

# West Lothian

## Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review



# Introduction

The slave trade in the British Empire was abolished over 200 years ago but transatlantic slavery has had a lasting effect on Scotland which continues to impact life today.

In recent years, research and public campaigns have raised the profile of both black history and the role which transatlantic slavery played in fuelling the industrialisation of Scotland.

In 2021, West Lothian Council established the Legacy of Chattel Slavery Working Group to explore local links to transatlantic slavery and colonialism. This thematic review document has been developed by the group to support community conservation and consultation. In order to facilitate this process, group members decided it would be more helpful to explore local features through seven key themes rather than producing an exhaustive list of West Lothian's links. The document highlights the ways in which transatlantic slavery and colonialism touched all aspects of life.

## Key Themes and Representative Features

<b>Theme 1</b>	The Growth of West Lothian	<b>3</b>
<b>Theme 2</b>	Politics and Patronage in Great Britain and the Colonies	<b>5</b>
<b>Theme 3</b>	Inspiring Individual Stories	<b>7</b>
<b>Theme 4</b>	The Role of the Military in Sustaining Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism	<b>8</b>
<b>Theme 5</b>	Funding Educational Foundations from the Profits of Transatlantic Slavery	<b>10</b>
<b>Theme 6</b>	West Lothian and the Abolition Movement	<b>11</b>
<b>Theme 7</b>	Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism in Arts and Literature	<b>12</b>

## Theme 1

## The Growth of West Lothian

The agricultural and industrial revolutions transformed West Lothian in the 18th and 19th centuries. This benefitted both landowners and the entrepreneurs who provided capital for new developments. It was common for estates to be bought by the newly wealthy, including those who had made their money directly or indirectly as a result of chattel slavery.

The first phase of industrialisation involved the growth of textile industries in the county. These were based on cotton spinning, weaving and printing; this facilitated part of the market for the cotton produced by slave labour on American plantations.

### The Textile Industry

In 1793, a cotton mill was built in Blackburn by Charles Hamilton, a Glasgow manufacturer. Cotton was imported from slave-worked plantations of the Southern United States and the West Indies and made into cotton yarn in mills. Yarn was supplied by Glasgow manufacturers to the weaving trade in West Lothian towns such as Bathgate and Whitburn.

There was also a large print works at Linlithgow Bridge, producing printed cotton fabrics. The cotton industries relied on the raw material produced by slave labour, and the finished products were also re-exported to the colonies in large quantities.



Blackburn Cotton Mill

### Tobacco

The dynastic Mitchell tobacco business was founded in Linlithgow in 1723 and the town's port at Blackness became an important entry point for imported tobacco. The business included a snuff mill at Waulkmilton close to Linlithgow Bridge. The family shop was at 150 High Street and was demolished in the 1960s during the Vennel redevelopment.

The business was passed down through the family. Until 1865, the profits of the business relied entirely on tobacco produced by enslaved people on the American plantations.



Mitchell's shop, 150 High Street



Spanish Ambassador's house

The great-grandson of the founder, Stephen Mitchell, lived in the Spanish Ambassador's House, now the site of the Vennel. Mitchell relocated the business to Glasgow in 1825, following a change in legislation which stopped tobacco imports through the local port at Blackness. Mitchell died in 1874, leaving his estate to the people of Glasgow for the formation of a public library – The Mitchell Library. His body was brought back to Linlithgow, and is buried in Linlithgow Cemetery beside his father.

## Blackburn House and Village

George Moncrieff was probably born in Perthshire. Moncrieff made his fortune from his slave-worked sugar plantation in Antigua, and when Moncrieff returned to Britain he bought the Blackburn estate and built Blackburn House in 1772.

He also established a new village of Blackburn, moving his tenants from the old village and encouraging new inhabitants. This grew into the present town of Blackburn and the old part of the town still reflects the few plots he laid out. The gravestones of George Moncrieff and his wife are in Livingston Old Kirkyard. Blackburn House was used as a farmhouse for many years before becoming derelict. It has now been restored. It is owned by the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust and is in commercial use.



Blackburn House

## Shale Oil

When shale oil was discovered and began to be extracted in West Lothian, local land-owners received royalties from the minerals on their land. This included landowners who had historical connections with transatlantic slavery and plantations like the Hope family (the Earls of Hopetoun) and the Erskine family (the Earls of Buchan). Shale bings, like the ones at Winchburgh, are memorials to this mineral exploitation.

A few landowners took a more active role, like Peter McLagan (Scotland's first mixed race MP), who invested in, and was director of, one of the oil companies formed to exploit the shale on his Pumpherston estate. The estate, and McLagan's fortune, were an inheritance from his father who had co-owned two plantations and enslaved people in Demerara.



