

Christ's College Legacies of Enslavement Project Report

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Short form report

My project explored how archives facilitate or obscure our understanding of the Christ's alumni community and their historic involvement in enslavement. In order to explore this question, I identified one slave-owning alum to study in as many archives and databases as possible. The individual I focussed on was Jonathan Blenman, who was born in Barbados in 1753, and matriculated at Christ's in 1769. Blenman joined Lincoln's Inn in 1770, and eventually became a Solicitor General in Barbados. He died in 1807, and in his will, he left his property, 'Duke's Farm' and the associated enslaved persons to his wife, Anna Maria Blenman (née Cobham).

I chose Blenman because his relatively unusual name meant he was easier to trace in the sources. Moreover, according to A Cambridge Alumni Database, he donated two silver candlesticks to Christ's, evidence of his financial support of the College. Frustratingly, the books of silver records in the college archive lack entries between 1750-1850, so I was not able to trace his specific donation. The Study Rent books for this period do reveal that Blenman paid some of the highest fees to College amongst his cohort, and was therefore provided with the highest level of comfort available to Christ's students. The Blenman familial wealth came from Barbadian plantations, and thus, from enslaved labour: his grandfather owned enslaved people, and despite having multiple plantations seized for debt by the Lascelles family (significant lenders), subsequent generations, including Jonathan II, continued to reinvest in plantations. Both historic familial practices of enslavement and active economic decision making contributed to Jonathan Blenman's involvement with enslavement.

A further aim of my project was to attempt to trace the individuals who were enslaved by Jonathan Blenman – the individuals from which he extracted labour and thus wealth. I was not able to find any records from the period of his life. However, during the 1820s after Duke's Farm had been purchased by Benjamin Ifill, the colonial government started to compile a census of enslaved people, the 'Slave Register', for the purpose of facilitating compensation payments in the future. In a digitised entry for one of Ifill's other properties, 'Haggetts', there is a record of a Barbadian born 26 year old woman called Venus, who joined Haggetts between 1823 and 1826 (the date of this Register). It is noted that she was 'Removed from Duke's'. If she had spent her life on Duke's up until this 'removal', she would have been there as a child while the plantation was owned by Jonathan Blenman.

These examples illustrate how the structure of archives make it challenging to trace legacies of enslavement related to Christ's College. Even the most seemingly comprehensive databases of alumni and slave-owners respectively, A Cambridge Alumni Database (ACAD) and the Legacies of British Slave-ownership database (LBS), lack clarity on Blenman's slave-owning status. ACAD describes him as an alum and Solicitor General but not a slave-owner, while LBS describes him as a slave-owner and Solicitor General but lacks information about his educational affiliation. Blenman benefits from the absences in the databases and sources which privilege him with what I term in my report 'archival duplicity'.

Full report

Project introduction

I had a suspicion that in attempting to research the legacies of enslavement at Christ's College, my pathway would be blocked by 'archival silences' – the researcher's dead end. 'Archival silences' include absences in the original sources collected by the archive; subsequent losses and censorship; and institutional structures which, partially or completely, restrict access to collections. Although these silences are not necessarily intentional, once we become aware of these silences, we should aim to rectify them wherever possible, particularly when the obscured or overlooked legacies continue to shape institutions and society today.

The aim of my project was to understand how simple or challenging it is to identify slave-owners amongst the historic community of Christ's College alumni and donors. This Report concerns the role of the archives in my research, while the accompanying appendixes outline the historical information I discovered, and the pathways that led me to these discoveries.

Methodology

Tracing fees and donations funded by wealth accumulated from the exploitation of enslaved people's labour is only one facet of an academic institution's legacies of enslavement. Nonetheless, information related to finances and property tend to be relatively well preserved within institutional archives, making this a fruitful starting point for my archival experiment. Researching the financial relationship between slave-owners and the College offered the potential to explore legacies of enslavement across traditional and digital archives, and from the smaller college collections to the national level archives.

Adopting a case study approach allowed me to trace, as thoroughly as possible, the archival presence of one individual. I intentionally selected a relatively unknown alum, with a reasonably uncommon name, which made his family more easily identifiable in the sources. This individual was Jonathan Blenman; born in Barbados in 1753, Blenman matriculated at Christ's College in 1769.

