

The Bristol Claxton family and slavery

An essay by Ruth Hecht

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The Bristol Claxton family and slavery

Introduction

This research has been done as a contribution to the University of Bristol's *Bristol, Capital and Enslavement* project¹ and has grown out of my wider interrogation of people in Bristol who received compensation under the Abolition of Slavery Act 1833 in which enslavers were given compensation for every enslaved person they claimed ownership over. In Bristol about 97 people were awarded compensation, over a quarter of whom were women; between them they received over £400,000 for more than 25,000 enslaved people.²

This is a detailed case study of the Bristol based Claxton family. Originally from St. Kitts, they settled in Bristol in the early 1780s when two members of the family - Robert and Rachel Claxton - moved to the City where they and their children had an impact on both anti- and pro- slavery politics, whilst continuing to own enslaved people in the West Indies and take an active role in the slavery economy. The 'slavery economy' refers to every aspect of chattel slavery, 'the international mercantile structure which exploited the labour of African enslaved people, and those of African descent'.³ The Claxton family were part of the slavery economy because they claimed ownership over enslaved people; they invested in ships trading with the West Indies; they had business interests in England as sugar merchants and sugar refiners; and they provided credit to plantation owners.

This is an important case study for several reasons. It shows that it is possible to make visible some of the stories of enslaved people who would otherwise be anonymous. When writing about families such as the Claxtons it is all too easy to refer to enslaved people as numbers – for example 'Rachel Claxton received compensation for 95 slaves'. In presenting enslaved people in that way it is very hard to conceive that those 95 people were all individuals – they had names; were born in different places; were different ages and had different roles on the plantation; they were part of different family and friendship groups – in other words they were individual human beings living unique lives – albeit their lives were severely restricted because legally they were other people's property and they had no agency over their own lives as part of a brutalised system of enslavement.

¹ The aims of the *Bristol, Capital and Enslavement* project at the University of Bristol was led by Dr Richard Stone and Dr Cassandra Gooptar. The aims are for 'citizen researchers' 1) To investigate the lives and careers of those in Bristol who claimed ownership over the enslaved, and the resultant compensation. 2) To conduct research on who were the enslaved people associated with Bristol enslavers and help to tell their stories. The project took place in 2022 and 2023.

² For the detailed list of the 97 people in Bristol who received compensation when slavery was abolished see *From Wulfstan to Colston* pp.310-317 Mark Steeds and Roger Ball, Bristol Radical History Group, 2020

³ *Glasgow, Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: An Audit of Historic Connections and Modern Legacies*, Stephen Mullen March 2022, University of Glasgow

One definition of the Transatlantic Slave Economy/Slavery Business is that it refers to:

- the production of goods in Britain (guns, chains, pots, pans, textiles), which were transported to the west coast of Africa and exchanged for captured and enslaved women, men and children.
- the shipment of these African people across the Atlantic Ocean.
- the sale of enslaved African people to slave-owners in the Caribbean and Americas.
- the forced domestic, agrarian and other forms of labour reluctantly undertaken by enslaved African people.
- the transportation of goods produced by enslaved African people back to Britain (and their sale in other parts of the world) from which slave-owners profited.' From *A Glossary of Terminology for Understanding Transatlantic Slavery and 'Race' Key Stages 2 to 4, Teachers' Resource* produced by Nottingham Museums (no date) <https://nottinghammuseums.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/3a.-Slavery-and-Racial-Terminology-Glossary-Omitted-Terms.pdf> [accessed 5,6,23]

I would add to that definition: 'the economic activities needed to support those businesses, such as the provision of credit and mortgages by individuals and banks' and 'the processing and sale of slave produced goods in the UK such as sugar, tobacco and cotton'

It is extremely difficult to trace enslaved people's histories. In contrast it is a relatively easy task to research the people who enslaved them such as the Claxton family, where there are marriage records, the census, newspaper reports, etc., making it possible to build up a detailed picture of how they lived. However, it is vital that people enslaved by families such as the Claxtons are not reduced merely to numbers or a monetary value. So in order to give enslaved people a voice in this narrative I have included details - such as they exist - of some of the people enslaved by the Claxton family. Most records only give enslaved people's names, ages and details of where they were born and their role on the plantation. Where there is more information which gives a tiny glimpse into individual enslaved people's lives, I've included it.

By focussing on a single family such as the Claxtons, it is possible to highlight the complex relationships between family members involved in the slavery economy linked to both Bristol and the West Indies; it shows how they supported each other's businesses as owners of enslaved people, ship owners, merchants, and sugar refiners, whilst simultaneously holding different views about the abolition of slavery and how people of African descent should be treated.

Although several books about Bristol's history of the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans refer to different members of the Claxton family, I haven't found any narrative which tells of their far-reaching ownership of enslaved people. A cursory look at, say, the list of people who received compensation in Bristol gives the names of two Claxton family members who received compensation for owning 68 enslaved people,⁴ but this gives no indication of the Bristol Claxton family's ownership of hundreds of enslaved people over many decades, nor does it provide any notion of who those people were.

This study covers the period from the mid-1770s to the 1840s: the period of the abolition of the slave trade by the British (1807), the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (1833), and the introduction of the apprenticeship system (1834). It shows how incredibly complex the economics of slavery were during this time, with loans, mortgages, and debts contributing to the constantly changing ownership of both plantations and individual enslaved people as they were being bought, sold or manumitted (freed). By tracing a small number of the people enslaved by the Claxtons, it is possible to see how this time of change affected the lives of individuals born into chattel slavery.

There is a common perception that the business of slavery was a male concern, and that women had no financial agency at this time. This study shows how women, because of their income derived from slavery, could be independently wealthy from their husbands, and that women also helped cement important networks linked to Bristol's slavery economy through marriage, politics, and business. Because of a legal loophole, married women in the Claxton family (as elsewhere across England), were able to own their own property, and thus claim ownership over enslaved people – either individuals bequeathed to them in wills, or large numbers of enslaved people on plantations which they had inherited.⁵

One reason for doing this case study of a single family is to interrogate whether later generations of a family which had become rich through slavery continued to have an impact on Victorian Bristol. For this reason I have included details about the generation of the Claxton family born in the first few decades of the C19th who became adults after abolition. It shows that by the 1840s the Claxton family had very little

⁴ *From Wulfston to Colston* op. cit. p.314

⁵ Even though married women were not able to own their own property until 1882, there was a legal loophole which permitted a married women to own her own 'sole and separate estate' in the form of a trust. 'This gave wives limited property rights, protected her independent interest in particular property during her marriage and, depending on the terms of the trust, sometimes even gave her the power to bequeath the property as she so desired after her death.' Single women, including spinsters and widows, could own their own property. *Women, slavery compensation and gender relations in the 1830s* p.8 Hannah Young, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/media-new/pdfs/hyoung.pdf> [accessed 12.05.2023]

money to pass on to the next generation, and their business as planters, sugar merchants, mortgage lenders, etc. had ceased. As far as I have been able to establish, none of Robert and Rachel Claxton's 25+ grandchildren or their many great grandchildren were involved in Bristol's civic or business life – indeed by the mid-1800s most Claxton family members lived elsewhere in England.

Notes on the text

At the end of the essay are family trees and a list summarising the details of Robert and Rachel Claxton's children and grandchildren for ease of reference.

At different points throughout the text I give comparative values to show the wealth accumulated by the Claxtons. The tool used to calculate these sums is 'the most trusted and most regularly utilized resource of this type used in academic research',⁶ the Measuring Worth calculator. This provides different contemporary values for any sum in any given year; these comparators given vary considerably, for example £1,000 in 1800 is equivalent in 2022 to sums which vary from £86,000 to nearly £7m.⁷ So as not to litter the text with dozens of figures, I have used one of the middle sums in all my comparators - the relative wage or income growth calculation, in other words the amount of income or wealth relative to the wage of the average worker; in the example given this means that £1,000 in 1800 is the equivalent of £1,279,000 today.

Please be aware that within this essay there are references to contemporary C18th and C19th sources which use language that today is considered offensive and racist.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Christine Eickelmann whose extensive knowledge about enslavers and enslaved people on Nevis has been incredibly helpful, and who has responded patiently to all my questions. Thanks are also due to Peter Malpass and Steven Carter for clarifying particular issues.

Ruth Hecht, Bristol, June 2023

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To start this narrative it is important to pay tribute to some of the people enslaved by the Bristol-based Claxton family. Below is the list of enslaved people on the Mardenbrough estate in St Kitts between 1817 and 1834 enslaved by Rachel Claxton (ne. Mardenbrough) for whom she received compensation when slavery was abolished in 1834 whilst living in Bristol.

⁶ Glasgow, *Slavery and Atlantic Commerce* op. cit. p.13

⁷ The Measuring Worth calculations for £1,000 in 1800 for 2022 are:

£85,900 = the relative price worth (RPW), in other words the purchasing power of £1,000 today for its ability to purchase a package of services and commodities such as food, shelter and clothing

£1,279,000 = the relative wage (WIG), in other words the amount of income or wealth relative to the wage of the average worker. This calculation is based on the average earnings for all workers in the base year, and then calculates the average earnings for all workers in 2022 (allowing for inflation). It then calculates what proportion of annual wages (across the population) £1,000 represented in, say 1807, and then applies that proportion to annual wages in 2022, thus arriving at a modern equivalent.

£6,725,000 = the economic share or relative output worth (ROW); this is calculated using the percentage of GDP and so measures the amount of income or wealth relative to the total output of the economy

<https://www.measuringworth.com/index.php> [accessed 5.6.23]

List of 152 enslaved people registered on the Mardenbrough Estate between 1817 and 1834

People in this list who are *not* highlighted were the 95 enslaved people for whom Rachel Mardenbrough received compensation. The people highlighted in grey were no longer in the Mardenbrough family's ownership in 1834 either because of death (36 people), sale (4 people) or manumission (4 people); there was also one run-away – Fortune. 12 people highlighted are not on the 1834 register, although they are listed on previous registers; 10 of those were aged 2 or under so it's assumed they died before 1834 but their deaths weren't registered

Name [in brackets name on 1834 return if different]	Sex	Colour	Reputed age at time of register	Register date	Country	Usual Employment	Increase in slaves	In return date	Decrease by sale or manumission or death	In return date
Adam	Male	Black	2	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By birth	1827-28		
Agnes	Female	Black	13 months	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822		
Amelia	Female	Black	1	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822		
Ann [Anne]	Female	Black	6 months	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Anthony	Male	Black	5 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825		
Anthony	Male	Black	4	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Anthony	Male	Black	47	1817	<i>African Elbollem</i>	<i>Driver of the little gang</i>			<i>Died Occupation 'Driver of Stockman'</i>	1822
August	Male	Black	25	1817	African Mandingo	Cook	Repurchased of Robert Claxton. Occupation 'Formerly cook at present stockman'; aged 26	1825	By Sale to Robt Claxton	1822
Barbie	Female	Black	2	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825		
Belmore	Male	Black	47	1817	<i>African Elbollem</i>	<i>Field Negro</i>			<i>Died</i>	1822
Ben	Male	Mulatto	45	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Carpenter</i>			<i>Died</i>	1822
Benneba	Female	Black	30	1817	African Congo	Field Negro				

Betsey	Female	Black	2	1831	Creole of St Kitts	Useless	By birth	1831		
Big Fortune	Male	Black	40	1817	African Timmany	Field Negro				
Billy	Male	Black	12	1822	Creole of St Kitts	House Boy	By purchase of J. Jessup [Jane Jessup]	1822	By Sale to the Thomas J Brownhill	1822
Blackwall	Male	Black	40	1817	African Congo	Field Negro				
Bob	Male	Black	47	1817	African Minday	Stock man				
Candace	Female	Black	2	1822	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		By birth	1822	Died	1822
Caroline	Female	Black	11	1817	Creole of St Kitts	in town with Thompson			By manumission	1825
Caroline	Female	Black	60	1817	<i>African Mandingo</i>	seven years useless and unemployed			<i>Died - Several years [?] and unemployed'</i>	1827-28
Catey [Old Katy]	Female	Black	47	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Washer				
Charles	Male	Black	7	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Charles Nicolay	Male	Black	2	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Charley	Male	Black	30	1817	<i>African Minday</i>	Field Negro			Died	1827/28
Charloe	Male	Black	40	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Field Negro			Died	1822
Charlotte	Female	Sambo	9	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Chorus	Male	Black	50	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Watchman			Died	1827/28
Claude	Male	Black	19	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Congo Jack	Male	Black	40	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Field Negro			Died	1825
Congo Jimmy	Male	Black	38	1817	African Congo	Field Negro				
Cork	Male	Black	19	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				

Cotto	Female	Black	33	1817	African Mandingo	Field Negro at present attending the sick				
Creole Venus	Female	Black	37	1817	Creole of St Kitts	supplies the estate with 3 bottles castor oil monthly			<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Cudgoe	Male	Black	38	1817	African Congo	Field Negro				
Cuffy	Male	Black	2	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By birth	1827-28		
Damon	Male	Black	26	1831	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	Mason	<i>By purchase from Katherine Fasioux</i>	1831	<i>Died</i>	1834
Daniel	Male	Black [Sambo 1817 register]	9	1822	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By purchase of R Ferris	1822		
Daniel	Male	Black	43	1817	African Elbollem	Field Negro				
Davy	Male	Black	1	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Dillon	Male	Black	23	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	Field Negro			<i>Died</i>	1822
Dinah	Female	Black	6	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Dublin	Male	Black	45	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Mason				
Eliza	Female	Black	2	1831	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1831		
Eliza	Female	Black	2 months	1831	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		By birth	1831	<i>Died</i>	1831
Fanny	Female	Black	3	1817	Creole of St Kitts	not at work				
Farewell	Male	Black	55	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Still Man			<i>Died</i>	1827/28
Farne	Male	Black	20	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	Field Negro			<i>Died</i>	1825
Fortune	Male	Black	36	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Driver (1817) Overseer (1834)			By desertion / Runaway off the Island	1825 / 1834
Frances	Female	Black	17	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				

Francois	Male	Black	8	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Frank	Male	Black	2	1831	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1831		
Frank	Male	Black	1	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Frank	Male	Black	2 months	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work			<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Frank	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>14 months</i>	<i>1825</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		<i>By birth</i>	<i>1825</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>1825</i>
George	Male	Black	45	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Driver				
George [George Paton]	Male	Black	21 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth 'Formerly returned by Ann Titley'	1825		
George Shilling	Male	Sambo	22	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Hamlet	Male	Black	5 months	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Hannah	Female	Black	2	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825		
Harriet	Female	Black	13 months	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Harriet	Female	Black	4 months	1834	Creole	Not at work				
Isaac	Male	Black [Sambo 1817 register]	11	1822	Creole of St Kitts	Stockminder	By purchase of R Ferris	1822		
James	Male	Black	3 months	1831	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1831		
James	Male	Black	2	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
James	Male	Black	12	1817	Creole of St Kitts	House Boy				
James Paul	Male	Black	2 years 9 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		

Jane	Female	Black	6 months	1831	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1831	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Jane [Jane Bryan]	Female	Black	24	1822	African Congo	Washer	By purchase of Dr. Chas Bryan	1822	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Jeannette	Female	Black	17	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Field	Purchase of Jane Phipps	1827-28		
Jim Brown [Tom Brown]	Male	Black	20	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Joe	Male	Black	40	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
John	Male	Black	2 years 2 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
John	Male	Black	10	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
John Friday	Male	Black	8 weeks	1822	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		By birth	1822	<i>Died</i>	1822
John Thomas	Male	Black	1 month	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Joseph	Male	Mulatto	1	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Julius	Male	Black	36	1825	Africa	Carpenter	By purchase of A Wade	1825		
Katey [Katey Paton 1834]	Female	Black	30	1825	African Congo	House Servant [Field Negro 1834]	By purchase of Ann Titley	1825		
Kitty	Female	Mulatto	1 yr 3 months	1831	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work			By manumission	1831

Little [Collo?]	Female	Black	5	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	Ommitted by last return and now [?] by [?] Order of Lieut Govenor [N?]	1834		
Little Bob	Male	Black	19	1817	African Congo	Field Negro			[?] by Custom House	1834
Little Charles	Male	Black	2 years 3 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work			Died	1834
Little Jane	Female	Black	6 months	1834	Creole	Not at work				
Little Jimmy	Male	Black	2 years 6 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Little Margaret	Female	Black	22 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Little Providence	Male	Black	40	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Groom			Died - Occupation 'Stable'	1822
Lucretia	Female	Black	12	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Lucy	Female	Black	37	1827/28	African Congo	Field	Purchase of Jane Phipps	1827-28		
Margaret	Female	Black	22 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825	Not on 1834 register	
Margaret [Old Margaret]	Female	Black	34	1817	African Mandingo	Field Negro				
Margaret Anne	Female	Black	1	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Mary	Female	Black	37	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Sick House Nurse				
Mary Ann	Female	Sambo	3 weeks	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work			Not on 1834 register	

Mary Frank	Female	Black	6 months	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work			<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Mary Magdalen	Female	<i>Black</i>	2	1822	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		<i>By birth</i>	1822	<i>Died</i>	1822
Masy	Female	Black	13	1831	Creole of St Kitts	Domestic			By manumission	1831
Minda	Female	<i>Black</i>	6	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Not at work</i>			<i>Died</i>	1822
Moses	Male	Black	7	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Nancy	Female	Black	19	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Nanny	Female	Black	2 months	1822	Creole of St Kitts		<i>By birth</i>	1822		
Nature	Male	<i>Black</i>	9 months	1822	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		<i>By birth</i>	1822	<i>Died</i>	1822
Ned	Male	Black	3	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	<i>By birth</i>	1827-28		
Ned	Male	<i>Black</i>	1	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Not at work</i>			<i>Died</i>	1822
Nicky	Male	Black	8	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Ottway [or Oltway?]	Male	Black	7	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
Peggy	Female	<i>Black</i>	19	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	Field Negro			<i>Died</i>	1822
Penda	Female	Black	15 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	<i>By birth</i>	1825		
Penda	Female	<i>Black</i>	8	1822	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Not at work</i>	<i>Not at work</i>	1822	<i>Died</i>	1822
Penny	Female	<i>Black</i>	15 months	1827/28	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Not at work</i>	<i>By birth</i>	1827-28	<i>Died</i>	1831
Peter	Male	Black	18	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Cooper				
Peter Pickering	Male	Black	9	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Field	Purchase of Isaac Pickering	1827-28		
Phalie?	Female	Black	23 months	1834	Creole	Not at work				
Philicina	Female	Black	17	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Philip	Male	Black	10	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				

Phillis [Big Phyllis]	Female	Black	28	1817	African Eboe	Field Negro				
Phoebe	Female	Black	23 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825	<i>Not on 1834 register</i>	
Phoebe	Female	Black	12	1817	Creole of St Kitts	House Boy				
Polidore	Male	Black	21	1817	African Timmany	Field Negro				
Prince	Male	Black	6 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		
Quashey	Male	Black	6 months	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Quashey	Male	Black	47	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Boiler			<i>Died - Field</i>	1827/28
Rachel	Female	Black	6 months	1825	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		By birth	1825	<i>Died</i>	1825
Richard	Male	Black	7	1817	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Little Gang</i>			<i>Died - Occupation 'useless'</i>	1822
Ritta	Female	Black	11	1817	Creole of St Kitts	<i>Little Gang</i>				
Rodney	Male	Black	45	1817	African Timmany	Mason, sometimes Driver				
Romeo	Male	Black	35	1817	<i>African Congo</i>	Field Negro			<i>Died</i>	1834
Rose	Female	Black	28	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Sally	Female	Black	4	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1822		
Sam	Male	Black	10	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Stock Boy				
Sam	Male	Black	16	1817	Creole of St Kitts	House Boy	Leesee? Of Wm Abbott	1817	Returned to Mr Abbott	1822
Sarah	Female	Black	3	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
Sarah [Sarah Gillards]	Female	Black	20	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Scipio	Male	Black	14	1817	Creole of St Kitts	<i>Little Gang</i>				
Sharry	Male	Black	50	1817	<i>Cassia African</i>	<i>Watcher Negro Ground</i>			<i>Died -</i>	1822

Simon	Male	Black	8 months	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By birth	1827-28		
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	<i>1822</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		<i>By birth</i>	<i>1822</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>1822</i>
<i>Sophy</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>1817</i>	<i>African Congo</i>	<i>Field Negro</i>			<i>Died</i>	<i>1825</i>
Susannah	Female	Black	18	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Field Negro				
Susannah [Susannah Bryan]	Female	Black	10	1822	Creole of St Kitts	Field	By purchase of Dr. Chas Bryan	1822		
Sylvia	Female	Black	4	1822	Creole of St Kitts		By purchase of Dr. Chas Bryan	1822		
Thina?	Female	Black	2	1831	Creole of St Kitts		By birth	1831		
Thomas	Male	Black	2 months	1825	Creole of St Kitts	Infant	By birth	1825		
Thomas	Male	Black	6	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Little Gang				
<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1817</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Little Gang</i>			<i>Died</i>	<i>1825</i>
Tittle	Male	Mulatto	22	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Carpenter			Returned to Miss Wattley	1822
Tom Dugger [Duggin]	Male	Black	2 years 2 months	1827/28	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By birth	1827-28		
<i>Toss</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1822</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>		<i>By purchase of Dr. Chas Bryan</i>	<i>1822</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>1822</i>
Venus	Female	Black	53	1831	Creole of St Kitts	Cook			By manumission	1831
Violet	Female	Black	4	1817	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work				
<i>William</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>1817</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Little Gang</i>			<i>Died</i>	<i>1834</i>
<i>William</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>1817</i>	<i>Creole of St Kitts</i>	<i>Not at work</i>			<i>Died</i>	<i>1822</i>
William Martyne	Male	Black	1 year 6 months	1834	Creole of St Kitts	Not at work	By Birth	1834		

Rachel Mardenbrough (c.1767-1840) and Robert Claxton (1754-1812)⁸

Introduction

The two people whose children became embedded in Bristol's slavery economy were Robert Claxton and his wife Rachel ne. Mardenbrough. They had at least eleven children, all born in Bristol, nine of whom survived into adulthood. Some of their children returned to the West Indies to live and work, where one set up a settlement for 400 'liberated Africans' in Tortola (part of the British Virgin Islands). In Bristol one son was notorious for being the key pro-slavery advocate in the 1830 'slavery election'; another son is remembered because for thirty years he was the first paid treasurer of the Society of Merchant Venturers. Different members of the family were in business with, and / or married into, other key families involved in Bristol's slavery economy such as the Pinney, Protheroe, Miles and Savage families. Like Robert Claxton himself, some of his sons were involved in Bristol politics and major projects such as the expansion of the docks. Some of the women in the family were richer than the men because of their own particular connections to slavery. Detailed information about their children's lives is below.

