

Shropshire Council 2026 Resources Pack

Anti Slavery Action in Shropshire

Purpose

This resources pack has been put together in order to highlight anti-slavery actions here in Shropshire. It links into national October Black History Month observations as well as actions around Hate Crime Awareness Week and Anti-Slavery Week.

Anti-Slavery Week takes place in the same week as Hate Crime Awareness Week, which concludes with Show Racism the Red Card Day on Friday 16th October 2026.

This year, Anti-Slavery Week 2026 runs from 12th to 18th October 2026, culminating in Anti-Slavery Day on 18th October 2026. The week provides an opportunity for organisations, professionals, and communities to reflect on their understanding of modern slavery, strengthen safeguarding practice, and demonstrate a collective commitment to ending exploitation.

We are encouraging everyone across Shropshire to take a moment to learn more about modern slavery, discuss it within their organisations, think about it as individuals, and consider how they can help identify and safeguard those at risk.

We are asking people to think about this in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, and to reflect upon all that was done in Shropshire to campaign for the abolition of slavery then, and how this links to racism now.

The Council already works with the national charity Show Racism the Red Card on their initiative every year, along with partner organisations including local unions and the NHS. More information on this will be available through linked publicity materials on the Shropshire Council website at www.shropshire.gov.uk, including how to report a hate crime, whilst previous Black History Month resources packs are also available on the website for perusal. Racism is a form of hate crime, and we will not condone any hate crime in any form.

We will take every opportunity to act in ways that will respect and honour those who have suffered in the past and those who stood up for them, including through the transatlantic slave trade, and those who need our support and for us to stand up now, including victims of modern slavery.

This pack is accordingly set out in three parts as follows:

- Transatlantic slavery through one Shropshire family's perspective: what can their journey tell us
- Modern slavery: what does this look like and what can we do
- Actions against slavery in Shropshire: what can the Archives tell us and what can we celebrate about local people's lives

1. Transatlantic slavery through one Shropshire family's perspective

1.1 Introduction

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution earlier this year, on 25th March 2026, to recognise the enslavement of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade as *"the gravest crime against humanity"*, a move advocates hope will pave the way for healing and justice.

The resolution, which was proposed by Ghana, called for this designation, while also urging UN member states to consider apologising for the slave trade and contributing to a reparations fund. It does not mention a specific amount of money. The proposal was adopted with 123 votes in favour and three against: the United States, Israel and Argentina.

Fifty-two countries abstained, including the United Kingdom and European Union member states. Countries like the UK have long rejected calls to pay reparations, saying today's institutions cannot be held responsible for past wrongs. Unlike UN Security Council resolutions, those from the General Assembly are not legally binding, though they carry the weight of global opinion.

Ghana, one of the main gateways for the transatlantic slave trade, has long been a leading advocate for reparations.

Forts, where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were once held under inhumane conditions, remain standing along the West African country's coast. This summer, the Archbishop of Canterbury visited one of them as part of a visit to Africa. In paying her own respects on behalf of the Church, she said: *"Seeing the horrific conditions that thousands of people were kept in, it is impossible not to feel the weight of the immense evil that drove the transatlantic slave trade"*.

It is apposite therefore to now share another story from Ghana; this one is from a Shropshire woman whose family have Ghanaian and Jamaican heritage, and who visited the exact same fort of Cape Coast Castle this summer as well.

This is their story: it will bring it home, and help us all to think about the people who never got to come home.

1.2 A Slavery History Personal Narrative, August 2026

Assin Manto and Cape Coast Castle, Ghana

Our family had been in Ghana for several weeks, visiting friends from a stay I had here over two decades ago. We are Tyrone and Laura, mum and dad, and our kids, Elijah, Nell, Zeke, Josiah and Shiloh, ages ranging from 7-14.

We are a Shropshire family. Ty's a local doctor, I'm a teacher in a local school and the kids all attend schools in the Telford area. Our Ghanaian friends, Deborah and Gideon, suggested we visit Cape Coast as it's "very beautiful". We made two detours on the way which had more impact on us than anything else we saw or did in Ghana.

