

Did an 18th century stone gateway in suburban Liverpool originate from a building where enslaved Africans were sold?

LIVERPOOL'S SLAVE GATE

A 'Bygone Liverpool' History Project

Published online: 1st January 2023

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Introduction

When the authors first came across the story of the Slave Gate, it was first met with suspicion because it had all the hallmarks of an urban myth. Legend has it that enslaved Africans once passed through an old stone gateway that belonged to an 18th century building in Liverpool, before being transported on ships to the West Indies. When the building was demolished, the gateway was salvaged and relocated six miles away to the village of Gateacre. The actual building it came from was a mystery, in finding it we discovered it was an important relic of the town at the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. But was the story true?

In 2017 an old photo had been shared on Twitter that proposed to be of a warehouse that had collapsed, the title of the image was 'Old Slave Market Bld.g' (p.10). As there are several unproven traditions surrounding Liverpool's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the title of the photograph was taken with a pinch of salt. Although it was still deemed worthy of further research.

During the ensuing email exchange, the authors were informed of the existence of the Slave Gate. Tradition claims this was originally sited very close to the supposed 'Slave Market' in the old photograph (*purported to have been around Tower Building at the bottom of Water Street*). Could this be how the story originated?

Locating the gateway's origin was only half the story. Finding evidence to confirm the slave connection would prove equally challenging. The research for this book provided the authors with an opportunity to explore Liverpool in the 18th century at the time the town grew immeasurably in both size and global importance. Wherever possible we've attempted to find original archive material rather than rely on quoted sources, and in many cases we have used previously unseen images.

During the course of this research, the authors have immersed themselves in the history of Liverpool and how it was shaped greatly by the shameful part it played in trafficking 1.5 million Africans to endure a life of unimaginable cruelty on plantations. Many of the main characters that feature in the research achieved their wealth and status through enslaving Africans and selling the produce made by them in Virginia or the West Indies. Often these men became Mayors of Liverpool, so great an importance the town placed on the slave trade.

Liverpool came to dominate the slave trade in Britain. The wealth created from it helped create a network of docks, and huge warehouses rose beside them filled with slave-grown sugar, rum, tobacco and timber, one was a remarkable 13 storeys high in the late 18th century. The town grew at an impressive rate with a network of new streets and a rapidly growing population to fill them. The rich merchants erected grand mansions, churches and institutions, some are still with us today.

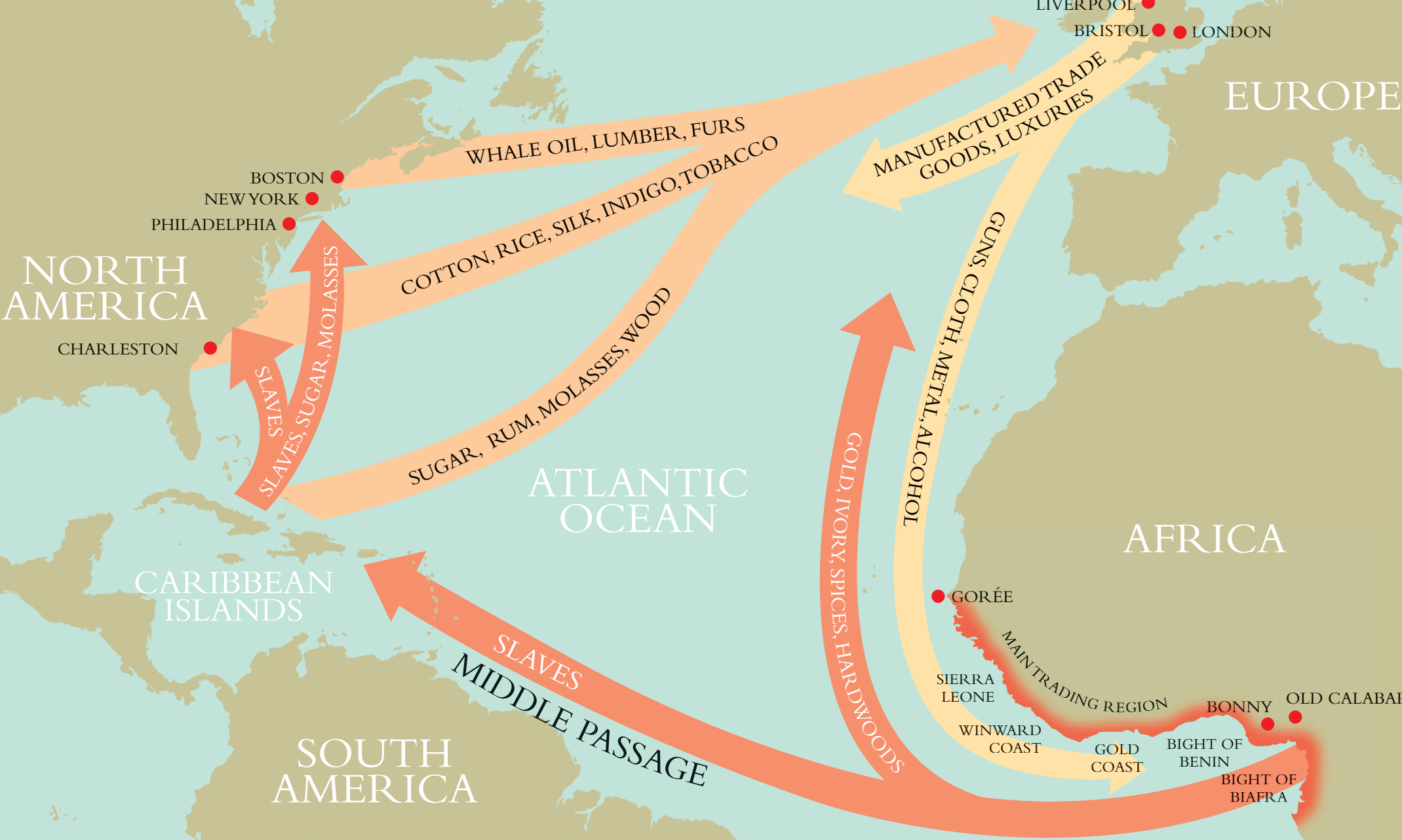
The story is not just of a stone gateway but also what it represents. Whether the story of slaves passing through the gateway is true or not we will discover, but it has served as a reminder to the city's involvement in the slave trade since it arrived in Gateacre in the 19th century.

We offer you to join us on a tour of Liverpool over 250 years ago. The city has changed, almost beyond recognition, but enough survives for you to still find your bearings. Although the slave trade is never far from the story, we hope to give you an insight into the town beyond that – from the many inns, taverns and coffee houses to the lesser recorded people and places we have uncovered.

The building the gateway came from turned out to be one of most fascinating structures ever built in Liverpool, and one that has been associated to the Liverpool slave trade in almost every book on the subject.

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The Transatlantic Slave Trade



Authors' diagram based on information from Smithsonian Learning Lab and Tibbles, 2018.

Part 1: Liverpool and the Slave Trade

In examining the slave gate story and its location, a brief background to Liverpool's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is required.

In 1648 a ship called *Friendship* arrived from in Liverpool from America carrying 30 tons of tobacco which heralded the start of the town's Atlantic trade. Britain began to prosper in the transatlantic trade from the 1650s when it acquired the colonies in the West Indies, and particularly Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655. The sugar plantations required a huge labour force and this was supplied by enslaving Africans. At first this was controlled by the Royal African Company, which had been established by Charles II, this unpopular monopoly was ended in 1698 as a result of lobbying of merchants, particularly from Bristol.

In the first half of the 17th century Liverpool was a very small town and its ships had traded mainly with Ireland and British ports. The Civil War saw the town sacked by the Royalists in 1644, led by Prince Rupert. Twenty years after the war, some London merchants fleeing from first the plague in 1665 and then the great fire in 1666 came to Liverpool and started businesses that would literally change the course of Liverpool's mercantile trade:

In 1698 Liverpool successfully promoted a Bill enabling the Corporation to build a new parish church. The Corporation 'Case' for the Bill describes in graphic terms the expanding Liverpool of the closing years of William III's reign.

It was formerly a small fishing town; but many people coming from London in the time of the Sickness, and after the fire, several ingenious men settled in Liverpool, which encouraged them to trade with the Plantations and other places; which occasioned sundry other tradesmen to come and settle here; which hath so enlarged

their trade, that from scarce paying the salary of the Officers of the Customs, it is now the third part of the trade, of England and pays upward of £50,000 per annum to the King: And by reason of such increase of inhabitants, many new streets are built and still in building, and many gentlemen's sons . . . are put Apprentices in the Town.¹

The trade these merchants started was sugar and tobacco – first grown using indentured servants and convicted prisoners and later replaced by chattel slavery using enslaved Africans. One such enterprise was that of Allyn Smith of Battersea who came here after the Great Fire of London. His partnership of Smith, Cleiveland and Danvers built a sugar refinery, located on the corner of Redcross Street and Preeson's Row. One of Smith's partners, Daniel Danvers is mentioned in 'The Moore Rental' (A description of the land tenure held by one of Liverpool's largest landowners Edward Moore). It tells of a planned sugar house in Dale Street. Although never built, Moore named the plot of land Sugar House Close in preparation:

Sugar-House Close... This croft fronts the street for some twenty-seven yards and I call it the Sugar House Close, because one Mr Smith, a great sugar-baker at London, a man as report says, worth forty thousand pounds, came from London to treat with me. According to agreement he is to build all the front twenty-seven yards a stately house of good hewn stone ... and there on the back side, to erect a house for boiling and drying sugar, otherwise called a sugar-baker's house, ..."

Moore speculated on that the profits of the sugar house:

...it would bring a trade of £40,000 or more from Barbadoes, which formerly this town never knew.

¹ HSLC 130-2-Gnossipelius.

By 1768 there were eight sugar houses. Five of these are shown on George Perry's map of 1769.²

The first ship to Barbados was The Antelope, part funded by William Blundell (known as The Cavalier due to his support for the Royalists in the Civil War) on September 15th 1666 it returned with its cargo (semi-refined sugar, molasses or rum) almost exactly a year later on 19th August 1667.

A record from the London Gazette mentions a ship called the *Lion* in

There are lately put into Milford by contrary winds the *Appeal* of London from Bayonne, laden with Wines, homewards bound, the *Anne* of Bristol from Calais laden with Wine, Fruit, and Salt, bound for Ireland, and the *Lion* of Liverpool intended for Barbados.

1669:

Although Liverpool ships traded in the West Indies, the first record of a ship carrying slaves from Africa is in 1696 when 195 arrived at Montserrat, West Indies. 243 had left Africa but 48 had not survived the horrors of the Middle Passage³. (The Liverpool Merchant, three years later in 1699 is often cited as the first recorded ship).

London and Bristol had been the main ports for slave ships but Liverpool was to take over and become, by far, the most important port in the trade, due in no small part to the creation of Liverpool's wet dock in 1715. This 'Old Dock' and the others that came after it enabled the town to cater for the huge cargoes that came back after the slaves were exchanged in the Americas.

By the 1730s about 15 ships a year were leaving for Africa and this grew to about 50 a year in the 1750s, rising to just over a 100 in each of the early years of the 1770s. Numbers declined during the American War of Independence (1775-83), but rose to a new peak of 120-130 ships annually in the two decades preceding the abolition of the trade in 1807. Probably three-quarters of all European slaving ships at this period left from Liverpool. Overall, Liverpool ships transported half of the 3 million Africans carried across the Atlantic by British slavers.⁴

The transatlantic slave trade took a triangular route – the ships leave Britain with goods to buy slaves in Africa – slaves are brought to the West Indies – slaves are exchanged for goods that are brought back to Britain. The sequence of this route meant that the numbers of slaves that came back to Britain was comparatively low.

Ships' officers would be given an enslaved person by the owner of the ship as a special honour or 'privilege' as this letter from Liverpool merchants to Captain Earle in 1751 demonstrates:

You are to have for your privilege, two slaves, Mr Bankes your mate one slave, your doctor Mr Black one slave and one boy slave. Pay your doctor his head money, your coast commission one dollar in ten and pay what seamen's wages they'll take in the West Indies. In case of your mortality, (which the Almighty prevent), your mate Mr Bankes is to succeed you in command and observe there our directions, and when he arrives in the West Indies, that he be entirely directed by Mr Carter of Barbados whether to stay there or proceed farther and to what place.⁵

It was not unknown for captains to be allowed up to five enslaved people. The vast majority were sold in the Caribbean, a small amount stayed with the ship. If sickness or an attack by an enemy ship inflicted casualties it was not uncommon for enslaved people to be drafted into the crew. On some occasions they would return to Britain.

² <http://www.mawer.clara.net/loc-liv-detail.html>

³ Transatlantic Slave Trade database. Voyage 21236, source material Treasury Records at the National Archives, T70/12,107

⁴ www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

⁵ https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/slavery/europe/earle_letter.aspx

Once the ship returned to Britain, these 'Privilege' Slaves might be sold by the crew in the coffee houses, inns, and broker's offices. The skills they acquired onboard and the fact they could speak English, made them useful as house servants. Not only that, but owning a Black slave/servant was a fashionable status symbol for wealthy merchants:-

I was amazed to see the sumptuous drawing rooms, rich with satin and silk, in houses where there was no library, and at the large assemblage of gaily dressed and jewelled visitors, many of whom seemed to think that books were as much a superfluity as the great Pascal esteemed brooms and towels. But what surprised me most in the aspect of Liverpool was the multitude of black servants, almost all of whom had originally been slaves; this deeply moved my compassion, and when I saw the table laden with West India produce, in its various forms of fruit and sweetmeats, and saw the black servants looking on at the produce of a land, their native home, which they had left for us, and of which they might not partake, my heart often ached.⁶

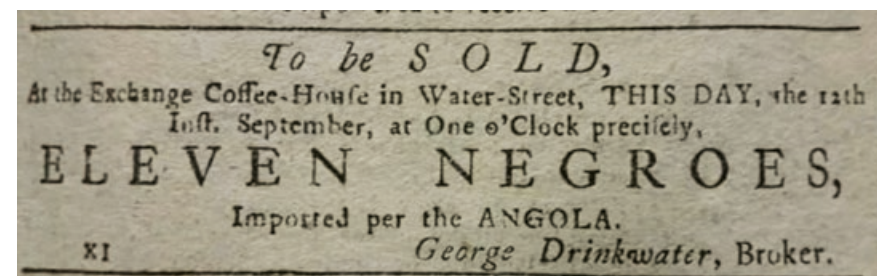
To be able to serve in a household the enslaved person needed to speak at least a little English and to have acquired some skills, because of this they had usually arrived via the West Indies.

One of the most infamous auctions, due to the high number of people sold, happened in 1766 when 11 people were offered for sale at the Exchange Coffee House⁷. The sale of this number of people was highly unusual, probably unique as most auctions were much smaller or of just one person. The Angola ship had arrived directly from Africa with a cargo of barwood the previous week. Nothing is known of the fate of the 11 but as they spoke no English it is more likely they were shipped to the plantations in the Caribbean rather than stay in Liverpool⁸.

6 The account above was taken from The Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, - the daughter of Samuel Galton Jnr (1753-1832), a Birmingham gun manufacturer who supplied merchants with guns to trade for slaves.

7 12th September 1766, Williamson's Liverpool

8 See Tibbles, 2018



Many of the enslaved and ex-enslaved people that were brought to Britain were to serve in households, stables or as hairdressers. Although their living conditions are not known, and undoubtedly not as horrific as those on the plantations, they were still abducted and stripped of their liberty. Most could speak English, indicating they had already endured enslavement before being brought to Britain.

Life in Britain may not have been as bad as the plantations but being forcibly returned to them was a constant threat, therefore runaways were common, with escapees hunted down if they tried to abscond.

Without doubt enslavement in Britain and in the Americas was very different. Most enslaved people in Jamaica, for example, were engaged in plantation agriculture, a horrific labour regime which — together with insufficient food, a dangerous disease environment and the violent rule of the planters — resulted in horrendous and short lives for the enslaved. Yet better working conditions in Britain should not blind us to the fact that many of these people had been stripped away from family and community, a traumatic event for all who endured it but particularly for the many children.⁹

9 Runaway Slaves in Britain website.

Evidence of public sales of enslaved people can be seen in the advertisements placed in newspapers announcing auctions, and also by the advertisements placed to offer rewards to recover those that ran away. Two of these auction notices we have reproduced below.

**To be SOLD, A NEGRO MAN,
about 22 Years of Age, an excellent House Servant,
and perfectly Skilled in the Business of a
BARBER and HAIR DRESSER,
the Property of a Gentleman lately return'd
from the West-Indies. The Slave was bought at
Guadeloupe from a famous French Barber, with
whom he learn'd the Trade.
N.B. He understands the CARE of HORSES.
Apply to James Campbell, Broker.¹⁰**

**To be sold at Auction at George's Coffee-house,
betwixt the hours of six and eight o'clock, a very
fine negro girl about eight years of age, very
healthy, and hath been some time from the coast.
Any person willing to purchase the same may apply
to Capt. Robert Syers, at Mr. Bartley Hodgett's
Mercer and Draper near the Exchange, where she
may be seen till the time of sale.¹¹**

In 1772 a landmark legal case known as the Somerset Ruling helped to greatly reduce, (but not to end) the sales of slaves in Britain. James Somerset had been enslaved to Charles Stewart of Boston and had been brought to England, but two years later Somerset escaped. Once recaptured, Stewart intended to take Somerset back to Jamaica but the court ruled he could not be forcibly sent out of England to be sold as a slave in the Americas and Somerset gained his freedom.

The celebrated Somerset ruling of 1772 concerned a slave's liberty and status as property. The slave James Somerset (or Sommersett) was the property of a Boston customs official, Charles Stewart. Somerset was brought to England. After two years he escaped, but he was recaptured on 26 November 1771 and was forced onto a ship bound for Jamaica. With help from Granville Sharpe, a humanitarian anti-slavery campaigner, a writ of habeas corpus was granted by Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, ordering the captain of the ship on which Somerset was incarcerated to produce Somerset before a court.

The case was repeatedly adjourned. Somerset's legal team argued that although slavery was tolerated in the colonies, the Court of King's Bench was bound to apply the law of England. Mansfield ruled in 1772 that 'no master ever was allowed here (England) to take a slave by force to be sold abroad because he deserted from his service... therefore the man must be discharged'. And so James Somerset won his freedom.¹²

Although the ruling did not make the selling of enslaved people in England illegal, it was a catalyst for the abolition movement and heralded the beginning of the end of the slave trade in Britain.

After 1772 public sales of slaves in Britain were very rare but one example occurred as late as 1779 where the Liverpool broker George Dunbar sold 'A Black BOY about 14 years old, and a large Mountain Tyger CAT' from his office in Exchange Alley. In 1780 a runaway

¹⁰ Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, 23 January 1767.

¹¹ Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 1765
(day unknown) Gomer Williams

¹² National Archives.gov.uk

advertisement was placed that described the fugitive as *'The black is not only the slave but the apprentice'*. (See end of this book for a list of auctions and runaway advertisements).

Another route how Black people made it to the town was the children of African merchants and White British slave merchants with African mothers. These were encouraged to their sons to Liverpool, Bristol and London to be educated. By the 1780s it was estimated that between 50 and 70 of these children were in Liverpool annually.¹³

*It has always been the practice of Merchants and Commanders of Ships trading to Africa, to encourage the Natives to send their Children to England, as it conciliates their Friendship and softens their Manners, but adds greatly to the Security of the Trader, which answers the Purposes both of Interest and Humanity.*¹⁴

This was a risky endeavour as some of these children were enslaved themselves during the journey.

From the 1780s an abolition movement began to gain pace in Britain. Liverpool merchants, fearing an end to their lucrative business actively sought in Parliament for continuance of the trade.

In Liverpool a small group of abolitionists, the most prominent being William Roscoe, wrote poetry and pamphlets to gain support.

Thomas Clarkson, a leading campaigner for the abolition of slavery, had been travelling across Britain collecting evidence on the trade. In 1787 he visited Liverpool and was attacked and nearly killed by a gang of sailors who were paid to assassinate him.

In the mid 1790s Liverpool added to the many warehouses in the town by erecting a vast range of buildings on a stretch of reclaimed land adjoining George's Dock known as the Goree Causeway.

This land was named after the slave embarkation island off Senegal. Like many of the warehouses, much of the goods stored here were produced by enslaved people on plantations. This range included the famous Goree Piazzas. Soon after being completed they were destroyed by fire and rebuilt. The warehouses were finally demolished following extensive bomb damage in WW2.

Although the slave trade was prohibited by the passing of the Slave Trade Act 1807, (entitled 'An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade'), slavery itself remained legal in most of the British Empire until the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Slave ships were still crossing the Atlantic after 1807/1833, which was then policed by Britain's West Africa Squadron, from 1808, partly to supply the demand for slaves in South America, particularly in Brazil.

When slave-ownership was abolished in Britain's colonies in 1833, the slave owners received compensation from the British Government. This was a scheme that saw 3,000 families receive a total of £20 million, equating to £16.5bn in modern terms. The enslaved themselves received nothing.



¹³ Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery. Edited by David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles, 2007.

¹⁴ 'Reports of the Lords of the Committee of Council appointed for the consideration of all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations'. Volume 1', 1789.



Goree Piazza, July 16, 1913.

The warehouse on the supposed 'Slave Market' photograph (p.10) can be seen to the right of the buildings undergoing demolition, indicated by the shutters for rubble. Image: LRO. .

The oral history of Liverpool and Slavery

As with all histories, misconceptions surrounding Liverpool's role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade have appeared. Since the late 19th century there have been some stories linked to the trade that are unsupported. These stories are often sensational in nature and take place on the sites of Liverpool landmarks, past and present. For many they have served as an introduction to the history (often it is a parent who would tell their child the story where they can point to where the event took place). They can also prove a distraction from the documented facts. For many years the oral tradition was the only information on the trade available to most. Now with the benefit of experts and a wealth of literature and online resources we now know more about the trade than ever. New information and insights are still being discovered.

Although some locally published books had mentioned the subject of the Slave Trade from as early as 1773, it would only be in the late 19th century that comprehensive histories were written on the subject.¹ Schools did not cover the subject in the curriculum, most still don't. Because of this lack of information there are a host of colourful legends connected to slavery including slave cellars, secret tunnels where the slaves were transported onto ships and a slave market near Goree Piazzas – a group of warehouses built at the very end of the 18th century and named after the slave trading island off Senegal. Most of these stories appeared at the start of the 20th century.

Some of these stories have since been dismissed as unfounded but refuse to die. They probably arose from a misunderstanding of Liverpool's role in the slave trade – this actually saw a relatively small number of enslaved Africans sold in Liverpool due to the triangular aspect of the trade route. Church records show enslaved Africans were brought to Liverpool and lived and died here. Newspaper advertisements shamelessly announce auctions of African men, women and children alongside other goods for

sale; rum, wine, tobacco and in one case even a tiger. Wealthy owners also placed appeals for runaways, offering considerable sums of money for information that would lead to their capture.

If the unproven stories like the Slave Gate or the Goree Piazza slave rings resurface today, they are usually dismissed but they often divide opinion, with anyone mentioning them being instantly rebuked by a host of people who'll inform them that they are myths – but are they? Instead could they have some basis in fact?

Three years after we began our research, the subject of a possible relic related to the Slave Trade has never been more important or newsworthy. In the United States in 2020 the killing of a Black man named George Floyd by white police led to worldwide outrage and protests. Although started years before, the Black Lives Matter movement gained immense support. Part of these protests were focused on old public monuments that were erected to honour the lives of merchants, many of these men owed their great wealth to the slave trade, a fact not mentioned on their plaques. On 7th June a statue of the slave merchant Edward Colston was toppled in Bristol. This brought the issue of how we address the memory of slavery in Britain. Institutions and councils across Britain were forced at last to reassess how they acknowledge the physical reminders of the Slave trade on their statues, organisation names and street signs named after these merchants.

For decades Liverpool has done more than most cities to acknowledge its shameful past, but it has been a slow and often challenged process. We have a museum dedicated to the subject, but we can still do more. The city had planned to install information plaques to the streets named after slave merchants but this was halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Local experts on the subject have organised tours of Liverpool showing the actual sites associated with the Slave Trade for many years.

In this chapter we examine some of the stories that appear to have little or no evidence to support them. As the story of the Slave Gate story is bound to several of the key stories; its supposed origin near a slave market and Tower Building and its connection to the transportation of enslaved people directly from Liverpool.

1 'Dicky Sam', 1883 and Gomer Williams, 1897 – Enfield's 1773 History of Liverpool, the anonymous The History of Liverpool 1810; Smither's 1825 Liverpool its commerce, statistics and institutions with a history of the cotton trade; Baines's 1852 History of the Commerce and town of Liverpool and Brooke's 1853 Liverpool as it was during the last quarter of the eighteenth century 1775 to 1800 all talk about the slave trade but in to the same extent.



1919 postcard, private collection. Tower Building can be seen in the background, placing the site close to the bottom of Water Street.

The 'Liverpool Slave Market'

On the 5th August 1889, the Liverpool Mercury had a feature about a conference to be held at Lucerne to discuss ways of suppressing of the existing slave trade in Africa that it stated still supplied slave markets in Arabia, Persia, Morocco and Turkey. The article included this claim:

"It may startle some readers to be told that the piece of open ground at the foot of Water-street was once the Liverpool Slave Market, where human beings were bought and sold less than a century ago – one can measure the growth of public feeling in the right direction by the surprise and horror this fact excites – and efforts such as those of this convention will at least help in the same way".

In 1919 an old warehouse on Back Goree collapsed, a photograph from the time (shown left) makes the claim that it was the 'Old Slave Market B'ld Collapsed, 150 years old' (therefore older than 1769).

As it was just after the First World War, it had been forced to stock more supplies than the old structure could withstand.

In the Daily Post on the 2nd August 1906, Alderman E. Paull had discussed the proposed redevelopment of the area close to Goree Piazzas – around Tower Building (alleged site of the slave gate), the Old Churchyard and Prison Weint. Paull promised that:-

This scheme will sweep away the last taint of the old slave trade from Liverpool – I mean the disappearance of Prison-weint, where slaves used to be sold.

