



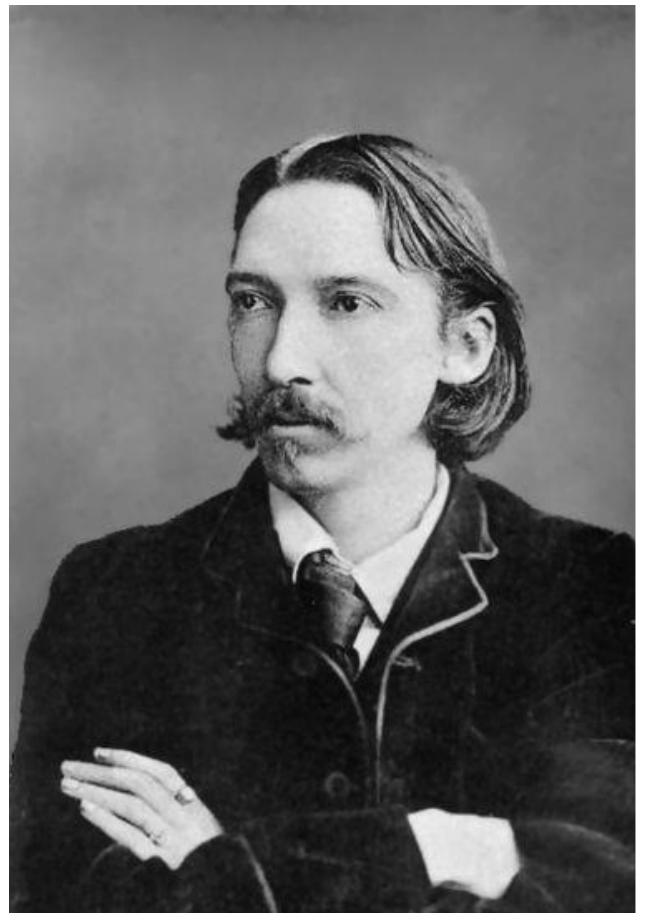
# Robert Louis Stevenson and the Heroes of Birkenhead.



41.



## Robert Louis Stevenson Pays Tribute to Liverpool – the Town That Abolished Slavery Within the British Empire.



Robert Louis Stevenson

UBI FIDES IBI LUX ET ROBUR



## -The Dingle Group-

Part of a network of black, white and mixed race 'brothers' and 'sisters' working together to achieve the abolition of slavery in 1833.

## -The Dingle Group-

Supported by the great people of Liverpool and paid secret tribute by some of the giants of world literature.

A wonderful story to tell our children.

## **The ‘Dingle Group’ of Abolitionists of Knott’s Hole ‘Down the Dingle’.**

**Robert Louis Stevenson, like many authors before him, is drawing  
attention to the ‘Dingle Group.’**

**This is their Story.**

The 1807 Slave Trade Act did not free a single slave in the Caribbean, it merely banned the trade in slaves. In 1821 a Liverpool merchant James Cropper of Dingle Bank decided to kickstart an ‘abolitionist revival’ this time for the total abolition of slavery itself and he founded new anti-slavery groups in both Liverpool and London.

Cropper acted swiftly and he recruited to his cause three of the veteran campaigners of the 1807 Slave Trade Act, he started at the very top with William Wilberforce.

*‘Good Cropper’s proposal ... makes me love better, a man I already esteemed and loved’.*

**William Wilberforce.**

Historians would agree with Cropper’s pivotal role in the ‘abolitionist revival’.

*The campaign for emancipation opened with a series of letters which the Quaker merchant James Cropper wrote to Wilberforce in 1821 and which he published in the Liverpool Mercury.*

**Michael R. Watts *The Dissenters* (1978)**

James Cropper then gave the legendary abolitionist Thomas Clarkson £700 (£100,000 today) to undertake an ‘abolitionist revival’ tour of Britain this time calling for the end of slavery itself and not just the trade in slaves.

James Cropper also recruited another veteran abolitionist, the former Governor of Sierra Leone, Zachary Macauley. Macauley’s daughter Margaret would marry into the Cropper family, so forming an extended group of ‘Dingle abolitionists.’

