

## Introduction

This study chronicles the lives of all people known to have lived on Mountravers sugar plantation on the Caribbean island of Nevis. Over nine hundred named enslaved individuals have been identified as having inhabited the lands that later became known as Mountravers, or Pinney's Estate, from its very early beginnings until 1834 when Britain abolished slavery in its colonies. Their existence established, researched and recorded, they have emerged from obscurity and now can take their place in history. They stand as representatives for the millions of Africans and their descendants who have laboured in the plantations of the British Caribbean.

This study also documents over forty white staff employed on Mountravers and records the work they did, their families and their personal slaves.

Mountravers is already well known through the work of the economic historian Professor Richard Pares. In his book *A West India Fortune* he examined the complexities of the business empire of one planter/merchant family, the Pinneys. He based his research on the Pinney Papers, a collection of documents which is now held in the University of Bristol. In these records enslaved people appear in inventories, in accounts and letters, but as far as Pares was concerned, his main interest was their productive capacity and, in general terms, the work they did and how they were treated. He did not connect the history of Mountravers with their individual fates, and out of hundreds of individuals he mentioned fewer than a dozen by name. He considered the managers and some of the overseers in more detail, particularly their duties and remunerations, but did not investigate their social backgrounds, their families, or the people they owned. *A West India Fortune* provided the initial impetus for this research, and this study attempts to carry on where Pares left off and to tell the stories of those people who laid the foundations for Pinney family's wealth. The plantation and its inhabitants are introduced through an accessible historical narrative; the approach is evaluative and does not set out to condemn or commend one side or the other.

Slavery shaped the development of Nevis, and slavery played an important part in the economy of the English West Country and Bristol in particular.<sup>1</sup> This study highlights the links between Nevis and Bristol and the West Country and may therefore appear rather West Country-centric, but it addresses an underrated aspect of the history of the British West Indies. The Scots, so prominent in, for instance, Jamaica and the Chesapeake area, by the 1670s accounted for just over one per cent of the population in Nevis, while Irish immigrants made up a fifth. There was also a small Jewish presence. It was the English settlers who largely shaped the island's early history. Some of these were descendants of the first European colonisers of St Kitts, who mostly hailed from East Anglia. Links with East Anglia were maintained but a sizeable number of English people, whose origins can be traced back to the West Country and particularly to Bristol, lived in Nevis or had family or trade connections with the island. Evidence for this can be found in the wills recorded in Vere Langford Oliver's *Caribbeana*, in the collections held in the Bristol and other West Country archives and record offices, as well as in private collections such as the Pinney Papers. When in the late seventeenth century a visitor to Bristol singled out Nevis as one of the city's overseas trading partners, this not only underscored the island's importance

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<sup>1</sup> The West Country is a loose term and usually encompasses the old counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset and includes the city of Bristol. It can also take in the neighbouring counties of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.

but everyone knew what the colony represented: sugar and slaves.<sup>2</sup> Nevis was firmly lodged in Bristol's consciousness, and when one of the owners of Mountravers plantation, the Somerset-born John Pretor Pinney, returned to England after living in Nevis for eighteen years, he chose to settle in Bristol. He and his family brought with them two servants, Pero and Fanny Coker, and moved into a newly built house in Great George Street in what is now the centre of town. A century and a half later, in the 1930s the then owner gave the property to the city of Bristol and it was opened up to the public as a museum. It is known as the Georgian House Museum.

John Pretor Pinney had financed the house out of the very profits his Nevis ventures had yielded but there was no mention of this in the museum; it was simply marketed as a 'West India merchant's house'. Enslaved people only figured insofar as John Pretor Pinney's letters showed 'that he continued to take a lively interest in the running of his estates and the welfare of his negro slaves'. In contrast, the family's brief associations with the poet William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy warranted five lines.<sup>3</sup>

The museum's literature is a good example of how Bristol then was very much in denial about its part in the slave trade and plantation slavery. However, in the meantime the city has undergone a process of transformation, which was partly stimulated by the involvement of the author and her husband with the history and, to some extent, the archaeology of Nevis and partly through a city-wide debate on the issue of slavery. This was fuelled by a controversial 'Festival of the Sea', an event in 1997 that proudly celebrated one aspect of Bristol's long maritime history - the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Cabot's 'discovery' of Newfoundland – yet failed to address the effect of Cabot's venture on the indigenous people of the Americas, nor the very significant role Bristol subsequently played in the transatlantic slave trade.

Bristol merchants traded on the Guinea coast from as early as the sixteenth century and, at first, were mostly interested in gold and ivory, but in the seventeenth century, as settlers established colonies in the Americas, their focus shifted to human beings. Planters who cultivated tobacco and sugar called for a continuous supply of workers and while thousands of white indentured servants and 'undesirables' – criminals and political rebels – left on Bristol ships for the new frontiers, it was the trade in African captives and the colonial produce extracted from their labour that drove Bristol's economy.<sup>4</sup> In the 1730s Bristol overtook London as the major slaving port but during the mid-1740s lost its leading position to Liverpool because of its geographical location: Bristol's harbour is tidal and the river Avon that leads to it silts up quickly and became too narrow for larger ships. By 1807, when Britain officially ended its participation in the transatlantic slave trade, Bristol ships had made over 2,000 slaving voyages and had carried about half a million Africans, perhaps a fifth of the British total.<sup>5</sup>

Bristol's denial about this aspect of its history can be traced back almost two hundred years. Just before slavery was abolished in the British colonies, one of John Pinney's sons-in-law acknowledged that the city owed 'all her prosperity, nay, ... her existence to her commerce with the West Indies' <sup>6</sup> but he failed to address the disagreeable fact that this prosperity was founded on the labour extracted from enslaved people who had been transported by Bristol ships from Africa to the Americas. The West Indian

<sup>2</sup> Dresser, M *Slavery Obscured* p7, quoting JH Bettey *Bristol Observed: Visitors' Impressions of the City from Doomsday to the Blitz* p59; see also VL Oliver *Caribbeana* Vol 2 p310.

As far as Bristol's consciousness went, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Nevis sank into obscurity. The historic links were not maintained when, in the 1950s, Britain recruited Caribbean migrants to boost its labour market. While Jamaicans established themselves in Bristol in large numbers, Nevisians tended to settle elsewhere in the country, mostly in Leeds.

<sup>3</sup> *The Georgian House*, a leaflet for sale from the 1960s until 2003

Another publication omitted to mention enslaved people entirely but devoted 17 lines to the Pinneys' connection with Lady Nelson and 14 to their association with the Wordsworths (*Bristol Civic News* No 175).

<sup>4</sup> For details on Bristol's early involvement in the slave trade, see M Dresser *Slavery Obscured*.

<sup>5</sup> Estimates of the number of captive Africans transported in British vessels range from between 2.6 and 4 million.

<sup>6</sup> Dresser, Madge and Sue Giles (eds) *Bristol & Transatlantic Slavery* p80

commerce, and therefore Bristol's wealth, was based on the stealing and the buying and selling in human beings.

The city has finally and very publicly acknowledged this aspect of its past by naming a newly built footbridge in the historic Harbourside after Pero, John Pinney's manservant who worked and died in Bristol. An ordinary, slave-born man, Pero stands as a symbol for those Africans and their descendants who were enslaved by Bristol's merchants and planters.

In Nevis the impact of plantation slavery was so much more direct than in Britain and shaped everything from the island's landscape to its language. Slavery is remembered in the colours of the national flag - the black stands for its African heritage and the red for the struggle from slavery through colonialism to independence – and slavery is now taught in the schools but otherwise there appears to be little public recognition of this aspect of the island's past. An uncomfortable subject for residents, second-home owners and tourists alike, it has either been approached very gingerly, or it has been avoided completely, as is evident from the museum displays, the official tourist literature and the hotel brochures. However, there are signs that attitudes are beginning to change. In 2011 St Kitts and Nevis joined the UNESCO Slave Route Project, and it is hoped that this study - a celebration of the lives of some of those early African Nevisians from whom today's Nevis developed - will be seen as a positive and relevant contribution to the island's re-appraisal of its history.

This is the first longitudinal study of a slave population on a sugar plantation in the Leeward Islands. It has been possible to mesh together plantation records with parish registers and other official papers, follow the trails of those who were taken abroad, and investigate the freed people and their descendants. An important finding that emerged from this research is that many more freed people in Nevis owned enslaved people than is apparent from the island's Slave Registers. At the request of the British government these registers were instituted from 1817 onwards and while a few 'free coloured' slaveholders were identified as such, the majority was not. Some of them were the children or grandchildren of Mountravers people and by closely tracking them and other freed individuals it has been possible to establish that in Nevis a considerable number of free or freed people benefited from the slave compensation fund. This was money set aside by the British Government intended to recompense slaveholders when a four-year-apprenticeship system replaced slavery in 1834. Of a total of £20 million Pounds sterling, S£151,000 went to Nevis, and of this the free coloureds and blacks in the island received about five per cent – roughly worth S£900,000 in today's money.<sup>7</sup> While they represented over a quarter of all claimants, the relatively small share of the money they received reflects the fact that each person owned a relatively small number of individuals. It shows that the freed people, too, had a stake in the British Government's share-out to the colonies - an uncomfortable fact for some of their descendants, a source of pride for others.

Not only was it possible to establish that freed Mountravers people went on to own people themselves but it was also possible to reveal some of the previous owners of the enslaved people who were bought for the plantation and some of the people to whom individuals from Mountravers were sold. In addition, the ship that brought at least twenty African children to Nevis is known, as well as the children's points of departure in Ghana and some details of their journey. For another three groups of young people the ships which carried them from Nigeria to the West Indies have been identified with some certainty. Starting in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, this study also goes back in time further than most other investigations into plantation populations, and, with the last known burial dates of former Mountravers

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<sup>7</sup> The inflation calculator on the Bank of England website has been a most useful tool in converting historic amounts of money into today's (2016).

people in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it ends well beyond the point of time when plantation slavery was abolished in British colonies.

