

Two Devon families in Jamaica: a local association with slavery

by Gillian Allen

Maritime South West No 21 (2008); Revised 21/07/2017

My perspective on slavery

I take the view, first propounded by Eric Williams in ‘Capitalism and Slavery’, that slavery was not a marginal enterprise but that it was central to the development of the British economy in the 18th century. It produced capital for the industrial revolution; it prompted the development of financial institutions and the improvement of shipping and the navy. It was central to the development of the prosperity we enjoy today. It was also a major step on the road to globalisation, bringing together disparate parts of the world in one economic enterprise, with the founding of multi-cultural societies.

By the same token, the Transatlantic Trade in Africans left a legacy of tribal conflict in West Africa, and of poverty in Africa and the Caribbean, and of the racism which hampers the participation of black people in our prosperity even today.

My view is that it is important for us to know about our own history and to address the issues that arise from it. The extent of our involvement in an iniquitous system has been denied, hushed up and erased from the history books. I believe that it is behoves us to uncover that hidden history, to understand and discuss it, and to come to terms with it. I think that a thorough examination of our history will enable us to admit to our latent racism and to begin to establish a more honest dialogue among the inheritors of the legacy of slavery – the black people on either side of the Atlantic, and the whites; the enslaved and the enslavers.

At this point, I should declare my interest. I spent 23 years in Jamaica as the wife of a Jamaican and as a physics teacher in state schools. As the years went by, and I grew in understanding of the Jamaican situation, I became more sympathetic to the black point of view. Returning to England, I became acutely aware of the disadvantage suffered by people of Caribbean origin in this country and the (usually unvoiced) misunderstandings and prejudice shown towards them. This was paralleled by the misunderstandings and prejudice shown towards the poor countries of the world, particularly in Africa.

When I have read books on local Devon history, I have seen hardly any mention of Devonians’ involvement in slavery or the slave trade. And yet, increasingly, historians are unearthing evidence that slavery was an important source of wealth for Devon people. This ‘oversight’ in not mentioning a significant facet of our history contributes to the general denial and downplaying of the role of Devonians in slavery.

This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge of our history. During the past year I have been researching two Devon families with Jamaican slavery connections: the Glanville family of Ottery St Mary and the Davy family of Countess Wear.

How I became interested in family history research

I became interested in tracing family trees when my friends in Jamaica, named Glanville, told me that they believed their ancestors had come from Devon, but they didn't know exactly where in Devon, or who they were. It sounded a fun exercise to try to trace their ancestors! I was fortunate to be able to visit Jamaica in August 2007 and stay with the Glanville family in Mandeville, the capital town of the parish of Manchester. Ralph Glanville is a great-great-grandson of Samuel Glanville (1785 – 1862) of Ottery St Mary, the original Glanville settler. His son, James, a history buff, was happy to help me explore the hills to look for the remains of the Davy and Glanville properties.

I was alerted to the Davy connection with Jamaica by local historians: Martin Weiler, Geoffery Harding, David Clement and the late Barbara Entwistle. Starting with these two, apparently unconnected, families I have tried to trace their Devon roots, their Jamaican properties, and their descendants. What soon became clear was that they were not unconnected at all, but they were close friends, and their lives were intertwined with each others', on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Davy and Glanville families in Devon

James Davy (1729 – 1813) was a tenant farmer who moved from Mare Farm, Heavitree, to Wear Barton Farm off Glasshouse Lane, Countess Wear, in 1766. His eldest son, Robert (1762 – 1862), built large sailing ships by the River Exe at the end of Glasshouse Lane, some of which were "West Indiamen", large cargo ships designed to trade with the West Indian islands.

One of these was the 'Jamaica Planter', a ship of 424 tons, built in 1810, which carried 20 guns and was licensed to carry 45 armed men. Robert sold the ship to London merchants but retained a part ownership in it. This ship sailed in a convoy – as it was during the Napoleonic Wars – to Jamaica, where it returned laden with sugar, rum, coffee and pimento, the products of slave labour. This ship met an untimely end on its second voyage, when it became separated from its convoy in rough seas near Bermuda and disappeared without a trace.

Perhaps it was through their brother's shipbuilding business that two younger Davys, James (1765 – 1825) and Edward (1776 – 1803), became interested in venturing to Jamaica and buying plantations in the 1790s. The Davy family tomb in Clyst St Mary points to the connection: "*To the memory of James Davy Esquire, late of the Island of Jamaica, who died October 19th, 1825, aged 60.*"

Samuel Glanville was the son of Thomas Glanville (c1762 – 1854), the solicitor of Ottery St Mary. Samuel first appears in the Jamaican records in 1809 where he was connected with James Davy's estate. Quite possibly he obtained work here through another Davy brother, Thomas (1773 – 1852), who had become a doctor and moved from Wear to Ottery at about that time. It seems likely that the town's doctor and solicitor would have become acquainted and between them found a job for the young Samuel in Jamaica.

