



# Remembering 1807: Lessons from the Archives

by *John Oldfield and Mary Wills*

The commemorations of 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, it has been claimed, amounted to a ‘Wilberfest’: a celebration of Britain’s abolitionist traditions (personified by the MP William Wilberforce) to the extent that all other considerations of Britain’s dominant role in the transatlantic slave trade before 1807 were overshadowed, if not ignored entirely. Much of the blame for this has been attributed to the official national narrative played out in parliament, government publications and the popular press in 2007, which was often misleading (conflating ‘slavery’ with the ‘slave trade’, for example), or else manipulative, as witness how ‘1807’ was utilized as part of the then Labour Government’s emphasis on ‘social cohesion’.<sup>1</sup> According to this view, 2007 was a missed opportunity. While the bicentenary represented a watershed moment in that it provided funding, time and space for organizations and individuals to research and represent the history of transatlantic slavery, the focus on abolition within a commemorative framework, it has been argued, inhibited a deeper and more sustained critical engagement with the subject.

This article is not a critique of the official narrative in 2007, nor is it about the well-publicized exhibitions put on by UK museums and other heritage institutions in that year: much excellent scholarship has already been devoted to these themes.<sup>2</sup> Instead, it suggests that we take a closer look at how Britons marked the bicentenary, highlighting the diverse and often innovative projects organized by heritage organizations and community groups around the UK. We also argue that what happened in 2007 should be regarded as a beginning, rather than an end. Looking forward, there are other anniversaries and commemorative moments relating to transatlantic slavery that will soon be upon us, among them the bicentenary in 2033 of the Emancipation Act of 1833 (the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape) and in 2038, the bicentenary of the 1838 Act to abolish the apprenticeship clause (considered by many to represent the true ‘end’ of slavery in the Caribbean).<sup>3</sup> This article argues that rather than being dismissed for its shortcomings, 2007 should be seen as a pivotal moment in

*University of Hull*  
*University of Hull*

*John.Oldfield@hull.ac.uk*  
*marycwills@hull.ac.uk*

our nation's public history, one that in many cases opened up new ways of confronting the legacies of British involvement in transatlantic slavery.

What follows is based on research drawn from *Remembering 1807*, a digital archive launched in 2017 and produced by researchers at the University of Hull.<sup>4</sup> The resource contains data on nearly 350 events and exhibitions that took place around the UK in 2007, collected via consultations with heritage organizations and community groups, and through targeted searches online and in national and local repositories.<sup>5</sup> Some of these bicentenary events were self-funded. A large proportion of them, however, were funded from the Heritage Lottery Fund's commitment of a substantial sum (between £15 and 20 million) between 2006 and 2008, made available to museums, libraries, archives, universities, galleries, theatres, churches, schools, local history societies, youth groups, community groups, filmmakers and others.<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 1) *Remembering 1807* captures the full range and diversity of these projects, while at the same time archiving the surviving materials and making them available in a readily accessible format.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, it provides researchers with the first comprehensive guide to how Britons remembered 1807, illuminating what the UK chose to remember about transatlantic slavery in 2007, and just as importantly, what the nation chose to forget.<sup>8</sup>

As Catherine Hall has argued, 2007 started a 'national conversation' on slavery and the politics of race, and provoked new questions over collective memory: what was to be remembered and how?<sup>9</sup> *Remembering 1807* endorses this view. While it is true that many 2007 projects up and down the country celebrated the achievements of Wilberforce and other abolitionists, others were much more hard hitting, particularly those that highlighted the role of transatlantic slavery in hitherto unexplored areas of British history, in local stories and in broader narratives of Britain's commercial, military and imperial expansion. As we shall see, many community-led projects also drew attention to the lasting legacies of slavery: prejudice, discrimination, racism. Equally striking was the emphasis on resistance and what the enslaved did to free themselves. Others celebrated the Black presence in Britain, or else sought to identify and preserve archives of Black history. Some of these projects were admittedly small in scale, nevertheless they had a significant impact, challenging observers and participants to rethink the boundaries of slavery and abolition in Britain's public history.

#### 'GENTLEMEN SLAVERS': BRITAIN, WEALTH AND ENRICHMENT<sup>10</sup>

Several projects organized in 2007 encouraged a consideration of how and where the vast profits generated from the rise in demand of slave-produced goods like sugar, coffee and tobacco was spent. This honest appraisal of Britain's role in transatlantic slavery (and the huge material benefits accrued to the nation) provided a counterpoint to the focus on abolition and the celebratory mood of the 'better times we live in today', in the words of then



Courtesy of Marian Gwyn.

**Fig. 2.** Local schoolchildren at the exhibition *Sugar and Slavery – the Penrhyn Connection*, at Penrhyn Castle in Wales, which threw light on the Pennant family's fortune, built on Jamaican sugar.

Prime Minister Tony Blair. Many of Britain's landowning families owned or invested in slave-worked plantations in the Caribbean, as revealed in the histories of some of Britain's stately homes.<sup>11</sup> For example, *Re:interpretation*, a partnership project between the National Trust and the creative education company Firstborn Creatives, exposed linkages with the transatlantic slave trade in the histories of several National Trust properties in the South-West, by utilizing creative media and supporting community research. At Harewood House in West Yorkshire, several interrelated projects highlighted the wealth accrued by the Lascelles family in the eighteenth century from their slave-worked estates in Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada and Tobago. Examinations of this legacy included a large-scale production of *Carnival Messiah* in the house grounds. Similarly, the *Bittersweet* exhibition at Tissington Hall in Derbyshire examined life on four Jamaican sugar plantations inherited by the FitzHerbert family.<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 2)

The complex historical legacies of this wealth are tied up in the development of British industry and commerce. Victorian cities and merchant entrepreneurs of Britain's Industrial Revolution grew rich from lucrative trading relationships with slavery at their heart, such as cotton, tobacco, guns and ships. The *Cotton Threads* project in Bury was not alone in exploring the links between Britain's booming textile industry in North-West England and the importation of cotton from the slave-worked plantations of the United States; *Hetty, Esther and Me*, for example, a play written and performed by school pupils at Quarry Bank Mill in Styal, centred on the connections between slave-produced cotton and child labour in English mills.<sup>13</sup> In the Midlands, exhibitions such as *Sugar Coated Tears* at Wolverhampton Art



Courtesy of Woburnhampton Art Gallery.

**Fig. 3.** Photographer Vanley Burke and blacksmith Lofty Wright collaborated on the *Sugar Coated Tears* exhibition to explore the links between the iron industry and the production of implements of restraint and punishment.

