

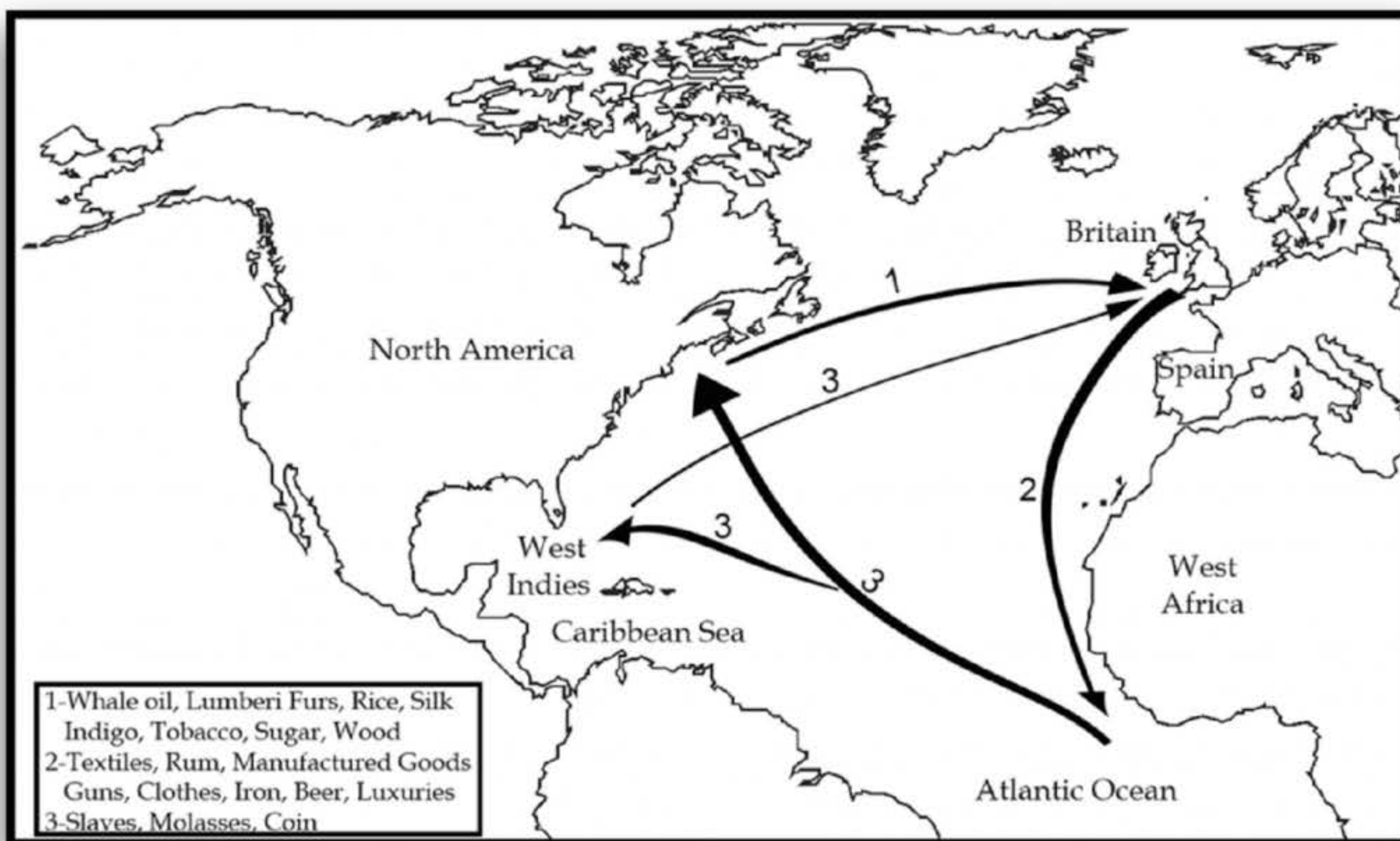
Welsh Plains

Newtown Textile Museum Summer Exhibition 2021

Woollens, called 'Welsh Plains', were produced in mid-Wales in the eighteenth century, and played a vital role in clothing enslaved peoples in the Caribbean. Yet making 'Negro Cloth', as this historic Welsh product was also known, was a vital money-earner for impoverished rural households in Montgomeryshire and Merionethshire.



The Triangular Trade



The Triangular Trade.

The Triangular Trade was the route taken by slave traders to British colonies in the Caribbean and North America.

