

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY



The Centre for the study of the
Legacies of British Slavery

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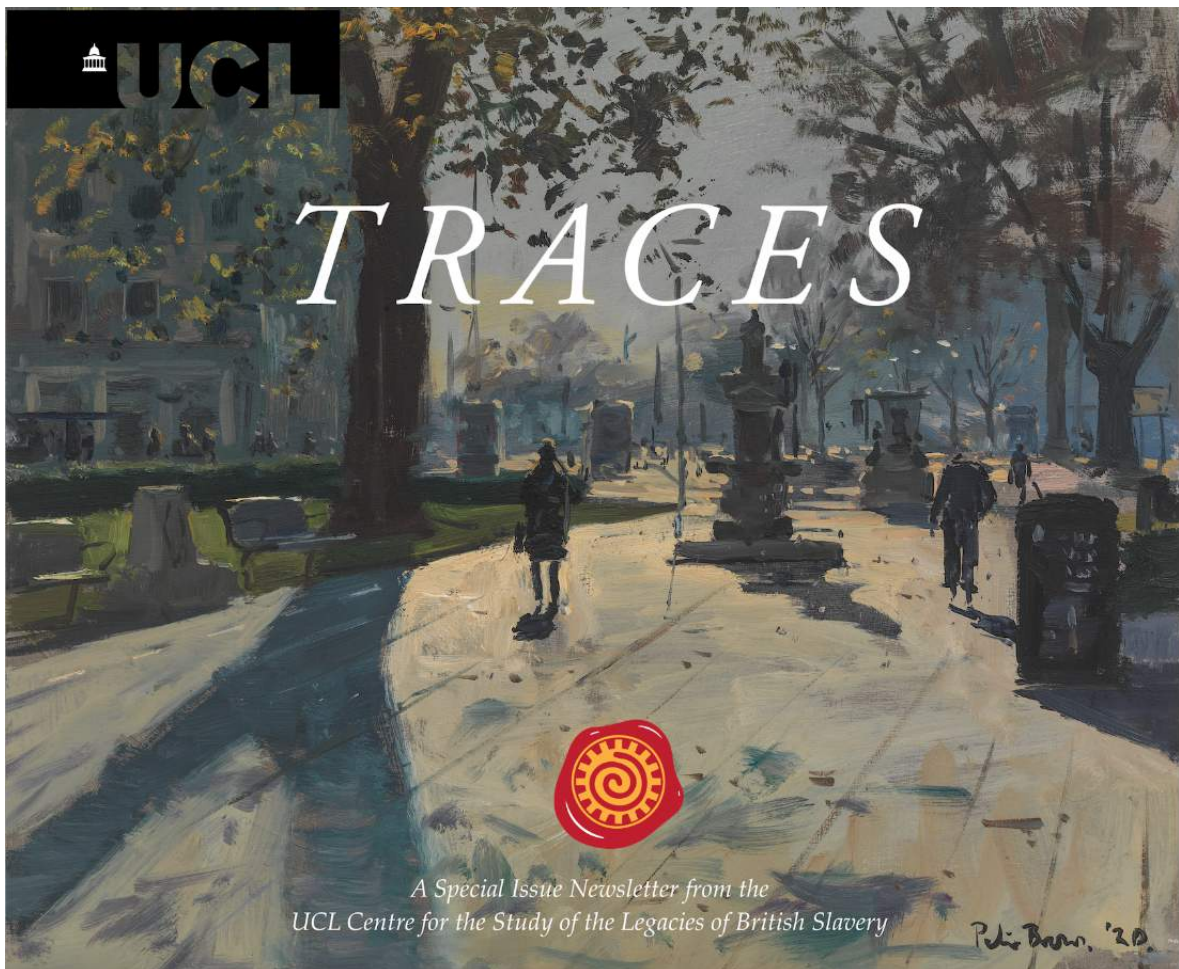


Image: "The Empty Plinth, 2020," by Peter Brown

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DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

Absence

PROFESSOR MATTHEW J. SMITH

Director of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery

The Edward Colston statue was toppled by racial justice protesters, then painted red and blue, and rolled into Bristol harbour on June 7, 2020. It happened at the end of my first week in post as Director of the CSLBS. Within hours we were inundated with requests for interviews. The LBS database saw unprecedented traffic with the number of users that summer matching the total of the previous seven years. Quite rapidly we were cannoned into meetings, Zoom presentations and panels, and requests from Japan to Jamaica for interviews not only on Colston, but the entire, haunting past of British slavery.

It was surprising how much this reckoning exposed. The contorted and traumatic aspects of slavery and colonialism seemed revealing to a twenty-first century British public with limited knowledge of the full extent of their nation's involvement in human bondage.

The protests in Britain started after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. At a time of a global pandemic and impending political change in the United States, Floyd's death—which was filmed and

circulated globally—produced international anger. In Britain, it revived unresolved tensions over historical racial injustice. On social media, people shared reading lists and Spotify playlists all intended to give a crash course in global Black History and culture.

"The contorted and traumatic aspects of slavery and colonialism seemed revealing to a twenty-first century British public with limited knowledge of the full extent of their nation's involvement in human bondage."

