

# “THE WICKEDEST OF CARGOES...”



## WELCOME

**This exhibition commemorates the 200th anniversary of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. The Act outlawed the practice by British ships and crews of forcibly removing Africans from their homeland to a life of slavery. This marked the beginning of the end for the transatlantic traffic in human beings and was the culmination of one of the first and most successful public campaigns in history.**

**Whilst it would be another quarter of a century before slavery itself was finally abolished throughout the British Empire, this Bicentenary gives us the opportunity to remember the millions who suffered; to pay tribute to the courage and moral conviction of all those – black and white – who campaigned for abolition; and to demand to know why today, in some parts of the world, forms of slavery still persist two centuries after the argument for abolition in this country was won.**

**Newham has many residents from an African Caribbean background who are descended from those who were once enslaved. The Borough is proud that those people have made Newham their home and made an important contribution to our diverse community.**





# SLAVERY

Since records began, most societies have had some form of slavery. The Babylonians, Egyptians, Jews, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and, closer to home, the Anglo-Saxons all kept slaves. Slavery was also part of African societies. Some slaves were captured in battle or were from conquered territories, others were enslaved in order to pay debts or because they had committed crimes. Slavery in Northern Europe had mainly become serfdom and disappeared by 1300, but it remained a part of many other societies for hundreds of years afterwards.



## SLAVE

A person who is the legal property of another person who has total control over him or her.

A slave can be sold, traded or forced to work at any job the master wants done.

## SERF

A labourer who cannot leave the land on which he or she works without the permission of the landowner; also called a villein. The landowner does not technically own the serf but does have control over his or her life.

## INDENTURED LABOURER

Someone who agrees to serve a master for a set number of years.



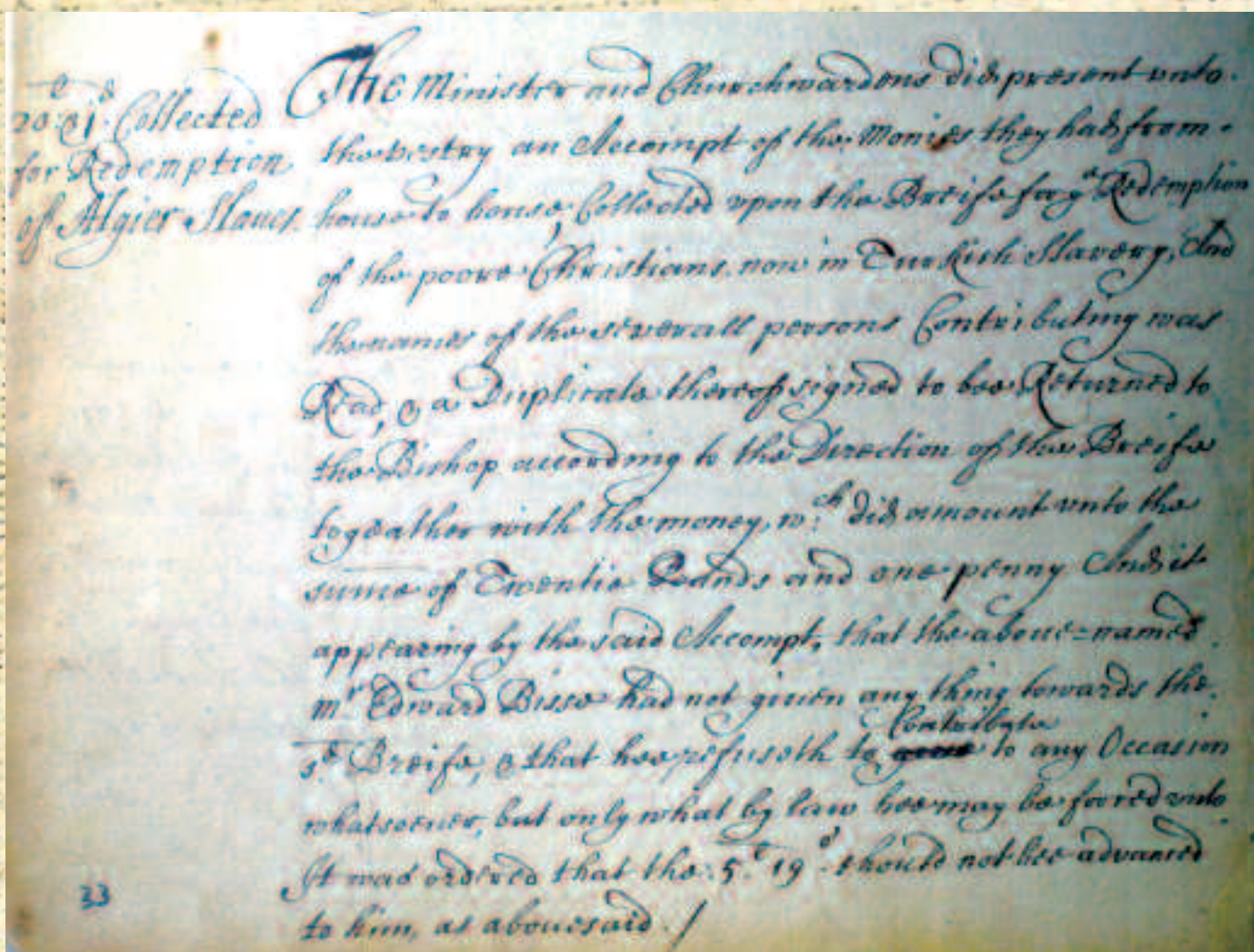


# THE ARAB SLAVE TRADE

The Arab slave trade is first recorded in 650 and continued to the early 1900s. It was concentrated on East Africa, where slaves were bought and shipped to Arabia, the Middle East, Persia and the Indian subcontinent. It is estimated that between 11 and 17 million Africans were transported during this time. Arabs also traded in slaves from other places. The word “slave” comes from “Slav”, a person living in the Balkans and around the Caucasus Mountains, whom the Arabs enslaved to fight in armies.

