

Part 3

The employed men: managers, overseers, and boiling house watches

Chapter 1 An overview

Attorneys and plantation employees

Sugar plantations were complex businesses which, depending on their size, required a number of people to carry out a range of management tasks relating to the land, the buildings, the animals and machinery, the plantation infrastructure and, of course, the enslaved workers and the commodities they produced - sugar, rum and molasses.

Resident planters ran their enterprises with the help of one or two white men, and when they left the West Indies, appointed trusted fellow planters to keep a watchful eye on their estate and to conduct business on their behalf. They gave these men, their attorneys, legal power to represent them. In return, the attorneys were generally recompensed in the form of commission on the sugar that was shipped but some were also paid an annual fee.¹ John Pretor Pinney (JPP), however, expected his friends to perform this service for free and was peeved when one of his attorneys raised the subject of money. Some absentee planters had unspoken reciprocal arrangements with their attorneys and, for instance, acted as unofficial guardians when their children came to England for their education.

Those wishing to leave the island often struggled to find someone willing to accept the responsibility of acting as an attorney, or someone capable. As one planter put it:

Tis true, it is a favour that a stranger can scarcely ask; for if any man in the West Indies has a tolerable share of industry, he will generally have business enough of his own to employ him. If he has no industry, it is not to be imagined, he will regard the business of others, when he neglects his own; therefore, proper persons as attorney are scarcely to be had; for few people will take that trouble, unless to particular friends or acquaintances.²

Attorneys took the commercial decisions and, unless the owner sent men from Britain, also engaged the white staff charged with running the plantations on a day-to-day basis, or made recommendations to the owners as to who should be employed from a pool of local labour. If absentee planters had several plantations, they could appoint one man as attorney for one estate and as manager for another – as was done in the case of the Stapleton plantations. In the 1820s, John Swindell managed Lord Combermere's St Kitts property and acted as agent for that in Nevis. The advantage was that one man had insight into the running of both estates and could make consistent, informed decisions; the disadvantage was that more power was concentrated in one man and that he became less accountable.³

¹ Pares, Richard *A West India Fortune* p20

The attorneys' remuneration tended to reflect the size of the plantation and responsibility they carried. On Lady Stapleton's estate, in 1828 the attorney received a salary of N£200, while the manager was paid N£330 a year (Stapleton Cotton MSS 31). See also David W Galenson *Traders, Planters, and Slaves* p138.

² Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Walter Nisbet, Edinburgh, to Ellis Yonge, Acton, 30 November 1772

³ NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton p291 and p335

The job titles of the men charged with managing the plantations varied in the islands and changed over time. Originally called overseers in Nevis, by the eighteenth century the men whom absentee owners entrusted with the day-to-day running of their plantations were generally known as managers and those who assisted them tended to be called overseers. On Barbados overseers were termed drivers,⁴ while in Jamaica managers were called overseers and their subordinates bookkeepers although they kept no books and 'were in some cases scarcely literate'.⁵ In addition to managers and overseers - in official documents both tended to be referred to as planters - on Mountravers another group of mostly white plantation workers existed. Various described as assistant or under-overseers, boiling house watches or overseers during crop time, they were engaged to oversee the sugar-making operations during the busiest time of the year. With mechanisation, a new breed of plantation employee came into existence. He had to combine the overseeing of people and land with the management of technical equipment. When Pinney & Ames in 1820 ordered from a Scottish firm ploughs to be sent to Nevis, they also asked for a man used 'to the Scotch plough'. He was 'to teach the negroes to plough' and, when not ploughing, to work as overseer.⁶ The New River estate, which by then had a steam engine installed, engaged a 'new engineer and overseer',⁷ and when the House considered replacing the manager on Stoney Grove, probably with a view to installing a steam engine, they had the man trained up for the job in Jamaica.

No women held any of these posts. As Barry Higman wrote, 'the idea of a female attorney, overseer or bookkeeper was unheard of'.⁸ Unusually, the daughter of a Nevis manager wrote to the proprietor on her father's behalf when he lay 'much indisposed with a fever in bed'. She reported competently on recent events that affected the island and the plantation.⁹

Contemporary observers viewed white men working on plantations as no more than corrupt tyrants. To the black abolitionist Olaudah Equiano managers were 'for the most part persons of the worst character of any denomination of men in the West Indies'. He distinguished between owners and managers and thought it unfortunate that absentee planters - 'many humane gentlemen' - were obliged to leave their estates 'in the hands of these human butchers, who cut and mangle the slaves in a shocking manner on the most trifling occasions, and altogether treat them in every respect like brutes'.¹⁰ Other eyewitnesses looked upon them just as disapprovingly. Lady Nugent, the wife of the Governor of Jamaica, was repulsed, yet fascinated, by their masculine, brutish qualities. Hinting at sumptuous sexuality, she evoked the image of a harem when she likened one manager to a 'Scotch Sultan'. But there was nothing exotic or majestic about this man; he was just a repulsive specimen with a 'dingy, sallow-brown complexion' who, by way of teeth, sported 'only two yellow discoloured tusks'.¹¹ Another female writer, Janet Schaw, also used the image of noble figures - princes - but the managers she met were no more than corrupt, thieving fakes who 'enrich themselves, and live like princes at the expense of their thoughtless masters'.¹² The cartographer and engraver John Luffman picked up on the same theme. Writing from Antigua in the 1780s, he found that managers lived beyond their means and abused the trust of their employers: they financed their extravagant lifestyle by appropriating plantation land to grow vegetables tended by plantation workers. According to Luffman their 'contribution' to the plantations was to father mulattoes and mustees -¹³ the 'yellow children' Lady Nugent's Scotch Sultan produced with his 'favourite Sultana'.

⁴ Ward, JR *British West Indian Slavery* p40

⁵ Green WA *Slave Emancipation* p60 fn86

⁶ PP, LB 55: P & A to Dennistoun and Co, Glasgow, 18 December 1820

⁷ SRO/I, Maynard Papers, HA 178-1/53

⁸ Higman, BW *Montpelier, Jamaica* p75

⁹ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Frances Daniell to The Revd The Dean of St Asaph, 7 September 1793

¹⁰ Equiano, Olaudah *The Interesting Narrative* p105

¹¹ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* pp39-40

¹² Andrews, Evangeline Walker and Charles McLeon Andrews (eds) *Journal of a Lady of Quality* p92

¹³ Oliver, VL *Antigua* Vol 1 Letter XI 28 January 1787

Men like John Luffman and the pro-slavery campaigner James Tobin expressed the prevailing view that these children were fathered by men of the lower orders, the managers and overseers, rather than by the planters. By living with their mistresses the men served as bad role models for the enslaved people - indeed, Lady Nugent thought that 'their example must be the worst possible to these poor creatures'.¹⁴ Low birth rates among the enslaved people were attributed to the 'premature and promiscuous connexion (sic) of the sexes',¹⁵ and Lady Nugent and others went so far as to blame the whites' lax morals for the continuation of the slave trade. She believed that '... there would be certainly no necessity for the Slave Trade, if religion, decency, and good order, were established among the negroes.' If enslaved men and women had stable relationships - 'if they could be prevailed upon to marry' -¹⁶ their promiscuity, which the whites had encouraged by their own immorality, would cease. Married people would produce more children and naturally replenish the stagnant or diminishing slave populations. The result would be - so the argument went - the end of the trade in human beings.

Equiano's human butchers, Lady Nugent's Scotch Sultans, Janet Schaw's thieving fakes - these men existed, and brutality, debauchery and corruption were aspects of West Indian plantation life that increasingly came to the British public's attention through the books and pamphlets written by Equiano and other abolitionists, and through newspaper reports on, for instance, the trials of Edward Huggins in Nevis and Arthur William Hodge in Montserrat. But the images were one-dimensional. There were other features, undetected by those whose stay in the West Indies was temporary, ignored by those whose politics proscribed certain omissions, or just of no interest to anyone: the work these white men actually did on the plantations, and their everyday living and social environments. These remained largely unrecorded.¹⁷

Today, plantation managers and overseers are seen as oppressors and exploiters who were part of the whole brutal regime. Barry Higman, for instance, excluded whites in his brilliantly detailed study on Montpelier because they did not belong to the plantation community which, according to the definition of the concept of community he used, only consisted of the enslaved people. The whites, however, were part of, and operated in, that interacting, interrelated entirety - the sugar plantation. They were some of the very components that made up the functioning whole. It is surprising, then, that so far little research has been done into their work and into their lives. In the context of historical archaeology, David Watters found that in the British Caribbean research 'related to overseers, indentured servants, merchants, soldiers, and other white components of society is essentially nonexistent'. Watters pointed out that archaeological research has also neglected other members of colonial society: the freeborn or the manumitted people. He cited the 'Lack of urban, commercial, and military sites' as the principal reason for these omissions, and the fact that the documentary records which exist were intended for use by the planters and are therefore heavily biased towards them.¹⁸ For historians, a shortage of suitable records may be one of the problems but while, for instance, the Pinney Papers are not complete and therefore can only paint part of a very narrowly-focussed picture, it is still possible to tease out many valuable details about managers and overseers from the documents that are available. Plantation records, by definition, are biased towards the planters but in their one-sidedness they can still be revealing.

In the context of this study most records that have survived are from the period of JPP's ownership so that the information gathered relates mainly to the white plantation employees who worked on Mountravers after 1761. As well as drawing on secondary sources, other useful material came from the letters written by Worthington Coker, a grandson of one of the Mountravers managers, and from the recollections of a Bristol-born plantation worker, Henry Ransford. The son of a businessman,

¹⁴ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* pp39-40, p118

¹⁵ Lambert, S (ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 69 1789 Evidence by the Legislature of Nevis

¹⁶ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* pp117-18

¹⁷ A notable exception is Michael Craton's depiction of three Backra men (*Searching for the Invisible Man* pp255-72).

¹⁸ Watters, David 'Historical Archaeology in the British Caribbean' in Paul Farnsworth (ed) *Island Lives* p91

Ransford gathered experience on half a dozen Jamaican estates before managing one of the Nevis plantations mortgaged to the Pinneys, Stoney Grove. However, while their texts convey a sense of ordinariness and normality, one has to remember that, most likely, these men, too, abused and mistreated enslaved people and, by their actions or inactions, may have killed those under their control. And although men like Worthington Coker and Henry Ransford were beholden to their employers, they all partook voluntarily and of their own accord in plantation slavery. They made choices in their lives that led them to work on sugar plantations.

Recruitment

During the eighteenth century owners of overseas plantations competed with British aristocrats and other wealthy people for men with the right skills and qualities to look after their properties. An increasing number of owners of British country estates moved to the town for the season, and later to the seaside, while other rich folk acquired country residences in addition to their town houses. They all needed someone to manage their estates or their second homes. Sometimes middling farmers or lawyers acted on their behalf but increasingly men called stewards specialised in such work.¹⁹ The shortage of suitable managers was compounded during times of war but once peace returned, a glut of young men seeking work entered the labour market²⁰ although, as anti-slave trade sentiments spread throughout Britain in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, this would have shrunk the pool of volunteers willing to venture to the West Indies. The fear of slave revolts and tropical illnesses were added restraints.

As plantation slavery developed, the status of white workers increased. In the seventeenth century the majority of whites came to the West Indies as indentured servants and worked as agricultural labourers alongside enslaved people, but in the eighteenth century white men oversaw the work of the enslaved people. As Michael Craton wrote, 'one of the social developments that occurred during the transition to sugar monoculture was the elevation of white men employed from bondservants to managerial staff.'²¹ With their change in status from agricultural labourers to superintendents of agricultural labourers, the gap between the white elite and the lower ranks of white society narrowed. In the seventeenth century those at the extreme end of the spectrum, the rich plantation owners, still lived in the West Indies but once they returned to Britain the white elite came to include a broader field of people, and by the end of the eighteenth century the leading whites in the islands were planters and merchants of more modest wealth, as well as plantation managers, government officials and professionals such as lawyers, doctors and clergymen. The overseers, skilled craftsmen, shopkeepers, and clerks constituted the second rank of whites. They 'remained excluded from the society of the leading inhabitants',²² as were, of course, the white people of the lowest status: the under-overseers, or boiling house watches, the matrosses guarding the forts, and small-scale traders.²³ Despite the class distinctions, a poor Nevis-born white who had the right connections could rise to become a Member of Parliament in England, as the half-brother of one of the managers on Mountravers did. One feature which united all classes - and indeed all colours - was that they all aspired to own people.

