

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

THE MIDLANDS AND SLAVERY [2]

John Montagu, 2nd Duke of Montagu (1690–1749)

In 1722 a royal patent was approved granting the Caribbean islands of St Vincent and St Lucia to John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, owner of Boughton House in Northamptonshire.

The Duke's plans to settle St Lucia failed when French forces from nearby Martinique drove his expedition from the island. Six years later, in 1728, he sought approval for a royal grant that would give him control of the island of Tobago but his request was denied.

From the 1730s through to his death in the late 1740s he appears to have lost interest in acquiring Caribbean estates. Instead he chose, amongst other things, to provide educational support for his black servants, notably Ignatius Sancho, a musician, actor and writer; Francis Williams, a Jamaican scholar; and Cesar Montagu, who resided at Boughton House and was educated by the local schoolmaster at Weekley during the 1740s.



John, 2nd Duke of Montague
by Godfrey Kneller (1709)



Ayuba Suleiman Diallo by William Hoare (1733)

Perhaps the most striking example of the shift from John Montagu's earlier interest in profiting from the transatlantic plantation economy, was his involvement in the liberation of a prominent enslaved African, named Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (1701–1773). Diallo was captured in Senegambia, West Africa, and sold into slavery in 1730. He was transported to North America on a vessel possessed by the British Royal African Company and set to work on a tobacco plantation in the state of Maryland. Diallo's enslavement came to the attention of John Montagu who in 1733 assisted him in gaining his freedom.

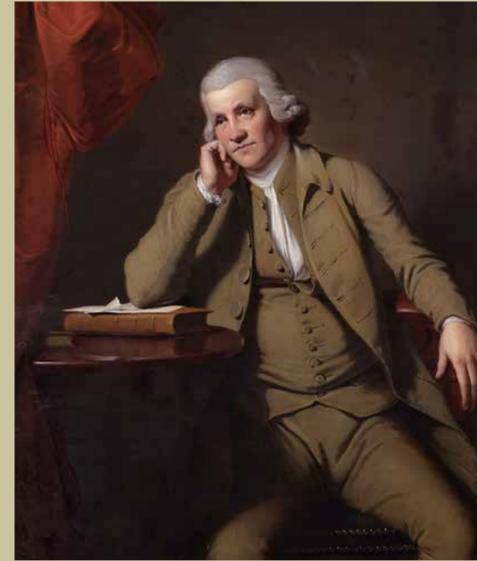
Jedediah Strutt (1726–1797)

Jedediah Strutt was a hosier and cotton spinner born in the east Derbyshire village of South Normanton. An extremely successful man, his wealth was rooted in the establishment of a water powered cotton mill (co-founded with Richard Arkwright and Samuel Need) along the Derwent River. Situated in the hamlet of Cromford, central Derbyshire, in 1771 the mill employed around 220 local men, women and children.

Between 1776 and 1778 Strutt, Arkwright and Need erected another mill, in the town of Belper, eight miles south of Cromford. The factory became operational in 1778 and provided employment for approximately 400 workers. The partnership between the three men was dissolved in 1781, with Jedediah retaining control of the Belper mill.



Strutt's North Mill, built in 1803



Jedediah Strutt, c. 1787

In the 1780s the Strutt family built another factory, in the village of Milford, two miles south of Belper. By 1815 they had become the largest manufacturers of cotton yarn in England. The raw cotton that lay at the heart of their fortunes, however, came largely from North American plantations, upon which thousands of enslaved Africans toiled. Derbyshire's cotton mills were some of the earliest factories in Britain, part of an industrialisation which was driven and sustained by the processing of raw materials that were cultivated via enslaved labour.

Nottingham and abolition

George Walker (c.1734–1807), a dissenting minister and mathematician, was born in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. He lived in a number of cities across northern Britain but it was his southbound movement to Nottingham in 1774 that marked his most prolific congregational and political work. Walker became a minister at Nottingham's High Pavement Chapel and began to advocate for the abolition of the slave trade. He also galvanised local support and drafted communal petitions which called for an end to the War with America (1775), advocated parliamentary reform (1782), and promoted religious liberalisation (1789–90). As an anti-slavery activist George Walker enjoyed a cordial relationship with the prominent black abolitionist Olaudah Equiano whom he had known since 1791.



George Walker, c. 1805



High Pavement Chapel, built in 1805. The site is currently occupied by the Pitcher and Piano public house within the replacement church built in 1876

Nottingham's Black presence

George Africanus was born in Sierra Leone, West Africa, around 1763. He was enslaved and brought to England in 1766, where he was given to Benjamin Molineaux, an affluent brass manufacturer, at a time when owning a black domestic servant was an explicit sign of wealth. He was baptised in Wolverhampton in 1766 as 'George John Scipio Africanus', although his original African name is unknown.

George grew up both numerate and literate, and became an apprentice at one of Molineaux's brass foundries. He moved to Nottingham and in 1788 he married Esther Shaw, a local inhabitant, at St. Peter's Church on St. Peter's Gate Street. They lived at 28 Chandler's Lane where their first child, George, was born in 1790. Six more children followed, but only one, Hannah, survived into adulthood.

George and Esther established the Africanus Register of Servants, an employment agency. He bought his house in Chandler's Lane, thereby becoming a 'freeholder' and eligible to vote. George found extra work as a brassfounder, a labourer and a waiter, while Esther earned money by making hats. At the 1826 General Election he voted for the abolitionist John Smith Wright of Rempstone, South Nottinghamshire. In 1829 they bought more property on Chandler's Lane, which they rented out.

George died in 1834, leaving his estate to his wife and daughter, and was buried at St. Mary's Church on Nottingham's High Pavement Street.



Green plaque marking the burial place of George Africanus at St Mary's Church, Nottingham, crediting him as 'Nottingham's first black entrepreneur'.