

Echoes of Slavery

All Saints Church and Contested Heritage



All Saints Church, Kingston upon Thames

2021

Introduction

The 21st century has seen a huge resurgence of public interest in the contemporary legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. For example:

In 2007, to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade, English Heritage (now separately English Heritage and Historic England) commissioned research into connections with slavery at English Heritage sites.

Beginning in 2009, the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at University College London has developed a comprehensive and still-expanding database of the legacies of British slavery.

Since the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, a greater volume of literature has been published on the British slave-trade, slavery, abolition and emancipation than had appeared in the whole of the preceding century.¹ Further impetus for this interest was provided by the widespread anger that followed the murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2021, the consequent surge of anti-racism

¹ *London Review of Books*, 15th July 2021, p. 25.

demonstrations around the world and a wave of attacks on statues of people associated with the slave-trade and imperialism. In the UK, the toppling of the statue of the wealthy slave-trader Edward Colston in Bristol and the continuing controversy over the future of the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oxford are just two British instances of this global expression of concern.

Other consequences of this renewed interest have been the renaming of places and organisations that commemorated individuals who were connected with the slave trade. For example in 2020, Sir John Cass's Foundation, one of London's oldest and largest education charities which was founded with funds provided by the legacy of Sir John Cass, a wealthy 18th century London merchant with trading interests in the West Indies, a Member of Parliament and a philanthropist, announced that "*... it had taken the opportunity to reflect on its mission in the light of the tragic events in the USA and the Black Lives Matter movement*",² and that following extensive consultation with all stakeholders it was to be renamed as The Portal Trust. The business school at City, University of London, has removed its association with Sir John Cass, adopting instead the name of the 18th century mathematician Thomas

² 'Black Lives Matter' is the name of a decentralised political and social movement protesting against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against black people. To be opposed to police brutality and to racially motivated violence against black people is not necessarily to imply any alignment with the more radical political agendas espoused by some adherents of BLM.

Bayes. The Sir John Cass Redcoat School in London changed its name to Stepney All Saints School, and a memorial bust of Sir John in St Botolph's Church, Aldgate, was removed in 2020.³

There has been, and there continues to be, considerable controversy about attempts to reformulate society's perspective on the consequences of British involvement in both the slave trade and colonialism. For example, the research reports published in 2020 by the National Trust and Historic England into the links between their properties and colonialism and the slave trade provoked a furious political backlash, which has been characterised by some commentators as a 'war on woke'. All Saints Church, however, aligns itself firmly and unapologetically with all aspects of anti-racism as a means of working towards the more equal and just society that is embedded in the teachings of the Christian faith.

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³ An interactive map showing monument removals in the USA and other parts of the world including the UK, Belgium and Canada has been created by Dr Hilary Green, and can be accessed via the Museum of London (Docklands) website: <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/who-are-monuments-for>.

The Church of England context

In May 2021, the Church Buildings Council and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England published guidance on behalf of the Archbishops' Council entitled: *Contested Heritage in Churches and Cathedrals*. The guidance set out to provide a framework which lays out key principles, processes and considerations designed to help church and cathedral communities approach decision-making and discussions around contested heritage, with a clear understanding of all possible outcomes within the statutory legal processes of the Ecclesiastical Exemption.⁴ The framework is designed to enable churches and cathedrals to assess how, and to what extent, their memorials might impact on their ability to undertake missional, pastoral and liturgical activities.

The guidance emphasises to parishes that whilst it is accepted that this is difficult and sensitive territory, doing nothing is not an option:

⁴ The Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) England Order 2010 gives the Church of England, along with four other religious denominations, exemption from Listed Building consent and Conservation Area consent, provided that there is an equivalent heritage protection system in place. For parish churches this is the Faculty System. The Exemption recognises that church buildings are places of worship, and it allows considerations of mission, worship, and wider community use to be set alongside a concern for care and conservation.

'The guidance recognises the distinctiveness of contested heritage in a church context. This work supports the mission of the Church by helping churches to be places of welcome and solace for all people. At its heart is the fourth Mark of Mission, which enjoins everyone in the Anglican Communion:

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.

*The aim has been to find ways of mediating discussion that will help churches and their wider communities to develop solutions that will ultimately tackle the issues that contentious memorials evoke. It is important to remember that this is not about judging people in the past by the standards of the present, but about how items of contested heritage and wider issues of under-representation affect our ability to be a Church for all in the 21st century.'*⁵

As this guidance makes clear, the Church of England has an unambiguous position on the 'Contested Heritage' debate, and All Saints Church is fully supportive of this position:

⁵ The Church Buildings Council and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (2021), *Contested Heritage*, Archbishops' Council, p. 7.

