

FROM SLAVERY TO CIVIL RIGHTS

In 2007 at the Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, there was an Exhibition called "Breaking the Chains". Princess Anne opened the exhibition and the Rev. Jessie Jackson came and spoke to give his support to the event. The Exhibition commemorated the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade though out the British Empire in 1807. Sadly the Museum closed a couple of years later following the economic crash of 2008 to 2009. Bristol had been one of the leading British ports for the Slave Trade. A few miles south of the city, the National Trust purchased Tyntesfield, a Victorian Gothic country mansion in Somerset. It was asserted that the William Gibbs, who built the Gothic mansion, and his family had no involvement in slavery.

This assertion has been shown to be untrue as the following evidence will show:-

"An attempt was made by the Peruvian Patriot Government in October 1822 to exact a large levy from the foreign merchants in Lima, but it was at the time successfully resisted on their behalf by Captain Prescott of H.M.S. *Aurora* (Moens wrote a report of the incident to Lloyd's). Nevertheless the Government did obtain large sums of money in this way in the next year, as appears from Gibbs, Crawley Moens & Co.'s accounts. With Government paper money (probably received in repayment of these levies) the firm bought in Dec. 1826 an interest in a cotton, sugar, and rice estate called San Jacinto in the valley of Nepefia in Santa, equipped with buildings, machinery, 134 slaves, etc." (*The History of Antony and Dorothea Gibbs and of their contemporary relatives, including the History of the Origin and Early Years of the House of Antony Gibbs and Sons. John Arthur Gibbs. Page 411.*)

The History Department at University College London have for some years been investigating the parliamentary records of the compensation paid to slave owners after the Abolition of Slavery in 1833. These reveal that there were 37 claims made by 27 slave owners named Gibbs. Some of these relate to George Gibbs senior of Redland, Bristol and his son George Gibbs of Belmont married to William Gibbs sister, Harriet. George Gibbs senior's partner, Samuel Munckley was actually involved in the Slave Trade. His ship, "The Hope" took cargoes of slaves to the West Indies. Captain John Gibbs and his sons Captains William and John Gibbs from Topsham near Exeter were mariners involved in trade with the Caribbean.

Other claims relate to the descendants of Lt. Col. Robert Gibbs, who was appointed Governor of Barbados in 1648. His son Robert and cousin John settled in the Carolinas and owned slaves there. Indeed Robert Gibbs became Governor of South Carolina in 1715. During the American War of Independence, the Gibbs Plantation near Charleston was attacked by the British in March 1780.

George Gibbs of Belmont was in partnership with Robert Bright, whose grandfather Henry Bright was a major sugar plantation owner in Jamaica. He inherited the plantations from his wife's father Richard Meyler. He also inherited a large mansion, Ham House near Bristol and a considerable fortune. George Gibbs, father and son received £2535 in compensation for 155 freed slaves on estates in the Bahamas, Barbados and Jamaica. George Gibbs junior and Robert Bright also had another plantation in Barbados. In 1844, a mortgage was taken out on 6,324 acres of Gibbs-Bright plantations in Jamaica and William Gibbs of Tyntesfield was one of the mortgagees.

There is in the Drawing Room at Tyntesfield a portrait of Sir Thomas Hyde Page by James Northcote. He was the maternal grandfather of Mrs William Gibbs. During the American War of Independence, he was map maker for General Howe in Boston. His maps of Boston and Bunker Hill are now in the National Archives in Washington. Indeed he was severely wounded at the Battle of Bunker Hill and had to have a leg amputated. The Northcote portrait shows Sir Thomas at Fort Languard in Essex where he installed wells for water supply. He did likewise at Harwich and at Fort Townshend in Kent. He was also involved in the construction of Wicklow Harbour and of the Royal Canal and Newry Canal in Ireland. This led to Captain Thomas Hyde Page being appointed as the Engineer responsible for building the Eau Brink Cut linking Kings Lynn to the River Ouse. A contemporary of Sir Thomas was Sir George Vancouver from Kings Lynn who learned his mapmaking from voyages with Captain Cook. He gave his name to the largest city on the west coast of Canada. William Gibbs' wife Matilda Blanche (née Crawley Boevey) came from Flaxley Abbey in the Forest of Dean. Sir Thomas Hyde Page's portrait hung there for many years. Matilda Blanche's paternal great grandmother was Lady Susanna Crawley Boevey, née Lloyd. Her brother Charles Lloyd had a sugar plantation in St Andrews, Jamaica. To his Will of 1745, he added a Codicil in 1751 giving freedom to his four oldest slaves and an annuity for their pensions from a bequest of £32 and 5 shillings. The slaves were called Flaxley, Sambo, Botty and Scroll.