Gallery (Fig. 3) and *Trade Links: Walsall and the Slave Trade* examined how the area's industrial history was entangled in empire and slavery in the problematic legacies of the city's gun, chain, iron, and tool manufacturing industries.<sup>14</sup>

Several bicentenary initiatives examined the subtle forms of enrichment from slavery, infiltrating all corners of the social and cultural development of British life. *Bittersweet: Sugar, Spice, Tea, Slavery* by Gateway Gardens Trust, for example, examined links between the slave trade, sugar, cotton and tea, in the financing of many gardens of grand houses in Wales. Initiatives by the Bath Preservation Trust looked at how connections to plantations in the Caribbean enhanced the luxury of eighteenth-century life in Bath, through objects, paintings and furniture. Traces of the history of transatlantic slavery can be found in architectural heritage and landmarks. *'It Wisnae Us!' Glasgow's built heritage, tobacco, the slave trade and abolition* by Glasgow Built Preservation Trust assessed the impact of the tobacco and sugar trades on the built environment of Glasgow in an exhibition and city trail.<sup>15</sup> Part of the *Slaves and Highlanders* project by Cromarty Courthouse Museum involved the placing of a plaque in the former Royal Northern Infirmary (now the executive office of the University of the Highlands and Islands), which remains one of the few public acknowledgements of the use of profits from slavery to fund charitable public institutions. In Bristol, St Stephen's was once the city's harbour church, which effectively 'blessed' slave trade ships leaving the prosperous port, and which benefited from slave merchants' donations. This history was acknowledged in the *Reconciliation Reredos* project, from which a new altarpiece for the church was commissioned, exploring the mercantile connections that the city was built on.

Other projects highlighted the careers of individuals involved in the trade: the slave trader Captain Hugh Crow in the exhibition *A Necessary Evil* at Manx National Heritage Library and Archives, for example, or Royal African Company investor Sir Josiah Child at Redbridge Museum. Others made connections with slavery in the histories of prominent individuals not usually associated with the trade in human lives – Sir Henry Tate, for example, one of the most notable philanthropists of the nineteenth century. A group of young men from the ORIGIN Rites of Passage Programme in Brixton produced the documentary *In Search of Henry Tate* about Tate's legacy and the tensions inherent in his acts of generosity being funded by wealth derived from sugar production. *1807 and Tate* at Tate galleries in London, Liverpool and St Ives examined similar themes in connection with the philanthropist. These and other projects mapped in *Remembering 1807* exemplify an important theme of commemorations in 2007 in the un-savoury legacy of enrichment and material benefits arising from a system built on cruelty and subjugation. This theme, shifting the narrative to Britain's association with the business of slavery, has been developed in other public history explorations since the bicentenary year, notably *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* at University College London (identifying British slave-owners) and the *Global Cotton Connections* project, which examined the legacies of cotton manufacturing in the Derbyshire Peak District.<sup>16</sup>

#### 'HIDDEN HISTORIES' AND LOCAL STORIES<sup>17</sup>

A further avenue of interest for bicentenary projects was an engagement with the histories and experiences of local communities, as museums, archives and heritage organizations sought to demonstrate the meaning and relevance of the history of slavery to British localities.<sup>18</sup> Projects linked local people, places, and institutions to the larger national and international histories of slavery and anti-slavery via local abolitionists, African residents, merchants and landowners, buildings and street names, local businesses and manufacture. Importantly, there was a new awareness of slavery's contribution to British history beyond the port cities of London, Bristol, Liverpool and Hull. *Remembering 1807* maps these connections to slavery and the slave trade across diverse regions of the UK, from rural Wales to Essex, Guernsey to the Yorkshire Dales, Bromley to Aberdeen. A number of books were published illuminating local themes.<sup>19</sup> The heritage walk or trail was a popular way of shedding light on this local history, taking place for instance in Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Camden, Croydon, Deptford, East Riding of Yorkshire, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Hull, Ipswich, Lambeth, Lancaster, Leyton, Liverpool, Musselburgh, Newcastle, Southwark, Sunderland, the West India Docks and Westminster. Extensive research projects in the North East of England and East Anglia utilized local archive collections to uncover extensive local involvement in slavery and abolition.<sup>20</sup> In many ways this approach is unsurprising. The

study of local history is one of connection, pride and meaning; many organizations tied their commemorative projects to ‘a sense of place’, to borrow from the title of Bristol Libraries’ *Bristol 1807* initiative, in order to understand the relevance of slavery to the history of their town or area in 1807 and today.

Close analysis of individuals and family connections excavated wider themes, in particular previously untold stories relating to the local Black British presence, a growing field of historical enquiry.<sup>21</sup> Several projects looked at people of African descent who lived and worked in Britain as servants.<sup>22</sup> Edward Juba, for example, was a former slave who rose from being the servant of Lord Wentworth to become the first Black Freeman in the City of Leicester.<sup>23</sup> Samuel Mudian worked as a butler at Carshalton Park House in the London Borough of Sutton for George Taylor, owner of plantations in St Kitts and Nevis. Evidence of the favour in which he was held is found in Taylor’s will, by which Mudian is left £50 on the condition that he was living with Taylor at the time of his death.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, local researchers in Bishop’s Castle attempted to learn more about the occupant of an unnamed grave in the local churchyard, dedicated in 1801 to ‘I.D., a Native of Africa’.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, *Myrtilla’s Trail* at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum explored local links with the slave trade through the Warwickshire gravestone of Myrtilla, described in 1705 only as ‘Negro slave to Mr Tho. Beauchamp’.

Via their connections to a particular place, other bicentenary projects celebrated the histories of Black residents. George John Scipio Africanus (1763–1834), for example, was Nottingham’s first recorded Black entrepreneur, starting the employment agency ‘Africanus Register of Servants’. Nottinghamshire Archives and MLA East Midlands produced web resources for teachers and learners based on his life. *The Wickedest of Cargoes* exhibition by the London Borough of Newham Heritage Service featured the story of Kamal Chunchie, originally from Ceylon, who set up the Coloured Men’s Institute in Canning Town as a place where Black residents and their families could meet. A touring exhibition, *Dorset’s Hidden Histories*, by DEED (Development Education in Dorset) explored 400 years of the stories of people with African and Caribbean heritage across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole. The lives of Black men and women who lived in or visited Yorkshire were explored by the Diasporian Stories Research Group in the publication *From Africa - Baht’ at: African Heritage in Yorkshire* (2007). For example, the Fisk Jubilee Singers toured Britain in the late nineteenth century, raising money to build a University for African-Americans; one of the singers, Thomas Rutling, settled in Yorkshire.<sup>26</sup>

