WHOSE HERITAGE? RESEARCH RESIDENCY PROGRAMME

A Culture& programme offering residencies to new diverse arts professionals at leading arts and heritage organisations.

January 2021 – November 2021

Programme Manager
Sandra Shakespeare
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‘Unless the younger generation has access to...cultural repertoires and can understand and practice them, to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources – the cultural capital – of their own 'heritage', as a base from which to engage other traditions.’

THE OPEN CALL

Sandra

Whose Heritage? Residencies were undertaken by New Museum School graduates at the following National Trust sites: Sutton House, 575 Wandsworth Road in London, Runnymede & Ankwerwyke and Clandon Park in Surrey. Online organisations Art UK and the Collections Trust and Milton’s Cottage Museum in Buckinghamshire. Researchers brought diverse perspectives to specific areas of research at each organisation. Each researcher was mentored by curatorial, research, or interpretation staff in their quest to reveal new narratives behind objects and sites to connect meaningfully with diverse audiences - those communities who might not feel the collections or sites are ‘for them’.

INTERSECTIONALITY
DECOLONISATION
ACTIVISM

Residencies allowed researchers creative opportunities for the interrogation language and terminology, traditionally used when classifying or describing objects. The reports capture this tension with contemporary forms of decolonisation practice to challenge accepted institutional practice. For example: Sutton House’s intangible history linked to ‘squatter activism’ explored local communities and new insights conveyed through archives, protest banners and posters through a digital zine. This ezine also speaks to Gen Z, the accessibility and consumption of heritage through online digital media expressed through non-conformist DIY art forms.

Or with Art UK and research into Bi-visibility: the importance of bisexual+ representation in UK art collections. At 575 Wandsworth Road research and re-interpretation of the times and life of the owner Khadambi Asalache will help enhance and understand how BAME visitors experience topophilia at this site. Whose Heritage? Residencies:

- Revealed new narratives behind objects, collections, sites, and monuments in ways that connect meaningfully with diverse audiences
- Brought new research and interpretation to heritage assets
- Illustrated the value of a diverse workforce
- Supported the careers of graduates through an outcome driven residency with leading heritage organisations
- Shared knowledge with the wider sector with work and outcomes on a new online platform this provides the context for the broader debate of diversity issues across the arts and heritage sector.
EDINAM EDEM-JORDJIE

University of Leicester in collaboration with English Heritage

Edinam is a recent New Museum School graduate, having been based at the National Trust. Edinam was based within the London Creative Team at the Trust’s regional office in London, and the Garden and Outdoors team at Morden Hall Park, focusing on projects centred around urban greenspace – one of which involved restoring the famous Rose Garden. After graduating with a degree in anthropology at Goldsmiths, Edinam worked at UCL where she supported the Community Engagement and Exhibitions teams with the planning, production and delivery of exhibitions and public engagement programmes within and outside UCL. Alongside this, she also spent time volunteering at various heritage sites such as the National History Museum. These experiences have inspired her interest in finding new and innovative ways of presenting the objects, traditions, places etc. that tell the stories, beliefs, histories and values of our society.
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Research project by Edinam Edem–Jordjie for the University of Leicester in collaboration with English Heritage as part of the *Whose Heritage?* residencies in partnership with Culture&.

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Audley End

Just outside the small town of Saffron Walden in Essex lies Audley End, a stunning Jacobean mansion once renowned as the largest and most opulent house built in early 17th-century England.

Its rural location is far from the ports and marine cities that enabled Britain to become the world’s foremost slave-trading nation and colonial power. Yet, a glimpse into Audley End’s past will reveal connections to the British Empire and Atlantic enslavement in the activities of three families who’ve resided at the property: the Howards, the Griffins and the Nevilles.

All prominent members of the English nobility, together, these families take us through 200 years of British imperialism, from the explorative beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade to the establishment of a global empire.

Overview – Early History of the Site

Audley End has long been associated with the English nobility. Originally an Abbey that was founded by the 1st Earl of Essex, it was seized by King Henry VIII during the 16th century English Reformation and granted to Sir Thomas Audley (1488–1544) who converted it into a residence. This was the house that his grandson Admiral Thomas Howard, 1st Earl of Suffolk, inherited, demolished, and then rebuilt on the scale of a royal palace in the period between 1605 and 1614.

The Howard Family

Thomas Howard inherited Audley End at a time when Britain was competing with other European nations such as Portugal and Spain to establish overseas empires, with Ireland being colonised in the late 16th century and colonies across the Americas soon following, beginning with Virginia in 1607. As a Royal Navy admiral, Thomas Howard helped establish England as a maritime power and was subsequently rewarded with a knighthood, made Baron Howard de Walden in 1597 and the 1st Earl of Suffolk in 1603.

Thomas’ firstborn son, Theophilus, 2nd Earl of Suffolk and 2nd Baron Howard de Walden (1584 – 1640) was named as a councillor in the Second Charter of Virginia in 1609. The document awarded colonialists and planters more influence over the territorial governance of Virginia and enabled English merchant companies and individuals to invest in the colonisation effort. The position did not earn Theophilus much wealth and when combined with the family’s stale finances, led to him selling £36,000 worth of land to avoid bankruptcy.

Theophilus’ firstborn son, James, 3rd Earl of Suffolk (1619–1689), married Lady Susanna Rich (1627–1649) in 1640, the year he inherited Audley End. Her father, the 1st Earl of Holland (1590–1649), was the governor of the Providence Island Company, which colonised several islands off the Mosquito Coast in Central America to use as bases for trade and privateering purposes. Although Holland was largely inactive in the company’s business affairs, he used his influence at court to obtain a charter and other legal privileges for it, meaning he still earned a significant amount of money from the company.

Despite marrying into wealth, this did little to improve James’ fortunes and in 1666 he sold Audley End to King Charles II for £50,000. However, upkeep costs proved ruinous and as successive monarchs showed little interest in the property, Audley End was returned to the Howards in 1701, with Theophilus’s youngest son, Henry, 5th Earl of Suffolk acquiring the estate.
Upon Henry’s death in 1709, the estate passed to his firstborn son, also named Henry, whose role in the Council of Trade and Foreign Plantations provides another significant connection to transatlantic slave trading and chattel enslavement in the Americas for the Howard family. Established in 1696, the Council was an unelected regulatory body of commissioners composed of noblemen and merchants responsible for foreign trade and plantation affairs. Henry became the Council’s first Commissioner of Trade and Plantations in 1715 and held the post until his death in 1718.

A further and more geographically close link to enslavement history that occurred during the lifetime of Charles William Howard (1693–1722), the 7th Earl, was the family’s connection to an enslaved Black servant named Scipio Africanus (1702–1720). An elaborate headstone and religious inscription bearing the name ‘Scipio Africanus’ marks the burial place of the young, enslaved African, located in St Mary’s churchyard, Henbury, near Bristol. His presence there, and the 1720 date of burial, suggest that he worked at Henbury’s Great House when it was Charles’ main residence. In keeping with a convention of the time to assign the classical names of Greek or Roman leaders to servants of colour, the young, enslaved African was named after Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, the famous Roman general of African descent. At the time of the young man’s death, it is estimated there were around 10,000 enslaved Black people in Britain. However, in the absence of detailed documentation about the lived experiences and social status of people who were enslaved servants in stately homes throughout Britain, this type of memorial dedicated to a named 18th century figure with African heritage remains very rare.

After Charles’s death in 1722, a succession of Earls from that historical period gradually reduced the size of the estate until only the inner court was left. After the 10th Earl died in 1745 with no surviving heirs, Audley End was divided between distant family members. Elizabeth, Countess of Portsmouth (1691–1762), was a beneficiary and in 1751, she bought the rest of the estate for her nephew, Sir John Griffin Whitwell (1719–97) to inherit, on the condition that he change his surname to Griffin.

The Griffin Family

Sir John Griffin Griffin inherited Audley End in 1762. He was made the 1st Baron of Braybrooke in 1788, with the condition that his title and inheritance would pass to his nephew’s son, Richard Griffin, as he had no children. Richard (1750–1825) inherited Audley End in 1797. As a former Provost–Marshal of Jamaica, he oversaw the British military personnel that had day-to-day responsibilities for aspects of civilian law enforcement in Jamaica. This was said to have brought him about £120,000 over his lifetime. With his wealth, he made considerable changes to Audley End, including the addition of efficient sanitation features and lighting.

The Grenville Family

In 1780, Richard Griffin married Catherine Grenville (1761–96), the daughter of Prime Minister George Grenville. Their firstborn son, also named Richard, inherited Audley End whilst their second, George Neville–Grenville, invested in a Jamaican sugar plantation.

Named Hope, the 200-acre plantation was owned by Roger Hope Elletson, who was the Lieutenant–Governor of Jamaica, the official representative of the monarch and acting nominal chief executive officer. Under his management, around 300 enslaved people lived on the plantation.

When Elletson died in 1775, the plantation and all enslaved persons were inherited by his widow, Anna Gamon. She married James Brydges, the 3rd Duke of Chandos in 1777 and the
two became joint absentee plantation managers and slave owners. The work of the enslaved people delivered the couple an annual income of £6,000 per year amounting to around £5m today.

In 1813 the plantation was inherited by their daughter, Lady Anna, who married the 1st Duke of Buckingham (1776–1839) in 1796, and passed it to her son, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1797–1861) when she died in 1836.

At the time, Britain was in the process of abolishing slavery throughout its Empire – primarily as a direct result of the slave rebellions that destabilised the plantation economy, the lobbying of anti-slavery campaigners and the legislative debates taking place in the British Parliament. Cessation of the transatlantic trade began with the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Act of 1807, which restricted the transportation of enslaved persons on British ships. This was followed by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833/4. However, full emancipation for enslaved Africans in British colonial territories took a further four years to achieve, after the transitional process known as ‘Apprenticeship’ was forced to end on 1 August 1838. To compensate slave owners for the loss of their ‘property’, the UK government set aside £20 million (equivalent to many billions today). This amount had to be borrowed and was only paid off by British taxpayers in 2015. Formerly enslaved people weren’t offered any compensation or reparations.

George Neville-Grenville was a trustee of the 2nd Duke of Buckingham’s marriage settlement and was awarded £6,630 as part of a £20,000 slave owner compensation claim for the 379 enslaved persons slaves resident on the plantation at the time.

Conclusion

Uncovering the connections to plantation enslavement and the British Empire of the three families resident at Audley End, has revealed very poignant narratives about how enslavement labour in the Caribbean underpinned the wealth of the English nobility.

