

<b>Institution: University College London</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 17B – Geography, Environmental Studies &amp; Archaeology: Geography</b>
<b>Title of case study: Illuminating the black presence in London before 1948</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research on the black presence in London conducted at UCL by Caroline Bressey was incorporated into the London, Sugary and Slavery Gallery (LSS), which opened at Museum of London Docklands (MoLD) in November 2007 and remains the only permanent gallery on slavery in a London museum. Developing a new narrative of London’s historical relationship with enslavement, LSS has presented museums and galleries engaging with public history with a deeper and wider context through which to present their own historical narratives. Bressey’s contribution embedded her unique methodological approaches in black historical geography into the gallery. In turn, LSS contributed to the creation of new discussions of London’s history and new methodologies for museum practice.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Throughout her career at UCL, Caroline Bressey (Research Fellow 2005–2008; Lecturer in Human Geography from 2008) has studied and developed interdisciplinary methodologies for researching the black presence in Britain which, particularly before the iconic arrival of Jamaican migrants and former servicemen on the <i>Empire Windrush</i> in 1948, is under-researched. The absence of identifications of blackness in many British archives had led to assumptions that the black population in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain had dramatically declined following the end of transatlantic slavery. The histories that <i>are</i> known are still largely ignored within public history and heritage institutions. Bressey’s empirical research has recovered and continues to explore the lives of black men and women in Victorian Britain, particularly London [a]. She has pioneered the use of archival photography to examine the historical geographies of Victorian black London [b] and argues that placing such images into heritage sites is key to challenging traditional narratives of Britishness [d].</p> <p>The stories made available through these images offer a unique snapshot of the experiences of men, women, their children, and their extended family and friends during the period c1860-1914. These people were members of multi-ethnic communities, and their presence demonstrates that black people formed an integrated part of London’s communities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within these communities they had diverse experiences that were both ordinary and extraordinary. For example, Bressey’s work covers black Victorians such as Caroline Maisley, a woman admitted to Colney Hatch Asylum in 1898 [b], and Sarah Forbes Bonnetta, one of Queen Victoria’s godchildren [c]. Both women appear in the LSS gallery emphasising the presence of black people in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain and the diversity of their experiences, from paupers to kinship with Queen Victoria.</p> <p>Although the stories reveal very different experiences of life, they also reveal common themes, such as the absence of a consistent understanding of race within British institutions, that reflect changing meanings of race across space and time. In recovering these historical geographies, Bressey’s empirical research has raised methodological questions about the absence of ‘colour’ in British Victorian archives. She has, in particular, advocated the combined use of numerous archives as a more effective method of elucidating the lives and histories of black Victorians, and argued that the use of written sources alone has often obscured the diversity of both the available archival evidence and the stories that it tells [d, e]. Black women admitted to Victorian asylums, for example, often had no record of ‘ethnicity’ or the colour of their skin; as such, it is only through the use of additional sources such as asylum photographic albums that race can be ‘seen’, as illustrated by the case of Caroline Maisley [b].</p> <p>More generally, these findings demonstrate that multi-cultural London has a far longer history than has been imagined. Embedding this narrative into LSS was a key part of the gallery’s aim, allowing those engaging with heritage sites to position themselves in the present within a far wider and deeper context of London’s history [d].</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] Bressey C. (2009) The legacies of 2007: remapping the black presence in Britain. <i>Geography Compass</i> 3:3, 903–917. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00218.x">10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00218.x</a> (peer-reviewed survey article)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper and accompanying teaching resources explore how fractures highlighted by the 1807/2007 bicentenary might be developed by geographers and students interested in the</li> </ul>

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making of Britishness.

[b] Bressey, C. (2006) Invisible presence: the whitening of the black community in the historical imagination of British archives. *Archivaria* 61, 47–61. <http://bit.ly/16dS66p>. (leading journal in Library and Information Science, recently ranked A+ by the Australian Research Council)

- Investigates tensions between the presence of black people in London, their material absences in archives and the complexities of British histories that this tension articulates.

[c] Bressey, C. (2005) Of Africa's brightest ornaments: A short biography of Sarah Forbes Bonetta. *Social and Cultural Geography* 6:2, 253–266. doi: [10.1080/14649360500074675](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360500074675). (ISI Journal Impact Factor (JIF): 1.764; ranking in 2012 SSCI: 16/72 Geography)

- Biography of an African woman who though a protégée of Queen Victoria was vulnerable to racialisation and prejudice.

[d] Bressey, C. (2012) Seeing colour in black and white: the role of the visual in diversifying historical narratives at sites of English heritage, *Critical Social Policy* 32:1, 87–105. doi: [10.1177/0261018311425200](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018311425200). (JIF: 1.616; ranking: 15/39 in Social Issues, 22/92 in Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary)

- Discusses the importance of visual methodologies in developing a more inclusive approach to heritage in British museums and galleries.

[e] Bressey, C. (2002) Forgotten histories: three stories of black girls from Barnardo's Victorian archive. *Women's History Review* 11:3, 351–375. (major international journal published six times a year) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09612020200200326>.

