

**Memorials in St Mary's Church, Twickenham:
A note on links to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
(together with known links within the church)**

The recent increase in awareness of the historical involvement of British merchants, traders and landed gentry, both as plantation owners and investors in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and their legacy in Britain today, has raised the question of possible links between residents of Twickenham commemorated in the parish church with the slave trade and the ownership of slaves.

From medieval times Twickenham was a small village surrounded by farms, orchards and market gardens, which was busy with riverside trade, transport and fishing. The 18th and 19th centuries saw Twickenham enjoy immense popularity amongst people of wealth and culture from London and elsewhere. Titled families, often with young children, as well as retired army and navy men, lived in villas along the banks of the Thames either for the summer months or for permanent residence. The attractive location, being both rural and near to London, was made fashionable by Alexander Pope with his villa and grotto, Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill and Lady Howard at Marble Hill, to the extent that the Thames-side from Hampton Court to Chiswick became known popularly as Arcadia.

St Mary's Church has a large number of memorials on the walls, in the floor and on the exterior walls of the church building, as well as numerous tombs and gravestones in the churchyard and the two cemeteries in Holly Road and Oak Lane. Those inside the church were recorded in 2015 by Anthony Beckles Willson, at one time the St Mary's archivist, in *The Memorials and Ledgerstones*, listing a total of 93 memorials of which the majority postdate the rebuilding in 1713.

However, this work did not focus on links to the slave trade, and St Mary's has now carried out additional research. Unhappily, but not surprisingly, given the wealth and societal standing of many of those living in Twickenham at the time, we have uncovered such links to some of our memorials.

Using the *Legacies of British Slave Ownership* website hosted by University College London, it has been possible to check whether these Twickenham residents were associated in the slave trade as owners, relatives or heirs, as shown in the Compensation Lists of the Slavery Abolition Act 1833.

The following, whose memorials can be seen in the galleries and north aisle, appear to have had direct or indirect links to the trade:

- **Lambert Blair** (1767-1815): owned slaves and plantations in Berbice and Demerara in Guyana, and in Surinam. He lived at Richmond House with an African servant, David Maxwell.
- **Thomas Wildman** (1740-1795), his widow Sarah and daughter-in-law Lady Margaret: Thomas Wildman acquired the Quebec Estate in Jamaica in lieu of payment for legal work for William Beckford; it was managed by his brother James Wildman.
- **Lucia, Viscountess Clifden** (1832-1802) and **Agnes Breton**: Lucia married James Agar, 1st Viscount Clifden, nephew of Welbore Ellis who owned five slaves; both sisters owned land in Virginia, a state with significant slave ownership .
- **Caroline Agar Ellis** married Henry Agar, 2nd Viscount Clifden, son of James and Lucia, as above.
- **Joseph Mellish** (1769-1823) was left an annuity from the estate of Iter Boreale, Jamaica, by his father, Charles Mellish, in his will.
- **George Gostling** (1714-1782) was a co-heir of the Clay Hill Estate on Nevis, where his actual ownership of slaves is not clear. (OHG p24-25)
- **Ann Littledale** (1777-1794) was from a prominent family in Whitehaven Cumberland, who were slave owners.
- **Hamon L'Estrange** (1670-1728) was probably related to Guy L'Estrange who was compensated for 99 slaves on the Mauritius Estate.
- **Lord John Berkeley** (1606-1678): many of his relatives and descendants were listed in the 1833 list.
- **Edward Osborn Pocock** (1794-1813) was the grandson of Sir George Pocock (1706-1792), whose naval career saw him defending British trade interests around the world, in the Leeward Islands; the coast of India; in 1744 convoying ships from England to Cape Coast Castle, HQ of the Royal African Company, the first leg of the Transatlantic slave trading "triangle"; in 1762 capturing Havana. The family owned Orleans House from 1764 to 1837. (OHG p24)

The South Sea Company and "Bubble"

Perhaps the most famous figure commemorated in St Mary's is the poet **Alexander Pope** (1688-1744), whose is buried beneath the nave under a slab marked "P" and whose memorial, dominating the north gallery, is one of the largest. Another distinguished figure, **Sir Godfrey Kneller** (1646-1723), the eminent court painter who lived in the original Kneller Hall, Whitton, was churchwarden in 1713 when the collapse of the old medieval building took place and played a significant part in raising funds in an impressively short time for the rebuilding of the church as we see it today.

Pope and Kneller were among the many illustrious figures in English society who invested in the South Sea Company which was formed in 1711

to raise funds to help reduce the national debt. Its purpose was to supply slaves and other goods to Spanish America – with a right to supply up to 4,800 slaves each year for 30 years - but in 1720 its sudden collapse ruined many investors. **Sir Thomas Vernon** was also churchwarden at that time and was suspected of being deeply involved in this financial collapse. He was expelled from the House of Commons but regained his seat in 1722.

The son of Rev Robert Burt, vicar of St Mary's 1788-1791, **Rev. Robert Gascoyne Burt** (1792-1875) was a beneficiary of slave-owning wealth in the will of his aunt Mary Gascoigne (1768-1855) living in Montpellier Row, who had received compensation for an interest in 7 Plantations Estate, Jamaica.

It is likely that many more Twickenham residents were among those who benefited - or suffered financial loss – after investing in the slave trade. The *Dictionary of British Slave Traders*, which is planned for publication in 2024, is a work in progress by a team of British academics at Lancaster University, Manchester University and UCL, with £1 million of government funding, to include biographies of 6500 investors.

Sources of information:

The Memorials and Ledgerstones: the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Twickenham, 2015, Anthony Beckles Willson.

University College London, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership* website:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>

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Trading in Lives: the Richmond connection, exhibition at the Museum of Richmond, 2007.

Twickenham Museum, <http://www.twickenham-museum.org.uk/>

Beneficiaries of the Slave Trade living in the old Borough of Twickenham, Borough of Twickenham Local History Society newsletter 185 (part 2), December 2020, Paul Barnfield.

The National Trust, Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery, September 2020, see <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London, History Workshop Journal, Volume 64, Issue 1, Autumn 2007, Pages 162–199, <https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article/64/1/162/600955>

Dictionary of British Slave Traders, to include 6500 investors, planned by Lancaster University, Manchester University and UCL to complement the Legacies database in 2024 (see The Times, 28 December 2020).

Wikipedia entries for several of those listed above.



Today, St Mary's Twickenham is part of the Inclusive Church network and welcomes all who come through our doors to worship God and to explore and grow in Christian faith.

Our Statement of Belief

We believe in inclusive Church - a church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, age, race or sexuality. We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.