

# THE ISLE OF MAN AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

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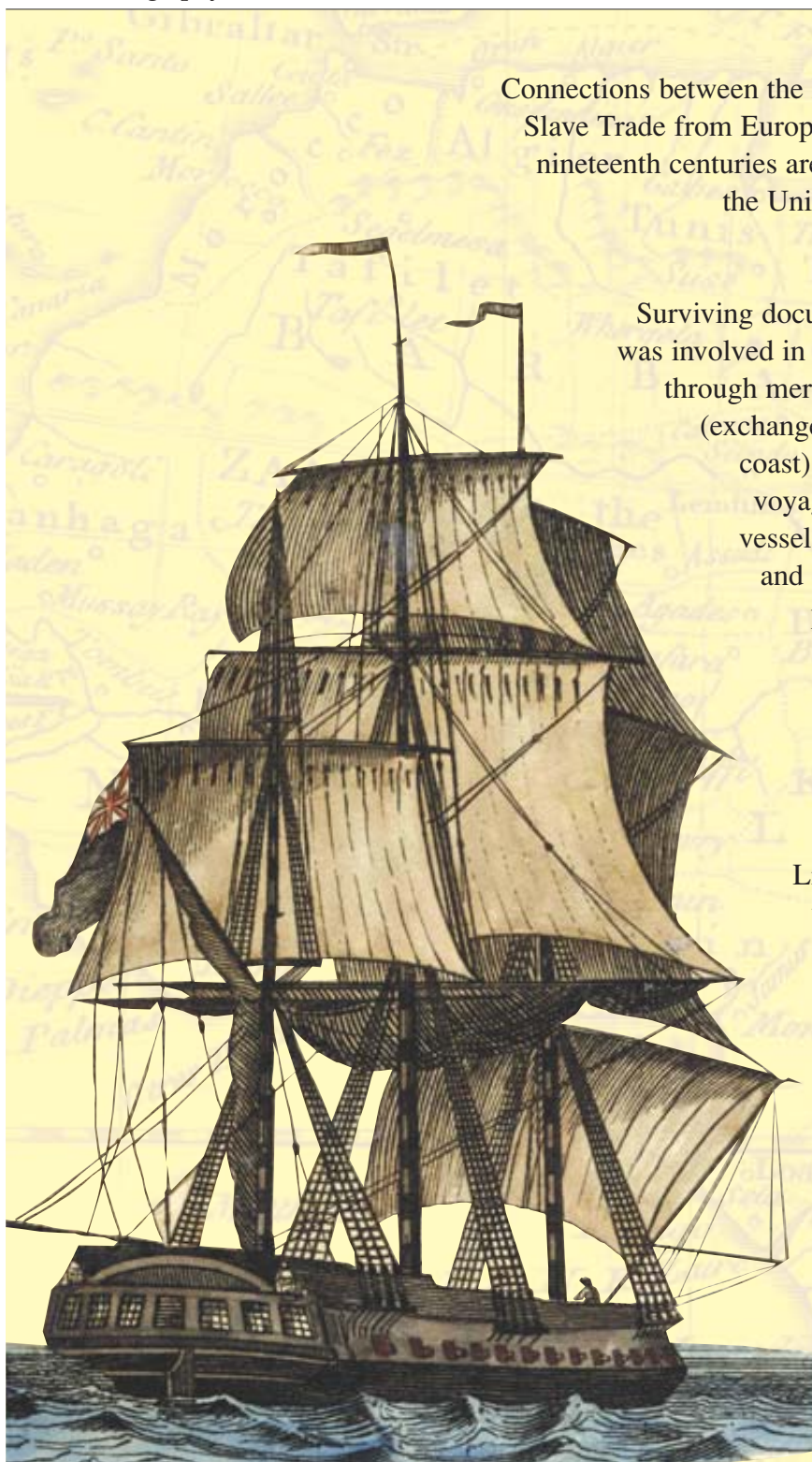
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Connections between the Isle of Man and the Transatlantic Slave Trade from Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are found in manuscripts located in the United Kingdom and North America as well as on the Island.

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.



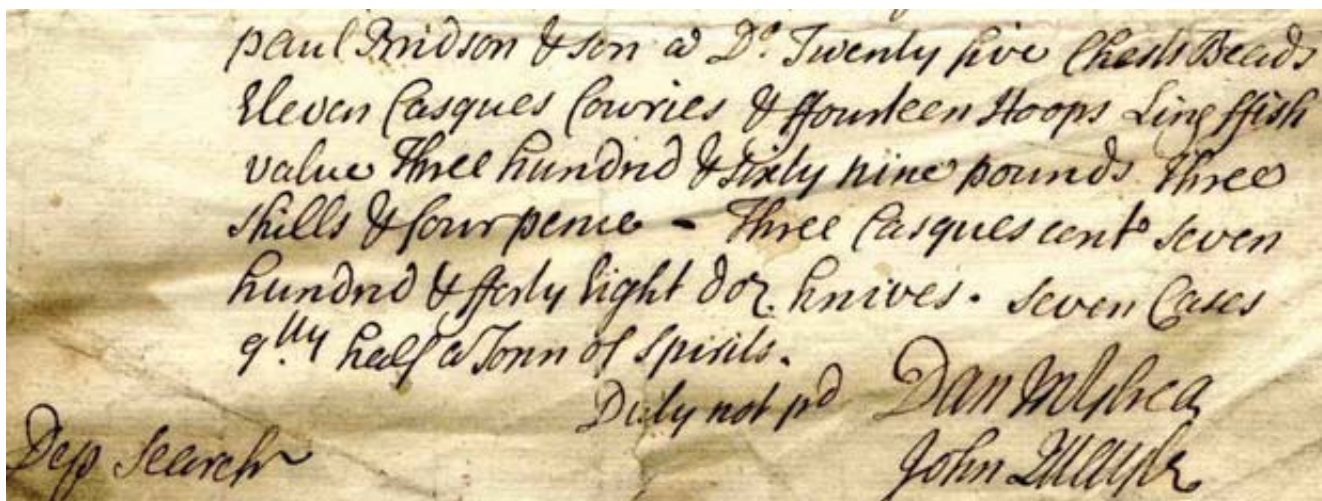
## Slave Trade Goods available on the Isle of Man

