

Remembering Slavery - a catalyst for change

The UK bicentenary of 2007 has been described as an 'important moment in the politics of multi-culturalism' by Professor Catherine Hall, University College of London. Discussion of the bicentenary year has been almost as ubiquitous as the events and exhibitions that the anniversary generated. This paper will reflect on the themes emerging from this analysis and demonstrate how the bicentenary is reinvigorating professional practice in museums.

Reflection on the UK bicentenary has tended to focus on the larger projects in the cities with obvious links to the trans-Atlantic slave trade such as Liverpool, Bristol, London and Hull. This presentation, however, will look at the bicentenary at a regional level. It will highlight the *Remembering Slavery* programme in north east England, a region not automatically connected to the slave trade. The paper will also address the question - what does the bicentenary year tell us about Britain in the 21st century? And in particular, what does it tell us about the north east of England where the black and minority ethnic population makes up only 2.4% of the total population?

Using national research and the recently published evaluation of Tyne and Wear Museums' *Remembering Slavery* programme, this paper will offer an analysis of the impact of 2007, actual and potential, on museum practice, especially in regional museums. It will focus in particular on how Tyne and Wear Museums (TWM) is developing models for partnership working, the transfer of knowledge and sharing authority with the public. Using TWM's bicentenary output in 2007 and legacy work in 2008, I will conclude by arguing that the public narrative of the slave trade and abolition story has shifted substantially because of the way museums shared authorship and engaged in dynamic partnerships.