Everton's new Bramley-Moore stadium is a stark reminder of Liverpool's historic entanglement with slavery in Brazil

Despite opposition from heritage groups, Everton Football Club's planned move to a new £500-million stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock has this week been given the green light by planning officials. The grade-II listed site is rightly regarded as an important example of Liverpool's rich maritime heritage, but its name also carries a stark reminder of the city's historic entanglement with slavery in Brazil, which continued long after abolition in Britain's own colonies, writes **Joe Mulhern** (Durham University).

• Também disponível em português

Given Liverpool's past status as the epicentre of the British slave trade, much recent historical reckoning has quite justifiably focused on the city's connections to that traffic until its abolition in 1807 and to slavery in Britain's Caribbean colonies until 1833. There has also been wide recognition of Liverpool's links to slavery in the United States and the city's broad support for the Confederacy during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Less well recognised, however, are Liverpool's deep connections to Brazil, where the illegal slave trade raged on until 1850 and slavery persisted until 1888. At the very centre of this problematic history was John Bramley-Moore, the Liverpool merchant-cum-politician who gave his name to the dock where Everton plan to build their new home.

The site of Everton's new stadium is named for John Bramley-Moore, who profited directly and indirectly from the exploitation of enslaved people in Brazil (by Edward Benson; public domain)

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When the eponymous dock opened in August 1848, John Bramley-Moore's political career was just about to take off. A few months later he was installed as Liverpool's Lord Mayor and by 1854 he had been elected as an MP for the first of two stints at Westminster (1854-1859; 1862-1865). During this period, Bramley-Moore maintained an active interest in the mercantile business that had brought him significant wealth and enough social capital to launch his political career. Bramley-Moore was a "Brazilian merchant", and it was through this trade that he directly and indirectly profited from the exploitation of enslaved people.

When he arrived in Rio de Janeiro as a young man in around 1820, he was still known as John Moore, only adding Bramley to his surname in 1841. Little is known about his early years in the then capital of the Portuguese empire, but Moore was one of many merchants seeking their fortune in a market only recently opened to British trade. It was in the decade after Brazil's independence in 1822 that John Moore & Co began to consolidate its position as one of Rio de Janeiro's principal import-export houses, profiting from an economy and operating in a society where slavery predominated.

In the 1820s alone, slave traders forcibly trafficked over half a million Africans to Brazil to work as slaves on plantations and in a range of rural and urban contexts. Aside from trading in slave-worked exports such as sugar and coffee, Bramley-Moore himself was a slaveowner, making use of forced labour in both his commercial establishment in the centre of the city and on his "extensive and prettily situated" country estate (*chácara*) at Alto da Boa Vista, a property containing five thousand coffee bushes.

Pieter Godfred Bertichen's depiction of Chácara Russel, another British-owned estate in Rio de Janeiro (public domain)

Diary entries penned by John's brother, Joseph Bramley-Moore, during a visit to Rio in 1831 mention some of these enslaved people. Characteristic of the justifications and delusions employed by British slave-owners and their apologists, Joseph made a point of describing his brother as "a kind and indulgent master". The idea of the benevolent British slave-owner is of course baseless in a system defined by violence and coercion. Indeed, the diarist would go on to undermine his own argument by recalling the case of Joaquim, a coachman, who had resisted enslavement by escaping and living free in a nearby town before being pursued and ultimately recaptured by John Bramley-Moore.

