



# HUMAN CARGO

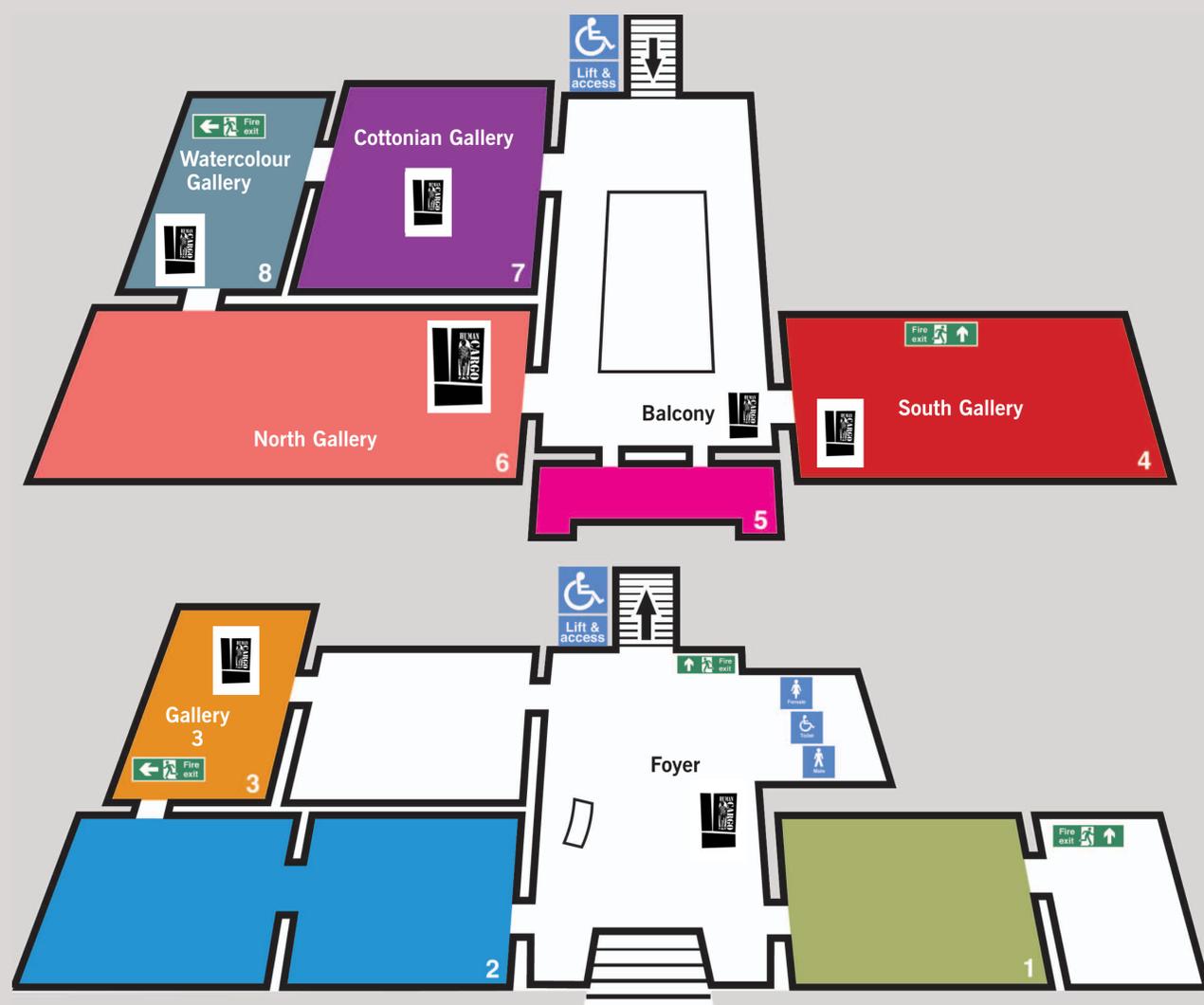
The Transatlantic Slave trade, its Abolition and Contemporary Legacies in Plymouth and Devon

*Human Cargo* commemorates major events in the history of the Slave Trade and its abolition. The exhibition charts the existence of slavery from 1400 and highlights the many ways in which enslaved Africans and others fought to overcome oppression. It considers contemporary legacies of the Slave Trade; it looks at present-day forms of forced labour and our implication in this through consumerism.

