

## Guernsey & the Slave Trade



Western Europe and America owe much of their wealth to slavery but the cost, particularly to Africa, in lost culture and economic opportunity was enormous and is still felt today. Guernsey, like most trading nations, took advantage of what was regarded as *'a perfectly respectable trade'* with Guernsey people investing in related businesses, supplying ships and providing goods to support the slave trade.

### SLAVERY – A European Invention?

#### Myth 1

Slavery was not invented by the Europeans. In fact, by the time the first Europeans reached West Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, slavery was already long established between neighbouring warring tribes.

#### Myth 2

Africans were NOT routinely kidnapped by bands of white men. Although this did happen occasionally, the reality was that slaves were generally taken prisoner by their fellow Africans in tribal wars before being sold on to European agents by African Kings, Chieftains and officials.

Back Story.....

## Barbary Pirates

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries most Europeans were concerned with the type of slavery conducted by the Barbary pirates. These marauding bands of sailors travelled around the Atlantic seaboard of Africa and the Mediterranean coasts preying upon Christian shipping and isolated villages.

For over 300 years, about 5,000 white slaves were captured each year. So many white Christian slaves were taken that the English Parliament ordered churches to collect money to buy back English slaves. The average cost of buying someone out of slavery was £38, women cost more and attractive women could cost astronomical amounts.



Between 1550 and 1730 the city of Algiers was said to have a continuous white slave population of around 25,000. The cities of Tunis and Tripoli held a further 7,500 Christian men, women and children.

## White or Black?

Europeans were outraged by the treatment of their fellow Christians at the hands of Islamic owners in North Africa but there was no one to protect the black slaves who were being shipped out of West Africa. This was referred to as the “Guinea trade” or “African trade” and the ships involved were known as *Guineamen*.



## A Respectable Trade

When America was discovered and colonised an insatiable demand for people to work the land and help to establish communities encouraged the idea that the human trade in slaves was essential.

White (and black) traders and business men increasingly chose to ignore the fact that many of those kidnapped in Africa and forced into bondage came from sophisticated and successful cultures choosing to see their traditional dress and incomprehensible language as a sign of inferiority.



Wars between African tribes enabled European traders to pay rival Africans to attack and kidnap each other. Those captured were treated as primitive and inferior by the Europeans and harsh treatment made it impossible for them to fight back. Trading in largely black humans was soon regarded as “a perfectly respectable trade”.

## What was a human life worth?

Slaves were bartered, swapped for cloth or beads, boats or beer. The records show that slaves were bought and sold for items such as these listed below

### **East India goods;**

Bafts, Bandanoes, Byrampauats, Chilloes, Guinea stuffs, Neganipauts, Niccanees, Red and Blue Chintz, Romals, Sastracuneis,

### **Manchester goods;**

Beads, Boats, Bottled ale and porter, Brushes, Cargo hats, Canvas, Cases, Common caps, Coral, Cordage, Cotton chilloes, Cushtaes, Earthenware, Empty kegs, Fine hats, Flints, Glass ware, Guns, Hair trunks, Hardware, Iron Bars, Jars, Kettles, Kilmarnock caps, Knives, Lead bars, Lead basins, Leg and hand manilloes, Linen Britanias, Locks, Looking glasses, Neganipauts, Oil, Paints, Pans, Photaes, Pipes, Pitch, Provisions, Powder, Romal handkerchiefs, Scarlet cloth, Silk handkerchiefs, Slops, Shot, Snuff boxes, Spirits, Stone ware, Swords, Tar, Tobacco, Tobacco boxes, Trade chests, Umbrellas.



## The Triangular Slave-Trade

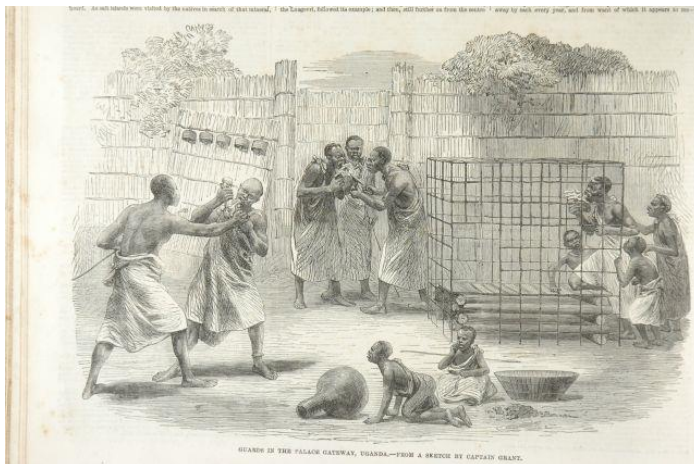
The trade in slaves worked on a triangular route which comprised of an

**'Outward'**, **'Middle'** and **'Return'** passage. Each leg of the journey saw different goods being transported. The **Outward Passage** from English ports carried items such as those listed in the **'Manchester Goods'** above. These were then traded for slaves off the coast of West Africa.



