

# The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at [www.seapn.org.uk](http://www.seapn.org.uk) and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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## Contents List

### Did you see ...?

- *Information Professional* – page 2
- *Museums Journal* – page 2
- *ARC Magazine* – page 3
- *Books for Keeps* – page 4

### Black Lives Matter

- *SHF race report: 40 years of tackling racial inequality in Britain* – page 4

### Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

- “Contested heritage” – page 7

### Abbreviations and acronyms – page 16

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## Did you see ...?

### **Information Professional**

The Jan-Feb 2021 issue includes:

- Naomi Korn “Brexit means new risks for the sector”, which highlights issues around ‘orphan works’<sup>1</sup> – for example, the British Library had taken *Spare Rib* offline, whilst the BFI and University of Kent have left their ‘orphan works’ online [p13]
- Adele Patrick (interviewed by Rob Mackinlay) “Feminist leadership, libraries and Covid-19”<sup>2</sup>, an interesting look at leadership and feminist values from the co-founder of Glasgow Women’s Library<sup>3</sup> [pp16-19]
- Julie Peel, Hannah Armitage and Ambreen Aziz “Apprenticeships: supporting new talent in to libraries”, which looks at the work that Kirklees Libraries have been doing to support two apprentices, opening up new pathways into librarianship [pp22-25]
- Carl Banks “Marking LGBTQ+ History Month and squashing boxes”, which outlines the development of the CILIP LGBTQ+ Network and highlights some key achievements [pp34-35]

### **Museums Journal**

My apologies, I included information about the Jan/Feb 2021 issue in the last Newsletter<sup>4</sup> before looking at earlier issues.

The Sept/Oct 2020 issue includes:

- Geraldine Kendall Adams “History in the making”, which looks at the effects of the toppling of the Colston statue in Bristol and the growing movement to reassess heritage in the public realm<sup>5</sup> [pp4-5]

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<sup>1</sup> “Orphan works are creative works or performances that are subject to copyright - like a diary, photograph, film or piece of music - for which one or more of the right holders is either unknown or cannot be found.” <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/copyright-orphan-works#:~:text=Orphan%20works%20are%20creative%20works,unknown%20or%20cannot%20be%20found>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/news.asp?id=555193>.

<sup>3</sup> Further info about the GWL at: <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/>. GWL were a finalist in the 2017 CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award, see:

<https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/LCLA2017Shortlist>.

<sup>4</sup> *The Network Newsletter*, 239, Jan 2021, pp2-3.

<sup>5</sup> This mentions the London Assembly commission to review diversity in the public realm, see: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-announces-members-of-landmark-commission>; Glasgow University’s funding of a joint research centre at the University of the West Indies, see: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/gccdr/>; work at Oxford University, including the setting up of the Oriel College Commission of Inquiry to look into the legacy of Cecil

- Shereen Hunte “Working life” (“People” column), which outlines work at the Jewish Museum London, including their Black history programme and tours<sup>6</sup> [p10]
- Michael Fryer “We must strive to find creative ways of engaging older people” (“Comment” column), which argues for more engagement work with older people to ensure that they are not digitally excluded [p12]
- Michelle Charters “Tackling racism and intolerance in a city built on slavery”, which looks at the development of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool<sup>7</sup> [p13]
- Jon Sleigh “Safeguarding your engagement teams’ mental health is imperative” (“Comment” column), which highlights the importance of engagement work – but also the toll it can take on frontline staff and volunteers [p15]
- Simon Stephens “Life under lockdown”, which looks at some of the imaginative responses made by museums, including community collecting and activism [pp18-21]
- Juliana Gilling “Get on board”, which looks at the importance of diversifying trustees [pp30-32]
- Rebecca Atkinson “Offering culture via social media” (“Case study”), which looks at the work that Hastings Museum & Art Gallery has been doing via #HastingsDigitalMuseum to tackle social isolation<sup>8</sup> [p63]

### ***ARC Magazine***

The March issue<sup>9</sup> includes:

- Katie McDonald “The role business archives can play in the climate crisis and social justice” [pp11-13], which argues that:

“[...] many organisations are working on reducing their own carbon footprint. Within archive repositories there are huge carbon

