

Excerpt from The Herald, 10 September 2009

We can't ignore Scotland's link to Slavery, Joanna Blythman

The facts are shocking. The great mercantile wealth that Glasgow accumulated in the 18th century, so confidently expressed in the handsome buildings of the Merchant City, was based on the profits from slavery. Our Scottish banking system, so proudly defended by first minister Alex Salmond, grew as a direct result of the triangular trade. It gave us the first Scottish millionaires; "Virginia Dons" such as Andrew Buchanan, James Dunlop, James Wilson, Richard Oswald and John Glassford, who cornered the Chesapeake Bay tobacco trade. They have streets named after them to this day. Places such as Virginia Street, Jamaica Street, Kingston Bridge and Mount Vernon (named after a plantation in Virginia) underscore the Scots involvement in the Caribbean and America.

Part of the building that now houses the Gallery of Modern Art was built by merchant William Cunninghame as a lavish home, in no-expense-spared Palladian, plantation style from the profits gained from slavery. Richard Oswald, who lies buried with honours in Glasgow cathedral, founded a learning tobacco dynasty. His eponymous nephew bought Bance island off Sierra Leone, where he traded 13,000 enslaved Africans, a man so patriotic that he had slaves dressed in tartan as caddies on his island golf course.

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