

# William Mellish

**William Mellish lived at Harts House, Woodford Green. His brother, Peter Mellish, invested in the building of the West India Docks which opened in 1802.**

**The West India Docks were built for the sugar trade which was based on slave labour.**

William's father owned land in Shadwell, in the East End next to the Thames. William and his brother Peter made their fortune through supplying the navy with provisions and becoming shipping agents. William was M.P for Middlesex 1806-1820 and a Director of the Bank of England.

The Bank of England, after it was set up in 1694, underpinned the whole system of loans to those involved in the slave trade. Many of its wealthy City members had made their fortunes from the slave trade. The Bank stabilised the national finances, and enabled Britain to wage its major wars of the 18th century. These wars were aimed at securing and safeguarding overseas possessions, including the slave colonies, and to finance the military and naval means that protected the Atlantic slave routes and the plantation economies.

When William Mellish died in 1834, he left behind property worth £3million, including Harts House.

## **The West India Docks**

Built between 1799 and 1802, the Docks were financed by West India merchants and sugar planters, the City of London, the shipping trade, local merchants, professionals and tradesmen. As he was involved in the shipping trade, William Mellish's brother, Peter, was a typical investor.

The Docks were very successful in the 1800s. Much of the area was destroyed during WW2 and from the 1980s the area was re-developed as Canary Wharf.

The Museum in Docklands is built in a former West India Docks warehouse. From November 2007, it will have a new permanent gallery on London, Sugar and Slavery.

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## **Harts House in 1840, the home of William Mellish from 1815 until his death in 1834**

When he bought Harts House in 1815, Mellish demolished the existing medieval building and built a spacious new house designed in the fashionable classical style. This is the house which still stands today. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Harts was used as a hospital and is now a private care home. The grounds were redeveloped for housing in the 1990s.

Image - Essex Record Office

## **Portrait of William Mellish, 1820s**

### **West India Docks**

William Mellish's brother, Peter, invested in the building of the West India Docks, which opened in 1802. Peter was involved in the ship trade and was a typical investor who hoped to benefit from the Docks' success in the sugar trade.

The Government wanted to make sure that ships from the West Indies could land safely. The Docks had a secure wall around it and an armed police force.

The Docks had space for more than 600 large ships. Most were strong ocean going merchant ships designed to sail from Britain to the Caribbean - which meant being able to handle the Atlantic storms. Most ships were armed to ward off pirates and the ships of rival nations. Their main role was as cargo carriers, especially for sugar and rum.

Image - Museum of London