This work also covers a geographical area that has not been explored much. Published material about enslaved people in the Leeward Islands, and Nevis in particular, is scant. So far most published studies are analyses of Jamaican estates from the middle of the eighteenth century until the abolition of slavery. Richard Dunn was able to trace hundreds of individuals who lived on Mesopotamia in Jamaica during the period from 1762 to 1834 and to reconstruct their occupational patterns and health histories from an enviable number of very detailed annual slave lists,<sup>8</sup> while for Worthy Park Michael Craton and his collaborators have analysed a dozen ledgers, more than thirty slave lists and Jamaica's triennial slave population registers. Frustratingly, Craton has stereo-typed a sample selection of about thirty out of 1,300 individuals into categories such as 'Accommodators', 'Resisters' and 'Specialists'. Revealing and detailed as each biography is, the overwhelming majority of enslaved people are reduced to bare data and now only exist as figures in tables.

Barry Higman has pushed back the boundaries of plantation studies based solely on written records by combining a rigorous analysis of documents with archaeological investigations. By interpreting the plantation landscapes he has placed the individuals into their wider physical surroundings and, through unearthing and recording their physical possessions, has brought to life the people on the plantation he has studied, Montpelier.<sup>9</sup> Through archaeological processes he has accessed not only people's material conditions but has also managed to touch on their inner lives in a way that written plantation records cannot do. However, although the archaeological evidence suggests a passage of time, in the documents the people are suspended in time: they mostly exist at particular, brief periods around 1790 and from 1825 to the early 1830s.

A biography is an account of the life of an individual written by someone else. Lively, rounded biographies would include details about a person's appearance, their values and their beliefs – elements that are sadly lacking in the biographies of the enslaved people who are known to have lived on Mountravers. Indeed, some of their histories consist of no more than a few unconnected biographical notes. Ideally a person's own writing would provide information but, except for a couple of letters, no written records left by the Mountravers people could be traced. Of necessity, then, their histories are based on a collection of details which were noted down by their owners, by plantation managers, parish clerks and court officials. But what these people noted only reflect their economic, bureaucratic or legal interests. This distorts the picture and does not reveal the enslaved people's priorities or concerns, nor their thoughts, feelings and aspirations. Their portraits are sketchy, based on disjointed elements of information gathered from a variety of sources. Any weaving together and subsequent interpretation of facts can never approximate their own accounts, in their own words. Except for the occasional faint echo, we do not hear their voices; these exist only in the readers' imagination.<sup>10</sup>

For some, especially the early, biographies no more than a few fragmentary facts exist. Whole lives are distilled into a few lines. With so little detail to stitch together even the most basic material, one could question why these people are included at all. What can be gained by just knowing a name, or by

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Dunn has investigated the lives of over 2,000 individuals who lived on two plantations, Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia. See "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' and the comparative study, 'A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia' Harvard University Press 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Montpelier was made up of three estates: the sugar-producing Old Montpelier and New Montpelier, and a livestock-raising enterprise, Shettlewood Pen.

<sup>10</sup> Although North American plantation slavery differed to the Caribbean experience, the recollections of former slaves have an emotional impact that a study based on bureaucratic documents cannot match. See, for instance, Lynette Ater Tanner (ed) *Chained to the Land, Voices from Cotton & Cane Plantations* John F Blair, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

speculating on one person's relationship to another? Is it useful to know that a man was an uncle of a girl when we do not even know his real name, or the names of his parents, or where he came from? What do we learn from the fact that people died within a vague time frame, in some cases spanning nearly thirty years? Is it relevant that one man was administered two shillings worth of boluses at some point between 1728 and 1731? The answers have to do with the individual as much as the plantation population as a whole. Individual enslaved people living on Mountravers were mentioned in the plantation account books, recording not just their purchase prices but also the cost of medicines and treatments administered, the hire income they generated and, occasionally, the buying of produce they had grown or made. Bringing together these different mentions and gathering any other material relating to them builds a record that not only informs us of their existence, but also provides the briefest of glimpses into their lives. Once their identity is known, they, surely, deserve to be included, and if a seemingly banal incident is the only surviving fact, then this warrants stating. It becomes our only point of contact with that person. Given the paucity of published material relating to individual, named enslaved people - particularly those outside Jamaica - each known piece of information then becomes more significant and worth recording. All isolated details added together contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject of plantation slavery.

Previously recorded in so-called slave lists and perhaps some legal or business documents, people's names appeared in isolation, disjointed from their very being. Except, for instance, where grouped as members of work gangs, they were listed as single individuals without context. Generally they were not recorded in family or household groups yet enslaved people were husbands and wives, became parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. They had brothers and sisters,<sup>11</sup> nephews and nieces, and, of course, friends. They forged strong bonds with fellow sufferers during their nightmare transfer from Africa, the Middle Passage,<sup>12</sup> and with people on and off the plantation. One of the aims of this research was to establish relationships, and thereby, in a sense, to re-unite each person with their kith and kin. Ideally, every individual would have their place in the context of people with whom they had close associations but, unfortunately, this was not possible. The least that could be achieved was to recognise, analyse and record any personal relationships wherever they became apparent and, were relevant, to speculate on their associations. One important aspect of African identity, the notion of lineage, could only be addressed in the context of the plantation-born children.<sup>13</sup> The rich family histories of the Africans who arrived on Mountravers are lost.

Although each person was, and should be seen as, an individual, each person was also part of a wider picture. Their exact relationships and roles may remain obscure but at any one time they were components of a body of people that interacted not just with each other, on the plantation, but also with those around them. This is not always immediately apparent from the documents and, again, only by piecing together isolated facts do the stories emerge, some in more detail than others. Assembling these stories creates a sense of a group of people existing together in time and space, forming a whole. To leave out the insubstantial life stories and selectively publish only the more extensive accounts would exclude some individuals from remaining part of this community and deny their participation in it.<sup>14</sup> They would, again, be written out of history. The fact that their life stories could not be recreated any more comprehensively does not mean that their *lives* are not worth, at least, remembering. To omit some

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<sup>11</sup> Unless the exact relationship was important or a particular point needed emphasising, no distinction between full and half brothers and sisters is made in this study.

<sup>12</sup> Craton, M *Sinews of Empire* p212, quoting Bryan Edwards *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1801 ed) Vol ii p155

<sup>13</sup> For instance, PC Lloyd has written on the importance of lineage among the Yoruba ('The Yoruba of Nigeria' in James L Gibbs junior (ed) *Peoples of Africa* p562).

<sup>14</sup> Whilst agreeing with Barry Higman that the term community is 'a persistently troublesome concept', in this study the rather loose definition taken from the Shorter Oxford Dictionary is used: that of 'a body of people living in the same locality'. For a full discussion on the concept of community, see BW Higman *Montpelier, Jamaica* pp292-95.

stories would also further skew the overall picture of the Mountravers slave population. Most facts are known about certain groups - mistresses of white men and their children, those who rebelled, domestics, skilled and freed people - and by including everyone, a more balanced view emerges which might almost directly correlate to the kind of exposure people had at the time: we know the least about the ordinary fieldworkers who, although they made up the largest number, as individuals would have been, to managers and visitors, the least visible on the plantation. They had less direct contact with whites, and therefore fewer opportunities for being mentioned in their miscellaneous accounts.

Enslaved people also operated in spheres outside the plantation and for this reason, wherever possible, their stories are related not just to the people who had sold or bought them but also the planters and craftsmen who hired, the physicians who treated, and the ministers who baptised them. Of course, this does not take account of all those fellow and freed slaves and white folk whom they met in everyday life. Nothing is known about the people who bought the women's produce in the markets, or who sheltered fugitives. The lives Mountravers people led alongside their recorded existence remain uncharted, and we have to make do with what contact has been documented, and as the documented contact was mostly with whites, sometimes more is known about their lives than those of the enslaved people with whom they had dealings.

From the surviving documents and other sources it is also possible to reconstruct the biographies of the managers and overseers<sup>15</sup> and some of their personal slaves. A relative wealth of written material exists, including documents relating to their business transactions and the buying and selling of their own people. But the main source is their correspondence with the owners, and through their letters the managers often speak directly to us. The Pinney Papers is not the only collection of plantation correspondence that is available for scrutiny, and it is therefore surprising that despite the availability of such fertile sources so few white plantation workers' lives have yet been researched in detail. They are mentioned in passing and, although powerful characters, remain shadowy figures on the side lines - symbols of oppression but not people in their own right. Lady Nugent's description of the 'vulgar, ugly, Scotch Sultan who is about fifty, clumsy, ill made, and dirty' has contributed to a stereotypical view of managers and overseers. Of course, misfits such as Thomas Thistlewood, who operated in Jamaica, perfectly fitted Lady Nugent's description of the needy adventurer 'without either principle, religion, or morality',<sup>16</sup> and as Thistlewood's diaries are the most easily accessible source of information available, he is much quoted and has almost become the archetypal plantation manager.<sup>17</sup>

If whites had a reason for going to the West Indies, it is thought that they escaped poverty. John Luffman, writing about Antigua, stated that white overseers were 'generally poor Scotch lads ... [who] came out as indentured servants',<sup>18</sup> and Janet Schaw, another contemporary observer, in fact travelled to Antigua with a shipload of such poor Scottish emigrants. These and other accounts leave the impression that all white plantation workers in Jamaica and Antigua were Scotsmen, while those in islands such as Montserrat and St Croix were Irish,<sup>19</sup> and that they had all fled impoverished backgrounds. Other than that, they appear in the West Indies without history, place or families. Pares in *The West India Fortune* did sketch Pinney's managers' backgrounds but admitted that for overseers and trades people 'It is not easy to discover

<sup>15</sup> In Jamaica managers in the Nevis sense were overseers while overseers were called bookkeepers (Green, WA *British Slave Emancipation* p60 fn86); in Barbados overseers were called drivers (Ward, JR *British West Indian Slavery* p40).

