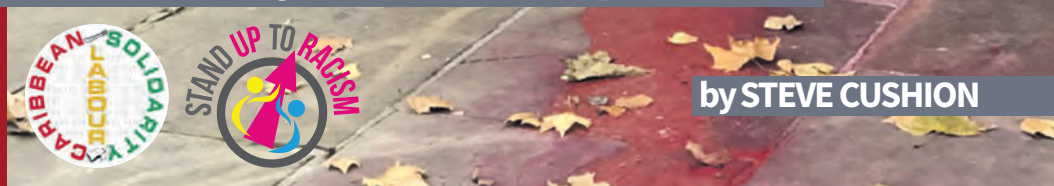


# Sir Robert Geffrye and the Business of Slavery



**Why the Museum of the Home  
must remove the statue of  
Robert Geffrye and make reparations**



by STEVE CUSHION



Published by Hackney Stand Up To Racism 2022 in association with Caribbean Labour Solidarity as a Special Issue of “Cutlass”

Printed by Rap Spiderweb Ltd  
([www.rapspiderweb.com](http://www.rapspiderweb.com))

First edition sponsored by Hackney Stand Up To Racism, Caribbean Labour Solidarity, Hackney Trades Council, North and East London Equity, DAYMER Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, and the following Districts of the National Education Union: Hackney, Islington, Haringey.



Produced in association with Bookmarks:  
1 Bloomsbury Street,  
London, WC1B 3QE

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Thanks to photographers:

Dean Ryan: Pages 3, 4, 11, 15, 20, 25, 27

Jenny Nash (IG@SullenRiotPhotography): Pages 6, 18, 28,

Seema Rampersad: Front cover, page 8

Hackney Citizen: Page 22 and back cover

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## The Calculation of the Modern Equivalent of the Value of Money

The calculation used in this book uses the Relative Income Measure, which measures an amount of income or wealth relative to per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When compared to other incomes or wealth, it shows the economic status or relative “prestige value” the owners of this income or wealth

have because of their rank in the income distribution. More details from [www.measuringworth.com/](http://www.measuringworth.com/).

Today’s values calculated in this manner will be placed in brackets after the original figure. The annual rate of inflation between 1657 and 1704 averaged 1.5 per cent, making £100 in 1657 the

equivalent of £177 in 1704. This accounts for the same original figure being calculated differently depending on the year concerned.

We recognise that this can only be approximate and is to give some idea of what a particular transaction would be worth today.



# Forewords

**Diane Abbott MP**  
addressing a protest  
at the Museum of  
the Home.

This is a terrific pamphlet, and I cannot recommend it strongly enough.

It deals with a small part of one of the worst chapters in British history, or even world history. But starting with one man, the author Steve Cushion has managed to weave together an entire, rigorously documented narrative that sheds light on the history of slavery as a whole. It is wide ranging and meticulously sourced.

That man is Robert Geffrye. There is a wealth of material in the pamphlet, dealing with many of the companies he was associated with which were involved in colonialism and slavery. There is a detailed account of his career as a politician and as a philanthropist. Of course, that philanthropic activity was funded by slavery and

its monuments were founded on the bones of Africans.

There has been a long campaign relating to one physical legacy of that philanthropy, the former Geffrye Museum, renamed now as the Museum of the Home on Kingsland Road in Shoreditch. I have been an enthusiastic participant in the campaign.

The Museum is a valuable and informative institution. It should be celebrated. But the statue to Robert Geffrye should not. The statue is a mark of honour and celebration of his life and work. But his life and his work were both thoroughly dishonourable. They should not be celebrated.

The opponents of decolonising our public spaces are determined in

fighting for the statue to remain. They advance the ridiculous argument that those who want the statue removed are trying to rewrite history. This is hollow. We used to execute people in public in this country. We do not celebrate that by maintaining the hangmen's gallows on public display.

We do not want to rewrite history. Instead, we want to highlight it. And we refuse to honour figures like Robert Geffrye who are responsible for enslaving and murdering people and profiting from it.

His statue should go. This pamphlet is a great weapon in our arsenal to bring down the statue.

**■ Diane Abbott MP,**  
**Hackney North and**  
**Stoke Newington**





**Weyman Bennett, SUTR co-convenor, speaking at a protest at the Museum of the Home.**

The National Education Union applauds this booklet which shows why the Geffrye statue should be removed from the museum. In the booklet, Steve Cushion vividly illustrates why we should not continue to venerate buildings or statues named after people culpable of the most abhorrent brutality and genocide, of using Black people as fodder for their economic greed.

The arguments put forward by government that we shouldn't erase parts of British history miss the point. We don't want to erase history, but we don't need reminders in public spaces of the

horrors of the racism that underpinned slavery and colonialism. We want to teach a history which both acknowledges the truth about colonialism and slavery, and which recognises the histories of resistance, achievement and cultures of the global majority.

The causes of the many inequalities that exist in Britain and globally would be better understood if the curriculum examined the philosophy behind slavery and colonisation, and the perspectives and rights of those who still experience the reverberations.

■ **Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary, National Education Union**

The Black Lives Matter movement and the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol led anti-racists across the UK to look at just who was being honoured by statues in their local community. When we challenged the glorification of slavers, like Colston and Robert Geffrye, we were told that we were trying to “cancel history”. This pamphlet gives the lie to such nonsense. We want more history, not less. We want real history, not racist fiction. This pamphlet digs deep into Britain's colonial past to help us fight back against who seek to divide us today.

■ **Weyman Bennett, co-convenor, Stand Up To Racism**







S<sup>R</sup> ROB GEFFRYES KN<sup>T</sup> ALDERMAN  
AND IRONMONGER  
FOUNDER OF THIS HOSPITALL

# Sir Robert Geffrye and the Business of Slavery

In the 400 years of the Atlantic slave trade, somewhere in the region of 12 to 15 million Africans were enslaved and transported by force to the Americas and the Caribbean. Between one and two million died in the crossing and millions more people in Africa also died because of slave raids, wars, and on the way to the coast for sale to European slave traders. Once in the Americas, these enslaved labourers were forced to work in labour camps where the conditions were so harsh that most only lived for about seven years before the accumulation of fatigue, whipping and hunger sent them to an early grave. The attrition rate in a Caribbean plantation was worse than the Battle of the Somme. This is one of the worst crimes against humanity in history.

The debate over the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye (1613–1703) has opened a window onto the slave trade and its role in the creation of modern Britain. As a successful London businessman and politician, Geffrye's life well illustrates the early development of capitalism in England and the relationship between the City of

London and the origins of imperialism, particularly the importance of the whole business of slavery.

Geffrye came to London in 1630 from Landrake in rural Cornwall, where his family owned a farm. The family was connected to several influential members of the Ironmongers' Company in the City of London, and this secured him an apprenticeship with Richard Peate, a trading ironmonger. He graduated from his apprenticeship in 1637 and was admitted as a Freeman of the Ironmongers' Company and a Liveryman<sup>1</sup> in 1646. The London Livery Companies had started out as guilds to

**“Conditions were so harsh that most only lived for about seven years... after fatigue, whipping and hunger sent them to an early grave.”**

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1. A Liveryman was a full voting member with the right to participate in elections.



## “Livery companies became cabals of rich businessmen who covered their tracks by engaging in charitable activities.”

control specific trades but by the 17th century had become cabals of rich businessmen who conspired to restrict profits to themselves and exclude others. Then, as now, they covered their tracks by engaging in charitable activities, although these were normally restricted to their own members and retainers who had fallen on hard times.

