

Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade

Source:

https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/africa_caribbean/africa_trade.htm

Europeans

Before the 16th century, Europeans were not deeply involved in slave trading on the West African coast. However, there was some movement of African labour to Madeira and the Canary Islands by the early Portuguese explorers from 1470 onwards. The Portuguese were also the first to use African slave labour in gold mines, and on sugar plantations on the small equatorial island of São Tomé. These plantations became the model for future sugar estates in the West Indies. African exports at this time included gold, palm oil, nuts, yams, pepper, ivory, gum and cloth.

An Interview with the King of Sestro



This drawing from the journals of Jean Barbot illustrates his meeting with the King of Sestro (now in modern Liberia) to trade for ivory and obtain supplies. The king is shown wearing 'a sort of cap made of straw in the shape of a mitre, decorated

with goats' horns, small porcupine tails and other trifles', and is surrounded by some of his 'ministers'. The seated man in European dress is apparently Barbot himself.

Jean Barbot was employed as a commercial agent on a number of slave-trading voyages to West Africa by the French in the 1670s and 1680s. His remarkable journals include a variety of drawings on many subjects - local flora and fauna, scenes from African life, coastal views and forts, to name but a few - as well as a guide to common words and phrases in a number of African languages.

ADM 7/830A, f. 96 (1681)

During the 16th century the first foundations of globalisation were laid when African rulers forged relationships with European traders. One early English explorer was William Hawkins, father of [John Hawkins](#). In the 1530s, Hawkins made voyages to Guinea to obtain ivory, [Gdyewoods](#) and gold. At this stage the English seemed to have little interest in taking slaves. This, however, was soon to change.

There was intense rivalry for West Africa among Europeans. With no interest in conquering the interior, they concentrated their efforts to obtain human cargo along the West African coast. During the 1590s, the Dutch challenged the Portuguese monopoly to become the main slave trading nation. Later, Scottish, Swedish and Danish African companies registered their interest. With so many European powers on the coast, conflict was inevitable, culminating in the Anglo-Dutch war of 1665-7. Forts built by the Portuguese and Dutch on the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) were captured by the British in 1667.

European Forts in Africa

The 'factories' appearing on this map were European forts or trading posts. Note that the equator is referred to as the 'Aquinocstial' (equinoctial line).

A Draught of the Coast of
AFRICA
from the Streights
Mouth to Cape Bona

Esprance

Note

The Flaggs denote the Factory's,
and the Place on the Coast where the
Flaggs are Raised from shews where
such Factory stands, and the Names
writt against the Flaggs is the Names
of those Factory's

MPG 1/221 (c. 1663-81)

Below

Note Benin did not have a trading post.



A Draught of the Coast of
AFRICA
 from the Straights of
 Mozambique to Cape Bonae
 Esperance

Note
 The Flags denote the Factories,
 and the Place on the Coast where the
 Flags are Raised from, shews where
 such Factory stands, and the Names
 writ against the Flags is the Names
 of those Factories

CANARY
 ISLES

C. VERD
 ISLES

The Equinoctial

The Tropick of Capricorn

A Scale of 200 Leagues

C. Bonae Esperance

Slaves for Guns

West African rulers were instrumental in the slave trade. They exchanged their prisoners of war (rarely their own people) for firearms manufactured in Birmingham and elsewhere in Britain. With their newly acquired weapons, kings and chiefs were able to expand their territories. The slave trade had a profound effect on the economy and politics of West Africa, leading, in many cases, to an increase in tension and violence.

Europeans Repay African Hospitality



In this picture, shipwrecked sailors are shown repaying their rescuers by enslaving them.

The man on the right may be an African middleman. Generally, Europeans did not travel into the hinterland - it was considered too dangerous. Instead, they relied on local traders to capture men, women and children to sell on into slavery.

This print was based on a pair of paintings by George Morland, first exhibited in 1788, and was probably used in support of the abolitionist cause.

