

**Co-authoring Relationships:
Blackfoot Collections, UK Museums, and Collaborative Practice**

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Abstract

Ceremonial leaders from the four Blackfoot Nations of Siksika, Piikani, Kainai and the Blackfeet work together to pursue the shared goal of accessing museum collections for the collective good of their communities. They also favor an approach which draws on Blackfoot concepts of consensus to allow them to make meaningful relationships with museum workers. This article focuses on the Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network, which has aimed to generate and exchange knowledge about little-studied Blackfoot cultural items in British collections. In order to undertake this work, the network established a way of working shaped by Blackfoot concepts of co-existence and practices of relationship-building, as well as by current approaches in museum anthropology which foreground dialogic models yet acknowledge their limitations. Through an ethnographic discussion of the network's reciprocal meetings, held between 2013 and 2015 in Blackfoot territory in Alberta, Canada, and Montana, US, and in museums in southern England, I examine how Blackfoot practices of co-authoring relationships can shape new relations with museum staff who are critically evaluating the possibilities for collaboration.

Introduction

This article concerns museum-centered research that is critically informed by emergent museological theories as well as by concepts of consensus and relationship-building practices favored by indigenous museum users. The focus is on the Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network which has brought together researchers from the Siksika, Piikani and Kainai Nations in southern Alberta, Canada, the Blackfeet Nation, Montana, United States, staff of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), Exeter, both in England, with myself, from the Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, as network leader.¹ Our aims are to generate and exchange knowledge about little-studied Blackfoot cultural items in British collections with a view to enhancing their curation and to considering future access to Blackfoot-speaking peoples of this material. To do this we have established a way of working shaped by Blackfoot practices of relationship-building and concepts of co-existence and of consensus. There are several Blackfoot words that broadly encompass what would be understood in English as ‘consensus’ and these have informed our network’s working practice. They include *Aatsao'tssapi'tsiyaawa*, which translates as “They all agreed together”², and *Itomaniyo'op*, which literally translates as “They all came up with the truth”.³ In addition, our practice has been shaped by current approaches in curatorship which foreground dialogic models yet acknowledge their limitations.

The network emerged from my long-term fieldwork with Blackfoot colleagues, and from their desire to extend their existing working relationships with North American museums to those in Europe (Brown et al 2006; Brown and Peers 2013; Brown

2014). Like many First Nations, the Blackfoot consider engagement with tangible and intangible heritage to be crucial to cultural revitalization. Access to material heritage is often (though not always) linked to the repatriation of items deemed essential for spiritual, physical and emotional health, and the Blackfoot have been at the forefront of the repatriation movement in North America for three decades. Blackfoot colleagues had visited several UK museums in connection with this work before the project began, but had not been to the MAA or RAMM where, arguably, the most significant Blackfoot material in the UK resides. The Blackfoot collections in the MAA are the most sizeable in a British museum and include many items connected with ceremony. Those in the RAMM are linked to the diplomatic relationship between the Blackfoot in Canada and the British Crown, formalized with the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877 and which remains the basis of their political relations with the state. The histories of nation-to-nation relations are entangled within cultural items in these museums, but as no Blackfoot had engaged directly with them, knowledge of their significance was partial. It was our hope that our network would foster “exploratory discussions” that would begin to address the gaps that exist between UK museums and the Blackfoot that both limit the interpretation of collections in ways that support cross-cultural awareness and the ability of Blackfoot to contribute to their care (A. Pard to A. Brown, 31 March 2011).

Our approach is located between “collaborative ethnography” (Lassiter 2005) and “team ethnography” (Clerke and Hopwood 2014). Blackfoot partners have not co-authored scholarly articles emerging from the project, though collaboration was “deliberately and explicitly” emphasized in how we framed our funding application, the planning and undertaking of fieldwork, and the subsequent evaluative

discussions (Lassiter 2005, 16). It is also explicit, as I show below, in how Blackfoot come together to approach museums. Only the UK-based project team have written about our work, though some Blackfoot colleagues have read drafts of what we have written. Our decision to work in this way, of course, raises questions about the authority of these publications, and whether they adequately reflect our activities. While we recognize the limitations of our approach, it is based on a collective decision made early on. As the network was testing possibilities for building relations with museums that had no prior meaningful engagement with the Blackfoot, we agreed that co-authoring relationships was far more important than co-authoring articles. Additionally, although most Blackfoot partners have some experience of academic publishing, they have little time to work on scholarly papers and choose to disseminate their research to community audiences through alternative forms.

Anthropology relies on nurturing relationships between researchers and those from whom they wish to learn and, in museum anthropology, co-curation and collaboration have dominated theory and practice over the last twenty years. Successful collaborations are not, of course, confined to anthropology or to museum work. The Blackfoot are well aware of the need to cultivate healthy relationships with those with whom they share their world, whether they be animal beings, spirit beings, or other human beings. Wolves, for example, taught people about the importance of cooperation, and many Blackfoot ceremonies concern with aspects of human-animal relations which are manifested through engagement with ceremonial bundles that contain parts of animals, birds and plants that “stand in for the extended network of animate, inspirited kin” and “remind human beings of their vulnerability and that their survival depends upon alliances formed with the other beings in times past, social

contracts still in force” (Chambers and Blood 2009, 255). Related to this, Bastien (2004, 5) writes that Blackfoot ways of understanding are enmeshed within the connections that people maintain with the natural and cosmic forces around them; “the knowledge exists as long as the relationships with the alliances continue and changes as these relationships change.”

Just as Blackfoot take great care to nurture their relationships with the world around them, they are also careful in their relations with other people.⁴ Oral tradition and documentary sources offer many examples of how they negotiated political, military and economic relations with other groups, including with Europeans who arrived in their territory in the eighteenth century. Access to horses and guns transformed inter-tribal relations and were adapted into existing frameworks, along with other trade goods that came with the Hudson’s Bay Company, the American Fur Company, and with independent traders (Ewers 1958; Nugent 1993; Binnema 2006). Blackfoot nowadays argue that although their relations with outsiders were tested during this period of economic and social transformation, core values remained strong (Conaty 1995; Conaty 2015, 61). Furthermore, given more recent experiences of settler colonialism, they are sharply aware of the importance of strong relations, and of the consequences when those made in good faith break down. Lame Bull’s Treaty (1855) and Treaty 7 (1877) included provisions for land entitlement, annuity payments, access to education and health care, assistance with resource development, and the maintenance of hunting and trapping rights. Yet in the aftermath of the treaties, further disenfranchisement from land, sickness and starvation, and attacks on ceremony and language, supported by Church and federal policies, contributed to the near devastation of Blackfoot communities and

intergenerational transmission of historic trauma (Tovías 2011; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004).