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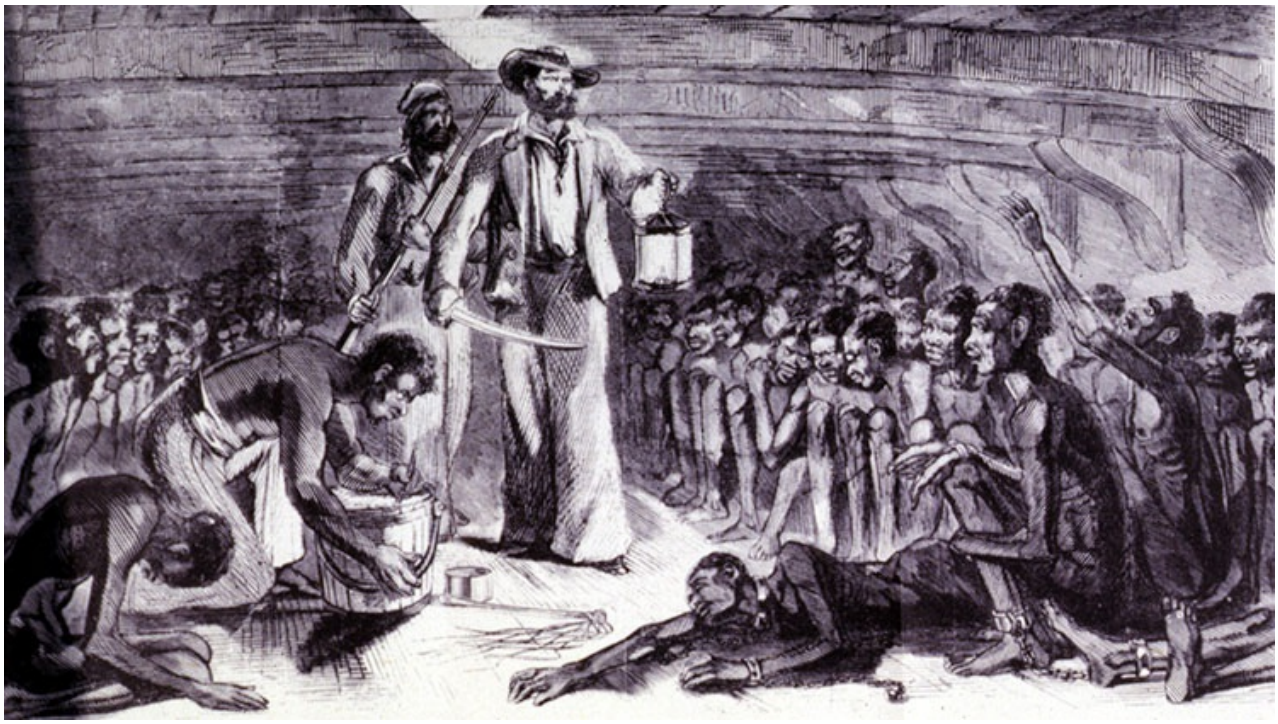
Bramley-Moore was also complicit in the violence of the middle passage through his firm's role in supplying and financing the slave trade to Brazil. Despite the traffic having been outlawed by the Brazilian government in 1831, an extensive illegal slave trade persisted until the mid-century, accounting for the enslavement of some three quarter of a million Africans. Though organised and carried out by Luso-Brazilian principals, British firms played a central role in the resurgence of the trade through the supply of manufactured goods on lengthy credit terms, which allowed the traffickers to make repayment on the return of their clandestine voyages. These arrangements were so lucrative to British merchants, many with branch houses in Liverpool, that it caused HM Chargé D'Affaires in Rio to admit in 1839 that "very many, nay most of our countrymen in Brazil, are more or less openly, advocates and supporters of the slave trade".



"Bramley-Moore was also complicit in the violence of the middle passage through his firm's role in supplying and financing the slave trade to Brazil" (scenes below deck on the Gloria, which served ports like Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, by Richard Drake; public domain)

Though John Bramley-Moore left Brazil in 1835 to manage his business from Liverpool, his firm's continued connections to the illegal trade are amongst the clearest of any British merchant house in Brazil. In 1839, John Moore & Co, alongside other British firms, declared their public support for Manoel Pinto da Fonseca, by signing an attestation of good character in the Portuguese's favour. Fonseca had already organised illegal slaving voyages and would go on to become one of the most notorious *traficantes* of the 1840s.

The most flagrant example of Bramley-Moore's complicity in the illegal slave trade though, was the capture in March 1840 of the *Guiana* by a Royal Navy cruiser off the coast of West Africa. The *Guiana*, part owned by Bramley-Moore and another Liverpool merchant, was then taken to Sierra Leone, where it was condemned by the Vice-Admiralty Court for aiding and abetting the slave trade. The Court's suspicions were well-founded; the vessel had been chartered by well-known *traficante* Manoel Francisco Lopes while at Bahia, where John Moore & Co had an office, with the intention of supplying the "coast goods" typically employed in the illegal trade.

