

# St Mary's Lancaster (The Priory) in the Age of Transatlantic Slavery

A new research project commissioned by  
Facing the Past and written  
by Melinda Elder.



Thanks to National  
Lottery Players



Image: Extract of 'South View of St Mary's Church,'  
taken from 'A Plan of the Town of Lancaster'  
by Stephen Mackreth, 1778'

**This new research paper was commissioned by Facing the Past. It was written by Melinda Elder and first published in 2023. Facing the Past is an arts and research programme to reflect, reveal and redress omissions in the way the City of Lancaster has understood and commemorated its role as the fourth largest slavery port in the UK.**

In 2021, following the Black Lives Matter Movement and 'slave trader' graffiti on a mercantile family memorial in Lancaster Priory Churchyard a group of activists, arts and heritage organisations, faith & community groups and academics came together to facilitate a meaningful response. They sought to create new agency and awareness of issues of Transatlantic Slavery and the historic Black presence in the city. Facing the Past was conceived and a series of initial creative workshops and community consultation funded by the Arts Council England.

Further feasibility and scoping resulted in funding from The National Heritage Lottery Fund to produce an engagement programme which pervasively responded to the legacy of profit, power and persecution of enslaved Africans in the historic city in meaningful and multifaceted ways.

This continuation of Facing the Past is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to commission new research, create a digital archive and trail and present the series of commemorative and community participation events across Lancaster.

Facing the Past is a collaboration between multiple partners across the city including University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster Priory, Lancaster City Council Museum Service, Judges' Lodgings and Lancaster & Morecambe Primary Headteachers' cluster. Facing the Past brings together creative practitioners, heritage professionals, community historians and educators to tell the full story of Lancaster's history. Our digital presence at [Facingthepast.org](https://facingthepast.org) is both a record of the history and this subsequent work to ensure that it is connected, documented, mapped and resourced. It also forms the base for public and academic use of the archive for further research and exploration of the historic city.

**Melinda Elder** has worked with the Open University and is currently Honorary Research Fellow in the History Department at Lancaster University. She has researched the region's connections with transatlantic slavery for 40 years. She is author of *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (1992) and has also written on Morecambe Bay's connections with the Liverpool slave trade and on aspects of Lancaster's merchant community.

Find out more at [facingthepast.org](https://facingthepast.org)

# Facing our past should come naturally to us

The Christian Church is a global movement which is dedicated to ensuring that significant events (specifically the Story of God and God's people) are told, and retold, afresh in every generation, in ways that transform community for the common good. However, in the more recent past, Christians have lived in their own generations, rarely reflecting on these histories. In the case of the era of Transatlantic Slave Trade, much of that history has been reduced to architecture, monuments, memorials and graves. For most worshippers and visitors to Lancaster Priory Church, the memorials barely register as part of what the Priory is and stands for.

Thanks to Melinda Elder's research, we now know more about those people commemorated centuries ago within the very fabric of our church. Perhaps most importantly, we have begun to discover the Black people in whose lives the Priory played a part; at their Baptisms, in their Weddings or Funerals. The living liturgy of the Priory is complex and multi-vocal and we are particularly thankful to Melinda for the insights gained here of those communities and peoples we have often erased and silenced. All of the people named in this research add a richness to our understanding of the Priory's history. By engaging well with them and their stories today, we commit ourselves to always being mindful of the missing stories and voices in our present and the future of our church and city.

*Rev'd Leah Vasey-Saunders*  
*Vicar of Lancaster*





Lancaster Church and Bridge', Thomas Girtin, c.1797 (Tate, Creative Commons)

# St Mary's (Lancaster Priory) in the Age of Transatlantic Slavery

## Introduction

During the 18th and early-19th centuries, Lancaster was inextricably linked with colonial slavery through its prosperous transatlantic trade. The town's church of St Mary - now known as Lancaster Priory - was inevitably affected by and connected to this trade in various ways.

This study will start by introducing Lancaster's transatlantic trade before moving on to consider its more general effects on the church. The focus will then shift to some more specific links, including support for the port and certain bequests received by the church. The longer sections which follow will be devoted to exploring the commemorative plaques associated with those directly involved in the enslavement of Africans and examining the church records for the Black individuals who found themselves in Lancaster as a consequence of the town's transatlantic trade.

Before proceeding, a few general points are worth noting. Firstly, there is an unavoidable imbalance between the wealth of information available for those who enslaved Africans on the Middle Passage or in the Caribbean and the sparse details relating to Lancaster's Black population in the era of colonial slavery. This has necessitated a somewhat different approach in each case.

Secondly, it was virtually impossible not to be implicated in slavery in some way in Georgian Lancaster as so much of the town's economy was directed towards this transatlantic trade. For example, there were those who supplied the goods that were exported to Africa and the Caribbean. Still others built ships that would be furnished with sails, anchors and rigging. Then there were the slave-produced imports which would be consumed at local tea tables or sold to local manufactories. Slavery's pervasiveness has made it necessary to focus on those most directly implicated in the enslavement of Africans.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between fact, supposition and myth when exploring the past, and this is an important principle to bear in mind in any portrayal of St Mary's Church in the age of transatlantic slavery.

# Lancaster's Transatlantic Trade

The 18th century proved to be a golden age for the port of Lancaster. Its position on England's north-west coast made it ideally placed to participate in the African slave trade and Britain's growing trade with its American colonies. Lancaster ships traded with other destinations too, such as the Baltic and Mediterranean, but it was the port's transatlantic trade, above all, that enriched the town. Its effects are still visible today in the town's Georgian buildings and infrastructure. These range from St. George's Quay, with its elegant Custom House and sturdy stone warehouses, to the former Town Hall on Market Square (now Lancaster's City Museum) and Assembly Rooms on King Street. They include Skerton Bridge (formerly New Bridge) and the canal aqueduct which improved transport links across the River Lune in the late-18th century. St Mary's Church had, of course, originated centuries earlier but it too experienced various modifications, particularly in relation to its expanding congregation which would subsequently lead to a new chapel of ease on the Green Ayre.

Lancaster's transatlantic commerce can be divided into two main branches, the first being the larger and more enduring of the two. The first branch comprised the port's direct trade with Britain's plantation colonies, notably that with the Caribbean islands which was commonly known as the West-India trade. The second branch was the triangular slave trade with Africa which was particularly active in the third quarter of the 18th century though some Lancaster merchants persisted in the trade by transferring their operations to Liverpool.

