

S.A.L.H.S

website: www.salhs.org.uk

Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

Issue 42

Editor—Terry Collins

April 2022

Hertfordshire and the Slave Trade

A return visit by Marion Hill from HALS was our February speaker on Zoom telling us about the above topic. Her talk was split in two parts, to begin with she examined the Slave Trade and how it worked and then went on to discuss the rise of the abolishment movement.

The slave trade as we know it began in the 15th and 16th centuries and was mainly carried out by Dutch and Portuguese traders who were looking for gold and silver and land for growing crops in the Caribbean, mainly coffee and sugar to meet the ever increasing demand in Europe. These traders sailed from Europe to West Africa where they took millions of people into slavery and transported them to the Caribbean islands. Life expectancy for these slaves was just about seven years. Until the start of the nineteenth century eleven million people were enslaved of whom one and a half million died.

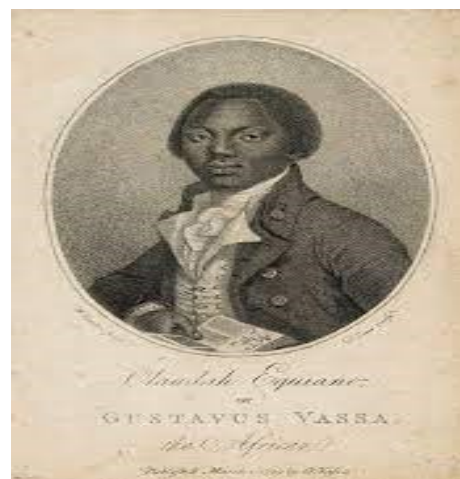
British slave ships sailed for English ports to West Africa where they took the slaves on board and then set off on a voyage of two months to the West Indies where they were sold in slave markets and the ships sailed back to England carrying with them goods such as coffee and sugar, making the traders extremely wealthy this voyage was the infamous slaving triangle. Most of the slaves travelled on large ships capable of carrying 454 slaves on which, women and children were separated, but on board they suffered both mental and physical abuse. They were forced go outside to exercise in the open air and it is estimated that up to 20 % died on the voyage. Eventually the numbers carried were

reduced and a doctor was carried on board but this was mainly to protect the investment of the traders.

Youngberry Manor in Standon was the home of the Giles Pullen and in 1800 they owned 119 slaves whose value ranged from 25-200 pounds. Not all slave owners were men it was fashionable for women to have little slave boys as pages, for example Mary Grimston from Borehambury near St Albans owned a small boy who was given to her as a gift by her grandfather. Not all slaves were ill-treated many were educated and baptised such as Francis Barber who was given to Dr. Johnson after being sent from Jamaica to England, he eventually became Dr Johnsons secretary. A few of these slaves managed to write accounts of their lives, one of whom was Gustavus Vassa who became a free man, married an English woman and became a member of the abolition movement and wrote his memoirs.

During the eighteenth century the movement to abolish the slave trade grew with the involvement of a number of famous names including Josiah Wedgewood and David Barclay from the Banking family, who was a slave owner but being a Quaker he freed all his family's 32 slaves, and the in 1878 the Giles Pullen family changed their feelings about slavery and joined the abolition movement. Locally Thomas Fowell Buxton and his sister in law Elizabeth Fry became two of the leaders of the movement. Thomas Clarkson from Wisbech was a young man who won a prize in an essay competition about slavery and on his way back home after winning he stopped at Wadesmill and he had what he called a spiritual revelation and decided to

devote his life to the abolition of the slave trade. After his death a monument was erected near the spot where he had his revelation.



Gustavus Vassa 1745-1797

In the late 18th century the Hertfordshire Anti Slavery movement was founded, one of many throughout the country, anti slavery petitions were produced and sent to parliament. One from Hitchin had over 5000 signatures. The poet William Cowper wrote poems to help the abolitionist movement, a sugar boycott took place and it was discussed in parliament.

