

LIVERPOOL AND AFRICA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE CONTINUING CONNECTION

Martin Lynn

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For Baines and Fairbairn, Liverpool in the 1860s was 'the second town or city of the Empire in population and wealth'.¹ This was not hyperbole. By 1857 Liverpool was responsible for nearly half of U.K. exports and a third of U.K. imports. Indeed 'the most outstanding feature of British mercantile enterprise in the first half of the nineteenth century', notes Chapman, 'was the rise of Liverpool from being a small provincial port to a very close competitor with London'.²

This growth dated back to the eighteenth century. It was the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that saw the most dramatic increases in Liverpool's economy.³ In retrospect, by the middle of the nineteenth century Liverpool's economy can be seen as being at its apogee. Liverpool's growth as a port, suggests Hyde, peaked in the early 1850s, with the rate of increase in shipping tonnage entering the Mersey tailing off thereafter; a similar process

- 1 T. Baines and W. Fairbairn, *Lancashire and Cheshire past and present* (2 vols, London, 1868), II, p. 457. I am grateful to Prof. D. Killingray and Prof. D. Hempton for help with various aspects of this paper; such errors that remain are my responsibility alone.
- 2 S. Chapman, *Merchant enterprise in Britain* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 82.
- 3 F. E. Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey: an economic history of a port, 1700-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 203.

can be identified for the rate of increase of Liverpool's cotton imports and for its population.⁴ While the economic health of Liverpool remained sound right through to the First World War if not later, the development of other ports and broader changes in the British economy meant that it was the 1850s which saw her commercial expansion at its zenith.

Numerous factors have been put forward to explain the rise of Liverpool's economy in the century before 1850. For some historians the development of Liverpool as an entrepôt, not least with the growth of its Atlantic trade, has been the critical factor. Trade to the Americas and the Caribbean, to the Mediterranean, to India from 1814 and then the Far East, all played a vital role in the growth of Liverpool's economy in these decades, though trade with Ireland, particularly after 1780, and coastwise commerce more broadly must not be forgotten. The impact of war with France on Liverpool was important too, as was the expansion of the port's harbour facilities from the early eighteenth century.⁵ For others, the improvement in communications with its hinterland was the vital element in Liverpool's economic growth. This was central to a process whereby Liverpool first developed its own manufacturing base and then began the export of its hinterland's manufactures. The development of Lancashire's and Cheshire's turnpike and canal network from the 1720s was the crucial factor in this. This communications revolution was part of a broader process of transport improvements that led in 1830 to the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester railway. 'In 1800,' notes Langton, 'Liverpool was the best connected port in England'.⁶

4 Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, p. 203.

5 C. N. Parkinson, *The rise of Liverpool as a port* (Liverpool, 1952); F. E. Hyde, 'The growth of Liverpool's trade', in *A scientific survey of Merseyside*, ed. W. Smith (Liverpool, 1953), pp. 148-63; Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, p. 35; P. G. E. Clemens, 'The rise of Liverpool, 1665-1750', *Econ. H.R.*, XXIX (1976), pp. 211-25.

6 J. Langton, 'Liverpool and its hinterland in the late eighteenth century', in *Commerce, industry and transport: studies in economic change on Merseyside*, ed. B. L. Anderson and P. J. M. Stoney (Liverpool, 1983), pp. 1-25, esp. 7; see also S. Marriner, *The economic and social development of Merseyside* (London, 1982), pp. 13-29.

Africa undoubtedly has a place in Liverpool's rise as a port, for Liverpool has had a long connection with that continent. Initially this connection took the form of the slave trade. The first recorded voyage by a Liverpool slaver was in 1700.⁷ Thereafter Liverpool's involvement grew rapidly. By the 1750s Liverpool was Britain's leading slave-trade port; by the 1780s 90 per cent of all British ships in this trade came from Merseyside and Liverpool was the largest slave-trading port in Europe. Over 100 slave ships a year cleared Liverpool at the turn of the century and the capital employed in the trade was at least £1 million.⁸

The ramifications of this trade went deep into Liverpool's economy, affecting banking, insurance services, manufacturing and commercial organization in numerous ways.⁹ Liverpool merchants, noted the *Universal British Directory* in 1791, trade 'to all parts of the world . . . but the most beneficial trade is to Guinea and the West Indies by which many have acquired very large fortunes'.¹⁰ Over 200 Liverpool merchants have been identified as having some connection with slaving in the late eighteenth century.¹¹ For Fryer, 'Liverpool was built on the trade in slaves and the trade in slave produced cotton'.¹²

7 G. Chandler, *Liverpool shipping: a short history* (London, 1960), pp. 167–8; F. E. Sanderson, 'Liverpool and the slave trade: a guide to sources', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXIV (1973), pp. 154, 169.

8 T. Baines, *History of the commerce and town of Liverpool* (London, 1852), p. 719; J. A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool* (2 vols, London, 1873), I, p. 223; *An historical account of the Liverpool African slave trade, by a Genuine Dicky Sam* (Liverpool, 1884), p. 137; G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers and letters of marque* (London, 1897), p. 680; D. P. Lamb, 'Volume and tonnage of the Liverpool slave trade, 1772–1807', in *Liverpool, the African slave trade and abolition*, ed. R. Anstey and P. E. H. Hair (Widnes, 1976), p. 92; S. Drescher, *Econocide: British slavery in the era of abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977), pp. 65–76; S. Drescher, 'The slaving capital of the world: Liverpool and national opinion in the age of abolition', in *Slave trades, 1500–1800: globalisation of forced labour*, ed. P. Manning (Aldershot, 1996), p. 335.

9 J. E. Inikori, 'English trade to Guinea: a study in the impact of foreign trade on the English economy, 1750–1807' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Ibadan, 1973).

10 Quoted in Chapman, *Merchant enterprise*, p. 82.

11 Sanderson, 'Liverpool and the slave trade', p. 161.

12 P. Fryer, *Staying power* (London, 1984), p. 33.

The importance of the slave trade for Liverpool's economy in the late eighteenth century has therefore to be acknowledged, as must the legacy of that traffic for Liverpool today. Other historians have been less persuaded of the importance of the slave trade for Liverpool, however, stressing that the profits from the trade were much lower than imagined and the losses much higher, and that its impact on Liverpool was by no means as great as sometimes suggested. 'Liverpool was more important for the slave trade than the slave trade for Liverpool', note Anstey and Hair.¹³ For these historians, slaving—while important—did not compare with other trades such as coal, wheat or timber in the growth of Liverpool in the late eighteenth century.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the role of the slave trade in the development of Liverpool's economy in the late eighteenth century. Rather the aim of this paper is to examine the place of African commerce in Liverpool's economic prosperity in the years between abolition in 1807 and the 1850s. While Africa was not necessarily of vital importance in explaining Liverpool's economic success in these years, none the less it is the contention here that the place of Africa in Liverpool's economic history was significant and has hitherto been unduly ignored. Moreover, it is the theme of this paper that 1807 was by no means the end of an era and that Liverpool's connection with Africa after that date was deeply rooted in the slave-trade era.

