

Research Report

Joseph Need Walker, the Mansion House at Calderstones and Slavery

Summary

After significant research we have found no evidence directly linking Joseph Need Walker (1790-1865) - for whom the Mansion House was built in 1828 - to slavery or the slave trade.

However, metals, including brass, iron and lead, all of which the Walker family manufactured, were central to the operation of the trade in enslaved Africans as goods that were used to exchange for people in West Africa. Lead shot, guns and cannon were essentials on board slave ships to protect from attack by enemy privateers and insurrections by the enslaved. Walker cannons and shot were exported throughout the British Empire and can still be found today on many of the Caribbean Islands where they would have been used to prevent attack from Britain's enemies during the almost constant wars with the French during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Arms were also vital for the putting down of rebellions by the enslaved that took place on plantations throughout the period of slavery in the British colonies.

In addition, by the 1810s some evidence exists that indicates that at least one member of the family firm was in business with one of Britain's most notable slave plantation owners, James Blair MP.

Literature Review

There is very little published material on The Walker Family in general and Joseph Need Walker in particular. In fact, even though the Walkers were one of the most important metal manufacturers in the country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there has not been a comprehensive monograph published on the family. The two most significant works that make reference to the family business are:

The Walker Family: Iron Founders and Lead Manufacturers 1741-1893.
John, A H (ed), 1951.

Lead Manufacturing in Britain: A History. Rowe, D.J. 1983

Research

The lack of secondary information available on the family has meant that most of our research has focused on primary sources. This has included examining newspapers, street directories, wills, letters and parish records. Most of our investigation has been done using internet resources, but as a group we visited the archives at Liverpool Record Offices, the Merseyside Maritime Museum and individual volunteers made visits to the Cheshire and Rotherham Archives on our behalf. All in all, including archive visits, we conducted our research over 14 sessions. Much of the source material we consulted that was relevant to our research has been archived in a Google Drive file and can be drawn upon for further investigation.

Findings

Joseph Need Walker was the grandson of Samuel Walker (1715-1782) a teacher and land surveyor living near Sheffield in Yorkshire. The Walker family also owned a farm where they began experimenting with iron production in 1741. By 1746 Samuel had ceased teaching and moved with two of his brothers to Masbrough, near Rotherham, in order to develop their interests in the iron business. By the 1780s The Walker Iron Works had become one of the largest companies in Northern England making various steel, iron and lead goods. Their wares varied, from those used in domestic settings like kettles, irons and paint, to those used by the military. The Walkers were particularly known for manufacturing cannon and secured a contract from the government to supply them to the British during the American Revolutionary War, and the wars against France. Between 1774 and 1815 they made 13,000 tons of cannon, including 80 of the 105 cannon on board HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar. When Samuel died in 1782 his four sons continued the business, growing it further.

By the late 1790s the family had expanded their business into the north west. In 1799 they had begun building a works at Chester, probably due to its proximity to and historic connection with North Wales through the lead trade, for which the city was still an important centre. The famous Chester Shot Tower that still stands was built by the Walkers. Rowe has highlighted that the firm leased a warehouse and office in Liverpool, circa 1801, to provide a convenient base for the export trade and coastal shipping for the goods being produced at their works in Chester. The 1807 Gore's Liverpool Street Directory is the earliest edition that survives showing the Walkers with an office in the town, occupying a building in Bold Street. 1801 would be the year Joseph Walker (1752-1801) died, leaving his interests in the business to his son, Joseph Need Walker, who was still a young boy at his father's passing and would go on to become the largest single shareholder in the lead interests of the business during his lifetime.

Although our focus was on the paternal side of Joseph Need Walker's family his maternal grandfather, Samuel Need (1718-1781), was a partner in the business of Richard Arkwright and Jedidiah Strutt, building three water powered cotton mills. The

significant innovations in textile production that the partners made transformed the British fabric industry and made cotton 'the fibre of the industrial revolution', but this transformation was reliant on slavery for the availability of cheap raw cotton. Need and his partners would become very wealthy through their investments. Samuel left £5000 a significant amount in the eighteenth century to his daughter Elizabeth who went on to marry Joseph Walker, the father of Joseph Need Walker. English Heritage intend to modify Arkwright's blue plaque to acknowledge his links to the slave economy.

None of this suggests that the Walkers as a family were supportive of the system of slavery, morally or politically. On the contrary, there is evidence that Joseph Need Walker's father and his three brothers were supportive of the abolition of the slave trade. All four appear as subscribers to the publication of the second edition of Olaudah Equiano's, *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, published in 1793. Equiano was one of Britain's most notable campaigners for the abolition of the slave trade and the Walkers subscription contributed to the continued publication of his autobiography, considered to be one of the most important texts in the campaign to end the slave trade.

Joseph Need Walker's father was a friend of William Wilberforce, correspondence between them beginning in 1788 still exists, with some of the letters referring to the slave trade and Wilberforce attempts to have it abolished. Unfortunately, the letters that Joseph wrote in response have not been found, if they still exist, but the dating of the letters would indicate that Joseph took an early interest in the campaign to abolish the slave trade.

One of Joseph Need Walker's cousins and a shareholder in the business, Joshua Walker (1786-1862), was a supporter of James Blair, a slave plantation owner and pro-slavery MP who shared business interests in banking and lead production, which could indicate that by the 1810's the business as a whole had investors who were involved in slavery.

Due to paucity of evidence of the specific involvement of Blair in the business this has been impossible to verify. We do know that in 1820 Blair had entered parliament for the rotten borough of Aldeburgh that had been bought by Joshua and Joseph Need Walker's cousin, Samuel (1779-1851), in 1818 for £39000. Blair used his position in parliament to argue against the abolition of slavery. Joshua was also an MP and took a similar stance as his business partner. Although he came from a Methodist family, on 11 June 1824, he voted against condemning the indictment in Demerara for inciting a slave insurrection of the Methodist missionary, John Smith.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence we have been able to consult we have not found a direct link between Joseph Need Walker and slavery. However, the nature of the family business and their status as a major company producing metal goods during the period would indicate that the products the Walkers manufactured would have found their way into the slave economy prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and

slavery itself in 1834. The arms they produced were undoubtedly used to enforce and protect the slave system in Britain's Caribbean colonies, but they would obviously have had no control over how their cannons were used, and by whom, once they had sold them.

These are the most significant connections we have found between Joseph Need Walker's family and slavery. Further research in the future and access to the significant archive materials we were unable to consult in Newcastle-upon-Tyne may shed further light on the Walkers business interests and the connections to slavery.