History

In the 1970s, the Commonwealth Heads of Government recognised the value of nongovernmental organisations, particularly professional associations[1] and encouraged the Commonwealth Foundation, an intergovernmental organisation established by the Heads in 1965, to instigate the establishment of Commonwealth Organisations. A Commonwealth Association of Museums was first discussed at International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Paris/Grenoble in 1971 and established at ICOM in Denmark in 1974 with David Ride of Australia as the first President. CAM's membership included individual museum workers, museums and related organisations throughout the Commonwealth as well as others in non-Commonwealth nations who share similar interests.

CAM was initially based in London with operational and financial support from Commonwealth Institute and, from 1982-2013, the Commonwealth Foundation. The Foundation encouraged Commonwealth Organisations to establish a Secretariat outside the UK, which CAM did, moving the Secretariat to Canada in 1980. Since 1997, CAM and other Commonwealth Organisations have provided input into the Commonwealth People's Forum which meets prior to the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM).

In 2008, the Foundation published *Putting Culture First: Commonwealth Perspectives on Culture and Development*,[2] which focused primarily on the literary, performing and visual arts but made several references to museums in terms of colonial perspectives, festivals and product generation. The report suggested that culture would be front and centre in the post-2015 development conversation. However, in 2011 the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) recommended ways in which the Foundation could support Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and in 2012 the Foundation determined that in order to "more effectively deliver the objectives of strengthening and mobilising Civil Society in support of Commonwealth principles and priorities"[3] it would no longer fund Commonwealth Organisations.

CAM's early programmes were sporadic: a 1975 regional symposium on *Museums and Cultural Scientific Exchanges* in Calcutta in collaboration with ICOM India and the ICOM Regional Agency; a 1977 event on *The Establishment, Development and Staffing of Museums using Locally Available Resources, Materials and Skills* in London; a 1978 workshop on the *Conservation of Historic Towns and Monuments in Kenya* collaboration with the Commonwealth Association of Architects. CAM met at Calgary in 1980 and in Singapore in 1982 for a working session in Singapore when the National Museum's History Section was being established.

The relationship between CAM, as an Affiliated Organisation (AO), and ICOM has also evolved. CAM initially met during ICOM triennial general assemblies: Argentina in 1986, St. Albans, UK in 1989 prior to the ICOM conference in the Netherlands, and in 1992 a symposium on *The Role of Museums in Society* in Ottawa before the general assembly in Quebec City. Since then CAM events have been held apart from ICOM meetings in order to reach more members in developing nations. CAM continues to collaborate with other AOs, International Committees and National Committees where appropriate. In 2013-2014, for the first time, ICOM allowed AOs to apply for Special Project funding and to submit an annual report what acknowledges CAM's contributions to the international museum community.

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[1] Commonwealth Foundation, *Strategic Plan 2012-2016*, p. 4.

[2] Mowottny, Mark, *Putting Culture First: Commonwealth Perspectives on Culture and Development. London:* Commonwealth Foundation, 2008, pp. 18, 19, 49.

[3] Commonwealth Foundation, *Strategic Plan 2012-2016,* p. 5.

The Secretariat relocated to Calgary when Duncan Cameron became President in 1983. In 1985 CAM initiated the Distance Learning Programme in Museum Studies. The programme has been revised a number of times in the years since, with the programme evolving to reflect the changing role of museums in society, particularly in the context of development.

The *CAM Newsletter* was published from 1987 to 1995, succeeded by the *CAM Bulletin* in January 1996. Initially published occasionally, since 2013 it has been published bimonthly. The intention was for the *Bulletin* to become "*a forum for exchange of ideas and information and discussion on critical issues promoting post-colonial museology.*"[4] CAM introduced a website in 1999 that was redeveloped in 2020. CAM's President, Secretary-General and members have presented at numerous international conferences and published occasional papers such as *The Manual for Children in African Museums* (2011), presentations from the triennial symposia and regional workshops as well as articles in various international, Commonwealth, and museology publications.

CAM has long had a particular focus on Indigenous curatorship in post-colonial societies witnessed by support of the Museums Association of the Caribbean's 1993 regional workshop in Belize on *Museums, Ethics and Indigenous Peoples: Taking the Initiative*, the 1994 triennial *Curatorship: Indigenous Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies* held in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada; and the first resolution adopted at the 1995 program in Botswana which was "that CAM should enhance its communications strategy to further the development of a discourse of post-colonial museology in the next three years."

