Parallel Views: Black History in Richmond

In 1807, Parliament passed the Slave Trade Abolition Bill, ending Britain's longstanding and economically fruitful participation in the transatlantic slave trade. On January 1st 1808, a similar prohibition became law in the United States of America.

From within scarcely more than a decade of the first permanent British settlement in North America at Jamestown, both Britain and her American colonies had benefited from the triangular trade system which moved British manufactures, enslaved Africans and North American crops around the Atlantic. The 1807 and 1808 laws sought to eliminate the slave trade from this system.

Throughout 2007, the bicentenary of the 1807 Act has been marked across the United Kingdom by events, exhibitions and publications. This flurry of activity has prompted an unprecedented level of engagement with the history of Britain's role in the slave trade, slavery, and its abolition.

This engagement raises many questions, not least about how we approach challenging aspects of our own heritage, and why so may institutions and organisations are particularly keen to do so in 2007.

For us in Richmond, commemoration raises a further question. What does our borough, far removed from the trading ports of Liverpool, Bristol, and Docklands, or the manufacturing centres of the midlands and the cotton towns of the north, have to do with the slave trade? What has this frenzy of 2007 commemoration got to do with us?

This question was the starting point for *Parallel Views: Black History in Richmond*, and hovers behind each section of the display.

The exhibition explores our own borough's links with the slave trade and abolition, before turning to the parallel history of slavery and abolition in our twin town of Richmond Virginia.

In contrast to our own 'hidden history', the place of slavery in the history of our twin town in the United States is uncontested. Richmond was a major centre for the trading of enslaved Africans and African Americans and relied upon a slave economy. Yet here too commemoration of the 1807 and 1808 laws must raise questions: in Richmond VA both slave trading and slavery continued unabated until 1865. Looking to our twin town allows us to investigate the transatlantic impact of the 1807 act and explore a second key question – why 2007? What precisely are we commemorating?

It is not a comfortable history, for commemoration of 1807 makes no sense without an understanding of the years of slave trading which preceded it.

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Parallel Views

The view from Richmond Hill, immortalised by painters and poets for centuries, is famous around the world for its picturesque beauty. In 1733, across the Atlantic, William Byrd II chose to name a new city Richmond because it enjoyed a similar prospect along the James River.

Many Virginia planters, like the English elite who built their Thameside villas at Richmond, Twickenham and Hampton, aspired to a rural lifestyle in close contact with uplifting natural beauty as a step towards a contemplative, virtuous life. These two paintings present a vision of an idyllic landscape which our two towns, for all their differences, share.

Within this picturesque beauty, displayed for our delight and contemplation, there is much left un-pictured.

Virginia's pastoral idyll relied upon enslaved labour to tend its fertile tobacco fields, while the banks of the mighty James River acted as points of disembarkation for those arriving to begin a life of slavery, or points of departure for those leaving friends and family to be sold 'down river'.

The riverside villas, parks and gardens which gave the turn of the Thames its unique character were products of a society more subtly dependent upon enslaved labour, be it to supply the coffee and sugar consumed on riverside lawns or the income to maintain and furnish a lavish lifestyle or help finance literary ventures.

Many landscape artists during the 18th and 19th centuries chose to show the countryside free from human labour. There is nothing surprising or sinister about these examples. And yet, by thinking about what these images fail to show us, we can begin to realise the gaps in our own pictures of our past.

Parallel Views: Black History in Richmond explores the uncomfortable histories lurking, un-pictured, within the Arcadian beauty of our two river landscapes.

C. Heath, after T. Hofland
A View from Richmond Hill
c. 1820
engraving
Borough Art Collection

W. J. Bennett after G. Cooke
Richmond
c. 1832-34
engraving
Reproduction courtesy of Valentine Richmond History Center, Richmond Virginia

What has the slave trade got to do with us?

The slave trade is undoubtedly part of Britain's national history, just as it is part of the history of West Africa, South America, the Caribbean and the United States. In these places however, the physical legacy of the slave trade – the slave castles of Ghana, the whipping posts in U.S. museums, and above all the descendants of those Africans displaced by slavery now living across the 'new world' - makes it difficult to ignore.

This is not the case in Britain. Despite being a major participant in the slave trade, Britain's place on the 'triangle' meant that slavery itself took place far from our island's shores. As long as cloth and armaments continued to sell for export to Africa and coffee, sugar, cocoa, cotton and tobacco continued to arrive, there was little need to think about slavery.

This situation, which made it possible for the majority of Britons to ignore or remain ignorant of the brutal reality of the slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, continues to affect our engagement with our history. The legacy of British involvement in the slave trade is all around, particularly in our ports and financial centres, but it is also easy to ignore or misread.

This has begun to change. Bristol now has a museum of Trade and Empire, while the Liverpool Maritime Museum's Transatlantic Slavery exhibition is about to be superseded by an entire International Slavery Museum focussing upon the city's part in the slave trade, and in London the Museum in Docklands is about to open its 'London, Sugar and Slavery' galleries exploring London's role in the trade. Gradually, we begin to see the warehouses and insurance buildings of these ports as our equivalents of the slave prisons.

But what has all this got to do with our borough? The fact that London played a significant part in the slave trade is uncontested, but Richmond? No slave ships sailed from the banks of our stretch of Thames.

Yet even without the sugar warehouses and the docks, the people who lived in our borough were part of a society which benefited from the transatlantic slave trade. They were also part of a society which, in 1807, chose to abolish that trade. This is our local history too. It seems naïve to believe that there could be anywhere in London without links to the slavery, the slave trade, or the debates around abolition.

This was the starting point for our exhibition. Preparing *Parallel Views* has been a leap in the dark; we were confident that there were connections to be found, but we did know exactly what those connections would be.

So where do we look for evidence? Where might we find the more subtle traces of engagement with the slave trade nestling in our Arcadian landscape?

This section of the exhibition looks at some of the different ways we set about re-examining our local area to explore this hidden history.

Black History in Richmond?

The African diaspora is perhaps the most obvious legacy of the slave trade. However, the vast majority of Africans enslaved and transported on British ships never set foot in Britain, let alone Richmond. Some Africans did travel along a second side of the 'trade triangle' across the Atlantic to Britain, and some of these, or their descendants, ended up in our borough.

African people in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries occupied a range of positions in society.

Some were servants to wealthy individuals and families, often those with connections to the West Indies plantations or the slave trade. They might be specially selected, often when young, to join aristocratic households, or might be brought back to England by a successful plantation owner when he retired.

In our borough, we can identify a number of such individuals. Parish records across the borough record black servants in various households. These include Orleans House itself, while in the ownership of Governor Pitt.

The social and legal status of these Africans could be confusing, some regarded as slaves, some as domestic servants. Some became favourites, highly valued household members who might be freed or even inherit from their former 'masters'.

Others were not servants but lived independently through a range of occupations as shopkeepers, merchants, writers, musicians and political campaigners. They moved in many different social circles, often with white Londoners but also without them creating distinct social networks through balls, dances and other black social events.

Africans who had originally arrived as slaves or servants might go on to run their own businesses and enjoy independent lifestyles.

In our local area, Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780) provides a compelling example of an individual, born on a slave ship, who ran his own business in London and moved in Richmond's literary and artistic circles, corresponding and even collaborating with local figures such as David Garrick, the actor and theatre manager, as well as contributing to the campaign to abolish slavery.

This section of the exhibition examines the specific local evidence to build up a fuller picture of the life of the borough's African population during the era of the slave trade.

Map of London Borough on Richmond showing households where black people lived and worked

This map is a work in progress – we hope that people using the parish records for their own research will help uncover evidence to build up a fuller picture.

Sir Peter Lely
The Duchess of Lauderdale with a black servant
c. 1651
oil
Photograph: Tom Ganf, 2007, with permission of the National Trust

Elizabeth, Duchess of Lauderdale lived at Ham House during the second half of the seventeenth century. Portraits such as this, which can still be seen at Ham, suggest that black servants may have been part of the household. We cannot assume however that the individual shown here necessarily lived at Ham or even had any connection with family. Being depicted with a black servant (often alongside other 'exotic' props such as tropical birds) was fashionable and some artists would hire black models to incorporate in portraits.