# THE BARBARY PIRATES

Barbary was the old name for the west coast of North Africa and the pirates operating from ports in this area formed a small part of the slave trade in North Africa. These pirates were mainly Arabs or Turks, but included men from other countries.



Local Churchwardens' accounts which illustrate the regular appeals made by some local churches for money to pay ransoms for the release of slaves.  
© Newham Archives

Although the British government did free some of its people, it did not want to hand over money for ransoms, partly because of the cost and partly because it thought that payment would encourage the pirates. Regular appeals for money to pay ransoms were also made in churches in Britain but it was never enough to release all those enslaved.

Between about 1625 and 1811, they captured Europeans and later Americans. They were usually seamen and passengers from ships in the Mediterranean, but the pirates also raided coastal towns and villages, sometimes as far away as England, Wales and Ireland, to carry away the inhabitants. Those they seized were taken to markets in North Africa and sold at auction. These slaves remained with their masters until a ransom was paid. Some of the Barbary slaves were released on payment, but those with special skills and attractive young women were not allowed to go home, although some managed to escape. Up to a million Europeans were enslaved in this way. This was a lot less than the number of Black Africans enslaved by both the Arabs and later the Europeans.





# THOMAS BETTON



Thomas Betton

In 1724 Thomas Betton, a member of the Ironmongers' Company, one of the livery companies (a kind of trade union) of the City of London, died. He had been a merchant trading in the Mediterranean and was aware of the dangers to seamen there. In his will he said that half the income from his estate should go towards freeing British slaves in Turkey or Barbary. With the money, the Ironmongers bought land in various parts of the country, including East and West Ham, and used the profits made from it to pay ransoms for British slaves.

In 1811 the Royal Navy attacked Algiers, the headquarters of the Barbary pirates, and destroyed it. This ended the pirates' activities but left the Ironmongers with a problem. After long legal cases, it was agreed that the money could be used for educational and charitable purposes. In the late 1800s they began to sell the land off. Some was bought by the companies building the docks and gasworks at Gallions in East Ham, and some by the Borough of West Ham.

A marker-stone, marking the boundary of the land which once belonged to the Ironmongers' Company still stands to this day. Thanks to recent research undertaken by a local historian in association with staff from Newham's Heritage Service and Planning Department, the stone became Grade II listed in February 2007.



The boundary stone which has stood on the ancient plot called Barrowfields, since 1730. The land was bought to form part of Betton's charity. The coat of arms on the stone is that of The Worshipful Company of Ironmongers.

Photo: Bob Rogers



© Essex Records Office



Thomas Betton's grave at the Ironmongers' Alms Houses in Kingsland Road (now the Geffrye Museum).





# THE BRITISH SLAVE TRADE



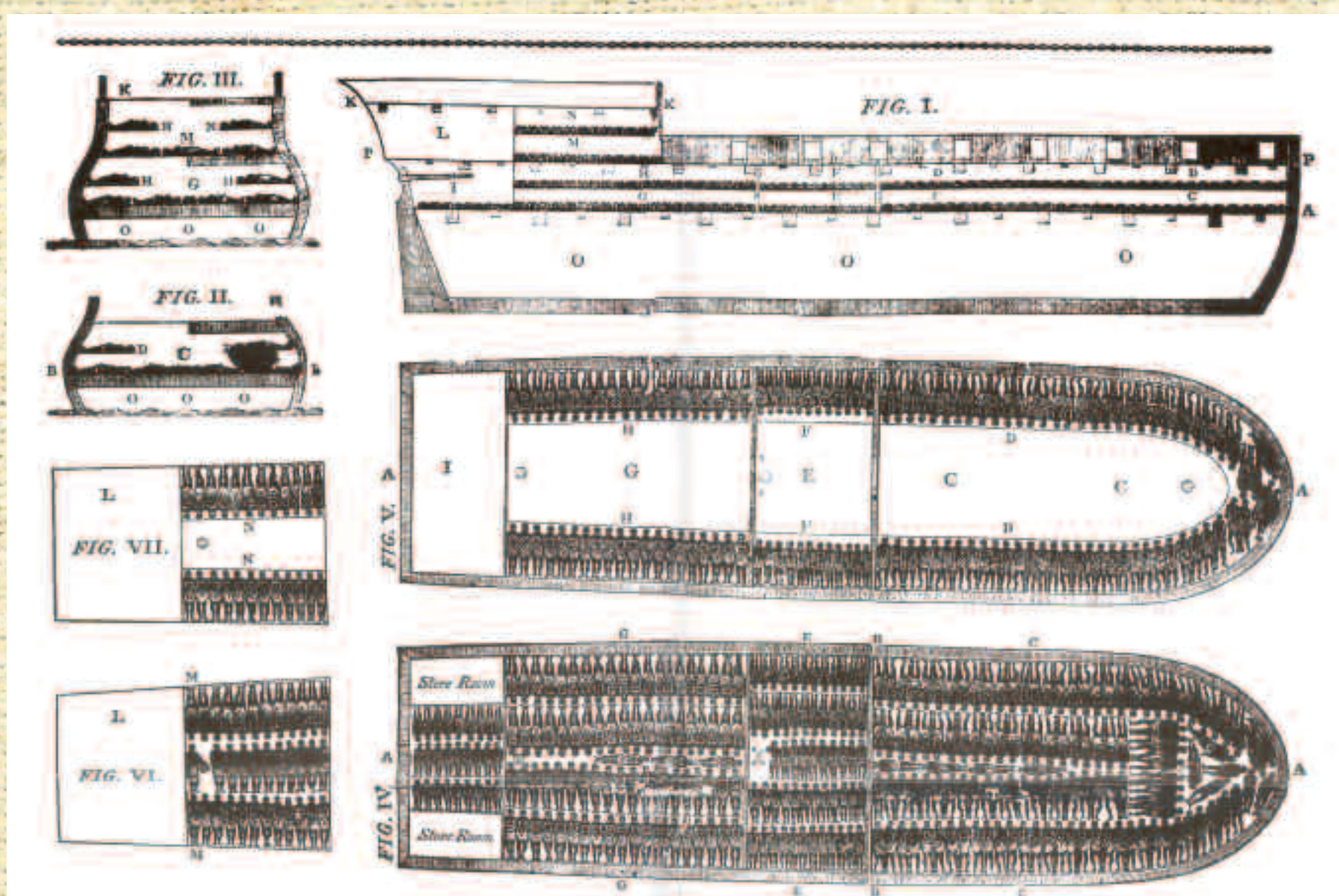
*A Liverpool Slave Ship, about 1780 by William Jackson*