As well as class, another, peculiarly colonial division existed among the white population. It separated the British-born and the island-born whites. Those who came from Britain felt superior to the Creoles, judged them lazy, lethargic, lacking in spirit. Most likely this developed as a result of increasing

¹⁹ Rule, John *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* pp70-1

²⁰ Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker *The Many-Headed Hydra* p218

²¹ Craton, M *Searching for the Invisible Man* p11

²² Goveia, EV *Slave Society* pp205-09

²³ Luffman claimed that European hucksters were in general most successful in acquiring riches, enough to buy estates and retire to England. He put their success down to using enslaved people to steal on their behalf but this probably was no more than a generalisation by a disgruntled sojourner; Luffman was aggrieved because someone had stolen from him a lamb and a milch goat (Oliver, VL *Antigua* Vol 1 Letter XII 15 February 1787).

absenteeism: planters' sons and grandsons attended schools in Britain and developed a certain disdain for people whose way of life was different to theirs.²⁴ John Frederick Pinney's dislike of Creoles spread to his manager, William Coker, who shied away from employing local men as overseers. Coker, mindful of the fact that his employer was a Creole himself, singled out 'the poorer sort of Creoles'; to him they were 'generally speaking a very worthless set of creatures, not in any sort to be trusted or depended on'.²⁵ JPP held similar views. He only resorted to engaging a Creole as manager after he had run out of family members he could employ and when he was unable to procure a suitable replacement in Britain. Except for two or possibly three of the men who worked for brief spells on Mountravers, all the overseers were also recruited in Britain, while generally poorer, island-born whites were engaged as assistant overseers, the boiling house watches. It appears that they were either young men starting their plantation careers, or elderly tradesmen. They may have been too infirm to continue in their craft or, with free mixed-race people moving into the labour market and competing for business, they may have been forced to take on seasonal plantation work when orders were short. And if the case of John Hay Richens was in any way representative, white men on their way down the social ladder also ended up as boiling house watches. Conversely, ambitious young men who started as boiling house watches could advance to become overseers, and overseers could be promoted to managers, and managers who survived disease and natural disasters could eventually rent and then buy their own plantation.²⁶

Occasionally black or mixed-race men held supervisory posts. In 1697 a black man, the 'Negro Tom', managed Charlot's for several months. There is no record whether he was paid for his work but on some estates in Nevis it is documented that enslaved men received money for overseers-type duties. On Russell's Rest a black overseer shared a one-off payment of about N£5²⁷ with the boilers,²⁸ but it is likely that he was a plantation slave and not an employee and that he was recompensed for services as assistant overseer in the boiling house. On Oliver's estate an enslaved black man called Butler received N£10 a year for inspecting 'the canes and livestock' - work similar to that of an overseer - but he did not supervise the plantation people and payment was by way of an annuity rather than a salary. Knowing that working in the field would lower Butler's status and undermine his authority, his master Roland Oliver had bequeathed him this annuity on condition that he did not work in the field.²⁹ Around the early 1800s several free men worked as overseers on estates in Nevis, and at least one free mixed-race man, James Scarborough, held the post of manager. Generally it appears, though, that on medium-sized or large plantations very few rose to the rank of manager while those free mixed-race men who owned plantations appear to have mostly inherited them. However, just before slavery was abolished there is also evidence of free tradesmen joining together to acquire their own estate.

²⁴ Worthington Coker's remarks about Creole girls from St Croix proudly returning from their education in America suggest that among the Creoles another distinction developed: between those who were island-educated and those who went for their education abroad.

²⁵ PP, WI Box D: Wm Coker, Nevis, to JF Pinney, 24 July 1762

²⁶ Thomas Mills, for instance, left for the West Indies in the 1720s, worked first as a plantation manager or overseer on his uncle's estates in St Kitts, later rented a plantation for himself in St Kitts and acquired his own plantation in 1758. He became a partner in Matthew and John Mills of Great St Helens, London, until his death when his son John succeeded him. He had a country house at Clay Hill, Enfield (Thoms, DW 'The Mills Family' pp3-10).

A planter from Grenada showed that there was an additional route onto the planting ladder. He suggested to Miss Stapleton that she should send out 'a Lad from 18 to 20 Years old to each Estate that knows something of the Millwrights and Carpenters bussiness' (sic). Indentured for three years or more at about S£30 a year, these young men were to be engaged 'upon the promise of making them overseers when there (sic) time is out, if they are capable' (Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770).

²⁷ N£ means Nevis currency

²⁸ Stapleton Cotton MSS 3(i): Nevis Account 1745

²⁹ ECSCRN, Nevis Wills Book 1763-1787 ff177-78

During the period 1761 to 1805 about a dozen white men left Britain to take up employment on Mountravers.³⁰ Recruited mainly through connections and usually engaged for three years, they were mostly English and from the West Country but at least two brothers are known to have come from a small town in Wales. One overseer had lived in Bristol, another came with an industrial background from a small town in Somerset but generally urban areas were not good recruitment grounds. As one planter put it, 'Near London I think will not be the likely places to find him - but the son or relation of some respectable English or Welsh farmer ... they must be acquainted with the duties of a husbandman, and know something of the fatigues.' JPP cast around among his rural West Country tenants and tended to employ as overseers men who were the sons of farmers. One man appears to have owned a small farm himself. Managers had additional administrative responsibilities, and it was necessary that they were not only 'of a mechanical turn, and acquainted with agriculture' but also knew something of accounts and wrote a 'fair hand'.³¹

Apart from looking for candidates with certain useful skills, their employers foresaw that these young recruits would find it difficult to maintain moral standards. To curb their actions and keep them 'in the path of honour', it was believed that they should either come from a family already known to the proprietor, or be 'dependent on' some of the proprietors' friends. Recommendation by word of mouth was the most effective way of recruiting people, and planters were always on the lookout for eligible lads they could enlist.³² Ideally, these young men were of a suitable temperament. They had to be sociable but not too sociable, and above all, sober: 'He must not be a person who is too fond of company, or makes too free with his bottle; but a man of a tolerable flow of spirits, without such assistance.' It was recognised that psychological resilience contributed to the good health of a person, because 'An active man of this sort need not fear the climate.'³³ In addition to having the right skills, it was equally important that a man came with plenty of mental strength and good physical health.

These were the backgrounds and qualities planters were looking for, but, apart from escaping poverty and seeking an exciting new life, what made a young man to go to the West Indies? The motives of three men who worked on Mountravers are known: John Hay Richens followed his friend JPP, Henry Williams his brother James, and David Jones his friend Henry Williams. Another man, John Arthurton, went to Nevis because his uncle suggested he worked on a plantation, and there must have been countless others for whom the sugar colonies would otherwise have remained a distant irrelevancy had they not heeded the calls of friends and relatives. At least one young man is known to have been packed off to Nevis to grow up and to mature. William Freeman hoped that plantation work would improve his ill-tempered and ill-mannered nephew who was not to return home until he knew 'himself better'.³⁴ As the small West Indian islands also brought opportunities for social advancement, JPP tried to tempt a cousin of his with the prospect of being introduced to the 'best company' through whom he could further his interests.³⁵ Others went to the colonies for health reasons. Ransford was 'sent on a voyage to the West Indies as the best means of saving [his] life and probably establishing strong health'. Having been taught as a child about 'poor ill-used slaves, wearing chains', he knew what to expect in the West Indies,³⁶ as did a grandson of JPP's manager William Coker. Family lore and his contact with the Pinneys would have prepared Worthington Coker who left the West Country

³⁰ British overseers and managers: William Coker, Thomas Arthurton, John Hay Richens, Joseph Gill, John Andrews, John Smith, John Beer, John Cheyney, William Thomas Williams, David Jones, James and Henry Williams and probably also Samuel Bennett. Thomas Peaden was not counted because he was apprenticed to John Frederick Pinney.

³¹ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

³² One young man called Richard Smith had approached JPP for a job on the plantation but at that time William Coker and James Williams were in post, and JPP recommended Smith to another planter. Smith was given the management of Stoney Hill Estate (PP, LB 7: JPP to Richard Smith, No 9 Drury Lane, Liverpool, 19 July 1786, and 6 August 1786).

³³ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

When sending young men to the West Indies, soberness had always been valued as much as willingness: the 'young lusty carpenter' sent by William Freeman to Nevis was said to have been 'a sober man and good workman' (Jeaffreson, John Cordy (ed) *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century* Vol 1 p207 and p209 Christopher Jeaffreson to William Poyntz, London, 11 May 1677).

³⁴ Hancock, David (ed) *The Letters* p124 William Freeman to Robert Helme, 15 September 1679

³⁵ PP, LB 4: JPP, Nevis, to Simon Pretor, 12 June 1777

³⁶ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p6 and p7

out of boredom and a sense of wanting to be 'useful'. With a view of rising to manager and attorney, he started off his plantation career as an overseer on one of the St Croix estates mortgaged to the Pinneys.³⁷

The hope of wealth and social advancement was a deciding factor for many. Writing about Scottish migrants Michael Fry stated that 'Prospects in the islands beckoned because their more fluid society offered greater upward mobility than Scotland could',³⁸ and of course the same was true for young men from other parts of the British Isles. Ambitious men could, and did, acquire enslaved people and land of their own and were then able to 'cultivate acquaintance in the best families' in the island.³⁹ They could create a comfortable existence for themselves in the colonies, or, better still, they could return home and spend their newly acquired wealth in cooler, healthier climes. Like JPP, they could turn into country gentlemen. For some men an added ingredient must have been the prospect of exercising power to a degree that few of their class were able to in Britain. They could virtually govern a small corner of the world; the enslaved people were their subjects and under their command. Within a weak legislative framework, virtually unhindered they could use and abuse people, impose whatever work regime they chose, inflict whatever punishment they saw fit, act out their sexual phantasies – as men like Thistlewood evidentially did. Becoming a manager or overseer on a West Indian plantation must have been the dream job for every brute and pervert.

The work

The duties of the plantation manager were distinct but to some extent overlapped with those of the overseer and the attorney. In JPP's case three of his six managers were family members and he therefore entrusted them to also act on some of his business, and in this case the overlap with the attorney's role was more pronounced than was usually the case. However, unless instructed to do so by JPP, for instance the buying and selling of people was outside a manager's remit.

On Mountravers, managers were engaged almost seamlessly; a new one started his job immediately after the previous one had been sacked, had quit, or died. It would have been unthinkable not to have a white man oversee the running of the plantation although, as one Jamaican observer stated in the 1830s, he had known estates "managed for weeks together entirely by blacks, and very well managed". That writer also made the important point that skilled workers passed on their knowledge and generally taught managers the practical side of planting.⁴⁰ Those young men who came to Nevis with no experience of the sugar business would have received an important aspect of their training from the enslaved people.

The manager's job was to produce wealth for his employer. To carry out his job, he was not only expected to be a proficient agriculturalist concerned with productivity; in today's terms he was also a human resources manager, an accountant, mechanic, storekeeper, buyer and vendor, foreman, architect and property administrator. At times he also acted as debt collector, doctor or vet. He was responsible for the security of everyone and everything on the plantation. He had to do what was required to make the plantation function as a cohesive, single-purpose unit, and this included acting as a judge and jury, settling minor disputes and deciding on rewards and punishments. He needed to understand the island's customs as well as its legislation (although often this was ignored) and have the social skills to build up a network of reliable contacts among the local merchants, doctors and

³⁷ PP, Dom Box C2-13: Mrs John Frederick Pinney to Charles Pinney, 1 October 1828

³⁸ Fry, Michael *The Scottish Empire* p73

However, not everybody's expectations were fulfilled. A Mr Harding went out to Nevis, believing he was going to act as second manager on Stapleton's estate only to find that he was allocated the overseer's job. He had to climb one more rung of the ladder than he had intended (Handlist of The Stapleton-Cotton Manuscripts, Box 2/18 v: Letters 23 October and 12 November 1783).

³⁹ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

⁴⁰ Higman, BW *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean* p170, quoting Augustus Beaumont

anyone else who provided services. Responsible for a wide variety of tasks, a manager had to know what was required on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis, and to plan, make decisions and organise accordingly.

Managers had a long working day. Henry Ransford on Stoney Grove estate rose before dawn; he was on his horse 'by day light every morning as the gun was fired from the fort below the house.'⁴¹ Each day particular cane pieces had to be holed, planted, manured, weeded, or harvested, and a manager had to decide on an efficient work schedule. He had to communicate his instructions to his assistants, the overseer and the drivers, who allocated the duties to individual workers.⁴² Mills, boiling houses, cisterns, stores and workshops, dams and bridges, roads and boundary walls – each structure had to be maintained, and it was the manager's task to plan when he could spare people to carry out the repairs and how many he could spare. In addition, occasionally he had to supply a number of labourers for government-initiated public building projects, or risk a fine, and if the government required people during crop, he had to ensure that those left on the plantation covered their duties. JPP stipulated that surplus craft workers were to be hired out, and the manager had to find temporary employers, agree the arrangements with them and collect the hire charges. A shortage of skilled labour on the plantation meant hiring specialists, and the manager had to decide which skills were needed, find master craftsmen prepared to take on apprentices and select those boys he considered most suitable for training. No doubt trusted leaders like the drivers advised him in this and in other decisions concerning the plantation people, such as determining when someone was shamming sick and when someone was sufficiently recovered from injury or illness to return to work.