Entry from parish register of St Mary's Twickenham
16th July 1671
London Metropolitan Archives
Photograph: Miranda Stearn

This entry records the baptism of Mathew, 'a Black baptised at the Parke'. This refers to Twickenham Park, which in 1671 was home to Lord John Berkeley (1607-1678). Lord John's brother, Sir William Berkeley, had been Royal Governor of the colonies in Virginia from 1642 and it was during his governorship that the use of slave labour from Africa became widespread on Virginia plantations. Might this be how Mathew came to be at Twickenham Park?

Grignion, after Augustin Heckel
A West View of Richmond in Surry
Engraving
Borough Art Collection

Twickenham Park, home to Mathew whose baptism is recorded in the extract from the parish register, can be seen to the far left of the scene – the orange-coloured building in the middle distance, behind the white structure with a domed clock-tower.

Entry from parish register of St Mary's Twickenham
20th May 1749
London Metropolitan Archives
Photograph: Miranda Stearn

This entry records the burial of Thomas, son of Mevy 'a black servant of Govr. Pitt'. George Morton Pitt lived here in the house which would become known as Orleans House, from c. 1737 until his death in 1756.

Augustin Heckel
Twickenham Riverside and Governor Pitt's House
c. 1744
watercolour
Borough Art Collection

This watercolour shows Orleans House as Mevy, Governor Pitt's black servant mentioned in the parish records, would have known it.

Tablet inscribed to Charles Pompey
Hampton Parish Church
1719
Photograph taken c. 1930s, courtesy of John Sheaf

The photograph shows a tablet erected by Lady Thomas of Hampton to Charles Pompey, her 'Ethiopian' servant. Charles probably didn't come from Ethiopia specifically, but elsewhere in Africa. Lady Thomas's decision to erect a monument to her servant suggests her real affection for a young man she had apparently brought up. The inscription however makes clear that her purpose is not only to honour Charles, but to set him up as an example of good behaviour to other servants of all races:

Here lyeth the body of CHARLES POMPEY

Late servant to ye Lady Thomas who breed him of

A Child in ye Christian Faith he being by Birth an

Ethiopian. In memory of his honesty and faithful service

This stone is erected for a pattern not only to those servants

Of his own Nation but to all such as are borne of Christian

Parents to follow his example who behaved himself lowly

Reverently to all his betters civilly & kindly to all his equals

Which made him lamented by all that knew him. He died

About ye 24th Year of his Age January the 9th, 1719.

This photograph dates from the 1930s. Today, local historians have been unable to locate the tablet, which seems to have been located in the vicarage wall, suggesting that it may have been removed or destroyed when the churchyard was cleared in the 1970s.

Christophe, King of Haiti (or St. Domingo)
Image reproduced from H. Cole, *Christophe: King of Haiti*, London 1967

According to Richard Cobbett's 'Memorials of Twickenham' (1872), The Folley was briefly home to Marie-Louise Christophe, widow of King Henri Christophe of Haiti, an important figure in the history of resistance to slavery in the West Indies. Marie-Louise and her daughters had come to Britain after Christophe committed suicide following a coup, and had stayed with leading abolitionist Thomas Clarkson before coming to Twickenham.

Christophe had been born a slave in St Kitts and had taken part in the slave revolution of 1804, led by Toussaint L'Overture, which defeated both the French and British armies to make Haiti the first independent republic free from slavery in the Caribbean. Having deposed Toussaint's successor Dessalines, he became President and then self-appointed King of Haiti, ruling for fourteen years.

Christophe enjoyed good relations with British abolitionists. William Wilberforce assisted Christophe in his quest to create an education system for the Haitians based on an English model by recruiting teachers and professors from England. For Wilberforce, Christophe's Haiti provided a hopeful example of the potential for ex-slaves to establish 'civilised' societies.

Entry from parish register of St Mary's Twickenham
15th September 1798
London Metropolitan Archives
Photograph: Miranda Stearn

This entry records the Baptism of William Affection, 'a negroe livery servant' aged 28. The entry specifies that he was baptised 'by his own ernest desire'.

Francesco Bartolozzi, after Thomas Gainsborough
Ignatius Sancho
1802
stipple engraving
Photographic reproduction, courtesy of National portrait Gallery, London

Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780) was born on a slave ship and came to England at the age of two. He worked in the household of the Dukes of Montagu, who owned a property in Richmond, before setting up business as a grocer. He composed and published songs and dances, some of which are named after places in the local area such as 'Kew Gardens' and 'Bushy Park', and played an active part in the literary life of his day, counting actor David Garrick and novelist Laurence Sterne among his correspondents. His letters, published after his death, helped raise awareness of the issue of slavery.

The story of the Ignatius Sancho is explored in more detail at the Museum of Richmond in the exhibition **'Trading in Human Lives: The Richmond Connection'**, until 29th July 2007.

Profiting from the slave trade

Identifying examples of African individuals who came to Richmond as a result of the slave trade shows us one set of connections. To really get to grips with our borough's links with slavery however, we need look at the financial links between borough residents and the trade.

Economic connections with the trade might take a variety of forms:

Some borough residents were directly involved in the business of trading slaves, as members or agents of the Royal Africa Company, the London-based company of merchants which dominated the British trade in enslaved Africans.

Other residents were not slave traders but slave owners. Those who owned land in the Caribbean or the American colonies made profits from plantations worked by slave labour.

There was no need to be actively involved in the business of slavery to profit from it. Investing in slave trading companies such as the South Sea Company, which supplied slaves from British colonies in the Caribbean and North America to Spanish colonies in the Americas, was seen as a sound investment for people from all walks of life.

In addition to all these levels of involvement, people in Richmond were economically linked to the slave trade every time they consumed slave produced products: every time they took sugar in their tea, enjoyed coffee or chocolate, smoked Virginia tobacco or wore textiles spun from slave-grown cotton.

Identifying borough residents who were connected to the trade through business or investment can be difficult, especially as in the years following abolition people avoided mentioning connections or involvement with the slave trade or slave ownership.

The money made by these individuals was put to a range of uses, shaping their local environment and, indirectly, ours.

Some used their money to amass art collections, improve their homes or create lavish monuments, while others used their fortunes to benefit the local poor. Slave traders might also be philanthropists.

This section explores the ways in which the economic benefits of the slave system were felt in our area.

Peter Tillemans
The Thames at Twickenham
c. 1724
oil on canvas
Borough Art Collection

This familiar scene shows the Thameside villas which characterised our local stretch of river in the eighteenth century, with Alexander Pope's villa in prime position just to the left of the centre. Such imagery evokes a serene environment, an appropriate setting for genteel living and literary endeavour.

At least four of those who lived within this vista had direct financial links with the slave trade. Robert Cramond the slave trader lived at Crossdeep House, while Alexander Pope and two of his neighbours at The Grove all invested in the South Sea Company. That so many connections can be found within this one painting comes as a shocking reminder of this unacknowledged dimension of our familiar local history.

J. Posselwhite, after Hudson
Alexander Pope
c. 1790
engraving
Borough Art Collection

Poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) lived in Twickenham from 1719 until his death.

Pope invested in the South Sea Company. This might seem like an odd choice of investment for Pope who, in his poetry, seems to criticise the practice of slavery, particularly as practised by the Spanish in their colonies.

Charles Jervas
Philip, Duke of Wharton
1719
Private Collection

Philip, Duke of Wharton (1698-1731) lived briefly at The Grove, Twickenham. A controversial figure and Jacobite (supporter of the Stuart dynasty and therefore disloyal to King George), he was eventually outlawed to Catalonia in 1729. He invested in the South Sea Company.

Another resident of The Grove was James Craggs the Younger (1686-1721), who became Secretary of State in 1718. He moved to The Grove in 1720, and like his friend and neighbour Alexander Pope invested in the South Sea Company.

Diagram showing slaves on board a slave ship

Robert Cramond was a member of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa during the late 1750s, and owned a slave ship capable of carrying at least 392 slaves. From 1752, a Robert Crammond (almost certainly the same man) leased Crossdeep House in Twickenham. Crossdeep House can be seen to the right of the domed summer house in Tilleman's *The Thames at Twickenham,* previous bay. Cramond and his slave ship are mentioned in a lecture given by Teddington resident Dr. Stephen Hales to the Royal Society in 1755 on the subject of ventilators designed for slave ships. Apparently, Cramond found them effective in maintaining a more healthy atmosphere as all 392 slaves, with the exception of 12 who were already ill when taken abroad, 'arrived well at Buenos Aires'.

