

The following is a transcript of Exeter City Council's ceremony to mark the Bicentenary of the British Act of Parliament to end slave trading on British ships. It was held on Sunday 25 March 2007 at midday on Cathedral Green in Exeter and was attended by members of the public and individuals representing organizations.

Exeter Cathedral choir and clergy walk from the west door up the broad steps.

Prayer by Exeter Cathedral's Canon Chancellor and Director Council for Worship & Ministry, Andrew Godsall.

Exeter Cathedral choir sung African-American spiritual

Address by humanist celebrant and historian of local black history, Lucy MacKeith:

'Welcome!

On behalf of the Lord Mayor and Exeter City Council I would like to thank the cathedral for allowing us to hold this ceremony to mark the Bicentenary of the British Abolition of the Slave Trade here on Cathedral Green and for opening our ceremony today.

This is an inclusive ceremony for those of any religion and of none. We are all welcome here today.

There are people who are unable to be here with us today but send their good wishes and are with us in spirit.

This ceremony provides an opportunity for us here in Devon to mark this county's involvement in the Slave Trade and its Abolition by reflecting on the world-wide consequences of that trade – a powerful example of globalisation – both in the past, and the present; and to consider the legacy of racism which continues today.

Exeter's Lord Mayor has said 'We can't turn back the hands of time but it is vitally important that we never forget this part of history and ensure that nothing remotely close to the Transatlantic Slave Trade ever happens again.'

We need to examine the nature of the slave trade which the Act of 1807 was meant to abolish – and to examine whether anything remotely like it exists today. I fear that slavery and slave trading is alive and well in the world today ...

2007 gives us the opportunity to research and consider Devon's involvement, to begin the process of examining our records to 'unpick' the historical strands which make up this county's contribution to both the Slave Trade itself and the push for its abolition. Whilst we mark this bicentenary with a sense of the achievement of passing the Act in Parliament it is important for us to recognise that it was only a small and inadequate step in the pursuit of justice for enslaved people at that time.

Not only do we have much learning to do about the nature of the Transatlantic Slave Trade but we also have the misinformations of the past to UNlearn. And for true learning to take place it is likely that we will feel uncomfortable as 'old accepted truths' are reassessed and we get to examine and correct the assumptions we carry which provide our frameworks of thinking.

We have records of Devon's involvement in the three stages of the Triangular Trade:

- Exporting Devon goods to West Africa

- Exporting Africans from West Africa to the Americas, what we would call 'people trafficking' today
- Exporting products of slave labour from the Americas to Devon, what we can recognise as the products of UNFAIR trade today

Devon's wealth is often attributed to its cloth industry – woollen fabric created from the sheep raised on Devon soil. The Slave Trade required fabric which was cheap, durable and not too heavy. Serges and perpetuanas were appropriately hard wearing and the Royal Africa Company, the company with the monopoly on trading in slaves, bought cloth from Devon. Merchants and weavers in Exeter petitioned against the monopoly because they wanted to not be limited in their trading. There were uprisings in Totnes, Ashburton and Ivybridge agitating for free trade also.

Other items were exported to Africa and we know that manillas were made in Exeter before 1625. These were metal bracelet-like objects – you may have seen them on the poster announcing this ceremony – and they were used as currency in West Africa. This gives us a connection between brass working in Exeter and the trade in Africans.

We have evidence of Devonians' involvement in transporting Africans from West Africa to the Americas, starting with Captain John Hawkins of Tavistock who initiated the English Slave Trade in 1562. In 1588 Queen Elizabeth I granted a patent to certain merchants of Exeter and others of west parts and of London for a trade to the river of Senegal and Gambia in Guinea. The company was granted a monopoly for ten years.

Devonians imported products from sugar and tobacco plantations of the Americas which completes its involvement with the triangular trade. There was also direct trade between Devon and the Americas as basic supplies were shipped over to the plantations.

But Devonians also played their part in the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The Society of Friends initiated work towards abolition with meetings held in Plymouth, Kingsbridge, Modbury, Exeter, Cullompton, Newton Tracey and Spiceland in Culmstock parish.

