Bittersweet

A

Story of Four

Jamaican

Plantations

Frances Wilkins

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A Story of Four Jamaican Sugar Plantations

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for the Historical Houses Association

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Tea Bush (Bohea variety) and Sugar Cane

TEA and SUGAR

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries tea drinking swept through Britain like a mania.

> *The young and the old, the healthy and the infirm, and the superlatively rich, down to the vagabonds and beggars, drink this enchanting beverage when they are thirsty, and when they are not thirsty.*

At this stage all the tea came from China, where people drank it unsweetened. In Britain, however, sugar became tea's inseparable companion.

Originating in the Old World tropics, sugar cane was taken to America by Columbus. It grew particularly well in the West Indies and from 1655 onwards Jamaica thrived through the rapid development of its sugar economy. This meant that it was possible for the plantation owners to make vast profits.

Sugar cane required intensive agriculture – and a high proportion of labourers to the number of plants. At first white labour was employed on the sugar plantations. The combined effects of debilitating climate and disease, however, made this uneconomic.

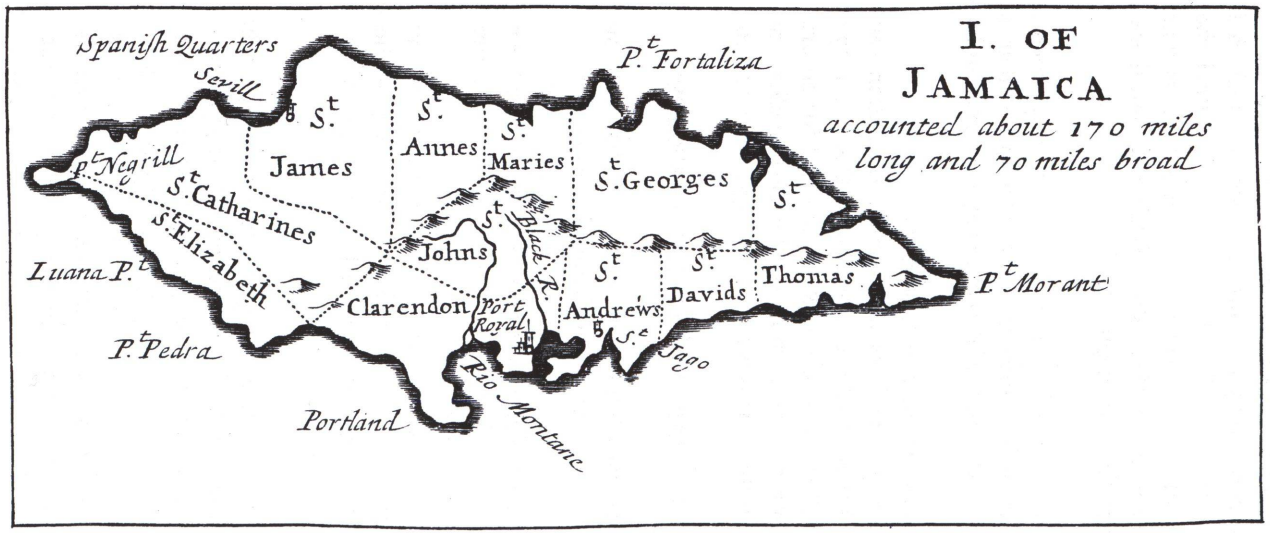
Africa, on the other hand, could provide labour in the form of slaves:

> *by the thousands, nay millions, and go on doing the same to the end of time.*

This was the impetus behind Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, when this trade was abolished.

Add together Jamaica's productive land, British capital and management and African labour and we have the potential for profit-making, which is behind the story of *Bittersweet.*

This booklet has been written to support the *Bittersweet* exhibition held at Tissington Hall during the summer of 2007, the 200th anniversary of the abolition of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. After 1807 no more British slaving ships transported slaves from Africa, legally, and the plantations were dependent upon natural increase.


I. OF
JAMAICA
accounted about 170 miles
long and 70 miles broad
Spanish Quarters
Sevill
S.t
P.t Fortaliza
James
Annes
Maries
S.t Georges
P.t Negrill
S.t Catharines
S.t Elizabeth
S.t John
Black R.
Thomas
P.t Morant
Luana P.t
Clarendon
Port Royal
Andrews
Davids
S.t Jago
P.t Pedra
Portland
Rio Montane

THE FOUR SUGAR PLANTATIONS

The FitzHerbert family has owned Tissington Hall in Derbyshire since the 17th century. On 14 October 1777 William FitzHerbert married Sarah Perrin in London. The Perrin family owned plantations in Jamaica that produced sugar and coffee. When Sarah inherited these plantations they were managed from Tissington Hall.

William Philp Perrin was only a young boy when he inherited the plantations from his father in 1759. This meant that at first they were managed by an attorney, Malcolm Laing, who lived in Jamaica.

The Role of the Jamaican Attorneys

There were large numbers of absentee plantation owners so that the Jamaican attorneys had a clear-cut role. Because they were responsible for the overall success of the plantation and for ensuring that the sugar and rum shipped home were of the best quality, the attorneys were highly paid so that this was a greatly sought after position.

Tasks performed by the attorneys

carrying out the instructions of their employer
ordering plantation supplies
purchasing slaves
ensuring that the overseers were looking after the plantation
superintending shipments of sugar and rum

Fortunately they were expected to send regular reports back to Britain and where these have survived, as in the case of the four plantations described here, then it is possible to reconstruct what was happening at Jamaica in some detail.

The attorney lived in Kingston or one of the other towns and he might be responsible for plantations belonging to several different owners. There were four other groups of white people actually living on the plantations. The overseer was in charge of the plantation on a day to day basis. Sometimes he was assisted by a book-keeper. Often the carpenters, millwrights, wheelwrights, masons, coopers, ropemakers and distillers were white, although they were later replaced by mulatto or black artisans. Finally there were the white doctors assisted by black doctors, doctresses, nurses and midwives.

In 1759 Malcolm Laing described the four plantations to William Philp Perrin:

Forrest Plantation (about 1,160 acres) in Westmoreland Parish
The land was generally rocky barren hills so that the canes could only be planted in detached pieces (fields) of five, six or seven acres in size and the crop had to be carried on mules over the hills to the sugar works.

About 215 acres were planted with canes, of which:
41 acres were in plants that would be cut next crop;
40 in first rattoons;
45 in second rattoons
and the remainder old rattoons.