It was heady, overwhelming, and often contradictory. Institutions and individuals apologized for their genealogical links to human ownership; universities commissioned deep research into their history to find links to slavery; new posts were advertised in Black History; conferences and interviews and documentaries were planned. Just as quickly, a backlash surfaced. The insistence to recognize the history of British slavery and its enduring afterlives was drawn into a longer discussion of denial. The bitterness has expanded in the three years.

Far more significantly, the concern over this difficult history has also grown. To me the most striking outcome of 2020 has been the sustained public interest in Britain to confront and change how this past is remembered. In our last issue, we discussed a few such undertakings; the efforts of the Church of England and the personal donation to Grenada by members of the Trevelyan family are highly visible examples of this effort.

At other levels, some museums and art spaces are investing a great deal in refreshing their displays to respond to consistent demands from non-white publics to do better. This may be long overdue work, but it is not easy. Much has to be learned about how to tell truly complicated histories in ways that go well beyond simple acknowledgement of their importance. Repair means that this new knowledge presents the past of British slavery with all its attendant violence and silence as being as British as Dover's cliffs and London's Tower.



"The Empty Plinth, 2020," by Peter Brown

At the CSLBS these matters concern us greatly. How might a plan for repair at microlevels alter British public history representations of slavery? What have we learned since Colston was felled from his perch? It is this concern that led us to organize this summer a workshop, generously funded by an Octagon Grant from the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies, of collaborators working in British museums, community art spaces, and public historians to discuss their experiences and intentions.

Titled 'Empty Plinths: The Racial Justice Protests of 2020 and Memories of British Slavery,' our session featured colleagues from the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, the London, Sugar and Slavery Gallery at the Museum of London Docklands, the Atlantic Worlds Gallery at the National Maritime Museum, the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester, M Shed in Bristol, the Greenwich-based artists in the Collective Makers, and early-career researchers and members of the CSLBS research team for a fruitful session.

"How might a plan for repair at microlevels alter British public history representations of slavery? What have we learned since Colston was felled from his perch?"

A pictorial of the workshop appears below in this season's special issue of *Traces*. The highlight of this issue is four pieces by early career researchers, Sean Cham, Ella Sinclair, Tacita Quinn, and OD Jones. We invited these writers to reflect on the spaces that have been responding to the call for a more interrogative and publicly engaged history of British slavery.

In this issue's Advanced Search section, Sean Cham, an affiliated researcher with the CSLBS, details work on his recently completed doctoral dissertation related to material held at the National Portrait Gallery. Sean demonstrates how the fusion of research and public history can open new ways of representing history in public art space. Ella Sinclair considers the *Guardian's* recent [*Cotton Capital*](#)

project, placing its achievements within the context of similar reparative actions and challenges them to redefine reparations to be much more socially integrated. Tacita Quinn discusses the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery at the Museum of London Docklands as a product of the 2007 bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade. As she points out, the gallery is a crucial site for Londoners to learn about slavery, but must also be mindful of the space it occupies in the city. A similar point is raised in OD Jones' meditative account of his first visit to the Atlantic Worlds gallery at the Royal Maritime Museum, Greenwich; that scaling the massive history of Atlantic slavery is a major challenge but one that museums can do well by working closely with communities. Taken together, all three pieces suggest a refinement of public narratives of slavery is a continual process.



The empty Colston plinth, with the word 'erected' modified to read 'rejected'

With our partners at Royal Museums Greenwich, in April we co-hosted a moving public lecture by [Elgin Cleckley](#), a professor in Architecture and empathic designer at the University of Virginia. Elgin presented on his major project recreation of the Liverpool Brookes ship's transatlantic voyages. There is much in Elgin's project that speaks to the value of rethinking images and symbols to produce a different understanding of how their role in forming historical memory. We hope he will share the fruits of his powerful work in the UK in the near future.

In May, [Lila O'Leary Chambers](#) of the University of Cambridge, who worked as postdoctoral researcher with the CSLBS in 2022, gave a fascinating public lecture on some of her findings during the AHRC-funded Slave Traders project led by Professor Will Pettigrew of Lancaster University.

Later the same month, we held the second installment in our Elsa V. Goveia Speaker Series. Our guest speaker was [David Lambert](#) of the University of Warwick, whose fascinating talk was on his major research project on the First West India Regiment. A review of the talk is included below.

This special issue's cover image comes courtesy of Bath-based artist Peter Brown. Titled *The Empty Plinth*, Peter's painting of Bristol was an inspiration for our June workshop of the same name. In the painting, he gently reflects on the everydayness of historical absence. As Peter states, "I was simply painting morning winter light through the trees and noticed the empty plinth as I drew it." The painting invokes a big question: what happens to these silent spaces when time moves on? It forces us to think of what happens to collective memory of what was once held when the space itself changes.

I had a similar experience when I visited Bristol earlier this year to walk [The Centre](#) to Magpie Park to see the site of the Colston statue. To confirm that the empty plinth I was looking at was the correct one, I asked a passing student from University of Bristol to show me where Colston once stood. She had no awareness that a statue had actually been there, who Colston was, or even what took place in 2020 at the site we were standing on. The experience reminded me that invisibility inside and outside the archives can produce contradistinctive results.

The energy of the people and projects we highlight in this issue fills that emptiness with the knowledge that that absence is a story in itself. The obligation of those of us in the present in a world altered by the events of the past three years is to tell the story of what was there and why all that was associated with it still matters.