For many historians, the sailing of the *Kitty's Amelia*—the last Liverpool ship lawfully to trade in slaves—in July 1807 marked an end to the connection between the port and Africa. Thereafter, it appears, the links between Liverpool and Africa atrophied, at least until the development of the shipping firm of Elder Dempster under the hand of A. L. Jones in the late nineteenth century and the emergence of William Lever's soap business in the same period. Yet this was far from the case in

13 'Introduction', in *Liverpool, the African slave trade and abolition*, ed. Anstey and Hair, p. 5. For recent analysis in what is now an extensive literature on the profitability of the slave trade see the several papers included in 'A symposium on the Atlantic slave trade', *Journal of Economic History*, XLV (1985), pp. 685–711.

reality. In fact the connection between Liverpool and Africa during the first half of the nineteenth century was enduring, vital and significant, and had long-term consequences for the economies of both. Central to understanding this is to realize that 1807 was not, in practice, a break in Liverpool's economic history, or even her connection with Africa. This is not because slaving from Liverpool continued after 1807, though it is certainly true that the continuing illicit involvement of Liverpool traders with the slave trade after 1807 is not fully acknowledged. It is known, for example, that slave ships were still being fitted out on Merseyside as late as 1860.¹⁴ Illegal slaving by Liverpool traders, most notably William Taylor, continued at least until the Piracy Act of 1824.¹⁵ Even after that, however, it was common and profitable for Liverpool African traders (like traders from Bristol and London too) to continue to supply goods to Portuguese and Spanish slavers on the African coast for use in slaving.¹⁶ Not to be ignored either was Liverpool investment in Brazilian plantations in these years, which indirectly encouraged demand for slaves from Africa after 1807.

Certainly it is true that contemporaries saw the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 as a threat to Liverpool's prosperity and thus as marking a break in its economic history. Aspinall in 1852 noted 'the actual panic occasioned by . . . abolition', while Walthew refers to the 'great fears entertained that so abrupt a termination of this most important branch of commerce would have proved ruinous to [Liverpool's] welfare'.¹⁷ Yet the fears of contemporaries were misplaced.

14 *Slave traders in Liverpool* (London, 1862), p. 5.

15 B. K. Drake, 'Liverpool's African commerce before and after abolition of the slave trade' (unpub. M.A. thesis, Liverpool Univ., 1974), pp. 112-17.

16 The practice was for palm oil traders on the African coast, unable to complete their cargo but eager to return home, to sell off their trade goods to slavers for specie; the slavers would thus have access to British manufactures which they would otherwise be unable to obtain, which could then be used to buy slaves. For controversy about this practice see P.P. 1842, XI (551), pp. 247, 701, 711.

17 J. Aspinall, *Liverpool a few years since* (London, 1852), 155; J. M. Walthew, *A lecture on the rise and progress of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1865), p. 47.

1807 was in practice not as severe a blow to Liverpool's prosperity as imagined. On the contrary, abolition was a short hiatus in what is best seen as a long-term trend of continuity in the port's connection with Africa. It can be said that Liverpool recovered quickly from abolition and by the end of the decade had shaken off most of its effects, such as they were.¹⁸

There were three reasons for this. One was that, as noted above, while slaving was important, it was not as significant to Liverpool's economy before 1807 as might be imagined. Only 3 per cent of Liverpool's ships, says Drake, were involved in the African trade in 1791; in 1805 only 112 ships out of 2,349 Liverpool clearances (or 5 per cent) were to Africa and not all these were slavers. This is not a negligible figure, certainly, and in terms of Liverpool-owned ships, some 11 per cent were involved in the African trade in 1805.¹⁹ Drescher, similarly, estimates that abolition in fact led to a reduction of an eighth in Liverpool's total trade.²⁰

What is remarkable, however, is how quickly this fall was restored. The recovery in Liverpool's African commerce was at least partly because of the second factor involved in this process, namely that even in the slaving period Liverpool traders had been concerned in trade in other African produce which they were able to expand sharply after 1807. It must not be forgotten that considerable numbers of Liverpool's African merchants traded directly with Africa before 1807, in dyewoods, gums, ivory, beeswax and skins rather than in slaves across the Atlantic. Indeed most Liverpool slave traders, particularly after the Dolben Act of 1788 imposed space regulations on slave ships, were involved to some degree in produce trading on the African coast. In one estimation, 20–30 per cent of the net profits on a slaving voyage in the last years of the trade came from this produce trade.²¹ The slave trade and the so-called 'legitimate' produce trade, far from being in opposition to each other, were in fact inextricably

18 Drake, thesis, p. 111.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 95–8.

20 Drescher, 'Slaving capital of the world', p. 336.

21 Drake, thesis, pp. 61–2.

linked; the produce trade was an integral part of the slave trade before 1807.²² As abolition approached it was thus relatively easy for Liverpool traders to shift their activities away from the latter to the former.

This relates to the third factor. Abolition had been on the horizon for so long that slave traders were able to redeploy their fleets well in advance of 1807, not least into the general West Indies trade.²³ New markets, particularly following the capture of French colonies in the French wars, were rapidly developed by Liverpool traders in these years. Indeed the abolition campaign by William Roscoe and William Rathbone benefited Liverpool by pushing her merchants towards new and increasingly profitable markets in the West Indies, in India and in the Far East.²⁴ For Drake, the crisis for Liverpool—if such it was—posed by abolition was thus overcome with relative ease.²⁵ Continuity, rather than a sharp break, and adaptation rather than crisis, were the features that marked Liverpool's African trade in the early nineteenth century.

This continuity can be seen if we examine in more detail Liverpool's African commerce in the years after 1807. What is striking is how deeply rooted in the former slave trade—in terms of personnel, trading techniques, geographical distribution and commercial organization—was the legitimate trade that expanded after 1807 to take up the shortfall threatened by abolition. After the initial temporary slump following 1807, Liverpool's African trade soon recovered. While this trade grew slowly to around 1820, it kept pace with the general growth of the port's commerce, and thereafter, again in parallel with the broader development of Liverpool's economy, grew significantly.²⁶ The 1820s were the start of a new period of prosperity in Liverpool's African trade which continued at least to the 1870s.

22 B. K. Drake, 'Continuity and flexibility in Liverpool's trade with Africa and the Caribbean', *Business History*, XVIII (1976), pp. 91–2.

23 Drescher, 'Slaving capital of the world', p. 336; D. M. Williams, 'Abolition and the redeployment of the slave fleet, 1807–11', *Journal of Transport History*, II (1973), pp. 103–15.

24 Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, p. 35.

