



Hidden Stories of the Slave Trade



Through the initiatives of persistent campaigners and the establishment of websites such as **100 Great Black Britons** and **The Black Presence in Britain**, the names of historical figures such as **Mary Seacole**, **John Archer** and **William Cuffay** are becoming more familiar in the UK's schools. In addition, commemoration of the bicentenary of the act to abolish the trade in

slaves, has brought to the forefront figures such as **Ignatius Sancho**, **Ottobah Cuguano** and **Mary Prince**, highlighting their contribution to the movement to abolish the trade.

A little digging, though, uncovers a wealth of other, hidden stories - tales of hypocrisy, appalling cruelty, guile, bravery and sheer determination that can have relevance to geography, citizenship, religious education and law as well as history.

To have and to own

It is sometimes forgotten that many of the Africans kidnapped for the trade in slaves were children. Contemporary advertisements in newspapers offer for sale 'A Negroe BOY, about ten Years old' or 'A Pretty little Negro Boy, about nine Years old, and well limb'd' (*Daily Advertiser*, 11 December 1744). Clearly, from the 'wanted' ads, children were very much in demand: 'WANTED, A NEGRO LAD, Native of ABO, from 15 to 17 Years old, Who has had the Small-Pox, and is of a healthy Constitution...' According to *Cymru Ddu: Hanes Pobl Duon Cymru/Black Wales: A History of Black Welsh People*, Sir John Phillips, MP for Pembrokeshire was given a 6-year-old black boy from Senegal.

Peter Fryer points out in the remarkably detailed *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* that in 1651 the administrators of the Guinea Company were able to ask James Pope, as he set sail for Africa to 'buy for us 15 or 20 young lusty Negroes of about 15 years of age, bring them home with you for London...' Charles II paid £50 for a black slave in 1682 and Samuel Pepys records in his diary being shown by Sir Robert Vigner 'a black boy that he had

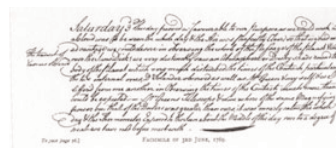
that died of a consumption; and being dead, he caused him to be dried in an Oven, and lies there entire in a box'.

Abolitionists made use of the trade in children to highlight the evils of slavery. The Society for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the African Slave Trade gathered evidence such as the case of **George Dale** who was kidnapped and transported from Africa aged about 11. He arrived in Scotland after working as a plantation cook and then as a crewman on a fighting ship.



Loyal and not so loyal service

Two Black servants accompanied their master on Captain Cook's first voyage round the world in 1768. Together with a white seaman, they climbed a mountain to gather rare plants for scientific purposes. The result of the expedition



was recorded in *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Around the World* :

Thomas Richmond : Negro Servant : Frozen to death : 16 January, 1769.

George Durlton : Negro Servant : Frozen to death : 16 January, 1769.

The purchase of slaves did not always go to plan as shown by an advertisement, typical of those in many papers of the time: 'RUN AWAY from his MASTER at SUMMER HILL, last Monday the 27th July, BLACK BOY, Whose name is WILL; He is about 15 years of age, speaks English plain, has a burnt mark on one of his wrists...'

Mary Harris, a Black-woman, of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields, was indicted for feloniously Stealing a Pair of Holland-sheets, 3 Smocks, and other Goods of Nicholas Laws, Gent. on the 30th of November last. It appeared that she was a Servant in the House, and took the Goods, which were afterwards pawned by the Prisoner'. **Lawrence Noney**, a black Boy, was Tried for stealing a Leading Staff, having a Silver Head on it weighing 19 Ounces, value 4 l. 15 s. on the 16th of March last, from the

Honourable Company of Haberdashers, London...'
In 1779, **Lucy Johnson** was found guilty of 'theft with violence' and was sentenced to death.

The law working for and against

Records of the Old Bailey show that **Isaac George** (a Blackamoor) was indicted for assaulting John Gravener, in the King's Highway, putting him in Fear, and taking from him a Pair of Silver-bow'd Scissars, value 5 s. a Silver Spatula, value 4 s. a Silver Probe, value 6 d. a Steel crooked Needle, value 1 d a Fish skin Case with Silver Hinges and Clasps, value 10 s. 6 d **Ann Duck** quickly learned a new trade... as a highwaywoman. She was 'indicted, with another Person to the Jurors unknown, for assaulting William Cooper on the Highway, putting him in fear, and taking from him a Money-bag, Value 1 d. and 35 s. in Money , his Property, Dec. 28.