The Livery Companies were more than just trading consortia, they also controlled the politics of the City of London, electing the Lord Mayor and Aldermen. They appointed magistrates who stood in judgement and acted as chiefs of police, and even had their own militia, the Honourable Artillery Company and the Trained Bands. Finally, the Livery Companies served as dining clubs, enabling their members to do business over copious dinners and vast quantities of wine – a function they still perform today.<sup>2</sup> The Ironmongers’ Company was a lot more than just a 17th century version of Robert Dyas.

Geffrye did not restrict himself to the ironmongering trade. He was an investor in and officer of the Royal African Company, the East India

Company, the Levant Company, The Honourable The Irish Society (Society of the Governor and Assistants, London, of the New Plantation in Ulster, within the Realm of Ireland), as well as being the part owner of a slaving ship, the China Merchant, that was active in both the East India and West India Trades. He was a Colonel in the City Militia and a substantial trader in tobacco, then entirely produced by enslaved labour.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, iron bars, five of which Geffrye placed on his coat of arms when he was knighted, were used as a commodity in the slave trade.<sup>4</sup>

Colonial trade emerged as the most dynamic sector of the European capitalist economy in the seventeenth century and was the basis of British economic expansion in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> At the heart of this Atlantic economy lay the slave trade and the plantation economy based on enslaved labour.



2. <https://www.ironmongers.org/dining-and-celebrations>

3. Charles Welch, “Geffrye, Robert”, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 10 (London: Elder Smith & Co, 1887).

4. Chris Evans & Göran Rydén, “Voyage Iron: An Atlantic Slave Trade Currency, its European Origins, and West African Impact”, *Past & Present*, Volume 239, Issue 1, May 2018, Pages 41–70.

5. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492–1800* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 524, 542; Joseph Inkori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 118, 100.



# The Royal African Company

Originally set up in 1660 as the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa, it was relaunched in 1672 as the Royal African Company with James, Duke of York and future James II, as Governor of the Company until 1688 and its largest shareholder.<sup>6</sup> Geffrye was one of the original 200 investors, investing £400 out of the original subscription of £111,000. Four hundred pounds would be worth around £1,500,000 in today's money.<sup>7</sup>

**The Royal African Company transported about 5,000 enslaved people a year across the Atlantic and “shipped more enslaved African women, men and children to the Americas than any other single institution during the entire period of the transatlantic slave trade”.<sup>8</sup> Between 1672 and 1713, the Company's 500 ships exported £1,500,000 (£45 billion) worth of goods to West Africa, transported 170,000 enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and returned with 30,000 tons of sugar and enough gold to make half a million “guinea” coins.<sup>9</sup>**

The Royal African Company owned several slave factories and forts on the West African Coast which were staffed by permanent agents, providing fixed bases from which the triangular trade could be organised. On the first leg of the triangular journey, the Royal African Company exported English manufactured goods, East Indian textiles, and European iron and copper, all of which were traded in West Africa for ivory, gold, dyewoods, palm oil, and other African raw materials in addition to the primary focus on enslaved Africans. The enslaved Africans were then transported on the “middle passage” to provide labour for the sugar plantations of the West Indies. The final leg of the journey transported Caribbean products, mainly sugar, to be sold in England or re-exported, as well as the bills of exchange by which the planters arranged their credit and settled their debts.<sup>10</sup>

Geffrye's investment yielded him a modest average of 7 per cent a year in dividends. But his membership of the

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6. Kenneth Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, 1957).

7. See inside cover for calculation of relative values.

8. William Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the politics of the Atlantic slave trade, 1672-1752* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p. 30.

9. Mark Steeds and Roger Ball. *From Wulfstan to Colston: Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol* (Bristol: Bristol Radical History Group, 2020), pp. 49-53.

10. Charles Killinger, *The Royal African Company Slave Trade to Virginia, 1689-1713* (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, 1969), p. 17.

## “The Royal African Company acted as a get-rich-quick racket for the royal family.”

Royal African Company opened opportunities denied to “interlopers” in the slave trade. He exported cotton calico and iron bars to Africa for the purchase of slaves, both as part of the general activities of the Company and directly through his part ownership of the China Merchant, a ship that was chartered to the Royal African Company, which yielded substantial profits from gold and ivory but, above all, from the trade in enslaved labourers. In September 1689 the China Merchant set sail with a cargo of cloth, beads, iron bars, pewter, carpets and gunpowder and was insured for £3,000 (£9,000,000) by the Royal African Company. It left the Gold Coast with 555 kidnapped Africans, of whom only 422 arrived alive in Barbados, where they were sold for an average of £23 (£70,000) each.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the enslaved Africans, the China Merchant carried 1869 ounces of gold and 77 elephants’ tusks from Africa, as well as 62 casks of sugar and smaller quantities of ginger, logwood and indigo from Barbados. For this voyage Geffrye and the co-owners of the China Merchant were paid £3,656 16s 8d (£11,250,000). Shareholders in the Royal African Company received a bonus in 1691, quadrupling their holding and bringing Geffrye’s holding up to £1,600 (£4,900,000). In that year, he

was also appointed an “Assistant” (equivalent to a modern company director).<sup>12</sup>

The China Merchant made another slaving voyage in 1692-3, this time taking more than 400 Africans from the Gold Coast, of whom 175 died en route, with only 262 surviving the crossing to be sold into slavery in Jamaica. Despite this loss, and the fact that the China Merchant was detained by the French Navy on its return crossing, Geffrye received £1539 (£3,923,000) in 1696.<sup>13</sup> But times were changing, and the tide was running against the Royal African Company.

The Royal African Company acted as a get-rich-quick racket for the Stuart royal family, Charles II and James II, along with their cronies and backers from the City of London, amongst whom we find Geffrye. However, denying other City of London businessmen, as well as traders based in other cities, access to this profitable trade was one of the reasons the increasingly powerful capitalist class in England turned against Catholic King James II. It led to their support for the 1688 invasion from the Netherlands, led by Protestant William of Orange and James’s daughter Mary Stuart, resulting in the coup d’état known as the “Glorious Revolution”. Opposition to the monopoly of the Royal African Company also came from the owners of the slave plantations in the West Indies, whose increased wealth enabled them to buy growing influence in the British Parliament. The Royal African Company could not supply enough enslaved labourers to meet the West Indian planters’ requirements for the

11. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>

12. Penelope Hunting, *Riot & Revolution: Sir Robert Geffery 1613-1704* (London: The Geffrye Museum, 2013), p. 88.

13. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution*, p. 92, and *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database*.

Slave breaking free  
projected onto the  
Museum of the  
Home.



growing slave-based economy. At the same time, restricting the numbers of Africans shipped by the Company enabled it to exploit its monopoly to force the price up. But there were also financial difficulties. Because of the long-term nature of the capital investment resulting from the long round trips at sea, the Company found it increasingly difficult to purchase the £100,000 (£315,800,000) worth of goods required for annual export to Africa. So, the Company began to borrow money to pay dividends and by 1688, interest payments reached £6,000 per year (£18,950,000). Such a financial pyramid scheme could not last forever.

