

Infosheet No. 39

Archive Sources for Studying the 18th and 19th Century Slave Trade

Lloyd's Register has a unique archive of shipping in the 18th and 19th centuries. The earliest records are contained within the *Register of Ships*, published since 1764 and contain such details as: ship's names, their owners, the master's name, tonnage, place and year of build, the port the ship usually sailed from, and the destination it usually sailed to, classification, number of crew and number of guns.

From 1834, our archive is more detailed including plans and survey reports of ships plus various Committee minutes and other records. There are about 1.25 million records held within the archive, which the Lloyd's Register Foundation is currently cataloguing and digitising, to make it openly and freely available online as a unique historical and educational resource.

Researchers studying the history of the slave trade may find the *Register of Ships*, when combined with other data sources, provides important insight on this shameful and barbaric trade.

This factsheet provides references for further research at the end.

Origins

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was at its most devastating in the period following the European discovery and colonisation of the West Indies

and the Americas. From c1500 to 1900, Europeans forcibly uprooted people from West Africa and West Central Africa, as slave labour. European shipping records show that at least 12 million Africans were transported by brutal force across the Atlantic as slaves. Some scholars argue that this is a gross underestimate and put the figure closer to 20 million. Countless others died either incarcerated on the African coast or during the Atlantic passage. Many thousands were murdered by being thrown overboard when they fell ill.

British involvement in the Slave Trade

John Lok is the first recorded Englishman to take Africans from Africa for the purpose of slavery. In 1555 he brought 5 slaves from Guinea to England. A year later, William Towerson captured slaves during his voyages to Africa. Supported by the Crown the trade became established in Britain and its colonies.

Some Africans were captured during European raids along the African coast, and many were bought from local African or Afro-European slave traders who had a network of trading alliances. Up to 80 per cent were captives taken in African wars and then sold by the victors. Some were sold as slaves as a brutal punishment or because they were in debt.

The greatest number of slaves came from the Congo-Angola region of Africa; the Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast as well as Mozambique, Madagascar, the Cameroons and what is now Nigeria.

The middle passage

The broad pattern of the African slave trade was quickly established. Ships sailed from Europe to Africa, loaded with goods in order to barter for slaves, who were forcibly shackled and taken across the Atlantic. Then goods and commodities from the Americas, the products of slave labour, were brought back to Europe.

Africans were held in 'forts' along the coast or rivers, often after having been forcibly marched for long distances in shackles. The British made use of these forts as well as establishing their own trading posts from Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and to the Bight of Biafra.

One of the most inhumane and harrowing part of the journey was the passage from Africa to the Americas, which is commonly referred to as the 'middle passage'. It is estimated that approximately 2.5

million enslaved Africans died during this crossing, as a result of hunger, punishment or disease. Desperate to escape, slaves would often jump overboard or rebel when taken on deck occasionally for exercise. The insurrections were frequent on slave ships, and were suppressed using violence and incurring bloodshed.

In the hold, slaves were generally chained together, with hardly any room to move, creating unbearable heat. They fed from communal supplies and were forced to relieve themselves where they lay. Epidemics of fever, scurvy, dysentery (the 'Flux') and smallpox were rife as was sea-sickness. Witnesses to the horrors described it thus:

"I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me." *Olaudah Equiano, 1789*

"Epidemical fevers and fluxes which fill the ship often break out infecting the oppressors and the oppressed, who all fall by the same stroke." *Reverend John Newton, 1788*

In Britain an Act of 1788 provided that the height of the slave deck must not be less than five feet. Before this, an intermediate platform would be erected in the 'tween

decks reducing the space into which slaves were crammed. This same Act limited the number of slaves carried to the proportion of 5 males for every 3 tons. Further legislation reduced the slave per ton ratio from 2.6 per ton before 1788 to one per ton after 1799. Only by the 18th century, did ships customarily have portholes. There are reports that while those slaves that managed to remain alive in these appalling conditions were on deck, the crew would wash down their quarters with vinegar to try and combat the spread of disease.

