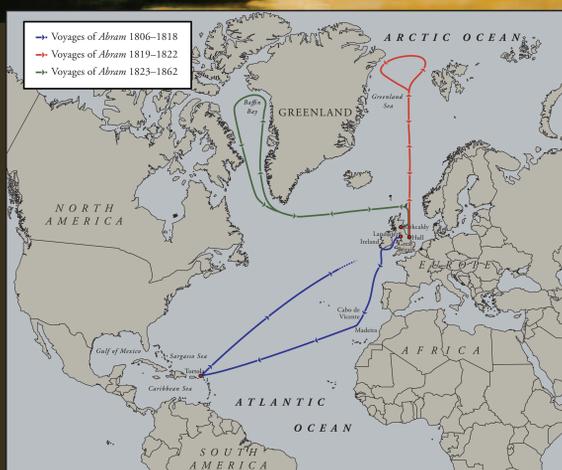


the VOYAGES of ABRAM (1806-1862)



Abram attributed to James Wheldon (Maritime Museum: Hull Museums)

Wind power is not usually associated with Britain's industrial revolution, but it played a vital role. Sailing ships brought in vital raw materials and exported manufactured goods all over the world. This exhibition looks at two significant places through the experiences of one ship, *Abram*.



Map of the Atlantic showing Lancaster/Liverpool - Tortola route and Hull/Kirkcaldy - Greenland Sea/Baffin Bay routes

'Digging the Cane-holes' from William Clark, *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua* (London, 1823) Held by the British Library, image made available through Creative Commons



THE WEST INDIES TRADE

In the late eighteenth century the islands of the Caribbean were Britain's most lucrative trading partners. Slave plantations exported sugar and, for many decades, cotton for the growing British textile industry as well as hardwoods, plant dyes and rum. Merchants at British west coast ports and in London could make fortunes which they invested in Britain's growing industrial sectors.

WHALING IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic was exploited for its mammals. Whalers, mainly based in British east coast ports, hunted the bowhead and Greenland right whales for their oil which was vital for early street lighting and industrial processes, and whalebone, used in the manufacture of corsets, umbrella spokes and beds. Whaling could be lucrative but was a dangerous, filthy and risky business.

Abram was not unusual in being built for the West Indies trade but subsequently converted for whaling. This exhibition tells her story and those of some of the people involved with the ship.

Advertisement for a whalebone manufacturer, Hull (Maritime Museum: Hull Museums)

THE WHALEBONE MANUFACTORY,
South street, Kingston-upon-Hull

G. R.

By the King's Letters Patent.

The Public is respectfully informed, that Orders are received and executed with the greatest punctuality and dispatch, for

*SIEVES and RIDDLES of every description,
NETS, with Meshes of various Sizes, for folding Sheep, preventing Hares and Rabbits from passing through Enclosures or Pleasure Grounds, or entering young Plantations.

SLAYS, for Weavers.
TRELICES or GUARDS for Shop-windows, Gratings for Granary, Barn, Warehouse, or Cellar Windows.

Ornamental BLINDS, for House Windows, of various Patterns.

CLOTH of great durability for the preservation of Meat, in Larders, or Safes.

BED BOTTOMS, in place of Sacking.
CARRIAGE BACKS and SIDES; CHAIR and SOFA BACKS, and BOTTOMS, in Black, White, or other Colours, after the manner of Cane in any Pattern.

STUFFING, for Chair and Sofa Bottoms and Backs at a lower Price, and preferable to Curled Hair.

BRUSHES, of different sorts. With a variety of other ARTICLES.

John Bateman,
AND
Robert Bowman.

* Extract from the last address to the House of Assembly, by Sir John Sturges, Bart., on the 7th June, 1828.—The
of Haddock's Bones, and Veins for
containing Shells, formed by the
is so strongly elastic, and is
in other respects greatly to be preferred, as any article of the same sort now in use.
It is the recommendation of Haddock, in practice and theory, which, like other
of domestic industry, cannot be
too much encouraged.

MYRTON HAMILTON, PRINTER, SILVER STREET, HULL.