Robert Claxton and Rachel Mardenbrough belonged to a relatively small number of Bristol merchant families who were born in the West Indies, both families having been in St. Kitts from the early to mid C18th⁹¹⁰. Born in St. Kitts, they married there on 1 May 1783, though all their children were born in Bristol. Their children who survived into adulthood were: Butler Thompson, Christopher, Rachel Wright, Robert, Elizabeth, George Wright, William, Philip Protheroe, and Margaret Wright.

Both Robert and Rachel Claxton had siblings who remained in St Kitts and Nevis. Robert Claxton's brother, Butler Claxton (1748-c.1806) had several children whose business affairs, including slave ownership, were closely connected with the Bristol Claxton family, and Rachel Mardenbrough's brothers continued to live in St Kitts and run the plantation from which she benefitted financially.

Rachel Mardenbrough and the Mardenbrough estate

Rachel Mardenbrough was the daughter of Christopher and Rhoda Mardenbrough whose plantation on St Kitts is referred to in the compensation records as Mardenbrough¹¹. This estate was in the ownership of the Mardenbrough family from at least the 1750s, as a map showing the estate belonging to a Giles Mardenbrough exists from 1753.¹²

On the 31st August 1772 when Rachel Mardenbrough was a child, a hurricane hit St Kitts and damaged many estates, including the Mardenbrough's. Her father's description of the damage caused to his property gives an idea of the extent of their land at that time: 'Two houses in town and a stable shed

⁸ Robert Claxton is referred to as 'Robert Claxton of Bristol' on *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146649873> [accessed 31st January 2023]

⁹ Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol West India Merchants in the Eighteenth Century, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Vol III* pp.185-184. Morgan lists five people who came to Bristol as merchants from the West Indies: David Dehany, Thomas Daniel Snr., & Jnr., Robert Claxton and James Tobin.

Caribbeana Vol VI p. 41 Vere Langford Oliver: '1707-8. Census of St. Kitts. Parish of Trinity, Palmetto Point: Francis Claxton, aged 32 —1 man, 3 women, 2 boys, 26 slaves.' Oliver also quotes a reference that a Francis Claxton was living in Basseterre, St Kitts in May 1716

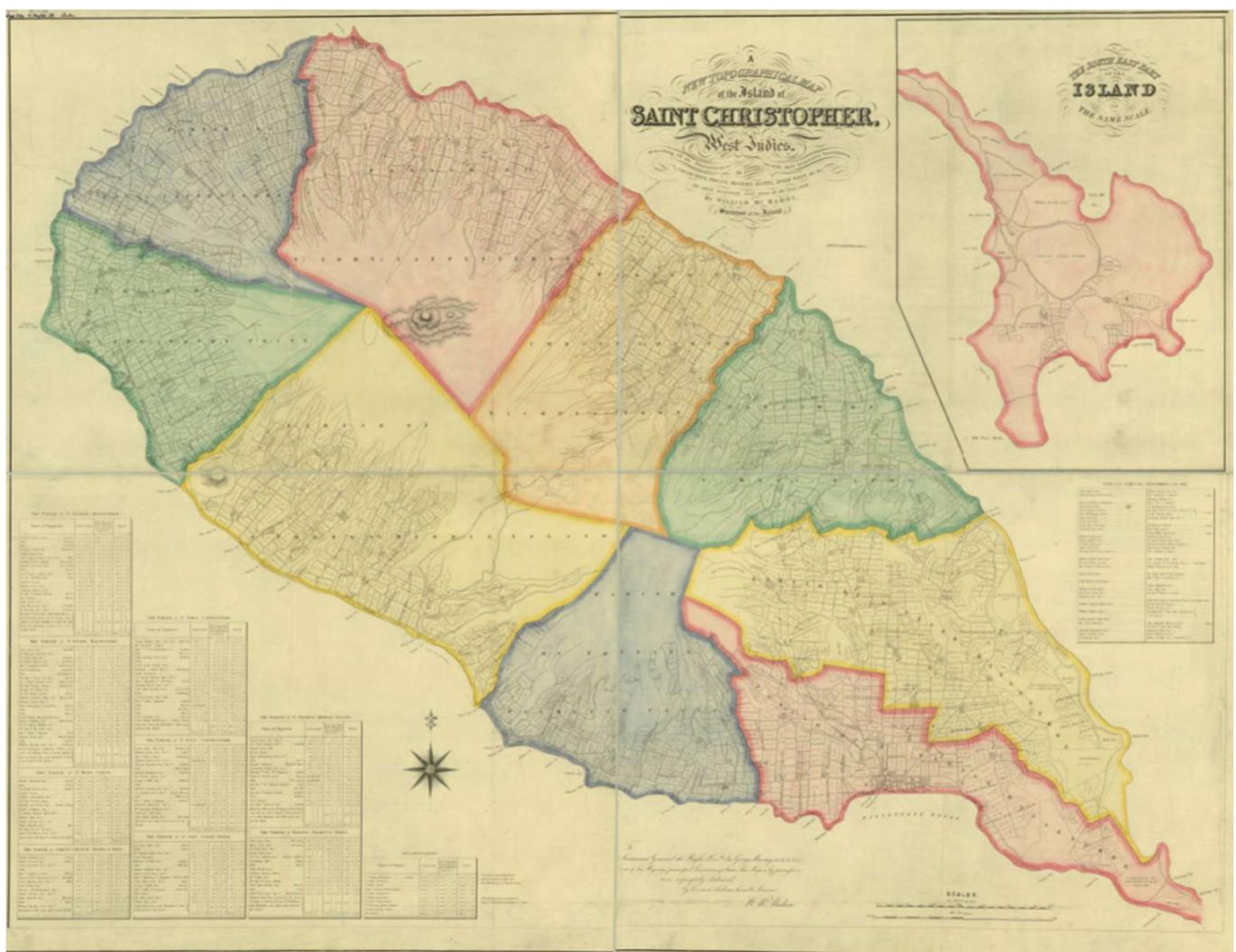
¹⁰ The Mardenbrough estate is marked on a map from 1753: *A new and exact map of the island of St. Christopher in America, according to an actual and accurate survey made in the year 1753. Describing the several parishes, with their respective limits, contents, & churches; also the high ways, the situation of every gentleman's plantation, mills, and houses; with the rivers, and gutts. Likewise the bays, roads, rocks, shoals and soundings that surround the whole.* Map in the Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g5042s.ar198500> [accessed 31.1.2023]

¹¹ 'Mardenborough or Mardenbrough [St Kitts | St Peter Basseterre]', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3407> [accessed 31st January 2023]

¹² 'A new and exact map of the island of St. Christopher...' op. cit.

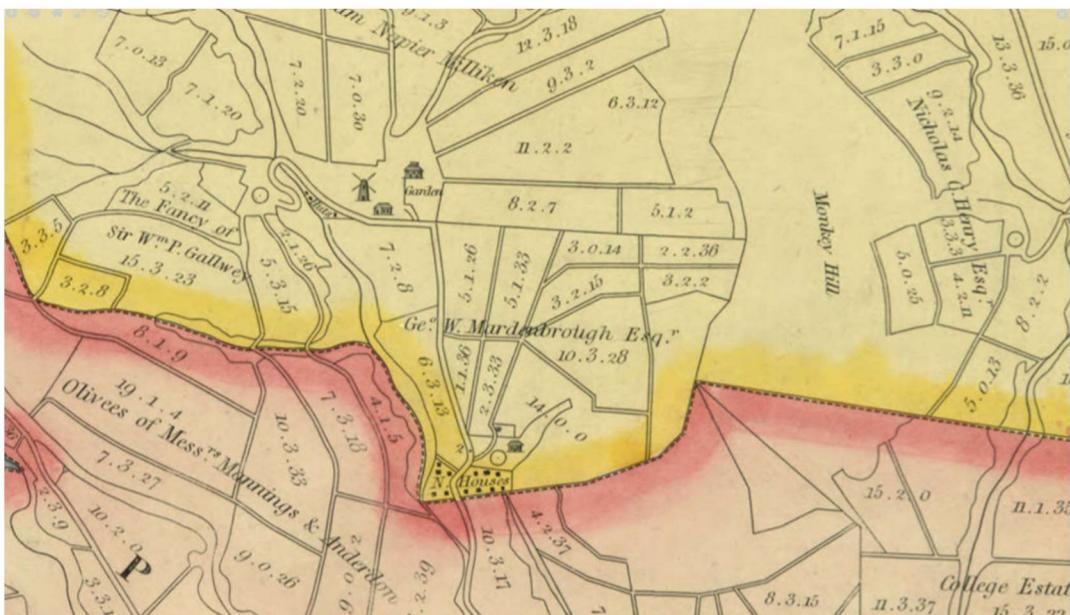
down; mill seventeen months old, new shed over the copper holes, new trash house, kitchen, and hot house, blown down with one blast; east chamber of the dwelling house down, the curtains carried away, part of them were afterwards found in a cane piece, and the rest lost. Many shingles blown off the dwelling house; the water house, chaise house, part of the stable, rabbit house, pigeon house, overseer's house, another out building, all the new fences, fruit trees, logwood trees, and negro houses, all levelled with the ground; one bull, a few goats, and a great quantity of small stock lost. One piece of canes fifteen months old, another ten months, and all the rest torn in pieces.¹³

By the time Rachel Claxton was living in Bristol her brother, George Wright Mardenbrough, was managing the family estate, his father having died in 1806. The estate is clearly marked on an 1828 map of St Kitts (see illustration below) - the legend lists George Mardenbrough as owning 67 acres of 'Cane Lands' and 19 acres of 'Works, Negro Huts, Pasture, Mountain, and uncultivated Land, &c. &c.'¹⁴



¹³ An Account of the late dreadful Hurricane, which happened on the 31st of August, 1772. Also the damage done on that day in the Islands of St. Christopher and Nevis, attempted to be ascertained by The Editor [sic], 1772 pp.22,23
https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/An_Account_of_the_late_dreadful_Hurrican/r1tgAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

¹⁴ A new topographical map of the island of Saint Christopher in the West Indies describing all the plantations with their respective boundaries, the parishes, churches, towns, rivers, gutts, high ways, &c. &c. / by William McMahon, surveyor of the island. American Geographical Society Library Digital Map Collection <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/id/1970> [accessed 31.1.2023]



[Previous page](#): Complete map of St Kitts from 1828 including list of land owners

Above: Detail of map from 1828 of St Kitts showing the Mardenbrough estate in the Parish of St. Peter, Basseterre

Rachel Claxton received £320 in compensation for the 95 enslaved people on the estate in 1834 (out of the total amount awarded for the Mardenbrough estate of £1711 3s 11d).¹⁵ The list of enslaved people for whom she received this award is above. The sum she received in compensation was, however, very much smaller than the money she was bequeathed from her husband who pre-deceased her by 28 years – he not only gave her their house on Park Street in Bristol, but also £1000 per annum, plus the interest from a £4000 investment and a one off amount of £200. £1000 in 1812 would in 2022 be worth £880,000 - the value of wealth relative to the wage of the average worker.¹⁶

There is only one other record for Rachel Claxton - she received a sum of money from her family sometime after 1806, linked to an annuity left by her father, but it has been impossible to find out the value of the money she received¹⁷. Rachel Claxton died in 1840 in Westbury on Trym aged 72 and has a memorial in St. Marks Church (the Mayor's Chapel), Park Street, as does her husband.¹⁸

¹⁵ The total award of £1,711 3s 11d was split between four people: Rachel Claxton ne. Mardenbrough, Christopher Mardenbrough (another brother who had purchased the estate in 1831 from his brother George Wright), Neville Reid and John Dixon – both assignees for the firm Manning & Anderdon who received multiple awards. 'St Kitts 394 (Mardenbrough)', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/25308> [accessed 3rd February 2023]

¹⁶ All comparative money values are given using the Measuring Worth calculator <https://www.measuringworth.com/index.php>

¹⁷ Sometime after 1806, long after Rachel Claxton (ne. Mardenbrough) was living in Bristol, she received money from an annuity left in her father's will to Sarah Gumbs (Rachel's sister). Their father died in 1806, and the annuity fell into arrears and although an annuity can't be reassigned, the arrears can be, so Sarah Gumbs reassigned (presumably in her will) the arrears to Rachel Claxton. There's no record of how much this sum was, but it would have been money which Rachel had independent to her husband. 'Rachel Claxton (née Mardenbrough)', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25386> [accessed 11th April 2023]. My thanks to Steven Carter for explaining what the UCL entry meant.

¹⁸ Bristol and Avon Family History Society Church Inscriptions database online <https://bafhs.org.uk/databases/inscriptions-local/?v=79cba1185463>

Robert Claxton, the first generation to live in Bristol

Rachel's husband, Robert Claxton¹⁹ was the younger of two sons born to Elizabeth and Butler Claxton in St Kitts, their other son was also called Butler, and he remained in the West Indies (of whom more below). Their father died in 1759, when Robert and Butler were still young boys; six years later their mother remarried Dr George Thompson from St Kitts.²⁰ Robert and Rachel Claxton moved to Bristol sometime in their late 20s or early 30s, where Robert Claxton became a member of the mercantile and political establishment, supporting the abolition of slavery whilst still being heavily involved in the slavery economy.

Politics and philanthropy

As a Whig (Liberal) politician, Robert Claxton was part of Bristol Corporation from his early thirties in 1787 to his death in 1812, acting as Mayor in 1798. It's highly likely he was an Abolitionist as there is a record of him chairing a Public Dinner on 2nd April 1812 at the Assembly Room in honour of Sir Samuel Romilly who was standing as MP on an anti-slavery ticket (he lost the election in favour of the pro-slavery Edward Protheroe and Richard Hart Davies).²¹

Robert Claxton was President of the Anchor Society in 1789²², set up by the Whigs in 1769 to emulate the slave trader Edward Colston's philanthropy who'd died 46 years earlier, one of three such Societies which carried out charitable work (the other two were the Dolphin Society for Tories and the Grateful Society which was non-political). Gorsky suggests that the three societies were set up around a 'conception of need centred on the integrity of the family or household as the "core" unit of city life. The charitable relationship was not a straightforward hierarchy of rich and poor, but sprang instead from this mutualist vision of the city as community of households.'²³ The Anchor Society supported women of child-bearing age, and the Dolphin Society supported apprentices. In the year which Claxton was President the society collected £350 in donations - this is equivalent to £598,000 relative value in relation to wages of the average worker, and it is interesting to note that in 2022 the Anchor Society's collection was £110,006.²⁴

In 1792 Robert Claxton was one of the Corporation's nominees present at the first Joint Committee meeting between the Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV) and Bristol Corporation to discuss improvements to Bristol's harbour – something which had been under discussion for many years because the huge tidal reach of the river Avon severely restricted the timing of when ships could dock, unload, etc. However the Committee only met a few times and then went into abeyance because of the war with France until 1801 before anything more was done; again Claxton was present at meetings between the Council and SMV, and supported the initial scheme put forward to improve the facilities by building a floating harbour. But by 1803 a new, much more ambitious and more expensive scheme had been approved by the Council and SMV. Claxton withdrew his support and became an active part of the group lobbying Parliament to alter the plans, alongside other West India merchants including Philip Protheroe, Richard Bright, Peter Baillie and George Gibbs, who weren't objecting to a new floating harbour as such,

¹⁹ Referred to as 'Robert Claxton of Bristol' on UCL's database 'Robert Claxton of Bristol', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146649873> [accessed 11th April 2023].

²⁰ Robert Claxton's father was Butler Claxton who died in St Kitts in 1759. He'd married Elizabeth ne. Hardiman in 1748 and after Butler Claxton's death she married Dr George Thompson in 1766 in St Kitts. *Caribbeana Vol VI* p.42 Vere Langford Oliver

²¹ *Bristol Mirror* 21 March 1812

From Wulfstan to Colston p.151, Roger Ball and Mark Steeds, Bristol Radical History Group 2020

²² *Bristol Lists: Municipal and Miscellaneous*, p.142, Alfred Beaven, Bristol, 1899

²³ *Charity, mutuality and philanthropy: voluntary provision in Bristol 1800-70* Martin Gorsky, University of Bristol PhD Thesis, 1995 p.175

²⁴ Wikipedia: Anchor Society https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchor_Society [accessed 21.4.23]; the Anchor Society's current website doesn't mention its links to Colston <https://www.anchorsociety.co.uk/> [accessed 21.4.23]

but to a scheme which they felt was unnecessarily large and costly. However their lobbying failed, and construction started on the more ambitious new harbour in 1804.²⁵

Business

When Robert Claxton first came to Bristol he was in business with the Protheroe family, a firm he joined in 1783 and remained with for 25 years. His son, William, describes in his diary how the partnership came about: 'My father created for himself a business with the West Indies in the island of St. Christopher, and subsequently, under the auspices of Messrs. Davies & Protheroe of Bristol was so successful that on his coming to England, Mr. Davies retired from business and my father was taken into partnership by Mr. Protheroe. Hence arose the House of Protheroe and Claxton so well known in this City. The elder Mr. Protheroe dieing [sic], his sons Edward and Philip succeeded to their father, but on my eldest brother coming into the business, the partners separated and our branch became "Robert Claxton & Son".'²⁶

Between 1785 and 1800 Protheroe & Claxton ran one of the largest sugar importer businesses in Bristol, importing sugar cultivated by enslaved labour. As William Claxton said in his diary 'the business of this House was so extensive that they one year imported upwards of 7,000 hogshead of Sugar.'²⁷ The company also owned ships trading with the West Indies such as the *Edward* which regularly traded with Nevis, and in 1786 the *Nevis* which was built for Tobin & Pinney, Protheroe & Claxton. The *Edward*, a second *Edward*, and the *Rachael* all worked for both Pinney & Tobin and Protheroe & Claxton. According to Pinney's biographer 'The two houses not only shared the ownership of these ships, but all continued to take up additional shipping for their joint account whenever the size of the crop at Nevis seemed to require a third vessel.'²⁸

In addition to importing sugar and investing in shipping, together Protheroe & Claxton gave mortgages to plantations in Jamaica and St. Vincent which enslaved hundreds of people.²⁹ By this point in the history of transatlantic slavery many planters in the West Indies were reliant on money borrowed from British-based merchants to keep their businesses afloat, and many resident owners of enslaved people died hugely indebted to their creditors / mortgagees. This is one reason why so many people living in Britain received slavery compensation – they had lent money to plantation owners, so when compensation was awarded they received the compensation as repayment (or part-payment) of debts owed to them.³⁰ Plantations changed hands many times between different mortgagees, as can be seen from the transcription of deeds from St Vincent in 1809 involving not only members of the Protheroe and Claxton families, but other Bristol merchants too, such as John Cave, Henry Bengough and Matthew Wright. By the time compensation was awarded the Claxton's had no interest in these particular estates, so the

²⁵ *The Construction of the Floating Harbour in Bristol: 1804-1809* R. A. Buchanan *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Association* Vol Ixxxviii, p.187, 1969

I'm grateful to Peter Malpass for giving me specific information about Claxton and the docks, and for letting me read his draft essay *Richard Bright and the Politics of Harbour improvement at Bristol*.

²⁶ *Diary of William Claxton, 1842 – 1873* Bristol Archives SMV/2/3/3/2a

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The largest importers of sugar in Bristol between 1785 and 1800 were:

Michael Atkins - 40,289 hogsheads William Miles - 36,543; Robert Gordon 35,070; Protheroe & Claxton 31,897;

Thomas Daniel & Sons 20,993. *Bristol West India Merchants in the Eighteenth Century* op. cit. p.207

²⁸ *A West-India Fortune*, Richard Pares, 1950 pp. 213-214

²⁹ Between 1798 and 1804 Robert Claxton with the Protheroes gave mortgages to two plantations in Jamaica (Longville with 143 enslaved people in 1809 and Stoakes Hall with 100 enslaved people in 1802) and one plantation in St. Vincent (Ratho Mill with 263 enslaved people in 1817). 'Robert Claxton of Bristol', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146649873> [accessed 3rd January 2023].

³⁰ See *The economics of emancipation Jamaica & Barbados 1823-1843* Kathleen Mary Butler The University of North Carolina Press, 1995

assumption is that their loans would have been repaid long before 1834 when compensation was awarded.³¹

The North Wales and Williams estates on Nevis

However, there are two estates in Nevis which Robert Claxton was associated with from 1806, in which the family continued to have a financial stake twenty five years later. In 1806 Robert Claxton as a partner in Protheroe & Claxton was party to two legal agreements with Robert Claxton's nephew in Nevis, (Butler Claxton est.1778-1824), relating to the North Wales and Williams estates.

