

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY



# UCL



The Centre for the study of the  
**Legacies of British Slavery**



INSIDE THIS AUTUMN 2023 ISSUE OF *TRACES*, A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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# *Long Time People*

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**PROFESSOR MATTHEW J. SMITH**

*Director of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery*

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A cherished virtue of historical study is the promise of finding the clues to our origins. Ancestors give us our appearance. What is less obvious is how they lived. We come to a better understanding of them when we learn about their world. That world, when consciously observed, can be closer to us than we think. The clues are there in street names, building sites, and even the very contours of the spaces we occupy. If we connect what we see with what we learn, these clues give us the frame for the people we seekers of the past try to know better.

For the Atlantic world, connections are indefinite. Street names in Paris and Port-au-Prince mirror each other as they do in London and Bridgetown. In Jamaica, the lanes, waterways, and layers of hills carry not just names but silent stories of generations who made the island before, through, and after slavery. These stories motivate historians to keep digging and re-creating the elements of the past.



*Jamaica Street, Liverpool*

In this autumn issue of *Traces* we feature the work of some who have used this motivation in their historical practice to use evidence of old Jamaica to give people of the past a place in the present. In the “Advanced Search” section, we have a thoughtful piece by

historian and inaugural curator of the UWI-Museum, Dr Suzanne Francis-Brown. Suzanne's dedicated work in documenting the stories of the enslaved persons and their descendants who lived on the three estates (Papine, Mona, and Hope) that crisscross through the present campus has been crucial to thinking through the place of slavery in the history of that area. In her recent monograph (*World War II Camps in Jamaica*) she tells another part of this history when before there was a university, the land was known as a detention centre for displaced Europeans. Her current work takes her into the registers of enslaved persons and Jamaican civil records to rethink Jamaica during slavery. In her article, Suzanne discusses how the LBS database has been a boon to her investigations into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaica.

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***"If we connect what we see with what we learn, these clues give us the frame for the people we seekers of the past try to know better."***

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That period is also intriguing to Hannah Bekkers, author of one of this season's feature project pieces. Hannah is a recent graduate of the History department at UCL and worked with us as a researcher at the CSLBS. Her award-winning MA dissertation examined free women of colour during Jamaica's age of revolution. She focused on three women and through fascinating research illustrated how they understood their social power and deployed it to circumvent the constraints of repression and control. Hannah finds in their extant and rare letters evidence of a sharp knowledge of how colonial male-centred power thrived on the system of slavery into which they were born. That awareness informed how they constructed their own spaces of personal autonomy.

Knowledge of a different kind motivated unfree people in the island in the same period on which Suzanne and Hannah's research focuses. Jamaica's great importance to the networks of industry and commerce in the British system included the labour and ingenuity of the enslaved population. This past summer, the Centre worked on a project titled 'Black Industrial Revolution' that aimed to highlight the stories of these contributions. With funding from a UCL Impact and Policy Grant, our aim was to inform educational policy with teaching materials for both Jamaican and British secondary schools that centred Jamaican slavery in the story of Britain's First Industrial Revolution. In this issue we have a piece jointly authored by members of that research team—Ashley Jones, Rohan Shah, and Jess Hannah—that describes its purpose and outputs.

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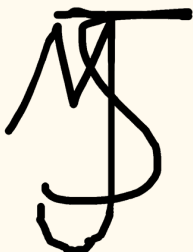
***"Jamaica's great importance to the networks of industry and commerce in the British system included the labour and ingenuity of the enslaved population."***

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Members of the Centre have in recent months kept up a busy schedule of presentations to schools, museums, advisory boards, genealogical societies, universities, and community events. Some of these engagements are highlighted in the "Of This and That" section of this issue. It is with delight we can share that the Centre now has a new website

that covers all our current project work and serves a place for our community to find out more about our events and activities. A special thanks to Jess Hannah from the Centre and Izzie Harvey from the UCL History department for all their work on the website. Please do visit the new site at [ucl.ac.uk/history/cslbs](https://ucl.ac.uk/history/cslbs).

