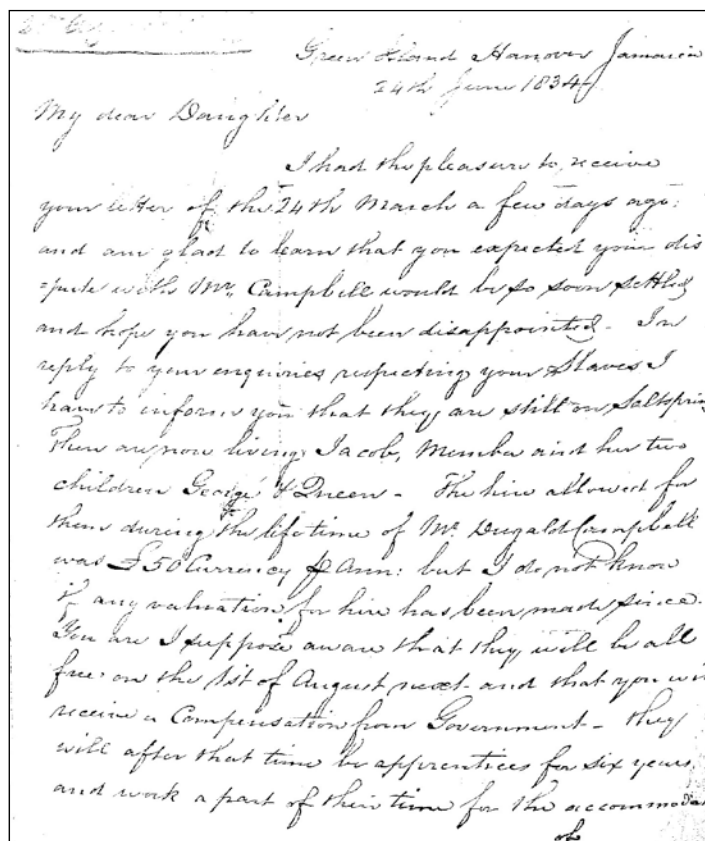


# COMPENSATING SCOTTISH SLAVE-OWNERS

## 1. Legacies of British slave-ownership Keith McClelland

When slavery in the British Empire was abolished in 1833 the British government paid out £20 million in compensation to slave owners for the loss of their 'property', that is, the men and women who had been enslaved. One of the off-shoots of emancipation was a unique census of the owners. Each one was listed in a Parliamentary Paper published in 1837-1838 and each claim for compensation was documented with material which is now held in the National Archives at Kew. A project being undertaken at University College London on the *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* is engaged in an attempt to provide



Letter dated 24 January 1834 from Eleanor Affleck in Green Island, Jamaica to her daughter Sarah of 10 East Adam Street Edinburgh concerning her compensation claim (no. 487 for one slave).

the first systematic analysis of the impact of compensation and slave-ownership on the formation of Victorian Britain. Who were those compensated? How much did they receive? Where did they live? What networks of activity were they engaged in? Drawing on the records of the Commissioners of Slave Compensation, appointed to distribute the £20 million, and other records, the

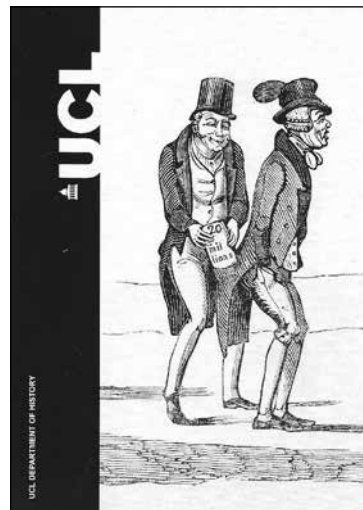
project is constructing a database of slave-owners and other beneficiaries of

compensation. In particular, we are focussing on beneficiaries who were living in Britain at the time of Emancipation or came to Britain thereafter. These absentees amounted to about 2,500-3,000 of the total number of about 29,000 beneficiaries. But they received about 40% of the money.

One particularly interesting dimension of this is that Scots played a disproportionately important role. Our research so far suggests that people living in Scotland accounted for at least 15% of absentee owners at a point when the Scottish population was less than 10% of the UK population as a whole. Moreover, one of the largest single groups receiving compensation were Glasgow merchants, despite the prior absence of a significant direct participation in the slave trade. In total, they seem to have taken about 10% of the compensation paid to British merchants.

The project is tracing the absentees through six research strands embracing different types of legacy as well as establishing basic biographical data about individuals. *Commercial continuities* analyses the evolution of individual merchant firms and banks receiving slave compensation, as well as the apparent use of the compensation money in funding other investments. *Cultural legacies* examines the role of British slave-owners as connoisseurs and collectors, and as founders or participants in new cultural and social institutions. *Historical lineages* explores the role of slave-owners and their descendants as writers and historians constructing memories of the slave-trade and slavery. *Political Legacies* traces the affiliations and associational networks of slave-owners and their immediate descendants in national and local politics, and explores how former slave-owners left their imprint on contention over free trade and the wider reconstitution of the nation in mid-century. *Imperial legacies* traces the role of slave-owners in the wider circuits of Empire, as investors, administrators and settlers beyond the slave-colonies. Finally, *Physical legacies* catalogues and assesses the built environment associated with slave-owners, including residential and commercial buildings, public monuments and public spaces.

