



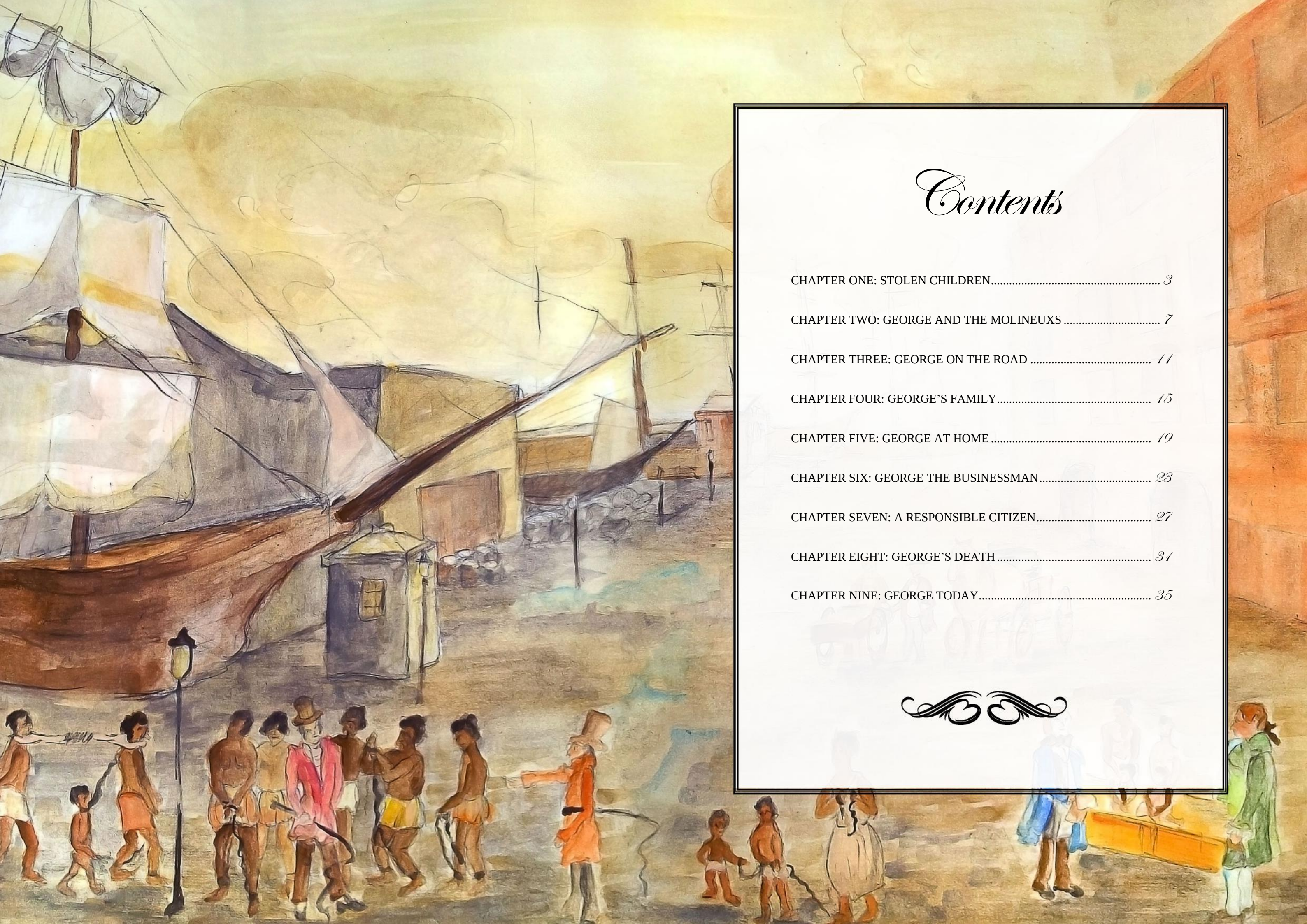
GEORGE
BOMPETIS

ILLUSTRATED BY

MARIA-TEREZA
TZELEPAKI

GEORGE AFRICANUS

FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM AND CITIZENSHIP



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Stolen Children

In 1766, a three-year-old boy was gifted to a wealthy family from Wolverhampton, who grew up to be George John Scipio Africanus, a successful businessman who lived in Nottingham in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The people of Nottingham, both now and in the future, can be proud of George Africanus and his extraordinary life; he faced many difficulties and overcame many challenges. We can admire and respect George's work ethic, his courage and his dignity.

It is impossible for us to know exactly the story of how George first came to live with the Molineux family. What we know of his story starts in their elegant mansion - built of bright red bricks and dotted with large windows that allowed the sun to flood through its many rooms with light. When he was older, George was told that he was born in a small village in a country on the West Coast of Africa that is now called Sierra Leone.

However, due to the effects of displacement caused by enslavement and the lack of records available, we cannot be sure if this was true. After all, the separation of African families prior to boarding slave ships and on the slave ships themselves makes it difficult to know who George's mother and father were, or his exact date of his birth, and moreover, his original African name would have been changed to a more Western name. Researchers are still searching for an image of what George might have looked like, information we may still find out in the future. Not only do we not know what his parents first named him, but we don't even know what he looked like!

What we do know is that George was extremely valuable to the Molineux family. During this period of English history, it was fashionable for rich families to have African children working for them as domestic servants. In fact, historians

believe that the Molineux family already had another African black servant called Pluto, who might have been one of George's first friends. George and Pluto may have enjoyed playing hide and seek in the small and secret spaces of the vast Molineux house. They may have told jokes, or made up games to pass the time in between their duties.

Incredibly, George and Pluto were just two of over eleven million people taken by slave traders from Africa and sold to Europeans and Americans from the late fifteenth century through to the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of these people were enslaved and forced to labor on sugar,



cotton and tobacco plantations in the Caribbean and the Americas. However, some, like George, were sent to England to work as servants. It is important for us to realize that although George's experiences in Wolverhampton were very different to the lives of most enslaved African slaves living on plantations, George too was not free. He was owned by the Molineux family and had to obey their instructions. Towards the end of the eighteenth century when George was



a young man, there were about fourteen thousand Africans living in England. Around four thousand of these people were children who were given new names and often raised as Christians by the families who owned them.