## Kidnapped!

Men, women and children unlucky enough to be captured were kept in holding forts on the coast until slave ships arrived to transport them across the Atlantic Ocean.

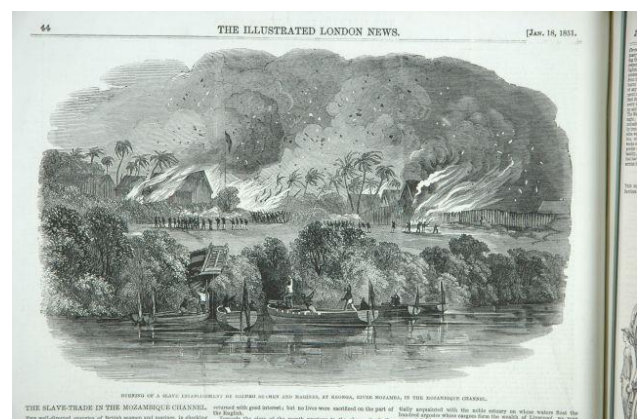


The voyage that carried Africans into slavery across the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean was called the **'Middle Passage'**. When they arrived at the African coast the ships' captains were anxious to make their stay as short as possible to avoid disease and mutiny.

At first slaves were taken from villages along the seaboard

but black traders moved increasingly inland as the demand grew. African towns and villages lost their strongest and most valuable people as the traders targeted those who would command the highest prices from the white masters. These weakened communities became even more vulnerable.

Slaves in West Africa were often collected during the rainy season which although regarded as 'unhealthy' by the Europeans, was the most profitable as they could get slaves to the West Indies in time for the harvesting season when the need for labour was most needed. Gathering slaves in the dry season was



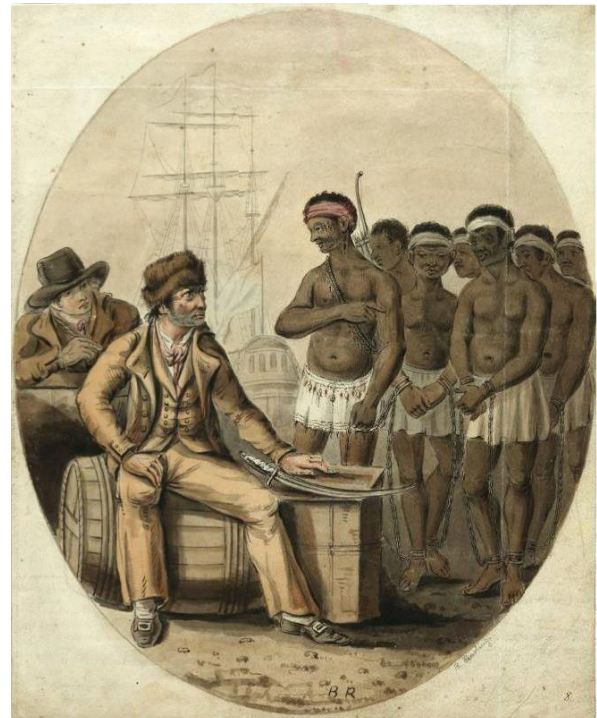
more pleasant for Europeans but it meant that there were more slavers operating along the coast and so it took longer to gather up the numbers required. This could delay the ship so its arrival in the markets in Barbados would be too late to get a good price.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the average purchase price of a slave in West Africa was goods to the value of £20.

## Transported!

Slaves were taken from the holding forts, shackled together in pairs with leg-irons and carried to the ships in dugout canoes.