In addition to overseeing the people, the manager had other jobs on the plantation. To prevent anyone from becoming idle through lack of equipment, a manager had to ensure that there was an adequate supply of tools and utensils and that each item was in good working order. He was responsible for ensuring that the cattle and mules were well looked after and fit to do their duties: trudge around animal mills and pull carts. The carts, too, required repairs and maintenance, and if they were beyond use, new ones had to be ordered from England, or made by the plantation carpenters. The manager also had to ensure the safe transport of produce to the ships, take delivery of items that had arrived from England and store them safely so that they did not spoil, or get stolen. He distributed the weekly food rations from the stores, and stock-taking and re-ordering was an on-going process that required much forward-planning. Supplies had to be requested in time to allow for shipment from abroad: clothes for himself, the overseer and the plantation people, their food, household and medical items, building materials – everything down to the last nut and bolt. The hurricane season interrupted deliveries and in case ships got lost at sea or arrived late, contingency plans had to be in place to cover all eventualities. When he had failed to order goods, or the wrong item was sent, he could try and borrow (in these situations it paid to have reliable contacts), or if it was available, purchase a replacement in the island. If that added to the costs, this would attract JPP's attention and displeasure. As well as collecting rent for JPP's properties in town and chasing debts, all along the manager had to record how much money was taken, how he spent the money and how much sugar, rum and molasses the plantation produced. JPP required his managers to be meticulous in their book-keeping. Although he wanted regular accounts, he did not go as far as one planter who advocated monthly updates but would have agreed with this man that each and every item necessary for an estate should be entered in the books.⁴³ And each January, when there was not much work to do, JPP wanted each account 'examined and approved'. Having signed accounts would be useful for the proprietor 'in case of the death of the manager'.⁴⁴

Although other men supervised the production processes, the manager was ultimately responsible for supplying his employer with large quantities of good-quality sugar that would sell at top prices. Apart

⁴¹ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p21

⁴² Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p9 and BW Higman *Montpelier, Jamaica* p79

⁴³ Caines, Clement *Letters on the Cultivation of the Otaheite Cane* p205 and p209

⁴⁴ PP, AB 35 Undated note c. 1788

from the condition of the land and the weather, a manager's success or failure – and his very job - depended almost entirely on the plantation folk who did the work and carried out his instructions. In the context of Jamaica it has been said that the manager “in general performs his duties through the negro headmen, who know the routine of the business a great deal better than he does”.⁴⁵ This meant that the manager had to build up a good relationship with key people on the plantation. On Mountravers, this would have included women like Old Mary who were entrusted with seasoning the newly purchased Africans so that, in time, these newcomers became productive workers. But not only the Africans had to be settled in; the manager also had to ensure that those acquired from other owners were integrated into the plantation routine. Many came from smaller, urban units and were unused to fieldwork. Isolated from their former friends and their families, adjusting to the new regime was hard – yet somehow the manager had to ensure that every person was made use of and was not allowed to remain idle or under-employed. If he wanted to keep his job, he had to try and squeeze the maximum degree of labour from each man, woman and child. This required skill. As Barry Higman wrote, ‘The labor of rural slaves was extracted by means of a complex combination of negative factors. Physical coercion was fundamental, but it was combined with the imposition of extra tasks, the withholding of material goods or customary “indulgences” or free time, and the granting of special allowances, occasional monetary payments, and short-term freedoms.’⁴⁶

Balancing these components successfully was one of the major challenges a plantation manager faced. He could decide to take a *laissez faire* approach and keep punishment to a minimum, or he could adopt a harsh, intimidating regime. William Coker fell into the latter category; other managers appear to have increased ‘indulgences’: Thomas Pym Weekes doled out larger food rations, James Williams allowed extra time to tend the provision grounds and Henry Williams probably did both. If the manager failed to determine the appropriate balance between reward and punishment, one day he could face a hostile, mutinous workforce – as the Hugginses found to their cost soon after they bought Mountravers. The young Peter Thomas Huggins demanded too much too quickly, using methods to which people were unaccustomed. They rebelled. A planter once stated that ‘An insensitive manager can in a short time ruin the best blacks, cause them to become maroons, or do other destructive acts’⁴⁷ - such as murdering the white men in charge of them. This happened. Mr Carroll, the overseer on Colhoun's St Kitts estate, was the first man intended to be killed in the Easter rebellion of 1778, in Nevis in 1811 the overseer George Vaughan was poisoned and in 1829 Thomas Hurman, the manager of Indian Castle, set to and murdered.⁴⁸

These acts were committed against individuals but there was always the threat of organised revolt. When Henry Ransford, during his time in Jamaica, got to hear that ‘the negroes were about to rise’, he and his fellow overseer barricaded themselves into his room but, as it turned out, Martial Law was proclaimed and prevented the rising.⁴⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that managers or overseers on Mountravers ever faced such threats, but acts of resistance took place on the plantation and the manager had to deal with the consequences. It was his duty to ensure that order was restored and the damage repaired, and he had to make good any losses. This included the safe return of runaways. He decided at what stage to send out the hunters, and if he had news that people had fled to other islands, either he had to go there himself, or find someone he could trust to carry out a diligent search. Once people were returned, he had to determine the most appropriate punishment. A manager made life and death decisions. It was at his discretion how severely people were punished, at what point sick people were excused from work, and if and when to call in the doctor for treatment or to carry out routine check-ups. If his judgment was faulty and a person died, his employer was

⁴⁵ Higman, *BW Slave Populations of the British Caribbean* p170, quoting Augustus Beaumont

⁴⁶ Higman, *BW Slave Populations of the British Caribbean* p199

⁴⁷ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p116

Marrons were enslaved people who escaped, banded together and formed independent settlements in difficult-to-reach hideouts.

⁴⁸ UKNA, CO 153/23 and CO 186/13

⁴⁹ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p14

liable to deduct the cost of a replacement from his salary – for enslaved people as well as livestock. In fact the first manager on Charlot's plantation left within a few months because he was charged for losses.

Apart from making everyone do the work that was required of them on the plantation, the manager also had to organise the white workers and keep them in line. He had to exercise his authority when appropriate, and the advice given to one absentee was that 'Your Manager must have ample power over overseers, as well as negroes - and this were you even present yourself; for without a proper authority, order would cease, and your whole estate become one scene of disobedience, tumult, and confusion.'⁵⁰

While it was important for the absentee owner to get regular reports from the island, for the managers it was important to get clear directions from his employer. The managers on Mountravers worked to JPP's broad guidelines and detailed instructions. Sometimes the dividing line between helpful instruction and unhelpful interference was thin. There is not sufficient correspondence to judge the approach John Frederick Pinney took after he inherited Mountravers from his mother in the 1730s but it appears that his involvement with plantation affairs was minimal. JPP in general had a hands-on approach although at first he allowed his managers a lot of leeway. Later on, after experiencing many disappointments, the managers' contracts and JPP's directives became more detailed, and over time his 'Standing Orders to Managers' increased as letters were added to a 'red book with my other instruction'.⁵¹ His correspondence, like that of other absentees, was interspersed with reminiscences about 'when I was in Nevis ...' which must have been most irksome to the men in the island. JPP's son Charles, who had no direct experience of plantation management himself, earned the manager's approval by letting him get on with his work. Henry Ransford welcomed that Charles Pinney during his stay in the island often consulted him but that his employer refrained from meddling in his work 'in any sort of way'.⁵²

All communication with the owner went through the managers. They reported important events on the plantation and usually also acted as go-betweens between owners and enslaved people and petitioned the owner on their behalf. The overseers, on the other hand, did not correspond with the owner directly; one overseer's letter to JPP asking for improvements to his accommodation was unusual and suggests that the manager was too slack passing it on, or did not back his plea. Precisely for this reason an overseer on another estate wrote directly to London - he believed, wrongly, that the manager had not forwarded his request for freeing his enslaved son.⁵³ Equally, when one absentee planter wrote to his overseer, this was to praise and flatter him in the hope of getting the man to apply himself to his job and to remain on the plantation.⁵⁴

The attorneys were also in regular contact with JPP and reported not only on plantation business but often added some other incidental news from the island. To get an independent view, JPP's managers were also expected to write about the general goings-on - today's gossip could inform tomorrow's commercial decisions – and he repeatedly urged slow or uninformative correspondents to keep him up to date. Generally, planters wanted managers who could 'write a fair hand to be able to keep up a proper and strict correspondence' with their master back in Britain,⁵⁵ and on Mountravers certainly all the managers were literate and probably many, if not all, the overseers as well. It is likely that, when recruiting men in England, JPP chose those who had some education so that they could keep the overseer's book, which existed in addition to the manager's book,⁵⁶ and perhaps, if needed,

⁵⁰ Stapleton Cotton MSS 18: Walter Nisbet, Nevis, to Mrs Catherine Stapleton, 10 July 1783

⁵¹ PP, LB 9: JPP to TP Weekes, Nevis, 24 October 1791

⁵² Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p21

⁵³ Handlist of The Stapleton-Cotton Manuscripts, Box 2/20 I: Jordan Burke, St Kitts, to Mrs Eleanora Conway, 25 July 1760

⁵⁴ MLD, Mills Papers, 2006.178/7, Vol 1: John Mills junior to Wm Sunderland, 30 November 1770

⁵⁵ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

⁵⁶ PP, LB 19: JPP to Henry Williams, 25 October 1804

stand in for the manager, or in future even replace him. On the Stapleton plantation overseers were expected to be able to read and write,⁵⁷ but literacy was not always a prerequisite for the post; for instance, both Benjamin Legget on Jesup's⁵⁸ and Robert Croft on Shettlewood Pen in Jamaica apparently were illiterate,⁵⁹ and on Mr Mills's plantation in Nevis the manager, Mr Ward, was barely literate.⁶⁰

Communications with Britain were slow. Out of the hurricane season it took at least three months for replies to letters to arrive but attorneys were at hand to make major decisions, and they could also be called upon to lend their support in certain situations. JPP's attorney Samuel Laurence, for instance, stepped in after one man beat another and both Laurence and the manager, Joseph Webbe (Joe) Stanley, reprimanded the culprit.⁶¹ If the manager and the attorney did not get on – as appears to have been the case with James Williams and John Taylor – then this was an added strain, and when an attorney died or left the island in a hurry, this created a vacuum. Once a replacement was appointed, the manager had to adjust to a new decision-maker and seek to develop a good working relationship. And he always had to be prepared for his employer to arrive for an inspection; during one of JPP's visits to Nevis he sacked his manager and when his son John Frederick later briefly stayed in the island, he did the same.

By the mid-eighteenth century, stewards working on large British estates could earn as much as £400 sterling a year (about £680 currency)⁶² while managers in Nevis received much less, even on large estates. In addition, however, imported goods, plantation produce or plantation resources supplemented their incomes. Walter Nisbet, for instance, who managed Lady Stapleton's Russell's Rest, in the mid-1740s received a salary of N£150 a year while his imported foodstuffs, soap and candles amounted to just over half that sum again.⁶³ In the case of James Browne, the imported goods he was allowed were similar in kind but of different quantities and came to nearly N£90, thereby almost doubling his basic salary of N£100. Thirty years later, in 1761, William Coker also started on a salary of N£100 a year. If he had additional perks, these could not be ascertained. Once JPP took on the management, he raised his own pay and until 1781 allowed himself an annual sum of N£165⁶⁴ and after that N£200.⁶⁵ He also employed his first manager, Joseph Gill, on the same salary.

Managers on other plantations were paid at different rates and sometimes by different methods. While Gill on Mountravers received N£200, Charles Hutton's salary on the Stapleton's estate was N£250.⁶⁶ Forty years later, in the 1820s, William Murray was paid the same amount for first managing Stoney Grove⁶⁷ and then Clarke's Estate,⁶⁸ but on Stoney Grove he also received an additional disbursement of N£12 for 'attending the sick house'.⁶⁹ Half of Murray's salary was payable in cash,

⁵⁷ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Walter Nisbet, Nevis, to Dean Shipley, 28 April 1794

⁵⁸ Benjamin Legget signed his will with a mark (SCRO, Moberley and Wharton Collection, D/MW 35/14/1).

⁵⁹ At Shettlewood, bookkeepers (overseers in Nevis terms) seemed to have done the accounting, and Robert Croft made his mark on the Accounts of 1794 and 1795 (Higman, BW *Montpelier Jamaica* p57).

⁶⁰ MLD, Mills Papers, Vol 4 2006.178/10

⁶¹ PP, Dom Box P: JW Stanley to JF Pinney, 27 December 1805

⁶² Rule, John *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* p70

The 1766 exchange rate of 170 per cent was used to arrive at the salary in currency.

⁶³ Walter Nisbet's imported goods are listed in an account dated 10 March (1746):

To Capt. Drinkwater for 7 barrels of beef @70s for my use	£24:10:0
To 1 pipe Madeira wine for do.	32:0:0
To 2 firkin butter 120 [pounds] @18d	9:0:0
To 1 barrel of flour	2:15:1
To 1 box of soap 18d	4:10:0
To 1 box of candles 15d	3:15:0 = £76:10:0

(Stapleton Cotton MSS 13 (i))

⁶⁴ PP, AB 20 Plantation a/c

⁶⁵ PP, AB 26 Plantation a/c

⁶⁶ Stapleton Cotton MSS 15 (v)

⁶⁷ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate 1824

⁶⁸ PP, LB 60: JC Mills, Nevis, to PA & Co, 2 February 1827

⁶⁹ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate 1825

half 'in produce at market price'. The same arrangement applied to John Rawlins, the manager on Symmonds and Vervain estate,⁷⁰ while on Belmont the manager once had an enslaved child given to him as part of his salary. In that instance the girl was used as currency, in the same way as commodities, such as rum and sugar, could be included in a man's pay.⁷¹

The reasons behind deciding the level of managers' pay varied. John Rawlins was kept on the same rate as his father before him, and he was allowed a relatively high salary of N£330 a year because he was 'attentive' to the negroes 'and by no means wanting in humanity towards them'. In this case, evidence of neglect - tough nutgrass that covered the lands at Symmonds and Vervain - was overlooked.⁷² Symmonds and Vervain, as well as Stoney Grove and Clarke's, were mortgaged to the Pinneys, as were three estates in St Croix. There different criteria were applied to the managers' salaries; they were paid roughly in line with their levels of production and the profits they made.⁷³ In setting a starting salary, a manager's experience was taken into account. When Henry Ransford replaced William Murray on Stoney Grove in 1825, he started on N£300 a year (N£50 more than Murray's final pay),⁷⁴ because he came with good references from his previous employers in Jamaica and had undergone training in that island. 'An intelligent and active man' who was judged to be 'kind to the negroes'⁷⁵ Ransford's pay was raised further and five years later he calculated that his salary and perquisites, with 'everything considered was equal to £800 per annum'. Unless he took into account stolen produce, this appears to be a rather high estimate although, in addition to the salary, there were, of course, the hidden benefits: his employer provided plantation workers as servants, he could sell his rum allowances, his medical bills were paid for and his food and accommodation free. Even his transport did not cost him anything; soon after he had settled in, Ransford had sold the mare he had brought from England - presumably because he used one of the plantation horses instead. This was with permission of the Pinneys' attorney; in fact he was the one who bought Ransford's horse.⁷⁶

Ransford lived up to the Pinneys' expectations of him, and as a reward for erecting new works, increasing the crops and for his good management in general, he received a free passage for a holiday in England.⁷⁷ Managers received other inducements. A planter in Grenada rewarded his managers with presents of wine which he gave as 'a matter of compliment, but never of right.'⁷⁸ When

The allowance for the sick house was increased to N£20 when Charles Clifton Caines took over after Henry Ransford left Stoney Grove. Clifton's starting salary, however, was N£300 a year - N£30 less than Ransford had got when he first worked on Stoney Grove in 1824 (PP, WI Box 1829-1836: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate Charles C Caines's a/c).

