The Black Country & Enslavement:

Manufacture of Agricultural Tools

by Dr Angelina Osborne

cover picture from *Trade Directory, Staffordshire Record Office*

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The Black Country

Introduction

In 2021 the Wolverhampton and Bilston Trade Union Council commissioned research to ascertain the links between transatlantic slavery and the Black Country. That report discovered the region, a principal hub of iron and ironware manufacture sustained and perpetuated the system of slavery through the manufacture of instruments of restraint such as chains and collars, without which enslaved Africans could not have been captured and detained whilst being brought across the Atlantic to the Americas from the African continent. The report also identified complicit individuals from the region who made their fortunes from sugar using enslaved labour and those who exported iron and guns to Africa used in exchange for captives. It also touched upon the exportation to the Caribbean manufactured iron goods that formed part of the Atlantic economy; however, in not in any significant detail.

In 2024 a second report was commissioned to look more closely at the iron goods manufactured in the Black Country region, without which the cultivation of commodities like sugar, tobacco, coffee and more could not have taken place – namely the agricultural tools such as hoes, machetes, spades, axes, and bill hooks.

This report examines how the Black Country, a region consisting of industrial towns and villages located in the southern part of Staffordshire, became integral to the Atlantic economy through the production, export, and sale of agricultural tools made of iron.

Methods and scope

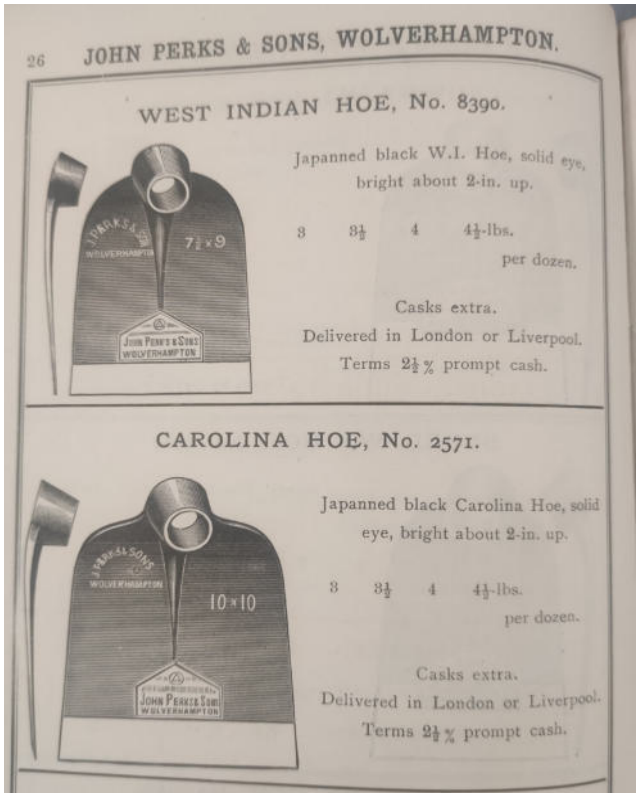
The scope of this report was to understand to what extent were Black Country manufacturers involved in the Atlantic economy, and to identify individuals involved in their manufacture, exportation, and sale to Caribbean and North American plantations in the period of transatlantic enslavement.

The methodology undertaken involved an exploration of the work by historians on the social and economic history of the Black Country studies of iron-making families, and a broader examination of the importance of iron to the Atlantic economy. Further, an exploration of the records of the iron manufacturers who left behind evidence of their activities, supported by the examination of available merchants' records, the history of the Black Country iron industry, House of Commons journals, contemporary newspapers and publications, colonial publications, customs records, and statistics relating to iron exportation also informed this study.

This report found that identifying the manufacturers of agricultural tools for export to the Americas during the transatlantic enslavement era has proved to be a more complex undertaking than anticipated. This is due to several factors. There has been little scholarly attention paid to the study of agricultural tools exported from Britain for use on plantations, and there exist few studies on plantation tools. To give a deeper understanding of the use of these tools contemporary accounts have been consulted and quoted throughout the report.

Many of the papers belonging to several of the ironmongers in this study are in private collections, the owners of which remain unidentified. Secondly, the available archives have

provided little information on the specific items manufactured, and exported – that is to say an understanding of the supply chain: the process of making the tools, arranging for them to be sent from the various towns to the larger cities of Bristol, Liverpool or London to be shipped to the Americas and distributed to the purchaser, remains elusive.



Hoes manufactured by *John Perks and Sons*, *Wolverhampton* (being sold in 20th century)

Iron in the Atlantic economy

In addition to the domestic market for iron and iron products, the colonial markets in the British Caribbean and American colonies expanded rapidly from 1660 as their populations grew and their production for Atlantic commerce increased. Consequently, large quantities of agricultural implements and iron nails for plantation needs were demanded yearly.[1]

Joshua Gee, a London merchant and business associate of Joseph Farmer, the founder of *Galton and Farmer*, the Birmingham gun manufacturers, said of plantations in 1729 that they were *'the cause of the increase in our shipping and navigation ... There are few manufacturing or trading towns in Britain [that do not] have some dependence on the plantations. The number of tradesmen who have dependence on this traffic is prodigiously great.'*[2]

By the end of the 18th century, iron had emerged as one of the most important components of the vast exchange networks that formed the empire.[3] In this period exports of nails and other ironware increased considerably. Nail exports grew from a few hundred tons per year in the late 17th century to average over 1,600 tons per year between 1749 and 1773. These went largely to North America and the West Indies.[4]

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1 Joseph Inikori, 'Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England', (Cambridge University Press 2009), p.67

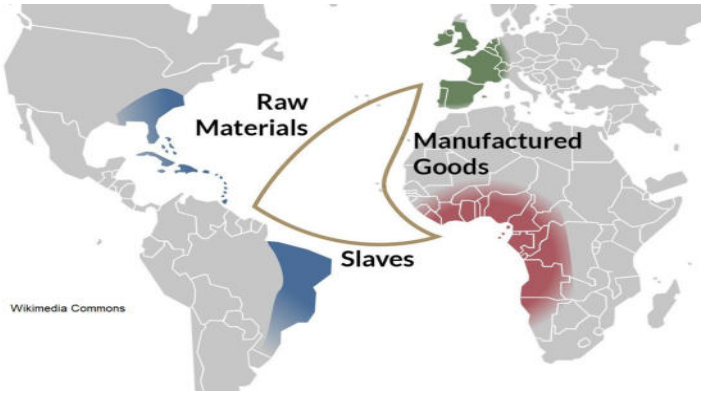
2 Joshua Gee, 'The trade and navigation of Great Britain considered' (Glasgow 1750), p.52

3 Ibid., p.1000

[Ibid. means the same source cited in the preceding note; Joshua Gee's book in this case. We use this term in these footnotes]

4 Peter King, 'The production and consumption of bar iron in early modern England and Wales', Economic History Review, Vol 59 No1 (2005), p.19

Exports of wrought iron goods (other than nails) grew from about 1,000 tons per year in 1700, to peak at around 13,000 tons in 1771. Their destination more widespread. However, it has been noted that, during this period, the North American colonies took less than the West Indies.[5]



A series of technological innovations helped to shift Britain into the role of world leader in iron production. The use of coke in iron smelting after 1750 freed British iron furnaces from the use of wood charcoal; and the introduction of steam engines to power blast furnaces resulted in the production of iron at higher temperatures. In the 1780s British iron producers adopted a process called puddling and rolling which resulted in a more refined raw material with fewer impurities. These processes resulted in a five-fold increase in iron production by the end of the 18th century.[6] The improved production processes increased the quality of the iron produced and production doubled between 1790 and 1800; and again between 1800 and 1810.[7]

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5 Ibid.