In 1995, CAM President Emmanuel Arinze developed a three-year plan that set CAM's direction to the present day. CAM held its first meeting in Africa that year, a seminar in Botswana and South Africa on *Museums and the National Identity: Ideas, Issues and Applications.* CAM was the first organisation to welcome South Africa into the free world, and acknowledged that, "For museums primarily concerned with the colonial past, change is critical to encompass the full range of South Africa's cultural and natural heritage to foster cultural identity, reconciliation and nation building."[5] Delegates discussed the challenges in working with collections that had been established by colonial administrators and were inadequate to reflect cultural diversity and *amasiko*, the intangible cultural heritage of oral tradition, rituals and customs. Chief Emeka Anyaoku, then Secretary-General of the Commonwealth addressed the delegates, saying: "The world needs organisations such as the Commonwealth which show how different people can be brought together, not in order to make them similar but to foster understanding, cooperation and development within the framework of diversity."[6]

In May 1996, CAM met with ICCROM-PREMA (Preventive Conservation in Museums of Africa), the West African Museums Programme (WAMP), and the Southern African Development Community Association of Museums and Monuments (SADCAMM) to identify priority areas for cooperation with African museums and conditions for development of networks to support common programmes. WAMP signed an agreement to collaborate with CAM as a 'sister organization' and promoted the development of museums in the fifteen countries of West Africa.

Since 1997 CAM, with funding provided by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Young Canada Works at Building Careers in Heritage Programme operated by the Canadian Museums Association, has provided opportunities for young Canadian museologists to intern in museums and related organisations throughout the Commonwealth. These internships provide invaluable international work

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[4] Editorial, Amareswar Galla, *CAM Bulletin*, No. 1, January-April, 1996, p. 1.

[5] *CAM Bulletin*, No. 2, February 1986.

[6] *CAM Bulletin*, No. 1, January-April, 1996, p. 4.

experience in the museum field for recent graduates and have benefitted CAM as well as the host institutions in Africa, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, India, and the United Kingdom.

The late Nelson Mandela, then President South Africa, and Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal of Guyana, former Secretary General of the Commonwealth, became CAM patrons in 1997 in acknowledgement of their roles as global leaders and supporters of cultural heritage. The Cowrie Circle was introduced in 1998 to honour prominent museologists in the Commonwealth who have contributed to CAM and to museum development in their own countries and internationally. The cowrie shell was chosen as CAM's symbol because it "is a true example of 'Common Wealth' which is shared across our Commonwealth. It is an object of value and an object of meaning. CAM has selected this symbol to represent our common heritage and to represent a continuum from past to future as we work to contribute 'something of value' to our international museum community."[7]

CAM's programme *Children in African Museums: The Undiscovered Audience* in Nairobi, November 1997, highlighted the museum's relationship with children and the need to listen to children, their parents, teachers, and caregivers in developing programmes for children and youth in rural and urban, school and non-school environments. CAM subsequently founded the Group for Children in African Museums (GCAM), a network of people interested in making museums 'children-friendly' and helping to link museums and museum professionals, to support and promote children's programs, and share ideas and programs across the continent and beyond. Doreen Nteta of Botswana said that, "For African museums this has been revolutionary."[8]

CAM held a triennial meeting on the theme of *Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21st Century* in Barbados in May 1999. With the belief that museums "can no longer continue to remain silent on such critical issues," the symposium focused on how museums "can and should use their resources to contribute to global Peace, true Democracy, good and effective Governance in the 21st Century"[9] an initial attempt to encourage museums to "tackle the challenging issues of the contemporary world from the museum perspective. This topic was and is controversial as many museum professionals do not see these concerns as an important role of museums. Others feel strongly that museums as institutions which operate on behalf of society and for the public good, must use their knowledge and resources, their programmes and collections to related to the more critical issues of their time on local, national and global levels in order to be institutions for the development of society and agents for change."[10] CAM adopted the Bridgetown Declaration which stated that "CAM endeavours to be a potent force within the international museum community concerned with peace and democracy, and an instrument in finding the best ways of integrating peace and democracy and related issues into our museums. In the process CAM will be an advocate for the promotion of peace, democracy and good governance through Commonwealth museums."[11] As a result of this meeting and the GCAM workshop in Nairobi, CAM organised an exhibition of children's art titled *What Peace Means to Me* in 2002.

AFRICOM (the International Council of African Museums) was established in October 1999 in Lusaka, Zambia with the support of a number of related organisations, including CAM whose President Emmanuel Arinze spoke about training activities. In September 2001, GCAM 2 in Nairobi addressed the theme *The Friendly Museum: Managing Children's Programmes* in African Museums. This workshop

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[7] *CAM Bulletin* 2, February 1996.
[8] Correspondence to Catherine C. Cole, April 16, 2013.
[9] *CAM Bulletin*, No. 4, May 1998.
[10] *CAM Bulletin*, No. 6, February 2000.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 15.

built the 1997 workshop and explored current thinking about children's programmes. GCAM and the Program for Museum Development in Africa (PMDA) collaborated to to develop an action plan for children and African museums.