*'The effects of enslavement continue to impact the lives of many UK ethnic minority communities to whom, at best, these objects may be reminders of an 'overcome' past, a horror from which we celebrate our extrication; at worst, for these objects to remain in place with no discussion or interpretation could be taken to imply⁶ that the oppression and disenfranchisement they evoke for many in affected communities is socially and theologically acceptable to the Church.'*⁶

In commissioning the research which led to the publication of this pamphlet, All Saints Church is seeking to make a positive and constructive response to the Church of England's call to affirmative action with regard to any instances of contested heritage that the church building may contain. Such instances might be regarded as 'echoes of slavery'.

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⁶ Op. Cit. p. 11.

Echoes of slavery in All Saints Church

All Saints Church is probably unique in having an ancient but very positive link with slavery. **King Athelstan** (reigned 924 - 939AD) was one of seven Saxon kings who are believed to have been crowned in a church on the site on which All Saints has stood for over a thousand years. Athelstan is recorded as having released a slave at the time of his coronation in the year 925AD, in the presence of his household. This was understood by contemporary chroniclers to be a symbolic act which signified Athelstan's intention to rule a more free and just society than the one he had inherited. Some years later, in his undated *'Ordinance on Charities'*, Athelstan commanded his 'reeves' (a network of local officials) to release one 'penal' slave each year *'... for the loving kindness of God and for the attainment of eternal life.'*⁷

⁷ Sarah Foot, *Athelstan: The First King of England*, Yale University Press, 2011. p. 139.



King Athelstan presenting a book to St Cuthbert

There is no memorial to King Athelstan in All Saints' Church, although he will feature as one of the subjects of the *'Seven Saxon Kings'* heritage embroidery project, which is currently in progress. As they are completed, each of the seven tapestries will be permanently displayed at the East End of the church, along with a range of interpretative material.⁸

⁸ King Athelstan was buried in Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire, although his remains are now lost. A proposal to erect an eleven-foot tall bronze statue of Athelstan in the grounds of the Abbey was withdrawn in July 2021 following local opposition (<https://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/news/19472789.plans-king-aethelstan-statue-malmesbury-withdrawn>). Athelstan is also commemorated in Beverly Minster, East Yorkshire and in Ripon Cathedral, North Yorkshire.

A second instance of All Saints' Church having a positive connection with slavery is provided by **Cesar Picton (c1755 – 1836)**, a Kingston celebrity of Senegalese origin. Picton is believed to have been brought to England by a British army officer when he was about six years old, having been purchased at a Senegal slave market, apparently (according to one uncorroborated source) along with his mother who did not survive the journey.⁹ He was presented as a gift to Sir John Philipps MP in 1761, along with a parakeet and an African duck.¹⁰ Sir John lived at Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire and also at Norbiton Place near Kingston upon Thames. According to one source, there is evidence in family correspondence suggesting that he was opposed to slavery.¹¹ On 6th December 1761 Philipps had the young boy baptised at Norbiton by Rev'd Dr Philipps, who may well have been a member of the family, with the given name 'Cesar Picton'. Cesar was a popular 18th century name for black servants in Britain.

Whether or not Picton should actually be considered to have been enslaved is a matter of debate. Whilst some sources use the word 'enslaved' in recounting his life,¹² his experience was very different from that of the majority of the millions of African people who were

⁹ 'Exploring Surrey's Past':

https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/black_history/cesar-picton/

¹⁰ https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/black_history/cesar-picton/

¹¹ Howard Bengé, 'Cesar Picton' | Guildhall Library blog (wordpress.com)

¹² See, for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesar_Picton

forcibly transported to the West Indies by European slave traders and put to work on plantations, often in appalling conditions. Nonetheless, through being taken overseas and baptised as a Christian, he was denied the use of his own name, a life in his country of origin and his original (almost certainly Islamic) culture.¹³

Black domestic servants had become an established part of the household in many British country estates by the late 17th century. Most black male domestic servants in these houses probably occupied visible roles, such as a pageboy or footman. They were regarded as living symbols of their master's status, wealth and overseas connections. Whilst slavery was well established in the colonies when Picton was in service, the institution of slavery had no legal status in England. The situation of black domestic servants was consequently ambiguous. Some were paid wages or in kind and could leave their employment by choice, whilst others were treated as nothing more than slaves.¹⁴

The young Cesar was evidently treated kindly by the Philipps family, and a legacy of £100 from Lady Philipps, together with another bequest from her daughter, enabled him to establish himself as a coal

