

# CONNECTING HISTORIES

## Guide

### Slavery / Antislavery Resources in Birmingham City Archives

There are detailed catalogues available for many of the collections in Birmingham City Archives. Numbers given in brackets in the list below are the reference numbers required to order the document described. You will need proof of your identification to consult the original material at Birmingham City Archives. The documents are listed in chronological order.

Birmingham City Archives education pack on 'The Slave Trade' can be printed from the website [www.birmingham.gov.uk/archives](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/archives) There are sections on Traders; Society; Plantations; the Anti-Slavery movement; Published Voices, and Sources held elsewhere.

#### 17<sup>th</sup> century

##### Slaves on the Barbary coast

The earliest 'Parish Book' of St Martin's Church was seen by John Thackray Bunce in the 1870s when he wrote his *History of Old St Martin's*. There are 5 volumes of Town books surviving in the City Archives from 1723 onwards, but the earliest one does not appear to survive. Bunce however, transcribed various extracts from it in his book, and his work shows that the following collections were made in 1680 and 1692 from people living in Birmingham:

September 1680.

"Collected & rendered in ye town & p[ar]ish of Birm[ingham] towards ye Redemption of Slaves [in] Algiers (in Sept. 1680) ye Sum of £16 6s 5d. Rec[eive]d by me Hen[ry] Grove. Minister."

"1 March 1692.

Payd to Mr Adam Frogat of Lichfield ye sum £5 14s 9d being collected in B'ham for ye redemption of Captives in Algiers. "

See Bunce, J.T. *A History of Old St Martins* [LF 14.11; Arch 274.2496] pp. 38, 41

#### 18<sup>th</sup> century

As far as is known, there are no records in the City Archives of any Birmingham citizens who owned slaves. The city's manufacturers and traders were more likely to be involved in the slave trade because they sold metal goods which were used for trading for slaves or sold guns to those involved. Birmingham was known to have manufacturers of chains and shackles which were used in the slave trade, but no records of the companies manufacturing these exist in the City Archives.

Some records relating to landowners in the Caribbean from elsewhere do survive.

## Plantation in Barbados

About 1700, Robert Hotchkin, from Rutland, owned a plantation in Barbados and his brother Thomas lived there. By 1780, the administration of the various estates of Robert Hotchkin, who had been declared a lunatic, had been given to Charles Bowyer Adderley, Lord Norton. Hence, a letter book survives in the Norton Collection, with copies of correspondence from Thomas Hotchkin to his brother about merchant affairs, which include letters about the sale of slaves, c. 1712. There is also an inventory of Thomas Hotchkin's household made after his death which has details of the slaves on his estate. **[Norton 102 (2078)]**

There is also a map made in 1737, by Alexander Skene, surveyor, of the Hotchkin estate in the parish of St Catherine and St Andrew, which shows Hotchkin's house. **[MS 917/110]**

## Plantations in Jamaica

There are two maps of estate in Jamaica which are not dated, but appear to be pre – 1834, and are part of the collection of maps of the Robins family who were surveyors in Birmingham in 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Plan of the Dover estate, parish of St George, Jamaica, belonging to Thomas Bayley Howell. [This family appear to have returned from Jamaica to Prinknash Abbey, Gloucestershire]. **[MS 275a/91]**

Draft map, of the Longville estate, Jamaica, owned by Hon. Thomas Tredell, and a small notebook, with calculations about land on the Longville estate. **[MS 275a/91]**

## Gun Trade

Guns were a major export from Birmingham from the 18th Century onwards. In the earlier years the export trade was frequently associated with the exchange of guns for slaves in Africa. The firm of Galton & Farmer supplied guns to merchants who traded in West Africa, as surviving letter books show. **[MS3101/C/D/15/1]**

e.g. Letter from James Farmer to his brother Joseph Farmer, who also worked for the firm in Liverpool, 12 November 1743. **[MS3101/C/C/2/1/5]**

*Deare Brother*

*If you could mention any time that would be proper for to send Tom Probin down to gett his freedom I would sent him directly because before he comes & brings his family that would be necessary to be secured & may prevent objections & probably you may fixt it when there is like to bee the least opposition I desire you would lett me know because the sooner its done ye better & spring will be coming on soone I have another favour to begg but would not have it divulged that is that you would procure me an abstract for a cargo for the Windward or Gold Coast for a vesel that caries about 250 slaves, some particular persons desir'd me to gett it whom I expect to serve with the cargo: observe to add a few more guns for I shall send what you send mee without copying.*