As the financial beneficiaries of enslavement connected to Audley End were primarily absentee plantation owners based in Britain, the additional, embodied link to enslavement, via Scipio Africanus, is a very important, poignant, and proximate aspect of this site’s connections to the Atlantic world. Additionally, the fact that the headstone marking the burial place of the 18th century enslaved man named Scipio was defaced by vandals during 2020 – presumably as a retaliatory response to the earlier toppling of enslaver Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol during that year – shows that these histories continue to be of relevance to contemporary socio-political debates and activism concerning equality, diversity, decolonisation, and racial justice.
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**Published:** 4 July 1740, London  
**Creator:** George Foster  
**Accessed from:** The British Library  
**URL:** [https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-new-map-of-the-island-of-jamaica](https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-new-map-of-the-island-of-jamaica) |
| ![Gravestone](image2) | **Full Title:** Headstone of Scipio Africanus  
**Published:** 10th August 2020  
**Creator:** William Avery  
**Accessed From:** Archaeology Magazine  
**URL:** [https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/scipio-africanus-gravestone.htm](https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/scipio-africanus-gravestone.htm) |
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<td><strong>Full Title:</strong> Map of the Mosquito Shore, Nicaragua, Central America</td>
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| **Contributor Names:** Higley, H. G. (Henry Grant), Sr.
Spellman, Sam D.
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| **Published:** 1894, New York |
| **Accessed From:** Library of Congress |
| **URL:** [https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4852m.ma001018/?r=-0.712,0.16,2.425,1.149,0](https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4852m.ma001018/?r=-0.712,0.16,2.425,1.149,0) |

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<td><strong>Description:</strong> Desk seal of the Providence Island Company consisting of silver seal–die and wooden turned handle, possibly ebony; its circular face is engraved with a device of three islands in waves with a motto from Isaiah.</td>
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| **Source:** British Museum
British Museum collection reference number: 2016,8002.1 |
| **Online image:** [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_2016-8002-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_2016-8002-1)
See also: [https://grants.fnl.org.uk/silver-seal-die-providence-island-company](https://grants.fnl.org.uk/silver-seal-die-providence-island-company) |
Herman Moll Map of the West Indies
("A Chart of ye West-Indies, or the Islands of America in the North Sea & c.")

Creator: Moll, Herman, (1654-1732)
Source: Royal Geographical Society
Dimensions: Height: 8 in (20.3 cm); Width: 11 in (27.9 cm)

RGS collection reference number: rgs559472

Online image (Wikimedia Commons):
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1732_Herman_Moll_Map_of_the_West_Indies_and_Caribbean_-_Geographicus_-_WestIndies-moll-1732.jpg
Battle Abbey

Introduction

With its well-preserved battlefield and the historic town of Battle that was created to serve it, the ruins of Battle Abbey stands as a tangible and vivid reminder of one of the most famous conflicts to take place on English soil – the 1066 Battle of Hastings.

However, a look past the events of 1066 will reveal connections to the British Empire and Atlantic enslavement in the activities of the Webster family, the Abbey’s longest and last residents.

Covering a period of over 200 years from the 17th century to the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, a glimpse into the lived experiences of the Webster family will show how the wealthy supplemented their fortunes through enslavement related commerce in the Americas.

Overview

The Battle of Hastings was fought on the 14th of October 1066 and marked the beginning of the Norman Conquest of England, when William the Duke of Normandy, defeated King Harold II and became William I, the first Norman monarch to rule England.

The battlefield owes its survival to William I who built a monastery on the site as an act of penance for those who lost their lives during the battle. Dedicated to the Trinity, the Virgin and St Martin of Tours, the Benedictine monastery of Battle Abbey was opened in 1071.

It operated for 467 years before it was suppressed by Henry VIII in the 16th century English Reformation and given to Sir Anthony Browne, who demolished the church and converted the abbey’s dormitory into a country house. It remained within the Browne family until it was bought by Sir Thomas Webster in 1721 for £56,000.

Power and Profit

Sir Thomas Webster (1679 – 1751) purchased Battle Abbey at a time when Britain was beginning to assert itself as the world’s foremost economic and imperial power. This was primarily a direct result of the transatlantic slave trade, a highly lucrative international trading network in which Europeans exchanged goods for millions of enslaved Africans from West and Central Africa.

The Portuguese were the first to engage in Atlantic slave trading in the early 16th century, in response to the strong demand for labour in their colonies across the Americas, following the establishment of plantation economies based on crops such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco in the region. The British followed when Queen Elizabeth I, upon seeing Portugal’s economic success, commissioned John Hawkins on a voyage to Sierra Leone, the first of many such English voyages to Africa and the Caribbean.

These Atlantic crossings, alongside various battles against other European powers such as Spain and France, eventually led to the establishment of the first colonies of the British Empire, with Ireland being colonised in the late 16th century and colonies across the Americas soon following, with Virginia in 1607, Saint Kitts in 1623, Barbados in 1627, Montserrat in 1632, Anguilla in 1650 and Jamaica in 1655.
It was the colonisation of these territories that were referred to as the ‘new world’ and the highly profitable network of global commerce that their plantation economies spawned that facilitated Britain’s rise as a global imperial and economic power.

Sir Thomas Webster was the eldest son of prominent merchant and tobacco trader Sir Godfrey Webster (1648 –1720), who was able to accumulate an immense fortune from Britain’s establishment of plantation economies in the Americas.

**Rising Fortunes**

Sir Godfrey Webster began his career in 1633 as an apprentice to his uncle Peter Webster, a merchant and prominent member of the Clothworkers’ Company. He qualified as a clothier and gained admission to the company in 1670. From then on, Godfrey earned enough money to expand his business interests. One of these interests was tobacco.

Tobacco cultivation and exports formed an essential component of the colonial North American economy. It was the main and most successful cash crop that was cultivated and exported from Virginia, the first British colony established in the Americas. So much so, that by late 1600s, the equivalent of more than 20 million pounds of the crop was exported to London per year. As such, those who traded the crop like Sir Godfrey Webster were able to become enormously wealthy from it.

At the time, financial institutions such the Bank of England were being set up to help manage Britain’s finances and develop the nation’s long-term credit instruments, such as loans. Alongside helping to finance the creation of the markets, traders and merchants that facilitated the dramatic expansion of Britain’s network of global trade, these credit instruments also helped finance Britain’s army and navy. This increase in funding for the military enabled Britain to engage in multiple wars during the 17th and 18th centuries, which were in large part aimed at securing more colonies and increasing the number of enslaved Africans working on plantations.

Wanting to reap the financial benefits granted to one involved in colonialism and the nefarious slave trade, Godfrey provided a loan to King William III and in return, the king awarded him a contract to supply clothing to the army and hemp to the navy. With the money earned, he purchased stocks in the Bank of England and by 1710, owned a sufficient stake to qualify for the role as governor. This led to him supporting other mercantile ventures that enabled Britain to expand its plantation economy and colonial footprint around the world.

With the fortune he amassed, he bought several properties across England and was able to gain political and economic influence, leaving his children in a privileged position as part of the British landowning class. This influence and money was something that Thomas Webster was able to take advantage of in his career as a politician and when he acquired the funds to purchase Battle Abbey. At the time, the estate was in a poor state of repair, but he was able to renovate and refurbish the estate as his family seat.

**Connections to a slaveholding dynasty**

Battle Abbey’s history is connected to that of the Vassalls, a prominent slaveholding family through whom the Websters were able to gain access to and directly benefit from various plantations across Jamaica. The story begins with Sir Godfrey Webster Vassall 4th Baronet (1749–1800), a descendant of Sir Thomas Webster who inherited Battle Abbey in 1780 and his marriage to Elizabeth Vassall (1771–1845), a 15-year-old heiress.
The Vassalls were a large family of wealthy English colonists who settled in British colonies across the Americas in the 16th century, including Virginia, Massachusetts, Jamaica, and Barbados. Beginning with William Vassall’s (1592 – 1655) purchase of land in Barbados in 1648, members of the Vassall family were among the Caribbean’s most influential planters until Britain abolished slavery throughout its colonies in the 19th century.

At the time of Elizabeth’s marriage to Godfrey Webster 4th Baronet in 1796, her father Richard Vassall (1732–95) owned three sugar plantations named Sweet River Pen, Friendship and Greenwich in Westmoreland, Jamaica.

Their location in Jamaica suggests that the plantations were highly profitable. This is because Jamaica was the region’s focal point in the Triangular Trade – especially for the sailing routes used by British slave traders. Enslaved Africans held captive on the coast of West Africa were transported to Jamaica where they were sold at an auction and then distributed to other islands in the Caribbean. In addition, Jamaica was also Britain’s main source of sugar, and with it the wealth of many British merchants and traders, as it quickly became the most profitable cash crop to be produced in the region following rising demand in 18th century Europe to sweeten luxury drinks such as tea and coffee.

As Richard’s only child, Elizabeth was the sole heiress and was thus entitled to a lifelong yearly income of £7,000 from the profits of the plantations as stated in her father’s will. However, as she was a woman, it was expected that in the event she got married she and her husband would hold these properties jointly, with both families entitled to the inheritance. Godfrey 4th Baronet took on the additional surname of Vassall in recognition of this marriage alliance.

Their relationship however ended in divorce in 1796 following Elizabeth extramarital affairs which resulted in two illegitimate children. As a result, Elizabeth surrendered her inheritance, yearly income, and children to Godfrey 4th Baronet. However, after Godfrey 4th Baronet committed suicide three years later, Elizabeth received everything back and shared it with her new husband, Lord Holland, the father of one of her illegitimate children. Like Webster, he even adopted the name Vassall to safeguard his children’s rights to his wife’s West Indian fortune. This fact is further complicated by the contrasting actions of his brother Charles James Fox, who was a prominent abolitionist of the slave trade.

Godfrey 4th Baronet and Elizabeth has one child together, also named Godfrey 5th Baronet (1815–1853) who inherited Battle Abbey and with the family’s wealth undertook extensive restoration and renovation of the estate. However, the combined costs of the building works and his constant gambling left Godfrey 5th Baronet in debt prompting him to sell most of his property and shares, which included the Battle Abbey munitions. The three plantations were unaffected as following Elizabeth’s marriage to Lord Holland, their primary ownership had transferred from the Vassalls to the Hollands.

At the time, Britain was in the process of abolishing slavery throughout its Empire – primarily as a direct result of the slave rebellions that destabilised the plantation economy, the lobbying of anti-slavery campaigners and the legislative debates taking place in the British Parliament. To compensate slave owners for the loss of their ‘property’, the UK government borrowed £20 million, a debt that was only paid off by British taxpayers in 2015. Formerly enslaved people weren’t offered any compensation or reparations.
The Hollands made a slavery compensation claim in 1836 which Godfrey 5th Baronet successfully counterclaimed against for an amount of £5,000. It was paid out to trustees for the benefit of his son Godfrey 6th Baronet (1815–1853).

So, although the marriage between Godfrey 4th Baronet and Elizabeth was short lived, the fact that their marriage entitled Godfrey to her fortune, meant that through their child, the Websters continued to hugely benefit from the profits of plantation enslavement in Jamaica. Thus, illustrating how marriage was used as an apparatus for wealth amongst the elite and how for women, their ownership of enslaved persons and plantations often made them ‘good’ marriage prospects.

Being an heiress to a fortune built on the Atlantic trade in Jamaica, which as explained before, was of particular geographic and strategic importance to Britain’s plantation economies would have made Elizabeth a very ‘good’ prospect for marriage. A point further highlighted by both Elizabeth’s husbands taking on her surname to ensure they had rights to her inheritance.

Another such marriage alliance continued with the next generation further connecting the residents of Battle Abbey to Jamaica.

**An advantageous marriage**

Godfrey 6th Baronet married Sarah Joanna Ashburnham, neé Murray (1807–89) in 1851. Her creole father, William Murray, was a slave owner who had lived on his own sugar plantation in St James, Jamaica, between 1795 and 1815. He was also said to have owned various properties across Jamaica, others which he acquired from merchants in England and two of which were Jamaican plantations inherited from his wife Elizabeth Virgin. Named Bull Dead and Hope, they were sugar and rum plantations located in the Jamaican parish of Manchester.