Matthew J. Smith
Director

ELSA V. GOVEIA SPEAKER SERIES

On "Of Uncertain Rank: The West India Regiments in British Imperial Culture" by Professor David Lambert

The UCL Centre for the Study of Legacies of British Slavery in 2022 launched a Speaker Series honouring one of UCL History's most distinguished graduates, the Guyanese historian Elsa V. Goveia. Our inaugural speaker was Professor Jennifer Morgan of New York University who on May 18, 2022, delivered a

fascinating lecture based on new research, titled “The Measure of Their Sadness: Slavery and Private Life in the Early Black Atlantic.”

This year, the CSLBS proudly held its second lecture on May 25, 2023, which was delivered by Professor David Lambert of the University of Warwick. Professor Lambert’s lecture, entitled “Of Uncertain Rank: The West India Regiments in British Imperial Culture,” was based on a major project on the First West India Regiments in the British Caribbean, the subject of Professor Lambert’s upcoming book, *Of Uncertain Rank*.

For over a century, the West India Regiments were an anomalous presence in the British Army: raised in the late eighteenth-century Caribbean in an act of military desperation, their rank-and-file were overwhelmingly men of African descent, initially enslaved. As such, the regiments held a unique and uncertain place both in the British Army and the wider British Empire for over a century, until their final disbandment in 1927. In his lecture, Professor Lambert argued that the image of the West India Regiments mattered; their military spectacle shaped public perceptions in the Caribbean societies in which they were raised, and impacted how they were deployed there and in Africa. Professor Lambert’s close examination of visual and textual representations of these Black soldiers opened a complex and hitherto little explored insights of the Black soldier in the Caribbean as sitting at the intersection of discourses about racial difference, slavery and freedom, savagery and civilisation, and heroism and military service during the long nineteenth century.

The lecture is available for viewing on our YouTube channel [here](#).



Professor Lambert's lecture

Elsa V. Goveia (1925-1980) read History (Honours) at UCL from 1945-1948. She was one of the first West Indian students to have studied in the department. While a student at UCL, she won the prestigious Pollard Prize for English History in 1947. She was awarded her PhD by the University of London in 1952 and became a distinguished historian and teacher of British slavery. For three decades she taught History at the University of the West Indies, Mona, in Jamaica, where she was responsible for a pioneering course on Caribbean History. Among her publications are *A Study of the Historiography of the British West Indies* and *Slave Society of the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century*. This speaker series in Goveia’s alma mater department honours her foundational work in the study of Atlantic slavery.

You can learn more about Elsa Goveia's career, including her time at UCL and in London, in a short video titled "[Reflections](#)" produced by the History Department at the University of the West Indies, Mona.



Elsa Goveia in her student days

FEATURE PROJECT

Corridors of the Atlantic World

OD JONES

Researcher, Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery

A corridor usually exists in an entirely practical realm. It is a connective tissue between rooms that perform true functions. In the case of the Atlantic Worlds gallery, it is a span of history. Stretching along the front of the National Maritime Museum, this gallery was created in 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade.

At the time, Prime Minister Tony Blair wrapped the anniversary clinically into a moment of [sombre reflection](#), identifying 'a need to recall our place in its practice.' While some historians such as James Walvin predicted a national shift, others such as Diana Paton and Jane Webster feared it would merely glint as a flash in the pan.

This space might be considered testament to 2007's singular moment of historical recalibration. It was a gigantic step forward in acknowledging Britain's role in transatlantic slavery and had to cover a vast terrain of history that had not hitherto been properly explored in museum and heritage spaces in the UK.



The façade of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

Such breadth is disorienting. It is therefore not surprising that as one progresses through the gallery, its gaps show. The maroons—central players in the story of the Caribbean—appear in a single sentence in the contextual materials on the gallery’s walls and the Haitian Revolution in a single paragraph before visitors are moved swiftly onwards to another continent in another time. Female abolitionists are mentioned via Hannah More, but the exhibits do not cover the many other roles of women in this Atlantic World. Simply put, this Atlantic history is too big for one corridor.

It is, however, easy to criticise. The power of this gallery should not be understated. Its role remains crucial, acting to give importance to a history that was previously neglected.

Chong-Ming Lim describes the ordering that history undertakes in a public setting: ‘commemorations are a way in which a community takes its past seriously.’ I see a lot of worth in this explanation. Even 'silly' statues, such as the [Alice in Wonderland statue](#) in Central Park, are calls to take silliness more seriously, to value childishness. It is one group acknowledging that a person or event or idea holds weight for many.



The map of South East London in the Atlantic Worlds gallery

It is no surprise that Black Lives Matter protests throughout the UK were so heavily focused on critiques of public memorials. The statues in these public spaces we occupy are supposed to represent us and what we believe in. This was not history as we saw it, and yet there they were still standing.

The gallery highlights this alternate perspective on public space. Towards the end of its corridor, a map of local South East London demonstrates how nearby buildings were closely linked with this sprawling Atlantic world. The map allows visitors to trace how islands occupied by ships dispatched from Deptford Dockyards plied their substantial trade with the sites of the plantation slavery that financed the grand homes of the enslavers only a thirty-minute walk away from the site of the museum. These transatlantic spaces of enslavement are suddenly closer than they first appear.