I intended to trace Blenman in as many archives, databases, and other sources as possible, to comprehensively understand how Blenman is represented. I initially encountered Blenman in 'A Cambridge Alumni Database' (ACAD, also known as Venn), before searching his name in University College London's 'Legacies of British Slavery' (LBS). These websites serve as the most comprehensive digital databases of Cambridge alumni and British slave-owners respectively. Neither is completely comprehensive, however both are widely used and thus constitute an appropriate place to begin to understand the accessibility of knowledge about Christ's College's legacies of enslavement.

Research questions

1. Which archives contain Jonathan Blenman, and how is he presented?
2. How did Blenman's personal and family involvement in enslavement impact his education at Christ's College?
3. Who were the people enslaved by Jonathan Blenman?

While my primary objectives considered the role of the archive in forming these legacies and histories of Christ's College's connections to enslavement, it was also imperative that I did not entirely neglect the lives of the enslaved. As such, despite the time constraints of the research project, I hoped to identify the individuals who were enslaved by Jonathan Blenman if possible. This third research question is addressed in Appendix A.

Research findings

Using A Cambridge Alumni Database and the Legacies of British Slavery

ACAD consists of a digitised version of Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, along with additional information from A.B. Emden's work and the records of Newnham and Girton. The database provides biographical information for university alumni up to 1900, and is searchable by name, college, location (place name, county, or country), approximate date range, and a full text search option. Between 1940-54, when the historic biographical notes for alumni between 1752 and 1900 were compiled, identifying slave-owners was not a priority. Entering 'slave' in the text search results mostly in hits for abolitionists, in the context of comments such as 'early member of a local committee for the suppression of the slave trade' (John Boutflower), and 'An active member of the British and Foreign Antislavery Society' (Thomas Fowell Buxton). The emphasis on abolitionism reflects the traditional focus in British historiography on anti-slavery and notions of British liberty and morality, which is a legacy of the myth of benevolent British imperialism propagated by the Victorians following the abolition of slavery in the 1830s.

The LBS database offers individual, address, estate, and compensation claim searching. When searching for individuals, the user can input name, sex, education, occupation, religion, wealth at death, birth year and sources, search in the 'notes', and specify whether they are looking for absentee or resident slave-owners. The 'education' option enables searching by school, university, or college; searching 'Christ's College' generates three individuals, who happen to be or be connected to slave-owners in Jamaica.

The screenshot shows the website interface for the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (UCL). The header includes the organization's name and logo, along with navigation links: HOME, SEARCH THE DATABASE, LEGACIES, ESTATES, INVENTORIES, MAPS, CENTRE, CONTACT. The main content area is titled 'Advanced Search' and shows a search result for 'Christ's College, Cambridge'. The search results are displayed in a table format with columns for Name, Address, and Estate. The results are as follows:

| Name | Address | Estate |
|--|---|---|
| Ralph Bernal | Christ's College, Cambridge | Jamaica St Ann 455 (Richmond Estate) £5154 58 80 (244 Enslaved) |
| JAMES [OWNER: IN FID] | Jamaica St Ann 64 (Endeburgh [Edinburgh] Castle) £1525 185 30 (78 Enslaved) | |
| JAMES [OWNER: IN FID] | Jamaica St Dorothy 15 (Cherry Garden) £4779 175 30 (242 Enslaved) | |
| Robert Hibbert the younger of Chalfont | Elton College | Christ's College, Cambridge |
| Richard Lacy or Lacey | Christ's College, Cambridge | |

Theoretically, this search feature has the potential to make identifying the College's legacies of enslavement, in terms of alumni, simple. At present, LBS does not provide comprehensive records of the slave-owners' educational backgrounds. The fact that the subject of my research experiment, Jonathan Blenman, is not listed as an alumnus of Christ's means that he does not appear in this search. More broadly, this obscures the extent of slave-ownership amongst college and university alumni.