From her father’s mercantile profits and real estate investments, Sarah was able to amass a fortune of £33,473 8s by the time she married Godfrey 6th Baronet.

The bulk of this fortune was likely made from the five and only named plantations that William made slavery compensation claims for as the owner in fee in 1835. In addition to Hope and Bull Dead plantations, this also included the Garland Grove Pen, Purling Stream and Latium plantations which were all located in the Jamaican parish of St James.

As detailed on the UCL Legacies of Slave Ownership database (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/), he was awarded £6,612 10s 5d for 373 slaves on the Latium plantation, £916 3s 11d for 50 slaves on Purling Stream plantation, £565 9s 11d for 26 slaves on Garland Grove Pen plantation and £2,010 13s 10d for 115 slaves on the Hope and Bull Dead plantation.

**Conclusion**

Covering a period from Britain’s 16th century foray into Atlantic Slave trading to the abolition of the trade in the 19th century, exploring the Webster family’s connections to plantation enslavement and the British Empire has shown how the historic Battle Abbey benefitted from slavery-derived wealth for five generations.

As such, this investigation has highlighted the myriad ways in which enslavement labour in the Caribbean supplemented the fortunes of the wealthy. Particularly, the massively overlooked role of female slave and slave-property owners in the Triangular Trade and Jamaica’s geographic, economic, and strategic importance to the British Empire. Points
further highlighted through the fact that of the six connections to plantation enslavement explored, four were achieved through marriage alliances between the Websters and heiresses of plantation estates in Jamacia.

Prevailing scholarship has tended to argue that married women rarely possessed control over enslavement related properties and profits because of misogynistic reasons, with an example being coverture – the legal doctrine whereby the property and income of any woman would become her husband’s upon marriage. As I hope to have shown through an exploration of Battle Abbey’s connections to Jamaica byway of marriage alliances to wealthy heiresses, the situation was far more complex as there were many ways in married women circumvented the limitations that came with marriage. Ensuring that whether it was by lifelong wages from plantation profits, or by a marriage settlement or alliance, women could benefit from the profits of the enslavement related commerce.

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| ![Map of Virginia](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_map_1606.jpg) | Full Title: Map of Virginia, discovered and as described by Captain John Smith, 1606; engraved by William Hole.  
URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Virginia_map_1606.jpg |
| ![Map of Port Royal and Kingston](https://wellcomecollection.org/) | Full Title: Map showing the harbours of Port Royal and Kingston, Jamaica  
Date: 1774  
Author: Edward Long  
Accessed from: The history of Jamaica. Or, General survey of the antient and modern state of the island: with reflections on its situation settlements, inhabitants, climate, products, commerce, laws, and government ... / illustrated with copper plates ... [Anon].  
URL: https://wellcomecollection.org/works/gtqhnhrz?wellcomeImagesUrl=/indexplus/image/L0063041.html |
| Title: Founding Charter of the Bank of England  |
| URL: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/museum/online-collections/archive-gallery/founding-documents  |

| Title: A Map of the island of Jamaica divided into counties and parishes for the history of the British West Indies  |
| Creator: Edwards, Bryan, 1743-1800  |
| Date: 1794  |
| Accessed From: University of Florida Digital Library  |
| URL: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF90000118/00001  |

| Non-coloured Version  |
| Accessed From: The JCB Library  |
Brodsworth Hall & Gardens

Abstract

With its spacious grounds and rural location, Brodsworth Hall has been described as a comfortable vision of the English Country House. As a rural recluse far from the industrial centres of Britain, it can be hard to imagine that the mid-Victorian house has links to the transatlantic slave trade. However, a look into the lived experiences of the property’s former residents reveals connections to the complex history of Britain’s involvement in the trade.

Structured into five sections that cover the hall’s early history and what archives reveal about how the property’s former residents earned their wealth, this report makes clear the connections between Brodsworth Hall, Britain’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and associated links to the history of colonialism throughout the Caribbean region.

Through the recovery, foregrounding and reinterpretation of archival content about Brodsworth Hall, the report illuminates and raises awareness about the long-standing connections between key sites of English heritage and the British Atlantic World.

OVERVIEW

Nestled amongst the trees in a small village near Doncaster lies Brodsworth Hall, one of England’s most unaltered country estates from the Victorian era. Designed in the Italianate style favoured by the likes of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, the estate survives as a mid-Victorian country house with surrounding pleasure gardens set within 15 acres of private parkland.

With its rural location far from the ports and marine cities that facilitated Britain’s rise to become the world’s principal slave trading nation and naval power, it may be difficult to imagine that the estate as it stands today was largely funded through British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. However, a glimpse into the lives of the Thellusson family, Brodsworth’s longest tenants, reveals a history, where successive generations of the Thellussons amassed great wealth and power through their involvement in plantation enslavement, banking, and national politics.

The estate as it currently stands was built in the 1860’s. Detailed documentation about the size and condition of the estate prior to that date is scant. First home to the Dawnyss and then the Wentworth’s, the property was purchased in 1713 by George Hay, Viscount Dupplin, who upon his death passed the estate down to his brother Archbishop Robert Hay-Drummond. Between 1761 and 1765, Hay-Drummond commissioned Robert Adam to draw up plans to rebuild and enlarge the existing property at Brodsworth. Although these plans were never fully realised under his ownership, he is believed to have remodelled the house to a degree and planted several trees across the estate.

Following his death in 1777, the estate was neglected until it was sold to merchant and banker Peter Thellusson in 1791 by the Archbishop’s eldest son. Thellusson, who lived at Brodsworth until his death in 1797, was a notoriously private person, so not much is known about the extent to which he made changes to the estate. At the time of his death, however, it is believed that the estate comprised the house, gardens, offices, and farmlands totalling around 4,320 acres.
Upon his death, Thellusson left an infamously complex will in which he bequeathed the bulk of his fortune in trust for as yet unborn male descendants. After a legal judgment in 1858, the inheritance was finally passed on, with his great-grandson Charles Sabine Thellusson (1822–85) being granted the Brodsworth estate.

Charles, who wanted a bigger house to suit his social needs, decided to demolish and replace the existing house with a larger one, setting it further away from the church and village in private gardens overlooking newly opened up parkland. In 1861, he commissioned architect Philip Wilkinson to draw up plans and by the end of the decade, the remodelling of Brodsworth was complete.

The existing Georgian mansion had been replaced with an Italianate style three story home that included a subsidiary wing for the servants to live and work in, with a separate laundry and gas works. The Italian sculptor Chevalier Casentini was hired to decorate, filling the hall with its famed collection of paintings and sculptures. The London firm of Lapworths was hired to furnish the house in the conventional taste of the day, including many items made from mahogany which was first brought to Britain from the then British colony of Jamaica.

Around the estate, new Victorian pleasure gardens had been laid out alongside new cottages, stables, greenhouses, and farm buildings. Charles also purchased more parkland and constructed roads to extend the parameters of the estate and accommodate all these additions. Within the newly opened parklands, a small woodland area had been set aside to accommodate a shooting range, one of Charles’ favourite activities. With all the renovations and additions, the size of the estate increased to 8,000 acres.

It’s not surprising that the Thellussons were able to afford to purchase the estate and carry out all these renovations and improvements as they were a family of merchants and bankers, who like many other European elites thrived in the world of the transatlantic slave trade.

Over the years, the family had amassed a great fortune built largely on their links to the transatlantic slave trade. This included banking activities such as providing loans and insurance to slave-ship and plantation owners, and their acquisition of interests in sugar plantations, mainly in the islands of Martinique, Montserrat, St Vincent, Grenada, and Trinidad.

Their reliance on the profits of enslavement meant that when the slave trade was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1807, and emancipation was achieved in the anglophone Caribbean by 1838, the family struggled financially, with the house soon falling into disrepair as they could no longer afford the upkeep.

Successive generations of the family continued to live at Brodsworth, making small modernisations such as the adding of electric lights as the years went by. The estate was eventually given, by Pamela Williams, a descendant of Charles Thellusson, to English Heritage in 1990, who undertook work to ensure that the house was conserved as found.

TIMELINE

For more than 400 years several European powers participated in the transatlantic slave trade, a highly lucrative international trading network in which Europeans exchanged goods for millions of enslaved Africans from West and Central Africa. The Portuguese were the first to engage in Atlantic slave trading in 1526, in response to the strong demand for labour in their colonies across the Americas, following the establishment of plantation economies based on crops such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco in the region.
The British followed in 1562 when Queen Elizabeth I, upon seeing Portugal’s economic success, commissioned John Hawkins on a voyage to Sierra Leone, to find out how to replicate it for Britain. Setting sail with three ships, he captured and enslaved 300 Africans in Sierra Leone, and transported them to plantations in the Americas where they were traded in return for pearls, hides, and sugar. The profit made from the sale was so prosperous that on his return to England, the Crown commissioned additional voyages and granted Hawkins a coat of arms with a depiction of an enslaved man.

These voyages eventually led to the establishment of the first colonies of the British Empire, with Ireland being colonised in the late 16th century and colonies across the Americas soon following, with Virginia in 1607, Saint Kitts in 1623, Barbados in 1627, Montserrat in 1632, Anguilla in 1650 and Jamaica in 1655.

In the competition with other European nations such as Spain, and France to form vast overseas empires, it was the colonisation of these territories and the highly profitable network of global commerce that it spawned that facilitated Britain’s rise to become the world’s foremost imperial and economic power. Particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, when British interests in the region were dominated by the production of sugar, in response to rising demand for the crop in Europe to sweeten luxury drinks such as tea and coffee. This focus on sugar, combined with the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht which granted British slave traders the Asiento contract enabling them to enslave and transport 144,000 people per year to Spanish South America, led to a substantial increase in the number of enslaved people working on plantations.

The wealth generated from plantation enslavement was used to colonise more territories and establish organisations such as the East India Company who assumed control and maintenance of foreign trading posts, allowing Britain to have the global monopoly on commerce. This monopoly made the country enormously wealthy as British traders could buy and sell commodities from and to every corner of the empire. By the end of the 18th century, Britain was the world’s principal slave trading nation and economic power, with more than half of the world’s goods being traded through British hands and with British currency. The wealth generated funded organisations, banks and properties across Britain and would later contribute to the Industrial Revolution, further enriching Britain.

It is important to note that enslaved people consistently resisted their captivity, with revolts and freedom-fighting movements only increasing in frequency and vigor with time. Notable events include the 1816 Barbados slave revolt led by Bussa, and the major 1831 slave revolt in Jamaica led by Sam Sharpe, both who were enslaved Africans. There was also a growing abolition movement, which gained ground in Britain following the 1772 Somerset vs Stewart case relating to the right of an enslaved person on English soil not to be forcibly removed from the country, and the 1781 Zong massacre, which saw more than 130 sick enslaved Africans thrown overboard by the crew of the British slave ship Zong, so that insurance could be claimed on them as ‘damaged’ goods.

This all came to a head in the early 19th century, when the combination of the success of the Industrial Revolution, the cost of supressing regular slave rebellions and the abolition movement made imported goods produced by plantation enslavement less viable if not non-profitable.

