

The Eugenic and Racist Ideas of Flinders Petrie

11th September 2020, 6-8pm (BST)

via Zoom

The main aim of this event is to initiate an ongoing discussion with the Friends of the Petrie Museum, and other attendees, on the challenges presented by the eugenic and racist ideas of Flinders Petrie.

The Friends of the Petrie Museum are committed to advancing the education of the public and to promote public understanding of the history, archaeology and culture of the Nile Valley and surrounding regions, by support of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology and its collections, and promoting academic research, or otherwise. As such it is essential that we discuss Petrie's eugenic and racist ideas in a frank and honest manner and this event is intended as a first step in the discussion of these issues by first providing a factual introduction to these ideas and their legacy, at UCL, in Egyptology, and beyond.

The event will begin with a lecture by Debbie Challis on Petrie's views and their legacy within Egyptology and British society. This will be followed by responses from Joe Cain (UCL) who was part of the Eugenics Inquiry at UCL and Egyptologist and archaeologist Fatma Keshk. A final discussion will consider some of the issues — such as the name of the Museum — and how the Friends of the Petrie Museum can address some of them, with questions from the audience.

Lecture Abstract, Debbie Challis

What's in a name? On 19 June 2020 UCL announced that it was renaming buildings and lecture theatres named after the prominent eugenicists Karl Pearson and Francis Galton. This move has come after several years of debates and campaigns by students and academics within and outside of UCL as well as an official inquiry into the history of eugenics at UCL that published its findings in February 2020.

William Matthew Flinders Petrie is most known - where known at all - as an archaeologist and pioneering excavator in Egypt and what was then known as Palestine in the early twentieth century. Petrie was also an eugenicist and a racist. This event explains those views and places them in historical context but underlines that people at the time, for example the African American activist W. E. B. DuBois, challenged Petrie over them. It also attempts to make clear why such views from the past have consequences today as well as why UCL has taken the decision to address its historic promotion of eugenics and racial science.

Aims:

- To provide evidence of Petrie's racist and eugenic views
- To contextualise these views within the social and political history of the time
- To illustrate how these prejudices informed Petrie's analysis of the ancient world
- To give voice to people who challenged Petrie and his racist analysis
- To signpost the legacy of this racism within Egyptology and in British society today

The subsequent discussion will be partly guided on questions from attendees, but it is hoped will cover or address the following topics:

1. The name of the Petrie Museum and why this may change
2. The legacy of Petrie's eugenic and racist ideas (in Egyptology, Egypt, and British Society)

3. Positive actions and commitments from the Friends of the Petrie Museum to continue to support the Museum, Egyptology, and the public in an inclusive way in light of this problematic legacy.

This is an open public lecture and all are welcome. Numbers are limited but Friends have a priority booking opportunity so **please sign up before 5pm on the 7th September** via <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-eugenic-and-racist-ideas-of-flinders-petrie-tickets-116865179899> to guarantee a place. (Previous registration for the Zoom lectures does not automatically guarantee a place).

There will be an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the event, but we are also collating questions in advance so as to cover as many topics as possible during the discussion. If you want to send any questions, or want any further information about the event (or have difficulty with Eventbrite) please e-mail Chloë Ward (chloe.ward.11@ucl.ac.uk). Attendees will be provided with more details about the running of the event, where to send questions, and a literature review on some of the topics addressed. **Please note that you must sign up in advance to be provided with your unique Zoom link and code.**

Debbie Challis is Education and Outreach Officer at LSE Library. Debbie previously worked as UCL Public Programmer at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology where she also curated the *Typecast: Flinders Petrie and Francis Galton* exhibition on the relationship between Petrie and Galton and the influence of eugenics and race on Flinders Petrie. Debbie is the author of *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (2013), <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-archaeology-of-race-9781780934204/>.

Joe Cain is Professor of History and Philosophy of Biology at UCL, director of the 'Legacies of Eugenics' project, and was a member on the 'Commission of Inquiry into the History of Eugenics at UCL' and the MORE subgroup. For the full report of both the Inquiry and the further recommendations made by the MORE subgroup please go to <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/provost/reports/report-and-recommendations>.

Kandace Chimbiri is an author of Black history books for children; *Secrets of the Afro Comb, 6,000 Years of Art and Culture*, *The Story of Early Ancient Egypt*, and *Step Back in Time to Ancient Kush*. Kandace was born in London in 1968 to parents from Barbados. She founded Golden Destiny Publishing Ltd in 2009, specialising in non-fiction titles for children. This led directly to working with museums on exhibitions. She has worked with the V&A, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and with the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology on the Fusion of Worlds in 2014. http://www.goldendestiny.co.uk/about_the_author.shtml

Tracey Golding needs no introduction to the Friends or to anyone who has visited the museum over the last 20 years to 2018. Starting as a museum assistant to Barbara Adams she rose to become Visitor Services Manager and Volunteer Manager at the Petrie Museum. She is an educator and museum interpreter and has facilitated many specialist group visits to the museum. Actively involved in the many projects the museum has run involving the BAME community she is well-placed to discuss community responses to the Petrie Museum.

Fatma Keshk is an Egyptologist, archaeologist, and PhD researcher at the Free University of Berlin and has been part of several outreach projects with local communities across Egypt. Fatma is also the founder of 'The Place and the People' which promotes local heritage and community engagement in Egypt, <https://www.facebook.com/The-Place-and-the-People-2315808581791112/>.