



EQUIANO'S WORLD

GUSTAVUS VASSA
— AND THE ABOLITION OF THE BRITISH SLAVE TRADE —

ABOUT

This project on Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) focuses on the abolition movement. The subject of the project is the life of Olaudah Equiano, alias Gustavus Vassa, the African, whose *Interesting Narrative*, published in 1789, has been credited as influential in the abolition of the British slave trade implemented in 1807, and which is widely read in English literature and Black Studies courses, and remains in print in several popular editions. There are over 25,000 sites on the web relating to this most interesting African and black Briton. His story is a classic slave narrative, written in the richness of eighteenth-century literature, by someone who did not know any English until he was eleven. In the early 1790s, the heady days influenced by Revolutionary France on those interested in Parliamentary reform, the abolition of the slave trade, and the ending of slavery. Vassa was arguably the most influential black in London, at a time when the black community numbered perhaps 20,000, making London one of the largest "African" cities, if not the largest, in the world at the time.

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CONTEXT

Establishing context is important in understanding the significance of Equiano's World and the role that Gustavus Vassa played in the abolition movement. Vassa's autobiography does not always clearly establish context, and sometimes his own misunderstandings cloud an appreciation of his own evolution as an intellectual and political activist.

TRAVELS OF
VASSA

Vassa traveled extensively, having come from the interior of the Right of Biafra, in the heart of Igholand, and taken the coast, probably leaving via the slave port of Boney in 1754. By his own account, he was taken to Barbados and then to Virginia, where he was bought by British naval officer, Captain Pascal, and taken to England.

ASSOCIATES OF
VASSA

Vassa met many important and influential individuals during his career, some while he was a slave and others after he had earned his emancipation. Other individuals figure prominently in his life, although he had little or no contact with them. This portal is intended to identify many of the key individuals in his life.

QUESTIONING
EQUIANO

Inevitably, there are questions about Vassa's life including where he was born, the significance of his name, his attitudes towards race and culture, what he had to say about slavery, and the authenticity of certain documents. The portal also includes a Forum where key issues can be discussed and further questions raised.

STUDYING
EQUIANO

Studying Equiano requires access to the scholarly literature and key documents and other primary source materials. This portal has a comprehensive bibliography with links to published material that are permissible in terms of copyright restrictions. There are also links to relevant websites.

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INTRODUCING EQUIANO

There has been a considerable body of information collected, much of it published in the various editions of the Interesting Narrative, and most fully in the edition by Vincent Carretta. Moreover, there is some very good [scholarly analysis of different aspects of Vassa/Equiano's life and significance](#). This project builds on that knowledge. Considerable historical work remains to be undertaken, particularly with regard to the relationship of Vassa to the black poor of London, his friendship with radical leader Thomas Hardy, who was tried for treason in 1794, his marriage to a white woman, Suzannah Cullen, and their children, his commercial activities and observations in the Caribbean, his involvement in the Mosquito Shore venture of Dr. Charles Irving and Vassa's fascination with the Muslim world of the Ottoman Empire. The papers of the leading abolitionists, intellectuals and political figures of the late eighteenth century and those who subscribed to the various editions of the Interesting Narrative are being searched. Moreover, research is being conducted on places and individuals that were important in Vassa's life.

This website is divided into different sections that establish the context in which Vassa lived, explore the places where he traveled, and the people whom he knew. There is also a section that raises questions surrounding Vassa's life, including where he was born to his views on race and slavery, and hosts a forum for discussion and queries. Studying Equiano provides access to primary documents, published scholarly analysis and web links relevant to times and places of Equiano's World. Taken together, Equiano's World is an adventure into the history of abolition, accessible to scholars, students and the interested public.

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ESTABLISHING CONTEXT

Establishing context is important in understanding the significance of Equiano's World and the role that Gustavus Vassa played in the abolition movement. Vassa's autobiography does not always clearly establish context, and sometimes his own misunderstandings cloud an appreciation of his own evolution as an intellectual and political activist. Vassa's rendition of the notorious "Middle Passage" has to be understood in context, for example. Similarly, Vassa's exploration of different religions is worthy of reflection, while his role in the abolition movement has spawned an important scholarly literature. That Vassa's slavery overlapped with the Seven Years War requires an understanding of where he was and when, and the impact that his risky adventures had on him. His role in the first Sierra Leone colonization scheme and his importance in the abolition movement also require some discussion. Finally, Vassa's involvement in the radical politics of London in the early 1790s help to establish the context in which his autobiography was received.

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ASSOCIATES OF VASSA



The Sons of Africa

The "Sons of Africa" was a group of fifteen prominent Blacks that emerged in London in the 1780s, which included various educated, formerly enslaved Africans and prominent black writers.



