

Atlantic slave trade: investigating primary sources

Scotland and the Caribbean

This resource can be used alongside *The abolitionist campaigns* resource.

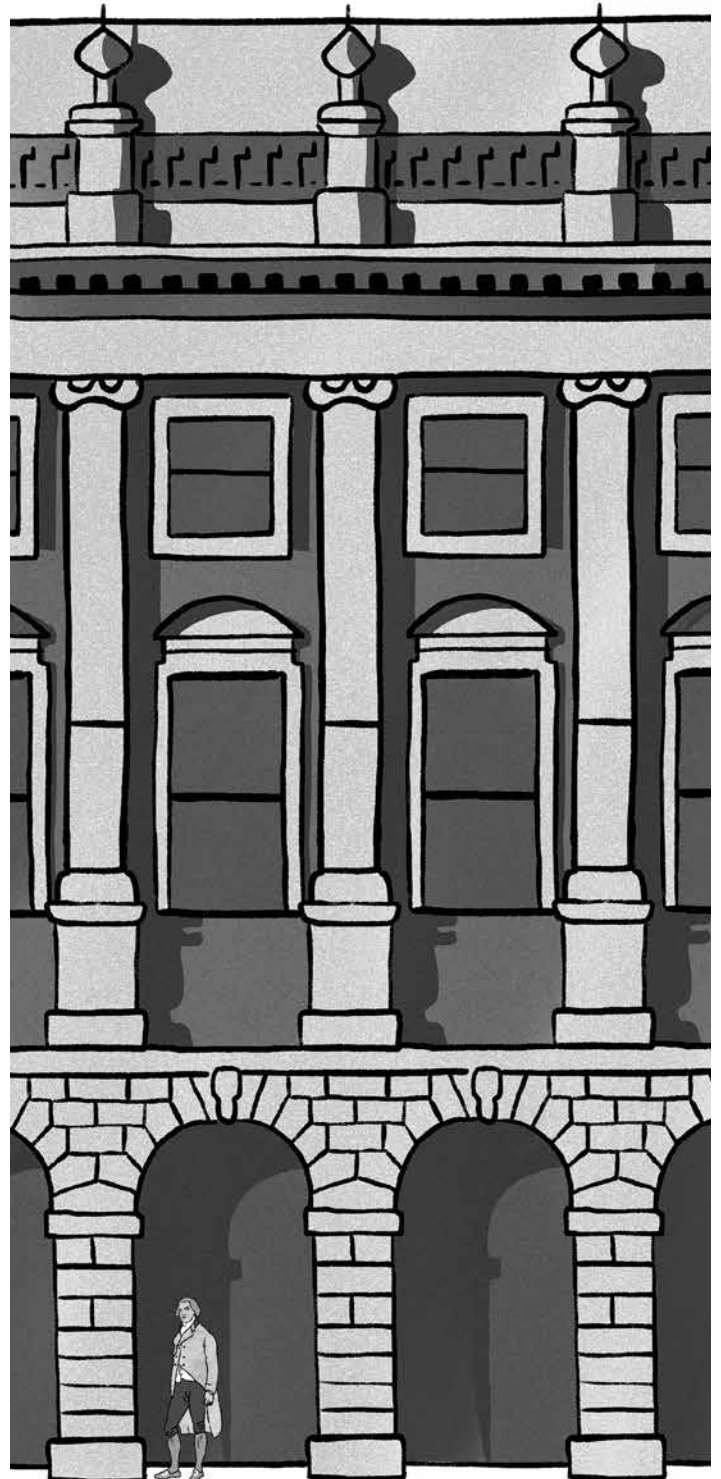
Introduction

The story of Scotland's economic success is inseparable from slavery. The wealth created through the trade of tobacco, sugar, cotton, rum, indigo and rice helped shape the course of Scottish industrialisation during the 18th and 19th centuries, at a key moment for the economy, creating lasting impacts to the present day.

