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Treasury Office: Slavery Registers

Key Stages 3-5 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850

Video resource

Treasury Office: Slavery Registers

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Eighteenth Century Records Specialist Philippa Hellowell looking at records from the Treasury. This video focusses on slavery registers from 1826 concerning Jamaica which shed light on colonialism and the slave trade in the British Caribbean.

Suitable for:

KS 3-5

Time period:

Empire and Industry
1750-1850

Our collections contain ideas, language and imagery from original records which reflect historical perspectives and attitudes of the time. Some of this language will be considered offensive. However, we think it important to show them as accurate representations of the record to help us understand the past.

[Watch video¹](#)

¹ <https://youtu.be/h8l8zG69ou0>

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Video transcript

Hello. My name is Philippa Hellowell, and I'm the 18th century record specialist at The National Archives. Today we're going to look at a document from our Treasury collection, which runs from 1547 to 2020.

The Treasury is the department that deals with public spending and economic policy. So what kind of material can we find in this collection? The material is wide ranging, including letters both to the Treasury and from the Treasury, minutes of meetings, accounts, warrants, reports, circulars, records of different panels and commissions and all relate in some way to the Treasury's core function: managing the revenue of government.

Now let's take a closer look at our document and work out what it is about. This is a register of the names and number of enslaved people working on plantations in Jamaica in the early 19th century. The registers are printed forms that have been filled in by hand and compiled into hardbound volumes, which have worn over the years. This particular document is from 1826, but registers with the enslaved run from 1813 to 1834. The document was produced by the office of the Registrar of Colonial Slaves, which was set up in 1819. Copies of slave registers kept by the colonies were sent to this office.

This is the register of enslaved people at Spring Garden Estate in the parish of Saint George in Jamaica. The owner of the plantation and the enslaved people listed was a man called John Rock Crossett, who was the MP of Chippenham. His two attorneys, his lawyers filled out the return on his behalf. The document lists a total of 572 enslaved people who worked on the plantation, 264 men and 308 women. It also has a column to explain the increase and decrease of enslaved people on the plantation, which was normally due to birth or death. There were 22 fewer enslaved people in 1826 than in the previous return. In 1823, some of the enslaved were even emitted, meaning they legally acquired their freedom. This included more women than men, including a group of four young girls with the same surname Rebecca, Jane, Mary and Nancy Gail, from ages 7 to 12, who could have been sisters.

Generally, surnames do not appear in the lists, but were sometimes acquired with freedom or baptism. Following the Act of Parliament of 1807 that made the trade of enslaved people

Video transcript (cont.)

from Africa to the British colonies illegal, many British colonies instituted registers of people who they deemed to be lawfully enslaved. Registers were used to monitor the changing number of the enslaved at each state, to ensure that plantation owners had not illegally imported more enslaved people to their plantation.

Since the ban on the trade, registration generally occurred once every three years. These registers are incredibly important in understanding the history of transatlantic slavery. Most importantly, they present some of the personal details of the Africans forced into slavery. The information is limited, but we see their names and ages and where they worked. We also have some information on when infants were born and when other enslaved people sadly died. The youngest enslaved person on Spring Garden estate at the time of the register was a ten month baby boy called Monday and the oldest person on the register was a man called Morris, who sadly died two years earlier at 67 years old. The Register also asks if each enslaved person was African or Creole, referring to whether an enslaved person was African or Caribbean born. It also asks about the skin colour of the men and women. Most are listed as Black though some are listed as being mixed race, normally using outdated and offensive terms, which we wouldn't use today.

Secondly, we also get an insight into the scale of plantation slavery. Spring Garden Estate was one of two plantations in Saint George, Jamaica, which had over 500 enslaved people, though there were dozens of plantations with smaller number of enslaved people working on the land. This was just a small part of Jamaica, too, with over a hundred other plantations on the island with plantations of over 500.

This brings me to a related document in the Treasury Department, as well as registers of the enslaved. The Treasury records also contain the compensation records for enslavers when slavery was abolished in the colonies. The Slavery Abolition Act provided for some of 20 million pounds to compensate enslavers. It's difficult to approximate, but this is equivalent to at least 2 billion pounds.

The distribution of compensation was entrusted to a slave compensation commission. The Slave Compensation Commission used the registers as the basis to calculate how much

Video transcript (cont.)

compensation was owed to enslavers. When the enslaved were freed in November of 1835, John Roch Rosset, who owned Spring Garden Estate, was compensated 8,429 pounds in compensation for the 483 enslaved persons who were listed on his plantation. In the most recent registers, this is the equivalent of over 800,000 pounds in today's money.

The National Archives holds the records of central government. And this is just one of millions of government records we have in our collection. Once information had been collected from the registers of the enslaved, the Treasury issued a payment warrant for each individual enslaver to be paid by the National Debt Office. If it involved money, then it often involved the Treasury, which is why these records are present in the department archive.