6 CK Hyde, 'Technological change and the British Iron industry, 1700-1870' (Princeton University Press 1977), p.17

7 James A. Delle and Kristen R. Fellows, 'Repurposed Metal Objects in the Political Economy of Jamaican Slavery,' International Journal of

Iron and the plantation economy

The development of iron technologies in mid-18th century Britain led to a significant increase in the variety and scope of iron objects manufactured for the consumer market. A primary market for these iron goods was the plantations in the Americas. Wrought iron products such as hoes, shovels, machetes, rakes, and bill hooks were essential tools required for the harvesting of sugar cane, tobacco, coffee, and other key crops grown by enslaved African workers. Without the huge imports from British metal industries these plantations would not have evolved and caused the Caribbean sugar islands to be regarded as one of the main sources of Britain's wealth and power.

The plantation economy was fundamentally reliant on the capture, enslavement, and trafficking of African individuals. The mortality rates on American plantations was staggeringly high, creating an insatiable demand for more African souls to replace those who were worked, starved, and tortured to death under its brutal regime. The capture transportation and sale of African people was a highly lucrative business that continued for centuries, displacing millions into forced labour, while enriching the lives of those who participated in this diabolical trade.

This so-called trade significantly contributed to the rise in the importance of metal industries in Britain, and the plantations in the Americas served as crucial export markets for British manufactured goods. A central aspect of mercantilism - the 18th century economic policy designed to protect British markets - was to maximise British exports while minimising colonial manufacturing. The colonies' value lay in the extraction of commodities and the metropole

provided the refinement of said commodities. Consequently, ironware became a primary export market, providing plantations with the necessary tools to ensure their continued profitability. This was a policy from which metalware manufacturers throughout the country benefitted, with the 18th century peak of the plantation system in the Caribbean coinciding with the rise in provisioning these plantations with manufactured goods used by the enslaved and slaving population.

Merchants were deeply invested in pouring manufactured iron goods into the West Indian economy. When the prospect of emancipation arose in 1833, Robert Fairweather, a colonial agent employed by the absentee planter James Lindsay, Earl of Balcarres, wrote that it would *'ruin all those connected with the West India colonies, stop an immense revenue to the government and be also the complete ruin of many of the manufacturing people at home.'*[8] Mass-produced ironware for use on slave-based plantations was among the most important components of the colonial trade that Fairweather and others feared would be affected.

Iron was imported into the British Caribbean in the form of fully fashioned objects and as raw material, which was manipulated into any number of shapes, often by enslaved African blacksmiths. Skilled blacksmiths and other metalworkers were among those transported to the Caribbean and there is evidence that these skilled workers drew on both African and European traditions in their work.[9]

8 Quoted in James A. Delle and Kristen R. Fellows, 'Repurposed Metal Objects in the Political Economy of Jamaican Slavery,' p.999

9 Most recently, Jenny Bulstrode's research has shown that Jamaican metallurgists using such techniques were responsible for the development of the process of rendering scrap metal into valuable bar iron, an innovation that their enslaver and ironmaster Henry Cort

Utilised for a multitude of purposes, one of iron's principle uses in the Caribbean was for agricultural labour. Hundreds of thousands of enslaved African workers across thousands of plantations planted, harvested, processed, and packaged agricultural goods for shipment back to Britain. Each stage of the agricultural cycle required the use of iron: hand tools for clearing forests, cutting sugar cane, hoeing fields, or pruning coffee trees. Iron machinery was needed for processing crops. Iron hoops held the barrels containing sugar together. Additionally, iron shackles, branding irons, collars gibbets and other devices were designed and manufactured to force the enslaved populations into subservience and obedience.[10]

Marshall's Pen
Great House

www.jamaicascene.com

Archaeological excavations on the site that was once known as Marshall's Pen, a coffee plantation in Mandeville, Jamaica, recovered a large quantity of iron and metal objects and reveals the key role iron played in the daily lives of the enslaved people who lived and worked there.

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claimed as his own. Jenny Bulstrode, 'Black metallurgists and the making of the industrial revolution', History and Technology, 39:1(2023) pp.1-41

10 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Industry and Empire: The Birth of the Industrial Revolution' (find page)

This included the most common tools used by the field hands, including cutlasses (machetes) bills and knives.[11]

Archival records of this Pen that reveal the range and scope of iron objects used. An 1813 list of supplies for the plantation included two dozen bills, which were socketed edge tools that feature a prominent hook, as well as two dozen hoes.

Hoes and cutlasses recovered from Marshall's Pen
source: *www.researchgate.net*

In 1799 on Balcarres Plantation, another estate owned by the same absentee planter Alexander Lindsay, former governor of Jamaica, received a consignment of 100 hoes, 100 bills, 100 machetes *'for plantation use'*, as well as 30 felling axes and 10 broad axes used for clearing land.[12]

11 James A. Delle and Kristen R. Fellows, 'Repurposed Metal Objects in the Political Economy of Jamaican Slavery', p.1004
12 Ibid., p.1009

The plantation hoe and transatlantic enslavement

The plantation hoe was the ubiquitous farming tool of the British Atlantic. According to Chris Evans, it was '*the instrument that pushed the frontier of Britain's Atlantic empire forward.*'[13] For such a simple tool, the hoe has '*a complex and knotted history*,' as it became the tool most associated with enslaved labour; a tool specifically manufactured for the use on plantations, with no European equivalent. Used in the manner of an axe, primarily for weeding, shaping the soil and harvesting root crops such as sugar and tobacco, in this respect it is regarded as a commodity specific to the Atlantic world economy.[14] It was a tool that had to be invented to meet the specific demands of cultivating crops that were outside of European mainstream agriculture.

According to archaeological evidence discovered in North America and the Caribbean, there was great variation in its form. Ambrose Crowley, one of the most pre-eminent iron manufacturers of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, established ironworks in the north east of England that from the 1680s onwards were making three styles of hoes: the Virginia, the Carolina and the Barbados. Each was made in broad or narrow form and each in six assorted sizes and adapted to the different modes of plantation agriculture practised in Britain's Atlantic empire.

13 Chris Evans, 'The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity,' The William and Mary Quarterly, 69:1 (2012), p.71
14 Ibid., p.73

The use of the Virginia hoe, for example was, according to agricultural historian William Tatham, to

> break up the ground and throw it into shape, which is done by chopping the clods until they are sufficiently fine, and then drawing the earth round the foot until it forms a heap round the projected leg of the labourer, like a mole hill, and nearly as high as the knee; he then draws out his foot, flattens the top of the hill by a dab with the flat part of the hoe, and advances forward to the next hill in the same manner until the whole piece of the ground is prepared.[15]

In Tatham's description one gets the clear sense that this was labour that was monotonous, intensive, gruelling, and dull. The hoe was clearly essential for working the provision grounds, garden plots. It did double duty in both the productive cycle for agricultural export and for the production of food for local consumption.[16]

By the end of the 18th century there was a wide variety of several types of hoes. According to Chris Evans' research, there were hoes for different regions, crops and even plantations, and models that were gender and age specific.[17] There was no lack of consumer choice, and plantation owners drove the market in ways never seen before.

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15 William Tatham, 'An historical and practical essay on the culture and commerce of tobacco' (London 1800) pp.13-14. It is worth noting here that Crowley's daughters Mary and Sarah, respectively married Sampson Lloyd and Charles Lloyd, both iron masters in Birmingham, with Sampson becoming the founder of the Birmingham Lloyd family and of Lloyds Bank.