¹³ 'Exploring Surrey's Past':

https://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/black_history/cesar-picton/

¹⁴ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/kirby-hall/james-chappell/>

merchant in Kingston. Cesar's decision to enter the coal trade was undoubtedly influenced by Sir John Philipps' considerable interest in the coal industry. The family estate in Wales was a well-established coal mining centre, and Sir John's connections may well have set Cesar up with some helpful contacts.¹⁵ Picton proved to be a highly successful businessman and he became very prosperous. Whilst this story of upward mobility was in marked contrast to the experience of the vast majority of black people in Britain at the time, some of them undoubtedly succeeded in achieving status and prosperity, including the writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano and the Mayfair shopkeeper Ignatius Sancho. Other successful black businessmen are known to have worked as publicans and lodging-house keepers, providing evidence of a degree of black upward social mobility in 18th and 19th century British society.

Cesar Picton certainly succeeded in achieving a marked improvement in his own circumstances. His two substantial town houses still stand in the High Streets of Kingston upon Thames and Thames Ditton, and both properties are now marked with commemorative heritage plaques. Picton died at the age of 81 and following a lavish funeral he was buried in the South Aisle of All Saints Church ¹⁶, where he had

¹⁵ Sean Canty, *Cesar Picton – the full story*, Exploring Surrey's Past, October 2020.

¹⁶ Picton's burial was evidently no easy matter. Because he was a very large man, it took ten men to carry his coffin, which had to be lowered into the grave with the assistance of planks and rollers. (Sean Canty, *Op. Cit.*)

attended meetings of the 'Vestry', the precursor of today's Parochial Church Council. The generous bequests in his Will indicate that he was on familiar terms with the leading members of the Kingston community. Although there is no gravestone marking Picton's burial place, he is commemorated by a modest slate tablet simply inscribed 'C.P.' on the nearby wall of the South Aisle.



Cesar Picton's house at 52 High Street, Kingston upon Thames

In 2021, English Heritage commissioned a series of portraits depicting six historic figures from the African Diaspora whose stories have contributed to English history. The paintings included one of James Chappell who was a servant in the household of Christopher Hatton of Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire. As a highly successful merchant and businessman who had risen from domestic service, Cesar Picton could easily have been chosen to be a part of this group, had he only been associated with an English Heritage property.



Picton House, High Street, Thames Ditton

One of the finest of all the memorials in All Saints Church is the marble statue of **Lady Louisa Theodosia Jenkinson, Countess of Liverpool (1767 – 1821)**, the work of the eminent 19th century sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey. ‘The Countess’, as she is affectionately known at All Saints’, was the first wife of Robert Jenkinson, who became the second Lord Liverpool on the death of his father, and then, from 1812 to 1827, Prime Minister. The couple lived at Coombe House, a large mid-18th century residence (now demolished) built on high ground to the east of Kingston’s town centre. As a young Member of Parliament, Jenkinson was a stalwart defender of the transatlantic slave trade, probably as a result of the influence of his father who was an outspoken opponent of William Wilberforce’s anti-slave-trade campaign. But years later, at the 1814 - 15 Congress of Vienna, he

argued strenuously (now as Lord Liverpool and Prime Minister) in favour of the international abolition of the trade. Within a few years most European countries had accepted his view. Might it be possible that Lady Louisa, whose memorial speaks of her many virtues and who was known to take a close interest in her husband’s political work as well as engaging in her own charitable activities, exercised a moderating influence on his political opinions, and perhaps especially his attitude towards slavery?



Lady Louisa Theodosia Jenkinson, Countess of Liverpool (d. 1821)

Lady Louisa’s statue achieved a measure of fame well beyond the confines of All Saints Church in 1981, when it was the centrepiece of a bicentenary exhibition of Chantrey’s work at the National Portrait Gallery in London and subsequently at the Mappin Art Gallery in

Sheffield, close to Chantrey's birthplace. A photograph of the statue was featured on the cover of the exhibition programme.¹⁷

There are approximately one hundred and fifty other monuments and memorials in All Saints Church, which have been accumulated over four centuries and more. Along with the statue of the Countess, they include the colourful reclining alabaster effigy of Sir Anthony Benn (1568 – 1618), a prominent lawyer who served as Recorder of both Kingston and London. Sir Anthony is also commemorated by a handsome decorative plaque on the wall of the former St James Chapel at the East End of the church.



