

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

THE MIDLANDS AND SLAVERY [1]

Newtons of Kings Bromley

Sisters Elizabeth Newton and Sarah Holte owned two Barbadian sugar estates, Newtons and Seawells, with over 400 enslaved people. They had inherited this property, along with land in Staffordshire and the family manor of Kings Bromley, from their brother John Newton in 1783.



The Manor at Kings Bromley, home to the Newtons and later the Lane family, before it was pulled down in 1928.

The 59 year old John Newton had married Catherine Seymour in 1776 when she was just 19 years old.

Catherine gave birth to a son, also called John Newton, which John senior claimed could not have been his. A scandalous divorce case followed and was reported in great detail by the national press.

After Sarah's death Elizabeth Newton was warned that if she died intestate her inheritance would be claimed by the younger John Newton. 'Not a farthing shall go to that nasty little Bastard if I can hinder it, as he was no more my Brother's child than he was mine,' Elizabeth responded, subsequently writing a will which left all her property in Staffordshire and Barbados to her cousins Thomas and John Lane. Between them the Lane brothers received £10,200 in compensation for 486 people enslaved on the Newtons and Seawalls estates. Coincidentally, the younger John Newton died in the Caribbean, while on naval duty in Jamaica. He was virtually penniless.

Clergymen

Almost 150 Anglican clergymen claimed slave compensation. Some, like Barbadian-born clergyman and theologian Renn Dickson Hampden, were slave-owners in their own right. His father owned three large estates in Barbados with over 300 enslaved people. Renn Dickson Hampden himself received compensation for one enslaved person, but as editor of the Christian Remembrancer, he maintained links with West India merchants. In 1848 he became the Bishop of Hereford and moved with his family to the lavish Bishop's Palace.

As respectable members of the local community, clergymen often acted as trustees and executors and many were awarded slave compensation in this capacity. Reverend John West, for example, was awarded £2,8881 5s 0d for 152 enslaved Jamaicans as a trustee of Mount Lebanon estate in the parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East. By 1841 he was the Rector of Clipsham and magistrate for the county of Rutland, living in the local rectory with his wife.



Renn Dickson Hampden (1793–1868), Bishop of Hereford

Sir Joseph Birch (1755–1833)

Joseph Birch was the MP for Nottingham between 1818 and 1830. A Liverpool merchant, he had a diverse range of commercial interests, including shipowning, brewing, East India Company stock and Jamaican plantations. Birch was one of a number of MPs whose public pronouncements against slavery conflicted with their commercial interests.

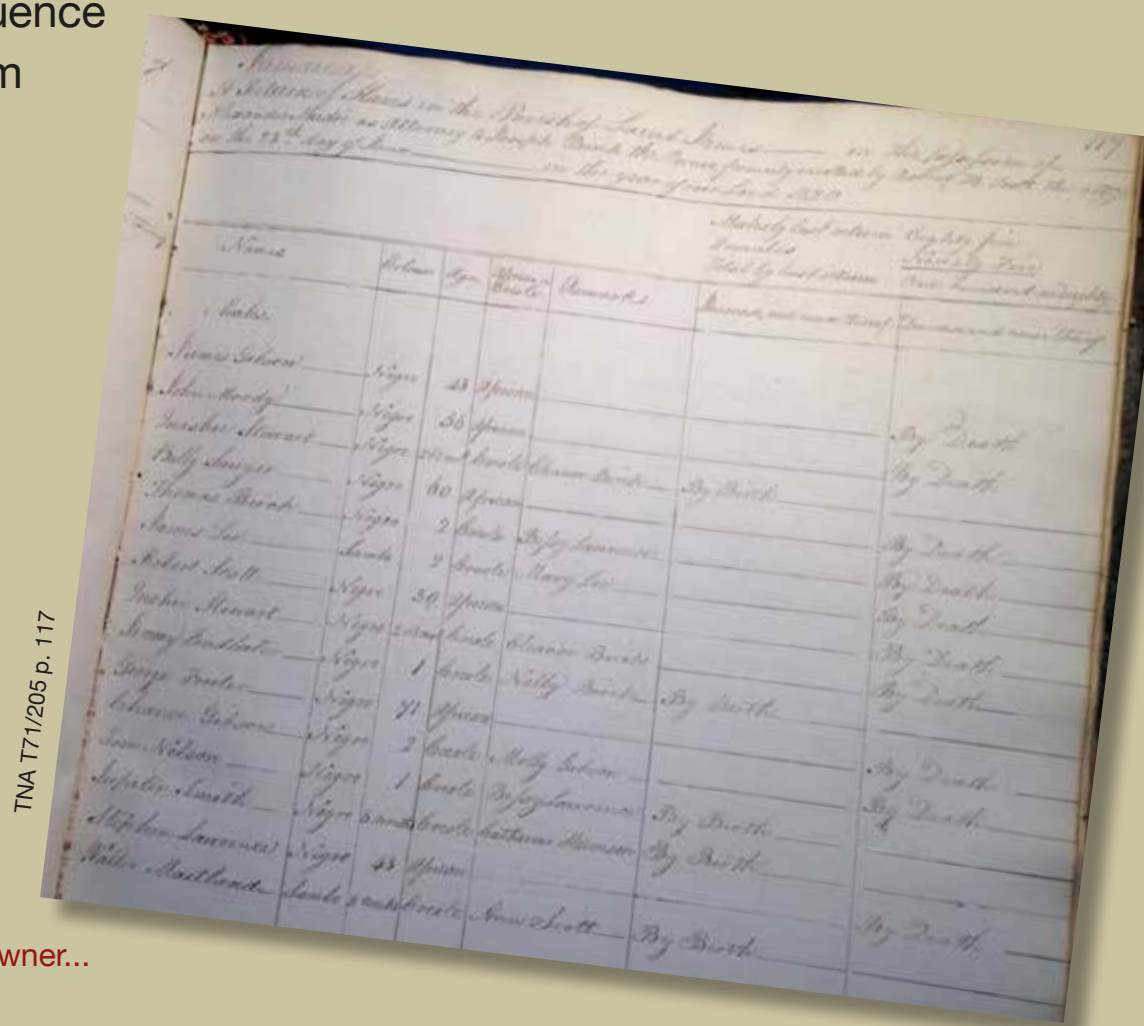
Birch pledged to support the abolition of slavery and presented his constituents' anti-slavery petitions before the House of Commons. This did not prevent him from claiming compensation. As one of the mortgagees of the Hartfield Estate in Jamaica, Birch, alongside his business partner William Ward, claimed £1689 5s 3d for 86 enslaved people, although he died before the compensation could be collected. Birch's will also hints at the economic importance of his West Indian interests.

