

LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVE-OWNERSHIP

SCOTLAND AND SLAVERY [2]

Abolitionism in Scotland

An abolitionist movement emerged in Scotland in the late 1780s led by members of Scottish churches including William Dickson of Moffat, who had lived in Barbados for 13 years and been appalled by the brutal conditions there. He was joined by, among others, the Rev. Robert Walker of Canongate, Edinburgh, immortalised as 'The skating minister' in a portrait by Henry Raeburn. They set up committees such as the Edinburgh Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1789).

In 1792, Scots from all over the country sent 185 petitions to parliament calling for the abolition of the slave trade – over a third of all the petitions from Britain as a whole. Many of the prominent Scots were based in London, for example, James Stephen, a lawyer and the brother-in-law of William Wilberforce, who helped draft the bill to abolish the slave trade in 1807.

In the 1820s the campaign to abolish slavery itself was revived. The main committees of Edinburgh, Glasgow and elsewhere were initially cautious, calling for improved conditions for the enslaved and a gradual move towards abolition. Others such as Dr Andrew Thomson, the leading evangelical minister in the Church of Scotland, demanded more radical action. Slavery, he said in 1830, was "the very Upas tree of the moral world, beneath whose pestiferous shade all intellect languishes and all virtue dies... The foul sepulchre must be taken away. The cup of oppression must be dashed to the ground. The pestiferous tree must be cut down and eradicated; it must be, root and branch of it, cast into the consuming fire and its ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven."



Rev. Robert Walker, 'The skating minister', by Henry Raeburn (1790s)

Links with the wider British Empire

John Douglas (1772–1840) was a Glasgow merchant and partner in the firm of J. T. and A. Douglas, West India merchants. The Douglas family owned estates and enslaved people in British Guiana, where John Douglas was resident around 1800. Douglas was probably the father by way of a relationship with Martha Ann Ritchie (later Telfer), a free woman of colour, of James Douglas (later Sir James), Governor of Vancouver Island 1851-1864 and British Columbia 1858–1864.

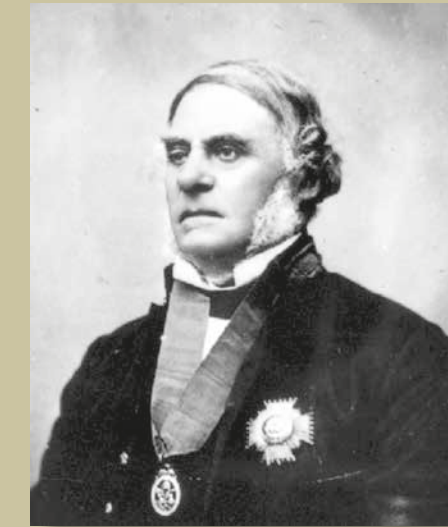
John Douglas appears to have moved back permanently to Scotland in the 1810s, 'where he had another family, one recognised by British law and custom'. He married Janet Hamilton and they had four children. Other members of the Douglas family included Cecilia Douglas (1772–1862), a significant art collector in Glasgow and her brothers Archibald (1776–1860) and Thomas Dunlop (1776–1869). All of them benefited from compensation awards for the ownership of enslaved people.

The King family from Port Glasgow and Tobago provide a contrasting example of the links between Scottish slave-owners and the wider Empire. Daniel King of Port Glasgow owned a half share in Sherwood Park estate in Tobago. The compensation for the enslaved people on this estate was shared between his three daughters, one of whom, Celia, married Andrew Scott at Port Glasgow in 1821.

The family settled at the Mount Buninyoing Station in Victoria, Australia, late in 1839. Subsequently it became known as Scotsburn, named after them. Andrew and Celia Scott established a cattle farm of 16,000 acres. From 1843 the family began to run sheep and later purchased property in the western district of Victoria and in New South Wales.