The investors in the Royal African Company tried to cling on to their legal privileges, in part by Edward Colston (the slave trader whose Bristol statue

was pulled down by anti-racists in June 2020) bribing the new King William III with a gift of a large shareholding in the Company. But pressure from those merchants excluded from the trade, as well as the demands of the West Indian planters for ever increasing supplies of enslaved labour, forced Parliament to pass the Trade with Africa Act 1697. This opened the slave trade to all English merchants who paid a ten per cent levy to the Company.<sup>14</sup>

Geffrye saw the way the wind was blowing early on and offloaded the bulk of his shareholding onto one of his more gullible fellow “Assistants”, Captain Robert Lancashire, in 1693, while they were still worth something. He thereafter concentrated on the East India trade.

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14. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*, 2013, pp. 52-58.



# The East India and Levant companies

In the 17th century, most legal foreign trade was carried out through cartels known as “Companies”. The Levant Company (the Company of Merchants of England trading to the Seas of the Levant, also known as the Turkey Company) had enjoyed a monopoly of the profitable trade between England and the Ottoman Empire since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>15</sup> There was a particularly close link between the Ironmongers’ Company and the Levant Company, with 21 Masters of the Ironmongers also being “Turkey Merchants” and the Levant Company frequently holding its business meetings in the Ironmongers’ Hall.

Geffrye managed to become a member of the Levant Company in 1653, one of only about 300, although how he amassed the initial capital to start trading once he had finished his apprenticeship in 1637 is unclear - possibly he entered into a partnership with his old master, Richard Peate. Peate’s fortunes declined as Geffrye’s star rose and by the time he died in 1653, Peate had been reduced to appealing for charity from the Ironmongers’ Company.<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence that Geffrye felt obliged to help his old master.

Joining the Levant Company seems to have been Geffrye’s breakthrough into big money. The Levant Company was given a new charter that confirmed its monopoly in 1661 by the recently restored King Charles II. By the mid-1670s, dividends reached 50 per cent, but thereafter trade declined, and the major business opportunities transferred to the East India Company, to which Geffrye turned his attention. In reality, there was considerable overlap in membership of these organisations, exemplified by George Berkeley, first Earl of Berkeley, who was elected to the governorship of the Levant Company in 1680 and was also, like Geffrye, a member of the Royal African Company and the East India Company.

The first record we have of Geffrye’s involvement in the East India Company was his support for Maurice Thompson who, in 1654, led an attempt to open up the East India trade. This failed, but Thompson did manage to become Governor of the East India Company in 1657, when a new charter established the Company as a joint stock company. This meant subscribers invested in the company as a whole and shared the profit, rather than investing in an

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15. Mortimer Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company* (London: Routledge, 1908).

16. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution*, 2013 pp. 33, 38.

individual voyage with the potential to lose all if the ship went down. The initial subscription raised £739,782 (£3,014,000,000), of which Geffrye contributed £125 (£509,300), which would have had a resale value of £600 (£1,789,000) by 1683. This was clearly a modest part of his total investment in the East India Company as he sold shares worth £1,000 (£3,660,000) to Charles Thorold and Henry Johnson in 1670. When he died in 1704, he still had an investment of £6,433 (£14,790,000).

At this time, the English East India Company was not yet the fully fledged colonialist monster it would become. It was mainly still a trading company using its armed forces to fight the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*) rather than to directly conquer territory in India. That would come later. However, it was already an important player in the English imperial network.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the trade in calico, a cotton textile, formed an important part of the trade with India. As well as selling this cloth at a profit in London, East India merchants supplied calico for re-export to West Africa, where it was used as trade goods to purchase enslaved Africans. Geffrye was heavily involved in the calico trade, both as part of the East India Company and through his share in the China Merchant, which was hired out to the East India Company before it changed its use to becoming a slave ship. After its two slaving voyages, the China Merchant returned to the East India trade, but on its 1700 trip to India, it returned via Barbados, where it

**“It is clear that the City of London business community was deeply embedded in the business of slavery at this time.”**

stopped to sell cheap cotton cloth from India for clothing for the enslaved workers.<sup>18</sup>

Most histories of the period treat the East India and the African trades as separate, but in fact they were deeply entwined, with ship owners operating in both, depending upon which offered the best immediate profits. It was not just cotton textiles from India that were used as trade goods for the slave trade. The East India Company also traded in glass beads and cowrie shells, which were used as currency in West Africa. Moreover, while the company was not directly involved in the West African trade, it did enslave people from Madagascar and transport them to the Caribbean from as early as 1621.<sup>19</sup> Given the overlapping directorships between the Royal African Company and the East India Company, it is hard to untangle the extent of involvement, but it is clear that the City of London business community was deeply embedded in the business of slavery at this time. Geffrye is not only illustrative of this financial involvement; he was also deeply involved in organising the process.

17. Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: Rise of the English-speaking Empire from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (Pimlico 1998), pp. 241–250.

18. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution*, 2013, pp. 79–86.

19. R B Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2015), p. 11.

# The political connections

Compared to some others who invested in the African slave trade and the East India trade, Geffrye was a minor player. He really made his fortune as an administrator of the financial dealings of the City of London and as a politician. He was a High Anglican, a Royalist and a Tory by political conviction, so was not in political favour during the period of the Commonwealth (1649 to 1660), when England was a republic. During this time he concentrated on advancing himself within the Ironmongers' Company. He served as Auditor in 1658-59 and by all accounts he had an excellent head for figures. Meanwhile he built up his finances for when the affairs of state became more congenial to men of his opinions. He obtained the office of Constable of Lime Street Ward in 1655.

The Restoration of 1660, which reinstituted the monarchy in the person of Charles II, saw the re-establishment of the old regime and attempts to wipe out the memory of the Civil War, the regicide and the Commonwealth. Geffrye became Common Councillor in Lime Street Ward in 1659, in advance of the Restoration of 1660. This may have

