

The Slavery Connection

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

1560s

During the Transatlantic Slave Trade an estimated 10-12 million African people were enslaved and forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean. This was part of a global trading system that changed the economy, development, populations and cultures of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas.

This exhibition tells the history of Bexley's connections with the Transatlantic Slave Trade and how they have shaped the borough. It is a story of people and buildings, of slave owners and the fight for abolition.

Early explorers introduced many new commodities to Europe such as tobacco, tea, coffee and chocolate. These bitter tastes led to a rise in the demand for sugar which was met by Europe's new colonies in the Americas. By the 16th century both Portugal and Spain were making vast profits by using enslaved West African people on their sugar plantations.

West Africa already had a vibrant indigenous chattel slave trade. Many enslaved African people began as prisoners of war. Their African captors would enslave them and move them to the coast. Here, European traders would barter for them with goods including cowrie shells, guns, textiles and luxury items.

These enslaved African people were then imprisoned until a ship could take them across the Atlantic to labour on plantations in the Americas. Ships used to transport enslaved Africans were notorious for the oppressive conditions on board.



Image of a Victorian trading station in Africa.
©Bexley Museum: Boswell Slide Collection

Disease, thirst and starvation claimed 3 in 10 African lives. 1 in 5 sailors shared the same fate leading to a sharp rise in the forced recruitment of sailors.

The first British settlers arrived in St Christopher in 1624 including British Bonded people working to pay off debts and prisoners to labour on plantations. The first enslaved Africans arrived two years later. British colonies in the West Indies spread and so did their trade in tobacco, sugar and enslaved Africans. By 1655 Britain had captured the Bahamas and Jamaica from Spain, giving them a strong hold on the Caribbean. Back in Britain a small population of West African people emerged in London



Famous seafarer Sir John Hawkins was one of the first Englishmen to trade slaves in the 1560s. He also set up 12 charitable Almshouses for poor sailors in East Wickham.
©National Maritime Museum, London



An artist's impression of an enslaved West African called Peter Probee who was baptised at Footscray in 1666.
©Cliff Pereira



Diagram of The Triangular Trade
The Transatlantic Slave Trade was part of a triangular trade route between Europe, Africa and the Americas.

1444

The Portuguese built the first permanent slave trading post in Ghana

1482

The first public sale of enslaved people took place in Portugal



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1758

Sir John Boyd

Danson House

By far the most prominent surviving connection to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Bexley is Danson House in Welling. This lavish 18th century Palladian villa was the wealthy country home of a slave trader and plantation owner set within an impressive estate, Danson Park.



A close-up of Sir John Boyd Bexley Museum ©Sarah Cove



Danson House shows the opulent lifestyle of Sir John Boyd, loving father and husband, public benefactor, plantation owner, merchant and slave trader. Bexley Museum ©Sarah Cove

John Boyd owned sugar plantations on the West Indian Island of St Christopher. In the mid 18th century John Boyd, his father Augustus and other plantation owners were partners in a new trading firm called Grant, Oswald and Co. This firm dealt directly in all aspects of the triangular trade buying goods to trade for enslaved West Africans, shipping them to the partners' sugar plantations in the Caribbean and then returning to Britain with the sugar. The business soon flourished, trading with different nations.

This trade helped make Boyd a wealthy businessman. In order to elevate his status and become a gentleman he leased the Danson House estate in 1758, adding more land when available. He employed the best craftsmen to design and build a new house, furnishings and landscape.

These craftsmen included the architect Sir Robert Taylor, renowned for designing houses for the new wealthy merchant classes. Sir William Chambers, the King's Architect worked on the interiors of the house, with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's student Nathaniel Richmond landscaping the surrounding parkland for Boyd. Boyd also had an extensive collection of artwork including pieces by Vernet, Courbould and a set of wall paintings by Pavillon. The result was a lavishly gilded house built for entertainment and excess.



Map of St. Christophers showing the village of Boyd.



The Dining Room - Danson House
©Bexley Heritage Trust



The Library - Danson House
©Bexley Heritage Trust



The central stairwell & dome - Danson House
©Bexley Heritage Trust

Boyd also became a great public benefactor supporting numerous charities and endowing religious and educational institutions caring for the poor and sick.

1502

First reported enslaved African people in the Americas

1510

The first enslaved Africans are transported to Spanish colonies in the Americas



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1712

Erith Port

Many ships ended their voyages at Erith. During the 18th century it was a busy port with an estimated 200 ships docking a year. Local men from Erith often became part of the crews as did many West Africans. Sailors from these ships were among the first African people to be seen in Bexley.



The Catherine
©Cliff Pereira

Many of these ships were part of the successful East India Company that bought goods from the East Indies like spices, textiles and tea. Sir John Boyd was a Director of the East India Company in the 1750s and 60s and used his influence to enhance the interests of Grant, Oswald and Co.