16 Delle and Fellows, 'Repurposed Metal Objects in the Political Economy of Jamaican Slavery', p.1014

17 Chris Evans, 'The Plantation Hoe: The rise and fall of an Atlantic commodity', p.88

In 1831 John Holland wrote about the types of hoes being exported from Britain at that time, noting that

> The hoes are of three sorts including assorted sizes: first, the East India grubbing hoe which is long and narrow; the West India hoe, which is much larger, being the width of a small spade and third, the Carolina hoe, which is larger still and formed like an inverted shovel.[18]

Holland's comment on the quality of these tools is worth mentioning as it is instructive of his view of the people who used them:

> They are wrought by means of a forge hammer in the same manner as shovels; and unfortunately ... they are of exceedingly little worth ... For the sake of cheapness [they] have been manufactured entirely of iron! But in tools designed to be used by persons whose time and labour are accounted of no great value and whose comfort is rated still lower, excellency of material and superiority of workmanship weigh nothing in the scale against cheapness and cupidity.[19]

Iron manufacturers and plantation owners, Holland appeared to be suggesting, did not prioritise the quality of their tools as they were intended for use by enslaved African workers, whose time, comfort, and effort were not valued. The manufacturers and merchants who sold these goods were largely indifferent to the identity of their consumers and unconcerned about the durability or efficacy of the items.

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18 John Holland, A Treatise on the progressive improvement on the present state of the manufacturers in metal: Volume I: Iron and Steel (London: Longmans 1831), p.142
19 Ibid., p.143

As Trinidadian historian Eric Williams put it with his usual clarity and forcefulness, African slavery *'can be expressed in three words: in the Caribbean, Sugar; on the mainland, Tobacco, and Cotton.'*

John Davy, who spent three years living in Barbados as Inspector General of Army Hospitals, wrote that *'the hoe was almost the sole tool employed in cane or other cultivation ... [whose] success was marked and encouraging.'*[20]

The plantation hoe was central to slavery and plantation agriculture, a tool designed for a workforce that had no say in its design or implementation, or whether they wanted to engage in this type of labour.

Other edge tools distributed to and used by enslaved workers were bills and cutlasses. Bills were heavier tools with a hooked end and made of cast iron. While they were heavy to carry and somewhat unwieldy, they had some advantages in plantation work. They were useful in cutting cane and pruning branches of coffee trees. Machetes, or cutlasses, on the other hand were more versatile than bill hooks. They were basically large knives with a wooden handle (which was added after it was exported) and often wrapped with leather to improve grip. This tool was - and continues to be - used for a multitude of jobs in the Caribbean such as clearing bush and cutting grass.

Additionally, enslaved African workers tended to use these items in ways unanticipated by their manufacturers. During

20 John Davy, 'The West Indies Before and Since Emancipation, comprising the Windward and Leeward Islands' military command, founded on notes and observations collected during a three years' residence' (London, Dublin, and Barbados, 1854), p.108

slave rebellions they were used as deadly weapons and symbolised the instability of slave societies.

Slave Rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831, led by Nat Turner. Rebel slaves killed from 55 to 65 people, at least 51 being white. The rebellion was put down within a few days, but Turner survived in hiding for more than two months afterwards.

source: Science Source/Science Photo Library

Historian Justin Roberts described cane hole manufacture as *'among the most backbreaking of all tasks performed by slaves in the Americas ... it contributed to high mortality and morbidity rates on sugar plantations.'*[21] The remains of enslaved Africans who laboured on the Newton Plantation in Barbados were studied by archaeologists who found their skeletons showed significantly high levels of arthritic joint deterioration in their wrists knees and spine. This type of degeneration suggests the enslaved workers were in constant stooped positions that the labour they undertook required of them as they repeatedly dug holes to plant sugar cane, a brutally taxing task.[22] Hoes had to be strong to

21 Justin Roberts, Slavery and Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807 (Cambridge University Press 2013), p.105
22 Ibid., p.106

withstand the cane holing process where, as reported by James Stephen, an English lawyer and abolitionist who had lived in Jamaica for eleven years, '*the slaves, of both sexes, from twenty, perhaps, to fourscore in number, are drawn out in a line like troops in a parade, each with a hoe in his hand.*'

Stephen went on to describe the process:

> Close to [the enslaved] in the rear is stationed a driver, or several drivers in number duly proportioned to that of the gang. Each of the drivers ... has in his hand a long a strongly plaited whip ... It is necessary that every hole or section of the trench should be finished in equal time with the rest; and if any one or more of the negroes were allowed to throw in the hoe with less rapidity or energy than their companions in other parts of the line ... the work of the latter must be suspended ... the tardy stroke must be quickened, and the languid invigorated ... no breathing time, no resting on the hoe, no pause of languor, to be repaid by brisker exertion on return to work can be allowed to individuals: All must work, or pause together.[23]
>
> In slavery the demands on the bodies of the slaves was enormous, as was the demands on their tools.

23 James Stephen, 'The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies; or An Enquiry into the Objects and Probable Effects of the French Expedition to the West Indies; and their Connection with the Colonial Interests of the British Empire to which are subjoined, Sketches of a Plan for settling the Vacant Lands of Trinidada' (London, 1802) pp.9-10

Agricultural tool manufacture – hoes, bill hooks and machetes

Research on Sheffield's involvement in the Atlantic economy and slavery revealed that the region specialised in producing tools and other metalware purchased by plantation owners in North America, the Caribbean and Brazil during the 18th century.[24] However, the Midland ironware manufacturers made an earlier presence within this export trade. Marie Rowland has asserted that as early as 1657 the overseas markets for Midland goods extended globally, with the West Indies importing nails and agricultural metalware. As sugar became the pre-eminent crop West India slave owners required huge quantities of cask nails, plantation hoes, cane cutters, ox chains and slave collars.[25]

G.C. Allen observed that the edge tools in which the West Midlands specialised were of a heavier type compared to tools made in Sheffield, including scythes, axes, hammers trowels, hoes, shovels, spades rakes and machetes. His research found nearly 3,000 varieties of these items were produced there.[26] A large proportion of the products was produced for foreign markets, particularly the Caribbean, Maryland and Georgia. Nuala Zahedieh noted that in this period metalware accounted for around 14% of the value of goods exported to West India.[27] As the purchasing power of the plantations increased along with the enslaved

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24 Michael D Bennett, R.J. Knight, 'Report on Sheffield, slavery, and its legacies' (2021), p.11

25 Marie B. Rowlands, 'Continuity and change in an industrialising society: The case of the West Midlands industries', in Pat Hudson ed. 'Regions and Industries: A perspective on the industrial revolution in Britain' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), p.115

26, G.C. Allen, 'The Industrial Development of Birmingham, and The Black Country' (London: George Allen & Unwin 1928), p.11

populations in the 18th century, ships left Bristol bound each week for Virginia, Barbados or Jamaica carrying hoes, bills, and scythes and other wrought ironware from the Midlands.[28]

Hoeing, from *The Black Man's Lament; or, How to Make Sugar,* an 1826 illustrated anti-slavery poem by Amelia Opie

The writer Daniel Defoe had this to say about how the demand for ironware in the early 18th century led to the diversification of business among the population as a consequence:

> Every farm has one forge or more; so that the farmers carry on two very different businesses, working at their forges as smiths when they are not employed in the fields as farmers. And all their work they bring to market where the great tradesmen buy it up and send to London ... we cannot travel far in any direction out of the sound of the hammer.[29]

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27 Nuala Zahedieh, 'The Capital, and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700' (Cambridge University Press 2010), p.270
28 Marie B. Rowlands, Masters, and men in the West Midlands metalware trades before the industrial revolution' (Manchester University Press 1975), p.127
29 Daniel Defoe, 'A tour through the whole island of Great Britain, divided into circuits or journeys' (London 1724)

Between 1710 and 1735 exports of wrought iron to the British Caribbean almost trebled. The transatlantic markets continued to be important for Midlands goods. In 1818 Alexander Burns, an employee at Marshall's Pen, wrote to his father that *'there is an extensive field open here for the consumption of iron goods ... whilst in Kingston I was through a great many ironmongery stores. I find their hoes and bills etc. are imported from London and manufactured in Staffordshire.'*[30] This statement indicates there were links between Black Country iron manufacturers and London merchants, who facilitated the exportation of ironware, reaching lucrative overseas markets. This point was further emphasised in 1831, when John Holland a writer on mining and metallurgy observed *'an amazing trade [in plantation tools] is carried on between this country and the colonies ... tools [consisting of machetes, cane bills and hoes ... Formerly, these hoes were largely manufactured by Sheffield edge tool makers ... latterly, however, that town has been somewhat supplanted in the estimation of the merchants who trade to the colonial markets by the smiths of Staffordshire, who furnish the goods on such terms as almost to preclude competition.'*[31]

However, one must be cautious to lend credence to this assertion. It is beyond the scope of this report to undertake a more in-depth study into the identification and activities of London and Bristol merchants trading to the West Indies and to ascertain their links with Black Country iron manufacturers.