Queen Charlotte

Charlotte was the youngest daughter of Duke Charles Louis Frederick of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Prince of Mirow and his wife, Princess Elizabeth Albertine of Saxe-Hildburghausen. [More](#)



Ottobah Cugoano

Born in the 1750's in present-day Ghana, Ottobah Cugoano was affiliated with African royalty and was abducted by African slave traders before being sold to Europeans at a fort near Cape Coast (possibly Cape Coast Castle). [More](#)



Edward Despard

(1751 – 21 February 1803) was an Irish-born British colonel turned revolutionary, executed for High Treason. [More](#)



Charles Irving

"In February 1768, I hired myself to Dr. Charles Irving, in Pall-mall, so celebrated for his successful experiments in making sea-water fresh; and here I had plenty of hair-dressing to improve my hand" [More](#)



Constantine Phipps

City, State

2nd Baron Mulgrave, PC (19 May 1744 – 10 October 1792) was an English explorer and officer in the Royal Navy. He served during the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, seeing action in a number of battles and engagements. Inheriting a title, he also went on to have a successful career in parliament and occupied a number of political offices during his later years. [More](#)



Granville Sharp

(10 November 1735 – 6 July 1813)

He was one of the first British campaigners for the abolition of the slave trade. He also involved himself in trying to correct other social injustices. [More](#)

Guerin Sisters



Horatio Nelson
(29 September 1758 – 21 October 1805)



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James Ramsay (abolitionist)
(1733–1789)

He was a ship's surgeon, Anglican priest, and leading abolitionist.

[More](#)



Johanna Vassa Bromley
(1795 - 1857)

She was the only surviving descendant of author and leading anti-slavery campaigner, Olaudah Equiano, who is also known as "Gustavus Vassa, the African".

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Mattias MacNamara

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Michael Henry Pascal

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Robert King

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William Wilberforce

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Le Chavelier St.-George

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Queen Charlotte

Charlotte was the youngest daughter of Duke Charles Louis Frederick of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Prince of Mirow and his wife, Princess Elizabeth Albertine of Saxe-Hildburghausen.

She was a granddaughter of Adolf Frederick II, Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz by his third wife, Christiane Emilie Antonie, Princess of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen. Her father's elder half brother reigned from 1708 to 1753 as Adolf Friedrich III. For a woman marrying the sovereign of one of the most powerful countries of the time, her descent from kings was somewhat remote. All her ancestors up to the level of great-great-great-grandparents were solidly princes, dukes and counts (or the equivalent) with no kings. While her 58 closest ancestors (rather than 62; four of her great-great-great-grandparents are counted twice) included some reigning princes, one might observe that she was of ducal and princely blood, rather than royal blood. Only two of her great-great-great-great-grandfathers were kings: Gustav I of Sweden and Frederick I of Denmark and Norway. Other royal monarchs are found in her earlier ancestry.



Early Life

Charlotte was the youngest daughter of Duke Charles Louis Frederick of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Prince of Mirow and his wife, Princess Elizabeth Albertine of Saxe-Hildburghausen.

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Marriage

In 1767, Francis Cotes drew a pastel of Queen Charlotte with her eldest daughter Charlotte, Princess Royal. Lady Mary Coke called the likeness "so like that it could not be mistaken for any other person".[1]

Charlotte's brother Adolf Friedrich IV, Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (reigned 1752–94) and her widowed mother actively negotiated for a prominent marriage for the young princess. At the age of 17, Charlotte was not thought conventionally pretty; she had a wide nose and mouth, and dark hair.[2] Nevertheless, she was selected as the bride of the young King George, although she was not his first choice. He had already flirted with several young women considered unsuitable by his mother, Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, and by his political advisers. He also was rumored to have married a young Quaker woman named Hannah Lightfoot, though all later claims to prove this marriage were deemed unfounded and the purported supporting documents found to be forgeries.

Princess Charlotte was collected at Cuxhaven by a squadron of British yachts and warships under Admiral Anson (including the specially renamed HMY Royal Charlotte) but on its return the squadron was subjected to westerly gales and took ten days to reach Harwich, which it did in early September 1761. Charlotte then travelled to London, where the couple were married at the Chapel Royal in St. James's Palace, London, on 8 September

because I was not pretty." After a carriage accident in which she broke her nose, she joked "I think I was not so ugly after that!"^[3]

Her mother-in-law did not welcome her with open arms, and for some time there was a slight tension between the two. However, the king's mother had yet to accept any woman with whom he was alleged to have been involved, therefore it seems that the young king cared little for her approval by this time. Despite not having been her husband's first choice as a bride, and having been treated with a general lack of sympathy by her mother-in-law, the Dowager Princess of Wales, Charlotte's marriage was a happy one, and the king was apparently never unfaithful to her. In the course of their marriage, they had 15 children, all but two of whom (Octavius and Alfred) survived into adulthood. As time went on, she wielded considerable power within the realm, although she evidently never misused it.

