

Three Devon men and their role in the early development of the slave plantation system in the Americas

What part was played by Devon men in the early history of the slave plantation system and in the racial laws governing it?

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At the 2015 Legacies of Slave-ownership Conference held in Exeter by University College London, Joanna Traynor introduced us to the idea that certain Devon men had played a key role in formulating the early slave code that became the basis of later racial laws in the Caribbean and USA. Three key men were (1) Thomas Modyford (1620-1679), (2) John Colleton (1608 – 1666) and (3) Humphrey Walrond (1600? – 1670?). This is an attempt to use secondary sources to flesh out the stories of these Devon men and assess their roles in the development of New World slavery and the racial laws governing it.

(1) Thomas Modyford

Thomas Modyford (1620 - 1679) was a son of the mayor of Exeter with family connections to the Duke of Albemarle. Having fought on the Royalist side in the early stages of the English Civil War, he emigrated to Barbados in 1647, with £1000 to buy a plantation and another £6000 to maintain it for the next three years.

Modyford travelled to Barbados in 1647 with his employee Richard Ligon, who wrote a detailed and vivid account of these events and of the island as it existed at that time in "*A true and exact history of the island of Barbadoes*". Ligon had been told of the opportunities for making a fortune in Barbados by an ancient sea captain who had been one of the first to land on the uninhabited island; this was during his imprisonment in Upper Bench Prison. Their ship sailed to Barbados via the Cape Verde Islands, where they bought negroes in exchange for wide-brimmed hats, and took them with them to Barbados, from where the ship returned across the Atlantic to Africa with goods to barter for slaves. Thus African slavery was a factor in the plantation system from the very start, albeit as a smaller element than it was to become.

Arriving in Barbados, Ligon noted the lush tropical forest, the negroes, the beautiful women, the various trees, fruits, birds and insects which were unknown to him. At that stage, new colonists had the monumental task of clearing the primeval forest of enormous trees before they could start to plant their crops. The magnitude of this task is sympathetically described by Andrea Stuart in her "*Sugar in the Blood: A family's story of slavery and empire*", in which she recounts the history of the island as it related to her English ancestor, George Ashby, who had emigrated there in the 1630s and had to begin by clearing the forest.

However, unlike Ashby, on Modyford's arrival he and Ligon visited established planters and local bigwigs to seek advice on whether it was better to start with virgin forest, which would be cheaper, or to fork out for a ready established plantation. They were advised that, since Modyford had the resources (both goods and credit), he should buy an existing plantation, as starting from scratch was such an overwhelming task. Thus Modyford negotiated the purchase of half of a 500 acre plantation

from William Hilliard with its 96 negroes; 200 acres were in sugar. He was determined to make his fortune, declaring that he would not return to England until he had made £100,000 from sugar.

The early settlers in Barbados experimented with different crops. From 1627 to 1640 it was the 'tobacco age', but soon the price fell as the American mainland colonies such as Virginia produced better tobacco at a lower price. Cotton was another local crop. However, sugar soon superseded all others in profitability and acreage. Barbados was the first WI island to develop the sugar-slave-plantation system which later spread to the rest of the Caribbean, and Modyford was in the forefront of this development. Ligon describes how the early sugar planters on Barbados obtained plants from Fernambock in Brazil and learned how to grow sugar successfully by trial and error.

How did some planters become so rich and powerful?

Beckles¹ reports that the previously uninhabited island of Barbados was first settled by the English in 1627 and, by 1639, the then governor had allocated land to people with known financial and social connections in England so that a small number of prominent men soon had all the best land, and with it the social and political power; a prime example was James Drax. An Act of 1643 allowed freehold of land and hereditary tenure (previously land had been rented from the crown?) which provided more incentive to permanent settlers. During the time that the English Civil War was stifling commercial activity at home, in Barbados the planters were benefiting from the Dutch who had been dislodged from Brazil and who were able to help them with capital, technology, markets and credit; they were the principle slave traders and shippers of colonial produce. By the mid 1640s Barbados was England's most attractive colony and by the early 1650s it was the richest place in the New World, based on sugar cultivation by enslaved African labour. By 1600 the planter class was fully formed.