Sir Anthony Benn (d. 1681)

¹⁷ Brigadier Freddie Rushmore CBE (Attributed: undated, but certainly before 2013), *Memorials, All Saints Church, Kingston upon Thames.*

Some of the men and women commemorated in the church were undoubtedly very wealthy. For example, the local charity established by Anne Savage, whose large memorial tablet is located above the North West door, is still in existence as the Savage Trust and continues to provide '*... relief of persons resident in Kingston Deanery who are in need, hardship or distress ...*' and to '*... further religious, educational and charitable work in the Kingston Deanery*'. Anne was the wealthy widow of Rev'd George Savage, a late-18th century Vicar of Kingston.

Alderman William Cleave (1572 - 1667), another wealthy local philanthropist, left sufficient property in the Parish of Kingston to provide for the foundation of Cleave's Almshouses '*... for the maintenance of twelve poor people*', and these picturesque almshouses continue to serve the local community on their original site in Old London Road.

Some of the wealth accrued by individuals and companies in the 18th and 19th centuries would undoubtedly have been derived either directly or indirectly from the profits of the slave trade, although nothing can confidently be said about the sources of the substantial legacies left by either Anne Savage or William Cleave. But it has been well established that the whole of the British economy from the 16th century onwards was permeated by wealth derived from the slave trade, including ownership of West Indian plantations and slave

workforces, investment in plantations and slave trading voyages, the associated banking, insurance and legal services, and also the shipbuilding industry, which began to provide custom-designed vessels for the transportation of slaves. Slave owners received substantial compensation payments after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833. The slaves, it need hardly be said, received nothing. This wealth, much of it invisible, is reliably considered to have been the source of up to one-fifth of personal fortunes in Victorian times, and a considerable amount of Victorian-era philanthropy is believed to have been funded by individual wealth that originated in one or other aspects of the slave trade.¹⁸

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Echoes of slavery in All Saints Church

Four memorials in All Saints Church have been identified as having links to the transatlantic slave trade, although none of the individuals who are commemorated in these memorials was actually involved in the transportation of African slaves to the West Indies.

The Davidson Family

The church contains a group of memorials to Henry Davidson (d. 1781), Duncan Davidson (d. 1799) and the younger Henry Davidson (d. 1827), successive chiefs of the Scottish Clan Davidson. They were very wealthy individuals and, as the database of the *Legacies of Slavery* project reveals, they owned plantations and slaves in the West Indies.¹⁹ The reason for their commemoration in the church is a mystery, since none of the members of the Davidson family members is known to have owned property in Kingston.

The Davidson memorials, which have occupied different positions in the church since they were first installed, are situated on the South Wall of what was formerly St James Chapel until the 1970s

¹⁸ William Rubenstein (2017). *Who Were the Rich?*, London, Edward Everett Root.

¹⁹ UCL Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project>)

refurbishment of the church, and which is now the Café servery. The memorials occupy two of a group of three identical spaces on that wall, and are considered to be of considerable artistic importance. On the left, a figure of a woman in mourning commemorates Henry Davidson (died 1781) and is by the prominent English sculptor Charles Regnart (1759-1844). This memorial also commemorates Henry's brother Duncan (died 1799), and Duncan's wife Lucy (died 1777). In the centre is a seated figure of Duncan's son Henry Davidson (died 1827). The sculpture is by John Ternouth (1795 – 1849) and is regarded as his most ambitious work. The third space remains vacant, and may have been intended to be filled by a memorial to another member of the family.²⁰



Henry Davidson (d. 1827)

The *Legacies of Slavery* database shows that the Davidson family was substantially compensated after 1833, when slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

William Dunbar (d. 1794)

A nephew of the Davidson family, whose family estates in Scotland were adjacent to those of the Davidsons, William Dunbar's memorial is situated on the wall of the South Aisle and is also by Charles Regnart. Dunbar was a wealthy West India merchant and Member of Parliament for Cromartyshire from 1790 to 1796. Parliamentary records show that he opposed an early proposal to abolish the slave trade. The *Legacies of Slavery* database has undated entries for four men named William Dunbar, one of whom is highly likely to be the person commemorated by this memorial.

²⁰ Brigadier Freddie Rushmore, Op. Cit.



William Dunbar's memorial

Charles Pallmer MP (1772 - 1848)

Charles Nicholas Pallmer, whose memorial tablet is located on the wall of the North Transept, was born on a slave plantation in the parish of St Dorothy, Jamaica, which was owned by his father. Pallmer lived at Norbiton Place, in the parish of Kingston, and as a prominent member of the West India Merchants' and Planters' Standing Committee he was a highly committed parliamentary defender of the slave trade 'interest'.