David Spens had been brought to Scotland from the West Indies in around 1768 by Dr David Dalrymple. Spens asked, and was allowed, to be baptised. He then ran away and it was claimed that since he 'had been baptised he was no longer heathen and therefore no longer a slave'. He received a great deal of local support though Dalrymple died before the case could come to court.

The case of **James Somerset**, brought to England by an American, did result in a famous judgement. Somerset ran away and his owner tried to force him on board ship to sail to America. Lord Mansfield ruled, in 1772 that 'A foreigner cannot be imprisoned here on the authority of any law existing in his own country'. Although not bringing an end to slavery in Britain, the ruling did mean that slaves could not be forced by their owners to leave England.

A haven for abolitionists



After the trade in slaves was abolished, the UK provided sanctuary and support for a number of slaves escaping from the United States. One of the most dramatic and innovative escape stories is that of **Ellen and William Craft** who fled slave catchers and bounty hunters. Ellen's skin was light enough to allow her to dress in trousers and a top hat and pretend to be a Southern slaveholder while her husband travelled with her as her servant. They boarded a ship heading for Liverpool, arriving there in 1851. They settled in West London where they

continued to campaign against slavery in the United States. Ellen wrote to the editor of the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, 'I had much rather starve in England, a free woman, than to be a slave for the best man that ever breathed upon the American continent.' The couple remained in London for 19 years before returning to the United States.

The African-American poet **Phillis Wheatley** published her first volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in London in 1773 because no publisher in her native Boston would publish it. **Mary Prince**, an abolitionist and former slave, also came from America and published the story of her experiences in *The History of Mary Prince: a West Indian Slave*. She became the first Black woman to publish an autobiography in England. She was also the first black woman to present an anti-slavery petition to Parliament.

In 1789, **Olaudah Equiano** published his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written By Himself*. He more or less self-published his book, retaining the copyright and putting together a list of well-connected and influential subscribers, who agreed to buy copies. It was submitted to Parliament as documentary evidence when the bill for the abolition of the slave trade was being debated in 1792. The book was a success and made Equiano a wealthy man.



Economic success

John Edmonstone, a freed captive from British Guiana (now Guyana) earned his living in Edinburgh by teaching taxidermy. One of his students was Charles Darwin.

Nathaniel Wells was the son of a slave-owner in St Kitts. He was sent to England to be educated and eventually inherited much of his father's slave estates. 'I give unto my Natural and Dear Son Nathaniel Wells whose mother is my woman Juggy and who is now in England for his Education ... I recommend my Dear Son Nathaniel Wells above-mentioned to the particular Care and Attention of my Executors hereafter named and that they will be pleased to pay particular Attention to his Education and that when he is fit and qualified they will send him to the university of Oxford and According to my Calculation the remainder of my Estate...' Wells was undoubtedly the richest Black man in the country owning his own plantations (and slaves). He lived in Chepstow and was appointed a Justice of the

Peace and became High Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1818. He fathered 22 children and died in Bath in 1852, aged 72.

Fighting for and against the British

The **First West India Regiment**, made up of Black soldiers, was formed in 1795 and consisted mainly of freed Africans. The regiment went on to fight in Barbados, British Guiana, the Gold Coast, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Jamaica (the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865) among other campaigns. However, a mutiny in Trinidad in 1837 by recruits who had been freed from slave ships and 'press-ganged' effectively brought an end to this practice.

Robert Wedderburn, the son of a slave, campaigned against slavery in the West Indies, writing pamphlets addressed to slaves in Jamaica and smuggling them out to them: 'I am a West-Indian, a lover of liberty, and would dishonour human nature if I did not shew



myself a friend to the liberty of others.' He suggested an annual one-hour strike throughout the whole island. Because of his political activities, he was tried for sedition and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Sam Sharpe, born into slavery in Jamaica, grew up to become a Baptist preacher who followed the growing abolitionist movement in Britain and sermonized about the iniquity of slavery in his own parishes. He organized a rebellion involving some 20,000 rebels at Christmas in 1831. Although it was initially intended as a peaceful strike, violence spread and a number of slave owners and overseers were killed. Many slaves were sentenced to death, including Sam Sharpe, who was executed in 1832. This, though, was the last major uprising against slavery before it was finally abolished in the British Empire in 1833.