How might George and other children like him have felt? Being separated from his mother at such a young age must have made George feel very lonely and frightened as any child might feel. If, as many people believe, George was born in Sierra Leone, England must have seemed a very strange and confusing place to him at first. Everything, from England's climate,

food and language, would have been completely unfamiliar to George. If, like many of the other African black children in England at this time, George was first sold to traders at a noisy auction in a public coffee house, he must have felt vulnerable. We must not forget that many English people in the late eighteenth century would not have seen a black person before. It is therefore likely that George was often stared and pointed at in the street as an object of people's curiosity; George may have felt exposed and uncomfortable. Upon finally arriving at the Molineux family home, it is impossible for us to know exactly how George felt, especially as he was such a young child. Would he have simply been relieved that he had a warm place to stay? Did he feel scared of what might happen next? Did he know that he would never have the chance to see his parents again? Did he believe he would become a successful businessman and property owner?

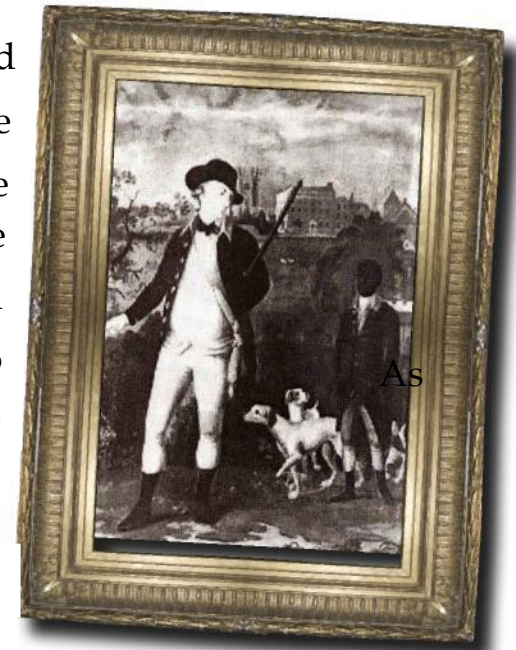


George and the Molineuxs

George was baptized and given his new English name on 31st March 1766 at St. Peter's Collegiate Church in Wolverhampton. Benjamin Molineux, the head of the household, was responsible for naming him George John Scipio Africanus.

Maybe he selected 'George' and 'John' because these were common names in the Molineux family and he wanted young George to feel

welcome and accepted in his new home. 'Scipio Africanus' was the name of a famous Roman general who won a heroic battle in the 3rd century BCE, and in choosing this name, perhaps Benjamin Molineux was predicting that George would become the strong and courageous man that the people of Nottingham are proud of today!



As a servant, George had to follow all of the Molineux family rules and instructions. If they had wanted to make George's life terrible, the Molineux family could have time full only of tiresome and repetitive domestic chores. However, the information we have from

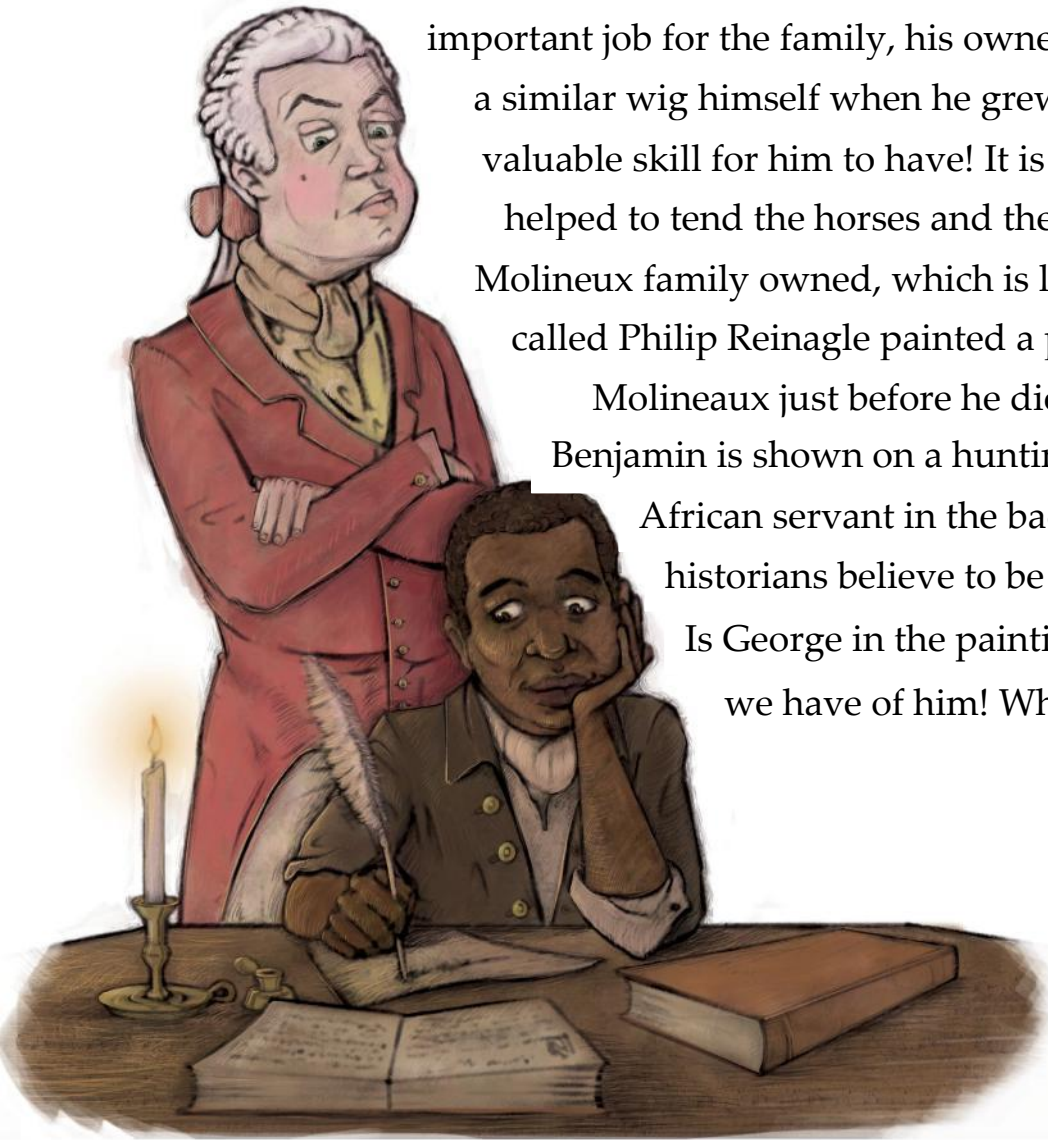
George's obituary in the local newspaper, the Nottingham

Review, tells us that the the Molineux family chose to educate George.