Highlighting connections to an individual was a popular way to uncover local links to slavery, and many local histories chose to focus on the work of abolitionists with associations in a particular area: William Wilberforce (Hull), Thomas Clarkson (Wisbech in Cambridgeshire) and John Newton (Olney in Buckinghamshire) being the obvious examples.<sup>27</sup> There were other

projects which gave a voice to less well-known contributors to the abolitionist cause, many of them Quakers, including: William Dillwyn and Priscilla Wakefield (*Links and Liberty* at Bruce Castle Museum); Dr Robert Jackson and the Pease family (*Slavery Here!* by Stockton Museums Service); John and Samuel Fothergill (*The Wickedest of Cargoes* by London Borough of Newham Heritage Service); the Baptist missionary William Knibb (*1807–2007: End of Slavery* at Manor House Museum, Kettering); and the Reverends Thomas Burchill, Newman Hall and James Sherman (*Abolition Voices from Abney Park* by Abney Park Cemetery Trust). Female abolitionists were also celebrated, including Elizabeth Heyrick (at Abbey Pumping Station Museum); Sarah Bowdich-Lee (*Bexley: The Slavery Connection*); and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*Unfair Trade* by Herefordshire Museums). In *Interwoven Freedom* by Sparkbrook Caribbean and African Womens Development Initiative (SCAWDI) in collaboration with English Heritage, participants drawing on earlier female abolitionist tradition made and distributed workbags filled with anti-slavery manifestos. *Women and Abolition* by CETTIE (Cultural Exchange Through Theatre in Education) and Yaa Asantewaa Arts and Community Centre explored the role of Black women in the abolitionist movement, particularly the work of Mary Prince and Phillis Wheatley.

Without doubt, Olaudah Equiano was the most prominent individual of African descent to feature in bicentenary initiatives. The former slave who became an author and abolitionist had whole projects and exhibitions dedicated to studying his life and work, and was mentioned in many others.<sup>28</sup> Equiano married a local woman from Soham in Cambridgeshire, hence the focus on his story in *Soham at the Time of the Abolition* (a partnership project between Soham Village College, Soham Museum and Soham Action 4 Youth). Local connections were employed to tell the stories of other Black abolitionists and writers. The author Ignatius Sancho, for example, born in 1729 on board a slave ship, featured in *Trading in Lives: The Richmond Connection* (he had once lived in the town) and *Young Runaway Slaves* at the V&A Museum of Childhood. At Epping Forest District Museum, the film *The Longest Journey* detailed the life of autobiographer James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw: captured into slavery as a child in present-day Nigeria, once freed he travelled to England where he lived and worked in Colchester. Enslaved in West Africa as a boy, Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1807–91) was released from a slave ship when it was intercepted by a Royal Navy anti-slave-trade patrol. He and his family were resettled in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where he attended the Church Missionary Society's school and then college; he later became the first African bishop of the Anglican church. His story featured in two projects (*Crowther's Journey* by Southwark Pensioners Black History Group and the exhibition *Samuel Ajayi Crowther: From slave boy to African national hero* at Islington Local History Centre, celebrating links to where he trained as a minister). The radical preacher and anti-slavery advocate Robert Wedderburn, born in



Jamaica to an enslaved mother and a plantation-owning father, was the subject of a commemoration walk in Musselburgh, organized by the National Trust. The walk ended at the Gardens of Inveresk Lodge, once owned by his father, James Wedderburn.<sup>29</sup>

### ‘FREEDOM FROM THE PAST’: RESISTANCE, COMMUNITY AND LEGACIES<sup>30</sup>

As Lola Young powerfully wrote in 2007, a ‘damaging side effect of the focus on white people’s role in abolition is that Africans are represented as being passive in the face of oppression’.<sup>31</sup> This is a common criticism of slavery and abolition remembrance in the UK: that historically the popular narrative has too often ignored Black agency on Caribbean or US plantations.<sup>32</sup> Rebellions and insurgencies were endemic to slave societies in the British Caribbean, exemplified by uprisings in Jamaica in 1760 and 1831, in Barbados in 1816 and Demerara (today’s Guyana) in 1823. No initiatives in 2007 had these rebellions as their sole focus, but it was a theme acknowledged by many, not least in the narratives addressing ‘Resistance and Rebellion’ now digitized by Anti-Slavery International’s *Recovered Histories* project. The Haitian Revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century was understandably selected by bicentenary projects as the most famous Black-led revolution of them all, and its leader, Toussaint L’Ouverture, featured as the personification of resistance. So, too, did Nanny of the Maroons, leader of a community of formerly enslaved Africans called the Windward Maroons, who formed independent communities in the Jamaican interior in the early eighteenth century. For example, *Freedom Think Tank* was a Black-led voluntary group established to influence the agendas of those organizations in North-East England commemorating the bicentenary. Focusing on themes of social solidarity and raising the awareness of Black people in abolition, images of L’Ouverture and Nanny of the Maroons were prominently displayed on their publicity.

Such projects reflected a determination, in some quarters, to celebrate a different kind of abolitionist hero. The *Bicentenary Freedom Flag* was produced by Manchester City Council Corporate Services Black Staff Group in collaboration with pupils of Trinity Church of England School in Manchester. The flag featured individuals of African descent who had fought to bring the transatlantic slave trade to an end, positioned on the background of the Sierra Leone flag. They included L’Ouverture and Equiano; the American former slaves turned abolitionists and activists Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Elizabeth Freeman; ‘Bussa’ of Barbados, leader of the 1816 rebellion; Joseph Cinque, leader of the ‘Amistad’ slave ship revolt; and the African-American writer and activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. In reply to the official series of bicentenary stamps produced by the Royal Mail, the Pan-African human rights organization Ligali produced a set of ‘Freedom Fighter’ stamps, as part of their response to promote African perspectives of the bicentenary. Alongside

L'Ouverture, Tubman and Nanny of the Maroons, the stamps featured Queen Nzingha of Ndongo, Gabriel's Rebellion in Richmond (US) in 1800 and the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831 in Virginia.<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, the role of African freedom fighters in resistance efforts was the focus of *Abolition Truths*, a series of debates hosted by BTWSC (Beyond the Will Smith Challenge) in North-West London, and the publication *Abeng Soundings: Abolitionist Landmarks of our Freedom March*, co-authored by Esther Stanford-Xosei as part of her work on the Southwark 2007 & Beyond Steering Group.<sup>34</sup>