*It was James Cropper, a Quaker businessman of Liverpool, who examined, questioned and ultimately attacked British slavery from 1821, who impelled abolitionism forward. The old abolitionists rallied to Cropper’s side only after the newcomer had set the movement on an ideological and organisational course of his own choosing.*

**Mark Jones *The mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade and slavery* (1998).**

Cropper did not stop there, and he recruited 'new blood' for his cause notably Joseph Sturge of Birmingham who Cropper personally mentored into becoming a radical abolitionist.

*His interest in it (abolitionism) was continually nourished by the discussions which took place, almost annually at the Friends' Yearly Meeting and especially by the close personal intercourse which soon grew up between him and Mr. James Cropper of Liverpool.*

***Memoir of Joseph Sturge (1865) Henry Richard.***

Sturge would marry James Cropper's daughter Eliza – so further extending the Cropper family of abolitionists into a collective that would historically be more accurately termed 'The Dingle Group'.

In 1824 Cropper travelled to Ireland and would recruit perhaps the most influential member of the whole 'Dingle Group' – a man who would turn out to be the finest anti-slavery orator of the nineteenth century – Daniel O'Connell.

*O'Connell's interest in the issue of slavery had been dated back to 1824 when James Cropper, a Liverpool Quaker merchant, visited Ireland to raise support for a proposal to undermine West Indian slavery.*

***Liberator The Life and Death of Daniel O'Connell 1830-47. Patrick M. Geoghegan (2012)***

O'Connell, in turn, would be an inspiration to many influential black activists including the most important African American orator of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Frederick Douglass.

As an experienced Liverpool merchant James Cropper, his wife and daughter were given sole responsibility for distributing anti-slavery leaflets in the north of England, Ireland, the Caribbean and the United States. As a result, James Cropper's incendiary pamphlets were personally blamed by Liverpool merchant John Gladstone for inciting the 1823 Demerara (Guyana) slave revolt.

John Gladstone stated in no uncertain terms that he believed the slave revolt on his plantation had originated not in Demerara, South America but in the Dingle, South Liverpool...

*...the late revolt in Demerara (originating here)...*

**John Gladstone.**

***The Correspondence Between John Gladstone, Esq., M.P., and James Cropper. Liverpool Mercury. (1824).***

Cropper's pamphlets were also partially blamed for insurrection in the 1832 Sam Sharpe rebellion in Jamaica – these two slave revolts and their brutal suppression were pivotal in slavery being abolished in the British Empire in 1833.

James Cropper had also set up a network of black activist contacts in the United States including editors of anti-slavery newspapers such as John Brown Russwurm and Peter William Junior. The New York antislavery Society thanked James Cropper for his support upon its foundation on December 26<sup>th</sup> 1832. They were later to give refuge to a young runaway slave named Frederick Douglass.

Cropper invited leading black activists to Dingle Bank such as the nineteen year old James McCune Smith (later the mentor of Frederick Douglass) and Nathaniel Paul an early pioneer of the 'Underground Railroad' which smuggled escaped slaves from the United States to Canada.

Cropper did not stop there and on the eve of the 1833 Abolition Act, he invited the most powerful American abolitionist of the nineteenth century, William Lloyd Garrison to Dingle Bank and then on to London where he introduced Garrison to all the leading British abolitionists of the day.

James Cropper was not happy when slavery in the Caribbean was replaced by a six year 'apprenticeship' scheme, which was no better than slavery. He sent his son-in-law Joseph Sturge to Jamaica to report on conditions in the plantations.

*It remained to Joseph Sturge, with the constant support of Cropper on the side lines, to fight the outstanding battle concerning apprenticeship.*

***James Cropper and his Contribution to the Liverpool Antislavery movement.***

**K. Charlton (1971).**

Sturge's report to Parliament resulted in the 'Apprenticeship Scheme' being scrapped two years early and true freedom coming to 800,000 enslaved Africans in the Caribbean on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1838. Joseph Sturge is celebrated today as an official 'Champion of Jamaican Emancipation'

Frederick Douglass' first abolitionist tour of Great Britain and Ireland would largely be promoted and organized by Dingle Group member Joseph Sturge. Sturge also organized the world's first antislavery convention held in London in 1840.