Here it is.

In Ghana's central region, hidden between tropical forest roads and the echoes of centuries past, lies one of the most sacred and emotionally powerful places in the African diaspora, the Assin Manso Slave River Site.

This is the place where people were processed as slaves before being taken to Cape Coast Castle for imprisonment before shipping. The language is brutal but it isn't shied away from here. Why beautify or smooth out something so horrific?

Assin Manto is a quiet and reflective place. The carpark is lined with colourful simple murals depicting the journey slavery took from people being taken captive to emancipation.

When you head through a stone doorway, intentionally low so you bow your head as you enter, you step into a circular garden, with three huge ancestral graves at the centre. The left one is dedicated to a person from Bermuda, the central, America and the right, Jamaica. They all lay one significant figure in the fight against slavery for each of these areas to rest and represent all the lost people who were stolen and taken to these areas and never got to return.

Around the circular walls are large photos of significant figures in the fight against slavery and the oppression of black people, and the eventual emancipation they worked so hard to achieve.

A calmly spoken guide took us to a cool shaded building with benches where we sat and learned how important the Ghanaian names are, Adwoa, Kofi, Akosua, Yaw and the rest. He explained that when a person introduces themselves with their Ghanaian day of the week name, their heritage and history is clear. When they were stripped of these, they became generic and Matilda, Daniel, Nancy and Bernard could come from anywhere. We all introduced ourselves with our Ghanaian names and promised to ask Ghanaian people for these when we meet and use them.

This place is where the river runs and captured slaves were walked here, right from Kumasi down. Kumasi is a 90 minute drive north from Anhwiaso. The drive from Anhwiaso to here had taken us hours. The walk took three months and many died en route.

They estimate around 30% died but as nobody cared enough about the human beings collapsing before them, not even to give each person a number at this stage, the fallen were shrugged off, pushed into the roadside and the dismal procession continued without so much as a nod backwards to acknowledge the loss of a human life. Captives were later counted in units as "inventory" not people, but for this walk, as so many didn't survive, they were simply "goods".

Those who made it to Assin Manto arrived skinny and dirty and sickly. Skinny, dirty, sickly people do not sell for large amounts of money so they were chained in threes with a ball hanging off each person and first made to bathe in the river; "the last bath". It was hard as the current pulled them away and they were chained together but the relief at being cleaner must have been immense after all those months.

We solemnly knocked three times each on a gate and uttered a phrase in Twi which acknowledged all those who had passed through this route before us in unhappier times.

We then walked the three minute walk to the riverbank in silence, 80 foot bamboo trees towering above us and looking down, sadly remembering what they witnessed all those years ago. The route is lined with red and black posts, the Ghanaian colours of mourning.

A few years back, one of the balls and chains that were used to prevent the captives escaping was found in the river bed by a passing ancestor, a visitor to the centre who was horrified and humbled by what she uncovered. We had all been allowed to feel the weight of it. The ball was astonishingly heavy. Psychologically, it felt dirty holding it, I'd imagine like touching NAZI memorabilia or other artefacts from man's most evil inhumanity to man. It felt good to pass it along to the next person and wipe my hands on my skirt, wanting rid of the sense of filth that pervaded that dull hunk of metal.

Once bathed, the people were taken back up away from the water, tied to trees and force fed until they became stronger. If anyone was stubborn they were whipped and left there for the animals to smell the blood and eat them, in front of their fellow man tied up nearby. The guide encouraged us to stand in the waters, and pray or reflect, particularly Ty and the kids as their not so far back ancestors would likely have travelled through here and been subjected to this brutality and degradation.

The guide told us how the Europeans would rape the women and impregnate them, passing on lighter skin and more uncommon hair and eye colours. Ty and his dad have red hair in their sideburns and Ty managed to have a red-headed son with me, his auburn-haired wife. His dad moved to the UK from Jamaica when he was 14 years old. The guide said gently there is only one way those recessive genes got into his DNA and it would not have been through a consensual relationship.