Nowadays, the Blackfoot are recovering from this dark period of their history, yet their communities continue to experience disproportionate social and economic challenges. Racism in the towns and farming communities located near the reserves is evident, and opportunities available to other residents are often closed to Blackfoot. Whittles and Patterson (2009, 97) claim that “as a result of the extreme dislocation and poverty that they commonly experience, urban Aboriginal people are often perceived as culturally dead, as people who left the remaining elements of their culture back on the reserve”. This statement resonates with many of my colleagues who tell me that nearby towns and cities can feel unwelcoming, which hinders positive and productive relations between Blackfoot and other people living locally. Furthermore, like all communities, there are diverse opinions about matters of culture, and not all Blackfoot are interested in traditional knowledge or community histories (Potts 2015, 142). Given this, skills in negotiation, collaboration and diplomacy continue to be crucial for Blackfoot individuals in many aspects of their daily lives. It should come as no surprise that these skills are evident in how they co-author relations with museums.

Collaborative work in museums

The Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network is very much influenced by the collaborative turn in anthropology, particularly as it has shaped relationships between indigenous peoples and external researchers within North America (e.g., Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Lassiter 2005; Field 2008) and in other parts of the

word, “where ethnographic relationships can entail special kinds of expectations and commitments” which generate obligations and inspiration (Salmond 2013, 3). It is also guided by debates in museum anthropology concerning the extent to which collaboration is possible and which highlight the tensions that can emerge in museum spaces (e.g., Ames 1992; Jessup and Bagg 2002). The status of objects in museums has also been reassessed as part of the wider material turn in anthropology. Cultural items are routinely analyzed in connection to their place within social relations, rather than as abstractions used to inform classificatory knowledge systems. Moreover, many curators recognize that these social relations may extend beyond those with other humans to relations with non-human beings; thus the tangible is no longer viewed as the primary means through which the significance of artefacts is expressed. Accordingly, while many items in anthropology museums were originally acquired as scientific specimens, intended to demonstrate the variety and richness of human cultures and to be preserved for posterity, over time the object has become decentered. Allied to these theoretical and methodological shifts it is now commonly accepted that cultural items acquired during colonial encounters are embedded in power relations that continue to shape contemporary engagements with them. These relations form the back-story to a variety of experiences indigenous peoples have had with museums, from contestation over ownership and authority to represent, to very positive examples of co-curatorship (Phillips 2011; Clifford 2014).

Terms such as “collaborative museology” (Schultz 2011) or “contact work” (Nicks, 2003) have become routine within the museum sector. The practices they encompass are by no means restricted to engagements with indigenous peoples and discourses about what collaboration involves can be rather abstract. Without

glossing over the existence of traditional power hierarchies, Golding describes collaboration ideally as “sustainable and distinct from tokenistic participation, consultation, and information gathering, although one-off collaborative activity may mark a beginning for museums to risk more inclusive ways of working” (2013, 20). Collaborative museology is generally celebrated, though the limitations of the models which have influenced it – perhaps most famously James Clifford’s essay ‘Museums as Contact Zones’ (1997) – are being articulated more frequently. Robin Boast (2011, 56), for example, has claimed that the contact zone model “is now more or less synonymous” with inclusion programs in museums, and this is especially so in Europe. The flipside to this, he cautions, is that the model has been used more selectively and far less critically than desirable, resulting in overly optimistic representations of engagements that are persistently neo-colonial in nature and which may, in fact, “destroy the very empowerment that [the contact zone] is meant to engender.” Boast explicitly supports collaboration, in that “it is an important feature of the empowerment of communities whose patrimony museums hold”, but he questions the assumptions that underpin how the contact zone is used, and advocates for recognition that it is not just “inherently asymmetric” but “is a site in and for the center” (2011, 67).⁵ Similarly, Lynch and Alberti argue that contact zones are places for contestation, rather than collaboration, and that collaborative projects may productively generate “dicensus” which invites further dialogue (2010:16)

Where does this leave those of us who wish to work collaboratively, but who also want to better understand how indigenous frameworks shape museum engagements? Closer examination of inter-community engagement is a logical starting point, as noted by Bryony Onciul (2015), who has proposed an “engagement

zone” model. Based on interviews with Blackfoot and heritage organizations in Alberta she draws attention to the negotiations *within* and *between* groups that are part of cross-cultural collaborative museum work. Though her work is not based on direct participation, it usefully contributes to unpacking internal dynamics within cultural/heritage projects. Too often, engagements between museum and community are framed dualistically without addressing internal tensions or recognizing individual perspectives. Given the lack of First Nations involvement in creating theory through which to understand these engagements, perhaps this should come as no surprise, but having participated in several large-scale projects over the last two decades involving museums, Blackfoot cultural leaders, educators, and others, my observation is that inter-community negotiations are absolutely critical to how Blackfoot operate in museum spaces. These negotiations reflect Blackfoot practices of seeking consensus in their relations with each other and with other persons. This leads me to argue that, when applied to museum contexts, the co-authoring of relationships may be more actively shaped by Blackfoot cultural protocol and ways of behaving than might be apparent to museum colleagues.

Blackfoot experiences of museums

The Blackfoot are no strangers to museums; their material culture has long fascinated collectors, anthropologists and art historians alike. Some of the earliest non-archaeological items date from the period when the Blackfoot maintained the balance of power within their territory, and exchanged material goods with outsiders to cement diplomatic relations. Later in nineteenth century, as most Blackfoot concentrated on simply surviving, missionaries, colonial agents, and anthropologists steeped in ideas of the culture concept, amassed collections which were believed to

represent the full spectrum of material culture: domestic utensils, clothing and adornment, horse trappings and weapons, as well as ancestral remains and individually or communally-owned ceremonial items. From a low point in the 1960s, when it seemed that there was no future for Blackfoot ceremonies, the Blackfoot have revitalized and reclaimed their cultural heritage as part of their efforts to heal from historical trauma, and this has involved engaging directly with museums (Conaty and Janes 1997; Crop Eared Wolf, 1997; Conaty 2008; Lokensgard 2010; Noble and Crowshoe 2002; Bell et al 2008).

Not surprisingly, many Blackfoot ceremonial leaders' earliest engagements with museums took place in Alberta, where three of the four Blackfoot nations are located. The Glenbow in Calgary and the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton both have sizeable collections of Blackfoot material gathered over a number of decades (Conaty 2015, 44-49). Largely due to the persistence of Blackfoot leaders, these museums moved from policies of short-term loans of ceremonial items during the 1970s, to long-term loans in the early 1990s, to full repatriation by the turn of the twenty-first century, following the passage of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (FNSCORA) (2000) and The Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation (2004). The Blackfoot soon turned their attention to museums beyond Alberta, and some have responded positively (though not always swiftly or, indeed, graciously) to repatriation requests. In recent years the Blackfoot have repatriated ceremonial bundles from museums including the Denver Art Museum, the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (prior to its incorporation into the Smithsonian Institution), and the Marischal Museum at the University of Aberdeen (Curtis 2008). Having returned home, these bundles now

participate in the lives of their communities, a process that has provided opportunities for more people to get involved in Blackfoot ceremony and has led to enormous cultural and social benefits (Conaty 2015).