*Three small boats approaching from the coast with Africans on board were painted out – perhaps following abolition, and were only revealed as a result of conservation treatment in 1994.*

© National Museums Liverpool

Although Sir John Hawkins, cousin of Sir Francis Drake, made three voyages to West Africa in 1562-3 to capture slaves, no serious attempts to establish a slave trade were made until about fifty years later. During this period, England began to acquire territories in North America and the Caribbean in competition with other European countries like Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France and Denmark. Labour was needed to develop the lands. At first, the landowners tried to use people already living there, but they did not want to work on plantations.

England also tried to recruit indentured labour from its own population but there were not enough volunteers so some English people were kidnapped and taken overseas. This still did not solve the labour shortage, and nor did transporting criminals, which began in 1597 and continued until the American War of Independence in 1775. So, slaves from Africa began to be used.



*Stowage plan of the Liverpool ship Brooks (1789)*

*The Brooks made four slaving voyages on what was known as the Middle Passage between 1781-6. This illustration shows 482 people fitted in the hold. Remarkably however, the actual number of slaves carried on each of these voyages exceeded even the number shown here.*





# THE TRIANGULAR TRADE

In 1660, Charles II granted a charter to the Royal Adventurers into Africa, the first English slave-trading company to receive state backing. In 1672 the Royal Africa Company was formed to regulate slave-trading and had a monopoly until 1689.

At first the main slave-trading port was London, but later it was Bristol and Liverpool. Other ports like Lancaster, Whitehaven and Glasgow also operated some slave-trading voyages. Ships left Britain taking metal goods, guns, cloth and alcohol from Britain to the West Coast of Africa. Here the goods were exchanged for slaves who were then shipped across the Atlantic where they were sold to plantation owners and the money used to buy goods produced by the slaves there. In the Caribbean, the main goods were sugar and rum; in North America, tobacco, rice and cotton were grown and in South America timber was an important crop. These goods were brought back to Britain and sold. This was known as the Triangular Trade.



Although Britain entered the slave trade much later than others, it became the biggest trader in the mid-1700s, although Portugal transported the largest total number of Africans across the Atlantic. It has been estimated that in total, Europeans transported about 11.6 million Africans to their colonies in the New World. About 2 million died on the journey. By 1699, 80% of the people in the English territories of the Caribbean were African slaves.

At least one person from East Ham had a plantation in Barbados. In 1678 John Gregory owned 204 acres of land and 85 "Negroes" on the island. Two years later he was dead, leaving property, including a black person, to his wife.



The will of Barbados plantation owner John Gregory from East Ham.



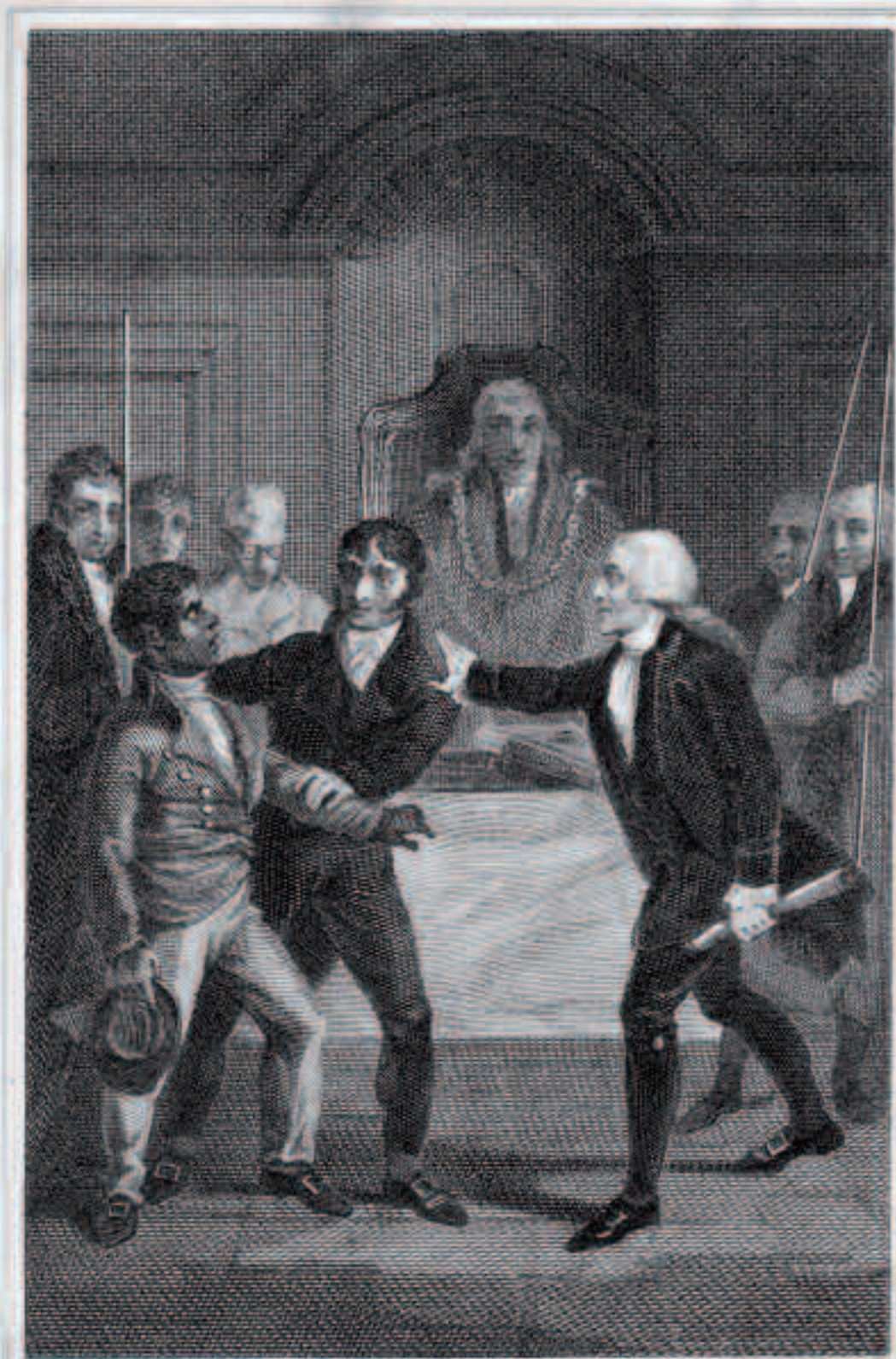
# THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT

At first, not many people thought there was anything wrong with slavery. Although some people argued that slaves should be better treated, only a few people were against slavery itself and they were mostly ignored. But in the middle of the eighteenth century, more people began to oppose slavery on religious grounds.

In the 1750s Anthony Benezet, a member of the Religious Society of Friends (known as the Quakers), who lived in Philadelphia, became convinced that the slave trade was morally unacceptable. He wrote a number of pamphlets and worked to persuade his fellow Quakers that it was wrong.

The Quakers were particularly important in the growth of the abolitionist movement, but they were not the only people to want the slave trade and slavery to end.

Granville Sharp, a member of the Church of England, brought a number of cases to court in an attempt to have slavery declared illegal. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, also preached against it. Both Sharp and Wesley promoted Benezet's work in England.



*Granville Sharp, Esq.  
advocating the cause of an oppressed Negro.*

*Published by R. Edwards, London, 1769.*

Another Anglican, named Thomas Clarkson, became convinced that slavery was wrong and in 1787 he, Granville Sharp and ten other men met to form the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.



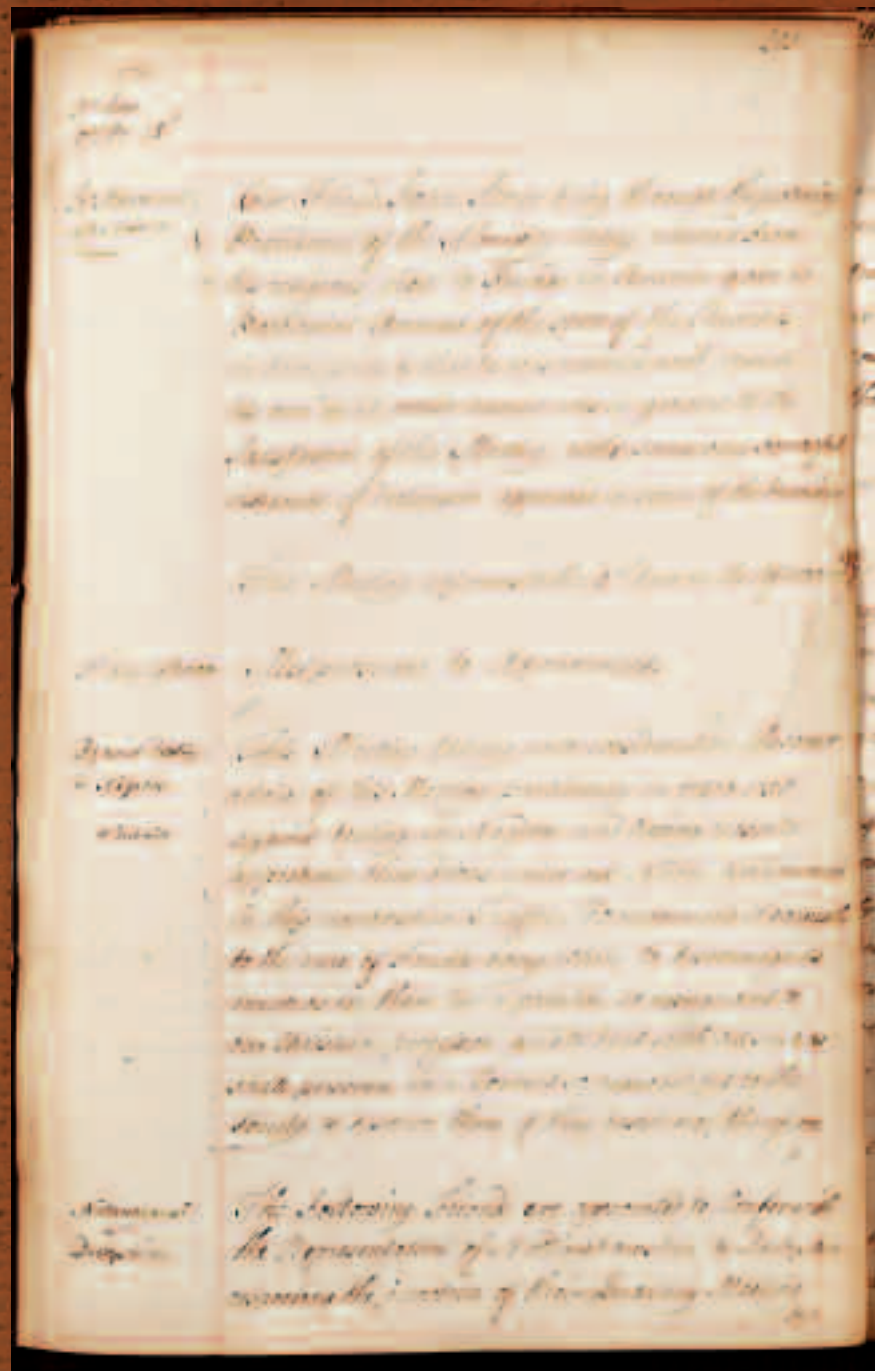
*Thomas Clarkson*  
© National Portrait Gallery