Note: after harvesting, the cane roots sprouted again and would produce another crop. These canes were called rattoons. They required much less field labour and matured in less than a year but yielded less sugar than the younger plants: the older the rattoons the poorer the crop.

The hills produced valuable hard timber such as fustick and some logwood, both used in dyeing, and a little mahogany.

Although there were a hundred Negroes on the plantation, only forty of these actually worked – the others were either too young or too old. There were twenty-four mules and eighteen steers.

Vere Plantation (333 acres) in Vere Parish at the southern end of Clarendon on the map and including Portland.
This was described as:

pleasantly situated and looks like a garden with a large dwelling house and has been well furnished. But the furniture is greatly decayed and destroyed by vermin. There has been a library of books, totally destroyed by the wood ants, and Mr Perrin's papers that he left there (except a few) so eat by vermin that you cannot read a line of them.

About 280 acres in canes, of which:
130 old rattoons;
130 in first and second rattoons
and 20 newly planted for next crop.

In addition 84 acres of cane fields were leased from the neighbouring absentee landowner James Fraunces of London. These were all in old rattoons, except 16 acres that had been planted recently.

There was pasture land near the house and the sugar works and in addition:

54 acres Guinea corn - for feeding the Negroes;
15 acres overflowed by the river
except - 2 acres in plantain walks (banana palms).

Blue Mountain Plantation (about 1,165 acres) in St Thomas-in-the East Parish, which included Morant Bay.

About 250 acres in canes, of which:

80 last year's plant;
60 this year's plant to be cut next year;
60 in first rattoons;
15 in second rattoons
and 40 or 50 acres ruinate [laid waste] cane.

All the canes were in very bad order because they were never kept clean.

15 acres in the old plantain walks;
Negro provision grounds in good order.
900 acres of bottom woodland, used as pasture,
thought to be some of the best land belonging to the plantation.

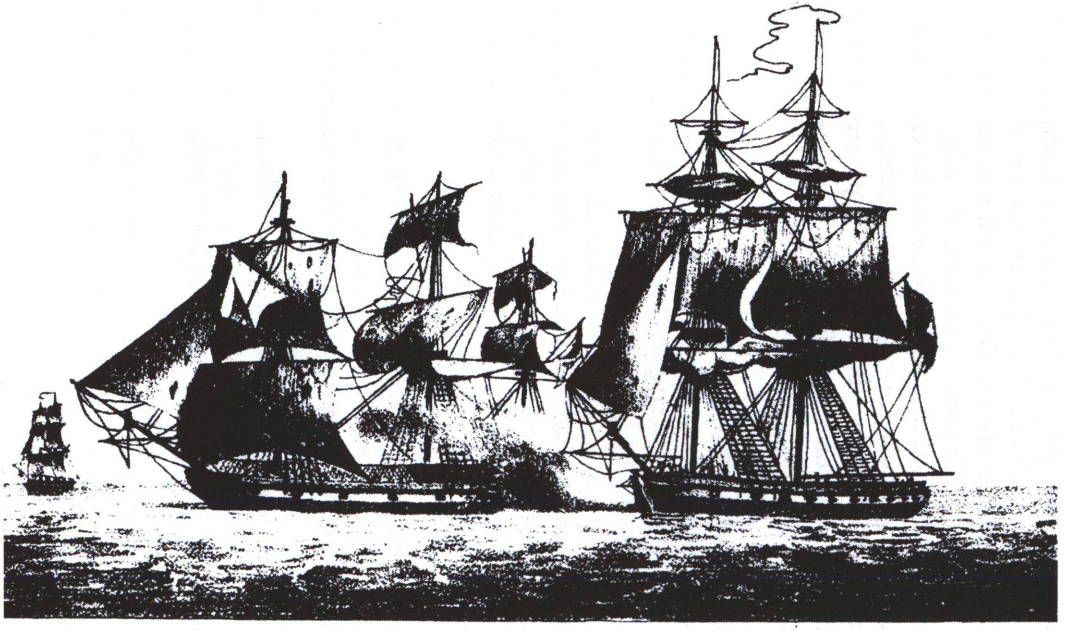
Grange Hill Plantation near Manchioneal, in Portland Parish

About 200 acres in canes, most of which in very bad order:

40 lodged (beaten down by heavy rain) and rat eaten;
5 in first rattoons the same;
40 second and third rattoons lodged;
30 planted this year upon a rocky hill for the next crop
all the rest in fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh rattoons.

Negroes in general troubled with sores.

The dwelling house was in a bad state of repair. In 1768 Laing was able to report, however, that it had been rebuilt by the Negroes. It was *agreeably situated and very healthy. When you come here you will like to be there. It is a good country house, not elegant nor has it been any great expense.*



The WILL, of Liverpool, CAPT CROW, beating off a French Privateer 21st Feb.y 1800

THE SLAVES

Slaves formed the main labour force on these plantations. As a first stage, they had to be transported from West Africa to Jamaica.

The 430 ton slave ship the *King Pepple* of Liverpool belonged to William Boats, Thomas Seaman and James Percival. At this stage Boats was one of the wealthiest slave trading merchants in the town. With John Marshall as captain and a crew of 41 men, the *King Pepple* sailed from Liverpool on 11 August 1792. Marshall bartered his cargo, which would have included cloths, beads, firearms and gunpowder, on the Gold Coast of Africa and on 29 January 1794 the *King Pepple* arrived at Kingston, Jamaica with 436 slaves on board. She returned to Liverpool on 20 May 1794. Nine of the crew had died on the voyage.

Forty 'prime slaves', twenty males and twenty females were purchased from the *King Pepple*'s cargo for the Perrin plantations: four for Blue Mountain, twenty-four for Grange Hill and twelve for Vere.

> *An excellent bargain, having had a private choice allowed me before the day of sale ... at the same price the sale opened at, which was £84 each for the males, including the duty, and £82 each for the females, to be paid for in October next. They are very fine young people, many of them having had the small pox.*

Small pox was a constant problem on the ships and in the West Indies so that any slaves who had survived the disease were regarded as a major asset to a plantation. In 21st century currency £84 is worth over £5,000.