Several projects explored other forms of resistance deployed by Africans under enslavement, focused on expressions of culture, religion and spirituality. For example, images of 'Africa, Slavery and Resistance' were presented in the *Blind Memory* exhibition by Ziba-Ufa, a project led by the African Community Council for the Regions. The research publication *Slavery and the Natural World* by the Natural History Museum discussed resistance through traditional uses of plants and medicine for everyday survival (as poisons, for example). The various means by which the enslaved resisted their slavery via celebrations of African and African-Caribbean culture were examined in, amongst others, *Sounds of Slavery* by River Niger Arts in Liverpool and *Sing Freedom* by a collaboration of Kaine Management, Leicester African Caribbean Arts Forum and Leicester City Council. Similar themes were explored in projects which focused on the tradition of quilting. *In Stitches*, organized by the African Families Foundation, brought together British, African and African-Caribbean women's quilting groups meeting in London, Liverpool, Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham to produce a quilt (designed by Janice Gunner) depicting historic figures, scenes and artefacts associated with the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition. Commemorative quilts were also produced by the *Slavery Here!* project (a collaboration between Stockton Museums Service and Newtown Community); the Freedom Quilters of Wisbech; and the Quaker Quilters of Norwich Quaker Meeting.

Many of these initiatives were examples of community activism, which arguably lay at the heart of 2007's bicentenary commemorations, as many projects sought to examine the contemporary relevance of 1807 and transatlantic slavery to the UK's diverse communities.<sup>35</sup> Such responses around the UK were varied, from photography (the *Freedom Roads* exhibition by London Metropolitan Archives at Guildhall Art Gallery featured contemporary photographic portraits of people of African descent whose work has contributed to the struggle for human rights); to community radio broadcasts (*Three Continents, One History* led by the African-Caribbean Millennium Centre explored the historical links between Birmingham, the slave trade, colonialism and the Caribbean); to film (*The Living Memory Lab* involved people from local communities in Plymouth making short films on slavery and abolition).<sup>36</sup> The quest for different perspectives was clear. To take one example, Leicester's *Black History Season* in 2007 marked the

bicentenary with an aim to redress the 'Eurocentric point of view' of abolition with a focus on the 'Afrikan perspective'; the theme of the season was 'Souls of Black Folk'. Another prominent point of interest was the preservation of community archives, memories and family histories. *Bristol Black Archives Partnership* collected documents, objects and photographs from Bristol's African-Caribbean population and organizations and made them accessible via Bristol City Council's main archive collections. Family history, experiences and cultural responses of twenty-five African and Caribbean families in the North-East was the focus of the *Changing Perspectives* by North East England African Community Association. Leicester Libraries collected oral histories about health and healing from African Caribbean people passed down through the generations in the *Calabash* project.

Explorations of identity were a key theme of the bicentenary, particularly in youth projects. In *The Adisa Project: Bristol Faces, Afrikan Footsteps* (a collaborative partnership project between Bristol Museums and local youth and community groups) twenty young people of African and African Caribbean heritage researched the history and legacy of Bristol's involvement in the trade in enslaved Africans, and went on a two-week trip to Ghana to learn about the country's history and culture. For *Road to Freedom*, Eastside Community Heritage worked with young people from West Ham and Stratford to explore the significance of the bicentenary in the context of their own history in London and in British history more widely. Research at various museums led to the production of a documentary-drama and a touring exhibition. Youth initiatives focused on resisting the legacies of slavery made creative use of film and music. *Video ART (Anti-Racist Trails) Postcards* explored connections between slavery, colonialism and contemporary issues of racism in the West India Docks area of London using video 'postcards' for self-expression.<sup>37</sup> *Hidden Histories* by Ground Up Development worked with young people from South London to examine the impact of the African diaspora using film, creative workshops, and visits to heritage sites. Some projects tied racism to other forms of prejudice. For example, the educational resource pack *A' Adam's Bairns?* from the National Library of Scotland and the Scottish Development Education Centre explored equality and diversity in Scotland, and looked at attitudes and behaviours linking racism, sectarianism, prejudice and ignorance.<sup>38</sup>

Collaborations between Black community groups and heritage organizations occurred frequently in 2007, as community consultation was regarded as an essential part of informing and improving mainstream heritage interpretations. One of the largest collaborative community initiatives was the *Leeds Bicentenary Transformation Project* by Leeds West Indian Centre, with a focus on commemorating the Abolition Act by 'highlighting African achievement, liberation and aspirations'. It brought together community groups, churches, local activists and the University of Leeds. As Project Director Carl Hylton commented: 'One advantage of the

commemorations was that groups who never talked to each other now had a reason to'.<sup>39</sup> Community consultation was also a major component of many projects, amongst others, *Parallel Views: Black History in Richmond* (Orleans House Gallery), an exhibition and community engagement programme; *Beyond the Bicentennial, 1788–1838: Exploring 50 Years of the Slave Trade* (Peterborough Museum and the Peterborough branch of the African Caribbean Forum), which interpreted museum objects and made local connections to the era of abolition; and *Norfolk's Hidden Heritage*, which researched the links between Norfolk, transatlantic slavery and Black heritage.<sup>40</sup> *Freedom From the Past: Long Time Coming* was a collaboration between the Northamptonshire Black History Association (NBHA), English Heritage and local schools and churches. The NBHA committee issued a statement in 2007 explaining that 'our commitment was not to a one-off commemoration of slavery, but to the long-term history of Black achievements in Britain and across the world'.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, this question of longevity was one of many issues raised as to the preparedness of heritage institutions for working directly with communities as key 'interpreters' of the historical record. Black community-based and pan-Africanist organizations were able to exert influence over the way in which the bicentenary played out; in particular through consultation networks and events such as the *2007 Cross-Community Forums*, which began in 2005.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as Colin Prescod has argued, many Black community groups registered frustration and disappointment about lost opportunities and feelings of alienation in 2007 and after.<sup>43</sup> As a result, there was a marked reluctance on the part of some Black groups to publicly associate with 'official' bicentenary commemorations.<sup>44</sup>

#### 'CHANGING PERSPECTIVES': LOOKING TOWARDS 2033 AND 2038<sup>45</sup>

Where does this survey of how 1807 was remembered leave us? Heritage responses to Britain's history of transatlantic slavery did not start in 2007, but that year was undoubtedly a milestone, if only because of the unprecedented sums put aside by the British government to mark the bicentenary. The vast extent of commemorative activity relating to transatlantic slavery in 2007 demonstrates how anniversaries are dominant in setting the public history agenda in the UK. In the last few years a plethora of commemorations have ranged from Magna Carta 800, the founding of Parliament, the centenary of (some) women being given the vote, and the very many anniversaries connected to the First World War. In the right circumstances, anniversaries can provide an opportunity for institutions to engage with new and existing audiences. However, there is a danger that well-meaning attempts to mark commemorations concerned with Britain's complex histories of slavery and empire can frustrate and alienate some community groups working in this area. Studies of transatlantic slavery can never be 'history': implicit in such efforts is the central ambiguity of commemorating an 'end' of something that is not itself over, with legacies still very influential.<sup>46</sup> What

is the value of having a year of programmes and events when issues of national identity, racism and diversity remain unresolved?

