

A Wales Office  
Publication



# WALES AND SLAVERY

Marking 200 years  
since the Abolition of the  
Slave Trade Act



# FOREWORD

There can be few episodes in the history of the world that have been more shameful or inhuman than the transatlantic slave trade.

Wales was part of this: Welsh men and women made large profits from slavery. Equally people from Wales fought hard for its abolition, with 1807 marking the beginning of the long road to the eventual abolition of slavery within the former British Empire by 1833.

Today, it is difficult to understand how this appalling crime against humanity - fuelled by racism and greed - was ever acceptable, let alone legal. But what is even harder to comprehend is that, although slavery was finally legally abolished after a long struggle in the Americas in 1888, it still continues in practice today.

Over 20 million people across the world are estimated still to be suffering in the miserable daily reality of slavery and servitude. Modern day slavery – including human trafficking, enforced prostitution and bonded labour – remains a lucrative industry, generating an estimated £24.6 billion in profits every year. So the international battle against slavery must continue.

Just as people in Wales joined the campaign against apartheid in South Africa – and were thanked for doing so by Nelson Mandela when he received the honorary freedom of the City of Cardiff in 1998, so we must expose and fight all such oppression today and in future.

This bicentenary provides our nation with the opportunity for a salutary visit back to acknowledge our debt to those who suffered and died as a result of this vile trade in Wales, and those of different races, faiths, and classes who fought for its abolition.

It reminds us to redouble our efforts to combat racism and to assert our insistence that every human being is equal, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, age or disability.

As we reflect on the achievements of the abolitionists, we should also recognise the contributions of Black African, Caribbean and other minority ethnic communities in making Wales the modern, vibrant, richly multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-faith country it is today.

The most fitting way to mark this 200th anniversary and pay tribute to the struggles of the abolitionists – both black and white – is to celebrate our diversity in Wales and increase our determination to tackle global injustice and poverty across the world.

## Peter Hain MP

Secretary of State for Wales

March 2007



## The Slave Compensation Commission

The Wales Office has its own direct historic link with the abolition of the slave trade.

Gwydyr House – home to the Wales Office in Whitehall, London – was used to accommodate the Slave Compensation Commission for part of its life in the 19th Century.

The Commission was one of the more controversial outcomes of the abolition of slavery. It was established in 1833 following the decision by the British Government to set aside £20 million to compensate planters, slave traders and slave owners for the abolition. Today that figure would equate to £2billion. Nothing was ever awarded to a former slave.



Gwydyr House, London

The Wales Office would like to thank: National Museum Wales, The National Trust, Swansea University, Bangor University, the Paul Robeson Wales Trust and Hywel Francis MP for their help in producing this booklet.

For further information on the “Everywhere in Chains...”: Wales and Slavery exhibition being shown at the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea from May 07 go to: [www.museumwales.ac.uk](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk)

For further information on events being arranged by the National Trust to mark the bicentenary please go to: [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

For further information on Paul Robeson Wales Trust events go to: [www.croesoproject.org](http://www.croesoproject.org)

For further copies of this booklet please email: [wales.office@walesoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:wales.office@walesoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

Or write to:  
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To tell us what you are doing to commemorate the bicentenary please email: [wales.office@walesoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:wales.office@walesoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

Cover image: ‘The Negro Coach Boy portrait’ hanging at Erddig Hall, Wrexham

It was at the end of the fourteenth century when the first West Africans were forcibly seized from their home villages, chained up in the bowels of stinking ships, and transported across the sea to be sold into lives of slavery.

For generation after generation afterwards, millions of Africans followed this grim route, clamped with leg irons and traded like pieces of personal property right across the world, to toil for their mostly white masters. In total, some twelve million were transported - and some three million died during passage.

Those who survived were bought and sold by families, by employers, by rich individuals. They were forced to endure lifelong violence and racist abuse, treated as a subhuman species. When they were sold on, slaves became the literal property of their owners, living in squalid conditions as servants, gardeners, plantation workers, chattels, often raped or beaten.

The transatlantic slave trade followed a triangular route. Traders set out from European ports towards the West African coast. There they bought people in exchange for goods – including copper bracelets produced in Swansea’s many copper works – and loaded them onto the slave ships. After a voyage of some six to eight weeks, they arrived in the Americas and those Africans who had survived the journey were offloaded for sale.

The ships then returned to Europe with sugar, coffee, tobacco, rice and cotton, the products of the slaves’ harsh labour.

Britain was right at the centre of this trade – one of the most shameful acts of exploitation and oppression in the history of humankind. British industry and ports were intimately intertwined in it and enormous wealth generated from it.