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Resources

Advertisements for slaves can be seen at:

www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/showImageDetails.php?sit_id=1&img_id=528

www.mersey-gateway.org/server.php?show=conMediaFile.1786

The story of **George Dale** can be found at www.nas.gov.uk/about/050930.asp

An example of advertisement for a **runaway slave** can be seen at

www.mersey-gateway.org/server.php?show=conMediaFile.1778

Details of the case of **Mary Harris** can be seen on the Proceedings of the Old Bailey website at

www.hrionline.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/highlight.jsp?ref=t17020114-18&words=

and that of **Lucy Johnson** at

www.hrionline.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/highlight.jsp?ref=t16900430-4&words=

Isaac George's case is recorded at

www.hrionline.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/highlight.jsp?ref=t17380628-5&words=

and that of **Ann Duck** at

www.hrionline.ac.uk/luceneweb/bailey/highlight.jsp?ref=t17430114-11&words=

The story of **David Spens** is told at www.nas.gov.uk/about/101006.asp and that of James Somerset at

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/slave_free.htm

Ellen and William Craft's story can be found at www.black-british-heritage.com/heritage_HF2.htm

There's information on **John Edmonstone** at

www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/john_edmonstone.html and **Nathaniel Wells** at

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work_community/wealthy.htm with the text of his father's **will** at

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work_community/transcripts/william_wells.htm

Information on the First West India Regiment is available at <http://website.lineone.net/~bwir/wirhist.htm>

Robert Wedderburn's biography is online at www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/robert_wedderman.html and Sam Sharpe's details at www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/slave_routes/slave_routes_jamaica.shtml

There are a number of resources in the Real Histories Directory that can help as a starting point for researching some of the hidden stories around the history of the trade in slaves and the abolition movement.

Both **100 Great Black Britons** (www.100greatblackbritons.com/) and **The Black Presence in Britain** (www.blackpresence.co.uk/) tell the stories of some of the outstanding Africans who were first enslaved and then fought to ensure the freedom of others.

Regional websites such as **Portcities Bristol** (www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/) and **Portcities Liverpool** (www.mersey-gateway.org/) tell the history of the trade in those cities and also provide access to archive material. Similarly, the **National Archives of Scotland** (www.nas.gov.uk/about/101006.asp) website allows you to locate historical records.

The National Archives' **Black Presence: Asian and Black History in Britain, 1500-1850** site (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/index.htm) has a selection of relevant records held by The National Archives and other sources, presenting a largely forgotten history. It aims to reclaim some of this history and make it more widely known. The **Old Bailey** records (www.oldbaileyonline.org/history/communities/black.html) also gives advice on how to search for materials about Black people's involvement in trials, including the best terms to use.

The Anti-Slavery Society's **Breaking the Silence** website (www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/) aims to represent the voices that are not usually heard. It hopes to highlight the involvement of Africans in their own liberation and to show that the impact of enslavement of the African continent was so far reaching that the legacies remain with us today.

Slave-Studies.net (www.slave-studies.net/) offers a subject catalogue and a search engine that provides access to internet resources for the study of slavery and abolition across all geographical areas and historical periods (with the exception of forced labor and sexual slavery under totalitarian regimes in the 20th century).

The BBC **Abolition** site (www.bbc.co.uk/abolition/) has a great deal of information on the trade and links to information on the practice of slavery and its legacy in different parts of the country such as Wales (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/slavery/).

The academic **Brycchan Carey**'s website has information on the life and works of African former slaves and abolitionists **Olaudah Equiano**, (www.brycchancarey.com/equiano/) **Ignatius Sancho** (www.brycchancarey.com/sancho/index.htm) and **Ottobah Cugoano** (www.brycchancarey.com/cugoano/index.htm).

Hidden Histories: Slavery and Antislavery

(www.hlf.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/4A9BB4D0-CA7D-4372-92FE-38C85ED1EB20/2745/05SLAVERYFINALPDF.pdf) is a downloadable pdf with information on some of the important figures in the slave trade and abolition movement. The Real Histories Directory's Events Pages (<http://www.realhistories.org.uk/diary.php>) will provide information about debates, exhibitions, theatre productions and other events that look at many elements of 2007's commemorations.



The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.

