

George John Scipio Africanus

**George John Scipio Africanus is
the first black person to live in
Nottingham whose story we know.**

His is a remarkable tale:
born in West Africa in the
age of slavery he
became a successful
businessman, a property
owner and a prominent
citizen of Nottingham by
the time he died at the
age of seventy one.



George Africanus

The Age of Slavery

George Africanus' story starts over two hundred years ago in Sierra Leone, West Africa, where he was born in 1763.

Following voyages of discovery to the Americas, 'new' lands were colonised by the Europeans. Workers were needed for their plantations, to produce luxury goods for the European market. First local people were used, then white bonded servants who sold their labour in return for free passage to the new lands, but still more labour was needed. It was then Europeans looked to enslaving Africans.



Sierra Leone on the coast of West Africa

This illustration shows what is known as the 'triangular trade'. European's ships left home filled with manufactured goods that were traded for slaves. The slaves were then transported to the Caribbean and the Americas where they were auctioned and sold to plantation owners. Their slave labour produced items such as sugar and cotton, which were shipped back to Europe.

By the time George Africanus was born in 1763 most of the people taken in slavery were transported in British ships. The trade reached its peak between 1750 and 1800, when around 4 million slaves were transported across sea by the major European powers.



George Africanus in Wolverhampton

George Africanus was not enslaved and taken across the Atlantic to work on a plantation. Instead, at the age of three, he was sent to England where, presumably, he was sold. Black servants were a fashionable sign of wealth in England at the time. George, whether bought or accepted as a present, entered the household of Benjamin Molineux, a wealthy ironmaster, merchant and banker in Wolverhampton.

The Molineux family were kind to the young boy and on 31 March 1766, soon after his arrival, he was baptised and given the name George John Scipio Africanus. George and John were Molineux family names, Scipio was a Roman general who fought in North Africa and his surname Africanus was from his place of birth, Africa. We do not know what his African name had been.



March 31 1766
Mary Scipio of White Alley Town 31
Benjamin son of John & Mary Molineux 31
George John Scipio, surnamed Africanus
& Negro Boy of Benj^m Molineux 31

a Negro Boy of Benj^m Molineux 31

Record of George's baptism reads 'George John Scipio, surnamed Africanus, a Negro Boy of Benjm Molineux'

Portrait of George Molineux. The painting shows him as a gentleman of some wealth with his estate, large house, hunting dogs and black servant. The servant is almost certainly George John Scipio Africanus.

The Molineux family were very fond of the little African boy and George received a good education in the household. When he was older he was apprenticed to a brass founder. The age of slavery in England was coming to an end and it is likely that the Molineux family wished to give him a trade so that he might live an independent life.

The grounds of the house are now the site of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club. The stadium is still known as 'Molineux Park'.

The End of Slavery in the British Empire

Towards the end of the 18th century, when George was in the Molineux household, there were about 14,000 black people living in England. Many of them, like George, worked as servants to well-off families, others found work as tailors or barbers.

However, this was also the time of a great campaign to abolish slavery in Britain and its colonies. In 1787 William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, and others founded the Committee for the Abolition of Slave Trade. A year earlier Wilberforce had visited his cousin Samuel Smith and stayed at Wilford House in Nottingham. Here he gathered his thoughts, rereading the classics and educating himself before heading home and beginning his fight against injustice.

George Africanus was given his independence before the campaign had succeeded in changing the law, possibly following the Somerset case of 1772.

James Somerset was a slave in England who, to avoid being deported to the plantations, won a case in the High Court.

One prominent campaigner was Olaudah Equiano, himself a former slave who was born in what is now Nigeria. He came to Nottingham in 1790 to speak at meetings against slavery. Although we have no evidence that George Africanus attended the meetings he must have been very interested in the campaign.

Public opinion was turning against slavery and it was finally abolished in Britain and the British Empire by Act of Parliament in 1833. So popular was the Act that when it came into force in 1834 people celebrated in Nottingham – and elsewhere – by closing shops and holding street parties.



Josiah Wedgwood actively participated in the anti-slavery movement and was a member of one of the committees of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery. This medallion, showing the society's emblem, was made in 1790 as part of a campaign to raise awareness. The motto reads 'AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?'



Title page from Equiano's autobiography 'Gustavus Vassa', written using his slave name. Published in 1789 this narrative of a slave's life made many more English people aware of the problems surrounding slavery.

