

# THE SLAVE-OWNERS OF BLOOMSBURY



## George Hibbert

### The Hibbert family and the slavery business



This portrait was commissioned by the West India Dock Company in recognition of the leading role Hibbert had played in steering the dock plan. It now features in the London, Sugar, Slavery exhibition at the Museum of London in Docklands. George Hibbert by Thomas Lawrence, oil on canvas, 1811. © Museum of London.

George Hibbert (1757-1837) became wealthy through his family's involvement with slavery. George's uncle Thomas had emigrated to Jamaica in 1734 where he became a successful slave dealer. Thomas opened up merchant houses in Jamaica and London, where George became senior partner. The business encompassed the lucrative sugar trade. Sugar and slavery were intimately connected; slave labour was used to cultivate land and operate the sugar mills. The Hibberts owned ships and private quays on the Thames, allowing them to transport, insure, warehouse and distribute sugar. They lent money to plantation owners for investment in slave labour, land and equipment. The Hibberts owned plantations and pens, including Agualta Vale. George was a Chairman of the Society of West Indian Planters and Merchants. In 1806 he purchased a seat in Parliament as a representative for the rotten borough of Seaford. He defended the slave trade in the 1807 parliamentary debates which officially ended

British involvement. He tried to justify the continuance of the slave trade as financially beneficial to the 'national interest'. At the end of British colonial slavery the Hibbert family received £38,603 compensation for their possession of 1,618 enslaved people.



Plaque depicting a monument to Thomas Hibbert at Agualta Vale estate in Jamaica, from James Hakewell's A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica, from drawings made in the years 1820 and 1821 (London, 1825). Image courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library/Rare Books.

### Slavery and the City of London

The City of London was the finance capital of the system of slavery. From its many mercantile houses credit was lent for the purchase of manufactured goods, supplies, land, plantation building, equipment and enslaved people. It was also the centre of the sugar trade. George's merchant house was a brief coach and horse ride across the city from his house on Portland Place. Located on Mincing Lane it was a short walk to the Thames quays, Custom House and Commercial House. Mincing Lane was famed for its tea auctions; Hibbert provided the sweetener to the drink which came to embody Briton's love of colonial commodities.



Two views of the Custom House, above is the Custom House which burnt down in 1814 and beneath is the building in Mincing Lane which was used in its place. Artist anon., engraver John Pass. Engraving on paper, c. 1814. © City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.

