

Why was the Robert Milligan statue removed?



The statue outside the Museum of London Docklands before it was removed

The Museum of London Docklands is housed in a 200-year-old former sugar warehouse in what was the world's first dock complex, built in 1802. Around the museum there are monuments, plaques and statues symbolising the involvement of this area in the history of the sugar trade and the trading of enslaved people.

Why were the docks built?

The West India Docks were built to receive goods that were being imported to London from the West Indies. This included sugar that was being grown and harvested by enslaved men, women and children.

Up until 1807, these docks also served as a port in the transatlantic slave trade, sending slave ships to Africa and the Americas. At least 22 known slave ships unloaded produce at these docks.

The docks were built after a campaign led by two men: George Hibbert and Robert Milligan.

Who were George Hibbert and Robert Milligan?

George Hibbert was a West India Merchant whose family traded in enslaved people in Jamaica.

Robert Milligan was a prominent London-based slave-master who traded in enslaved people. By the time of his death in 1809, he owned two sugar plantations and 526 slaves in Jamaica.



Portrait of George Hibbert, 1811

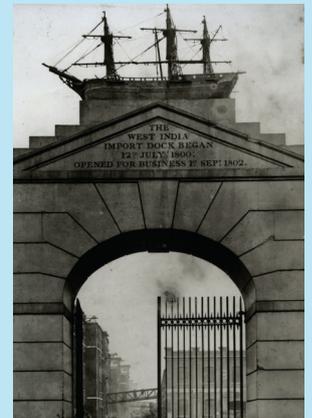
What monuments are around the museum that uncritically commemorate George Hibbert and Robert Milligan?

Around the corner to the museum is an ornamental stone which commemorates the activities of Hibbert and Milligan. The stone celebrates uncritically the two men as promoting British commerce.

Hibbert's Gate, a gate that formerly served as the entrance to the docks, still stands there today. When it was built, George Hibbert chose a ship model to be placed above the gate.

The ship was *The Hibberts*, a model of one owned by his family, which served within the West India trade.

A statue of Robert Milligan used to stand outside the front door of the Museum of London Docklands.



Hibbert's Gate

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Why was a statue of Robert Milligan put up on the Quayside?

A statue made by Sir Richard Westmacott, in 1809 after Milligan's death, was moved from storage in 1997 to West India Quay, outside the Museum of London Docklands.

Milligan served as both Deputy Chairman and Chairman of the West India Dock Company. The statue was created to commemorate Milligan's 'genius, perseverance and guardian care' in being one of the key driving forces in the docks construction.

The statue sat upon a plinth that depicts a classical scene of commerce bringing prosperity to Britannia.

Why was the Robert Milligan statue removed?

Why was the statue of Robert Milligan removed?

As one of only three museums in the UK to address the history of the transatlantic slave trade, the statue of Robert Milligan stood uncomfortably outside of the Museum of London Docklands for a long time.

In 2020, with the Black Lives Matter movement calling for an end to public monuments honouring slave owners, the museum advocated more strongly than ever for the statue of Robert Milligan to be removed on the grounds of its historical links to colonial violence and exploitation. On 9 June 2020, the local authority, Tower Hamlets, and landowners, Canal & River Trust, removed the statue, to recognise the wishes of the community.

Following the removal of the statue, Tower Hamlets, Canal & River Trust and the Museum of London Docklands have formed a consortium to discuss the future of this statue. We are working with the local community to inform this future.

How to encourage your students' critical thinking?

We hope this information instigates thoughtful discussions amongst your students. Not everyone agrees that the statue should have been removed, with traditionalists saying that by contesting these monuments, we are trying to alter the past.

The museum's position is that in removing the statues it is highlighting parts of the past that have been ignored.

We suggest using the following Talking Point with your class:

Do you agree with the removal of this statue?

What arguments might you use to persuade someone of a different opinion?

Further resources for discussion

Film: **Slavery and the landscape of London**
youtu.be/kBo4-lBRhU

Film: **Teachers Guide: London, Sugar & Slavery gallery**
youtu.be/OFgUaSughi8

Blog: **Mapping the legacy of slavery in London's Docklands**
museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/mapping-londons-legacy-slavery-docklands

Blog: **Who are monuments for?**
museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/who-are-monuments-for



The statue being removed in June 2020



**IT
HAPPENED
HERE**