In 1788 an Anti-Slavery pamphlet was published in Plymouth which included the well known image of the Liverpool slave ship Brookes with 454 Africans forced into a small space.

Meetings were chaired by banker Sir William Elford and included members of the Cookworthy family, the lawyer John Prideaux and clockmaker Samuel Northcote.

Many petitions were signed and sent to Parliament including from Topsham, Moretonhampstead, Crediton, Plymouth and Exeter – Devon played its part.

Finally, when the Act abolishing Slavery was passed in 1833, twenty six years after the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the Bishop of Exeter, the Right Reverend Henry Philpotts and his partners, like thousands of other slave owners, received a total of £12,729 4shillings 4d as compensation for slaves they had owned in Jamaica.

No slaves received any compensation.

The history on this subject is not simple; gross injustices remained.

Death is always sad for humans but sometimes, as in the case of genocide, the scale of deaths can be so overwhelming, that we lose sight of the fact that we are looking at the lives and deaths of individuals.

We will now hear extracts about the Slave Trade from the Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, the autobiography which he published in 1789. This account is from an African whose life embodies so much of the story of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. He was captured at the age of ten or eleven.

Chukumeka Maxwell, is well suited to be our reader as he has connections in Nigeria, Jamaica and Britain.

The adults in Equiano's society used to leave home to work in the fields, leaving the children behind:

"... it was my fate to be attacked and to be carried off when none of the grown people were nigh. One day when all our people were gone out to their works as usual and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and without giving us time to cry out or make resistance, they stopped our mouths and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands and continued to carry us as far as they could until night came on...."

Separated from his sister, Equiano travels for six or seven months to reach the coast:

"The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo. This filled me with great astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board...

"I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat... two of the white men offered me eatables, and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and lay me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely...

"When ... the whole ship's cargo were confined together it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us... and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died...

"When the boat landed in Barbados... We were conducted to the merchants' yard where we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold without regard to sex or age..."

We cannot learn of all the details of Equiano's life now but he wrote about travelling all over the world and eventually settled in England where he published his autobiography as part of the political struggle for abolition. At one time he worked for the navy in Plymouth and he wrote that:

"On January the seventh 1777 we arrived at Plymouth ...and, after passing some little time in Plymouth and Exeter among some pious friends, whom I was happy to see, I went to London."

Equiano wrote:

"I hope that the Slave trade will be abolished. I pray it may be an event at hand."

Eighteen years later, after Equiano's death in 1797, the Abolition Act was passed.
(Thank you)

The Transatlantic Slave Trade changed the world forever. Its consequences were truly global.

We will now take time to name some of the Africans who came to Devon, mostly up to 1807, because of this county's connection with the Slave Trade. We also mention others with connections with Devon who lived elsewhere.

The names we have are not their original African names –these were stolen from them along with their liberty.

Our readers - Gillian Allen, Crystal Carter, Simone de Hoogh, James Hennessey, Anderson Jones, Natalie Marcus, Lucy McQueen, Vincent Mudane, Len Pole, Tony Simpson, Mia Dawson, Nic van Grunsuen - share backgrounds from all over the world, just as the slave trade reached into so many parts of the world.

When the names have been read we will have a time of silence to reflect on slavery in the past and today and the part humans can play in the continuation or abolition of such practices.

"We remember Anthonye who was mentioned in the will of Nicholas Wichehalse in 1570 in Barnstaple.

"We remember these Africans who were amongst those recorded in the register of baptisms, marriages and burials at St Andrew's in Plymouth:

- Bastien, of Mr William Hawkins, who was buried on 10 December 1583
- Christian, servant to Richarde Sheere, whose daughter Helene was baptised on 2 May 1593 and whose daughter Christien was buried on 14 April the following year
- Christien, daughter of Mary, owned by John White and the supposed daughter of John Kinge, a Dutchman who was baptised on 12 November 1594
- An un-named African attached to Captain Sparks who was buried on 30 November 1601
- Mary, an African of Mr Stallenge, who was buried on 16 December 1601.

