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Image: Rome, San Pietro, 18th-cent. copper engraving.

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Hartsheath

The Legacy of 2007: Looking Forward

Miranda Kaufmann, owner of Hartsheath in Flintshire, Wales

Last year I inherited a historic house in North Wales and was chosen by English Heritage to research the links between their properties and slavery. In the course of the latter, I discovered that in the former I had inherited not just a beautiful house but a controversial legacy. North Wales is, after all, far too close to Liverpool for at least some of its families not to have been linked to the Slave Trade. Thus I have watched the events and debates of this year with a personal as well as an academic interest.

It is often asserted that all stately homes were built on the proceeds of the Slave Trade. This is patently too broad a generalisation to be true in every case. Of the 33 properties in the custody of English Heritage built or occupied between 1600 and 1840, I found eight that had no demonstrable link to Slavery. I looked for a wide range of possible connections, from the obvious family ownership of plantations or involvement in slave trading, to more indirect links, such as marriages to ‘West Indian’ heiresses, investment in the South Sea Bubble, or involvement (on either side of the debate) in the Parliamentary process which led to abolition. This was an initial survey of the secondary literature and various databases, including one detailing the individuals who were paid reparations for the loss of their enslaved ‘property’ in 1834. Further examination of house archives, furnishings and architecture would provide further or new evidence of these connections. This is a story that needs to be told in full, for all the houses in this country, whether they are cared for by English Heritage, the National Trust or private owners. Then, in 2033, we will be better able to commemorate the Abolition of Slavery, as opposed to the Slave Trade. We will also be better

equipped to make informed judgements on the issues that arise.

This inevitably conjures up strong feelings. Perhaps that is why I find it so fascinating. It does seem appallingly unjust now that in 1833 it was the slave owners and not the enslaved people who were offered a total of £20 million in reparations. Today, many believe that reparations should be made for the Maafa (the Kiswahili term meaning ‘Disaster’ or ‘Terrible Occurrence’, which is used to refer to the centuries-long exploitation of Africa by Europeans). It is often argued that modern Britons cannot be held accountable for the sins of those that went before. However, I feel that it is the inequality and racism still sadly prevalent in our lifetimes that lie behind the urgency of calls for reparations, as much as the wrongs of the past. While it is right to celebrate the achievement of the men and women, black and white, that forced the Abolition Bill through Parliament 200 years ago, it is sobering to remember that that bill was only the first step in a long and not-yet-won battle for equality of opportunity. Individuals who sought to assert their freedom in the Caribbean continued to be executed as rebels well into the 1830s. The institution of Slavery itself was not abolished until 1st January 1834, and was then replaced by a servile system of indentured labour in the Caribbean, and an escalation of Imperialist activity in Africa.

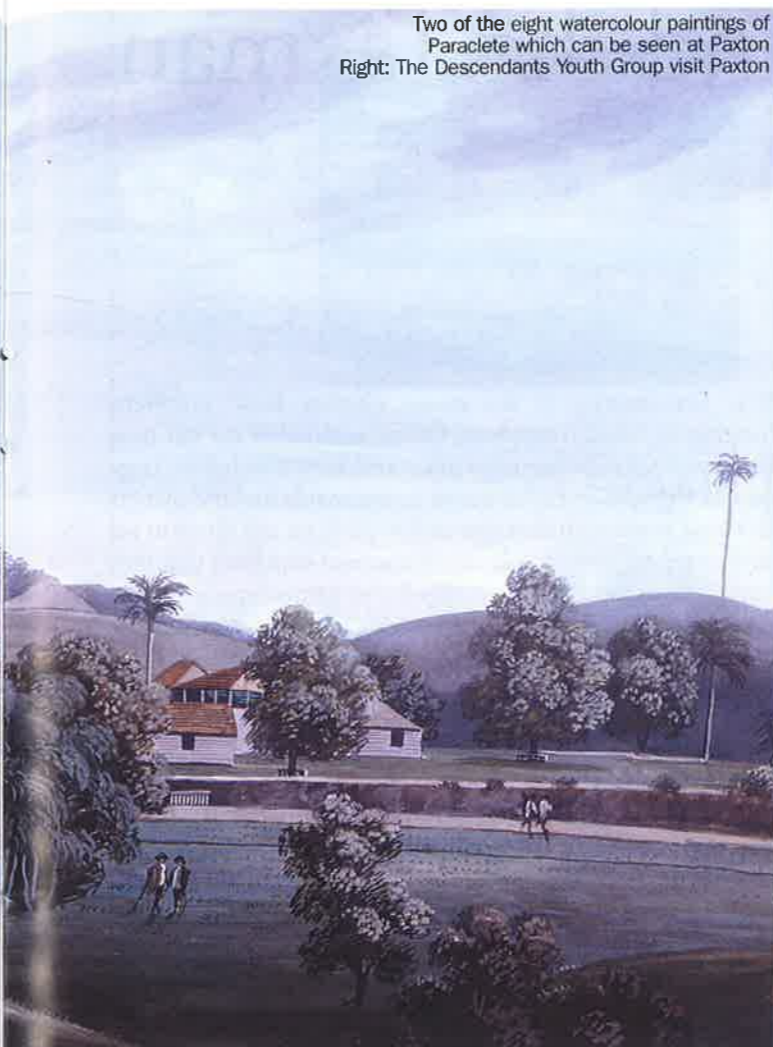
But reparations will always be about much more than the money. Handing over a cheque will not salve the deep emotional and psychological wounds that remain. We must open our minds and hearts, rather than our wallets. This is why initiatives to reach out across cultural divides, such as

