

Remembering the Enslaved at Home

Slave Burials in Britain from 1701 to 1868

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Introduction

Throughout the period of the slave trade Africans were brought to Britain to serve wealthy families across the country. Through their presence in British households African ‘servants’ became statements of their owners’ wealth, status and power. Several attempts have been made to establish the total number of black people living in Britain during the era of the slave trade (c. 1600-1807) with suggested figures ranging from 3,000 to 30,000. Numerous enslaved and freed Africans lived and died in Britain, but they were seldom given marked graves and, in cases where marked graves exist they are often poorly recorded. Despite this, graves of African slaves have gained popularity as sites of memory. These graves have arguably taken the place of a national memorial to the slave trade: something we still lack in England.

Aims and Objectives

- To quantify the number of enslaved individuals whose graves survive in Britain today and to plot the distribution of these memorials across the country.
- To ask what the imagery and wording on these memorials reveal concerning contemporary attitudes to the slave trade.
- To examine the ‘afterlife’ of these memorials as sites of memory, from the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 to the present day.

Results

My research has uncovered twenty-three graves of slaves buried in Britain. The majority of the identified graves are located in port cities heavily involved in the slave trade, or in manufacturing towns and coastal areas. Few of these graves are remembered today but those that are well documented act as sites of memory.

1. **Sambo’s grave** (Sunderland Point) is well known not only locally but also on a national scale as there is a stone at the grave which has been left by visitors from Poland. Painted stones and other trinkets are left at Sambo’s grave: there were seventy-eight stones present when I visited the site, suggesting that the grave attracts many visitors. The presence of sign posts and information plaques further demonstrate that Sambo’s grave is an important site of memory which is often visited. Sambo died in c. 1736. An elegy added to the stone in 1796 shows that this has been a site of memory for over 200 years.
2. **Scipio Africanus’** gravestone (Henbury) was fully restored and re-painted in 2007 allowing its flowers, skulls and black cherubs to be clearly seen. The restoration of the grave is clear evidence that it is considered an important site of memory. Visitors often leave flowers, suggesting that slave graves have an afterlife in today’s society as memorials. Scipio’s epitaph refers to him as a ‘Negro’ and states that he was ‘born a pagan and a slave’, but died a ‘Christian in my grave’. The use of the offensive term ‘negro’ depicts the eighteenth century attitude toward black people.
3. **John George Scipio Africanus’** gravestone (Nottinghamshire) was unknown until 2003. In 2007 the grave was rededicated to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. A plaque was displayed at Africanus’ former home in 2014 and a tram has since been named after him. It appears that Africanus’ grave has received considerable attention over a short period of time. It could be argued that this is due to Africanus’ having died a free man who set up an employment agency for servants. His grave therefore provides a site of memory representative of slaves, former slaves and revolutionaries who paved the way to freedom for others.
4. **George Edward Doney’s** gravestone (Hertfordshire) was restored in order to make the inscription more visible and the site is clearly marked with two information plaques. St Mary’s Church, where Doney is buried, provides an information leaflet about the grave. It is also included as a stop on the local heritage tour. Despite this, the grave is not particularly well known locally and there is little evidence that it is visited.

The presence of slaves in Britain has also been commemorated through a memorial statue in Lancaster named ‘Captured Africans’ (the first such memorial erected in Britain), and the construction of Pero’s Bridge in Bristol, named after the domestic ‘servant’ Pero Jones.

Table 1. The graves of African slaves identified in the course of my research.