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 India
1 chest	Chintz India	painted or stained calico more expensive than the bafts
15 chests	Siliesias	fine linen or cotton fabric from Silesia
154 casks	Cowries	Small shells from the Maldiv 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.



MNHL MS 10637

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

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

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.



Portrait of John Taubman

## 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.

Douglas ————— Nov. 17. 1766

John Callister mariner son of Robt. Callister late of the Town of Douglas decd. departed this Life on the coast of Africa on board the *Sarah* Brig of Liverpool Captain Joseph Ward Commander on or about the month of January last Intestate, as by Affidavit made by Clement Chambers hereunto annexed appears — The Court upon

MNHL MS 10216 (Episcopal Wills 1766 Book 3)

## 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 uncleanness 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.



Portrait of Hugh Crow

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, coquin!" 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 Campbelltown the 13<sup>th</sup> 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.

*into Caye in ...  
glad to be of service to you and the gentleman  
concerned upon this occasion, but I am afraid  
it would appear too delicate a point for me to inter-  
-fer in, Besides I am at a loss to know to whom  
and in what manner to make any applications  
If you can give any hint concerning it this I shall  
Let you know how far it may be fitting for me to  
interpose I am your  
Obedt Servant*

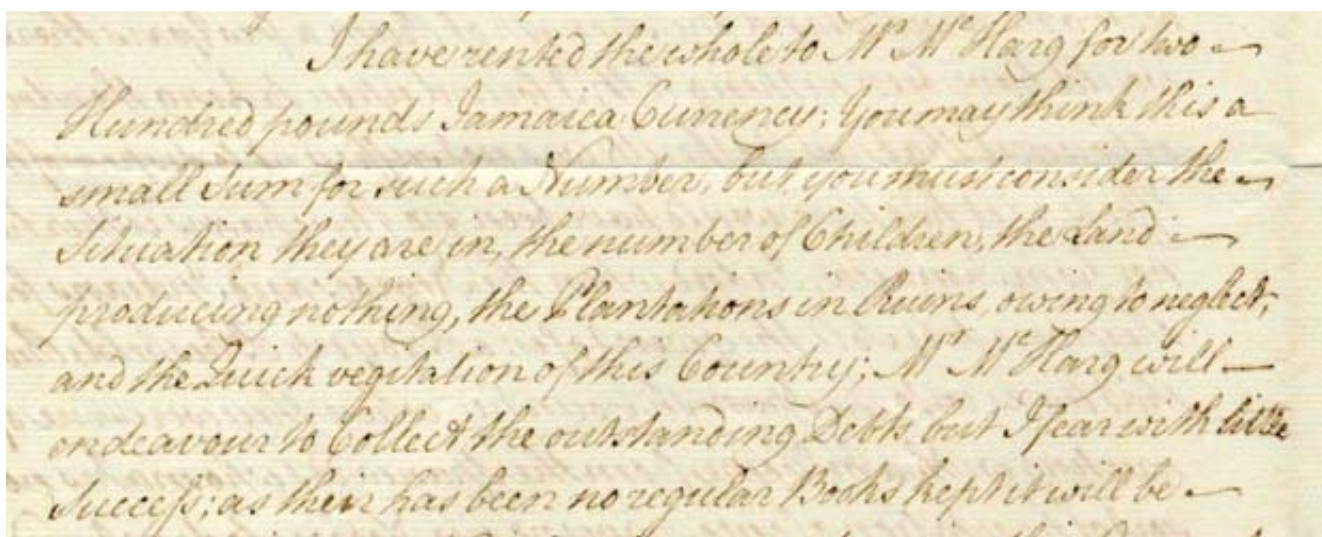
## Merchant networks around the Irish Sea and in the Americas

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,



*I have rented the whole to M<sup>r</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Harg for two hundred pounds Jamaica Currency; you may think this a small sum for such a number, but you must consider the situation they are in, the number of children, the land producing nothing, the plantations in Ruins, owing to neglect, and the quick vegetation of this Country; M<sup>r</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Harg will endeavour to collect the outstanding Debts but I fear with little success; as there has been no regular Books kept it will be*

MNHL MS 03228 C



Left: The Blewfields region as shown in a map of the Mosquito Territory surveyed by Charles Bell, 1856. Grey Town lies to the south. From the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Volume 32, 1862.

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MNHL MS 09707 Atholl Papers  
AP 108(2nd)-40

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MNHL MS 11518 Copy of George Cannon's logbook, 1798-1800

MNHL MS 11532 Copy of letter of instruction, slaver *Apollo*, 1762

MNHL MS 11533 Copy of crew list for the *Cerberus*

MNHL MS 11555 Copied extracts from trade book of the *Dobson*, 1769-1770

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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