<sup>16</sup> Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* p118

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Douglas D Hall *In Miserable Slavery*; Trevor Burnard *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* and Cecily Jones "'If tis be living I'd rather be dead": enslaved youth, agency and resistance on an eighteenth century Jamaican estate' in *History of the Family* Vol 12 No 2 (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Luffman, John A *Brief Account* Letter XXIII 3 October 1787 in VL Oliver (ed) *The History of the Island of Antigua* Vol 1

<sup>19</sup> Tyson, GF and AR Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p187

whether more of the white employees were natives of the island or imported from England'.<sup>20</sup> Elsa Goveia's *Slave Society in the Leeward Islands* concentrated on the social mobility and political status of white plantation workers but there are few indications as to where these men actually came from, what they left behind, or what they were to expect if they ever returned to Britain.<sup>21</sup> From this research it is evident that managers and overseers who worked in Nevis came from a much wider geographical area and from different social classes than previously credited. Many of them left their legacies in the islands; they got married, or took mistresses, had children and acquired properties. By following the generations and studying these, it is evident that the men not only participated in, but also had an impact on, Nevis society, the landscape, the economy. They were part of the island's mosaic. In addition, detailed research has also revealed another layer of white plantation society: the overseers during crop time, or temporary boiling house watches. Although incomplete, it is hoped that the study of these men adds to the understanding of a little-known section of white plantation society.

Hilary Beckles quite rightly stated that 'The Pinney women ... are located, when identified, on the margins of the entire accumulation affair'; they 'engendered positive responses only from enterprising menfolk'.<sup>22</sup> Pares, for instance, underplayed Mary Pinney's role in plantation affairs and did not mention Jane Pinney's own small-scale trading activities; he only acknowledged these women as wives and mothers. But what about the wives of the Mountravers managers who were even more marginal to the whole enterprise? At the most Pares referred to them in passing. But he was not alone. Wives of managers and overseers, unless they were slave mistresses, generally have no presence in plantation literature. They are the least visible and the least studied. For this reason particular attention has been paid to them and to investigating the roles they played but, as these women did not leave the same kind of records as their husbands, this proved difficult and, like the enslaved people, we see them mostly through the eyes of white, male writers.

While some Jamaican estates have been studied in great detail (their demography, food, shelter, health and clothing), this work has not yet been done for plantations in the Leeward Islands. Archaeological investigations have been carried out, for instance in Nevis by Jim Chiarelli and groups of Earthwatch volunteers, in Montserrat by Lydia Pulsipher and her team, as well as by David Watters, and in St Eustacia by Norman Barka and his team. However, the close meshing of historical and archaeological evidence, as Higman did for Montpelier, has not yet been undertaken for any of the Leeward Island plantations. Elsewhere, not many pre-1780 estate records have survived, or been analysed, which makes it difficult to judge how far Mountravers was representative of other Caribbean, or even Nevisian, eighteenth century estates. More studies are needed but one conclusion can be reached at this stage: Mountravers and other plantations in Nevis were very different from those large Jamaican estates investigated by Craton, Dunn and Higman (Worthy Park, Mesopotamia and Montpelier). For example, Mountravers goes back further as a sugar-producing estate than Montpelier, where the first sugar was only shipped in the 1740s. Montpelier and Worthy Park also covered much larger areas, had many more enslaved people and were generally inhabited by transient white workers without families. During the same period that metropolitan absentees or people who lived elsewhere in Jamaica owned Montpelier, for about half the time resident owners lived on Mountravers, managing their own affairs.

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<sup>20</sup> Pares, Richard *A West India Fortune* p133

<sup>21</sup> Goveia, EV *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands*, in particular the chapter on 'The Ranks of Society'

<sup>22</sup> Beckles, Hilary McD 'Fortune: Gender and Wealth during Slavery' p2

Pamela Sharpe has addressed Beckles's criticism that the Pinney women only figure on the margins of the male enterprise. Her research into the commercial enterprises of Hester Pinney reveals a woman who in her lifetime accumulated considerable wealth through her own determined efforts ('Pinney, Hester (1658-1740)' in *Oxford DNB*; 'Dealing with Love: The Ambiguous Independence of the Single Woman in Early Modern England' in *Gender and History* Vol 11 Issue 2 (1999) pp209-32 and 'Gender in the Economy: Female Merchants and Family Businesses in the British Isles, 1600-1850' in *Histoire sociale/Social History* 34 (68) pp287-306).

The size of Montpelier and Mesopotamia led to a degree of specialisation not found on Mountravers where, except for a few trained individuals, the rest of the enslaved population had to perform a variety of jobs. They were multi-skilled; their tasks changed more often and they benefited from some variety in their work. Many were hired to other plantations or to private employers and thereby gained opportunities to interact socially with a range of people – whites, blacks and mixed-race, enslaved and free. In contrast, from Worthy Park only seven people were hired out over a fifty-year-period, and none were brought in from outside over a forty-year-period.<sup>23</sup> Montpelier and Worthy Park were closed, self-contained communities, tucked away in valleys while Mountravers lies about a mile from Charlestown. Everyone could easily get around whereas the distances walked by enslaved people in Jamaica to their provision grounds may have been the distance from the furthest corners of Nevis to the capital.

Montpelier was relatively inaccessible. It was surrounded by extensive pasture and cane fields, and a thick belt of hills and forests. However, as Higman pointed out, it operated 'not as an isolated entity but as an interactive part of the whole'.<sup>24</sup> It existed as a world within worlds; it functioned in its own right and at the same time was part of the Atlantic World. Slavery enabled the expansion of the Atlantic economy<sup>25</sup> but the enslaved people were not only the passive 'commodities' and 'labour-providers', they also took an active part in this Atlantic World. On Montpelier their interaction was localised and indirect; they influenced the political landscape through their actions but it was their masters who, through their involvement with the political structures in Britain, related to the wider world: enslaved people rebelled on Montpelier and the owner, Lord Seaford, took his grievances to the Parliament, which, in turn, passed legislation that affected enslaved people on Montpelier and elsewhere in the British colonies.

On Montpelier the gateway to the Atlantic World was, literally, a narrow funnel of land leading to the coast, but in Nevis, where the widest point between the Atlantic and the Caribbean shores is about six miles, there is almost a physical connection with both oceans and the world beyond. Below Mountravers, a long beach still known as Pinney's Beach opened up and extended horizons. One central question presented itself: To what extent were the enslaved people on Mountravers involved in the life beyond the confines of Nevis, in the Atlantic World?

The research revealed that a significant number of Mountravers people actively and, for the most part, voluntarily participated in, and had direct contact with, the Caribbean as well as the Atlantic World. This was largely an individual rather than a collective or organised effort. A number of people moved about. They sailed around the Caribbean Sea as ships' crews and crossed the Atlantic as servants. Some shared social and small-scale but significant commercial ties with people well beyond the confines of Nevis. Although this applied mostly to the elite - the domestics and the skilled - the travellers' tales, the news and information and some of the goods they brought with them would have quickly trickled down into the wider slave population. On Mountravers, the earliest reference to contact with the Atlantic World is from 1701 when one enslaved man was said to have been 'in England',<sup>26</sup> the last to a freed woman who left for America just before Emancipation - one of the early, modern-day emigrants. Setting off about a mile from the plantation, more than half a dozen enslaved and freed people associated with Mountravers are known to have travelled to North America and to England, to work there temporarily or

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<sup>23</sup> Craton, M *Searching for the Invisible Man* p161

<sup>24</sup> Higman, BW *Montpelier, Jamaica* p296

<sup>25</sup> According to David Hancock, the development of the Atlantic World comprised four elements: the exchange of commodities (and related to this, the diffusion of finance, and ever-improving communication); the movement of people - both free and unfree - across state lines and imperial boundaries; the borrowing of labour forms in the shape of slavery; and 'the sharing or borrowing of commercially, and economically-informed, social, legal and sometimes political ideas and structures across imperial boundaries' (Hancock, David 'The British Atlantic World: Co-ordination, Complexity, and the Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651-1815' in *Itinerario. European Journal of Overseas History*).

<sup>26</sup> PP, WI Box A: Handwritten inventory



permanently. Two returned for brief visits to Nevis, and between them, two women made the journey across the Atlantic and back at least seven times. They not only exchanged news, letters and gifts with family and friends but also ideas. This was recognised by John Pretor Pinney who, at one stage, did not want another black woman to visit England because 'the coloured people already have had too much communication with the inhabitants of this country and the colonies'. He feared 'the ill consequence attending such intercourse'.<sup>27</sup> One freed Nevis-born woman who worked for the Pinneys in Bristol bequeathed in her will money to the Baptist, or Wesleyan, Missionary Society which was engaged in missionary work in Africa and the West Indies - a telling sign of her wish to influence events across the Atlantic.

During the course of the research for this study it became clear that Nevis's geographical position also played a part in shaping the plantation community. The island's size and its location allowed for more inter-island contacts and for developing a more cosmopolitan outlook than would have been possible in Jamaica. At its widest point the island of Jamaica is about the same distance as Nevis is to Dominica and to St Croix - two islands which very different populations. From various vantage points around Nevis several other islands are always visible - St Kitts, Redonda, and Montserrat - and on a clear day, also Guadeloupe. St Eustacius and Saba lie just beyond St Kitts, and Antigua was a day's sailing away. The proximity of these other islands, which were occupied by the Dutch, the Danes and the French, made for a less insular existence; there was movement within the Eastern Caribbean that brought with it opportunities for exchanging information and wares, for picking up the latest news and for making new contacts. Some of these transactions are documented, others did not 'go through the books': parcels handed directly to captains in the harbours and messages conveyed verbally. Trusted individuals acted as couriers, delivering letters and messages, money and goods - not just within Nevis but also to neighbouring St Kitts. At times of ill health a few people were sent there 'for a change of air', others to learn new skills as apprentices in trades. Some men accompanied the owners and managers on trips to St Kitts to buy new people, or to recover absconders. There were those who brought back with them stories from their encounters on islands further afield: the man who was stolen, taken to St Vincent and then to Martinique; those escapees who were captured, for instance, in St Eustacius, and those travellers who briefly lived with their master in Martinique. The movement was a two-way process. The few who succeeded in freeing themselves and the 'persistent runaways' who were sold to other Caribbean islands or to North America took with them to their enforced exile not just the memories of their lives in Nevis but also the experiences, skills and insights gained there.