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Rhodes, see: <https://www.oriel-rhodes-commission.co.uk/>; and wider programme of decolonisation and reconciliation set up by the Pitt Rivers Museum, see, for example: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/critical-changes>; the Bristol City Council “We Are Bristol History Commission”, looking at the city’s relationship with slavery, see: <https://news.bristol.gov.uk/news/bristols-real-history-to-be-told-by-we-are-bristol-history-commission>; and National Museums Liverpool’s appointment of an historian in residence to look at the legacies of slavery, see, for example: [https://independent-liverpool.co.uk/blog/national-museums-liverpool-appoints-new-historian-in-residence/#:~:text=National%20Museums%20Liverpool%20\(NML\)%20has,Westgaph%20as%20Historian%20in%20Residence.](https://independent-liverpool.co.uk/blog/national-museums-liverpool-appoints-new-historian-in-residence/#:~:text=National%20Museums%20Liverpool%20(NML)%20has,Westgaph%20as%20Historian%20in%20Residence.)

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/?s=black+history>.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum>.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: <https://hastingsmuseum.org/digital-content/>, <http://www.hmag.org.uk/aboutus/digital/> and <http://www.hmag.org.uk/events/>.

<sup>9</sup> *ARC Magazine*, 379, Mar 2021.

savings to be made through the efficient heating and cooling of buildings, as well as in the thoughtful storage of digital materials. However, we should not limit our response to the climate crisis only to carbon reduction; the heritage sector can also play an important role in educating our audiences about the related issues of biodiversity loss, economic inequality and social injustice. Our collections hold the answers to mitigate against, and adapt to, some of the worst impacts of our warming world.” [p11]

### ***Books for Keeps***

The March issue<sup>10</sup> includes:

- Elle McNicoll “Inclusive storytelling”, in which the author introduces her two books<sup>11</sup> (which feature characters who are neurodivergent) and talks about being published as part of “Own Voices”<sup>12</sup> [p3]
- Karen Sands O’Connor and Darren Chetty “Beyond the Secret Garden: East Asian Characters in British children’s fiction” [pp10-11], an interesting article which assesses the representation of East Asian people in children’s books and suggests that “[...] the new Hong Kong British will be able to see at least some positive representations of people that look like them in British children’s books.” [p10]
- Kristabelle Williams “Libraries in lockdown” [pp16-17], which outlines how the author kept her secondary school library open, and “[...] demonstrates the positive impact of a well-funded and professionally staffed school library on students’ achievement.” [p16]

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## **Black Lives Matter**

### ***SHF race report: 40 years of tackling racial inequality in Britain***

“In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a cross-government inquiry into all aspects of racial inequality in the United Kingdom. The cross-governmental ‘Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities’ would look into discrimination against black, Asian and minority ethnic people in education, health and the criminal justice system. A number of people questioned why another inquiry was necessary [...]” [p2]

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<sup>10</sup> *Books for Keeps*, 247, Mar 2021, <https://content.yudu.com/web/1mjdv/0A1mjdx/BfK247March2021/html/print/BfK%20247%20March%202021%20Download.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *A kind of spark*. Knights Of, 2020; and *Show us who you are*. Knights Of, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> “#ownvoices is a hashtag movement, started on Twitter, used to recommend books about diverse characters that have been written by authors from that same diverse group.” [Taken from: <https://www.broadartbooks.com/newsletter/posts-in-2019/what-is-ownvoices>].

In order to “[...] review, recall and re-count the work of earlier commissions and inquiries into racial inequality and to assemble their findings in an accessible form [...]” [p2], this important new report<sup>13</sup> was commissioned by the Stuart Hall Foundation<sup>14</sup> in partnership with the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity<sup>15</sup>.

It:

“[...] provides summaries of a selection of reports published between 1981 and 2017 and offers a thematic analysis of recommendations put forward to address racism and racial inequality in communities, education, employment, policing and the criminal justice system. The report examines 589 recommendations and draws out a number of common, overarching themes running through the recommendations including the need to address the disconnect between legislation and its enforcement; the requirement for holistic and co-ordinated approaches across government and between government agencies, employers and community groups; the requirement for further research as well as for regular, improved and standardised forms of data collection; and the need to establish accountability and responsibility at organisational and leadership levels as well as the need to establish independent oversight, investigation and review.” [pp2-3]

This summary of key reports is valuable (and as a reminder of just how many reports there have been).

