

Cotton and transatlantic slavery



Study for Slave Hold,
© The estate of Sir Jacob Epstein



Traite des Nègres,
The Whitworth Art Gallery,
The University of Manchester



Slave chain fabric,
Museum of Science & Industry



Mrs Rosa Samuel and
her three daughters,
The Whitworth Art Gallery,
The University of Manchester

No. 2.

COTTON IS KING!



Old England is mighty ; Old England is free ;
She boasts that she ruleth the waves of the sea ;
(But between you and I, that's all fiddle-de-dee;) ;
She cannot, O Cotton ! she cannot rule thee.
Lo ! Manchester's lordling thy greatness shall own,
And yield more to thee than he would to the Throne :
For before thee shall bend his fat marrow-bone,
And deaf be his ear to the live chattel's groan.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1861, by STIMSON & Co., in the Clerk's Office of the United States for the Southern District of New-York.

Union patriotic envelope, 1861

Museum of Science & Industry

This envelope was published in New York in 1861, at the start of the American Civil War. Both the northern anti-slavery **Union** and southern pro-slavery **Confederate** states published illustrated envelopes from the 1850s as political **propaganda** to support their cause. Over 4,100 different envelope designs were produced, with versions published in most of the major cities, especially New York and Boston.

Slavery was a common theme as the northern **Union** states wanted to abolish it and the southern cotton growing **Confederate** states wanted it to continue.

The verse called 'Cotton is King!' mentions Manchester and says:

*Old England is mighty;
Old England is free;*

*She boasts that she **ruleth**
the waves of the sea;*

*(But between you and I,
that's all fiddle-de-dee:)*

*She cannot, O Cotton!
she cannot rule thee.*

*Lo! Manchester's **lordling**
thy greatness shall own,*

*And **yield** more to thee than
he would to the Throne:*

*For before thee shall bend
his fat marrow-bone,*

*And deaf be his ear to the
live **chattel's** groan.*

The words suggest that wealthy English traders valued American cotton extremely highly. The images reinforce the poem. John Bull, the **stereotypical** Briton, is showing respect to a cotton bale whilst kneeling on an enslaved African, showing what was more important to him.



Entrance into Manchester across Water Street.

LONDON PUBLISHED Feb 1833, by A. Ackermann, 96 Strand

The Liverpool and Manchester Railway, 1830

Museum of Science & Industry

The Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened on 15 September 1830, with stations at Liverpool Road, Manchester and Edge Hill. It was the world's first inter-city passenger railway. As well as carrying people, the railway was important for carrying goods.

In December 1830, American cotton grown by enslaved Africans was part of the first **consignment** of goods transported by the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. The need to move large amounts of cotton was a major factor in the development of transport in the north west of England. Canals were the main form of transport in the early 1800s until the expansion of the railway network.

New technology and machinery in the 1700s and 1800s helped **revolutionise** the British cotton industry. As more and more raw cotton was **processed** in the mills in and around Manchester, more Africans were enslaved to work on the **plantations** in the southern states of America.

By 1860 over 88% of the cotton imported into Britain came from the labour of enslaved Africans in America. Slavery was only **abolished** in America in 1865, although it had ended in the 1830s in the British **colonies** in the Caribbean.

You can see the original Liverpool and Manchester Railway train tracks and passenger station at the Museum of Science and Industry, MOSI, in Castlefield, Manchester.



Two cotton cops, 1735, 1885

Gallery Oldham

A cotton cop is a cone with cotton thread or **yarn** spun around it on a **spindle**. These two cotton cops were framed by William Mannock to celebrate the long history of cotton spinning in the north west of England.

Mannock was the owner of Marsland Mill in Oldham, which had over 40,000 **spindles** and employed 400 people. Mannock gave the cotton cops for the opening display of Oldham's Free Library, Museum and Art Gallery in 1885 to reflect the wealth the cotton trade brought to the town.

The two cops were made 150 years apart but both **yarns** are made to the same fineness and from the same raw material, American cotton. In 1735, before large-scale **mechanisation**, spinning was 'put out' and people did the work at home. By 1885, there were hundreds of mills across Lancashire.

The cop on the right was made at Marsland Mill. The older cop on the left was only discovered when an old warehouse in Manchester was redeveloped in 1882.

The early cop is spun from cotton that was picked by enslaved African workers in America. The raw cotton came to England as part of the triangular trade associated with slavery. The 1885 cotton was probably picked by free African Americans who were the **descendants** of enslaved people. Slavery was abolished in America in 1865.

Questions

- 1 How was cotton linked to the transatlantic slave trade?
- 2 How were raw and **manufactured** cotton products transported?
- 3 Why did so many people work in cotton factories around Greater Manchester?
- 4 How important was slave-grown cotton to the north west of England?
- 5 Where does cotton come from today?