

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

MANCHESTER AND SLAVERY [1]

Introduction

Manchester was one of the slavery business's hinterlands. Its proximity to Liverpool meant that the two cities engaged in interlinked commercial activities. Products manufactured in Manchester were used in the slave trade by Liverpool ship's captains. Manchester finished cloth was particularly in demand in West Africa. Some industries, for example, the cotton business used materials that were produced by enslaved people. Manchester imported slave produced cotton from both the British West Indies and later from the Americas.

Family networks were crucial to this trade. It could take months, and sometimes years, for a ship to return to Britain after it had completed a circuit of Africa, the West Indies and the Americas. The family network connected those in the colonies with access to news, supplies for the plantations, credit, and opportunities to sell the goods produced by the enslaved back in Britain. Male members of the family provided the personnel in merchant houses in Britain as well as management on the plantations in the Caribbean. Women played a crucial role by creating or cementing commercial ties through marriage and the creation of a new generation to support the family's interests.

The American Civil War

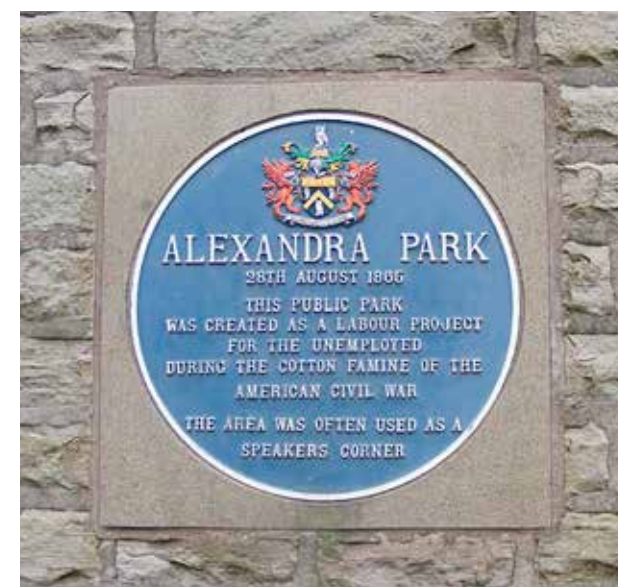
Manchester's connection to slavery did not end with abolition in the British Caribbean in 1833. The explosion in cotton manufacturing in Lancashire meant that many of the populace relied on the industry for employment. The cotton which fuelled this expansion came in large part from the Americas where slavery still existed.

When the American South attempted to secede from the North it tried to force Britain to support it by cutting off the cotton supply. Later the North used blockades to strangle the South's trade and its economy. The cotton famine struck Lancashire very hard. At a meeting in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on 31 December 1862 cotton workers gathered and resolved to support the North in its fight against slavery. Lincoln Square in Manchester remembers the part played by cotton workers in supporting antislavery.

Image from John McConnell, *A Century of fine cotton spinning, 1790-1913* (1913)



McConnell & Company's mills, Ancoats, c. 1820.



The Public Works Manufacturing Districts Act (1864) allowed for unemployed cotton workers to be hired for public works such as the creation of Alexandra Park in Oldham.

The Cross Street Chapel network

Families from Liverpool and Manchester married into each other. A record of these marriage patterns can be found in *The Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel* (1884) which was written to document the history of the Cross Street Chapel in Manchester. Although many Dissenters were abolitionists there were others who were involved in the business of slavery. Among the notable people the author refers to are men that were involved with the slave trade, cotton manufacturing and the trade in West Indian commodities produced by enslaved people, for example, sugar.

Families who worshipped in the chapel included the Hibberts, the Philips and the Greys. By tracing who these people were and how they were connected to each other it is possible to recreate the networks of family and commercial interests that structured the world these people inhabited.

The Philips

The Philips family provide an example of the way slave-derived wealth could translate into political power. **John Philips (1724–1803)** and his brother **Nathaniel Philips (1726–1808)** were active in the West India trade as well as the trades in silk, smallwares, fustians, checks, cotton dealing, hatting, cotton spinning and power-loom weaving. Nathaniel and his wife Elizabeth née Hibbert had several homes including one outside Manchester called The Dales at Stand, and a town house in Manchester at 10 St. James' Square. Their grandson **Mark Philips (1800–73)** served as MP for Manchester between 1832–47 and was a proponent of 'Manchesterism'. He was president of Manchester Academy from 1842–6 and 1871–3.

Nathaniel's first cousin **Sir George Philips (1766–1847)** was a partner in the West India merchant house of Boddington, Philips, and Sharp which traded in sugar amongst other colonial commodities. He married Nathaniel's sister Sarah Ann and his dominance of the Manchester cloth industry earned him the nickname 'King Cotton.' He was an MP 1812–1834 and a member of the Society of West India Planters and Merchants. Despite this he voted for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. He appears in the records of those who claimed compensation for enslaved people in Jamaica, although his claim was not successful.



The Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, c. 1835



The House of Commons 1833 by Sir George Hayter.

The Hibberts

The Hibbert family were from Manchester and an important part of the Cross Street chapel network. They illustrate the transformation of capital from manufacturing to slave-ownership to genteel pursuits. **Robert Hibbert I (1686–1762)** provided finished cotton pieces to Liverpool slave ship's captains for use in the slave trade. His eldest son **Thomas Hibbert (1710–1780)** went to Jamaica in 1734 and became one of the most powerful slave traders on the island. He had a thirty year relationship with a free woman of colour called Charity Harry. The couple had three daughters, two of whom were sent to England to be educated. In 1760 Thomas purchased a plantation called Agualta Vale in the parish of St. Mary, Jamaica.

Thomas's brother **Robert Hibbert II (1717–84)** became a West India merchant in Manchester. Three of his sons went to Jamaica where they worked as slave traders, attorneys, merchants and planters. The Hibberts owned ships, docks and warehouses to transport, house and distribute their clients produce. They also lent money to planters in Jamaica. Brothers George (1757–1837) and William (1759–1844) worked in the London merchant house.



Monument of the late Thomas Hibbert, Esq., at Agualta Vale, St. Mary's, from James Hakewill, *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica* (1825).



George Hibbert (1757–1837) by Thomas Lawrence.

Image courtesy of the Museum of London

George Hibbert (1757–1837) was the senior partner in the West India merchant house in England. He was a Chairman of the West India Merchants and lobbied for the continuation of both the slave trade and slavery. He was an early advocate of compensation for the slave-owners. At the ending of Caribbean slavery in 1834 the Hibberts received £103,000 of which £63,000 was paid to George. The family owned country houses, art, book and botany collections. They invested in docks and railways as well as land in Canada.