



REIMAGINING GUNNERSBURY

A PROJECT TO INCLUDE MORE BLACK HISTORIES

The project at a glance

Gunnersbury's formal learning service completed a project, 'Reimagining Gunnersbury', to include more voices in what we do and specifically more Black Histories in the programmes we offer. Successfully gaining a grant from The Art Fund in the Spring of 2023 supported us in developing a series of planned activities that included:

- Working with The Black Curriculum, who carried out a consultation as part of an audit of our formal learning provision.
- The Black Curriculum report offered advice, resources, and suggested ways to diversify the programme and included staff training.
- Embedding suggested improvements to our existing offer by including more Black Histories.
- Getting research done to boost awareness of significant local figures and of wider national and global histories.
- Developing two new workshops focusing on Black histories.
- Developing a Black Histories Network consisting of a wide range of heritage organisations and schools.
- Sharing experiences, as was done by giving a talk at the GEM conference in Bristol and writing an article for the GEM Case Studies.



More detail about the project

Our starting point was an awareness of the need to review and update our workshops as well as the processes involved in how we work. There was also an awareness of the links between this site and some wider history of national and international significance that was not being covered by this museum. An example of that is the fact that the former owner of what was Gunnersbury Park House, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, was central to the arranging of the loan to the British government as part of the act that compensated the former slaveowners in the British Empire.

During the project we recruited researchers to delve further into histories such as that and we were then able to use that research to create a range of sources to spark children's curiosity and for them to investigate and reflect on it for themselves.

Gunnersbury Park Museum sees this project as a key step forward in its efforts to incorporate more diverse and inclusive voices and to work more proactively with a wider variety of relevant professional bodies, communities and other stakeholders.

Here's a quick flavour of the things that have been done as part of the project:

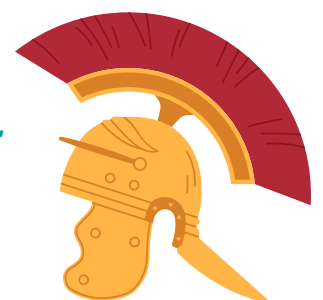
Enhancing workshops based on the audit

The Black Curriculum is a respected social enterprise that aims to address the lack of Black British history in the UK Curriculum through training, campaigning, supporting young people and working with key partners. They were commissioned to carry out an audit and this included consultation with staff, pupils and teachers, looking at our provision in action, working with the experienced learning team and resulted in a report that suggested ways each workshop could include more Black Histories. The suggestions highlighted by the report were worked on by Gunnersbury's formal learning team in terms of how to include the changes in a way that makes interesting and substantial points naturally within the flow of the sessions.

All of the workshops have had changes made and a few examples of that included:

The Romans workshop

We now refer to (using illustrations where possible) all the African soldiers in this country and to Septimius Severus, the Roman Emperor, and to the Ivory Bangle lady, a rich lady from Africa living in Roman York.



Victorian School workshop

We now refer to (using illustrations where possible) Abdul Karim, the attendant of Queen Victoria, and John Edmonstone, the taxidermist, and Mary Seacole, the nurse, and in the plenary, the educational work of the Huntleys.



New workshops

The new workshops utilise our strengths in immersive learning through roles plays and use of a filmed actor and investigating archive sources and handling objects.

The museum team has also adapted the new workshops for both KS2 and KS3.



NEW

Equiano's Story

This workshop gives specific pre-enslavement African histories equal weight to later events. We were keen to ensure that the topics of the British Empire and the Transatlantic Slave trade were placed in context and did not subsume the important earlier African histories of great Kingdoms such as Benin.

One of the activities looks at how products went from raw materials into the types of items consumed in Britain in places such as country houses, like this one. Other activities allow students to investigate sources for themselves to explore the processes involved in abolition and its links to local history.

NEW

Peoples Unite

This workshop encourages empathy, comparing sources, and uses role play to understand migration, inequalities, resistance, and social change.

It has been very well-received as can be seen in this feedback:

"The students LOVED the activity and it really boosted their confidence" - [Teacher].

"It was a great activity which really brought the students together and the role play helps them to understand elements of why people resist" - [Staff Member].

"It made me happy because Southall is being recognised". [Yr 8 Student].

"Excited and intrigued to learn about local history". [Yr 8 Student].

"Made us appreciate every culture and race". [Yr 8 Student].



Black History Network

We convened several meetings in 2023 and 2024 of a network, both in person and online, with a wide range of both museum educators, heritage professionals, and teachers. These sessions, brought together representatives from 12 London boroughs, reflecting a wide geographical spread and a deep-seated interest in integrating Black histories into educational curricula and cultural programming across the heritage sector. These iterations of a Black History Network have allowed mutual sharing of information, ideas and advice. We aim to work in an ongoing basis with local partners to continue to have similar meetings of the network.



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