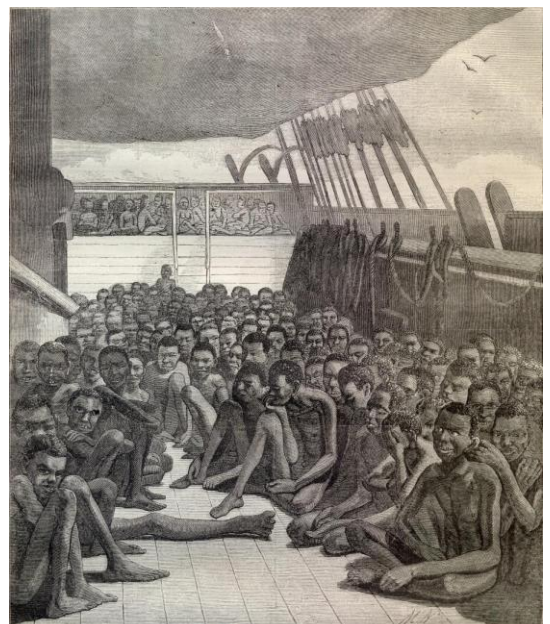
Once aboard they were branded with a red-hot iron to show who owned them and their clothes were removed.



They were housed in the ship's hold like any other cargo. The men were kept in chains while women and children were allowed to go free. Slaves lay on specially built shelves with about 0.5 metres of vertical space, the men still fettered in pairs.

As long as they were in the hold slaves had to remain lying flat on their backs. Once the available spaces were filled the captains would set sail.

Once at sea, the slaves were brought up out of their steamy dungeon each morning. The men's leg-irons were linked to a chain running down the centre of the ship's deck to prevent them jumping overboard. On some ships they were made to dance for exercise. The slaves would receive their meal, usually a kind of porridge made from maize or millet. A second meal might be provided in the afternoon, usually the same as the first. While on deck a





good captain had the slaves washed down with warm vinegar and scrubbed. Some did not bother and in rough weather the slaves would not be allowed out at all.

Shackled in darkness and filth, seasickness and disease were rife. The heat in the hold could reach over 30°C and the slaves often had no access to toilets or washing facilities. So foul was the smell of slave ships that other vessels took care to steer well clear of them. In such conditions disease spread easily, and many slaves died.

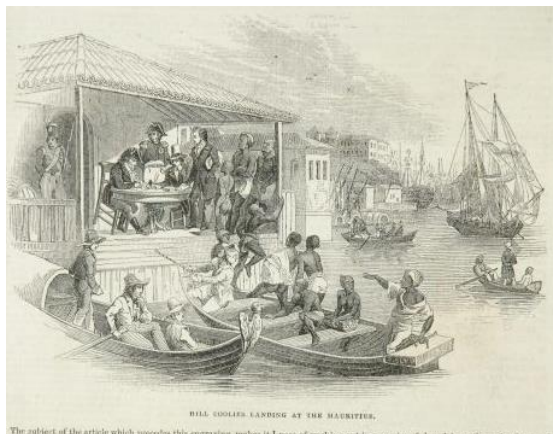
It was common for hundreds to die in an epidemic; occasionally every African on board was dead by the time the ship entered Caribbean waters. Their bodies would be thrown overboard.

Slaves were valuable cargo so a good captain would do his best to keep as many alive as possible. But many slave captains were notorious for their cruelty. Often the ships were badly managed and badly provisioned and the crew and captain had no interest in the slaves as human beings. The actual voyage could take anything from 6 weeks to three months, sometimes in appalling weather.

It has been estimated that between 9 million and 11 million people taken from Africa by European traders survived the journey across the Atlantic

But as an average of 1/8 of all slaves were lost it can be estimated that a further 1½ million Africans are buried in the Atlantic Ocean somewhere between Africa and the Americas.

## For Sale!



When the slave ships reached the Caribbean Islands at the end of the voyage they were brought to shore in canoes and the 'cargo' was put up for sale. Africans were considered particularly suited to the work as they were used to the climate.

*" the slaves were brought in one at a time and mounted upon the chair before the bidders, who handled and inspected them with as little concern as if they had been examining cattle at Smithfield Market".*

The Africans were inspected for physical faults and auctioned like meat in a meat-market.



There was no interest in communicating with the Africans so it was impossible for them to respond. If they tried to speak or help for each other they were more likely to be separated and violently punished.

A “prime” slave or *bozal* sold in the Caribbean was worth around £60 – a healthy profit. A female slave brought about 80% of the value of a male slave. Prices for healthy slaves rose throughout the 18th century:

1709 - £20

1780 - £50

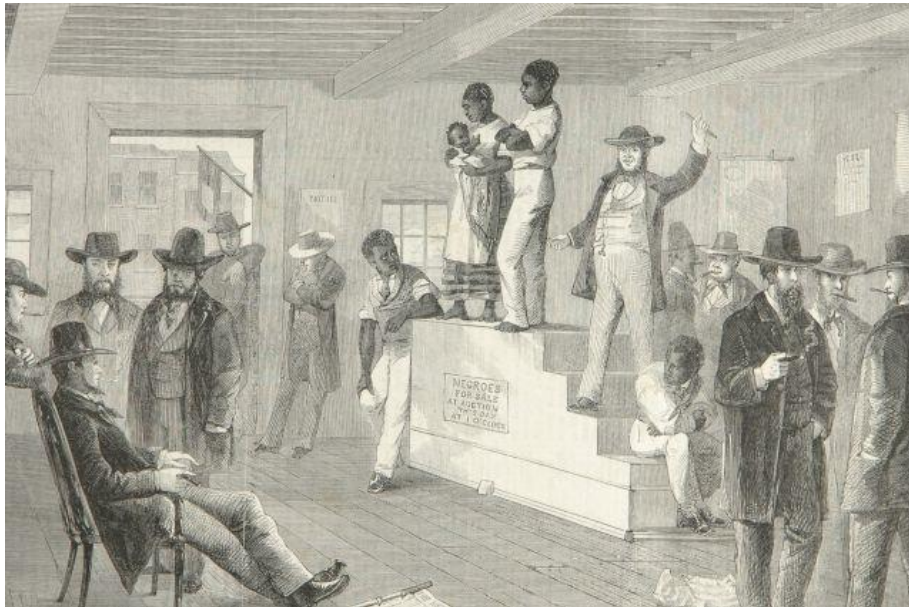
1800 - £100

### **‘Refuse’ Slaves**

Slaves who were not bought because they were too sick or weak were known as ‘refuse’ slaves. At an agreed time, the doors of the auction yard were thrown open and a scramble of buyers rushed in to grab any ‘refuse’ slaves they could get their hands on. Any slaves too sick to be of service were left to die on the wharf. Those slaves who were referred to as “refuse” because they were sick, too old or perhaps because they had mutinied were sold “by the candle” and usually went for £1 to £2. Money never changed hands for the slaves – the deal was always made in trade goods or merchandise such as fabrics, kerchiefs, muskets, powder, shot, gunflints, iron knives, cutlasses, beads and brandy. In the West Indies the slaves were sold for molasses, rum, raw cotton, coffee and tobacco. The profits of the sales were only turned into hard cash when the goods were returned to England and sold there.

Plantation owners liked to pick and choose their slaves to get a 'mixture' of people of different nations. This made the Africans as a group less of a threat as they often spoke different languages and had different cultures.

Families were often deliberately split up and sent to different plantations never to meet again.



## On the Plantation

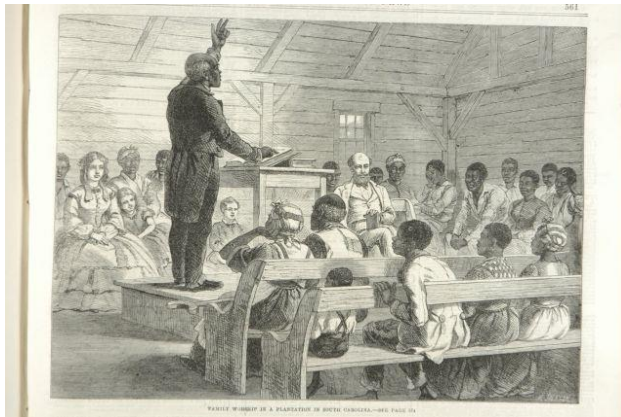
Once sold at auction the slaves were taken to their new home - the Plantation. The owners branded the slaves with "estate marks" to show which plantation they belonged to and to make it easier to identify runaway slaves. These same marks were used on cattle, barrels and other goods.

New slaves took a long time to become used to plantation life and many failed to survive long enough to become used to their new living conditions and climate. Diseases like dysentery and pneumonia killed many in the West Indies sugar plantations. Huts built by the plantation owners for their slaves were flimsy protection against the cold winds of winter.

Food was often dull and lacked nourishment. Meat was a rarity; and some owners decided it was 'bad for slaves'. Salt Herrings, sent from England instead of meat, had often turned rotten before they arrived. On some plantations slave families were given small gardens where they were expected to grow yams and vegetables and raise pigs and poultry.

Often, slaves were given new names, although many hated giving up their African names. Roman names, Scottish names and names of famous people were popular amongst plantation owners.