Repatriation is, of course, just one aspect of Blackfoot engagement with museums. Many Blackfoot have been involved with exhibition projects in North America and beyond. Both the Glenbow and Royal Alberta Museum have delivered, or are currently developing, gallery projects with significant Blackfoot participation. Indeed, the Glenbow's Blackfoot gallery, which opened in 2001, is often cited as a model of co-curation (Conaty 2003; Conaty and Carter 2005; Harrison 2005). Blackfoot have also contributed to exhibition and access projects at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC, the Zeeuws Museum in the Netherlands (van Santen 2013), and to the Blackfoot Shirts Project (Brown and Peers 2013). Many Blackfoot are also active in protecting and interpreting traditional territories. For example, archaeological excavations carried out on Blackfoot land are undertaken with the guidance of the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, and Blackfoot cultural specialists from all four nations regularly advise industry about sites of significance on land identified for potential resource extraction. This work extends to land in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, which is part of Blackfoot traditional territory but is outside the provincial boundaries. Efforts to consult with Blackfoot about sites beyond Alberta thus reflect a new respect for traditional territory. Blackfoot ceremonialists also are involved in securing access to sites on privately owned lands. These discussions are fraught at times but, as Chambers and Blood (2009) argue, Blackfoot participation in the care of sacred sites, as well as of the cultural heritage associated with them, is crucial to maintaining relationships not just

between humans (Blackfoot and newcomers), but between humans and other beings. Their work proposes a revision to how we might understand repatriation, in that as bundles return home through repatriation processes, and ceremonies are revived, people actively re-engage with the land and visit places that are intimately connected with Blackfoot cosmology.

As this brief overview shows, Blackfoot ceremonial leaders have considerable experience of heritage matters that informs how they negotiate access to collections. Many of those involved in the early stages of relationship-building with museums have now passed on, but other leaders are taking their work forward into international arenas. Whenever possible, younger members of Blackfoot sacred societies participate in this work so that the transmission of knowledge across generations concerns not only knowledge of ceremony, but also of how to engage positively and productively with museums in a way that fosters consensus through the co-authoring of relationships.

Network origins

The Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network has its immediate origins in a conference held in 2011 at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, which I co-organized as part of the Blackfoot Shirts Project (Brown and Peers 2013). Several curators presented on Blackfoot collections in their care and towards the end of the conference Blackfoot delegates met with myself, Anita Herle from the MAA, and Tony Eccles from the RAMM to discuss creating a project which would focus on these two museums.⁶ This was strategic. First, despite their historical and ceremonial significance, Blackfoot colleagues had never accessed these collections

in person, though some were familiar with the MAA holdings through my doctoral research. Second, we agreed that a European museum tour would be too challenging, given the distances involved, potential costs, and commitment required by Blackfoot participants. Such visits are emotionally, spiritually and physically exhausting, and the stakes are high. Further, most individuals who participate in museum research visits are in full-time employment, and all of them have family and other responsibilities that make it difficult to be away from home for lengthy periods. Given these circumstances, we agreed that keeping the visit focused would allow us to identify strategies for maximizing trans-Atlantic visits, with a view to developing research partnerships with museums in continental Europe at a later stage.

There was also consensus that the project should involve a small and specialized group. Blackfoot cultural protocol is shaped by *pommaksiistsi* – or ritual transfer – of rights to sacred knowledge and, in turn, to the safe handling of ceremonial items. It also involves rules of behavior which are strictly adhered to by those the Blackfoot refer to as “ceremonial people” and are respected by many of those who are not. Museum staff are also expected to be aware of cultural protocol and my experience is that Blackfoot ceremonial leaders are willing to explain – to a point – how protocol informs their actions, so as to enable museum staff to better understand their position. Museums contain many utilitarian items that are not subject to cultural protocols, but as sacred knowledge and the associated rights to handle holy items is ceremonially transferred, only those who have been through the appropriate ritual transfers should physically engage with them. The individuals who attended our initial meeting have the transfer rights – and thus the appropriate authority; they are also experienced in undertaking museum research, in co-curation, and in negotiating

repatriations. They are by no means the only people in their communities involved in these matters, but they are recognized as leaders in the ceremonial realm as well as in the realm of cross-cultural education. The Blackfoot support each other in ceremony and other cultural matters, and we agreed that the network should include individuals from each nation as well as individuals with transfer rights to as wide a range of ceremonial knowledge bases as possible. The group suggested that these individuals be drawn from the societies established in Alberta for the purposes of representing their own nation in repatriation claims: Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society (Kainai); the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Foundation (Siksika); the Long Time Trail Society (Piikani). The group also recommended that the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Blackfeet Tribe, who was not at the conference, be approached to represent his community.

The museums' records showed that their collections were almost exclusively provenanced to three of the four Blackfoot nations, but as ceremonial materials can be transferred between people from different nations, place of collection does not always imply place of 'belonging'. Indeed, the major ceremonial bundles are considered to belong to all Blackfoot people, though certainly some cultural items are associated with age-grade and other sacred societies that are specific to one or other of the nations (Conaty 2015, 90-91). Concepts of ownership and the associated protocols are thus far more complex than those unfamiliar with Blackfoot ways might appreciate. Accordingly, decisions regarding the network composition were made through consensus by the Blackfoot themselves. In the event, eight colleagues (two from each nation) were named in the funding application, and two further colleagues joined the delegation, partly at their own expense, and played very

significant roles in it. It would have been difficult to support a larger group, due to the reasons put forward by the Blackfoot themselves, but also because neither museum has research extensive facilities. From previous experience, the curators felt that hosting more than a dozen people (including the UK team) could be unproductive. As we wanted to respect Blackfoot cultural protocols regarding ceremonial authority, as well as curatorial concerns about safely and sensitively accommodating the group, we agreed to limit its size. In retrospect, it could be argued that we compromised too much with regards to group size and composition, but there was an internal logic to how the delegation was put together, and this was a difficult balance to get right.

