

World Heritage Day 2021: Complex Pasts: Diverse Futures

Beixi Sun, MA student on the International Cultural Heritage Management course at Durham University, has been conducting some research into the Bailey as part of her placement with the Durham World Heritage Site. Considering the theme of the 2021 World Heritage Day, 'Complex Past, Diverse Futures', Beixi shares some research on one of Durham's lesser known residents, Granville Sharp

Complex Pasts: Diverse Futures - Understanding the Past, Sharing Responsibility

18 April is the 39th International Day of Monuments and Sites. Since its adoption by the 22nd General Conference of UNESCO in 1983, 18 April has been designated as International Day of Monuments and Sites. It is a day created to commemorate the preservation of cultural heritage and this year's theme is "Complex Pasts: Diverse Futures". Although Durham is found to be inextricably linked to the horrors associated with the African slave trade, Granville Sharp, one of the inhabitants of Durham, played a pivotal role in the abolition of slavery.



(G. Dance. (2013). *The English abolitionist Granville Sharp* [image] Available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25206659>)

Granville Sharp (1735-1813), an English scholar and philanthropist, who is recognized as an advocate of the abolition of slavery, was born in Durham in 1735 and educated at Durham School.

In 1767 he was involved in litigation with the owner of a slave named Jonathan Strong, in which he decided that even on English soil slaves were still the chattel property of their owners. Sharp was committed to fighting this decision with pen and court. Eventually, the matter was brought by another case he brought, James Somersett (1772), which stipulated that "once any slave sets foot on British soil, he is free." (This decision, however, did not include the colonies.)

John Spears, the author of *The American Slave Trade*, wrote that:

"This was a case that was about to rock the whole of England. For it was openly attacked, not only by the planters of the distant colonies but also by all England's foreign trade. England's foreign trade had grown, been financed and improved with the profits of the slave trade, and had eventually achieved supremacy at sea."

In other words, the case for the freedom of a black slave called James Somersett, which took place in November 1769 and was delayed for several years, went straight to the heart of the slave-trading interests, both upstream and downstream.

Because of Granville Sharp, the silent black slaves began to appeal to their enslaving race to recover their lost justice and mercy. The case sparked a lively debate among the British and ordinary people began to wonder if it was right to enslave the other. It set the stage for the eventual abolition of slavery.

So while Durham contributed to both sides of the shameful slave trade, some were reluctant to be mentioned in the past. But today we are committed to revisiting local history and heritage to shape a future that all groups will now wish to be proud of.

Reference :

Spears, J.R.,1900, *The American Slave Trade*