Belfast, trade and slavery, 1613-1866

OLE3245 - Belfast and Slavery, 1613-1866

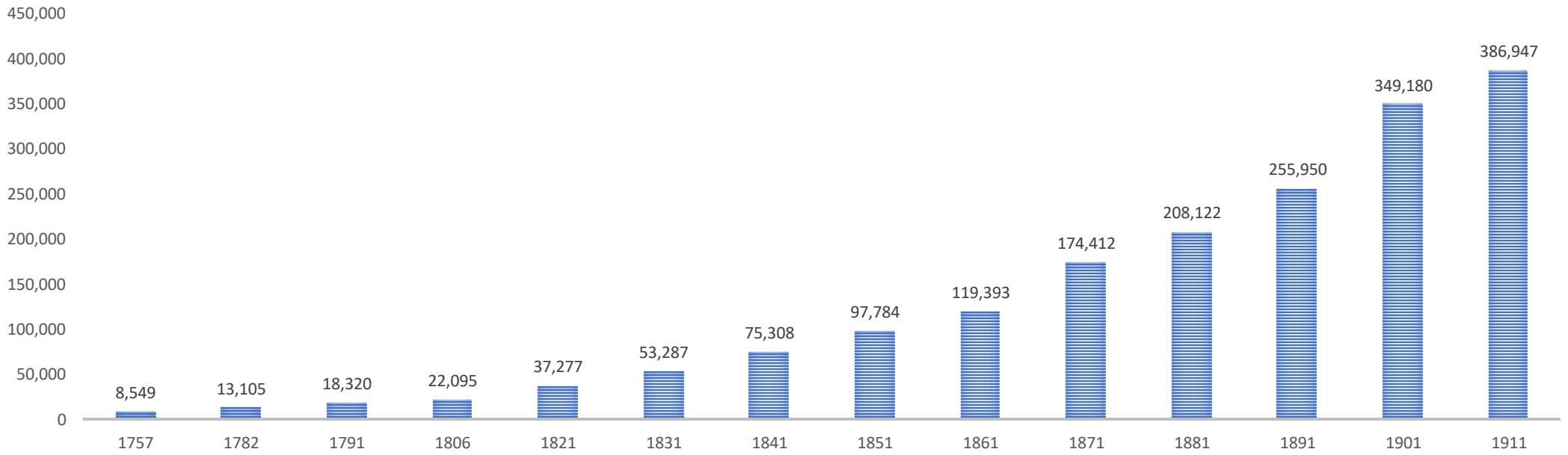
Dr Tom Thorpe

Objectives

- Provide social, political and economic background to Belfast in the 18th century and early 19th century.
- Set the context for abolitionist activity.
- Scope out Belfast's trade with the West Indies
- Highlight some Belfast citizens who owned and profited from Slaves.
- Consider Belfast's status as a slave owning/trading centre with other UK towns.

The rise of industry and development of the port

Belfast population, 1757 to 1911



Overview: religious composition

Table 3: Religious Composition of Belfast Population, 1757-1891

Year	Total Population	No.of Catholics	% of Total
1757	8,549	556	6%
1784	13,000	1,092	8%
1808	25,000	4,000	16%
1834	60,803	19,712	32.4%
1861	119,444	41,237	34.1%
1871	174,412	55,575	28.8%
1881	208,122	59,975	28.8%
1891	255,950	67,378	26.8%

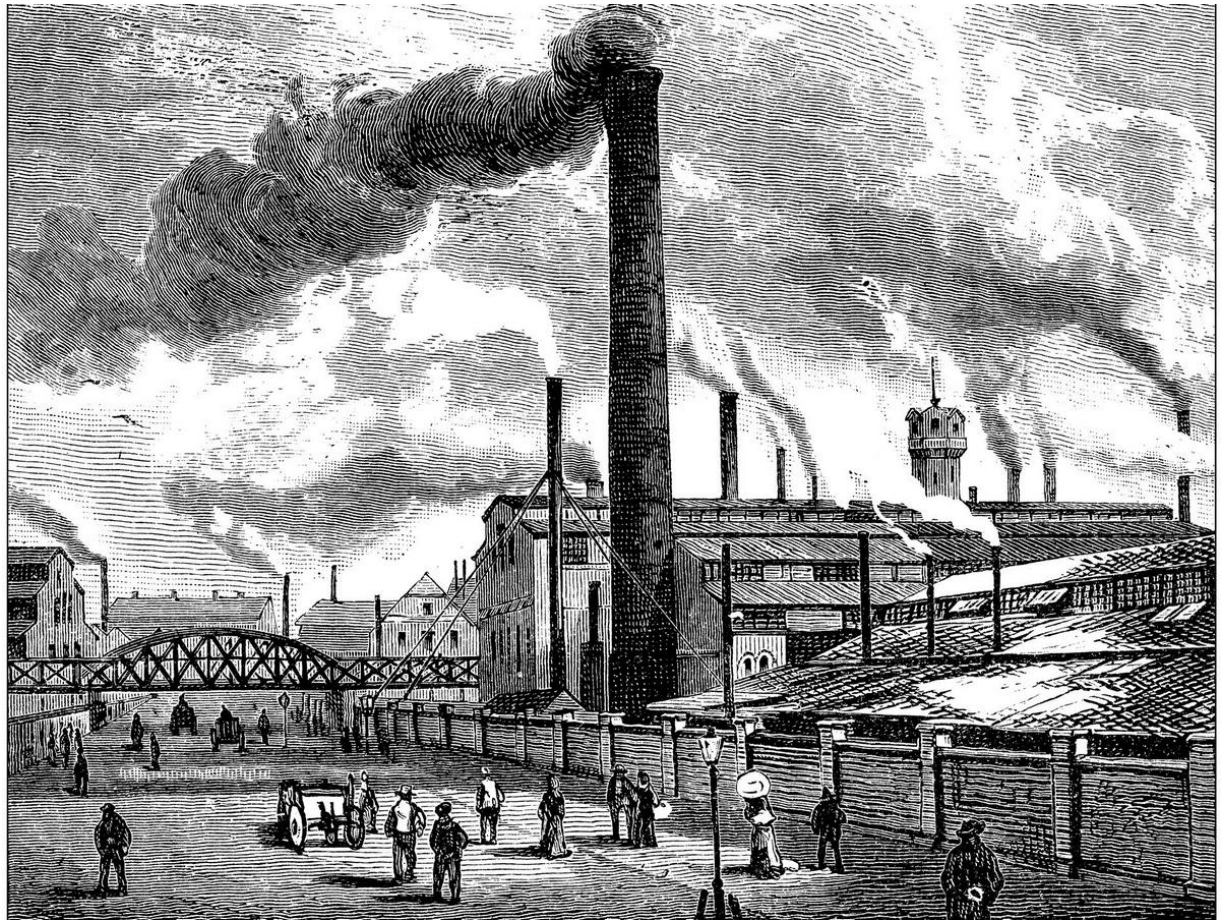
Source: I. Budge and C. O'Leary, *Belfast: Approach to Crisis*, (London, 1973), p. 28, p. 32.

Factors that shape the industrial revolution

- Agrarian Reforms: Enclosure movements and innovations in agriculture boosted food production and freed up labour for industrial work.

- Rising Population: A growing and increasingly urbanized population provided a larger labour force and consumer base.

- New Ideas and Inventions: Intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and the development of new technologies spurred innovation.



Factors that shape the industrial revolution

- Access to Capital: Accumulation of wealth, capital investment, and access to credit supported industrial ventures.

- Natural Resources: Abundant reserves of coal, iron, and other raw materials fuelled industrial growth.

- Transportation Improvements: The development of canals, roads, and later, railways, facilitated the movement of goods and people.

- Political Stability: A stable government and legal system encouraged entrepreneurship and protected property rights.

Cotton industry

Cotton is a soft, fluffy staple fiber that grows in a boll, or protective case, around the seeds of the cotton plants of the genus Gossypium.

The fibre is almost pure cellulose.

The fiber is most often spun into yarn or thread and used to make a soft, breathable textile.

Birth of the cotton industry

- The Poor House introduced cotton spinning for inmates as ‘productive labour’ in 1777.
- Mills started to be erected in Belfast, both water and steam powered.
- In 1782, 25 looms, 1791, 229, 1806, 600.

Decline of the cotton industry

By 1836, cotton manufacture had almost ceased in the city. Reasons were:

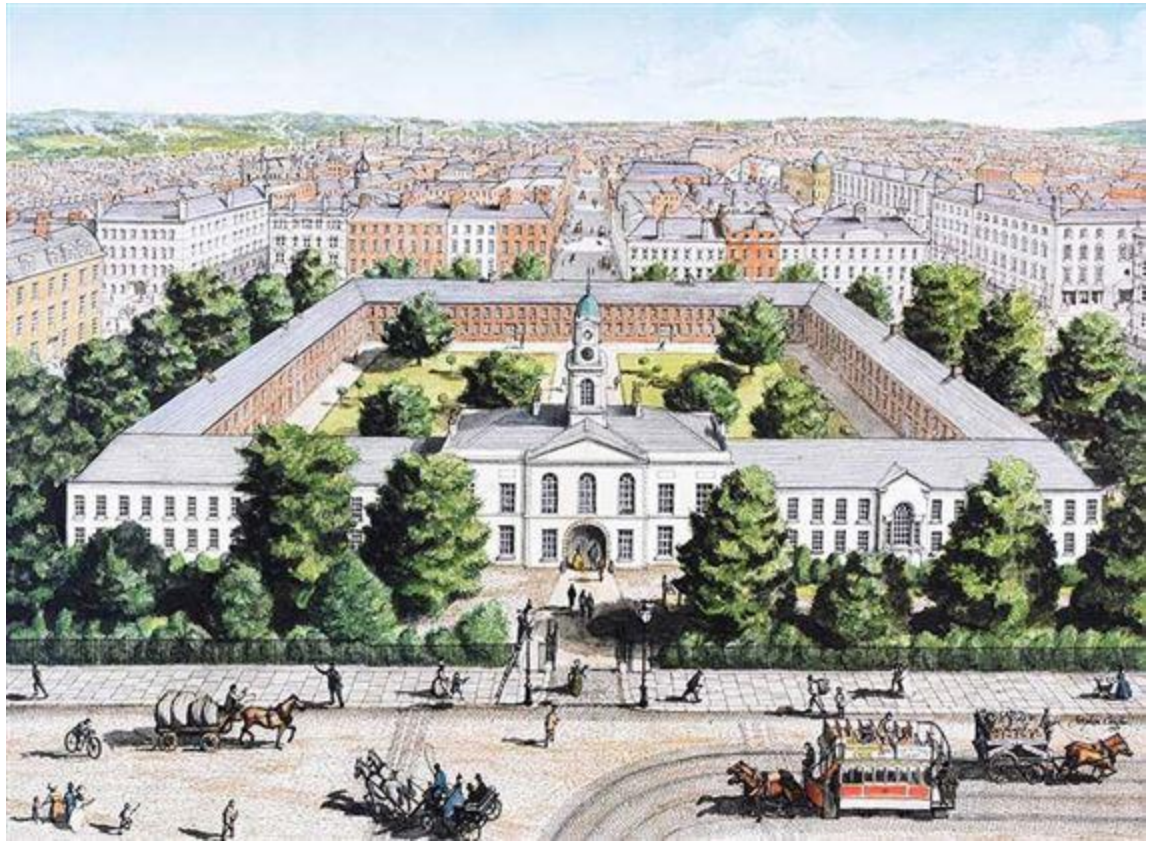
- Belfast manufacturers had no incentive to cut labour costs as wages were very low. Cotton mills in Lancashire could produce cheaper and higher quality cotton than Belfast.
- Parliament had removed the cotton tariff between England/Ireland trade which made imports into Ireland cheaper.
- Belfast mills had increased costs by importing coal, cotton and other raw materials.
- Linen was much more lucrative than producing cotton.

Linen

- Linen is made from Flax (Linum usitatissimum), also known as common flax or linseed, is a member of the genus Linum in the family Linaceae. It is a food and fiber crop cultivated in cooler regions of the world.
- Linen is very strong and absorbent, and dries faster than cotton. Because of these properties, linen is comfortable to wear in hot weather and is valued for use in garments.

Origins of the linen industry

- In 1699, William III sent Louis Crommelin, a Hugenout to Ireland to stimulate the linen trade. He was based in Lurgan and helped spread the trade to Lurgan and Portadown. Belfast became the main outlet for the finished product.
- 1st Linen Hall was opened in 1739.
- 2nd Linen Hall was opened in 1754 in Linenhall Street (now Donegall street). This was known as the Brown Linenhall.
- 3rd Linen Hall was opened on the site of City Hall in 1785 and was known as the White Linen Hall.
- By the end of the 18th Century, bleach greens were found on the outskirts of Belfast. These were open areas used for spreading cloth on the ground to be purified and whitened by the action of the sunlight.



Linen in the 18th century

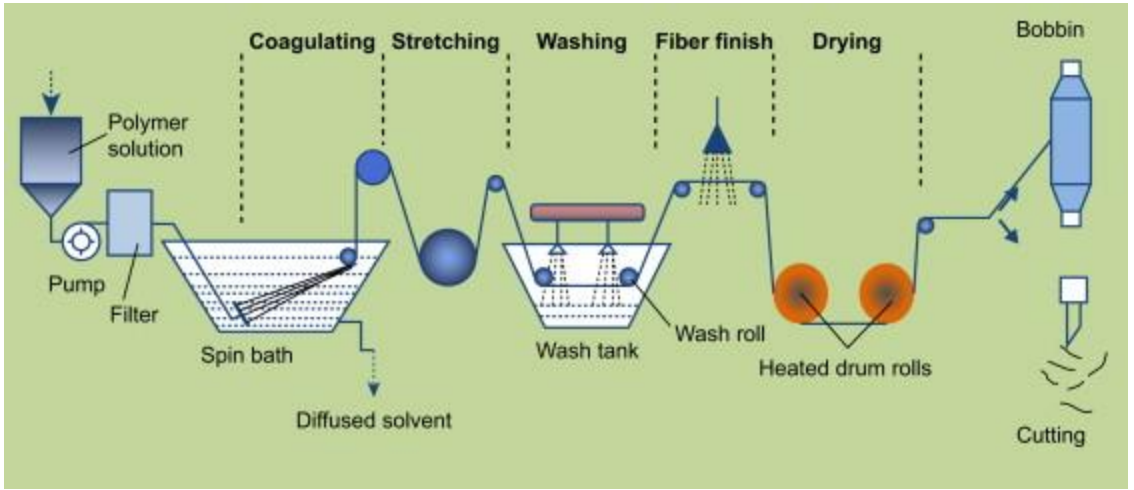
- Belfast was one point of the production triangle for linen (Lurgan, Armagh, Lisburn) and it became increasingly important as a market place and export hub. Disputes with linen merchants in Dublin meant Belfast merchants sought to set up their own markets and distribution networks. The Brown Linen Hall was built in 1740s (for unbleached linen) and the White Line Hall set up in 1785).

- The city also became know with innovation in the industry. 1763, Belfast doctor, James Ferguson was awarded £300 by the Linen Board in Dublin for his discovery of the addition of lime into the bleaching process.

- First ideas of mass production were in 1776 when the Belfast Newsletter advertised linen made by Nicolas Grimshaw. Grimshaw brought ideas of mass production through the use of Arkwright's water-frame and carding machine to Belfast. Robert Joy set up the first mill in Belfast in 1784 at Whitehouse.

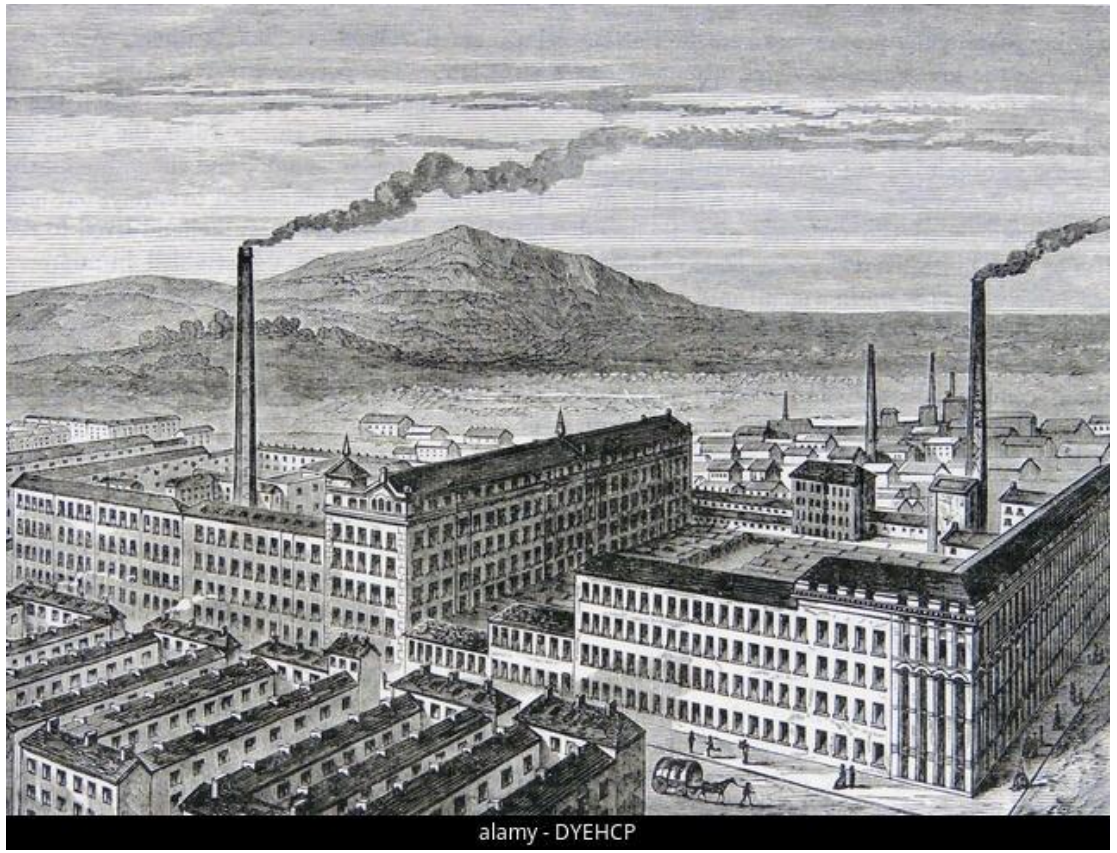
The linen breakthrough

- The success of cotton spinning inspired inventors to think of ways in which mechanisation could speed up linen production. The brittleness of the flax fibre meant that a new machine had to be invented - the cotton machines simply couldn't be converted.
- In 1825, James Kay of Preston invented a method of "wet spinning" which passed the flax through warm water and enabled a much finer yarn to be spun.
- By the late 1820s several "wet" spinning mills using water-power had been built in Ulster.



