



**ST HELENA, SLAVERY AND THE
ABOLITION ON THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE**



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“In the beginning, gold was the magnet that attracted Europeans to Africa. It was soon followed by ivory, pepper, beeswax, gum and the skins of tropical animals. Yet for well over three centuries, it was a trade in human beings that cemented the continents of Europe, Africa, and the Americas together in a commercial relationship. Fuelled by the demand for human labour in European enterprises in the New World, the transatlantic slave trade would bring millions of Africans to bondage in the Americas from eight major slave-trading regions – Senegambia, Upper Guinea, the Windward Coast, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, the Congo and Angola. At markets situated along a great arc of the west coast of Africa, from Senegal in the north to Angola in the south, ships flying the flags of Spain, Portugal, Holland, England, France and Denmark all took on cargoes of African captives. Thus began a journey to colonies in the Americas, where slave labour would be used to build and sustain mining operations and plantations producing lucrative agricultural commodities – tobacco, cotton, coffee, rice and most of all, sugar.”

(Reynolds 1985)

By the 1500s it was generally realized that black slaves were essential to the production of goods needed for European colonization, as this large and controllable workforce was the most reliable and efficient. So, it is no surprise that slaves came with St Helena's first settlers in 1659.

Like other colonies, these settlers, the employees of the East India Company, brought with them indentured servants to work in the Company's Plantations, and slaves to work in the production of high market value crops, such as sugarcane and coffee, and as hard labour. The East India Company soon placed restrictions on the further importation of slaves, as there was general fear that their numbers would exceed those of the white 'or more civilised community'.

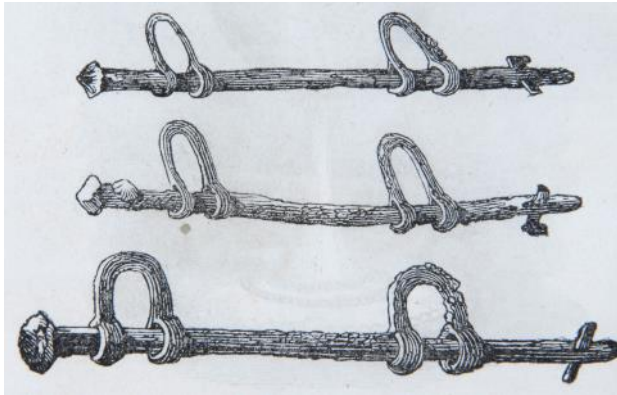


An 1800 depiction, idealising the abduction of individuals for enslavement.

As the cost of white labour increased during this period, due to wage advancement in England, permission was again granted to import slaves on the condition that the purchaser should maintain a white man for the militia, or, in default, the Slave Proprietor would pay the East India Company 10 shillings for each slave owned.

A little after, a convenient local law was passed requesting that

'each Madagascar ship calling for stores should be compelled to land a black, either man or woman (whichever was decided by the Governor), for service in the Company's Plantations, as payment for customs and dues'.



Slave Shackles.



Captured

During the Atlantic Slave Trade, Africans were wrenched from battlefields, farms, and villages, from river houses and coastal crafts, from judicial proceedings and caravan routes. These captives were eventually sold to European buyers on the coast.



Villages burning after the abduction of its residents.

However slaves were procured, they were always brought to the coast of Africa for sale. Chained to prevent their escape, many first passed through various markets and masters, some being used along the way as domestics or as field hands during the planting or harvesting season.



The exportation of abductees to Slaver Vessels.

European ship captains and slavers who arrived at the African coast were required to obtain a trade licence, typically by paying fees or purchasing a number of slaves at a specified price from the local chief. The fees and numerous presents European slave traders were obliged to give Africans to pave the way for business were governed by complex protocol and were subject to change at the behest of the local people. Europeans strove to comply with such demands to avoid jeopardising their ability to trade.

The transatlantic slave trade was driven by the need for labour in Europe and the Americas, which led it to be called the European slave trade. It also has been termed the 'triangular trade', as the trade route often involved a voyage of three legs: from Europe to Africa where trade goods were exchanged for slaves; on to the Americas where slaves were sold for cash, promissory notes, or agricultural products; then back to Europe, where the New World commodities would be sold.

On arrival at their destination, slavers would sell their cargo. One form of sale was known as a 'scramble', when prospective buyers rushed on board to select slaves they liked at a fixed price. For the captives, a scramble sale could be a frenzied, terrifying event as buyers frantically grabbed and roped their quarry. Having disposed of its slave cargo, a ship would often return to Europe with colonial products such as coffee, sugar, and cotton.

