

Wanstead and Slavery

The Royal African Company and Sir Josiah Child of Wanstead

In 1672 the **Royal African Company** was created by King Charles II to trade with West Africa. One of the early investors in the Company was a rich and powerful **Wanstead** merchant, Sir Josiah Child.

In 1677 Child became a director of the East India Company. This British Company had made a huge fortune trading goods between Britain and India. By the 1680s Child was running the entire Company and acted as Governor for many years. He also appears to have owned land in Jamaica as documents from 1670 in the Jamaica Archives (copies of which are displayed here) shows.

With this wealth, like many merchants in the City of London, he was able to invest in the Royal African Company. By 1713 the Company had built eight forts on the West African coast, transported 120,000 slaves to the Americas, and imported 30,000 tons (3000,0000 kilos) of sugar from the West Indies.

Josiah Child as a stock holder would have benefited from his investment in the slave trade.

Wanstead House

Child began his working life as a humble apprentice to a merchant. Child was an ambitious man, and wrote widely read essays about how English trade and business could be improved.

Josiah Child spent much of his fortune on his vast country estate and gardens at Wanstead House. Great avenues of trees were planted and the River Roding was diverted to form ornamental ponds. The impressive new gardens in Wanstead attracted lots of attention.

In 1683 the gardener and diary writer John Evelyn described his visit:

"I went to see Sir Josiah Child's prodigious cost in planting walnut trees about his seate, and making fish-ponds, many miles in circuit in Epping Forest".

Wanstead House

A Music Party at Wanstead House

Painted by Joseph Nollekens, about 1740

This painting shows a Black servant at Wanstead House.

The owner of Wanstead House, Richard Child, was Josiah Child's son from his third marriage. Richard used his father's inheritance to rebuild Wanstead House in a magnificent classical style by 1722. As one of the largest in Britain, the house was 260 feet long and 3 stories high with over 50 rooms.

By law, you could not be a slave in Britain and there was no legal discrimination based on ethnicity. However, most Black servants were usually employed because of the family's connection with the slave trade, such as owning plantations in the Caribbean. They would still have been seen as the 'property' of the family.

Although black servants had few rights, their condition could be better than many poor white British people. At this time it was fashionable to have a Black servant, a measure of a family's wealth and status. As such, the Black servant would have enjoyed similar conditions to other, white, servants.

The parish register for Wanstead in 1698 also records the death of '*...Caesar Child's black*'.

Josiah Child

A grant of land, called a 'patent' concerning Josiah Child of Wanstead House and Samuel Bach about land at Morant, in the Parish of St Thomas, Jamaica, 1670

Two surveys of the above land owned by Samuel Bach, 1670

These documents relate to two areas of land of 693 acres and 837 acres in Morant Rivers which is on the eastern coast of Jamaica. The patent is a long document issued by Government, in the name of King Charles II, which is an agreement between Josiah Child and Samuel Bach.

As an investor in the Royal African Company which traded slaves from 1672 and a wealthy East India Company merchant, it is not surprising that Josiah Child also had investments in Jamaica.

Josiah Child

Josiah Child, etching about 1680

By permission of The British Library

The document declares that, in 1678, Josiah Child was awarded a Baronetcy.

This meant that Child could call himself **Sir** Josiah Child, and pass the title onto his sons.

The document is written in Latin. The figure in the top left hand corner is King Charles II.

Courtesy of Essex Record Office

Josiah Child

Memorial to Sir Josiah Child, St Mary's church, Wanstead

Josiah Child died at Wanstead in 1699 and was buried in Wanstead Parish Church.

A marble memorial was erected in his memory, complete with a life-size statue of Child.

Below him are statues of his son Sir Richard and his wife.

Sir Richard was Josiah Child's son from his third marriage. It was Richard who inherited Wanstead House and his father's fortune in 1704.

Josiah Child

Wanstead House and gardens by Kip and Knyff, about 1715

Josiah Child spent much of his fortune on the gardens of Wanstead House.

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