The second section of this report is a ‘thematic analysis of recommendations’, which identifies ‘nine cross-cutting and overarching themes’. These include:

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen D Ashe. *SHF race report: 40 years of tackling racial inequality in Britain*. Stuart Hall Foundation, 2021, <https://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SHF-Race-Report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> “The Stuart Hall Foundation was established in 2015 by Professor Stuart Hall’s family, friends and colleagues. The Foundation is committed to public education, addressing urgent questions of race and inequality in culture and society through talks and events, and building a growing network of Stuart Hall Foundation scholars and artists in residence.

We work collaboratively to forge creative partnerships in the spirit of Stuart Hall; thinking together and working towards a racially just and more equal future.” [Taken from: <https://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/about-us/>].

<sup>15</sup> Based at the University of Manchester: “The Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) is an ESRC funded research centre providing theoretically informed, empirically grounded and policy-relevant research on ethnic inequalities in the UK.

CoDE combines quantitative and qualitative methods in an interdisciplinary framework to examine changing patterns of ethnic inequality over time and in the contemporary context.

We bring together expertise from a range of disciplines including sociology, demography, economics, history, geography, political science, cultural studies.” [Taken from: <https://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/about/>].

1. “[...] there being a disconnect between legislation and its implementation/enforcement, as well as there being discrepancies between policy and practice.” [p29]
2. “[...] as well as recommending the review of existing initiatives, practices and structures, several reports also highlight the need for holistic approaches, joined up thinking and greater collaboration across different branches of government at both the local and national levels.” [p29]
3. “[...] arguably the most common recommendations put forward relate to data collection and the need for further research. In terms of data collection, recommendations typically refer to either improving and/or standardising quantitative and statistical data collection mechanisms in order to establish consistency in how different ethnic and racial categories are defined. Such recommendations are also closely aligned to proposals calling for data-led/evidence-based approaches to both decision- and policy-making processes. Another common recommendation is that statistical data is collected on a regular basis in order to map and monitor racial inequality and break down differential outcomes and the effectiveness of various interventions over time.” [p29]
4. “[...] , a number of reports put forward recommendations relating to issues of disclosure, communication and transparency.” [p29]
5. “[...] , several reports recommend that improvements must be made when it comes to the recruitment, retention and career progression of ethnic and racial minority people, while recommending that the lack of representation of ethnic and racial minority people in senior leadership positions must also be addressed.” [p29]
6. “[...] almost all reports recommend the introduction of new, or changes to various existing, training and educational programmes. Over time, this includes calls for the introduction of the racial awareness, cultural diversity, cultural competency and/or unconscious bias training.” [p30]
7. “[...] several reports recommend that targets and key performance indicators are established, routinely monitored and published to ensure transparency. This includes using targets and key performance indicators to evaluate the performance of public bodies and institutions, and private organisations, as well as appraising the performance of individuals in senior leadership positions.” [p30]
8. “[...] a number of the reports recommend that independent bodies are set up to handle complaints and reports of racism.” [p30]

A very useful pulling-together of existing reports and their findings and recommendations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Source: *Black & Asian News*, 18 Mar 2021.

## Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### “Contested heritage”

The MA has published a Q&A<sup>17</sup> with Corinne Fowler, Professor of Postcolonial Literature, University of Leicester) – she was “[...] singled out for criticism by senior government figures and the press following the publication of a landmark report on links to slavery and colonialism at National Trust properties, which she co-authored.”

The article outlines the range of criticism that her work received, and then makes very uncomfortable reading when it details how the attacks became personal:

“From here, the attack became more narrowly focused on myself as the only academic report editor and my research project, Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted, which is guided by a team of historians. The Daily Mail, The Times and the Spectator accused us of being ‘politically partial academics’.

Following this, there was a series of attacks on my book, with misreporting of my work – a false claim that I wrote in my book that ‘gardening is racist’, another misleading claim that the National Trust report was ‘error strewn’ and a further false report today that I compared British colonialism to the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war (all in the Daily Mail).

The majority of these articles gave me no right of reply, and none to any of the Colonial Countryside historians mentioned in the news reports. Finally, government ministers and other senior politicians briefed against the work. The group wrote open letters against the National Trust report and then wrote to my funders and said that Colonial Countryside was ineligible for public funds because it is a ‘political project’.”