Don't forget, we've only looked at two documents on this period of history. And remember, our records are not really going to offer the perspective of the enslaved themselves, but rather the people that enslaved them. These are considerations we must bear in mind when we are trying to evaluate their significance. So this is just two of the many documents to be found in our Treasury collection, which can be used to find out more about transatlantic slavery.

Tasks

Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What was the role of the Treasury Office?
- When was it created?
- What type of material can be found in the Treasury Office collection?
- What is the reference for the document examined in the video?
- What type of document is it? How has it been preserved?
- When did the 'Office of the Register of Colonial Slaves' begin?
- What information does the document record?

Source 1a

Extracts from the register of enslaved people at Spring Garden Estate, the parish of Saint George in Jamaica, 1826. The first extract shows the top of a register, and the second extract shows some of the female enslaved women and girls at the same plantation. Catalogue ref: T 71/161, f. 183

Copies of slave registers kept by the colonies were sent to the Office of the Register of Colonial Slaves, which was set up in 1819.

The owner of the plantation and the enslaved people listed was John Rock Grosett, Member of Parliament for Chippenham. His two attorneys (lawyers) filled out the return on his behalf.

Some of the language used in this document to categorise different individuals is considered racist.

The term 'race' can be considered as a social construct (meaning something that has come about through complex social and political processes, rather than being grounded in science). Therefore, language relating to it depends on its context in time and location and is often contested and frequently problematic.

Tasks

The following definitions provide information about how the different social groups described in this document were racialised (given often negatively evaluated characteristics on account of their ethnic backgrounds) in a system of racial classification and discrimination. These terms have complex historical and cultural meanings and may not be used in the same way in all regions or contexts.

- Find the name of the plantation and the name of the plantation owner.
- How many enslaved men and women are recorded working on this plantation?
- What is the total?
- How would the increase and decrease of the enslaved normally be recorded?
- What do these first entries on the register reveal about those enslaved?

Source 1b

Extracts from the register of enslaved people at Spring Garden Estate, the parish of Saint George in Jamaica, 1826. The first extract shows the top of a register, and the This second extract shows some of the female enslaved women and girls at the same plantation.

Catalogue ref: T 71/161, f. 183

- From looking at both parts of the document what does the language used to categorise and describe individuals reveal about attitudes towards race at the time? [Clue: also see caption information].
- How many sisters appear to be listed in this second extract?
- What is the age of the oldest female listed here?
- The slave trade itself was banned in 1807. Why do you think therefore, that these registers were kept recording the existing enslaved people working on plantations?
- What information does this register reveal about the enslaved?
- What does the register reveal about British attitudes towards the system of slavery?
- What information does this document not reveal about the system of slavery in the British Empire? Explain why.

Tasks

Source 2

Image entitled 'Sugar Cane Harvest, Antigua, West Indies', 1823 from 'Ten Views in the Island of Antigua in Which are Represented the Process of Sugar Making.... From Drawings Made by William Clark, During a Residence of Three Years in the West Indies' (London,1823). Plate IV. © British Library, Wikimedia Commons.

Clark might have managed or overseen plantations in Antigua, the prints in the collection were probably based on his drawings. For further examples see [A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora](#)¹. Also find out more about images seen in our video by [James Hakewill](#)² from his 'A picturesque tour of the island of Jamaica, from drawings made in the years 1820 and 1821'. Picturesque is a style of landscape painting.

This image shows cutting the sugar cane on Delap's Estate, Antigua. Use a map to check the location of Antigua, another British island sugar colony in the Caribbean.

- How are these enslaved workers organised to cut the sugar cane?
- How are they supervised?
- What is the role of the manager/overseer on horse-back?
- What other information does this image infer?
- What perspective does/does not this image reveal about the enslaved themselves?
- Why do you think this image was produced?
- What is the value of looking at this image alongside Document 1 in terms of understanding this topic?
- What other sources, beyond Treasury Office records, would be important to explore when studying this topic?

¹ <https://www.slaveryimages.org/public/index.php>

² <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/orbis:1266998>

Tasks

Source 3

Extract of a Treasury Department payment warrant which paid compensation the enslaver, John Rock Grosett mentioned in the slave register extract, Document 1. Catalogue ref: T 71/869, n. 66

The Slave Compensation Commission used the registers as the basis to calculate how much compensation was owed to enslavers when the enslaved were freed. Once the information had been collected from the registers of the enslaved, the Treasury issued a payment warrant for each individual enslaver to be paid by the National Debt Office. This often involved the Treasury, which explains how these records are present in the Treasury collection.

- How much compensation did John Rock Grosett receive in 1835?
- What is the value of the compensation today as expressed in our video?
- How would you explain the difference in number of enslaved people recorded on the document? [Clue: 480 & 483]
- How much was Robert Sproull, also listed here, compensated?
- Why did he receive less compensation?
- What does this document reveal about slavery and the slave trade?
- What is so shocking/surprising about this document?