Modyford was one of the leading players at this time, making his fortune by 1657 and in 1660 being temporarily made acting governor of the island. He was made a baronet by King Charles II in 1664. He then expanded his interests to Jamaica where he also acquired large plantations and was made governor in 1664. By the time of his death in 1679 he was one of the largest planters in the West Indies.

Modyford's character and career

According to Dunn, Modyford was one of the able and aggressive young newcomers to Barbados in the 1640s, along with Colleton and Walrond, who shouldered aside the earlier set of leaders and quickly established themselves as the aristocracy of the island. They were often younger sons who brought with them money and family connections which enabled them to take over political leadership. Modyford epitomised the verve and nerve of the pioneering sugar gentry. As well as having the means - he paid £1000 down for his plantation and promised the remaining £6000 in instalments. - he also had a brother-in-law (Thomas Kendall) who was a London merchant who provided the essential commercial connection to send him supplies and market the sugar. Modyford muscled his way into the centre of Barbadian politics, getting on to the island Council a mere four years after arriving, and Speaker of the Assembly by 1652, before becoming acting Governor for several months in 1660.

Royalists and Parliamentarians

The politics of Barbados in the mid-seventeenth century were closely related to what was going on in England at the time, that is, the Civil War (1642-1651) with its conflict between those loyal to the

crown and those supporting parliament. The early settlers had been anxious to avoid the conflicts raging at home, and Modyford and Ligon were pleasantly surprised to find, on their arrival, that both sides of the argument co-existed peacefully, their main interests as far as their relation with England was concerned being to maintain free trade and the colony's freedom to govern themselves with a parliamentary form of government. However, Barbadians were sometimes forced to choose sides. This happened especially after the end of the Civil War, in 1650, when some defeated Royalists fled from England to Barbados with the aim of restoring their fortunes and re-establishing their political philosophy. Humphrey and Edward Walrond had arrived after the royalist defeat in the siege of Bridgwater in 1645 and became aggressive leaders of the royalist cause in the island. Modyford himself changed sides as conditions changed. He had fought for the Royalists in England, sided with a Parliamentary faction in Barbados when persuaded by Ayscue in 1651, then became a staunch Royalist again at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. As a shrewd politician, he changed his allegiance, resigning as governor later in 1660 due to the victory of the royalist side, to become speaker of the Assembly, giving way to the appointment of Humphrey Walrond, the staunch royalist, as next acting governor. The Royalists then became the most powerful faction on the island. On the opposing side, Drax, the largest planter of them all, had remained a faithful Parliamentarian, which led to his exile from the island but subsequent return in 1651 with Ayscue's parliamentary fleet which retook the island and he was restored to his plantation and position of power.

Barbados Slave Code 1661 and Modyford's part in it

Dunn (p.238) describes the infamous Barbados Slave Code of 1661, which formed the basis of subsequent racist laws throughout the English colonies of the Caribbean and mainland America¹. The Act was passed by the Barbados Assembly; this corresponded to the English Parliament in that it could be called upon by the Governor to make new laws. In 1661 Modyford was speaker of the Assembly and the new laws included the Slave Code. Modyford was therefore deeply involved in instituting this piece of legislation. The Act was passed "*for the better ordering and governing of Negroes*" and was the most important piece of legislation passed in the islands during the seventeenth century. The preamble assumes that Negro slaves are chattels, that is, goods that can be moved from place to place, not human beings with rights. It characterises Negroes as "*an heathenish, brutish and an uncertaine, dangerous kinde of people*" who are unfit to be governed by English law. The Act was designed to protect the white population from the black population which was rapidly growing in number as the sugar industry and the slave trade progressed. And yet it modified this assumption in offering some measure of protection to the enslaved against "*the arbitrary, cruell and outrageous wills of every evill disposed person*". It also acknowledged that the negroes were, in fact, human; "*being created Men, though without the knowledge of God in the world*". With this Act, racist attitudes were embedded in law leading to social patterns which have persisted throughout the centuries and been difficult to alter.