Source: Reynolds 2002



Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of St Helena (1816-1821)

The credit for abolishing slavery on St Helena belongs to Sir Hudson Lowe, and whatever history may say regarding his actions as guardian of Napoleon, nothing can detract from the praise that is his for carrying out this humanitarian reform in a community given over entirely to the practice of slavery.

Although Britain had abolished slavery in 1807, the colonies had not, St Helena included. Although the island did have a population of freed slaves, 329 from a total population of 1560 enslaved individuals. Their freedom was granted as the result of an edict in 1673, when the EIC decided that;

"all Negroes that shall make profession of the Christian Faith and be baptised shall, within 7 years become free"



The enslaved working on plantations, hundreds of miles from their homeland.



Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Hudson Lowe, as Governor of St Helena, had frequently raised the issue of abolition, it was discussed by the St Helena Council, but with no result. The brutal beating of a young Slave girl in August 1818 leading to a change in attitude and the end of Slavery on St Helena.

"On 24th August 1818, Sir George Bingham, the commander of the troops on the island, had just left the Magistrate's Court where he had been presiding when his eye fell upon a poor slave girl, about fourteen years old, limping down the road with blood dripping from fresh wounds on her arm and back which had been produced by a whip.

Sir George, with his well-known kindness of heart and chivalrous disposition, was shocked at the distressing sight, and inquired who had been guilty of such inhumanity. He was told that the injuries had been inflicted by the girl's owner, Mr Charles De Fountain. Sir George at once returned to the court, ordered Mr De Fountain to be brought before him, and inflicted the statutory fine of £2. Then, addressing those about the court, he gave vent to his indignation in violent terms, and said he only wished he had it in his power to make the fine £40 and to order Mr De Fountain to receive the same treatment he had meted out to the poor slave.

Mr De Fountain, callous to the last, complained to the Council of the injurious terms in which he had been addressed by Sir George in the hearing of others, but Sir George repeated in the Council every word he had said, and stated that he did not withdraw or regret a single word that he had uttered in anger in the Court House.

The whole matter made a considerable commotion, and Sir Hudson Lowe immediately gave notice that he would again bring up the whole question of slavery at the next Council Meeting. Soon after, the whole Island agreed voluntarily to



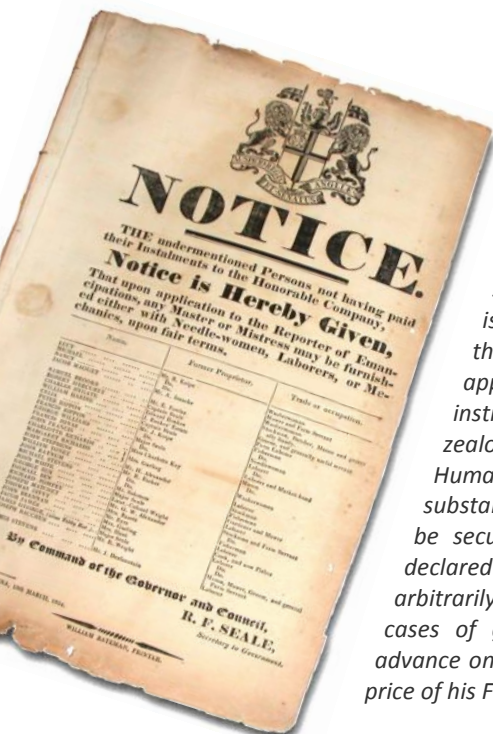
give up the practice of slavery, and Sir Hudson had just cause to be proud of his achievement.” (Chaplin 1919)

In his fight to stamp out slavery on St Helena, Sir Hudson Lowe put forward a proposal that the island should adopt the practices of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), that all children born to slaves were classed as free. Later in that year the Governor and Council approved a law declaring that

‘all children born of a slave woman from and after Christmas Day 1818, were to be free, but to be considered as apprentices to the proprietors of the mothers if males, until the age of eighteen, and if females, until sixteen; and that the masters and mistresses were to enforce the attendance of free-born children at church and the Sunday schools’.

These measures meant that, over time, slavery would die out, but for the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company, the eventual end was not soon enough. St Helena was the only ‘spot under their government where slavery still existed’ (Gosse 1938).





Emancipation of Slaves on St Helena

"the speedy and entire abolition of slavery is essential to the welfare of the island. Emancipation should be secured the moment the slave understands and appreciates the blessing, and the means of instruction should be steadfastly and zealously pursued at the cost of Government. Humanity however should not interfere with substantial Justice and the Proprietor should be secured the value of his slave whenever declared free. This value to be fixed, not arbitrarily, but by a disinterested committee. In cases of good character we authorize you to advance on Loan to the slave without Interest, the price of his Freedom."

Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company
19th December 1826

Following the orders of the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company, the St Helena began the process to emancipate its entire slave population.

By the 1st January 1828, after having valued the island's 869 strong slaves population, at £37,639.00, the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company authorised St Helena's Governor and Council to proceed with their proposed method of emancipation, as they had outlined four years before, these were:

1. To afford emancipation in the course of 5 years to the whole slave population, excepting only a few dissolute and worthless members of it, by pecuniary advances from money on loan to the slave.
2. To effect the emancipation by dividing the slaves into classes according to their character and valuation, and by emancipating a proportion of each class every year; the selection to be by Lot.
3. Government should maintain the general feeling that ... 'every shilling which a slave could earn or obtain was hoarded with a view to the eventual acquisition of this blessing'.
4. To proceed without delay to divide the slaves into classes and to purchase the manumission of $1/5^{\text{th}}$ every year, the purchase money to be considered as a loan to the slave, repayable by instalments without interest.

Emancipation did not mean that the island's resident slaves were truly free. Those who were able to pay their loan were very few. The majority who could not were punished by being advertised for hire.



A final ordinance created in 1839, during the suppression of the international slave trade clarified this issue and **all** were truly and legally freed.



Robert Patton, Governor 1802-1807, “who hit upon the novel conceit of rewards or medals as an inducement to good behaviour. Medals so awarded were inscribed, ‘Honest Faithful Diligent Sober’, and if a slave should win one of these converted prizes in three successive years, he did not, as might have been expected, received his freedom but only ‘have his merits completely established’” (Gosse, 1938).



Stopping the International Slave Trade

Some North American States started the movement towards abolition and were followed by Denmark and other European countries, but it was Britain taking the lead. During the 1800s, public opinion in Britain favoured the end of slavery and in 1807 the importation, to Britain, of African slaves was officially outlawed.

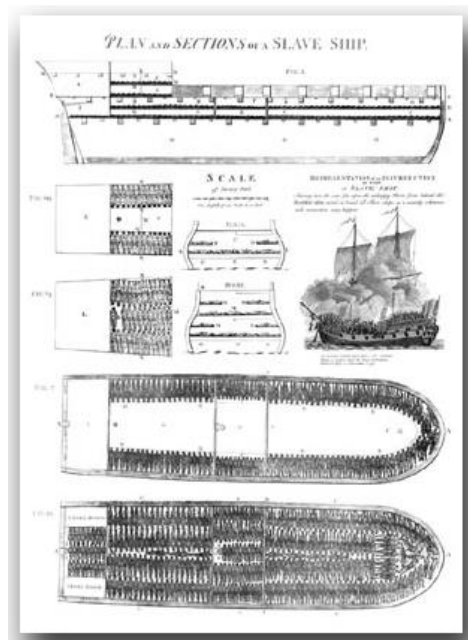
Britain's powerful Royal Navy began patrolling the Atlantic. Many governments disputed Britain's right to impose British law on vessels flying other flags, but some South American nations, not wanting to risk disrupting their maritime commerce with England, quickly jumped on the anti-slaving bandwagon: slave imports were banned in Venezuela in 1811 and in Colombia and Argentina in 1812. None of these nations had a large demand for slave labour. Brazil, by contrast, continued to require tens of thousands of newly arrived Africans each year, as well as its existing population, to operate sugar and coffee plantations.



HMS Arab in pursuit of a Slaver

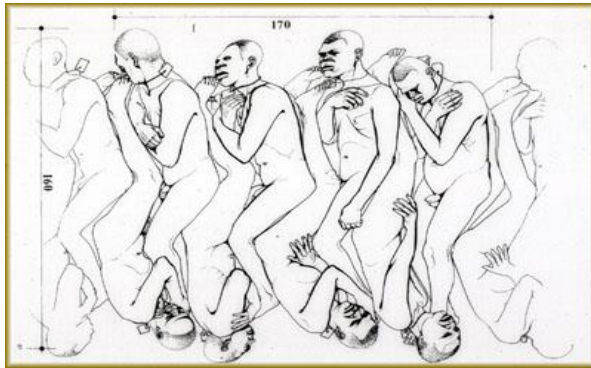
Spurred on by ever-increasing pressure from abolitionists, in the first two decades of the nineteenth century Britain began pursuing anti-slaving treaties with the other maritime European nations whose flags had flown over slave ships for centuries. Britain, now the great maritime power of the time, became the head of the antislavery movement controlling thousands of kilometres of the Western African coastline.