Interests and patronage

Queen Charlotte was keenly interested in the fine arts and supported Johann Christian Bach, who was her music teacher. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, then aged eight, dedicated his Opus 3 to her at her request after they met in London in 1764. Charlotte sang an aria accompanied by Mozart. When Joseph Haydn visited London in 1794, Charlotte invited him to stay at Windsor.^[4]

The queen also founded orphanages and a hospital for expectant mothers. The education of women was a great importance to her, and she saw to it that her daughters were better educated than was usual for young women of the day. However, she insisted that her daughters live restricted lives close to their mother, and refused to allow them to marry until they were well-advanced in years, with the result that none of her daughters had legitimate issue (one, Princess Sophia, may have had an illegitimate son).

The queen was a well-educated amateur botanist and helped establish what is today Kew Gardens. Her interest in botany led to the magnificent South African flower, the Bird of Paradise, being named *Strelitzia reginae* in her honour.

In 2004, the Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace staged an exhibition illustrating George and Charlotte's enthusiastic arts patronage, which was particularly enlightened in contrast to that of earlier Hanoverian monarchs; it compared favorably to the adventuresome tastes of the king's father, Frederick, Prince of Wales. Among the royal couple's favored craftsmen and artists were the cabinetmaker William Vile, silversmith Thomas Heming, the landscape designer Capability Brown, and the German painter Johann Zoffany, who frequently painted the king and queen and their children in charmingly informal scenes, such as a portrait of Queen Charlotte and her children as she sat at her dressing table.^[5]

Up until 1788, portraits of Charlotte often depict her in maternal poses with her children, and she looks young and contented.^[6] However, in that year her husband fell seriously ill and became temporarily insane. It is now thought that the King was suffering from a genetic metabolic disorder, porphyria, but at the time the cause of the King's illness was unknown. Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of her at this time marks a transition point after which she looks much older in her portraits. Indeed, the Assistant Keeper of Charlotte's Wardrobe, Mrs. Papendiek, wrote that the Queen was "much changed, her hair quite grey".^[7]

Relations with Marie Antoinette

Charlotte sat for Sir Thomas Lawrence in September 1789. His portrait of her was exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year. Reviewers thought it "a strong likeness".^[8]

The French Revolution of 1789 probably added to the strain that Charlotte felt.^[9] Queen Charlotte and Queen Marie Antoinette of France kept a close relationship. Queen Charlotte was 11 years older than the Queen of France yet they shared many interests, such as their love of music and the arts in which they both enthusiastically took an interest. Never meeting face to face they kept the friendship to pen and paper. Marie Antoinette confided in the Queen of Great Britain upon the outbreak of the French Revolution. Queen Charlotte had even organized apartments to be prepared and ready for the refugee royal family of France to stay in.^[10] After the execution of Marie Antoinette and the bloody events that followed, Queen Charlotte was said to be shocked and overwhelmed that such a thing could happen to a kingdom, and right on Britain's doorstep. King George lowered taxes to avoid a British revolution.

Husband's illness

After the onset of his madness, George III was placed in the care of his wife, who could not bring herself to visit him very often, due to his erratic behaviour and occasional violent reactions. However, Charlotte remained supportive of her husband as his illness, now believed to be porphyria, worsened in old age. While her son, the Prince Regent, wielded the royal power, she was her husband's legal guardian from 1811 until her death in 1818.

The queen died in the presence of her eldest son, the Prince Regent, who was holding her hand as she sat in an armchair at the family's country retreat, Dutch House in Surrey (now known as Kew Palace). She was buried at St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. Her husband died just over a year later. She is the second longest-serving consort in British history, having served as such from her marriage (on 8 September 1761) to her death (17 November 1818), a total of 57 years and 70 days. Her eldest son, the Prince Regent, claimed Charlotte's jewels at her death, but the rest of her property was sold at auction from May to August 1819. Her clothes, furniture, and even her snuff was sold by Christie's.[11] It is highly unlikely that her husband ever knew of her death, and he died, blind, deaf, lame and insane, fourteen months later.

Legacy

Claims of African ancestry

Mario de Valdes y Cocom, a historian of the African diaspora, has argued[13] that Allan Ramsay, a noted abolitionist, frequently painted the Queen in works said to emphasize the alleged mulatto appearance of Charlotte, and that Ramsay's coronation portrait of Charlotte was sent to the colonies and was used by abolitionists as a de facto support for their cause. Valdes y Cocom goes on to state that, along with descriptions of a "mulatto face", the Queen's features had also been described as Vandalic, as exemplified by a poem written for the occasion of her marriage:

"Descended from the warlike Vandal race,
She still preserves that title in her face."