Timeline of Slavery and Abolition

- 1444** First African slaves taken from Mauritania to Portugal.
- 1562** Sir John Hawkins is the first Englishman to go on a slaving expedition. He travels to Sierra Leone to capture slaves, then sells them in the Caribbean.
- 1619** First recorded cargo of African slaves lands in Virginia, America.
- 1655** British capture Jamaica from Spain, gaining control of the slaves already there. Some slaves on the island manage to escape and form their own settlements in the mountains.
- 1730** Britain becomes the country with the largest slave trade. Between this point and 1807 about 2.8 million enslaved Africans are transported in British ships.
- 1772** Outcome of James Somerset case declares that slaves cannot be forcibly removed from Britain and taken back to the plantations by their masters. This often led to the incorrect belief that slaves in England were free and slavery had become illegal.
- 1778** Slavery becomes illegal in Scotland.
- 1787** Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade is founded in London, with Granville Sharp as President.
- 1789** Olaudah Equiano publishes his 'Gustavus Vassa'.
- 1805** Bill for Abolition passed in the House of Commons, but rejected in the House of Lords.
- 1807** Slave Trade Abolition Bill is passed in Parliament on 25 March. This made slave trading illegal for British subjects and any British person caught would be fined £100 for each slave. Buying, selling and transporting slaves is now illegal, but ownership continues.
- 1808** Special section of the Royal Navy is established to try and stop slave trading.
- 1833** The Abolition of Slavery Act is passed, to end slavery in the British Empire.
- 1834** The Abolition of Slavery Act and the Emancipation Act take effect. The British government pays compensation to the slave owners.
- 1865** Slavery is abolished throughout territories of the United States
- 1942** Slavery is abolished in Ethiopia.
- 1962** Slavery is abolished in Saudi Arabia by King Faisal.

Today

The battle to end modern day slavery continues throughout the world. Today people of all ages, races and sex can be slaves. One example affecting millions of people is bonded labour, where people agree or are tricked into agreeing to pay back a loan by working. The value of labour given will be far greater than the amount originally borrowed and the debt may end up being passed down generations.

George Africanus in Nottingham

Sometime around 1784, when George was 21 years old, he left the Molineux family and moved to Nottingham to work as a brass founder. Four years later he married a local girl Esther Shaw and they lived on Chandler's Lane in the centre of Nottingham.

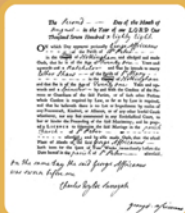


The map shows Nottingham and Chandler's Lane around 1800.

Family life

George and Esther had seven children although only one survived to adulthood.

NAME	BORN	DIED AGED
George	1790	14 years
Samuel	1793	18 months
Elizabeth	1796	9 months
Sarah	1798	13 years
Samuel	1799	2 years 7 months
Hannah	1804	90 years
Ann	1810	14 months



Declaration of intention to marry Esther Shaw, signed by George Africanus.



A Perspective View of Nottingham Market Place, dated 1813, by T. Cartwright

During this time George presumably still had connections with the Molineux family as one of his children, Sarah, was baptised in Wolverhampton. His surviving daughter Hannah married a watchmaker, Samuel Cropper, in 1824 and their first child Sarah Ann was born the following year. They had another daughter Esther Africanus Cropper sixteen years later.

Death and the Family

In his will, drawn up in 1833, George describes himself as a 'yeoman' and leaves his property to Esther and daughter Hannah.

This is the last Will and Testament of one George Africanus of the Town of Southampton Yeoman. First I desire all my just debts to be paid. I give the use and full power of administration during the life of my dear and lawful wife and after her death of my dear daughter Hannah I give all my said household goods and Furniture unto my said wife and her heirs male for ever for my said daughter Hannah I give absolutely for her own use and benefit and to be enjoyed as she shall think proper from the payment of all debts and interest of her said husband Samuel Cropper who I have with care and diligence shall never enjoy or possess any of my property. Provided that in case my said daughter should at any time hereafter marry she shall not take her said husband the said Samuel Cropper then she shall forfeit all her right to my said household and effects herebefore given unto or in trust for her and the same shall remain the property of William Maria Jones and Myriam Jones heiress of 15 Tottenham Court Road London I have also devised all that my Mortgage or Tenement situate in Beaufort Lane in the City of Southampton now in my own name and also all those three other Mortgages or Tenements adjoining to the North end of the said first mentioned Mortgage and hereby give the said Mortgage and Tenement situate in the street of George as recompense of my said daughter Hannah Joseph Jones and Samuel Cropper and which said three last mentioned Mortgages or Tenements have been lately paid and held by me when the title of five old Mortgages or Tenements which were heretofore in the possession of Saml Rice and Peter Emery and also all that being situate in the Market yard adjacent now occupied by the said Mortgage or Tenements above described that all other my said rights and advantages and advantages which any Justice John Spence of the Town of Southampton or Justice of the Peace John Thomas and James Hewlett of the same place have or shall have and also my Household when the said will is read for the said use and intent and purpose herebefore mentioned provided and repeated that is to say when I shall that this the said Samuel Cropper or the survivor of them or the heirs or assigns of such persons do not take receive the rents and profits of any said Mortgage or Tenement and premises during the life time or term of years of my said wife or daughter Hannah and after deceasing thereof the expense of keeping the said premises in good and

George Africanus

First page of the will of George Africanus, proved 1835

It seems that Hannah's husband Samuel Cropper was out of favour with George for the will states that she shall have the benefit of property held in trust

'as though she were unmarried and which shall be free from the control, debts or interference of her husband Samuel Cropper who . . . shall never enjoy or possess any of my property'.