Mulholland York Street

- In 1828, the Mulholland York Street cotton mill burnt down.
- It was rebuilt as a linen mill and the first linen spun in a Belfast Mill by mechanical power in 1830.
- It started with 1,000 spindles in 1830 and had 17,000 by 1846 and 1,000 employees. In 1856, it had 25,000 spindles and was probably the biggest mill in the world.
- In 1830, there were 2 mills making power spun linen yarn, by 1846, there were 24.



Mid century boost to Linen

In 1862, Belfast linen industry saw a massive boom. The US civil war had disrupted the US cotton supply and linen was the nearest substitute.

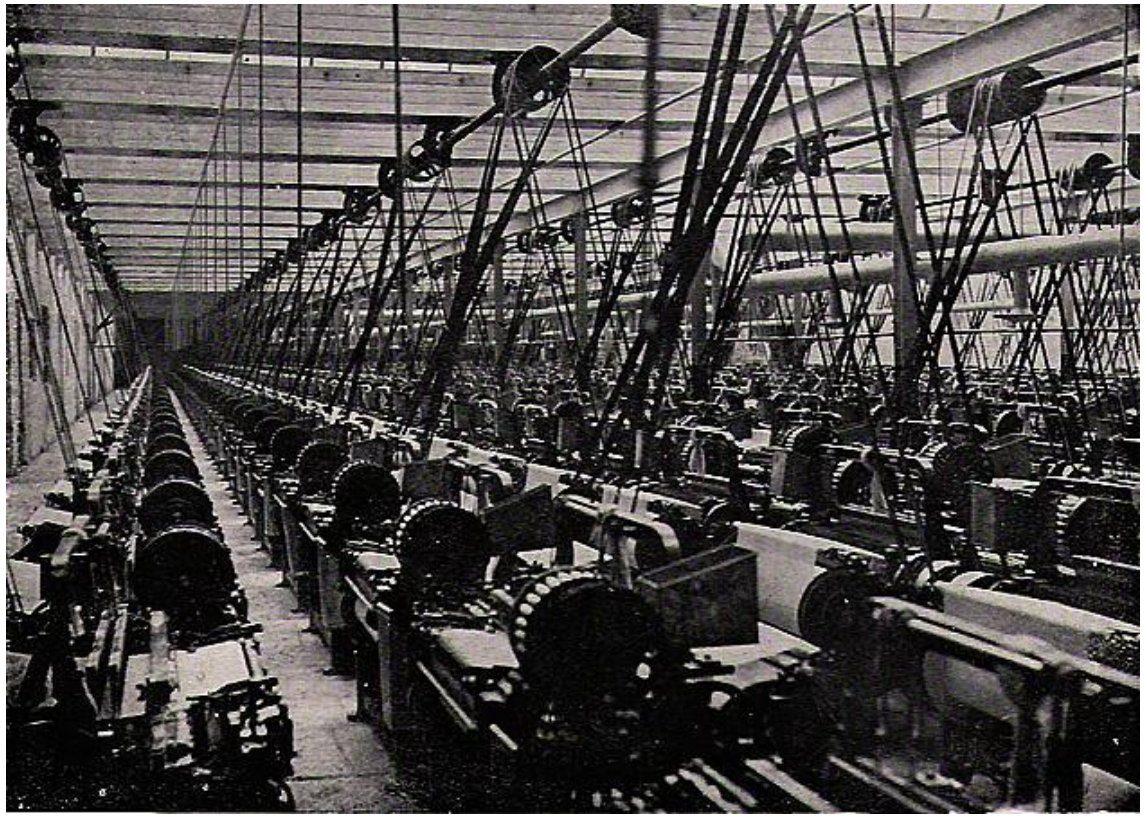
Power looms had increased from 218 in 1853 to 4,900 in 1861.

By 1867 it was 12,000 looms.

In 1868, there was a major depression in the industry and 4,000 looms were idle.

Linen industry remained the biggest employer. In 1871, there were 55k spingles and 69k by 1896.

Belfast had over 80% of the spindles in the world in 1870.



Belfast workforce in 1790

Table 1: Occupational Structure of Belfast, c. 1790

Employing 15-39 workers:		*Employing 40-99 workers:*		*Employing over 100 workers:*	
Staymakers	15	Nailors	41	Tailors	100
Hosiers	16	Cabinetmakers	40	Coopers	115
Painters	17	Tanners	45	Carpenters	169
Saddlers	22	Bakers	67	Shoemakers	312
Watchmakers	22	Masons	68	Weavers	679
Chandlers	29	Smiths	69	Total	1,375
Barbers	30	Total	330		
Ropers	35				
Sawyers	37				
Hatters	38				
Butchers	39				
Total	300				

Source: Adapted from D. J. Owen, *History of Belfast*, (Belfast, 1921), p. 152.

Workforce in 1850

Table 2: Occupations Employing Over 100 Workers (over 15 years of age), Belfast 1851

Occupation	Male Workers	Female Workers
Ministering to Food:		
Farmers' Labourers and Servants	897	73
Gardners	100	-
Bakers	334	-
Tobacco Twisters	121	-
Huxters and Provision Dealers	105	21
Butchers	216	-
Grocers	339	83
Tavern Keepers and Vintners	274	67
Total (including occupations with less than 100 workers)	3,280	454
Ministering to Clothing:		
Flax Dressers	537	16
Spinners of Flax	32	532
Spinners (unspecified)	-	243
Factory Workers and Overseers	639	2,901
Weavers of Muslin and Cotton	936	298
Weavers of Damask and Linen	655	219
Weavers (unspecified)	461	926
Bleachers	123	18
Linen, Muslin and Cotton Lappers	119	9
Boot and Shoe Makers	1,139	-
Tailors and Vestmakers	616	11
Dressmakers	-	1,316
Milliners	-	317
Embroiderers	2	989
Sempstresses	-	1,461
Bonnet Makers	-	153
Drapers	147	5
Total (including occupations with less than 100 workers)	6,286	10,491
Ministering to Lodging, Furniture, Machinery, etc:		
Stonecutters	200	-
Stonemasons	194	-
Potter, Tile and Brick Makers	149	11
Bricklayers	261	-
Sawyers	248	-
Carpenters	939	-
Cabinetmakers	208	-
Coopers	264	-
Shipwrights	239	-
Miners	460	-
Iron Founders and Moulders	135	-
Blacksmiths	390	-
Nailers	140	-
Whitesmiths	140	-
Braziers and Cooper Smiths	102	-
Tinplate Workers	119	2
Copperplate Printers	311	-
Painters and Glaziers	349	-
Rope and Twine Makers	203	1
Total (including occupations with less than 100 workers)	7,621	241

Source: Census of Ireland for the Year 1851, pp. 414-416

Development of Belfast’s Harbour

- George Benn's 1877 "History of the Town of Belfast" describes the 17th-century harbor as 'a poor little harbour.'

- Records from 1663 note 29 vessels in Belfast, boasting a total tonnage of 1,100 tonnes.

- In the early 18th century, Belfast supplanted Carrickfergus as Ulster's primary port, leading to the construction of privately owned wharves on reclaimed land to accommodate the port's growth.

Ballast Board

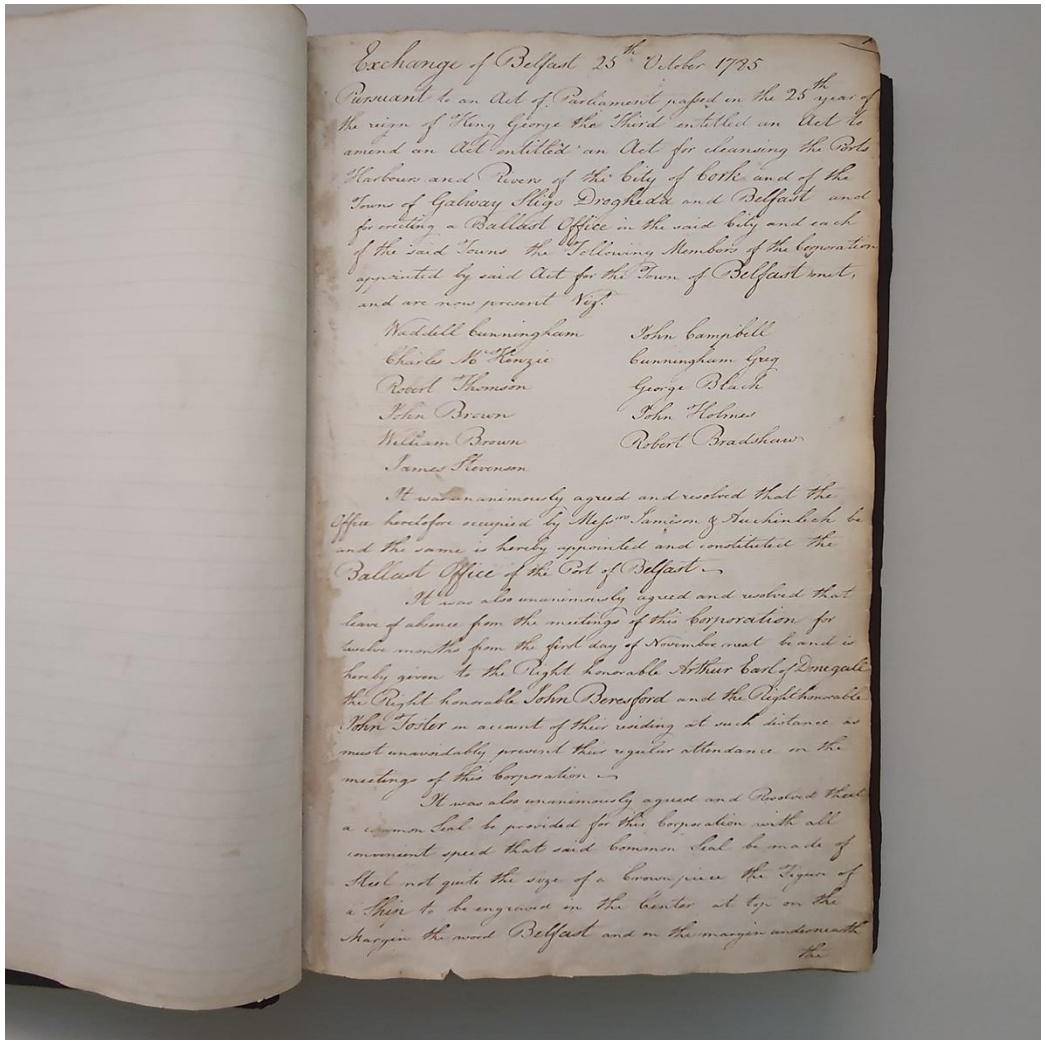
- In 1785, the Irish Parliament enacted legislation to address the expanding port of Belfast.

- This led to the establishment of a new entity, known as 'the Ballast Board' or formally, The Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port and Harbour of Belfast.

- The Ballast Board assumed control of the port, superseding the Belfast Corporation.

- The Ballast Office, established in the premises of the present Customs House, became the operational center for port management.

Names on the Ballast Board's first meeting



Exchange of Belfast 25th October 1785

Pursuant to an Act of Parliament passed in the 25th year of the reign of King George the Third entitled an Act to amend an Act entitled an Act for cleansing the Pool Harbour and Revers of the City of Corke and of the Town of Galway Sligo Drogheda and Belfast and for erecting a Ballast Office in the said City and each of the said Towns the following Members of the Corporation appointed by said Act for the Town of Belfast met, and are now present Viz.

Waddell Cunningham	John Campbell
Charles McKenzie	Cunningham Greg
Robert Thomson	George Black
Allen Brown	John Holmes
William Brown	Robert Bradshaw
James Stevenson	

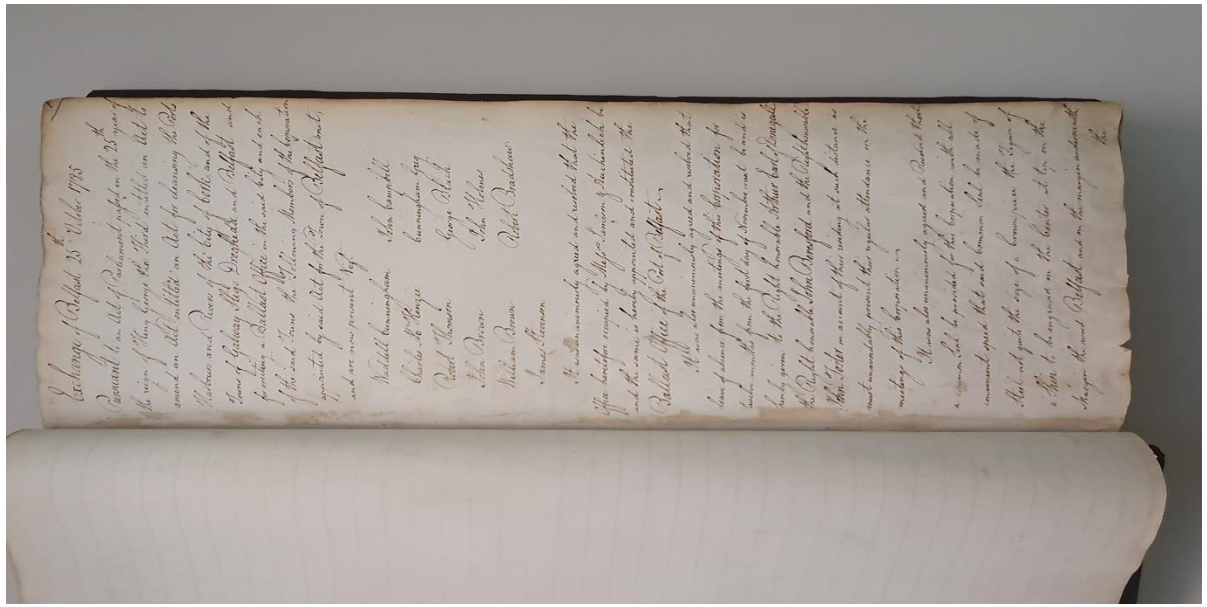
It was unanimously agreed and resolved that the Office heretofore occupied by Messrs Samson & Buchinbah be and the same is hereby appointed and constituted the Ballast Office of the Port of Belfast.

It was also unanimously agreed and resolved that leave of absence from the meetings of this Corporation for twelve months from the first day of November next be and is hereby given to the Right Honorable Arthur Earl of Donegall the Right Honorable John Beresford and the Right Honorable John Foster on account of their residing at such distance as must unavoidably prevent their regular attendance on the meetings of this Corporation.

It was also unanimously agreed and Resolved that a common Seal be provided for this Corporation with all convenient speed that said Common Seal be made of Steel not quite the size of a Crown piece the Figure of a Ship to be engraved in the Center at top on the Margin the word Belfast and on the margin underneath the

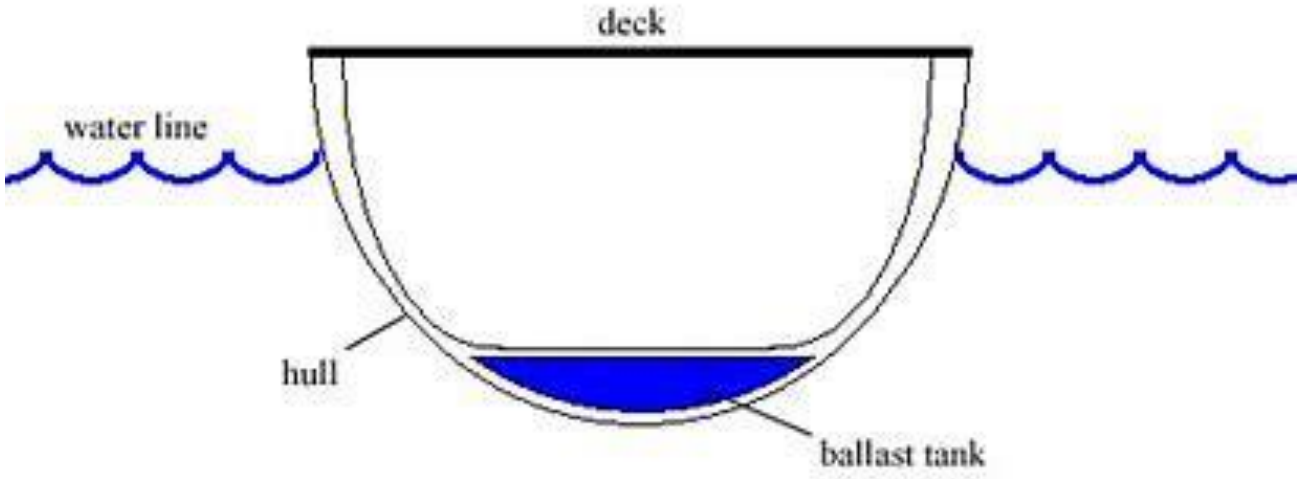
Why the ballast board?

The Ballast Board was named for its key responsibility of managing ballast in the port, overseeing the proper distribution and handling of heavy materials for ship stability.