Whalebone umbrella spokes (Maritime Museum: Hull Museums)



A whalebone corset (Maritime Museum: Hull Museums)



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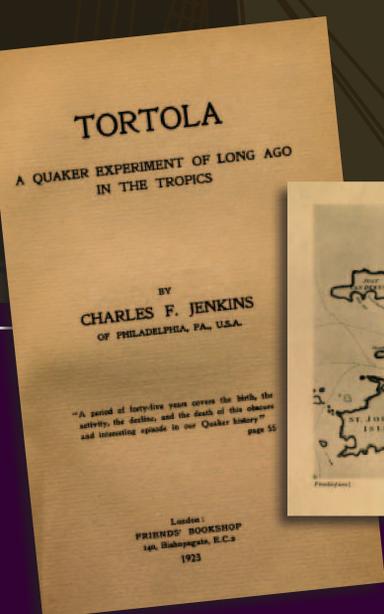
the VOYAGES of ABRAM (1806-1862)

LANCASTER AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Lancaster, in north-west England, developed as an important West Indies trading port from the mid-eighteenth century.



Gideon Yates' sketch of Lancaster Quays, c.1790s
(Courtesy of Lancaster City Museums)



Title page and facing map in *Tortola: a Quaker Experiment*
(Society of Friends 1923) (Images courtesy of Lancaster University Library)

Lancaster merchants traded throughout the Caribbean but developed particularly close connections with the Virgin Islands.

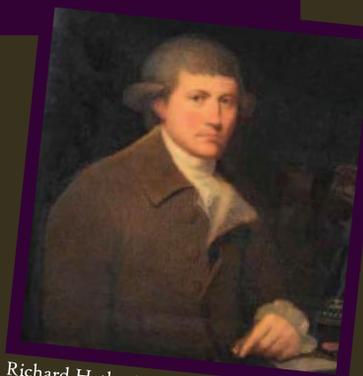
James Birket, a Lancaster merchant based in Antigua, had introduced Quakerism to the islanders in 1738.

The Rawlinson family from Lancaster were also Quakers; two generations carried on an extensive trade with the islands and in the 1780s Henry Rawlinson was Parliamentary Agent for the Virgin Islands.



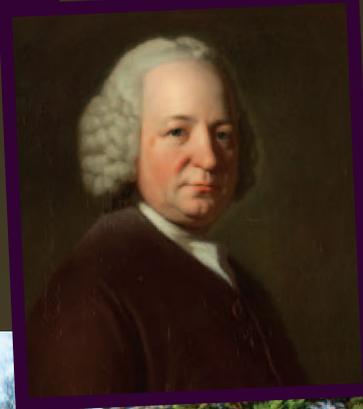
The Rawlinsons brought the young John Coakley Lettson to Lancaster for his education; he became a leading physician. The family of William Thornton, architect of the Capitol in Washington DC, born on the islands, hailed from a farm near Lancaster and he went to school in the town. Richard Hetherington, who lived on the largest island, Tortola, for some 60 years and rose to become president, came from a village in the nearby Lune Valley.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a ship built in Lancaster was named after a merchant and plantation owner on Tortola, namely, Abram Chalwill Hill.



Richard Hetherington as a young man; an 1872 copy of the original then in the possession of the family, by Clement Burlison (Reproduced courtesy of Lancashire County Council Museum Service)

◀ Portraits of Abraham and Thomas Hutton Rawlinson ▶
(Courtesy of Lancaster City Museums)



▼ The gravestone of Richard Hetherington's daughter in Tunstall churchyard, Lune Valley, Lancashire (The president is mentioned on a gravestone) (Photograph: Mike Winstanley)



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the VOYAGES of ABRAM (1806–1862)