On 25th March 1807 the Slave Trade Act was passed by Parliament making slavery illegal throughout the British Empire but it still continued. On 28 August 1832 the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, it purchased slaves from their masters and paved the way for the complete abolition of slavery in the British Empire by 1838, however former slave owners demanded compensation for the loss of their income from slaves and the Government paid out 20 million pounds to owners.

Terry Collins

An Evening With Old Relics

Tim Turner from Swords was our March speaker making his fourth visit to us. This time when he looked at a number of items brought by members of the audience he wanted to know the story behind them. He also brought some items along as well.

To begin with there were two small paintings from Sara Atkins which were taken from a French Chateau, by her grandfather during the first World War, one of which had a bullet hole in it. Julia Davies had brought along a fire screen which had been given as a wedding present to her grandfather and grandmother, she also has a book of the letters they wrote to each other while he was serving overseas. Julia also mentioned that her grandfather was awarded the Military Cross and 2 Bars.

John Lloyd had brought with him a number of items which had belonged to Talbots garage in Ware, including a metal plaque, a number of photographs including a picture of the owners of the business Gideon and Gertrude and a metal jug. The garage remained open in to the 1970's. Andrea Roche was another member who brought along a painting, this time of a horse. This had been given to her by her great, great grandfather, it was a horse that he had looked after while he was working on the Buxton estate. Tim explained that in the 19th and early 20th centuries it was quite common for artists to go from farm to farm and country estates painting pictures of animals and this picture was typical of that type of work and did date from the 19th century.

A silver christening spoon from the 1880's was supplied by Rob Gifford. Tim said that it was quite common for silver cutlery sets to be offered for sale with at least one piece missing and unless it was made by a well known name such as Mappin and Webb, it would not fetch a very good price at auction. He also brought in a book about William Hogarth written by Austin Dobson. Inside which were letters between the author and Rob's great grandfather who had been asked to edit the book. He was the head of Brentford Library and had written his own book entitled *The History of Antiquities of Brentford*, circa 1920.

When our secretary, Lynne Heraud moved into her new house in the High Street she discovered a couple of items in the building, which had preciously been one of the village pubs, The Pied Bull. She found a metal

From the Editor

I am sorry to say that this will be the last SALHS Newsletter that I will be writing, editing and producing. I have been doing this for the ten years that the society has been in existence. I am giving up due to health reasons as I am unable to write as fast as I could making it impossible to keep up with the speaker.

I hope that someone out there will feel they can carry on this job as it keeps all our members up to date and in touch with everything that is going on. I have enjoyed producing these

tool from a blacksmiths forge and a lamp from the late 19th century.

One of the items Tim brought along was a bottle from the 18th century called a mallet bottle as it is shaped like hammer and Tim told us that they were normally hand blown. They were sometimes found buried in a doorway or in the hearth where they were supposed to bring good luck and kept away witches. He also showed us some pieces of pottery and porcelain from different centuries including one from the 17th century which was in the Chinese/Japanese style which was very popular at the time. This plate had been broken into more than thirty pieces but had been repaired by using rivets to hold the it altogether as it would not have been possible to glue so many pieces



back together, people did this if it was a favourite item of theirs.

A Japanese box, which opens to what looks like a compass, was brought along by Imogen White which was obtained by her late husband Ian, our society's founder and first Chairman.

He was at a conference in Japan at which many of the delegates finished the day at a karaoke bar, with Ian taking

part singing Yesterday. Later on there was a formal dinner with hundreds of attendees, given by the Mayor of Tokyo, after all the formalities were over the Mayor stood up and announced to everyone 'Now I believe that Ian White San, he sing karaoke' Ian almost died with embarrassment and said to the senior civil servant. 'if you think I'm singing to this lot, you can f***** think again. The very senior civil servant turned back to him and said, 'and if you think you can f***** get out of this you can't. You must f***** do this for your f***** Queen and f***** country. So Ian sang Hey Jude, to resounding applause.

Terry Collins

newsletters over the years and I hope you have had as much enjoyment from reading them.

