Henry ‘Box’ Brown Poster  
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This poster formed part of a (2009) student live project in American Studies entitled ‘Commemorating Abolition and Liberating Sojourn’. The project involved researching the ex-slave Abolitionists who came to Britain from America in the 1840s and 1850s, prior to the American Civil War. The poster itself is the culmination of this research. It focuses on the black Abolitionist and traveller, Henry ‘Box’ Brown, a runaway slave who made his escape from bondage in 1849 by being posted in a box, from Richmond in the slave-controlled south, to Philadelphia in the relatively free north, hence the nickname. From Philadelphia he was able to make his way to England in 1850.

The starting point for this project was The Unboxing of Henry Brown (2003), a biography by Jeffrey Ruggles, and from here we trawled through several archives in search of information: the Manchester Library, the Shropshire Archives online, the Preston record office and other various online applications. During this period of research we also paid visits to an array of museums, including The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool and Lancaster Maritime Museum. We also spent a weekend in London in order to visit various institutions, which had links with either the slave trade or abolition. These included the Quaker Library, Freemasons Hall and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

The results of months of research were astounding and rewarding. We began with the hope of finding an original and yet to be discovered source and, searching through the Shropshire Archives, Shukar made a very prominent discovery: an entertainments bill for December 1859, which contains a wealth of information about Brown’s activities. As the Ruggles biography of Brown discusses his visit to Britain only until May 1859, it appeared that we had made quite a discovery. Furthermore, as far as we are currently aware, the bill and the Shrewsbury visit it documents, have not been discussed by previous historians of Blacks in Britain or Abolitionism. The Shrewsbury bill and other important material that we discovered, including new information about Abolitionist
contacts in Wolverhampton and census details providing confirmation of Brown’s wife
and children, we reproduced in the Poster itself. But the value of this research was
confirmed by the reaction of several international delegates, when the poster was
presented at a conference on Abolitionism: Liberating Sojourn 2, which was held in
Liverpool in April 2009, organized by Professor Alan Rice, our UCLan tutor.

This project, the research it entailed and the new material identified in this undergraduate
activity, lead to the conclusion that there is still an abundance of slave history waiting to
be discovered. For more information visit www.uclan.ac.uk/abolition