

# Ae Fond Kiss, and Then We Sever!

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Coca-Cola Enterprises' limited edition iconic 'Coke' glass bottle designed for the Homecoming Scotland campaign: "The design aims to combine the tradition and heritage of a cultural icon with the contemporary nature of a modern brand." The launch of the Homecoming bottle is expected to drive demand for the 'Coke' brand. Scotland has been one of the few countries in which a domestic brand, Irn-Bru, outsold the US product.

The term *diaspora*<sup>1</sup> refers to any movement of people from their homeland to another country, where they share a common ethnic identity or community. The word has its provenance in Greek, meaning, literally, a scattering or sowing of seeds. Perhaps the greatest of all Scottish exports has been its sons and daughters. Their legacy has left an indelible mark across the globe.

Of course, like many nations, there is a selective view of Scotland's Diaspora. There are numerous tales of men, women and children being transported from these shores as indentured servants due to economic conditions, Covenanters due to religion, for political reasons like the Jacobites, or simply being forced from the land in the Highland Clearances. The story of Scots forcibly transported to foreign shores is maintained in the national psyche through popular literature.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, there are several well-known tales of more fortunate and heroic Scots venturing abroad. It could be argued that Scots seem to revel in either "victim or hero" history. But why is this?

The popular history of the nation is one of subjection and tyrannical rule by its larger neighbour, England. The "greatest of all heroes", William Wallace, has long been lionised as dying in a vain attempt to free Scotland from under the English yoke. After the Incorporating Union of 1707 with England, it has been almost casually accepted that Scotland was the victim of colonial rule. Yet the Union undoubtedly opened up a dazzling array of riches in the plantations of New World and allowed Scots to become collaborators in Empire.

Until fairly recently, a selective view has been underpinned by lack of systematic academic examination. However, historians such as Prof. Tom Devine, Dr. Eric Graham and Dr. Stuart Nisbet are now actively examining the role of Scots in Empire as never before. There are many grey areas and unpalatable truths omitted from general historical texts and subsequently from popular mindset and culture, whilst the noble glories and popular tragedies in Scotland's past are celebrated with great vigour. This is particularly evident in modern tourist initiatives, and it could be argued that Scottish history is defined by a split personality. For every aspect of the Dr. Jekyll version, there is a reprehensible Mr. Hyde interpretation of events waiting to be told.

The role of Scots in slavery remains a contentious issue. However, it is undeniable that the nation was historically dependent on trade with North America and the West Indies. This was enabled by the infamous Triangular Trade which involved three stages of commodity transportation. The main commodity was human life transported via ships on Middle Passage from the West coast of Africa to near certain death in the New World. The captured Africans were subjected to the most lethal form of slavery in the plantations. Chattel slavery, an English concept, was established in Barbados in 1661 and many versions and slave codes rooted in this most lethal form of slavery were subsequently adopted across the colonies. The term *chattel* has its provenance in French and means literally *property*. That is indeed what the slaves became. They had no human or legal rights and murder as a form of punishment was prescribed.<sup>3</sup>

Scotland had comparatively low levels of direct involvement in the maritime trade in slaves from Africa to the New World. From 1706 until 1766 there are 31 recorded slave voyages from Scotland. Of these, 19 left from Glasgow's satellite ports at

Greenock and Port Glasgow. The direct voyages from Scotland are estimated to have carried around 4,000 to 5,000 souls into chattel slavery. Exact quantification, however, is impossible; the Custom Records from Port Glasgow and Greenock are incomplete for the crucial years between 1742 and 1830. Scotland's limited direct involvement, however, is attested to by other circumstantial evidence<sup>4</sup>, and the recorded 31 voyages over a 60 year period is atypical when compared with the prominent slave ports in England; from 1790 until 1799 the prolific port of Liverpool cleared 1011 slave voyages. It is further evidenced by considering the total estimated number of slaves transported on direct voyages from Glasgow with the total slaves exported by British ships from Africa; circa 1.5 million souls in the period 1710 until 1769.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there are several recorded slave traders from Glasgow, such as the infamous Richard Oswald of Auchincruive who owned a slave trading fort at Bance Island off the coast of Sierra Leone in West Africa from 1748 until 1784.