Another gallery at the National Maritime Museum typifies this redrawing of history. Organised by the Collective Makers artists' collective, *Our Connection to Water* features artists from Cyprus, Chile, South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Malaysia, New Zealand and the UK and explores the many ways in which we are connected to water as a resource, necessity, and unfathomable depth. It ends with 'Conversations with Our Grandmothers,' an exhibit which shows this transoceanic world from a much more interpersonal aspect. Just like the map of the slave trade in London, the pieces in this exhibition reverberate into the present.

"The gallery highlights an alternate perspective on public space."

A week after visiting the Atlantic Worlds gallery, I was introduced to the curatorial team from the Collective Makers. One artist spoke of a giddy drive to work on the gallery itself, buoyed no doubt from achieving that miraculous thing of getting behind the museum walls. It was amazing to hear.

Encouraged by this enthusiasm, I have begun to imagine other corridors into which Atlantic histories might fit. One could explore this history through ships alone; it might start with the construction of the ships, and explain how copper sheathing was implemented to reduce fatalities in its human cargo, glutting industrial titans in Wales. It might go on to talk of how sailors recognised slave ships at sea from their smell. It could draw upon

what it meant to turn human beings into products, the enslaved and unsold marooned in the hull of a ship, trapped in dreadful limbo. It could explore what small parts of Africa could be carried on these vessels, poisonous seeds in the hair, melodies, military practises.

I have also begun to imagine a corridor looking at women in the Atlantic world. It could begin with the minutiae of slave codes detailing the world in which enslaved women were expected to live, and then all the many ways such codes were transgressed, against their will and with their own actions or inactions. It would foreground the hidden histories of women as authorities on medicine, and their roles as leaders in the many rebellions that characterised life in the colonial Caribbean.



An object and its label in the exhibition space

The more I think about it, the more each small facet of the Atlantic Worlds gallery forms another corridor. And as I think of a new corridor, the more vivid these histories become.

From this point onward, our histories sprawl. Quantum corridors do not yet exist in a museum setting, but nonetheless this creative exercise is important. Imagining alternate corridors allows one to see a historical path beyond what is placed in front of one and reveals shows the value of space.

Setting the past in motion becomes easier when we have a length of corridor to do it, one dedicated to properly exploring the atrocities of our shared past, so we can treat them with the seriousness they deserve in our present.

EMPTY PLINTHS

Moments at our event in June



LBS Database Custodian Jess Hannah moderates a discussion between Helen McConnell Simpson (Bristol Museums), Rebecca Loy (National Museums Liverpool) and Sebastian Letts (UCL History MA).



Early-career researcher Sebastian Letts during the second session of the day.



CSLBS Director Matthew Smith introduces the afternoon workshop's discussion themes.



Jean-François Manicom (Museum of London Docklands) during the morning session.



Lila O'Leary Chambers (University of Cambridge) asks a question during the day's opening session.



Rebecca Loy presents in our second session, *Since 2007*.

Audience members during the second session, *Since 2007*.



CSLBS Research Associate Matt Stallard moderates the discussion during the day's final session, *Towards 2033*.



Joseph Oyeyemi (The Collective Makers) and Katie Belshaw (Museum of Science and Industry) in conversation.



Miles Greenwood (International Slavery Museum) presents during our first session, *Since 2020*.

ADVANCED SEARCH

Legacies of British Slavery in London's National Gallery

SEAN CHAM

In 2018, London's National Gallery established an academic partnership with the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery to investigate links between key figures in the Gallery and slavery. In this piece, Sean Cham details how his ongoing doctoral research draws on the CSLBS database in its investigation into the connections between the history of the National Gallery and the history of slavery.

The findings from the first phase of the academic partnership between the National Gallery and the CSLBS were published on the Gallery's website in November 2021, just a month after I started my PhD research into the legacies of the British Empire in the Gallery.

Each key figure was given an individual webpage which detailed their biography, any links to slavery and abolition, their contributions to the Gallery, and hyperlinks to relevant entries in other databases, including the CSLBS Legacies of British Slave-ownership database.

When I became aware of the research that had already been conducted, my first thought was that there was not much else I could add, especially since connections between the National Gallery and the CSLBS had now been firmly established.

The research that had been conducted by the Gallery focused on the nineteenth-century key individuals such as trustees, donors, directors, keepers, sitters, and vendors. I realised, however, that I was also interested in the family and social networks in which these figures were embedded.

Family networks were important to the intergenerational and interfamilial transfer of wealth, property, and estates, including ownership and management of plantations in the Caribbean.

"The research that had been conducted by the Gallery focused on the nineteenth-century key individuals such as trustees, donors, directors, keepers, sitters, and vendors. I realised, however, that I was also interested in the family and social networks in which these figures were embedded."

The CSLBS database is a vital resource in examining the legacies of slavery in British cultural institutions like the National Gallery. It makes clear and evident the connections that key figures in the Gallery and their family members had with slavery; not only the individuals listed in the Slave Compensation Commission, but also others who were legally connected to or received monetary benefits from the plantations in the years prior to the abolition of slavery.