Any reckoning with the legacies of 2007 must begin with the negatives. Reflecting the ephemeral, funding-dependent nature of most of the projects, relatively few of the initiatives listed in *Remembering 1807* are still in existence.<sup>47</sup> Equally troubling is the fact that a significant number of them have left little or no trace. These projects seemingly have been lost to view. Others have left incomplete records, sometimes only a flyer or a poster. This is particularly the case with musical or theatrical performances, poetry readings and workshops. Remarkably, heritage funders, particularly the Heritage Lottery Fund, did not insist on – or, crucially, provide extra funds for – archival storage or conservation of the events they supported in 2007–08, leaving the burden to fall on local groups that, by definition, were in some cases ill-equipped to respond.<sup>48</sup> As a result, many displays were destroyed, dispersed or left to decay in garages and outbuildings. If 2007 teaches us anything, it is the need for greater collaboration between heritage funders and major repositories such as the National Archives, with their expertise in devising collections policies, including the more extensive use of digital archiving; or, failing that, more support for municipal and county record offices that are sometimes in a position to help but lack the resources to do so.

Many events organized in 2007 were obviously intended as one-offs, in the sense that there was little intention to extend them beyond the bicentenary, or to use them as platforms for further initiatives. These decisions, in turn, were linked to funding opportunities, the prospect of a National Lottery Grant (or equivalent) providing an impetus that could sometimes prove difficult to sustain. Priorities also changed, particularly for larger institutions with one eye on the next ‘big’ anniversary. (Significantly, 2007 was sandwiched between two other important commemorative events, the two hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005 and the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain in 2010.) The media circus moved on, in many cases leaving in its wake not a deeper understanding of the subject at hand – transatlantic slavery – but a reassuring sense that something had been done to mark the anniversary, however fleeting and ephemeral.<sup>49</sup>

Yet this is not the whole story. In other instances, 2007 started a debate that is still alive and kicking. This is perhaps most evident in Britain’s museums. As the outcomes of the 2018 workshop ‘10 Years of the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery: Reflections and Responses’ show, the Museum of London Docklands recognizes the need to continually improve on past attempts to represent this history.<sup>50</sup> The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool is another significant legacy of 2007. As its Director Richard Benjamin writes, the museum used the ‘bicentenary as a springboard rather than being an outcome. This has allowed the museum to develop and broaden its remit and become the campaigning museum it is

today'.<sup>51</sup> Several societies and groups who managed projects in 2007 have since led other initiatives. For example, the Equiano Society, which led *The Equiano Project* in collaboration with Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery in 2007, was awarded funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund to celebrate the 225th anniversary of Equiano's publication *The Interesting Narrative* in 2019 with a series of talks and exhibitions.<sup>52</sup> Equally important are those projects that build indirectly on the legacy of 2007, among them *Untold Stories*, organized by Medway African and Caribbean Association and Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust in 2018, which offered an 'insight into Black history that does not start with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, nor end at its abolition, nor begin with the post Second World War Windrush generation'. This project, and others like it, are reflective of the expansive and inclusive new research into local Black British histories which will have major impact on future anniversaries.<sup>53</sup>

In this sense, the landscape has changed. Even so, there is also a nagging sense that something already has been lost. This is why *Remembering 1807* is so important. Not only does it provide us with a reference point going forward; it also helps us to imagine a future that is significantly different. More than likely, the next major anniversary for remembrance of slavery and abolition among heritage organizations and groups will be 2033, the bicentenary of the Emancipation Act of 1833. Complexities associated with this anniversary start with the date itself, some preferring 1838, which marks the end of apprenticeship in the Caribbean.<sup>54</sup> The subject area will be different too – there was so much emphasis on the slave *trade* in 2007, to the extent that abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself were often confused in the public consciousness. The fact that many Britons remained slave holders after 1807, and continued to invest in the slave trade, will make commemorations more problematic in terms of the celebratory British narrative, as will the £20 million compensation for loss of 'property' paid out by the state to British slaveowners after 1833. Ironically, 2033 will also mark the bicentenary of the death of William Wilberforce, inviting further scrutiny of Wilberforce's legacy. Given these complexities, and the different layers of meaning associated with 1833, it is important to remember where we have come from. The implicit danger here is that we end up reinventing the wheel, whereas what is needed is a more nuanced approach that not only takes into account what happened in 2007 but also what has happened since.

In this sense, the *Remembering 1807* archive can help to (re)orientate future memory work around Britain's role in transatlantic slavery. This necessarily implies learning lessons from what was absent during the bicentenary. To take an example, while abolitionism in its many forms was relatively well covered in 2007, slave agency was given much less attention; all the more significant, given the approaching bicentenaries of the Demerara Rebellion of 1823 and the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the Abolition Act's impact on Africa was rarely discussed, even though the consequences were of enormous significance, marking the beginnings of

colonization by European powers.<sup>56</sup> 2007 also raised – but did not resolve – questions about what forms of slavery should be discussed and remembered. Anti-Slavery International, for example, used the bicentenary not only as a vehicle to promote better understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies, but also as a platform for its campaigns to end contemporary slavery.<sup>57</sup> This emphasis was not without controversy, however, some accusing NGOs and charitable organizations of ‘hijacking’ the bicentenary for their own purposes. Furthermore, while many projects explored 1807 and contemporary forms of unfree labour as bookends in discussing slavery and its legacies, relatively few dealt with the multitude of forms of slavery that bridged the two.<sup>58</sup> Understandably, some commentators bemoaned how the notion of slavery in shaping the UK’s history had to be contained as ‘a singular, shameful episode’. As Roshi Nadoo has argued: ‘For that meaning to dominate, the story of post-slavery forms of exploitative labour must be obscured’.<sup>59</sup>