This lack of direct involvement in the maritime trade in slaves has made it all too easy to view England as the guilty nation while depreciating the economic benefit to Scotland from slavery. Local merchants did not dominate in the maritime trade in slaves but later excelled at the trade in plantation grown produce. At times, Scotland traded more than all English ports together – and the majority arrived and departed from Glasgow's ports.<sup>6</sup>

Glasgow was the premier Scottish trading port and the city's merchants monopolised the produce grown by slaves, in particular tobacco. From 1740 to 1790, Glasgow was the leading *entrepôt* of tobacco in the world. Indeed, this period is known as the city's Golden Age.<sup>7</sup> The incoming wealth initiated vast social change as an *arriviste aristocracy*, the Tobacco Lords, became Scotland's richest men. They built magnificent townhouses in testament to their status. Some examples, such as the Cunninghame Mansion, now the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), remain intact today. The early townhouses built by extravagant slave traders were designed in a Palladian style which came to define Glasgow's architecture. The grandiose locations, which placed the townhouse at the end of an avenue, set a *point de vue* urban grid which is clearly identifiable in the Merchant City area today. The city still has Virginia Street as an urban reminder of the importance of the tobacco trade.

The merchants bought surrounding estates and embarked on a process of Improvement. Some historians suggest that the beginnings of the agricultural revolution in the West of Scotland can be identified to this period. The tobacco trade also promoted the growth of a complex urban economy in Glasgow. There is an ongoing debate about the impact of slavery-tainted wealth and how far this provided the impetus for the Industrial Revolution. In any case, Scotland was one of the poorest countries in Western Europe in the 1690s, and by 1850 was on the way to becoming one of the leading industrialised nations in the world. Historians, and city boosters alike<sup>8</sup>, have been quick to recognise the entrepreneurial attributes of the Tobacco Lords, yet at the same time have neglected to address the reality that this trade was built almost exclusively on black chattel slave labour.

The colonial merchants also traded in sugar, which was similarly dependent on black chattel slavery. This was facilitated by trading



Homecoming Scotland 2009 Events Guide graphic:  
 FAR LEFT:  
 First Minister Alex Salmond holds the original version of the graphic.  
 ABOVE LEFT:  
 detail of the original version.  
 BELOW LEFT:  
 detail of the amended version

relationships which from the 1640s linked Glasgow and the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the colonial merchants in the city were dependent on sugar for a longer period than tobacco, although this was not quite as lucrative. There were several sugar houses built in Glasgow from 1667 onwards, and the trade continued after slavery was abolished in 1838. West Indian merchants such as James Ewing accrued vast fortunes which seeped into Glasgow. There are still many indications in the city today of the long connection with chattel slavery for those who care to look. It should be noted that many distinguished scholars, part of the Scottish Enlightenment, played a key role in the abolition of the slave trade. Later, many local campaigners also had a direct role in the abolition of slavery in the British colonies and the Campaign for Universal Emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

It is indisputable that the merchants in Scotland were involved in colonial trade. Clearly, there is no absence of evidence. But there is an absence of acknowledgement. The nature of the trading relationship has allowed a myth of detachment from the brutal realities of chattel slavery to evolve. It could be argued that there is a distinctive “*It wisnae us*” mindset in modern Scotland. This is particularly evident in the role of Scots in the colonies in the New World. Indeed, there is a lack of contemporary acceptance of the extensive role as plantation owners and the legacy of these sojourners.

Scotland had legal access to English colonial markets after 1707. India, however, remained the monopoly of the English East India Company until 1801. Whilst a large number of Scots served with the Company via the patronage system, there was no mass invasion of the Glasgow merchant fraternity that occurred in the Americas. The loss of the American colonies in 1775 narrowed the focus of their activity to the West Indies and British hegemony was established by 1815.