Yet, to our eventual credit, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, famously championed by William Wilberforce, made Britain the first country in the world to abolish the whole barbarous business.

2007 marks the bicentenary of Parliament’s abolition of the slave trade. It meant that it was illegal to trade in slaves throughout the British Empire and banned British ships being involved in the trade.

Two hundred years on, the transporting of slaves across the Atlantic still stands as one of the most inhuman enterprises

in history. The record of Wales – and of Britain generally – in its links with the slave trade is hardly a proud one. On the contrary, a great many Welshmen prospered from slavery and much of the wealth of Wales at that time was based on the trade.

However, many prominent Welshmen and women supported the 1807 Bill to abolish British involvement with the trade and many joined the campaign for the abolition of slavery in America.

It seems extraordinary today, to consider how many Welsh people benefited – directly or indirectly – from the slave trade.

They included Welshmen who owned plantations and slaves abroad; Welsh captains and seamen serving on ships that transported slaves; ship builders and their workmen, making ships used in the trade; people living in stately homes financed by the slave trade; labourers in industries financed by money from the slave trade; and crafts people making trinkets and other goods to be sold in exchange for slaves.

It could be argued that the Welsh and, more generally, British involvement in this shameful trade helped to fuel the industrial revolution. With the money that was being made through slavery, they were able to develop new machinery and build new factories and, with the vast plantations owned by Welsh people, they also had access to a cheap source of raw materials such as sugar and cotton.

Many people, however, thinking about links between Wales and slavery, would look no deeper than pondering on how many African American families have surnames considered traditionally Welsh.

Some argue that the reason for this is their slave ancestors took the name of their slave owner. No doubt this would be so in some cases. However, it may well be that many names came about by converting Christian names of John, William and David to Jones, Williams and Davies or Davis, for example. Others could have taken their surnames from Welsh preachers and others after Welsh people who helped them escape from slavery, sometimes providing a ‘safe house’ as they made their getaway.

What is certain is that the names of some plantations in the Caribbean were linked to Welsh owners, such as Llandoverly and Cardiff Hall in Jamaica. And some slaves were even named

Captured slaves aboard a ship



Captured Slaves



Penrhyn Castle





# ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

The **GLORIOUS 1st of AUGUST, 1838,**

*When it is confidently expected that the last vestige of SLAVERY will be swept away in all our West India Islands.*

A Public Thanksgiving Service will be held in the **ENGLISH WESLEYAN CHAPEL, on WEDNESDAY Evening next, AUGUST 1st, 1838, PRECISELY at 7 o'Clock.** Addresses in both Languages will be delivered on the auspicious occasion.

The attendance of ALL that feel interested in the welfare of **800,000** of their fellow-creatures who will shortly emerge from a state of Slavery into that of Freedom, is most earnestly requested.

Poster promoting a thanksgiving service in Carmarthen

after places in Wales – a plantation owner in Jamaica had slaves he called Monmouth, Pembroke, Newport and Cardiff.

This arose partly for geographical reasons, as the three main British ports in those days were convenient for Welsh captains and seamen – London, where many Welsh people lived, and Bristol and Liverpool, with their close proximity to south and north Wales.

The slave ships returning to Britain carrying goods, such as sugar, cotton and tobacco, landed at Welsh ports as well as the main English ones, bringing trade to Holyhead for example.

As well as providing work for Welsh seafarers, the slave trade provided work for Welsh shipyards.

Shipbuilders, craftsmen and labourers profited from the trade, with ships built at Cardiff, Chepstow and Newport sailing regularly on triangular voyages.

Many ships were built at Chepstow, with some of their shipbuilding companies benefiting greatly from the trade, including the Bowsher, Hodges and Watkins Company.

There were also benefits for local ship-owners, like Henry Wise, who set up a shipyard at Caldicot, building 13 ships there, as well as many others at Chepstow and at English yards.

Many Welshmen prospered as plantation owners and many Welshmen kept slaves in the West Indies and the American colonies.

Richard Pennant, MP for Liverpool and later the first Lord Penrhyn, inherited the largest estate in Jamaica, owning 600 slaves and 8,000 acres of sugar plantations. On 12 May 1789 he took part in a fiery House of Commons debate where he argued strongly in favour of slavery and against abolition. He also

‘...the names of some plantations in the Caribbean were linked to Welsh owners...’

opposed a measure which would have reduced the number of slaves allowed on board a ship.