The Outward Passage

Textiles from Britain and Europe, including **Welsh Plains** and **copper**, guns, gunpowder, brandy and silks from India to West Africa where they were used to 'buy' captured slaves, held in prisons known as 'factories.'

In 1700 the average cost for a slave, in traded goods was just £3.

The Middle Passage.

The notorious Atlantic route to the West Indies and America where the slaves and **Welsh Plains** were sold to plantation owners. In 1700 a slave could be sold for £20, the equivalent of £1,700 in today's money.

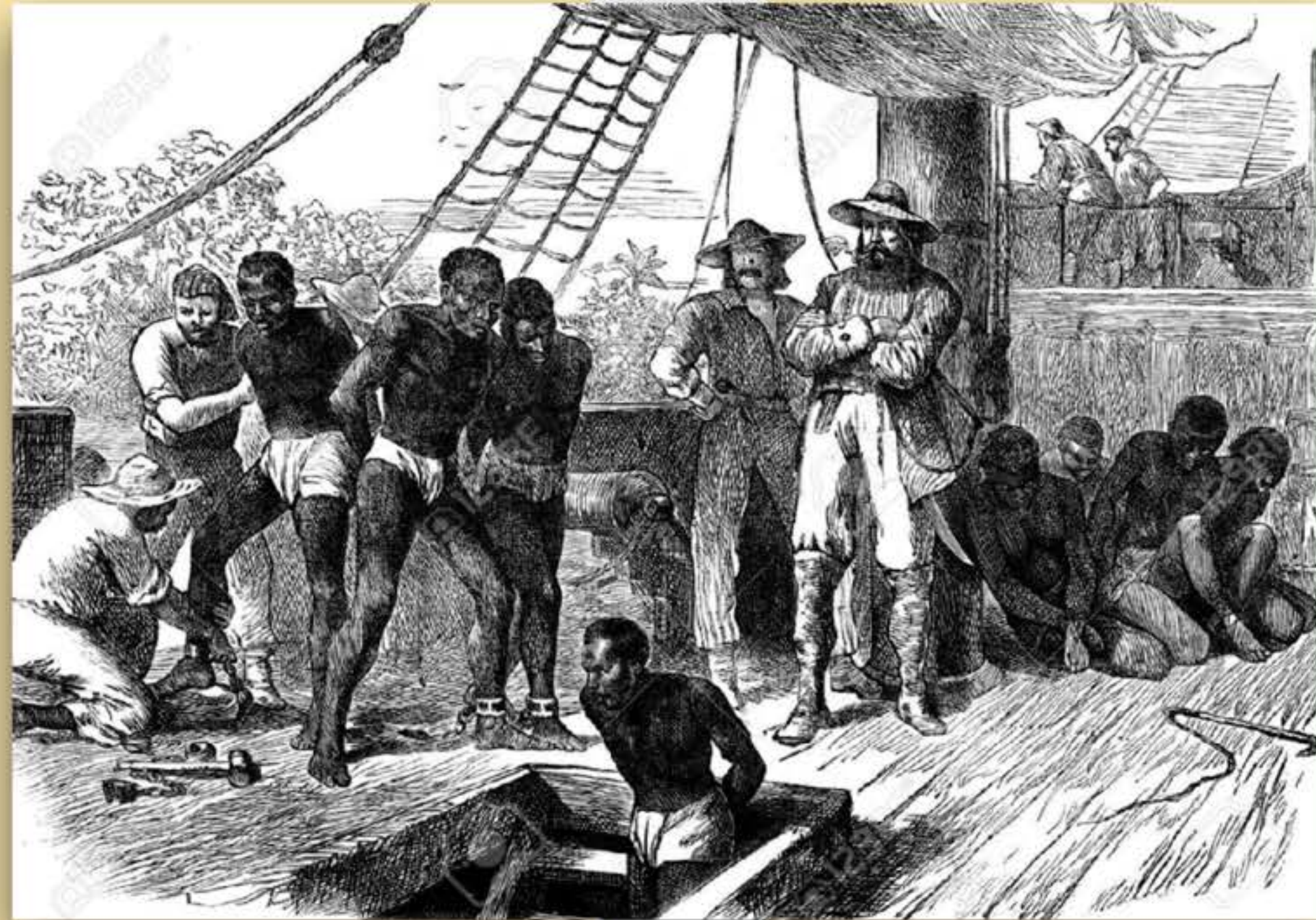
The Homeward Passage.

