

United Kingdom

The British trade in African slaves began with Sir John Hawkins's illegal shipment of slaves to the Spanish West Indies in 1562. In its heyday in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Britain accounted for half of all the slaves transported across the Atlantic Ocean. The bulk of the trade was to the West Indies, Jamaica in particular, amounting to more than 1.6 million people in total. By the end of the 18th century, Britain had become the largest and most accomplished slaving nation in the world. The profits transformed the lives of people living in Britain; it changed their landscapes (money was poured into new buildings, houses, schools and universities, museums, libraries etc), their tastes (turned sugar from a luxury item to a commodity), and their local economies (banks grew rich from the profits made by some of Britain's most notorious slave traders). Eventually this process of transformation would leave Britain as the world's first industrial power, its slave economy indivisible from the whole. The changing fortunes of the sugar industry and the abolitionist campaigns led to the abolition of the trade in 1807. Slavery itself continued to thrive, until resistance from slaves and abolitionists alike succeeded and emancipation was finally granted in 1833. However merchants would continue to trade in slave commodities like tobacco and cotton long after abolition, and given their pre-eminence, goods manufactured in the industrial heartland still found their way to the African coast to be exchanged for human beings.

Royalty, Parliament and The City of London

London has always had connections with the Transatlantic Slave Trade. From its very beginnings, throughout its expansion and until its abolition, the fortunes and fates of the merchants and people of London have been bound up with the trade in human beings. Almost every aspect of its life - its banks, insurance companies, listed buildings, schools, museums, libraries, universities and most obviously its population - are in some way a result of the capital's involvement with the traffic in slaves from Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean.

The earliest records of African slaves in this country are from the 16th century. The first recorded slaving voyage to west Africa was made in 1562 by Devon born Captain John Hawkins who captured 300 people from what is now Sierra Leone, to be sold as slaves in the Caribbean. The profit he made from that voyage allowed him to get backing and approval for further slave trading ventures from Queen Elizabeth I. In fact, Hawkins was knighted shortly after his second successful African venture and his coat of arms below depicted the head of an African woman with a chain around her neck.

It was only a matter of time before such concentrated political and economic power produced William Beckford, Britain's first millionaire. As the owner of more than 22,000 acres of land in Jamaica, Beckford sat as a London MP for 16 years. His brothers were also MPs for Bristol and Salisbury. Families such as the Beckfords could use their money and influence to buy seats in Parliament, to corrupt the course of justice and to try to sway public opinion in favour of slavery.



Greenwich

In the eighteenth century, the town of Greenwich was one of Britain's major ports and business centres, prosperous, wealthy and home to some of the captains and merchants who grew rich from the slave trade. For example Thomas King of the slave trading firm Camden Calvert and King lived in Greenwich. This powerful company was the largest in London - at one time a fifth of all slaving ships that set sail from London were theirs. In the late 1780's they chose to diversify their 'business' and they won a license to transport convicted people to Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. Thomas King was also a member of the Royal Blackheath Golf Club, which was the first official golfing club in Great Britain. Its membership was exclusively Masonic and disproportionately connected to local slave trading interests, from the plantation owner turned banker Francis Baring, to the slave trader turned Lloyds bank founder, John Julius Angerstein (founder of the National Gallery). Also members, were the Greenwich iron merchant Ambrose Crowley, who manufactured shackles and collars and the West India merchant William Innes. The golf course was seen as an ideal place to share ideas and make slave trading alliances. Greenwich was also home to some of the greatest resisters of enslavement and anti-slavery campaigners, who strongly influenced public opinion and exposed the terrible truths of slavery to an awakening European conscience. Former enslaved Africans such as Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho, both Greenwich based for much of their lives, campaigned tirelessly through their narratives and letters against the institution of slavery. Olaudah Equiano, stolen from his home in what is now south-eastern Nigeria at the age of ten, first published his narrative in 1789 (and subsequently in nine British editions during the course of his lifetime).