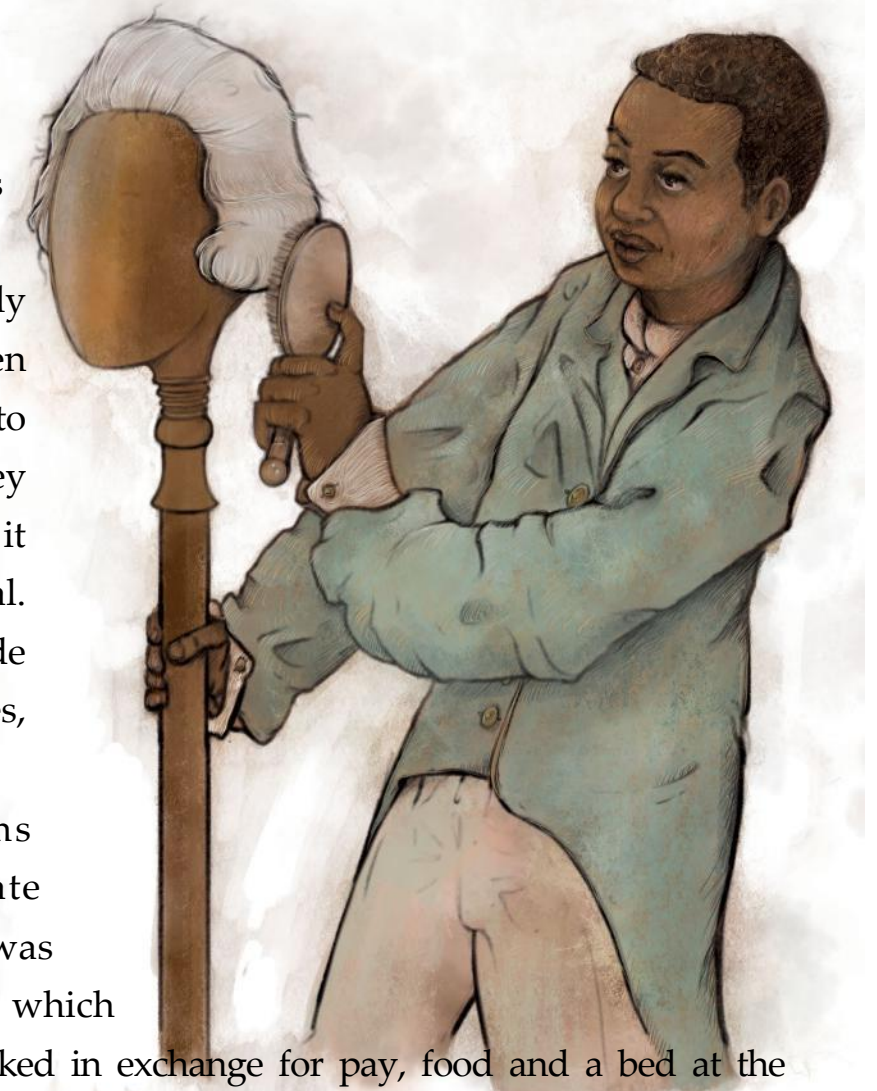
Being knowledgeable and well educated was absolutely crucial to George's success as a businessman when he grew older, so it is likely that George made good use of his ability and opportunity to read and write.

He was grateful to his owners for encouraging him to learn to read and write. In 1772, Benjamin Molineux died. His eldest son George Molineux was now responsible for the education and work of nine-year-old George Africanus. George learned a number of different skills during these years. He was taught to 'dress hair', which probably meant that he was responsible for taking care of the family's extravagant wigs. At the lavish parties that families like the Molineux family attended in this period, having a beautifully curly wig was a well-known symbol of being rich and fashionable. In looking after these wigs, George was therefore doing a very

important job for the family, his owners. He may have worn a similar wig himself when he grew older, so this was a valuable skill for him to have! It is also likely that George helped to tend the horses and the hunting dogs that the Molineux family owned, which is likely because an artist called Philip Reinagle painted a picture of Benjamin Molineux just before he died. In this painting Benjamin is shown on a hunting trip with a young African servant in the background, which some historians believe to be George Africanus. If it is George in the painting, this is the only we have of him! When he was older



George was sent to work in the Molineux family business as an apprentice at a brass foundry. Foundries were suffocating and hot places where workers melted big pieces of brass at astonishingly high temperatures. They then poured the liquid metal into small moulds. After that they let it cool down so that it turned back into solid metal. In this way, the workers made brass buttons, belt buckles, cutlery, pots and pans, and many other everyday items that families used in the late eighteenth century. George was an apprentice at the foundry, which meant that he may have worked in exchange for pay, food and a bed at the Molineux family home. Apprentices in the late eighteenth century had to work for their masters for a set period of time, perhaps for four or five years. When they finished the apprenticeship, they were allowed to leave to look for work. It was a hard life for many young men. Many poor children were forced to become apprentices by the local councils. The local councils thought that this was a good way to reduce poverty.



George on the road

In 1784, at the age of 21, George finished his apprenticeship and therefore, crucially, was now a free man in charge of his destiny and the choices he made. Thankfully, George decided to leave the Molineux family and Wolverhampton behind in order to search out his own life and fortune further afield, in Nottingham, to be precise! This is one of the most extraordinary parts of George's story.



