

James Lonsdale

George Brown with Liverpool Blue Coat School in the background

Undated painting, oil on canvas



George Brown became a pupil of Blue Coat School in 1765. Aged eight and an orphan, his only possessions were his parents' marriage certificate and his own birth certificate. He was a successful pupil and when he left the school he was apprenticed to the sea. Before taking his first voyage, however, he got tangled in a rope and broke both legs.

He recovered from his accident and went to sea, eventually making his fortune and becoming one of the wealthiest merchants in Liverpool. He donated money to Blue Coat

School, as he felt he owed his good luck and fortune to the opportunities it had given him.

Records reveal that Brown's wealth was made from Transatlantic slavery. As a slave ship captain, he made journeys to Africa, transporting enslaved people to the Americas to work on plantations. In five such journeys, a total of 754 people were boarded, against their will, on to one of Brown's ships, 85 of whom died during the passage. There are no details of the lives of those who survived the journey, and the harsh life they endured as slaves.

Despite his business as a slaver, Brown was considered to be a success story for the school at the time, and was said to be the 'best of Christian men.'

This portrait of Brown was commissioned by Blue Coat School to thank him for his donations and support.