This image shows slaves densely packed onto another slave ship, the *Brookes*. The diagram was used by abolitionists to show the conditions endured by slaves during the 'middle passage'.

Virtue, after a painting by Richardson
Edward Colston
1702
engraving

Edward Colston (1636 - 1721) came to live at Cromwell House by the Thames in Mortlake in 1689, having amassed a considerable fortune through trading a range of comodities, including enslaved Africans. He was a member of the Royal Africa Company from 1680 and in the year of his move to Mortlake was a deputy governor of the Company. He became one of the main English suppliers of slaves to the Caribbean and North American plantations.

There were two black servants in Colston's Mortlake household, 'Black Mary' and John.

Memorial window to Edward Colston, Bristol Cathedral
Commissioned in 1890 by the Dolphin Society, a philanthropic society established in Colston's memory in 1749
Photograph courtesy of Bristol Cathedral

Colston was extremely generous, distributing his money to charitable causes both in Mortlake and in his native Bristol. He was particularly interested in supporting education. In Bristol, he is commemorated in stained glass windows in the Cathedral and in All Saint's Church, and by a bronze statue on Colston Avenue. Such commemorations of a slave trader, albeit a highly generous one, raise problematic questions in Bristol today. To us the biblical quotation included in the cathedral window, 'As much as ye have done it unto the least of my brethren ye have done it unto me' seems inappropriate bordering on darkly ironic.

Colston Road, East Sheen, 2007
Photograph: Miranda Stearn

Locally, Colston donated money to Mortlake schools as well as rebuilding cottages as almshouses for the parish. His will provided for the education and clothing of twelve boys at Mortlake School for twelve years, as well as providing charity for 85 poor men and women of the parish. The cottages were demolished in 1922 but Colston Road off Sheen Lane serves as a reminder of this local slave trader and philanthropist.

During the twentieth century, historians have remarked upon the paradoxical contradiction between involvement in such an inhumane trade and such generous philanthropy. The fact that Colston's contemporaries never seem to have done so can help us understand how little the morality of the slave trade was questioned during the early part of the 18th century.

Sophia Brunel Hawes
View of Interior of Old Cromwell House, Mortlake
1841
watercolour
Borough Art Collection

This nineteenth-century watercolour shows the interior of Cromwell House (demolished c. 1860), Colston's Mortlake home. Cromwell House was situated on the river front near the current site of Chiswick Bridge.

After Thomas Hudson
Sir George Pocock
c. 1761
oil on canvas
Reproduction courtesy of the
National Portrait Gallery, London

George Pocock joined the navy at the age of twelve and spent much of his career in the East and West Indies. In 1744 he convoyed the 'African trade' on the first leg of the slave trade triangle, protecting the British goods which would be bartered for slaves at Cape Coast Castle.

Pocock acquired the house which would become known as Orleans House in around 1763, and kept it as his country residence until his death in 1792.

After 1807, the navy stopped protecting the slave trade and began enforcing the ban instead.

Tomb of Lady Dorothy Thomas and her daughter Susanna, St Mary's Church, Hampton

Lady Dorothy Thomas was responsible for erecting the memorial tablet to her 'Ethiopian' servant Charles Pompey discussed in the 'Black history in Richmond?' section of this exhibition. The presence of an African servant in her household is unsurprising; her late husband, Sir Dalby Thomas (c. 1650-1711), was highly involved in the West Indies sugar trade and an agent of the Royal African Company.

Lady Dorothy and her daughter had settled in Hampton after Sir Dalby's death on the Gold Coast in 1711. She inherited his estate and it seems likely that it was Sir Dalby's legacy which helped create both the lavish tomb and the new vicarage given by his daughter Susanna to the parish.

Cape Coast Castle, Ghana
From an engraving by Greenhill, 1682

This engraving shows Cape Coast Castle, where Sir Dalby Thomas held the post of Governor or Agent-General from 1703 until his death there in 1711. Royal African Company rules meant that Lady Dorothy would not have been permitted to accompany her husband to the Castle. Cape Coast Castle was the Royal African Company's headquarters in Africa and the main hub of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade from 1664 until abolition in 1807.

Enslaved Africans were held in the Castle while they waited to be loaded onto British ships which would transport them across the Atlantic. As Governor, Sir Dalby was responsible for the smooth running of these operations, which included brokering and maintaining alliances with the local Asante people. Life expectancy for Englishmen on the Gold Coast at this time was only four to five years due to tropical diseases such as malaria, so Sir Dalby's eight years was above average.

John Vanderbank
Grace Carteret, Countess of Dysart, with her Daughter and a Servant
1735
Photograph: Tom Ganf, 2007, with permission of the National Trust

This portrait from Ham House, like that of Elizabeth Murray painted 85 years earlier, shows the lady of the house accompanied by a black servant. Wearing earrings and a jewel at the neck, and holding a white cockatoo, the servant adds a sense of opulent exoticism. For Grace however, the figure may be more than a fashionable accessory used as a device by the artist. Grace's family owned huge plantations in North and South Carolina.

Spring Grove, Hampton (demolished 1981)

Spring Grove in Hampton was home to John Greg of Belfast and his wife, Catherine Henderson. The couple owned plantations on two Caribbean islands: Hillsborough on the island of Dominica and Cane Garden on St. Vincent. Cane Garden had belonged to Catherine's family before her marriage. From 1765 John was Government Commissioner for the sale of land in the West Indies.

Tomb of John and Catherine Greg
Hampton Parish Church
Photographs: Miranda Stearn, 2007

This impressive tomb was built for John in 1795; when Catherine died in 1819 she too was buried here. The couple had no children but the Hillsborough estate on Dominica remained in the family until 1928. The daughters of the final owner of Hillsborough helped pay for the restoration of the tomb. One can assume the Greg family estates were worked by slaves and that the family may have benefited from the compensation paid to slave owners by the British government-when slavery itself was finally abolished in the British Empire 1833-38.

J. Johnson
View of Kingstown, St Vincent, from Sion Hill
1827
engraving
Reproduction courtesy of British Library

This engraving shows am early nineteenth century view of St Vincent. Greg's estate at Cane Garden was not far outside Kingstown; in fact maps suggest that this view must have been taken from somewhere near his estate. The wealth generated by the Cane Garden plantation helped fund Greg's lifestyle at Spring Grove, and no doubt his lavish tomb.

Tourist map of part of St. Vincent
2007

As this map shows, the legacy of Greg's Cane Garden estate lives on in current place names on St. Vincent.

Pompeo Girolamo Batoni
Robert Udny
1770
oil on canvas
Reproduction courtesy of Christie's London

"A gentleman much distinguished for his taste in the fine arts, and ranked with our best judges of painting…and possessed of a very fine collection of pictures. He was a man of general information, great liberality, and a hospitable disposition; indeed he was one of the old breed of true English gentlemen.' (Gentleman's Magazine, 1802)

Robert Fullerton Udny -sometimes spelt Udney- (1725-1802) made his fortune by trading sugar from the Caribbean. On his death, he left a property in the Grenada worth £10,000 a year, presumably a sugar plantation worked by slaves. From 1789, Robert owned Udney House on the High street in Teddington and quickly became acquainted with Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill at Twickenham.

Slave-produced sugar proved a highly lucrative trade and allowed Robert to form an art collection, which he displayed in a picture gallery designed by Robert Adam which he added to his Teddington house in 1790.

The collection was so impressive that even George III made a visit on his way to Windsor. Paintings from Udny's gallery can now be found in important public collections around the world, including our own National Gallery.

Leonardo da Vinci

The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist
c. 1499-1500
charcoal, black & white chalk on tinted paper
Reproduction, courtesy of National Gallery, London

Previously owned by Robert Udny, now in National Gallery, London

Udney Park Road, Teddington
Photograph: Miranda Stearn, 2007

Udny's gallery was destroyed c. 1825 and Udney House c. 1899 but Udny's name lives on in Udney Park Road.

