
THE WOMEN OF LLANRUMNEY

The historical backdrop

This pack contains information from the exhibition accompanying Sherman Theatre's production *The Women of Llanrumney* in May 2024, as well as a list of further resources.

Colonisation, the control over one territory and its peoples by another, was practiced by several ancient and medieval civilizations. Indeed, there are strong arguments that Wales itself was England's first colony and this remains relevant to the political landscape and debate around national identity today. Wales, like many other regions in Europe, however, has its own links to the expansion of the British Empire and the abhorrent practices on which its growth depended.

COLONISATION IN THE 15TH CENTURY

Prior to the 15th century, Europe was reliant on the *Silk Route* between Asia and the Mediterranean for the transport and exchange of goods. Fuelled by developments in nautical technology and the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453, the continent's most powerful countries sought out new international routes for trade. This led to increased global exploration and in turn exploitation, resulting in one of the darkest periods in human history.

Under the banner of a new age of discovery, naval fleets from Britain, Holland, Spain, France and Portugal voyaged to the Americas and the Caribbean. Here they claimed lands for their sovereign countries, through aggression and tyranny. They extracted any natural resources they found and were in direct competition with one another to expand their territory and influence. Any resistance from indigenous communities was met with extreme violence and subjugation and native populations were often decimated as a result.

To further consolidate and maximise their gains, the Europeans began to traffic people from Africa to work on the land they had seized. Whilst enslavement and the trade of human beings was not an entirely new

concept, it had never before existed on such an industrial scale or been conducted with such brutality and degradation.



The East India Company Leaves Port, painting by Adam Willaerts (1577-1664)



Map of Jamaica 1671



Llanrunney Estate, St Mary's Parish, Jamaica, by James Hakewill circa 1820

Taken from modern day Ghana, Nigeria and Central Africa, many enslaved people in the Caribbean were Akan, Ashanti, Yoruba, Igbo or Ibibio. They were routinely torn from their families and suffered torturous living and working conditions. They were overworked, malnourished, subject to all manner of assaults, often endured beatings and were legally considered the property of their owners. If they survived the enforced passage from their homeland, they had a life expectancy of just 7 years.

Jamaica, a small island of just over 4,000 square miles, located in the Caribbean Sea, south of Cuba and to the west of Haiti, was first occupied by the Spanish in 1510. They had initially hoped to find gold on the island, but when this search proved fruitless, they established plantations to provide food for their ships travelling between Europe and the Americas instead.

During the 16th century and into the early 1800s, it is estimated that as many as 2,000,000 people were transported to Jamaica from West Africa, although tens

of thousands perished on route. Colonisation ultimately transformed the demographic of the island.

Spain remained in control of Jamaica for 150 years and the country's influence can still be seen in the architecture and place names today. The number of long-term Spanish settlers, however, was limited and in 1655 British naval forces took control. During the prolonged transition and ongoing fighting, many of those enslaved by Spanish Planters freed themselves and migrated to the mountains. Known as **The Maroons**, they formed communities and developed their own culture based on their West African roots. The British were never able to recapture the tenacious Maroons, who were granted political autonomy in 1739.

The original motivation for the British in controlling the island was to disrupt Spain's lucrative trade in gold and silver and challenge their supremacy across the region. This led to an increase in piracy, with government sanctioned buccaneers operating alongside mercenaries to

attack Spanish cargo vessels and seize their goods. With the onset of improved relations between Britain and Spain, many privateers turned to land ownership and the exportation of sugar and other crops to generate income. One such privateer-turned-planter was **Sir Henry (Harri) Morgan**, who established the **Llanrumney Plantation**, in St Mary's parish, named after the area where he was born in South Wales in 1635.

Along with landowners and privateers, the Caribbean islands colonised by Britain were also home to indentured servants, many of whom were Irish, Scottish or Welsh. Though treated very harshly, indentured servants only had to labour for a fixed period of time. This might be in exchange for their passage, or the result of a conviction for a petty offence, such as

vagrancy. Once they had completed their indenture however, they could live without restrictions and weren't subjected to the same dehumanising treatment as enslaved people from Africa who had minimal hope of ever being free.



Llanrumney Hall, Cardiff, South Wales 1891



The Maroons in Ambush On The Dromilly Estate in The Parish of Trelawney, Jamaica, 1795. An aquatint, from an 1810 painting by F.J. Bourgoïn

SIR HENRY (HARRI) MORGAN



Sir Henry Morgan

Although little is known about his early life and arrival in the Caribbean, Henry Morgan was an accomplished sea captain who rose to prominence through a series of successful attacks on Spanish held cities, in the so-called 'New World'. His activities, throughout the 1660s, were permitted by way of a *Letter of Marque* issued by the British Governor of Jamaica, Sir Thomas Modyford. This license only authorised maritime plundering, but Morgan was able to justify numerous raids on terrestrial targets, including ports and fortifications, due to the political tensions between Spain and England. He was considered a bold military tactician, and his exploits weakened the position of Britain's imperial foes, brought prosperity to the crown and bolstered the fledgling economy in Jamaica. They also made him a personally wealthy man, alongside Modyford, who took a substantial cut of any profits returned by Morgan to his base at Port Royal.

Morgan fell temporarily out of favour with the authorities when his most famous assault, on the city of Panama, occurred after the signing of a treaty between Spain and England. To appease the former, Morgan was arrested and returned to Britain to stand trial for the crime of piracy. When the fragile Anglo Spanish peace collapsed a few years later however, Morgan, who hadn't been tried, was instead knighted by King Charles II and invited to return to Jamaica as Lieutenant Governor, where he remained until his death in 1668.

Morgan was survived by his wife, Mary Elizabeth Morgan, a cousin who he married in 1666. The couple had no children and consequently his estate, comprising of three plantations, passed to his nephews following her death. Morgan's considerable assets were valued at £5263.06, around £1,400,000 today and amongst the 'property' inherited by his relatives were 131 enslaved people: 64 men, 67 women and 33 children who made up 36% of his 'fortune'.

PRESENT DAY JAMAICA



Barry Street Graffiti, Kingston, Jamaica, photographed by Karol Kozlowski

On 6 August 1962, after 300 years of British colonisation, Jamaica became an independent nation. Whilst most Jamaicans are of African descent, the population also includes some Europeans and citizens with Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern heritage, whose ancestors arrived as indentured labour, or were fleeing political and religious persecution around the world.

English remains the official language of the country, but Patois is most widely spoken. This lyrical creole dialect uses a lot of English vocabulary, but is distinctly different in structure, grammar and pronunciation. **Patois** blends words and phrases from West African languages, with Spanish, French and Portuguese and incorporates words from the Arawak language. This was spoken by the

indigenous population of Taino Indians, who lived peacefully on the land for 900 years, prior to the arrival of the Spanish in 1510. *Hammock, hurricane, tobacco, barbeque* and *canoe* are all Arawak words.

Modern Jamaica's music, food, religions and rituals are heavily influenced by Africa but also reflect the many different cultures and nationalities that have co-existed on the island for centuries. The national motto '*Out of many, one people*', highlights how a unique identity has emerged from a torrid history, which finally saw rebellion and resistance triumph. The legacy of colonialism, colourism, racial hierarchy, and social injustice, however, still presents many challenges as Jamaica strives to forge a new way forward as a progressive island nation.

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Produced by the Creative Engagement Department, Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, May 2024 to support the production of the *The Women of Llanrumney* by Azuka Oforika.

With thanks to Abu-Bakr Madden Al-Shabazz and Azuka Oforika for their curatorial input.

THE WOMEN OF LLANRUMNEY FURTHER READING LIST

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