

SLAVES AND HIGHLANDERS

An exhibition developed by Cromarty Courthouse Museum to mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the colonial slave trade in 1807.



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I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR RETURN AS RICH AS A DEMERARY MAN

Edward Fraser, Reelie, Inverness-shire (April 1803)



Modern day Guyana (South America), formerly British Guiana, was formed from three Dutch colonies – Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice. They came under British control from 1796 and Scots were to the fore in the expansion of cotton, coffee and sugar plantations.

This exhibition uses Guyana to highlight the involvement of Scots, especially those from the Highlands, in the slave trade and in the slave economies of the Caribbean and South America.

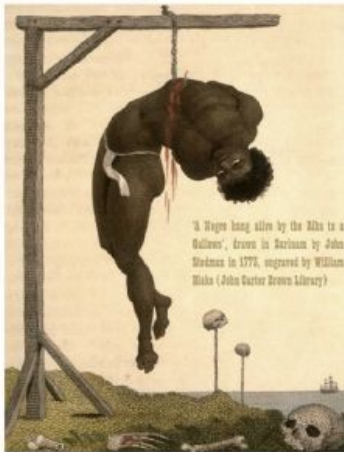
Around 1800, Demerara was a symbol both of the attraction and the dangers of the region – the prospect, in the words of the Chief of Clan Mackenzie (Lord Seaforth), of ‘very rapid and splendid fortunes’, but with the constant threat of death from fever. In 1797 the minister of Urray (Ross-shire) regretted ‘the necessity of sending young men to . . . the West Indies where the climate destroys three of every four’.

Berbice was worse – ‘a poison’ according to Edward Fraser of Reelie (Inverness-shire) – but it attracted young men seeking their fortune. Charles Waterton, later a leading naturalist and explorer, told of how ‘sheals’ of poor Scots descended on Berbice hoping for sudden wealth and of how once forty of them had lain on the shore and drunk rum until they were all dead.

As coastal mud flats in Berbice were reclaimed from the sea to create plantations – using the Dutch experience of ‘polders’ – their Scottish owners named their new properties.



- Plantation Ainess
- Plantation Ankerville
- Plantation Belladrum
- Plantation Berlam
- Plantation Cromarty
- Plantation Dunrobin
- Plantation Fyrish
- Plantation Glartulch
- Plantation Golspie
- Plantation Kilcoy
- Plantation Kildonan
- Plantation Lemlair [Kiltsearn]
- Plantation Lochaber
- Plantation Nigg
- Plantation Rosehall
- Plantation Tain
- Plantation Tarlogie
- Plantation Belladrum
- Plantation Brahan
- Plantation Edderton
- Plantation Fearn
- Plantation Foulis
- Plantation Inverness
- Plantation Kingilly [Kingillie]
- Plantation Novar
- Plantation Ross
- Plantation Rosefield
- Plantation Seafield



‘A Negro hung alive by the Nails to a Gallows’, drawn in Barbados by John Woodman in 1778, engraved by William Blake (John Carter Brown Library)



Slavers shipped such large numbers of Africans into Guyana after 1796 that it became the colony with the highest ratio of black slaves to white masters – and the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 was the largest in the British Empire. A white missionary, John Smith, who was charged with instigating the rebellion, was tried and hung. Many slaves were executed without trial.

Execution of slaves, Demerara, 20th September 1823 (John Carter Brown Library)





Runaway Slave with Bow and Arrow (Gardner's Magazine)

We will never know the real name of the enslaved African called Inverness, who was bought and sold, re-named, exploited as a slave and hunted as a runaway, by Scots in Guyana.

He arrived in Demerara in 1803 and was one of a group of twenty 'prime Gold Coast Negroes' bought by the manager of Lord Seaforth's estates in Berbice. The ten men in the group were re-named Brahan, Kintail, Lewis, Ross, Sutherland, Dingwall, Britain, Gordon, Crawford and Inverness.