The slave ships returned to Britain with cargoes of sugar, tobacco and rum.

The British Slave Trade and Welsh Plains

- The British Slave Trade operated from the 16th century until its abolition in 1807.
- It has been estimated that overall, about 12 million Africans were captured to be taken to the Americas as slaves. at least one third of them on British ships.

- 1792 was the busiest slave trading year for Britain, when 204 ships left to carry slaves from Africa to the Americas - this amounted on average, to four ships a week.



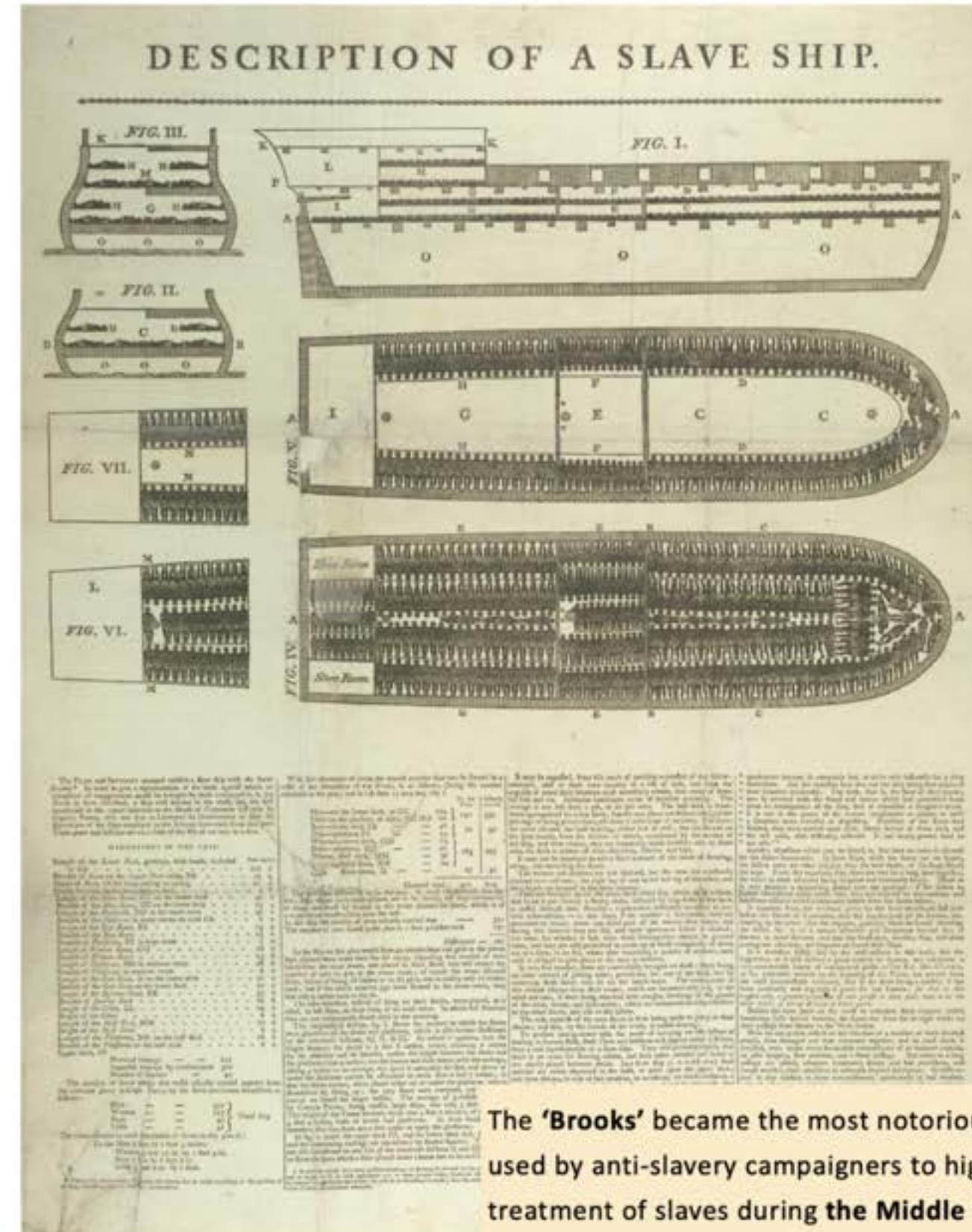
- 'Welsh plains' - a rough heavy woollen fabric woven produced on looms in the upland farms of Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire and Denbighshire.
- Used as barter for payment on African gold, ivory and slaves as well as to make clothing for enslaved people in

the Americas.

- It was made into jackets, breeches bodices, skirts, trousers, and shirts. It was uncomfortable to wear being hot and very itchy.

- The demand for Welsh Plains declined as slaves were emancipated throughout the British Empire after 1833 and after the American Civil War in the 1860s.

How to pack a slave ship:1787



The 'Brooks' became the most notorious of all slave ships. It was used by anti-slavery campaigners to highlight the inhuman treatment of slaves during the **Middle Passage**.

Created in 1787, the image illustrates how enslaved Africans were transported to the Americas. It depicts a slave ship loaded to its full capacity - **454 people**.

The 'Brooks' sailed the passage from Liverpool via the west coast of Africa to the Caribbean. It made 11 slave voyages between 1781 and 1804.

454 people held in such cramped conditions for several weeks at sea was horrendous. But on her third voyage, she carried **740 people**. **105 people** did not survive the voyage.

Making Welsh Plains

This cloth was produced by **Jill David** in 2019, as part of the **Sheep to Sugar Project**, using equipment and methods as close to those available to Welsh weavers in the 1700s.

The fleece used was from a **Clun Forest Sheep** (see examples of this sheep downstairs on our loom floor).

Washing

The fleece was washed in a tub of rainwater, not the fast-running stream that would have been used, using a **Cyntell**, a traditional Welsh. It was then dried in the sun.

Carding

Carders were traditionally made from strong prongs set into pigskin and were used to comb the fleece. For the weft, Jill used carders to make 'Rolags'- small bundles of wool that could be spun into yarn. For the warp, Jill used a dog comb as the wool combing was heavy work. The rolags were then spun on a great wheel, like the one in the exhibition.



Weaving

Traditionally, men would have done much of the weaving. Their greater reach meant they could make a wider cloth. Hence the width of the average cloth being 27 inches – a man's reach.

Jill used a **rigid heddle table loom** like the one in the exhibition. Jill comments that it was heavy work, boring and 'the mind would wander, resulting in mistakes and broken warps: 'lift, pass, beat, lift, pass, beat all day stretching the width of the loom.' At best she could produce 4 inches of cloth an hour.

Fulling

Fulling involved cleaning to release the fibres from grease and thicken the cloth. Stale urine, Fuller's Earth and soap were used.

Jill stamped on the cloth in her wellies in a large bucket, without success. A better finish was achieved by hand. The cloth was then stretched on a padded board with pins used as tenterhooks.

Using a teasle brush to bring up the nap and soften the cloth, did not work very well.

This piece of cloth would have earned Jill one old penny for many many hours of work.

We are very grateful to Jill for sharing her experience and knowledge about the whole process and being able to show you an example of the cloth used to trade for and clothe enslaved peoples.



An early 19th century Jamaican sugar plantation showing slaves wearing typical clothing. They were normally issued with cloth, such as Welsh Plains, and expected to make their own.

Thomas Davies, born c.1615 Welshpool; died Barbados 1667

Settled In Barbados about 1651, possibly a Royalist refugee from the Civil War. Sugar plantation and slave owner. In 1661 he was appointed as factor (merchant) with the East India Company and spent 15 months on the west coast of Africa. Trading fabrics, **including Welsh Plains**, guns and carpets for 'Guinea gold'. Because of the high mortality rate from disease amongst Europeans, he rose to Principal Agent for the East India Company. He presented this cup to St. Mary's Church, Welshpool in grateful thanks for his safe return. It was inscribed in Latin



The chalice is now on display in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

**Thomas Davies agent general of the English
on the west coast of Africa
because his life was preserved there by the bountiful mercy
of God
had this chalice forged from the purest Guinea gold
and gave it as a sacred offering to the Grace of God
and for the permanent service of the church of Welshpool.
If any villain should subsequently remove the same chalice
from this use
may he be punished at the Last Judgement of God the
avenger.
9 April 1662**



Figure 1.1: A map of Barbados by Richard Ligon, 1657.

Thomas Davies was resident in Barbados at the time that the first map of the island was drawn.

Barbados was the most important sugar producing centre in the world at that time. Already there are stereotypical images of African slaves. The names of the principle plantation owners are shown on the map. Thomas's name does not appear, indicating he was a minor landowner.

Nevertheless, when he died in 1667 he made bequests totalling £900 to his friends and family (equal in value to over £100,000 in today's money), and left his "land, house, negroes, etc", to his wife, Mary, as 'her dower'.

Welsh Plains: the evidence from U.S. newspapers

Ten Pounds Reward. RAN away from the subscriber in the upper end of Hanover County, the 27th of March, a dark mulatto fellow named **DAVID**, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, proportionately made, a little inclined to be bow-legged, 30 years of age, and carries his age very well, as he has not been much exposed to hardship; he is from the Indian descent, which is discoverable in his hair and complexion; his features are regular, with a tolerable countenance; he is deprived of the sense of smelling; very sensible and artful in conversation, active and clever in business, is a very good horstler, but has been bred to plantation business. I expect he will endeavour to pass for a freeman. He took with him the following clothes, viz. a great coat of French twilled striped cloth with pockets of the same, and pocket flaps at the side, made for the convenience of carrying papers, a coat, jacket, and pair of breeches of fine dark mixed plain wove Virginia cloth, the coat has striped pockets, and the back of the jacket is different from the fore parts, a full suit of **Welsh plains**, three osnabrug shirts, a country made fur hat that has been much worn, trimmed round the brim, it is very greasy where the brim joins the crown, and has a hole in the crown, a pair of imported yarn hose, and a pair of country made shoes, a Dutch blanket almost new. The above reward of **TEN POUNDS** shall be given if the said slave is taken out of this state, and five pounds if taken within and committed to gaol, so that I get him, or delivered to me in Hanover, and all reasonable expences paid by **ABRAHAM FONTAINE**.

Virginia Gazette, April 16, 1785



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Oct. 28.

M'Dowall, Hayne & Co.
HAVE received per ships Thomas Bennett, Medora and Chicora, just from Liverpool, an extensive assortment of
PLAINS, BLANKETS, &c.
 viz: **PLAINS.**
 Bales extra quality Milled White Welsh Plains
 Do 1st, 2d and 3d quality do do Plains
 Do fine & extra quality, imitation Welsh Plains
 Do. Barnstable and Yorkshire Welsh Plains
 Do. Super. Blue Dressed English Plains
 Do. 1st and 2d quality Grey Welsh Plains
 Do. Blue and Grey Mixt Dressed Plains
 Do. 1st and 2d quality Brown and Drab Kerseys
 Do. best Englishall Wool Mixt Kerseys
 Do. Wilkinson's Grey Mixt all Wool Kerseys and Plains
 Do. 3-4 and 7-8 heavy English Union Plains
 Do. 3-4 and 7-8 heavy English Cotton and Wool Kerseys
 Do. 3-4 and 7-8 Grundy's all Wool Kerseys
Domestic Plains and Kerseys.

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Sixteen Dollars Reward. Ran Away from the subscriber, on the 20th of April, 1801, a Negro man, named **JAMES**, he has a dark complexion, about 33 years of age, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high; he has a thin visage, a big mouth, thick lips and a small beard. I have some reason to believe he has forged a pass. He had on, and took with him, a new white **Welch plains** close bodied coat and trowsers, one pair blue cloth trowsers, one country cloth short coat, one dark coloured great coat half-worn, two oznaburgs shirts, a new hat and other clothes, one old pair of velvet breeches, with a piece of brown cloth in the seat, the white coat has some (if not all) very large old yellow gilt buttons. It is very likely he may change his name and endeavor to pass as a freeman. Whoever takes up said fellow and secures him in any jail, so that I get him again, shall receive 8 dollars if under 10 miles from home, and if over 10 miles the above reward, and all reasonable charges paid if brought home,

Alexandria Advertiser, May 26, 1801

In 1828, the US government introduced taxes on foreign textile imports. Despite this, demand for "**Welsh Plains**" remained, as this South Carolina newspaper advertisement of 1844 shows. In fact, they were so popular that other areas of Britain were producing 'imitation' Welsh Plains!

Exposing the evils of slavery

The Slave trade was abolished by Parliament in 1807, although it did not abolish the institution of slavery in British colonies for another twenty five years.

This followed a long campaign by abolitionists across Great Britain.

Welsh non-conformist writers played an important role in bringing the evils of slavery to the attention of their Welsh-speaking contemporaries.

In this way, it is probable that Welsh woollen workers came to understand how the cloth they made had a sinister connection to the trade in human misery.