

## **The Porter's Garden Anti-Slave Trade Border opened Sunday 25 March 2007**

Each year the Friends of the Porter's Garden in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard design a new border to commemorate and publicise a topical event. This year it commemorated the passing of the Act on 25 March 1807 to make the British slave trade illegal. From 1519-1890s possibly 24m enslaved Africans were taken to the Americas on the Middle Passage. Many died en route, only 11-12m arriving, the largest proportion being carried in British ships. At times their life expectancy in the plantations was only 3 years.

Forty guests joined the Friends in celebrating this acknowledgment that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century all people must be free and equal. They stood facing a display of replica manacles set off by red, navy and gold ribbons. The colour red symbolises the blood of the Africans, gold the sugar, tobacco and sun, and navy the Royal Navy. The planting scheme will feature tobacco *Nicotiana Tabacum*, sugar cane *Saccharum officinarum*, crops grown on the plantations, the dahlia Bishop of Llandaff (red flowers and black foliage), gold lace primulas (dark red laced with gold), red Pasque flowers, black iris and black grasses and cowslips. As it is too cold in March to plant the tobacco, sugar cane and Bishop Llandaff, they will be planted in June when the weather is warmer. The border was designed by Friends Margaret Judd and Pauline Powell.

Dr Colin White, Director of the Royal Naval Museum, whose exhibition, 'Chasing Freedom - The Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade', began on 3 February 2007, opened the Border. He told stories of the difficulties and dangers experienced by Royal Navy ships of the West African Squadron in combating the trade in the Atlantic Ocean and the empathy we can feel of the fear experienced by the enslaved Africans. Gradually British regulations gave naval captains more powers. From 1820-1870 Royal Navy ships seized 1,600 ships and freed 150,000 slaves, at a cost of £40m. Colin echoed a visiting African-American lady who told Hampshire schoolchildren that we all have a history, but not everyone's story has been written down, and there are lots more stories to be discovered. 'Chasing Freedom' and associated events will run until 6 January 2008.

Alisa Vanlint of the 2nd Augustan Legion Living History Society, dressed as an enslaved Roman farm worker, presented 'The Origins of Slavery', which showed that many elements of what we think of as

African slavery have been present since prehistoric times, to deny people their identity and freedom. Simon Vanlint was dressed as an American plantation overseer, his costume inspired by an American banknote. Anne Carpenter from the Anti-Slavery Organisation said that we must not think that slavery is something elsewhere and in the past, it still exists in Britain today. Marie Costa of the African Women's Forum ended the ceremony by saying that slavery in the Americas only ended when it was no longer economically profitable. She believed today would be the start of a new awareness of individual freedom and dignity: 'We can only be free when *all* people are free.'

Afterwards, while everyone was warming up with a cup of tea, Archie Malley from the Portsmouth Royal Dockyard Historical Trust Support Group pointed out that a captured slaver *Dos Amigos*, had been bought by the Royal Navy in 1831 and renamed *Fair Rosamund* and employed as a tender in the West African Squadron. There is a picture at the National Maritime Museum [www.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk) The ship was eventually broken up in Portsmouth Dockyard in 1845. Archie also referred to HMS *Black Joke*, ex-slaver *Henriquetta*, captured in 1827, which captured slaver *El Almirante* after a 31-hour chase. It caught many slavers during its commission and released thousands of captured Africans, saving them from the horrific Middle Passage. There is a picture of the capture at [www.royalnavalmuseum.org](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org), [royalnavy.mod.uk](http://royalnavy.mod.uk) and information about the exhibition at [www.royalnavalmuseum.org/Visit\\_Tempexhibit\\_ChasingFreedom.htm](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/Visit_Tempexhibit_ChasingFreedom.htm)

Simon Vanlint dressed as a plantation overseer reminded Pam Nelson, Chairwoman of the Caribbean Association, of foremen on the estate near where she grew up. She could remember her grandmother telling stories about *her* grandmother. She said that as Caribbean residents get older they sometimes do not receive the Social Services community support that they need, because they are English-speaking and are assumed to know their entitlements. The Caribbean Association provides emotional as well as practical support. The opening of the Anti-Slave Trade Border in the Porter's Garden brought together forty people who told each other some stories new to them.

Dr Ann Coats, Coordinator, Friends of the Porter's Garden