Connections between the Isle of Man and the Transatlantic Slave Trade from Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are found in manuscripts located in the United Kingdom and North America as well as on the Island.

Surviving documentation reveals that the Island was involved in many aspects of the overall trade through merchants dealing in ‘Guinea goods’ (exchanged for slaves on the West African coast), financial partnerships in slaving voyages, the presence of slave trading vessels in Manx waters, Manx captains and crews on these vessels and Manx people living on or supplying the plantations in the Americas. Examples of source material in the Manx National Heritage Library are provided here.

The last slaving ship to sail from Liverpool on the triangular voyage to Africa, the Americas and back to Britain was the *Kitty’s Amelia* under the command of the Manx captain, Hugh Crow. Whilst she was on the African coast in 1807 legislation abolishing the trade in slaves by British vessels came into force. Trading did continue illegally but a milestone had been reached and is commemorated in events across the British Isles 200 years later.
Slave Trade Goods available on the Isle of Man

The East Indies supplied both the cloths and beads which formed a major and essential part of the Guinea cargoes. The English East India Company supplies were high-priced. It was possible to import the less expensive Dutch East India Company goods into the Isle of Man from Holland. Between 1718 and 1764 slaving vessels called at the Island to collect these goods en route for Africa.

On 22 January 1761 Paul Bridson imported into Douglas from on board the Bonac, Jan Wolfers master, from Rotterdam the goods displayed in the table.

| 28 chests | Beads | arangoes or red carnelian beads from India |
| 7 casks    | Baft from India | coarse cotton cloth from |
| 1 chest    | Chintz India    | painted or stained calico more expensive than the bafts |
| 15 chests  | Silesias        | fine linen or cotton fabric from Silesia |
| 154 casks  | Cowries         | Small shells from the Maldive Islands off India |
| 3 casks    | 748 dozen knives | also used as part of the ‘pawn’ to purchase slaves |
| 14 hoops   | Ling fish       | provisions for the voyage |

The value of these Guinea goods, excluding the knives whose value is not listed, was £4,056 (over £240,000 in current values). Part of the customs record for this landing is shown below.

The Top 20 Merchants importing Guinea goods into the Isle of Man, 1718-1764

1. Paul Bridson
2. William Teare
3. William Murray senior
4. William Quayle
5. John Joseph Bacon
6. Thomas Arthur
7. Patrick Savage
8. John Murray
9. Robert Kennedy
10. Phil Finch
11. Mary Reeves
12. Philip Moore
13. Hugh Cosnahan
14. Andrew Savage
15. Ross, Black & Christian
16. John Frissel
17. Edward Moore
18. Catherine Halsall
19. James Oates
20. John Taubman

The merchants highlighted in the above list are mentioned either in the manuscript display ‘A Necessary Evil’ at the Manx Museum or in this information sheet.
The Merchants involved in Slave Trading Voyages

John Taubman (1723-1799) of the Bowling Green, Castletown was a major merchant on the Island as well as an advocate and Member of the House of Keys (lower chamber of the Manx Parliament) for over 40 years. His many business interests both on and off island are documented in great detail in the Goldie Taubman Papers (MNHL MS 09591), including his financial investment in the slaving voyage of the brigantine Prince Vauba (registered as the Prince Vada).

A crew of 25 sailed on the Prince Vauba from Liverpool on 22 December 1760, calling at Douglas for part of her cargo before going to Malembo in Angola hoping to purchase 250 slaves. It is not known how many slaves were purchased but 180 were delivered to Barbados and St Kitts in the West Indies. The vessel returned to Liverpool on 12 April 1762.

Mariners on Slave Trading Vessels

Manx crewmen and carpenters worked on board the slaving ships. Many did not return to their homeland, dying from disease or shipwreck. Their fate is recorded in Manx ecclesiastical probate records. John Callister died at the Casey River in Sierra Leone on board the brig Sarah of Liverpool in January 1766.
A Surgeon’s Tale

The crews consisted of men with many varied skills: surgeons and tailors for instance sailed on the slaving ships. One of the five brothers of Fletcher Christian (Master’s Mate on the Bounty) was a surgeon, Charles. Born in Cumberland in 1762, Charles Christian was the grandson of John Christian of the Milntown family, Lezayre. In a vivid account of his eventful time on the slaver William, Charles records tensions among the crew, the death of the first mate from fever when trading on the river Congo, and the loss of slaves after encountering difficult sailing conditions on the river. His transcribed account reads,

This disaster threw the ship into such confusion, and occasioned so much uncleanliness and mephitic effluvium as to cause the death of many slaves. I was grieved and much disappointed, because I had expected that the captain and myself would have gained, and been triumphant by, the premium – the Act of Parliament in its wisdom to encourage humanity allowed to the captain £100, and to the surgeon £50, if so many were purchased, and so few died before an arrival in port for sale. Although by deaths we were not entitled to the premium, yet after all we arrived at Kingston in Jamaica with 500 slaves, including both sexes. I received from the merchant to whom the cargo was assigned a good round sum. I cannot say exactly what it was, but I think it was 1/- per head – head money it was called.

MNHL MS 09381/5

Christian sold his two slaves for £120 in Kingston. The William sailed for England in 1800 in the company of other armed Guineamen (slaving ships). Christian put his medical skills to use treating the wounded after a sea battle between a vessel in the convoy and a Spanish privateer; later in the voyage the William herself was captured by a French privateer, barely a week’s sail from Liverpool. After an adventurous journey through Spain and Portugal Christian landed at Deal, Kent.