Once the slaves were healthier looking, they were walked west to Cape Coast. Calling the African captives slaves is their choice of language - at home we would refer to them as enslaved people but the attitude here is to force you to confront the truth of what happened and not polish it to make it fit today's attitudes. If it feels horrible calling African people slaves that's because it was horrible.

They talk about "the whites" doing these things to them, again, because back then it was all whites that they met that were part of this. It made me cringe every time I heard it as the only full white in the group, but a cringe is nothing compared to what everyone else felt about what their ancestors went through and I need to put up and shut up and accept that if we are to face what happened we have to make the atmosphere brutal and uncomfortable and as painful as possible. I was welcomed by everyone in our group and the guide had absolutely no animosity towards me. I felt no element of continued resentment towards white people, just a sense that they want to depict the time as accurately as possible and if we try to save feelings now that cannot be done and creates an inauthentic muting to the noisy horror of what went on.

The place is so peaceful and beautiful now but was so terrible. The atrocities that happened here weigh heavily in the air.

We set off again, following the journey these people would have taken by comfortable vehicle whilst watching animated episodes of Mr Bean on the drop down TV, rather than chained together on foot, being whipped and left for dead if we complained. We reached the main coastal junction and instead of turning left to Accra, and out to Greater Accra where the airport is, headed right, into the Western Region. The lush plantations which we had taken for jungle, but are actually carefully cultivated farms, made way for palm trees and coastal scenery. The red earthen roads were the same; and the potholes as treacherous, but it felt more holiday like and less deeply traditional village life. We were told that the sandy roads would have been the same for centuries.

But for wind and rains and the passage of time, we could have looked down and seen the footsteps in the earth of a large portion of the 12.5 million Africans who walked this route toward a lifetime of slavery.

We reached Cape Coast Castle. This is the second largest slave castle in Ghana and the main port for taking people to the Caribbean and America. It was built in 1653. There is another in the very north of the country, but the ancestors of everyone we have met here, and all my family would have most likely passed through here.

Cape Castle is beautiful. It looks like a lovely white fortress style castle on the coast, set against the cobalt sea and cerulean sky. How lovely.

1,300 people at a time were imprisoned here, and stored for two or three months awaiting shipping across the sea. It was a hotbed for murder, rape and torrid abuse of fellow man for hundreds of years. In the dungeons below the beautiful plaza with its line of cannons (you can't have other Europeans stealing the people you stole from you) are the men's and women's dungeons. The men's dungeons held 1,000 men at a time and the women's 300.

They weren't supposed to enslave women but realised that the manual work the male slaves were doing was all well and good but houses of the white folk running the plantations needed cleaning, and the wives and families needed servants too, so they often took strong women along for these jobs. They also realised that they could save costs by creating a breeding programme. You don't need to ship people over if you can let them create their own ready-made slaves already in situ. You don't get stubborn slaves either if they're born into it and never know freedom. If a human has always been property, do they even know they're human?

The whites working the castle were male only. They also wanted to use the captured women to meet their other needs, those aside power and money and dominance. They'd go into the female dungeon and select the women they felt like raping that day. If a woman fought back, she was sent to the specialised cell created for that purpose alongside the female dungeon. This was a tiny punishment isolation cell designed to be relentlessly hot, where she'd stay naked for days and be fed through a hole in the wall, be mocked and insulted through the barred window and have to go to the bathroom on herself.

You have to look for signs of empowerment when all power has been stripped from people, but the fact they needed a room for this purpose demonstrates the strength of these women, their refusal to submit and give everything away, despite woman after woman after woman being sent to the cell and tortured right beside the dungeon where they all spent so many weeks.

So for this range of reasons, all inarguably linked to their reproductive and sexual organs, a sweeping blind eye was turned across the world and women also were illegally captured, taken and shipped.

Those who were impregnated while at the castle (and the baby survived pregnancy and birth) were freed: no half white child could be a slave. This was overlooked on the plantations when the owners raped the slaves there as it could be assumed the woman had been impregnated by a fellow slave and the slave owners ignored the chance the child could be their own. At the castle it could only be a white who had got the woman pregnant, so the woman and child were freed and often given a place to live and a white name. This is how the surnames such as Davidson, Wilkinson, Harrison and Edmondson came to become African family names, as each will have been given to an African rape victim who bore the child of a slave worker.