SN	Name	Role	S.No. (A)	Father	S.No. (B)	Mother	S.No. (C)	Spouse	S.No. (C1)	Spouse's Father	S.No. (C2)	Spouse's Mother	S.No. (D)	2nd Spouse	S.No. (D1)	Spouse's Father	S.No. (D2)	Spouse's Mother	S.No. (E)	Successor
0	John Julius Angenstein	Founding Collection	0_A	Andrew Paulist Thompson	0_B		0_C	Anna Crockett	0_C1	Henry Mullman	0_C2	Anna Darnel	0_D	Eliza Lucas	0_D1	Joseph Payne	0_D2		0_E	John Angenstein
1	Sir George Beaumont Bt	Trustee	1_A	Sir George Beaumont, 6th Baronet	1_B	Rachel Howland	1_C	Margaret Willes	1_C1	John Willes	1_C2	Frances Freke	1_D		1_D1		1_D2		1_E	George Howland Wilkoughy Beaumont
2	George Hamilton Gordon, 4th Earl of Aberdeen	Trustee	2_A	George Gordon, Lord Haddo	2_B	Charlotte Baird	2_C	Catherine Hamilton-Gordon, Countess of Aberdeen	2_C1	John Hamilton, 1st Marquess of Aberdeen	2_C2	Catharina Copley	2_D	Harriet Douglas	2_D1	Hon. John Douglas	2_D2	Francis Lascoles	2_E	George Hamilton-Gordon, 5th Earl of Aberdeen
3	Roberts Banks Jenkinson, 3rd Earl of Liverpool	Trustee	3_A	Charles Jenkinson, 1st Earl of Liverpool	3_B	Amelia Watts	3_C	Louisa Jenkinson, Countess of Liverpool	3_C1	Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol	3_C2	Elizabeth Davers	3_D	Mary Jenkinson, Countess of Liverpool	3_D1	Charles (Bagot) Chester	3_D2	Catherine Legge	3_E	Charles Cecil Cape Jenkinson, 3rd Earl of Liverpool
4	Sir Thomas Lawrence PRA	Trustee	4_A	Thomas Lawrence	4_B	Lucy Read	4_C	Amelia Hannah Long, Lady Farnborough	4_C1	Sir Abraham Hume, 2nd Baronet	4_C2	Amalia Egenon	4_D		4_D1		4_D2		4_E	
5	Charles Long, Lord 5 Farnborough	Trustee	5_A	Beeston Long	5_B	Sarah Crepp	5_C		5_C1		5_C2		5_D		5_D1		5_D2		5_E	
6	Frederick John Robinson, 1st Viscount Goderich, later Lord Ripon	Trustee	6_A	Thomas Robinson, 2nd Baron Grantham	6_B	Mary Yorke	6_C	Sarah Albinis Louisa Hobart	6_C1	Robert Hubert, 4th Earl of Buckinghamshire	6_C2	Margaretta Bourke	6_D		6_D1		6_D2		6_E	George Frederick Samuel Robinson, 1st Marquess of Ripon
7	William Seguler	Keeper	7_A	David Seguler	7_B		7_C		7_C1		7_C2		7_D		7_D1		7_D2		7_E	
8	George Agar Ellis, Lord 8 Dover	Trustee	8_A	Henry Ellis, 2nd Viscount Clifden	8_B	Caroline Agar-Ellis, Viscountess Clifden	8_C	Georgiana Howard	8_C1	George Howard, 6th Earl of Carlisle	8_C2	Lady Georgiana Cavendish	8_D		8_D1		8_D2		8_E	Henry Agar-Ellis, 3rd Viscount Clifden
9	Sir Robert Peel 2nd Bt.	Trustee	9_A	Sir Robert Peel, 1st Baronet	9_B	Elton Yates	9_C	Julia Floyd	9_C1	Sir John Floyd, 1st Baronet	9_C2	Rebecca Juliana Darke	9_D		9_D1		9_D2		9_E	Sir Robert Peel, 3rd Baronet
10	Charles, 2nd Earl Grey	Trustee	10_A	Charles Grey, 1st Earl Grey	10_B	Elizabeth Grey	10_C	Mary Elizabeth Grey, Countess Grey	10_C1	William Pensonby, 1st Baron Pensonby	10_C2	Louisa Molesworth	10_D		10_D1		10_D2		10_E	Henry George Grey, 3rd Earl Grey
11	Nicholas William Ridley, 1st Lord Colborne MP	Trustee	11_A	Sir Matthew White Ridley, 2nd Baronet	11_B	Sarah Colborne	11_C	Charlotte Steele	11_C1		11_C2		11_D		11_D1		11_D2		11_E	
12	Sir Martin Arthur Shea PRA	Trustee	12_A	Martin Shea	12_B		12_C	Mary Power	12_C1		12_C2		12_D		12_D1		12_D2		12_E	
13	Henry, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne	Trustee	13_A	William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne	13_B	Louisa Petty, Countess of Shelburne	13_C	Louisa Fox-Strangways	13_C1	Henry Fox-Strangways, 2nd Earl of Ichester	13_C2	Mary Theresa O'Grady	13_D		13_D1		13_D2		13_E	Henry Thomas Petty-Fitzmaurice, 4th Marquess of Lansdowne
14	Samuel Rogers	Trustee	14_A	Thomas Rogers	14_B	Mary Radford	14_C		14_C1		14_C2		14_D		14_D1		14_D2		14_E	
15	Sir Charles Bagot GCB	Trustee	15_A	William Bagot, 1st Baron Bagot	15_B	Elizabeth St John	15_C	Mary Charlotte Anne Wellesley-Pole	15_C1	William Wellesley-Pole, 3rd Earl of Mornington	15_C2	Katherine Elizabeth Forbes	15_D		15_D1		15_D2		15_E	
16	Alexander Baring, Lord Ashburton (1st Baron)	Trustee	16_A	Sir Francis Baring, 1st Baronet	16_B	Harriet Herring	16_C	Anne Louise Baring, Baroness Ashburton	16_C1	William Bingham	16_C2	Ann Willing	16_D		16_D1		16_D2		16_E	William Bingham Baring, 2nd Baron Ashburton
17	Francis Egerton, 1st Lord of Ellesmere	Trustee	17_A	George Leveson-Gower, 1st Duke of Sutherland	17_B	Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland	17_C	Hanriet Catherine Greville	17_C1	Charles Greville	17_C2	Lady Charlotte Cavendish Bentinck	17_D		17_D1		17_D2		17_E	George Egerton, 2nd Earl of Ellesmere
18	Sir James Robert Graham Bt	Trustee	18_A	Sir James Graham, 1st Baronet	18_B	Catherine Stewart	18_C	Frances Callander	18_C1		18_C2		18_D		18_D1		18_D2		18_E	Sir Frederick Graham, 3rd Baronet