Butler Claxton's father, Butler Claxton Sr. (Robert's brother), had died some sometime between August 1805 when he made his will and December 1806 when the legal agreement described below was drawn up. The details of Butler Claxton Sr.'s will are interesting as not only does it refer to his Williams and North Wales plantations, but it's also a clear example of how enslaved people were treated as property, how women inherited as well as men, and how whole estates were passed from one generation to another. In the will he bequeathed £1000 sterling to three of his children: William, Ann and Robert; as well as smaller sums to his daughter Sally and wife, also Sally whom he said 'can reside in either of his dwelling houses on his plantations called Williams and North Wales... with the use of a good House and a good Milch Cow'. He also left her during her life the 'use of the following Mulatto and other slaves that is to say Sarah Maria Polly Nancy Kitsey and Sally Mulatto's and my negro woman Patty to be at her sole disposal at or before her death.' He also bequeathed to his daughter Ann Claxton his 'mulatto girl July and a Negro Boy named Mial?' and to his son Robert, his 'negro boy named Matthace.' The rest of his estate, including his enslaved people, he left to his oldest son, Butler Claxton Jnr who was his sole executor. However, he says that 'As many of my Negroes as are not Mortgaged and of equal value may be substituted [for those named]', indicating that there was a mortgage outstanding on the estate.

Indeed, when Butler Claxton Sr. died he owed Protheroe & Claxton £5151 11s 10d which had been lent to him and his son 'on account'. The agreements drawn up on 26th December 1806 between them and

³¹ There are more details about estates in St Vincent which the Protheroes and Claxtons were mortgagees for in Kenneth Morgan's transcription of St Vincent deeds: *EAP345: A survey of the endangered archives of St Vincent, West Indies, during the slavery era* http://eap.bl.uk/downloads/eap345_survey.pdf [accessed 29.3.23]:

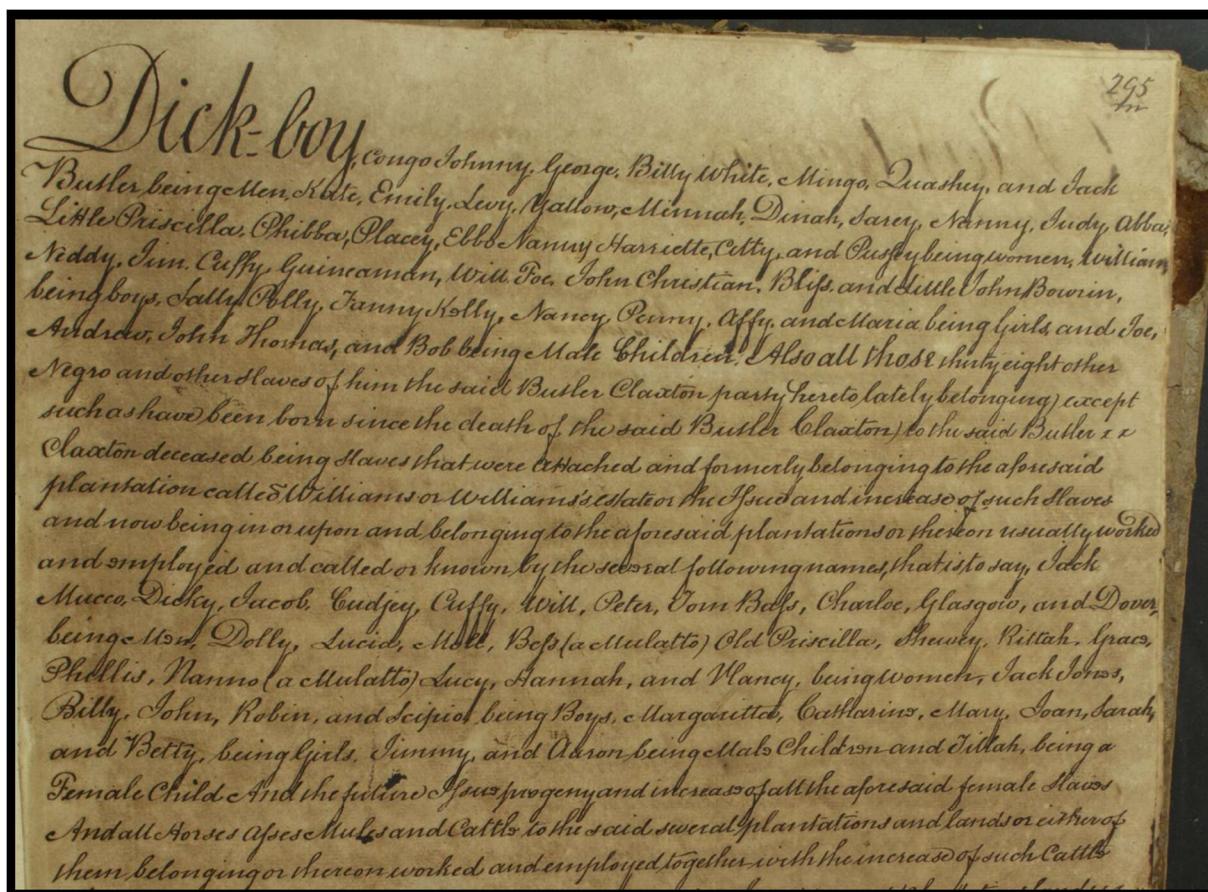
- f. 93-105 Entered 26 April 1809 Assignment from Messrs Edward & Philip Protheroe & Robert Claxton (merchants and co-partners, Bristol) and John Cave (esquire, Bristol) in trust for Messrs Robert Claxton & Son: an indenture dated 21 October 1808. The Protheroes & Claxton sell to Cave an estate called Raths Mill, Calliaqua, Saint Georges parish, Saint Vincent, 212 acres, 174 slaves. An indenture of mortgage for this property was dated 1 November 1804 between Edward Sharpe, esquire of the one part and Edward & Philip Protheroe and Robert Claxton of the other by William John Struth, esquire, their attorney. The property had been acquired in 1804 for £6,000 sterling. The estate is now acquitted, released and discharged to Robert Claxton and Butler Thompson Claxton of Bristol.
- f. 106-36 Entered 26 April 1809 Transfer of mortgage: an indenture made on 21 October 1808 between i) Edward Protheroe, Robert Claxton and Philip Protheroe (merchants and copartners, Bristol) and ii) Henry Bengough (esquire and alderman of Bristol) and Matthew Wright (merchant, Bristol). The Protheroes & Claxton sell Rivulet estate, Saint George parish, Saint Vincent, 162 acres plus 45 acres of pasture in the valley of Marriaqua, Saint George parish. Also sold is Revolution Hall plantation, Saint George parish, Saint Vincent, 146 acres, to Bengough and Wright. The buildings, utensils and slaves of these estates are included in the transactions. Numerous financial details given in this long document. Two schedules of the names of the slaves on Rivulet and Revolution Hall plantations are included.
- f. 267-76 Entered 15 July 1809 Release of Belmont estate: an indenture dated 14 July 1809 between i) John Cruickshank (esquire, Saint Vincent) and ii) Alexander Cruickshank and Alexander Cumming (esquires, Saint Vincent). Refers to the sale by John Cruickshank to Alexander Cruickshank and Alexander Cumming Belmont sugar estate, Saint Davids parish, Saint Vincent, 220 acres, 140 slaves. The slaves are named. The sale price was £28,000 sterling. The payments for this by bills of exchange are itemised. The estate currently has various encumbrances, including £6,000 sterling to James Grant, about £10,000 sterling in a mortgage to Protheroe & Claxton (merchants, Bristol).

Butler Claxton mortgaged the North Wales estate (140 acres) and the Williams estate (63 acres) to Protheroe & Claxton and laid down a schedule of payments over 3 years for the debt of £5151 at 6% interest. It's possible that these payments were never made as there is a record that Butler Claxton Jnr left the North Wales estate insolvent as a result of which he spent a spell in prison for debt.³²

The legal documents drawn up in 1806 name the 48 enslaved people on the North Wales estate and the 39 enslaved people on Williams who were included as property in the agreement:

From the North Wales estate: 'Tom, Frank, Ned, Dick boy, Congo Johnny, George, Billy White, Mingo, Quashey, and Jack Butler being men, Kate, Emily, Yallow, Minnah, Dinah, Sarey, Nanny, Judy, Abba, Little Priscilla, Phibba, Placey, Ebbo Nanny, Harriott, City, and Pussey being women, William, Neddy, Jim, Cuffy, Guineaman, Will, For, John Christian, Bliss and Little John Bowrin, being boys, Sally, Polly, Fanny, Kolly, Nancy, Penny, Affy and Maria, being girls, and Jo, Andrew, John Thomas, and Bob being male children.'

From the Williams estate: 'Jack, Mucco, Dicky, Jacob, Cudjey, Cuffy, Will, Peter, Tom Bass, Charloe, Glasgow, and Dover, being men, Dolly, Lucia, Moll, Bess (a Mulatto), Old Priscilla, Shewey?, Rittah, Grace, Phillis, Nanno (a Mulatto), Lucy, Hannah, and Nancy, being women, Jack Jones, Billy, John, Robin, and Scipio, being boys, Margaritta, Catherine, Mary, Joan, Sarah, and Betty, being girls. Jimmy and Aaron being male children and Tillah being a female child.'³³



³² Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for this information about Butler Claxton.

³³ The legal documents are summarised in *Caribbeana Vol VI* pp. 41, 42 Vere Langford Oliver; however these are only a summary. The full original documents available online: *Common Records 1805-1808*, Nevis, pp. 293-305 digitised by British Library <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP794-1-1-30> [accessed 1.2.23]

Above: *List of enslaved people on the North Wales and Williams estates which form part of a mortgage agreement between Butler Claxton in Nevis and Protheroe and Claxton in Bristol from Nevis Common Records 1805-1808. Note that John, Frank and Ned appear on the previous page of the document.*

Six years after that agreement was signed, in January 1812, another legal document was drawn up by Butler Claxton Jnr concerning two enslaved people, 'a certain Mulatto woman slave called Betsey' and her daughter 'a Mestize Girl called Kitty' (who had been born since 1806). I assume Betsey is the same woman as Bess listed above (though she might not be). The agreement was between Butler Claxton, William Higgins (a Nevis barrister), Robert Claxton & son in Bristol, and Reverent Robert Pemberton in St Kitts³⁴. This indenture gave Robert Pemberton ownership of Betsey and Kitty, for a cost of Nevis £170. On 17th April 1812 Robert Pemberton petitioned for Betsey and Kitty to be manumitted, and this was granted on 23 April 1812.³⁵

Robert Claxton's later life and will

Back in Bristol, far removed from the enslaved people in Nevis, there was a business split between Robert Claxton and the Protheroe family in 1808 when two separate companies were formed: Robert Claxton & Son (Butler Thompson Claxton) and Protheroe & Savage (the Savage in the partnership being Robert Claxton's son-in-law, John Savage – see below). It's likely the split took place because, as Morgan says, 'by then each family opposed each other politically on the slavery issue'.³⁶ Note that Philip (the younger) and George Protheroe received compensation of over £5000 for 601 enslaved people in 1834.³⁷

Robert Claxton continued to do business with St Kitts and Nevis. He and his son owned at least two ships trading with those islands – the *Elizabeth* and the *St. Vincent*, described as 'the largest West-Indiaman in the port'. In his will Robert Claxton refers to 'his messagges or tenements, stores, warehouses and other premises in the town of Bassertaire in St Christopher' as well as 'mortgages in the West Indies', so he continued to own property in St Kitts (and possibly elsewhere in the West Indies) decades after he was established in Bristol.^{38 39}

³⁴ Rev Robert Pemberton was the husband of Elizabeth ne. Williams; she was one of two daughters who owned the Williams estate before it came into the ownership of Butler Claxton Snr.; the other daughter was Frances Williams, married to Rev William Jones. Frances Jones died in Bristol in 1813 and was a good friend of Mrs Pinney, leaving her £10 for a ring in her will. John Pinney had lent or given Frances Williams some money and he had helped with her son when he was in Bristol; Pinney had also taken her daughter, Sally, who had an eye complaint to a school in Weymouth. Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for this information. See also *Frances Jones (née Williams)*, *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146666817> [accessed 1st February 2023]

³⁵ *Common Records 1810-14, Nevis* pp.498-506 digitised by British Library, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP794-1-1-32> [accessed 1.2.23]. It was unusual for a request of manumission to be made to the Legislature, but in Rev Pemberton's case he sought to free Betsey (also Betsy) and Kitsy (also Kitty) without paying the required security. In correspondence with Christine Eickelmann, she thinks this is because he would have had to provide security because he was no longer considered a Nevis resident, having moved to St Kitts, and as he didn't want to / couldn't provide the security he had to make a request to the Legislature.

³⁶ *Bristol West India Merchants in the eighteenth Century* p.197 op. cit.

³⁷ *From Wulfstan to Colston* pp.310-317 op. cit.

³⁸ The St. Vincent's first owners had been the Protheroes, but by 1817 it was being advertised 'for freight or passage' to St. Kitts and Nevis by the Claxtons. At some time between 1818 and 1821 the St. Vincent passed from Butler Thompson Claxton to Miles and Kington. *Records of Bristol Ships 1800-1838*, Grahame E. Farr, Bristol Record Society Vol XV 1950 p.41

Bristol Mirror 27 September 1817

³⁹ Will of Robert Claxton [accessed on Ancestry 6.2.2023]

Robert Claxton died in June 1812 aged 58. His will⁴⁰ runs to 12 pages, and the key points are: He left his wife Rachel his house at no. 9 Park Street as well as all his furniture, linen, etc. from his houses in Bristol and Almondsbury, and his 'messuages or tenements in the parish of Saint Augustine'. The latter were to be sold and invested so that she could receive a legacy of £1000 per annum unless she re-married; even if she was to remarry she was still to benefit annually from the interest of a separate £4000 investment made for her. The will stipulates that when she died the money which had been invested for her was to be shared out equally between their children. She was also to receive £200 immediately after her husband's death.

Robert Claxton's property in St. Kitts was to be sold, and the money held in trust for his son Butler Thompson Claxton and his wife. Legacies of £3000 each went to 4 of his sons (Christopher, Robert, William and Philip Prothero); to his daughters Elizabeth and Margaret he left £4000 each. His Trustees were required to sell his land in Almondsbury to provide an annuity of £200 for his son George on reaching 21 as well as a legacy of £3000. He makes additional bequests to each of his children of £3000 other than Butler Thompson Claxton and his daughter Rachel (married to John Savage) whom, he says, had already had the equivalent. He left his son Butler Thompson Claxton 'the portraits of his late mother and her second husband Dr. George Thompson' and a sum of £500.

The rest of his estate was to be sold and invested by his trustees so 'that my son and partua [sic] Butler Thompson Claxton and the partners in his mercantile house or other trades and businesses in which he has an interest can borrow that money at interest'; he also gives his wife and the other trustees the right to dispose of his West India mortgages 'as they shall deem satisfactory and proper.' The whole of the estate which remained after his bequests was to be divided equally between all of his children.⁴¹

Thus Robert Claxton's wealth as indicated in his will was £41,700 (the cash bequests) and the money which would be liquidated from the sale of property in England and the West Indies to provide, at the very least, a £1000 annuity and a £4000 investment. If his total estate is estimated at £50,000 it would make him one of the richest merchants in Bristol at that time⁴², with a current equivalent value of £44,000,000 of wealth relative to the average worker.

There is no way of knowing what state Robert Claxton's business affairs were in when he died, so it's possible that his bequests were never realised. His son, William, writes in his diary: 'On my father's death in 1812 the affairs of the House being embarrassed in consequence of the eruption of a Volcanic Mountain in St. Vincent, were put under Trust, and I [William] was placed in the Counting House under my brother [Butler Thompson]'. This refers to the eruption of the Soufriere volcano in April and May 1812, famously painted by Turner⁴³, and in which at least 34 enslaved people died. The damage caused by the eruption is described in the *Bristol Mirror* of 27th June 1812: '... On the estates in the vicinity of the mountains, the ashes are said to be from two to three feet deep, - that two of the principal rivers have been dried up and new ones formed, - and that many of the estates in that quarter have been much

⁴⁰ Robert Claxton's will was made on 22nd January 1812 and proved on 6th February 1813. The Executors and Trustees were his wife, Rachel Claxton; his eldest son Butler Thompson Claxton; his friend John Cave and Arthur Palmer the Younger.

⁴¹ Robert Claxton's will made 22 Jan 1812. There are several other pages of the will relating to his business affairs which I can't read.

⁴² As a comparison Graham Bush lists the value of estates of members of Bristol's Corporation between 1820 and 1851, and the top 15 people have estates valued from £350k (Peter Maze d. 1869) to £45k (Richard Bright d. 1840 and Charles Ludlow Walker d. 1856) *Bristol and Its Municipal Government 1820-1851* pp.234-237 Graham Bush, Bristol Record Society Publications Vol XXIX 1976. Thank you to Peter Malpass for collating the information

⁴³ <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/j-m-w-turners-the-eruption-of-the-soufriere-mountains-in-the-island-of-st-vincent-30-april-1812>

injured.' Robert Claxton imported sugar and rum from St. Vincent⁴⁴, and it's possible that the volcanic eruption affected this, but I've found no reference to him having any interest in plantations on the island.

Butler Thompson Claxton (1785-1842)

Introduction

Robert Claxton's eldest son, Butler Thompson Claxton⁴⁵ (1785-1842) who was born and based in Bristol, took over his father's business activities when Robert Claxton died.⁴⁶ As a teenager in 1799 Butler Thompson Claxton was apprenticed to his father's business partner Philip Protheroe; eight years later, when he became a member of the Merchant Venturers in 1807, he's still recorded as being Protheroe's apprentice – the year before his father stopped being in business with Protheroe.⁴⁷

Butler Thompson Claxton had an interest in several estates in the West Indies, exploiting the labour of hundreds of enslaved people, continued his father's business as a sugar merchant, and had shares in ships trading with the West Indies.

He was also in partnership with Philip John Miles and others, as rope-makers in Bristol under the firm of Miles, Claxton & Co., but the partnership was dissolved in 1821. Philip John Miles received one of the largest compensation awards in Bristol when slavery was abolished for owning 1,381 enslaved people on estates in Jamaica and Trinidad.⁴⁸ It's possible that there were other partnerships between the Miles and Claxton families, or that the families were close friends, as one of Butler Thompson's brothers named their daughter born in 1835 Clara Miles Claxton.

In January 1809 Butler Thompson Claxton married Lucy Shuckburgh Anderdon (1789-1851), daughter of London based West India merchant and slave owner John Proctor Anderdon. On both her father's and mother's side Lucy Shuckburgh had many relations involved in the slavery economy,⁴⁹ and it seems from her will that not only was she financially independent of her husband, but also richer.

Butler Thompson owned several plantations in Nevis and one in Berbice (British Guiana) (details below) as well as being a mortgagee for plantations in Nevis. For example he was the mortgagee for Shaw's plantation on Nevis owned by resident slave owner James Laurence who owed £7,000 to Robert Claxton & Son. The debt was paid by granting the estate to Butler Thompson Claxton who then in 1818 passed it to another Bristol merchant, William Weare to pay off a £10,000 loan which he owed to Weare. It was

⁴⁴ For example on the 29th August 1812 the *Bristol Mirror* reports two ships, the *Charlotte* and the *Elizabeth* from St Vincent with consignments of sugar and rum for R. Claxton & Son

⁴⁵ Presumably his middle name Thompson was after his father's step-father, Dr George Thompson (see footnote 15)

⁴⁶ After his father died in December 1812 Butler Thompson Claxton filed for bankruptcy as 'Merchant, Dealer and Chapman', however, this was superseded in January 1813 – I'm not quite sure what this means in relation to his business. *The Gazette* 26 January 1813

⁴⁷ *Britain, Country Apprentices Register 1710-1808*

⁴⁸ Miles, Claxton and Co., Legacies of British Slavery database <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/firm/view/1949604806> [accessed 6.4.23]. Christopher Claxton's daughter was Clara Miles, she died aged 6 or 7 in January 1842

⁴⁹ Lucy Shuckburgh Claxton ne. Anderdon had the following relations involved in the slavery economy: her uncles, John Cave, Charles Anthony Partridge and Henry Hope Tobin who were all Bristol based and married to her mother's sisters (her mother was Ann Oliver); her brothers, James Hughes Anderdon (who received compensation for three estates in Nevis) and John Lavicount Anderdon (who owned ten estates in St Kitts and Nevis which in 1834 had a total of 1,125 enslaved people); her grandparents on her mother's side were Elizabeth Vassall and Thomas Oliver originally from New England, but who then owned an estate, Friar's Hill, in Antigua before living in Bristol (for which six of Lucy Shuckburgh's relatives benefitted from the compensation of £1984 16s 10d for 137 enslaved people).