The male and female dungeons have a dark uneven floor covering which we guessed was some kind of poured molten stone. It wasn't. It was solidified faecal waste. Around 25 years ago, when excavating the dungeons, someone had happened to find a softer section so blasted it and it came away. One of the four rooms which housed 250 men inside, in pitch darkness but for a 30cm window near the rooftop and with nothing but a shallow trough ostensibly for urine and waste to flow along and out of the room, despite having no downward slope, was jet-washed. It turns out it had a cobbled floor and the others likely do too. They've all been left as they are, again, why make them pretty when the truth is so hideous?

A three foot square of the original surface of the jet-washed room has been left to show the depth of the human waste these people lived in. The smell and infections and disease would have been fetid. They would have been partially submerged if they lay down to sleep, but would have been so crammed in they likely had to sleep standing up for the most part. Those who collapsed, dying, would have drowned in it.

One room has a large hole in the side leading to a tunnel under the castle to The Door of No Return. There was a slotted window at the top where the owners watched down from the sunny plaza above, peering into the darkness as slaves passed through into the tunnel, their final journey from storage to shipment. Any weak appearing person would elicit a call down and the person herding them into the tunnel would snatch that person away and into a cramped, dark, stone side room. There the weak and sick would wait until the healthier had left for their months at sea, crammed into a boat in which huge numbers died on the way over. The figures are reportedly 12-15% who died en route by the 19th century, and around 25-30% in the 17th century when the journey took much longer, but speculation is it was many more.

After the main room was empty, the sickly left behinds would be taken into another room under the castle, locked in and left to die; as simple and callous as that, out of

sight, out of mind. This is such a side note in the picture of slavery and the journey people took that it's almost missable. But what a disgusting way to die, no chance for survival or escape, no shred of hope that the life ahead of you just may be better than the one you're living now; just the assured knowledge that the slave traders have no further use for you so you will only leave this stone clad room of misery one way. You'll either die first or have to watch all those around you die then live with their decaying corpses, knowing the same fate awaits you also. Diabolical.

The worst room in the underground tunnel system beneath the breezy courtyard and whitewashed, pretty, pentagonal castle was a room behind three locked doors, each with a small space between. This ensured the room was stifling hot in the bowels of the castle. Our guide herded us in, closed just one door and switched off the light. We were in pitch black and all immediately began to sweat with the heat. Children screamed. We were left like that for five seconds and in that time could already uncomfortably feel the wetness of others' skin against our own - we all subconsciously tried to move apart to give each other personal space. This room was where the stubborn slaves were taken. They were locked in and left to die.

The first partition, between the outside courtyard and the second door had a tiny, glassless, barred window above the door, a plaque with the word CELL bluntly displayed and was where the drunkard or wayward white workers were sent to be punished. They only spent their day or two of punishment locked in that first section as it was considered too brutal and inhumane to leave a man further in. That needed to sink in for us all. Some people began to cry. As one of the three white people in our group of twenty to thirty I felt horrendous.

We saw a couple of tombs in the middle of the courtyard. One belonged to a Ghanaian man our guide told us had been one of many African men who worked with the whites to buy and trade his fellow blacks. He would have been known as a "factor", the name for these in between workers, and worked so loyally to the whites, and was responsible for so much betrayal towards his fellow man that he was considered an honorary white and entombed out of respect for his sound decision making and admirable character right in the centre of the slave castle for all to see and remember. His legacy turned out very differently to how he may have imagined. The members of our group certainly didn't view his tomb in a positive light.

The exit tunnel, when in use, the one that lead from the room with the side room for the infirm to be carelessly tossed aside and sentenced to death, lead under the castle and out at the opposite side of the courtyard, just a few paces from The Door of No Return. There were viewpoints into the tunnel from the courtyard along the way, for slave workers to peer in and throw things at the slaves as they passed, or mock them as they waved them off.