At Erith in 1712 the *Catherine* unloaded silks from Bengal, cotton textiles from Surat in Gujarat, blue cotton strips from India and cowrie shells from the Maldives and East India. These goods were then shipped to the West African coast and sold to merchants as barter for slaves.

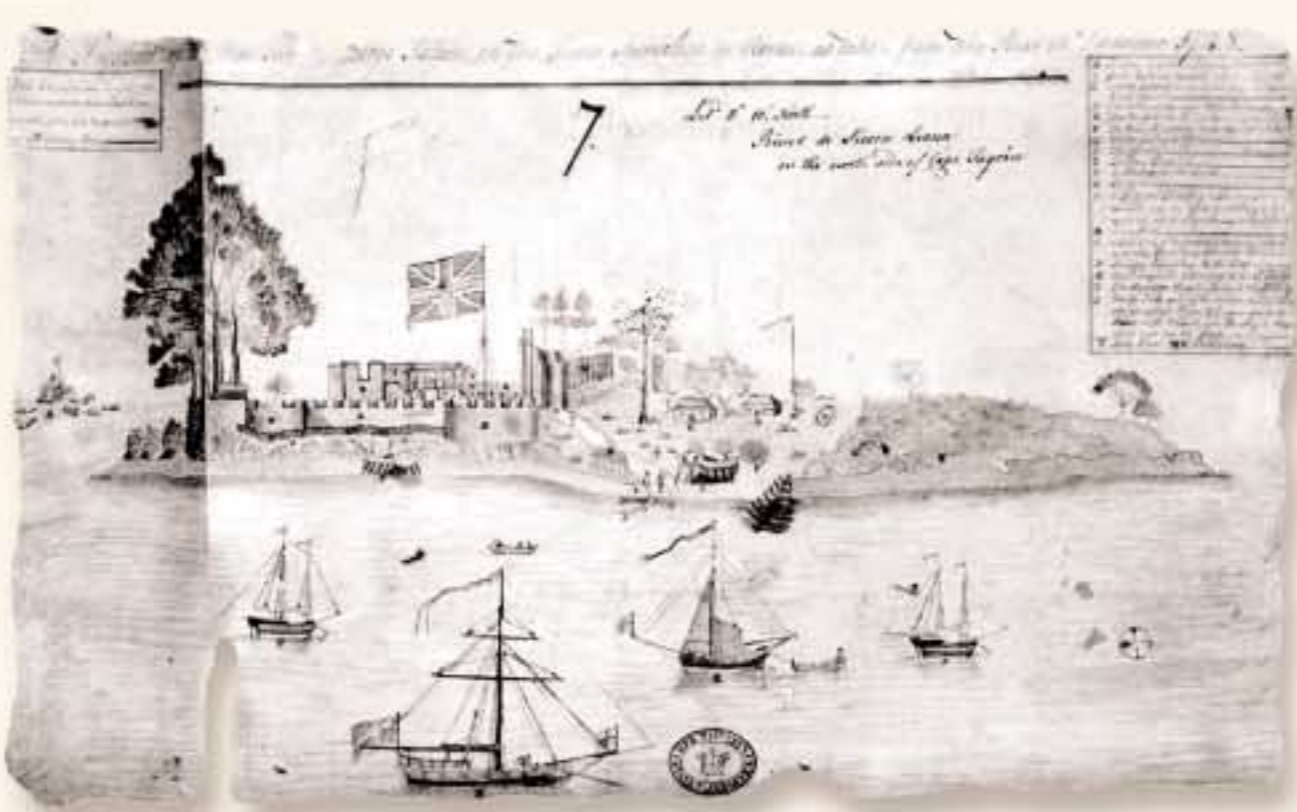


Erith Port - Published by Tombleson & Co. date 1839
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

1748

Bance Island

To meet demand Grant, Oswald and Co bought an old trading post in the Sierra Leone River on the coast of West Africa in 1748. Here on Bance Island, the company paid rates to the local rulers for permission to trade for enslaved African people. There was a high demand in North and South Carolina for enslaved Africans from this region because of their rice growing skills.



Bance Island afforded a factory, fort, outbuildings and a safe port for merchant ships to dock. It was one of many such islands in the river and along the west coast owned by different European traders and pirates. ©The National Archives ref. CO700/Sierra Leone 1 (a)

Africa had a thriving economy and Bance Island primarily traded with the local rulers who often set the price for their slaves as well as the goods for the exchange. Preferred goods included Indian cottons, cowrie shells, guns, knives, tobacco, alcohol and glass beads from Italy.

Enslaved African people survived the horrors of war, kidnapping, enslavement and the journey to the coast before being imprisoned on Bance Island. Between 1750 and 1769 9,655 enslaved Africans were exported from Bance Island, this was 2% of all slaves from West Africa and 5% shipped on British vessels. This was too much for the island and many outstations were set up on the mainland, overseen by both European and African employees.