25 Drake, 'Continuity and flexibility', p. 91.

26 Drake, thesis, p. 126.

It was the former slave markets of West Africa that remained the focus for Liverpool merchants in these years. Although some Liverpool ships did attempt to open trade with Zanzibar and East Africa in the 1820s, little trade appears to have reached Liverpool directly from this region before the 1870s.²⁷ Re-exports from India should not be forgotten, however; much of the trade from East Africa lay in the hands of Bombay merchants in these years and it would have been via Liverpool's Indian traders that products like East African ivory reached Merseyside.²⁸ South Africa, too, was of limited importance to Liverpool, at least before the end of the century when T. & J. Harrison began their shipping service to the Cape.²⁹ South Africa remained the preserve of London traders in this period; it is notable that Donald Currie moved from Liverpool to London in 1865 when he began his attempt to enter the Cape shipping business.

It was former slavers who developed Liverpool's West African trade after 1807. Drake shows that of the seventeen African traders in Liverpool in 1809 all were former slavers.³⁰ Figures like James Penny, Jonas Bold, William Taylor, J. & J. Aspinall, George Case and John and Thomas Tobin—all former slavers—were the pioneers of this legitimate commerce; Charles Horsfall, a West Indian trader—though not, he claimed, a slaver—was another of this early Liverpool generation to trade with Africa after 1807.³¹ Penny was a long-established slaver who had been active in the campaign against abolition but was quick after 1807 to turn to legitimate trading in Old Calabar, a major slaving entrepôt in West Africa.³² Bold belonged to a prominent Liverpool mercantile family who invested in land in Everton and Southport, as well as laying out Bold Street; he (together with

27 A. Sheriff, *Slaves, spices and ivory in Zanzibar* (London, 1987), p. 90.

28 B. Poole, *The commerce of Liverpool* (London, 1854), pp. 190–1.

29 F. E. Hyde, *Shipping enterprise and management, 1830–1939: Harrisons of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1967), p. 82.

30 Drake, 'Continuity and flexibility', p. 93.

31 M. Lynn, 'Trade and politics in nineteenth-century Liverpool: the Tobin and Horsfall families and Liverpool's African trade', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXLII (1993), pp. 99–120.

32 P.P. 1847–8, XXII (536), p. 4.

his son Isaac), Case and Penny were the very first Liverpool traders after 1807 to develop a produce trade from Old Calabar.³³ Taylor was the largest-scale African merchant in Liverpool following abolition, funding both legitimate voyages and clandestine slaving ones for several years after 1807. John Tobin entered the slave trade in the 1790s, married in 1798 into the Aspinnall family—themselves major slavers—and became the most prosperous of Liverpool's legitimate traders. Like Bold and Penny he was prominent in the trade from Old Calabar, the port he had slaved from regularly before 1807.³⁴ Thomas Tobin, again an important slaver before 1807, in his case from the port of Bonny, was central to the development of legitimate trade from that entrepôt in the 1820s, in partnership with Charles Horsfall & Co.³⁵

The products these Liverpool traders dealt in were nothing new. Initially, Liverpool merchants continued to trade to West Africa as they had done before 1807 for mixed cargoes of general produce such as ivory, beeswax, skins and gums. Only in the 1820s did they begin to specialize in dyewoods and particularly timber. In these years Sierra Leone became a major exporter of timber to Liverpool, and this remained the case through to the 1840s when the colony's timber stock began to become exhausted. Involvement in the African timber trade, however, was relatively short-lived as far as Liverpool was concerned. In the 1820s the real structure of Liverpool's post-abolition African trade began to become apparent. This was with the growth of the West African palm oil trade.

Palm oil is extracted from the fruit of the oil palm, *elaeis guineensis*. It is an important part of the West African diet and had long had a major place in the slave trade, being purchased by slavers for provisioning slaves on the Atlantic

- 33 Jonas Bold (d. 1822) and Isaac Oldham Bold (1785–1853) both operated in sugar and slave trading as well as property development: J. Hughes, *Liverpool banks and bankers, 1760–1837* (Liverpool, 1906), pp. 138–40; Marriner, *Merseyside*, p. 76.
- 34 A. J. H. Latham, 'A trading alliance: Sir John Tobin and Duke Ephraim', *History Today*, XXIV (1974), pp. 862–7.
- 35 P.P. 1847–8, XXII (536), p. 474.

crossing. Some quantities had been traded direct to Liverpool before 1807, with a marked increase in overall British imports noted from the 1770s.³⁶ The significant growth, however, began in the 1820s; from that decade imports of palm oil into Britain began to rise sharply, with Liverpool traders leading the way. In 1807 some 2,233 cwts were imported into Britain from West Africa; by 1830 the figure was 213,467 cwts and by 1854 it had reached 731,659 cwts with a value of nearly £2 million; it was the most valuable single item traded from West Africa to Britain.³⁷ By this stage, due to the impact of the Crimean War on Russian tallow supplies, prices had reached £48 a ton in Liverpool (compared to half that on the coast) and the oil trade was at its peak.³⁸

Liverpool traders were at the heart of this growth in Britain's palm oil imports, just as they had been at the centre of her pre-1807 trade with Africa. Traders from Bristol and London were also involved but their role was much less important. By 1830, on one estimate, some 96 per cent of British imports of palm oil were being landed through Liverpool; while that figure dropped thereafter as the trade expanded, Liverpool traders remained responsible for around three quarters of British imports throughout the century, and usually much more.³⁹ Liverpool's place as Britain's premier port for the African trade, won in the 1740s, remained unchanged throughout the nineteenth century.

Liverpool traders could be found buying oil from virtually every part of the West African coast, at least to the 1820s. The oil palm grows widely in West Africa and its oil was traded by African brokers right along the coast from Sierra Leone to the Congo. The trading techniques used to purchase it were the same as had been used in the slaving era. The practice, at least

36 Baines, *History*, p. 714; M. Johnson, *Anglo-African trade in the eighteenth century*, ed. J. T. Lindblad and R. Ross (Leiden, 1990), pp. 68–9.

37 M. Lynn, *Commerce and economic change in West Africa* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 12–13, 31.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 29. To compare palm oil and tallow imports into Liverpool in this period, see T. Baines, *Liverpool in 1859* (London, 1859), p. 58.

39 Poole, *Commerce of Liverpool*, pp. 114–15; M. Lynn, 'Change and continuity in the British palm oil trade with West Africa, 1830–55', *Journal of African History*, XXII (1981), p. 337.

immediately after 1807, was to buy oil through 'coasting', that is by sailing along the coast calling at numerous ports and leaving small quantities of goods on credit, then returning later to collect the promised palm oil; oil was thus collected in numerous small cargoes. This was particularly the practice around Sierra Leone and modern Ivory Coast. Only on the Gold Coast were there shore bases, where the old slave trading forts were quickly put to use as bulking centres for the new produce trades, in the so-called 'factory' trade. However, coasting is an immensely time-consuming, even inefficient, way of trading, while the factory trade of the Gold Coast was in decline in these years due to political unrest in the interior; moreover both these regions of the coast were areas of low-quantity and poor-quality oil.⁴⁰ Liverpool traders thus soon eschewed coasting and the factory trade and instead, by the 1820s, focused on a third technique which had been used in the slave-trade era, that of the 'river' trade.

