

## 18th and 19th Century Slavery Trail in Camden

Camden's Slavery Trail explores the lives of men and women in the 18th and 19th century that were connected to the slave trade and abolition movement. All of them lived and worked in a Camden that is today remembered only in history books and archives. This trail brings to life the days when black and white people campaigned together to bring enslavement to an end, and shows where those who profited from the trade in humans lived and worked.

The trail reveals the privileged and not so privileged, those determined to make a better life for themselves against all odds, and those who took on the system head on and had significant victories that would resonate throughout the centuries. The bicentenary of the act to abolish the slave trade has created the opportunity to revisit a hidden aspect of British history from a more inclusive perspective.



## Stop 1: Whitfield Street

The American Church is the site where the Whitefield Tabernacle once stood. George Whitefield (1714-1770) an evangelical Anglican priest and friend of John Wesley opened his chapel on Tottenham Court Road in 1756. In the 1730s Whitefield travelled to Georgia, at that time a British colony, giving a series of sermons there. He eventually opened an orphanage there called Bethesda, which still exists today. At that time, Georgia was prohibited from having slaves, but in 1749 there was a movement to introduce slavery, which Whitefield supported. 'If the colony is allowed Negroes, as it is thought it must and will be', he wrote to a friend, 'they can, with about 20 negroes to manure the plantation which contains about five hundred acres of land, raise much more provision than a larger family than this can expand'.

Thus Whitefield used slaves to maintain his orphanage, but he was by no means unique as a clergyman that supported slavery – the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had been bequeathed the Codrington plantation in Barbados, which they ran successfully without any qualms about owning slaves; indeed, they would brand their enslaved Africans with the word Society. Despite being a friend of John Wesley, who was against slavery and wrote Thoughts upon Slavery in 1774, George Whitefield is indicative of many 18th century clergy who had no problem with enslaving others despite being men of the cloth. Olaudah Equiano witnessed Whitefield give a sermon in Philadelphia in 1766, and became attracted to his form of evangelical Christianity, which ironically focused on charity toward the less fortunate.

## Stop 2: Goodge Place

The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor was founded in 1786 as a result of the large numbers of Africans and Indians in London who were destitute and walking the streets. Indian sailors, who worked for the East India Company and on other ships, were promised their passage home. However, the Company did not always fulfil its responsibilities, and many of them were left to fend for themselves in England. There were also Africans, who had come to England as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, because they were Black loyalists from the United States or because they were sailors who worked on merchant ships or for the Navy.

The Committee's supporters were drawn from London's financial elite, including the governor of the Bank of England, George Peters, and the abolitionist Samuel Hoare (from Hampstead). However, the aim of the committee was somewhat unclear – whether to send Africans to Sierra Leone or to support people with no homes and no income.

Olaudah Equiano, who lived in Goodge Place in 1788 (Tottenham Street, Fitzrovia), was known for his activities in organising the Black Poor, and was involved in the scheme to settle Africans in Sierra Leone. However, he resigned believing the scheme to be a sham and that his post counted for nothing.



### Stop 3: 47 Bedford Square

From childhood, abolitionist Sarah Parker Remond had been encouraged to challenge racism and bigotry. Born into a family of free blacks in Salem, Massachusetts in 1824, Sarah was an early witness to her family's activism. Her father, John Remond, organised a year long boycott against the segregated school system that resulted in the eventual desegregation of the state's public schools. Furthermore, her brother, Charles Lenox Remond, was the first black lecturing agent for the Massachusetts Anti Slavery Society, travelling to London in 1840 to attend the World Anti Slavery Convention.

In 1858, Sarah moved to England to 'enjoy freedom' from the pro slavery atmosphere and racial segregation in the United States, to 'serve the anti slavery cause' and to train to become a doctor – an opportunity she would never have as a black woman in America.

Sarah enrolled at the Bedford College for Ladies in London. She boarded with the college's founder, Elizabeth Reid, a supporter of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. The registers of student courses at the Royal Holloway Archives show that she threw herself into her studies, enrolling in various subjects. However, she was not prepared for study at that level, blaming American racism for her poor schooling.

She stayed in England during the American Civil War, becoming an active member of the London Ladies Emancipation Society and the Freedmen's Aid Association. At the same time she worked at London University Hospital, training to be a nurse, then travelling to Italy, where she eventually received her diploma for 'professional medical practice' in 1871. Sarah remained in Italy until her death in 1894.



### Stop 4: Senate House

In 1785, Thomas Clarkson, a student at Cambridge University, entered a Latin essay competition that would change his life. The question was whether 'it was lawful to enslave the unconsenting'.

The question was set by the vice chancellor, Peter Peckard, a man of liberal views who later wrote two abolitionist pamphlets himself. Although Clarkson knew nothing about this subject, it engaged his curiosity and he soon discovered the works of Anthony Benezet, which became at that stage his principal source. He also asked around, and found both students and others with personal experience of slavery and the slave trade. Clarkson's research paid off, and in 1785 he won first prize for his essay. He then 'rather hurriedly' translated the essay into English, he apologetically informs us, so that it could gain a wider audience. The essay was published in 1786 entitled *An essay on the slavery and commerce of the human species, particularly the African, translated from a Latin Dissertation*. Clarkson then went on to read his prize winning essay at Senate House.