The tunnel opened up to the right of the women's dungeon and the isolation cell for the women who fought against rape to be held. This was intentional. It forced the men to walk past the women, having not seen or touched a woman in months, reduced physically and mentally to a shadow of their former selves - many would have relatives in there, even daughters. It was another cruel jab away at their humanity and another way for the slave traders to taunt them one last time.

The Door of No Return opened to directly beside the steps where the water of the ocean met the castle and smaller boats would be waiting to take the captives to the waiting slave ships out at sea and their new lives in slavery. If the captive people lived long enough to leave the tunnel and pass through this door, they would never return to Africa.

Now, although the original Door of No Return sign still exists above the doorway on the internal side, a newer version, saying "The Door of Return" has been placed on the outside leading in. Our guide told us to take some time to appreciate the choice we all have to pass through and out to the sea, and then return, as easy as that.

He encouraged those whose relatives didn't have that choice, to walk back through ceremonially for them, to thank them for surviving long enough in the worst conditions and degradation humans have ever put other humans through, to make their very lives possible today.

Ty pointed out that his relatives, our children's ancestors, would have almost certainly passed through here and never had the chance to turn back. As we passed back through many more were crying. One woman nearby collapsed in grief and had to be carried to a seat by her friends.

The original exit path and the entrance to the tunnel was closed off by the British when the British Parliament abolished the imprisonment, trade and transport of enslaved people. The Slave Trade Act of 1807 made the trade illegal within the British Empire. Other countries eventually followed suit. The British blocked the tunnel as the function of the fortress chambers altered over time, so it was blocked to prevent it being taken by a country still practising slavery and being used again for the same purpose.

I'll not white wash the British though. Above the men's dungeon, literally built in the same shape of the dungeon, sits an Anglican church. Beside the door into the church is a raised box with slotted lid. As the worshippers went into church to pray about doing unto others as you would have done to yourself and God's love, they would lift the lid and peer down into the male dungeon for laughs, seeing how they were doing and turning up their noses at the foul smell and groans. They'd spit and urinate on the men held captive below. They'd then head into church and sit above them, the slaves below listening to their hymns and commands to be Christian. It was sickening. The way it was designed, it was almost fully audible, the dungeon entirely overlaid by the church - piously bringing Christianity to the "inventory" languishing below.

The rooms above were beautiful. The castle governor was only 28 years old at the time and his rooms had 16 shuttered windows and were the size of Monica's apartment in Friends. Palava Hall was the large wooden floored room where they auctioned off the slaves, now known as "merchandise". It was called Palava Hall because of the commotion these troublesome slaves made when the gentlemanly whites were just trying to get the negotiations completed in a civilised manner. These poor white men just wanted to get the job done and retire to their rooms for a nice cup of tea and a rest. It's hot in Ghana, for goodness sake. That hall was busy and full of smelly slaves. It was hell on earth to be there longer than necessary.

Every room and corridor was laid out perfectly to complement the climate, the breeze and sea views here. This was cutting. It means they understood architecture very, very well. The dungeons being so torrid was intentional. This wasn't neglect, they were treating the slaves worse than animals. You don't take action to make animal storage as bad as it possibly can be. They did for the people they captured. It shows that their feeling towards the blacks wasn't neutral, it was derision, hatred. They wanted them to suffer as much as possible. The whites weren't just storing them, they were brutally breaking them.

Full of thought and heartbreak and glad we are here today with our African friends, when our kids and Gideon's kids were playing and cuddling and taking selfies and didn't notice the colour of each other's skin, we left.

It was an incredible place. We hadn't heard of it before but are so grateful Deborah and Gideon shared it with us. As Ty said, his grandpa would have known people who were alive when this was a thing, when slavery was ongoing. It isn't ancient history. It was what thousands of people did to millions and millions of people not so long ago.

It's so important we learn about and remember the past, so we recognise when it is at risk of repeating itself. To learn about and talk about slavery isn't to condone any of it. It honours the memory of those who died and lived through it, those whose survival enabled so many today to live. We should feel appalled. It's appalling. It's inhumane.

