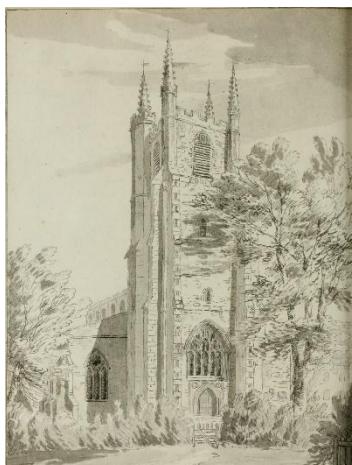


Truth-Telling in Sacred Spaces: 7th February 2026, Southwark Cathedral
"If we keep quiet, the stones will cry out"

Croydon Minster's Links With African Chattel Enslavement

By Stephanie Offer



Croydon Minster in 1792
painted by Daniel Lysons

Croydon's Black history stretches back to 1502 when newly widowed Katherine of Aragon came to live at the Archbishops' palace by the Minster. Among her household were two formerly enslaved North African women who had accompanied her from Spain, one of whom was called Catalina.¹ They returned to Croydon in 1509 with Katherine and her new husband Henry VIII, heralded by Black trumpeter John Blanke.² Had you stepped out of the Minster at this time the air would have been heavy with smoke, as Croydon was the main producer of charcoal for London.³ By 1600 this was fuelling London's new industry refining sugar grown using enslaved labour.⁴

Croydon's first link to plantation colonies came in 1605 when Charles Leigh of Addington, backed by his brother Sir Oliph, attempted to found one in British Guiana.⁵

The first Black person in the Minster records is an enslaved woman called Judeth Timmothy who was buried at the Minster in 1722. Two enslaved people were baptised at the Minster, John Baker in 1755 and in 1765, Charles, enslaved by the Vicar of Croydon Rev Apthorp's brother.

There are also records at the Minster of free Black people being baptised including Richard Hodges in 1779; and being buried, including Thomas Chance in 1773 and Margaret DeAndro in 1780. Another family, the Beckfords, were descended from the white enslaver William Beckford and one of his Black enslaved women.⁶

¹ TNA: PRO 31/11/12) quoted in Lauren Johnson. "Catalina of Motril (fl. 1501–1531), royal bedchamber servant." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 10 Oct. 2019; Accessed 11 Aug. 2025. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-369157>.

² Miranda Kaufmann, Black Tudors: The Untold Story, Oneworld, 2017, page 19; BL Add MS 21481 folio 15v (Payments), 1509, https://www.tudor chamberbooks.org/edition/folio/LL_BL_AddMS_21481_fo015v.xml?basic_search%5Bkeyword%5D=croydon&basic_search%5Bversion%5D=original&basic_search%5BsearchType%5D=keyword&basic_search%5Byear%5D=0&basic_search%5BfromYear%5D=0&basic_search%5BtoYear%5D=0&basic_search%5BmoneyItemMinimum%5D=0&basic_search%5BmoneyItemMaximum%5D=0&basic_search%5BmoneyPageMinimum%5D=0&basic_search%5BmoneyPageMaximum%5D=0&basic_search%5BGo%5D=&page=1&order=year&asc=asc

³ Will Noble, Croydonopolis, Safe Haven Books, 2024, chapter 1

⁴ <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/article/how-england-became-the-sweetshop-of-europe>

⁵ James Alexander Williamson, English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon 1604-1668 pp29-41 <https://archive.org/details/englishcolonies00will/page/29/mode/1up?q=leigh>; David B. Quinn, "LEIGH, CHARLES," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 1, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed January 30, 2026, https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/leigh_charles_1E.html.

⁶ William Beckford <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146640587> his son John farmed in Selsdon, his son Nathaniel lived in Croydon and his daughter Susanna was baptised at the Minster

There were four Vicars of Croydon and at least five Curates whose families had links to African chattel enslavement; and in the 114 years between 1765 and 1879 there were only 23 years when there wasn't a Vicar of Croydon with links to African chattel enslavement.⁷

Rev East Apthorp was the Vicar with the greatest lived experience of African chattel enslavement. He grew up in Boston Massachusetts in a household with 5 enslaved servants and his entire family were, between them, involved in just about every aspect of the Trans-Atlantic trade. He and his family were deeply involved in the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and his brother-in-law Barlow Trecotthick of Addington was also involved in the running of the Codrington plantations.⁸ The Trecothicks were one of four families with links to African chattel enslavement who lived at the Addington estate before the Archbishops of Canterbury bought it in 1807.⁹



John Singleton Copley, Head of a Man, 1777 - 1778, oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund, 52.118.