The United States influence in Europe was promoted by two of the founding fathers - Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, who were in succession American Ambassadors in France. Their influence impacted on French thinking and the subsequent French Revolution. In 1794, France enacted the Abolition of Slavery. A few years later Alexander von Humboldt set out to explore the interior of the North Eastern part of South America. He was distressed by the cruelty to slaves in the Spanish Colonies. During his exploration of the coastal region of Peru, he found the

native Americans used guano as a fertilizer, a discovery which brought great wealth to the Gibbs family. In 1805, on his return from South America, he met Simon Bolivar in Paris and Italy. He listened to Bolivar's youthful dreams of liberating Latin America, which he thought over ambitious and unachievable. Bolivar went on to visit the British Foreign Secretary, Richard Marquis of Wellesley in London in 1807 and then sailed from Hamburg to the United States where he visited Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington. He could not understand how Jefferson, who declared that "All men were created equal" could keep slaves at Monticello.

In 1803, Napoleon had sold 828,000 square miles of territory to America for 50 million francs, the Louisiana Purchase. America was seen by Britain as a friend of France. In 1807 the British Parliament abolished the Slave Trade and the Royal Navy was given the task of enforcing abolition. This brought the navy into conflict with the United States. The Royal Navy was also authorised to intercept vessels conveying American exports to France and to those lands in Europe conquered by the French. This inevitably led to conflict and in 1812, the military successes of Napoleon and his imminent invasion of Russia encouraged the United States to declare war against the United Kingdom. Napoleon's retreat from Moscow freed up British forces for the American War during which United States forces burned down the Parliament and Governor's residence in York (now Toronto) in 1813. In retaliation, the British now dominant at sea after Trafalgar, burned down the Capitol Building and the White House in Washington in 1814. From 23 December 1814 to 8 January 1815, Andrew Jackson defended New Orleans from a British assault after the Peace Treaty had been signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve 1814. Lady Wraxall of Tyntesfield's father - Sir Arthur Lawley - was Deputy Leader of a Delegation which came in 1913 to America to prepare for the Centenary of peace between Britain and the U.S.A.

While the war of 1812 was being waged, Simon Bolivar was driving the Spanish out of Colombia and Venezuela in the Admirable Campaign. Simon Bolivar was forced to flee when the Spanish forces returned in 1814 and he escaped to Haiti, now an independent country after a successful slave uprising led by Toussaint Louverture from 1792 to 1802. In 1794 the Convention in France had abolished slavery and Toussaint formed a citizens army which defeated a British Invasion and conquered Spanish San Domingo. He was a wise leader who reconciled the white and mulatto plantation owners and their freed slaves now working reasonable hours for a living wage. In 1802, Napoleon sent an army to subdue San Domingo with the hidden intent of restoring slavery. This was resisted by Toussaint who remained a supporter of the ideals of the French Revolution. He was duped by General Le Clerc, arrested and taken to France where he died in prison in 1803. General Dessalines fought on and defeated Napoleon's army declaring Independence in 1804. In Haiti, Bolivar was given arms, ships and supplies by President Pétion which enabled him to return to the fray in Venezuela. Ultimately after a series of long and arduous campaigns with many setbacks he won the final victory at the Battle of Carabobo in 1821. Vehemently opposed to slavery he set all his slaves free. In 1816 he declared, "I have come to decree as law full Liberty to all slaves." He enlisted black slaves into his army.

In 1821 San Martin from Argentina sailed with the Chilean Navy commanded by Admiral Lord Cochrane along the west coast of South America to liberate Peru. For the liberation of Chile, San Martin had freed and enlisted thousands of slaves so that half his infantry would be black. He was strongly opposed to slavery. In Peru he declared that all children born after July 21st 1821 would be free and at 21 gain the full rights of citizenship. On August 12th 1821, he decreed the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Simon Bolivar freed his own slaves and would have enacted the liberation of all black slaves, but he was opposed by Santander and the politicians in Bogota and Caracas. Slaves who joined Bolivar's army were given their freedom. The Constitution of Bolivia gave restricted freedom to slaves. General abolition was opposed by those who feared insurrection. Simon Bolivar died disillusioned in 1830.

In Britain George Canning, Foreign Secretary, declared on 12 December 1826, "I brought a New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old." Two years later, William Gibbs' cousin, Charles Crawley and his wife Eliza set sail for Peru. The journey took 5 months and they visited Valparaíso, Santiago, Arequipa and then stayed for two years in Peru where the firm of Gibbs, Crawley and Co was established in 1824. Charles Crawley appointed John Hayne to run this Lima branch of Antony Gibbs and Sons. It was John Hayne who in 1842 signed the first contract to import Peruvian guano into the United Kingdom. Antony Gibbs in due course acquired the British monopoly for guano as well as selling guano in most of Europe, Australasia and the Caribbean.

