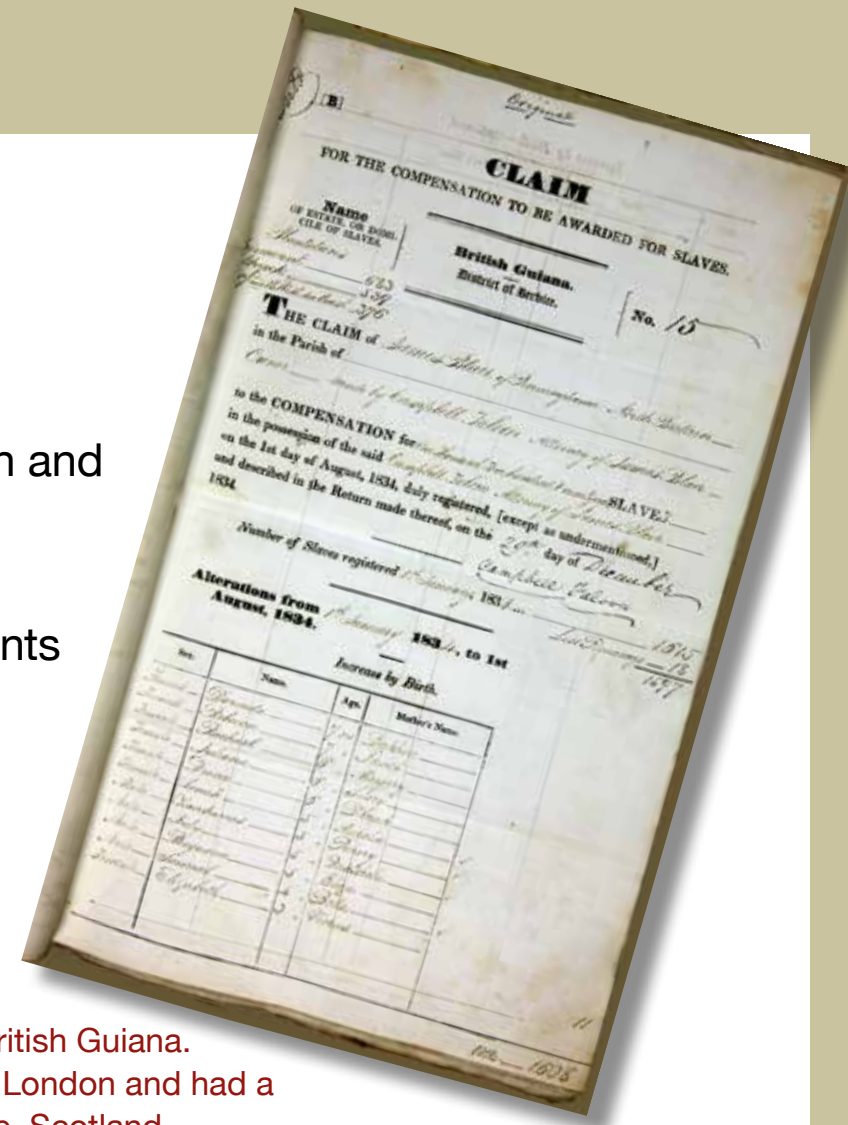


LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

Introduction

When slavery was abolished in the British Empire in the 1830s, half the £20 million compensation money was paid to absentee slave-owners in Britain and to their creditors among Britain's merchants and bankers (the other half went to slave-owners living in the colonies). The official records of these payments allow us to find out exactly who in Britain owned the enslaved and who else benefited from the compensation paid.

Original claim form for the MP James Blair (1788-1841) for 1597 enslaved people in British Guiana. Blair lived in Portman Square, London and had a country estate in Wigtownshire, Scotland.



Absentee slave-owners

Plantation-owners often chose to retire to Britain after amassing wealth and property in the Caribbean. In addition, a lack of schools in the colonies meant that those who could afford it sent their offspring to Britain to be educated, immersing their colonial-born children in British society at a formative time in their lives. Not surprisingly, the next generation frequently had fewer ties with the colonies even when they retained property there. Land and slave-property was also acquired in Britain when the daughters and heirs of colonists married into the British gentry. These absentee slave-owners made up 10 per cent of the total number of people who feature in the slave compensation process but owned half the enslaved people.