An account for the estates of John Estridge in St Kitts reveals that the manager there was paid a salary of £330 currency a year which was boosted with 'allowances for the sick' (£16:10:0), wine (£39:12:0) and provisions (£66). He had about 200 enslaved people under his care (BROR, D/EX292 E1: Ledger for The Hill Estate of John Estridge dec'd 1815-1824: William Greatheed Crooke's a/c).

⁷⁰ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate 1824 and Accounts Symmonds Estate March 1824- March 1825

⁷¹ It is likely that the girl, Fanny, who was given by way of payment, married one of the Mountravers men, William Peaden.

⁷² PP, Dom Box C2-8

⁷³

Three St Croix Plantations: Salary Costs in Relation to the Number of Workers, the Output and the Net Revenue

Plantation	Number of Workers	Manager's salary p.a./\$	Overseer's salary p.a./\$	Attorney's salary p.a./\$	Produce	Net revenue/\$
Mount Pleasant	104	640	352	570	150 hhds sugar 100 puncheons rum	5,803
Windsor Forest	128	576	640 (2 overseers)	570	115 hhds sugar 90 puncheons rum 20 casks molasses	3,105
Peters Rest	148	512	352	570	95 hhds sugar 70 puncheons rum 5 casks molasses	1,414

Source: PP, Dom Box T/1: Black Notebook. See also R Pares *A West India Fortune* pp304-05

⁷⁴ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate 1825

⁷⁵ PP, WI Box O-3/1: Charles Pinney, Nevis, to RE Case, 19 June 1828

⁷⁶ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p18, and PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Unnumbered item

⁷⁷ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p21

⁷⁸ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

an absentee planter sent gifts to his man in St Kitts, he always stressed their superior quality and, thereby, their value as luxuries. He did not just send porter, cheese and hams but 'a cask of Ben Kenton's best London porter, 2 fine Gloucester cheeses, & 6 exceeding good hams...' ⁷⁹ As long as he was on a good footing with his managers, JPP also regularly made them presents of food, such as tripe, ham, and cheese. The barrel of porter he sent to Coker was among the more unusual gifts. ⁸⁰ Occasionally JPP granted managers on Mountravers incentives in addition to their salaries. Usually these were cash bonuses, such as N£10 paid to John Fisher on Woodlands for his 'exertion in the crop'. ⁸¹ JPP rarely sent presents to overseers and never to boiling house watches. ⁸²

The overseers

On a small plantation one white man did all the managerial and administrative tasks and also supervised work in the field, in the mill and in the boiling house. On estates the size of Mountravers the work was shared between a manager and an overseer and, during crop time, an assistant overseer.

While it was possible to establish the origins, and the ages, of all the managers on Mountravers, unfortunately this could not be done for all the overseers and assistant overseers but it appears that, generally, they started their working lives when still very young. One of the assistant overseers, Tom Peaden, came to Nevis when he was about ten years old, and after he left Nevis, JPP wanted a replacement for Tom sent from England and asked for a boy aged ten or twelve. ⁸³ This, however, appears to have been particularly young. Henry Ransford went to Jamaica 'a delicate boy of 16', on Stoney Grove William Archbald started work when he was about 17 years old, and the Mountravers overseer John Cheyney was 'a lad of 18 or 19'. James Williams was slightly older; he began working as overseer in his early twenties and a Grenadian planter was expecting his overseer to be of similar age. ⁸⁴ Immature, inexperienced and untrained, these young men were supposed to instil obedience and discipline, and ensure order and control over their subordinates. They had to struggle to establish their authority over drivers who were not only older but also figures of authority in their own right. Enslaved Africans who honoured the elderly for their wisdom ⁸⁵ would have found it difficult, if not insulting, to take their orders from these 'giddy inexperienced young men'. ⁸⁶ Workers recognised that overseers had neither the wealth nor the education enjoyed by owners and managers and tended to use their lack of standing within white society to undermine their position. As a result, overseers were liable to exert their authority by force, ⁸⁷ which could bring them into conflict not only with the people they were supposed to supervise but also with their supervisors – the managers and owners. One absentee planter who knew and disapproved of their reputation advised his attorney 'to take care of the negroes and use them well and not whip or cut them, as is too much the practice of the Nevis overseers.' ⁸⁸

The overseer carried out the instructions the manager gave him. Consequently, fewer skills were required of him. Like the manager's, an overseer's job was mostly supervisory, and he did little

⁷⁹ Thoms, DW *West India Merchants and Planters* Letter 488 John Mills junior to Joseph Clifton, 30 November 1770

⁸⁰ PP, LB 37: P & T to Jn Sherer, 67 Mark Lane, Fenchurch Street, London, 15 October 1787

⁸¹ PP, AB 26 John Fisher's a/c

⁸² PP, LB 17: JPP, Bristol, to James Williams, Nevis, 6 March 1802

Charles Pinney paid William Archbald, the mulatto overseer on Stoney Grove, a bonus of N£50 but this payment was unusual and a reward for Archbald's twenty years of service on the plantation (PP, WI Box 1829-1836 Accounts Stoney Grove Estate Wm Archbald's a/c).

⁸³ PP, LB 4: Memo to Gill 24 August 1778

⁸⁴ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

⁸⁵ Ógúnjímí, Báýò and Abdul Rasheed Na'allah *Introduction to African Oral Literature and Performance* p85

⁸⁶ Lambert, S (ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 69 p458

⁸⁷ Goodwin, Ron *Plantation Overseers - The Middle Managers of the Peculiar Institution*, citing Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*; John Hope Franklin *From Slavery to Freedom*; Alton V Moody *Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations*; and Andy Anderson, Lulu Wilson and Henry Butler *Texas Slave Narratives*

⁸⁸ MLD, Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, Thomas Mills to William Bowles, St Kitts, 26 January 1762

physical work. An overseer was in charge of the daily work in the field and also attended to many other tasks around the plantation. For instance, he examined the bundles of grass, which each individual had to collect daily for use as animal fodder,⁸⁹ and he issued materials and equipment from the stores. Worthington Coker found that he was kept so busy giving 'out every pound of nails etc wanted by the tradesmen' that he had little time to see what was 'doing in the canefields'.⁹⁰ Once a chapel was established on Mountravers, the overseer also issued docketts for attendance at the service held in the plantation chapel,⁹¹ and he was probably also responsible for issuing the tickets enslaved people were required by law if they wanted to sell certain types of goods and produce in town. Overseers usually did not keep plantation accounts although on Mountravers one appears to have done so when the manager suffered from ill health and another may have done so because he was particularly skilled at book-keeping. In Jamaica Henry Ransford, 'being ready' with his pen and good at figures, occasionally assisted the clerk, thereby gaining additional training.⁹² An overseer had fewer responsibilities, fewer opportunities for cheating his employer, and he also had less power over the plantation people. This became enshrined in law in March 1825 when the Nevis Legislature introduced an act that limited the number of lashes an overseer could administer to ten.⁹³ In St Croix, by the 1820s managers were 'permitted to inflict thirty lashes upon their own authority', overseers were restricted to six.⁹⁴

Having less power brought fewer privileges and lower salaries. Overseers, roughly, earned about a third to a half less than managers. Criteria for the level of pay are difficult to establish; JPP appears to have taken into account the men's ages and abilities. Overseers on three-year contracts usually received annual increases, and further improvements were at JPP's discretion. During JPP's ownership the pay for all white workers on Mountravers increased but while overseer's salary rose by just over a half, the pay of the managers and the assistant overseers doubled. The way the wages were paid reflected their status as permanent or casual employees. The overseers', like the managers' pay, was always calculated on an annual basis but that of the assistant overseers on a monthly basis. Throughout the island managers' and overseers' salaries varied. In 1780/1781 James Begg, working on Camp, earned N£60, Edward Lawrence on Russell's Rest N£80 and when overseer Rigg replaced Lawrence, he was put on N£90 a year⁹⁵ - the same amount Richard Bunn had earned on the Windward Estate three years earlier.⁹⁶ In the 1820s, there were similar variations; overseers on three other Nevis estates were paid N£100 (Symmonds), N£120 (Stoney Grove) and N£125 (Clarke's). In this case the overseer's salary was exactly half the manager's.⁹⁷

The men had some opportunities to earn additional money. While some managers bought plantation produce and exported it for sale in Britain, overseers may have bought and sold small quantities in the island. They could top up their fixed earnings by various other means. Richard Clarke from Roland Oliver's estate, for instance, made money from a particular skill - castrating mules -⁹⁸ and John Cheyney from taking on the post of Constable. Men could also earn money from overseeing the

⁸⁹ Ward, JR *British West Indian Slavery* P17

⁹⁰ PP, Dom Box I i-2: Wm Worthington Coker, Peter's Rest, to [Mrs John Frederick Pinney], 11 August 1830

⁹¹ PP, Dom Box R-4: Undated document c. 1830

⁹² Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p10

⁹³ The first prosecution under the law, which restricted overseers' powers, failed. The case concerned John Beard, the overseer on Ward's estate, under whose 'order and direction' the black driver had severely punished a woman, Bitchey. Beard was taken to court but 'immediately after the last bill of indictment had been ... disposed of, Beard was raised from an overseer to the designation of a manager, which was calculated to take him out of the operation of the Act on this point' (NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton p313, p316 and p318). As with many other laws intended to protect enslaved people, a way had been found to circumvent this one, too, and although overseers were lower down the white pecking order than managers, when it came to protecting one of their own, the whites closed rank. A noticeable exception was John Peterson, the Senior King's Council, who, despite opposition from the planters, made their abuses public and fought them as best as he could.

⁹⁴ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p175

⁹⁵ Stapleton Cotton MSS 15 (v)

⁹⁶ Stapleton Cotton MSS 16

⁹⁷ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Accounts Symmonds Estate; Accounts Stoney Grove Estate 1825, and LB 60: JC Mills, Nevis, to PA & Co, 2 February 1827

⁹⁸ PP, WI Box O: Account John Stanley in account with Joseph Webbe Stanley March 1780-January 1800

enslaved people labouring on one-off public building projects, as Thomas Peaden appears to have done.

The assistant overseers

While the overseer had a range of responsibilities on the plantation, the assistant overseer supervised the people who manufactured the sugar.

The boilers and their helpers had the power to ruin batches if they so chose: adding too much lime or too little, removing not enough dirt, boiling the juice too high or too low, pouring the crystallising syrup out too early or too late. The assistant overseer's duty was to ensure that "the negroes commit no depredations on the syrup or sugar".⁹⁹ Theft was another reason for overseeing the work in the boiling house. When Henry Ransford started his training in the sugar business, his first job in Jamaica was as a boiling house watch, and he found that he 'had not much to do beyond seeing the negroes did not steal sugar or syrup'. For him having 'to be there not only by day on the watch, but half the night' was the worst part of the job. One week he 'was only in bed from 7 pm until midnight, the following week from midnight until 6 am', which made him so tired that he slept the greater part of his morning watches. Resting his head in his hands on a table he was fast asleep and 'the negroes might have done what they pleased at that time in petty pilfering.' He suspected that his main achievement 'was to prevent stealing going on wholesale.'¹⁰⁰ The only reference to night work in the Pinney Papers is to John Frederick Coker going 'down in the evening' to help James Williams but elsewhere it is well documented that during crop time people worked around the clock, and it is reasonable to assume that on Mountravers they did as well.

During periods when plantations did not or could not employ assistant boiling house watches, the overseer would have had very long working days, superintending the sugar-making process by night and supervising the field workers during the day. Exhaustion from lack of sleep was a common theme. Worn out by constant fatigue, Worthington Coker, too, complained that it was 'a fag' to sit up 'until 12 or 1 in the morning during the crop' when he had to get up again at 5 o'clock.¹⁰¹

Living conditions and leisure time

Boiling house watches, who appear to have been mostly Creoles, probably did not live on Mountravers but overseers and managers and their families did. While one boiling house watch, Dominic Alvarez, paid rent for one of JPP's properties in town, the accommodation on the plantation was rent-free and came with the jobs. The managers occupied the Great House and overseers the overseer's house at Sharloes. This was small – too small for a man and his wife – and may have been similar in size to the overseer's accommodation at the lower works on neighbouring Jesup's: there it measured twelve feet square.¹⁰² The house at Sharloes was in a poor state of repair and, as on Jesup's, lay close to the works. 'Much pestered' with rats,¹⁰³ the works were smelly and noisy, particularly during crop time.¹⁰⁴ And there was little breeze; the land was low-lying and, towards the shore, swampy. Higher up at the Great House and at Woodland, managers enjoyed cooler – and therefore healthier - conditions, and JPP suggested that one of the overseers escaped to the upper properties whenever he felt poorly. As to the furniture, the only content that is known to have been at

⁹⁹ Higman, *BW Slave Populations of the British Caribbean* p172, quoting Report by Sturge and Harvey, 1837

¹⁰⁰ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* pp7-8

¹⁰¹ PP, Dom Box I i-2: Wm Worthington Coker, Peter's Rest, to [Mrs John Frederick Pinney], 11 August 1830

¹⁰² In an inventory of Jesup's Estate a house at the upper works was described as an 'overseer's house' but it is more likely that this was actually where the manager lived (SCRO, Moberly & Wharton Papers, D/MW 35/18).