The exhibition brings together contemporary art interventions and current museum practice through a commissioning process involving artists who have made new work as part of the project.

The main exhibition is located in the North and Watercolour galleries and includes historical material selected from regional and national museums. Contemporary art interventions by five international artists take place throughout the Museum and beyond, including an artist's trail (collection point in the foyer).

Further information of relevance to the exhibition can be found in the adjacent Resource Area.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**With special thanks to:**

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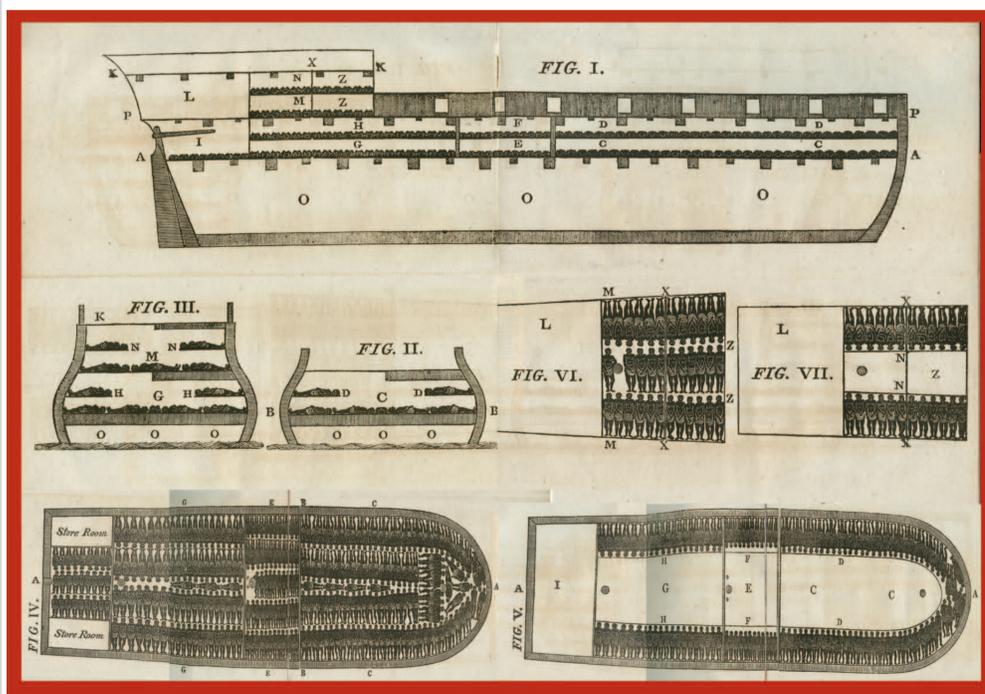


PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE



# TRADE IN HUMANS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

**“... AUTHORISE 50 SLAVES TO HISPANIOLA FOR THE BENEFIT  
OF THE MINES, TO BE THE BEST AND STRONGEST AVAILABLE”  
[King Ferdinand of Spain, 22nd January, 1510]**



Cross-section of the slave ship *Brookes*, 1789  
Anti-Slavery International

Black people in Africa were treated as cargo, to be taken and sold for beads, metals, guns or cloth. The brutality and scale of the trade set it apart from other forms of slavery. About half of all those captured in Africa for sale as slaves did not survive the Atlantic voyage.

Slavery was a well-used form of controlling other people's lives in many periods and most parts of the world. It had been common in Europe throughout the Roman Empire as well as in Ancient Egypt and Greece. What made the Transatlantic Slave Trade different was its scale, the profits it made for those who organised it, the reliance on 'racial' difference and the ruthlessness with which both the trade and the plantation system were developed.

In the period between 1500 and 1900, many millions of Africans were taken as captives. It is impossible to know the exact number, because of the great many who died at every stage. However we do know that it involved at least 24 million people, and may well have been twice that number. Up to half of those taken to become slaves perished before they arrived in America. They were either killed during capture on African soil or died during the voyage across the Atlantic.