I had the task of identifying a suitable funder and settled on the Leverhulme Trust, which is supportive of research that enables “a refreshing departure from established patterns of working – either for the individual, or for the discipline”⁷. The Trust also has a history of funding collaborations between academic and non-academic partners and is supportive of international projects. Once it was agreed who would represent each Blackfoot nation, the work of writing the funding application began. I wrote the drafts, which were then sent to all partners for their input, and we spoke as regularly as possible on the phone. Writing coherently, when numerous partners were involved is undeniably tricky and while the words on the page were not co-authored, the ideas informing the content of the application most certainly were. As we discussed the application in its different stages we were co-authoring our project primarily through spoken dialogue rather than through text. Nevertheless, there were limitations to this way of working. Given the time difference and that not all network partners use email, getting feedback was a lengthy process, and at times, felt

unsatisfactory (to me if not to my colleagues). I was sometimes uncomfortable speaking to partners individually about matters that would have benefitted from group discussion, but conference calls would have been difficult to arrange given the numbers and schedules of those involved. There were also times when I would have appreciated more sustained advice on how to proceed with particular aspects of the application, rather than a short email telling me that my suggestions were fine. It transpires that my colleagues' view was that I knew more about writing grants than they did, and so I should just get on with it, whereas I was conscious that I was making decisions on topics which seemed to me to require consensus. Similarly, once the funding was in place and we were establishing the schedule in detail, my attempts to make decisions by consensus did not always work. I make these points simply to flag them as tensions that, I suspect, are common when trying to develop projects collaboratively (particularly when partners are geographically scattered), and to observe that these tensions can be experienced quite differently by those involved.

We structured the network in such a way that it would involve reciprocal learning for all partners. In addition to planning and evaluation meetings for the UK team, there were two main periods of research. The first involved Blackfoot partners visiting the MAA and the RAMM in November 2013⁸; the second was the visit of the UK team to Blackfoot territory in August 2014. Blackfoot partners argued that for the museum staff to understand the significance of the collections for which they are responsible and to develop positive working relationships, meeting in Blackfoot territory was essential. In our application we emphasized that this structure was especially novel in European contexts, where co-authoring relations is difficult given that museum

staff are usually responsible for global collections and are rarely able to engage in long-term fieldwork, but it is crucial given the historically unequal power relations between museums and indigenous peoples. We also noted that despite the goal of Blackfoot leaders to access museum collections outside of North America, few domestic funds were available for international travel. There is, of course, an inherent inequality in the network (and indeed, in many similar projects), in that while the UK team participated primarily as part of our jobs, most of our Blackfoot colleagues had to use some of their annual leave to make the visit to the UK. Few grants allow for the payment of honoraria equal to the amount of salary that participants taking unpaid leave would lose, and visa requirements were a further complication. These inequalities are undeniable, but it is also the case that museum managers and grant agencies rarely recognize the investment of personal time and resources for museum staff who participate in these projects, despite their championing of inclusionist practices in policy documents. As a sector, we need to consider these issues carefully and advocate for change.

Fieldwork in and beyond museums

We experienced our engagements in the museum storage areas and galleries and at various locations throughout Blackfoot territory in very different ways. Here I present four encounters to illustrate the strategies used by Blackfoot to co-author relationships with museum staff. These moments highlight some of the challenges, tensions and productive moments of trans-Atlantic teamwork and are drawn from field notes, recorded dialogue from group meetings and public events, so as to incorporate voices other than my own. The efforts made to achieve consensus as

the project developed could be considered an indigenization of the collaborative process, though one which our broader team does not yet fully appreciate.

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

The day starts with Frank tired and not eating or sleeping properly and talking about changing his flight to go home early. He is upset about the Vanishing Indian paradigm, which he read about in the Haddon article the night before.⁹ “They tried to assimilate us; we were not vanishing.” By the end of the day he seemed more settled and ready to continue.

We arrive at the museum around 10am. I have a quick word with Anita, and report on the above. She asks if there’s anything they can do. There really isn’t. The staff are bending over backwards and doing all they can. It is the context of it all, and this is a tense and emotional time. ... After prayers¹⁰, Narcisse makes a formal speech about wanting to let Anita and Rachel know that this is very difficult for them, and it is important that they know this. He said their “stuff is all over the world, even in Japan”. The time they spend together at these meetings is important for them to re-energize.

I wrote these notes on the third day of our visit to Cambridge. Many of the group were suffering from jetlag and the cultural disorientation of being in a small university town. Being confronted with, in one case, family materials, was proving to be difficult, as was absorbing the extant documentation that fore-grounded anthropological perspectives current in the early twentieth century and which reinforced the contexts in which the MAA collections were assembled. One of these collections was

acquired on the Blackfeet reservation in 1909 by Cambridge anthropologist Alfred Haddon and includes photographs, a memoir, lists of Blackfoot words and genealogies, and several well-documented cultural items. Network partners were sent object lists, copies of the memoir and genealogies well in advance of their visit, and for all its colonial language, we were told that the information Haddon recorded is “helpful” and “made sense” (author field notes, 19 November 2013). Nonetheless, for at least one member of the group, re-visiting Haddon’s words after witnessing his companions’ response to the collection was jarring. Such documentation written *about* the Blackfoot, but not *with* them, challenges their understanding of their own history and culture. Being faced with such narratives, and feeling obligated to defend their own view of history, is a constant frustration.

The previous afternoon had been especially hard and had involved looking at many personally-owned items associated with ceremony. My overriding recollection is of helping the museum staff to pack the boxes after we had finished, glancing up occasionally to our colleagues who were sitting opposite me as I did so. I distinctly remember feeling nauseous as I wrapped each of the necklaces, bags and other items in acid-free tissue, and gently laid them in their wooden boxes, knowing that it had been a long time since they had heard Blackfoot voices, and that it would probably be a long time until they heard them again. Afterwards, some of our group went for a stroll around Cambridge. It was dusk, and negotiating the cobblestones – and the swarms of cyclists – temporarily took our minds from what we had witnessed in the workroom. Later that evening, I joined two of our party in the hotel for coffee and a chat. Being in the museum, they told me, reminded them of what it was like to work with the Glenbow twenty years previously, “when no-one there knew anything.”

“It was small steps, baby steps,” they said, in relation to how staff in that museum learned how to adjust their curatorial practice and how the Blackfoot themselves began to understand museum protocols. “But we have to start somewhere” (H. Yellow Old Woman and K. Ayoungman, author field notes, 20 November 2013).

Museums can be confusing places (C. Murray, author field notes, 25 November 2013). Finding ways to overcome what can be very different ways of relating to cultural materials and to each other is immensely challenging, but is crucial to co-authoring relationships. The staff at the MAA had no prior experience of working with Blackfoot people, but they do have considerable experience of working with indigenous groups from the many other parts of the world. Indeed, within European contexts, Herle has been at the forefront of developing collaborative museum projects, having experimented with this way of working since the early 1990s (e.g., Herle 1994, 2003). Given the geographical range and size of the MAA collections, and the constraints of working in a historic building with limited resources, developing long-standing meaningful relationships is incredibly difficult. What could be seen as ‘holding back’ from developing a close working relationship would more fairly be characterized as hesitancy to promise more than can be delivered based on the reality of the situation and the recognition that small steps are nevertheless tremendously important.

