

Wales links with the slave trade

- By 1800 Swansea was producing 90% of British copper, much of which was used to fuel the trade, as bracelets and trinkets which were popular with African leaders. During 1780 the entire output of the Penclawdd works near Swansea was used to purchase slaves.
- Richard Pennant, the 1st Lord Penrhyn and MP for Liverpool built roads and a harbour to support Penrhyn Quarry, all on the proceeds of the slave trade. He was fiercely 'pro-slavery' believing that the middle passage from Africa to the West Indies was 'one of the happiest periods of a Negro's life'. This belief was fuelled by the paintings of idyllic plantations which hung in Penrhyn Castle.

(Source: Cymru Ddu: Hanes Pobl Duon Cymru / Black Wales: A History of Black Welsh People, Alan Llwyd/Hughes 2005)

- "The copper process during the 17th - 18th centuries had a profound influence on Britain's trade and was mainly the result of one man - Thomas Williams - The Copper King. As a result of copper being found and mined at Anglesey in 1768, he founded the Parys Mine Co. in 1774, taking the ore to St Helens or Swansea for smelting."
- "The copper ingots then came to Greenfield Valley to be made into Neptunes or saltpans and items for the slave trade, and more importantly, into copper bolts and sheets. The bolts were made to a secret formula, which many countries, including Holland, France and Germany tried to steal, held copper sheets to the hulls of wooden ships. "

(www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northeast/sites/nhob_walk/includes/walk_printout.sssi?1)

- Much of the social life of Western Europe in the 18th century depended on the products of slave labour. In homes and coffee houses, people met over coffee, chocolate or tea, sweetened with Caribbean sugar. They wore clothes made from American cotton and smoked pipes filled with Virginian tobacco. They used furniture made from mahogany and other tropical woods.
- Although the profit and loss on individual voyages could vary, many merchants and investors made fortunes from the trade. Many landowners also had estates in the Caribbean, which provided them with large incomes. Though historians disagree about the extent, the profits of slavery and slaving stimulated European economic growth and the growth of capitalism. In particular, the demand for goods to trade in Africa and the goods, particularly cotton, brought back from the Americas encouraged trade and industry in the Midlands and North-West England, the heart of the Industrial Revolution.

- The income from slavery and the slave trade made many people wealthy. They built large houses and were able to invest in a wide range of activities, including banking and industry, as well as supporting charitable institutions.
- Penrhyn Castle near Bangor in North Wales was built for George Hay Dawkins-Pennant. He was a wealthy Jamaican plantation owner who lived in Britain. Penrhyn was designed by Thomas Hopper in 1827 as a vast Neo-Norman castle. It is now owned by the National Trust.
- Richard Pennant, later Lord Penrhyn, inherited the largest estate in Jamaica. He devoted much of the profits of his plantations to developing the slate quarries of North Wales. He was MP for Liverpool 1767-80 and 1784-90 and spoke forcibly against the campaign to abolish the slave trade.
- The transatlantic slave trade generally followed a triangular route. Traders set out from European ports towards Africa's west coast. There they bought people in exchange for goods and loaded them into the ships. The voyage itself generally took 6 to 8 weeks. Once in the Americas, those Africans who had survived the journey were off-loaded for sale and put to work as slaves. The ships returned to Europe with goods such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, rice and later cotton, which had been produced by slave labour.

(<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/slavery/eprofits.asp>)

Use of copper in the African slave trade

Thomas Williams established copper and brass works at [Holywell](#) in Flint. Products made from the copper and brass at these factories were used mainly for the African slave trade. The importance of this trade can be seen from Thomas Williams petition to the House of Commons in July 1788.

" A petition by Thomas Williams Esquire, on behalf of himself and his co partners in the manufacture of Brass Battery, and other Copper , Brass and Mixed Goods, for the African Trade at Holywell in the county of Flint, Penclawdd in the county of Glamorgan, and Temple Mill in the county of Berks...setting forth, that the Petitioner and his Co-partners have laid out a capital of £70,000 and upwards to establish themselves in the aforesaid manufactories, which are entirely for the African market...and that the Petitioner has lately been informed that a Bill is now depending in the House, for the purpose of regulating for a limited time, the shipping and carrying of slaves in British vessels from the coast of Africa, which ... will greatly hurt, if not entirely ruin, the British trade to Africa in the manufactories aforesaid, whereby the Petitioner and his partners would lose the greatest part of the aforesaid Capital"

The importance of the slave trade to the copper industry had been recognized as early as 1713 in Bristol. By 1726 the record of Slave trades in Liverpool showed

that Copper was a very important secondary cargo for the slave traders. In 1771 over 300 tons of brass and 50 tons of copper were exported from Britain to Africa. While in 1776, 220 tons of Brass and 600 tons of copper were exported to the West Indies. By the 1780's over 1000 tons of copper per year was being sent to the west Indies. At least two vessels "Prince of Wales" and "Polly to Bonny" were in contract to carry slaves. the ships outward's cargo also included. " Padlocks and collars for blacks or dogs"

In the main manilas or bangles and neptunes and salt evaporation pans were the main cargo on the outward journey to Africa. For the West Indies a large part of the export goods were in form of copper bottoms and plates required for sugar boiling and rum distillation equipment.