Both trades relied on slave-produced imports, such as sugar, cotton and mahogany, on the return leg of a voyage. However, they were distinguished in two main ways. Firstly, exports would reflect market differences between Africa and the plantation colonies. Secondly, and most importantly, the slave trade had an extra, middle leg, involving the enforced transportation of captive Africans to the American colonies. Here, the enslaved cargo's ownership would pass from slave trader to plantation owner. Specific examples of St Mary's links with slavery will focus on these two types of enslaver in particular.

## St Mary's Church and Religious Practice during the Georgian Era

Perched high above the River Lune on Castle Hill, St Mary's Church would have been a prominent landmark for incoming shipping and townsfolk alike. As the established church, it dominated Lancaster's religious scene too, although the situation for Catholics and nonconformists was improving. St Mary's was predominantly a 15th-century building but would undergo various modifications during the Georgian period due to the port's prosperity and growing population.

In the early 18th century, new galleries were constructed to the north, south and west (its central section survives) of the nave, and in 1731 new seats were added to the chancel. Preaching and prayer were central to 18th-century worship, with sermons being delivered from the church's three-tiered pulpit dating from 1619. Its woodwork and original date are still present in today's reconstructed pulpit. Large congregations would fill the church, with those able to afford it, the town's merchants amongst them, occupying the private box pews that lined the nave. These were often elaborately furnished to reflect the wealth and status of their occupants and one, which dominated the aisle close to the pulpit, was so large that it came to be known as 'Noah's Ark'. Private pews not only bolstered church coffers but could also be left in wills, rented or sold just like any other form of freehold property.

By the mid-18th century, it was becoming clear that St Mary's alone could no longer accommodate the town's growing population. It was therefore agreed that a new chapel of ease, St John the Evangelist, should be built on the Green Ayre to serve the surrounding community. Completed and consecrated in 1754-55, merchants and captains, amongst others, readily paid for the box pews to help fund the chapel's running costs. They remain in place to this day.

Although St Mary's 18th-century font was replaced in 1848, its carved oak cover, dating back to 1631, has survived. Of course everyone would be baptised at the same font but the cover constitutes one of the few tangible links we have to the Black baptisms that took place inside St Mary's all those years ago. Another would be the church registers, usually too fragile to handle, which are often the only record we have of their existence and names. At this time, wills were not only proved in ecclesiastical courts but also couched in religious terms, as shown in this extract from a printed sailor's will, completed just before the sailor in question boarded one of the Hinde family's Liverpool slave ships in 1797.

*In the name of God Amen I William Atkinson Mariner now bound to Africa in the Vessel called the Lancaster Witch Captn. Thos. Rockcliffe being of Sound and disposing Mind and Memory do hereby make this my last Will and Testament. First and Principally I commend my Soul into the Hands of Almighty God hoping for Remission of all my Sins through the Merits of Jesus Christ my blessed Saviour and Redeemer and my Body to the Earth or Sea as it shall please God...*

A sign of the growing wealth of the town can perhaps be seen in the recasting of St Mary's old church bells in 1743-44 and the consequent raising of the tower to accommodate them. The latter would prove unsatisfactory, the tower being deemed unsafe just ten years later. It was consequently taken down and rebuilt between 1754-1755 to the design of Henry Sephton of Liverpool and survives to this day.

These various modifications to St Mary's Church no doubt reflect Lancaster's expansion and prosperity at this time but were there some more specific ways in which the mother church and its chapel of ease can be linked to transatlantic slavery?





Lancaster Priory Church (credit: Facing the Past)



St John's Church, Lancaster: Church organ case (credit: Terry Parsons)



# St Mary and St John's links with Transatlantic Slavery

The most obvious physical connection between slavery and the two churches has to be the surviving plaques and gravestones that commemorate merchants and captains involved in the slave trade and the owners of enslaved Africans on colonial plantations. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, no such memorials exist for Lancaster's Black inhabitants which means that their links with the church can only be seen through the parish registers. Detailed examples of both these groups will be considered later on.

Two interesting and rather different pieces of evidence suggest that St Mary's Church and its officers actively supported Lancaster's transatlantic commerce, although in both cases it would be in the context of encouraging the port's trade more generally. Firstly, when the bells were recast between 1743-44, as mentioned previously, one carried the inscription 'Prosperity to this port and parish AR 1744'. Then, more actively, by an Act of Parliament passed in 1749, the church leased a strip of its lands running alongside the river Lune to enable St George's Quay to be built. It is hard to believe that the church was in any way critical of the town's transatlantic commerce at this time.

Another link between church and slavery came through certain donations. Three magnificent brass candelabras of Flemish design, which have been prominent fixtures inside St Mary's Church for many years, provide a prime example. The benefactor was William Heysham (not to be confused with his son of the same name). He died just before they were donated to the church in 1717 which presumably means they were presented by his executors in his memory. William Heysham had been born locally but, like his brother Robert, had moved to London where they both became wealthy merchants engaged in colonial trade and the slave trade. William spent time as a resident merchant in St Michael, Barbados, where he owned 'Lands Tenements Messuages houses Negroe Slaves' and was prominent in local affairs.

On his return to England, he became agent for the island. William never lost touch with his northern roots and in 1705 became MP for Lancaster, a position he held till his death. His will records his significant wealth, including his shipping interests, enslaved Africans and other Barbados property, as listed above, which were to be sold after his death. Aside from family bequests, he left £50 to the churchwardens for the poor of Lancaster parish and was buried at St Mary's Church.

Another example is the organ and elegantly carved mahogany Gillow case donated to St John's Chapel by Abraham Rawlinson in 1784. Although the organ has since been replaced, its original Gillow case survives. Abraham Rawlinson owed his wealth to his prominence in direct colonial trade although he had inherited a ninth share in a Grenada slave plantation

from his father in 1769 and invested in a single Liverpool slaving voyage to the Isles de Los and Jamaica in 1776.

St John's received the gift when Rawlinson, too, was MP for Lancaster. It should be noted that the tower added to St John's around this time was funded by the executors of Thomas Bowes, a Baltic merchant.