Corinne Fowler goes on to make some important points, including:

- “We are at a very sensitive moment nationally. We are in the middle of a pandemic and the summer’s Black Lives Matter protesters tried to open up a conversation about our past and how we commemorate it. The choice we then had as a nation was to open up that conversation across cultures, generations and political divides.”
- “We should all be concerned about attempts to sanitise our national history – in the name of not sanitising it – and to call for less history, not more history.”

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<sup>17</sup> “We need to defend the freedom to research our histories in all their nuance”, MA, 16 Feb 2021, [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/people/2021/02/qa-we-need-to-defend-the-freedom-to-research-our-histories-in-all-their-nuance/?utm\\_campaign=1890975\\_16022021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,14J33,27LU0M,4C3R3,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/people/2021/02/qa-we-need-to-defend-the-freedom-to-research-our-histories-in-all-their-nuance/?utm_campaign=1890975_16022021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,14J33,27LU0M,4C3R3,1).

- “We need to defend the freedom to research our histories in all their nuance, being careful not to confuse nationalism with historical evidence. We need to hold the line: timidity only encourages hostile coverage, presumably in the hope of pressuring organisations to cancel more projects along the same lines.”
- “I would like to see a calming down of the rhetoric and posturing so that respectful and thoughtful conversations can take place. There is no need to present heritage professionals as unpatriotic for telling the truth, either. We need to avoid this ‘culture war’ mentality and history should not be used for political gain.” [all quotes taken from the MA article]

However, following an investigation by the Charity Commission, the Commission has found that:

“The National Trust did not act outside its charitable purpose in publishing its recent report on slavery and colonialism [...]”<sup>18</sup>

In response, Hilary McGrady (Director-General of the NT) has written<sup>19</sup>:

“We welcome the Charity Commission's conclusion that there are no grounds for regulatory action against us, following complaints the Commission received about the report we published on historic slavery and colonialism links at the places we care for. We are also pleased that the Commission is satisfied we gave due consideration to how the report and the research behind it would further our charitable purpose [...]”

It is worth remembering why we published this report. To look at an aspect of history that is there in many of the places we care for. To look at the material evidence we have and to ensure that we take account of it in the way we look after and present the places in our care. To be transparent and factual about this.

We have listened and considered the many responses, and been reminded that researching history and sharing it can stir up strong feelings and views [...]

The National Trust must continue to take a wide-ranging and evidence-based approach to history. We have been reminded that we must work hard to place particular themes such as historic slavery and colonialism in a broad context at the places in our care. These are places that should help curious people come face to face with history and feel they can arrive at their own views. For these reasons, we support a ‘retain and explain’ approach to history, and will work with government and other organisations in culture and heritage as they develop their own thinking.

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<sup>18</sup> Taken from: Geraldine Kendall Adams “National Trust slavery report did not breach charity law”, MA, 12 Mar 2021, [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/national-trust-slavery-report-did-not-breach-charity-law/?utm\\_campaign=1905083\\_12032021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,14TYZ,27LU0M,4DC2Y,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/national-trust-slavery-report-did-not-breach-charity-law/?utm_campaign=1905083_12032021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,14TYZ,27LU0M,4DC2Y,1).

<sup>19</sup> Hilary McGrady “Responding to the Charity Commission's statement”, NT Director's blog, 11 Mar 2021, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blogs/directors-blog/responding-to-the-charity-commissions-statement>.

This approach will underpin our research, interpretation and programming and help us to maintain an open and positive relationship with our broad range of stakeholders and members, present and future.

We are developing a programme of rounded interpretation at properties. Balance and integration will be at the heart of this programme. Our curatorial teams continue doing vital work with properties to make sure we have the highest standards of presentation and interpretation at these places. We are here for all of history – for everyone, for ever.”

On 23 Feb, Oliver Dowden called a meeting with the heritage sector to discuss these issues. According to the MA<sup>20</sup>, it included:

“[...] England’s national museums and arm’s length heritage bodies, as well as charities such as the National Trust and the Landmark Trust. A full list of attendees has not been released.

The summit was called after months of heightened rhetoric on the question of how Britain’s imperial history should be dealt with in the public realm. Museums Journal understands that the meeting was “polite but managed”, with little back-and-forth discussion and no opportunity for questions at the end.

Institutions were reminded that they should remain impartial and not be beholden to a ‘vocal minority’, and it was agreed that a working group would be formed to develop guidance on putting the government’s ‘retain and explain’ policy on contested history into practice.