It was extremely unusual for Africans at this time to have the freedom that George did. Whether they were domestic servants, apprentices, or slaves on a plantation, it was impossible for most Africans living in late eighteenth century England and the Americas to move away from their owners and decide their own future. While more and more people, Africans and non-Africans, were fighting against slavery, very little changed until the year before George died, when the British Parliament passed the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

Perhaps George left Wolverhampton riding on one of the Molineux family horses or sitting in a cramped, smelly coach. He probably had little money in his pocket and was carrying his few possessions on his back. So, why did 21-year-old George Africanus choose Nottingham as the city to make his home? One reason may have been that George felt confident that he would be able to find work without difficulty in Nottingham. This was because the Molineux family had good connections in the Nottingham area, with another side of the family relatives living near Mansfield. The Molyneux family that lived in Mansfield were extremely important landowners at this time. In fact, one member of the family held the noble position of High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire. The King or Queen of England personally chose the Molyneux family for this job, so they must have been a very important family! George probably felt reassured to know that he could rely on these influential people for help if he needed it.

Nottingham was a very different place in 1784 to the place that we know now. Nottingham today has a busy city center full of shops, offices and people. However, at that time Nottingham was considered to be 'a garden city'. This meant that, in the late eighteenth century, Nottingham had delightful parks full of beautiful wildlife and orchards brimming with ripe fruit. Nottingham felt airy and spacious and was a very enticing place. One German visitor in 1782

described the city in a very admiring way. He said, 'Of all the towns I have seen outside London, Nottingham is the loveliest and neatest.' It is possible that when he was a young boy, George Africanus may have attended a funeral with the Molyneux family in Mansfield. If this is true, it is likely that George, on his way to Mansfield, was impressed by the beauty of Nottingham and the magnificent Sherwood Forest. This could have been the inspiration for his decision to move to Nottingham as an adult. Perhaps he thought that Nottingham was the perfect spot to embark upon his new life of independence freedom and opportunity.

It appears that George was an intelligent man who was ambitious and wanted to be a successful businessman. This too might have influenced his decision to move to Nottingham as the city was changing. It was on the verge of undergoing a massive economic transformation. New businesses, such as mills, workshops, markets and iron foundries were opening up at a rapid rate. Nottingham became famous for manufacturing textiles, particularly lace. This meant that many people, like George, moved to the city in search of the opportunity to work hard, become wealthy and live a better life.





George's family

Nottingham had much more to offer George than simply business opportunities. Like many young men enjoying the first taste of the freedoms of adulthood, George fell in love! In 1788, four years after he had first arrived in the city, George married a local girl, Esther Shaw, at St. Peter's Church. George and Esther's wedding was a very different day to the celebrations that we attend now. They were married by license, which was quick, easy and, importantly, symbolic of social status. We do not know how formal the ceremony was, but Esther may have made use of contacts in Nottingham's famous lace industry to have a delicate wedding dress crafted of the material. Now aged 25 years old, George decided to marry a local woman named Esther Shaw at St Peter's Church Nottingham on the 3rd August 1788. They lived in a rented house in the parish of St. Peter for a little while before settling permanently in Chandler's Lane, now called Victoria Street, very near to where the Market Square is today.

Two years later, on 15th May 1790, George and Esther's first child was born and several weeks later the baby was baptized. They named their baby boy George and baptized him at the church where they had been married. The couple went on to have six more children. Esther gave birth to two more boys, both named Samuel, and four girls; Elizabeth, Sarah, Hannah and Ann.

Tragically, Six of George's seven children died when they were young. Only Hannah grew up to become an adult. Both of George's sons named Samuel, along with his daughters Elizabeth and Sarah, died before they were three years old. While this would have been extremely hard for George and Esther, it was not uncommon to lose so many children in the 18th century. Lots of babies and toddlers died due to the terrible living conditions of families in cities across

England. Dirty drinking water often led to outbreaks of a fatal infection called cholera, which could cause death just twelve hours after a victim first caught the disease. Many other children died from smallpox, which spread so quickly that it killed nearly 400,000 Europeans every year at this time. Even though George and his family may have had more money and space in their home than lots of poorer families, it seems that even they, like many other families, could not escape the deadly diseases of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries



George at home

As an aspiring businessman, it was important for George to make his home in the center of the city. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was not unusual for people to run their businesses from home, and George and Esther were no exception in this respect. George chose Chandler's Lane as the site of both his home and business empire. Chandler's Lane was a very narrow and crowded street in the heart of Nottingham. Living so centrally, George, Esther and their children would have been constantly bombarded by the clashing and rattling sounds of a city at work. Each time they stepped outdoors, they risked being stricken by the putrid stink of sewage, dirty animals and rotting food which overpowered Nottingham at the time.