A SLAVE CALLED INVERNESS

Inverness was sold to Plantation Brahan by a Demerara merchant, William Mackenzie, for about £35. Mackenzie and his partner, Macleod, sold slaves on behalf of one of the major slave traders in the Caribbean, George Baillie & Company. The Seaforth estates also bought slaves from Fraser, Ross & Sinclair of New Amsterdam (Berbice).

Before the end of the year both Inverness and Dingwall had escaped but Inverness was re-captured in January (1804) when a camp of around fifty 'runaways' - known as maroons - was found in the woods about a day's journey away. Inverness ran away again and remained free for some time. From the maroon camp he kept in touch with slaves on the plantations on the coast, helped others to escape, and was in contact with at least one slave who practiced obeah - the African-derived religious rites, which were regarded by the planters as subversive.

The maroon camp continued until at least 1810, when 100 Africans were killed or captured by an expedition sent to hunt down runaways. This was led by another Scot, Charles Edmonstone (of Gardros, Dumbarton), whose wife, Helen Reid, was the daughter of an Arawak Indian woman. The colony of Demerara had appointed Edmonstone as 'Protector of the Indians' and he relied heavily on Arawaks in trashing down runaways in the dense forest.



Edmonstone's house at Mibirri Creek, sketched by Thomas Daniell in 1808



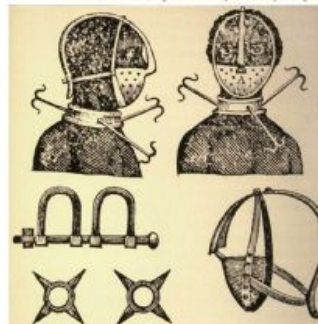
Arawak Indians



Edmonstone lived at Mibirri Creek, where he had been granted exclusive rights to cut timber, in recognition of his services. He was an enthusiastic hunter and collector of plants, birds, reptiles and animals noted for his hospitality to his (white) visitors. His slave, John, would later, as a free man, teach taxidermy to Charles Darwin in Edinburgh.

If Inverness was not one of the Africans killed by Edmonstone's hunting parties, he may have been captured and sold to a plantation on one of the Caribbean islands.

Tree mask, Bush Collar, Leg Shackles and Spurs (Library of Congress)



Evan Baillie

A perfect model of the gentleman of the old school; of polished manners and of the most punctilious honour and correctness in all his transactions and intercourse with society (Obituary, *Inverness Courier*)

Evan Baillie (1740–1835) was a merchant, slave trader and Member of Parliament for Bristol, who led opposition to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. His son, James Evan Baillie, was also an MP for Bristol, and campaigned against the emancipation of slaves.

One of Evan Baillie's slave ships, the *Maria*, was captained by Hugh Inglis, whose brother William was provost of Inverness; another slave ship, the *Pilgrim*, was under the command of Evan's cousin, James Fraser.



SLAVE TRADERS

The Baillies had been supporters of the Jacobites and their house at Dochfour was burnt in reprisals after the defeat at Culloden (1746). As a very young boy Evan had watched the battle from the hills above his home. At the age of fifteen, Evan joined the army and served in the West Indies during the Seven Years War (1756–63). He used this experience to establish himself as a merchant and slave trader in the Caribbean islands of St Kitts and St Vincent, along with his brothers Alexander and James, and later his cousin George. Evan later established himself as a leading merchant in Bristol.

Only Position of Slaves on the Slave Ship *Arcton*, 1784



Evan Baillie inherited Dochfour, where a new mansion house had been built, in 1799 and lived there from 1815 until his death in 1835 – one year after the emancipation of slaves – at the age of 95. The house is still owned by his descendants.

When all slaves in the British colonies were finally freed in 1834, the Baillie family received £110,000 (c.£8.5m at today's prices) from the government in compensation for the 'loss' of 3100 slaves. Former slaves received nothing.