Servants who travelled with their masters in the Eastern Caribbean and free and enslaved fishermen and seafarers brought news to Nevis from other islands, as did those who crossed the Atlantic. The main conduit for trans-Atlantic communications, however, were the white ships captains and the mostly white crews. Their arrival was eagerly awaited: they brought with them letters, goods and presents, and magazines and newspapers to which the planters subscribed. Every year, for several months, the ships crews were part of the Nevis community. Captains and officers invited local people abroad for dinner and conversation and were, in turn, entertained by the locals.<sup>28</sup> Some men lived in the island;<sup>29</sup> some kept mistresses or married local women. Ships captains witnessed manumission documents, hired men to do repairs and to load and unload their vessels. They were involved in recovering, as well as sheltering, fugitives. Sometimes they became fugitives themselves. Runaway seafarers sought sanctuary in the island. In one documented case a sailor sheltered with escapees from plantations but in another instance a black man gave away the hiding place of two sailors who had deserted. Ships crews, too ill to continue after the Middle Passage or dismissed after their second leg of the triangular voyage, inhabited the

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<sup>27</sup> PP, NLB 12: John Pretor Pinney to John Taylor, Nevis, 24 November 1796

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, *Aaron Thomas's Journal* p49, p195, p309 and p329

<sup>29</sup> For instance, William Reap and John Shipherd were 'Mariners at Nevis' (PP, AB 39, and UKNA, PROB 11/956).

harbours and, while waiting to sign on for another trip, flogged goods they had brought with them. On their return journey vessels sailed off not just with the plantation commodities - sugar and rum - but also with presents and goods for absentee planters and enslaved people's friends and relatives in England. Ships captains and crews were the eyes and ears of planters anxious for unbiased news about their estates and the state of politics in Nevis, and they kept themselves well informed of events in the island. No doubt, when these men returned to Bristol, servants like Pero and Fanny Coker who lived close to the harbour, quickly got to hear about events in Nevis.

People associated with Mountravers came to a wider public's attention and they came to have a public profile well beyond Nevis. After the plantation was sold, in 1810 the new owner subjected a number of the Mountravers workers to a very public and very brutal flogging, and the enslaved people themselves became the subject of political debate across the Atlantic. The incident came to the attention of the British government and was reported in newspapers not only in London and Edinburgh but also in America. One man provided crucial support, James Webbe Tobin. A Nevis planter with abolitionist leanings, he was the son of John Pretor Pinney's business partner, James Tobin, and stood on the opposite side to his father in the debate on slavery and the slave trade.

James Tobin senior, as the public voice of the Pinney & Tobin partnership, in 1790 had given pro-planter evidence to the Parliamentary Enquiry on the Abolition of the Slave Trade. James Tobin, John Pretor Pinney and the man from whom John Pretor Pinney inherited Mountravers, John Frederick Pinney, all belonged to the influential West India lobby, and John Frederick Pinney even was a Member of Parliament in London. Although he did not have a high political profile, the then owner of Mountravers was nevertheless positioned at the very centre of eighteenth century British political life.

In carrying out the research for this study it became apparent that the people on Mountravers were connected with the outside world through a multitude of threads – political, commercial and social. A question that arose from their connections to the wider world was the extent to which this shaped their community. Again, the obvious sources for trying to answer this are the plantation papers. Many eighteenth century and nineteenth century contemporaries recorded their West Indian experiences and impressions, and as John Pretor Pinney was an educated man, one could reasonably expect his correspondence to have been as informative as, for instance, John Luffman's letters, or the journals of Lady Nugent, Janet Schaw or Gregory 'Monk' Lewis. John Pretor Pinney may have come to the West Indies well-briefed, having heard stories from his relative John Frederick about his time in Nevis in the 1740s and perhaps he had personal accounts from more recent visitors, but so much was new to him when he first travelled to the West Indies that, surely, this young man would eagerly have recorded his early impressions. He corresponded not only with his English business partners but also with friends and his uncle, the banker Simon Pretor – people who would have been curious about his new life in the tropics. But all he ever did was to sketch his surroundings in broad terms, give a few details about his work in Nevis, and to the wife of a Somerset friend he sent some curios, 'three humming birds and one nest, a wood slave, tarantula, and a large moth'.<sup>30</sup> He did not go on to say where these animals were gathered, who carved the intriguing 'wood slave', or whether, for instance, among the people on Mountravers there was a tradition of woodcarving. Instead of accompanying his exotic presents with a letter detailing the peculiar manners and customs of the enslaved people on the plantation – their dances perhaps, or their Christmas revelries (he arrived just before the annual holiday period) - his first letters convey no sense of wonder at the strangeness of it all. His much-quoted reaction at seeing, for the first time, naked people being traded is almost all he had to say after arriving in Nevis. Nor did he elaborate over the following years on any of the cultural practices of his workforce. From the few scattered

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<sup>30</sup> PP, NLB 3: John Pretor Pinney, Nevis to George Warry, 25 July 1769

references that exist about the plantation workers' daily lives, it appears that he was neither interested in, nor did he interfere to any great extent with, their private spheres. He was in Nevis to do business, not for the cultural experience. Whilst acknowledging that first and foremost he was a businessman with a businessman's preoccupations, the lack of observation about life on Mountravers is still puzzling. One would expect him to at least have recorded, when he first arrived, some of what amazed, amused and excited him.

There may have been reasons for this lack of detail. His workers may have guarded their privacy very effectively. Although evidence exists of sailors visiting slave villages, of entering huts and of being treated hospitably, the Jamaican planter John Baillie stated that whites would never 'attempt to go into a negro house without asking permission' because the enslaved people were so protective of their property. They were, said Baillie, 'very tenacious upon that point'. If indeed this was the case on Mountravers, Pinney could have commented on this fact in the way Baillie did. And in any case, much of enslaved people's lives took place in a very public arena, was on public display and very observable but if Pinney ever wrote in any detail about physical appearance, living conditions, cultural practices and social organisation of his workforce, then none of these documents have survived. Despite the voluminous letter books and the many, many archive boxes of correspondence, there are only few instances of him describing, or commenting on, the people he owned, or – other than in a work context - giving instructions as to how they should conduct themselves.

Perhaps what is more astonishing is that during their visits to Nevis his sons were equally uninformative in their correspondence. One would expect them to report home on how people in the island had fared during their parents' absence, what changes had taken place on Mountravers – which, after all, was their family home - but their letters, too, were confined to business matters. Frustratingly, the one known non-family visitor to the plantation, Thomas Wedgwood, was no more forthcoming. Wedgwood's only observation of life around him came at the end of a letter: 'birds singing on all sides of me - oranges by thousands close to the house - a supper on land-crabs in prospecto ...'<sup>31</sup>

It is, of course, possible that there were additional private letters that were not copied. It is also possible that over the years some editing of the family papers has taken place and that material that was too painful or too embarrassing has been destroyed. Alternatively, the wider family may still hold some documents, or, like the plantation diary, some papers may have ended up for sale on the open market. All these points were considered as likely explanations for the absence of details on cultural matter but it appears that, quite simply, neither John Pretor Pinney nor his sons did record any of it. Evidence for this comes from John Pretor Pinney's granddaughter Anna Maria. She suggested that there were no such descriptions and that father and sons were following in the footsteps of earlier Pinneys. Remarking on early eighteenth century plantation documents she had found in a trunk, Anna Maria was disappointed that 'these papers throw no light on negro life, save the enormous expenses of the medical men ...' Researching and writing in the 1840s and 1850s and a loyal member of the 'Ladies Committee for the Address from Women of Britain to the Women of the United States, on Slavery', Anna Maria Pinney had obviously been curious about the Mountravers inhabitants, but she, too, had found no answers. When investigating her own family history, her task was no easier: 'My grandfather seldom wrote or received gossiping letters, so of 5 generations I am unravelling, or rather 6, his box of papers furnishes the least to these volumes'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Litchfield, Richard Buckley *Tom Wedgwood* p90

<sup>32</sup> PP, Misc Vols 48 Misc Notes

Having to work with so little satisfactory material, one is left to speculate how the Mountravers plantation community was influenced by its contacts with the wider world. Higman has shown that the material culture of the enslaved people on Montpelier plantation was neither African nor European but that they forged a new aesthetic – Creole - and he emphasized the extensive, mostly African-influenced creolisation that was shaping this particular plantation.<sup>33</sup> But, as has been stated already, the Montpelier community was isolated and the Mountravers community was not.

It is argued here that on Mountravers the interactions with other Caribbean islands, North America and Britain created an earlier and more strongly European/western-influenced Creole culture than, for instance, was the case on Montpelier. Although in the Pinney Papers direct references to culture - African, European, or Creole - are so scant that they have to be teased out ever so carefully, there is evidence of a continued connection with England. The Pinneys' own servants, Pero Jones and Fanny Coker, and other people like Kate Coker and Mulatto Polly, who are known to have travelled across the Atlantic, are crucial components in the argument that there were strong European influences. These slaves and former slaves were its carriers, or transmitters. They brought back or sent to Nevis goods and presents, which had been produced mostly by white people: European-style dresses, hats, cloth, and jewellery. Fanny Coker sent such items to her family and to a friend in Nevis and when she died, her remaining possessions were shipped to Nevis. In Bristol she also chose to involve herself in a religious movement, the Wesleyan Baptists, and it is telling, first of all, that almost all members of her family in Nevis underwent baptism, and secondly, that they were baptised in the Wesleyan Methodist rather than the Anglican church – a direct result of one woman's experience of living in Britain and of her influence spreading to the West Indies.

