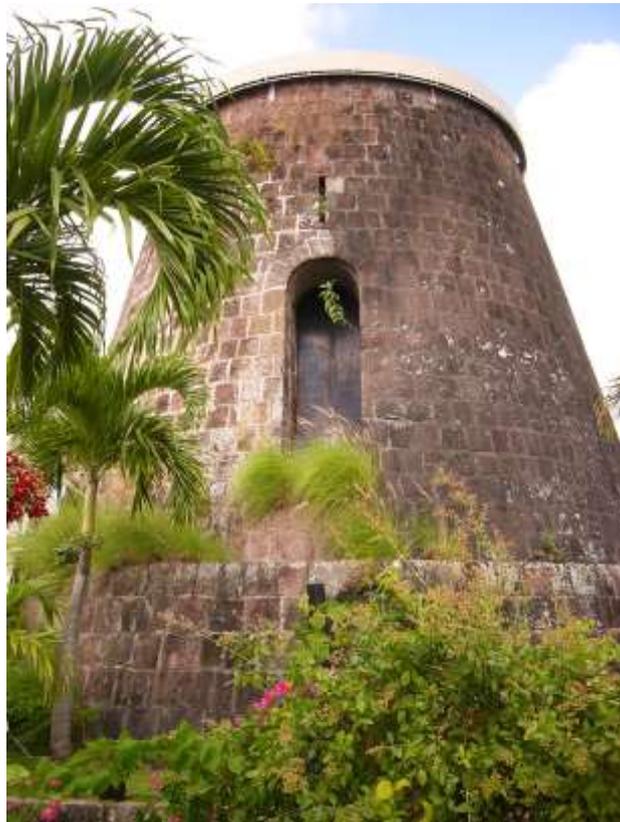


Montpelier Estate

St John Figtree Nevis

Contrasting Legacies on a Sugar Plantation



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Montpelier Estate, St John Figtree, Nevis

Contrasting Legacies on a Sugar Plantation

Introduction

Montpelier Estate, in the parish of St John Figtree on the West Indian island of Nevis, is known today as the location of an internationally renowned plantation inn. It was purchased by the Hoffman family in 2002 from the previous owner Mr James Milnes Gaskell. A sign on the gateposts of the house site, across the road from the inn, reminds visitors to the island that the estate is where Captain Horatio Nelson, in the mid-1780s, met and married Frances Nisbet, the niece of the owner John Richardson Herbert. Although interest in Nelson may have been beneficial to the island's tourism industry, the focus on Nelson has tended to obscure the real history of the estate as a sugar plantation in the days of slavery. This account has come about because of the late Lincoln Hoffman's desire to produce a more balanced version of the estate's history.

The ownership of the land on which the inn now stands is unclear in the seventeenth century. However, in the early nineteenth century the name given to the estate in the slave registers was 'Clark's¹ or Montpelier and Stapletons' (1817).² This can be linked to purchases of land in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It seems that in 1772 the President of the island Council, John Richardson Herbert, bought from a mariner, Joseph Clarke, an estate of 50 acres. Immediately to the East of it he bought, in 1776, a 58-acre estate 'known by the name of Stapleton's Plantation' on which he appears to have been living previously. These two purchases may form the heart of the estate now known as Montpelier. As will be seen from the following account, this hypothesis needs to be tested through further research in the land records on Nevis, in the process seeking to track the properties owned by John Richardson Herbert back into the seventeenth century.

One other point to stress is that the history of Montpelier can really only be understood by seeing the estate as the domestic, residential and, to a lesser extent, agro-industrial centre of a linked group of estates built up by Herbert in the late eighteenth century. This nexus continued for at least 150 years.

Maps and plans

The modern plantation inn is situated around the old windmill and sugar works, on the south side of a public road running southwest from Pond Hill on the western flank of Saddle Hill. Some tens of metres to the west, on the northern side of the road, is the reputed site of the estate's 'Mansion'. The clearest description of the location and boundaries of 'Montpellier' is given in a sale notice published in St Kitts and dated 24 August 1836:

¹ This Clark's or Clarke's estate is not to be confused with an estate called 'Clark's' of 45 acres, also in St John Figtree, owned by John Mills in the 1770s or with Clarke's Estate in St Thomas Lowland, now part of the Four Seasons land.

² 'Clark's or Montpelier and Stapletons' in 1817 and 1822, 'Clarke's or Montpelier and Stapletons' in 1825, 'Clarke's or Montpelier' in 1828, 'Montpelier' in 1831 and 1834. Since the relevant owner's name was spelt *Clarke*, and that is the most common usage, the name of the plantation has generally been given as 'Clarke's' in this account.

‘Lot 1 All that plantation or estate, called Montpelier, situate, lying and being in the Parish of Saint John, Figtree, in the Island of Nevis, abutted and bounded as follows – to the north and north west by lands of the heirs or representatives of the late Lord Le de Spencer [later in the notice described as ‘Low Ground’], on the south with an estate called Budgen’s, on the east by an estate called Clay Gut, containing about 79A. 3R. 21P. of cane land, be the same more or less, and about 50A of pasture land...’³

It is possible that the estate appears on the 1758 Bellin map of Nevis. In 1848 a works site called ‘Upper Clarke Mill’ is shown in the right general location on the relatively accurate survey of the island by Captain Edward Barnett of *HMS Thunder*. To the west of it, although perhaps rather further away than indicated on the ground, is shown the mansion of ‘Montpelier’. Interestingly, the survey indicates a settlement close by on the east side of the works.⁴ An 1858 map of Nevis by J Parson shows the works, this time named ‘Clark’s’, and the settlement. It also appears to show the estate ‘Low Ground’ immediately to the north. On the sometimes inaccurate Iles map of 1871 the works are called ‘Montpelier’ and the ‘Mansion’ is shown across the road.⁵ The War Office map of 1920, brought up to date by Major J A Burdon, Administrator of the Presidency, shows ‘Montpelier’, without mention of ‘Clarke’s’, on the north side of the road as one of the ‘Inhabited Estate Houses or Estate Works in use’.⁶

The records held in the Supreme Court Registry, in the Courthouse in Charlestown, hold numbers of estate plans from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the authors were surveying these court records for a British Library ‘Endangered Archives’ project in 2008 there was an opportunity to find a plan of the estate, if it existed. Unfortunately, it seems that no plan of the estate has been retained among those records, although there must have been survey plans drawn at various times, either for the transfer of property or for the purposes of managing the estate.⁷ Indeed, James Milnes Gaskell refers to a survey carried out by his surveyor, Steele Douglas, in 1964.

³ *London Gazette* 11 October 1836 quoting *Saint Christopher Gazette and Caribbean Courier* 26 August 1836, courtesy of Brian Littlewood

⁴ *West Indies Leeward Islands, St Christopher and Nevis Surveyed by Capt. Edwd. Barnett RN...* April 1848, published 1864, corrected 1868

⁵ Iles, John Alexander Burke *Map of the Island of Nevis* 1871

⁶ Burdon, Major J A *The Presidency of St. Kitts and Nevis* 1 inch : 2 miles, War Office, 1920

⁷ Mr Simeon Hill of Hills Survey, who in 2008 was digitising estate plans for the Nevis Island Administration, stated that he too had not found a plan.



Fig. 1: Saint Kitts and Nevis, courtesy of the Nevis Tourist Office

The Herbert family

Any account of 'Clark's or Montpelier and Stapletons' estate is dominated by the commanding presence of John Richardson Herbert, President of the Island Council for twenty-five years, protector of unpopular naval captains and wealthy merchant planter. Because of the Nelson connection historians have investigated the origins of Herbert's family on Nevis; not all of this work has necessarily been clearly sourced or accurate.

According to a biography of Nelson by Carola Oman, the Herbert family on Nevis was descended from Philip, fourth Earl of Pembroke and 1st Earl of Montgomery, a favourite of James I from whom they got grants of land in the West Indies. Oman states that it was J R Herbert's grandfather, James, who moved to Nevis and built Pembroke Lodge with his coat-of-arms above the entrance gateway. J R Herbert, the grandson, built Montpelier which was described by Oman as 'something palatial in the style of his day' with no expense spared in the furnishing.⁸ Since Oman did not footnote the account it is unclear where this story came from. It has been repeated a number of times since in biographies of Frances Nisbet and her husband. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* does indeed state that Philip Herbert received in February 1628 'a grant of the islands of Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, and Fonseca'.⁹ Hicks mentions the Earl of Pembroke procuring a patent for Barbados, only, on behalf of William Courteen in 1628 and that this was soon overturned in the same year by the granting of a second patent to the Earl of Carlisle.¹⁰

A potentially more accurate view of the family's origins emerges in a much earlier correspondence between V L Oliver and Charles H Thompson carried on through the pages of *Notes and Queries* in 1920. Oliver, the doyen of Caribbean planter genealogy, had presented in *Caribbeana* a detailed 'pedigree' of the Herbert family of Nevis in which, while noting that some points were doubtful, he suggested that John Richardson Herbert was descended from an Edward Herbert, merchant of Bristol.¹¹ Thompson disputed this and, from the slightly acrimonious debate, there emerged a clearer understanding of the family's origins.

They agreed that the original ancestor on Nevis of J R Herbert was not Edward Herbert of Bristol and Montserrat but an un-named Herbert who married a Mary Mountstephen. Their son Thomas, together with Mountstephen relatives, began in 1686 a legal action to recover one or more plantations. This property, possibly known originally as Mountstephen, had passed, through the second marriage of Mary Mountstephen, to one Bartholemew Harvey and became known for a period as 'Harvey's'. Thomas Herbert won a judgement in his favour in 1688 but it took another thirteen years and a Report from the Lord Commissioners for Trade and Plantations for him to take possession of the property.¹² In this report Thomas Herbert was described as 'now owner of a small sugar Plantation and lives and has always done so with the character of a very honest and inoffensive man'.¹³ Oliver notes in his pedigree of Herbert that there was a Thomas Herbert in the 1677-8 Nevis Census and, in the 1707-1708 Census, a Thomas Herbert was listed with 3 white females, 4 negro males and 6 negro females.

Several points are noteworthy here. Firstly, Thompson had examined the wills and administrations of over 700 Herberts, some of them clearly of the Earls of Pembroke, and he

⁸ Oman, Carola *Nelson* London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1947 p71

⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Oxford University Press, 2004 'Philip Herbert 1584-1650'

¹⁰ Hicks, Dan *The Garden of the World: An historical archaeology of sugar landscapes in the eastern Caribbean* Archaeopress, 2007 p20

¹¹ Oliver, V L *Caribbeana (Caribbeana)* vol. 5 pp223-232 'Herbert of Nevis'

¹² *Calendar of State Papers – America and the West Indies* vol. 19, 18 December 1701, petition of William Shipman et al and vol. 20, 13 January 1702, courtesy of Brian Littlewood

¹³ Thompson, Charles H in *Notes and Queries* 12th Series, 18 September 1920 pp232-234

found no connection between the Herberts of Nevis and the Herberts of Britain. However, at the end of the debate he states the following:

‘I have little doubt that the Herberts of Nevis descended from a branch of the Herbert family of Wales, and that the chief difficulty in establishing a connection between them is due to the fact that prior to, and at the time of, their settling in the Island the Nevis Herberts were of small estate. The rise of the family in Nevis followed upon the recovery of the Plantations which Thomas Herbert inherited through his mother Mary Mounstephen.’¹⁴

Secondly, it is perfectly possible that in some way the Mountstephen/Harvey estate formed the core of the estate to which John Richardson Herbert added in the 1770s and that other Herberts owned land in the general vicinity in the first half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, three Herberts, including Thomas Herbert senior made available a total of 199 negro workdays for the works on Saddle Hill between 28 August and 11 Nov 1735 and these must have come from estates in St George Gingerland or St John Figtree.¹⁵ However, estates changed hands frequently and it is equally possible that Mountstephen Estate has nothing to do with Montpelier. Although not conclusive, the genealogical work of Oliver and Thompson provides a more detailed family line for the Herberts on Nevis back into the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Both agree that J R Herbert’s grandfather, Thomas, married Dorothy Lytton, daughter of Major Henry Lytton of Nevis and later of Camberwell in Surrey.¹⁶ It is worth noting, in passing, that Budgen’s Estate, part of which was immediately to the south of Clarke’s/Montpelier, was described in a 1788 mortgage as having to the east of it land ‘Litton alias Herbert’.¹⁷ It is also known that around 1719 James Lytton and Sarah Lytton, a widow, owned land on the northern boundary of Clay Gut estate, in other words in the general area of Clay Gut and Clarke’s/Montpelier.¹⁸

Dorothy Lytton must have been exhausted when she died in childbirth at the age of forty-one and was buried at St George Gingerland in 1724. Married at fifteen or sixteen, she gave birth to seventeen children in twenty-five years of married life. Her eldest son was Thomas Herbert junior. He married a Frances whose maiden name is unknown although, given the name of their son, she may have been a Richardson. This was John Richardson Herbert’s mother. She died in 1736 and was buried in St George Gingerland. From here on, thankfully, the family relationships are a good deal clearer.

John Richardson Herbert

Herbert was baptised on 21 December 1732, the son of Thomas Herbert junior and his wife Frances.¹⁹ The fact that the baptism took place at the church of St George Gingerland could suggest either that the family had their home in that parish or simply that it was the planters’ church for those in the general area.

¹⁴ Thompson, Charles H in *Notes and Queries* 12th Series, 25 September 1920 pp251-253

¹⁵ UK National Archives (NA) CO 186/2, Council; Assembly; Council in Assembly 1730-1756

¹⁶ It is likely that there is a family connection between these Lyttons and the family of James Lytton who married Ann Faucette, the aunt of Alexander Hamilton. The family left for St Croix around 1737, owned the Grange Plantation on that island and Hamilton’s mother Rachel was buried there in 1768.

¹⁷ Bristol University Library Special Collections (BULSC) DM 89/3/24

¹⁸ BULSC Pinney Papers (PP), West Indies, Damaged or Fragile Box, pre-1720 indenture for one year’s rent of Clay Gut estate

¹⁹ *Caribbeana* vol. 5 p230 ‘Herbert of Nevis’

In about 1753 he married Elizabeth Williams, daughter of Col. John Williams of Antigua. Born in 1735/6, according to her gravestone in St John Figtree, she was seventeen or eighteen when she got married. Thompson suggests that the event took place in Mayfair, London. A Williams family settled in Antigua before 1680 and owned 1275 acres with 250 slaves. They were also London West India merchants.²⁰ Assuming Elizabeth was from the same family, this connection offered Herbert considerable prospects. Indeed, she inherited in 1767 half of a plantation in Antigua from her uncle Thomas Williams who also owned substantial property on Nevis including, possibly, an estate on Saddle Hill.²¹

Around the time of his marriage, it is unlikely that Herbert had any great wealth. In 1755 he paid tax on eight slaves together with another five, the latter of whom seem to have been resident on Thomas Williamson's (sic Williams's?) estate.²² These may have been domestic slaves together, perhaps, with some to support his work as a merchant. Other Herberts who paid the tax on slaves at the same time, probably on estates, were William Herbert (70), John Herbert (36) and Joseph Herbert (73), the last almost certainly for Pembroke Estate.²³ In December 1757 J R Herbert was appointed to the island Council. In answer to an enquiry about him from the Board of Trade before his appointment, Governor Thomas wrote: 'Mr John Richardson Herbert is a Young Merchant of Good Character in the Island of Nevis, but he has very little landed Estate there...'²⁴ 'Of good character' might well be taken to mean 'well connected'. The family was of long standing on the island, his marriage had brought him prospects and his uncle (or possibly great uncle) Joseph Herbert, who owned Pembroke Estate, had been appointed Chief Justice of the island in 1754.

The young merchant and his wife Elizabeth had one daughter, Martha Williams Herbert. She was born in the 1750s and quite probably raised as a young child on Nevis. However, in late 1761 Herbert and his family visited England. A London correspondent of the Pinneys wrote to John Frederick Pinney on 18 June 1761 that Captain John Beach (of the *Nevis Planter*) was expecting to carry Herbert and his wife and daughter, together with a number of other passengers with Nevis connections.²⁵ Martha's parents had returned to Nevis by April 1762 but she remained in England to be educated, with Herbert's sister Sarah acting *in loco parentis*.

We get a sense of Martha from letters written to Herbert by the Mills family in London, for whom he was acting as an attorney on Nevis during the 1760s and 1770s. In 1763 Thomas Mills noted several times that she was 'in perfect health and looks as fresh as a rose' or 'she grows a fine girl'. In April the following year he noted 'Miss Sally Herbert your Sister was with me just now. She is very well as is your Daughter, she grows a fine girl. I saw her the other day at her Aunt Webbe's'.²⁶

In a foretaste of things to come Mills assured Herbert in November 1765 that Martha 'is grown a fine girl and will soon make you look about and open your Purse...'. Clearly in some admiration five years later, he wrote that Mrs Mills had called at Queen Square and invited Herbert's daughter to spend the day with them 'but she is generally at yr Aunt Williams's...She grows a fine girl and you will soon be called on for a long purse, she is enough to make the young fellows' mouths water'. Shortly afterwards he noted that Martha

²⁰ Sheridan, Richard B 'The Rise of a Colonial Gentry: A Case Study of Antigua, 1730-1775' in *Economic History Review* New Series vol. 13 no. 3, 1961 pp342-357

²¹ *Caribbeana* vol. 6 p159 will of Thomas Williams, dated 1766

²² BULSC PP, Domestic, Box P

²³ Also Horatio Herbert (9), Edward Herbert (1) and Anne Herbert (widow 2)

²⁴ Sheridan, R B *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies 1623-1775* 2000 p169 quoting NA CO 152/29, CC 8, 20 May 1757

²⁵ BULSC PP, Domestic, William Withers to John Frederick Pinney. The Catalogue for these papers refers to Herbert's 'daughters' but the original letter states clearly only one daughter.

²⁶ Museum of London Docklands Mills Papers (Mills Papers), Letterbooks 1752-1771, Mills to Herbert 23 February and 22 September 1763 and 27 April 1764

was ‘at last happily settled at Mrs Webbe’s [in Salisbury]. She is a fine girl and will do honor to her country, being an accomplished young woman...’.²⁷

Martha was still in England when her mother died on Nevis on 29 September 1769 aged 33, having been married for 16 years. She was buried at St John Figtree.²⁸ Herbert never remarried, although in 1771 John Mills mentioned a rumour he had heard in England. ‘I presume by this time you are, or are near being, married to an agreeable young lady, fame has trumpeted her praises, and it seems they do not go unobserved by you...’.²⁹

Plantation attorney

Herbert played many different roles on Nevis, becoming an increasingly important and influential figure on the island. However, it is largely because of his part in two affairs that he is known about at all. In 1782 he was President of the Council when the island surrendered to the French. In 1785-1787 he played an interesting political role in Nelson’s attack on breaches of the Navigation Acts and a more personal role in providing a home for the young widow Frances Nisbet. Rather than attempt a chronological account of this period it seems more useful to examine those different roles to see what can be learned about the man.

In the 1760s and 1770s Herbert acted as an attorney for members of the Mills family who owned plantations on Nevis and St Kitts and ran a firm of London sugar merchants, John & Thomas Mills. Their Nevis estate, known only as the Mills estate but probably what is now known as Prospect, was acquired in 1758 from John Richardson in lieu of a debt and Herbert’s role was to supervise the management of the estate rather than be the manager day to day.

Thomas Mills appointed Herbert as his attorney on Nevis along with Robert Pemberton and James Brodbelt in 1760. In the letter accompanying their powers of attorney Mills noted that he had ‘charged Edmond Richards [the manager] not to exercise any acts of cruelty to the negroes; it is what I abhor...’. About a year later he sent instructions to William Bowles about his St Kitts estate: ‘and above all things to take care of the negroes and use them well and not whip or cut them, as is too much the practice of the Nevis overseers’.³⁰ Clearly Mills was none too impressed by the behaviour of some Nevis overseers.

The letters are full of the usual business relating to an absentee owner’s attempt to control what was happening on his estate from several thousand miles away. The dispatch of supplies was noted and Mills began to complain about the behaviour of his manager. In the end Herbert had to sack Richards, and Mills, while still respecting his attorney, complained about the latter having allowed ‘the destroyer’ of his estate to continue for so long.

The issue of slave punishment stands out during this period of Herbert’s supervision. It was customary on Nevis for slaves to be able to appeal to an estate’s attorney for a measure of protection against treatment that was more than usually cruel. This is recorded in the Mills Plantation Journals. For instance the following note appears in September 1776:

‘York put in the stocks for gitting liquor and fighting with Cooper Sam Matthias rund a way and went to Mr Herbet he came home with him he told Mr Herbet that I

²⁷ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, Thomas Mills to Herbert 9 November 1765, John Mills to Herbert 26 November 1770 and 1771 n.d.

²⁸ *Caribbeana* vol. 5 p 231, extract from the memorial stone in ‘Herbert of Nevis’

²⁹ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, 1771 n.d.

³⁰ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, Thomas Mills 12 December 1760 and 26 January 1762

was a going to wip him for his impertinence and giving me lyes he wipt before Mr Herbets Negrows in the field'. A month later the entry reads 'Ned went to Mr Herbit to complain of being wipt so much'.

But there is a totally disgraceful entry for November: 'Harry catch'd in Vandaypools cane chopt on the top of the shoulder the bone lay bare and in the arm brook his hand and wipt him from his hed to his backsides while he was raw then brought him home. Tom sent to hunt for Phill.' Harry had been chopped with a machete on the shoulder, had his arm broken and then he was beaten. This was not carried out by Herbert but it was perpetrated under his overall supervision of the Mills estate as attorney. The very randomness of this brutality is underlined by an entry in April 1777: 'Mr Ward broke Jinnatts hed with the house broom that her gown was all blodey for her being in ye back kitchen when he wanted some water to wash his hands'.³¹

Herbert was the estate's attorney and had a responsibility both to the owner and to the estate's labouring population. It would seem that he both tolerated and did very little as an attorney to prevent this sort of brutal treatment on Mills's estate. The plantation journals show that an unusually high number of beatings were carried out and these were accompanied by a higher than average number of incidents of slaves absconding.

Leasing Low Ground

It will be remembered that in 1757 Herbert had been described as having 'very little landed estate' on Nevis. No references to any estate he might have owned or rented have been found during the present search until the year 1764. On 22 August Thomas Mills wrote to him that he would consult George Webbe, when he came to London, 'about renting Sir Thos Stapleton's Estate for you'.³² By November Mills was writing that George Webbe had unfortunately approached Stapleton who had then gone to 'an artfull lawyer Mr McNamara'. Mills told Herbert not to be afraid of losing the estate as he did not know of anyone on Nevis 'but yourself' capable of finding someone to stand security for the rent. Merchants in London were sick of doing so.³³ In March 1765 he was dismayed that Herbert had already concluded the deal. 'By your letter to the house I find you have agreed to take a lease of Sir Thos Stapleton's Estate. I wish you had not been in such a hurry, as I am convinced Mr Worthington and myself could have made a much better bargain for you'.³⁴ The estate in question was almost certainly 'Low Ground' in St John Figtree³⁵ and it appears that Herbert's first step towards ownership was the less usual one of renting an estate.

The details of this plantation are somewhat controversial among those currently interested in the history of the Stapleton estates on Nevis. There has been an archaeological search for the location of the Stapleton 'greathouse' in the area, the details of which have not been made generally available. For the purposes of studying Herbert's connection with the estate it is assumed that Low Ground, or 'Low Grounds' as it is sometimes known in the documents, is more or less synonymous with at least one part of the Stapleton estate in St John Figtree known in the seventeenth century as 'Jennings and Balls Range'. It seems sensible to do this since no evidence has yet come to light that the Stapleton family, which owned the estate from the late seventeenth century up until at least 1920, had two large estates in the parish.

³¹ Mills Papers, Plantation Journals for 1776 and 1777, entries dated 17 September, 21 October and 3 October [November] 1776 and 26 April 1777

³² Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771

³³ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771

³⁴ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771

³⁵ This Low Ground estate in St John Figtree is not to be confused with Low Ground/Lower Grounds in St James Windward, Lower Ground in St George Gingerland and Lower Grounds in St Thomas Lowland.