The Slave Trade Act of 1807 restricted the transportation of enslaved persons throughout the Empire and the Slavery Abolition Act Of 1833 eventually led to emancipation throughout the British Empire by 1st August 1838. To compensate slave owners for the loss of what they
considered their ‘property’, the government set aside £20 million (equivalent to many billions today). This substantial amount had to be borrowed and was only fully paid off by British taxpayers in 2015. Significantly, it did not offer formerly enslaved people any compensation or reparations.

**ENSLAVEMENT AND COLONIAL HISTORY CONNECTIONS**

A world away from the rural recluse of Brodsworth, business was booming on the streets of London. In the city centre lay Britain’s first specialist commercial building, The Royal Exchange, and the city’s coffeehouses, home to the stock exchange, insurance and auctioneering industries that spawned the credit, security, and markets that facilitated the dramatic expansion of Britain’s network of global trade in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The trading deals that merchants and traders made here created the commerce network that enabled Atlantic slave trading. Merchants and traders profited from the trade not only in the buying and selling of enslaved Africans, but also in the business of selling ship insurance and mortgages to sea captains.

As a family of merchants and bankers, this was an industry that the Thellussons had long been familiar with.

The Thellussons were Huguenots (protestants) who fled France for Switzerland in the 16th century to escape religious persecution. Upon arrival, Isaac Thellusson set up a merchant bank in Geneva in partnership with Jacques Necker (Thellusson, Necker et Cie), who then went on to manage the French branch of the bank in Paris with the help of one Isaac’s sons, George-Tobie. The success of the partnership led to Isaac’s subsequent appointment as the Genevan ambassador to Paris. Across the Channel, one of Isaac’s other sons, Peter, moved to England in 1760 to manage the London branch of the bank. All partners amassed a considerable amount of wealth.

Peter settled in England, naturalising as a citizen in 1760 and marrying Ann Woodford in 1761, with whom he had children with. He opened a finance house where he operated as a merchant and agent. His experience in the finance sector eventually led to his appointment as a director of the Bank of England, a role which saw him expand his business interests to the Caribbean.

Partnering with Antoine de Grenier de Fonblanque and John Crossant, Peter started offering mortgages, insurance, and loans to slave ship and plantation owners in British and French colonies across the Caribbean. As most of his clientele were French Huguenots like himself, he didn’t make it a priority to actively remind them when or that the debts needed to be paid off. This led to a lot of his clientele defaulting on their loans and as a result, Peter acquired interests in various land and property holds across the region, the majority of which were sugar plantations, located mainly in the islands of Martinique, Montserrat, St Vincent, Grenada, and Trinidad. Through these holdings, Peter became a slave owner, planter, part owner of several sugar refineries, and an importer of tobacco and sugar from the Caribbean.

Although he might not have actively set out to become the owner of plantations worked by enslaved Africans, it is clear through his willingness to use these circumstances to his advantage to make money, that he had no moral or financial qualms about being involved in enslavement-linked wealth creation.

He took advantage of The Navigation Acts which were a series of English Laws enacted to prioritise English ships, shipping, trade, and commerce between other countries and with its own colonies. Through the acts, foreigners’ participation in England and its colonial trading
systems were heavily restricted, resulting in the phenomenon of English merchants and traders like Peter becoming unimaginably wealthy as they had the monopoly on all goods and trade produced, imported, and exported from England and its colonies.

This monopoly also enabled Peter to achieve all of this without ever really needing to leave the country to trade. Indeed, his absentee planter status enabled him to use his fortune to acquire property and land throughout England, with the most significant being the purchase of Brodsworth Hall in 1790, intended to be the main family’s home. When he died in 1797, his fortune was worth an estimated £700,000 amounting to over £35 million at today’s rates. This is the pot of money that Peter’s grandson, Charles, drew from to remodel Brodsworth Hall when he inherited it in 1859.

Due to the complex nature of Peter’s will, his three sons didn’t directly inherit his fortune, however they got heavily involved in his business interests, carrying on his legacy of being a significant absentee planter.

As someone born overseas, Peter was barred by the Act of Settlement from holding public office. A position that would benefit merchants and traders as they would be advantageously placed to obtain directorships with insurance companies, banks, and colonial companies such as the East India company. However, his English born sons were free to do so and they did, becoming part of the pro slavery lobby in parliament in the late-18th century. Together with an alliance of merchants, shipbuilders, planters and other financiers, the sons of Peter Thellusson strongly defended the transatlantic slave trade in Parliament, showing no signs that they wished to withdraw from supporting it or acknowledgement that slavery was no longer profitable or viable.

Indeed, even after the nefarious trade was abolished, emancipation was achieved throughout the British Empire by 1838, and the Sugar Duties Act of 1846 ended the Caribbean preference system by equalising duties on all sugar entering Britain (no longer economically viable), the Thellusson name continued to be linked with plantations and trading in the island of Trinidad well into the 20th century.

THE THELLUSSONS AND THE PLANTATION ECONOMY

Once reserved for the tables of monarchs and aristocrats, by the 19th century, sugar was on almost every table in Europe, used to sweeten the continent’s drinks and food. It’s rise from a luxury to ubiquity was facilitated by the mass production of the sugar cane crop by enslaved Africans forced to work on plantations across the Americas.

Sugar, or ‘White Gold’ as it was colloquially known by British colonists, was by far the most popular crop produced in plantations across the Americas. Its popularity is why although the transatlantic slave trade involved other crops such as tobacco and cotton, it was the sugar cane plantations established by European colonial powers that forever shaped the history of every nation in the Caribbean, much of South America and parts of the Southern United States.

The interests ranged from plantations outright, to the ships which carried enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. As mentioned before, it can be difficult to directly link the Thellusson’s name to these interests as they weren’t purchased outright, but rather acquired by borrowers defaulting on loans.

Regarding sugar plantations, there are four known properties which the Thellussons have been linked to. The first was Conference, a sugar plantation of around 330 acres in St
Andrews, Grenada in the Windward Islands. Peter Thellusson acquired a share in the plantation in 1768 when the former owner failed to pay his debts. At the time, it is believed that around 155 enslaved Africans were on the estate. The second, third and fourth were the 580-acre Windmill Hill estate in Montserrat, the 384-acre Bacolet estate in Grenada and the Las Cuevas cocoa and coconut plantations in Trinidad.

**Windmill Hill**

The Windmill Hill Estate, used to be located in the centre of western Montserrat, close to the River Belham and just north of Plymouth, an area now in the exclusion zone following the eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano in 1995. Detailed documentation about the nature of the estate and its owners, prior to the late 18th century is scant. However, it is known that in 1772, Peter Thellusson and John Cossart lent £7,180 to Mr Anthony Lynch Tully, the owner of a half share of the Windmill Hill plantation and 87 enslaved Africans and their right to issue. Of the 87 enslaved Africans owned by Tully, 19 were part of the relatively small workforce at the plantation. The loan given to Tully was raised through bond-secured annuities on the lives of 12 of those 19 enslaved Africans and secured on the Windmill Hill estate.

Although the archival information is scant about the nature of Windmill Hill estate and the position of Mr Tully in the period after the loan was given. However, Thellusson’s will dated April 1796, states that he and Cossart had acquired shares as mortgagees of the estate, suggesting that Mr Tully defaulted on the loan. In July 1796, they sold their shares for £5,700 to a Mr Thomas Harcum, a resident of Montserrat.

Thellusson received £2,139 of the purchase price and the remainder was secured by a Bond of David Milligan and Grant Allen to be paid in seven instalments, one of which he received before his death in 1797. The remaining instalments were paid to the executors of his will and his second son, George Woodford Thellusson.

**Bacolet estate**

Peter Thellusson was first linked to the Bacolet plantation in 1772, when he and John Cossart lent £12,855 to Peter and Marie Fournillier, the owners of the plantation. The plantation was located in the Grenadian parish of St Andrews, an area known for its considerable number of plantations. 121 enslaved people were resident on Bacolet at the time and the loan was partly secured on the lives of 101 of them.

At Fournillier’s request, Thellusson and Cossart then arranged and acted as security for a series of bond loans that amounted to £25,710, with Fournillier paying the annual interest of £1,393. These loan arrangements came with came certain operating conditions that had to be met. If they weren’t, Thellusson and Cossart could legally take possession of the plantation, its workforce and working capital, with the Fournilliers liable for payment for any further legal measures.

The operating conditions included having to produce a certain amount of sugar every year, ensuring there was a workforce of 140 enslaved Africans on the estate, and shipping and consigning the majority of the produce made on the estate to Thellusson and Cossart in London.

The Fournillier’s were never fully able to meet the conditions of the loan due to events which adversely affected the estate’s ability to produce goods and make profits. These events include the 1780’s Revolutionary Wars with France which disrupted trade to Grenada for two years and Fedon’s 1795 rebellion, which saw the destruction of 100 plantations in Grenada.
and the deaths of around 7,000 enslaved Africans, who were either killed in the insurrection or condemned to death as rebel insurgents. In order to avoid defaulting on their loan, the Fournilier’s borrowed more money, however this only resulted in them owing more debt, the majority of which was never paid off.

When Thellusson died in 1797, he left his interests in the plantation to his second son, George Woodford, who assumed responsibility of the estate until his own death in 1811. As his tenure as manager of the estate coincided with Britain enacting the Slave Trade Act in 1807, he was never in a position to help alleviate the debt nor restore its profits. After his death, the court appointed a consignee, Mr Ambrose Humphrys, to manage the estate, who went on to sell it in 1820 to a Mr William Le Blanc for £3,000.

This was the last sugar plantation the Thellusson’s had an interest in. The abolishment of the trade across the Empire in 1838 combined with the Sugar Duties Act of 1846, which ended the West Indian preference system by equalising duties on all sugar entering Britain, ensured that it was no longer economically viable to run a sugar plantation nor profit from the trade of sugar. With this, the wealth of the Thellussons declined. However, Peter’s grandson Charles inheriting Brodsworth Hall and a significant portion of money from his will, meant that the effects of the Thellusson’s declining source of wealth were cushioned for a while.

This was also helped by the fact that Bacolet wasn’t the last plantation that the Thellussons have been linked to. Letters and accounts held at the Suffolk Record Office show that Frederick William Brook Thellusson 5th Baron Rendlesham (1840-1914) and Frederick Archibald Charles Thellusson 6th Baron Rendlesham (1868-1936) were owners of the Las Cuevas cocoa and coconut plantations in Trinidad in the 1920’s. Detailed documentation about the estate is scant, however it is known that it was mainly staffed by indentured labourers from British India, who Britain relied on to staff plantations across the colonies, as a substitute for the enforced labour provided by formerly enslaved Africans.

THE COLLECTIONS

With its Italianate exterior and modern Victorian-era furnishings, it can be hard to imagine any obvious references to the slave trade at Brodsworth Hall. However, a walk through its interior will reveal how a certain material was seen as central to the whole fabric of the building. From the shutters that covered the windows, to the house’s numerous doors, tables, closets and chairs, many pieces of furniture, fixings and fittings were made out of mahogany.

The house was furnished to the taste of the day and mahogany furniture was very much in style. The use of mahogany in domestic furniture across Britain was so commonplace during the Victorian era, that it may come as a surprise to learn that the wood was virtually unknown across these shores prior to the 18th century and that it was primarily sourced via slave-based production.

