

Who was Equiano?

Olaudah Equiano describes how he was born in 1745 in a village in the Kingdom of Benin, situated in what today is known as Nigeria. He first published his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* in 1789. Equiano's book describes his amazing experiences as a boy, being kidnapped and enslaved at the age of 11, and later working and saving £40 to buy his freedom. He served as a sailor in the Royal Navy in the Seven Years' War (1756 –1763) against the French, and later became a businessman.

As well as writing *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano published many letters in newspapers and toured Britain campaigning against the slave trade. He was one of the leading abolitionists, working closely with others, including Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson. Equiano published nine editions of his autobiography and, as he published and distributed the book himself, he was able to earn a good living. Equiano married Susanna Cullen in 1792 and had two daughters, Anna Maria and Joanna. When he died on March 31 1797 he left a will which was worth £950, perhaps as much as £100,000 in today's money.