

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

SCOTLAND AND SLAVERY [1]

Alexander Grant (d. 1854)

Alexander Grant was the son of the minister of Glenrinnies in Banffshire. He emigrated to Jamaica as a young man and made an immense fortune managing sugar estates, eventually acquiring land and enslaved people of his own. He returned to north-eastern Scotland in middle age where he was feted as a 'local boy made good'. In the 1830s he built a mansion, Aberlour House, a few miles from where he was born. He died in 1854 leaving £300,000 in personalty as well as part-ownership of three estates in Jamaica.



Aberlour House in Banffshire, built by Alexander Grant c. 1836.

His property in Jamaica and Scotland was inherited by his niece Margaret Gordon MacPherson Grant (1834–1877) who continued to live at Aberlour House. Margaret's charitable giving left lasting legacies in the north-east of Scotland; she paid for the building of St Margaret's Church in Aberlour and for the organ in Inverness Cathedral. She helped set up the Aberlour orphanage in 1875, still in existence today as the Aberlour Childcare Trust.

Susan Beckford (1786–1859)

Wealthy sugar planters sometimes sought to enhance their social status by forming connections with aristocratic families. This particularly applies to the female heirs of colonial fortunes. In this way, women became important transmitters of slave property when ownership passed to their husbands.

Susan Beckford was the daughter of William Thomas Beckford, from whom she inherited an immense fortune based on Jamaican sugar estates. In 1810 she married Lord Alexander Douglas-Hamilton, who became 10th Duke of Hamilton on the death of his father in 1819. Living in splendour in Hamilton Palace, Susan was a keen pianist and patroness of the arts; Frederic Chopin stayed at the palace during his tour of Britain in 1848.



Susan, Duchess of Hamilton at her pianoforte, c. 1845.

INTRODUCTION

Scotland was disproportionately represented among slave-owners. In the 1830s, 10% of the British population lived north of the border while 15% of absentee slave-owners had Scottish addresses. They were to be found across the country: in Glasgow and Edinburgh, in Aberdeenshire and Sutherland, in the Highlands and the borders. Many more slave-owners were part of the Scottish diaspora in England, Ireland and the Caribbean colonies.

Scottish slave-owning was both widespread and diverse. Some, such as the partners in the merchant company J. T. & A. Douglas & Co. of Glasgow, owned hundreds of enslaved people and received tens of thousands of pounds in compensation. Others, often women, owned small numbers of enslaved people, like Anna Archibald, a 6 year old girl from Black Quarry, Glasgow, owner of one enslaved person in Trinidad (the compensation was awarded to her grandmother as legal guardian).

The Scottish economy was particularly dynamic in the early 19th century: the slavery business was a key part of its growth and a source of investment in industry, in railways, and in finance.

Many of the richest and most powerful Glasgow merchants were involved in the West India trade. In 1807 they formed the Glasgow West India Association, attempting to protect their commercial interests and campaigning against the abolition of slavery.



The Custom House, Greenock, by Robert Salmon (1820)

Elizabeth Jane Lambie (1821–1885)

Elizabeth Jane Lambie was born in Jamaica in 1821, the daughter of William Lambie, an attorney and slave-owner, from whom she inherited shared ownership of Friendship estate in St Thomas-in-the-East, Jamaica. Her mother died in childbirth and her father died when Elizabeth was 13 years of age. Her life was spent largely in the company of women relatives and servants. She lived in Edinburgh with her grandmother's sister, Jane Lambie (d. 1848), and her aunt Sarah Margaret Crichton, the latter 'acting as a second mother' to her and 'living in the highest respectability', together with two female servants.

In 1841 they had been living in Gayfield Square and subsequently at various addresses in Edinburgh and South Queensferry. The household depended on rentier income. Elizabeth Jane Lambie, 'Stockholder', unmarried, died at 1 Kew Terrace, Edinburgh age 63 in February 1885.



Modern view of Gayfield Square, Edinburgh, home of Elizabeth Jane Lambie in 1841

Sir Archibald Alison (1792–1867)

Archibald Alison was a historian, High Tory 'political philosopher', criminal lawyer and, from 1835, Sheriff of Lanarkshire. He appeared in the slavery compensation records as a trustee of his late brother-in-law's estate in St Vincent. But his main importance was as a prominent defender of slavery in both the Caribbean and the United States. Forecasting dire consequences for the Empire if slavery were abolished he was later to defend the southern states of America and slavery there during the Civil War.



Sir Archibald Alison (1792–1867)



The grave of Sir Archibald Alison in Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh

Intertwined with these attitudes was his role as fierce opponent of working-class movements in Glasgow: as Sheriff he took action against the cotton spinners' strike of 1839, the miners' strike at Airdrie in 1842 and the Chartist 'insurrection' of 1848. A prolific writer – and satirised by Disraeli in his political novel *Coningsby* as Mr Wordy – his autobiography was published posthumously in 1883.