

Local landmarks, global stories:
Exploring Lancaster's 'glocal' history online and on foot

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Reading landscape 'aright'

W. G. Hoskins claimed that reading landscape 'aright' is essential to understanding 'the richest historical record' we have.¹ By 'record', Hoskins was referring to landscape itself, but what does it mean to read such a record 'aright'? That is a tricky question, but the answer to it is important. The environment that surrounds us is a vast archive of historical and archaeological evidence, and that is certainly true here in the United Kingdom (UK). There is hardly a stone in these isles that has not been touched or turned by the hands of humankind. Angus Winchester, our emeritus colleague, has put the point well by quoting the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Most everything in this country 'wears man's smudge and shares man's smell'.²

Now, the two of us probably do not know half as much about the landscape of North West England as Angus Winchester – few people do! Still, for our part, we would wager that reading landscape aright requires a multi-perspectival approach. Such an approach involves combining different disciplinary and temporal points of view. That is precisely the sort of thing Hoskins had in mind. Equally, though, such an approach involves considering different geographical viewpoints and taking stock of historical associations that put local places into broader constellations of relationship. Doing that is an effective way of enhancing peoples' appreciation of the links that connect their communities with places around the world. It is also a way of engaging people from different global backgrounds in exploring shared local histories. That, at any rate, is what we have learned while completing a linked set of projects about Lancaster's history this past year.

Both of us have come to Lancaster from different parts of the earth. One of us was born in India, the other in the United States, and since we moved to the North West, we have both been repeatedly surprised by the range of historical connections that link Lancaster with the wider world. The name Lancaster itself is a case in point. If you run a search for populated places called Lancaster in an online gazetteer like GeoNames, you will find that there are at least 32 other Lancasters around the globe. The Lancaster where we both work is the oldest of these Lancasters. It is the namesake of the others, whether directly or indirectly, most of which are


located in the US. That fact reflects the roles people connected with Lancaster (or Lancashire more generally) played in the colonisation of North America.

Take Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for example. Its naming is generally credited to a Lancashire-born immigrant named Joseph Wright (1667–1749). He hailed from a Quaker family in Warrington, and like several members of the Society of Friends, he migrated to the Province of Pennsylvania during the early 1700s. Similar stories appear to pertain to Lancasters in other parts of the world. In some cases, though, they are harder to trace. The Lancaster located in Manchester Parish, Jamaica, for instance, appears to have been named by Thomas Addison, who was born in Lancaster, England in 1776. More research is needed to confirm this connection, but it is certainly plausible. Addison, who was the son of a former slave-ship captain, was the first person listed as the proprietor of the Lancaster estate in Jamaica. That was in 1811, a few years before the establishment of Manchester Parish. More than 50 people were enslaved on the estate at the time.

33 Lancasters


In sum, taking stock of the histories of the various Lancasters that dot the globe suggests that the name Lancaster travelled with the spread of the British Empire. That is something we have recently been exploring as part of a pilot study called ‘33 Lancasters’, which we are completing with the writer and independent scholar Clare Ramsaran and our colleague Rianna Price. This study, which has emerged as part of our involvement with the Decolonising Lancaster University network, has mainly focused on exploring the histories of a selection of the Lancasters we have identified and determining whether and how they are linked with Lancaster, England. One of our aspirations in this study has been to build on the work completed by the Lancaster Black History Group’s Slavery Family Trees Community Research Project, which has documented the involvement of Lancastrian families in the transatlantic slave trade as well as the lives of some of the people of colour who were brought to Lancaster as a result of local slave-trading connections. Consequently, in our pilot study, we have placed a particular emphasis on investigating Lancasters in the Americas and the Caribbean, including the ones found in Pennsylvania and Jamaica. We have also been examining the histories of Lancasters in Barbados and Guyana.