As ever our commitment in all our public work, whether online or in-person, is to bring to wider attention the stories that lay beneath the surface of the vast history that connects us. In these stories lay the experiences of the people from the past whose lives still yearn to be known.



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**Matthew J. Smith**  
Director

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## FEATURE PROJECT

# *Uncovering Women's Voices in Caribbean History*

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## **HANNAH BEKKERS**

*Former CSLBS Researcher and UCL MA in History Graduate*

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***Hannah Bekkers was awarded the UCL Department of History Dissertation Prize 2023 for her study "titled "By Her Quill: The Social Power of Free Women of Colour in Jamaica's Age of Revolution." Hannah has worked with CSLBS as a Researcher and contributor to the national public history programme, The World Reimagined, as well as other initiatives.***

In the 1750s, Mary Johnston Rose could be seen traveling across Spanish Town, Jamaica in a horse-drawn carriage sporting silks and fur imported from Europe. Mary Rose, an elite free person of colour and slave-owner, was known to socialize with prominent white colonists in the capital. Over 200 years later, a collection of letters held in the East Sussex Record Office written by Mary Rose to Rose Fuller, a British planter and politician, offers us intimate details of her life

and an exceptional case of a free woman's writings that survive from this period.



*Scene of King's Square, Spanish Town, c. 1825. The House of Assembly is depicted on the left-hand side of the illustration and was erected during Mary Rose's lifetime in 1762. Engraving by James Hakewill in A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica (London: Hurst and Robinson), 1825.*

Despite the strides taken by scholars from the 1970s—beginning with Lucille Mathurin Mair's ground-breaking PhD thesis on the histories of women in pre-emancipation Jamaica—Black, enslaved, and Indigenous women occupy a precarious position in the archive. In recent years, historians have used wills and civil records to demonstrate how free women of colour in Jamaica retained personal liberties and challenged racial boundaries through economic and legal strategies.

I began my dissertation with the goal of re-examining the archive for alternative sources that captured the voices of free women of colour, such as letters, newspapers, and memoirs. My dissertation drew on the work of feminist historians Marisa Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman, who address gaps in the archive by combining rigorous historical research with critically imagined narratives. Through this process, I produced micro-histories of free women who lived across Jamaica's age of revolution and explored the impact of their writings on our understanding of Jamaica's history in areas of gender, urban and social life, cross-cultural interaction, and the slave-labour regime.



*Portrait of Mary Seacole in her war medals by London artist Albert Charles Challen, c. 1869. National Portrait Gallery, London.*

While surviving letters such as the ones authored by Mary Rose are rare, newspapers offer a frequently overlooked opportunity to discover more details on the experiences of free women of colour. Traces of the lives of Elizabeth Foord and Mary Wynter, the owners of a popular tavern and lodging houses in Kingston, are scattered across the surviving pages of Jamaica's *Kingston Mercury* and *Royal Gazette* from the turn of the nineteenth century. Their businesses served as spaces of cultural exchange and social life, while profiting from enslaved labour and the public auctioning of captives. Runaway and commercial notices in the newspapers indicate the ways Foord, Wynter, and other free women of colour perpetuated the institution of slavery in Jamaica in the years following the legal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

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**"Seacole's account of various people and places is a powerful counterpoint to the Caribbean histories and memoirs authored by white, mostly male, travelers and planters."**

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The fleeting mention of Foord and Wynter buried in Jamaican newspapers stands in contrast with the notoriety of Mary Seacole, a well-known Creole nurse, writer, and businesswoman from Kingston, whose portrait now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. Her famous memoir, published in 1857, chronicles her life as a doctress in the Caribbean, Central America, Britain, and Crimea. Seacole's account of various people and places is a powerful counterpoint to the Caribbean histories and memoirs authored by white, mostly male, travelers and planters. While Mary's international travels are a recurring focus of scholars, her memoir also reveals how her

female kin and upbringing in the diverse city of Kingston prepared her for life as a businesswoman, doctress, and cultural mediary, interacting with and nursing soldiers from around the world.