Local Opinion

In the final decades of the eighteenth century, abolition became one of the burning issues of the day, and many people from all walks of life contributed to the debate.

Abolitionist politicians such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson played an important part in shaping public opinion, but so too did many others including members of religious groups, society ladies, those who had experienced slavery at first hand, artists and writers. Those who wished the slave trade to continue also worked hard to publicise their points of view. The conversations which took place around dinner tables and in drawing rooms were just as important as the parliamentary debates, and poetry and fiction were seen as important tools for influencing public opinion.

How did people in Richmond feel about this controversial issue?

Unsurprisingly, people in our borough can be found expressing views on both sides of the debate, while the opinions of many can only be guessed at.

Voting records at the time did not necessarily record how specific members of parliament voted, so we may never know how our local representatives influenced this most crucial of debates, although examining correspondence and other documents allows us to make an informed guess.

It seems likely that of the two MPs for Surrey, Sir John Frederick would have voted against the abolition of the slave trade, while William Russell would have supported the bill. George Byng (1764-1847), who represented Middlesex from 1790 until his death, was a supporter of abolition, while it has proved difficult to confirm the position of his colleague Sir Francis Burdett (MP for Middlesex 1802-04, 1806, then MP for Westminster 1807). In the House of Lords the Duke of Clarence (the future King William IV), who lived at Bushy House in Hampton, was an eloquent supporter of the slave trade.

The abolition debate was also a concern for Richmond's literary elite. Actor and playwright David Garrick corresponded regularly with abolitionist Hannah More, while Ignatius Sancho entreated his novelist friend Laurence Sterne to turn his attention to slavery, and Horace Walpole's letters regularly express his disapproval of the trade. Some writers addressed the topic of slavery directly in their prose or fiction, although even in these instances it can be difficult to be sure of their opinions.

This section examines evidence for local viewpoints on abolition, and investigates how local literary figures responded to the debate in their writing.

Timothy Sheldrake after Jonathan Richardson Snr
Alexander Pope
pencil drawing
Borough Art Collection

Alexander Pope (1688-1745) was one of the best known poets of the eighteenth century, and for many years lived in a riverside villa in Twickenham. Several of his poems address the topic of slavery, yet his own beliefs remain hard to pin down. Inspired by the poetry of ancient Greece and Rome, Pope's verse looked back to a world in which slavery was commonplace. Nevertheless some of his works seem to condemn modern slavery outright.

"Some happier island in the wat'ry waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians search for gold"

Extract from Pope's 'Essay on Man'
1733-34

This excerpt from Pope's 'Essay On Man' describes the vision of paradise held by a 'poor Indian'. The words can seem to empathise with enslaved Africans, evoking the idea of a longed-for return to a native land across the sea.

Yet the meaning is far from clear; while a native land across the sea suggests enslaved Africans, the idea of Christians searching for gold as well as the phrase 'poor Indian' sets the scene in Spanish-controlled South America with the conquistadors as the villains and the indigenous people as the enslaved victims.

"Till conquest cease, and slavery be no more;
Till the freed Indians in their native groves
Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable loves,"

Extract from Pope's 'Windsor Forest'
1713

These lines seem clearly anti-slavery. Yet the fact that they appear in a patriotic poem written to celebrate the British victory which led to the Treaty of Utrecht makes things more complicated. This treaty was popular partly because it gave British companies a monopoly to supply slaves to the Spanish colonies, and we know that Pope actually invested in the South Sea Company which was set up precisely for this task.

While the 'freed Indians in their native groves' sound more like the indigenous people of South America, their 'sable loves' might be Africans. Is Pope's poetry anti-slavery, or more anti-Spanish?

P. W. Tomkins, after William Hamilton
James Thomson crowned by muses
1798
engraving
Borough Art Collection

James Thomson (1700-1748), poet and playwright, lived in Richmond from 1736. The features of the local landscape, particularly view from Richmond Hill which he described as 'the matchless Vale of Thames', are celebrated in his poetry.

Thomson also touched upon the topic of slavery in his verse. One commentator even believed that 'had he written when the evils of the trade were more widely known, he might have been the greatest poet of anti-slavery,' yet as with Pope, Thomson's opinions remain elusive.

Increasing still the terrors of these storms,
His jaws horrific armed with threefold fate,
Here dwells the direful shark. Lured by the scent
Of steaming crowds, of rank disease and death,
Behold! He rushing cuts the briny flood,
Swift as the gale can bear the ship along;
And from the partners of that cruel trade
Which spoils unhappy Guinea of her sons
Demands his share of prey –demands themselves.

The stormy fates descend: one death involves
Tyrants and slaves; when straight, their mangled limbs
Crashing at once, he dyes the purple seas
With gore, and riots in the vengeful meal.
The Seasons: Summer, 1013-1025

This extract from Thomson's *The Seasons* gives a graphic description of a slave ship in a storm, pursued by a shark who will devour all on board should the storm winds break up the ship. Several things suggest Thomson's disapproval of the trade: the 'steaming crowds, of rank disease and death' showing awareness of conditions on the middle passage, the 'cruel trade', the traders as 'Tyrants' and sympathetic reference to 'unhappy Guinea'. Yet Thomson's concern seems to be to paint a dramatic picture of the forces of the storm rather than to provoke outrage at the slave trade; the overriding message is of the levelling power of nature, the 'stormy fates' which indiscriminately reduce the slaves and tyrants to one gory mass of humanity. It is a bleak, rather than a hopeful, vision of equality.

Rule Britannia!
Britannia rule the waves.
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!

Thomson's most famous lines celebrate British freedom and commercial expansion. When we hear these lines belted out in jubilant fashion at the last night of the proms the reference to slavery slips by almost un-noticed. The words seem far more loaded when we consider that one of the indicators of 'ruling the waves' in Thomson's time was dominance in the slave trade.

Sir Joshua Reynolds
Horace Walpole
c. 1756-57
oil on canvas
Reproduction courtesy of
the National Portrait Gallery, London

Horace (Horatio) Walpole (1717-97) lived at Strawberry Hill in Twickenham from 1747. He was one of the leading figures

in the literary and cultural worlds of his day, and his letters give us a privileged insight into his times.

Walpole's letters suggest clear opposition to the slave trade. He was influenced in this by reading the chapter on the slave trade in Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* (*Spirit of the Laws*, 1758), and recommended the book to others. He also corresponded on the subject with staunch abolitionist Hannah More, and subscribed to Ignatius Sancho's letters.

"We, the British Senate, that temple of liberty, and bulwark of Protestant Christianity, have this fortnight been pondering methods to make more effectual that horrid traffic of selling negroes. It has appeared to us that six-and-forty thousand of these wretches are sold every year to our plantations alone! – it chills one's blood."

Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, 25th February 1750, expressing his response to debates surrounding a bill to foster the slave trade.

Horace Walpole
An Account of the Giants Lately Discovered
1766

This political satire uses a fantasy narrative of the discovery of a race of giants in Patagonia to highlight the ridiculousness of the English tendency to attempt to enslave all those they come into contact with. Much of his argument is directed at English attitudes towards rights of the American colonists, but elsewhere these debates become mixed with Walpole's attitude towards the slave trade.

'That wise maxim of our planters, that if a slave lives four years, he has earned his purchase money, consequently you may afford to work him to death in that time.'

J. Dixon after Thomas Hudson
David Garrick
engraving
Borough Art Collection

Actor and playwright David Garrick lived in Hampton. He corresponded regularly with abolitionist Hannah More, and collaborated with Ignatius Sancho who composed the music to Garrick's Ode to Shakespeare. The fact that he counted these abolitionists among his friends and collaborators might lead us to assume he supported abolition; however evidence suggests that his London theatrical productions may have been partly financed by money from West Indies trade.

Artist unknown
Mrs. Hannah More
c. 1810
stipple engraving
Borough Art Collection

Horace Walpole and abolitionist writer Hannah More (1745-1833) corresponded regularly, sharing ideas on the trade and its evils.

Ignatius Sancho

Sancho made clear his disgust of slavery in his letters, which attracted many subscribers when they were published 1782. He believed literature could play an important part in shaping public opinion, and entreated his novelist friend Laurence Sterne to 'draw a tear in favour of my miserable black brethren'.

