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S. D. Smith
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1 Introduction: Remembering and Forgetting

During the eighteenth century, spectacular fortunes were gained and lost in the West Indian colonial trades. European powers, chiefly Britain and France, competed for control of Caribbean islands and shipping routes in a series of naval conflicts. And more than six million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic to be sold into plantation slavery. This book examines commercial success and failure in the British transatlantic nexus by analysing the activities of the Yorkshire-based Lascelles family and their associates over three centuries. It is thus a micro-history, in which Henry Lascelles emerges as a paragon of success, while his business partner Gedney Clarke exemplifies a certain type of failure. The rationale underpinning this volume is that detailed analysis of these and other case studies enriches understanding of the processes shaping the course of history.

In the pages that follow, hypotheses or conjectures regarding these historical processes are advanced based on surviving sources documenting the activities of the Lascelles. Some of these conjectures are related to previous research; others are more original in the sense that they emphasise aspects of the past that feature less prominently in existing accounts. The first of the hypotheses argues that a new framework for business association was established by mercantile communities based in London, Barbados, and North America between the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The second thesis argues that a key element of this framework lay in control of complex credit networks, crucial for the success (or failure) of Atlantic commercial ventures. Merchants' strategies were shaped by the working of the credit market, ultimately obliging the Lascelles to become large-scale plantation owners. The third hypothesis argues that by the mid-eighteenth century Caribbean colonies and transatlantic trade were subject to fiscal-military control through the medium of naval power and metropolitan credit. However, it locates the instruments of control in gentry capitalist networks of kinship and regional affiliation, matrimonial alliance, mercantile expertise, and public service. In consequence,

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the concept of a centralising authority and a dependent periphery is inadequate when applied to an imperial relationship that was poorly regulated in many aspects, and which possessed fluid trading boundaries.

The Lascelles are interesting and worthy of study not only for what their records reveal about the course of development in the eighteenth-century Caribbean and Atlantic economy. Events that took place centuries ago are also linked to present-day concerns. The research for this book was sparked in 1998 by an approach from the Harewood House Trust of West Yorkshire.[1] During an inventory of one of the 'treasure houses of England', a black metal deed box was found to contain West India papers, including details of several plantations. More manuscripts were subsequently discovered in a locked bureau during the recataloguing of artefacts at Harewood. Lacking information about the Lascelles family's past connections with slavery, the trustees sought guidance from historians working at the University of York, in order to place these finds in context. Around the time of its initial approach, the Harewood Trust received designated museum status.[2] As a result of this award, a number of initiatives were launched to stimulate research into Harewood House and its collections. Among the projects sponsored by the trustees was a preliminary study of the involvement of the Lascelles in Caribbean trade and slavery. Shortly afterwards (in 1999), the University of York established its Yorkshire Country House Partnership, with the aim of fostering links between seven country houses (including Harewood) and the academic community.[3]

[1] In 1986, ownership of Harewood House was transferred from the Lascelles to a charitable trust, charged with the preservation of the estate and also the promotion of educational activities. Under the terms of the trust, the Lascelles family continue to reside at Harewood.

[2] Harewood House was the first stately home to receive designated museums status: originally, a classification awarded by the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) to non-national registered museums with collections judged to be of national and international importance. In 2000, the MGC was replaced by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (renamed Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries): a national development agency responsible for providing strategic leadership for the museums sector and advising the British Government on policy issues.

[3] C. L. Ridgway and Allen Warren, 'Collaborative Opportunities for the Study of the Country House: The Yorkshire Country House Partnership', *Historical Research*, 78 (2005), 162–3, 167. Between 1996 and 1999 (later extended to 2000), the York History Department hosted the HEFCE funded project, 'Heritage Studies as Applied History', directed by Dr Simon Ditchfield. As a result of this initiative, twenty courses were established at twelve higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, along with eight conferences and teaching workshops. See John Arnold, Kate Davies, and Simon Ditchfield eds., *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture* (Shaftesbury, Dorset, 1998).