When UNESCO adopted the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* in 2001, CAM asked "But what of museums? What is our response to the crisis around us?"[12] CAM met in Liverpool in 2003, with the theme *Museums in the Commonwealth: Global Vision, Local Mission,* ably expressed by Rudo Chitiga, Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, who spoke of the role that Commonwealth Associations, particularly museums can play: "The museum, I think, has a key role in the empowerment of people…the museum is a centre where people can reaffirm their belief in their abilities…All my life when I felt there were too many things coming from all directions that I couldn't cope, I always went to the Great Zimbabwe Monument to spend a weekend there…and just look and see that there are people of my Mother's tribe who built this, therefore, it is in my genes to do great things or to succeed." [13] She argued that the museum could inspire and stabilize community members, acting as memory in places where those who would normally transit cultural memory and knowledge had passed away.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and now the Sustainable Development Goals, have been addressed by Commonwealth museums. The Liverpool Declaration stated that CAM would "develop strategies which strengthen capacities and encourage partnerships between museums, and between museums and communities/constituencies…in response to the UN Millennium Development Goals."[14] CAM identified wide-ranging directions regarding peace-and slavery-related initiatives, the protection of cultural and intangible heritage, professional development, the status of women in museums of the Commonwealth, disaster planning and mitigation, inclusion of marginalised groups, community-led strategies, cultural diversity and equity, biodiversity and sustainability. Many of these themes have been addressed in the years before and since.

Realizing the Dream: Reaching the Children in Africa in Blantyre, Malawi in 2005 and *The Creative Museum: African Museums Using Culture for the Development of Children and Youth* near Stanger, South Africa in 2009 continued the work of GCAM. In 2005, CAM extended its youth focus into the Caribbean with the development and administration of a survey on the current status of educational programming in Caribbean, gathering and analysing curricula related to culture and heritage, and planning a workshop to initiate a strategy for children's programming in the Caribbean. CAM organised a meeting in The Bahamas in 2007 in conjunction with *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Resources, Research and Education in Caribbean Museums,* an event held by the National Museum of the Bahamas to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

CAM continues to support Commonwealth values; in 2005 CAM President Martin Segger noted that CAM was dedicated to supporting the Commonwealth's programme for promoting diversity, civil society and social cohesion. He suggested the need for museums "to rejoin the diversity debate at the policy, practical and professional levels worldwide, and with some urgency" and suggested, "Perhaps a role for CAM, representing a coalition of countries which have seriously addressed the implications of immigration, racial discrimination and armed conflict, could start by developing a catalogue of best

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[12] *CAM Bulletin,* No. 7, November 2001, p. 2.

[13] *CAM Bulletin,* No. 8, February 2007, p. 4.

[14] *Ibid*, p. 6.

practices for a museology of social tolerance and understanding. Do museum in the developing world have something to teach those in the developed world?" [15] he asked.

CAM supported a symposium on *Pacific Museums and Sustainable Heritage Development* organized by the Australian National University in Canberra in 2006 that gave CAM the opportunity to gain considerable knowledge about Commonwealth museum needs and development in the South Pacific. Recent CAM workshops and symposia include: *Museums & Diversity* in Georgetown, Guyana in 2008; *Rethinking Museums* in Mumbai India in June 2010; and *Commonwealth Museums: Culture, Economy, Climate Change and Youth* in partnership with the National Heritage Board, Singapore in May 2011.

In 2001 CAM initiated a Cultural Heritage Project which from 2005 proceeded in partnership with the Commonwealth Lawyers' Association and the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, McGill University. It expanded to include intangible heritage and examined the capacity of museum and heritage professionals in smaller Commonwealth countries to access and utilize international conservation laws, protocols and interstate agreements. The first report of the Cultural Property Project was completed in 2010-2011 and was provided to the International Advisory Committee and Commonwealth Lawyer's Association.

Since 2013, CAM has organised triennial general assemblies in Glasgow (2014) on *Taking it to the Streets;* Calgary (2017) including a *Study Tour of Indigenous Heritage Sites in Southern Alberta, Indigenous Heritage Roundtable* and *Museums* and *Nation Building Symposium*; and *Living Forward, Looking Back: Museum Practice for Postcolonial Future* at the South African Museum in Cape Town (2020); as well as regional workshops related to projects *Migration:Cities Ⅰ (im)migration and Arrival Cities* in Mexico City and Athens (2017) and Frankfurt (2018); and *Human Remains Management* in Cape Town (2017), Windhoek, Namibia (2018) and Gaborone, Botswana (2019). Other regional workshops include *Access in Museums in South Asia* in Jaipur (2016) and in Jodhpur (2019), and *Museum Education in the Caribbean* in Barbados (2015); *Disaster Risk Management in the Caribbean* in The Bahamas (2013); and *Museum Education in the Pacific: Building Resilience to Climate Change* in Fiji (2018), all in collaboration with international partners.

CAM continues to provide a postcolonial forum for museologists throughout the Commonwealth and to encourage museums to use their resources, their collections, exhibitions, programmes and expertise to address the Sustainable Development Goals.

Past-Presidents
David Ride, Australia, 1974-1980
Frank Greenaway, United Kingdom, 1980-1983
Duncan Cameron, Canada, 1983-1989
Lois Irvine, Canada, 1989-1992
Sadashiv Gorakshkar, India, 1992 -1995
Emmanuel Arinze, Nigeria, 1995-2005
Martin Segger, Canada, 2005-2011
Rooksana Omar, South Africa, 2011-2017 [Martin Segger pro-tem 2011-2013]
Richard Benjamin, United Kingdom, 2017-2020
Rachel Erickson, Canada, 2020-

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[15] *CAM Bulletin,* No. 8, February 2007, p. 2.