The earliest type of slave ship reported in the Register was a snow (a type of two-masted vessel, similar to a brig) of about 60 feet in length, 21 feet breadth and 9 feet depth. The largest British slaver was said to be the *Parr*, built at Liverpool in 1797 of 566 tons with a loaded draft of 17 feet. The Register records that she was heavily armed, with twenty 18-pounder cannon and twelve 18-pounder carronades. A ship of this size would carry a crew of 50-70 men. West Indiamen carried most of the cargoes in a direct two way trade to and from England, and they rarely deviated from it. The average size of slave ships increased steadily, from 172 tons in 1782-88 to 294 in 1800-08. Ships in the 100-200 tons range were preferred because their smaller draft meant that they could easily sail along rivers and close into the coast to obtain their cargo.

The Abolitionists

In Britain the abolition campaign began to gather more momentum towards the end of the 18th century. Religious groups, including Quakers,

protested against ill treatment of slaves – although it must be said that some Quakers, notably Woodes Rogers, were purportedly amongst those profiting from the slave trade. The Methodist John Wesley furthered the campaign by calling for slaves' emancipation. The slave trade was abolished by law in Britain and its colonies in 1807. This was largely due to the campaigning of a number of abolitionists, including William Wilberforce (1759-1833) who led the British parliamentary campaign. His birthplace in Hull is now maintained as a museum. Also Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), a shipowner was a founder member of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 along with Granville Sharp and James Ramsey.

Other prominent abolitionists include Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho both of whom escaped slavery and became powerful symbols of the immorality and inhumanity of slavery. Likewise, reports of rebellions on plantations throughout the latter 18th century served to highlight the injustices of enforced labour.

However, slavery continued for some 60 years in the Americas after it was abolished in Britain and its colonies. After abolition of the slave trade the Royal Navy formed a new squadron to suppress the slave trade formed of two ships HMS *Solebay* and HMS *Derwent*, a frigate and sloop respectively. Military and naval campaigns initially meant that it was difficult to police the west coast of Africa due to the ongoing conflict in Europe. Once peace in Europe was established in 1815, more naval ships were available to capture slave ships,

prosecute the traders in courts established along the African coast and to release the enslaved people.

Royal Navy vessels could intercept ships that had signs that it was being used in the slave trade such as manacles, chains and extra planking. Sir George Ralph Collier, the first Commodore of the West Africa Squadron stated how the slave trade

“is more horrible than those who have not had the misfortune to witness it can believe, indeed no description I could give would convey a true picture of its baseness and atrocity”

The Royal Navy continued a 60-year campaign patrolling the west coast of Africa. In the first 30 years they captured over 500 slave ships. This naval activity was seen in Britain as acts of humanitarian work; ultimately thousands of ships were captured and close to 200,000 enslaved people were released.

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Online sources accessed:

Liverpool Maritime Museum, History of Slavery,
<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/history-of-slavery/abolition>
(accessed 19 June 2020).

Mary Willis, *The Conversation*, Royal Navy sailors were appalled by conditions on slave ships, but those they ‘rescued’ rarely experienced true freedom,

<https://theconversation.com/royal-navy-sailors-were-appalled-by-conditions-on-slave-ships-but-those-they-rescued-rarely-experienced-true-freedom-126903> 2020 (accessed 19 June 2020)

Sources for researching slavery and tracing African ancestors

**Lloyd’s Register Foundation
Heritage & Education Centre**

71 Fenchurch Street,
London, EC3M 4BS
T +44 (0) 207 423 2475
E hec.info@lrfoundation.org.uk
<https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk>

Although Lloyd’s Register was founded in 1760, our first records date from 1834, with the exception of our *Register of Ships*. Published since 1764, this unique resource enables research of specific ships for a given period. The earliest *Register* covers the period 1764-1766, and recorded details including: ship’s name, owner, master, where built and year, port sailed from, destined port/country, tonnage, and classification of hull, masts and rigging. The *Register* does not contain details of cargo carried. Digitised copies of the early *Registers* are available via our website. They enable researchers to investigate particular ship’s details and to track ships engaged in specific trading areas by referencing the port from and destined voyage columns.