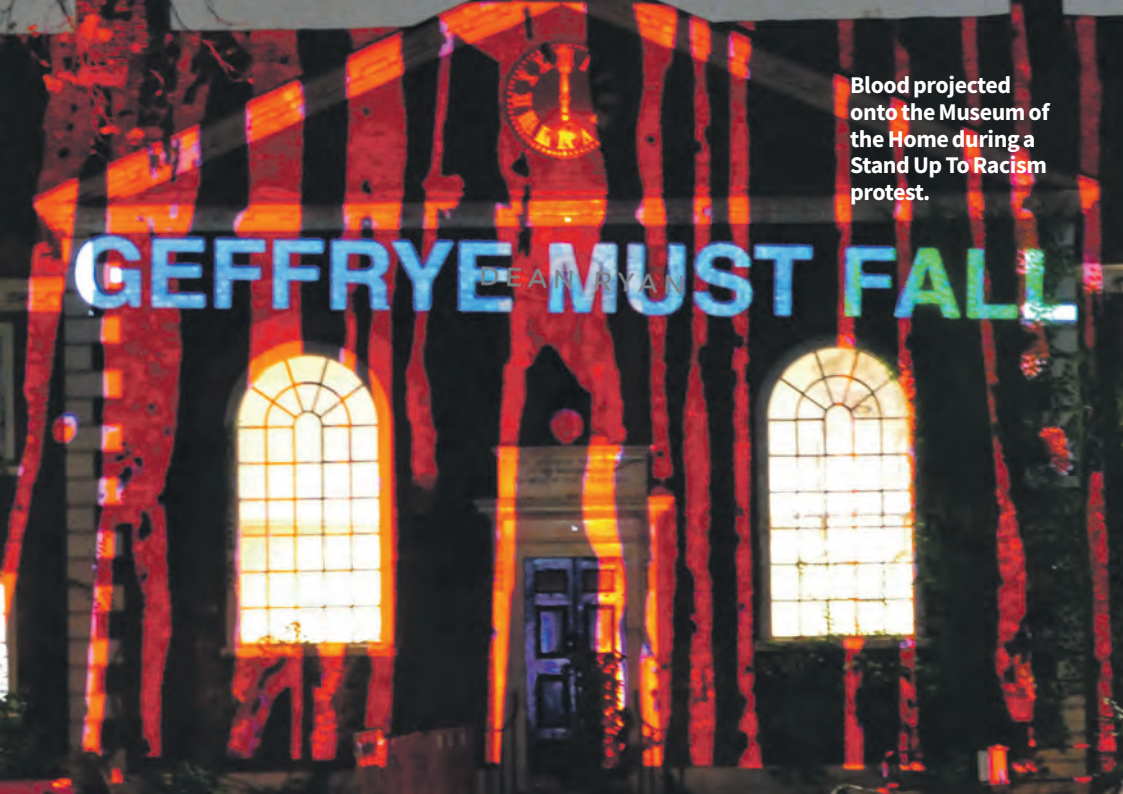
been an example of his far-sightedness, or maybe just an ability to profit from inside information. He was elected Master Ironmonger in 1667, Sheriff in 1673, the year he was knighted, Deputy Alderman from 1662 to 1676, Alderman from 1676 to 1704, and was Lord Mayor in 1685. In addition, he was made a Colonel in the City militia in 1681, when the King dismissed many of the previous officers of the militia and replaced them with his trusted placemen. He also held an honorary commission in the Honourable Artillery Company. As Alderman he was a magistrate and responsible for policing in his ward. This political power was extremely useful in advancing his business interests and in acquiring inside information to benefit his trading deals.<sup>20</sup>

The 1660s and 1670s were years in which businessmen with the right political connections could make their fortunes. Geffrye gained a reputation for liking a drink, being jovial company ("A Merry Man") and a lavish entertainer. As Sheriff and later as Lord Mayor, he entertained at home. Plate, household goods and jewels valued at £408 (£938,300) were found at his house after his death. He is known to have

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20. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution*, 2013, p. 98.





Blood projected onto the Museum of the Home during a Stand Up To Racism protest.

# GEFFRYE MUST FALL

socialised with Samuel Pepys, Clerk to the Navy Board and Sir William Penn, Commissioner of the Navy, when they were deciding on contracts for the refitting of naval ships. Geffrye had a particular interest in supplying naval ironmongery.<sup>21</sup>

The Navy was vitally important to the success of the slave trade. Without the power of the warships of the Royal Navy, foreign powers and pirates would have wreaked havoc with the trade. At the very least, the slavers would have had to provide their own naval protection at considerable expense. Far better for them that the English state take charge of their protection and, at the same time, provide business

opportunities in shipbuilding and refitting at public expense. The symbol of this connection was James, Duke of York, the King's brother who was both Governor of the Royal African Company and High Admiral.

In 1683, King Charles II, in defiance of the traditional election procedures, suspended the charter of the City of London and its Livery Companies and appointed his supporters to office. This situation continued when his brother took the throne to become James II. It was under this regime that Geffrye was appointed Lord Mayor and Master of the Ironmongers' Company in 1685. He was central to the Tory, royalist clique that took over and ran the City of

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21. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: a new and complete transcription*, edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews. Vol.111: 1662 (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 50.

## “Geffrye was a past master at operating in the gaps between politics and business.”

London on behalf of the Crown, enriching themselves in the process.<sup>22</sup>

As Lord Mayor, Geffrye acted as the principal enforcer of the King's will in London. At this time he became particularly friendly, indeed a regular drinking partner, with Judge George Jeffreys, the Lord Chancellor. Jeffreys is known as “The Hanging Judge” for sentencing 251 people to death in the “Bloody Assizes”, following the suppression of an uprising in the West Country led by the Duke of Monmouth. There is archival evidence that Geffrye used paid informers to root out “sedition” in London and report their activities to the government.<sup>23</sup>

King James II was arguably even more arrogant, high handed and corrupt than his brother Charles and very quickly a powerful opposition grew, particularly amongst the merchants of the City of London. Geffrye, foreseeing the coming end of Stuart rule, contrived to have himself dismissed as Alderman in 1687. This timely manoeuvre helped him avoid direct implication in the corrupt regime of King James II when it fell. He was thus able to be part of the welcoming committee for William of Orange when he arrived in London to be proclaimed

King William III. Judge Jeffreys was not so shrewd and stayed loyal to King James to the end and was caught trying to escape following James's flight, dying in the Tower, of apparently natural causes, the following year.

Despite having extracted himself from the dying days of the Stuart regime, the new regime was not to his political taste as the new King and Queen favoured the political group known as the “Whigs”, while Geffrye was a leading Tory. But Geffrye was able to find a home in the changed environment and like many politicians, past and present, he seemed to consider politics to be the continuation of business by other means. **Then, as now, many politicians found no difficulty in using their office to enrich themselves and their cronies. Geffrye was a past master at operating in the gaps between politics and business. He combined a profitable business of property speculator, slave trader and East India merchant with being an accountant, administrator, politician, magistrate and chief of police.** He may not have been in politically favour with the new regime after 1688, but they knew a useful man when they saw one.

A few months into King William's reign, Geffrye was granted new powers, to augment his continued service as Alderman. In March 1690 King William appointed him to the “Lieutenancy Commission”, with the responsibility of suppressing “commotions, rebellions and unlawful assemblies”. At the same time, Geffrye “loaned” the King £500 in 1689, and £1,000 in 1690, 1693 and 1694 to help finance the war with France.

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22. Neil Burton, *The Geffrye Almshouses* (Inner London Education Authority, 1979), p. 9.

23. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution*, 2013, p.135.

# The 'Father of the City'

The official historians like to suggest that Geffrye committed the last 15 years of his life to works of charity. Within three months of the accession of Queen Anne in 1702, Geffrye succeeded Sir John Moore as the senior Alderman, a position which brought with it the title of "Father of the City". **However, his most important public role during his final years was as President of Bridewell and Bethlem Hospitals. Geffrye's hagiographers would have us believe that this was an act of selfless charity. However, this neglects the fact that the Bridewell Hospital was not a hospital in the modern sense, but a prison.**

In 1553 Edward VI had given an old royal palace to the City for the reception of vagrants and homeless children and for the punishment of petty offenders and 'disorderly women'. The City of London converted it into a prison and workhouse that became known as Bridewell Prison. It was referred to being for the 'correction' of 'habitual idlers'. Bridewell was one of London's first prisons, and thus the term "bridewell" became synonymous with prison and punishment.<sup>24</sup>

There was a lengthy historical process, beginning in the fourteenth

century, whereby the great mass of the population was driven from the land and "hurled onto the labour market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians." Moreover, this historical process of "the expropriation of the agricultural producer, the peasant, went hand in hand with the genesis of the capitalist farmer and the industrial capitalist". In England, the nobility, which was already moving to a money-based economy, made "transformation of arable land into sheep-walks ... its slogan". The process of dispossessing the peasantry took the form of enclosures of common lands, thus depriving agricultural labourers of their means of subsistence, turning them into paupers and wage labourers who could survive only by selling their labour power in the towns.<sup>25</sup>

Enclosure of the land entailed the expropriation and privatisation not merely of the subsistence farms of peasant producers, but also of the woodlands, meadowlands and marshlands which were customarily exploited in common. The privatisation of these common resources was a key factor in forcing ordinary people to sell their labour for a wage, which was critical to the

24. Paul Griffiths, "Contesting London Bridewell," *Journal of British Studies* 42.3 (2003) pp. 283–315.

25. Karl Marx, "So-Called Primitive Accumulation", *Capital*, volume 1, Part 8 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp. 876, 879.



accumulation of capital.<sup>26</sup> England was, at most, 47 per cent enclosed in 1600, but it was at least 75 per cent enclosed by 1760. From 1600 to 1760, 28 per cent of England was therefore enclosed.<sup>27</sup> The peasant farmers thus expropriated flocked into the towns in the hope of making a living. For the ruling class and its urban elite, this caused potential problems in maintaining order.