In 1762 records show that a prime slave averaged a cost of 65 iron bars, 65 cowrie shells or around 325 shillings (£28). John Sargent bought 3.5 tons of cowrie shells in one transactions

A 1751 provisions request from Bance Island asked for "good beans" for the captive Africans and "...100 shackles, 100 handcuffs, 1,000 forelocks (fastening devices), and 6 strong chains."

'Citizens of the World' by David Hancock © Cambridge University Press 1995

1562

John Hawkins became the first Englishman to join the Transatlantic Slave Trade

1619

Dutch traders started to transport enslaved Africans to the Americas and soon became the dominant slave-trading nation



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1758

John Sargent

May Place, Crayford

Another partner in the Grant, Oswald and Co firm was John Sargent. At the same time John Boyd built Danson House, Sargent purchased May Place House in Crayford. The house no longer stands. It was hit by a bomb in World War II and the remains destroyed by fire in 1959.



May Place, Crayford – engraved by J Greig, 1823
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

To complete his rise to the status of a gentleman he too leased a grand estate in Bexley, May Place in Crayford in 1758.

John Sargent was one of London's prominent textile merchants specialising in goods from the East Indies. His experience, knowledge and trade connections served the company of Grant, Oswald and Co well. Sargent provided most of the cloth and other East India goods and his European contacts provided the guns for trade with Africa.



John Sargent
©The Holburne Museum of Art, Bath

In 1753 Sargent became a Director of the Bank of England and was an MP in the 1750s and 60s.

1797

The Malcolms

Lamorbey, Sidcup



18th Century Sugar Plantation in Grenada, West Indies
©Paxton House Trust - Berwick Upon Tweed

of the Lamorbey estate in 1797. His marriage settlement to Mary included plantations in Jamaica with 207 enslaved Africans.

The Malcolms inherited and extended the Lamorbey estate in 1812 and were active local community benefactors. They endowed the chapel at Holy Trinity at Lamorbey, and provided land for a new vicarage. They also supported the church school in Hurst Road and established another in Burnt Oak Lane, where they also erected a series of cottages for workmen.

Neill Malcolm
MP, married
Mary Ann Orme

Although the British Transatlantic Slave Trade was abolished in 1807, slavery was not. As others continued the trade, plantations continued to be worked by enslaved African labour. The Malcolm family from Scotland, became prominent sugar plantation owners in Jamaica. The family is connected with the Lamorbey estate in Sidcup which still exists as part of the Rose Bruford College.



Lamorbey
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

1630s

Britain joined the Transatlantic Slave Trade because of its colonies in the Americas

1700s

Britain became the dominant slave-trading nation



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1771

The Williamson family and Scipio

East Wickam

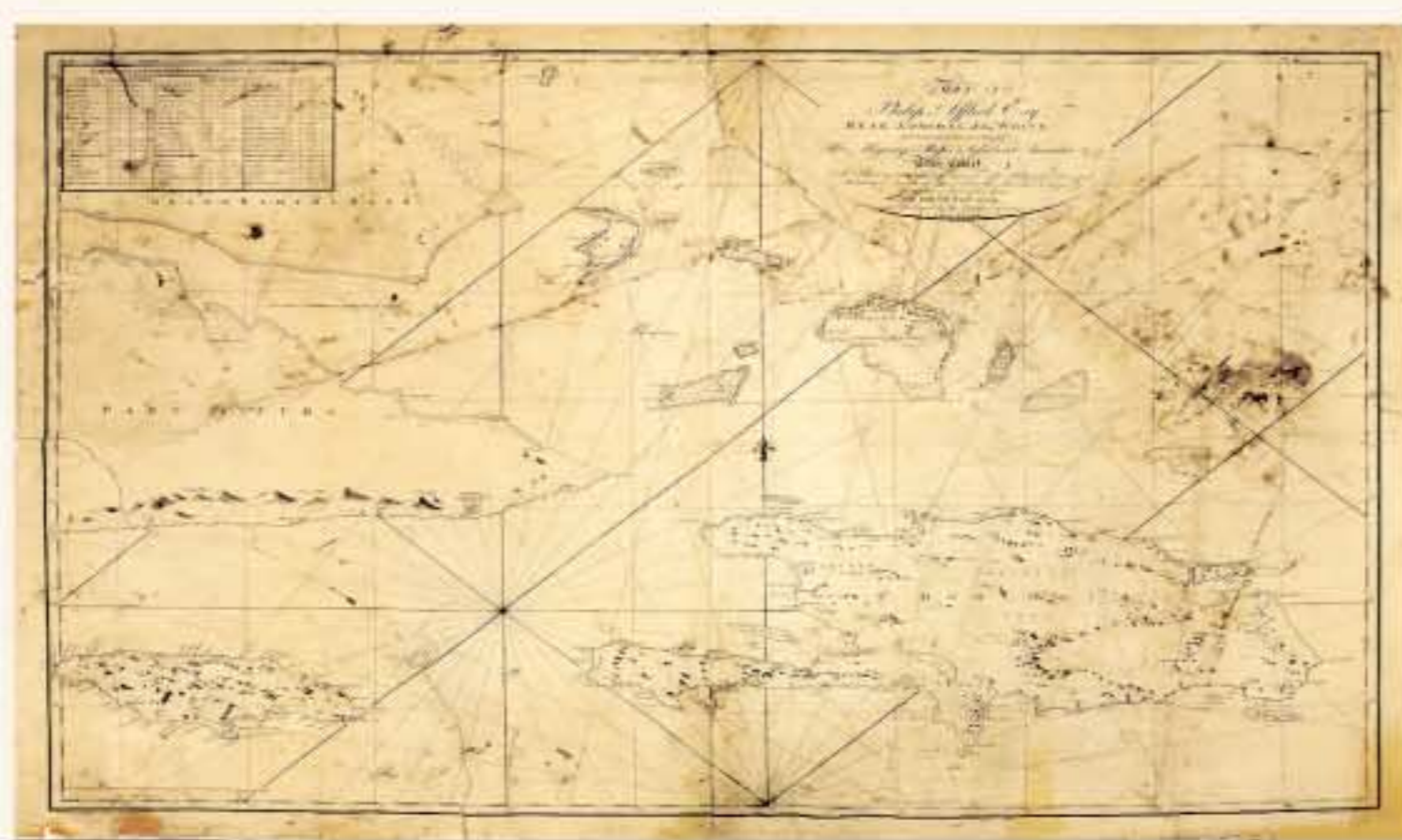
The East Wickham Estate played host to both a colonial Governor in the West Indies and an emancipated African called Scipio.