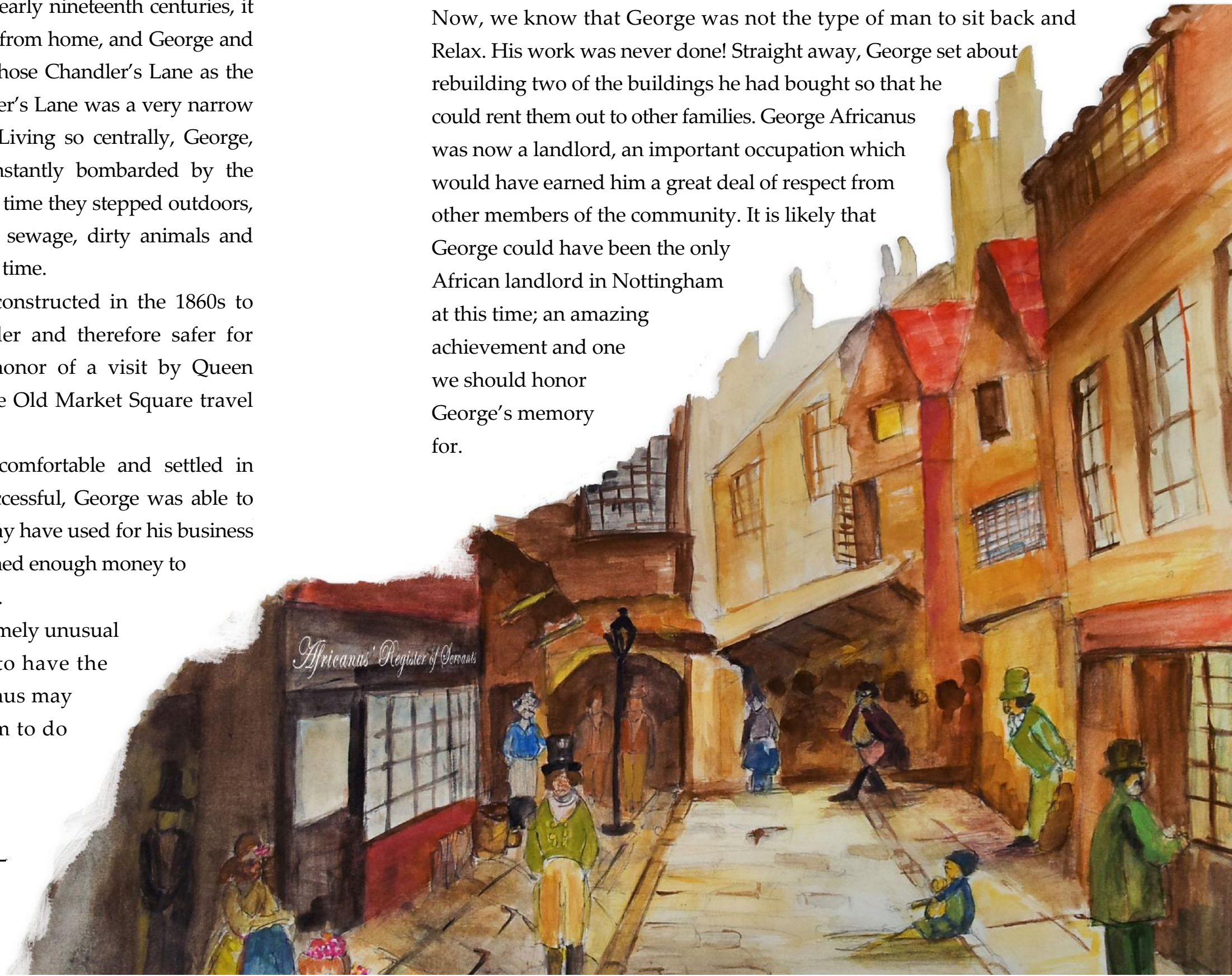
Chandler's Lane was knocked down and reconstructed in the 1860s to make room for Victoria Street, which was wider and therefore safer for horses and carts. This road was renamed in honor of a visit by Queen Victoria to Nottingham. Today, trams leaving the Old Market Square travel up Victoria Street on their way out of the city.

It appears that George and his family felt comfortable and settled in Chandler's Lane. As he grew more and more successful, George was able to rent additional buildings on the street, which he may have used for his business purposes. By 1829, at the age of 66, George had earned enough money to buy the properties he had previously been renting.

It is important for us to realize that it was extremely unusual for African people in the nineteenth century to have the opportunity to own their homes. George Africanus may have been the only African man in Nottingham to do

so. On 23rd March 1829, George attended an auction at the Black's Head Inn where he paid £380 for his houses. This was a huge amount of money in the early nineteenth century. In today's currency, George could well have been a millionaire!

Now, we know that George was not the type of man to sit back and Relax. His work was never done! Straight away, George set about rebuilding two of the buildings he had bought so that he could rent them out to other families. George Africanus was now a landlord, an important occupation which would have earned him a great deal of respect from other members of the community. It is likely that George could have been the only African landlord in Nottingham at this time; an amazing achievement and one we should honor George's memory for.



George the businessman

George Africanus is celebrated today as Nottingham's first black businessman that we know of. Like all successful entrepreneurs in the past and present, George didn't just have one business. Rather, he and Esther worked extremely hard to build up a number of different enterprises. These included a millinery business, with Esther responsible for making fashionable hats for the ladies of Nottingham, and an employment agency for servants.

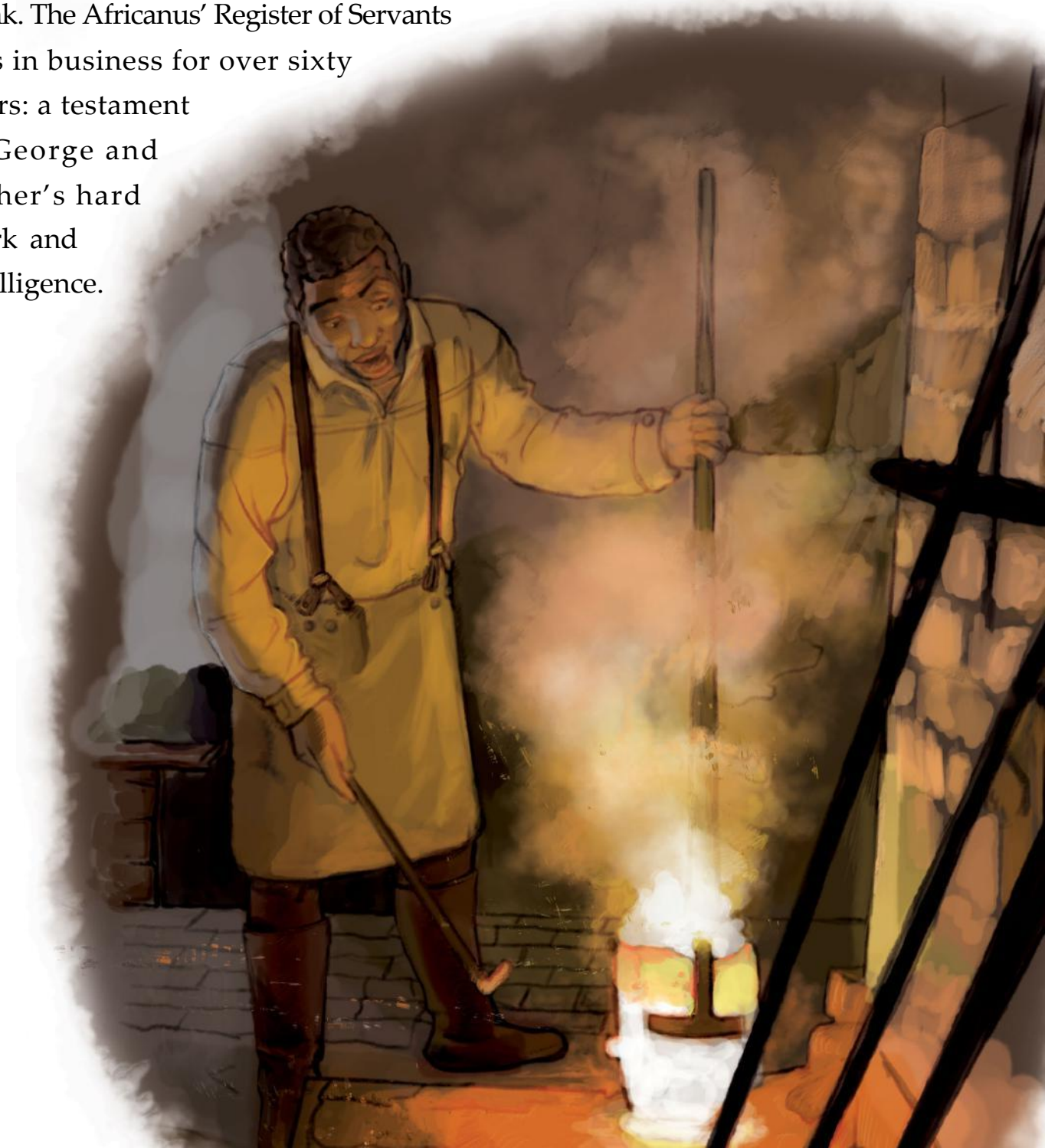
When George first moved to the city it is likely that he had many different jobs so that he could build up his savings and start a family. We know that at one time he was a waiter; at another time he looked after horses. During his brass foundry apprenticeship George learned important skills that he could put to good use as a free man. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there were several foundries close to Chandler's Lane that would have been