The first “Societies for a Reformation of Manners” were formed in 1690 and, in addition to producing an extensive range of printed pamphlets, these Societies sought to prevent what they saw as vice and disorder, by paying informers and using the courts aggressively to punish those who committed a range of minor offences.<sup>28</sup> The magistrates cracked down on people who were denounced for profane swearing and cursing, sabbath breaking, drunkenness, “lewd and disorderly” conduct, prostitution, brothel keeping, having sex in a Hackney carriage, gambling and sodomy. Vagrants and “idle persons” were also rounded up and incarcerated. And, of course, any working-class radicals could easily be arrested and fitted up for any one of these so-called crimes. Most prisoners were given punishments as well as imprisonment, usually whipping and hard labour.<sup>29</sup>

But there is more to social control than just repression.



26. Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. Berkeley (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 46–93.

27. J. R. Wardie, “The Chronology of English Enclosure, 1500–1914.” *The Economic History Review* 36, no. 4 (1983), pp. 494–5.

28. Faramarz Dabhoiwala, “Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688–1800” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007), pp. 290–319.

29. Faramarz Dabhoiwala, “Summary Justice in Early Modern London.” *English Historical Review*, 121 (2006), pp. 796–822.

# ‘Mighty benefactor of humanity’

A minority cannot rule a majority by force alone. It must convince its victims to submit or confuse them into paralysis. To accomplish this, the capitalist class presents itself as the benefactor of mankind. Philanthropy is the key to this sleight of hand. Charitable giving also has the advantage of allowing the rich to determine social policy as they wish. The rich never give money away without strings attached.<sup>30</sup> As Frederick Engels wrote:

The English bourgeoisie is charitable out of self-interest; it gives nothing outright, but regards its gifts as a business matter, makes a bargain with the poor, saying, ‘If I spend this much upon benevolent institutions, I thereby purchase the right not to be troubled any further, and you are bound thereby to stay in your dusky holes and not to irritate my tender nerves by exposing your misery. You shall despair as before, but you shall despair unseen...this I purchase with my subscription of twenty pounds for the infirmary!’ It is infamous, this charity of a Christian capitalist!...

As though you rendered the workers a service in first sucking out

their very lifeblood and then placing yourselves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity when they give back to the plundered victims the hundredth part of what belongs to them!<sup>31</sup>

When Geffrye died in 1704, he left around £13,000 (£29,900,000), which was split roughly equally between surviving friends and relatives on the one hand, and charitable donations on the other.<sup>32</sup> Nothing was left to ameliorate the conditions of enslaved workers in the West Indies. The major charitable bequest was to pay for the building of the almshouses that were eventually to become the Geffrye Museum, later renamed the Museum of the Home.

**The establishment of almshouses was one of the favourite forms of charitable giving in this period.** There were 18 in Shoreditch alone. They were frequently managed by one of the City Livery Companies and members and supporters of the Company concerned received precedence in the allocation of accommodation. This meant that though presented as charitable institutions, they were as much a form

30. Susan Rosenthal, “Philanthropy: the capitalist art of deception”, *Socialist Review* (May 2015).

31. Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Panther, 1969), pp.304 and 303.

32. Burton, *The Geffrye Almshouses*, 1979, p. 14.



of insurance for those freemen of the City who had fallen on hard times. They provided accommodation to a very limited number of people who were otherwise homeless but gave the founder a very public edifice to boast of his generosity. In case there was any doubt as to who the benefactor was, most had a statue to him prominently displayed.

The contentious statue to Geffrye outside the Museum of the Home is a good example of such glorification.

Honour and reputation were very important to the ruling class of the 17th and 18th centuries, so whitewashing the public memory of a slave trader would have been considered money well spent. Even in death, Geffrye served his class well. His portrait still has pride of place on the main staircase of the Ironmongers' Hall. Ironically, the original statue was removed in 1913, and the statue prominently on view in Kingsland Road is a copy.



# Statues: to reinforce the rule of the elite

The overwhelming majority of statues raise issues around class, gender and race, as they usually portray members of the ruling class of the time. Given the importance of profits made from slavery and the slave trade in the rise of British capitalism, it is inevitable that a very large number of statues will be memorials to businessmen who made their fortunes in the slave trade.

**Boris Johnson says that removing statues is “to lie about our history”, but in reality, it is the statues themselves that lie about our history.** If the plinth of the now famous statue thrown into the river in Bristol had said “Edward Colston, who kidnapped 80,000 Africans and shipped them to the West Indies where those who did not die on the way were whipped and tortured throughout a lifetime of backbreaking toil before going to an early grave”, then there would not have been such local anger in Bristol.

As historian Louise Raw wrote recently:

As there’s talk of removing a statue I’ve written a lot about, of William

Gladstone on Bow Road in East London, we should also consider honouring the women forced to pay for it in 1882. The unveiling took place in 1882 at the behest of their hugely wealthy bosses, Bryant and May, who’d forced the match-women to pay for the statue from already starvation wages. The firm made workers attend the ceremony – but watched in horror as the women turned it into a protest, attacking the statue with rocks, jabbing their fingers with hatpins to stain it red, and shouting “our blood paid for this!”<sup>33</sup>

And, of course, the Gladstone family wealth came from the slave plantations of Sir John Gladstone of Fasque and Balfour, father of the William Gladstone honoured in this statue.<sup>34</sup>

The purpose of statues throughout history has been to reinforce the rule of the elite, to make their dominance look permanent and to sanitise their history for future generations. So, it is no wonder that extreme right-wing thugs are organising “statue defence squads” and mealy-mouthed politicians are

33. Louise Raw *Statues of slavery benefactors sparked protests more than 100 years ago – this isn’t a new debate*, Independent Online, Friday 12 June 2020, <https://bit.ly/3GYaZCp>

34. Although not a claimant, Gladstone was closely involved with the claims of his father, John Gladstone, one of the largest of owners of the enslaved in the Caribbean and a highly influential figure in the West India lobby. As a politician, W E Gladstone supported compensation for slave-owners, the system of apprenticeship, and the defence of the West India interest over such matters as sugar duties.

## “The lie that there was widespread support for slavery needs to be challenged.”

wringing their hands saying that, of course, something should be done, but it should be done “within the law”.