30 Quoted in James Delle, p.1010

31 John Holland, 'A Treatise on the progressive improvement on the present state of the manufacturers in metal: volume I: Iron and Steel' (London: Longmans 1831) pp.142-143

In this image drawn in Trinidad in the 1830s an enslaved worker is depicted carrying several metal tools. He carries an iron hoe over his right shoulder and a machete or cutlass in his left hand. These items were manufactured in England and exported to the Caribbean.

Image from 'Slavery Images: A visual record of the Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora' *www.slaveryimages.org*

The challenge of identifying Black Country iron manufacturers exporting to the Americas

This report has demonstrated that there was a lucrative market in metalware to serve the demands of the trade and trafficking in African people, and the cultivation of sugar, tobacco, and coffee on plantations in the Americas. The attempt to identify the people who manufactured and exported these goods has proved to be a more complex endeavour.

Professor Ralph Davis made the following observation that might explain the lack of a clear identification of items and who exported them within the customs records:

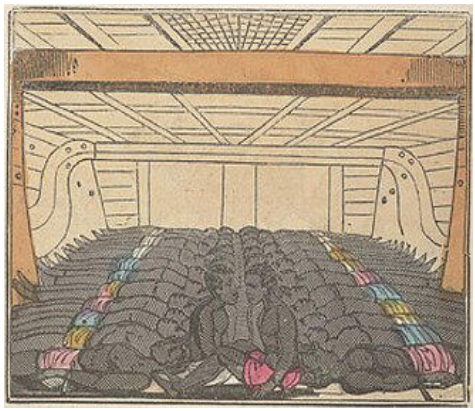
> The process of industrialisation in England from the second quarter of the 18th century was to an important extent a response to colonial demands for nails, axes, firearms, saddles and a thousand other things; a variety of goods becoming so wide that the compilers of the customs records tired of furthering their long schedules of commodities and lumped an increasing proportion of these exports under the heading *'Goods, several sorts'*. I have taken it for granted these were nearly all manufactures ... in the iron and brass industries and all the metal working crafts dependent on them, colonial demands made an important supplement to those of the growing home market and must have played a considerable part in encouraging the new methods of organisation through which the metal industries were to make a major contribution.[32]

32 R Davis, 'English foreign trade, 1700-1774', Economic Historical Review, Volume XV (1962), p.290

Chris Evans, whose research represents one of the very few studies on agricultural tools used by enslaved workers in the Americas also recognised the challenge in the categorisation and identification of these goods exported from Britain. He notes that it is impossible to chart the market in hoes precisely,as they would have been itemised as *'wrought iron,'* an extensive category that included ironmongery of all kinds, except for nails and barrel hoops.[33]

The data from the customs ledgers in the National Archives do make clear however, that the Caribbean was the most important market for British made metalware.

One way to ascertain who was exporting agricultural tools to the Caribbean is through the study of West India merchants' correspondence. It has been beyond the scope of this report to identify the London, Liverpool and Bristol merchants who functioned as agents for iron manufacturers resident in the Black Country in their business dealings with plantation owners who were interested in purchasing their goods. However, a study of the bankruptcy records of James Rogers, a Bristol merchant and a prominent slave trader has revealed a link with William Gibbons, a member of the Gibbons iron dynasty.



Rogers, who also purchased trade goods from Samuel Galton, among many others, was a slave trader who had

33 Chris Evans, 'The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity', p.78, n12

invested in 37 voyages to Africa between 1785 and 1793, that delivered 7,205 African captives to the Caribbean.[34]

Rogers' large cache of records gives a compelling insight into the conduct of the British slave trade, as well as its risks and complexities. In these records it was discovered that William Gibbons was possibly one of his investors and was assigned one of the merchants who took control of his assets after he went bankrupt, along with three other men: John Anderson, James Harvey and Thomas Cole.[35]

Three points can be made that show this man is likely the William Gibbons who conducted business with Rogers. Firstly, William established a merchant house in Bristol that exported iron and sandstone to the American markets. Secondly the success of this export company led the family to establish a bank in the same city. Lastly, William served as mayor of Bristol from 1800-1801.

This makes it likely that Gibbons encountered Rogers in the course of his business dealings with others within the Bristol merchant class and could explain why he was named as responsible for managing Rogers' assets after his business went bankrupt.

Further evidence is found in these records where there is a credit note stating that Rogers owed William Gibbons £616 15s 6d; a further note stated Rogers owed Gibbons a further £1,000.[36]

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34 Kenneth Morgan, 'James Rogers and the British Slave Trade', Historical Research, 76:192 (2003), p.190
35 TNA C107/59, The Rogers Papers. Research into the other three men did not yield any further information about them
36 C107/59 unpaginated

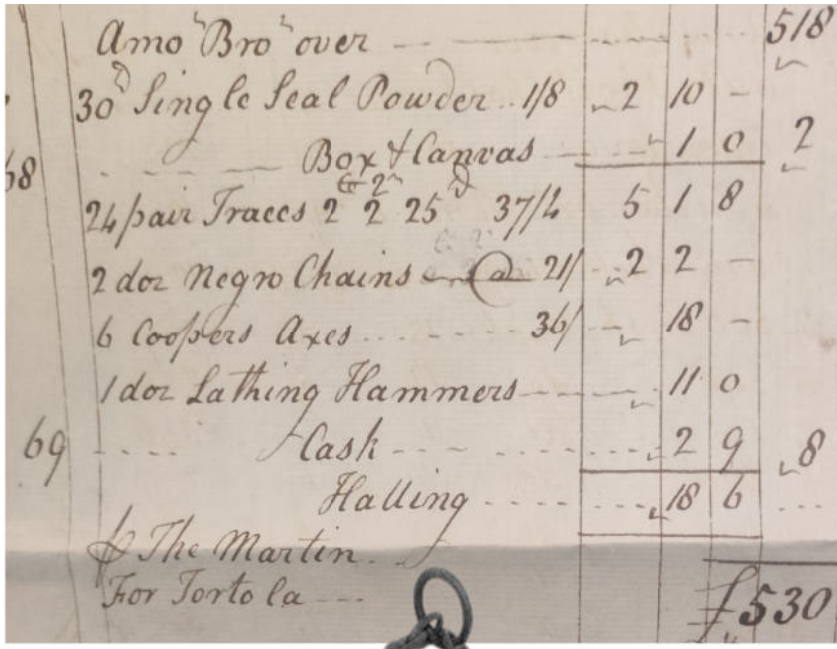
N1 Bristol May 24th 1788

9 Mr James Rogers

Bou.t of Will Gibbons & Co

			£	s	d	£	s	d
GIR 1a10	10 Ca 20 m Ea 7½d 6d Rose Nails							
	are 200 m a	2/8	26	13	4			
11a20	10 Ca 12 m Ea 7½d 6d do							
	are 120 m a	2/8	16	0				
21a26	6 Ca 12 m Ea 11d 8d Flemish							
	are 72 m a	3/6	12	12	–			
27a31	5 Ca 20 m Ea 14d 10d Sharp							
	are 100 m a	4/4	21	13	4			
32a41	10 Ca 12 m Ea 22 20d Sharp							
	are 120 m a	6/3	37	10	–			
42a44	3 Ca 6 m Ea 56d 30d nails							
	are 18 m a	14/6	13	1	0			
45	1 Ca 4 Cwt Spikes Serd fm 5½ a 7 In 29/		5	16	–			
	Casks 10 Ca a 16d 15 a 1/6 16 a 2/3 4 2/6		4	1	10	137	7	6
	20 doz Hoes	13/6	13	10				
46	Cash		–	4	6	13	14	6
	20 doz Hoes	15/6	15	10				
47	Cash		–	4	6	15	14	6
	20 doz Hoes	15/6	15	10	–			
48	Cash		–	4	6	15	14	6
	20 doz Hoes	15/6	15	10	–			
49	Cash		–	4	6	15	14	6
	20 doz Hoes	17/6	17	10	–			
50	Cash		–	4	6	17	14	6
	20 doz Back Bills	13/	13	0				
51	Cash		–	3	9	13	3	9
	20 doz Back Bills		13	0				
52	Cash		–	3	9	13	3	9
	2 doz tin'd Curry Combs	7/	–	14				
1	2 doz wel'd Horse Brushes	9/6	–	19	–			
2	1 doz large marking Irons		–	11	0			
3	3 doz masons trowels	9/6	1	8	6			
4	2 doz fine Padlocks	6/	–	12	–			
	(over)		4	4	6	242	7	6