Britain's task was not easy and became much more difficult as the slavers changed their tactics. They started to use little vessels in place of large commercial ships. The brigs were easier to handle and trickier to find. For the slaves, conditions were worse as they were packed even more tightly into these small brigs than into the larger ships.



Plans and Sections on a Slave Ship

In 1840, Britain extended its efforts to St Helena. Before this time, slavers could operate without interference in the Southern Hemisphere, as the treaties between the British and Portuguese or Brazilians only forbade trade north of the Equator. During the 1820s, the number of military ships policing the seas was quite small and inadequate but this was put right by increasing the numbers until there was a reasonable force to patrol the area.



Slaves 'packed' for shipping

St Helena Island was chosen to become the base of the British West African Squadron and the seat of a Vice Admiralty Court. It was very well located to do so; sited in the middle of the ocean the island was an easy position to access from the Angolan and South American coasts, in a relatively short time. Not as well located, smaller and more recently settled, Ascension Island played a less important role.

Source: Delacampagne 2002

In 1840, the British West African Squadron was stationed at St Helena, their job was to suppress the slave trade by enforcing Britain's abolition of slavery. A Vice Admiralty Court was also established to try those pursuing the slave trade on the high seas. *H.M. Brisk*, *H.M. Fantom* and *H.M. Waterwitch* and later many other HM Cruiser captured many slaver ships enroute from the West and East of Africa to the Americas.



The Slaver 'Sunny South' alias *Emanuela* surrendering to *H.M. Brisk*



Freeing Captive Souls

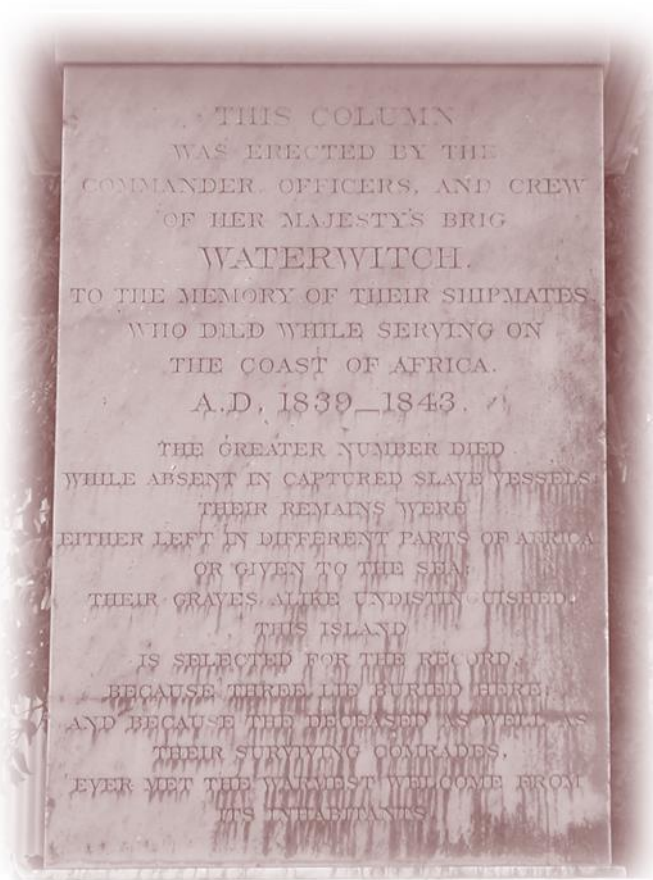
The first naval vessel to capture a slaver was *H.M. Waterwitch*. She was the most well known during the entire anti-slave trade struggle based in St Helena. The slaver she captured was the *Cabaka*, a vessel sailing under Portuguese colours, fortunately it lacking any papers giving it the right to protection under the Portuguese flag. The *Cabaka* was seized on the 14 March 1840 close to Ambriz, in the Northern part of Angola. Lieutenant Henry James Masson, commander of the *H.M. Waterwitch* reported to the Vice Admiralty Court that,

‘the *Cabaka* made every effort to avoid capture, endeavoured to escape, after being detained and did not surrender until being repeatedly fired at’. (Letters of the Vice Admiralty 1840)

The *H.M. Waterwitch* was the most active British West African Squadron having chased and brought into St Helena 43 slavers. A memorial to her crew, who lost their lives while serving off the coast of Africa, stands in the Castle Gardens, Jamestown.



