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Press release

A new exhibition opens at Fulham Palace.

The Bishop of London, colonialism and transatlantic slavery: resistance



Fulham Palace Trust is an independent charity set up to restore the house and garden and to provide public access to this ancient site on the banks of the River Thames. From 704 to 1973 the site was owned by the Bishop of London, one of the most important figures in the Church of England.

The Bishop of the Colonies

The Church of England was deeply implicated in Britain's colonial expansion and the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans. The Bishop of London was one of the Church's most senior figures, having had jurisdiction over the British colonies around the world.

Some Bishops of London were personally involved with or benefitted from colonialism and the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans. One Bishop is known to have owned enslaved people, another exploited his connections overseas to import thousands of plant species to Fulham Palace and other Bishops owned land abroad, or invested money in trading companies like the Royal African Company.

Uncovering the history

In 2020 Fulham Palace Trust started to research the historic role of the Bishops of London in colonialism and transatlantic slavery. The research informed Fulham Palace's decision to empower people who are descended from those who were enslaved or indentured to shape and lead on future projects, including this current temporary exhibition.

Over a period of three months in 2022, poet Adisa the Verbalizer worked with 100 participants from five schools and community groups in London to explore the story

of the resistance of enslaved people. Participants explored four key themes of resistance against slavery: hair, dance (and martial arts), obeah and song.

Exhibition

The new exhibition was co-curated by Adisa, and showcases the work of participants by examining the systems of physical and spiritual resistance that ultimately led to the ending of the transatlantic traffic in enslaved people and slavery itself in the British Empire. This is set against the backdrop of the historic involvement of the Bishop of London and the Church of England in colonialism and transatlantic slavery.

The Bishop of London, Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, said:

"I am profoundly sorry for the harm that was inflicted by my predecessors through their involvement with the transatlantic slave trade. It continues to be a source of great shame to us as a Diocese, and this exhibition at Fulham Palace comes as a painful but vital reminder of the Church's role in this reprehensible period of our history - one which still adversely impacts descendants of enslaved people, manifesting in a range of issues from systemic inequalities to explicit racism.

"Today, we are committed to having racial justice woven into every aspect of what we do, and we are focused on taking practical steps towards building communities and cultures that are inclusive and fair for all. Earlier this year, the Church Commissioners committed to addressing past wrongs for its involvement in the slave trade with a £100m fund delivering a programme of investment, research, and engagement. Our attempts to right this wrong will never be enough, but understanding and responding to our past can help us create a positive and lasting legacy to serve communities impacted by slavery."

Sian Harrington, CEO of Fulham Palace Trust, said:

"Fulham Palace Trust is challenging the standard narrative of British history alongside many other organisations in the UK. We hope that we and the partners on this project can help push for further conversations about the historic actions of the Bishop of London, the Church of England and other British institutions, acknowledging how these have shaped our lives today."

The exhibition was supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

The project artist Adisa said:

"My aim for this project was to focus on the enslaved Africans, their stories, and celebrate them. I wanted to put their experiences front and centre of the story, not see them as victims and secondary. That's how I chose to focus on resistance – to

show what enslaved people did, rather than what was done to them. I'm so passionate about this subject, and my dream of bringing this story to life has been realised through this project."

Ade Banjoko, founder and director of PARC, which runs Queen Nzinga Saturday School who participated in the project, said:

"We have found this collaboration with the Fulham Palace Trust very impactful. The project directly ties into the work we are currently doing to include voices that have been historically underrepresented in museums and other institutions."



About the exhibition

The exhibition, opening to the public on Monday 24 April, runs throughout the museum and historic rooms. Visitors follow the African Adinkra symbol Kwatakye Atiko to guide them around the museum, Bishop Sherlock's room and the Porteus Library.

The exhibition includes a variety of mixed media and interactive aspects including films, audio-visual experiences, a timeline of key resistance figures, historical objects and letters, QR codes with additional information, and a dedicated space for contemplative reflection.

ends

Editor's notes:

Admission to the exhibition is free, advance booking is encouraged. A series of lectures are being hosted in addition to the upcoming exhibition. Lectures include topics such as Afrofuturism, spirituality and resistance. More information on the lectures can be found online at fulhampalace.org/whats-on.

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Acknowledgements

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Thanks also to steering group members Nelly Ali, Ade Banjoko, Claire Driver, Raj Pal, Hannah Stapleton, Kate Ward and Fr Niall Weir.

Finally, thanks to Adisa, project artist and co-curator; Bimpe Adeyemi, outreach and participation lead; Kate Kern, learning and engagement manager; researchers Desirée Baptiste, Isaac Crichlow, Dr Cassandra Gooptar, and Gaverne Bennett; co-curators Sian Harrington and Emily Toettcher; and co-curator and project researcher Dr Celia Mill.

About Fulham Palace

Fulham Palace is the historic home of the Bishops of London. For centuries, the Palace and surrounding estate served as a country retreat for the bishops and their families before becoming the bishop's permanent residence in the early 20th century. The last bishop moved out in 1973, and the Palace and 13-acre botanical garden are now managed by the Fulham Palace Trust, an independent charity dedicated to engaging people and providing an insight, through the stories of the Bishops of London, into over 1,300 years of English history, and to become one of Great Britain's most loved and inspiring houses and gardens.

How to get there:

Main entrance: the end of Bishop's Avenue by gates to Bishop's Park.

Bus: 14, 74, 220, 414, 430.

Tube: Putney Bridge (from the station follow the Thames Path west along the river through Bishop's Park, midway through the park is the Bishop's Avenue gate, exit through gate and immediately right onto Fulham Palace grounds).

Parking: metered parking on Bishop's Avenue

Current opening hours

Botanic garden	weekdays: dawn to dusk Weekends, bank holidays and school holidays: dawn to 18.30
Walled garden	10.15 – 16.15
Café	9.30 – 17.00
Shop	10.30 - 17.00
Museum	10.30 - 17.00