Low Ground was immediately to the North of Clarke's/Montpelier and the boundaries between the two estates will be found not only on the ground but in the 1964 survey of Montpelier carried out by Steele Douglas. James Milnes Gaskell in 2009 recalled a long-running dispute with the CCM-led island administration during which the government attempted to drive a new road over Montpelier land: 'When my surveyor Steele Douglas surveyed Montpelier Estate in 1964 he found an 'old time' stone wall forming the boundary between Montpelier and Low Ground estates. Senior citizens who speak to me confirm that this was the case.'³⁶ The estate amounted to 532 acres when Governor Sir William Stapleton awarded it to himself in 1678 and was 'called by the name of Jennings and Balls Range'.

The boundaries of this plantation, particularly the southerly one, may suggest avenues of research for clearly identifying the ownership of the land around Montpelier in the late seventeenth century. They were identified as follows:

'limited Southerly with the land and Plantations appertaineing to the heirs of Captain Francis Smith decd. and Mr John Smiths Plantation Leased to Mr Thomas Tovey, East Northerly with the Plantations of Mr Francis Burton, Mr Henry Mayle and John Sampson, north Westerly with the land . . . of Mr George Cruft Mr William Springer, Ralph Wyan and Thomas Johnson, Mrs Honor Thompson, Nicholas Cashine, Capt. John Williams, Capt. Wm Howard and the Plantation belonging to heires of Mr Gerrard Lowry decd. and west southerly with the Sea near Long Point..'³⁷

In 1824 Magnus Morton Herbert described it as being in two parts - the 'said plantations called Stapleton's Low Grounds and Upper Estate' and the 1836 notice, detailing the Herbert plantations to be sold, stated that the Stapleton land rented by the heirs of Herbert amounted to 300 acres. If this was the case then clearly Herbert was leasing only a part of the original Jennings and Balls Range, albeit a major part.

The estate continued to be linked to Herbert's own plantations until the mid-nineteenth century but it was in poor shape when he began to rent it. In July 1766 Mills commiserated with Herbert that 'Stapleton's Estate was left in such a disordered state, it is no more than I expected'.³⁸ A good deal of misery had been associated with it. In 1706 it had been deliberately pillaged by the French. They carried off 147 out of roughly 183 slaves and destroyed the house, mills, works and 120 acres of sugarcane. In 1725 an insurrection was planned and two of the alleged ringleaders were burned to death as a punishment and a warning to others. The estate had two works and, in a reasonably good year, was capable of producing 130-140 hogsheads of sugar although it suffered from problems of water supply until at least the 1760s. On average in the 1720s and 1730s it made an annual profit of £690 stlg for the Stapleton family. However, the management of the estate was consistently underfunded by the Stapletons, leading to regular hardship for the enslaved population. In 1750, when it was valued at £7,020 Ncr, the family decided to rid themselves of the problem and leased the plantation to Thomas Ottley for 14 years. Herbert then took on the lease in 1764/5 and set about improving the estate.³⁹ This process must at some point have included buying

³⁶ www.sknavibes.com/News Gaskell, James Milnes 'Gaskell responds to Brantley's statements'

³⁷ John Rylands Library, Stapleton Ms. 2/1 courtesy of Brian Littlewood. A plan for a low cost housing scheme in the 1930s, held possibly by the Nevis Planning Department, is reported to show Low Ground estate as extending from the pond at Pond Hill down to the sea. Brian Littlewood pers. comm. quoting information from R Leech.

³⁸ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771

³⁹ For a more detailed account of the Stapleton estates on Nevis see the following: Gay, Edwin F 'Notes and Documents - Letters from a Sugar Plantation in Nevis, 1723-1732' in *Journal of Economic and Business History* vol. 1, 1928 pp149-173; Johnston, J R V 'The Stapleton sugar plantations in the Leeward Islands' in *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library* vol. 48, 1966 pp175-206; Mason, K 'The World an Absentee Planter and his Slaves Made: Sir William Stapleton and his Nevis Sugar Estate, 1722-1740' in *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library* vol. 75, Spring 1993 pp103-32.

enslaved people to work the land, although no information has come to light about how and when this was done.



Fig 2: Parish of Saint John Figtree and part of Saint George Gingerland, from J A B Iles 'Map of the Island of Nevis' 1871, courtesy of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society

‘Clark’s or Montpelier and Stapletons’

It is conceivable that the origins of ‘Montpelier’, as we understand it today, lie in one of the estates belonging to a Herbert mentioned in the 1755 tax on slaves. However, no evidence to that effect has yet been found. It would seem that Herbert, having already leased Stapleton’s Low Ground Estate, only acquired ‘Clark’s or Montpelier and Stapletons’ in the 1770s and, judging by its name and location, it was constructed from two purchases of land at that time, both of which can be traced back a little further.

On 12 March 1776 John Pinney, who was merely an observer in these matters, wrote to the firm of Mills & Swanston: ‘Mr Hamilton hath not yet sent up Mr Roger Pemberton’s mortgage... I learn that Mr Herbert has bought the estate whereon he resides and expects to have it in possession as soon as the crop is taken off which deprives Mr Pemberton of those pleasing ideas he used to flatter himself with of making remittances from his rented estates.’⁴⁰

Pinney may have been misinformed in March that Herbert had already bought the land since, over several days from 25 April 1776, there is a series of indentures recording an agreement between the Reverend James New and Frances his wife of Bristol, and Herbert in which the couple, for a ‘consideration’ of £5000, did ‘Grant Bargain and Sell unto the said John Richardson Herbert all the said Messuage or Tenement Plantation piece or parcel of Land situate lying and being in the said parish of St John in the said Island of Nevis and commonly called Stapleton’s Plantation containing fifty eight acres of land...’ together with all buildings structures ‘ffabbricks’ Mills etc and ‘all negroes and other slaves’. No boundaries are given.⁴¹

Fortunately these are given in a previous indenture, dated 16 January 1776 between New and a lawyer Abel Jenkins of New Inn, London as follows:

‘All that messuage, tenement or dwelling house plantation piece or parcel of land situate in the parish of St. John in the Island of Nevis commonly called Stapleton Plantation (58 acres) bounded to the North with lands now or late of Sir Thomas Stapleton Baronet⁴² to the Southward with lands now or late of Thomas Budgen Esq., to the Eastward with lands now or late of John Williams Esqr. and to the Westward with lands now or late of Joseph Clarke Mariner... All which premises now are or late were in the tenure of Roger Pemberton Esqr. as Tenant thereof’.

Included in this agreement was a further plot of 26 acres in St George Gingerland which Pemberton leased from New but which Herbert either did not want or did not get.⁴³ While it might appear that New was double-dealing, it seems only that he had mortgaged the freehold of the land for a period to Jenkins.

New’s agreement with Herbert shows how sharp the latter was. New agreed to get Pemberton off the land and to pay Herbert £330 p.a. rent for the length of time it took to do it. At the same time Herbert mortgaged the land to New so he was not paying for it outright.

It is possible to trace the history of this plot of 58 acres a little further back. The Reverend New was the Vicar of St Philips and St Jacob, a church in central Bristol. In his father Samuel’s will, dated 1763, James, the eldest son, inherited property in Charlestown, ‘lands in the p’ish of St John, Nevis called Stapleton Plantation, which I purchased of Mary Sargent’

⁴⁰ BULSC PP, Letterbook 4 ff31-34

⁴¹ Bristol Record Office, Nevis Box, Item 37941/22

⁴² Sir Thomas Stapleton, 5th Baronet of Rotherfield Greys, Co. Oxford d. 1 January 1781

⁴³ Bristol Record Office, Nevis Box, Item 37941/21a

and Cressey's Land in the parish of St George. His brother John got a half share in Clifton Estate in St Thomas Lowland (100 acres) and in 'Bristol Plantation' in St John Figtree (160 acres). They each inherited 500 acres in Georgia, so they were substantial landowners.⁴⁴

It seems that on 26 March 1744 Mary Sargent of Nevis, a widow, and Elizabeth Brodbelt of Nevis, the widow of the planter George Brodbelt and also of the late Thomas Beauchamp the younger, conveyed such a plantation of 58 acres for a debt of £1784 to Samuel New, Merchant, and for £685 more sold it to him.⁴⁵ A day later, as part of the deal they sold or mortgaged fifteen slaves. Of these, five were men: Pompey, Mathew, Cudjo, Sambo, Billy. There were seven women: Nanny Jack, Celia, Minna Nanny, Plantation Sarah, Joan, Old Phillis, Old Abba. Lastly, there were three children: Sabella, Little Mary and Pompey. The property came with a mule, called Rob, a boiling house, two coppers and 'one furnace hung therein', one 'compleat cattle mill', one still, a still head and a worm, all indicating a small, working plantation.⁴⁶

These 58 acres were immediately to the East of another 50 acres which Herbert had already purchased. During the first two weeks in July 1772 there were a number of petitions in the Nevis Council (or Assembly) for a law to be passed to allow the sale of 50 acres in St John Figtree, 'formerly the property of Samuel Clarke sen.'. Those petitioning were doing so on behalf of Joseph Clarke, a mariner of Nevis, and his wife Mary following their marriage settlement of 1767. Later in July the relevant Journal of the Board of Trade and Plantations notes the following: 'The draught of a representation to his Majesty, proposing the confirmation of a private Act passed in the island of Nevis in July 1772, to enable Joseph Clarke, and the trustees named in his marriage settlement, to sell a plantation, thereby settled, to the Honorable John Richardson Herbert... was approved, transcribed and signed.'⁴⁷

The petition dated 16 July 1772 noted that the land was bounded as follows: east by land of Samuel New, west by land of Michael Williams, north by Stapleton plantation and south by lands of Thomas Budgen.⁴⁸ The land to the east was the Stapleton Plantation noted above, bought by Herbert in 1776. Confusingly, the boundaries also list Stapleton Plantation to the north. In practice, this was probably the main Stapleton Estate in St John Figtree, Low Ground. The land to the south is interesting. A plan of Budgen's Estate in the Supreme Court Registry in the Nevis Courthouse, dated 29 June 1892, shows that 'Budgen's' was in two parts, running east/west to the sea. The bulk of the estate bordered Low Ground on its north side but in the northeast corner it bordered on 'Clarke's'.⁴⁹

The same Joseph Clarke was almost certainly the Master of the plantation-built, merchant vessel *Clytus*⁵⁰ which carried plantation stores and sugar between London and Nevis in the 1770s and was, in 1774-5, owned by Herbert Clarke and others.⁵¹ The relationship between the master mariner and Samuel Clarke, who had previously owned the land and who himself may have been a substantial land owner, is unclear but he might have been Samuel's son.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Caribbeana* vol. 6 p116

⁴⁵ Brian Littlewood pers. comm. quoting *Caribbeana* vol. 4 pp22-24, 'Nevis Deeds', iii., f43

⁴⁶ Supreme Court Registry, Nevis Courthouse, Common Deed Record Book (NC CR) 1741-1749 f46

⁴⁷ *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations* January 1776 - May 1782, vol. 14 f23, courtesy of Brian Littlewood

⁴⁸ NA CO 186/7 and CO 186/6 Minutes of Council and Assembly for 1768-80 and 1765-81

⁴⁹ 'Plan of the Upper and Lower Lands of Budgeons' found amongst a roll of loose plans in the vault of the Supreme Court Registry, Nevis

⁵⁰ Captain Clarke was an extremely fortunate man. In 1780 the *Clytus* sank in mid-Atlantic: 'The *Clytus* Capt. Clarke that had all your Plantation Stores Shipped on board him, foundered in Latitude 38 the Capt. & all the People was saved, they were took up by a Dutch Ship bound to the West Indies...' (Stapleton Cotton MSS 16, Cha's Hutton on Nevis to Mrs Catherine Stapleton, 24th April 1780, courtesy of Brian Littlewood).

⁵¹ NA T 1/512 f232, Nevis, Naval Officers Returns Inward and Outward, 1 October 1774 - 1 April 1775

⁵² In 1755 Samuel Clarke and the 'orphans of Samuel Clarke and John Henry Clarke' paid tax on 64 slaves. In, or around, 1741 Daniel Smith mortgaged to Tobias Wall a lease of a plantation called Colonel John Netherway's of

Unfortunately, the genealogy of the Clarke family on Nevis is complicated, with a number of Samuel Clarkes featuring even in the parish of St John Figtree, and it will need more detailed investigation.⁵³

Another scenario, which may or may not identify an alternative Clarke family, is presented by a collection of papers in the London Metropolitan Archives. These relate to Bush Hill Estate on Nevis which borders on Montpelier and is almost certainly named after Bush Hill, a property in Edmonton in London. The London house was owned by a merchant, John Clarke, in 1699 and descended through his family to Mary Forbes, nee Clarke in the 1780s. She and her husband removed to Nevis for a period and developed the small Bush Hill Estate.⁵⁴ This is unlikely to be a co-incidence but any links between the Clarkes of Bush Hill and Joseph Clarke, the mariner preparing to sell 50 acres to Herbert in 1772, will require further research in the records in the Nevis Courthouse.

In summary, it can be said that in the mid-1770s Herbert bought two neighbouring plots of land, totalling 108 acres, which in turn were immediately south of the Low Ground estate he already leased. The first plot of 50 acres was sold by Joseph Clarke, a merchant captain and his wife. It may have been a small portion of a much larger estate tracing back into the seventeenth century. The other was a small estate called Stapleton Plantation, of 58 acres, bought from the New family and it appears that Herbert had been living on it prior to the sale. It is possible that these two small estates were added by Herbert to another estate which he already owned, but nothing has yet been found in the records to substantiate that. Together the two plots seem to have formed the basis of the estate known today as 'Montpelier' or in the early part of the nineteenth century as 'Clark's or Montpelier and Stapletons'.

It seems that Herbert was in the business of purchasing relatively small lots of land in the parish at this time. In 1775 there was an appraisalment of the estates of James Brodbelt including Morning Star and the Pembroke Estate which had once belonged to Joseph Herbert. Mention is made of a 20 acre plot of land called 'Frosts' which Brodbelt had agreed to sell to John Richardson Herbert. The picture here is of a man, in part, building an 'estate' through the acquisition of smaller parcels of land.⁵⁵

Nevis in the 1770s

In the 1770s, when Herbert was buying land, it is clear that the people of the island were under tremendous stress and most of all the enslaved population. The Great Hurricane of 31 August 1772 destroyed slave villages across the island, killing slaves, ruining whatever provision grounds they had and scattering or killing the small numbers of animals they kept. Planters were also severely hit. On the estate of Upper Gingerland two boiling houses were destroyed and six slaves killed. Budgen's, leased by Thomas Wenham, lost a new boiling house and outbuildings, Richmond Lodge had two boiling houses 'thrown down' and the plantation house. Pembroke Lodge, the estate of Edward Herbert who shortly afterwards

327 acres, leased to Smith by Samuel Clarke. See *Caribbeana* vol. 4 pp289-296, pedigree of 'Smith of Nevis'. In 1735 a Samuel Clarke made available 56 negro work days for work on Saddle Hill and William Clarke another 116 days. See NA CO 186/2, Minutes of Council; Assembly; Council in Assembly 1730-1756.

⁵³ Clarkes are first seen on Nevis in the seventeenth century. On 22 January 1684 a Joseph Clarke, merchant of Nevis, was granted 125 acres by Governor Sir William Stapleton. See Oliver, V L *The History of the Island of Antigua* vol. 1, 1894 p138. In Oliver's account of 'Smith of Nevis', he suggests that Joseph Clarke might have been a brother of a 'Samuell' Clarke, a merchant of Bristol in 1681 and that one of them was the 'ancestor of all the Clarkes of that island'.

⁵⁴ For more details on Bush Hill Estate and links with the Clarke/Forbes family see Small, D and Eickelmann, C *Bush Hill Estate, St John Figtree, Nevis: A preliminary assessment of the documentary evidence* 2007

⁵⁵ BULSC PP, Account Book 18

became bankrupt, had the roof of its boiling house carried away and the estate of the late Thomas Williams at Saddle Hill lost the boiling house and the dwelling house.⁵⁶ All around Montpelier and Low Ground were estates which had to recover from the effects of this dreadful event. Herbert suffered some commercial losses dealt with later, but otherwise Herbert was lucky only to lose his kitchen, pantry and a valuable quantity of china, although it is unclear where these losses occurred.

The island suffered further blows in the lead-up to, and during, the American War of Independence. Pinney wrote in June 1775: 'God only knows what will become of us in the islands, as we chiefly depend on them for our support – I am determined to plant provisions, if I make ever so little sugar, for the prospect of a famine is horrid'.⁵⁷ Another issue was the tightening of credit on the island with creditors wanting payment immediately. In May 1777 Pinney pointed out to his correspondents that not only had the hurricane of the previous September and the dry weather afterwards cut sugar production by one third but the general situation had made planters wary of taking on further commitments. By November 1777 famine was a reality. Supplies from America had been stopped and privateers cut off ships from other sources; on top of that there was drought and slaves began to die. Governor Burt estimated that 1000 died in Antigua, 1200 in Montserrat, 300 to 400 in Nevis and the same in St Kitts.⁵⁸

In these times a leading merchant who had status and cash and who wanted to buy land was a God-send for landowners wanting to sell off smaller estates which were probably unprofitable.

Merchants and the trade in enslaved people

Herbert was not only an attorney and a planter but he was also a merchant, probably on his own account as well as for the firm Herbert, Morton & Woolward. The other two partners in the firm were his brothers-in-law and fellow Council members Magnus Morton and William Woolward, the latter of whom was also a Judge of the Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas. Herbert seems to have been the most successful, and certainly the wealthiest, of the partners.

The firm traded in goods brought to Nevis from Britain, Ireland and North America and would surely have bought sugar and rum from planters to send away on the return voyages. They would also have acted as island agents for metropolitan firms. An indication of the sort of material traded can be found in the plantation accounts of John Pinney's Mountravers estate. As well as leather goods, claret and boiling lime, Pinney purchased from them in the 1760s and 1770s a lot of pitch pine board and joist, cypress shingles, 'hiccory' hoops, staves and rice which would have come from North America.⁵⁹ Another indication of this dealing in timber comes in reports of the 1772 hurricane which devastated the island. Herbert & Co lost 'ninety thousand feet of boards mostly destroyed'.⁶⁰

So far this account of the Herbert family and Montpelier could read like any narrative of a family of merchant farmers in mid-Georgian England but a letter to Herbert from John Mills

⁵⁶ Anon. *An Account of the Late Dreadful Hurricane, which happened on the 31st of August, 1772. Also the Damage done on that Day in the Islands of St. Christopher and Nevis, Attempted to be Ascertained By the Editor. Printed and sold by Thomas Howe, Basseterre...1772*, courtesy of Brian Littlewood

⁵⁷ BULSC PP, Letterbook 3, 1 June 1775

⁵⁸ NA CO 153/23, Governor Burt 17 March 1778

⁵⁹ BULSC PP, Account Books 18 and 20, accounts for J R Herbert and Herbert, Morton & Woolward

⁶⁰ Anon *An Account of the Late Dreadful Hurricane...1772*

in 1770 points to a darker side of this life. It is a reminder that life in the Caribbean was based on the cruel, barbarous and destructive business of slavery.

On 16 March 1770 John Mills wrote the following to Herbert:

‘Dear Sir, Having wrote you very fully lately, have now only to advise, that I have wrote to our Mutual friends, Messrs Jn & Wm Crossbies advising them that we shall pay due honour to your bills on the Brig Ann Capt McVica, with slaves from Africa, at the same time assuring them that you will do justice to them in that or any other cargoe, they shall see fit to consign you...’⁶¹

The rest of the letter deals with a general request for Herbert, in his role as attorney, to buy up to 50 more slaves for the Mills estate.

The brig *Ann*, captained by Duncan McVicar and owned by John and William Crosbie and others, left Liverpool with a crew of 16 on 12 March 1769 to buy or capture slaves, Igbos probably, at the (Nigerian) slaving port of Calabar in the Bight of Biafra. There are no details of how many were loaded but, based on the tonnage, researchers have calculated that about 179 would have been loaded and about 145 disembarked at St Kitts, an imputed number of 34 enslaved people having died on the voyage. McVicar carried out at least four other voyages in the 1770s. The Crosbie family were major slave traders in Liverpool and were involved as owners in 61 slaving voyages between 1748 and 1775. Including the *Ann*, seven of these were destined for St Kitts carrying about 1800 enslaved Africans.⁶²

The bills for the slaves on the *Ann* were drawn on the Mills firm but it is unclear whether the cargo was consigned to Herbert for his own leased estate or whether his firm was trading speculatively in slaves for other plantations on Nevis. Mills’s letter clearly proffered support for any further consignments of that sort.

In addition to their trading, Herbert’s firm held mortgages on estates around the island. One of these, for instance, was on ‘Upper Gingerland’ estate. This, together with ‘Lower Gingerland’, had been created by the Pinney family out of lands once owned by the Choppin and Cressey families and it bordered on Clay Gut.⁶³ The two estates had suffered long-term neglect until the arrival of John Pretor Pinney who put them in order and leased them out. Upper Gingerland went to James Chapman but he mortgaged it both to Mills & Swanston and to Herbert, Morton & Woolward. Pinney wrote to Mills & Swanston in 1777 that Herbert’s firm stood to lose their mortgage on the estate, when Chapman was in financial trouble, because he (Pinney) had got Mills & Swanston’s claim executed prior to theirs.⁶⁴ By 1778 Herbert and Magnus Morton (either senior or junior) were renting the estate and ten years later Pinney and Herbert were negotiating a continuation of the lease. Pinney seemed very happy with them as tenants and Herbert appears to have thought about buying the property. However, Pinney noted the following: ‘your ideas and mine respecting its value are so wide there is not much probability of our agreeing. My lowest price including buildings etc is four thousand guineas.’⁶⁵ It seems that two canny businessmen were not to be outdone by each other. Herbert and Morton continued to rent the estate until Herbert’s death. On a return visit to Nevis in July 1794 Pinney sold it to Magnus Morton (junior) for £4,500.⁶⁶

It seems that relations between Pinney and Herbert, which were probably always more businesslike than close, cooled somewhat further in the late 1780s. Tobin & Pinney ran

⁶¹ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771

⁶² Eltis, David et al. (eds) *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade CD-ROM* Cambridge University Press, 1999

⁶³ Pares, R A *West India Fortune* London, 1950 pp 55-56

⁶⁴ BULSC PP, Letterbook 4, 3 May 1777

⁶⁵ BULSC PP, Letterbook 8, John Pinney to Herbert 20 and 26 August 1788, 21 and 25 January 1789

⁶⁶ BULSC PP, Account Book 45 f27

merchant ships with supplies to Nevis and in 1789 complained about Herbert's lack of assistance in filling them with sugar on the return journey. 'I think it unkind that you should in such a very scarce year not only put the whole of Mills's sugar on board the *Pilgrim* but also the poor 10 hhds of Mr Budgen's, whose sugar whether more or less always came in our ships.'⁶⁷

Colonial affairs

Herbert served as President of the Council of Nevis for twenty-five years. He was appointed to the Council in 1757 as a young man and just over ten years later, in 1768, he succeeded his uncle (or great-uncle) Joseph Herbert as President. Clearly he would have had an important role in organising the disaster relief after the 1772 hurricane as well as in trying to avert famine on the island during the American War of Independence. His letters, as President of the Council at the time of the surrender of the island to the French in 1782, during the occupation and in the subsequent squabble with St Kitts over the terms of surrender have been published⁶⁸ and there is no need to repeat the sequence of events here in detail.

The President headed a Council which took a sensible, pragmatic line in surrendering the island in the face of overwhelming force and took the initiative in suggesting the terms of the surrender to the French rather than waiting for less generous terms to be imposed upon them. As would be expected, the terms agreed focussed on the preservation of property, amongst which slaves were counted. However, care was taken to have those slaves released who had already been taken and some provision was made for free black and 'coloured' islanders.

There was notable emphasis in getting the French to agree to allow ships en route to bring in provisions which would avert famine. Herbert's dispatches to British Governors in the surrounding islands are clear and detailed. Also interesting is Herbert's hauteur while appealing to the French governor against one of the French officers whom he obviously considered socially inferior. It seems clear, however, that the officer concerned, Mons. Millon, managed to upset nearly everyone by his overbearing behaviour.

