



IGNATIUS SANCHO

The first Briton of African descent to vote in a General Election

Ignatius was born on a slave ship crossing the Atlantic. With both of his parents dead, Ignatius was housed in Greenwich with women who were childless and unmarried. Although not certain on his exact age, they estimated he was born around 1729.

Ignatius' neighbour began to lend him books. This was the point in which Ignatius began to become self-educated. As well as this, Ignatius also started to teach himself music! Not long after, he was able to write music and fell in love with song and dance-going on to publish four books. As an adult, Ignatius met a woman he fell in love with called Anne Osborne with whom he had seven children. Together they opened a little stall/shop to sell fruit and vegetables near Westminster.

Although Ignatius' life started difficult with the loss of his parents and being brought into the world on a slave ship, he was able to build a life for himself in the UK and became a home owner which also then enabled him to vote in 1774. This made him the first Briton of African descent to have voted in a British general election. Ignatius continued to study writing and music and was known as a "man of letters". He wrote about the abolition of slavery and not only did he become the first African man to vote, he was also the first person of African descent to publish classical music in a European style. Although criticism towards Ignatius continued for many years, he still continued to write about what he was passionate about and eventually became a symbol for the anti-slavery movement.

A UK artist called Kingsley Nebechi created a piece of art which commemorates Ignatius' work. You can find it on the southwest corner of Greenwich Park, where it says: "African man of letters, composer and opponent of slavery. Born on a slave ship, he was encouraged to educate himself by John 2nd Duke of Montagu and served as butler to the Duchess here in Montague House."

On his death, Ignatius was the first man of African descent to have an obituary published in the British press.

FURTHER READING

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatius_Sancho
- <https://www.newsshopper.co.uk/news/18763154.todays-doodle-commemorates-work-ignatius-sancho/>

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Brave, strong, and devoted

Being a resident of Greenwich, I was very much taken aback by the lack of information in regards to local Black history regardless of my research. Therefore, I was so pleased to come across a man as brave as Ignatius.

Personally speaking, I feel it takes so much courage to be able to live in a society that doesn't accept change and diversity. Ignatius was able to show the community of Greenwich and Westminster that he deserved to be treated no differently than his white counterparts. Becoming a business owner, home owner and the first African born man to vote, attempts to show that at some point in history- we were able to make change occur.

I also appreciated that upon further review, he was considered a devoted husband and father to his seven children. This man and his family, they built a life in a world that was unfair, they built a community in which they educated, loved and strived to make society a better place. I'm so pleased that from a difficult start, he is still remembered in Greenwich and people can still admire his strength today.