## Stop 5: Great Queen Street

In June 1840 the Anti Slavery Society convention was held in Freemasons' Hall. Founded in 1823, the aim of the society was the abolition of slavery and the slave trade worldwide and the protection of the emancipated slaves in the British colonies. Some of the delegates present included Louis Lecesne, leader of the free coloured movement in Jamaica, Daniel O'Connell, a radical Irish MP, Thomas Clarkson, president of the convention, Henry Beckford, a freed slave from Jamaica who addressed the convention, and Samuel Jackman Prescod, the delegate from Barbados and editor of a radical newspaper highly critical of the planters who pursued policies to suppress black people. The convention is also known for trying to prevent female delegates from speaking and attending – Sarah Parker Remond's brother Charles Lenox Remond led a boycott of the convention, which eventually led to women being allowed to attend the convention.



## Stop 6: Leigh Street

Mary Prince, an enslaved woman, lived here with her master and mistress, the Woods, before deciding to run away from them because of cruel treatment. She eventually wrote a narrative that undoubtedly influenced the decision to abolish slavery in the Caribbean.

Born around 1788 in Brackish Pond, Bermuda, Mary and her parents were the property of Frances and David Trimmingham. In 1798, Mary was sold for £20 to a Captain John Ingham. Her experience there was a brutal one – her mistress constantly flogged her. She later wrote: "To strip me naked – to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence."

After working in the salt pans in the Turk and Caicos Islands, Mary went through a series of owners who mistreated her, until she was bought by John Wood, and settled in Antigua where she met her husband, Daniel Jones, a free man whom she married without her owners' permission. John Wood was furious when he found out and once again she had to endure a severe beating with a horsewhip.

In 1828, the Woods travelled to London, taking Mary with them. Soon after arriving Mary ran away from the Woods to the Moravian Mission in Hatton Garden. Desperately trying to make a living in London, she worked first as a charwoman, and then as a ladies' servant. Then, out of work, she used up all her savings in lodgings and was forced to apply to the Anti Slavery Society for assistance. Eventually, she went into service for Thomas Pringle, a member of the Anti Slavery Society, to whom she recounted her life story, after realising that the Woods would never let her return to Antigua as a free woman.

Mary's history illustrates her outspokenness and her ability, within the limits of her existence, to negotiate who would own her in an attempt to escape the brutality that she experienced. She had been able on three occasions to persuade her owners to sell her on. She would make them face up to their behaviour, which while not preventing her from being beaten, displayed her agency. She married against the wishes of her owners, and refused to let them threaten her when they were in England and tried to persuade them to allow her to go free, because she knew that in England she was a free woman.



## Stop 7: The Foundling Museum, Brunswick Square

Jack Beef, the servant of John Baker, diarist and former Solicitor General of the Leeward Islands is buried near here. Beef accompanied Baker when he returned to England. He attended his master on horseback, went on messages and did commissions in London, and was much in demand among John Baker's friends for cooking turtles and bottling wines. He was on friendly terms with the white servants. He often went with them to the theatre and also attended the fashionable Black balls. He was eventually freed on 2 January 1771, and died in his sleep four days later. His funeral took place on 10 January at the cemetery near the Foundling Hospital, and was attended by the Baker family, fellow servants and several Africans.



## Stop 8: Baldwin's Gardens

Olaudah Equiano, the African abolitionist and author, lived at number 53 Baldwin's Gardens between 1787 and 1788. Today, the building is replaced by St Alban's Church Of England School. Equiano used this address in letters that he wrote to the press published at the time. For example, on 28 January 1788 he writes to the public advertiser in answer to a pro slaver called James Tobin, accusing him of 'glaring untruths' in his claims that Africans living in the Caribbean were living as equally as whites.

'You oblige me to use ill manners' he asserts, 'you lie faster than Old Nick can hear them. A few shall stare you in the face: what is your speaking of the laws in favour of Negroes? That you never saw the infliction of severe punishment, thereby implying that there is none?' and so he goes on.

He signs himself as 'Gustavus Vassa, the Ethiopian and the King's Late Commissary for the African Settlement, Baldwin's Garden, Jan 1788'.

According to his famous autobiography, written in 1789, Olaudah Equiano (c.1745 1797) was born in what is now Nigeria. Kidnapped and sold into slavery in childhood, he was taken as a slave to the New World. As a slave to a captain in the Royal Navy, and later to a Quaker merchant, he eventually earned the price of his own freedom by careful trading and saving. As a seaman, he travelled the world, including the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Atlantic and the Arctic, the latter in an abortive attempt to reach the North Pole. Coming to London, he became involved in the movement to abolish the slave trade, an involvement which led him to write and publish *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African* (1789) – a strongly abolitionist autobiography. The book became a bestseller and, as well as furthering the anti slavery cause, made Equiano a wealthy man.