The work the project is doing has already been enriched by contributions of information and material from many independent scholars and researchers, including family and local historians, as well as from colleagues in academic history. In due course, our database will become available through a website – which we intend should be launched by the autumn of 2011 – and it will be fully accessible and searchable. In the meantime, we urge all those interested in the project to have a look at the preliminary data for Scotland, which can be downloaded from <http://www.>



ucl.ac.uk/lbs/regionalworkshops/scotland; and if there is someone who you know about please do send us material which might be incorporated into the database. The project team is acutely aware that there is a great deal of information being uncovered by different people in many different contexts; but we also actively want this project to be a collaborative venture, drawing on the skills and knowledge of many diverse people. For more details of the project please visit [www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs); or you can contact us directly by e-mail through [lbs@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:lbs@ucl.ac.uk).

## 2. Burns' neighbours and their slavery compensation claims, 1835-6

### Eric J Graham

Many of the grand houses that stand in and around the parish of Alloway, which the Bard knew well, were built on the profits of black slavery and sugar. This short note explores the compensation claims that their occupants made in 1835-6 to the Treasury following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. These have recently been catalogued by the UCL's *Legacies of the British Slave-ownership* project and whose aims are related above.<sup>1</sup>

The compensation claims investigated concern two Jamaican plantations – 'Rozelle' in the parish of St Thomas-in-the-East and 'Pemberton Valley' (with its affiliated 'Boscabelle Pen') in St Mary's Parish.<sup>2</sup>



Rozelle Plantation Map. Courtesy of the Fergusson of Kilkerran Family.

The eventual payouts amounted to £9237, which is somewhere in excess of three quarters of a million pounds in today's monetary values. Both these large plantations had originally been acquired by Robert Hamilton, a young merchant adventurer from Ayr, upon his extremely advantageous marriage to a Jamaican planter's widow in 1734.<sup>3</sup>

One hundred years later the ownership of these plantations had devolved to two groups of Ayrshire's landed gentry who were closely linked by marriage. Unravelling who these claimants were and how they came by their share is a challenge faced by all who delve into the Compensation Lists. It requires careful genealogical mapping of the families involved in the ownership of estates both in Jamaica and Ayrshire and over a considerable time period.

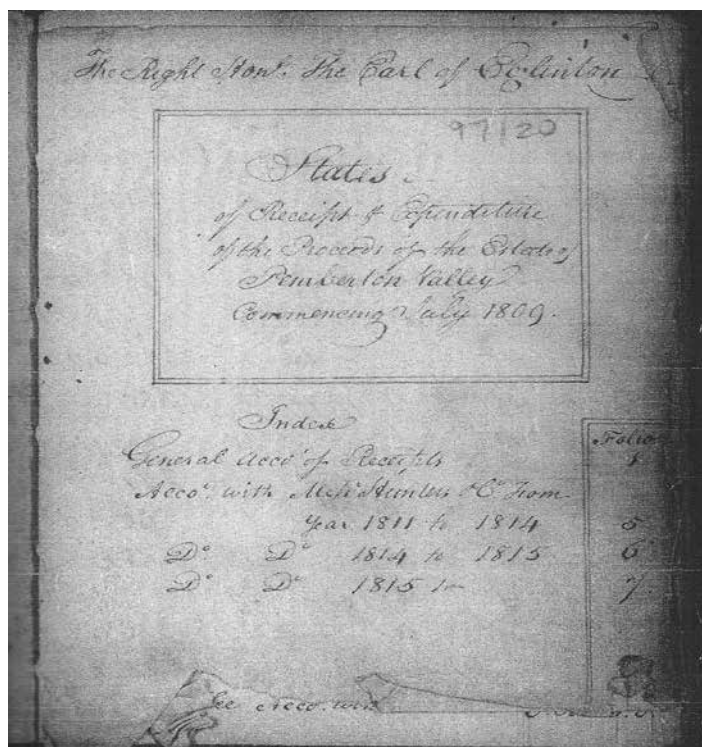
The key event was Robert's selling of his Rozelle sugar plantation soon after retiring back home from Jamaica in the early 1760s. This was necessary to finance his social ambitions set by his purchase of one third of the land of the parish of Alloway, close by Burns' birth place, and the erection of a mansion - Rozelle House. In a very short time the ownership of that plantation passed to two of the most prominent South Ayrshire families – the Hunter Blairs of Blairquhan and the Fergussons of Kilkerran.<sup>4</sup> Robert chose to retain his other sugar plantation - Pemberton Valley - a half share of which had previously been passed to his

brother John's widow. Over the next seventy years both Jamaican estates were managed by a succession of his nephews, such as the closeness of the families involved. The profits were phenomenal and allowed each of the nephews to found their own family seats, as the Hamiltons of Sundrum Castle and the Hamiltons of Pinmore & Bellisle. Robert completed his social metamorphosis from local merchant's son to landed gentleman with the advantageous marriage of



Lillias Oswald with grandson Archibald Hamilton. Courtesy of the Maclaurin Collection.

his daughters. His eldest daughter Jean married the wayward Earl of Crawford while his youngest daughter Eleanora married Hugh Montgomerie of Coilsfields, latterly 12th Earl of Eglinton. By 1834, intermarriage between these families and their peers amply testifies to the close circle of the ruling lowland families.