At this time it was virtually impossible to maintain or expand the numbers of slaves on a plantation by natural increase. Yet the profit had to be safe-guarded. As Malcolm Laing reassured William Philp Perrin:

> *I propose purchasing from time to time, as opportunity offers, until the estates are well stocked with Negroes, which will be a means of increasing your fortune greatly.*

Names

When the slaves were purchased on the West African coast they were given a number. For example, in June 1770 the *True Blue* of Liverpool was in the Benin River. Her log recorded:

Tuesday, 5th June:	bought the first slave, a man, number 1
Wednesday, 6th June:	bought a woman, number 2.
Thursday, 7th June:	bought two women, numbers 3 & 4
Saturday, 9th June:	bought a man, number 5

Similarly, if they died during the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean, the slaves were recorded as a number. The same log reported:

Monday, 4th February: died slave number 7, mortality number 11.

When the slaves were sold in Jamaica their value was recorded against their number. In other words, total anonymity.

The slaves were given names, however, by the Jamaican agents who purchased them from the slaving ships. Sometimes this was an attempt at understanding their African name: Beniba, Cuffee, Cudjoe, Quasheiba, Yamina – the anglicised versions of names which still appear on school registers in West Africa.

When there was more than one slave on a plantation with the same name then they were distinguished by epithets such as Old and Young, Little and Big or by the part of the African coast they came from: Eboe and Windward; by their previous owner: McKay's or Cammack's; by some physical deformity such as 'broke back'. When these women had children they were identified by their mother's name: Beniba's Quasheiba. These slaves maintained some semblance of identity. They were in the minority, however. The majority of them were given names indiscriminately. So we have on the four plantations:

Greek gods: Olympus
Days of the week: Wednesday
Months of the year: April
Naval ships: Portland, Plymouth and Drake
Place names: Aberdeen, Glasgow, Kirkwall, Orkney, Oxford, Derby
Surnames: Johnston, Laing, Perrin, Nixon

Sometimes it was possible to negotiate a successful purchase of slaves from a neighbouring plantation. These Negroes were purchased by the attorney for William Philp Perrin's Vere plantation *at what they would consider them to be a bargain.* Note the mixture of names:

London, a capital [sic] fine fellow, who can do any kind of work: £140
Cudjoe, an excellent carpenter: £140
Cuffee, a head driver and valuable fellow: £120
Cudjoe, the pen keeper: £90
George, a field man: £75
Adam, a driver and field man: £70
Young able field men:
Hercules, Berbeck, Argyle, John and Johnny, valued at £370
Old watchmen: Dimitty & Otto valued at £15 each.
Quashieba, a valuable hot house woman (for a description of her abilities see page 23): £100
Maria, an able field woman: £80
Chance, an able field woman: £80 and her child Dido: £15
Priscilla, a house woman and careful about children: £70 and her children, aged between 2 and 15: Chester, Quashee, Hagar, Dolly, Cromwell and Wednesday, valued at £275
Quashieba and her child Tabia (18 months): £90
Cuba, a field woman: £60 and her children, between 11 and 16: Agnes, Judy and Andrew, valued at £200
Catalina, rather elderly: £50 and her children: Tabia, an able, fine woman £90 and, aged between 4 and 14, Lettice, Alick, Beck and Ben, valued at £215
Young, able field women:
Beniba, Celia, Nancy, Little Celia, Present and Betsey, valued at £455

Treatment

The slaves were a major investment. The forty slaves purchased from the *King Pepple*'s cargo in 1794 cost £3,320 [nearly £200,000 in today's currency]. As a result it was essential that they should contribute towards the profit of the plantations as quickly as possible.

When they arrived in Jamaica, the slaves had to be 'seasoned' or acclimatised. During the first twelve months they were allowed time to build their houses and plant their crops - they were expected to be self-sufficient. Once a year, in December, they were supplied with cloth, thread and needles to make their own clothes. The Perrin estates required over 4,000 yards of cloth annually – osnaburgs (coarse linen), Kendal cotton and woollen cloths. Most of this could be purchased at 7d or 8d a yard in Britain. In addition the supply list for 1760 included coarse felt hats and tobacco pipes 'for encouraging the Negroes'.

List of Supplies for the Crop in 1800

	Vere	Blue Mountain	Grange Hill
Osnaburgs	2200 yds.	4000 yds.	2500 yds.
Blue frize clothing	1000 yds.	1500 yds.	1000 yds.
Osnaburg thread	20 lb.	40 lb.	20 lb.
Needles	2000	4000	2000
Cotton check	2 pieces	3 pieces	2 pieces
Negro hats	16 doz.	35 doz.	-
Kilmarnock caps	12 doz.	18 doz.	12 doz.
Handkerchiefs	12 doz.	18 doz.	12 doz.
Negro knives	16 doz.	35 doz.	20 doz.
Negro pipes	-	-	12 gross

The supplies should arrive in Jamaica by December. Quality was all-important. In 1763 it was suggested that no more Kendal cottons should be sent *as they are not at all serviceable nor lasting.*

According to Perrin's Jamaican attorney it was possible to produce the ideal working environment for the slaves:

> *Feed and clothe them well and they are willing to set about any thing they are desired. They go about their work with pleasure, cheerfulness and alacrity, when attended to in these two particulars. We think we can with truth assure you there are not a set of labouring people in any part of the world who live more comfortably than your people upon all these estates even in these times of scarcity. And we judge this by their own declarations.*
> *At Blue Mountain we believe they are as much contented as people in that description can well be.*
>
> *At Grange Hill, finding you are increasing their strength and paying more attention to that property than has been done heretofore, they are almost equally so.*
>
> *At Vere, indeed, though contented, they do grumble now and then at the severity of their labour, particularly in a season as this has been, which requires many exertions to keep things in a tolerable degree of good order. We have helped them out with some hired labour.*

Written reports, sent home in duplicate if not triplicate to ensure that at least one copy arrived safely, were one way of keeping in contact. But the attorney lived in the perpetual hope that William Philp Perrin would not only visit his estates but also take charge of them. With this in mind, Malcolm Laing took a young slave, Nancy, from Grange Hill plantation and brought her to Kingston, where she was trained as a seamstress *that you might have some person about you capable of taking care of your clothes and house affairs.* She had turned out very well.

By January 1774 it was only too clear that Perrin did not intend to visit Jamaica, let alone live there. As a result Nancy was *now unhappy to think that she must be returned to the estate and made liable to the lash of a whip and under the direction of overseers and white people and liable to their humours and passions. She is totally unfit for plantation business being brought up tenderly in town.* Laing solved this problem by purchasing Nancy from Perrin.