This was the technique that had been used by Liverpool slavers in the centre of slaving on the coast in the late eighteenth century, namely the Niger delta. The reason for this was that the major region for the production of palm oil in West Africa in the early nineteenth century lay in the interior of the Niger delta. In contrast to the Gold Coast or Sierra Leone this was a major source of high-quality oil. Here Igbo and Ibibio producers rapidly developed production of palm oil in the early nineteenth century.⁴¹ What is remarkable is how by the 1820s this new trade was flourishing in the delta on the same techniques and practices as the slave trade. As had been the case with the 'production' of slaves, the resulting oil was traded along the rivers of the interior to the ports of the coast where Liverpool traders remained at anchor in their ships, just as they had done before 1807 while waiting for slaves. At the heart of this trading system was credit, or 'trust' as it was called, with traders giving out large quantities of goods to local brokers who would travel inland over several weeks to purchase oil while the trader waited on the coast.⁴²

40 Lynn, *Commerce and economic change*, pp. 86–9.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–7.

42 P.P. 1842, XI (551), p. 275.

This system moved seamlessly from the slave trade to the trade in palm oil.

The Niger delta area had been the heart of Liverpool's slave trade in the last decades before abolition. The delta area ports had by the 1820s become the centre of the oil trade: some 90 per cent of Britain's imports of palm oil came from there in 1830.⁴³ There were two ports in particular that developed as the centre of the oil trade and in both of them it was Liverpool traders who led its expansion. These were Old Calabar, where during the 1810s the oil trade first expanded in a major way, and Bonny, where it took off from the 1820s; by 1851 Bonny had replaced Old Calabar as the centre of the commerce and was exporting some 12,000 tons to Liverpool, compared to Old Calabar's 3,000.⁴⁴ At Old Calabar, as noted above, Bold, Case and Penny led the way, but it was John Tobin in particular who was associated with the sharp increase in the port's oil exports in these years. His success, as Latham has shown, was because of his skill in developing a close trading relationship with the ruling oligarchy of the port, and particularly Duke Ephraim, Old Calabar's dominant political figure; as in the slave-trade era personal contacts and connections were central to this new commerce.⁴⁵ His brother Thomas had similar success from the 1820s at Bonny.⁴⁶

By the 1820s, therefore, this new trade was well established in the delta. Moreover Liverpool traders had been behind this; the Niger delta was almost exclusively a centre for Liverpool ships. Indeed by the 1820s a Liverpool-Niger delta connection at the centre of this new trade may be said to have been established. Few London or Bristol merchants—W. B. Hutton of London being virtually the only example—traded with any success in the heart of the oil trade in this period. Part of the reason for this was that Liverpool slave traders had the contacts, knowledge and experience of Africa that enabled them to adapt quickly to the economic conditions which followed 1807. The African trade, both pre- and post-1807,

43 P.R.O., CUST 5/19.

44 P.P. 1852, XLIX (284), pp. 453, 461.

45 Latham, 'Trading alliance', pp. 862-7.

46 P.P. 1847-8, XXII (536), pp. 471-83.

was one that relied on personal contacts and individual knowledge of the coastal economy. In truth, the African market was not one market but several, and it required intimate knowledge of the different ports, of the goods in demand in them and the different techniques required to trade, for merchants to succeed on the coast. Thus the former slavers of Liverpool had an immense advantage after 1807 over their rivals from Bristol or London. For contemporaries a more basic reason for the success of Liverpool merchants lay in the alleged willingness of these 'palm oil ruffians', as they were termed, to resort to strong-arm methods to obtain trade. 'There is no infamy or enormity that some of those Liverpool commanders of ships will stop at', complained one observer in 1832.⁴⁷

Whatever the truth of such complaints, Liverpool's palm oil trade fitted well into the existing commercial structures of the port's African trading sector. The former slave traders who developed this trade continued to function as they had done before 1807; the commercial organization required for legitimate trade was no different to that which had been utilized for slaving. Many voyages were, as in the slave-trade era, put together by two or three merchants forming a partnership for a specific voyage, that partnership being dissolved on the return of the ship and a new one formed for the next voyage; voyages were usually funded by the profits of the previous one.⁴⁸ Firms were usually family-based and depended on family members for raising capital and providing management personnel. They were relatively unsophisticated businesses that, as in the slave-trade era, relied on the supercargo or master to undertake trade on the African coast; resident agents in Africa were rare before the 1850s.

The unsophisticated nature of Liverpool's African commerce can be seen in the fact that these merchants continued to use their own ships, or chartered ships for themselves, for their African voyages. In this these Liverpool

47 P.R.O., CO 82/5 (Nicolls to Hay, 30 Aug. 1832).

48 For an example of this in Bristol's slave trade, see W. E. Minchinton, 'The voyage of the snow *Africa*', *Mariner's Mirror*, XXXVII (1951), pp. 187-96.

merchants stood against the wider trend of specialization between the shipping and trading functions that began to be apparent in Liverpool's commerce in these years.⁴⁹ The risks involved in the African trade, and the length of time required before a return on capital could be realized, explain why Liverpool's African trade retained the commercial organization of the slaving era. This had, however, a significant consequence, in that the capital costs of chartering one's own shipping and equipping a voyage acted as an effective barrier to entry into the African trade and restricted that trade to a small coterie of long-established merchants.

This had important results for the wider trading body involved in the African trade. At its simplest this factor explains why the former slavers were able to retain their hold at the heart of Liverpool's African commerce after 1807. Thus the dominant figures in this new trade in its early years were connected with the slaving era: the Tobin brothers, the Bold family and Charles Horsfall. By 1852, Horsfall was importing double the quantity of oil of any other Liverpool trader.⁵⁰ Yet this did not mean that no other traders entered the African commerce in these years. As had been the case before 1807, other traders could and did enter the African trade, not least as generational change had its effect on the former slave-trading firms. Many of these newcomers were general produce merchants involved in trade to a number of regions and in a number of commodities, such as Zwilchenbarts, Baring Bros, Ewart & Myers or Yule, Wylie & Co., who were only involved in the African trade for a short period. This was the pattern in the slave trade too, as specialists in the commerce were relatively rare.⁵¹

However, at the centre of the African trade was an oligarchy that remained in it for a long period. These were the major African houses of Liverpool. While the Tobins,

49 R. H. Thornton, *British shipping* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 40; F. Neal, 'Liverpool shipping in the early nineteenth century', in *Liverpool and Merseyside*, ed. J. R. Harris (London, 1969), p. 160.