The image below shows that Rogers also purchased iron wares from Gibbons, including hoes, trowels, bills and *'negro chains.'*[37]



Leg irons found at Chubb's Horseley Fields works, when the company moved there in 1838
[Chubb Archives]

37 TNA, C107/59

A brief study of the available historiography on merchants trading in the Atlantic economy has uncovered some references to the exportation of agricultural tools to the Americas. Robert Pumstead, a London Quaker merchant whose business lay mainly with the American colonies and the West Indies in the 1750s, exported chiefly iron goods such as nails, tools farming implements and cooking utensils. He noted that it was no easy matter to send out implements strong enough to withstand rough usage in the plantations, writing that:

> I have out in hand the hoes, bills and axes order'd for Gidney Clark etc. the two latter will be steeled with the same steel I send to New York to steel their axes with ... I hardly think it possible to make hoes in any quantity that everyone will stand the unfair strains and wrenches backwards when struck into the earth that your negroes give them.[38]

Similarly, J.H. Bettey's study of another Quaker merchant, Graffin Prankard from Bristol shows that he too exported agricultural tools, furnishing ships sailing to South Carolina with hoes, nails, files, chains, and iron hoops.[39]

Black Country and indeed, all Midlands ironmongers exporting to American and Caribbean markets through necessity would have acted through factors and agents.

Therefore, a more detailed study of surviving merchants' letter books may provide insight into whether they were in business with Black Country iron merchants.

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38 C.A.J. Skeel, 'The Letter book of a Quaker merchant, 1756-8', The English Historical Review, volume 31 No.121 (1916) pp.137-143
39 J.H. Bettey, 'Graffin Prankard, an eighteenth-century Bristol merchant', Southern History, volume 12 (1990) pp.34-47

Black Country iron masters

Many of the iron producers in the Black Country region are thought to have taken advantage of the demand for agricultural tools within the Atlantic economy. *'Thought to have*' is emphasised because an examination of the available records does not explicitly demonstrate that they participated in the production and export of these tools. Locating supporting evidence to substantiate these assertions has been a challenge.

Below is a list of companies that it has not been possible to confirm that they were complicit in manufacturing West Indian hoes; however, there is a strong possibility that they were.

- Robert Mole and Sons, Granville Street, Birmingham - machetes for plantation use
- John Perks and Sons, Monmore Green Works, Wolverhampton - edge tool manufacturers
- Thomas Foley (1616-1677) owner of ironworks in Stourbridge
- Thomas Jesson, West Bromwich ironmonger and nail merchant
- M&W Grazebrook Ltd (Dudley)
- The Horseley Iron Company (Dudley)
- Brades Company, Oldbury (best known as makers of edge tools)
- Thomas Hildick of Walsall, edge tool maker

- George Benjamin Thorneycroft (1791-1851) established Shrubbery Ironworks Wolverhampton in 1824
- Richard Dearman – established Eagle Foundry in Birmingham 1785; said to have developed a method for making hoes for American and West Indian plantations[40]

The following ironmongers from the Black Country region were listed in trade directories of the 19th century, compiled through an analysis of the South Staffordshire region that included Wednesbury, Bilston, Wolverhampton, Walsall, and the surrounding areas, from the years 1827-1845. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to confirm whether or not they were manufacturing agricultural items for the markets in America and the Caribbean. The Wednesbury commercial directories consulted stated that the *'manufacture of articles wrought from iron are very numerous, consisting ... of different branches of gun making, screws, hinges, nails and agricultural implements.'* A more detailed study of the trade directories at Stafford Record Office and Birmingham Archives might reveal more iron manufacturers commercially linked to slave owning societies in the Caribbean and North America.

Ironmongers – Darlaston

Cooper George, Church Street
John Etheridge, Church Street
Thomas Pretty, Church Street
Spencer Hannah, Church Street

40 I have not been able to substantiate this claim. Grace's Guide to British Industrial History is the source for these names *www.gracesguide.co.uk/Main_Page* accessed multiple times

Foster Moses, Church Street
Rubery Sarah, Upper Green

Iron merchants

Bagot Elijah and son, Blockhall

Willenhall

John Payne, Wood Street

Wednesbury

William Colcomb, High Bullin

Thorneycroft family's Wolverhampton home, Chapel House, Tettenhall Rd

Directory of Wolverhampton

Iron founders and manufacturers

E&T Clark
Richard Newman
Thomas Hill
G&E Thorneycroft
John Mansfield
Thomas Phipps

Ironmongers

Thomas Barnett
Thomas Charles
Farmer and Jones
Nicklin and Co
Benjamin Shaw
Benjamin Sollom
Tarratt and Neve
Joseph Underhill

Edge tool makers

James Dunn
John and Robert Perks
(listed as making edge tools and all kinds of plantation tools)
John Westwood
Joseph Bridgen, of Darlington Street

Case studies[41]

Edward Elwell: plantation tool manufacturer

A brief history of Wednesbury Forge ownership

The site of Wednesbury forge has four hundred years of industrial history. The site was in continuous use as an iron forge from the late 16th century until the early 21st century. Situated in the borough of Sandwell (formerly part of Staffordshire), it was located north east of the town of Wednesbury in the valley of the river Tame, from which it drew its water supply.[42]

In 1657 ironmaster and MP Thomas Foley rented the forge premises. The son of Richard Foley, a prominent Stourbridge ironmaster who had established a monopoly on the nail making industry in the West Midlands, Thomas Foley took over his father's business after his death and made great profits fulfilling government contracts providing iron ordnance, shot and nails.[43]

The Foleys divested themselves of the forge in the early 18th century, with John Willetts taking possession of it in 1704. Foley used it as a rolling mill shaping metal into sheets or wire. Suffering from periodic bouts of water shortages,

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41 These case studies represent those where it was possible to provide evidence they identified as exporting to the West Indies or North America

42 Paul Belford, 'Five centuries of ironworking: Excavations at Wednesbury Forge', Post-Medieval Archaeology, 44/1 (2010), p.1

43 Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, The Foley Family *http://tiny.cc/d7mq001* accessed 1st May 2025

Willetts is credited with developing the only wind-powered grinding and boring mill in the history of metalworking.[44]

John Willetts was succeeded by his son, also called John, who continued at the forge until his death in 1753. Listed as a saw maker, he was also involved in gun making. As Sheffield began to dominate the saw industry with better quality tools, John Willetts' son Benjamin continued his father's foray into the lucrative gunmaking trade, with his output so immense that he was supplying guns to the Board of Ordnance until his death from 1786, when the forge passed on to his son, also called Benjamin.[45]

The first Edward Elwell (1737-1809) established an ironworks in West Bromwich, producing cast iron hollow ware.[46] His brother, the first William Elwell (1736-1793) was an iron founder of Walsall and served as its mayor in 1778 and 1787.[47] William's son, the second William Elwell (1736-1793), was an iron founder of Walsall and served as its mayor in 1778 and 1787.