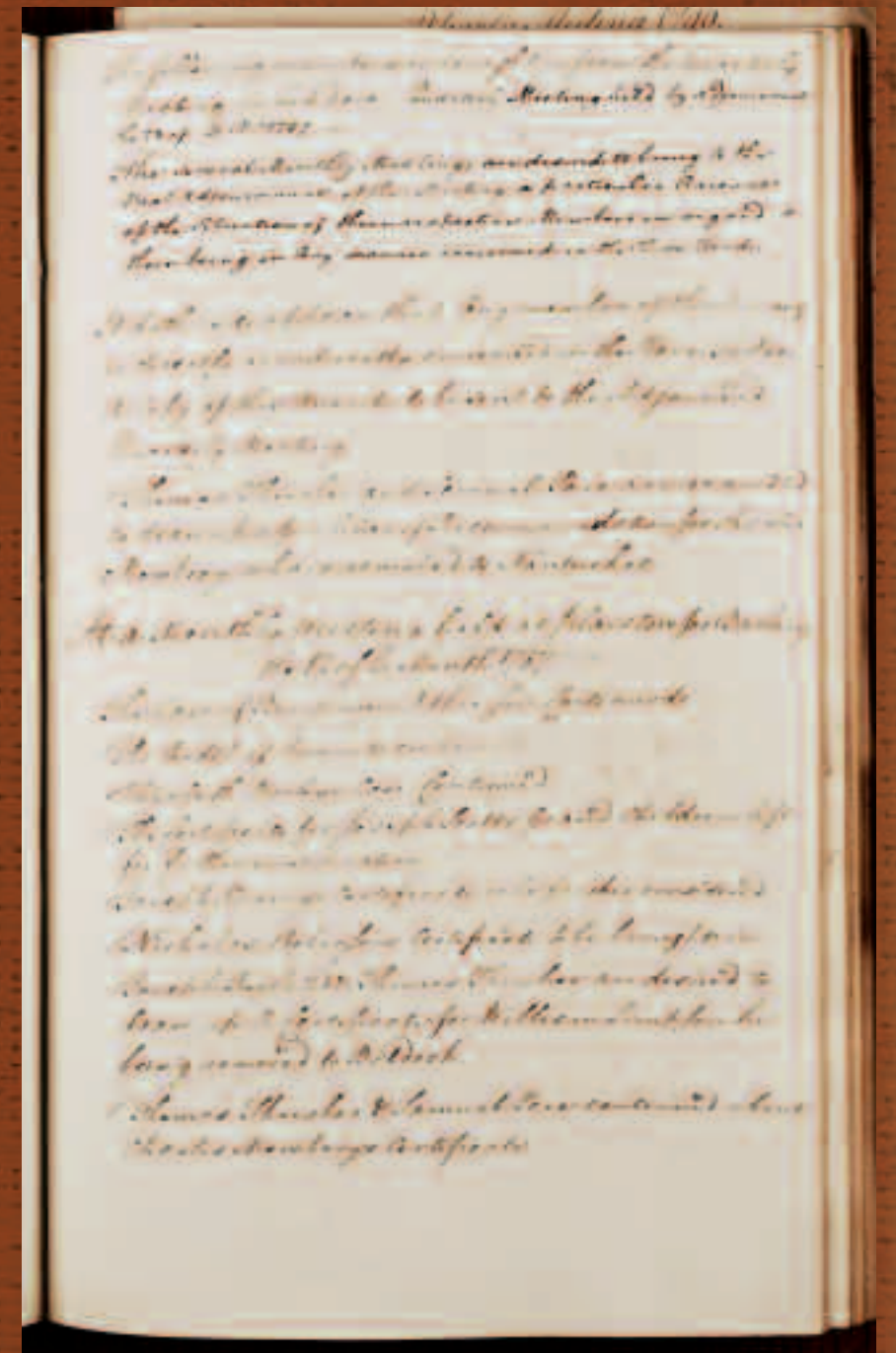
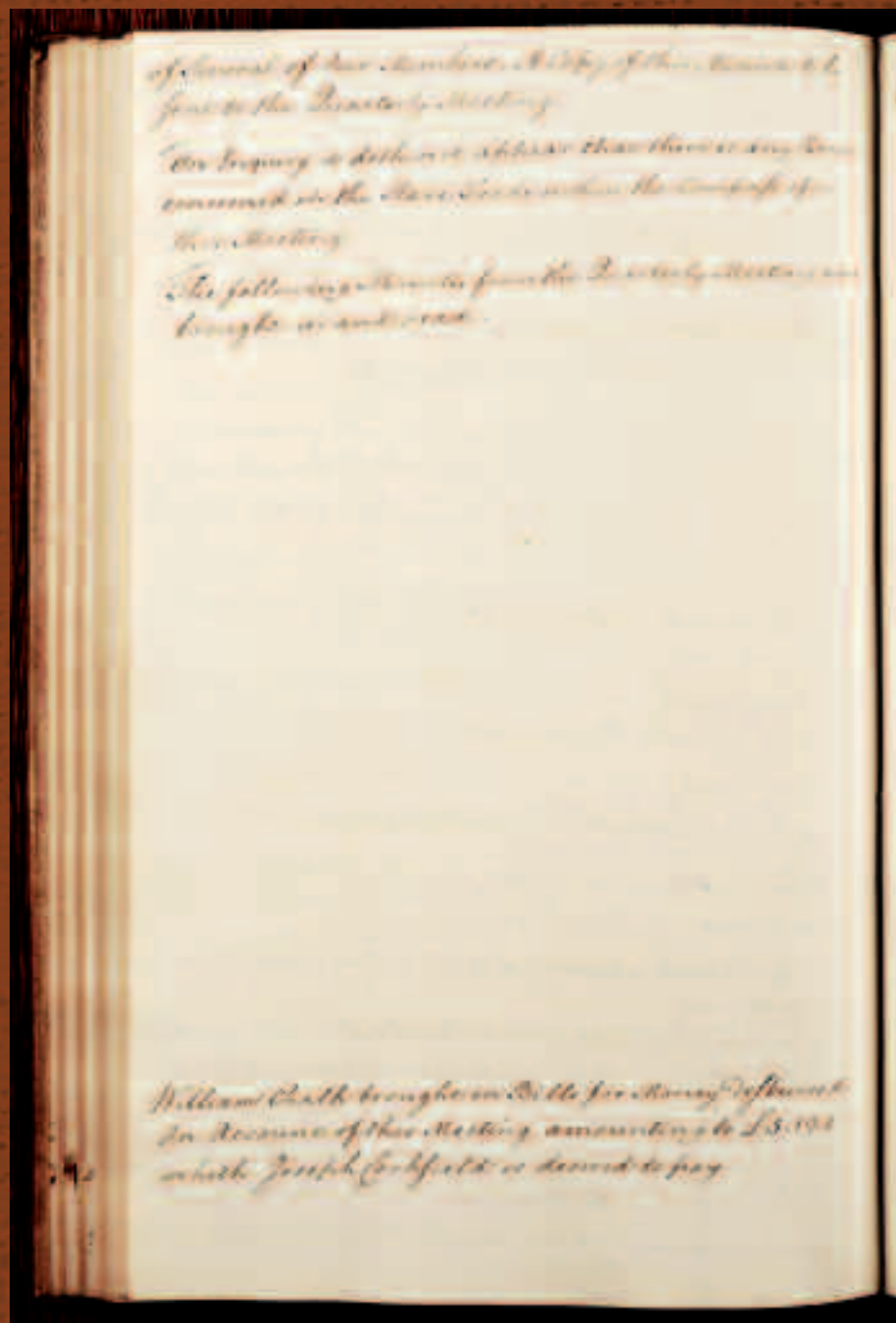


