

Local Connections with Slavery

Bridport had nothing to do with slavery! That all happened in Africa, the Caribbean, and maybe London! Didn't it?

Slavery has a long history locally, of defeated tribes building the Roman roads, Viking ships raiding the coast for slaves, and serfdom on the land for hundreds of years. It might surprise you to know that people from West Dorset took part in the mass slavery of Africans transported to the Caribbean, Brazil and North America. This is that story.

Local Harbours

While London, Liverpool and Bristol were the chief slave-trading ports in the UK, there were many smaller ports involved, such as Poole, Weymouth and Lyme. Bridport Harbour (West Bay) was mainly involved in shipbuilding and fishing. Local businessmen owned shares in fast sailing boats used to transport perishable goods like fish from the Newfoundland Grand Banks. Some may also have been used to carry slaves later because the ships' names are sometimes the same as those on the slavevoyages.org website from earlier dates.

Bridport MPs

Bridport was represented by two MPs at a time until the 19th century, and the Bridport MPs below were involved in the slave trade as plantation owners, ship owners and/or directors of slave-trading companies:

1677 - 1679	John Strangways
1677 - 1679	Wadham Strangways
1727	William Bowles
1747 - 1754	J F Pinney
1765	Benjamin Way
1780 - 1784	Richard Beckford
1780 - 1795	Charles Sturt

Local Investors

There were local people with business interests in slavery and plantations. Between 1713 and 1720, the South Sea Company was given the monopoly to supply African slaves to the 'islands in the South Seas' and South America. The company's ships were given a convoy escort by the Royal Navy. The Governor/head of the company was the ruling monarch, with a deputy and sub-governor who ran the company. Lewis Way and later Benjamin Way of Bridport were sub-governors. The South Sea Company was allowed a quota of 4,800 units a year. A man was one unit, women and children counted as less.

In the early 18th century, Benjamin Way was the major stockholder in the slaver Cecilia from London to Guinea in west Africa. He worked with James Gould of Dorchester and John Burrridge (also local). In 1706 the 'London Galley' traded for slaves, sugar, logwood, indigo, cocoa and other products on behalf of Benjamin Way and John Burrridge. The Way family had slave-trading ships registered in London, Bristol and

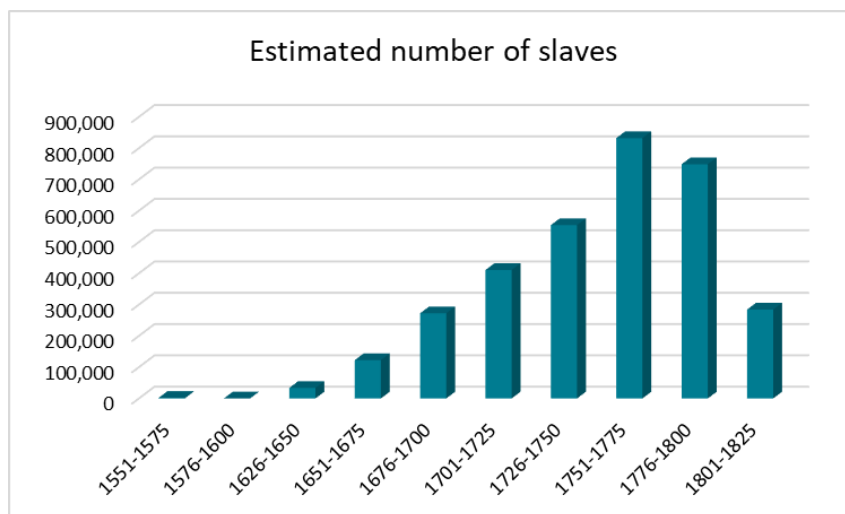
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Liverpool, sometimes working on behalf of the Royal African Company. This company had the King at its head, and Edward Colston of Bristol was sometime deputy governor. Investors and officials included Anthony Ashley-Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury of Wimborne St Giles, and Ferdinand Gorges of Kingston Russell near Dorchester. Slavery was such a profitable trade that local businessmen bought tiny shares in ships.

In the same period on a smaller scale, there is a record of Nathaniel Gundry importing 50 tons of tobacco with his partners John and Robert Burrige through Lyme. He also sent 15 slaves from Barbados to Potomac (now Washington DC).

How big was the Atlantic slave trade? How do we know?

All numbers to do with the transatlantic slave trade are under-estimates. Many slaving ships completed no documents saying which port they were headed for in West Africa or how many slaves they took on board. But the estimated numbers of slaves transported on British ships between 1551 and 1825 are shown below. Many people benefitted from the wealth created by the Atlantic trade in slaves. The peak of the slave trade from 1750-1800 corresponds to the building of grand houses in Dorset.



Add up the millions.

The slave **trade** was abolished in 1807, but it took until 1833 to abolish slavery and free the slaves. £20 million in compensation, was paid by British taxpayers to the former slave-owners, for the loss of their 'property'. The former slaves got nothing. If it were not for the compensation records being unearthed this century, we would know very little about the enormous scale of the transatlantic slave trade, and its links to west Dorset.