Sugar was a mainstay of the Scottish economy for over 200 years. This promoted long term trading relationships and a huge return of wealth, principally to Glasgow. There was a Scots plantation grab in Jamaica and St. Kitts after 1711, and from 1763 in Dominica, St. Vincent, Grenada, Guyana, Antigua, and Trinidad and Tobago. This facilitated the emigration of up to 20,000 sojourners in search of their fortune in the period 1750 to 1800.<sup>11</sup> These were typically young men in their twenties who travelled to the slave islands. This added to already established communities who had settled there as exiles and indentured labourers. Scots adopted a unique role in the plantations as doctors, plantation owners, lawyers, merchants... and slave traders and overseers. Indeed, the greatest of all Scottish egalitarians, Robert Burns was on the way to become, in his words, “a poor negro driver” in 1786 before unexpected earnings from his poetry intervened. It seems his libertarian sentiments would have been forgotten in order to pursue the proceeds of slavery in a position that Scots dominated. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, although a noted *Scottophobe*,

observed in 1812:

“Of the overseers of the slave plantations in the West Indies, three of four are Scotsmen, and the fourth is generally observed to have suspicious cheek bones: and on the American Continent the Whippers-in or Neger-Bishops are either Scotchmen or the Americanised Descendants of Scotchmen.”

Scots sojourners were involved at the leading heights of the management of the plantations and became established amongst the ruling elite. The premier destination was Jamaica, the leading producer of sugar in the Caribbean. One commentator, Edward Long, estimated that in Jamaica in 1774 around one third of the white population were Scottish or of Scottish descent. There are many documented examples of Glaswegians owning plantations. Alexander Houston and Co. was the largest sugar house in Scotland, although they were declared bankrupt in 1800 in the worst financial disaster in the history of the British slave trade.<sup>12</sup> James Ewing, the Lord Provost and first MP for Glasgow in 1832, owned the Caymanas slave plantation, the largest in Jamaica.

Scottish vested interests in the Caribbean were protected in the British Parliament by Henry Dundas, known as “the uncrowned King of Scotland.” As the MP for Midlothian, he introduced the cynical concept of “gradual abolition” which ensured British slavery continued for 31 more years after the slave trade was abolished in 1807. The role of Scots in the Caribbean is indisputable and there was a pervading Caledonian influence in Jamaica. How does this resonate today?

Scots originally surveyed Jamaica and set the boundaries of the slave plantations. To this day, this legacy resonates in place names such as Glasgow, Hampden, Argyle, Glen Islay, Dundee, Fort William, Montrose, Dumbarton and St. Andrews. Of the 173 place names in Greater Kingston a quarter can be found in Scotland or are based on Scottish family names; for example, place names such as Hamilton Gardens, Sterling Castle, Gordon Town and Elgin Street.

Many of the Scots emigrants in the 18th century were temporary sojourners. However, there are many examples of Scottish men having children with their slaves. The husband of one of Robert Burns’ mistresses chose to remain in Jamaica on his plantation with his “ebony women and mahogany children”. Many Jamaicans are therefore directly descended from Scots and this is reflected in surnames. Former slaves also adopted the surnames of plantation owners after Emancipation in 1838. Scottish surnames are prominent across the Caribbean and in particular Jamaica. Common Scots-Jamaican names include Campbell, Douglas, Reid, McFarlane, McKenzie, MacDonald, Grant and Gordon. Despite all this, the descendants of Scots in Jamaica have been termed “the Forgotten Diaspora”<sup>13</sup> by Scots-Jamaican, Prof. Geoff Palmer at Heriot-Watt University. Indeed, this amnesia is directly played

out this year in *Homecoming Scotland 2009*, a “year-long celebration of Scotland’s culture and heritage” managed by *Event Scotland* in partnership with *Visit Scotland*, funded by the Scottish Government and part financed by the European Union.

This new initiative to develop the Diaspora Market, via a £3 million programme and £2 million of marketing, encourages “Scotland’s global family to come home” to participate in festivities, celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, and to revel in the achievements of Scots emigrants. There is no doubt, *Homecoming* is a strategic vehicle for economic development and profile raising, and for “attracting high quality talent to Scotland”.