The recovery of the voices of individuals who seemingly left few traces for discovery is increasingly being shown to not only be a viable and innovative historical practice, but one which provides extensive new opportunities to engage with their histories. Free women of colour balanced various identities as matriarchs, healers, entrepreneurs, and, in some cases, slave-owners, and their writings unsettle the problematic and objectifying characterization of free women in dominant historical narratives by planters and colonists. The voices of free women of colour call out from the archive with stories of determination, struggle, and success, prepared to be enriched by authors of Caribbean history.

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## ADVANCED SEARCH

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# *How the Database Illuminates Enslaved Lives*

**DR SUZANNE FRANCIS-BROWN**

Author and Researcher

Honorary Research Fellow, UWI Museum, University of the West Indies

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***The major focus of my work on the plantation period in pre-Emancipation Jamaica relates to the enslaved population – the men, women and children who laboured in agro-industrial and domestic spaces, forcibly contributing to the British imperial economy from afar.***

Designated as chattel, these persons appeared in limited records generated by their enslavers, in inventories as part of property transfers, and in a limited but groundbreaking series of required public registers generated between 1817-1832. Some appeared in church records and, if they broke the barriers around them, in newspaper advertisements or even occasional administrative correspondence. I am reading between the lines of available public archival records to—even dimly—illuminate the lives of this majority population, especially those who lived on estates such as the Papine and Mona Estates in St Andrew parish where plantation records have either not survived or not yet come to light.

This excavation of buried lives cannot ignore the context in which these enslaved people lived restricted social lives while working year-round from dawn to dusk and even through the night during crop time. Hence it also cannot ignore the estates or those who owned and managed



those operations and thereby affected those who lived there.

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In this regard, the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery database is not just a convenient, cross-referenced, easily searchable compilation of information on those who benefited from slavery. The Centre has drawn together significant information on the various estates, often including crop account information as well as ownership and name changes. More broadly, the site's vision, pursued with determination, has also changed how people understand the beneficiaries of the system.

Increasingly, the CSLBS database has become a first stop for researchers of the period. It can bring together what's available or sometimes facilitate further searches, such as investigations of the Slave Registers which compiled returns required of all enslavers in 1817 and then every three years until 1832. Those returns were categorised by parish but often submitted without reference to the estate itself, rather naming the property owner or manager. Hence the connection of estate and ownership information on the CSLBS database can facilitate the location of persons within the registers.



*Obelisk in Papine Village, monument to the enslaved*

This sort of connectivity has been useful in researching one quite obscure line of my own family history. A simple search of the database threw up a relevant name for an overseer on the Golden Vale sugar estate in the beautiful mountains behind the town of Port Antonio, in the parish of Portland, Jamaica in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as information on the estate, its production, and its population. On the flip side, the ownership records on the database facilitated identification of the estate's 1817 and subsequent slave returns, which included an enslaved, mixed-race family that appears to triangulate with other research leading to one of my great-grandfathers.

If the Centre is able to incorporate or establish direct links to information in the registers, as has been projected in an earlier issue of this publication, this will further expand the database's usefulness to researchers.

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***"[...] The ownership records on the database facilitated identification of the estate's 1817 and subsequent slave returns, which included an enslaved, mixed-race family that appears to triangulate with other research leading to one of my great-grandfathers."***

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Based on my previous experience and its own dynamic development, I know that the CSLBS database will continue to be an important point of reference for my research on enslaved people within the broader context of British colonial enslavement.



A moment that indicates the names of 'people alive on the Papine estate in 1832.'

## FEATURE PROJECT

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# *Black Industrial Revolution*

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### CSLBS PROJECT TEAM

Ashley Jones, Rohan Shah, Matthew J. Smith, Matthew Stallard, and Jess Hannah

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***Black Industrial Revolution is a new CSLBS research project that explores narratives of enslaved labourers and innovators in the plantation Caribbean to highlight the long history of Black contributions to British innovation.***

Funded by a UCL impact and policy grant, the project engages with pioneering new historical research by Dr Jenny Bulstrode (UCL Lecturer in History of Science and Technology and project partner) on technological innovations by unfree African labourers in Jamaica that contributed to the first industrial revolution (c. 1750s-1850s). Black Industrial Revolution expands this premise with a view toward implementing this approach into school curricula.

