

You can access this trail at any point as it is not in chronological order

It is 200 years since the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire. This bicentenary milestone gives us an opportunity to engage with the history of this trade and its impact upon Britain in general and Greater Manchester in particular.

Rather than telling a full history of slavery we have brought together a range of objects in themes that explore a variety of links. The range of objects may at first seem surprising. However, as the trail reveals, slavery is inextricably linked with many aspects of our history, nationally and locally.

The displays are located in the foyer, at the bottom and top of each staircase. The exhibitions Oldham Votes (18 August - 17 November) and Cops and Bobbins (17 November - 2 February) also link to the trail.

Look out for the orange logo on highlighted objects.

The transatlantic slave trade

The transatlantic slave trade was started by the Portuguese in the 15th century. By the 1730s British ships transported more African slaves than any other nation.

Conditions on the voyage were horrific. The average space that a slave had in the ship's hold was 9 inches - just enough space to lie on his side, chained to other slaves.

'I was soon put down under the decks, and there received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that with the loathsome stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat..'

Olaudah Equiano, ex-slave and abolitionist campaigner

1.25 million slaves died on the journey between Africa and the Americas. A further one third of slaves died within 3 years of arriving at their destination as a result of their conditions.

Slavery brutalised all that were involved in it: 20% of crew members (mostly working class white men) on slave ships died on the voyage.

The displays on this trail fit into a number of themes

Sugar and the British economy

'Slavery underpinned the Georgian economy as oil does ours'
Tristram Hunt, historian

In 1625 the English captured their first territory in the Caribbean, Barbados. By the 1730s Britain was the biggest slave-trading nation in the world transporting Africans to cultivate crops in the West Indies. Back in Britain everybody was linked to this trade, through the sugar they consumed (in tea, alcohol and desserts) the tobacco they smoked, the rum they drank or the mahogany chairs they sat on. The wealthy invested in slave voyages and the banking and insurance industries expanded to manage the enormous wealth generated by slavery.

It wasn't just the wealthy who were connected to the trade. Many depended on it for their jobs: Countless people made up the crews of the slave ships or worked in the various industries which supplied voyages with goods to sell, clothes for slaves to wear and luxuries for the wealthy planters.



Barbados Penny 1788

The Abolition of Slavery

In the 18th century some people in Britain campaigned vigorously to end slavery. This mass political movement included the first consumer boycott when more than 400,000 Britons refused to eat plantation-grown sugar.

In 1807 Parliament abolished the slave trade, but it was still legal to own slaves. The forces against slavery came not just from abolitionists but from the slaves themselves who resisted enslavement through a series of rebellions.

Parliament finally passed an act to abolish slavery in the British Empire in 1833. However slaves were still not freed immediately as they had a forced period of 'apprenticeship' where they continued to work for their masters. They were eventually emancipated in 1838.

£20 million was given to slave owners in compensation. Slaves received nothing.

After emancipation many faced unemployment as their jobs were undercut by poor labourers from India. These Indians were often tricked into working in the Caribbean and treated little better than slaves themselves.

Timeline

- 1441 Portuguese take 10 Africans as a gift for Prince Henry the Navigator
- 1555 English capture and transport African slaves for the first time
- 1625 The English capture Barbados
- 1760 Tacky's Revolt, major slave rebellion in Jamaica
- 1807 The Slave Trade is abolished in the British Empire
- 1833 Parliament passes the Emancipation Act
- 1838 Slaves emancipated. Asian labourers arrive in the Caribbean
- 1865 Emancipation of slaves in America after the Civil War

The Cotton industry and the American Civil War

The story doesn't end in 1807, or even 1838. The Americans did not abolish slavery and in fact their slave plantations grew to meet growing demand for cheap raw cotton from the mills of the North West.

'Every slave in a southern state is an operative for Great Britain'

Thomas Cooper South Carolina 1830

In 1860 over 80% of cotton imported into Britain came from America. During the American Civil War cotton was blockaded, causing shortages in the mills.

**Oh dear! If yond Yankees could only just see
How they're clammin' and starvin' poor weavers like me,
I think they's soon settle their bother an' strive
To send us some cotton to keep us alive**

Many people in Greater Manchester supported the Southern states in order to protect their jobs. However, some mill workers felt that, as working people, they had an affinity with oppressed slaves and supported the North.

Tell us what you think!