Terry Collins

From the Treasurer

I need to remind those of you that are not on standing orders with us that it is time to renew your memberships. If you pay by bank transfer and are **not** renewing would you please let me know, and for those of you who usually pay by cheque or cash I enclose a renewal form. Many thanks

Glenis Collins

A Walk With The Admiral

April saw the return to us of Richard Thomas who many of you will have seen and enjoyed on one of his previous visits and this time his subject was the history through the ages of a street in Hoddesdon.

Reached via Upper Marsh Lane, and now known as Admirals Walk this was a track leading to grazing land and the River Lea known as Four Leas. As long ago as 1399 records are held of the landowners and those who rented land, one section held by Nicholas Bash for the sum of thirteen and four pence. In 1573 the first map of the area was made followed by a second one in 1599. A title map of 1847 shows one of the land holders was the Fearnley-Whitingstall family, distant relatives of the celebrity chef.

In 1841 Rear Admiral Donat Henchy O'Brien purchased and moved into Yew House, which was on the High Street in Hoddesdon, close to Four Leas where he walked his dogs. He was born in Ireland in 1785 and



Rear Admiral Donat Henchy O'Brien 1785-1857

joined the navy in 1796. Despite his young age he joined the *Overyssel* of 64 guns and was employed on boat service. In 1799 aged 14 he was put in command of a hoy (a small sailing craft) which was loaded with stone, meant to be sunk at the entrance to the enemy's harbour, but in a sudden squall it sank in the wrong place and O'Brien and crew had to be rescued. In February 1803 he was made midshipman and a year later he was master's mate of the frigate *Hussar* which was wrecked upon the Isle De Sainte and he was taken prisoner by the French and sent as prisoner of war to Verdun where he stayed for three years. In August 1807 he determined to escape and he made a rope from bed sheets, climbed down a 72 foot high wall with two colleagues and set out to walk to Etaples on the French coast, 250 miles away. They were captured on 18th September and handed to the Army and sent back to Verdun and then onto a prison at Bitche 100 miles near-

er the German border. However after walking 80 miles he escaped from his escort and walked alone 220 miles to Lindau on the Swiss border.

Once again he was arrested and handed back to the army and sent to the rock fortress at Bitche. He was held there for nine months before escaping again after descending three concentric walls using a home made rope. This time after 4 days they crossed the Rhine into Germany and 440 miles later they reached Salzburg and from there onward to Trieste. In total during 70 days of freedom he had walked over a thousand miles.

He boarded a ship called the *Amphion* where he was welcomed by the captain and added to the ships roll as a Midshipman. The following day he was in action and was hit in the right arm by a musket ball, which left him with a lifelong disability. After recovery He was sent to Malta where he joined the *Ocean*, Admiral Collingwood's flagship, which was a 98 gun ship. The Admiral promoted him on 29th March 1809 to Lieutenant. In November 1811 he was in service on board HMS *Bacchante* where he distinguished himself and was promoted again to Commander in 1813. From 1818 to 1821 he commanded the *Slaney* on the South America station. In October 1821 he returned to England on half pay, this ended his active service. He was promoted to Rear Admiral in March 1852. In 1814 he had published "The Narrative of Captain O'Brien R.N." an account of his service, capture and various escapes. The book was in two volumes and was followed in 1839 by a further volume entitled "My Adventures in the Late War".

On 28th June 1825 at the age of 40 he married Hannah Walmsley they had three sons and two daughters. He remained in Yew House until his death on 13th May 1857 at the age of 71. In 1883 his adventures were commemorated in the name of a new road built on land where he used to exercise his dogs - it was called Admirals Walk.

Meanwhile more plots were becoming available for building and Richard showed us just how the road grew over the years, using maps and drawings. He spoke of various people who bought plots such as Thomas Hackett who was a pork butcher, he even told us which plot number they bought. Thrift House where our speaker lives was built in 1885. More houses were built in 1891 and at one time there were 27 people living in just three cottages. One cottage was also used as a shop for a number of years. He supported all this with very old photos of the different people he spoke about giving us a real look into their lives.

Admirals Walk today looks like very many suburban roads with a mixture of detached, semi detached and terraced houses and when seen from the air the whole length of the road can be seen from top to bottom, I wonder if the admiral would recognise it today if he was walking along it with his dogs.

