

King Leopold II of Belgium & the Armstrong Building: a pilot project for NU Campus Legacies



Jemima Kimvula (PGT, School of Law)

Heather Proctor (PGR, School of Arts and Cultures)

Annie Tindley (Chair of the Black History Month Steering Group: School of History, Classics & Archaeology)

Loes Veldpaus (Co-director, Centre for Heritage: School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape)

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1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the activities, methods and recommendations of the pilot Campus Legacies project, which has focused on the donation made towards the building of Armstrong College in the 1880s by King Leopold II of the Belgians. The historical research undertaken as part of this project uncovered a longer-term relationship between King Leopold II (and his father, King Leopold I) with the development of the city of Newcastle, the Armstrong College (later Newcastle University) and its citizens, politicians and students. This relationship was just one part of a much bigger history of colonial entanglement between Newcastle, NE England and the British Empire. This report outlines the initial findings from that research, what kinds of principles and methodologies we could utilise to address the legacies presented by this history, and our recommendations for next steps, informed by external expertise and experience.

At a glance historical timeline

1881: King Leopold II of the Belgians contacted by the Mayor of Newcastle to solicit a donation in support of the centenary celebrations of George Stephenson's birth. A donation of £500 is promised.

1888: King Leopold II contacted by the Principal of Armstrong College of Science with plans for a new George Stephenson Engineering Laboratory building, and a request that the £500 donation is directed to that.

1889: King Leopold II donates £500 to the College.

1893: King Leopold II is invited by the College Council to open the new wing of the Armstrong Building but declines.

1895: the Building is officially opened by the Mayor of Newcastle.

1901: King Leopold II invited to join Convocation and is offered an honorary degree but declines both.

2020: NU Vice Chancellor Review Group established on 'Lord Armstrong and his legacies.'

2021: Armstrong Review Group report published.

2022: Project work on the history of the Sage faculty uncovers the donation made by King Leopold II.

2023: Initial archival work results in a further short report and funding application for Campus Legacies project between the University's Centre for Heritage and the Black History Month Steering Group.¹

2024: workshops and project delivery – this report, November 2024.

¹ These reports can be provided.

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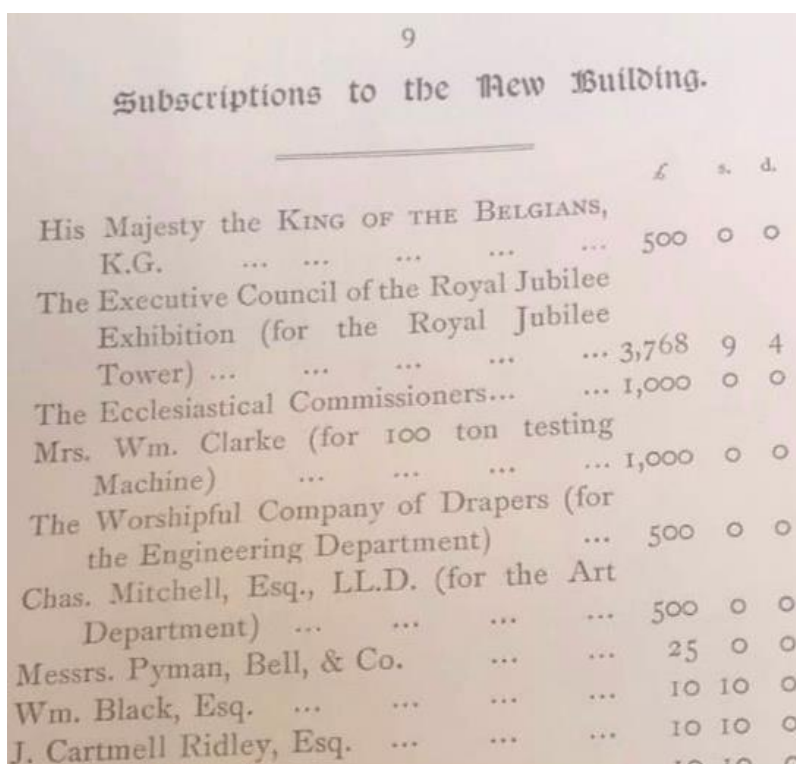
2. The Historical Context

This section of the report gives a detailed overview of the historical context of the donation made by King Leopold II of the Belgians to the institution which would evolve into Newcastle University and the wider context of city development, imperial and industrial entanglements and philanthropy in which the donation was made.