<http://www.amlwchdata.co.uk/parys/slave.htm>

Thomas Williams (1737-1802) was a [Welsh](#) industrialist. At the time of his death, he was the richest man in Wales.

In the 18th century, there was a significant shortage of food for labouring people, because supply could not meet demand. Williams, known to his Welsh speaking workmen as *Twm Chwarae Teg* ("Tom Fair Play"), once complained to the magistrate at Llanidan that the villagers on Anglesey raided his fields and stole the turnips intended for his cattle and used them to feed their families. His business rival, [Matthew Boulton](#), called Williams the "copper king" – "the despotick sovereign of the copper trade". To his friend and agent he said, "Let me advise you to be extremely cautious in your dealings with Williams". He spoke of Williams as "a perfect tyrant and not over tenacious of his word and will screw damned hard when he has got anybody in his vice". Of the Cornish producers, Boulton said "they would not have submitted to be kicked and piss'd on by me as they have been by them" (Williams and his partner [Wilkinson](#)).

Williams' tenacity as a lawyer was very evident when acting for the Hugheses of [Llysdulas](#) who were in an acrimonious dispute with Sir [Nicholas Bayly](#) of [Plas Newydd](#) concerning the [Parys Mountain copper](#) mine. This dispute, which ran for over nine years, involved the interpretation of that very unsatisfactory testamentary device called a [moiety](#). At one stage the dispute involved four years of expensive litigation in the [Chancery](#) court with the [Attorney General](#) and the [Solicitor General](#) acting for opposing sides and was not finally settled until 1778. In that year Sir Nicholas leased his own copper mine to a [London](#) banker John Dawes (a secret associate of Williams) for 21 years.

Williams emerged from the dispute as the managing partner with the Revd Edward Hughes and John Dawes in the Parys Mine Company. This under Williams control was cheap to run and extremely productive. His great problem was to obtain an attractive price for the copper. He faced a cartel of copper smelters whose aim was to buy cheap and sell dear. He moved decisively to

establish his own smelting facilities and quickly entered into an agreement with John Mackay to establish an industrial complex at [Ravenhead](#) near [St Helens](#) in [Lancashire](#). He also established warehousing and copper manufacturing and finishing facilities, and even a mint – thus creating a vertical organisation.

He also acted quickly to absorb or control other producers – notably the Cornish mines to produce a complete response to the cartel. Although always the driving force, Williams built up and controlled a major commercial organisation and surrounded himself with able staff. The Revd Edward was always a sleeping partner but younger brother Michael Hughes was an able manager. Other partners and staff included The [Earl of Uxbridge](#), Owen Williams, and Thomas Harrison.

His business organisation was first rate. He developed the technique of establishing his various businesses in separate companies. Thus the Parys Mine Company controlled its own smelting in South Wales and Lancashire and copper manufacture at [Holywell](#). Likewise the Mona mine (adjoining Parys) output was smelted by the Stanley Company in both Lancashire and South Wales. Other Companies dealt with manufacture at Greenfield near Flint and in the Thames Valley, Chemical Works (vitriol) at Garston Liverpool and still others with Warehousing and Banking.

Williams had built copper works at [Flint](#) and [Penclawdd](#) where he made copper and brass products. Many of these materials were for use in the [African slave trade](#). These copper trinkets etc. were largely exported to Africa for use as payment for slaves, who were then transported to the [West Indies](#) and sold. The proceeds were then used to purchase commodities for import into Britain. Williams claimed to have invested £70,000 in this trade and petitioned parliament in [1788](#) when a bill was being discussed to prevent British ships from carrying slaves. Williams is said also to have introduced the use of copper bolts to fix the copper sheeting to naval vessels and it would appear that he sold them to all sides in the naval conflicts!

Thomas Williams born in [Llanidan](#), [Anglesey 1737](#) was clearly a complex character; tenacious lawyer, remarkable businessman, some would say an unscrupulous cheat. Certainly he was a decisive man who could and did act quickly, as on the occasion when, without regard for his depositors, he closed the doors to pre-empt a run on his [Chester and North Wales Bank](#). When he died in [1802](#), 1,200 people were employed in his Parys and Mona mines, but five years later the number had dropped to 120. This owing partly to the collapse of copper prices, but also to the exhaustion (so it was said) of the known local copper deposits – but no doubt largely resulting from the death of the firm's great driving force

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Williams_of_Llanidan)

Other Useful Sites:

Life on a Slave Ship – Hell Below Deck

- <http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/students/his3487/lembrich/seminar53.html>
- <http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/>
- <http://www.understandingslavery.com/>