Very shortly after the return of the island to the British in 1784 Nelson descended on the Leeward Islands and began his campaign against breaches of the Navigation Acts. Nelson's activities in the West Indies have been written about copiously and there is no need to reprise the details here. In May 1785 President Herbert, supported by his friend and neighbour, John Stanley, the Attorney General, took a brave decision in offering to stand bail for Nelson to allow him to come ashore and then gave him hospitality at Montpellier - all in the face of much planter opposition. As John Sugden writes 'Herbert admitted that Nelson was a threat to his commercial enterprises, but he recognised a man of principle in the little captain and rather liked him.'⁶⁹ Since most planters in the Leeward Islands depended on supplies from North America and supported the wholesale deception involved in getting them, it says much for Herbert's confidence in his own authority that he would take such a step.

The arrival of Prince William Henry in the Leeward Islands in November 1786 provided Herbert with a largely ceremonial role in the celebrations of a 'loyal' island. But it also reinforced his position as the leading figure there. Nelson wrote to Fanny Nisbet on 27 February 1787 that the Prince had mentioned that on St Kitts 'Mr Priddie advanced money to

⁶⁷ BULSC PP, Letterbook 9, John Pinney to Herbert 15 September 1789. Magnus Morton senior had died sometime before the end of 1788.

⁶⁸ Watts, Arthur P *Nevis and St Christopher 1782-1784 Unpublished documents* Paris, 1927

⁶⁹ Sugden, John *Nelson: A Dream of Glory* London, 2004 p295. Sugden's biography provides a very detailed and balanced account of Nelson's time in the Leeward Islands.

the country and at Nevis he knew he could not have been entertained if Mr Herbert had not given security for the money'.⁷⁰ Clearly, either the planters individually, or the island collectively, had borrowed money for the lavish entertainments and Herbert had underwritten the loans.

Family life in the 1780s

Fanny Nisbet is the best known member of the family at Montpelier in the 1780s. John Pinney noted her return to Nevis in 1784 with her son Josiah in a letter to Herbert: 'I believe your good niece Mrs Josiah Nisbet little expected so sudden an alteration when she left this country in December last – My best wishes always attend her – She is your child by adoption and your kindness will alleviate the distresses of her mind.'⁷¹

Herbert's daughter, Martha, had returned to the island at some point after her schooling in England and she was destined to get married on Nevis not long after Fanny Nisbet. She may well have returned to Nevis in the company of her Aunt Sarah, Herbert's sister.⁷² Sarah appears in Nelson's letters as a rather ill spinster, staying with her brother. She died in 1785, aged 53, and was buried in St John Figtree.

Family visitors to Montpelier may have included the Woolwards, Fanny Nisbet's parents, in the very early days. Herbert's sister Mary had married William Woolward of Nevis, one of the partners in the firm of Herbert, Morton & Woolward, but he died in 1779.⁷³ Another unnamed sister married Magnus Morton, the third and perhaps more active partner in the firm. They had two children. Sarah, or Sally, Morton married in 1786 Captain (later Rear-Admiral) William Hancock Kelly, Flag Captain of the *Adamant*, a man whom Nelson described variously as 'fat and merry as ever' or 'an ignorant self-sufficient man'. It seems that Nelson, having begun by liking Sally took umbrage and came to regard her as grasping and selfish. Her brother was Magnus Morton (later Magnus Morton Herbert) who eventually inherited, and lost, Herbert's estates. Nelson thought him a 'blockhead.'⁷⁴

One other person who should perhaps be mentioned in the context of 'family' is an enslaved man, John Mintas or Mintos. It was usual for planters in their wills, or before they left the island for good, to manumit their principal personal servants and to leave them an annuity. In his will of 1788 Herbert gave his 'mulatto man' John Mintas his 'absolute freedom and manumission from all slavery and servitude' and an annuity of £30 stlg. In terms of timing, Herbert was better than his word. On 15 May 1789 John 'Mintos...now my servant', was manumitted.⁷⁵ It is worth noting that this manumission was the only one granted by Herbert in his will and Mintas, if not strictly family, must have been close to him. As well as being a personal servant he was probably a Presidential 'gopher' and would have acquired a good deal of authority, in the first instance 'reflected' but, increasingly, in his own right. He may well have been with Herbert in England. Many years later, a Susanna Mintas, possibly a daughter of this man, was paid compensation for three slaves.⁷⁶

Nelson was impressed by the wealth Herbert had accumulated and, as a somewhat impecunious naval captain, excited at the 'prospects' which a marriage to the niece of this

⁷⁰ Naish, G P B (ed) *Nelson's letters to his wife and other documents 1785-1831* London, 1958 pp46-47

⁷¹ BULSC PP, Letterbook 5, 14 April 1784

⁷² Herbert also had a brother, Thomas, who died as a child in 1734.

⁷³ *Caribbeana* vol. 5 pp223-232 'Herbert of Nevis'

⁷⁴ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp220-221, Nelson to his wife 25 August 1795

⁷⁵ NC CR 1789-1790 ff179-180

⁷⁶ NA T 71/1039

wealthy man might bring. In November 1785 Nelson reported to his uncle on Herbert's view of his relationship with Fanny:

'I am as poor as Job, but he tells me he likes me, and I am descended from a good family, which his pride likes. But he also says, "Nelson, I am proud, and I must live like myself. Therefore, I can't do much in my lifetime. When I die she [Fanny] shall have twenty thousand pounds; if my daughter dies before me, she shall possess the major part of my property. I intend going to England in 1787, and remaining there my life. Therefore if you two can live happily together till that event takes place, you have my consent"'⁷⁷

In a further report, the following March, Nelson wrote:

'Although his income is immense, yet his expenses must be great, as his house is open to all strangers, and he entertains them most hospitably. I can't give you an idea of his wealth, for I don't believe he knows it himself. Many estates in that Island are mortgaged to him. The stock of Negroes upon his estate and cattle are valued at 60,000£ sterling: and he sends to England (average for seven years) 500 casks of sugar'.⁷⁸

Herbert stuck to his plan of going to England in 1787 and went to live at Cavendish Square in London. He was not there long when his house was burgled. In the December 'Sessions' for 1787 a Charles Berkeley was found guilty of taking goods to the value of £11-2-3 from Herbert's house; the judge recommended a sentence of seven years 'transportation'.⁷⁹ Life as an absentee planter in England seems not to have agreed with Herbert because by the end of 1788 there was talk of him returning to Nevis and Nelson reported to his wife 'Mr Herbert certainly goes out in the Spring'. The prospect of this return journey prompted Herbert to make his will on Christmas Eve 1788 and it is from this document, and from inventories drawn up after he died in 1793, that we are able to gather more detail about his family and his property.

To begin with there is a wonderful inventory of the clothes he left which is worth listing in full:

1 flannel coat, 2 flannel waistcoats, 4 banyans, 7 broad cloth coats, 1 regimental coat, 54 pairs of breeches, 11 pairs of sliders, 71 waistcoats, 17 stocks, 34 cravetts, 7 nets, 2 cotton caps, 59 shirts, 34 pairs silk stockings, 36 pairs thread stockings, 30 pocket handkerchiefs, 2 pairs silver shoe buckles, 2 pairs Bristol stone knee buckles, 1 hair bag, 3 pairs lace ruffles, 2 night gowns, 5 hats, 1 box shoes and books.⁸⁰

Certainly he had a full array of breeches, waistcoats and shirts from which to choose and it makes a stark contrast with the one set of clothing per year he would have allowed his own plantation workers.

⁷⁷ Sugden *Nelson: A Dream of Glory* p313 quoting Monmouth MSS E413, Nelson to Suckling 14 November 1785

⁷⁸ Quoted in Olwig, Karen Fog *Global Culture, Island Identity - Continuing Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993 p43

⁷⁹ NA HO 47/9/22, Judges' Reports on Criminals

⁸⁰ NC CR 1794-1797 f97

The house at Montpelier

The inventory of his house, drawn up on 8 February 1793, tells us a great deal both about the house and the affluent lifestyle of Herbert and his family at Montpelier.⁸¹ The house would almost certainly have been a two-storied wooden structure with a hipped roof, in which there was a loft, the whole built on stone foundations. A 1999 account of a modern house designed by Walter Chatham on the same site appears to show the foundations of the earlier house facing west and perpendicular to the public road. A ‘portico’ is mentioned; this is assumed to have been a veranda that provided shade and allowed people to take advantage of the cool breezes from the west. It may have surrounded the house and there may even have been one on the first floor.

Among the rooms were a drawing room, dining room and a breakfast room, assumed to be on the ground floor and off the veranda. There were four bedrooms, two to the left and two on the right, presumably on the first floor. Services were provided from a pantry, ironing room and kitchen. In addition there was a middle store, a wine store and a wine cellar. It is quite likely, based on experience with other houses, that the kitchen at least was separate from the main house because of the risk of fire.

The inventory is a reminder of Herbert’s role as the political and social leader of the island during his ‘Presidency’. Here he entertained governors, planters, visiting merchants, naval officers and dignitaries from other islands and from Britain. The drawing room had 12 mahogany chairs, a comfortable ‘sopha’ and an organ for entertainment. The dining room seems to have been the most opulent room with a sideboard, 4 dining tables, 18 chairs and 2 ‘elbow chairs’ and a chandelier. The glassware was kept in this room and included 3 punch bowls, 10 decanters of various sorts, 12 green Hock glasses, 5 cider glasses, 22 claret and 16 wine glasses. Three mahogany waiters were used for guests to help themselves.

The breakfast room may have been more of a domestic space since there were 3 pictures and 11 prints on the walls and only one dining table with 11 chairs. However, the china was also kept in this room and it presents a picture of some opulence as befitted his social position.

Five different sets of tableware are identifiable, the largest being ‘Red and White’ china with 95 plates, 33 soup plates, 22 soup dishes and 4 different tureens. There was also a set of blue and white china. Three smaller sets of white tableware were decorated with blue borders, plain gilt borders and blue and gilt borders; they were not described as ‘china’.

There are two interesting footnotes to this description of the china. It has been noted already that, in the 1772 hurricane, Herbert lost ‘a valuable quantity of china’ so it has to be assumed that the china appearing in the 1793 inventory included replacements bought after 1772. The other noteworthy point comes from the discussion between Oliver and Thompson about the origins of the Herberts. In October 1920 Oliver noted the following: ‘A few days ago a correspondent, whose mother had lived in Mrs Andrew Hamilton’s house in Nevis, sent me a rubbing of a coat of arms, on a piece of his plate, of which he knew nothing, and it was the single coat of Herbert, in the early Chippendale style circa 1750-60, and as J. R. Herbert was married in Mayfair in 1752, he may have been the original possessor.’⁸²

Tea was clearly important since there were several china tea canisters and one silver tea chest. Coffee was drunk too; one set of 10 coffee cups was listed together with a single cake dish. Milk and cream were not much in evidence because there was only 1 milk pot and 1 cream pot, although there were 6 silver butter dishes. Among the individual items listed were 5 ‘card

⁸¹ NC Book of Wills 1787-1805 ff234-257, ‘Inventory and Appraisement of the Furniture Stores etc...of the dwelling house of the Hon’ble John Richardson Herbert deceased as taken 8th February 1793’

⁸² Oliver, V L in *Notes and Queries* 12th Series, 2 October 1920 p273

saucers' and a shell pyramid. The '19 Glass wash hand basons' are of particular interest. A copy of an invoice has been found relating to Herbert, dated 29 July 1777, for goods sent by the *Nevis Planter*, Henry Webbe master.⁸³ Among the items ordered were '2 ½ doz Cut Glass wash hand Basons'. It is likely that the 19 listed in the inventory were survivors of this consignment.

The dining tables were decorated with silver drawn from a chest, although it is unclear, from the inventory, where this was kept. Among the knives and forks with silver handles and the '3 doz 2nd course solid silver forks' are individual items such as tankards, 2 silver punch bowl ladles, several cruet stands, a single, silver marrow spoon, a toast-rack and a bread basket. The guests would have helped themselves from the several large and 4 small, silver 'waiters'. The whole was valued at 5 shillings per ounce. Keeping the tables and guests clean were Damask table cloths (32), 'Common' table cloths (23) and 134 Damask napkins. 'Liquors' were kept in a variety of places – the house had a wine store and a wine cellar and there was a separate store down at the bay. The specific location of this latter store is unclear but the 1871 map of Nevis shows a store down on the shore at the bottom of 'Low Grounds'. Rum and Madeira were the drinks of choice. Two puncheons of rum, or somewhere between 140 and 240 gallons, were kept in the wine store. One of these was dated 1789 and the other 1791. There was also a 60 gallon cask of Antigua rum, perhaps from the Herbert or Williams estate in that island. A third puncheon was kept down at the bay store. Some of the rum would have been for slaves on the estate.

The Madeira is a reminder of the important role played by that island in commerce across the Atlantic. The wine store held a large quantity of different types and ages of this wine. There were two butts, that is roughly 250 gallons, together with 17 dozen bottles of what was listed simply as 'Madeira wine'. In addition, there were 32 dozen bottles of 'straw coloured' Madeira, that is lighter and drier wine, which had more brandy in it and tended to appeal to the North American market. Finally, there were 24 bottles of 'old Malmsey', the darker, sweeter Madeira. Down at the store on the bay were kept another three butts of ordinary Madeira. But the best of the Madeira was kept in two lofts in the house, probably to assist the aging process through the heat of the sun on the roof. In one of these, the 'loft over the chamber', the inventory listed 259 bottles of 'best old Madeira wine'. This was probably seven to ten years old already.

For those occasions which merited something else there was a cask of 'red seal'd' claret and two dozen bottles of 'green seal'd', 5 bottles of Hock, a cask of cider, a barrel of 'table beer' and two dozen bottles of porter stout.

The kitchen, pantry and ironing room contained a collection of cooking equipment which would not have looked out of place in a typical Georgian merchant's house in Bristol. In evidence are Dutch ovens and spits for roasting, several frying pans, 2 skillets and a number of iron pots. The ironing room seems to have lacked irons but did have a mangle and the room was obviously used for storing riding gear.

The inventory noted only a limited amount of food and one wonders how the servants and housekeeper managed to supply the large dinners required. Amongst other items, a hamper of potatoes was kept in the middle store together with dozens of bottles of vinegar, 4 pint bottles of fish sauce, a bag of coffee and 2 pints of lemon pickle.

The four bedchambers were arranged left and right, presumably off a corridor on the first floor. Three of them had four-poster beds and the other a plain bedstead; all of them had large numbers of chairs. The first left-hand chamber, with a 'biddy', and first right-hand chamber with a 'biddy' and 'night chair', perhaps might have been the principal bedrooms. The second

⁸³ BULSC West Indies Collection, DM 1061, 'Abstract of Goods for J R Herbert Nevis 29 July 1777'

right-hand chamber had a four-poster bed but, with its mahogany desk and two bookcases, might have served as a study or lady's 'withdrawing' room. Listed in the inventory were 17 pairs of sheets.

'Hicks's Room', which appears to be listed in the inventory after the pantry, may have been a housekeeper's room, with its 'city bedstead'. No other reference to 'Hicks' has been found but, towards the end of his life, Herbert's daughter had married and Frances Nisbet was living in England so he would have required a housekeeper. Similarly, there is little to be learned from the inventory about the large numbers of enslaved servants required to keep the house running and maintain Herbert's social position. Two bundles of 'Oznaburghs' and one bundle of 'Pennistones' in the pantry, both of them cloth, were undoubtedly for the servants. A trunk in the middle store held three pieces of 'Huckabuck Linens for Servants Cloaths'.

Although Nevis is a small island and Montpelier was not too far from Charlestown, travel in the eighteenth century was more difficult particularly at night and, like some other planters, Herbert also owned a house in Charlestown. In 1794 William Burt Weekes wrote from Bristol to his sister on Nevis about a piece of land 'opposite the house and land of the late President Herbert in which he formerly resided in town with my observations respecting them'. From the description of Weekes's land it would appear that Herbert's house was on the shore side of Main Street.⁸⁴

Herbert's other sugar plantations

'Clark's or Montpelier and Stapletons' estate was the domestic heart of what was, for Nevis, an unusually large group of estates built up by Herbert during his lifetime. It included Dasent's, Saddle Hill, Clay Gut, Coxheath (or Cox Heath) and the leased estate of Low Ground.

Herbert's will and the inventories⁸⁵ which followed his death in 1793 are useful sources for beginning to understand the details of these estates. Another important source is a Chancery Court case of 1824 initiated by Magnus Morton Herbert at a time when this group of estates ran into financial trouble.⁸⁶ Finally, there are the various sources in the UK National Archives dealing with slave compensation after partial Emancipation in 1834. In some cases they can be informative about the history of an estate.

The first of the inventories is an 'Inventory and Appraisement of the Mountain Estate of the Honourable John Richardson Herbert deceased' taken on 8 February 1793. It is assumed, because it is the first, that this refers to Clarke's/Montpelier although this needs further examination. It lists 158 enslaved people of whom 10 were tradesmen. Of these people 50 were men, 50 women, 22 boys, 17 girls and 19 were described as 'children'. In the 1824 Chancery Court case Magnus Morton Herbert lists 'all that plantation or parcel of land called by the name of Clarke's Plantation containing by estimation one hundred and thirty acres of land'. No boundaries are given and there are, of course, no plans. By then 164 slaves are mentioned.

Attached to it, and leased from the Stapleton family, came the estate of Low Ground, some details of which have already been given. Herbert had continued to lease the estate all the way through the 1770s. In 1783-1784 Herbert had used John Pinney to try and negotiate an

⁸⁴ BULSC PP, Domestic Box S-1, William Burt Weekes to his sister 16 November 1794

⁸⁵ NC Book of Wills 1787-1805, from f235

⁸⁶ Berkshire Record Office, Loveden Papers D/ELV/26, Office Copy of Nevis Chancery Court Bill of Complaint, Magnus Morton Herbert vs Richard Dennistoun et al 1824 (Loveden Papers D/ELV/26)

extension to the lease of Low Ground with Sir Thomas Stapleton, the first son and heir of the 5th Baronet, a 'minor'. Although Herbert was ultimately successful, these particular negotiations through Pinney were difficult and not particularly fruitful because they were carried on, once more, through the 'artfull lawyer' Mr McNamara.⁸⁷ In 1793 there was a separate inventory for Low Ground of those items which were Herbert's property. Buildings were mentioned which must have constituted structures Herbert had put up to improve the estate. Listed along with the stock were 145 field negros, 5 tradesmen and 7 coopers. Among those named were Hannibal, who had drowned in a cistern and Constant who had been found 'dead in the canes'. All the slaves were clearly Herbert's 'property' rather than belonging to Sir Thomas Stapleton and so, between 1764 and 1793, Herbert had built up a considerable workforce, probably through buying enslaved Africans off the ships as well as buying locally born creoles. The total value of Herbert's property on the estate, including slaves, some buildings, the sugar crop and some land amounted to £20,538 Ncr or about £11,736 sterling.

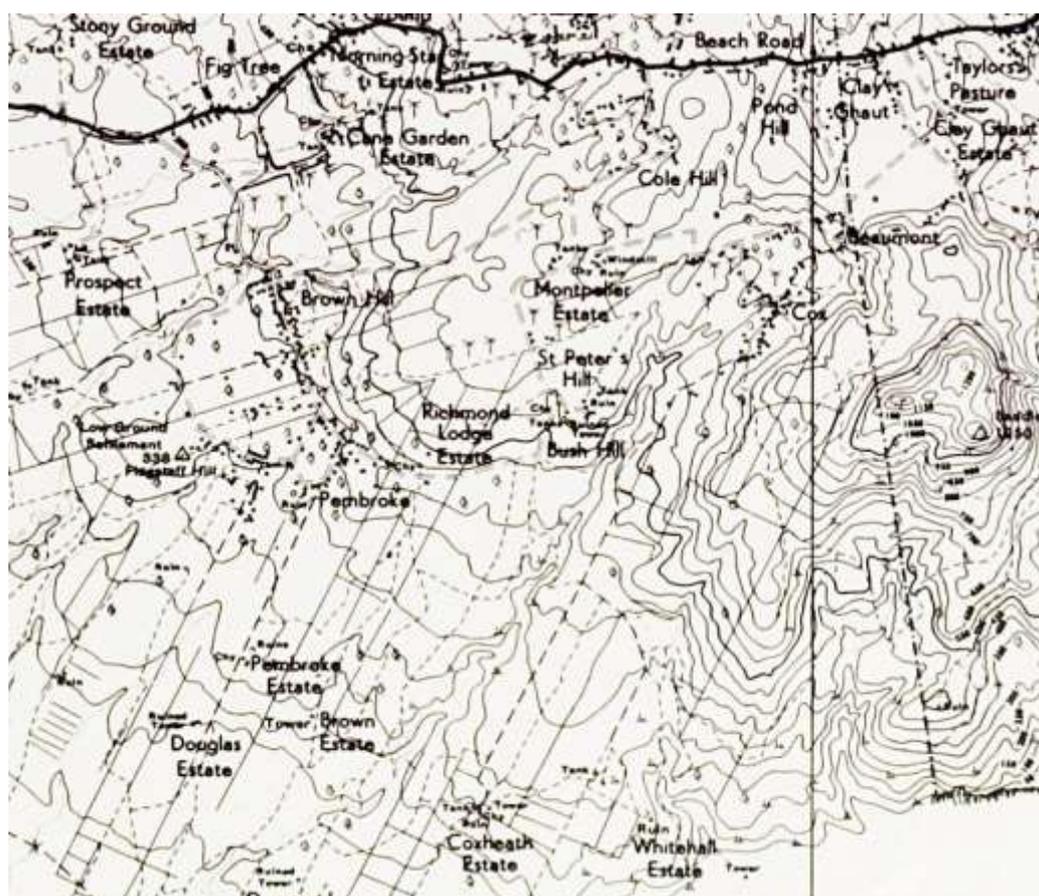


Fig 3: Estates around Montpelier, extracted from 'Nevis with Part of Saint Christopher' D.O.S. 1960, courtesy of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum

⁸⁷ A series of letters from John Pinney to Herbert reported on his efforts. An agreement was made with McNamara that the lease (which ran out on 6 January 1786) would be extended to 6 January 1788 and that a further lease would be granted on the same terms to 6 January 1793. Pinney complained about McNamara delaying in the hope that Herbert would become the purchaser and about his duplicity in seeking to undermine the agreement. See BULSC PP, Letterbook 5, 28 October 1783 and 16 April 1784, Letterbook 6, 13 July and 27 December 1784, Letterbook 7, 9 July 1784.

Dasent's, in St George Gingerland, had been the property of the island's Chief Justice, John Dasent. In 1772 it still belonged to him for his estate is listed as having lost a boiling house and every outhouse in the hurricane.⁸⁸ An inventory of the estate in 1793, when it belonged to Herbert, lists 113 enslaved people. Four of the women and one man had leprosy. By 1797 there were 118 slaves attached. Indentures of 1797 give boundaries⁸⁹ which suggest that the bulk of the estate of 150 acres lay in roughly the area it is shown on the 1984 D.O.S. map of Nevis, that is, south of the main island road and east of Hanley's Road.⁹⁰

Saddle Hill plantation was another ex-Dasent estate.⁹¹ Deeds in the Nevis Courthouse record that on 2 July 1783 Saddle Hill Estate, formerly owned by Hon. John Dasent, and Clay Gut Estate were put up for sale by the Provost Marshall on Nevis and Herbert bid for the plantations and became the owner.⁹² Alone that summary would be perfectly clear but another document records a different transaction on 22 September 1792. In this source Francis Williams Sanders of Greys Inn and his mother Elizabeth Sanders sold and assigned Saddle Hill plantation, of 153 acres, to Herbert for an annuity of £160 sterling to the son and £50 Nevis currency to the mother. Elsewhere in the document it gives the acreage as 135 acres and notes there were 88 slaves.⁹³ It is believed that a Thomas Williams, who appears to have owned land at Saddle Hill and who died in 1766, left part of his estate to a John Williams Sanders, the father of Francis.

