

## **Bust of Sir Hans Sloane**

Hans Sloane (1660–1753), whose collection was purchased for the public to found the British Museum, acquired objects and natural specimens during his time in Jamaica as physician to the British Governor of the island. He would later become physician to Kings George I and II, and President of the Royal Society. This bust was made by Michael Rysbrack in the 1730s as a model for a full-length marble sculpture of Sloane.

The statue was set up in the Physic Garden of the Society of Apothecaries, in the grounds of Sloane's country manor house at Chelsea in West London. Together with his medical earnings and land investments, Sloane used income generated by enslaved people on plantations, inherited by his wife Elizabeth Langley Rose Sloane, to purchase 'curiosities' from around the expanding British empire and his wide network of contacts around the globe.

## Natural and artificial rarities

Cabinets of curiosities in the 1600s were made up of ‘natural and artificial rarities’ – objects found in nature and objects made by humankind. A selection of Sloane’s artificial rarities is displayed in the wall cases behind you. Sloane collected such objects to learn about the past and about cultures around the world. As he did so, his cabinet of curiosities evolved into a more universal collection, closer to the kind found in the Museum today.

The ‘Akan Drum’, shown here, was sent to Sloane as a ‘drum from Virginia’, then a British colony. He believed it was Native American, but it was made in West Africa by Akan people. It may have been used on a slave ship to force enslaved Africans to exercise by ‘dancing’ to keep them fit for plantation labour. The oldest African American object in the British Museum, it is displayed in the North America Gallery (Room 26).



## *Natural history of Jamaica, 1707*

In Jamaica, Sloane provided medical services to British plantation owners and collected and catalogued the island's natural resources and commodities. He published an illustrated account of his travels with the natural history of Jamaica and the British Caribbean islands in 1707 (displayed here), followed by a second volume in 1725. The volumes reveal how he encountered the medical practices and material culture of Akan men and women, who had

been enslaved and transported from areas that are now in modern Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Sloane questioned them about their botanical knowledge and collected plants which enslaved people grew, but dismissed their healing knowledge as 'superstition and quackery'. He had a pair of early 'banjos' engraved for his book along with a sheet of music he had heard at a festival, the earliest record of African music in the Americas.

## **Portrait of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, 1734**

Belonging to a Senegalese family of Muslim clerics, Diallo was sold into slavery in West Africa in 1731. Captured while trading slaves for his father, he was transported to work on a plantation in Maryland, America. Diallo made a plea for his release and due to his educated background was brought to London in 1733. While in London he translated the inscriptions on Sloane's collection of Islamic amulets (displayed in Room 43). Diallo was bought out

of slavery by public subscription and returned to West Africa with the assistance of the Royal African Company. Little is known of his later years before his death in 1773. Advocates of the abolition of slavery cited Diallo as a key figure in their assertion of the moral rights and humanity of Black people. This etching by William Hoare is based on his 1733 oil painting of Diallo wearing a copy of the Qur'an.

## Seal-matrix of the Royal African Company, 1662

In the 1560s, Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake, with the support of Queen Elizabeth I, made several voyages to West Africa (Guinea and Sierra Leone) to enslave Africans. They sold them to the Spanish in the Caribbean at great profit – an estimated 1,500 people, but far more died. This was the beginning of British involvement in the slave trade, which expanded enormously as the British empire

grew. In 1672, the Royal African Company was given a 1,000-year monopoly over the slave trade by King Charles II. Hans Sloane invested in the Company in 1704. This oval bronze seal-matrix, used to seal documents, depicts the Company's coat of arms. It features representations of Africans wearing feather headdresses, with the Latin motto 'By Royal patronage trade flourishes, by trade flourishing, so too the realm'.



Printed in reverse

## *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*

Olaudah Equiano (about 1745–1797) was prominent in the campaign to abolish slavery after publishing his autobiography in 1789. His book recounts how he was enslaved by slave raiders as a child in what is today Nigeria, being transported to Barbados, then Virginia, America. Sold to a British naval officer and baptised in London as Gustavus Vassa, eventually he purchased his freedom in 1766 with money he earned trading alongside his

work for others. An explorer and merchant, he settled in England, becoming one of the most prominent Black individuals within Georgian society. His book – one of the first published in Europe by a Black African writer – sold out immediately. In 2007, a first edition of Equiano's book was carried in procession at a special service in Westminster Abbey, London, to commemorate the bicentenary of Britain's Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

## Anti-slave trade print

This 1789 broadside, widely circulated by abolitionist campaigners in various versions, depicts cross-sections and four plans of a slave ship (based on the 'Brooks' of Liverpool).

It shows how Africans were transported across the Atlantic. The text describes 609 individuals in inhumane conditions (corrections indicate the actual numbers were higher), with male slaves chained, the so-called 'dancing' exercise regimes and the overcrowding and

high mortality rates on the 6–8 week 'Middle Passage' crossing from Africa to the Americas. It describes slavery as 'one of the greatest evils at this day existing upon the earth'. In the early 1780s, an anti-slavery movement emerged amongst the British public. In parliament William Wilberforce used a model of the Brooks ship to demonstrate conditions on the Middle Passage.

Presented by the Friends of Prints and Drawings  
and Karsten Schubert, 2019

## **‘Success to the Brooks’ – an anti-abolition jug**

The jug depicts the ‘Brooks’ ship, built in 1781 and operated until 1804 as a slave ship. Its hold, crammed with enslaved people, was used as the model for the abolitionist print shown at the other end of this case. The ship was one of nine slavers measured by Captain Parrey of the Royal Navy for a Parliamentary report on these ships. Like the ‘Brooks’, this creamware jug was also made in Liverpool, in 1793, and

boasts a picture of the ship with the caption: ‘SUCCESS TO THE BROOKS CAPt. NOBEL’. This reflects pro-slavery sentiments from those such as the owner of the ship, ‘WH’, or the ‘Rope Makers’, both referred to on the jug, who feared losing the substantial income generated by the slave trade. Nobel captained the slave ship five times, the last in 1785 to 86.

Presented by William Geoffrey Skillicorn, 1994

## **African Steam Ship Company medallion, 1852**

This earthenware medallion celebrates the founding of the African Steam Ship Company, set up to develop other forms of commerce after slavery's abolition. The medallion features a paternalistic representation of an African, revealed by Britannia.

While representing a post-abolition moral fervour, it also conveys the continuing

post-abolition exploitation of Africa for trade and the persistent image of Africa as impoverished. The founder, Macgregor Laird, was an evangelical Christian who believed that Africa could be 'civilized' through Christian missionary activity and 'legitimate commerce'. The Company's charter boasted that it 'may fairly be recommended to the public as one of the great civilising agents of the Benighted continent.'



## **Collecting, empire and slavery**

The Museum is developing plans for new displays and programmes to address questions around collecting, empire and the transatlantic slave trade. This work will evolve over time and we will continue to engage in these crucial debates and discussions. Please visit the Museum's website for the latest information.

## **Collecting, empire and slavery**

The Museum is developing plans for new displays and programmes to address questions around collecting, empire and the transatlantic slave trade. This work will evolve over time and we will continue to engage in these crucial debates and discussions. Please visit the Museum's website for the latest information.