



Lancaster and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

This information has been developed to support staff and volunteers from Lancaster City Museums, Lancaster Priory Church and the Judges Lodgings.

The FAQs are real questions gathered by the front of house Museum teams in 2022.

Glossary

Transatlantic slavery made Britain richer and more powerful on the world stage. The largest forced migration in human history, between 12 and 15 million African people were enslaved by Europeans.

Enslaved Africans

European merchants traded manufactured goods for enslaved Africans, who had been captured and taken from their home, family, culture and country. They were bought from African traders or European traders based in Africa and sold in the Americas. We use the term 'enslaved Africans' instead of 'slaves' as this isn't a whole person's identity; they were also mothers, brothers, artists, musicians, thinkers and many other things.

Middle Passage

The voyage transporting enslaved Africans from West Africa to the Americas. The conditions were horrific, cramped, with poor sanitation. Approximately 10% of enslaved Africans and 25% of the slave ships crew died on the journey.

Chattel slavery

Black men, women and children were considered property to be bought, sold or inherited, and had no legal rights. They could be killed with no legal consequences, and were subjected to gruelling work and extreme violence. Enslaved for life, their children were born into slavery.

Abolition

The slave trade was banned in Britain in 1807. Owning slaves was banned in the British Empire in 1833.

Lancaster as a port

Lancaster merchants became rich and powerful from the two branches of transatlantic trade. Approximately 30,000 enslaved African men, women and children were transported to the Caribbean and North America by Lancaster merchants.

Enslaved Africans in Lancaster

An estimated 0.2% of enslaved Africans were brought back to Europe. John Chance and Henry Hinde lived in Lancaster and worked as servants for John Lindow and James Hinde. Read their stories at facingthepast.org

Enabling

Slave ships were built at Brockbank's shipyards in the early 1700s. Between 1736 and the 1790s at least 122 slave ships sailed from the port of Lancaster to the west coast of Africa. Lancaster was Britain's 4th biggest slave trading port after Liverpool, London and Bristol.



Example

Local families like the Hindes, Rawlinsons and Lindows were involved in the business of slavery as plantation owners, slave ship owners or share-holders, merchants in slave-produced goods, and in other ways. Many ordinary jobs relied on the business of slavery such as ironmongers, furniture-makers, sail makers, farmers and mill-workers.

Legacy

The wealth that slavery brought to Lancaster can be clearly seen in the city's grand Georgian architecture, paintings, tombstones and streets named after families directly connected with the slave trade. These families and their descendants invested their fortunes in mills and businesses paving the way for the industrial development of the city.

FAQs

I'm sick of hearing about it. It's a long time ago. Why does it still matter?

To ignore transatlantic slavery is to ignore a significant part of Lancaster's history. This history is important in its own right, and because the legacy it leaves behind still persists in the inequality and racism present in the modern world. For example, in 2018/19, the Social Metric Commission found that 46% of Black African and Caribbean people and 32% of those with a mixed ethnic heritage were in poverty compared with 19% of White British people.

Why should Lancaster look at this uncomfortable history, rather than just concentrating on the things that make you proud to be from Lancaster?

Why can't we do both? History is about what happened in the past and we shouldn't pick and choose the bits we like. Difficult histories are as important as those we are proud of, and learning about them helps us to develop more rounded perspectives. It is estimated that 30% of Lancaster city centre looks the way it does today because of profits from business involving enslaved Africans.

Hasn't slavery always existed?

Slavery has existed in many forms through many eras of history and continues as modern slavery today. Chattel slavery in the Americas was different to other forms of slavery. Enslaved people became the legal property of their owners, and the next generations were born enslaved.

What about white slavery?

White slavery has existed through various eras of history and still exists today. Transatlantic slavery was the enslavement of Black African peoples and is a history which particularly relates to Lancaster.



It wasn't all white people's fault. Didn't Black people sell other Black people?

Most enslaved Africans were bought from local African dealers or European dealers based in West Africa. Some were captured directly in raids by European traders. As in Europe, slave trading had long existed in Africa. However white Europeans colonised land and incentivised the enslavement of Black people on a scale never seen before. At this time indigenous people from the African continent did not consider themselves African, but rather belonged to different tribes.

What about all of the poor local people kept out of the doss house because they were employed on the ships, or in mills that used the cotton coming in?

The profits from transatlantic slavery were invested in many industries and sectors which gave work to local people both directly and indirectly. Some Lancastrians profited far more than others with exploitation happening in the plantations and in the mills. There are examples of mill workers standing in solidarity with enslaved people, refusing to work the cotton picked by enslaved Africans and their descendants in defiance of the systematic exploitation of others and to their own financial detriment.

Wasn't slavery acceptable in its own time?

Resistance against slavery is documented through slave ship rebellions, runaways, and abolitionist campaigns led by free Black and white people. In Britain slavery was not made illegal until 1807.

Further reading:

facingthepast.org

lancasterblackhistorygroup.com

ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/details



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