

**NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE**

**Embargoed until 00:00 on Monday 8 March**

**Hold yer tongue**

National Trust for Scotland asks whether the days of the dark and deeply misogynistic scold's bridle are truly a thing of the past on International Women's Day

A barbarous instrument of torture, originating in Scotland, and used from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is being highlighted by conservation charity, the National Trust for Scotland on International Women's Day (8 March). The device is a chilling reminder of the steps taken to silence women in the past and offers pause for consideration on the inequalities still suffered by women today.

The scold's bridle, which can be found in the collection at Craigievar Castle in Aberdeenshire, consists of a headpiece made of iron, opened by hinges at the side to enclose the head, with a flat piece of iron projecting inwards that was used to press the tongue down and hold it still.

Whilst the scold's bridle was never a legalised form of punishment, it was employed by town councils, kirk sessions and barony courts in Scotland, who assumed a right to use it. These institutions were set up by men who inflicted the device on women who were said to be 'nagging', gossips or opinionated.

This instrument has the dubious honour of being responsible for the saying 'hold your tongue' – it is a visceral reference to the metal plate that held a woman's tongue down.

Once the bridle was placed on the woman, she was then led through the streets in order to humiliate the wearer. Bystanders would jeer, hurl insults, throw objects, spit at and even urinate on women whilst chained. Perhaps even more cruelly, a woman who was forced to wear the bridle at home, as a deterrent to her children, presenting a terrifying picture with the distortion of her features and probable laceration of her tongue and lips.

Vikki Duncan, Curator at the National Trust for Scotland, reveals why this item is a reminder that the gendered pattern of discrimination is still alive today. She said, "Women have always had to fight to have their voices heard. The scold's bridle is a reminder that in the past women could be physically silenced. Many women struggle to be heard, not just at home but also in the workplace.

"Women might recognise having to stop themselves from saying something that they'd really like to say, using the expression: 'I had to bite my tongue'. This is another expression with its origin in the scold's bridle and its literal suppression of speech.

"It is generally acknowledged that the scold's bridle has been consigned to history. On International Women's Day, let us all, men and women, raise our voices in support of women being heard and listened to and let's really consign the bridle to history."

Discover more stories from the National Trust for Scotland at [www.nts.org.uk/stories](http://www.nts.org.uk/stories).

ENDS

Issued on behalf of National Trust for Scotland by Frame PR. For media enquiries contact:

Mamta Kakaiya, 07876 835 744, [Mamta.Kakaiya@framecreates.co.uk](mailto:Mamta.Kakaiya@framecreates.co.uk)

Gregor Kyle, 07415 537 087, [gregor.kyle@framecreates.co.uk](mailto:gregor.kyle@framecreates.co.uk)

**Editor's Notes:**

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, the National Trust for Scotland exists to protect the national and natural treasures we all love. To plan your visit today, enter your postcode at [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

We would be grateful if, when referring to the National Trust for Scotland that our name is not shortened to 'the National Trust'. We are an independent organisation, separate from the National Trust. The National Trust for Scotland is commonly shortened to NTS or 'the Trust'.