The second William Elwell's son, the second Edward Elwell (?- 1869) trained to be a doctor, obtaining a commission as a second assistant surgeon in the Royal Artillery Regiment in 1807.[48] After four years he resigned his commission and returned to Walsall. After a few years, he decided to enter into the family profession of ironmaking, moving to Wednesbury where he set up as a maker of edge tools at Sparrow's Forge. In 1817 he leased Wednesbury Forge,

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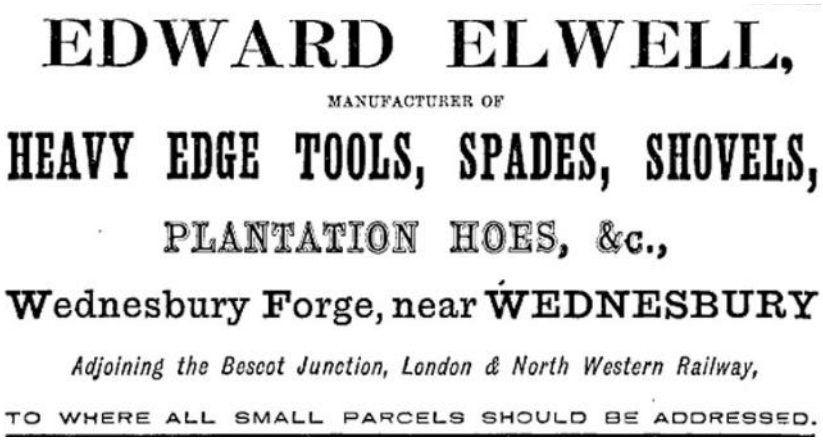
44 Belford, 'Five centuries of ironmaking', p.16
45 Ibid., pp.20, 25, 26
46 Charles J.L. Elwell, 'The Iron Elwells: A Family Social History' (Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd 1964), p.36
47 John F. Ede, 'History of Wednesbury' (Wednesbury Corporation,1962), p.234
48 Ibid., p.81

restoring it to its original purpose: the production of blades and other cutting instruments and weapons.

Edward's descendant Charles Elwell wrote in his family history in the 1960s that *'the world's implements were made at Wednesbury Forge ... Mexican axes, Peruvian hedge bills, West Indian hoes, Barbados hoes, Carolina hoes, Mauritius grubbing hoes Demerara hoes Canada hatchets, banana pruners yam spades machetes ... Their names conjure in the imagination vistas of West Indian sugar plantations, Brazilian coffee estates, Californian and Australian gold fields and the lumber forests of North America.'*[49]


EDWARD ELWELL,

MANUFACTURER OF

HEAVY EDGE TOOLS, SPADES, SHOVELS,

PLANTATION HOES, &c.,

Wednesbury Forge, near WEDNESBURY

Adjoining the Bescot Junction, London & North Western Railway,

TO WHERE ALL SMALL PARCELS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED.

1876 advert source: *www.gracesguide.co.uk*

Elwells maintained a significant a significant position in the edge tool trade in Wednesbury, with three hundred workers at the firm by 1851.[50]

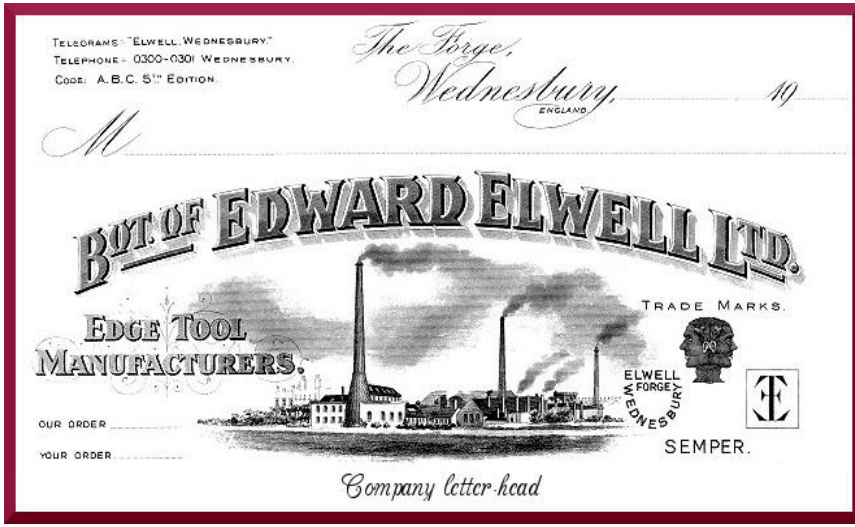
Charles Elwell writes with no small measure of pride, that *'the family historian is moved to a pitch of Gibbonian*

49 Elwell, 'The Iron Elwells', p.84

50 Ede, 'History of Wednesbury', p.235

solemnity at the thought that the Ural miner in his black hell, the Afrikaner on his bright veldt, the Egyptian fellah, the French peasant and the New Zealand colonist, all alike must have wielded at some time or other an implement branded Double E'.[51]

Among his prideful declarations of his ancestors' contributions to colonial commerce, Elwell does not give any consideration to the forced assignment of his tools onto the unwilling enslaved workforces in the Caribbean and other countries where Britain had established an imperial grip, and from whom so much wealth and power was acquired.



Edward Elwell Company letterhead. Note the bound Africans used as a trademark and the *'double E'*. *source: History of Wednesbury blog*

With a lack of archival sources to evidence Elwell's involvement in the Atlantic economy, we must look to Charles Elwell as providing some confirmation of it. More is provided in later pages. The abolition of slavery in the

51 Elwell, p.84

Caribbean is shown to have caused Elwell significant distress about his financial future. His nephew Tom Newton is recorded as remarking that *'my old uncle, who was much dependent on the West Indies slave cultivation thought he was going to be ruined, and was plump against the abolition of slavery until he became intimate with the Quaker [Joseph] Pease, who in 1833 came up to London as an MP and changed him altogether.'*[52]

The second Edward Elwell had handed the management of the forge to his son the third Edward Elwell (1814-57) but on his death the running of the forge went back to his father, the second Edward Elwell, until his death in 1869. According to Joseph Ede, the American Civil War (1861-65) brought a lot of business to the firm which became a supplier of plantation tools for the Southern states.[53]

Edward Elwell's death in 1869 provides some insight into his workforce. In its obituary notice, the *Wednesbury and West Bromwich Advertiser* reported that *'multiplied are the occasions in which he has generously assisted his workmen or tenants to tide over some distress or to enjoy with greater means some festive day'.*

The *Walsall Observer* referred to the workforce at the forge as consisting of *'about 200 stalwart wielders of the hammer who gave vent their sorrow at Elwell's funeral.'*[54]

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52 Having read both editions of this publication, the author notes this remark is absent from one of the editions. In the first edition read it was on page 82. Tom Newton was a member of the Newtons of Kings Bromley, related to John Newton (1717-83) who owned plantations and enslaved workers in Barbados. See report on the Black Country and slavery, 2022

53 Ede, 'History of Wednesbury', p.235, Elwell, p.91

54 Black Countryman Magazine Volume 20 No.4 (Autumn 1987) CJL Elwell, 'The Workers of Wednesbury Forge', p.6

The Gibbons Family

The fortunes of the Gibbons family reflect the economic changes inherent in the industrial growth of the Black Country (then part of Staffordshire). Their move into the production of iron coincided with the rapid expansion of the industry in the Midlands in the latter decades of the 18th century.