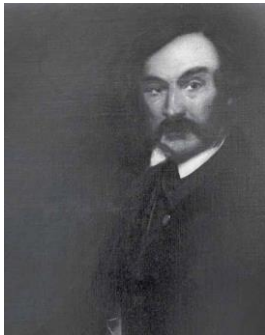
People who gave their primary address in Dorset made 53 claims for compensation for the loss of their slaves; 42 were successful. They include names such as Frampton, Brooke, Glover, Rev. William Butler, Frome, Barclay, Gordon and Drake. Their plantations were found in Jamaica, Barbados, Nevis, British Guiana, St Vincent, Trinidad, Tobago and Antigua.

Prominent local families

Local families who were involved in the slave trade for generations include:

Pinney family  JOHN FREDERICK PINNEY I	Azariah Pinney 1661-1720 owned sugar plantations on the island of Nevis using slave labour. He justified the use of slaves like this: <i>'Since my arrival I've purchased nine negroe slaves at St Kitts and can assure you I was shock'd at the first appearance of human flesh exposed to sale. But surely God ordain'd 'em for ye use & benefit of us: otherwise his Divine Will would have been made manifest by some particular sign or token'.</i> The Pinneys owned Bettiscombe Manor in Marshwood Vale, although for much of the time they lived in Bristol as sugar merchants. The Georgian House Museum in Bristol holds a list of over 900 slaves owned by the Pinney family. John F Pinney 1717-62, was a third-generation slave-owner who rarely visited his plantations. He named two of his slaves Bettiscombe and Bridport. He was MP for Bridport between 1747-54. Pinney was a member of the West India Association in Bristol which in the late 1780s tried to persuade Parliament to keep the slave trade. After he returned from the Caribbean, Pinney multiplied his wealth by funding slaving voyages. When the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 came into force throughout <i>most</i> of the British Empire, his sons Charles and John Frederick Pinney received £23,210 in compensation from the British government for 1220 enslaved people, worth approximately £3 million today. The slaves received no compensation, and their daily lives were often unchanged.
Beckford family  WILLIAM BECKFORD	William Beckford of Stepleton, just north of Blandford, was described as 'the richest commoner in England'. At age 10 in 1770 he inherited £1m in cash, an estate, several sugar plantations in Jamaica, and about 3000 black slaves. At abolition he received £200,000 for his slave property. A man was judged to be worth £37/10s (£37.50); women and children were worth less. The slave-owners complained that this was not enough. William Beckford became Lord Mayor of London and an MP. In 1780 Richard Beckford became MP for Bridport.

Drax family



Today, Richard Drax MP owns the largest estate in Dorset, at Charborough House, on the road from Dorchester to Poole, surrounded by a very long, high wall.

The Drax family were pioneers of the plantation system in Barbados and Jamaica from the 1640s, using slaves to produce sugar and rum, making vast amounts of money.

Their business model was copied by many others. In 1786 Edward Drax co-authored 'Instructions for the Management of a Plantation in Barbadoes [sic] and for the Treatment of Negroes'. He suggested 'negroes be treated with humanity'. The Drax plantation in Barbados was worked by up to 327 slaves at a time, with a high death rate for both adults and children. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 slaves died on the Drax plantations in Barbados and Jamaica over 200 years.

Richard Drax MP's ancestor, John Sawbridge Erle-Drax (also an MP), of Charborough Park, received £4,293 12s 6d (£4293.62 worth more than £500,000 in today's money) as compensation in 1836 for freeing 189 slaves.

The Drax family still own the plantation and Drax House in Barbados. There is a campaign to hand over the Drax estates to the people of Barbados.

Slaves in West Dorset

Compared with the numbers of people enslaved in the Americas, there were a small number of slaves brought to Britain. We know very little about their lives. In 1728, 456 slaves embarked in Africa and 380 were still alive when the ships reached Britain.

Richard Hallett of Lyme returned from Barbados to live in Lyme in 1699 and is said to have brought a number of enslaved black servants with him. In 1702 the Lyme Regis Town Court recorded that 'a Black Negro servant of Mr. Richard Hallett called Ando was accused with other inhabitants of rioting in Broad Street'. Although Ando is described as a 'servant' we have no evidence that he was paid. Slavery was still legal in England.

What did the press say about slavery?

This poster from Dorset History Centre (D-3000/1) though printed in Weymouth, was an extract from the Jamaica Despatch newspaper of 10th September 1832. It gave a reassuring picture of slavery to people in England. O'Reilly had just been appointed Attorney-General of Jamaica, the highest-ranking law officer. He was firmly on the side of the plantation owners.

DECEPTION EXPOSED.

West India Slavery.