Richard Pennant inherited not only the plantations in Jamaica but also Penrhyn Castle near Bangor, where paintings included idyllic plantations – far removed from the harsh misery of the slaves’ lives. Penrhyn Castle is now owned by the National Trust and is a popular tourist attraction for people visiting North Wales. Further proof of the wealth created in North Wales by the slave trade can be seen in Chirk Castle. Leg irons on show at the castle are a weighty reminder of the source of the Myddelton fortune.

Nathaniel Phillips, from Pembrokeshire, was also a wealthy landowner who owned a plantation in Jamaica.

Many Welshmen kept slaves in the American colonies and in the West Indies. The poet Goronwy Owen, who left London for Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1757, to teach at the College of William and Mary, kept slaves at his home, as was normal for even moderately prosperous white people.

The slave trade, directly or indirectly, led to the creation and development of stately homes in Wales, allied to local industries. Pant yr Ochain in North Wales was once the main house in Gresford and was built and improved by Sir Foster Cunliffe. His grandfather, also Foster Cunliffe, made his money from slavery as the main slave trader in Liverpool. Pant yr Ochain is now a popular gastro-pub.

Many other Welsh industries owed their prosperity to connections with the slave trade. Richard Pennant used much of his wealth from his plantations to build roads and a harbour to support Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, while the slate industry in the north and metal in the south were financed primarily by the trade.

## Welsh Seafarers

One Welsh seafarer was Thomas Phillips, who captained the **Hannibal** and was a slave trader himself. When he arrived at the largest British fortress at Cape Coast in Ghana, his ship carried all manner of things to trade for slaves, including muskets, brass kettles, carpets and Welsh cloth. He would then use his cargo to bargain with an African king and receive slaves in return before setting off for the West Indies.

As well as captains, many seamen from Wales were involved in the trade. These included John Morris, from Anglesey, the youngest of four seafaring brothers.

He served on the **Harrington**, a British East India Company ship involved in transporting slaves from Madagascar for sale in India. His captain, Robert Jenkins, himself bought some slaves to sell and John Morris recorded in a letter to one of his brothers that he had a slave to sell. He died in 1740 as a crew-member serving on the **Torbay** in Dominica - ironically, one of the islands associated with the slave trade.



Slaves working on a sugar plantation



Manilla Bracelets



Iron leg chain

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Wales controlled half of the world's copper. The Parys Mine Company, near Amlwch in Anglesey, under the management of Thomas Williams, owed its success to the slave trade. The items they produced were extremely popular with African leaders and were used to purchase slaves. The money they made was then invested back into the Mine.

Williams also set up copper works at Penclawdd near Swansea and at Holywell in North Wales. At one time the entire output of the Penclawdd works was used to buy slaves.

By 1800 Swansea was producing 90 per cent of British copper, much of which was used to fuel the slave trade. The factories provided ships with dishes and cups and also made rings, bracelets and copper and bronze trinkets, used by slave traders to buy African slaves.

Welsh industries prospered as slaves could be bought for these metal objects. The Forest Works and White Rock Works, both established near Swansea, specifically produced manillas (bracelets) for the trade which were among the objects used to buy slaves.

Slavery also played a key role in the success of the iron industry in Merthyr Tydfil. Anthony Bacon's connections with the trade enabled him to develop the iron works at Cyfarthfa and other industries in the Merthyr Tydfil area. Cyfarthfa Castle, now a museum, still displays wealth gained through involvement in slavery.

Such was the scale of the trade that by the middle of the eighteenth century there was hardly a town or employer in Britain not connected to the triangular or direct slave trade.

## THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

But the involvement of Welsh people with the slave trade was not all negative, as many prominent figures supported the abolition movement.

The campaign to abolish slavery became a force in the last quarter of the 18th century. The slave trade was condemned by winning poets and writers at an Eisteddfod in St Asaph in 1790.

Another fervent opponent of the trade was the poet Iolo Morgannwg, founder of the National Eisteddfod's Gorsedd of Bards. He was an admirer of William Wilberforce and criticised his own brothers for owning slaves.

Iolo Morgannwg wrote a special poem to commemorate the passing of Wilberforce's Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807, which ended Britain's involvement in the slave trade. The poem read:

*"Man as merchandise! His body and soul  
No more will be claimed by the sons of greed;  
Soon, with a furious vengeance,  
They will disappear from every land;  
A day to open all prison doors,  
Shatter chains, and break the yoke,  
A day to dry the tears of sorrow,  
The day of our God is drawing near."*

But the battle to abolish slavery worldwide was not over, and many Welshmen played a prominent part in the campaign against slavery in America, not abolished until the Civil War had ended in 1865.