Clay Gut⁹⁴, or a major part of it amounting to 102 acres, had belonged to a Margaret Cressey before the Pinney family foreclosed on a mortgage in 1728. It was smaller than, and seems to have bordered on, Upper Gingerland. The history of the estate is not clear in accounts of the Pinneys but it seems to have been leased or sold to a Mr Williams. On this estate his two sisters, Frances and Sarah Williams, held mortgages amounting in total to £2300. But it was also mortgaged to the firm Mills & Swanston. In 1777 John Pinney noted to this firm that the Williams mortgages had priority over theirs 'in fact they have nothing else to depend upon for their support and as I know their distressed situation... (I) have promised them a few hogsheads of Rum from the Estate'. However he noted that, if he were to force a sale of Williams's estate to raise the money demanded by Mills & Swanston, 'I am satisfied in these times, there would not be a single bidder'. The Williams sisters, in turn, were inclined 'to ease their Brother' by not calling in the full amount.⁹⁵ In the end, 66 acres of Clay Gut Estate belonging to John Williams jun. had to be sold at a Marshall's sale in 1783 and these were bought by Herbert. He then became responsible for the mortgage held by the Williams sisters.⁹⁶ Eventually Herbert came to own the whole estate which in 1797 had 415 acres and

⁸⁸ In 1773 Dasent sold to Herbert two small estates in St George Gingerland, Sommers Upper Plantation of 50 acres and Jenkins Rice jr.'s Lower Plantation of 40 acres and 14 acres of land near the sea, formerly in tenure of Jenkins Rice jr. deceased, with 80 slaves, but these pieces may have not been his core estate. See NC CR 1777-1778 f122.

⁸⁹ Bounded east by lands of Copley [sic Cossley] Saunders, west by land of Walter Maynard, north by lands of Magnus Morton [?Hard Times] and James Huggins and south by lands of George Symonds deceased. See Loveden Papers D/ELV/26.

⁹⁰ Several plans of one part of Dasent's Estate, amounting to between 55 and 78 acres, dated ca. 1881 and 1893, show that particular part as having been either northeast of Old Manor Estate or having been included in Old Manor. See NC CR 1877-1899 f162 and NC Land Title Register Book 1 f137.

⁹¹ The 1836 sale notice states that the estate was bounded to the north by lands late of Finlay Nicholson, now of Thomas Budgen and by Coxheath estate, to the east by Clay Gut, to the south by lands late of Haddock Prentis but now of the assignees of Edward Frith dec'd, to the west by the sea. It contained about 94a of cane land and 40a of pasture. See *London Gazette* 11 October 1836.

⁹² NC CR 1783-1785 f146

⁹³ Loveden Papers D/ELV/26

⁹⁴ The name of this estate is spelt in a variety of ways including Clay Ghut, Clay Gutt and Clay Ghaut.

⁹⁵ BULSC PP, Letterbook 4, Pinney to Mills & Swanston 3 May 1777

⁹⁶ There appear to have been two Williams estates, one belonging to John and the other to Joseph, both possibly sons of 'old' Mr Williams. There is an interesting plea from John Pinney to Herbert to subscribe £10 to a collection for the release from jail of 'Count Williams...once in affluent circumstances' who had been imprisoned for a debt 'of an unworthy son'. See BULSC PP, Letterbook 5, 4 February 1784.

135 slaves.⁹⁷ It included 164 acres of caneland, presumably the original plantation, to which 250 acres of pasturage in Gingerland, called Dunbar's Dale, had been added at some point.⁹⁸

The windmill at Clay Gut has an inscription 'Hon J R Herbert Esq 1785'. Among the actual builders may have been a Joe, or John, Moore, a skilled man described as Mr Herbert's 'negro mason' in 1790. John Pinney apprenticed a 15 year-old mulatto slave called William Fisher to Mr Moore to learn the trade, for which the mason was paid £15 Ncr by way of an apprenticeship fee.⁹⁹ The following year Pinney recommended to his own manager the windmill at Clay Gut as a model for the mill he was about to build on Mountravers at the lower works (now known as Pinney's Yard).¹⁰⁰ It is possible that Mr Moore may also have worked on the windmill at Montpelier.

Little has come to light about Coxheath in the eighteenth century. Based purely on the name, the estate may have had some connection with Richard Cox, a merchant of Bristol who had been a member of the Nevis Council around 1749/50. Together with Samuel New he owned the plantations of Bristol in St John Figtree and Clifton in St Thomas Lowland prior to 1763.¹⁰¹ When the inventory of Coxheath was carried out in 1793 the estate had 102 slaves. Listed among these were Kate, who was a runaway and George, who had yaws; Rudy had died, drowned in the worm tub. Among the buildings mentioned were a windmill with a 'dungeon', a dwelling house valued at £100 Ncr and a sick house. The whole estate, including slaves, was valued at £20,071 Ncr (around £11,469 stlg).¹⁰² In 1797 the estate amounted to 120 acres but by 1836 had increased to 170 acres of cane land and about 40 acres of pasture.

Succession and inheritance

Having found that living in England did not suit him, John Richardson Herbert returned to Nevis in 1789 and died there aged about 61. He was buried on 19 January 1793 at St John Figtree, a wealthy and powerful leader of the planter community.¹⁰³ From Clarke's/Montpelier, his residential estate, he had controlled six largely contiguous plantations, totalling 1250 acres, and the lives of about 740 enslaved people. As a single economic entity it was unmatched on Nevis at the time.

To the will he had drawn up in England on Christmas Eve 1788 Herbert added codicils dated 5 December 1792 and 13 January 1793.¹⁰⁴ The central provision of the main document, after certain specific legacies, was to leave his estate in trust for his daughter Martha Williams Hamilton. Although Herbert never remarried after the death of his wife Elizabeth, the will makes it clear that he had a number of families.

Herbert's second family was with a free mulatto woman called Maria. It was not unusual for widowed planters to have a relationship with a mixed race or black woman. In this case she was free and therefore had an element of choice about whether to pursue the relationship or

⁹⁷ In 1836 Clay Gut was bounded to the east by lands late of John Hanley, 'now' of Edward Huggins, to the south by Saddle Hill estate, to the west by the Stapleton's Low Ground estate and by 'Montpellier' and by the road running between Clay Gut estate and Saddle Hill estate and to the north by the high road dividing Clay Gut estate from lands of Robert Pemberton deceased. See *London Gazette* 11 October 1836.

⁹⁸ Loveden Papers D/ELV/26

⁹⁹ BULSC PP, Account Book 39, Cash a/c and 1790 Plantation a/c

¹⁰⁰ BULSC PP, Letterbook 9, Pinney to William Burt Weekes 24 January 1791. Details of the windmill at Clay Gut can be found in Gjessing, F C and Wilkins, W W *The Windmills on Nevis, BWI* Historic Structures Report pt 1, 1963, Nevis Historical and Conservation Society Archives (NHCS), MG 10.8

¹⁰¹ NA CO 155/8 and *Caribbeana* vol. 6 p116, will of Samuel New, 1763

¹⁰² NC Book of Wills 1787-1805 f252

¹⁰³ A memorial tablet in the church stresses his hospitality, integrity and other virtues.

¹⁰⁴ NA PROB 11/1230. A summary is given in *Caribbeana* vol. 5 pp 223-232 'Herbert of Nevis'.

not. In Herbert's will she was left three slaves: any two women belonging to Herbert, except those with children, and one man provided he was not a tradesman. These people were to pass, on her death, to a free 'mustee' called John Herbert, 'my reputed natural son by her', then living in Bristol. She was also to get an annuity of £200 Ncr. Their son John was to get Herbert's substantial 'wardrobe', gold watch chain and seals and £1500 sterling to which was added a further £1000.

Written into a codicil to the will was a particular provision concerning Maria's situation after Herbert's death. She was left an additional £50 Ncr 'and the house she now lives in with permission to her to reside in it where it now stands for twelve months if she pleases before she shall be obliged to take it down and carry away'. Herbert was clearly trying to afford her a measure of temporary protection against any overzealous trustee or family member, though not for very long. There is no indication as to where the house stood, for instance whether it was on the estate or in town. It seems to have been a smallish, portable house.

The legacies to Maria and her son raise several issues. The first is that the sums left to these black family members were substantial. The value of Maria's annuity might equate to £115 sterling or, in today's values, roughly £6,500 a year. Black or mulatto mothers in just such a relationship were often left a legacy, not an annuity, of £100 Ncr. Similarly Herbert's son, John, was left the equivalent in today's values of £140,000 sterling. Although that does not compare with the value of the property left to his white half-sister, it is an almost uniquely large sum of money inherited by the mixed-race son of a Nevis planter.

Secondly, it is worth noting that John was reported to have been in Bristol at the time the will was drawn up, although by 1794/5 he was in London at Warren Street in St Pancras. It is possible that he was trading as a merchant of some sort but by then he was in debt. Around that time he assigned £1000 of his legacy to George Fisher, a merchant of Lambeth. Although John died before 1824, the assignment went through at least three different hands and was still being claimed against slave compensation in 1835.¹⁰⁵

There is one very revealing letter about Maria, written just after she died. On 28 May 1795 John Pinney wrote to John Herbert at John Roberts, 45 Great Russell St, Bloomsbury, London replying to John Herbert's letter of 25 May. Pinney was not able to give details 'of your late Mother's effects – what she had with her here is not sufficient to pay the expence of her funeral'. He had heard

'that she should say several of her Negroes were hired to Mr Hamilton and that she had sold two to Mr Morton for which he had given his Bond – she also said that she had left with Mrs Hamilton above one hundred pounds in money and the late Mr Herbert's gold watch, and I suppose there may be £30 or £40 due on her Annuity. Three trunks and some Bedding, I understand, are in the Custom House in London – in one of which is the Clothes you mention'.

The trunk belonged to a Mathew Wilks 'taken in the *Ranger*, Capt. Cook, from Barbados who was a prisoner with your Mother at L'Orient [Lorient in Brittany] and behaved very kindly to her'. Wilks had put some papers in the trunk and wanted Herbert's mother to deliver the trunk and papers 'when she came to London'. Pinney had not yet learnt where Wilks was staying but expected to be informed soon. Mr Baillie had undertaken 'to adjust and settle your Mother's affairs here; therefore all Keys and whatever trifling property she might have left in her Lodgings will be delivered up to him.' Also, she had left a trunk in France with a power of attorney to a gentleman and she seemed sure that he would be able to get it for her and that he would send it on by an American vessel. Pinney assured John Herbert that property left with Mr and Mrs Hamilton was safe in their hands.

¹⁰⁵ NA T 71/1237

Pinney also noted a bill of John Herbert's for £110, 'accepted by you', which was due on 30 September 1793 but which had been 'regularly protested for non-payment'. The creditor, William Scarborough, had requested Tobin & Pinney to recover the money from John Herbert. Pinney had called at his lodgings several times without seeing him and he had not responded to their letters. Herbert was asked to settle the bill. They would then forward it to William Scarborough, who Pinney thought might be able to get Mr Hamilton to pay up.¹⁰⁶

John Richardson Herbert had another 'reputed natural son', Thomas Herbert. He was a 'mulatto' so his mother was unlikely to have been Maria. There is no mention of her in the will. Thomas, who had remained on Nevis, was only left £300 Ncr (about £170 sterling) but he was excused debts he owed to Herbert, so clearly he had been helped at some earlier point.

One unusual feature of Herbert's will was a provision which stated that should Maria, John Herbert, Thomas Herbert or John Mintas have to use the law to claim their inheritance then the costs of any such action were to be paid out of Herbert's estate. Again, it seems that Herbert did not necessarily trust his executors and members of the family to stand by the legacies left to the black members of his family.

Martha Williams Hamilton

The principle beneficiary of the will was Herbert's daughter, Martha. Her father seems to have disapproved of her choice of husband. That man was Andrew Hamilton who had bought the large 'Hamilton's Estate' from Sir Ralph Payne in 1772.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that he was the son of a Dr William Hamilton of St Kitts and he was baptised at St George Basseterre on St Kitts on 11 June 1743.¹⁰⁸ He was listed as a merchant in 1785, of Fenchurch Street in London, late of St Kitts. His first wife, according to Oliver, may have been Hannah Vaughan with whom he had a son, William Vaughan Hamilton.¹⁰⁹ Hamilton's wife had died in England on 14 March 1782 and, in his forties, he married Martha Williams Herbert 18 May 1787¹¹⁰, shortly before her father left for England.

One of the sources of her father's disapproval was probably the fact that Hamilton's commercial activities were unwise. They had either landed him in debt already or were likely to. One example of this is his commercial relationship with the Rev. William Jones for whom Hamilton stood security. The Pinneys' commercial house wrote about Jones: 'We are at a loss to conceive how he could contrive to consume so much property'.¹¹¹ Hamilton's estate suffered a misfortune in the hurricane of 1785 when the greathouse was destroyed and it may have been for that reason that Hamilton leased the estate to Benjamin Vaughan the same year.¹¹²

Martha and her husband went to England in 1787 and, according to Herbert's will, lived for a period in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. Sometime before the end of 1788 the couple returned to Nevis. In August 1788 Nelson reported to his wife after a visit to Herbert: 'Mrs

¹⁰⁶ BULSC PP, Letterbook 12, Pinney to John Herbert 28 May 1795

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, D 'A short history of Hamilton Plantation' in *NHCS Newsletter* May 1992 pp4-6 based on information drawn from NC CR. Although the article suggests the estate was sold in 1785 to Benjamin Vaughan, it is more likely that this was one of a number of leases by the Hamiltons.

¹⁰⁸ *Caribbeana* vol. 1 p359

¹⁰⁹ He went out to Nevis in 1805 and subsequently wrote from Spanish Town in Jamaica in 1818 that he was Rector of St Catherine's. See *Caribbeana* vol. 1 p359.

¹¹⁰ Oliver, V L *Caribbeana* vol. 3 p109

¹¹¹ Pares *A West India Fortune* p245

¹¹² Hubbard, Vincent K *Swords, Ships & Sugar - History of Nevis* 5th ed, Corvallis, Oregon, Premiere Editions International, 2002 p32

Mills and myself could not keep from laughing. Poor Mr Huggins is quite in disgrace and is to be turned out very shortly. Mrs Hamilton is to take possession of Montpelier if their house is not ready'.¹¹³ Two months later Hamilton seems to have mortgaged his own estate to the merchants Richard and Thomas Neave.¹¹⁴

Mrs Hamilton had a large inheritance. According to the inventories, the Nevis estates were worth £125,861 Ncr or roughly £72,000 sterling. The equivalent in today's values might be something around £4 million sterling. She also inherited unspecified 'real estate' in Antigua, presumably one or more plantations. She came into this fortune just after the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars. Although that was a turbulent time in Atlantic history, when the supplies on which planters depended were often interrupted and certainly became more expensive, nevertheless generally, until 1815, it was a period of prosperity for planters when sugar prices and land values were high.

In Herbert's will there were certain conditions and legacies which became the source of much gossip, debate and, ultimately, recourse to the law. It is really only because of this that there is any account at all of what was happening to the Herbert/Hamilton estates on Nevis in the next 20 years. The main provision in Herbert's will was that his daughter should, in effect, have a life interest in the estate which was entailed to her children, if she had any. There was, however, a proviso that income from the estates should be applied to her upkeep rather than to any liabilities of her husband.

Herbert had also made arrangements, on behalf of his nephew Magnus Morton, to discharge certain mortgages contracted by the Morton family (making the total sum up to £10,000) and provision for him to inherit the Herbert estates if Martha and Andrew Hamilton were to die childless, provided he took the name Herbert. Shortly after Herbert's death and presumably on the basis of his markedly improved prospects, Morton married Christianna Forbes, the daughter of George Clarke Forbes and his wife Mary from the neighbouring estate of Bush Hill, on 9 April 1793 at St John Figtree.

There had been some rather grand talk between Herbert and Nelson about what Fanny Nisbet might inherit. In the end she was left at least £4,000; her son Josiah inherited £500. The struggle to lay hands on the money and her sharp and witty comments in letters to her husband, together with his more angry replies, give us some insight into the life of Martha Hamilton at this time.

Nelson wrote to his wife on 12 March 1793 that he had called on Mr Fraser, one of Herbert's trustees, and 'they had not opened the copy of the will...'. The Trustees told him that they did not think the £100 promised by Herbert to him could be paid (perhaps because it was not mentioned in the will). 'Everybody knows the amount of the legacy. Mr Maynard and Mr Brown told Mr Thomas that the estate is only entailed to Mr Morton, therefore in fact he has given his whole property to the Mortons except the few legacies, but never mind it.'¹¹⁵ Three days later he followed it up with 'And now you will recollect that a handsome fortune for Josiah depends on your surviving Mrs Hamilton'. Not only were they struggling to get the legacy but they could not even get the interest paid on it. Nelson showed his anger and frustration in October 1794: 'As to these West India people I put no confidence in them. I hope we shall get the legacy paid in due time and then I shall not care about them.'¹¹⁶ In

¹¹³ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* p51, 26 August 1788

¹¹⁴ Ingram K E *Manuscript Sources for the History of the West Indies* Barbados, 1975 quoting National Library of Jamaica, MS 1331 release from Andrew Hamilton to Richard and Thomas Neave of Walker's, or Windmill, plantation and Payne's Upper, or Morgan's, plantation in Nevis, 1 November 1788

¹¹⁵ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp73-74, Nelson to his wife from London 12 March 1793

¹¹⁶ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp186-187, Nelson to his wife 24 October 1794

November Fanny Nelson noted the news that ‘Mrs Morton has lost a son and heir to Montpelier’.¹¹⁷

In December 1794, Fanny reported on the gossip including the suggestion that ‘the West Indies is worse than ever’:

‘Mrs Hamilton never stirs out, has thirty cats...The Forbes are going to the West Indies in a very great hurry, how could it be otherwise they lived quite a style...I shall make Mr Pinny who is coming here tell me how I am to draw upon Baily for the money’.¹¹⁸

During the next two years Nelson complained about the Hamiltons and Mortons expecting the couple to ‘live on air’ and using the produce of the estate for purposes other than paying the legacies and interests due. In August 1795 Nelson wrote to Fanny that ‘It is scandalous to withhold the scanty pittance from you. As to Mrs Hamilton I am not surprised at any part of her conduct or young Morton, who is a blockhead.’¹¹⁹

Herbert’s will specifically enjoined that care be taken ‘to prevent my said Daughter or her present husband...from defeating or destroying the trusts or equitable Interests hereinbefore given...’. In other words, the Trustees were to look out for any attempt by the Hamiltons to change the provisions of the will. This is precisely what they set out to do and the process was recorded in some detail both in Fanny Nelson’s letters and in a subsequent court case.

A long letter concerning the Nevis estates was written by Fanny on 3 April 1797, two months after Nelson’s naval success at the Battle of Cape St Vincent. The first news from Bristol was that Sarah Kelly had told Miss Tobin that her brother, Magnus Morton, and Mrs Hamilton had consulted the first lawyers in England about whether they could cut off the entail of Mr Herbert’s estate. They had received a satisfactory answer. Mrs Hamilton had offered Morton thirty thousand pounds, which he had accepted and he and Mrs Morton were coming to England. Morton was to spend a short time with his wife and then return to the West Indies. ‘Mrs Morton’s income would be five thousand a year.’ Fanny noted that she had got used to not believing rumours. However at Mr Pinney’s she had had a visit from Evan Baillie who reported on what Mrs Hamilton had written to him about their plans. ‘Hamilton had wrote him that from my uncle’s estates he should ship four hundred hogsheads at least, which will pay off, Mr B. says, all the debts and legacies....Mr H. offered Morton Dasent’s estate and I think Mr B. said ten thousand sterling.’ Baillie was a trustee for both the estate and the legacy and stated that he would look after the Nelson interest. ‘They are all loud against Mrs Hamilton as she has no children. Why not let her father’s female heirs have a chance?’¹²⁰ In May 1797 Nelson was a bit more relaxed having calculated his share of the prize money. ‘You may build upon £5000 in addition to my half pay, it may be more but this you are sure of besides your money from Mr Herbert...I care not about the entail of Mr Herbert’s estate but it [is] unhandsome. As to Mrs Kelly she is all self.’¹²¹

At this point it is worth considering what was actually happening with the inheritance. It was a valuable collection of estates. However, the legacies left by Herbert amounted to around £20,000 or about 28% of the value of those estates and some of the estates had outstanding mortgages against them. The Hamiltons had their own estate but it seems to have been leased and was almost certainly mortgaged to the hilt. Morton had his own estate, Hard Times, next door to Dasent’s in Gingerland. He also had prospects from the intailing of the Herbert estates

¹¹⁷ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp259-260, Mrs Nelson to her husband 27 November 1794

¹¹⁸ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp264-265, Mrs Nelson to her husband 17 December 1794

¹¹⁹ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp220-221, Nelson to his wife 25 August 1795

¹²⁰ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp356-358, Mrs Nelson to her husband 13 April 1797

¹²¹ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp324-325, Lord Nelson to his wife 27 May 1797

to him in the event that the Hamiltons had no children. He was also paid a salary for managing 'the estate'.

Given the size of the legacies, the trustees and the Hamilton and Morton families had a number of options. One was to sell one or two of the estates, for example Clay Gut and Saddle Hill, and this would have paid off the legacies and debts. On the other hand, that would have made a major hole in the productive capacity of the enterprise. With the benefit of hindsight, this might have produced a more sustainable result.

Another option was to follow the line taken by Hamilton that they could use the produce of the estates collectively to pay off the claimants. Given that the expenses of a well run estate were generally paid off by the sale of the rum produced it was probably not unreasonable that over time the legacies and debts could be paid off from the sugar production. Most planters were over-optimistic about the amount of sugar which was going to be produced and 400 hogsheads may have been just that. However, sugar production of that order would have made somewhere between £21,000 and £24,000 and over a few years they should have been able to pay off the claims.

The rumours which reached Fanny in April 1797 were reasonably accurate. By an agreement with Morton dated 12 and 13 May 1797 the Hamiltons bought out Morton's 'contingent remainder intail' to Herbert's estates in return for a cash sum of £10,000 and a life interest in Dasent's Plantation which had 150 acres and 118 slaves. If Mrs Hamilton died without any children then Dasent's was to go to Morton and his heirs forever.¹²² Morton also gave up his salary for managing the Herbert 'estate'. From then on Mrs Hamilton was in complete control of the remainder of the estates and at her death they were to go to whomever she decided, although Morton, as will be seen, was not completely out of the picture.¹²³

Two years later Lady Nelson wrote to her husband in June 1799 'Report says my rich cousin is coming home. I wonder how we shall stand in her good graces'. She followed this up in October 1799 with 'Mr and Mrs Hamilton are arrived in England. I congratulated her on the occasion and received a letter of thanks and full handsome expressions of you and speaks highly of your goodness to my Josiah. She concludes by saying with economy and good crops she hopes to remain in England'. Economy seems to have been a relative concept for, on 13 November 1799 Lady Nelson wrote:

'Mr and Mrs Hamilton are in London. I understand they will keep an excellent table when they remove into their new house, No. 1 Harley Street. Poor Hamilton much good may do him the prospect of my cousin's great fortune. She was truly glad to see me, made kind enquiries after you and Josiah, declares Mr H. has never been in his sober senses since he heard of the Battle of the Nile. Mr H absolutely cries with joy when he mentions it. Everybody in the West Indies claimed you as their acquaintance who (Mr H. says) had seen the hem of your garment.'

Further slightly waspish accounts of the Hamiltons followed, one on 10 December 1799. 'I wish I could say Mrs Hamilton is the least modernised of all the antique figures. She is certainly the most. Mr Morton pays great attention...'. Three days later all was not well with Mrs Hamilton. 'Mrs Hamilton I hear is ill, I called but was not let in. She has sent for a physician but positively refuses to do any one thing he advises. I never beheld a creature with so much patience as Mr Hamilton. He will get all her money which I think he deserves.'

¹²² Loveden Papers D/ELV/26

¹²³ Shortly after the agreement Morton was enjoying a modest stay in Bristol. Pinney wrote to Morton in July 1797 that Mrs Pinney had gone to the village of Clifton, then just outside Bristol, and had found a house for the Mortons at No. 24 The Mall, owned by a Mrs Mills. The house had a dining room, drawing room, four good chambers and four rooms in the garret, tea china and Queensware for the table, all to be had for five guineas a week. See BULSC PP, Letterbook 12, 19 July 1797.