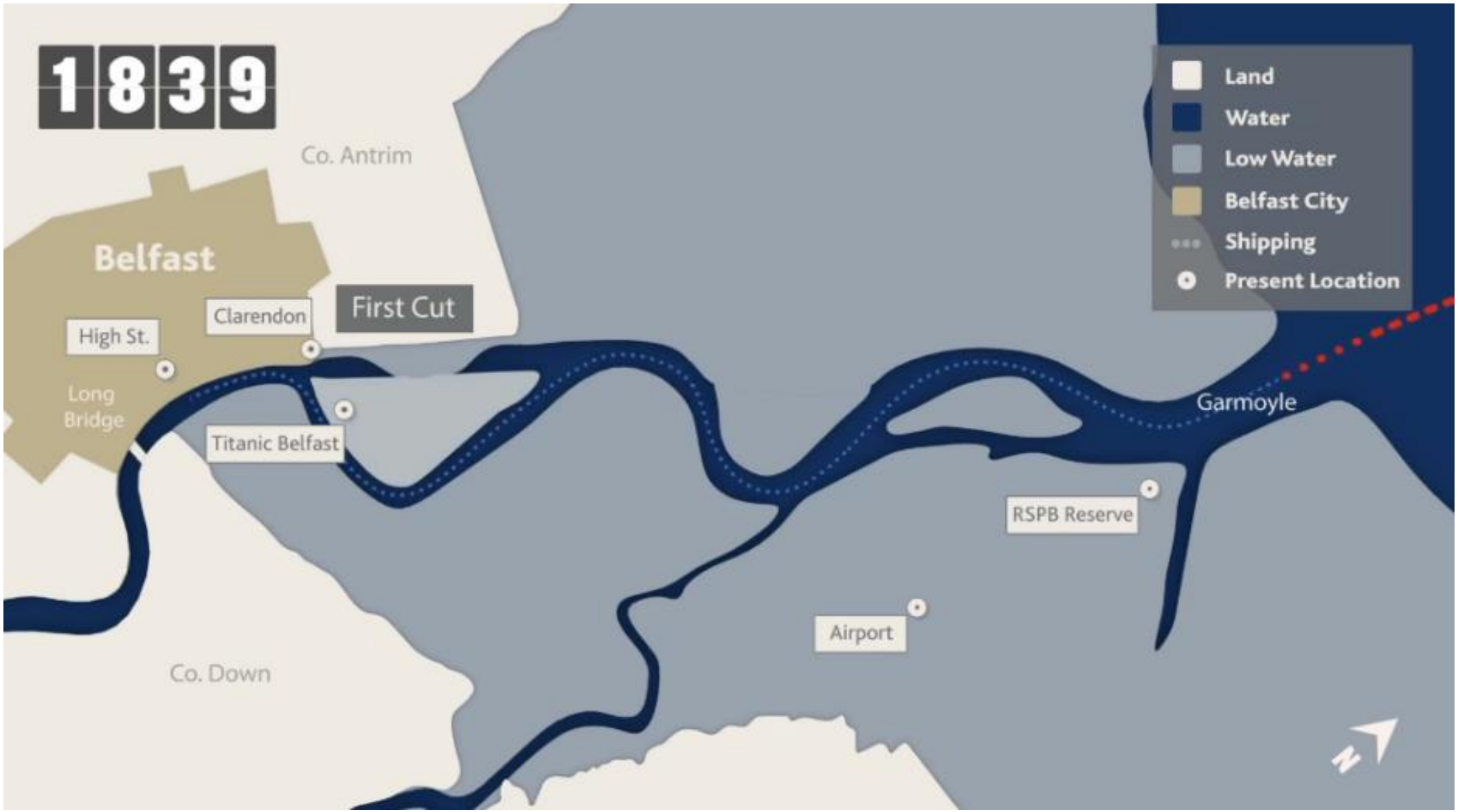


Activities

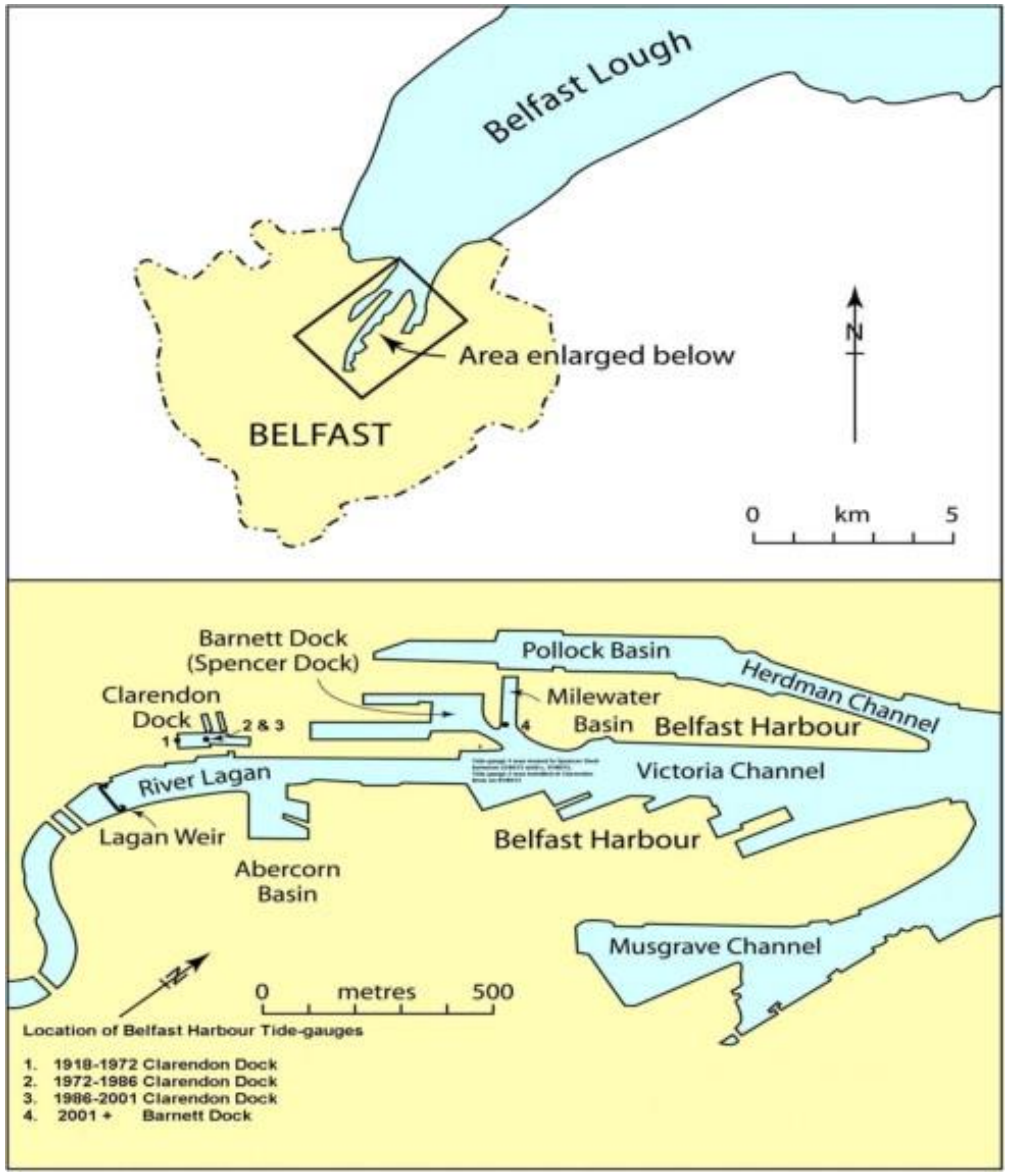
- The organisation sought to preserve and improve the port of Belfast
- One of their major projects was to straighten the meandering River Lagan and build new quays
- The contractor for this project was William Dargan, a famous Irish engineer
- The material that was removed from the river bed was deposited on the shore, forming a new island that was named after Dargan
- This island later became known as Queen's Island in honour of Queen Victoria's visit in 1849
- The island was the site of many shipbuilding activities, including the construction of the RMS Titanic.

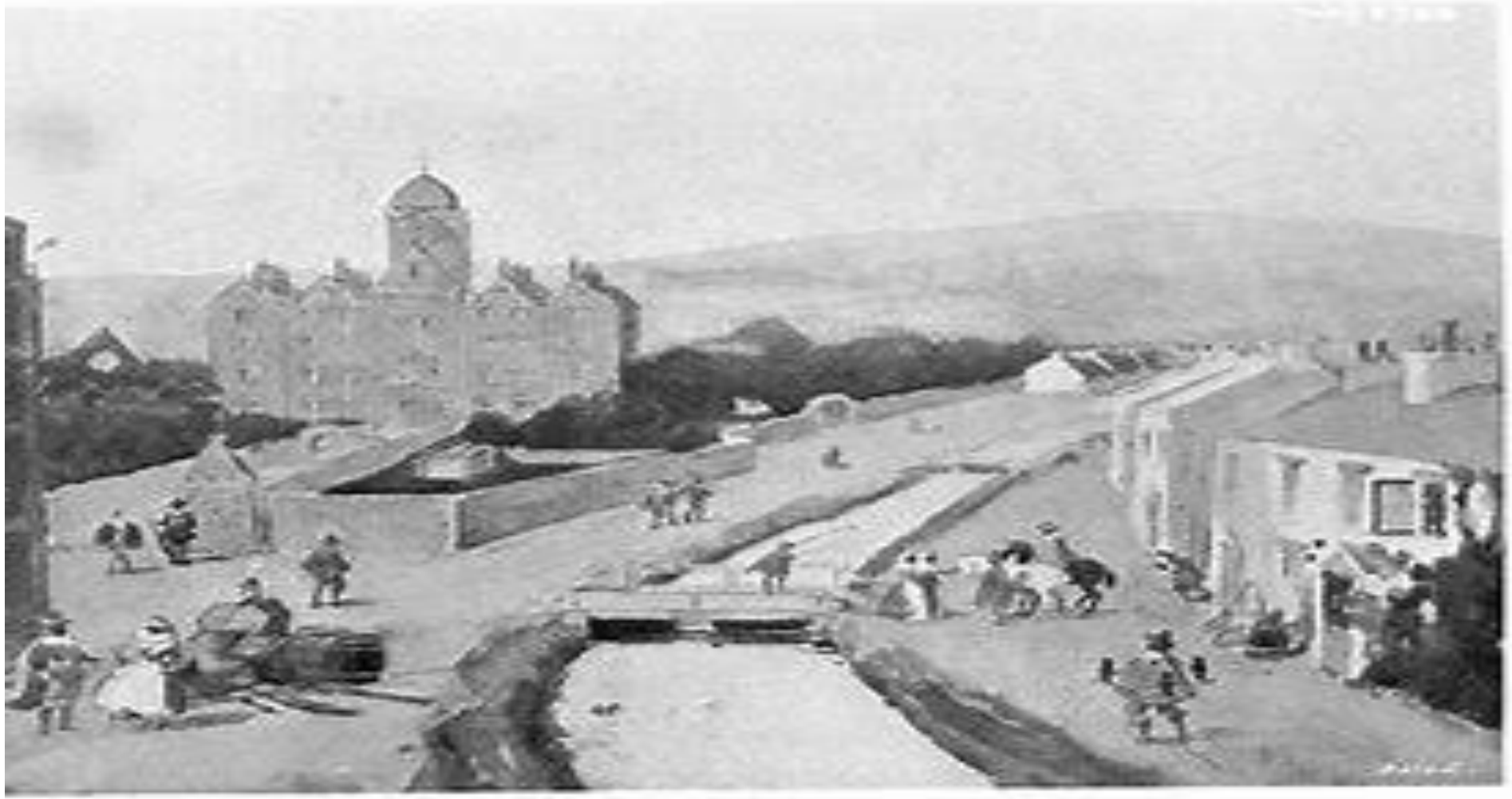


The port, c.1790


1839
Co. Antrim
Belfast
Clarendon
First Cut
High St.
Long
Bridge
Titanic Belfast
Garmoyle
RSPB Reserve
Airport
Co. Down
Land
Water
Low Water
Belfast City
Shipping
Present Location
N

Belfast Merchants and traders





Trade with the West Indies

- Expansion of colonial plantations in the West Indies increased demand for imported manufactured goods and created a lucrative market for exports
- Belfast's growth as a maritime hub and centre for shipbuilding improved trade logistics and shipping efficiency
- Political stability and favourable trade policies within the British Empire boosted commercial exchange
- Advances in navigation and transportation reduced costs and risks associated with long-distance trade
- Rising consumer demand in Europe for West Indian produce and Belfast-manufactured goods further stimulated trade flows

Ships belonging to Belfast, 1792

Trade to	Ships	Tonnage
West Indies	25	4,630
Liverpool	8	720
London	8	1,235
Streights	4	800
Miscellaneous	4	1,350
America	4	700
France and Holland	1	120
Coasters	4	200
Total	58 ships	9,765 Tons

Ships belonging to Belfast, 1819

104 Ships - 10,429 Registered Tons - 755 Sea

Linen for Enslaved Labourers

- - Belfast was a major linen producer, and its merchants exported coarse linen used to clothe enslaved people on plantations.
- - The city's merchants actively sought out markets in the Caribbean for their linen industry.

Salted Fish and Beef for Plantation Rations

- - The enslaved population needed cheap, preserved food. Belfast traders exported salted fish, beef, butter, and pork to feed both enslaved people and plantation owners.
- - The trade in foodstuffs was particularly important to plantations in Barbados and Jamaica.

Shoes and Manufactured Goods for Slaves and Planters

- - In 1783, 224 shoemakers worked in Belfast; by 1791, this had increased to 312, many producing broad-fitting shoes for enslaved Africans.
- - Soap and candles were also exported to the Caribbean.

Sugar refining

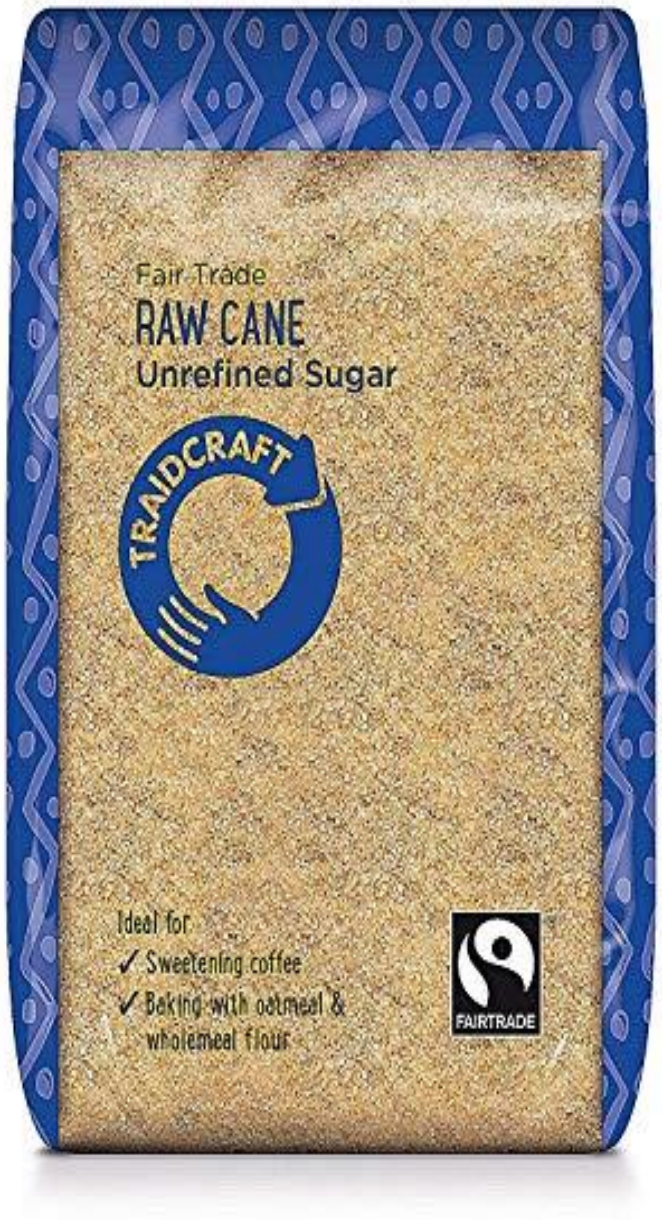
- - In the late 1600s, Belfast boasted two sugar refineries.
- - One was situated in Rosemary Lane, now a street, while the other was located in an entry off High Street, later named Sugarhouse Entry.
- - The prosperous merchant George McCartney owned the Sugarhouse Entry refinery and, in 1678, expanded his operations by leasing the adjacent Wilkins tenement.

Expansion

- In 1683, according to Benn's History of Belfast (1823), Belfast received 60 tons of raw or brown sugar and 2 tons of white sugar.

- By 1700, the annual sugar import into Britain and Ireland had surged to 10,000 tons.

- Sugar was considered a luxury item during this time, limited to the wealthier segments of society.



Sugarhouse Entry, off Waring Street

An incident…

- - According to Cathal O'Byrne's book "As I Roved Out" (946), a tale is recounted highlighting the damaging effects of rumor-spreading on businesses.
- - In this anecdote, Belfast streets were filled with gossip claiming that an employee had tragically fallen into a sugar vat and suffered a horrific fate of being boiled alive.
- - Compounding the situation, the rumor suggested that the contaminated sugar had been processed and sold to the public without any disclosure of the incident.
- - The Sugarhouse Company was forced to offer a reward of 50 guineas to anyone revealing the identity of the person spreading the false rumour. The reward was never claimed

Rum importation

- - Origins: 17th-century Caribbean, born from sugarcane byproduct.
- - Composition: Derived from molasses or sugarcane juice.
- - Fermentation: Yeast transforms sugars into alcohol.
- - Distillation: Process refines and extracts alcohol.
- - Evolution: Boomed during the Colonial era, pivotal in the Triangular Trade, and linked with piracy.
- - Modern Varieties: White, dark, spiced, and aged rums.
- Conclusion: Rum's rich history, diverse composition, and cultural significance make it more than a beverage—it's a liquid legacy.

Valentine Jones (Snr) (1711–1805)

- Born in Belfast; ancestral roots traced back to Wales c.1640. Notable ancestors involved in timber trade in Co. Londonderry.
- Married Mary Close (m. 1715), high sheriff's widow. Son of Valentine Jones (d. 1761), had a brother, Dr. Conway Jones.
- Second marriage to Eleanor Agnew, widow of business partner James Ross.
- Partnered with Thomas Bateson in West Indies trade.

Valentine’s work

- Wealthy wine merchant, extensive business in Winecellar Entry, Belfast.
- Supported projects: Linen Hall, Poor House, and Donegall Place houses.
- Sociable and popular; lively behaviour remembered.
- First wife: Mary Rochet, had five children. Second marriage to Eleanor Agnew, two children: Margaret and Edward.
- His son was based in Barbados and owned a 167 acre plantation.

A legacy…?

Naval muzzle loading cannon in Winecellar Entry.

