

Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation is an independent charitable foundation. We have been working in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark for over 500 years.

We exist to build the foundations of a healthier society. We do this in a range of ways, collaborating with our communities, partners and hospitals, including our work as the charity for Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

This statue of Sir Robert Clayton (1629-1707) is part of our art collection. Global racial justice protests in 2020 intensified the spotlight on statues of individuals with connections to the trade of enslaved people in the public realm. This prompted us to take a deeper look at this statue of Clayton and a nearby statue of

Thomas Guy (1644-1724), also part of our art collection. In 2020, we commissioned independent historical research, which confirmed both men profited significantly from the trade of enslaved African people.

The inhumane trade of enslaved people has left a harmful legacy. For example, we see how systemic racism today contributes to the health inequalities we work to tackle in Lambeth and Southwark and beyond. Until now, information about Guy and Clayton only focused on their philanthropy. It did not reveal their connections to the trade of enslaved people and the origins of their wealth in racial slavery. We have set out to acknowledge and change this.

Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation Investing in a healthier society

This engraving shows Clayton's statue in the third courtyard of the hospital.



Clayton was a benefactor, governor and President of St Thomas' Hospital. Clayton made much of his money from banking, which he then invested in colonial businesses. Clayton, like many British philanthropists in the 1700s and 1800s, had connections to the trade of enslaved African people. He was a member of the Royal African Company, which traded in enslaved people. Through marriage to Martha Trott in 1659, he gained a plantation in Bermuda that was likely to have been worked on by enslaved African people.



The Foundation is developing digital content exploring the issues raised by this interpretation. Scan here to find out more.

In 1702, St Thomas' Hospital installed Clayton's (1629-1707) statue in recognition of his donations and service. The statue does not convey the entire story behind Clayton's donations.

Statue of Sir Robert Clayton

1702

Clayton was St Thomas' President when the hospital installed this statue. He was proud of it, according to reports at the time. When the statue was erected, it was designed to commemorate Clayton's contribution to the development of the hospital. The statue did not acknowledge the enslaved people that generated the wealth, which enabled this contribution. Historically, the source of Clayton's wealth and donations was not widely shared. Clayton's statue represents an important contradiction, between the enslavement of African people from which he derived some of his wealth and his charity towards the poor people of London.



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After Clayton's death in 1710, the hospital added an inscription to his statue. This confirmed Clayton's legacy only as a charitable man of high social status.



The statue of Clayton, in its original location in Southwark.

Statue of Sir Robert Clayton

1710

This engraving shows Victorian London's smoke-filled skies. Parliament and the financial centre are in the foreground. The West India Docks are in the distance. These places enabled the trafficking of enslaved African people. The profits of these people's forced labour in part funded the development of these landmarks.

The trade of enslaved African people ended in the British Empire in 1807; the enslavement of people was abolished in 1833. Many of the institutions depicted owe their growth and development to wealth from Britain's state sponsored trade of enslaved African people in previous centuries.



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Wylie and Brewer's 1884 engraving of London shows the new St Thomas' Hospital by the river in Lambeth.



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In 1871, the statue was moved to the new St Thomas' Hospital in Lambeth. The hospital continued to grow with the expansion of London, the capital of the British Empire.

1871

In the 1970s, the statue was relocated to the new St Thomas' buildings in Lambeth.



The statue is by celebrated sculptor Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721). In 1979, Historic England listed the statue due to its artistic merit. The decision did not account for Clayton's connection to the trade of enslaved people.

1979

The statue of Clayton was Grade I listed as it is the last public example of Grinling Gibbons' stonework in London. Gibbons portrayed Clayton in mayoral robes celebrating his charity and public service. There was no mention of his connection to the trade of enslaved people.

A focus on the statue's artistry and symbolism obscures how Clayton made his money. The culture of silence around the trade of enslaved people and colonialism is enshrined in statues of men like Clayton across the nation. New historical research helps tell the fuller story of these men.

Statue of Sir Robert Clayton

The murder of George Floyd in the United States and racial justice protests in the United Kingdom forced new reckoning with the legacies of British slavery and colonialism. The 2020 toppling of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol widened the discussion about memorials to people involved in the trade of enslaved people.

Recent research has shown that Clayton had direct connections to the transatlantic slave trade. Historically, this had not been widely shared.

Please visit the Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation's website to learn more: gsttfoundation.org.uk/statues



Clayton's statue was removed from public view in June 2020.



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There were racial justice protests in London in summer 2020. Following these protests, Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation, who own the statue of Clayton, chose to board it up until the fuller history about him could be told.

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This engraving shows Guy's Hospital after it was built in the 1720s. The hospital was built with Guy's donations.