It is all true though, however hard that is to face. That truth belongs to all of us...because we are human. All of us.

Laura Lightbody
August 2026

2. Modern slavery: what does this look like and what can we do

2.1 Introduction

From the transatlantic slave trade to the modern forms of exploitation we see today, slavery has not disappeared. It has simply evolved.

Many of us are familiar with educational initiatives such as **Show Racism the Red Card**, which help us understand the lasting impact of racism and historical slavery.

Whilst the abolition of the slave trade was a significant milestone, the exploitation of human beings did not end. Instead, it adapted to changing societies and economies, becoming less visible but no less harmful.

Today, this exploitation is known as **modern slavery**.

2.2 What does this look like

Modern slavery encompasses a range of abuses including human trafficking, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, debt bondage, and the coercion of people into criminal activities. Victims can be adults or children, British nationals or foreign nationals, and exploitation can happen in cities, towns, rural communities, businesses, and even within families.

Slavery has changed, not gone away.

Modern slavery does not always involve chains or visible imprisonment. Control is often achieved through intimidation, violence, grooming, psychological manipulation, debt, threats, substance misuse, or the withholding of identification documents.

Children may be groomed into county lines drug supply, criminal exploitation, or sexual exploitation. Adults may be exploited through forced labour, domestic servitude, or trafficking. Victims frequently do not recognise themselves as victims due to the manipulation and control exerted by perpetrators.

The reality is stark. The UK continues to identify increasing numbers of potential victims each year.

2.3 The national picture

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the UK's framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery, recorded **23,411 referrals in 2025**, the highest annual figure since records began and a **22% increase** on the previous year.

British nationals represented the largest single nationality referred, accounting for approximately **22% of all referrals**, with **Eritrean (13%)** and **Vietnamese (9%)** being notable vulnerable groups.

The figures demonstrate that modern slavery is not solely an international issue. It is occurring across the UK and increasingly affecting our own communities, children, families, and vulnerable adults.

2.4 Tackling Modern Slavery in Shropshire

Shropshire is committed to identifying, preventing, and responding to exploitation through a collaborative, partnership-led approach.

Children's Services have a robust pathway and dedicated team - **TREES (Together, Reducing and Ending Exploitation in Shropshire)**. TREES brings together safeguarding partners, statutory agencies, education, health, police, and community organisations to identify risks, support victims, share intelligence, and coordinate disruption activity against those who seek to exploit others. [Child exploitation | Shropshire Council](#)

Shropshire is also one of a few Local Authorities in the UK to currently operate the **Modern Slavery NRM Devolved Pilot** – ensuring that child victims of Modern Slavery have robust, timely and comprehensive locally-made decisions by professionals who have local knowledge of contextual exploitation risks.

Modern slavery cannot be tackled by one agency alone. Successful intervention depends upon professionals, communities, and organisations recognising the signs and taking action.

Key prevention partners play a vital role, notably:

- **Catch22** - delivers child exploitation and child sexual exploitation prevention services, working directly with young people at risk of grooming, trafficking, criminal exploitation, and other forms of harm. Their targeted interventions help build resilience, raise awareness, and support safer choices. [STEPS \(Support Through Exploitation and Prevention Service\) | Catch22](#)
- **Steer Clear** - delivered by **The Children's Society**, **Steer Clear** works with children and young people affected by, or vulnerable to, knife crime, gangs, and exploitation. By providing education, support, and positive interventions, the service helps reduce vulnerability to criminal exploitation and modern slavery. [Steer Clear | The Children's Society](#)
- **Independent Modern Slavery Advocates** – delivered by **Victim Support**, advocates support and work with adult victims of Modern Slavery, including supporting throughout the NRM process. [West Mercia - Victim Support](#)

Together, these services contribute to a wider safeguarding network designed to identify risks early, intervene effectively, and reduce opportunities for exploitation within Shropshire.