The President of Peru for most of the time when Antony Gibbs were exporting and selling guano was Ramon Castilla, who had been in the Spanish Army and then joined San Martin and Simon Bolivar in the fight for independence. After a few years out of office from 1851 to 1854, he came back following a military coup and in December 1854 enacted a law abolishing slavery in Peru. He remained President until 1862.

The guano was quarried by Chinese indentured labourers sent from China under contract to Peru. This was a form of slavery and working conditions were tough. Many coolies were first deceived or kidnapped and then kept in barracoons (detention centres) or loading vessels in the ports of departure. In 1875, British commissioners estimated that approximately eighty percent of the workers had been abducted. Their voyages, which are sometimes called the Pacific Passage, were inhumane and dangerous. Mortality was very high. It is estimated that from 1847 to 1859, the average mortality for coolies aboard ships to Peru was 40 percent, reducing to 30 percent from 1860 to 1863. The duration of a

contract was typically five to eight years, but many coolies did not live out their term of service because of the hard labour and mistreatment. Their accommodation was in timbered shacks. Reports by British sea captains of “murderous cruelty” on the Chincha Islands, reached Lord Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary in 1854, who wrote to Sullivan in Peru asking him to investigate. Conditions were improving. Samuel West, head of the Gibbs House, had been asked to take over administration of Chinese labour in the Chinchas. From December 1853 to March 1855, William Gibbs and Co. were in charge of the Chinese Coolies on the Islands and the firm did erect a small hospital to care for the sick. Then Domingo Elias, the previous manager of Coolie Labour returned to the Chincha Islands*. Sadly the Chinese workers who did live were often forced to remain in servitude beyond the contracted period. The coolies who worked in the guano beds of the Chincha Islands (the islands of Hell) of Peru were treated brutally. More than two-thirds of the Chinese coolies who arrived in Peru between 1849 and 1874 died within the contract period. In 1860 it was calculated that of the 40,000 coolies brought to the Chinchas since the trade began, not one had survived servitude. (**A Primitive Export Sector: Guano Production in Mid-Nineteenth Century Peru*. W.M. Mathew. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, May 1977.)

Between 1862 and 1864, Easter Island was raided by Peruvian ships and 1407 islanders were taken to dig guano. The slave raids were known as Blackbirding and took place on many Polynesian Islands. Enlightened scholars who knew South America like Alexander Von Humboldt and Charles Darwin were appalled at slavery and at illicit raiding of Polynesian island for slave labourers. The Chinese indentured labourers were finally liberated by the Chilean Army during the War of the Pacific in January 1880, and they then fought with the Chileans and formed their own brigade helping to defeat the Peruvian Army.

On the other side of the family at Tynesfield, Lady Wraxall's mother was. Annie Cunard whose paternal grandfather was Sir Samuel Cunard and whose maternal great grandfather was Thomas Addis Emmet, the brother of the Irish Patriot Robert Emmet. Thomas Addis Emmet was sent to prison after the rising of the United Irishmen in 1798. Released from prison in Fort St George in 1802, he went to Belgium and then France before emigrating with his family to America. Robert Emmet rebelled again and was executed in 1803 at the age of 25.

Thomas Addis Emmet's daughter Jeanette (Jane) Erin Emmet married Bache McEvers of New York in 1825 and their daughter Mary married Sir Samuel Cunard's son Edward in 1849 and Annie Cunard was their second daughter. Bache McEvers had an uncle Richard Bache who married Sarah (Sally) Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's only legitimate child and heiress. The McEvers and Emmet's were Irish Americans. Indeed at the time of the Potato Famine in Ireland, Bache sent his own ship, the Bache McEvers to bring Irish immigrants to America. Bache McEvers was a prosperous merchant and Chairman of the New York Insurance Company. He died in Paris on July 14th 1851 and his widow took his body to New York to be buried in the family vault in Trinity Churchyard. On 11 September 2001, the debris from the Twin Towers covered the churchyard and now a small flag, the Stars and Stripes, is placed beside each grave. The City of London later presented to the City of New York a fine Bell to express its sympathy and support.