- Interrogates British history and our understanding of the Black Atlantic through the biographies of three young black women revealed through photographic and written archives.

**Research Quality:** Bressey's UCL research on the Black Presence in Victorian London was funded by an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship (2002–2003: £28,201) and then an ESRC Research Fellowship [2005–2008: RES-000-27-0153 - £117,534]. Bressey was subsequently PI on an AHRC grant, "Drawing Over the Colour Line" (2012–2013: AH/I027371/1, £199,235). In 2009, she was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize for Geography (£70,000).

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research described above played an important role in the establishment and curation of the Museum of London Docklands' London, Sugar and Slavery gallery. LSS is a key component of MoLD, the world's largest urban history museum, attracting, on average, 100,000–180,000 visitors per annum in 2008 to 2011 [1]. As its external academic curator, Bressey has played a key role in the development of the gallery since it was first proposed to commemorate the bicentenary in 2007 of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade. The only permanent gallery on slavery in a London museum, its impact has continued throughout the REF census period.

One of MoLD's objectives in setting up the gallery was to develop an innovative strategy of engagement with communities, including Afro-Caribbeans, who feared the bicentenary would be 'whitewashed' into a celebration of the abolitionist movement rather than exploring the experience of black people in London. Bressey took particular responsibility for the gallery's 'Legacy Section', which draws heavily on her work on Black Victorians [b, c]. Her research on the continuous black presence in London, including on using visual materials to develop diverse narratives [d], was instrumental in creating a space in which a continuous history to the present day could be explored, thus enabling the museum to fulfil its goal of developing a historical narrative in partnership with the communities most closely involved [10]. By utilising Bressey's research, the museum was able to convey a more complex story about the history of slavery than the usual narrative of victimhood and rescue, and to create the gallery as a co-production with local communities [10], with space for a continued public participation in the histories displayed.

The gallery launched with a two-day open event in November 2007 with over 3,000 people in attendance; for many, the launch represented their first visit to the museum [2]. As such, the opening of LSS had an immediate impact in terms of **engaging new museum audiences** and, more specifically, **attracting new audiences from black and minority ethnic groups**, who made up 44.7% of those attending the opening event [2]. The museum's diversity manager at the time stated that community involvement in the gallery's development attracted new black audiences

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from impoverished areas, and sparked debates among this demographic about the narratives of slavery and the presentation of the historical and contemporary black experience in London [3]. It also had – and continues to have – a **beneficial impact on MoLD’s visitor numbers**. Between January and April 2008 these showed a 35% increase relative to the same period in 2006; numbers for 2010–2011 were even better, with 178,925 museum visitors, 50,000 more than in 2009–2010 [1]. These higher numbers of people coming into contact with the gallery content have significantly enhanced its capacity to illustrate that this history of slavery is the story of all Londoners.

The impacts of Bressey’s research contribution on the **quality of visitor experiences** and **level of their engagement with the gallery content** are also apparent in the 937 gallery comments reviewed from 2008 to 2012. Visitors’ close engagement with the gallery material is evident in the references in these comments to themes of personal connection, links, emotion and humanity, with many of them identifying strong bonds between the gallery material and visitors’ own lives. These themes are to be found in 264 (28 per cent) of comments reviewed and are thus representative of a substantial amount of gallery responses [4]. The reach of the gallery’s impacts on public awareness of, and engagement with, core themes in Bressey’s work has, moreover, been **extended through LSS’ coverage in many local, regional, national and international media outlets** including: ‘Voices from the past’ (16 January 2008). *BBC Homes & Antiques Magazine* (circulation 100,886); You and Yours (January 2008). *BBC Radio 4*; ‘London’s not too sweet’ (25 January 2008). *The Chronicle*, local paper (circulation 41,157); and ‘A story of slavery’ (15 January 2008). *Limited Edition*, local paper (circulation 22,195) [4].

LSS includes a permanent space for community groups or collectives to produce exhibitions that respond to the gallery in any way they choose. These exhibitions are displayed on six-month cycles, with each cycle curated by a different community group or collective as a means of allowing new voices to enter the gallery and engage with the research. The space actively **facilitates community engagement with cultural and artistic heritage, including among traditionally hard-to-reach demographics**. Thus, for example, the Journeys and Kinship project, which ran from February to November 2012, involved four members of museum staff and around 26 young participants, predominantly black males aged 13–26 and from a mix of London areas. As part of the project, the young people worked with research material in the gallery to create a range of creative outputs, including music recordings and clay masks [4]. Reporting on the process, two of the project facilitators noted that it changed the young participants’ understanding of the past: “One of the things that the young people [...] talked about,” one reported, “is now that they’ve seen the past, they can see where they are now and also what do they want to change” [4]. The truth of this impression was supported by discussion with a project participant about sharing project content with others: “If I don’t show a youth it doesn’t feel like I’ve done anything with it because you’re only as good as the person you’ve taught” [5].