Insecurity

The system of hiring slaves rather than purchasing them had various advantages: the slaves were already seasoned, they were fit, their abilities were known and an equal balance between males and females could be ensured. When William Philp Perrin inherited the Vere plantation there were 316 Negroes attached to it. One would imagine that all these slaves would live permanently on the estate. In fact only 135 listed in the inventory actually belonged to Perrin. Of the remaining 181:

153	were hired (126 from James Fraunces and 27 from Mrs Mercy)
17	were claimed by someone else, as part of an ongoing lawsuit
5	were away, working on the Blue Mountain plantation
3	were in the process of being freed
3	had run away

Fraunces was an apothecary in London, who owned both land and slaves in Jamaica. These slaves had been hired from him for more than twenty years and they included the head coopers at Vere and Blue Mountain, the best carpenters and boiler men at Blue Mountain together with forty fit and healthy field Negroes. When Fraunces died, his heirs in Virginia wanted a quick sale. Perrin was told that he should purchase the slaves because they were so interconnected with the plantations. *Besides it would be cruel to separate them from your interest, where their wives and children must be tore from them, should they fall into any other person's hands.*

The price and conditions insisted upon by the heirs were too exorbitant, however, and the slaves were sold elsewhere. The resultant economic loss to the plantations continued for some years – canes were not planted because of lack of labour and the sugar produced was of an inferior quality because of lack of expertise. Above all, the slaves on the plantations were unsettled by the destruction of so many family units.

Dr Affleck's plantation at Edingham was close to Grange Hill.

> *He had made a promise to his Negroes that they should never be sold to any other property but Grange and they all assured him that they would be well pleased to be sold to that property. Indeed it is natural that they should be so from their vicinity to that estate and being intimately connected with the Negroes on it.*

Although the negotiations continued for over six years, the final purchase seemed certain. Then, at the last minute, the sale fell through. In the meantime plans had been made for the development of Grange Hill, using these slaves. Instead slaves had to be transferred from the Blue Mountain plantation, causing yet more distress.

Twenty-five years later twenty-four slaves were transferred in the opposite direction – from Grange Hill to Blue Mountain. They were *very dissatisfied and try to give as much trouble as they possibly can.* Only three of them went to work. Ten of the others were taken before the magistrate at Morant Bay, found guilty of wilful disobedience and showing a bad example to the others. Four of the men were given 36 lashes across the back in the public parade and five of the women received 24 lashes across the shoulders, inside the workhouse. *They are behaving very well since.*

The forty slaves, purchased in 1794, represented equal numbers of men and women. In 1782 Blue Mountain plantation had been in difficulty because of a numbers imbalance.

> *They are much in want of ten or twelve new Negro women at your Blue Mountain estate, there not being a proportion of that sex for the men. The consequence of this is that many of the men go a-roving among the neighbouring estates in the night. And not only create jealousies and disturbances between one another but they contract disorders, which they bring upon the estate, the bad consequences of which I need not point out.*

The Negro Houses on Blue Mountain Plantation

James Blaw was the doctor on the Blue Mountain plantation in the 1770s. On 4 July 1773 he reported to Perrin:

> *You may be assured that, as I always have, I shall in future pay the most particular attention to your Negroes here in the physical capacity. Indeed they require it more on Blue Mountain estate than on most other estates in the neighbourhood. Their houses are situated in a low clay bottom, which in wet seasons always retains the moisture. The Negro houses likewise surround a piece of water in a dam for the water mill.*
>
> *This original bad situation and the Negroes constantly breathing in this moist, noxious air, occasions disorders such as bloating, dropsys and dirt eating disorders and infants in the first month are much more liable to be carried off by lock jaw (a very fatal disorder among the infants of Negroes in general) from the damp situation of their houses*

There was a problem over moving the houses, however, as the doctor explained in 1774:

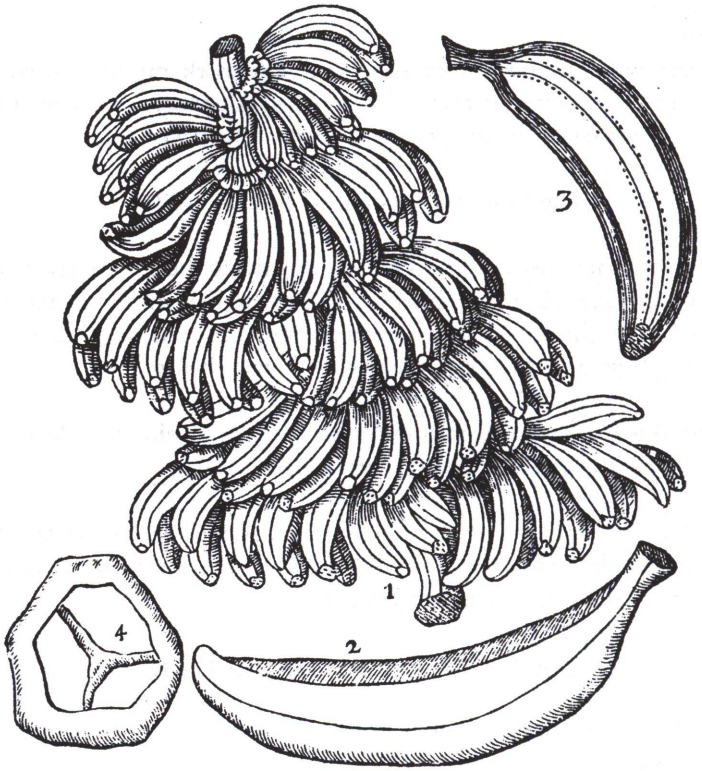
> *I have for two years past been removing the Negro houses at Blue Mountain on to a rising ground near the works, dry and healthier than where the old Negroes had their houses. These things must be done by degrees, as it makes the old Negroes uneasy to remove from their old habitation where their little planting and fruit trees are, but all the new people are removed from it.*

During this delay five more Negroes died from the marsh agues.

Superstition

Part of this insecurity was based on superstition. There was a solution:

> *You will observe in this estate's journal for last year that some of your people have been christened. An indulgence, as it proceeded purely from a wish and desire of their own, we could not in that case deny them.*
>
> *It gives them an idea that no magic in charms of any sort (to which many of them give way) can ever after have power over them or affect them in the smallest degree. In short they immediately conceive themselves to be different beings altogether and afterwards go about their work with cheerfulness and without fear.*



Plantain

Before they could be christened, the slaves needed second names:

Peter, a bricklayer at Grange Hill, was christened Peter Fisher;
Cudjee, a driver and boiler man there, became William Sutherland
and Old Derby, who took care of the slaves' provision grounds, became William Perrin.