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Localised factors clearly played an important role in establishing contacts between Harewood House and academics.[4] Indeed, initially the invitation to research the Lascelles' West Indian interests appeared as an intriguing, yet self-contained project. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the investigation can also be seen as part of an ongoing re-evaluation of slavery's legacy. The historiography of the African Diaspora stretches back over several centuries and the accumulated bibliography of slavery reflects the repeated iteration of written history and social memory.[5] It would be misleading, therefore, to claim that the 1990s witnessed the inauguration of an entirely different form of scholarship. Nevertheless, in retrospect the decade does seem to mark the emergence of a new phase in the relationship between history, heritage, and the public understanding of slavery. Consciously or subconsciously, social and political events in Britain and the wider world influenced the trust's decision to adopt a policy of openness about Harewood's past links with slavery.

During the 1980s, a breakdown in British race relations contributed to rioting in Brixton (1981) and Broadwater Farm (1985). This decade also saw the formation in 1982 of the British National Party (BNP). The anti-immigration policies of the BNP gained limited electoral support in areas of high unemployment possessing ethnic minority populations, such as east London. Indeed, in 1993 the BNP shocked many observers by winning a local council seat in the Millwall ward of Tower Hamlets. While the electoral gains of the BNP were extremely limited, the organisation's enhanced public profile stimulated the relaunch of the Anti Nazi League, which sought to assemble a popular coalition against racism by staging protest marches, concerts, and festivals.[6] Also in 1993, a widely publicised media campaign was launched by the Commission for Racial Equality (with support from the Professional Footballers' Association and the Football Trust). The campaign's slogan – 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' – resonated beyond a sport widely regarded as the English 'national game'.[7]

[4] Formal links between Harewood and York date from 1963 (the year the university was established) when the 7th Earl of Harewood was invited to become the first chancellor.

[5] Ralph A. Austen, 'The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slaving Voyage Documents and Communal Traditions', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 58 (2001), 229–44; Celeste-Marie Bernier, review of 'Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity', 'A Respectable Trade?', and 'Pero and Pinney Exhibit', *Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), 1,006–12; Michael L. Blakey, 'History and Comparison of Bioarchaeological Studies in the African Diaspora', in *African Burial Ground Final History and Final Skeletal Biology Reports Prepared by Howard University* (Howard University and General Services Administration: 3 vols., New York, 2004), vol. I, 38–96.

[6] The latter events were organised in association with Rock Against Racism (established in 1976).

[7] James Walvin, *The People's Game: A History of Football Revisited* (Edinburgh, 2000).

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A growing awareness of race issues received added impetus after failings in the police and criminal justice system were exposed. In May 1997, a Labour Government was elected. The following July, the new Home Secretary, Jack Straw, announced that a public inquiry chaired by Sir William Macpherson would investigate 'the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence': a young man of Afro-Caribbean descent, murdered in 1993 in south London. Macpherson's terms of reference included the identification of 'lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes'. The Macpherson report was duly published in February 1999. Among other findings, the inquiry concluded that the Metropolitan Police Service had exhibited 'institutional racism', which manifested itself in 'processes, attitudes and behaviour' that disadvantaged minority ethnic people, 'through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping'.[8] By introducing the concept of institutional racism into mainstream political debate, Macpherson encouraged both public and private sector organisations to examine their inclusiveness and accessibility.

As a consequence of this shift in public opinion, the museums and heritage sector joined with other public organisations in devoting greater consideration to racial issues. During the 1990s, the custodians of heritage sites and special collections were urged to do more to acknowledge slavery's legacy and Britain's past involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. In 1993, for example, the Labour MP for Tottenham, Bernie Grant (1944–2000), founded the United Kingdom branch of the Africa Reparations Movement (ARM).[9] ARM called on the British and other Western governments to issue an apology for the enslavement and colonisation of Africans, for the return of cultural artefacts, and for a more accurate portrayal of African history in order to restore dignity and self-respect to African people. One of the most widely reported events co-organised by ARM occurred in 1997, when Grant led a ceremony of remembrance on the Devon beach of Rapparee Cove, Ilfracombe, following the discovery of manacled human remains (presumed to be slaves) from the 1796 shipwreck of *The London*.[10]

Remembrance of slavery has continued to gather momentum in Britain as the 200-year anniversary of Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1807 approaches. There is insufficient space here to list all of the

[8] *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny* (London, 1999).
[9] 'Reparations or Bust', speech given by Bernie Grant MP 12 November 1993 at Birmingham Town Hall: Middlesex University, London, Bernie Grant Archive, BG/ARM/16/4/4.
[10] *The Times*, Monday 24 February 1997.

