This Resource pack is for Primary Schools.

It tells the story of Willis, a slave who arrived in Swansea on the 2nd of February 1833, and was freed. Placing the story in the context of the Slave Trade and the Welsh and other people who helped to end it, it becomes relevant to today's children.

The Pack provides a timeline, a book list, website references, photographic resources of where slaves came from, how they were transported, their new lives, songs about their freedom, and how they escaped on the 'underground railroad', etc.

9 schools have already used these materials and here are some of the children's comments

‘The play was excellent and taught me a lot about the slave trade. When the actor called Willis came in I jumped out of my skin, he was a great singer. Some parts made me feel like crying. I'm glad the slave trade is abolished'

‘I liked it when Derek put the pictures up and we were singing and doing actions’

I think the story helped me understand about the way they treated black people. I loved the music’

TEACHERS NOTES;

These resources stand alone, and we would be grateful if Jazz Heritage Wales is acknowledged when they are used, and that competed evaluation forms are sent to the email address below.

The pack is also designed to prepare the children for a Performance, which tells the story using words, songs and pictures. This can be commissioned separately. Again, please contact us.

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Britain became involved in the slave trade since the early 1600s, capturing Africans, loading them aboard ship as tethered cargo, and landing them (if they were still alive) in America or the West Indies. Some captured Africans were brought to this country. Some Welsh people, owning tobacco or sugar plantations in the West Indies, kept hundreds of slaves, building their castles in Wales on the backs of slavery, like the wealthy Pennant family of Penrhyn Castle, near Bangor. The eminent Swansea family De La Beche owned plantations and slaves in Jamaica. Thomas Eaton was another notable slaveowner. Swansea streets are named after them.

This is the story of how a young man, born a slave on a faraway plantation in America, found himself in Swansea. He had no way of knowing that Swansea had one of the largest and most committed Anti Slavery Societies in Wales.

Willis the slave, not his own name but the name of his owner, was born in 1813. We know nothing of his early life except that he was a slave on one of the southern cotton plantations, probably Kentucky or the Carolinas. The south meant slavery for African Americans, the north was freedom. For those slaves brave enough to try to escape, freedom meant crossing the vast, fast flowing Ohio River which separated Kentucky the slave holding state (the south), from Ohio and the northern freedom states on the opposite bank. Ohio’s main town on the riverbank in Willis’s day was Cincinnati with its paddle steamers carrying goods down to New Orleans. Today, Cincinnati’s paddle steamers run tourist trips.
Cincinnati was also the town to which the Swansea anti slavery campaigners Anna Margaretta Donaldson and Jessie (Heineken) Donaldson emigrated in 1822 and 1854. Both women (aunt and niece) ran safe houses for fleeing slaves on the Ohio riverbank in their houses called “Frandon” (after Francis Donaldson Anna Margaretta’s husband), “Penmaen” (Anna’s son’s house named after the family farm back in Monmouth), and “Clermont” Jessie Donaldson’s newly built house. “Frandon” and “Penmaen” are still standing. “Clermont” has not (yet) been found.

Willis ran away from his plantation in 1832 when he was 19 or 20 and instead of heading toward the Ohio River and trying to cross it to go north, he opted to travel along the river southwards to New Orleans, a journey on foot of many months. In the bustling port of New Orleans Willis stowed away on a copper ore carrier, destination Swansea, to discharge its cargo for the copper works at Landore.

Today Cincinnati is proud to have the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (opened 2004) on its riverbank, telling the stories of plantation life, and the slaves who helped build America. Willis, Jessie and Anna Margaretta’s stories are now part of the archives at the NURFC.
TIMELINE

1799
Jessie Heineken is born, the daughter of lawyer Samuel Heineken; an anti-slavery campaigner. Opens school at 32 Wind Street, Swansea in 1829

1813
Willis is born to a slave mother on a Kentucky Plantation.

1822
Anna Margareta & Francis Donaldson (Jessie’s Cousin) emigrate with 7 children from their farm “Penmaen” in mid-Wales to Cincinnati, Ohio. They run a Safe House for runaway slaves at “Frandon” on the riverbank.

1823
Anti-Slavery meeting held at Swansea Town Hall. Welsh Slave owners are discussed.

1824
Thomas Clarkson, Anti-Slavery campaigner, visits Swansea Anti Slavery Society, the largest and most committed society in Wales.