On the Jamaican side

The internet has made it increasingly possible to discover our historical links across the Atlantic, with websites that feature transcriptions of records from Caribbean countries. I found the Jamaican Family Search website a treasure trove here. This website contains transcriptions of the Jamaica Almanacs from 1811 to 1845 which list the names of properties and their owners. This table is abstracted from the 1831 Almanac for the parish of Manchester, Jamaica.

Proprietors	Properties	Slaves	Stock
Davy, John	Green Hill	27	135
	Green Pond	130	82
	Green Vale	87	8
	Banbury and Russell Place	220	210
	Knowsley Park	55	
	Litchfield	69	8
	Robin's Hall	46	
	Wear Pen	97	322
Glanville, Samuel	Green Mount	16	
	Green Vale	117	319
	Norway	100	

The names John Davy and Samuel Glanville provide clear evidence of the link between these Devon families and Jamaica. It shows that they owned large numbers of slaves on their properties. The fact that slaves were listed along with stock shows that the status of enslaved Africans was more akin to that of animals than of human beings.

The Almanacs show that the Davy brothers established three properties in Jamaica: Wear Pen, Heavitree and Topsham. These were situated in the hilly interior of the island, in the parish of Manchester. Samuel Glanville bought the properties Devon and Greenvale, initially in partnership with one William Abell. As Emancipation approached, they bought up other properties, probably at bargain prices.

Wear Pen and Greenvale

The main economic activity in Jamaica in the early 19th century was sugar cultivation using slave labour. But Manchester was too cool, too steep and too dry for sugar cultivation. Instead, here they grew coffee and pimento and raised cattle. Pimento is a spice that grows as berries on trees. The cattle were raised for use on the sugar plantations that occupied most of the lowland coastal plains of Jamaica. The heavy work of turning the machinery to grind the sugar cane was often done by oxen, as was the haulage of cane carts from the fields to the factories.



Wear Pen House, January 2007

This was Wear Pen house, built by James Davy, probably around 1800. As the name Pen implies, it was primarily a cattle farm and the lush green fields still surrounding it are ideal for cattle. James had, no doubt, learned a lot about cattle farming during his childhood on Wear Barton Farm.

He arrived in Jamaica near the end of the slavery period. In 1807 the Transatlantic Trade in Africans was legally abolished in the British Empire; this was followed by period of “Amelioration”, that is, tighter legal controls over the conditions in which slaves were kept and worked. Then Emancipation was instituted in two stages; in 1834 a partial emancipation known as “Apprenticeship”; and in 1838 full Emancipation.

After Emancipation, the economy of Jamaica went into decline. Planters could not compete with other countries when they had to pay their workforce. Wear Pen and many other estates ended up in receivership by the 1840s and the next generation of the white Davy family had returned to Britain by the 1850s. Despite being supposedly bankrupt, James Davy’s grandsons were sent to Uppingham School and then Oxford University. His son, John lived on Royal Crescent, Kensington, and his widow was able to live out her life on the money he left to her. The compensation he received for the loss of his human property, his slaves, no doubt helped him out here.

The following section describes my exploration with James Glanville into the hills of Manchester to search for Davy and Glanville ruins. Alas! We did not find what we expected at Wear Pen! It had been partially demolished between January and August 2007, possibly by local people looking for building materials.

Samuel Glanville’s house, Greenvale, has been spared Wear Pen’s fate, perhaps due to the intervention of Marilyn Horner, a Glanville descendant in Canada. It is being used as the Headquarters of the bauxite company, so it is preserved for the time being, despite the close encroachment of open cast mining operations.

Greenvale, next door to Wear Pen, was bought by Samuel Glanville in the 1820s and remained in the family until the 1960s. In contrast to John Davy, Samuel Glanville

managed to maintain his financial viability after Emancipation and was eventually able to leave his Jamaican property to his two eldest sons.

A piece of land between Wear Pen and Greenvale estates was donated by James Davy for the building of an Anglican church.



St George's Church, Wear Pen

The church, St George's, initially served the white elite of the area and has only recently been abandoned as the population has moved away. It has, or had until recently due to vandalism, marble plaques and tombstones to members of the Davy and Glanville families.