happy to take George on as an experienced brass founder. As George grew older and had more money of his own, perhaps he established a small brass foundry in the basement of one of his properties and employed an apprentice himself. Of course, we can never know this for certain. Perhaps more research in the future may uncover more to George's unique life story.

It would seem that George's early experiences as a servant had a lasting effect on him because in 1793 George and Esther opened the 'Africanus' Register of Servants', which they ran from their home on Chandler's Lane. The business

involved finding work for servants in the homes of wealthy families across Nottingham. Having worked in a grand household himself, George knew exactly the qualities that a good servant needed. He also knew how best to interact and build business relationships with people who were rich and influential. George would have made many important contacts in Nottingham through his work. Having grown up in the Molineux household, George probably felt no fear approaching the handsome homes of Nottingham's merchants or attending lavish parties where rich citizens ate and drank wonderful and exotic food and drink. The Africanus' Register of Servants

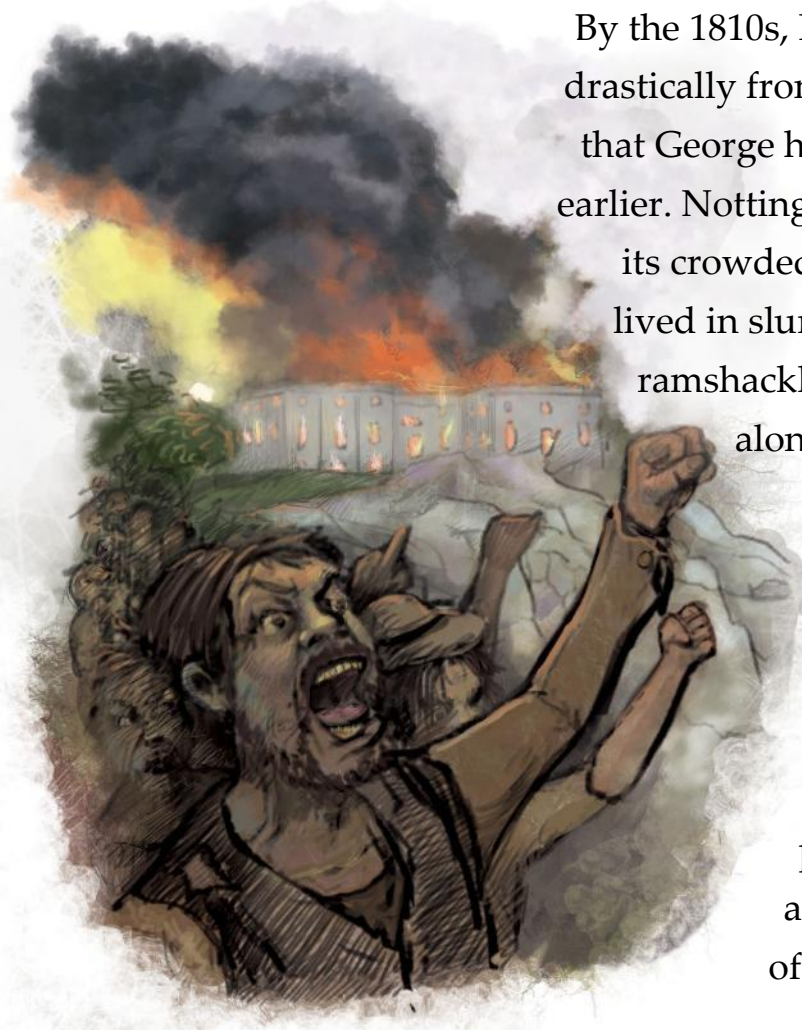
was in business for over sixty years: a testament to George and Esther's hard work and intelligence.





Received
of the sum of ten pounds
from the said John
the sum of ten pounds
being the sum of money
due to the said John
by the said John
the sum of ten pounds
being the sum of money
due to the said John
by the said John

A responsible citizen



By the 1810s, Nottingham had begun to change drastically from the pleasant and spacious town that George had first set eyes upon thirty years earlier. Nottingham was becoming notorious for its crowded and filthy streets where families lived in slums, piled on top of one another in ramshackle houses. Rats scurried unbidden along the city's gutters and feral dogs may have roamed the streets in search of food. Many men, women and children had to work in horrible conditions, where they regularly lost their hands and arms to formidable pieces of machinery or developed agonizing lung conditions because of all the dust and smoke in the air.

The terrible conditions of Nottingham's workers led to fearsome riots which turned the city into a very dangerous place to be. The worst of the rioting was in 1831. Many people were angry because Parliament had refused to pass the Reform Act, a new law which would have made the British political system fairer to people living in cities. On the night of 10th October 1831, rioters forced their way into Nottingham Castle and after looting all of the precious furniture and artwork that was held there, they set fire to the building. Flames engulfed

the Castle for days until all that was left was the shell of the mansion. The damage would have cost millions of pounds in today's money. Living just ten minutes' walk away, the sight of the derelict palace on the hill would have soon become a familiar one to George in his final years.