It is also argued here that the process of creolisation would have been accelerated in Nevis because certain physical and demographic factors contributed to a faster distribution of European cultural matter. Generally, in Nevis the plantations were smaller in size and lay closer together than in Jamaica. Per

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<sup>33</sup> The term Creole has many different meanings. It can denote ancestry (either a person of European descent born in the West Indies or in Latin America or a black person born outside Africa in the western hemisphere); language (a mother tongue that originated from contact between two languages, of which one usually is European); a style of architecture and a type of cuisine found in the southern United States.

Yanick Lahens stated that Creole first referred to a 'biological reality: a European ... born in the Caribbean islands or in America' and quoted Frank Martinus Arion, who suggested 'that the concept derives from an Afro-Portuguese Creole spoken on the West Coast of Africa from the fifteenth century. The word *criar* from which it stems means to be born locally'. For a discussion of its broader meaning – 'that of the native being not necessarily European' – and an analysis of its Spanish origins, see Yanick Lahens 'Afterword' in KM Balutansky and M-A Sourieau (eds) *Caribbean Creolization* p156.

In this study the term Creole is applied in the way it was used in the Nevis documents: it denoted an island-born person of any descent. Equally, it was employed to distinguish island-born from imported animals.

Culture in this context are 'the distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, etc of a society or group: the way of life of a society or group' (Shorter Oxford Dictionary). Culture includes a society's or group's beliefs, rituals, traditions, behaviour, language, patterns of thought, their art, music, literature, dress.

Describing the development of Creole culture, Higman used the beautiful metaphor of beads on a string. These beads contained elements of diverse cultural influences that were intermixed; they 'could be broken and lost but constantly restrung' and were 'evidence of a dynamic aesthetic'. This emergent Creole culture was something new – neither African nor European. Although Higman acknowledged the European influence on the emerging Creole culture, unfortunately he did not include white plantation workers in his study, which he restricted to the 'plantation community'. According to Higman's definition of community whites were not members of that community. They were transients who did not actively seek to be included in the slave community, their relationship with the slave population was essentially exploitative, 'and even where social and cultural exchange occurred whites withheld the reciprocity and respect essential to a recognition of shared humanity'. The white plantation employees were parasites, 'fundamentally separate from the community of the village, in both social and spatial terms' (Higman, *BW Montpelier, Jamaica* p257, p305 and p301). However, despite their separateness and their transience, they still contributed, actively and passively, to the development of the emerging Creole culture. Having acknowledged their 'contributions' (however negative), their exclusion from Higman's study of Montpelier plantation, therefore, is a regrettable omission.

square mile, there were more enslaved people in Nevis than in Jamaica,<sup>34</sup> and per plantation, slave populations were smaller. If planters took with them one or two individuals as servants to Britain, in Nevis this represented a higher percentage of enslaved people leaving the island than would have been the case of an island the size of Jamaica. With plantations lying together more closely than in Jamaica, goods, news, ideas and other cultural matter could spread faster and more easily.

The number of African-born people on a plantation would have been an important aspect influencing the spread or retention of culture. On Montpelier in Jamaica, in 1817 Africans made up over 40 per cent of the plantation population,<sup>35</sup> on Mountravers African-born people represented just over six per cent. Most of them were old men and women who had lived on Mountravers since they were children in the 1760s. Had there been more new arrivals later on, they would have brought with them their customs and beliefs and introduced new cultural traditions, or refreshed and strengthened some of those that were fading. Although the results cannot be measured, it can be assumed that newly arrived Africans counterbalanced the European regimes that were imposed on the slave population and the European influences that were seeping into their lives. Predominant people groups such as the so-called Ebboes presumably would have impacted more heavily on traditions on Mountravers than small groups, but small groups, or even single individuals, may have brought with them some beliefs or rituals that survived on the plantation. If, for instance, these individuals became powerful people such as drivers, then others may have readily taken on aspects of this person's cultural fabric. However, in the 1760s almost all the Africans purchased for Mountravers were children and although they would have come equipped with some cultural matter – values, such as respect for the elders, or perhaps skills, such as weaving - they were too young to act consciously as culture-bearers. It is likely, therefore, that on Mountravers many features of African culture did not last for long. As is the case with other groups of young people, the young Africans would have adapted to a Creole culture more quickly and more easily than adults. Academics now view Creole languages as 'an original linguistic creation of the Caribbean world'<sup>36</sup> and, whilst perhaps contributing their own idioms, these children quickly picked up the new language.<sup>37</sup> Transplanted into an alien environment and working in an unrelenting labour regime, the children's own cultural traditions would have weakened, with taboos losing their power. Those very young children who were isolated because they were the only representative of their people group in time may even have forgotten their mother-tongue. Another factor in the argument that African culture did not survive on Mountravers as strongly as on Montpelier is the point that young children would also not have had full knowledge of traditional conventions or skills: for instance, girls who had not yet given birth may not have experienced the rituals attending childbirth, and young boys whose bodies had been adorned with scars and 'country marks' in their homeland, would probably not yet have learnt to apply these decorations on others. If pre-pubescent, they would not have undergone initiation ceremonies nor taken part in adult rituals, and the children's cultural and spiritual framework would have been less secure, less strong, and therefore less long-lasting, than that of adults.

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<sup>34</sup> In all islands the slave population fluctuated over time but in 1831 there were about 8,100 slaves in Nevis, an island of 36 square miles. This translated into a population density of 225 slaves per square mile and, compared to other islands, represented medium density. St Kitts, on the other hand, had a high-density slave population with 19,780 slaves living in 63 square miles. This equated to 314 slaves per square mile. The lowest population density was found in Jamaica, where there were 74 slaves per square mile (Green, WA *Slave Emancipation* p193 Table 5).

<sup>35</sup> Africans represented 39 per cent on Old Montpelier Estate, 46 per cent on New Montpelier and 45 per cent on Shettlewood Pen (Higman, BW *Montpelier, Jamaica* p38).

<sup>36</sup> Lahens, Yanick 'Afterword' in KM Balutansky and M-A Sourieau (Eds) *Caribbean Creolization* p158

<sup>37</sup> Some of the adults who came to the West Indies when they were 'already quite old', never managed to learn the Creole language (Tyson, GF and AR Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p88), but for others, not learning English may, of course, have been a form of passive resistance and a way of disengaging from events around them. One writer tells of Tina, an enslaved African woman who lived in Charleston, South Carolina. She 'never learnt to speak English, in fact made no effort to learn the language, but she managed to communicate with the other slaves in her own way' (Tracey, Hugh 'Tina's Lullaby' in *African Music* Vol 2 No 4 (1961) p99).

When speaking of 'Africans' one has to remember that the Mountravers people were not a homogeneous group but came from different regions, each with their own distinct values and customs. This becomes abundantly clear if one looks at one central aspect of cultural expression, the burying of the dead. Because it is not known what form such ceremonies took on Mountravers, for several reasons this makes it all the more important to enquire closely into West African burial practises. Firstly, death affected each and every one who lived on the plantation; secondly, ancestry, death and burial are important concepts to Africans – as is evident, for instance, from the size of an Ashante funeral and its accompanying rituals - and thirdly, the burial practices reveal the commonalities as well as the differences between the various peoples groups. Even if one just considers the main people's groups living in the countries that the majority of Africans on Mountravers originated from, Ghana and Nigeria, it immediately becomes apparent that there are wide variations in the way they laid their dead to rest. The only documented evidence from Mountravers to enslaved people being buried reveals Christian elements, but these concerned funerals of two of the domestics at the turn of the nineteenth century, and house servants, with their close contact to whites, were more likely to have embraced Christianity earlier than others. Although there is no evidence that on Mountravers African ceremonies attended enslaved people's funerals, these have been documented in other islands, and it is reasonable to assume that until the advent of Christian burials in the 1820s, on Mountravers the dead were similarly interred - with rituals that originated in Africa and in a manner that was customary in Africa. It is very likely that over time elements of Christian burial ceremonies became incorporated, thereby creating a creolised version of African funerals.

Burial practices are a perfect reminder that African culture, or even West African culture, is not one uniform notion. While many West African funerary rituals include common features such as libations at the graveside, the actual burial practises vary: the location of the grave, the position of the body, whether or not and with which grave goods the dead were buried, and whether or not and how the graves were marked. Common to all burials were the correct funerary rites because an 'improper burial would incur the displeasure of the deceased spirit and bring curses on the off-spring.'<sup>38</sup> And common to almost all burials were five phases: the preparation, the wake and the mourning prior to the interment; the interment; and the mourning after burial.<sup>39</sup> The body was usually disposed of on the same or the next day;<sup>40</sup> in some cases this was followed by a second burial.<sup>41</sup> Depending on the status and wealth of the deceased, significant items may have been placed in the grave to allow the deceased the comforts that they had enjoyed on earth, or they may have been gifts to the ancestors, and one source described how some dead were given a bundle with their possessions so that they had no reason to return.<sup>42</sup> These were the marginalized dead, 'evil' people or suicides. Among several people groups they were cast into the bush, usually without any burial ceremonies. The Igbo, for instance, buried those who had taken their own lives in the bush;<sup>43</sup> while other groups buried those in the bush who died of certain diseases. The Nupe buried lepers in the bush although smallpox victims were buried in the normal manner.<sup>44</sup>

This raises the question as to where some particular individuals on Mountravers were buried: Cuffee and Mingo who committed suicide, or Ducks Jenny, Phillis, John and Range, who are known to have died from smallpox. But it also raises the question where the majority of people were laid to rest. Evidence from other Caribbean islands shows that different sites were used: in Jamaica enslaved people were

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<sup>38</sup> Ilogu, Edmund *Christianity and Ibo Culture* p40

<sup>39</sup> Parrinder, Geoffrey *West African Religion* p107

<sup>40</sup> Mbiti, John S *Introduction to West African Religion* p119

Evidence from Christian burial records shows that whites were also buried on the same or on the next day. Climate necessitated such practice and therefore cannot be seen as evidence of a particular cultural expression.