The economic impact of the Atlantic slave trade and wider slavery system on Scotland can be seen in various ways:

- the growth of industries (e.g. manufacturing linen cloth which enslaved people wore on plantations in the Caribbean and North America; herring processing industries which supplied food for enslaved people).
- the rising wealth of merchants and manufacturers (e.g. those involved in the production and trade of goods such as sugar, tobacco, linen and herring) evidenced by the money they invested within their own towns, cities and in estates across Scotland's countryside.

There are some objects in the collections at National Museums Scotland which can shed light on connections between Scottish society, the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery system in the Caribbean. When placed in the context of the wider historical period, they also raise important questions which may encourage further research.



Find out more about this topic
www.nms.ac.uk/slavetraderesources

Architectural model of the Glasgow town house



What is it?

This is an architectural model of the first Glasgow town house or town hall. The model shows the street-facing front of this magnificent building, which was built in the Trongate between 1737 and 1760. It was considered to be the most distinguished building in 18th-century Glasgow and symbolised the new wealth of the 'tobacco lords' who governed the city. The 'tobacco lords' were a group of merchants who made enormous fortunes by trading in tobacco produced through the exploitation of enslaved people in the Americas.

Who made it?

The Glasgow town house represented by this model was designed and built by architect, Allan Dreghorn and sculptor, Mungo Naismith. In addition to being the architect of St Andrew's in the Square (the church where many of Glasgow's colonial merchants worshipped during this period), Dreghorn was a prominent Glasgow businessman. He was a coach builder, house builder and tobacco merchant who also traded in timber and lead. He co-founded the first Glasgow bank, the Ship Bank, in 1750, and was an important figure in the development of Glasgow's Merchant City (e.g. holding the office of Treasurer in 1739 and Bailie in 1741).

In 1781, the town house was converted into Glasgow's first hotel, the Tontine, which was named after the Tontine Society of Glasgow, established by the 'tobacco lords'. It was demolished around 1911. The *Tontine Heads*, sculpted by Naismith (along with David Cation and W. J. Maxwell) on the original town house, can still be seen in Glasgow today in St Nicholas' Garden, Provand's Lordship, Castle Street.

Date:

The model was made around the year 1756.

Materials and dimensions:

Wood, mahogany; painted and varnished.

Length: 97.0cm

Height: 55.5cm

Depth: 5.0cm

Connections to the Atlantic slave trade:

- The River Clyde in Glasgow was a major port from which linen and other goods were exported and tobacco and sugar were imported from the Caribbean and North America, to be consumed in Scotland or traded across Europe.
- This model illustrates how the wealth generated through both direct and indirect involvement in the Atlantic slave trade benefitted Scottish cities by being invested in the construction of grand and lavish buildings.
- The mahogany wood from which the model is made is a direct link across the Atlantic to the Caribbean, where these enormous, hardwood trees were grown. Enslaved people were forced to take part in the dangerous and demanding manual labour that the trade in hardwoods generated.
- Allan Dreghorn benefitted from the Atlantic slave trade by developing his reputation as a fine architect of some of the grand buildings of Glasgow's new Merchant City. His economic and political success can also be linked to his involvement in the trade of tobacco, and his connections with Glasgow's 'tobacco lords'.
- The establishment of the Ship Bank in 1750 illustrates how Scots' involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery system enabled the expansion of merchant banking in Scotland.

See this object on display at the National Museum of Scotland, in the Scotland Galleries, Level 3, Scotland Transformed: Trade and Industry.