Uphall Oil Works

## Theme 2

## Politics and Patronage in Great Britain and the colonies

Many prominent families and individuals in West Lothian were linked to transatlantic slavery, directly or indirectly, and to the British colonial system. This included members of parliament and military officers. Local MPs were involved in the abolition of the slave trade and transatlantic slavery, on both sides of the debate. Landowners benefitted from transatlantic slavery, often by marrying into money derived from slave-owning families or trading with the West Indies, and used their wealth to expand their estates.

### The “Green Man” Statue

This statue, formerly located at Linlithgow Cross and now in the gardens of the Burgh Halls, commemorates John Adrian Louis Hope, 7th Earl of Hopetoun and 1st Marquess of Linlithgow. He served as Governor of Victoria and first Governor-General of Australia.

As Governor-General, he gave assent to the Australian Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which was designed to keep a “White Australia”, although we do not know his personal opinion on the legislation.



Unveiling of the Linlithgow Memorial, Oct 5 1911

### Polkemmet Estate and Whitburn

The Baillie family of Polkemmet had their fortune increased considerably when William Baillie married Mary Lyon Dennistoun, daughter of James Dennistoun, a Glasgow merchant who traded in cotton, sugar and tobacco and whose profits depended upon the labour of enslaved people in the West Indies. Mary also had a quarter share of her uncle Robert Dreghorn’s fortune. Dreghorn was a West India merchant and tobacco lord.

Mary’s dowry allowed the Baillies to expand Polkemmet House in the 1820s. The next generation of the Baillie family used their wealth paternalistically to provide facilities for the people of Whitburn and the surrounding area. This included the Baillie Institute in Whitburn, now the Whitburn Partnership Centre.

Polkemmet House was demolished in the 1960s. The Polkemmet Park Visitor Centre is house in buildings which survive to the West of the house, including the stables.



Polkemmet Estate

## Linburn House and the Waterloo Tower

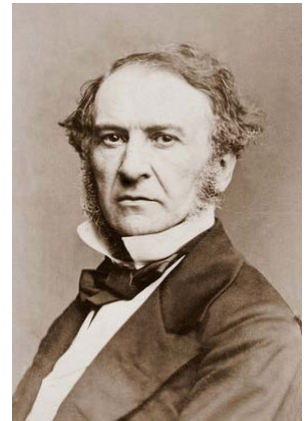
The Waterloo Tower, which is situated near the Linburn Centre in Wilkieston, is popularly believed to commemorate the battle of 1815. It was built by William Pagan of Linburn, who was a sugar plantation and slave owner on Dominica. Pagan sold 253 enslaved people around 1820 and eventually returned to Scotland to live as a respectable gentleman in Linburn House on the proceeds of chattel transatlantic slavery.



Waterloo Tower

## Members of Parliament

Many politicians financially benefitted from chattel slavery. William Ewart Gladstone was the MP for Midlothian which included West Calder and other areas now part of West Lothian. His father John was one of the largest slave owners in the West Indies with sugar plantations in Jamaica and Guyana. In 1833, John Gladstone had a fortune of £636,000 (equivalent to around several hundred million pounds today), half of this being derived from enslaved people and property in the West Indies.



William Ewart Gladstone  
John Jabez Edwin Mayal, Public domain,  
via Wikimedia Commons

William Gladstone had been an active supporter of compensation for slave owners, helping his own father to secure compensation of £112,000 (around £140 million today) for 2912 slaves. Gladstone was also financially dependent on his father who not only provided a large allowance but assisted with election expenses. His rise to political prominence was possibly due to wealth derived from transatlantic slavery.

Gladstone's opinions on transatlantic slavery changed over the course of his political career. In early speeches, he defended plantation owners like his father and advocated a "safe and gradual emancipation". Gladstone later declared abolition of transatlantic slavery to be one of the ten great achievements of the previous sixty years.

## Linlithgow Palace

James Glen was born in Linlithgow in 1701. He served as Provost of Linlithgow from 1724–1726 and 1730–1736 as well as Keeper of Linlithgow Palace. He lived at the Cross House at Linlithgow Cross which still stands and now belongs to St Michael's Parish Church. In 1738, he was appointed Royal Governor of South Carolina, representing the King in the colony with responsibility for defence and the appointment of local officials. In 1750, there were 50,000 enslaved black people and 25,000 white people in South Carolina and many merchants in the colony actively engaged in the slave trade.

Glen was recalled from his position in 1756 but he and his wife remained in the colony, purchasing a rice plantation and 19 enslaved people to work it. In 1761, James Glen returned to Britain, taking with him a black servant named Jacob. Glen died in 1777 and made provision for the two children of the now deceased Jacob in his will, putting his niece in charge of the welfare of the two children who lived in Linlithgow.



Drawing of Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone leaving  
West Calder, 1879. © The Scotsman Publications Ltd.