Prior to its demolition in 1815, the Duke of Montague lived here. The Duke's singular interest in African people led him to sponsor Francis Williams (the free-born Jamaican who he sent to an English grammar school and afterwards to study Mathematics at Oxford) and Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, also known as Job Ben Solomon, a slave whose transcriptions of the Koran (three times in

its entirety from memory), are still kept in Oxford. Montague House was also where Ignatius Sancho (the 18th century Black writer and composer) was employed as a butler and where through 'unwearied application' he taught himself to read.



Bristol

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Like its later rival Liverpool, Bristol was able to use its position as an Atlantic port to become a major player in the slave trade. For 50 years in the 18th century it was Britain's main slaving port growing in wealth and population to become the country's second city. The slave routes carried local goods all over the world, including the African coast, the profits shaping the face of a beautiful and 'respectable' city.

The house above was built and owned by John Pinney (1740-1818). Pinney earned his fortunes from his sugar plantations on the Caribbean island of Nevis. He became even richer through the sugar company he set up with his friend, the anti-abolitionist pamphleteer, James Tobin. Pinney and Tobin owned ships and loaned money to plantation owners, and took over both the plantations and slaves of those who could not pay their debts. On his death, Pinney left a fortune (at the time) of £340,000. The photo of the bridge below was built in 1999 as a memorial to Pero, a slave to John Pinney.

In 1552, the merchants of Bristol obtained a Royal charter which established them as the Society of the Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol, which sought exclusive control of overseas trade. The Merchant Venturers were a powerful lobby, responsible in the 18th century for ensuring that Bristol had its share of the trade in African slaves, and defending the trade on the grounds that the city's prosperity depended on it. By the late 18th century, another lobby, the West India Society, whose members included some Merchant Venturers, took up the cause of defending planter interests.

This statue of Edward Colston was built in 1895, and idealises him as a revered Bristol benefactor. It does not acknowledge his role as a member of the Court of Assistants to the Royal African Company, which had the official monopoly on the slave trade until 1698. Colston was also a prominent sugar merchant with interests in the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. He endowed many of the city's educational institutions, almshouses and hospitals, and restored a number of churches.



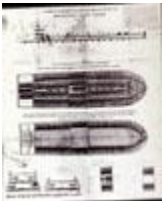
Bristol's slave trade fostered strong links with the American colonies, which survived after the War of Independence. Queen Square, a fashionable part of Bristol, already home to many prominent slave traders and plantation owners, became the sight of the United States first overseas consulate in 1792.



Thomas Clarkson

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Thomas Clarkson was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire on 28 March 1760. Known later as *the moral Steam-Engine* (by Samuel Taylor Coleridge), Clarkson was hugely influential in Britain's abolitionist movement and was very much the 'wheels' behind Wilberforce's political campaign. He worked tirelessly to gather information about the cruelty of enslavement, which he presented at local meetings and to local communities. He gathered 1500 petitions to lobby Parliament signed by a million and a half people in Britain and encouraged boycotts against products made under slavery. Around 300,000 people refused to buy sugar, which had been produced in the British West Indies. Clarkson also travelled with a chest full of African goods to show that Africa was a place of culture, learning, and sophistication. He wanted to demonstrate that Africans were equal human beings and that slavery should end. He showed people the 'Brookes' model which depicted the inside of a typical slave ship, using the dimensions of the ships to illustrate the cramped, squalid and inhumane conditions of the 'Middle Passage' Atlantic crossing, and the barbarity of treating human beings as cargo. He also put forward the alternative of an economically beneficial trade with Africa, using the labour of free men in to produce goods for export, such as spices and precious metals. Clarkson worked with Josiah Wedgwood who deigned china and ceramics decorated with the anti-slavery emblem *Am I Not a Man and a Brother* or *Am I not a Woman and a Sister* to spread the abolition message.



William Wilberforce

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William Wilberforce was a son of a wealthy Hull merchant who was committed to abolishing the slave trade and slavery. As a member of the British Parliament, he used his oratory skills, influence and moral

authority to pass bills against the slave trade. After some political setbacks, Wilberforce's campaign adopted modern techniques of lobbying, such as collecting petitions signed by millions, holding mass outdoor meetings, and handing out tracts and pamphlets to the public. Motivated primarily by a religious faith in his opposition to slavery, he seized the slavery cause and jumped on the moral bandwagon. Wilberforce's opposition to slavery did not extend to freeing slaves; in 1792 and again in 1807, he denied supporting the immediate emancipation of slaves, as he felt that Africans were not 'ready' for their freedom.