A few weeks later in the Daily Post², a feature was published stating that the old Tower Building was to be demolished and replaced with the structure that is still there today.

The old building has always been of special interest because it indicated a historic landmark – to wit, the Old Tower, a model of which Professor Ramsey Muir suggests should be made as one item the celebration of the 700th anniversary King John Charter, has significance to the local antiquary : it stands on part, at any rate, of the site of the Slave Market.

The Yorkshire Evening Post reported the collapse, and linked the Goree Piazza warehouses in front of it, to auctions of enslaved Africans:-

The building occupied a site at the rear of Goree Piazzas, a name reminiscent of Liverpool's interest in the slave-trading enterprises – and was in existence when the buildings in front of it were used as a market place for slaves.

When the Coventry Evening Post ran the story, it stated:-

*The Goree, where the warehouse was situated, is composed solely of dock warehouses, many of them very old. It was in this thoroughfare that the life of the port of Liverpool started long ago and on this spot dealing in slaves carried on.*³

² Liverpool Daily Post – Monday 27 August 1906

³ Coventry Evening Telegraph 01 April 1919



The building in the centre of the photograph was known as Goree Piazza because of its covered walkway (visible on the left side of the building). The street behind it to the right was called Back Goree (originally part of the Goree Causeway). Tower Building can be seen on the left of Back Goree. The portion visible here is from James Street to Brunswick Street. *Traffic at the Pier Head City Engineers Department 23 September 1919: LRO.*

The primary source of evidence of slave auctions in Liverpool are the announcements that appeared in the press at the time. These advertisements do not suggest a 'slave market' but indicate smaller individual auctions. Of course it has to be remembered that these only record PUBLIC sales, private sales and auctions will have happened that were not advertised in the press. Also, Liverpool traded with the West Indies from 1666 – 90 years before Liverpool's first regular newspaper!

Over a century would pass before a book on the subject on the subject was published, the first by 'Dicky Sam' in 1884 and another by Gomer Williams in 1897.

Dicky Sam mentions slaves being sold on the steps of the Custom House and a street nicknamed Negro Row – named as such because of the number of merchants trading to Africa that were situated on it. But, caution must be applied when taking these accounts as fact as there is no other evidence available yet to support these stories.

There is proof of auctions that occurred close to the Custom House at the Old Dock, but this was in a tavern situated in Brook's Square called 'The sign of the Custom House' ran by a cooper named William Stainton:

*To be sold by Auction, On Wednesday next,
the 12th inst. October, at Eleven o'Clock in the Forenoon, at the House
of William Stainton, the Sign of the Custom-House, in Brooks's Square,
Liverpool,
A Handsome NEGRO BOY, From ANGOLA,
about 9 Years of Age.
Apply to the said Mr. Stainton.*⁴

The newspaper articles relate to the land the 'Slave Market' building stood on. The building itself dated from after 1802 (not 1769 as claimed). There is no doubt that enslaved Africans were sold in that area but there is no evidence to support the idea of one dedicated 'slave market'. Although the 'Slave Market' is highly unlikely, small-scale and impromptu slave auctions on newly arrived ships on the quayside almost certainly occurred and so would not appear in the contemporary press.

4 Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 7 October 1768

During this research, we have found many other stories that relate to the same area (the foot of Water Street)⁵ in the British Newspaper Archive, these were repeated periodically in the press and some live on today.

In 1923, Charles Herbert Reilly a Liverpool architect and University professor (knighted in 1944), contributed to a publication called *Merseyside: A Handbook to Liverpool and District Prepared on the Occasion of the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Liverpool*. What Reilly's chapter on the architecture of Liverpool lacks in facts and dates, he makes up for in opinion. In just one paragraph, he managed to cram in every slavery-related folk story associated with the city for the visiting delegates;

*Apart from these buildings, there are only a few fine old merchants' residences in Duke Street and the neighbourhood, now used as warehouses, and the wall of a slave prison. It is not certain whether the Goree Piazzas, along the river front, are as old as the eighteenth century, but they certainly are in the eighteenth century manner of building, and local tradition says that slaves were exposed for sale in their arcades. Curiously enough, there is still a very finely carved wooden tiger with a negress upon its back (which ought to be in the local museum) to be seen above their arches.*⁶

Why Reilly should have thought it necessary to include these stories in a thin chapter on architecture, or for that matter why he did not check when the Goree Piazzas were built, is puzzling.

If Reilly had checked when the Goree Piazzas were erected he may have thought twice about mentioning them in connection with a slave market. Construction commenced in the second half of the 1790s. (P. 16) They were destroyed by fire in 1802 and rebuilt soon after. The land the warehouses were built upon however may have seen small, undocumented auctions in the earlier part of the 18th century (P. 14).

5 The area around the Exchange (Town Hall) also has many slave-related stories. This area was the home of most of the coffee houses, inns and taverns of the town, in addition, many of the brokers had offices close to the Exchange and, it was often in the alleys that linked the coffee houses and inns to the offices that documented sales of West Indies goods (including slaves) took place.

6 See also Moody, 2020

The slave market in relation to the Goree Piazzas

The stories of enslaved people sold at a slave market or kept in chains at the Goree Piazzas are linked to the same location, an area of enclosed land called The Goree. This was named after the trading post of Gorée, Senegal that the British had captured from the French in 1758, it would be returned to them in 1763 (P. 15). By the time the warehouses were built here the name had little relevance to Liverpool's links to the slave trade.

Liverpool's Goree was the site of the 'Old Custom House' that was originally on the shore. The Corporation planned to build a new dock there, and the Bill for this was passed in 1761/62. The first stage was to construct a causeway and they named it Goree because at that point the British still held the island. This heralded the first stage of the dock construction. A dock wall is recorded as being built almost as soon as the Bill was passed but destroyed by a hurricane soon after.

The 'Slave Market' photo is dated 1919, and as it states the building is 150 years old (1769) this is the same year George Perry drafted a plan of the area (below). This enables us to examine the area in the time-frame of the story.

Perry included the 'new intended warehouses' that would later be Goree Piazzas but they would not be erected until 1793. Perry shows the land as 'Goree Strand', this was also known as Goree Causeway.

Where the Mersey had originally reached the walls of the Tower and the Old Churchyard of the church, the huge George's Dock was indicated in front. As can be seen in 1769, rather than warehouses the Old Custom House and the yard next to it is still standing.

The orange tint shows the position of the supposed 'Slave Market' warehouse superimposed onto Perry's map. Next to it is a conjectural view by W. G. Herdman. Part of the Old Custom House range of buildings dated from the 17th century. From the 1750s a shipwright named Thomas Galley had his premises there. He built his ships on the shore in front (near to the letters 'nd' of the word Strand), causing a long-running land dispute with Joseph Clegg (Mayor 1748 - 1749). Galley is also listed as the owner of at least five slave ships in the 1760s and 70s.¹ The 'Old Tower' can be seen to the right of St. Nicholas' Church and has become the town prison, later the site of Tower Building.

All of the warehouses built in this area were known as the 'Goree Warehouses'. The Goree Piazzas that Reilly refers to were so named because they featured a covered walkway of arches. The businesses located there would have this as their address as their entrance was under the arcade.

¹ Liverpool Slave Ship Voyages Database



The site of the purported slave market shown over a watercolour by W. G. Herdman. Original painting: LRO

W. G. Herdman's painting of the bottom of Water Street (previous page) shows the area in the late 17th century. Herdman had copied earlier drawings of how the shore looked in this period, in particular this 1821 lithograph by Maxim Gauci (1774 – 1854). In turn, Gauci used a painting from 1680 as his reference (p. 42). The Tower can be seen on the left with the Custom House at the foot of Water Street (c. 1663 – 1721-2). Behind that was an area called the Custom House Yard. Liverpool Castle can be seen on the right. At this period the waves of the Mersey came right up to the Tower. Later the land was enclosed and became the Goree Causeway with George's Dock adjacent.

It is possible that small, impromptu auctions of enslaved people took place on this shore before the warehouses were erected in the late 18th century (P. 20).



A history of the Goree Piazzas

Confusion has surrounded the history of the buildings that became known as Goree Piazzas, mainly due to historians misinterpreting the collective term ‘Goree Warehouses’ that predated them. The Goree Piazzas would represent just one part of these¹. Furthermore, the term piazza actually referred to the covered walkway and not the buildings themselves.

The Goree Causeway (‘Cawsey’ on Eyes’ plan of 1765, and ‘Strand’ on Perry’s plan of 1769) predated the Goree Piazzas by 3 decades. Prior to this the Mersey reached the foot of Water Street. The area was probably laid out between 1761 and 1762. The causeway was named after the capture of the French-held island of Gorée by the British in 1758. The British held the island until 1763 when it was returned following the Treaty of Paris. The island changed hands several times, Britain held it again between 1779 and 1783 and 1800 – 1817.

Businesses were trading on the ‘Goree Causeway’ in the 1770s. Gomer Williams² stated *‘On the 25th of May, 1778, the Liverpool Blues mustered 1,000 strong on the sands near Bank Hall, where they were reviewed, and presented with their colours. On the 4th of June, the birthday of George III., they were reviewed in front of the Goree warehouses.’*

In 1793, work had commenced on a gigantic warehouse for a West Indies merchant named James France. Next to James France’s warehouse, and closer to Water Street, was the warehouse of Baker & Dawson. This partnership achieved fame as a ship-builder and Privateer partnership³. Lesser known is that they were slave merchants and owners.

The researchers found burial records of St John’s church that show their at least two people of African heritage died within a year of each other,

both belonging to that warehouse. As names are not given it is very likely that these men were enslaved:

A Black Man of Mess Baker & Dawson. Burial Date: 8 Jan 1788

A Black Man of Mess Baker & Dawson. Burial Date: 18 Feb 1789

A few years after France built his warehouse, work on the Goree Piazzas commenced⁴, these were in front of France’s building. The passage between them was later renamed Back Goree. The Goree Piazzas consisted of two blocks, north and south. These blocks were separated by a gap aligned with the bottom of Brunswick Street.

A scheme for warehouses with a covered walkway had been planned since the 1760s but delayed for decades. Work was possibly stalled by the planned construction of Brunswick Street that opened c.1790. This street created a much needed additional route from the docks to Castle Street by cutting through the area around Drury Lane. A plan from 1797 (P.16) shows only half of the north section was completed in that year. At the close of the 1790s, only the north section of the Goree Piazzas was completed. Even by 1802, only one quarter of the south section had been completed.

This view below shows all of the original warehouses before the fire in 1802 (Thomas Troughton’s history of Liverpool, 1810). The north section of Goree Piazzas on the left is completed, but not the south section. Behind them is the 14 storey warehouse of James France.



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- 1 Picton was possibly the first to attribute the date of construction of the Goree Piazzas to 1793, this was in fact the date of James France’s warehouse.
 - 2 History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1744-1812.
 - 3 Baker and Dawson: Privateer Captain John Dawson, captured a French East Indiaman, The Carnatic, in October 1778 (valued at £135,000). His ship, The Mentor, was built by Peter Baker (Mayor of Liverpool in 1795) who built a mansion at Mossley Hill, called Carnatic Hall with the proceeds.

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- 4 The date for the Goree Piazzas is often cited as 1793. New evidence suggests that it could have been as late as 1796. (P. 16)



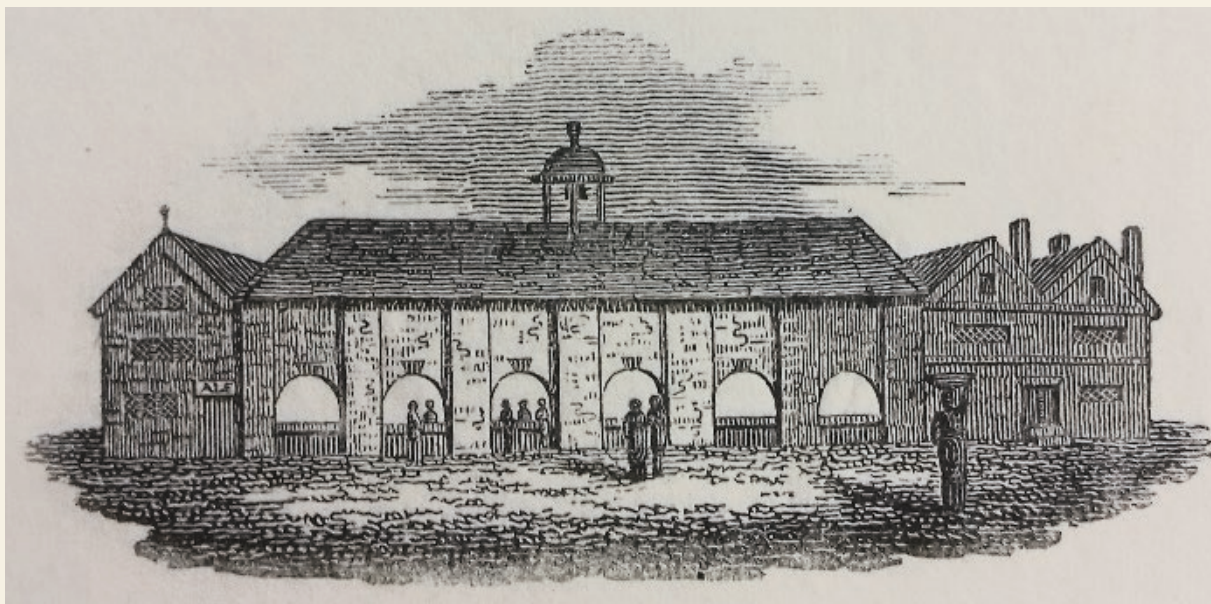
Left: A detail of an etching that was based on a painting by John Thomas Serres (1759–1825) from May 1797. To the right can be seen the warehouse of James France. On top of the pediment is a giant weather vane in the shape of a ship, (also visible on the view on page 15). Goree Piazzas, which were in front of France's warehouse, are not on this view, neither do they appear on the other view (P. 57).

Image: British Library.

A plan of 1786 (P. 56) shows a Fish Market (also called the Fish Stones) on the Goree Causeway. A range of short-lived and irregularly shaped buildings has also been erected around the market. Although catalogued as depicting Alms Houses, the picture on the left better fits the contemporary description of the Fish Stones as '*an oblong building... covered by a good roof with a small turret and supported with 22 pillars*'. When these were demolished, a new fish market was erected in James Street.

Image: Binns collection, LRO.

The plan below dated 1797 (William Jones) shows that one quarter of the Piazzas had been erected by that year. Work on the Goree Piazza was slow – with just over half of the warehouses completed before being destroyed by fire in 1802.



The short-lived buildings have been toned pink, the first stage of Goree Piazzas is shown green. The blue tone shows the 'Fish Stones' market.



James France (1728 - 1795)

France imported sugar, rum and other slave-produced commodities from the West Indies.

Like many merchants involved with the slave trade, France was a benefactor for the building of schools and churches. In his case, the Paradise Street Chapel (also known as the Octagon Chapel due to its design). France can be seen pointing to the chapel in the painting. France was in partnership with his nephew Thomas Hayhurst (France & Nephew) who, following the terms of France's will, took his surname on his death. With the money he inherited, and under instruction to invest in property, Thomas France purchased the Bostock Hall estate in Cheshire.

The France family were also in partnership with Thomas Fletcher of Gateacre (P. 37). At the age of 16, Fletcher (the son of a hatter) was apprenticed to France on the recommendation of Rev. John Yates, the minister at Key Street Chapel. Thomas Fletcher later obtained a share in the firm with money loaned in part from a fellow Unitarian, Matthew Nicholson. (p. 35-36).

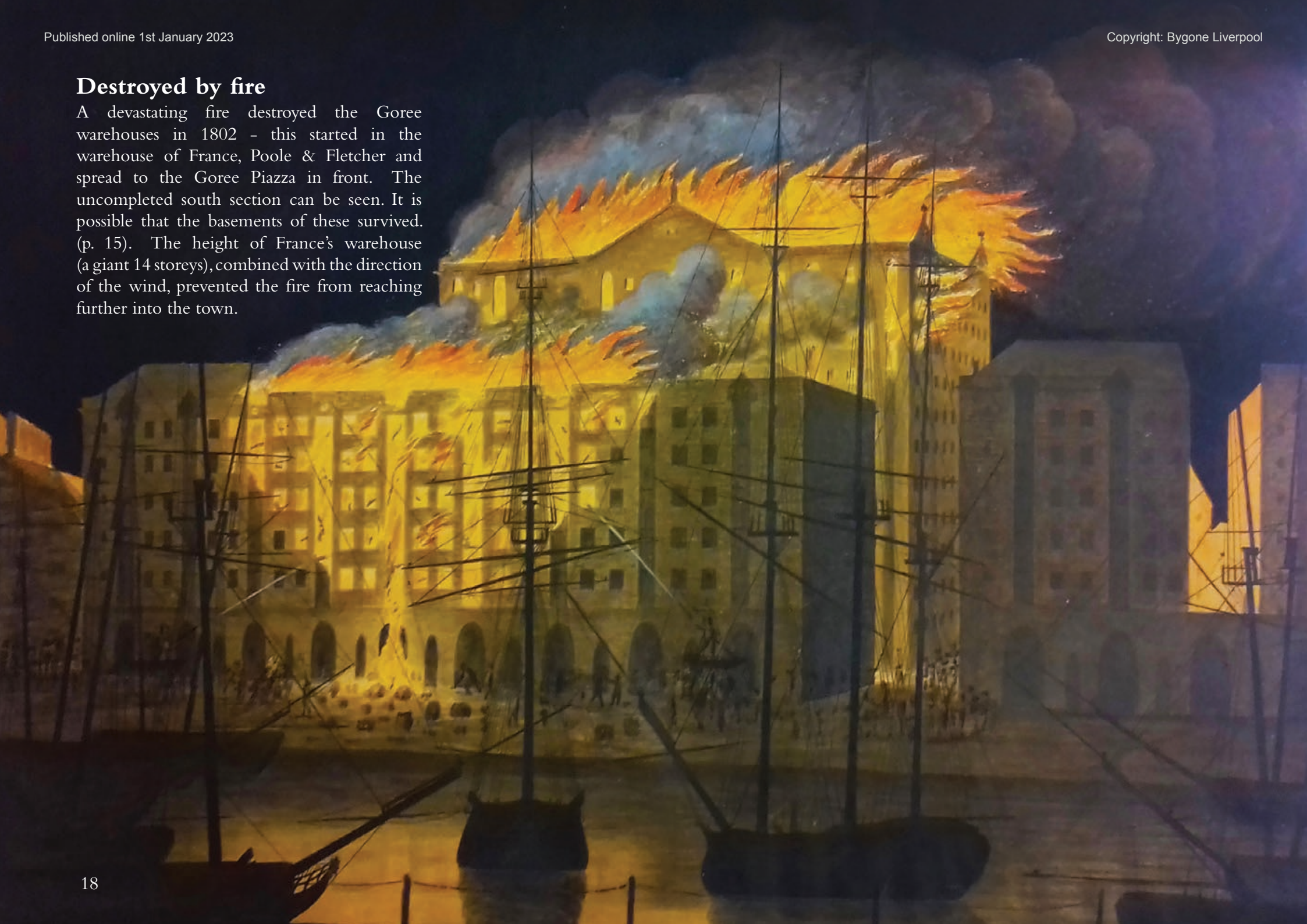
France lived in Everton and died on 21st July, 1795, just one year after his warehouse was finished. His will left no power enabling his trustees to sell them. An Act of Parliament was necessary to settle on the issue of Thomas France, and the children of the testator's niece, Alice, wife of Abraham Crompton¹.

A stained glass window in the church of St Michaels & All Angels in Middlewich is dedicated to James France. and bears his coat-of-arms. This was on the request of his grandson Thomas France France of Bostock.

¹ Maps and Plans of Liverpool and District by The Eyes Family, R. Stewart-Brown, M.A. HSLC

Destroyed by fire

A devastating fire destroyed the Goree warehouses in 1802 – this started in the warehouse of France, Poole & Fletcher and spread to the Goree Piazza in front. The uncompleted south section can be seen. It is possible that the basements of these survived. (p. 15). The height of France's warehouse (a giant 14 storeys), combined with the direction of the wind, prevented the fire from reaching further into the town.



This view shows the fierce intensity of the fire. Many of these warehouses had been storing highly inflammable goods from the West Indies – cotton, sugar and rum. *'A snuff of a candle among shavings in a porter-vault'* was blamed as the cause. Vast quantities of corn was also held (see p.17).

Image: LRO



This rare image from the Liverpool Record Office shows the devastation the fire caused. The North section of the Goree Piazzas has been reduced to smouldering rubble. Mr France's warehouse behind the Piazza (the source of the fire) is completely destroyed. Behind the column of smoke can be seen the Town Hall. The rebuilt Goree Piazzas can be seen on the next page.

Image: LRO

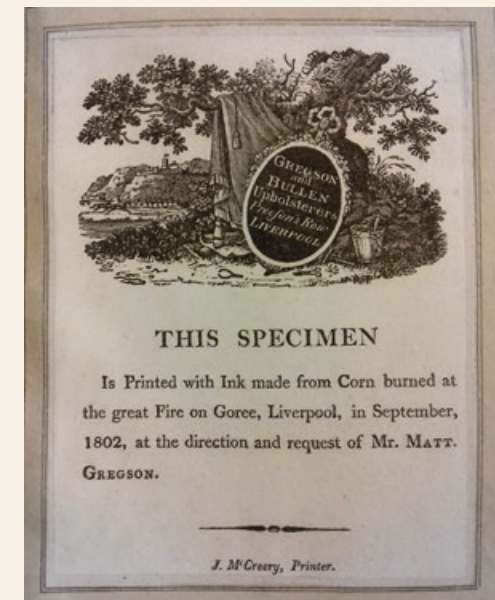




A close inspection of the basement of the rebuilt piazzas shows that some of the original arches of the building may have survived the fire. The left-hand side stone is rendered differently to the right. To blend the two sides together the entire surface has been painted – including the drainpipe.

The front has, given way, except some large stone arches, which, formed its basis ; these, as the buildings have fallen are mutilated, and appear: above the heaps of rubbish... a perfect picture.¹

Faced with a massive financial loss, estimated at the time as £1m, one enterprising Liverpool merchant saw an opportunity in the face of adversity. Mathew Gregson took the burt corn from the fire and turned it into ink!²



¹ Saint James's Chronicle - Saturday 18 September 1802

² Image: LRO



Too late for slave auctions

The dates for the erection of the Goree Piazzas (After 1797¹ northern half only – followed by fire – rebuilt 1802 with the southern section completed) make it very unlikely that slaves auctions took place there. As we have seen earlier due to the Somerset Ruling of 1772 (see page 6) public sales of slaves in Britain were very rare. The scenes Professor Reilly described of *'slaves were exposed for sale in their arcades'* appears to be pure fiction. But as the warehouses were built on the site of the original harbour (later named the Goree Causeway) and close to where the old Custom House was located, it is almost certain that smaller numbers of auctions took place on that shore decades before.

Because of the date evidence it would have been impossible for a 'Slave Market' – (used in the sense that the slaves are paraded on view to purchase) – to have existed at the Goree Piazzas, but there is a twist that has been overlooked.

Slaves (on foreign soil) were sold at Goree Piazzas

The story of the slave market refers to slaves present at the sale on British soil. But, if we consider slaves sold who were not present, i.e. on foreign plantations, then enslaved people WERE sold at Goree Piazza, and for that matter, all over the country, including London where many appeared in the Court of Chancery. An advertisement from 1805² shows a plantation in Little Courabanna in Demerara with land, trees buildings and *'154 prime negroes'* also the plantation Britannia on the West Sea Coast of the colony of Berbice with *'94 prime negroes – For further particulars apply to Jones's and Davies, Goree'*.

The fact that the slaves were not present at the time of these sales is surely a technicality? Human beings facing unimaginable cruelty on plantations were sold at Goree Piazzas – as well as across the whole country, in huge numbers. Numbers that in just one sale, far exceeded the numbers of slaves who were present at their own sale. These sales of plantation slaves were advertised in British newspapers over 50 years after George Dunbar's advertisement.



Goree Piazzas in 1910: LRO.

1 In 1797 John Thomas Serres produced two views that show France's warehouse but not the Goree Piazzas. British Library

2 Gore's Liverpool General Advertiser on Thursday, 31 January, 1805

The ‘Goree Piazza Slave rings’

Of all the many slave-related traditions in Liverpool, the story of slave rings on or near the Goree Piazzas is by far the most enduring. In the same year that Reilly gave his list of slavery relics, Cicely Fox Smith published her book ‘*Sailor Town Days*’ in which she recalls reading about slaves held ‘in cold storage during the process of transhipment to the plantations’ at the Goree Piazzas:

Its author I cannot remember — I am not sure it was not by that prolific author “Anon” — but its title, if I am not mistaken, was “John Manesty, Liverpool Merchant.” It was an incredibly prosy novel, and horribly printed on bad paper ; and I remember so little about it that I think the weather must have taken a turn for the better before I finished it. But the one part of it that found permanent lodgment in the scrap-heap of memory was the statement that there are — or were when the book was written — still to be seen in the neighbourhood of the Goree Piazza the barred dens where the slaves were, so to speak, put into cold storage during the process of transhipment to the plantations which were their final destination. Whether those places still exist I cannot say. I have never looked for them, for the simple reason that the scrap of memory only came to the surface while I was writing these pages.¹

The book Fox Smith recalls reading is *John Manesty, A Liverpool Merchant* by William Maginn and was published in 1844. It is a work of fiction (not to be confused with the real slave merchant Joseph Manesty²). Contrary to Fox Smith’s statement, the book makes no mention of either Goree Piazzas or slave dens. Although Fox Smith can’t be sure where she has heard of the story of the Goree slave dens, or looked for them, she has no qualms about repeating the story. (C. Fox Smith says she didn’t finish the book and neither did Maginn, as he died before completing it, with the concluding chapters written by Mr. Charles Oilier).

¹ *Sailor Town Days*, C. Fox Smith 1923

² See bygoneliverpool.wordpress.com: *John Newton in Liverpool – From slaver to customs official*, and *John Newton in Liverpool, Part 2. Locations and connections*.

