

Starting to trace Black History in Exeter

People of African descent are not immediately visible in the history of Exeter.

These two 'trails' offer a starting point for uncovering the evidence to help us build up a picture of members of this group and their contributions to the city's history.

They offer scattered examples of evidence; not a neat trail.

We are at the beginning of uncovering black history in Devon and Exeter. There is much more to uncover...

If you find evidence of black history in the county or city, please share it with other researchers by emailing [**blackhistindevon@yahoo.com**](mailto:blackhistindevon@yahoo.com)

Thank you!
Lucy MacKeith
Trail Author

Reading recommendations

Peter Fryer: *Staying Power*. Pluto Press, 1984. The standard introduction to the history of black people in Britain.

Sylvia Collicott: *Connections: Haringey. Local-National-World Links*, Haringey Community Information Service in Association with the Multi-Cultural Support Group, 1986. An example of work in one area which links local history with events worldwide

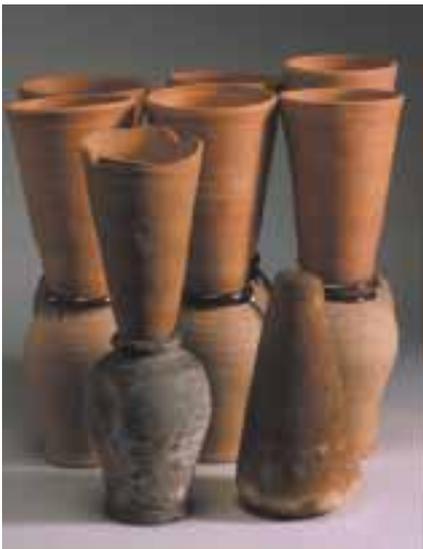
Lucy MacKeith: *Local Black History – a beginning in Devon*. Archives and Museum of Black Heritage, 2003. This introduces the story of black people in the county, and at the same time gives useful hints and methodologies for researching the black presence in all parts of Britain. Notes for educators in schools, museums and libraries, on resources for learning, extensive notes on the text, and an index provide access to many avenues for further inquiry and sharing information about the local black British heritage.

Please use an Exeter street map to find the precise locations listed

- 1 Names of roads in Exeter may indicate connections with black history, such as **Blackboy Road**. **Guinea Street** is named after a part of the West African coast which was used as a measure of wealth from 1663.
- 2 Manillas, a sort of bracelet, were used as currency in West Africa during the period of the Slave Trade. A mould for making manillas was found at the site of a foundry in **Cowick Street**, which was in use before 1625. This indicates that people in Exeter were involved in trade with West Africa.



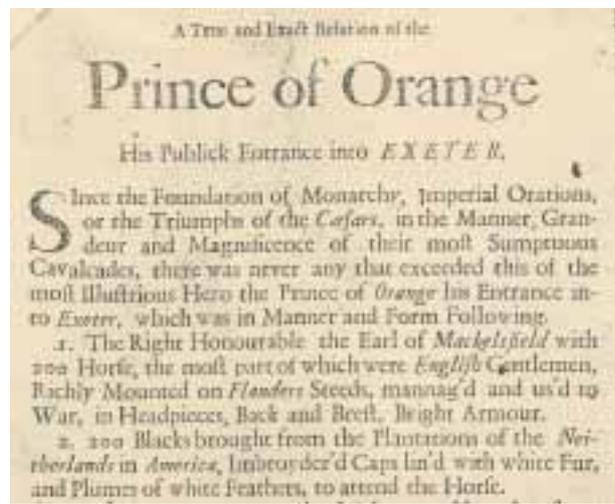
- 3 There were factories to process sugar from slave plantations in Exeter at the **Bishop's Palace**, **The Retreat** in **Topsham**, and **Goldsmith Street**.



Sugar pots as used in processing sugar

- 4 The Scots missionary, Mary Slessor, worked in Calabar in West Africa. For a while in 1885 she rented 48, **The Strand** in **Topsham**, with three year old 'Janie' from Calabar. Some years later they lived in **Majorfield**, also in Topsham.

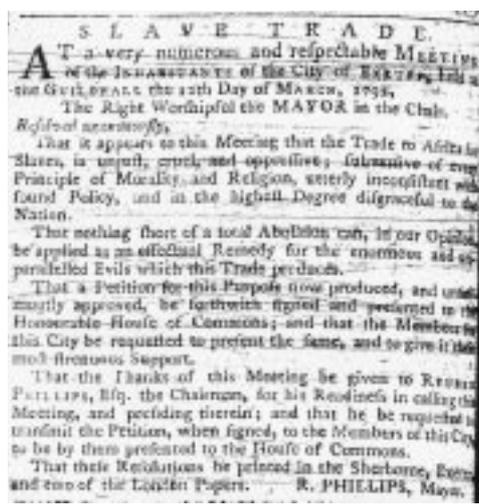
- 5 In 1688 William of Orange marched through Exeter on his way to claim the throne in London. A broadsheet of the time described '200 blacks' who were in the procession.