Thomas Bateson and Family

- Business partner of Valentine Jones, frequently mentioned in West Indian produce advertisements.

- Partner in Mussenden, Bateson and Co, wine merchants, Winecellar Court, Belfast.

- Collaboration with James Adair to establish Belfast's first bank.

- Thomas Bateson resided at Orangefield House, Knockbreda.

- Son, Robert Bateson, lived at Belvoir Estate.

- Thomas Bateson's philanthropic efforts. - Robert Bateson continued philanthropy, providing beds to the poor in Knockbreda.

The Family of Thomas Bateson, Esq. (1705–1791) by Strickland Lowry

Thomas McCabe

- Born: 1740?, Lurgan, Co. Armagh
- Professions: Watchmaker, businessman, United Irishman
- Co-founded watchmaking business in Donegall Street, Belfast (1762).
- Introduced cotton industry to Belfast with Robert Joy (1779).
- Robert Joy, Captain John McCracken, and Thomas McCabe explored new manufacturing possibilities.

Pioneered Cotton in Belfast

- Discovered pioneering cotton spinning and carding technology during travels in Britain.
- Imported machinery set up in the Poor House basement, generating income and providing employment training.
- Partnered with Joy, Henry Joy, and John McCracken (1783).
- Expanded operations to Rosemary Lane (1784).
- Built Ireland's first water-powered mill at the Falls (1787).

Active citizen

- Invented improved loom for weaving cotton and linen with William Pearce (1791).
- Flourishing horological business in the 1780s.
- Freemason and Volunteer; Captain in the Belfast regiment.
- Known for liberal political opinions, involved in planning Belfast Society of United Irishmen (1791).
- Faced financial difficulties by 1796, withdrew from political activities.
- 229 cotton Spinning Jennies in 1791, employing 13,500 people within a 16km radius by 1800.

Slave ownership by Belfast citizens

Irish Involvement in the Caribbean Slave Economy

- - Many Irish people from Ulster and other parts of Ireland became involved in the transatlantic slave trade and plantation economy, particularly in Montserrat and the wider Caribbean.
- - Some Irish emigrants and their descendants were successful planters, traders, and slave owners.
- - Irish Catholic families such as the Galways, Farrells, and Skerrets accumulated significant wealth through slave-based sugar plantations.

Slave Trading and Business Networks

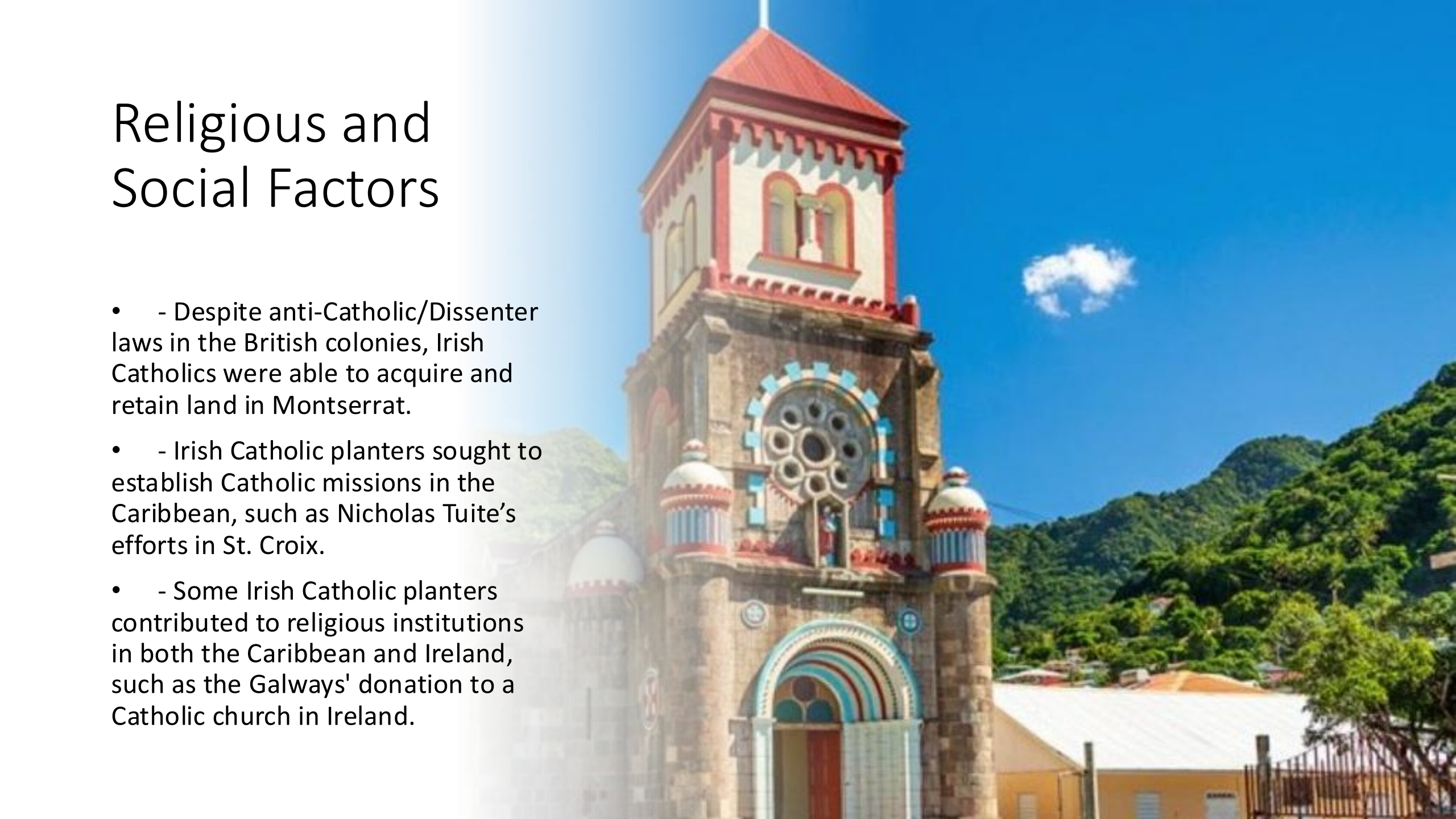
- - The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) allowed Britain to expand its role in the slave trade, which benefited Irish merchants in the Caribbean.
- - Richard Farrell, born to Longford parents in Montserrat, became a major slave dealer in Havana, Cuba.
- - George Skerret, an Irish Catholic, partnered with Bristol slave traders and owned ships capable of importing enslaved Africans directly from Africa.
- - Irish merchants, including those in Dublin, were involved in financing and provisioning Caribbean plantations.

Irish Creoles and Their Role in Slavery

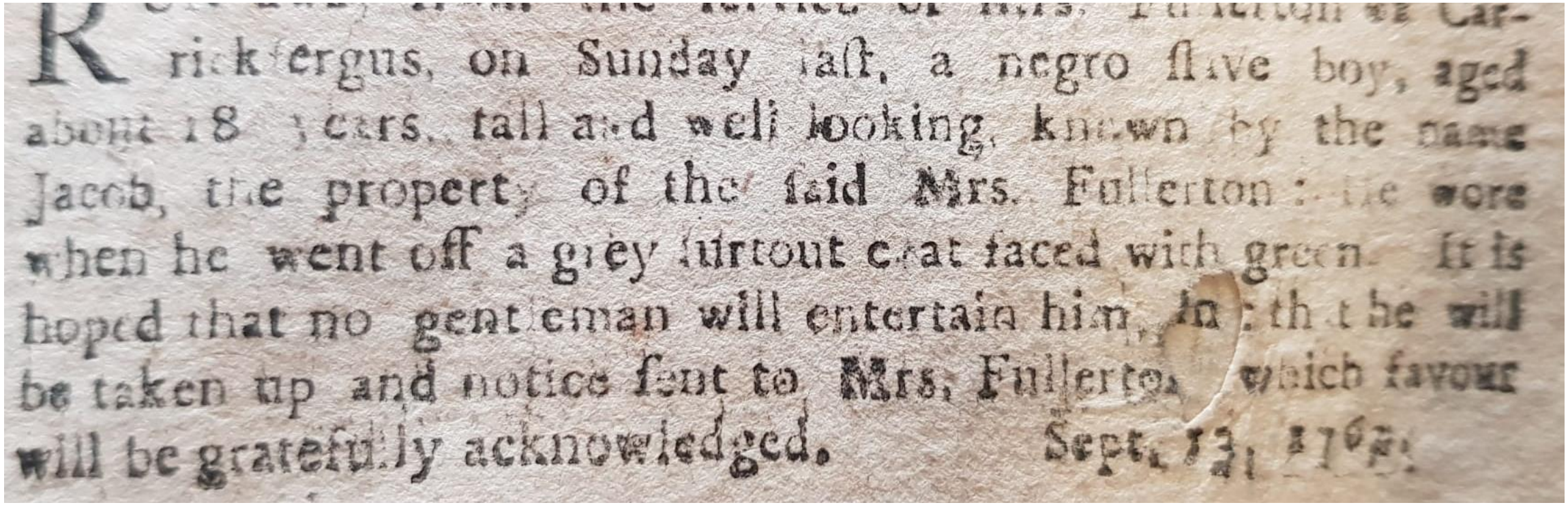
- - The Irish-born settlers in the Caribbean became Creoles, integrating into the plantation economy and accumulating wealth from slavery.
- - Originally, in the colonial Americas, Creole was applied to people of European descent who were born in the colonies rather than in Europe. Over time the meaning expanded and came to include individuals of mixed European, African and sometimes Indigenous ancestry.
- - They owned plantations and rented out enslaved workers as part of the commercial economy.
- - Some absentee planters moved to London, continuing to profit from Caribbean slavery while living in Britain.

Religious and Social Factors

- - Despite anti-Catholic/Dissenter laws in the British colonies, Irish Catholics were able to acquire and retain land in Montserrat.
- - Irish Catholic planters sought to establish Catholic missions in the Caribbean, such as Nicholas Tuite’s efforts in St. Croix.
- - Some Irish Catholic planters contributed to religious institutions in both the Caribbean and Ireland, such as the Galways' donation to a Catholic church in Ireland.



BNL, 13 Sept 1765



Kirkpatrick Fergus, on Sunday last, a negro slave boy, aged about 18 years, tall and well looking, known by the name Jacob, the property of the said Mrs. Fullerton: He wore when he went off a grey surtout coat faced with green. It is hoped that no gentleman will entertain him, knowing that he will be taken up and notice sent to Mrs. Fullerton, which favour will be gratefully acknowledged. Sept. 13, 1765.

BELFAST NEWSLETTER (19 OCTOBER 1765)

- “Runaway from John Cawden, Princes Street, Belfast. A young negro manservant named John Moore. A reward of three guineas. Straight and well made has two remarkably broad teeth in upper jaw.”

Valentine Jones (Jr), 1729 - 1808

- Son of Valentine Jones (d. 1805) of Belfast, a West India merchant, and wine and rum dealer.
- Online sources suggest Valentine Jones (d. 1808) as the probable owner of Providence estate in Christ Church, Barbados, in 1777.
- Merchant of Barbados for 33 years.
- Bequeathed 6 guineas and an annuity of 4 guineas p.a. to 'my black female servant named Bamba.'
- His son, also known, Valentine Jones (son) convicted of embezzlement as Commissary-General of the West Indies in 1809.

Dominica


PLAN
OF THE ISLAND OF
DOMINICA


Penville
Calibishie
Wesley
Portsmouth
Marigot
Salybia
Coulibistrie
Dominica
Castle Bruce
Mero
Mahaut
Canefield
La Plaine
Roseau
Loubiere
Berekua
Scotts Head

Background: Dominica, 1700-1763

- French and British Rivalry: Dominica, a lush Caribbean island, attracted European powers. The French and the British struggled for control over the island.
- Indigenous Kalinago People: The Kalinago (Carib) people, the island's indigenous inhabitants, resisted European colonization but faced encroachment.
- 1761-1763: Treaty of Paris. British Control: Following the Seven Years' War, Dominica was formally ceded to the British

Dominica, 1763-1796

- Later 18th Century: Dominica's economy became centered around sugar plantations, with enslaved Africans providing the labour force. Maroon Communities: Escaped slaves formed Maroon communities in the mountainous interior, resisting plantation slavery.
- 1783: Treaty of Paris (1783)
- British Confirmation: The Treaty of Paris (1783) reaffirmed British control over Dominica.
- 1795-1796: Maroon War. The Maroons, led by Joseph Chatoyer, rebelled against British rule, seeking to establish an independent state. The rebellion was quelled, and Chatoyer was killed.

Dominica, 1805-1838

- 1805-1815: Napoleonic Wars. French Occupation: Dominica briefly fell under French control during the Napoleonic Wars but was restored to British rule in 1815.
- 1831: Emancipation. Slavery was officially abolished in the British Empire in 1833, and slaves in Dominica were emancipated in 1834.
- 1838: Apprenticeship Period. Transition Period: The Apprenticeship period followed emancipation, during which former slaves were required to work for their former masters for a set number of years.

Thomas Greg (1721–1780)

- Born to Elizabeth and Thomas Greg, part of a prominent Belfast family.

- Partnered with brother-in-law, Waddell Cunningham, forming a successful mercantile business.

- Established a thriving shipping company in New York, benefiting from war and trade.

- Invested in a sugar plantation called "Belfast" on Dominica, supplied with slaves by Greg's brother.

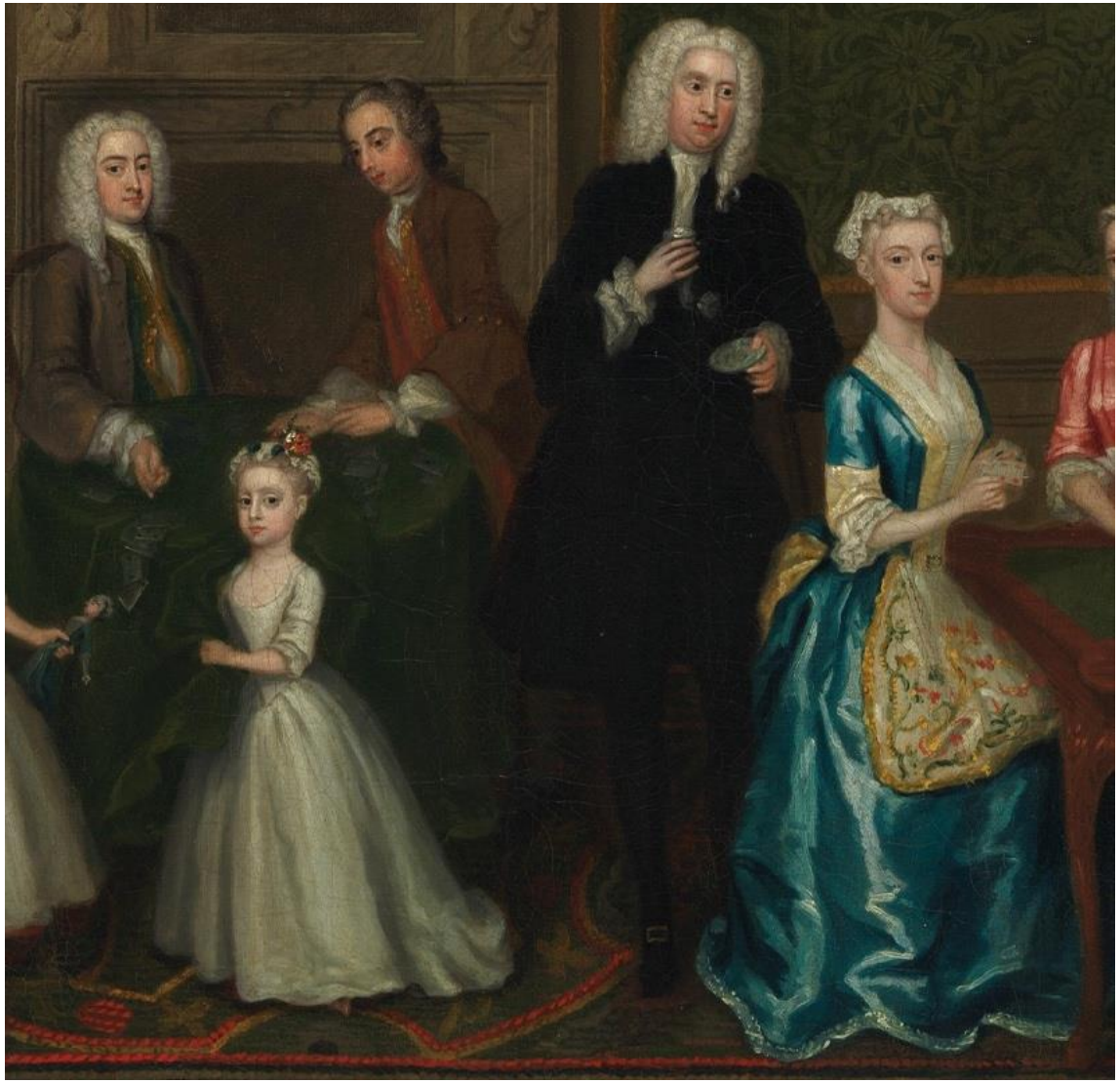
- Improved Belfast's commercial infrastructure, including the Lagan navigation canal and White Linen Hall.

- Played a significant role in the Volunteers, advocating for free commerce and Irish legislative independence.