A further barrier to identifying slave-owning alumni is in the quirks of using a digital database. Entering 'Christ's College' in the 'notes' search generates only two individuals. Ralph Bernal appears in both searches, but the other record is for Richard Assheton, whose heir, also called Richard Assheton, was warden of Christ's College, Manchester. The other two alumni generated by the search for 'Christ's College' in 'education', Robert Hibbert and Richard Lacy, do not appear in the 'notes' search.

2 Individuals [4 Records] → 0 to 4

The screenshot shows a search results page with a header '2 Individuals [4 Records] → 0 to 4'. Below the header, there are two main entries:

- Richard Assheton or Asheton**: A grey bar labeled 'INDIVIDUAL'S NOTES' contains the text: '...aton of Lancashire, the Rev. Richard Assheton rector of Middleton and Warden of **Christ's College**, Manchester (d. 1800). ♂ Richard Assheton of St Ann, Esquire...
- Ralph Bernal**: A grey bar labeled 'INDIVIDUAL'S NOTES' contains the text: '... Leo da Silva. 1. Educ.: Revd John Hewlett's school, Shackleton, Hackney, **Christ's College**, Cambridge 1802-1806 (11th wrangler; MA 1809). Bernal married [...]. Below this are three orange bars labeled 'ANABODEE [OWNER-IN-FEE]':
 - Jamaica St Ann 435 (Richmond Estate) E5154 55 80 [244 Enslaved]
 - Jamaica St Ann 64 (Endinburgh [->Edinburgh] Cause) E1525 185 30 [78 Enslaved]
 - Jamaica St Dorothy 19 (Cherry Garden) E4779 175 30 [242 Enslaved]

The results of these enquiries demonstrate how searching in LBS is deceptively simple. Not all slave-owning alumni are listed as alumni in LBS, and among those that are, how the search terms are entered impacts how many results are generated. Cross-referencing both ACAD, which does not mention that Blenman was a slave-owner, and LBS, which does not mention he was a Christ's alum, is necessary to identify that Jonathan Blenman was a slave-owning alumnus.

Gender and Blenman's legacy

The identity of Blenman's wife is blurred in these databases. In ACAD, she is Anna Maria Cobham, while in LBS, her name is given as Maria Anna Blenman. On LBS, Anna Maria also lacks her own record, despite the fact that, as LBS notes, Blenman bequeathed her his property in enslaved people. Anna Maria Blenman appeared as a slave owner in her own right in the 1817 Barbadian Slave Register, available on Ancestry.com, but does not seem to have owned enslaved people at the time the compensation was awarded. This could be explained by LBS's focus on digitising the compensation records, although they do intend to include data from the Slave Registers in future updates. Alternatively, this might be because of the confusion over her name when copied from Jonathan's will, the only source cited by the compiler of this entry, which would make her Slave Register entry harder to trace. This demonstrates how human error in transcriptions also increases the difficulty of tracing legacies of enslavement.

Given the space constraints of this project, there is not space here to discuss in detail how women are often harder to trace archivally, but it is worth pointing out that with an imbalanced gender ratio favouring women in Barbados, Anna Maria would have been part of a slight majority of women on the island, and certainly not unique as a female slaveowner.¹ Despite recent developments in the historiography of female slave-owners, there has, until now, been greater focus on slave-owning men and their legacies.² While the connection between Christ's College and their male slave-owning

¹ Hilary McD. Beckles, *A history of Barbados: from Amerindian settlement to nation-state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 41-42.

² 'Where there's still a gap and some space to make some strides in historical research is the role of white women in these practices.' Misha Ewan, qu. in *Human Resources* episode 1: 'Where there's a Will, There's a Way' (Broccoli Productions, 11 May 2021).

alumni appears more direct, wives like Anna Maria, and the children or mothers of alumni who acquired wealth through slavery are also part of this entangled legacy. Future research may illuminate ways in which women who financially contributed to Christ's were connected to enslavement.

[Blenman in the college archive](#)

In addition to exploring Blenman's presence and absence in the digital archive, I located him in traditional archives. The record of Jonathan Blenman in the college archive, located with the help of Christ's College archivist Dr Genny Silvanus, demonstrated how his family's wealth impacted his experience as a student.

