

Introduction

Hello, everyone. I should explain that I was an undergraduate here at Exeter in the 1960s, studying Sociology and Statistics. Most of my working life was spent abroad in the tropics, working on government statistics. I joined the LDSG ten years ago, just before we hosted that UCL workshop here in Exeter.

Today, I want to focus on two issues:

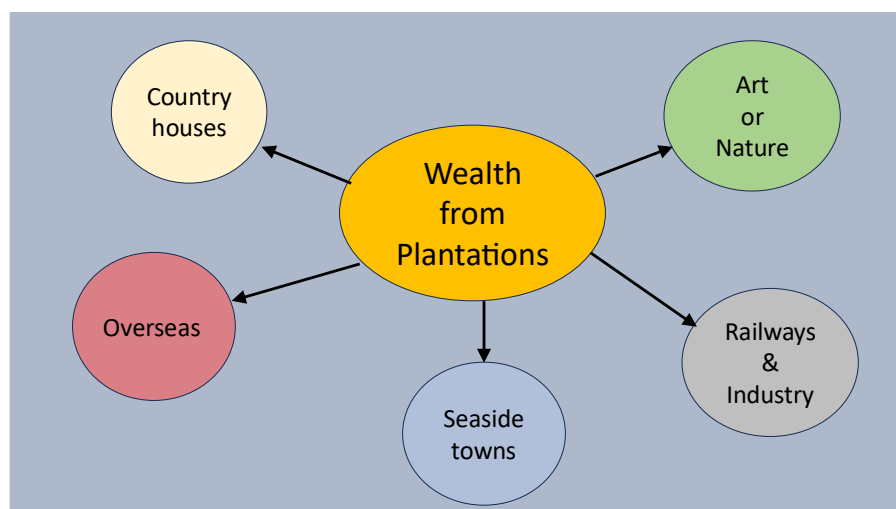
First: How did major plantation owners spend the fortunes they acquired.

And secondly: I want to stress the importance of church memorials as a source of information on slavery and empire.

First, some background:

When talking about the profits made in the Caribbean by British owners of plantations, we tend to focus on the compensation payments made to slave owners when slavery was abolished in 1834. That is because those details are now easily available online on the UCL/LBS website. But we need to realise that people from Devon started profiting from slavery almost three hundred years earlier. In fact, it was a Devon man, Sir John Hawkins, who began the transatlantic slave trade back in 1562, and Devon men were active in Barbados in the mid-1600s.

Many of the slave owners who received compensation in the 1830s would already have made vast profits from slavery during the latter half of the 1700s. That was the time when plantations, particularly sugar plantations, were most profitable. By 1834 the economic situation was much more difficult. I want to take a look at what these British plantation owners did with their vast wealth, using some of the examples that I have worked on.



Construction, purchase or embellishment of country houses

Many plantation owners spent their money either building country houses for themselves, or buying existing houses and enhancing the buildings and the grounds surrounding them. A good local example is the Porter family who spent many years in Guiana, owning cotton and later sugar plantations over three generations, between 1782 and 1860. With their profits they bought two lovely country houses just outside Exeter - Rockbeare Manor and Winslade House – and then beautified the houses and grounds still further.

Naturalist or artistic pursuits

One of the people I researched for RAMM's exhibition on slavery was W.S.M. D'Urban, who became RAMM's first curator in 1865. He was born in 1836 which is after the abolition of slavery, but it was clearly useful to look at his family connections.

I found that his paternal grandfather Sir Benjamin D'Urban had been lieutenant-governor of Demerara-Essequibo from 1824 to 1831, and then the first Governor of British Guiana from 1831 to 1833. His maternal grandfather Samuel Mitchell had owned a plantation in Grenada and had become the Acting Governor of that island in 1795. In 1798 Samuel purchased the Newport Estate in Topsham, Devon, where this grandson WSM later lived. D'Urban was connected to the Porter family, because he married Gertrude Porter, daughter of Henry Porter of Winslade.