The Slave Code gave three groups – white masters, white servants and black slaves - different rights and obligations. Essentially, slaves had few rights, were restricted in what they were allowed to do, and received much harsher punishments for infringing the laws. Masters had to provide their Negroes with one new outfit of clothes per year but there were no rules about their food or working conditions; masters could punish their slaves in any way they liked, and if the slave died in the process there was no penalty, though a heavy fine could be imposed for wantonly killing a slave. The slave had no recourse to a court of law. Servants, in contrast, had minimum food and clothing allowances, and could appeal to the court if mistreated; the master could be tried for murder if the

¹ (see National Archives, C.O. 30/2 Barbados laws 1645 – 1682)

servant died at his hands. Negroes suffered harsh punishments for minor crimes, by whipping, branding or having their nose slit; murder, rape, arson, assault or theft of anything worth anything above one shilling in value were capital crimes. This system constituted a reign of terror for the African population of Barbados and, later, other West Indian islands, set up to control the working population that made possible the sugar industry and its vast profits.

Modyford’s other roles in developing the sugar/slave/plantation system.

Apart from the Slave Code, Modyford played a part in other aspects of the establishment of the slave plantation system, in expanding the slave trade, in setting the trend for the planters’ grand style of life, and in disseminating sugar plantations to other Caribbean islands.

Early slave trade with Barbados and Modyford’s part in it

In the early slave trade with the British West Indian islands, it was Barbados which led the way in importing slaves from Africa, and the numbers landed increased rapidly over the course of the seventeenth century, though records are sparse. Curtin² made estimates for Barbados, compared to Jamaica, which are shown in the table.

Estimated English slave imports 1640-1700

Years	Barbados	Jamaica
1640-1650	18,700	
1651-1675	51,100	8,000
1676-1700	64,700	77,100
Total	134,500	85,100

During the period that Modyford was in Barbados (1647-1664) it can be seen that the trade in slaves was increasing at a pace. There were already African slaves on the island when he arrived, indeed some came on the same ship as him and Ligon, and there were many more by the time he left. In light of Modyford’s powerful positions as Governor of Barbados and then Jamaica during this period, it is clear that he played a vital role in the growth of the Atlantic slave trade.

Planters were constantly short of labour and demanding more slaves. In the early years it was predominantly the Dutch who engaged in the slave trade but the English tried to obtain a monopoly in 1660 with the passing of a Navigation Act which made the Dutch trade illegal and instead set up a company called the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading with Africa. However, this arrangement was unsatisfactory to the planters as it delivered too few Africans at too high a price and, in an attempt to mollify the planters, the Company employed local leaders to act as agents. Modyford and Colleton were two such agents. The Company’s price of £17 per slave was too high as, in Modyford’s view, it was not possible to start a sugar plantation without a supply of slaves at £7 per head, only possible with free trade. Modyford’s key role as Barbadian agent to this slave-trading company is further evidence of his key role in the development of West Indian slavery.

In 1667 the Royal Adventurers ceased slave trading but allowed other English ships to trade under their licence. Before the Royal Adventurers there had been another royal English monopoly company, the Guinea Company (1618-1649), and after there was a better organised one called the Royal African Company (1672-1750). These companies did not manage to stop the Dutch and

² (The Atlantic Slave Trade: A census, 1972, U of Wisconsin Press)

independent slave traders (called interlopers). Between 1698 and 1712 the 'ten percenters', interlopers who paid 10% tax to the RAC, were able to operate from small Devon ports³ but this was after Modyford's day.

Modyford's role in the grand life style of slave-owners

When Modyford and Ligon arrived in Barbados in 1647 they were shocked to find the rough conditions of life on the island. Ligon described the difficulties in getting food, the primitive ill-designed shacks occupied by many of the early planters, and the absence of fine living or good education. For example, Modyford wrote to the then governor in Latin and was surprised when the latter was unable to understand it. Drax, later to become the richest planter, had apparently started off by living in a cave. Stuart describes that meat was in limited supply and the island diet was based mainly on starches - sweet potatoes, cassava and plantains – and tropical fruit. It was even difficult to obtain fish at an inland plantation because it would spoil within the few hours of the short journey from the sea. Lawlessness, drunkenness and viciousness characterised the island's inhabitants, especially in the capital, Bridgetown. *'This Island is the Dunghill whereupon England doth cast forth its rubbish'*⁴. In the year of their arrival there was a plague, probably yellow fever, in Barbados, which *'raign'd so extremely, as the living could hardly bury the dead'* (Ligon) followed by famine as planters had neglected their staple crops. Ligon himself suffered bouts of serious illness during his three years on the island. Life for the white settlers was nasty, brutish and short, filled with hard labour, deprivation and homesickness; Ligon recounts his alarm at discovering that over the previous 15 years the island had had an almost complete turnover of population because few of the original settlers had survived that long.

