

Liverpool and the slave trade

Much has been written about transatlantic slavery, and about the slave trade in particular. After the abolition of the slave trade in the British empire in 1807, the issue was periodically studied by antiquarians, and also took on a political significance for new generations of radicals. Gomer Williams, who wrote the classic 1897 history of the Liverpool trade, was partly motivated by anti-imperialism; to Williams, European expansion in Africa in the 1880s and 1890s was the latest phase in a centuries-long exploitation of the continent. Criticism of the slave trade gained an even higher profile when Ramsay Muir included a condemnatory chapter in his 1907 book, written to mark Liverpool's 700th anniversary.

The middle decades of the twentieth century saw some peculiar approaches to the history of the slave trade. Averil Mackenzie-Grieve's *The last years of the English slave trade* (1941) is an odd hybrid, well-researched for its time, with extensive use of primary evidence and a lengthy bibliography, yet written almost in note-form, and sweeping over large issues in a few very short sentences. As a sketch of Liverpool's merchant culture, it still makes interesting reading. Other comments on the slave trade from this era ranged from the tactless to the frankly bizarre. Chandler's 750th anniversary history argued, for example, that descendants of slaves had enjoyed a higher standard of living in the Americas than the descendants of those left behind in Africa, while C. N. Parkinson thought that although African-Americans suffered through slavery, their influence on twentieth-century popular music had inflicted much damage in return.

After that low point, the 1960s and 1970s saw a major improvement. Growing interest in slavery and ethnicity among American historians helped create the broadly-ranging field of Atlantic history, bringing together areas of British, European, African and American history that had previously been rather separate. Philip Curtin's *The Atlantic slave trade: A census* (1969) started debates about the scale and nature of slave trading that are still continuing. British universities had a long tradition of studying exploration and early colonisation in the Atlantic world, and the slave trade became an important element in that school of research. Most recently, the development of NML's Merseyside Maritime Museum, with its path-breaking 'Against human dignity' gallery (1994), and the International Slavery Museum (2007), has been a catalyst for another reassessment of Liverpool and the slave trade.

Liverpool remains an important case study. In 1976, Roger Anstey and Paul Hair edited a pioneering volume of essays that sparked some controversy, especially over the question of the profits made from slave trading. Many of the papers have stood the test of time, and the volume was reprinted with additional material in 1989. In common with other branches of historical study in the 1990s and 2000s, slave trade research turned to cultural aspects, seeking to understand the lives and mentalities of the enslaved and their enslavers alike. Slavery Remembrance Day and Black History Month both help to sustain and increase knowledge and interest in the trade. A conference held at the Maritime Museum in 2005 produced a new volume of essays reflecting the current state of research in the field, updating the Anstey and Hair collection for a new generation.

General works and guides to sources

Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic trade and the British economy, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 2000). Excellent short guide to the literature and controversy of the slave trade.

James Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African diaspora* (London, 2000).

The Maritime Archives and Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum, has a list of books and articles held in its own collections on slavery and the slave trade, and an information guide.

F. E. Sanderson, 'Liverpool and the slave trade: A guide to sources', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 124 (1972), pp. 154-76.

Late 19th/ early 20th century works

'Dicky Sam', *Liverpool and slavery: An historical account of the Liverpool-African slave trade* (Liverpool, 1884).

Ramsay Muir, *A history of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1907).

Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers and letters of marque: With an account of the Liverpool slave trade, 1744-1812* (1897, reprinted by Liverpool University Press, 2004). The slave trade section of Williams' book remains one of the most detailed studies of Liverpool's role, quoting extensively from contemporary sources.

Mid-20th century attitudes

Averil Mackenzie-Grieve, *The last years of the English slave trade: Liverpool 1750-1807* (London, 1941). Brings together extensive 18th and early 19th century writing in an eccentric style.

George Chandler, *Liverpool* (London, 1957).

C. N. Parkinson, *The rise of the port of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1952).

Modern books with a major focus on Liverpool

David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles, eds, *Liverpool and transatlantic slavery* (Liverpool, 2007). An important new collection of papers from Liverpool University Press bringing together major research across a range of aspects.

Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair, eds, *Liverpool, the African slave trade and abolition* (published in book form by the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire in 1976, 2nd edition 1989). A pioneering collection of essays, most of the papers having a Liverpool focus.

Suzanne Schwarz, *Slave captain: The career of James Irving in the Liverpool slave trade* (Wrexham, 1995, revised edition Liverpool, 2007). Edited journal and letters with introduction and notes.

Anthony Tibbles, ed., *Transatlantic slavery: Against human dignity* (2nd edition, Liverpool, 2005). Reprint of essays collected at the opening of the gallery in 1994, with two additional commentaries on museums and remembrance. Includes several short papers on Liverpool's role in the slave trade.