

# Unlearning History:

Getting to grips with Contested Heritage at  
Churches Conservation Trust

DAC Conference, Bristol St Mary Redcliffe, September 2023

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# Overview

1. Understanding Context
2. The path forward for CCT
3. Research findings so far...
4. Examples of Contested Heritage
5. Community-lead Interpretation



# Trigger Warning

Discussing and thinking about Contested Heritage can be triggering. The histories and human stories associated with 'Contested Heritage' are often violent and upsetting. This presentation includes references to human trafficking, exploitation, and other legacies of historic colonialism, which may trigger emotional - and sometimes surprising - personal responses.

# 1. Understanding Context

"We want...churches to be places of welcome and solace for all. Our guidance helps you to assess how, and to what extent...symbols of injustice or sources of pain may impact on your ability to undertake activities ...

This is not about judging people in the past by the standards of the present, but about how items of contested heritage, and wider issues of under-representation, affect [inclusion] for all in the 21st century, and how you can help to redress imbalances."

(CBC Contested Heritage Committee)

"Priorities and Conditions: specific focus areas associated with your baseline funding...work towards increased diversity, inclusion, and participation... Attracting new and diverse audiences by making collections...as accessible as possible; Uphold and operate the government's 'retain and explain' policy in relation to contested heritage assets"

(2022 settlement letter to CCT)

DCMS

Church of England

Churches Conservation Trust

Heritage Sector

Social Drivers

Priority for audiences, organisations and professionals

Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery

Tied to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion / Decolonisation / Access & Participation

The British Museums

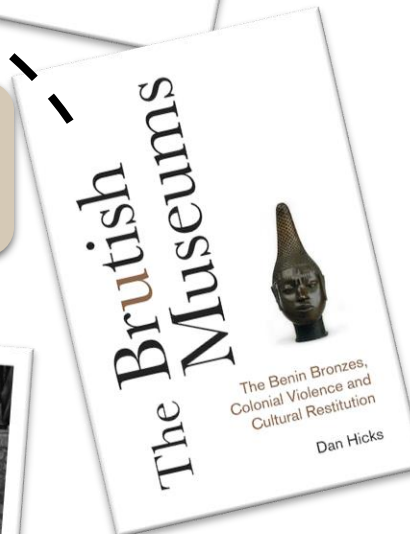
The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution  
Dan Hicks



BLACK LIVES MATTER

Reini Eddo-Lodge  
WHY I'M NO LONGER TALKING TO WHITE PEOPLE ABOUT RACE

I. CAN'T. BREATHE.



CCT is by no means expert in this subject matter,  
and is on a journey towards better understanding,  
management and public engagement with the  
Contested Heritage in our care.



## 2. The *envisaged* path forward...

1

### Organisational Preparedness

- ✓ Desktop research
- ✓ Develop resources for staff
- ✓ Record and share research findings with local community for individual churches
- ✓ Understand where Contested Heritage is being raised as an issue amongst our communities / core audiences
- ✓ Internal reporting and monitoring, linking in to EDI Committee
- ✓ Plan internal communications
- ✓ Identify, mitigate and manage additional risks as appropriate

2

### Internal Pilot & Sector-sharing

- ✓ More thorough research into a selection of CCT sites
- ✓ Engage local communities and new, target audiences, with/ about the heritage
- ✓ Develop pilot to temporarily interpret the history, always gathering feedback
- ✓ Share our Approach so far with partner organisations and stakeholders
- ✓ Develop methodologies and approaches to interpretation
- ✓ Review of sites, web descriptions, Walk Round Guides, etc

3

### Public Engagement

- ✓ Public-facing communications
- ✓ Broader programme of interpretation
- ✓ Identify new/ stretch audiences who might want to be consulted on managing/ interpreting the Contested Heritage
- ✓ Communicate with our communities, supporters and stakeholders
- ✓ Evaluate and monitor progress
- ✓ Honesty and transparency is key!

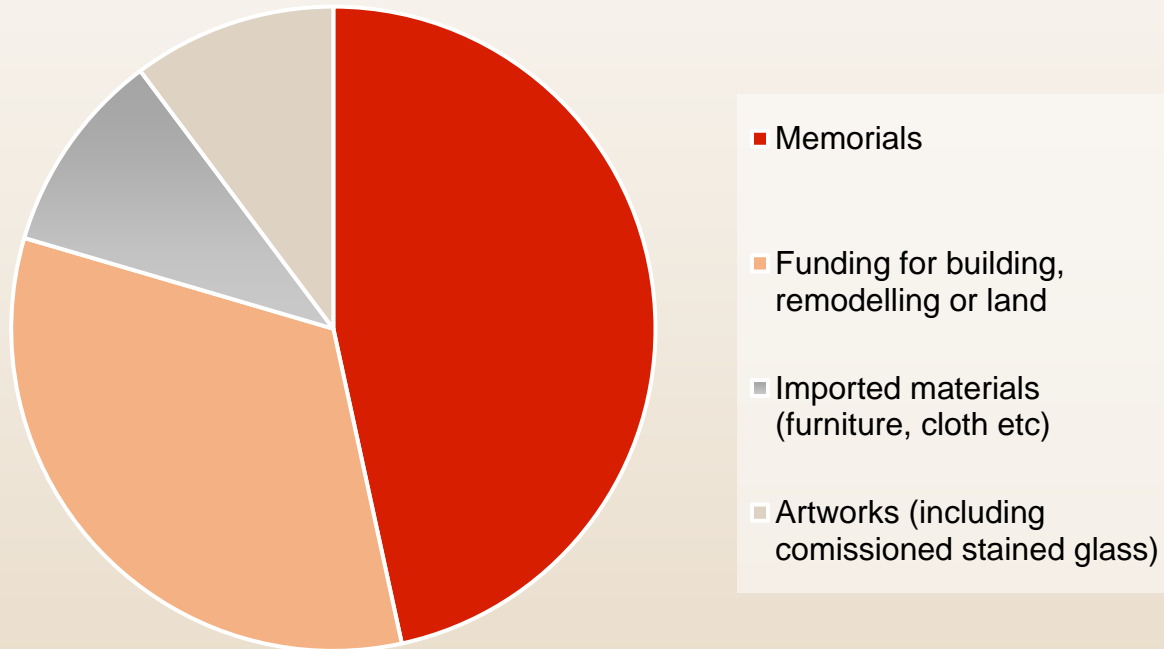
Ongoing governance and review + transparent communications