Cottage police station and lay magistrates' court

The only building that is still in good repair, and still being used for its original purpose, is this court house, near to Wear Pen. Downstairs is the police station and upstairs is the lay magistrates' court. Here, Samuel Glanville and James Davy, to be followed by their sons, dispensed justice in the days of slavery and beyond. The Jamaica Almanacs'

Civil Lists show Glanville in the category of ‘Assistant Judges and Magistrates’ in 1839 and 1851, James Davy in 1802 and 1824, and his second son John Davy in 1824, 1839 and 1851. However, his eldest son, James Lewis Davy, surpassed them all by becoming Custos Rotulorum, the chief magistrate, in 1839, the year before his untimely death at the age of 42 years.

Heavitree and Topsham

Our next expedition was to search for the Davys’ other properties: Heavitree and Topsham. Heavitree, to the north of Wear Pen, was established later than the other estates, first appearing in the Almanacs in 1840, after Emancipation. Having identified the district by the hand painted sign on a store front church, “*Church of Jesus Christ Heavytree..*”, we were directed up a side road.

The first indication of the house was the old barbeque. A barbeque is a cemented drying area where coffee and pimento berries were spread out and dried in the sun. The barbeque is now used to catch rain water which drains into a tank at the lower end. Because the area is limestone, there are no rivers or ponds to supply water; it all soaks away, so catchments like this are necessary.

To the right of the barbeque we found the remains of the wall of Heavitree house. We were lucky to find this young man loading his donkey. He agreed to pose for us!



Man with donkey by remains of Heavitree house

The people we met in Heavitree are not “natives” but descendants of the slaves on the estates in the area. The original inhabitants of Jamaica were Taino Amerindians who were virtually exterminated by the Spanish before the British arrived.

Topsham lies to the south of Wear Pen. We had greater difficulty finding the Topsham house. We drew on the help of one Sergeant Sas Davey who lived in the area, the brother-in-law of my children's former French teacher. But Mr Davey didn't know where the remains of the house were. He had to ask around and found that we had to go to Miss Morgan's house and ask permission to walk through her yard, then into the bush behind the house. We eventually found the bottom of the wall and there was a barbecue behind.

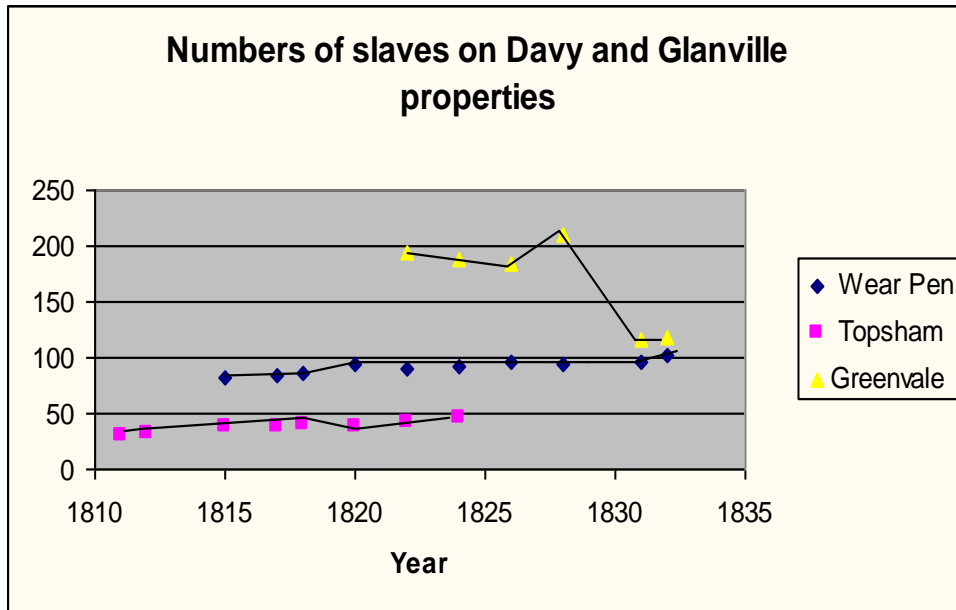


Sergeant Davey standing on the remains of Topsham house

So this is all that remains of the house! Topsham was first owned by Edward Davy, a younger brother of James. He didn't live long in Jamaica, dying in 1803, and leaving his property to his brother Thomas and sister Rebecca, still in Devon, England. Thomas was the doctor in Ottery. Thomas and Rebecca became absentee landlords, never visiting their property or taking an active part in its operation. Nevertheless, the property was run for their benefit and the profits of their slaves' labour must have helped Thomas to buy the best house in Ottery – the Raleigh House - and to educate his own three sons, who became a doctor, a solicitor, and an inventor. This aspect of Davy history is not mentioned by the Ottery St Mary Heritage Society in their publications or exhibition.