The database built by Sean

Through genealogical and biographical information, I created a dataset that records 142 people deeply associated with the National Gallery, and their family members.

Using the CSLBS database, I was then able to trace the connections that some of their family members had with estates in the British West Indies, thereby adding nuance to the preliminary research done by the Gallery. Further, the database allowed me both to confirm and expand upon some of the familial relationships found in my archival research, and also revealed new information and connections that I had not come across.

For instance, I could connect two key figures of the National Gallery through their joint contribution as lenders to a firm that had assets tied up in estates in Saint Kitts. The database also provided further information about the firm and its financial legacies, since I was able to find out that another key figure of the Gallery was listed as one of the owners.

Made by cumulative and collaborative efforts over the years, the references and cross-references provided in the database contributed to a better understanding of networks and relationships amongst enslavers, attorneys, mortgagees, trustees, and annuitants.

"The database allowed me both to confirm and expand upon some of the familial relationships found in my archival research, and also revealed new information and connections that I had not come across."

Even though the database originates from the list of mainly White enslavers and plantation administrators, the database has also grown to include details of the lives of enslaved people — an area of research that is still lacking in cultural institutions.

When writing the legacies of slavery in the National Gallery, I cannot dismiss the narratives of enslaved people who were exploited by some of these key figures in the Gallery.

I have started to gather the names and other limited details of the enslaved people both listed in the triennial slave registers and associated with key figures in the Gallery. I have also begun researching the geography of the estates, and gleaned information from various sources — newspaper advertisements, plantation journals,

correspondences from estate attorneys — to produce a glimpse of the everyday life of the enslaved population.

In doing so, I hope to write the previously invisible narratives of enslaved people back into the history of the National Gallery.



The National Gallery when at Mr J. J. Angerstein's House, Pall Mall (Frederick Mackenzie, 1834)

As the CSLBS database continues to grow both in size and in depth, especially with the new direction of the Centre to focus on the lives and experiences of enslaved people, cultural institutions like the National Gallery should not only acknowledge its links with the White connoisseurs-enslavers who donated their collections and wealth to the institution, but also work to include the histories of the enslaved people who were exploited by these individuals.

FEATURE PROJECT

Cotton Capital: Institutional Restorative Justice in a Society Hostile to Remembering

ELLA SINCLAIR

Researcher, UCL History

The widespread Black Lives Matter protests that ensued after the racist murder of George Floyd led to an 'awakening' to the reality of racial inequality in Britain.

However piecemeal and patchy this newfound insight may have been, it certainly marked a shift in tone: sweeping the nation's racial history under the carpet was no longer a respectable option for British institutions. It was all out in the open. They had to *do* something. UK newspaper, the *Guardian*, is one institution that decided to 'wake up.' This is marked by the debut of their *Cotton Capital* series in March, which grapples with the organisation's ties to transatlantic slavery.

Cotton Capital, a project three years in the making, is an ambitious attempt at an institutional reckoning with the legacies of British slavery. In the series, the *Guardian* re-tells the history of Manchester – or 'Cottonopolis.'

The project foregrounds the inextricable ties between Manchester's mills and the enslaved labourers forced to work on cotton fields. As [David Olusoga](#), historian and board member of the Scott Trust, points out in his series contributions – Britain's industrial revolution did not solely take place *in* Britain.

In 2020, the *Guardian*'s owners, the Scott Trust, were spurred by the intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement to interrogate the publication's past. The *Manchester Guardian* was founded in 1821 with money connected to the trade of cotton produced by enslaved people in the Caribbean and the US. The series explainer specifically notes the 2020 toppling of the statue of Edward Colston motivated this exploration of their own tangled history with transatlantic slavery and begin a process of restorative justice.

"The Manchester Guardian was founded in 1821 with money connected to the trade of cotton produced by enslaved people in the Caribbean and the US."

The *Guardian*'s bold [reparative strategies](#) exist alongside other landmark attempts in the UK. In January, the [Church of England](#) apologised for its role in transatlantic slavery, setting up a £100m compensation fund. The Bank of England similarly [apologised](#), and opened their two-year '[Slavery & the Bank](#)' exhibition in 2022. The National Trust and a number of universities have also begun to investigate their financial connections to enslavement. Some individuals descended from slave-owners, like the [Heirs of Slavery](#) group, are taking reparatory action into their own hands.