National Archives

Ruskin Avenue
Kew, TW9 4DU
T: +44 (0)20 8876 3444
E: enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Field Code Changed

National Archives Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade Research Guides

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records/>

The National Archives holds numerous references to people who lived in the West Indies, including adventurers, slaves, sailors, soldiers, transported criminals and Indians who emigrated. Information is held on Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Christopher, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Tobago, Trinidad and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The following records are held:

- **Records of the Colonial Office**
Original correspondence between the Colonial Office and the governors of particular colonies, Entry Books, Acts, Sessional Papers, Government Gazettes, colony statistics, Naval Office Returns, Registers of Correspondence and Registers of Out-Letters for each colony.
- **Records of how people got to the West Indies**
Passenger Lists, Indentured Servants, Transportation, Slave Trade, Liberated Africans, East Indians, American Loyalists.
- **Life Cycle Records**
Records of births, marriages and deaths of slaves and free persons, plus Censuses and wills.

- **Land and Property**
Land grants, maps and plans, Plantation records.
- **Military and related records**
Army: records of regiments, pension registers and casualty returns. Militia, Navy, Dockyards, Royal Marines, Colonial Marines and Merchant Navy.
- **Slaves' Records**
Slave Registry and Slave Compensation Commission 1812-1834.

For further information the interested researcher should obtain a copy of Guy Grannum's *Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors (Public Record Office Readers' Guide No. 11)* Second edition (Kew; Public Record Office, 2002).

Merseyside Maritime Museum

Pier Head
Liverpool
L3 1DN
www.nmgm.org.uk

The Merseyside Maritime Museum holds a specialist collection on slavery, including records of the Earl family who were prominent merchants in the slave trade. Helen Threlfall has compiled a bibliography of works held by the Maritime Archives and Library at the museum entitled *Slavery*, which can be viewed there or at Lloyd's Register's library. In addition the Peter Moores Foundation has produced a useful booklet, *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity*, which summarises the history of slavery and the Liverpool connection.

Guildhall Library

Aldermanbury
London, EC2 2EJ

T: +44 (0)20 7332 1868
F: +44 (0)20 7332 1870

The Guildhall Library holds the historic records of Lloyd's of London, which have information on slave trade voyages.

National Maritime Museum

Park Row
Greenwich
London, SE10 9NF
T +44 (0)20 8858 4422
www.nmm.ac.uk
library@nmm.ac.uk

The National Maritime Museum purchased the Michael Graham-Stewart collection in August 2002. Built up privately over more than twelve years, the collection contains paintings, prints and drawings, artefacts, coins and medals, photographs, manuscripts, newspapers, ephemera and rare books, offering a unique insight into this important and difficult subject area.

Other useful collections:

Bristol Archives

'B' Bond Warehouse
Smeaton Road
Bristol
BS1 6XN
T +44 (0)117 922 4224
bro@bristol.gov.uk
www.archives.bristol.gov.uk

International Slavery Museum

Royal Albert Dock,
Liverpool, L3 4AQ
T +44 (0) 151 478 4499

<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum>

The International Slavery Museum aims to increase understanding of transatlantic and other forms of enslavement. They explore their impact and legacy through their collections, public engagement and research.

Lancaster Maritime Museum

Custom House
St George's Quay
Lancaster
LA1 1RB
T +44 (0)1524 64637
F +44 (0)1524 841692
lancastermaritimemuseum@lancashire.gov.uk
www.lancashire.gov.uk/education/museums/lancaster/maritime.asp

Wilberforce House,

23-25 High Street, Hull, HU1 1NQ
T +44 (0) 1482 300300
<https://www.hcandl.co.uk/museums-and-galleries/wilberforce-house/wilberforce-house-galleries>
Birthplace of William Wilberforce, campaigner against the slave trade. The museum tells the story of the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition, as well as dealing with contemporary slavery.