Valdes y Cocom does not seem to take notice that the Vandals were a Germanic people originating from Northern Europe, even if they migrated to North Africa, further straining the credulity of Charlotte's supposed Sub-Saharan African ethnicity.

All this has led Mario de Valdes y Cocom to inquire about her ancestry and research her genealogy. Still according to Valdes y Cocom, one of the possibilities for Queen Charlotte's supposed racial features is that they were a concentration of traits inherited through three to six lines from a nine times removed ancestor of hers, Margarita de Castro e Souza, a 15th century Portuguese noblewoman who traced her ancestry six generations earlier to King Afonso III of Portugal and one of his lovers, Madragana.

Critics of this theory argue that Margarita's and Madragana's distant perch in the queen's family tree, respectively 9 and 15 generations removed, makes any presumed African ancestry, Northern or sub-Saharan negligible and no more significant in Charlotte than in any other member of any German royal house at that time, and therefore that Charlotte could hardly be accurately described as "mulatto" or "African".

Even more, Valdez y Cocom assumed that Madragana was a Black African woman, because a single author, Duarte Nunes de Leão, described her as a Moor[15], that is to say, in the context of the Iberian Reconquista, someone of Islamic religion, regardless of actual ethnic origin (and that could have been Arab, North African Berber, or Muladi - native Iberian European Christians who converted to Islam after the arrival of the Moors, all of whom can be described as Caucasian or White). Modern researchers, however, believe Madragana to have been a Mozarab, that is to say an Iberian Christian living under Muslim control, of Sephardi Jewish origin.[16]

Valdez y Cocom has also argued, trying to defend the African origin of Queen Charlotte, that the Royal Household itself, at the time of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1952, referred to both her Asian and African bloodlines in an apologia it published defending her position as head of the Commonwealth.[13] This is denied by Buckingham Palace.[17] The issue remains important to Afrocentrists.

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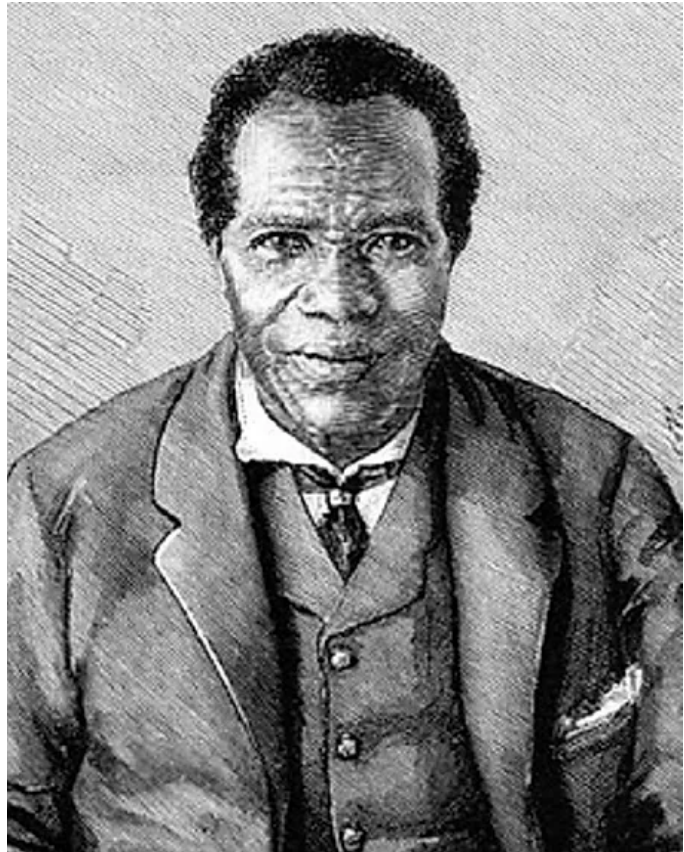
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Ottobah Cugoano

Born in the 1750's in present day Ghana, Ottobah Cugoano was affiliated with African royalty and was abducted by African slave traders before being sold to Europeans at a fort near Cape Coast (possibly Cape Coast Castle). He survived the "Middle Passage" sailing from the West in 1773, Cugoano was baptized and adopted the name "John Stewart" (or John Stuart). He worked as a servant for the popular artist Richard Cosway. It was during this period in

Africa across the Atlantic to the Caribbean Island, Grenada. There he worked as a slave on the plantations for a short period of time before being brought to England eventually obtaining his freedom. In the mid 1770's that he wrote his powerful narrative "Thoughts and Sentiments", which was published in 1787. Cugoano was involved in the British abolition movement to end the slave trade as he corresponded with the influential British abolitionist Granville Sharp and fellow African abolitionist Olaudah Equiano. In 1791, he published the second edition of his narrative after which he disappears from historical record. Scholarship has yet to discover new documents that may reveal the further contributions he made to the abolitionist cause.



