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Timeline: Slave Trade & Abolition

Different forms of slavery are common throughout history but before the 15th century there was no particular association with Africa. Advances in Portuguese ship design made it possible to sail down the coast of Africa in search of trade and wealth.

1444 First slaves brought to Portugal from northern Mauritania.

1471 Portuguese arrive in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana).

1482 Portuguese begin building Elmina Castle on the Gold Coast.

1490 First Portuguese missionaries go to Congo.

1492 Christopher Columbus sails west to find the fabled spice islands of the East Indies but makes landfall in the Caribbean.

1500 Sugar plantations established on island of São Tomé two hundred miles off the coast of west Africa.

1510 First slaves shipped to Spanish colonies in south America via Spain.

1518 First direct shipment of slaves from Africa to the Americas.

Britain, the Netherlands and France were competing with Spain and Portugal for a share of the profits of slavery. This new trans-Atlantic slave trade was very different from the slavery that had existed before.

1555 A group of Africans from Gold Coast are brought to England by John Lok, a London merchant, to learn English so that they can act as interpreters in their homelands. The English want to break the monopoly that the Portuguese have over the African trade in gold, ivory and pepper.

1562-69 John Hawkins becomes the first Englishman known to have traded in Africans, making three voyages to Sierra Leone and transporting a total of 1,200 slaves to Hispaniola and St Domingue (present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti). He sold them to the Spanish in exchange for pearls, hides, sugar and ginger.

1618 King James I creates The Company of Adventurers of London Trading into the Parts of Africa.

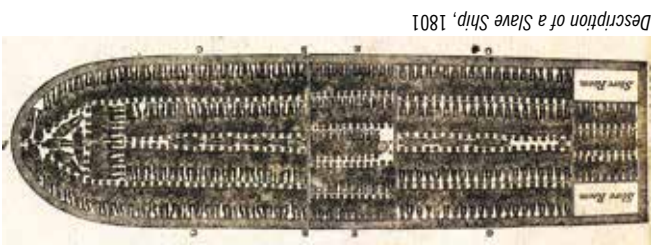
1624 English settle St Kitts.

1627 English settle Barbados, Monserrat and Antigua.

1628 English settle Nevis and France establishes colonies in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Europeans tried growing different crops to be sold back home. After failed experiments with growing tobacco, the English colonists successfully introduce sugarcane.



For over 250 years the trans-Atlantic slave trade fuelled Britain's economy. This guide explores the close links between Reading and slavery and reveals how the wealth generated supported the lavish lifestyles enjoyed by Berkshire's privileged elite.



Description of a Slave Ship, 1801

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About Aspire

The **Caribbean Associations Group** (CAG) is the umbrella organisation representing the Caribbean and people of Black heritage with a single authentic voice. The **Central Club** is our spiritual home and the iconic **Black History Mural** a totem of our struggles for a half a century.

In 2016 CAG set about acquiring the Central Club site and Mural for the community from Reading Borough Council. **Aspire (Reading) CIC** was registered as the legal entity to negotiate the transfer of the site from the Council. The diaspora's struggles to own assets and participate in economic and political life is the hallmark of a functioning people. This struggle is reflected in the story told by the Mural.

In our fight to save it from developers we have registered the Mural as an **Asset of Community** value. With the backing of the Council, Aspire CIC have now applied to **Historic England** for both the site and Mural to be given national listed status and protection under the law.

We hope you find your tour of Reading's hidden history informative.

More information: www.aspirecic.co.uk or www.CAG-Reading.org.uk



Orange Valley Estate, St Ann's, Jamaica, property of Henry John Blagrove Esq, Fredrick Coore

This guide is published by **Aspire CIC** for Black History Month, 2020
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 Text & design by **Dave Richards**

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An exhibition of **Reading's Slave Links** that can be used to raise awareness of this hidden history is available as a **free download** or a set of 15 A1 panels that can be borrowed from Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) admin@risc.org.uk. It is ideal for display in schools or community spaces.

RISC's Education Team offer training and support for examining and developing your history curriculum and making the most of local links. Contact education@risc.org.uk for more information.