Captains of Slave Trading Vessels

Hugh Crow encountered a French privateer when sailing as chief mate on the Gregson in July 1794. His experience after capture differed widely from Charles Christian’s benign treatment. Crow devotes a chapter of his Memoirs, published posthumously in 1830, to this tale of inadequate food, an enforced march of hundreds of miles north through France, hospitalisation and imprisonment.

Crow managed to escape and headed for the coast. Fifty miles on he was intercepted at a bridge by an officer and a file of soldiers. in my confusion I had forgotten nearly all my French, and stood mute. The officer followed up one stern inquiry by another, but all to no purpose. At length, as a random expedient, I bolted out all the words of the different languages I could remember, and of which I had obtained a smattering in my different voyages, mingling the whole with my native language, the Manks, with a copiousness proportioned to my facility in speaking it. The Frenchman was astonished and enraged, and as he went on foaming and roaring, I continued to repeat (in broken Spanish) “No entiendo!”—until worn out of all patience, he swore I was a Breton, and giving me a sharp slap with his sword, he exclaimed “Va-t-en, corbin!” I thanked him over and over again, as loud as I could, in Manks, and I assure the reader never were thanks tendered with more sincerity.

Crow also returned to Deal and made his way back to Liverpool where he resumed his slaving career. He went on to command seven Guinea voyages.
Quayle Fargher was captain of two slaving vessels, the Jane (1784 & 1786) and the Eliza (1787). He married Esther, the eldest daughter of William Quayle, a merchant and slave trader in Douglas. Fargher’s friends were ‘joyful’, when he returned to the Island after his last voyage. In 1787 he purchased the Snugborough estate in the parish of Braddan: several Manx captains invested their capital in property on the Island. After Fargher’s death, the ownership of Snugborough was contested in the Manx courts; his widow managed to retain the property.

Gunpowder and Plot

The Duke of Atholl, Lord of Mann was pressurised by slave trading merchants to exercise influence on their behalf. In April 1759 John Tarleton of Liverpool wrote to the Duke in alarm. A revenue cruiser had intercepted the ship Isabel en route to the Island, bringing in gunpowder and other goods from Rotterdam. Tarleton wrote,

I hope you will excuse me acquainting you with an incident that has happened in which I think your Grace’s interest is greatly concerned – we are informed from the Isle of Man that the brig Isabel Capt Dougall belonging to Scotland bound from Rotterdam to the Isle of Man laden with 600 barrels of ordinary gunpowder, a quantity of spirits and a small parcel of muskets, suitable only for the Guinea Trade was seized upon and carried into Campbeltown the 13th inst by Capt Colin Campbell in His Majesty’s cruiser the Prince George – this gunpowder and other things were ordered by different people here and designated for six different Guinea ships which are now fitting out here, in one of which I have am concerned. The reason for ordering them from Holland is plain – Our stills are stopped in England and gunpowder is scarcely to be had at any price that if we are debarred this resource we may give up the trade and I am not conscious of any law that is the least infringed upon by this step – Your Grace’s revenue in the Isle of Man has been greatly increased by the many cargoes we have had landed there from Holland for our Guinea ships therefore we hope you will use your influence to have this ship immediately discharged and that for the future the trade may not be interrupted by such illegal seizures…

MNHL MS 09707 AP X8-25

The gunpowder was intended as cargo for at least six Liverpool slave trading vessels (probably the Beaver, Blackburne, Ferret, Isaac, Lyme and Spy). This part of the trade – landing goods on the Isle of Man to circumvent higher prices elsewhere – came to an end entirely only six years later with the political and fiscal upheaval known as Revestment and increases in customs duties payable on the Island. As for the Isabel, the Duke received news early in July 1759 that the vessel was at liberty to proceed from Scotland to the Island. The Duke’s draft reply to Tarleton’s appeal (see below) reveals that he recognised the sensitivity of becoming directly involved in the affair.

MNHL MS 09707 AP X8 - 25
Merchant networks around the Irish Sea and in the Americas

The significance of a bundle of papers in the Manx National Heritage Library has been enhanced by recent research using Scottish manuscripts to illuminate the associations of a number of merchants.

In 1772 a five year old Manx boy, Robert Cummins, inherited from his uncle Henry Corrin (formerly of Peel) a coffee plantation at Blewfields on the Mosquito Shore (present day Nicaragua). Sir George Moore of Ballamoar was appointed guardian of the young boy and he contacted John Christian in Ayr. Christian had been in partnership with the Scotsman David Ross and Irishman Robert Black, who built the large house on North Quay, Douglas which became the Douglas Hotel. The partnership traded in Guinea goods and features on the list of top twenty Guinea importers. After 1765 Christian, who was a relative of John Taubman, became cashier of the ill-fated Douglas-Heron Bank in Ayr.

Christian recommended Captain James Lawrie of Auchinleck in Ayrshire to Sir George Moore to oversee affairs on the plantation. Lawrie took the step of renting out the plantation for three years to another Ayrshire man, John McHarg, with whom the slaves were satisfied and in order to secure them the more, I shall take with me some of the children of each family, and have given them a promise of visiting them sometimes. His letter to Sir George of 12 October 1773 continues,
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The Manx National Heritage Library holds a wealth of various and extensive source material. Staff at the Library and throughout Manx National Heritage are always pleased to hear from anyone with an interest in Manx history.

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