Jonathan Blenman matriculated at Christ's College on 18 October 1769 as a fellow-commoner at the age of 16 and remained until Midsummer 1773. From the Study Rents records held in the Muniment Room, we learn that Blenman paid £2 per term, along with seven other students. The majority of his cohort of twenty-eight paid a fraction of Blenman's fee, only 3 shillings, and a handful paid £1 15 shillings or 7 shillings 6 pence. The Blenman family's wealth not only funded his education, but provided Jonathan the highest level of comfort available at Christ's. Paying £2 per term over four years, Blenman's total study rents cost £16 between 1769 and 1773. To contextualise this figure with respect to the practice of enslavement, if an enslaved "criminal" was executed in Barbados, the slave owner was entitled to £25 compensation from the island's Treasury.

The college's eighteenth century archive bears fruit when searching for the financial records of fees paid by students. However, other parts of the archive are frustratingly silent. While numerous secondary sources state that Blenman donated two silver candlesticks to college, the silver record book passes between 1750 and 1850 without a single entry. The thick volume deceives the researcher: despite seeming to promise hundreds of pages of material, the second half of the page block is unused. Blenman's donation does not appear in the other records of silver currently available in the college archive. The absence of information about the silver donated during Blenman's lifetime means that it has not been possible to locate the specific candlesticks, or identify whether they have been sold since.

[Blenman's presence in other archives](#)

Searching 'Jonathan Blenman' in the National Archives digital catalogue mostly generated results regarding the grandfather of my subject. There are three wills, and Jonathan Blenman II's will is available for digital download (free, provided the user signs up as a member, which is also free). Both items I viewed in the National Archives at Kew were large files, of which only a couple of leaves were relevant to my research: a letter informing the Colonial Office of Blenman's death and the subsequent appointment of a new Solicitor General, and a memorandum of 1794. The memorandum is the only reference I found to the notion that Blenman might take a post in Martinique, an island which the French and British fought over, the latter holding the colony between 1794 and 1802, along with other periods. The network of patronage implied by this letter is a reminder that the British colonial Caribbean was not a meritocracy, and that slaveowners and state employees were overlapping groups who drew income from both activities.

We can interpret the silence regarding Blenman and Martinique as evidence that he was not successful in acquiring the position. The biographical information available on ACAD and LBS, as well as in texts such as *Genealogies of Barbados Families*, does not usually mention failed attempts to find employment. However, this source is a reminder that wealthy slave-owners were eager to garner influence in the governance of plantation colonies and used personal connections to do so.

These networks upheld the power of the plantocracy by enabling the planters to influence judicial and governmental policy to their economic benefit.

Conclusions

Jonathan Blenman is not a victim of systematic archival silences; rather he is their beneficiary. His reputation, in the twenty-first century context, is protected by the silence around slave-ownership in the ACAD which neglects to mention the slave-owning status of figures in its catalogue. 'The archive' is not 'silent' on the slave-owning status of alumnus Jonathan Blenman. Indeed, it took barely half an hour to identify Blenman in ACAD as a white Barbadian and Christ's alumnus, locate his grandfather's will (which includes reference to slave-ownership in the catalogue comments) in the Lascelles Archive, and then find Blenman himself in the UCL's Legacies of British Slavery database. There is a considerable quantity of noise about his wealth in human property available freely and almost immediately online. It is not 'archival silence' but institutional wilful ignorance, in the sense that to ignore is to 'refuse to take notice of'. Individual 'archives', that is, specific institutions, ignore his slave-ownership, while the LBS database ignores the evidence of his educational affiliations.