# QUAKERS AND ABOLITION IN WEST HAM

There was a large Quaker community in West Ham that had a meeting place in Plaistow. At annual London meetings, the Quakers sent out instructions to its members to declare that they were not involved in the slave trade. As most of the Quakers in the West Ham, Stratford and Forest Gate areas were involved only in local trade, this was easy for them to do.



Entries from the minutes of the Plaistow Quakers' meetings show that members were required to declare that they were not involved with the slave trade in any way.



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# JOHN FOTHERGILL (1712-1780)



John Fothergill, from the cameo by Josiah Wedgwood.  
By kind permission of Friends' House

John Fothergill and his older brother Samuel were Quakers from Yorkshire. Samuel became a preacher and John a doctor in London. John Fothergill also owned a house and estate at Upton, today's West Ham Park. Here John established a botanical garden which rivalled Kew Gardens in West London. The Fothergill brothers knew Anthony Benezet, probably through Samuel's journeys to speak to Quakers in America. Benezet wrote to John in 1763 and 1773, asking him to raise the issue of the slave trade with his patients.

John's reputation as an opponent of slavery became well known outside Quaker circles. In 1772, when Granville Sharp was fighting an important case in the courts, he sent James Somerset, the Black man involved, to deliver a

pamphlet he had written to John Fothergill. In return John sent him a pamphlet and offered to contribute money to the costs of the hearing. This case led to the famous Mansfield Judgement, which concluded that slavery was illegal in England and Wales.



While writing about plants to people interested in botany around the world, John took the opportunity to condemn the slave trade. In 1774, when Sweden was still conducting a slave trade, he wrote to the important Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, saying that it dealt in "the wickedest of cargoes – men torn from everything that makes life worthwhile." John must have hoped to convince Carl to use his influence in his own country.

In 1783 the British Quakers had set up an informal committee to consider the slave trade. On this committee was George Harrison, the son of a shoemaker from Kendal in Westmorland. The Fothergill brothers had paid for his advanced education, so John had had another, less direct, influence on abolition – one he and his brother cannot have foreseen when they took an interest in the young man. Later, in 1787, Harrison became a founder member of the original Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.



Correspondence between Anthony Benezet and John Fothergill.

By kind permission of Friends' House



Upton House, home of John Fothergill.

© Newham Heritage





# THE ABOLITION CAMPAIGN



*William Wilberforce*  
© National Portrait Gallery

**It was a long haul between the setting up of the Committee and the abolition of the slave trade. The Caribbean plantations contributed a huge amount to the British economy and the slave owners there were a strong political force.**

**Aware of the opposition they faced, the Committee sought a sympathetic MP to spearhead their campaign and found William Wilberforce, the MP for Yorkshire. Many other people however, contributed to the eventual success of the campaign.**

**Thomas Clarkson collected evidence of the cruelties involved in the trade. Others arranged for petitions to be signed and delivered. Black writers who had been slaves, like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugnano, wrote biographies and gave lectures; and people who used sugar were asked not to buy it.**

**Newspapers published stories of atrocities, like the one which took place in 1781 on a slave ship named the Zong. A number of slaves on board fell ill and were thrown into the sea while still alive in order to claim the insurance on them. During the 1790s there were also a number of rebellions by slaves in the Caribbean.**

**Despite all this, a majority of MPs continued to vote against attempts to abolish the slave trade until early in 1807. A few weeks later, on 25 March 1807, George III signed the Act into law. On hearing the news, William Wilberforce turned to his cousin and asked: "Well, Henry, what shall we abolish next?" His cousin suggested the lottery, but Wilberforce and his thousands of supporters had a more important goal in sight. They wanted to abolish slavery itself.**

