It is important to recognise, while studying this history, that slavery is not restricted to white people enslaving black people. It is a practice human beings have inflicted on each other from the beginning of our history. In Bristol, before the Africa trade, slavery and indentured servitude were common practice as wealthy folk needed labour to work their land. Slavery still goes on today between people of all colours and creeds all over the world.

Enslaved Africans were regarded as status symbols in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Young boys would be taken from their families to become servants or ‘footmen’ in the homes of the wealthy. They were included in portraits as symbols of the wealth and importance of the families they served. They were not portrayed as individuals in their own right, but as possessions.

Abolition Afloat
A booklet to accompany Bristol Ferry Boats’ tour for schools

Pero's Bridge is one of the very few memorials to transatlantic slavery in the country. Until recently Bristol's involvement in, and debt to, slavery has been ignored. Such architectural remembrance is particularly crucial in Bristol where, "There is not a brick in the city but what is cemented with the blood of a slave".

This Bridge is dedicated to the memory of Pero, an enslaved man of African origin who was brought from the Caribbean island of Nevis in 1783. He was a servant of the Pinney family who lived in what is now the Georgian House Museum in Great George Street. He died in the city in 1798.
Bristol’s involvement in, and benefits from, Transatlantic Slavery can still be seen in all corners of the city’s physical fabric.

Bristol established itself as a major slaving port. Between 1739 and 1748, there were 245 slave voyages from Bristol (about 37.6% of the whole British trade).

Those who benefited from the slave trade left behind evidence of the huge profits they made: merchant’s homes in Queen Square and Royal York Crescent, major banks, insurance companies, theatres and churches.

The Theatre Royal, one of Britain’s oldest working theatres, was established in King Street in 1766 by 50 wealthy local business men. Many of them were Merchant Venturers who lived in nearby Queen’s Square and were involved in transatlantic slavery. The theatre is now home to the Bristol Old Vic.

Bristol sailors did not benefit. In 1787:
940 crew sailed on 24 Bristol ships; 216 died during the voyage and 249 deserted in the colonies.

Transatlantic Slavery was responsible for the forced migration of 15 million Africans over 400 years. Africans call it Maafa, meaning disaster, great tragedy, or holocaust. It depopulated and impoverished great swathes of Africa and created desperate unhappiness and despair in millions of people scattered across the Americas.

When slavery was finally abolished millions of pounds of compensation was paid to the slave owners, but no reparation to the enslaved.

“They will remember that we were sold but they won’t remember that we were strong; they will remember that we were bought but not that we were brave.”
Liberated ex-slave William Prescott in 1937
Only the most desperate sailors worked on slave ships. Conditions were bad - many died during the voyages from illness and often the enslaved captives would rebel. Many sailors were recruited by ‘crimping’ from rough drinking taverns such as the Hole in the Wall pub (then the Coach and Horses). They were often taken by trickery; the captains would pay pub landlords to let the sailors drink on credit. Once the sailor was drunk, the bill was presented and he would be unable to pay it. The corrupt landlord would then give them a choice; either the sailor would go to debtor’s prison, or join the crew of a slaving ship bound for Africa.

The Ostrich Inn was built around 1745. It was used by the sailors, shipyard and dockside workers and merchants who worked in the Port of Bristol. One of its walls has been partly knocked down so that you can see part of the caves under Redcliffe. Inside the pub, on the wall there is a copy of a trade card for the Ostrich Pub from 1775, which has a picture of a young black man (probably enslaved) on it.

There is a local story that slaves were kept in Redcliffe Caves before they were sold, but there is no evidence to support this. This story may have started because goods used in the African and West Indian trades were stored in the caves. Sand was mined from the caves to be made into glass for bottling beers and rum, made of molasses from sugar cane which was produced on the plantations.

Anti-slavery campaigner Reverend Thomas Clarkson came to the Seven Stars pub in 1787 to collect testimony from sailors to support the Act for the Abolition of Slavery. He disguised himself as a miner, blackening his face and wearing working clothes to hide his true identity. “I was determined to inquire into the truth of the reports that seamen had an aversion to enter, and that they were often forced, into this hateful employment. For this purpose I was introduced to a landlord of the name of Thompson who kept a public house called Seven Stars. He was a very intelligent man, well accustomed to receive sailors when discharged at the end of their voyages, and ... nothing could now pass in Bristol relative to the seamen employed in this trade, but it was soon brought to me.”
Coffee, chocolate and tea all had a naturally bitter taste. What made them popular was adding sugar. Instead of an expensive luxury item, slavery made sugar cheap and available to everyone. Tea and coffee houses became popular.

The new craze for sugar meant that there was a massive increase in the number of sugar plantations in the Caribbean and the huge number of people needed to plant and harvest the sugar. Bristol was a centre for refining sugar and had over 20 sugar refineries by 1760 to supply the local demand.

Three Sugar Loaves Pub

This pub gets its name from a nearby sugar refinery that burned down in 1859. Fires were quite common in the sugar industry and between 1670 and 1859, 11 sugar houses were destroyed by fires in Bristol.

The sugar was moulded into conical loaves of sugar and you can see an example of a sugar loaf and sugar tongs on the pub sign and in the kitchen of the Georgian House Museum.

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?

William Cowper in his poem, Pity for Poor Africans, makes fun of peoples’ attitudes to Abolition.