The National Archives

Rappaport Centre
Victoria Park
St John's Antigua
West Indies
T + 268 462 3946

The Registrar General's Office

High Court
High Street
St John's Antigua

West Indies
T + 268 462 3929

Museum of Antigua and Barbuda

Long Street
Box 103
St John's
Antigua and Barbuda
West Indies
www.antiguamuseums.org
nicholsond@candw.ag

National Museum of African American History and Culture

15th Street and Constitution
Avenue, NW,
Washington DC, US
www.si.edu/museums/african-american-museum
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/slavery-and-freedom>
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/nmaahc-digital-resources-guide> and Digital Resources

Part of the Smithsonian Institution and enables learning about the richness and diversity of the African American experience, what it means to their lives and how it helped shape the United States as a nation.

Digital resources - online collections and databases:

Transatlantic Slave Trade Database

This database was compiled by various institutions, academics and contributors. It consolidates the information from several archives and lists hundreds of slave trade voyages.

<https://www.slavevoyages.org>

University College London - Centre for the Study of British Slave-ownership

Legacies of British slave-ownership database

The Centre is building upon two earlier projects, the Legacies of British Slave-ownership project and the Structure and significance of British Caribbean slave ownership 1763-1833 project, and has compiled an extensive database:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Academic Institutions:

Institute of Historical Research

(printed global collection of sources)
<https://www.history.ac.uk/library/collections/history-slavery>

University of Liverpool, Antislavery Network

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/politics/research/research-projects/akn/>

University of Liverpool, Centre for the Study of International Slavery

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/csis/>

University of Nottingham, Institute for the Study of Slavery (ISOS)

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/isos/index.aspx>

Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation, University of Hull (slavery, emancipation,

diaspora studies and modern day slavery)

<https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/wilberforce-institute/wilberforce-institute>

General reference books on the slave trade:

R. Anstey, *Liverpool: The African Slave Trade and Abolition* (Liverpool, 1976)

Cameron & Crook, *Liverpool: Capital of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool, 1992)

Sir George Collier, *Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, volume 12* (1812)

Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade - A Census* (Wisconsin; University of Wisconsin, 1970)

P. Edwards *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (Longmans, 1988)

P. Fryer *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (Pluto Press, 1984)

G. Grannum, *Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors* Second edition (PRO Readers' Guide No. 11) (London; PRO Publications, 2002)

Peter Grindal, *Opposing the Slavers: The Royal Navy's Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London; I B Tauris & Co, 2016)

Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (New York; Cornell University, 2012)

P.E. Lovejoy, *Transformation in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1983)

Mannix & Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1518-1865* (London; Longmans, 1963)

S. I. Martin *Britain's Slave Trade* (London; Channel Four Books, 1999)

Merseyside Maritime Museum *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity* (guide to the gallery supported by the Peter Moores Foundation)

K. Patience *Zanzibar: Slavery and the Royal Navy* (Zanzibar Publications, 2000)

E. Reynolds *Stand The Storm: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Allison & Busby, 1985)

Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London; Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2015)

A. Tibbles (ed), *Trans-Atlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity* (Liverpool; National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1994)

J. Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London, 1992)

James Walvin, *A Short History of Slavery* (London; Penguin, 2007)

James Walvin, *The Trader, the Owner, the Slave: Parallel Lives in the age of slavery* (London; Jonathon Cape, 2007)

G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers* (London, 1897)

Mary Willis, *Envoys of Abolition:
British Naval Officers and the
Campaign Against the Slave Trade in*

West Africa (Liverpool; Liverpool
University Press, 2019)

Researchers should check availability, accessibility and opening times with the repositories listed before making a personal visit.

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