Modyford and Ligon set about 'civilising' the colony, at least as far as the white planters were concerned, resulting in great improvements over Ligon's three years. There were no 'great houses' on Barbados when they arrived, so Ligon, the gentleman-architect, drew up plans for improved houses suitable for the tropics that made use of windows appropriately placed for ventilation and with removable shutters for rain storms; his plans began to be implemented and some of his designs are still in use today. Royalists with ample money, like Modyford, Walrond and Colleton, brought with them the habit of keeping showy establishments for others to admire, and also good taste and good manners, which led to a more civilised way of life (Bridenbaugh p.135). Planters started to import fine houseware for sumptuous wining and dining, and clothes such as Devonshire kerseys, even though wool was unsuitable for the climate. Ligon was particularly interested in improving the culinary standards of the island gentry's tables. We could say, then, that Modyford and others contributed to setting a standard of luxury for the white planters which, while fine in themselves, in the end led to many of them becoming indebted to London merchants as they borrowed to keep up standards, and that this also contributed to the perpetuation of the institution of slavery to maintain this indebted elite class.

Conditions of life and death in 17th century Barbados

The colonists in Barbados, according to Dunn, managed to produce a society which was intolerable for both blacks and whites. Blacks longed to return to Africa and whites longed to make enough money to retire to England. Life in a slavery regime was brutish for both black and white, tropical

³ (<https://erenow.net/modern/atlanticslavetrade1440-1870/12.php>)

⁴ H. Whistler, 1900, Extracts from Henry Whistler's Journey of the West India Expedition, in C.H. Firth, ed., *The Narrative of General Venables*. London: Longmans.)

diseases were rampant and the food was unsatisfactory. The system continued because of its great profitability to the whites, not because people enjoyed the lifestyle.

Death rates were high for blacks and whites, but especially high for black men on sugar plantations. The Barbados census for 1700 (Dunn, p.314) enumerated about 40,000 blacks in the population. Compare this with the 134,500 who had been imported since 1640 (see previous table). This shows an extremely high death rate. Clearly the conditions of slavery led to a demographic catastrophe for the enslaved (Dunn, p.313). The higher death rate for black men is also shown in the various statistical sources from the West Indies. For example, the Royal African Company records show that, of the 60,000 slaves imported to the West Indies between 1673 and 1711, 60% were men and boys and 40% women and girls. While the planters preferred to buy men, the sex ratio quickly evened out once they were put to work, indicating a higher death rate among the men. Dunn proposes that they were forced to work harder, suffered more frequent accidents in the sugar works, were more likely to be flogged, maimed or executed, or to run away.

We have not got first-hand accounts from the enslaved describing the conditions they lived under but these demographic data give indisputable evidence of the extreme brutality of the system which Modyford and others had implemented.

Barbados' population problem

With the establishment of the sugar plantation system over the course of Modyford's sojourn in Barbados, there resulted a change in the social structure, eventually leading to a population problem. In the early stages of settlement of the island, the many small-scale English colonists had employed indentured white servants to work on their holdings, supplemented by only a few African slaves. But as sugar was established, it became more efficient to consolidate small holdings into larger entities using African labour; this required access to large amounts of capital, such as in Modyford's case. The small settlers and their indentured servants found themselves being pushed out. The indentured servants were entitled to receive a parcel of land at the end of their contracts, but there was now a shortage of land. Barbados had received too many indentured servants over the years, largely Scottish or Irish prisoners of war, or convicts, and was keen to get rid of them. Indeed, the small island of Barbados was estimated (Dunn p.75) to have about 20,000 whites and 20,000 blacks by 1660, giving it a population density greater than most regions of England.