Weare who received compensation of £522 11s 2d for the 28 enslaved people on the estate.⁵⁰ Other plantations in St James, Nevis were mortgaged to both Butler Thompson Claxton and William Weare.⁵¹

Ship ownership

Until the 1820s Butler Thompson Claxton owned several ships trading with the West Indies,^{52 53} but in 1825 the Pinneys came to an agreement with him and others trading with St Kitts and Nevis to allow only Pinneys' ships to consign all the sugar from those islands. According to Pares's book about the Pinney family, the Pinneys concession in relation to the deal was that '[they] seem to have bought off the Claxtons by employing Christopher Claxton [Butler Thompson Claxton's brother] as their chief captain at unusually large allowances.'⁵⁴ John Pinney was a Nevis plantation owner and sugar merchant who settled in Bristol in 1783 after leaving Nevis, and whose house on Great George Street is now open to the public as the Georgian House Museum. There were many connections between the Pinney family and the Claxton family – for example Pinney had employed Butler Claxton Snr as clerk in a shop he owned on Nevis; Pinney bought a former enslaved man from Butler Claxton Snr called Prince, and an enslaved woman called Grace; one of Butler Thompson Claxton's brothers (Philip Protheroe) married the daughter of Pinney's Mountravers plantation manager. Eickelmann and Small have done extensive research into Pinney's Mountravers plantation on Nevis and the people of colour connected to the plantation.⁵⁵

Enslaved people on the Whim estate

In 1825 Butler T Claxton is recorded as being the owner of six plantations with 515 enslaved people⁵⁶:

- 89 enslaved people on Hanley's estate, Nevis
- 51 enslaved people on Meales estate, Nevis
- 114 enslaved people on North Wales estate, Nevis
- 38 enslaved people on Powels estate, Nevis
- 117 enslaved people on Prospect estate in Berbice / British Guiana
- 106 enslaved people on The Whim estate, Nevis (in 1828 not 1825)

In order that those 515 enslaved people aren't totally anonymous, below are the names of the enslaved people who appeared on the 1828 register for the Whim estate. The register was made by his brother Robert Claxton on 15th January 1828. There had been 14 new births: Billy, Christianna, Elizabeth, Fanny, Henry, Job, James, Kitsey, Martha, Milley, Robert, Rosianna, Robert and William Riley. There had also been 'losses' since the previous return in 1825. Those no longer in Butler Thompson Claxton's possession were:

⁵⁰ 'William Weare', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25187> [accessed 18th April 2023]

⁵¹ *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734 to 1834 Part 2 p. 901, 902* Christine Eickelmann <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountraversplantationcommunity.html> [accessed 12th March 2023]

⁵² 1818-1820 the company Robert Claxton & Son owned the St Vincent described as 'the largest West-Indiaman in the port [of Bristol]'; they sold the ship in 1821 to Miles and Kington. He also had part ownership of the Lucy Anne built in Bristol in 1819 with Thomas Skryme Protheroe, John Harris, Thomas Protheroe and Thomas Wadley, merchants, Bristol. John Lavicourt Anderdon, merchant, and Adolphus Pugh Johnson, insurance broker, London. *Records of Bristol Ships 1800-1838* pp. 36, 81 op. cit.

⁵³ Butler Thompson Claxton was also in business as a rope-maker in the firm Miles, Claxton & Co., with Philip John Miles, John Chubb, William Acraman and William Birch. He left the partnership in March 2021 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/firm/view/1949604806> [accessed 12.05.2023]

⁵⁴ The other two companies which agreed to this deal were Evan Baillie & Son, and Protheroe & Savage. A *West-India Fortune* p.215 op. cit.

⁵⁵ *The Mountravers Plantation Community* op. cit. There are many references in Part 2 'The enslaved people' to Butler Claxton Snr.. For example on p. 474: *Grace (born perhaps c 1752-1757), a black 'wench', was purchased for £50:2:0 on 21 April 1772. Her former owner, Butler Claxton, also sold Philley to John Pretor Pinney. In his early twenties and recently married, it is possible that Claxton was selling off his former mistresses.* (p.474)

⁵⁶ In nearly all cases the slave return states that the firm Protheroe and Savage were 'trustees of B. T. Claxton, owner', with the return actually being made by his brother, Robert Claxton, then resident in Nevis.

- Betty, a Creole aged about 88 who had died
- Dick (aged about 70), Lydia (30), and John (37) who were all Creoles and were sold to resident slave owner Finlay Nicholson who was the previous owner of the Whim Estate. There's no way of knowing why Nicholson bought back those three enslaved people from the 100 enslaved people on the estate which he'd sold to Butler Thompson Claxton sometime between 1825 and 1828. It's not been possible to find out what happened to them after 1828.
- Frank Moore, a Creole aged about 41 was 'Criminal & hanged by Sentence of Law'⁵⁷ At this period there was a certain amount of unrest on Nevis with people thieving, sugar works burning, people absconding, etc; Frank Moore's crime must have been something such as insurrection, murder or arson for him to have been hanged. He was convicted and sentenced on 14th and 17th May and hanged on the 28th May 1827. Robert Claxton received N£100 in compensation for Frank Moore's death on behalf of Butler Thompson Claxton.⁵⁸
- Joe Moore, a 'sambo' aged about 29, had absconded - he obviously had the same second name as Frank which implies there were probably originally enslaved by someone called Moore. Both are on the 1817 register for The Whim, along with a John Moore who was a 'mulatto' then aged 10. John Moore is on the 1831 Whim register, but Joe Moore doesn't appear to be in any registers after 1828, so it is possible that he wasn't found after absconding.
- Mingo, a Creole aged about 36, was manumitted⁵⁹

Above: Part of the 1828 register of enslaved people for the Whim estate owned by Butler Thompson Claxton who was resident in Bristol, so the return was made by his brother, Robert Claxton in Nevis. Note that the registers only record 'additions' and 'deductions' to the previous register, so with 14 new births

⁵⁷ The Mountavvers Plantation Community op. cit. p.829 Eickelmann quotes the Nevis Council and Assembly Minutes of 19 June 1827 (CO 186/13) which says that Frank Moore was from Hamilton's estate. However he is clearly listed in the registers for the Whim in both 1817 and 1828. In 1825 the Whim estate is still in the ownership of Finlay Nicholson, so Butler Thompson Claxton must have purchased it and all the enslaved people on it between then and June 1827. 'The Whim [Nevis]', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3395> [accessed 8th February 2023]

⁵⁸ Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for this information

⁵⁹ Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834 (registers for The Whim on Nevis, 1817, 1825, 1828, 1831, 1834)

and seven 'deductions' the total number of enslaved people on the Whim in 1828 whom Butler Thompson Claxton claimed ownership over is recorded as 106 people.

As well as Mingo on the Whim estate, a small number of other people enslaved by Butler Thompson Claxton were freed. In 1824 John Fraser Arthurton (of whom more below) paid N£70 for Cudjoe from the North Wales estate to be freed. This is the same person who is recorded as 'Cudjey' in 1806 from the Williams estate (see above) and recorded as aged 60 in 1817, so by 1824, when freed, he would have been 67 or 68.

A few years later, in 1828 Butler Thompson Claxton freed two other enslaved people from his North Wales estate, Ben, a mulatto born in Nevis who would have been aged about 31 and Maria an African who would have been aged about 50. On 20 May 1828 Butler Thompson Claxton sold to John Fraser Arthurton 'a certain negro man Slave named Mingo late belonging to the Estate called North Wales to have and to hold the said Slave named Mingo as aforesaid to his proper use and behalf forever.' The record goes on to say that Robert Claxton - acting as attorney for BTC's Trustees Protheroe & Claxton - will 'from time to time hereafter warrant and defend the said Slave named Mingo against all and every person and persons whatsoever claiming or to claim by from or under me the said slave named Mingo.'⁶⁰ The sale was for N£120. Strangely in the North Wales return for 1828 Mingo is recorded as being 'freed' on 20 May, so it's not clear if Arthurton freed him or kept him enslaved. If the latter, then he would have likely been one of the four enslaved people for whom John Fraser Arthurton claimed compensation. John Fraser Arthurton who was born enslaved, owned land next to the North Wales estate, and was the son of Thomas Arthurton of Nevis and Joan Arthurton, a woman of colour enslaved by Thomas Arthurton, a manager on Pinney's Moutravers Estate. Mother and son were manumitted by Thomas in 1803.⁶¹

Business failure

Despite owning six estates in 1828, by 1831 Butler Thompson Claxton had sold them all, including the North Wales estate⁶². Of the 121 enslaved people on that estate he sold one person to his brother Robert or possibly his cousin, also Robert (I haven't been able to establish who that enslaved person was), and one enslaved person to his brother Philip Protheroe, who I assume was Tom Bass (see below).⁶³

It's not clear why he sold these estates, or why his whole West India business appears to have failed - his will of 1842 refers to a Life Assurance policy of £2000 which he 'purchased at the period when my

⁶⁰ *Nevis Common Records 1823-1829 Volume 2* pp. 626-627, British Library, EAP794/1/1/36, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP794-1-1-36>

⁶¹ Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for the information about the people freed on the North Wales Estate and for additional information about John Fraser Arthurton

1817 slave register for North Wales estate

'John Fraser Arthurton', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25118> [accessed 29th March 2023]

⁶² Butler Thompson Claxton's cousin, Butler Claxton (est. 1778-1824) was the owner of the North Wales estate in 1817 and 1822 after which it came into the ownership of Butler Thompson Claxton. I have not been able to find a copy of Butler Claxton's will. Having been born in Nevis, at some point he moved to Bristol as he died there aged 46 in February 1824 at his lodgings in Unity Street, Bristol (*Bristol Mirror* 21 February 1824; burial record). It's not clear when he moved from Nevis to Bristol – there is a Bristol newspaper advertisement in 1818 that Butler Claxton Esq is looking to rent a 'good family house, ready furnished', and then in 1820 a notice of an auction of 'part of the household furniture' and various other things including a drawing by Rubens of 'Butler Claxton, Esq., at his residence Henbury-Hill'. I assume this is the same Butler Claxton, although he has signed the slave registers for North Wales in 1817 and 1822, so if it was the same person he was travelling backwards and forwards between Nevis and Bristol at this time. *Bristol Mirror* 14 November 1818; *Bristol Mirror* 13 May 1820

⁶³ The 121 enslaved people on the North Wales estate were sold by Butler Thompson Claxton to: Edward Huggins (116 people), James Dore and Powell (2 people), Mrs Herbert (1 person), Robert Claxton (1 person), and Philip Protheroe Claxton (1 person). 'North Wales [Nevis]', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3365> [accessed 21st April 2023].

mercantile house was compelled to suspend its payments.' However, it is now widely acknowledged by historians that one reason the British abolished slavery was because it was no longer financially viable, and many plantation owners went bankrupt in the years preceding and following abolition, so it would be no surprise if Butler Thompson Claxton's businesses in the West Indies failed.

Butler Thompson Claxton didn't receive any compensation when slavery was abolished, nor did he make any claims. His will is primarily legacies from the £2000 insurance policy to his 'real' children Maria Louisa and Julia Emma. He doesn't mention another of his children Lucy Anne – possibly because she had converted to Catholicism and he was a very devout member of the Church of England⁶⁴.

Lucy Claxton ne. Anderdon

His wife, Lucy Shuckburgh Claxton (ne. Anderdon) on the other hand, who died nine years after him in 1851, was clearly independently wealthy and left her daughters far more money. In 1846 she inherited £8000 from her father⁶⁵. In her will she bequeathed her eldest daughter, Lucy Anne Marchiness de Salvo received £8,000 'from the fund in settlement on my marriage'; her youngest daughter Julia Emma received a sum to make up to £10,000 from that which she received on her marriage to Rev. Thomas Partridge Nunn; and the rest of her estate went to Maria Louisa, including a property in New Street, Spring Gardens, London.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that Lucy Claxton's brother was John Hughes Anderdon, a banker and art collector based in West Pennard, Somerset and London; he received compensation for three claims on Nevis, one of which - the claim for 19 enslaved people on the Meales estate - was unsuccessfully contested by John Savage who was Lucy and Butler Thompson Claxton's brother in law (see below).⁶⁷

Butler Thompson and Lucy Claxton's children

Of Butler Thompson and Lucy Claxton's children: Lucy Anne was an artist married to a writer and diplomat who lived abroad and supported various Catholic charities throughout her life and in her will⁶⁸; she died in Paris in 1892 aged eighty - her estate was worth £7800; in her will she bequeathed £1000 to be put in trust and the interest distributed annually to the poor of West Pennard, Somerset on her sister's birthday. Julia Emma was married to Rev. Nunn for over forty years, living at the Vicarage in West Pennard; her estate was valued at over £11,000 when she died in 1890. Maria Louisa Claxton who never married, lived with her mother in Devon, dying thirty years after her in 1881, by which time she was also living in West Pennard; her estate was worth £13,000.⁵⁹

⁶⁴ Evidence that Butler Thompson Claxton was a devout member of the Church of England: In 1816 he is listed as being on the Committee of the 'Bristol Auxiliary Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews' with Edward, Samuel and Durbin Brice, Stephen Cave, George Daubeny, James Fripp, George Gibbs, Philip Protheroe (*Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 17 October 1816). In 1819 he makes a donation to the Diocesan School Rooms along with many others (*Bristol Mirror* 13 November 1819). The opening line of his will is unusually devout: "Whenevor I come to die I may have so obeyed the voice of God in his gospel that trusting in the [?] of those who hath died for us I may yield up my departing spirit to God who gave it in the hope of a joyful resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ my Lord and my God.'

⁶⁵ 'John Proctor Anderdon', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/926> [accessed 7th June 2023]

⁶⁶ Wills and probate of Butler Thompson Claxton and Lucy Claxton ne. Anderdon. Lucy Anne Claxton married Vincenzo Salvo di Pietraganzili, and according to online genealogical sites received Papal dispensation for then to marry, her being Church of England and him Catholic; Lucy was an artist and he was a writer and diplomat for the Two Sicilies; she supported various Catholic causes.

⁶⁷ 'Nevis 76 (Meales)', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/25287> [accessed 25th April 2023].

⁶⁸ There is a brief biography of Lucy Ann De Salvo: <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Claxton-994> [accessed 7.2.2023]. Details of her will were published in the *Shepton Mallet Journal* 9 June 1893

⁶⁹ England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995

Thus Butler Thompson Claxton and Rachel Claxton (ne. Mardenbrough) who had both been so deeply connected to the ownership of enslaved people had three daughters who appeared to live comfortably from the profits made by it, having inherited from their mother, whilst themselves being totally disconnected from it living in Europe, Devon and Somerset. Those three women are some of the richest of Robert and Rachel Claxton's many grandchildren.

Christopher Claxton (1789-1868) and Ann Elizabeth Taylor (c.1799-1869)

Introduction

Robert and Rachel Claxton's second son was Christopher Claxton (1789-1868). He had a career in the Royal Navy from 1804 until 1819⁷⁰, then in the 1820s was Master on several ships sailing to the West Indies (including those for Pinney – see above). He lived in Bristol in Queen Square, and after his career as a mariner, in 1834 was made Quay Warden (Harbour Master). He is most notorious for being a key player in the 1830 'slavery election' in Bristol, when he led the pro-slavery lobby and is credited with achieving the election of one of the pro-slavery candidates. He subsequently lobbied for compensation to be paid to enslavers. By 1836 he was an inaugural Managing Director of the Great Western Steamship Company, was a close friend of and advisor to Brunel, and was involved in various engineering projects in Bristol and elsewhere.

Much has been written about Christopher Claxton, particularly in relation to the 1830 Bristol parliamentary election, and so I won't elaborate in detail here, except to give some examples of his attitudes and ways of operating. He fought a vicious campaign for the pro-slavery candidate James Evan Baillie, whilst the abolition candidate was Edward Protheroe - the son / grandson of Edward and Philip Protheroe whom Christopher Claxton's father, Robert had been in business with for so many years. Both Baillie and Protheroe were Whig candidates, whilst Richard Hart Davis was the sitting Tory candidate (who wanted gradual abolition).

The 1830 'slavery election'

Madge Dresser in *Slavery Obscured* describes Christopher Claxton as the slave-owning plantocracy's 'unselfconscious wild man' and goes on to consider his attitudes to slavery and race including his public racist anti-Semitic remarks and contemptuous attitude towards Africans. For example, in one publication he says 'the negroe gives ample occasion for the greatest trial of temper. Hasty emancipation will ensure that the negro race, a barbarian in grain... will as surely retrograde... as his master will be ruined.'⁷¹ Steeds and Ball in *From Wulfstan to Colston* say of Claxton that '[he] was renowned for his use of intimidation and violence; he organised gangs of pro-slavery thugs, leading to arson, assaults and attacks on properties.'⁷²

There is a contemporary report of an anti-slavery meeting held in Bristol on 9th November 1830, the second to take place within a few days because the first had fallen into disarray because of 'Mr Claxton... and his West India "gang"'. At the second meeting, the Anti-slavery Monthly Reporter says that:

'Mr Claxton harangued the audience at great length, and it is said with considerable declamatory talent... His speech, as reported in the Bristol papers, is a strange inconsistent farrago of candid admission, preposterous assertion, and dauntless denial; and it only deserves notice as another specimen of the tactics of that party of which this man is so zealous a partisan... [He is reported as saying] "... Let it not be understood that I question the planter's right to his Slave, or his absolute control over him, any more than I question his humanity generally. Nor do I question the comfort for the Slaves themselves, or their

⁷⁰ His naval history can be read in *A Naval Biographical Dictionary* by William Richard O'Byrne, 1849

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Naval_Biographical_Dictionary/Claxton,_Christopher [accessed 9.2.23]

⁷¹ *Slavery Obscured* p.213 Madge Dresser, Redcliffe Press 2007

⁷² *From Wulfstan to Colston* p.166 op. cit.

perfectly contented condition, before you [the anti-slavery lobby], through your missionaries, made a crusade across the Atlantic, and worried them into a different belief, and robbed them of much of their hard earnings for payments to love-feasts and to keep class, which rather than forfeit, they would commit robbery to support." To reply seriously to such stuff as this is of course out of the question: and yet this man is the recognized leader and champion of the West India party in Bristol!

The report goes on to say that Claxton moved two resolutions at the meeting: 'one in favour of abolition "with a fair and equitable regard to the rights of property involved;" the other containing a claim for "compensation for the value of the Slave before the agitation of this question reduced the same; and a security for the lands and works, in the event of free labour failing, provided the planter fairly tries the experiment, to be decided by constitutional authorities." Of these resolutions the former was passed without opposition, being quite accordant with the principles of the meeting; the latter was thrown out by an amendment referring the subject of compensation to Parliament.'⁷³

There is a very detailed account of Claxton's pro-slavery activities by Peter Marshall in *Bristol and the abolition of slavery – Politics of Emancipation* which quotes some of the inflammatory posters circulating at the time, gives descriptions of meetings where Claxton harangued the public, and describes the circumstances of him challenging an opponent (John Hare) to a duel. The result of the 1830 election was that James Evan Baillie received 3377 votes to Edward Protheroe's 2840, so he was elected alongside Richard Hart Davis who received 5012 votes.⁷⁴

Robert Hopson, Christopher Claxton's Black servant

Marshall also describes Claxton's involvement in the 1831 riots when his house at 42 Queen Square was being looted and his Black servant, Robert Hopson, alongside the Dragoon guards managed to fend them off. A contemporary narrative of the riots says that Claxton was out of the City at the time, and although Robert Hopson is not named, the following is reported: 'As soon as the party appeared this honest fellow shouted, "Hurrah massa, now for em!" and the party, after a smart struggle, beat the villains out... The black servant behaved nobly, and felled one of the miscreants by a blow which caused the blood to spurt from his head against the walls.' He is named in a letter by Christopher Claxton to the Bristol Mirror on 12th November 1831: 'Sir, It is well known that the progress of the incendiaries was effectually checked at my house, after it had been totally plundered, and the furniture of one bedroom set on fire. The following are the names of as many of the resolute individuals who there distinguished themselves... and the thanks of their fellow-citizens are due: ... my own black servant, Robert Hopson... Your very humble servant, Christopher Claxton.' There is also an account of Robert Hopson's actions in John Latimer's *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century*: 'After a smart conflict, during which Mr. Henry Smith, solicitor, received two stabs, while Mr. Claxton's negro servant threw one of the thieves clean out of an upstairs window, the villainous crew were driven off, and the fires they had kindled in three rooms extinguished'.

I have not been able to find any more records for Robert Hopson, and there is no information where he was born or if he was enslaved or free. There were many free people of African descent who were sailors, so it's possible Robert Hopson was a member of the crew on one of the ships Claxton sailed, and Claxton subsequently employed him as a servant.⁷⁵ It's also possible that Robert Hopson was or had been

⁷³ *Anti-slavery Reporter No. 74* (January 1831) Vol. IV pp. 59-61

⁷⁴ *Slavery Obscured* pp.212-216 op. cit.

Bristol and the abolition of slavery the politics of emancipation, Peter Marshal, the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1975

From Wulfstan to Colston p.168 op. cit.

See also a detailed description of the 1830 election by Terry Jenkins on the [History of Parliament Online](#) [accessed 9.2.23]

⁷⁵ Robert Hopson isn't listed in the 1841 or 1851 census as part of Christopher Claxton's household, nor can I find him in any other records or newspaper articles. In 1841 Christopher Claxton lived at 10 Vincents parade, Clifton and in 1851 at Beachley College, Beachley, Tidenham, Gloucestershire. References: *Bristol Mirror* 12 Nov 1831;

enslaved - before abolition many enslaved people of African descent were bought to England as servants; sometimes they remained enslaved and other times they were freed.