FOR PROFICIENCY IN PENMANSHIP

Eliza Junor was awarded the prize for penmanship by Fortrose Academy in December 1818, the only female pupil on the prize list. She was a 14-year old black girl, the daughter of Hugh Junor (from Rosemarkie) and an unnamed 'free coloured' woman in Guyana. She had probably been born on her father's wood cutting plantation at Supenaam Creek (Essequibo, Guyana) and arrived in Scotland in 1816, with her father and her younger brother William, who was also a pupil at the Academy.

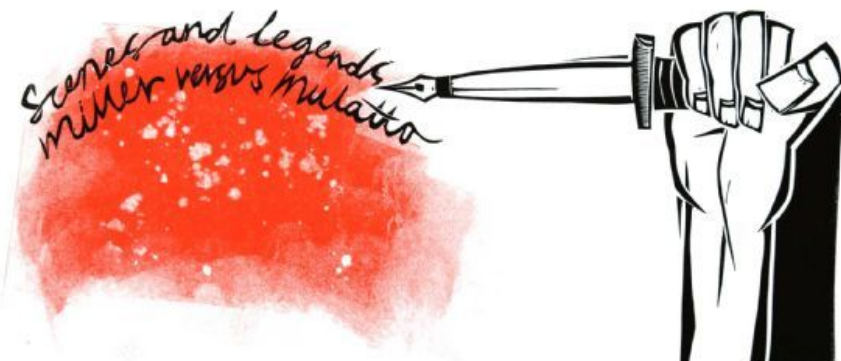
Robert Wedderburn, the son of a slave (Barbados) and his Scottish owner, came from America to Britain where he campaigned against slavery.



Robert Wedderburn.
Son of the late James Wedderburn Esq of Jamaica.

Engraving of Elizabeth and William Junor, Rosemarkie, 1818

Ten years earlier, there were three black pupils at Inverness Royal Academy – all brothers, named Macrae, from Jamaica. At the newly established Tain Academy, between 1814 and 1818, there were eight pupils from the Caribbean – three girls and five boys. And in Cromarty, a black pupil from the West Indies sat next to a local boy called Hugh Miller, in one of the town's private schools. From Miller's point of view, the 'mulatto' was of 'a wild, savage disposition' and known for defending himself in fights with a clasp knife. However, when they came to blows, it was the equally wild and savage Hugh who stabbed the black pupil in the thigh.



Inverness Royal Academy (Highland Photographic Archive)

The three Academies – Inverness, Fortrose and Tain – were all established with generous donations from the owners of slave-plantations in the Caribbean. Tain received almost £1000 from the colony of Barbice alone; and Fortrose, who raised almost £2000, received a quarter of this sum from the Caribbean (mostly from Grenada), a further quarter from London merchants (most with interests in cotton, sugar and slaves) and the remainder from India. Other public institutions, such as the Northern Infirmary, also received donations from plantation owners. In 1824 Cromarty, Fortrose and Tain sent petitions to parliament opposing the emancipation of slaves.

It was difficult for mixed race children to find a place in Scottish society, more so as more explicit racist views developed in the mid-nineteenth century. Eliza Junor did, however, remain. She died in Fortrose in 1861 and is commemorated, along with her brother William (who died in Argentina), by a stone in Rosemarkie kirkyard.



In 1778 a majority of judges in the Court of Session declared that slavery within Scotland was illegal. Until then a number of rich families had house slaves in their mansion houses, including some in the Highlands. In 1772 a slave known as Caesar, who worked as a cook, ran away from Novar in Ross-shire.



Hector Munro of Novar with an African servant (possibly a former slave), 1765 (National Portrait Gallery)



Blackhills House, near Elgin

After 1778 a number of freed slaves were brought back to Scotland as servants. Lachlan Cuming, a successful planter in Demerara, returned to Blackhills House, Elgin, in the 1820s with his former slave, Welcome. The relationship between them deteriorated. According to Cuming, Welcome 'was once faithful' but a legacy to him in Cuming's will was later revoked on the grounds of his 'ungrateful conduct' and 'evil habits'.