However, Museums Journal understands that there is concern among institutions that official guidance from government on editorial or academic matters would breach the arm’s length principle, as well as putting certain topics off-limits because of fears that funding will be affected.”

However, again according to this article:

“The heads of several cultural institutions have signalled their support for the government’s position. The Science Museum Group’s chief executive, Ian Blatchford, wrote in the Daily Telegraph: ‘I’m happy to report that the importance of independence was underlined, not undermined at the meeting. There is no desire to meddle in the thousands of curatorial decisions that museums make every day.’

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<sup>20</sup> Geraldine Kendall Adams “‘Polite but managed’ summit fails to allay concerns about government overreach”, MA, 26 Feb 2021, [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/02/polite-but-managed-summit-fails-to-allay-concerns-about-government-overreach/?utm\\_campaign=1896867\\_25022021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,14NMR,27LU0M,4CLQI,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/02/polite-but-managed-summit-fails-to-allay-concerns-about-government-overreach/?utm_campaign=1896867_25022021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,14NMR,27LU0M,4CLQI,1).

Blatchford added: 'We should not be at the beck and call of every loud voice, or rush to change our museums at the first sign of complaint from a particular lobby, and we should steer clear of political activism.'

The chair of the Museum of the Home, Samir Shah, said the secretary of state's intervention was completely justified'."

The Director of the MA, Sharon Heal, has also issued a short statement<sup>21</sup> which says that:

"The Museums Association unreservedly supports work to decolonise museums and their collections and to broaden and deepen our understanding of the legacy of empire and slavery.

We are therefore concerned about the government's perceived interference in this area of museum work in England. It is both a hallmark of a democratic society and a cornerstone of museum ethics that our sector should operate at arm's length from the government.

Museums must be able to carry out research and inquiry into all areas of history – it is not for ministers to dictate what constitutes a legitimate subject for investigation or what the outcome of that research might be.

It is vital that the government consults widely with the sector – including with the Museums Association – before proceeding with its proposal to produce guidelines on 'contested heritage'.

The Museums Association has already convened a sector-wide Decolonisation Guidance Working Group which will continue to provide guidance and support for individuals and institutions.

We are particularly concerned that a climate of fear has been created amongst museums and museum staff, especially those working on subjects relating to Britain's imperial past, and we support the rights of everyone working on these issues to do so free of interference, threats and intimidation."

*The Guardian* ran an article<sup>22</sup> on the meeting, which reported that:

"Prospect, the FDA union and PCS union wrote that their members were 'deeply worried' that the government was challenging the independence of museums and galleries to provoke an unnecessary 'culture war over the portrayal of historical figures."

This article also has a useful link to another article<sup>23</sup> about various pressure groups within Parliament, including the "Common Sense Group":

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<sup>21</sup> "Our response to the DCMS contested heritage meeting on 23 February", MA, 24 Feb 2021, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/ethics/our-response-to-the-dcms-contested-heritage-meeting/>.

<sup>22</sup> Rajeev Syal "Unions fear government wants museums to 'airbrush' UK history", *The Guardian*, 23 Feb 2021, [https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/feb/23/unions-fear-government-wants-museums-to-airbrush-uk-history?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/feb/23/unions-fear-government-wants-museums-to-airbrush-uk-history?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other).

“The Common Sense Group, which launched quietly in the summer with about 40 members, was the subject of a front-page story in the Daily Telegraph this week after it accused the National Trust of being ‘coloured by cultural Marxist dogma’ and in the grip of ‘elite bourgeois liberals’ over a report acknowledging links between its properties and slavery.

It now has 59 MPs and 7 members of the House of Lords in its ranks.

Sir John Hayes, the founder of the group, told the Guardian: ‘The ERG has served an important role, but it has very largely done its work. The government has to decide what its defining purpose is beyond Brexit. There’s a thirst in the party to have an open debate about what the direction should be now. There’s a different kind of Conservative family emerging.’

One member of the group, Jonathan Gullis, posted a ‘CULTURE WAR ALERT’ on Facebook last month telling his followers that research by Greenwich Maritime Museum into the Royal Navy’s links to slavery was ‘leftwing ideological nonsense’.”