*Your compliance & answer by return of post will oblige*

*Your mo[st] affectionate Brother to serve you*

*James Farmer*

## **African trade; estate in Tobago**

There is an account book, 1765-1780, of John Darbyshire, Daniel Ruston, Samuel Garbett and others, owners of the ship *Darbyshire*, which includes some correspondence about an estate in Tobago and a list of goods (mostly beads and metal trinkets) sent to Africa. [MS 39/115]

## **African trade**

As well as the letter books mentioned above, the **Galton** papers also contain information about one William Douglas, who was stationed at Cape Coast Castle as secretary to Archibald Dalzel, governor in chief of the settlements on the west coast of Africa. While there, Douglas seems to have been involved in importing goods to Africa to sell on, probably as part of the slave trade. Some correspondence and Douglas' will of 1798 survive [MS 3101/B/6/2, MS 3101/C/E/4/3, MS 3101/C/E/5/4, MS 3101/C/E/5/28 etc.], and there is an account of expenses of the ship *Perseverance* on a voyage from Liverpool to Africa and the West Indies, with brief details about the sale of slaves, c.1789. [MS 3101/B/6/1] There is an address by Dalzel to his officers at Cape Coast Castle, made on his departure for Europe in 1798. [MS 3101C/E/4/3/3] A memoir, recorded by Isabella Galton in 1844, gives an account of how Douglas, intending to return to England for a few months to improve his health in 1799, left with £12,000 worth of gold dust and elephants' teeth and a favourite slave. At Madeira however, Douglas was persuaded to go ashore, but overnight, he disappeared, with the gold and his slave, and was reported dead. [MS 3101/B/12/1]

## **Trade records, Scotland**

**[See separate list for details of references to slaves in the 'Archives of Soho'.]**

The papers of James Watt of Greenock, merchant, (1698-1782), the father of James Watt the improver of the steam engine, include letters and accounts about shipping, particularly the trade between Scotland and North America (Carolina, Virginia etc.) and the West Indies. Some of the records mention the purchase and sale of Black people,

e.g. Letter. James Hunter (St Eustatius) to James Watt of Greenock. 2 July 1740.  
'Sir I wrote you from Sett Christophers dated the first of June letting you know the badness of the market att Bass Stare.....  
As negroes turn out dear Bought six three men and three women....'  
[MS 3219/3/100/51]

Two receipts show that a 'Black boy' was brought to Scotland in March 1762, to be delivered to John Warrand, a merchant in Glasgow, who was to take him to Lady Spynie at Brodie House. The boy was named 'Fridrick' and there is a list of clothes for him which include a big blue coat and three check shirts. [MS 3219/3/71b(1762)/61,62]

## **Sierra Leone**

Henry Smeathman had a plan to resettle poor Black people from London in a free colony in Sierra Leone. Many of the settlers were freed slaves. The following letter was part of his fund raising appeal.

Letter. Henry Smeathman (London) to James Watt (—). 21 Jun. 1786.

*[He encloses a plan [not present] concerning his attempt to open a new trade with Africa by establishing a colony of poor Black people in Sierra Leone].*

**[MS 3219/4/94/29]**

See: *Black Poor & White Philanthropists; London's Blacks and the foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786 - 1791*, Stephen J. Braidwood. (1994)

There is no reply from James Watt in the outgoing letter book for 1786.

### **Estate in Jamaica**

A copy letter exists from John Eustace of Kingston, Jamaica, to William Sutherland of Blue Mountain Estate, Jamaica, about the settlement of an estate there belonging to Mrs Mary Kendall of Birmingham. The letter, of 1792, mentions the sale of 'negroes'.