Morgan John Rhys, a Baptist minister from Llanbradach, emigrated to America to establish a Welsh colony. He preached against slavery and set up a church for black people in Savannah, Georgia.

Robert Everett, from Gronant, Flintshire, and a Congregationalist minister, emigrated in 1823. He published Y Cenhadwr

**\$1200  
TO  
1250 DOLLARS!  
FOR NEGROES!!**

**THE undersigned wishes to purchase a large lot of NEGROES for the New Orleans market. I will pay \$1200 to \$1250 for No. 1 young men, and \$850 to \$1000 for No. 1 young women. In fact I will pay more for likely**

**NEGROES.**





## Cyfarthfa Ironworks

Amercanaidd, a monthly magazine for Congregationalists and used the magazine to condemn slavery and urge Welsh people in America to join the abolition campaign.

Also prominent in the anti-slavery movement were Francis Donaldson and his wife Anna Margaretta, who emigrated from Rhayader to Ohio in 1822. Ohio borders Kentucky, where slavery was still legal and their home became a 'safe house' for slaves fleeing to freedom across the Ohio River.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose great-grandmother emigrated from Wales to America was another abolitionist with Welsh connections. In 1853, a year after her novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, was published in America, two Welsh versions were also published. This gave people back in Wales a shocking account of the horrors of the slave trade. Many events were held in Wales at which abolitionists from America spoke to gain support for the campaign.

In 1841 Moses Roper travelled all over Wales to publicise a book he had written on his experiences as a slave and his escape from slavery – a book which was translated into Welsh.

Another former slave, Samuel Ringgold Ward, also spoke in Wales, as did one of the most famous of the African-American abolitionists, Frederick Douglass.

In 1860 Republican Abraham Lincoln stood for the White House and made a specific target for Welsh settlers. He canvassed them with up to 100,000 election pamphlets which had been printed in Welsh. The Republican Party, which had only been founded in 1854, was radical and anti-slavery. The Democrats, on the other hand, were pro-slavery. With the help of the Welsh

vote Abraham Lincoln triumphed in the election and went on to play a major role in abolishing slavery in America.

Many Welshmen fought on the northern side in the American Civil War, among them more than 150 men in the 56th Ohio Infantry. The war was fought on many fronts including the argument against slavery. As the war came to an end in 1865, with Union forces being victorious, slavery was finally abolished in America.

In these, thankfully more enlightened, times – and especially during the year that marks the 200th anniversary of the end of Britain's participation in the slave trade – we fully acknowledge the involvement of Welsh slave owners, slave traders and industrialists who made fortunes from the trade. Against that grim reality, however, we also salute the involvement of a great many men and women from Wales in the campaign for its abolition.

We can trace back to slavery and the British Empire the racism which is today illegal and abhorred. New laws protect workers and aim to stamp out racism in our society. But greedy criminal gangs try to get round the law, smuggling and exploiting poor people around the world creating modern slaves.

As we all remember the slaves of the past, and the shameful and brutal exploitation they suffered, we need to re-affirm our commitment to the same rights and freedom all people should enjoy today, regardless of their race, faith, gender, sexuality, age or any disability.

‘...the entire output of the Penclawdd works was used to buy slaves’

‘...many Welshmen played a prominent part in the campaign against slavery...’

# PAUL ROBESON IN WALES

Wales has had a special place in the struggle to abolish slavery for many reasons.

One of the proudest links is Wales's association with Paul Robeson, that great African-American human rights campaigner, internationalist and son of an escaped slave.

When he was persecuted for his stand against the enduring legacy of slavery – racism and colonialism – Wales, particularly the Welsh miners, stood by him and campaigned for his right to travel and sing throughout the world.

His transatlantic telephonic link, made secretly from New York, to the South Wales Miners' Eisteddfod at Porthcawl in 1957 has become one of the great moments of modern Welsh history – defying his travel ban from the United States.

Paul Robeson identified himself with the slave-like working conditions of the Welsh miners in the inter-war period, particularly through the making of his film Proud Valley in 1939, which also starred the Welsh actress, Rachel Thomas, who was from Neath.

At an anti-fascist memorial meeting in Mountain Ash in 1938 he memorably said:

**“The artist must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery. I have made my choice, I had no alternative.”**

Secretary of State for Wales Peter Hain met Paul's son, Paul Robeson Jnr, in New York in February 2007 as part of Wales Office events to commemorate the bicentenary and the 50th anniversary of Robeson's famous broadcast to Porthcawl.



Paul Robeson



Paul Robeson Jnr and Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Wales