¹⁰³ PP, LB 5: JPP to Joseph Gill, 30 October 1783

¹⁰⁴ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* p80

the overseer's dwelling at Sharloes were five low-back Windsor chairs.¹⁰⁵ The house may otherwise have been unfurnished. On Stoney Grove, Henry Ransford was provided with an empty house and, until he got himself organised, he had to accept the attorney's hospitality. He was disappointed; in Jamaica he had enjoyed furnished accommodation.¹⁰⁶

Managers were not always required to live on the plantation¹⁰⁷ but on Mountravers they did. The Great House was a modest two-storey, wooden building with a cellar, in which JPP's china was stored. Before JPP left for England in 1783, he recorded this when he compiled 'a rough inventory of furniture belonging to John Pinney Esq at his house in the island of Nevis - without being particular'. Far from not 'being particular', his inventory is actually very detailed, down to '10 brass hat pins - one sort'. The contents convey a sense of domestic comfort rather than opulence. The house consisted of few rooms. On the ground floor were a passage, a hall (with two portraits of himself and wife), closets going into the hall, a chamber adjoining the hall with 'a hardwood bedstead', a parlour with a breakfast table, a pantry that contained the housekeeper's bureau, and a counting house or office with 'one mahogany and one deal writing desk'. Upstairs, on the second floor were two large bedrooms - each with a four-poster bed that supported a mosquito net - and a middle chamber 'called Nanny's room'.¹⁰⁸ When Thomas Pym Weekes lived in the house, he changed this into a 'physick room' where he kept his apothecary's chest, and downstairs made one of the chambers into an 'allowance house' where he stored tools.

When the Pinneys visited Nevis the manager was required to move to the house on the upper estate, Woodland.¹⁰⁹ This was a wooden construction. When Charles Pinney wanted a new manager's house built on Clarke's Estate, it was to be made of the same material and was to consist of two rooms.¹¹⁰ In St Croix, where by the end of the eighteenth century little wood was available for building,¹¹¹ managers and overseers appear to have lived in more substantial stone houses.¹¹² During Worthington Coker's time in St Croix in the 1830s he found that while managers and overseers lived in separate houses, they ate together.¹¹³ As he thought this worth remarking on, this probably did not generally happen in Nevis. JPP's request to his manager James Williams to provide board for a newly arrived overseer was unusual and intended as an 'encouragement' and to help John Beer's settling in. On the Stapleton estate the overseer William Huggins sometimes dined with the manager, Mr Walley,¹¹⁴ but those appear to have been special occasions. Managers and overseers were separated by their social status and this separation appears to have been reflected in their living arrangements and their social habits.

All managers on Mountravers owned enslaved people but it is not known where these lived. Many of Thomas Pym Weekes's worked away from the plantation. Joe Stanley owned the most at any one time (14 in 1817, reduced to eight in 1834) but he had living with him a wife and children and was a well-established Creole who may have inherited people from members of his family. Another manager in Nevis, Robert Mulhall,¹¹⁵ owned nine but William Garvey Laurence's three and Charles Clifton Caines's four may have been more typical numbers for bachelors. There is no evidence that the

¹⁰⁵ PP, Misc Vols 6 List of Deeds and Papers, 1783 ff55-8

¹⁰⁶ PP, LB 58: JC Mills, Nevis, to PA & Co, 15 February 1825

¹⁰⁷ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

¹⁰⁸ PP, Misc Vols 6 List of Deeds and Papers, 1783 ff55-8

¹⁰⁹ PP, Misc Vols 7 1783-1794 List of Deeds and Papers at Nevis

¹¹⁰ Presumably the new manager's house on Clarke's Estate was intended as accommodation for William Murray who in 1827 had moved from Stoney Grove (PP, WI Box O-3 Book 1: Charles Pinney to Mrs Ames, 8 March 1828).

¹¹¹ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p150

¹¹² PP, MSS in Numbered Folders (Folder 21)

¹¹³ PP, Dom Box I i-11: Charles Pinney to Mrs [?John Frederick Pinney] P, 3 November 1829. See also WA Green *Slave Emancipation* p62

¹¹⁴ NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton p311

¹¹⁵ ECSCRN, CR 1810-1814 ff779-81

overseers on Mountravers owned anyone although they may have done so: the overseer on Bowrin's Estate, William Prentis, had two, and William Archbald from Stoney Grove three.¹¹⁶

Mountravers lies within easy walking distance of Charlestown but to get around the island one needed transport. John Frederick Pinney's manager James Browne was allowed a horse, but when William Coker, the next manager, first arrived, he bought his own.¹¹⁷ Under JPP managers and overseers presumably also bought their own or borrowed the plantation horses; their contracts did not specifically entitle them to one. When he went to Jamaica, Ransford took his own saddle with him and he acquired two horses during his three years in the island but when he came to Nevis, he brought a mare with him from England.¹¹⁸ Coker in St Croix rode around the estate on a mule but when he wanted 'to be gay and go off it' he would borrow the manager's horse.¹¹⁹ On another estate in Nevis the manager had at his disposal a bay mare ('branded with MILLS on her near foot') which his employer had sent from England for when he was 'in need of being mounted'.¹²⁰

On Mountravers the men could also use the plantation canoe but for the crossing to St Kitts, to buy supplies or to return absconders, they usually hired a vessel. These occasional trips to other islands provided a break in the routine and could turn into quite lengthy expeditions. The manager from Lady Stapleton's plantation, Charles Hutton, spent six days in St Eustatius trying to recover a mason, Billy Carlton, who had sought refuge there.¹²¹

The inter-island network of contacts, which existed among the planters, extended to their managers. Introductions were invaluable. John Colhoun Mills, for instance, happily offered 'to show every attention' to a man who was on his way to Nevis,¹²² and Henry Ransford went to Tobago with a recommendation which allowed him to remain there 'long enough to have a good view of this pretty island'. In Trinidad, too, his letters of introduction resulted in invitations to several estates.¹²³ To be admitted into society in St Croix 'a person in the planting business' had to have 'a very good introduction', and as Worthington Coker arrived without carrying one with him, he, 'of course, saw no one for the first five months'. Coker solicited from Mrs John Frederick Pinney an introduction to the Governor of St Croix, because he realised that 'if he notices me I shall get into society and it may also be of great use to me in other ways'.¹²⁴ Because Coker was related to the Pinneys, albeit distantly, he benefited from their connections but many men arrived in the West Indies without the advantage of such patronage and had to build up their own contacts.

Luffman was astonished at how much plantation managers in Antigua spent on food, drink and women although they earned only £80 or £100 a year. Disapprovingly he reported that they 'sport several dishes at their tables, drink claret, keep mulatto mistresses, and indulge in every foolish extravagance of this Western region'.¹²⁵ Like Luffman, the St Kitts planter Clement Caines condemned his contemporaries for being too fond of their 'West Indian eating-parties'. At these, the men over-indulged on 'turtle and cherry punch, kidney-covered mutton and Madeira wine' while their conversation dragged along, dull and empty. Judging by Worthington Coker's evidence, socialising was one of the pastimes much enjoyed by managers, and but planters believed their men would waste too much time. Clement Caines warned that 'Proprietors should therefore as carefully guard

¹¹⁶ HoCAaP 1837-1838 Vol xlvi: Chadwyk-Healey mf 41.389 pp107-08, and PP, Dom Box R-6: Compensation file

¹¹⁷ PP, Misc Vols 3 AB 3: 23 October 1761

¹¹⁸ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p18

¹¹⁹ PP, Dom Box C2-13: WW Coker, Peter's Rest, to Charles Pinney, 21 February 1830

¹²⁰ MLD, Mills Papers, 2006.178/7, Vol 1: John Mills junior to Joseph Clifton, 16 March 1769

¹²¹ Handlist of The Stapleton-Cotton Manuscripts, Box 2/16 iv

¹²² SRO, DD\BR\bs/6: JC Mills, Nevis, to William Mills, Bishops Hull, 18 June 1796

¹²³ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p23

Ransford's contact in Tobago may have been Joseph Webbe Stanley's daughter Lucy and his son-in-law, John Hendrickson Laurence, who spent some years as a clergyman in Scarborough, Tobago. In Port of Spain Ransford at first 'went to a lodging kept by a Nevis woman, a mulatto' but he also had letters of introduction to planters in and spent time on their estates. He also spent a few days with Mr Brickley 'who belonged to a Bristol family'.

¹²⁴ PP, Dom Box I i-2: Wm Worthington Coker, Peter's Rest, to [Mrs John Frederick Pinney], 11 August 1830

¹²⁵ Oliver, VL *Antigua* Vol 1 Letter XI 28 January 1787

against the giving of entertainments by their managers, as against the accepting of invitations to become guests at them, when given by their neighbours.' Caines firmly believed that managers should never visit others or 'receive company at home, unless casual visitors ... on any day but Sunday, and never in the Christmas holidays.'¹²⁶ John Frederick Pinney, too, warned against idleness caused by 'visiting and being visited'.¹²⁷

While William Garvey Laurence's possessions seemed to equip him well for the sort of lifestyle Luffman and Caines described – they amounted to eighteen wine glasses, five wine coolers and not much else -¹²⁸ other men shunned these decadent excesses. The manager's house on Parson's Estate in St Kitts, for instance, contained a large assortment of books, almanacs and manuals, which, of course, included such tools of the trade as John Latham's *Practical Rules on the Management of Negroes*. The furniture and other belongings were modest: a table, a writing desk, three chairs, a chest, a bedstead with a feather bed and a counterpane, a mosquito net, a jug basin and chamber pot, two portmanteaux, a surgeon's case of instruments, two stamps, a mariner's compass and a magnifying glass. Only the weaponry (a sword, a gun, a pair of double-barrelled pistols and a single barrelled one) hinted at something other than simple, industrious domesticity.¹²⁹

Henry Ransford was similarly armed when he served in the Jamaican militia but he, too, was far removed from those gluttons Luffman described and detested. Coming from a 'respectable family' and gentlemanly in his 'manners and habits', Ransford was well educated and, keen to learn and improve himself, also self-taught.¹³⁰ During his time in Jamaica, he spent his only spare time, Sundays, at church, and if he worked where there was no place of worship 'within many miles', he 'visited the negro provision grounds', strolled about the hills and valleys ('it was a very beautiful country'), and played quoits.¹³¹ An outdoor pursuit, in which players aim rings made of metal or other materials at upright target pins, quoits is a test of skill and, according to Ransford, this 'was much practised and certainly better than card playing or gambling'. Country life suited him; returning from church, he and his 'capital pony, Badger, a black hogsmane little scamp', entered many a race with half a dozen other young men. During his last three months in Jamaica he had an easy time at the Lodge Estate, 'visiting the works in the morning but visiting friends or playing billiards in the afternoon'. On Stoney Grove he continued to lead a sober and increasingly contemplative life. After he 'took up with the Methodist Missionaries', he 'fitted up an old boiling house roughly as a sort of Chapel'. Every week one of the Missionaries came to tea and then held a service which most of the plantation people attended voluntarily. Ransford 'was always present, as an example to the negroes and an encouragement to the Missionary', and enjoyed the singing which was 'better than what is often heard in country places in England.' With the Missionary he 'had long conversations and arguments on various doctrinal points ...' Ransford later wrote about his time as manager in Nevis: 'I passed a very regular life, [and] except when dining out or [I had] friends to dinner, I was in bed by 9.30'.¹³² Coker in

¹²⁶ Caines, Clement *Letters on the Cultivation of the Otaheite Cane* p228

¹²⁷ PP, LB 1: JF Pinney to Browne, Nevis, 9 August 1756

¹²⁸ ECSCRN, Book of Wills 1837-1864 f299

¹²⁹ PP, LB 44: Inventory witnessed by Charles Woodley and Robert Williams Rickwood, St Kitts, 26 July 1821

At the Great House on Mountravers, JPP also kept a small armoury: '3 firelocks and bayonets in good order, 1 brace pistol, 2 cutlasses, 1 bayonett, 1 old soldiers piece' (PP, Misc Vols 6 List of Deeds and Papers, 1783 f58)

¹³⁰ PP, LB 59: P & A to JC Mills, 18 August 1824

Henry Ransford came to the West Indies with a good education but he also had an enquiring mind which led him to broaden his horizons. As a child he had been a boarder at an Independent Minister's school at Chippenham in Wiltshire, where he had been 'well taught in reading, writing, spelling, geography and the use of the globes.' He learnt Latin and Greek but neither language was to his taste. When sent to Oxford to a school kept by a Dr Hinton, he 'used to attend the college lectures of Natural Philosophy by Professor Rigaud and more than once accompanied a schoolfellow to the anatomical lectures by Professor Kidd'. Occasionally he attended the Assizes and heard trials, 'walk over the Museums, Libraries, etc. so that by observation [he] picked up a knowledge of many things at Oxford' (Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* pp3-5).

¹³¹ Several versions of the quoits are played in different British regions, each with their own rules. In the Long Game, played mostly in Wales and Scotland, the quoits weigh up to 11 pounds, almost double the weight of the Northern Game, and the target stakes are 18 yards apart, seven yards further than the Northern Game. The game is associated with agricultural and working class people and gained popularity during the nineteenth century. Quoits suited Jamaican conditions: the target pins are set in soft clay and the quoits can be forged from left-over, poor quality metal.