Liverpool’s famous solicitor, Rex Makin, writing in his column in the *Liverpool Echo*, 5th August 1994 ‘recalled’ seeing them as a child:-

When I was a small boy, my father took me down to the Pier Head, passing a colonnade at the foot of James Street and Water Street and known as the Goree Piazza. He pointed out chains on top of the cellar covers and told me it was where slaves were kept.

Terry Fields, then MP for Broadgreen, when speaking to the House of Commons in 1985, used the story of the slave rings (rather confusingly) to highlight a lack of investment in Liverpool:-

My father was a docker, so I feel qualified to speak on some of the matters on which I hope to enlarge. I remember, as a young person, seeing around the pier head, the Goree Piazza and the Strand, shackled to the wall, bolts where slaves were tied up in the lucrative trade in human misery.

Although this story had been repeatedly dismissed as myth from the 1920s, it refused to be forgotten. In the mid 1970s it was often discussed (and repeatedly dismissed) in letter pages of the *Liverpool Echo* or in the columns of local historians that had been asked about them by a reader:-

And now, a cri de Coeur from Mrs. M. McKibbin, of Greenside Close, Castlefields, Runcorn, who tells me she used to swing on the rings at the Goree “and with my vivid kid’s imagination pictured the poor slaves tied up all night. “please don’t say they weren’t there,” she pleads, “and don’t disillusion me by saying they were there for another reason”³

Mrs McKibbin’s plea of ‘**please don’t say they weren’t there and don’t disillusion me by saying they were there for another reason**’ shows how deeply the story had reached into Liverpool folklore.

³ *Liverpool Echo*, 3rd October, 1974

Origin of the Goree slave ring story

One possible origin of the Goree Slave Rings story, may be the result of the enterprising owner of 'Thorn's Dining Rooms', situated in the Piazzas. Thorn turned the cellar under the dining rooms into a slavery-themed attraction. When the story was discussed in the Liverpool Echo in 1975, readers sent letters into the paper recalling being brought to Thorn's as children many years before, and being shown a chamber with slave rings, chains embedded into walls, leg irons and neck irons. 'Historic items' and notices relating to the sale of slave were pinned to the walls.⁴



⁴ Liverpool Echo, 12th September 1975

This story resurfaced in 1990 in the letters page of the Liverpool Echo, when reader L. W. Harrison of L12 recalled going into the derelict Thorn's cafe years before:

My mate and I went into this cafe. The door had been broken down so we went down the cellar and, impaled on the walls, were mighty iron rings. We came came to the conclusion that they were there for the slave trade.

Thorn's Dining Rooms was owned by Herbert Thorn and was located at 18 Goree Piazzas, near to James Street. He also had Temperance Hotels in Tithebarn Street and Whitechapel. The dining rooms were at Goree Piazzas from about 1915 to at least 1938. An advertisement for staff states it was situated at the foot of James Street.

A map from 1785 (13 years after the Somerset Ruling) shows that Thorn's occupied the site that was the previously mentioned fish market called 'The Fish Stones'. Prior to Thorn opening his dining rooms, the Goree premises had been a corn warehouse.

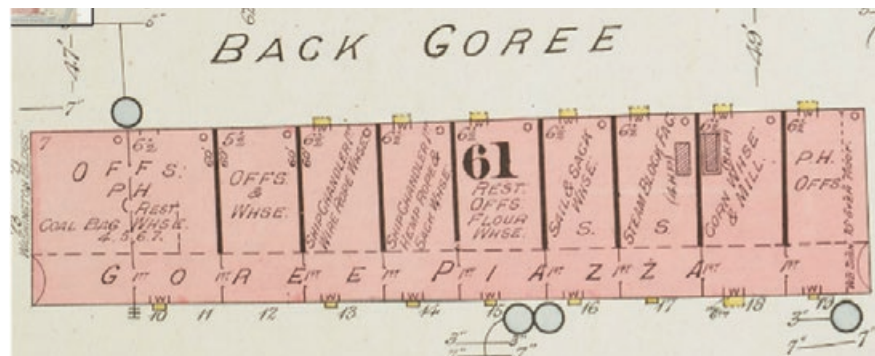
It appears that Herbert Thorn had spotted a marketing opportunity, and created a fake slave dungeon beneath his café to titillate his customers. No doubt utilising the esisiting rings that had been used for lowering sacks of corn into the basement (Parbuckling),⁵ and adding the leg irons and assorted slave posters to complete the effect.

⁵ The quickest and easiest way to lower cask goods into a shallow basement was by the technique known as 'parbuckling'. Two ropes secured to rings in the basement wall are passed over the top of the cask, which is then rolled down the wall under control by a man on each of the ropes. When you consider the variety of goods that used to be packed in casks you understand why there were lots of 'slave rings' in Liverpool cellars. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/faq.aspx>

Thorn's Cafe was located at the end of Goree Piazza that is closest to James Street (coloured below on an 1848 map). Goad's insurance map from the 1880s (below) shows that before Thorn took over, number 18 Goree Piazzas was a corn warehouse. Iron rings would have been used to lower the sacks of corn into the cellars.



Goree Piazzas, a sign for H.Thorn Dining Rooms can be seen.
Image: LRO



Number 18 Goree Piazzas featured in an advert in 1914 (Liverpool Echo - Thursday 23 April 1914). This building would later become Thorn's Dining Rooms. The advertisement lists a jigger, machinery and fittings suitable for a corn business - no doubt this corn warehouse also included iron rings on the wall.

The 'negress on a tiger' at Goree Piazzas

Professor Reilly also referred to a *'finely carved wooden tiger with a negress upon its back'* on the wall of the Goree Piazzas. This was in fact a carved wooden sign for Khoosh Tonic Bitters. It was carved by a ship's figurehead maker who had premises Mann Island.

Rather than depicting a slave, it actually depicted a Hindu Goddess holding a flag saying 'Health.' This sign dated only from circa 1880.

Apart from tigers being from Asia and not Africa, Reilly had mistaken a sign less than 50 years old for a relic of the slave trade in the 1700s!



A trade card for Khoosh Tonic Bitters showing the lady on a tiger from 1882.
Image: Wellcome Collection.

Right: The carved wooden sign for Khoosh Tonic Bitters on Goree Piazzas made by a masthead carver. Image: LRO

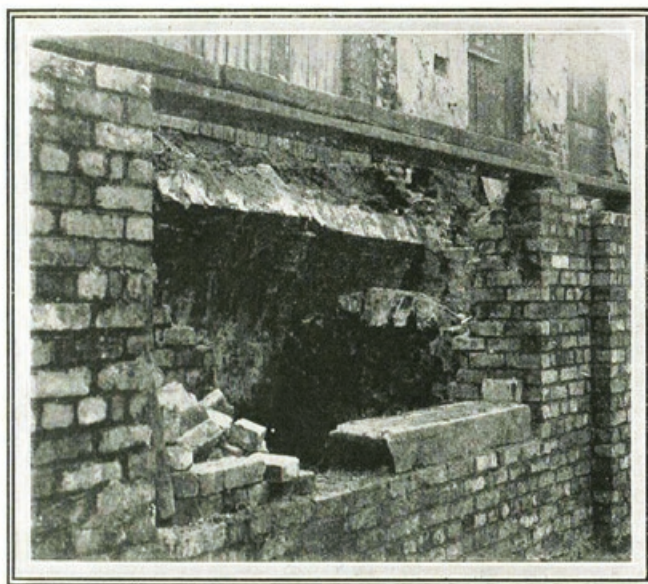


The 'Slave Cell' in Duke Street

Although not related to the area around the warehouses on the Goree, the 'Slave Cell' in Duke Street that Reilly mentioned was photographed in 1908 and printed in the Illustrated London News. A press clipping, shortly after Reilly wrote his chapter, shows the story had regained popularity at that time. It had been sent in to a children's newspaper, this time it was under a shop complete with gates, tunnels, seats, and iron rings and the floor worn by the feet of slaves.

Many merchants had homes, counting houses and warehouses in Duke Street and some survive to this day. A cellar to store goods or wine under the house would have been an important feature.

Although it is possible that those merchants, who had enslaved or indentured African servants, allocated living space for them in the cellar (perhaps some were locked to avoid escape), there is no evidence to indicate these were 'cells' to confine them before shipment.



Illustrated
London News
Saturday 22
August 1908.
Image: BNA.

A RELIC OF LIVERPOOL'S SLAVE-TRADING DAYS: THE ARCHED ROOF
OF A SLAVE'S CELL.

The slave-cells are now being demolished in Duke Street, Liverpool. In them slaves were confined while they were awaiting shipment.

How did the stories originate?

These stories arose because of a lack of discussion and education about the slave trade. With more books, websites and documentaries being made, we have a better understating today than ever. But the resurfacing of these stories from time to time shows there is still more progress to be made.

Some have a little basis in truth, the original Tower of Liverpool had been used a prison with cells holding criminals and French prisoners. This was in the area where slave ships left for Africa and arrived from the West Indies, and slave-produced goods were stored. These two factors may have merged in the imagination of Liverpool people to create the tradition.

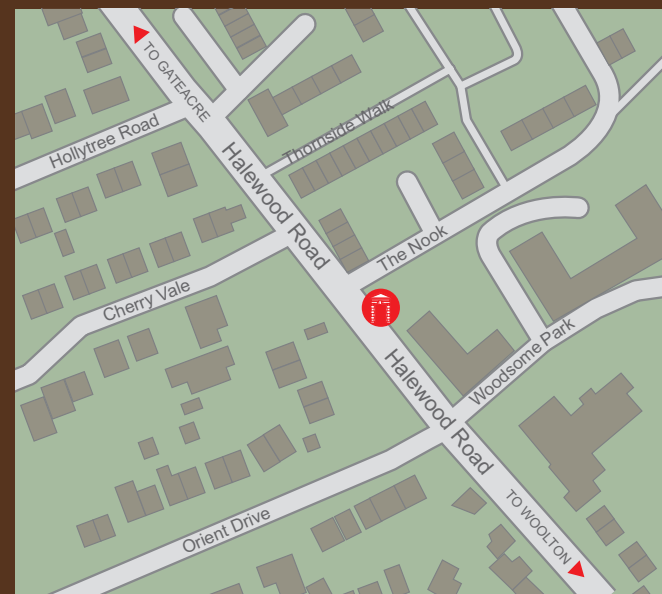
With better education, the real history of Liverpool's involvement in the slave trade can be focussed on. The stories serve as a distraction to the factual records. It is these stories that often reduce a serious discussion of the subject to one of correcting mere conjecture.

In 1994 the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery was created in Liverpool to explore Liverpool's role in the slave trade and in 2007 this became the International Slavery Museum; 'increasing the understanding of transatlantic, chattel and other forms of enslavement'. A visit to which is well recommended.

Laurence Westgaph has researched Liverpool's role in Transatlantic Slavery for many years, his regular walking tours of the city are thoughouly recommended. At the time of writing, Laurence has put forward a motion to Liverpool Council, which has been approved, to erect signs across the city to give 'a honest account' of the part Liverpool played in the enslavement and exploitation of African people.

Details for Laurence's Twitter and Facebook sites can be found in the Recommended Reading section.

A list of many of the public auctions in Liverpool of African people can be found at the end of this book.



Shown left is the Slave Gate in 1976 with a view of Gateacre Hall Hotel beyond it. Image: LRO.

Above shows the location and the gateway in 2020. Image: Bygone Liverpool.

Part 2: Liverpool's 'Slave Gate'

Gateacre is located six miles [SE] from the centre of Liverpool. It borders Woolton, Belle Vale and Childwall. Within a quarter of a mile of the village centre are an impressive 100 listed buildings.

Gateacre is known for its Victorian Tudor-style structures, it also has the 17th century Grange Lodge and a Unitarian chapel constructed around 1700. It also boasts a charming village. In 1969 Gateacre was one of the first places in Liverpool to be designated as a conservation area.

As impressive as Gateacre's architectural history may be, it is not a place you would expect to find a relic of Liverpool's involvement with the Transatlantic Slave Trade. And yet, just a short walk away from the village green, on Halewood Road, and close to the corner where the road meets the lane called The Nook, there is a stone doorway that looks oddly out of place. Known as the "Slave Gate" the entrance has been permanently locked for well over 100 years. With the old house it was connected to now demolished, it adorns the perimeter of a modern apartment block and almost obscured from the view of passing cars by a bus shelter.

The local legend of the 'Slave Gate' is that the doorway was taken from an 18th century building in Liverpool where enslaved Africans were sold and it was the last place the slaves stood before being transported to the West Indies - to face a life of cruelty and forced labour on the plantations. The exact location in Liverpool of this 'slave market' building in Liverpool has been a mystery.

The story of the 'Slave Gate' is reminiscent of 'Door of No Return' of Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast, Ghana, (HQ of British slave-trading operations). This was one of the final exit points of the slaves before being transported to the Americas in barbaric, overcrowded ships in conditions of unimaginable cruelty¹.

The Gateacre gateway is a grade II listed structure, but the description by English Heritage offers little information to incite more than a passing interest and nothing about its local name 'The Slave Gate':

Historic England Listing

A Grade II Listed Building in Woolton, Liverpool

SJ 4287 HALEWOOD ROAD (east side), Liverpool L25

41/568 Gateway to Gateacre Hall Hotel

14.3.75 G.V. II

Free-standing gateway at former garden entrance (now disused, and standing beside car park). Perhaps late C17, or early C18.

Stone with rusticated square pilasters, corniced keystone and pediment. Iron gate.

Once the gateway was brought to Gateacre, it has remained in the same location - now the modern accommodation of Woodsome Park. Previously, this was the site of the Gateacre Hall Hotel, demolished in 2003/2004 by Bellway Homes.

Where the gate came from, the identity of the person who brought it to Gateacre, and the reason why it was moved there, has been unknown until now.

¹ Another 'Door of no return' exists at the museum of the House of Slaves (*Maison des Esclaves*) on Gorée Island off the coast of the city of Dakar, Senegal. This was built later and was the home of a Senegalese slave trader.



Architectural features of the 'Slave gate'

English Heritage describe the gates as 'Perhaps late C17, or early C18'. It is topped with a pediment, and supported by an entablature styled lintel. Set within it is a dropped keystone, flanked by two voussoirs. Two rusticated pilasters (columns) feature alternating courses of smooth faced square blocks, or "blocking". It's constructed of locally quarried yellow sandstone. The assembly is known as a Gibbs' Surround named after James Gibbs (1682 – 1754). Gibbs borrowed the style from the Renaissance and popularized it in England. Remnants of stucco show that at some point in its history the whole gateway had been rendered.



Examples of stucco (render) can be seen on the top left photograph. The shape of the rear of the pediment suggests that it was originally an entrance on a wall that reached the height of the pilasters only. The metal gate is a much later addition, probably dating from when it was erected in Gateacre. Although partially obscured, the name *St. Pancras Ironwork Co., London* can be made out. (p. 34).

All photographs: Bygone Liverpool





Gateacre Hall Hotel, 1975. Image: LRO

The legend of the Slave Gate

Back in 2017, Ross Walsh, a retired member of the Liverpool Ambulance Service, told the authors about the gate by recalling a conversation he had with a patient:

I used to take an old chap home from the Royal (Hospital) regularly. As he was always last off, I used to have a cup of tea with him. He was a former lecturer and he mentioned the demolition of the Gateacre Hall Hotel, a grand house which stood in Halewood Road until a decade ago and was told by the owners of it during a conversation, that an ornate side gate had once been on the front of that building in the Goree. The reason it finished up in Gateacre was because the family who owned the Gateacre Hall Hotel as a family home were descended from one of the movers and shakers of the abolition movement. When the building was demolished, the stones and the gate were taken to Gateacre. It was always referred to as The Slave Gate. The hall is gone now and there's new flats on the site. But the gate still stands.

The following description appeared in a small story in the Liverpool Echo of 25th March 1974, and came from Bill Taylor, the owner of Gateacre Hall Hotel. Although the story is actually about Mr Taylor spotting an old earthenware bottle dating from 1830 during extension work, his description of the legend is the classic version of the story:

The hall itself dates back to 1652 and is steeped in history. One story in particular is attached to the The Slave Gate, which according to tradition, has been kept permanently locked since the ending of the slave trade. It is said that anyone one who passes through the gate will be cursed.

With elements of slaves and curses, it is easy to see how such a tale could excite the imagination of people growing up in the area, and how each generation could have passed the legend on to send shivers down the backs of their own children!

Derek Whale, a Liverpool historian and long-standing journalist for the Liverpool Echo, had written many articles in his column in the 1970s and 80s about the slave trade. These often featured popular Liverpool slave-related legends – followed with facts to demonstrate that most of these were probably untrue. Whale was also an author, he mentioned the Slave Gate in his 1984 book *Lost Villages of Liverpool*. Although he attributed the legend iron gate, rather than the stone surround:

Gateacre Hall, Halewood Road, thought to have been originally built about the middle of the 17th Century, has been altered considerably and is now a hotel. This has what is called The Slave Gate - a wrought-iron gate, taken from the site now occupied by Tower Building at the foot of Water Street. Slaves were reputed to have passed through this gate into the older Tower building there, where they were confined pending transhipment.

Some slaves certainly were sold in Liverpool, but in spite of the sensational stories of waterfront cellars with ring-bolts, chains and so on, very few slaves actually passed through the port, being shipped from Africa directly to the Americas and West Indies.

In the 2008 book 'Discover Liverpool', author Ken Pye repeated Whale's claim:

Now the only remnant of the original hall and its grounds is the Slave Gate. This is a white, stone arched gateway containing a wrought-iron gate. This has been taken from the old Liverpool Tower that once stood at the foot of Water Street in the city-centre, where Tower Buildings now stands.

For generations this has been known as the 'Slave Gate', in belief that slaves have passed through this gate, into the old Tower where they were then sold.

Ken Pye also stated that the association of slavery with the gateway is unfounded:

However, whilst the gate may well be from the Tower, the association with slavery has no basis in fact. Very few slaves ever passed through the port and even less were ever sold here except at very infrequent private sales.

The first mention of the Slave Gate?

The earliest mention of the legend that the authors could find is in 1937 in the Liverpool Daily Post. An architect named Huan Arthur Matear¹ (1845 – 1945) submitted a letter in response to a story about an alleged ghost at what was then known as Gateacre Hall² before it became a hotel. Matear had visited the house, then owned by George Hunter Robertson, ‘over 60 years over earlier’ as a student and later made it his home:

As regards the so-called “ghost,” I may say I never saw or even heard of one, and I think it is very unfortunate that rumour should attribute such a thing to a fine old place.

As a matter of historic interest, may I add that the old stone entrance gateway and wrought iron gates were many years ago removed from a site now occupied by Tower buildings, at the bottom of Chapel-street (?), where they formed the original gateway through which the slaves were reputed to have passed into the old building where they were confined pending transhipment.³

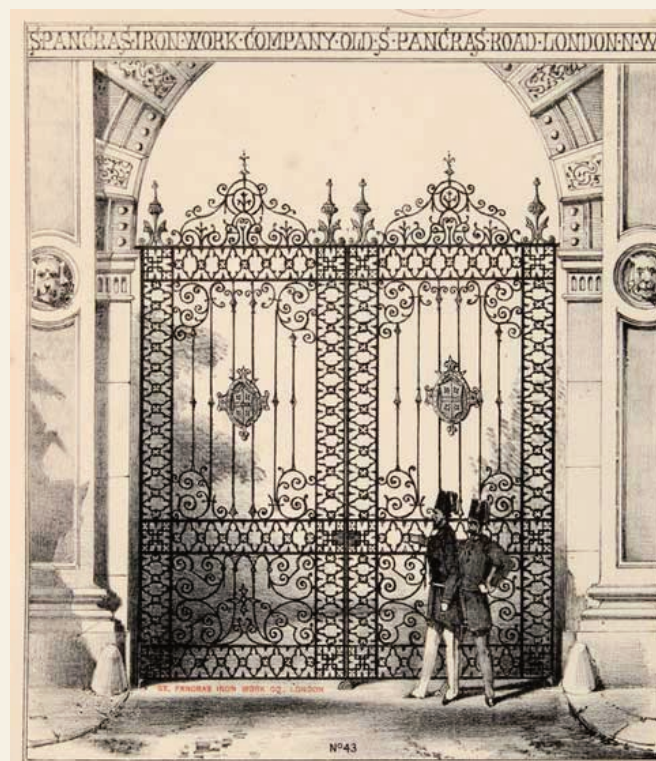
¹ Matear designed amongst other buildings the Liverpool Cotton Exchange and Southport’s Holy Trinity Church.

² See next section.

³ July 5, 1937 – Liverpool Daily Post. Note – Question mark after Chapel Street is by the Daily Post. See also Moody, 2020.

The wrought-iron gate

The wrought-iron gate that Matear, Whale and Pye mention, appears to be much later than the stone surround. It probably dates from the latter half of the 19th century and was probably constructed by the St. Pancras Ironwork Co., London. The maker of the iron gate is likely to be the same as that which can be seen on the lock mechanism, (see page 27). This company was active c.1860 to 1916. The company advertised in national newspapers, including Liverpool. Because of its date of construction the iron gate cannot be related to the slave trade.



Iron gates and railings from a catalogue of the St. Pancras Iron Work Co., 1870.

The site of the Gateacre Hall Hotel

How did this stone gateway make its way to Gateacre? Is any truth in the story about slaves? To find the answers we need to look at the house itself and its previous occupants.

The Gateacre Hall Hotel was part of a group of buildings said to date back to the 14th Century. The earliest of these was modified in 1652, this event being recorded on a stone lintel inside the property. The hotel building that faced Halewood Road was known for a period as The Laurels, a private house, this was erected in the early 18th century.

As well as being known as The Laurels, the house was also known by several names including Mersey Vale, Falcon Rock and Gateacre Hall (after another building of the same name was demolished, this was situated at the top of Gateacre Brow).

William Shepherd and the Nicholsons

The group of houses and farm buildings the The Laurels belonged to was set in a rural environment until the late 19th/early 20th century. They were reached by a lane called The Nook that took its name from a house of the same name. The importance of this house in relation to other buildings can be seen on this map from 1849. The Laurels, coloured green for identification, has ornamental gardens.

The Nook was the home of the Minister of Gateacre Chapel, most notably William Shepherd (1768 – 1847). Shepherd was a dissenting minister, abolitionist, writer and politician. After completing his education in 1790, he became tutor to the sons of the Rev. John Yates of Toxteth Unitarian Chapel.



Ordnance Survey map from 1849 showing the lane leading to 'The Nook'. The Laurels is coloured green. The small building behind it was an ancient house that was constructed before 1652.

William Roscoe was to be a great influence on him. Shepherd moved into the Nook in 1792 when he married Frances, daughter of Robert Nicholson. Shepherd was to become a great family friend of the Nicholsons for many years. Shepherd died at The Nook on 21st July 1847, and was buried in the yard of the chapel. The Nook was demolished in 1880 to make way for the Cheshire Lines railway. The remaining buildings and the lane kept its name.

For many years The Laurels was the home of the Nicholson family. This much-respected Unitarian family, known for their humanitarian deeds, began its connection to Liverpool when linen merchant Matthew Nicholson had moved here from Dumfriesshire in 1688.

Robert, the father of Frances Nicholson who Shepherd married, is reputed to have given up his interests in the slave trade because of the abolitionist stance of Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce, and at great personal expense:

Matthew's son Robert continued the work of humanitarian effort ; thus in the time of the anti-slavery movement he was so impressed by the disclosures and the advocacy of Clarkson and Wilberforce that he separated himself wholly from a firm engaged in the lucrative slave trade. He thereby lost a great fortune...

Robert Nicholson would have no fellowship with the traffickers in negroes, and he died a comparatively poor man, but with a clear conscience.¹

This is actually false, as Robert remained a member of the Africa Company of Merchants, and attended its annual meeting from 1770 to 1779. His last attendance being just a few weeks before his death. A possible explanation for this falsehood is as Nicholson was the father-in-law of Shepherd, a prominent abolitionist, it was too much of an embarrassment, and needed covering up.

We can glean some information about this family from a book written by Francis Nicholson. In 1798 one of Matthew's sons, Thomas Nicholson (1753-1825), moved to the family house in Gateacre from Gorton Hall after carrying on the business of one of his brothers in Manchester:

By 1798 T. N. had decided that Manchester was the wrong place for his wife's health and his own business. He thought of farming, and considered estates at Wrexham and Rotherham, but his wife dissuaded him from embarking on a business with which he was not acquainted and by Sept., 1798 he and his family were settled at Gateacre in a house to which the children gave the names of Mersey Vale House, and perhaps also Falcon Rock, neither

being its official name. There was some farmland attached and the annual value of the property from 1810 to 1824 averaged over £153, this no doubt including the value of the crops and garden produce.

Thomas married Mary Hatfield and had six children. Just three weeks after giving birth to her last child Dorothy she succumbed to a five month long illness and died on the 19 April 1803. Dorothy Nicholson was to live a long life and be forever connected to Gateacre and the house.

Dorothy attended the school where Shepherd was the minister and schoolmaster. In 1807 Thomas Nicholson voted for William Roscoe in the election of that year, an event Dorothy was to remember, even though she was aged just 4 – wearing a pink sash she cried “Roscoe forever!”



Dorothy Nicholson owned the house for many years, she leased it out while she lived at 120 Allerton Road, Woolton.
Image: LRO.

¹ Liverpool Mercury 3rd April 1893

Later Occupants of the Hall

Thomas Fletcher (1767 – 1850) is shown as the occupier of the house on the 1848 Tithe Schedule. Although Fletcher had lived in several places prior to The Nook, his family could be traced back to there from 1682, as a date stone in the barn was inscribed with the names of his ancestors Francis and Elizabeth Fletcher. He died at the Nook in 1850.

Like many Liverpool merchants of the period, Fletcher had interests in the slave trade, He had plantations in Jamaica with Joseph Brookes Yates and in banking partnership with Roscoe's son, William Stanley².

