

11/09/2025

Outline of Jill's contribution to CIGH Oct 2025

I have approached slavery research through three different routes: families, houses and slave registers.

Families

I started my research into Devon involvement in West Indian slavery through attending a local history talk which concerned a family called Davy living in my area of Countess Wear. Since the internet was just opening up I was able to trace enslavement by families I was personally familiar with. The jamaicanfamilysearch website was particularly useful in linking names of enslavers to names of Jamaican plantations. The 2015 University College London conference in Exeter was a stimulus to my research and it brought our Legacies of Devon Slavery Connections Group together.

I had lived for many years in Jamaica so it was very exciting to discover that there had been links in the past between places and people in Devon and in Jamaica that I had been completely unaware of. It was exciting to discover things that nobody else knew about. It was a thrill to discover that two families that I researched (Davy and Glanville) had been close friends two hundred years ago. They had both gone to Jamaica to grow coffee around the year 1800; the Davys had helped the Glanvilles over many years. I was able to introduce their present-day descendants to each other a few years ago.

This happened after I was contacted by Davy descendants living in Australia who were interested in making some reparations, leading to my detailed research into that family and subsequently my book *Slavery and a Countess Wear Family*.

After that early start, another way to research enslaving families has been through the compensation records on the UCL website. At the end of West Indian slavery, compensation was paid to enslavers for the loss of their 'property', and these payments are listed on the UCL website together with some biographical information. This gives a way in to discovering links between British families and enslaving. Through this I identified 78 people who were living in Devon but owning enslaved people in the West Indies in the 1830s. It was fascinating to find the great range of people – from quite ordinary women to vastly wealthy men – who were on the list. From this I drew up a typology of enslavers based on their wealth. It would be interesting

to compare other counties with Devon based on a similar typology. This is written up in the Transactions of the Devonshire Association 2022.

For example, there was Margaret Taylor, herself a woman of colour, living in Dawlish who received £29 compensation for one enslaved woman she 'owned' in Kingston Jamaica. At the other end of the spectrum was Henry Porter, who received £36,000 for 709 enslaved people on his sugar estate in Guyana. The median amount was paid to Thomas Davy of Ottery St Mary (from the family already mentioned) who received £1,100 for 59 enslaved people on his coffee plantation in Jamaica. How far did these profits from slavery spread – within the families and in the wider society? This is an interesting topic to investigate and Peter addresses it next.

Another period of interest is after the English Civil War in the 1600s when some wealthy Exeter men went to Barbados; these included Colleton, Modyford and Walrond. They were Royalists defeated in the Civil War and they became founders of the racialised society in Barbados. They helped to establish the sugar/slave economy and the legal system (Slave Code) which supported it by having more severe laws for blacks than for whites. They carried it to other Caribbean islands, such as Jamaica, and to North American colonies especially South Carolina. This is not widely known.

What part exactly did these Exeter families play? They had a profound influence on the development of racist laws in the Caribbean and in the USA – the legacy of which have persisted into today. This is would be a topic of international importance to know more about.

Houses

Another approach to investigating Devon enslavement links is through houses. There are many large mansions around Devon – where did the money come from to build them? Hugh Meller's book *Country Houses of Devon*, gives the history of many Devon country houses with the names of families who developed them. These can be cross-referenced with other sources to establish slavery links. Some examples are Maristow House near Plymouth which was owned by relatives of the Colleton family, Millcombe House on Lundy Island built by William Heaven 'with the proceeds of his family's Jamaican sugar plantations' and Larkbeare House on Holloway Street in Exeter, once property of the Baring banking family.

Slave Registers

But what about the enslaved Africans themselves? There is less information but the Slave Registers give some information about births and deaths over the period of Amelioration (1817-1834). These can be accessed free of charge on Ancestry. You can draw up short family trees, deduce when the people were captured from Africa, or look at the 'problem' (as their owners saw it) of childlessness. You could compare different types of plantation – whether sugar or coffee for example – and look at numbers of children or ages of death. This gives an opportunity for a quantitative analysis. Unfortunately it is quite difficult to link names on the slave registers to post-Emancipation families as the names were often changed and records were not kept.

So I have talked about some of the ways I have researched slavery – through families, houses and slave registers – and now I'll hand you over to Peter who will talk about some of the ways that enslavers spent their money and also how he has used church memorials to research slave-owning families.

Dr Gillian Allen