In February 1800 Lady Nelson wrote: 'Mrs Hamilton is a perfect recluse in Harley Street, neither stirs out nor admits any inside her house'. In what is probably a reference to her the following month '...cats and dogs. I am told not a creature is asked inside of her house. Mrs Morton was telling me all this. I therefore said it was fortunate Mrs K[elly] had her brother's house to go to'.¹²⁴

For several years, at least, the Hamiltons were absentee planters and lived in Central London in some style, surrounded by cats and dogs. The cost, however, must have been too great for at some stage they returned to Nevis despite the expressed intention to remain in England. It seems clear that Thomas Mills's comments in the 1760s about Martha Herbert's capacity to spend money were extremely prescient. From 1805 Mrs Hamilton began a process of mortgaging the estates. To add to her troubles, her husband died on 3 April 1808.¹²⁵

The list of mortgages and debts accumulated between 1805 and Mrs Hamilton's death in 1819 is given in Morton's 1824 Chancery Case. In his words she 'contracted very many large debts' and created 'several incumbrances'. In 1805 she secured a debt or a mortgage of £6000 owed to the London merchants Latham & Neave on a part of Coxheath and the attached slaves. By 1817 a further £6400 was owed to a London merchant Thomas Plummer, again secured on Coxheath. In the same year Liverpool merchants William Ewart, William Calton and others had a claim secured on Saddle Hill for £15,000. Martha Hamilton had borrowed very large sums from the Glasgow merchants Dennistouns, secured on Saddle Hill, Coxheath and Clay Gut, and at the time of her death still owed them £17,000. Clearly even a large and potentially profitable collection of estates such as hers would struggle to support a level of debt which amounted at her death to something in the order of £44,000 sterling or £1,850,000 in today's values.

Walter Lewis Bucke, a Nevis planter, noted in his diary on 23 July 1819 that Mrs Hamilton was ill. She died three weeks later on 12 Aug and was buried the following day at St John Figtree.¹²⁶ Her will and subsequent codicils listed further incumbrances on the estates totalling around £10,000 stlg, equivalent to about £420,000 in today's values. These mostly took the form of legacies to her cousins Mary Smith, Edward Thomas Wolfe and Margaret Galpine and their children.¹²⁷ In addition, Mary Smith was bequeathed two 'stout' negro men and one negro woman from the estate. Some care was taken to look after the extensive Dasent family whose estate Herbert had acquired; this had then been handed over to Magnus Morton in the 1797 agreement. She required that the house at Crab Hole occupied by the Dasent family was to be kept in repair and the family allowed to remain there in their accustomed style. They were to have the attendance of six of her negroes, these to have their usual allowances and medical care.

Comparison of the will with the 1817 slave register for Montpelier suggests that Martha Hamilton surrounded herself with a coterie of mixed race domestic servants. Her principal waiting woman was Jenny, a mustee woman aged twenty eight (in 1819). By the terms of the will she was given her freedom, together with her daughter Eliza, aged 9, and her mother Nancy, a 'mulatto' who was 64. Jenny was given the remainder of Mrs Hamilton clothes, not the best since they, together with the diamonds and pearls, went to Mary Smith and her daughters; nevertheless clothes were valuable. More valuable still was the £50 stlg annuity for Jenny which would, after her death, be reduced to £20 for her daughter. A house was to be

¹²⁴ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp530-552, Lady Nelson to her husband 30 June, 21 October, 13 November, 10 December and 13 December 1799, 17 February and 4 March 1800

¹²⁵ In November 1810 Hamilton's Estate was given up. See Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b), typed extracts from the diary of Walter Lewis Bucke.

¹²⁶ Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (a and b); Oliver *Monumental Inscriptions of the British West Indies* p89

¹²⁷ NC Book of Wills 1819-1830 f24. See also a copy in Rhodes House Library, Oxford Box MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (a) and details revealed in Loveden Papers D/ELV/26.

built for Jenny on a part of the estate called Duberry's (or Dewberry's) which Martha Williams Hamilton had acquired after the death of her father.¹²⁸

The other servants who were specifically mentioned were Candice, Mary, Kitty and Patty. Three of them seem to have been middle-aged mulattoes but they were not given their freedom; they were each left a £20 Ncr annuity. Interestingly, all the women and the domestics were given an additional sum for 'mourning', a provision that more usually applied only to white friends and relatives of planters. Candice does not appear on the 1817 slave register for Montpelier, although she may either have been a free woman or have come from one of the other Herbert or Hamilton estates. She was to take charge of all Mrs Hamilton's dogs and was to be allowed £10 Ncr a year for the maintenance of each dog. This was roughly equivalent to just under £6 stlg. It is worth noting that at least one estimate given to the Parliamentary enquiry into the slave trade 30 years earlier gave £4 - £6 as the annual cost to planters for one slave's food, clothing and medical attendance. It says a great deal about the way enslaved human beings were treated that the care given to them cost about as much as that given to the plantation owner's dogs.

In practice, although there were a limited number of manumissions as a direct result of Mrs Hamilton's will, there were a number of further changes in people's lives which followed on from her death, as revealed by the 1822 slave register for the estate. A young mulatto girl, Bessy or Betsey, aged 11 in 1817, was manumitted sometime between 1817 and 1822. She was known as 'Patty's' Bessy and it is possible that she was the daughter of Mrs Hamilton's waiting woman of that name and that there was some private deal by which Patty herself would not be freed but her daughter would be. Even luckier was John, another mulatto, this time a baby boy, born on 28 October 1818. He was freed two years later in December 1820.

Two slaves were required to change owners as a result of bequest. Nancy, a young mixed-race woman of 19 and Pockery, a black man aged 31, were both transferred on 12 August 1819 as a result of the bequest to Mary Smith.

Magnus Morton

Magnus Morton may, or may not, have merited Nelson's description of him as a 'blockhead' but he inherited estates which were burdened by the legacies of his uncle, many of which had not been paid off. To add to this the plantations had been heavily mortgaged by his cousin and were loaded with current account debts. Finally, he had to pay the additional legacies from Mrs Hamilton.

In reality, 1819 was exactly the wrong time to inherit. Sugar prices had hit an all-time high in 1815 but returned to their 1750s level and found the floor by 1821. Land values had collapsed. Early in 1823 Pinney, Ames & Co wrote to one of their correspondents that West India property had decreased in value by half since the Peace in 1815.¹²⁹ Nevis was also hit in the 1820s by one of those periodic decades of drought which not only brought a collapse in sugar production but also had a catastrophic effect on the growing of provisions for the plantation workforce. Morton claimed that there were droughts in 1819, 1821, 1822 and 1823.

On 20 July 1822 Morton noted to Pinney, Ames & Co 'ruinous crops...failure of every reasonable hope...that out of three estates I should only be able to realise for the August

¹²⁸ Duberry's was described as 12 acres in the 1797 agreement between Morton and Mrs Hamilton. Jenny would probably only have had a small part of this.

¹²⁹ BULSC PP, Letterbook 57, Pinney, Ames & Co to James Parris 6 January 1823

shipment 16 hhds of sugar'.¹³⁰ Three months later Edward Huggins sen. moved at the Assembly that a reward of \$100 be put up for the murder of Toney, a watchman belonging to Magnus Morton.¹³¹ This fits in with a pattern on the island in the 1820s of stealing and the breaking of sugar canes in the fields associated with a terrible period of hunger and disease. On 2 December 1822 Morton wrote to Pinney, Ames & Co about two bills he had drawn on them for £150 and £100 'for the purpose of purchasing provisions for the immediate wants of the negroes under my care – for which purpose we this day dispatch a vessel to Barbadoes in the hope of procuring the means of averting the dreadful evil of famine'. He also mentioned that the legislature was passing an Act to secure payments for provisions.¹³² This was designed to make sure that feeding the enslaved population became the first call on the finances of indebted estates.

In recognition of, and in response to, the abject failure of West Indian planters to improve the conditions of their enslaved populations through a process of 'amelioration', abolitionists in Britain set out in 1822 on the long road to emancipation through parliamentary legislation. In July 1823 Magnus Morton, worried by recent reports from Parliament, was alarmed 'lest the minds of the negroes should become inflamed from the nature of the late debate, and the numerous pamphlets which are circulated to explain to them their rights and privileges as British Subjects'. He dreaded 'the worst goaded on as they are by the artful misrepresentation of the Abolitionists'.¹³³

At this point, Morton had a choice. He could try and sell the estates at the prevailing, much reduced market value and clear the debts and legacies or he could try and make a go of running the estates to get them clear of the debts and legacies. He chose the latter course. One of the first things he appears to have done was install a Mr Davoren as overseer, or perhaps manager, of the estates.¹³⁴ He also sought to restructure the debts and contacted Dennistouns, the Glasgow West India merchants, soon after Mrs Hamilton's death. They refused to extend further credit but were prepared to carry on with the existing debt arrangements. He sought arrangements with other metropolitan creditors who seem, on the whole, to have been prepared to wait and see whether he could manage to pay off the debts. The Pinneys had thought so in 1820, Morton 'having the Hamilton property'. He tried to renegotiate the terms of the lease for Low Ground when it came up for renewal in 1822. Sir Thomas Stapleton, Lord Le Despencer,¹³⁵ would not lower the rent from £800 p.a. but agreed to leave Morton in possession of the estate.

However, Morton was also in trouble with his own estates, owing around £14,000 stlg to the firm of John Blackburn in London and around £5,000 to others including the Pinneys to whom, in 1822, he offered a mortgage on Dasent's and about 100 slaves. With the Herbert/Hamilton estates he had fatal difficulties with his Nevis creditors. The local firm of Mills & Galpine were owed £3167 Ncr by Mrs Hamilton in 1819. By 1823 they had had enough and John Colhoun Mills and Francis John Galpine commenced legal action. Morton bought them off for a while by securing the debt on 54 slaves. However, the following year Morton himself had come to the conclusion that he needed help from the courts and on 9 April 1824 he filed a case as complainant against Dennistouns and others in the Nevis Court of Chancery. This became the subject of the papers from which much useful information about the estates has been drawn and it was a case that ran for at least another 12 years.

¹³⁰ BULSC PP, Letterbook 56 f89

¹³¹ NA CO 186/12, Assembly Minutes 30 October 1822

¹³² BULSC PP, Letterbook 56 f217

¹³³ BULSC PP, Letterbook 56, Magnus Morton, Nevis, to Pinney, Ames & Co 10 July 1823

¹³⁴ Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (a), entry for 21 November 1819

¹³⁵ Sir Thomas Stapleton, 6th Baronet (1766-1831), inherited the title Lord Le Despencer.

A Chancery case in 1824

In essence, Morton was not making claims against the defendants. He was seeking help from the court to adjudicate on the facts of the case and clarify which, among the many legacies, mortgages and debts left by Herbert and his daughter, should take priority. He wanted also to secure his own salary as manager of the estates and the monies he had laid out on the management of the estates in buying supplies and provisions. He claimed that the defendants wanted the debts incurred by Mrs Hamilton to take precedence over those raised by Herbert. He denied the claim of Mills & Galpine that they had not agreed to him continuing to run the estates as working plantations and he sought to get the court to restrain his creditors from taking him to court. Galpine claimed to his own creditors, Pinney, Ames & Co, that Morton had made a bankrupt of him and that he was intending to leave for America; in the event, he did not.¹³⁶

The Chancery Court on Nevis, probably much to the relief of the creditors, appointed a barrister, James Davoren, as Receiver on 26 June 1826. It ordered Morton to hand over possession of the various estates and any personal property of Herbert and Mrs Hamilton applicable to the payment of debts and legacies. The Receiver was ordered to pay managers to run the estates and doctors to supervise the health of the workforce. He was directed to pay the sum of £1263 to the Committee responsible for the supply of negro provisions, a body set up on Nevis by an Act of 1822 in response to the threat of famine. To keep the estates running he was immediately to buy 40 mules and continue to buy sufficient each year. The Receiver was to apply the production of all the estates, apart from Low Ground whose production was to go to paying the rent, first of all to the cultivation of sugar and to the feeding and clothing of the workforce. After that a hierarchy of priorities was established. The mortgage debts owed by Herbert to the Williams sisters and Francis William Sanders took precedence. After that the priorities followed a logical order of Herbert's debts and then legacies. Only then were the mortgages raised by Mrs Hamilton to be dealt with. The produce and income from various estates were allocated to particular commercial debts.¹³⁷ The ordinary debts and legacies of Mrs Hamilton came last in the pecking order. The final point of interest in the decree was that the Receiver was given the power to decide about the lease of Low Ground from the heirs of Sir Thomas Stapleton, Lord Le Despencer.¹³⁸ The lease was terminated at the end of December 1826 but the slaves remained on the estate. In effect, the process had been reversed. The Herbert/Hamilton estates, under the Receiver, no longer leased the land but it was worked by slaves who had 'belonged' to the family and were now under the supervision of the Court.

The immediate effect of these decisions was that one of the estates called 'Stapleton's', either that part of Montpelier or perhaps Low Ground, was appraised on New Year's Day 1827. This was followed by a 'sale at Montpelier' on 18 January.¹³⁹ It is likely that all the fine china, cut glass, silver and furniture from the house, together with the remaining personal possessions of Herbert and his daughter, went under the hammer that day. Morton had already moved to Hard Times Estate shortly after the decree the previous year.¹⁴⁰ He finally left the islands on the '*Albomer*' on 24 October, according to Walter Lewis Bucke who accompanied him as far as St Kitts.¹⁴¹ Perhaps as a last act of kindness, Morton manumitted three slaves a

¹³⁶ BULSC PP, Letterbook 60, FJ Galpine, Nevis, to Pinney, Ames & Co 15 April 1826

¹³⁷ The proceeds from Clay Gut were to settle the mortgage debt to Dennistouns, those of Coxheath to relieve Plummer's mortgage and those of Saddle Hill were to be applied to the debts connected with that estate. The crops of Coxheath and Saddle Hill were to be consigned to Plummer & Wilson and those of the other estates were to go to Dennistouns.

¹³⁸ NA T 71/1236

¹³⁹ Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b)

¹⁴⁰ Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b). The typed extract states that 'W Morton' moved but this is probably a transcription error.

¹⁴¹ Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (a)

week before he left. One of these was James Parris.¹⁴² It may be no coincidence that in 1775 William Woolward had given his daughter ‘Frances Herbert’ two slaves, the mulatto boy James Parris and the mulatto girl Molly. This was a transaction witnessed by Morton’s father.¹⁴³

The following year it was being reported to Charles Pinney on Nevis that ‘Moreton remains in France and Mrs Moreton in Bath – she does not wish to see him’.¹⁴⁴ It is conceivable that the tone of this was something of a fiction cooked up to deceive the creditors who were undoubtedly circling and from whom Morton was escaping by staying in France. Christianna Morton had her own money and was later on able to live in some comfort in Montagu Street, near Portman Square in London. Morton’s own Nevis estates, Dasent’s and Hard Times, were heavily in debt and had to be given up in August 1831. He died in Brussels in October 1834.

It is hard to draw any firm conclusions about his tenure of the Herbert/Hamilton estates. On the one hand he was seemingly abandoned by his wife and had lost control of a valuable collection of estates. On the other, he was handed a welter of debts, legacies and mortgages by his uncle and cousin during times which were extremely difficult for all planters, when the floor had dropped out of land values and sugar markets and other estates were collapsing around him.

Meanwhile, between 1827 and 1834 Montpelier and the other Herbert estates mouldered on under the overall control of the Receiver but under several different managers. The crops were consigned to merchants in Glasgow and London to whom the estates were indebted. The slave compensation claims in 1835 make it clear that the estates racked up debts to the Receiver for supplies and provisions and were not paying their way. Montpelier as a house had presumably been cleared of all those signs of ‘gracious living’ that had supported the lifestyle of an island leader. The plantation infrastructure would have been deteriorating and one would expect to see in the record that, in these circumstances, the enslaved population had suffered more than fellow slaves on the island. In fact, the effects of this decline on the plantation workforce are by no means clear.

The enslaved population of Montpelier and other estates

So far this account of the Herbert estates has been a tale of presidential refinement and the attempt by Mrs Hamilton to maintain a social position through mortgaging the future. The large, enslaved workforce who supported this lifestyle has largely gone unmentioned. This is because very few records have been found, so far, to give an idea of the conditions which these people had to endure on these particular estates. That the system of enslavement throughout the Caribbean was brutal and relied on the threat of barbaric punishment is absolutely clear. Slaves could be whipped on an overseer’s whim, housing was cramped, dirty and vulnerable to passing hurricanes. Food was always short and periodically people starved and the daily physical labour could break otherwise strong men and women.

Few details have been found so far to put flesh on these particular bones for Montpelier and the other Herbert estates. It is known that Edward Huggins learnt plantership under Herbert¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² NC CR 1831-1835, index. The slaves were James Parris for £100 Ncr and Nancy for £30 Ncr, together with Jane Parris.

¹⁴³ NC CR 1775-1776 f121

¹⁴⁴ BULSC PP, Domestic Box C2, bundle 13, R E Case to Charles Pinney 7 June 1828

¹⁴⁵ NA CO 152/100, T J Cottle, President of Nevis, *A plain statement of the motives, which gave rise to the Public Punishment of several negroes, belonging to the estate called Pinney’s...and of the serious consequences resulting from it, with a sketch of the characters of Mr. Huggins and Mr. Tobin* 1811, to be found in the official papers of Governor Elliott

and that he later acquired a reputation as a flogger of slaves. This was after he set up as a planter on his own in the 1780s. Since Herbert was the President during this period of Huggins's 'apprenticeship', it is unlikely that Huggins was allowed to give full reign to his approach to handling an enslaved population; it would have looked bad for the President to have had a reputation for allowing the brutalising of his own workforce.

The appraisal of Herbert's 'Mountain Estate', assumed to be Clarke's/Montpelier, taken on 8 February 1793 at the time of his death, mentioned 158 slaves. The 1824 Chancery Court case gives 164 as the number of slaves on 'Clarke's' plantation'. This seems to show that the population of this estate was on the increase at a time when estate populations on Nevis generally were in decline. Whether the improvement was because of natural increase or purchase is not known. However, there is more to be drawn from the records.

The so-called Triennial Slave Registers drawn up for Nevis between 1817 and 1834, together with the Slave Compensation records, allow us a snapshot of the population in 1817. But they also make it possible to get some idea of how the enslaved population fared during this period compared with other estates on Nevis.¹⁴⁶

In 1817 the estate was atypical in that, by comparison with others, it was 'overhanded'. The 1817 register lists 185 slaves (82 males and 103 females) working an estate of something around 130 acres. In contrast, the Pinney/Huggins Mountravers Estate had 159 slaves working 393 acres. It has to be assumed that some of the Montpelier slaves were also working on the neighbouring Herbert/Hamilton estates. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the ratio of slaves to acres may have had something to do with the comparative longevity of slaves on the estate.

As can be seen in Table 1 Montpelier's slave population in 1817 was generally older than the population of Nevis as a whole and by comparison with Mountravers.

Table 1: *Age distribution in Nevis, on Mountravers and on Montpelier, 1817*

Age group	Nevis-wide total in %	Mountravers in %	Clarke's/Montpelier in %
0-4	11.1	12.6	10.8
5-9	10.8	7.6	8.6
10-14	11.0	9.4	11.3
15-19	7.7	8.8	8.1
20-24	8.1	11.9	6.5
25-29	8.5	9.4	3.8
30-34	8.5	8.8	3.8
35-39	8.0	7.5	8.1
40-44	7.1	5.6	9.2
45-49	5.1	1.3	6.5
50-54	4.6	3.8	10.2
55-59	2.4	1.9	3.8
60-64	3.0	7.5	7.5
65-69	1.4	0.6	1.1
70+	2.6	3.1	0.5

¹⁴⁶ Nevis Slave Registers and Compensation Records are to be found in NA T 71. Comparisons for Nevis as a whole are drawn from Higman, B W *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* Baltimore, 1984; comparisons with individual estates are drawn from research by Christine Eickelmann. See *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734 to 1834* Part 2, Chapter 7 p849 on <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountravers~part2chapter7.pdf>.

Age group	Nevis-wide total in %	Mountravers in %	Clarke's/Montpelier in %
Unknown	0.1	0	0

The proportions of children (0-14) and 'youths' (15-19) are roughly similar in each case. The 20-34 age group, those considered 'prime' slave labourers, were very under-represented at Montpelier (14.1%) compared to Nevis as a whole (25.1%) and Mountravers in particular (30.1%). However more than a third of the population on the estate were aged 40 and over and Montpelier had a significantly greater number of slaves between the ages of 40 and 54 (25.9%) compared to Mountravers (10.7%) and Nevis (16.8%).

The reason for this older population is unclear. It may suggest that less work was required per hand or that living conditions, treatment and food were slightly better. It is possible that Herbert, as President, got the pick of the healthier slaves off the slave ships and it may be that the airy situation of the estate had some ameliorating effect. The age of the population did mean that the estate had a greater proportion of experienced slaves and this may have made the work of individuals easier since they knew what they were doing.

The ratio of females on the estate at 55.7% was in line with nearly all of the other Herbert/Hamilton estates but slightly higher than the ratio for Nevis as a whole (51.2%). It was fairly typical for estates to have a large number of female field labourers because men tended to be chosen for 'skilled' manual labour and tradeswork.

Noticeable in the 1817 slave list is the number of slaves of mixed race. At 28.1% this is almost double the figure for Nevis as a whole (15.8%) or other estates like Clarke's in St Thomas Lowland (15.4%). There is a significant number of 'mulatto' women on Montpelier and one can only make suggestions as to why. There may have been more overseers on the estate, or on connected estates, who had relationships with black or mulatto women as Herbert did himself. It might suggest the sexual abuse of black women on the estate with the President handing over 'black girls' to white visitors, as was known to happen on some estates. The proportion of mixed-race slaves in the population will almost certainly have made the 'occupational politics' of the estate some of the most complicated on the island since mulattos were known to be reluctant to work as field labourers and would have had to be found domestic or skilled work.

Perhaps the most interesting group on the plantation were the Africans. In terms of numbers, there were 36 people born in Africa on the estate in 1817 (20 men and 16 women) or 19.5% of the population. Estates varied enormously in the numbers of Africans amongst their populations in 1817. Clarke's in St Thomas Lowland had 12.5%, Stoney Grove Estate belonging to the Tobin family had 7% while Richmond Lodge, just south of Montpelier, had 4.7%. The Montpelier Africans were generally older than those in the Nevis population as a whole. Over half of those on the estate were aged 55 or over while only 25% fell into the same age bracket in Nevis as a whole. 13 Africans on the estate, or one in three, made it through to Emancipation and their reputed average age in 1834 was very nearly 61. Even the average age of those Africans who died before 1834 was 58.4. They were clearly survivors in an otherwise brutal system. Such a large population of Africans will almost certainly have had an effect on the cultural politics of the estate where there would have been a stronger than usual memory of how things were done in their respective local cultures. This, of course, may have been countered to some degree by the larger than average 'mulatto' population.

Looking at the names there are no indications as to their ethnic origin. They had clearly been outwardly stripped of their cultural identity and 'given' generic slave names such as Dick, Polydore, Juba, Phoebe and Quashy. Although Herbert inevitably had more experience of buying enslaved people, there is a record, as noted before, of Herbert concerned in one cargo

of slaves on the brig *Ann* from Calabar in 1770. This was probably carrying enslaved Igbos (or Ebbos), Ibibios or Efiks. Given that other slave owners, like John Pinney, were buying Igbos and also slaves from the Gold Coast, or modern-day Ghana, it is quite likely that these were the origins of many of the Montpelier Africans. Mixed in with these people on Montpelier may have been some from the Windward Coast, modern day Liberia. Herbert had bought at least 5 ‘Windward negroes’ for Mills in 1767. In general, the slaves who ended up on Nevis in this period would have been shipped to St Kitts rather than Nevis. Mills noted to Herbert in 1761 that ‘it is very seldom you have any ships from the coast of Africa with negroes to your island’.¹⁴⁷

Care is needed with the reputed ages in 1817 since many Africans will not have been able to ‘translate’ when they were born from their own cultural reference points and ages will have been guessed at by those taking the registers. However, below is a table which takes the ages given at face value.