50 Poole, *Commerce of Liverpool*, p. 115.

51 J. K. Walton, *Lancashire: a social history, 1558-1939* (Manchester, 1987), p. 69.

Horsfall, Bold, Case and Penny were among the early leaders of this group, by the 1820s other large-scale Liverpool firms had joined them; Wilson & Dawson, W. A. & G. Maxwell, J. J. Hamilton, H. Laffer and G. Quayle were among the more important examples of this type of Liverpool African trader. Overall, by the 1830s around a dozen large-scale Liverpool African houses had emerged, surrounded by a similar number of smaller-scale, more transient general merchants.⁵²

Thereafter, the expansion of the trade in the 1830s and 1840s drew in new Liverpool names, initially in a small way. These firms often already had a tangential link with the trade and while still small-scale were to become major operators in the later decades of the century. Thomas Harrison & Co. were founded in 1837, Hatton (a former ironmonger) & Cookson in 1838, Stuart (a former cooper) & Douglas (a former surgeon in the African trade) in 1843 and Tyson, Richmond & Jones (soap manufacturers, originally Lamb & Tyson) in the 1840s; these were but the most prominent of this new Liverpool generation who emerged in these years of rising prices.⁵³ They were to be the central figures in the Liverpool Association of African Traders, formed as a lobby group in 1843. Thereafter few new names entered the African trade on a large scale, though John Holt, whose business began in the 1860s, famously is the exception to prove that rule.⁵⁴

The palm oil trade that came to fill the vacuum left in Liverpool's economy by the abolition of the slave trade can thus be seen as being rooted deeply in the commercial structures and practices of the slaving era. Yet change was to come. Just at the moment when Liverpool's African trade was at its peak in the 1850s, developments occurred that in the long term were to alter the commerce dramatically. This came in 1852, with the start of a steam shipping service from Liverpool to West Africa by Macgregor Laird, of the Birkenhead shipbuilding family. The operations of the steamship lines—first the African Steam Ship Co. and then,

52 Lynn, 'Change and continuity', pp. 342–7.

53 Lynn, *Commerce and economic change*, pp. 98–9.

54 C. Gertzel, 'John Holt: a British merchant in West Africa in the era of imperialism' (unpub. D.Phil. thesis, Oxford Univ., 1959).

from 1869, the Glasgow-based British & African Steam Navigation Co.—have been analysed by Davies in his monumental study of Elder Dempster, the shipping agents which by the 1890s effectively ran both firms, and this is not the place to examine their history in any depth.⁵⁵ However, it is important to look, at least briefly, at the consequences for Liverpool's African traders of the introduction of steam.

The use of steam had a significant impact on Liverpool's trade with Africa.⁵⁶ The steamers had several advantages over the older system of traders running their own shipping. For one thing they were faster and more regular in their voyages. Traders could thus turn round their capital more quickly and reduce inventory costs. For another, the steamships increased carrying capacity in the African trade. Unit costs fell and the cost of freight similarly was reduced. Moreover steam meant that new ports in West Africa could be called at, and thus new areas of the African coast, where hitherto access had been restricted because of the pattern of winds, were opened up to Liverpool traders. Traders could now operate all along the coast and spread their risk. These factors significantly reduced costs and over time drove Liverpool's African merchants to ship with the steamer services; in this the African trade came into line with the broader pattern in Liverpool's commerce, of specialization of function between shipping and trading.

This had a number of consequences for Liverpool's African trade. In essence the steamers ended the slave-trading structure that had survived 1807. New techniques of trade had to evolve on the African coast, as Liverpool traders using the steamer services developed land factories where shore agents could reside, in place of the sailing ship's waiting in a river, on which they had previously relied. Concurrently, commission houses emerged in Liverpool, and even more so Manchester, to provide goods and credit and to arrange the sale, on commission, of African produce. This meant that the

55 P. N. Davies, *The trade makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa, 1852-1972* (London, 1973).

56 P. N. Davies, 'Impact of the expatriate shipping lines on the economic development of British West Africa', *Business History*, XIX (1977), pp. 3-17.

trade opened up to newcomers (sometimes Africans themselves) who did not need a head office in Liverpool and who were no longer kept out by the capital costs of entry represented by the need to charter or purchase a sailing ship; anyone could now freight goods to West Africa. The number of Liverpool traders involved in the palm oil trade thus rose from twelve in 1850 to 135 in 1870.⁵⁷

In turn this increased competitiveness encouraged a slump in the African trade in the last quarter of the century. There were many causes of this slump—not least falling demand in Britain and Europe for tropical produce—but important in it was the fall in prices generated by the increased competition ensuing from the steamship services. Prices for most African products fell sharply in these years with an overall fall in the value of the African trade of 20 per cent in the 1880s; the Liverpool price of palm oil fell from £36 a ton in 1870 to £19 in 1887.⁵⁸ The consequence was a major shake-out of traders in the 1880s. Several firms went bankrupt, such as Irvine & Woodward in 1881 and Herschell in 1886. From this a new structure of the African trade emerged, characterized by fewer and larger-scale companies. Thus in 1889 the main surviving Liverpool African firms agreed on amalgamation, along with R. & W. King of Bristol, into the African Association Ltd, the dominant player in the trade until the twentieth century.⁵⁹

The restructuring of business in the 1880s marked an important break in Liverpool's African trade. Yet what remains striking about the period up to the third quarter of the century is the continuity over 1807 in the port's involvement in Africa. What underlay this was the congruence between Liverpool's hinterland economy and that of West Africa. As with the slave-trade era, in the era of legitimate commerce Liverpool's hinterland offered the goods that West African consumers demanded, at the same time as providing a

57 M. Lynn, 'From sail to steam: the impact of the steamship services on the British palm oil trade with West Africa', *Journal of African History*, XXX (1989), p. 242.

58 C. W. Newbury, 'On the margins of Empire: the trade of Western Africa, 1875–1890', in *Bismarck, Europe and Africa*, ed. S. Forster, W. J. Mommsen and R. Robinson (Oxford, 1988), p. 42.

