

SOURCE GROUP 3 – LADY ELIZABETH AND DIDO BELLE

A. DOUBLE PORTRAIT (1779)

This portrait shows cousins Dido Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray standing on the terrace at Kenwood. Elizabeth and Dido were both brought up at Kenwood after Elizabeth's mother's death. The portrait of the two women is highly unusual in 18th-century British art for showing a black woman as the near-equal of her white companion, rather than as a servant or slave. Dido's aristocratic upbringing can be seen in her expensive silk gown and pearl necklace. However, art historians have noted that exotic symbols such as the fruit she carries and the turban on her head suggest that, while Dido may not be a servant, she is still considered different from her more conventionally styled white cousin.

© By kind permission of the Earl of Mansfield, Scone Palace, Perth, Scotland



B. HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNT BOOK (1789)

Detail from Anne Murray's account book from 1789 which shows that Dido Belle was given an allowance of £5 four times each year. This suggests that she was raised as a lady and an equal member of the family, rather than a servant, since servants were not given a quarterly allowance in this way.

fm Sept: 28 to Octo: 4	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Letters of Surrender	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
fm Sept: 28 to Octo: 4	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Dido's Allowance Octo: 4	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Jane Jones's wages Octo: 28	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Car Doctors Bill for the year	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Doors Rate at Paneras & the Wick	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Subscription to Birch's & W. of Birch	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
To Mr. Agle. Player	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
To Digger poor Labourer	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....



C. QUOTES ABOUT DIDO BELLE

'Dido's amiable disposition and accomplishments have gained her the highest respect.'

From the obituary of Dido's father in *The London Chronicle*, 1788. An obituary is an article about someone's life and achievements, published after their death.

'A Black came in after dinner and sat with the ladies and, after coffee, walked with the company in the gardens, one of the young ladies having her arm within the other [...] He calls her Dido, which I suppose is all the name she has. He knows he has been reproached for showing fondness for her – I dare say not criminal.'

Thomas Hutchinson, an American living in London, writing about his visit to Kenwood as a dinner guest in 1779. He was the ex-governor of Massachusetts and a client of Mansfield at one stage. At this time, it would have been unusual to see Dido joining in with after-dinner activities in this way. The 'young lady' who Dido links arms with is probably Elizabeth, her cousin.