National Maritime Museum ZBA 2507 (c. 1788-1812)
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In 1650, for example, Dahomey, a small coastal state on the Atlantic, extended its borders into the interior of Africa. Half a century later, the Asante Empire under Osei Tutu forcibly united a number of small kingdoms into a strong federation. A large proportion of the prisoners of war were sold on as slaves. Other Africans captured during raids into the interior were exchanged for commodities.

Kidnapped and Incarcerated

Europeans lacked the local knowledge to be able to negotiate the perils of the African interior, so they used middlemen for this task, according to [Olaudah Equiano](#), who had himself been captured in this way. European slaving ships waited at coastal ports to pick up their cargoes of slaves. Middlemen would attack Africans working in the fields and march them to the coast. Children acting as lookouts for their parents might also be captured.

Black People and 'Mulattoes' Employed by the Royal African Company

Free Africans as well as slaves worked for the British. As the entries towards the end of this list of Royal African Company personnel illustrate, Africans on the payroll of the RAC helped to maintain Royal African Company 'factories' (trading stations and forts) in Africa and sometimes acted as military back-up. The list also shows the range of skills possessed by RAC employees.

T 70/1445, ff. 23-4 (1 Jan 1703/4)

Black People and 'Mulattoes' Employed by the Royal African Company T 70/1445, ff. 23-4

image

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Bens Island 1st January 1703/4

A List of the Persons in the Services of the Royal African Company of England at their Factory of Sierraleon & the out Factories, thereunto belonging with an acco[un]t of the persons deceased from ye 26th November 1702

Persons	Names	Employments	Sallaries
Mr John	Freeman	Governour	
Mr Henry	Glynn	}	
Mr John	Fletcher	}Chief Agents	£
Mr Henry	Murray	}	
Mr Thom[as]	Kaerfoott	Capt[ain] Leiu[sic][tenant]	60
Mr Henry	Gadbury	}	40
Mr. W[illiam]	Proudfott	}	40
Thomas	Cheshire	}	26
John	Woodrow	}	26
John	Wenham	}	26
Ralph	Rountree	}	26
Robert	Gold	Writer	26
William	Topping	Surgeon	40
John	Wheeler	Distiller	25
John	Gill	}	30
Daniell	Jarman	}	30
Thomas	Rawlins	}	30
Thomas	Arndle	}	30
Robert	Tarris	Gunner	30
Cain	Higgins	Steward	18
Thomas	Tunbridge	Serjeant	18
William	Whitpain	Gardiner	15
Thomas	Charters	Guardian of Ben's Island	18
James	Reddock	Soldier	12
Channell	Wooten	Guardian of Tarnis Island	15
Francis	Parada	Sub Guardian	12
Domingo	Fardnando	Guardian of York Island	12
James	Hughes	Mast of ye Spy Brigantine	54
Richard	Emberley	Mate	30

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Persons	Names	Employments	Sallaries
James	Ectford	} Sailors in the	27
Thomas	Batchelour	} Spy	24

John	Bradford		}		
Thomas	Inman		}		24
Jeronomy	Sustena		}		18
Thomas	Stout		}	Sailors in the	26
John	Mason		}	Carge	15
William	Legg		}		24
David	Scott	}			18
Henry	Scott	}	Molattoes	} Camwood	18
Sampson	Comma	}		} Factors	18
Charles	Cornelius	}	Blacks	}	18
James	Phillips		Molatto	}	12
Brass	Morris	}		} Provision	12
John	Case	}	Blacks	} Factors	12
Congro		}		}	12
Thomas	Boyce			Comp[an]y's Apprentice	
John	Cartwright			Surgeons Apprentice	
Thomas	Tunbridge's			Wife	
Domingo	Fardnandoes			Wife	

Persons Deceased

Freind Richard Warner				July ye 16th 1703
Richard Emberley's Wife				June ye 25th
Joseph Bevis				August 10th
William Toppings Wife				Sept[ember] 8th
John	Johnson	}		
Thomas	Parrott	}		
Michael	Cooper	}		Sept[ember] Drowned
John	Summers	}		

Thomas Clark Bricklayer this Day

Mem[oran]d[um] this list came by ye Nicholson who lay in Ireland £22 & ^ was in getting to ye River Thames from June 1704 to ye 14th April 1705 at which time this came to ye office

A list of Later Date vide fol[io] 20, 21

Kidnapped and Incarcerated

Europeans lacked the local knowledge to be able to negotiate the perils of the African interior, so they used middlemen for this task, according to [G.Olaudah Equiano](#), who had himself been captured in this way. European slaving ships waited at coastal ports to pick up their cargoes of slaves. Middlemen would attack Africans working in the fields and march them to the coast. Children acting as lookouts for their parents might also be captured.

