

# Sunderland's links to slavery

The Hilton family were an important family in the North East and owned Hilton Castle in Sunderland, the name changed to Hylton by the 19th century.

The Hylton's were a sea faring family who forged links with the Caribbean. Sir William Hylton was a mariner and salt merchant who went to America in 1621 and settled in New Hampshire. Anthony Hylton from South Shields (probably a relative of Sir William) took settlers to Jamestown, Virginia in 1623. It is probable that William and Anthony were connected to the Hyltons at Hylton Castle. Descendants of William Hylton settled in Maryland, Carolina and Jamaica before 1700. Records show that Ralph Hilton of South Shields went to Jamaica in the 1740s and owned slave plantations there. Like many of the first settlers, involvement in the slave trade and slavery grew out of labour shortages in their new lands. The Hylton surname is widespread in Jamaica today, through descendants of enslaved Africans who worked on the Hylton plantations.

## Local abolitionists

James Field Stanfield (1749 – 1824) was born in Dublin and later lived in Sunderland. Stanfield initially trained for the priesthood, but instead became a merchant seaman and sailed on ships to all parts of Europe as well as to North America and the West Indies.

Stanfield was the first ordinary seaman involved in the Trans – Atlantic Slave Trade to write about its horrors. In 1788 Stanfield wrote 'Observations on a Guinea Voyage', vividly describing his experiences on the voyage from Liverpool to Benin in West Africa. It was published as a series of letters addressed to a leading anti-slavery campaigner, the Revd Thomas Clarkson. The Guinea Voyage, A Poem in Three Books' – was published the following year, a copy of which is currently held at Sunderland Local Studies Centre.

By 1782 James Field Stanfield's sailing career was over and he became an actor, appearing on the stage in various towns, joining the Scarborough-Sunderland theatre circuit in 1789.

Sunderland was then to be his home for over twenty years. He played a significant part in the life of the town, being a leading figure in the foundation of the town's Subscription Library and in the Phoenix Masonic Lodge. A plaque is erected on Boddlewell House in Sunderland on the site of Stanfield's house, this is the wording on the plaque:

## JAMES FIELD STANFIELD (1749 – 1824)

Actor, author and campaigner against the Slave Trade lived in a house on this site, which was also the birthplace of his son **CLARKSON STANFIELD R.A (1793 – 1867)** Theatre, marine and landscape painter

There was popular support in Sunderland for an end to slavery as shown in the 1790s by petitions and the fact that the town's grocers had agreed to cease selling sugar produced in the slave plantations of the West Indies. Campaigning continued after the abolition of the British slave trade in 1808 and slavery in the British Empire in 1838. Frederick Douglas, the fugitive enslaved worker and antislavery campaigner addressed a meeting in Sunderland in 1846. The Dominican Celestine Edwards (1858 – 1894) briefly lived in Sunderland before moving to London. Edwards gave speeches across England on the subject of slavery and in September 1891 he gave several addresses in Sunderland Assembly Hall. Quakers, such as Edward Backhouse, and Methodists, such as Michael Longridge, were particularly involved in the anti-slavery campaign along with Sir Ralph Milbanke, a local MP for the County Durham constituency.



This is an earthenware jug made by Garrison Pottery in Sunderland around 1820 which includes an anti-slavery verse. It is in the collection of Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens.

## Washington connection

Five generations of George Washington's descendants lived in Washington Old Hall, Tyne & Wear. Another descendant, John Washington (then living in Tring) left for Virginia in 1656 to seek his fortune. Three generations later George Washington was born on his father's slave plantation in Virginia and went on to become the first President of the United States of America. Upon the death of his father