Of those who were set to work on the plantations, few survived for more than ten years. Once the Transatlantic Slave Trade was fully established, the high death rate ensured that it became essential to the plantation system.



A sugar mill, part of a rum factory in Monserrat, West Indies  
Images of Empire



Elmina Castle in Ghana, on the Gold Coast of West Africa  
Len Pole



# SLAVE TRADING LINKS WITH PLYMOUTH AND DEVON



View of Plymouth Sound and the Citadel from around Jennycliffe by Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707) oil on canvas: painted circa 1673-75 Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery © (Plymg 1898.12.2)

**“HAWKINS ... GOT INTO HIS POSSESSION, PARTLY BY THE SWORD AND PARTLY BY OTHER MEANES, TO THE NUMBER OF 300 NEGROES AT LEAST”**  
[Richard Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations ... of the English Nation, 1589*]

The first English slaving voyages were organised from Plymouth by Sir John Hawkins. Plymouth and Exeter merchants were involved in financing the trade and profited from the products of the plantations.

European vessels first reached the Guinea Coast in the 1460s. The involvement of people from Devon in the trade began with the Hawkins family of Plymouth. William Hawkins first went to Guinea in the *Pole* of Plymouth in 1527, seeking gold; he saw Africans being shipped off to Brazil. William’s son John became a merchant in the 1550s. He organised three ships to Guinea with the help of merchants in the Canary Islands in 1562 and went on to trade Africans as slaves at Spanish ports in the Americas. In 1567, his most ambitious voyage comprised a fleet of up to ten ships, including the *Jesus of Lubeck*, loaned by the Queen, and the *Judith*, captained by Sir Francis Drake.



The slave ship *Jesus of Lubeck*

English colonies had been established in the early 1600s in Virginia and Maryland. Later in the century, Exeter merchants such as Daniel Ivy and Henry Arthur made their fortune by trading in tobacco. They financed a ship, the *Daniel & Henry*, which sailed out of Dartmouth in 1700.

The voyage was a disaster; a paltry five tons of muscovado sugar was brought back, plus an estimated debt of £1500. 452 West Africans were taken to be sold as slaves across the Atlantic, over 200 of them died in transit.

Plymouth was irregularly involved in the trade during the 18th century. Bideford ships mostly serviced plantations in Carolina and Virginia, returning with tobacco. However, several Barnstaple and Bideford merchants were sucked into the Bristol trade. John Parminter was one who helped finance the *Elizabeth’s* voyage to the Guinea coast in 1700. She reached Calabar, but having taken captives on board, foundered on the shoals outside the port and was lost with the whole of her cargo.



The Ditchley Portrait Elizabeth I c.1592 Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger © National Portrait Gallery, London



Detail of the Coat-of-Arms of Admiral Sir John Hawkins by Hieronymus Custodis oil on panel: painted 1591 PCMAG©(PLYMG 1928.7)

Safer profit was made from investing in or importing the products of the plantations. The Swete family of Modbury, for example, leased a plantation estate in Antigua in 1699. Devon merchants supplied wool to the Royal Africa Company and processed plantation products, both tobacco and sugar.



# SLAVERY AND THE BRITISH WAY OF LIFE



Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth 1682  
by Pierre Mignard © National Portrait Gallery, London

The first plantations in the Americas were started by Spanish and Portuguese who wanted to take advantage of the land and the climate. Slave labour became a necessary part of the way the plantations in the Americas worked. Planting, harvesting and refining sugar cane were all hard jobs. Making free people into slaves was not thought of as despicable at this time. The first labourers were native Americans, forced to work until they died in great numbers. The earliest imported labourers were prisoners from England (sometimes called 'redlegs'), but there were not enough of them. Black Africans were being taken to the West Indies by 1510.



Labourers harvesting sugar cane, Dominican Republic, 1930s  
Images of Empire

British involvement in supplying Africans and dealing in goods for Africa and from the Americas grew in the 17th century. The Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa was established in 1660, later becoming the Royal African Company. One of the main products taken to West Africa to exchange for captives was copper often in the form of curved bars of copper alloy, called manillas. These were made in many places in England, including Exeter.