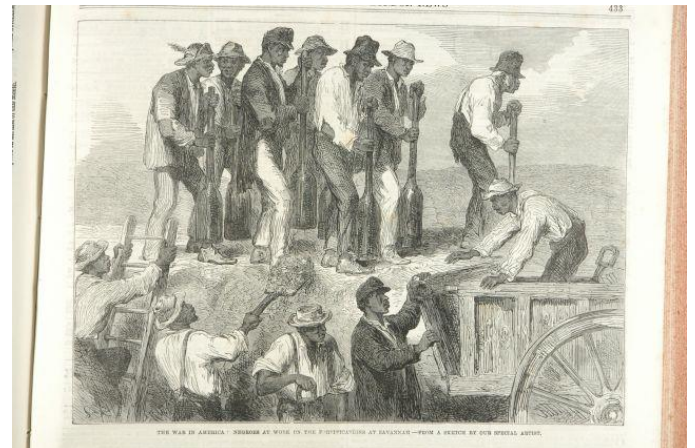


On some plantations they were encouraged to become 'godly'- and lose their 'pagan' ways, attending church with the Plantation owners. As this was a respite from work many slaves welcomed this.

## Work in the fields

Work on the sugar plantations was extremely hard and required large numbers of workers. All slaves, including children and the old, were expected to work. Discipline was extremely harsh and, in some cases, very cruel.

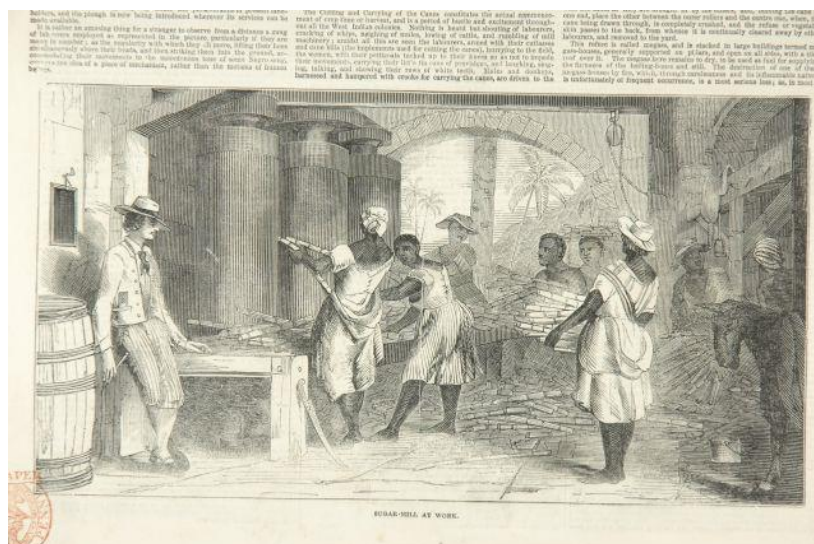
First, land had to be cleared and ploughed, then divided into squares of about one metre. Holes six inches (15cm) deep were dug for plants, a back-breaking task for the line of slaves who moved slowly across the field, row by row, with the whips of the overseers hovering over them. At harvest time the cane was cut, stripped, tied in bundles and loaded on to donkeys to be carried to the mills.



## The Sugar Mills

Sugar was extracted from the cane in the mills by crushing the cane then boiling the juice that drained off. It was not unusual for a slave to have his

fingers trapped and crushed in the giant rollers as he fed in the cane. In the boilers, the scum that formed on top of the boiling syrup had to be ladled off; a tricky and dangerous job. The boiling liquid

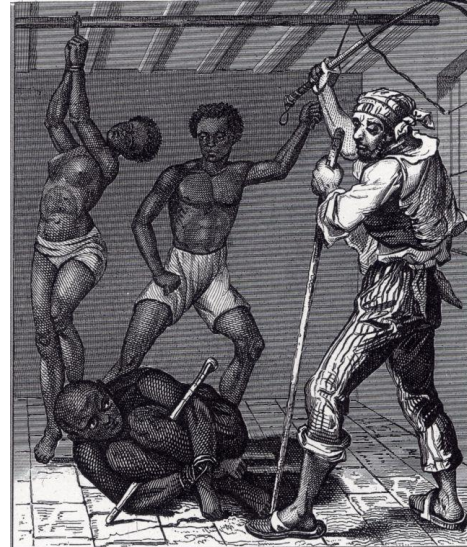


passed through five or six boilers before it was finally transferred to a cooler, where the sugar crystallised. The refined sugar could now be loaded into large barrels to await transportation back to Bristol or Liverpool on the Return Passage.

Working in the boiler houses was very unpleasant. The stench, like sickly manure, was filthy, and the heat terrific. Limbs swelled in the hot, damp atmosphere and even the strongest slaves, specially picked for the job, could not work in the boiler house for more than four hours at a time.