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activities taking place, but museums, archives, and heritage centres in London and the provinces have launched events to mark the bicentenary. Parallel developments in the United States have influenced greatly the re-examination of slavery within Britain. By the end of the 1990s, reparations had emerged as one of the most racially divisive issues in American politics and established itself as an extension of the Civil Rights agenda.[11] A growing number of North American museums and heritage centres, dedicated to presenting the colonial past, have accepted that the public's implicit trust in museums as a repository of historical truth requires that slavery's significance be disclosed.

By no means all institutions, towns, or cities have chosen to confront the role slavery has played in their histories. Nevertheless, the events of the 1990s made a difference and the extent of public acknowledgements of slavery, on both sides of the Atlantic, appears unprecedented.[12] As Ira Berlin declared in his presidential address to the Organization of American Historians: 'Slavery has a greater presence in American life now than at any time since the Civil War ended.'[13] In terms of public memory, it is tempting to claim that slavery similarly enjoys a higher profile in Britain's national consciousness than at any time since Emancipation.

The Lascelles' three-centuries-long association with Barbados ensured that their West Indian connections were never forgotten entirely by the family. Much uncertainty, however, existed in 1998 concerning the precise nature of Harewood House's past associations with slavery, notwithstanding that the Lascelles had owned Caribbean sugar plantations as recently as 1975. The absence of a written history of the family was one important consideration responsible for collective amnesia. A second factor lies in the disorganised state of surviving documents at the house itself, coupled with a devastating bombing raid in 1940, which destroyed a large amount of manuscript material relating to the

[11] Four articles that comment on a large and growing literature are: Richard F. America, 'Reparations and Public Policy', *Review of Black Political Economy*, 26 (1999), 77–83; Tuneen E. Chisolm, 'Sweep Around Your Own Front Door: Examining the Argument for Legislative African American Reparations', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 147 (1999), 677–727; John Topley, '"Making Whole What Has been Smashed": Reflections on Reparations', *Journal of Modern History*, 73 (2001), 333–61; Alfred L. Brophy, 'Some Conceptual and Legal Problems in Reparations for Slavery', *NYU Annual Survey of American Law*, 58 (2003), 497–556.

[12] The 1990s also witnessed increased interest in comparative slave regimes, including Islamic participation in the slave trade, John Hunwick, 'The Same but Different: Approaches to Slavery and the African Diaspora in the Lands of Islam', *Saharan Studies Association Newsletter*, 7 (1999), 9–14.

[13] Ira Berlin, 'American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice', *Journal of American History*, 90 (2004), 1,251–68.

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Lascelles and the West Indies kept in the London offices of the firm of Wilkinson and Gaviller.[14] While it is not possible to analyse the process of memory loss with precision, events occurring in the early twentieth century probably exerted a significant influence. In 1918, the Barbadian estates of Thicket and Fortescue were sold and the 6th Earl of Harewood devised the two remaining plantations, Belle and Mount, to his younger son.[15] Four years after these West Indian properties were severed from the main branch of the Harewood estate, the Lascelles were connected dynastically with the British royal family through the marriage of Princess Mary, the Princess Royal, to Henry, Viscount Lascelles.[16] A sense of deference may have contributed to the drawing of a discreet veil over links with slavery during the first half of the twentieth century. Pevsner's history of the buildings of England, for example, comments judiciously that, 'the Harewood estate, with Gawthorpe as the house on it, was bought by Henry Lascelles, a wealthy man whose money came from the ribbon trade and the collecting of customs in Barbados'.[17]

