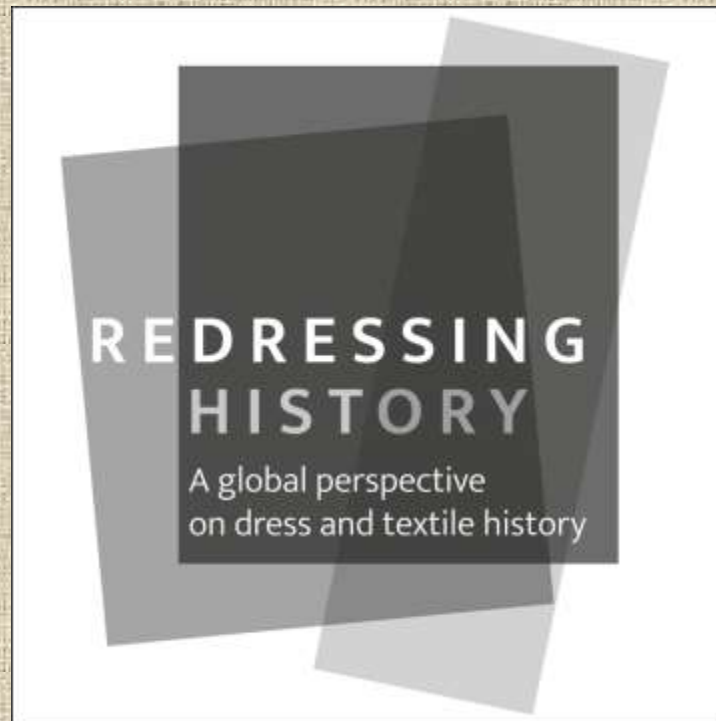


Redressing History 2021

Textiles and Dress Connected to the Atlantic Slave Trade in the
Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries:

A conversation with Dr Anna Vaughan Kett (University of
Brighton) A.p.vaughankett@brighton.ac.uk

and Dr Sally Tuckett (University of Glasgow)
Sally.tuckett@glasgow.ac.uk



A global perspective
on dress and textile history

Thanks are also due to the Southern Counties Costume Society for funding the creation of the 'Redressing History' logo.



Centre for Design History



Southern
Counties
Costume
Society

Welcome to Redressing History

We are a group of dress historians examining narratives and histories that pertain to the under-represented communities of Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color. I'm Dr. Anna Vaughan Kett and today I'm talking to textile expert Dr. Sally Tuckett about British cloth made for, and connected to, the Atlantic slave trade. British textiles of many types were in great demand in colonies and plantations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet this lesser-known aspect of British involvement in the slave economy, literally 'woven in' to the global web of trade. As Sally explains;

'We have to realise that colonisation and empire are all predicated on slavery and oppressed people. The textile trade can, and should, be part of that discussion' (Sally Tuckett).

The following slides provide a taster of the first half of our conversation, focusing on Sally's work on textiles the eighteenth century. In the second half we discuss my work on the nineteenth century. We also include some images and suggestions for further reading. To distinguish our voices, my words are in italics, and Sally's are not.

Click on the sound icon to listen to the podcast...

Sally has published widely on Scottish eighteenth-and nineteenth-century textiles and dress. Recurrent themes include the multiple significances of clothing in the formation of identity and within enslaved cultures and how social control was exerted through cloth and clothing.

For some time I've been researching into political dress, as both public and private statement, and especially abolitionist dress used to communicate disassociation with the Atlantic slave trade. I am also fascinated by consumer boycotts. I started examining the garments worn by abolitionist women (especially Quakers) and the clothing worn by the enslaved ; I am investigating the possibility of empathic connections between them. I'm examining two types of hand-loomed cotton gingham produced in Carlisle in the 1850s. One was a small range of bespoke cloth made at an ethical and philanthropic weaving co-operative run by John Wingrave, made using only warranted 'free' rather than slave-labour cotton. I compare this to the range of cloth made by outworkers employed by Peter James Dixon & Sons, a very large industrial producer that relied on the slave-system, importing slave-grown cotton and supplying the plantations with cloth.

Our friendship goes back a long way and with shared interests in the multiple significances of cloth, clothing and material culture in building identity and political agency within different societies (and a fascination with checked cloth) I'm excited to continue our conversation in today's podcast. I am particularly interested in hearing about 'Osnaburg' or coarse linen, following Sally's paper 'The Staple of Scotland? Tracing Scottish Osnaburgs in the Eighteenth Century' given at the conference 'Clothing the Enslaved in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World' (Cardiff, July 2019). We both have essays in the forthcoming book 'Clothing the Enslaved' edited by Chris Evans and Naomi Preston.

Sally explains her research journey:

I started with History at Undergrad, focusing more and more on Scottish history, and then material culture, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and I don't think I have looked back since!

My PhD was on Scottish textiles (hoping to get away from tartan, but never quite managing it) and looking at other aspects of Scottish textile heritage and global trade, such as Turkey red cloth and Ayrshire white work. I was lucky enough to be awarded a fellowship and residency at Monticello, USA, the Virginia home of Thomas Jefferson, which was fantastic for getting hands-on with a wide variety of sources related to the enslaved population there.

My approach is to use dress to understand the past, as a means to think about how people lived their lives, and to try to understand the society in which they operated. It's a fantastic way to open yourself up to all sorts of sources such as surviving objects, portraiture, personal and private correspondence, trade agreements and business records. It also makes you think about what hasn't survived, and why that might be, and who are the people who are being left out of the story and who are not immediately visible in the written record. That links to my idea about clothing and social control, how power is exerted and how society can be ordered and managed through textiles and dress. This led me to look at clothes of enslaved people where social control was integral to what they wore.

Let's move on to discuss the Atlantic slave trade. For over 300 years, the chattel slave trade entailed European (predominantly British) traders abducting, purchasing and trafficking 12.5 million African men, women and children to colonies and plantations in the New World. In conditions of unbelievable brutality and inhumanity, their coerced, unfree labour produced high value commodities and raw materials at a huge profit for the slavers and traders. Operating across the globe, it persisted precisely because it was so lucrative. The exploitation of Africa and the establishment of new industries and markets that relied on the slave economy were foundational and enduring aspects of capitalism. Referring to Eric Williams, James Walvin states; 'quite simply slavery was integral to the way the Western world lived, functioned and prospered.'

This was a vast, global and reciprocal trade: Britain came to rely on importing slave-produced raw materials to produce goods that were exported all over the world, including to colonies and slave economies. At home, British consumers had great desire for 'exotic' products that were produced within the slave-system. These included sugar, rum, spices, mahogany and tobacco and later, cotton. Even enslaved Africans, especially children, were in demand as servants in wealthy homes.

British manufacturers profited hugely from trading with slave economies and colonial markets; for example, Birmingham's metal goods such as machetes, shackles and chains were in high demand and wealthy planters and traders sought luxury goods such as silk cloth and fine Staffordshire ceramics. This was a complex network of trade, drawing in multiple agencies. Even Josiah Wedgwood (the well-known abolitionist) made a bowl to commemorate a Liverpool slaving ship; you can see it in the city's International Slavery Museum.

It should not be forgotten that textiles made for, and connected with, the Atlantic slave trade were hugely profitable for Britain. A variety of textiles were made and in many locations such as 'Cottonopolis' or Manchester, Carlisle and rural areas such as mid-Wales, where poor workers relied on Welsh Plains (wool) shipped to the New World. Scotland was also a big producer of wool and linen. In the eighteenth century, Britain was exporting considerable quantities of cloth to the colonies and plantations in America and the Caribbean, to be used as practical clothing and also currency in buying the enslaved. The shipping logs of Dutch and British slaving ships list multiple rolls; humble textiles such as calico and Osnaburg, specialist ones such as Madras check, check-and-stripe gingham as well as the finest silk brocades that were snapped up by slave traders and the 'plantocracy'. As Sally has explored, much cloth was specifically destined to clothe unfree workers on farms and plantations as well as a myriad of shops, manufactories, businesses and households.

In the nineteenth century, the Anglo-American cotton industry grew to enormous proportions and Britain became completely reliant on America for raw cotton grown by the enslaved. Britain exported finished cloth all over the world, competing with American-made cloth for regulation dress issued to the enslaved. This was something of an 'elephant in the room' for Britain; whilst celebrating the Abolition Act of 1807, it was an 'uncomfortable truth' that Britain's textile wealth derived from cotton grown by the enslaved. It would take many years before Britain would begin to accept and evaluate its involvement in the slave economy; this process is ongoing.

It should be noted that not everyone accepted slave-produced goods and ethically-motivated consumers and abolitionists instigated several consumer protests, for examples the Sugar Boycott (1791-2) and the Cotton Boycott (1840s-60s). The Free Produce Movement was set up, and parallel chains of production created a wealth of free-labour goods.

Emanuel Bowen, 'A Map of the British American Plantations, extending from Boston in New England to Georgia,' 1754. (Image: Bridgeman Education)



I asked Sally why was so much British-made cloth sent to the colonies

To understand why hundreds of thousand of yards of British cloth were exported to the colonies we need to think about a combination of economic, social and cultural reasons. The economic reason, namely a mutually beneficial trade between the motherland and the colony, was the key driver. Add in the fact that Britain's colonies in North America were restricted by Navigation Laws, this made them completely reliant on imported goods of all types. This meant that all household and practical things such as cloth, sewing equipment, books, tools and even carriages had to be shipped.

The socio-cultural reasons (of which racism is central) are perhaps harder for us to comprehend in modern society. On one level, you have the idea that chattel slavery was an investment for the enslavers, the enslaved people were the labour on which their fortune was based, so clothing was needed at the most basic level for protection. Also, even though the enslaving class saw enslaved people as subhuman, they still imposed on them European standards of gendered and sartorial decency.

There was also an association that tailored clothes were civilised. So they're imposing European standards onto these captive, enslaved people and since the colonies weren't making enough cloth, that gives imported cloth even more significance.

Later on, in the nineteenth century, enslaved workers on cotton plantations were sometimes allowed to spin, dye and weave in their homes and small weaving sheds. This demonstrates considerable knowhow and expertise and points to agency and perhaps resistance to social control. But on the whole, textile production was a time-consuming activity and I guess it was easier to import cloth - you didn't want your work force 'wasting time' making clothes when they could be working and generating profit.

You do also see plantation owners in the eighteenth century using their enslaved people to make cloth, I saw this at Monticello, where Jefferson set up a textile manufactory using young girls and old women who couldn't work in the fields. But they could never produce enough cloth for everyone, and cloth had to be imported too.

Monticello must have been a fascinating residency.

It was in so many ways. I was able to see, first-hand, how clothing differed according to hierarchies and occupations within enslaved communities and how it was gendered, and conformed to European style and how it was used as both a reward and repressive tool of social control.

I was also able to trace named individuals, the clothing that they owned and generally to piece together how clothing reveals some aspects of the lives they led.

The British trade in textiles for the enslaved has been quite a ‘secret’ history, not so widely discussed in the past. Would you say that it is now attracting the attention that it deserves?

That’s a good question! The textile industry has always been an integral part of the slave trade and textiles are one of the most fascinating ways in which we can understand the enslaved experience.

Scholars are now increasingly discussing dress; see Steeve O. Buckridge and Mary Hicks, who are opening up all sorts of perspectives and showing us how cloth and clothing were used to transmit ideas about identity and appearance.

What is also changing is the perspective on British history, and there is now an acknowledgment that British wealth and industry are inextricably linked to slavery. There’s no denying that. Now, there’s a greater awareness and the things we were taught in school, such as the Industrial Revolution and the cotton mills of Manchester, I don’t remember any reference to them being based on enslaved labour. But that’s changing, and we have to realise that colonisation and empire are all predicated on slavery and oppressed people. The textile trade can, and should, be part of that discussion.

And what about Scotland's involvement in the slave trade? Is this now being brought to light?

Yes, definitely! Scholars, museum curators and independent researchers have all added their voices to the field and it continues to grow. Stephen Mullen's work has really highlighted Glasgow's involvement in the slave trade, through his work on the tobacco lords and following the money, and for example, how this links to the university. Glasgow Museums have run projects exposing slavery and imperial links through their collections, there are some great blogs out there. Lisa Williams, head of the Edinburgh Caribbean Association has been researching links with slavery. She runs great walking tours of the city.

So much of research is piecing together the narratives from the available sources. Is this what you are working on right now?

Yes, I'm putting all my interests in one place! I'm writing a book on the Scottish linen trade, taking a more social perspective and tracing the fibre from flax to the people who made the cloth, to the end user. I'm looking at how it was made in Scotland, and how it was sent to North America and the Caribbean to clothe the enslaved. It's a journey that takes us from poor Scottish workers to unfree workers in the colonies. I'm really enjoying tracing the shipping logs and records of American stores run by Glasgow's tobacco lords.

Let's go back to the specific type of linen known as Osnaburg, I've often seen it in shipping logs, and you gave a wonderful paper on it at the conference in Cardiff. Can you tell us a bit about it?

Osnaburg was a pretty unremarkable, plain weave, medium weight, coarse linen cloth, initially produced in Germany (hence the name after Osnabrück). Because of colonial demand, Scottish manufacturers wanted a slice of the profits and from the 1740s they started producing it. It's a utilitarian basic cloth, used across society, for lining clothes, actual clothes, upholstery webbing (and wrapping precious goods such as mahogany furniture) and of course for clothing the enslaved.

Has it survived?

Not so much, especially Osnaburg clothing as it was used and re-used until it became rags and was quite unrecognisable. Given the enslaved only had one or two allocations of clothing per year, making the most of the little clothing they had was essential and they absolutely had to make it last. If anybody knows of any, please let me know!

Maybe it's survived more in upholstery, but Osnaburg clothing seems to be very rare and like so much working and lower-status clothing, historically people have not been so interested in collecting and preserving it and that's another reason why it may not have survived. Any museum today tends to be full of silks and special clothing, but this is changing and there are exceptions, such as the National Museum of African American Culture in Washington which has displays of dress and accessories worn by the enslaved.

We share a fascination for checked cloth; me for cotton gingham, and you for woollen tartan. There's a lot of tartan being shipped to America in the eighteenth century, why was that I wonder?

That's an interesting question and opinions differ on this. For a long time I've been fascinated by Scotland's textile links to the wider world. Maybe because tartan was so iconic and identifiable, this led plantation owners to have requested it as a sort of 'uniform', but I haven't found evidence for it being actually imposed upon enslaved workers. You do, however, see enslaved people wearing tartan, but it seems to be something they've acquired for themselves, rather than being given it. After all, it's colourful and aesthetically pleasing type of cloth, available in a range of qualities.

By the time we get to the mid-nineteenth century checked and striped cloth predominates in clothing worn by the enslaved, and you can see this through many different sources. I wonder about the shift to check as being "suitable" for the enslaved. I wonder, is gingham related to tartan?

I've worked on tartan for years, and there's a debate about when 'tartan' becomes 'check' and what can be classified as 'gingham.' Terminology is important. For me, in the 1700s, tartan means a woollen, multi-coloured woven cloth and check is likely to be linen or cotton, with only two colours.



Display of cotton gingham from Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, linking Peter James Dixon & Sons with the Atlantic slave trade. Note similarity with Scottish tartan cloth (below) shown in a painting by an anonymous artist, c.1830. (Images: photograph by AVK and Bridgeman Education)



Sample of heavy, hand-loomed, cotton gingham cloth, c.1866, made by Peter James Dixon & Sons, Carlisle. Was this gingham destined for the plantation? (image: photograph by AVK, at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle)



What do we know of the realities of slave dress?

When it comes to sources about clothing of enslaved people, pretty much all of it comes from the perspective of the enslaver, such as records of allocations of cloth and clothing, so it is a rather selective view. But there's some great work being done on the plantation records and new thinking is emerging, for example on clothing expressing hierarchies within enslaved communities.

The existing visual examples, for example runaway adverts with their caricature illustrations and 'charming' paintings of plantation life do present highly distorted views. With these sorts of sources, we are always looking for gaps and ways of reading against the grain.

And what about the role of clothing in imposing social control and how the enslaved resisted social death?

We do know that clothing can definitely be a form of resistance and there are unwritten sartorial codes that could demonstrate African influences such as the head wrap, or the use of the colour red. Such items may have escaped the notice of the enslaver, but could hold real significance for the wearer. Archaeology can be helpful here, when the records are biased.

The next slides show some examples of biased views, created from the perspective of slave-owners and planters

Advertisement offering reward for runaway slave, Bardstown, Kentucky, 1838 with a familiar, visual caricature of an enslaved man, used by printers. (Image: Library of Congress.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.0220120b/>)

\$150 REWARD



RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Perhaps he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and is handy in any capacity as a house servant. Had on when he left, a dark cassinett coatee, and dark striped cassinett pantaloons, new—he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville; 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

WILLIAM BURKE.

Bardstown, Ky., September 3d, 1838.

John Rose, 'The Old Plantation,' c.1785-1795, watercolour, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia showing the enslaved dressed in European, 'civilised' clothing. (Image:

<http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/998>)



Nicholas Pocock, 'Sugar Plantation,' Antigua, West Indies, 1801, watercolour, original in in Beinecke Lesser Antilles Collection, Hamilton College Library , showing an idealised 'exotic' pastoral landscape and field workers. (Image: <http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1433>)



Agostino Brunias, 'Dance,' Dominica, West Indies, 1770s, engraved print published London (1779) showing genteel, European-style dress, including a fashionable hat, worn by the enslaved (Image: <http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1025>)



THIS PLATE (representing a NEGROES DANCE

to the Hon^{ble} Charles O'Hare, BRIGADIER

Col. of Foot, & Lieut. Col. of the Coldstream Regiment of

in the ISLAND of DOMINICA) is humbly dedicated

GENERAL of his Majesty's Army in America,

Foot Guards by his most obedient Serv^t A. Brunias

London, Printed at the Repository of the Engraver, in Pall Mall, 1779.

Agostino Brunias, 'Villagers Merry Making in the island of St. Vincent, with Dancers and Musicians, A Landscape with Huts on a Hill.' (Image: <http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/2432>)



*How can we see beyond the caricatures and idealised views, to find real individuals?
How can we address the gaps in the historical record, the visual absences and lack of
reference to people and individuals?*

*Can we talk a bit about anonymity, I find this really disturbing, for example, recording
enslaved deaths on board ships as numbers, rather than names.*

It's one of the most frustrating and emotive paradoxes; the deliberate anonymising of enslaved people, giving them numbers rather than names, almost screams from the archival record. It is precisely because there are so many gaps, so many unknowns that when we do find a name, it is important that it is said and included in the narrative. But we have no way of knowing whether this was a name imposed on that individual and what they felt about it. In my work I have honed in on specific individuals, tracking their lives through the clothes they were wore and assessing, where possible, their relationship with their clothing. The clothing forms a sort of 'silent witness' to the (often) anonymous lives of the enslaved.

One of the individuals I encountered is Beck, an enslaved woman working at an American store owned by Glasgow tobacco lords, Glassford & Co. Beck's wardrobe is interesting, for example she had a more generous allocation than her peers, she used Osnaburg to make a pair of pockets and she owned a dress made from striped holland, which was superior to the green cloth given to Constant, another enslaved woman at the store. One of the last entries in the record shows that Beck also had three children, whose names we do not, and may never, know.



**'Portrait of Flora', an
enslaved woman, date
unknown, a candlelit
silhouette portrait,
exhibited in The
National Gallery,
Washington USA**

At this point our discussion shifts to the nineteenth century and my work on cotton gingham made in Carlisle for both abolitionists and the enslaved.

Lastly, the following slides have some suggestions for further reading -

Baumgarten, Linda. 'Clothes for the People: Slave Clothing in early Virginia', *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, 14:2 (1988), 27-61

Baumgarten, Linda. *What Clothes Reveal* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2012)

Block, Sharon. *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018)

Buckridge, Steeve O. *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica 1760-1890* (University of West Indies Press, 2004)

Duplessis, Robert S. *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Durie, Alexander. *The Scottish Linen Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (John Donald, 1978)

Eaton, Linda. *Printed Textiles: British and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850*, (Monacelli Press, 2014)

Eltis, David and David Richardson. *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Yale, 2010)
<https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/maps#introductory->

Evans, Chris. *Slave Wales: The Welsh and Atlantic Slavery 1660-1850* (University of Wales Press, 2010)

Fashioning the Self (project) at: [Fashioning the Self in Slavery and Freedom](#)

Foster, Helen Bradley. *New Raiments of self: African American Clothing in the Antebellum South*, (Berg, 1997)

Gruber, Katherine Egner. "By Measures Taken of Men": Clothing the Classes in William Carlin's Alexandria, 1763—1782' *Early American Studies*, 13: 4 (2015), 931-953

Hicks, Mary E. 'Transatlantic Threads of Meaning: West African Textile Entrepreneurship in Salvador da Bahia, 1770-1870', *Slavery & Abolition*, 41:4 (2020), 695-722

Holcomb, Julie. *Moral Commerce. Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2016)

Knowles, Katie. [An African American Family Story of Slavery and Freedom](#) [video], talk given at *Fashion Unravelled Colloquium*, (Sep 2018), FIT, USA

Legacies of British Slave Ownership - <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Olusoga, David. *Black and British. A Forgotten History* (Pan Books, 2017)

Rockman, Seth and Sven Beckert. *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016)

Samford, Patricia. 'The archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53:1 (1996), 87-114

Shaw, Madlyn. 'Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves: Craftsmanship, Commerce and Industry', *The Journal of the Early Southern Decorative Arts*, 41 (June, 2020) online: <https://www.mesdajournal.org/2012/slave-cloth-clothing-slaves-craftsmanship-commerce-industry/>

'Slave Clothing' online resource: <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/slave-clothing/>

Square, Jonathan Michael. 'Culture, Power, and the Appropriation of Creolized Aesthetics in the Revolutionary French Atlantic' (July 2021) online discussion: [Culture, Power, and the Appropriation of Creolized Aesthetics in the Revolutionary French Atlantic | Small Axe Project](#)

Thomas, Sarah, *Witnessing Slavery. Art and Travel in the Age of Abolition* (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale, 2019)

Tuckett, Sally. 'National Dress, Gender and Scotland: 1745–1822', *Textile History*, (2009) 40:2, 140-151

Vaughan Kett, Anna. "'Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would be no Slaves". Wearing Belief, Quaker Women, Dress and Anti-Slavery Activism 1853-1858', in Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank (eds). *Quakers and Abolition* (University of Illinois Press, 2014)

Vaughan Kett, Anna (forthcoming) “‘She Hath Done What She Could: The Charitable Work of Eleanor Clark of Street in the 1850s and the 1870s: Quaker Women’s Networks, Sisters and Philanthropy’ in Robynne Healy and Carole Spencer (eds). *New Critical Studies on Quaker Women, 1800-1920* (Penn State University Press)

Vaughan Kett, Anna. (Forthcoming) ‘Dressing Abolitionists and the Enslaved: Slave-Labour and Free-Labour Gingham Cloth in Carlisle in the 1850s’ in Christopher Evans and Naomi Preston (eds). *Clothing the Enslaved in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, (Pasold Research Fund Studies in Textile, Dress and Fashion History)

Waldstreicher, David. ‘Reading the runaways: self-fashioning, print culture and confidence in slavery in the eighteenth-century Mid-Atlantic’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 56:2 (1999), 243-272

Walvin, James, *A Short History of Slavery* (Penguin, 2007)

Walvin, James. *The Trader, the Owner, The Slave: Parallel Lives in the Age of Slavery* (Jonathan Cape, 2007)

Wares, Lydia Jean. 'Dress Of The African American Woman In Slavery And Freedom: 1500 To 1935', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Purdue University, 1981), online:

<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI8210269/>

White, Shane & White, Graham. 'Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Past & Present*, [No. 148 \(Aug., 1995\)](#), 149-186

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1944)