**It's important to recognise that the history of slavery and of this country is also a history of often widespread opposition and resistance both by slaves themselves but also by others. The lie that there was widespread support for slavery needs to be challenged.**

The first known proposal for a public statue in London referring explicitly to Caribbean slavery actually sought to expose the City's complicity in the cruelties of the slave system. Published in 1682, a brief pamphlet by the Anglican Rev. Morgan Godwin, called for a sculpture to be placed in the city portraying the barbarity of a slave master. His proposal focused on the refusal of ‘Christian’ slave owners to countenance baptism, in the belief it would encourage subversion and revolt. The centrepiece of the sculpture was to show:

an Overseer [to some English Planter in America] whipping and most unmercifully tormenting a poor Negro-Slave under his Governance, for no other Crime but for having been that day (Sunday) baptised. In his right Hand (held aloft) place a long Willow Rod...; and by him a large Bundle of the like Rods to be spent upon the

Wretch, for that Offence: Out of his Mouth these Blasphemous Words proceeding, Ye Dog, as you were baptized in the morning with Water, so in the Afternoon ye shall be baptised in Blood. The Negro tied by both his Wrists up to a Rafter or Beam; deep marks of each Stroak appearing upon his Flesh and drops of Blood in abundance issuing or starting out of his Body, stript quite naked.<sup>35</sup>

Needless to say, it was never constructed. Perhaps the Museum of the Home could commission such a sculpture to replace the contested statue in the front of the building? And we surely want more than just the quiet removal of statues and the moving of portraits into the basement so that the matter can be buried and we all “move on”. Rather there needs to be a thorough accounting of the role of the business of slavery in the growth of the British economy, who profited and what businesses and institutions have a debt to repay to the descendants of the enslaved labourers.



35. Madge Dresser, “Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London”, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 64, 2007, p. 167.

# Resistance and radical abolitionists

In 1819, at a meeting in his Hopkins Street Chapel in Soho, Robert Wedderburn asked the congregation “Has a slave an inherent right to slay his master, who refuses him liberty?” Following a discussion, “nearly the whole of the persons in the room held up their hands in favour of the Question”. Wedderburn then exclaimed “Well Gentlemen, I can now write home and tell the Slaves to murder their masters as soon as they please”.<sup>36</sup>

But it would be a mistake to see emancipation as arising from British politics, whether radical, moderate or conservative. **The enslaved themselves played an essential part in their own liberation. They did not sit passively and await “saviours from on high to deliver”. They fought on the beaches of Africa, they mutinied on the slave ships, they deserted to form free, independent communities in the hills of the Caribbean colonies and, given the slightest opening, engaged in full scale rebellions.** This history needs to be more widely known.

Despite the cruel punishments for rebellion and resistance there were important revolts and conspiracies in

the Bahamas in 1635, Jamaica in 1656, 1670, 1673, 1675, 1678, 1683, 1686, 1690, 1702, 1704, 1718, 1720, 1760, 1765, 1766, 1777, 1795, 1798, 1799 and in 1831-32, Barbados in 1649, 1675, 1686, 1692, 1708 and 1816, Demerara and Berbice in 1733, 1749, 1752, 1762, 1763 and 1823, St Vincent in 1719, Grenada in 1795 and British Honduras in 1765.<sup>37</sup>

The “Baptist War”, as the 1831 Jamaica uprising became known, can be credited with concentrating the minds of the British government to face the fact that increasing rebelliousness was causing the whole system to fail.<sup>38</sup> The slave power would equally have been aware of the Nat Turner rebellion of enslaved people in Virginia, which also occurred in 1831. Meanwhile, the increasingly militant working-class opposition in Britain, starting with the Luddites from 1811 to 1816, the “Captain Swing” movement in 1830, followed by the widespread strikes in 1831, presented the authorities with the danger of fighting on two fronts. In general, the slave unrest of 1816-32 helped both to destabilise and discredit slavery and force the slaveholders to accept emancipation.

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36. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (London: Verso 2000), p. 319.

37. Richard Hart, *Caribbean Workers' Struggles* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, 2012), p. 26.

38. Mary Turner, “The Baptist War and Abolition”, *The Jamaica Historical review*, vol. XIII, 1982, pp. 31-41.

# Reparations for slavery

Enslaved workers were paid nothing for their labour power. Jamaica was a British colony with a slave-based economy for 179 years from 1655 to 1834, with an average of 150,000 enslaved people. Given that a British agricultural labourer was paid around 25 pounds a year in 1750, a quick, back-of-an-envelope calculation leaves an unpaid wages bill of £671,250,000, worth about £600 billion in today's money. And this is just for Jamaica. A similar calculation for the whole of the British West Indies produces an unpaid wages bill of £1,500 billion pounds. **The descendants of the enslaved are saying “It’s our money and we want it back”.**<sup>39</sup>

The call for reparations for slavery appeals in a broader sense to the “correcting of a wrong”. In the case of the slave trade and slavery with its persistent legacies this means implementing measures of compensation at different levels. It embraces a multitude of symbolic and material dimensions, including the call for apology and recognition, but also for collective investments that would fight the structural inequalities and racial discrimination people of African descent still suffer in terms of accessing

education, health systems, income, housing and labour markets, to name just a few. Besides financial transfers, claims for reparations demand support for historical and commemorative activities, the erection of memorials, days of remembrance and museums that would contribute to decolonising the history of slavery and its legacies.

The exploitation of their labour force in the various slave-based economies of the Americas stimulated Western European and North American industrial development. The devastating material, economic, social and cultural damages, in particular for Caribbean and South American societies, continue to haunt the present. European and North American governments have never properly addressed their role within slavery, whether the historical injustices committed in the various regions or the ongoing legacies of historically rooted global inequalities. On the contrary, they continue to ignore the call for reparations. In 2001, the United Nations finally condemned the transatlantic trade and slavery as a crime against humanity and called on the former European colonising countries to fight

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39. Steve Cushion, *Up Down Turn Around, the political economy of slavery and the socialist case for reparations* (London: CLS, 2016), pp. 13-15.



structural marginalisation and racial discrimination still affecting the lives of Africans and people of African descent.

Racism, which the supporters of the slave trade used as a justification for slavery, has badly infected British society. The racism of the police, the unemployment figures for young Black people, the endless discrimination and petty humiliations of everyday life, the Windrush scandal: all these factors and more have their origins in the wealth and power that the British ruling class gained from slavery.

The protests at the murder of George Floyd have sparked a global response, part of which was the joyful removal of one slave trader's statue and the demands for the removal of all the rest, amongst whom is Robert Geffrye. We need to finish the job and radically change a society that continues to rest upon exploitation of human labour and relies upon racial divisions to maintain the domination of the wealthy few.

Nor should we underestimate the importance of demanding a formal apology by government. An apology is an acknowledgement of responsibility, an act that changes the story. And it works as much for the speaker as the listener. Instead of dragging a nation out to the stocks for a public shaming, an apology is the moment the offender first looks into the mirror and truly sees themselves. It is the first step to recovery.

But an apology, if it is to mean anything, must be more than the regret and remorse expressed by a criminal in the hope of a lighter sentence after they



**Philip Glanville, Mayor of Hackney, protesting at the Museum of the Home.**

have been found guilty. It must involve a real and appropriate action.<sup>40</sup>

Removing the statue of Robert Geffrye could be part of the process of reparation for slavery.

Eric Williams argued that racism was “a consequence, not the cause of slavery”. Workers in Britain have long suffered from divisions caused by racism that have weakened our ability to defend and advance our wages and conditions. A recognition of the origins of such divisions in the slave-based economy of the 18th and 19th century will go a long way to combating racial prejudices and assist building a united response to the problems facing today's workers.<sup>41</sup>

40. For instance, the Bank of England's “Statement in relation to the Bank's historical links to the slave trade” is completely inadequate. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/news/2020/june/statement-in-relation-to-the-banks-historical-links-to-the-slave-trade>

41. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Penguin 2022).

