

UNESCO Day of Remembrance for the Abolition of the Slave Trade – Edinburgh invited to observe a minute's silence

A minute's silence is to be observed in Edinburgh on Friday 23 August at 11am to mark the UNESCO International Day of Remembrance for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

It is hoped that everyone in Edinburgh will observe the moment of reflection – including Fringe audiences and performers.

In 2020 the city council agreed to address historic racial injustice and to put a stop to day to day discrimination in the capital. Two years later councillors approved the report by the Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Implementation Group with its [ten recommendations](#).

One of these was to observe the [UNESCO International Day of Remembrance](#). There was a civic reception on 23 August last year. Representatives of arts and business, community organisations and the diplomatic corps in the city met to reflect on the legacy of the slave trade and colonialism in Edinburgh. This year the public including those involved in the Fringe, businesses, schools, museums, libraries, galleries and community groups are invited to observe the minute's silence.

In the evening there is a civic event at Cornerstone Centre at St John's Scottish Episcopal Church on Lothian Road when Hannah Lavery the Edinburgh Makar will recite a poem she has written. St John's has been chosen as the most appropriate location as it is the only church where there is a grave of an enslaved person – Malvina Wells, whose tombstone can be found at St John's graveyard. Malvina Wells (1804-1887) was born into slavery in Carriacou, Grenada, and was brought to Edinburgh where she worked as a free woman as a lady's maid for the MacLean family.

Review group

One of the other recommendations to the city council was to set up the review group which held its first meeting in October last year. (Previously the city has looked at its heritage and how that is presented to the public, and members of the public were invited to offer their views. One of the most tangible expressions was to change the text on a plaque on the [Melville Monument](#) in St Andrew Square).

Irene Mosota, FRSA, is Chair of the Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Implementation Group which has 15 members. She is an Edinburgh-based social enterprise practitioner with experience in delivering a variety of social projects and campaigns.

Ms Mosota said: "As the City of Edinburgh marks the second year observance of the UNESCO International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, we invite our educational institutions, cultural venues, festivals, business and public offices to join us in observing in a minute of silence at 11.00am on 23 August 2024.

"This solemn observance is a sign of respect and a tribute to the countless women, men and children who were dehumanised, exploited, and mistreated, their labour valued more than their lives by the slavers.

“It is a chance to inspire and give hope to our future generations as our city faces its troubling past. The Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Implementation Group is undertaking further steps following 10 recommendations approved by The City of Edinburgh Council that require action across our city. We are determined to deliver on an equitable future for those who are forging a life in our city from both the trauma and privilege of our city’s past.

“Though the slave trade has been abolished, its pernicious legacy persists, continuing to perpetuate racism, discrimination, social exclusion, and inequality. We all have the responsibility to confront and address racism promptly and firmly within our city. Education is essential in reconciling with the past and is vital to our collective goal of creating a better, more inclusive future for everyone in our city.”

Here Ms Mosota invites everyone to take a minute to reflect on Friday at 11am:

Anti-racism initiatives in Edinburgh

Museums & Galleries Edinburgh is taking part in two equalities initiatives:

The Museum Association’s [Anti-racist Museums Programme](#) encompasses six museums that are actively working towards becoming anti-racist organisations, with Museums & Galleries Edinburgh being the only Scottish Museum taking part in the programme. The programme presents an opportunity to create meaningful change in the UK museum sector through organisational and professional development.

Museums Galleries Scotland is working with 19 heritage organisations from across Scotland on the [Museum Transformers](#)

[programme](#) which will run for two years. The programme aims to empower the museum workforce to make changes to help all people to access culture, in an organisation-wide approach which will include trustees, staff, and volunteers.

Culture and Communities Convener, Cllr Val Walker, said in June when the involvement with these initiatives was announced: “I’m proud that we are taking steps to continue to educate ourselves and take the opportunity to create meaningful personal and organisational change.

“We recognise the urgency for action and that we need to play our part in that change. We have a duty to examine our collections and ourselves so that we can stand up to racism. Not just today, but in the future.

“We’ve also been clear that the ESCLRIG has our full support going forward as they carry out these key recommendations for our city.

“I’m confident that these schemes will allow us to move forward positively alongside colleagues across Scotland and the UK as our institutions embody the changes we want to see across society.”



Jamaica Street – a visible reminder of the city's links to slavery. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com