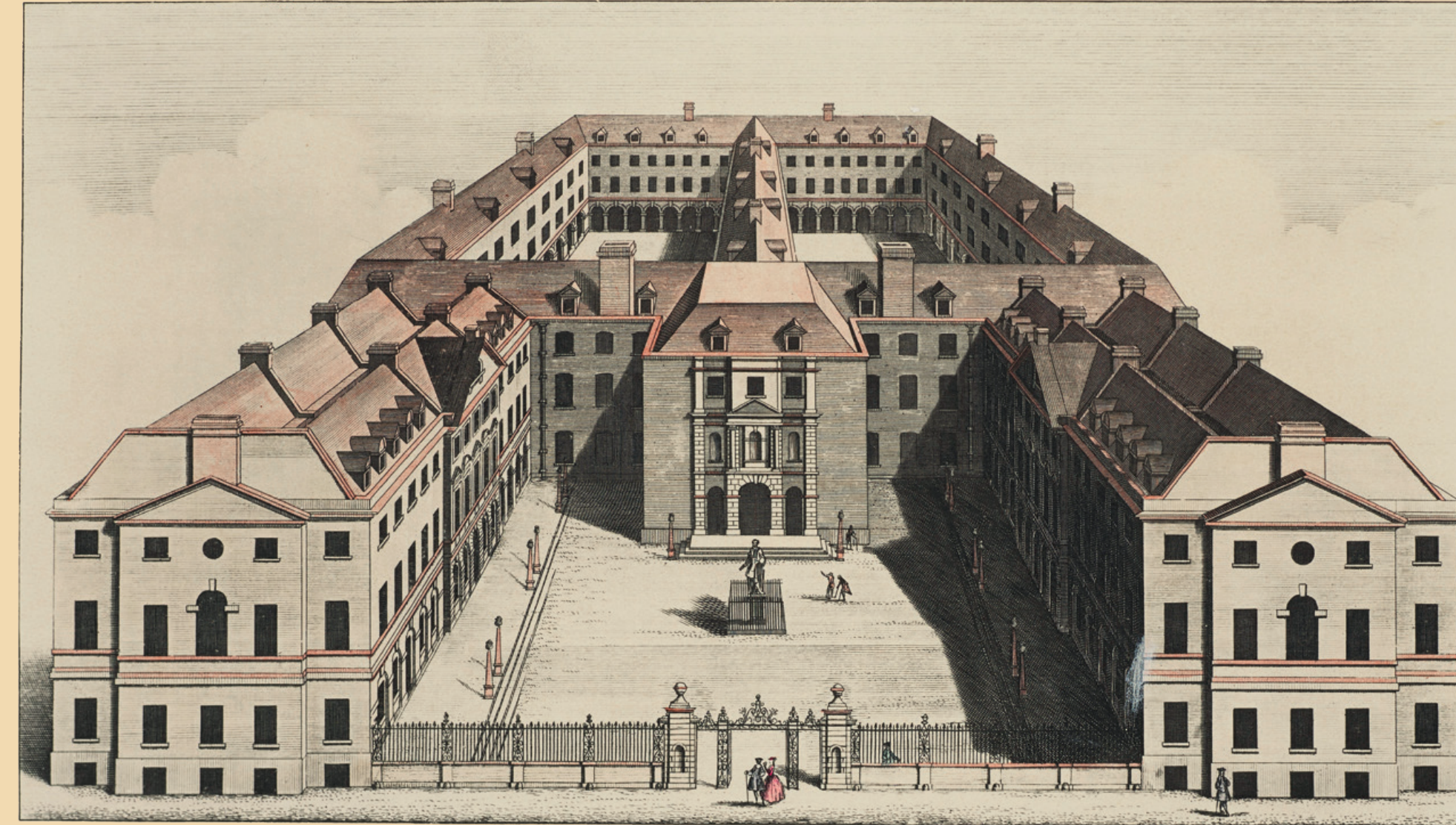


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Guy's (1644-1724) decision to pay for a new charitable hospital was significant. The hospital's governors marked this by commissioning a statue of Guy in 1725.

The statue of Guy tells an incomplete story about how Guy's Hospital was funded. Guy began his career by selling Bibles to Oxford University. He built most of his wealth by selling his stock in the South Sea Company in 1720. A central part of the South Sea Company's business model was the trade of enslaved African people. In 1721, Guy spent £18,793 to build Guy's Hospital to provide care for people with no likelihood for recovery from St Thomas'. He gave the hospital a further £200,000 in his will for its continued work. It was the largest charitable donation of the eighteenth century.

Guy was publicly criticised after his death for not being generous enough to his family and giving the bulk of his wealth to support the building of the hospital. While the focus of his generosity was called into question, the source of Guy's wealth was not criticised.



This engraving shows the statue of Guy in the centre of the hospital's courtyard in 1734.



© The British Library

Wylie and Brewer's 1884 engraving of London shows Guy's Hospital near the river in Southwark.



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After his death, some people questioned Guy's legacy as a charitable man. As a result, the hospital governors put up a statue of Guy to recognise his charity and improve his reputation.

Guy's Hospital grew in the 1700s and 1800s with the expansion of London, the capital of the British Empire.

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Statue of Thomas Guy

1734

1884



This image presents a view of Guy's Hospital's courtyard in the mid-1950s.

Sculptor Peter Scheemakers portrayed Guy as a respectable businessman wearing livery robes. Guy is younger looking, to show he made his charitable donations during his lifetime. The base panels depict religious stories, to link Guy to Christian morals and values. It is one of few statues from the early 18th century cast in bronze.

A focus on the statue's artistry and symbolism obscures how Guy made his money. The culture of silence around the trade of enslaved people and colonialism is enshrined in statues of men like Guy across the nation. New historical research helps tell the fuller story of these men.

The statue is by celebrated sculptor Peter Scheemakers (1691-1781). In 1979, Historic England listed the statue due to its artistic merit. The decision did not account for Guy's connection to the trade of enslaved people.

1979

Statue of Thomas Guy



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2020

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