

# PRESS RELEASE

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## CANALS AND TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY: REVIEW PUBLISHED BY WATERWAYS CHARITY

An initial review of academic literature about canals and transatlantic slavery has been published by waterways and wellbeing charity the Canal & River Trust.

Some aspects of the canals' history remain hidden or have never been researched and explored with wider audiences. It is known that some people who made their wealth through the slave trade invested those profits in canal building, and some canals were built specifically to carry goods derived from the exploitation of slaves – tobacco, cotton and sugar for example. The Black Lives Matter movement has spurred on the Trust to start exploring these issues and make them more widely known.

In spring 2020, the Trust commissioned Dr Jodie Matthews, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield, to undertake the review. Dr Matthews' research interest and expertise in the canals and their story has helped her to contextualise the work of the Trust, especially its Museums, in wider academic debates and fields of study.

Graham Boxer, head of collections and archives at Canal & River Trust, said: "Museums and heritage organisations are well aware that the narratives they present might exclude potential audiences and 'hide' histories that many people today identify with. The series of events that have made up the Black Lives Matter movement have led to many organisations re-evaluating the stories they tell.

"We recognise that our National Waterways Museum Collection and Archives are not representative of all those whose lives that have been touched by the canals and that there are important stories waiting to be uncovered and made known. As custodian of the waterways, and despite ongoing work with communities, we have lacked specific in-depth knowledge about the linkages between canal history and the transatlantic slave trade.

"We welcome the important conversations taking place about Black British history, and how best to recognise the legacy of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. We are pleased to publish this initial review and are working on how to move forward from this starting point."

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More information, and the full review, can be found here: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canal-history/canals-and-transatlantic-slavery>.

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**Notes to editors**

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across Wales and England. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)