**“THE PLEASURE, GLORY AND GRANDEUR OF ENGLAND HAS BEEN ADVANCED MORE BY SUGAR THAN BY ANY OTHER COMMODITY ...”**

[Sir Dalby Thomas, Director-General, Royal Africa Company, about 1707]

Products from plantations in the Americas became essential elements in the economies of European countries in the 1600s. Black servants also became fashionable in European high society.



Cartoon by George Cruikshank 1792  
Images of Empire

Sugar in particular became an essential and fashionable part of the British way of life. In the 18th century it encouraged the national addiction to tea drinking, and also made many other foods palatable. Tobacco smoking became fashionable. The massive industrial developments in Manchester and all over Lancashire concentrated on the production of cloth using cotton from the plantations. The Industrial Revolution was largely founded on the products of the plantation economies.



Mould for making manillas,  
used in Exeter in the 1690s  
RAMM, Exeter

Africans also became fashionable in polite society in the 1700s, but usually in the role of servant. The occasional visiting black prince such as Job Ben Solomon or William Ansah Sessarakoo, caused a stir and became an object of society curiosity.

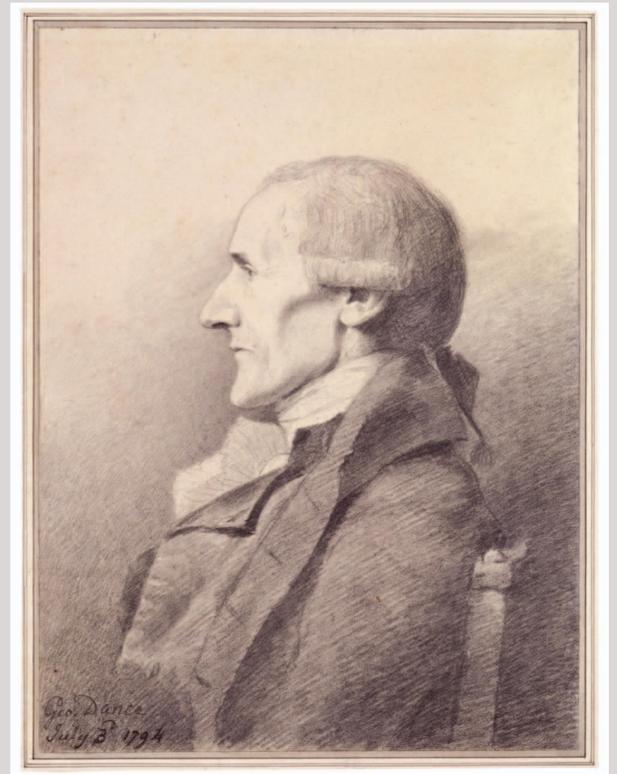


# STRIVING TOWARDS ABOLITION

**“.. TO DECLARE OUR EXTREME ABHORRENCE OF A TRAFFICK .. IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE DISGRACEFUL TO A CHRISTIAN NATION.”**

[from the Exeter petition submitted to Parliament, March 1788]

The horrors of the Slave Trade and conditions in the plantations were widely publicised in Britain during the 18th century. Abolition Committees were set up. Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was eventually passed in 1807.



Granville Sharp by George Dance, 1794  
©National Portrait Gallery, London



The Slave Trade from a painting by George Morland, 1791  
©Bridgeman Art Library

Rebellions by captives on slave ships and by enslaved Africans in the Americas frequently happened. The earliest African revolt in the West Indies occurred in 1570. Uprisings were discovered and put down with heavy loss of life in Barbados (1675 and 1692), in Antigua (1735), and in Jamaica (1742 and 1745). In Jamaica, communities of escaped slaves (called Maroons), won their freedom in 1739 after years of guerrilla warfare. A revolt in St Domingue led by Toussaint L'Ouverture started in August 1791 and eventually led to the establishment of Haiti in 1804. About 5,000 French soldiers were killed during the conflict.