Finally, in a small town like Lancaster, there was bound to be an overlap between port and church. It is thus no surprise to find merchants amongst the list of churchwardens. Captain William Mason, for example, was churchwarden in 1758–59. The son of a wealthy innkeeper near the old bridge in Lancaster, Mason had captained the *Hawke* on three direct colonial voyages between 1748–51, two to St Kitts and one to South Carolina. He then captained the slave-ship *Africa* on a single voyage from Lancaster to Sierra Leone and Charleston in 1753–54 before becoming a land-based merchant and Port Commissioner. Clergymen would also marry into or come from merchant families. This was the case when the widowed Reverend Oliver Marton (vicar 1767–1794) married Elizabeth, daughter of the late Henry White of Lancaster who had been a captain and significant investor in the Liverpool slave trade. When Marton died in 1794, he was followed by Henry's son, his brother-in-law, Reverend William White (vicar 1794–1806).

It is worth noting that Georgian clergy could take a very relaxed view of their role, often leaving their curates in charge.

## St Mary's Memorial Inscriptions to Slave Traders and Plantation Owners

This section will take a different form. What follows is a series of short biographies, arranged alphabetically by surname. Each biography relates to a particular memorial and explains how the person named was involved in the direct enslavement of Africans. A few of the memorials were recorded by W. O. Roper in 1906 but may not have survived.

### **Addison, John (1739–1788)**

His memorial is a brass plate now kept in the church tower, an area currently closed to the public. John Addison was one of a number of slave-ship captains who came from Furness. He was born in Ulverston where his father was a clockmaker. He made at least 5 slaving voyages whilst captain, sometimes trading in the Sierra Leone estuary which was a popular destination for Lancaster slave ships. He typically took his captive cargoes to the American mainland, mainly Charleston in South Carolina but on one occasion to Savannah, Georgia. John Addison subsequently became an important investor in Lancaster's slave trade, often partnering others with Furness connections including Richard Millerson, Robert Dodson and James Sawrey.

John Addison was part of the town's merchant elite, twice serving as a port commissioner. In 1777, he insured two unfinished buildings intended as dwelling houses on the north side of St Leonardgate, one of which became his home. In 1787 he took a share in Catshaw cotton mill, Over Wyresdale with nine other partners. When he died in 1788, aged 48, Addison's obituary in the Leeds Intelligencer read 'On Saturday se'nnight died, Mr. John Addison, merchant, at Lancaster, universally lamented by a numerous acquaintance, who have lost a most valuable friend'.

### **Butterfield, William (1707-1787)**

His memorial is a brass plate now kept in the church tower, an area currently closed to the public. William Butterfield started out as grocer, apothecary and ropewalk proprietor in Lancaster but became an early investor in the slave trade, initially with his elder brother Thomas who died young. William invested in 10 slaving voyages, 1745-71, when Lancaster's African trade was at its height. As with other slaving ventures at this time, the Gambia and Sierra Leone were both popular destinations on the African coast. William Butterfield was a key player in both the running of the port and the town. He was present at the founding of the Port Commission in 1750 and served as port commissioner on several occasions. He was also an alderman, a mayor three times and treasurer for the county for nearly 40 years. He lived at a fashionable address on the upper end of Church Street which, with 24 windows, must have been substantial.

### **Godson, Richard (1797-1849) and Mary (1804-1873)**

Their memorial is on the south wall inside St Mary's Church. Richard Godson was a barrister and MP for St Albans then Kidderminster. Their Lancaster address was the imposing Springfield Hall on the south side of town where the Royal Lancaster Infirmary now stands. It had been built in the early 1790s by Mary's father, James Hargreaves, a wealthy WestIndia merchant and mortgagee of Pusey Hall sugar plantation (see his entry below). When James Hargreaves died in 1804, the mortgage on Pusey Hall, with its enslaved Africans, passed into his estate which was put in trust for his two infant children, Henry and Mary Hargreaves. On her marriage to Richard Godson in 1825, Mary Hargreaves's interest in her father's property, including the mortgage on Pusey Hall, passed to her husband which evidently proved uncomfortable. As an abolitionist, Godson complained that he had been 'forced to take possession of a £50,000 mortgage' on a West-India estate. Subsequently, Godson and his brother-in-law Henry Hargreaves would take full possession of the Pusey Hall plantation, in lieu of debts, Godson declaring in 1832, 'I scorn the idea of having property in my fellow subjects'. This did not, however, prevent him from collecting their compensation money of £5,018 7s 11d for its 236 enslaved Africans three years later. Was he one of the abolitionists who argued compensation for the enslaved was the only way to secure emancipation?

When Henry Hargreaves died in 1840, Richard and Mary Godson succeeded him at Springfield Hall. The Godson's private pew in St Mary's remained in the family's possession until 1855. Interestingly, Roper records a four-sided memorial to Henry Hargreaves, Esq.,



Deputy Lieutenant & Magistrate of County, Richard and Mary Godson and their children in his survey of St Mary's churchyard in 1906. It appears not to have survived.

### **Hargreaves, James (1752-1804)**

His memorial is a stone plaque in the floor of the nave. James Hargreaves is commemorated alongside his father Henry, who ran Lancaster's sugar house, his mother Elizabeth and his widow Mary. James Hargreaves made his money in direct colonial trade and spent many years in Kingston, Jamaica during the 1770s and early 1780s as a resident merchant. Whilst there, he became a mortgagee (lender) for Pusey Hall, a Jamaican sugar plantation and its enslaved workforce (and for a time another one named Ashley Hall). The terms were favourable with an interest rate of 6% and exclusive rights to supply the estate with goods and receive its sugar. In 1784, James Hargreaves returned to Lancaster where he continued his colonial trade. In 1792-93, he invested £3,000 in the Lancaster canal and £2,400 in the New Bank on Penny Street, subsequently known as Dilworth and Hargreaves.

It was around this time that he purchased the land to build Springfield Hall. James married late, in 1802, and had two children, Henry and Mary Hargreaves, who were just infants when he died in 1804. James Hargreaves's wealth and extensive property, including mortgages on two Jamaican properties, were put in trust for their benefit (see under Godson for details).

### **Hinde, Samuel (1778-1840)**

His memorial in the churchyard no longer exists but was recorded by Roper in 1906. Samuel was the youngest son of Thomas Hinde (see following entry). He invested in the Liverpool slave trade with his brother William and also became a partner with him in Dolphinholme Mill until 1829 (see William Hinde's entry). This presumably explains why Samuel gave his address as Dolphinholme at the time of his marriage in 1817. He subsequently became a Land-Tax Commissioner and was living in Lancaster when he died in 1840, leaving an ample estate.