Rev Apthorp was an American loyalist and many members of his family and friends fled during the American Revolution and followed him to Croydon, where many were buried; nearly all were enslavers. They included painter John Singleton Copley, who was given three enslaved people as a wedding present, Lucy, Cato and a child named Snap.¹⁰



Mrs Ann Trecotthick by Sir Joshua Reynolds

From the 1700s onwards Croydon had a large community of lay people, involved in African Chattel Enslavement, baptised, married and buried at Croydon Minster, part of the life and finances of the church.

Among them were bankers, plantation owners, insurers, army, navy and colonial officials, politicians, ship owners, traders in enslaved people and the goods they produced. They were involved in the Royal Africa Company, the South Sea Company and the West India Dock Company; as well as the East India Company and the Bank of England.

<https://museumofcroydoncollections.com/deeds-and-documents-relating-to-croydon-farm-rent-receipt-1>

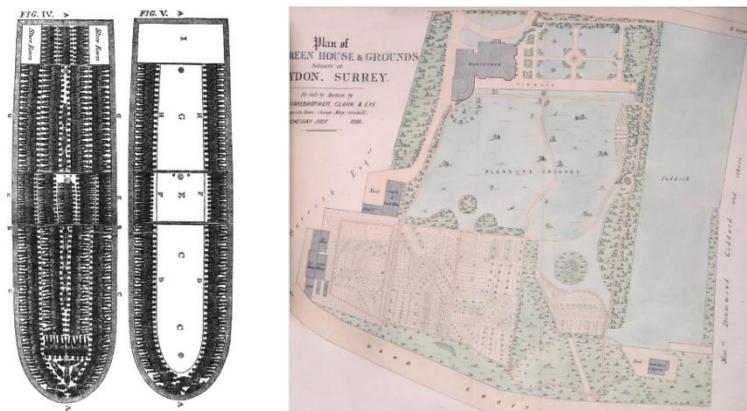
⁷ The vicars were: Rev East Apthorp Rev Henry Lindsay Rev John C Lockwood Rev John G Hodgson The curates were: Rev John R Greenhill Rev Edmund Harden Rev George Coles Rev John F Hodgson Rev Frederick Harford

⁸ Rev Apthorp was a member of the SPG and had been one of their missionaries in Massachusetts; he and his wider family appear in the SPG archives. Barlow Trecotthick's involvement in Codrington was also recorded here

[https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2f1123%2f2&pos=2 ff. 191-192 \[item 170\]](https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2f1123%2f2&pos=2 ff. 191-192 [item 170])

⁹ They were the Leighs, the Trecothicks, the Coles and the Thelussons

¹⁰ Kamensky, Jane, *A Revolution in Color : the world of John Singleton Copley*, Norton, New York, 2017, pages 188-9



The cramped conditions aboard the ships trafficking enslaved people were a huge contrast to the spacious pleasure grounds belonging to Alexander Caldcleugh © London Museum

One of them, Alexander Caldcleugh was a ship owner, insurance underwriter and trader in enslaved people who transported 3,767 captive Africans across the Atlantic, 382 of whom died during the journey. Two of these voyages were in his ship named The Croydon; the second departed from London for the Congo River to buy captive Africans nine days before Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was enacted in Britain.¹¹ A year later an inscription was placed on the exterior wall of the old church which said, "This chancel was repaired & beautified by Alexr. Caldcleugh, Esqr. In the year 1808."¹²



Inspecting what was left of the church after the fire

Croydon Minster had also contained many memorials to enslavers; one even mentioned an enslaver's links to Jamaica, another to Antigua. However, nearly all were destroyed when the church burnt down in 1867. Records show that 19% of the donations to the restoration fund came from people with links to African chattel enslavement and the project was overseen by architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, who was also from a family of enslavers.¹³

The Smith family of Selsdon made the largest donation. They were William Wilberforce's cousins and while with one hand they joined him in the fight for abolition, with the other, through their bank, they funded African chattel enslavement and claimed £22,844 for the four plantations and 795 enslaved people they owned.¹⁴