All history is open to different interpretations. Do you agree with our labels? Do you have something to say?

Please write your own label for an object (or group of objects) on the trail. Or you could use this space to comment more generally on the trail and the Revealing Histories Project.

My object is:

Your comments may be integrated into our slave trail at a later date, and could also be included on the Revealing Histories website.

My thoughts about this object are:

REVEALING HISTORIES

REMEMBERING SLAVERY

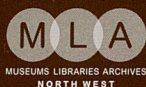
Talking about slavery:
A trail around Gallery Oldham exploring the history of slavery using our collections



Revealing Histories, Remembering Slavery

Gallery Oldham is one of 8 Museums and Galleries across Greater Manchester involved in the Revealing Histories, Remembering Slavery project. Throughout 2007 and early 2008 these venues will be hosting exhibitions and activities relating to transatlantic slavery and its legacy.

For more information pick up a Revealing Histories leaflet or visit www.revealinghistories.org.uk



Events at Gallery Oldham in 2007-8

17 November - 2 February

The exhibition Cops and Bobbins will explore the history of Oldham's links with American slavery in the 19th century.

Wednesday 14 November

Gallery Talk: Revealing the Links, Senior curator, Dinah Winch will give a guided tour of the Talking about Slavery trail. Please come and join the conversation!

We are developing a series of workshops to explore the links between slavery and Oldham in more detail. If you would like to get involved please contact Dinah Winch on 0161 770 4653 email: dinah.winch@oldham.gov.uk

Thanks to Paula Allen, John Marshall, Doug & Marge Ashmore (Royton Historical Society) and Roger Ivens (Oldham Local Studies and Archives)

Racism

Racism was not invented in the period of slavery, but it was essential to its survival because it justified the inhumane treatment of slaves. Many objects in our collections reflect racist attitudes and imagery that date to this period.

Why are we showing objects such as golliwogs?

"These objects are in our stores and rarely seen because they are crudely racist. However, we have put them on display here because we believe that its important to show the reality of racism in our history, and discuss where it came from."

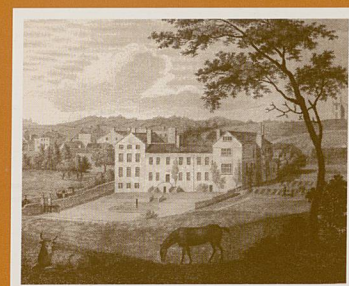
Dinah Winch, Senior Curator at Gallery Oldham

Black People in Oldham

Black people have lived in Britain since Roman times. The earliest recorded black resident of the Oldham area is Juba Thomas Royton who was baptised on 2 June 1761 at St. Pauls Church, Royton. He was described as 'a Negro belonging to Thomas Percival' then the owner of Royton Hall. A photograph of the Hall later in the 19th century appears to include black people who may be descendants of Juba Thomas.

In the 19th century many black American ex-slaves toured the area to promote support for the abolition of slavery in the United States. One was James Johnson who settled in Oldham and whose biography was published by his daughter in 1914.

After the Second World War West Indians came to Oldham to work in the cotton industry and settled at first in the Glodwick area.



Royton Hall

Why does this matter today?

Slavery affected many aspects of British culture, from the sugar in our tea, to the development of our economy and the growth of the British Empire. The legacies of that period affect us all today.

"We didn't learn about slavery at school in Barbados. But its part of our history. Its important that we don't forget it."

John Marshall, who came to Oldham from Barbados at the age of 20 to work in the mills.

'The slave trade is still going on today, mainly because of war. Children are taken to fight, young girls are used for prostitution. What can we do today?'

Gallery visitor, March 2007

Tell us about you

Name:

Postcode:

Age:
 Under 16 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

Please indicate your ethnic origin using the list below

By answering this question you can help us ensure that we reaching all sections of the community:

- Asian/Asian British Black/Black British
 Mixed heritage White/White British
 Other (please specify)

Before you made your visit today, had you heard of the Revealing Histories, Remembering Slavery project?

Yes No Not sure

Have you visited Gallery Oldham in the last 12 months?

Yes No

Would you like to join our mailing list?

If you would like to join the Revealing Histories Mailing List please pick up a Revealing Histories leaflet which includes a mailing list form

Your personal details will be used by Gallery Oldham (Oldham MBC) for monitoring purposes only. They will be held anonymously as statistical information, kept securely and destroyed within a maximum of one year.