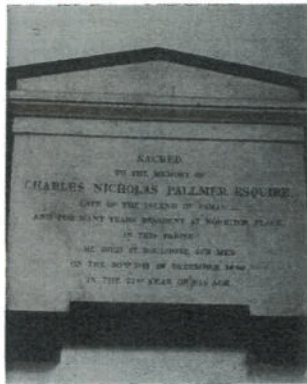


Charles Pallmer MP (d. 1848)

Pallmer argued strongly in favour of tax concessions for the products of the West Indian plantation economy. He defended his own West Indian proprietorship by claiming that one-thousand slaves on his plantation had converted to Christianity.²¹ Once the abolition of slavery had become law in 1833, Pallmer argued vigorously in Parliament for the compensation of the dispossessed slave owners. He became heavily indebted towards the end of his life, apparently as a result of living far beyond his means, and was declared bankrupt in 1831, at which time he was living in Boulogne sur Mer, having fled from his creditors in London. The inscription on his memorial states that he died in Boulogne in 1848, aged 77, although the Administration of his Will described him as '*lately of Norbiton in the*

²¹ '*The History of Parliament: British Political, Social and Local History*' (historyofparliamentonline.org/)

county of Surrey but now of the parish of St Dorothy in the Island of Jamaica'.

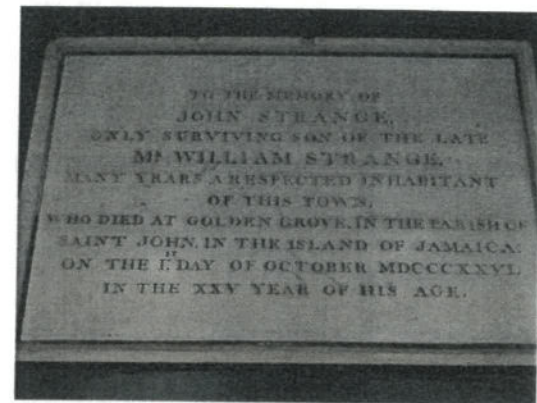


Charles Pallmer's memorial

John Strange (1802 - 1826)

The poignant memorial tablet commemorating John Strange states that he died in 1826 at Golden Grove in Jamaica, aged only 25. The memorial is situated on the west face of the massive north-west pier, one of four such piers which support the Tower. The Golden Grove estate was a slave plantation in the Parish of St John, producing molasses, rum and sugar and which employed approximately 700 slaves. John Strange, whose parents lived in Kingston, was likely to have been an employee, as opposed to an owner, of the plantation,

and may have been an apprentice. Although nothing more is known about Strange, his memorial is an eloquent reminder of the hazards that awaited the considerable numbers of young men who went abroad in search of fortune in distant corners of Britain's colonial possessions. John Strange is described in the memorial inscription as '*... the only surviving son of the late William Strange*', hinting at some earlier but unknown bereavements in the Strange family.



The memorial to John Strange (d. 1826)

Conclusion

The whole community of All Saints Church deeply regrets the part that slavery has played in the history of our nation. We are distressed to think that the presence of memorials in our historic building to individuals who were in some way associated with slavery might suggest our acceptance of the slave trade and its highly deplorable practices. This is categorically not the case. Rather, we are inspired by the example of King Athelstan, the first King of England, who was crowned in a church on the site of today's All Saints Church and whose first act after his coronation was to release a slave in a symbolic act of liberation. This enlightened gesture speaks to us of the justice and freedom from oppression that Jesus taught, and this is the guide and light that we seek to follow.

We want to remember the past honestly, and by publishing this booklet we are signalling our sincere desire to bring the contested heritage of some of our memorials into the open. We do not consider, however, that the removal of any of these historical artefacts would be justified. We do not believe that their presence in any way detracts from our ability to be a 21st century church for everyone. We will continue to act with determination on the essential imperative to proclaim in the present day that black lives certainly matter, and to

acknowledge that striking evidence of long-standing and persistent racial inequalities in (for example) criminal justice, education, employment, housing and income suggests very strongly that, in the past, black lives have not mattered nearly as much as they should have done in our society. We believe that injustice and cruelty, including modern slavery, remain evils in our society that must be resolutely addressed.²²

²² Instances of modern slavery have been detected in Kingston in the recent past (see, for example: <https://www.surreycomet.co.uk/news/19163542.raid-kingston-targets-modern-slavery-ring>). We maintain close contact with the Metropolitan Police in order to ensure that we are constantly vigilant about the possibly existence of modern slavery rings in the locality. All Saints Church also supports the Kingston Community Refugee Sponsorship scheme, which is one means of helping to protect refugees and asylum seekers from falling into the hands of criminal and exploitative gangs.