The Historical Significance of Ottobah Cugoano...

What is important about Cugoano's publication is that it was the first abolitionist narrative written by a former African slave in the English language. Other

In 1787, a monumental event in world history took place: Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's "Thoughts and Sentiments On the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, A Native of Africa" was published. So called 'slave narratives', perhaps more appropriately referred to as 'freedom narratives' (to borrow from Paul Lovejoy), by individuals such as Ignatius Sancho and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw appear earlier in the 18th century but none as outspoken and explicitly against the slave trade and slavery as Cugoano's narrative. Thoughts and Sentiments was published two years before Olaudah Equiano's bestseller "The Interesting Narrative" in 1789 yet it has received far less attention than Equiano's narrative. This is partly a consequence of scholarship that questions the authenticity of Cugoano's narrative and therefore diminishes its value as a reliable source. However, there are two schools of inquiry: one that believes he wrote his narrative and one that believes his narrative was quote 'edited and improved' (to borrow from Paul Edwards) by a fellow abolitionist or abolitionists, namely Olaudah Equiano.

What is for certain is that Cugoano's narrative was clearly ahead of its time in its explicit call for not only the abolition of the British slave trade but for the abolition of the institution of slavery itself (a feat which would not be officially realized in the British Empire until 1838 – although remnants still persisted in the empire until the 1930s). Thoughts and Sentiments is a rhetorical masterpiece that methodologically debunks 18th century myths surrounding the subhuman nature of the African while leaving the European readership with no ethical alternative (based on religious, reasonable and property-ownership principles) but to act and abolish the slave trade and slavery.

From historical hindsight, Ottobah Cugoano's narrative remains the product of a remarkable era characterized by the revolutionary ideological changes inherent in The American, French and Haitian Revolutions and the mass mobilization of public opinion in the British abolition movement. His narrative can be understood as an integral part of the body of abolitionist writings that were circulating in Britain and beyond in the 1780's and 1790's, which included works by Olaudah Equiano,

world history and the human costs of modernization' (to borrow from David Brion Davis). Ultimately, "Thoughts and Sentiments" was an important contribution in the drive towards the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire.

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Charles Irving

References to Dr. Charles Irving

taken from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written by Himself, 9th Edition, 1794

"In February 1768, I hired myself to Dr. Charles Irving, in Pall-mall, so celebrated for his successful experiments in making sea-water fresh; and here I had plenty of hair-dressing to improve my hand. This gentleman was an excellent master; he was exceedingly kind and good-tempered; and allowed me in the evenings to attend my schools, which I esteemed a great blessing; therefore I thank God and him for it, and used all diligence to improve the opportunity. This diligence and attention recommended me to the notice and care of my three preceptors, who, on their parts, bestowed a great deal of pains in my instruction, and besides were all very kind to me."

"On my return to London, I waited on my old and good master, Dr. Irving, who made me an offer of his service again. Being now tired of the sea, I gladly accepted it. I was very happy in living with this gentleman once more; during which time we were daily employed in reducing old Neptune's dominions by purifying the briny element, and making it fresh. Thus I went on till May 1773, when I was roused by the sound of fame to seek new adventures, ..."

"On the 20th of June we began to use Dr. Irving's apparatus for making salt water fresh; I used to attend the distillery; I frequently purified from twenty-six to forty gallons a day. The water thus distilled was perfectly pure, well tasted, and free from salt; and was used on various occasions on board the ship."

"OUR voyage to the North Pole being ended, I returned to London with Dr. Irving, with whom I continued for some time, ... In process of time I left my master, Doctor Irving, the purifier of waters."

"I was happy once more amongst my friends and brethren till November, when my old friend, the celebrated Dr. Irving, bought a remarkable fine sloop, about 150 tons. He had a mind for a new adventure, in cultivating a plantation at Jamaica and the Musquito Shore; he asked me to go with him, and said that he would trust me with his estate in preference to any one. By the advice, therefore, of my friends, I accepted of the offer, ..."

He was very unwilling at first to grant me my request; but I gave him so many reasons for it, that at last he consented to my going, and gave me the following certificate of my behaviour:

The bearer, Gustavus Vassa, has served me several years with strict honesty, sobriety, and fidelity. I can, therefore, with justice recommend him for these qualifications; and indeed in every respect I consider him as an excellent servant. I do hereby certify that he always behaved well, and that he is perfectly trust-worthy.
CHARLES IRVING.

Musquito shore, June 15, 1776 Though I was much attached to the Doctor, I was happy when he consented to my going ... the Doctor and I parted, not without shedding tears on both sides."

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Constantine Phipps

Constantine John Phipps, 2nd Baron Mulgrave, PC (19 May 1744 – 10 October 1792) was an English explorer and officer in the Royal Navy. He served during the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, seeing action in a number of battles and engagements. Inheriting a title, he also went on to have a successful career in parliament, and occupied a number of political offices during his later years.