WSM D'Urban was an avid collector of natural history items. Indeed, before he came to RAMM, he spent the year of 1860 in South Africa collecting plants. Initially he gave these to the RAMM, but later many of them were transferred to the Natural History Museum in London. Several years later, after he left RAMM, he and a friend, Murray Mathew, published the authoritative book entitled *The Birds of Devon*. To collect information on his life, I used mainly census records and personal data obtained through Ancestry, newspaper archives from the Devon and Exeter Institution, and location data from the annual Kelly and Besley Directories.

Another person who indulged their passions was the Reverend John Swete, who in 1781 inherited a Devon estate, and a plantation in Antigua, from his relatives. He built Oxton House near Exeter, but is best remembered as a watercolour artist, travelling around Devon and painting country houses.

Investment in railways, industry, and city development

In the mid-19th century there was a massive expansion of the railway network in Britain, and many slave-owners invested in companies that were building new railway lines.

Some industrialists in Britain also owned plantations in the Caribbean. If they built country houses, it is often difficult to disentangle how much of the cost of building came from the profits of industry and how much from the profits of the plantations. For instance, the National Trust website tells us that Penhryn Castle in North Wales was rebuilt in the 1820s and 1830s on (quote) “the proceeds of the North Wales slate industry and sugar plantations in Jamaica”.

When I was researching Bishop Phillpotts, the famous Bishop of Exeter in the mid-19th century – I identified his younger brother Thomas as a slave-owner. He had lived in Jamaica for 25 years, where he provided financial services to plantation owners. When he came back to England, he set up a company with Samuel Baker - the father of Samuel White Baker, the famous explorer in Africa. This company, Baker and Phillpotts, bought up land in the centre of Gloucester and did much to promote its development as an important port in those days.

Investment in seaside resorts

I also did research on Emmanuel Baruh Lousada, a member of a Jewish family that were important financiers in London for Caribbean slavery. In 1788 he moved down to Sidmouth, built Peak House on the hill overlooking the seafront, and did much to attract other influential people to visit or settle there, thus turning it from a sleepy fishing village to a desirable coastal resort.

Investment overseas

Another way in which the profits from slavery are used is to invest in activities overseas. Another family I researched was the Teschemaker family. They had come from Holland, but made a fortune in Guiana from sugar. The two brothers settled back in Devon in the 1830s, but most of their children later headed off to New Zealand, and with their acquired wealth purchased enormous areas of land. They were instrumental in developing the New Zealand sheep industry. I got first-hand information about them from family diaries that are preserved in the Canterbury Museum in New Zealand. I was also able to see digital extracts from local New Zealand newspapers, in what is called the British Newspaper Archive, which is available through the British Library or the London Library.

The value of money

I want to say a word about the value of money. One way of assessing the wealth of slave owners is to try to calculate what their wealth represents in modern-day terms.

British owners of enslaved people received compensation in the 1830s when slavery was abolished. For simplicity, suppose a person received just £1. What would that be equivalent to in terms of today's money? Any amount given is necessarily only very approximate. There are really two main approaches that are used.

One is **Relative Prices**: If we consider the change in the value of a basket of goods and services, the multiple to use should be almost 100, which would make £1 in the 1830s equivalent to £100 in today's money.

The other measure is the **Value of labour**: When compensation was paid in the 1830s, it was based on the supposed value of their enslaved workers. If we consider the change in average earnings, the multiple to use would be very much larger, perhaps 1,000, which would mean that £1 in those days is really equivalent to perhaps £1,000 today.

In practice many people use the first multiple, since it is the simplest. But compensation did represent a payment for loss of labour, so really the second multiple is the more appropriate one to use.