The captured Africans were held in forts, sometimes called 'slave castles', along the coast. They remained there for months until finally leaving their homeland for an unknown destination on board European merchant ships, including those of the British [Royal African Company](#). Ships constructed in Britain carried the Africans to the West Indies. This human cargo of slaves was chained at the wrists and legs with irons, and stowed in the lower decks of the ships, like any other commodity.

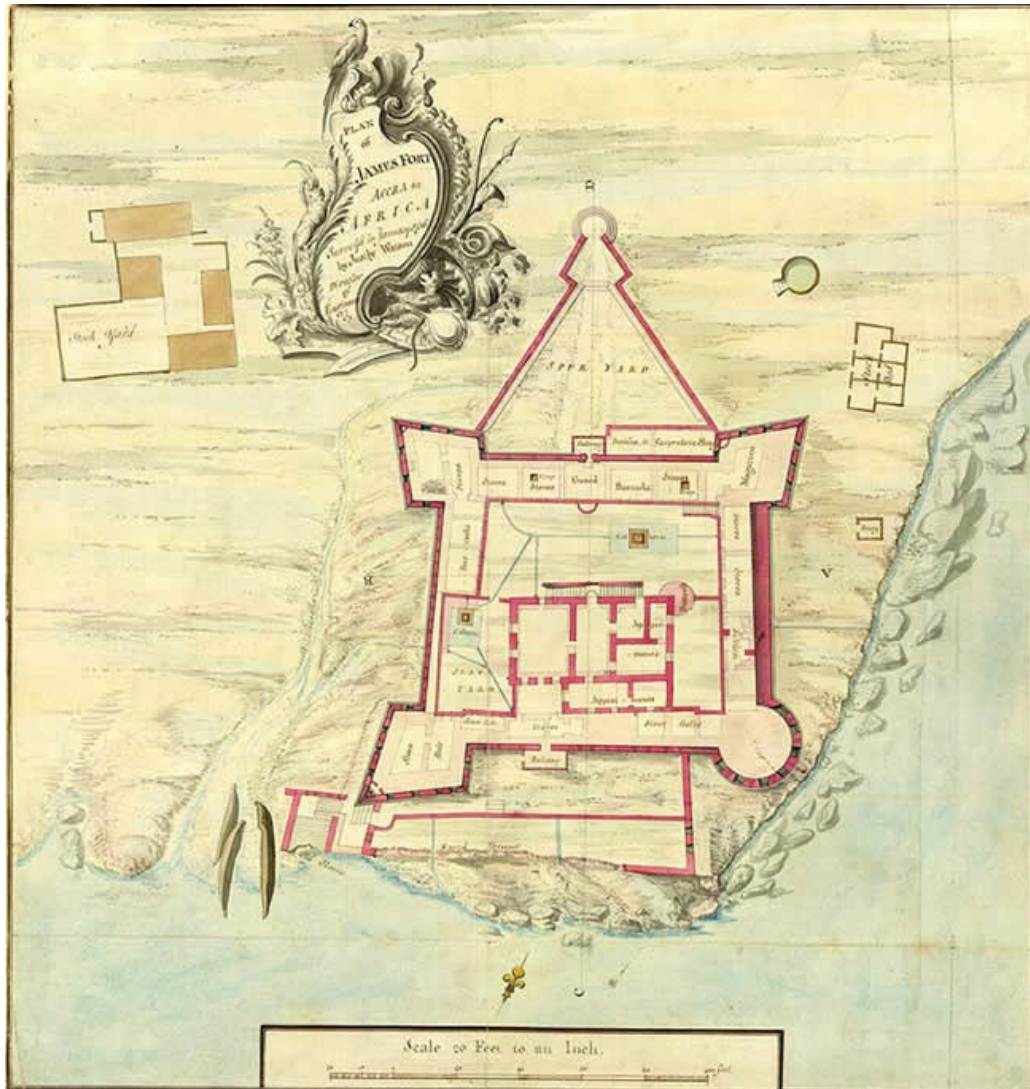
The slave trade developed into a complex system that included many different groups and interests. The actual number of Africans taken continues to be disputed, but it is somewhere in the range of 15 to 20 million people. It has been suggested that a great many of those captured went unrecorded. Many died on the march to the coast, in the cellars of slave forts and on the ships