59 F. Pedler, *The lion and unicorn in Africa* (London, 1974), p. 139.

ready market for West Africa's exports. A variety of manufactured products were in demand in West Africa in these years: metalware, tobacco, firearms, gunpowder and alcohol were among the major items required by West African consumers. Liverpool was well placed to meet this demand. The growth of copper smelting on Merseyside in the late eighteenth century was directly related to production for the African market.⁶⁰ Equally, the canal and railway improvements of these years allowed Liverpool to gain access to Birmingham's metal manufactures. Further, Liverpool's continuing Caribbean and American trade provided the supplies of rum (particularly Brazilian and West Indian) and tobacco needed along the coast. 'A good supply of rum is necessary' in order to trade in West Africa, commented W. A. & G. Maxwell in 1832.⁶¹ Not to be ignored either was the cowry—a shell from the Indian Ocean which was utilized as a currency in West Africa, and which was much in demand among producers and brokers of palm oil. In these years cowries were imported by Liverpool's Indian traders for re-export to West Africa.⁶²

The most important products required in West Africa, however, came from nearer home. Manufactured cottons, particularly early in the century, were central to the African trade after 1807. Textiles approached around half of all West African imports between 1808 and 1850.⁶³ While Indian cloth had a market in West Africa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the 1830s it was Lancashire cottons—initially regarded as luxury items on the coast—and light woollens that came to predominate. The fall in price of Lancashire cottons in these years was important in driving Indian cloth from the market; in 1830 Britain exported nearly 2½ million yards of cottons and re-exported just over

60 Walton, *Lancashire*, p. 119.

61 'Memoranda of the African trade' (ascribed to W. A. & G. Maxwell), Sydney Jones Library, Univ. of Liverpool. I am grateful for permission to cite this material.

62 Poole, *Commerce of Liverpool*, pp. 190–1.

63 J. E. Inikori, 'West Africa's seaborne trade, 1750–1850: volume, structure and implications', in *Figuring African trade*, ed. G. Liesegang, H. Pasch and A. Jones (Berlin, 1986), pp. 64, 80–5.

$\frac{1}{2}$ million yards of Indian cloth to West Africa; by 1850 the former had risen to 17 million yards and the latter had declined to 460,000 yards.⁶⁴

A key item in establishing Liverpool's place in the West African market and indeed in explaining Liverpool's continuing place in the African trade of these years was Cheshire salt. The figures for Liverpool's salt exports to West Africa are not in themselves large, certainly compared to textiles, but salt was important in a number of specific markets. Salt imports were critical to the West African economy in these years; salt is a necessity of life in Africa.⁶⁵ West Africa was by no means lacking its own salt manufacturing capacity but imports from Liverpool were cheaper and far more plentiful. Early nineteenth-century visitors to West Africa stressed how salt was vital to trading in particular markets on the coast, as indeed it had been in the slave-trade period; this remained the case right through the nineteenth century. Liverpool's ability to meet this demand—unlike her rivals in Bristol and London—was central to her success in retaining control over the West African trade.

Old Calabar, the first oil entrepôt, was the major centre of salt imports in these years. As Latham has argued, a 'special relationship' developed between oil exports from Old Calabar and salt imports from Liverpool; indeed John Tobin's success in establishing trade in Old Calabar may be put down to his imports of salt into that entrepôt.⁶⁶ Salt imports from Liverpool, in fact, were notable at Old Calabar at least from the 1770s. This developed further during the early decades of the nineteenth century. 'There is little good trade to be made there [Old Calabar] without salt', reported Captain Moss of the *Hamilton* in 1831.⁶⁷ In 1845 Old Calabar imported 3,000 tons of salt, the largest single market on the coast, out of the total Liverpool export of 8,000 tons to West Africa that year;

64 Ibid., p. 79.

65 G. A. Robertson, *Notes on Africa* (London, 1819), p. 314; J. Adams, *Remarks on the country extending from Cape Palmas* (London, 1823), p. 247.

66 A. J. H. Latham, 'Palm produce from Calabar, 1812-87', in *Figuring African trade* ed. Liesegang, Pasch and Jones, pp. 265-96.

67 'Memoranda of the African trade'.

Bonny imported about half Old Calabar's quantity.⁶⁸ In the Cameroons, noted one trader in 1831, 'salt is an article of the first importance for either the oil or the ivory trade'.⁶⁹ This importation of Cheshire salt had important consequences within West Africa, partly in causing the collapse of local production in many areas and partly in enabling the Efik of Old Calabar to establish a salt monopoly across a wide area of what is now Nigeria.

Liverpool was well situated to satisfy this demand for salt. Salt manufacture had a long history within Liverpool; there were salt works in the port certainly from the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ This in turn provided a stimulus to the coal industry with the need for fuel for salt boiling. Salt was indeed 'the Nursing Mother' of Liverpool.⁷¹ Barker has shown that exports of coal and salt were the key to Liverpool's rise as a port; indeed salt was Liverpool's major export in the late eighteenth century, being used in cod fisheries, as ballast, in the clay industry of Cornwall and in fertilizer for Ireland.⁷² The development of the Cheshire salt workings and of Liverpool investment in them, together with the concurrent improvement in transport links between Liverpool and Cheshire, were of the utmost importance in the port's place in the African trade after 1807.

If Liverpool's hinterland provided key products that were needed in West Africa in these years, it also was peculiarly well placed to provide a market for West Africa's exports. A variety of items, in addition to palm oil, were exported from West Africa and found a ready market in Liverpool's industrial hinterland: ivory, dyewoods, gold dust, beeswax, gums and timber. However, the most valuable item was palm oil. Before the discovery of mineral oil in the U.S.A. in 1859, palm oil was an important industrial and railway lubricant, competing in the market against animal tallow; the sharp rise

68 P.P. 1850, IX (53), p. 221.

69 'Memoranda of the African trade'.

70 *Universal British Directory* (4 vols, London, 1791), III, p. 656; Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, pp. 25-6.

71 T. C. Barker, 'Lancashire coal, Cheshire salt and the rise of Liverpool', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CIII (1951), pp. 83-101.

72 *Ibid.*

in palm oil imports into Liverpool in these years must be seen as a reflection of the growing industrialization of the British economy. Palm oil was also used in wool combing, and as a flux in the manufacture of tinsplate, being used to prevent oxidization during coating. Tinsplate production in Britain quadrupled between 1805 and 1837 and then doubled between 1837 and 1850 before doubling every decade to 1880; British output of tinsplate increased 150-fold between 1800 and 1891. Britain's major tinsplate industries lay in south Wales—hence Bristol's trade in palm oil—and in Staffordshire, for which Liverpool acted as the most convenient entrepôt; once again the improvement of transport links from Liverpool to the Midlands was vital in this.⁷³

However, palm oil's main use in Liverpool's hinterland was its role as a fat in soap and candle manufacture. In this it was particularly well fitted for the industrial development of this region in this period. Liverpool and its hinterland were a centre of candle manufacture. Price's, a major candle producer, had a works at Bromborough by the 1850s. The use of palm oil in this industry increased sharply from the 1830s as new bleaching techniques and the development of brighter burning stearic candles, not least by Price's, facilitated greater use of palm oil and increased output.⁷⁴

Merseyside was perhaps more renowned as a centre of soap production; indeed the major centre of soap manufacture in mid-nineteenth century Britain lay here. Demand for soap in Britain was stimulated by new notions of cleanliness that emerged in the early nineteenth century; important too was the role of soap in bleaching, dyeing and calico printing in the cotton industry. Soap consumption per head in Britain effectively doubled between 1801 and 1851, a development given a further boost by the abolition of the soap duties in

73 W. E. Minchinton, *The British tinsplate industry* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 28–9, 55. The use of palm oil for sheep salving can be seen in *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 July 1811.