WHALING FROM HULL AND KIRKCALDY

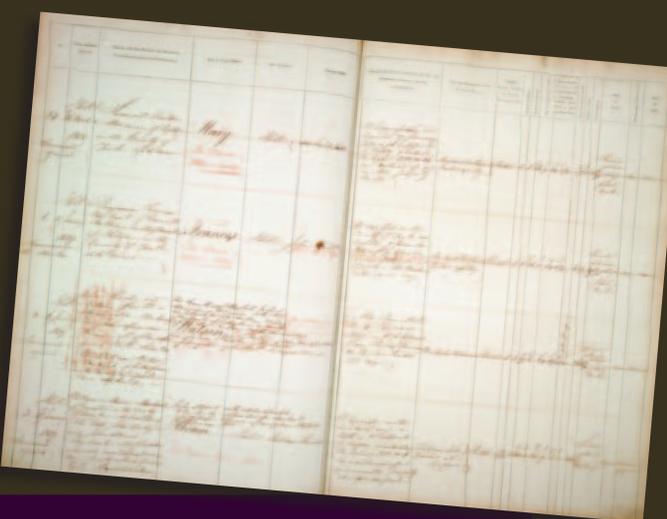


Map showing whaling areas

A mid-nineteenth-century photograph of the whale ship *Lord Gambier* at Kirkcaldy (Fife Cultural Trust (Kirkcaldy Galleries) on behalf of Fife Council)

Between 1819 and 1862 *Abram* sailed to the Northern Whale Fishery.

She sailed initially from Hull and then from Kirkcaldy (1855–1862). Voyages in 1819–1821 were to the East Greenland Sea, but whales became scarce there, so from 1822 she sailed to Baffin Bay.



Registration of *Abram* at the port of Hull on 11 January 1819 (Hull History Centre: C DPC/1/2/3 (1819))



The Lodberries, Lerwick. A part of Lerwick little changed from when *Abram* anchored in the harbour (Photograph: Rob David)

SAILING TO THE ARCTIC

After leaving her home port in early spring, *Abram* called in at the Shetland Islands to take on supplies and further crew members provided by a ship's chandlery, Hay and Co.

March and April was known locally as the Greenland Time in Lerwick as most whaling ships stopped there. *Abram* arrived with a ship's company of about 28 and left with 50.

THE VOYAGE OF 1839

We know most about this voyage to Baffin Bay as the 23-year-old surgeon, Thomas Phillips, kept a journal.

He vividly described the weather: '23 April: strong gales with showers of snow'; chasing, killing and processing whales and resupplying the ship: '10 August at 7am, Thomas Mills, Harpooner, struck a fish [whale] and got her killed in two hours'; '24 May: crew employed in fetching water from the land; shot 13 Ptarmigan this day'; '13 August a polar bear was shot'; visiting settlements and meeting the 'Esquimaux': '17 June: arrived at the Danish settlement of Upernavik consisting of about a dozen Danes and 319 Esquimaux'; '26 July: Several Englishmen bathing were viewed by the natives with evident signs of astonishment'; and overcoming ice barriers: '14 June: The men employed in sawing a passage for the ship through a large field of ice'.



The Danish settlement of Upernavik, Greenland: coloured Magic Lantern slide of photograph taken by Walter Livingstone-Learmonth in 1889 (Reproduced courtesy of Mike and Kate Lea)

▼ A whaling scene showing whales being chased, killed and flensed (stripped of skin and blubber). A painting of *Neptune* (1778) (Reproduced by permission of Mirehouse, near Keswick)



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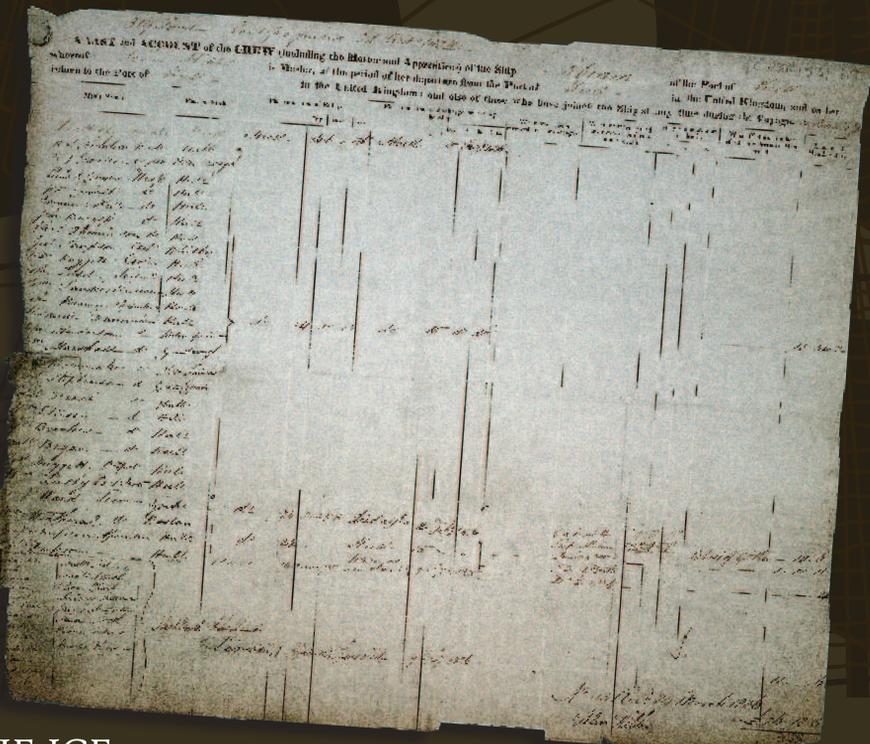
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the VOYAGES of ABRAM (1806–1862)