Since forging links with the University of York, the Harewood Trust has sought to raise awareness of the Lascelles' past involvement in slavery in a variety of ways. The BBC's *House Detectives* programme (broadcast in March 2002) featured Harewood House and included a segment investigating the Barbados slavery connection. An exhibition entitled 'Sugar Table Decorations at Harewood' was prepared in 2003 under the direction of David Stockdale. This presentation included, for the first time, a panel devoted to the family's West Indian plantations. In the same year, a 'New Freedoms' conference was organised in association with the Interculture organisation.[18] Recently, the Trust formulated a Learning and Access agenda, which includes plans for a Festival of West Indian Culture and the production of education packs for use in British secondary schools. Existing outreach activities include liaison with Afro-Caribbean community leaders in Leeds, and the Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Members of the

[14] Richard Pares, 'A London West-India Merchant House, 1740–1769', in Richard Pares and A. J. P. Taylor eds., *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (London, 1956), 75–107. Limited space prevents discussion of the history of the Lascelles' archive in this volume, but see S. D. Smith, 'An Introduction to the Records of Lascelles and Maxwell', in LMLB.

[15] See Chapter Eight.

[16] In 1922; Viscount Lascelles was heir to the 5th Earl of Harewood.

[17] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Yorkshire: The West Riding* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1959), 245.

[18] 'Estates for Profit and Estates for Pleasure: Unlocking the Links Between the West Indian Sugar Plantations, Slavery and the English Country House', Discussion Document by Terry Suthers (Director and CEO of the Harewood Trust), March 2005.

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Trust have also established contacts with overseas organisations facing similar challenges, including the Barbados Museum of History, Monticello House, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.[19] In August 2005, Diverse Productions broadcast the documentary-drama, *How to Make a Million from Slavery*, based loosely on aspects of the career of Henry Lascelles. This programme, though strongly critical of Henry Lascelles, was made with the cooperation of the Trust.

Yorkshire provides the starting point for this book. However, the web woven by the Lascelles transcends the county. Their business network extended upwards into Scotland, passing through the East Lothian region and reaching as far north as the Orkney islands. To the south, English associates of the Lascelles can be found in East Anglia and the West Country. To the west, the family firm injected credit into the slaving port of Liverpool; across the Irish Sea, their early ventures also touched Dromore, Lisburn, and Belfast. While Barbados formed the Lascelles' most significant and longstanding colonial connection in the Americas, their Atlantic interests were never confined to this island. Antigua, Jamaica, Grenada, Tobago, Demerara, and Essequibo all feature in the colonial portfolios of the family's circle. Along the eastern seaboard, from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, commercial attachments were formed with leading merchants of North America. The Guinea coast of Africa attracted both direct and indirect investment by syndicates of London merchants and Liverpool mariners, either headed or underwritten by the Lascelles. During the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their vessels traversed the Atlantic ocean, carrying slaves, dry goods, sugar and rum, and victuals. Family members also sought business opportunities in South-East Asia, sending ships out to trade across the seas and investing in the East Indian Company.

In Chapter Two, the origins of the London–Boston–Bridgetown trading network are traced by examining the careers of the Vassall and Hall families, whose business interests intersected with those of the Lascelles at various points. Chapters Three and Four examine the Lascelles' own commercial origins and analyses the complex business networks they constructed, linking associates based in Britain, the Caribbean, and North America. By the death of Henry Lascelles in 1753, one of the greatest of all fortunes earned from West Indian commerce had been accumulated by combining the pursuit of private profit with patronage of colonial and naval offices. Chapter Five analyses the remarkable career of Gedney Clarke, one of the Lascelles' most important associates. Clarke's activities emphasise the role of London

[19] Ibid.

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financiers in underwriting the expansion of sugar and slavery in the English-speaking West Indies; his business operations also reveal how commercial networks were capable of cutting across formal national boundaries in the Caribbean. The themes of capital and credit are developed further in Chapters Six and Seven, which examine the Lascelles' financial dealings with slave traders and planters, stressing the extent to which metropolitan lending contributed to expansion in the sugar trade.

During their first twelve decades of participation in Atlantic commerce the Lascelles owned surprisingly little real estate in the West Indies. This situation changed abruptly after the American Revolution. Within the space of fourteen years, the family acquired an immense property portfolio as its business empire was restructured. The remaining chapters provide three different perspectives on the management of West Indian estates. Chapter Eight examines the profitability of slavery to the Lascelles as absentee proprietors. In Chapter Nine, the human cost of involuntary servitude borne by the enslaved population is assessed. A quantitative analysis of plantation demography conveys something of the indescribable tragedy that was Caribbean slavery. Finally, Chapter Ten investigates intercultural relations between the enslaved and white communities – a difficult subject that is only partially documented in surviving archives.

