

PRESS RELEASE

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

People of India

Photographic Exhibition at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry
26 September 2014 – 11 January 2015

A remarkable photographic exhibition, **People of India**, is set to open at Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in September 2014.

People of India presents a series of extraordinary photographs drawn from three immense collections - two historical, one contemporary - created at key moments in India's history. Together these official, personal and historic images invite the viewer to compare the ways in which the people of India have been documented over the last 150 years.

At the heart of the exhibition is a series of striking contemporary portraits by Coventry based photographer Jason Tilley. Taken between 1999 and 2009, Tilley's black and white studies document a personal journey through India made possible by travel grants from Arts Council England. Tilley's personal and cultural explorations, often re-tracing his grandfather's footsteps, are presented through a series of portraits of the people he met, befriended and often re-encountered over a decade travelling through the urban and rural landscapes of India.

Tilley says, "These sometimes very brief encounters, or in many cases, re-encounters with people I had known for a number of years, were made with very little direction from me. I simply sought to capture an essence of their spirit as I found them."

Tilley began his photographic career in 1987 as a staff photographer at the Coventry Citizen, going on to work for the Coventry Evening Telegraph, Birmingham Post and Mail, and a wide range of national newspapers and magazines, before embarking on this decade-long project.

Tilley's journey was inspired by an archive of family photographs taken by his Anglo-Indian grandfather, Bert Scott. Scott worked as a press photographer for The Times of India newspaper from 1936 to 1940 and then as head of the Indian Army's photographic unit in Burma during the Second World War. These roles gave him unique access to record a defining moment in British-Indian history, including the very last days of the Raj. Scott's press, family, social and army photographs bear witness to everyday and official life in India up to the point when, risking their lives travelling through the violence of Partition, his family left India in 1947 carrying their precious family photographs with them.

Finally the exhibition presents a series of ethnographic images from the seminal 19th century photographic undertaking *The People of India* on loan from the Library of Birmingham, who have also supported Tilley's ten year project. The origins of this study, published between 1868 and 1875, lay in the British government's desire to create a visual record of 'typical' physical attributes and characteristics of Indian people: a reference work to assist them in understanding and then

controlling the Indian population under British rule. Tilley established a remarkable personal link to this publication when he discovered that a distant relative, the Reverend E Godfrey, was one of the photographers who contributed to *The People of India*.

John Falconer, Curator of Photographs at the British Library, said of the exhibition:

"Within a tradition of humane and engaged portrait photography, Tilley has evolved a distinctive and impressive personal style, engaging with his subjects in a manner which is uncompromising, unpatronising and often humorous.

His work is also intriguingly situated within the larger historical narrative of Indian photography, explicitly inviting comparison with the 19th century attempt to record and tabulate the ethnic variety of the subcontinent, which saw publication in The People of India (1868-75), and also with the photographs of his own grandfather in the 20th century."

Admission to the exhibition is free of charge. Find out more at www.theherbert.org.

This exhibition is a partnership between the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Jason Tilley and the Library of Birmingham.

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Editors Notes:

1. The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum is managed by Culture Coventry. The Trust also manages Coventry Transport Museum, the Lunt Roman Fort and Priory Visitor Centre.
2. The Herbert was awarded the Guardian's Kids in Museums Family Friendly Award 2010.
3. The Herbert was awarded the Godiva Best Family Venture Award in 2010.
4. The Herbert was shortlisted for the Art Fund Prize 2010.
5. The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum is a non profit making charity. All proceeds from this exhibition, donations or retail sales go towards maintain FREE entry to our gallery, our work with the local community and maintaining our collections for future generations.
6. Last year the Herbert welcomed over 309,000 visitors.
7. The Herbert Art Galley & Museum's opening hours are:
Galleries: Monday to Saturday 10.00am – 4.00pm and Sunday 12.00pm – 4.00pm
History Centre: Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am – 3.30pm
Herbert Café: Monday to Saturday 9.00am – 5.00pm, Sunday 12.00pm – 4.00pm
8. The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum's mission is to bring history and the arts to life for the people of Coventry; this is done through the many projects and initiatives run by the Learning, Social Inclusion and Media departments. For more information please visit www.theherbert.org.

PRESS CONTACT

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