It begins with (a) a timeline of the research undertaken and how the donation was first uncovered; (b) it then explores the wider historical context of the Belgian royal family's relationships to the city, region and its key civic institutions. (c) provides some context on King Leopold II's other philanthropic activities in Britain during his lifetime and lastly (d) provides a brief outline of King Leopold II's imperial activities in what was then the Belgian Congo, and which form the basis of the controversies around his donation and its legacies.

a. Timeline of research to date

In 1889, King Leopold II of Belgium made a donation of £500 to the fund-raising campaign for what would become the Armstrong Building; this donation was followed by invitations to preside over the opening ceremony (1895) and to attend the university's convocation (1901).² This was discovered in 2022 by two PGR students in the SaGE faculty as part of work they were undertaking around the 150th anniversary of Mathematics and Statistics at Newcastle University.



Subscriptions to the New Building.		£	s.	d.
His Majesty the KING OF THE BELGIANS, K.G.	500	0	0	
The Executive Council of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition (for the Royal Jubilee Tower)	3,768	9	4	
The Ecclesiastical Commissioners...	1,000	0	0	
Mrs. Wm. Clarke (for 100 ton testing Machine)	1,000	0	0	
The Worshipful Company of Drapers (for the Engineering Department) ...	500	0	0	
Chas. Mitchell, Esq., LL.D. (for the Art Department)	500	0	0	
Messrs. Pyman, Bell, & Co.	25	0	0	
Wm. Black, Esq.	10	10	0	
J. Cartmell Ridley, Esq.	10	10	0	

Figure 1: image of the formally printed record of donors to the Armstrong Building showing King Leopold II's donation of £500.

² In contemporary values this translates to approximately £68,000 (RPI) or £306,000 (in labour costs). Most studies on the financing/compensation for enslavement and the slave trade use the labour cost translation: <https://www.measuringworth.com/slavery.php> [last accessed 8.11.24].

Recognising that more historical investigation was required, a History PGR was commissioned to research and write a brief report completed in February 2023.

This report concludes by stating:

The donation by King Leopold II has a lasting legacy in the physical form of the Armstrong building, which is still central to the city centre campus today. The donation was very much made within the culture of Victorian benevolence which was not limited to Newcastle but part of elite philanthropic culture across Britain at the time. Donations from foreign royal families were, however, uncommon. The reasoning behind this donation is not clear, despite extensive enquiries. With this in mind, while we can speculate that the donation was motivated by a desire to support research into minerals, naval architecture and medicine (all of which were of significant relevance and potential benefit to imperial interests) we cannot say this conclusively. This must be acknowledged when discussing the research and its findings.

Although a sensible conclusion to draw, as we will see, further archival research has highlighted broader motivations for the donation.

In order to move forward productively from this report, a workshop called 'Campus Legacies' was organised by the University's [Centre for Heritage](#) in May 2023. Participants from a range of disciplinary and practitioner perspectives and drew on best practice from other universities in Britain working on imperial legacies in their institutional histories. The workshop focused on two key themes: 'Dealing with Difficult Histories at Heritage Sites and in Archives' as well as 'Colonial Histories on Campus and Legacies of Lord Armstrong.'

Shortly afterwards, a group of three PGRs in the School of Arts and Cultures ran focus groups investigating the impact of working/studying in the Armstrong building on current students, particularly international students, in a built environment with such close links to colonialism. Eleven students took part in the focus groups, reflecting on and discussing the following questions:

1. How links to colonialism impact how we feel about the building itself;
2. How links to colonialism impact how we feel about the university itself;
3. How links to colonialism impact what we think about the university's history;
4. Relationship with university history and 'decolonising the curriculum';
5. Do links to colonialism affect how we feel about our own position in the university or not?