¹³² Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p21

St Croix spent his evenings visiting neighbours or being visited, and often there was singing and dancing.¹³³ He got to know the families in the neighbourhood, and through one of Mrs John Frederick Pinney's letters of introduction he met his future wife.¹³⁴

Wives, mistresses and children

Missionaries found that managers and overseers were the biggest obstacle they encountered in the 'moral improvement' of slaves. 'Exposed to temptations', some had 'sufficient firmness of principle to resist, yet not a few of them [led] the most dissolute lives.'¹³⁵ Like Lady Nugent, missionaries believed they set a bad example. Opinion was divided as to whether married or single men made better managers. The merchant and planter Alexander Douglas preferred single men unless they happened to have the kind wife who was 'remarkably careful and attentive to the plantation negroes', but the abolitionist James Ramsay believed that married men managed plantations better than bachelors as bachelors tended to be inexperienced and did not stay long. He blamed the 'prevailing objection against the employing of married men on the supposition that their families use more sugar, and keep more attendants about the house than bachelors; neither of which is generally true.'¹³⁶ Ramsay's adversary James Tobin responded to this with a curiously long and obviously heartfelt diatribe; he suggested that too few suitable eligible spinsters lived in the islands and blamed the modern practice of planters sending their daughters to England for a useless and frivolous education. Previously these girls had grown up in the West Indies to become excellent housewives and nurses.¹³⁷

John Frederick Pinney was the kind of owner who preferred single managers and overseers. When the overseer Thomas Wenham intended to get married and (through the attorney) asked permission to remain on Mountravers, Pinney responded unenthusiastically and cautiously. He tolerated but did not encourage the couple to live the plantation and warned Tom Wenham to continue his work diligently and not to fall into slack Creole habits. He did, however, allow Wenham and his new family four domestic attendants. JPP had no objection to couples living on Mountravers, and three of his managers were married and three were single men. Two of the bachelors were known to have had slave mistresses who bore their children. In terms of moral standards set by JPP's managers, William Coker, one of the married men, probably set the worst example. Almost certainly he raped an African girl, but whether rapes were common occurrences on Mountravers is not known. There is evidence of alcohol abuse among the managers as well as the overseers; several appear to have had drink problems but whether, and to what extent, their behaviour influenced that of the enslaved people, again, is impossible to tell. Overall, in terms of their general plantation management, there is no evidence to suggest that the married men did any better or any worse than the bachelors. Except for the last, the (married Creole) Joe Stanley, all of JPP's managers failed in one way or another, and Stanley did not remain long enough in his post to be found wanting.

William Coker had dismissed 'the poorer sorts of Creoles' as untrustworthy but happily married a Creole from a well-connected family. Marriage to a Creole placed him comfortably into an extended family network with its ready-made social and business contacts. Thomas Pym Weekes and Joe Stanley brought their British wives with them to the plantation.

Apart from Thomas Pym Weekes, who got married at the age of 24, the men married relatively late in life; Coker was in his mid-thirties and Joe Stanley past his mid-forties. It was important that a man could provide for his family, and JPP had thought Thomas Pym Weekes's wedding plans 'a species of madness' because he believed that his brother-in-law should secure his financial standing first.

¹³³ PP, Dom Box I i-2: Wm Worthington Coker, Peter's Rest, to [Mrs John Frederick Pinney], 11 August 1830

¹³⁴ PP, Dom Box I i-14: Wm Coker to Mrs Pinney, 3 October 1833

¹³⁵ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p187

¹³⁶ Lambert, S (ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 71 p297 and Vol 69 p458

¹³⁷ Tobin, James *Cursor's Remarks* p69-74

Ignoring JPP's advice, Thomas Pym Weekes married Isabella Livingston, a young Scotswoman from a professional family. His wife came from a similar social background to his, as did William Coker's wife Frances Weekes. Joe Stanley's situation is less clear-cut. The son of an impoverished planter, his brother had served as a Member of Parliament in England and through him Joe Stanley had gained access to influence, if not wealth. He married a woman from Britain, Lucy Bligh, the daughter of a secretary of a London waterworks company.

As the eighteenth century progressed, middle-class women in Britain retreated to the home front. Incomes rose among an increasing section of the population and the dependent, non-working wife became a mark of affluence and status. It showed that the husband could afford to maintain her,¹³⁸ and plantation managers would have aimed to keep their womenfolk at home. Elsewhere managers' and planters' wives certainly assisted their husbands with the care of the plantation workers,¹³⁹ but the records do not reveal whether the managers' wives on Mountravers played such roles. If they did, they were not paid; their work would have been seen as charitable services that went with their husbands' jobs. But at least two of the managers' wives earned money from their own enterprise; Mrs Coker and Mrs Stanley sold merchandise brought or shipped from England. In Montserrat, one other manager's wife is known to have sold goods that she ordered from England: Elizabeth Ellery asked for material for clothes and bedding - dowlas, corded dimity, Prussia sheeting, Irish linen, Poland starch, Holland, calamanco – as well as hair ribbons, men's hats, candles, best Whitechapel needles, pins, cord, edging, and 'anything fashionable such as earrings, or necklaces [as] they will sell very well here.' Elizabeth Ellery's trading activity probably was typical of the way managers' wives organised their business; it did not involve an established merchant house granting credit or sending supplies but was small-scale, financed from the sale of goods and organised within the family. Mrs Ellery ordered her wares through her cousin, a clergyman, who settled the invoice until she was able to repay.¹⁴⁰

The women's participation in trade was not seen as negative or shameful. In islands where almost everything was imported there was honour in trading; commercial activities were valued. Even colonial governors dealt in something. As Christopher Jeaffreson remarked, 'The Captain General did not disdain to turn an honest penny in retail trade.' Equally, it was Jeaffreson who pointed out that selling from home undercut the merchants whose overheads included maintaining shops and store houses.¹⁴¹ The women who traded from Mountravers were competing with the stores in Charlestown but those who served outlying regions had the field to themselves and no shortage of customers. To market her wares, Mrs Stanley sent out enslaved people females, and this may well have been the way the managers' wives commonly shifted their stock. Miss Rebecca Rawlins, too, was known to have employed an enslaved woman, a former field hand from Symmonds estate. For the last twenty years of her life Benneba was 'in the habit of hawking dry goods about the country for that lady'.¹⁴²

Whether the profits remained in the women's hands or was subsumed in the family's general expenditure is not known, but the ability to earn money must have afforded the women an element of independence and at the same time honed their commercial and organisational skills.

In addition to selling European wares, women could acquire cash through other means. They could raise and sell poultry and small animals, or utilise their skills by giving private lessons in sewing and other domestic accomplishments, or by making and selling preserves and sweetmeats.¹⁴³ It was said

¹³⁸ Rule, John *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* p97

¹³⁹ Revd Ramsay thought that enslaved people were more willing to reproduce if the manager was blessed with a wife, who 'of her own accord, without orders or reward, sympathizeth with the Negresses when pregnant, helps them out with a few rags to wrap their infants in, and sees that they are properly tended when lying-in' (Lambert, S (ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 69 p458).

¹⁴⁰ GA, D1571/F845: Elizabeth Ellery, Montserrat, to Revd WY Coker, 30 July 1792

¹⁴¹ Jeaffreson, John Cordy (ed) *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century* Vol 1 p102

¹⁴² PP, Dom Box C2-8: FJ Galpine to Charles Pinney, 22 May 1822

¹⁴³ PP, Dom Box C3-16: Revd HJ Leacock, Nevis, to Charles Pinney, 12 July 1832

that a teacher's wife, Mrs Jones, 'had many opportunities of making a little money by selling bread and various other things.'¹⁴⁴ The wife of a planter, Mrs James Tobin, and her maid Priscilla Gould, traded in small quantities of cotton grown by enslaved people,¹⁴⁵ and it is reasonable to assume that some managers' wives earned money this way, too. Hiring out their people would also have been a source of income for single women until, upon marriage, these became their husbands' property.¹⁴⁶ Although their husbands owned the enslaved people, married women were not entirely without voice; during Mr Coker's absence in England, Mrs Coker (and not JPP as her husband's attorney) made decisions about buying and selling the family's people, as well as their horse and household goods.

As mistress of the house, the women oversaw the domestic affairs but had little to do by way of housework – enslaved people did the washing, cooking, cleaning; they nursed the children and tended the small animals and grew the vegetables. But the servants needed instructions and their tasks had to be assigned and organised and thereby the managers' wives acquired managerial skills. Servants were a visible sign of wealth and status, and the number of servants depended on how many enslaved people the family themselves owned and how many the plantation owner allowed from the pool of plantation workers. Opinions as to what was considered reasonable by way of domestic staff varied. It was said that on Mesopotamia in Jamaica 'No fewer than ten houseboys, maid servants, and cooks waited on the overseer and the bookkeepers',¹⁴⁷ on the Stapleton plantation the manager whose family lived with him was allowed a total of seven: three women servants, a cook, two house boys, and one man in the stables. This was considered an 'ample allowance'.¹⁴⁸ JPP approved five servants for Thomas Pym Weekes, married but as yet childless, and Joe Stanley employed eight Mountravers people, plus his own, for his growing family.¹⁴⁹

While servants carried out the domestic chores, the woman had time on their hands. Visiting and being visited was an often-mentioned pastime, and white women of all classes, whether Creole or British-born, had social contact with free women. In Jamaica, Lady Nugent mixed with 'the black, brown and yellow ladies' and had 'mulatto friends', who were all daughters of 'Members of the Assembly, Officers, &c. &c.'.¹⁵⁰ Occasionally the relationships went beyond superficial social contact and were cemented with gifts and services of friendship. For instance, Mrs Lucy Stanley was left money in the will of the mustee woman Elizabeth Arthurton,¹⁵¹ and when another Mrs Stanley, Ann, freed a slave of hers, she chose as her witness Elizabeth Cheevers, a 'free woman of colour'. This Ann Stanley, the elderly widow of a 'gentleman', was illiterate and signed the manumission document with her mark.¹⁵² While the wealthier whites sent their daughters to school in Britain, many of the poorer white Creole women remained uneducated, as did the poorer British women who came to Nevis.¹⁵³ Those women who were literate could match their grammar, spelling and punctuation with any educated man, as a lengthy letter written by Elizabeth Ellery shows. A manager's wife, she had

¹⁴⁴ PP, Dom Box C3-18: Peter Thomas Huggins, Nevis, to Charles Pinney, 5 January 1833

¹⁴⁵ PP, LB 45: P & T to James Tobin 20 July 1809, 17 August 1809 and 26 July 1809 and LB 46: P & T to James Tobin, 1 August 1808 and 1 October 1808

¹⁴⁶ The parish registers did not always identify the husband as the owner of the enslaved people. For instance, when Grace Ross was baptised, the owner was given as Mrs McPhail but when Grace Ross's illegitimate daughter Elizabeth Maria was baptised, the owner was said to have been William McPhail (NHCS, St Paul's Baptisms 1824-1835 Numbers 67 and 559).

¹⁴⁷ Dunn, Richard *A Tale of Two Plantations* p52

¹⁴⁸ Stapleton Cotton MSS 17 (ii): Instructions for Mr Daniell

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Herbert, Sir William Stapleton's manager, had five able plantation people in the house and stable, as well as four of his own. When visitors came and for some other jobs, more plantation workers might be called in. David Stalker, the overseer, pointed out that Herbert had a large family and that a man with a smaller family would need fewer house servants (Ryland Stapleton MSS 4.5: David Stalker to Sir Wm Stapleton, 13 April 1732)

¹⁵⁰ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* p88 and p105

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Arthurton died in 1816 (see Thomas Arthurton's biography).

¹⁵² ECSCRN, CR 1829-1830 Vol 2 f154 and ff159-60

¹⁵³ Barry Higman made the point that by the early C19th whites in the West Indies were relatively more literate than their contemporaries in Britain. He based this claim on an analysis of slave registration returns which slave holders verified with their signature or their mark, and compared this to British literacy records (Higman, *BW Slave Populations of the British Caribbean* p111, quoting EG West 'Literacy and the Industrial Revolution' in *Economic History Review* 31 (1978) p380 and Lawrence Stone 'Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900' in *Past and Present* Vol 42 (1969) p120).

come to the West Indies as a young girl, and her letter asking her cousin in England for trade goods was elegantly worded and written in a fluent and confident hand.

English-born Elizabeth Ellery was the niece of the Creole Francis Coker, and Mrs Coker, too, was illiterate, but both her sons went to school in England. According to JPP and others,¹⁵⁴ Creole mothers spoil their children and sending them away for their education must have been a wrench for these women. For the island-born children, going abroad meant leaving behind their indulgent mothers, their families and friends – many of whom would have been their parents' plantation people. For the children a whole way of life ended, where, by virtue of their colour, they wielded power over a large number of men, women and children. In one case in Nevis, where a female domestic had offended her mistress, her master gave her the option to work in the field or, alternatively, to 'ask one of the young mistresses' to plead leniency on her behalf. The young mistress who was delegated such power was, at the most, in her teens.¹⁵⁵

During their stay in Jamaica, Lady Nugent's children had acquired 'funny talk' and so, when English-born children returned to Britain, they brought with them their 'Creole ideas and ways'.¹⁵⁶ Equally, when island-born children arrived in Britain, they spoke differently and they looked different. They all arrived with a fading tan while wearing clothes suitable for the tropics but not a cold climate. When JPP sent his daughter to England, he recognised that she might stand out and asked for her to be kitted out anew in London: 'The dress of children in England being different from what it is here Mrs Pinney has only made up shifts and under petticoats, requesting the favour of you to procure such other things as may be necessary.'¹⁵⁷ He asked this favour of Mrs Patterson, who was to look after Betsey. Grace Patterson was not related to the Pinneys but if there were no relatives to take care of children arriving from the West Indies, then merchants and planters with Nevis connections volunteered or were envagled to become their guardians.