# ‘Recognise the need for change’

**“I’m not about to send my child to a venue where she has to look up to an image which represents cruelty, oppression and subjugation”.**

**Soraya Adejare, Hackney Councillor**

**“Statues of those involved in slavery ought to be pulled down and removed. It is morally reprehensible to continue to support their existence”.**

**Sade Etti, Hackney councillor**

Following the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, and those of Confederates in the United States, many organisations including the Museum of the Home in Hackney have looked at who they are publicly honouring. Local MP Diane Abbott recalled school visits to the museum as a child, where she came away having been told Geffrye was a “philanthropist” but not having been told that he made money from slavery. The museum, she told a protest in the summer of 2021, should “recognise the need for change and resist pressure from central government. It should remove the statue”.<sup>42</sup>

The Museum of the Home consulted the borough’s residents on whether the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye should be

removed from its plinth. Some 71 per cent of those taking part wanted the statue to come down and be put in a more appropriate position, and its history explored. No one suggested destroying it. Since that museum-commissioned poll, there have been various suggestions about how to best explore what Geffrye represented.

One idea is to create a display within the museum, putting his life in context. Tamsin Ace, the museum’s director of creative programmes told *The Daily Telegraph* that “The museum staff feel that by moving it to an alternative location on site we can explain it better. Having it at height on a really visible thoroughfare in Hackney is problematic.” She proposed transferring the statue to Geffrye’s grave on the museum grounds, arguing “It’s a great spot for contemplation and reflection, and people can choose whether they engage with him in that way because the statue remaining in position is a painful memory”.<sup>43</sup>

There are still other ideas on how the museum could illustrate the way Sir Robert Geffrye enriched himself from the misery of the slave trade. Some have suggested the Museum of the Home

42. “Protesters clash with Hoxton museum’s board over slave trader Robert Geffrye’s statue”, *East London Advertiser*, 4 August 2020; “Museum of the Home considering moving statue of slave ship owner”, *Guardian*, 18 November 2021.

43. “Government 1, Woke Warriors 0: Oliver Dowden blocks removal of Robert Geffrye statue”, *Mail+*, (21 June 2021).



**Hackney Councillor  
Soraya Adejare  
protesting outside  
the Geffrye Museum.**

would be well placed to turn one of its trademark exhibition rooms into the kind of cabin in which the enslaved labourers had to live, to contrast such squalid surroundings with the luxury of those who profited from their unpaid labour. A notice could be erected at the front of the building saying that the initial finance of the almshouses came from a crime against humanity perpetrated by the founder of the almshouses.

The government is currently refusing to sanction the statue's removal and is making barely concealed threats to the institution's funding if it is relocated. In the aftermath of the Museum's public consultation, then culture secretary Oliver Dowden told the trustees: "It is imperative that you continue to act

impartially, in line with your publicly funded status, and not in a way that brings this into question".<sup>44</sup>

Dowden instructed museum directors that they "must defend our culture and history from the noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down". In fact, he is misrepresenting the aims of campaigns seeking to move statues, including 'Geffrye Must Fall'. **The campaign is concerned to see the statute removed from the front of the building, where it is an affront to the people of Hackney, particularly those whose ancestors suffered the brutalities of the triangular trade. It is also wants to extend understanding of the history of Geffrye and what he stood for. This means looking at the facts, rather than ignoring them in the name of "our"**

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44. <https://www.museumassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2020/10/dowden-letter-on-contested-heritage-stokes-fears-of-government-interference/#>







culture. The campaign is not about cancelling history; it's about better educating us all.

The murder of George Floyd and the world-wide Black Lives Matter movement has led to huge discussion over decolonising the curriculum and over how we teach and learn about our shared histories. This means teaching the history of this country; it also means looking beyond this country and at its place in the world and the other cultures and histories it interacts with, and which have enriched our

communities. Students in Hackney, their families and the wider community deserve this. They don't deserve to be insulted as "baying mobs" of "woke worthies", as the then Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick referred to those campaigning for change.

Dowden, Jenrick's successor, and Nadine Dorries, who quickly replaced Dowden, along with their friends in Westminster, may believe their threats will win the day, but the tide of history has turned.

Geffrye will fall.

# Rebranding the Museum

The Geffrye Museum was rebranded in the autumn of 2019 as the Museum of the Home with the director Sonia Solicari saying, "Robert Geffrye didn't create the museum," and that the collections showcased in the building had little to do with him.<sup>45</sup>

Following the government's warning to the museum trustees that the statue must remain in place, Solicari told a parliamentary culture committee on 6 October 2020: "The museum would ideally be free to act with integrity and in the best interests of its beneficiaries. It is highly unusual for government to

take such a strong view in a matter which should normally be a curatorial decision."

The government's intervention at the Museum of the Home has blighted efforts to rebrand and relaunch the Museum after its £18.1m refit. The people of Hackney and the Museum's staff want the statue removed from its position in front of the building, placed within the museum with appropriate explanation. Until that happens local educationalists, local people and the wider London public will shun the institution.

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45. <https://www.museumnext.com/article/londons-geffrye-museum-rebrands/>

# Turning a blind eye to history

The Museum and its trustees have long been reluctant to face up to the past. This can be seen from the four books that concern Robert Geffrye, published by the organisation.

**Penelope Hunting, *Riot & Revolution: Sir Robert Geffrye 1613-1704* (2013)**

This is a hagiography that paints Geffrye an honest businessman, charitable giver, efficient administrator, just magistrate, good churchgoer and a “Merry Man” who was entertaining company. There are sections on the Royal African Company and the China Merchant that do clearly spell out the basic facts of the Atlantic slave trade, but once that is passed, no further mention is made and the conclusion states, with sickening contempt for the victims of the slave trade: “The monarch, ministers of state, merchants, politicians and lawyers respected his honesty, integrity, fairness and faith. His personal qualities and not, as was often the case, aristocratic connections or wealth, accounted for his successful career. Loyal, dutiful and hard-working, Geffrye made his mark among the merchant community, while at the

same time attending to the needs of poor parish children...”<sup>46</sup>

**David Dewing, *The Geffrye, Museum of the Home* (2008)**

Dewing was director of the museum, and it was he who commissioned Hunting’s book described above. The introduction just refers to Geffrye as a wealthy merchant, while an appendix at the back of the book informs us that he “had interests in the Royal African Company and the East India Company”, with no explanation of what these companies traded in.<sup>47</sup>

**Kathy Haslam, *A History of the Geffrye Almshouses* (c.2004)**

This mentions the Royal African Company on page 6, but the only explanation as to what it traded in is in a footnote buried at the bottom of the next page, which does mention the 5,000 slaves a year transported to the West Indies, but quickly moves on.<sup>48</sup>

**Neil Burton, *The Geffrye Almshouses* (1979)**

This is the only book of the four that admits that “most of the profits of the Royal Africa Company came from the

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46. Hunting, *Riot & Revolution* (2013) p.183

47. Dewing, *The Geffrye, Museum of the Home*, p. 47.

48. Haslam, *A History of the Geffrye Almshouses*, p. 6.

trade in black slaves and part of the wealth which was eventually used to build the Geffrye almshouses may have been derived from this unhappy source”<sup>49</sup>.