Participants spoke up about what it means to be an international student in the UK now, how they are impacted by discrimination during their studies, and what they feel about the legacies of colonialism as well as how a colonial mindset (and structural racism) still influences their experiences at Newcastle University. Themes that came up included exploitation, discrimination and lack of understanding and wellbeing.

One of the results of the 2023 workshop was the identification of further work, constructed as a pilot project for a wider and comprehensive engagement with the University's histories and its legacies. A joint project between the University's Black History Month Steering Group and the Centre for Heritage was created and funded and this report is one of the principal results of that project.

This project asked three questions:

- 1) How and why was this donation made and accepted and what are the legacies that need to be worked through among our university community and the wider public in the region and (inter)nationally?
- 2) What can we learn from other institutions facing similar legacies, and become an active participant in collective reparative action?
- 3) How does the university community set out an ethical roadmap as part of its global strategy, recognising the central importance of its international staff and student community while acknowledging this aspect of its history?

These questions were taken to a workshop (May 2024), to which external expert participants were invited to discuss on-going projects on colonial histories in institutions such as the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow, to understand best practice in the sector.³ The colonial contexts of these institutions differ to Newcastle's, but some underlying common principles emerged from the discussions. The importance of working with impacted communities, undertaking proactive (rather than reactive) work, and focusing on substantive change and engagement rather than performative flourishes emerged as key principles for effective anti-colonial and reparative work.

Due to the close institutional relationship between Newcastle and Durham Universities (Newcastle was a college of Durham University at the time of the donation), we have also been starting to open discussions with colleagues in History and Special Collections & Archives at Durham. A [report](#) is being researched and published on Durham's imperial histories and we plan to engage with its findings and recommendations.

(b) King Leopold II, the City and Newcastle University/Armstrong Building

This section lays out in more detail what we know about the historical connections between King Leopold II, the City of Newcastle and the College, later Newcastle University. This is based on a further programme of academic research into the donation which exposed additional connections which helpfully contextualise it across King Leopold's other philanthropic and colonial activities and investments.

King Leopold II was first approached to solicit a donation in 1881, not from the College, but the City of Newcastle. In a letter from Jonathan Angus, the then Mayor of the city, King Leopold II was asked to contribute to the 'fetes' being organised to celebrate the centenary of the birth of the railway engineer George Stephenson. Angus pointed to the close relationship between Stephenson and the King's father, Leopold I, which developed after King Leopold I commissioned Stephenson to design and oversee the building of the domestic railway system in Belgium, decades previously.⁴

Clearly, there were existing, if slightly tenuous connections, between the Belgian king and the city of Newcastle, and once this overture had been successfully made, the connection was once again leveraged when fundraising began in earnest for the new Armstrong College and what was then

³ See also University of Liverpool: <https://www.jobs.ac.uk/job/DJK940/academic-lead-history-and-heritage-project> and for further details the associated [pdf](#).

⁴ Archives of the Royal Palace of Belgium, Cab LII. Com_Roi_G_souscriptions: G 80/12, Jonathan Angus to King Leopold II, 27 May 1881. For context on the development of the Belgian railways and British investment see F. Buelens, J. van de Broek and H. Willems, 'British and French investments in the Belgian railway sector during the nineteenth century,' in R. Roth and G. Dinobol (eds), *Across the Borders: financing the world's railways in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008).

called the Stephenson Engineering Department. In 1888, the Principal of the Durham College of Science, William Garnett, wrote to King Leopold to revive the idea of his donation, but now able to outline specifically what it was to be spent on. It is worth quoting at length, as it also lays out the ambitions for expansion of the College and its place in the regional economy:

Nearly two years ago the College Council secured an admirable site containing about 6 ¼ acres & situated only three quarters of a mile from the Central Station just opposite to the house where George & Robert Stephenson lived in 1824-5. The erection of the first section of the College consisting of the Chemical & Physical Departments is now nearly completed. This section forms one side of a quadrangle, is 300 feet in length & will cost, when fitted, about £23,000. The department of Engineering will form the opposite side of the quadrangle & will be called the George Stephenson Engineering Laboratory. It will include Mechanical and Civil Engineering, general & special courses of instruction will be provided in Mining, Locomotive & Marine Engineering, Naval Architecture & Electrical Engineering. This department will be under the direct control of committees of engineers appointed by the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers & Ships Builders, which will afford the best security that the teaching will be of a practical character and adapted to the requirements of the district ... May the Council venture to hope that your Majesty's promised help will be available for this memorial to George Stephenson?⁵