Linlithgow Palace

## Theme 3 Inspiring Individual Stories

Peter McLagan was Scotland's first mixed race MP.

Peter McLagan (1823-1900) was born in 1823 in Demerara in British Guiana (now Guyana) in South America. His father, also Peter, co-owned two plantations which were worked by over 400 enslaved people. It is likely that Peter and his brother, John, were born to a free black woman.

Peter McLagan Snr. returned to his native Scotland with his two sons upon retirement from the plantations. Following the abolition of transatlantic slavery, he and his business partner received the equivalent of over £1.2 million in compensation from the British Government. This alongside his wealth accrued from the plantations allowed him to purchase the estates of Calder Bank and Pumpherston.

Whilst Peter McLagan Snr. continued to live part-time in his Edinburgh town house, his son Peter devoted his time to improving the farmland on his estate.

The McLagan wealth, accrued from proceeds of transatlantic slavery, assisted Peter McLagan Jnr. (as it did William Gladstone) to get into Parliament. He entered politics in 1865 after being approached by a group of local gentlemen who asked him to stand for Parliament. He was elected unopposed as MP for Linlithgowshire, becoming Scotland's first MP with a mixed ethnic background. Peter McLagan went on to be re-elected in seven consecutive elections, retaining his seat until 1893.

Peter had strong political beliefs. He was an advocate of free education, temperance, women's suffrage and believed that women should have the right to train as doctors. Peter McLagan Jnr. died in 1900 and he is buried in Mid Calder Churchyard.



Peter McLagan, 1887

## Theme 4

# The Role of the Military in Sustaining Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism

## Hopetoun House

Hopetoun House is the ancestral home of the Hope family. They have strong links to the Empire and colonialism, through both military associations and administrative positions.

During his early military career, Sir John Hope, 4th Earl of Hopetoun was heavily involved in campaigns in the West Indies focusing on the protection and restoration of British colonial rule.

Spurred on by the French Revolution, which promised equality and liberty for all, enslaved people in the Caribbean were encouraged to believe that they could free themselves. On the former French island of Grenada, a planter of mixed ethnic background, Julien Fédon, initiated a rebellion against British rule in 1795.

The British government sent troops to take back control, including 10 Brigades of the 25th Foot led by John Hope; a bloody two-year conflict ensued. Hope returned home after only a month, having contracted yellow fever. Upon recovery, he joined a new contingent of troops sent to bolster British forces in the Caribbean.

As Adjutant General to the Commanding Officer, Hope played a pivotal role in masterminding the British campaign in the Caribbean. This careful planning secured victory in the French-held islands of St Vincent and St. Lucia, and ultimately allowed the rebellion on Grenada to be crushed. British colonial rule was restored, ensuring the continuation of transatlantic slavery on most of the Caribbean islands. 7,000 enslaved people were killed, executed or deported during the conflict on Grenada.



Hopetoun House, 1796

## Hope Monument, Airngath Hill

The Hope Monument commemorates Brigadier the Hon. Adrian Hope, the youngest son of the 4th Earl of Hopetoun. He followed his father into the military, serving with the 60th Rifles in the Mediterranean and Jamaica. He also fought in the war against the Xhosa people in South Africa, and in the Crimea at Alma and Inkerman in 1854.

He transferred to the 93rd (Sutherland) Highlanders and returned to Crimea in 1856. He and his regiment were among the first to arrive in India following the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. The Mutiny presented a major threat to British Colonial rule in India and saw Indian soldiers, civilians and leaders rebelling against military commanders.

Adrian Hope was involved in the relief of Lucknow and commanded troops at Cawnpore, one of the decisive battles of the Mutiny. His troops were among those sent to attack the fort of Rohya or Roya in Oude. Adrian Hope was killed in the fighting on April 15th 1858.



Adrian Hope monument, Airngath Hill



## Howden House

Howden House, now a private residence in Howden Park in Livingston, was the home of William Farquarhson from 1794 until 1818. William was a surgeon in the 2nd Battalion of the 42nd Regiment (the Black Watch) and also acted as a surgeon for the East India Company.

During his tenure, the Battalion served in India where they were involved in the campaign against Tipu Sultan mounted jointly by the East India Company and the British Army.



Howden House

## Theme 5

## Funding Educational Foundations from the Profits of Transatlantic Slavery

### Bathgate Academy

Bathgate Academy opened in 1833. The school was funded by John Newland, a native of Bathgate, who emigrated to Jamaica, making his fortune from the profits of transatlantic slavery.

John Newland wrote his will in 1799, months before his death, leaving his fortune to the people of Bathgate. Twelve years of legal wrangling followed. In the end, Bathgate only received ten years of interest on his fortune. This amounted to £14,500 and the Newlands Trust was set up to oversee the funds. A number of prominent local figures served on the Trust including Alexander Marjoribanks, the first Provost of Bathgate.