<sup>41</sup> Parrinder, Geoffrey *West African Religion* pp107-12; also Edmund Ilogu *Christianity and Ibo Culture* p67

<sup>42</sup> Okorochoa, Cyril C *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa* p175

<sup>43</sup> Basden, GT *Niger Ibos* p276

<sup>44</sup> Nadel, SF *The Nupe Religion* p124

buried in 'negro burial grounds' (if provided), or randomly in fields, or near or underneath their huts and that of relations. One proprietor of an estate in Jamaica said that enslaved people were "always buried in their own garden"<sup>45</sup> and those who could afford it erected a simple tomb to mark the grave.<sup>46</sup> A visitor to Ward's estate in Nevis, surprised at 'seeing a grave not more than 3 yards from the front of the door' of a slave woman's hut, was told that it was 'a common mode, in the West Indies, for the negroes to bury their friends in their gardens, and after the first fortnight to plant yams on their graves, which is that [they] say, the best of soil for them'.<sup>47</sup> In Barbados in the eighteenth century it was common to 'inter a near relation under the bedplace on which they sleep'<sup>48</sup> but 'the great majority ... were buried in unmarked plantation cemeteries'.<sup>49</sup> These sites were important. As James Walvin wrote, 'slaves held special affection for those burial grounds and wanted them close to their homes.'<sup>50</sup> If one understands the importance of keeping close to the remains of one's family, then this spiritual dimension can explain the unwillingness by a particular group of people, John Pretor Pinney's reserved people, to move away from Mountravers. What appeared as practical considerations, or resistance for resistance's sake, can take on a new and different, deeper meaning.

To what extent the keeping alive of African traditions was a deliberate effort is a question that will never be answered. In fact, were people aware of belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group, and did they consciously want to recreate a particular African identity? Studies by the historian Barry Higman show that many Africans in early nineteenth century Trinidad lived with partners who were not from their own ethnic group or even their region of origin. In these mixed households each partner's cultural identity contributed to a new form of cultural expression and, as Higman had discovered, people's ethnic identity dissolved rapidly.<sup>51</sup> One has to ask whether the keeping alive of one's own particular cultural practices would have been important if one's first priority was to keep oneself and one's children alive, although perhaps holding on to one's culture was an instrument of survival: those individuals who preserved their traditions were strengthened by them and were thereby better equipped to withstand the hardships they had to face in their daily lives. But living in close proximity to white people exposed the enslaved Africans to European, mostly English, culture - did accepting aspects of this alien society impoverish or enrich their lives? It has become fashionable to dismiss those enslaved people who willingly adopted, or even aspired to, aspects of European culture as lackeys, collaborators and traitors to the African cause, but a more important issue is how the slave community would have viewed those people who accepted European cultural traditions and values. Creole culture then was different from what it is now and in judging whether enslaved people benefited from a cultural mix, after the passing of two or three centuries we inevitably overlay our own values and aspirations. All one can say is that what has evolved in the former slave colonies is a rich, vibrant culture that can be admired and celebrated.

Although it is argued here that on Mountravers creolisation occurred with a pronounced European rather than an African slant, there is evidence that certainly some common aspects of African culture – clothing, music and religious beliefs - did survive on Mountravers well into the nineteenth century. Mrs Pinney sent

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<sup>45</sup> Brathwaite, EK *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* p9, citing JB Moreton (1790) and M Lewis *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*

<sup>46</sup> Hicks, Dan 'The Garden of the World', citing J Stewart *A View of the Present and Past State of Jamaica* Edinburgh 1823 p267

<sup>47</sup> Aaron Thomas's *Journal* p12

<sup>48</sup> Walvin, James *Black Ivory* p150, quoting JS Handler and FW Lange *Plantation Slavery in Barbados* Cambridge, Massachusetts 1978

<sup>49</sup> Handler, Jerome S 'A Prone Burial from a Plantation Slave Cemetery in Barbados' in *Historical Archaeology* Vol 30 No 3 (1996) p78

On Newton Plantation, Barbados, the cemetery was about 300 meters from the slave housing.

<sup>50</sup> Walvin, James *Black Ivory* p150

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, Philip D 'The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments' in David Eltis and David Richardson (eds) *Routes to Slavery: direction, ethnicity, and morality in the transatlantic* p136, quoting BW Higman 'African and Creole Slave Family Patterns in Trinidad' in *Journal of Family History* Vol 3 No 2 (Summer 1978) pp163-80

material for head wraps as presents to some of the favoured women, and in 1810 a neighbouring planter felt disturbed by the drumming drifting over from the slave village. In Nevis, aspects of African beliefs flourished so well into the second half of the nineteenth century that Charles Pinney advocated renewed Christian instruction to prevent 'old African superstitions so enervating both to mind and body' re-invigorating the beliefs of others.<sup>52</sup> Elements of African culture, of course, have survived in Nevis until today. Oral tradition has kept alive the Nancy, or Anancy stories, and, among some of the older people, knowledge of medicinal plants. Experts like Joseph 'Charley' Woodley of Westbury can find a cure for every ailment in the bush, in the garden, or just growing wild by the roadside. Some people still use of the yabba pot, the locally made, fuel-efficient charcoal cooking vessel, and occasionally one sees older women carry bundles, baskets or trays perfectly balanced on their hands, African-style. As on other Caribbean islands, the African inheritance is all around: in the food, in the language, in the music, in the swept yard - even in the way Nevisians landscape their gardens: plants are spaced separately and rarely grouped or massed. Each is meant to be appreciated and valued as an individual.<sup>53</sup>

Cultural exchange took place between Nevis and Britain but it would require a different study altogether to establish to what extent aspects of African and Caribbean Creole beliefs, ideas and values became embedded in Britain, initially among those with close connections to Africa and the West Indies and later among the wider population, but one can, at least, consider some very visible displays of cultural transfer. Among the most obvious West Indian exports were the foodstuffs. Apart from the plantation-produced goods such as sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco and rum, which over time transformed British society, the well-to-do in Britain grew pineapples and oranges in their hothouses, ate coconuts and consumed turtles in vast quantities. When one of the Pinney daughters wanted to entertain some country neighbours, she asked for a turtle and coconuts but, if unavailable, she thought that 'every kind of West India fruit will be very acceptable'.<sup>54</sup> The Pinneys' dining table in Bristol featured such exotica as yams, hot pepper sauce and cassava bread, and the family cured some of their ailments with remedies from Nevis: castor oil, bay rum and wormgrass. These were mere by-products of the main West India plantation trade and they were mostly luxury items, accessible to a relatively small section of the British population, but almost everyone in Britain would have been aware that they existed.

Other manifestations of cultural transfer across the Atlantic were words that crept into common usage in Britain, such as tobacco, hammock and hurricane, borrowed from the language of the original Caribbean inhabitants, the Arawaks,<sup>55</sup> and although there is no record of this in the documents, no doubt the Pinney family used some Creole expressions at home or when in the company of friends from Nevis. After all, Mrs P herself was born in Nevis and grew up in the island, as did two of their family servants, Pero Jones and Fanny Coker. Mrs P's requests for calabashes to be sent to Bristol, surely, must be seen as a Creole woman's desire to maintain a link with her Creole heritage. Her Creole tastes (and those acquired by her husband during his sojourn in the West Indies) were shared with those slaves and former slaves who, like Pero Jones and Fanny Coker, came from Nevis to live in Britain. However, in addition to adapting to life in Britain and to holding onto aspects of their Creole heritage, they would also have retained some of their African-based cultural fabric, resulting in a rich, cultural melange.<sup>56</sup> And perhaps even the business-

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<sup>52</sup> PP, NLB 35: Charles Pinney to EJ Huggins, 31 Aug 1858

<sup>53</sup> In her article 'Out of Africa', Joan Robinson states that plants in traditional African-Caribbean gardens generally are not 'structural elements' in the way they are incorporated into garden design by North Americans or Europeans; they are not used as ground cover, as edging, or to screen unsightly buildings (*NHCS Newsletter* No 70 November 2003 pp8-9).

<sup>54</sup> PP, Dom Box S4-5: Elizabeth Pinney, Racedown, to John Pretor Pinney, 12 September 1793

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, James *In Focus Eastern Caribbean: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* p12. Columbus had observed Arawak people smoking tobacco through a tube they called *tobago*, hence its name. The origin of the word hurricane, a tropical cyclone, lies in the word '*furacán*' (Millás, JC *Hurricanes of the Caribbean*).

<sup>56</sup> Even today, remnants of African burial practices can be seen in West Indian funerals in Britain. Big community gatherings, they are social events at which libations at the graveside may be made. Mourners take an active part, with men often filling up the graves



mindful John Pretor Pinney had absorbed a few African concepts. When he forbade the planting of vegetable matter among canes he argued that it took 'from the spirit of the land' - <sup>57</sup> he may have been expressing an African view of land as being more than just clots of soil but a life-force that needed to be nurtured and treated with respect.