Fletcher and Yates were also in partnership with James France, the West Indies merchant who erected the first warehouses on Goree Causeway. (p. 15)

When slave-ownership was abolished in Britain's colonies in 1833, Fletcher received compensation from the British Government:

Compensation awarded to Thomas Fletcher for the loss of his slaves

Jamaica Clarendon 278 (Richmond Park) £1,846 8s 0d

Jamaica St Thomas-in-the-East, Surrey 299 (Mount Pelier (sic) Estate) £2,948 9s 1d

Jamaica St Thomas-in-the-East, Surrey 300 (Mount Ephraim) £2,912 11s 6d

Jamaica Vere 65 (Caswell Hill) £7,029 16s 1d³

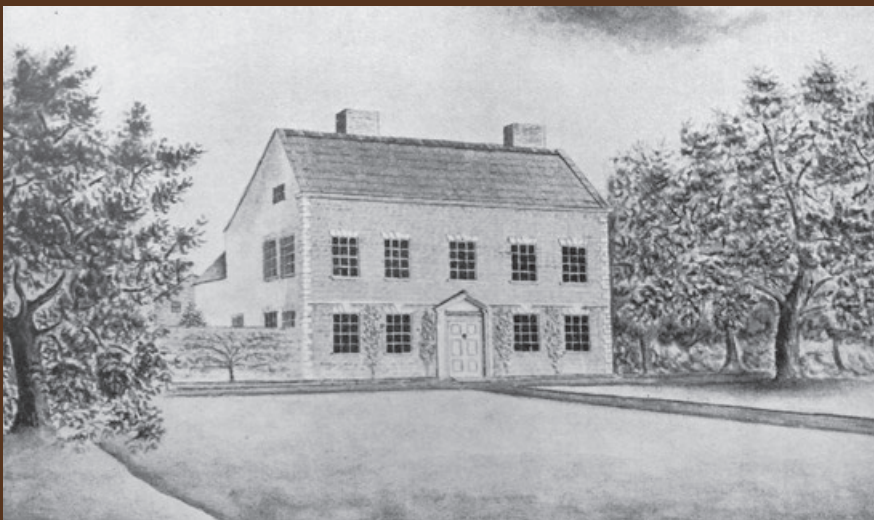
After Fletcher the house was occupied by Thomas Robert Wilson. He appears on the 1861 census when the house is listed as 1 Nook Lane and is listed as an American Merchant, born in the United States.

² www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/43542

³ Information: www.ucl.ac.uk



The Laurels was renamed Gateacre Hall after another building of the same name was demolished. The blue circle indicates the site of the first Gateacre Hall and the pink shows the site of The Nook/Gateacre Hall Hotel. The top map is from 1848 Little Woolton Tithe Schedule, on the second map can be seen the Cheshire Lines Railway that was the reason Dr Williams Shepherd's house was demolished.



Mersey Vale, the house of Thomas Nicholson. Image: LRO



A postcard from 1904 showing the group of buildings behind The Laurels. The card states 'The Nook (A.D. 1652) Gateacre, Liverpool. The house called The Nook was originally situated at the end of the lane but was demolished when the railway was built in 1880. The back of The Laurels can be seen on the right. Image: Personal collection.



Nook Lane in 1976, showing the house as the Gateacre Hall Hotel. Image: LRO



The same view today, the picturesque and historic buildings that lined this lane were destroyed to make way for an apartment block. Although every effort was made by the Gateacre Society to save them, English Heritage deemed them unsuitable for listing.

In 1864 the property was again up for sale, at this period it was known as The Laurels. An advertisement shows that it had a garden, orchard, stable and barn plus other erections and buildings belonging to it. Land adjoining the property was known by the names of The Orchard, Backside Hey and Outlying Meadow. Four cottages were included, one being occupied by Chapple Gill Esq, a senior partner in a firm of Liverpool cotton brokers.

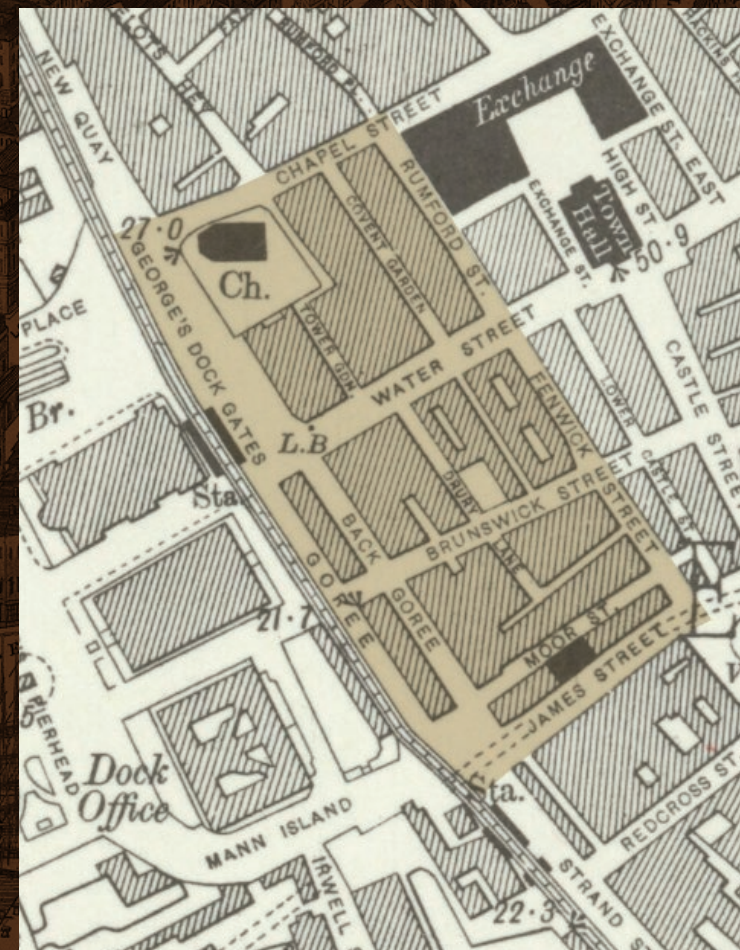
The family of Chapple Gill were painted by James Tissot when they lived at the house named Lower Lee in Beaconsfield Road, Woolton. The painting features his wife Catherine Gill and her two year old son Robert and their six year old daughter Helen, together with their dog. This charming painting captures the family life of the well-heeled in the Woolton of the 19th Century. The painting is on display at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

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CHESTER WESTMINSTER HOTEL
 Olive Thomas, Bill Walton.
LIVERPOOL GATEACRE HALL
HOTEL.—Don Ellis, Gateacre Trio.
LIVERPOOL PALLADIUM. — Film
 season.
MOBBERLEY FROZEN MO
HOTEL.—Johnny McGee Trio.
SHOTON CUSTOMS HOUSE
HOTEL.—Eileen Wayman, and Cabare
 as booked.

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Admission 30p.
Bar open 8 p.m. to Midnight
Wednesday :
Topless Go-Go's and Disco
Admission 30p. Bar open 8 to 12
Tuesday and Thursday :
DISCO IN THE NOOK BAR
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Friday :
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[illegible]



To help with identification of the area explored in this chapter, is this map of Liverpool in 1928. The 20th century structures of Port of Liverpool, Cunard and Liver Buildings can be seen on the left together with St. Nicholas' Church.

The Goree Piazzas (demolished after WW2) can be seen spanning Water Street and Moor Street.

Left: 1847- Ackermann's Panoramic View of Liverpool
www.historic-liverpool.co.uk

The original site of the Slave Gate

The accounts given by Matear, Whale, Pye and others provide a consistent location for the building in central Liverpool from where the gateway was taken:

‘the site now occupied by Tower Building’
or
‘at the foot of Water Street’.

Crucially, this is also the exact area where local legend stated that the ‘Slave Market’ was situated. It appeared that the stories of Gateacre’s Slave Gate and the Slave Market were intrinsically linked.

For the purpose of this research, this area was taken as being from Chapel Street at the northern edge of the church of St. Nicholas to James Street. (see inset map on facing page)

This is an historic location in Liverpool – the church of St. Nicholas being built on the site that had been a place of worship since 1256. When the town was cluster of a just few streets, this patch of ground had witnessed the coming and going of ships – even before King John had issued his letter of patent in 1207.

Along with the streets surrounding the Exchange (Town Hall), the area at the bottom of Water Street is also linked to many of slave-related stories. Some of these are historic fact, like the sale of 11 Africans at the Exchange Coffee House in Water Street in 1766.

To discover the building that was the original home of the gateway, we must examine the site back through history from the late 17th to the 19th centuries.

In Liverpool we are fortunate to have an amazing archive of paintings of early Liverpool drawn by the likes of W. G. Herdman, E. Beattie and James Brierley. These artists captured the town at the moment

of great development, recording these ancient structures before they were lost forever. The first avenue of research was therefore scouring these archives for a similar gateway.



Thanks to artists such as William Gavin Herdman, Liverpool has an amazing record of how it looked in the 18th to 19th centuries. Many of these can be found in the Liverpool Record Office. After that, period photography becomes the primary resource for historic buildings. Herdman even dedicated drawings solely to doorways as can be seen in the examples above of Cooper's Row and Fenwick Street.

Image: Personal collection



The area at the foot of Water Street

Above is a painting of how Liverpool looked at the start of the town's links with the slave trade. This section, taken from the Peter's Painting (owned by Town Clerk Ralph Peters and painted in 1680) shows Water Street in the centre of the picture. The Tower of Liverpool (built c. 1256 and fortified c. 1406 by John Stanley) is on the left corner of the street and the custom house is to the right.

Key to buildings in 1848

- 1 The Exchange (Town Hall)
- 2 Water Street
- 3 Site of the Ancient Tower of Liverpool
- 4 The first Tower Buildings
- 5 Liverpool Parish Church (Our Lady and Saint Nicholas)
- 6 Westbrook's Merchants' Coffee House
- 7 The Liverpool Arms
- 8 The warehouse depicted on the photograph showing the 'Slave Market'
- 9 Back Goree
- 10 Goree Piazzas

The area in 1848.

In 1888 the block of buildings from 6 to 7 would be demolished.





The Tower Building area after 1846

Due to the many references to Tower Building as the location of the gateway, the first area to look for a similar gateway was the first Tower Building, designed by Sir James Picton in 1846 and shown here in 1906 (No. 4 on the map). The church of St Nicholas is on the left and Water Street is on the right. The buildings in front that can be seen on the map (6 to 7) have been cleared as part of town improvements.

This view was taken shortly before demolition to make way for the second building of the same name. The building got its name from the Ancient Tower of Liverpool (erected circa 1256) that stood on this site. Water Street is on the right side of the photograph.

No doorway matches that of the Gateacre gateway.



The second Tower Building in 2020, this was the second structure by that name and was designed in 1906 and completed by 1910.

Image: Bygone Liverpool

The site of the Tower of Liverpool, later Tower Buildings

Shown left is a 'A view of St Nicholas' Church from Prison Weint', c1840, W. G. Herdman (LRO).

When making this view, Herdman was standing on Water Street with the Tower of Liverpool on the right and the Liverpool Arms on the left. Next door was a public house called the Tower Vaults. A row of warehouses can be seen before reaching the gated entrance to the Old Churchyard. The group of buildings on the left are numbered 6 to 7 on the map. These buildings would later be demolished as part of town improvements. This now form part of the main road passing the Pier Head.

Prison Weint had once been called Stringer's Alley and renamed when the tower was used to hold criminals and French prisoners of war. Liverpool had several 'Weints', the term's meaning was a turning off a main street, from Old Norse venda ("to turn").

This is the area Alderman E. Paull spoke of in 1906 (p. 10):

This scheme will sweep away the last taint of the old slave trade from Liverpool – I mean the disappearance of Prison-weint, where slaves used to be sold.

In all the images of buildings in this area, no doorway matches the gateway in Gateacre.





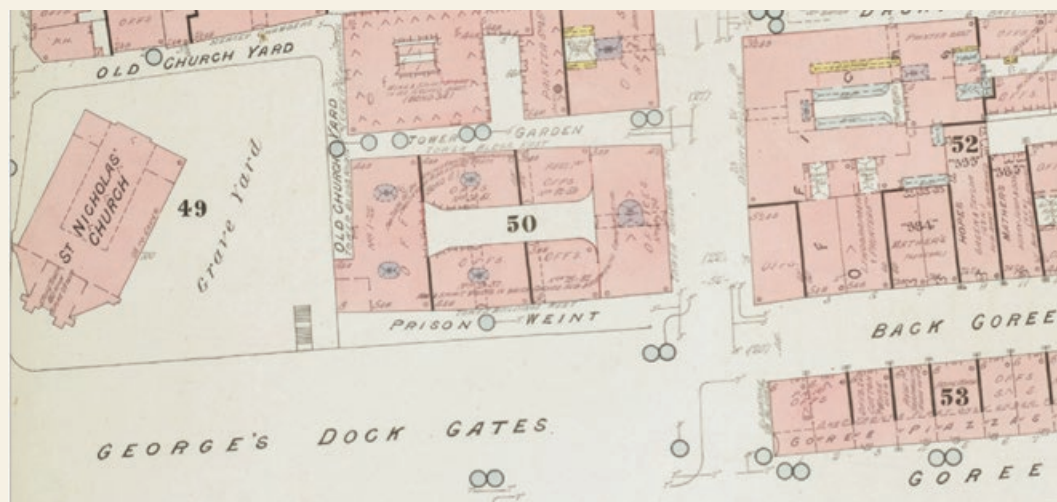
George's Dock Gate from the bottom of Water Street

Shown here is George's Dock Gate by W. G. Herdman, 1867 (LRO). These are the fronts of the buildings shown on the previous page.

By the time this view was drawn, the Liverpool Arms had been demolished as can be seen by the vacant plot on the corner. This may have been the 'open ground' referred to in the Slave Market article of 1889 (except that 1867 was almost a century too late for slave auctions). Alternatively, the article may have been referring to the general area that became George's Dock (construction of the dock started in 1762 and opened in 1771).

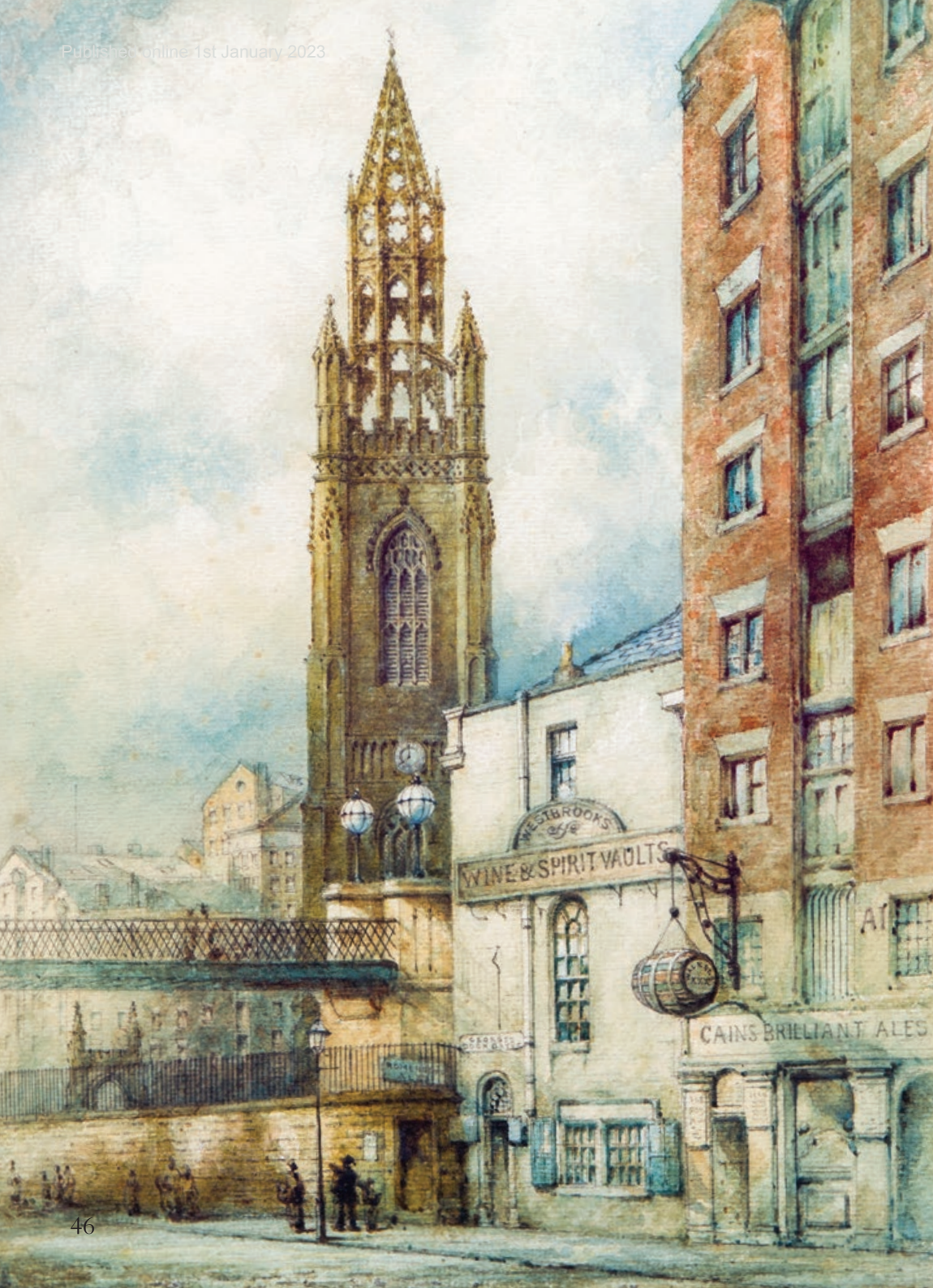
To the right of the picture can be seen a corner of the Goree Piazzas.

Careful scrutiny of all available images of this area failed to reveal any gateway resembling that in Gateacre.



Goad's Fire Insurance map from 1888 shows that the site of the buildings above (in front of Prison Weint) have now been cleared away.

'The Old Slave Market Building' was number Mather's at 7, Back Goree can be seen above the word 'Back'.



George's Dock Gates, Old Churchyard end

If not on the corner of Water Street, let us investigate the other end of George's Dock Gates. As these buildings were in front of the Tower Building, they relate to the supposed location of the gateway. This view shows the area in 1865.

Fortunately, Herdman and other artists were particularly fond of this area due to its proximity to the church of St Nicholas. This image shows a large warehouse owned by the famous Liverpool brewers Cain's. This sits next to Westbrook's Wine & Spirit Vaults (No. 6 on the map). This can also be made out on the extreme left of the Herdman view on page 45.

You will notice that there is still no match for the gateway. An inspection of the side of Westbrook's that faced the Old Churchyard, reveals that the spirit vaults building was in fact the Merchants' Coffee House. This building is an important landmark in Liverpool's history and is probably the most famous all coffee houses in the town. The building was also infamous as it has documented links to the slave trade.

On the facing page can be seen the entrance of the Merchants' Coffee House. It had a Gibbs' Surround with a distinctive triangular pediment. It is instantly recognisable as the gateway now situated on Halewood Road, Gateacre. The artist Edwin Beattie also depicted this coffee house just before its demolition (p.48).

Left: The Church of St Nicholas, The Sailors Church, George's Dock Gate, Watercolour. William Gawin Herdman (1805-1882)
Image with kind permission from Rowley Fine Arts.

Overleaf: George's Dock Gates, from the Merchants' Coffee House, showing the Goree Piazzas on the far right, William Gawin Herdman, 1865.
Image: LRO, WG122.





48 A watercolour by Edwin Beattie showing the Merchants' Coffee House from the Old Churchyard. Beattie painted this view twice, this version has not been published before. To the left is Stringer's Alley/Prison Weint and to the right is George's Dock. The figures to the right of the building are descending a staircase to the dockside. The paved flags in the foreground are actually gravestones. Image: ©Bonhams.

Beattie's view of The Merchants' Coffee House and Old Churchyard (facing page) was painted from the vantage of St Nicholas' Church. George's Dock can be seen to the right, Stringer's Alley or Prison Weint is on the left and accessed via a gateway.

The area in front of the building is known as the Old Churchyard - the flagstones in front of the coffee house are actually gravestones that have been turned over. Evidence of some of these gravestones can still be seen today. Directly in front of the gateway is a staircase that leads down to the dock.

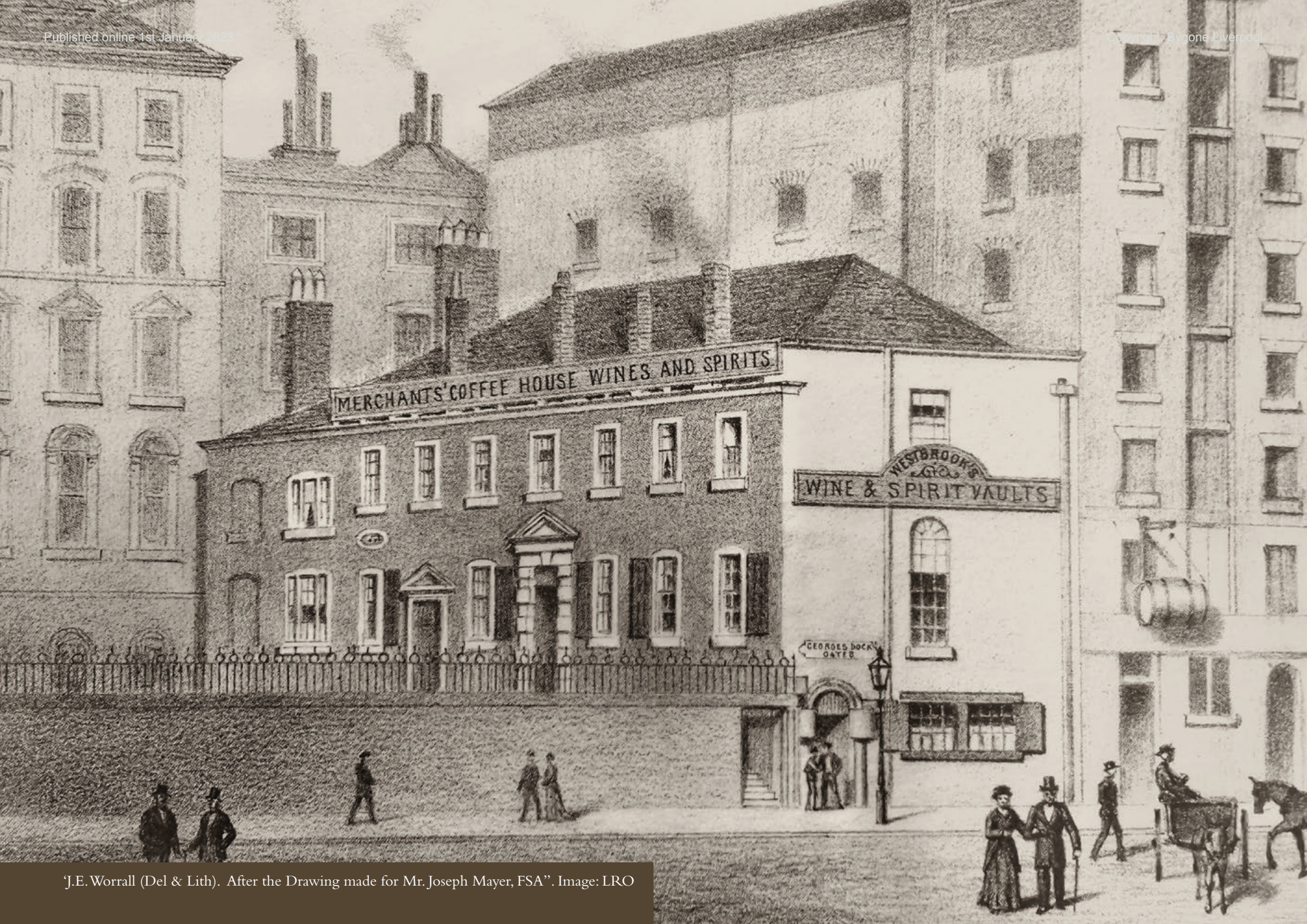
The authors have made exhaustive searches of hundreds of 18th and 19th illustrations of Liverpool – not just those located by Water Street and Chapel Street but the whole town. No other doorway matched the style of the Gateacre gateway.

The 'rusticated square pilasters, corniced keystone and pediment' as described in the official listing was not a popular style in Liverpool in the 18th Century. Indeed, the entrance of the Merchants' Coffee House would appear to be unique to that building, and of course, the Gateacre gateway.

With the likeness of both gateways, the location in relation to the site of Tower Buildings and its supposed links to the slave trade, there can be very little doubt that this is the origin of the Gateacre 'Slave Gate'. But more proof was required to be 100% certain.



Shown above are comparisons of the doorway of the Merchants' Coffee House and the Gateacre gateway. Taking into account the loose style of the drawings with their slightly distorted proportions, the architectural details of the two are identical.



'J.E. Worrall (Del & Lith). After the Drawing made for Mr. Joseph Mayer, FSA". Image: LRO

A coffee and a salt water bath

“Such rapidity of growth is difficult to realise, but I would recommend the visitor to Liverpool to help his imagination by paying a visit to the Merchants’ Coffee House in the Old Churchyard, and opposite to St. George’s Landing Stage. To this place I was taken by a thirty years resident in Liverpool, and the quaint old structure, with ancient wooden furniture is well worth seeing. In this Coffee House some generations ago the Liverpool merchants met daily in full court dress, powdered wigs and three cornered hats to transact their business; and from a little cock-loft of a gallery in the room upstairs municipal dignitaries aired their eloquence, and discussed the best plans for advancing the good of the old town. The old ladies to which the place belongs take a pride in retaining it in its old style – and it certainly forms a great contrast to the New Exchange, and the splendid municipal buildings.”¹

When this evocative description of the coffee house was written in 1874, the building had been a coffee house for 118 years. When it was first opened in 1756 it was known as the Bath Coffee House and shared its prize location, near to the ancient church of St Nicholas, with a select group of neighbours. It was situated that one side of the building was actually on the shoreline.

In contrast, by the time that description was written in 1874, Liverpool had grown immeasurably in both size, population and international status.

