Britain and the Trade

Slaving Pioneers

The sea captain John Hawkins pioneered English involvement in the Atlantic slave trade in the 16th century. Hawkins was the first Englishman to deport Africans from the west coast of Africa for sale in the West Indies. From the 17th century, Britain joined the Portuguese, Dutch and French in this large-scale, global commercial enterprise, becoming masters in the trade in human cargo.

Transcript

The King Grants the Right to Trade in Africa
CO 268/1, ff. 8 10

The Royal African Company of England their CHARTER

The King Grants the Right to Trade in Africa

Transcript

The Royal African Company of England their CHARTER

Charles the Second by the Grace of God King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland Defender of ye Faithe. To all to whom these presents shall come Greeting. Whereas all and singular ye Regions, Countries, Dominions and Territories, Continents, Coasts and places, now or at any time heretofore, called or knowne by the name or names Guiny, Buiny, Angola, or South Barbary, or by any of them, or which are or have been reputed, esteemed or taken to bee parcel or member of any Region, Country, Dominion, Territory, or Continent called Guiny, Buiny, Angola, or South Barbary, And all and singular Ports and Havens, Rivers, Creeks, Islands, and places in the parts of Africa to them or any of them belonging, and the sole and only Trade and Trafique thereof are the undoubted Right of Us, Our Heires and Successors, and are, and have been enjoyed by us, and by our Predecessors, for many yeares past, as in Right of this Our Crown of
England. And whereas the Trade of the said Regions, Countries, and places is of great advantage to Our subjects of this kingdom, and, for the improvement thereof, divers attempts have been made, and several Charters granted, by Our Royal Progenitors, to several persons, with such Powers and Authorities as were then conceived proper for the carrying on of the said Trade. But all the said endeavors have proved ineffectual until Wee by Letters .......

The New Grant.

And of Our more especial Grace certain knowledge, and meer motion Wee have given and granted, and for Us, Our Heires and Successors doe hereby owe and grant unto Our Dearest Brother James Duke of Yorke & Anthony Earle of Shaftesbury, Mr. John Buckworth, S[i]r. John Banks, John Bence esq. William Earl of Craven, Mr. James Cartwright, Mr. Samuel Dashwood, S[i]r. Richard Ford, Mr. Thomas Farrington, Capt Ferdinando Gorges, Mr. Edward Hopegood, Mr. John Jefferys, S[i]r. Andrew King, Charles Modyford esquire, Mr. Samuel Moyer, Mr. Peter Proby, Mr. Gabriel Roberts, S[i]r. John Shaw, Mr. Benjamin Skut, S[i]r. Robert Viner, Mr. Thomas Vernon, Mr. Nicholas Warren, and Mr. Richard Young, their Executors and Assignes.

All and singular the Regions, Countrys, Dominions, Territories, Continents, Coasts, and Places, lying and being within the limits and bounds hereafter menc[i]oned (that is to say) Beginning at ye Port of Seilley in South Barbary inclusive, and extending, from thence, to Cape De bona Esperanza inclusive, with all the Islands neer adjoyning to those Coasts, and comprehended within the Limits aforesaid. Which Regions, Countrys, Dominions, Territories, Continents, Coasts, places and Islands have been heretofore called or known by the name of South Barbary, Guinny, Binny, or Angola, or by some or any other name or names which are or have been reputed esteemed or taken to bee part, parcell or Member of any Country, Region, Dominion, Territory or Continent within the limits aforesaid. And all and singular Ports, Harbors, Creeks, Islands, Lakes, and places in the parts of Africa to them or any of them belonging or being under the the obedience of any King, State; or Potentate of any Region, Dominion or Country within the limits aforesaid. To have & to hold all and singular the said Regions, Countrys, Dominions Territories, Continents, Islands, Coasts, and places aforesaid. And all and singular other the premisses within ye limits aforesaid to the said James Duke of York, Anthony Earle of Shaftesbury, Mr. John Buckworth, S[i]r. John Banks, John Bence esq. William Earl of Craven, Mr. Jarvis Cartwright, Mr. Samuel Dashwood, S[i]r. Richard Ford, Mr. Thomas Farrington, Capt Ferdinando Gorges, Mr. Edward Hopegood, Mr. John Jefferies, S[i]r. Andrew King, Charles Modyford esq, Mr. Samuel Moyer, Mr. Peter Proby, Mr. Gabriel Roberts, S[i]r. John Shaw,
The Royal African Company