2007 also saw relatively little discussion of the question of reparations. At the official level, Britain’s overwhelming response was to evade issues of ‘blame’: Tony Blair notably expressed ‘deep sorrow and regret’ about Britain’s role rather than offering a full apology.<sup>60</sup> Stories which emphasize the power relations that remained in place after slavery and the impact of enslavement on British and former colonial societies have proved harder to present as ‘public history’.<sup>61</sup> More recently, a recognition of endowments from the profits of transatlantic slavery has emerged from some UK institutions. The University of Glasgow’s announcement that it benefited from donations amounting to the equivalent of tens of millions of pounds from individuals whose wealth was generated by slavery serves as another reminder of the long and complex money trail behind Britain’s role in the transatlantic human traffic. Speaking to this same point, Geoff Thompson, chair of governors of the University of East London, has said that universities in the UK which benefited in previous centuries from the slave trade should contribute to a £100 million fund to support ethnic minority students.<sup>62</sup> The way that universities, museums, religious bodies and other institutions around the world deal with the legacy of benefactors with links to transatlantic slavery has become a major area of debate. Hence Catherine Hall’s call for ‘reparative history’: a need ‘to develop a different understanding’ of Britain’s involvement in slavery, and recognition of ‘our responsibilities, as beneficiaries of the gross inequalities associated with slavery and colonialism’.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The act of commemoration involves constructions of new meanings about the past, to reflect the public consciousness but also to challenge it. The heritage sector has a responsibility to stress the interconnectedness of past and present, to provide visitors with the tools and knowledge to view history from multiple perspectives. So far from being a ‘Wilberfest’, the *Remembering 1807* archive makes it clear that the 2007 bicentenary enabled

expression of a wide range of concerns relating to transatlantic slavery, among them questions of national identity and historical legacies. Historical research and public history have taken various new directions in the years since 2007, helping to shape further our understanding of Britain's slaving past. As a result, the idea that abolitionism somehow triumphed in the nineteenth century has been thrown open to wider discussion and debate, in recognition of other post-emancipation histories. This trend will continue but, as we have argued, there is an urgent need for past commemorative efforts to inform future ones, not least through engagement with young people, local communities and new audiences. One of the most important lessons of 2007 was that the history of transatlantic slavery is intertwined in all aspects of British history. Looking forward, commemorations can provide tools and knowledge to affect public debates about slavery, and to contribute, in Lola Young's words, to this 'shared understanding of overlapping histories'.<sup>64</sup> But to do this effectively those responsible for organizing such events need to engage critically with past memory work, just as they need to understand which versions of the past they wish to commemorate.

**John Oldfield** is Professor of Slavery and Emancipation at the University of Hull and former director of the University's Wilberforce Institute. His books include *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: an International History of Antislavery, c. 1787–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and *'Chords of Freedom': Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester University Press, 2007). He specializes in the history of slavery and abolition in the Atlantic world, 1750–1850.

**Mary Wills** is an Honorary Fellow of the Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull, and was formerly a Postdoctoral Research Fellow there as part of the Antislavery Usable Past project. She is the author of *Envoys of Abolition: British Naval Officers and the Campaign Against the Slave Trade in West Africa* (Liverpool University Press, 2019).

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807–2007*, HM Government, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See, amongst others, 'Remembering 1807: Histories of the Slave Trade, Slavery and Abolition', Feature in *History Workshop Journal* 64: 1, 2007; 'Remembering Slave Trade Abolitions: Reflections on 2007 in International Perspective', special edition of *Slavery and Abolition* 30: 2, 2009; James Walvin, 'The Slave Trade, Abolition and Public Memory', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19, 2009, pp. 139–49; Emma Waterton, Laurajane Smith, Ross Wilson and Kalliopi Fouseki, 'Forgetting to Heal: Remembering the Abolition Act of 1807', *European Journal of English Studies* 14: 1, 2010, pp. 23–36; John Oldfield, '2007 Revisited: Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery', in *Ambiguous Anniversary: the Bicentennial of the International Slave Trade Bans*, ed. David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis, Columbia SC, 2012, pp. 192–207.



3 Slavery was abolished on 1 August 1834 but only children under the age of six were freed immediately under the Emancipation Act of 1833. Slaves in the Bahamas and Antigua were also freed at this point. All other former slaves were bound, as apprentices, to their former masters for periods up to a further six years.

4 <http://antislavery.ac.uk/remembering1807>. The resource is a major collection on the Antislavery Usable Past digital archive.

5 Each entry in *Remembering 1807* contains information about the individual project's themes and outputs, its geographical scope, and the organizations and groups involved. Materials produced by each project have been collected and, where possible, are freely available to view and download with the permission of the authors. All project titles listed in italics in this article can be found in the *Remembering 1807* archive.

6 Heritage Lottery Fund, 'Remembering Slavery in 2007: a Guide to Resources for Heritage Projects', 2005. *Remembering 1807* also includes projects funded by other national and regional funding bodies, including Arts Council England.

7 Sadly, much of the material produced in 2007 has already been lost. Part of the rationale of *Remembering 1807*, therefore, was to scope the full extent of what happened in 2007 while also identifying gaps in the archive.

8 *1807 Commemorated* (<https://www.york.ac.uk/1807commemorated/index.html>), based at the University of York, analysed seven of the major bicentenary exhibitions and produced toolkits on community consultation, audience responses, and the challenges of exhibiting this history and curatorial experiences. *British Slave Trade Legacies* (<https://archive-it.org/collections/866>), a web archiving project, collected websites and online material relating to the bicentenary.

9 Catherine Hall, 'Doing Reparatory History: Bringing "Race" and Slavery Home', *Race & Class* 60, 2018, pp. 3–21.

10 *Gentlemen Slavers* by London Borough of Sutton Archives examined how the influence of wealth generated by the slave trade was present in many aspects of Sutton's local history and development.

11 A theme explored by English Heritage in 2007; further findings were published in *Slavery and the British Country House*, ed. Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann, Historic England, 2013.

12 See also *The Long Road to Freedom* research project by the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, which revealed how many of Leicestershire's landowning families had investments in sugar plantations in the Caribbean.

13 See also the many outputs of the *Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery* partnership of eight heritage bodies in Greater Manchester.

14 Andy Green, 'Remembering Slavery in Birmingham: Sculpture, Paintings and Installations', *Slavery and Abolition* 29: 2, 2008, pp. 189–201.

15 See also the *Sweet History?* youth project and educational heritage trail, which explored the social and economic impacts of the sugar and slave trades on various sites in Bristol, available at <http://www.sweethistory.org/>, accessed 10 Feb. 2019.

16 [www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs); <https://globalcottonconnections.wordpress.com/>, accessed 10 Feb. 2019.

