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## Dr. Livingstone's Lost 1871 'Massacre' Diary recovered

### Discovery rewrites history after 140 years

140 years ago in Africa, David Livingstone, the Victorian doctor, missionary and explorer, gave Henry M Stanley a harrowing account of a massacre he witnessed, in which slave traders slaughtered 400 innocent people. Stanley's report of the massacre in the world press would prompt the British government to close the East African slave trade, and secure Livingstone's place in history.

Today an international team of scholars and scientists, led by Dr Adrian Wisnicki, publishes the results of an eighteen-month project to recover Livingstone's original account of the massacre. The story, found in a diary that was illegible until restored with advanced digital imaging, offers a unique insight into Livingstone's mind during the greatest crisis of his last expedition, on which he would die.

Livingstone had once been a national hero. But when he wrote his diary, he had been forgotten by the public and was stranded without supplies in Central Africa. A dedicated writer, he made ink from berry seeds and wrote over the pages of a single copy of the *London Standard* – the precursor to today's *Evening Standard*. Exposed to the African environment, the manuscript deteriorated rapidly and today is virtually invisible to the naked eye.

The diary depicts, in Livingstone's words, 'the unspeakable horror' of the slave trade in what is now the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. It provides an eye-witness account of the shocking massacre, perpetrated by armed slave traders in Nyangwe, a Congolese village. The event forced Livingstone to change his travel plans and led to his famous meeting with Stanley. When Stanley returned to England and America his reports on the massacre in the world press hastened the closure of the East African slave trade and made Livingstone a hero.

The massacre is one of the most important events in *The Last Journals of David Livingstone* (1874), edited after Livingstone's death in 1873 by his friend Horace Waller. Until now this book was the main source for historians and biographers. However, critical and forensic analysis of the original 1871 text reveals a very different story from Waller's heavily edited version. In particular it sheds light on a heart-stopping moment when Livingstone gazes with 'wonder' as three Arab slavers with guns enter the market in Nyangwe, where 1500 people are gathered, most of them women.

*'50 yards off two guns were fired and a general flight took place – shot after shot followed on the terrified fugitives – great numbers died – It is awful – terrible, a dreadful world this,'* writes Livingstone in despair as he witnesses the massacre. *'As I write, shot after shot falls on the fugitives on the other side [of the river] who are wailing loudly over those they know are already slain – Oh let thy kingdom come.'*

Dr Wisnicki, assistant professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and honorary research fellow at Birkbeck, University of London, says, 'Evidence in the diary suggests that members of Livingstone's party might have been involved in the massacre. Livingstone seems to have considered this possibility and this, together with his failure to intervene, appears to have left him with a profound

sense of remorse. In copying over the 1871 diary into his journal, Livingstone decided to rewrite or remove a series of problematic passages. His revised journal account, on which the 1874 book is based, did not reflect his original record. It's taken 140 years to discover Livingstone's original words and reveal the many secrets of the original diary.'

The original account of the massacre – which Dr Wisnicki analysed with contributing editor, Dr Debbie Harrison, also an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck – is just one of many passages in the 1871 field diary that is significantly different from the 1874 book. 'Livingstone would never have published this private diary in his own lifetime,' says Dr Wisnicki. 'In particular his attitude to the liberated slaves in his entourage is one of disgust – an attitude greatly at odds with his public persona as a dedicated abolitionist.'

Dr. Wisnicki anticipates that the publication of the 1871 diary will change the way history interprets Livingstone's legacy. 'Instead of the saintly hero of Victorian mythology, the man who speaks directly to us from the pages of his private diary is passionate, vulnerable, and deeply conflicted about the violent events he witnesses, his culpability, and the best way to intervene – if at all.'

Spectral imaging, the process used to recover Livingstone's original text, involves illuminating the manuscript with successive wavelengths of light – starting with ultraviolet, working through the visible spectrum, and ending with infrared. Processed digital images enhance the selected text.

The scientific and technical team, led by Mike Toth of R.B. Toth Associates, an expert in technical studies of cultural objects for museums and libraries, includes Keith Knox, Roger L. Easton Jr., Bill Christens-Barry, Ken Boydston, and Doug Emery. Imaging and data support was provided by Kate Simpson, a PhD student at Edinburgh Napier University. Together the scholars and scientists involved in this interdisciplinary project help usher in a new era of academic endeavour, in which advanced imaging technology is applied to the study of nineteenth-century manuscripts.

Toth says, 'The results of this diary project, which enhanced Livingstone's faded handwriting and suppressed the underlying printed text, demonstrate the significance of the spectral imaging process for the digital recovery of damaged and old manuscripts. By making the results available online, the project helps preserve the original diary, which is too fragile to be made available to the public.'

*Livingstone's 1871 Field Diary* is funded by the British Academy and the US National Endowment for the Humanities, and is a free online public resource published by the UCLA Digital Library Program in Los Angeles (<http://livingstone.library.ucla.edu/1871diary/>).

**Ends**

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**\*Free Public Event: Dr. Livingstone's Lost 'Massacre' Diary**

Saturday 5 November, 2-4pm, Birkbeck, Clore Management Centre, Bloomsbury

Book here: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/about-us/events/dr.-livingstones-lost-massacre-diary>

#### Notes to editors:

**Analysis, images for download, and details about collaborating institutions can be seen here:** <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/news/dr.-livingstones-lost-1871-massacre-diary-recovered>

**Academic project team:** project director Dr Adrian S. Wisnicki, contributing editor and medical historian Dr Debbie Harrison, and research assistant Kate Simpson, together represent the pioneering Victorian scholarship of Birkbeck, Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), and Napier University of Edinburgh.

**Scientific and technical team:** led by Mike Toth of R.B. Toth Associates, an expert in technical studies of cultural objects for museums and libraries, the team comprises imaging scientists Keith Knox, Roger L. Easton Jr. and William Christens-Barry, data manager Doug Emery, and camera engineer Ken Boydston. Members of the scientific team have worked on previous projects in support of major manuscript studies, most notably the Archimedes Palimpsest ([www.archimedespalimpsest.org](http://www.archimedespalimpsest.org)) at the Walters Art Museum, palimpsests at St. Catherine's Monastery, and manuscripts at the US Library of Congress, including drafts of the US Declaration of Independence and President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

**Digital publishers:** The UCLA Digital Library Program (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/2627.cfm>), the publisher of the diary, coordinates the creation, management, and delivery of digital content in support of the UCLA Library's mission and goals. The program, led by Stephen Davison, digitizes and publishes online content drawn from the university's collections and engages with U.S. and international partners to build innovative digital collections, services, and technologies.

**Diary manuscript:** The manuscript has been carefully preserved by the National Trust for Scotland's David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre (<http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/23>). Further segments of the diary and additional letters are held at the National Library of Scotland, the largest repository of Livingstone documents in the world (<http://www.nls.uk>). These institutions collaborated with the project team to help bring the 1871 diary to the light of day.

**Project sponsors:** The project would not have been possible without the generous funding provided by the British Academy (<http://www.britac.ac.uk>) and the US National Endowment for the Humanities (<http://www.neh.gov>).