H.M. Waterwitch Memorial



The inscription on the *H.M. Waterwitch* Memorial

St Helena, Slavery and the Abolition on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Liberation... on St Helena



Individuals packed on board a slaver

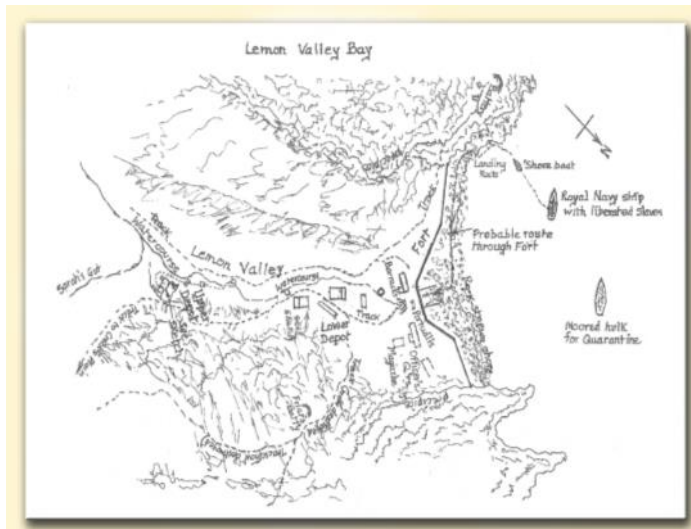
'I picked my way from end to end in order to avoid treading upon them, was thickly strewn with the dead, dying and starved bodies, . . . A visit to a full freighted slave-ship is not easily to be forgotten; a scene so intensified in all that is horrible almost defies description' (Mellis 1861).



The vessel he writes of was one hundred tons burden, and contained nearly one thousand souls. They had been closely packed for weeks in the 'hottest and most polluted of atmospheres'.

"The arms and legs of the poor creatures were worn down to about the size of walking-sticks and as they were passed over the ship's side, some living, some dead, others dying, it was hard to believe they really were human beings. Many died as they were in the act of being passed over the side of the ship" (Mellis 1861).

Captured Slavers tried and condemned by the Vice Admiralty Court were sold and broken up, while their human cargos were taken to Depots at Rupert's Valley, Lemon Valley, and High Knoll. Here they were fed, clothed and cared for until they had sufficiently recovered to continue their journey to British West Indies or Cape Town.



A sketch plan of the Liberated African Depot at Lemon Valley

During the short period of nine years between June 9, 1840, and September 30, 1849, 15048 slaves were received by St Helena. For over 4900* St Helena, was their final resting place, most of the remaining Liberated Africans were shipped to Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad and the Cape of Good Hope, where they would be employed as labour. This practice continued throughout the abolition of the Slave Trade.

*This number is specific to the period 1840 to 1849; St Helena Island is final resting place of thousands of Liberated Africans, beyond the numbers described here.



Prior to large numbers arriving, it was agreed to assimilate the freed slaves; St. Helenian Merchants and Farmers were given permission to *employ* liberated Africans as servants, on the condition that they clothed and fed those individuals chosen. A number became so fond of their St. Helena masters and mistresses that they decided to remain on the island instead of seeking their fortunes elsewhere.

During the late 1800s Mrs. Emily Jackson was able to interview some of the last remaining Liberated Africans.

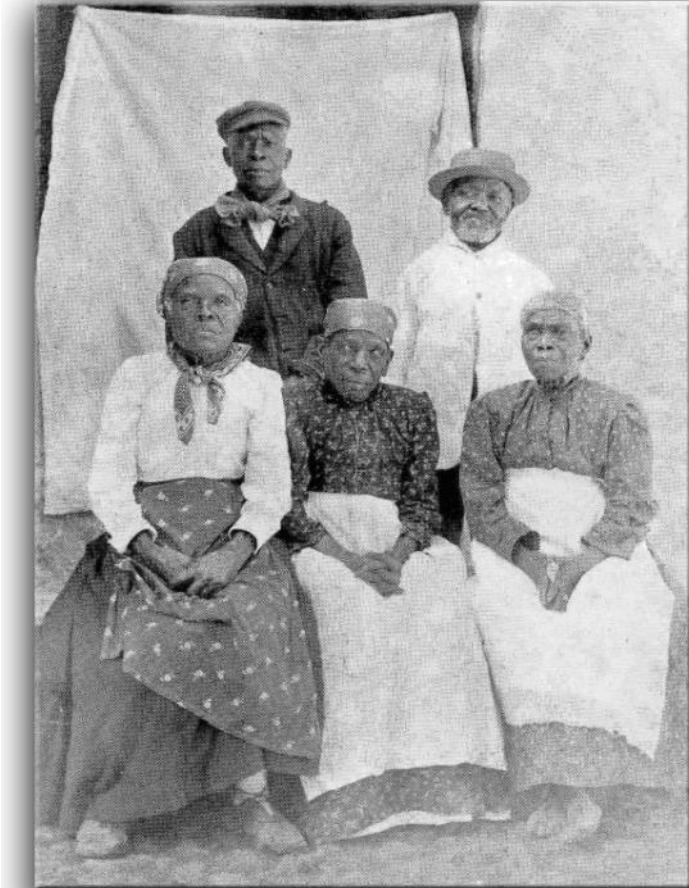
“Of the all the Navy Squadron the most remembered was the *H. M. Styx*, *H. M. Conquest*, *H. M. Waterwitch* and the *H. M. Cyclops*.