The true mahogany tree can be found across the Americas but is particularly abundant in the Caribbean. Most of the mahogany imported into England in the 18th century came from Jamaica, although a significant part of the trade came from other British Caribbean colonies, such as Barbados, and from territories controlled in Central America near the Gulf of Honduras and today’s Belize (formerly known as British Honduras). The British Caribbean colonies were of vital importance to British trade. It was the country’s main sources of sugar and with it the wealth of many English merchants. Since mahogany trees grew abundantly in the region, the wood became another source of profitable cargo.
Extracting mahogany was hard, labour intensive work, predominantly supplied by enslaved Africans. The process required more labour than other woods as the trees were large and mahogany had to be transported to the market intact to realise a reasonable return. The harmful process of extracting Mahogany in combination with the cultivation of cash crops such as sugar and coffee gave way to near complete deforestation of the British Caribbean. In fact, by the advent of the 19th century, Britain had to source more of its mahogany from around the Gulf of Honduras, the Dominican Republic and Haiti in as most of the viable mahogany in the British Caribbean had been cut.

CONCLUSION

The story of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is one that permeates nearly every nook and cranny across the country. Brodsworth Hall is no exception to this, despite its rural location far from the ports and marine cities that facilitated Britain's rise to become the world's principal slave trading nation. The nation's involvement in this brutal and inhumane trade is a complex story but is one that is central to British history as a whole. Which is why, although it can be difficult to discuss, I believe telling this story can speak profoundly about our past and who we are as a nation.

The abolition of the slave trade across the British Empire in 1838 is regarded as a great British achievement, but as I hoped to have demonstrated in this report, it was a complex and long process. One that often favoured the slave traders and as a result meant that willing participants such as the Thellussons could benefit from it long after abolition. Willing, as the Thellussons not only built their wealth using plantation enslavement, but used the power and influence gained from that wealth to oppose the abolition of Atlantic slave trading.

As such, the story of British involvement in the trade is one that is central to the creation and maintenance of Brodsworth Hall, from the money that was used to build it to the mahogany furniture that fills its interior. Ensuring that this history is uncovered can help us dispel myths about the transatlantic slave trade that continue to uphold troubling narratives – mainly the notion that abolition was something that Britain enacted out of benevolence, rather than the hard fought struggle for freedom by the enslaved that the road to abolition and emancipation was.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Selected items from the Brodsworth Hall collections with links to enslavement history.

Source: Brodsworth Hall collection catalogue and additional expert guidance from Eleanor Matthews – Curator of Collections and Interiors (South Yorkshire, Lancashire, North Midlands), English Heritage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection reference</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90009149</td>
<td>Mahogany sideboard</td>
<td>A nineteenth century mahogany sideboard with a leaf carved cresting and a frieze drawer, flanked by pedestals each with a panelled cupboard enclosing drawer, one zinc lined one felt lined, with original brass handles, on paw feet. Maker: T. &amp; G. Seddon(?). Dimensions: H 118 L 275 W 74.5 cm. Located in the Dining Room at Brodsworth Hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90009011 and 90009012</td>
<td>Rosewood card tables, c.1815-1820</td>
<td>Pair of George IV rosewood card tables, each with a rectangular baize-lined top on tapered column support on a concave sided quatrefoil base ending in brass hairy paw feet, mounted over all with gilt brass foliate appliques. Maker: T. &amp; G. Seddon. Overall dimensions of each table: (90009011) H 735 mm x W 495 mm x L 990 mm; (90009012) H 740 mm x W 495 mm x L 990 mm. Located in the Drawing Room at Brodsworth Hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90009572</td>
<td>Mahogany tripod table, c. 4th quarter of the 18th century</td>
<td>Late-18th century circular mahogany tripod table, with a tip-up top with brass clip, and turned baluster stem on pad feet. Dimensions: H 72 D 42 cm. Located in the South Hall at Brodsworth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90014499</td>
<td>A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the West Indies (1735), by John Atkins</td>
<td>Adkins’ Voyage was printed in London and published in 1735. Although there isn’t a bookplate, the book is believed to have been owned by Peter Thellusson. The author John Atkins (1685–1757) is described in online biographies as a British naval surgeon and an enslaver. His book provides a description of the naval voyage of the Swallow and the Weymouth, including information about the slave trade. There are also various accounts and observations about plantation enslavement and sugar production, including the relative cost of enslaved men, women and children in different islands and territories of the anglophone Caribbean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90013671 – 90013675</td>
<td>“Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Etablissements et du</td>
<td>This five-volume first edition of Guillaume Thomas François Raynal’s “A philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the Two Indies” was published in Switzerland in 1780, and was owned by Peter Thellusson (with each volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90014269</td>
<td>Commerce des Europeans dans les Deux Indies” (1780), by Guillaume Thomas François Raynal containing a bookplate of Mr Thellusson). The particular volume of interest is Vol. III, “Etablissements des Anglois dans les isles de l'Amérique” [Settlement of the English in the American Islands]. Raynal's book was very influential at the time of publication and included contributions by the famous French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713–1784) – who openly documented his opposition to enslavement and, for example, is described in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as “a passionate abolitionist with no tolerance for the crimes of the Atlantic slave trade.” (NB: A copy of Diderot's <em>Encyclopédie</em> (1765) is also in the Brodsworth Hall library.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 90014269 | “Six Months in the West Indies in 1825”, by Henry Nelson Coleridge (who was related to Samuel Taylor Coleridge) was published in London in 1832. The book documents the author’s travels throughout various islands – including Barbados and Trinidad, and also includes a chapter titled ‘Planters and Slaves.’ The plate at the front features an engraved map of the islands. |

Note: Curator Eleanor Matthews identified more than 450 objects from the 30,000+ items in the Brodsworth Hall collection that were made from tropical hardwoods – specifically mahogany and rosewood. Many items date from the 1860s+. Nevertheless, the aforementioned selection have earlier dates, and some additional items of furniture that have not yet been catalogued may also have provenance linked to the Caribbean region.

**Appendix B**

Online images selected to illustrate and accompany the Brodsworth Hall narrative.

1. **A digitised 2nd Edition of Adkins Voyage is available online via the Wellcome Collection**
   - Title: “A voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies; in His Majesty's ships the Swallow and Weymouth.”
   - Author: Atkins, John, 1685-1757.
   - Publication: London: Printed for Ward and Chandler, 1737
   - URL: [https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mm59rvhj/items?canvas=1](https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mm59rvhj/items?canvas=1)

2. **A digitised English translation of Guillaume Thomas François Raynal’s book (Vol. VI), published in 1783, is available online via Archive.org**
   - Title: “A philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies.”
   - Author: Raynal, abbé (Guillaume Thomas François), 1713-1796
   - Publication: London: : Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1783
URL: https://archive.org/details/philosophicalpol06rayn_0/page/n3/mode/2up
A colour aquatint portrait of Raynal (c.1793) is also available online via the British Museum: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1922-0517-6 (British Museum collection ref: 1922,0517.6).

3. Colour illustration of the burning of Roehamption Estate in Jamaica during the Baptist War (also known as the 1831/32 Christmas Rebellion), led by Sam Sharpe (c.1801-1832). Creator: French engraver and lithographer Adolphe Duperly (1801–1865)
   Date: 1 January 1833
   Online source: Wikimedia Commons
   https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duperly_(1833)_Destruction_of_the_Roehampton_Estate_January_1832.png

4. “A General Chart of the West India Islands,” 1796
   Creator: Louis Delarochette
   Description: 18th century colour map of the West Indies
   Date: 1796
   Held by: British Library (Shelfmark: Maps K.Top.123.14)
   Online source:
   https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-general-chart-of-the-west-india-islands
OSBORNE HOUSE

ABSTRACT

“It is impossible to imagine a prettier spot,” said Queen Victoria of Osborne House, her scenic retreat located on the idyllic Isle of Wight. With its spacious grounds and natural gardens on the coast, the house is a shining example of the country houses that have become so emblematic of England’s heritage. An opulent portrayal of the Victorian elite. However, a look behind its picturesque façade can reveal hidden connections to the complex history of British Imperialism, as well as some hitherto not widely known realities about the lives of Black people in Victorian England.

Structured into five sections that cover the site’s early history, the details of landowning families connected to the estate, and what archives reveal about the lived experiences of the current property’s former residents, this report makes clear the connections between Osborne House, Britain’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and associated links to the history of colonialism throughout the Caribbean region, continental Africa, and the wider British Empire. A particular point of focus discusses the hidden Black presence at Osborne – not only in relation to the provenance of selected artworks and cultural objects within the collections, but also evidence about the lives and experiences of people of colour with direct links to this historic house as former visitors and residents. Through the recovery, foregrounding and reinterpretation of archival content about Osborne House, the report illuminates and raises awareness about the diverse, intricate, and long-standing connections between key sites of English heritage and the British Atlantic World.

INTRODUCTION

As the ferry from Portsmouth crosses the Solent and approaches the Northern coast of the Isle of Wight, the cream-coloured portico of Osborne House, the marine residence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, comes into view. Reminiscent of an Italian villa with its picturesque silhouette and gardens, it was one of the most well-known buildings of its day, inspiring architecture all over the world. Due to its position near the port of Southampton, once known as Britain’s gateway to the world, the building was one of the first or last attractions people saw when sailing away from or towards these isles.

The house in its current form was built between 1845 and 1851 as a holiday home for the royal household. However, records show that the property has existed for far longer as it is comprised of the former manors of Barton and Osborne.

Barton Manor was first recorded as being held of King Edward by Bolla in the Domesday survey, carried out in 1086 as Britain’s earliest public record of property owners liable for tax. Osborne Manor was first recorded as Oysterborne, the hereditary home of the Bowermans before being passed to the Arneys, then the Lovibonds. The house was purchased in 1430 by Eustace Mann, who upon his death, passed it to his granddaughter Elizabeth and her husband Robert Blachford.

In 1755, a descendant named Robert Pope Blachford inherited a fortune and between 1774 and 1781, carried out numerous improvements, turning the property into a three-storey residence, with a walled kitchen garden and a brick stable bloc.

This was the property that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert purchased for £28,000 in 1845 from Lady Isabella Blachford, a descendant of Robert Pope, concluding their search for a
seaside retreat to escape the pressures of London and Windsor. As the existing house was too small, an extension was required, which is why the Queen and Prince purchased the nearby Barton Manor as an adjunct to Osborne. The house as it stands today was designed by Thomas Cubitt, a builder and property developer, in a quintessential Italian ‘palazzo’ style, inspired by Prince Albert’s trip to Italy’s Bay of Naples in 1839.

During the renovations, the estate’s size increased from 800 to 5,000 acres, with the addition of the Pavilion and household wing, containing nurseries and accommodation for members of the royal household. The existing house was demolished and replaced in 1851, with what became the main wing of the house and accompanying terraces.

Barton Manor was ‘restored’ by Cubitt and had its outbuildings redesigned as a model farm. As the house went from being a summer retreat to the royal household’s main residence, other building projects were added in later years. This included the Swiss cottage and lodge for the children, stables to house 50 horses, a dormitory for male servants, a museum, a landing house for the coastguard, and a sea wall along the coast.