**[MS 1120/2]**

### **Poem**

Gregory Watt (1777-1804), the younger son of James Watt, wrote a poem while he was a student at Glasgow, about 1798, about a slave from Benin lamenting his situation. **[MS 3219/7/8]**

'This was wholly written by me without the assistance of any book. G. Watt'

### **Steam engines**

Steam engines and mint engines were supplied to many countries by the firm of Boulton & Watt of Soho, Handsworth. A recent cataloguing project has brought to light more information about the purchasers of steam engines, employees within the company and acquaintances of Matthew Boulton and James Watt and families. The firm of Boulton & Watt supplied the Caribbean islands with nearly 200 steam engines, designed for sugar mills, between 1778 and 1825. There are drawings for most of these and, in many cases, correspondence about the engine. Most were independent engines or bell crank engines. **[see MS 3147/5/822 to 1029 for independent engines]** One drawing of an engine produced by Laing and Anderson, shows a Black man feeding sugar cane into the crusher. **[MS 3147/5/1353b]**

### **Jamaica**

A printed map of Kingston, Jamaica, surveyed in 1807 by Major John Bonnet Pechon, engineer, also exists in the Boulton and Watt collection, which marks a 'negroes' burial ground' and other landmarks. **[MS 3147/5/1479]**

### **Jamaica**

John Woodward (died 1810) was an employee in the London banking agency of Boulton and Watt, and was involved in various trading enterprises with the island of Jamaica. His uncle, William Voce, was a surveyor in Jamaica, and papers about his estate there have survived, **[MS 3147/30/2, 3, 5]** and a transcript of his will of 1808, which manumits his slave Caesar. **[MS 3219/6/2W/433]**

## Antislavery

Most of the records in Birmingham City Archives which concern slavery are related to the campaigns against slavery.

### Antislavery campaigners

There is some correspondence to Matthew Boulton, James Watt and both their sons, from Josiah Wedgwood senior and junior about antislavery legislation, for which Wedgwood was an active campaigner. [e.g. **MS 3782/13/26**]

### Commemorative medal

The Soho Mint produced a medal for Sierra Leone in 1807 to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade. [**MS 3782/3/210 p.84**]

*'Obverse. An European An African shaking hands with this inscription "We are all brethren" An Arabic inscription commemorative of the abolition of the Trade.'*

### Antislavery literature

The Society of Friends was very active in campaigning against the slave trade and the papers of Mary Capper (1755-1845), who joined the Friends in 1788, contain a leaflet considering the African slave trade (1805) and several tracts (1784-1813) including one about slaves in the British Dominions. [**MS 695**]

Leaflet considering the African slave trade, for members of the Society of Friends, 1805. [**MS 695/26/17**]

Tracts, include one about slaves in the British Dominions, c. 1784-1813. [**MS 695/28/1**]

## 19<sup>th</sup> century

### Antislavery: sugar

There is a letter from E.H. [probably Emily Hutton] to a Mr Coltman, concerning family matters and her work to promote the consumption of East Indian sugar instead of West Indian. n.d. c.1824. [**MS 168/59**]

### Antislavery literature

**The Friends Book Society**, established in Birmingham in 1822, has left archives with lists of reading matter, often concerning the slave trade, with publications from female and male campaigners from the Society of Friends, 1822-1988. [**MS 2160**]

### Antislavery campaigners

**The Birmingham Female Society for the relief of British Negro Slaves** was the first female British antislavery society, started in 1825 to educate, campaign, fund-raise and

support work among enslaved people, especially women. The annual report for 1851 describes the work of the Reverend Henry Garnet of Jamaica, whose industrial school in Stirling, Jamaica, the Society had supported for many years. The 28th report (1853), describes the visit to Birmingham of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She was presented with a 'memorial' and there was an 'Uncle Tom' fund to raise money by readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. More than £200 was raised in this way. In 1879, the African American evangelist Amanda Smith visited Birmingham and spoke to the Society. There are minute books, annual reports and an album of publicity material promoting the cause of antislavery. [98614; 110416; 265524; 265525; 302206; 302207: IIR 62]; and a cash book. [302205: IIR 3]

### **Antislavery campaigners**

There was a considerable amount of campaigning against slavery by Birmingham residents and records of another two organisations survive in the City Archives. These are the minute books of Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society, 1826-1869 [152006; 158748; 265526: IIR 62] and a minute book of Birmingham & Midland Freedmen's Aid Association, 1864-65. [361222: IIR 62]