"We remember these Africans who lived in Barnstaple:

- Grace, servant of Mr Richard Doddridge baptised on 6 April 1596
- Peter Mingus, servant of Mr Norrishe, who was buried 22 May 1596
- Elizabeth, servant with Mrs Ayer, baptised 10 April 1598 and her daughter Mary who was baptised on 22 May 1605
- Chaterin, servant of Mr Lanyon baptised 26 February 1606
- Susannah and her daughter Elizabeth who was baptised on 10 November 1606

"We remember these two women who lived in Hatherleigh:

- Grace, who was baptised on 13 May 1604 and her
- daughter Rebecca who was baptised on 10 August 1606

"We remember Katheren, servant to Sir William Pole, who was buried on 1 January 1619 at Colyton.

"We remember the unnamed young African Sir James Bagg of Saltram House near Plymouth ordered should be 'handsomely clothed' to reflect the high status of the Bagg family in society in 1628.

"We remember Luce who was buried at Chumleigh on 1 June 1658.

"We remember Thomas who was buried in Exeter on 4 February 1631.

"We remember the 200 un-named Africans in the procession through Exeter on 17 October 1688 when William of Orange passed through on his way to claim the throne in London. They were from the plantations of the Netherlands in America, Imbroyder'd Caps lin'd with white Fur, and Plumes of white Feathers, to attend the Horse.

"We remember Mary Negro who was baptised at St Stephen's Church in Exeter on 16 February 1689.

"We remember Richard Argey, servant to Madam Duck of Mount Radford who was baptised at Aylesbeare on 4 August 1695.

"We remember 20 year old Elizabeth who was baptised at West Ogwell on 15 November 1696.

"We remember an African named 'Plymouth' who worked on an estate in South Carolina and thus contributed to the wealth of Elias Ball of Stoke-in-Teignhead who had inherited the estate in 1698.

"In 1700 the ship the Daniel and Henry, captained by Prideaux left Dartmouth for West Africa. We remember the 450 Africans whom they took from West Africa to the Americas. We especially remember the 200 who died on the journey.

"We remember William Hayle, aged 17 or 18 and who belonged to Mr Cove who was baptised at Bishopsteignton on 3 April 1708.

"We remember Ignatius Sancho, born on a slave ship in 1729, who worked for the wealthy Montagu family in London and ran a grocery shop in Westminster. Recent research identifies the portrait of an African at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum here in Exeter as being of him.

"We remember Charles English who was buried in Exeter on 9 April 1735.

"We remember William Coffee, servant to Mr John Creed of Maristow who was baptised on 19 November 1738.

"We remember Colla, an African who was enslaved on a plantation in Antigua owned by the Swete family of Modbury. During the mid eighteenth century he was described as a 'notorious runaway' for which he was publicly flogged.

"We remember Scipio, belonging to John Yarde Esq, who was buried at Churston Ferrers on 20 June 1750.

"We remember these Africans recorded as being baptised at Stoke Damerel:

- James Wager on 12 December 1762 at the age of eleven
- George Thompson on 10 January 1763 at the age of 20
- James Tobias, a boy, on 25 April 1764
- Charles Phoenix, about 35 years old, on 23 September 1803

"In Topsham we remember the burials of:

- Ann Avery on 11 June 1715
- Issac Primus, servant to Sir John Colleton on 6 February 1771
- Charles Lewis, servant of James Huish Walcott, on 11 January 1786
- Abigail Wallay on 7 August 1783

"We remember Charles Marinnel, son of African parents and servant to Mr Thomas Hardy who was baptised on 17 April 1773 at Sidmouth.

"We remember Susanna, servant to Mrs Watson who was baptised at Alverdiscott on 14 April 1771.

"We remember Anne Hobbs, who was baptised at St Davids in Exeter on 7 August 1772 and Thomas Walker, who was baptised in the same church on 4 December 1778.

"We remember Thomas Lazarus, an African mariner living in Instow who married Mary Muxworthy of the parish on 27 May 1779.

"We remember Philip Scipio from St Helena, servant to Lady Lucy Morice who was buried at Werrington on 10 September 1784.