It’s not surprising that the royal household was able to afford and carry out all of these renovations as Queen Victoria’s reign was marked by a great expansion of the British Empire that helped Britain emerge as the principal economic power. Victoria herself became so wealthy, that she was the first British Sovereign who could afford to bequeath her private fortune to her family in her will.

The Queen resided at Osborne until her death in 1901, with the estate passing down to her successor, Edward VII, who gifted it to the nation on his coronation day in 1902.

In 1903 part of Osborne was developed into a college for naval cadets as reforms initiated in 1902 led to a rapid expansion of the navy and the provision of additional training places. The Royal Naval College Osborne was formally opened by Edward VII in August 1904 and ran for 17 years before closing in 1921 as by then the Royal Naval College Dartmouth was able to host all the new cadets required. A succession of short-term tenants occupied the site thereafter until it came under English Heritage management in 1986.

TIMELINE

The British monarch was the head of the British Empire, which at its height assumed governance over nearly half a billion people and covered a quarter of the world’s land area. The Empire has its roots in overseas exploration voyages commissioned by the monarch since the late 15th century, following earlier Spanish and Portuguese dominance in overseas exploration.

The first of these voyages was in 1496 when King Henry VII of England commissioned John Cabot, an Italian navigator and explorer, to discover a new route into Asia through the Atlantic. Following this, England went on to establish overseas colonies with the first being Ireland in the late 16th century. Colonies across the Americas soon followed, with Virginia in 1607, Saint Kitts in 1623, Barbados in 1627, Montserrat in 1632, Anguilla in 1650 and Jamaica in 1655.

In the competition with other European nations, such as Spain and France, to form vast empires, it was the colonisation of these territories and the highly profitable network of global commerce that it spawned that facilitated Britain’s rise to become one of the world’s foremost imperial powers.
At the heart of this economic and colonial growth was the transatlantic slave trade, a highly lucrative international trading network in which Europeans and North Americans exchanged goods for millions of enslaved Africans from West and Central Africa. It was initiated by the Portuguese in 1526 in response to the strong demand for cheap labour on plantations in the Americas, following the establishment of plantation economies based on cotton, sugar, and tobacco.

British involvement in the nefarious slave trade began in 1562, when Queen Elizabeth I, upon seeing Portugal’s economic success, commissioned John Hawkins on a voyage to Sierra Leone to find out how to replicate it for Britain. Setting sail with three ships, he captured and enslaved 300 Africans in Sierra Leone, and transported them to plantations in the Americas where they were traded in return for pearls, hides, and sugar. The profit made from the sale was so prosperous that on his return to England, the Crown commissioned additional voyages and granted Hawkins a coat of arms with a depiction of an enslaved man.

Using the wealth generated from plantation enslavement, Britain went on to colonise more territories across the world, establishing organisations such as the East India Company, to assume the control and maintenance of foreign trading posts, allowing the country to have the global monopoly on commerce. This enabled the country to generate great wealth as British traders were able to buy and sell commodities from and to every corner of the empire. To the extent that by the end of the 18th century, Britain was the world’s principal slave trading nation and economic power, with more than half of the worlds goods being traded through British hands and with British currency. The wealth generated funded organisations, banks and properties across Britain and would later contribute to the Industrial Revolution, further enriching Britain. The nation’s involvement in the trade continued until the early 19th century, by which point, the combination of the success of the Industrial Revolution, the cost of supressing regular slave rebellions and a growing abolition movement made goods produced by slavery less important to the British economy.

The Slave Trade Act of 1807 restricted the transportation of enslaved persons throughout the Empire and the Slavery Abolition Act Of 1833 eventually led to emancipation throughout the British Empire by 1st August 1838. To compensate slave owners for the loss of what they considered their ‘property’, the government set aside £20 million (equivalent to many billions today). This amount had to be borrowed and was only fully paid off by British taxpayers in 2015. It did not offer formerly enslaved people any compensation or reparations.

**COLONIAL CONNECTIONS**

With its location the sparsely populated Isle of Wight, it can be easy to forget that Osborne House isn’t far from the busy British port of Southampton, known then as the gateway to the world. Whilst the house’s expansive grounds on the coast enabled the royal household to live a life of relative seclusion, its proximity to the busy port and the ease of access it afforded to the world meant that the royal household was able to easily reap the economic benefits of the ever-expanding empire, that Victoria herself saw as civilising and benign.

The Queen’s reign oversaw Britain’s ‘Imperial Century’ called so because of the rapid expansion of territorial governance and dominance in the world trade. By the end of the 19th century, the Empire covered approximately one quarter of the worlds land surface and nearly half a billion people, which was one fifth of the world’s population at the time. New colonies established throughout the century included Egypt, New Zealand, Kenya, Ghana, Togo, Uganda, India, Nigeria, and Burma. The century also saw large numbers of settlers from the
British Isles migrating to British dominions such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, where British rule had severely diminished the indigenous populations.

With the Empire, Britain was able to establish and maintain economic dominance as it afforded Britons the ability to easily acquire raw materials such as cotton and sugar cane, turn them into goods inexpensively and sell them freely in a global market covering every continent. This was combined with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which enabled products to be produced at a speed and on a scale never seen before. Together, this meant that by 1851, Britain was the world’s dominant exporter and first global industrial power, producing much of the world’s coal, iron, steel, and textiles. Every week ships arriving to and from ports such as Southampton, would be carrying merchants, traders, soldiers, emigrants etc, alongside these goods, making Britain a very wealthy nation.

Before the Queen ascended to the throne in 1837, Britain was in the process of formally abolishing the transatlantic slave trade throughout the Empire. Despite this, Britain continued to benefit from the slave trade long after abolition as the country continued to import materials such as cotton from the United States, which still relied on slave labour to fuel the mills in Northern England.

At the same time, Britain relied on a system of indentured servitude mainly from the Indian sub-continent to staff plantations across the colonies, as a substitute for the enforced labour provided by formerly enslaved Africans. From 1840 to 1870, it is estimated that over one million Indians were transported to British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa, with a smaller portion to Britain itself. At Osborne House, for example, there were a number of Indian servants attending to the royal household at the time.

Britain’s continued reliance on goods produced by slavery and the system of indentured servitude, meant that even with abolition, the country continued to rely on exploitation to generate the great wealth which financed the wars, invasions, and excursions the country undertook in its mission to become the world’s foremost colonial power by the end of the 19th century.

Queen Victoria, like many of the British elite, benefitted from this wealth and it was used to fund the creation of properties and organisations that enriched them further. In the case of the monarch, she was able to privately invest in properties across the Britain and the Americas, including the early skyscrapers in New York, said to have “helped her pennies grow” to tens of millions of pounds. She became so wealthy that unlike her predecessors who bequeathed nothing but debts to their successors, she became the first British sovereign who bequeathed private fortunes and properties to her family and successor. This wealth was also used to the fund the creation and renovations of Osborne House as unlike the Crown Estates of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, it was funded entirely by the Monarch’s personal funds and therefore privately owned.

**SARAH FORBES BONETTA**

It is often thought that that the historic presence of Black people in Britain began and ended with Britain’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Two frequent visitors to Osborne House, Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a Yoruba orphan from Nigeria and her daughter Victoria Davies, are evidence of the contrary. Unique figures in British history, their stories reflect a position of privilege that most living in Victorian Britain could only imagine, whilst at the same time highlighting how absent Black women have been from the little that has been written and retained in archived about the longevity of the nation’s Black presence.
Born as Omoba Aina, in Oke-Odan, a village in the Nigerian administrative area now known as Yewa South in the Ogun State, Sarah was raised as a princess of the Yewa (formerly Egbado) tribe. She resided in Oke-Odan with her family until 1848, when she was orphaned during a war with the nearby Kingdom of Dahomey at the age of five. The Kingdom, which is located in the area known today as Northern Benin, was an important regional power because of their organised domestic economy which was built on conquest and slave labour.

The war which left many of her fellow tribe members dead or enslaved, led to Aina being captured and enslaved by Dahomey’s ruling monarch, King Ghezo. Due to her royal background designating her as an important prisoner, she was spared from being sold into the transatlantic slave trading system. Instead, she was kept as a slave of King Ghezo’s court, where she remained for the next two years, until the arrival of the British Captain Frederick E. Forbes of the Royal Navy in 1850. Forbes was visiting Dahomey on a British diplomatic mission set up to persuade African leaders to end their involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade, following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.

Despite two visits, Forbes was unsuccessful in his negotiations with King Ghezo to end Dahomey’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade and on his last visit was instead presented with a number of gifts, one of which was Aina. Out of moral concern for her likely and deadly fate of being executed, Captain Forbes accepted her on behalf of Queen Victoria and returned to Britain in July 1850, with plans for the British government to be responsible for her care.

During this time, the majority of Black people present in Britain were comprised of soldiers, domestic servants and former enslaved Africans who were emancipated following the abolition of slavery a few years earlier. Due to the racist beliefs that were used to justify the subjugation of Black people during the slave trade and colonialism, many Black people suffered social prejudice and lived in poverty. As a ward of the British State, Aina was in a position of privilege that most in Victorian Britain could only imagine and yet her treatment whilst she was in England would show the unique dichotomy she faced as Black African individual living amongst the British elite.

Upon her arrival in England, she was renamed Sarah Forbes Bonetta, after Captain Forbes and his ship, the HMS Bonetta, much like the way that enslaved Africans were renamed after their owners.

She remained with the Forbes family for a few months and during this time, Forbes put together a proposal to present to the government for her care, describing her as intelligent, good mannered and able to speak English fluently. He eventually won approval to present his case directly to Queen Victoria and in November 1850, she was presented to the Queen who was said to have become so enamoured by the “poor little Negro girl” that she paid for Sarah to be educated at the Annie Walsh Memorial School in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as her ward (Source of the quotation: Royal Archives (RA) Queen Victoria’s Journal, 1850; cited by Bressey 2005, p. 255).

She was chosen to be educated in Sierra Leone as it was widely believed that England’s climate was fatal to the health of African children due to the number of children who had died en-route to England during Britain’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

She returned to England in 1855, aged twelve and was entrusted to the care of Rev Frederick Scheon and his wife, who lived at Palm Cottage, Canterbury Street Gillingham. Over the
years, since her return, the Queen hosted her at Osborne House several times for periods ranging from days to months.

In 1862, she was granted permission by the Queen to marry the Sierra Leone-born Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies in Brighton. Following her marriage, she split her time between Lagos and England, giving birth to three children. Her eldest was called Victoria Davies, named after the Queen, who was also her godmother.

Despite her closeness to the Queen, over the next few years, Sarah’s family faced many financial difficulties culminating in Captain Davies being taken to court in early 1880 on charges of fraud. Though he won, the stress of the case and their financial difficulties took a toll on Sarah’s health. In May 1880, she left Lagos for Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean to recuperate and escape the stress. However, after receiving word that all the property she owned, not secured to her in the marriage contract by her trustees, had been handed over to her husband’s trustee in bankruptcy, her health deteriorated further, and she died of tuberculosis on the 15th of August 1880.