Eglinton's Pemberton Valley Plantation Account Book 1811 onwards.

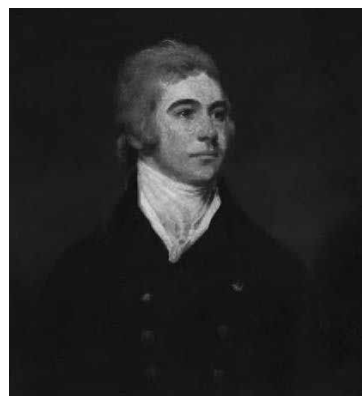
With such basic genealogical information, the data from the compensation claims can be unravelled. Claim No. 267 was lodged for 265 former slaves on the Pemberton Valley estate and 42 slaves at Boscabelle Pen. The first named claimant was John Hamilton of Sundrum (III) who had married Christine Dundas of Dundas. The second named claimant was Lady Jane



John Kay's caricature of 'Sodger' Hugh Montgomerie of Coilsfield, later 12th Earl of Eglinton.

Montgomerie, daughter of Eleanora (last surviving daughter of Robert Hamilton) and 'Sodger Hugh' Montgomerie, 12th Earl of Eglinton. The third claimant was Lady Lilius Oswald (nee Montgomerie and grand daughter of the 6th Earl of Eglinton) mother of 'Sundrum John' III. Her first husband John II (her cousin) had died in 1821 and she had just married the widower Richard Alexander Oswald of Auchencruive and Scotstoun. Richard Alexander Oswald, described by Burns as 'the wealthy young Richard', was the fourth claimant. Richard's first wife, the celebrated beauty Louis 'Lucy' Johnstone, had previously been the wife of the reviled jurist Robert Dundas McQueen, Lord Braxfield. At the same time a further claim (No. 269) was submitted by a Thomas B Hamilton for 10 slaves on the Pemberton Valley estate. This claimant was almost certain the plantation manager or overseer's private stock accumulated during his residency.

The payout to the single claim (No. 510) for 198 former slaves on the Rozelle plantation was split between the owners Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran and Sir David Hunter Blair of Blairquhan.<sup>5</sup> Sir James, born in 1765, was the eldest son of Sir Adam (the 3rd baronet) who had first acquired his half of the plantation in 1782 in lieu of debts owed by his brother.<sup>6</sup> The father of David - Sir James Hunter Blair - was a keen supporter of Burns, cordially receiving him on his arrival in Edinburgh. Indeed, Burns penned an elegy to his patron 'the lamp of day, with ill-presaging glare' on his death in 1787. Sir James was noted as one of



Above: Claimant John Hamilton of Sundrum.

Below: Rozelle House, Alloway with post 1837 side extensions.



the great Lord Provosts of Edinburgh - pushing through the second phase of the New Town and acting as the driving force behind the building of South Bridge over the Cowgate and the rebuilding of the Old College in the Old Town and the Bridewell on Calton Hill. He made most of his fortune as a banker with Sir William Forbes and was MP for Edinburgh. Sir David eventually sold his share of the Rozelle plantation in 1848 to Sir Charles Dalrymple-Fergusson who had succeeded to the Kilkerran baronetcy ten years earlier.

As for the monies received, it would appear much was spent on improvements on their Ayrshire estates. It is known that new wings were added to Rozelle mansion in Alloway in 1837, when acquired by Archibald Hamilton of Carluie (Lilius Montgomerie's grandson and husband of claimant Lady Jane) from his nephew the 13th Earl of Eglinton. Around the same time improvements to Blairquhan Castle (rebuilt 1822-4) were ongoing. The ex-slaves, of course, received nothing.

## References

- 1 The author is very grateful to the UCL team for a sight of these claims in their database.
- 2 Pens were smaller holdings that provided food for the slavers and fodder for the draught animals.
- 3 See Eric J Graham, *Burns & the Sugar Plantocrats of Ayrshire*, Monograph 36 (Ayrshire Archaeology & Natural History Society, 2009).
- 4 Sir Adam Fergusson served as Rector of Glasgow University and was MP for Ayrshire three times. Burns referred to him as the 'aith-detesting chaste Kilkerran' in *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer*.
- 5 David succeeded to the baronetcy aged 22 when his elder brother died in 1800.
- 6 James' grand son (also James) went on to become Governor of Southern Australia, New Zealand and Bombay in succession; he was MP for Ayrshire and held numerous government posts before, ironically, he was killed in the 1907 Jamaican earthquake.