

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Friday 23rd November 2007

EMPIRE MUSEUM ANNOUNCES MOVE TO LONDON

The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum has announced today plans to move its core operations to London. The Board of Trustees of the independent charity has taken the decision to relocate the institution to secure its long-term future, and to reach a larger international audience. The award-winning Museum, that recently celebrated its fifth anniversary, is in negotiations over major cultural venues in the capital to house its existing archives and to accommodate an ambitious programme of major exhibitions and events.

The move is in line with the Museum's long term plans to become a leading international centre for the learning, research and understanding of Britain's colonial past. It is the first and only Museum in the world to explore the history of the British Empire and its emergence into today's Commonwealth, and has been widely praised for tackling contested and controversial histories.

Dr Gareth Griffiths, Director of the Museum says:

"Relocation to London presents a major opportunity for the Museum to widen its reach and engage new audiences with this important and formative part of our shared past. We have enjoyed great success over the last five years of operation and are extremely grateful to the people of Bristol and all those who have supported us. We hope that Bristolians will take the opportunity to catch our acclaimed exhibitions over the coming year and support our transition to this next exciting stage."

The Museum is currently based in the 'Bristol Old Station' at Temple Meads. The building was designed and built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as the world's first purpose built railway terminus, pre-dating Paddington Station. The Museum Trust was responsible for the major restoration of the Grade 1 listed building that has since been nominated as a World Heritage Site.

The Museum plans to retain control of the historic building to ensure that it is appropriately protected and maintained. The landmark site will shortly be made available

on the property market for applications from interested parties. All enquiries will be managed by appointed international property consultants Knight Frank, from their Bristol and London offices.

The Museum was opened in October 2002 by its Patron HRH The Princess Royal. It has since attracted visitors from all over the world and received recognition in more than ten industry and tourism awards and nominations.

In its first five years of operation the Museum has:

- Become one of only two institutions in the UK to be short-listed three years running in the 2003 - 2005 Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence, winning the title in the first year
- Staged five successful exhibitions covering topics such as Migration, Native American culture, globalisation and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
- Reached the final round of the 2004 European Museum of the Year award
- Delivered a Community Radio Station 'Commonwealth FM' service for three consecutive years
- Won the 2004 Sandford Award for Heritage Education and the 2004 Good Britain Guide award
- Completed the £7million restoration of the Bristol Old Station building
- Acquired over 75,000 artefacts and historic items ranging from film and photographs to costume and art
- Attracted significant research funding to explore its collections in Universities across the UK
- Hosted over one hundred lectures, talks and debates including the high profile 'Apology Debate' in May 2005
- Garnered the public support of leading political and cultural figures such as Tony Benn, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sir Trevor Phillips OBE and local campaigner Paul Stephenson
- Led Bristol's 2007 commemorations for the abolition of the slave trade with the landmark exhibition 'Breaking the Chains'.

In April 2007 the Museum opened the £1million Heritage lottery funded exhibition 'Breaking the Chains'. The exhibition is the centrepiece of the city's activities to commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade. It was created through a process of community consultation, in partnership with Bristol City Council's Museums, Galleries and Archives Service. Elements of the special exhibition have already been

adopted by Museums in the British Virgin Islands and the Gambia, and are due to be permanently incorporated into the new Museum of Bristol.

Leader of Bristol City Council, Cllr Helen Holland says:

"We have enjoyed working with the Empire and Commonwealth's management and board for the relatively short period they have been here. We certainly wish them well in their new home in London.

"We are confident that our new Museum of Bristol, due to open in 2010, will continue to provide the city's 9 million tourists and the city region's 1 million residents with a fascinating insight into Bristol's role as a key player in the British Empire and Commonwealth over the centuries - in both good times and bad."

It is anticipated that the move will enable the Museum to expand upon the range of topics covered in connection with Britain's colonial past and continue to address the contemporary legacies of this history today. In May 2008 the Museum will host an international conference in partnership with Kings College London marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the British mandate in Palestine. Plans for a ground-breaking exhibition on the Palestine Mandate are currently underway, in addition to a touring exhibition entitled 'Serving Empire', reflecting the lives of those who worked in outposts of the British colonies. Further exhibitions up until 2010 have also been confirmed in conjunction with London partners.

Both the Museum's permanent galleries and the current exhibition on the abolition of the slave trade, 'Breaking the Chains', will remain open to the public until Autumn 2008.

END

Notes to Editors:

For further information, images and interview opportunities, please contact the PR & Marketing Manager Lucy Edwards:

Tel. 01179 25 4980 Ext 230

Email. lucy.edwards@empiremuseum.co.uk

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum
Station Approach, Temple Meads, Bristol, BS1 6QH
www.empiremuseum.co.uk

Awards to date:

- Silver: Roses Awards for 'Breaking the Chains' exhibition graphics 2007
- Short-listed: Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence 2005
- Best in the Region: Britain's Best Museums and Galleries 2004
- Finalist: European Museum of the Year 2004
- Winner: Sandford Award for Heritage Education 2004
- Winner: Good Britain Guide 2004
- Short-listed: Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence 2004
- Double-winner: Museum & Heritage Awards for Excellence 2003
- Winner: National Railway Heritage Awards 2003
- Short-listed: Group Travel Awards 2003
- Short-listed: British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2003

National & International Press Acclaim:

'A valuable and accessible narrative, imaginatively and carefully told.' **The Guardian**

'Outstanding museum...full of moving and chastening accounts, it treads carefully between being too jingoistic and too PC'. **The Independent**

'It is astonishing how good the museum is.' **Melbourne Age**

'A brave and level headed look at the central fact of the past 300 years of British History' **The Sunday Times**

'Displaying the British Empire for posterity.' **The New York Times**

'It's understated presentation is typical of the Museum, the most interesting place I saw on my six-city tour.' **The Times**

'The galleries are a mass of information, clearly laid out with enough interactive stuff for the keenest techno-boffin.' **Sunday Express**