

Connections

The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Hampstead Connections An article by Carol Seigel, Curator at the Hampstead Museum about their exhibition October-December 2007

Hampstead was a growing and prosperous village near London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This new exhibition at Hampstead Museum will take a number of different angles in examining Hampstead and slavery.

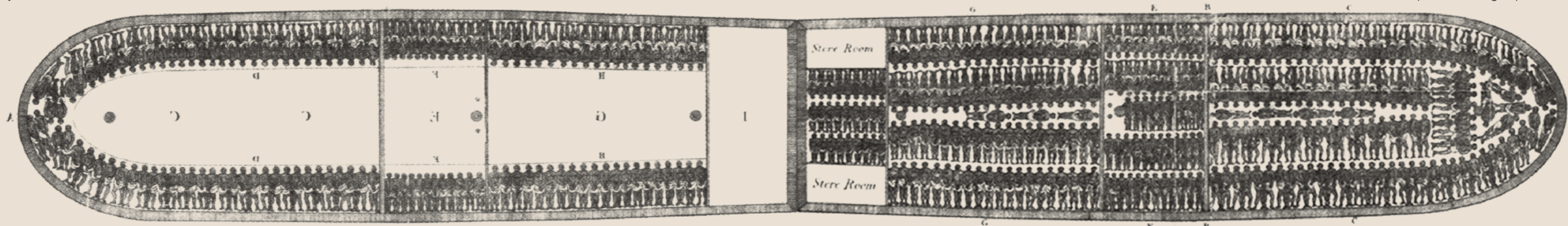
Hampstead was also known for its radical thinkers and many of the men and women closely bound up with the abolitionist movement lived or passed through here.

Hampstead Museum is based in Burgh House, and research for the exhibition has already uncovered some surprisingly close links between Burgh House and the fight to abolish slavery.

The most famous abolitionist of all, William Wilberforce, owned a 'house, coach-house and stable' in New End – a stone's throw from Burgh House – towards the end of his life.

Historians now believe London's black population in the late eighteenth century may have been anything up to 14,000 people.

This new exhibition will provide great opportunities for schools and young people to work with Hampstead Museum on slavery and the slave trade. Burgh House also has performance spaces for drama or performance groups.



It will look at how fortunes made on the backs of slaves in the West Indies were used to buy and build properties in this area, through men like William Beckford, whose family made one of the greatest fortunes ever out of Jamaican sugar, and Robert Milligan, another wealthy merchant who developed the West India Dock on the Thames.

Best known was Samuel Hoare, one of the most active members of the Anti-Slave Trade Society. His daughter Sarah later recalled how the horrifying image of slaves crammed together in the hold of a ship was displayed in their house and made an indelible image on her mind.

William Davy, living in Burgh House with his wife Catherine, was one of the barristers acting for runaway slave James Somerset in the famous slavery case of 1772, presided over by Lord Mansfield.

What of black people in Hampstead? The best known is Dido Belle, who lived as a family member at Kenwood House in the late eighteenth century.

It would not be surprising if some of these black people worked as servants in Hampstead or visited this popular village, and further research might shed more light on this.

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