context.

**Belinda Crerar, Project Manager for *The Asahi Shimbun Displays* at the British Museum**, said: “*The Asahi Shimbun Displays* in Room 3 the British Museum allows us to showcase important objects and research, create small displays of topical interest, and learn more about improving the display of objects across the Museum. *Collecting Histories: Solomon Islands* is an opportunity to find out more about what our visitors respond to, while also showcasing a selection of wonderful objects from a lesser-known part of the collection.”

**Notes to Editors:**

***The Asahi Shimbun Displays*** are a series of regularly changing displays which look at objects in new or different ways. Sometimes the display highlights a well-known item, sometimes it surprises the audience with extraordinary items from times and cultures that may not be very familiar. This is also an opportunity for the Museum to learn how it can improve its larger exhibitions and permanent gallery displays. These displays have been made possible by the generous sponsorship of The Asahi Shimbun Company, who are long-standing supporters of the British Museum. With a circulation of about 6 million for the morning edition alone, *The Asahi Shimbun* is the most prestigious newspaper in Japan. The company also publishes magazines and books, and provides a substantial information service on the Internet. The Asahi Shimbun Company has a century long tradition of staging exhibitions in Japan of art, culture and history from around the world.

**Public Events**

Gallery Talks

Gallery talks provide an introduction to the themes of the display, given by the curators of the exhibition or guest speakers.

Free, just drop in.

**Collecting histories: Solomon Islands**Wednesday 3 July 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 3

**Collecting histories: introduction to the display and trail**Tuesday 30 July 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 3

**Collecting histories: betel-nut cutter from Sri Lanka**  
Wednesday 7 August 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 33

**Collecting histories: dance costume from Kiribati**Wednesday 14 August 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 24

With members of the Kiribati Community

**Understanding Raffles’ colonial collections from Java**Tuesday 20 August 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 1

**Collecting histories: milk vessel from Somalia**  
Friday 30 August 2019, 13.15–14.00 Room 24

Handling session

**Collecting histories: Solomon Islands handling session**Friday 16 August, 14.00–16.00 Room 3

With members of the Solomon Islands Community

Free, just drop in



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**Further information**

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High resolution images and caption sheet available at <https://bit.ly/2x3LJcL>