Finzel’s sugar factory became Georges Brewery

Photos©Bristol Culture, Bristol City Council
Sydenham Teast’s shipyard was situated where the 1980 ‘Merchant’s Landing’ development now sits on Merchant’s Wharf. It is on record that in 1786 the slave ship *Hector* was repaired and re-fitted here. Transatlantic slavery also supported iron works and nearby glass and brass factories. By the end of the 18th century virtually all economic activity in Bristol was connected to transatlantic slavery. Mr. Teast lived in Redcliffe Parade which was, along with Queen’s Square, the home of wealthy Merchants until Clifton was developed.
Resistance and Rebellion

The African people who were enslaved resisted the system of slavery, from the moment of capture to life on the plantations.

Enslaved Africans fought their captors or tried to escape. The most successful uprising was the revolution in St Domingue, led by Toussant Louverture which led to Haiti becoming an independent republic.

The price of overt resistance was high and many lost their lives. The enslaved also resisted by retaining their cultural traditions, often in secret. Even very small things, like the headwrap and traditional hairstyles became symbols of personal and communal identity.

This is Nancy Burns, an enslaved woman who gained her freedom.

Plantation owners frequently tried to suppress all vestiges of African culture, fearing that it could lead to resistance or rebellion. Drums, for example, were prohibited in many plantation colonies as it was thought they might be used for covert communications, as indeed they were. Dancing and singing were permitted as the plantation owners failed to recognise any element of resistance in them. Capoeira evolved as a martial art disguised as a dance.
Tools of the Abolition Campaign

- Poster Campaign
- Sugar boycott
- Judicial challenges
- Petitions
- Parliamentary lobbying

Branding and logos

Photos©Bristol Culture, Bristol City Council
Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped when he was 11 years old and sold into slavery. He had many terrible experiences as a slave and was sold from owner to owner. He eventually bought his freedom and became a spokesperson for the anti-slavery movement. Equiano was courageous, resourceful, literate, cultured and Christian - all the qualities that British people admired and aspired to. He published a book about his experiences which became very popular and played an important part in educating people about the realities of enslavement and challenged some of the widely held beliefs about Africans and transatlantic slavery.

The Abolition Campaign

Personal testimony: Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped when he was 11 years old and sold into slavery. He had many terrible experiences as a slave and was sold from owner to owner. He eventually bought his freedom and became a spokesperson for the anti-slavery movement. Equiano was courageous, resourceful, literate, cultured and Christian - all the qualities that British people admired and aspired to. He published a book about his experiences which became very popular and played an important part in educating people about the realities of enslavement and challenged some of the widely held beliefs about Africans and transatlantic slavery.

Collecting evidence: Thomas Clarkson

Slavery was regarded as normal, legitimate, profitable and even 'genteel' employment. The pro-slavery lobby claimed that Africans had no native society, lived like savages, were grateful for the opportunity to escape Africa, enjoyed the crossing and benefited from a good life on the plantations.

Abolitionists proved that none of these things were true. They bought shackles, thumbscrews, and a device for force-feeding slaves who went on hunger strike. These provided evidence of physical abuse.

Thomas Clarkson came to Bristol to interview sailors who testified that the ‘trade’ was conducted with brutal cruelty, and that, on average, 20% of each crew died of disease or ill treatment.
Campaigns for the vote and other civil rights use marches and petitions

Legacy: other social justice campaigns that use the same tools

Campaign logos and branding

Boycotts

Campaign posters
Legacies

“From our rich ancestral life, we were bought, sold and used, but we were brave, we were strong, we survived. All the world is now richer.”
Sokari Douglas Camp

Odd One Out

Which one of these was not a legacy of Transatlantic Slavery?*

- Bank of England
- Modern popular music
- Racism

*Trick question - they are all legacies
The Colston Debate - changing the name
What do you think? Airbrushing history or respecting those who were enslaved?

An official-looking plaque has been placed on Bristol’s statue of Edward Colston by someone seeking to set history straight.

Sitting just below the original inscription celebrating the ‘virtues’ of the notorious slave trader, a new gold-embossed sign has been added to commemorate the millions of people who were enslaved and lost their lives.

B24/7 August 2017

It reads:
Unauthorised Heritage
Bristol
Capital of the Atlantic Slave Trade
1730-1745
This commemorates the 12,000,000 enslaved of whom 6,000,000 died as captives.

The council is currently rewording the official plaque

This is a painting of an imaginary scene of the death of Edward Colston. Kneeling deferentially by his bed is his servant ‘Black Mary’, who was probably an enslaved African. Colston was the most significant benefactor to the city of Bristol and schools, streets, and a concert hall were named after him. He made much of his money from slavery, and his prominent memorials in the city remain controversial to the extent that the concert hall and school are changing their names.

While the text of a new plaque on Edward Colston’s statue is being finalised, a stark reminder of his role in the transatlantic slave trade has appeared in front of his statue in the centre.

The artwork contains dozens of figurines as if packed tightly into an 18th Century slave trip, with words around the side bringing slavery into the modern day, including sex worker, fruit picker, nail bar worker and car wash technician.

Writing on Twitter, Alasdair Cameron said: “One of reasons I think this statue should remain. It creates a place for thought and remembrance, and that slavery was once considered quite normal in many societies, or that societies once felt one could be a slaver and a philanthrope… shows journey we are on.”

B24/7 October 2018