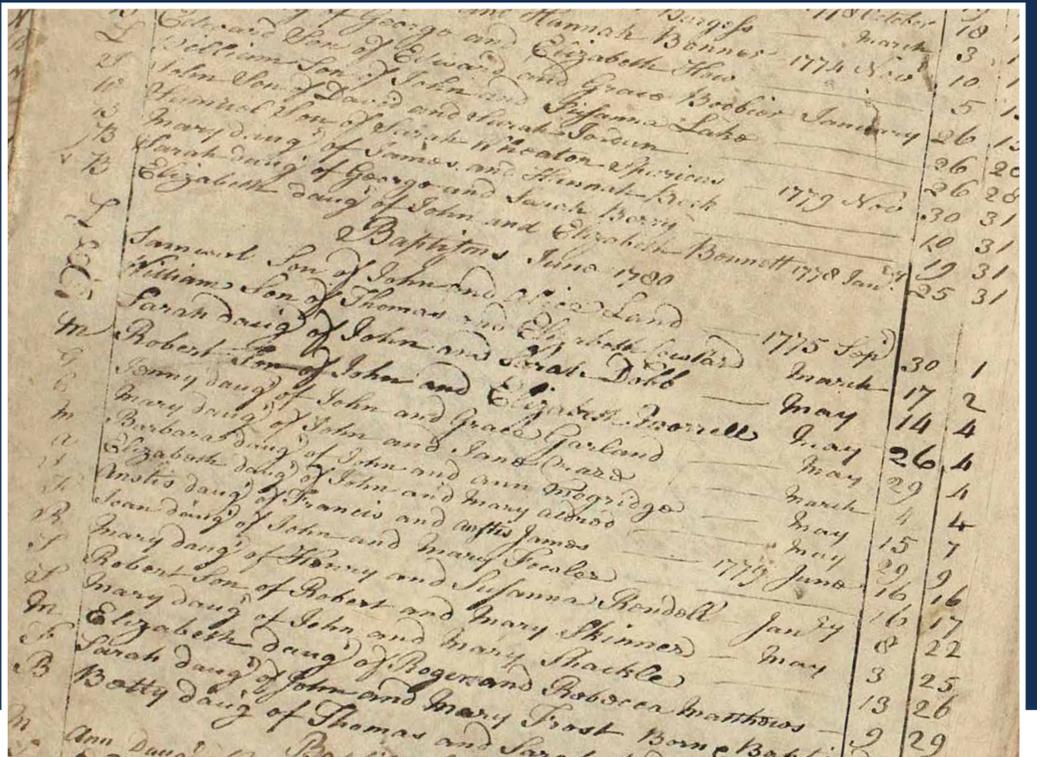
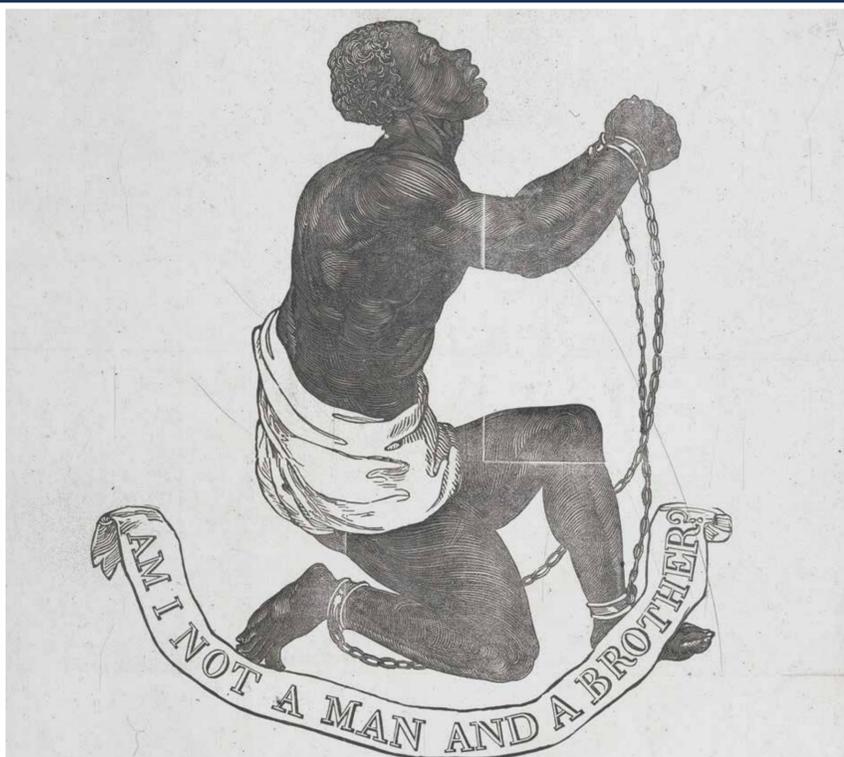


Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots



Tiverton's Connections with the Slave Trade

Tiverton is not a port town, so its connections with the slave trade are often hidden or overlooked. Nevertheless, even those who seem to exist apart from the trade might be linked by family, marriage or financial arrangement. Furthermore, those in positions commonly associated with empathy and moral fortitude can still be connected both to Thomas' story and to the ownership of enslaved people.

Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton was connected to Tiverton through her sisters, Bridget and Anne. Bridget married Daniel Hamilton, and Ann married Samuel Newte, who became Rector of Tidcombe in 1742. As Rector, Samuel Newte may have baptised Thomas Gullen at St Peter's Church. In 18th century England, it was popularly believed that enslaved people were heathens, and that becoming a Christian conferred freedom. It is also possible that Thomas could have been ill and therefore baptised for that reason. Whatever the motivations for the baptism, it is likely that just 11 years later, Thomas died in Bristol.

The Parish Register of St Augustine the Less in Bristol records that a Thomas Gullen was buried there in 1791 and describes him as a black man.

If this is the Thomas Gullen who was baptised in Tiverton in 1780, he would have been around 29 years old: a sadly premature end to this young man's life. Furthermore, it's worth pointing out that if this was the same Thomas, his death remained unknown to Elizabeth Hamilton, who still believed him to be alive when writing her will sometime before 1798.



Thomas Gullen is a rare example of a black man in 18th century Tiverton, but he's certainly not the town's only connection to the slave trade. In the terms of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, the UK government agreed to pay a total of £20 million (about £300 billion in today's money) as compensation for the loss of 'property in men'. Some of this figure was paid to those with Tiverton connections. The list of slave owners included teachers and frequently vicars, all of whom willingly invested in the trade.