Thomas Greg and family

John Greg (1716-1795)

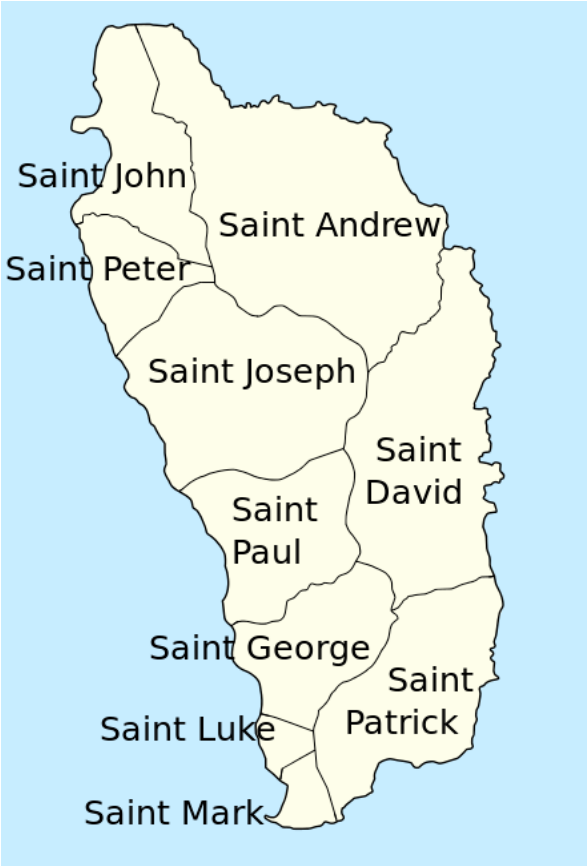
- Went to the West Indies in 1765, became the first Government Commissioner for the sale of land
- Owned two estates in Dominica (Hertford and Hillsborough)
- His wife, Catharine (née Henderson), inherited Cane Garden in St. Vincent in 1773
- Thomas Greg, John's brother, also owned an estate in Dominica with Waddell Cunningham
- John Greg's Will proved on 25/06/1795. Left leasehold houses in Stratford Place, London, and Spring Grove, Hampton to his wife Catharine

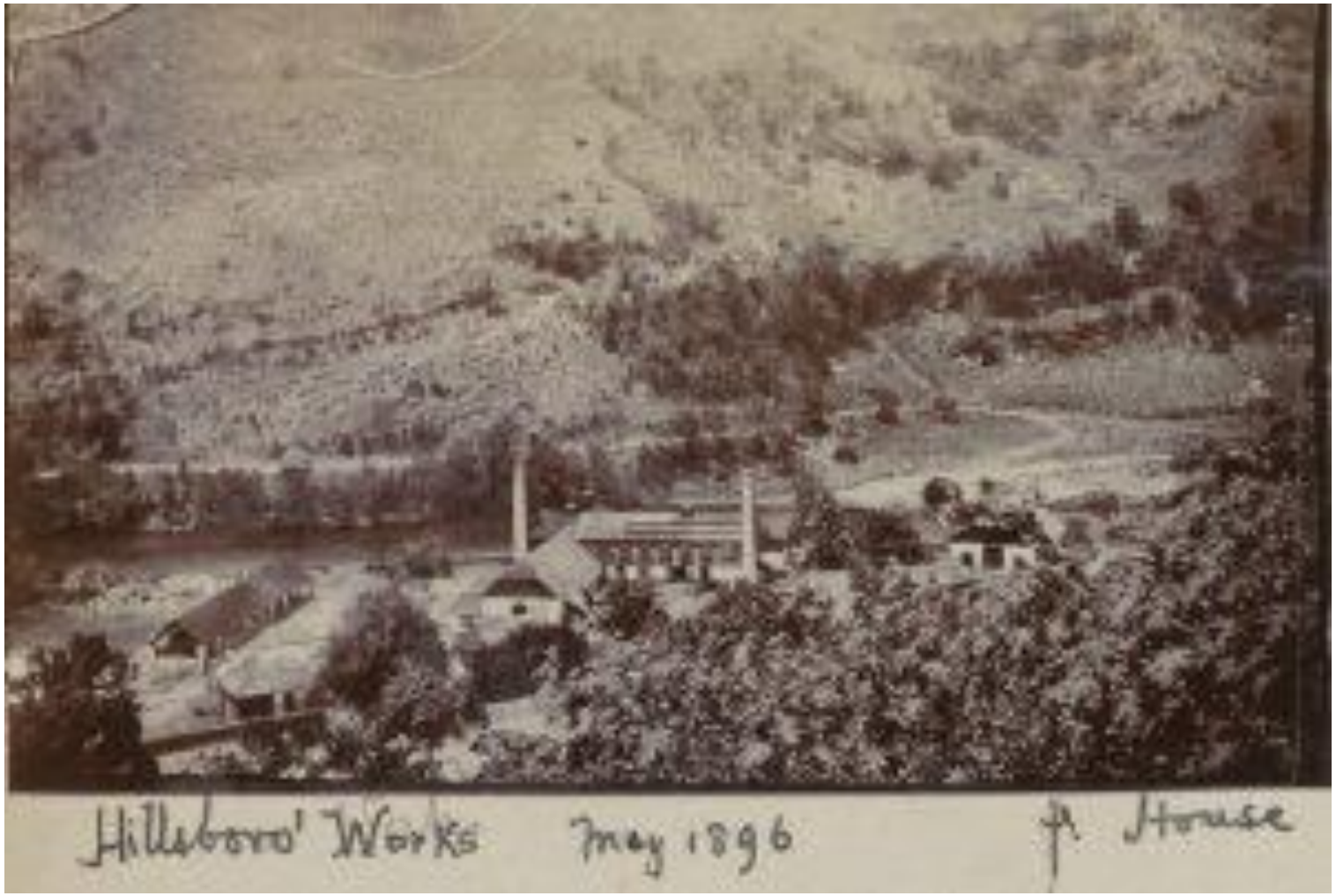


Death and legacy

- Left monetary legacies to family members Left a life interest in his West India estates to his wife Catharine, then to nephews Thomas Greg and Samuel Greg
- In Dominica, John Greg was the original purchaser of St Joseph Lot 37 (86 acres) and Lots 87-89
- John Greg was the original purchaser of St Paul Lots 14-15 (33 acres each), Lots 18-20 (16, 45, and 133 acres), Lot 75
- John Greg, along with Thomas Jemmit, purchased Lots 76-78 (40, 15, and 34 acres)
- John Greg and Thomas Jemmit were present possessors of St Joseph Lands on Lease Lot 26 (58 acres) and St Paul Lands on Lease Lot 1 (60 acres)

Hillsborough Estate, St Joseph's Parish





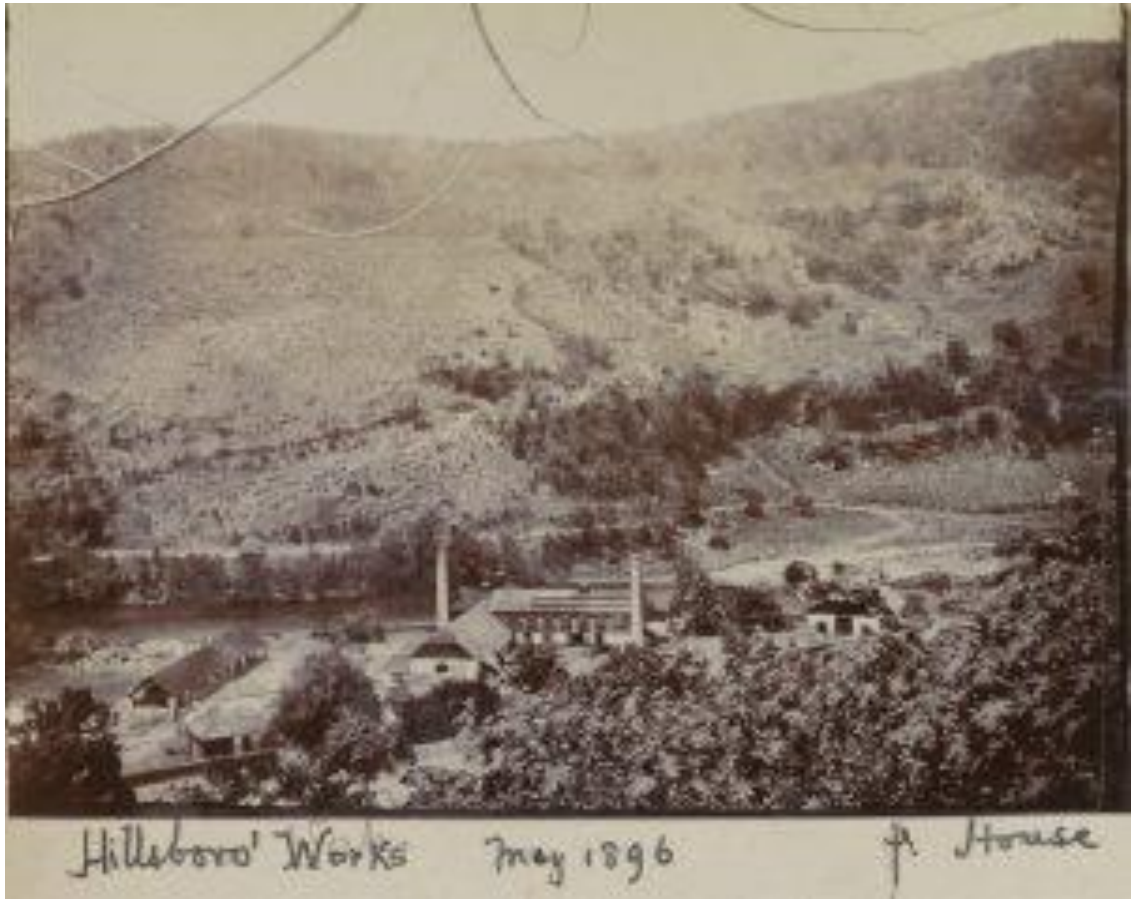
The estate

Revolt and resistance: Balla Rebellion

Timeframe: The Balla Rebellion is believed to have occurred sometime between 1812 and 1814. It was one of several slave uprisings that took place in the Caribbean during this period, fueled by the desire for freedom and better living conditions.

Grievances: Enslaved people in Dominica, like those in other parts of the Caribbean, faced harsh and oppressive conditions, including forced labor, physical abuse, and separation from their families. These grievances likely played a role in sparking the rebellion.

Suppression: The British colonial authorities swiftly suppressed the rebellion. As a result, the rebellion did not achieve its goal of securing freedom for the enslaved people involved.



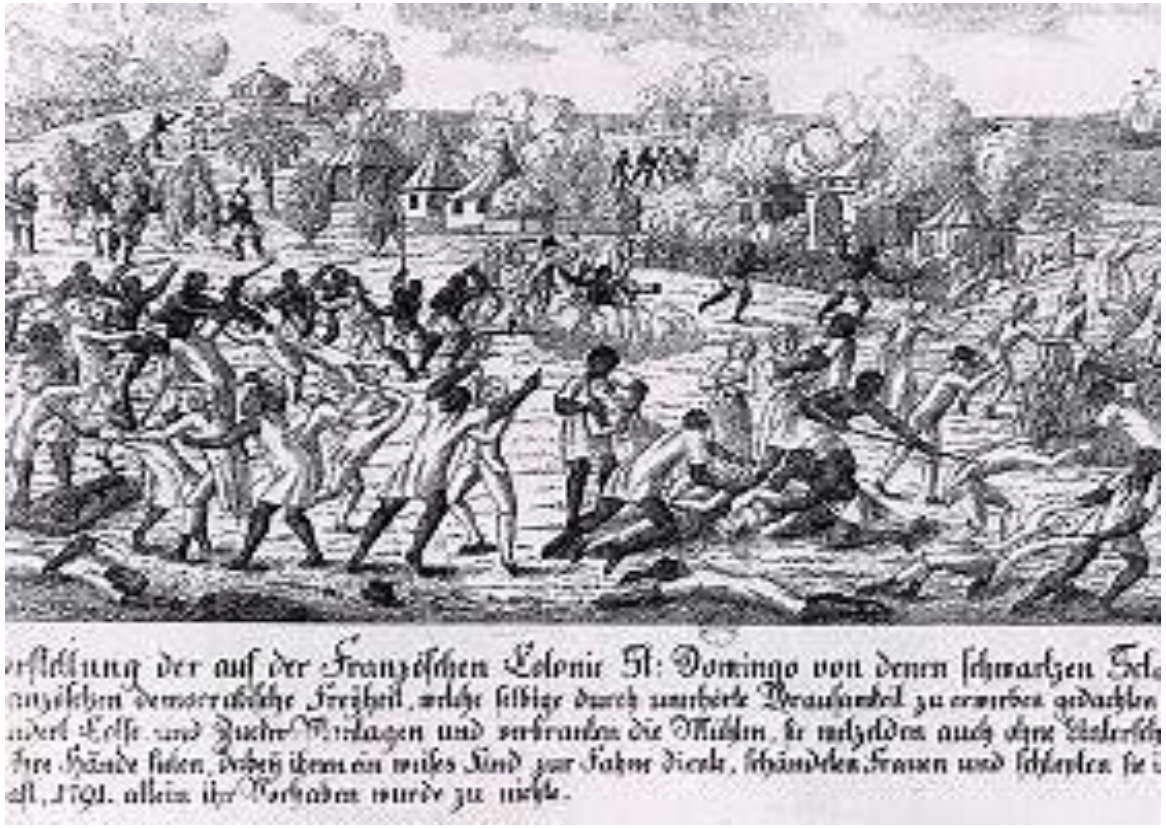
Repression and impact

Repression: Following the rebellion's suppression, there were likely harsh reprisals against the participants, with severe punishments, such as floggings and executions, being carried out. The British colonial authorities were determined to maintain control and suppress any further rebellion.

Long-Term Impact: While the Balla Rebellion itself did not lead to the abolition of slavery in Dominica, it was part of a broader movement toward emancipation in the Caribbean. Slavery was eventually abolished in British colonies in 1834, with full emancipation taking effect in 1838.

Punishments, Hillsborough Estate, January 1814

- On January 15-16, 1814, Peter, was court-martialed for inciting a mutiny among 20 other slaves and stealing provisions. He was sentenced to hang, and the execution took place on January 18, 1814. His head was placed on a pole, and his body was hung on a gibbet.
- On January 22, 1814, Dick and Daniel, were court-martialed for being runaways and received 100 lashes each. They were then returned to their owners.
- Also on January 22, 1814, Sarah,, was court-martialed for being a runaway and sentenced to receive 50 lashes. However, she was pardoned and released.
- Finally, on the same day, January 22, 1814, Hetty, Penny, and Placide, were court-martialed for being runaways and received 40 lashes each. They, too, were returned to their owners.



Fate of the estate

- John Greg passed away on June 10, 1795, leaving his West Indian properties to his nephews Thomas and Samuel (sons of Thomas (1718-1796)), who were raised by their uncle Robert Hyde.
- Thomas conveyed his share to Samuel for a £1500 annuity.

Later history

- After Samuel's death in 1834, the estates passed to his son, Thomas (who died around 1839).
- In 1839, the Hillsborough estate was inherited by his brother, Robert Hyde Greg.
- The Greg family owned the estate until 1928 when it was sold to a Dominican family named Rolle, despite initial reluctance due to the family's ethnicity.
- The Rolle family still owned the estate as of 2010.

Waddell Cunningham (c. 1729-1797)

- Irish merchant prominent in Georgian-era Belfast

- Patron of Belfast Charitable Society and its Poor House

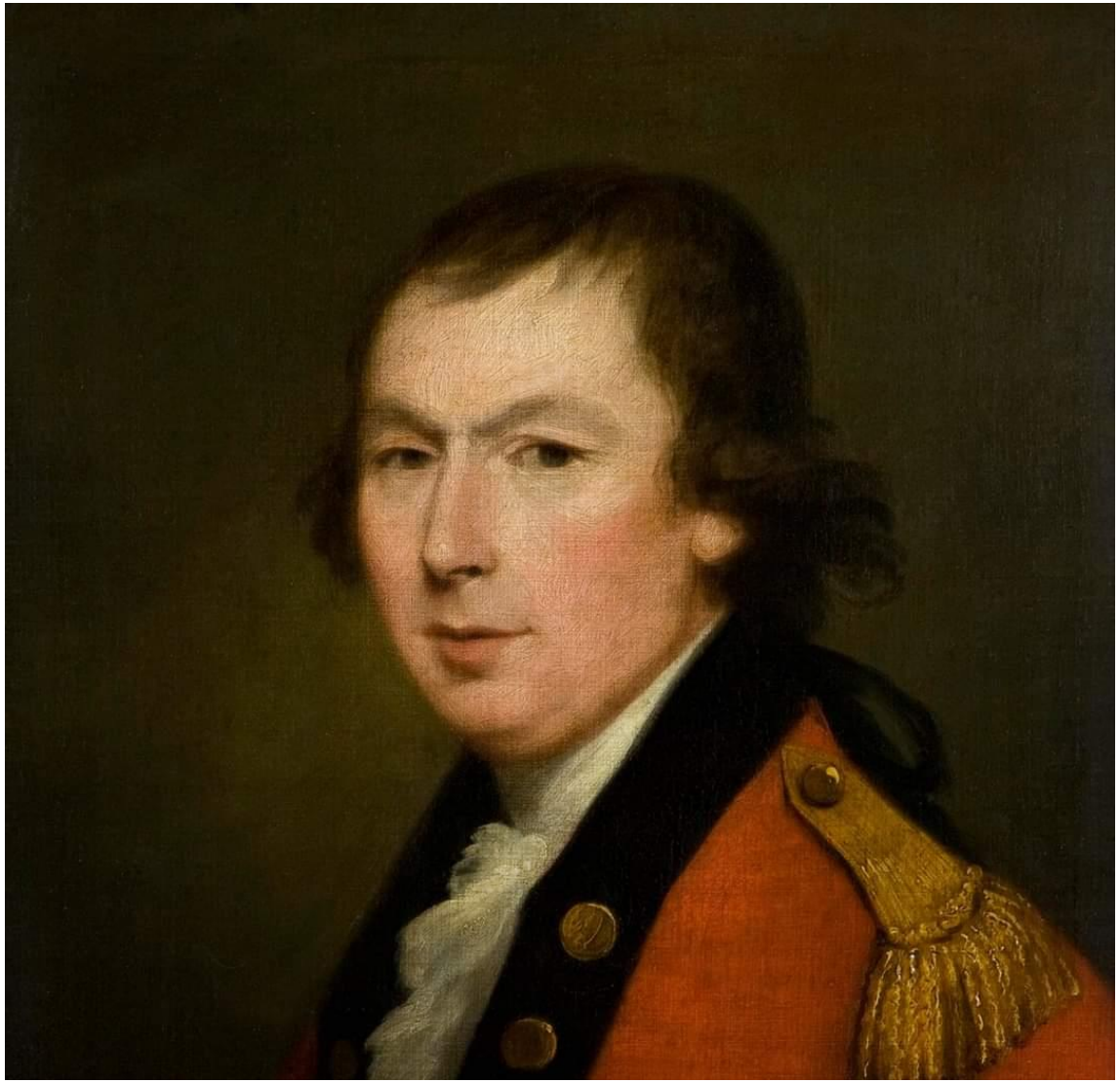
- Commander of Volunteer patriot militia