"The Duke of Clarence rose, and made his maiden speech…He had proofs in his possession, that the evidence given before the committee of the House of Commons, was at least erroneous, if not worse. The negroes were not treated in the manner which had so much agitated the public mind. He had been an attentive observer of the state of the negroes, and had no doubt but that he could bring

forward proofs to convince their lordships that their state was far from being miserable; on the contrary, that, when the various ranks of society were considered, they were comparatively in a state of humble happiness. He had been an eye witness to what was called slavery, and was ready to meet any noble lord on the subject on any future day. He gave it as his opinion, that the moment this trade was lopped off from this country, there were a junto from other countries, at this time in London, to close an agreement with the merchants and the planters of the same. He, therefore, conjured their lordships to give the business that consideration it so eminently deserved…Full and substantial proof only would satisfy him that the enormities complained of actually existed. Another consideration was, the great poverty and the immense commerce which was intimately connected with this trade."
3rd May, 1792

B. Holl after A. Wivello
William IV
1831
engraving
Borough Art Collection

S. Rawle
Clarence House, Bushy Park, Middlesex
Engraving
Borough Art Collection

William Duke of Clarence (later William IV) lived at Clarence House, Bushy Park. He based his passionate defence of slavery in the House of Lords upon his personal experience of the West Indies, where he claimed to have witnessed slavery at first hand and found no evidence of the cruelties described by the abolitionists.

James Gillray
WOUSKI (Prince William Henry, future Duke of Clarence)
1788
hand-coloured etching
Reproduction courtesy of National Portrait Gallery

This satirical etching was published the year before Prince William Henry, third son of King George III, became Duke of Clarence. Prince William is shown sharing a hammock with a voluptuous black woman while in Jamaica. The prince had joined the Navy at the age of thirteen and was stationed in the West Indies in 1786; this etching suggests a young man escaping the responsibilities of monarchy to enjoy womanising (and rum) far from home.

This imagined intimacy between the prince and his black lover is presented as a source of humour but also of disapproval – as something degrading and inappropriate. This image of two carefree lovers takes on a new tension when one considers that, four years later, Prince William was to rely upon his first hand experience of life in the West Indies to battle against the abolition of slavery in the House of Lords.

Slavery and abolition in Richmond Virginia: a parallel view

Slavery and the slave trade are inescapable features of Richmond Virginia's history. Founded by William Byrd II, the pre-eminent tobacco planter of his day, Richmond thrived on the trade in both slave-grown commodities and slaves. At the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the fall of Richmond signalled the end of slavery itself. In contrast to the painstaking process of uncovering our own area's connections with the trade, Richmond's links are direct and plentiful. It would seem impossible to write the city's history without mentioning slavery.

This does not make it an easy history to write. For many people living in Richmond, it is a personal history arousing strong emotions. Slavery's integral role in Richmond's development makes the topic more uncomfortable, not less so.

There is no shortage of historical material. Paintings and engravings provide graphic images of the city's slave auctions and of the workplaces of the resident enslaved population. Written agreements relating to the sale or hiring of slaves give an insight into these transactions, while business and household accounts and census data give an indication of the distribution and lifestyle of the city's slaves.

This data gains a more human dimension through the surviving words of those who experienced Richmond's slave-trading society at first hand. Visitors to Richmond, including English novelist Charles Dickens (1812-1870), wrote detailed accounts of what they saw from an outsider's perspective. Most compelling are the narratives of those with a closer connection – those individuals who had lived as slaves in the city and went on to tell their stories.

Examining all this evidence, we can build up a relatively detailed picture of the slave trade in our twin town. During a year in which so much attention has been paid to the anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic trade, it

makes sense to think about the transatlantic impact of this Act. Exploring Richmond Virginia's story allows us to do just that.

Advertisement: Vitriola music for *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny*

Late 19th century

Reproduction courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

The lyrics to *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny*, Virginia's state song 1940-1997, encapsulate a nostalgic view of the American South. In it, an 'old Darkey' longs to return to his homeland, a fertile paradise of potatoes, corn, cotton and … slavery.

Carry Me Back to Old Virginny reflects the state's difficult relationship with its slave-holding past. In 1997, it was dropped as state song because of the positive view of slavery it promoted, but remains 'state song emeritus'. Virginia is currently without a state song.

Written by James A. Bland (1854 – 1911), an African American born in New York who had never experienced slavery, the song was popular with black communities in the northern states at the end of the nineteenth century.

A society built on slavery

By the time William Byrd II (1674 – 1744) looked out along the James River and decided that the city he was about to found should be named after a similarly picturesque spot on the Thames, enslaved Africans had been in Virginia for over a century.

Like most prominent Virginians of his day, Byrd was in the tobacco business. As well as the land at the Falls of the James River on which he was to found Richmond, he owned docks, warehouses and mills, and had inherited a plantation at Westover 30 miles downstream. It was Virginia's tobacco plantations which were responsible for both the colony's prosperity and dependence upon enslaved labour.

Inspired by the riches flowing into Spain from her South American empire, Virginia's original settlers had hoped to find a 'new world' dripping with silver and gold. Instead they discovered the key to prosperity was agricultural rather than mineral wealth, above all the export of tobacco to meet growing European demands.

Cultivating tobacco required a large workforce. This was a challenge in the early days of the colony, especially as mortality rates for settlers were extremely high, and most ordinary people could not afford to travel to Virginia even if they wanted to take their chances in the inhospitable new world. However, slavery was not the original solution to this problem.

Instead, many poor, unskilled or unemployed people were brought from Europe as 'indentured labourers'. This meant that their transport had been paid for by a wealthy colonist, whom they repaid by completing 4 -7 years labour, after which they were free. Life was hard and for many indentured labourers, migration represented a last resort rather than an exciting opportunity, and so the 'supply' of such workers depended upon poor economic conditions in Europe. In the late seventeenth century, supply declined

and enslaved African labour became a more popular alternative for plantation owners in the new world.

The first Africans recorded in Virginia appear in 1619. Between 1619 and the end of the seventeenth century, approximately 33,000 Africans were imported into English mainland North America to work on plantations growing tobacco, cotton or other crops. In 1661, Virginia passed laws making slavery hereditary. From 1700 - 1775, approximately 280,000 Africans were imported into the Thirteen Colonies of English North America, of which approximately 100,000 were bought by Virginians. By 1776, African-Virginians accounted for 40% of the population.

Richmond quickly became a commercial centre within this slave-dependent economy. Slaves were bought and sold in the city, while tobacco from the surrounding plantations was processed, packed and exported from the city's warehouses and wharfs. As the city developed, so too did slavery, with industrial slavery emerging alongside the existing domestic and agricultural slavery. The city might change but slavery remained a given.

Hans Hyssing
William Byrd II
c. 1724
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

William Byrd II laid out the new town of Richmond Virginia in 1737. A plantation owner, he compared himself to a slave-owning patriarch like those described in the old testament of The Bible: *"Like one of the patriarchs, I have my flocks and my herds, my bond-men and bond women, and every soart of trade amongst my servants."* The fact that slavery was the norm in The Bible helped its acceptance among the Christian colonists.

Black Boy Tobacco
Print block tobacco label
18th century
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

These Virginia tobacco labels evoke the significant role played by enslaved Africans in the production of the colony's major export. Not only were African labourers essential to the cultivation of the tobacco crops, they became so closely identified with the product that they might become part of the 'brand', as in this label.

Tho. Foster's Best Virginia Tobacco
Print block tobacco label
18th century
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

These labels suggest the plantation owners' pride in their tobacco businesses, in which slavery played so significant a part. Far from avoiding the issue, these two planters chose create tobacco labels which function as self-portraits, depicting the planter enjoying a smoke while presiding over his slave-worked plantation.

Daniel's Best Tobacco
Print block tobacco label
18th century
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

Site of Manchester slave docks, Richmond VA
Photograph: Miranda Stearn, 2007

During the late eighteenth century, docks here on the Manchester side of the James River acted as the main point of disembarkation for slaves arriving to be sold in Richmond.