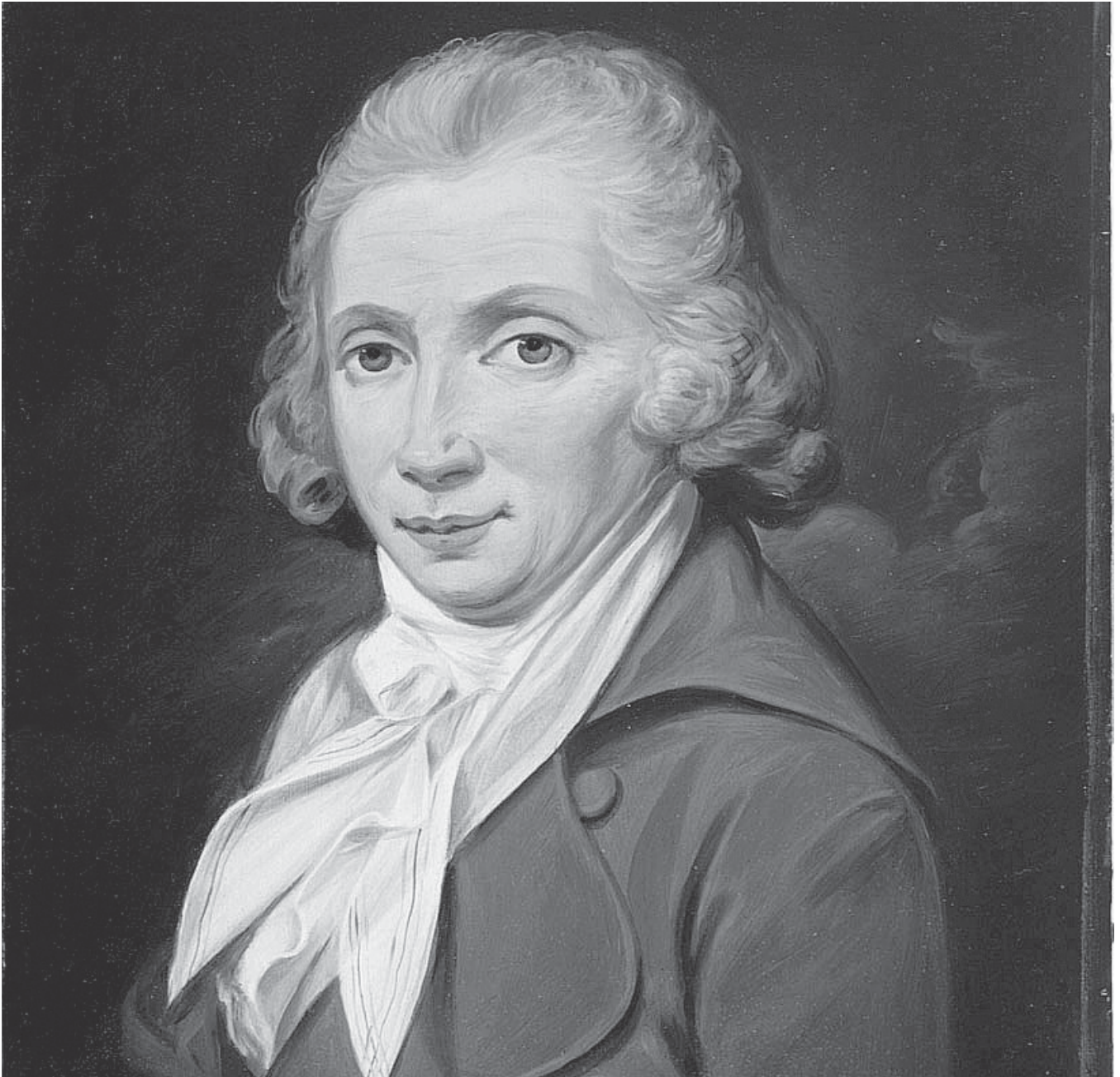
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George became a slave owner and over time his estate on Mount Vernon grew and 316 enslaved Africans were held there. George began to feel troubled by the moral implications of slavery and vowed never to purchase another slave. In his will George arranged for all his slaves to be freed on the death of his wife Martha. Washington's decision to

emancipate his slaves was an unusual move and although various editions of his will were printed in many countries few of his contemporaries followed his lead.

(Acknowledgment to Neil Sinclair, John Charlton and Tamsin Lilley for research)



James Field Stanfield (1749 – 1824)

## Find out more about slavery in the North East

For more information, visit the Local Studies Centre at Sunderland City Library & Arts Centre, which has information on slavery in the North East, such as:

- 'Hidden Chains: the Slavery Business and North East England' by John Charlton
- 'The Guinea Voyage' by James Stanfield

More information and images can also be found on the following websites:

[www.rememberingslavery.org.uk](http://www.rememberingslavery.org.uk)

[www.bbc.co.uk/wear](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wear)

[www.litandphil.org.uk](http://www.litandphil.org.uk)