- Supported the construction of Belfast's first Catholic chapel

- Controversial for land speculation and slaveholding

- Opposition to immediate Catholic Emancipation

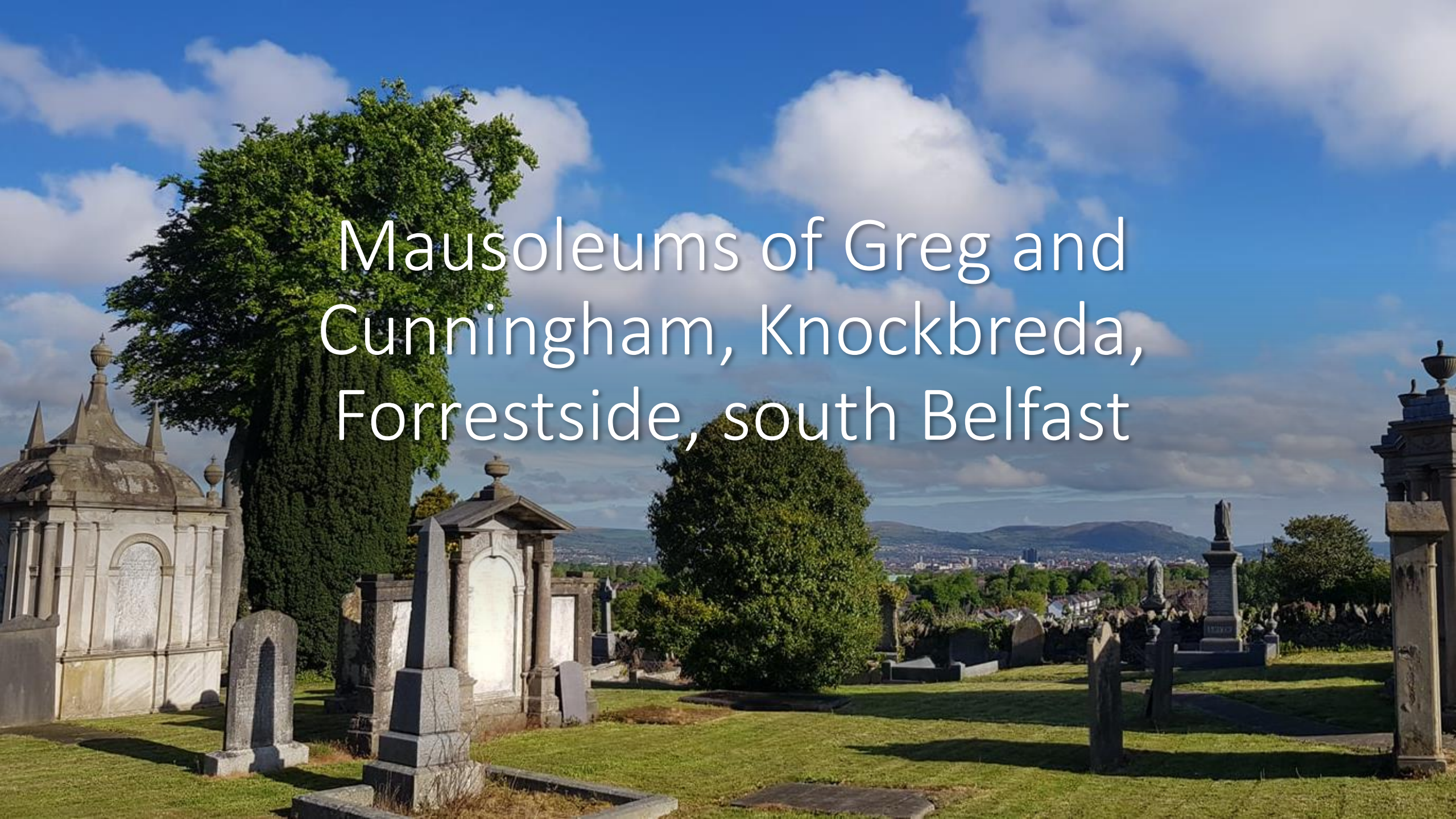
- Legacy includes contributions to trade, infrastructure, and social initiatives



Cunningham and Greg owned the ‘Belfast’ Estate

- Thomas Gregg married Elizabeth Hyde and has 13 children: he died in 1796, leaving his youngest son Cunningham as residuary legatee, and he and Waddell Cunningham sold the Belfast estate for £17,000.

Belfast Estate Rum Distillery, Belfast, Dominica


Mausoleums of Greg and Cunningham, Knockbreda, Forrestside, south Belfast

William Forsyth in British Guiana

Jaar	Register der Plantagien. Aan de Oostwal in Rio Demerary.		Akker	Roed.
1759	1. Thomas Adams.		500	
1759	2. Jaques Salignac.	La Bourgade.	500	
	3. D'Ed. Compagnie's Brander.			
1759	4. Richard Bass Dalt.	Jerish hope.	225	
1759	5. Jean François de Saffon.	La Penitense.	500	
1756	6. Mr. Johannes Heyliger Joh. Filius.	Ruymzicht.	500	
1753	7. Pieter Haley.	Pieters Hall.	2000	
1756	8. John Bermingham.	Lucky Hitt.	1000	
1757	9. Gedney Clarke Junior.	Hampton Court.	1000	
1753	10. John Carter.	Diamond.	1500	
1753	11. Gedney Clarke Junior.	Golden Grove.	2000	
1752	12. Francq Clarke.	De Vrindschap.	1000	
1752	13. Samuel Carter.	Garden of Eden.	2000	
1754	14. Jan Nicolaes van Eys.	't Land Canaan.	2000	

Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1753	15. P. La Cheau en L'Amirault.	Jerusalem.	2000	
1753	16. George Ruisch.	't Huys te Coeverden.	500	
1753	17. Laur. Lod. van Bercheyck & Comp.		1000	
1753	18. Idem & Compagnie.	Soesdyk.	2000	
1752	19. Geisbregt Brouwer.	Nieuw Gelderland.	2000	
	in de Kreek Hawereroenie.			
1753	20. Laur. Lod. van Bercheyck & Comp.		500	
1751	21. Jonathan Sam. Storm v. 's Gravesande.	De Standvastigheid.	333	100
	in de Rivier Demerary.			
1751	22. Jonathan Sam. Storm v. 's Gravesande.	De Standvastigheid.	1666	200
1752	23. Wed. Pieter Markoe.	Nieuw St. Eustatius.	1900	
1752	24. Eadem & Kinders.		441	200
1752	25. Carel Fredrik Warmbury.		166	200
1751	26. Nicolaes Heyliger & Comp.	De drie Vrienden.	2000	
1751	27. Benjamin Niccolls.	Freedside.	500	

Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1753	28. Manasse Williams.	Soud Wallas.	1700	
1747	29. Johannes Heyliger.	Susanna's Rust.	1666	200
1750	30. Egidius de Scharden.	De Vryheid.	2000	
1751	31. Jacob & Abraham Simmons.		2000	
1748	32. John Simmons.	The Frindschip.	1500	
1754	33. Jan Haley.		500	
1752	34. Gedney Clarke Junior.	't Loo.	2000	
1753	35. Pieter Clarke.	York.	1000	
1751	36. Johannes Vellage.	D'Elisabeth.	2000	
1752	37. Pieter Schellekens.	Sandvliet.	333	
1752	38. André de la Villette.		500	
1747	39. d'Erven Andries Pieterse.	Adventer.	625	
1748	40. John Bermingham.	Dalgin.	2000	
1749	41. John & Eduard Fitz Patrik.	Fitz's hope.	2000	
1746	42. Mr. Johannes Heyliger Joh. Filius.	't Huys t' Amelisweerd.	1900	

Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1755	43. Isaac Knott.	The Retreere.	2000	
1746	44. Jan Adolph Von Rosen.		500	
1753	45. John Allibek.		500	
1755	46. Stephanus Jeke.		402	200
1753	47. Jan Haley & Comp.	Siberien.	1000	
1753	48. Idem.		1000	
1753	49. Cornelis Hendriks.		1000	
1753	50. Jan Oyen.		1000	
1753	51. Bartholomeus Martin.	Heyliger Sigt.	1000	
1753	52. John Thomas.	John Trewerns folly.	1000	
1753	53. Jean François de Saffon.		1000	
1753	54. Johannes Jansson.	De Maria Elisabeth.	2500	
1758	55. Ignatius Van Noorke.		300	
1754	56. Alexander Loef.		500	
1755	57. Paul Andreas Scheuerman.		1000	

Jaar	Register der Plantagien. Aan de Westwal in Rio Demerary.		Akker	Roed.
1759	A. F.J. Mushack.		500	
1759	B. Christoffel Jan Heede.		500	
1759	1. Jan Jacob Becker.		500	
1759	2. Felix.		1000	
1759	3. Labadi.		1000	
1759	4. Bartholomeus Cantinaux.		500	
1755	5. Denis des Granges.	Plantage des Granges.	1500	
1756	6. Johan Hendrik Meyer.	Mindenborg.	375	
1756	7. Jean Francois Langlade.	Nisme.	1125	
1756	8. Abel Bever.	Beverehaven.	1000	
1756	9. Ignace Courthial.	Hoebabbee.	2000	
1759	10. Adriaan Speere.	De Laurentia Catharina.	1500	
1756	11. Jacob Barbey.	Breemen.	625	
1753	12. Jan Dudenson.	De Goede Verwagting.	2000	
1759	13. Christiaan Hendrik Troez.	Georgia.	1000	
1759	14. John Poder.	Little Barbados.	1000	

Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1752	15. Engel Lonke.	De Catharina.	1500	
1754	16. Abraham Runnels.		1000	
1759	17. Michiel Loeff.		700	
1754	18. Manasse Williams.		300	
1758	19. Christiaan Hendrik Troez.	Georgia.	1000	
1755	20. John Maynard.		500	
1751	21. Simon Cornelis van Bercheyck.	Hermanstryn.	1500	
	in de Kreek Camawoeny.			
1758	22. Henry Perry.	Harwood.	1000	
1758	23. Wartley Hall.	Elcyry.	2000	
1756	24. George Gascoigne.	Utika.	2000	
	in de Kreek Mibiroe.			
1753	25. Mr. Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande.	De Hoop.	500	
	in de Rivier Demerary.			
1753	26. George Gascoigne.	Beehive.	1100	
1751	27. Baron Van Groesteins.	De Princesse Carolina.	2000	
1750	28. Wed. Pieter Markoe.	Nieuw St. Eustatius.	500	

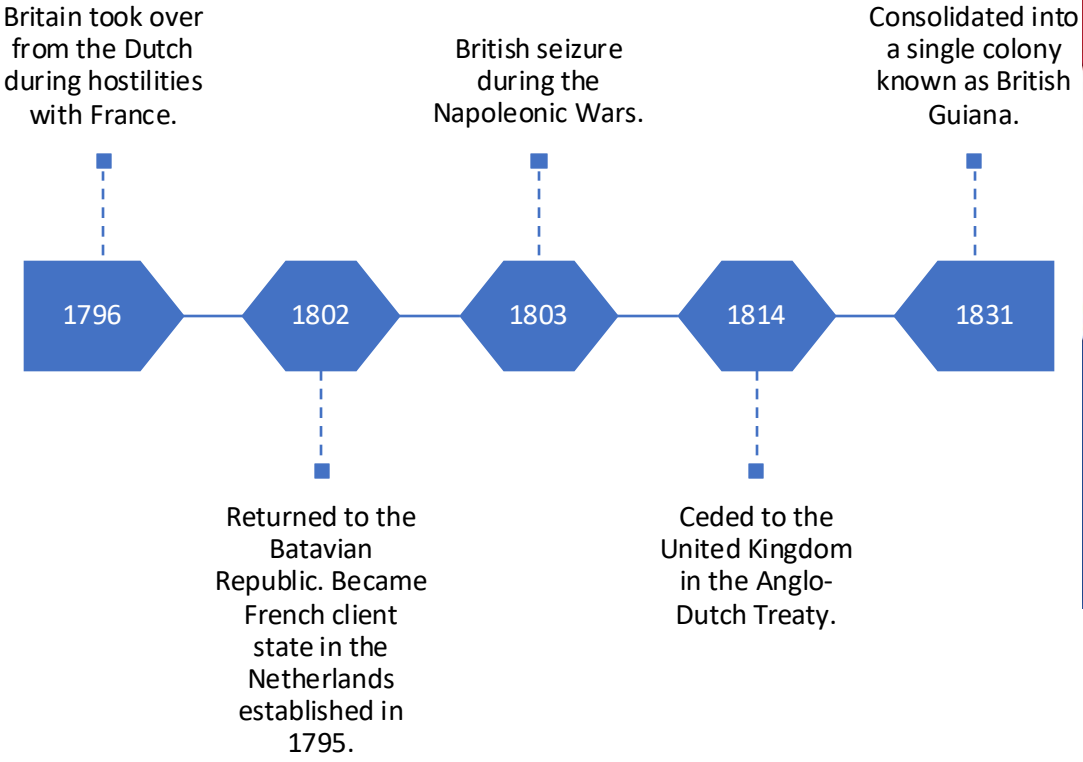
Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1754	29. Geisbert Elias.	Vreed-en Rust.	2000	
1752	30. Daniel Stewart.	Denoon.	2000	
1756	31. Adriaan Runnels.	Aurora.	500	
1756	32. Josias Philips.		500	
1758	33. Benyamin Niccolls.	Freedside.	1000	
1748	34. Wed. Paulus Wezaerd.		1221	
1748	35. Johannes Heyliger.	Susanna's Rust.	333	100
1746	36. Jan Baptist Slengarde.	Berlin.	1000	
1755	37. Plaats voor het Dorp.		1000	
1748	38. Thomas Artin.	Spring Garden.	2000	
1746	39. Jan Haley en Compagnie.	St. Jan.	1000	
1753	40. William Clarke.	Richmond.	2000	
1752	41. Gedney Clarke Senior.	Blenheim.	2000	
1750	42. William Roberts.	The Bell.	1000	
1759	43. Thomas Simmons.	De Herstelling.	500	
1754	44. André de la Villette.		500	
1753	45. d'Erven Andries Pieterse.	Adventer.	1000	

Jaar			Akker	Roed.
1752	46. Jacobus van Roden.	Suyd Bereland.	2000	
1748	47. Paulus Amyot.	Nieuw Amsterdam.	2000	
1755	48. Thomas Simmons.	De Herstelling.	1000	
1756	49. Eduard Fitz Patrik.		225	
1748	50. d'Erven Christiaan Finet.	Christianenburg.	2000	
1747	51. Idem.	Christianenburg.	500	
1747	52. Anthony Semmarsal.	Wismer.	2000	
1749	53. Jan Adolph von Rosen.		1000	
1755	54. Joseph Starr.		283	
1753	55. Jan Magnus Frenzel.	De Susanna.	2000	
1753	56. Jan Haley & Compagnie.		2000	
1756	57. Palmer & Sap.		2000	
1756	58. Pieter Berck.	D'Aurora.	2000	
1756	59. Bartholomeus Martin.	Cape a Star.	2073	
1753	60. Pieter Berck.	De Hoop.	2500	
1756	61. Erhard Atting.	Wel te Vreede.	500	

Home of...

- Demerara sugar is one of several types of sugar that are classified as "raw" sugars, along with turbinado sugar, as well as products described as raw cane sugar, washed sugar, evaporated cane juice, and others. Contrary to popular belief, raw sugars such as demerara do in fact undergo a high degree of refining. What the term "raw" indicates is that it has been crystallized only once, as opposed to twice for granulated white sugar. It's named for the Dutch and then British colony in what is now Guyana where the sugar was first produced.

Colonial history



Flag of the Batavian Republic,
a client state of the French Republic that ruled over the Low Countries during the French Revolutionary Wars

Economy

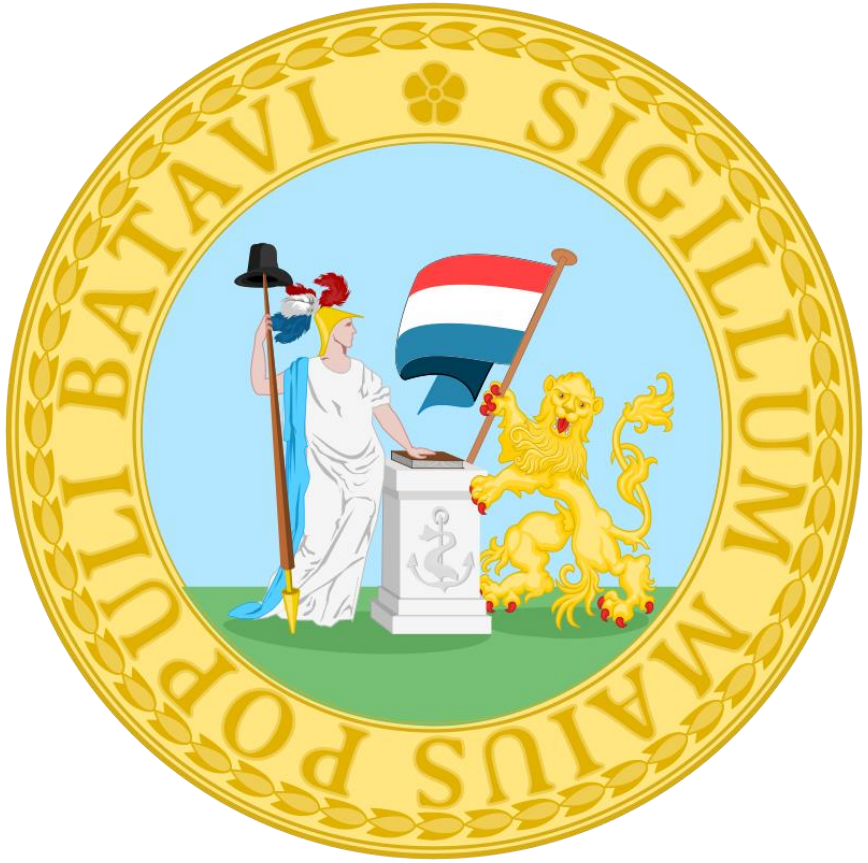
1807–1830s: Slave economy dominated.

Shifts: Post-emancipation transition to rice farming, mining, and forestry.

