

WIGAN AND SLAVERY

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From the mid-18th through the mid-19th centuries Wigan and surrounding townships grew rapidly to become a significant hub in the Industrial Revolution that spread across the world. Population in the Wigan area mushroomed on the back of coal, cotton and iron industries, fuelled by private wealth and entrepreneurship.

It was construction of the Leeds-Liverpool canal that opened up large-scale coal production in the Wigan area in the 1770s. Local people were influential in constructing the canal, but we see the appearance of rich and powerful 'foreigners' from Liverpool and Bradford. John Hustler and Thomas Hardcastle were Bradford wool staplers and merchants and Jonathan Blundell, William Earle and John Hollinshead were Liverpool merchants. All served as members of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal Committee and provided some of the earliest substantial investments to develop waterways, railways and collieries.

In 1774 Jonathan Blundell started to mine coal in Orrell and in the 1800s the Blundell family mined coal in Ince, Wigan, Blackrod, Chorley, Winstanley and Pemberton. Coal production at Blundell's Pemberton Collieries rocketed to a peak of 738,000 tons in 1913, when it was the largest colliery in Lancashire.

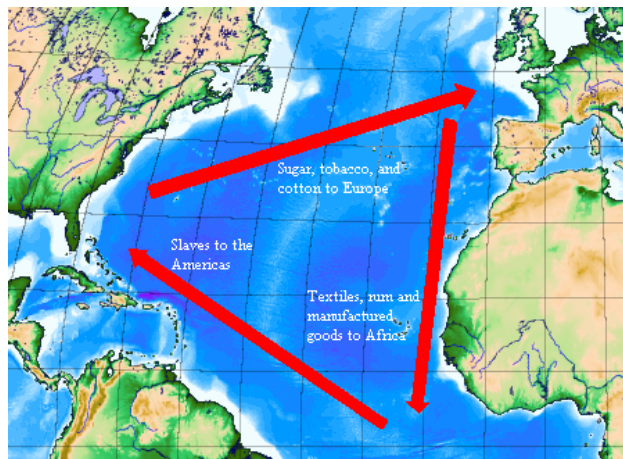
Over one hundred steam locomotives were built at Haigh Foundry owned by the Earl of Balcarres, including *The Walking Horse* in 1812 and two more steam locomotives by 1816. *The Walking Horse*, operating on John Clarke's Winstanley and Orrell colliery railway, was the third commercially successful steam locomotive in the world and the first to cross a viaduct. The Earl's collieries, together with the Kirkless Hall Coal and Iron Co. Ltd. and two smaller concerns, formed the nucleus of the vast Wigan Coal and Iron Company established in 1865 as the largest joint-stock company in the country, excluding railways.

So, where did the Blundell's, Clarke and the Earl of Balcarres get their money?

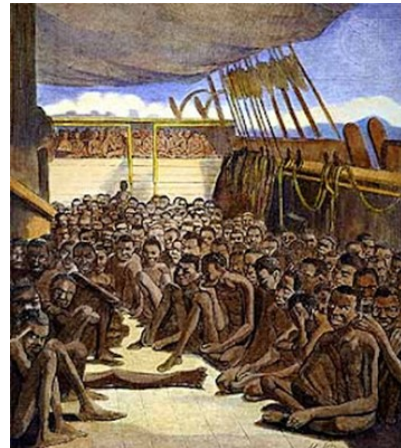
Through the early nineteenth century, landowners, merchants, bankers, ministers, lawyers and manufacturers supplied capital to finance relatively small-scale mining and quarrying operations. Colliery owners Leigh, Woodcock, Berry, Bankes, Bradshaigh, Prescott, Culshaw, Dawson, Hardy, Jackson, Jarrett, Laithwaite, Langshaw, Lofthouse, Peckover, Monk, Townsend, Brimilow, Bradshaw, Stephen, Whaley, Barton, Hodson, Hatton, Winstanley, Claughton and the Germans fall into this category; and Longhbotham, Chadwick and Haliburton can be added by including engineers and ironmasters. However, as John Langton concludes, large infusions of capital were needed to sustain and expand the coal production industry and many of these people were incapable of making the necessary investments.

In his book 'The Orrell Coalfield', Donald Anderson mentions that Liverpool's corporation "pursued a very enlightened policy" and engaged extensively in the slave trade. He reports that Bryan Blundell engaged in the slave trade, founded Liverpool's first charity school, the Bluecoat School, and was instrumental in founding Liverpool Infirmary, Warrington Academy and 36 alms houses in Liverpool. His son, Jonathan, became treasurer of the school and Colonel Henry Blundell owned Pemberton Collieries and built St. Matthew's Church and schools in Highfield, where I was baptized and educated. Anderson also mentions that a list of the 'Company of Merchants trading to Africa' included Henry Blundell and his friends, and that Henry Blundell was much concerned about William Roscoe and other abolitionists trying to end the slave trade. So let us look a bit deeper into the Liverpool slave trade.