There was also pressure to populate other Caribbean territories such as Surinam and Jamaica. In 1652, the governor, Lord Willoughby, supported by Modyford, went with 300 Barbadian Royalists to attempt to colonise the Surinam river area; Modyford believed that each freed servant could be promised 100 acres so it could be settled very quickly, yet it grew slowly. This colonisation attempt came to an end with an epidemic in 1666 followed by the Dutch conquest in 1667 which finally drove them out.

Another unsuccessful attempt to seed other colonies from Barbados was the proposed Barbados Adventurers company to settle Cape Fear in Carolina. In 1663 the Proprietors of Carolina chose Modyford and Peter Colleton to promote this idea among 'gentlemen of good quality', but the scheme fell through when the participants' demands for home rule were rejected. Only one or two Barbadians went to Cape Fear with the aim of using it to supply timber and provisions for the island.

This lays the backdrop to the colonisation of Jamaica and Modyford's 1664 emigration from Barbados to Jamaica, where he spent the rest of this life.

What happened in 1664?

Attempts to colonise Jamaica had been going on since its conquest by English forces under Penn and Venables in 1655. This was after their failed assault on Hispaniola and was part of Cromwell's Western Design, that is, his proposal to compete with Spain in forming New World colonies. Modyford was one of the architects of Cromwell's policy. He wrote to Cromwell's government in support of settling Jamaica and claiming that he had a hundred families ready to leave Barbados, warning though that the planters would try to prevent Jamaican settlement as it could lead to competition in sugar and the lowering of prices, even though it would ease their excess population. This migration did not materialise, however, as knowledge had spread of the high mortality among the early settlers on the island. Nevertheless, pressure to reduce the population of Barbados continued as did the need to develop other colonies in the Caribbean, leading in 1664 to Modyford's eventual move to Jamaica.

In 1664, after the end of Cromwell's rule and now under King Charles II, Modyford was made a baronet and governor of Jamaica (why?). He sailed from Barbados that same year with almost a thousand islanders who were mainly 'free from debt' and of 'composed families'. Further Barbadians sailed to Jamaica over the next two years; many met a grim end. Bridenbaugh (p.211) claims that this was due to the poor quality of these freed servants, who were incapable of establishing plantations to feed themselves, often debauched by rum and in a poor physical and psychological state. Modyford himself, though, '*plunged into his new assignment with characteristic brio*', according to Dunn (p.81), selling his Barbados property (his half of the Hilliard property) and staking out more than 20,000 acres in Jamaica for himself and his relatives, and shaping the new colony with a strong hand. This was the end of his influence over the very early stages of the slave plantation system in Barbados but the beginning of his influence over its broadening to the much larger island of Jamaica.

Thomas Modyford in Jamaica⁵

During his time as Governor of Jamaica, Modyford was given much of the credit for establishing the colony on the firm footing which enabled the British to acquire great wealth from it. As the inscription on his tombstone in Spanish Town Cathedral extols:

MISTAKE NOT READER, FOR HERE LYES NOT ONELY THE DECEASED BODY OF THE HONORABLE SR THOMAS MODYFORD BARRONETT, BUT EVEN THE SOULE AND LIFE OF ALL JAMAICA, WHO FIRST MADE IT WHAT IT NOW IS. HERE LYES THE BEST AND LONGEST GOVERNOUR, THE MOST CONSIDERABLE PLANTER, THE ABLEST AND MOST UPRIGHT JUDGE THIS ISLAND EVER INJOYED HE DYED THE SECOND OF SEPTEMBER 1679.

Modyford, according to Dunn (p.155), ruled as an independent potentate ignoring instructions from home and controlling the island revenue. However, he played key roles in establishing the laws governing slavery, in the profitable running of sugar plantations, and in using the services of the buccaneers to the British advantage.