¹ Sheffield Daily Telegraph – Tuesday 13 October 1874

Instead on being on the shore, the coffee house now had George’s Dock between itself and the Mersey – just one of a whole system of new docks had been built to cater for the immense increase in maritime trade, due in no small part to the towns dominance over London and Bristol of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Gomer Williams, writing in 1897² tells us the Coffee House was a source of distraction to some of Liverpool’s gentlemen:–

It was the boisterous conduct of the sea captains at this tavern that led to the erection of the Athenaeum in Church Street, a haven in which Mr. Roscoe, Dr. Currie, and other men of literary tastes could rest undisturbed by slave captains and privateer commanders.

Liverpool by the mid eighteenth century had several popular coffee houses including Neptune’s (in The Shambles behind the Town Hall), George’s (Castle Street), Pontack’s (Water Street) and an earlier-named Merchants’ Coffee House (Dale Street) (p. 75). The latter closed between 1766 and 1767 and the second coffee house by that name was in 1773³ when the name was transferred to the former **Bath Coffee House**.

In researching the Merchants’ Coffee House, papers written by two authors have been of great assistance. The first by A. H. Arkle; *The Early Coffee Houses Of Liverpool*, 1912 and Graham Jones *Walking on Water Street, Part 9*, Liverpool History Society.

- ² History of the Liverpool privateers and letters of marque with an account of the Liverpool slave trade
- ³ 1774 was the date given by Arkle and Jones but the authors were able to find an earlier reference to the Old Churchyard establishment and that is 1773 when Ralph Prince fitted out the Bath Coffee House and renamed it the Merchants’ Coffee House.

The Bath Coffee House

When the Bath Coffee House opened, the first Merchants' Coffee House was still trading in Dale Street. It would be another 17 years before the Old Churchyard establishment adopted the name.

In 1756 two very interesting advertisements were printed in the Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register. Both advertisements were next to each other, and both advertised salt-water and hot baths. The salt-water was fed direct from the Mersey via pipes and channels.

Both baths were owned by two Mayors of Liverpool. Clegg's bath, owned by Joseph Clegg (Mayor 1748-49) and the Bath Coffee House which was the brainchild of James Bromfield (Mayor in 1745-46).

Bromfield's property combined two 18th century preoccupations - salt-water bathing and coffee houses, and combined them into one unique attraction. The large bath was situated in the basement of the building and was cut out of the bedrock of the shoreline:

The salt water bath at the Bath-Hall, and Coffee House is now opened for admission of Company.... This Bath is an oblong, in length 60 feet, in breadth 24 feet, and 27 feet high. The floor is formed of natural Rock. On the N. side it is closed, on the West it is opened by a large Venetian Window and on the S. by four wide and lofty arches, which support the superstructure... water is conveyed to it in great purity by pipes which run a considerable way into the river and is let out again by every tide... Coffee and tea 6d. each person.

The Salt-Water Bath at the Bath Hall and Coffee House was a development of James Bromfield, an apothecary, land owner and Mayor in 1746. It was managed by James Powell. (Captain and part owner of the Privateer 'Old Noll'). Beneath the advertisement is another for a Salt Water Bath at the North End of Town owned by Joseph Clegg, Mayor 1748/49.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, Friday, June 25, 1756. Also listed on 11 June, 1756, LRO.

that we the joint owners of the Bath, are willing to work at our several Branches, provided we have our OLD WAGES according to our MERITS.

The SALT-WATER BATH,
At the BATH-HALL, and COFFEE-HOUSE,
 Is now open'd for the Admission of COMPANY.

THE whole Building, by its peculiar Structure, is accommodated with every Convenience requisite in this Kind of Bath; so that the Advantages of Bathing in Sea-Water may be here participated in a much more extensive and commodious Manner, than on an exposed open Shore.

This Bath is an Oblong, in Length 60 Feet, in Breadth 24 Feet, and 27 high; the Floor is formed in the natural Rock; on the North Side it is closed, on the West it is opened, by a large Venetian Window, and on the South by four wide and lofty Arches, which support the Superstructure. By these Appertures there is a free Communication of Air and Light, without Exposure to inclement Weather, or common Observation, and the Water is convey'd to it in great Purity by Pipes, which run a considerable Way into the River, and is let out again at every Tide.

There are also several Apartments for Undressing and Dressing, with Fire-places in them, and proper Persons to attend. Prices to those who choose to subscribe for the Summer Season, are 5 s. for the whole Year, 7s. 6d. and for a single Time 3d. besides 1 d. each Time to the Bathing Woman, for her Care and Attendance.

Contiguous to this Building are erected two Hot Baths, and a Bagnio for salt or fresh Water, as different Occasions may require.

Ladies Hours of Bathing, from 4 o'Clock in the Morning to 11. Gentlemens Hours afterwards.

* * * Gentlemen and Ladies who choose to lodge at the Hall, may depend on meeting with genteel Accommodations, from their most Obedient Humble Servant,
James Powell JAMES POWELL.
 N. B. Coffee, Tea, &c. at 6d. each Person. (Char)

A Salt Water BATH,
 At the North End of the Town,
 Is now ready to accommodate Gentlemen and Ladies;
DIVIDED into two APARTMENTS; each about 20 Feet square.

James Bromfield

The person responsible for the Bath Hall & Coffee House is an interesting character. From seemingly humble beginnings, his rise in status in Liverpool society seems to have been meteoric.

It is likely Bromfield was born in Great Budworth, Cheshire in 1692 to James Bromfield of Barton.

When Bromfield moved to Liverpool, he became a surgeon (archaic term for surgeon, notorious for being ‘Quack doctors’ with little or no training). He is recorded as taking apprentices from at least 1717.

Bromfield is mentioned six times in the diaries of Henry Blundell (*Lord of the manor of Little Crosby*) from 1724 to 1727. Not only was his quackery in demand by the Blundells, he regularly joined the Squire in sport:

I went to Crosby Green there was parson Brooks, Parson Davys, Bannion of Ormschurch, Mr. Haymar, Doctor Bromfield &c.: there were several Cocks brought from Leverp : and Ormsch : we fought upon the green, I saw three of four Battles.¹

Bromfield was Mayor of Liverpool in 1745–1746. This was at the time of a Jacobite rebellion when ‘a mob of ships’ carpenters, sailors, and others attacked and set fire to a Roman Catholic chapel, completely destroying it and four adjacent houses’.² A month later the mob attacked a private house that contained a Catholic Chapel. Bromfield tried to read the Riot Act but was assaulted and knocked down with the act pulled from the hands of the Clerk as it is being read. The Mayor then locked some of the rioters in the Tower Prison and put a strong guard on the Town Hall. The angry mob then went to Bromfield’s house but as he wasn’t home, they marched to the Gaol and forced them to release the prisoners. The mob carried off one escapee in triumph.

In May 1746 Bromfield had to write to the Duke of Newcastle, requesting military support to quell the disturbance.³

In 1749 James Bromfield contributed £32, 6s to the building fund of the Liverpool Infirmary, one of the largest donations.

In 1756, during the Seven Years War with France, Bromfield was put in charge of the welfare of 600 French prisoners in the grossly unsuitable Tower of Liverpool. For this monumental task he assigned his 17 year-old relative, the later esteemed Henry Park ‘*apparently without even the affectation of superintendence, though wounds or maladies of different kinds must have been incident to the circumstances that placed them there*’.⁴ Memoir of the Late Henry Park, Esq., Surgeon, of Liverpool. 1840

Bromfield wealth and status appears to owe much to his four marriages to wealthy women, with each coupling he extended his property portfolio. The first in 1717 was Anne Ovet who bore him all of his seven children. Next came a widow Margaret Cottam in 1729, Elizabeth Barrow in 1734 and Margaret Marshall in 1739. It was through this final marriage that he appears to have acquired the land by Stringer’s Rocks that he built the coffee house upon, a house on Preeson’s Row and land in Knotty Ash.

As well as the above, Bromfield had a house on the high Street, business premises next to the Old Dock (indicated by the now-demolished Bromfield Street), land by Salthouse Dock and a plantation of slave-grown tobacco in Virginia that he purchased from Humphrey Morice ‘*the foremost London slave merchant of his time*’.⁵ He also owned land in Mount Pleasant that he sold to Mr Roscoe the father of William Roscoe who set up a Bowling Green there. Today, commemorated by the name, Green Lane.

James Bromfield died in 1764, his funeral took place on 21st July at St George’s Church, Liverpool.

1 Blundell’s Diary, Comprising selections from the diary of Nicholas Blundell, Esq. From 1702 to 1728. 1895

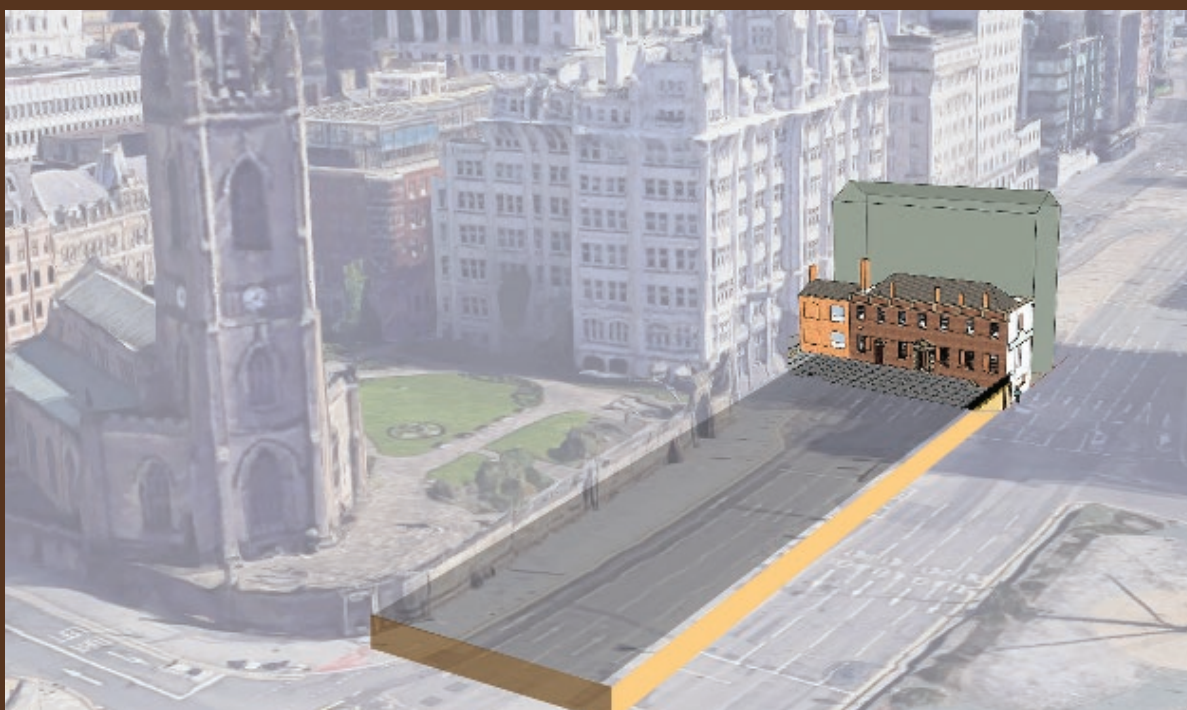
2 Popular Disturbances in England 1700–1832. John Stevenson, 2014

3 <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C15669749>

4 Memoir of the Late Henry Park, Esq., Surgeon, of Liverpool. 1840

5 Humphry Morice and the Transformation of Britain’s Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1698–1732. Matthew David Mitchell, 2020

The location of the second Merchants' Coffee House



An artists impression to demonstrate the site of the Merchants' Coffee House today. The area in front of the coffee house was part of the graveyard, this was cleared in 1888 and the bodies removed to Everton Cemetery.



Above; Two early photographs, probably 1860s, showing the Merchants' Coffee House with the tall warehouse behind it.

James Bromfield erected his Bath Hall & Coffee House on an outcrop called Stringer's Rock. The town's butchers would bring their bulls here to be baited before slaughter. In a ceremony that now seems barbaric, the townspeople would parade behind the butcher from Shambles behind the Exchange and down Water Street to the Mersey's shore. No bull could be slaughtered without being first baited by dogs, some of the dogs would be killed in the process:

In 1753 a large addition was made to the Old Church-yard, by taking it from the shore, then called the new burial ground. Before this ground was enclosed, the space was very frequently occupied as a place for the baiting of bulls, as no butcher was suffered to kill one until this piece of barbarous cruelty had been executed. The ground was very rocky, in the centre of which was let in a large piece of iron, and headed by a very strong ring of iron, to which the beast was fastened : a large concourse of people always assembled on these occasions, and Stringer's Rock was better attended than many places of worship.— The writer has frequently been an eye-witness at a distance, from the church-yard above.¹



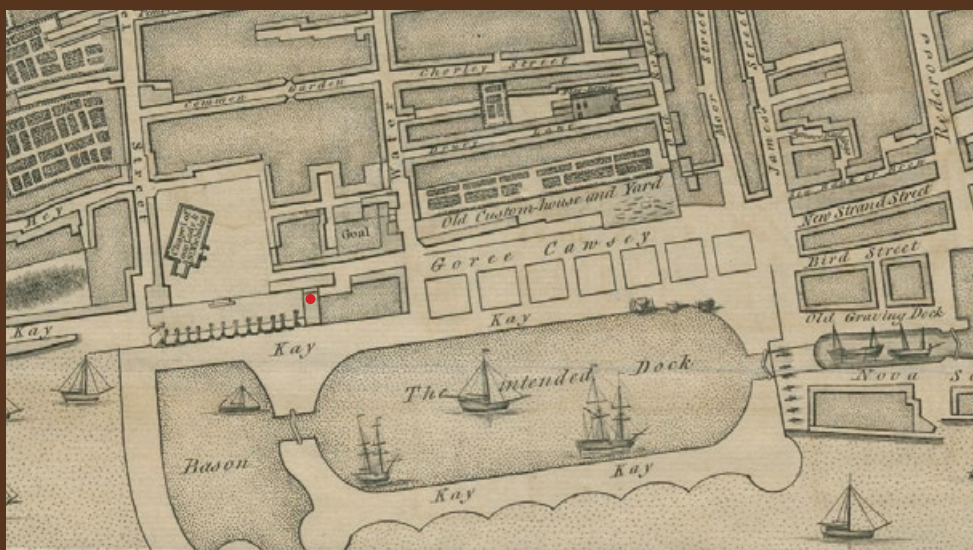
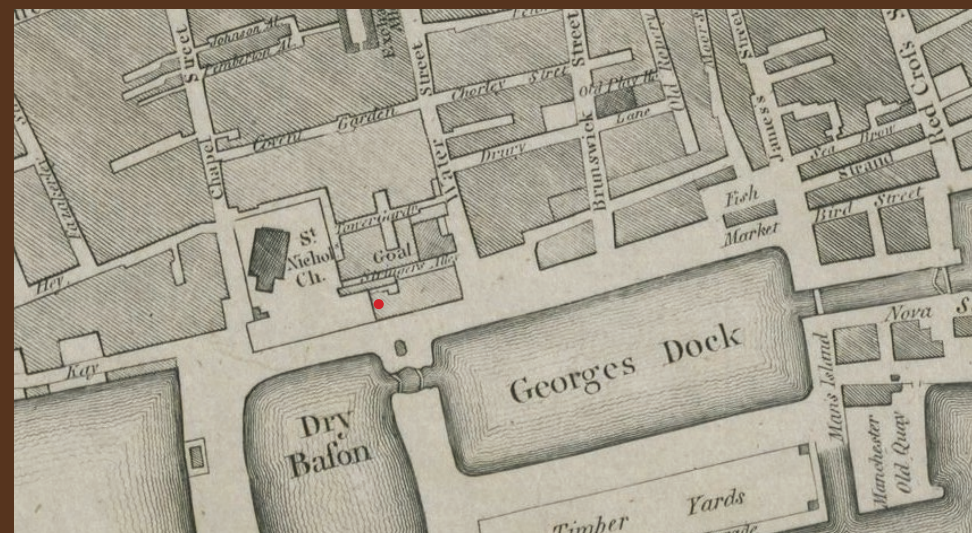
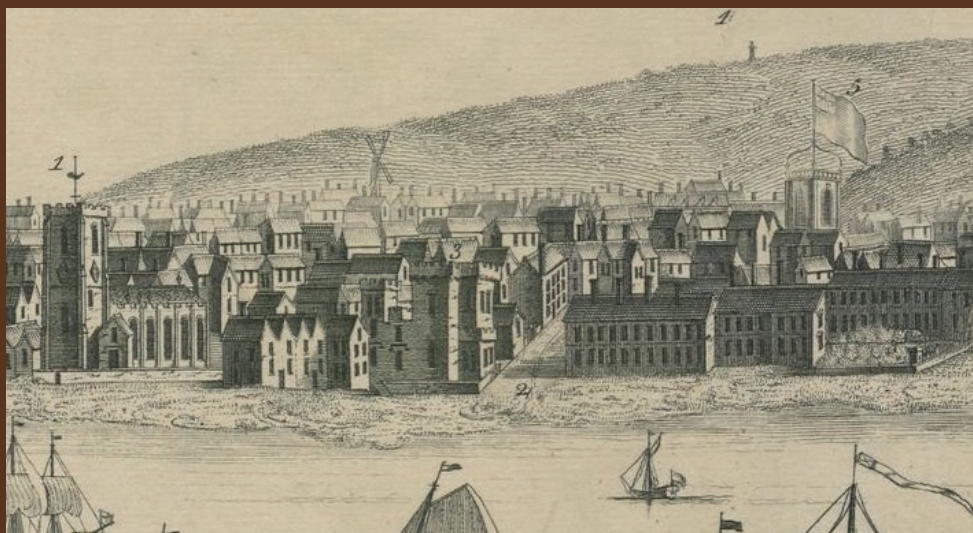
The above plan, drawn by John Eyes in March 1753, clearly shows how Water Street (originally Bank Street) acquired its name, the plan shows the Mersey overflowed the Strand at high water. James Bromfield's ground is shown where the coffee house would be erected - directly on the shore. In this location the salt-water bath could be renewed with each tide. Behind 'Bromfield's ground' is the Old Tower.



A view of the first Tower Building c. 1847, The Merchants Coffee House and the Old Churchyard can be seen in the background to the right. With the close proximity of the two buildings, it is easy to see why the story of the Gateacre gateway is sometimes associated to ‘the site now occupied by Tower Building’.

Image: LRO

1 The Kaleidoscope; Or, Literary and Scientific Mirror. E. Smith and Company, 1822



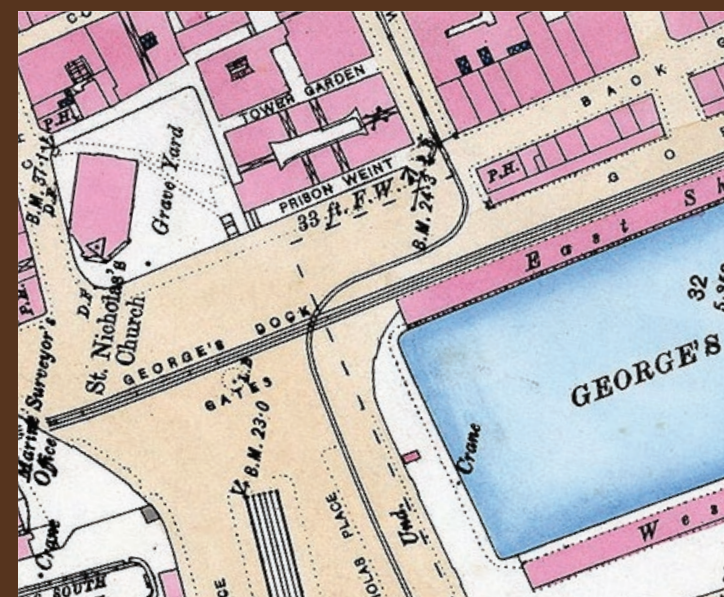
Top left: The area in 1728. A detail of Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's view. On the left is the church of St. Nicholas and in the centre is Water Street with the Tower on the left and the Old Custom House Yard on the right. The Mersey reaches the foot of all of these buildings at this point.

Bottom left: John Eye's pan of 1766 showing the area in front of the Old Churchyard has been enclosed, on this the Bath Coffee House has been erected (above the word Kay - 'Quay'). A 14 gun battery is also shown for coastal defence (below the church). Top right: The area in 1790 showing the completed George's Dock. Bottom right: 1774 (M. A. Rooker engraved by E. Rooker). This shows the Bath Coffee House in it's earliest form (centre). When first built it featured a Venetian window facing the Mersey. This view also features a proposal for the Goree Piazza design that was not used. All images: British Library.



A detail from an etching of John Thomas Serres' view of a shipwreck on the Mersey, 1797.

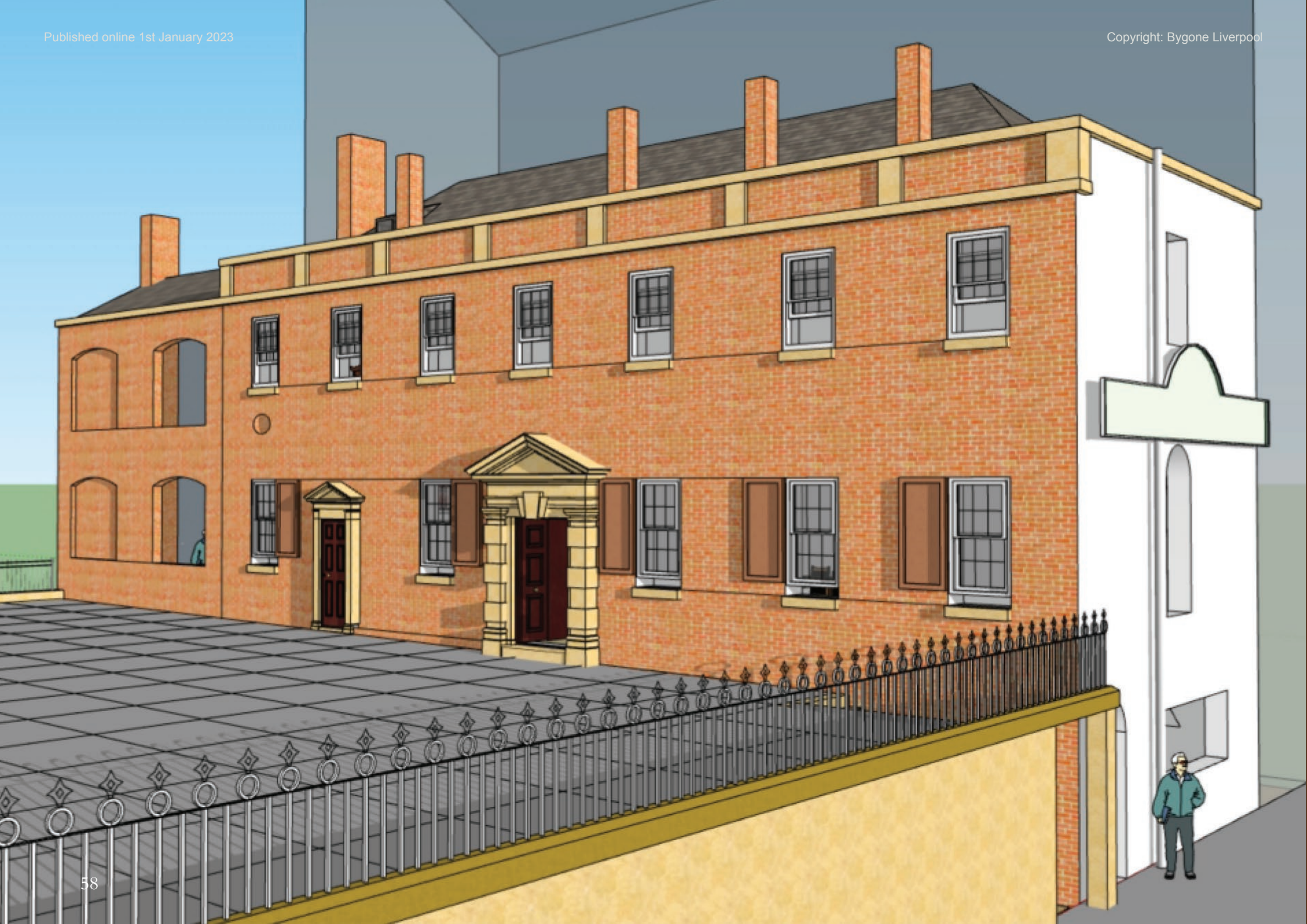
The church of St. Nicholas is to the left, next is James France's warehouse with the large ship sculpture on the pediment. In front of that is the first large warehouse of George's Dock Gates (visible on Beattie's view). Just visible in front is the Merchants' Coffee House with its distinctive row of chimneys.



In 1883 town improvements saw the removal of the area in front of the church, including the extended graveyard. This also meant that the coffee house needed to be demolished.

The plan (rotated to match the earlier plans) of the graveyard we see on this map from 1893 is how it still is today. George's Dock is now the site of the 'Three Graces' (Royal Liver Building, The Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building).

Image: www.centraldocks.co.uk





How the bath worked

The bath situated below the coffee house was hewn from the natural rock of the shore. A simple but ingenious system allowed the bath to fill with seawater from the Mersey at high tide and naturally drain when the tide went out – ensuring a fresh supply of water: *‘water is conveyed to it in great purity by pipes which run a considerable way into the river and is let out again by every tide’*. A lease from 1753 refers to a ‘Sough’ (an underground channel for draining water out of a mine).

The Bagnio mentioned was a term to describe coffee-houses that offered Turkish Baths (similar to a sauna). Later the term came to signify a brothel (being also boarding houses where no questions were asked).

When the bath first opened it is possible that the north side of the building, facing the churchyard, had no windows; *‘On the N. side it is closed, on the West it is opened by a large Venetian Window and on the S. by four wide and lofty arches, which support the superstructure’*.

The changing rooms *‘apartments for changing and undressing, with fire-places in them’* were possibly above the assembly room. Lodging was also catered for. In 1759 Mrs Davis had converted the changing rooms for accommodation only *‘in a commodious Manner as a private House’*.

In 1762, the land in front of the coffee house was enclosed to make way for George’s Dock (opened in 1771).