1822: Administration of Essequibo and Demerara combined.

1831: Formation of British Guiana through the merger of Essequibo-Demerara and Berbice.

1959: Sugar still accounted for nearly 50% of exports.



William Forsyth (1789-1856)

William Forsyth, a native of Ballynure, County Antrim, emigrated to the West Indies as a penniless youth.

He achieved wealth by becoming a prominent landowner in the West Indies.

His financial stability was challenged by the impact of slave emancipation on property values.

Through a legal dispute, Forsyth successfully recovered his lost property.

He later relocated to Belfast and gained respect as a highly regarded resident.

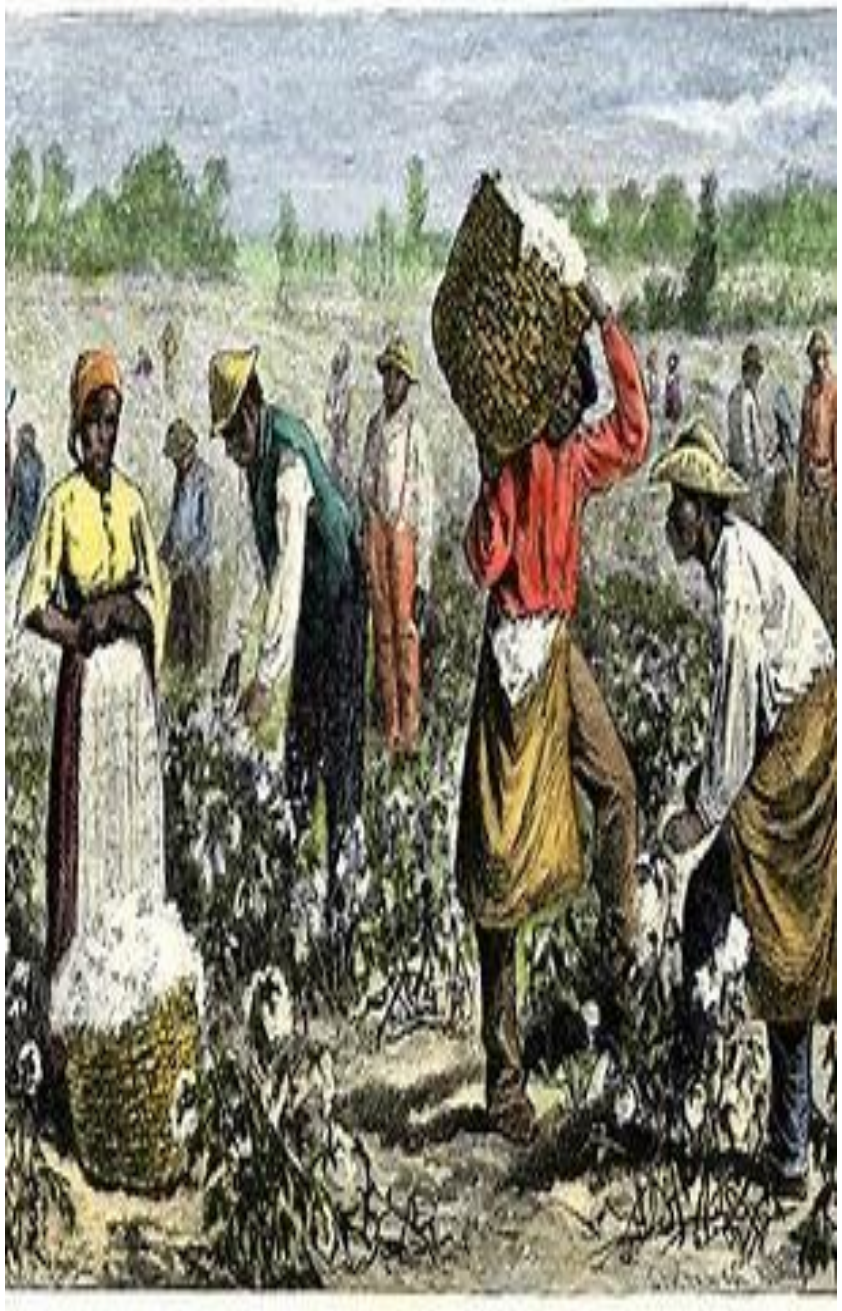
Forsyth was actively involved in civic affairs, representing the town in the Town Council.

Unsuccessful claim

- Claimed unsuccessfully as owner of Friends plantation in British Guiana which had 272 slaves.
- The compensation for the enslaved on which was awarded to George Robert Smith of Smith Payne & Smith.

Hugh McCalmont

- McCalmonts' involvement in Demerara since 1790 and in Berbice from about 1799.
- They owned two plantations on the west sea coast.
- Hugh McCalmont, a key figure (1765-1838) from Abbeylands, Co Antrim.
- Letters addressed to him in Demerara, London, and Baltimore.
- In 1814, a McCalmont slave named February was rewarded for revealing an uprising plan.



Management of the estate

- In 1819, Hugh McCalmont owned the Hope & Experiment plantation on the west sea coast with 285 slaves.
- John Maclennan managed the plantation on his behalf.
- A letter from 1823 mentions Hugh McCalmont's presence in the colony during an insurrection.

Change of management

A letter from 1823 suggests a younger relative was managing the family's interests.

A younger Hugh McCalmont (1811-1838) who drowned in 1838 in Berbice.

He is commemorated as 'late Mayor' of Georgetown and an elder of the church.

Wealth and descendants

- In 1826, a letter from James Calley, manager of a plantation in Berbice, to owner Hugh McCalmont in Belfast.
- McCalmonts managed their interests across different locations.
- Hugh McCalmont (1765-1838) married Elizabeth Allen Barklie in 1807.
- Their son Hugh McCalmont (1810-1887) became one of the richest men in the country.
- McCalmont Brothers of London was their merchant bank.
- The latter Hugh McCalmont was an uncle of Unionist politician Hugh McCalmont MP (1845-1924).

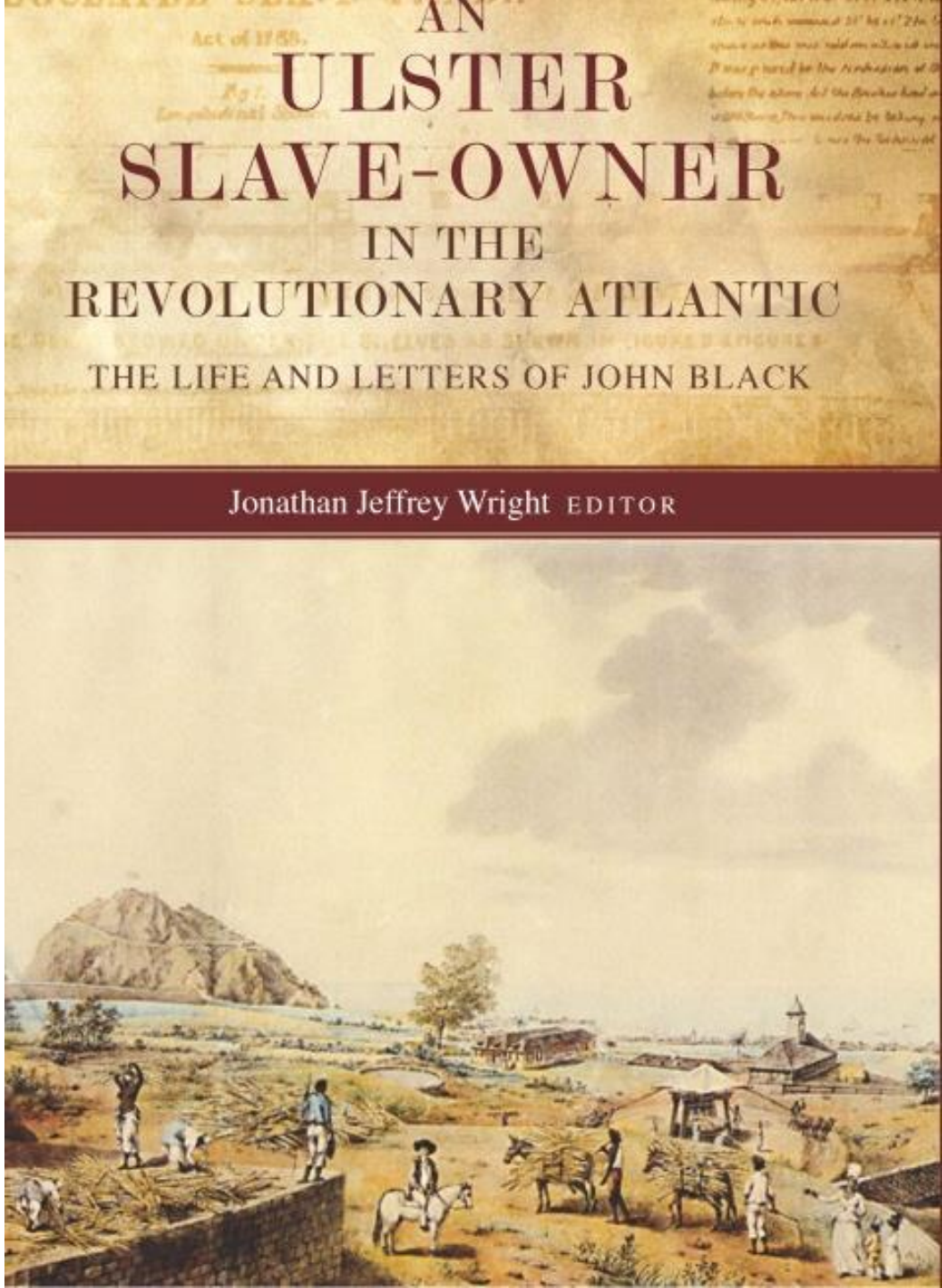
Compensated under the Act

- Their success reflects broader processes of wealth transfer from slavery into the British national and imperial economy in the 19th century.
- Plantations compensated under the 1833 Act.

Hope & Experiment, British Guiana	287 slaves	£14,639
Hope & Experiment, British Guiana	139 slaves	£7,244
Orangestein, British Guiana	82 slaves	£4,261

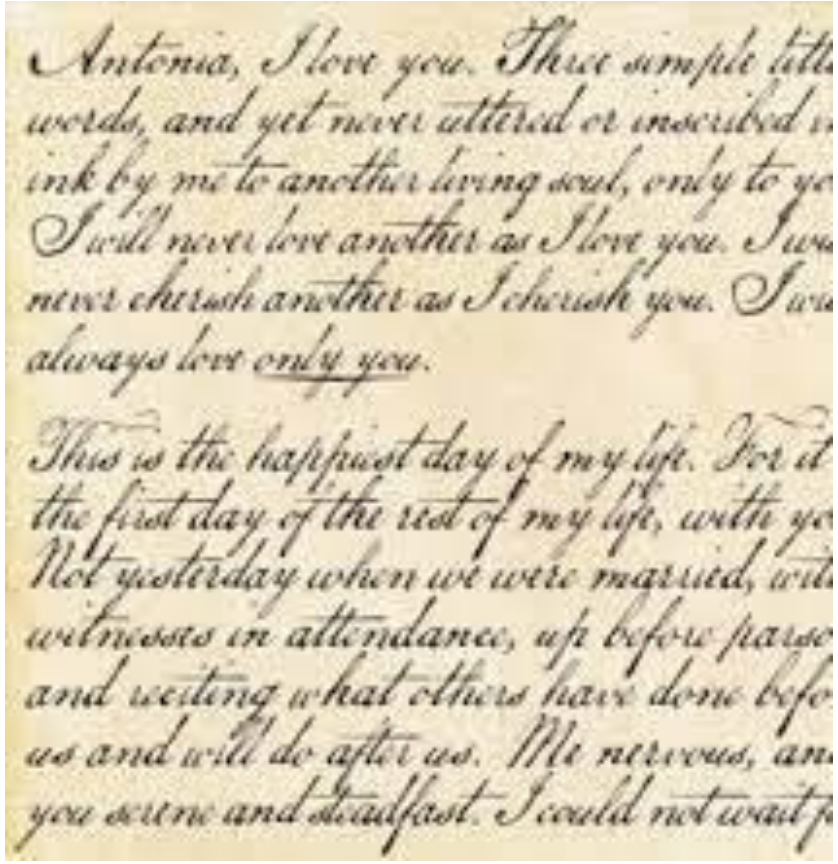
John Black

- John Black, a pioneering British/Irish settler in Trinidad, hailed from a prominent Belfast family, with his father George Black serving as the Mayor of Belfast.
- After Britain seized Trinidad from the Spanish in 1797 and formal accession in 1802, Black became part of the early power structure around Thomas Picton.
- He owned the Barataria estate, along with the enslaved people on it, from some point between 1819 and 1828.
- Born in Ulster, Black left Ireland in 1771 and settled initially in Grenada before moving to Trinidad in 1784 [sic], establishing himself as a major slave owner and a prominent figure among the island's planter elite.



Black’s letters

- Black's letters, written between 1799 and 1836 to his brother George in Belfast, reflect his attempt to maintain familial ties across the Atlantic and offer insights into the close connections between Ulster and the West Indies during the early nineteenth century.
- The letters depict the challenges of mercantile life amidst political and economic unrest and provide a vivid portrayal of a world centered around the institution of slavery, in which Ulster played a significant role.
- His career in Trinidad, detailed in a recent unpublished doctoral thesis by Jennifer McLaren of Macquarie University, reveals Black's partnership with Edward Barry as a 'merchant and planter' and his role as an agent for the slave-traders Baker and Dawson of Liverpool.



Trinidad in the Lesser Antilles

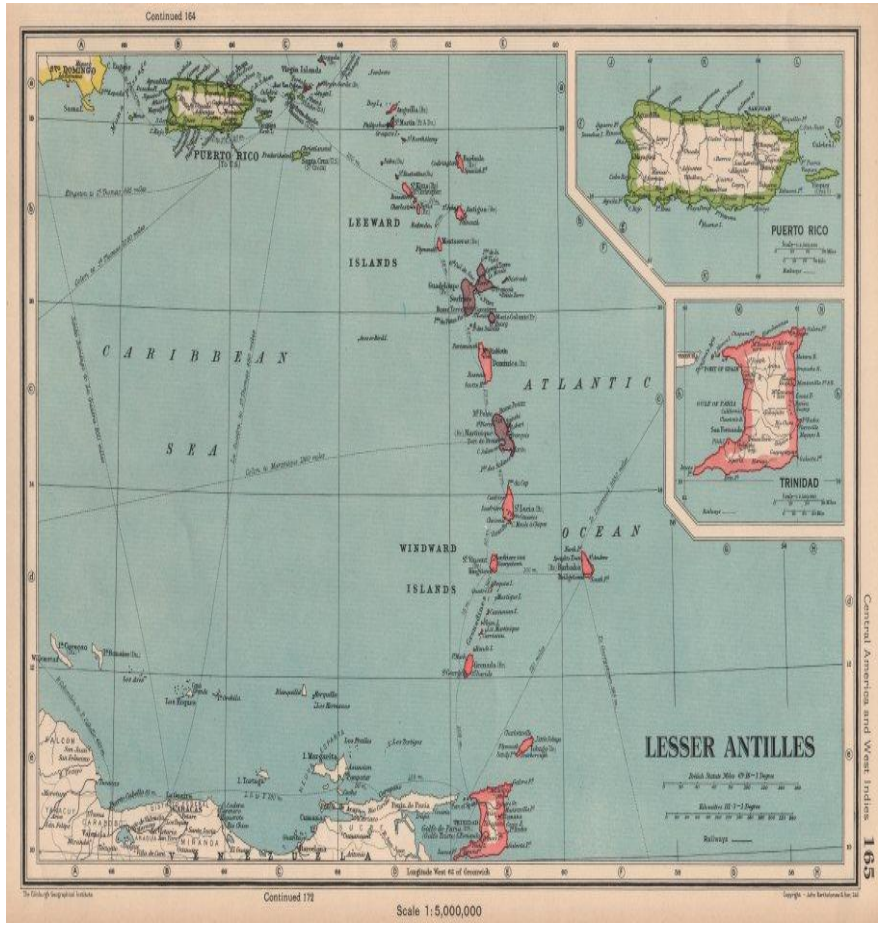
George Black, John Black's father

- Held the position of Sovereign of Belfast five times (1775, 1776, 1782, 1783, and 1785).

  - Appointed Vice-President of the Belfast Charitable Society.

- Lived at Stranmillis, Lagan water course ran through his land.

- Brother of Dr. Joseph Black, a renowned Professor of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, famous for his work on carbon dioxide and latent heat.



History of Trinidad, history to 1700

- Pre-Columbian Inhabitants: Before Christopher Columbus's arrival in 1498, Trinidad and Tobago were inhabited by Arawak and Carib Indian populations, leaving limited physical traces.
- Impact of Spanish Encomienda System (1300s): The indigenous populations faced a decline under the Spanish encomienda system, which coerced them into converting to Christianity and working as slaves on Spanish Mission lands.
- Viceroyalty of New Spain (1700): By 1700, Trinidad, a sparsely populated island, fell under the Viceroyalty of New Spain, comprising Mexico, Central America, and the southwestern United States.

History of Trinidad, 1700-1838

- 1783 Cedula de Poblacion: King Carlos III issued the Cedula de Poblacion in 1783, offering free lands to foreign settlers and their slaves in exchange for allegiance to the Spanish crown, attracting French planters and other Europeans.
- British Occupation (1796-1802): In 1796, British forces led by Sir Ralph Abercromby compelled the Spanish Governor to surrender Trinidad. By 1802, it officially became a British colony.
- Sugar Industry Expansion: The British, eager to expand the sugar industry, relied on African slaves as the main labour force. However, the abolition of slavery in 1838 posed economic challenges to Trinidad's agricultural sector.

Geographical Context of Correspondence

- Member of a prominent Belfast Anglican mercantile family.

- Extended network to Bordeaux, Dublin, Edinburgh, and the Caribbean.

- Black's letters focus on his experiences in Trinidad, revealing a "nobody" in Ireland but a "somebody" in Trinidad.

John Black's Role as a Slave Owner

- Unapologetic slave owner, reflected in banal references to slaves as commodities.