Family and early life

Phipps was born on 19 May 1744, the eldest son of Constantine Phipps, 1st Baron Mulgrave and his wife, Lepell Phipps.[1] Phipps studied at Eton College with Joseph Banks.

Seven Years War

Main article: Great Britain in the Seven Years War

In January 1759 he joined the 70-gun HMS Monmouth as a cadet under his uncle Captain The Hon. A. J. Hervey during Hervey's 21-week watch on the French fleet in 1759. Phipps remained with his uncle on the latter's appointment to the 74-gun HMS Dragon in 1761 and was present at the reduction of Martinique and St Lucia. His good service led to his promotion to lieutenant on 17 March 1762 by Sir George Rodney, and Phipps went on to serve in the battle of Havana.[1]

He was further promoted on 24 November 1763 to command the 12-gun sloop HMS Diligence, moving to the 24-gun sixth rate HMS Terpsichore on 20 June 1765.[1] In 1766 he sailed to Newfoundland as Lieutenant on HMS Niger. Banks accompanied him as ship's naturalist. From 1767 to 1768 Phipps commanded HMS Boreas in the English Channel.[1]

Political career and command

Phipps was elected to Parliament in the 1768 general election as Member for the constituency of Lincoln.[1] On 4 June 1773 Phipps set off from Deptford on a voyage towards the North Pole. He had two ships, the *Racehorse* and the *Carcass*. Phipps took with him Dr Irving as naturalist and doctor, and Israel Lyons (1739–1775) as astronomer. The *Carcass* was commanded by Skeffington Lutwidge, while one of her midshipmen was a young Horatio Nelson. They sailed beyond Svalbard to the Seven Islands, but were forced back by the ice and returned to Orfordness on 17 September. During the voyage Phipps was the first European to describe the Polar Bear and the Ivory Gull, which were included in his *A Voyage towards the North Pole undertaken... 1773* (1774). Notably, the early descriptions of the characteristics of the polar bear in particular can be found in his voyage log book entries, dated 12th May 1773, and now kept in the British Library archives.

On 13 September 1775, he succeeded his father as Baron Mulgrave (Ireland). He became MP for Huntingdon in 1777, and was also appointed as one of the Lords of the Admiralty. Continuing an active naval career, he commissioned the 74-gun HMS *Courageux* in 1778, and played a leading role in the Battle of Ushant on 27 July that year. Phipps led the attack on the 90-gun *Ville de Paris*, but the indecisive nature of the engagement meant that the French ship was able to escape. Phipps returned to Britain and gave evidence at the subsequent court-martial, his evidence favouring Hugh Palliser.[1] The *Courageux* remained under his command until 1781, with Phipps serving mostly in the Channel under Admirals Charles Hardy, Francis Geary, George Darby and Richard Howe. On 4 January 1781 he captured the 32-gun French frigate *Minerve* in heavy weather off Brest. The *Courageux* was paid off at the end of the American War of Independence, and Phipps went ashore, never to serve at sea again. [1]

Later life

Phipps remained as MP for Huntingdon until 1784, when he became MP for Newark. In April that year he became Paymaster of the Forces and on 18 May he was appointed a commissioner for the affairs of India, and one of the Lords of 'Trade and Plantations', until being forced to resign in 1791 due to ill health.[1] He was created Baron Mulgrave in the Peerage of Great Britain in 1790, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society and of the Society of Antiquaries.[1] He once entertained his miners underground in the Blue John Caverns in Castleton, Derbyshire. The particular cavern where they all dined as his guests is now named after him.

He died at Liège on 10 October 1792.[1] The title of Baron Mulgrave in the British peerage then became extinct, though his brother Henry Phipps succeeded him in the Irish barony.

The standard author abbreviation Phipps is used to indicate this individual as the author when citing a botanical name.[2]

Notes

¹ "Phipps, Constantine John". *Dictionary of National Biography*. 1896. p. 231.

² "Author Query". *International Plant Names Index*. <http://www.ipni.org/ipni/authorsearchpage.do>.

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Edward Despard

He was born in Mountrath, Queens County, Ireland, in 1751. In 1766 he entered the British Royal Navy, was promoted to lieutenant in 1772, and stationed at Jamaica, where he soon proved himself to have considerable engineering talent. He served in the West Indies with credit, being promoted captain after the San Juan expedition (1780). In 1782 he commanded a successful expedition against the Spanish possessions on the Black River. He was subsequently made Superintendent of the Bay of Honduras on the Mosquito Coast (present-day Belize).