The family was descended from yeoman farmers. Engaged in the coal trade from the 1620s onwards, by the 1750s John Gibbons (1703-1778) was established as an ironmonger with nails as his main output.[55] With the expansion of the American markets, John Gibbons was able to establish himself as a forgemaster. By 1766 he was operating forges in Sutton, Hyde, and Kingswinford. In 1776 these leases were placed in the names of his three sons: Thomas, William and Benjamin.[56]

These sons were, through their father, well established in the iron and banking business by the time John died in 1778. Thomas, his eldest son (1730-1813), is listed in Sketchley's Wolverhampton Directory of 1770 as a merchant of Dudley Street and was also on the list of Wolverhampton Town Commissioners in 1777.[57] These entries confirm Thomas as a man of some means, as inclusion in this list required possession of property worth at least £1,000.[58] His father put the Wolverhampton business in his name, as well as the banking business.[59]

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55 ODNB, 'The Gibbons Family' *http://tiny.cc/i7mq001* accessed 2nd May 2025

56 W.A. Smith, 'The Gibbons Family: Iron and Coal Masters' (unpublished thesis, University of London 1967), p.27

57 Wolverhampton Archives, Sketchley's Wolverhampton Directory

58 W.A. Smith, p.28

59 Staffordshire County Record Office, D695/1/12/19 f.117

William (1732-1807) established himself in Bristol as a buyer of iron for his father, and with his help he become the leader of the Bristol branch of the family operations. The proximity of the river Severn to the Gibbons' business activities in and around Kingswinford allowed easy access to Bristol which served as a gateway to North America. The Bristol branch meant the Gibbons family could function as their own intermediary between their production of iron in the West Midlands and the American markets. According to W.A.Smith shipments of iron goods were sent to ports in Baltimore Boston, New York, Charleston Newfoundland, and the West Indies. These shipments were mixed cargoes of mainly metal goods: manufactured and bar iron, mainly agricultural and wrought iron implements, such as shovels, pots, kettles, wrought iron wheels anchor, anvils, and lead shot.[60] The Gibbons brothers took advantage of the growth of the North American markets, which allowed them to extend their interests.

To this end, Benjamin Gibbons (1735-1832) who was entrusted with the management of the forges in Kingswinford, Hyde and Lye, extended into the establishment of another forge in Bilston in 1787. In 1788 he joined his brothers in leasing a forge and slitting mill at Cradley.[61] The Gibbons brothers therby emerged as major figures in the iron industry in the Black Country, operating seven furnaces there.

60 W.A. Smith, p.134
61 ODNB, ‘The Gibbons Family’

Table XXIV

Exports - Number of Shipments Annually

January to December

	Ireland	West Indies	N.America	Europe
1790	-	-	13	1
1791	2	1	15	3
1792	-	-	9	1
1793	-	2	10	-
1794	-	2	8	-
1795	2	-	6	-
1796	1	-	8	-
1797	1	1	7	-
1798	-	-	10	-
1799	1	2	8	-
1800	1	1	11	-
1801	-	3	6	2
1802	2	2	8	-
1803	-	-	11	-
1804	1	1	12	1
1805	-	-	11	-
1806	-	-	15	-
1807	5	2	10	-
1808	2	3	6	-
1809	2	4	9	-

The above table shows the number of shipments to the West Indies and North America between 1790 and 1809. They suggest that the Gibbons experienced a brisk trade in iron goods. The market for hoes and other agricultural tools was immense due to the growth in the enslaved populations in both regions, making it a self-sustaining market that was constantly replenished, as they were tools that were used so intensively.[62]

62 Evans, 'The Plantation Hoe', pp.78-79

UNDERSTANDING that an impreſſion has been made on the minds of many Gentlemen who have warmly inte-

TAX ON PIG IRON.

AT a GENERAL MEETING of Iron Masters, principal Iron Merchants, Manufacturers and Exporters of Iron Wares, and others concerned in making, manufacturing, and vending Iron, and Iron and Steel Wares, held on the 18th of April, 1806, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in the Strand, pursuant to public notice, at which were present, a very considerable number of persons of the above descriptions, acting on behalf of themselves, and many of them as Deputies also, from the Trade, in different parts of the Empire---

WILLIAM GIBBONS, Esq. IN THE CHAIR;

When the following Gentlemen were appointed a Committee:

WILLIAM TAITT, for South Wales;
JOSHUA WALKER, for Yorkshire;
JOHN STURGES, for Yorkshire;
THOMAS BOTFIELD, for Shropshire;
THOMAS EDINGTON, for Scotland;
JOHN A. ADDENBROOKE, for Staffordshire;
WILLIAM THOMPSON, for London;
THOMAS HADLEY, for Birmingham;

Who, after taking into serious consideration, on the one hand, that it is the duty of all good subjects to contribute, without murmur or reluctance, to all just and reasonable imposts, demanded by the necessities of the State, and to give their aid in levying the same; and, on the other hand, that is the duty of all men, having particular means of information upon subjects in which the national welfare is concerned, to submit their opinion of the same to Government, with all due deference; considering also, that the individuals present at this Meeting, cannot be generally affected by the proposed Tax, without a considerable consequent shock to the national prosperity, proposed the following Resolutions, which were unanimously agreed to:

1st. Resolved---That the making of Native Iron, from the Ore, is, in the opinion of this Meeting, one of the most important manufactures of this country, as tending to render the nation independent of foreign supply, for an article of the first necessity; and as being a source of great and widely diffused wealth, and the nursery of a most valuable and increasing population.

2nd. Resolved---That this manufacture, although greatly improved and increased, within a few years, is yet by no means so far perfected, or so firmly established, as to be able to bear the proposed Tax, which, in the opinion of this Meeting, must have the effect of nearly annihilating our export trade---even now very materially interfered with by the manufacturers of iron wares abroad---and of greatly diminishing our home consumption, and will, at the same time, give an advantage to the competition of foreign iron imported, which it does not now possess.

3d. Resolved---That the proposed Tax will be oppressive to the Manufacturer, by the consequent necessity of an increase of about one-third of their present capitals, which are in general already inadequate to the most advantageous pursuit of the trade, and by subjecting it to the regulations of the excise, which cannot, in the opinion of this Meeting, be so modified as to provide an adequate security against fraud, without creating embarrassment, which will be oppressive and ruinous to the trade.

4th. Resolved---That it will be oppressive to the Public, by its necessarily advancing the price of articles in their progress from the raw material to their finished state.

5th. Resolved---That it will be unjust to subject Iron to a heavy and oppressive Tax, whilst tin, copper, lead, wool, and other raw materials, the produce of the country, and the production of hemp, timber, and other naval stores, in our distant dependencies, will continue to be encouraged, by bounties and protections, although iron is the most important, and stands most in need of protection.

6th. Resolved---That, from the nature of the articles manufactured, it will be extremely difficult, if not totally impracticable, to form proper regulations, for the calculation of the drawbacks; and, even if a sufficient drawback could be allowed, it would at the same time, in a great measure, defeat the operation of the Tax.

7th. Resolved---That it is unwise and imprudent, because Government are great Consumers of Iron, for the supply of ordnance and naval stores, the cost of which will be much enhanced by the Tax.

8th. Resolved---That the Chairman, and the Gentlemen deputed from the Country, do wait upon the First Lord of the Treasury, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with a Copy of these Resolutions, and request them to accept the Thanks of this Meeting, for the attention which has been shewn to the representations already submitted to them, and for the readiness with which they agreed to postpone the second reading of the Bill.

9th. Resolved---That these Resolutions be signed by the Chairman, and published in the London and Provincial Newspapers.

WILLIAM GIBBONS, CHAIRMAN.

Resolved---That the Thanks of this Meeting be given to the Chairman, for his unwearied attention and exertion, on this and all former occasions, for the benefit of the Iron Trade in general.