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death/Burial	Location	Listing
Augustin Leonard		Died 2nd April 1793	St. Michael & All Angels, Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester	
Cesar Picton	1755	Died 16th June 1836	All Saint’s Church in Kingston-Upon-Thames, Greater London	
Charles Ashume		Died 6th November 1721	St Mary’s, English Bicknor, Gloucestershire	
Charles Bacchus		Died 31st March 1762, buried on 6th April 1762	St. Mary’s Church, Culworth, Northamptonshire	Grade II
Charles Morson		Died 16th February 1776	St Mary’s Church, Almondsbury, Gloucestershire	
Charles Poor		Died 9th March 1783	St Helen’s Churchyard, Durham	
Chloe Gambia	1760	Buried 14th September 1838	St Peter’s, Aston Lane, Aston, Cheshire	
Evaristo Muchovela	1830	Died in 1868	St Wendrona Churchyard, St. Wendron, Wendron, Cornwall	
George Alexander Gratton	1808	Died 3rd February 1813	All Saint’s Church, Marlow, Buckinghamshire	
George Edward Doney	c.1758	Buried 8th September 1809	Churchyard of St Mary’s, Church Street, Watford, Hertfordshire	Grade II
George John Scipio Africanus	1763	Died in 1834	St Mary’s Church, Nottinghamshire	
J.D. (Possibly John Davies)		Buried 12th September 1801	Church of St John the Baptist, Bishop’s Castle, Shropshire	Grade II
Jacob Walker	c.1802	Died 14th August 1841	Old Churchyard of St Mary’s, St Mary’s Tower, Hornsey High Street, London	Grade II
James Long		Died 17th March 1773	St Mary’s Church, Almondsbury, Gloucestershire	
Jane		Died 20th February 1701	St Nicholas’ Churchyard, Cumbria	
Joseph Emidy	c. 1775	Died 23th April 1835	St Keyne Churchyard, Kenwyn Church Road, Kenwyn, Cornwall Unitary Authority, Cornwall	Grade II
Myrtila Negro		Died 6th January 1705	Churchyard at St Lawrence, Oxhill, Stratford on Avon	Grade II*
Philip/Paul Scipio		Died 10th September 1784	St. Martin’s Churchyard, Werrington, Cornwall	
Rasselas Belfield	1790	Died in 1822	St Martin’s Church, Bowness on Windermere, Lake District, Cumbria	Grade II
Rasselas Morjan		Died 25th August 1839	Our Lady and St Nicholas Church in Wanlip, Leicester	
Sambo/Sambo		Died c.1736	Sunderland Point, Lancashire	
Scipio Africanus	c.1702	Died 21st December 1720	St Mary’s Churchyard, Church Close, Henbury, Bristol	Grade II*
Thomas Bloomsbury	c.1754	Died 7th October 1829, buried 11th October 1829	Newent, Gloucestershire	

1. Sambo (Lancashire)



Top: A collection of Sambo’s stones and various other trinkets. Bottom left: Image of Sambo’s grave. Bottom right: Close up images of Sambo’s stones.

2. Scipio Africanus (Henbury)



Top: Image of Scipio Africanus’ grave after restoration work carried out in 2007. Bottom: Image of the grave prior to restoration.