Ramsaran and Price’s contributions to the study have mainly focused on collating information from online resources, including the Legacies of British Slavery Database. So far, their work has confirmed some of the well documented challenges of studying colonial histories from afar, especially the histories of places in the Global South. As our colleague Sarah Barber

has observed of her own research on Barbados, even where original records survive, they are often not accessible online. ‘The records’ offices of the Caribbean’, she writes, ‘do not have the equipment or funding to engage in large-scale copying, particularly digitisation’.³ That is part of the reason why, even today, it is easier to research the history of Lancaster, Pennsylvania remotely than that of Lancaster, Jamaica. The information Ramsaran  Price have helped us assemble, however, has laid the foundation for our next steps. Those steps involve networking with stakeholder groups and institutions in the Lancasters we have been studying. Our broader aim in this is to develop a collaborative networking project to explore how decolonial perspectives can inform approaches that place local histories in a global context and that, in doing so, can support the work of redressing historical inequalities associated with the legacies of slavery, colonialism and empire.

A ‘glocal’ tour

More immediately, we have been sharing the findings of this research with different audiences as part of a series of guided walks we have led around Lancaster’s city centre. We initiated these walks last autumn as part of the programme of activities for our university’s welcome week. At the time, we referred to the walks as the ‘Glocal Lancaster History Tour’. Glocal may be an odd-sounding word, but we agreed it was a concise way of communicating our intentions. In short, we wanted to provide undergraduates and postgraduates who were new to Lancaster with an opportunity to learn about the city’s historical links with other parts of the world. Our original guided walk included stops at nine local landmarks on a route extending from Lancaster Castle Hill (SD474618) to Dalton Square (SD478616) in the city centre, by way of St George’s Quay (SD473622). At each stop, we paused to engage the group in thinking about locally born individuals who chose or were forced to travel overseas as well as people who, though born in other parts of the world, became part of Lancaster’s history. In each case, we chose examples related to issues of social justice we thought the students would find meaningful.

So, for example, when we paused outside Lancaster Castle (SD474618), we considered the lives of George and Elizabeth Youngson: two locally born children who were among the first Lancastrians transported as convicts from the Castle to Australia in 1787. Both children were initially sentenced to death for theft, but had their sentences commuted to seven years’ transportation.  Similarly, at St Mary’s Priory Church (SD473619), we paused to contemplate the memorial of Frances Elizabeth Johnson, the Black slave-servant of the Satterthwaite family. Johnson, who was likely born into slavery in St Kitts around 1750, appears to have been brought to Lancaster by John Satterthwaite following his marriage to Mary Rawlins in 1777. The only

known original record of Johnson's life is the entry for her baptism in the church's register in April 1778. Therein she is described as 'a black Woman servt. to Mr. John Satterthwaite an adult aged 27 yrs.'⁴ After visiting the Priory, we made our way to the Lancaster Maritime Museum, which is partly located in the city's former Customs House (SD473622). The building, which the Pevsner guide calls 'a fine Palladian job', was designed by Richard Gillow in the 1760s.⁵ There, we reflected on Lancaster's growth as a port town during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on how local families, including the Gillow family, attained wealth and status through their involvement in the slavery-driven economy of the early modern Atlantic world.

In engaging the students in considerations of these stories, we intended to help them appreciate how the historical movement of people to and from Lancaster had linked the city's past to places throughout the world. In practice, though, we found that the subjects we introduced also prompted the students to consider contemporary issues. At the Priory Church in particular, after contemplating Frances Elizabeth Johnson's memorial, we found ourselves discussing the continuing relevance of the Black Lives Matter movement. In this context, we drew the group's attention to an adjacent memorial to the Rawlinson and Lindow families that was graffitied with the words 'Slave Trader' in 2020. After telling the students about these and other local families' historical connections with transatlantic slavery, we invited them to share their views about whether the graffiti ought to be removed or retained. Should it be regarded merely as an ordinary act of vandalism to a listed monument? Or should it be viewed differently? Can violent acts be justified when they call attention to acts of historical violence that have for too long been ignored?

