

Charles Partridge: Bringing a taste of Nigeria back to Suffolk

Colchester and Ipswich Museums and the British Museum partnership on Charles Partridge project

Thursday 10th February 2011

3pm

Ipswich Museum

PRESS CALL: 10th February, 3pm at Ipswich Museum

Representatives from the British Museum, Colchester and Ipswich Museums and two Nigerian Curators will be in attendance to launch this new display in the Ethnographic Gallery at Ipswich Museum.

A ground-breaking partnership between the British Museum and Colchester and Ipswich Museums has brought together the collections, photographs and writings of Charles Partridge, the first researcher on the Cross River district and the Igala people in Eastern Nigeria.

This has led to the creation of a new display in the Ethnography Gallery at Ipswich Museum highlighting Partridge's collections and photographs; this includes exceptional field film footage of recent masquerades in the same area of Nigeria. It is perhaps the fullest coverage of art from this region anywhere in the world.

Colchester and Ipswich Museums has also created a travelling exhibition based on Charles Partridge's photographs which will tour Nigeria.

Charles Partridge was born in Stowmarket, Suffolk and was educated at Ipswich School. After attending University he, like many others of his class at the time took up a career as an administrator in the British Empire. Armed only with an undergraduate degree in theology, he soon found himself in charge of hundreds of square miles and thousands of people, without the ability to speak any local language and no understanding of their history or culture. He had little option but to try and understand this different world by which he was surrounded and which he was supposed to transform. So he took an interest in the peoples of that country, building up relationships with local people and collected many artefacts including photographs, textiles and masks.

Then returning to England to serve in the First World War he had an active career as a local historian and was deeply interested in the heritage of Suffolk too. On his death he left his collection to Ipswich Museum, his photographs and official papers to the British Museum and his unofficial papers to the Suffolk Record office and the Mary Slessor Institute at Dundee.

This project has sought to reunite these sources and has seen partnerships between Colchester and Ipswich Museums, the British Museum, the leading researcher Jill Salmons, and two museums in Nigeria.

Cllr. Andrew Cann, Ipswich Borough Council Culture Portfolio Holder said, "This project shows the broad reach of the collection at Ipswich Museum, its relevance to the community and building on partnership-working with the British Museum and museums in Nigeria."

For two weeks in April 2010, Colchester and Ipswich Museums also hosted two guest curators from Nigeria, Pamela Otuka from the Lagos Museum and Maureen Alagoa from Port Harcourt as a part of the British Museum's programme of training African curators. Whilst at Ipswich Museum they focused on the touring exhibition but also worked along side museum staff to plan the new display in the Ethnography Gallery.

David Jones, Keeper of Human History at Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service said, "As I'm approaching the end of my career and looking towards enjoying retirement, this project has enabled me to pull together the research I have completed on Charles Partridge throughout my life. Engaging Nigerian curators with the way British museums are run and how they present the collections has helped us gain further understanding about how we display other cultures within our museums."

Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service

Our vision is to create a museum service that is a source of pride, inspiration and fun.

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