For a list of sources and ideas for teaching activities on **Black History** contact www.risc.org.uk/education/current-projects.

1833 Slavery Abolition Act is passed in Parliament, taking effect in 1834. This gave all slaves in the Caribbean their freedom although some other British territories have to wait longer. However, freed slaves were forced into a period of 'apprenticeship' (working for former masters for a low wage) so slavery is not fully abolished in practice until 1838.

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1796 Fédon's slave rebellion in Grenada defeated by British troops.

1802 West India Dock opens in the Port of London, initially dealing solely with the produce from the West Indies.

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The Maroons in Ambush on the Dromilly Estate in the Parish of Trelawney, Jamaica, J Mergel, 1801

The triangular trade

At least 12 million enslaved Africans were taken to the Caribbean and Americas, about 70% in British ships. An estimated 2 million died on the Middle Passage—the voyage across the Atlantic that lasted between six weeks to several months, depending on the weather.

The vast profits generated by the triangular trade helped to fuel the industrial revolution, develop financial services such as insurance and banking, build the British empire, enable charitable donations and feed conspicuous consumption—large town houses, country estates, art collections and the European 'Grand Tour'.



Sugar production

- The ground had to be dug, hoed, weeded, planted and then fertilised with manure, from dawn until dusk in tropical heat.
- At harvest time, sugar cane was cut with cutlasses and loaded onto carts. This was back-breaking work. Life expectancy was low.
- The harvested cane was taken to the sugar mill where it was crushed and boiled to extract a brown, sticky juice which was allowed to separate into molasses and semi-refined sugar. Operating the machinery was dangerous—slaves could be maimed or killed. The sugar boiling houses were unbearably hot especially in summer.
- Molasses was used to make rum. The sugar was packed into barrels and shipped to Europe.



Mill Yard on Gamble's Estate, Antigua, 1823, William Clark

Royal Berkshire Regiment

1 Brock Barracks (RG30 1HW) & 2 Maiwand Lion (RG1 3EJ) The Maiwand Lion in Forbury Gardens famously commemorates the soldiers from the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment fighting for the British imperial cause in Helmand province, Afghanistan in 1880. Less well-known is that both predecessors of the Regiment fought in the Caribbean throughout much of the 18th century.

Britain captured Jamaica in 1655 and recruited independent militias to defend the island and suppress slave revolts. In 1748 these were combined by the governor into Edward Trelawny's Regiment of Foot to protect plantation owners from the 'threat of an outbreak of negroes'. In 1751 it was rechristened the 49th (Hertfordshire) Regiment of Foot and merged with the 66th Regiment to form the Royal Berkshire Regiment based at Brock Barracks in 1880.

Plantocracy

Berkshire's Royal connections and proximity to London and Parliament attracted many noble and wealthy inhabitants. Many of the landed gentry were slave owners whose families inter-married and moved between their estates in the Caribbean and England.

3 Blagrove Arms in Blagrove Street (RG1 1PW) The extensive Blagrove/Blagrove family were connected with Reading for over 400 years. **Daniel Blagrove** (1603-68) was elected MP for Reading in 1640. One of the 'regicides' who signed the death warrant of King Charles I, he was rewarded with lands in Jamaica by Oliver Cromwell.

The Berkshire Record Office holds many historical documents relating to local involvement to the slave trade. These include the accounts of **Thomas Blagrove** showing that his slaves on the Trelawny Estate were worth £8175 in 1767 and an inventory in his will, dating from 1774, that listed the names of his chattel slaves on the Pembroke Estate.

Another family member **John Blagrove** (1754-1824) was actively engaged in the Second Maroon War against the nearby Trelawny Town maroons in 1795.

4 Grove House (RG4 8LR) Admiral Arthur Forrest (1716-70) came from a planter family with extensive interests in Jamaica and served in the Royal Navy's Jamaica Squadron. He bought Forest Lodge, Binfield in 1760 and Grove House, Emmer Green (now part of Highdown School). At the time of his death Forrest owned six sugar estates in Jamaica.

In 1838, under the provisions of the Slavery Compensation Act, his grandson **Thomas Forrest** of Binfield was paid £2261 0s 2d for the loss of 113 slaves on the Bellfield Estate, Jamaica.