17 A popular theme in the archive, 'Hidden' features in the titles of at least ten projects, including: *Bromley's Hidden History*; *Carnival: the Hidden Truth*; *Dorset's Hidden Histories*; *Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories*; *Hidden Connections: Ulster and Slavery 1807–2007*; *Hidden Histories: Stockport and the Slave Trade*; *Hidden History of the Dales*; *Hidden Stories*; *Norfolk's Hidden Heritage*.

18 Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Bringing it Home: Making Local Meaning in 2007 Bicentenary Exhibitions', *Slavery and Abolition* 30: 2, 2009, pp. 259–75; *Britain's History and Memory of Transatlantic Slavery: Local Nuances of a National Sin*, ed. Katie Donington, Ryan Hanley and Jessica Moody, Liverpool, 2017.

19 For example, Todd Gray, *Devon and the Slave Trade*, Exeter, 2007; Stephen Mullen, *It Wisnae Us: the Truth About Glasgow and Slavery*, Edinburgh, 2009; *Cargo: Excavating the Contemporary Legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Plymouth and Devon*, ed. Len Pole and Zoe Shearman, Plymouth, 2011; *Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the Campaign against Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution*, ed. John A. Hargreaves and E. A. Hilary Haigh, Huddersfield, 2012.

20 *Remembering Slavery Archive and Mapping Project*, led by Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society; *Norfolk's Hidden Heritage*, Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council, Norfolk Record Office, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

21 Recent works include David Olusoga, *Black and British: a Forgotten History*, Basingstoke, 2016; Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: the Untold Story*, London, 2017; Jeffrey Green, *Black Americans in Victorian Britain*, Barnsley, 2018.

22 It was fashionable in eighteenth-century grand houses to have a Black boy, often dressed in exotic clothes, as a servant or 'blackamoor'.

23 *The Long Road to Freedom*, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. See also John A. Ferguson, "'Massa Very Good to Tony': the Family of Captain William Giles – Encounters with Slavery", Carlisle, 2007, based on a lecture given to the Annual Conference of the Cumbria Family History Society in 2007.

24 Sue Barnard, *Sutton's Connections with the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 2009.

25 *The African's Grave*, Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre.

26 See also *Hidden History of the Dales*, a collaboration between the Dales Countryside Museum and North Yorkshire Record Office, which researched people and places of the Yorkshire Dales connected with Africa, the Caribbean and India. The study of people of African descent in Yorkshire has continued since 2013 with the research project *African Stories in Hull & East Yorkshire*, <https://www.africansinyorkshireproject.com/>.

27 *Wilberforce 2007* was a year-long programme of events from Hull City Council, named after 'son of Hull' William Wilberforce MP. Born and raised in Wisbech, Thomas Clarkson was the subject of *A Giant with One Idea*, an exhibition at Wisbech and Fenland Museum, and the *Slave Trade Abolition in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk* project managed by St John's College, Cambridge University. Clarkson's story also featured in exhibitions at Manchester Cathedral, Suffolk Record Office and Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service; in two plays (*The Ebony Box* by Red Rose Chain Theatre Company and *Breaking the Chain* by Black and White Productions); and a film, *Clarkson*, by Bristol Film and Video Society. The Cowper and Newton Museum in Olney was once home to the poet William Cowper. The Reverend John Newton – formerly master of a slave ship – was Cowper's great friend. The museum's exhibition *From Slave Trade to Fair Trade* involved a reinterpretation of its collections relating to slavery and abolition.

28 *The Equiano Project*, a collaboration between The Equiano Society and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, organized an extensive biographical exhibition alongside other outreach and educational activities. Equiano was also central to the play *Nobody Knows* by Krik Krak Productions. Equiano is the most frequently mentioned individual in *Remembering 1807*.

29 Robert Wedderburn was the subject of a newly commissioned portrait by artist Paul Howard at the *London, Sugar and Slavery* gallery in the Museum of London Docklands.

30 Quoted from *Freedom from the Past: a Long Time Coming* (Churches Together in Northampton, Northampton Black History Association and English Heritage).

31 Lola Young, 'The Truth in Chains': <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/mar/15/race.past>, accessed 10 Feb. 2019. See also Marcus Wood, 'Significant Silence: Where was Slave Agency in the Popular Imagery of 2007?', in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Cora Kaplan and John Oldfield, Basingstoke, 2010: Wood argues that 2007 reproduced visual tropes that led to passive stereotypes of the enslaved.

32 To take an example, the events organized in 1933–4 to acknowledge the centenary of the abolition of slavery (1833–4) invariably presented Emancipation as a 'disinterested act', and rarely acknowledged Black perspectives. See John Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery*, Manchester, 2007, p. 98.

33 The Royal Mail's bicentenary stamps featured Olaudah Equiano, William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, Hannah More and Ignatius Sancho.

34 Funded by Southwark Council, the group was established to promote education and dialogue on anti-slavery resistance and human rights.

35 Eighty-four community projects are listed in *Remembering 1807*, and community participation was a component of many more.

36 *Living Memory Lab* was a partnership between Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council, BBC South West, the community arts agency Creative Partnerships and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

37 Led by Manifesta and the Runnymede Trust. The films can be viewed at <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/video-art-postcards.html>, accessed 10 Feb. 2019.

38 The resource pack can be viewed at <http://www.scotdec.org.uk/aadamsbairns/>, accessed 10 Feb. 2019.

39 Quoted in Rose Roberto, 'Technology Intersecting Culture: the British Slave Trade Legacies Project', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 2008, p. 227.

40 See also the 'Culture Clubs', a series of outreach projects as part of *The Equiano Project*.

41 Quoted at <http://northants-black-history.org.uk/about-us/our-history-so-far>, accessed 10 Dec. 2018.

42 These open meetings held in London were initiated by the African-led organization Rendezvous of Victory, in alliance with Anti-Slavery International and the World Development Movement. Emphasis was on alliance-building in areas connected to the legacies of enslavement and related global injustices.

43 Colin Prescod, 'Archives, Race, Class and Rage', *Race & Class* 58: 4, spring 2017, pp. 80–1. See also Richard Benjamin, 'Museums and Sensitive Histories: the International Slavery Museum', in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space*, ed. Ana Lucia Araujo, New York, 2013; he wrote that disbanding the 2007 Bicentenary Advisory Group (chaired by then Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott), 'was seen by many as a missed opportunity to keep influential organizations and individuals around the table to discuss future events' (p. 185).

44 This was particularly the case in Bristol, where dissatisfaction with *Abolition 200*, the official umbrella project for over 100 events in the city, led to the establishment of *Operation Truth 2007*. See Madge Dresser, 'Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol', *Slavery & Abolition* 30: 2, 2009, pp. 223–46.

