

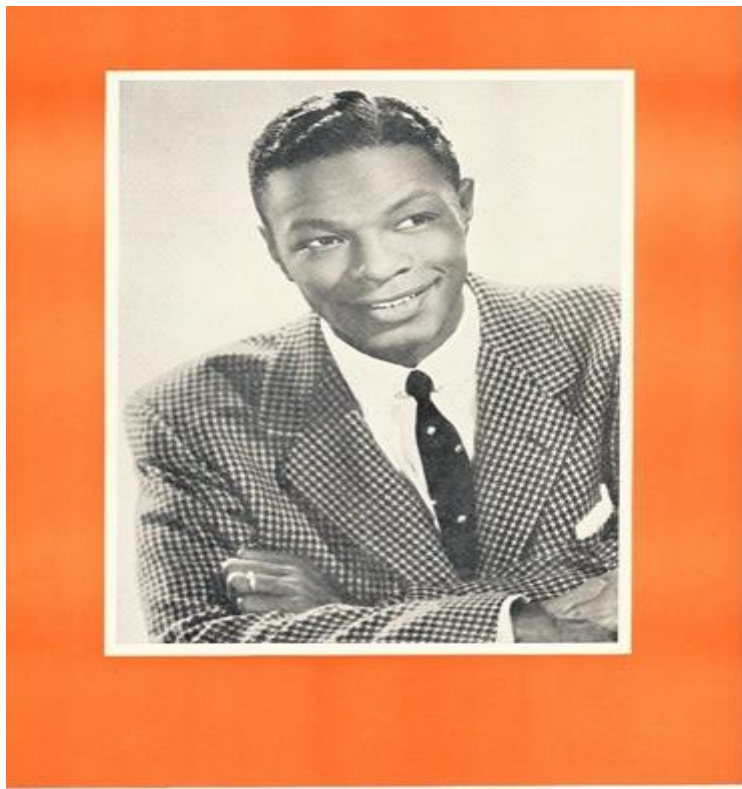
**Tales from DalesRail**  
**The World rides Lancashire DalesRail:**  
**Black and Asian history along the line**  
**Aidan Turner-Bishop**

*DalesRail may not be operating in 2020 but that doesn't stop us sharing our many interesting experiences about our journeys. We hope you will share your interesting stories, favourite walks, fascinating anecdotes and pictures about DalesRail. Please send them to [richard.watts.crl@gmail.com](mailto:richard.watts.crl@gmail.com) or [simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com](mailto:simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com).*

Lancashire DalesRail runs from Blackpool and Preston, through Blackburn and Clitheroe, to join the scenic Settle & Carlisle railway at Hellifield and then on to the Border city of Carlisle. 'Black' history of people of African and Asian heritage may seem a long way from the wild slopes of Mallerstang and the lush fields of the Ribble and Eden valleys but this isn't so. African and Asian people have lived and worked in the area for over a thousand years since the days of the Roman Empire as we shall discover. There is a Chinese saying that "a journey of a thousand *li* (miles) begins with a single step". In our case this starts at Blackpool North station.

**Blackpool** is the setting for Gurinder Chadha's 1993 comedy film ***Bhaji on the beach***, written by Meera Syal, in which a group of British women (mainly Punjabis of various faiths) enjoy a busy day out at the Blackpool Illuminations.

Artists from over the world have starred in Blackpool. They include Dame Shirley Bassey, Nat King Cole, and Sammy Davis Junior.



*Nat King Cole*

The African-American historian, writer, politician, journalist, and Baptist minister **George Washington Williams** (1849-1891) is buried in Layton cemetery, Blackpool. He was the first Black member of the Ohio state legislature. In 1882 his influential *The History of the Negro Race in America 1619–1880* was published: the first overall history of African Americans. He also wrote *A History of Negro Troops in the War of Rebellion* (1887) about African American participation in the American Civil War. He visited Europe but, while traveling back from Africa, he died from tuberculosis and pleurisy on 2 August, 1891, in Blackpool, where he's buried.



