

## Collection, care and curation: animals in collections

The fourth in our series of work in progress workshops took place in January 2023 at the [Powell Cotton Museum](#) in Kent. Our theme was 'Collection, care and curation: animals in collections' and the Powell Cotton Museum was the perfect location for this. The museum is named after its creator Percy Powell Cotton; having been established in the Victorian era the museum is now being creatively reimagined to ensure it remains relevant for visitors.

The workshop was launched with a tour of the museum: curator [Rachel Jennings](#) showed us around the museum enabling us to see not only the original exhibits and the dioramas for which the Powell Cotton Museum is rightly famous but also the work that is going on to reimagine them.



One of the original dioramas at the Powell Cotton Museum

After the tour we settled down to our regular workshop format of short talks from a panel of speakers followed by group discussion, starting with presentations on the lives and after lives of animals in museums. This was kicked off with a talk from David Cooper and Blessing Chidimuro on the osteobiography of Choppers the PG Tips chimp; we hope to continue our collaboration with Rachel Jennings to produce a similar osteobiography of the Powell Cotton elephant by combining her archival work with isotope analysis of hair samples from the elephant's tail. [Sam Alberti](#) (National Museums Scotland) then presented on [the afterlives of animals](#), the subject of his book of the same name, including entertaining claims and counterclaims about the sizes of elephants collected and preserved in museums.



The Powell Cotton Elephant whose life story curator Rachel Jennings is seeking to tell



Our second discussion session focused on collectors and their collections with Andrew Kitchener giving us further insight into how museums are reinterpreting their collections. This was followed by [Elle Larson](#) (University of Westminster) on her work on Rothschild's Zoological Enterprise. She presented on plans to develop a digital approach to reimagine and communicate the global network of natural history collecting c1890-1914, specifically on the movement of animals now in the Rothschild's collection and their journey to get there. The final talk in this panel was from Gaia Mortier on The Wonderful History of Fleas and Their Circuses: Unexplored Ectoparasites in Archaeological and Museum Collections, a discussion of how the parasites which, one way or another, find their way into museums.

Lastly, we continued the conversation started at our previous workshops on collaborations between researchers and museums to enrich the collections we have and the information we can gather from them.



Blessing Chidimuro and Juliette Waterman examine a skull from the Powell Cotton Museum's handling collection

Thank you very much to all at the Powell Cotton Museum for hosting this workshop and to everyone who contributed to making it a success.