The silences in the archive of the enslaved are the result of different forces compared with those which mute the archives of the slave-owners. Considering the connotations of a silent archive as a form of oppression and violence, describing the archives of Jonathan Blenman as 'silent' implies victimhood. Blenman benefits from the absences in the databases and sources (such as the *Genealogies* and Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses*) which privilege him with what I term 'archival duplicity'. The Jonathan Blenman, husband of Anna Maria Cobham, is a successful alumnus of Christ's College who donated silver candlesticks; meanwhile, Jonathan Blenman, husband of Maria Anna Blenman, was a Barbadian slave-owner. This duplicity protects Blenman as an individual, and by extension the institution of Christ's College, from being shamed by the immoral history of slave-ownership. These duplicities represent a significant barrier to recognising the extent of Christ's College's legacies of enslavement, insofar as this legacy concerns relationships with slave-owning alumni. If Christ's College wishes to reckon with their own Legacies of Enslavement, it will be necessary to interrogate the archive and disentangle these duplicities.

Ongoing goals: updating ACAD and LBS

As discussed, currently both the entries for Jonathan Blenman in ACAD and LBS fail to mention the part of his identity which the other emphasises as the reason for his inclusion in their database. I have attempted to contact both in order to update the entries. Unfortunately, ACAD is not currently able to process updates as there is no database manager. LBS has adopted a policy of updating their information at set dates, so as to allow users to cite the specific edition of the database they used in research. By maintaining contact with both databases, I hope that in the future I will be able to revise the biographical data for Blenman to make accessible his dual identities as a Christ's alumnus and a slave-owner.

Possibilities for further research

In relation to Blenman's legacies, it would be illuminating to trace Duke's Farm in the compensation records or find evidence of the sale of the property. Either would help uncover the numbers of enslaved people he claimed as his property, and better understand the size of the plantation.

Future research may benefit from exploring the involvement of women in the relationships between slave-ownership and Christ's College, which would increase our understanding of the college's history of female patronage.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Tracing Blenman's property 'called Duke's Farm'

In his will, written in 1804, Jonathan Blenman left his property in St. Michael's 'called Duke's Farm with the plate, silver, china, household goods and furniture of all kinds which shall be in the aforesaid dwelling-house at the time of my death' as well as his property in enslaved people, to his 'beloved wife Anna Maria Blenman'.³ The Legacies of British Slavery database includes this information in their entry for Jonathan Blenman II.

Despite this bequest, Anna Maria Blenman appears in the Slave Register of 1817 as the owner of one enslaved person, a fifty-five year old woman named Melia.⁴ Although sometimes owners of multiple plantations would have separate entries for each plantation in the register of the same year, I was only able to find Anna Maria Blenman in one entry, and in the one register year. Then, between 1817 and 1820, Melia was also sold, died, manumitted, or escaped, although as 'absent' enslaved people were still included, it seems more likely that Melia was sold or died. I checked some of the other 1820 hits generated by Ancestry.com in a search for 'Melia' in Barbados slave registers but was unable to find any who the register indicated had been purchased in the preceding 3 years.

Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834 for Melia
Barbados > ALL > 1817, Part 01

| | | <i>The Return of Mr. Robert Hardy, of Slaves, the Property of Miss Martha Beauford, to whom Mr. R. Hardy is Attorney.</i> | | | | | | |
|----|--------|---|---|--------|----------|-------------|-------|-----------|
| t. | Age. | Country. | Name. | Sex. | Colour. | Employment. | Age. | Country. |
| | 14 | Barbadian | Mary A. Beauford | Female | Coloured | Washes | 25 | Barbadian |
| | | | Franky | do | Black | Laundress | 23 | do |
| | | | Mary | do | do | do | 21 | do |
| | | | Lucy Ann | do | do | Washes | 15 | do |
| | 23 | African | Sarah Ann | do | do | | 1 | do |
| | 10 Mos | Barbadian | William Edward | Male | do | | 8 | do |
| | 22 | do | Henry | do | do | | 3 | do |
| | 3 | do | James | do | do | | 3 mos | do |
| | | | John | do | do | | 4 | do |
| | | | <i>The Return of Francis & Barron of a Slave the Property of Ann C. Barron (attorney) of whom he is the natural Guardian.</i> | | | | | |
| | 7 | Barbadian | Sarah Christian | Female | Coloured | Washes | 20 | Barbadian |
| | | | <i>The Return of Philip Leddell of a Slave the Property of Miss Anne Maria Blenman, to whom he is constituted Attorney.</i> | | | | | |
| | 54 | Barbadian | Melia | Female | Black | | 55 | Barbadian |
| | 15 | do | | | | | | |
| | 7 | do | | | | | | |

Evidently, at some point in the decade between inheriting her husband's estate and enslaved people in 1807, and the first Barbadian slave register, Anna Maria must have sold her inherited property. This realisation prompted the question of who took ownership of Duke's Farm and the enslaved people who lived there, and who received compensation in the 1830s.