- 6 In **Topsham parish church** there are memorial stones which commemorate shipbuilders who built ships involved with trade with Africa.

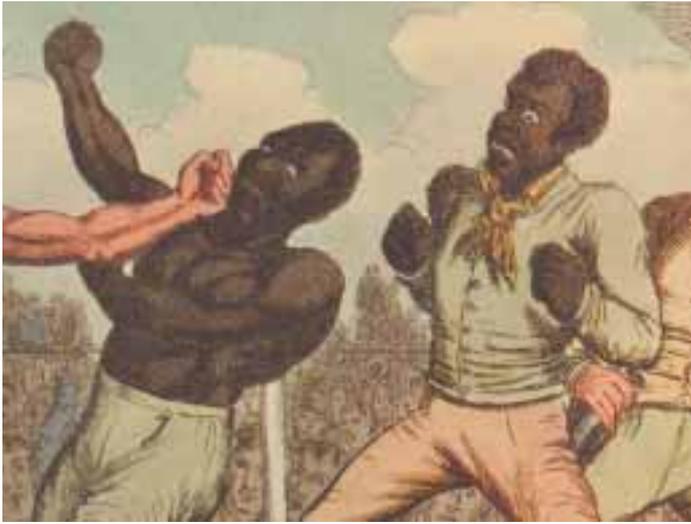


- 7 Grave stones in **Exeter Cathedral** mark the connections between Devon and other parts of the world where African labour contributed to Devonians' wealth.



- 8 Meetings supporting the abolition of the Slave Trade were held in Exeter.

- 9 In a wrestling match in Exeter in 1812, Tom Molyneux, a famous black boxer at the end of his career, was defeated by 'John Snow of Moretonhampstead'.



- 13 In 1854, Dahlia Graham, an African, was living in the workhouse aged 93. She had been captured from Senegal as a child and had worked as a 'General Upper Servant' in Hill's Court Road, now known as **Pennsylvania Road**.

- 14 Black people were baptised and buried at various Exeter churches.

- 15 In April 2001 the Mayor, Councillor Mary Evans, hosted the Dagara Peace Commission as they visited Exeter to commemorate the connection between Devon and the Slave Trade.



- 10
a In the 1765 Summer Circuit court session at the **Guildhall**, Henry Oroonoko was sentenced to be hanged 'for assaulting Joseph Bray on the King's Highway, and theft'.



- b In the 1766 Winter Circuit session his sentence was changed to transportation for 14 years.



- 11 On 22 March 1792 Nicholas Herbert, an apprentice of African appearance, ran away from his master, James Holman, opposite the London Inn.

EXETER.
RAN AWAY, on Sunday last, the 18th instant, NICHOLAS HERBERT, an Apprentice to Mr. JAMES HOLMAN, Boot and Shoe-maker, opposite the London Inn, Exeter. He is about five Feet six Inches high, wore his own black bushy Hair, brown Complexion, pitted with the Small Pox, and has thick Lips; had on when he went away, a brown Cloth Coat, with Metal Buttons, black Lasting Breeches, and took with him a blue Coat with yellow Buttons. — Whoever harbours or employs the said Apprentice after this public Notice, they will be prosecuted according to Law.

- 16 In the 1820s there was a black beggar in Exeter, known as 'Mr White'.



- 12 In April 1835 an African servant was sent to meet his master's visitor at *The Ship* pub in Heavitree. (Now known as **The Ship and Pelican**).

17 In the 1860s or 1870s a Prince of Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) visited **St David's Station**.



18 In 1871 the daughter of an English merchant in West Africa was in Exeter.



19 To see examples of objects from African cultures which many of the Africans who landed up in Devon came from, visit the World Cultures Galleries in the **Royal Albert Memorial Museum** in **Queen Street**.

Acknowledgements for images:

- 2, 3 Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter City Council
- 5,10 Devon County Council Library Services
- 7 Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral
- 15 Lucy MacKeith: *Local Black History – a beginning in Devon*. AMBH 2003
- 16,17,18 Todd Gray: *Exeter Unveiled*. Mint Press. 2003

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