According to Dunn (p.243-46), when Modyford arrived in Jamaica in 1664 he brought with him a copy of the Barbados Slave Code of 1661. His first Assembly in 1664 issued a new law which copied the language and terms of the Barbados law almost exactly. This slave code became the basis of the social and economic law of the island, and lasted with only minor modifications for the next 150 years. These laws "*legitimised a state of war between blacks and whites, sanctified rigid segregation,*

⁵ Much of this section is taken from www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com

and institutionalised an early warning system against slave revolts”. Without going into detail of these laws, it can be seen that in reference to Jamaica Modyford did, indeed, “make it what it now is”, as his epitaph claimed – for better or worse.

Plantations

According to Lawrence-Archer (1875), the very early colony of Jamaica got energy and administrative talent from the younger sons of British families displaced by the Civil War, commercial talent from the Jewish contingent, social style from the Spanish, and extra income from the buccaneers’ loot, but were in want of skills in tropical agriculture. This is what the acclimatized Barbadians led by Modyford were able to supply. Modyford saw the agricultural potential of Jamaica and urged Charles II to be generous in issuing large areas of land to settlers and to award special tax concessions. As Governor, Modyford issued land patents of more than 300,000 acres, mainly in the finest farmland in the south of the island, in large allotments. He quickly acquired large areas of fertile land for himself, his family and his followers. According to Dunn (p.154), Modyford with his eldest son (Thomas) patented 9,000 acres, a younger son (Charles) 6,300 acres, and brother James 5,800 acres. This inequitable land distribution laid the foundation for the social inequality that marks the island to this day; there was no place for the small settler.

Modyford’s 1670 Map of Jamaica



In 1670, Modyford sent a survey of the island of Jamaica to Lord Arlington in the government in England. It included this map, a list of land patents, the population, and agricultural products. In it he says: “Your Lordship will find great quantities of land granted to some persons among whom my Son 6000 acres whose name I made use of for myself having about 400 Persons in Our Family”. He seems to be trying to justify why he has given himself so much land.

The 1670 survey lists the following:

Parish and name	Acres
St. Catherines	
Thomas Modyford Esq & Co	6,090
Sir James Modyford	3,500
Sir Thomas Modyford	109
St Andrews	
Sir James Modyford	530
St Johns	
Sir James Modyford	1,000

He appears to have awarded himself only 109 acres on the official records!

Bybrook Estate

Modyford was able to use his experience of growing sugar in Barbados to give encouragement and helpful advice to other aspiring sugar planters. Some of this is recorded in the documents of the Bybrook estate, near the present town of Bogwalk, which was held by the Helyar family of East Coker in Somerset. These Helyar manuscripts are unusual in being very early plantation records and showing the extreme difficulties planters had in establishing their estates and making them profitable. Dunn (p.212-223) outlines the progress of Bybrook based on these manuscripts.

Colonel William Helyar had been a Royalist and fought alongside Thomas Modyford in the Civil War, so when his younger brother, Cary, arrived in Jamaica in the same year as Modyford, a friendship was established. In 1669, Cary Helyar took Modyford's advice and patented 600 acres of prime sugar land next to his at Sixteen Mile Walk. Successive members of the Helyar family attempted to establish the plantation and make it profitable, two of whom died suddenly of tropical diseases, so other family 'servants' were appointed as managers for brother William in East Coker who was the financier of the enterprise. Modyford, in a letter of 1677, strongly advised William only to use a close family member as manager and let him share the profits rather than attempt to run it as an absentee. Indeed it was only during the four years when his son John Helyar was in charge that a profit was made. Modyford had used this approach himself in Barbados where he managed the estate while his brother in law Thomas Kendall managed the English side of the business. This Bybrook plantation remained in the Helyar family until 1713 by which time its soil was exhausted due to mismanagement, in spite of Modyford's good advice. Whereas the family's land in East Coker had remained fertile for a thousand years, their Jamaican lands were exhausted within forty years, illustrating the general approach of the colonists to making a quick profit by wearing out not just the land but also the enslaved people who worked on it.

Buccaneers

Apart from the potential profits to be made from growing sugar, Jamaica made money from pirates, and Modyford had to find ways to manage this side of the economy. Jamaica was the most boisterous and disorderly of the English colonies and this was epitomised by the buccaneers, a specific group of pirates and privateers operating in that part of the Caribbean in the late seventeenth century. The most famous of these was Henry Morgan. Jamaica was well positioned for strikes against Spanish shipping and Spanish colonies, with whom England was often at war. Port Royal ("The wickedest city on earth") was the buccaneers' central base where they could sell their loot to merchants. Even Modyford had trouble bringing these wild men to heel.