Despite quoting 'Duke's Farm' from Blenman's will, searching for 'Duke's' in the LBS website's estate feature fails to pull up a plantation of that name. Removing the apostrophe and instead entering

³ PROB 11/1478/270; The National Archives, Kew.

⁴ The National Archives, Kew; Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Records; Class: T 71; Piece Number: 520. 1817 Barbados, part 1. [https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1129/images/CSUK1817_133760-00039].

'Dukes' in the 'Estates' search bar, generates one result: 'Dukes or Bellair' in the adjacent parish of Saint Thomas.⁵ The discrepancy in parish does not necessarily mean that the estate in question is not the one left by Blenman to his wife – as portions of land were often sold and bought, estates frequently shifted in size and location. The 'Dukes or Bellair' estate was ultimately processed as compensation claim Barbados 2214 by Benjamin Ifill, who was awarded £2512 17s 3d.⁶

According to LBS, the Slave Registers of 1817 and 1826, both name Dukes as a plantation owned by Benjamin Ifill, with 88 and 87 enslaved people in each year respectively.⁷ Unfortunately, these specific sections of the slave register have not been digitised. In the 1826 register, I located an entry for another plantation owned by Benjamin Ifill, known as Haggets.⁸ In the column explaining increase and decrease of enslaved numbers, there is a note indicating that a 26 year old Barbadian female named 'Venus' was 'removed from Dukes' to join the labour force at Haggets. Ancestry.com, host of the records, transcribed her name as 'Venns', although it might be better interpreted as 'Venus'. With a birth year of c. 1800, assuming she lived her first 26 years at the Dukes plantation, she would have been there whilst it was owned by Jonathan Blenman. Thus, Venus is the first named enslaved person I have been able to find within the archive who was owned by Jonathan Blenman.

| Increase. | Decrease. | Male. | Female. | Names. | Age. | Colour. | Country. | Total. |
|-----------|-----------|-------|---------|-----------|-------|----------|-----------|--------|
| | | 1 | | Jeff | 32 | Black | Barbadian | |
| | | 1 | | William | 34 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Tom | 31 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | David | 11 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Sammy Sam | 10 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Henry | 3 1/2 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Poon | 42 | do | do | |
| | | 7 | | Hester | 39 | do | African | |
| | | 1 | | Phidolia | 51 | do | Barbadian | |
| | | 1 | | Peruda | 20 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Kitty | 33 | do | do | |
| | | 1 | | Venus | 26 | coloured | do | |
| | | 1 | | Charlotte | 31 | Black | do | |

Removed from Dukes

Before finding the information connecting Duke's Plantation to the Ifill family, I had already hypothesised that the 'Duke's Farm' plantation might have been owned by the Duke family before Jonathan Blenman. Then, after having identified Dukes on the LBS database, my suspicions were confirmed, as LBS list William Duke as the estate's owner in 1746.⁹ The Blenman and Duke families

⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/737> [accessed 20/08/2021].

⁶ Barbados 2214 (Dukes or Bell'air)', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/5262> [accessed 23rd August 2021].

⁷ T71/522 186-8; T 71/538 85-6.

⁸ Benjamin Ifill received £5,433 10s 10d compensation for Haggets (claim Barbados 4502), as well as a further £217 9s 11d for 13 enslaved people (Barbados 1285) and £2406 1s 4d for Harrisons plantation (Barbados 5197).