In 1889, King Leopold II sent the College £500, as recorded in the Minutes of Council on 21 September, 7 and 31 October.⁶ There would eventually be hundreds of donors who contributed to the building costs of Armstrong College, but the Council were especially solicitous of King Leopold's donation, due to its high prestige and potential to attract a wider range of other donors. As such, much effort went into thanking King Leopold and making his donation as visible as possible.

King of the Belgians. Draft of a letter of thanks to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Belgium for the donation of £500 to the Stephenson Engineering dept. from the King of the Belgians, was presented, and ordered to be engrossed and signed by the President, Treasurer and Principal and Lord Armstrong on behalf of the College and by Mr George Stephenson for the Engineering Committee. The College seal to be attached.

A draft letter to Mr George Reid, Belgian Consul, thanking him for the trouble he had taken in the matter was also presented and ordered to be sealed.⁷

This effort outstripped the actual value of his donation, which – while substantial – was far from the largest. In terms of the overall cost of the building, initial estimates given to the Council were in the region of a total cost of £90,000 (which approximately equates to £10,620,000 (RPI) or £44,840,000

⁵ Archives of the Royal Palace of Belgium, Cab LII. Com_Roi_G_souscriptions: G 80/12, William Garnett to King Leopold II, 24 March 1888.

⁶ Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 00-3166: Durham College of Science Minute Book (1891-1900) ff. 86 21 October 1891 and 00-3197 Durham College of Science Minute Book House Committee, 1888-1894: 21 September, 7 October and 31 October.

⁷ Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 00-3199 Durham College of Science Minute Book 1884-90 ff. 267, 7 Oct. 1889, Council meeting

(labour value).⁸ Although the focus on soliciting King Leopold's donation was on engineering connections, other departments to be housed included Fine Art, English Literature, Natural History, Applied Chemistry.

In order to enhance the profile of the College and its ambitions, King Leopold was invited to Newcastle to formally open the new building, however as the Minutes record:

Proposed visit of the King of the Belgians. A letter from the Belgian Ambassador was read, enclosing a copy of one he had received from Belgium to the effect that it would give the King much pleasure to be present at the opening of the new Departments of the College, but that he could not in January state what his engagements would be in October and was therefore unable to give a definite answer now. The matter was left in the hands of the Principal.⁹

In the end, the grand opening went ahead in 1895 without King Leopold's presence in person, although his spirit was invoked by the Mayor, Stephen Quin, who did the honours instead:

Mr Warden of the University, Members of the Council, Governing Body and Staff of the College.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regard the position which I have the honour and pleasure to occupy here today, as, perhaps, the most signal privilege of a not uneventful year of office. We had all hoped that these proceedings would have been distinguished by the presence of the most illustrious among the Governors of the College – I mean His Majesty King Leopold, who has earned the gratitude of all friends of the College, and whose kind interest has been even more valued by us than his substantial assistance. His Majesty was among the first and most liberal donors to this new building, which is now completed, and which forms such a splendid addition to this really great institution, of which Newcastle and Tyneside have a right to be proud. Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, His Majesty King Leopold is not only one of the most enlightened Sovereigns in Europe, but unfortunately for us, he is also one of the most hard-worked, and consequently we are assembled here today under less brilliant auspices than we had anticipated ... We can only hope that the proceedings of today will prove such a turning point in the fortunes of the College as will ensure His Majesty's presence here upon another, even more important occasion.¹⁰

The College continued to pursue King Leopold over the coming years, to try to capitalise on the connection: this included invitations to Convocation and the offer of an honorary degree, both of

⁸ The eventual actual cost was in the region of £75,000, which equates to £8,850,000 (RPI) or £37,360,000 (labour value): 'Of this sum £17,000 has been borrowed, and the interest is a standing charge against the revenue of the College ... The shell of the buildings now in course of erection will cost about £20,000 towards which about £10,000 is in hand ... the cost of the block with its internal fittings cannot be estimated at less than £50,000. Hence to complete the college as planned and to remove the present liability about £90,000 should be forthcoming.' Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 16/7/1 Armstrong Building.