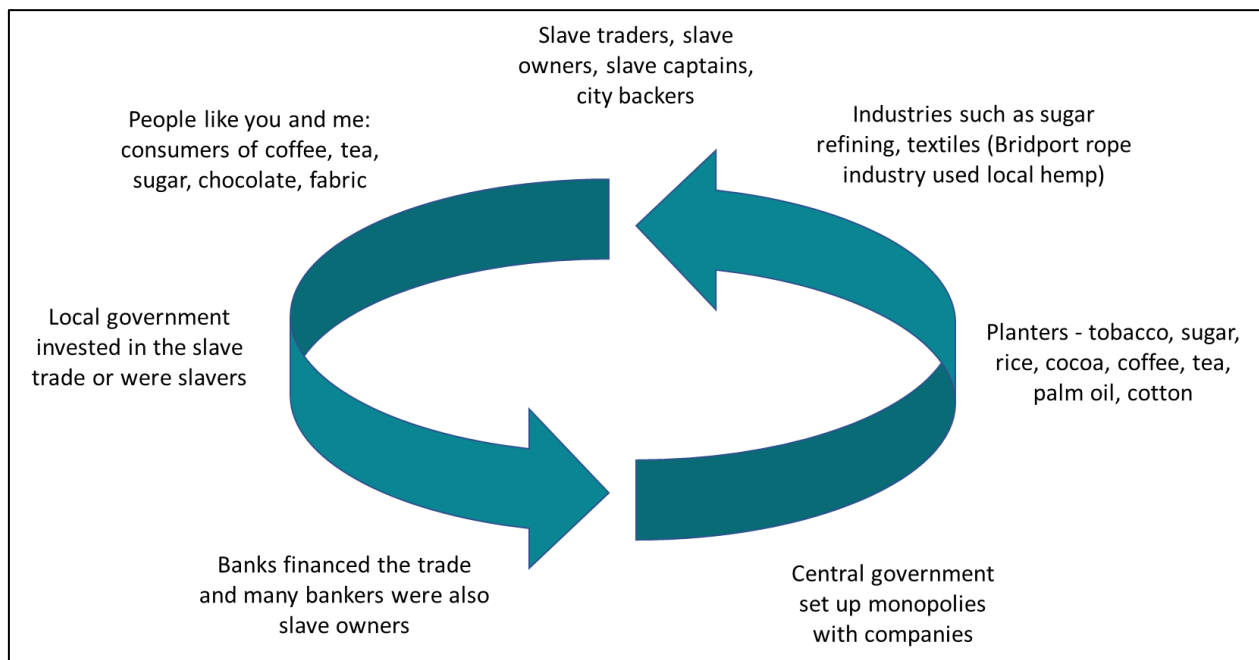
[Extract from the Jamaica Despatch, the 10th of September, 1832:]

AT a public entertainment given on the 4th Inst., amongst other toasts was "The health of the Attorney-General of Jamaica, the Honble. Mr. O'Reilly," appointed in the spring of this year, and consequently by His Majesty's *present* Ministers.

Mr. O'Reilly returned thanks. "He said that the feelings which had just been evinced, had been assimilated to those of a mob meeting, and truly it had been so, for the feelings given vent to by such assemblages were those of sincerity, and he participated in them. He arrived in this island an utter stranger to its inhabitants, to its institutions, and the manners of the country. His instructions when he left England were, to ascertain the condition of the negro, to report it faithfully, and to be the friend and the protector of the slave. Faithfully had these instructions been obeyed; and he could from ocular demonstration state, and the fact was undeniable, *that Slavery existed but in name. The Negroes were a well-fed happy people; their condition, in every respect, superior to that of the majority of the peasantry of England. In fact they enjoyed luxuries which he never could have imagined.* The protection of an Attorney-General was not required by the slave, for their kindest friend and protector was their humane and generous owner. These were his sentiments. Although but a short time in the colony he had witnessed enough to convince him that the character of the planter was slandered, and the condition of the slave misrepresented in Europe. In conclusion he would merely say, that he would ever discharge the duties of his office faithfully, and if in doing so he restored confidence to the planter, and was instrumental in saving to the British crown this beautiful and important island, his greatest ambition will have been obtained, for he was well satisfied that then the character of an honest Attorney-General would still be given him."

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Everybody was involved



How does this make you feel?

Where to find out more

The campaign to hand over the Drax estates to the people of Barbados.

<https://www.barbadosadvocate.com/news/sir-hilary-return-drax-plantation>

More about the Drax family's links with slavery.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/12/hes-the-mp-with-the-downton-abbey-lifestyle-but-the-shadow-of-slavery-hangs-over-the-gilded-life-of-richard-drax>

Compensation claims, estate maps and records.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery.

<https://www.slavevoyages.org>

<http://www.mjr-uk.com/uploads/1/2/2/0/12205473/slavingports.pdf>

Bybrook plantation accounts (Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton) showing purchases and sale of slaves.

<https://somerset.epexio.com/records/DD/WHh/1089/2>

The legend of the screaming skull

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bettiscombe>

Some suggested books:

Title	Author	Publisher
The Forgotten Trade: Comprising the Log of the Daniel and Henry of 1700 and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor Ports of England 1698-1725	Nigel Tattersfield	Pimlico (1998) ISBN 10: 0712673431
A Resource Book for the History of Slavery	Nigel Pocock	Soma Books Ltd ISBN: 9780861449637
A Respectable Trade (A well-researched novel)	Philippa Gregory	Harper Collins ISBN 9780006473374

The team at Bridport Museum summer 2021