In weighing up these questions with the group, we found ourselves turning from the domain of history to that of heritage: to debates about the relationship of the past to communal memory and identity in the present. That is something which occurred repeatedly throughout the walks. For instance, when we stopped at *Captured Africans* (SD475620), Lancaster's quayside memorial to the victims of the city's involvement in the slave trade, our discussions eventually turned to the enduring presence of slavery in the global economy. In each instance, we were impressed by the students' thoughtfulness and their willingness to consider how people living in Lancaster today might respond reparatively when dealing with challenging aspects of the city's past.

Landscape literacy

Over the course of welcome week our walks were enriched by the perspectives shared by students who had come to Lancaster not only from other parts of the UK, but also from Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East. In several cases, members of the groups

expressed interest in learning more about Lancastrian connections with their own countries and communities. We found this interest affirming, and it impressed on us how considering the global context of local histories can encourage a greater diversity of people to participate in the study of the past. That is something that other scholars have noted, of course, not least when responding to the recommendations of the Royal Historical Society's report on 'Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History'. 'Focusing on the diversity of past local societies', as Andrew White has written, 'might be a way of encouraging people from heterogeneous backgrounds to become involved in the exploration of local history.'⁶

Inspired by this idea, we decided to offer a version of the 'glocal' tour for members of the general public as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Festival of Social Science this past November. Over the course of two days, we led walks for nearly 100 members of the public, many of whom expressed surprise and interest in discovering their city's historical links with other parts of the world. As one participant shared, 'It was absolutely fascinating to learn more about the city I was born in and have lived in all of my life.' We have since led walks for five other university and community groups, and we are in the process of preparing a new version of the walk, incorporating more of the findings from the '33 Lancasters' project, which will be running in collaboration with Lancaster City Museums as part of the AHRC Being Human Festival this November.

Collectively, these walks are proving an effective way not only of sharing knowledge, but also of fostering greater landscape literacy. In increasing awareness of the global stories that pertain to some notable local landmarks, we have been able to encourage others to engage in the kind of 'reading aright' that (à la Hoskins) can help unlock the rich historical record that surrounds us.

Notes

¹ W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), p. 14.

² Angus J. L. Winchester (ed.), *England's Landscape: The North West* (London: HarperCollins, 2019), p. 11.

³ Sarah Barber, 'Digitisation and the Survival of Documents: The Records of Seventeenth-Century Barbados', *APPOSITIONS: Studies in Renaissance/Early Modern Literature & Culture*, 10 (2011) <<http://appositions.blogspot.com/2011/05/>> [accessed 8 August 2023] (para. 12 of 21).

⁴ 'Baptisms at St Mary in the City of Lancaster: Baptisms recorded in the Register for 1749–1778', Lancashire Archives, PR 3262/1/3.

⁵ Clare Hartwell and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Lancashire* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 159.

⁶ Andrew Walker, 'Decolonising and Diversifying English Local History?', *Local Historian*, 51.4 (2021), 284–96 (p. 293).

Recommended reading

Shahmima Akhtar, 'Revisiting RHS's 'Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change'', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 31 (2021), 115–22

Hannah Atkinson, et al, 'Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change' (Royal Historical Society, 2018) <<https://royalhistsoc.org/racereport/>>

Melinda Elder, *Slave Trade and the Economic Development of 18th-Century Lancaster* (Ryburn Publishing, 1992)

Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool University Press, 2010)

Andrew Walker, 'Decolonising and Diversifying English Local History?', *Local Historian*, 51.4 (2021), 284–96

Andrew White and Stephen Constantine (eds), *A History of Lancaster* (Edinburgh University Press, 2001)

Author biographies

Sunita Abraham is Lecturer in Decolonisation at Lancaster University and co-convenor of the Decolonising Lancaster University network. Her current research focuses on issues of race, colonialism, decolonisation and inequality. In particular, she is interested in examining how Higher Educational Institutions can bring about systemic change through various decolonising initiatives that link staff and students with each other and with local/regional communities.

Christopher Donaldson is Senior Lecturer in Cultural History at Lancaster University and co-director of the University's Regional Heritage Centre. His current research projects mainly focus on the global histories of national landscapes. He is currently finishing a book project entitled *A Shadow of a Magnitude*, which explores the history of people of African and African-Caribbean ancestry in the English Lake District between the 1600s and 1800s.