Table 2: *Birth decades of Africans on Montpelier who survived to 1817*

Birth Decade	Numbers in 1817	Numbers who survived to Emancipation in 1834
1750s	7	1
1760s	14	5
1770s	8	2
1780s	7	5
Total	36	13

It has been shown that Herbert was leasing an estate from the mid-1760s and then in the 1770s bought the two plots of land which probably constitute Montpelier today. It is known that many planters were interested in buying African slaves roughly between the ages of ten and eighteen. Further evidence is provided in the correspondence between Thomas Mills and his attorneys Robert Pemberton and Herbert. In 1763 Mills wrote to both of them that he was ‘much of your opinion that new negroe men full grown will never answer on an estate and therefore I always bought when I was in the West Indies, Boys of ab’t 16 or 17 years old...’.¹⁴⁸ Many planters were of the view that young men of that age were less likely to be spiritually crushed by their enslavement, could better survive the period of ‘seasoning’ and in any case had a longer productive life from which to extract labour and therefore profit. Others advocated the virtues of buying slaves who were even younger, between the ages of 12 and 15.

Table 2 indicates a large group of slaves who were born in the 1760s. These ideas might lead to the notion that the Africans on Montpelier were bought in two or more lots. One of these could have been in the 1770s to establish the estate and the other in the 1780s or 1790s to replenish the ‘stock’. The absence of slaves born in the 1790s is a reminder that there was little buying of ‘new’ slaves from the slave ships in islands such as St Kitts in the last decade before abolition. Estates were generally well established by then. It is interesting to note that a significant number of those who were living in Africa in the 1760s survived to have the freedom, which had been stolen from them, restored as relatively old people.

There are two groups of people, who may possibly be identified from the 1817 register as enslaved Africans who may have come on the same ship since they are of similar age and are listed alphabetically and numerically together. The first is a group of four women: Jane (born

¹⁴⁷ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, 25 June 1761

¹⁴⁸ Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771, 9 May 1763

1762/3), Juno (1756/7), Jessey (1766/7) and Indemara (1761/2). The other possible group consists of three men similarly arranged in the register: Sarrah (1761/2), Sunday (1762/3) and Sammy (1761/2)

Two other enslaved men stand out because they originated in Antigua. Cudjoe was a black man aged 60 in 1817. He died on 28 August 1823 aged 66. James Osborne was 30 years old at the time of the first register and he seems to have made it through to Emancipation. The men may have been especially skilled and brought over from Herbert's estates on the island for that reason or, perhaps, they had struggled against their enslavement and been sent away.

When considering how people were employed on the estate the registers do not reveal this for 1817. However, the information exists for 1834/5 in the claims and counterclaims for compensation and it is likely that it was not very different in 1817, or even earlier, under Mrs Hamilton.

Table 3: *Occupations of the Slave Population of Montpelier 1834*¹⁴⁹

Description of Slaves being the object of Counter-claim	Number of Individuals
<i>Praedial Attached</i>	
1. Head People	4
2. Tradesmen	13
3. Inferior Tradesmen	
4. Field Labourers	43
5. Inferior Field Labourers	39
<i>Non-Praedial</i>	
1. Head Tradesmen	
2. Inferior Tradesmen	
3. Head People employed on Wharfs, Shipping, or other Avocations	10
4. Inferior People of the same description	3
5. Head Domestic Servants	18
6. Inferior Domestics	3
Children under Six Years of Age, on the 1 st day of August 1834	22
Aged, Diseased, or otherwise Non-effective	7
(Total)	162

By comparison with other estates on Nevis a number of points stand out. Only half of the people on the estate worked in the field. This contrasts with 70% for Clarke's Estate in St Thomas Lowland, for instance. One reason for this may be the smaller acreage of Montpelier as a working estate already mentioned. But it is almost certainly related to other factors indicated by Table 3.

13 of the workers on Montpelier were tradesmen and another 13 worked at the wharfs and on shipping. The figures for Mountravers, a much larger estate, were 7 and 4 respectively. One in six of the population on Montpelier was engaged in either a skilled occupation, creating and maintaining buildings and equipment, or dealing with the loading and unloading of ships.

¹⁴⁹ NA T 71/1236, Slave Compensation Counterclaims for Montpelier Estate, Nevis (No. 15). Table 3 was extracted from a 'Schedule to Counterclaim'. Note there were no entries for 'Praedial Unattached' slaves.

These occupations took them away from the mindless drudgery and back-breaking labour of working in the fields and engaged them with workers and managers on other estates. Those who worked at the wharfs would have been the first to hear news from the world beyond Nevis and would have had the opportunity to trade quietly with the sailors for themselves.

Another 21 slaves on the estate were domestics. This was a far greater number than for larger estates on Nevis and it may partly have been a reflection of the larger number of mulattos on the estate. But, perhaps more important, was the fact that the estate was owned by the President of the Council with a social position to maintain. His daughter had lived, however briefly, in England in some style and the evidence shows that, surrounded by servants, she mortgaged the future of the estate.

Thus, the estate was in some ways quite different from other estates on the island. Fewer slaves worked in the fields, a much larger proportion than usual was engaged in supporting the domestic arrangements and social position of the owners and many of workers were skilled people who were out and about around the island in more 'responsible', and perhaps meaningful, employment. This provided opportunities for them to benefit a little economically and socially.

Conditions

Since no letterbooks or accounts have so far turned up for Montpelier it is unhelpful to speculate on the sorts of conditions which the slave population had to endure on this particular estate. As has been noted before, housing on the island, despite the claims of planters, was squalid and damp and got destroyed in hurricanes. There was not enough food because planters paid too little attention to planting provisions for their slaves and in times of war or drought people starved.

It is not known where the slaves on Montpelier lived and in due course that will be a task for landscape archaeologists. A notional clue as to the type of housing can be found in a late nineteenth – early twentieth-century photo of nearby Bush Hill by A M Losada, entitled 'Sugar Mill and Native Hut'. The 'native hut' in the foreground is boarded and thatched. Eighteenth-century descriptions of slave housing suggest various types of construction. These range from houses with thatched walls and roofs to houses which had walls of board and roofs which were shingled. Nearly all consisted of one room. John Davy, who observed slave housing on St Kitts in the late 1840s, was uncompromising; he described them as 'wretched hovels'.¹⁵⁰

The records are unclear about the size of the ground given over to such housing for Clarke's/Montpelier when Herbert died, but there are some details for other estates. Saddle Hill with 85 slaves had 2 acres. 'Clay Ghutt' with 130 slaves had 4 acres while Dasent's, with fewer people, had 8 acres. It can be seen, therefore, that there is no clear pattern. In addition there was 'negro ground', probably for each estate, where slaves had the task of working on their day off to grow provisions to feed themselves. At least one of these pieces was at Hickman's, although which estate it was attached to is not clear.

Clothing was completely inadequate and generally doled out once a year. The 1777 consignment of goods sent out on the *Nevis Planter* has already been mentioned. Amongst the 'Cut Glass wash hand Basons' and kegs of boiling lime is mention of clothing. 110 yards of 'blue negroe clothing' were sent, presumably for Herbert's own estate. Further on is a list of

¹⁵⁰ Davy, J *The West Indies Before and Since Slave Emancipation* 1854 pp482-483

'Sundrys' to be sent to Antigua including 200 yards of 'Pennestones', '2 ps Ozenbrigs' and '2 ps Hessians'. 'Pennestones' were made of a cloth stretched well past its limit which shrank when wet. Ozenbrigs were made of a coarse linen and this cloth was used for waistcoats and breeches for men and jackets and petticoats for women. All the material destined for Antigua was commonplace among slave owners and was likely to have been used at Montpelier. Indeed, it will be remembered that several bundles of 'Oznaburghs' and 'Pennestones' were listed among items in the pantry at Montpelier in 1793.

The slave registers give some idea of conditions on the estate in the period 1817 to 1834 since they allow some analysis of the overall numbers and provide details of the numbers of births and deaths. In bald terms, the estate had seen an increase in the number of slaves from 158 in 1793 to 185 in 1817. However, from 1817 onwards the numbers went into decline and shortly before Emancipation in 1834 they stood at 163.¹⁵¹

This decline needs to be seen in context although there is no certainty that that context is itself the explanation for the decline. Two particular factors stand out. First of all, there was instability in the estate's ownership and management. The transition from a stable period of ownership under Martha Williams Hamilton, through the debt-ridden interlude under Magnus Morton Herbert into an even more uncertain period of management by a receiver, must have taken its toll on the workforce. Food supplies would have been uncertain, equipment would not have been maintained and labour-saving improvements at best delayed.

The second factor, particularly relevant during most of the 1820s, was the weather. Nevis went through a prolonged period of drought. There was little rain in 1821; 1822 saw the driest weather for twenty years and there was fear of starvation. By 1823 provisions had been made, by law, the first priority on indebted estates. After prolonged drought 1823 saw incessant rains between April and July. 1824 was another bad year with many estates 'all burnt up' by July. The weather did not improve until the rains in the autumn of 1825. But then correspondents were reporting fever and many deaths in early 1826. In March the following year they reported that they had had ten months of dry weather, except a waterspout in December. Walter Lewis Bucke recorded that 1827 was the worst year in his 27 years on the island.

Slave numbers in decline

This is the background against which the numbers given in the slave registers for Montpelier should be viewed. The overall figure had declined from 185 in 1817 to 184 in 1822 but this apparent stability is misleading. In fact there were a remarkable number of births. 29 children were born on the estate or about 7.25 a year. This was offset by an almost equally large number of deaths, 25 over the same period or about 5.5 a year. Seven of those who died were Africans. There were other changes in the workforce. Magnus Morton Herbert moved four slaves to Montpelier from the nearby Saddle Hill estate and bought another. Removed from Montpelier were those slaves manumitted, bequeathed or sold as a result of provisions in Mrs Hamilton's will.

Between 1822 and 1825 the catastrophic weather had little effect on the number of deaths, roughly 5 per year. These were mostly older people except in 1824 when it was largely children who died. There was, however, a steep decline in the number of births to 11 or roughly 3.6 per year. Either there had been a 'spike' in the number of children born between

¹⁵¹ The totals given by, or calculated from, the registers are as follows: 1817 – 185; 1822 – 184; 1825 – 180; 1828 – 179; 1831 – 162; 1834 – 162. One or other of the totals given in the 1831 and 1834 registers is inaccurate since both record 162 slaves and yet there were 14 'additions' and 13 'deductions' between the two dates.

1817 and 1822 and Montpelier returned to a more 'natural' birth rate for the rest of the period to 1834 or the harsh conditions took their toll on the fertility of women on the estate.

While there was almost complete stability between 1825 and 1828, there being 12 births and 12 deaths (and one transfer to another plantation), the details reveal several interesting points. There were only 2 births in 1825 and this low fertility rate may have stemmed from the continuing drought. Among the 12 births overall, 7 of them were of mixed race and this is a reflection of the larger number of mixed race slaves on this particular estate. 1826 was an unusual year for the estate because there was only one death. On the other hand proportionately more young children died in 1825 and 1827.

The birth rate remained roughly the same for the period 1828 to 1831, with 13 births in 3 years, but this stability was not shown in the number of deaths which jumped to 30. Unfortunately, no years are given for these deaths in the register so it is not possible to identify any particular factor as a cause. Only 4 children are recorded as having died so it was not the young who were vulnerable. Very nearly half of those who died were 51 or over and the average age of the 8 Africans who died was around 60. The deaths were removing older, more experienced slaves. In addition, the cultural balance on the estate was being altered by the fact that the majority of those who died were black creoles or Africans, thus reinforcing the burgeoning mixed-race population of the estate.

Quite why there was a dramatic increase in the number of deaths in this period is not clear. A lot of people died in the same period on Clay Gut (22), Saddle Hill (19) and Stapleton's (10), all estates or slave populations owned before receivership by Mrs Hamilton/Magnus Morton Herbert. It may have been an effect of receivership, in that managers were put in and may not have been attentive to the needs of their charges. On the other hand, two estates under receivership, Coxheath (4) and Low Ground (6) had fewer deaths than in the previous periods, and births on those two estates outnumbered deaths. So the trend was not general and was certainly not universal on Nevis. It varied from estate to estate. There are few indications in the documentary record, no particular mention of fevers or fluxes, and it seems that the weather improved in 1828. It is certainly possible on Montpelier that the high number of deaths was an effect of an aging population in grim conditions enduring hard labour.

In the final register of 1834 there were 14 births and 13 deaths, about the standard number, taking the period from 1817-1834 as a whole and ignoring the 'spikes'. However, in total the estate had lost nearly 13% of its population since 1817, mostly because the number of deaths outnumbered the children born. This made Montpelier, in one sense, a fairly typical estate on Nevis. Using the same triennial returns for ten selected estates on Nevis, it can be shown that their slave populations declined on 8 out of the 10 plantations between 1817 and 1834. The decline varied between 6% on Mountravers and 35% on the small, poorly managed Scarborough estate.¹⁵² Of course, it demonstrates the validity of the argument put forward by Emancipationists that amelioration had done little or nothing for the enslaved population in the British-controlled Caribbean.

Emancipation for many and compensation for a few

No records have been found detailing what happened on the old Herbert estates when Emancipation came in 1834. It was only a partial freedom, in any case, since anyone over the age of six was required to serve a period of enforced 'apprenticeship'. Conditions were really no better than before. Planters wanted a workforce and were not prepared initially to make

¹⁵² Eickelmann, C *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734-1834* Part 2, Chapter 7

land available for small-scale farming and the development of independent villages. And so the ex-slaves were tied to the labour that they had endured for so long, but now at one shilling a day, to begin with, although wages were half that by 1839. Elsewhere on Nevis, in the late 1840s and 1850s planters, who could not make their estates pay, began to see an economic advantage in leasing plots of land on which independent villages could develop. It is quite possible that this happened in St John Figtree and that workers moved off the former Herbert estates into developing communities at Cox and Brown Pasture, although further research on Nevis would be needed to ascertain this.

Planter opposition had been bought off by the promise of compensation, a process which, in general, benefited only the merchant houses to which the planters were in debt. In the case of the Herbert estates the situation was complicated by the fact that the estates were massively in debt, subject to various legacies and under a receivership which had racked up running costs since 1826. Claims for compensation were invited, as were counterclaims from those owed money by the various estates. There were, in fact, two claims relating directly to Montpelier: No. 15 claimed on 162 slaves and No. 16 relating to 32 slaves owned by the Stapleton family who were leased to the Receiver of the Herbert/Hamilton properties. The other estates owned or leased by the family were also the subject of claims and, presumably, counterclaims.¹⁵³

For Montpelier and Low Ground the basic claims were made by the Receiver, now Walter Williamson. The previous Receiver had run the estates at the behest of the court since 1826 and incurred substantial costs. The counterclaims were put in by anyone who had a call on the compensation money as a result of mortgages, debts or legacies generated by Mr Herbert, Martha Williams Hamilton or Magnus Morton Herbert. It will be remembered that the decree issued by the Chancery Court in 1826 had established a hierarchy, primarily for Montpelier, putting the Receiver's costs for running the estates first, secondly paying off the mortgage debts owed to the Williams/Sanders family, only then paying off the debts and then the legacies generated by John Richardson Herbert. Provision was made for the output of Clay Gut, Coxheath and Saddle Hill estates to be used to settle the debts owed to the various merchant houses on mortgage respectively. The legacies and ordinary debts generated by Martha Williams Hamilton came a long way down the list.

In the case of claim no. 15 for Montpelier, counterclaims were put in by one Thomas Gilby who claimed £1000 of the legacy left to John Herbert which had come down to Gilby through a series of debts. Theophilus Clive of Bond Street in London entered a claim for sums which either had been left directly to his wife Mary Anne Clive, nee Kelly, or to her mother Sarah Kelly. John Brown of Taunton claimed as the survivor of his late wife, Sarah nee Williams, in relation to the mortgage sum which Herbert had owed the Williams family. The banker Evan Baillie or his executors claimed a substantial sum incurred in his role as the trustee and executor of John Richardson Herbert. Indeed, each individual claim was of the order of £2000 - £6000 including interest. One claim which was missing was any money owed to Lady Nelson. On one occasion in February 1797 she had been advanced money by Evan Baillie himself as a down-payment on the interest due on the legacy from Herbert.¹⁵⁴ Magnus Morton Herbert made it clear in his submission to the court in 1824 that Viscountess Nelson was entitled to an unpaid sum of £3000 plus interest. So it is unclear what happened in the end to that legacy. Many of the counterclaims on Montpelier were repeated as claims against other Herbert estates although some were individual to particular estates. For instance, claim No. 16 on the 32 (Stapleton) slaves leased to Montpelier not only generated a counterclaim by the Stapleton family but also another counterclaim by Evan Baillie. This related to a mortgage of £2000 given by him to Sir Thomas Stapleton, Lord Le Despencer.

¹⁵³ Low Ground (Claim no. 5), Saddle Hill (no. 17), Coxheath (no. 18) and Clay Gut (no. 35). Details for the Montpelier and Low Ground claims and counterclaims taken largely from NA T 71/1236 and T 71/1237.

¹⁵⁴ Naish *Nelson's letters to his wife* pp348-350, Mrs Nelson to her husband 23 February 1797

In the end the Receiver's answer to all counterclaims, including those relating to Montpelier, was essentially very simple. He referred to the 1826 Chancery Court order which put the expenses incurred by him as Receiver in running the estates at the top of the list. He demonstrated that the estates were deeply in debt to him; in the case of Low Ground, for example, this was to the tune of £14,192 Ncr. Since the compensation money would be nowhere near this figure his claim was to supersede all others. As noted before, the competing claims were the object of another hearing of the Court of Chancery in Nevis in August 1835. The Court, first of all, dealt with the practical question of which firm was to receive the compensation money and distribute it to the successful claimants. In all cases, except claim no. 16, it was to be handled by a merchant banking firm which came to be known as Reid, Irving & Co. In the case of claim No. 16, power of attorney was granted to the executor of Lord Le Despencer since the slaves were only rented to Montpelier by the Stapleton family.

The Court essentially accepted the Receiver's case and ordered that his expenses should be paid first of all and only then were the other claims to be met in the order established by the 1826 decree.¹⁵⁵ This seemed to rule out any of the counterclaims and, given the costs incurred by the Receiver, it is highly unlikely that anyone else got any money out of the Slave Compensation process. Although compensation had been awarded on nearly all of the Nevis claims by December 1837, a report to Parliament in 1838 noted that all six claims for slaves on the old Herbert properties were still the subject of litigation.¹⁵⁶ In the case of Montpelier, (claim No. 15), the sum claimed was £2737-12-11 for 162 slaves. The apprenticed ex-slaves, of course, got nothing.

Reid, Irving & Co – punctual and safe

These events only dealt with the slave compensation money. The Chancery Court in Nevis was left to handle the 'real estate' associated with at least four working plantations together with the renting of Low Ground. Over the next two decades these estates changed hands at least three times.

Montpelier, Clay Gut, Saddle Hill and Coxheath estates, together with a one-acre plot, were all put up for sale in five lots by the Chancery Court in an auction on Nevis on 1 March 1837.¹⁵⁷ All the estate lots included the unexpired terms of the 'apprentices' thus, in effect, revealing the gulf between the appearance of 'Emancipation' in 1834 and the reality of life until 1838. The details are given in Appendix B but it is worth giving a summary here.

'Montpellier' formed the first lot and contained 79 acres of cane land, 50 acres of pasture, 'a spacious dwelling house and out-offices, requiring repair, with a windmill and boiling house in complete repair, [and] curing house requiring repair'. Listed after the mules and cattle were the apprentices: '80 male praedials [agricultural workers], 82 female do. 17 boys do. 19 girls do. 18 male non-praedials [domestics], 22 female do. 1 boy do. 1 girl do.' This number totals 240 whereas the final slave register of 1834 lists 162 slaves. There is no satisfactory explanation for this major discrepancy other than to suggest that the people who had worked Low Ground and who had originally been the property of Herbert and later Martha Williams Hamilton had been, or were considered to have been, transferred to Montpelier. Added to Lot 1 was 'the advantage' of the rent of Stapleton's Low Ground, containing about 300 acres, together with 32 (rented) apprenticed labourers and some stock.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, NA T 71/1236, Attachment B to claim No. 5.

¹⁵⁶ *House of Commons Accounts and Papers*, vol. xlviii 1837-1838 Session, Chadwyk-Healey, Microfiche 41.391 pp314-5, List E (Nevis) Litigated Claims

¹⁵⁷ *London Gazette* 11 October 1836

Clay Gut, the second lot, had 164 acres of cane land and 250 acres of pasture with ‘the remains’ of a house, windmill, sugar works and still house all ‘in tolerable repair’, stock and the unexpired terms of apprenticeship of 117 workers.

Lot 3, ‘Saddle-Hill’ comprised 94 acres of cane land and 40 acres of pasture, a house which was only in tolerable repair but a cattle mill and sugar works which were in ‘good order’. Included were the remaining terms of labour of 82 workers.

Coxheath, Lot 4, was the final estate. This had 170 acres of cane land, 50 acres of pasture, a windmill and associated works, all in good order together with stock and 116 labourers and domestics.

The fifth lot concerned about an acre of land with a small house ‘now in the occupation of Hill Dasent’ and thus probably referred to the land at Crab Hole which had been set aside for a house for the Dasent family.

These estates were acquired by the firm of merchant bankers, Reid, Irving & Co of Tokenhouse Yard in the City of London. This is clear from correspondence among the agents acting for the Stapleton family, between 1840 and 1849. The estates were described in a letter dated 10 October 1849 as ‘Clarke’s and others, late of Irving Reid & Co’ (sic). It will be remembered that they were identified by the Chancery Court as the firm to receive for distribution most of the slave compensation money for the Herbert estates.

John Irving the Elder was an MP and had acted as a merchant banker on behalf of the British government. Sir John Rae Reid’s father had been a chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company and he, himself, was one of the Directors on several occasions; he then became an MP and, later, Governor of the Bank of England (1839-41).¹⁵⁸ This was a very well connected firm, although latterly described as being in the second rank.

It is not known why they became the proprietors. They do not figure in the list of claimants on Herbert, nor are they overtly among the list of Mrs Hamilton’s creditors. It may simply be that, having become involved in receiving the compensation money, they saw a good commercial opportunity and were able to take over the estates at a much reduced price. They also continued to rent Low Ground from the Stapletons.¹⁵⁹

In November 1840 a letter makes it clear that the company had been contemplating erecting a steam engine at the Low Ground works and seeking an extension of the lease to 21 years in return for an increase in rent. Although they then abandoned the whole idea, it shows that the firm were planning to stay in Nevis. The focus of the correspondence was the Low Ground estate but it is possible that the firm might have been thinking about installing steam engines on some of the other estates, such as Clarke’s or Clay Gut, as the primary source of power, using the windmills as back-up in the event of problems.

The lease for Low Ground ran out in 1843 but the firm carried on renting it on an annual basis and in January 1845 were described as ‘punctual and safe tenants’. A letter from Messrs Malton & Trollope, dated 16 April 1846, enclosed the rent from the Stapletons’ attorney, Mr James D Roger, but raised the possibility of the rent being lowered. While surmising about the reasons for this Malton noted that ‘the Low Ground Estate is situated as to make it almost indispensable to the owner of adjoining Estates to hold it with such Estates’.

¹⁵⁸ Thorne, R G ed. *House of Commons 1790-1820* 1986; Stenton, M *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament vol. 1 1832-1885* Harvester Press, 1976

¹⁵⁹ John Rylands Library, Stapleton MSS, Nineteenth Century Unlisted Documents, courtesy of Brian Littlewood. See correspondence between Malton & Trollope and Woodcock & Claxton/Woodcock & Davoren 14 November 1840, 24 January 1845, 16 April 1846, 27 September 1848 and 10 October 1849.

Despite the firm's description as 'punctual and safe', Reid, Irving & Co. fell victim to their own mismanagement in the financial and commercial panic of 1847. The causes of this were multiple but central were a series of poor harvests in Europe in the 1840s and the potato blight in Ireland and Scotland. This led to credit-based speculation in grain prices fuelled by low interest rates. There was associated speculation in many other commodities. Reid, Irving & Co took part in this in two ways. They lent money to producers and traders of sugar but they also tied up their own capital in sugar estates in Mauritius and the West Indies while carrying on their general business on credit.¹⁶⁰

In the summer of 1847 three aspects of this situation came together. The passing of the Sugar Duties Act in 1846 equalised the duties on sugar coming from the British Empire and led to a glut in the market. The price of sugar fell by one third, land prices declined and firms were left with sugar and estates on their hands which they could not sell except at a loss. Also, there was news of better-than-expected grain harvests in Europe along with a sharp tightening of credit. Coming together, these pricked the speculative bubble in September and October 1847. Initially it was the corn traders who went under but this was followed by a general collapse in confidence.