⁹ Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 00-3197 Durham College of Science Minute Book House Committee, 1888-1894, ff. 285 11 Feb. 1893.

¹⁰ Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 16/7/1 The Durham College of Science Newcastle upon Tyne. Opening of New Buildings, forming the South-East and South-West Wings. Inaugural Address by the Mayor of Newcastle (Alderman Stephen Quin). 1895.

which were turned down.¹¹ These invitations came just in advance of the global expose of King Leopold's brutal actions in the Belgian Congo, although campaigners had been attempting to highlight what was going on for many years.

The Archives of the Royal Palace in Belgium keep a complete record of King Leopold II's philanthropic activities under Cab LII.Com_Roi_G_Souscriptions. From the inventory, we can see that he made a number of donations to universities, almost exclusively Belgian institutions, and to a range of disciplines including natural sciences and Classics. He did not donate to many other British higher education institutions, the exception being the newly founded Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.¹²

(c) The wider funding picture for the Armstrong Building

Further archival research was conducted on the other donors listed on the record found in 2022, focusing on the nature of their links to the university. The two (overlapping) links that pertained to the figures that were traceable demonstrated financial relations between the university and a) local industry and b) the city's council and political elite.

Notable subscriptions included a donation from the Executive Council of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition of £3768, which was credited by the Mayor of Newcastle in his inaugural address at the opening of the new buildings as forming the 'nucleus' of the fund. The money appears to have come from the surplus of the 1887 Jubilee Exhibition held in Newcastle, held in the area now known as Exhibition Park. Timed to coincide with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, the event also functioned as a celebration of local industry and engineering. As the Executive Council was staffed mostly by members of the council, we can see how both council links and industry are central to the funding of the university.¹³ Other donations came from local industrial companies, such as from the spouse of the late William Clarke of Clarke, Chapman & Co. (specialised in manufacture of cranes and other mechanical handling equipment) and Pyman, Bell & Co. (coal exporters).

The Worshipful Company of Drapers, a London Guild, also donated £500. Though it is not explicitly clear why the Drapers donated, council proceedings from 1879 showed that one of the Aldermen had been canvassing support for the College from "gentlemen connected with London Guilds, and who happened to be Members of Parliament."

Importantly, a much more extensive record of donations to the College – documenting donations from 1871 up to 1894 – was found in this archival research phase. Though it has not yet been possible to research this record more extensively (there are over 170 donation sources from the period 1871 to 1884 alone) notable names include William Armstrong, Lowthian Bell (a later Principal of the College), and Robert Stirling Newall, among others.

¹¹ Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle University Archive, 00-3201 Durham College of Science Minute Book House Committee, 1894-1897, ff. 255 30 Sept. 1901 and Archives of the Belgian Royal Palace, Cab LII. Com_Roi_V_invitations, V 15/16 Durham College of Science, 1906-1910.

¹² He donated at least £650 to this institution and held meetings with its principals, to attempt to drive a cure for sleeping sickness. See: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=younghistorians> [last accessed 26.10.24].

¹³ Though the event raised a lot of money, at the time [stall holders and tradespeople complained that they had suffered losses through the event.](#)

(d) King Leopold II, Belgium and the Congo

The history of Belgium's annexation and exploitation of the Congo – and King Leopold II's active role in leading and administering what would become the Belgian Congo colony as a personal fiefdom – is very complex, and only the briefest summary is possible here, purely for context.