3. George John Scipio Africanus (Nottinghamshire)

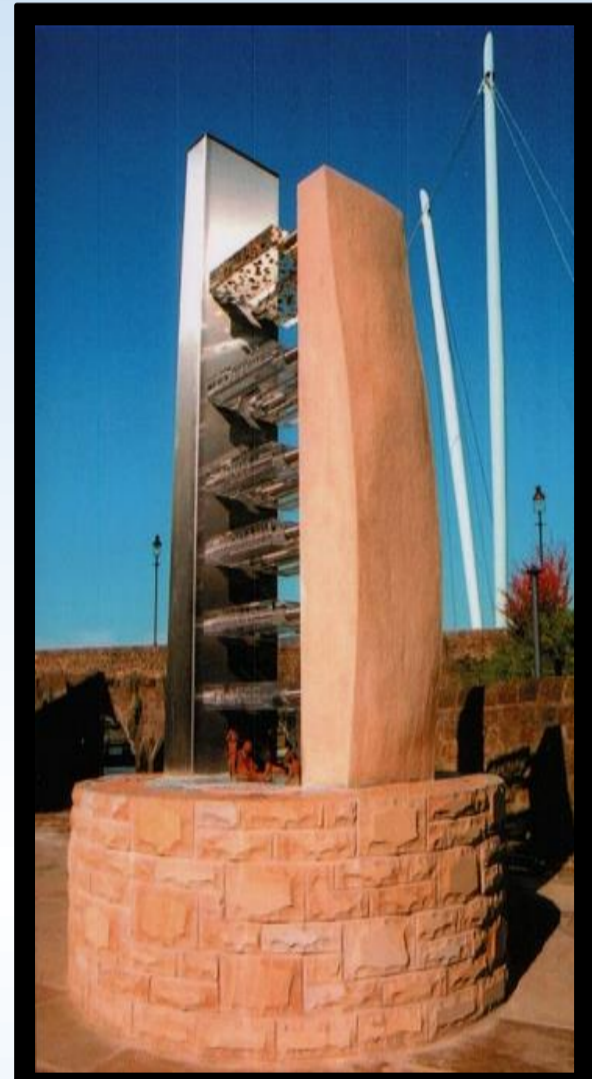
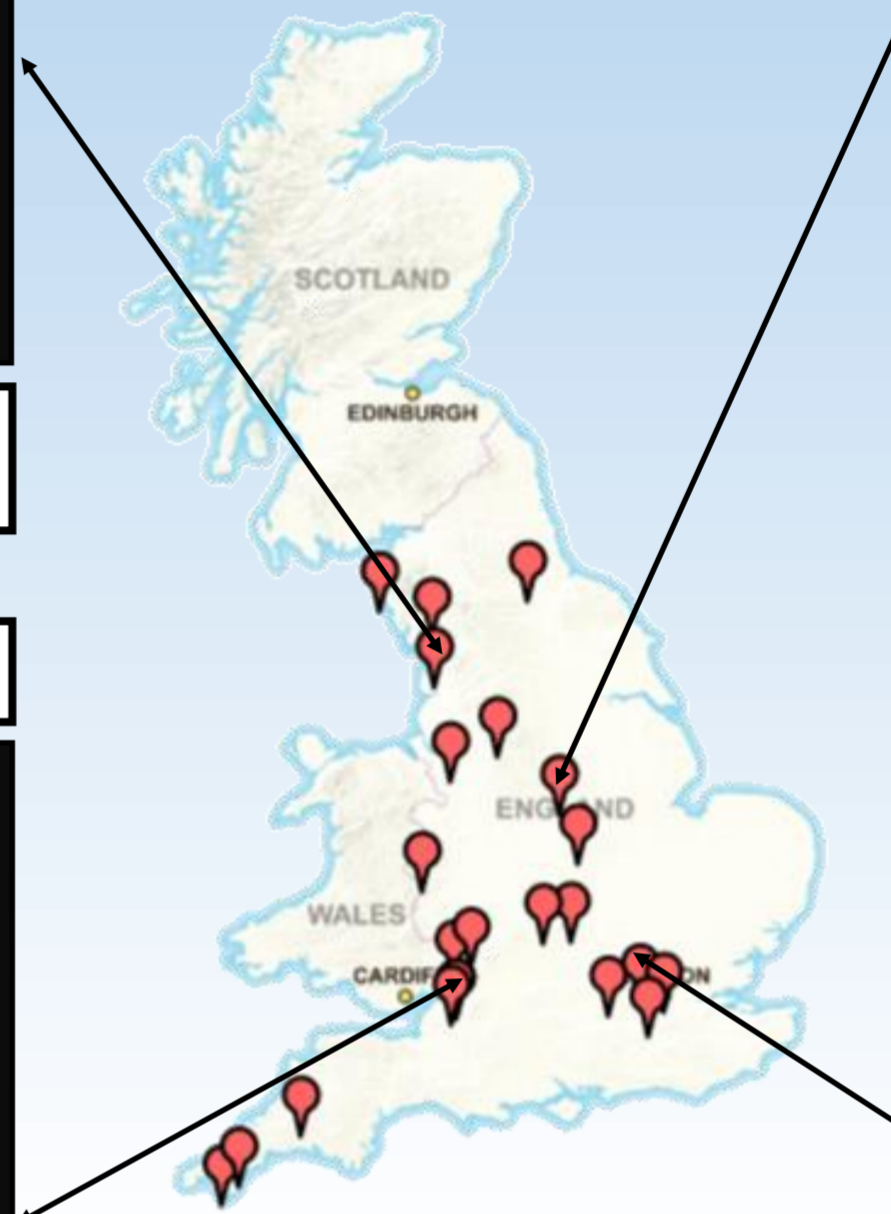


Top: George John Scipio Africanus’ gravestone at the rededication ceremony. Bottom left: Commemorative plaque. Bottom right: Photograph of the rededication ceremony.

4. George Edward Doney (Hertfordshire)



Top left: George Edward Doney’s headstone. Top right: St Mary’s Church where the headstone stands. Bottom: An information plaque next to the gravestone.



Captured Africans, Lancaster. A regional memorial designed by Kevin Dalton-Johnson.



Pero’s Bridge, Bristol. This pedestrian bridge was designed by Ellis O’Connell.

Conclusion

Many of these graves have been difficult to locate and several are poorly documented. The exclusion of many of these graves from parish records demonstrates the complex past of this erased history concerning the presence of black slaves in Britain. Although many of these graves remain undocumented and unknown, the emergence of some as popular and poignant sites of memory provides evidence that slave graves have an afterlife in contemporary society. These sites of memory are engaged with today by locals, tourists, descendants of slaves and archaeologists who seek to further their understanding of the lives and the afterlives of slaves. I would argue that since the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007 interest in slave graves as important sites of memory has increased. It is significant in this context that five were listed in or after 2007.

References

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