



**Brief for review of Somerset House’s history
in relation to Britain’s colonial past**

Version		Published Date
1.0		30/09/2020

Contents

Background to Somerset House Trust..... 3

The current historical narrative 3

Brief and Scope of the review 3

Outputs 4

Timeline..... 4

Available Resources 4

Who are we are looking for? 5

Process and Applications 5

Background to Somerset House Trust

Somerset House is London's working arts centre, built on historic foundations around one of the most beautiful courtyards in Europe. Situated in an iconic Grade I listed, neo classical building, famous as the 18th century architect William Chambers' seminal masterpiece, we are home to the UK's largest and most exciting creative community.

Since 1997 the building has been repurposed as a venue for the arts. We are now home to 70 artists, each with their own subsidized studio space, Makerversity, our Creative Careers Academy, a business community made up of over 200 independent enterprises, and our neighbours, The Courtauld Institute and Kings College. We welcome 3 million annual visitors to share this unique combination of public events, creative enterprise, and artistic practice.

Dedicated to championing openness, nurturing creativity, and empowering ideas, we are committed to supporting new work by emerging artists, while striving to embrace the biggest issues of our times.

The current historical narrative

As outlined in [our anti-racism pledge](#), Somerset House Trust wants to interrogate the history of Somerset House and its role in Britain's colonial past, updating what is currently understood and making this widely available.

To our knowledge, the historical information about Somerset House readily available in the public domain largely represents white historical perspectives. There is a lack of clarity on the impact of the current and previous building, and the legacy of those who have occupied it over its 400+ year history, on the lives of people of colour. In undertaking this work, we aim to broaden the historical understanding of Somerset House, to make it a more open and accessible space for all.

There are two examples of existing historical narratives. A primary, publicly available, information point for Somerset House is [the historical outline published on our website](#). This consists of a listing of what we currently understand to be landmark dates for the site, running from the original Somerset House palace in 1547 up to the modern day. Alongside this is the Somerset House Guidebook, a seventy-page book detailing the history and current use of the site.

Brief and Scope of the review

As well as reviewing the history currently available, the individual/s will undertake research into the social, political and economic context of the buildings and its occupants on the site.

This would cover both the Tudor palace built by the Duke of Somerset and the current government buildings initiated by King George III, with a particular focus on the impact of the building on the lives of people of colour. This should include research into why and how the buildings were originally built, the institutions and organisations who have been based at Somerset House (including the British navy) and the wider historical context within which it has operated.

We are particularly keen to highlight areas which may be omitted from what can be widely read. In re-examining the history of Somerset House, we anticipate highlighting omissions and areas where context is lacking. We do not expect this initial review to be exhaustive, but rather the starting point or an overview for what we anticipate will be an ongoing project.

The brief should result in a central document, which will be used by Somerset House as the basis for updating how we talk about our history going forward. Our in-house marketing department will interpret these facts for a wide variety of audiences online and in the building, such as our website, in signage and tour information. We may also use the document as a basis for anti-racism training, staff inductions, and commissioning artists to make new work.

Outputs

- To produce a central document of no more than 4000 words exploring the history of Somerset House and its relation to Britain's colonial past, with accompanying bibliography. The content would start with the original palace but would primarily focus on the existing buildings.
- To produce a short list of recommendations for further research.

Timeline

Deadline for Expressions of Interest	9 December
Appointment	21 December
Sharing of draft	February 2021
Sharing of final document	March 2021

Available Resources

There is no formal archive, but you will be provided with all currently published materials that Somerset House has, including:

- Somerset House and the Navy – A volunteer produced document detailing the history of Somerset House with a focus on Naval Links.
- Somerset House The History – A hardback book of 131 pages, covering the historical background and the transformation of Somerset House
- The Somerset House Guidebook
- Plaques, historical signs, and information boards within Somerset House
- Paintings, murals, statues, as well as the limited archival material found within Somerset House
- Access to our Young Producers, who are also exploring our history to create a new digital work in collaboration with resident design studio Comuzi
- Access to the Somerset House Trust staff and Trustees as you need.

Who are we are looking for?

We are looking for an individual or group with experience of conducting historical research and analysis within a social context. It will be particularly beneficial to have performed this in the broader context of race and colonialism. You will have a qualification and recognition in a related field and have demonstrated the ability to combine your historical research into a cohesive written account.

Process and Expressions of Interest

It is envisaged that the project should be completed within 4 months and the total fee will be £2,000 excluding VAT. We understand that the current COVID-19 pandemic precautions may cause difficulties with the accessing of archive and research materials. Any reasonable delays as a direct result of COVID-19 can be evidenced and presented as an amendment to a final delivery timeline.

We appreciate that different historians will bring with them very different areas of specialist knowledge and are likely to approach the brief differently. We see this as an initial piece of work which may highlight further areas for exploration, so we do want to hear from people even if their experience and proposed direction might change the scope outlined to some extent.

If you would like to be considered to work on this review, please submit the below items:

- A short outline of how you would approach the brief (250 words max)
- A summary of experience with examples of relevant previous works (250 words max or a CV)

In appointing, we will consider experience and track record alongside proposed method and ability to deliver. The final appointment will be made in collaboration with Somerset House's Anti Racism Task Force, who have devised this brief.

Somerset House is keen to encourage a wide range of respondents. If you have specific access needs that require support, or you wish to present your interest in a different way, please contact us.

Applications and queries can be submitted to: change@somersethouse.org.uk