### 3. Desktop Research: Key Findings

43%

of CCT churches have – or are likely to have – tangible links with the historic, trans-Atlantic trade in trafficked & enslaved peoples and British occupation of India

Categories of links



Of the 90 people associated with CCT churches and documented to have links to these histories...

3

were enslaved or formerly enslaved and living in English parishes

12

of the 79 people documented to with links were closely associated with abolitionism

17

were slave/plantation 'owners' or traders

28

were senior colonial officials

30

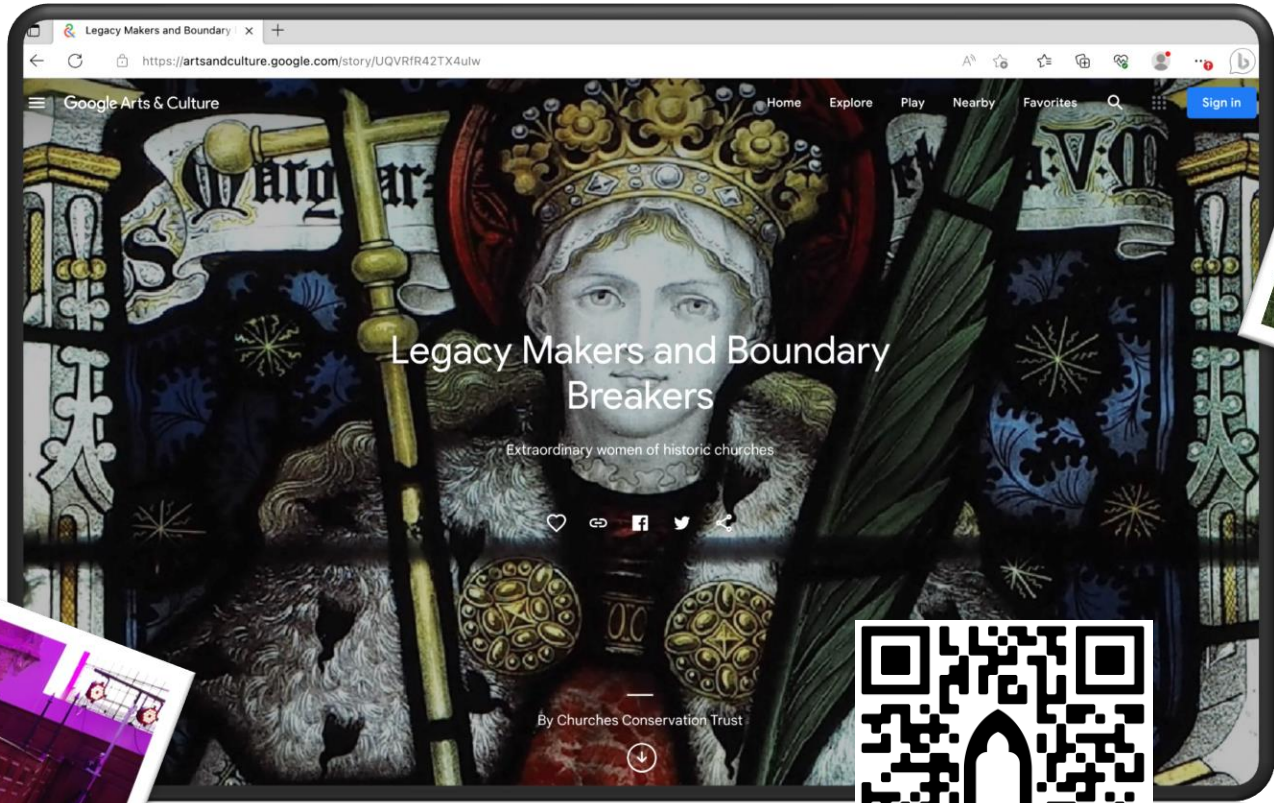
inherited wealth from Transatlantic trafficking, including compensation

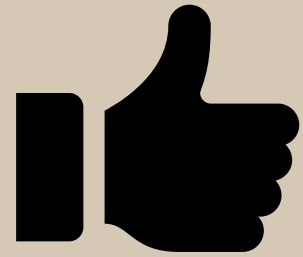
## 4. CCT examples of Contested Heritage





5. Community consultation  
& co-produced interpretation





Thank you!