CAESAR, WELCOME, BLACK JOHN AND THE 'BLACK LADY OF BAYFIELD'

In contrast, James Baillie Fraser's slave, Black John, was taken from Barbice to Scotland c.1809 (probably to Roellig House, Inverness-shire). James's brother, Edward, wrote that 'if he returned to the country and there was an insurrection . . . he would as soon see his master and me killed as not'. Yet, for almost fifteen years Black John travelled with James in India, Persia and elsewhere. James made provision for John's retirement in London, he did not live to enjoy it. He died in the Middlesex Hospital in 1823 and was buried in Paddington churchyard - no longer a slave but, according to James's mother, 'the attached faithful friend as well as the devoted servant'.

On the slave-plantations, sexual abuse of slaves was common. But there were also relationships which were stable and long-lasting. Many female house slaves and 'free coloured women' servants were the sexual partners of the plantations owners, managers and some black women came to Scotland. Hugh Rose Ross of Cromarty and Glastullich (Ross-shire) is reputed to have brought back a 'quadroon' mistress (1/4 black) to Bayfield House (Nigg), where in 1806 - according to local tradition - she murdered Ross's wife, Arabella Phipps. This may well be untrue - but the story suggests an awareness both of a few, isolated black women servants and of the relationships some had had with local landowners.



James Baillie Fraser (National Portrait Gallery)



Hugh Rose Ross (Cromarty Courthouse Museum)



Dr Macdonnell

Alexander Macdonnell, a Belfast doctor, became a vigorous supporter of slave-owning planters in the West Indies and, in 1824, published an account of the condition of slaves in Demerara. He produced evidence from seven doctors, most of them Scots (Drs Macdonald, Mackay, Maclean, Rose and Macrae), who painted a glowing picture of the care given to sick slaves. The harsh reality of plantation life is, however, apparent in their admission that deaths exceeded births.

Plantation hospitals were filled with sick, awaiting operations for treatment and punishment. (John Carter Brown Library)



Their evidence also revealed that the position of a doctor on the slave-plantations was attractive. They received a fixed fee per slave and some earned more than £1200 (over £85,000 at today's prices). There were additional payments for treatment of the white owners, managers and overseers – and many doctors bought slaves themselves as an investment.

Highland doctors included Dr Gordon of Carrol, Dr Munro, Dr Noble and Dr Chisholm.

It is seldom acknowledged that the effectiveness of Scotland's universities in training doctors depended not just on positions for them at home and in the military – but also on the slave plantations.

DOCTORS AND PUBLIC BENEFACTORS

William Fraser of Goldstone Hall, Berbice, has in his will bequeathed freedom to upwards of twenty slaves on his estate in the colony. Mr Fraser died at Tain in the 43rd year of his age. (Obituary, Inverness Courier, 1830)

William Fraser also left £100 to the poor of Cromarty.

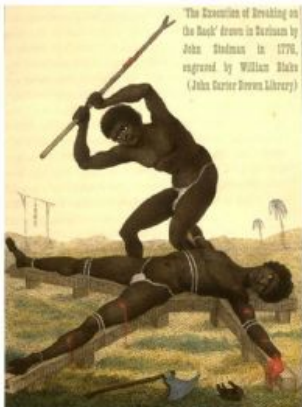
William Fraser

In 1819 Fraser has been fined for excessive punishment of a slave at Goldstone Hall Plantation. Tommy (a cooper) had taken some sugar – because, he said, he was not properly fed or clothed.

William Fraser: Do you not know, you are not allowed to go into the boiling house to take sugar? I never forgive lying or stealing, and therefore I must punish you. I directed the driver to flog him; and he tied him to the stakes and flogged him. I gave him such punishment as I, as owner of that slave, considered myself in duty bound to do. I gave him thirty-nine lashes. [Tommy said he had received 100 lashes – the legal punishment was two.]



Many other charitable legacies were similarly tainted.



The Northern Infirmary, Inverness, was established by contributions which included donations from plantation owners. It is now the NHS Forwards Unit.