The *H.M. Cyclops* was spoken of by one of the old men still living, and there are five I was able to photograph who came in her; two men and three old women, who are now in the poorhouse. The men, although over seventy, are still able to earn a little, but the women are helpless, and almost blind, being all of good age. The taller man is named Duke Wellington, the other Blinker.

Wellington says they were brought here in the *Cyclops*, and that soon after they arrived some officers came to Rupert's to choose servants, and, as he relates, Captain George Woolet, St. Helena Regiment, took him, Major Piggott chose Blinker, and Colonel Ross, an officer, chose Caesar. While they lived in tents at Rupert's, with only rations: biscuit, rice, salt meat, and fish, once they became servants they lived in the mess-house and ate like soldiers. During the past two years many have died; Old Cappy, who earned a living to the last by fetching watercress down for the shipping, Jack Fry Pumpkin or John Janische (his master's name) and Toby Morrison, here again the mas-ter's name, were for many years well known to all..." (Jackson 1903).



Liberation... Beyond St Helena



Liberated Africans living on St Helena during the late 1800s.

An important part of the suppression process was the formal trial and condemnation of captured slave ships by the High Court of Admiralty of England and Vice-Admiralty courts existing at Sierra Leone, St Helena, Barbados and the Cape. Operating in concert with Mixed Commission (bi and multi-national) courts set up under treaties with Spain and Portugal at Sierra Leone, and later Loanda, Rio, Surinam and Havana, gave St Helena the right to seize any vessel engaged in the Slave Trade and to bring the same adjudication as if the vessel and cargo were the property of Britain.



Portuguese Map dated 1502

During the period 1840 to 1872, no less than 425 ships were tried at the Vice Admiralty Court of St Helena. It is estimated that between 21 500 and 25 000 enslaved men, women and children, were brought to St Helena, of which about $\frac{1}{3}$ died and most are buried at Ruperts. It is estimated that of the 425 ship tried, approximately 80% were captured along the Angolan coast, 15% from the West coast of Africa North of Angola and the rest were seized close to the South American coast. The nationality, when clarified, was mainly Portuguese, and then Brazilian or Brazilian related as the Brazilian Slave Trade began to flourish.

Some would say that by 1850 the slave trade was over, however the illegal trafficking of human cargo continued, as Slavers were caught sailing the Atlantic with the intention of transporting large volumes of human cargo. By 1862, the illegal trade began to slow and by 1868 only 24 slavers were adjudicated on St Helena. The British West African Squadron was no longer needed; the Brazilian Slave Trade had ended. As the frequency of vessels condemned on St Helena became fewer the island's duty to try the slave ships ceased after 1872 and two years later the Liberated African Establishment or 'depot' was closed.

The establishment at Rupert's Valley for the Africans rescued from Slavery by the British remained deserted until 2008...

Source: Pearson 2009 and Letters of the Vice Admiralty Court 1840 -1872

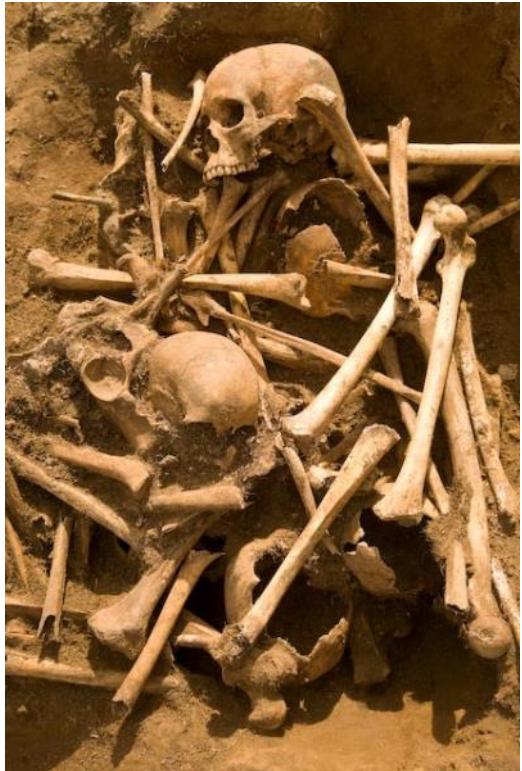


Liberated African Cemeteries

During 2008, as part of the cultural heritage mitigation of the impact of the proposed airport, archaeological excavations were undertaken in Rupert's Valley.