⁹ 'Dukes or Bell'air [Barbados | St Thomas]', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/737> [accessed 23rd August 2021]; <http://creolelinks.com/barbados-plantation-history.html#stthomas>.

shared a history in Barbados: William Duke had been a protégé of the earlier Jonathan Blenman – slaveowner, Barbados Attorney General, and Jonathan Blenman II’s grandfather.¹⁰

My first archival encounter with the Duke family came via another route. Attempting to understand how a Barbadian slave-owner like Jonathan Blenman might have justified and rationalised enslavement in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, I arranged to view a pamphlet arguing in defence of slavery written by the curate of Saint Michael’s parish in 1788. Jerome Handler, who discussed these writings for his 2006 article in the *Journal of Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, stated that the Wren Library at Trinity College contained the single extant copy. Advertised in the Barbadian Gazette’s 17-19 March 1788 issue, by the 12-16 April, the writer announced that he had received enough orders to begin printing.¹¹ The writer was John Duke, a curate in his early thirties when the tract was published. Handler outlines that John Duke was a member of a prominent Barbadian family including William Duke, clerk of the Assembly (1735-1765) and perhaps the elder Blenman’s protégé, and his eldest son William Duke, rector of St Thomas (1758-1786) and the owner of Duke’s Plantation in St Thomas.¹² Although Handler does not outline the specific relationship between William Duke Jr and John Duke, we can speculate that his defence of Barbadian enslavement practices was informed by his family’s ownership of enslaved people at Duke’s Plantation. It is also likely that as curate of Jonathan Blenman’s parish church, John Duke’s defence of slavery may have influenced or reinforced Blenman’s own convictions.

John Duke’s tracts responded to Parliamentary discussions about the Abolition Bill. He claimed almost total disinterest, stating ‘I have no other motive than to remove many of those Prejudices, which have hastily been taken up against the Owners of Negroes in these Western Colonies’.¹³ His arguments included the religious and the economic. Duke claimed that the African was ‘the Creature formed, apparently by the Hand of Providence, for the Service of his fellow Men’. Duke simultaneously dismissed the manhood of Africans by asserting their status as servile ‘creatures’ and evoking a *paternal or moral something something* by describing the slave-owner as the enslaved African’s ‘fellow Men’. Duke also made the common argument that without enslaved Africans, the economy of the colony would collapse, asking ‘of what Value will our Lands be, *if we are deprived of the necessary Means of cultivating them*’?

Where it has not proved possible to find archival documentation of neither Jonathan Blenman’s thoughts about slavery nor records of individual enslaved people, turning to other owners of the same plantation more visible in the archive has illuminated this history. The Duke family provided a proxy for understanding the culture of Barbadian slave-owners in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century St Michael and Saint Thomas. Similarly, tracing the archival legacies of the Ifills, who owned the plantation during the period of centralised records creation, reveals some sparse data about the enslaved individuals who worked at Duke’s Farm.

¹⁰ S.D. Smith, *Slavery, Family and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 68-70.

¹¹ Jerome S. Handler, ‘A rare tract in defense of slavery in Barbados: the thoughts of the Rev. John Duke, Curate of St Michael’, *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 1.1, (2005), 58-65.

¹² Handler, p. 63.

¹³ John Duke, *Two letters on the treatment of negroes, in the island of Barbadoes; together with some observations on slavery, addressed to the Rev. Thomas Lyttleton, of London*, (Barbados: printed by Thomas-Wilmott Perch, 1788).

Appendix B: Tracing Blenman's children

The family tree in James Brandow's *Genealogies of Barbados families* lists four children for Jonathan Blenman II and his wife, Anna Maria Cobham.¹⁴ According to Brandow, the eldest, Jonathan, was born in 1786, followed by Timothy, Anna Maria, and John Cobham Blenman. Jonathan matriculated at Christ Church College Oxford in 1802 and followed his father to Lincoln's Inn, where he was called to the Bar on 4 July 1808.¹⁵

Familysearch.com holds the baptism records for the Blenman children and reveals some inaccuracies with the dates on the family tree in *Genealogies*. Jonathan was baptised 11 January 1785.¹⁶ John Cobham Blenman was baptised 16 April 1798 following his birth on the 22 March 1798, and Anna Maria on 30 May 1794 having been born on 24 February. I was unable to trace the Baptism record for Timothy in the microfilm. The Parish register also includes a record for Elizabeth Blenman, born on the 20 November 1792 and baptised 15 December 1792, who does not appear on Brandow's family tree.