The project re-centres enslaved persons as not just labourers but innovators and our researcher have inclusive learning tools for pupils, enhancing Black and minority ethnic sense of belonging

and encouraging their study of History and STEM subjects. Our key objective is to emphasise the importance of BAME histories to the histories of industrialisation and STEM teaching.



*"Interior of a Boiling House." Richard Bridgens, West India Scenery...from sketches taken during a voyage to, and residence of seven years in...Trinidad (London, 1836), plate 11.*

Our two researchers on the project, Rohan Shah in London, UK, and Ashley Jones in Kingston, Jamaica, have examined education curricula in the UK and Jamaica closely. They have produced module templates, lesson plans, and other resources for reinscribing this history into school curricula with the needs of students in both places in mind.

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***"When we teach students that the sugar industry was heavily dependent on not just a large, enslaved labour force but also enslaved technical knowhow and skillsets, we really communicate and acknowledge the weight of the contributions of the enslaved community."***

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Ashley Jones, a freelance Archival Research Assistant based in Kingston, Jamaica, focused on the Jamaican Grade 5, 7, and 9 Social Studies and History curricula.

Ashley identified that the Grade 9 curriculum requires that students learn about the British Industrial Revolution, including some of the effects of the revolution on both British and Caribbean society and economy, but not its connection to the unfree technical labour and ideas

of enslaved Africans and their descendants.



"Whitney Estate, Clarendon." James Hakewill, *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica*, from Drawings Made in the Years 1820 and 1821 (London, 1825; reprinted, Kingston, Jamaica and San Francisco, 1990), plate 21.

Ashley's aim was to produce lesson templates introducing students to the skillful, enterprising and industrious character of unfree African labourers in contrast to the biased belief that enslaved people were "void of genius" and "almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science," in the words of British-born enslaver and historian of Jamaica, Edward Long.

For Grade 5 students learning from the Social Studies curriculum, Ashley recommends a "deconstruction of the general stereotype of the character of an enslaved person. At their age and educational level, grade 5 students are introduced to the enslaved person as a labourer which is a gross simplification of what historians know to be true of enslaved people on plantations; that many were highly skilled, enterprising, and innovative."

When we teach students that the sugar industry was "heavily dependent on not just a large, enslaved labour force but also enslaved technical knowhow and skillsets," says Ashley, "we really communicate and acknowledge the weight of the contributions of the enslaved community."