Although they were christened, it was emphasised that these slaves could not be freed, and they could not attend church services.

Provisions

The slaves were allowed time each week to work on their provision grounds in an attempt to make them self-supporting. The main plants that they grew were plantains, yams, Guinea corn and cocoa.

Blue Mountain Plantation Journal, 1822

Saturday, 18 June: Negroes got the day to cultivate their grounds. Rain.
Saturday, 25 June: all hands the same as yesterday until Bell Ring. After that given them the afternoon to cultivate their grounds. Slight rain.
Saturday, 2 July: Negroes got the day to cultivate their grounds

Most of the imported provisions were for the white people on the plantations, with the exception of herrings.

In 1778 it was suggested that the herrings should be purchased not in Cork but at Glasgow where, although they were less expensive, Laing believed that they were of as good quality.

Weekly allowance of herrings on Perrin's estates

Old head driver and head driver	20
Head people	15
Tradesmen	6
First gang, including some domestics, and several others by jobs	5
Watchmen, invalids and second gang	4
Third gang, including several domestics	3
Weaned and suckling children	2

THE OVERSEERS

The overseers were all important. They were ultimately responsible for the quality of the sugar and rum that was shipped back to England and therefore the 'fortune' or otherwise of the property owners.

It was essential that the overseers were proficient planters, and understood how to produce the best sugar and rum. In 1760 the Vere plantation was *kept clean and about 80 acres of plants put in the ground and could not find any reason of complaint against Mr Hodgson, as a planter, and the neighbours thereabout approved of his management.*

A good overseer would ensure maximum productivity from the slaves. Any discord between them could lead quickly to disaster. At one stage there was a considerable turnover of overseers, which was unsettling for everyone. *We have been under the necessity of discharging Grant, the overseer at Blue Mountain. His peevish temper and teasing method of treating the Negroes (though without any severity) had lost him their affections and occasioned our parting with him.*

The Grange Hill overseer was 'turned off' because the *Negroes had got the better of him and he was of a timorous disposition and had them under no command.* In 1782 the overseer at Vere was 'a sober, industrious man' *but there is a want of method and proper management of the Negroes, which must be attended to* ...or else *things will never of smoothly.*

When Mr Denstone was first employed by William Philp Perrin's father as the overseer at Forrest Plantation, he had no money. But while he worked at the plantation he acquired a considerable fortune: sufficient to purchase the neighbouring estate. It was suspected he had done this by selling the valuable timber on the Forrest Plantation, and keeping the proceeds for himself. *I cannot think Denstone would continue upon Forrest estate on overseer's wages ... if he had not some other advantage in view.*

After Denstone left the plantation, he stirred up the slaves against the new overseer, Forbes, so effectively that fourteen of them ran into the woods. *They came to a gentleman in the neighbourhood to beg for them. The only reason they would give for running away was that the overseer turned them out at break of day, which is a custom all over the country, and that he kept them too close to their work.* As it was all too clear that Denstone had agitated the slaves for his own ends, no action was taken against them on this occasion.

On other occasions runaways would be punished, sometimes by having a leg cut off, while the incorrigible ones, when caught, would be sent to the workhouse for life. There were other reasons for slaves to disappear: Johnny, who was supposed to have run away from Blue Mountain Plantation, in fact had been murdered. Jupiter, an old hired Negro on Vere Plantation, who was employed as a fisherman, was *supposed to have been taken by the French.*

The overseers had to be encouraged. Each Christmas they were sent two or three dozen bottles of wine. Drink was a constant problem, however:

> *While Richardson lived at Vere, he kept no books and left me quite in the dark as to the affairs of the estate. He delivered in his accounts some months before he died and made a balance of upwards of £400 due him, beside wages due to the other servants and doctor. I believe he was honest and a good planter but latterly was given to drinking, which was the occasion of his death, and growing quite negligent.*

They were required to send regular reports to the attorney.

Blue Mountain Plantation Journal, 13 to 20 June 1825

Monday: Great, 2nd and 3rd gangs planting potatoes on Cotton Tree Piece. Carpenters variously employed in their shop. Coopers trimming fences. Blacksmith making iron work for Grange Hill. Constant rain.

Tuesday: Great, 2nd and 3rd gangs cleaning canes. Carpenters employed in their shop. Coopers planting bamboos. Blacksmiths same as yesterday. Very little work done this week in consequence of heavy rain. Working the plough opening land to plant fuel.

Wednesday: the gangs not able to do any work in consequence of very heavy rains. Carpenters, coopers and blacksmiths variously employed in their respective shops. Opening land with plough to plant fuel

Thursday: all the gangs, tradesmen etc. etc. the same as yesterday. Rain.

Friday: all hands the same as yesterday. Heavy rains.

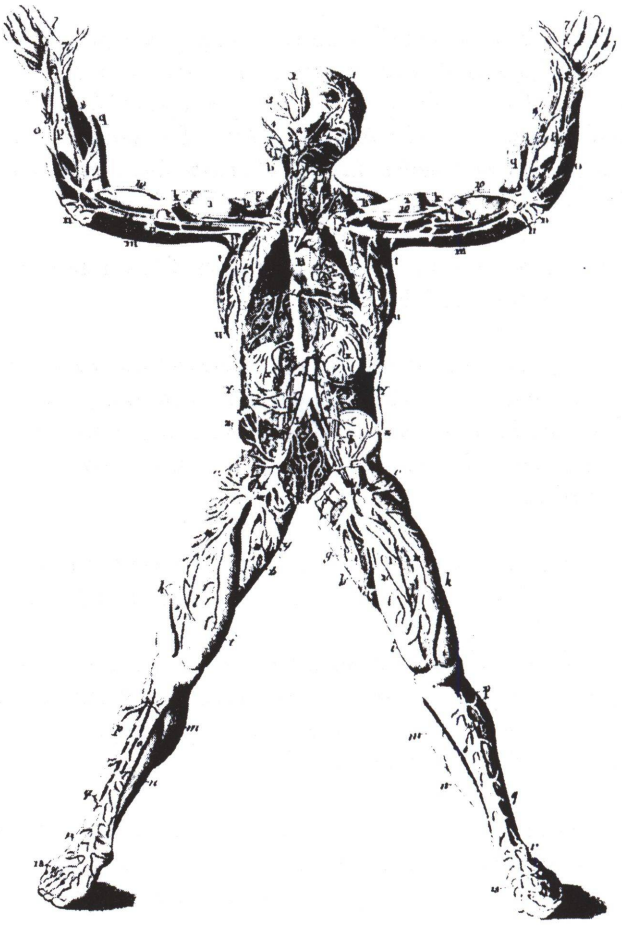


Diagram of the Human Body, 1771

THE DOCTORS

The health of the slaves was of constant concern. The doctors often used somewhat individual methods. The supplies ordered in 1766 included five parcels of medicines each containing:

> *1 oz. and 2 drams of corrosive sublimat, 50 oz. of gum gucacum and 30 oz. of Edinburgh species of treacle, all apothecary's weight to be put in 10 gallons of rum here. The use of this medicine is to give to your Negroes in the yaws, venereal disorders and for inveterate ulcers. The cures it has made is surprising, when given with a decoction of sarsaparilla, which can be got here cheaper than with you.*

Smallpox was a constant threat. Dr James Blaw reported from Blue Mountain Plantation in July 1773:

> *I have lately inoculated all the new Negroes and children and others that have come to and been on the estate since last inoculation, ninety-two in all. There was one new Negro that catched it in the natural way, notwithstanding being inoculated, and died and another died by inoculation, though indeed he was consumptive before.*

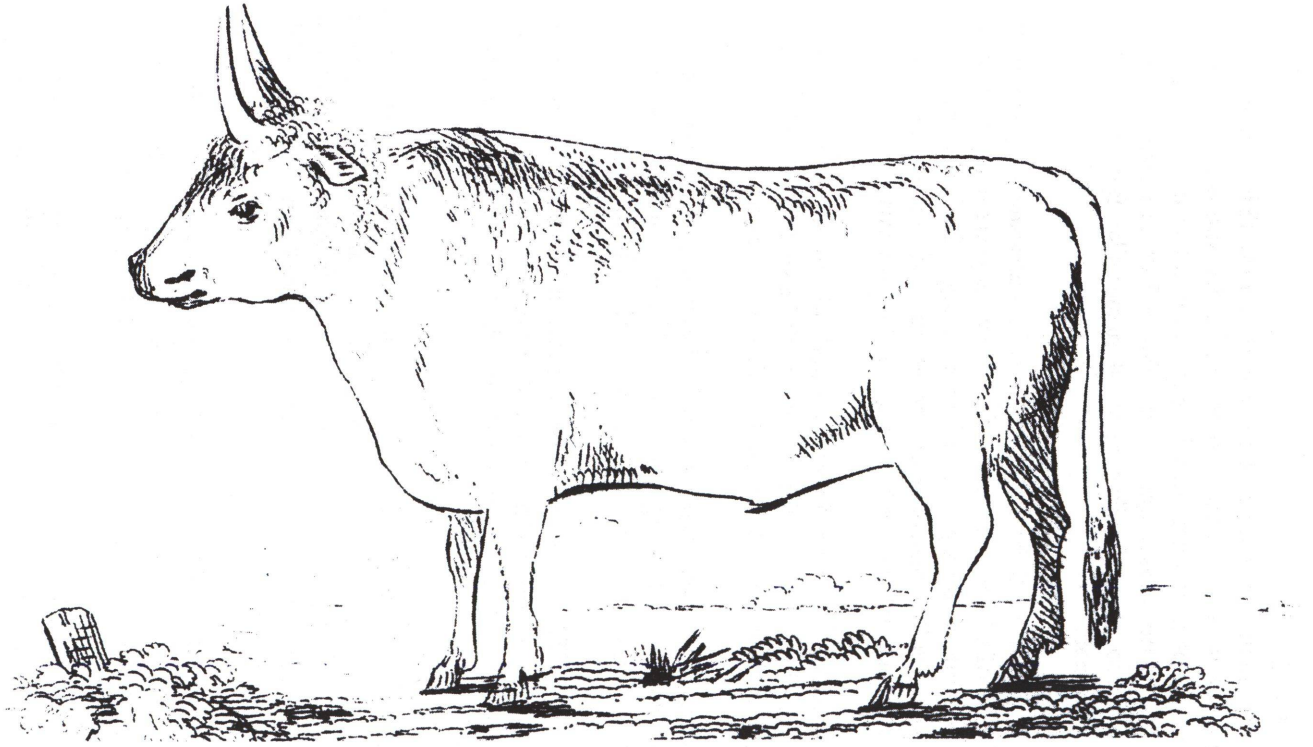
In some instances the plantation overseer took on the responsibilities of the doctor. William Munro wrote from Grange Hill in March 1784:

> *There is a vast number of the best of the Negroes with sores and old venereal complaints, which I am sorry to say our doctor is very unsuccessful in their cure. However, as I have acquired some knowledge in physick I mean to take the most part of that burthen on myself.*

Munro's treatments were highly successful and it was recorded that he had been *of more real service among the Negroes, who have got sores and chronic complaints, from his mode of treating them than our doctors are in a twelve month.*

Sick slaves were sent to the 'Hot House'. In July 1760 the slaves at Blue Mountain and Grange Hill were *very sickly with a pluratick disorder – thirty to forty Negroes in the hot house for weeks together at both estates.*

The slaves had their own doctors, and nurses. At Vere plantation Quasheiba was described as: *A valuable hot house woman, can bleed and administer medicines etc.* (see page 13).



Cattle were used as beasts of burden, in the crushing mills (see page 28)
and as a source of manure for the crops

THE STOCK

The other essential source of labour was the stock. This included mules and cattle that were used both as beasts of burden and as a source of the manure essential to maintain healthy sugar canes. The stock was another valuable asset: the beasts were worth almost half as much as a slave. They were also given familiar personal names like Beniba, Portland, Derby and Nixon.

On 30 July 1784 there was a devastating hurricane on Jamaica, the 'fatal effects' of which were to be felt for several years to come. Because of the amount of damage caused to buildings, the stock had to be overworked, hauling planks from the woods and bricks from Morant Bay. At the same time all the food crops had been damaged.

These extracts are from William Sutherland's monthly reports on the state of the Blue Mountain Plantation, which he sent to Perrin's attorney in Kingston. Note that Sutherland describes the stock first.