### **Hinde, Thomas (1720-1798)**

His memorial is on the south wall inside St Mary's Church. Thomas Hinde was one of the early captains in the Lancaster slave trade. He sailed to Africa four times in the Jolly Batchelor and Africa between 1748 and 1753. Subsequently, he became Lancaster's foremost investor in the slave trade. His investments in at least 34 slaving ventures spanned a period of 40 years, right up to his death in 1798. Initially, his ships sailed from Lancaster, a popular African destination being the Gambia and Sierra Leone Rivers. His later slavetrading investments were from Liverpool, where three of his sons moved to take advantage of the larger port's more favourable opportunities.

Thomas Hinde originated from Caton, a village close to Lancaster, and was probably sent to sea at an early age. He was heavily involved in the development and running of the port of Lancaster, being elected a port commissioner four times. He was active in town affairs too, serving as alderman on the Lancaster Corporation and twice as mayor. Thomas Hinde,

his wife Ann and family lived in a house on Church Street which was described as having 18 windows in 1766. Towards the end of his life, he bought a much newer property on Dalton Square, where his unmarried daughter Anne lived until her death in 1852. In 1795 Thomas Hinde, Son, and Company leased Dolphinholme worsted mill from its original owners for £500. With money to buy new machinery, they soon turned it into a profitable concern and it would stay in the family for nearly 40 years.

### **Hinde, Thomas Junior (1757–1829)**

His memorial is a plain gravestone in the churchyard which might come as a surprise given his father and brother William's striking memorials inside the church. Thomas was Thomas Hinde's eldest son and as soon as he was old enough, he entered his father's slave-trading business, first appearing as a registered owner in 1784. Thomas junior's initial investments were in Lancaster slave ships but when it became obvious that the trade could be more profitably conducted from Liverpool, he moved to the larger port, becoming a freeman of the town in 1795. His commercial wealth had already made him an eligible bachelor, for in 1797, he married Jane Chambre, daughter of Walter Chambre, a Whitehaven merchant and niece of Alan Chambre, a well known judge. Thomas would invest in at least 38 slaving voyages, in a period spanning 20 years. His mercantile activities ensured his place amongst Liverpool's elite which included serving as bailiff, deputy lieutenant and committee member of the Company of Proprietors of the Liverpool Exchange. By 1807, he had moved his family to fashionable Everton and his counting-house to the recently rebuilt Goree Piazzas. So, why the plain stone in the churchyard? It may well be a consequence of Thomas junior's bankruptcy in 1811. The precise cause of his economic downfall is yet to be determined. However, it evidently prompted Thomas and his wife Jane to retreat north, to Undercroft House in Ellel, and his assignees to sell much of his property to meet his creditors' demands. One will never know how Thomas reacted to his financial ruin which left his wife Jane receiving financial support from both his mother and her uncle Chambre. Some secrets of this simple gravestone remain untold.

### **Hinde, William (1770–1834)**

His memorial is on the south wall inside St Mary's Church. William was a younger son of Thomas Hinde (above). He entered the Liverpool slave trade in 1799, aged 27, where he invested, mainly with his younger brother Samuel, in 12 slave ships which made 26 voyages to West Africa and the American colonies between 1799 and the trade's abolition in 1807. William and Samuel's last slave ship, the Trafalgar, was purpose-built in John Brockbank's shipyard on the Green Ayre in 1806, the brothers managing to squeeze in two slaving voyages before the trade became illegal. Ironically, the slave trade proved particularly profitable in the run-up to its abolition. Back in his native area, he was already a partner with his elder brother Thomas in Dolphinholme Mill and subsequently with his younger brother Samuel (see previous entries). He lived with his wife Anne and family at Ellel Hall, their having married in St Mary's Church in 1805. He became a Deputy Lieutenant and JP for Lancashire.



'Mr and Mrs William Lindow', George Romney, 1772 (Tate, Creative Commons)



## Henry Rawlinson, William Lindow and Abraham Rawlinson of Fakenham, Norfolk

This memorial is a four-sided monument, with oval marble plaques. It was built for Henry Rawlinson and his close family rather than the wider Rawlinson family (many of whom were interred in the Quaker burial ground) as is often supposed. In July 1786, the vicar and churchwardens granted Henry Rawlinson's widow, Martha, permission to build, at her own expense, 'a Vault or Burial place in the Northwest Corner of the yard of the Parish Church Lancaster on the west side of the little Gate leading out of the said Church yard into the Glebe Land belonging to the Vicarage of Lancaster'. The licence also allowed her to erect 'a Monument in memory of...Henry Rawlinson deceased, whose corps[e] is interred within the said space, with a door and sufficient stairs to go down into the said Vault and to be inclosed with Iron Rails for a Burial place for the Bodies of... the said Martha Rawlinson and the heirs and family of the said Henry Rawlinson deceased'. Access to this vault has presumably since been filled in.

Henry Rawlinson (1743-1786) was the son of Abraham Rawlinson, a prominent West-India merchant in Lancaster with his brother Thomas Hutton Rawlinson. Henry also became a West-India merchant but moved to Liverpool where he would become a major importer of slave-produced cotton. He also invested in the Liverpool slave ship Molly in 1776 which made a single voyage to the Iles de Los and Jamaica, carrying an estimated 300 captive Africans. In 1780 Henry was elected MP for Liverpool and also served as a colonial agent for the Virgin Islands, the only such agent living outside London. When his father died in 1780, Henry inherited an interest in his third share of a Grenada sugar plantation.

William Lindow (1724-1786) was Henry's brother-in-law. Lindow had been a captain in the West-India trade for brothers Abraham (Henry's father) and Thomas Hutton Rawlinson before becoming their agent in Grenada. It was probably Lindow who persuaded them to buy the Grenada sugar plantation with him. This would not be William Lindow's only direct link with the enslavement of Africans. He bought shares in two more plantations in St Vincent, invested in two Liverpool slaving voyages in 1763-64 and traded captive cargoes between the islands in 1766. Enriched by the West-India trade and his slaverelated activities, he was back in Lancaster by 1771 where he married Abraham Rawlinson's daughter Abigail (Henry's sister) in St Mary's Church and became a partner with his father-in-law Abraham Rawlinson. Lindow commissioned Richard Gillow to design his new residence with adjoining coach house and stables on Queen's Square which would also be home to his Black servant, John Chance (see later entry). Lindow became actively engaged in port business, serving as a Port Commissioner several times and lending £200 for the building of Glasson Dock. He also fitted in one more slave-trading investment, this time in the Lancaster slave-ship Sarah which traded in the Sierra Leone estuary before taking its enslaved cargo to Grenada. William Lindow died a very wealthy man, just four months after his brother-in-law Henry.