1832
Willis, the slave, runs away from his plantation and stows away on a copper ore carrier called the St. Peter in New Orleans.
TIMELINE

Willis arrives in Swansea Docks. Mr. T. Edwards, the Portreeve (Mayor) is sent for by the captain. He sets Willis free.

1833

1836

Anna Margaretta’s son, Thomas, runs a safe house called “Penmaen”. Mobs threaten Anna Margaretta at “Frandon”. Shots are fired.

1840

Jessie, aged 41, marries her cousin from Cincinnati, Francis Jnr.

1845

Frederick Douglass, freed slave, publishes his autobiography. Undertakes speaking tour of the UK. Visits Swansea?

1854

Jessie, aged 57, and Francis emigrate to Cincinnati and build the third welsh Safe House, “Clermont”. They stay at “Penmaen” while their house is built.

1861 - 1865 The American Civil War
B E F O R E  F R E E D O M

T I M E L I N E

1863
Ellen and William Craft, freed slaves, Lecture at Mount Pleasant Chapel, Kingsway Swansea.

Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, opens “for the education of Free Slaves and their children”

1866
Jessie, aged 69, and Francis, return to Swansea.

Jessie, aged 69, and Francis, return to Swansea.

1874
Fisk Jubilee Singers arrive in Swansea.
Willis is aged 61. Jessie is aged 77.

Jessie Donaldson dies, aged almost 91, in Swansea.

1889

1894
The last sighting of Willis. He was sittin on a wall in Northampton Lane aged about 80.
PLANTATION LIFE

Willis the slave. Born 1813
(Willis was not HIS name, but the name of his owner.)

“Flogging; A punishment practiced in the United States, for the crime of loving liberty.”

“Some captured Africans were brought to this country. Some Welsh people, owning tobacco or sugar plantations in the West Indies, kept hundreds of slaves”
Anti Slave Campaigner Visited Swansea in 1822

"Britain became involved in the slave trade since the early 1600s, capturing Africans, loading them aboard ship as tethered cargo and landing them (if they were still alive) in America or the West Indies."

BEFORE FREEDOM
**Slave Ships**

The journey was long and for men and women who had probably never travelled by ship it must have been terrifying. Many people died without ever making it to their new ‘homes’.

**Capturing and Branding**

The inhuman treatment began as soon as the slaves were either captured or sold to the slave traders.

**West African Languages**

The languages of the region are tonal and their vocabulary is based on variations in the vowel sound.
THE ESCAPE

1832 - Willis, Aged 19, runs away.

For those slaves brave enough to try to escape, freedom meant crossing the vast, fast flowing Ohio River.

Sign commemorating the safe passage route, Kentucky.
SWANSEA ABOLITIONISTS

Anna Margaretta and Jessie Donaldson emigrate to Cincinnati, U.S.A. and run safe houses for runaway slaves.

BEFORE FREEDOM

BOTH WOMEN (AUNT AND NEICE) RAN SAFE HOUSES FOR FLEEING SLAVES ON THE OHIO RIVERBANK IN THEIR HOUSES

C. DONALDSON & CO.
IMPORTERS AND DEALERS IN
HARDWARE & CUTLERY,
STEEL, BRASS WARE AND SADDLERY,
In all their varieties,
No. 24 MAIN STREET, BETWEEN FRONT AND SECOND,
CINCINNATI.

(The text on the page is not legible due to the image quality.)

ABOLITIONISTS BEWARE.

The citizens of Cincinnati, endeavoring every means to promote the interest of the city, are requested to be on their guard against any attempts to disturb the quiet of the town.

(Additional text is not legible due to the image quality.)