Overcoming the tensions inherent in these encounters is also difficult given that museum staff have inherited collections management systems that they recognize as being out of step with how indigenous researchers may see the world. Collections – numbered and called “objects” by museum staff – for example, are stored together

in ways that privilege museum organizational structures, but bear no relation to Blackfoot knowledge systems. The gaps between these knowledge systems are vast. Museum objects are often referred to by assemblage, according to the name of the donor or collector: thus, the Haddon Collection or the Denny Collection.¹¹ Sometimes they are referred to in speech only by their identification number. This use of language makes sense to museum staff, who must “manage” the collections, but it rarely make sense to Blackfoot, who can find it alienating and of limited use.¹² During their fieldwork in the MAA and RAMM Blackfoot colleagues made suggestions that would enable the staff to better care for the collections in ways that reflected Blackfoot knowledge and values. For example, they recommended separating out some materials that were stored together at the MAA, a request which the museum staff immediately acted upon. They also attended to ceremonial items by women members of the group carefully wrapping in the proper way bundles that had been disturbed much earlier in their museum history.¹³ On our final afternoon, after all the boxes had been returned to the storage area, we had tea in the workroom where we had spent much of the previous three days. Over the next two hours, Blackfoot colleagues told stories about their experiences in museums in other towns and cities, often shaking with laughter as the museum staff looked on, mildly bemused.

Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

Where I am at is the relationship will have to go further, in that our people don't know much about your people, about this place. This museum is situated in an area that is very significant to the people of Devon. What happened here - and this is King Arthur's country - it is about learning about each other and it is not about beating up

on each other. That is the easy way out. It is for our people to come back here and say this is where Crowfoot's shirt was and who is Crowfoot? We want you to know about him, and what happened with the treaties, and the outstanding issues that continue over there. But we also want to know about this place and the people. We want to look at trading of courses, bringing our students over here and vice versa. Exchanging lectures; you come and lecture at Blackfeet Community College, at Old Sun [College], at Red Crow [College]. We want to know you, and we want to come and do that kind of exchange.

Narcisse Blood made these comments in a meeting at the RAMM on our second day in Exeter. The museum has material associated with Crowfoot, the political leader at Siksika who was instrumental in negotiating Treaty 7 in 1877 (Treaty 7 Elders et al 1996). This includes his full regalia, which came to the museum in 1878 via the family of Cecil Denny, a North West Mounted Police officer with connections to Exeter who had been at Blackfoot Crossing when Treaty 7 was signed (Pratt 2006, 239). The group had seen this regalia the previous day in an emotionally-charged session in the storage area, which began with a pipe ceremony and concluded with an honor song for Crowfoot sung by Herman Yellow Old Woman and Kent Ayoungman.

The following day, all the network partners participated in a panel discussion attended by some 100 members of the public, in which we talked about the network's goals and Blackfoot partners spoke of their involvement with museums more generally. At this event Tony Eccles publicly reiterated his personal support to repatriate Crowfoot's regalia, while making clear that the decision on this matter

would be taken by the City Council, the museum's governing body.¹⁴ Improved public access to Crowfoot's regalia has long been on the agenda for the Blackfoot, who argue that the heritage center at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park is a more fitting venue for it. Immediately after the panel discussion, we met to plan the visit that UK partners would make to North America the following summer and to consider our future aspirations. It was at this point that Blackfoot partners initiated a frank discussion about the long-term goals of repatriation and how these might shape a relationship with the RAMM. This could extend beyond the return of the items associated with Crowfoot to incorporate cultural and educational exchanges to benefit a range of people, not just the Blackfoot. Such exchanges, it could be argued, have the potential to restore the original spirit and intent of the treaties, and, at the very least could generate renewed understanding of a historic agreement that links the Blackfoot with Great Britain, as Narcisse Blood explained:

What I'm saying is people don't know that much about the Treaty here. And vice versa; we are starting to lose it. And this is a good way to revive a very solid sacred agreement [that] was made. And I think that is why everything is happening the way it is. When we ask for prayers about the Treaty we made, sometimes they get answered in very peculiar ways. ...What you saw in there with the pipe, *that* was what was invoked. ...And so I think that is something that we could use to talk about the connection, especially those two shirts.¹⁵

...It was a guy from Siksika that said these reserves were set up to deliberately to divide us. He said, "The challenge is to reconnect." So, we are reconnecting.

Reconnections were being made between the museum collections and the Blackfoot researchers who spoke with them, sung to them, and prayed with them. New connections were also being made with the people who care for them now. At the time of writing there has been no agreement to repatriate any of the items we saw in Exeter, though dialogue about this matter was extended beyond our immediate group during the reciprocal phase of the project, and is continuing.

Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park: Crowfoot day of celebration

Arriving there it seemed it was getting more and more exciting. And we walked up to the room where things were. They had covered the suit and the rest of the stuff with that paper. And it was so powerful. You could see parts of it sticking out from underneath the paper. It was like Christmas time, when you want to open your gift and you don't know what is inside, what to expect. And that is how it felt.

And you can feel it, you can feel the energy. I am a very emotional guy. And then we smoked the pipe. And after the pipe was smoked, then they unveiled the suit. Gee, that was a very, very powerful time. Today, when I look at the film that was taken that day, I still feel goose bumps, the energy. And then we sang the Chief's song. That kind of really...the pot boiled over after that.

15 July 2014 was a day of celebration at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park (BCHP), Siksika Nation. Organized by Herman Yellow Old Woman, whose reflections on his visit to RAMM I quote above, the event was attended by, amongst others, members of Chief and Council, elders from Siksika, Kainai and Tsuu T'ina nations, representatives from Alberta Aboriginal Relations and corporate guests. The day

began with a pipe ceremony led by Frank Weasel Head in a tipi painted with scenes related to Treaty 7, deemed appropriate given the purpose of the day. This was a continuation of the process begun in the RAMM, during which Herman Yellow Old Woman and Kent Ayoungman had sung to Crowfoot, and at which many of those present had felt the chief's presence.

After the pipe ceremony, we relocated to the atrium of the impressive conference center and exhibition building at BHP. Here, the audience took in the view towards the river valley opposite – the site of Blackfoot Crossing – while listening to speeches from the elders and dignitaries present about Crowfoot's regalia and its importance to Siksika Nation, to the Blackfoot, to the peoples of Alberta, and to all Canadians. The UK partners were also invited to speak. I summarized the network's activities then Tony Eccles related how Crowfoot's regalia came to be in Exeter and explained that repatriating from a UK museum was likely to be a lengthy process. At the conclusion of the speeches, presentational gifts were made from the Provincial Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Frank Oberle, to Tony Eccles, as the representative of the RAMM, and from Oberle and Eccles to representatives of Siksika Nation Chief and Council.

