

Reflecting on the Past - Looking to the Future, Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act 1807-2007'

The presence of black people in Kirklees can be traced back through the centuries and this year will see a series of events which celebrate African and Caribbean culture as well as commemorate the abolition of slavery.

Links between Yorkshire and Jamaica are the focus of some research currently being undertaken by Kirklees Council. During the period 1822 - 1832 the 33rd Regiment of Foot, recruited from West Yorkshire, was stationed in Jamaica. At the end of the tour 142 men chose to remain in Jamaica in a town now called Haddersfield. Some of these men may have originated from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, and given the town its name. The regiment later became known as 'The 33rd (or The Duke of Wellington's) Regiment' - soldiers from this area are still being recruited to the regiment.

Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act 1807-2007'

The Bicentenary marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of an Act of Parliament in 1807 which outlawed the transportation of slaves but which did not end slavery itself in the British colonies. It did however mark the point at which Britain transformed itself into an international campaigner against the trade. A long campaign led by abolitionists including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson met with success with the Emancipation Act of 1833 when slavery was finally abolished. Locally Joseph Priestley was prominent in the anti-slavery movement both in Britain and the Americas whilst Richard Oastler campaigned against "Yorkshire Slavery" – the term used to describe working conditions in mills and factories across the region.

Commemorations and celebrations are taking place at regional and national scale where many communities are taking the opportunity to address inequalities and tackle discrimination in Britain. Further details are available at www.direct.gov.uk/slavery or www.antislavery.org

Around 8,500 people of African-Caribbean descent currently live in Kirklees today and here in Kirklees a programme of events is planned which recognises the diversity of our local residents and encourages communities to come together. For further details of the events programme visit www.kirklees.gov.uk/bicentenary or telephone Kirklees Museums and Galleries on 01484 223800

Black History month in October will provide further opportunities to celebrate the vibrant culture of local African and Caribbean culture in Kirklees. Visit www.kirklees.gov.uk/blackhistorymonth for details.

There is historical evidence which shows the existence of both anti-slavery campaigners and advocates of the slave trade in Kirklees.

In support for the Anti-Slavery Campaign

Olaudah Equiano

Susannah Atkinson, whose family owned Bradley Mills in Huddersfield, and who lived in Dalton wrote a letter to Gustavus Vassa on 29 March 1791 apologising for some of the treatment he had received in the area. Vassa, also known as Olaudah Equiano, was a prominent Black figure in the abolition movement and a much respected figure in England. He wrote a letter to the Leeds Mercury in April 1791 thanking the Atkinson family and others for purchasing copies of his autobiography and giving support to him.

Huddersfield Parish Church

Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield parish church from 1759 to 1771, was a prolific writer and his ministry at the church was much appreciated by the congregation many of whom travelled considerable distances to hear him speak. He was also a great friend of John Wesley, another person very much opposed to slavery, and it was Venn who invited Wesley to preach at the parish church at a time when Wesley was meeting a lot of opposition to his preaching.

Anti-Slavery Campaigner – Thomas Jeffery

Thomas Jeffrey made the 5000 mile voyage to the West Indies preaching “to the poor blacks” and fighting for the rights of those still kept in slavery after the trade was abolished. He then returned to Britain, moving to the Heavy Woollen area in 1862 where he served as a Methodist minister in Birstall and Batley. Thomas Jeffery is buried in Batley Cemetery.

The Skelmanthorpe Flag

A banner believed to have been made in Radcliffe Street Skelmonthorpe was donated to Huddersfield's Tolson Museum in 1924. Found in an abandoned mill in 1884 the Skelmanthorpe Flag may well have been a reaction to Manchester's Peterloo Massacre in 1819 when cavalry charged into a public meeting killing 11 people, and injuring 400 including many women and children. One panel of the banner shows what had become the logo of the Abolition movement - a kneeling man in chains with his hands raised in prayer accompanied by the words, "Am I not a Man and Brother". However the man is depicted as a white European rather than depicted as a negro man as in the original image.

Wedgwood's image of a kneeling slave appeared over and over again and was used in countless ways: on English and American tokens to raise money for the cause; a woman's pinholder; on tea wares and jugs; and needlework pictures. Even after the slave trade and slavery were abolished in England, this image was used to show a grateful ex-slave thanking God for liberty.

Local Connections with Slavery

The Mills in Batley

The Kirklees connection with slavery seems to have extended far beyond the people who lived in the big houses. On a tour of the Yorkshire textile districts in 1849 Angus Bethune Reach observed: "In Batley I went over two shoddy [cloth made from woollen waste] establishments - the Bridge Mill and the Albion Mill. In both of these rags were not only ground, but the shoddy was worked up into coarse bad cloth, a great proportion of which is sent to America for slave clothing."

Extract from a booklet called The Yorkshire Textile District in 1849 ed. C Aspin 1974.

The Batts of Oakwell Hall

In the late 1630s, several members of the Batt family of Oakwell Hall in Birstall went to seek their fortunes in the 'New World'. Settling in Virginia, they undertook many business ventures, some becoming plantation owners.

Transcripts from the wills of members of the Batt family record several references to slaves.

- 'Jack', the Negro slave of Thomas Batt was given his freedom at Christmas in a will dated March 1684.

- The will of Henry Batt dated 1727 states "My loving Mother, Mary Batt, to have the use of my two negro men Roger and Tom for her life", whilst his brother, William Batt was to receive "all my lands and negroes and all the remaining part of my estate in Virginia and England."

Baptism at Kirkheaton

On November 2nd 1782 Richard Henry Beaumont's Ethiopian servant from the west coast of Guinea was baptised Daniel Whitley at Kirkheaton. He is said to "have felt the cold terribly" according to the biographer Thomas Beaumont.

Further information relating to some of the campaigners mentioned can be found in the Local Studies Library at Huddersfield Library, Princess Alexandra Walk, Huddersfield Tel: **01484 221965** Email:

hudlib.localhist@kirklees.gov.uk