



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

City of Wells and Transatlantic Slavery Conference takes place alongside launch of new city trail

Thursday 16th March 2023

Speakers from Britain and the Caribbean came together on Thursday 16 March 2023 at Cedars Hall, Wells, for a thought-provoking and inspiring day, sharing the findings of research focused on Wells and its links to transatlantic slavery.

The conference, which was co-chaired by Jess Witchell, Wells Cathedral Learning Manager and Susann Savidge, Somerset African Caribbean Network, included talks that gave a range of histories and perspectives including contributions from partners and historians from the Caribbean. The in-person event, kindly hosted by Wells Cathedral School, attracted 135 adults and sixth formers, representing a wide range of locations across the country. A hundred people registered to be sent the recorded speeches after the event, including organisations and individuals from across the Atlantic.

Recordings of the talks were made and will be available online from the end of March 2023 via the project's dedicated website www.wellsandtransatlanticslavery.com

The Reverend Dr Carlton Turner, a Theologian from The Queens Foundation, Birmingham, who had previously given online Black Lives Matter talks organised by the Cathedral in 2021, made a welcome return acknowledged by Anne Gell, Acting Dean of Wells Cathedral. The Reverend Dr Turner shared his very personal story that connects him to Wells. (see accompanying image and text) His talk, 'Re-thinking African enslavement', explained how the trauma associated with enslavement, and the race-based ideas that justified it, still affects people both sides of the Atlantic. He said the Anglican Church is implicated in this trauma, and together with others, can help with the healing process.

Anne Gell, Acting Dean of Wells Cathedral thanked all those involved in the Wells and Transatlantic Slavery Project for so much work already done in opening up the subject and helping us to understand the reality of transatlantic slavery, and how its legacy is woven into the fabric of our life here in Wells.

She referred to the statement from the Chapter of Wells Cathedral:

'The research clearly indicates that Wells Cathedral has benefited from slavery-derived wealth from both the slave trade and the enslavement of people in the Caribbean. Chapter is profoundly sorry for the effects of these historic failings and aims to scrutinise and respond to any financial, social, spiritual and other legacies from this time in order that it may do better in the present. Chapter will also look to work with individuals and organisations in the Caribbean, so that these histories may be meaningfully addressed from both sides of the Atlantic.'

Author Stephanie Mathivet explored how Wells has been impacted by the Tudway family, owners of enslaved Africans on the Parham plantations in Antigua from 1679–1944. (see accompanying image and text)

Joy Lawrence OH, an Antiguan historian and poet, created a 20-minute film—featuring one of the project’s partners, the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda—showing the Parham plantations today and explained how the legacy of slavery in Antigua continues.

The conference also marked the launch of the 'Self-guided trail to historic sites linking the City of Wells to British slavery'. The trail includes sites such as Wells Cathedral, The Bishop’s Palace, and Wells & Mendip Museum to name a few, and highlights treasured places and items—paintings, stained-glass windows, and chandeliers—that all have connections to the enslavement of Africans. A QR code from the trail takes you to the website for further information.

Professor James Clark, Professor of History, Exeter University gave a presentation about the cathedral’s links to slavery. Two university research internships were funded though the project, held by final-year undergraduate Tommy Maddinson (now doing an MA at UCL) and master’s student Debbie Manners, who also spoke at the conference. ([see accompanying image](#))

Professor James Clark, said:

“Many historic landmarks in Wells were built or rebuilt with slavery-derived wealth from the plantations in the West Indies, but until now, these have been hidden histories and what this project has done is draw back the curtain on what some might see as challenging territory, telling this story for the first time.”

Renowned actor Paterson Joseph, author of the recent and critically-acclaimed ‘The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho’ recorded a short performance especially for the event, accompanied by pupils from Wells Cathedral School playing Sancho’s music.

The same afternoon, participants took part in a choice of workshops ranging from viewing artefacts in Wells & Mendip museum to a ‘Decolonising Movement’ dance workshop led by

Cleo Lake-Ayih, former Lord Mayor of Bristol & Research Associate, Bristol University. ([see accompanying image](#))

Students from the Blue School went to the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace to learn how to use primary source materials to uncover hidden histories that link Wells both to slavery and the abolition movement. There was also a 'Seeing your city in a new light?' discussion led by the project's mentor, Rob Mitchell, about what the city can do to remember and move forward with this history.

The day closed with a plenary, a libation and a prayer led by Reverend Dr Carlton Turner.

- ENDS –

Accompanying this release are:

Image 1 & 2: The Revd Dr Carlton Turner in Vicars' Close Chapel. Revd Turner studied at Codrington Theological College in Barbados which has a strong connection to Wells Theological College (who adopted the Vicars' Close Chapel). Inside the chapel is a memorial frieze and window to the college's first principle and cathedral canon, the Revd John H Pinder (1874-1868). He had previously been a slave-owner and a chaplain to enslaved people on the Codrington estate, owned by The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts (SPG), a Church of England missionary organisation. Early in his church career, Revd Pinder had publicly defended slavery and the interests of slave-owners.

Image 3: Susann Savidge, Somerset African Caribbean Network; Anne Gell Acting Dean of Wells Cathedral; Alastair Tighe, Head Master of Wells Cathedral School; The Revd Dr Carlton Turner, The Queens Foundation; and Simon Tudway-Quilter. They are standing in front of the copy of the 'Charles Tudway MP' Oil painting by Thomas Gainsborough inside Cedars House (originally built and owned by Charles Tudway, now owned by Wells Cathedral School)

Image 4: The Revd Dr Carlton Turner and Simon Tudway-Quilter in front of the copy of the 'Charles Tudway MP' Oil painting by Thomas Gainsborough inside

Cedars House (originally built and owned by Charles Tudway, now owned by Wells Cathedral School)

Image 5&6: The Revd Dr Carlton Turner, The Queens Foundation; Tommy Maddinson, MA student; and the Rt Revd Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Image 7: Judith Desbonne , Somerset African Caribbean Network member participating in the ‘Decolonising Movement’, A dance and movement workshop led by Cleo Lake-Ayih that used creative tools to start to form movements telling the story of Wells Cathedral’s involvement in enslavement

Image 8: Q & A with the panel members led by Rob Mitchell. (left to right) Cleo Lake-Ayih, former Lord Mayor of Bristol & Research Associate, Bristol University, Stephanie Mathivet, author, Professor James Clark, Exeter University, The Revd Dr Carlton Turner, The Queens Foundation, Debbie Manners MA, Tommy Maddinson graduate student, Rob Mitchell, project mentor.

Image 9: Image of the self-guided trail

NOTES TO EDITORS

The institutions involved so far are Wells Cathedral, Wells Cathedral School, Wells & Mendip Museum, St. Cuthbert’s parish church, The Bishop’s Palace, City Archives, Somerset African Caribbean Network, local historians, the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda and interested individuals including members of the Tudway family. Professor James Clark of the University of Exeter and consultant Rob Mitchell are acting as mentors for the group as well as undertaking aspects of research.

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