Liverpool

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Liverpool is arguably the city in Britain that was most complicit in the slave trade. By 1750, 10 of Liverpool's 14 most prominent banks were owned by slave traders. By 1787, 37 of the 41 members of the Liverpool council were involved in some way in slavery. Further, all of Liverpool's 20 Lord Mayors who held office between 1787 and 1807 were involved. Today their names are engraved in one of the huge bronze plaques, which dominates the Liverpool Town Hall's main committee room. This 18th century building speaks volumes about the city's trade links, a close inspection of its carvings revealing elephants, lions, crocodiles and African faces.



Liverpool employed more than half of the ships involved in slavery and by the mid 18th century imported annually from Africa more than half of the slaves purchased by all ships in Britain. Its net proceeds from the African trade in 1783-93 were said to be £12,294,116. The profit was accrued on the basis of 878 voyages and the sale of 303,737 slaves. A large part of this profit was returned to a small number of prominent Liverpool men who held both political and economic power. Thomas Johnson, was a slave trader who was part owner of slaving ships such as *Liverpool Merchant* and *Blessing*. Despite his shameful earnings from the enslavement of Africans, he was described as "the founder of the modern town of Liverpool", served as Mayor of Liverpool in 1695, and an MP from 1701 to 1723, and was even knighted in 1708. Two streets, Sir Thomas Street and Johnson Street, were named after him.

In 1793, and in response to demand, merchants constructed the 'Goree Piazzas', two massive warehouses at the end of what is now The Strand. They housed the vast quantities of colonial goods that flowed in and out of the port, and according to legend the iron rings set into their walls were used to secure slaves. In truth few Africans were ever brought to Liverpool, but the Goree did owe its name to the tiny island off Senegal that served as a marshalling point for millions of

slaves en route to the Americas. The famous Royal Liver Building occupies some of the Piazzas original site.



Liverpool proved remarkably resistant to abolition. When abolitionist Thomas Clarkson visited Manchester in 1787, he left with over 10,000 signatures on his petition. The same year in Liverpool he barely escaped with his life. Liverpool found ways to legally trade with Africa after abolition, but it remained sympathetic to slaving interests. During the US Civil War Merseyside docks constructed 35 vessels for the slave holding South, including the notorious commerce raider CSS Alabama (pictured).



Samboo's Grave, Lancaster

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Despite not being as involved as Liverpool or Bristol, Lancaster ships also participated in the slave trade. Two or three mayors of Lancaster were also ex slave ship captains. Most of the African men and boys who were brought to the UK were brought as servants. It became the fashion to have a 'Negro servant', and Samboo was one such person. He arrived in Britain in 1736. He was the captain's servant or a 'cabin boy'. There have been many stories about Samboo's death, but the most likely is that he caught a fever which brought him to an early death. He died in this house, known as 'Upsteps Cottage', at the time, a brew house.



He is buried in 'Samboo's field'. At the time, Africans were not allowed to be buried on sacred grounds. The grave stone reads:

*Full sixty years the angry winter's wave,
Has thundering dashed this bleak and barren shore,
Since Sambo's head laid in this lonely grave,
Lies still and ne'er will hear their turmoil more.
Full many a sandbird chirps upon the sod,*

*And many a moonlight elfin round him trips,
Full many a summer's sunbeam warms the clod,
And many a teeming cloud upon him drips.
But still he sleeps - till the awakening sounds,
Of the Archangel's trump new life impart,
Then the Great Judge his approbation founds,
Not on man's colour but his worth of heart.*

There are almost always flowers on Sambo's grave.