Daniel Orme, after W. Denton
Olaudah Equiano ('Gustavus Vassa')
1789
stipple engraving
Reproduction courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

African man of letters and anti-slavery campaigner Equiano had been kidnapped and sold into slavery as a child. In his autobiography (published 1789), he records that having spent two weeks in Barbados following the Atlantic crossing, he was moved on to Virginia to work on a plantation:

"We were landed up a river a good way from the sea, about Virginia county, where we saw few of our native Africans, and not one soul who could talk to me… I was now exceedingly miserable, and thought myself worse off than any of the rest of my companions; for they could talk to each other, but I had no person to speak to that I could understand."

Albert C. Pleasants
Rocketts Landing
1840
Reproduction courtesy of Valentine Richmond History Center

This image shows the busy shipping at Rocketts Landing on the Richmond side of the James River, where the majority of shipping (including ships carrying slaves 'down river' to be sold further south) docked during the nineteenth century.

The river continued to play a vital part in Richmond's slave trade. In 1841, one year after this view was painted, the slave ship *Creole* sailed from Richmond bound for New Orleans, but ended up in the Bahamas after the slaves on board took control of the vessel.

Railway bridges on the James River at Richmond
Photograph: Miranda Stearn, 2007

During the nineteenth century, Richmond's transport links developed. Slaves began to be transported on the railways as well as well as by river or on foot. It was the city's railway network which allowed Richmond to surpass the city of Alexandria as the leading supplier of slaves in the American South.

Abolition of the slave trade?
Slave trading in Richmond after 1808

On 1st January 1808, it became illegal to import slaves into the United States. Like Britain the previous year, America had legislated to end her involvement in the horrors of the transatlantic trade.

It is easy to assume that the end of the transatlantic slave trade was imagined as a step towards an end to slavery itself, and that slave-dependent Virginia would be horrified. Closer examination reveals a far more complicated picture; within the United States, the trade in human beings was far from over. In fact, more people were bought and sold in Richmond Virginia after 1808 than before.

Before American independence (1776), Richmond had been a minor destination for slave ships coming from Africa, or from the British West Indies. In his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano (*c.* 1745-1797) records being taken from Barbados to Virginia.

In 1778, thirty years before the national ban, the state of Virginia outlawed the importation of slaves. Local plantation owners did not oppose or resist this law. So many people were now being born into slavery on Virginia's plantations that there was no need to import any more. Instead, Virginia-born slaves were being advertised for sale to new owners, often those setting up plantations outside the state along the Mississippi River. The 1808 ban on the importation of slaves helped Virginia slave holders by increasing the value of their 'property', the slaves born on their plantations.

This inter-state trade flourished in Richmond until the end of slavery itself. By 1820, Richmond exported more surplus slaves to other states than any other American city. In 1857, the *Richmond Enquirer* estimated that slave sales in Richmond auctions that year totalled $3,500,000, while another paper estimated $4,000,000. By 1860, Richmond had 15 slave-trade companies, 19 auctioneers and 15

collecting agents. Slave trading was big business, and contributed to the city's thriving economy.

These statistics convey the volume of the trade, but not its devastating impact. Slave auctions often resulted in the breaking up of families, with husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters separated forever.

This total disregard for personal bonds among the enslaved undermines the nostalgic image of harmonious plantation life in which slaves enjoyed protection and stability provided by a benevolent 'Massa' (Master). It also severely limited the impact of the relative independence experienced by those slaves who were 'hired out' (see next panel) and lived away from their owners, often with their own spouse and children. All Richmond's slaves lived in the knowledge that their family could be broken up at any time.

During the final decades of slavery, Richmond's slave auctions attracted not just traders but curious onlookers, intrigued by this trade which was a source of growing dissent within the (increasingly divided) United States. To many outside, these auctions seemed a ghastly anachronism continuing decades after the abolition of the transatlantic trade; in some ways however they owed their booming success to the abolition bills being commemorated this year.

Lefevre Cranstone
Slave Auction, Virginia
1860
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

This scene was painted by an English artist visiting Richmond. The crowd of potential buyers pushing through the doorway suggest business is thriving. However the general atmosphere captured by Cranstone seems calm rather than frenetic, as the women sit with their children waiting in turn to mount the auction steps.

Dealers inspecting a negro at a slave auction in Virginia
Sketch accompanying 'Slave Auctions in Richmond, Virginia' in
The Illustrated London News, vol. 38, no. 1075, 16th February 1861

"The negro paced up and down the room to show that he was sound on his legs. Some of the buyers stopped him during his walk and asked him a variety of questions, as to last employment, state of his health, and so forth. Then they turned his head to the light, and lifted the corners of his eyes, to ascertain whether they were free from indications of disease; in the same way they examined his teeth. They did not do this in a harsh or brutal manner, but just the same as a doctor might examine a patient."

"Being a little before the time fixed for the auction, I had a good opportunity to look at the crowd of men about me who dealt in human flesh, and I am bound to say that I saw nothing very dreadful in their appearance; they carried neither revolvers nor whips. They were not a gentlemanly-looking lot of men certainly, but seemed quiet, respectable people such as one might meet at a sale of books or old china in any part of London."

A Slave Auction in Virginia – from sketch by our special artist

Sketch accompanying 'Slave Auctions in Richmond, Virginia' in
The Illustrated London News, vol. 38, no. 1075, 16th February 1861

In 1861 *The Illustrated London News* ran a feature from their special correspondent on the slave auctions of Richmond. The reporter recorded that residents initially regarded him with suspicion, feeling that they have been *"so grossly libelled and misrepresented by novelists and newspaper-writers"*. His final report is a strange mix of moral disgust and 'objective' reporting of events.

"This was the first human being I had ever seen sold, and during the time of the biddings I felt the greatest difficulty in preventing myself from fainting. A dreadful, indescribable sickness came over me, which defied all my efforts to conquer…"

Map showing locations of Richmond slave dealers 1852 – 1863

(Map by Elizabeth Kambourian, taken from *Seeing the Scars of Slavery in the Natural Landscape*, James River Park System)

This map shows the fifty-nine different slave dealers operating in the Shockoe Bottom district of Richmond.

Lumpkin's Jail

Reproduction courtesy of Valentine Richmond History Center

This was the largest slave dealership in Richmond. It was owned by Robert Lumpkin, whose prominence within the city's slave trade is suggested by the fact that ninety percent of the slaves on board the ship *Creole* when she set off from

Richmond in 1841 had been shipped by him. Lumpkin's compound contained two slave dormitories where slaves might be kept prior to shipping, as well as a kitchen, laundry and office. Slaves referred to Lumpkin's as the 'Devil's Half Acre'.

After the Civil War, the complex became the home of the first school for former slaves.

George Herbert Watkins
Charles Dickens
1858
albumen print
Reproduction courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

In his *American Notes for General Circulation* (London, 1842), novelist Dickens recorded his encounter with Richmond Virginia's slave system, including the experience of sharing a train with a slave family who had just been separated from one another by the interstate trade:

"In the negro belonging to the train in which we made this journey were a mother and her children who had just been purchased; the husband and father being left behind with their old owner. The children cried the whole way, and the mother was misery's picture."

"When you gather a bunch of cattle to sell their calves, how the calves and cows will bawl, that the way the slaves was then. They didn't know nothin' about their kinfolks. Most chillen didn't know who their pappy was and some their mammy, 'cause they taken away from the mammy when she wean them. They sell or trade the chillen to someone else, so they wouldn't get attached to to their mammy or pappy."

Elige Davison, born a slave in Richmond in the late 1840s, interviewed during 1930s.

Slavery in the city: life and work for Richmond's enslaved population

Those living as slaves in Richmond VA between 1808 and emancipation experienced a variety of living arrangements and undertook a wide array of occupations. While some worked as agricultural labourers and domestic servants on the plantations outside the city, many others lived lives far removed from this traditional view of slavery in the 'Old South'.

Slave owners in Richmond adapted their systems to meet the needs of their thriving industrial city, creating a slave-holding society very different from the rest of the agricultural south. For the enslaved African-Virginians, this set of circumstances presented both opportunities and challenges.

Richmond depended on slave labour in many areas of city life. Some worked as construction workers and bricklayers, contributing to on ambitious and dangerous building projects such as the Kanawha Canal. Many others worked in manufacturing at the city's mills and factories, processing cotton, flour and tobacco, or at the Tredegar iron works. In Richmond, slavery proved itself able to meet the needs of a modern, industrialised city.