Abraham Rawlinson of Fakenham (1789-1829) was the son of Henry Rawlinson's brother,

Thomas. Abraham never engaged in transatlantic trade but was rather a partner in the Norfolk banking firm of Gurneys, Birkbeck and Rawlinson. He did, however, become an heir to his father's share in the Broom Hall cotton plantation in British Guiana at the age of 14. Thomas Rawlinson had instructed his executors to sell it but Broom Hall still belonged to his heirs in 1832 by which time Abraham Rawlinson was already dead. Others interred here are Henry Rawlinson's four young grandchildren and his daughter Ellen, the wife of Reverend Ainslie.

### **Satterthwaite, John (1743-1807)**

His memorial is a plain stone in the floor of the nave which would have been reset when the church was re-floored in 1911. John Satterthwaite was baptised in St Mary's Church in 1743, his father Benjamin having surrendered his Quaker membership on marrying an Anglican. During the 1770s, John was engaged in direct colonial trade, spending time as a resident merchant in St. Kitts. In June 1777, he married the daughter of Stedman Rawlins, a wealthy planter, and shortly afterwards returned to Lancaster with his young bride, known as Polly. The following year, their Black servant, Frances Elizabeth Johnson, was baptised at St Mary's (see later entry) and a few years later, Satterthwaite purchased Castle Park, an impressive house opposite the John O' Gaunt Gateway, a property the family may have rented initially. Meanwhile, he was engaged in several commercial enterprises. He continued his merchant house in St Kitts through his wayward resident partner who caused him endless headaches over settling their accounts. Although most of their trade was in colonial goods, such as cotton and sugar, Satterthwaite also complained about his partner's decision to sell two slave-ship cargoes on their behalf though his objections were most likely financial.

John also invested in a number of privateering ventures during the American War of Independence and two slave ships, the Sally of Lancaster and the Stag of Liverpool. The Sally proved a financial disaster as she and her captive Africans were taken by the French in 1782, within an hour's sail of St Kitts. However, the 200-ton Stag, which carried three large cargoes of enslaved Africans from Bonny to the Caribbean between 1782-84, must have more than made up for any financial losses. It was during the time that John Satterthwaite invested with others in a worsted spinning mill at Dolphinholme although it would take one of Thomas Hinde's sons to make a go of it. Having finally sorted out his commercial affairs in St Kitts, aided by his cousin and trusty clerk, John Satterthwaite retired from all overseas trade in March 1788. He died in 1807, leaving a widow and nine children. His will would end up in Chancery.

## **Lancaster's Black Presence in St Mary's**

### **Church Registers during Transatlantic Slavery**

St Mary's parish registers for this period comprise several leather-bound volumes. These have been digitised by online genealogical companies. The Lancashire Online Parish





'The New Buildings on the West Front of Lancaster Castle', Robert Freebairn, 1802  
(credit: Lancaster City Museums)



St Mary's churchyard, extract from Jonathan Binns' map of Lancaster, 1821 (credit: Lancashire Archives, item held at Blackburn with Darwen Library Service)

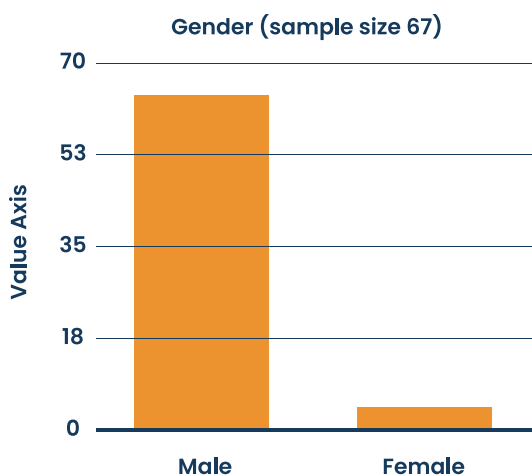


Clerk provides a free, transcribed alternative. The sources relating to Lancaster's Black population are scanty at best. This means special care needs to be taken in distinguishing between fact, speculation and myth. One person's speculation can all too easily morph into someone else's historical fact. There is, of course, room for historical accuracy and creativity but the two should always be clearly differentiated.

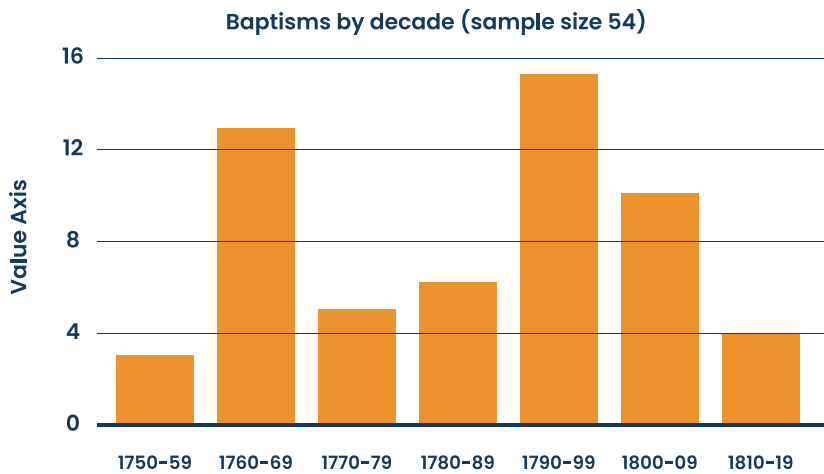
Another consequence of the sparse information on Lancaster's Black inhabitants is a somewhat different approach here. This section will start with some general information, using some statistics and charts to give a wider picture before moving to specific examples where a little more information exists.

## The wider picture

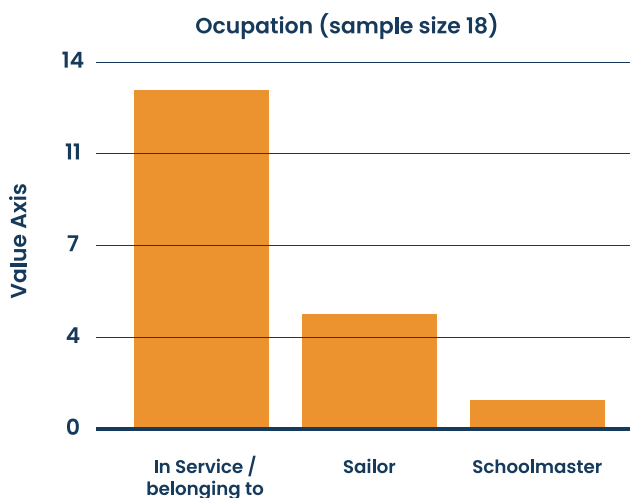
76 entries for those of African or mixed African heritage have been identified in the St Mary's Church registers between 1755 and 1837. These include 58 baptisms, 13 burials and 5 marriages. Some individuals, of course, appeared in the registers more than once, for example as a baptism and a burial, although this was relatively uncommon. In many cases, the only available information on these Black lives is what the clergyman recorded in the church register. In an attempt to provide as broad a picture as possible, the following bar charts isolate various criteria. The samples can be limited, due to a lack of information, so caution needs to be exercised when drawing conclusions.