The Cunard family were of German origin descended from Thones Kundreds of München Gladbach. The family settled in Germanston, Philadelphia and changed their name first to Cunreds and then to Cunard. Sir Samuel's grandfather, Abraham Cunard, was a Quaker and in 1688, the First Protest against Slavery in America had been drafted in his house. Sir Samuel Cunard founded the Cunard Shipping Line from Halifax, Nova Scotia. His father was loyal to Britain and after the American Declaration of Independence the family left Philadelphia to settle in Canada. On July 4th 1840, the first Cunard Mail Ship, the R.M.S. Britannia sailed from Halifax bound for Liverpool and a great Royal Mail Shipping line was born. Sir Samuel Cunard died in 1865, Lady Mary Bache Cunard, his daughter in law in 1866, and Sir Edward Cunard in 1869. This left Sir Edward and Lady Mary Cunard's seven children as orphans. They were brought up by Jane Erin McEvers, their remarkable grandmother, at Nevill Holt in Leicestershire. She lived to the ripe old age of 88. Her eldest grandson was Sir Bache Cunard. He married an American heiress, Maud Burke and they had one child - Nancy Cunard. Maud left her husband, changed her name to Emerald Cunard and had a long lasting relationship with Sir Thomas Beecham. Her sister in law, Annie Cunard was an artist who trained at the Académie Julian in Paris. She portrayed the Indians and negroes that she encountered, during a visit to her American family in 1883, in a series of vivid water colours. Her Emmet cousins, Rosina, Lydia and Jane Erin Emmet were also artists.

As a young woman before the Great War, Nancy Cunard joined the Bloomsbury Group and had love affairs with T.S. Elliot, Leonard Woolf and Wyndham Lewis. She associated with Roger Fry and Augustus John. During the war, she had romantic encounters with officers on leave and married an Australian officer, Sydney Fairbairn in 1916, but the marriage did not last. After the war she associated with the Dada and Surrealist sets. In 1920 she went to live in France in an apartment on the Île St Louis in Paris, and eventually bought a house, Le Puits Carré at La Chapelle-Réanville near Vernon on the River Seine. In 1928, she set up her own Printing and Publishing House called "The Hours", and published books by many authors including Iris Tree, Samuel Beckett, Havelock Ellis, Norman Douglas, Harold Acton, Richard Aldington, Robert Graves, Ezra Pound, Lewis Carroll and George Moore. Nancy was a style icon of the 1920s famed for her many African bangles worn on her slender arms. She was photographed by ManRay, Tristan Tzara and Cecil Beaton.

In 1927, in Venice, Nancy Cunard met Henry Crowder, a pianist with an American Negro Band. Thus began a seven year love affair which transformed Nancy's life. Her mother was appalled that Nancy should have a negro lover. Nancy responded with a booklet - *Black Man and White Ladyship*. She asked why her mother might mix with Maharajahs, while her daughter was not supposed to socialise with negroes. Nancy's growing interest in African, Caribbean and Afro- American art, music, poetry, literature and culture led to the production of an extraordinary book - *Negro*. Nancy became an outspoken advocate of black rights particularly in the United States. Her defence of the Scotsboro Boys, falsely accused of rape, was legendary. Nancy was appalled by fascism and travelled to Ethiopia to support Haile Selassie against Mussolini.

When the Civil War broke out in between the Falangists and the Spanish Republic, she went as Guardian correspondent to Spain. She fought with the Republic against Franco and with her friend and lover, Pablo Neruda produced a book of Poems in support of the Republican cause. She met and befriended Pablo Casals and Ernest Hemingway. She also encountered Pablo Picasso. She published the results of her literary questionnaire to writers and poets, "Authors take sides in the Spanish War" in the *Literary Review*. Out of 147 responses, 126 supported the Republic, 12 were neutral and only 5 supported Franco, the most prominent of whom was Evelyn Waugh. When the Republic was defeated by Franco, she worked among the refugees in France providing food and help whenever she could. In 1940 she left France to go and live in Chile with Pablo Neruda. Returning from Chile via Mexico, Nancy worked for the BBC and Free French in London. When she returned to France, she found that her home had been trashed by the Nazis and the collaborating local mayor. She continued to oppose Franco and to write books and poetry, but later life saw her encounter nervous breakdowns, anorexia and emphysema. She died in Paris in 1965 and her ashes were interred at Père La Chaise Cemetery in Paris. Nancy Cunard died intestate and her cousins inherited her estate. Anthony Robert Alwyn Hobson collected her papers and photographs together and placed them in the University of Texas in Austin.

The Gibbs family in the Carolinas fought for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Colonel George Couper Gibbs had a cousin Anna McNeill who married George Whistler. They had a son James Abbot McNeill Whistler whose portrait of his mother is in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. In Charleston South Carolina is the Gibbs Memorial Art Gallery where there are seven works by Whistler in the collection.

During the 1930s Nancy Cunard was unpopular because of her opposition to white supremacy and her support for the rights of black Americans. Only 500 copies of her book *Negro* were sold. The remaining 500 were destroyed by bombing in the Second World War. Now she is a cult figure, admired by the black and gay communities and feminists world wide. First edition copies of her book *Negro* are rare, very valuable and much sought after. How times have changed!

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23rd February 2015