

PRESS RELEASE**On Their Own: Britain's child migrants****24 October 2015 – 12 June 2016**

The publicity photographs show children smiling into the camera and waving from the decks of ocean liners bound for new homes thousands of miles away, but their subsequent stories tell of lonely, isolated and brutal childhoods that were a shattering consequence of Britain's child migration schemes.

Between 1869 and 1970 an estimated 100,000 British children were sent to Canada, Australia and other Commonwealth countries as child migrants, some as young as four years old. These initiatives were run by a partnership of charities, religious organisations and governments, and claimed to offer boys and girls the opportunity of a better life in Britain's Empire overseas. Most never saw their homes, or their families, again.

On Their Own: Britain's child migrants will tell the heart-breaking true stories of child migrants and how the schemes changed their lives. In bringing this exhibition to a major London museum for the first time, the V&A Museum of Childhood will also explore the complex moral backdrop to these schemes.

Gordon Lynch, Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent and contributing curator, says: "*The history of the British child migration schemes provides a compelling insight into how humanitarian schemes have the potential to harm those they claim to help. Whilst some child migrants went on to see their experiences positively, for many their lives were shaped irrevocably by a terrible lack of proper care and, in some cases, truly horrendous abuse.*"

Children were placed in child migration schemes when their family lives were disrupted through poverty, parental death or illness. Single parents also placed their children in care, often unaware that their children would be sent overseas. Their fate depended on how the schemes were run in each country, and whilst some experienced good care with new families others faced isolation and institutional brutality. Many migrants tried to find comfort between these extremes, and some found opportunities in a new life overseas, but all felt the pain of separation from family and home.

On Their Own: Britain's child migrants will feature detailed first-hand stories, photography and personal items which belonged to child migrants, in addition to video and audio packages which recount this period of history. There will also be a series of specially commissioned folk songs by leading British musicians including

John McCusker, Julie Matthews and Boo Hewerdine that capture the reality of child migrants' lives, which visitors can listen to at certain points in the exhibition.

Gordon Lynch continues: *"What is most striking is how long child migration continued after the Second World War given that fundamental problems in these schemes were well known to the British Government. Many issues remain unresolved for former child migrants today and we hope the exhibition will be another step in the process of public understanding of their experiences."*

More than a million people in Canada alone are believed to be descendants of child migrants, and about 2,000 former British child migrants are still alive today across all the Commonwealth countries involved. For those whose lives were touched by these migration schemes, this is not a distant past but a living history. The longstanding work of the Child Migrants Trust, in particular, has brought some comfort to former child migrants, many of whom have found their families and reunited with surviving members.

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Notes to Editor

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Press photographs can be downloaded here: <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>

On Their Own: Britain's child migrants is a collaborative exhibition between the Australian National Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool and V&A Museum of Childhood and supported by additional funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The V&A Museum of Childhood aims to encourage everyone to explore the themes of childhood past and present and develop an appreciation of creative design through its inspirational collections and programmes. The Museum is part of the V&A, housing the national childhood collection.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA

Admission free. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30

Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Tel: 020 8983 5200 www.vam.ac.uk/moc

The Child Migrants Trust was established in 1987 by Margaret Humphreys CBE, OAM; a Nottinghamshire Social Worker. It addresses the issues surrounding the deportation of children from Britain. Campaigning by the Child Migrants Trust has successfully brought the issue of child migration to the awareness of the British public and those of the countries which maintained the schemes, resulting in a formal apology from the Australian and British Prime Ministers, Kevin Rudd and Gordon Brown, in 2009 and 2010, respectively. The Child Migrants Trust has also worked tirelessly to reconcile families who were separated through the

schemes, and has brought about over a thousand reunions over the past few decades. The Child Migrants Trust continues to advocate on behalf of those who were affected by child migration schemes.

Gordon Lynch, is the Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent and researches schemes run by charities and churches that removed children from their families or local communities. His book 'Remembering Child Migration' is due to be published by Bloomsbury in early 2016. He writes and speaks more generally on the effects of people's moral commitments in contemporary society and has previously written for The Guardian and Open Democracy, as well as making several appearances on BBC radio and television. He co-produced a short film on women's experiences of life in Magdalene Laundries which won a national Learning on Screen award in 2014.

Esther Lutman, Assistant Curator at the V&A Museum of Childhood has worked with the Museum collections for over ten years and she specialises in the material culture of childhood. Her areas of expertise include toys, furniture and nursery. Esther has curated a number of high profile exhibitions including 'Space Age: Exploration, Design and Popular Culture' in 2007 and co-curated 'Cut it, Fold it, Build it with Paper' in 2010. She works with researchers, communities and schools to provide access to the Museum's collections and to support the Museum's programming. She has a deep interest in the history of childhood and in telling children's stories through their own voices, which this exhibition on child migration explores. She regularly appears in the media as a spokesperson for the museum.