Males appear to have made up an overwhelming majority of Lancaster's Black population. This probably reflects occupation, notably sailors and menservants to merchants and captains travelling between Lancaster and the colonies. Two periods - the 1760s and 1790-1809 - stand out in relation to Black baptisms. This correlates with Lancaster's most prosperous periods in transatlantic trade, especially that with the colonies.

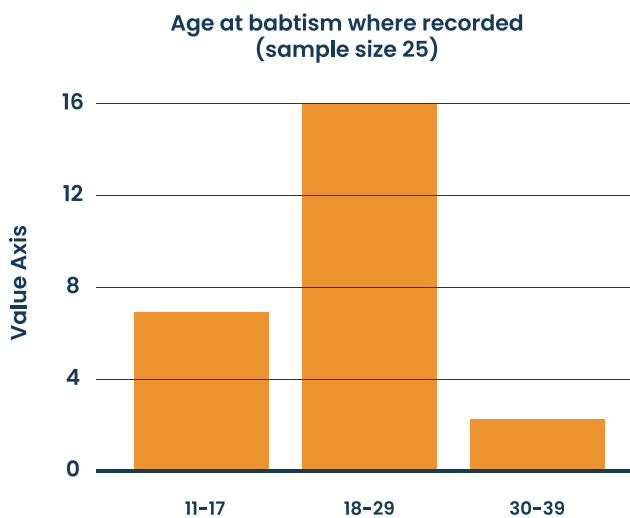


From the limited sample available, it can be seen that those in domestic service, whatever their legal status might have been, formed by far the largest category. The records show that these Black ‘servants’ had typically accompanied a returning master who had been resident in the Caribbean islands. Whether their transfer to Lancaster was willingly undertaken or not is unknown. However, it seems likely that both parties would already be well acquainted and that, on the part of the Black ‘servant’, a greater freedom might be anticipated on coming to England



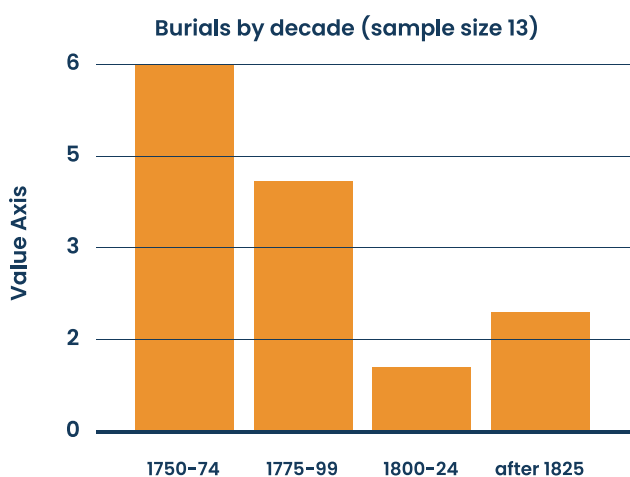
This chart shows that Black baptisms occurred most frequently amongst those in their late teens and twenties. Only two Black baptisms are recorded beyond the age of 30. Within the youngest category, one is for an 11-year-old, five relate to those in their mid-teens and four to those aged between 17 and 18. The register applied the term ‘adult’ to anyone aged 13 or over. There are 26 further entries which simply describe the individual as ‘an adult’. The fact that most of the Black baptisms at St Mary’s occurred amongst ‘adults’ is significant. Not only were adult baptisms deemed voluntary but evidence from elsewhere – including documents from the diocese of York and Lambeth Palace – also shows that Black people actively sought baptism, which was believed to confer both freedom and identity, acting as a form of passport. Although reality did not necessarily match expectation, as will be seen in the case of Henry Hind(e), it was probably an improving situation, especially from

the 1770s. Whilst freedom was the goal, some presumably occupied that uncertain realm between servitude and slavery. Still others would be free, waged workers.



The frequency of burials again reflect Lancaster’s most prosperous years in transatlantic trade but are far fewer in number. A variety of reasons could explain this. For example, individuals would presumably have more control over their baptisms than their burials. Also, in contrast to the entries for baptism, those for burials seldom reference a person’s ethnicity, making it far harder, if not impossible, to identify or trace those of African heritage. Finally, some of the Black people who had been baptised presumably moved elsewhere, died at sea or perhaps returned to the colonies with their master. Whatever the reason, there are only two examples of a Black person being both baptised and buried at St Mary’s Church. Meanwhile, three of the burials relate to unnamed individuals, presumably because their identity was unknown, and with two of them dying within three days of each other in November 1755, perhaps suggesting a common cause. Burials would have taken place in consecrated ground, wherever there was space, but most likely in unmarked graves. St Mary’s churchyard was extended in 1819.

Finally, the parish registers record four Black men who married local girls, three of whom were sailors and one a schoolmaster. In a position to marry, one might safely assume they were all independent, waged workers.





# Selected Black Lives from St Mary's Church Registers

These examples are again ordered alphabetically by surname, or first name if only one name is given. The information mainly comes from the parish registers and other local primary sources.

**Burrow, Thomas** married Mary Tomlinson, a spinster of Sunderland Point, at St Mary's Church on 7 August 1781. His marriage licence describes him as 'a black Man and a sailor' of Lancaster. Thomas was clearly sufficiently educated to sign his name. His bondsman was Thomas Culsha, a sawyer, who was possibly Thomas Culshaw, a ship carpenter, who had married in 1764.