### **Antislavery: sugar**

In 1828, the inhabitants of Birmingham produced a petition at a public meeting on 18 April 1828, which they sent to Parliament, to protest at the duty levied on East Indian sugar. The consumption of West Indian sugar, produced by slaves, was encouraged by lower taxes and the petition was to try to change this. [106136: ZZ 34]

### **Antislavery literature**

Verses on 'The Slave Trade', written about 1820 by Isaac Collins, deacon and secretary of Cannon Street Baptist Chapel, survive in his commonplace book. [MS 1637 pp.60-65]

### **Antislavery campaigners**

The Reverend Thomas Swan (died 1857) was Professor of Theology at the College of Serampore in India in the 1820s. In 1829 he was appointed minister at Cannon Street Baptist Church. He was also secretary of the Birmingham Auxiliary of the Baptist Missionary Society. His surviving papers include annual reports of the Society which detail its work in India, South Africa and the West Indies. Swan gave addresses on the emancipation of slaves and kept copies of correspondence with Joseph Sturge over the freeing of slaves in the West Indies in the 1830s. [MS 1675]

- [MS 1675/1/7] Includes notes on societies receiving government money for education of 'negroes'. 1835-36.
- [MS 1675/1/12] Joseph Sturge to Thomas Swan requesting a speech at an Anti-slavery meeting, 1849.
- [MS 1675/2/7] Anti-slavery speech, 1830s.
- [MS 1675/2/14] Notes for speech on the emancipation of slaves
- [MS 1675/4/ 1-4] Copies of correspondence between Sturge and church leaders in Jamaica about slavery there and the anti-slavery movement in England, 1830s - 1840s.
- [MS 1675/5/7] Meeting in Jamaica about slavery, c.1834

## Antislavery campaigners

The Albright family was one of the families in the Society of Friends much involved in antislavery activity. The family papers have a letter mentioning antislavery meeting in Birmingham in 1837, [MS 1509/4/13] and cards advertising antislavery meetings (1873) adapted for use as playing cards. [MS 1509/5/69]

## Antislavery campaigners

On 1 August 1838, Joseph Sturge (1793-1859), led a march from Birmingham Town Hall to Heneage Street to lay the foundations of Birmingham's Emancipation School. There was a celebration of the abolition of the apprenticeship system, which had replaced slavery in the Caribbean; about 3,500 children from the Baptist, Lancasterian and Infant schools sang hymns, and a memorial pamphlet was presented to each Sunday scholar in Birmingham who joined in the celebrations. A copy of the memorial can be found with the Birmingham Anti-Slavery Society minutes, along with details of the meeting in the Town Hall and the speeches made. [158748: IIR 62] There are also three letters written by Sturge to various people about the Anti-Slavery Committee, 1833-1844. [MS 926]

## North America

A collection of letters survives, written by John W. Armstrong to an acquaintance, Thomas Ross, of Pope Street. Armstrong emigrated from Birmingham to America, c. 1840. There are various references to slavery in America, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, etc. 1851-53. [MS 1671]

## Montserrat

Members of the Sturge and Albright families of Birmingham advanced money for the development of the Montserrat Company which was established by Joseph Sturge as a free labour plantation to grow limes for the chemical works owned by the Sturge family. There are minutes, photographs and miscellaneous papers, [1855]-1960. [MS 1436]

## 20<sup>th</sup> century

### History of slavery

The records of Charles Parker (1919-80) show many links with Black history. Parker was a BBC Radio producer, based in Birmingham for over twenty years. He was involved in Christian anti-racist activity in the late 1950s, and worked with singers from the emerging folk revival movement to produce innovative multi-cultural and multi-media events.

His proposals to make a musical documentary programme about the slave trade in 1969 were not accepted, but the various materials he collected for research on the subject remain. These include a 'Jackdaw' pack on the Slave Trade (1965); booklets on slavery; songs; scripts for proposed radio and TV programmes. There is also a photocopy of *Revelations of a slave smuggler*, (1860), the autobiography of Richard Drake, from the British Library. [MS 4000/2/130]

*Compiled by Fiona Tait, 2007*

*For information regarding services, contact:*

Birmingham City Archives  
Floor Seven - Central library  
Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3HQ

Tel: +44 (0)121 303 4217  
Email: [archives@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:archives@birmingham.gov.uk)

[www.connectinghistories.org.uk](http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk)