Reid, Irving & Co suspended payments on 17th September 1847. A week later 16 firms interested in the East and West India trades collapsed. The crash became more general and involved banks, colonial brokers, soap boilers, warehousemen, calico printers and many more. There were even worries about the solvency of the Bank of England and the government had to step in. The collapse, however, weeded out the weaker traders who had depended on an unsustainable supply of cheap credit.

Initially it was reported that Reid, Irving & Co had gone under with liabilities of £1,500,000. A contemporary account suggested that, when they suspended payments, their immediate liabilities amounted to £793,782 with £5491 cash in the bank to meet them. Company accounts, published in the *Times* on 11 October 1847, revealed sugar estates and shares in the Mauritius Bank to the tune of £91,000 and estates in Trinidad, Tortola,¹⁶¹ Nevis and St Kitts valued at nearly £195,000. Reports in the *Times* pointed out that, given the speculative bubble, all the estates were probably overvalued. They noted, however, that those in the West Indies had been appraised by a valuer sent out especially for the purpose the year before.

Thus, for the second time in less than ten years the creditors were circling round the Herbert/Hamilton/Morton estates. The immediate effect on Nevis, as seen in the correspondence, was a letter dated 11 November 1847 from Mr Roger, as attorney for the now insolvent firm, stating that he was planning to give up possession of Low Ground when the lease expired in January.¹⁶²

An interesting letter about Low Ground was sent by Woodcock & Davoren to Malton & Trollope dated 26 July 1848. It noted that 'In compliance with their covenant the lessees did put in substantial repair the buildings on the lower work & we have reason to believe they are now in good order.' This suggests that the company would have kept the sugar works and buildings on the other estates in a good state of repair too.

However, the other point made in the letter was that 'up to the present time the lessees have continued the cultivation of the Estate [ie Low Ground] - this cultivation is conducted on the

¹⁶⁰ See Ward-Perkins, C N *The Commercial Crisis of 1847* Oxford Economic Papers, 1950; Martin, R M *Railways – Past Present and Prospective* London, 1849 pp44-49; *Times* newspaper.

¹⁶¹ The collapse was particularly serious for the British Virgin Islands where the company are reported to have had 10 estates and employed 1,150 people.

¹⁶² It is possible that Mr Roger was from St Kitts.

Share system, that is the labourer receives a certain portion of the produce made as a recompense for the labour bestowed on the cultivation of the cane and the manufacture of the Sugar.' Although the discussion is about Low Ground, it is most likely that the same system was applied to Montpelier and the other estates.

What the agents were talking about here is share cropping. Hall notes that the exact division of the crop varied but, in general, it was either shared equally between the workers and the proprietor, or one third to the workers and the bulk to the proprietor. For the planters it was a way of getting through the lean times in the 1840s and the early 1850s.¹⁶³ Olwig says that it became very prevalent on Nevis and that in 1866 half the estates were using the system wholly or partially. But she also notes that it shifted the economic losses from the owner to the labourer and that they still had to provide the labour. Quoting Davy, she pointed out that it was a conservative measure which was unlikely to produce agricultural and economic improvement either for the estates or for the workforce.¹⁶⁴ It is likely that, once begun, the cultivation of Clarke's/Montpelier remained on that basis into the twentieth century.

Several other points were raised in the Woodcock & Davoren letter of 26 July. There was a theme running through the letters about the absence of stock on Low Ground per se and in relation to the effect of share-cropping. 'We are pretty well assured that there is no Stock whatever on the Est`e [ie Low Ground] & that the Cane in cultivation particularly if allowance be made for the labourer`s share of produce, will not equal the quantity mentioned in the Schedule. If at this time the Est`e were taken over by the Lessor we should feel much difficulty in taking off the Crop now on the land from want of stock, & we should be obliged to make some arrangement, over the footing of giving a portion of the produce for the use of Stock or otherwise for its manufacture.' Woodcock & Davoren were going to check to see if any of the stock from Low Ground could be found on company estates such as Montpelier.

It was noted that the firm's estates would be subject to a 'judicial sale' on 5 August 1848 and that Mr Roger, the attorney would likely become the purchaser. It was thought that he would be willing to rent the upper part of Low Ground Estate from the Stapletons and that one of the Mills family would rent the lower part. However, in a comment that is illuminating about the general economic situation and the value of land, Woodcock & Davoren pointed out the following:

'We cannot hold out the hope of a rent being paid for this Estate equal to that which Messrs Reid Irving & Co. gave. The state of West Indian property is now before the world & from the information made public you are aware of the fearful depreciation in its value, which has taken place even in the most favoured Colonies, & we are sorry to say that Nevis instead of ranking amongst them must be classed with the most falling.'

A further letter, dated 29 August 1848, confirmed that 'Mr Roger who has become the purchaser of the Est`s in Nevis formerly the property of Messrs Reid Irving & Co. would rent a part of the Low Ground Lands which lie at the greatest distance from Mr. Mills property & has offered £40 a year for them. We think Mr Mills sh`d give at least £100 for the remainder including the works. The Island of Nevis was visited by a severe Hurricane on the night of the 21st but we have not yet learnt of any serious damage occurred to the buildings, on the Low Ground Est`e.' No mention was made of the neighbouring estates but they subsequently reported that there was no damage at Low Ground.

The final letter in the series dated more than a year on (10 October 1849) gives some useful account of Montpelier's place in relation to the neighbouring estates.

¹⁶³ Hall, Douglas *Five of the Leewards 1834-1870 Barbados*, 1971 pp114-5

¹⁶⁴ Olwig *Global Culture, Island Identity* pp95-6

‘It appears to me that Sir Francis [Stapleton] cannot do better than accept Mr. Rogers’ offer. Mr. Mills will not advance on his of £100 - it is said that Mr. George Mills is in treaty with Mr Rogers to rent the estate (Clarke’s & others) late of Irving Reid & Co. It is therefore improbable that the Brothers [George and Paitfield Mills] would be Competitors for the Low Ground, in these times it is hardly to be expected that any party would rent it to work by itself as a large outlay for purchase of Stock would be requisite. The Low Ground Estate is no doubt desirable to the occupier of Clarke’s as affording the readiest communication with the shipping place, but it can hardly be said to be essential as the distance from Clarke’s to Charles Town by the High road is inconsiderable. As to the necessity for the renter of Clarke’s to make his sugar in the Low Ground Boiling House, Sir Francis must have misunderstood W. Claxton, there are on Clarke’s Estate a complete set of works and a good windmill.’

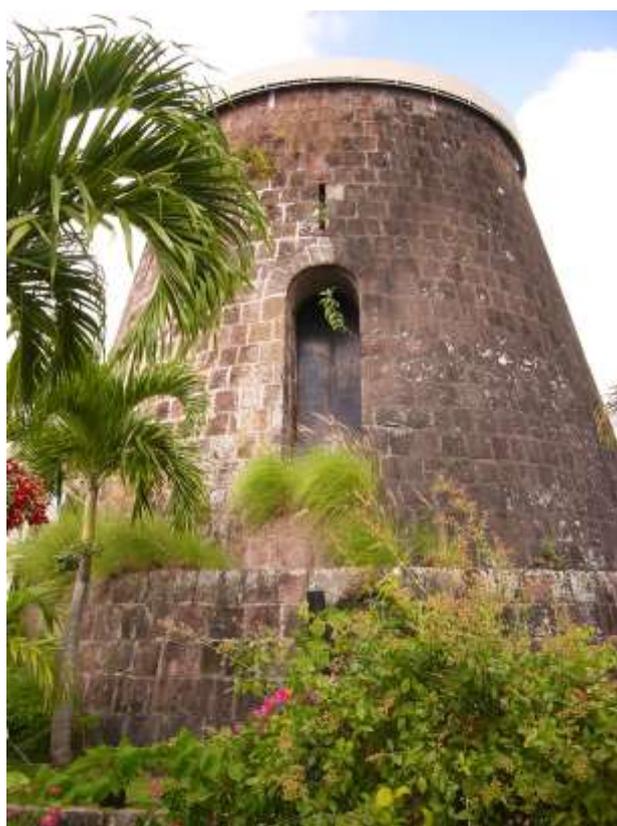


Plate 1: Windmill at Montpelier Estate 2009, courtesy of David Rollinson

The reference to the ‘shipping place’ is interesting because it suggests that Herbert and his successors had been shipping their sugars from Long Point but they also had the alternative of taking them to Charlestown. It is not clear whether or not George Mills did rent Mr Roger’s estates, including Montpelier. If he did, it was not for long because he died in the 1853-4 cholera outbreak, along with his brother Paitfield.

There was one visitor who passed by Montpelier during this period, sometime between 1845 and 1848. John Davy, who was Inspector General of Army Hospitals, notes his visit without giving any useful details:

‘An estate joins this [Morning Star], similarly situated, on which is the house still standing unaltered, where the hero of the Nile and Trafalgar passed, probably, some of his happiest hours, certainly his most peaceable and domestic ones, after his marriage with Mrs Nisbet, a native of Nevis... . It was pointed out with manifest pride by my companion.’¹⁶⁵

The most interesting point is that Montpelier was both a tourist venue and an object of ‘local’ pride 150 years ago.

One final change in the ownership of Clarke’s happened in this short and unsettled period. Amongst documents in a collection of solicitors’ papers from the firm of Wigley & Burt were two damaged documents relating to a Hugh Flick and several members of the Wilkin family. From the sequence they appear to date to the late 1850s. The first (possibly 1859) notes that ‘Mr. Flick purchases Clay Gut, Saddle Hill, Mt Pelier or Clarkes and the lands of Whitehall for £3,800 sterling’. The second is a letter from Hugh Flick to Wigley & Burt, dated 14 January, asking for deeds to be executed in the names of Hugh Flick, John Richard Wilkin and Henry Wilkin concerning ‘Clay Gutt, Deasent and Huggins estates being in St. George Gingerland Parish: Mont Pellier, Saddle Hill, Whitehall and Wilkinsons being in Figtree Parish...’.¹⁶⁶ After this the collection of estates centred on Montpelier settled down to a relatively long period of ownership by the Wilkin family and their descendants.

The Wilkin and Sampson families

With this change of ownership, it is worth pausing a moment to examine the economic context which framed the next half-century on Nevis. The island in the 1840s and 1850s was in an economic slump. Owners were mostly absent, generally deeply in debt and unable to raise capital. Production of sugar on the island had fallen from around 3000 tons per annum, before Emancipation, to less than 900 tons in 1849 and its cultivation had been abandoned altogether on some estates. New technology in the form of steam engines had largely failed on the island. Wages were appallingly low and many workers withdrew from the plantation system completely, preferring to live away from the estates and farm for themselves on a small scale. Where they were still engaged, it was often on the basis of share-cropping.

The economy was given a short-tem boost by the arrival in 1859 from Barbados of Sir Thomas Graham Briggs who bought many plantations and tried to make the production of sugar more efficient by installing steam engines on his estates. Briggs’s optimism only lasted a short while and by 1866 much of his land had been turned over to pasture. For a short while there was renewed interest in the production of cotton but this lasted only as long as the American Civil War. Many estates were so burdened with debt that they sought an official solution to their problems through recourse to the Incumbered Estates Act which, in effect, structured their bankruptcy. By 1876 only about half the island’s cultivated land was planted with sugar. There was a partial recovery around 1881 when planters found they could sell their sugars more profitably in America but this was brought to an end in the late 1890s when this market was closed to West Indian sugar. Canes fields were burnt by impoverished workers and in 1897 a Royal Commission recommended the need for ‘urgent action’ to improve life on Nevis.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Davy *The West Indies Before and Since Slave Emancipation* p491

¹⁶⁶ Wigley & Burt Papers in two boxes, held by a private dealer. Mr Flick disappears from view at this point but it is known that he had been the manager on Governor’s Estate in 1852.

¹⁶⁷ See Dyde, Brian *Out of the Crowded Vagueness: A history of the islands of St Kitts, Nevis & Anguilla* Oxford, 2005 pp171-173 and Olwig *Global Culture, Island Identity* p98.

Into this mix came the Wilkin family from Montserrat in the shape of John Richard Wilkin and Henry Wilkin together with Hugh Flick. In a substantial acquisition of acreage they bought three estates in St George Gingerland and four estates in St John Figtree. The purchase price for four estates of £3,800 stlg demonstrates the complete collapse in the value of land on Nevis which had taken place since 1815. Out of their new estates, Clay Gut, Montpelier, Saddle Hill and Wilkinson's¹⁶⁸ had all been part of the Herbert/Hamilton/Morton empire. The estate which seems to have become detached was Coxheath which, in 1871, was listed by Iles as belonging to Stedman Rawlins.

It is assumed that John and Henry Wilkin were joint proprietors and that they were brothers. It is possible to demonstrate from land and genealogical records that they were connected with the wider Wilkin family which owned Gages and Dagenham estates in the south of Montserrat.¹⁶⁹ The founder of the dynasty was William Wilkin who came from Middlesborough in northern England and accompanied one Thomas Howes to Montserrat in 1835.

Like Briggs, the family came from another island and, other than spotting a favourable economic opportunity, it is unclear why, in the next 50 years, they bought a substantial amount of property on Nevis particularly. According to the documentary record, they do not appear to have been on the island before the 1850s.

In 1871 Iles named John R Wilkin as the proprietor of Montpelier, Safole Hill (probably Saddle Hill) and Clay Gut. He was also shown as leasing 'Lower Ground' from Lord Le Despencer, continuing an economic connection between Montpelier and Low Ground which stretched back to J R Herbert.¹⁷⁰ Iles noted that the house at Montpelier would only be 'recognized for the grandeur of its ruins'. It seems likely that ownership of the Wilkin estates continued to be shared within the family, although it is not clear what happened to Hugh Flick who disappears from the record. Again, it is not known whether the Wilkin family lived on one of the estates, attempted to work the plantations themselves, put in tenants or worked the estate through share-cropping.

In general, the burden of debt prevented Nevis planters from any move to invest in their estates to make them more efficient through mechanisation and the British government intervened. This came in the form of the West Indian Incumbered Estates Acts, backed by local legislation which, in the case of Nevis, was enacted in 1867. It provided a mechanism whereby the debts could be structured. Either the proprietor or the various claimants could petition for the sale of an estate, claimants were sought and priorities established. Generally the estate was then sold, often to the largest claimant many of whom were merchants in Britain. The purchase money was used to clear a portion of the debt. In some cases the owners were able to purchase the estate themselves and thus free themselves of their current debts.

The Wilkin family used this process around 1874 to acquire Hicks Estate in St James Windward¹⁷¹ but it is apparent that they were in some trouble with their other estates in the late 1880s. In his will, dated 31 December 1882, Henry Wilkin left two thirds of his 'interest' in various properties to his 'natural' daughter Matilda Emma Sampson and one third to his 'natural' son William Henry Harper Wilkin. The properties listed were Clay Gut, Dasent's and 'Huggins' in St George Gingerland and Clarke's, Whitehall, Saddle Hill and Stanley and

¹⁶⁸ 'Wilkinson's Land' was described as 33 acres in the 1797 agreement between Morton and Mrs Hamilton.

¹⁶⁹ carrollfamily.accessgenealogy.com/wilkin.html and carrollfamily.accessgenealogy.com/wilkinresources.html

¹⁷⁰ It is not clear for how long the Wilkin family continued to lease Low Ground Estate. Further research in the Supreme Court Registry would clarify this. In 1924 this estate of 491 acres was still owned by a member of the Stapleton family, Clare, Countess Cowley. See Watkins, Frederick Henry *Handbook of the Leeward Islands Misc.* Official Publications, London, 1924.

¹⁷¹ In 1875 Henry Wilkin petitioned for the sale of Hicks Estate (Clay Hill and the Spring) in St James Windward on which he was a tenant. See NA CO 441/24/3.

Bowman Lands (?Beaumont) in ‘St Paul’s Figtree’ (sic), together with Hicks and Spring Hill in St James Windward. The reference to Henry Wilkins ‘interest’ in the properties suggests that he was only one of several owners of these estates.¹⁷²

In 1885 Matilda Emma Sampson leased “‘Montpelier’ or ‘Herbert Clarke’s’” to Charles Phipps Esdaile for seven years from 1 November 1885 at a yearly rent of £80. The lease enjoined Esdaile to keep the estate in good condition and ‘proper working management’ which implies that the estate was in a roughly workable condition at that point. Esdaile almost certainly came from a St Kitts family, although in the indenture he was described as being from St Thomas Lowland in Nevis.¹⁷³ A confusion is raised by the lease in that it describes the lessor as ‘widow Executrix of Henry Wilkin deceased’.¹⁷⁴

Despite the lease, however, there were sufficient debts for the Incumbered Estates process to be invoked at the end of the decade. On 30 July 1889 William Henry Wilkin¹⁷⁵ and many others of his family¹⁷⁶, though not including his ‘sister’ Matilda, filed a petition for the sale of ‘Clarke’s, Clayghaut and other Estates’. There is some doubt as to whether Clarke’s/Montpelier was included in this because Clarke’s is crossed out on the following page in the relevant document.¹⁷⁷ The same petition for the sale of Clay Gut and other estates is recorded in another Incumbered Estates volume, this time dated 14 October 1889. It noted that many of the estates were tenanted at this time and included the summary of Henry Wilkin’s will alluded to above. It also noted that a receiver from Montserrat was appointed to handle the process.¹⁷⁸ Thus for the third time in 65 years a receiver was called in to handle a collection of estates which had proved to be economically unviable since the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

It seems unlikely that the Wilkin family were warring among themselves and more likely that they were using the Incumbered Estates courts to clear themselves of debt and, eventually, divide the estates up between themselves. There are several indications for this. In December 1892 Saddle Hill and ‘Beaumont’s Lands’ were detached from the rest and conveyed by William Henry Harper Wilkin to one Edmund John Ellis.¹⁷⁹ In September 1892 ‘Matilda Emma Sampson’ granted ‘Clay Ghaut’, Dasent’s, Hicks and Spring Estate to William Henry Wilkin and others.¹⁸⁰ Clay Gut had been an integral part of the group of estates that Herbert had built up around Montpelier. These grants identify the point at which, after a century, they separated partially. It may also suggest a date when the family of Eva Wilkin, the Nevis artist, became involved with Clay Gut, later her residence and gallery. Her father, according to the genealogies, was York Wilkin, another son of the original William Wilkin. He is described as a planter living at Clay Gut in 1919 and 1931.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² NA CO 441/24/2

¹⁷³ There are two Phipps estates in the parish of Middle Island, Con and Harry, on the modern D.O.S. map of St Kitts. In *Caribbeana* Oliver identifies close family ties between the Esdaile and Phipps families. One Archibald Esdaile from Palmetto Point was described, in the 1790s, as President of the island and ‘in the absence of Major-General Leigh’ Commander of the Leeward Islands. See *Caribbeana* vol. 3, p107 et al.

¹⁷⁴ NC CR 1877-1899 ff240-241

¹⁷⁵ It is unclear whether this is William Henry Wilkin (1863-1931) who, according to the genealogies, was the son of the original William Wilkin, or William Henry Harper Wilkin, the ‘natural’ son of Henry Wilkin and brother of Matilda.

¹⁷⁶ These included William Henry Wilkins’s sisters Ada Ann Penchoen, Laura Howes, and Emily Wilkin and his brother York.

¹⁷⁷ NA CO 441/3/6

¹⁷⁸ NA CO 441/24/2

¹⁷⁹ See NC CR 17 ff25-32 and NC CR 15 ff492-495. Ellis further conveyed them to Alice Ann Scarborough who, in turn, sold them (estimated to be 120 acres) to a mason of Cox Village, Samuel Brazier, in 1911 for £300.

¹⁸⁰ NC CR ‘Entry Book of Deeds’ 1884-1956, no.s 1710 and 1745

¹⁸¹ NC CR 17 and 19

Montpelier into the twentieth century

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there are only glimpses of the estate. Often they were written by travellers to the island and occasionally they are unclear. One such description comes from an American visitor to the island in 1895 who noted that

‘On the hill behind [the great stone mansion] rises the tower of the windmill, still intact, with its huge arms still motionless in the air. The sugar boiling house is a thorough ruin with the roof fallen in... A great square stone tank sunk in the ground is still full of water, but the house and buildings are empty and abandoned. Some of the fields are grown up, but others are being cultivated in small patches by the Negroes whose huts and cabins are scattered about. Their huts, too, are more neat and better kept than in other islands, and one sometimes sees a flower garden with roses and other brilliant blossoms...’.

This description has been linked on the internet with Montpelier and would fit in with the general air of decay that characterised Nevis at the time. This was before a brief period of relative prosperity generated by the high prices paid for sugar and cotton during the First World War. Unfortunately, it is uncertain whether the description is actually of Montpelier. Vincent Hubbard adds to the beginning of the above quotation from the original source: ‘At a turn in the road, we came upon the ruins of a great stone mansion, bare and desolate, with its eyeless windows boarded up...’. He ends the piece with ‘The plantation he described was almost certainly Morning Star’.¹⁸²

Norman Maynard, who grew up on Nevis, presents a more positive picture of a working estate at the turn of the century. ‘At this time steam engines had taken the place of windmills for power to grind the sugar cane. I only saw six of the old [wind]mills operating - Dunbar’s, Zetland’s, Clay Ghaut, Henley’s, Montpelier and my grandfather’s at Powell’s Estate.’¹⁸³

The house at Montpelier is described as a ruin around this time in a guidebook published in 1912: ‘Alas! of the original Montpelier House, only the ruined walls and the gate posts now remain, but a granite tablet placed on one of the latter by permission of the present owner, Mr J.H. Sampson, records the connection of the place with the hero of Trafalgar.’¹⁸⁴ The reference is interesting because it provides a date before which the house had become a ruin and the tablet on the gatepost had been erected. Secondly, it demonstrates that the Wilkin/Sampson family remained in control of the estate throughout this period.

It was probably around this time that Mr Sampson began experimenting with cotton, a crop which was extremely important for Nevis before and during the First World War. Dyde states that there were 1050 acres given over to cotton on the island in 1904. By 1918 the high prices paid for it during the war led to the cultivation of 3000 acres on Nevis ‘where it had become the main cash crop’. Thereafter it slowly declined.¹⁸⁵ Recent investigation of the *house site* at Montpelier has identified a cotton gin on the lower floor of a long building which may had a wooden upper floor. David Rollinson has noted that ‘there were ginning machine parts and cotton seed residue.’¹⁸⁶ Herman Ward, who was born in Cox Village, recalled in an interview

¹⁸² See www.definitivecaribbean.com ‘The Story of Montpelier’ and Hubbard *Swords, Ships & Sugar* p187 both quoting from Williams, Alfred Mason *Under the Trade Winds* 1896 pp36-37

¹⁸³ Maynard, Norman ‘Nevis at the Turn of the Century’ in NHCS *Newsletter* November 1987

¹⁸⁴ Aspinall, *A West Indian Tales of Old* 1912, courtesy of Brian Littlewood

¹⁸⁵ Dyde *Out of the Crowded Vagueness* pp237-238

¹⁸⁶ David Rollinson pers. comm. November 2009. Unfortunately, a written note of this discovery, in a report on archaeological work on other estates in St John Figtree, gives the impression, first of all, that *the whole of* Montpelier Estate had converted to cotton, and, secondly, that it had happened in the early 1800s. See Meniketti, Marco ‘Sugar Mills, Technology, and Environmental Change: A Case Study of Colonial Agro-Industrial Development in the Caribbean’ in *Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology* vol. 32 Issue 1

with Dr June Goodfield that he had been growing cotton in the 1920s on 'Prentis Works', an estate very close to Montpelier. He remembered Harry Ransom, the overseer, 'a tough one' who was also the overseer at Montpelier. Ward had been a sharecropper but, according to him, that had stopped in the 1950s. 'We soon realised that it was better to pay rent for land than to work for someone else and give them over half of everything we grew.'¹⁸⁷

It is worth remembering that Major Burdon's War Office map of 1920 shows Montpelier and indicates that it was an estate where either the estate house was inhabited or the works were in use. Unfortunately, there is no indication as to which.¹⁸⁸ Low Ground was another such estate. Coxheath and Whitehall appear not to have been either lived in or worked..

