A Very Human Trade: The Archaeology of Slavery

The 2007 CBA NW autumn conference marked the bicentenary of the end of the British slave trade and was held with the support of National Museums Liverpool, which in 2007 opened the International Slavery Museum.

**Slavery in the Roman World**

Peter Carrington

Our chairman reviewed the ‘who, what, why, where, when and how’ of slavery in the classical world. Widespread use of slaves appears to have begun with Greek colonisation of other parts of the Mediterranean, which reduced the availability of local hired labour, while increasing the market for tradable goods and services and the availability of enslavable populations through frequent warfare.

Ironically, it was slaves who made possible ancient democracy, by giving their citizen masters the leisure to engage in the political process. Manumission worked only where freed slaves could be integrated into the free society.

The numbers of slaves varied with the availability of cheap free labour. Of Roman Italy’s estimated 6 million inhabitants around 22.5% may have been slaves, while in Egypt slaves accounted for only around 7% of the population.

Maintaining the Roman empire’s slave workforce required around 200,000–250,000 new slaves each year. As the empire grew these were supplied from newly conquered areas, by breeding slaves and by the acquisition of unwanted or kidnapped children.

There were few separate ‘slave occupations’ in the classical world, although mining, which was a Roman state monopoly, may be an exception, and there are few sites that could be interpreted as slave markets.

**Sugar Plantations in the West Indies**

Rob Philpott

Rob Philpott gave an account of recent fieldwork in Nevis and St Kitts (St Christopher Island), where St Mary Cayen and Christchurch parishes have been surveyed.

Although originally discovered by Columbus, the islands were not settled by the Spanish as there was no gold. In 1593 two venturers, Ralph Merrivale and Thomas Warner, settled the island to develop it commercially. French settlers also arrived on the island, hence the mix of English and French place names.

Initially tobacco and indigo were grown alongside sugar, but by the mid-seventeenth century sugar had become the sole commercial crop. Initially the labour was provided by indentured servants (mostly convicts), but there were labour shortages and by 1636 slaves were being brought to the island. By the end of the eighteenth century 90% of the population were slaves. As numbers grew treatment of slaves became worse and the life expectancy of slaves on the island was a mere ten years.

The key building on each plantation site was the stone-built boiling house where sugar was made. The ‘Great House’ of the plantation owner or his manager was smaller and constructed.
of timber. Typically the Great House was on higher ground above the boiling house. The sites of slave villages are now difficult to find, being less substantial and usually confined to a marginal area of the plantation above the cliffs or along the edge of one of the island’s natural ravines, which provide the natural boundaries of the island’s parishes.

Other buildings that are found associated with the sugar industry are mill buildings where animal or wind power was used to crush the cane and extract the liquid that would be processed into sugar. Many of these mills were adapted to steam power in the 1820s. A final group of buildings associated with the use of slaves on the island are the churches, Anglican for the white population and Moravian for the slaves.

The Archaeology of the Middle Passage
Jane Webster

The transatlantic slave trade accounted for 27,000 voyages (9,945 by British ships), which transported eleven million Africans (over three million on British ships). Of these around 1.5 million of these died during the voyage, including 183 ships that were lost at sea with a cargo of slaves on board.

Only two of these ships have been excavated. The Henrietta Maria sank in 1700. The ship’s bell was raised by treasure hunters in 1973. This treasure hunter Mel Fisher founded the Maritime Heritage Society, which has taken responsibility for the wreck site and now has a museum in Florida. The ship was owned by a syndicate of businessmen who provided many of the trade goods sent to Africa from their own factories.

The Fredensborg was found in 1974. It sank in 1768 in the Baltic while returning to Copenhagen after a successful voyage to Africa and the West Indies. Among the materials recovered were elephant and hippopotamus ivory, mahogany and dyewood, and a mortar used for preparing African food, as slaves were fed on their native diet during the voyage (rice, yams, beans), in contrast to the European diet of the crews.