10
EMANCIPATION OF A SLAVE AT SWANSEA.—A short time since, the St. Peter (H. Nickle, master), a large American ship, arrived at this port from Cabija, in Chili, with copper ore; and on Thursday the 24th ult., a very fine young negro, about 20 years of age, of the name of Willis, applied to T. Edw. Thomas, Esq., Portreeve, stating that he was a slave acting as cook on board the St. Peter; that he had accidentally heard, that if he could but put his foot upon British ground, he would then be free, and requested advice upon this point. Mr. T. instantly sent to the ship to ascertain whether Willis really had been a slave on board such vessel, but as the Captain was not to be met with at the instant, the worthy Magistrate lost no time in assuring the poor fellow, that by the laws of this happy country, he was emancipated—that he was no longer a slave!!! This gratifying information naturally gave the most heartfelt delight to all present, but more especially to Willis, who for the first moment of his life, felt that he was a free man!!! The following morning, as he would not return on board, he had a written discharge from the ship, and as he was not entitled to any wages, the Captain generously gave him two sovereigns. Willis belonged to the ship owners, and it will be gratifying to the friends of humanity to learn, that during the nine years he had served in the bonds of slavery, he had no complaint to make against his former or his present master, but that, on the contrary, he had experienced every indulgence and kindness compatible with his situation. Notwithstanding (and his good condition and well-dressed appearance, bespoke the truth of his statement) he was anxious to be free.
WILLIS IN SWANSEA
Penmaen, Frandon and Clermont were three safe houses for runaway slaves.
INSTEAD OF HEADING TOWARD THE OHIO RIVER AND TRYING TO CROSS IT TO GO NORTH, WILLIS OPTED TO TRAVEL ALONG THE RIVER SOUTHWARDS TO NEW ORLEANS.
SLAVE AUCTION HOUSES

COURT HOUSE STEPS
Old Washington, Kentucky

$1200 to $1250 dollars for negroes!!

Two undesignated wishes to purchase a large lot of negroes for the New Orleans market. I wish the negroes to be well fitted and to have $1200 to $1250 for 3 or 4 young women. In fact I will pay more for likely.

WM. P. TALBOT.
LEXINGTON, JULY 5, 1883.
LIFE ON THE OHIO RIVER

TALL STACKS

PADDLE STEAMERS USED ON THE OHIO RIVER, CINCINNATI
THE ABOLITIONISTS

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

ELLEN CRAFT

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

WILLIAM CRAFT
CONDUCTORS ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Safe Passage Route.

HARRIET TUBMAN

POLLY ANN JACKSON CALDWELL

BILLY MARSHALL

JOHN & JEAN RANKIN
B E F O R E  F R E E D O M

S I N G I N G  F O R  F R E E D O M

PLANTATION SLAVE SINGERS.

STRAIGHT FRUIT

No. 53. I'm Troubled in Mind.

[Music notation]

Verse 1:
I'm troubled, I'm troubled, I'm troubled in mind, If Jesus don't help me, I surely will die. O Jesus, my Saviour, on thee I'll depend, When troubles are near me, you'll be my true friend.

Chorus:
I'm troubled, I'm troubled, I'm troubled in mind, If Jesus don't help me, I surely will die. O Jesus, my Saviour, on thee I'll depend, When troubles are near me, you'll be my true friend.

Verse 2:
When hemmed with trouble and burdened with grief, To Jesus in secret I'll go for relief. Oo— I'm troubled, &c.

Verse 3:
In dark days of bondage to Jesus I prayed, To help me to bear it, and he gave me his aid. Oo— I'm troubled, &c.
SLAVE SONGS AND SPIRITUALS
BY FREE SLAVES
WEBSITE LIST

Find More Stories on Runaway Slaves, the Underground Railroad, Plantation Songs, Slave Songs, the history of runaways:

Swansea and Wales Stories
jazzheritagewales@uwtsd.ac.uk

Cambrian Indexing Project (Cambrian Newspaper, Swansea)
www.archives@swansea.gov.uk

American Memory, the Library of Congress
www.memory.loc.gov

Documenting the American South
www.docsouth.unc.edu

Fisk Jubilee Singers
www.fisk.edu

Plantation Music – Stephen Collins Foster
www.pdmusic.org/foster

Negro Spirituals
www.negrospirituals.com

America’s Story
www.americaslibrary.gov

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
www.freedomcenter.org

Cincinnati Historical Society Library
www.Cincymuseum.org

The African-American Experience in Ohio
www.dbs.ohiohistory.org

Interactive Maps
www.yourchildlearns.com
Runaway Slaves, Rebels on the Plantation by John Hope Franklin & Loren Schwe-ninger, Oxford University Press, 1999 p.222 “When the slave Willis boarded a steam-boat in New Orleans in 1832, he wore a white shirt, brown linen pants, a blue cloth frock coat, and a black hat. He also took with him a bundle of clothing wrapped in a sheet.”. Women in Jazz Swansea library collection.


Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life by Frederick Douglass, Oxford University Press, 1999 (first published 1845) WIJS collection.


Negro Spirituals or The Songs of the Jubilee Singers, W. J. Gibbs, Bromley, Kent, 1900 (? un-dated) WIJS collection.