Slave population

It is interesting to see how the number of slaves on these estates varied over the years. The Jamaica Almanacs give figures for many of the years between 1811 and 1832.



The graph shows that, while Wear Pen and Topsham experienced a steady increase in numbers, Greenvale showed fluctuations, with a sudden drop near the end of the slavery period.

We have to bear in mind that importation of new slaves from Africa was now illegal. There seems to have been a natural increase at Wear Pen and Topsham, with more births than deaths each year. This may not seem surprising, but in the context of Caribbean slavery it was very unusual! The whole rationale behind the slave trade was that, as slaves were property and could therefore be regarded solely as economic entities, it made business sense to work slaves hard – so hard that women’s health did not allow them to have many children. The death rate was higher than the birth rate in nearly all parts of the West Indies, even after 1807 when planters made efforts to ameliorate conditions. One of the few exceptions was this area of northern Manchester. The explanation may lie in the high altitude, above the level of many tropical diseases, and the less arduous nature of the work. These slaves were not working in gangs in the cane fields under close supervision all day, as was the lot of most slaves.

The reason for the sudden drop in the number of Greenvale slaves in 1827 was revealed by the West Indian Slave Registers which became available on Ancestry.com. In this year, Glanville separated his property from that of William Abell, which they had shared until then, and transferred many of his slaves to Abell’s Devon property.

The number of slaves greatly exceeded the number of whites in Jamaica. By law, the ratio of blacks to whites was not allowed to exceed 10 to 1, but it had been known to go as high as 13 to 1. How did the whites maintain their hold over so many enslaved Africans? One way was through the local militia. Each property had to contribute a certain number of white men to serve in the militia. The militia’s main purpose was to put down slave rebellions, which they did with great ferocity. Samuel Glanville rose to become the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Manchester Militia of Foot; while James Davy made it to Captain. The Topsham estate was fined after Edward Davy’s death for not sending anyone to bear arms in the militia.

Slave remains

It is notable that the slaves themselves left so few concrete remains of their existence. It is only recently that efforts have been made to commemorate enslaved Africans. We came across a sign, next to the police station, saluting three slaves who contributed to the struggle for freedom: *George Lewis, first evangelist; Damon, freedom fighter, killed in the struggle; James Knight, Christian martyr*. It would have been helpful to have been told more about these men.

Slave settlements tended to be flimsy affairs which quickly decayed, leaving little trace. The only remains of a slave settlement we came across were at Bellefield, a few miles to the east of Wear Pen, which had been acquired by William Davy through marriage, on the eve of Emancipation. The relationship of this William to James Davy is not known; I suspect he may have been an illegitimate son. We met a mixed race family who claim to be descendants of William Davy. The son, Dillion Dawkins, visiting from New York, had bought up a very overgrown nearby plot on which there were remains of slave houses and tombs which he was planning to renovate.



Davy descendants, Dillion Dawkins, his mother and Jill Allen

People called Davy today

People with the name of Davy today could be descendants of the white Davys or they could be descendants of the slaves of the Davys.

James Davy married a white Englishwoman, and had white sons (James Lewis and John), who in turn married white Englishwomen and had white children. I know this because the Jamaican parish registers were divided into racial categories before 1833. How many children these men had outside of marriage, by their slaves or by free women of colour, is less likely to be recorded.

However, the registers do show that Edward Davy, the original owner of Topsham and who died young, had a daughter, Jane, by a free mulatto woman, Elizabeth Morgan. Mulatto was the term for a mixed race person who was half black and half white. She was 'free' in the sense that she was not a slave. In his will of 1803, he left Elizabeth some money, 25 acres of woodland and three negro women. That is, he left her three domestic slaves. He left his daughter Jane £1000 "*to be sent to England at the age of eight years to have a decent education.*"

One wonders what happened to little Jane. Was she accepted into her uncle James' household after her father's death? Did she survive to the age of eight? Did she ever come to England to be educated? And did she come to her relatives in Countess Wear or Ottery? Might she have any descendants in Devon today?