In the latest twist to this series of news stories, the DfE has produced a White Paper<sup>24</sup> calling for the protection of free speech and academic freedom in universities. Gavin Williamson has issued a call<sup>25</sup> for the protection of free speech and academic freedom in universities in England. According to *The Guardian*:

“The government is to introduce legislation that will enable academics, students or visiting speakers who are no-platformed to sue universities for compensation where they feel they have suffered because of free speech infringements.”<sup>26</sup>

However, according to *OpenDemocracy*, some of the evidence for the White Paper that leads this call has come from:

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<sup>23</sup> Archie Bland and Jessica Elgot “Dissatisfied Tory MPs flock to ERG-inspired pressure groups”, *The Guardian*, 11 Nov 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/nov/11/dissatisfied-tory-mps-flock-to-erg-inspired-pressure-groups>.

<sup>24</sup> *Higher education: free speech and academic freedom* [CP 394]. DfE, 2021. Available to download as a pdf from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/961537/Higher\\_education\\_free\\_speech\\_and\\_academic\\_freedom\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/961537/Higher_education_free_speech_and_academic_freedom_web_version.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Nick Duffy. “Education secretary Gavin Williamson lauds student who called gays an ‘abomination’ as he reveals ‘free speech’ plan”, *PinkNews*, 16 Feb 2021, [https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/02/16/education-secretary-gavin-williamson-felix-ngole-gays-abomination-free-speech-champion/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=PNnewsletter](https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/02/16/education-secretary-gavin-williamson-felix-ngole-gays-abomination-free-speech-champion/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PNnewsletter)

<sup>26</sup> Sally Weale “Proposed free speech law will make English universities liable for breaches”, *The Guardian*, 16 Feb 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/feb/16/proposed-free-speech-law-will-make-english-universities-liable-for-breaches>.

“ADF International, an anti-abortion, ‘dark money’-funded think tank [...]”<sup>27</sup>

This article provides a link to a statement by the Southern Poverty Law Center which lists ADF International:

“[...] as a hate group because it has supported the idea that being LGBTQ+ should be a crime in the U.S. and abroad and believes that is OK to put LGBTQ+ people in prison for engaging in consensual sex. It has also supported laws that required the forced sterilization of transgender Europeans.”<sup>28</sup>

The *OpenDemocracy* piece also quotes Peter Tatchell:

“Research by ADF International on threats to free speech can hardly be considered as objective and impartial. It has a partisan anti-human rights agenda on LGBT issues”

John Bowers (a barrister) and David Isaac (former chair of the EHRC) have written an “Opinion” piece<sup>29</sup> in *The Guardian*, which looks at some of the background to this, and they argue that the existing legal framework is already sufficient, and that good work is being undertaken to look at applying it in practice<sup>30</sup>. They conclude:

“We believe that further politicising this already contested area by creating new legal obligations for universities, students’ unions and the OFS is not the responsible way forward. At a time when virtually all meetings do actually go ahead and institutions are working hard to get back to normal as we emerge from the pandemic, the government should focus on the most significant challenges for higher education – how to address financial shortfalls for both universities and students to enable the sector to flourish.

We deplore the cancelling of any meetings which are lawful, but these issues will not be helped by further legislation or litigation.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Adam Bychawski “UK government cites US anti-LGBT ‘hate group’ in free speech proposals”, *OpenDemocracy*, 19 Feb 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/uk-government-cites-us-anti-lgbt-hate-group-in-free-speech-proposals/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Why is Alliance Defending Freedom a Hate Group?”, Southern Poverty Law Center, 10 Apr 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/04/10/why-alliance-defending-freedom-hate-group>.

<sup>29</sup> John Bowers and David Isaac “Ignore this manufactured crisis: free speech is alive and well in our universities”, *The Guardian* (“Opinion” column), 5 Mar 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/05/manufactured-crisis-free-speech-universities-freedom-of-expression-legal>.

<sup>30</sup> They are referring to: *Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students’ unions in England and Wales*. EHRC, 2019, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/freedom-of-expression-guide-for-higher-education-providers-and-students-unions-england-and-wales.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Source: *Black & Asian News*, 5 Mar 2021.

*The Conversation* carried a helpful article<sup>32</sup> which quotes the MA statement on decolonisation:

“Decolonisation is not simply the relocation of a statue or an object; it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of empire in British museums – from their creation to the present day. Decolonisation requires a reappraisal of our institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches to all areas of museum work.”<sup>33</sup>

and argues that:

“The proposal that monuments must be preserved at any cost falls within a view of heritage that privileges white and upper-class narratives [...]