S. DAVIDSON, PRINTER, DUKE'S COURT, BOW STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

William Gibbons, who ran the merchant house in Bristol, overseeing the export of metalware to America, also served as its mayor in 1800-1801. It is therefore extremely likely that he regarded trade of all kinds to the Americas as beneficial to the city. He was probably in business with James Rogers; certainly he controlled Rogers' assets after his bankruptcy. Gibbons treated the trading and trafficking of Africans as a significant commercial venture. William Gibbons became one of the iron industry's leading lobbyists, giving a voice to the anxieties of iron producers around the country on what they saw as infringements to their commercial future, as illustrated in their opposition to a tax on pig iron in 1806. William Gibbons served as chair of the iron interest.[63]

When William died in 1807, the Bristol holdings were signed over to his son, also named William, with the Midlands properties divided between the surviving brothers. After Thomas' death in 1813 his share in the Wolverhampton bank and ironmaking business passed to his three sons: John (1777-1751), Benjamin (1783-1873) and Thomas (1787-1829) With Benjamin Snr's retirement a year later the control of the businesses was passed on to the next generation.[64]

Benjamin Gibbons Jnr (1783-1873) photographed in the 1860s.
source: National Portrait Gallery

63 Science Museum Library and Archive, Weale Manuscripts (MS0371/1)
64 W.A. Smith, 'The Gibbons Family,' p.44

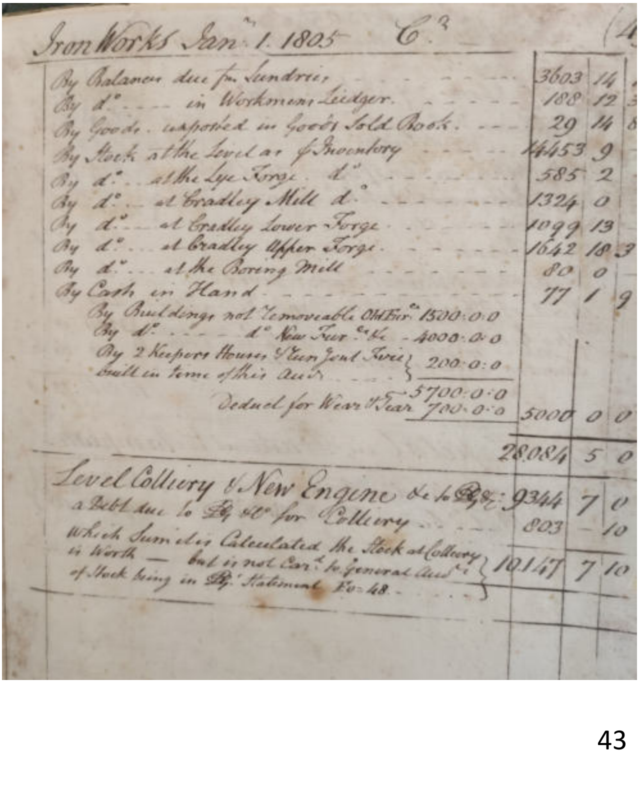
The end of the Napoleonic Wars was financially disastrous for the business which was saved only by Benjamin Snr's intervention by acting as preferential creditor.

As a consequence of this, the family was able to rebuild its fortune until the decline of south Staffordshire as an iron producer in the 1840s.

The Gibbons family occupied a prominent position in the Midlands iron and coal industry, from the early days of the industrial revolution, until the end of the Napoleonic wars. They ranked with John Wilkinson in the number of furnaces worked and in tonnage production as the most important ironmasters in the Black Country.

A study of the Gibbons accounts at Staffordshire Record office provided little in the way of evidence of the types of ironware being exported to the Americas.

This page from the account book entitled *'Account book entitled T Gibbons,'* of the Cradley Ironworks gives a description of revenue made from myriad items, listed *'by balances due from sundries.'*


Iron Works Jan^y 1. 1805 Cr
By Balances due fm Sundries 3603 14
By d^o in Workmens Ledger 188 12
By Goods exported in Goods Sold Book 29 14
By Stock at the Level as p Inventory 14453 9
By d^o at the Lye Forge d^o 585 2
By d^o at Cradley Mill d^o 1324 0
By d^o at Cradley Lower Forge 1099 13
By d^o at Cradley Upper Forge 1642 18
By d^o at the Boring Mill 80 0
By Cash in Hand 77 1
By Buildings not removeable Old Furn^s 1500:0:0
By d^o d^o New Furn^s &c 4000:0:0
By 2 Keepers Houses & [illegible] built in time of this Acc^t 200:0:0
5700:0:0
Deduct for Wear & Tear 700:0:0 5000 0 0
28084 5 0
Level Colliery & New Engine &c [illegible] 9344 7 0
a Debt due to [illegible] for Colliery 803 — 10
Which Sum [illegible] Calculated the Stock at Colliery is Worth — but is not Carr^d to General Acc^t of Stock being in [illegible] Statement Fo: 48. 10147 7 10

Sundries could be a blanket term for any item and could have referred to agricultural tools. However, it has not been possible to confirm this.[65]

The Molineux Family – Wolverhampton

John Molineux (b.1685) began selling Black Country ironware in Dublin with his brother Daniel, setting up a warehouse in the city in the 1720s. He returned to England, settling in Wolverhampton, continuing exporting to Ireland, and setting himself up as an ironmaster in Horseley Fields where he had two houses with workshops in the back.

His youngest son Benjamin (c.1715-1772) followed his father into the family business, continuing to sell ironware to Dublin ironmongers, collaborating with his uncle Daniel out of their warehouse in Essex Street.[66] From there he sold all kinds of goods such as locks, hinges, and tools. Benjamin took advantage of the increase of trade between Britain and the West Indies by exporting many of his goods there. He also imported Jamaican rum, opening a rum warehouse in Wolverhampton in the 1760s.

George Africanus, 1766 baptismal record described him as 'a negro boy belonging to Benjamin Molineux of Molineux House'.

65 Staffordshire Record Office 6060/3/2, Account Book entitled T Gibbons

66 Faulkner's Dublin Journal, 30th July 1754

It is said that Benjamin Molineux was able to build his house through the profits of the trade with Ireland and the West Indies.[67]

Molineux House, Wolverhampton, former residence of Benjamin Molineux, now restored and houses Wolverhampton Archives.

from *Remnants of Old Wolverhampton,* John Fullwood 1854 – 1930;

photo by Roger D.Kidd

67 Marie Rowlands, 'Masters and Men', pp.98, 116,119

Recommendations for further research

- Study colonial newspapers (available at the National Archives and the British Library) to explore whether Black Country iron manufacturers advertised agricultural tools to prospective and existing planter clientele.
- Investigate plantation inventories, ledgers and account books held in archives in the UK and Caribbean to ascertain which Black Country ironmongers plantation owners and slavers were purchasing their agricultural tools from.
- It has been beyond the scope of this research report to research the workers who made these items or to ascertain which workers were employed by individual ironmongers. Families were the unit of production conducting the greater part of work in workshops attached to their homes. A study of the families involved in the manufacture of agricultural tools for export to the Americas is currently under-researched.
- Investigate, where available, the archives of Bristol, Liverpool, and London merchants to ascertain those who functioned as agents for Black Country ironmongers in the export of iron made tools for plantations.
- Investigate whether the universities of Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Keele, or Staffordshire received financial donations or endowments from firms or individuals who manufactured, among other ironware, agricultural tools for use on plantations in the Americas.

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It can be viewed and downloaded, along with the original research ***The Black Country & Enslavement: An Overview,*** also by Dr Angelina Osborne, at https://wolvestuc.org.uk/researcher

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Dr Angelina Osborne is an expert in Black British history, the politics of slavery and abolition, post-emancipation, and teaching difficult histories.

She is an experienced historical researcher, writer and editor who has worked on a range of projects related to slavery, memory, citizenship and cultural heritage.

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Working in collaboration with museums, libraries and archives, NGOs and community organisations, Dr Osborne helps to educate and raise awareness of the lives and achievements of Black British people, focusing on the history of race, education, and social justice in Britain.

She co-authored the bestselling book, ***100 Great Black Britons;*** Wolverhampton TUC raised funds to supply over 100 schools in Wolverhampton with a copy in 2021.

pic Express & Star