The marketing of *Homecoming*, however, has been firmly directed towards the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>14</sup> In the ‘Plan your trip’ section on the official website the only countries highlighted are in North America, Australia and Europe.<sup>15</sup> There is no mention of the Caribbean islands at all.

Scottish National Party (SNP) Members of the Scottish Parliament are currently on a drive to win international friends by twinning towns. Again, the focus is firmly on North America, New Zealand and Australia, with California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger encouraging co-operation with California in Falkirk.<sup>16</sup> However, it begs the question why the premier Atlantic trading port of Glasgow in Scotland should not have been a priority to develop co-operative relationships with the modern New World? Indeed, Glasgow in Jamaica would seem appropriate given the historic links. This oversight seems strange considering the sugar trade was the mainstay of the city’s development for almost 200 years; Jamaica Street and Kingston Bridge in Glasgow, and the location in Jamaica named by Scots, all point towards these connections. However, place names are not the only aspect that has been overlooked.

Prof. Geoff Palmer has stressed that no-one from Jamaica has been officially invited to any festivities although many view themselves as part of the global Scots Diaspora. Of course, if there is not a full acceptance of the role of Scots in the Caribbean, then how can there be full acceptance of the human legacy? Indeed, it could be argued that the *Homecoming* initiative had no option but to exclude the Scots Diaspora in the Caribbean considering the denial surrounding Scots involvement in slavery. If the Caribbean Diaspora were included it would have represented a sharp challenge to the dominant national mindset.

The selective amnesia is nothing new but the cultural segregation at its heart is now supported by official policy. There has been a clear lack of will in government circles to accept the more inglorious aspects of Scotland’s past. The Scottish Executive produced a booklet in 2006-07 that commemorated the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807. The booklet was intended to illustrate a history of the Scottish role in slavery. However, much like the view to who constituted the

*Homecoming* Diaspora, this had a narrow focus. The two historians on the project, amongst the leading authorities in Scotland, were dismissed after discussions about the booklet's content and style. One, the Scots abolitionist historian Rev. Dr. Iain Whyte, stated to the media at the time:

"In my view, they wanted a particular slant that was not historical. I felt that they wanted certain stories that weren't possible to produce, to change the text in certain ways. I wasn't prepared to do that. The government always has a certain agenda and they felt that what we were producing wasn't what they wanted."<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the two historians suggested that the booklet should illustrate the deep level of Scots complicity in the slave plantations. Both recommended that there should be a follow up study to examine the unique Scottish role. However, the booklet's government editors were resistant to the notion as, they affirmed unironically, the general population in Scotland was unaware of this involvement. Subsequently, the editors of the booklet made 188 changes to the research, which minimised and softened the role of Scots perpetrators. These revisions were not, of course, consistent with the professional integrity of the two academics. After some debate the research was shelved. The Scottish Executive eventually produced an official booklet that contained a more palatable, watered down version of the role of Scots. Whilst it was a Labour government who commissioned and censored the research, it is quite clear there has been scant change with the Diaspora focus of *Homecoming*.

Amnesia and 'whitewashing' is further illustrated by the continued lack of acknowledgement of Scottish involvement in slavery within the school curriculum. This is in spite of the establishment of the Scottish Centre for Diaspora Studies at Edinburgh University under the leadership of Scotland's prominent historian, Prof. Tom Devine, who has been lumped in with "British unionists" by some in the SNP due to his criticism of the "Burns Supper" school of Scottish history.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, the role of Scottish perpetrators in the colonies doesn't sit nicely with the notion of a subjugated province.