The estate was the home of General George Williamson and his son Adam who were based at the army arsenal at Woolwich. Both men had been posted in the Americas.

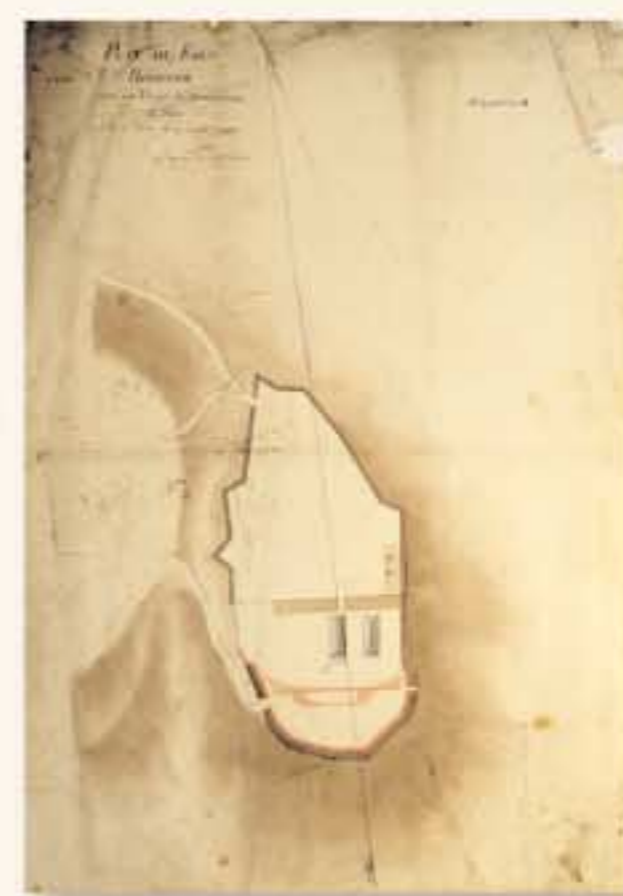
Adam Williamson married Ann Jones in 1771. Ann was the daughter of Thomas Jones of East Wickham, Kent. As Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica Adam offered a safe haven to planters fleeing the largest successful slave revolt in St Dominque (modern Haiti) 1791 - 1803. We know that Adam owned enslaved African people from evidence at the Bodleian Library. He was also part of the British occupation force to quell the rebellion on St Dominque, implementing a crown colony under his Governorship until 1796.



East Wickham House -Lithographer R. Martin, 1838
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre



Map of Jamaica and St. Dominque 1792
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor)



Map of Fort Bizoton 1794
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor)