**Preston, Bamber Bridge and Blackburn** were important centres of the Lancashire cotton spinning industry. In the early nineteenth century much of the raw cotton was grown and harvested by African slaves in the Southern plantations of America. During the 1861-1865 American Civil War between the pro-slavery Confederate states and the abolitionist Union states the supply of cotton to Lancashire was seriously disrupted. This resulted in a depression and unemployment called the **Lancashire Cotton Famine**. To create work and prevent family poverty work creation projects were set up. One of these was the laying out and construction in 1864 of Miller Park, Preston, next to river Ribble and Preston main railway line. It opened in 1867.

The great Black American bass baritone singer **Paul Robeson** (1898-1976) stayed in the red-brick Park Hotel, near Preston station, in 1937 when he was touring Britain. He was renowned for singing 'Negro spiritual' songs, popular music, and for his political activism. He also acted in films and in Shakespeare's drama as Othello.

Britain's first professional Black footballer, **Arthur Wharton** (1865-1930), played at Deepdale for Preston North End football club. He joined PNE as an amateur and was in the "Invincibles" team that reached FA Cup semi-finals in 1886–87. He left Preston in 1888 to concentrate on his running. His father was from Grenada; his mother was Fante royalty from Gold Coast, now Ghana. He is buried in Edlington Cemetery, Doncaster. He worked as collier in later life.



*Arthur Wharton*

Preston has enjoyed an annual flamboyant and colourful **Caribbean Carnival** since 1985. Music bands, dancers, and exotic costumes parade through the city. Preston has Caribbean and African communities as well as different Asian communities. One interesting group is from **Montserrat**, West Indies: the largest Montserrat community in England. After the island was 'vacated' by the Amerindians it became home to Irish Catholics sent there in 1632. They were later joined by other Irish Catholics. However the Irish were soon outnumbered by African slaves brought to work on plantations. Montserrat's flag shows an Irish harp. It's a self-governing UK Overseas Territory. Half of the island was covered with ash, mudflows, and lava when the Soufrière hills volcano erupted in 1995. It's still active.

The area near Bamber Bridge railway station was the site of the June 1943 '**Battle of Bamber Bridge**' when US Army 'Negro' soldiers reacted to overbearing treatment by 'White' military police. Eventually this led to changes in the US Army's racial segregation policies towards its Black soldiers.

On platform 4 of Blackburn station there's a laser-cut metal wall panel sculpture showing people prominent in Blackburn's history. It was created in 2001 by Scartworks Ltd. One of the portraits shows **Mahatma M K Gandhi**, (1869-1948) the Indian politician and independence campaigner, who visited Blackburn and Darwen in 1931. Gandhi's policy of nonviolent non-co-operation – *swadeshi* – included the boycott of foreign-made goods, especially Lancashire cotton textiles. Instead he advocated the spinning and use of Indian *khadi* cloth. In September 1931 Gandhi met Darwen cotton workers at Greenfield Mill who were suffering as a result of the Indian boycott and he explained his policies. He was, it seems, kindly received by them.

Blackburn has a sizeable British Asian, including Muslim, community. You can see impressive **mosques** from the DalesRail train. The large mosque and community centre to the south of the railway is the Jamia Ghosia Mosque and Ghosia Academy, Chester Street.