After these formal proceedings, we enjoyed a lunch of beef stew and bannock, accompanied by demonstrations of powwow dance styles, and the elders made further statements about Crowfoot, about museums, and about repatriation. Beaded medallions depicting the Siksika Nation coat of arms were then gifted to the UK partners and to Oberle. These gifts, diplomatic in nature, were accompanied by an explanation from Herman Yellow Old Woman of the elements of the design, with

specific reference to the blue and green circle components which symbolize that “as long as the sun shines, the green grass grows, and the river flows the Treaty will always be”.¹⁶ Our respective roles in the network were explained to those present, and a public statement was made about the importance of continued collaboration. Afterwards, Herman Yellow Old Woman gave the UK team a tour of the storage and exhibition areas at BCHP. This was an opportunity to show the extent of the collections management work undertaken since the facility opened in 2007, and to indicate where Crowfoot’s regalia would be displayed, should a formal request for repatriation be submitted and approved.

Blackfoot Crossing, where Treaty 7 was signed, is considered a site of partnership, as that term was understood by our Siksika hosts’ ancestors. The words “partnership”, “collaboration” and “relationship” were used repeatedly at the event to honor Crowfoot, and the meaning they encompass was reinforced through diplomatic means such as gift exchange and formal language. Eccles was politely and publicly reminded of the personal support he had extended to the Blackfoot delegation in Exeter in November 2013, and we were all witnesses to support in Alberta – from provincial representatives and business interests – for making Crowfoot’s regalia accessible to people in Canada.

Two Medicine, near Browning, Montana

Carol Murray: So, up at this area is where they had to be camped. You have to remember, the road wasn’t here like it is today. So, this was all open, there were no fences. These fences are new, but the camp would have been up here....This would

have been Little Plume's land, back here where the houses are – you can see the top of the houses.

Anita Herle: *So where the old wooden house is?*

Carol Murray: *Yeah, that would have been Yellow Owl's house. And some of the people that were in the meeting today – like the one named Gilbert – that would have been his childhood home.*

Anita Herle: *And the creek here, what is it called?*

Carol Murray: *The creek here is called Little Badger. But in the record they put it down as Beaver Creek.*

Anita Herle: *Right.*

Alison Brown: *And that is just a mistake?*

Carol Murray: *It is just a mistake. Yeah. But in the back, where all the big tall trees are growing, that is where the Two Medicine River flows.*

Anita Herle: *Yeah, so he does say here Two Medicine River. And who else? You mentioned some other people along here, who would have been here.*

Carol Murray: *So, down this way, on the other side where the trees are, actually right on the other side of these trees, is where Little Badger Creek drops into Two Medicine River. And then Little Plume would have lived down there. Yellow Kidney lived just down there, where you see my daughter's house. That is actually where Yellow Kidney lived.*

Anita Herle: *Okay.*

Carol Murray: *Yeah. So this is the area where the event of 1909 would have taken place.*

This conversation took place during one of several tours to sites in Blackfoot territory that are directly connected to collections in the MAA and the RAMM. In this case, we were at the area of the Blackfeet reservation visited by Cambridge anthropologist Alfred Haddon with celebrated photographer Edward Curtis in August 1909. Over several weeks, Haddon took numerous photos and collected cultural materials that are now split between the MAA and the Horniman Museum in London, with the majority being in Cambridge.¹⁷ Earlier in the day, we participated in a well-attended and lively gathering, initiated by Carol Murray, to which individuals descended from those depicted in the 80 photographs in the MAA were invited. Participants worked together to try and identify those Haddon photographed, drawing on their prior research with the better-known Curtis photographs and their genealogical knowledge. After the meeting, Anita Herle presented electronic and printed copies of the photographs to the Blackfeet Community College and she and Carol Murray signed a Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of their institutions, in which they agreed to share new information about the images if and when it should arise. We then drove the short distance from Browning, the largest settlement on the reservation, first to a rocky outcrop used as a bison drive and then to the area where Yellow Owl, Little Plume and others named in Haddon's memoir lived. As we swatted away the persistent mosquitoes, we cast our minds back over 100 years to when the photographs were taken and, with Carol's guidance, tried to reconcile the descriptions from Haddon's memoir with the landscape in which we were situated.

We experienced similar tours in each of the nations. Herman Yellow Old Woman took us to Blackfoot Crossing and Crowfoot's last camping place, and Narcisse Blood and Alvine Mountain Horse took us to several ceremonial sites on the Kainai

reserve and also to nearby Waterton Lakes National Park. We also met with Allan Pard at Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, adjacent to the Piikani Nation. These meetings allowed the museum staff to contextualize the collections they care for, but also to listen to the stories that continue to be told about each of these places in the places themselves. Throughout Blackfoot territory there are named features associated with Blackfoot history, including those connected to ancient stories as well as to more recent events (Oetelaar 2006; Zedeño 2007). The Beaver Bundle, for example, was given to the Blackfoot in the area today known as Waterton Lakes National Park; the MAA has items in its collection associated with this bundle. Visiting these sites, and hearing the stories, emphasized for the museum staff the living present in which these 'historic' collections feature. Moreover, if, as Árnason et al (2011, 10) argue following from Heidegger, that "narrative is the process of gathering relations with landscape par excellence", then the telling of and listening to narratives in Blackfoot territory gave rise to a better understanding of how the narratives that the museum staff had come to know through archival sources could be complicated by Blackfoot knowledge of their own histories.

"We all agree": A Blackfoot approach to museum collaboration

Relationships do get tested, but that strengthens them" (N. Blood to A. Brown 01 April 2011).

The Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network brought together colleagues from very different places. Although we used the overarching 'Blackfoot' ethnonym, our group has involved individuals from all four Blackfoot nations who are related

through ceremony as well as through kinship. It also brought together colleagues from different kinds of institutions (university, university museum, local government museum). This means that while we operated as a team, it would be simplistic to think of this as anything other than a team made up of smaller teams and sets of relations. Nonetheless, while the Blackfoot nations are distinct, they work together to achieve shared goals, as Frank Weasel Head (2015, 160) has noted, “We have always been related by blood, language, and ceremony, and these alliances continue into the present day.” Collaboration is thus often (though not always) uppermost in how Blackfoot come together in their dealings with museums. Collaboration with museums extends to making the necessary compromises if they will secure the future well-being of Blackfoot children.

At several points in this article I have referred to reaching consensus in decision-making processes. I have witnessed this many times in museum situations when a unified ‘Blackfoot approach’ is required. For example, during planning meetings for the Glenbow’s Blackfoot Gallery that I attended in the late 1990s, Blackfoot-speaking community curators would often discuss a theme or concept together, while non-Blackfoot speakers sat patiently until they reached an agreement on how to proceed, after which a synopsis of the discussion would be presented. This usually occurred during discussions of spiritual matters involving restricted knowledge. Similar processes were at play during network gatherings, for example, when we discussed how we should record information generated during our museum work, Blackfoot colleagues spoke first among themselves and then proposed that one member of the group should film the sessions and would subsequently gather further information from people at home. This research data, where appropriate, would then be

presented to the museum for their catalogues in a format that worked for Blackfoot team members. Note-taking in the museums was thus quite limited at the time of the group's visit. Internal collaboration and respect for protocol was also evident when it came to speaking about particular cultural items. One of the crucial lessons of the project is thus the importance of accepting the internal modes of collaboration that Blackfoot colleagues already have in place. Reflecting later on how the group functioned, Herman Yellow Old Woman told me that "our team worked pretty well" (25 July 2015) and we agreed that the group's extensive prior experience of working together in museum situations helped put everyone at ease.