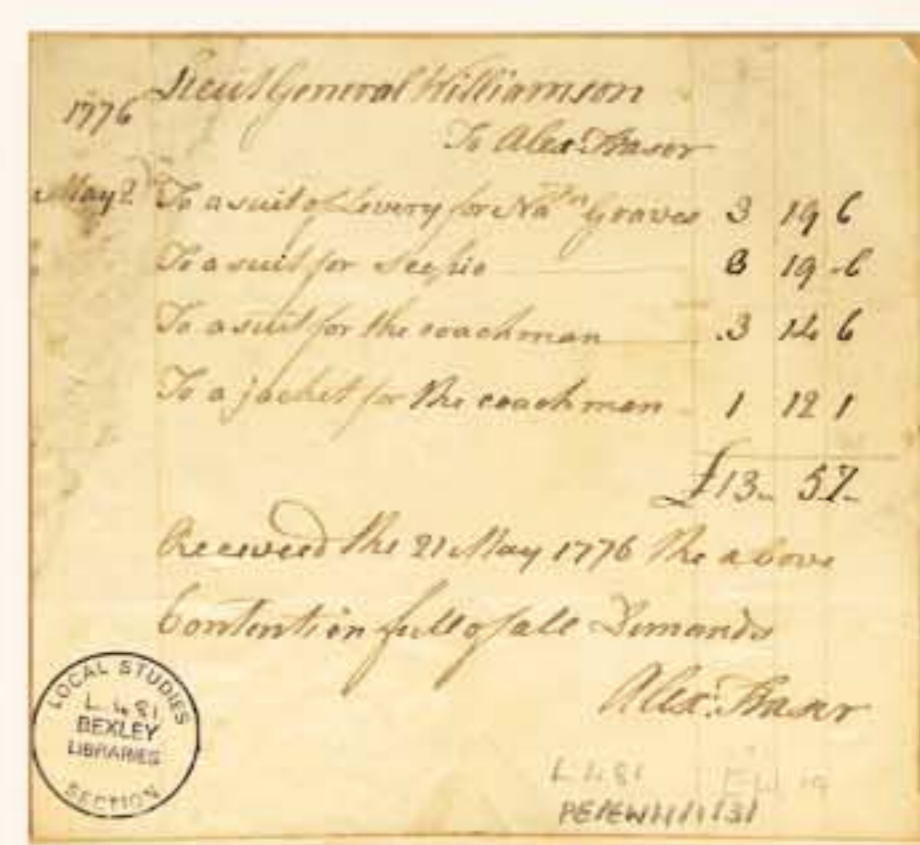
It is in the accounts of East Wickham estate that we find evidence of a West African coachman called Scipio. The two separate bills dated 1776 are for a pair of gloves, a new hat and 2 pairs of fine black hose purchased by General George Williamson, Adam's father.

Enslaved Africans were often given classical names by their owners which distanced them from the names that they would have given their children. However, chattel slavery had been illegal in Britain

since 1772 so Scipio was a free man working in Bexley. Unfortunately, nothing else survives to tell us more of Scipio. He was one of thousands of former enslaved African people who travelled to Britain after gaining their freedom.



Bill of sale for a hat and 2 pairs of fine black hose for Scipio, the West African coachman at West Wickham House
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor)



Bill of sale for a suit for Scipio
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor)

1780s

The Transatlantic Slave Trade reached it's peak

1787

The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was established



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The Slavery Connection

The Abolition Campaign

1791

The fight for the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807 is often seen as the work of a few prominent men like William Wilberforce. But these men were part of a growing tide of British popular opinion. The real heroes of abolition were the enslaved African people themselves.

The resistance in the colonies



A Victorian portrait of a Zambesi Warrior
©Bexley Museum: Boswell Slide Collection

Many enslaved African people resisted their capture at every stage of their enslavement, from when the African slavers first captured them until the Europeans who purchased them and beyond. To limit insurrection, captured African people from different tribal regions were mixed together to foil communication. Numerous enslaved Africans were chained together and ships decks were netted to make escape and attempts at suicide more difficult.

Escapes and rebellions by enslaved Africans were ever present and a continual threat to plantation owners. Runaway rebel slaves banded together to successfully fight their cause from uninhabitable areas such as mountains and forests. In Jamaica, these freedom fighters were called Maroons, meaning runaway. They fled to the mountains where the indigenous population helped them to survive.

During the American War of Independence enslaved Africans were offered freedom if they fought on the British side. Thousands took up the offer and later arrived in Britain raising awareness of the horrors of the slave trade. By 1800 London had an estimated Black population of 20,000 people. Some wrote of their enslavement such as Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Santo, Quobna Ottobah Cugoana and Mary Prince.



Image of Olaudah Equiano
©National Maritime Museum, London



Map of St. Dominique, 1792
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor



The Nag's Head

Many slaves won or bought their freedom. As early as 1767 a successful legal case prevented former slaves in Britain from being sold back into slavery
©Bexley Museum



Image of African freedom fighter
©National Maritime Museum, London

The 'Glorious Revolution' in France inspired ripples of insurrection throughout its West Indian colonies. In 1791, under the leadership of Toussant L'Ouverture, the African population of St Dominique successfully overthrew the French colonial government and the British one that replaced it. After 12 years of courageous fighting chattel slavery was abolished and the island was declared the independent state of Haiti.

We know from a local painting that emancipated African people settled in Bexley. One of these Africans was a barber working next to the Nag's Head pub in Welling around 1815.

1788

Olaudah Equiano published his autobiography 'The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, The African'.