**Chance, John** was baptised on the 12 September 1777 and is noted as being 'a black aged 22 Years or upwards in the Service of Mr Lindow'. It seems likely that he would have come to Lancaster when William Lindow (see earlier entry) returned from Grenada in 1771. If so, he would have lived in Lancaster for a number of years before he was baptised. His home was likely to have been the coachhouse attached to Lindow's fine new residence on Queen's Square and his position that of coachman, or possibly footman, which would probably have involved him in various errands about town. He was buried on 8 October 1783 in St Mary's churchyard, being simply recorded as 'a Negro' in the register. He is one of only two Black people to have a clearly identifiable baptism and burial in the church.

**Dixon, John** was baptised at St Mary's Church on the 26 April 1803, being described as 'an adult negro in Mr Ridley's service about 18 years old'. Mr Ridley was probably Jacob Ridley, a Lancaster colonial merchant and slave owner in Demerara, who had spent time in Grenada prior to his marriage in 1790. Ridley was declared bankrupt in 1811 and three years later died in Demerara. It is possible that Ridley's servant was the same John Dixon who served the Lodge family, firstly James Lodge of Church Street and after his death, John Lodge of Bare Hall (Morecambe). When this John Dixon died in 1841, the records agree about his length of service to the Lodge family but disagree on his age and origin. The parish register of St Trinity's, Poulton gives his age as 70, noting that 'for 40 years' he had been 'a faithful Negro Servant in the family of the Lodges'. His gravestone in St Trinity's churchyard, a rare survival for a Black person, records an age of 73 for this 'native of Grenada' who 'was the true and faithful servant of the family of John Lodge Esq of Bare Hall' for 19 years. Meanwhile, the Lancaster Gazette suggests he was 'a native of Martinique' who died at 'a very advanced age', having lived a total of 39 years with James then John Lodge. If John Dixon's gravestone is correct, this could suggest he was the same 'adult negro' who had been baptised in St Mary's Church in 1803, especially given Ridley's connections with Grenada, although the recorded ages would have to be considered approximations at best.

**Fileen, Sophia** was baptised on 15 Feb 1799, recorded as 'a negro aged 11 years' of Lancaster. Not only was she one of the very few females to appear in the parish registers but she was also the youngest Black person to be recorded. Sadly, no further information about her has been found.

**Hannibal, John** was baptised in Overton in 1771, being described as 'an African'. Further information shows that he had arrived in the area as a child. He evidently received an education for he went on to become a schoolmaster in the village. Although his eldest son would be baptised in Overton, John had married at St Mary's and would subsequently move to Lancaster. In later years, he is found in charge of a stone quarry before finally becoming a coal merchant. Living into his seventies, John is buried in St Mary's churchyard along with his son and infant grandson who both shared his name. His full story, and that of his son who became a cabinetmaker but died young, is the subject of an article (see 'References', Elder, 2023).

**Hardman, Edward** was baptised on 19 September 1803. The register notes that he was 'an Adult Negro, belonging to Cap[tai]n Braithwaite, about 17 Years old' and living in Lancaster. Braithwaite was probably James Braithwaite, captain of several of Abraham and John Rawlinson's ships trading with the Caribbean, especially Jamaica. It is perhaps no accident that Captain Braithwaite completed his final voyage from Jamaica on 10 August 1803 just over a month before Edward was baptised. No further information has been found on Edward Hardman but Captain Braithwaite subsequently moved to Liverpool where he drowned in the river in 1818. Coincidentally, James Braithwaite may have had a son with a mixed heritage woman in Jamaica, who would have been similar in age to Edward Hardman but was named after his father.

**Hind(e), Henry (Harry)** was baptised on 31 May 1761, the clergyman describing him as 'an adult Negroe' of Lancaster. Nothing further may have been known about Henry had he not run away three years later, sparking two newspaper advertisements seeking his return. James Hinde is the named Lancaster contact and may have been Henry's owner too. He was a prosperous Lancaster woollen draper and younger brother to Thomas Hinde (see earlier entry). James lived with his wife Sarah and their growing family in a substantial house on Market Street and if he was indeed Henry's master, this would have been the scene of the young man's flight. The advertisements show that Henry was more familiarly known as Harry and that he had absconded in the night. He was said to be about 20 years old, 'about five Feet four Inches high' and 'stiff' or 'strong made'. One of his ears was also 'bored' (the 18th-century term for pierced). This physical description only appears three times in the 'Runaway Slaves' database, with Harry alone having just one ear 'bored' and being of African heritage. The circumstances of the piercing are unknown. Was it the result of a tribal custom, as practised within certain African cultures, or did it occur elsewhere, perhaps at sea or in Lancaster (it was not unknown for Black servants to be portrayed with earrings)? Despite James Hinde's generous reward for Harry's recapture, he was still on the run a fortnight after he had escaped by which time he was 'supposed to be gone

for London' where his discovery would inevitably be harder. How Harry came to Lancaster remains uncertain. Perhaps he arrived directly from Africa, possibly on one of Thomas Hinde's slave ships. Then again, he may have spent time in the Caribbean or at sea. Whatever the details, the runaway advertisement implies that Harry was enslaved.

**Hodges, John** was buried at St Mary's Church, aged 45, on 16 July 1837 but with a Roman Catholic ceremony. The records of St Peter's describe him as 'a Negro from the West Indies', aged 47, who was 'long resident in the Town'. John would have been a free man as he served with the Royal Lancashire Militia, first as a private and then as a drummer. His army records show that he had been born in Guadeloupe, had entered the Royal Lancashire Militia in 1809 and was finally discharged in 1835 on account of a reduction in militia staff. His death was announced in a local newspaper.

**Jennings, Robert** was baptised on 25 June 1802, the 'Son of Robert Jennings an Adult Negro belonging to Messr. Mason & Burrow aged abt. 18 Years Lancaster'. Burrow and Mason were West-India merchants and Thomas Mason had been their agent in the Caribbean, latterly residing in Tortola and St Thomas. It is therefore possible that Mason brought Robert Jennings back with him when he returned to Lancaster in 1799. Given Jennings was described as 'belonging to Messr. Mason & Burrow', it seems quite likely that he undertook errands for their business.

**Johnson, Frances Elizabeth** was baptised on 2 April 1778 and is described as 'a black Woman Servt. to Mr. John Satterthwaite an adult aged 27 Lancaster'. Frances had presumably accompanied John Satterthwaite (see earlier entry) and his bride Polly from St Kitts to Lancaster in 1777. As John Satterthwaite did not purchase 20 Castle Park until 1781, Frances may not have lived here at first although the family could have rented the property initially. Her role was probably that of a domestic servant and perhaps included caring for the couple's growing family. Her precise legal status is unknown. Frances's surname is of interest. Polly Satterthwaite's mother was Mary Johnson before she married Stedman Rawlins. Moreover, a 'free Negroe Woman' called Mary Johnson, from Stedman Rawlins's estate called 'New Guinea', was buried in St Kitts in 1786. Could there be a link? More recently, a member of the Satterthwaite family has claimed that a severed hand in her possession belonged to Frances, having been retained and passed down the generations as a keepsake. In 1997, this hand was buried in the churchyard beneath an initialled plaque. The account remains unproven, the evidence being confined to oral family history, and there is no burial record for this apparently treasured servant.