One direct and visible result of the opening up of the Atlantic World was the emergence of a sizeable black presence in eighteenth century Britain. In the early 1770s there may have been between 14,000 and 20,000 black people in England, mostly in London but also in Bristol and Liverpool.<sup>58</sup> In London they had their own places of entertainment <sup>59</sup> but, as paintings, parish registers, contemporary literature and newspapers testify, black people then lived, worked, married and died not just in the metropolis and in the big slaving ports but in every nook and cranny of the country. Some, like the African man who farmed in a Hampshire village,<sup>60</sup> were stable members of their communities, others appeared only briefly, such as the black sailor who lived rough in rural Somerset, 'concealing himself from the press gang that were at Bridgwater'.<sup>61</sup> To some they provided cheap and dependent labour,<sup>62</sup> to others black people became objects of desire. Knowing what would please their friends and patrons in Britain, along with pineapples and turtles planters sent them presents of enslaved individuals,<sup>63</sup> and the wealthy and those wishing to be seen to be wealthy wanted a black servant as a social status symbol. As Peter Fryer wrote, they 'conferred on their masters and mistresses "an air of luxurious well being"'.<sup>64</sup> And while black servants in Britain became cosseted cultural icons, their enslaved brothers and sisters across the Atlantic came to be at the centre of national political discourse. The arguments over the trade and later the abolition of slavery confronted the British public, and many took sides and aired their views. Abolitionists like Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce were the prominent figures but countless ordinary citizens played their part: they boycotted colonial produce, signed petitions, penned letters to newspapers and wrote impassioned pamphlets. There is little public recognition of their role in the anti-slavery movement but one small town in Gloucestershire has honoured their contributions by building a lasting

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with soil, taking the shovelling in turns, while the women decorate the grave mounds with flowers inserted individually into the soft, freshly turned soil.

<sup>57</sup> PP, LB 5: John Pretor Pinney to Joseph Gill, Nevis, 30 October 1783

<sup>58</sup> Equiano, Olaudah *The Interesting Narrative* p283 fn465

With a total population of about 6.5 million, black people represented about 0.2 per cent.

<sup>59</sup> By the eighteenth century some establishments appear to have catered for an all-black clientele: Lord Pembroke found himself in a 'black bawdy house ... sitting in a company all black' (Unnamed contributor to 'Parish and other records' in *BASA Newsletter* No 42 (April 2005) p27, quoting from James Boswell's *The Ominous Years, 1774-1776* London 1963 p118). In 1770 John Baker's black servant Jack Beef attended a 'black ball' (Yorke, PC (ed) *The Diary of John Baker* p15 and p201).

<sup>60</sup> The unnamed African farmed at Twyford, near Winchester in Hampshire. His son, the aptly named Thomas Birch Freeman, became a missionary and colonial official (Flint, John 'Freeman, Thomas Birch (1809-1890)' in *Oxford DNB*). A wealth of other examples of the black presence in Britain can be found in the extracts taken from parish records, workhouse books and other such documents, which are published in the newsletters of the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA), an organisation based at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London.

<sup>61</sup> Ayres, Jack (ed) *Paupers and Pig Killers* p219

William Holland also noted in his diary the visit in his parish of a young mixed-parentage man. The son of a black woman, his father had financed his education which had enabled him to take Holy Orders. Although 'young Mackay' had two livings and was 'in good circumstances', on each visit to his father, 'far from assisting him', he drew money from him. This 'plundering' led William Holland to confide to his diary that he was 'not very partial to West Indians, especially to your Negro Half Blood people' (p106).

<sup>62</sup> Planters, who brought with them their favourite servants did not always bring with them a tolerance towards black people in general - indeed, it has been argued that whites' racism towards blacks emerged with plantation slavery. Whites deemed Africans suitable for enduring the hardships of plantation labour in the tropics because of their dark skin, and to justify their exploitation (and the brutal treatment of them) it was argued that they were dumb, impervious to pain and suffering, and their morals ungodly. Similar racist arguments were put forward to justify the expansion of the British Empire and the establishment of British rule in Africa and the Indian subcontinent. In the Caribbean, colour and the gradations of colour became an issue not just among the enslaved people but also spread to the wider populations who internalised the inherent values. The offspring of white parents - the mulatto and mestizo children - were thought unsuitable for field labour and many of these children were freed, so that over time dark skin became synonymous with lowly work and low status. The legacy of slavery lives on in today's Caribbean societies where a lighter complexion is still perceived by many as more desirable and many light-skinned people expect to be privileged.

<sup>63</sup> The gifts of a slave were not always appreciated and on at least one occasion William Stapleton's present of a little boy was rejected by the recipient (Hancock, David (ed) *The Letters of William Freeman* p27 and p41 William Freeman to William Stapleton, 19 September 1678 and 26 October 1678).

<sup>64</sup> Fryer, P *Staying Power The History of Black People in Britain* pp72-3

memorial: an Anti-Slavery Arch. The folk of Stroud, which was linked to Africa and the West Indies through its cloth industry, were but a speck in the assemblage of the Atlantic World yet they, too, were part of the interactive whole.

It has to be remembered, though, that the passage of cultural matter was, like the shipping voyages, a three-way process - albeit a lop-sided one – and went roughly like this: some traditions and customs moved from Africa to the Americas and from there to Britain, and, to some extent, from Britain to Africa, or even from the Caribbean to Africa.<sup>65</sup> Trade goods, which were shipped from Britain to Africa, influenced African patterns of consumption of, for instance, European-made cloth and guns. Slavers and merchants brought their goods as well as values and beliefs, but ideas also spread through the British-educated elite of Africans who returned to their country of birth to become translators, traders and later also missionaries. Indeed, one of these missionaries, the Revd Philip Quaque, travelled from England to Ghana on the very ship that brought African captives to Nevis and from which John Pretor Pinney purchased twenty boys and girls. Put simply, these children brought with them their African cultural imprints, they in turn influenced the emerging Creole culture in Nevis, while elements of this made its way back to Britain by way of the ships crews and other travellers - the triangle was almost complete. However, like the shipping voyages involved in the 'Triangular Trade' between Britain, Africa and the Americas, the transfer of culture was not truly triangular. It did not just occur across the Atlantic but also within the Americas and within the Caribbean; words such as maroon, mulatto and mestize, for instance, entered the English language through inter-island contact with French and Spanish colonies.

Culture and its spread or retention was among the issues deemed important in this study. However, to a large extent these had to remain without firm conclusions because, as already stated, the plantation records contain hardly any direct references to cultural expression. In an attempt to go beyond documentary sources and to strengthen this research, in 1998 the authors requested the help from the makers of the first British television series of archaeological excavations. For three days their high-tech, multi-disciplinary *Time Team* explored sites of interest, and while a three-day search can in no way be an exhaustive survey, it was hoped that it would answer at least one of the questions: where on the plantation was the slave village situated that was mentioned in a late eighteenth century document? Deep in the bush members of the team did, indeed, locate it - the first slave village positively identified as such in Nevis. They also found two stone structures, potential house platforms or garden plots and a 'slab' (a waterhole). Given the time pressure and the importance of the site, *Time Team*, however, decided not to carry out any intrusive archaeological investigation. It was possible that human remains might have been unearthed, and, taking account of the sensitivity surrounding excavating burials and the handling, studying and subsequent reburial of the remains in an appropriate manner, as well as the legal requirements, this was an entirely sensible decision. At the same time it was a disappointing outcome because without excavating and accessing personal items one of the central questions still could not be answered: to what extent did African culture survive on Mountravers?

*Time Team's* locating the site of the slave village gave new impetus for trying to discover who had lived on the plantation and to gather as much information as possible about each inhabitant - a project previously dismissed as too ambitious. Information about enslaved people from the early development of Mountravers is thin but from leases and slave lists we do get some of their names and, although they lack

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<sup>65</sup> An intriguing example of how technological know-how adapted by Europeans in the Caribbean was exported to Africa is the use of tarass. A volcanic stone, in the Caribbean tarass was used to waterproof cisterns and other structures that needed to be watertight, but when in the early 1700s a large consignment arrived in Africa, the Governor had to write to London to ask how they prepared it in Antigua. According to Lawrence, the English were 'characteristically ... incompetent with tarass' and slow in adopting it in Africa but eventually it was used for roofs and walls in the castles and slaving forts (Lawrence, *AW Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* p92).

detail and depth, some of their stories can be pieced together. The fragments of plantation documents that do exist hint at violent times and at much sickness and the planters' compensation claims following the French invasion of 1706 at brutality, destruction and upheaval. The first comprehensive slave list dates from 1734 and, astonishingly, from this a large number of the people could be traced into the 1760s, to the next surviving slave registers. Many of these people could even be followed into the 1770s and beyond. A sense of continuity began to emerge. The life of many an individual would have altered, though, with the arrival of John Pretor Pinney and the change from absentee to resident owner. Once Pinney married and had children, further changes took place when the family employed enslaved females as ladies maids and nurse maids. The biographies, which cover the period when John Pretor Pinney and his son John Frederick owned Mountravers, are the richest because a wealth of documents exists. Once the Huggins family took over, there are no more plantation records but the Mountravers slave population can be updated from the island's Triennial Returns, the official Slave Registers. In addition, those people John Pretor Pinney reserved for his own use exist in some documents that relate to the plantation to which they were hired, Clarke's Estate. In addition, parish registers provide ample details on baptisms, marriages and burials. Everyone's story has been followed through to 1 August 1834, the day slavery was abolished and replaced by the apprenticeship system. Had there been suitable documents, it would have been even more fitting to track the slaves-turned-apprentice labourers as far as 1 August 1838, the day of complete Emancipation.

