

Hidden Story

People & Places Waiting to be Discovered...

2007 is the 200th anniversary of the Act abolishing the British trade in enslaved Africans. In response to this, the Dales Countryside Museum and North Yorkshire County Council Record Office have begun to look at this long hidden part of our history, taking Black history in its widest context.

We have researched many of the people and places of the Dales that have been connected with Africa, the Caribbean and India, whether through slavery or for other reasons. We hope to find out about people who came to live in the area and to encourage people to think about the impact that the transatlantic slave trade had upon the Yorkshire Dales and surrounding areas.

'Hidden History' is an ongoing project to which we hope you will be able to contribute. We would love to hear from anyone who has information about their own family history that shows African or Asian ancestry or who has discovered archive material that helps to paint a picture of how and why the Dales and Africa are connected.

If you have any information you are happy to share, please contact the Dales Countryside Museum, Hawes on 01969 666210 or email

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Origins...

Over the years, people from all over the world have travelled to or settled in the Dales for a huge number of reasons. The same applies to people who originated from the Dales, but then travelled to live or work abroad.

Where people have come from, where they moved to, why they came and why they went may come as a surprise to us today. This exhibition provides an insight into this fascinating subject.

If you like you can use the files to dig a little deeper into the people and subjects mentioned on the panels. You'll be able to see the many different sources of information for and evidence of the movement of people in and out of the Dales and the many types of information that you too could research.



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Connections...

Over the centuries people living in the Dales have made connections with countries throughout the world. This has happened in many different ways. Some such as *Christopher Weatherhead* of Stainforth Hall, Little Stainforth were merchants. Others like *Henry Coor*, mill-wright of Settle, moved to work abroad. *William Hillary*, born at Birkrigg near Hawes, moved to Barbados in 1747 to work on climate and disease. He wrote a tropical medicine book on his return.

Families such as the *Backhouse* family of Giggleswick manufactured goods or traded abroad and yet others such as *Charles Inman* from Nidderdale, traded in human life. For some the link with a different country came more indirectly, through education, marriage, or ancestry.

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Slave Traders, Merchants & Ships' Captains...

For centuries, profits from transatlantic trading contributed to the development of the Western European economy, including that of the Dales. There was direct trade between Britain and Africa, the West Indies and the Americas. Knitted stockings and 'bump caps' made in Dent were exported to the West Indies and sugar and other goods were imported to England.

However the most profitable trading route was made up of three journeys, known as the 'triangular trade'. The outward passage involved the transport of manufactured goods from Europe to Africa. The 'middle passage' involved the shipping of goods and the transport of African captives in the most horrendous conditions, from West Africa to the Americas or the Caribbean.

The homeward passage carried sugar, tobacco, rum, rice, cotton, mahogany, indigo and other goods back to Europe where they were much in demand. Sometimes enslaved Africans were also carried on the homeward passage. We have found evidence of servants, enslaved and free, who were seemingly brought here by people living in the Dales and surrounding areas. Local people also filled various roles such as ship's surgeon, captain of a slaving vessel and slave trader.

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Planters & Plantation Workers

Several Dales families owned plantations in the Caribbean. Property names such as *Grenada House* in Askrigg and what was known as '*Africa House*' in Sedbergh, provide tantalizing clues to the history of their past owners. Other people from the area worked in countries such as Jamaica, Dominica, Tobago, Grenada and Barbados, in roles such as overseer, surveyor, millwright, doctor and book-keeper. *George Metcalfe* of Rigg House near Hawes was a sugar plantation owner and President of the counsel in Dominica.

The contribution that Africa and enslaved Africans made to the wealth of certain Dales families must have been significant. For some, the inheritance of estate, property and trading interests raised both financial and ethical issues. *William Place* of Spennithorne for example, became a planter in Jamaica. *Thomas Place*, his son, "*born of the body of a Slave of the name of Sherry Ellis on the Greencastle Estate in Jamaica*" in 1823, was freed and came to England in 1835, eventually inheriting his father's property in 1844.