Upon her death, Sarah’s financial difficulties left her children as reliant on the generosity of the Queen as she had been. Sarah’s eldest daughter Victoria Davies left for England, shortly after her death, to meet with her godmother, the Queen. At the Queen’s expense, Victoria Davies attended Cheltenham Ladies College and was later given an annuity by the Queen which allowed her to remain in England and maintain a close relationship with the Queen. She continued to visit the royal household at Osborne House, which at this point was the Queen and Prince Albert’s main residence, throughout her life. They were so close that when Victoria Davies had her first child, the monarch’s youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, became the child’s godmother.

THE COLLECTIONS

Although famous for its Italianate exterior, a walk-through Osborne House will reveal how some of the ornate furniture, artefacts, and portraits that line its interior are reflective of hidden geographies that tell the story of the power of the British monarchy and its empire.

The Durbar Wing, for example, which was completed in 1892 to house the Queen’s youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, and her family, contains various architectural stylings and pieces of artwork that speak to the Queen’s status as Empress of India. Dozens of portraits of people from India line the walls of the Durban corridor. Some of the people depicted are named such as Maharajah Duleep Singh, the deposed fifth King of Lahore who as a result of the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848, was sent to Britain in exile. The corridor opens into a large room known as the Durbar room, which was designed by Lockwood Kipling, father of the author Rudyard Kipling, in a Northern Indian architectural style, inspired by the Queen’s role as Empress of India. The focal point of the room is an intricate piece of plasterwork designed by Indian plasterer Bhai Ram Sing, that depicts a peacock, a significant symbol in Indian mythology.

Throughout the house, other rooms, pieces of artwork and furniture reveal similar links to colonial history. One example would be the portrait of Prince Alamayou, the only legitimate son of Tewodros II, the Emperor of Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). He was brought to England by Tristam Charles Sawyer Speedy, an army officer and explorer in 1868, following his father’s suicide that took place after Abyssinia’s defeat against the British in the Battle of Magdala. Similar to Sarah Forbes Bonetta, he was presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House, where the Queen expressed great interest in him. However, his arrival and
Presentation at Osborne is where the similarities between Alamayou and Sarah end. This is because, unlike Sarah, upon his arrival, he got to keep his name, had an official portrait painted of him and was schooled in England until he died of pleurisy aged eighteen. Perhaps speaking to the differences between how girls and boys were treated, or indeed whether it mattered if the person of colour came from a British colony or not.

This portrait is one of the only connections that Osborne has to the African diaspora that is emphasised. Other depictions of a Black presence have little to no descriptions or reasons for that presence. Down the Equerries’ corridor for example, there is a painting called The Embarkation which includes a ‘black boy’, an ‘Arab man’ and a naked, brown skinned ‘servant’. In the Durbar room entrance hall, on one wall, there is a portrait of a black boy dressed in what appears to be a uniform. The truth is unknown as there is no text accompanying the portrait to indicate who this boy is and why his portrait is hanging in Osborne House. Of Sarah Forbes Bonetta and her daughter Victoria Davies, figures who were known to have had a presence at the house, no contemporaneous portraits of them line the walls to indicate their past presence.

CONCLUSION

As far as the remit of this report can go, I hope to have made clear how much of Britain was built on slavery and how Osborne House, a former royal residence is no exception to this. As a country house known worldwide for its architectural style and opulence, to many Osborne has simply been a beautiful royal backdrop to a wonderful visitor experience. However, with its colonial connections, links to British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and hidden Black presence, it is also a place that can speak profoundly about the past and who we are as a nation. There is a reason why many of these histories were hidden and in uncovering them, we can help to dispel myths and narratives that uphold troubling legacies today.
REFERENCES


*Domesday Book (The Great Survey; Liber de Wintonia).* (1900 [1086]). Victoria County History.


*Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database.* Retrieved from Slave Voyages: https://www.slavevoyages.org/ [26/02/21]

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

Selected items from the Osborne House collections illustrating aspects of the property’s links to enslavement history, colonialism and the Atlantic world.

Source: The Royal Collection Trust – online catalogue
https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/page/1

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<th>Collection reference</th>
<th>Title / Short description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCIN 84551</td>
<td>Baby’s bonnet c.1842 (Jamaica)</td>
<td>A baby’s bonnet from Jamaica. Made from pink silk with Jamaican lace–bark (previously identified as flax) laid over the top and gathered at the edges. It has pink silk ties. Dimensions: 23.0 x 18.0 x 4.0 cm. Provenance: This cap was sent to HRH Princess Victoria (1840–1901) from Jamaica in 1849.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCIN 420766</td>
<td>Watercolour portrait of Prince Alamayou, aged 7 (1868) – painted at Osborne House by Reginald Easton (1807–93)</td>
<td>Portrait of Prince Alamayou, son of Tewodros II (1818–68), Emperor of Abyssinia (modern–day Ethiopia). Following his father’s suicide in 1868, Alamayou was brought to England by army officer Tristam Charles Sawyer Speedy (1836–1910). Alamayou lived with Captain Speedy on the Isle of Wight and was presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCIN 41202</td>
<td>Mahogany serving table, c. 1825–75</td>
<td>A mahogany serving table with a low shaped back ledge with scrolling ends and a central cresting, projecting ends and entablature, resting on two robustly carved winged lion monopodia supports. Located in the Dining Room at Osborne House. It is likely the wood was sourced from tropical forests in Central America and the Caribbean region.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCIN 403652</td>
<td>Portrait in oils of a Black sitter – located at The Durbar Entrance Hall, Osborne House</td>
<td>The portrait depicts Willem Jerve Koetjie (1850–1867), a page boy who completed four years’ service in the household of Queen Victoria’s daughter, Princess Alice (1843–78). In this portrait, Willem Jerve Koetjie wears a black livery jacket trimmed with silver edging over a red waistcoat. Materials: Oil on canvas. Dimensions: 58.3 x 49.7 cm. Provenance: Presented to Queen Victoria by Princess Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse, 1867; recorded at Osborne House, 1876.</td>
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Appendix B

Online images selected to illustrate key content about colonial history discussed within the Osborne House report.

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<tr>
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<td>Photograph of Sarah Forbes Bonetta (Sarah Davies) by Camille Silvy</td>
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<td>Albumen print, 15 September 1862 - NPG Ax61384</td>
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<td>Source: National Portrait Gallery</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw66053/Sarah-Forbes-Bonetta-Sarah-Davies">https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw66053/Sarah-Forbes-Bonetta-Sarah-Davies</a></td>
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| Photograph of James Pinson Labulo Davies and Sarah Forbes Bonetta (Sarah Davies), by Camille Silvy | ![Image](https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp63230/sarah-forbes-bonetta-sarah-davies) |
| Albumen print, 15 September 1862 - NPG Ax61385                                             |                        |
| Source: National Portrait Gallery                                                          |                        |

| Albumen carte-de-visite, 1868 - NPG x74572                                                 |                        |
| Source: National Portrait Gallery                                                          |                        |
WITLEY COURT

Abstract

Formerly a place of lavish Victorian parties and royal entertainments, the neoclassical mansion of Witley Court in Worcestershire, West Midlands is known today for its near-total destruction caused by a devastating fire in 1937. Now one of England’s most spectacular ruins, its remaining walls, and the surrounding village of Great Witley that was created to serve it still give a sense of the wealth and opulence that was once exhibited there.

Past work on the history of Witley Court has focused mainly on how the wealth of its owners has led to the stunning architectural developments of the house, gardens, and grounds. Until relatively recently however, little attention had been given to the sources of wealth which made the development of Witley Court possible.

A look past the façade will reveal a journey through a history of empire, where successive generations of two families who resided at the property: the Foleys and Wards, economically prospered from their involvement in Atlantic slave-trading and Britain’s colonial expansion across the globe.

The Iron Assault

For nearly two centuries, Witley Court was owned by the Foley family, whose fortunes were at first based on the iron industry.

The Foley’s first became associated with Witley Court through Thomas Foley’s (1616 – 1677) purchase of the estate in 1655. At the time, Witley Court was a substantial Jacobean mansion, which had been developed in turn from a medieval manor house by the Russell family. Upon, purchasing the estate, Thomas immediately began to make renovations, starting with the addition of two towers on the north side of the property.

His purchase of Witley Court and these renovations was made possible through his family’s involvement in Britain’s burgeoning ironworks industry. Though iron had been manufactured in Britain since prehistoric times, the 17th century saw numerous changes take place which enabled ironworkers to enrich themselves in ways never seen before. One of these changes was the sudden emergence of the Midlands at the forefront of worldwide developments in science and technology, among them new developments in iron production processes. These developments helped set the stage for Britain’s involvement and dominance in the transatlantic slave trade, a profitable international trading network in which Europeans exchanged goods for millions of enslaved Africans from West and Central Africa.

The trade began with the Portuguese in the early 16th century, in response to the strong demand for labour in their colonies across the Americas, following the establishment of plantation economies based on crops such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco in the region. Britain followed in the early 17th century, after expeditions funded by Elizabeth I, and conflicts fought against other European powers such as Spain and France, led to the establishment of what became the first colonies of the British Empire.

Although the Empire began with Ireland, it was the colonisation of territories in the ‘New World’, such as the North American state of Virginia (1607), Barbados (1627), Anguilla (1650) and Jamaica (1655), and the profitable network of global commerce that their plantation economies spawned that facilitated Britain’s rise as the world’s foremost imperial and economic power.
The manufacture of iron was essential to the success of Britain’s plantation economies across the Atlantic world. Chains, shackles, branding irons, guns and most of the other weapons and tools used by Britain’s military and traders were iron-made, as were most shipbuilding materials. As the slave trade and Britain’s colonial footprint across the globe expanded, the iron industry saw incredible growth. The coal industry saw similar benefits, as it was used in iron’s production.

As a family of ironworkers from the Midlands, the Foleys contributed to the industry’s growth and were able to become enormously wealthy from it.

Building an Empire

Thomas was the eldest son of Richard Foley (1580–1657), a parliamentarian and prominent ironmaster from Stourbridge, West Midlands. Born in Dudley, Richard inherited a modest nail-making business from his father. By the time he was 50, however he had converted this business into an iron production empire that covered Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Bromford and Bridgnorth.

His mercantile success was due to his centralisation of the whole iron production process from the moment the iron ore was delivered to the furnace to when the rods were given to the nailers, achieved through the purchase of several furnaces, forges and nail shaping sites across the Midlands. This was also helped by Richard being one of the first to use the newest developments in iron production technology such as slitting mills, which made the process faster and more efficient than ever before. Richard’s success helped propel the Midlands to the forefront of the country’s iron production at a time when naval expeditions and wars that were fought for the purpose of acquiring colonies across the New World, put increased demand on the material.

As such, iron manufacturers like the Foleys from the Midlands played a chief role in supplying the armaments of the country’s military during the 17th and 18th centuries and profited enormously from it. For example, over the course of 1644 and 1645 alone, during the English Civil Wars of the mid-17th century, Richard Foley was supplying as many as 10,000 pike-heads to the royalist cause, together with of bullets, grenades, cannons, shots and other iron and timber works.

With his wealth, he helped set up his three sons - Richard, Thomas, and Robert, providing them with political influence, business opportunities and properties. Upon Richard’s death, Thomas Foley as the eldest, inherited his father’s fortune and business. Over the next 40 years, he used this wealth and his political status as an MP to increase the profits of the family business by expanding its commercial links. In 1651, he invested in ironworks in New England, a region comprising the North American states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont that were all colonised by the British.

