

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

DEVON AND SLAVERY [1]

Early Devonian development

Sir John Hawkins of Plymouth is credited with leading the first British slave trading expedition in 1562 when he attacked a Portuguese slave ship in Guinea, kidnapped the 400 slaves on board, and sold them in the West Indies. In the five years from 1564, Hawkins made two further voyages to the West Indies, each time buying slaves in Africa and selling them at a profit in the Americas. He was not the only Devonian to make profits from slave-ownership.

Historically, Devon's wealth has been built on the wool trade. Devon's cloth trade played its part in the slave economies, both as items to export to Africa in part-exchange for buying people and also as direct exports to the plantations in the Americas.

Sugar processing factories in Devon included those at the Bishop's Palace (1650s) and Goldsmith Street in Exeter.



Bishop's Palace, Exeter, which housed an early sugar processing factory in 1653.



John Hawkins of Plymouth (1532–1595) naval commander, merchant and slave trader.

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Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Buttall family set up a refinery in Topsham, now the site of The Retreat, which they supplied with sugar from their plantations in South Carolina and Barbados.

Another important Devon activity was the Newfoundland fish trade. Fish catches were taken to colonies in Virginia and the Caribbean. This 'salt fish' was a part of the diet of the enslaved people.

Devonian men and the legal structure of slavery

Many defeated Royalists left England during the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth (1642–1660). During this period some Devonians became involved in plantation economies in the Americas. Some of them moved from Barbados to Jamaica and then to the Carolinas, creating legal frameworks in each place in turn, to codify the institution of slavery.

Mayor of Exeter in 1621, Thomas Modyford arrived in Barbados in 1647 with money to invest in plantations. Together with Devon merchants John Colleton, Peter Leare, and others, he developed plantations there. Peter Leare was later knighted and in 1660 bought a country house, Lindridge Manor, near Bishopsteignton.



Lindridge Manor, near Bishopsteignton, in 1795. Sir Peter Leare bought the house in 1660 and greatly enlarged and remodelled it. Painted in 1795 by Rev. John Swete who himself inherited money from estates in Antigua.

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An early map of Barbados from Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657).

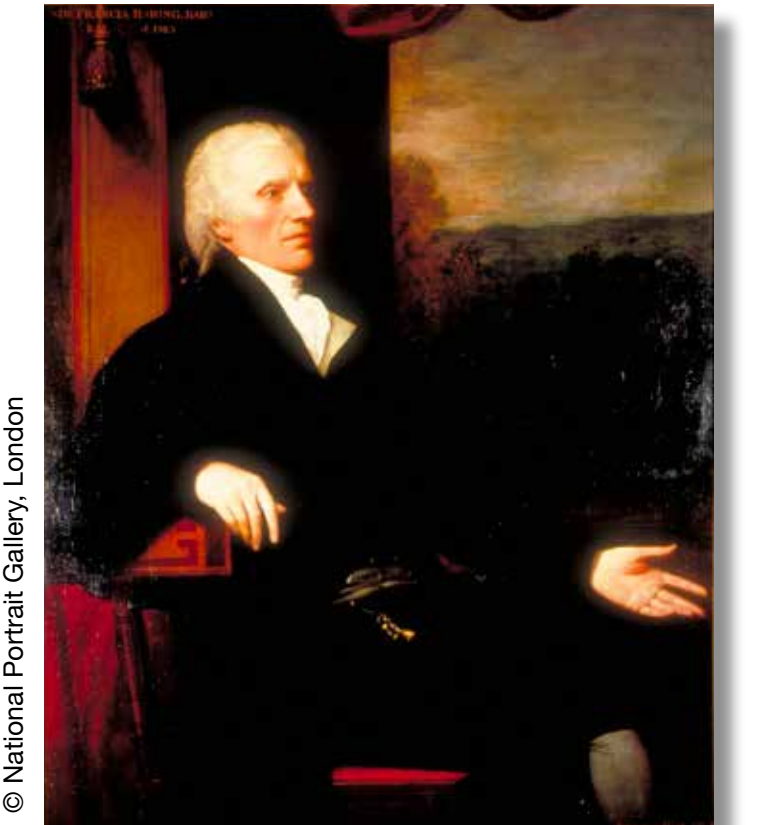
In 1661 there was the first post-Restoration Assembly in Barbados which passed the first comprehensive Slave Code in the Americas. Similar codes were passed in Jamaica, South Carolina, Antigua and Georgia over the next 100 years.

As these slave codes were refined, distinctions were drawn between white indentured servants, indigenous people and enslaved Africans. These distinctions increasingly codified divisions between these groups according to the concept of 'race'.

Banking and mercantile activity in the 18th century

The Barings of Exmouth and Exeter were firstly wool merchants and then bankers. Johann Baring, born in Bremen, Germany, had settled in Exeter in 1717. His son Francis (1740–1810) was apprenticed to a Manchester financier of slave ships. Later he created the merchant house of John and Francis Baring Company with his older brother John, which eventually became Barings Bank.

The Barings were intimately involved in slavery in both the Caribbean and the American colonies. The firm claimed substantial slave compensation in the 1830s as a creditor of Wolfert Katz, the largest slave-owner in British Guiana.



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Sir Francis Baring by Charles Muss, after Sir Thomas Lawrence (1823).



The original site of The Exeter Bank, established in 1769 by the Praed family, on Exeter's Cathedral Green

The Praeds were a prominent banking family in the Westcountry and established The Exeter Bank in 1769 in what is now part of the Royal Clarence Hotel.

William Praed owned enslaved people on the Waterhouse Estate in the Parish of St Andrew in Jamaica between 1811 and 1819. This was the period of 'amelioration', after the Abolition of the slave trade when conditions for the enslaved were supposed to have been improved. Nevertheless, in 1811, 177 slaves were listed but by 1818 they were reduced to 148, implying high death rates and low birth rates for the enslaved people.