J H W Sampson was identified as the owner of 606 acres at Montpelier in 1920. This may seem a confusing number but Mrs Burdon identified the estates individually as Montpelier 101 acres, Prentice 200 acres, Stanley 55 acres and Whitehall 250 acres.¹⁸⁹ In fact, Sampson was also the owner of Symonds Estate in St George Gingerland (368 acres), although this gives a somewhat false notion of prosperity.¹⁹⁰ In 1925 James Henry Wilkin Sampson of Montpelier Estate had to mortgage to the Royal Bank of Canada a number of estates. He owed the bank £3835 which had been secured on promissory notes. On 12 December 1925 he secured these notes on a mortgage of the following:

Firstly on 'Clay Ghaut' *pasture*, Huggins, Symonds and Vervaine Estates in St George Gingerland

Secondly on 'All those Plantations or Estates situate in the parish of St John Brown Hill in the said island of Nevis commonly called 'Clarks (including Montpelier), Prentice Works, Stanleys and Whitehall'.

The mortgage extended to the stock which included one horse and ten donkeys at Montpelier, nine horses at Prentice Works and 40 cattle at Whitehall.¹⁹¹

Clearly Sampson was land rich, cash poor and it is unlikely that he had any money to invest in the upkeep of any of the works. The distribution of stock on the estates suggests that Montpelier was still, to some degree, a working estate and the number of cattle at Whitehall indicates that it was being used as pasture at the time. The reference to 'Clay Ghaut' pasture is a reminder that Clay Gut estate had included 250 acres of pasture in Gingerland, known as Dunbar's Dale. This had not been hived off to William Henry Wilkin in 1892 and remained with the original collection of estates put together by Herbert.

One further description is of interest, despite its obsession with the issue of colour and its racist language. It comes from an account of travels in the West Indies by Amy Oakley and her 'illustrator' (her husband Thornton Oakley) sometime between 1939 and 1941:

'Our way led to Montpelier House – of which only the globular stone gateposts date from the marriage of Trafalgar's hero... An unpretentious dwelling stands to-day on the old foundation. A blooming mango towers above the stone walls so characteristic of Nevis, that, in contrast to stoneless St Kitts, give the rugged island an almost Breton appearance. A mere stone's throw away arises the windmill of the old estate – a substantial tower also reminiscent of Brittany. It is owned by an Englishman who lives in the successor to Montpelier House. We were fortunate to find this sugar-mill

¹⁸⁷ Goodfield, *June Rivers of Time: Why is everyone talking to Philippa* Leicester, Matador 2008 p58

¹⁸⁸ Burdon, War Office map 1920

¹⁸⁹ See Burdon, K J A *Handbook of St Kitts-Nevis* London, 1920, courtesy of David Rollinson

¹⁹⁰ Watkins *Handbook of the Leeward Islands*

¹⁹¹ NC CR 18 ff244-250

in action and have its owner explain to us the traditional muscavado process. The structure stood upon a knoll overlooking a bluer-than-Breton sea. When, owing to a shift in the breeze the sails ceased to revolve, a dozen or more darkies, straining like mules on a towpath, turned the wings to windward. A centenarian black man who stood guard at the doorway ushered us into the stifling interior, where we watched canes fed one at a time, to be crushed between cylinders, the juice jutting forth as though joyously liberated from an imprisoning body. The smell of boiling liquid issued from an adjacent building – a smell connoting fermentation. Donkeys frisked upon the slippery chaff, where, upon our approach, my Illustrator, to the accompaniment of guffaws from onlookers, had ignominiously fallen.’



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Plate 2: From Amy Oakley's 'Behold the West Indies', 1941

This account has raised some scepticism among those familiar with the history of mills on Nevis but, in spite of the florid language, the description is detailed and quite specific and the location fits the site. It suggests that the estate was, in however small a measure, still producing sugar at the beginning of the Second World War. Unfortunately, the accompanying illustration could fit a number of different windmills on Nevis.

The 'unpretentious dwelling' standing on 'the old foundation' presumably refers to a wooden house on the Montpelier house site which was removed in the 1980s. A short article, in a book on architects designing houses for their families, reported on a house designed at

¹⁹² Oakley, Amy *Behold the West Indies* D. Appleton Century Co., 1941 pp260-263 from <http://books.google.co.uk> 2007. The introduction to the volume states: 'This volume is, then, the result of three journeys undertaken by my Illustrator and myself during the last two winters and one spring'.

Montpelier by Walter Chatham for his parent's-in-law, William Howard and Janet Adams.¹⁹³ The article stated that the wooden house was successor to the Herbert house, although whether or not it was the immediate successor is not clear. In any case, it was riddled with termites and had to be demolished. The plan had been to rebuild on the 'nineteenth century' foundations but they too required rebuilding. 'Still, all the other historic elements – wall outcroppings, gateposts, a privy house were saved'. Chatham was also able to restore two eighteenth-century cisterns on the site' returning them to 'their original pyramidal form'. A plan is shown of the replacement house on what may be the rebuilt foundations of the Herbert house, although strangely the caption reads 'Site plan shows house on its historic *seaside* site'.¹⁹⁴

Returning to the works - if the windmill and boiling house were operating at the beginning of the war they did not long survive it. The geographer Gordon C Merrill conducted research on Nevis in 1952 and 1953 when the cultivation of sugar cane on the island had almost collapsed. Although he did not comment on Montpelier Estate, he did include a photo of the windmill under the title 'Ruins of a windmill on Montpellier Estate, Nevis'. The stonework was in reasonably good condition but a small tree was growing out of the carriage and the roundhouse had been removed or destroyed.¹⁹⁵

In the early 1960s Frederick Gjessing conducted a survey of the windmills on Nevis. Noting that the windmill was a 'ruin', he pointed out the similar construction of the windmill towers at both Clay Gut and Montpelier, in particular 'size, stone finish and disposition of the openings'. Some of the machinery missing at Clay Gut was found to be intact and in situ at Montpelier, particularly the three rollers together with their timber-framed housing. About the sails he noted that 'the two timbers which form the four points are intact and seated in the sail shaft' and he estimated the timbers to be 57 foot in length.¹⁹⁶

It is unclear how long the Sampson family had continued to own the land but the works were in ruinous condition when the estate, now consisting of 200 acres, was bought in 1963 by James Milnes Gaskell. His plan to build a 'small hotel' produced a plantation inn that has developed a reputation for quality throughout the Caribbean.

In a heartfelt and touching tribute to his contractor, Samuel Hunkins, Mr Gaskell recalled that 'although Montpelier had substantial ruins, they were ruins, and virtually everything except the mill had to come down...'. The rebuilding took two years and as part of this they created the 'Great Room' out of the old boiling house. A memory of Mr Rawlins, 'a renowned foreman stonemason', sitting on the steps of the front entrance shaping stones is a reminder of the long tradition of skilled work by stonemasons and enslaved workmen on Nevis who, in the days of slavery, built Herbert's mansion and sugar works.¹⁹⁷

Montpelier over time

In reviewing the history of the estate, it is apparent that the central feature is the commanding figure of John Richardson Herbert. He rose from a position of no great wealth to owning the largest collection of estates on the island with Montpelier at its centre. Because of Herbert's mercantile and political skills this modest estate was also, for a period, the social and political

¹⁹³ Dunlop, Beth *A House for My Mother: Architects Build for Their Families* 1999

¹⁹⁴ For another account of this house see Adam, William Howard 'The Adams house in Paradise' in *House and Garden* vol. 158, Feb 1986 pp103-107 and pp205-6.

¹⁹⁵ Merrill, Gordon Clark *The Historical Geography of St Kitts and Nevis, British West Indies* Mexico, Instituto Panamericano de Geografia e Historia, 1958 p111

¹⁹⁶ Gjessing and Wilkins *The Windmills on Nevis*, courtesy of David Rollinson

¹⁹⁷ www.SKNVibes.com/commentary Gaskell, James Milnes 'Two Lives'

heart of the island. In other hands the estates might have been a sustainable legacy. Instead, those who inherited this wealth lacked the skills and judgement to maintain it, albeit in difficult economic circumstances.

The enslaved people on the estate largely suffered the same brutal system as everyone else and numbers declined in much the same way as they did on other estates. There was probably some kudos to be had from working on the 'presidential' estate but it is very unlikely that this was any consolation for years of hard labour and the enslavement of your children.

In a crucial way, however, the estate was not a typical Nevis plantation. It had a larger than usual mixed-race population at the same time as having a strong, and long-lived, African core. In 1817 the population on the estate was generally older and more experienced and, in the early nineteenth century, a smaller proportion of the workforce was likely to have been working in the fields by comparison with other estates.

The group of estates centred on Montpelier largely held together throughout the nineteenth century, after Emancipation, but it was no longer the economic force it had been under Herbert. The advent of sharecropping and the slow deterioration of the infrastructure marked that decline. In common with many other plantations in the nineteenth century, debt and receivership were never very far away. To outsiders the most noteworthy point about Montpelier, from quite early on in the nineteenth century, was a past that they imagined to have been 'glorious'.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Hoffman family for continuing to support the idea of researching and writing an account of Montpelier Estate at what was a very difficult time for them after the death of Lincoln Hoffman.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the members of staff at the Supreme Court Registry in Nevis and the Special Collections Department in the Library of Bristol University for their help in locating information.

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Appendix A

An Alphabetical List and Return of all the Negro and other Slaves now resident on the Estates called Clark's or Montpelier and Stapletons and belonging to or in the lawful possession of Mrs Martha Williams Hamilton Given in by me the fourteenth day of July One thousand eight hundred and seventeen

MW Hamilton

No	Names	Sex	Country	Colour	Reputed age
1	Abraham	Male	Nevis	Mustee	Twenty one
2	Augustus	"	"	Mulatto	Twenty one
3	Andrew Cox	"	"	Sambo	Twenty one
4	Aaron Jeffrey	"	"	Black	Thirteen
5	Aaron Cox	"	"	Sambo	Fourteen
6	Abel/Cotto	"	"	Black	Seven
7	Abel/Maria	"	"	"	One
8	Azariah	"	"	Sambo	One month
9	Anne Amelia	Female	"	Mulatto	Four
10	Barrington	Male	Africa	Black	Forty five
11	Billy Cane	"	Nevis	"	Fifty
12	Billy Baillie	"	"	"	Four
13	Bob	"	"	"	Twelve
14	Billy	"	"	Mulatto	Seventeen
15	Betty Guy	Female	"	Black	Twenty four
16	Betty	"	"	Mulatto	Twenty three
17	Betty New	"	"	Black	Sixty
18	Betty	"	Africa	"	Sixty four
19	Betty Cox	"	"	"	Thirty six
20	Bess Baillie	"	Nevis	"	Fifty eight
21	Bess Isaac	"	"	"	Twenty six
22	Bess Joan	"	"	"	Forty five
23	Bessy	"	Africa	"	Forty
24	Betsy Patty's	"	Nevis	Mulatto	Eleven
25	Bessy	"	"	Black	Thirteen
26	Belinda	"	"	"	Fifty three
27	Bettoe	"	"	"	One month
28	Constant	Male	"	"	Forty five
29	Charley Isaac	"	"	"	Forty eight
30	Charley Mason	"	"	Mulatto	Forty eight
31	Cudjoe	"	Antigua	Black	Sixty
32	Cubbenah	"	Nevis	"	Twenty three
33	Cuffy	"	Africa	"	Thirty six
34	Clinton	"	"	"	Forty five
35	Caesar	"	Nevis	Sambo	Ten
36	Christmas	"	Africa	Black	Sixty
37	Cotto	Female	Nevis	"	Thirty six
38	Christiana	"	"	"	Seventeen
39	Christiana	"	"	Mulatto	Ten
40	Catherine Mills	"	"	"	Eleven
41	Caroline	"	"	Black	Ten
42	City	"	"	"	Three

43	Cicely	“	“	“	Six
44	Cordelia	“	“	Sambo	Five
45	Daniel New	Male	“	Black	Thirty four
46	Dick	“	Africa	“	Forty
47	Davey	Male	Nevis	Sambo	Two
48	Diana	Female	“	Black	One
49	Dinah	“	“	“	Forty eight
50	Equa	Male	Africa	“	Fifty
51	Exchange	Male	“	“	Fifty four
52	Edward	“	Nevis	“	Sixteen
53	Edwin	“	“	Sambo	Two
54	Eleanor /Kitty’s/	Female	“	Mulatto	Fourteen
55	Eleanor /Catherine’s/	“	“	“	Ten
56	Eliza	“	“	Quadroon	Seven
57	Foe	Male	“	Black	Twenty
58	Figtree	“	“	“	Eighteen
59	Fanny	Female	“	Mustee	Twenty
60	Fanny Isaac	“	“	Black	Thirteen
61	Flora	“	Africa	“	Thirty two
62	Guy	Male	Nevis	“	Seventeen
63	George Belindas	Female	“	“	Seven
64	Greeta Williams	“	“	Sambo	Eleven
65	Hannah	“	“	Black	Fifty
66	Hester	“	“	“	Forty five
67	Hago	“	“	“	Twenty eight
68	Hago	“	Africa	“	Sixty
69	Harriet	“	Nevis	“	Seventeen
70	Henrietta	“	“	Sambo	Two months
71	Horatio	Male	“	“	Five
72	Henry	“	“	Black	Nine
73	Henry	“	“	Sambo	Seven
74	Hero	“	“	Black	Nine
75	Hicks	“	Africa	“	Thirty six
76	Johnny	“	Nevis	“	Thirty four
77	Jemmy Smith	“	“	“	Forty
78	Jeffery	“	“	“	Forty eight
79	Jeffery	“	Africa	“	Fifty five
80	Jack Allen	“	Nevis	“	Twenty nine
81	John Juba	“	“	“	Twelve
82	John Blyden	“	“	“	Five
83	John Black	“	“	Mulatto	Twenty one
84	James Osborne	“	Antigua	Black	Thirty
85	James	“	Nevis	Mustee	Twenty eight
86	Isaac Newton	“	“	Black	Four
87	James	“	“	“	Three
88	John Chapman	“	“	Mulatto	Forty
89	Joe	“	Africa	Black	Fifty
90	Joe	“	Nevis	Mulatto	Sixty
91	Jolante	Female	“	Black	Forty
92	Juba	“	“	“	Thirty four
93	Juba	“	Africa	“	Fifty five
94	Juba	“	“	“	Fifty
95	Judy	“	Nevis	“	Fifty
96	Judy /little/	“	“	“	Sixteen
97	Jenny /Isaac/	“	“	“	Sixty eight

98	Jenny Monkey	Female	Nevis	Mulatto	Forty five
99	Jenny	"	"	Mustee	Twenty six
100	Jenny Liburd	"	"	Black	Eighteen
101	Jane	"	Africa	"	Fifty four
102	Juno	"	"	"	Sixty
103	Jessey	"	"	"	Fifty
104	Indemara	"	"	"	Fifty five
105	Janey [?Joney]	"	Nevis	"	Thirty eight
106	Jennett	"	Africa	"	Thirty four
107	Katey	"	Nevis	"	Forty four
108	Kitty	"	"	Mulatto	Thirty eight
109	Leah	"	"	Black	Eighty
110	Lady Bell	"	"	Sambo	Twelve
111	Molly Town	"	"	Black	Sixty six
112	Molly New	"	"	"	Thirty eight
113	Mary	"	"	Mulatto	Six months
114	Mary Symonds	"	"	Black	Twelve
115	Mary	"	"	Mulatto	Forty
116	Mary Black	"	"	"	Nineteen
117	Maria	"	"	Black	Forty two
118	Maria	"	"	"	Fifty
119	Martha	"	"	"	Four
120	Mabble	"	"	Mustee	Four
121	Manuel	Male	"	Black	Forty
122	Mila	"	Africa	"	Sixty
123	Moses	"	Nevis	"	Fifteen
124	Moses Cox	"	"	Sambo	Seventeen
125	Neptune	"	"	Black	Forty
126	Ned	"	"	"	Thirty six
127	Nancy Maria's	Female	"	"	Sixteen
128	Nancy Hago	"	"	"	Five
129	Nancy Belinda	"	"	Sambo	Three
130	Nancy	"	"	Mulatto	Sixty two
131	Nancy	"	"	Sambo	Seventeen
132	Nelly New	"	"	Black	Sixty
133	Nelly Peggy	"	"	"	Nine
134	Nelly	"	"	Mulatto	Thirty six
135	Nanno	"	"	Black	Ten
136	Neely	"	"	Mulatto	Thirty six
137	Oliver	Male	"	Black	Fifty six
138	Philip Neale	"	"	"	Twenty one
139	Pompey	"	"	"	Twenty one
140	Pockery	"	"	"	Twenty nine
141	Polydore	"	Africa	"	Thirty eight
142	Polly Martin	Female	Nevis	"	Twenty
143	Patty Belinda	"	"	Mulatto	Eighteen
144	Patty	"	"	"	Thirty four
145	Phoebe	"	Africa	Black	Sixty
146	Patience	"	Nevis	"	Eleven
147	Peggy	"	"	"	Forty
148	Peggy Coull	"	"	"	Forty four
149	Penny	Female	Nevis	Black	Two
150	Parine	"	"	"	Forty six
151	Quasheba	"	"	"	Sixty four
152	Quashy	Male	Africa	"	Forty two

153	Quashy Mountain	“	Nevis	“	Forty
154	Quamina	“	Africa	“	Forty four
155	Robin	“	“	“	Sixty four
156	Rowley	“	“	“	Fifty
157	Richard	“	Nevis	Mulatto	Eleven
158	Ritta	Female	“	Black	Eleven
159	Rachel	“	“	“	Fifty
160	Rosey	“	Africa	“	Thirty six
161	Sarah Dick	“	Nevis	“	Sixty
162	Sarah Sarjeant	“	“	“	Fifty
163	Sarah	“	“	Mulatto	Nine
164	Sarey Cotto	“	“	Black	Seventeen
165	Sue	“	“	“	Twenty six
166	Sukey	“	“	“	Forty four
167	Sabella	“	“	“	Thirty eight
168	Sally	“	Africa	“	Forty four
169	Sally	“	Nevis	“	Nine
170	Sally Monday	“	“	“	Seven
171	Sarrah	Male	Africa	“	Fifty five
172	Sunday	“	“	“	Fifty four
173	Sammy	“	“	“	Fifty
174	Scipio	“	Nevis	“	Fifty two
175	Tom Liburd	“	“	“	Fifty
176	Tom	“	“	Mulatto	Thirty six
177	Thomas	“	“	Sambo	Four
178	Thursday	“	“	Black	Three
179	William Cooper	“	“	Mulatto	Thirty seven
180	William Henry	“	“	Black	Thirteen
181	William Xmas	“	“	Mulatto	Eight
182	William	“	Africa	Black	Thirty six
183	Yattah	“	“	“	Forty eight
184	Sue Challenger	Female	Nevis	Mulatto	Fifty
185	Sally Kitty’s	“	“	Sambo	Six months

Total number of Males Eighty two and of Females One hundred and three

MW Hamilton

(extracted from UK NA T71/364)

Appendix B

Montpelier and Other Estates - Sale Notice 1836

‘Extract from the Saint Christopher Gazette and Caribbean Courier of Friday the 26th of August 1836’

‘In Chancery – Herbert, Complainant, and Dennistoun and others, Defendants, by Original Bill; and Comrie, Administrator of Hamilton and of Herbert, Complainant, versus Dennistoun and others, Defendants, by Bill of Revivor and Supplement.

Pursuant to a Decree of this Honourable Court, bearing date the 16 day of May 1836, will be sold, on the 1st day of March 1837, by the Honourable George Webbe, Master of this Honourable Court, at his Chambers, in Charlestown, in the said Island of Nevis, at Twelve o’Clock at Noon of the same day:

The several plantations hereinafter described, together with the unexpired term of apprenticeship of the apprenticed labourers severally attached thereto, the plantation stock and utensils, and live and dead stock thereunto severally belonging, also a small lot of land, situate in the Parish of Saint George, Gingerland, in the said Island, together with the dwelling house and tenements thereon, in the occupation of Hill Dasent, Esq. that is to say:

Lot 1. All that plantation or estate, called Montpelier, situate, lying, and being in the Parish of Saint John, Fig Tree, in the Island of Nevis, abutted and bounded as follows – to the north, and north west by land of the heirs or representatives of the late Lord Le de Spencer, on the south with an estate called Budgen’s, on the east by an estate called Clay Gut, containing about 79A. 3R. 21P of cane land, together with a spacious dwelling house and out-offices, requiring repair, with windmill and boiling house in complete repair, curing house requiring repair; 5 horses, 13 mules, 79 head horned cattle, 12 sheep, plantation utensils, and the unexpired term of apprenticeship of 80 male praedials, 82 female do. 17 boys do. 19 girls do. 18 male non-praedials, 22 female do. 1 boy do. 1 girl do.; also all the benefit and advantage of the rent of an estate adjoining the above-mentioned estate, late of Lord Le de Spencer, deceased, containing by estimation about 300A. be the same more or less, and now rented by the said receiver, at the yearly rent of £450 sterling; to this last mentioned estate are attached 32 apprenticed labourers, 3 mules, and 60 horned cattle.

Lot 2. All that plantation or estate, called Clay Gut, situate, lying, and being in the Parish of Saint George, Ginger Land, in the said Island, abutted and bounded as follows – to the east by lands of the late John Hanley, now of Edward Huggins, Esq. to the south by the next hereinafter mentioned estate called Saddle-Hill, to the west by the last mentioned estate, called Low Ground, late of Lord Le de Spencer, and by the said Montpelier estate, and by the road running between the said Clay Gut estate and the said Saddle-Hill estate, and to the north by the high road dividing the said Clay Gut estate from the lands of Robert Pemberton, deceased, or however otherwise the same is abutted and bounded, containing about 164A. 3R. of cane land, and about 250A. of pasture land, together with the remains of a dwelling house, windmill, and sugar works and still house, in tolerable repair, 1 horse, 4 mules, 46 head horned cattle, 2 sheep, plantation implements and utensils, and the unexpired term of apprenticeship of 27 male praedials, 37 female ditto, 13 boys ditto, 17 girls ditto, 7 male non-praedials, 11 female ditto, 1 boy ditto.

Lot 3. All that plantation or estate, called Saddle-Hill, situate, lying, and being in the Parish of Saint John, Fig Tree, in the same Island, abutted and bounded to the north by lands late of Finlay Nicholson, now of Thomas Budgen, Esq. and by the next mentioned estate called Coxheath, to the east by the last mentioned estate called Clay Gut, and to the south by lands

late of Haddock Prentis, but now of the Assignees of Edward Frith, deceased, and to the west by the sea, containing about 94A. of cane land, and about 40A. of pasture land, together with a dwelling house, in tolerable repair, cattle mill and sugar works, in good order, 44 horned cattle, 3 mules, 17 sheep, plantation implements and utensils, and the unexpired term of apprenticeship of 14 male praedials, 27 female ditto. 10 boys ditto. 15 girls ditto. 5 male non-praedials, 10 female ditto. 1 girl ditto.

Lot 4. All that plantation or estate, called Coxheath, situate, lying, and being in the Parish of Saint John, Fig Tree, in the said Island, and abutted and bounded to the north by lands of George Clarke Forbes, deceased, to the south with lands called Beauchamp's and part of the said estate called Saddle-Hill, to the west by the sea, and with lands late of Finlay Nicholson, now of Thomas Budgen, containing about 170A. of cane land, and about 50A. of pasture land, with windmill and sugar works, boiling house, curing house, and still house, in good order, 46 head horned cattle, 14 sheep, 7 asses, plantation implements and utensils, and the unexpired term of apprenticeship of 29 male praedials, 40 female ditto. 17 boys ditto. 14 girls ditto. 8 male non-praedials, 5 female ditto. 2 boys ditto 1 girl ditto; or such of the said stock, and the unexpired terms of apprenticeship of such labourers respectively, as may be on the said estates respectively, on the said day of sale.

Lot 5. The said lot of land, about an acre, with a small dwelling house thereon, now in the occupation of Hill Dasent, Esq.

Particulars of sale may be obtained from the said Master, in Nevis; from Messrs. Claxton and Woodcock, and J. G. Pigneuit, Esqrs. Solicitors, St Christopher's; and Messrs. Crowder and Maynard, Solicitors, Mansion-House Place, London.

GEORGE WEBBE, Master in Chancery

Dated August 24, 1836

(Source: *London Gazette* 11 October 1836, courtesy of Brian Littlewood)