those documented in the Summer issue of HHA Magazine, are so important. I was particularly fascinated by the pictures of heritage properties in Jamaica. It occurs to me that the HHA as an organisation is rich in knowledge and experience of how to care for historic property. Would it not be a step in the right direction to reach out to our counterparts in the Caribbean (Jamaica was of course not the only island colonised by the British), through groups such as the Friends of the Georgian Society in Jamaica, and share? We would also have much to learn from them, especially about the histories of British plantation families, from a different perspective. At the present time, most Brits travel to the Caribbean for the sun and the rum. Were heritage tourism to be introduced to this already heady cocktail, the benefits for the Caribbean economies would be manifold.

The descendants of enslaved Africans are not living only in the Caribbean. The pictures of Dido Elizabeth Belle and Charles of Boughton, and many other like them, are a strong visual reminder that there has been a black presence in Britain for centuries; in fact, at least since Libyans came here with the Roman Army. My own doctoral research, on Africans in Britain 1500-1640, shows that there were at least 300 Africans present in these isles in that century and a half. Numbers had increased to an estimated 15,000 by the 18th century. Discovering this hidden part of our shared history is a journey we should take hand in hand with black communities. In many cases, and unlike the Jamaican taxi driver encountered by Baroness Parks, these individuals are far better informed than we are. At the recent exhibition at Kenwood, I met a woman who told me she had known about Dido for years, but met only with blank stares from custodians when she asked about her. It is this kind of encounter that we need to eradicate through more thorough research and dissemination of knowledge. It is the feeling that these stories have been ignored, or worse, purposefully hidden, that alienates and angers people. I went to a conference in Jamaica in December, where I gave a paper in Accompong, a Maroon settlement which dates back to the 1650s, on strategies for freedom employed by enslaved Africans in the 16th century Spanish Caribbean, and saw a few examples of the fascinating heritage buildings that remain there. I have recently discovered that my ancestor, John Chambres-Jones of Bryn Eisteddfod (1750-1833), was a part-owner of four slaving ships of Liverpool. These four ships, the Chambres, Clementine, Doe and Rose Hill are recorded as participating in 12 voyages between 1783 and 1791 on the website www.slavevoyages.com, which comprises a searchable database of all the transatlantic slave voyages ever made. I hope to investigate him further. The idea of speaking openly about what I may find is rather daunting, but I feel it is the least I can do.



Left: A silver cup presented to Miranda Kaufman's ancestor, John Chambres-Jones, for his part in securing the goods of a ship wrecked on the North Wales coast en route from Liverpool to Jamaica in 1784.



Two of the eight watercolour paintings of Paraclete which can be seen at Paxton
Right: The Descendants Youth Group visit Paxton



Slavery to Freedom: Grenada to Paxton

John Malden, Director of the Paxton Trust

Paxton House, in the Scottish Borders, was built between 1758 and 1763 to a design by John Adam for Patrick Home of Billie. The house was sold in 1769 to Patrick's cousin Ninian Home, who owned two sugar plantations on the island of Grenada, one at Waltham on the west coast, and one at Paraclete on the east. Ninian Home employed Thomas Chippendale, both senior and junior, to furnish the house, which currently holds the largest collection of Chippendale furniture in Scotland on view to the public.

The Home of Wedderburn Papers, deposited in the National Archives of Scotland by the Home Robertson family, is one of the most complete country house archives in Scotland. Among the papers are some 2,000 documents relating to the Grenada properties from the 1760s until the 1840s when the plantations were sold.

During that period there was a steady stream of correspondence between Grenada and Paxton, and a wealth of documents about the plantations and the slaves. Also, on display in Paxton House, is a unique set of eight watercolour paintings of Paraclete.

For 2007, the Paxton Trust has obtained a Heritage Lottery Grant to digitise all the documents relating to Grenada, so that they be made more available to researchers and also so that the

archives on Grenada may have easy access to this aspect of their heritage. A booklet and small exhibition is also being prepared which will be available during 2008, the 250th anniversary of work starting to build Paxton House.

In parallel with this, as part of the same project, links have been made with Grenadians living in London. There is a very active youth group called Descendants, based in Acton, where most of the young people are of Grenadian descent. In July, some 20 young people aged between 6 and 16, and 26 adults, visited Paxton, giving a display of art work, dance, songs and stories based on their heritage. Staying for two nights in the Coldingham Youth Hostel on the Berwickshire coast, getting them away from the beach was quite a problem!

Whilst both sides were a little apprehensive at the beginning, the visit proved to be a resounding success and it is hoped to build on this by encouraging schools in the Berwickshire area to twin with schools in Grenada, especially those at Waltham and Paraclete, with the eventual aim of exchanging young people, possibly through the Scouting movement.

The Paxton Trust feels that this project is the best way in which to build on what has gone before in the most positive way possible, so that future generations may be made aware of and learn from what has happened in the past.