Scotsburn Hall, Victoria. The settlement was named after Andrew and Celia Scott, beneficiaries of slave compensation in British Guiana

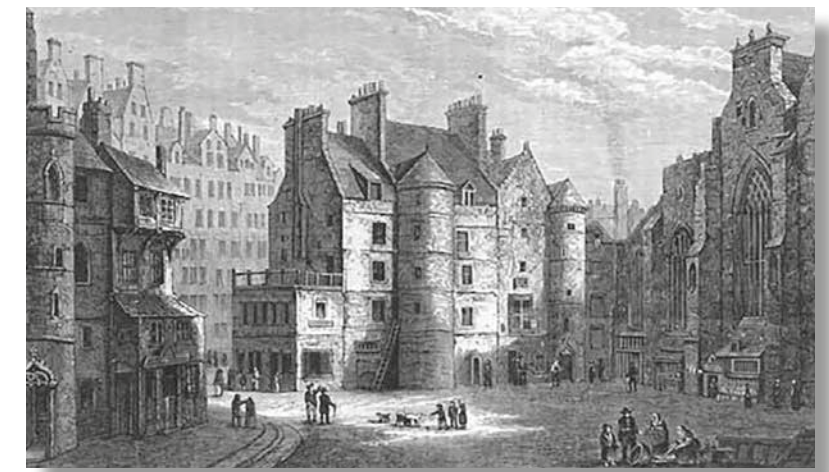


Sir James Douglas (1803–1877), Canadian governor

The Black Presence in Scotland

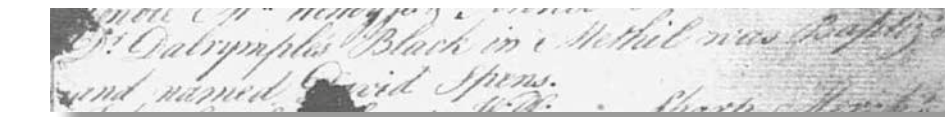
There were people of African descent living in Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries, as there were elsewhere in Britain. But we know little about how many there were, who they were or about their lives in Scotland. There were three important cases brought before the Scottish courts which highlighted the conditions of these people.

Jamie Montgomerie was taken by his owner, Robert Shedden, a Virginian planter, to be trained as a carpenter. When he refused to return to Virginia he was forcibly taken to Port Glasgow to be shipped back. Montgomerie escaped to Edinburgh, where Shedden placed adverts in local papers appealing for his capture. Montgomerie was apprehended and held in the Old Tolbooth Gaol. Though he sued for his freedom, he died in 1757 before the case could be heard.



Old Tolbooth Gaol, Edinburgh, where Jamie Montgomerie died in 1757

In 1769 Dr David Dalrymple had brought 'Black Tom' from his estate in Grenada to be his personal servant in Fife. Tom was baptised in Wemyss parish church as David Spens. Dalrymple tried to return



An extract from the parish register for Wemyss, 1769, recording the baptism of David Spens, 'Dr Dalrymple's Black'.

him to the Caribbean but Spens refused. Though supported by members of his local Kirk, his freedom was only secured by the death of Dalrymple in 1770.

In 1788, a majority in Scotland's highest court ruled that Joseph Knight, who had been brought from Jamaica by his owner Sir John Wedderburn, could not be forced to return as a slave to the Caribbean. Unlike the Mansfield judgement in England, the ruling declared unequivocally that slavery could not exist in Scotland.

But such rulings did not necessarily improve the lives of people of African descent in Scotland, as is shown in the poignant memoir of George Dale of Edinburgh, written in 1790. Captured in Africa as a child and sold into slavery in Jamaica, as Dale expressed it, "like so many swine", he was later bought by a Mr McNicoll. Dale travelled on a ship to Greenock with his new owner, but when they landed McNicoll said he had no further use for him. With injuries sustained during his life of slavery and no means to support himself, Dale "betook himself to carry some trifling things in a box, about the streets, and working at mills".