In 1652, he married Ann Browne, who was the daughter of John Browne, the country’s premier arms dealer and the first King’s Gunfounder. In his role, John helped supply the military with weapons, especially cannon and guns, throughout the 1660s and 70s. Decades which saw the navy help seize Jamaica, Barbuda and the states of New York and New Jersey as colonies, alongside winning several battles against European powers such as the Dutch and the French. These formative years for the British Empire saw the reinforcement of the navy’s role in building and protecting of the Empire, as most of those colonies were ‘won’ in battles against other European powers, with examples being New York taken from the Dutch and
Jamaica from the Spanish. Thomas aided his father-in-law by supplying him with the iron needed to make these weapons. In this way, the Browne and Foley partnership helped to ensure the prestige of the navy whose brief increasingly was to ensure British hegemony over the Atlantic trade. The wealth earned from these ironworks related business ventures enabled Thomas to purchase Witley Court and make the renovations, alongside the purchase of several smaller properties across the country, which helped set up further generations of the Foleys.

**New Money, New Politics, New Power**

The immense wealth earned from the Foley iron production empire propelled the Foleys from the middle to the upper class. With this newfound wealth and status, further generations of the Foleys, decided to gradually abandon the industrial base that made them wealthy and focus more on reconfiguring themselves as members of the landed aristocracy and politicians. To achieve this, the Foleys concentrated on philanthropical efforts, the making of various additions and improvements to Witley Court and the surrounding village of Great Witley and forming marriage alliances and partnerships with families that had strong political and mercantile connections and investments in the British Empire and the triangular trade.

Thomas Foley’s sister Martha married William (Jolley) Jolliffe (1622–1712), who was an MP who held leading posts in the Royal Africa Company, the Levant Company and later the East India Company. These were all colonial charter companies set up to assume control and maintenance over foreign trading ports and posts enabling Britain to have the global monopoly on commerce. This was achieved through the seizure and colonisation of territories, with the East India Company operating in large parts of the Indian subcontinent, parts of Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. Combined with the Navigation Acts which were a series of Laws enacted to prioritise British ships, shipping, trade, and commerce between other countries and with its own colonies, this helped make the country enormously wealthy as British traders had the monopoly on all goods and trade produced, imported and exported across the Empire.

Thomas Foley’s grandson, also named Thomas was created the 1st Baron Foley (1673–1733) married Mary Strode, the daughter and heir of Thomas Strode (1628–1699) a wealthy London lawyer and sergeant-at-law. Through their marriage settlement, he earned £30,000 which allowing for inflation would be worth between £3 – £6.8 million today.

The Strodes had strong mercantile links to the British Empire, in particular to the recently colonised island Barbados and North American state of Carolina. Mary was the niece of John Strode, an MP who held the office of farmer of export duties for Barbados and Leeward Islands from 1670–84. In this role, he earned some £400 pa from the collection of duties on rum and sugar in Barbados. He was also leading planter in South Carolina by 1671. At the time, the Carolina slave trade, was the largest among the British colonies in North America, with rice being the earliest main cash crop.

A further but nonetheless relevant connection can also be found in the marriage of the 1st Baron Foley’s (1673–1733) sister Elizabeth to Robert Harley (1661–1724), a notable Conservative politician, First Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer in 1685.

Harley had a strong interest in expanding the scope of the nefarious slave trade across Africa. He invested heavily the Royal African Company, which was originally set in 1660 to establish colonies in Africa. It soon shifted its focus to the establishment and sustainment of Britain’s slave trading economy in Africa, with the company being responsible for shipping
more enslaved Africans to the Americas than any other company in the history of the Atlantic slave trade. Harley supported the establishment of the South Sea Company as he wished to see some important commercial and governmental role for the Royal African Company after it lost its monopoly in the trade in 1698 due to financial troubles.

Founded in January 1711, the company was created as a public-private partnership to consolidate and reduce the cost of the national debt. It was intended to be a Conservative competitor to the Bank of England’s financial dominance in Atlantic Slave Trading. To help achieve this, Harley appointed the cousin of his wife and the 3rd Baron Foley as the Commissioner of Trade and Plantations in 1711. This was a lucrative post which took a sustained and direct interest in protecting the interests of British Caribbean sugar planters.

In 1713, Harley became the Governor of the South Sea Company. That same year, the company was granted Asiento de Negros monopoly contract, enabling them to enslave and transport 144,000 people per year to Spanish South America. The contract led to a substantial increase in the number of enslaved Africans working on plantations. Though the company infamously crashed in 1720 and ruined thousands of investors in an event known as the South Sea Bubble, the wealth and position which Harley derived from his investments were significantly linked to Britain’s colonial and enslavement related activities.

A further and more distant connection to the South Sea Company for the Foleys can be found in the family’s relationship with the Hoares. The Foleys and the Hoares were linked through the marriage of the 1st Baron Foley’s grandnephew to the second daughter of Henry Hoare (1677–1724).

The Hoares are known for founding C. Hoare & Co, the oldest private bank in the United Kingdom and the second to established ever after the Bank of England. Henry inherited the bank from his father, Richard (1648–1719) who founded it. As one of the oldest banks, it played a pivotal role in Britain’s enslavement linked financial activities. One of these investments was the South Sea Company, with the bank and Henry being among very few to benefit from the South Sea Bubble, as he earned £28,000, a sum worth between £3 and £5 billion by today’s money, in share prices.

As many members of the Foleys banked with C. Hoare & Co, saved from ruin after the crash, the overall wealth of the Foleys wasn’t impacted by the bubble as badly as others had. The 1st Baron Foley (1673–1733) ‘lost heavily’ when the bubble burst ‘but remained a wealthy man’ and was able to begin plans to rebuild Great Witley Church where he was buried.

Although some of these connections are distant to Witley Court, it exemplifies the political, mercantile and financial benefits that such marriage alliances brought to a family.

**Changing Fortunes**

With the money earned from his inheritance, the 1st Baron Foley set out to rebuild and renovate the village of Great Witley, starting with a new church, however he died before any work could start. In 1735, his son, the 2nd Baron Foley (1703–1766), in his place, constructed a new parish church. In 1747, the 2nd Baron Foley commissioned James Gibbs to decorate the church in a Baroque style, as such was the current trend amongst the elite, with paintings and furnishings acquired at the auction of the contents of Cannons House. This included painted panels by Antonio Bellucci, and ten hand painted windows by Joshua Price of London.
A few years later, the park was landscaped, which included the relocation and expansion of the village of Great Witley. In the mid-18th century, the lake known as Front Pool was created to the north of the house by damming the brook that feeds it. Sometime between 1772 and 1794 an ornamental woodland known as the wilderness was planted to the north-east, with walks laid out along the banks of the lake and brook.

In 1805, the 3rd Baron Foley, was able to commission John Nash, the leading Regency architect, to design a succession of ambitious alterations to Witley. These included the addition of two massive porticos to the north and south fronts.

These purchases, however, combined with the move away from ironworking as a source of wealth, came at a significant cost for the Foleys as it depleted their family fortune, with the Foleys having to eventually sell the estate in 1833 to ward off Bankruptcy.

Heirs and inheritors

The other main family that contributed to the development of the Witley Court estate was the Ward family. A family of prominent politicians and landowners, their association with the estate began in 1833, when it was sold by the 4th Baron Foley to the trustees of William Ward (1817 – 1885). Although an orphan at 16 and therefore still a minor, he was one of the richest individuals in England with an inheritance that included a fortune built on the income from more than 200 coal mines in the Midlands and plantations in Jamaica from his second cousin, John William Ward (1781–1833) the first Earl of Dudley. John William Ward owned three plantations in Jamaica that he inherited from his grandmother Mary Lady Viscountess Dudley and Ward. These were the Whitney and Rymesbury estates in the Jamaican Parish of Clarendon and the New Yarmouth estate in the former Jamaican parish of Vere, that now constitutes part of Clarendon.

At the time, Britain was in the process of abolishing slavery throughout its Empire – primarily as a direct result of the slave rebellions that destabilised the plantation economy, the lobbying of anti-slavery campaigners and the legislative debates taking place in the British Parliament. In 1826, with his inheritance of the Jamaican plantations, John William Ward tried to prevent this by speaking against a proposal to abolish slavery in the British Colonies in parliament. Nonetheless, the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 eventually led to emancipation throughout the British Empire by 1st August 1838. To compensate slave owners for the loss of their ‘property’, the UK government borrowed £20 million, a debt that was only paid off by British taxpayers in 2015. Formerly enslaved people weren’t offered any compensation or reparations.

According to the UCL Legacies of British Slave-Ownership database, John William Ward was awarded £12,728 for the emancipation of 655 enslaved people from the three plantations. However, as he had died by the time the funds came through, without any heirs, his fortune was distributed among distant family members, with William Ward’s trustees receiving the estates and the slavery compensation payment.

With the immense wealth earned from his inheritance, William Ward commissioned architect Samuel Dukes to remodel the house, who had already altered his London house, Dudley House on Park Lane, and the church at Great Witley. The renovations, which were largely complete by the 1860s involved using ashlar stone cladding over the existing red brickwork in the ornate Italianate style popularised by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert for the Osborne
House residence on the Isle of Wight. Other new additions included a new curving wing which led to a vast glass-roofed conservatory.

William also commissioned the leading garden designer William Andrews Nesfield to create an ornate formal garden to complement the remodelled mansion. The garden, which included grand formal parterres and a Perseus and Andromeda fountain, was said by Nesfield to be his ‘monster work’. These renovations helped Witley Court reach the peak of grandeur, as it was now host to a range of formal lavish parties, some of which were attended by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII).

**Conclusion**

Once of the great country houses of England and now one of the country’s most spectacular ruins, a walk around Witley Court will still enable one to gain a sense of the opulence and scale of what once was, from the mixture of architectural styles ranging from Jacobean to Italianate, to the surrounding gardens that speaks of its Victorian grandeur. But as I hope to have shown in this investigation, a look past the grand façade reveals how the foundations of Witley Court were built on a dark history. One that is connected to the founding of the British Empire, Jamaican sugar fortunes and the nefarious Atlantic trade.

Exploring the sources of wealth of the two most prominent families at Witley Court, the Foleys and the Wards, reveals how embedded enslavement is in the house’s history. From the Foleys iron production empire that enabled its first expansion, to the Ward’s slavery compensation award that led to further financial development of the estate, slavery-derived wealth has always been invested into Witley Court and elevated the wealth of its residents. This is typical of many estates that display opulence but do not state the details of how that opulence was achieved. As such, this investigation reveals the varied ways in which enslavement labour benefitted the aristocracy, from the trade being a new route to wealth to the compensation that was awarded to slaveholding families after abolition.

**REFERENCES**


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http://www.sedgleymanor.com/trades/nailmakers2.html
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Taken From: Edward Long’s ‘The History of Jamaica'

Source: The British Library

URL: http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/carviews/m/O22zzzg4255vol1uO0376ir0.html

Title: Watercolour of Witley Court with the gardens as designed by William Andrew Nesfield

Creator: William Andrews Nesfield (1793 - 1881)

Date: 1880

URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Witley_Court_from_Morris%27s_Seats_of_Noblemen_and_Gentleman_(1880).JPG