Indeed, George goes further and directs that should Hannah ever get back together with her husband she shall give up her entitlement to any benefits from the property. This didn't deter Hannah for she must have been reconciled to her husband; their second daughter was born about seven years later.

George's grandchild Sarah Ann (first daughter of Hannah and Samuel) had some illness or disability for in his will George provides for his 'grand-daughter . . . in a comfortable and proper manner according to her situation in life and afflicted state.'

Burial and Further Generations

On 25 May 1834, at the age of seventy one, George died. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary's, a long way - in so many ways - from his place of birth in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

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BURIALS in the Parish of Saint Mary, in the Town of Nottingham, in the Year 1834

NAME	ABOVE	WEEK BURIED	AGE	BY WHOM THE CEREMONY WAS PERFORMED
George Africanus No. 298	Chancellors Lane	May 25	71 years	See Column Above
		6 0 1 6 1 1		

This is to certify, that the above is a true Copy of an entry in the Register of Burials, belonging to the Parish of Saint Mary, Nottingham.

John Molyneux, Esq.


Burial certificate for George Africanus

So what became of George's family after his death?

His wife Esther continued to run the Register of Servants until her own death in 1853 when she was 85 years of age.

173. REGISTER OFFICES FOR SERVANTS.

Africanus Esther, Chandler's lane
 Boot John, Carter gate
 Husbands Mrs., Goose gate
 Wainer Samuel, Hounds gate
 Webster Mary, Derby road

Deardon's Trade Directory 1834

DIED, Feb 12, 1853.

Yesterday (Thursday), aged 85 years, Mrs. Africanus, for upwards of sixty years proprietress of the Servants' Register Office, in Chancellors Lane.

On Tuesday week, in his 71st year, George John Scipio Africanus, a native of Sierra Leone. He was brought when an infant, to England; being a present made to John Molyneux, Esq. of Wolverhampton, cousin to the late Sir Francis Molyneux, Bart., of Wellow in this county. Mr. M., who was much attached to him, for some years kept him in his household, and had him educated, and finally put him out an apprentice to a brass-founder, in Wolverhampton; and when out of his time he removed to Nottingham, where he married and has resided for the last fifty years, and was well known for several years as the keeper of the Register Office for Servants, in Chandler's Lane.

George Africanus' obituary in the Nottingham Review 30 May 1834

Her daughter Hannah then took over the business for another nine years. Then, as part of the town centre improvements and road widening, Hannah and Samuel were obliged to sell the Chandler's Lane property to the Board of Health, receiving £50 in compensation for their loss of business.

Family Gravestones in St Mary's Churchyard

George Africanus' gravestone is much decayed and the almost illegible inscription reads:

*Oh cruel death that has separated here
A loving father from his daughter dear,
Also a tender parent in decline of life,
A loving mother and a careful wife,
While on this world they did remain,
The latter days were full of pain.*

'North West View of St Mary's Church,
Nottingham', dated 1827, by Thomas
Earnshaw



Gravestone of George Africanus Junior

George and Esther's eldest son, George, died at the age of 14 years. By that time three other children had died in infancy as is alluded to on his gravestone:

*Our life is nothing but a winter's day,
Some break their fast and go away,
Others stay dinner and depart full fed,
The deepest age but sups and goes to bed.
He's most in debt that lingers out the day,
Who dies betimes has less and less to pay.*

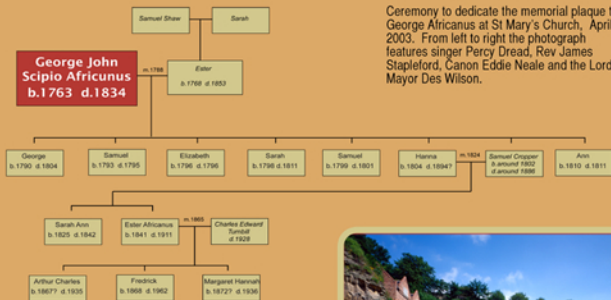
The Search for George Africanus

Several local people have looked through references and records for pieces of the puzzle of the story of George Africanus and his family.

Work continues and the hunt for George's descendants goes on. George Africanus' story is now well known and continues to be taught at local schools. George is celebrated as a model citizen, a caring family man and a successful businessman. His importance has been officially recognised by a plaque in the churchyard where he is buried, this declares him 'Nottingham's first black entrepreneur'.

Original manuscript Africanus records can be seen at Nottinghamshire Archives, Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham. The Local Studies Library on Angel Row has Poll books, trade directories and census material. Thanks to both these institutions for their help.

The Family of George Africanus



Ceremony to dedicate the memorial plaque to George Africanus at St Mary's Church, April 2003. From left to right the photograph features singer Percy Dread, Rev James Stapleford, Canon Eddie Neale and the Lord Mayor Des Wilson.



If you have any more information on George Africanus, or would like to borrow this exhibition, please contact the Museum of Nottingham Life at Brewhouse Yard