

Orphaned and Abducted Art: Who owns, Who knows, Who cares?

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The prestigious Ironbridge Lecture will this year be delivered by cultural object law specialist, Professor Norman Palmer QC on 5 December 2012. Hosted at the University of Birmingham, the lecture entitled 'Who owns, Who knows, Who cares? – Legal milestones on the trail of orphaned and abducted art' will explore the often problematic journey that objects undertake before they arrive in the museum.

Between the unearthing of an archaeological object and its appearance in a public museum there exists a middle stage that is seldom in the public eye. This concerns the process by which a discovered antiquity becomes public property or otherwise enters the public domain.

A barrister specialising in the field of cultural objects, personal property, commercial law and dispute resolution, Professor Palmer has much experience in the mediation of disputes over cultural objects and his lecture will examine the stories underlying some of the claims and the efforts of those who attempt to retrieve 'orphaned' and 'abandoned' objects. He will ask whether the present network of laws goes far enough and whether the policies underlying the current approaches are coherent and justified. Should our desire to act correctly in this field go beyond an exercise in institutional self-denial? Should we be seeking a more creative and pragmatic response to the challenges presented by these orphaned and abducted antiquities?

Professor Palmer says: 'Museums contain many things of uncertain origin and lineage, inevitably because many collections are ancient and because collecting practices were different long ago. An object that has lived through colonisation, war and persecution, for example, is unlikely to arrive at a museum with a full family tree. These gaps in knowledge are part of the fascination of museum objects.'

Professor Palmer will follow in the footsteps of a long line of celebrated speakers including Professor Carl Chinn MBE, Gaye Blake Roberts, director of the Wedgwood Museum and popular historian Adam Hart-Davis. The Ironbridge lecture was first established in 1986 as an annual public University lecture which aims to raise the profile of the work of the Ironbridge Institute.

To register for this free event please email Caroline Ashton, Events Manager, c.e.ashton@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:c.e.ashton@bham.ac.uk>).

For media enquiries, please contact Samantha Williams, University of Birmingham Press Office, 0121 414 6029 / s.k.williams@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:s.k.williams@bham.ac.uk>)

Notes to editors

- Journalists are welcome to attend the lecture
- Prior to the lecture attendees will have the opportunity to tour the University's new Heritage and Cultural Learning Hub.

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