## No Escape!

The slaves existed for nothing except work. Not all were cruelly treated, but many did suffer savage and horrible punishments. Worst of all they had no future to look forward to. They were condemned to a life of endless work. Many slaves tried to retain their dignity and to learn the language but few had the opportunity. Many tried to escape but most were recaptured and given terrible punishments as a lesson to others. Whippings were common and on some plantations many crueller punishments were carried out by ruthless overseers.



## The Return Passage

Meanwhile, the captains totted up the profits for the investors or 'Merchant Venturers' and the crew began cleaning out the ship to take on a cargo of colonial produce, which had to be carried in better conditions than the slaves had endured. As soon as the ship was ready and loaded, the final part of the trade triangle, The Return Passage, could begin.

Having loaded the ships with sugar, tobacco and rum paid for from the proceeds of the sale of slaves, the captains would try to set sail for England on the final part of their triangular voyage before the 'Hurricane season' began in mid-July. This was to avoid much higher insurance rates that were demanded for ships leaving at more 'dangerous' times of year.

The dangerous journey home followed the trade winds but with the risk of Atlantic storms, could take between 6-8 weeks. A ship that sank, or was wrecked near the English coast, could mean disaster for a single owner. This was the reason most Merchant Venturers shared the risk, and therefore the profit, by investing jointly in the trade.



Once back in England the cargo would be unloaded and sold for often a very good profit. Money was thus realised and could then be returned to the Merchants, ship owners or shareholders.



# Slavery and the Guernsey Connection

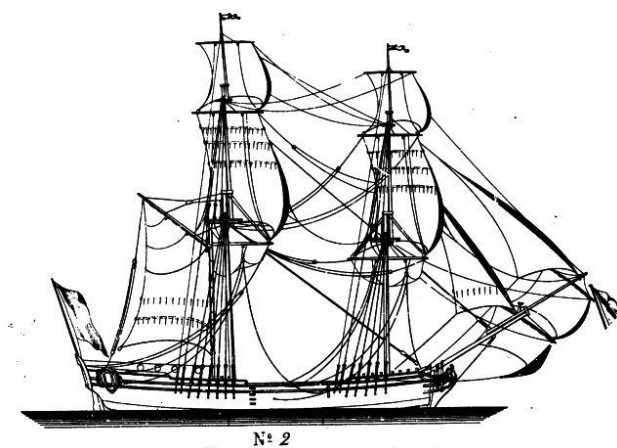


Records show that Guernsey was involved in the notorious 'triangular trade'. The trade was dominated by ships using the ports of Liverpool, Bristol and London in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, so Guernsey merchants directed their vessels to follow a straight forward Atlantic crossing which often stopped off at Madeira to pick up wine for the planters. They then returned with the produce of the plantations.

Guernsey was involved as;

- Islanders who were actively and directly involved in the trade of slaves e.g. Thomas Ebworthy of the *Anne Galley* (registered in Guernsey 1740 ).
- Ships known to be involved whether registered in the islands or not. (e.g. the *African* and the *Fanny*.)
- Islanders' involvement with the supply of goods or services.

Records are scarce because of the Navigation Acts that meant that with the exception of the Newfoundland trade, a Guernsey registered vessel wishing to trade with the British colonies had to clear from a British port. This restricted direct island activity in the slave trade.



## Guernsey Slavers

In January 1741 the *Anne Galley*, a 135-ton snow registered in Guernsey and owned by P. and N. Dobrée, W.

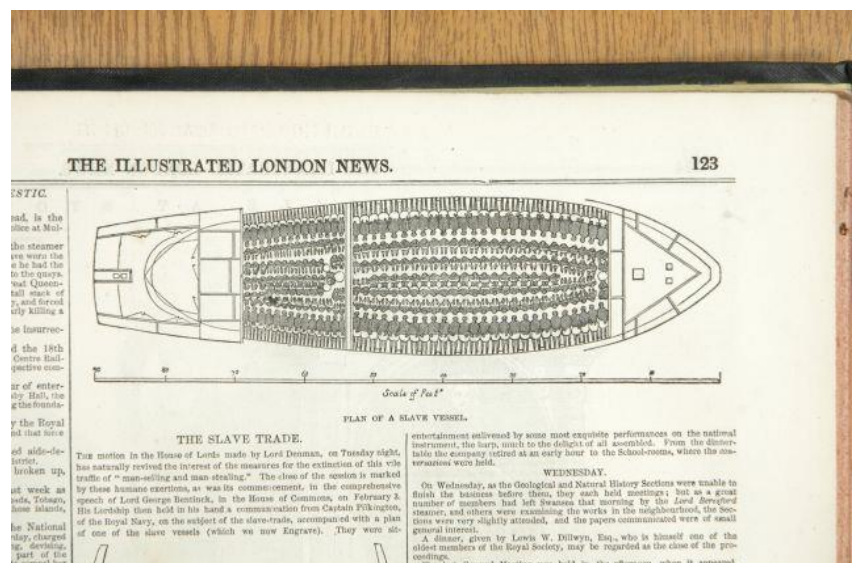
H. and J. Brock, Daniel Falla and P. Stephens left London on a voyage to West Africa. She was armed with 14 guns and had 30 crewmen. The main backer of the voyage was Morgan Vaughan. Of the 293 slaves loaded in West Africa only 239 survived the passage to the West Indies. This voyage clearly had some problems as the master, Thomas Ebsworthy, was sued by one of the share holders, Pierre Dobrée for the net proceeds of the Negroes he had “mistakenly” sold in Barbados. Dobrée claimed that he had misappropriated the money from the sale of eight slaves; he then enlarged his claim to cover the delivery of 25 elephant tusks and a piece of camwood.