King Charles II encouraged the expansion of the slave trade. He granted a charter to a group of men, the Royal Adventurers, who later became the Royal African Company (RAC). The king and the Duke of York backed this enterprise by investing private funds. The charter stated that the Company 'had the whole, entire and only trade for buying and selling bartering and exchanging of for or with any Negroses, slaves, goods, wares, merchandise whatsoever'. The king therefore gave full support to this system of trading.

The first Royal African Company ships sailed from Liverpool and Bristol to develop their commercial activity along the West African coast. Over the next two centuries, these two cities grew from the profits of the slave trade.
The Royal African Company Trades for Commodities
Along the West African Coast
CO 268/1, ff. 5-6

Accompt of the Limits & Trade for ye African Company.
The Royal African Company's Limits for Trade granted them by His Majesty's Charter, doe begin at Sally in South Barbary neer Tangier; and end at Cabobuen Esperança, where the limits of the East India Company take place.

Barbary. The Trade for Barbary, is hitherto followed, by particular persons, because the Royal Company have not thought fit, as yet, to take it up. From thence comes Bees-wax, Copper, Goatskins, Gold, Oyles, Corne, Feathers, Jumms, and many other Commodities.

Canary Islands. The Canary Islands are within the Company's charter, but they have not alsoe, hitherto, thought fit to take up that Trade, but leave it, to bee followed by particular persons.

Guinny. Next begins the North Coast of Guinny, neer the Cape de Verde Islands.

River Gambia In the River Gambia, upon James Island, the Company have built a Fort, where seaventy men, at least, are kept. And there is a Factory from whence Elphants Teeth, Bees-wax, and Cowhides are exported in very considerable
quantities. The River Gambia is very large, and runs up very high (much higher than any discovery hath bin made) and it is supposed the Gold comes most from places, at the head of this River.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rio Noons,</td>
<td>The Company have several small factorys in this River, vizt, at Rio Noones, Riopongo, and Calsamança, and doe trade by their Sloops, to Rio Grande and Catchao, for those Commodities, and alsoe for Negro's.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riopongo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calsamança,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grande &amp;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catchao</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sieralion</td>
<td>The next River, where the Company do trade at, is Sieralion, where a factory is setled, for buying the same Commodities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherbero</td>
<td>Thence they sail into another River called Sherbero, where alsoe a factory is setled, and the Trade there is cheifly for Red-wood, useful in dying; of which sometimes Three hundred Tonns per ann, may bee got, and some Elephants Teeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Mount &amp; Cestos.</td>
<td>Thence they trade to Cabe Mount, and Cestos, for Elephants-teeth; and there hath been formerly a factory setled alsoe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graine &amp; Luaqua - Coast.</td>
<td>And all along by Ships staying, sometimes a day, sometimes more, they trade in the Graine and Luaqua Coast, for Guiny-grains, or Mallaguette (which is phisic for Negro's) and for quaqua-cloths which are carried to sell at the Gold-coast, and for Teeth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Trespontes.</td>
<td>Then, at Cape Trespontes begins the Trade for Gold, and soe along that coast, they have several Factories, but their names are not laid downe in ye Mapps, vizt. Ashinee, Abinee, Dixiscove, Anashan, Anto, Succondee, Anamaboo, Wyamba, and Aga.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cormentine.  They had Cormentine, but it was taken from them in the first Dutch - warr, when Mr Selroyn was Agent; at the same time the English took Cabo-Corso, from ye Dutch.

Cabo-Corso-Castle.  At Cabo-Corso-Castle is now their Cheife port, and place of Trade, having there about one hundred English besides Slaves. It's the Residence of their Agent General, who furnisheth, from thence, all their several under-factories with goods, and receives from them, Gold, Elephants-Teeth, and Slaves.

Castel de Mina.  Neer Cabo-Corso is the Great Castle called the Mina, belonging to the Dutch.