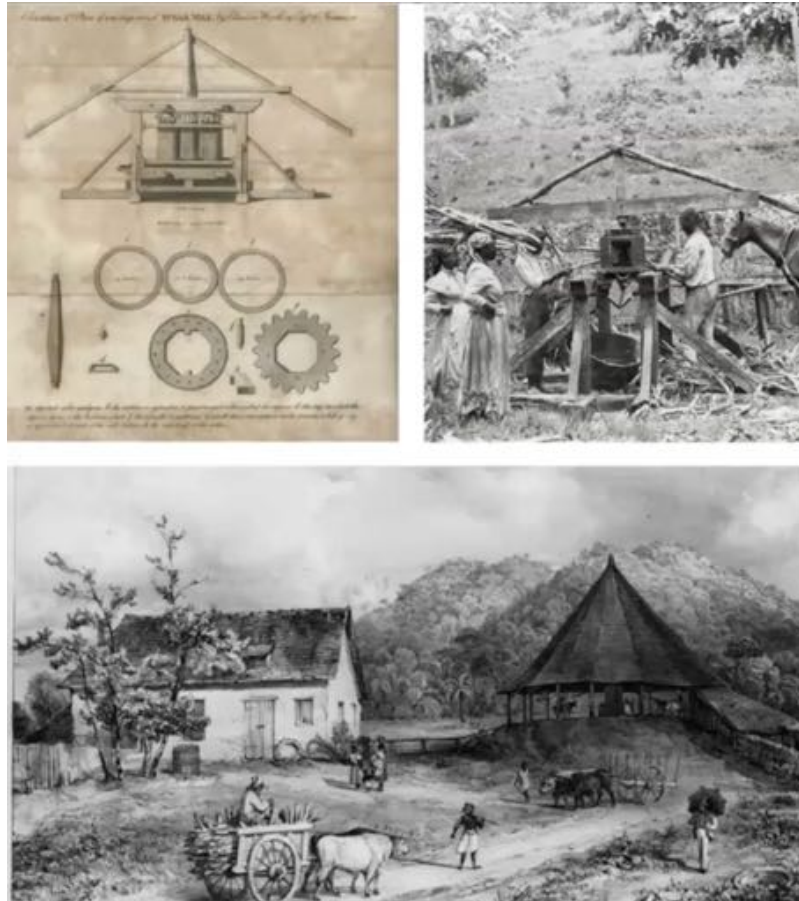
Ashley wrote teaching materials and other resources for older students around two working themes: for Grade 7, "African Agency and Ingenuity During Enslavement," and for Grade 9, "African Contributions to the Success of the British Industrial Revolution."

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***"We want pupils to start questioning why these narratives have been, and often continue to be, obscured."***

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Rohan Shah—who is both a researcher and a History teacher at a secondary school in Croydon, south London—focused on KS3 level History curricula in the UK. Rohan described his motivation to have pupils “see how enslaved peoples, migrants, and other minority groups shaped the trajectory of Britain’s Industrial Revolution and subsequent innovation. We want pupils to start questioning why these narratives have been, and often continue to be, obscured.”