**Wilberforce retired in 1825 and the MP Thomas Fowell Buxton took over leadership of the anti-slavery campaign within Parliament. Buxton had important links with Samuel Gurney, an inhabitant of West Ham.**



*Olaudah Equiano*  
© National Portrait Gallery





# SAMUEL GURNEY (1786-1856)



Samuel Gurney  
© Newham Heritage

When John Fothergill died in 1780, his estate was sold up and the house and land around it bought by another Quaker, James Sheppard. He died in 1812, and the house was taken over by his son-in-law Samuel Gurney. Samuel became an important and wealthy banker who used much of the money he made to support various causes. His older sister, Elizabeth, married Joseph Fry and became involved first in prison reform and later in the campaign to abolish slavery. Another sister, Hannah, married Thomas Fowell Buxton, who became an MP in 1818.

Samuel's support was essential in his family's work for good causes. He also made an important personal

contribution to the development of Liberia, an African country set up in the 1820s as a home for emancipated slaves from America. In 1851 Samuel gave £1,000 (around £54,000 today) to buy the territory of Gallinas, near the Liberian border, where there was a large slave market which was a threat to Liberians. A town was built on this land and called Gurney in recognition of his contribution.



Elizabeth Fry © Newham Heritage

Samuel is less well remembered today than his sister Elizabeth Fry or his brother-in-law Thomas Fowell Buxton, but without his practical and financial support neither would have been so successful. The local authorities in West Ham however, recognised his charitable work and erected a memorial to him in Stratford Broadway.



The memorial to Samuel Gurney in Stratford Broadway  
© Newham Heritage





# THE CAMPAIGN TO ABOLISH SLAVERY IN BRITISH COLONIES

After Britain abolished its slave trade, some British people continued to break the law and of course the other European countries involved in slave-trading between Africa and the Americas were not covered by British law. The Royal Navy intercepted illegal British ships and foreign ships in order to free slaves.

In Parliament the fight continued. The methods previously developed to bring about the abolition of the slave trade were adapted for the new campaign and the china manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood produced a plaque showing a slave in chains appealing: "Am I not a man and a brother"? Artists produced drawings showing atrocities committed in Caribbean plantations where laws were passed to improve the conditions of slaves. The Government now recognised that the abolition of slavery itself was inevitable.



In 1834, an Act to abolish slavery in the British Empire was passed. This introduced a period of "apprenticeship" of four years, during which time slaves had to work for their previous masters. Slave-owners (but not slaves) were compensated. Gradually other countries followed suit.

*The design for a seal approved by the Society of Friends (Quakers) which was subsequently produced as a cameo by Josiah Wedgwood at his pottery factory*



*Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton M.P. took over from Wilberforce as the Parliamentary face of the anti-slavery campaign.*

*By kind permission of Friends' House*





# LUKE HOWARD (1772-1864)

**In England, organisations were set up to improve conditions in Africa and find other sources of income than the slave trade and also to end slavery in all countries of the world. One of these was the African Institution, a Quaker organisation.**

**The aim of this society was to improve the lives of African peoples by education and by developing trade in other goods. The Institution also campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade in other countries.**



*Luke Howard*

© Newham Archives

**Two of the founder members, William Allen and Luke Howard had links with West Ham. Luke Howard lived in Balaam Street, Plaistow and with his business partner William Allen had a chemicals factory in Plaistow and later in Stratford.**

**Best known today for developing a system of classifying the shape and type of clouds, Howard also supported the movement to abolish slavery. When travelling on business, he took anti-slavery pamphlets to distribute. Howard's wife Mariabella was also a committed abolitionist.**





# THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY IN BRITAIN

After slavery was abolished in the Caribbean colonies in 1834, Britain continued to rule them and to make profit from goods produced there. The British Empire was built on trade. Bananas and other exotic fruits became important crops and were imported, along with other commodities, through the docks in present-day Newham. Sugar remained a major import from the West Indies.

Railways were needed to transport the goods that arrived by sea. The marshland south of what is now Barking Road was drained in the early 19th century and in 1839 the railway system came to Stratford, followed by an extension to North Woolwich in 1847.



*An engraving of the Eastern Counties Railway passing close to the Bow Back River c. 1839*

© Newham Heritage

Advances in technology meant that bigger ships could be constructed of metal and the old London docks were too small to accommodate them. So a larger dock was built in Plaistow marshes. Called the Victoria Dock after the Queen, it opened in 1855. This was still not enough to deal with all the shipping, so the Royal Albert Dock was built and opened in 1880. The last dock in this area, the King George V Dock opened in 1921. These three formed what was claimed to be the world's largest dock complex.

All the ships that came to the docks needed crew. Among these were sailors from the Caribbean, who settled either temporarily between voyages, or permanently around the docks, which were extended eastwards from the City of London.





# THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY IN BRITAIN

Censuses from 1851 onwards show a number of people born in the Caribbean living in East and West Ham. Place of birth rather than colour or ethnic origin was recorded so it is not possible to tell whether they were Black or White. The majority of the sailors from the Caribbean however, were probably Black. They faced some local prejudice and in 1919, in the economic depression that followed the First World War, there were anti-Black riots in the docks.

By the 1930s, the largest Black population in London lived in the Canning Town area. Crown Street became known locally as 'Draughtboard Alley' because both Black and White people lived there. There were also a number of Black people living in Catherine Street. This community was largely destroyed by the Blitz in 1940 during the Second World War, when the docks were heavily bombed and local housing destroyed.



A Local newspaper account of the anti-black riots in 1919.