74 G. F. Wilson, *On the stearic candle manufacture* (London, 1852), pp. 8–17; G. F. Wilson, *On the manufactures of Price's Patent Candle Co.* (London, 1856), pp. 10–21; Marriner, *Merseyside*, p. 146.

1853.⁷⁵ Liverpool, and Merseyside more broadly, benefited directly from this sharp increase in demand.

Soap manufacturing—which requires the combination of fats and alkalis—has a long history in Liverpool and the early nineteenth century saw production flourish in the port before new sources of alkali led the industry to relocate inland. By the 1820s, if not earlier, Merseyside had replaced London as the major centre of soap production in Britain. Liverpool, Runcorn and Warrington together produced 37 per cent of Britain's hard soap output in 1837 and 67 per cent of soft soap.⁷⁶ Liverpool was the major centre of soap exporting in Britain, particularly to Ireland: 'Liverpool is the great market now for the export of soap', wrote one observer in 1835.⁷⁷ By the middle of the century the port of Liverpool was responsible for four fifths of Britain's soap exports.⁷⁸ The key to Merseyside's success in soap production lay in its utilization of raw materials. Unlike London producers, who continued to rely on imported Spanish barilla and animal tallow, Merseyside producers used cheap sources of alkali in the form of soda (replacing Liverpool's previous supplies of Irish and Scottish kelp) and cheap sources of fat in the form of palm oil (replacing tallow). The key factor here was the development of caustic soda production on Merseyside following James Muspratt's introduction of the Leblanc process in the early 1820s.⁷⁹

As is well known, supplies of Cheshire salt were behind this development. This allowed the use of salt to develop the soda industry of Widnes, St Helens, Warrington and Runcorn, with the ensuing production of cheap caustic soda facilitating the boom in soap production on Merseyside and in turn the demand for West African palm oil. Thus increasing numbers of soap manufacturers developed on Merseyside in the early nineteenth century. Joseph Crosfield & Sons were established in Warrington in 1815, Thomas Hazellhurst in Runcorn in 1816 and William

75 A. E. Musson, *Enterprise in soap and chemicals: Joseph Crosfield & Sons Ltd., 1815–1965* (Manchester, 1965), pp. 14, 22, 27.

76 P.P. 1837–8, XLV (223), pp. 448–9.

77 Quoted in Musson, *Joseph Crosfield*, p. 14.

78 Hyde, 'Growth of Liverpool's trade', p. 157.

79 Marriner, *Merseyside*, pp. 57–9.

Gossage in Widnes in 1855. Hudson's were to follow.⁸⁰ In 1885 William Lever began his soap manufacturing business on Merseyside, and began the creation of Port Sunlight.⁸¹ Thus palm oil entered a network of interrelated industries on Merseyside: salt, soda, soap, chemicals and even glass.

Palm oil also played a role in the development of Merseyside margarine manufacturing, though somewhat after this period. From the middle of the century palm kernels—the kernels being the nut of the oil palm, hitherto discarded once palm oil had been extracted from its pericarp—began to be imported into Liverpool from West Africa. Palm kernels produced a different type of oil but one which proved immensely valuable for cattle feed, soap manufacture—it was the key ingredient of Lever's 'Sunlight' soap—and, by the end of the century, for margarine production. The growth of margarine manufacturing, producing cheap margarine (or 'butterine' as it was originally called) to replace lard in the working-class diet was immensely important in the cities of Lancashire in the late nineteenth century.⁸²

Clearly Africa played a continuing role in Liverpool's economy after 1807. Yet it is important to keep this in perspective. While Africa contributed commodities, particularly palm oil, that were of great importance in particular industries or trades and was a significant market for Liverpool's exports, the overall contribution of Africa to Liverpool's economy in these years should not be exaggerated. Compared to trade with the Americas, or for that matter with Europe, Africa remained of relatively limited significance. In 1857, West Africa contributed 114 out of the 4,528 ships to arrive in Liverpool from foreign countries or British colonies; this was more than the number from Germany, Turkey, Holland, Russia, China or Denmark but still a relatively limited figure; palm oil's approximately £2 million value in 1850 was the equal of Liverpool's sugar or tea trades, but well below the £16 million of the port's cotton imports.⁸³

80 C. Wilson, *The history of Unilever* (2 vols, London, 1954), I, pp. 11–13.

81 *Ibid.*, I, pp. 21–34.

82 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 24–5, 37–8.

83 Baines, *History*, p. 745; Baines, *Liverpool in 1859*, pp. 16–17.

Yet the African connection was not without significance for Liverpool. Indeed, it is important to stress that the trade with Africa after 1807 had wide ramifications for Merseyside's economy. The African trade was important for Merseyside shipbuilding, for instance. Laird's business in Birkenhead, which developed during the 1820s, has already been mentioned; the African Steam Ship Co. and its rival proved important customers for the Birkenhead shipbuilders to the 1870s.⁸⁴ Equally, African traders invested their profits in other sectors of the Merseyside economy. African traders such as John Tobin, the Maxwells and William Rotherham were prominent as backers of the Liverpool–Manchester Railway during the 1820s.⁸⁵ John Tobin invested considerably in transatlantic steam shipping.⁸⁶

The continuing African connection also had an impact on Liverpool's society and culture in this period. The sheer prevalence of voyages to West Africa during the first half of the century meant there would have been numerous individuals in Liverpool who had worked as crew on an African voyage and who had visited West Africa.⁸⁷ Moreover, a consequence of this commercial tie with Africa was the growth of an African community in Liverpool in these years. Evidence for this is hard to unearth, and some scholars suggest that the African community in Britain effectively disappeared after abolition and did not re-emerge until the twentieth century.⁸⁸ This is not entirely persuasive, however,

84 Davies, *Trade makers*, p. 483.

85 Baines, *History*, p. 599.

86 'Obituary of Sir John Tobin', *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXV (Apr. 1851), p. 434.

87 T. Lane, *Liverpool: gateway of Empire* (London, 1987), p. 9. The other way inhabitants of Liverpool might have visited Africa in these years would have been through military enlistment. Further research needs to be done on this, though the main regiment associated with Liverpool, the King's Liverpool Regiment of Foot, did not become linked to the town until 1881. Thereafter it served in the West Indies and, from 1897, South Africa: R. Cannon, *Historical record of the King's Liverpool Regiment of Foot* (Enniskillen, 1904). I am grateful to Mr Simon Jones for this reference.

