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Reflection of the video diary

The audio and visual recording was created outside the Bath New Theatre Royal, Bath's prestigious theatre and place of evening entertainment. At first glance it is a stylish Georgian theatre that is part of the overall scenery of Bath's eighteenth century architecture. To the untrained eye it is a place where the well to do middle classes come to meet friends and enjoy dinner after an on stage performance. It is not the typical place that many would associate with Britain's trans-Atlantic slavery past, but there is a hidden history behind this landmark feature of Bath.

Upon conducting research towards my dissertation on London's involvement and benefit from the slave economy, last summer, I discovered that the New Theatre Royal had a link to this past British history. Indeed this place is not a 'site of memory' dedicated to victims of the slave trade, and it never will be. All there is, is a small black metal plaque to the right of the entrance arches, above an advertisement board which contains the name of the building's architect, George Dance the Younger.

But here lies the connection. As well as being a portrait painter and prominent architect and of other famous buildings such as London's Newgate Prison and St Luke's Hospital. Dance was also a subscriber to the West India Dock Company in London, according to London economic historian, Nick Draper. This was the company which won the contract to construct the West India Quay Warehouses at Canary Wharf, now London's prominent financial district, following a special Act of Parliament at the turn of the nineteenth century and just a few years before the 1807 abolition.

The West India Dock Company or WIDCO, beat the rival competitor, The London Dock Company to build the warehouse complex at the West India Quay as opposed to Wapping which was the proposal offered by the LDC. Both were part of the powerful West India interest in Parliament who had enormous leverage with the political institutions of the day. Many were represented by absentee plantation owners and others rose to become Lord Mayors, Aldermen and Governors of the Bank of England.

It provokes the mind to think that here was a man who designed St Luke's, a hospital designed to treat people, and yet he made money from a system which killed thousands of men, women and children. This is the last thing that the middle class and middle age majority of visitors to this theatre would ever think about, as they enjoy entertainment in the company of friends.

This is not the only site in Bath which has connections to slavery. Bath's iconic Pulteney Bridge was also financed with money made from slavery, while Bath Abbey contains memorials to slave traders, planters and plantation owners and their families. It is a significant site in this regard. One such man was Matthew Munro (1761-1797) who, according to UCL's *Legacies of British Slave Ownership* database, was granted 500 acres worth of plantation on the coast of Berbice or Dutch Guyana, later to be under British control.

In light of what I have learned about so far in relation to sites and places of public memory, this is not a site of memory linked to remembering the victims of the slave trade but rather it was constructed with profits from the system of slavery. It is a building which still exists for purposes of entertainment, not to remind people of the grim realities of where the money came from.