Although all these biographies are no more than outlines of people's lives, when taken as a whole, they form ever-changing tableaux of people. Initially the picture is blurred but gradually individuals come into focus. Scenes change through the passage of time. In the 1730s there appeared to have been a large number of relatively young people; almost thirty years later the survivors had grown old. The dynamics change with an influx of new arrivals, mainly boys, mostly Africans. As these young Africans mature, as well as the children of the original enslaved people, their children are born, and those who survive become grandparents. By the time Mountravers is sold, the population is relatively stable, increased mostly by births rather than purchases. Moving to the 1820s and to the eve of the abolition of slavery, the influence of church and school are seen: grand- and great grandchildren get baptised, married and buried in church, and children attend school. From the earliest mention of enslaved people on Mountravers throughout its history there is evidence of their determination to shape their own destiny, of their fight for freedom and of their involvement in a wider world. At this stage the study of people on Mountravers provides a broad picture but one day - when a Nevis, or even a Caribbean-wide database exists, following the model of the St Croix African Roots Project - all the different threads can be knitted together. Such a database and additional material may, in future, extend the work, answer questions and perhaps even revise some of the conclusions reached.

As the research developed, the circles widened. New characters appeared on the scene when it was found that someone was sold, got married or had children. Each one of these was followed up, too. Documents that had previously been deemed exhausted were re-examined, in ever-expanding circles, and as this spiral became almost endless, at some time the decision had to be taken to leave some fates unresolved, some facts uncorroborated, and some loose ends untied. Out of necessity but also by design, speculation and supposition are woven into the biographies - not only were the records, at times, insufficient to establish or verify facts and to draw firm conclusions, an element of conjecture is also introduced to widen the scope and to suggest possibilities as pointers to a future generation of researchers, and to encourage further research.

Despite the gaps and the uncertainties about particular aspects and details of the lives of the Mountravers people, one fact, however, has been firmly established: forgotten lives can be reclaimed.

### **Language matters**

The language of slavery presents challenges. In the latter stages of plantation slavery even planters recognised this; in the 1820s the Nevis Legislature found the term driver 'so obnoxious at present' that they considered changing it 'to some other such as Captain or Boatswain'.<sup>66</sup> Since the early days of slavery, owners of enslaved people generally avoided the term 'slave' as it 'affronted traditions of British liberty'; they preferred the euphemism 'negro'.<sup>67</sup> Today both terms are suspect.

Plantation owners and other slaveholders have been described as 'enslavers' but this term should really only apply to those men who enslaved free Africans in Africa. Any African bought by a planter or other person in the Americas was already enslaved and those children born to enslaved mothers were slave-born. The slaveholders who 'owned' these people kept them in a state of enslavement. And, as Burns has argued, the 'preference for 'enslaver' over 'master' obscures dynamics of ownership and manumission'.<sup>68</sup>

Nowadays the term 'slave' implies passivity, a mindless acceptance of, and submission to, the status of enslavement, or a servile devotion devoid of the will or the power to resist. People's involuntary state of bondage is more accurately reflected by the terms 'enslaved man', 'enslaved woman' or 'enslaved person' but unfortunately these are more cumbersome and sometimes downright unwieldy, and for this reason alone they were sometimes avoided in this study. Historically, negro (or Negro) was used as an alternative to 'slave' but, confusingly, could also mean a free black person, as opposed to someone of dual descent or mixed heritage.<sup>69</sup> Nowadays 'Negro' is used to describe people who 'take on the anti-black cultural behavioural mannerisms of mainstream American society'<sup>70</sup> (as well as British society), and it is, therefore, a value-laden term but, in the context of historic plantation slavery, unavoidable.

In the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, the term 'coloured' was applied in Nevis mainly in the context of enslaved people who had been freed but, despite today's connotations of Apartheid, segregation and lackeyism, the term has been used in this study as an identifier. In this historic setting, it is shorthand for any person of mixed cultural or racial heritage.<sup>71</sup> The terms planters employed to describe individuals' racial and ethnic origins are troublesome, too, although in Nevis the colour distinctions were applied more loosely and less systematically than in some other islands. While Jamaica was inhabited by so-called quadroons, octoroons and mustee-finns, David Watts found that 'in St Domingue, thirteen types of mulatto ... were distinguished by colour, ranging from 'free black' to 'mesallié' white. In Barbados, on the other hand, mulattoes were simply considered as being a mixed assemblage of people who were neither pure black nor pure white. The same was true of French territories other than St Domingue, where they were accorded the name 'gens de couleur'.<sup>72</sup> In Antigua 'dustees', the children of a white and a mustee parent, had skin 'as white and fair as the most delicate European',<sup>73</sup> while in Nevis mixed-race individuals were variously called 'mestize' or 'mustee', 'sambo' and 'mulatto' (the female

<sup>66</sup> UKNA, CO 186/12: 26 June 1823

<sup>67</sup> Ward, JR *British West Indian Slavery* p1

<sup>68</sup> Burns, James Robert 'Slaves' and 'Slave Owners' or 'Enslaved People' and 'Enslavers'? Cambridge University Press online, 17 November 2023 (accessed 14 January 2024)

<sup>69</sup> In its most derogatory form the term Negro developed into 'Nigger' which only appeared once in the Pinney Papers and in a Jamaican context (PP, Dom Box H-2: E Dickinson to Aunt Pinney, 31 August 1844). In recent times the term has been reclaimed and subverted, amid much controversy, by African American rap artists such as Niggaz with Attitude.

<sup>70</sup> Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn 'Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens: Viewing Caribbean Women's History Cross-culturally' in Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (eds) *Engendering History, Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* p9

<sup>71</sup> Miscegenation, the technical term for sexual relations or intermarriage between different races, has its roots in the Latin for 'to mix' (*miscere*) but because of its negative association with the prefix 'mis', which denotes 'wrongly' or 'badly', it appears offensive and has not been used.

<sup>72</sup> Watts, David *The West Indies: Patterns of Development* p371

In a Caymanian context, Buchler has identified 36 so-called 'ethno-genetic categories', ranging from two white parents having white children to a white and a 'musty feno' parent producing 'musty feno' children (Buchler, IR 'Caymanian Folk Racial Categories' in *Man* Vol 62 (December 1962) pp185-86).

<sup>73</sup> Aaron Thomas's *Journal* p203

form Mulatta or even mulatress were hardly ever used). Confusingly, people of colour were also described as 'yellow', 'yellow cast', or even 'black of a yellow cast', and this also applied to a few of the African-born individuals. Although this is not how enslaved people would have identified themselves, these gradations provide valuable pointers to a person's lineage and identity.

The term 'runaway', too, is value laden. It was commonly used to describe people who had absented themselves without permission from the plantation. The term implies a cowardly act – running away. It does not recognise the planning that might have gone into escaping, or the courage it took to break free. A more correct term would be 'freedom seeker' although it also has to be recognised that some 'runaways' only absented themselves for short periods of time and returned on their own accord after spending some time with friends or family who lived elsewhere. Their goal was not to seek permanent freedom from enslavement; only temporary normality. The term 'Maroon' (from the Spanish *cimarrón* for fugitive, runaway) was not in use in Nevis. Nevis, unlike Jamaica, had no long-standing, settled communities of escapees. This illustrates how the language of slavery differed between the islands, and such information, in itself, provides valuable historical data. It is, therefore, important to use the original terminology.

While accepting the use of some of the expression that were current at the time of slavery, one area where it was found necessary to make changes is in the spelling of many of the original written passages quoted in this study. Today old spelling is often seen as quaint and charming but, seen in a modern text, it suggests that people were of a lower educational standard than they were, and it removes our understanding of them further than is necessary or desirable. For these reasons some changes have been made. Purists will wince at the very thought of altering historic text to modern spelling and punctuation, but in order to make the quoted extracts more accessible and easier to read and understand, capital letters have been changed to lower case and punctuation has occasionally been introduced where it did not exist, or erased where it causes confusion. Abbreviations have been extended and some inconsistent spelling has been ironed out although, where the original spelling is of a significantly lower standard than is found elsewhere in contemporary correspondence, some of this has been retained to give an indication of the writer's educational level.

The language of race and racial politics differs subtly in Britain from that used in the United States and other parts of the world, and it changes over time and is still evolving. What is acceptable language today may not be acceptable tomorrow,<sup>74</sup> but as reactionary and painful terms such as 'slave', 'negro', and 'coloured' are, it is hoped that in the context of this study all readers will see their use as appropriate. When presenting historical evidence, original terms cannot be avoided – however distasteful they appear nowadays. Furthermore, it is not important how we feel about slavery but how *they* felt, and changing obnoxious expressions to something less offensive to us would only cushion our perceptions and soothe our twenty-first century sensibilities. The language used should not gloss over the fact that the system of plantation slavery was brutal, vicious and corrupting and a shameful chapter in British history. And so, if

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<sup>74</sup> The term 'race' is loaded with ambiguity and often confused with 'ethnicity', sometimes with 'culture'. A careful clarification goes beyond the scope of this study but, in this context, has simply been used to mean people of African or European origin. The term 'mixed race', applied for instance by Dunn in "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields', is rejected by some people in Britain in favour of 'mixed heritage', 'biracial', 'bicultural' or 'multi-cultural'. Elsewhere 'dual descent' or 'dual heritage' are preferred although some reject these terms as too restrictive.

Debate about the term 'black', too, is ongoing: whether it is an appropriate term, who can be included, who has the right to define a person as 'black' and whether and in which context to spell the word with a lower case or a capital letter. The language keeps evolving.

Equally objectionable are expressions such as 'coolie' for people from India, as well as 'cripple' and 'lame', but these, too, have been used to maintain historical accuracy.

Africans and people of African descent appear to be dealt with as objects in this study, it reflects the reality of the time: they *were* mortgaged, bought and sold, they *were* left in wills, given as presents and used to settle debts. They were property; they were owned. However, while recognising this reality, each person is also portrayed as an individual in his or her own right. The purpose of this study is to try and overcome their objectification by their so-called masters; they were human beings who laughed and cried, stole and fought, behaved timidly and bravely, and lived lives that went beyond the offensive term 'slave'.

To read other chapters, please copy this link and paste it into your search engine:  
<https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountraversplantationcommunity.html>

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