Other sites of slave ships are known but these have not been excavated:

the Florida coast in 1827. Most of the slaves were evacuated before the ship sank, although forty-one were lost. The Trouvadore sank off the coast of the Turks and Caicos islands in 1841. 193 slaves survived and found themselves by default ‘free’, having arrived on a British shore.

The fates of some ex-slave ships are also known. For example: a wreck in Beaufort Island inlet off the Carolina coast is thought to be Blackbeard’s Queen Anne’s Revenge, a former French slave ship. The James Matthews, which sank off the coast of western Australia in a squall in 1841, was formerly a Portuguese slave ship, the Don Francisco, and was taken as a prize ship by the West Africa Squadron in 1837.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Ghanaian Perspective
Ben Kankpeyeng

Slavery in Ghana predated the transatlantic slave trade. Within Ghanaian society slaves were integrated into the owner’s family. They could gain freedom by marrying a free person and could inherit property from their owner. However, the children of slaves were born into slavery.

The trans-Saharan slave trade pre-dated the Atlantic trade by 600 years and began following the collapse of the west African Songhai empire after its defeat by Morocco. Frequent conflict between the successor states, of which there were three in what is now northern Ghana, produced prisoners who could be traded as slaves with the Arabs.

Gold first brought Europeans to the west African coast, and in 1482 the Portuguese built Elmina, the first of sixty European castles along 300 miles of coastline. The first forty slaves were transported in 1654 and the forts were developed as slave-trading and holding centres.

Archaeological evidence for the trade in Ghana comprises: defensive walls around settlements; transit camps and known rest stops along trade routes; slave markets; shrines where slave ancestors are remembered; and abandoned settlements depopulated by slave raiding. There is also archaeological evidence for the suppression and cessation of the slave trade in the form of nineteenth-century British forts and new settlements established by freed slaves.

Slavery, Power and Cultural Identity in the Irish Sea Region, 1066 – 1171
David Wyatt

The Irish Sea slave trade has often been blamed on the Vikings, but taking slaves was part of a regional culture in which young nobles were expected to gain prestige through exploits that included raiding and slave-taking.

In the eleventh century the Church sought to reform behaviour in western Europe, to replace the warrior culture with chivalry. Church condemnation of slavery was initially limited to the sale of slaves who were Christians to non-Christians. The Welsh and Scots on the margins of Europe were condemned as bestial and barbarous, particularly following Welsh into English territory incursions in 1094 and 1098, which involved the taking of slaves. Demonisation helped to justify their conquest and could lend English wars against them a crusade-like quality.

The Ritualisation of Slavery and Restraint
Miranda Aldhouse Green

This talk provided a review of the evidence for the treatment of captives from the classical world and European prehistory, ranging from a description of the treatment of slaves in Tacitus’ Germania to excavated Iron Age bound inhumations and bog bodies. Examples of Iron Age burials include bodies that were bound at the time of burial or contained within ‘crates’. Some bog bodies provide evidence for disfigurement or torture before interment in the bog.

Slave manacles and shackles have been found at Celtic ritual sites, apparently deposited as dedications to the gods.

The iconography of defeat and the psychological effect of chaining individuals together, suppressing individuality, was deposited as dedications to the gods.
The Lancashire Gardens Trust needs your help

The Lancashire Gardens Trust is a new not-for-profit organisation which aims to study, record, promote and protect examples of designed landscapes: estate and private gardens and parks, public squares, botanical gardens, arboreta and plant nurseries, allotments, and workplace landscapes of historic or special interest. By ‘historic’ we mean older than about the last 20 years, but outstanding recent work will also be included. ‘Lost’ parks and gardens, including medieval deer parks and such like, are also part of the scope.

The first county trust was established in 1985, and until a few months ago Lancashire was one of only two counties which did not have such a trust. The trust will also cover Merseyside and those parts of Greater Manchester which were not historically in Cheshire. The county trusts are autonomous, but are supported by the London-based Association of Gardens Trusts.