1791

Rebellion began in St. Dominique



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The Abolition Campaign

1783

People Power

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was seen as an acceptable part of Britain's economy. People were limited by the ideas of the time. Those involved distanced themselves from the human consequences. Society as a whole was quite ignorant of the cruelties until eye-witness accounts and media reporting publicised the truth.

The Quakers were the first to send a petition for abolition to parliament in 1783, which failed. Campaigners persevered and were joined by many Anglicans and Methodists. They founded the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 and started to gather evidence of the injustices within the trade. By the end of 1788, 183 petitions had been sent to Parliament signed by tens of thousands of people.



Sugar cone and nippers
*Replica warehouse Goostrey, Cheshire

As well as signing petitions, people also attended marches, rallies and distributed numerous pamphlets, posters and leaflets. Lacking political power, Elizabeth Heyrick led thousands of British women in a boycott of slave produced sugar. Sales of sugar in Britain dropped by nearly a half.

STOP PRESS!

In 1783 the captain of the slave ship 'Zang' was cleared of murdering 132 slaves when he threw them overboard to collect insurance

1824

Sarah Bowditch-Lee St. John's Church, Erith

Sarah Bowditch-Lee was a local female campaigner. She married the famous anthropologist Thomas Bowditch, who is recognised as the first European to appreciably study West African cultures. When he died in 1824, Sarah wrote his biography and later became the first European woman to write of her own travels in Africa.



Parish Register of St. John's Church, 1856 showing the entry for Sarah Bowditch Lee at the bottom ©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre - photographed by Philip Batchelor

In 1828 Sarah wrote a story called "The Booroom Slave" containing a vivid description of how African people were captured, enslaved and treated. The story was used to publicise the horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and heavily criticised all those involved. It starts in the fictional African country of Booroom where the village chief's daughter is kidnapped.

"... she found herself surrounded by a hundred other victims bound hand and foot, crowded together in readiness to start for the coast to be sold to the slave traders. These victims were linked two by two with thick cord running along connecting them in a long line. ... The captives' flesh was mangled by thorns, their feet swollen by fatigue; their unwashed skins were cracked by the sun and peeled off in long scales, their cheeks were hollow, their eyes inflamed, their lips parched, their limbs wasted and cut by manacles."

Sarah Bowditch-Lee died in 1856 and was buried at St John's church in Erith.



St. John's Church - published by Hodgson & Co.
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre



A Victorian portrait entitled 'A gift of fruit' embodies the image of European explorers in Africa at the time.
©Bexley Museum: Boswell Slide Collection

1807

Britain passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act outlawing the British Atlantic Slave Trade

1811-1819

The United States, Sweden and the Netherlands abolished slave trading. Spain, Portugal and France abolished it with certain omissions.



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After 1807 Abolition

1807

Viscount Castlereagh

Viscount Castlereagh was Foreign Secretary, and Leader of the House of Commons of Britain. He lived at the Loring Hall estate in North Cray from 1811 until he committed suicide there in 1822. The house still exists today.

Lord Castlereagh voted against the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 arguing that it would be useless unless all slave trading nations passed similar acts. He was right, and spent the rest of his life convincing other



Lord Castlereagh

In 1815 William Wilberforce acknowledged Castlereagh's support, writing 'He really takes much pains for the cause'.

©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

nations to do the same. Throughout 1814-15 he worked tirelessly to obtain abolition agreements through bribery and persuasion. Britain paid out millions of pounds in cash incentives and compensation to curb European involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

As the largest maritime nation in the world, Britain's Royal Navy became the dominant anti-slavery patrol. Castlereagh set up a series of law courts in Europe, Africa and the West Indies to enforce the new abolition laws. The court in Sierra Leone was the most active, freeing 65,000 enslaved Africans between 1819 and 1846 and seizing empty slaving vessels before they could be loaded.

Loring Hall, North Cray

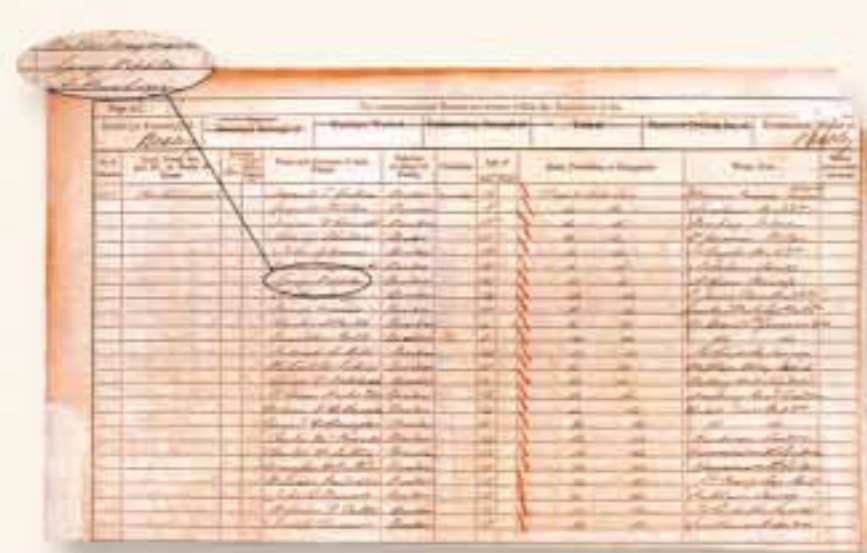


North Cray Cottage, Geo Shepherd 1828
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

1861

George Pepple

During the reign of Queen Victoria, Hall Place was an elite private boys school with many international students. In the 1861 census one of the students was George Pepple, son of William Pepple the King of Ubani on the Bonny River in Nigeria.