Rebellion in St Domingue, 1791  
Anti Slavery International/  
Images of Empire

Stories of the horrors of the trade came to the notice of people in Britain in the 1770s, mainly through the courts. In 1772, James Somersett, an escaped slave recaptured in England was defended by Granville Sharp before the Chief Justice Lord Mansfield, who reluctantly ruled that no man could be a slave in this country.

In 1781, the Captain of the slave ship *Zong* threw 133 captives overboard because they were likely to die before reaching the West Indies. He pretended that his action was necessary to save the crew and ship because of a shortage of water; he claimed their value at £30 per head as cargo from the insurers. The claim succeeded but his action appalled a great many people. Abolition Committees were set up in many towns, including Plymouth and Exeter. Like Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and Olaudah Equiano campaigned against the trade. Clarkson came to Plymouth to search out sailors and document their experiences of life on a slave ship. Olaudah Equiano was an enslaved African taken to America, who eventually bought his own freedom. He worked in Plymouth to help ex-slaves get to Sierra Leone in 1787.



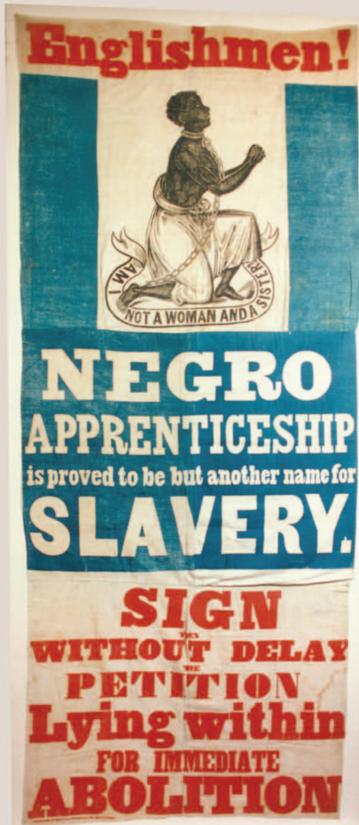
Olaudah Equiano (G. Vassa) by David Orme, after W. Denton. Published 1789  
©National Portrait Gallery, London

The famous image of Africans packed into the hold of the *Brookes* was first created in Plymouth to draw attention to conditions on slave ships. Abolitionist activity in Plymouth and Exeter, was mainly organised by Methodists and Quakers. Petitions were signed by hundreds of people at a time when few had the vote.

The abolition movement gained strength in the 1780s but it took many years to persuade Members of Parliament to vote against the trade. The MP for Hull, William Wilberforce, presented the Abolition Bill many times. Finally, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed on 25th March 1807.



# 1807 AND AFTER, IN BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAS



Anti Apprenticeship banner, 1834  
Anti Slavery International

**“THE SLAVE TRADE HAS BEEN AT ALL TIMES  
POPULAR AND IS NOW”**

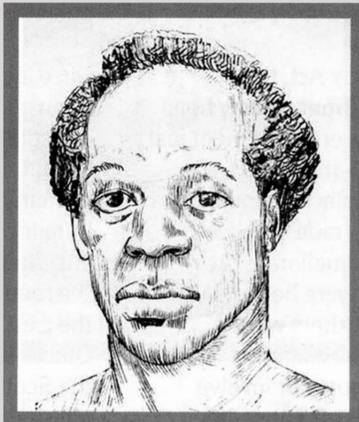
[John Hughes,  
English businessman, 1828]

The 1807 Act did not bring an end to slavery. Plantations based on slave labour thrived in the 19th century. Insurrections continued. After the Anti-Slavery Act of 1834, compensation was paid to slave-owners, but not to ex-slaves.

Although Britain abolished its involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807, other European countries did not (apart from Denmark in 1803). France eventually banned the trade for its citizens in 1831. Despite this, the number of people taken from Africa to the Americas each year between 1807 and the 1880s was even greater than before.

Plantations continued to depend on slave labour. In 1817 the Slave Registration Act came into force. All slave owners had to provide lists of enslaved people they owned every two years.

Rebellions by enslaved people continued. One occurred in Barbados in 1816. In Demerara (now Guyana) in 1823 the Anglican Church became involved through its missionaries. The so-called Baptist War of 1831 in Jamaica was led by Sam Sharpe, a Baptist preacher.