History can confront its audience with the unpalatable, but it can also teach lessons from the past. This unpalatable aspect of Scottish history

has implications for the next generation. Indeed, an inclusive history of Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, could aid the process of acceptance in future. But to mitigate the Scottish role in slavery by suggesting it was atypical of the actions of the time does not fit with the continued attempts at obscuring this past. This selective view can be neatly summarised in a *Homecoming* promotional graphic which caused some controversy recently. The compound image is of a large group of people seen celebrating *Homecoming*, with not one non-white person in the assemblage. Six months later, in an updated design to reflect "the diversity in modern Scotland"<sup>19</sup>, an Asian man was airbrushed in, taking up the position of reading Robert Burns' poetry. What this cynical tokenism states loud and clear, to anyone who cares to listen, is that non-white ethnic minorities are historical empty vessels that await assimilation on Scottish terms. This cynicism has the potential to divide the nation and the Diaspora.<sup>20</sup>

Does the *Homecoming* initiative have implications for race relations in modern Scotland? Considering the sensitivities of the issues, should a systematic Race Equality Impact Assessment have been undertaken prior to its launch?<sup>21</sup> As yet, there appears to be no version publicly available. Considering the scale of the *Homecoming* initiative to develop the economy and provide support to businesses<sup>22</sup>, surely an assessment must have been undertaken in order to ascertain its impact on contemporary society?

How damaging – or beneficial – is this loss of memory to Scotland? On the surface, *Homecoming Scotland 2009* is a tourist initiative right out of the "Burns Supper" school of Scottish history designed to encourage increased visitors and spending. According to the Scottish Government, an 8:1 return on core spending is projected, purporting a minimum income of £40 million to Scotland, though business representatives have questioned the viability of the targeted overseas markets.<sup>23</sup> It is also clear the *Homecoming* initiative represents the beginnings of an aggressive policy to cultivate business networks with a wealthy Scots Diaspora. Recent research commissioned by the Scottish Government, 'The Scottish Diaspora and Diaspora Strategy: Insights and Lessons from Ireland', points to an impending Scots policy which transcends the previous boundaries between culture and commerce. It is very clear that Scottish politicians have scant regard for any such safeguards and think that culture should serve commerce at every possible opportunity. Significantly, the authors highlight the urgency in defining the Scots Diaspora as one which should be as wide ranging as possible:

"There is merit in widening the definition of Diaspora to include as many constituencies who might be prepared to play for 'Team Scotland' as possible."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the research highlights the commercially defined scope of the Scots Diaspora at present. The economic motive behind Team Scotland is made explicit by a strategy which says, "[...] the wider the net is cast the richer the contributions harnessed will be."<sup>25</sup>

According to the authors, the Scots Diaspora strategy must be both cultural and economic, but at the same time there should be an open view of exactly who the Diaspora consists of. With *Homecoming* we are instead seeing a programme that disguises the cultural exclusion of some through the assimilation of others. This is not simply a matter of forgetting the real life of Robert Burns or airbrushing in the odd 'token other' in order to mask an obviously exclusive invitation. There is an even deeper issue with the mutilation of Scottish history and culture – whether by omission or commission – to suit a commercial agenda. *Homecoming* is a unique national event with an international focus. Given the link with Burns and slavery, this year would have been a perfect opportunity to publicly reconcile ourselves with our real history. Instead, the Scottish Government has severed itself from the complexity of the nation's past and shown how it is keen to adapt to a romantic Disney-like charade based upon the denial of historical evidence. For a country which has a long imperial past, a peculiarly white vision has been authorised and publicised.