Brunel and the Great Western Steam Ship Company

In the 1830s and 1840s Christopher Claxton was very closely involved with Brunel's projects, as an obituary summarises: 'Captain Claxton, whose name was associated with many important enterprises in the city of Bristol, died on Saturday. With the Great Western Steamship Company he was connected from the beginning; and under the late I. K. Brunel had a good deal to do with the building of the Great Britain. Captain Claxton was afterwards engaged, also under Mr Brunel, in the building of the Great Eastern; he likewise superintended the rising of the great tubes of the Menai Railway Bridge under Stephenson, and was the first secretary of the Clifton Suspension-bridge Company.'⁷⁶

Christopher Claxton was undertaking his work as Director of the Great Western Steam Ship Company at the same time as being paid by the Council as Quay Warden where he 'brazenly flouted his duties. His office was a sinecure, £50 of his £400 annual salary being given to an underling, who did the work while he spent his time as managing-director of the Great Western Steam Ship Company.'⁷⁷ His duties as Quay Warden – which he was so bad at carrying out - were to collect wharfage, anchorage and moorage dues, and in 1845 were 'confined to the part of the Harbour and Docks between Crane no. 16 on the Grove and Hanham Mills excluding management of the Feeder and Totterdown Locks.'⁷⁸

There were years of wrangling between Christopher Claxton and the Town Council as some didn't feel he could carry out both duties of Quay Warden and Director of the Great Western Steam Ship Company simultaneously; however they *didn't* stop him doing both, although they *did* stop him from doing paid work for the Bristol Dock Company. In 1836 he'd been paid 100 guineas for 'his services in assisting the working of Mr. Brunel's plans on the Floating Harbour'⁷⁹ (it was silting up), and in 1842 the Directors of the Dock Company 'again asked Mr. Brunel to report in conjunction with Captain Claxton, upon "what further measures are requisite for keeping the Floating Harbour more clear of mud than it has been for a few years"'.⁸⁰ But by 1844 the Mayor said at a Town Council meeting 'The employment of Captain Claxton by the Dock Company was the principle objection made [to him being Quay Warden] on former occasions, and that connection has been put an end to immediately on the council intimating its opinions.' – in other words the Council *had* stopped him from being connected to the Dock Company.⁸¹ His role as Quay Warden ended in 1847, presumably so that he could focus on his work with the Great Western Steam Ship Company where he was one of Brunel's 'most intimate friends, and his confidential advisor on all points on which nautical experience was of value.'⁸²

Wife and children

I haven't been able to find any probate records for Christopher Claxton. He and his wife, Mary Ann (ne. Taylor) had six daughters and one son. None of his children remained in Bristol. His son, Robert Berkeley Bailey Claxton, was a Civil Engineer based in London who died in 1876 of suspected suicide aged 55,

contemporary account quoted in *Bristol and the abolition of slavery the politics of emancipation* p. 23 *ibid.*; *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* p.182, John Latimer; *Black Jacks – African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* W. Jeffrey Bolster, Harvard University Press, 1998

⁷⁶ *Frome Times* 08 April 1868

⁷⁷ *Bristol and its municipal Government 1820-1851* p.136 op. cit.

⁷⁸ *Bristol Record Society Vol. XXXVI The Port of Bristol 1848-1884*, David Large, 1984 p.7

⁷⁹ *Gloucestershire Chronicle* 02 July 1836; *Bristol Mercury* 6 January 1844

⁸⁰ *The Life of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Civil Engineer* p.424 Isambard Brunel, Longmans 1870. Christopher Claxton both contributed to and edited this biography of Brunel written by Brunel's son

⁸¹ *Gloucestershire Chronicle* 02 July 1836; *Bristol Mercury* 6 January 1844

⁸² *The Life of Isambard Kingdom Brunel* p. 234

having spent a very brief time in a London lunatic asylum in his 30s.⁸³ One of his daughters, Clara Miles, died as a child; Gertrude was married to a chaplain in India who died there in his early 40s, she returned to live in London with her two surviving children who'd been born in India; another, Mary Anne, appears not to have married; Louisa Ann married a lawyer, lived in Leicestershire and was the richest of all the sisters (one of their 10 children had the middle name 'Brunel' and was, appropriately, a major in the Royal Engineers); Caroline who had a double wedding with her sister Victoria married a widowed vicar and moved around the country; Maria Victoria, the youngest, married an Irish surgeon in the Indian Army and had six children in India and two in Ireland / England and died in her 50s in London.⁸⁴

Robert Claxton (1792-1841) and Anne Brodie Hanley (c.1798-1833)

Introduction

Robert and Rachel Claxton's third surviving son was also named Robert. Born in 1792⁸⁵, in 1815 he was admitted to the Society of Merchant Venturers with a note that he was apprenticed to his brother, Butler Thompson Claxton. By 1817, in his mid-20s he was in Nevis where he started his career as a Controller of Customs. He was there for just over 10 years, and then from 1828 until the 1830s he was in Tortola (the largest island in the Virgin Islands) as Controller of Customs; he also spent time in the same role in Antigua where he wrote his will in 1838. He then returned to Bristol where he died and was buried in 1841. When he was in Tortola he successfully negotiated for the settlement in 1831 of over 400 Liberated African adults and children (see below).

During his time in the West Indies Robert Claxton enslaved 21 people as listed below.

⁸³ *Acton Gazette* 15 July 1876 – it was reported that Robert Berkeley Bailey Claxton died by throwing himself under a train at Brighton station. There is an earlier record from 1855 of a very brief stay of seven weeks in a lunatic asylum in Chelsea. *UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers 1846-1921*

⁸⁴ Marriage, death, probate and census records; various newspaper articles

⁸⁵ Note that *Caribbeana* op. cit. p. 43 names two Robert Claxtons and they have been wrongly attributed. Robert Claxton born in Bristol in 1792 who married Ann Brodie Hanley was the son of Robert Claxton b. 1754 whose biography is in my text; Robert Claxton b. 1794 who married Frances Young was the son of Butler Claxton b. 1748, older brother of Robert Claxton b. 1754. This has been deduced from wills, baptism, marriage and burial records

<i>People enslaved by Robert Claxton whilst working in the West Indies</i>						
Return date	Where	Name	Sex	Colour	Age	Country
1817	Nevis	Bob	Male	Black	15	Creole
1817	Nevis	Charlotte	Female	Mulatto	40	Creole
1817	Nevis	Grace	Female	Sambo	8	Creole
1817	Nevis	Jem	Male	Mulatto	5	Creole
1817	Nevis	John	Male	Mulatto	3 weeks	Creole
1817	Nevis	London	Male	Black	14	Creole
1817	Nevis	Philip	Male	Black	25	Creole
1817	Nevis	Violet	Female	Black	28	Creole
1822	Nevis [1822] / Virgin Islands [1831]	Julia	Female	Black	28 [aged 36 in 1831]	African
1825	Nevis	Albertine	Female		4 months	Nevis
1825	Nevis	Candice	Female	Black	36 in 1817	Nevis
1825	Nevis	Christianna	Female	Sambo	9 in 1817	Nevis
1825	Nevis	Jim	Male	Black	4 in 1817	Nevis
1825	Nevis	Joe	Male	Black	40 in 1817	Nevis
1825	Nevis	John [John Tyrrell in 1817]	Male	Black	11 in 1817	Nevis
1825	Nevis	Lucy	Female	Black	3 months in 1817	Nevis
1828	Nevis	Charles	Male	Black	14 months in 1828	Creole
1834	Virgin Islands, Tortola	no name given	Female			
1834	Virgin Islands, Tortola	no name given	Female			
1825 1834	Nevis Virgin Islands	Clementine [1834 Tena]	Female	Black	1 in 1817	Nevis

1827-28	St Kitts	Robert	Male	Black		Creole of St Kitts
1828 1831 1834	Nevis (1828) Virgin Islands (1831 1834)	Davey	Male	Black	18	Creole

Information extracted from the *Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834*

Soon after he arrived on Nevis from Bristol, Robert Claxton must have purchased at least eight of these enslaved people, as he registers them in 1817: Bob (whom he had sold by 1825), Charlotte, Grace, Jem, John, London, Philip, and Violet. On September 25th 1817 he bought Julia, an African aged 28 from Christina and Hester Smith who were daughters of a free woman of colour, Amelia Brodbelt.⁸⁶ Sometime before 1825 Robert Claxton inherited seven enslaved people from his father-in-law, John Hanley⁸⁷. They were two adults Candice aged 36 and Joe aged 40, and children aged from 11 to 3 months: Christianna, Clementine, Jim, Joe, John and Lucy. It's possible they were a family; by 1828 Joe and Jim had both died. There were two births during his 17 year period of slave ownership: Albertine and Charles. In 1828 he purchased 15 year old Davy from his brother-in-law, William Hanley.

New		27 ⁴⁹					
No	Names	Sex	Country	Colour	Reputed Age	By birth, purchase or return by purchaser of whom	
10	Albertine	female	Nevis	Black	four Months	Birth	
11	Candice	female	Nevis			By will of John Hanley	
12	Christianna	female	Nevis			d ^o	
13	Clementine	female	Nevis			d ^o	
14	Joe	Male	Nevis			d ^o	
15	Jim	Male	Nevis			d ^o	
16	John	Male	Nevis			d ^o	
17	Lucy	female	Nevis			d ^o	

11. 12. The whole of the above list of Negroes were registered originally in the Estate Hanley except No 10 Albertine

1825 Slave Register for eight new enslaved people in Robert Claxton's possession

⁸⁶ 'Christiana Smith', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25260> [accessed 3rd March 2023].

⁸⁷ John and Judith Hanley were the parents of Ann Brodie Hanley, Robert Claxton's wife. John Hanley died sometime between 1820 and 1822 [Although LBS states he died 'before 1820', Eickelmann has a reference to him receiving a plough in December 1820].

Compensation

It is just possible from the compensation records and the slave registers to work out for whom Robert Claxton received compensation⁸⁸. He received £26 7s 2d for two enslaved people in a Virgin Islands claim who could have been the two un-named enslaved people registered to him in the Virgin Islands in 1834, or one could have been Tena / Clementine who in 1834 is listed as having been 'bought to [Tortola] from the island of Nevis as a domestic in attendance on her owners family'.

He received £13 0s 2d for one enslaved person on Antigua whom I think was the Creole from Nevis called Davey as in 1834 Davy was recorded as having 'left [Tortola] with his Master for Antigua.' In 1817 Dav[e]y was aged 5, one of the 145 enslaved people on Hanley's estate, belonging to John Hanley; in 1825 Davey was transferred to the ownership of William Hanley (Robert Claxton's brother-in-law), from whom Robert Claxton bought him in 1828.

There are two Nevis claims, one for £19 18s 10d for 2 enslaved people, and one for £230 11s 3d for 12 enslaved people. I assume these were for Albertine, Candice, Charles, Charlotte, Christianna, Grace, Jem, John, John Tyrrell, Julia, London, and Lucy, Philip and Violet.^{89 90}

Land for illegally traded Africans on Tortola

When Robert Claxton was the Collector of Customs for Tortola he successfully negotiated parliamentary grants for the settlement in 1831 of over 350 African adults and children who had been taken to Tortola after they had been freed from ships illegally trading in African people. Between 1807 and 1819 the British Royal Navy rescued over five thousand African people from slave ships operating illegally in the Caribbean following the 1807 Abolition Act. The African people removed from those ships were either taken back to ports on the West coast of Africa, admitted into the army or the navy, or 'bound as apprentices in the colonies: and of these last many were settled on Tortola.'⁹¹

In 1829 Robert Claxton, as Collector of Customs was being directed to pay from an annual £50 fund 'for relief of the captured Africans... [such as those suffering] from infirmity, infancy, or old age, [who] are unable to support themselves', as well as 'the expenses of funerals, medicines and medical attendance' of people who were apprentices. On 10th June 1830 Robert Claxton wrote that he had had to provide relief for 518 people who were unable to work; also that there had 'not been one single instance of any one of them having been brought before any court of justice, for any crime or misdemeanour since their

⁸⁸ Several people named Robert Claxton are listed on UCL's database. My conclusion is that the following are *this* Robert Claxton (1792-1841): <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/30227> claim Virgin Islands 175; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/1306> claim Antigua 608; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25156> claims Nevis 45, Nevis 69 and Nevis 70. All accessed 3.3.2023

⁸⁹ Frustratingly I have not been able to find the 1834 registers for these people

⁹⁰ The other claim which UCL's database links with this Robert Claxton is for 60 enslaved people on Neale's Estate, Nevis for which he and Henry Iles Woodcock were Assignees acting on behalf of the owner of the estate, William Liburd. However, it's possible that this claim should be associated with Robert Claxton's cousin, also Robert Claxton (d. 1849) referred to as the Hon. Robert Claxton of St Kitts on UCL's database as he was the Solicitor General of St Kitts and 'Claxton & Woodcock' and 'Woodcock & Davoren' were solicitors on St Kitts in the 1830s and 1840s, the partners were probably William Woodcock & H I Woodcock. Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for the information about the solicitors. 'Neale's Estate [Nevis]', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3115>; 'Nevis 45 (Neale's Estate)', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/23741>; 'Hon. Robert Claxton of St Kitts', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25615> [accessed 6th March 2023].

⁹¹ *Household Labor and Sexual Coercion: Reconstructing Women's Experience of African Recaptive Settlement. Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, pp. 174-97 Adderley, Laura Rosanne, edited by Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, NED-New edition, Boydell & Brewer, 2020 [JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvktrz0v.13>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2023]

manumissions were granted.' He said that 38 men and 77 women 'are in society' with the Missionaries on the island, and that 'double that number attend public worship', and 53 children regularly attend school under the missionaries. He goes on to say: 'The bonus of freedom, as an inducement for their own exertions, appears to be duly appreciated by them; but I humbly submit, that situated as they are in this Island, that bonus requires an accompaniment of means whereby to gain a livelihood.' He goes on to argue the case that 'it would be an act of justice and humanity for Government to purchase a lot of waste land... and parcel it out to them, reserving to the Crown the right of possession, so as to prevent a sale thereof or transfer by them; and that I should be allowed to assist them in the erection of houses thereon.' In March 1831 it was agreed by the Treasury to provide £1025 sterling for 'the purchase of the land and materials... for locating the liberated Africans in the Island of Tortola.' When the price of materials for buildings increased, Robert Claxton was given another £300 a few months later.⁹²

Claxton was appointed Protector to establish this 'African village' named Kingston on the Eastern part of the Island (named after the new King William IV). The initial population was around 350 people, half of whom were children. Each family was given a plot of land on which to build their residence and grow crops. The village began with around 75 allotments and grew slowly over the next decade as the villagers themselves cleared out forested areas to make room for more lots. According to Mulich 'While the initial intention of the British government was to integrate Africans liberated from the illegal slave trade into colonial society, the construction of Kingstown and the reaction of white Tortolan society to the presence of more free blacks on the island made such integration increasingly difficult. In effect, the village functioned more as an officially sanctioned maroon community than as a part of the colonial social order.' There was friction within the colonial government because it was felt that house and income taxes should be paid by the African community, whilst 'Claxton and others saw it as unreasonable that houses built from funds by the British government were to be taxed by a local colonial administration.' Claxton appointed and supervised a small police force made up of local Africans, as well as helping the local missionaries to establish a local school and church.⁹³

According to UCL's entry for Robert Claxton, his butler in Tortola was one of the African apprentices, an Igbo named Yamo who was brought to Tortola in 1814 on the seized Spanish slave ship, *Candeleria*. Renamed William Ingram, Yamo's previous master was Francis Ingram, one of Claxton's predecessors as Collector Customs on Tortola. After the move to Kingston under Claxton's supervision, William Ingram's son by his wife Sophia Dyer (Zilpha from the *Candeleria*) was named Robert Claxton Ingram, and was one of the first liberated African children to be baptized by the Wesleyan Methodist mission in Kingstown in 1831; he lived to nearly 100, as he died in 1927.⁹⁴

Wife and children

In 1833, whilst Robert Claxton was in Tortola, his wife Ann Brodie Claxton was in Bristol where she died in Westbury on Trym 'after a long and severe illness, borne with Christian patience and resignation'.⁹⁵ Ann Brodie was from the Nevis Hanley family, and she and Robert Claxton married there in January 1817. William and Ann Brodie Claxton had four children: Mary, Robert Savage, William and Ann Judith. The eldest were born in Nevis, the youngest in St Kitts; all were still children when their mother died.

⁹² *House of Commons Papers*, Vol.19, 'Colonies and Slaves' Session 14 June – 20 October 1831 pp.24-29

⁹³ *In A Sea Of Empires – Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean* pp.130, 131, Jeppe Mulich, Cambridge University Press, 2020

⁹⁴ 'Robert Claxton', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/30227> [accessed 6th March 2023]

⁹⁵ *Bristol Mercury* 07 December 1833

The other Robert Claxton - Solicitor General, St. Kitts

Robert Claxton left Tortola to be Collector of Customs in St Kitts in the summer of 1835⁹⁶, less than a year after the abolition of slavery. At the time he was in St Kitts, his cousin, also called Robert Claxton⁹⁷, was Solicitor General and a member of the St Kitts Council. As such his cousin had a crucial role in dealing with slave revolts prior to abolition and with the strike which took place on 1st August 1834 – the first day after abolition - and with subsequent unrest amongst people who had gone from being enslaved to a system of apprenticeship. As Richard Frucht who has written about emancipation and revolt in St Kitts in 1834 says: 'apprenticeship was slavery under another name... The slaves, however, were not taken in, and the resistance to this modified form of slavery ranged from "disquiet" and unrest among the laborers to riots.'⁹⁸ The Collector of Customs Robert Claxton would have been working in St Kitts during the first few years of the apprenticeship system, whilst his brother, Philip Protheroe Claxton was a magistrate on Nevis, and thus had a more formal role in dealing with the aftermath of slavery (see below).

There is, inevitably, some confusion between the two cousins called Robert Claxton who were both active in Nevis and St Kitts at the same time. I have looked in detail at the slave registers, and in addition to tracing the enslaved people who belonged to Robert 'Controller of Customs' Claxton who are named above, I have also traced the enslaved people belonging to his cousin the Solicitor General of St Kitts.

Enslaved people whom 'Solicitor General' Robert Claxton claimed ownership over

Those registered to the Solicitor General Robert Claxton were:

In the 1817 register:

- Cinda - a chamber maid and seamstress, a creole from St Kitts aged 20 in 1817
- Lucy and her son William, both Creoles from Nevis. By 1825 Robert Claxton had 'dismissed [Lucy] from [his] service and [she had] returned to Nevis of her own accord'; her son William, a 'House Boy', remained in St Kitts; he was originally enslaved by Robert Claxton's sister, Sally Smith, but in 1822 'was lent by Mrs Smith, of Nevis, to be with his Mother Lucy.' In the 1825 return he is recorded as 'removed to St Kitts some years ago and now in my possession.'
- Mattese – an African, who in 1817 was 24 years old, a 'scullion and groom'. Mattese had been left to Robert Claxton in his father's will of 1805: 'I bequeath to my Son Robert Claxton my Negro Boy named Mattace [sic]'. By 1827/28 Robert Claxton had sold Mattese to William Dunlop; he in turn had sold Mattese to George Adams who it is recorded by 1834 had sold him to Isaac Deming, where he was one of 22 enslaved people in Deming's ownership.
- Patty – a creole from Nevis who died aged 3 before 1825

In 1822 he purchased:

- August - an African from Mandingo, a cook, whom he bought in 1822 aged 29 from George Wright Mardenbrough – Rachel Mardenbrough's brother. Robert Claxton sold August back to G

⁹⁶ When Robert Claxton left Tortola for St. Kitts the ship he was travelling on was lost at sea for over a week; they were saved by a French Brig 100s of miles from their destination. They made it back to Tortola to a reception which Claxton said 'can never be effaced from my memory.' *Barbados Mercury and Bridge-town Gazette*, Tuesday 18 August 1835

⁹⁷ UCL's Legacies of British Slavery refers to this Robert Claxton (? – 1849) as 'Hon. Robert Claxton of St Kitts' <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25615> [accessed 26th March 2023]. RH's research has established that he was the son of Butler Claxton (1748-1805 or 1806) and Sally (or Sarah) Brookes (d.1813); Butler Claxton was Robert Claxton's (1754-1812) brother - see main text. The St Kitts Robert Claxton was born on Nevis sometime between 1787 and 1796. He's recorded as being a Barrister at Law and member of the Freemasons Mother Lodge in St Kitts in 1815, and married Frances Young Stephens of St Kitts in 1816. From the slave registers it appears he was living in Nevis in the 1820s before becoming Solicitor General in St Kitts from 1833 or earlier; by 1849, the year he died (in London), he was Chief Justice and Judge of the Vice Admiralty Court and President of the Council in St Kitts. From the 1817-1827/28 slave registers it's been possible to trace the enslaved people in his possession.

⁹⁸ *Emancipation and Revolt in the West Indies: St. Kitts, 1834* in *Science & Society* pp. 199-214 Summer 1975, Vol. 39, No. 2. Richard Frucht

W Mardenbrough in 1825; in 1834 August is one of the 95 enslaved people for whom Rachel Mardenbrough received a share of compensation as listed above

- Charles – a 23 year old creole labourer from St Kitts whom he enslaved in 1822 but had sold by 1827/28 to Nicholas Joseph Lynch, one of 13 enslaved people in his possession.