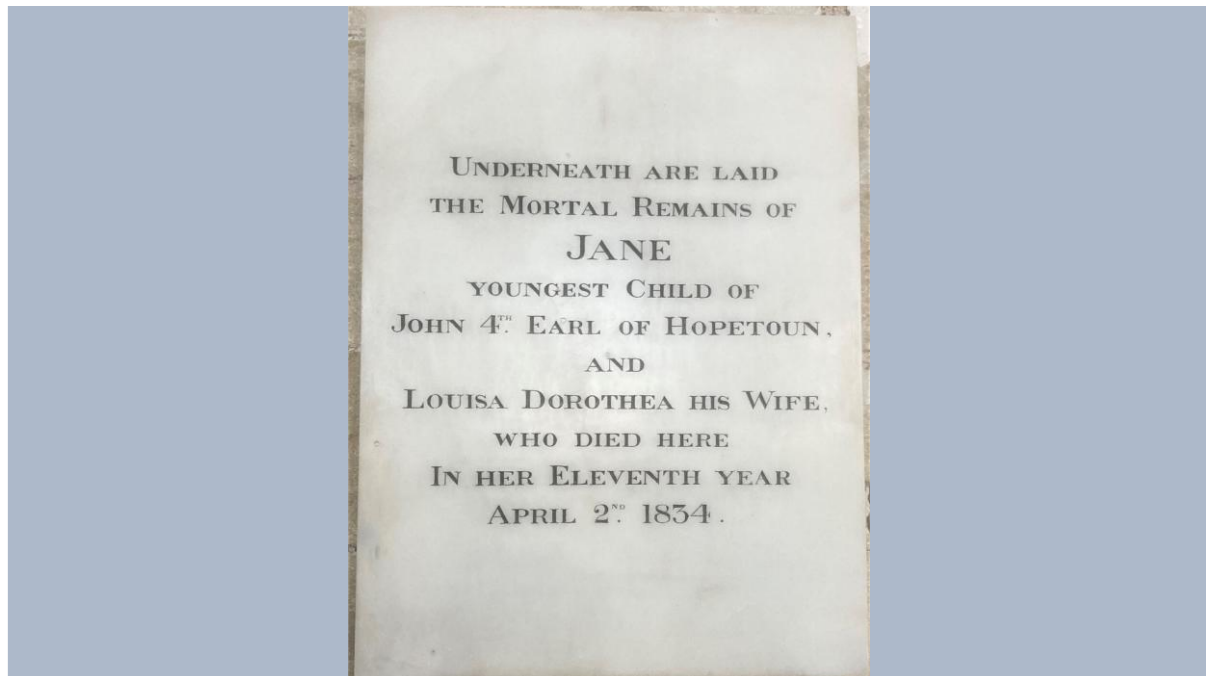
If you want to find out more on this important topic, go to the websites of the Bank of England or the National Archives, or go to a special website called 'Measuring Worth'

Church memorials

Memorials in churches and cathedrals provide another valuable source of information on slavery.

Because of my work experience overseas, I am interested in the history of Empire. I published a book three years ago, entitled: *Exeter Cathedral Memorials with Links to Empire*. There are copies in your university library, and I have brought one or two copies with me today. These memorials provide a valuable source of information for research. In my book, besides mentioning the individuals shown in the memorials, I attempted to look at other close family members, to see whether they had connections to Empire.

I would like to talk about just one memorial that is shown in my book, since it is also a good example of investment overseas.



The memorial is in the nave, on the south wall. It is a very simple memorial to a girl, Jane, who died aged only 11. What do we learn from this memorial?