Jonathan Blenman did not name his children in his will, and none of the five aforementioned individuals are listed on the Legacies of British Slavery database. Searching the surname 'Blenman' generates five results: Jonathan Blenman II; Jonathan's father, William; William's brother, Timothy; Richard; and Rebecca. The latter two appeared as slave owners in the Slave Register, and are both listed there with the note "fm" in brackets, which LBS explains refers to 'free mulatto', the term used for a person with one white and one black parent.

The screenshot shows the website for the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at UCL. The search results for 'Blenman' are as follows:

| Name |
|---------------------|
| Jonathan Blenman II |
| Rebecca Blenman |
| Richard Blenman |
| Timothy Blenman |
| William Blenman |

¹⁴ James C. Brandow, *Genealogies of Barbados families: from Caribbeana and the Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983), p. 178.

¹⁵ Joseph Foster, *Alumni oxonienses: the members of the University of Oxford, 1715-1886; their parentage, birthplace and year of birth, with a record of their degrees* (Oxford: Parker, 1888), p. 123 [accessed <https://archive.org/details/alumnioxonienses01univuoft/page/n7/mode/2up?q=BLENMAN>]; *Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn: Black Books Volume IV, 1776-1845*, (London: Lincoln's Inn, 1902), p. 244 [accessed <https://archive.org/details/VOL417761845/page/n2/mode/1up?q=blenman>].

¹⁶ "Barbados Baptisms, 1739-1891", database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XLP9-3BQ>; 29 January 2020), Jonathan Blenman, 1785.

The biographical information about Rebecca provided on LBS is brief: 'Owner of two enslaved people in Barbados in 1829. Listed in the slave register as "fm" ("free mulatto").'¹⁷ I located the entry for Rebecca Blenman in the 1829 slave register referenced on LBS, allowing me to identify that she had owned three slaves, but the individual named Mumbah Nancy had died.¹⁸ Rebecca Blenman also appeared in the 1832 and 1834 registers, where she registers more enslaved people. In 1832, Rebecca registered five enslaved people, none of which she registered in the previous year: two adult women, named Peggy and Mahelah; and three children, ten year old William Henry, five year old Sam Thomas, and ten-twelve month old Mercy Patience.¹⁹ With five enslaved people in 1834, Rebecca Blenman would most likely have received a compensation payment from the British Government, although this is not included in her LBS record.



When researching the Blenmans on Familysearch.com and Ancestry.com, I was only able to find one Blenman family. Although I could not find the baptism records for Richard and Rebecca, there is a possibility that they were the children of Jonathan Blenman and an enslaved woman. Rebecca Blenman's burial is registered in the Saint Michael parish burial records on 7 October 1841.²⁰ Her age at death was recorded as 61 years, thus she would have been born c. 1779-1780. At the time of her birth, Jonathan Blenman would have been twenty-seven years old, and his father owned Cooper's Hill (or Walwyn's) in Barbados as well as Messepotamia [sic] in Tobago.

Children born to enslaved mothers were legally the property of the enslaved mother's owner, regardless of their father. According to Hilary Beckles, in eighteenth century Barbados, some white men manumitted their mixed race offspring, but rarely their enslaved mothers, when the children reached adulthood.²¹ Rebecca Blenman might have been freed in this way, and then become a slave-owner herself.

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¹⁷ 'Rebecca Blenman', Legacies of British Slavery database, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146661519> [accessed 23rd August 2021].

¹⁸ T71/540 102.

¹⁹ The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Records; Class: T 71; Piece Number: 547 [https://www.ancestry.co.uk/imageviewer/collections/1129/images/CSUK1817_133769-00406].

²⁰ "Barbados Church Records, 1637-1887," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RS5-9K2?cc=1923399&wc=M6PQ-FZ3%3A218217901%2C218217802%2C218354401> : 20 May 2014), St Michael > Church of England > Burials 1836-1848 > image 30 of 219; Department of Archives, Blackrock, p. 353.

²¹ Hilary McD. Beckles, *A history of Barbados: from Amerindian settlement to nation-state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 64-67.

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