King Leopold II attempted to persuade the Belgian government to support colonial expansion around the then-largely unexploited Congo Basin. Their ambivalence resulted in his establishing a colony himself and with the support from a number of European countries, he achieved international recognition of the Congo Free State in 1885. Between 1885 and 1908 the Congo Free State operated as a corporate state, privately controlled by King Leopold II through a non-governmental organization, the International African Association. The state included the entire area of the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo, and under Leopold II's administration became a moral and economic humanitarian disaster. King Leopold's *Force Publique*, a private army that terrorized the Congolese into working as forced labour for resource extraction (principally rubber), disrupted local societies and killed and abused natives indiscriminately. Even by the low standards of European colonial enterprise in Africa of the period, the administration of the Belgian Congo became a by-word for cruelty.¹⁴

The cause was taken up in the early twentieth century, crystallising in the 1904 Casement Report, which was covered extensively in the European, British and American press.¹⁵ As a result of the exposure of human rights abuses and other crimes in the Report, in 1904 Leopold II was forced to allow an international parliamentary commission of inquiry entry to the Congo Free State.¹⁶ By 1908, public pressure and diplomatic manoeuvres led to the end of Leopold II's personal rule and to the annexation of the Congo as a colony of Belgium, known as the Belgian Congo.¹⁷

Of course, these histories have multiple and complex post-colonial legacies, and this project sought to start a process of understanding what those mean for Newcastle University and how we might collectively and constructively address them today. We have been helped by the postcolonial literature which examines the current state of both Belgium and the Congo, and how issues of unequal power dynamics play out in economic, social and linguistic-cultural ways.

Please see the Bibliography and Further Resources for more details on best practice.

¹⁴ Guy Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885–1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ W.R. Louis, 'Roger Casement and the Congo,' *Journal of African History*, Vol. 5:1 (1964), pp. 99-120.

¹⁶ H. Hawkins, 'Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, and the Congo Reform Movement,' *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 9:1 (1981 - 1982), pp. 65-80.

¹⁷ Vincent Viaene, 'King Leopold's Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905,' *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 80:4, A Special Issue on Metropole and Colony (December 2008), pp. 741-790.

3. Principles & methods of working on campus legacies

Universities can publicly acknowledge past wrongs and injustices colonial and support symbolic concrete reparation initiatives such as scholarships for Congolese students. They can also encourage dialogue and aware through the organisation of conferences, seminars and exhibitions on colonialism and its lasting effects as well as promoting cultural exchange and academics between Belgium and Congo. Also ensure diverse representation of academic and administrative staff and create an inclusive and respectful environment where Congolese and African students feel valued and supported.¹⁸

Many universities and other institutions are in the process of examining, understanding and facing up to the legacies of their histories of colonial entanglements.¹⁹ Although all of those histories are different, we are able to draw on external experience and expertise to help guide the discussion and recommendations at Newcastle University. As such, our **first working principle is: to understand and work with cognate institutions to draw on best practice.**

The team undertook a review of what other UK universities were doing to stand as suggestions or guidelines for what we might do as a project. These included:

- Researching and releasing a report: principally these speak to the university (the staff and student community) and in some cases also to the wider city/region.
- Reconsidering the building names/renaming building
- Considering a reparative programme: this came in different forms – some institutions have set up partnerships with universities in postcolonial areas (e.g. University of Glasgow with University of the West Indies), or established and staffed funded research centres, and commissioning long term, detailed research work on the wider colonial connections and legacies (as part of those centres).
- Considering creating a module/taught provision on the history and legacies of the institutional connections with colonialism.
- Working with the local council authorities on shared colonial histories.
- Walking tours and maps pointing out the histories, as well as celebrating positive Black history

Some of these approaches are already underway at NU; others will form part of our recommendations. However, they all speak to our **second principle: work must be collaborative, undertaken on a basis of equality and be driven by reparative principles.**

Here we can be assisted by the ‘Four Truths’ developed by South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee: Factual or Forensic truth, Personal or Narrative truth, Social or Dialogic truth, and the Public or Healing truth.²⁰ Universities and our academic disciplines traditionally hold Factual or Forensic Truth as the primary form, and unequal power structures flow from that, particularly when attempting to hold a dialogue with non-university participants. This leads to our **third principle: that**

¹⁸ Interview by Kimvula, 2024

¹⁹ See for example the National Trust’s Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery (2020).

