

The Honest Burgess

In the extreme northwest corner of the churchyard, close to the wall, is the grave of Matthew Marston. It reads:

To the memory of Matthew Marston he departed this Life May 29th 1802 aged 81, the oldest Burgess of the Borough. His steady and uncorrupt conduct presents an Example to his Brother Burgesses for perpetual imitation, and an useful lesson to the Parliamentary Representatives of the Borough That Opulence and Power cannot alone Secure independent suffrages.

Until the Reform Act of 1832, Bishop's Castle returned two Members to Parliament and was notorious for the scale of bribery inflicted upon would-be candidates by unscrupulous Burgesses. Much evidence exists of Rotten or Pocket Borough political engineering. For the 1802 election, in the year Matthew Marston died, the price of votes rose from £20 to £25, a considerable amount which only very wealthy candidates could afford. A steady and uncorrupt Burgess was remarkable, and the Marston family proudly recorded his example for posterity.

The French Napoleonic Colonel

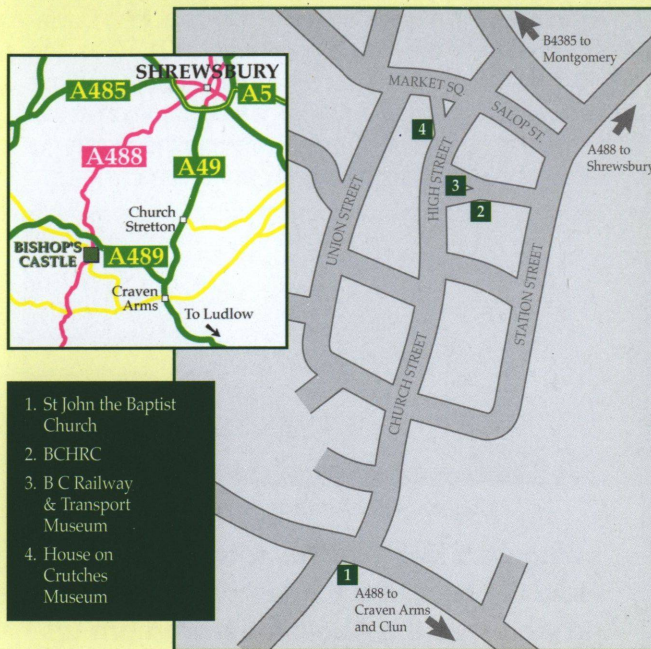
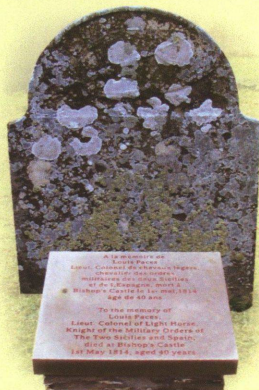
Located across the path from the door of the tower is a badly eroded gravestone. The inscription reads:

À la mémoire de Louis Paces (or Pages) Lieut. Colonel de chevaux legers, Chevalier des Ordres Militaires des deux Siciles et de l'Espagne, mort a Bishop's Castle le 1er mai 1814, age de 40 ans.

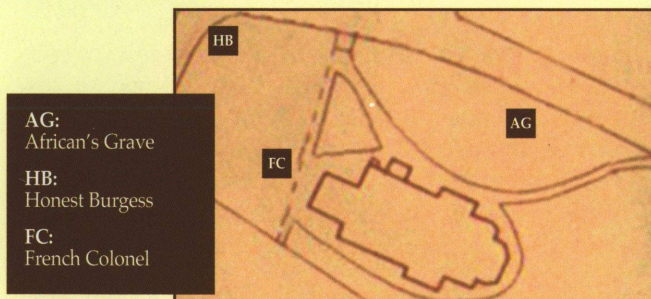
To the memory of Louis Paces, Lieutenant Colonel of Light Horse, Knight of the Orders of the Two Sicilies and Spain, died at Bishop's Castle, 1st May 1814, aged 40 years.

Nothing is known about this senior officer, but he would appear to have been well respected locally for a handsome headstone to be erected over his grave. At least 57 Napoleonic prisoners of war are known to have been housed in the area. It is said that as they were on parole they were forbidden to go more than one mile from the town ("The Frenchman's Mile").

See SWSHAS journal 24 pp39 - 40



1. St John the Baptist Church
2. BCHRC
3. B C Railway & Transport Museum
4. House on Crutches Museum



- AG:
African's Grave
- HB:
Honest Burgess
- FC:
French Colonel

Research for this leaflet was carried out by Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre with the support of Shropshire Archives, English Heritage, The Equiano Society, and Birmingham Central Library.

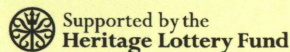
It was produced in partnership with the Parochial Church Council for St John the Baptist Church and Bishop's Castle Town Hall Trust and revised in 2015

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HERITAGE ON YOUR DOORSTEP

*The African's Grave
in the churchyard of
St John the Baptist
Bishop's Castle and
other interesting graves*





In the churchyard of St John the Baptist Church, Bishops Castle is a special grave. It is beautifully decorated and inscribed on its west side as follows:

**Here lieth the body of I.D.
A native of Africa
Who died in this town
Sept 9th 1801**

**God hath created of one blood all nations of men
Acts Ch 17 verse 26**

This biblical text was used by those campaigning for the abolition of slavery and suggests that the stone was erected by someone with abolitionist sympathies. English Heritage has included this memorial in its list of "Sites of Memory", which commemorate the Bicentenary of the 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

In 1788 Dr Joseph Priestley, Unitarian, scientist and abolitionist, gave a sermon based on this text at the Quaker New Meeting House in Birmingham.