Blackfoot concepts of relationship building, consensus and co-existence, undoubtedly influenced how the engagements we had as a team (or teams within a team) unfolded. The insistence of Blackfoot partners when we first proposed putting the network together that it should not just involve Blackfoot colleagues coming to the UK, but that the UK curators should also visit the Blackfoot in their own territory, and on their own terms, is crucial here. The museum staff, they believed, would never understand the cultural items they care for if they did not take the time to visit the places connected to these collections so as to start to appreciate how they might figure in the lives of Blackfoot today. In addition, spending time together, visiting, eating, and laughing was going to be important in giving the group opportunities to get to know one another a little better. Of course, Eccles and Herle, who spent only ten days in Blackfoot territory, gained only a superficial glimpse of life within Blackfoot communities, but that glimpse was far more than they had experienced previously, and its importance cannot be underestimated. This is especially so, given that both curators were able to reflect upon their emerging relationships with

Blackfoot in relation to their considerable experience of working with indigenous peoples from other parts of the world.

All of us worked hard throughout the project to make the reciprocal visits as comfortable and as positive as we could, even though we knew there would be difficulties and disorientation along the way. Collaboration and relationship-building are not a one-way street; we have all had to learn about and respect each other's protocols. Despite all of our collaborative efforts, however, tensions remain. I have already mentioned the inherent inequalities in doing this work: for academics and museum staff working with collections is part of their jobs; for the Blackfoot, collections are not objects, this is their life. As Carol Murray quietly observed, while gently patting the bottom edge of a shirt during our first day in the MAA, "We have been taught to be scared of these things, but this is *us*" (author field notes, 18 November 2013). Where do comments like this take us? During the museum fieldwork, Blackfoot colleagues made direct reference to reciprocity and needing assurances that the museums were serious about working together. As we looked at displays in the MAA on our very first morning, for example, John Murray spoke of what he sees today as a renaissance in Blackfeet culture, following the near destruction of language and spiritual knowledge within his community. "At home the people are hungry [for knowledge]," he said, and then asked what the MAA was planning to do about this (author field notes, 18 November 2013). While the group could give guidance to the museums, there had to be something given in return, something upon which to base a relationship.

Several days later, as we reflected on what we had seen in both museums, the question arose of how to take action, and not just to talk about what we might do next. Participating in such projects brings with it the expectations of people at home, who suspect – with good reason – that such exchanges are more heavily weighted in the favor of museums, as Frank Weasel Head explained:

The big question that is asked of us, coming over [is], “What’s in it for the people? What is in it for us, of you going over there?” ... I think we have delivered a lot, coming over. ...We brought a lot of information. And that is what people asked of us when I told them I was going over. “Well, what you gonna bring back? What’s in it for us? You’re going to bring a lot of information over there, but what are you going to bring *back*?”

This is, indeed, the big question. In this particular instance, Tony Eccles’s assurance that he remained personally supportive of the group’s desire to repatriate items in the RAMM collection was positively received, and the MAAs subsequent presentation of copies of the Haddon photographs to the Blackfeet Community College should also be acknowledged. Nonetheless, these discussions force us to confront how we might meaningfully continue to co-author our relationships and what form these future collaborations might take. We also continue to ponder the forms of data which museums can usefully provide, given Blackfoot concerns that collections lists have limited value and that the language they encompass can potentially be alienating. We do not yet have answers to these questions, but we continue to consider them as the network’s first phase comes to a close.

“You can’t eat a buffalo all at once”¹⁸: concluding thoughts

This is an on-going story. I have used the Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network to raise questions about what collaboration can mean in museum spaces and beyond. This network arose at a time when the Blackfoot had established good relations with many North American museums so as to locate and repatriate major bundles and continue with the process of cultural revitalization begun in the 1970s. They see working with museums in Europe as their next major challenge (Pard 2015, 133). It also arose at a time when museums were looking more critically at how collaboration was being practiced, whether this meant expanding the notion of the ‘contact zone’ (Onciul 2015), developing ‘radical trust’ (Lynch and Alberti 2010), or finding alternative strategies to negotiate the very real challenges and tensions of doing this work.

It is within these contexts that I have presented ethnographic moments that occurred during network meetings in order to foreground Blackfoot notions of consensus, of collaboration, and of the importance of relationship-building, and to examine how these contexts intersect. Blackfoot strategies for developing relationships with museums include emphasizing the importance of getting *out* of the museum, so that curators can begin to grasp the intimate relationship between people, places and cultural items. This is indeed an indigenization of museum-First Nations collaboration. We saw this clearly with the emphasis on taking the UK partners to sites within Blackfoot territory and explaining to them how they connected to cosmological beliefs and events in more recent history. The Blackfoot are fully aware, through their own processes of collaboration, that working together can

produce many benefits: repatriations have taken place; bonds have been strengthened; more people in their communities are getting involved in ceremony.

Clearly, this work is challenging on many levels and compromises have to be made when attempting to co-author relationships, especially those being built from scratch. Community support as well as adequate financial resources and institutional commitment are vital. Without the financial support of the Leverhulme Trust it is unlikely that either partner museum would have contemplated working as closely with the Blackfoot as has been possible; this is especially so given the international travel which we all agreed was essential. Given the lack of a prior relationship with the Blackfoot, the network's experimental nature, and the many other commitments of staff who are responsible for diverse collections and must also respond to the needs of local audiences, it took an immense commitment for the RAMM and the MAA to allow their staff to participate. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Blackfoot face parallel challenges to co-authoring relationships. It would have taken many years for them to raise sufficient funds to travel to the UK as a group. How then, could we have started to get to know each other? This brings me back to a point forcefully made in our funding bid: countries that now house collections deemed crucial for cultural survival have a responsibility to provide resources for them to be better cared for. This means providing adequate support for the expenses incurred by cultural specialists who advise curators on their care. It also means supporting museum staff to give them the opportunity to participate in fully engaged museum work beyond their institutions.