A copy of the 1861 Census showing George Pepple
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

Religious instruction played an important part in the school's daily activities. George Pepple used his English education when he returned to Bonny and became king in 1866. During his reign Christianity was adopted as the official religion in Bonny and although indigenous chattel slavery still existed, the export economy changed from that of slavery to palm oil.

William continually traded in the illegal slave trade despite warnings from the Royal Navy and the promise of £10,000 a year in 1841. When this failed Pepple and his son were deported to Britain in 1854.

The Hall Place prospectus at the time extolled the "whole system of instruction in this school has for its object the cultivation of the moral, physical and intellectual faculties and the formation of habits of industry and self government."



Hall Place as a school ©Bexley Museum

1823

The Anti-Slavery Society was formed

1833

The Abolition of Slavery Act was passed in Britain



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After 1807 Abolition

1822

Nicolas Vansittart, Lord Bexley

Nicolas Vanisttart MP and Chancellor of the Exchequer was the only person to ever hold the title of Lord Bexley. He purchased the Foots Cray Place estate in 1822 and spent vast amounts on its lavish refurbishment and improvement. As part of this he brought the adjacent North Cray Place estate giving him a massive 1,003 acres. Foots Cray Place was destroyed by fire in 1949.

Nicholas was very interested in the plight of enslaved Africans in the West Indies and America. This interest can be seen in his correspondence with a man called Shenton who travelled to Jamaica in 1823. He also supported the American Colonisation Society formed by abolitionists and clergymen to offer emancipated Africans and their descendants the opportunity to return to Africa. Those who feared the rising number of free African-American people and wanted to expel them from America also supported the Society.

Lord Bexley was a devout Anglican and appears as one of the 66 vice-presidents of the American Colonisation Society. There were only three non-Americans on the list.

The society purchased a vast tract of land named Liberia in Africa (Land of the free). More than 11,000 African-American people emigrated to Liberia before 1860. Many of the freed African people from anti-slavery laws were also settled here under the governorship of the society and the area prospered. In 1842 Liberia gained its first non-white governor and in 1847 declared itself an independent state. There is still a settlement in Liberia called Bexley.

The Lord Bexley letters from Shenton dated 1825 and 1826 - photographed by Philip Batchelor)
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