All this work is incomplete, and perhaps raises more questions than it answers. Who sets the reparations agenda? What voices and perspectives are heard and privileged? Each institutional approach is different, but the critical question – how do we engage with the ‘traces’ of the past – runs through them all.

More encouraging efforts, like the *Guardian*’s, are [prepared to engage with descendant communities](#), such as the Gullah Geechee people, the descendants of the enslaved people who picked the cotton fuelling Manchester’s industrialisation. Other efforts, whilst they may be well meaning and impactful, are inevitably complicated by the fact that they are able to centre themselves in these discussions precisely because of the legacies of wealth and privilege accumulated as a result of involvement with British slavery.

Despite these institutional attempts to repair the legacies of British slavery, Britain’s wider societal context remains hostile to restorative justice. [In 2014](#), Britain rejected Caricom’s reparations plan. Prime Minister [Rishi Sunak](#) recently refreshed the government’s refusal to apologise for Britain’s role in the slave trade or engage in reparatory action with the Caribbean.

"All this work is incomplete, and perhaps raises more questions than it answers. Who sets the reparations agenda? What voices and perspectives are heard and privileged?"

Cotton Capital contributors such as journalist Samira Shackle have interrogated the [incessant backlash](#) with which reparatory work is met – acknowledging the engulfing culture war that surrounds this work in Britain. Dr Cassandra Goptar, a researcher commissioned by the Scott Trust, also notes the importance of re-humanising the narrative around slavery.

The [Cotton Capital researchers](#) navigated archives devoid of humanity in such a way to identify and piece together the lives and stories of the enslaved people linked to the *Guardian*’s founders. The series also spotlights stories of resistance from black Mancunians, such as activist [Elouise Edwards](#), as well as African American abolitionists, celebrated under the series section titled ‘[The Radicals](#).’ *Cotton Capital* also outlines the *Guardian*’s bold [plan for restorative justice](#).

The time, thoroughness, care and sheer resources fuelled into *Cotton Capital* marks a welcome shift away from more tepid institutional acknowledgements of the past. Perhaps the *Guardian* has set a precedent. As we move forward, and as acts of restorative justice progress and more British institutions follow suit, we must think critically about how they narrate the legacies of transatlantic slavery, and which power dynamics they uphold or dismantle.



Artists' representations as part of Cotton Capital's 'The Radicals' series section.

In her contribution to *Cotton Capital*, the renowned historian [Olivette Otele](#) points out that reparative actions often begin and end with institutions – but what about society as a whole? Otele's point urges one to think about the limits of these institutionally (and regionally) bound programmes of restorative justice that grapple with a societal or nation-wide phenomenon, that being Britain's legacy of slavery. Will, or can, the emphasis ever shift to that of a national reckoning? Do institutional efforts cloud this national responsibility?

Otele's comments also raise questions about the ways this work is received more widely at a mainstream societal level. The [Daily Mail](#) quickly labelled *Cotton Capital* 'the simple-minded war on history'. Commenters on this particular piece bemoaned the supposed erasure of history inflicted by the *Guardian*'s restorative justice efforts. Upon the publication of a report investigating their organisation's links to colonialism and slavery, the National Trust in 2020 was swiftly [accused](#) of having a "political agenda" and attempting to tell "a certain version of history." These examples make clear that great care must be taken in reparative efforts, lest they be mired in the ongoing 'culture war,' but also prompt one to question the realisable impacts of ambitious restorative justice efforts, and what they can achieve in a disparaging societal context.

The *Guardian* has certainly covered a lot of ground since 2020. Perhaps this, alongside other institutional reparative efforts, will spur a more accurate national remembering in Britain – creating an imperfect but impactful restorative justice movement in years to come.

FEATURE PROJECT

Remembrance and Marginalisation: Visiting the London, Sugar and Slavery Gallery at the Museum of London Docklands

TACITA QUINN

When the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery first opened at the Museum of London Docklands in 2007, the statue of Robert Milligan still towered over the museum's entrance. Milligan played an integral role in the creation of the West India Docks in the early nineteenth century. He fuelled the project with money amassed through managing his family's plantation in Jamaica, which profited from the labour of enslaved African people.

The historical irony of Milligan's memorial presiding over a space intended to explore the vast and enduring legacy of slavery in Britain was addressed only after Black Lives Matter protestors demanded the statue's removal. In an effort to recognise the wishes of the local community, the statue was taken down by the Tower Hamlets local authority with the support of the museum on June 9, 2020. To this day the empty plinth remains.

Across the UK, toppled statues and empty plinths have become emblematic of the changes in public space since the Black Lives Matter movement cast a critical eye on representations of Britain's colonial history. The removal of Milligan's statue has certainly made a symbolic statement.

Does the museum as it stands today, however, respond adequately to calls to overhaul narratives that deliberately diminish Britain's connection to the horror of slavery? More broadly, does London's landscape reflect slavery's critical presence in Britain's national history?

"The legacy of slavery in Britain must be embedded into museum spaces across London and foregrounded within its scores of historical and artistic collections."