ABRAM IN THE NEWS



The approximate route of the drift of *Abram* in the ice 1835–1836 (map by Dr Emma Sakamoto Ferranti)



The crew list for *Abram* for the voyage of 1835–6 (Hull History Centre: C DSTR/53/113. Reproduced by permission of Hull History Centre)

OVER-WINTERING IN THE ICE

In 1835 *Abram* and ten other British whaling ships were trapped in the ice off the coast of Baffin Island, and drifted south with the ice for nearly four months.

Food and fuel ran short, frostbite and food poisoning were constant hazards, and the ship's company became weaker by the day. On 30 January 1836 *Abram* broke free from the ice, and those that were healthy enough sailed the vessel back to Hull 'where thousands cheered us and welcomed us, as it were from the dead'.

Sir John Franklin (© National Portrait Gallery, London)



Lady Jane Franklin (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

SEARCHING FOR SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

In 1845 Sir John Franklin's vessels, *Erebus* and *Terror*, disappeared looking for the North West Passage. *Abram* became involved in the search for the ships and their crews.

In 1849 and 1850 Sir John's wife, Lady Jane Franklin, engaged *Abram* to help in the search with a promise of a reward for information about the fate of her husband and his crew. In the event her master, John Gravill, spent more time whaling than searching, and returned with no news.



THE WRECK OF ABRAM

On 26 July 1862 *Abram*, commanded by Captain Souter, was crushed by ice and sank in Melville Bay in north-west Greenland, along with the other two Kirkcaldy whalers.

The captain of another whaling ship witnessed what happened. '*Abram* was overtaken by a hurricane of a most dreadful character ... she was crushed [by the pack ice] to atoms so that not a vestige of her was seen again.'

The crew escaped onto the surrounding ice and were rescued by neighbouring ships, but Kirkcaldy's whaling industry never fully recovered.

The scene of the wreck of *Neptune* (1778). The sinking of *Abram* would probably have looked similar. (Reproduced by permission of Mirehouse, near Keswick)

Map marking the location of the wreck 75°35'N, 63° W



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the VOYAGES of ABRAM (1806-1862)

PERSONAL STORIES

Here are the stories of a few of the many people involved with *Abram*.



View of Tortola and Road Town from Ruthy Hill by J. Johnson, from *Series of Views in the West Indies* (Messrs. Underwood, 1827) © The British Library Board

DEATH OF ABRAM CHALWILL HILL OF TORTOLA (1819)

‘A most awful and destructive visitation’.

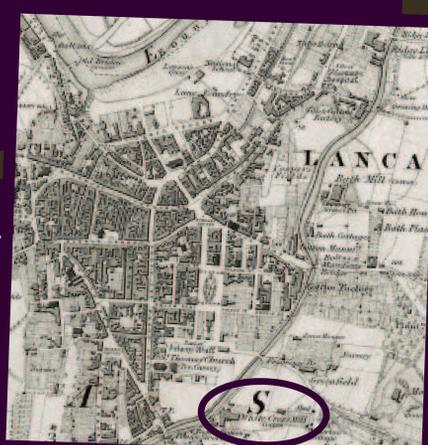
Abram was one of about 120 people who died in a violent hurricane in September 1819.

