Museum Ethnographers Group

The **Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG) Conference and AGM** will take place at the **Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford** on **23–24 April 2026**. The conference is organised by **Rethinking Relationships**, an **Arts Council England**–funded programme that seeks to develop new forms of museum practice grounded in equitable collaboration with descendant communities.

Calls for "equitable collaboration" now circulate widely across museums. Yet collaboration remains uneven, fragile, and often constrained by institutional hierarchies, colonial legacies, funding structures, and professional norms. This conference asks what collaboration *actually does,* both inside museums, and for the communities who choose to collaborate. What does collaboration fail to do/undo?

We invite contributions from those who are collaborating with museums, as well as museum professionals and academics, that critically examine both the **possibilities and limits** of equitable collaboration in contemporary museum practice. While *Rethinking Relationships* focuses on working with African partners, this conference is **not geographically limited**. We welcome proposals engaging with collaborative work in any regional, institutional, or disciplinary context.

Rather than celebrating collaboration as an unqualified good, we are interested in work that grapples with tension, refusal, compromise, and disruption.
What happens when collaboration exposes incompatible expectations, unequal risks, or conflicting claims to authority? When does collaboration redistribute power, and when does it merely repackage it?

Themes for papers and discussion might include (but are not limited to):

- **Partnerships and access**: barriers, conditions, sustainability, and the uneven costs of collaboration
- **Multiple perspectives**: interpretation, disagreement, and managing conflict between communities, institutions, and individuals
- **Institutional constraint**: navigating colonial legacies, governance structures, and professional accountability
- **Creative and artistic responses**: collaboration as method, critique, or disruption
- **Cross-museum working**: infrastructures, solidarities, and limits of institutional cooperation
- **Disruption**: moments when collaboration unsettles institutional routines, narratives, or authority

We particularly welcome papers that reflect critically on practice, ask uncomfortable questions, or challenge established collaborative models rather than simply reproducing them.

Participants wanting to contribute **a twenty minute paper** should send a proposal of not more than 250 words and a 50 word biography. Please include a short biography of 50 words and send both to RethinkingRelationships@prm.ox.ac.uk by 5pm on the 5th of March.

Call for Films
In addition to traditional formats, **we also warmly invite submissions of short films**, which will be screened alongside films created in collaboration with the Pitt Rivers Museum within a dedicated workshop space. **With a limit of 5 minutes**, these works will be presented without formal introductions by their creators, providing an informal and engaging opportunity to share and encounter work that resonates with the conference's core themes

Conference Bursaries:
Two UK bursaries are aimed at people working (paid or voluntary) or wanting to work in UK museums, without institutional support to attend the Conference, with up to £300 each for Conference fee, membership, travel, accommodation, and food. Applications are especially welcome from people who have been historically marginalised, including scholars who are women, BAME, LGBTQI+, disabled or have a long-term health condition, first generation scholars, carers, unemployed etc.

We ask that individuals in receipt of the MEG bursary write up their recollections of the conference in a blog for the MEG website (by the end of June 2025).
If you are interested in applying for a bursary, please fill in the form found on the MEG website at https://museumethnographersgroup.org.uk/conference/, which will include a statement of up to 500 words to by 19 March 2026. Please state why you want to attend the MEG Conference, the title of your paper or panel (if applicable), how attendance will benefit your study/work, and how you will share your learning. Applications will be assessed on the perceived benefits of attending and the fit with MEG's aspirations.

Rethinking Relationships are working in partnership with members of the African Diaspora and people from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana. Our partners include heritage professionals, community members, researchers, artists, diaspora groups and academics. Our work and outcomes are tailored to the specific contexts of the museums and our partners.

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