2.5 What can we all do?

Modern slavery is often hidden in plain sight. Signs may include:

- Unexplained absences from home or education.
- Evidence of controlling relationships.
- Sudden possession of money, phones, or expensive items.
- Fearful, withdrawn, or anxious behaviour.
- Individuals appearing under the control of others.
- Unsafe or overcrowded living and working conditions.
- People lacking access to their own identification documents or finances.

Awareness is one of the most effective tools we have. By recognising the signs and reporting concerns, we can help victims access support and prevent further harm.

Anti-Slavery Week 2026

For further information, please utilise following resources to explore more how Shropshire Local Authority, and most importantly – **you** – can tackle Modern Slavery in Shropshire.

[Tackling Exploitation — Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership](#)
[Welcome to the NWG Network](#)
[Submit a NRM Referral](#)

Sources:

[Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

3. Actions against slavery in Shropshire: what can the Archives tell us

3.1 Introduction

Shropshire Archives operates across Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. It aims to collect material which relates to the whole community of Shropshire past and present. We are aware that the collections don't always reflect this fully and the service would be grateful for any help which enables us to build a more complete picture of life in Shropshire.

3.2 Abolition actions against slavery

Sources at Shropshire Archives show how the abolition movement found support in Shropshire at the end of the 18th century and how campaigners and emancipated slaves visited the county.

Local boroughs, in particular Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock, regularly petitioned Parliament for the abolition of slavery.

A fantastic series of diaries by Katherine Plymley show the support she and her brother, Archdeacon Joseph Plymley of Longnor, gave to the Abolitionist movement.

She writes with admiration for Prince Naimbana of Mobana who visited Britain in 1791 and also describes meeting Gustavas Vasa (also known as Olaudah Equiano) who was enslaved at 11 but bought his freedom and wrote compellingly about his experiences (Shropshire Archives refs 1066/17 and 19).

Further details of Katherine's life can be found on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katherine_Plymley and on the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography .

3.3 Celebrating our collective history

Many people take the time to do research into their backgrounds or find out more about black people who have made a difference to the UK. In so doing, you could be helping us all to recognise and celebrate the richness and diversity of our collective history, and reach a fuller understanding of the contributions that people of colour have made to life in Shropshire.

If people would like to share their knowledge and perspectives about their families, or look into the archives to find out more, the Archives service would be delighted to hear from them and to assist them. Please contact archives@shropshire.gov.uk

For example, one of the researchers at Shropshire Archives has been following up references to **Samson the gardener**, who is the earliest Black person recorded in Shropshire as far as we are aware. You can find out more on the Archives blog: <https://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk/blog/samson-the-gardener/>

Another local person whose life we celebrate is **Mary McGhie of Ludlow**.

Mary McGhie was a botanist and natural historian, who was born in Jamaica and lived at Castle Lodge Ludlow between 1817- 1844. The Museum curators featured her in their Women in Science leaflet for Darwin History Month: <https://www.shropshiremuseums.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Shropshire-Women-of-Art-and-Science-1.pdf>

There is a short film about her, which was produced for the Darwin Festival.

This is on the Museums website here: <https://youtu.be/gDW-b6o6Ey0?feature=shared>

Mary McGhie was a woman of mixed ethnicity born in around 1770 in Jamaica. Her mother, Sarah, was a free black woman who may have once been an enslaved worker at her father's estate of Greenside Trelawny, Jamaica.

Her father Robert McGhie was a wealthy man who made his fortune from his sugar plantation in Jamaica. We do not know the exact nature of the relationship between Sarah, Mary's mother, and her father Robert. However, we do know that Sarah and her children, Mary and Thomas, were all granted white status by the Jamaican courts at the instigation of Robert McGhie. This meant when he sold his estates in Jamaica and returned to England, he was able to bring Mary and her brother Thomas with him.

It is undeniable that Robert McGhie and his family profited from the cruel brutality of slave labour. We know nothing of the conditions for the slaves forced to work on her father's plantation. For many slaves across the Caribbean, work was hard and dangerous. A disregard for the welfare of slaves led many to be injured cutting and hauling cane in the fields or pounding and boiling it in the mills. Most were dead within seven years of arriving at a plantation. However, Robert does appear to have acknowledged his relationship with Sarah and accepted Mary and Thomas as his children, bringing them into the privileged life of the social elite.