**Dent** is England's highest main line station. At an altitude of 1,150 ft (350 m) it may seem remote but it has interesting and disturbing links with the African slave trade. The Sill family lived at High Rigg End, a remote farm facing Whernside. Remember there was no railway then so it really was remote. John Sill owned a plantation in Jamaica, run on slave labour. It produced mahogany, rum, and sugar which he imported into England through his business premises in Liverpool. He brought some slaves to his Dentdale property. They worked on local farms, in a quarry, and probably securing the river levees or embankments in Dentdale. John Sill died in 1774 in Jamaica and his wealth was inherited by other members of the Sill family. They became very wealthy. They bought up other local farms and decided to rebuild West House in 1790-1800 into a grand mansion which later was called Whernside Manor. It is a large Georgian house built with stone possibly quarried by the Sills' slaves. The interior had mahogany fittings which were removed in the 1940s as they were rotten. The slaves were reputedly kept in the cellars at Rigg End. There are stories of chains on the walls, screams, and the sound of beatings. Bloodhounds were trained to guard and hunt humans it is said. Attempts have been made to locate cavities and passageways but without success. The slaves were kept illegally and hidden. There are tales of an African slave dying in a deep silent pool in the river at 'Black Dub'. The Sill brothers were cruel, debauched, and given to drink. They died in 1797, 1803 and 1805. The estate was inherited by Anne Sill, the unmarried daughter. She received all the Dentdale properties; Providence plantation in Jamaica with its 150 acres; 123 head of cattle; and 207 slaves. The slave trade was forbidden in British dominions in 1808 and by 1833 slavery itself was illegal. Anne was compensated for the loss of her slaves. She died in 1838, aged 69, and she is commemorated by an elegant marble monument in Dent church. The Sill brothers are buried in the churchyard. Whernside Manor, now grade 2 listed, was sold and changed hands over the years. At one time it was owned by the Scouts and later, in 1976, as Whernside Cave and Fell Centre. It was recently on the market for £895,000. The estate agent's publicity doesn't mention the slaves. Its OS Grid reference is SD 724858; the postcode is LA10 5RE.

What happened to the slaves? Some say they were shipped back to the West Indies. Others say that they found work locally. One version says they were shut in the cellars at Rigg End and left to die. No one knows. But it is possible that they may have settled locally. There reports of 'African' features appearing in family photographs. Who knows?

Dent is well known for its '**Terrible Knitters**'. Terrible means 'terrific' or impressively adept and fast. Many in the village were busy with hand knitting. What did they knit? Some reports that they knitted clothes for troops during the Napoleonic Wars. Some Dent knitters are known to have knitted *taqiyahs* or *kufis*, rimless skull caps worn by devout Muslim men. Locally they were called 'bump-caps'. They were made of a very coarse worsted knitted a yard long, with one half turned into the rest, creating the appearance of a cap. These would have been **slave goods** exported to Africa along with copper ingots, iron bars, cutlasses, textiles, and other manufactured goods which were exchanged with local African merchants and chiefs for captured slaves to be transported to America. Slave goods were stored in warehouses in

Liverpool before shipment. One of the largest warehouses still survives: Parr's Warehouse, Colquitt Street, Liverpool. It is now used for student accommodation.

**Appleby** is the site of the annual Horse Fair held in early June. Gypsies, Travellers, Rominchai, and Scottish and Welsh Gypsies assemble to trade horses and to meet. Many English Gypsies or Romanichai Travellers may be familiar with the Angloromani language. This is a mixture of Romani and English, a branch of the Roma language, which is an Indo-Aryan language originating in India. For example, in Angloromani numbers 1 to 5 are *yek*, *dooi*, *trin*, *stor* and *pange*. In Sanskrit they are *eka*, *dva*, *tri*, *catvarah*, and *panca*. In Hindi they are *ek*, *do*, *tin*, *car* and *pac*. It could be suggested that Romani Gypsies are one of the oldest communities from Asia to live in Britain.

Not far from **Langwathby** station is the site of the former Eden Hall demolished in 1934; only the stables remain now. The Musgrave family possessed an enamelled glass beaker, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century probably of Syria Muslim origin; an exceptionally fine example of luxury Islamic glass. It is called the '**Luck of Edenhall**'. The legend is that it was presented to the family by fairies. If the glass is broken or if it leaves Eden Hall the luck of the family is shattered. The fairies declared: "If this cup should break or fall / Farewell the Luck of Edenhall!" The Luck was presented to the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and it was bought for the nation in 1958. It remains on permanent view in the Medieval & Renaissance galleries, like something in an Indiana Jones film. Quite how a very fine example of Islamic glass reached rural Cumbria is unclear. The fairies perhaps?