**Millerson, Stephen** was baptised on 23 May 1768, as 'An Adult Negroe'. Stephen Millerson's baptism occurred just two months after the death of Thomas Millerson, a Lancaster merchant who had been resident in Barbados. Thomas Millerson's will instructed his executors to sell his merchandise, ships and personal estate but not his household goods and furniture, his wife's jewels or his 'negro'. The proximity of these two events seems more than a coincidence. If so, Stephen Millerson must have been an enslaved personal servant



to Thomas Millerson who no doubt sought freedom and identity through his baptism. Thomas Millerson's widow was buried in St Mary's churchyard the following year.

**Nelson** was baptised on 28 March 1807 and is recorded as 'a Negro belonging to John Cumpsty Mercht. aged 14 yrs.' who lived in Lancaster. John Cumpsty was a woollen draper but was also investing in the slave-ship Johns at this time. In 1809 Cumpsty built the imposing Lune Villa in Skerton. Whether Nelson lived there too is unknown.

**Ross, James** was baptised on 17 September 1801 as 'an Adult Negro aged 35 years in the Service of Mr Thos. Thompson Mercht.', living in Lancaster. James Ross's master was almost certainly Thomas Thompson, a West-India merchant who had spent many years in Barbados. Thomas Thompson died in Lancaster in 1803 so he had presumably returned to Lancaster sometime before James's baptism. What happened to James Ross subsequently is unknown.

**York, William** married Hannah Coupland of Lancaster at St Mary's Church on 16 September 1775. Neither signed their names, suggesting a lack of educational opportunity. William is described as a sailor and a Black man. Assuming this is the same William York who had been baptised at St Mary's on 27 January 1759, he had already been based in Lancaster for 16 years.

## St John the Evangelist (Chapel of Ease to St Mary's)

St John's parish registers include just two entries for Black people, both baptisms. The first concerns Frances, 'an adult Negroe' baptised in 1756. Assuming the name is spelt correctly, this adds to the relatively low number of female baptisms in Georgian Lancaster. The second took place just two years later when John Rich, the son of John Rich 'an adult mulatto' was baptised, presumably as an infant. No further information has been found on either of them, perhaps suggesting a move elsewhere. Meanwhile, several gravestones and a plaque commemorate those directly linked to the enslavement of Africans. All are outside and many of the gravestones are now broken or illegible through weathering.

**Dodson, John** was buried in a vault in 1842, aged 78. He was a West-India merchant but in 1835 had received compensation of £14,950 1s 3d for 288 enslaved workers on the Hampshire Plantation in British Guiana as a mortgagee (lender or creditor). The mortgage was stated to be worth £38,944 1s 4d. It should be noted that such mortgages were often the result of a planter's indebtedness to a merchant. Dodson was the eldest son of John Dodson, late of Ulverston, and nephew of Robert Dodson, a Lancaster captain and investor in the slave trade. He lived on St Leonardgate for many years but died after a long illness at his residence in Poulton le Sands (now Morecambe).



IN MEMORY OF

JOHN LOWTHER *of Lancaster Merchant*  
who died at the *Island of S<sup>t</sup> Thomas*  
27<sup>th</sup> Day of June 1804, aged 39 Years.

AGNES LOWTHER *his Widow*,  
died 20<sup>th</sup> Day of November 1810,  
aged 49 Years.

ELLEN NICHOLSON *Sister to the above*  
died 21<sup>st</sup> Day of February 1821,  
aged 58 Years.

John Lowther memorial plaque (credit: Terry Parsons)

**Lowther, John** is commemorated in a well preserved plaque by the church entrance which reads 'In memory of JOHN LOWTHER of Lancaster, merchant who died at the Island of St. Thomas 27 June 1804, aged 39 years'. A captain in the West-India trade, Lowther also invested in several slave ships with his partners John Cumpsty and John Nunns before his death. Their slave ships included the Johns which made 5 voyages to Africa before the slave-trade's abolition. It sailed from Liverpool, in accordance with parliamentary regulations, but was registered in Lancaster. The Johns had been built in Lancaster, at John Brockbank's shipyard, initially for the West-India trade. John Brockbank and other members of his family were also interred at St John's.

**Nunns, John** is commemorated on a gravestone in the churchyard (probably now illegible) which reads 'In memory of Captn. JOHN NUNNS of Skerton who died at sea on the 1 Oct 1807 aged 42 years and was interred at the Island of Trinidad in the West Indies'. Like John Lowther, he had been a captain in the West-India trade but he also captained the Johns on four of its five slaving voyages. His death occurred just before it completed its final voyage. With his partners John Lowther and John Cumpsty, he invested in several slave ships before his death.

**Salisbury, Edward** was buried in the churchyard in 1785 although his gravestone may have deteriorated beyond recognition. He was a Lancaster merchant who invested in three or four slave ships, mainly in the 1770s before the American War of Independence interrupted transatlantic trade. Edward Salisbury served as a port commissioner several times, owned property on the quay and lent money for the development of Glasson Dock.

## Conclusion

This survey has considered the various different ways in which St Mary's Church and St John's Chapel were linked to transatlantic slavery during the Georgian era. These have centred on certain features within the two churches, memorial inscriptions and the parish registers in relation to Lancaster's Black population. The survey has found that today's most prominent physical links to those directly involved in transatlantic enslavement can be found in a handful of St Mary's more elaborate, surviving memorials and its brass candelabras, and in St John's organ case and a conspicuous memorial plaque by its entrance.

The registers, with complementary sources, indicate that Black individuals were typically brought to Lancaster by merchants and captains returning from the Caribbean islands. The evidence also suggests that Black adults would have been baptised voluntarily, in the hope of freedom and identity. Finally, the aim of this study has been to strike a balance between depth and breadth. Other details or examples could be added. Moreover, no attempt has been made to examine the churches' links with all those who profited indirectly from the enslavement of Africans. This may well include a substantial proportion of Lancaster's Georgian population.



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