Reconstuctions: Bygone Liverpool



The early coffee houses of Britain - 'Penny Universities'

The coffee house was a Turkish Concept that arrived in Britain in the 1650s, first in Oxford in 1650. In 1652 a Greek named Pasqua Roseé opened the first establishment in London at St Michael's Alley, Cornhill. The concept soon spread with over 500 in London alone by the 1750s.

These establishments were not just a place to drink coffee – for a penny admission commerce, literature, politics and science may be discussed, earning the coffee houses the nickname 'Penny Universities'. A pamphlet published in 1673 discusses the merits of the coffee house over Taverns and Inns:

First, In regard of easie expence, being to wait for or meet a Friend, A Tavern reckoning soon breeds a Purse-Consumption, In an Ale-house you must gorge your self with Pot after Pot, sit dully alone or be drawn in to club for others reckonings, be frown'd on by your Landlady As one that cumbers the house and hinders better Guests, But here for a penny or two you may spend 2 or 3 hours, have the shelter of a House, the warmth of a Fire, the diversion of Company and conveniency if you please of taking a Pipe of Tobacco, And all this without any grumbling or repining.¹

Another difference between ale houses and coffee houses was that coffee houses were male only establishments (except for the staff); ale houses sometimes resembled brothels.

Early coffee Houses in Liverpool

It is not known when the first coffee house was opened in Liverpool. Wallace writing in his history of Liverpool (1795) gave what Arkle² later called a 'very contemptuous reference' by claiming there was only one coffee house in Liverpool in 1760. In truth there were at least five.

In fact, the first known coffee house in Liverpool was already well established at the very dawn of the eighteenth century, and probably earlier. Nicholas Blundell has an entry in his diary for Sept 20th 1707 that records a visit to the Exchange Coffee House where he also purchased a periwig:

*I drunk with Dr Tarlton, James Houghton and Wm Atherton.
I payed 20S at ye Exchange Coffy-hous for a Periwig.*

Coffee houses were the key place for merchants and ship owners to gain intelligence about shipping: goods arriving in ports, auctions of imported goods and of maritime disasters. Subscribers to the coffee house could read newspapers to gain a commercial advantage. Auctions of every manner of goods were held in coffee houses too from property and land to sugar and tobacco just arrived from the colonies.

It wasn't just goods like coffee, sugar, cotton and tobacco that was imported from the colonies – coffee houses, inns and brokers' offices across Britain in the 1700s were also the location of barbaric sales of enslaved men, women and young children. These sales, advertised openly in newspapers, had merchants and brokers describe their fellow humans with the same terms they would be used to sell livestock.

Culture and the birth of libraries

Bromfield's baths failed, but the building itself continued. Clegg's management of his baths was shortlived due to bankruptcy. However, Clegg's baths continued under new owners until the Corporation purchased them in 1794, creating Liverpool's first public baths (demolished c.1820). In its new role, Bromfield's bath was the location for many functions, often with a view to educate the well heeled occupants of the town. Inns and coffee houses were often used to hold functions and public meetings as there were few suitable public spaces available, when the new Exchange (the present town hall) opened in 1754, some functions transferred to the room but the old establishments remained the favourite locations for merchants and tutors.

On 16th May 1756 a concert of music was announced to take place there for Mr. Perkins and twelve year old son. Later that year, on the

¹ Coffee-Houses Vindicated. IN ANSWER To the late Published Character of a Coffee-House.

² The Early Coffee Houses Of Liverpool. A. H. Arkle. HSLC 1912

30th September, an advertisement was placed for 'Mr. Bruzet's Curious Collection of Capital Paintings done by the greatest masters of the Italian, Flemish and Dutch Schools'.

The Bath Coffee House featured in an advert from first day issue of Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, May 28, 1756. A sale of '*Curious mathematical and Philosophical Apparatus, Late belonging to the learned and Reverend Dr Rotheram.*' The advertisement was paid for by Joseph Manesty.³

The coffee house was also one of the earliest locations for the Liverpool subscription Library (later held at the Lyceum), this had been established for '*Gentlemen and Ladies, who desire to encourage the progress of Useful Knowledge, to procure for themselves a rational entertainment and to do a great deal of good at a small expense*'. In February 1758 a small reading society, organised by William Everard, met at the Merchants' Coffee House in Dale Street and the Talbot in Water Street. By 23rd June Everard had opened a school at the Bath Coffee House and this became the new, temporary location for the library:

We can with pleasure inform the Public, and particularly the encouragers of the Liverpool Library, now kept at the Bath Coffee House, that there is a very good collection of the best English Authors and Translations ready to be delivered out, of which Catalogues will be printed for the use of the Society as soon as all the subscriptions are paid to Mr. William Everard, Librarian, and the money is laid out in the purchase of books. A Catalogue of the present stock may be seen in the Library Room.

In January 1759 the management of the coffee house was taken over by Mrs Davis, who advertised that she intended to fit it up as a 'Private House for Boarders and Lodgers', this may indicate that the changing rooms on the first floor were converted into bedrooms for the guests.

³ Joseph Manesty was a prominent Liverpool Slave merchant and employer of John Newton, the slave ship captain who went on to write the hymn 'Amazing Grace'.

An advertisement from the Liverpool Chronicle informs us that Mr Hardy opened his school in the assembly room of the coffee-house. Hardy was just one of several tutors who utilised the large room in coffee house for education purposes. This signifies a change of use from a coffee-house frequented by merchants towards a function room for education, with teachers often splitting their time between Liverpool and Manchester:

Mrs. DAVIS has taken the House,

LATE THE

BATH-COFFEE-HOUSE,

Which she intends to fit up by the beginning of March next, In a commodious Manner as a private House,

For the Reception of BOARDERS and LODGERS.

N.B. Mr. Hardy will open his School in the long Room at the same place, on Monday the 19th February next, and at Manchester at Mrs.

*Hollands' Boarding-School the 11th of the same month.*⁴

From February 1760 a Mr. Desuaby used the coffee house as a dancing room and in 1761 gives a grand concert there. Mr Dassti, another teacher, taught French and German, fencing and violin classes.

Liverpool, Jan. 29, 1763.
Mr. DESAUBRYS, Dancing-Master,
TAKES this publick Method to return his Thanks to the Gentlemen and Ladies who have been so kind as to encourage him in *Manchester*; and as he is oblig'd to attend his School at the Bath Coffee House one Week, and the other at Mrs. Chambers's Boarding School, he hopes his Friends in *Manchester* will not take it amiss his leaving them.

⁴ Liverpool Chronicle Friday January 26th 1759.

Business in 18th century Liverpool

From the earliest days of trade in Liverpool, its merchants and brokers had preferred to carry on their business outdoors. The second Exchange (1673) was on the site of the market place of the old High Cross. This was situated at the meeting of the town's most important streets – Castle Street, Water Street and Dale Street. This exchange was erected on stone arches to enable business to be carried on beneath it.

Around the Exchange was a network of narrow alleys and courts such as Exchange Alley. Close by were the taverns, coffee houses and brokers offices. There are accounts where the shop owners complained that when it rained these merchants would flood into their premises causing havoc and dragging mud in with them.

A merchant could attend an auction at the Golden Lion in Dale Street and be at the Merchants Coffee House in the Old Churchyard two minutes later.

When the present Town Hall opened in 1754, it provided an open atrium space or courtyard for the merchants to trade within. But as Derrick's letters from Liverpool in 1767 describes, the space was 'so very dark that little or no business can be transacted in it, but the merchants assemble in the street opposite to it, as they used to do before it was erected'. Merchants also gathered on the Old Churchyard, the gravestones as Herdman put it, were a 'great promenade of the town'. In 1867 John Drinkwater, one Liverpool's senior businessmen, reminisced of doing business there:

If you would like to draw a contrast of what Liverpool Was in my boyish days and the present, I would recommend you and your committee go and see the Merchants' Coffee House in the Old Churchyard, where the gentlemen met daily to transact their business in full Court dress, powdered wigs, three-cocked hats, silk stockings, gold or silver headed canes, and paraded the flags in front. The room is nearly in the same state as it was then.¹

The Merchants' Coffee House had an important role as newsroom. Merchants could gather the latest intelligence on forthcoming sales, goods arriving into the port and if any news was to had on their own ship at sea. Before newspapers and telegrams the only way to receive this information was from other ships' captains who had just returned home and may have passed the ship on their journey.

Liverpool's first newspaper was as early as 1712, being the short-lived Liverpool Courant. It would not be until 1756 when the first regular newspapers would appear, the first being Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser (later Billinges Liverpool Advertiser). The following year the Liverpool Chronicle and Marine Gazetteer was founded.

These early newspapers concentrated on business news and trade lists, much more than current affairs. The Bath Coffee House opened just when these important newspapers entered circulation (the opening of Bath Coffee House was advertised in the first issue of Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser). These papers, as well as others from all over the country, were available to read for a subscription. In 1867 the Exchange Newsroom was erected strictly for this purpose but prior to that it was the coffee houses, in particular the Bath/Merchants' Coffee House.

For the purpose of consulting the newspapers, or of shelter from the weather, resort was had to the coffee rooms, established by individuals, of which there were several. One was established in Exchange-alley, another at the hotel at the bottom of Lord-street, the last remains of which have only just been at taken down ; a third was provided at the merchants' in coffee house, Old Churchyard. The latter apartment is still in existence-though no longer the place where "merchants most do congregate" - and may be inspected at any day by the curious in such matters. It is a tolerably large, old-fashioned room, with windows to the north and west, and, before the construction of the Prince's dock, must have commanded a fine view of the estuary and mouth of the river.²

A view of Bidston Signals

Soon after the coffee house opened four lighthouses were constructed on the Wirral side of the Mersey to aid the passage of ships through the Mersey. A signal station using flags was erected on Bidston Hill. The Bidston Signals were visible from the window of the coffee house in the Old Churchyard. As the signals heralded ships returning to the port, with their holds filled with valuable cargo, early news of its arrival would give the merchants a great advantage.

¹ Liverpool Daily Post – Tuesday 23 April 1867

² From a speech by J.A. Picton entitled The Architectural History of Liverpool. Liverpool Mercury, Friday 10 March 1854



The Bidston Signals and Old Lighthouse by Robert W. Salmon (1775–1851)

Image: Merseyside Maritime Museum

The gravestones of the churchyard were a popular walk or promenade, especially at high tide. They were also a place of business, a dockside Exchange Flags, for merchants meeting outside. The coffee house can be glimpsed on the right. Picton would erect his Tower Building on the site of the buildings on the left. (p. 55).

St. Nicholas's Churchyard, Liverpool, 1845.

John Raphael Isaac. Image: LRO.

Liverpool's second Exchange, erected in 1673. Described by Richard Blome in that year as a 'famous Town House, placed on pillars and arches of hewen stone; and underneath is the publick exchange for merchants.' Image: LRO.



Signor Grimaldi, the clown dentist

One of the most curious events to happen at the Bath Coffee House was when Signor Grimaldi (dancer, pantomime artiste and father of the famous Joe Grimaldi) appeared in a comic farce called *The Cow Keepers* at the New Drury Lane theatre, Liverpool in 1760.

During his stay in Liverpool, Signor Grimaldi lodged at Mrs Davis's Bath Coffee House. In between performances, he supplemented his income with a sideline of dentistry. This skill he advertised as 'to draw teeth, or stumps, without giving the least uneasiness in the operation'.

R. J. Broadbent¹ says of Grimaldi; '*There are not many instances of the union of the two professions of dentist and dancing master: but the signor possessed ability on both*'.

An advertisement from Aris's Birmingham Gazette in 1773 gives us an insight into Grimaldi's dentistry skills:

Mr. Grimaldi, surgeon dentist, who is just arrived from London, and stays here till the end of July, takes this method of acquainting the nobility and gentry that he will perform his operations apertaining to the teeth. He separates the teeth, and if any are rotten, and give pain, he cures them immediately; draws teeth and stumps even if they are covered with the gums; with ease transplants teeth from one head to another, and makes them take root. He makes artificial teeth, which cannot be distinguished from real ones, from one to a whole set, without springs. He sets young children's teeth to right, and gives them uniformity. To prevent mistakes his terms are as following: advice, gratis; cleaning teeth, 10s.6d; filling a tooth with lead, 5s; ditto with gold, 1 Os.6d; transplanting a tooth from one head to another, 3gns; artificial teeth which always keep their colour, each 10s.6d; his powder for cleaning and preserving the teeth, 3s.6d a box; his antiscorbutic water, 3s. the bottle.



Joseph Grimaldi as "Joey" the Clown. Image: Public domain.

¹ Annals of the Liverpool Stage. R. J. Broadbent

A rendezvous for the Press Gang

In 1795, two years into the French Revolutionary War, the Navy placed recruitment advertisements in the local press promising *'The LARGEST BOUNTIES ever given, or that ever will be given'* to *'jolly tars and lads of spirit, who prefer the honor of their country to an inglorious life at home'*.

The recruitments offices were the Merchants' Coffee House, Old Churchyard, the Sign of The Rock, Duke's Place and Captain Child's rendezvous at New Quay. One of the advertisements states *'In order to give Seamen an Opportunity of entering as above, the Impress is stopped for the present'*. This relates to the notorious 'Press Gang', hired thugs who would take unsuspecting men, often from the merchant navy, by force to serve in the Royal Navy.

James Aspinall,¹ under the pseudonym 'An old stager', wrote of the press gang in his book *'Liverpool, a few years since'*:

...the press-gang was, even to look at, something calculated to strike fear into a stout man's heart. They had what they called a "Rendezvous," in different parts of the town. There was one we recollect in Old Strand-street. From the upper window there was always a flag flying, to notify to volunteers what sort of business was transacted there. But look at the door, and at the people who are issuing- from it. They are the press-gang. At their head there was generally a rakish, dissipated, but determined-looking- officer, in a very seedy uniform and shabby hat. And what followers ! Fierce, savage, stern, villainous-looking fellows were they, as ready to cut a throat as eat their breakfast. What an uproar their appearance always made in the street ! The men scowled at them as they passed ; the women openly scoffed at them ; the children screamed, and hid themselves behind doors or fled round the corners. And how rapidly the word was passed from mouth to mouth, that there were 'hawks abroad,' so as to give time to any poor sailor who had incautiously ventured from his place of concealment to return to it.

Just two years before the advertisements were placed, sailors had attacked several of the rendezvous of the Press Gang, the Merchants' Coffee House was unscathed, as told by Gomer Williams:

On the Saturday evening following the crime, a large body of sailors assembled, and, out of revenge, it was supposed, for the death of Captain M'llroy, attacked the "rendezvous" of the press-gang, in Strand Street, and, soon after, the one on New Quay, which they completely gutted, cutting open the beds, and throwing the feathers, bedding, and household furniture of every description into the street. They tore down the wainscoting, mouldings, cornices and doors, which, as well as the windows, shutters, etc., they utterly demolished, leaving little more than the walls, floors, and roof undestroyed.

In 1795, the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger had passed two bills through Parliament called the Quota acts where every county was required to supply a quota of men for the Navy. It appears that even after the rewards promised in advertisements like those in Liverpool, few men came forward and the press gang returned.



The 'Press Gang' was temporarily stopped and instead 'extraordinary bounties' were offered. When this ploy did not work impressment was returned.

Manchester Mercury
7 April 1795.

British newspaper Archive

¹ Liverpool a few years since: by an old stager. James Aspinall, 1885

Renamed the Merchants' Coffee House

By 1767 the Bath Coffee House had been taken over by a shipwright named Ralph Prince.

In the Friday 2nd December 1768 edition of Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, a French language teacher called Mr. Durand was lodging at Ralph Prince's Bath Coffee house and acquainted the public that he would attend boarding schools and ladies and gentlemen's houses and that he kept an evening school in the coffee house. From 1769 to 1773 William Vincent, the 'Dancing Master' had classes at Ralph Prince's Coffee House.

The earliest mention of the establishment being renamed as the Merchants' Coffee House in on 27th August 1773 in Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, Ralph Prince announced:

The Merchants' Coffee House, in the Old Church Yard, being fitted up in a very genteel and elegant manner,

RALPH PRINCE,

Begs Leave to acquaint his Friends and Publick,

That he opened said Coffee Rooms on Friday the 17th of August, for the Reception of the Subscribers and others who may please to favour him with their Company. He humbly begs their Acceptance of his most general Thanks for their Encouragement fall all Favours done him, and will use the most studious Endeavors to merit a Continuance of them.

N.B. A good cook that can be well recommended is wanted.

Ralph Prince ran the coffee house until his death in 1783, after which his wife Mary (nee Burrowes) took over.

After Mary, the coffee house changed hands three times before the start of the 19th century, in 1790 William Dawson, and in 1796 Samuel Gardner. Joseph Bydder was the last 18th century occupant, he was a mariner who drowned in the Mersey and was buried in the Old Churchyard in front of the coffee house, on 27th November 1800.

The Assembly Room and Public Sale Room

The image on the right is one of the two images commissioned by the antiquarian Joseph Mayer. The other, an exterior view, appears at the start of this chapter (p. 50). According to Mayer this was **'The place where the last African was slave was sold in England'**. We will investigate his claim in another chapter.

*A MEMORIAL OF OLD LIVERPOOL -
We have been favoured by our venerable and respected townsman Mr. Joseph Mayer with lithographic copies of a couple of drawings which he caused to be made of the old Merchants' Coffee House in the Strand, Liverpool, just before it was recently pulled down. One of the drawings represents the exterior; the assembly and public saleroom in the interior. Independently of the thousands of merely local reminiscences which must cluster around a building through which so many generations of Liverpool business men have passed in pursuit of their daily occupations, the Merchants' Coffee House must be for ever memorable in the wider history of the nation at large as being the place where the last African was slave was sold in England.¹*

The box on the left side is the rear of the front entrance where the Gateacre gateway was located. At the end of the room is the musicians gallery:

and from a little cock-loft of a gallery in the room upstairs municipal dignitaries aired their eloquence, and discussed the best plans for advancing the good of the old town.

A concealed doorway to the gallery can be made out on the left hand side of the rear wall.

¹ Liverpool Mercury - Tuesday 04 September 1883, For further information on Mayer's 'last African slave' claim, see page 69.



The Assembly Room and Public Sale Room of the Merchant's Coffee House.
'J.E. Worrall (Del & Lith)...After the Drawing made for Mr. Joseph Mayer, FSA' Image: LRO

The Coffee House in the 19th Century

The 19th century would begin with improvements to the old coffee house, as can be seen from the Gore's directory of 1805 when William Woods the new proprietor placed an advertisement:

*MERCHANTS' COFFEE-HOUSE
OLD CHURCHYARD.*

*Formerly the most reputed Coffee-house in Liverpool, and is now on a
very respectable footing, both with regard to Accommodation, and Selection of
Newspapers, &c.*

Subscription One Guinea and a Half per Annum.

Graham Jones¹ noted that this may indicate that standards had slipped prior to Woods occupancy. Gomer Williams would later refer to the 'boisterous conduct' of 'slave captains and privateer commanders.'

William Woods' improvements must have been a success in gaining new customers, as two years later, the Liverpool Packet, that ran to and from the Ellesmere Canal, had moved its accommodation to the Merchant's Coffee House 'where a room, elegantly fitted up, is expressly appropriated for the reception, and where they may have good beds, and every other accommodation, and they may depend on the utmost attention being paid.'²

William Woods died at the coffee House in 1826, and in a familiar pattern, his wife Margaret (nee Gerrah) took over. In 1829 James Sixsmith was in charge, but the coffee house must have stayed in the Woods family, as Sixsmith's will of 1835 was granted and administered by William Woods. This was probably the son of the previous landlord. Again, on the death of Sixsmith, his wife Margaret also became the proprietor until her death in 1840. At this time the address has changed from being the Old Churchyard to 15 George's Dock Gates.

James Westbrook appeared as the proprietor in England's first census of 1841, he is with his wife Esther (nee Ashworth) and has three servants.

By the 1851 census, the Westbrooks are shown with nephew James (a painter), nieces Esther and Elizabeth, again with three servants. James son, also James, had a licensed premises close by at 54 Chapel Street.

During the Westbrooks' tenure, the coffee house would be the location for public meetings, such as a discussion to hear the grievances of Journeyman Pilots in 1853. In the same year a meeting was held at the premises attended by the disgruntled passengers of the emigrant ship Ebba Brah. The meeting itself was described as 'a scene of confusion and riot' the elected chairman climbed up and onto the musicians gallery breaking one of the balusters which he promptly utilised as gavel to bang on the railing to call order:

*A meeting of the passengers by this unfortunate vessel, bound for
Melbourne, which returned to this port Saturday last, took place
yesterday (Monday) at the Merchants Coffee-house, Old Church-
yard. The room was crowded with passengers and their friends,
and was a scene of confusion and riot from end. A chairman
was elected and elevated to a gallery which usually occupied in
the evening the musicians, and his deputy had pretty hard work
calling for order, and thumping upon the railing with one of the
balusters which he had broken out in climbing to his seat of office.*

By the census of 1861, the coffee house was ran by Thomas Robert Eden, although James Westbrook is still the licensee. The Westbrooks are now living in Green Lane, Litherland as 'Victualler and wife'. James died later that year. In 1863 the name on the license is transferred to Esther Westbrook indicating she still had control of the establishment. Esther died at her residence 31 Daulby Street in 1866.

In 1871 Margaret Griffiths is shown as a victualler, living there with her son Edward who is a Pilot and her sister Anne Tyson who is a school mistress, a Robert Snape is her assistant.

¹ Walking on Water Street, Part 9, Publicans Galore in the Old Church Yard.
Graham Jones liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk

² Chester Chronicle 24th April

In 1875 James Allanson Picton³ described the coffee house in his Memorials of Liverpool:

Before leaving the churchyard, I would call attention to the tavern at the south-west corner, with a doorway opening upon the churchyard, called the Merchants' Coffee-house. It was erected about the middle of the eighteenth century, at the time of the extension of the churchyard, and was for many years the great resort of the commercial community, the large room entering the churchyard commanding a fine view of the river. The advertisements of the latter half of the eighteenth century show that it was the principal place for auction sales of property and ships.

Robert Kemp shown as Licensed Victualler in 1881 with his wife Caroline, a one year old daughter and his sister Anne as a barmaid. On 18th September of that year, the Kems have a son.

The end of the Merchants' Coffee House

On 4th August 1882 in the Liverpool Daily Post, a transfer of the license of Robert Kemp to Beresford Road was printed because his premises at 10 George's Dock Gates was "on the eve of being pulled down". This was due to the Liverpool Improvement Act of 1882.

The coffee house was demolished in 1883, alongside the other properties along George's Dock Gates. The graveyard of the church was also considerably reduced to the size it is today. The graves were removed to Everton Cemetery in Fazackerley.

³ Memorials of Liverpool, James Allanson Picton, 1875.

Gravestone of Francis Mathers, African Trader

One of the gravestones that was removed to Everton cemetery dates from 1777 and is for Ellen Mathers, the wife of Francis Mathers, an African Trader. Francis Mathers was commander of the Cleveland ship and appears on a register in Liverpool in 1765. The Cleveland was an American Brigantine built in Philadelphia. It was owned by Richard Tate and William Woodville. Woodville funded several slave voyages in partnership with Tate. In 1767 the Cleveland purchased slaves at the Banana Islands and then Sherbro, on that voyage alone it took 250 slaves. The Mathers are listed in Goer's directory as living in Cook Street in 1777. Francis Mathers died at the Banana Islands in 1779.



The gravestone of Ellen Mathers the wife of Francis Mathers 'An African Trader'. This would have originally been laid flat, directly in front of the Merchants' Coffee House.

Many gravestones survive in their original location in the Old Churchyard but turned over so the names are not visible.

Photograph:
Bygone Liverpool

Memorandum
 From GEO. H. ROBERTSON, To
 GATEACRE
 Near LIVERPOOL.
 April 19th 1881.

This house was originally built in the fourteenth century and was extensively altered by S. Williamson and S. Williamson in the year of our Lord 1652. It was again altered and a new front built about 1770. When the old oak beams which

Memorandum
 To GEO. H. ROBERTSON, From
 GATEACRE
 Near LIVERPOOL.
 Tuesday, April 19th 1881

of the old Nook House which was pulled down last year to make room for the Cheshire Lines Railway. The house above mentioned was the school owned by the famous Dr. Shepherd. A new gatehouse was erected this year Mr Charles White is head

were removed from Childwall Church and used to support the flooring. It was again extended in 1853. A.D. and extensively altered again in the year 1869 by the present owner Mr. George Hunter Robertson. In this year 1881 this old doorway has been opened and the house altered. During which a considerable part

gardeners.
 This is written by George Hunter Finlay Robertson son of George Hunter and Constance Robertson aged 15 years on the 20 of February last.
 The family consists of:
 George Hunter Robertson
 Constance Robertson
 George Hunter Finlay Robertson
 James Hunter Robertson
 Constance Robertson
 Helena Woodsley Robertson
 Rubina Robertson
 George H. Robertson
 Constance Robertson



The other historic doorway of the Gateacre Hall Hotel, this has a lintel dated 1652. The Gateacre Society persuaded Bellway Homes to salvage this when the building was demolished. This historic feature has now been re-erected within the grounds of the new apartments (Woodsome Park) which have been built on the site.

The handwritten cards from the time capsule found at the Gateacre Hall Hotel. Dating from 1881, 15 year old George H. F. Robertson gives the history of the house, although he mentions another doorway with a lintel inscribed with the date 1652 there is no mention of the 'Slave Gate'. This indicates that in 1881 the gateway had not yet been transferred to Gateacre.

Reproduced with kind permission of the Gateacre Society.

Who brought the gate to Gateacre?

To prove that the gateway came from the Merchants' Coffee House, we have been certain that it was not in Gateacre before the coffee house was demolished in 1883. In this respect, we are incredibly fortunate with the help of an amazing piece of evidence discovered in the house itself. In the winter of 2003/4, during the demolition of Gateacre Hall Hotel, a 'time capsule' was discovered behind another ancient doorway (from 1652). This comprised of a bundle of items hidden away for future generations to discover.