Although going to Europe must have been an adventure, the children had to undergo much cultural adjustment, and the older they were, the more difficult this became. Edward Huggins's sons Edward and Peter Thomas started school in Bristol at the age of about sixteen and nine years respectively and, although 'very promising lads', JPP thought it 'a pity they were not sent home two years sooner, before they were quite so Man-ish' [his underlining]. Just as Thomas Pym Weekes upset his guardian because he was such an unruly pupil, the Huggins boys, too, were ill disciplined and wild.¹⁵⁸ Exposed to British education (and anti-slave trade sentiments), the Hugginses retained their old ways and ideas but others brought back with them values they had acquired abroad. That this was not always for the better is illustrated by the girls from St Croix who had been sent to North America for their schooling. Worthington Coker found that they came back all puffed up, thinking themselves superior. They were 'not a little proud' of their foreign education and they 'let you know it before you have been five minutes in their company.' He could easily spot these girls because 'In order to avoid the Creole tone which in St Croix is far from disagreeable they talk through the nose like the Americans.' But not only their way of speaking had changed; Coker also observed that in America they had developed 'a vulgarity which the untravelled Creoles are free from ...' He 'infinitely' preferred 'those who have never been off the island to those who have been educated in America.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Horatio Nelson, for instance, believed that his wife had spoiled Josiah, her son from her first marriage to Dr Nisbet (Hardy, Sheila Frances, *Lady Nelson* p63).

¹⁵⁵ NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton p321

The case concerned Harriet Knight, Edward Thomas Wolfe's domestic slave, and the incident took place in 1826. Edward and Jane Wolfe had more than one daughter, one of whom, Jane, was baptised in 1817 in St John Figtree.

¹⁵⁶ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* p332 and p338

Miss Schaw thought it 'improper' that parents sent their children for their education to Britain. She disapproved because 'They form their sentiments in Britain, their early connections there, and they leave it just when they are at an age to enjoy it most, and return to their friends and country, as banished exiles; nor can any future connection cure them of the longing they have to return to Britain' (Andrews, Evangeline Walker and Charles McLeon Andrews (eds) *Journal of a Lady of Quality* p92)

¹⁵⁷ PP, LB 5: JPP, Nevis, to Grace Patterson, 26 April 1781

¹⁵⁸ PP, LB 40: TP & T to Edward Huggins, 2 November 1796

¹⁵⁹ PP, Dom Box I i-2: Wm Worthington Coker, Peter's Rest, to [Mrs John Frederick Pinney], 11 August 1830

While some of the managers' children and grandchildren became firmly rooted in England, others extended their horizons beyond the West Indies: one moved to Canada via St Croix while another tried his luck in India. Worthington Coker's father (the son of the manager William Coker) followed family tradition and became a vicar. All the children of the Mountravers managers remained within their social class or advanced their status. Educated in Scotland, one of Isabella Weekes's sons became President of the Medical Board in Bombay; the other went to sea and eventually rose to Commander in the Royal Navy. One of Lucy Stanley sons was, like Worthington's father and brother, Oxford-educated and became Commissioner for Compensation and Speaker of the island's Assembly while her daughters married into respectable Nevis families: two married planters, the husband of another became rector at St Thomas Lowland, and the third a judge in the Court of the King's Bench and Common Pleas. Both Mrs Coker and Mrs Stanley lived to see grandchildren being born but Mrs Weekes died young.¹⁶⁰ She and also Mrs Stanley pre-deceased their husbands. Only Mrs Coker outlived hers, and she did so by many years.¹⁶¹ All three managers' wives had moved to where their husbands lived and worked, and the women died away from their birthplace: Mrs Coker, the Creole, in England, and the two British women in Nevis.

Among the overseers sent from Britain it appears that only one, David Jones, was married but his wife did not accompany him to Nevis. Five white men are known to have had relationships with enslaved women from the plantation. Barry Higman found that on Montpelier in Jamaica the transient white plantation workers 'never established families of their own nor did they incorporate themselves into the slaves' family system'.¹⁶² To what extent men like James Williams became part of the 'slaves' family system' on Mountravers cannot be judged except that at least three of the men who were known to have had children with women from the plantation appear to have been in lasting relationships.¹⁶³ Of the mistresses, three were Creoles and the fourth probably was plantation-born, too, while the fifth was an African woman JPP had purchased. John Hay Richens bought her but the others were entailed women. As Pares pointed out, there 'was at first some legal difficulty, in that the people who had belonged to John Frederick Pinney were entailed, with their children, and no valid manumission could be given till JPP's eldest son came of age'.¹⁶⁴ Between them, the women gave birth to at least ten children, and three of the men bought, or wanted to buy, their children. Although JPP generally accommodated the fathers, he later had reservations about adding to the free mixed-race population and once withheld consent to freeing a manager's children as a means of punishing their mother.

The women who are known to have had children with white plantation employees were all black and worked as field hands as well as domestics. JPP never expressed any moral objections to these unions although many people – mostly outsiders – did object to white men taking mistresses. Sylvester Hovey, an American abolitionist who toured St Croix during Worthington Coker's residence in the island, wrote that one of the 'evils' which spread 'through the community' was the 'practice of taking colored or black women as housekeepers; but who are, to all intents and purposes, wives,

¹⁶⁰ The average age at which these three managers' wives died was about 56 years. Surprisingly, the average age at death of the five white men's mistresses Judy, Phibba, Bridget, Jenetta and Hetty was higher by at least two years. However, the sample is far too small to draw any conclusions.

¹⁶¹ Thomas Pym Weekes died aged about 30, James Williams was 40 and Henry Williams about 45 years old, while William Coker reached the age of 75, Joe Stanley of 79 and Joseph Gill of 80. Their average age at death was about 58 years.

To establish whether the Mountravers managers died younger or older compared to managers on other Nevis plantations or other islands cannot be established because there is no comparable data. The only known deaths are those of three managers. Their average age at death was 50 years: Walter Nisbet died in 1765 'in the 54th year of his life' (Memorial in St James Anglican Church, Nevis), Samuel Sturge died in 1828 aged 46 (NHCS, St Thomas Lowland Burials 1827-1957 No 10), and Horatio Isles died in 1834 aged 51 (St Paul's Burials 1825-1837 No 547). A fourth, Henry Ransford, died aged 88/89 but he had only worked in the sugar islands for about ten years.

¹⁶² Higman, *BW Montpelier, Jamaica* p115

¹⁶³ When John Frederick Pinney said that Jenetta's 'mother had taken rice to sell in the market and 'that all her stock has been fed from my stores', he appeared to imply that James Williams had allowed his mistress's mother to do so – perhaps an indication that Williams had 'incorporated' himself into the slaves' family system' (PP, Dom Box P: JF Pinney, Nevis, to JPP, 21 February 1804).

¹⁶⁴ Pares, *R A West India Fortune* p132

except in name and respect.¹⁶⁵ But the practice of taking mistresses, of course, was not confined to St Croix, nor was it confined to plantation managers. Writing about Jamaica towards the end of the eighteenth century, Bryan Edwards stated that black and brown women were ‘universally maintained by white men of all ranks and conditions as kept mistresses’, or, as Lady Nugent put it, ‘no man here is without one’.¹⁶⁶ Mary Prince supported such views; these liaisons were ‘universal’ and were hardly considered immoral - except by missionaries ‘and a few serious persons’.¹⁶⁷

What outraged ‘the missionaries and a few serious persons’ was an inevitable consequence of the system of slavery in which white people held the power: white men could command the services of anybody for anything at any time. And the white men employed on plantations were mostly single men. If they fancied their house servants, they had at their disposal ready-made mistresses. If they could afford it, they could buy a woman. If they so choose, they could pick from any of the females on the plantation – even if that meant removing a wife from her husband. White men had claimed the right to enslave Africans and their descendants, and on the plantations they continued exercising their claims. Procuring for themselves mistresses lay within the parameters of the system of slavery.

However, while having slave, or free, mistresses was tolerated in plantation societies, two islands at least legislated against men taking married slave women as mistresses, or using them for casual sex. Dominica wanted to protect its married females by imposing a £50 fine on any white or any ‘free person of colour’ who violated their ‘chastity’, while in Grenada anyone who ‘debauched’ and had ‘carnal knowledge’ of a woman ‘during her marriage’ was subject to punishment on a sliding scale: a master or proprietor was fined £165 currency; attorneys, managers, overseers, bookkeepers, tradesmen, or other free people were fined half their annual wages; and strangers or visitors £50 currency. Enslaved men accused of having interfered with married women received physical punishment but were not to be mutilated or put to death. It must be noted that these laws protected married but not single women, nor did the law protect men and boys. Male rape – or indeed homosexual relationships - almost certainly did occur, but would then have been even more of a taboo than it is today.¹⁶⁸

The legislation was intended to strengthen moral habits by introducing enslaved people ‘to regular marriage, and when married protecting them in their conjugal rights’,¹⁶⁹ because many whites (like Lady Nugent) saw promiscuity as one of the main causes, if not the principal cause, of low birth rates among enslaved women. In effect, these laws were intended to increase the number of births and thereby the number of slave-born people. In addition, by encouraging stable unions between men and women, the laws, if enforced, were to ensure that the ‘right kind’ of children were born – black rather than mixed-race – as mixed-race children were seen as encumbrances. Generally planters thought that they should not labour as field hands but instead be trained in trades or work as domestics, and once a plantation had a sufficient number of those, they became a burden. Whether the legislation was enforced and whether it had its desired effect, is difficult to assess. Many factors affected the demographic make-up of a slave population, but by 1817 the proportion of mixed-race people in Grenada, for instance, was about half that of Nevis, where no such legislation existed.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p189

¹⁶⁶ Cundall, Frank (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal* pp39-40

¹⁶⁷ Ferguson, Moira (ed) *The History of Mary Prince* p101 Letter dated 18 January 1831

¹⁶⁸ On Thistlewood's plantation in Jamaica William, a barber, was said to have had a homosexual relationship with a white man, Philip Geudgeon (Donoghue, Eddie *Black Breeding Machines; The Breeding of Negro Slaves in the Diaspora* AuthorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana 2008 p313).

¹⁶⁹ Lambert, S (ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 70 p145 and p132 No IX, X and XI

¹⁷⁰ For the factors affecting the composition of slave populations see BW Higman *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*, in particular p116 Table 5.7 and p147

Transience and resistance

During John Frederick Pinney's absentee ownership, which lasted for about quarter of a century, three managers served on Mountravers (if Coker's short-lived tenure is included). During JPP's years as an absentee owner, he employed double the number in the same time span. The higher turnover stemmed from him having lived on the plantation for many years, having understood its workings better and having developed a watchful, hands-on approach. Also his expectations were higher than his kinsman's. Both John Frederick Pinney and JPP sailed to Nevis twice on inspection tours but on his first visit John Frederick was very young and inexperienced and his second stay was only a brief one. JPP used both of his trips to replace his managers - regardless of whether they were his kith and kin.

On average, each manager served for slightly over four years. JPP's cousin Joseph Gill was employed the shortest, for not quite two and a half years, and a non-relative, James Williams, the longest. His tenure lasted for about nine years. (In addition, Williams had also held the position of overseer for five years.) On Montpelier in Jamaica the turnover was marginally higher - managers changed every three to four years - while on Worthy Park during one particular period managers came and went with even greater frequency: in the six years after 1785 five different men held the post of manager.¹⁷¹

The overseers on Mountravers changed more often than the managers. During the period 1761 to 1807 thirteen overseers worked under JPP and his six managers. (Included are three temporary replacements and John Hay Richens who managed Gingerland; not included are the seasonal boiling house watches.) On average, the overseers stayed for about three and a half years. They remained longer on Mountravers than, for instance, on Mesopotamia in Jamaica, where overseers seldom worked for more than two or three years.¹⁷² The shortest term any of the permanent overseers served was four months (John Andrews), while Thomas Arthurton's term was the longest: a total of about sixteen years. This was not entirely unusual; other overseers, too, remained on the same plantation for very long periods. The Creole William Archbald, for instance, died after working on Stoney Grove for over a quarter of a century.¹⁷³ By contrast, two overseers on Mount Pleasant and Solitude estates in St Croix must have held the records for the shortest-ever periods of tenure: one appears to have left after only one day, and another after three.¹⁷⁴

If men only served for a short time on a plantation, they did not have to live with the consequences of their mishandling the enslaved people but transience also made their work more difficult. As one manager wrote: 'Those who of necessity must control blacks must first learn to know them well, a process which takes time. Therefore, it is harmful for an estate to have its whites changed often.'¹⁷⁵ However, a high turnover at overseers' level was built into the employment system. If planters like JPP issued three-year indentures, this created a defined, fixed period after which it was acceptable to move on. Annually rising rates of pay during the contracted period created expectations but once the agreement came to an end employers were under no obligation to increase the pay. If no pay rise was forthcoming, men left and sought a position elsewhere, or, their obligations fulfilled, returned to Britain.