Slaves might occupy a range of positions within these industries. From 1840, Tredegar iron works began to use slave labour in the specialist roles of puddlers, heaters and rollers. On the canals, slaves began to be promoted to the skilled rolls of stone-cutters and stone masons. This saved money for employers but caused anger among the white working population, who feared for their jobs. It also allowed Richmond's slaves to develop a wide range of specialist skills.

Many slaves working in Richmond were not owned by their employers but 'hired out'. Slave owners would have more slaves than necessary for their own requirements and would make money by hiring them out to factory or mill owners for a set period of time. This unusual system suited the more

dynamic labour markets of the industrial city, with employers able to vary the size of their workforce and to use slave labour without the huge initial investment of buying their own slaves.

Hiring out changed slaves' lifestyles too. Many owners did not mind what employment their slaves found, as long as they received the agreed hiring fee. This meant some slaves had more control over what they did and whom they worked for, being able to chose their own jobs.

For many, being 'hired out' also meant moving out of the owner's house to live in the city. Hired out slaves were often given an allowance to cover food and housing, enabling them to live independently, usually in tenements in family units with other slaves or free blacks. Poor sanitation often led to disease in these primarily black neighbourhoods.

Hiring out also gave slaves the opportunity to generate their own income, as once their owner had received the hiring fee, the slave worker could keep any additional wages earned. Some were able to earn enough to purchase their own freedom, or to buy their loved ones out of slavery. Others pooled their money to benefit the wider community, for example helping to buy the premises for the First African Baptist Church.

The system of hiring out was convenient both for slave owners and employers, but many white residents were wary of the relative independence it afforded the slaves. Black neighbourhoods where slaves might meet 'unsupervised' made them nervous, and during the 1850s laws were passed to increase control by preventing slaves choosing their own lodgings.

Augustus Kollner
Virginia Planter's Family
1845
watercolour
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

This watercolour evokes the more traditional view of plantation slavery in Virginia. The slave (along with the horse and the dog) might be considered part of the 'Virginia Planter's Family' referred to in the title, living together peacefully in an attractive rural setting beside the river.

The testing of the first reaping machine near Steele's Tavern VA, A.D. 1831
print
c.1890
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

This print shows slaves harvesting a field of oats. One slave continues to use a traditional sickle, while many stand around watching the new machine. Agricultural slavery continued in rural Virginia, but such mechanical advances mean fewer slaves were needed. While this image shows the slaves standing around or relaxing, in reality surplus slaves might well be hired out into the city or sold to cotton plantations outside the state through Richmond's slave auctions.

"A visit to a tobacco manufactory, where all the workers were slaves … Many of the workmen appeared to be strong men, and it is hardly necessary to add that they were all labouring quietly then. After two o'clock in the day they are allowed to sing, a certain number at a time. The hour striking while I was there, some twenty sang a hymn in parts, and sang it by no means ill; pursuing their work meanwhile."

Charles Dickens, 1842

John Durkin
Making the Virginia Twist
1887
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

This image, painted after the end of slavery to illustrate an article about Richmond's tobacco industry, shows one of the stages of tobacco processing previously carried out by slaves. Many of the workers pictured may have been ex-slaves, continuing to work in the same industry after emancipation.

Tredegar Iron Works (now the Civil War museum)
Photograph: Miranda Stearn, 2007

In 1847, the use of 'hired out' slave labour at the iron works led to a strike among the white workers. The strikers were sacked and replaced with a largely slave workforce.

Written agreement for hiring of a slave named Joe to work at Tredegar Iron Works for one year
1864

In this document, Tredegar Iron Works agree to pay Joe's owner $300 for a year of his labour. This agreement was written during the penultimate year of the civil war, when the iron works were making a vital contribution to the Southern war effort.

Slave pass for Aunt Jemima Johnston, born 1799
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

Slaves moving around the city independently were usually required to carry passes, whether going to work or attending social or religious gatherings. Sometimes these might be temporary notes stating that the owner had granted permission for the individual to attend a specific event;

others such as this functioned more like identity cards, giving the bearer's name, date and place of birth.

First African Baptist Church
1865
Reproduction courtesy of Valentine Richmond History Center

As the First Baptist Church, this building had been shared by white and black residents until 1841, with freed blacks and slaves restricted to the galleries. Black congregants, who outnumbered the whites four to one, fought to establish their own church, and in 1841 they were able to purchase the building. The First African Baptism Church played a vital role in strengthening the black community and allowing slaves in Richmond to develop organisational skills and experience. By law the preacher had to be white – an 'unsupervised' black congregation was considered too risky.

Escaping slavery: rewards, resistance and rebellion

In 1661, slavery became hereditary in Virginia, paving the way for a system that could survive the abolition of the transatlantic trade 146 years later. Over the following two centuries, many refused to accept the state of oppression into which they had been born or sold, seeking freedom through a number of strategies from self-purchase to armed rebellion. Some succeeded; others faced the dire consequences of failure.

Some slaves obtained their freedom through legal means. From 1782, slave owners were allowed to free ('manumit') their slaves. Some chose to on religious principles, others to reward specific individuals. As the system of 'hiring out' became more popular in Richmond during the nineteenth century, some slaves were able to save enough of their own income to purchase themselves or their loved ones out of slavery.

For most, the route to freedom lay in resisting the institutions of slavery rather than working within them. Newspaper notices regarding runaway slaves suggest that this was a frequently-attempted form of escape. Those recaptured were punished severely, so most runaways attempted to reach the relative safety of the northern 'free' states where slavery had gradually been abolished in the run up to American independence.

An elaborate system of secret stopping places, known as the 'underground railway', developed along the route, with both black and white individuals working together to help those escaping to the north. Some of those who escaped became passionate campaigners for abolition, using their stories to raise awareness of the realities of slavery. Many southern slave-owners believed that abolitionists in the northern states were responsible for encouraging their slaves to run away or rebel, and this contributed to growing tensions between north and south in the run up to the American Civil War.

As an alternative to escaping to the non-slave states, some left America altogether. In 1841, slaves on the slave ship

Creole took control of the ship and sailed to the Bahamas, where they were released by the British authorities (slavery had finally been abolished in the British empire in 1838).

For some, individual escape would not be enough: instead they planned armed rebellions. The organisers of these revolts sometimes linked their efforts to the example of the American War of Independence, highlighting the irony of continuing slavery in a new nation founded upon the principle of liberty. In 1800, a revolt was planned under the banner of 'Death or Liberty!' - an inversion of the famous 'Give me liberty or give me death' speech delivered in Richmond by American revolutionary leader Patrick Henry. In 1832, a slave revolt in which around 60 white Virginians were killed was symbolically carried out on the 4th of July, Independence Day.

Rebels were severely punished; Gabriel, who planned the 1800 revolt, and his co-conspirators were tried and executed in Richmond. White residents feared the threat of such armed uprisings, and tried to limit the opportunities for slaves to meet together. In 1811, Virginia Congressman John Randolph spoke of "The danger arising from the black population… The night bell never tolls for fire in Richmond, that the mother does not hug the infant more closely to her bosom".

John Blennerhassett Martin
James Armistead Lafayette
1784
engraving and facsimile testimonial
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

James Armistead Lafayette acted as a double agent, spying on the British during the War of Independence (1776-1783). After independence, he was rewarded for his service with freedom and welcomed into Richmond as a hero.

During the War of Independence, many slaves sought freedom by another means, escaping their owners to fight for the British after the Earl of Dunmore promised freedom to any slave who would take up arms to fight for the King against the rebel colonists.

Tom Molineaux
1812
hand-coloured etching
Reproduction courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

Tom Molineaux (1784-1818) provides an example of a slave who obtained his freedom as a reward. Born on a Virginia plantation, Molineaux was a skilled boxer and took part in contests against fellow slaves. Plantation owners placed bets on the outcomes, and after winning one of these matches Molineaux was rewarded with his freedom and $500. He subsequently pursued his boxing career in New York and England, where this engraving was made.