The idea that heritage must be preserved in its current form for an imagined future generation, leaves little room for necessary transformations and change. This long-held idea is one that museums have been trying to move away from as they try to embrace a more activist and active role, in today’s society.”

The MA<sup>34</sup> has expressed its concerns about the proposed changes to planning rules for historic statues, plaques and memorials; comments include:

“Decision-making on the future of historic statues, plaques and memorials should be more sophisticated than a simple focus on retention. This is not to say that there are not cases where ‘retain and explain’ may be an appropriate course of action, but it is not the only course of action.

The association said having a blanket ‘retain and explain’ approach was a ‘blunt instrument which is insufficiently concerned with democratic process’. The policy ‘in particular disregards local community consent for the continued display of a statue, plaque or memorial’, it said.

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<sup>32</sup> Katharina Massing “Statues: the UK’s plan to ‘retain and explain’ problem monuments is a backwards step”, *The Conversation*, 9 Mar 2021, [https://theconversation.com/statues-the-uks-plan-to-retain-and-explain-problem-monuments-is-a-backwards-step-156430?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%209%202021%20-%201884918397&utm\\_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%209%202021%20-%201884918397+CID\\_c21524524a8190a2f31b50e87cede9d2&utm\\_source=campaign\\_monitor\\_uk&utm\\_term=Statues%20the%20UKs%20plan%20to%20retain%20and%20explain%20problem%20monuments%20is%20a%20backwards%20step](https://theconversation.com/statues-the-uks-plan-to-retain-and-explain-problem-monuments-is-a-backwards-step-156430?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%209%202021%20-%201884918397&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%209%202021%20-%201884918397+CID_c21524524a8190a2f31b50e87cede9d2&utm_source=campaign_monitor_uk&utm_term=Statues%20the%20UKs%20plan%20to%20retain%20and%20explain%20problem%20monuments%20is%20a%20backwards%20step).

<sup>33</sup> “Our statement on Decolonisation”, MA, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/our-statement-on-decolonisation/>.

<sup>34</sup> Geraldine Kendall Adams “Tougher planning rules for statues are ‘impractical and unethical’”, MA, 12 Mar 2021, [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/tougher-planning-rules-for-statues-are-impractical-and-unethical/?utm\\_campaign=1905083\\_12032021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,14TYZ,27LU0M,4DC2Y,1](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/tougher-planning-rules-for-statues-are-impractical-and-unethical/?utm_campaign=1905083_12032021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,14TYZ,27LU0M,4DC2Y,1).

The MA added that it was ‘deeply concerned’ about the independence of decision-making in the heritage sector, saying: ‘We believe that the ‘retain and explain’ approach – whether applied to museums’ built heritage or to their collections – constitutes undue government interference in the curatorial judgement of museums. In such matters, museums operate independently from government in accordance with the arm’s-length principle. It should not be the role of government to dictate how museums should go about their work – and the planning process should not be used to this end.’

The MA’s policy manager, Alistair Brown, said: ‘Many museums in England are in buildings that will be affected by the government’s new planning proposals. If you have a statue, plaque or memorial on your site, the government is effectively requiring you to retain it in perpetuity – regardless of what it represents.’

We are arguing against these proposals on the grounds that they are both impractical and unethical. We already have a system in place to protect listed buildings and monuments – we don’t need new policies which will create confusion, bureaucracy and opportunities for misuse.

Even more importantly, we believe that the focus on retaining statues and memorials at all costs is a blunt instrument which disregards local decision-making processes and the principle of community consent for the types of statues and monuments that form part of our built environment.”

The latest organisation to face accusations of ‘wokeness’ is Kew Gardens (RBG Kew). In their recently-published manifesto<sup>35</sup>, they state that, by 2030, they will:

- “Ensure the diverse countries and cultures that partner with RBG Kew and contribute to our collections are accurately and equitably represented. We will move quickly to ‘de-colonise’ our collections, re-examining them to acknowledge and address any exploitative or racist legacies, and develop new narratives around them.” [p27]

According to an article<sup>36</sup> in *The Guardian*, a Conservative MP described this as: “preposterous posturing by people who are so out of touch with the sentiment of patriotic Britain”.