It was rewritten in July 1833 'in consequence of the change of circumstances and from the unfavourable alteration in the prospect of my affairs in Jamaica'. He left the majority of his property and wealth to his only surviving son, Thomas Bernard Birch, who himself received over £2700 in compensation.



Joseph Birch, MP

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A return of slaves in the Parish of St James in the possession of Alexander Mudie as attorney to Joseph Birch the owner...

Fitzherberts of Tissington Hall

The FitzHerbert family have owned Tissington Hall in Derbyshire since 1465 and continue to reside there today. They became slave-holders when William FitzHerbert (1671–1739) inherited Turners Hall plantation, in Barbados, from his wife Rachel FitzHerbert (nee Bagshaw). Their grandson, William III (1748–1791) added four Jamaican sugar plantations to the family's colonial possessions when he married Sarah Perrin, a West Indian heiress. Wealthy planters frequently returned to Britain where they were able to enjoy their fortunes more comfortably.

Sir Henry FitzHerbert collected a total of £20,000 in compensation for the emancipation of 981 enslaved people. Part of this sum, along with the profits generated from the labour of the enslaved, is likely to have been used in the financing of the extensive redevelopment that took place at Tissington after emancipation.



Tissington Hall, Derbyshire

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Thellussons of Brodsworth Hall

Peter Thellusson (1737–1797) was a Swiss entrepreneur, banker, and slave-owner who bought Brodsworth Hall in South Yorkshire from the 10th Earl of Kinnoull in 1791. A country house was a status-driven investment which provided the Thellusson family with an avenue for social and political advancement.

In 1767 Thellusson acquired a share in a ship named Liberty which transported 227 enslaved Africans across the Atlantic from West Africa. 42 of these people died on the voyage; the remaining 185 landed in Barbados, where they were sold on to local planters and traders and set to work on plantations, pens and in towns.

Thellusson's later business activities led him into slave-ownership. He acquired a share in Conference sugar estate in Grenada in 1768 with 155 enslaved people when the former owner failed to pay his debts. He temporarily owned a share in Windmill Hill estate in Montserrat around 1796, although he appears to have sold this soon after. In 1772 Thellusson lent money to the owner of Bacolet estate in Grenada, partly secured on 101 enslaved people who lived upon the property.

All three of Thellusson's sons joined his merchant business and all were also elected as Members of Parliament. His eldest son, Peter Isaac Thellusson (1761–1808) became a director of the Bank of England and was created Baron Rendelsham in 1806.



Peter Thellusson's mother Sarah (née Boullenger) and daughter-in-law Georgiana (née Theobald). Both these paintings are still held at Brodsworth Hall.

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