

# LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

## DEVON AND SLAVERY [2]

### Traders and settlers

The Davy family prospered through slave ownership. In the 1760s, James Davy, a tenant farmer at Wear Barton, started to run some small businesses importing coal and lime by boat up the Exe estuary. His son Robert became interested in repairing and then building these small boats and went on to build large sailing ships, including West Indiamen.

Robert's younger brothers James Davy (1765–1825) and Edward (1776–1803) travelled to Jamaica in the 1790s where they bought properties growing coffee and allspice and raising cattle, all using slave labour. Their properties were named Wear Pen, Topsham and Heavitree. After 1833, James' grandsons (John and James) were awarded £2156 as compensation for the loss of their human property. Eventually, John Davy and family returned to fashionable Royal Crescent, Kensington, not to Devon. He educated his sons at Uppingham public school and Oxford University which propelled them into the affluent upper middle class.

Many slave-owners retired to Devon from the colonies, for example Rebecca Ann Weekes of Sidmouth, a Jamaican-born widow whose husband had left her an annuity secured on Palmyra and Rose Hall sugar estates in Jamaica. Other Sidmouth residents awarded slave compensation included Catherine Haughton Clarke and her brother Philip Haughton James.



East Teignmouth, mid-19th century.

Not all slave-owners owned large plantations and many small-scale slave-owners were women. Catherine Seaman, a Jamaican-born widow, lived in Teignmouth from at least 1851 until her death in 1864. She was born in Jamaica c.1790 and awarded compensation for the ownership of eight slaves in Jamaica in 1835 but presumably had some links to south-west England: her Jamaican property was called Devon Pen.



Thomas Davy, son of the slave owner John Davy, with Rachel Longmore. Family photo from the Davys of Australia.

### Politicians and landowners

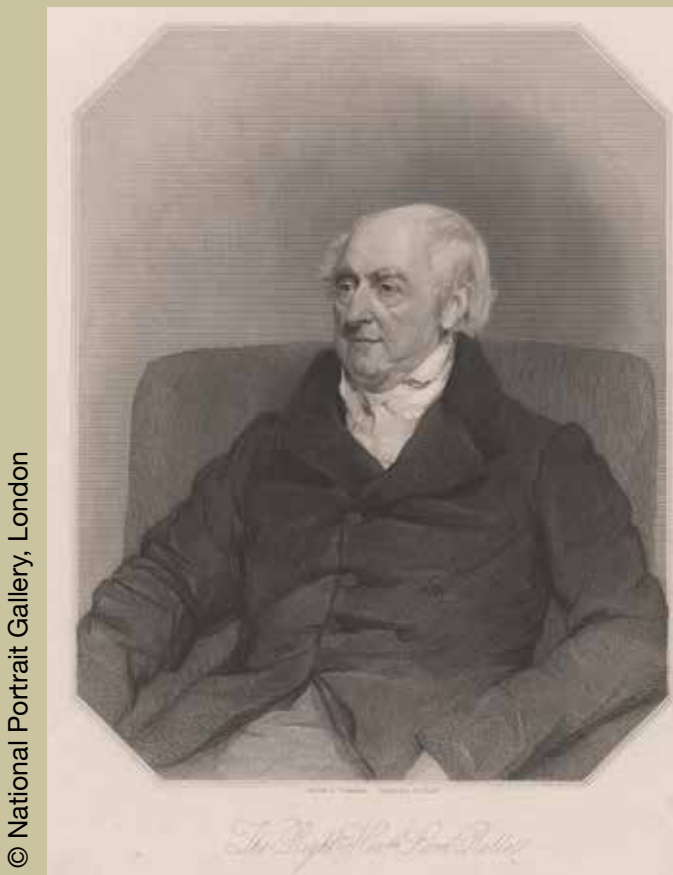
**Denys Rolle (1725–1797)** of Stevenstone, North Devon and MP for Barnstaple 1761–77, was awarded land in the Bahamas after Britain lost the American War of Independence in 1783. His son, **John Rolle (1751–1842)** thus became the largest slave owner in the Bahamas and also acquired extensive land in Devon from his uncle. John Rolle was MP for the county of Devon 1780–96 and became Baron Rolle in 1796.

Today there is still evidence of his legacy in North Devon such as Rolle Canal and Rolle Quay. Rolle College and Rolle Street in Exmouth were named after him. He built Bicton House in about 1800, for years the home of the county agricultural college.



Bicton House near Budleigh Salterton, built by John Rolle in about 1800.

There are many more families from Devon who had connections with slave-ownership in the Americas. There is much more research to do.



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John Rolle, Baron Rolle by Henry Thomas Ryall.

**John Inglett Fortescue (1758–1840)** was the son of Richard Inglett, collector of customs in Dawlish, and inherited the manor of Buckland Filleigh, Devon from his paternal grandmother.

Fortescue became MP for Callington in Cornwall, 1801–3. A friend of John Rolle, he bought Hope Estate in St Vincent with 85 slaves in 1822. He claimed slave compensation with his son John Dicker Inglett Fortescue in 1834 but lost out to mortgagees.



Buckland House in Torridge, Devon. John Inglett Fortescue built the house c.1810 after the original one burned down.

### The African presence in Devon

Medieval church carvings of Africans in Devon include a pew end in Sandford Church depicting a person with extremely tight curls, and a black saint in Uffculme Church, which may also have been a pew end. There are records of Africans, described in the language of the time ('negarre', 'neyger', 'blackmore', 'negro', 'black') in sources such as parish records, a news broadsheet, a private diary and in paintings from the sixteenth century onwards. The status of such individuals is unclear but their presence in Devon was undoubtedly connected with the trading and colonising activities of Devonians worldwide.

Olaudah Equiano first landed in Britain in Falmouth as a slave. Later, on 7 January 1777 he came to Plymouth as a free man and wrote about 'pious friends, whom I was happy to see' in Plymouth and Exeter. In the 1780s he was employed in Plymouth as the Commissary for Stores for the expedition to settle Sierra Leone. It is less well known that his daughter, Joanna, lived in Appledore in the 1820s where her husband, Henry Bromley, had been ordained as minister at the Independent Chapel in June 1821.



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Pew end from Sandford Church.

**Margaret Taylor** petitioned the slave compensation commission in 1835, describing herself as "A person of color late of Kingston Jamaica but now residing at Dawlish in the county of Devon". She came to England in 1830 as attendant to a Lady "with whom she has ever since resided". She owned one slave in Kingston, of whom she "became possessed... by purchase of her own industry".



Petition of Margaret Taylor "a person of color late of Kingston Jamaica but now residing at Dawlish in the County of Devon."