Robert McGhie was well connected with family ties to the attorney general and Privy Councillor to the King, George Crawford Ricketts. Ricketts retired to Ashford Hall, Ashford Bowdler and this may be how Mary came to live in Ludlow later in life. Mary's uncle Thomas McGhie was a sugar broker in London and no doubt bought and sold goods from his brother's Jamaican estate.

We can only suppose that Mary McGhie may have been educated at home by a governess as was common for girls at that time. She may have had an instinctive interest in the natural world and of course agricultural success was intrinsic to the business of her father's sugar plantation so growing up in this agricultural environment may have piqued her interest in the natural world and all things botanical.

This was also the era of a fashion for scientific study of the natural world. Middle class people held soirees and discussed the latest developments in science. Botany was one of the few areas deemed suitable for the interests of young ladies.

Mary was at the heart of scientific studies that were available to her at the time. She joined the Ludlow Natural History Society and was one of the few women members at the time of the second annual report in 1836. She contributed to W.A. Leighton's "Flora of Shropshire" and was so prolific with her botanical specimens that she is cited nearly 200 times in that work alone.

By being published in Leighton's "Flora of Shropshire", she demonstrated her specialist knowledge and keen understanding of botany. Her work was able to stand alongside more formally trained and officially expert men with the wonderful records of plants she discovered. Her legacy is still contributing positively to our understanding of local botany all these centuries later.

Price Watkis of Shrewsbury is another whose life we celebrate. Price was one of five children born to Price Watkis (born 1762) who had a half share of a plantation at Greenwich Park, St Ann, Jamaica. The children were baptised at Greenwich Park on 21 April 1802 alongside their mother Elizabeth Watkis described as 'a young woman of c[o]lour, born on 27th March 1778".

At time of his death, Price Watkins, senior, was living in Abbey Foregate with Elizabeth and his property in Shrewsbury was left to Elizabeth for her life. His land in Greenwich Park along with "slaves, cattle and stock" passed to his sons Price and James. The Legacies of British Slavery database records around 70 enslaved people at Greenwich Park.

Despite being mixed race, Price and his brother James were educated at Shrewsbury School. Price qualified as a barrister and on his return to Jamaica was the first person of colour to be elected to the Assembly as member of Kingston in 1832.

He and James were active anti-slavery campaigners both in Jamaica and in Britain. Price supported the Wesleyan Methodists petitioning campaign to end colonial slavery and publicly spoke in favour of Grey's ministry and the reform bill in 1831.

Find out more:

- Legacies of British Slavery (UCL) [Summary of Individual | Legacies of British Slavery](#) with further references
- 2947/728 Title deeds for Abbeydale in Abbey Foregate, 1728-1924
- Will of Price Watkis Snr, TNA/PROB 11/1848/425 and Will of Price Watkis Jnr. TNA/PROB 11/1862/293 (The National Archives)

- D 35.7 Rev. J. E. Auden, *Shrewsbury School register, 1734-1908* (Oswestry, 1909), p. 32 & 34

Thanks to Michael Watkis for making us aware of the contribution of Price and James Watkis.

3.4 The national picture

The National Archives has a useful guide: [Black British history - Black British History](#)

October is Black History Month in the UK, an event that has been celebrated nationwide for more than 30 years.

The month was originally founded to recognise the contributions that people of African and Caribbean backgrounds have made to the UK over many generations. Now, Black History Month has expanded to include the history of not just African and Caribbean people but black people in general.

Why is Black History Month important?

It is held to highlight and celebrate the achievements and contributions of the black community in the UK. Throughout history, black people have made huge contributions to society in the fields of art, literature, music, science, sport, and many more areas.

Although black people have always been present in the UK, there has been a lack of representation in the history books. Contributions made by black people have often been ignored or played down because black people weren't treated the same way as other people because of the colour of their skin.

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