Lancashire has many fine examples of historic gardens, designed landscapes and public parks. Many were created by leaders of the Industrial Revolution. Although some of their houses have been demolished, their parks can still benefit all of us. Parks and gardens represent changing fashions in design, they represent our heritage, and they provide us with open space and beauty. It is all too easy to let this important reference and resource slip away, when modernisation or redevelopment is in the air. The Trust is already aware of around 700 parks and gardens within the Lancashire study area, but only around sixty of these are on English Heritage’s Register of parks and gardens of special historic interest. Many of the others are under threat from neglect and/or development, or have not been researched.

Lancashire Gardens Trust needs to develop a membership base which will support the work that needs to be done. We plan to have a programme of talks and visits to gardens within and beyond our county. Many of these will be private places that are usually closed to the general public.

If you would like to get more involved, we are looking for people willing to offer practical support and help.

The Lancashire Gardens Trust has been founded just as a Heritage Lottery-funded national initiative gets under way. The Parks and Gardens UK project (www.parksandgardens.ac.uk), which aims to provide online access to records of 6000 parks and gardens throughout the UK, was launched in October 2007 by the Association of Gardens Trusts and the University of York. The project is coordinated by a roll-call of leading names in the garden history field, but the website is being created by data clerks around the country. Individual volunteers and county garden trusts are being invited to supply information, and enhancement to existing records. Each region has a volunteer co-ordinator.

The Lancashire Gardens Trust committee is extremely keen to ensure that Lancashire is well represented on the website, and we would welcome active involvement in research and recording from as many individuals as possible, and especially from local not-for-profit organisations and action groups.

Email: membership@lancsgt.org.uk

Nigel Neil
For The Lancashire Gardens Trust

Obituary

Neil Thompson, 56
Wyre Archaeology Society

We report the loss of Neil Thompson who spoke at the 2007 Spring Reports Meeting of the group’s work in the vicinity of the village of Nateby near Garstang.

Neil’s interest in history and archaeology began long before the foundation of the Wyre group, with a particular interest in ancient trackways, and Roman and later roads in the Fylde area.

He was a member of Pilling Historical Society and a popular speaker both with that society and Garstang Historical Society.

Neil also founded the Fylde Wildlife Preservation Society in 1974, and served as parish councillor for 24 years (as chairman three times) and represented Wyre parish on the borough council’s standards committee.
MadYAC visit Viking York

On 30 June members of MadYAC (the Mersey and Dee branch of the Young Archaeologists’ Club), with support from CBA North West, visited York, accompanied by parents and some of the volunteers who organise and run the club’s activities.

After walking roughly half of the circuit of York’s medieval ramparts the club members descended on the Jorvik centre to tour its simulation of Viking-age York and museum. Some had to be almost dragged away from the museum exhibits to proceed to ‘DIG’, where they were able, after a brief lunch, to actually dig. YAC members all want to dig, but rarely get an chance, due to a combination of health and safety issues and because youthful enthusiasm may not always accord well with proper excavation or recording methods.

The members completed evaluation reports after the visit. All enjoyed the day. The only dampener was the rain, although we were relatively lucky and intermittent light rain was the worst we had to contend with.

Metal Detector finds from North Lancashire

Two silver Roman denarii were found by a member of Lune Valley Metal Detecting Club and reported to Dot Bruns (Finds Liaison Officer for Lancashire and Cumbria) at one of their monthly meetings. Both denarii are in extremely fine condition. Dr David Shotter kindly provided an exact identification and RIC (Roman Imperial Coinage) references for the Portable Antiquities Scheme’s database (www.findsdatabase.org.uk) where more information about the coins can be obtained.

They have been recorded as:

- LANCUM-D96E91 (denarius of Antoninus Pius)
- LANCUM-D97CA2 (denarius of Faustina).

Antoninus Pius was married to Faustina I (or Faustina the Elder) and had her deified as a goddess after she died in AD 141. This is why our denarius of Faustina dates to after 141 – the inscription DIVA FAVSTINA already reflects her new status as ‘goddess’ rather than ‘mere’ empress.

Autumn Conference 2008

The CBA NW committee are exploring the theme of ‘Roman hinterlands’ for the Autumn Conference, with the intention of incorporating contributions into a future issue of ANW and to maintain the impetus of the Regional Research Framework.