88 J. Walvin, *Black and white: the negro and English society, 1555–1945* (London, 1973), p. 197. This view can be contrasted with R. Ramdin, *The making of the black working class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 85.

and there is evidence of a continuing African and Afro-Caribbean presence in Liverpool throughout the nineteenth century. Part of this presence would undoubtedly have been transient students, sent from West Africa by traders to be educated in Liverpool, as had been the practice in the slave-trade era.⁸⁹ Evidence of a more settled community can be seen in census returns and parish records; the 1851 census refers to blacks living in Pitt Street ward while St George's church, Everton, records several baptisms of blacks in the early part of the century.⁹⁰ John Williams, an escaped American slave, was surprised at the presence of free blacks in Liverpool on his arrival in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹¹ John Archer, son of a Barbados father and Liverpool mother, was born in Liverpool in 1863 and went on to become mayor of Battersea in London; George Christian, later an important trader in Nigeria and the Cameroons and whose firm maintained its head office in Liverpool, was born in Toxteth of an Antiguan father and Liverpool mother in 1872.⁹² These may have been prominent examples that have come down to history, but they are unlikely to have been exceptions.

It would be extremely surprising if a seaport like Liverpool with a close link with West Africa in the nineteenth century did not have a community of African seamen. Such seamen were undoubtedly common in Liverpool in the nineteenth century, and Frost has shown how the West African trade did generate such a community in this period.⁹³ The need for crew for the

89 Anstey and Hair, 'Introduction', p. 6; C. Fyfe, 'Sierra Leonians in English schools in the nineteenth century', in *Under the imperial carpet: essays in black history*, ed. R. Lotz and I. Pegg (Crawley, 1986), pp. 25–31. Details are difficult to come by and more research is needed on such educational provision in Liverpool in this period.

90 D. Frost, 'The Kru in Freetown and Liverpool: a study of maritime work and community during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool Univ., 1992), p. 329; N. Myers, *Reconstructing the black past: blacks in Britain, c. 1780–1830* (London, 1996), p. 60.

91 Walvin, *Black and white*, p. 193.

92 Fryer, *Staying power*, p. 290; J. Green, 'George William Christian (1872–1924): Liverpool merchant', in *Under the imperial carpet*, ed. Lotz and Pegg, pp. 69–77.

93 Frost, thesis, pp. 323–56; Myers, *Blacks in Britain*, p. 69.

West African trade was behind this. In the early nineteenth century, Liverpool ships would recruit African sailors on the way out to West Africa to undertake the heavy labour of loading and unloading; African crew were seen as more resistant to tropical disease than European crew, and above all were cheaper. It was thus usual for a Liverpool ship to send its European crew back home on another ship immediately after arrival in the Niger delta. Over time, it was the Kru coast, in modern Liberia, that became the main source of this labour. Kru were valued for their expertise and experience; some 3,000 were working in the African trade by the 1870s.⁹⁴ However, not all these Kru would be returned to the Kru coast when trading was completed; the pattern of winds or the need to return quickly to catch a market meant that sailing captains would return direct to Liverpool. Over time, therefore, these Kru crewmen formed an increasingly established community in Liverpool from which further labour could be recruited for the African trade, particularly once the steamers began, or for other trades in Liverpool ships.

Perhaps the most overt consequence of the continuing connection between Liverpool and Africa after 1807 came in the field of politics. It is well known that African traders had been prominent in Liverpool's politics before 1807. What is less well known is that they remained so after 1807. As has been shown elsewhere, the Tobin and Horsfall families were central to this web of African interest in Liverpool before the municipal reform of 1835 and indeed after it; the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1832 complained that Liverpool council was in the hands of a network that was held together by family ties, the Tory interest and, though it did not realize it, African trade.⁹⁵ Sir John Tobin, knighted in 1820, was one of the central figures, with his personal links to George Canning and to the Gladstone family.⁹⁶ Numerous African traders became mayor

94 G. E. Brooks, *The Kru mariner in the nineteenth century* (Newark, 1972), pp. 1–69; Frost, thesis, p. 42; D. Frost, 'Racism, work and unemployment: West African seamen in Liverpool, 1880s–1960s', in *Ethnic labour and British imperial trade*, ed. D. Frost (London, 1995), pp. 22–33.

95 *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 Oct. 1832.

96 Lynn, 'Trade and politics', pp. 109–10.

of Liverpool after 1807: Tobin was elected in 1819, Thomas Littledale in 1826, Charles Horsfall in 1832, J. Aspinall in 1834, Thomas B. Horsfall, son of Charles, in 1847, James Tobin, son of Thomas, in 1854. Others sat as councillors: George Case, first elected to the council in 1775, remained until the council was dissolved in 1835, George Horsfall was a councillor between 1846 and 1862, James Tobin between 1847 and 1854. Thomas B. Horsfall was Conservative M.P. for the borough between 1857 and 1868 and first president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1850. Yet others, like James Tobin and Harold Littledale, sat on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board after 1857.⁹⁷

It is clear, therefore, both how much the Liverpool connection with Africa survived 1807 and how deep into the port's life it penetrated. By the mid-nineteenth century, as in the mid-eighteenth, Africa, and the connection with it, permeated Liverpool's economy and society. One can see this in Liverpool's environment. Some of the profits of the African trade went into buildings. At least two churches can be identified as built by African money in this period, including Christ Church, Everton, built by the Horsfall family; Liscard Hall, Wallasey, was similarly built by John Tobin.⁹⁸ Far from the period between 1807 and the late nineteenth century being a time when Liverpool and Africa turned their economic backs on one another, these years saw an intimate and continuing connection between them, which had, certainly to the 1850s, significant benefits for both parties.

By the 1850s, as Liverpool reached its apogee as a port, numerous African ships waited in Liverpool docks, African traders worked in their counting houses on Bold Street, trade with Africa provided employment for Liverpool's sailors and

97 Baines, *History*, appendix, pp. 11–12; Baines, *Liverpool in 1859*, pp. 80, 89; J. Touzeau, *The rise and progress of Liverpool from 1551 to 1835* (2 vols, Liverpool, 1910), II, p. 848; F. E. Sanderson, 'The structure of politics in Liverpool, 1780–1807', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXVII (1978), pp. 65–6.

98 'Obituary of Sir John Tobin', p. 434; Picton, *Memorials*, II, pp. 419, 565; N. Pevsner and E. Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 372; Sir John Tobin part financed the building of St John's church, Liscard (I am grateful to John Penketh for this point).

stevedores, Kru sailors and African scholars settled in the town, the products of West Africa's forests lubricated Lancashire industry and helped manufacture soap and candles in Merseyside factories, salt from Cheshire workings made its way to the Niger delta, textiles from Lancashire factories, traded through Liverpool, were sold along the African coast, representatives of Liverpool's African traders sat in the port's council and another sat in Westminster. Some Liverpoolians worshipped in churches erected on the profits of palm oil, others travelled on railways similarly built. If Lane is right in suggesting that wherever one goes in Liverpool 'the sea cannot be avoided', then equally, in this period, Africa could not be either.⁹⁹

99 Lane, *Gateway of Empire*, p. 9.