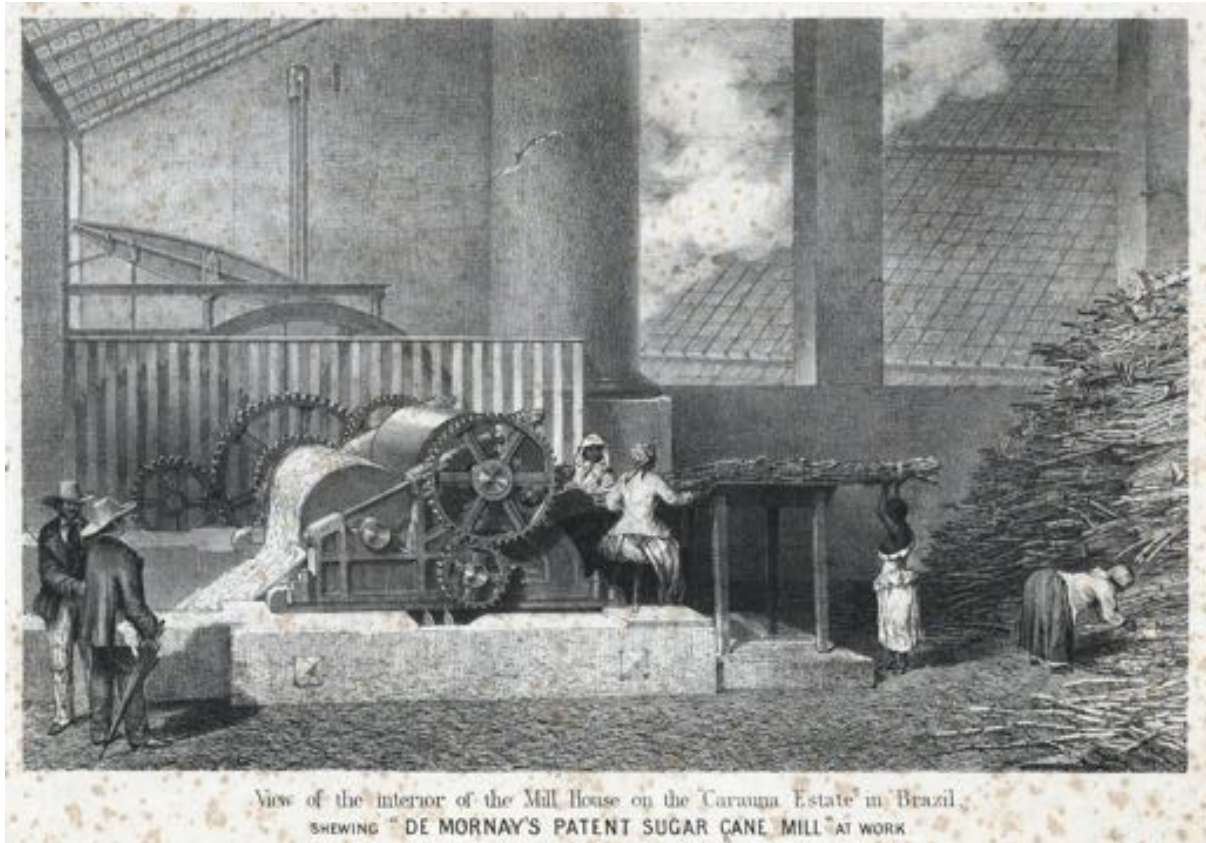


*Images from a Black Industrial Revolution team presentation at a Black Atlantic Innovation Network and Sarah Parker Remond Centre workshop titled 'Decolonising Secondary and Sixth Form Education.'*

Recognition in UK schools’ curricula of the industrial nature of Caribbean plantations, and of the roles of enslaved people beyond manual labour, remains limited, says Rohan. In representations of slavery in existing teaching resources, the industrial dimension of plantation life is situated, literally and metaphorically, in the background.

The resources developed by both Rohan and Ashley better represent the “factory in the field” reality of the plantation, and plantation life for enslaved peoples, that pupils rarely get to see. Rohan states: “as a foundation for black innovation history - to understand the influence that the Caribbean had on Britain’s industrialisation, through the skill, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship of black peoples alongside their physical labour - it is essential that pupils can conceive of the environment, the surroundings, in which they existed.”

By offering school pupils and those who teach and engage with them access to cutting-edge research in the history of science and the history of slavery, Black Industrial Revolution enriches the portfolio of resources upon which schools, museums and learned societies can draw in their efforts to redress longstanding disparities in Black representation in both History and STEM.



View of the interior of the Mill House on the Caraua Estate in Brazil,  
showing "DE MORNAY'S PATENT SUGAR CANE MILL" AT WORK

Engraving showing 'De Mornay's Patent Sugar Cane Mill at Work.' Science Museum Group Collection Online.

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## OF THIS AND THAT

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## *Moments from Summer and Autumn*

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Members of the Global Threads team at the launch of The Penistone Cloth: Textiles & Slavery – From the Pennines to Barbados and Beyond at the British Textile Biennial in Blackburn in September. This was the Global Threads



Rohan Shah presents on new CSLBS project Black Industrial Revolution in a keynote lecture at the Black Atlantic Innovation Network and Sarah Parker Remond Centre workshop 'Decolonising



team's first exhibition collaboration project, as historical research partners with the [British Textile Biennial](#), [Illuminos](#), and [Made by Mason](#).



An image from Ashley Jones's virtual presentation on the Black Industrial Revolution project at the 'Decolonising Secondary and Sixth Form Education' event in July.

Secondary and Sixth Form Education' in July.



Global Threads team members attend Manchester Literary & Philosophical Society's panel discussion on their report into the society's legacies of enslavement, which featured project co-lead Katie Belshaw of the Science and Industry Museum.



CSLBS team members Keith McClelland, Matthew Stallard, Jess Hannah, and Matthew Smith with former Legacies of British Slave-ownership team member and researcher Dr James Dawkins at the Heirs of Slavery conference in November.



Isaac Crichlow leads a workshop on the legacies of slavery and educational uses of the CSLBS database to sixth-form students at City and Islington College in November.



The Centre for the study of the  
**Legacies of British Slavery**

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