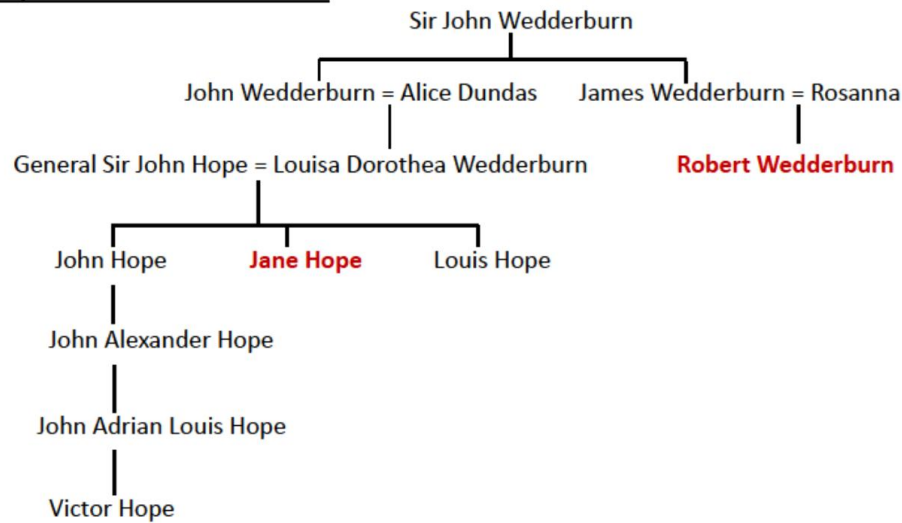
First of all, it tells us that she was actually buried in the Cathedral. This means there may well be a ledger stone on the floor nearby, marking the spot where she was buried, and that stone might contain some other useful information about her. But I have not found it yet.

Secondly, there is a surprising lack of detail about the family surname. She is not given any surname, and her father John is only given a title. The same happens with the mother who is given a first name and a middle name, but no surname.

Thirdly, Jane died here in Exeter, but why was she in Exeter in the first place? The answer is we don't know, without doing a lot more research.

I learn from the Internet that Hopetoun House, situated just outside Edinburgh, has been home to the Hope family since the late 1600s. Hopetoun House is part of a 6,500-acre estate, and is (quotes) "the finest stately home in Scotland".

Hope and Wedderburn families



In the 1820s Jane's father was a Governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland, which provided finance to plantation owners and to the Scottish industries that supported trade with the Caribbean. Jane's mother was the daughter of Sir John Wedderburn, the biggest plantation owner in Jamaica at the end of the eighteenth century. He and his brother James had gone out to Jamaica, after his father had been captured at the Battle of Culloden and executed for treason.

In Jamaica, James was not yet married, but he fathered several illegitimate children with enslaved women from the plantation. One of those children, born to Rosanna, was Robert Wedderburn, who later became a radical thinker and an abolitionist. Ryan, our chair today, knows all about him, and has recently published a book about him.

But I want to mention some of Jane's other close relatives, because of their links to Empire. Her eldest brother John inherited the Scottish estate and became the 5th Earl. His grandson, John Adrian Louis Hope, was appointed Governor of Victoria in Australia at the age of 29, and proved a great success. As a result, in 1900 he was made the very first Governor General of the new federal Australia. For his services, the King bestowed on him the title of Marquess of Linlithgow.

His son, Victor Hope, the second Marquess – and usually referred to simply as Linlithgow – was even more successful. He had several ministerial positions in Government in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1933 he chaired the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Indian constitutional reform. The committee's proposals became the Government of India Act 1935, and Linlithgow was then appointed Viceroy of India. His seven-year term of office, from 1936 to 1943, was the longest in the history of the Raj.

Finally, let's turn to Jane's younger brother Louis Hope. Initially he served as a Captain in the Coldstream Guards, but then went out to Australia in 1843. Ten years later he acquired land in Ormiston, now a suburb of Brisbane. He grew and milled Australia's first commercially grown sugar, and did much to foster the sugar industry in Queensland. His house there is now a celebrated colonial home, which is open to the public.

However, this output of sugar was only achieved through the use of what used to be known as Kanaka labour but is now euphemistically called 'Australian South Sea Islanders', and it is highly likely that these islanders had been captured by what were known as 'blackbirders', operating in ships on behalf of the plantation owners. These islanders may well have been treated as though they were enslaved. So although slavery was officially abolished in almost all British colonies in 1834, it was carrying on in Australia, in one form or another, as late as 1870.

So you can see how a simple monument can help to reveal so much about the history of slavery and Empire.

Thank you.