The Industrial Revolution

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The mass enslavement of African peoples made a vast contribution to Britain's rise as the first industrial nation. The networks of exchange that developed between the great Atlantic ports, the slave depots in Africa and the plantations of the Caribbean required the support of large parts of the British economy. Slavers needed ships, crews needed provisions, and to pay for the slaves on the African coast the traders required adequate barter goods. Liverpool, home to 3/7 of the European slave trade, developed accordingly. On top of its docks and shipyards, it became home to 13 rope manufacturers (used in ships rigging) and a major force in glass making, supplying the jewellery popular in west Africa, and bottles for the colonial market. A multitude of trades became directly involved with the trade, and grew consequently. This catalogue from a Bristol hardware store gives some idea of varied goods bound for the trade.

All European traders made similar deals. What marked Britain out was the scale of its production. The slave routes provided the money, the cheap raw materials and an incentive to transform methods of production, and ultimately society. Slave related industries would spread beyond the Atlantic ports and London, becoming an important and integrated part of the economy.

In land Birmingham boomed thanks to the demand for fetters, chains and padlocks, and trade goods such as guns, pots and kettles. It became famous for making cheap, very low quality goods, known derisively as *Brummagem ware*, made especially for the African market. Slavery sustained the local gunsmiths, producing over 150,000 weapons each year for trade with West African rulers. This in turn fuelled a cycle of violence in which complicit kingdoms (like Dahomey in the 17th and Asante in 18th Century) used their weapons to subjugate neighbouring peoples, selling their captives on to the Europeans. As guns sparked tribal wars, so the flow of slaves increased, and cities like Birmingham grew and prospered. Another local speciality was the 'manilla', a brass or copper

bracelet widely used as currency in West Africa. The pictured example, found buried in Africa, was manufactured in Birmingham at some time in the 18th century. Sent by the hundreds of thousands they proved a lingering hangover from the slave trade, and only ceased to be legal tender in British West Africa in 1949.



When abolition proposals came before parliament the manufacturers of Birmingham, who feared financial ruin, were among its fiercest opponents. This record of an anti-abolitionist petition put before Parliament in 1789 shows the city's determination to preserve its 'Africa Trade' .

Cotton, perhaps above all else, was the motor of the industrial revolution. The popularity of cotton cloth, in Europe as well as West Africa, had long been exploited by Britain's East India Company. A multitude of weavers and dyers in India fed a trade that led back to London, then on to West Africa where 'Guinea Cloth' (an Indian design of cheques and stripes) was highly sought after. In 1700 the government banned imports of Indian cloth to protect the silk and wool trade, but this only led to the creation small cottage industry, fed by the slave picked cotton of New England. It was tiny by Indian standards, employing a small number of people often working in their own homes. Yet over the 18th Century it was transformed into Britain's largest and most dynamic industry, turning Lancashire towns like Manchester from rural backwaters into vast industrial cities, with the slave trade as a vital impetus. Innovation provided larger and more efficient mills, and improvements in transportation carried finished cloth by road and canal to Liverpool. By 1770 over 90% of cotton exports went to the colonial market, largely to Africa, which in turn kept the cotton plantations of the Americas in labour. In just 20 years between 1750 and 1770 cotton exports multiplied 10 times over as the Revolution transformed the country and peoples lives, turning farmers into factory workers and villages into cities. As India came increasingly under British control in the early 19th century, colonial administrators set about deindustrialising the country, flooding it with cheap imported cotton. Britain was by now the undisputed *Workshop of the World*, and by keeping Africans in chains and Indians in poverty, helped create the modern world.



The Cotton Famine

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Although Britain abolished slavery in 1833 its cloth trade remained dependent on slavery. 70% of its cotton came from the plantations of the southern United States, and the disruption of the Civil War caused a major crisis in industrial centres known as the 'Cotton Famine' (1861-4). Tens of thousands of mill workers lost their jobs without cotton supplies to process, and it is estimated that as many as ½

million people experienced starvation within 40 miles of Liverpool. This voucher from the 'Cotton Town' of Blackburn was used to claim food in the soup kitchens that sprung up to provide for impoverished cotton workers. In spite of their terrible condition, the cotton workers of Lancashire pledged support for the North in the American Civil War, and received a personal message of thanks from President Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