²⁰ B. J. Little, ‘Violence, silence and the four truths: towards healing in U.S.-American historical memory,’ *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25:7 (2019), pp. 631-40.

we commit to dialogic work which values different ways of knowing. We have drawn here on the work of the Coalition for Sites of Conscience, who Newcastle University have a Memorandum of understanding with, and who are keen to be involved in exploring the campus as a site of conscience. <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/resources/toolkit/>

Please see the Bibliography and Further Resources for more details on best practice

4. Anti-colonial and reparative methodologies

Our focus here is towards future transformation that is, going beyond the opposition of colonialism but striving for more in different spheres such as education and within our communities. The methods here focus on that future transformation as a means to achieve reparative justice.

Walker sets out a tri-dimensional framework for approaching reparative justice:

1. Repair and futures
2. Combined capabilities
3. Transformative dialogic decolonised learning

This trilemma is an end goal to meet 'sustainable human development'.²¹

Repair and future pathways focus on addressing past injustices with the aim of 'repair' to ensure transformative justice. Addressing, and actively working on this project with the aims of later 'repairing' has been evident through our research. Repair also goes further than 'repairing broken objects' but is to embody the broken perspectives and communities shown throughout the project.

Combined capabilities refers to substantive opportunities to become or to do something for the benefit of sustainable human development. Our project has initially started within a university setting, seeking to resolve and discuss such historical pasts. However, it's evident that its impacts go further than just the university. In this sense, to achieve this 'sustainable human development' our recommendations and this project is a starting point to achieve and strive for more.

Finally, transformative dialogic decolonised learning refers to social learning; best understood as something that seeks to go beyond individual change to engage a wider community and networks.²² One of our aims is to engage with students, the university and the wider community; this will include discussions about our project with the aim of change. This framework demonstrates how we may approach reparative justice but also provides a method to analysing such aims.

Despite a difference in focus, Carlson's eight principles of '*anti-colonial research methodology for settlers*' offers useful and practical insights in how we may approach anti-colonialist practices in our project.²³ When discussing anti-colonialism, we are referring to the aims to resist and break colonial regimes, systems and ideologies²⁴ especially in the context of this project.

The key and relevant principles are as follows:

- Land/place engagement and accountability
- Egalitarian, participatory and community-based methods
- Reciprocity
- Wholism²⁵

²¹ Melanie Walker, Alejandra Boni, Diana Velasco, 'Reparative Futures and Transformative Learning Spaces', Springer Nature Switzerland, [2023], 1st ed

²² Melanie Walker, Alejandra Boni, Diana Velasco, 'Reparative Futures and Transformative Learning Spaces', Springer Nature Switzerland, [2023], 1st ed

²³ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

²⁴ Neil Nun, Madeline Whetung, Audrey Kobayashi, 'Anticolonialism', [2020], International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, 2nd ed, Elsevier

²⁵ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

Land/place engagement and accountability relates to anti-colonial research being accountable to not only the land but the colonial pasts²⁶. In our project, recognising the historical past of Congo and King Leopold's impact is crucial in first accountability and secondly, to provide solutions; whether this is ongoing or in a set time frame accountability is crucial in the first steps on a project such as this.

Egalitarian, participatory and community-based methods refers to anti-colonial research prioritising participation and egalitarianism, here community members contribute to the shaping of the research and the research design²⁷. The Armstrong building not only impacts the university but the community and the city therefore, their contribution to the project and our research is important.

Reciprocity refers to what we as researchers can give, contribute and collectively build²⁸. Our role, in providing recommendations and writing this report reflects this idea of reciprocity.

Wholism refers to anti-colonial research being wholistic, it tends to the heart, spirit and body in addition to the mind and attends to values, emotion, history and context²⁹. As much as there is a practical perspective to this project, there is an emotional side which is reflected through our relationship to the Armstrong building as well as our communities.

Overall, these methods offer useful insights to our project and how we may approach our project in relation to the university, communities and the city itself.