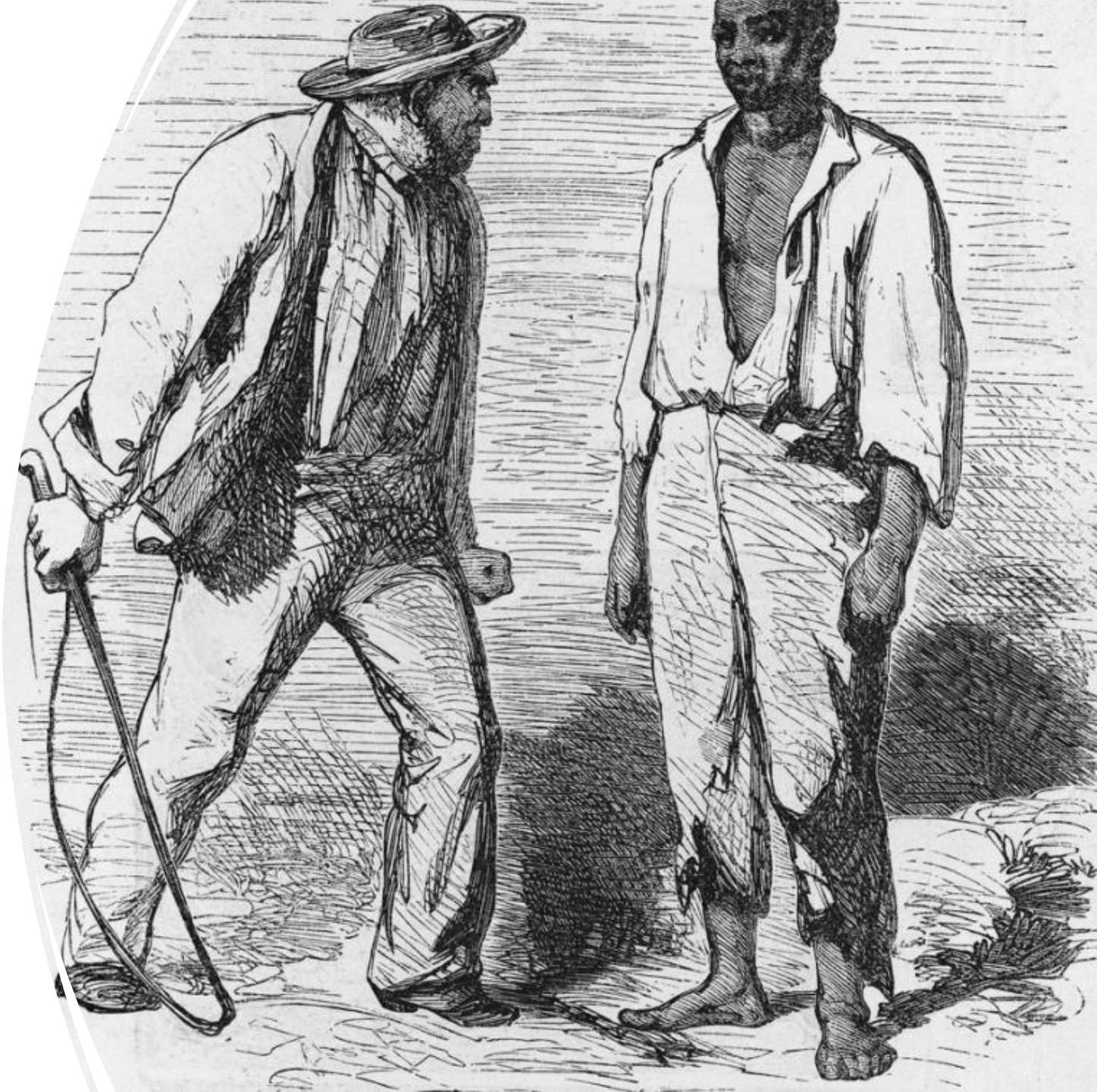
- Mentality of Black and his Belfast family accepting the everyday nature of the slave economy.

- Contrasts with modern narratives emphasizing abolitionism, highlighting Irish complicity.

•

Black's Early Life and Transition to Trinidad

- - Born into a Belfast Anglican mercantile family.
- - Career in Grenada, transition to Trinidad in 1784.
- - Trinidad as an unstable frontier zone between Spanish, French, and British empires.



Life in Trinidad - Plantation Owner and Politician

- Black's reliance on Belfast connections for influence in Trinidad.

- Use of correspondence to strengthen bonds with Belfast while establishing a new life.

- Challenges faced as a plantation owner: impact of weather, sickness, and anti-slavery legislation.

John Black's Correspondence - Maintaining Bonds with Home

- - Importance of correspondence in maintaining ties with Belfast.
- - Reminiscences of old acquaintances, family members, and spaces.
- - Efforts to connect his Trinidad-born daughters with his Belfast family.

The Chilling Reality of Slave Ownership

- Casual references to slaves alongside other investments.

- References to burying slaves, described as the "very best and most valuable people."

- Provides a glimpse into the mentality of a slave owner running a middling sugar plantation.

John Black's Prosperity in Trinidad

- Despite challenges, Black prospered in Trinidad.

- Correspondence reflects aspirations to return home, though he never did.

- Illustrates the trials and tribulations of a plantation owner in an uncertain climate.

James Blair

- James Blair, born in 1788 in County Armagh, Ireland
- Was a prominent Irish planter and politician deeply involved in the transatlantic slave trade.
- He was the son of John Blair and the nephew of Lambert Blair, both of whom were engaged in plantation ownership and slave trading.

Inheritance

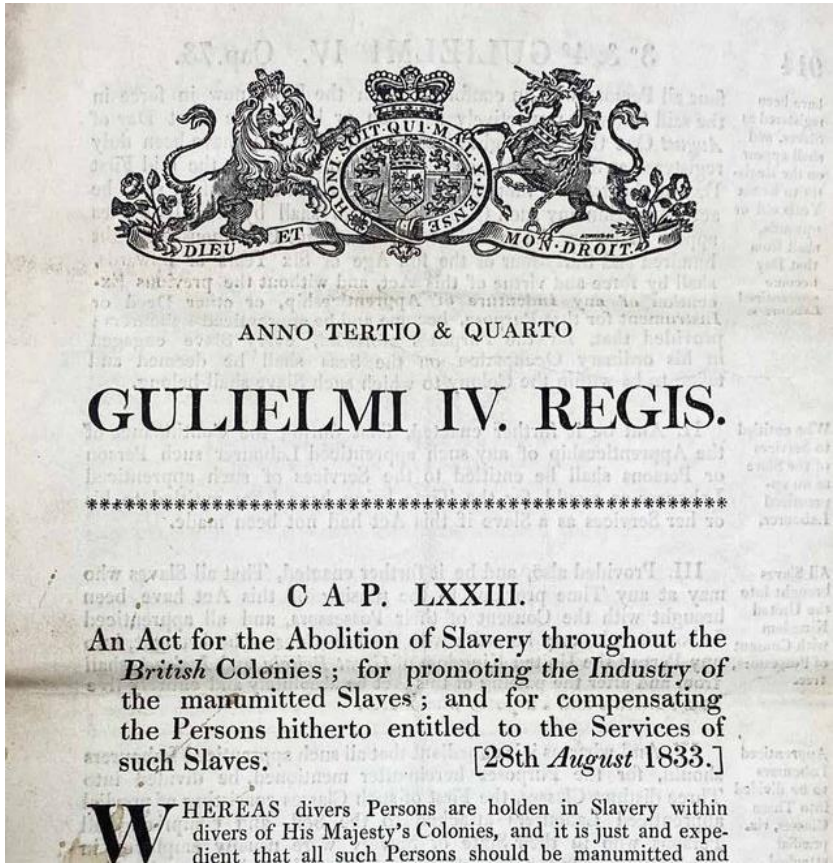
- In 1815, upon the death of his uncle Lambert Blair
- James inherited substantial estates in South America, including sugar and cotton plantations in Berbice, Demerara, and Surinam.
- These plantations were heavily reliant on enslaved labour.

Blair’s career

- Blair's political career was closely tied to his interests in slavery.
- He entered the British Parliament in 1818 as a Tory, representing the interests of the West Indian planter class.
- Throughout his tenure, he consistently opposed measures aimed at improving conditions for enslaved individuals and resisted movements toward emancipation.
- Notably, during debates following the Demerara rebellion of 1823, Blair argued against ameliorative measures, asserting that the revolt was a consequence of parliamentary discussions on slavery.

Compensation

- Following the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which mandated compensation to slave owners for the loss of their "property," Blair received the largest single compensation payment in the British Empire.
- For the 1,598 enslaved people on his Blairmont plantation in British Guiana, he was awarded £83,530 8s 11d, a sum equivalent to millions today.



ANNO TERTIO & QUARTO

GULIELMI IV. REGIS.

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CAP. LXXIII.

An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the *British* Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves. [28th *August* 1833.]

WHEREAS divers Persons are holden in Slavery within divers of His Majesty's Colonies, and it is just and expedient that all such Persons should be manumitted and

How does Belfast compare to other towns for its connections to slavery?

London

- - The Elizabethan Slave Trade: John Hawkins, the first English slave trader, initiated Britain's involvement during Elizabeth I's reign.
- - Despite initial concerns, Elizabeth I supported Hawkins due to the profitability of the trade.
- 17th Century Expansion: English colonies expanded rapidly in the 17th century, increasing the demand for African labour.

Early 18th Century Peak

- Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 granted Britain the 'asiento,' allowing enslaved Africans to be transported to the Spanish Americas.

- London's ships continued to carry enslaved people until the abolition of the trade in 1807, and the city played a central role in financing, insuring vessels, and arranging cargoes for Africa.

the 1710s and 1720s

1713

1807

- London's involvement in the slave trade grew significantly in the 1710s and 1720s, with Bristol later overtaking London in the 1730s.

Bristol

- Bristol's involvement dates back to the eleventh century.

  - Official participation begins in 1698 after the Royal African Company's monopoly ends.

  - The slave trade, though risky, was highly profitable.

  - Bristol's international port status made it well-suited to exploit the trade.

Bristol's Ascendancy

- Premier Slaving Port:
  - By the late 1730s, Bristol becomes Britain's premier slaving port.
  - In 1750 alone, Bristol ships transport 8,000 enslaved Africans to the British Caribbean and North America.
  - Many Bristolians profit from the trade, including shipbuilders, merchants, and manufacturers.
  - Profits form the basis of Bristol's first banks and contribute to the city's architecture.

Liverpool

- The African Company Act 1750
  - Establishment of the African Company of Merchants, replacing the Royal African Company.
  - Stipulations for a "free and open" slave trade and the organizational structure of the new company.
  - Liverpool's integral role in the African Company of Merchants, outlined in the act.
  - The town clerk of Liverpool given specific responsibilities within the company.

Liverpool's Emergence in the Slave Trade

- Liverpool becomes Britain's primary slaving port in the 18th century.

  - Rapid growth surpasses Bristol and London, achieving 80% control of British slave trade by the 1790s.

  - Liverpool's prosperity intricately linked to the transatlantic slave trade.

  - Between a third and a half of Liverpool's trade directed towards Africa and the Caribbean.

  - Liverpool's pivotal role in the triangular trade system.

  - Dominance in both British and European slave trade, solidifying economic prowess.

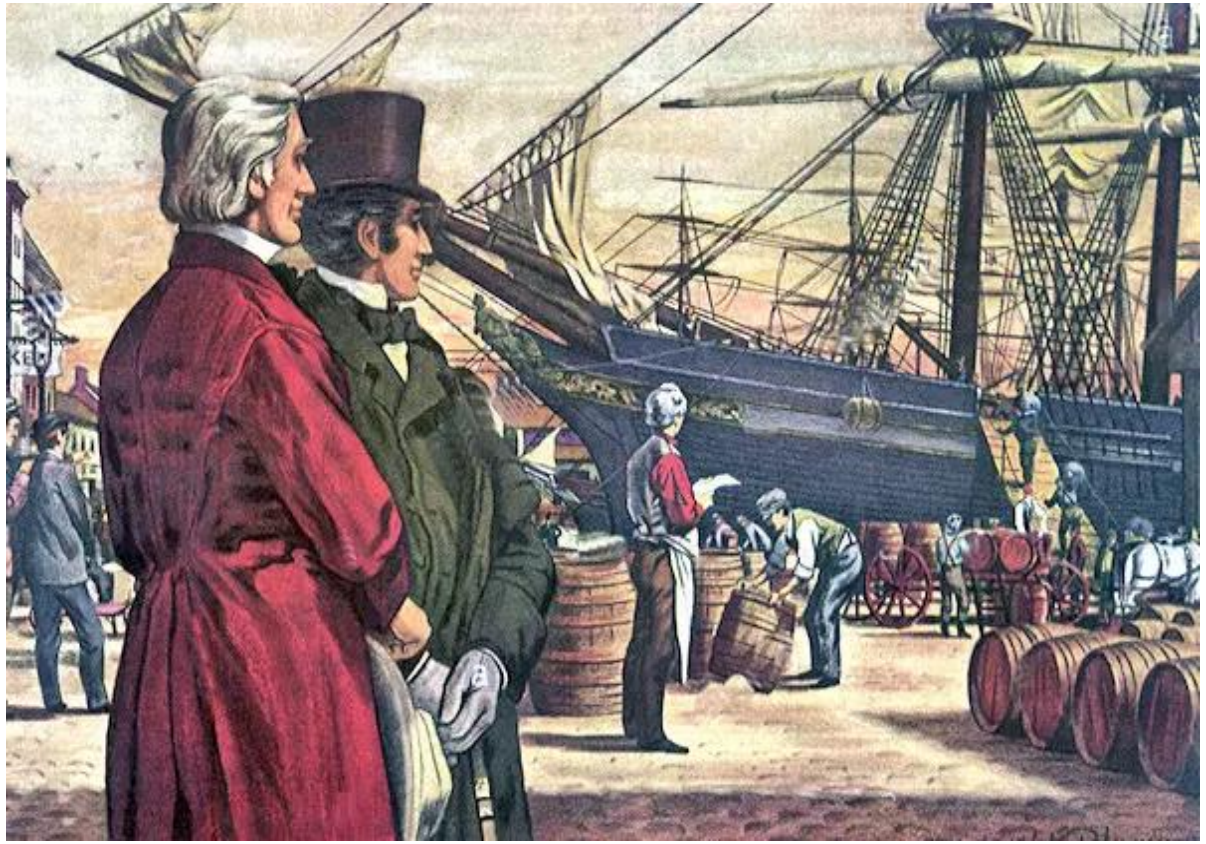
Growth and Pre-eminence

- From the mid-1740s, Liverpool becomes the largest slave trading port in Britain.

- By 1750, Liverpool surpasses Bristol, becoming the pre-eminent slave trading port in Great Britain.

- Liverpool's substantial control of the slave trade: 84.7% of all voyages between 1793 and 1807, London accounting for 12% and Bristol 3.3%.

At least 25 of the city's lord mayors were slave owners or traders and many of them have been immortalised in the likes of Tarleton, Cunliffe and Gildart streets.



Infrastructure

Docks and Shipbuilding

- Liverpool Corporation's financial strength: £1 million invested in six new docks during the 18th century.

- Liverpool's docks play a significant role in shipbuilding, constructing 26% of total UK ships involved in the slave trade.

Locational Advantages

- Geographical advantages during times of war, allowing ships to sail north of Ireland after leaving port.

- The tax-free status of the Isle of Man until 1765 contributes to Liverpool's economic ascent.

Sourcing Goods and Trading

- - Liverpool's proximity to the industrializing North of England facilitates easy sourcing of goods for the slave trade.

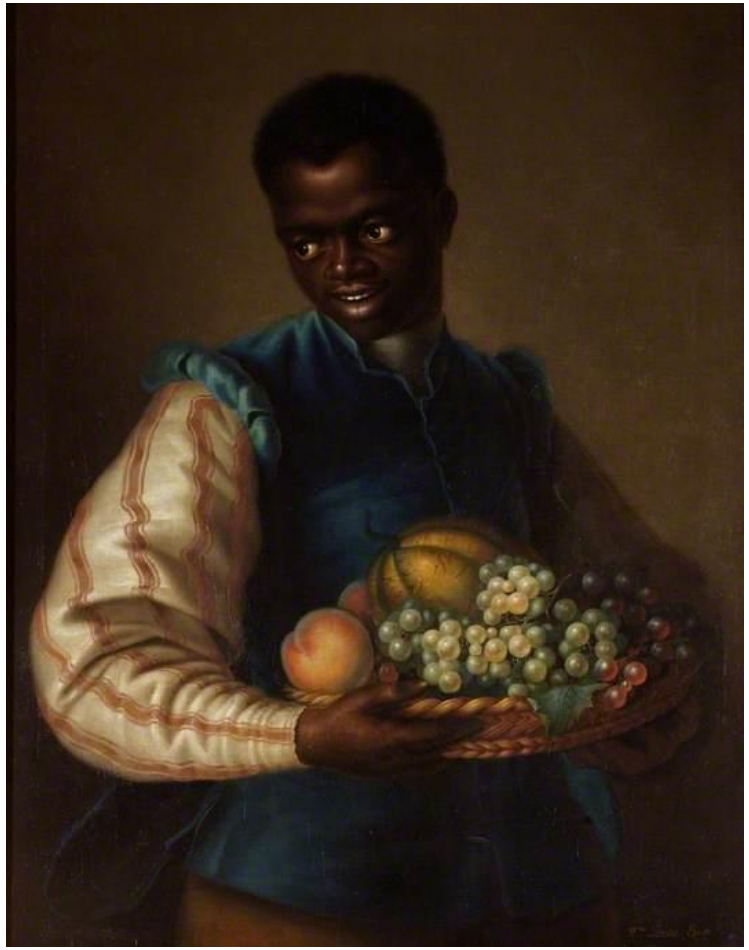
  - Liverpool traders specialize in trading cotton goods, aligning with the preferences of African slave traders.

- Regions of Focus

  - Liverpool's specialization in the Bight of Biafra and West Central Africa, transporting 427,000 and 197,000 individuals, respectively.

How does Belfast Compare?

- Around 10 Belfast citizens or former citizens owned enslaved people on plantations.
- No one was involved in slave trading, or owning slave ships (as far as we know).
- No ships registered to Belfast.
- Anti slavery sentiment stopped attempts by Waddell Cunningham to start a Belfast Slave Ship Company



Questions