Terry Collins

St. Margaret's Level Crossing Goes to Court

When the level crossing came into use in 1843 there was relatively little traffic on the road and did not cause much delay for road users. Older local residence will remember long queues of traffic caused by the closing of the gates against road traffic before the bypass was opened in the 1980s. They may be surprised that being kept waiting overly long at the railway gates was a problem as early as the 1870s. At that time the gates were operated by a porter/gateman, working from a small hut next to the level crossing, opening and closing them by hand. The opening of the Buntingford line in 1863 had given rise to additional delays for road traffic as Buntingford Line coaches detached from some Hertford bound trains had to be shunted across to the branch line. This led to growing complaints by people using the highway being held up for too long at St Margarets Level Crossing.

Things came to a head on the 28th August 1876 when a Mr Brown [a Magistrate] was detained for 8 minutes and claimed that road traffic had been delayed for up to 20 minutes in total by the gates on that occasion. He had complained immediately to the Stationmaster about this delay and the whole matter ended up in the Ware Petty Sessions Court on the 19th of September. The railway company was charged with; - *“that they did unlawfully and wilfully obstruct the free passage of the highway by having certain gates open across such railway for a long and unreasonable time and without just cause for so doing, thereby preventing one Henry John Brown Esq. from passing”*. The railway company claimed that they had a legal right to obstruct the highway and no time limit was mentioned in the said permission and therefore there was no case to answer. Both assertions were correct but the magistrates decided to determine the case on its merits, which would mean judging on the possible unreasonable use of legal powers.

The key witness in the case was William Lovett who had been responsible for opening and closing the gates on the day in question. He explained the problems arising at the level crossing when moving coaches detached from trains from London across to the Buntingford Line. It was revealed that his duties included operating the signals [located on the platform by the station building], dealing with passengers [including ticket collecting and assisting with their luggage], as well as the responsibility for operating the gates at the level crossing. It was discovered that Mr Lovett's young son had opened the gates to help his busy father on the occasion of the incident reported by Mr Brown.

The Magistrate's Bench found the Railway Company was guilty of obstructing the highway and fined them forty shillings. They also mentioned that the crossing at St Margarets was widely known to be the cause of delays to road users. The Railway Company was also admonished for expecting one person to do so many tasks which would inevitably lead to delays. In connection with which they made it clear that they did not feel that Mr Lovett was in any way to blame for the obstruction of the highway.

Despite the increasing use of new technologies over the intervening years the level crossing gates have been the cause of considerable continuing frustration to locals. The advent of motorised transport was to see many people end up in court themselves for trying to jump the gates as they were closing rather than be delayed. Today the level crossing barriers are remotely operated from many miles away and monitored by closed circuit television cameras. A far cry from William Lovett busily moving about the station from task to task, trying his best to please rail passengers and road users alike.

Stuart Moye

The SALHS Committee

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Vice Chair	Rosemary James
Archivist/Historian	Ray Dixon
Archivist/Facebook	Andrea Roche
Newsletter	Terry Collins
Parish Council Rep	Julia Davies

Committee Members:

Linda Gifford
Gerald Coppen
Rob Gifford
John Lloyd
Sara Atkins

Website Manager Brian Johnson
General enquiries email
Admin@salhs.org.uk

Data Protection Act

In accordance with the above act we have to advise that the Society holds information on computer in respect of each member. This information is used for routine membership purposes only and remains confidential.

Forthcoming events

May	13th 2022	AGM. Speaker TBA
June	10th 2022	What People had in their Homes 1600-1700 by David Short
July	8th 2022	Saxons In the Lea Valley by Neil Sankey
August	12th 2022	Barbecue—Further Details to Follow
September	9th 2022	Abbot Moots Great Barns around St Albans by Dr Lee Prosser
October	14th 2022	House Steward at the National Trust by Sara Atkins

Unless stated otherwise all meetings are at the Parish Hall at 7.30pm
Members Free Non Members £2.00 Tea Coffee and Biscuits included