Ebsworthy counter-claimed against the owners for a butt of rum. However it did his career no harm as Ebsworthy went on to command at least two more slaving ventures out of Bristol.

Nicholas Dobree maintained connections with other members of the family in London and in Nantes. Nantes was a centre for the slave trade in France.

The ship the *Charming Nancy*, a 50-ton Guernsey-built ship, made four slaving voyages out of Liverpool in the 1750s.

A John Mauger was captain of a ship called the *Cumberland*. This is recorded as having offloaded 89 slaves in Barbados in June 1749. Mauger had loaded 109 slaves in West Africa so 20 had died or been lost on the voyage. The following year he was captain of the Guernsey registered 180-ton ship called the *African*, which was armed with eight cannon and had a crew of 28 men. She left London in January 1750 and called in on Guernsey on her way to Guinea where 136 slaves were loaded. In September 1750 Mauger sold 111 slaves in Barbados before he returned to Falmouth in January 1751. Two of the investors in the voyage were William Le Mesurier. He owned 22 male and 5 female slaves who were sold for £702 and Daniel Tupper is recorded as having taken an “old man” for £15.



In June 1762 a London registered ship called the *Fanny* with her captain Bareaud ( Barreau?) left St. Peter Port in Guernsey bound for Senegal in West Africa where she loaded 189 slaves. According to the Lloyds List published in January 1762, Barreau and the *Fanny* were captured on the return voyage, either by pirates or privateers, after he had sold 165 slaves in Martinique.

## Another Life

In the early days of the slave trade it was rare for slaves to be aboard ships on the return journey to England or the Channel Islands, although one or more personal servants were sometimes kept to accompany their master. These were often slaves who had particular skills or were able through chance, to impress their masters. Olaudah Equiano (see below) was one of these. Some were taken to England just to show the wealth of their owner. Others, especially children, were bought as toys or gifts and although some were undoubtedly well loved and cared for, most were regarded as 'pets' rather than as human beings.



This picture in the Guernsey Museum collection shows Anne de Beauvoir and a slave child who may have been given to her by her husband -to -be. The child has a silver collar with 'de Beauvoir' written on it.



## Olaudah Equiano

One slave who became very famous through the publication of the story of his experiences was Olaudah Equiano. *'The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings'* \* is the extraordinary life story of an extraordinary man and it has a link to Guernsey.



Born in about 1745 in what is now Nigeria, Olaudah Equiano was captured at age 11 and transported to Virginia. He was sold and then resold to Michael Henry Pascal, an officer in the British Navy who brought him to London – and to Guernsey. Olaudah was transferred to a ship bound for England in 1757 with his master. During the long voyage he was renamed Gustavus Vassa and, thanks to a young American called Richard Baker who befriended him, he learnt some English. He also discovered books:

*“ I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I had often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent”*

Gustavus, by now about 12 or 13 years old then travelled to Guernsey with his master. The ship *“was part in owned by a merchant, one Nicholas Doberry.”* (sic)

Gustavus is grateful that he did not have his face scarred for ornamented like many other Africans as it made it easier for him to be accepted.