When the Gateacre Hall Hotel was being demolished in the winter of 2003/04, a 'time capsule' from 1881 was found by one of the workers as he took down another stone doorway in one of the bars. The Gateacre Society had previously suggested that this doorway – dated 1652 on the lintel – should be saved in view of its age (see facing page). Fortunately the developers agreed, which is why the sandstone door casing was being carefully dismantled before being sent away for cleaning. The 123-year-old capsule was picked out of the rubble, having probably been hidden behind the door. It consisted of a cylindrical wad of documents, about 8 inches long, sealed into a round container of some sort. This unfortunately seems to have broken as it fell to the ground. The contents of the time capsule were clean, dry and remarkably well preserved. The following list of contents is courtesy of the Gateacre Society website:

The Liverpool Daily Post for April 13th 1881.

The New York Weekly Herald (4 pages only).

Handwritten notes by George H Finlay Robertson, aged 15.

Handwritten notes by his brother James Robertson, aged 11.

An unsigned drawing of the 1652 stone doorway.

Advertisements for local businesses, and two calling cards.

A Cheshire Lines railway timetable and Index of Fares.

An invitation to a Town Hall reception from the Mayor of Liverpool

An illustrated 4-page catalogue of Welsh Woollen Goods.

A contractor's estimate for redecorating the Dining Room.

Among the items were memorandum cards with handwritten notes by the children of George Hunter Robertson, James and George, in 1881. They describe the old house and the Nook as well as the 1652 doorway.

In his notes for posterity, James gave us information about local people, and the fact that 'Lord Beaconsfield died to-day, April 19th 1881'. George junior gave us the different dates when the house was altered: 1652, 1770, 1853, 1869 and 1881. The two boys must have put their time capsule together when those latest alterations were being carried out - 'the old doorway again being opened' as one of the notes recorded.¹

Importantly, there is no mention of the Slave Gate.

¹ Gateacre Society

Surely two young boys would have mentioned an artefact with such a grim story? Crucially, the fact that the date of the time capsule is two years before the demolition of the Merchants' Coffee House is consistent with the gateway still having been in the Old Churchyard until 1883.

April 19th, 1881

This house was originally built in the fourteenth century and was extensively altered by J. Williamson and S. Williamson in the year of our Lord 1652. It was again altered and a new front built around 1770. When the old oak beams which were removed from Childwall Church and used to support the flooring. It was again extended in 1853. A.D. and extensively altered again in the year 1869 A.D. by the present owner Mr. George Hunter Robertson. In this year 1881 this old doorway has again been opened and the house altered. During which a considerable part of the old Nook which was pulled down last year to make room for the Cheshire Lines Committee Railway. The house above mentioned was the school owned by the famous Dr. Shepherd. A new greenhouse was erected this year Mr. Charles White is head gardener.

This is written by George Hunter Finlay Robertson son of George Hunter Robertson and Constance Robertson aged 15 on the 20th February last.

The family consists of

George Hunter Robertson

Constance Robertson

George Hunter Finlay Robertson

James Hunter Robertson

Constance Robertson

Helena Worsley Robertson

Rubina Robertson

George H F Robertson, Gateacre, Liverpool

Tuesday April 19th 1881

The following are the principal people in the neighbourhood of Gateacre, the vicar is Reverend Canon Warr, the clergyman is the Reverend William (?), some of the principle gentlemen of Gateacre are Mr. G. H. Robertson of The Nook Gateacre, Sir Andrew Barclay Walker¹ of The Grange also Dr. Robertson of Grange Cottage and Mr. J. H Wilson of Lee Hall.

The following ladies are very willing to help in the Parish. The Misses Bright, Mrs. G. Hunter Robertson and Mrs Warr. The people of the parish get up a concert every year it is held in the National School. Some of the principal singers are The Misses Bright, Miss Brown and Miss E. Johanna Ford sang there in the year 1879 which was a success. The little Woolton Local Board consists of Mr. Thornely, Mr G. H. Robertson, Mr. J. H. Wilson, Mrs. Kellock, Mr. Scotson of Holt Hall Farm and Mr. Jump. Mr. Wilkinson is the road surveyor. The Station Master is a very nice man his name is Mr. Trurton. There are no doctors in Gateacre but in Woolton there are 3 doctors Dr. Little, Wood and Tattersall. Dr. Little is our Doctor.

The streets in Gateacre are pretty good, Nook Lane is the only bad one. The principle shops are Mr. Lees the bakers & greens, Mrs. Milton's the chemist, Mrs. Sefton the provisions dealer.

There are three hotels in Gateacre The Bear, The Bull, The Brown Cow. The Bull was set on fire on the 12th January 1881. There are a numbers of (?) in Gateacre. There is a very fine old Unitarian Chapel in Gateacre. There are two Blacksmiths.

Hale is situated 2 miles from Gateacre it has a very pretty church of which Mr. Chambers is the rector.

Gateacre is situated 6 miles from Liverpool. Childwall Hall & Childwall Church are very fine buildings.

James Hunter Robertson.

N.B. Lord Beaconsfield died today April 19th.

¹ Sir Andrew Barclay Walker, (1824 – 1893) was a brewer and Liverpool Councillor. He built and donated to Liverpool the Walker Art Gallery.

George Hunter Robertson

The father of the boys, a wealthy cotton broker, was at the house from at least 1871 to about 1890. He and his family then moved to Plas Newydd in Llangollen (*his son George Hunter Finlay Robertson stayed in Liverpool but not at The Laurels*).

Robertson also owned another large property on Halewood Road, southeast of The Laurels, that was called Gateacre Nurseries. He still owned this on his death in about 1917. He also set up the first telephone exchange in Liverpool:

George Hunter Robertson was one of the people instrumental in setting up the first telephone exchange in Liverpool in 1879. About 1883 he had an exchange installed in Gateacre, in the chemists shop at 5 Gateacre Brow. By 1889 there were some 40 subscribers, and somewhere larger was required - so he had the new buildings opposite erected. The exchange was housed upstairs over the corner shop.²

As well as being a very successful businessman, and on the board of many companies, Robertson was also an antiquarian. The 1875 edition of the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society includes Robertson as a member. When he moved to Plas Newydd in Llangollen (the historic home of 'The Ladies of Llangollen') he added another wing and created formal gardens.

PLAS NEWYDD TO BE ILLUMINATED ON CORONATION NIGHT.

Mr. G. H. Robertson, the eminent Liverpool antiquarian, who purchased Plas Newydd and the priceless treasures that it contains on the death of General Yorke, has consented to the historic old mansion being illuminated on Coronation night.³

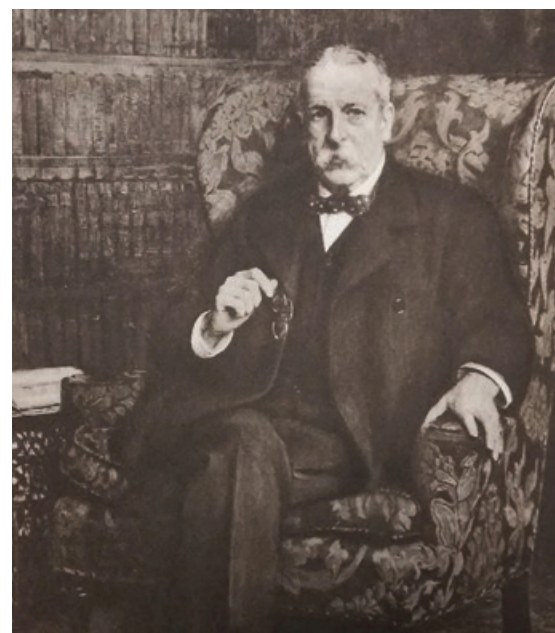
² Gateacre Society

³ Llangollen Places & Faces In Times Gone By -
Published 20th June 1902

Common to people of his time, Robertson will have been under the impression that the Merchants' Coffee House was the location for one of the first sales of cotton in Liverpool. Although this event is still often attributed to the Old Churchyard coffee house the date would place the event at the Dale Street establishment:

To be sold by auction at the Merchants' Coffee House, on Thursday 16th inst., at one o'clock precisely, 28 bags Jamaica cotton in four lots, samples to be seen with R. Robinson, broker.
Liverpool Chronicle and Marine Gazetteer, 3 June 1757

With his interest in historic architecture and the coffee house's (supposed) links to the history of the cotton industry that made him rich, it is easy to see what would attract Robertson to the gateway of the Merchants' Coffee House. It is therefore almost certain that it was Robertson who brought the gateway to Gateacre.



G. H. Robertson,
Taken from *London and Lancashire Fire Insurance*,
After fifty years 1911.
Image: LRO

Did enslaved Africans cross the threshold of the Gateacre Gateway?

There are many references, in history books and online, to auctions of slaves at the Merchants' Coffee House. On the rare occasions that an address is given, it is always the Old Churchyard. This would seem to offer conclusive proof that the gate originated from a building where public auctions of African people took place, with perhaps some even crossing its threshold. However, our further investigation suggests otherwise. We have been unable to find any evidence of a public auction of slaves at the Merchants' Coffee House in the Old Churchyard.

So why have many historians and authors said otherwise?

As we have seen, there were two establishments called the Merchants' Coffee House. The first was in Dale Street, opened before 1720¹ and lasted until 1767. The second (being the one that had the Gateacre gateway for its entrance), was so named in 1773.

Evidence suggests that historians in the late 19th century were oblivious to the existence of the older Dale Street premises, due mainly to the Dale Street address not being mentioned in the advertisements. This has led to confusion by researchers who, unaware that there was another candidate, wrongly named the Old Churchyard coffee house as the location. This error has been perpetuated until present day,

¹ The authors were able to push back the opening of the first coffee house to before 1720 (11 years earlier than Arkle was able to find) as The London Gazette has a record for a bankruptcy hearing of a merchant named Lemuel Rock that was held at the Merchants' Coffee House in Dale Street coffee house on 22nd March 1720.

resulting in almost every auction and event that happened in the Dale Street coffee house being attributed to the Old Churchyard Merchants' Coffee House.

At least one auction of an enslaved person is said to have taken place at the Dale Street coffee house, as well as the sale of ships fitted for the 'Guinea trade' together with goods from the West Indies and sales of the instruments of torture and bondage required to entrap and restrain their human traffic. Both these events are often attributed incorrectly to the Old Churchyard coffee house.

There is also a reference to a slave auction at Merchants' Coffee House, Old Churchyard from Joseph Mayer in 1883 where he made questionable claim that it the location of the last sale of an African slave in England: *'the Merchants' Coffee House must be for ever memorable in the wider history of the nation at large as being the place where the last African slave was sold in England'*.²

Mayer's statement was made as the coffee house was being demolished. Just a year later, the publication of a book entitled 'Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool African Slave Trade' written by an author who, quite understandably for the time, wished to stay anonymous and instead used the pseudonym 'A genuine Dicky Sam'. For this book the author used mostly original documents and referenced newspaper advertisements to give a better representation of the trade. This book would become one of the most quoted references on the African slave trade.

² Liverpool Mercury - Tuesday 04 September 1883

It is also this book that gives the seemingly damning evidence that slave auctions were held at the Merchants' Coffee House in the Old Churchyard.

Many curious advertisements have appeared in the old local newspapers. One, I recollect, ran as follows: -

A fine negro boy, to be sold by auction. He is 11 years of age; the auction will take place at the Merchants' Coffee House, Old Church Yard.

Sale to commence at 7 o'clock, by candle light. By order of Mr. Thomas Yates, who hath imported him from Bonny. Auctioneer, James Parker. Liverpool Chronicle.¹

A copy of this advertisement does not appear to have survived and unfortunately Dicky Sam gives no date for the publication – because it was from memory. He does however give dates for the others he reproduced and listed them in chronological order. This would place the publication date before 1765 a timeframe that puts the location in the Dale Street establishment.

1897 would see the publication of another important documentation of the slave trade, 'History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade' by Gomer Williams. Williams repeated the advertisement along with several others:

In the short-lived Liverpool Chronicle, James Parker, auctioneer, advertised for sale by the candle, at the Merchants' Coffee-house, a fine negro boy, 11 years of age, imported from Bonny, by Mr. Thomas Yates, a Guinea merchant, who lived in Cleveland Square.

We can assume that Williams copied the text from Dicky Sam² as he also neglects to provide a date although he does for the other advertisements, he does however place the date chronically between other slave auctions of 1757 and 1758. Williams' does not name the Old Churchyard as the location but this timeframe would make the location of the sale to be Dale Street.

We can also assume that Dicky Sam added 'Old Church-yard' to the advertisement himself as it would have been quite newsworthy with the building in the process of being demolished as he was writing. Further to this, Gomer Williams added the information about Thomas Yates' Cleveland Square address, as elsewhere in the book he tells of sailors attacking Yates' house in the square during the Seamen's Revolt of 1775.

In more recent times a date for the advertisement has been attributed in print and online as being in the Liverpool Chronicle on 15th December 1768. This may be an error as a similar auction was advertised in that paper on the very same day and could have led to confusion:

A Fine Negro Boy, of about 4 feet 5 inches high, of a sober, tractable disposition, 11 or 12 Years of Age, talks English very well, and can dress hair in a tolerable way.³

1768 is a very unlikely date for the advertisement as the Dale Street coffee house had been closed for a year. It is also five years too early for the Old Churchyard coffee house. Further evidence, is that just two weeks before the supposed date of the advertisement's appearance, the Bath Coffee House promoted language classes by a Mr Durand. This shows it had not yet changed its name to Merchants' Coffee House, and therefore rules out the Old Churchyard as the location for the auction.

1 Two newspapers had Liverpool Chronicle in the title, The Liverpool Chronicle & Marine Gazetteer ran from 1757 to 1759, the Liverpool Chronicle ran from 1767 to 1768, both are before the Merchants' Coffee House opened in the Old Churchyard in 1773.

2 It is very likely that Dicky Sam was actually an early pseudonym used by Gomer Williams. See: *Biography of Gomer Williams, Liverpool author and historian*, www.bygoneliverpool.wordpress.com

3 Liverpool Chronicle 15 December 1768.

Why did Mayer say it was the location of the last sale of an African slave in Britain?

Writing a year before Dicky Sam's book was published, Mayer may have been unaware of later slave auctions. It appears Mayer confused the Old Churchyard coffee house with that in Dale Street. He is also wrong about the last public auction in England, which is widely accepted as this, over 11 years later:

*Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 15
October 1779, p.3.*

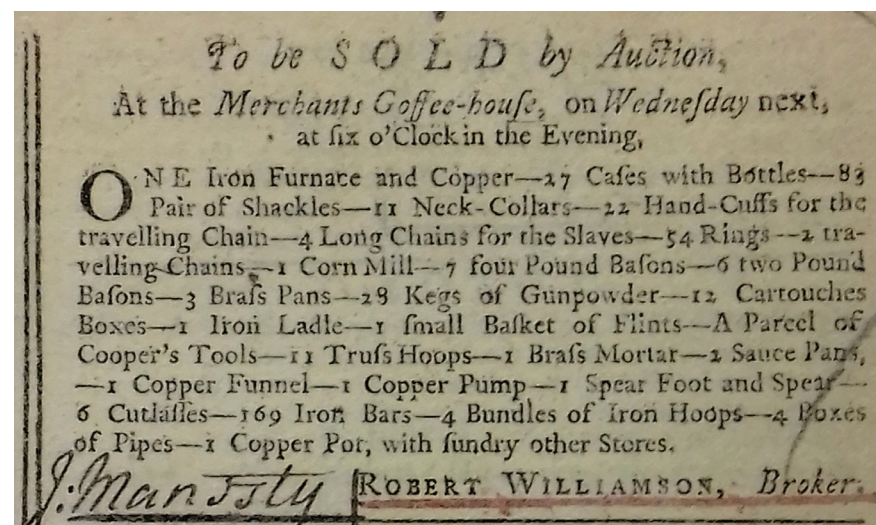
*To be Sold by Auction,
At George Dunbar's office, on Thursday next, the 21st instant,
at one o'clock, A Black BOY about 14 years old, and a large
Mountain Tyger CAT.*

Another shameful event that is often wrongly attributed to the Old Churchyard coffee house, is a sale of goods specifically designed for the slave trade. As well as a furnace, a corn mill basons and ladels for the plantation, it also included 83 Pair of Shackles – 11 Neck Collars – 22 Hand-Cuffs for the travelling chains – 4 Long Chains for the Slaves – 54 Rings – 2 travelling chain. As the date is 1756 it must also have happened at the Dale Street Coffee House.

The abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, who visited Liverpool and Bristol to gather evidence of the trade, would witness the sale of goods like this in shops and coffee houses. Again the Old Churchyard establishment has been mistaken for the location for some of these.

As we have already seen, many histories of the cotton trade cite the Merchants Coffee House in Old Churchyard as the location of the one of the first sales of imported cotton from the West Indies in 1757. This sale would also have taken place in Dale Street.

Although there is no evidence to date to indicate that auctions of enslaved people took place at the Coffee House in the Old Churchyard, the establishment was frequented by slave merchants and sales of ships and goods relating to the trade would have occurred there. The coffee house would have frequented by Guineaman captains from George's Dock (which received slave ships) and unless privilege slaves were locked on board ship, they would have accompanied their 'masters' around town. It is almost certain then that slaves or ex-slaves would have visited the coffee house.



Sale of slave shackles at the Dale Street Merchants' Coffee House.
Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register,
6 August, 1756. Paid for by Manesty and Robert Williamson who owned the
newspaper is also acting as the broker for the sale.

The location of the first Merchants' Coffee House

The exact location of the first Merchants' Coffee House had been a mystery, but we can reveal it here.

In his 1912 paper for the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, *The Early Coffee Houses of Liverpool*, A. H. Arkle wrote of the two Merchants' Coffee Houses;

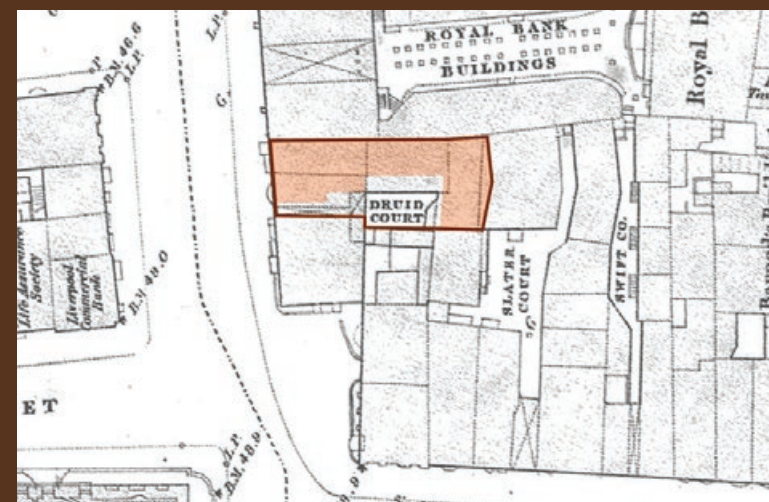
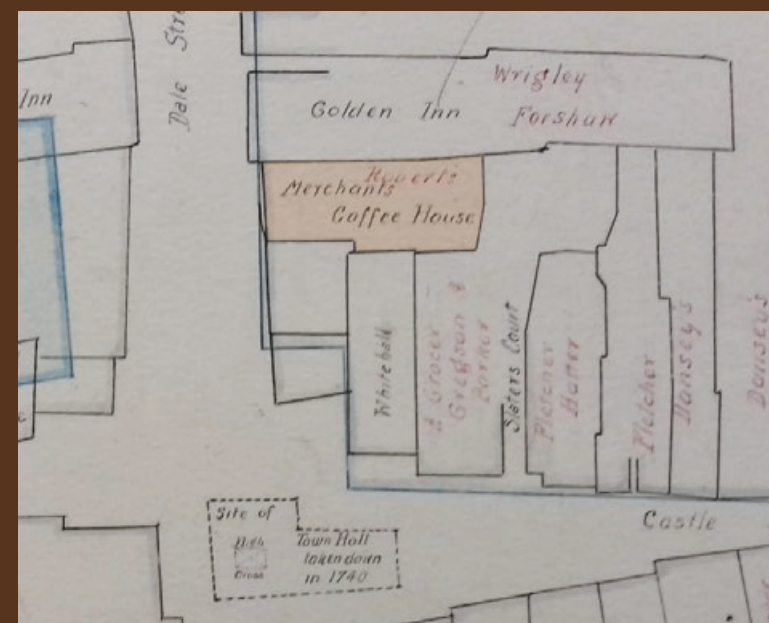
When the former of these two started, I am unable to say, nor even exactly where it stood.

For three years, the authors had been searching all available archives for clues, none had given any indication as to where on Dale Street the coffee house was located.

The authors knew of the existence of a plan that may show the location and they had narrowed down the possible site to just a few buildings. An advertisement from the 1760s was then found that shown that a Mrs Gorst had moved her milliners shop to next door to the Merchants' Coffee House that was *Opposite The Exchange*. The plan showing the location was thankfully tracked down (top right). An old watercolour shows the view opposite the Exchange – the third building from the right is the famous Golden Lion, the building on the corner of Dale Street and Castle Street is a saddlers shop, the building behind the woman carrying goods on her head is the Merchants' Coffee House.

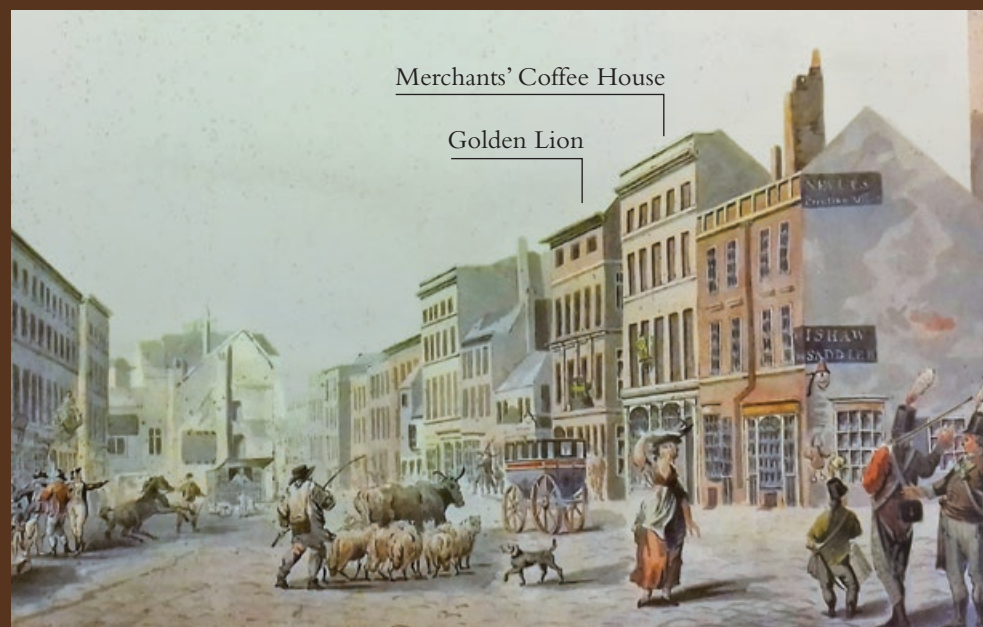
The coffee house had been in that location from before 1720 when the proprietor was Margaret Turner. It is possible the coffee house was even open before 1701, as a marriage at St. Nicholas. 8th January 1701 shows Lawrence Turner & Margaret Johnson of Dale Street. This could be the same Margaret Turner who ran the coffee house in 1720. (*The earliest registers of the Parish of Liverpool*)

The Roberts family took over from after 1746 and it closed on the death of Mary Roberts in 1767. No longer a coffee house, it was then taken over by Daniel Doran, a Peruke maker and continued to be a commercial premises until the 1830s when it was O'Donnell's Wine and Spirit Vaults. It was demolished in 1864 when Picton's North Western Bank was built on the site. A takeover saw it become *London and Midland Bank* in 1897 and in 1967 the new futuristic looking Midland Bank was erected. It is currently a restaurant (2022).



Images: A plan of the area around the Exchange in the 1770s.

1848 OS map with the site of the old coffee house highlighted, at this point it was O'Donnell's Wine and Spirit Vaults



Shown clockwise: 1. Dale Street in 1804, the Coffee House was next to the Golden Lion. *LRO*. William Herdman, Dale Street 1864, showing the Royal bank building with a glimpse of the old coffee house building (O'Donnell's) on the right. *LRO*. 3. The coffee house site replaced by The North Western Bank (later Midland Bank). *In a city living*. 4. The site in 2020 - The 1967 Midland Bank building is now a restaurant, the portico of the Town Hall can be seen on the left. *Bygone Liverpool*.



Summary

The authors hope that their research has proved the origin of the 'Slave Gate'. The evidence is certainly compelling:

- No other doors like the Gateacre gateway could be found in photographs or the hundreds of early illustrations of the town.
- The Merchants' Coffee House's location is very close to where early sources say the building was – on or near the site of the site of The Tower at the foot Water Street.
- It came from a building associated with auctions of enslaved Africans.
- It appears in Gateacre around the same time the Merchants' Coffee House was demolished.
- The owner of the Laurels was an antiquarian and a cotton merchant. The Merchants' Coffee House also had a history linked to the history of cotton importation.

Although no evidence of auctions of enslaved people has been found relating to the Old Churchyard coffee house, many auctions of goods sold would in some way be linked either directly or indirectly to the support of the West Indies trade. It has to be remembered though that few people or structures of that period can be truly excluded from being linked to the slave trade in Liverpool, or for that matter cities in Britain, Europe and the United States. If you were a merchant or indeed a consumer of cotton, printed fabrics, sugar, tobacco, timber, glass beads, iron or copper etc, you benefitted from the forced labour of Africans.

The Gateacre gateway came from a coffee house that was built by a slave owner¹ and frequented by slave owners but its reputation as a

location of slave auctions appears to owe more to association than to historical fact. Private sales between merchants remain a possibility, these wouldn't appear on bill posters or in the newspapers. It's not hard to imagine two merchants talking on the quayside and besides one, a small African child. There is though, a strong possibility that slaves, and former slaves that had become servants, passed through the gate accompanying their 'masters'.

In 2020 there was a worldwide debate on monuments, street names and artifacts that relate to the slave trade. Statues had been defaced or pulled down and institutions founded by slave merchants have been forced address their legacy. In Liverpool the consensus is that we keep these statues and street names, but add information plaques to tell the full story behind them.

