

Olaudah Equiano 1745 - 1797

A boy captured in Nigeria and sold into slavery at 11 years old, Equiano went on to buy his freedom. Penning his memoir, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African* Written By Himself, which details the horrors of slavery, Equiano became a key abolitionist and during his lifetime incredibly published no fewer than nine editions of his book. Alongside being the sole author, Equiano supervised and authorised each edition keeping the copyright. Importantly, the second edition was published shortly after his visit to Cambridge and contains for the first time several key Cambridge-based abolitionists who were to become great friends.

He fell in love with Susannah Cullen, a woman born in Ely and then living in Soham, where they were married and raised their two infant daughters.

Some may ponder the question "well Equiano...I mean that was all such a long time ago; why does this matter and to Cambridge?"

In other places around the UK and across the globe, it's often felt really important to emphasise contemporary Black figures; to remind audiences that we're not historical relics dating back from the time of slavery. In Cambridgeshire, however, you could imagine yourself as ahistorical, as lacking any context before 1948 when the Empire Windrush first set sail for the shores of Britain.

Our institutions—until recently—have done very little to contradict

this notion. It's arguably important for both underrepresented and dominant groups to understand this simply isn't the case *and* is an example of what we mean when we say racism functions at a systemic and institutional level.

These erasures aren't neutral but a reflection of who and what has been considered important enough to celebrate; an attempt at cementing dominant and subordinate positions into the European imaginary.