*“ When we arrived at Guernsey, my master placed me to board and lodge with one of his mates, who had a wife and family there; and some months afterwards he went to England, and left me in the care of this mate, together with my friend Dick. This mate had a little daughter aged about five or six years, with whom I used to be much delighted. I had often observed, that when her mother washed her face it looked very rosy; but when she washed mine it did not look so; I therefore tried oftentimes myself if I could not by washing make my face of the same colour as my little playmate (Mary), but it was all in vain; and I now began to be mortified at the difference in our complexions. This woman behaved to me with great kindness and attention; and taught n everything in the same manners she did her own child, and indeed in every respect treated me as such. I remained here till the summer of the year 1757, when my master, being appointed first lieutenant of his*

*Majesty's ship the Roebuck sent for Dick and me and his old mate: on this we all left Guernsey."*

With his master, Olaudah / Gustavus saw military action in the Seven Years War but having been promised his freedom - he was let down by Pascal and sold into the horrors of West Indian Slavery. However, with his likeable personality, hard work, intelligence and determination he overcomes the worst of his problems and emerges many years later a free man and a successful business man with a determination to sell his story.

His 'Interesting Narrative' went into nine editions and subscribers included General John Doyle, Governor of Guernsey in the early 1800s and Paul le Messurier, at one time a Lord Mayor of London.



John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church was a lifelong supporter of the anti - slavery movement, apparently reading 'An Interesting Narrative' on his death bed.

'The Narrative' is a lively and readable journey through his life and experiences as a slave but it also highlights the difficulties of trying to make sense of an alien culture and learning to live within it. His observations are as relevant today as they were 120 years ago.

## The Abolition of Slavery

By the 1740s slavery was beginning to be seen as an offence against 'natural law' by a small but growing section of British society. As early as 1760 'The Society of Friends' (Quakers) took up an anti-slavery stance on religious grounds.

Olaudah Equiano became the first black African to publish attacks against the slave trade travelling across the country to promote his book 'The Interesting Narrative'. People flocked to subscribe to it and nine editions were printed between 1789 and 1795. Equiano's narrative and that of the few other slaves who were able to tell their stories helped to change the climate amongst the more enlightened members of society.

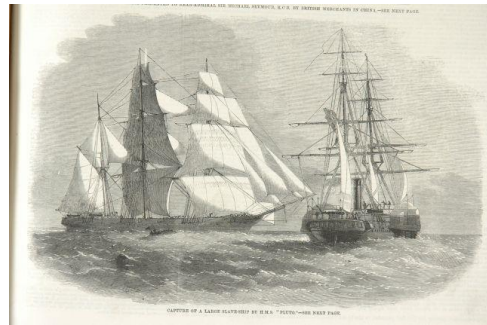
Clergymen, such as the young Thomas Clarkson, gathered evidence of the atrocities conducted aboard the slave ships. He collected shackles, thumb-screws, mouth-openers, and other instruments of torture used on slave ships. When he exhibited these things many people were shocked and began to actively support the abolitionists.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the anti-slavery movement was successfully bringing the plight of conditions aboard slave ships to wider public attention. In

1799 Parliament restricted slave ships to the ports of Liverpool, Bristol and London in order to monitor the conditions onboard.

By the time of William Wilberforce's bill to Parliament in 1807 the morality of this 'Respectable Trade' was being questioned by many and despite the fears of economic collapse without this trade in humans the tide had turned.

On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1807 the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill finally became law. Despite this several merchants still set about supplying the slavers. Britain was forced to establish the Blackbird patrol in 1820 and had to use the Royal Navy to suppress the slave trade. Over the following 30 years various treaties were signed which increased the Royal Navy's powers to stop and search suspect vessels. As part of the abolition movement a number of freed slaves who had become preachers, toured the country raising public awareness of the plight of black African slaves. The end of the plantation system was ensured when the Emancipation Act finally became law and took effect on 1st August 1834.



Despite the passing of the Act slavery continued to be practised in other areas of the world for decades to come.

A group of Guernsey Methodists petitioned the House of Lords in 1832 to protest that Slavery had not been abolished in the Colonies, and a prominent member of the anti-slavery convention was Sir John Jeremie, a Guernsey advocate who became Governor of Sierra Leone from 1840-1841.

For further resources linked to a study of Slavery:

[www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)  
[www.jerseyheritagetrust.org](http://www.jerseyheritagetrust.org)

Reading:

*'The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings' by Olaudah Equiano. ISBN 0-14-243716-6. Available through Guernsey Museums & Galleries.*

*'A Respectable Trade'. This novel, which covers slavery from both points of view, is written by popular author and historian Philippa Gregory. ISBN 0-00-647337-7. Available through Guernsey Museums & Galleries.*

With grateful thanks to Doug Ford for the use of his article 'A Respectable Trade or Against Human Dignity' published in the Jersey Heritage Trust Heritage Magazine 2006.

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