

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

A slave-ship called the Croydon

One of the last British slaving voyages was made by a ship called the Croydon. It left London on 21st April 1807, took on board 377 enslaved men women and children in the Congo River in West Africa, and disembarked 339 survivors at Kingston Jamaica on 1st December 1807, arriving home on 9th April 1808. The ship, built in Nantes in 1801, was owned and operated by the London slave-traders Edward Boyd and Alexander Caldcleugh. Caldcleugh lived at Broad Green Croydon, near where Mayday Hospital now stands, until his death in 1809. Alone and in partnership with Boyd, Caldcleugh in a total of 13 known slave voyages between 1798 and 1807 was responsible for the

forced transportation of 3867 captured Africans, of whom 376 are known to have died before reaching the Caribbean. His son, also called Alexander Caldcleugh (1795–1858), and who himself lived at Broad Green between 1822 and 1829, has an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as a celebrated businessman and traveller: the entry describes his father as ‘shipowner and merchant.’



Source: John A. Waller, *A Voyage in the West Indies* (1820), copy from Library of Congress.

Slave ships, including the Croydon, carried their human cargo in appalling conditions. This image shows a slave ship arriving in Carlisle Bay, Barbados, in 1807, the same year that the Croydon undertook its Atlantic crossing.

From Croydon to Toronto: imperial legacies

Henry Bowyer Lane, an Army officer in the Royal Artillery, was baptised in 1782 in Croydon and although he moved away he kept links here. In 1837 he left as part of his estate ‘a piece of land consisting of 2 acres of freehold of inheritance situated... in the parish of Croydon.’ He also left ‘One third part of a Sugar Plantation called Spring Valley in the Island of Jamaica together with the slaves, stock utensils etc. thereon the property of my present wife and settled on her and her children.’ Henry Bowyer Lane collected the compensation for the 210 enslaved people on the Spring Valley estate in the 1830s. His son, Henry Bowyer Joseph Lane, was an architect active in shaping Toronto in Canada as an imperial centre in the 1840s.



Osgoode Hall, Toronto, designed by Henry Bowyer Joseph Lane and constructed between 1829–1832.

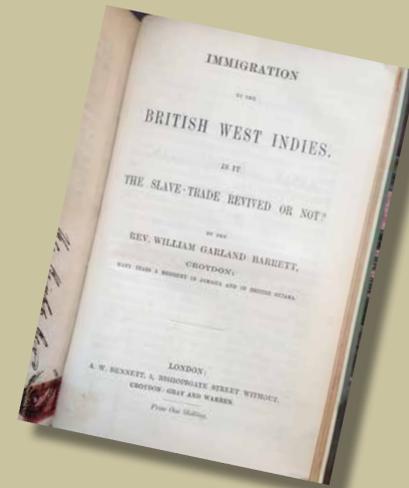
CROYDON AND SLAVERY [2]

Aftermath of slavery

British colonial slavery left many legacies, both in Britain and in the Caribbean. One of these legacies was the movement of indentured labourers from south Asia to the Caribbean after the end of slavery. As the former slave-owners sought to negotiate new labour relations with the formerly enslaved people, many of the latter, where they could, left the estates to become self-sufficient farmers. To replace their labour and to drive down wages, former slave-owners across the Caribbean but especially in British Guiana and Trinidad procured indentured labourers from south Asia. Such labourers signed contracts for 7 to 10 years, and left their families and homes to work thousands of miles away. Many died; many others never returned home but stayed and their ancestors became part of Caribbean society. Concern in Britain about their treatment led to protest about the use of indentured labour, including William Garland Barrett’s pamphlet ‘Immigration to the West Indies: is it the slave trade revived?’, published in 1859 at Croydon by Gray and Warren of 131 High Street, who also published the Croydon Directory.

Barrett wrote from Croydon in November 1859 to defend his pamphlet in the *Nonconformist* magazine.

Title page of William Garland Barrett’s pamphlet ‘Immigration to the West Indies: is it the slave trade revived?’



The African presence in Croydon

The African presence in Britain pre-dates and post-dates the centuries of slavery. The lives of many men and women of African descent remain unmarked, perhaps to an even greater extent than the lives of the mass of people as a whole. In Croydon, Liston Lewis has found records of an injured ‘Negroeman’ brought to Croydon Workhouse from Coulsdon in 1762: among other people of African and Asian descent traced in the area about whom we know very little are Charles Althorp (baptised as an adult in 1765), Thomas Chance (who died as a young man in 1773), Charles Samson (recorded as a servant in 1774), Peter Peterro (baptised in 1774), John Cappen (baptised in 1795), Diana Terrell Readwood (baptised in 1809) and Jean Baptiste from Guadeloupe (who served in the army 1813–1841). In other cases we do know more about their life stories. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) fought against racial prejudice to become a composer of international acclaim notably for his *Hiawatha* suite. His father was a surgeon from Sierra Leone who returned there when Samuel was very young. Samuel was brought up in Croydon by his mother Alice Martin and won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music at the age of 15. He considered himself an Anglo-African and combined African traditional music with western Classical music. In the census of 1911 he was at ‘Aldwick’, St Leonards Road, Croydon, with his wife Jessie and children Hiawatha and Gwendolen, both born in South Norwood. In 1901 the family had been at 30 Dagnall Park, Croydon (where there is a London county Council plaque).



William Wells Brown (c. 1814–1884). Image of the author from his book, *Three Years in Europe: Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met* (1852).

Abolitionists in Croydon

After the end of British colonial slavery, the struggle for freedom continued for and by those held in slavery in the southern US. On 5 September 1849, William Wells Brown, a formerly enslaved man in Kentucky who had escaped to freedom in 1834, gave a anti-slavery speech at the Lecture Hall at Croydon ‘as an advocate on behalf of the American slave.’ William Wells Brown (c. 1814–1884) was a novelist, playwright and historian as well as an anti-slavery activist. His autobiography *Narrative of William W. Brown, a fugitive slave* is one of a number of ‘slave narratives’ produced by formerly enslaved people in the US. By contrast, few such life-stories exist for those held in British colonial slavery: the most famous is the *History of Mary Prince*.