Although the biggest donations given by those involved in African chattel enslavement were given by bankers and wealthy landowners like the Smiths, many of the smaller donations came from professionals such as GPs, dentists, lawyers and architects. There has been a lot of research into the very wealthy, but this suggests that also we need to pay attention to the professional classes. This is particularly relevant to the Church of England where they often

¹¹ The figures have been compiled from <https://www.slavevoyages.org/> the Croydon's voyage IDs are 80940 and 80941

¹² George Steinman, A History of Croydon, Longman, London 1834 page 131

<https://archive.org/details/historyofcroydon00stei/page/131/mode/1up?q=caldcleugh>

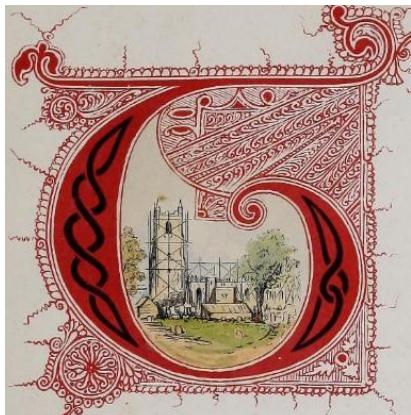
¹³ "Legacies of British Slave Ownership", Cambridge University Press, 2014, page 40; John Corbet Anderson, Croydon Old Church; Parish Register and The Whitgift Charity, page 189

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002088544920>

¹⁴ The donors were brothers George Robert and John Henry Smith,

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/firm/view/1816453197> there is more on their family and their family connection to Wilberforce here: <https://lbsatuc.wordpress.com/2019/02/27/slave-owners-and-abolitionists-some-letters-from-william-wilberforce/>

led the way in founding and funding new churches in growing towns and cities in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁵



An illuminated letter created by local antiquarian John Anderson Corbet showing the Minster being rebuilt

Researching this list of donors also revealed that the involvement in the Church of England of enslavers, their heirs and crucially their money did not end with emancipation in 1834. Not least because British businessmen such as Croydon bankers the Barings, Chollets and Charles Goschen continued to invest in Cuba and the southern United States until emancipation there.¹⁶ So although the three Southwark churches discussed today all pre-date 1834, if your church was built after that it is still worth researching.

This research may also make Croydon look like an outlier, with an unusually high concentration of enslavers. In the course of my research, I have found that this network of enslavers continues beyond Croydon's borders. This is not

unexpected as Croydon is typical of much of the Southwark Diocese in the 18th century: countryside within easy reach of London attracting wealthy people in search of a retreat from the city. Therefore, it is likely that many other churches in the diocese have similar links to African chattel enslavement.



The Trecothicks' estate at Addington and the Smiths' estate at Selsdon are two examples of wealthy Londoners' country retreats. Elegant facades built on barbarity (image © London Museum)

Overall, my research has made clear that between the beginning of the 17th century and the middle of the 19th century there were certainly tens, more likely hundreds of thousands of Black Africans enslaved and exploited by people linked to Croydon Minster and their families. To give this some context, during the time that Lady Catherine Annesley's grandfather, King James II, was most involved the Royal Africa Company trafficked 55,517 people across the

¹⁵ Jeremy Morris, Religion and Urban Change, Croydon 1840-1914, Boydell Press, 1992 page 51

¹⁶ Richard Drayton, Slavery and the City of London, text of a talk given at Gresham College 28th October 2019, page 7 <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/slavery-city-london>

Atlantic.¹⁷ As the profits flowed into the borough, the Minster and her daughter churches, we cannot disentangle the very stones of the church and the sacred space they contain from African chattel enslavement.

The enslavers are remembered in the Minster records and monuments; we know their names. However, only a few of the people enslaved are known to us by name. How do we find ways to remember them? How do we acknowledge the truth that their presence in and contribution to this sacred space was forced and exploitative?

About the Author

Stephanie Offer is a community researcher from Croydon. Going to school in a former palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury developed her love of history, which she then studied at Durham University. Her previous research was into the lives of the men named on Addiscombe's war memorials.

¹⁷ Lady Catherine was buried at the Minster in 1736; figures from Davies, K.G. The Royal African Company, Atheneum 1970, page 363
<https://archive.org/details/royalafricancomp0000kgda/page/362/mode/1up?view=theater>