In 1825 he came into the possession of:

- Mary and her son Robert. Mary, a creole from Nevis was a seamstress aged 22 in 1827/28. She belonged to Robert Claxton's sister, Sally Smith, but in the 1825 return it says that Mary had 'absconded from the service of Mrs Smith of Nevis, found here [in St Kitts], and taken possession of by me as [Sally Smith's] attorney and brother.' Mary and her then 18 month old son, Robert, who was born on St Kitts, were sold by 1927/28 to Mrs Frances Wade. Robert was a 'mulatto'. Because he was named Robert and born whilst in Robert Claxton's possession, it's possible that he was Robert Claxton's illegitimate son. There's no record of Frances Wade 'disposing' of Mary or Robert, so I assume they were 2 of the 9 enslaved people for whom she received compensation.⁹⁹
- Jeanette and Joseph were creoles from St Kitts - he had purchased Jeanette aged 22 and her son Joseph aged 2 in 1825, and they had both been manumitted by 1831

In 1831 he purchased:

- Charles – a 22 year old house servant, a creole from St Kitts whom he purchased in 1831

The UCL database lists 'Hon. Robert Claxton of St Kitts' as receiving £223 in compensation for 13 enslaved people in three separate claims, but I can't find the 1834 registers for him so it has not been possible to trace who those 13 people were, however it seems that Charles the last enslaved person he bought, Cinda and the boy William were still in his possession then.¹⁰⁰

Robert 'Collector of Customs' Claxton final years, his wife and children

For some reason Robert 'Collector of Customs' Claxton returned to Bristol before or in 1841 where he died at his lodgings on Park Street. An obituary refers to him as the 'late collector of H. M.'s Customs at Antigua'¹⁰¹, so it's possible that by his late 40s he'd come back to Bristol to live. In his will made in 1838 he asks his executors¹⁰² to sell all his land and possessions and divide his estate equally between his four children when they reach the age of 21, apart from his daughter Mary who was already married – she was to inherit twelve months after his decease. There's no indication of what his estate was worth.

I haven't found any reference to his children at the time of their father's death - they weren't living with him on Park Street and could have been in the West Indies or possibly elsewhere in England. His eldest daughter, Mary Claxton married Charles Kenny in Nevis in 1836 (who'd been a Captain in the 52nd Light Infantry and fought in the Peninsula War and then Waterloo), and it seems they continued living on Nevis as he was a Magistrate, and President of the Council. As a child Mary Claxton's grandmother, Judith Hanley, had bequeathed her a 'female mulatto called Teresa', who is recorded as belonging to Mary Claxton in 1825 where she is described as 'Sambo, aged nine years' alongside another enslaved girl Jane Ann a 'mulatto aged three years' who had been 'given away' by Adam Brodie on 1st February 1825.¹⁰³ I

⁹⁹ 'St Kitts 167', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/26046> [accessed 12th May 2023]

¹⁰⁰ 'Hon. Robert Claxton of St Kitts', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25615> [accessed 18th April 2023]

¹⁰¹ *Bristol Mercury* 16 October 1841

¹⁰² Robert Claxton's Executors were his cousin Robert Claxton of St Kitts, his brother William Claxton in Bristol, and his son-in-law Charles Kenny. Robert Claxton's will made 5 October 1838 proved in London 19th April 1843

¹⁰³ There is obviously a familial connection between Ann Claxton and Adam Brodie as Ann Claxton's mother, (Robert Claxton's wife) was called Anne Brodie Hanley. Adam Brodie left Ann Brodie Claxton £150 in his will written in Nevis on 1st February 1827, a larger bequest than to anyone else. In addition he leaves £100 to several members of the

haven't been able to find a record of Teresa or Jane Ann after 1825. In 1834 when slavery was abolished Teresa would have been about 18 and Jane Ann 12; there are no compensation records recorded for either Mary or Charles Kenny. Mary Kenny must have pre-deceased her husband, as in 1851 Charles Kenny married Jessey Huggins, sister of Sarah Bell Huggins who was married to Philip Protheroe Claxton (see below).¹⁰⁴

There is very little information about Robert and Anne's other children: Robert Savage Claxton (b. 1823) was 'employed in the capacities of Midshipman Mate and Master 16 years in British Merchant Service in the Foreign Trades'. Ann Judith Claxton married a doctor from America where she lived for most of her life.¹⁰⁵ I haven't found any information about their other son, William Claxton b. about 1827.

George Wright Claxton (1797-1851)

Robert and Rachel Claxton's fourth surviving son was George Wright Claxton. He must have had some kind of identifiable mental or physical health condition from an early age, as special financial arrangements were made for him in his father's will written when George Wright was about 15. The only record I can find of him is that he died in his fifties in a private Lunatic Asylum: Vernon House, Briton Ferry, Glamorganshire.¹⁰⁶

William Claxton (1797-1873) and Helen Nairne Bishop (c.1805-1889)

Introduction and early life

The next of Robert and Rachel Claxton's sons was William Claxton. He, like his siblings, was born in Bristol, and spent most of his life in the City. He has been written about primarily in relation to his role as the first paid Treasurer of the Society of Merchant Venturers, but those narratives rarely mention the fact that he spent time in the West Indies, was part of the slavery economy, and received compensation for an estate in Nevis for 88 enslaved people (see below).

William Claxton was apprenticed to his older brother Butler Thompson Claxton the year his father died in 1812 at the age of 15 or 16, and then 'went out to the West Indies in 1820 and on his return set up in the West India trade on his own account'¹⁰⁷ - he did not, as some sources suggest take on his father's business.

It's not clear exactly when he returned to Bristol from the West Indies, but in 1821 he joined the Royal Sussex Lodge of Hospitality – a Freemasons Lodge in Bristol which his older brother, Christopher, joined

Hanley family, to Ann Maynard, and children of William Liburd. James Hanley was left the bulk of his estate. Judith Hanley's will written in Nevis on 10th March 1822 leaves bequests to her children Alexander, James, William, Judith, Eliza and Sarah and her 'granddaughter Mary Claxton'. There's no mention of a daughter called Ann. In her will Judith Hanley is described as the widow of John Hanley. A John Hanley made a will in Nevis on 5th December 1799 where he bequeaths to his children John, Alexander, James, Mary and Anne. I haven't been able to unpick this. *Nevis Wills 1763-1880* online at British Library <https://eap.bl.uk/collection/EAP794-1-5/search>

¹⁰⁴ *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734 to 1834* pp.880, 899 op. cit. Email correspondence with Eickelmann 11.3.2023

¹⁰⁵ *UK & Ireland, Masters and mates Certificates 1850-1927*. Robert Savage Claxton's certificate of service was issued in Bristol in 1853, so it's possible that after 1853 he lived in Bristol, but I haven't found any records for him.

According to an Ancestry family tree Anne Judith Claxton married American Samuel Gourdin MD in 1858; he died when she was 35 and she continued to live in New Haven, Connecticut; she died in Ontario, Canada in 1907 aged 77. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/45425934/person/402243808635/facts> [accessed 8.3.23]

¹⁰⁶ *Glamorganshire Burial records*

¹⁰⁷ *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol*, Patrick McGrath, 1975 p.261

two years later. Other members of the Lodge at around that time were several others involved in Bristol's slavery economy such as Michael Hinton Castle, Thomas Kington Bayly, and Thomas Kington Jnr.¹⁰⁸ Soon after being admitted as a Freemason, on 5 July 1822 he was admitted to the Society of Merchant Venturers. To my knowledge there has not been any study made of the connection between people involved in Bristol's slavery economy and membership of the Freemasons, but it is an interesting subject for further research.

Politics and support for slavery

William Claxton was also a Whig member of the Council from 1829-1835, served as Sheriff in 1830 when the other Sheriff was George Protheroe (part of the Protheroe family the Claxtons were in business with) and the Mayor was William Claxton's brother-in-law John Savage. William Claxton was President of the Anchor Society in 1827, and Master of the Merchant Venturers 1836-1837.

William Claxton was also involved in the West India Association (for which he was Treasurer from 1841 and Secretary from 1843). This was a body which grew out of the West India Society formed in 1782 to further the interests of those connected to the slavery economy and oppose those who campaigned to abolish slavery. The Bristol West India Association, along with sister bodies in Glasgow, London and Liverpool contributed costs to fighting abolition at a time when William Claxton would have been active in it. At any one time it had between 20 and 30 members and 'some Merchant Venturers like Thomas Daniel, William Claxton, Philip Protheroe and Philip Miles played a prominent part in [it].'¹⁰⁹

Thus William Claxton was part of a small elite of people connected to the slavery economy in Bristol who were all connected by family and business interests, and who were embedded in positions of power and influence.

Hanley's estate, Nevis; business problems

The only compensation claim which William Claxton was connected with was for Hanley's estate on Nevis which originally had belonged to his sister-in-law's family (Ann Brodie Claxton ne. Hanley married to William Claxton's brother, Robert). Over a period of 17 years the estate and the ownership of enslaved people working there passed back and forwards between the Hanley family and the Claxton family.¹¹⁰ When compensation was being awarded William Claxton initially made a counterclaim against the then owner James Hanley, on the basis that he (Claxton) was a mortgagee for the sum of £2840 9s 3d. However, Claxton withdrew the claim, and James Hanley received the total award of £1501 17s 3d for 88

¹⁰⁸ England, United Grand Lodge of England Freemason Membership Registers, 1751-1921 (accessed via Ancestry)

¹⁰⁹ *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* p.291 op. cit.

¹¹⁰ A summary of ownership of that estate is as follows:

- 1817 owner John Hanley – 145 enslaved people
- 1822 John Hanley had died and his brother, Alexandar Hanley made the return of 146 enslaved people
- 1825 – Alexander Hanley's return showed that he transferred 146 enslaved people from Hanley's estate in March 1823 to others: 27 enslaved people were transferred to family members as outlined in John Hanley's will; 23 enslaved people were transferred to Samuel Laurence; 83 were transferred to Protheroe and Savage as trustees to Butler Thompson Claxton; 11 had died since the previous register, 1 person (Charles) had absconded and 2 (Polly Hanley and Mary) had been manumitted. [Note there is a big discrepancy in the numbers of enslaved people]
- 1825 return for Hanley's - Butler Thompson Claxton's was the owner, Protheroe and Savage were trustees, the return was made by BTC's brother Robert Claxton – 89 enslaved people those enslaved people transferred from Alexander Hanley in 1823 plus 6 new births
- 1828 Return by Robert Claxton for Protheroe and Savage as trustees – 83 enslaved people
- 1831 Return of James Hanley, owner (son of John Hanley) – 82 enslaved people
- 1834 Return of James Hanley – 85 enslaved people

Information taken from 'Hanley's [Nevis]', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/3372> [accessed 13th March 2023] and from the relevant Slave Registers

enslaved people; but it was William Claxton who signed for the compensation at the National Debt Office, and so it's assumed that he'd agreed a division of the sum with James Hanley.¹¹¹

Unlike his brothers Christopher and Butler Thompson, William didn't have any ownership of ships, and the fact that he only appears in the compensation records once implies that by 1834 he wasn't a mortgagee for plantations other than Hanleys. McGrath says that he got into business difficulties in the West Indies, and that by 1831 William Claxton had 44 creditors whom he had to ask 'for time to pay his debts, and they agreed to this without calling a meeting. He then went to the West Indies again, and by making great sacrifices he was able to pay his creditors fifteen shillings in the pound.'¹¹² In his diary William Claxton says: 'I commenced a business for myself [in 1822] and was successful till the year 1831 when the reverses in the West India business commenced and the failure of three large Houses in London whose acceptances I held to a considerable amount, together with the disappointment I met with in not receiving a sum I had relied upon in consequence of the embarrassments of another West India House obliged me to seek for time from my creditors which was most kindly granted me.'¹¹³ Despite this apparent failure in business, he continued to be recorded as a West India Merchant in the census returns right up until 1871 when in his 70s his occupation is listed as 'Wine Merchant'. Indeed there are several newspaper records of him importing goods from the West Indies in the 1840s and 1850s, for example, in 1846 he advertises for sale a consignment of yams from St. Eustatius (a small island north of St Kitts) and throughout the 1850s he imports sugar from islands including Nevis and Barbados.¹¹⁴

Business interests in Bristol and the Society of Merchant Venturers

During the 1820s and 1830s William Claxton was a Director of the Bristol Dock Company. This was the company which was set up in 1803 to build the floating harbour - the scheme which his father had disapproved of 30 years before, and his brother, Christopher, was briefly connected with (see above). William Claxton was one of the 27 Directors, there being 9 each from the Corporation, the Society of Merchant Venturers and the company's investors. Like most of the Directors, his attendance at meetings was very sporadic – for example between August 1824 and April 1827 he only attended 2 meetings, and missed dozens. This indicates that his role as Director was nominal and that he wasn't a key figure in the decision making process about its development at that time.¹¹⁵

In 1828 he's listed as one of 17 directors of the Bristol Savings Bank (which includes 5 women directors), of which the majority of Trustees (listed separately) are a roll call of people involved in the slavery economy: Thomas Daniel, Philip John Miles, John Scandrett Harford, Philip Protheroe, Robert Bright, and Charles Pinney. He's also the Manager of the National Loan Fund Life Assurance Society which similarly had a Board of Management with links to the slavery economy including: Edward Case, Charles Fripp, Thomas Kington and Charles Pinney.¹¹⁶ Unlike many of the banks established in Bristol at that time, these

¹¹¹ James Hanley was probably Ann Brodie Hanley's brother. Ann Brodie Hanley was Robert Claxton's wife – see main text. James Hanley received over £3000 in compensation for 171 enslaved people on Nevis. 'James Hanley', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/25167> [accessed 15th March 2023]

¹¹² *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* p.262 op. cit.

¹¹³ *Diary of William Claxton, 1842 – 1873* op. cit.

¹¹⁴ *Bristol Times and Mirror* 18 July 1846; *Bristol Mercury* 09 July 1853

¹¹⁵ Thank you to Peter Malpass for this information and allowing me to read his as yet unpublished essay *Richard Bright and the Politics of Harbour Improvement at Bristol*

¹¹⁶ *Bristol Mercury* 06 May 1828 and *Bristol Times and Mirror* 03 February 1849. The Bristol Savings Bank was established in 1812, based in Bridge Street until 1831; it eventually became part of Lloyds Banking Group. *A History of Banking in Bristol*, C. H. Cave p. 23; Lloyds Banking Group <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/who-we-are/our-heritage/our-companies.html> [accessed 5.4.23] The National Loan Fund Assurance Society was founded in 1837 with offices across England, Ireland and Scotland, extending to the US and Canada. Wikipedia International Life Assurance Society https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Life_Assurance_Society#References [accessed 5.4.23]

two banks targeted people with 'means more limited or uncertain than those more favoured by fortune.'¹¹⁷ He was also an agent for the Scottish Union Fire and Life Insurance Company (one of 38 insurance companies in Bristol at that time) at his own offices at 19 Trinity Street. It seems likely that he gave up these roles once Treasurer of the Society of Merchant Venturers, but presumably he was drawing an income from these roles.¹¹⁸

In his diary William Claxton wrote how he was adversely affected financially by the abolition of slavery: 'I have suffered the loss of all I ever made and my business diminished from the same cause.'¹¹⁹ Because of this, when Bristol's Society of Merchant Venturers made the position of Treasurer a salaried post he applied and was appointed – a post he was to have for 32 years from 1841 until his death in 1873. The salaried position at the SMV was a post he continued to need from a financial point of view long after slavery was abolished; he said of his job in 1856 'This situation is necessary for the support of my family as all private business has failed me and left me deeply in debt.'¹²⁰

Despite his complaints about a decent income William Claxton had three servants from the 1840s through to the 1860s, which reduced to two by the 1870s. In the 1850s and '60s he lived at 1 Nursery Villas, Clifton¹²¹ and by the 1871 census he was at 24 Apsley Road, Clifton, a substantial 3 storey semi-detached house – though not as large as his previous residence.

When he died his estate was worth less than £5,000 and the SMV paid for his funeral and also agreed to pay his wife, £200 a year and for his son William to complete his University Education.¹²²

Mercy Pike Bishop and the people she enslaved

William Claxton's wife was Helen Nairne Bishop who was born in Barbados in 1802. Her father was Charles Kyd Bishop, a member of the Assembly in Barbados and Collector of Customs for Speightstown who died in 1816. Her mother was Mercy Pike Bishop ne. Culpeper who owned the Orange Hill estate in Barbados, and at the time the claims for compensation were made she lived in Bristol. Mercy Pike Bishop received £421 6s 3d for 19 enslaved people.¹²³

The enslaved people for whom Mercy Pike Bishop received compensation were:

Name	Age recorded in 1834	'Colour'	Occupation 1817 / 1834
John	38	Coloured	House Servant / Domestic servant
Adam	47	Black	Cook / Domestic servant
Chaphy	31	Black	Cooper / Labourer
Quaco George	29	Black	Carpenter / Labourer
Mingo	32	Coloured	Not listed / Labourer
John Andrew	25	Coloured	Not listed / Labourer
Thomas Hooper	27	Coloured	Not listed / Labourer

¹¹⁷ *The Athenaeum May 23 1840* p.422 Advertisement for the National Loan Fund Assurance Society

¹¹⁸ *Matthews Bristol Directory 1836*

¹¹⁹ *Diary of William Claxton, 1842 – 1873* op. cit.

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ At the time that William Claxton lived at 1 Nursery Villas in Clifton it was half of a large house surrounded by nurseries, just off Whiteladies Road, at a time when there was very little housing in Clifton. The house is still there, now numbers 9 and 11 Chantry Road. *Know Your Place 1855 Ashmead Map*

¹²² *The Merchant Venturers of Bristol* p.262-265 op. cit.

¹²³ 'Mercy Pike Bishop (née Culpeper)', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2353> [accessed 28th April 2023]

Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834

Will	15	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Scipio	57	Black	Not listed / Labourer
John Edward	7	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Will Thomas	4	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Molly	67	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Camelia	33	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Hannah	30	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Eve	38	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Hannah Bess	7	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Charlotte	10	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Susanna	3 1/2	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Sarah Thomas	2 1/2	Black	Not listed / Labourer
Susana Muno?	37	Black	Not listed / Domestic servant
Meah	37	Black	Washer / Labourer

When Mercy Pike Bishop died in 1839 she left £300 and 15 guineas to her daughter, Helen Claxton and £50 to her son-in-law William Claxton, and implies in her will that Helen had received £2,500 from her father's will (he died in 1816, so she would have been a child then).¹²⁴ Thus Helen Claxton, like other women in the Claxton family, must have had some financial independence from her husband. Helen Claxton died in her 80s by which time she was living in Weymouth with one of her daughters and her estate was valued at £1,718 14s.

William and Helen Claxton's children

William and Helen Claxton had six children who were all born in Bristol: Philip Culpeper, Mary Craven, Helen Alicia, Donald Maclean, Robert Osborne, and William. However, none of them lived for more than a few years in Bristol or took on any roles in the City; two of the four sons became vicars, one joined the Merchant Navy and it's not clear about the eldest who died in debt; one daughter married a vicar and the other was a professional singer and publican who married a rate collector.¹²⁵

Philip Protheroe Claxton (1802-1836)

Introduction

Robert and Rachel Claxton's youngest son was Philip Protheroe Claxton (presumably named after Robert Claxton's business partners as he was born in 1802 when Robert Claxton was still in business with the Protheroe family, a partnership which didn't end until 1808). I can't find any information about Philip

¹²⁴ 'Mercy Pike Bishop (née Culpeper)', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2353> [accessed 16th March 2023].

¹²⁵ Philip Culpeper (1837-1869) died in his early 30s, apparently in debt, his personal state was under £300. Mary Craven (1838-1905) married a vicar and lived in various parishes in counties surrounding Bristol; she died in her 60s - her personal estate was £2100. Helen Alicia (1840-1921) was a professional singer and didn't marry until she was 49/50 when she married a widower who was a rate collector; they lived in Weymouth until her death in 1921 – her personal estate was valued at £4600. Donald Maclean (1841-1887) was a member of the clergy who spent 6 years at St. Mary Redcliff before becoming the vicar of Merriott, Somerset, where he died in his mid-40s with a personal estate of £2000. Robert Osborne (1845-1890) was a member of the Merchant Navy, who over 5 years from 1867 to 1872 rose from First Mate to Captain; he died in 1890 at Delagoa Bay, Lourenco Marques, South Africa whilst working for the Eastern and South African Telegraph Company; his personal estate was under £400. The youngest, William (1853-1933), studied at Oxford University with his tuition fees paid by the Society of Merchant Venturers; he became a vicar, for 21 years in Navestock, Essex. Although he retired in 1918 'for health reasons' he lived until 1933; his personal estate was £2000. References: census, probate records, marriage records, newspaper obituaries, etc.

Protheroe Claxton prior to 1828 by which time he is living on Nevis, where on 17 July 1830 he marries Sarah Bell Huggins, one of the daughters of Peter Thomas Huggins who managed Pinney's Mountravers Estate.¹²⁶

Tom Bass, enslaved by Philip Claxton

Somewhat surprisingly there is only one enslaved person registered to Philip Protheroe Claxton – a 38 year old from Nevis called Tom Bass, whom it says in the 1831 register was 'No. 114 [in the] Original List [of] North Wales Estate & purchased from the Trustees of Butler Thompson Claxton'. Tom Bass was listed in the 1806 legal agreement relating to the North Wales estate (see above). In the 1831 register for the North Wales estate it says that Tom Bass was sold to Claxton in December 1828, so it's likely this is when Philip Protheroe Claxton came to the island. There is no record of this Tom Bass in any 1834 register, or of Philip Protheroe Claxton receiving any compensation, so it's possible Tom Bass was manumitted before 1834.