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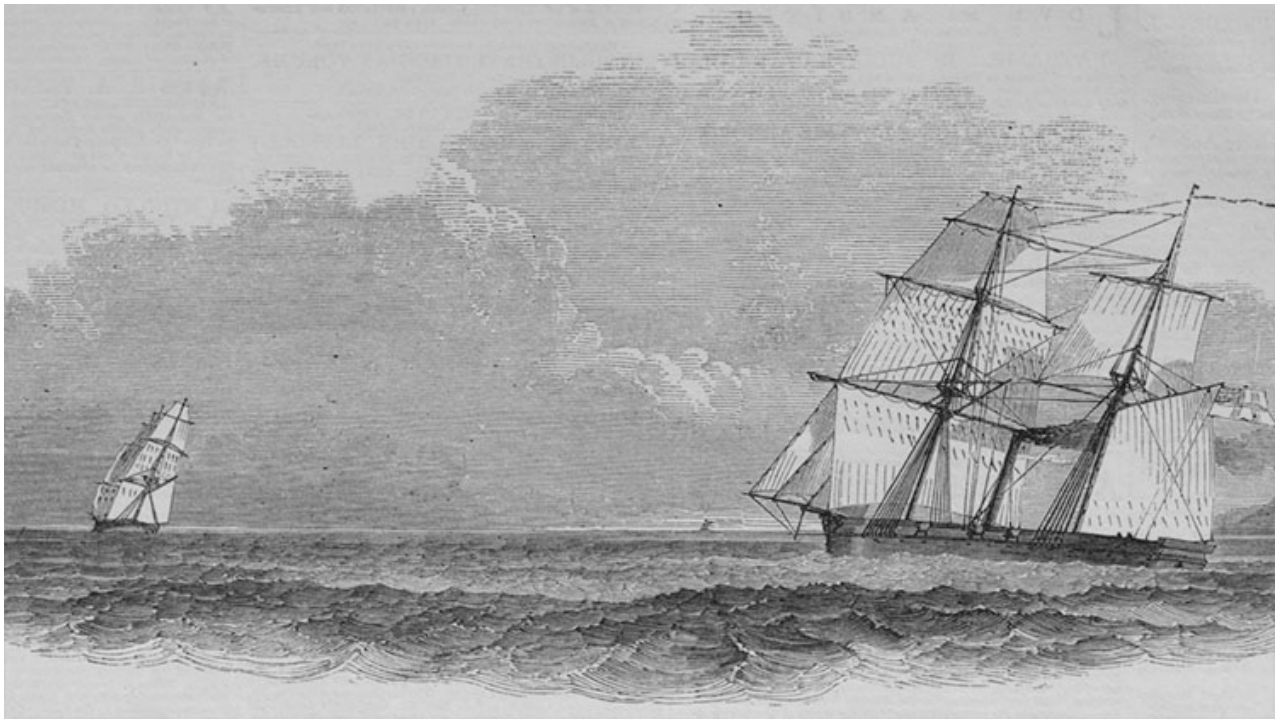

The British HMS Rifleman gives chase to a Brazilian slave ship (The Illustrated London News, 1850; public domain)

Despite being one of only a few examples from this period of a British vessel condemned for aiding and abetting the slave trade, the *Guiana* episode had little impact on Bramley-Moore's reputation nor his intertwined career in business and politics. The very next year he was elected to Liverpool's town council as an alderman and would soon embark on the docks project that would ultimately bear his name. Bramley-Moore's political ascension was sustained by his commercial success, in particular his firm's increasing interest in the export of coffee, the slave-grown commodity that became the Brazilian economy's engine of growth from the 1830s onwards. Similarly, Bramley-Moore used his political weight to defend commercial relations with Brazil and its slave economy, both as chairman of the Liverpool Brazilian Association and as an elected MP.

Bramley-Moore died in 1886, two years before the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) finally abolished slavery in Brazil. His wealth, and the political career that it facilitated, was built in large part on the direct and indirect exploitation of enslaved people and their labour. In spite of the very public episode involving the *Guiana*, Bramley-Moore's connections to slavery have been sanitised from his legacy. His entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1901), which has informed many modern references to the man, makes no mention of slavery. This omission also went uncorrected in Bramley-Moore's revised entry for the 2004 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. As the organisers of the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership project have noted, this is part of a wider process of elision that rendered problematic connections to slavery virtually invisible in British history.

A hard-fought campaign by historians, heritage organisations, and the local community has led Liverpool City Council to commit to installing plaques that contextualise links to slavery on a number of streets named for slave traders. As custodians of a site that will soon find itself in the global spotlight, Everton Football Club and the City Council have an opportunity to do likewise by contextualising an area named for a man so deeply entangled with slavery in Brazil.

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