James Cropper died on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1840 and he would sadly become Liverpool's 'forgotten abolitionist', however his legacy would not end with his death.

Cropper's sons, John and Edward, together with their wives, and the extended Cropper family would carry on with the struggle to free three million enslaved people in the United States in the years leading up to the American Civil War.

Edward's Cropper's third wife Margaret Denman of Dingle Bank (1815-99) was the daughter of the abolitionist Peer Lord Denman, Lord Chief Justice between 1832 and 1850 and a personal confidante of Queen Victoria.

As an abolitionist peer in the House of Lords, Denman had already proposed a motion in favour of black emancipation as early as March 1826 and a month later he supported an inquiry into the state of slavery in the West Indies. Denman, as a member of the extended Cropper family, was a frequent visitor to Dingle Bank and he would extend the Dingle Group's influence right into the heart of Queen Victoria's inner circle.

Despite ill health, Denman would also become Britain's most powerful and influential promoter of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Partly due to Denman's campaigning, the novel went on to become the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century and the book that Abraham Lincoln claimed to have started the American Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe would also stay with the Croppers several times at Dingle Bank referring to it as her 'English paradise'.

Lord Denman's son, Rear Admiral Joseph Denman (1810-74) was the brother of Margaret Denman Cropper of Dingle Bank and the brother-in-law of Edward Cropper of Dingle Bank and was yet another recruit to the Dingle Group.

Denman was a Commander in the West Africa Squadron, a Royal Navy flotilla initially set up after the Abolition of Slave Trade Act to intercept slave ships off the west coast of Africa. In November 1840, Denman then took three British warships, the *Wanderer*, *Rolla* and *Saracen* and with a force of 120 men, he went on a ruthless and systematic campaign along the African coast, burning slave holding forts to the ground, freeing over 850 slaves, and daring anyone to stop him.

One of the slave factories destroyed by Denman was that at Lomboko, at the head of the Gallinas River. The Stephen Spielberg film *Amistad* depicts the destruction of Lomboko and according to Melissa Eisen Azarian (1997)...

*After the verdict, the fictional character Captain Fitzgerald (Peter Firth) supervises the destruction of Lomboko. In actuality, Commander Joseph Denman led the destruction in 1840, even before the Amistad case went to the Supreme Court.*

Denman's anti-slavery plan became Government policy in 1844. The newfound powers drafted by Denman meant that by the time the American Civil War started in 1861 the 'Middle Passage' and slave trading from the west African Coast was virtually extinct.

Joseph Denman of the ‘Dingle Group’ more than any other individual in history can claim to have administered the ‘last rights’ to the hated Middle Passage that had once carried so many enslaved Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas.

Denman went on to command the Pacific Squadron, and as a favourite of Queen Victoria, he acted as the Queen’s groom in waiting and commanded her royal yacht, *Victoria and Albert*, from 1853 to 1860.

It can be argued with some considerable historical justification that were it not for the work of James Cropper as a motivator, an organizer, a financier, a propogandist, and as an insurrectionist then the freeing of up to 800,000 slaves in the Caribbean may have been delayed by several years.

For this reason, it could be said that the extended Liverpool Cropper family and ‘The Dingle Group’ made the major contribution to the abolition of slavery within the British Empire.

The Croppers would become the ‘forgotten abolitionists’ however they would not be forgotten by some of the greatest writers in history including

Harriet Beecher Stowe,

Edward Lear,

Elizabeth Gaskell,

Robert Louis Stevenson

Jules Verne.

John Lamb August 2022

A full version of this article can be found on the Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead website.

The link is here

[17.-Jules-Verne-pays-Tribute-to-the-Birkenhead-and-Liverpool-Abolitionists-1-compressed.pdf](https://www.julesverneandtheheroesofbirkenhead.co.uk/17.-Jules-Verne-pays-Tribute-to-the-Birkenhead-and-Liverpool-Abolitionists-1-compressed.pdf)  
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**Next on Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.**

**42. Theodore Roosevelt Returns to Treasure Island.**



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