Ambitious, bright young men like Ransford moved on quickly because they tried to advance their fortunes and gain as much experience as possible. Ransford, who was not on fixed-term contracts but took work as it came along, was keen to understand all aspects of agricultural production on sugar estates, stock pens and coffee plantations. Looking back on his time in Jamaica, he said that he 'could not see and learn too much of the management of different places.' On Colonel McLeod's

¹⁷¹ Higman BW *Montpelier Jamaica* p40 and p307, and M Craton *Sinews of Empire* p207

¹⁷² Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields p801

¹⁷³ PP, WI Box 1829-1836: Accounts Stoney Grove Estate Wm Archbald's a/c

¹⁷⁴ PP, Dom Box L-1

¹⁷⁵ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p116

Colbeck's estate he 'learnt a good deal, seeing after the cattle and mules, besides field work' and was given more responsibility when crop began: he 'not only had the management of the distillery, but superintended the boiling house'. When Mr Spencer, the manager, found that he took a real interest in the work, he requested him 'to see especially after the tempering of the cane liquor, and the result was, there was scarcely a shade of difference in all the sugar made that season.'¹⁷⁶ The Pinneys heard of this capable young man and, at their 'special desire', Ransford left his present employment and spent three months at the Lodge Estate under Mr Hannaford, whose 'successful management was known to the owners of the Nevis properties.'¹⁷⁷ After he had worked in Jamaica for a total of three years the Pinneys thought him fit to take on the management of Stoney Grove.¹⁷⁸ Three years was also the length of time Worthington Coker served in St Croix before he became a manager,¹⁷⁹ while John Cheyney worked for five years on Mountravers and then moved on to manage another estate in Nevis. A planter in Grenada, however, thought that 12 to 18 months of tutelage was sufficient time before men could take charge of a plantation.¹⁸⁰ Transience among overseers, therefore, was inevitable. Being an overseer was a stepping stone to becoming a manager, and many an able overseer quit his job because he sought or was offered a management position elsewhere.

Absentee owners wanted a stable workforce and leave the running of their estates to competent men who got on with the jobs in hand. Each new appointment had to be procured, vetted, inducted and, as one attorney pointed out, the chosen person might fall ill and die: 'at best' the training of 'raw inexperienced people from home [was] attended with so much loss.' And besides, there was always 'the chance of their not turning out well'.¹⁸¹ JPP employed some men who men turned out useless but none as bad as the two overseers who were on the Stapleton plantation and proved 'so errant & raskalls as ever lived'. They sold their clothes, at night galloped around on the plantation mules and generally gave 'a great deal of trouble'. When the attorney caught them stealing molasses they went to prison. One broke out, made his getaway with a sailor in a stolen boat, while the other man remained in jail, seemingly 'pleased with his confinement'.¹⁸²

As JPP and many other planters found to their cost, appointing people from Britain to work in a faraway place was fraught with problems. Men succumbed to rum, idleness and other temptations, or to diseases. If they died, or if they were inadequate, like John Beer and John Andrews, replacements had to be shipped out, at least in time for the next crop season. Both John Beer and John Andrews returned to England, two other overseers left on their own accord to work elsewhere in Nevis, two were sacked, one died, and one was promoted to manager. The last overseer the Pinneys sent from Britain, David Jones, may have remained on Mountravers after the plantation was sold but Joe Stanley, the manager, did not. He became redundant when the Hugginses took over. Four other managers were dismissed because of their unsatisfactory performance and James Williams would have been dismissed had he not died. Drink was said to have caused his death, and drink was also a contributing factor in Joseph Gill's discharge.

Alcohol abuse among white workers was so widespread that on the Jamaican Montpelier plantation it was the only reason for dismissal; Higman found that all the men appointed by one particular attorney

¹⁷⁶ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p10 and p8

¹⁷⁷ It is possible that Pinney and Ames heard of Ransford from Hannaford through Protheroe and Claxton of Bristol. Although Ransford did not mention this in his memoirs, Lodge Estate was one of four estates in the parish of St Dorothy which had Boulton and Watt steam engines erected between 1811 and 1817 (Satchell, Veront "The diffusion of the Watt Steam Engine in the Jamaican slave/sugar economy 1810-1830", Paper given at the 29th Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Historians, 7-12 April 1997, p16). Protheroe and Claxton supplied the engine to Mr Foulkes, the owner of Lodge Estate (BCA, Boulton and Watt Papers, James Watt and Co Soho MSS, Vol Arch/05 1 'List of Engines of the Independent Type supplied to the Sugar Plantations' ff218-33).

¹⁷⁸ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p15

¹⁷⁹ PP, Dom Box I i-14: Wm W Coker, Peter's Rest, to JF Pinney, 27 September 1833

¹⁸⁰ Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS 2: Unidentified writer [from Grenada] to Miss Stapleton, 11 February 1770

¹⁸¹ SCRO, Moberley and Wharton Collection, D/MW 35/14/1: Aeneas Shaw, Nevis, to Edward Jessup at W Ede's, Coal Harbour, Thames Street, London, 15 May 1765

¹⁸² Ryland Stapleton MSS 4.11.9: Timothy Tyrrell to Sir William Stapleton, 30 April 1724

had 'turned to drink, and had to be removed'.¹⁸³ The only surprising fact about the men's excessive alcohol intake is that people were surprised that it happened. With generous allowances for managers and overseers and the possibility of buying or stealing more at source, alcoholism became an almost inevitable by-product of life on a sugar plantation. JPP allowed his managers and overseers 'to use properly and fairly whatever they choose'¹⁸⁴ but later restricted them to 120 gallons (545 litres) a year. On Stoney Grove managers were also allowed 120 gallons a year - the equivalent of a daily ration of over two and half pints (a litre and a half). Overseers were granted fifty gallons (227 litres) a year, over a pint (half a litre) a day.¹⁸⁵ A few abstemious men like Ransford could have sold their share or dished it up at social events but for men who were weak, lonely and under constant pressure, who were at risk of diseases that could strike down a healthy man at any moment, it was easy to slide from 'rum and water, with a glass of punch to finish after dinner'¹⁸⁶ into rum without water well before dinner. Ransford remarked on his colleagues' drinking habits in Jamaica: the Irishman O'Hanlon 'seldom went to bed sober' and Basil Pourie, Beckford's clerk, joked he 'was the most regular man in the parish of St Dorothy, as he had never gone to bed sober for 30 years.' In fact, Ransford struck a bargain when one manager, Mr Strout, 'was the worse for rum'; wily Ransford swapped with Strout his little pony for a horse much 'admired by everyone'. Another manager caused Ransford to leave his job. This Mr Spencer, with whom he normally got on well, 'drank freely in the afternoon' and by supper time became 'very overbearing' to the overseers. Ransford could stand it no longer and left. In addition to disputes caused by alcohol abuse, other disagreements with their managers hastened the departure of many an overseer. William Huggins, for instance, left the Stapleton estate after less than eight months because the manager Walley held him responsible for the loss of a cattle. Accusing him of neglect, Walley wanted compensation but Huggins refused. He said the beast was overworked. Huggins quit his job.¹⁸⁷

On Mountravers, and elsewhere, managers had to compensate their employer for losses.¹⁸⁸ Anything JPP considered unreasonable or extravagant he deducted from their pay. William Coker, Thomas Pym Weekes, James Williams - they all had to foot at least part of the bills for their losses and their misdemeanours. As well as having one-off sums deducted, managers also faced having their salaries cut because of bad returns,¹⁸⁹ but bad returns could also result in dismissal - and not just on Mountravers. Walter Nisbet junior, for instance, lost his job as manager of Russell's Rest because he had produced poor crops,¹⁹⁰ and Edmond Richards was fired from his post on Thomas Mills's estate for bad management, idleness, feasting and expense.¹⁹¹ Theft, of course, was a sackable offence, too, as the Brownes found to their cost. It appears, though, that they did not steal plantation produce outright. Instead, they misappropriated plantation resources for their own benefit, such as allowing a family member to live rent-free on the plantation and employing plantation people where they should have employed their own.

Exploiting plantation workers for their own benefit was a common complaint levelled at managers and at their wives; in fact in the very first contract Azariah Pinney issued to the manager at Charlot's he stipulated, explicitly, that no plantation people were to work in the garden or to assist with the wife's

¹⁸³ Higman, *BW Montpelier, Jamaica* p40

¹⁸⁴ Pares, *Richard A West India Fortune* p134

¹⁸⁵ PP, WI Box 1823-1825: Stoney Grove Account 1824

During the Napoleonic wars, a soldier's rum allowance typically consisted of a gill or a pint a day, amounting to about three and a half gallons a month or 42 gallons a year. Buckley called this 'state-sponsored alcoholism' (Buckley, RN *The British Army* p284).

¹⁸⁶ Ransford, Henry *Dates and Events* p8

¹⁸⁷ NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton pp295-96

¹⁸⁸ While JPP did not fine Gill, he started with deducting money from Coker's pay and finally laid it down as a condition in Joseph Webbe Stanley's contract (PP, Pinney (WI) Box O Misc Item 2: Instructions dated 20 May 1805. See also R Pares *A West India Fortune* p147).

¹⁸⁹ PP, LB 29: Charles Pinney to PT Huggins, 19 September 1832

¹⁹⁰ Handlist of The Stapleton-Cotton Manuscripts, Box 2/5, and pers. comm., Brian Littlewood, 29 June 2004

¹⁹¹ MLD, Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771: Thomas Mills to Robert Pemberton and John Richardson Herbert, 9 December 1762, and Thomas Mills to John Richardson Herbert, 22 September 1763

poultry. Luffman alleged that managers' wives employed 'ten to twenty plantation negroes a day',¹⁹² and while he may have exaggerated, Mrs Stanley did engage at least one pregnant plantation woman to sell 'some things' for her.¹⁹³ Strictly speaking, these abuses amounted to theft but clearly were not of the same order as selling plantation produce on his own account, as James Williams did. No other managers on Mountravers were suspected of embezzling plantation goods and Williams's appears to have conducted a relatively small-scale operation but the allegations against a former manager of the Stapleton estate, Walter Nisbet the Elder, suggest large-scale, organised theft. He stood accused of having amassed wealth 'at the expense of the distant proprietors ... by the co-operation of under-officials of no character'. Nisbet's accuser, keen to succeed him as manager, may have exaggerated and been motivated by self-interest¹⁹⁴ but his claims probably had some foundation. He only spoke up after Nisbet's death, and James Williams's re-labelling of hogsheads also only came to light after he had died. Williams's deeds had gone unnoticed by the attorney, or, if he had noticed, he did not notify JPP. It was one of the drivers who divulged the details to the Pinneys.

Disgruntled neighbours, sharp-eyed plantation workers, conscientious attorneys and vigilant ships captains – someone was watching and willing to inform the owner of the manager's misdemeanours. However, while allegation of theft appeared in the plantation records it cannot be judged how common it actually was. The very nature of the crime makes this impossible. As Barry Higman wrote, attorneys and managers were often 'castigated as mendacious knaves who would conceal or falsify production or receipts when ever it suited them.' He pointed out that it is 'impossible to trace if they stole a part and sold it on their own account' and thought some were slack in accounting but concluded that 'It was probably more common to do private deals, rather than actually concealing output.'¹⁹⁵ But appropriating plantation produce or resources was not the only route to theft. One scam, for instance, involved a manager ostensibly buying expensive people for the plantation and cheap ones on his own account and then swapping the two lots and substituting 'the best & highest priced' for 'the low priced negroes'.¹⁹⁶ Again, how often this kind of abuse took place cannot be established. One thing is certain: a manager, if he was so inclined, could easily find ways of feathering his own nest at the expense of his distant employer.

Much has been written about enslaved people resisting their enslavement: they stole, ran away, damaged plantation animals and machinery, dawdled or plainly refused to work. It is also likely that managers and overseers indulged in their own acts of resistance – resisting their employer's interference, resisting their employer's exaggerated expectations of profits, resisting the harsh conditions they endured while their employers enjoyed a comfortable life, spending the very profits they had wrest from the plantation and the workers. Theft from the plantation may have been one such act of resistance; a general uncooperativeness could have been another. Opportunities for subversion were everywhere. On Mountravers, for instance, managers were responsible for shipping to England fruit, turtles, sweetmeats, and other tropical luxuries, and it was easy to pick fruit that was too ripe or too unripe and to pack it badly, or to dispatch the smallest and most sickly-looking turtle. From the evidence available it appears that some of JPP's managers may well have consciously chosen not to follow instructions too closely. One example may be the barrels of limes which, for two years running, arrived in Bristol 'mostly rotten'. They had been sent by Thomas Pym Weekes. In the first year he packed them in ashes (as JPP pointedly advised him: Coker's, packed in tarrass, arrived in 'excellent order') but next year's supply fared no better. Given the relationship between JPP and Weekes, the limes may well have started off their journey already bruised and overripe.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Oliver, VL *Antigua* Vol 1 Letter XI 28 January 1787

¹⁹³ PP, Dom Box P: JW Stanley to JF Pinney, 27 December 1805

¹⁹⁴ Handlist of The Stapleton-Cotton Manuscripts, Box 2/18

¹⁹⁵ Higman, B *Slave population and economy in Jamaica 1807-1834* p10, citing Benjamin McMahon *Jamaican Plantership* London 1839 p173

¹⁹⁶ Stapleton Cotton MSS 18: James Nisbet, St Kitts, to Mrs Catherine Stapleton, 28 August 1784

¹⁹⁷ PP, LB 9: JPP to TP Weekes, 18 August 1791, and AB 40: 30 September 1792

Managing a sugar plantation required stamina, initiative, a good sense of judgment and robust health. The skills and personal qualities required of managers were manifold, and it is unsurprising that many of the men failed to live up to their employers', and probably also their own, expectations.

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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