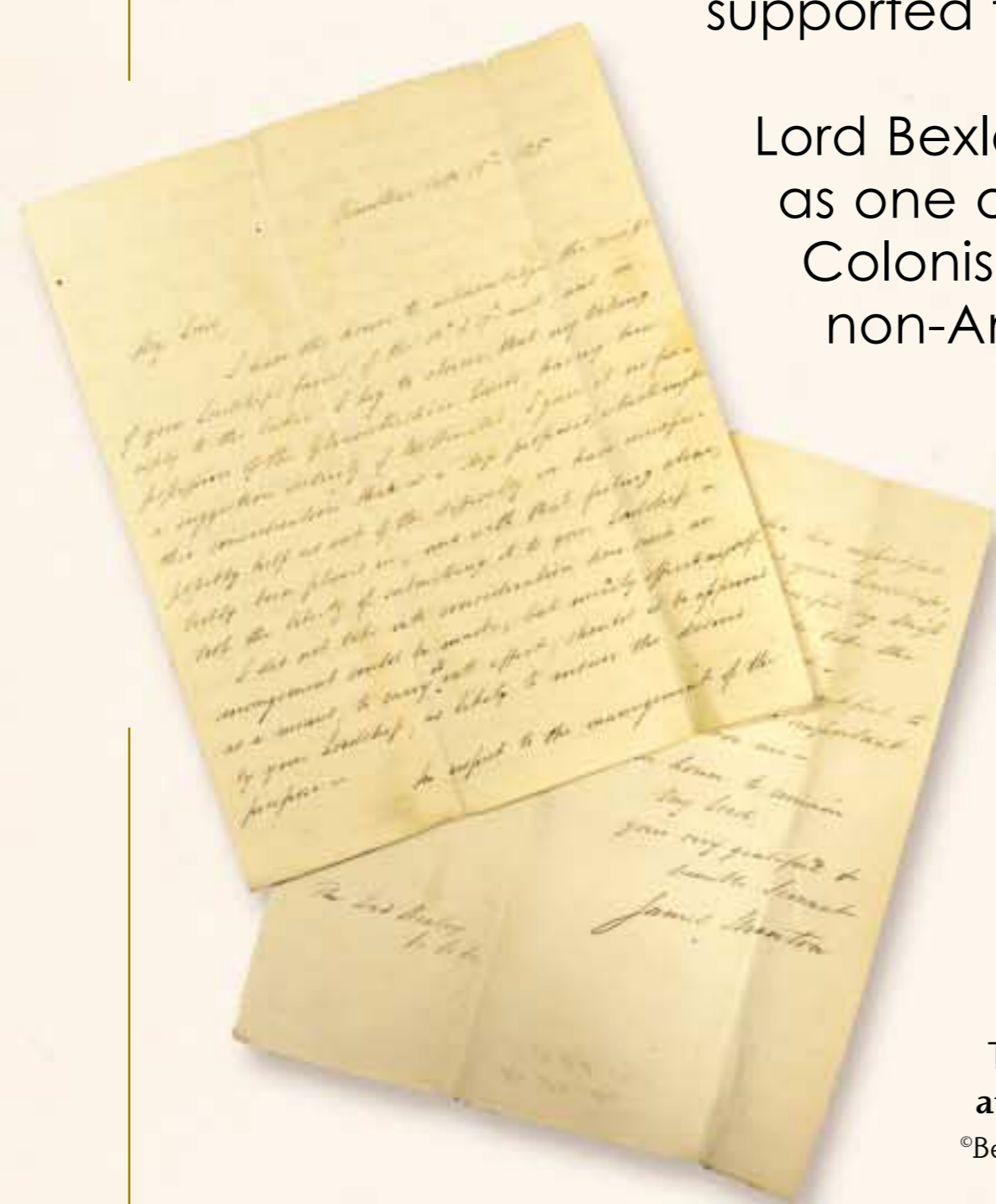
Foots Cray Place



Foots Cray Place - by Geo Shepherd
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre



Lord Bexley- Engraving dated 1831 by T.A. Dean
©Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre



Danson House - home of Sir John Boyd is open to the Public

Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays
11 am - 5pm Easter to October
Contact 020 8303 6699 for more details.

Tracing your local history

If you would like to know more about Bexley and the Transatlantic Slave Trade or other aspects of Bexley's history, please visit Bexley Local Studies and Archives Centre in the central library, Bexleyheath.



1834

Rebellion aboard the slave-ship, Amistad

1848-88

Slavery was abolished in France, the Portuguese colonies, Dutch colonies, the United States, Cuba and Brazil.



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The Slavery Connection

After 1807 Abolition

1833

The Legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Here in Bexley we see legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the remnants of the great estates purchased with the proceeds of chattel slavery. For example Danson House and the churches, schools, public buildings and parks associated with slave owners such as Boyd, Sargent and the Malcolm family. We also have objects relating to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Bexley Local Studies and Archive Collection and Bexley Museum Collection.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade affected millions of people, whole cultures, political systems and economies. It redistributed populations, dividing African people encouraging warfare, and rooting European colonisation.

There are other legacies also, those of racism, discrimination and ignorance. In the 16th to 19th centuries the Transatlantic Slave Trade was justified by the European erroneous belief that African cultures and people were primitive, savage and inferior. This was not so, the vast continent was diverse with many traditional cultures, languages and religions, including Christianity. This negative view has affected the national psychology of Africa, the Americas and also Britain, leaving deep and sensitive scars on society.

Learning from the past shows us the horrors and injustices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It also highlights the accomplishments of enslaved African people who retained their identity and culture, survived under the harshest of treatments, fought for freedom and prospered.

It is important that society acknowledges the past.

Britain abolished the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807 and chattel slavery in 1833. Although plantation owners received compensation, emancipated slaves received nothing and lost their homes. But this did not end slavery. In many cases their place was taken by bonded labourers from Asia working to pay off debt.

There are an estimated 27 million slaves of all nationalities in the world today, of which 8.4 million are children. Modern slavery is defined by being forced to work under threat, being owned or controlled by an 'employer', being brought and sold as property and having your freedom physically constrained. Modern examples of slavery include forced labour, human trafficking, child labour, bonded labour to pay debts and forced marriage under violence. It exists in Britain even today.

Modern slavery is being fought by the same people as in the past, politicians, church organisations, charities, the media, enslaved people and ex-slaves. The successful campaigns against the Transatlantic Slave Trade show that ordinary individuals can change the world. What are you going to do?

Visit www.antislavery.org for more information.

Bexley Heritage Trust would like to thank:

The Heritage Lottery Fund, Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre, Mosaic Print and all those hosting this exhibition from 2007-09

Curated by Anne-Marie Gill, based on research by Cliff Pereira.

This exhibition will be touring Bexley at various venues during 2007-09

For more details regarding Bexley: The Slavery Connection contact: 01322 526574



Two Victorian portraits of enslaved Africans in Morocco.
©Bexley Museum: Boswell Slide Collection



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