James Fort, Accra, Gold Coast

James Fort was built by the English in 1673. The layout is similar to many contemporary forts in Europe - but note the 'slave holes'.

Around this time, other European nations were also building forts along the Gold Coast - which were used both to house the captured Africans before they were shipped to the colonies and for buying and selling other commodities.

MPG 1/228 (1756)



The slave trade was responsible for major disruption to the people of Africa. Women and men were taken young, in their most productive years, thus damaging African economies. The physical experience of slavery was painful, traumatic and long-lasting. We know this from the written evidence of several freed slaves. Captivity marked the beginning of a dehumanising process that affected British attitudes towards African people.

Men, women and children aged 6 to 80 were captured and sold into slavery in West Africa. This extract from a list of enslaved Africans working at Cape Coast Castle shows that enslaved Africans were kept to supply labour at British forts, as well as being shipped out. Their skills varied: bricklayers, doctor's boys and washerwomen are included in the list.

BT 6/1 (April 1771)

Royal African Company Slaves - Men, Women and Children

Royal African Company Slaves - Men, Women and Children BT 6/1

image

State and Condition of Cape Coast Castle April 1771.
List of the Company's Slaves contin[ue]d.

No.	Names	Employment	Age	Condition
36.	Quashee	Doctors Boy	7.	Good
37.	Accramah	Bricklayer	30.	D[itt]o
38.	Coffee	Labourer	22.	D[itt]o
39.	Maddie	D[itt]o	65.	Super[anuate]d
40.	Ashun	Carpenter	19.	Good
41.	Coffee Berraboe	Slaves Doctor	31.	D[itt]o
42.	Coffee	Labourer	7.	D[itt]o
43.	John	Armourer	30.	D[itt]o
44.	Bonnetta	Sailor	76.	Super[anuate]d
45.	Allah	Carpenter	19.	Good
46.	Asiphrie	Bricklayer	19.	D[itt]o
47.	Bundy	D[itt]o	19.	D[itt]o
48.	Aperacu	D[itt]o	21.	D[itt]o
49.	Finn	Smiths Boy	15.	D[itt]o
50.	Cacoo	Bricklayer	23.	D[itt]o
51.	Amoy	Gunners Mate	31.	D[itt]o
52.	Quabino	Carpenter	14.	D[itt]o
53.	Aggin	Carpenters Boy	8.	D[itt]o
54.	Ohuniah	Carpenter	16.	D[itt]o
55.	Quamino	Cook	14.	D[itt]o
56.	Battamah	Gardner	31.	D[itt]o
57.	Quacoe	Drummer	41.	D[itt]o
58.	Bynce	Hall Boy	11.	D[itt]o
59.	Allah	D[itt]o	19.	D[itt]o
60.	Coffee	Carpenter	11.	D[itt]o
61.	Coffee	Bricklayer	13.	D[itt]o

62.	Dye	Smith	14.	D[itt]o
63.	Light gay	Stone Blower	40.	Blind
64.	Coffee	Smith	19.	Good
65.	Ashun	Bricklayer	17.	D[itt]o
66.	Coffee	Smith	17.	D[itt]o
67.	Allah	Labourer	10.	D[itt]o
68.	Quashie	Necessary Man	61.	Super[anuate]d
69.	Aduam	Carpenter	9.	Good

State and Condition of Cape Coast Castle April 1771.