Beyond connecting them with their own cultural heritage, engagement with the research underpinning this project helped **legitimise – and therefore promote and support – discussions about race and history**, fostering a perception among its young participants that they could have “more informed discussions”, since “seeing it in the museum made it a lot more real” [4]. Speaking about these topics encouraged some young people to share themes of LSS with family and friends, with one participant citing “the impact on his parents” and the “need to go away and teach” [4]. A project facilitator reported: “I think it has broadened their understanding to a point where they are more susceptible to further study and understanding of black history, African history, the history of Britain” [4]. Ultimately, moreover, the project helped **empower the young people involved**, with all participants since securing internships, education or employment [4].

As well as facilitating community engagement, such projects have promoted creative engagement leading to the **development of new artistic products**. Examples beyond the Journeys and Kinship project include the 2009 Living Ancestors project, an artistic tribute to the women of Dominica, and a November 2012 poetry group on the topic of sugar, led by Malika Booker [6]. Loss & Liberty (August–November 2009) involved the creation of a television broadcast by offenders at Wandsworth Prison as part of the prison’s arts education programme. The programme shows how prisoners were able to use both images and text from the displays in LSS to connect with understandings of their own history, as well as to express feelings around their loss of identity and

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separation from family as they experience it within the prison system [7]. In turn the ceramic artworks they produced inspired by ideas of freedom and liberty formed a temporary part of LSS.

Bressey's research has also delivered **educational benefits through its use in a series of School Slavery Study Days** at LSS. These events, which are delivered by education staff at MoLD and run on average five days a year, are typically attended by around 105 students; with 30 events since 2008, around 2,500–3,000 students have been reached so far [4]. The students engage with the gallery content by questioning the relationship between slavery and London, linking subjects associated with LSS to contemporary examples from the pupils' lives [4]. Around ten schools send groups to the study days every year, an indication of the continued value the schools ascribe to this engagement.

The emphasis on including diverse voices in LSS and the stress placed in the gallery on creating accessible narratives to link the past with present debates of identity and belonging (as demonstrated in Bressey's research) has been a transformative agent for the MoLD, such that Bressey's work has had additional impacts on the Museum's own **curatorial and organisational practices** [10]. The MoLD Director noted that, following the development of LSS, the Museum has been forced to rethink how, for example, press officers write releases referring to race and ethnicity, as well as the type of additional awareness training required by museum staff [9]. "Dr Bressey," he noted, "was able to supplement the work and knowledge of the museum's curators, and to provide a vital link with the consultative body which was created to inform the gallery. With Caroline's assistance, a gallery was created that has attracted considerable interest and attention from both visitors and museologists" [9]. The LSS gallery was designed to challenge the usual interpretations of the history of slavery from outside, including through consultation with communities, provision of collaborative spaces, and reflections on academic and lived narratives. These provided an example of best practice for the museum's practitioners in their development of subsequent successful exhibitions: LSS methods were, for example, applied to the hugely successful 'Jack the Ripper and the East End' MoLD exhibition (May–November 2008), which attracted an audience of over 56,000 [1], and LSS was used as a model for the MoLD's new gallery development for Many East Ends, introduced in a display in September 2012 [10].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Visitor Numbers *Museum of London Annual Reports* (2008–2009; 2009–2010; 2010–2011). <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/corporate/about-us/corporate-information/annual-reviews/>.
- [2] Evaluation of LSS opening: '1807 Commemorated'. *University of York Audience Report, Museum in Docklands* (2008) <http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/audiences/reports/>.
- [3] Statement provided by former diversity manager, MoLD on new audiences and debates sparked by the gallery; available on request.
- [4] Guyan, Kevin (2013). *London, Sugar and Slavery interviews, thematic reviews and slavery study days*. University College London. Available on request.
- [5] Transcript of participant feedback filmed for Journeys and Kinship (2012) is available on request. The film is also described on the filmmaker's blog: <http://bit.ly/1g0Ml2S>.
- [6] Malika Brooker poetry group: <http://www.mymuseumoflondon.org.uk/blogs/blog/london-sugar-and-slavery-with-poet-malika-booker/>.
- [7] For the Loss and Liberty project see 'Prisoners Art Connects with Slavery'. *British Satellite News* (18 August 2009): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfD4dJ79MLk>.
- [8] Spence, David (2011). 'Making the London Sugar and Slavery Gallery at Museum of London Docklands.' *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagements*. L. Smith, G. Cubbit, R. Wilson, K. Fouseki (ed). (Abingdon: Routledge), p. 152; available on request.
- [9] Director of Museum of London Docklands (26 February 2013) on benefits to MoLD of collaboration with Bressey, including changes in staff training, statement available on request.
- [10] Spence, D. et al (2013) 'The public as co-producers: making the *London, Sugar and Slavery Gallery*, Museum of London Docklands'. *Museums and Public Value: Creating Sustainable Futures*, pp. 95–109 Carol A Scott (ed) (Farnham: Ashgate). This chapter consists of accounts of and reflections on the LSS by those who participated in its creation and is available on request.