While we cannot know for certain how George felt about the Reform Act, we can guess that he would have disapproved of the actions of the rioters. As a well-respected and responsible businessman, the local council relied on George for help with keeping the peace in Nottingham. In 1816, aged 53, George took part in a special force that helped to keep the streets of Nottingham safe. This force was called the Watch and Ward. In early nineteenth century Nottingham, there was no professional police force as we have today. The Watch and Ward was a group of respectable citizens who took it in turns to patrol the streets and catch criminals. This could have been quite a terrifying experience! Wandering around the city's narrow streets in the middle of the night, with no police training and guided only by the light of the moon and a single flickering candle, anything could have happened to George. However, George put his community duties above his own needs.

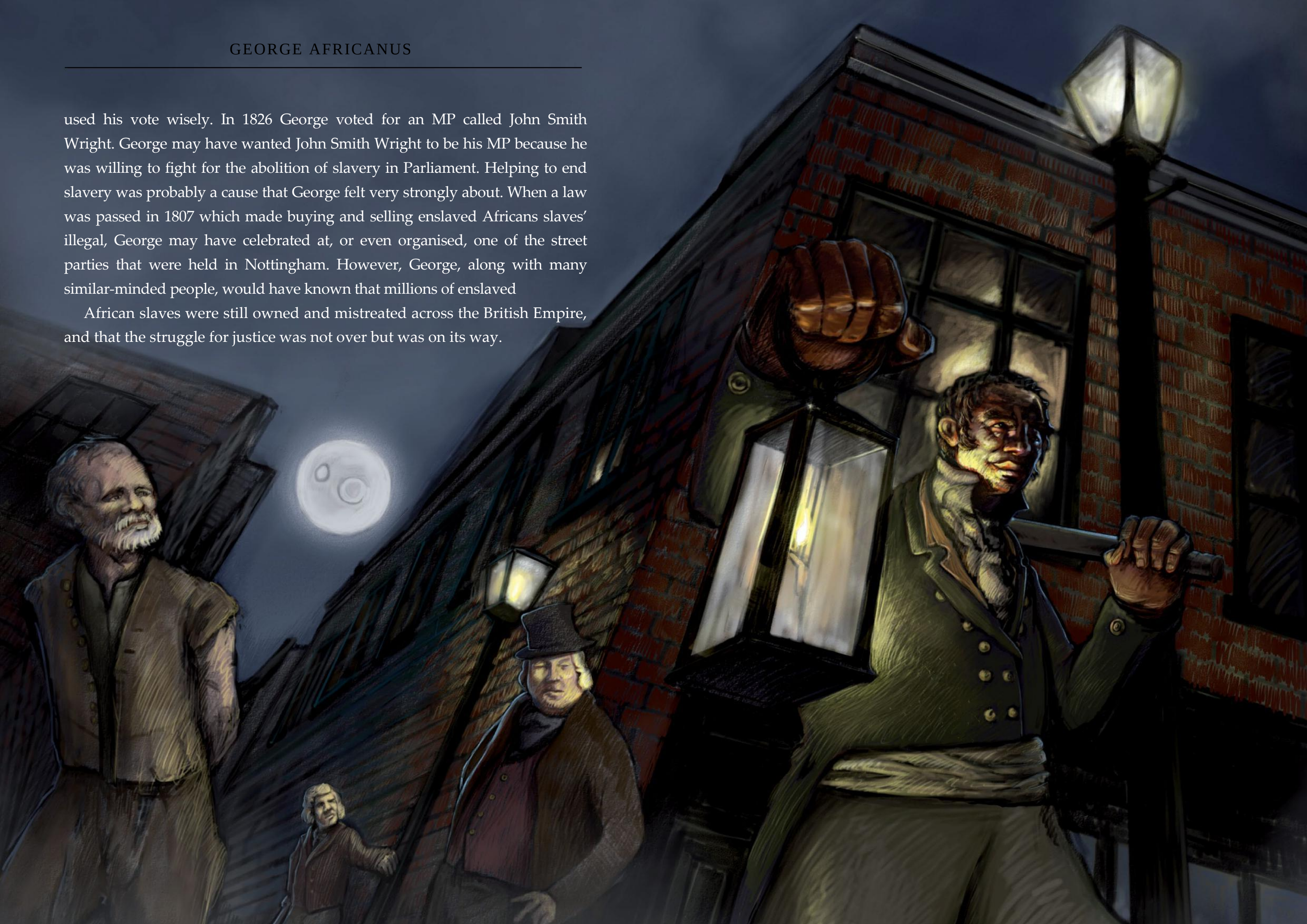
George's status as an important resident of Nottingham meant that he was able to vote for local councilors and for a Member of Parliament. In early nineteenth century England, very few people were allowed to vote: in 1780, less than 3% of the population had this right! George was therefore exceptional in this respect. We know that he



GEORGE AFRICANUS

used his vote wisely. In 1826 George voted for an MP called John Smith Wright. George may have wanted John Smith Wright to be his MP because he was willing to fight for the abolition of slavery in Parliament. Helping to end slavery was probably a cause that George felt very strongly about. When a law was passed in 1807 which made buying and selling enslaved Africans slaves' illegal, George may have celebrated at, or even organised, one of the street parties that were held in Nottingham. However, George, along with many similar-minded people, would have known that millions of enslaved

African slaves were still owned and mistreated across the British Empire, and that the struggle for justice was not over but was on its way.



George's death

In 1833, at the age of 70, George must have sensed that he would not live for much longer, perhaps due to his old age. He may have been feeling frail and weak, uncertain of what the future would hold for him. Over his lifetime, George had become a wealthy man, with his properties, money and business all adding up to a considerable fortune. As the head of his family, George would have been concerned about what would happen to his wife Esther and daughter Hannah after he died. In order to make sure that they could survive without him he wrote a will, in which he left his estate to them.

From his will, we learn that George had a granddaughter named Sarah Ann who was disabled. As her grandfather, George felt it was his responsibility to set up a special fund to look after her. We also find out from this document that George had concerns about Hannah's husband, a man named Samuel Cropper who she had separated from. It seems that George did not quite trust Samuel to provide for Hannah and Sarah Ann. George stated very clearly that Samuel 'shall never enjoy or possess any of my property' and that if Hannah decided to live with her husband again, she would have to relinquish all of the money that her father had left her.