28th February 1785: this month the mules began to pick up. But the cattle still continue low. The Negroes poorly off for provisions, being very little from the grounds. Served them with pease and flour.

31st March 1785: the mules in fairly good order. Some of the cattle picking up. The Negroes still in want of provisions. But pretty well off at present being some yams among them, which with a little flour helps them out.

31st May 1785: the mules continued in fairly good order. Many of the cattle still low. The Negroes begin to complain much for want of provisions, their yams being mostly exhausted. It was expected that the plantains would have been very plenty by this time but scare any of the trees have begun yet to bear.

Sutherland was faced with a very difficult problem – overwork the stock so that they would either die or at the very least be unable to perform any other labour for some time or stop rebuilding. His solution was:

> *We were at last reduced to the cruel necessity of sending Negroes all the way to Morant Bay to carry bricks on their heads up to the estate, a distance of no less than seven miles.*

GROWING THE SUGAR CANE

Cane Pieces on Blue Mountain Plantation, 1 January 1785: 430 acres.

	Acres		Acres
Sue's Piece	27	Mr Bacon's	19
Macca Tree	20	Horse Stable	9
Boswell's	15	Forbes's	14
Fisher's	15	Gutter	12
Bottom	18	Old House	13
Hilsom's	17	Negro House	8
Plantain Walk	12	Dam	15
Blaw's	18	Greenwich Hill	20
Star Apple	6	Middle	10
Angle	11	Round Hill	6
Pear Tree	14	Cotton Tree	14
Cow Pen	13	Small Pox Hill	13
Cooper's Shop	12	Guinea Corn	26
Garden	6	Marly Hill	11
Diamond's	10	Mamma Gut	9
Burial Ground	13	Four Acre	4

This land may and probably will be planted with canes by the close of this year. But at present many of the above pieces are a-ruinate [laid waste].

A new cane piece was started by digging a series of trenches. A field gang of thirty slaves working with hoes could trench two acres per day. The hoes were imported from England. For the 1800 crop the orders were:

Vere: 6 doz. assorted hoes;
Blue Mountain: 20 dozen hoes in three sizes and
Grange Hill: 6 doz. middle-size hoes and 3 doz. for children.

The cane was planted by placing cuttings from old plants end to end in the trenches and covering these lightly with soil. Provided there was enough rain, the cuttings soon sprouted at each joint. When the rows of young cane were one or two feet high, they were weeded several times and manured with a mixture of cattle dung and cane trash. Rats were a great menace at this stage. By the sixth or seventh month the canes were too tall and thickly sprouting for further cultivation. They were ready for harvesting once they reached their full height of eight feet.

The field slaves were divided into several work gangs, often occupied in different parts of the plantation. For example on the Vere plantation during August 1822:

Great Gang	
1-6	Hoeing corn land
6 -11	Cleaning out the pond and making dung heap
12 - 20	Digging corn holes
21	Planting corn
22-27	Digging corn holes
24 - 31	Making fences round the Negro ground

Second and Third Gangs	
1 – 11	Cleaning the yard of rotten trash
12 – 20	Digging corn holes
21	Planting corn
22 – 24	Digging corn holes
27 - 31	Planting penguins [tussocky grass]

The Cane Harvest

The sugar cane ripened in fourteen to eighteen months. It was harvested during the driest season - from January to May - when the sugar content of the mature cane was at a maximum. Once harvested the cane would spoil within a few hours. Therefore the plants on the different cane pieces should not ripen all at once.

Blue Mountain Plantation Journal, 1785

January: began crop on the 19th of this month and made five hogsheads of sugar. In the course of this month canes were cut from Marly Hill Piece and from Sue's Piece.

February: ... canes were cut from Marly Hill Piece, Cow Pen Piece, Sue's Piece, Cooper's Shop Piece, Dam Piece and Middle Piece ...

March: ... canes were cut from Mamma Gut Piece, Bottom Piece, Negro House Piece and Guinea Corn Piece.

The ripe canes were cut by hand with bills [curved knives]. The outer leaves were removed and the stalks bundled together ready for the mill.

PROCESSING THE SUGAR CANE

Converting the canes into sugar involved several different processes that were undertaken in various parts of the sugar works, which was located close to the plantation house.

The Mill

Once cut the cane had to be crushed within a few hours before its sugar content deteriorated. The canes were carted to the mill either on mule-back or in wains drawn by cattle. Spare parts were often required for the wains and these had to be imported from England. For example, in 1800 the Vere Plantation needed:

> Two wain axles 7½ feet from centre to out; 3½ inches square; 5 inches from shoulder to linch pin hole with brasses to fit.

In March 1759 the mills at Blue Mountain Plantation were described as

> *a very good, well-built water mill but of no great use as they cannot grind above two hours in twenty-four for want of water, which is collected from a small spring into a dam, and in dry weather no water at all... a gallows beam cattle mill falling to pieces, which I am in the greatest apprehension of for fear of its falling before crop is over, which if it does will ruin the estate and we shall not be able to make any sugars.*

The canes were fed by hand between the rollers and the dark brown juice flowed down into a trough. It was then piped into a cistern in the boiling house. The crushed canes were spread out ready to be used as fuel for the furnaces.

The Boiling House

The cane juice had to be boiled within a few hours or it would ferment. A battery of four or five great copper kettles was hung over a furnace. These were carefully scaled in size – 180, 120, 80 and 30 gallons. The smallest copper had the thickest bottom and was over the hottest fire. This is the state of the boiling houses on the plantations in 1759:

Forrest Plantation:	5 coppers hung (fire wall requires to be new built)
Vere:	6 coppers hung
Blue Mountain:	8 coppers hung
Grange Hill:	a very good boiling house

The boiler ladled cane juice from the cistern into the first copper, skimmed off the impurities from the surface and ladled it into the second copper. The process was repeated in the third and fourth coppers. The sugar began to turn thick, ropey and dark brown in colour. Gradually a gallon of juice contracted into 1 lb. of sugar.

A good head boiler was the most important slave – valued at £10 to £20 more than the others. In 1806 Charles, the head boiler at Blue Mountain, died *owing to his falling into the middle pan and being scalded to death.*

The Curing House

When the sugar had cooled for about twelve hours after the final boiling, it was transferred to the curing house, which was kept as hot and close as possible to help the drying process. This was the situation in 1759:

Forrest: *the curing part* [of the boiling house] *will hold about forty hogsheads. The molasses cistern about 10 feet square, a large curing house for pots, the cistern very bad.*

Vere: *a curing part* [joining boiling house] *will hold about one hundred and forty tierces on the ranges. The molasses cistern about 12 feet square.*

Blue Mountain: *the curing part* [attached to the boiling house] *will hold sixty hogsheads but the molasses cistern is too small ... When the cistern is full there is a curing house of 70 feet long about 100 yards uphill from the boiling house, which is of no service ... as they have no pots and cure all in hogsheads.*

There was no information about the situation at Grange Hill.