Other families had to choose whether to continue with their family trading operations and for those involved in the slave trade this may have been a controversial decision.



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Passing through the Dales...

People have come to the United Kingdom, Yorkshire and the Dales for a variety of reasons. Some came through personal choice in an attempt to find freedom and others through force. Amongst many things they have entertained, campaigned, worked, studied, and taught whilst they were here.

Lonnie Lawrence Dennis, of African, Native American and European descent, was a child preacher who travelled the north of England in the early 1900s and may have visited the Yorkshire Dales and surrounding areas.

The son of a Sudanese mother and an Egyptian Army Officer, *Duse Mohamed Ali* came to England to be educated at the age of 9. He became an actor and journalist and also gave elocution lessons. Later he was founding editor of the influential '*African Times*' and '*Orient Review*'. He left England in 1921 for the USA, eventually moving to Lagos in Nigeria where he founded and edited '*The Comet*', Nigeria's largest weekly.

Ira Aldridge, born in New York City, was the son of a lay preacher. He was the first major African-American actor, although many of his acclaimed performances were in Britain. Aldridge travelled throughout the country, playing at Kendal and possibly Richmond. He married *Margaret Gill* of Northallerton.

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Moving to the Dales...

Various records show that people were brought to the Dales and the surrounding area to work as servants or nurse-maids. *John Yorke*, a “*negro servant*”, was baptised at Marske Church in Swaledale and confirmed in Richmond. Yorke eventually married *Hannah Barker* at Kirkby Ravensworth and had seven children. It is interesting that in his book, *‘Richmondshire (1908)’*, *Edmund Bogg* describes two of the Yorke children as “*negroes brought ... from Afric’s sunny clime*” despite the fact that they were born and bred in Swaledale.

John Dalton Esquire (1726-1811), an army officer in the East India Company, also appears to have brought a Black servant to the Dales area. This man, *York*, may have been of Indian origin. We also know that women were brought to the area as servants. *William Findlay* of Thorns Hall, Sedbergh, came back to the area with a servant known as ‘*Black Jenny*’ and the *Robinson* family of Newby Park, near Topcliffe, Thirsk also employed a “*malloto servant*”.

There were many cotton mills in the Dales and Yorkshire area, all processing and generating income from a slave-produced product. Greenholme Cotton Mill at Burley-in-Wharfedale employed children from St. Margaret’s Workhouse, London. A letter from the Mill dated 3rd November 1797 requests more children, “*we ... rely upon you for sending healthy Children.... Sophia the Black Girl is greatly improved in her industry.*”

Thomas Rutling was born into slavery in America. He came to Britain as a member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group established to raise money for the building of a University for African-Americans, at a time when American universities were strictly for “*Whites only*”. Rutling eventually settled in Harrogate in 1891, living there for at least 20 years. A linguist, he taught Italian, French and German in several local schools.

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Abolitionists...

For some, the experience of living in other countries had a profound effect. On their return from the Caribbean to the Dales, some individuals chose to stand against slavery and to support the right for freedom and respect. They gave evidence at the House of Commons enquiries into the slave trade. Others also chose to stand in support of the abolition of slavery.

On 7 April, 1798, a Leeds Newspaper reported *“the collection of £18 for supporting the application to Parliament for repeal of the [slave] trade ‘raised by voluntary contributions in a small part of the high end of Wensleydale... The contributors (being chiefly farmers) were informed of the injustice and inhumanity of the slave trade by pamphlets circulated previous to the collection.”*

Robert Boucher Nicholls, Dean of Middleham, was born in Barbados and together with several other Dales people, gave evidence in 1791 to the House of Commons Select Committee which was enquiring into the slave trade. In 1787 he wrote a letter of support to the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which they considered important enough to be printed. He was a supporter of the Cambridge-educated African Caribbean poet, *Francis Williams*.

Henry ‘Box’ Brown was an ex-slave who spoke in favour of emancipation and travelled throughout the north of England. He is known to have spoken in Keighley and may have visited the Dales area.



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Feelings...