Discussion questions:

- 👁️ Look closely at the model of the Glasgow town house. What words would you use to describe it? How does the building compare with...
 - your house?
 - your school?
 - your local library or museum?
 - other buildings in your neighbourhood?Who do you think might have visited or used this building? Have you seen buildings like this one before?
- 🔍 Research any local grand buildings which remind you of the Glasgow town house. Find out when they were built, who funded them and if they were connected to the Atlantic slave trade.
- ❓ How do you think the links between profits made from slavery and buildings in our towns and cities should be recognised and represented?
- 👁️ Can you spot any similarities between the appearance of the Glasgow town house and classical buildings from ancient Greece or Rome?
- ❓ What impression do you think those who designed this building were trying to make on passers-by?
- 🔍 Allan Dreghorn was a businessman who gained power and financial success through his connection to the Atlantic slave trade. His contribution to the development of Glasgow's Merchant City is still recognised today in a wall-mounted bronze medallion on the shop-front of 178-82 Ingram Street. Can you research other prominent people who were involved in the Atlantic slave trade and have left their mark on Scotland's cities today?
- ❓ This model has been made from mahogany wood. Mahogany is a reddish-brown, straight-grained timber from tropical hardwood trees, native to the Americas and the Caribbean. Who chopped the trees down? How did mahogany wood end up in Scotland?
- 🔍 Very popular in the 18th century, mahogany was a status symbol, indicating refinement, wealth and good taste. It is still a luxury item today. Research National Museums Scotland's online collections catalogue to see if you can find other objects made from mahogany: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/searchourcollections>
 - ❓ When were they made?
 - ❓ What can they tell us about popular taste in Scottish society in the 18th century and its connections with the Atlantic slave trade?

Silver communion cups



What are they?

Two communion cups, (used as part of Christian worship where bread and wine are prayed over and shared between members of the church congregation) originally part of a set of four. These were commissioned from an Edinburgh silversmith and gifted to Kilmadock Parish Church in Doune, Stirlingshire, by William Mitchell – a Scot who owned many plantations in the West Indies. ‘King Mitchell’, as he was known on the island, was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Jamaica. His wealth came from the enslavement and exploitation of hundreds of people on his plantations.

The bowls of both cups are engraved in Latin, which can be translated as follows: ‘For the use of Kilmadock Church this cup is given by William Mitchell, gentleman, as evidence of a mark of respect for his birthplace, AD 1794’. Markings around the rim also indicate the name and location of the silversmith who made them.

Who made them?

Robert Clelland of Edinburgh.

Date:

These silver cups were made around 1794.

Materials and dimensions:

Silver.

Height of each cup: 23.3cm

Diameter of each cup at rim and base: 14.7cm

Connections to the Atlantic slave trade:

- These large communion cups serve as a striking visual indicator of the wealth generated in Scotland through its first-hand involvement in slavery.
- The cups are marked as luxury goods, both through the precious and costly material from which they have been made, and the highly-skilled craftsmanship of their maker (an expensive service).
- The direct connection of these objects to ‘King Mitchell’, one of the wealthiest and most powerful owners of enslaved people in Jamaica, show how Scots who were involved in making profit from human suffering at the other side of the world were often admired and respected in society back home.
- The cups are displayed beside the silver brand in the same display case at the National Museum of Scotland (more information on this can be found in **The abolitionist campaigns** resource). Both made from silver, they demonstrate two very different sides of slavery – on the one hand, the incredible wealth generated by Scottish merchants, and on the other, the unimaginable human suffering which led to this economic success.

See these objects on display at the National Museum of Scotland, in the Scotland Galleries, Level 3, Scotland Transformed: Trade and Industry.

Discussion questions:

- ? What material was used to make the communion cups?
What does this tell us about William Mitchell, the man who gifted them to the church?
- ? What does the Latin inscription tell you about the cups' donor?
- ? Why do you think William Mitchell commissioned and donated these silver communion cups to the church?
- ? The high social standing of individuals who made their fortunes through the Atlantic slave trade was unquestioned by many in Scotland. Why do you think this might have been the case?
- ? Why do you think William Mitchell was given the nickname 'King Mitchell'?
- 🔍 Research the biography of William Mitchell online. How does his life story help us understand Scotland's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade?
- ? Think about the silver material used in both the communion cups and the brand, and the different stories they can tell us about Scotland's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery system in the Caribbean. Reflect on how the stories behind these very different objects make you feel.