There is little idea in any of the books that the Bridewell Hospital was in fact a prison, that the Society for the Reformation of Manners was a morality police which used informers to prosecute those whose main vice was

being poor and which acted with the support of the magistrates who could fine, imprison and whip people for failing to live according to a moral code that the ruling class of the time ignored.

One way the Museum of the Home could start to make recompense for its financial origins in the slave trade would be to publish a book that fully exposed the origins of the buildings they have inherited.

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49. Burton, *The Geffrye Almshouses*, 1979, p. 8.

## What you can do

**1. Protest to Samir Shah, Chair of the Board, at the Museum of the Home, 136 Kingsland Road, London E2 8EA.**

**2. Protest to Nadine Dorries, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. Email: nadine.dorries.mp@parliament.uk**

**3. Send messages of support for the Geffrye Must Fall campaign to Hackney Stand Up To Racism. Email: info@hackneysutr.org**

**4. Order more copies of this pamphlet from Hackney Stand Up To Racism: publications@hackneysutr.org**

**5. Write to Hackney Mayor Philip Glanville and local councillors, encouraging them to continue to support the Geffrye Must Fall campaign and to use the resources of the council to put pressure on the museum trustees to remove the statue. Hackney Town Hall, Mare St, London E8 1EA. Email: mayor@hackney.gov.uk**

**6. Join Stand Up To Racism: Go to <https://standuptoracism.org.uk/join-donate/>**

**7. Join Caribbean Labour Solidarity: write to [info@cls-uk.org](mailto:info@cls-uk.org)**



**8. If you are an educator or parent, discuss how to support decolonising the curriculum initiatives with your colleagues and peers.**

**9. Invite representatives of Hackney Stand Up To Racism to speak about the Geffrye Must Fall campaign at your community group or trade union.**

# Reparations are a trade union issue

*The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) passed this resolution at its Annual General Meeting back in 2007. The question of reparations for stolen labour has not gone away since. Other trade unions could follow the RMT's example:*

## **Reparation And The Slave Trade**

The enslavement of African people was an evil act, and a crime against humanity.

The continuing enslavement of Africans in places such as Mauritania and Sudan is also repugnant and a continued modern-day crime against humanity.

The Annual General Meeting welcomes the formation of the Global African Congress (GAC) formed in Barbados on 6th October 2002 in order to bring together African voices in the Reparation Campaign.

Slavery for the African continent represented depopulation of its societies, the destruction of political and social structure, the retrenching of any and all economical aspiration

and the attempted genocide of those remaining on the continent by the removal of the normal means of survival.

Slavery for those Africans removed from the continent meant murder and inhuman treatment during the middle passage, then murder, mutilation, rape and degradation.

Those for whom the slave 'trade' has provided wealth and influence are the founding fathers of modern capitalism, who created systems of white supremacy and institutional racism that provided privileges for whites over Africans and Black people in general, and their descendants are living off the proceeds of an evil crime against humanity.

The Campaign for Reparation by Africans worldwide is in order to repair their societies worldwide and we call on the trade union movement to support this campaign.

The national Trade Union and Labour movement must be in the forefront of the Reparation movement because this struggle is about redress for the unpaid labour, including the special oppression of women, who were forced to have children to provide a continued source of slave labour.

The international Trade Union and Labour movement must be in the forefront of the Reparation movement because this struggle is also about stopping and repairing the effect of the ongoing super exploitation of Africans worldwide by institutions such as IMF and the World Bank.

A better world is possible.



# Further reading

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## Why this campaign matters

"As a scholar of the Atlantic slave trade I add my voice to those of the people of Hackney as they demand that the statue of the despicable slave trader Robert Geffrye must fall. His public commemoration is an affront to any society that professes democratic values."

■ **Marcus Rediker, author of *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, Distinguished Professor of Atlantic History of the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh**

"With his characteristic wit and eye for the damning detail, Cushion makes a compelling, historically informed case for why Geffrye must fall. Essential reading that exposes both the breadth and depth of Geffrye's - and Britain's - relationship with 'the business of slavery' and empire; and why the (non)arguments of present-day culture secretaries should likewise be toppled from their plinth."

■ **Kate Quinn, Associate Professor in Caribbean History, Institute of the Americas, UCL**

"We're often told it is 'desecration' and 'wiping out history' to remove statues.

In fact, monuments rise and fall in line with our ever-changing relationship with the past, and always have. The Ancient Egyptians did it: statues, even pyramids were removed. Every era has done the same: there are no statues now honouring Hitler, Mussolini or Stalin.

Hackney residents have clearly stated that a celebratory statue to a man so heavily involved in people trafficking and the misery, suffering and death of men, women and children has no place in their borough; their views should be respected. Geffrye's day is, rightly, done."

■ **Louise Raw, historian**

“This is a most welcomed publication which further confirms Robert Geffrye’s wealth and philanthropy was linked to the exploitation of my ancestors during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. We now need to reset the dial in how British history is taught, consumed, and reproduced as part of this cultural amnesia which denies the truth of this country and provides the false premise that history cannot be rewritten, or the narrative cannot be challenged, as a sop to justify white supremacy and structural racism.”

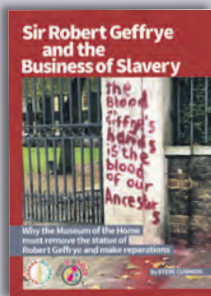
■ **Professor Patrick Vernon**  
**OBE, social commentator**  
**and cultural historian**

“As Walter Benjamin said, every monument of civilisation is also a monument of barbarism. The Geffrye Almshouse that houses the Museum of the Home, who I work with, was built from the profits that Robert Geffrye made from Empire. Reparations for enslavement is a part of decolonising the museum and this pamphlet makes transparent the history that coloniality in our time refuses to accept. As James Baldwin warns us, ‘History is not in the past, it is in the present, because we carry our histories with us.’”

■ **Dr Michael McMillan**,  
**University of the Arts,**  
**creator of the West Indian**  
**Front Room installation at**  
**the museum**

“Robert Geffrye was an active participant in one of the very worst crimes in history: the enslavement of millions of African people. Growing wealthy through the violent exploitation of human beings is not something to be celebrated, and it is a grotesque insult to the descendants of his victims that his statue still stands in one of the most international cities in the world. Please read and share this pamphlet with everyone you can – the history of Geffrye and his wrongdoing must be known more widely. Slavers should not be honoured. Geffrye must fall.”

■ **Paddy Docherty, historian**  
**of empire and author of**  
***Blood and Bronze: the British***  
***Empire & the Sack of Benin***



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# Sir Robert Geffrye and the Business of Slavery

Why the Museum of the Home must remove the statue of Robert Geffrye and make reparations



**“This is a terrific pamphlet, and I cannot recommend it strongly enough.”**  
*Diane Abbott MP,  
Hackney North and  
Stoke Newington*

**“We need to reset the dial in how British history is taught, consumed, and reproduced. This is a most welcome publication.”**

■ *Professor Patrick Vernon OBE*

**“We want real history, not racist fiction. This pamphlet digs deep into Britain’s colonial past to help us fight back against those who seek to divide us today.”**

■ *Weyman Bennett, co-convenor,  
Stand Up To Racism*

**“As a scholar of the Atlantic slave trade I add my voice to those of the people of Hackney as they demand that the statue of the despicable slave trader Robert Geffrye must fall.”**

■ *Marcus Rediker, author of  
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