He administered this British enclave until 1790 when, upon frivolous charges, he was suspended by Home Secretary Lord Grenville and recalled to England. From 1790 to 1792 these charges were investigated, and he was suspended on half pay with his expenses from the Bay of Honduras withheld. Pursued by a further law suit from his enemies in the Bay, he was arrested and confined in the King's Bench debtor's prison from 1792 to 1794.

On his release he joined the London Corresponding Society. In 1798 was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the Irish Rebellion. Habeas Corpus had been suspended in 1794, and Despard was held without trial for nearly three years in a succession of prisons, notably Coldbath Fields Prison in Clerkenwell, until he was released without charge in 1801.

In late 1802 he was named by government informers and disaffected soldiers as a member of a conspiracy engaged in a plot to seize the Tower of London and Bank of England and assassinate George III. The evidence was thin but Despard was arrested and prosecuted by Attorney General Spencer Perceval, before Lord Ellenborough, the Lord Chief Justice. Despite a dramatic appearance by Lord Nelson as character witness on his behalf, Despard was found guilty by the jury of high treason, and sentenced, with six of his fellow-conspirators (John Wood and John Francis, both privates in the army, carpenter Thomas Broughton, shoemaker James Sedgwick Wrattton, slater Arthur Graham, and John Macnamara),^[1] to be hanged, drawn and quartered. This sentencing of the conspirators was the last time in British history that anyone was sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered. Prior to execution the sentence was commuted to simple hanging and beheading, amid fears that the draconian punishment might spark public dissent. Despard was executed on the roof of the gatehouse at Horsemonger Lane Gaol, in front of a crowd of at least 20,000 spectators, on 21 February 1803.

References

1. This article incorporates text from the Encyclopædia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, a publication now in the public domain.
2. Horsemonger Lane Gaol

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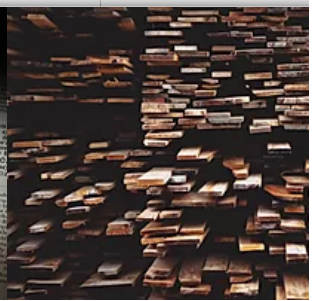
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QUESTIONING EQUIANO

Establishing context is important in understanding the significance of Equiano's World and the role that Gustavus Vassa played in the abolition movement. Vassa's autobiography does not always clearly establish context, and sometimes his own misunderstandings cloud an appreciation of his own evolution as an intellectual and political activist.



Where He Was Born

There are many theories about where Vassa was born.

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Significance Of His Name

The choice of name Gustavus Vassa seemed to have been prophetic, at least to Vassa later in his life, although it is still unclear why Captain Pascal selected that name of all names to call his newly purchased slave in 1754.

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Attitudes Towards Slavery

Equiano comments on the tendency of the African slave trade to alter and harm both Africans and Europeans.

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Attitudes Toward Race and Culture

Equiano addresses prejudices toward the black skin colour of African as a natural indicator of their inferiority.

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WHERE WAS HE BORN?

There are many theories about where Gustavus Vassa was born. He said he came from Essaka in Igboland. The name he was given after he was born, Olaudah, is an Igbo name, as his second name, Equiano, which was probably not a surname but the name of his father. It was suggested in the early 1960s by novelist Chinua Achebe that Essaka might be identified with Issieke, a theory that Catherine Anicholonu has advocated most forcefully. Issieke is located in central Igboland, to the southeast of Onitsha. G.I. Jones postulated that Vassa came from that part of Igboland to the west of the Niger River, primarily because of Vassa's references to the Kingdom of Benin, which is the west of the Niger and held sway over portions of Igbo country as far as the Niger River in the eighteenth century. Still another theory identifies Esseke with Usaka, which is located in Abia State. Finally, Vincent Carretta has argued that Vassa might have been born in South Carolina, and not in Igboland at all. Carretta bases his argument on Vassa's baptismal record from 1759 that states that he was born in Carolina. However, there is no reason to believe the baptismal record since it was dictated by relatives of his master, remembering that Vassa was a slave at the time and was certainly not responsible for the misinformation in the records of St. Margaret's Church in Westminster. Carretta also claims that a derivative document from the records of the Arctic Expedition of 1774, which also gives a Carolina birth, is to be trusted. At the time of the Arctic Expedition, however, Vassa was a freeman and carried with him two documents to prove his free status - his emancipation paper and his baptismal record. He was hardly in a position to contradict what was in his legal papers, which stated a Carolina birth. Vassa most certainly would have used the documents to legitimize his status as a free person, despite any errors contained therein.

