

Hidden Histories

Newsletter 1

August 2007

Investigating the links between Hertfordshire people, the slave trade and abolition

2007 is the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act passed in Parliament in 1807. Not many people realise that:

- Hertfordshire people were actively involved in the fight for freedom in Britain, the West Indies and America
- Many African Caribbean people came to Hertfordshire *before* 1807, all with fascinating stories to tell.

Archives, museums, libraries, and community organisations in Hertfordshire are currently working together to find out more from original documents, and give a voice to these Hertfordshire people whose stories have not been heard.

The Hidden Histories project aims to:

- Promote positive teaching and learning about the slave trade
- Highlight our shared heritage
- Show how we can continue to make a difference in our communities and world today.

Five major stories have emerged from the research so far. See inside for more details...

**Thomas Clarkson
George Edward Doney
Slave Revolts in the Caribbean
What's in a Name?
Making a Difference**



Looking at original archive documents at the Hidden Histories Launch event in May

Based on the stories from the original archive documents, there will be:

- Creative workshops with children, young people and adults
- Talks, events and archive visits
- Film-making training with young people
- Production of a DVD and touring exhibition
- A booklist
- A heritage trail booklet
- Working alongside the project for the restoration of the Thomas Clarkson Monument

THE STORIES

Thomas Clarkson



Thomas Clarkson was a relentless campaigner against slavery who travelled 35,000 miles on horseback around Britain, gathering evidence from sailors and ships' surgeons. He could be called the founder of Fairtrade as he showed how African products such as intricately woven patterned cloth, seeds, rice, jewellery and basket-ware could be traded with Africa as an alternative to people. You can still see the monument erected to his memory at Wadesmill on the old A10. Who are these people who attended the unveiling?

We will update you in future newsletters about the progress being made to restore this important monument, a key link to Hertfordshire's abolitionist past.

George Edward Doney

George Edward Doney worked as a servant for 44 years for the 5th Earl of Essex at Cassiobury in Hertfordshire. The inscription on his gravestone in St Mary's churchyard, Watford, reveals that he was captured from Gambia as a child and sold into slavery in America, before being brought to Hertfordshire. He was very highly regarded as it was rare for a servant to have a tombstone. Can we find out more about him in the archives? The Earl and Countess of Essex were among the list of subscribers to the 1st edition of the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, an ex-slave and leading black abolitionist. Did George Edward Doney know Equiano or influence the Earl and Countess to support the abolitionist cause?



Olaudah Equiano

Slave Revolts in the Caribbean

The resistance of enslaved people played a crucial role in the abolition of slavery. In 1791 a slave revolt broke out on the island of St Domingue (present-day Haiti), led by a slave called Toussaint L'Ouverture. The St Domingue revolt threatened the power of both France and Britain – and showed that both could be defeated by an army of former slaves. Many in Britain began to feel that the cost in money and lives was too high a price to pay for maintaining the slave trade. On 1 January 1804, St Domingue declared itself the first independent Black Republic of Haiti.

Henry Johnstone was one of 20,000 re-inforcements sent by the British Army in 1795 to quell the St Domingue rebellion. Love letters to his wife, in the Hertfordshire Archives, tell the story of the rebellion and how his regiment was forced to evacuate St Domingue in 1798. The rebels had won!



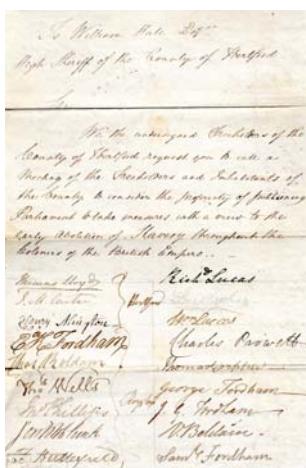
Toussaint L'Ouverture

What's in a Name?

Evidence shows that African Caribbean people have lived in Hertfordshire for over 400 years. So far over 80 individuals of African and Caribbean descent have been identified from parish registers and other sources. Evidence shows that these people married local women, and many people living in Hertfordshire today may be unaware that they have African ancestry. Where are their descendants now?



Making a Difference



A petition found in Hertfordshire's Archives is beginning to tell a new and unfolding story of Hertfordshire people in the 19th century who believed that their actions could make a difference. In 1830, people from across the county signed a petition asking the High Sheriff of Hertford, William Hale, to call a meeting to petition parliament for the 'early Abolition of Slavery throughout the Colonies of the British Empire'.

How did all of these men know each other? Were they actively involved in the abolition movement? Who were the movers and the shakers? Did the fact that many of them were non-conformists – Quakers, Unitarians and Methodists - link them to the movement? And are their descendants still living in Hertfordshire today?