²⁶ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

²⁷ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

²⁸ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

²⁹ Elizabeth Carlson, 'Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies', [2017], Settler Colonial Studies 7

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This project is the start of a reparative journey, whereby the university – its staff and student community – in partnership with the wider city and region – and its institutions – can start to understand the depth and impact of its colonial entanglements. A reparative journey has to go beyond a single institutional ‘challenge’ in the form of a donation, and should instead focus on deepening historical knowledge and understanding the current implications, in particular for the various communities affected by the historical context of the Armstrong building, and the wider campus, the university and indeed the city itself. This required a level of transparency, in which multiple contributions will be integrated into this work, including e.g. the findings of the work done in Durham, and elsewhere. As Newcastle University was a college of Durham University until 1963, this work should be undertaken in conjunction Durham University, strategically, as well as in practice, taking a regional approach, partaking and promoting each other’s events and activities, sharing knowledge and archival finds, developing further research and policy. The purpose of our recommendations is to outline and establish a way in which this conversation can take place and as such, they are laid out in concentric levels. It is also our intention to collaboratively co-produce further recommendations and actions with the staff and student body, as well as the regional Congolese community, the City Council and Durham University.

Recommendations

These recommendations sit at different levels within the institution and relate to its relationships with Durham University, the City Council, and the communities of the city and region, especially the Congolese community. As such, they have been layered to be developed with different stakeholders and communities.

This work will require resourcing in terms of time and expertise: different UK HEIs have approached this in different ways. Some (e.g. University of Glasgow; Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine) have built reparative work into their institutional strategy and funded research centres, scholarships and academic posts.³⁰ Others have focused work in partnership with other institutions (e.g. University of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian) or have only begun exploratory work (e.g. University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University).³¹ Given the scope of the university’s and city’s imperial entanglement, we recommend overall that future work is undertaken in collaboration with: Durham University, the City of Newcastle, the Lit&Phil, TWAM and other cultural partners.

Governance

1. We recommend that this project and on-going work feeds into the university’s Global and Education Strategies. Both have been recently refreshed and already speak more to the issues raised in this report, but dedicated and explicit work could be done to embed equitable and anti-racist and decolonial methodologies into those strategies and address how this history contributes to ongoing structural inequalities, affecting our student and staff communities.
2. We recommend that this report is brought to the University’s Race Equality Charter Implementation Group for discussion and collaborative delivery.
3. We also propose that outcomes and their implications find their way into other strategies, e.g. financial strategy, research strategy, and engagement and place strategy. Structural

³⁰ See: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/slavery/> [last accessed 25.10.24].

³¹ See: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/historic-links-to-slavery> and <https://www.thetimes.com/article/2a82c9bb-1805-4ca1-8267-9bcb60c56c98> [last accessed 25.11.24].

embedding is important, it cannot remain at project level. It is also directly related to research culture.

4. As such we recommend that a Research/Research Ethics and Culture statement is co-created/revised to reflect better awareness of the context(s) in which research is undertaken at NU.
5. We recommend that this report is presented to UEB, Senate and Council to create awareness of the context in which education and research have to be undertaken.

Awareness-raising and education

1. We recommend the co-creation of informative and educational resources with students and staff, with Newcastle Congolese community, and with school/college pupils in the region which explores both the histories of the city and university in the colonial context as well as positive and constructive ways to build a dialogue around the future. This means developing new resources, as well as promoting and building on the work already done for example the Anti-racist Toolkit developed for the Centre for Heritage by Carol Ann Dixon <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/heritage/resources/read/>
2. We recommend co-working with colleagues at Durham University to build a cross-institutional discussion and understanding of this shared history and the opportunities it offers for collaborative working within the region.
3. We recommend the creation of a 'Anti-Colonial North East' network in partnership with the universities, cultural institutions, Newcastle's Congolese community, and the City Council to build a sustainable, transparent and future-focused dialogue and programme of activities, designed along the methodologies noted in sections 3 and 4.
4. We recommend that further interpretation resources (onsite and online) are created for the Armstrong Building and the new Stephenson Building. In addition, we recommend that a dedicated web resource is created to collect and present all research materials and activities for public use.
5. We recommend further and wider research, addressing and embedding understandings of our campus legacies (with and building on the work undertaken at Durham University) - connecting also to current national (e.g. National Trust) and international partners (e.g. University of the West Indies and ICSC).

6. Select Bibliography & Further Resources

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