The gateway is a remarkable survivor from 18th century Liverpool, of which far too few remain. It is, like the Bluecoat (funded by a slave merchant), a relic of the town in a period of its most rapid development, a development that benefited greatly from the slave trade.

Rescued from the wrecking ball and brought to Gateacre by the antiquarian G. H. Robertson, the gateway has endured weather, vandals and over zealous developers. Whilst the grounds of the two buildings it adorned have been demolished.

The Slave Gate has been a talking point for generations of locals since the 1880s. Even if the story has turned out to be more myth than fact. Thanks to it being a listed structure it will hopefully remain unharmed by future developers and continue to be a portal to our city's history, both proud and shameful, for another 250 years.

Our next step is to ensure that English Heritage's listing of the structure is updated to include its full history.

¹ James Bromfield owned a tobacco plantation in Virginia as stated in his Will. He purchased it from Humphrey Morice, 'The prince of London slave merchants' Although once extremely wealthy from his slaving ventures, when he died he had debts amounted to nearly £150,000, including a claim of £29,000 from the Bank of England for bills he had discounted and which were discovered to be fictitious.



RUN away and has absconded himself, from Thomas Seel, Esq; of Liverpool, whose Property he is; on Wednesday the 16th of February, 1763, a Negro Slave, who answers to the Name of Lidiata, speaks very good English, and is an extreme good looking Black; had on, when he went off, an old brown Livery Cloth Coat; trimmed with red, yellow mettal Buttons, the Cuffs and Cape turned up with red, and Livery Lace thereon, a red Waistcoat, also trimmed with Lace, dirty Leather Breeches, and an old Silver laced Hat; is 5 Feet 5 inches high, or thereabouts; 21 Years of Age, is pretty strong and able; he waits well at a Table, and has been both under a Groom and Coachman, in the Stables. He endeavoured to change his Cloaths, the Day he went off, but whether he did nor no is not known. He spoke of going to the Forest of Delamere, in Cheshire, as has been learned since his Elopement. This is therefore to particularly Caution and Desire, that no Person will take in or Harbour the said Negro, on Pain of being prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of the Law; but that they wou'd secure him, and give immediate Information thereof, to Thomas Seel, Esq; of Liverpool, aforesaid, whose Property he is, so that he may be brought back again, and all reasonable Charges will be allowed.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 4 March 1763

Appendix: Advertisements for Liverpool Slave-related auctions and runaways

Shown below are advertisements placed in newspapers for public auctions and runaways. This is by no means a complete list, and it must be noted that more are still being discovered. Runaway advertisements were also place for indentured servants and apprentices but those for Black people often use the word slave, including one for Germain Foney, aged 20 years, who ran away eight years after the Somerset ruling. We have not included listings of ships involved in the trade as they are far too numerous.

Note: the derogatory term Mulatto refers a person of mixed white and black ancestry, especially a person with one white and one black parent.

1720s

Ran away from Bryan Hawarden, Merchant in Liverpool - 21 Years of Age

Whereas a Melatto Negro of about 21 Years of Age, about 5 Foot and half high, or thereabouts, strong made, and brought up a Sailor, has run away from his Master (Bryan Hawarden, Merchant in Liverpool) These are to give Notice, that if any Person or Persons can apprehend, or secure the said Mellatto, so that the said Mr. Hawarden may have him again, they shall have two Guineas Reward and reasonable Charges. Or if the said Melatto will return to his Master he shall be kindly receiv'd.

N.B. The Melatto has a Mark in his left Arm, betwixt his Elbow and his Shoulder, occasion'd by the Cut of a Knife,

Evening Post (South East England) 22 October 1723 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

1730s

Ran away, away from Richard Walker, of Liverpoole - 20 years of age

ON Friday the 7th of January 1736. Run away from Richard Walker, of Liverpoole, A Negro Fellow, aged about Twenty Years, near Six Foot High, goes by the Name of Damyan, but sometimes calls himself Daniel Sands: He had on when he went away, a brown Pea-colour'd Kersey Jacket, a stript Cotton Wastecoat, and a Pair of black plush Breeches; he speaks Portuguese Language, and talks English indifferent well. If any Person will secure him, so that the said Walker may have him again, shall have two Guineas Reward, and all reasonable Charges paid.

London Gazette, 15 January 1736 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away from Richard Fleetwood, Cooper, in Liverpool - 16 years of age

WHEREAS Matthew Natwit, a Mulatto born at Jamaica, a tall slender Youth, about sixteen Years of Age, did in the Month of October last run away from his Master Richard Fleetwood, Cooper, in Liverpool, this is to give Notice, that if he will return to his said Master's Service he shall be kindly receiv'd, on his Application to Mr. J. Conningham, Merchant, in Pancras-Lane, London.

Daily Advertiser (South East England) 24 March 1738 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away, from Mr. Jeremiah Riley, in Liverpool, an Apprentice for seven years, and a Slave

RUN away, a Gold Coast Negro, about five Foot six Inches high, with three Marks down each Cheek belonging to his Country, with a cross Pettee, and an R branded on his left Shoulder, which is the Plantation Mark; he had on when he went away, an old Fustian Frock with Brass Buttons, and a green Freze Waistcoat, both lined with yellow, and Leather Breeches. Whoever will apprehend and send him to the next Gaol, and give Notice to Mr. Jeremiah Riley, in Liverpool, or to Mr. John Boys, at the Golden Bull in Surry-Street in the Strand, shall have Two Guineas Reward, and all reasonable Charges.

Note, He is an Apprentice for seven Years, and a Slave.

Daily Advertiser (South East England) 11 October 1738

(www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

1750s

Ran away, Cæsar – 30 years of Age

RUN away from the Snow Anne, James Hudson, Master, lying at Liverpool, on Thursday, July 30, a Negro Man, called Cæsar, about thirty Years of Age, six Foot high, with several Scars and Bruises on his Face, speaks indifferent English; had on, when he went away, a light coloured Coat lined with green, a red Waistcoat.

Whoever apprehends him, and gives Notice thereof to Messrs. Jonathan Eade and Wilton, in Wapping; Mr. Witter Cuming, of Chester; or to John Hughes of Liverpool, shall receive two Guineas Reward, and all reasonable Charges.

General Advertiser, (South East England), 10 August 1752

(www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD, Iron goods for slaving voyage, Merchants' Coffee House (Dale Street)

To be SOLD by Auction,

At the Merchants' Coffee-house, on Wednesday next,

At six o'clock in the Evening,

One iron Furnace and Copper – 27 cases with Bottles – 83 Pair of

Shackles – 11 Neck Collars – 22 Hand-Cuffs for the Travelling Chain – 4 Long Chains for the Slaves – 54 Rings – 2 travelling chains – 1 Corn Mill – 7 four Pound Basons – 6 two Pound Basons – 3 Brass Pans – 28 Kegs of Gunpowder – 12 Cartouches Boxes – 1 Iron Ladle – 1 small Basket of Flints – A parcel of Cooper's Tools – 11 Truss Hoops – 1 Brass Mortar – 2 Sauce Pans – 1 Copper Funnel – 1 Copper Pump – 1 Spear Foot and Spear – 6 Cutlasses – 169 Iron Bars – 4 Bundles of Iron Hoops – 4 Boxes of Pipes – 1 Copper Pot, with sundry other Stores.

Robert Williamson Broker (*Advert paid for by Joseph Manesty – handwritten note*)

First day of publication for Williamson's Advertiser, 28 May, 1756 (Author's)

Wanted, A Negro boy younger than 15 years of age, by Robert Williamson,

Wanted immediately,

A Negro BOY

He must be of a deep black Complexion and a lively humane disposition, with good Features and not above 15, nor under 12 Years of Age. Apply to the PRINTER

Williamson's Advertiser, Friday August 20, 1756 (Author's)

For SALE – 20 and 12 years of age, by Robert Williamson

For SALE immediately, ONE stout NEGRO young Fellow, about 20 years of Age, that has been employed for 12 Months on board a Ship, and is a very serviceable Hand. And A NEGRO BOY, about 12 years old, that has been used since Sept. last, to wait at a Table, and is of a very good Disposition, both warranted Sound. – Apply to Robert Williamson, Broker. N.B. A Vessel from 150 to 250 Tons burden, is wanted to be purchased.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, 24 June 1757, page unknown. Repeated 24th June 1757 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD, a Negro boy, by Joseph Daltera, Merchant, in Union Street

To be SOLD, Ten Pipes of Rasin WINE, a Parcel of Bottled CYDER, and a Negro BOY. Apply to Mr. Joseph Dahera (Daltera), Merchant, in Union Street. Who sells, at his Warehouse near the Salthouse Dock gates, FINE, SECOND, and COARSE FLOUR, In Parcels, or by the single Sack, for the Convenience of private Families.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 17 June 1757, p.4. Repeated 24th June; 1st, 8th 15th 22nd July; 5th, 12th August 1757 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

For SALE, a healthy Negro boy, By Robert Williamson, near the Exchange

(Robert Williamson), Who keeps the Universal REGISTER OFFICE, Near the exchange in Liverpool, where ... For SALE, A Healthful NEGRO BOY, About 5 Feet High, well Proportioned, of a Mild, Sober, Honest Disposition; has been with his present Master 3 Years, and used to wait on a Table, and to assist in a Stable.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 17 February 1758, p.3 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away, 20 years of age, reward from David Kenyon in Liverpool

Run away from Dent, in Yorkshire, on Monday, the 28th August last, Thomas Anson, a negro man, about 5 ft. 6 ins. High, aged 20 years and upwards, and broad set. Whoever will bring the said man back to Dent, or give any information that he may be had again, shall receive a handsome reward from Mr. Edmund Sill, of Dent ; or Mr. David Kenyon, merchant, in Liverpool.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 8 September 1758 (Gomer Williams)

1760s

To be SOLD - 11 years of age, Merchants' Coffee House (Dale Street)

A fine negro boy, to be sold by auction. He is 11 years of age; the auction will take place at the Merchants' Coffee House, Old Churchyard*. Sale to commence at 7 o'clock, by candle light. By order of Mr. Thomas Yates, who hath imported him from Bonny. Auctioneer, James Parker. *Liverpool Chronicle*. No date given but placed chronologically before 1765 by "A Genuine Dicky Sam" writing in 1884

*Old Churchyard was added by Dicky Sam in 1884 the date would place it in Dale Street, Gomer Williams did not include Old Churchyard when he quoted the advert in 1897.

Run away from Thomas Seel - 21 years of age

RUN away and has absconded himself, from Thomas Seel, Esq; of Liverpool, whose Property he is; on Wednesday the 16th of February, 1763, a Negro Slave, who answers to the Name of Lidiate, speaks very good English, and is an extreme good looking Black; had on, when he went off, an old brown Livery Cloth Coat; trimmed with red, yellow mettal Buttons, the Cuffs and Cape turned up with red, and Livery Lace thereon, a red Waistcoat, also trimmed with Lace, dirty Leather Breeches, and an old Silver laced Hat; is 5 Feet 5 inches high, or thereabouts; 21 Years of Age, is pretty strong and able; he waits well at a Table, and has been both under a Groom and Coachman, in the Stables. He endeavoured to change his Cloaths, the Day he went off, but whether he did nor no is not known. He spoke of going to the Forest of Delamere, in Cheshire, as has been learned since his Elopement. This is therefore to particularly Caution and Desire, that no Person will take in or Harbour the said Negro, on Pain of being prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of the Law; but that they would secure him, and give immediate Information thereof, to Thomas Seel, Esq; of Liverpool, aforesaid, whose Property he is, so that he may be brought back again, and all reasonable Charges will be allowed.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 4 March 1763

To be SOLD - 8 years of age, George's Coffee House, Castle Street

To be sold at Auction at George's Coffee-house, betwixt the hours of six and eight o'clock, a very fine negro girl about eight years of age, very healthy, and hath been some time from the coast. Any person willing to purchase the same may apply to Capt. Robert Syers, at Mr. Bartley Hodgett's Mercer and Draper near the Exchange, where she may be seen till the time of sale.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 1765 (date unknown) (Gomer Williams)

To be SOLD, a Black Negro Man, by Thomas Gorstidge, Woollen-Draper, in Castle-Street

This is to acquaint the Publick, THAT Thomas Gorstidge, Woollen-Draper, in Castle- Street, having engaged himself in a different Branch of Business, is declining the Woollen Branch. Is now Selling off all his STOCK in TRADE, Consisting of Woollen Drapery and Mercery Goods, at Prime Cost. The sale to continue till all are sold: Who has to dispose of, the SALLY and BETTY Brig, burthen about 80 Tons. Likewise a Quantity of FUSTICK and a BLACK NEGRO MAN.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 11 January 1765, p.3 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

For SALE - under 14 years of age, by Robert Williamson, at the Exchange

TO be Lett, and Entered on, the 20th of August Inst. near the Exchange, Liverpool. A well furnished Dining Room - Lodging-Rooms for a Gentleman and Servant: Also, a Stable for a -. For Further Particulars, enquire of Mr. Williamson, at his Office, at the Exchange. Who has for Sale,

A WINDWARD COAST BLACK BOY,

Appears to be under 14 Years old, well looking and tractable, having been three Months in England.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser and Mercantile Register, 17 August 1765, p.3 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD, 11 Negroes, Exchange Coffee House, Water Street

To be sold at the Exchange Coffee House, in Water Street, this day 12 September instant at one o'clock precisely ELEVEN NEGROES imported by the Angola. George Drinkwater, Broker.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, 12 September 1766, page unknown (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD - 22 years of age, by James Campbell, broker

To be SOLD, A NEGRO MAN, about 22 Years of Age, an excellent House Servant, and perfectly Skilled in the Business of a BARBER and HAIR DRESSER, the Property of a Gentleman lately return'd from the West-Indies. The Slave was bought at Guadeloupe [sic] from a famous French Barber, with whom he learn'd the Trade. N.B. He understands the CARE of HORSES. Apply to James Campbell, Broker.

Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser, 23 January 1767, page unknown (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

**Ran away from John Street - 18 years of age
RUN AWAY,**

On Tuesday Morning the 18th Instant, a Negroe Man, called CAESAR, the property of John Street, Cooper, is about 18 Years of Age, Broad Set, of a Low Stature; had on when he went off a Blue Top Jacket, a Red Waistcoat, and Leather Breeches.

Whoever secures the said Negroe, shall be handsomely rewarded, and all reasonable Charges, paid by JOHN STREET.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register. 21 August 1767 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD, One Negro Man, and Two Boys, by Robert Williamson near the Exchange

To be Sold by Auction, At Richard Robinson's Office in High-street, near the Exchange, on Tuesday the 1st of December next, at One o'Clock precisely, One Negro Man, and Two Boys. They will be

brought up to the Place of Sale to be view'd. For further particulars enquire of Richard Robsinson, Broker.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 27 November 1767, p.2 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away from on-board the Havanna (William Wallace) - 25 years of age

RUN AWAY,

From on Board the HAVANNA,

(JAMES NICHOLSON, Master,)

A NEGRO SLAVE, called YORK,

Five Feet Seven Inches high, of a Yellow Complexion, about 25 Years of Age, speaks French and English; had on when he went away a Strip'd Lindsey Jacket, Furniture Check Trousers, and Check Shirt.

Whoever takes up the above Negro, and delivers him in Liverpool, shall receive Five Guineas reward and all reasonable Charges, from William Wallace. August 30, 1768.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register. 2 September 1768 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD - 9 years of age

To be SOLD, // A NEGRO BOY, // From Angola, about Nine Years Old. // For Particulars enquire of the Publisher.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 23 September 1768, p.2 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD by William Stainton, at his inn by the Custom House - 9 years of age

To be sold by Auction, On Wednesday next, the 12th inst. October, at Eleven o'Clock in the Forenoon, at the House of William Stainton, the Sign of the Custom-House, in Brooks's Square, Liverpool, A Handsome NEGRO BOY, From ANGOLA, about 9 Years of Age. Apply to the said Mr. Stainton.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 7 October 1768, p.2 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD by William Stainton, at his inn by the Custom House - 11 or 12 years of age

To be sold by Auction, On MONDAY next, the 5th instant December, At Eleven o'Clock in the Forenoon; At the House of Mr. WILLIAM STAINTON, The Sign of the Custom-House, in Brooks's-Square, A very handsome NEGRO BOY, About 11 or 12 Years of Age; And very suitable for a Gentleman's Family. Enquire of the said Mr. Stainton.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 2 December 1768, p.2 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

To be SOLD (no name or location of sale) - 11 or 12 years of age

A Fine Negro Boy, of about 4 feet 5 inches high, of a sober, tractable disposition, 11 or 12 Years of Age, talks English very well, and can dress hair in a tolerable way.

Liverpool Chronicle 15 December 1768.

To be SOLD, the Golden Lion, Dale Street - 13 years of age

To be sold by Auction, At Mr. James Wrigley's, the Golden Lion, in Dale-street, Liverpool, To-morrow, being Saturday the 3d inst. at One o'Clock at Noon, A fine strong healthy NEGRO BOY, About 13 Years old, and has had the Small Pox.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 6 June 1769, p.2 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away, reward from Felix Doran, Liverpool - 30 years of age

WHEREAS on Friday the 4th of August, 1769, ELOPED from the ship Loyal Briton, JAMES YOUNG commander, lately arrived from St. Kitts, a NEGRO MAN, commonly known by the name of JOHN CARR, a thick well set fellow, about 30 years of age, marked with his country mark on his forehead, has an impediment in his speech, and had when he run away, a kind of a sty, lately come on one of his eyes; is well known in London, having lived with the said James Young and his father upwards of twenty two years.

Whoever will give any intelligence of him, so that he may be secured to Capt. James Young, at no. 24 Prescot-street, Goodman's-fields, LONDON, or to Mr. Felix Doran, Merchant in LIVERPOOL, will have FIVE GUINEAS REWARD.

N.B. He has gone by the above name, some years, the stye may be gone off before now, as it was only cold he got on the passage here.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register. 25 August 1769
(www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away from Charles Cooke - 19 years of age

RAN away from Mr. Charles Cooke, merchant, at Liverpool, on the 23d instant, A Slave Negro Man, called Tom, of the Angola country, about five feet four inches high, well-made, about 19 years old, is active and strong; has a mark on his upper lip, from a cut he received some years ago by the kick of a horse; was formerly troubled with a sore head, and has several marks under his hair; his legs inclinable, at particular times, to swell a little; speaks good English, having been in England 11 years, and was christened about the year 1764 in London, by some name, and has a certificate of it. He is supposed to have made off to Ireland; but being too well known there, it is expected he will come to this city soon. Wore, when he went away, a dark drab-coloured coat, scarlet wastecost with livery lace, a pair of boots on, and carried with him a blue great coat lined with red. Whoever secures the said Negroe, and brings him to the said Charles Cooke, at Liverpool, shall receive Ten Guineas reward, and all reasonable charges borne.

Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser. 31 August 1769
(www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

1770s

To be SOLD, by Cope & Wright - 30 years of age

To be Sold, A Fine BLACK BOY, About 12 years old, speaks English well, and understands waiting at a table: any person inclinable to purchase, may apply to COPE and WRIGHT.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 4 May 1770, p.3
(www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Ran away from the Havanna (William Wallace) - 22 years of age

R U N, FROM the Brig HAVANNA, the 11th of September, a black MAN, named Pembroke, about five feet six inches high, well made, about 22 years old, speaks good English, had on when he went off a blue jacket and trousers and check shirt, the person or persons that takes up the above Negro and delivers him to William Wallace, shall receive a handsome reward and all reasonable charges.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 14 September 1770 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Run away, apply John Gore, (Castle Street) - 30 years of age, Friday, Nov. 23, 1770

Robb'd and Run away, From his MASTER this MORNING, A BLACK MAN, Aged 22 years, about 5 feet 5 inches high, named John Fortune, had on a green frize coat and waistcoat, or a brown cloth waistcoat and buckskin breeches, without his shoes or hat. Any person or persons who will apprehend or give information where he is to be found, shall receive FIVE GUINEAS reward, and all expences, by applying to Mr. John Gore, Bookseller, in Liverpool.

All Masters of Ships are hereby cautioned not to take such a man to sea with them; and whoever shall hereafter be found out to have secreted him, or to have been any way concerned with him in the said robbery, will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 30 November, 1770

Run away from William Wallace - 40 years of age

Absented from his Master,

On Monday the 4th of May, 1772, A Black Man, called Sam, or Boston, About 40 years of age, low stature, broad shoulders and remarkably strong made; had on when he disappeared a short blue coat, buff waistcoat and buckskin breeches, speaks English better than Blacks generally do. Any person or persons that will deliver him to Wm. Wallace, merchant in Liverpool, shall have Five Guineas reward and all reasonable charges paid.

N.B. Masters of ships &c. are desired not to carry off the said negroe, or they will be made accountable for his value.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 15 May 1772

..... **Somerset Ruling, 22 June 1772**

Run away from Captain Tittle in Old Hall Street

R U N A W A Y,

From his Master's Service, at Liverpool, on Thursday last the 14th of September, 1772,

A NEGRO MAN, named Seymour, about five Feet seven or eight Inches high; had on a Pair of white short Trowsers, and a blue Jacket. He had also along with him a blue Coat, with a red Collar on, and a French Horn.

Any one who can give Information of him, so that he may be secured, to Capt. Tittle, in Old Hall-street, Liverpool, or to Mr. Thomas Rider, Iron Founder, in Manchester, shall receive two Guineas Reward

Manchester Mercury, 29 September 1772

Run away from Captain Tittle (Old Hall street), A black boy

Liverpool, September 25, 1772.

Run away last Night, From Captain TITTLE,

A black Boy, named SEAMAN,

About 5 Feet 8 Inches high, with Cuts on each Cheek.

Had on when he went away, a short blue Jacket, (but sometimes wears a blue Coat) and blue Breeches.

Whoever will apprehend, and bring him to Capt. TITTLE, shall receive Two Guineas Reward.

Gore's Liverpool Commercial Pamphlet, 2 October 1772

Run away from Hugh Pringle - 15 years of age

RUN AWAY,

From his MASTER at SUMMER HILL, last Monday the 27th July,

A BLACK BOY, Whose name is WILL;

HE is about 15 years of age, speaks English plain, has a burnt mark on

one of his wrists, had on a suit of thickset, or fustian cloaths, a check shirt, and black handkerchief about his neck, but commonly wears linen stocks and white shirts. Whoever apprehends the said black boy, (named William Mancho, an indented servant) are desired to bring him, or acquaint Mr Hugh Pringle, either at Liverpool, or at his house at Summer Hill, four miles distant from Liverpool, on the Prescott road, and they shall receive a suitable reward.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, to all persons, not to entertain or employ the said indented servant at their peril, otherwise they will be prosecuted as the law directs.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 31 July 1778

To be SOLD, by George Dunbar, by the Exchange - 14 years of age

To be Sold by Auction, At George Dunbar's office, on Thursday next, the 21st instant, at one o'clock, A Black BOY about 14 years old, and a large Mountain Tyger CAT.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 15 October 1779, p.3 (www.runaways.gla.ac.uk)

Run away from Captain Ralph, Talbot Inn (Water Street) - 14 years of age

RUN AWAY, on the 18th April last, from Prescott, a BLACK MAN SLAVE, named George Germain Foney, aged 20 years, about 5 feet 7, rather handsome, had on a green coat, red waistcoat, and blue breeches, with a plain pair of silver shoe buckles, he speaks English pretty well.

– Any person who will bring the Black to his master, Capt. Thomas Ralph, at the Talbot Inn, in Liverpool, or inform the master where the black is, shall be handsomely rewarded. – All persons are cautioned not to harbour the black.

N.B. The black is not only the slave but the apprentice of Captain Ralph.

Liverpool General Advertiser, or the Commercial Register, 5 May 1780

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Research and searchable database of Slave auctions and runaway advertisements
www.runaways.gla.ac.uk

Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire

Includes a free archive of transactions going back to 1849
www.hslc.org.uk

Liverpool Record Office

Searchable database of items held in their collection
www.archive.liverpool.gov.uk/calmview

Lancashire Council Archives

Searchable database of items held in their collection
www.archivecat.lancashire.gov.uk/calmview

Websites and social media

Gateacre Society

www.liverpool.ndo.co.uk/gatsoc

Mike Royden's History Pages (historian and author)

www.roydenhistory.co.uk

Dusty Teapot (Liverpool history and publisher)

Twitter: @thedustyteapot

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Angela Collison, Invaluable resource for mages of Liverpool

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Bygone Liverpool website

Since 2020, the authors have published their research on many subjects that have either been previously been relegated to mere footnotes in the published histories of Liverpool.

Some are new discoveries that have never been researched before.

Please visit: www.bygoneliverpool.wordpress.com

Bygone Liverpool Authors' own sites:

Liverpool Fragments

Twitter: @Waite99d

The Priory & the Cast Iron Shore

Wordpress: theprioryandthecastironshore.wordpress.com

Image accreditation

- P. 8. 'A view of the Goree Piazzas from underneath the Pier Head Overhead Railway terminus. 1913. LRO: 352 ENG/2/2405
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Liverpool's Slave Gate

According to local legend, this old stone gateway originally belonged to an 18th century building in Liverpool. Enslaved Africans supposedly passed through it to their place of auction, before being transported to the plantations in the West Indies. When this building was demolished, the gateway was salvaged and relocated six miles away to the village of Gateacre. Later, this legend earned it the name of the Slave Gate. In 1975 the gateway was awarded Grade II listed status.

The actual building the gateway came from was a complete mystery, until now. Our research shows it originated from one of the most famous buildings of 18th century Liverpool. The building itself had a fascinating history. The Slave Gate is an important relic of the town at the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. But was the associated story of auctions of enslaved Africans true?

About the authors

Bygone Liverpool is a collaboration of two local historians, Glen Huntley and Darren White. Our aim is to uncover little known, or previously unknown, aspects of Liverpool's history.

By pooling resources and individual skills this project uses original source material from archives to enable a fresh outlook on the city's past.

You can read Bygone Liverpool's other research projects on Wordpress, you can also follow us on Twitter, see below for details.



A Bygone Liverpool History Project

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