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

Did you see us at our Hidden Histories project marquee at the Kaleidoscope Festival on 14th July held at Stanborough Park in Welwyn Garden City? The theme of this year's festival was 'Freedom and Equality' to tie in with the Bicentenary. Students from Onslow St Audrey's and Hertswood Schools also showcased the results of their creative workshops.



Find out more about Hidden Histories at our Worldwide Family History Day at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies in Hertford on 13th October 2007

Put it in your diary!

More news to follow....

THEATRE IS...

Working with dancers and spoken word artists from Theatre Is... (Regional Beacon Theatre Company for Young People), students from across the county are bringing the archive stories to life!



St Michael's School in Watford focused on the Story of George Edward Doney, buried in the nearby churchyard



The Thomas Clarkson Monument



Hertswood School in Borehamwood and Onslow St Audrey's School in Hatfield bringing to life the Story of Thomas Clarkson



Hitchin Girls School

Using historical sources from the archives, 11-16 year old students explored 'emotions' relating to the slave trade and its abolition and expressed their learning through various art media including dance, musical composition and quilt-making. Despite dealing with a complex and powerful topic, what the girls achieved in the one week Summer School was extraordinary.



Monks Walk School

At the Kaleidoscope Festival, Monks Walk School in Welwyn Garden City displayed some of the results of their poster competition entitled 'Freedom and Equality'. This poem, 'Vessel', is by Jennifer Nutter from Year 9.

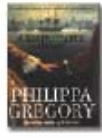
VESSEL

*This endless journey,
Stretched all around
Swallows so many voices,
Without a sound
Tell me which is my vessel,
The boat or my skin?
I could compare the standards,
Of the horrors within
The ship is a demon,
Inside there is nothing but pain
The people on board
Are defenceless, dying, drained
Snatched from comfort,
And thrown into despair
When I step foot on land again,
Only my Lord will know where
Then there's my skin,
That feeble, paper thin armour
I hide inside it and nurse my wounds,
Until all the seas are calmer
Is this my life now, living in this ship?
Is this my purpose, toes tip to tip?
Is this how you expect so many to live?
When you take so much, what do you expect us to give?
It is not your right to take our voices away!
For in fact in the end, it gives us so much more to say
Spent all my strength in this body that cannot mend
But I'll wait in this vessel until my journey's end.*

THE SLAVE TRADE, ABOLITION AND SLAVERY TODAY – A BOOKLIST



A booklist relating to the slave trade and its abolition is now available at libraries across the county. It lists books related to the history and legacy of abolition, slavery in fiction and books for young people. They are all available for loan and you can reserve any title if it is not available at your local library. To see further details of the books just follow the links at www.hertsdirect.org/libsl leisure/libraries/books/hiddenhistories/



Book covers reproduced courtesy of Holt Jackson Book Co Ltd

If any readers would like to produce a short review of any of the booklist titles we would love to receive them. We will put them on the website to share people's experience of exploring the issues of slavery and abolition through reading. Please hand them in at any library, marked '**Hidden Histories**' for the attention of Penny Whitehead at Welwyn Garden City Library or email them to penny.whitehead@hertscc.gov.uk.

PERFORMANCE WORKSHOPS FOR ADULTS

CAN YOU HELP US?



Free performance workshops

Explore the stories uncovered from the archives linking Hertfordshire with the slave trade and its abolition

Work with theatre artists and bring the stories to life.
No previous experience necessary, just enthusiasm!

Watford Central Library
29th September 2007 1.15 - 3.30pm
Welwyn Garden City Library
20th October 2007 1.15 - 3.30pm

Places limited. To book your free place call 01438 737333, email hertsdirect@hertscc.gov.uk, quoting "HALS course bookings".

THEATRE IS...

Supported by
The National Lottery
through the Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hertsdirect.org/hals



Volunteers are currently searching Hertfordshire Parish Registers for evidence of people of African and Caribbean descent living in the county since the 1500's. We have looked at 55 parishes so far and have already found approx. 82 people, but there are still another 79 parishes to go!



Can you help us? If you can spare a few hours weekly or fortnightly and are able to join one of our groups or work alone, please let us know.



A great opportunity to learn new skills!

You never know, you might uncover our most important hidden history yet!

For further details of the Hidden Histories Project please contact:

Jenn Banks, Project Co-ordinator,
Hertfordshire's Hidden Histories, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8EJ
Email: jenn.banks@hertscc.gov.uk
Tel: 01992 555117

For up-to-date news and events see our website at www.hertsdirect.org/hals