Henry Morgan

In his early years as governor, Modyford found it advantageous to form partnerships with the buccaneers (Dunn p.156). He commissioned buccaneering ships to attack enemy commerce and received large kickbacks for himself. According to Long⁶: SIR THOMAS, by his own sole authority, twice proclaimed war against the Spaniards, but in so doing, and in his encouragement of the Buccaneers, he was countenanced by Charles II., who empowered him "to commission whatever persons he thought good to be partners with his majesty in the plunder, 'they finding victuals, wear and tear.' So that his majesty entered very seriously into the privateering business, and held this reputable partnership for some years."

In this pursuit, between 1665 and 1671, Modyford sent Henry Morgan on spectacular raids against the Spanish, sacking rich cities around the Caribbean coast, culminating with a raid on Panama City on the Pacific coast bringing a reputed £70,000 in loot back to Port Royal. This was going too far! By this time Charles II wanted peace with Spain so he recalled Modyford and had him imprisoned in the Tower of London for two years. Modyford was never tried but returned to Jamaica in 1675. Meanwhile, Morgan was also arrested but treated as a hero by the population of England and received a knighthood in 1674. He returned to Jamaica as Lieutenant Governor!

By the 1670s it was clear that buccaneering was hindering the agricultural development of the island. This was because small planters and indentured servants found it more profitable to run away to join the pirates, and because legitimate traders feared to come to the island. For twenty years the planters and buccaneers struggled for control and by 1688 the planters had largely won. With the destruction of Port Royal in the 1692 earthquake, the buccaneers moved out and found other havens. Modyford had not managed to subdue the pirates or to bring order and civilisation to Jamaica. Other governors followed him and continued the struggle.

Sir Thomas Modyford lived an unusually long life for one in the West Indies, long enough to accumulate fortunes in Barbados and Jamaica, and then have ten years of retirement, dying in Jamaica at the age of 69 in 1679. A tentative family tree is included in the Appendix in an attempt to go some way to placing his origins in the Devon gentry (?) and to tracking his monetary legacy through a few generations. It would be another, but interesting, exercise to trace it further.

Assessment of Thomas Modyford's role in the slave plantation system

The purpose of this exercise has been to assess the role of Thomas Modyford in the early development of the slave plantation system, as part of our overall project to bring to light the hidden connections between the county of Devon and trans-Atlantic slavery. The evidence displayed here shows that he did, indeed, play a central role; one that has not been made much of in local history.

Modyford brought with him from Exeter money, connections and a tough ambitious character at the time of the birth of the slave plantation system. On his 1647 arrival in Barbados he quickly bought in to a nascent sugar plantation and muscled his way into the island governing body. He took an active part in the slave trade as agent of the Royal Adventurers and was in charge over the period when thousands of enslaved Africans were imported. He and his employee, Ligon, promoted standards of