For a discussion, see Paul E. Lovejoy, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa: What's in a Name?" *Atlantic Studies*, 9:2 (2012), 165-84

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The choice of name Gustavus Vassa seemed to have been prophetic, at least to Vassa later in his life, although it is still unclear why Captain Pascal selected that name of all names to call his newly purchased slave in 1754. Vassa's namesake was none other than the Swedish national hero, Gustavus Vasa (1496–1560), king of Sweden (1523–1560), founder of the modern Swedish state and the Vasa dynasty. Known as Gustavus Eriksson before his coronation, King Gustavus I was the son of Erik Johansson, a Swedish senator and nationalist, who was killed in the massacre at Stockholm in 1520, under the orders of King Christian II of Denmark, who was attempting to assert his control over Sweden through the Kalmar Union. Gustavus was imprisoned but escaped to lead the peasants of Dalarna to victory over the Danes, being elected protector of Sweden in 1521. In 1523 the Riksdag at Strangnas elected him king, ending the Kalmar Union that King Christian II of Denmark had been attempting to enforce. Two centuries later, English playwright Henry Brooke recorded these heroic deeds in his play, *Gustavus Vasa, The Deliverer of his Country*, published in 1739. Prime Minister Walpole banned the play for political reasons and it was not actually staged legally in London until 1805. And undoubtedly it was performed in London, and it was performed in Dublin in 1742 as *The Patriot*. Brooke's play was republished in 1761, 1778, 1796, and 1797. Hence the Swedish name had political significance in England that explains some association between Vassa and his namesake but does not explain why Pascal settled on the name in 1754.

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Equiano comments on the tendency of the African slave trade to alter and harm both Africans and Europeans:

Such a tendency has the slave-trade to debauch men's minds, and harden them to every feeling of humanity!...it is the fatality of this mistaken avarice, that it corrupts the milk of human kindness, and turns it into gall... Surely this traffic cannot be good, which spreads like a pestilence, and taints what it touches! Which violates that first natural right of mankind, equality and independency, and gives one man a dominion over his fellows which God could never intend! For it raises the owner to a state as far above man as it depresses the slave below it. (Equiano 111)

Equiano continues with an examination of the slave trade's effect on black slaves. He claims:

When you make men slaves, you deprive them of half their virtue, you set them, in your own conduct, an example of fraud, rapine, and cruelty, and compel them to live with you in a state of war; and yet you complain that they are not honest and faithful! You stupify them with stripes, and then think it necessary to keep them in a state of ignorance; and yet you assert that they are incapable of learning; that their minds are such a barren soil. (Equiano 111-112)

Difference between West African Slavery and TransAtlantic Slavery

Some key passages in Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative* (1789) that shed light on the ways in which slaves were procured for purposes of indigenous slavery include the following: Commenting on battles he confirms:

The spoils of war were divided accordingly to the merit of the warriors. Those prisoners which were not sold or redeemed we kept as slaves: but how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies! With us they do no more work than other members of our community, even their master; their food, clothing and lodging were nearly the same as theirs (except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were freeborn), and there was scarce any other difference between them than a superior degree of importance which the head of the family possesses in our state, and that authority which, as such, he exercises over his household. Some of these slaves have even slaves under them as their own property and for their own use. (Equiano 1789, 9)

The number of slaves one could obtain was directly associated with "merit" and signified prestige. Further, slaves are shown to be 'outsiders' or 'alien' to the societies in which they were enslaved.

Opinion on Economic value of the Slave Trade

Equiano proposes a solution that deals with the economic void and the demand for an alternative source of revenue that will arise as a result of abolition:

As the inhuman traffic of slavery is now taken into the consideration of the British legislature, I doubt not, if a system of commerce was established in Africa, the demand for manufactures would most rapidly augment, as the

British manufactures...The wear and tear of a continent, nearly twice as large as Europe, and rich in vegetable and mineral productions, is much easier conceived than calculated... It is trading upon safe grounds. A commercial intercourse with Africa opens an inexhaustible source of wealth to the manufacturing interests of Great Britain...[therefore]... The abolition of slavery, so diabolical, will give a most rapid extension of manufactures...The manufacturers of this country must and will, in the nature and reason of things, have a full and constant employ, by supplying the African markets. (Equiano 233- 234)

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACE AND CULTURE

Equiano addresses prejudices that suggest the black skin colour of Africans was a natural indicator of their inferiority:

Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? and should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, No. Let such reflections as these melt the pride of their superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their stable brethren, and compel them to acknowledge, that understanding is not confined to feature or colour. (Equiano 45)

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TRAVELS OF GUSTAVUS VASSA THE AFRICAN

Vassa traveled extensively, having come from the interior of the Bight of Biafra, in the heart of Igboland, and taken the coast, probably leaving via the slave port of Bonny in 1754. By his own account, he was taken to Barbados and then to Virginia, where he was bought by British naval officer, Captain Pascal, and taken to England. His subsequent travels are located on this portal.

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Studying Equiano requires access to the scholarly literature and key documents and other primary source materials. This portal will have a comprehensive bibliography with links to published material that is permissible in terms of copyright restrictions. There will also be links to relevant websites.

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