Englefield House (RG7 5EN) The family papers of **Richard Benyon the Younger** (died 1796) include a cash book for 1775 recording monthly expenditure on the Englefield Estate. On 12 September M. Risdale was paid £19 19s 'for a black man', roughly the same amount used for the upkeep of the house each month.

Purley Park (RG8 8EH) In 1655 an expeditionary force was sent by Oliver Cromwell to capture Spanish Jamaica. Many British army officers were the younger sons of the landed gentry who would not inherit family wealth. Those serving in the Caribbean often acquired land and established sugar, cotton and coffee plantations with slave labour.

Anthony Morris Storer (1746-1799) was elder son of **Thomas Storer** (1712-1793) who had inherited the Belleisle and Frome Estates in Westmoreland, Jamaica from his father, a former army officer. Educated at Eton and Cambridge he became MP for Carlisle. He bought Purley Park in 1793 after inheriting his father's fortune. He spent a considerable sum redesigning the property using the one of England's greatest landscapers, Humphrey Repton.

When Storer died the estate passed to his nephew, **Anthony Gilbert Storer** (1782-1818) who commissioned celebrated architect James Wyatt to design the house that we see today. In 1824 his wife **Ann Katherine Storer** was accused of the maltreatment of Philip Thompson, a black servant who was bought as a slave in Jamaica. According to Thompson's testimony, 'flogging was the usual punishment for any misdemeanour and he was often ill treated'. She was found not guilty.

In 1836 Mrs Storer was paid a total of £9,796 2s 8d in compensation for the loss of 559 slaves from her four estates in Westmoreland under the terms of the Abolition of Slavery Act.

5 Caversham Park (RG6 1PT) & 6 Marsack Street (RG4 5AP) In the 18th century it was fashionable for rich families back from India and the West Indies to have black servants or nurses for their children. The new owner of Caversham Park in 1784 was **Major Charles Marsac** (1747-1820), High Sheriff of Oxfordshire for 1787. He was a *nabob*—people who returned from working in India for the East India Company with considerable wealth. So many settled in Berkshire it became known as the 'English Hindoostan'. Marsac attracted public comment and Reading's *The Public Advertiser* obviously disapproved of the new owner: 'The homely rustic and blushing maid now supplanted by old French women, Swiss Valets de Chamber, Black boys, Gentoo [Hindu] coachmen, Mulatto footmen, and Negro butlers.' 3 November 1784

Parish records

In 1772 there were an estimated 14,000 slaves in Britain, most in domestic service. Berkshire Record Office holds records of baptisms and burials of black people though little information about their identities.

St Bartholomew's, Basildon RG8 9NH

Baptism 19 June 1732 *Charles Cato (a black boy) was baptised*

Holy Trinity, Cookham SL6 9SW

Baptism 6 January 1771 *Thomas Goree an African adult*

Gorée is an island off the coast of present-day Senegal where slaves were loaded onto ships destined for the Americas.

St James the Less, Pangbourne RG8 7AX

Burial 15 June 1749 *Scipio Africanus (a negro) was buried*

St Laurence, Reading RG1 1DA

Baptism 8 February 1777 *Anthony a Negro from Enstatia (adult)*

Baptism 13 January 1778 *Scipio Smith—a negro from the Coast of Guinea—servant of Mary, daughter of Joseph Smith Esq. of Hillingdon Oxfordshire*

St Mary's, Reading RG1 2HX

Baptism 28 September 1806 *Catharine James, a negro, about sixteen years of age*

Baptism 5 September 1773 *Peter William Williams a Negro about 12 years of age*

St Mary's, Shinfield RG2 9BY

Baptism 24 August 1799 *Joseph Phillip Bacchaus a West Indian a black boy*

St Mary's, Thatcham RG19 3PN

Burial 14 October 1771 *Thomas a Negro serv't to Rich'd Otteley Esqr*

St Michael the Archangel, Warfield RG42 6EE

Baptism 26 November 1732 *Elizabeth Greenhill a Black Girl aged about fifteen more or less*

Baptism 22 January 1760 *Thomas Green, Anne Elding and Jansen Battyn three adult Negroes converted to Christianity and Baptized*

St Mary's, Winkfield SL4 4SF

Burial 6 October 1765 *Maria Mountague (a black girl)*

Burial 20 March 1774 *Thomas, a black servant to Hugh Watts Esq*

Abolition

Reading was slow to support the campaign to abolish the slave trade. In September 1788 *The Reading Mercury* ran an article on the slave trade arguing that it was 'absolutely necessary for Britain if she means to hold her rank among the nations'.