Reconstructing the world of the Lascelles reveals much about the operation of the Atlantic trades during the eighteenth century. Strand by strand, historians have been slowly unravelling the complex business partnerships that enterprising merchants and their financiers fashioned to develop transatlantic commerce.[20] Communities of 'outsiders' or 'strangers within the realm' have attracted particular attention, including ethnic groups of Scots, Irish, and German migrants, and religious minorities, such as Puritans, Quakers, and Jews.[21] This book examines the Lascelles' Yorkshire-based circle and argues that English provincial

[20] See e.g. David Hancock, '"A World of Business to Do": William Freeman and the Foundations of England's Commercial Empire, 1645–1707', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 57 (2000), 6–8; Nuala Zahedieh, 'Making Mercantilism Work: London Merchants and Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1999), 152–8; Peter Mathias, 'Risk, Credit, and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise', in Kenneth Morgan and John J. McCusker eds., *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, 2000), 15–35.

[21] See e.g. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan eds., *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, 1991); Alan L. Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish Migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740–1800* (Ithaca, NY, 1992); Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (Philadelphia, 1999); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (New York, 1995);

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groupings proved capable of operating in similar ways. Its members possessed a strongly defined regional identity, centred on Anglicanism, kinship, and shared cultural pursuits. Two important strengths enjoyed by the Lascelles lay in their access to political patronage and also their ability to integrate with other networks, particularly through Scottish mercantile associates.

The term 'gentry capitalism' is used to describe the institutional structures of trade and finance underpinning the growth of Atlantic trade during the eighteenth century. Gentry capitalism should not be confused with 'gentlemanly capitalism'. The latter term is applied to non-landed mercantile families who sought to acquire wealth and social respectability through participation in imperial trade.[22] In contrast, gentry capitalism refers to families who were already landed and respectable yet which attempted to increase their wealth and influence through colonial trade. The social and political context in which Atlantic trade was conducted resulted in the emergence of a particular type of super-merchant personified by Henry Lascelles and his leading associates. These well-connected and advantageously situated individuals reaped extraordinary profits in the expanding but poorly integrated and loosely regulated colonial economy. In so doing, families like the Lascelles and their associates also helped forge a political consensus that empire was worth creating and defending.[23]

Confining business to kinsmen or to well-connected groups of individuals helped reduce the enormous risks of long-distance commerce And insofar as that strategy succeeded, it had the effect of integrating, and of expanding, the Atlantic economy. But the Lascelles network did not exert a wholly positive influence. The associates sought to deny trading opportunities to outsiders, and they manipulated naval resources and colonial government to protect their own interests. In the long term, the trading system created by the Lascelles proved unsustainable in the face of credit instability, tighter imperial regulation, and colonial bids for greater autonomy. After coming close to bankruptcy in the 1760s and 1770s, the Lascelles adopted new business strategies as a different type of Atlantic economic community came into being.

Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester, 2005).

[22] P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas. I: The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850', *Economic History Review*, 39 (1986), 501–25.

[23] Patrick K. O'Brien, 'Central Government and the Economy, 1688–1815', in Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey eds., *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700* (2nd edn, 3 vols., Cambridge, 1994), vol. I, 205–41.

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The Lascelles' association with the Caribbean is striking for its longevity. No fewer than 327 years span the earliest appearance of a Lascelles on Barbados (1648) to the sale of the family's last plantation in 1975. Involvement in the sugar trade can be documented from 1680 and the family remained tied to the same London commission house from 1732 until 1954. Continuous ownership of plantations in the West Indies lasted 202 years; on Barbados alone, estates were managed without interruption for 194 years. The continuity of the Lascelles' West Indian interests provides a valuable opportunity to survey the long-term development of the British Atlantic economy and to understand how merchants and planters responded to the challenges of warfare, political upheaval, revolution, and ultimately emancipation.

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