However, the Director of RBG Kew, Richard Deverell, made a strong statement, saying that:

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<sup>35</sup> *Our manifesto for change 2021-2030*. Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, 2021, [https://www.kew.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/13320%20Corporate%20Strategy%202020-2030\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.kew.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/13320%20Corporate%20Strategy%202020-2030_accessible.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Nazia Parveen “Kew Gardens director hits back at claims it is 'growing woke'”, *The Guardian*, 18 Mar 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/mar/18/kew-gardens-director-hits-back-at-claims-it-is-growing-woke>.

“[...] the manifesto signalled one of the most fundamental periods of change in the history of the world-famous botanic garden in London and to stay silent on issues of race could be seen as being complicit.

Describing it as a ‘fork in the road moment’, Deverell said the outpouring of grief around the world after the killing of George Floyd brought into focus deep-rooted and longstanding injustices faced by black people.

Deverell said Kew, as an institution, could not stand aside. ‘Like so many other organisations, parts of Kew’s history shamefully draw from a legacy that has deep roots in colonialism and racism,’ he said. ‘Much of Kew’s work in the 19th century focused on the movement of valuable plants around the British empire for agriculture and trade, which of course means that some key figures in our past and items still in our collections are linked to colonialism.’

Deverell, the 17th director of the Royal Botanic Gardens since 1841, alongside the board of trustees vowed to ‘decolonise’ its collections. The garden’s botany collection contains plant specimens that were obtained under colonial and exploitative conditions in many parts of the world including Asia and Africa. Display boards at the gardens will be changed to give further information on plants such as sugar and rubber, in order to reflect their links to slavery and colonialism.

‘For more than 260 years, scientists from Kew have explored every corner of the world documenting the rich diversity of plants and fungi. We were beacons of discovery and science, but also beacons of privilege and exploitation,’ Deverell said.

He added: ‘There is no acceptable neutral position on this subject; to stay silent is to be complicit. Each of us needs to step up to tackle injustices in our society and our organisations.

We have been a bit lazy with our language in the past. For example, we describe many plants as being ‘discovered’ by western botanists and explorers, but many of these plants had been used by indigenous communities for thousands of years already so it’s about making sure that detail, that historical context, is in there.’”

Finally, according to a news-story<sup>37</sup> from the MA, a group of key historians has written an open letter to the Government:

“In a letter to the Sunday Times this week, signatories including the presidents of the Royal Historical Society, the Historical Association and the Economic History Society wrote that they were ‘deeply’ worried by reports that the UK Government is seeking to deny funding for academic

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<sup>37</sup> Geraldine Kendall Adams “Government interference in heritage threatens freedom of speech, warn historians”, MA, 24 Mar 2021, [https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/government-interference-in-heritage-threatens-freedom-of-speech-warn-historians/?utm\\_campaign=1912419\\_26032021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Museums%20Association&dm\\_i=2VBX,14ZMR,27LU0M,4DZD2,1#](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/government-interference-in-heritage-threatens-freedom-of-speech-warn-historians/?utm_campaign=1912419_26032021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museums%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,14ZMR,27LU0M,4DZD2,1#).

Corinne Fowler and her Colonial Countryside project, which explores links to empire and slavery at National Trust properties.

The letter called on culture secretary Oliver Dowden to ‘confirm or deny’ these claims. The signatories said they were further concerned that the culture minister had been quoted as ‘seeking to deny public funding to any project deemed to be “political”’.

Ministers have ‘no right to determine’ which projects are supported by publicly funded institutions, they said. The letter continued: ‘Britain has a tradition of arm’s-length funding of education, culture and heritage, which insulates these spheres from excessive interference by government.

‘Such interference stifles the capacity of historians to do their work and exerts a wider chilling effect. It may deter – it may be intended to deter – historians from difficult or sensitive research. It runs counter to recent statements by the government in defence of academic freedom.

‘If anyone is being too ‘political’ here, it is politicians who violate the arm’s-length principle by seeking to dictate what research our heritage bodies can and cannot support.’”

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

BFI = British Film Institute  
DfE = Department for Education  
EHRC = Equality and Human Rights Commission  
ERG = European Research Group  
GWL – Glasgow Women’s Library  
MA = Museums Association  
NT = National Trust  
OFS = Office for Students  
RBG = Royal Botanic Gardens  
SHF = Stuart Hall Foundation

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This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

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