45 *Changing Perspectives*, led by North East England African Community Association.

46 See essays in *Ambiguous Anniversary*, ed. Gleeson and Lewis, which compare commemorative activity in the UK and the US. As one local member of Bristol City's Race Forum put it in the run-up to 2007: 'the legacy of slavery needs to be addressed before it is put on display as "history"'. Quoted in Dresser, 'Remembering Slavery', p. 234.

47 The permanent exhibitions still open in 2019 are the 'London, Sugar and Slavery' gallery at Museum of London Docklands; 'The Atlantic Gallery: Slavery, Trade, Empire' at the National Maritime Museum; and the display on the 'Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade in Great Britain' at the Cowper & Newton Museum. *Dorset's Hidden Histories* exhibition is still available for hire. The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool opened in 2007; Wilberforce House Museum in Hull reopened in 2007 after extensive redevelopment.

48 The Heritage Lottery Fund's guide for heritage projects, *Remembering Slavery in 1807*, made no explicit reference to the archiving of bicentennial projects and neither did the information pack sent out to applicants. We are most grateful to Vanessa Salter at Wilberforce House Museum for sharing these documents with us. Current policies are similarly silent on the question of archiving. It is interesting that while the Heritage Lottery Fund provides digital guidance for applicants, it does not insist that projects have a digital dimension, or that they should be preserved in any way. See <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/digital-guidance-applicants>, accessed 25 Feb. 2020.

49 This is not to deny the galvanizing effect of special anniversaries, only to note the time-limited nature of interventions of this kind. Interestingly, in its review of its activities in 2005–7 the Heritage Lottery Fund highlighted 'the perception (erroneous though it may be) that funding for these projects would not be available after 2007, which led to a number of projects abandoning their plans because their projects could not be delivered during 2007'. See 'A Review of the HLF's activity during 2005–2007 to mark the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in British Ships (2007)', March 2009: [https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/research/bicentenary\\_review\\_09\\_.pdf](https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/research/bicentenary_review_09_.pdf), accessed 26 Feb. 2020.

50 Melissa Bennett and Kristy Warren, 'Looking Back and Facing Forwards: Ten Years of the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery', *Journal of Historical Geography* 63, 2019, <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2018.12.004>. Several authors have written about the challenges faced by museums in 2007 in representing the history of slavery, among them Douglas Hamilton, 'Representing Slavery in British Museums: the Challenges of 2007', in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Kaplan and Oldfield, pp. 127–44, and Katherine Prior, 'Commemorating Slavery 2007: a Personal View from Inside the Museums', *History Workshop Journal* 64: 1, 2007, pp. 200–11.

51 Benjamin, 'Museums', p. 193.

52 See <https://equiano.uk/>, accessed 26 Feb. 2020.

53 Quotation from an exhibition panel. See also *Local Roots/Global Routes* (2013–15) and its teaching resources based on the histories of slavery, abolition and the historic Black presence in Hackney; the archive and database project *Runaway Slaves in Britain: Bondage, Freedom and Race in the eighteenth century* (launched 2018) at the University of Glasgow (<https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/>); and *Colonial Countryside* (from 2017), a child-led history and writing project investigating the Caribbean and East India Company connections of ten National Trust houses (<https://colonialcountryside.wordpress.com/>). The project *Windrush Strikes Back: Decolonising Global Warwickshire*, facilitated by the Global Warwickshire Collective (2018 onwards), aims to empower local descendants of the Windrush Generation in Warwickshire with critical tools of historical research. New scholarship in this area is exemplified by the 'What's Happening in Black British History?' series (<https://blackbritishhistory.co.uk/>).

54 On tour since 2014, the *Making Freedom* exhibition by the Windrush Foundation marks Emancipation Day 1838.

55 See recent developments in digital resources related to this history in *Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760–1761: a Cartographic Narrative*, curator Vincent Brown, 2012 (<http://revolt.axismaps.com/>).

56 Diana Paton, 'Interpreting the Bicentenary in Britain', *Slavery and Abolition* 30: 2, 2009, pp. 277–89, at pp. 283–84. *Coveting Africa: the European Desire: People, Land, Wealth* at Bishop's Stortford Museum and Rhodes Arts Complex was one of the few projects that dealt directly with the theme of imperialism in 2007, emerging from the town's connections to the Victorian financier and imperialist Cecil Rhodes. See also *Bombay Africans* by the Royal Geographical Society and *Trade and Empire* at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester.

57 The theme of modern slavery was also explored in theatre; for example, *Dreams of an African Child* by Greenhouse Northwest Theatre Company, which centred on child trafficking in Ghana.

58 Two exhibitions which did make connections were *Breaking the Chains* at the (now closed) British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, which included a section on the post-slavery Caribbean; and an account of the post-abolition movement of indentured labour from Asia to the Caribbean, part of the *Leeds Bi-Centenary Transformation Project*.

59 Roshi Nadoo, 'High Anxiety – 2007 and Institutional Neuroses', in *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagements*, ed. Laurajane Smith, Geoff Cubitt, Kalliopi Fouseki, Ross Wilson, London, 2011, p. 53.

60 David Cameron was similarly evasive on the issue of an apology during his visit to Jamaica in 2015.

61 Diana Paton, 'Interpreting the Bicentenary in Britain', p. 285. See the work of the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Afrikan Reparations (INOSAAR), a collaborative project co-ordinated by the University of Edinburgh and the University of Boston.

62 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-45979234>, accessed 15 Feb. 2019.

63 Catherine Hall, 'Doing Reparatory History', p. 18.

64 Lola Young, 'The Truth in Chains'.

**ABSTRACT**

This article offers new perspectives on the commemorative events organized around the UK in 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807). Drawing from the resources contained in *Remembering 1807*, a digital archive of information about nearly 350 events and exhibitions held in 2007, it offers a closer look at the variety, diversity and creativity of projects organized by heritage organizations and community groups from all parts of the UK. While agreeing that much of the national narrative focused on the celebratory aspects of Britain's role in abolition, we argue that many other projects gave voice to a wide range of concerns relating to transatlantic slavery, challenging participants to rethink the boundaries of slavery and abolition in Britain's public history. This included highlighting the role of transatlantic slavery in hitherto unexplored areas of British history, in local stories and in broader narratives of Britain's commercial, military, and imperial expansion. Other projects drew attention to the lasting legacies of slavery, emphasized stories of resistance or celebrated the Black presence in Britain. Recognizing these other perspectives within the commemorative impulse in 2007 can help us to (re)orientate future memory work around Britain's role in transatlantic slavery.