George died on 19th April 1834, aged 71. This is yet another amazing part of George's story; on average, men lived only until they were around 40 years old at this time. So, even though George had probably experienced a more difficult life than most people, he lived to a very good age! We do not know how George died but we can guess that he might have been ill for quite a long time beforehand, most likely from old age.

The poem on his gravestone tells us that George's 'latter days were full of pain.' George would not have had the modern medicines we take today to

give us comfort and relief, and so we can assume that he may have suffered greatly in his final years. Right until the end, George was a well-respected and admired citizen in Nottingham. We know this because he was buried in the graveyard of St. Mary's, a grand church in the Lace Market. Moreover, George's obituary featured prominently in the Nottingham Review, the city's local newspaper. It is from this document and others that we have learned a great deal about the life and times of George Africanus.

We know that George's wife Esther was, like her husband, strong and hard-working, determined to always do her best. Esther ensured that the family business continued to be successful until she died in 1853, aged 85 years old. After this, Hannah and Samuel became the owners of the Africanus Register of Servants. Despite George's disapproval of Samuel, the couple remained together and had two more children. Samuel and Hannah named their babies after the admirable George and Esther. In 1862 Chandler's Lane was demolished and reconstructed to make way for the new Victoria Street. It was time for Hannah and Samuel to move on! Records show that the couple did not move far, setting up a new home on Broad Street. In 1868 it was recorded that Samuel was living at Bromley Place, and working as a watchmaker a very intricate and time-consuming occupation. This is the last we know of the Africanus family in Nottingham. George's granddaughter Esther married a wealthy toy maker named Charles Turnbull and they moved to London, where they had four children and created beautiful dolls houses that became popular with children across the country.





George today

Since George's death in the mid-nineteenth century, we cannot know how many people have heard the story of his amazing life. In the last twenty years, it has been easier than ever before to piece together all the different fragments of information which make up the story of George Africanus. A large number of historians and volunteers, from all walks of life, have worked together towards creating a history of George's life. As a result, we have gained a great insight into the challenges that George overcame and the importance of his achievements. It is essential that the people of Nottingham come together to celebrate George Africanus and pay tribute to his experiences.

There are many ways in which we can keep the memory of George Africanus alive today. We can visit the place of his marriage to Esther Shaw, St Peter's Church, his grave and his son's grave in St. Mary's Churchyard, taking a look at the green plaque that was placed on the spot in 2003 to remember George by. We can also visit the site of his former home once Chandler's Lane now Victoria St, stopping to consider how different the spacious and modern Victoria Street is compared to the cramped and congested road where George spent most of his days. A blue plaque has been erected on this street to remind us just how very important George Africanus is to our city. We can also respect George's memory through telling his story, sharing the details of his extraordinary life with our family and friends. Finally, we can honor George's achievements in our own lives, taking inspiration from his dignity and courage to be fulfilled, compassionate and determined citizens of Nottingham.



George Africanus: Re-dedication of former slave's grave

Photo taken by Alan Lodge



AN
ALPHABETICAL LIST
OF THE
Burgesses and Freeholders,
WHO POLLED BEFORE
WILLIAM WALKER AND SAMUEL HENRY SWANN,
GENTLEMEN, SHERIFFS,
On the 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, and 19th
OF JUNE, 1826,
FOR THE ELECTION OF TWO BURGESSES
TO REPRESENT
THE

TOWN OF NOTTINGHAM IN
PARLIAMENT.

Candidates:
THE HAZLES, LANCASHIRE, ESQ.
E LORD RANCLIFFE, OF BUNNY PARK, NOTTS.
HT, OF REMPTONE, NOTTS, ESQ.

TOGETHER
REVIEW OF THE ELECTION;
of some of the Speeches;
Also the
DINNER IN THE EXCHANGE ROOMS,
On Tuesday, July 4th,
the Return to Parliament
CH, ESQ. AND LORD RANCLIFFE;
Likewise, a
ANALYSIS OF THE POLL.

NOTTINGHAM:
4 George Africanus
and Esther Shaw
of St Mary in this Town
were Married in this Church by Licence
this 17th
Day of August 1788 by me John Wilson
This Marriage was
solemnized between us { George Africanus
{ Esther Shaw
in the Presence of { John Wilson
of { Richard Sallerthwaite



9

1) The third page of George's Will showing the signatures of witnesses and a seal © Nottinghamshire Archives, 2) Poll Book of those who voted in June 1826 © Nottinghamshire Archives, 3) George Africanus' Baptismal Font, St. Peters Church, Wolverhampton, Photo taken by George Bompetsis, 4) Marriage certificate for George Africanus and Esther Shaw © Nottinghamshire Archives, PR 3650, 5) Plaque commemorating George Africanus, St Mary's Churchyard, Nottingham Lace Market 6) Model of George Africanus' property created in 2014 by Maria Tereza Tzelepaki and volunteers and based on original plans held in Nottinghamshire Archives. 7) Painting of Nottingham Market Place bustling with activity 1813 © Nottinghamshire Archives 8) Turnbull's dolls house, 9) Wedgewood medallion inscribed Am I Not a Man and a Brother, 10) Triangular or triangle trade map, 11) George Africanus Will - signature and seal

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Designed by Maria-Tereza Tzelepaki

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he she or they shall take and hold the same subject
to the life of my said son and his heirs and I appoint my
daughter during her life as aforesaid And I appoint my
said wife Esther Africanus sole executrix of this my will
And I direct that my said Trustees shall not be answerable
one for the other of them nor for any loss or deficiency
which may happen to my estate and property and that
they and each of them shall out of the said trust
properly reimburse themselves all damages and expenses
which they may sustain or expend in the execution of the
trusts of this my will In Witness whereof I the said
Testator George Africanus have to this my last will and
Testament put my hand and seal the fourteenth day of
February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight
hundred and thirty three
Signed sealed published and
declared by the said Testator
George Africanus as and for
his last will and Testament
in the presence of us who in
his presence at his request and
in the presence of each other
have hereunto subscribed our
names as Witnesses
George Bompetsis
John Walker



7

8

10

11

“Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo. Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui

Quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo

