

## Swallow Hard : The Lancaster Dinner Service

Shown at the Judge's Lodgings Museum on the splendid 18<sup>th</sup> century dining table, made by the Lancaster firm of Gillows, from imported Caribbean mahogany. The Customs House on St Georges Quay was designed by Richard Gillow and there are records to show that he at one time had part share in ships used for the slave trade. The installation attempts to map a visual history of the city's involvement in the trade and to commemorate the Act of Parliament abolishing it in Britain in 1807. Slaves could still be owned of course but not traded for goods.

Commissioned by Susan Ashworth, Project Manager Lancashire Museums, this work has been in production for 2 years. The research and development stage was spent walking the hundreds of streets, Queen street, St Georges Quay, Castle Park and Chapel street are just four important ones. I read the maps, photographed the buildings; the Customs House, the Quaker Meeting House, the churches, the Town Hall and the Sun Hotel and many more. I looked hard and filmed the wild plants and the water, the bridges, the walls, the minute details and the vistas. All this led to the production of numerous paintings and drawings, some shown as *Swallow* at the Judge's Lodgings in 2006. Since then I have looked at documents, ship designs, prints, watercolours, more details and more splendid doorways. These led into the houses of Lancaster slave ship owners such as Dodshon Foster, William Lindow and John Satterthwaite. I have tried to imagine the lives of the almost invisible slave servants these men owned, brought from the plantations to work in quiet isolation in this chilly place. I looked for clues, connections, ghosts and heroes.

This Dinner Service will sit as if it has always been there, on the tables, the mantelpieces, the sideboards and the window sills of the Judge's Lodgings telling the story of lost languages, the intense activity of commerce, the creative energy of influential traders and the alien looking structure of British wild flowers.

Hopefully the intervention will in turn help to explain what makes Lancaster the complicated place it is. It is a city in which traders became Abolitionists and in which Quakers owned slave ships. There are beautiful buildings designed by men involved in horrible deeds. Behind doors in attics and underground are the hidden histories of a few almost invisible African people who were owned by families engaged in a legitimate but immoral strategy to make a lot of money fast. Inside the tureens and the jugs are the names of the people painted on the outside; a hidden but very real identity. This work is not a memorial but more an encouraging incentive for everyone committed to restoring the balance, revealing the truths and continuing the dialogues.

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