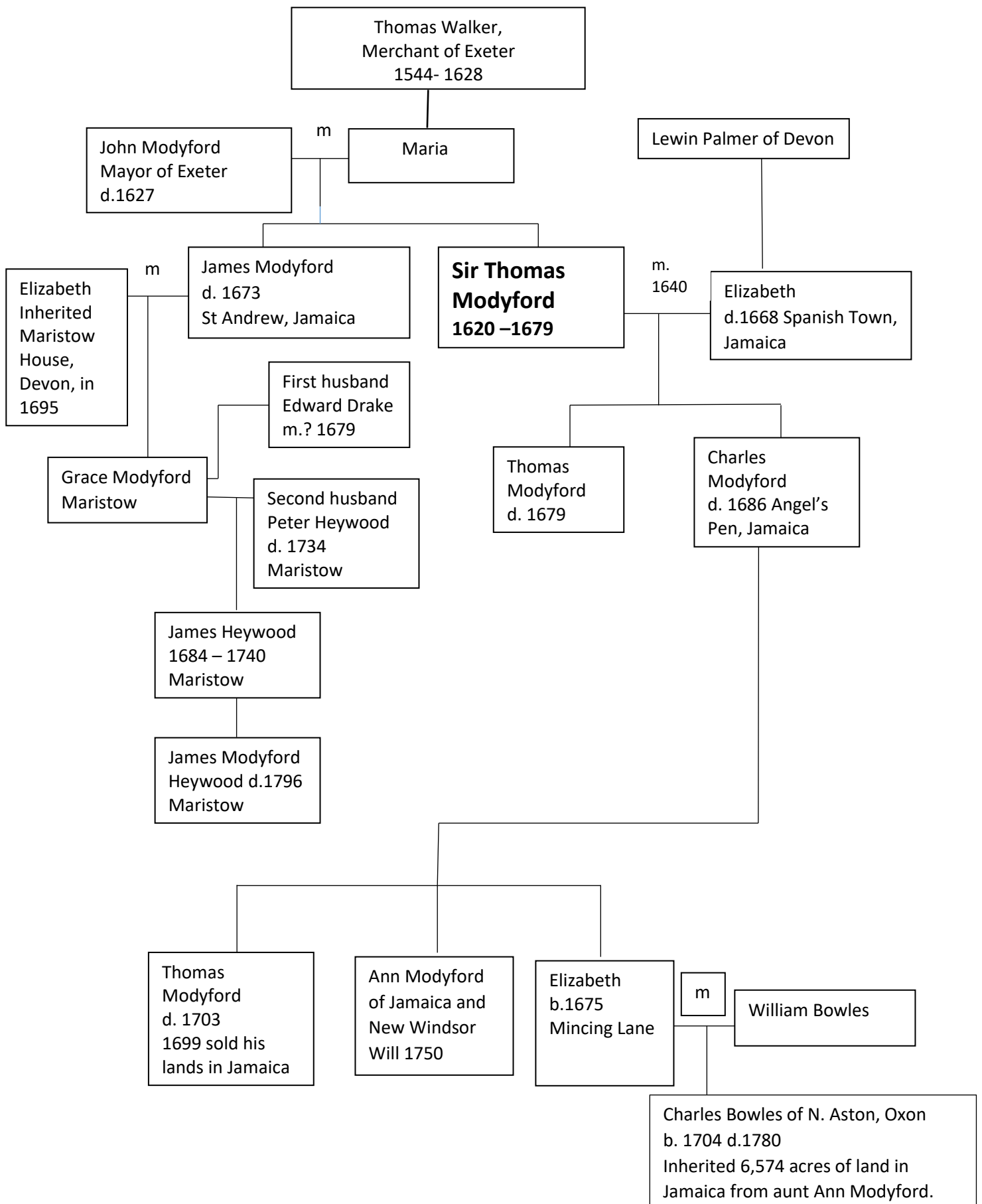
⁶ Appendix to Vol I *Edward Long (1774), History of Jamaica, London: T. Lowndes*, reported in www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com

extravagant living for the planters, which required the labour of enslaved people to maintain. Perhaps his main contribution, however, was in being one of the leading players in the formulation of the Slave code when he was speaker of the Assembly of Barbados while Walrond was acting governor, thereby setting the legal parameters for suppressing the African workforce and eventually the racist structure of societies in the English Caribbean and American colonies. In these endeavours he took a leading role.

He was a key person in spreading the sugar economy beyond its nursery in Barbados to other Caribbean territories, notably Jamaica, which was to become the greatest source of wealth for the British economy in the following century. Notwithstanding his entanglement with the buccaneers, he played an important part in establishing an elite planter class through his inequitable distribution of fertile land, and tried with varying degrees of success to enable newcomers to develop profitable plantations, again overseeing the massive importation of enslaved labour. Perhaps his main legacy, however, was his introduction of the Barbados Slave Code into Jamaica as the legal basis of the racial oppression that was to underlie that country's future.

In sum, if a single person could be identified as being responsible for the early development of the English New World sugar/slave/plantation system I would suggest that Sir Thomas Modyford was that person. And he was our local boy from Exeter!

Appendix: Tentative Modyford Family Tree



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