From 1695 to 1807, 5,300 voyages from Liverpool transported almost one and a half million slaves to the New World. By 1787, thirty seven of the forty one members of Liverpool Council were involved in slavery. Further, all of Liverpool's twenty Mayors who held office between 1787 and 1807 were involved. Liverpool's net proceeds from the African trade in 1783-93 are said to have been £12,294,116, which today would have a relative value of between £1.2 and £87.0 billion.



The Atlantic slave trade



Slave ship

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Triangle_trade2.png;
[http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?categorynum=5&categoryName=Slave Ships and the Atlantic Crossing \(Middle Passage\)&theRecord=21&recordCount=78](http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?categorynum=5&categoryName=Slave%20Ships%20and%20the%20Atlantic%20Crossing%20(Middle%20Passage)&theRecord=21&recordCount=78)

There is much evidence to document deep and lucrative involvement in the slave trade by the Blundells and their partners Thomas Leyland, William Earle, Samuel Warren and Edward Chaffers. Records show that from 1722 to 1784 slave ships owned by the Blundells conducted 113 voyages with 31,341 slaves embarking in West Africa and 25,313 disembarking in the Caribbean. They also dispatched slaves to Chesapeake Bay.

I am not sure if John Clarke, owner of the Winstanley and Orrell collieries and *The Walking Horse*, was directly involved in the slave trade, but there is no doubt that as a major Liverpool banker he benefited greatly from the slave trade. His father established the first bank in Liverpool in 1774.

I have found no evidence that the Bankes family of Winstanley was directly involved in the slave trade, but there is no doubt they and other land owners benefited greatly from leasing land and mineral rights to Liverpool entrepreneurs. In the 19th century, Bankes developed their own colliery and railway, landscaped Winstanley Estate and bought an 80,000 acre estate in Scotland.

Robert Daglish built *The Walking Horse* and two more early steam locomotives at Haigh Foundry, so it is also important to identify sources of capital for the foundry. There is strong evidence that much of the capital to renovate Haigh Estate and expand the foundry came from the slave trade. When Alexander Lindsay, 6th Earl of Balcarres, took over Haigh Hall it carried a debt of £6,000 (between £500,000 and £40 million in today's money) and was in terrible condition. The Earl's salvation came when King George III appointed him Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica – the jewel in the imperial crown – where he served from 1794 to 1801. There were more than a quarter of a million slaves on the island of Jamaica, where he purchased plantations and employed hundreds of slaves. It is reasonable to assume that he also profited from the sale of sugar and other products from his plantations. Further, he contracted slave-labour for the Army and the civil government in Jamaica. On completing his term as Governor, he received about £65,000 (between £4 and £240 million in today's money). On returning to Haigh, the Earl is reported to have established an 'Aggrandising Fund' for the purpose of accumulating wealth for his family and in 1804 he appointed Robert Daglish engineer at Haigh Foundry.

The Slave Trade Act of 1807 abolished the slave trade in the British Empire, but not slavery itself. It was not until 26 years later that slavery was abolished. With the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833, James Lindsay, the 7th Earl of Balcarres and Baron of Wigan, was paid £14,473.15s.6d compensation for 895 slaves in Jamaica (between £1.1 and £48.2 million in today's money). The Earl built Haigh Hall between 1827 and 1840 on the site of the ancient manor house.

To the east of the Pennines, landed gentry, London businessmen and local entrepreneurs had accumulated sufficient wealth to capitalize increasingly large collieries and early railways through the early nineteenth century. Around Wigan, local entrepreneurs had sufficient capital to get the ball rolling, but insufficient resources to capitalize large collieries and railways. This is where Liverpool merchants and bankers, who had become wealthy from the slave trade, stepped in.

Wigan Dissenters sent several petitions to the 1830 Parliament for the abolition of slavery and James Cropper (1773-1840), a Quaker born in Winstanley, up by the Big Stone, played a prominent role in the abolition of slavery. His mother was Rebecca Winstanley. Cropper served as Chairman of the Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society and his female relatives played central roles. William Roscoe, a partner of John Clarke, Thomas Leyland and the Earles, also was a strong advocate for the abolition of slavery.

Of course, cotton from slave plantations was the main source of raw material for the Lancashire cotton mills. And textiles and probably metal products from south-west Lancashire were exported in slave ships. In the mills and coal mines worked what many called "white slaves", including women and children. The Factory Act was passed the same year as the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833. This Act made it illegal to employ children under nine years of age, but made it legal to employ 9-13 year old

children to work up to nine hours a day and 13-18 year old children to work up to 12 hours a day. In 1842 the Mines and Collieries Act removed women from the coalface, but still permitted boys over the age of ten to work underground. Only in 1870, with passage of the Education Act, did it become mandatory for all under the age 14 to attend school full time.

Social morals have changed over time, but black and white slaves are woven into the history and development of Wigan and other towns and cities. Many human beings were exploited and suffered, while others benefited.

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