List of the Company's Slaves contin[ue]d.

No.	Names	Employment	Age	Condition
138.	Adadie	Hall Boy	9.	Good
139.	Quamino Dick	Hall Servant	63.	Super[anuate]d
140.	Coffee Dick	Cooper	17. }	
141.	Berraboe	D[itt]o	22 }	Good
142.	Quamino	D[itt]o	22 }	
143.	Gahtie	D[itt]o	16. }	
144.	Mammy	Swish Maker	57.	Indifferent
145.	Ashun	D[itt]o	57.	D[itt]o
146.	Mensah	Swimming Boy	11. }	
147.	London	Sailor	29. }	
148.	Adjumacon	Chappel Servant	26 }	
149.	Quabino Bynin	Labourer	21. }	
150.	Quabino Mundie	D[itt]o	15. }	
151.	Ashun	Smith	51. }	
152.	Budue	Labourer	}	
153.	Cudjoe	D[itt]o	}	
154.	Sarah	D[itt]o	}	Good.
155.	Boy	D[itt]o	}	
156.	Budue	Hall Boy	9. }	
157.	Aouchie	Canoeman	39. }	
158.	Appa	D[itt]o	31. }	
159.	Tuttoo	D[itt]o	25. }	
160.	Cudjoe	D[itt]o	29. }	
161.	Quacoe	D[itt]o	37. }	
162.	Accra	D[itt]o	35. }	

Women.

1.	Ajua & 1. child	Labouress	51.	Indifferent
2.	Matrima	D[itt]o	61.	Insane
3.	Tuttaway	D[itt]o	5.	Good
4.	Effebah	Prapra Woman	37.	D[itt]o
5.	Aquishebah	D[itt]o	61.	Super[anuate]d
6.	Abbacumah	D[itt]o	41.	Good
7.	Tutta Aquishebah	Labouress	8.	D[itt]o
8.	Quishebah	D[itt]o	61.	Super[anuate]d

State and Condition of Cape Coast Castle April

List of the Company's Slaves contin[ue]d.

No.	Names	Employment	Age	Condition
9.	Agguabah & 2 Child[re]n	Labouress	57. }	
10.	Allah Cumah	D[itt]o	37. }	
11.	Effebah	D[itt]o	37. }	Good
12.	Ambah & 1 Child	D[itt]o	25. }	
13.	Ashee	D[itt]o	7. }	
14.	Effeway	D[itt]o	28 }	
15.	Yeffebah	D[itt]o	71.	Super[anuate]d
16.	Tutteway	D[itt]o	9. }	
17.	Ajua	D[itt]o	46 }	
18.	Aggubah & 1 Child	}	31 }	
19.	Aquishebah 2. D[itt]o	}	25. }	
20.	Ambah 2. D[itt]o	}	41. }	Good
21.	Aquishebah 1. D[itt]o	}	51. }	
22.	Aquishebah Accun	}	10. }	
23.	Ambah & 1 Child	}	17. }	
24.	Effebah	}	61. }	
25.	Euccoah	}	Papra Women 19. }	
26.	Abbah	}	57.	Indifferent
27.	Eubah	}	7.	Good
28.	Abbah	}	6.	D[itt]o
29.	Betto	}	80.	Super[anuate]d
30.	Ducue	}	6.	Good
31.	Deddie, & 2 Child[re]n	}	46.	Indifferent
32.	Abinnebah 4. Child[re]n	}	41. }	Good

33. Quishebah	}	10. }	
34. Aoutchie	}	21. }	
35. Abinnebah	Washerwoman	42 }	
36. Euhubah 2. Child[re]n	Labouress	46 }	
37. Ambah	D[itt]o	73.	Super[anuate]d
38. Ashow	D[itt]o	40.	Good
39. Yafforduah	D[itt]o	47.	Indifferent
40. Ajuah	Washerwoman	42.	Indifferent

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