

Chair of Slavery and Colonialism Review group explains their remit

The council set up an independent review last summer to consider and make recommendations on connections between Edinburgh and slavery or the legacy of colonialism in the civic realm.

The group is made up of citizen volunteers.

This review is part of the city's response to Black Lives Matter which rose up in summer 2020. The council is also to enhance diversity and inclusion in the city's schools and to introduce best practice in the council's recruitment and employment practices.

The council appointed prominent activist Professor Sir Geoff Palmer as chair of the Review Group. He has been concerned about recent media reports which focus on those who profited from the slave trade, and that some reports do not include those who were aligned with the abolitionist movement.

The Review's remit is broad and takes in figures commemorated in the public realm who were both for and against slavery. An investigation is now underway of, including but not limited to, relevant public statues and monuments, street and building names within City of Edinburgh boundaries which Review Group members agree are of significance. They will go on to consider

the options and responses available to redress this legacy, including the possible removal or re-interpretation of features.

The Group will oversee a public consultation on this before formulating recommendations to bring back to the Council.



Professor Sir Geoff Palmer at the Black Lives Matter Protest in Holyrood Park in June 2020. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Here Sir Geoff sets out his thoughts ahead of the group meeting on Monday.

He said: “The purpose of this historical review is to select monuments, buildings and streets in Edinburgh which are associated with slavery and colonialism. Edinburgh’s links with slavery and colonialism are well documented.

“Edinburgh street names are well represented in the Slavery Emancipation, Compensation List of 1833 where slave owners were compensated for their slaves because legally the slaves were property. A recently compiled list of Edinburgh buildings, monuments and streets associated with slavery and colonialism will be discussed by the Review Group on 15th March, 2021.



Emancipation Street. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

“This list is comprehensive and it contains slave owners, abolitionists, buildings and monuments.

- “For example, the list contains:
- John Gladstone (Leith), slave owner, the father of William Gladstone, the Prime Minister. He received the largest compensation for 2,508 slaves.
- Henry Brougham, the distinguished abolitionist (St Andrew Square).

- Gilmore Place, commemorative plaque to Frederick Douglass, the black abolitionist who lived in Edinburgh in 1846.
- Balcarres Street, representing Earl Balcarres' period as governor of Jamaica and slave owner.
- Henry Dundas (Viscount Melville) ...statues (St. Andrew Square) and street names, Scottish politician who delayed the abolition of the slave trade to benefit slavers. As President of the Board of Control, he controlled the East India Company from 1793-1801 (India Street).
- Philosopher and economist Adam Smith and philosopher David Hume (statues) were indirectly involved in slavery. Smith proposed moderating slavery and improving its profitability with wages (see [Adam Smith's grave included dossier sites linked slavery colonialism](#) Daily Mail, 6 March) and Hume suggested that negroes were inferior to whites which had an impact on the practice of the racism in slavery.
- The British Linen Bank building, St Andrew Square, is included because it was a very profitable company managing the sale of clothes for slaves.
- Gillespie School (building) represents association with James Gillespie the tobacco merchant.
- David Livingstone (statue) missionary in British colonies in Africa.
- Rodney Street which ends at the Royal Navy Club. Admiral Rodney stopped the French from taking Jamaica from Britain in 1782 (Battle of the Saintes).
- Jamaica (Jamaica Street) was Britain's main producer of sugar and coffee.
- The Earl of Hopetoun (statue, St Andrew Square) had military association with slavery in Grenada and was a relative of Henry Dundas, so was Lawrence Dundas the owner of Dundas House (St Andrew Square).

“The list is historical and was compiled without prejudice or

bias. Reference in recent articles including the Telegraph ([Adam Smith's grave listed dossier slavery colonialism sites](#)) to the selection of Adam Smith is disappointing, no denigration was intended.

"The scope of our review is broad and takes into account figures commemorated in the public realm who were both for and against slavery. Indeed, the list also includes abolitionists Brougham (St Andrew Square) and Douglass (Gilmore Place).

"I would also like to clarify about the comments made in The Telegraph article by Tom Devine in regards to the new narrative on Dundas' temporary plaque being untenable because, it reflects his view about Henry Dundas in his 2015 book, 'Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past...The Caribbean Connection' where he says: "One of the most powerful of these was Henry Dundas, 'The Uncrowned King of Scotland', whose Parliamentary intervention in 1792 arguing for gradual abolition of the slave trade effectively killed off reform for a generation" [15 years].

"Not surprisingly, he received grateful thanks from influential members of the West India interest [slavers] for his support for their cause". As Secretary of State for War, Dundas managed "gradual abolition" during the French revolutionary wars and was the "chief instrument" against abolition of the slave trade.

"My views on statues are well known, as stated in the Edinburgh Evening News ([Don't tear our statues down' says Sir Geoff Palmer amid controversy over Edinburgh's historic links to slavery](#)).

"The Report which will be presented to the Council will contain historical information based on published work and supporting investigation.

"This project will be carried out in association with Edinburgh University. Working together we will achieve the

aims set out by the Council to ensure that equality, inclusion and diversity are embedded in the practices of the Council.”