On average a tierce held 35 gallons and a hogshead 63 gallons.

The sugar was put into large earthenware pots with a hole in the bottom. This hole was plugged for 48 hours, then unplugged so that the molasses could pour out. The process was repeated for about a month.

When the sugar was finally knocked out of the pot, it had hardened into a cone-shaped loaf. The frothy top-end and molasses saturated bottom end were cut off and re-boiled. The central two thirds of the loaf was spread out in the sun, packed into hogsheads and stored in the warehouse ready for shipment to England.

The Still House

The molasses that were drained from the sugar in the curing house were taken to the still house, where they were distilled into rum.

Still houses on the Perrin Plantations in 1759

Forrest: two stills (about 300 and 270 gallons), a third still wanted about 200 gallons. Nine cisterns about 5 feet square, three more wanted.

Vere: in bad order and must be rebuilt. Twelve cisterns 4 feet square. Three stills hung, two of them very old.

Blue Mountain: falling to pieces. Holds only two stills: one of 400 gallons, the other 350 or thereabouts. And can only still two puncheons each week.

Grange Hill: a very good still house.

A puncheon held 72 gallons.

All the equipment had to be sent from England. In 1761:

> *there is two still heads wanted for Vere. The width of one is 19⅜ inches, the other 22½ inches. I suppose they mean the diameter. Let them be sent by the first ship.*

CARGOES HOME

The sugar and rum were shipped back to Britain. This represents part of the crop that was sent to London in 1762:

Peter Beckford, William Lovelace	30 hogsheads & 10 puncheons Forrest produce
Albania, Captain Gilbert master	30 small hogsheads Vere sugars
La Ventura, John Potts	40 hogsheads Blue Mountain sugars
Pitt Frigate, Peter McTaggart	40 hogsheads & 10 puncheons Blue Mountain produce

The total value of these cargoes was £3,077 13s 3d.

Insurance was essential because there were so many different accidents that could happen to the West India ships. In 1761 Laing wrote:

I hope you will meet with no loss from the great risk you run in not insuring the produce of the estates on the different ships. Could I have brought the Blue Mountain sugars to town would have sold them here but the risk of bringing them down is almost as great as sending them to England, as our Island is greatly infested with privateers (see the picture on page 10).

About the middle of last month a vessel coming from Manchioneal loaded with rum was taken [captured by the French] *off the east end of the Island. There was ten puncheons on board belonging to Grange Hill. It was a great disappointment and loss. I have not been able to get any rum or sugar to market and I am greatly straitened for money.*

Our admiral does not take that care of the Island he ought. Your losses this year has been great.

BACK HOME

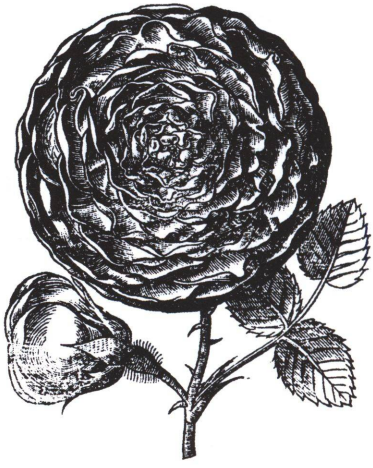
There were seldom congratulations from home for a job well done. Instead the absentee plantation owners in England expected larger and larger profits without any comprehension of the work required to ensure maximum productivity from the slaves.

They developed their theories of management from gossip at the tea table or in the coffee house and instructed their attorneys accordingly.

In May 1771 Malcolm Laing wrote: *I can by no means approve of Mr Needham's advice of picking out a hundred of the best Negroes of Vere estate to send to the other estates. They must all or none go, being every one Creole Negroes and all their families connected. Besides the risk of carrying them from a dry part of the country to a wet is dangerous. And if they do not take kindly with it, it may be a means of loosing one half of them.*

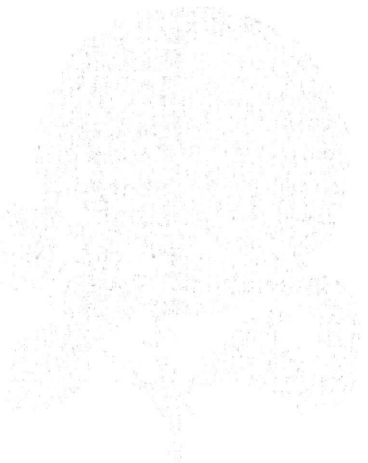
Two years later he commented: *give me leave to tell you that whoever advises you to put one hundred and fifty Negroes on your estates in one year knows little about seasoning of Negroes properly. It would be doing you the greatest injustice was I to attempt doing it, as I'm convinced some one half would not survive in the course of a twelve month. Besides great quantities of provisions must be planted and bought at a very great expense.*

Laing had hoped that William Philp Perrin would take a genuine interest in the source of his profits. But first of all his education must be completed, at Oxford University. In one of his early letters to Jamaica Perrin requested plants for the University's botanic garden. This dumbfounded Laing, who knew more about sugar production and slave management than he did about wild flowers. He replied: *I received your letter from Oxford desiring me to send you a plant from the Changeable Rose at the Retrieve* [coffee plantation]. *There is none such there. Besides this is not the proper time of year to send plants to England. In the spring shall endeavour to make a collection for you and send it by some safe hand that will be careful of them and deliver them to you.* Two years later one of Perrin's fellow students did go to Jamaica, to claim his own estate. He collected the plants but they were dead on arrival.



The Great Rose

Tissington Hall and Gardens are open to the public in the spring and summer and by appointment for groups throughout the year. For further details visit www.tissington-hall.com.



This booklet has been written to supplement the *Bittersweet* exhibition held at Tissington Hall during the summer of 2007, which year marks the 200th anniversary of the law abolishing the transatlantic slave trade from Britain. It describes the life and work on four Jamaican sugar plantations inherited by the FitzHerbert family in the eighteenth century and after then managed from Tissington Hall.

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