Source 1a: Transcript

Definitions for terms used in the document

'Mulatto' is used to refer to people of mixed African and European ancestry.

'Creole' as a term was used to describe people of mixed European and Black African descent born in the colonies often born in the Americas. Creole also can mean a language that has arisen from simplifying and mixing different languages.

'Quadroon' or 'quarteron' in the colonial societies of the Americas and Australia was a person with one quarter African/Aboriginal and three quarters European ancestry.

'Sambo' as a term was used in a broader sense as a derogatory term for black people, though here it seems to be used as a racial category to refer a person of mixed African and European or Indigenous American ancestry in Spanish/Latin America.

Transcript

Jamaica

RETURN of SLAVES in the Parish of St George in the possession of
Charles Anderson & Thomas Spicer as Attorneys to John Rock Grosett in the Spring Garden
Estate

On the day 28th day of June in the year of Lord 1826

MALES by last return: 276 Two hundred & seventy-six.

FEMALES: 321 Three hundred & twenty-one

TOTAL by last return: 597 Five hundred and ninety-seven

Source 1a: Transcript (cont.)

Name	Colour	Age (Years)	African or Creole	Remarks	Increase, and cause thereof	Decrease, and cause thereof
Names of males to precede names of Females.						
Edward Toblin	Negro	3	Creole	Lucy M Donato	Birth	
William Gladwish	Negro	3	Creole	Betsy Ellis	Birth	
Henry Thompson	Mulatto	3	Creole	Jenny Lewis	Birth	
William Gursell	Negro	2	Creole	Jane Gursell	Birth	
William Lister	Negro	2	Creole	Ann Watson	Birth	

Source 1b: Extracts from the register of enslaved people at Spring Garden Estate in Jamaica, 1826. Catalogue Ref: T 71/161, f. 183

Diana Davidson	Negro	58	African
Dorothy Kelly	Negro	48	African
Elizabeth Kay	Negro	24	Creole
Sarah Lewis	Negro	30	Creole
Elee Joanny	Negro	44	African
Nancy Kellin	Negro	17	Creole
Dorothy	Negro	50	African
Elizabeth Childen	Sambo	20	Creole
Isabella. I. Galtcomb	Quadrone	2	Creole
Rebecca Gale	Mulatto	12	Creole
Mary Gale	Mulatto	10	Creole
Jane Gale	Mulatto	9	Creole
Nancy Gale	Mulatto	7	Creole
Susannah Hall	Sambo	26	Creole
Mannette	Quadrone	15	Creole

Source 1b: Transcript

Name	Colour	Age	African or Creole
Diana Davidson	Negro	58	African
Dorothy Riley	Negro	48	African
Elizabeth Ray	Negro	54	Creole
Sarah Lewis	Negro	30	Creole
Eboe Joanny	Negro	44	African
Nancy Toblin	Negro	17	Creole
Dorothy	Negro	38	African
Elizbeth Ohlson	Sambo	20	Creole
Isabella Gatcombe	Quadroon	2	Creole
Rebecca Gale	Mulatto	12	Creole
Mary Gale	Mulatto	10	Creole
Jane Gale	Mulatto	9	Creole
Nancy Gale	Mulatto	7	Creole
Susannah Hall	Sambo	21 mons	Creole
Nannette	Quadroon	15	Creole

Source 2: Image entitled 'Sugar Cane Harvest, Antigua, West Indies', 1823. © British Library, Wikimedia Commons.



Source 3: Extract of a Treasury Department payment warrant.

Catalogue Ref: T 71/869, n. 66

Claim of John Rock Grossett *Owner in fee as to one moiety and one fourth part of the moiety remaining moiety* Spring Garden 1780
Estate Returns for 1783.

C. Order Vice Chancellor's Order dated Aug 3 1835 to pay the
 of Aug 11 1835 Compensation Money on this Claim to the Accountant General

£8429-10-1
 Paid unto John Rock Grossett
 of London
 by Robert Sproull } Owner in fee - Lowlayton Estate - 4.
 A. George }

Awarded £84-11-11 Oct 12th 1835

Source 3: Transcript

66. John Rock Grosett Spring Garden Estate

480. Returns for 483.

Owner in fee as the one moiety and owner for life as to the remaining moiety.

C. Order 18th August: Vice Chancellors order dated August 3, 1835, to pay the compensation money on the claim to the Accountant General

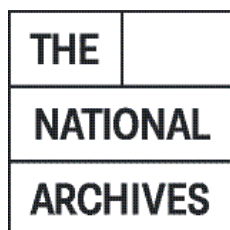
£8429-18-1

6 November 1835

Paid into Court in Walters Lois v Grosett & Sons?

67. Robert Sproull, St George [Jamaica] Owner in fee -Lowlayton Estate- 4 [enslaved]

Awarded £84-0-11 October 12th 1835



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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