Nearing Carlisle we aren't far from the coastal post of **Whitehaven**, Cumberland. It was an important port in the 'West Indies Trade' importing sugar, molasses, and **rum** made by Black slave labour on Caribbean plantations. This is probably why rum features in some 'traditional' Cumberland recipes such as Rum Nicky (a sweet tart) and Rum Butter (a rum-flavoured spread). Sugar – lots of it – features in Kendal Mint Cake. Some of the spices used in Cumberland sausages (molasses, sugar and rum) were imported this way. The story of Whitehaven rum is told in the Rum Story museum.

Whitehaven ships transported about 14,000 slaves before slave trading ceased from the port in 1769. Most Whitehaven-transported slaves went to Jamaica and Barbados. The slave trade encouraged local manufactures such as sugar processing, copper still metalwork, and – in Whitehaven’s case - even a pipe manufactory. After Emancipation, and sometimes before, Black former slaves travelled to Britain arriving at ports like Whitehaven. Maria Elder, the historian of the slave trade, says: “[Blacks] were evidently destined to serve in the town and country houses of merchants who no doubt considered fashionable Black servants as befitting their social aspirations. Although the majority of the region's Blacks would have been in domestic service, some were able to live more independently, including those receiving wages aboard vessels engaged in the plantation trade. Implication in transatlantic slavery was hard to avoid.” In the 1770s and -80s there were many free slaves arriving in Whitehaven. Some were servants of families returning to England during the War of American Independence; others were slaves freed because they fought for the British and then migrated to England after the war. Dorothy Wordsworth, writing in her *Grasmere Journal* on 13 November 1800 recorded meeting ‘a merry African from Longtown’.

One such former slave was Thomas Kent who arrived in Whitehaven. His son, **John Kent**, (1795-1886) achieved fame as **Britain’s first Black policeman**. He served in the Carlisle city police from 1835 to 1846. Local mothers would tell their children that ‘Black Kent’ would get them if they misbehaved. He later worked as a signalman on the south side of Citadel station. His box was known as ‘Kent’s Box’. His obituary in 1886 records that ‘the youthful Prince of Wales [later King Edward VII], passing through the Citadel station after publication of Mrs Stowe’s “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, seeing the negro in the box, is said to have asked his attendants if that was “Uncle Tom” in his cabin”. In the last seven or eight years of his life he was the attendant in the gentleman’s first class waiting room at the station. He lived at 13 Earl Street from 1881 to 1885-6. He is buried in Carlisle Cemetery. Considering his pioneering status it’s surprising that there seems to be no blue plaque to John Kent in Carlisle.

When you leave the entrance to Carlisle [Citadel] station look up at the 1852 date and monogram GHH high up on the exterior of the Lakes Court Hotel. This is a link to the owner **George Head Head** (yes, two heads!) (1795-1876), a local banker, who bought Rickerby Hall in 1832. Head was active in the anti-slavery Abolitionist movement and he attended the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention in London. His portrait is in the 1841 painting by Benjamin Haydon of those who attended the Convention. This is in the National Portrait Gallery, London. Head is the balding figure on the right of the group holding a hat.

Carlisle was the site of a major fort on the Roman’s **Hadrian’s Wall**. This was at Stanwix called Uxelodunum (‘high fort’) or Petriana (named after Prefect T. Pomponius Petra). It was located beneath part of the Cumbria Park Hotel. It covered 3.96 ha (9.79 acres). The Roman army recruited troops from across the empire which included all of northern Africa and Egypt (remember Cleopatra and Mark Anthony) and much of the Middle East (think of Pontius Pilate in Palestine). It’s almost certain that African troops would have served and lived in or near Carlisle. Traces are not easy to find but Moroccan-style cooking pots have been found at Wallsend. Parts of Vindolanda are built to typically African military plans. At Birdoswald fort a tombstone was found to G Cossutius Saturninus, a soldier of the Sixth Legion, from Hippo Regius, modern Annaba, in Algeria. Black-White racial distinctions were not really ‘seen’ in

Roman times: skin colour was less important than, say, speaking Latin fluently. Some emperors were born in North Africa; they probably looked like modern Arabs. But we can say reasonably safely that Africans were living in Cumbria long before the Anglo-Saxons arrived. Tullie House Museum has a very good Roman archaeology gallery where you can explore the subject more deeply.

