

Edinburgh's links to the slave trade exposed

At a lecture to be held in Edinburgh tonight the human rights activist Sir Geoff Palmer OBE will expose the capital as a beneficiary of a relationship with slavery.

Sir Geoff is Professor Emeritus in the School of Life Sciences at Heriot-Watt University and he will argue that Scotland as a nation benefited disproportionately from the slave trade.



Sir Geoff Palmer OBE Photo Alicia Bruce

He will point out that relative to population, Scots owned more slaves, more plantations and had a higher share of the transatlantic trade in plantation goods such as tobacco and sugar than England or most other European countries. And he will argue that the remarkable economic transformation experienced by Edinburgh in the final part of the 18th century

came at a heavy price.

By drawing together the stories of many wealthy residents of the New Town who were slave and plantation owners, such as James Lindsay, 7th Earl of Balcarres and Henry Dundas he will illustrate how they profited from slavery – and campaigned against its abolition.

The lecture forms part of a series of events in the city to mark Black History Month 2018 including talks, trails and exhibitions.

Sir Geoff said : “Being honest about how Scotland benefited from the slave trade is a crucial step on our journey to becoming a fair and inclusive society.

“While there has been much discussion in recent years about Glasgow’s role in this terrible trade, we now need to acknowledge that many of Edinburgh’s most notable citizens owned and exploited tens of thousands of enslaved people. Our glorious New Town, seen by many as the physical embodiment of the Scottish Enlightenment, was, sadly, partly funded by the enormous profits derived from the enslavement of Africans.

“Many wealthy residents were also handsomely compensated by the British Government for the loss of their slaves, described as ‘property’, in the years following the abolition of slavery in 1833.’



Adam Wilkinson Director Edinburgh World Heritage

Adam Wilkinson, Director of Edinburgh World Heritage, commented : “We cannot expect members of black and minority ethnic communities to feel a connection to our heritage unless we are honest about the past and the source of much of Edinburgh’s wealth in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Our mission as a charity is to connect people to their heritage in everything we do. Through thoughtful debate and respectful

discussion our hope is to deepen people's understanding of both the true value – and cost – of Edinburgh's remarkable heritage.”

[Ticket details here for Lecture which begins at 6.00pm at Canongate Kirk](#)