‘Towards evening on the 21st a very severe Gale commenced from the N. W. ... about midnight it blew a perfect Hurricane and continued to increase in strength until one or two in the morning ... The streets from one end of the Town to the other are still cover’d with Ruins, One House absolutely moved into the centre and obliging the Passengers to go through it. ... No prospect of a crop, had the planters the means of taking it off, the Canes stumped out and every description of Provisions destroyed.’

Tortola’s plantation economy never fully recovered from this devastation.



Extracts from a letter from Abraham Belisario to Henry Gent, 25 September 1819 (courtesy of Frank Gent, full text at <http://gent.org.uk/henrygent/belisi.htm>)



Map of Lancaster showing White Cross Mill. Ordnance Survey 6 inch, 1845 (Image courtesy of Lancaster University Library)

THOMAS BURROW OF LANCASTER (1753-1821)

Like many merchants, Thomas was a younger son of a local farmer. During the early nineteenth century he owned several ships: *Abram*, *Neptune*, *Flora*, *William Ashton*, *Eliza*, *Sterling*, *Lancaster* and *Thomas Burrow*. All sailed to the Virgin Islands. He and his business partner Thomas Mason built the first cotton mill at White Cross in Lancaster in 1802.



Thomas Burrow’s signature and seal, 1815 (reproduced by permission of Lancashire Archives)

JOHN GRAVILL OF HULL (1802-1866)

John Gravill was one of the most respected of Hull’s whaling masters. Between 1849 and 1853 he was master of *Abram*, and in 1849 and 1850 he was commissioned by Lady Jane Franklin to search for her husband. Gravill became master of the Hull whaling ship *Diana*, which in 1865 became trapped in the ice and was unable to return to Hull until April 1866. Gravill had already died from asthma, dropsy and exhaustion on Boxing Day 1865. Subsequently the seven crew members who were free of the symptoms of scurvy sailed her back across the Atlantic to Hull. Gravill’s funeral in Hull was attended by thousands of mourners.

A studio portrait of John Gravill (Maritime Museum: Hull Museums)



ALEXANDER HORN OF COCKENZIE (1819-1857)

Dr Margaret Bainbridge (1924-2016) of Lancaster and Barrow discovered that her great-great grandfather, Alexander Horn (1819-1857) was spectioneer (the man responsible for flensing that is, stripping skin and blubber from the whales) on *Abram* in 1857.

Alexander was already a skilled Kirkcaldy whaler. In 1857 he was accompanied by his uncle William as boatswain.

Alexander fell ill on the outward voyage and, despite the best efforts of the eighteen-year-old surgeon Malcolm Graham, died from ‘acute bronchitis’ on 25 April. He was buried at sea on the following day in the mid-Atlantic, south of Iceland.

The master, Alexander Hay, recorded the contents of Alexander’s sea chest after his death. It included enough clothes for a voyage of eight months and to keep him warm in the Arctic:

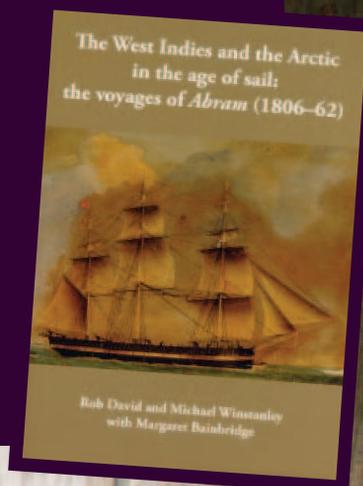
13 shirts	3 caps	3 handkerchiefs	6 pairs of drawers	3 pairs of shoes	2 pairs of stockings
2 jackets	4 vests	5 pairs of mitts	4 pairs of trousers	2 frocks	bedding

Margaret Bainbridge’s initial research into *Abram* inspired both this exhibition and a full-length book: *The West Indies and the Arctic in the Age of Sail: the Voyages of Abram (1806-1862)* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, 2013)

A sailor’s sea chest (courtesy Rebecca Marr; copyright Stromness Museum)



Margaret Bainbridge in 1988 (from the estate of Margaret Bainbridge)



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