

Vinyl Panel applied to
existing graphic incase
- thick vinyl to cover over
text on previous
- Not wrapped, face only
250x530mm

Case 14

SIR HANS SLOANE: PHYSICIAN,
COLLECTOR, SLAVE OWNER

IN HIS WILL, Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), a wealthy physician and President of the Royal Society, offered his entire collection to the public in return for a payment of £20,000 to his heirs. The collection was purchased through an Act of Parliament in 1753 which founded the British Museum. In common with many collectors from this period, Sloane’s vast collection was enabled by the wealth and networks that grew out of European imperialism.

Sloane collected in order to learn about the natural world and human culture, and to search for lucrative new commodities. While physician to the British Governor of Jamaica in 1687–89, Sloane researched local medicine and collected natural history specimens. He acquired objects connected to the enslavement of African peoples and anatomical specimens relating to skin colour and theories of racial difference. After his marriage in 1695, Sloane financed his vast library and collection of ‘natural and artificial rarities’ with income partly derived from the labour of enslaved people on his wife’s Jamaican sugar plantations. He also invested in the Royal African and South Sea Companies, both of which traded enslaved people.



LEGACIES OF EMPIRE AND SLAVERY



THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT was characterised by the rise of new sciences, faith in reason and expanding trade. It also witnessed the aggressive global expansion of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. This room's displays reflect the close connection between Enlightenment and empire.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, Britain was one of the main participants in the transatlantic slave trade along with other European countries, transporting people against their will from West Africa to work on plantations in the Americas, then bringing goods and wealth back to Europe. This trade was at its height during the eighteenth century. Millions of Africans were enslaved, many working in brutal conditions on hugely profitable sugar plantations.

The slave trade was abolished by Parliament in 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 led to the end of slave ownership in most British colonies. Abolition was motivated by passionately disputed religious and moral arguments, but also by the declining profitability of slave-based labour and the increasing impact of slave rebellions, most notably the Haitian Revolution of 1791 and the 1831 Jamaica rebellion. British slave owners were compensated financially for the loss of what was regarded as their 'property'.

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Case 1

PLANTS

SIR HANS SLOANE practised botany in an era of intensifying global imperial and commercial rivalry for access to new foodstuffs, drugs and medicines.

Sloane spent from 1687-89 as a physician in Jamaica and many of his specimens were collected there by enslaved men and women. A devout Protestant, Sloane studied plants for their medicinal uses, commercial profitability and to help understand God's design through nature. He gathered an enormous collection of specimens sent to him by botanists and travellers from around the world. He catalogued them according to a complex system devised by his friend John Ray. In 1735, the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus revolutionised natural history by developing modern taxonomy – a system still in use today for naming and classifying plants, animals and minerals.

**Vinyl Panel applied to
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200x300mm**