

Topic 7 Slave names and identities

What we call ourselves is an important part of our identity. It is part of how we see ourselves and often we resent it when someone pronounces our name in an odd way or makes fun of it. The Africans who were sold into slavery were repeatedly humiliated by the naming practices of their owners.

Naming practices for slaves varied, but it was common for planters to give newly arrived Africans a European personal name such as Betsy or Sam. Sometimes these names mocked the slaves' lack of power by being deliberately grand, such as Caesar or King George.

The slaves, however, often continued to use their African names among themselves and also passed them on to their children. Some of these names can provide clues to a family's place of origin in Africa. For instance, Cuffee is a variant of the name Kofi. This name comes from the Akan-speaking region of Ghana and is given to a male child born on a Friday. The female variant of it is Phibba. Other personal names of Akan origin include Quashee (Kwasi) for a boy and Quasheba for a girl; Quamin (Kwame) and Mimba; Cudjoe and Juba.

Enslaved children who had European fathers often took their father's surname. But slaves were sometimes named after their owner, rather than their father, especially if they were hired out to work for other people. In both cases, a lot of slaves ended up with Scottish surnames.

See *African-Scottish Families* www.abdn.ac.uk/slavery/banner5.htm for more information.

Things to do

Between 1812 and 1834, slave owners had regularly to submit a registration list of their slaves to the government. Complete copies of these lists survive in the UK National Archives at Kew in London. They contain the names of over half a million African Caribbean people held in slavery in the early 19th century.

The lists have recently been digitised and indexed by ancestry.co.uk. You can consult the indexes online for free, but if you wish to see the digital images of the original documents it costs £13 for a month's subscription to the site.

Tip. If you would like to see the images of the documents, ask around your family and friends for anyone who does family history; you may find someone who already has a subscription to the site.

[How to search the indexes of the Colonial Slave Registers](#)

Step 1. Go to ancestry.co.uk's search page for the slave lists, called **Slave Registers of former British Colonial Dependencies, 1812–1834**:

<http://content.ancestry.co.uk/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1129&offerid=0%3a7858%3a0>

If the link does not work, a Google UK search using the words *ancestry*, *slave* and *registers* should bring up the right page.

Step 2. Click on the name of a Caribbean country in the 'Colonial Dependency' box, such as Jamaica or Tobago. (Note that if you search all countries together your results will include slaves held in Mauritius and Sri Lanka as well as the Caribbean.)

Step 3. Enter a name in the 'Slave's Given Name' box and press the Search button for your results.

Tip. The first registration list filed for each country was the most complete one; later lists were 'top-up' notices of births and deaths that had occurred since the first registration. If you run a search on a common name, such as James, for a particular country, you will be able to see when records were first filed for that country. In Trinidad it was 1813, in Barbados, Dominica and Jamaica it was 1817, and in Tobago it was 1819. If you then enter this year in the 'Keyword/s' box it will limit your search and reduce duplicate entries from the later lists.

Tip. If you tick the 'Exact Spelling' box you will get a definite number of hits for your search. This enables you to answer 'How many?' questions.

Some searches to try out in the Colonial Slave Registers

1. How common are very grand names, such as *Caesar*, *Pompeii* and *Nero*? (Check different spellings, such as *Pompey* and *Cesar* as well.) Try too the names of some Roman gods and some royal or political names, such as *Queen Charlotte* and *Cromwell*.
2. How many slaves can you find named *Aberdeen*?
3. What other Scottish place names were commonly given to slaves? **Tip.** Try some other city names.
4. What other places names in the British Isles did slave owners often give to their slaves? **Tip.** Start with the names of some port cities.
5. Try some searches for names of African origin, such as *Cuffy/Cuffee* and *Phibba*, *Quashee/Quashie* and *Quasheba*, *Quamin* and *Mimba*, *Cudjoe* and *Juba*.
6. Some of the slaves' names indicate their place of origin in Africa. For example *Congo Bob* suggests someone born in Congo, while *Betty Eboe* suggests an Ibo woman from Nigeria. *Coromantee* indicates someone who was shipped from around Kormantin slaving fort on the coast of Ghana. Try some searches on *Congo*, *Ibo* (also *Eboe*, *Ebo*, *Ipbo*) and *Coromantee*.
7. How many slaves can you find with surnames that are common in North East Scotland, such as *Grant*, *Leslie*, *Shand* and *Lamont*?
8. Do a search to work out how many slaves lived in Jamaica in 1817. **Tip.** Enter Jamaica in the 'Colonial Dependency' box and 1817 in the 'Keyword/s' box, leaving the others blank. There is some duplication in the records online, so the result won't be 100% accurate, but it will be close.
9. Repeat the above search for Trinidad in 1813 and Tobago in 1819.
10. You can also use this website to search for slave owners from 1812 onwards, including some of the North East Scots mentioned in the exhibition, such as William Bremner and James Laing in Dominica, and Hugh Fraser Leslie and William Shand in Jamaica. Try some searches on these men to see if you can discover how many slaves they owned.

More things to do

You can get a good idea of the lasting strength of North East Scotland's connection with the Caribbean by searching the current Jamaican telephone directory online.

Many of the people you find will be direct family descendants of North East Scottish men who owned plantations in Jamaica or who worked there as overseers, clerks, doctors and tradesmen. Many of these men had children in Jamaica.

Other people you find will be descended from slaves who were owned by North East Scots and who were given their owner's surname.

1. On the web call up the home page for the Jamaica Online Directory, published by Cable and Wireless, at <http://jamaica.jamaicayp.com/index.html>.
2. Using the 'Search for a Person' option, search for some common North East surnames, such as *Burnett, Grant, Gordon, Forbes, Dyce, Lamont, Leslie* and *Shand*.
3. After you have made your search, click on the 'Switch View' button in the top right-hand corner of the screen. This will display your results in conventional telephone directory style, with all the surnames grouped together.
4. You can repeat this activity with the online directory for Grenada, which was another Caribbean island where Scots went in large numbers. The home page is at <http://grenadayp.com/index.html>.