The official archaeological excavations took place near to the Mid-Valley Fuel Farm. This location is one of few known burial grounds for many of the freed Africans. Much of this valley is occupied by unmarked graveyards. This archaeological dig only uncovered a very small proportion of the total number of burials known to exist.

During this dig, 325 bodies were excavated, some in single graves but many from multiple interments. All were children or young adults. As skeletal preservation was extremely high, it is believed that much information can be gained about these people and the stories of their life and death. Evidence has been found for injuries and disease sustained during their sea crossing, as well as cultural dental modification, contemporary medical practices and autopsies.



A grave bearing the remains of Liberated Africans



Jewellery, and other personal effects were found during the excavations

What has been found is a stark physical reminder of the process and conditions of the slave trade between Africa and the Americas. It is dramatic and disturbing and moreover it is extremely rare: over 11 million people were transported across the Atlantic between the 16th and 19th centuries but Rupert's Valley contains one of the few (and perhaps the only) graveyard of Africans rescued directly from the slave ships. Although remote in geographical terms, this small valley is of immense cultural and heritage significance and its story is one that deserves to be told.

Source: Pearson 2009



The 2008 archaeological excavation.

What makes a Saint?

What makes a “Saint”? Could it be the rich and varied culture shaped by the comings and goings of ships throughout our history from the days of the sail right through to the modern ships of today. The East India Company era saw English settlers arrive along with the garrison troops and workers and slaves from Madagascar, Indonesia, Malaysia, West Africa and China. The French connection dates back to Napoleon and a representation of South Africans remained after their imprisonment here during the Boer War. Each and every race bringing its own qualities to add to a melting pot blending them to produce the “Saint” with his gentle dialect, friendly greeting, love of fun, resourcefulness and immensely strong ties to family and to the island. What do you think makes a “Saint”?

In 2011, EUROTAST showed an interest in studying the liberated Africans exhumed in 2008.

EUROTAST is a Marie Curie Actions Initial Training Network (ITN), whose primary objective is to enable a new generation of researchers to uncover and interpret new evidence on the history and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme, the network will be running for four years from 2012 to 2016. It has provided fellowships to 13 early-stage (PhD) and two experienced (Postdoc) researchers to make a significant contributions to this scholarly field.

In 2012, Judy Watson and Erna Johannedattir arrived to on island to conduct research in the following fields:

- Osteoarchaeological perspectives on slave health and nutrition
- Isotopic perspectives on slave origins and forced migration

Erna Johannedattir's project entitled 'Osteoarchaeological perspectives on slave health and nutrition' focuses on the use of osteoarchaeological methods to provide new data on the demography, nutritional status and health of enslaved Africans in order to gain new insights into their physical quality of life and the physical effects of enslavement.

By drawing on various skeletal collections associated with the African diaspora and transatlantic slave trade, we plan to i) assess and document the state of preservation of the skeletal material, before ii) compiling age and sex profiles and iii) recording any pathologies or signs of trauma that could be indicative of nutritional deficiencies, diseases or violent abuse.



In addition, we plan to iv) assess biological ancestry of each individual, using a combination of anthropometric and anthroposcopic techniques. Finally, we also plan to v) collect data on dental modification, as it might yield information on the captives' ethnic origins.

Judy Waton's project entitled 'Isotopic perspectives on slave origins and forced migration', aims to improve our understanding of slave diets and their geographical origins through the analysis of stable and radiogenic isotopes in skeletal tissues associated with the African diaspora and the transatlantic slave trade. Carbon and nitrogen stable isotope analyses will be used to reconstruct diet, and to study changing patterns in diet during the lifetime. Building on recent work strontium and oxygen isotope analyses will be carried out to try to identify geographical origins and to elucidate family or tribal groups.

In addition, micro sampling strontium within a tooth using laser ablation might provide insights into individual 'migration histories' over the period while the enamel is forming (1-14 years). Key milestones in this project are as follows:

Carbon, Nitrogen and Sulphur isotopes in bone. What were the diets of these individuals? What ethnic groupings, or geographical location can be suggested on the basis of diet (e.g. in the case of marine food consumption vs. a terrestrial based diet).