## Notes

1. For a definition of *diaspora* "that takes into account current political environments and that encompasses all peoples who find themselves in diasporic situations", please see: 'Redefining "diaspora": the challenge of connection and inclusion' Berns-McGown, Rima, *International Journal*, December 2007. <http://www.articlearchives.com/international-relations/national-security/1874735-1.html>
2. For example, Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (1886); John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (1969).
3. Asante, M.K., 'The ideological origins of chattel slavery in the British world'. Slavery Remembrance Day memorial lecture (2007).
4. Duffil, M., 'The Africa trade from the Ports of Scotland, 1706–66'. *Slavery & Abolition*. 25 (3) 2004 (pp105-106).
5. Richardson, D., 'The British Empire and The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1660-1807, *The Oxford History of The British Empire. Vol. 2: The Eighteenth Century*, (p442).
6. Devine, T.M., *Scotland's Empire 1680-1815*, (p140).
7. Devine, T.M., *The Tobacco Lords: A Study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities, 1740-1790*, (John Donald, 1975).
8. "...the Merchant City is Glasgow's cultural quarter. Home to the former warehouses of the 'Tobacco Lords' - the 18th century entrepreneurs who built Glasgow's wealth through international trade - the Merchant City has been transformed into a hip assortment of designers shops, bars, galleries and venues which perfectly compliments Glasgow's cosmopolitan city centre." Experience Glasgow's Merchant City Festival, 13 September 2007, [Merchantcityfestival.com](http://www.merchantcityfestival.com) It is salient to contrast this official approach with that taken by Liverpool: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/slavery/europe/liverpool.aspx>
9. Graham, E.J., *A Maritime History of Scotland*, (Scotland, 2002, p37).
10. Whyte, I., *Scotland and The Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838*, (Edinburgh, 2007).
11. Devine, T.M., *Scotland's Empire 1680-1815*, (London, 2004, p231).
12. Thomas, H., *The Slave Trade*, (1997)
13. Available: <http://www.scotland.org/about/history-tradition-and-roots/features/culture/the-forgotten-diaspora.html> (Last Accessed 16.5.09)
14. Homecoming Marketing Budget, available: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/pqa/wa-09/wa0311.htm> (Last Accessed 15.6.09)
15. Available: <http://www.homecomingscotland2009.com/plan-your-scotland-trip/default.html> (Last Accessed: 5.5.2009)
16. Available: <http://www.snp.org/node/14969> (Last Accessed: 5.5.09)
17. Available: [http://www.sundayherald.com/news/heraldnews/display.var.1284345.0.executive\\_slave\\_trade\\_booklet\\_sparks\\_criticism\\_from\\_antiracism\\_group.php](http://www.sundayherald.com/news/heraldnews/display.var.1284345.0.executive_slave_trade_booklet_sparks_criticism_from_antiracism_group.php) (Last Accessed: 17.5.09)
18. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/nov/25/centre-study-scottish-diaspora-controversy> (Last Accessed: 16.5.09)
19. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/nov/25/centre-study-scottish-diaspora-controversy> (Last Accessed: 16.5.2009)
20. Available: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article5372681.ece> (Last Accessed: 5.5.09)
21. "Equality impact assessment (EQIA) is all about considering how your policy (by policy we mean activities, functions, strategies, programmes, and services or processes) may impact, either positively or negatively, on different sectors of the population in different ways." Available: <http://openscotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1032/0054791.pdf> (Last Accessed: 15.6.09)
22. [http://www.homecomingscotland2009.com/media-centre/forbes\\_forum\\_release.html](http://www.homecomingscotland2009.com/media-centre/forbes_forum_release.html)
23. Jim Mather, Scottish Parliament, Written Answers, Friday 30 January 2009. Available: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/spwans/?id=2009-01-30.S3W-19785.h> (Last Accessed: 15.6.09) 'European and External Relations Committee Official Report 17 March 2009', Col 1059, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/europe/or-09/eu09-0502.htm> (Last Accessed: 15.6.09)
24. Ancien, D., Boyle, M. and Kitchin, R., 'The Scottish Diaspora and Diaspora Strategy: Insights and Lessons from Ireland' (p2). Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/28141101/0> (Last Accessed: 16.5.09)
25. Ancien, D., Boyle, M. and Kitchin, R., 'The Scottish Diaspora and Diaspora Strategy: Insights and Lessons from Ireland' (p15) Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/28141101/0> (Last Accessed: 16.5.09)

BELOW:  
"First Minister Alex Salmond presents relative Susan McLean from New Zealand with a Homecoming certificate when they met at the Scottish Parliament."  
(Uploaded to Scottish Government's photostream on May 29, 2009 by Scottish Government)  
BOTTOM:  
"The Rowan" by Gerard M Burns, which hangs over the desk of the Scottish First Minister at the Scottish Parliament.