It is the hope of those involved in the network that the experience of starting to build relationships with two museums with no previous experience of working with the Blackfoot will lead to positive outcomes. But, we are realists. It is by no means certain that working relationships, beyond those established through our initial “exploratory discussions” will be sustained. This requires the will of all parties and there are challenges for us all. Moreover, all parties need to know what they want out of such relationships. To date, copies of all the Haddon photographs from the MAA have been deposited at the Blackfeet Community College and discussions about the future of cultural items in the RAMM are on-going and are considered a priority by the Blackfoot. Perhaps this is as far as we can or indeed need to go at this time. As Frank Weasel Head noted, the MAA and the RAMM staff received a lot of knowledge from the group, when they went through the collections with them. The extent to which the museums will reciprocate further than they have to date remains to be seen; but the next steps in any future relationship must be taken by the museums and the Blackfoot together without the organizing structure that the network has provided. This leaves the question of what will happen to the network itself. As I have shown, the Blackfoot have long collaborated with each other on cultural and spiritual matters, and have developed successful ways of operating as a team in their dealings with museums. The possibility of extending the network beyond the UK to other European museums remains, though it may shift composition to include different participants. Blackfoot colleagues are generally supportive of this goal, so long as the lessons learned from our activities to date are borne in mind.

A final question concerns the extent to which these lessons could be applied beyond museum work. In July 2014, Tony Eccles, Anita Herle and I met with Allan Pard in

Johnny's, a popular restaurant in the town of Fort McLeod, a short drive from the Piikani Nation. We discussed network activities to date, what Herle and Eccles made of the people and places they were being introduced to, and the positive aspects of the collaborative venture we were trying to push forward. In southern Alberta, where the lack of cross-cultural awareness in the past has led to tense relations between First Nations and others, museums and heritage organizations are in a strong position to demonstrate the benefits of good relations. As Pard noted during our discussion, "if there is one thing that the Blackfoot can teach the world, it's the importance of co-existence" (Allan Pard, 18 July 2014). The Blackfoot never tried to impose their values onto anyone who came into their territory. Those of us looking to work collaboratively - in whatever branch of anthropology – can learn from this, as we take small steps forward together.

Acknowledgements

The Blackfoot Collections in UK Museums Network (2013-2015) was funded by The Leverhulme Trust (grant IN-2013-009). Dr. Peter Loovers was the Network Facilitator and his assistance has been invaluable. I also thank colleagues David Laing and Susan Mitchell for administrative support. The staff of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter did so much to make this project happen and particular thanks go to Dr. Anita Herle, Rachel Hand, Dr. Jocelyne Dudding, and Tony Eccles. Dr. Stephanie Pratt offered sound advice throughout the project. Charlene Wolfe, John Murray, Carol Murray, Herman Yellow Old Woman, Kent Ayoungman, Alvine Mountain Horse, Charlie Russell continue to support the network in different ways and I am truly grateful to them all. I also thank those of the above-named colleagues

who read and commented on earlier drafts of this article. Dr. Gerald T. Conaty, Director of Indigenous Studies at the Glenbow Museum and an advisor to the network in its early days, passed away in 2013. In 2015, Frank Weasel Head and Narcisse Blood also passed away, as, in 2016, did Allan Pard. Readers who knew these men personally, or are familiar with their work, will recognize how influential they have all been on my thinking. This article is dedicated to their memory.

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¹ Blackfoot partners are Herman Yellow Old Woman (Siksika Nation Museum, Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park), Narcisse Blood (Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society, Kainai Nation), and Allan Pard (The Long Time Trail Society, Piikani Nation), all of whom through their respective organizations have legal authority to negotiate repatriations from museums in Alberta according to the terms of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. John Murray the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer has the tribal remit to work with US museums and represents the Blackfeet Nation. The grant also covered the expenses for a second individual from each nation: Frank Weasel Head (Kainai); Charlene Wolfe (Piikani); Kent Ayoungman (Siksika); Carol Murray (Blackfeet). Alvine Mountain Horse and Charlie Russell (both Kainai) funded their flights and meals. Anita Herle (Senior Curator for Anthropology) is the MAA partner and we were assisted by Rachel Hand (Collections Manager) and Jocelyne Dudding (Photographic Collections Manager). Tony Eccles, Curator of World Cultures, represents the RAMM. The University of Aberdeen, Brown's institution, is the lead partner, due to an existing Memorandum of Understanding with the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society that promotes collaborative working.

² Vivian Ayoungman, who teaches Blackfoot language at the Old Sun Community College on the Siksika reserve, provided this translation on 21 October 2015. I am most grateful to her, and to Kent Ayouman, for assistance with language and cultural matters.

³ I acknowledge here Andy Blackwater, a ceremonial leader from the Kainai Nation, who explained his understanding of this term and its role in Blackfoot diplomacy over a lunch meeting in Lethbridge, Alberta, on 27 July 2015.

⁴ The Blackfoot are three closely-related nations: Siksika, Kainai and Piikani. The imposition of the US-Canada border split the Piikani into north and south (Blackfeet), with a reserve in Alberta and a reservation in Montana. Naming is a politicized process and the names used by outsiders for the peoples who referred to themselves collectively as *Niitsitapi* have changed over time. I use the collectives “Blackfoot”, ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘First Nations’ as appropriate throughout this article.

⁵ With reference to collaborative programs developed by some European museums, Conaty (2015, 31-2) suggests that loans and other forms of access are positive steps but remain shaped by neo-colonial research frameworks.

⁶ These delegates included Frank Weasel Head, Narcisse Blood, Allan Pard, and Herman Yellow Old Woman, as well as Gerry Conaty from the Glenbow, who offered advice on the application and local support for Blackfoot partners.

⁷ <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/funding/our-approach-grant-making>

⁸ Allan Pard and Charlene Wolfe had to postpone their visit and came instead in March 2015 when we included the Horniman Museum in London in their itinerary.

⁹ Haddon’s memoir of his experiences is reproduced in Gidley (1982).

¹⁰ Blackfoot often smudge and/or pray before handling collections in museums. We established a practice for doing this as a team before we began work each day.

¹¹ The RAMM’s Blackfoot collections come from two distinct sources: the Denny Collection and the Dewdney Collection.

¹² Though most museums make computer-generated collections lists available prior to community visits, their format and quality is shaped by the institution’s record-keeping practices.

¹³ At the RAMM the group asked that a *Mao'to'ki* (Buffalo Women’s Society) headdress be removed from display, a request that was immediately addressed.

¹⁴ In the UK there is no legislation regarding the repatriation of cultural property, and museums respond to requests on a case by case basis. The RAMM has responded positively to requests for ancestral remains and cultural items from indigenous groups in the Pacific region. Until this project RAMM had not received a repatriation request for material in its North American collection.

¹⁵ Blood was referring to a shirt formerly belonging to Chief Red Crow, Crowfoot's Kainai contemporary, which is now in the British Museum.

¹⁶ The Siksika Nation coat of arms was recognized by the Heraldic Authority of Canada in 1992. The symbolism is explained at <http://www.siksikachildrengservices.com/about/coat-of-arms.html>

¹⁷ The collections included film negatives and lantern slides that not been scanned.

¹⁸ Allan Pard, 18 July 2014.