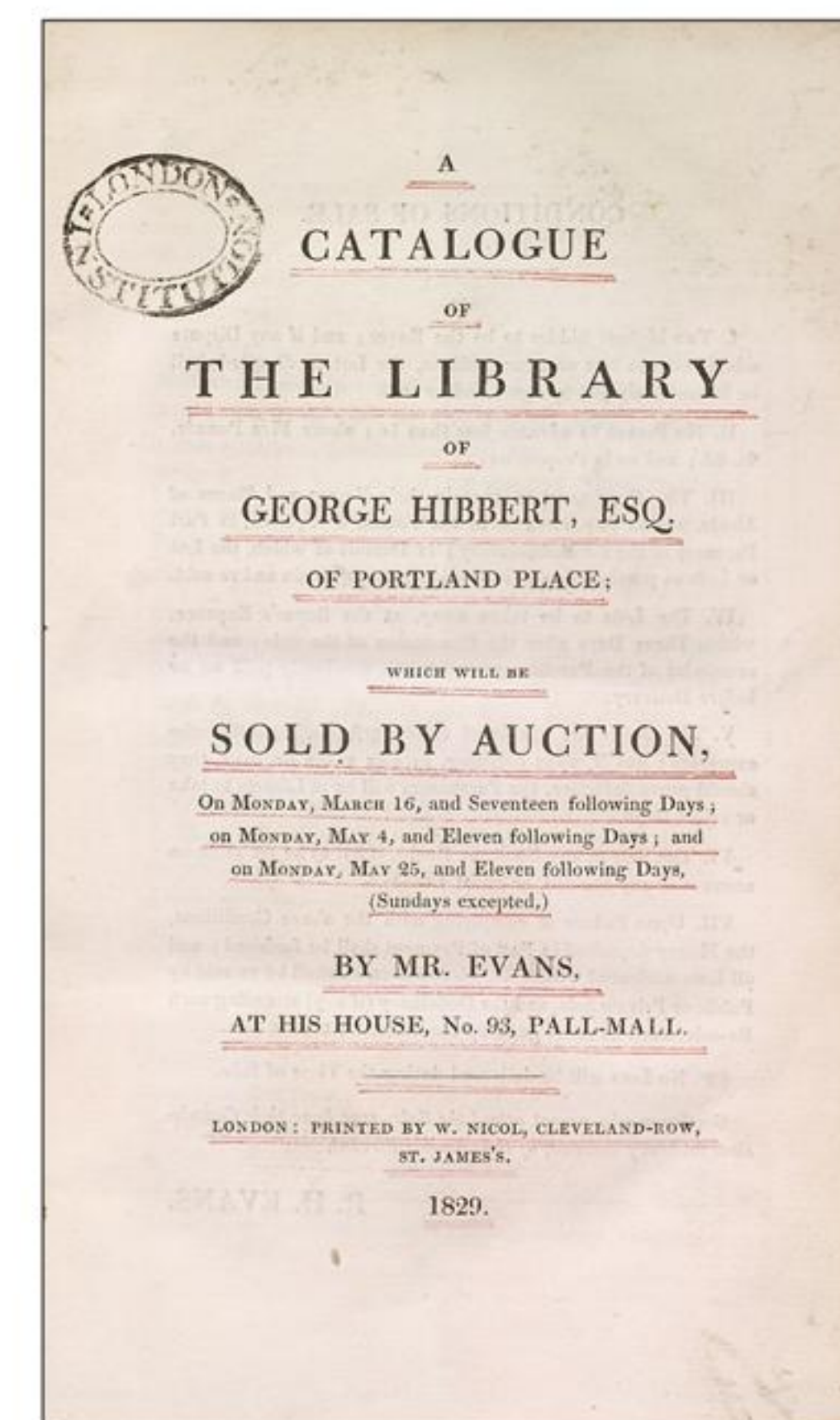
### George Hibbert in Bloomsbury



A contemporary picture of Portland Place, London home of George Hibbert's family. View of Portland Place by anon., aquatint on paper, c. 1814. © City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.

George married the daughter of the Director of the Bank of England, Elizabeth Fonnereau at St. George's Bloomsbury in 1784. They lived at Portland Place, a wealthy West London enclave popular with West Indian planters resident in the city. The couple had 14 surviving children. The fashionable town house was large enough to accommodate both George's family and the extensive book and art collection which he had

purchased with the profits he had amassed through his involvement with the slavery business. George enjoyed a reputation as a liberal patron of the arts; this may have helped to distance him from the brutal reality of his business dealings.



The 1829 sale of George Hibbert's prized collection lasted 42 days and consisted of 40,000 book titles. Title page of a Catalogue of The Library of George Hibbert, Esq. of Portland Place which will be sold by Auction, On Monday, March 16, and Seventeen following Days; on Monday, May 4, and Eleven following Days; and on Monday, May 25, and Eleven following Days, (Sundays excepted). 1829. © Senate House Library.

### George Hibbert and the West India Docks

George was the Director of the West India Dock Company. The Company built the world's first enclosed dock system as an attempt to stop the ritual looting of valuable sugar as ships waited on the Thames to unload their goods for distribution. As well as providing a secure site for the storage of tropical commodities, the West India Docks also acted as a slave trading port. According to the Museum of London in Docklands, 77 ships sailed from the West India Docks to West Africa where they purchased 24,962 enslaved people, of whom 3,136 died during the 'Middle Passage' on their way to the Americas.



An Elevated View of The West India Docks & Warehouses near constructing on the side of Ships near Limehouse for the reception & accommodation of shipping in the West India Trade... Artist William Daniell, coloured aquatint and etching, 1802. © National Maritime Museum.



St George's Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Way. George and Elizabeth Hibbert were married here in 1784. View of St George's Bloomsbury by George Shepherd, watercolour on paper, 1811. © City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.

Portraits of George Hibbert can be found in the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery and the Museum of London.