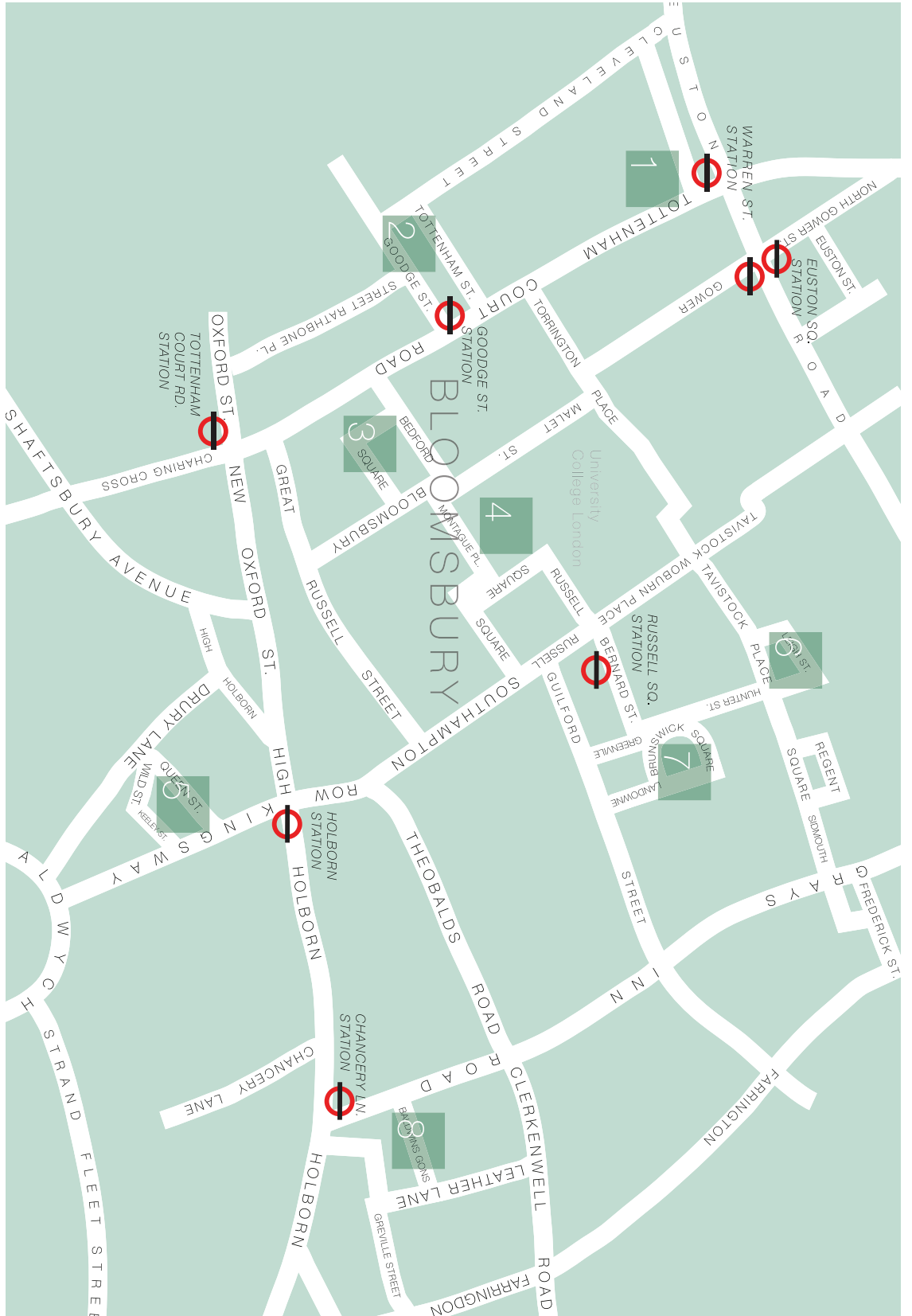
### Sources

Camden History Review  
George Whitefield Letters  
The interesting narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African  
Peter Fryer, *Staying Power*  
Clare Midgley, *Women against slavery: the British Campaigns 1780-1870*  
National Portrait Gallery  
The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave, written by herself  
Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833*

### Other mentions:

St Giles Circus: begging haunt of Billy Waters, King of the beggars, and where his funeral cortege passed.

15 Theobalds Road: birthplace of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, composer and Pan Africanist.



## Key

- Stop 1 - Whitfield Place/George Whitefield
- Stop 2 - Goodge Place/The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor
- Stop 3 - 47 Bedford Square/Sarah Parker Remond
- Stop 4 - Senate House/Thomas Clarkson
- Stop 5 - Great Queen Street/The Anti Slavery Society convention
- Stop 6 - Leigh Street/Mary Prince
- Stop 7 - The Foundling Museum/Brunswick Square
- Stop 8 - Baldwin's Gardens/OluDAH Equiano