© Newham Archives

Administrative County of West Ham		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										Page 10			
Civil Parish of West Ham		Municipal Borough of West Ham		Municipal Ward of Canning Town		Urban Sanitary District of West Ham		Town or Village or Hamlet of		Rural Sanitary District of		Parliamentary Borough or Division of South Hackney		Ecclesiastical Parish or District of St. Luke's	
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employed	Employed	Where Born	Whether Deaf and Dumb	Whether Blind	Whether Lame, Paralytic or Deaf		
48	Widdowson St. (Coffee House)	1	William Dixon	Head	M	26	Army Store Keeper	X		Swedish West					
			Mary Ann	Wife	M	24				Bedford					
			Edith	Daughter	F	10	Scholar			Old Kent Rd. London					
			Madeline	Daughter	F	8	Scholar			Bedfordham					
			David Gordon	Son	M	17	Witcher's son	X		Canning Town, Essex					
			Joseph	Son	M	15	Household Carpenter	X		London					
			Benjamin Benson	Wife	F	22				Jamaica B.S.					
			Thomas Clark	Son	M	23				Rope St. Vincent					
			William Bellin	Son	M	25	Marine Fireman			Barbados					
			Albert Hill	Son	M	24	Sea Man			St. Lucia W.I.					
			Alfred Gordon	Son	M	22	Seaman			Portsmouth W.I.					
			James Kelly	Son	M	21	Fireman			Montserrat W.I.					
			Fredrick Wright	Son	M	20	Business Letter			Portsmouth, Sussex					
49	Widdowson St.	1	Francis J. Cooke	Head	M	27	Bookbinder	X		Margate Kent					
			James	Wife	F	17		X		Widdowson St. W. Ham					
			Frank	Son	M	14	Lighterman Boy	X		West Ham					
			Henry	Son	M	12	Lighterman	X		do do					
			Rebecca	Daughter	F	11	Lighterman	X		do do					
			Albert	Son	M	10	Lighterman Boy	X		do do					
			Edward	Son	M	9	Scholar			do do					
			Edward Hardy	Son	M	19	Lighterman	X		do do					
			Elizabeth Porter	Wife	F	20	Widow's Servant	X		Widdowson St. W. Ham					
			Alfred Bath	Son	M	20	General Labourer	X		Widdowson St. W. Ham					
50	13 St.	1	Thomas Wood	Head	M	20	General Labourer	X		Widdowson St. W. Ham					
			John	Son	M	18	General Labourer	X		Widdowson St. W. Ham					
51	14 & 15 St. (Dispensary)	2	David M. B. Brown	Head	M	28	Medical Profession	X		Dorset					
			Charles Blake	Chemist	M	18	Chemist	X		Northampton, Bedford					
46	Total of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	5				Total of Males and Females		17	10						

An extract from the 1891 census showing the inhabitants of a lodging house in Tidal Basin Road.





# THE COLOURED MEN'S INSTITUTE



*Kamal Chunchie (centre) in 1920. © Newham Archives*

**In 1926 Kamal Chunchie from Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), set up the Coloured Men's Institute in Tidal Basin Road in Canning Town, where lodging houses for sailors had long existed.**

**Chunchie, like other men from the colonies, served as a soldier in the First World War. He was converted to Christianity and became a Methodist pastor. He experienced prejudice and discrimination so he set up the Institute as a place where Black people and their families could meet.**

**He, along with other Black and Asian men played cricket for the Essex 2nd XI. The cricket teams of the West Indies, India, Pakistan and South Africa are another, less controversial, legacy of Britain's overseas empire.**



*The Coloured Men's Institute in 1926. Black sailors married white women and lived in Canning Town. Their descendants may now live all over Britain.*

*© Newham Archives*



*The Coloured Men's Institute, Tidal Basin Road, Canning Town.*

*© Newham Archives*







# TABLE FROM THE HOME OF THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON M.P.

This table has been in the care of the London Borough of Newham since it was donated to the borough's museum by the Thames Group Hospital Committee in 1976. The table's history and significance is best explained by the inscription on its commemorative plaque.



*Thomas Fowell Buxton M.P.*

Thomas Fowell Buxton M.P. was born in Essex in 1786. He was a friend of the Quaker Samuel Gurney and his family. Samuel Gurney, the founder of Poplar Hospital, resided at Ham House and also owned the local manor of Woodgrange, both of which were situated in the then County Borough of West Ham, which was subsequently to form part of Newham.

Samuel's sister was Elizabeth Gurney who married Joseph Fry (Quaker) in 1800. The Fry family home was Plashet House in East Ham where Elizabeth lived until 1829. Philanthropist Elizabeth Fry, was a tireless campaigner for prison reform and human rights.

Both Fry and her brother-in-law Thomas Fowell Buxton, are commemorated on the back of the English five pound note; Buxton is the figure wearing glasses on the far left of the note.

In 1807 Thomas Fowell Buxton married Elizabeth's sister Hannah Gurney and in 1818 he was elected M.P. for Weymouth.

Buxton helped form The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1823 and worked towards his goal with, amongst others, William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay.

In 1825, upon the retirement of William Wilberforce, Buxton became leader of the campaign in The House of Commons, and Parliament finally passed the act in 1833.

Thomas Fowell Buxton died in 1845.

"THIS TABLE, HALLOWED BY INTENSE LABOUR & EARNEST DESIRES NOW HAPPILY FULFILLED, WAS PRESENTED TO THE POPLAR HOSPITAL IN 1833, BY SIR EDWARD N. BUXTON, BART. THROUGH MR SAMUEL GURNEY, THE FOUNDER OF THE HOSPITAL.

IT HAD BEEN THE PROPERTY OF THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON, M.P. & ROUND IT HAD SAT WITH HIM AT 54, DEVONSHIRE ST. BETWEEN 1823 AND 1833.

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE M.P.  
ZACHARAY MACAULAY,  
DR. LUSHINGTON,

& OTHERS DISCUSSING & DRAFTING THE BILL FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE BRITISH DOMINIONS, WHICH RECEIVED THE ROYAL ASSENT MAY 28TH 1833."