There are a number of places and properties in Bathgate associated with or carrying the name of Newland. They include the old Bathgate Academy building, Newlands Court, Newland Avenue and Newlands Medical Practice, as well as the Newlands monument in Main Street. John Newland is not Bathgate Academy's only financial benefactor with links to chattel slavery – Whitburn's Lady Baillie also gifted funds to the school.



Bathgate Academy, 1913

## Theme 6 The Abolition Movement

Although a number of West Lothian families benefited from transatlantic slavery, there was also a strong anti-slavery sentiment in the local community.

### Whitburn Cross

William Dickson, a leading abolitionist, stopped at the inn at Whitburn Cross whilst on a ten-week tour of Scotland. The site of the Inn is now occupied by the Cross Cafe. The incident is recorded in his travel diary. He engaged one fellow traveller in conversation on the topic of transatlantic slavery. At the end of the conversation, he raised a glass to “immediate abolition” whilst his fellow traveller drank to “gradual abolition.”



Whitburn Cross

### Petitions to Parliament

In 1792, towns and parishes across Scotland published pro-abolition petitions. This included Whitburn, Bathgate and West Calder. A public meeting held in West Calder declared that the slave trade was “criminal” and a “wanton violation of the plainest principles of morality and religion”.

### Almondell and Calderwood Park

Calderwood Park sits on the former Almondell Estate which included Almondell House, the private residence of politician and leading advocate, Henry Erskine. The Nasmyth Bridge was commissioned by Erskine and remains a central feature of the park.

Henry Erskine supported the abolition of the slave trade which he described as “equally repugnant to the principles of humanity and religion”. In 1792, Scots gathered across the country to petition for the abolition of transatlantic slavery. Erskine chaired a meeting of “the citizens of Edinburgh” who, along with their Scottish peers, sent 185 petitions to parliament calling for the abolition of the slave trade – over a third of all the petitions from Britain as a whole.



Almondell House (demolished 1969)



Almondell Bridge (Nasmyth Bridge)

### Sir James Young Simpson

James Young Simpson is Bathgate’s most famous son. He was born in 1811 and rose to become the leading obstetrician and gynaecologist in the country; his patients included Queen Victoria. He was also the pioneer in the use of anaesthetics in surgery and childbirth.

Simpson signed a petition against slavery in 1829. He later attended a meeting held by Dr Andrew Thomson, a vociferous opponent of slavery.



James Young Simpson

## Theme 7

# Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism in Arts and Literature

Transatlantic slavery and colonialism had an impact on all aspects of life. A part of the cultural history of West Lothian, including some notable artists and literary figures of the past, is inextricably linked with the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.

## Statue of Robert Burns and Highland Mary at Bathgate Partnership Centre

Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, planned to emigrate to Jamaica. He had accepted a job as a book-keeper on a sugar plantation that depended upon the enslaved labour of African people. The statue in the Bathgate depicts Robert with his lover Margaret ("Mary") Campbell. The couple had planned to start a new life in Jamaica. Burns abandoned his plans following the commercial success of his first collection of poems.



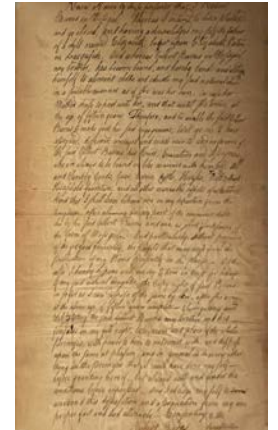
Burns and Highland Mary

## Gravestone of Elizabeth Burns

Robert Burn's first daughter, Elizabeth, is buried in East Whitburn. When Burns planned to emigrate to Jamaica, he penned a legal document transferring guardianship of his illegitimate daughter to his brother. A 19th century transcription of the document is on loan from Edinburgh Museums and is on display in Whitburn Community Museum.



Elizabeth Burn's gravestone



Legal Document. Image courtesy of Edinburgh Museums

## Portrait of John Hope (1765–1823), Earl of Hopetoun by Henry Raeburn (1756–1723)

A full-length portrait of John Hope hangs in the main stairwell of Linlithgow Partnership Centre.

As identified earlier in this document, John Hope was a prominent member of the military who played a proactive role in sustaining British colonial rule. He was married to Louisa, daughter of John Wedderburn. Wedderburn was a slave owner in Jamaica and was defeated in the famous case of "Knight vs Wedderburn", where transatlantic slavery was declared incompatible with Scottish Law.

John Hope's sister was the second wife of politician, Henry Dundas, whose statue in Edinburgh has been at the centre of recent controversy.

Henry Raeburn painted many key Scottish figures including those with links to chattel slavery and colonialism, indirectly profiting from their wealth. His son, also Henry, went on to inherit Howden House.



Portrait of John Hope, Fourth Earl of Hopetoun

