

Sugar Coated Tears

On March 25 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed through parliament. It was made illegal for British ships to be involved in the trade, marking the beginning of the end for the transatlantic traffic in human beings.

This exhibition shows the extraordinary collaboration between photographer, Vanley Burke, and blacksmith, Lofty Wright. They have reproduced some of the instruments used in the slave trade; forked wooden yokes that controlled captives, irons that bit into wrists and ankles, muzzles and braces that were used as punishments. All these show the shocking reality of this barbaric trade as well as the psychological and physical impact of items produced in the West Midlands.

Sugar Coated Tears explores the links between industry in the West Midlands and the commercial gains of slavery. Wolverhampton may not be a port but the city's role as a manufacturer of iron was crucial to the transatlantic slave trade.

Vanley Burke is an international artist who was born in Jamaica. It was here, as well as on the other Caribbean islands, that enslaved Africans were forced to work on plantations producing sugar and other goods for the European market. Lofty Wright, a locally trained artist and blacksmith uses traditional smithing techniques. The blacksmith trade once supported and was fuelled by the slave trade.

Alongside *Sugar Coated Tears*, we have *Value: One Life* by Victoria Bhurger of cast caramelised sugar manillas. These 'bracelets' were originally used as currency and traded for people. As the sculpture changes over time it raises questions about the value of human life and the dismal commerce of the slave trade.