"We remember David Shepherd, a mariner aged about 42, who was buried at Dartmouth on 24 January 1781.

"We remember the 400 passengers in four ships, who stayed in Plymouth during March and April 1787 before sailing to establish a colony of 'freed blacks' in Sierra Leone.

"We remember the unknown number of un-named Africans who died in the wreck of the London just outside Rapparee Cove near Ilfracombe on 9 October 1796.

"We remember John Peters, born in Demerara, who was baptised at Totnes in February 1798.

"We remember these Africans who lived at Withycombe Raleigh:

- Andrew Hector Harris belonging to John Colleton who was baptised on 3 August 1748
- Elizabeth Marchant, who also belonged to John Colleton who was baptised on the same day at the age of 27
- Mary Ann from the Island of St Christopher who was baptised at the age of 60
- Worsley, a bandsman in the Denbigh Militia who married Mary Webber of Withycombe Raleigh on 12 March 1801

"We remember Robert Hill, a servant at the Devon and Exeter Hospital, who was buried in Exeter on 8 May 1791.

"We remember Nicholas Herbert, apprentice to Mr James Holman, Boot and Shoe Maker, who ran away from his master in March 1792.

"We remember the Africans enslaved by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel who were treated very harshly indeed, including being branded with a red hot iron with the Society's name.

"We remember Ann Peel who was baptised in Heavitree on 17 March 1805.

“We remember Peter Courlon, servant to the French General Rochambeau, who was parolled with his master in Moretonhampstead in 1807 and went on to marry Susannah Parker of the town.

“We remember Dahlia Graham, born around 1761, the eldest of four children, she was kidnapped from Senegal as a child. She worked in the plantations in the Americas before coming to Exeter as a servant to Miss Harriet Louisa Wardrobe after the abolition of slavery and she lived to her nineties. She ended her days in the Exeter Workhouse.

“Finally we remember all those Africans whose names and life and death details we do not know.”

We will now have a period of quiet to reflect on Devon’s connection with the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its Abolition and what its legacy is today.
Thank you.

Later this year the Sameboat Project plan to retrace the route of the Triangular Slave Trade in their boat. Their purpose is to loosen the debts of history through the redemptive ritual retracing of the Atlantic Slave Triangle.

Here in Devon, the African drumming that Ayodele Scott teaches brings people together today in celebration of shared enjoyment of music which played its part in the Slave Trade in the past:

Monuments can help us to remember historical events.

This extract from *The Sea is History*, a poem by Derek Walcott, can explain to us why their planned ritual of retracing the route of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 2007 acknowledges the sea in its role of as a memorial:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.

Before we conclude this ceremony today with drumming created by the people from the continent which lost so many in the Transatlantic Slave Trade who are now scattered all over the world, thank you to all of you for coming today to mark this Bicentenary.

Let us take the opportunity to make contact with each other, maybe to meet at further events to continue marking this important Bicentenary.

Thank you for coming.’

Drumming by Ayodele Scott of the Same Boat Project.

End.

The following people attended as representatives of organisations:
Cllr Norman Shiel, ECC Lord Mayor of Exeter
Cllr Dilys Baldwin, ECC Portfolio Holder for Housing & Social Inclusion
Cllr Roy Slack, ECC Lead Councillor
Philip Bostock, ECC Chief Executive
Bindu Arjoon, ECC Assistant Chief Executive
Hazel Ball, ECC Director Community & Environment Directorate
Alan Caig, ECC Head of Leisure and Museums
Cllr Brian Greenslade, DCC Leader
Cllr Sheila Hobden, DCC Exec. Member for Culture
Phil Norry, DCC Chief Executive
Kate Devlin, UoE Equality & Diversity Manager
Emma Towell, D&CPC Corp. Equality & Diversity
Mr.Gus & Mrs. Gisela Bialick, Exeter Synagogue
Mark Flinton, Deputy Governor of the HMP Exeter
Sonia Francis-Mills, Director of Devon Racial Equality Council
Dr. Todd Gray, Friends of Devon Archives