Sam Sharpe  
Anti Slavery International

Making slavery itself illegal took many years.

Abolitionists began campaigning again. Britain passed an Act abolishing slavery in all its territories in 1833. But slaves were not free – they became “apprentices” for six years. This was later reduced to four years. However, slavery still did not stop. The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1839: it continues today as Anti-Slavery International.

The Act of Abolition allowed for compensation of those who had owned slaves. Altogether, they were given over £20million for loss of their “property”. The ex-slaves got nothing. They received neither compensation nor access to land. Many were forced to work for their former masters for a pittance, and had to pay rent and taxes. After 1837, people were shipped from India to work the sugar plantations for little more than food and shelter.

Throughout the period of the plantations, European operators tried to stamp out all aspects of African civilisation that persisted in the Americas. Africans were forbidden to speak their own languages, practice their traditional religion, and even to sing or play music. They were also forbidden to use their own names. The writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano for example, had been renamed Gustavus Vassa, after a Swedish king.

Despite these measures, African religious belief systems and practices continued in Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica and elsewhere. They flourish today.



West African drum, collected in  
Virginia, before 1730  
©The Trustees of the British Museum



# PATROLLING THE SEAS



Lt. Henry Binstead  
Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth

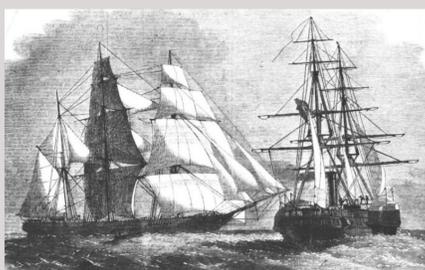
**“THE SHIP IS NOW TRULY MISERABLE. UPWARDS OF 200 RESCUED SLAVES ARE LYING ABOUT. MOST OF THEM SICK. THERE ARE ALSO SEVERAL BAD CASES OF FEVER AMONGST OUR OWN CREW”**

**[Diary of Midshipman Binstead, West Coast of Africa Station, 1824]**

Royal Navy patrols along the West African coast started in 1819. The greatest difficulty consisted in having to catch slavers trading, not merely in possession of captives.

The Royal Navy formed the Anti-Slavery Squadron in 1819 to operate along the West African coast - a distance of over 3000 miles (4800km), from the Cape Verde Islands to Benguela in Angola. Until 1830, no more than six ships patrolled the coast. The Transatlantic Slave Trade increased in this period: over 130,000 people were enslaved each year throughout the 1830s.

The slave traders operated out of forts, or the hulks of old ships moored in creeks along the coast. The slave ships moored, loaded captives and sailed away within 24 hours: catching them in act of trading was next to impossible. Possession of slaves was not made illegal by the 1807 Act. It was necessary to get evidence to prove trading in slaves. The presence of manacles on a specially constructed deck was not considered sufficient evidence until after 1835. A ship had to be captured with African captives on board.

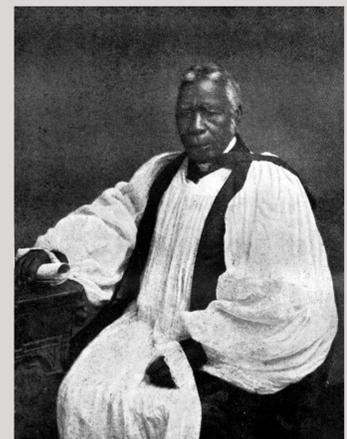


Royal Navy boat capturing a slaver, 1860  
Illustrated London News

Capture on the high seas depended on having fast boats. Initially the Navy's ships were old and slow, but the slave ships were built for speed. At first, the Squadron was not

allowed to board boats flying flags of other nations: “The Freedom of the Seas” was considered more important. Later, Spain and Portugal allowed a right of search, but only north of the Equator.

In Freetown, a court was set up to try the slavers arrested under the 1807 Act. African captives freed by the Royal Navy were also taken there: over 15,000 people were landed by 1822. Some were given land in Freetown, while others managed to return home.



Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1892) who was rescued from a slave ship by the Royal Navy in the 1820s. He became the first Anglican Bishop in West Africa.  
Images of Empire

From the beginning, the Squadron attacked pirate ships involved in any kind of illegal trade. It also served to protect colonial settlements and promote trade between their ports and Britain, particularly in palm oil.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the slave trade ceased to be important to Brazil and Cuba in the 1860s. The trade to the United States was stopped as soon as Abraham Lincoln became President in 1860.

The British Africa Squadron was withdrawn in 1867.



Boats from ships of the Royal Navy Anti Slavery Squadron destroying 'barracoons' (buildings where enslaved Africans were kept before shipment), 1834  
Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth

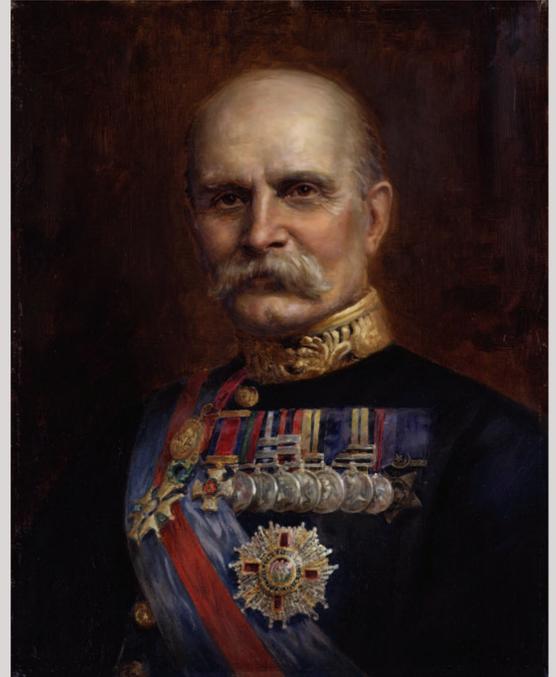


# LEGACIES OF THE TRADE IN AFRICA

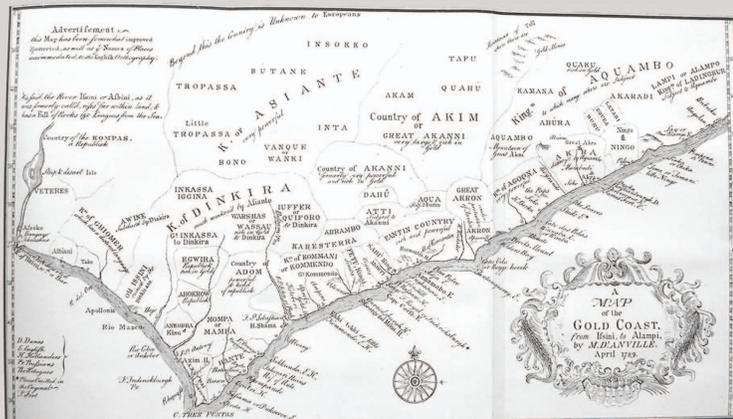
**“ ... ABSURD TO COMPARE THE DESOLATE CONDITION OF THE GOLD-LAND, WHICH IS TO SUPPLY THE MONEY, WITH THE CIVILISED MACHINERY IN ENGLAND WHICH IS TO WORK IT...”**

[Sir Richard Burton, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, 1883]

Cape Coast Castle became the colonial headquarters of the Gold Coast. Lagos colony was created in 1861. Royal Niger Company was formed in 1886; it eventually governed the whole of northern Nigeria.



Lord Lugard, who imposed British rule on Northern Nigeria in the 1890s  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Map of the Gold Coast, Africa  
The Devon and Exeter Institution

Between 1700 and 1800, the forts along the coast of West Africa became centres for an ever more concentrated trade in African captives. The largest, Elmina Castle, had prisons for men and women. The last fort the British built, in the 1760s at Beyin, on what was then called the Gold Coast, had a prison built into its south-west bastion.