Samuel Glanville's family life contrasted with the Davys'. Samuel never married but he had a long term relationship with Eleanor Vassal, a woman of colour. They had nine children, who were classified as 'mestees', that is, one eighth black and seven eighths white. Five of them moved, as young adults, to the hamlet of Alfington, just outside Ottery St Mary, in 1851. Again, it would be interesting to know how they were received by the local population. We do know that they were befriended by Dr Thomas Davy and his family, and he helped them find a place to live and to settle in to their English life. The youngest son, Thomas, was the principal landowner in Alfington from 1893 until his death in 1910. Samuel left his daughters a substantial sum in British investments to provide for them for the rest of their lives. His sons inherited farms and land near Ottery, such as Leggeshayes and Prings.

I have been contacted by a mixed race descendant of John Davy, now living in London, called Valerie Edwards-Davy. Her father, Hubert, came to England in the 1950s, during the wave of West Indian immigration to this country. His great-grandfather may have been a son of John Davy by one of his slaves or by a free woman of colour. Valerie is amused at the thought of what the English Davys might think of her as their relative!

Valerie tells me that their family have farmed at Devon, an area just north of Wear Pen, ever since John Davy's time, and, indeed, her uncle still farms there. I visited Devon Pen this summer – another ruined house in a beautiful landscape! Devon had been owned at various times by Samuel Glanville and James Lewis Davy. After Emancipation, Devon Pen went into receivership and was eventually divided into small lots to be sold or rented. Perhaps Valerie's ancestor had one of these plots.

There are many people named Davy in Jamaica today – but not many are descendants of the white Davys. Most are descendants of their slaves. There were so many Davys in the area next to Bellefield that the village is called 'Davyton'.

I was fascinated to find, in the Island Records Office, records of mass baptisms of slaves. On March 10, 1820, the vicar had a busy day. He baptised 26 slaves '*belonging to the Topsham property*' and 103 slaves belonging to Wear Pen. Most were given the surname Davy. These baptisms were part of the government's program to register slaves as a means of controlling illegal slave trading. By being baptised, slaves were given two-part names – Christian name plus surname – in contrast to the single name such as 'Quashie' by which they had previously been known. This was part of the

amelioration program which moved slaves gradually from the status of property to that of people.

I mentioned that we were shown the Topsham house by a Sergeant Sas Davey. Sas Davey lives near to Topsham, in the district of Maidstone. There are family graves there going back to his great-grandfather so I assumed he was a descendant of a slave of the Topsham Davys. But he said no, that his family hailed from Bellefield. His forebears had moved to Maidstone because it was a free village. After Emancipation, the planters had tried various means to tie their former slaves to their land in conditions as like slavery as possible. However, they were opposed by some non-conformist churches who bought up land for the ex-slaves where they could become independent peasants, called 'free villages'. Maidstone was one of these. This branch of the Davey family thrived and multiplied, producing men like Sas Davey who served in the Jamaica Defence Force, gave land to accommodate a local library, and is a backbone of the Moravian church. Ex-slaves who were unable to obtain land sometimes squatted on Crown land or remained on the estates as seasonal, landless labourers. They probably remained in extreme poverty and their descendants are likely to be found in the slums of Kingston today.

Conclusion

I hope I have managed to open up a small part of the history of Devon's association with slavery. These two respectable families participated in slavery through the building and owning of ships that traded with the slave estates of the West Indies; through the owning of slaves and profiting from their labour; and through the oppression of slaves by civil and military means. Their legacy includes the continued poverty and disadvantage of the slaves' descendants, and the affluence of the county of Devon today.

What it highlights is how closely the histories – and the genes - of black and white are linked. We can rightly ask: Whose history is it?

Bibliography

Beckles, H. and Shepherd, V. (Eds) (1991). *Caribbean slave society and economy: a student reader*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

Glanville wills on www.worldconnect.rootsweb.com, accessed 4 December 2006.

Higman, B.W. (1988). *Jamaica surveyed: Plantation maps and plans of the nineteenth century*. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica Publications Ltd.

Jamaica Almanacs on www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com, accessed November 2006.

Kelly's Devon Directories 1890 – 1914

Mackeith, L. (2003). *Local Black History: A beginning in Devon*. London: Archives and Museum of Black Heritage.

Manchester Parish Records, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

Ottery St Mary Parish Registers, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

Patterson, O. (1967). *The sociology of slavery*. London: Macgibbon & Kee.

Ponsford, C.N. (Ed) (1988). *Shipbuilding on the Exe: The memoranda book of Samuel Bishop Davy*. Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol 31.

West Indian Slave Registers. Ancestry.com.

Williams, E. (1961). *Capitalism and slavery*. NY: Russell and Russell.