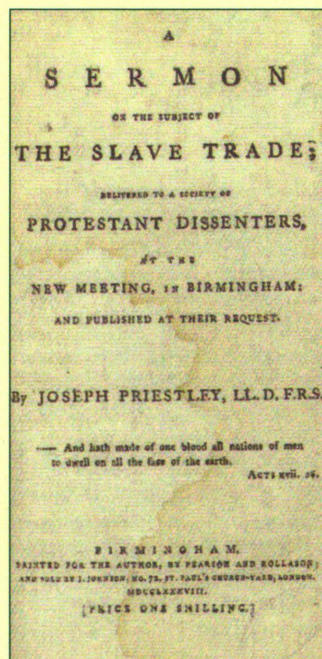


Image courtesy of Birmingham Central Library

The Bishop's Castle Parish Register shows a John Davies was buried here on 12th September 1801. Was this "I.D."? John Davies is not an African name, but perhaps it was given as a baptismal name, as was common at that time. There is no record of this baptism in the register or of black people living in the locality at the time.

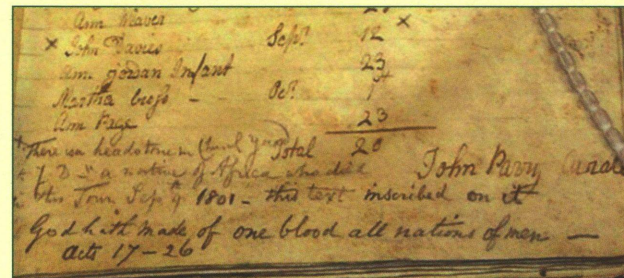
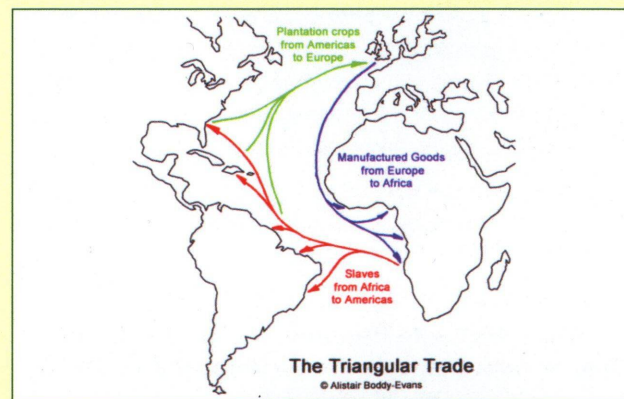


Image courtesy of Shropshire Archives

**Who was I.D.? Was he John Davies?
How did he come to die here in 1801?
And who was the Abolitionist who put up
the headstone?**

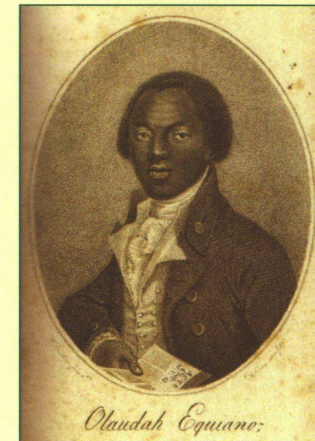
It is thought that up to 12 million Africans were captured, enslaved and transported across the Atlantic to the Americas, to labour in sugar and cotton plantations. In return, sugar, rum, cotton, tobacco and fine hardwoods were brought back to Europe. Manufactured goods, including guns and iron shackles made in Birmingham, were shipped to West Africa to exchange for slaves.



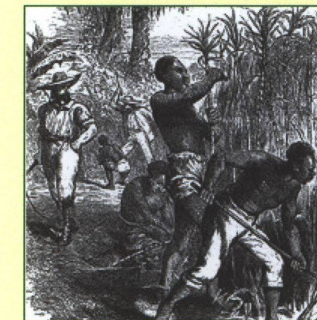
Much of the prosperity of the slave trafficking nations (UK, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal) depended on this "Triangular Trade".

At the end of the 18th century the movement for the abolition of slavery was close to success. It is interesting to learn how enlightened many Shropshire people were, judging by letters and leaders in the Shrewsbury Chronicle held at Shropshire Archives.

By 1801 few black people in this country were still in a condition of slavery, although they may have been taken from Africa as slaves. Many were by now employed as domestic servants. Some, like Olaudah Equiano (pictured right) had freed themselves, written about their experiences, and campaigned actively for emancipation.



We have recently found a connection in "The Plantation Journals of the Prospect Sugar Estate" (Simon D Smith, Univ of York, 2004) between the Oakeley family of Snakescroft, Bishop's Castle and the West Indies in this period.



This plantation was owned by Stephen Attlay, husband of Parnell Oakeley. Her brother, Thomas Oakeley, along with her nephew, also Thomas, went to Jamaica to work as plantation managers in the early 1790s, the Attlays being absentee owners. After Emancipation in 1834 the Oakeley Attlays received compensation of £6420 for the loss of their "property" of 141 enslaved workers. The workers received nothing.

This link between Bishop's Castle and Jamaica was active at the time of the death of "our" African, I.D. in 1801. It is possible that he or she accompanied one or other of the Thomas Oakeleys to Shropshire, sadly met his or her end in the town and was commemorated by this beautiful stone with its message of equality and liberation. We still don't know who paid for and erected the stone.