At the Museum of London Docklands, the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery spans almost an entire floor and aims to encompass 400 years of Britain's involvement in slavery. The exhibition starts by exploring how human trafficking began with the mercantile pursuit of valuable commodities in Africa, and then moves chronologically through the development of the Atlantic slave trade towards struggles for abolition. The brutal institution of racial slavery and its consequences are present throughout the gallery's collections, which repeatedly highlight the level of both physical and cultural violence committed by Britain in the pursuit of power and profit. The gallery concludes with a section dedicated to recent historical perspectives, which focuses on how slavery's legacy is tied to the deliberate minimisation of its impact within Britain's national history and identity.

The London, Sugar and Slavery gallery was an outcome of the commemoration of the bicentenary of the British abolition of the slave trade in 2007. The tone of many such celebrations throughout the UK amounted, in the words of the historian Verene Shepherd, to a 'Wilberforce mania,' insofar as the commemorations predominantly privileged the actions of white British abolitionists. Within this narrative of abolition, African subjectivity was often obfuscated, as was the resistance of both enslaved and freed Africans.



The statue of Robert Milligan outside the Museum of London Docklands before its removal in 2020

Now, however, by highlighting the integral work of abolitionists that had previously been enslaved, such as Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoana, and Mary Prince, the gallery at Museum of London Docklands deliberately challenges this narrative. While the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery amends the legacy of 2007, however, many of the issues raised by 2020 remain to be unpacked.

It is clear that the question of how we present slavery's legacy within Britain's public spaces cannot be addressed exclusively by the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery. If the gallery continues to be the only permanent exhibition on slavery in London, then slavery's legacy risks remaining marginalised, consigned predominantly to 'maritime history,' and not fully integrated into Britain's national story. Although the gallery successfully conveys slavery's fundamental role in shaping modern Britain, the unmistakable impression—inextricable from the location of the gallery itself—that slavery is a marginal topic in the history of Britain remains.

The legacy of slavery in Britain must be embedded into museum spaces across London and foregrounded within its scores of historical and artistic collections. Only in this way will the heritage sector fully reflect its integral place within the history of London as the metropole of the British Empire.

"The question of how we integrate the history of slavery into London's landscape is paramount to the next ten years of curatorial, artistic, and historical debate in this country as we look ahead to the bicentenary of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833."

Only once this marginalisation is confronted can we grapple with the role of public spaces in the telling of histories of slavery. Artistic interventions like Kara Walker's *Fons Americanus* at Tate Modern or the World

Reimagined project have opened new explorations of space, centrality and scale as fundamental parts of the dissemination of historical ideas. Such projects indicate both how the history of British slavery might be integrated into London's public spaces and how these artistic projects can foreground this history within national institutions. Large-scale projects, however, necessarily require large-scale funding. They will require work from the government and public institutions to build a multitude of long-lasting installations that integrate slavery's legacy into national spaces and thereby centralise it within the history of Britain.

As we work to integrate slavery's legacy within more of Britain's national institutions, yet more questions surrounding the appropriate handling of historical material will arise. One of the conundrums left by the events of 2020 is how curators and artists respond to the public space opened by new narratives and expectations.

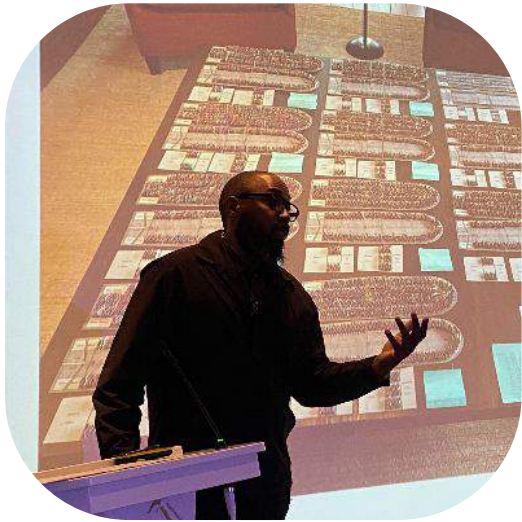


The Museum of London Docklands surrounded by the towers of Canary Wharf

The question of how we integrate the history of slavery into London's landscape is paramount to the next ten years of curatorial, artistic, and historical debate in this country as we look ahead to the bicentenary of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. By 2033, my hope is that we are discussing how we maximise the gains in public reckonings with the legacy of slavery rather than still struggling to make this crucial aspect of British history central to the political, social and cultural landscape of the nation.

OF THIS AND THAT

*Snapshots of Spring and Summer
at the CSLBS*



Elgin Cleckley during his lecture "Brookes (Revisited)" at the National Maritime Museum in April.



The team outside the Royal Maritime Museum with Elgin Cleckley and friends.



CSLBS Chair Catherine Hall features in a video installation at the ongoing V&A exhibition *Between Two Worlds: Vanley Burke and Francis Williams*.



CSLBS researcher Isaac Crichlow, whose doctoral research focuses on the West India Regiment, introduces Professor Lambert's Elsa Goveia lecture.



Lila O'Leary Chambers during her lecture "Gendering Racial Capitalism" at UCL last month.

Sold Down the River (1999) by British artist Tony Forbes. This piece was commissioned by Bristol Museum & Art Gallery for the 1999 exhibition *A Respectable Trade? Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery*.

We are grateful to the IAS Octagon Small Grants Fund for supporting our event and the special issue newsletter that developed out of it. We are also grateful to Peter Brown for generously granting us permission to use his painting "The Empty Plinth, 2020" both at the event and in this newsletter.



The Centre for the study of the
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