Acra.  Then, more Leewardly, the Company hath another factory at Acra, for gold, to be sent thence to Cabo-corso.

Ardra.  Their next place of Trade is at Ardra only for Slaves, which are there very plentifull, and a factory is setled there alseoe.

Benin.  Next follows Benin, where a factory is setled for buying cloths made of Cotton, of which they procure great quantitys, and bring them to Cabo-corso, to sell there, and on the Gold-Coast.

Bite.  New & Old Calabar.  Then, more Leewardly, lyeth he Bite, whither many Ships are sent to Trade at New and Old Calabar, but those places being very unhealthy, there are noe factories setled, and only a Trade used by the Masters of Ships for Slaves and Teeth, which are there to bee had in great plenty, and alseoe in the Rivers Cameroones and Gaboones, which are neer.

Angola.  A Trade for Angola is begun, and they have Ordered a factory to settle neer the Portugal's cheife Citty at Sunio Whence it's hoped
quantities of Slaves may bee got and much Copper.

They have not yet discovered any other places within the limits of their Charter.

The Slaves they purchas[e]d are sent, for a Supply of Servants, to all His Ma[jes]tie's American Plantations which cannot subsist without them.

The Gold and Elephants Teeth, and other Commodities, which are procured in Africa, are all brought into England. The Gold is always coined in His Ma[jes]tie's Mint. And the Elephants = Teeth, and all other goods, which the Company receives, either from Africa or the Plantations, in returne for their Negros, are always sold publicly at a Candle.

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**Modern equivalents of place names**

**Sally**  Salé - just north of Rabat, Morocco.

**Barbary [States]**  North of Africa - now parts of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

**Cabo buen Esperança**  Cape of Good Hope.

**Guinny**  Guinea. Refers to a stretch of the west coast of Africa, never very well-defined, but much larger than the area of the coast now occupied by Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.


**Calsamança**  Casamance. This appears to refer to the river rather than the region of this name - now in Senegal.

**Rio Grande**  Appears to be the Corubal river, now in
Guinea-Bissau.

**Catchao** Cacheu (town and river - now in Guinea-Bissau) or Catió (town in Guinea-Bissau). The former is more likely, as it is south of the Rio Grande/Corubal, whereas Cacheu is north, and the list seems to be running generally north to south.

**Sieralion** Sierra Leone. This reference appears to be to the river.

**Sherbero** Sherbro river. Now in Sierra Leone.

**Cape Mount** Grand Cape Mount. Now in Liberia.

**Cestos** Cess river. Now in Liberia. The river used to be called Cestos, but is now the Cess (although there is still a Cestos Point).

**Graine** Grain Coast. Now in Liberia.

**Luaqua** Probably 'Quaqua' (not located).

**Cape Trespontes** Perhaps Cape Three Points, in Ghana.

**Cormentine** Kormantyn (Cormantyn or Kormantine), Dutch fort, built 1631, W of Saltpond - now in Ghana.

**Cabo-Corso-Castle** Cape Coast Castle, Ghana.

**Castel de Mina** Elmina, in Ghana. This was a British fort in the 17th century.

**Acra** Accra. Now in Ghana.

**Ardra** Probably Ouidah, now in Benin.

**Benin** Benin - kingdom and city (not the modern country).

**London and the Slave Trade**

All over Britain families benefited from the Atlantic slave trade. Bristol and Liverpool were the most important ports.
Approximately 1.5 million enslaved people - about half those taken by the British from Africa - were carried in ships from Liverpool. London was also one of the main trading centres (particularly in earlier years of the slave trade) because of the transport links provided by the River Thames and the London docks. Merchants based in Blackheath, Deptford and Greenwich handled some 75% of sugar imports.

A number of Londoners closely involved with the Atlantic slave trade developed their businesses in this prime location. For example, Ambrose Crowley, an iron merchant, produced manacles and irons for tethering slaves on ships. John Angerstein, a Blackheath merchant and founder of Lloyd's of London, owned estates in Grenada. The Pett family, master shipbuilders in Deptford, built many of the ships that were involved in the Atlantic trade. Woodlands from their estate (today's Petts Wood) provided timber for their shipbuilding business. The East India Company also had ships built at Deptford.