**St Cuthbert's church** has a grave memorial stone, inside the porch, to **J. Greincapo, a 'Negro' servant** of the vicar (possibly the Revd. Joseph Carlyle). Greincapo died, aged 27, in 1789 of pneumonia. He had been brought back from the West Indies as a servant by the vicar. He was buried near the west wall but the gravestone has been moved into the porch in recent years. It was fashionable for some middle class people to have 'Negro' servants and pages. The writer and dictionary compiler Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) had a Black servant called Francis Barber (1742-1801). Johnson abhorred slavery and when he died he made Barber a residual heir with an annual income, providing he moved to Johnson's home city of Lichfield, Staffordshire, which he did.

St Cuthbert's church also has three memorials to **Richard Ferguson** who established the family textile firm of Ferguson Brothers. The firm made striped and checked **gingham** fabric which was exported to the Southern states of America where it was used to clothe slaves. Gingham was so identified with slave clothes that it appeared for many years on the trademark 'mammy' figure 'Aunt Jemima' on packets of pancake flour. The brand has recently been withdrawn by Quaker Oats.

Ferguson Brothers manufactured gingham cotton in the huge sandstone **Shaddon or Dixon's Mill** with its very tall chimney, a landmark for miles in Carlisle. Even today the chimney is 270 feet (82.3m) tall. The mill was the largest in England when it opened in 1836. Cotton was imported via Liverpool into Carlisle along the Navigation Canal, opened in 1823. Large quantities of Carlisle cotton textiles were made for the 'American trade' for use by the plantation slaves of the Southern states. After the Emancipation of the slaves in 1865 Carlisle spinners were unable to adapt to the changed market. It was reported that 'free negroes' understandably preferred patterns other than gingham with its association with slavery. Demand for Carlisle cotton declined and Dixon's Mill stopped spinning cotton in 1883.

On Lowther Street, Carlisle, there are two neighbouring buildings near the corner of Warwick Road. One, at no. 8, is a restaurant *The Last Zebra*, the former Gretna Tavern, the first State Managed pub to be opened in 1916 after all pubs and breweries in Carlisle and district were put under Home Office State Management. On 18 May 1917 the tavern was visited by **King George V and Queen Mary**. At that time George V ruled a quarter of the World's population including the British Empire in India. He was also the commander of one of the largest Muslim armies at the time.

Next door is Carlisle City (Congregational) Church. This was visited on 29 December 1918 by **President Woodrow Wilson** of the USA (1856-1924). He was on a personal 'Pilgrimage of the Heart' to his mother's home city, Carlisle. She had lived round the corner in Warwick Road. He had been in Europe negotiating the Versailles Peace Treaties after the end of World War One. There is a plaque on the church's wall recording his visit. Recently, Wilson has been criticised by students at Princeton University for his domestic policies of not removing



racially segregated 'Jim Crow' practices in US Government offices such as separate toilets for Blacks and Whites.



At the corner of Lowther Street and Lonsdale Street there's an Italian restaurant called Sannas. It sometimes flies **the Sardinian flag**. This is a red cross, like England's, on a white background. In each of the four quarters there are black silhouette figures of four Moors' Heads (*I quattro mori*). The design dates back hundreds of years: the heads may represent the heads of Moorish princes defeated by the Aragonese rulers of Sardinia. A fragment of mediaeval Black history on a street corner in Carlisle: there's always something of interest if you look closely.

**Aidan Turner-Bishop    September 2020**

Want to know more?

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Washington\\_Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_Williams)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancashire\\_Cotton\\_Famine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancashire_Cotton_Famine)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Robeson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Robeson)  
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*George Head Head at the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention painting*

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Anna Vaughan Kett *Cotton and Antislavery: The strange story of slave-labour and free-labour gingham cloth in the 1850s* Costume Colloquium VI: Textiles in Fashion, Creativity in Context, Florence, 2018.

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