Tragical Scene
broadside
1832
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

This broadside records the armed slave rebellion led by Nat Turner (1800-1831) in Southampton County Virginia, 1831. After being sold twice Turner, a religious and literate man, decided that God wished him to punish the slave owners. To avoid betrayal, he did not share his plans with other slaves but relied upon them spontaneously joining in the rebellion. Approximately 70 did so, and about 60 white residents were killed. Turner was captured and executed, along with 120 slaves many of whom were innocent. Many white residents blamed abolitionists in the north for encouraging the rebellion.

Samuel Rowse
The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown at Philadelphia
lithograph
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

Henry Brown (1816 - ?) used great ingenuity to escape from slavery in Richmond in 1849. With the help of a white accomplice, Brown had himself enclosed in a wooden crate and posted to Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, where slavery had been abolished. Brown adopted this highly risky and extremely uncomfortable escape plan after the trauma of seeing his wife and children sold away from him forever. He became a hero of the anti-slavery movement, with engravings, theatrical presentations and a ghost-written autobiography telling the tale of his dramatic escape, and travelled to England speaking in London and other towns across the south east.

Ending slavery: Civil War and emancipation in Richmond

In 1865, the fall of Richmond signalled the end of both the American Civil War and of the institution widely seen as its central issue: slavery.

Slavery had continued to flourish in the southern states of the United States after 1808, despite the ending of the transatlantic trade. This became a growing source of tension between these states and those in the north where slavery had disappeared.

In the south, slave-holding was fiercely defended as a vital part of the southern way of life. It was argued that the agricultural economy relied on slave labour, and that those who criticised slavery misunderstood it. Plantation slavery was defended as beneficial to all concerned, with slaves well treated and enjoying a better quality of life than the free bur poor industrial workers in the cities of the north.

These arguments are problematic when applied to Richmond, an industrial city in which many slaves worked in mills or factories and lived independently in poor quality tenement housing.

Slavery was defended as the status quo, an inherited system which could not be changed without disrupting a whole way of life. Slaves were personal property so emancipation posed a real financial threat to many people in the south who stood to loose 'assets' worth a huge amount. In Britain, the controversial system of 'compensated emancipation' had paid out millions to slave owners (and nothing to slaves); this system was not considered a possibility in the southern United States, where a far higher proportion of the population owned slaves.

Individual states fiercely guarded their right to make their own decisions on a range of issues and the southern states felt their rights were threatened by the northern abolition movement. Politics became divided on North-South lines; in 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president, supported

only by northern states. Seven southern states decided to secede from (leave) the Union, essentially declaring independence from the United States. Virginia joined them in 1861, after the United States army attacked the 'rebel' southern states. From 1861-1865, civil war raged between the Union (north) and the Confederacy (south), with Richmond as capital of the latter.

Whether the American Civil War should be seen as a war over slavery, a war over states' rights, or a combination of these and many other factors, it became clear that the fate of slavery depended upon the outcome of the war. In 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, officially freeing the slaves in the 'rebel' states. If the south lost the war, slavery would be over.

For Richmond, the fate of slavery became inextricably linked to the city's own fate. Richmond's iron works were vital to the southern war effort and the city's status as capital of the Confederacy, complete with its own White House, ensured its importance. The war brought change for all who lived in Richmond, and the population of the city doubled as army personnel from all over the south. In 1863, food shortages and inflated costs led to Bread riots.

While some Richmond slaves sought freedom by escaping to the Union camps or even acted as spies for the north, many contributed to the Confederate war effort in various ways. They worked in factories and iron works, in hospitals and warehouses, and on the canals and railways supplying provisions. Some were attached to military units as cooks, nurses and general labourers, while others were required to dig trenches. Labour shortages led to 'impressment', which allowed the government to conscript slaves against their owners' wishes to carry out war work. In 1864, after much debate, the Confederate army began recruiting slaves and free blacks in Richmond, forming two companies. It was widely believed that those slaves who signed up to fight for the Confederacy would be rewarded with freedom if the south won the war.

On April 3rd 1865 the Union army entered Richmond and six days later the Confederates surrendered. For years to come, former slaves would remember where they were when Richmond fell.

The end of the civil war brought not just freedom but confusion. Some former slaves stayed on in previous occupations, while others chose to travel out of the state to seek their fortunes. Many endured extreme hardship in the early days of liberty, but these years also represented a new phase of life for the black community which had grown up during the final decades of slavery, with new black societies, educational institutions and businesses emerging to earn Richmond the title of 'the Harlem of the south'.

Confederate memorial chapel, Richmond Virginia
Photograph: Miranda Stearn, 2007

The legacy of the Civil War is a particularly challenging aspect of Richmond's history and identity. Many residents resent the idea that the war was fought primarily over slavery and that the northern states should be seen as heroic, occupying the moral high ground. Instead, they believe their ancestors fought bravely to defend their homeland: the state of Virginia. The challenge of commemorating the Confederate dead without implying sympathy with slavery, an inescapable aspect of the Confederate cause, still haunts the city.

African American Army Teamsters, Cobb Hill, Virginia
1861-65
albumen print
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

Black soldiers fought on both sides during the American Civil War, as well a fulfilling a number of vital support roles. In the south, slaves and free blacks were restricted to these non-combatant roles for most of the war as generals did not want to give them weapons.

The Fall of Richmond, Virginia on the night of 2nd April, 1865
lithograph
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

The fall of Richmond had huge significance, both practical and symbolic, for the southern cause, and this image of the city in flames might suggest the violent destruction of an old way of life. For slaves across the American south, the fall of Richmond came to symbolise the moment of victory and the arrival of freedom. The fires which can be seen ravaging the city in this print were not caused by the victorious Union army but by the Confederates destroying resources and facilities as the abandoned the city.

'Virginia slave children rescued by colored troops: As we found them and As they are now'
Carte de visite photographs
c. 1864
Reproduction courtesy of Virginia Historical Society, Richmond Virginia

These images were produced to raise funds to help newly-liberated slaves. Testimonies from former slaves give many different accounts of their treatment at the hands of both their former masters and the Union soldiers, with kindness and cruelty displayed by both groups. Organisations such as the United States Christian Commission in Richmond offered relief to former slaves, while Freedmen's Bureaus were set up across the south to help reconnect families separated by slavery and direct former slaves towards employment and education.

President Abraham Lincoln entering Richmond Virginia, 4th April 1865
1865
Reproduction courtesy of the Valentine Richmond History Center

On 4th April 1865, Lincoln entered Richmond to a mixed response. This image shows him walking amongst the many black residents who came into the streets to greet him. Lincoln is shown welcomed as a hero and saviour by the adoring crowd. This image occupies an uneasy ground between reportage and myth-making, contributing to a visual rhetoric of emancipation in which freedom is presented as a gift, granted at the discretion of the virtuous white man to the helpless slave, rather than an inherent human right.

"I 'member plenty about the War, 'cause the Yankees they march on to Richmond. They kill everything what in the way. I heared them big guns and I'se scared…Massa, he send me to get the buggy and hoss and carry Missus to the

mountain, but them Yankees they capture me and say they gwine hang that nigger. But, glory be, Massa he saves me before they hangs me."

"When war over Massa call me and tells me I'se free as he was, 'cause them Yankees win the War.He gives me five dollars and say he'll give me that much a month iffen I stays with him, but I starts to Texas…Most niggers just got turn loose with a cuss, and not 'nough clothes to cover their bodies."

Elige Davison, born a slave in Richmond in the late 1840s, interviewed during 1930s

"The day freedom came, I was fishing with Pappy. My remembrance is sure good! All a-sudden cannons commence a-booming, it seem like everywhere. It was the fall of Richmond. Cannons was to roar every place when Richmond fell."

Mittie Freeman, born a slave in the late 1840s, interviewed during 1930s

"When de War broke out Old Marster enlisted and he took me 'long to wait on him and to keep his clothes clean. I had plenty o' fun 'cause dere wasn't so very much work to do. I 'members seeing his fightin' in Richmond and Danville, Virginia…After the war was over Old Marster was all shot up and I had to take him back on home. When we got dere all de slaves crowded raound me and wanted to know if dey was gonna be freed or not and when I told 'em dat de War was over and dat dey was free dey was all very glad."

Benjamin Johnson, born a slave in the late 1840s, interviewed during 1930s

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