Life on Nevis and early death

On 3 March 1833 Philip Protheroe Claxton and Sarah Bell Claxton received the sacrament at the Church at St Thomas Lowland – nothing unusual about that, except that they did so alongside eight enslaved people, five free people of colour and seven other white people – something which would have been unheard of a few years before.¹²⁷

In 1834 Philip Protheroe Claxton was made one of ten special magistrates charged with keeping the peace on Nevis following the change from slavery to apprenticeships. However, the appointment of the magistrates was questioned as the men were considered biased – either they had a direct interest in Apprenticeships, or, as in Claxton's case they were 'very much connected with colonial society', and they were later removed from office for this reason.¹²⁸

Eickelman says: 'According to Revd Britten [a Methodist Minister on Nevis] the change from slavery to the apprenticeship system went off quietly and in a dignified manner, but this did not last. By Monday, 4th August, "the labouring classes were in a state of most alarming insubordination". Their "disorderly and disaffected state" caused the immediate appointment of ten special magistrates charged with keeping the peace in the island [of which Claxton was one]... A few white men continued to hold the power to control and punish.... In Nevis efforts to enforce the new labour laws were met, "if not with insolence and opposition, at least with passive resistance, by refusing to work, during the crop, for wages on the Saturday." But there was also active resistance and the President reported "six cases in which valuable pieces of cane have been destroyed by fire". According to him "they had occurred under such circumstances as to leave no doubt but that they were the acts of incendiaries." While in Nevis opposition to the apprenticeship system remained patchy and covert, in St Kitts people openly rebelled.'¹²⁹

¹²⁶ The same day that Sarah Bell Huggins and Philip Protheroe Claxton married, another daughter of Peter Huggins, Jessey Huggins' married her first husband, Henry Harding who was then Collector of Taxes on Nevis, and whose second husband was to be Charles Kenny whose first wife was Mary Claxton (Philip Protheroe Claxton's niece) – in other words there were strong family connections between the Claxton and Huggins families. *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734 to 1834* p. 878 op. cit.

¹²⁷ Ibid p.80

¹²⁸ Ibid p. 1240

¹²⁹ Ibid p. 883

Emancipation and Revolt in the West Indies: St. Kitts, 1834 op. cit.

Philip Protheroe Claxton died suddenly 'of malignant fever'¹³⁰ in January 1836 aged 33, and his wife in September 1837.¹³¹

Rachel Wright Claxton (1791-1870) and John Savage (1785-1870)

Introduction

Robert and Rachel Claxton had three daughters, Rachel Wright Claxton (b. 1791), Elizabeth (b. 1794) and Margaret Wright (b. 1806). Two daughters - Rachel and Elizabeth - married men directly connected to the slavery economy, whilst Margaret never married.

Rachel Wright Claxton married John Savage in Almondsbury in October 1811. The marriage cemented links between the Claxton and Protheroe families after the two were no longer in business together, as John Savage was in business with Philip Protheroe as Protheroe and Savage, West India Merchants.¹³²

John Savage, sugar refiner

John Savage was primarily a sugar refiner. In business first with his brother and then his son, both Francis. They owned the Wilder Street refinery in the centre of Bristol between 1811 and 1848. Of course, sugar refineries were, until the abolition of slavery, largely dependent on imported slave-grown sugar from the British West Indies, and for over 150 years, from the mid C17th to the early C19th, the sugar refineries in Bristol were the most visible manifestation of the city's dependence on the slavery economy. However, the number of refineries gradually declined in the C19th, with those that remained processing much larger quantities of raw sugar imported from all over the World.¹³³

The Savage brothers were originally from Tetbury in Gloucestershire, but moved to Bristol to run the Wilder Street refinery which had been established in 1754. They introduced steam processes for refining, which was necessary to compete with other modern refineries in England. Their principle refiner

¹³⁰ 'Died Jan. 14 [1836] in the island of Nevis of malignant fever, which terminated his existence in three days, Philip Protheroe Claxton, youngest son of the late Robert Claxton, Esq. of this city.' *Bristol Mercury* 20 February 1836

¹³¹ There is a memorial to Sarah Bell Claxton and Philip Protheroe Claxton in Saint Thomas Anglican Church Cemetery Cotton Ground, Saint Thomas Lowland, Nevis

*'Sacred to the memory of
Sarah Bell
widow of Philip P Claxton
She died on the 8th Sept 1837.
Aged 25 years
her remains are deposited
by the side of those of her beloved husband
whom she survived only a few months
this tablet is erected
by Peter Thomas Huggins Esq
to perpetuate the many virtues
of a most affectionate child'*

Photograph of Sarah Bell Claxton's memorial: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/164470839/sarah-bell-claxton> [accessed 29.3.23]

¹³² *Bristol West India Merchants in the eighteenth Century* p.197 op. cit.

¹³³ The partnership of John and Francis Savage at the Wilder Street sugar refinery included Richard Edwin Honnywill for a period and although the Clara Sugar Database lists the partnership finishing in 1849, an obituary of John Savage says that he continued the business until about 1854. The business was valued in 1844 as worth £2500.

<http://www.mawer.clara.net/sugarsac.html> [accessed 14.12.22]

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 13 Jan 1870

Bristol's Sugar Trade and Refining Industry Donald Jones, Bristol Historical Association 1996

Bristol and the Sugar Trade Alison Grant, Longman 1981

was Conrad Finzel¹³⁴ who was with them until 1838 - in 1839 he acquired an old refinery at Counterslip which became Finzel's Refinery – one of the largest in Europe, in business until 1877 after most other Bristol refineries had closed (it then became Courage brewery and is now luxury flats).¹³⁵

Politician

As well as being in business, John Savage was embedded in Bristol's political life: 'Mr Savage, who was a magistrate of Gloucestershire and Bristol, was a member of the old, as well as the Reformed, Corporations. He served the office of High-sheriff and Mayor in the former, and was also one of the first Charity Trustees for Bristol.'¹³⁶ To show the interconnectedness of Bristol's politicians at that time, note that he was Sheriff in 1823 with Charles Pinney, and Mayor in 1830 when George Protheroe and William Claxton were Sheriff. In 1838 he was admitted to the Society of Merchant Venturers, in 1839 their Treasurer, and Master in 1842.¹³⁷ As a magistrate for Bristol and Gloucestershire he presided over dozens of cases, many of which were reported in local newspapers.

Compensation claims

John Savage was involved in slavery not only through refining slave-produced sugar, but also because he was connected to three estates on Nevis and St Kitts for which he made compensation claims which were all unsuccessful.¹³⁸ One was a counterclaim for compensation for the 76 enslaved people on the Belmont estate on Nevis - it's not clear what his connection to the estate was, and his counterclaim was unsuccessful.

With Philip Protheroe he made another unsuccessful claim for 19 enslaved people on the Meales estate on Nevis. This is one of the estates briefly owned by his brother-in-law, Butler Thompson Claxton (in the 1825 slave return Protheroe and Savage were named as his Trustees); but in the slave returns of 1828, 1831 and 1834 Protheroe and Savage are named as the owners of the estate along with Thomas Liburd. Thomas Liburd had died by 1834, and the compensation was awarded to London bankers, even though Protheroe and Claxton were 'owners-in-fee' – in other words they owned the estate. As one of the bankers, James Hughes Anderdon, was the brother of Thomas Butler Claxton's wife, Lucy, it's possible this is why Protheroe and Claxton were willing to allow the London bankers to claim the award of £297 11s 7d.

The third of John Savage's unsuccessful claims was for 131 enslaved people on the Clay Hill estate, St Kitts. In this case Protheroe and Savage were creditors for £1700 of the owner, John James Amory. However, Amory was also unsuccessful in his claim and the award of £2216 12s 7d went to a couple from Dublin who were Amory's mortgagees.

Property ownership

In 1815 John Savage bought Henleaze House from Philip Protheroe, who let the adjoining house, Springfield, to John Savage's brother, Francis.¹³⁹ Henleaze House was a substantial property of 50 acres. When John Savage put it up for sale nearly thirty years later in 1844 it was listed as a mansion 'which includes water closet, best and secondary kitchens, fitted up with all requisite conveniences; china and butler's pantries, capital dry arched wine, beer, and other cellars, 9 bed rooms, night nursery, 4 servants' apartments and 2 men servants' sleeping-rooms... Detached offices, dairy, laundry with drying ground,

¹³⁴ Conrad Finzel was a German refugee who'd fled Germany to avoid being drafted into Napoleon's army. He learnt about the sugar industry in London before living in Bristol. *Bristol ethnic minorities and the city 1000-2001* p.106
Madge Dresser and Peter Fleming, Philimore 2007

¹³⁵ *Bristol's Sugar Trade and Refining Industry* op. cit.

¹³⁶ *Bristol Evening Post* 20 November 1939

¹³⁷ *Bristol Lists: Municipal and Miscellaneous* p.229 op. cit.

¹³⁸ 'John Savage', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146630905> [accessed 30th March 2023] and related pages on LBS database

¹³⁹ *Bristol Evening Post* 20 November 1939

coach-houses, stabling for 8 horses, cattle sheds and other agricultural buildings... With the Lawn, Plantations, Pleasure Grounds, large productive Garden, stocked with the choicest Fruit Trees [and] 100 acres of excellent tythe free pasture land, of most park-like appearance.¹⁴⁰

John Savage also owned large amounts of land in what is now South Gloucestershire – in Almondsbury, Syston, and Winterbourne as well as other land in Henbury and Westbury-on-Trym in what is now Bristol.¹⁴¹ It's strange therefore, that in 1844 John and Rachel Savage moved to Bath where they lived until their deaths – her dying 2 days after him in January 1870. According to an obituary John Savage 'was, we believe, one of the last of our chief magistrates who occupied the Mansion-house in Queen-square [Bath]¹⁴².... Mr Savage was a man of the highest honour, excellent sound sense, and the kindest disposition. In manner, dress, and appearance he was a capital type of the English gentleman of the old school - courteous, hearty, and hospitable.¹⁴³ His estate was valued at under £9,000, his oldest son, Francis was his executor.¹⁴⁴

John and Rachel Savage's children

Born in 1814, Rachel and John Savage's second oldest son, Francis Savage, was apprenticed to his uncle, William Claxton (op cit), and in 1836 admitted to the Society of Merchant Venturers, becoming Warden in 1837. Francis Savage was the only one of Robert and Rachel Claxton's many grandchildren to remain in business in Bristol – though only until 1860. He became a partner in his father's Wilder Street sugar refinery with Richard Edwin Honnywill, but the partnership was dissolved in June 1848¹⁴⁵, and in the 1850s¹⁴⁶ he's in partnership with Henry Taylor Chamberlain trading as Savage & Chamberlain 'Sugar & India produce brokers' – one of seven firms of Colonial Brokers in Bristol in 1859; the partnership was dissolved in October 1860, the year he married in London where he lived as a 'retired sugar refiner'. But after the death of his parents in 1870, he's living at 10 Beaufort Buildings, Bath, which presumably he inherited from them as it's where both his parents died. In the 1871 census he's recorded as a 'Landowner' and in 1882 'JP for Bath'. An obituary says that for 17 years, he was involved in the Bath Savings Bank where 'thanks to his general knowledge of business... he gave much valuable aid in the management of the Institution.'¹⁴⁷ Earlier newspaper reports show that he was a manager of the bank from 1856. He died in Bath in 1882, and was buried in the family vault in Bathford churchyard, with the funeral ceremony performed by his cousin, Donald Maclean Claxton¹⁴⁸. His personal estate was valued at £7,300.

John and Rachel Savage had three other children – William (see below), John Claxton who died aged 23 in 1836 at his college in Oxford, and Maria who died aged 18 in 1842 at Henleaze House in Bristol. Could it have been the death of two children just as they were reaching adulthood which caused John and Rachel Savage to move from Bristol to Bath in 1844? William Savage who was a Church of England vicar lived to his 70s. For 25 years he was the vicar in Burcombe, a small village in Wiltshire living in the vicarage with his wife and several servants. Extraordinarily when he died in his 70s in 1894 his estate was valued at £23,301 6s 10d - exactly the same figure as the value of the thousands of Great Western Railway shares which he owned. This is the equivalent today of £11,400,000 wealth relative to the wages of the average

¹⁴⁰ *Bristol Mercury* 8 June 1844

¹⁴¹ *Indexes to the Bristol Record Office Tithe Apportionment Books*, Bristol and Avon Family History Society, 2003

¹⁴² In the poll books John Savage's addresses in Bath are given as 16 Green Park Buildings, Grosvenor House, and 10 Perry Place. When he died he was living at Beaufort Buildings East [Ref: Probate record]

¹⁴³ *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 13 January 1870

¹⁴⁴ Frustratingly the National Archives was only able to supply a copy of the Codicil to John Savage's will, not the will itself

¹⁴⁵ *The London Gazette* 23 June 1848 Issue: 20870 p. 2368

¹⁴⁶ In the 1851 census Francis Savage is registered as a 'Colonial Broker'

¹⁴⁷ *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 12 October 1882

¹⁴⁸ Donald Maclean Claxton was William and Helen Claxton's son. *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 12 October 1882

worker, thus making him worth far more than any other member of his extended family of that generation.¹⁴⁹

Elizabeth Claxton (1794-1879) and John Maynard (1799-1877)

John Maynard's family and connections to Nevis

Robert and Rachel Claxton's second surviving daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1794. In her early thirties, in 1826, she married the Rev. John Maynard in Bristol.

He was born on Nevis, one of the sons of Walter Maynard who came from an established family of Nevis planters, and was involved in a murder in 1822 when it is recorded he had killed John Huggins on the island. To show how interconnected the Nevis and Bristol families were, it's worth noting that John Huggins was the uncle of Sarah Bell Huggins, married to Philip Protheroe Claxton, Elizabeth's brother – in other words two Claxton siblings married people from rival Nevis families. There was a lot of ill will between the Maynard and Huggins families on Nevis from the early 1800s - Small and Eickelmann give a detailed analysis of John Huggins' killing, citing that Walter Maynard had a bad reputation on the island. They quote Mary Ames writing from Bristol in 1831, who said of Walter Maynard that she had gathered he was 'generally considered cruel towards his treatment of his slaves and that his habit of feeding them amounted to nearly starvation'. But, as Small and Eickelmann say: 'It seems however that the sins of Walter Maynard were not visited upon his sons, the eldest of whom, John, went to Oxford and subsequently lived a quiet life as a vicar in the beautiful Suffolk village of Orford for 35 years'.¹⁵⁰

Compensation claim and inheritance

Despite being a vicar in rural Suffolk from 1845 until his death in 1877, living with his wife Elizabeth (ne. Claxton), three children and two servants, John Maynard still had connections to Nevis and slavery as he was responsible for four estates left him in his father's will which I assume were still in his possession during at least the first ten years of his time in Suffolk (see below).

Whilst a curate in Berkeley, Gloucestershire¹⁵¹ in 1834 Rev. John Maynard made a claim for compensation for 142 enslaved people on the Mount Sion or Symonds estate on Nevis. However, the claim was unsuccessful and awarded to Charles Pinney in Bristol, as he was the mortgagee for 500 years for £9000.¹⁵² His father was more successful in his claims - Walter Maynard received £2720 9s 9d for 154 enslaved people on three estates on Nevis,¹⁵³ of which the New River estate was by far the largest, with 107 enslaved people.

In Walter Maynard's will made in 1839 (and proved in 1845) - by which time he was living in Uley, Gloucestershire - he bequeaths three estates (New River, Simmonds and Viane[?]) on Nevis to his three children - Rev John Maynard, Walter and Anne - to hold in trust for Walter Maynard's wife, Ann. On her

¹⁴⁹ Various newspaper reports; probate records; census records; records of Great Western Railway Shareholders 1835-1932 Vol 63, Folio 29, Entry number 111

¹⁵⁰ *A Nevis 'Legend' Revisited: the Huggins-Maynard Duel of 1822* David Small and Christine Eickelmann <http://seis.bris.ac.uk/~emceee/hugginsmaynardduel.doc%5b1%5d.pdf>

¹⁵¹ There are several newspaper references from 1837 to 1845 of John Maynard being a curate at Berkeley, Gloucestershire, and his youngest daughter was born there in 1845

¹⁵² 'Nevis 92 (Mount Sion or Symonds)', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/25286> [accessed 12th April 2023].

¹⁵³ 'Walter Maynard', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/23790> [accessed 12th April 2023].

death the estates were to go to Rev John Maynard. He leaves another estate, Gingerland, to be held by his three children as tenants in common.¹⁵⁴

After Walter Maynard's death, his wife Ann, accompanied by her daughter Anne goes to live in Suffolk in the same village as her son John, where, aged 74 in the 1851 census she is recorded as a 'Landed Proprietor'. However, in her short will (made in 1845 and proved in 1852) there is no mention of any land or holdings on Nevis, presumably because they were being held in trust by her children to give her an annual allowance. Ann Maynard leaves her 'household goods furniture books linen weaving and other apparel plate horses carriages and monies and securities for money and all singular my other effects of whatever nature insoever [sic] I might be possessed' to her daughter Anne, her sole executor.¹⁵⁵

Unrest on Nevis

It's not clear what Rev John Maynard and his two siblings did with their father's estates on Nevis or if / how they benefitted from them following their parent's death which was after abolition. Eickelmann notes that Walter Maynard was one of several people who lost property in 1836 and 1837 due to fires in Charlestown on Nevis. This was due to apprentices using arson as a means of protest about their situation as apprentices which, as has been noted above, was like slavery but with another name. The legislature on Nevis tried to stamp down on such acts of protest by passing three Acts in 1836 to severely punish such behaviour. For example, one of the Acts said that anyone who set fire to megass [sugarcane pulp], straw and grass could be transported 'beyond the seas' for seven years, or imprisoned for up to two years and, if the offender was male, he could 'be once, twice, or thrice publicly or privately whipped'. Arsonists who burnt cane, 'whether standing or cut down', faced double the periods of transportation and imprisonment, and the death penalty awaited those individuals or groups of rioters who set fire to or demolished ships, buildings - including churches - or machinery.¹⁵⁶

It's possible that the Maynard siblings sold their estates to enable them to live comfortable lives in England. This could explain why Rev John Maynard, a curate in a small Suffolk village had an estate valued at £7000 when he died in his late 70s in 1877 – the equivalent today of £3,627,000 relative wealth to the average worker.

His wife died two years later. They had three children: a daughter Elizabeth who married a vicar; Walter Fawkes a vicar like his father who pre-deceased his parents in 1874; and their youngest son John Seymour who matriculated from Oxford aged 19 in 1849 but died in 1850.¹⁵⁷

Margaret Wright Claxton (1806-1882)

Introduction

Robert and Rachel Claxton's youngest daughter, Margaret Wright was born in 1806. She never married, and lived in Bristol her whole life with her brother William's family at various addresses in Clifton¹⁵⁸. She was financially independent, variously listed in census records as an 'annuitant' (1851), and '[living off] railway dividends etc.' (1881).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Will of Ann Maynard

¹⁵⁶ *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734 to 1834* p.1246 op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ Census, marriage, probate and other records

¹⁵⁸ Margaret Claxton's addresses in Clifton were: in 1851 at 1 Nursery Villas; in 1871 at 24 Apsley Road; in 1881 at 9 Sherborne Villas (when there were just four women in the household – Margaret Claxton aged 75, her sister in law Helen Claxton aged 70 'an annuitant', her daughter Helen Claxton aged 40 a 'Professor of singing' and a female 'general servant' Emma Rossiter, a widow aged 48); her death in 1882 occurred at 8 Alma Road. Census and probate records

Ann Maynard

In the 1861 census Margaret Wright is visiting Ann Maynard in Suffolk, her sister Elizabeth's sister-in-law. Ann Maynard was born in the West Indies and also never married; she was the daughter of Walter Maynard, and lived for over 25 years in the same village as her brother, Rev John Maynard married to Elizabeth Claxton (Margaret Wright's sister). When Walter Maynard died in 1845 she was one of his three children to benefit from his Nevis estates (see above), and he also bequeathed her \$10,000 'part of the money owed to him on mortgages in New York in North America'.¹⁵⁹ Ann Maynard died in 1877, just six months before her brother, John; her personal estate was valued at £5,000.¹⁶⁰

Great Western Railway shares

When Margaret Wright Claxton died in January 1882 in her mid-seventies at 8 Alma Road, Clifton her personal estate was valued at £3,330 8s 1d – like her nephew, William Savage, the exact amount which her Great Western Railway stock was worth.¹⁶¹

A Bristol feast the month slavery ends

It's impossible to know what Margaret Wright was doing during her long life in Bristol – the only notice I've found of her is from the *Bristol Mercury* in August 1834 when she's reported as being one of the dozens of attendees at a Bristol Horticultural Society event on Tuesday 26th August, where there was a feast of 'cold chicken, ham, tongues, shell-fish &c.' and 'no expense [was spared] to obtain every rarity of the season' including ice from Ireland 'as none could be procured in this city, Bath, or London'. All this took place in a room 'festoon[ed] with flowers suspended from the roof, and the columns entwined with roses, dahlias, &c.' Alderman Thomas Daniel proposed toasts to the King and Queen whilst drinking champagne; a band played quadrilles and other dances.¹⁶²

This celebration was just weeks after the Abolition of Slavery Act came into force on 1st August 1834, the Act which meant owners of enslaved people received compensation. Thomas Daniel received the largest amount of compensation of anyone in Bristol, and one of the largest amounts in the country - £71,562 for 4,697 enslaved people on 29 plantations in Antigua, Barbados, British Guiana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Nevis, and Tobago.¹⁶³ So it is little wonder that he and other members of Bristol's slave owning elite were feasting and drinking champagne whilst across the Atlantic thousands of the people they had enslaved made the transition to an apprenticeship system – an estimated 647,000 people made the transition from slavery to apprenticeship. The new system meant that anyone over the age of six had to serve a four year term of apprenticeship if they were a 'household Negro' or a six year term if a 'field Negro'. This was across Britain's slave colonies other than Antigua, where everyone was freed. The apprentices had to

¹⁵⁹ Thank you to Christine Eickelmann for making this connection. 'Walter Maynard', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/23790> [accessed 1st April 2023].