George Hay Dawkins Pennant (1764-1840) of Penrhyn Castle in North Wales and Portland Place in London, an absentee slave-owner who was awarded over £15,000 compensation for the freedom of 764 enslaved people in 1835.

SLAVE-OWNERS IN BRITAIN

Merchants and Bankers

The City of London was the finance capital of the system of slavery. From its many mercantile houses, credit was advanced for the purchase of enslaved people, equipment and land in the colonies. Merchants in London, Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool financed ships and quays and arranged for the transport and sale in Britain of sugar, cotton and other goods produced by slave labour.

Colonial slave-owners were frequently in debt to their British agents and took out loans and mortgages on their colonial property, including mortgages on enslaved people. When a colonist became unable to pay his or her debts, the property reverted to merchants and bankers in Britain whose primary purpose was not the ownership of plantations or slaves but who employed managers in the colonies to run their plantations for them.



View of the West India Docks near Blackwall, published in Ackermann's Microcosm of London, 1810.

Female slave-owners

Not all British slave-owners were male and wealthy. Women often inherited slave-wealth on the deaths of their husbands, as part of their marriage settlements, or as heiresses in their own right. A small number built up their own businesses in the colonies.

Jane Hay (c. 1790-1865) was one of the many female and less wealthy slave-owners in Britain who inherited small land-holdings or who rented out small numbers of enslaved people to larger estates.

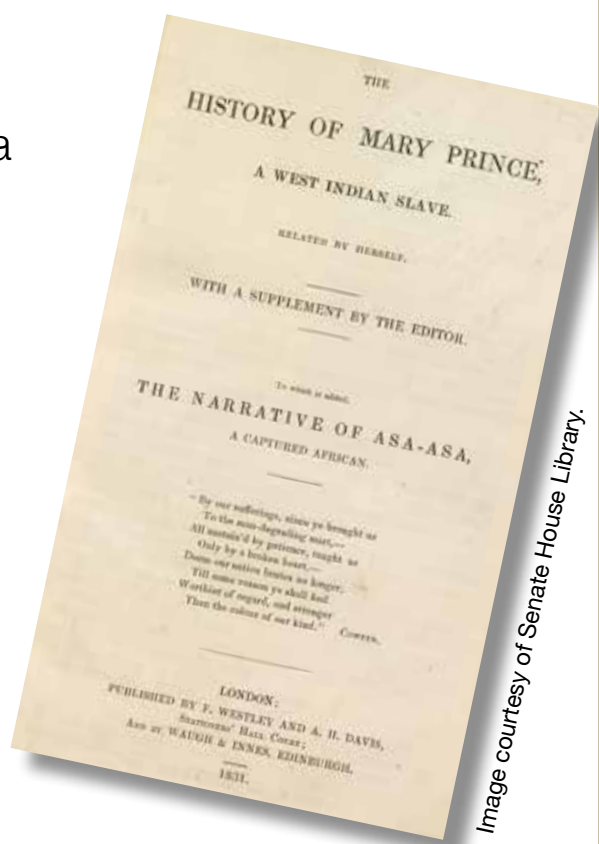
She was born in Jamaica c.1790 to Charles Hay and his wife Jane née Brodie. Her family had been in Jamaica from at least the mid 1780s but Jane left to live in Inverness-shire in the north of Scotland, where she married a physician, James Bayne. They had nine children baptised in Inverness-shire between 1818 and 1832. Jane was awarded £84 14s 2d for ten enslaved people in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1836.



Jane Bayne (c.1790-1865).

John Adams Wood and Mary Prince

John Adams Wood (c.1783-1836) was a slave-owner in Antigua whose enslaved people included Mary Prince. The Wood family travelled to Britain in 1828, taking Mary with them as a servant. While living at Leigh Street in London, Mary left the Wood household and found shelter in a Moravian Church. As long as she stayed in Britain, Mary was legally entitled to her freedom, although she was unable to return to her husband in Antigua where she would revert again to the status of slave. In 1831, with the help of her new employer, Thomas Pringle, she became the first black woman in Britain to publish an account of her life. *The History of Mary Prince* detailed the debilitating work and brutal punishments to which enslaved women were subjected, and became an important rallying-point for the anti-slavery movement.



Cover of Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave, related by herself* (1831).