We all know that moving to a new school, house or job can be a daunting thing. For some, the contrast between the place they moved from and the place they were taken to in the Dales and surrounding area, must have been stark. Children from the West Indies and the sons of rich Africans attended school in the UK. In 1750, *Francis Barber* was sent to school in Barton near Richmond by *Colonel Bathurst*.

It is difficult to know how these people were received, but a poem, '*Conquest of Prejudice*', written in 1809 may reflect the issues that arose and possibly how this was dealt with at the time. Individuals who were brought to the area as servants are described in various documents and some were obviously more accepted than others.

Addressed to "*My Dear Children*", this letter from one of the Robinson ladies of Newby Park (now Baldersby Park) near Topcliffe refers to a maid at Newby Park:

"I dar not leave little Nanny, her new maid has been come sometime in order to make an Acquaintance but I shant like her, she is a perfect Malloto tis so much alamode Frankland that I'me ashamed to own it but I feel a dislike & wish she would do something wrong that we might part for a more reasonable reason, the poor little soul don't mind the tincture of a skin, even kind Sr. Wm. Lowther's Osmin, but I'me afraid when she finds she is not so much diverted she wont be quite so happy."

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Contribution...

All of the people who have spent time in the Dales, who have contributed to the creation of wealth through their labour abroad, who created a trading connection between the Dales and other countries, or who became part of a Dales community, have created the rich heritage that can be explored today.

Although we have delved deeper than ever before, *'Hidden History'* has only revealed the tip of the iceberg. There are many stories of enslaved Africans being brought to villages in the Dales, which as yet have no supporting archival evidence. There are families for whom we can find no modern day link and people that we have not yet discovered. You have the chance to contribute to our research and to ensure that as far as possible, we have a full picture of the history of the Dales and the many people that have helped shape it.

Schools, groups or organisations interested in using the resources developed as part of the *'Hidden History'* Project should contact the Dales Countryside Museum on 01969 666210 or email to dcm@yorkshiredales.org.uk

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Timeline...

16th Century

1502 First enslaved Africans in the Americas

17th Century

1607 Virginia founded – first permanent British settlement and main area for the arrival of enslaved Africans

1655 England seizes Jamaica from Spain

1698 Slave trade opened to private traders

18th Century

1747 **William Hillary, born near Hawes, moves to Barbados and produces a book on tropical diseases**

1757 **The ship 'Dent' sails for Cork and Jamaica on 19 August**

1758 **Advert for Thomas Anson, 'runaway' from Dent (taken from the Liverpool Advertiser)**

1759 **Henry Coor, millwright of Settle, moves to Jamaica to work**

1787 Robert Boucher Nicholls writes a letter of support to the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade

1788 **Ecroyde Claxton from Burton in Westmoreland is a surgeon's mate on a ship off the coast of Africa**

1791 **John Terry of Askrigg gives evidence to the Select Committee enquiring into the Slave Trade, together with several other people from the Dales**

19th Century

1803 Denmark becomes the first country in Europe to ban the African slave trade

1804 **Baptism of Jenny Findlay "a native of Africa" at Sedbergh**

1807 The Transatlantic Slave Trade is abolished by the British Parliament.

1813 **Warwick Pearson, of Antigua and Kirkby Lonsdale buys Hebblethwaite Hall near Sedbergh**

1818 **Ann Sill of Dentedale owns the Providence Plantation, Jamaica**

1820 US law makes slave trading a crime equal to piracy, punishable by death

1821 **George Metcalfe, former President of the Counsel of Dominica, is buried at Hawes**

1825 **Ira Aldridge, Shakespearean actor marries Margaret Gill, daughter of a Northallerton stocking weaver**

1830 **Ira Aldridge performs at Kendal**

1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. William Wilberforce dies on 29 July, 3 days after the bill is passed

1844 **Thomas Place, the son of William Place and "born of the body of a slave" inherits his father's property in Newton-le-Willows**

1861 **Henry 'Box' Brown is living in Keighley**

1865 Abolition of slavery in the USA and end of the American Civil War

1901 **Duse Mohamed, actor, journalist and elocution teacher is working in Hull and Harrogate**

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