Bulk Strontium and Oxygen iso- topic analysis of tooth enamel. What is the most likely geographical origin for each individual? Does the grouping of isotopic values suggest family groups, or groups from a single region?

Laser-ablation Strontium isotope analysis of tooth enamel. What is the migration history of an individual (up to the age of 14)? Does this suggest a sedentary lifestyle or slaving related migrations?



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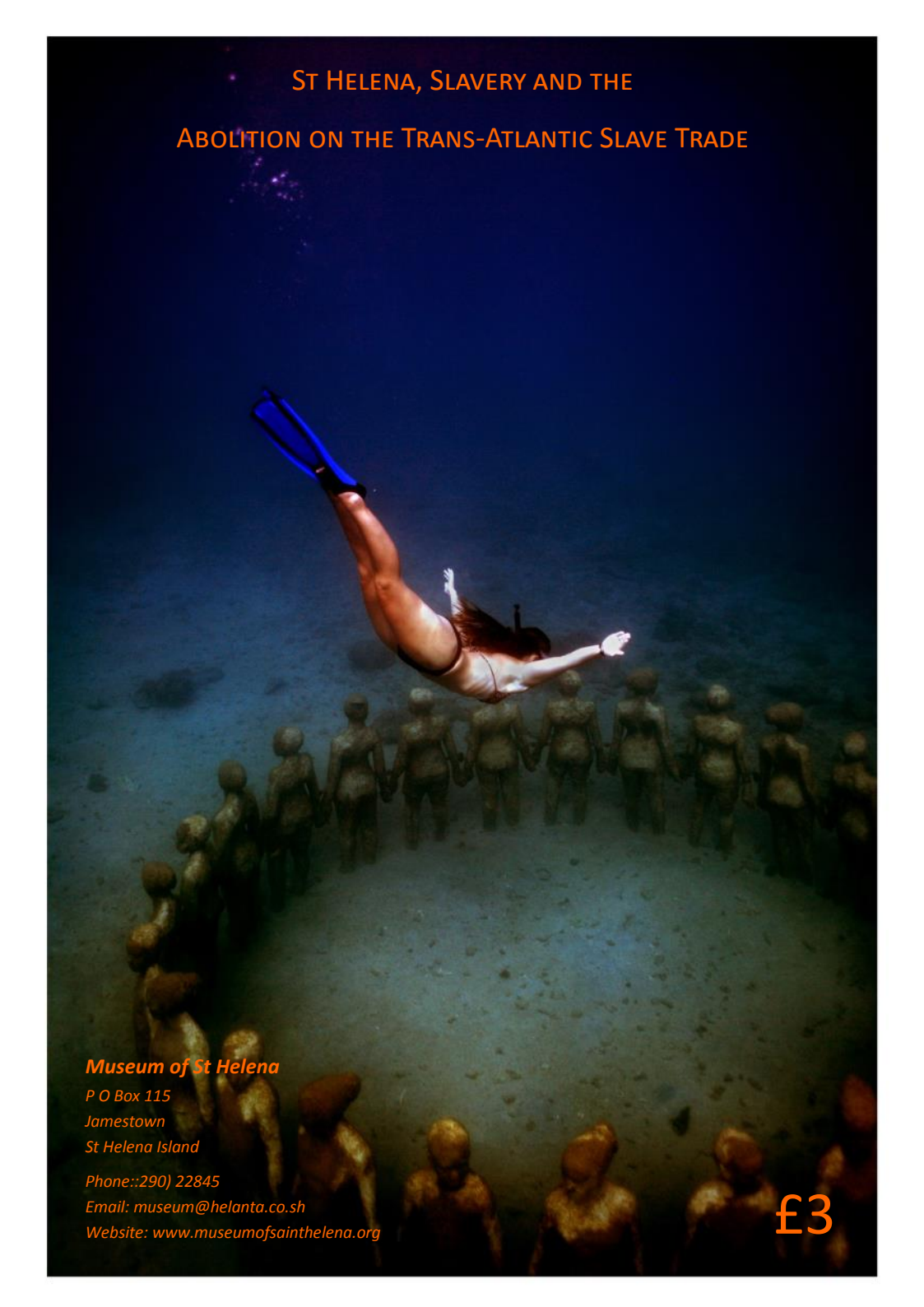
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The Museum of St Helena would like to thank the Royal Naval Museum, the St Helena Access Office, the Grenada Board of Tourism for images used in this publication.

A diver in a blue swimsuit and blue fins is swimming upside down in clear blue water. Below the diver, a large circle of bronze statues of African people stands on the seabed. The scene is set against a deep blue background with some light rays filtering down.

ST HELENA, SLAVERY AND THE ABOLITION ON THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

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