In March 1792 Reading finally presented its first independent petition 'to ward off from our islands those dreadful calamities, which the white inhabitants had experienced in the island of St Domingo (St Domingue/Haiti)', ie overthrow of slavery and the setting up of an independent black state.

7 Friends Meeting House (RG1 2SB) The Abolition Movement nationally was started by members of the Society of Friends in 1783, and Reading's Quakers were solid in their support.

8 Broad Street Chapel (RG1 2AP, now Waterstones) Non-conformist chapels also led in the campaign for emancipation. Broad St's ministers, **Archibald Douglas** and **Thomas Everett** were zealous opponents of slavery in the 1820s. Another was **John Hinton**, minister at Hosier St Baptist Chapel; he edited *The British Emancipator* and the *Anti-slavery Reporter* and was secretary of the British & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

In the established Church of England, **Charles Simeon** had links with the social-reforming Clapham Sect that was at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement and held 'conversation parties' that discussed slavery and other issues. **William Marsh**, born in Reading in 1775, also played a prominent part in the movement, undertaking several lecture tours.

9 Museum of Reading (RG1 1QH) The museum has a set of slave irons from Sierra Leone from the late 19th century, after slavery was abolished in Europe and the Americas but still practiced in parts of Africa.

Compensation

Another important concession in The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 extracted by the London Society of West India Planters and Merchants and its supporters in Parliament—the West India Lobby—was the provision of financial compensation for the loss of their human property.

Over 46,000 slave owners were paid about £20 million. This vast sum amounted to 40% of the Treasury's annual income at the time or approximately 5% of British GDP, giving a modern-day equivalent of about £17 billion. To finance the payments, the government took on a £15 million loan which was not paid back by the British taxpayer until 2015! By contrast the newly-liberated slaves received nothing.

A census of all slave owners on 1 August 1834 was made by the Slave Compensation Commission to calculate payments. Its 1,631 volumes of leather-bound ledgers and correspondence have lain in the National Archives in Kew for 180 years, largely forgotten. In 2010 a team from University College London began to analyse them. Its ongoing **Legacies of British Slave-Ownership** project (www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs) reveals an unexpected picture of the extent to which slavery permeated British society. The publicly accessible database can be browsed. A search on 'Reading' or 'Berkshire' shows several entries.

10 1 Albion Terrace/Place, (RG1 5BL now 45 London Rd) General Robert Haynes (1769-1851) was paid £5404 8s 4d on 9 May 1836 for 243 slaves. He was a notable planter, owning several large family estates mainly in St John Parish, Barbados and became Lieutenant-General of the militia and Speaker of the Barbados Assembly. He is buried in...

11 St Giles churchyard, Reading (RG1 2SB). Albion Terrace was built between 1825-35 by a local architect Richard Billing completed just in time for the General to invest his payment in a fine new town house.

12 Sidmouth House (RG1 5BN now 41 London Rd) Hon. John Broderick received £2019 4s 3d for 122 slaves on 9 November 1835, the year he began building Sidmouth House, now part of Kendrick School.

13 Black History Mural (Mill Lane, RG1 4PS) The mural was painted in 1988 by a team from Central Club, led by artist Alan Howard. It celebrates neglected hero(ines)—from **Queen Nefertiti** to **Marcus Garvey**—and includes Black role models: **Harriet Tubman**, who escaped from slavery and guided others to freedom as a conductor of the Underground Railroad from the American South, author and abolitionist **Olaudah Equiano** and **Toussaint L'Ouverture**, one of the leaders of the successful slave revolt against the French in Saint Domingue, that established independent Haiti.