Transcript

Royal African Company and the Arms Trade
BT 6/1

State and Condition of Cape Coast Castle April 1771.

Cannon of different Bores.
  7. Two Pounders
  19 Three D[itt]o
  3 Four D[itt]o
  9 Six D[itt]o
  5. Nine D[itt]o
15. Twelve D[itt]o
11. Eighteen D[itt]o
7. Twelve D[itt]o dismount[e]d
1. Six D[itt]o D[itt]o

Military and Ordnance Stores.
50. Firelocks
50. Cartouch Boxes etc
50. Bayonets
22. Hangers
87. 18 Pound[e]r round shot
1000. 12. D[itt]o D[itt]o
1000. 9. D[itt]o D[itt]o
1000. 6. D[itt]o D[itt]o
2000. 2. D[itt]o D[itt]o
80. Boxes Cannister Shott
30. Double headed Shot
12. Hand spikes
50. Ladles Springes Rammers & drums

Gunpowder for the use of the Fort.
19. Barrels
Guns for Slaves

The slave trade had a major impact on Britain's economy. Ships loaded with goods left Britain for the West African coast. There, commodities were bartered for all manner of tropical products, including humans. Military supplies were regularly shipped to forts in West Africa. Royal African Company schedules reveal a methodical record-keeping system for exchanging brass rods, cutlery and guns manufactured in Birmingham. The historian F. W. Hackwood argues that the West African slave trade was the chief supporter of the gun industry in Wednesbury and Darlaston, and gunsmiths in the Midlands produced most of the 150,000 guns which British ships exchanged annually for Africans.

Transcript

The Trade in Guns, Slaves and Elephants' Teeth
T 70/1464, f. 6

Commenda Fort ye 14th Decemb[e]r 1714 [mark] [ounce] [angel] [tacco]

to this fort

Sold for Gold

10 small Blew p[er]p[e]tts 2 [oz] 8 [a]
12i Sheets 12 [a]
21 Gunns 6 [a] 1 " 1 " 4 " -
Barter'd for Slaves 2 Men & 1 Boy
27 Blew p[er]ppetts 6 [oz] 12 [a]
Barter'd for Elephants Teeth

30 Sheets for 120 f Large

By the negligence of the Guard one of the Women Slaves made her escape 3 days ago but being catchd by some of J[oh]n Cabess's people had her Return'd when I made the Guard pay 4a[ngels] for their pains & to Encourage the Towns people, if such Occasion Shou'd again happen Upon this fearing they might do so again sent them down to Cape Coast

Sent to Cape Coast. 3 Men 2 Women & one Boy

Ditto The Traders Leaving the place gave them in Dashees 5 Sheets

Rec[eive]d one of the men Slaves I Sent to Cape coast Returned as not good for which I have paid 14 £ being 10 p[er]p[e]tts & 16 Sheets which was paid for him

Rec[eive]d from Cape Coast 1 man Slave

Sold for Gold being Enter[e]d

[perpet = variant c 1715 d 'perpetuana' - a durable fabric a wool manufactured in England.
dashee = gift, sweetener - almost a bribe
mark = 8 oz gold. ounce = 1 oz gold. angel = 1/16 oz gold. tacco = 1/12 angel.
Source Robin Laws ed. The English in West Africa 1681-1683 p xviii (Oxford 1997)]
The Triangular Trade

Ships rarely travelled empty. British shipbuilders constructed specially built vessels for the slave trade. Ships designed to carry human cargo from Africa would be converted to hold raw materials such as rum, tobacco, molasses and sugar, collected from the West Indies. To complete the cycle known as the 'triangular trade', these raw materials were then brought back to England to be turned into manufactured goods. These goods were then sold on at considerable profit in Britain and Europe. There can be little doubt that such a system of trade substantially boosted the development of Britain's commerce and manufacturing.

This map shows the main commodities traded between Africa, Britain, the Caribbean and North America at the height of the slave trade. As well as enslaved people, I took other products, including gold, ivory and spices, from Africa.

Maps in Minutes (2003)
References and Further Reading


Hackwood, F. W., *A History of Darlaston, near Wednesbury*, Handsworth, 1908