¹⁶⁰ Ann Maynard's funeral was carried out by her brother John's son-in-law Rev Charles Raymond; the local paper reported: 'Miss Maynard, who was in her 76th year, was of a kind and benevolent disposition, and will be greatly missed by one and all of the inhabitants of Orford and its neighbourhood. The love and respect felt for the deceased lady was fully shown at the funeral, when so many numerous friends and inhabitants left their occupations to pay this, their last, token of respect to her, who is b "simply gone before." *Ipswich Journal* 03 July 1877

¹⁶¹ Margaret Wright Claxton's nephew, William Savage (op cit) was one of her Executors, the other being William Barge who took over from her brother, William Claxton (op cit), as accountant for the Merchant Venturers. Census and probate records. *Great Western Railway Shareholders 1835-1932* Vol. 34, Folio 16, entry number 67.

¹⁶² *Bristol Mercury* 30 August 1834

¹⁶³ 'Thomas Daniel', *Legacies of British Slavery database*, <http://wwwdeps-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/92> [accessed 12th April 2023]. *The price of Emancipation* pp. 266, 341 Nick Draper, 2010, Cambridge University Press.

work for 45 hours a week for their former owners for which they received a food allowance and had the option of working for money and purchasing their freedom.¹⁶⁴

James Williams and his resistance to apprenticeship

As has been referred to elsewhere, there was much resistance to the new system of apprenticeship, and many former enslaved people felt that they were treated more harshly in the new regime than they had been under slavery. In the words of an 18 year old former enslaved person in Jamaica, James Williams:

'Apprentices get a great deal more punishment now than they did when they was slaves; the master take spite, and do all he can to hurt them before the free come; - I have heard my master say, "Those English devils say we to be free, but if we is to free, he will pretty well weaken we, before the six and the four years done; we shall be no use to ourselves afterwards."

Apprentices a great deal worse off for provision than before time; magistrate take away their day, and give to the property; massa give we no salt allowance, and no allowance at Christmas; since the new law begin, he only give them two mackerel, - that was one time when them going out to job.

*When I was a slave I never flogged, - I sometimes was switched, but not badly; but since the new law begin, I have been flogged seven times, and put in the house of correction four times.*¹⁶⁵

James Williams travelled to England where his account of events following 1st August 1834 was published. His account was instrumental in bringing apprenticeship to an end in 1838 – two years earlier than originally planned.

¹⁶⁴ *The Apprenticeship System in the British West Indies* The Journal of Negro Education, Vol.33 1964 pp. 52-57
James Latimer

¹⁶⁵ *A narrative of events since the 1st of August, 1834* James Williams, The Colonial Office, London 1838

Conclusion

This detailed case study of the Claxton family reveals the complex network of relationships that connected people based in Bristol and the West Indies during the period when Bristol's slave based economy was coming to an end. These networks – familial, civic and economic – all lead back to the ownership of enslaved people.

In Bristol, the Claxton family were part of a relatively small elite who were members of both the Council and the Society of Merchant Venturers, and thus involved in day-to-day decision making which affected the City, including participation in major projects such as the development of the floating harbour. This network included other Bristol families such as the Protheroes, Miles, and Pinneys whom the Claxton family were directly in business with, and who it is well documented made their fortunes from slavery.

Members of the Claxton family in Bristol took part in, and influenced, the national debate regarding the abolition of slavery; in this Claxton family members had differing views, with Robert Claxton Snr. supporting abolition whilst his son Christopher vehemently opposed it.

Members of the family who left Bristol for the West Indies had an impact on the transition between a society based on slave labour to one based on apprenticeship. Robert Claxton Jnr. established Kingstown in Tortola for illegally captured Africans and Philip Protheroe Claxton was a magistrate on Nevis charged with keeping the peace to ensure enslaved people didn't revolt when forced into apprenticeship, perceived by most as slavery by another name.

Women are often ignored in narratives about the slavery economy, but this study shows that many women at this time were financially independent. For example, Lucy Claxton (married to Butler Thompson Claxton) came from a family with extensive slave-owning interests and when she died her estate was valued to be far higher than her husband's; hers was valued at circa. £10,000, her husband's at £2000. Rachel Claxton inherited from her husband, Robert Claxton Snr., a sum which is equivalent today to £880,000. Their daughter, Margaret Wright Claxton, who never married and was financially independent, had an estate which consisted of Great Western Railway shares, the equivalent today in value to £1,822,000. I have identified 27 grandchildren of Robert and Rachel Claxton – 15 female and 12 male – and many of the granddaughters inherited the same sums as their male siblings.

At the heart of the Claxton narrative is their ownership of enslaved people. Most accounts of this period refer to two Claxton members: Christopher and William Claxton, the former in relation to the 1830 'slavery election' and his connection to Brunel, the latter for his role as Treasurer of the SMV. However, there is hardly any mention of the Claxton family's direct involvement in every aspect of the complex economics of slavery. They owned plantations; they bought, sold and manumitted enslaved people; they provided credit for planters; they were in debt linked to plantations; they owned and sailed ships trading between Bristol and the West Indies; they imported sugar and other goods produced by enslaved labour; they processed the sugar in Bristol; and they received compensation when slavery was abolished.

Their slave-based business affairs were made easier because of their connections with families in the West Indies including Rachel Claxton's brothers; Robert Claxton Snr's brother and nephews; and the marriages between five of their children to people with families from the West Indies.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Butler Thompson Claxton to Lucy Shuckburgh Anderdon, Robert Claxton Jnr to Anne Brodie Hanley, Elizabeth Claxton to John Maynard, William Claxton to Helen Nairne Bishop, and Philip Protheroe Claxton to Sarah Bell Huggins.

This study shows that the second generation of the Claxton family involved in plantation slavery in the 1810s-1830s (Rachel and Robert Claxton Snr's children) were losing money and had to turn to other sources of income generation; compared with others in Bristol, the Claxton family's compensation claims were small, and in several cases unsuccessful. For example Butler Thompson Claxton who at one point owned 515 enslaved people didn't make any compensation claims, and died with only a £2000 insurance policy to leave to his wife and children; William Claxton, although he benefitted from a compensation claim as a mortgagee, said that in 1831 his West India business had failed, hence he became an employee of the Society of Merchant Venturers; John Savage was unsuccessful in three compensation claims, retired from his sugar refinery business in the 1840s and presumably lived off his extensive land holdings. The two Bristol based women in the family who received compensation were Rachel Claxton (£428) and Mary Pike Bishop (£421) – sums below the average amount (£727) of compensation awarded to women in Bristol.¹⁶⁷

One reason for this case study was to investigate any impact on Victorian Bristol of a family whose wealth had been based on the slavery economy. Regarding the Claxtons, the answer is that there was no ongoing association between the third generation of Claxton family members (Robert and Rachel Claxton's 27 grandchildren), and Bristol's civic or business life.¹⁶⁸ In fact, all but two of their grandchildren left Bristol¹⁶⁹; they lived and died elsewhere – scattered around England and across the World in India, Canada, South Africa, and the West Indies. Eleven of the grandchildren were either themselves Church of England clergy or married to one; of the others there was a doctor, lawyer, engineer, army surgeon in India, member of the Merchant Navy, and sugar refiner / broker. Only one female grandchild is recorded as having an occupation, Helen Alicia Claxton¹⁷⁰, who was a professional singer and 'Licenced Victualler'. With one or two exceptions, none of the third generation of Claxton family members could be described as wealthy, though nearly all lived comfortably with at least one or two servants. Thus a family which had been embedded in the slavery economy from the early 1700s to the 1830s had, by the 1850s, almost no remaining connections to Bristol or the riches associated with owning enslaved people.

This study attempts to recognise and pay tribute to a small number of the people enslaved by the Claxton family by naming individuals, and making public details about their lives from the few records available. It is difficult to give a precise number of people enslaved by the Claxton family, but my estimate is more than 1250 people¹⁷¹. Many of those people's descendants are alive today, and it is fair to assume that some are living in England as part of the Windrush generation, and therefore there could be people living in Bristol now who are descended from the people enslaved by the Claxton family. It's vital to make the link between what happened 200 years ago and people's lives today, and recognise the connection between Bristol families' involvement in the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans, and contemporary events such as the tearing down of Colston's statue in 2020 and the Black Lives Matter movement – they are part of the same history.

¹⁶⁷ Based on RH's own research of Bristol awardees

¹⁶⁸ There is one exception - Francis Savage was a sugar refiner and broker in Bristol until 1860, when he left to live in London

¹⁶⁹ Those two were Mary Craven Claxton and Philip Culpepper Claxton – two of William and Helen Claxton's children

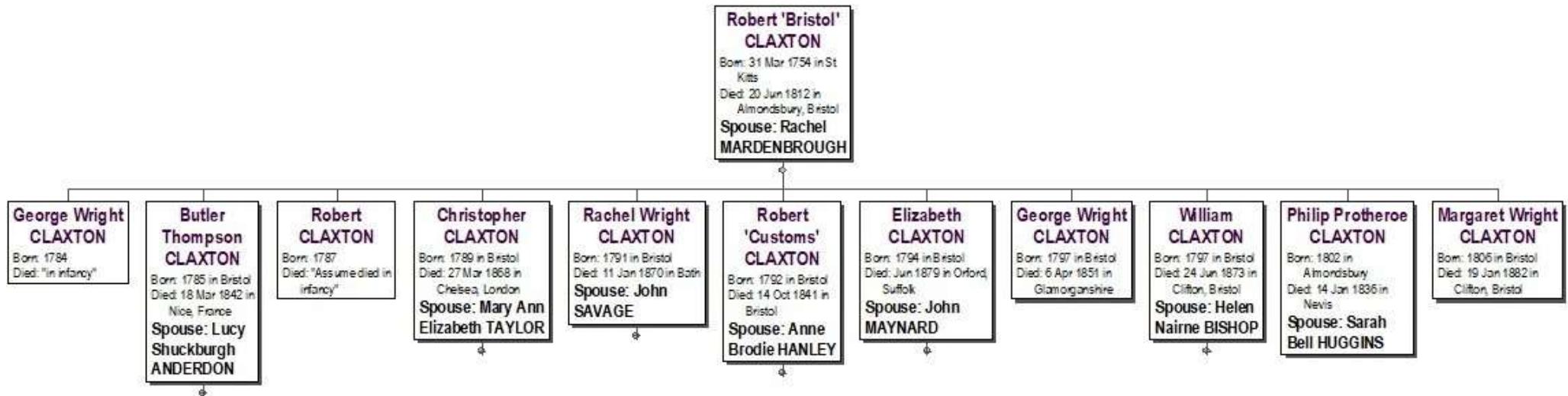
¹⁷⁰ Another of William and Helen Claxton's children

¹⁷¹ This figure does not include plantations for which the Claxton family were mortgagors at different times where no information about the number of enslaved people is available

Family Trees

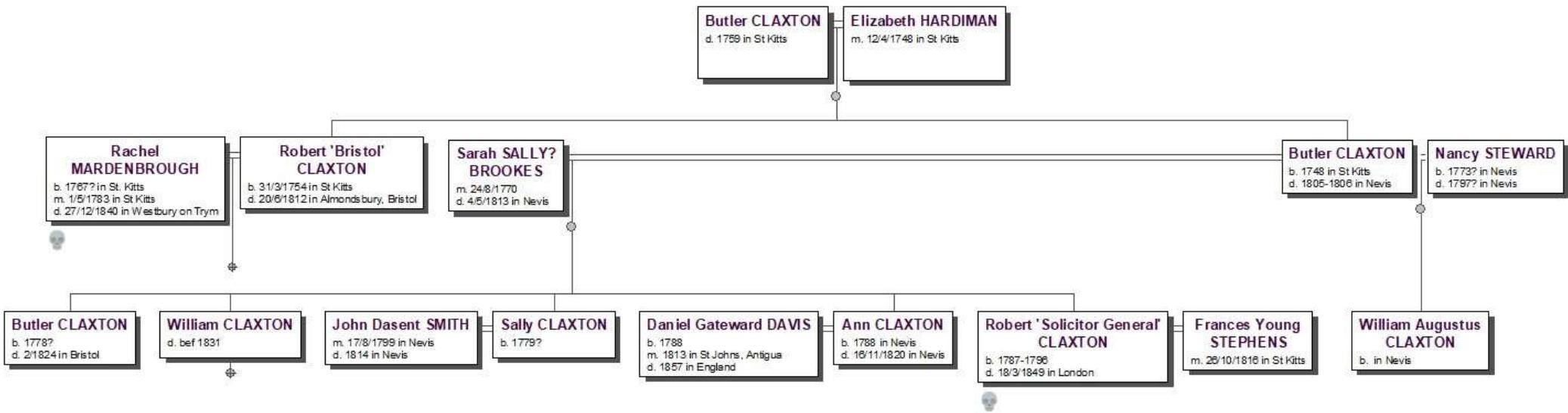
Robert and Rachel Claxton's children and their spouses

Robert and Rachel Claxton's children and their spouses



The Claxton family of the West Indies

Tree showing the West Indies based family of Robert Claxton who lived in Bristol including his brother, Butler Claxton and nephews Butler Claxton and Robert 'Solicitor General' Claxton



[Skull = received compensation]

List of descendants of Robert and Rachel Claxton

1 Robert CLAXTON, son of Butler CLAXTON and Elizabeth HARDIMAN

Born: 31 Mar 1754, St Kitts. Marr: Rachel MARDENBROUGH 1 May 1783, St Kitts. Died: 20 Jun 1812, Almondsbury, Bristol.

= Rachel MARDENBROUGH, dau. of Christopher MARDENBROUGH and Rhoda FRYERS

Born: 1767 (est), St. Kitts. Died: 27 Dec 1840, Westbury on Trym.

1.1 George Wright CLAXTON

Born: 1784. Died: "in infancy".

1.2 Butler Thompson CLAXTON

Born: 1785, Bristol. Marr: Lucy Shuckburgh ANDERDON 30 Jan 1809, London. Died: 18 Mar 1842, Nice, France.

= Lucy Shuckburgh ANDERDON, dau. of John Proctor ANDERDON and Anne OLIVER

Born: 1789, Henley, Littleham, Gloucestershire. Died: 1 May 1851, London.

1.2.1 Lucy Anne CLAXTON Born: 1812. Marr: Vincenzo Salvo, Marchese di PIETRAGANZILI 1845, Bad Homburg von der Hohe. Died: 15 Nov 1892, Paris, France.

= Vincenzo Salvo, Marchese di PIETRAGANZILI

1.2.2 Maria Louisa CLAXTON Born: 1815, Westbury on Trym. Died: 8 Jun 1881, West Pennard, Somerset.

1.2.3 Julia Emma CLAXTON Born: 1821, Christchurch, Hampshire. Marr: Thomas Partridge NUNN 30 Jun 1846, Littleham, nr. Exmouth. Died: 28 Mar 1890, West Pennard, Somerset.

= Thomas Partridge NUNN Died: 1901.

1.3 Robert CLAXTON

Born: 1787 assume died in infancy

1.4 Christopher CLAXTON

Born: 1789. Marr: Mary Ann Elizabeth TAYLOR Died: 27 Mar 1868, Chelsea, London.

= Mary Ann Elizabeth TAYLOR

Born: 1799 (est), Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. Died:

1.4.1 Robert Berkeley Bailey CLAXTON Born: 1820. Died: 1876, Brighton.

1.4.2 Mary Anne CLAXTON Born: 1820 (est), Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

1.4.3 Louisa Ann CLAXTON Born: 1821. Marr: Nicholas Edward HURST 26 Jul 1842, Clifton, Bristol. Died: aft 1885.

= Nicholas Edward HURST Died: 25 Apr 1885, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire.

1.4.4 Gertrude CLAXTON Born: 1829, St Kitts. Marr: William BOYLE 23 Nov 1847, Clifton, Bristol. Died: 1873, Wandsworth, London.

= William BOYLE Died: 26 Oct 1858, Bengal, India.

1.4.5 Clara Miles CLAXTON Born: 1835, Bristol. Died: Jan 1842.

1.4.6 Caroline CLAXTON Born: 1835, Nevis. Marr: John Bax MARRIOTT 1 Jul 1856, Battersea, London. Died: 1922, Burckinghamshire.

= John Bax MARRIOTT Died: 23 May 1887, Margate, Kent.

1.4.7 Maria Victoria CLAXTON Born: 1837, Clifton, Bristol. Marr: Samuel Adamson Homan ESQ. 1 Jul 1856, Battersea, London. Died: 1 Jul 1901, Battersea, London.

= Samuel Adamson Homan ESQ. Born: 27 Nov 1818. Died: 10 Mar 1895.

1.5 Rachel Wright CLAXTON

Born: 1791, Bristol. Marr: John SAVAGE 15 Oct 1811, Almondsbury. Died: 11 Jan 1870, Bath.

= John SAVAGE, son of John SAVAGE

Born: 1785. Died: 9 Jan 1870, Bath.

1.5.1 John Claxton SAVAGE Born: 1813, Olveston, Gloucestershire. Died: 1836, Oxford.

1.5.2 Francis SAVAGE Born: 1814, Westbury on Trym. Marr: Caroline Bass SHARPE 1860, London. Died: 3 Oct 1882, Bath.

= Caroline Bass SHARPE

1.5.3 William SAVAGE Born: 1820. Died: 20 Apr 1894, Burcombe, Wiltshire.

= Anne Hunt HOLDSWORTH Born: 1826 (est). Died: 30 Dec 1883.

1.5.4 Maria SAVAGE Born: 1824. Died: 7 Feb 1842, Westbury on Trym.

1.6 Robert 'Customs' CLAXTON

Born: 1792, Bristol. Marr: Anne Brodie HANLEY Jan 1817, est Nevis. Died: 14 Oct 1841, Bristol.

= Anne Brodie HANLEY, dau. of John HANLEY and Judith SHERIFF

Born: 1798 (est). Died: 30 Nov 1833, Westbury on Trym.

1.6.1 **Mary CLAXTON** Born: bef 1820. Marr: Charles KENNY 5 Nov 1836, Nevis. Died: Assume Nevis

= Charles KENNY Born: 1790 (est). Marr: Jessey HUGGINS 1851. Died: bef 1861.

1.6.2 **Robert Savage CLAXTON** Born: 1823, Nevis.

1.6.3 **William CLAXTON** Born: 1827 (est), Nevis.

1.6.4 **Ann Judith CLAXTON** Born: 3 May 1829, St Kitts. Died: 1907, Canada.

1.7 Elizabeth CLAXTON

Born: 1794, Bristol. Marr: John MAYNARD 11 Oct 1826, Bristol. Died: Jun 1879, Orford, Suffolk.

= John MAYNARD, son of Walter MAYNARD and Ann (surname unknown) Born: 1799, Nevis. Died: 8 Dec 1877, Orford, Suffolk.

1.7.1 **John Seymour MAYNARD** Born: 1830, Bristol. Died: 1850, Suffolk.

1.7.2 **Walter Fawkes MAYNARD** Born: 1831, Bristol. Died: 28 Nov 1874, Orford, Suffolk.

1.7.3 **Elizabeth MAYNARD** Born: 1834, Berkley, Gloucestershire. Marr: Charles Andrews RAYMOND 1864, Plomesgate, Suffolk.

= Charles Andrews RAYMOND Died: 12 Jan 1920.

1.8 George Wright CLAXTON

Born: 1797, Bristol. Died: 6 Apr 1851, Glamorganshire.

1.9 William CLAXTON

Born: 1797, Bristol. Marr: Helen Nairne BISHOP 9 Jun 1835, Clevedon. Died: 24 Jun 1873, Clifton, Bristol.

= Helen Nairne BISHOP, dau. of Charles Kyd BISHOP and Mercy Pike CULPEPER

Born: 1805 (est), Barbados. Died: 1 Nov 1889, Weymouth, Dorset.

1.9.1 **Philip Culpeper CLAXTON** Born: 1837, Westbury on Trym. Died: 23 Jun 1869, Bedminster.

1.9.2 **Mary Craven CLAXTON** Born: 1838, Westbury on Trym. Marr: William Henry HITCHCOCK 2 Aug 1860, Clifton, Bristol. Died: 1 Jun 1905, Clifton, Bristol.

= William Henry HITCHCOCK

1.9.3 **Helen Alicia CLAXTON** Born: 1840, Westbury on Trym. Marr: James White BOARD 1890, Weymouth, Dorset. Died: 20 Jun 1921, Weymouth.

= James White BOARD Born: 1831 (est). Died: 17 Aug 1914.

1.9.4 **Donald Maclean CLAXTON** Born: 1841, Westbury on Trym. Died: 13 Aug 1887, Merriott, Somerset.

1.9.5 **Robert Osborne CLAXTON** Born: 1845, Clifton, Bristol. Died: 26 Sep 1890, Delagoa Bay, Lourenco Marques South Africa.

1.9.6 **William CLAXTON** Born: 1853, Clifton, Bristol. Marr: Emily PRESTON 17 Jul 1879, Tenbury. Died: 17 Sep 1933, Thorpe Bay, Southend, Essex.

= Emily PRESTON

1.10 Philip Protheroe CLAXTON

Born: 1802, Almondsbury. Marr: Sarah Bell HUGGINS 17 Jul 1830, Nevis. Died: 14 Jan 1836, Nevis.

= Sarah Bell HUGGINS, dau. of Peter Thomas HUGGINS

Born: 1812 (est). Died: 8 Sep 1837, Nevis.

1.11 Margaret Wright CLAXTON

Born: 1806, Bristol. Died: 19 Jan 1882, Clifton, Bristol.