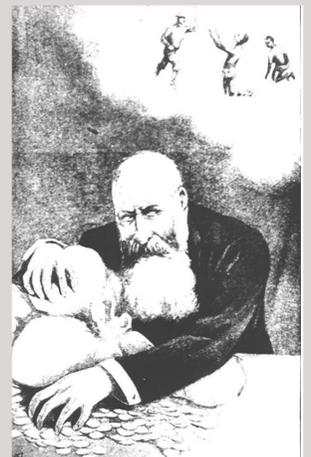
Freetown in Sierra Leone was taken over by the British Government in 1808. It became responsible for administering increasing British interests in West Africa; the British had bought out the Danes in 1850 and the Dutch in 1872. New fortifications were built on the Gold Coast between the 1830s and 1868, but now with their cannon trained on the African townships, not out to sea against rival European interests.

Production and trade in palm oil from West Africa was encouraged by the British, partly to replace the slave trade, partly to incorporate African nations

into international commercial networks. Flat-bottomed paddle steamers were sent up the River Niger in 1841 to encourage trade in other commodities. British companies were eager to expand markets for their manufactured goods.

The area around the Nigerian port of Lagos was brought under British control in 1861. One reason for this was to assist in stamping out slave dealing, but also to provide a base for colonial expansion in the region. The United Africa Company started trading up the Niger in 1879; it later became the Royal Niger Company. The British then created the West Africa Frontier Force in 1898, to try to halt the spread of French influence over what became Northern Nigeria.

Meanwhile in the Congo, the Belgian King Leopold II imposed his own personal control over an area half the size of Europe. He used the need to destroy Arab control of the slave trade in central Africa as an excuse and established the “Congo Free State” under his own rule in 1885. Leopold freed thousands of Africans from their Arab masters, only to use them as slaves himself in his rubber plantations, mutilating objectors. After many years of international protest, it became a Belgian colony in 1908.



Caricature of Leopold II, King of the Belgians  
Anti Slavery International



# LEGACIES OF THE TRADE TODAY

**“AFTER 200 YEARS, FIGHT TO END SLAVERY IN THE WORLD GOES ON”**  
[Daily Telegraph, 1st February 2007]

The Industrial Revolution in Britain focused on the processing of raw products from the plantations. Selling these products depended on the development of global markets. People trafficking continues today.



Shakil Pathan/Anti-Slavery International

It took many decades to shut down the Transatlantic Slave Trade after the Act of 1807. Its legacies remain with us today. Not only does slavery still exist in many parts of the world, but the attitudes that allowed it to flourish in and from Africa have not decayed. Slave trading on such a scale arose from commercial pressure to make as much money as possible, using labour that could not demand payment, combined with a basic assumption that it was not necessary to treat black people or anyone with different cultural traditions as human beings. This applied in 1550, and some might say it does today. Racism and the development of racial theories underpinned the Transatlantic Slave Trade; the presence of racism in many parts of Europe and the Americas today is a damaging legacy of the trade.



Coalbrookdale by Night, 1801 by Philip James (Jacques) de Loutherbourg, (1740 - 1812)  
©Science Museum, London, UK/The Bridgeman Art Library

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century was based on getting raw materials cheaply, tightly controlling the use of labour and energy in manufacture, and finding large markets for selling

the finished product. In that period, the raw material, whether it was cotton, sugar, tobacco or timber, was available through the plantations, using slave or indentured labour. Cheap labour and energy was found in the towns, villages, hills and valleys of the British Isles. The key was the realisation that the markets could be found in the same places from which the slave and indentured labour came: the countries of the Empire.



Umbrella made of European cloth, Northern Nigeria  
©PCMAG

Africa is a continent rich in human ingenuity and natural resources such as diamonds, gold, other metals, and timber. However, the people of Africa and those Africans in the Diaspora (through forced migrations) are still not enjoying the benefits the fair exploitation of these raw materials could provide.

International commercial pressures exist just as much today as they did 200 years ago. The Transatlantic Slave Trade involved the trafficking of people. The plantation system dealt in commodities that were the product of forced labour. Today's newspapers are full of similar stories. How can we say that slavery is truly history?

The new works by artists commissioned as part of this exhibition explore some of these legacies and stories.