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Legacies of British Slave-ownership, 1760-1880

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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Description

The Legacies of British Slave-ownership (LBS) project (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs>) has developed in two main phases. First, the project identified those who claimed compensation for the loss of their "property," i.e. the enslaved, totaling about 670,000 people, when slavery in the British Caribbean was abolished in 1833. There were about 47,000 individuals who made claims on the total of £20 million granted as compensation by the British state. Second, the work has pushed back into the period from the 1760s to 1833 to identify the owners of the enslaved on plantations and other holdings. This has added around 20,000 individuals to the database of slave ownership.

The project has sought to document not only any compensation received or estate ownership but also biographical material and the presence of slave owners within six “legacy” strands: commercial, cultural, historical, imperial, physical, and political. That is, we aimed to show the involvement of this universe of people in the Anglo-Caribbean economy, society, culture, and politics and the impact that they had.

The major sources for the project have been as follows: For phase 1 the published record of the slave compensation claims (British Parliamentary Papers: 1837-38 (215) XLVIII) and the underlying archive in the UK National Archives [TNA] (T71 series) were used to extract names of compensation claimants, the numbers of enslaved people enumerated in each claim, the amount of compensation paid, and to whom. Phase 2 has used, in particular, the Slave Registers (TNA: T71/1-565: Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Records, 1812-1851) to document names of slave owners in the British Caribbean between 1817 and 1833, the location and names of estates, and the numbers of enslaved. These sources have been supplemented by a wide range of others, both primary and secondary, including the Jamaican Crop Accounts; records of births, marriages, and deaths; biographical data; material relating to the legacy strands; and newspapers. The data has been used to build a database/website that gives the most comprehensive documentation of slave ownership in the British Caribbean between c. 1763 and 1833 and also has a good deal of material on both owners and their descendants after emancipation.

The wider context of the research is that it is a project of reparative history. We seek to contribute to the understanding of the importance of slavery in the making of modern British society. But what is also of critical, and ultimately of primary, importance are the stories of enslaved men and women. Currently, the database and website are primarily a resource for studying slave owners, though there is also material that is of value to those researching enslaved people. A future development will be the expansion of the database to include data, drawn primarily from the Slave Registers, to more fully document the enslaved themselves.¹

Dates of Data Collection

2009-present

Dataset Languages

English

Geographic Coverage

United Kingdom, British Caribbean

Temporal Coverage

1760-1880

¹ For a perceptive review of the LBS project, see Daniel Livesay, review of *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, *Reviews in History*, no. 2167 (September 2017), <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/2167>.

Documents Types

Census or Register, Civil Lawsuit, Legislation, Membership List, Life History, Will

Sources

Accounts of slave compensation claims, British Parliamentary Papers, 1837-38 (215) XLVIII

Slave Compensation Commission Records, UK National Archives T71: Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission: Records, 1812-1851, including the Slave Registers (T71/1-565); Accounts Produce, Jamaica Archives 1B/11/...; Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers, UK National Archives PROB11; etc.

Methodology

The initial core of the project – the documentation of compensation claims and claimants – was based on a digitization of the published record of the slave compensation claims (the British Parliamentary Papers and the T71 archive referred to above).

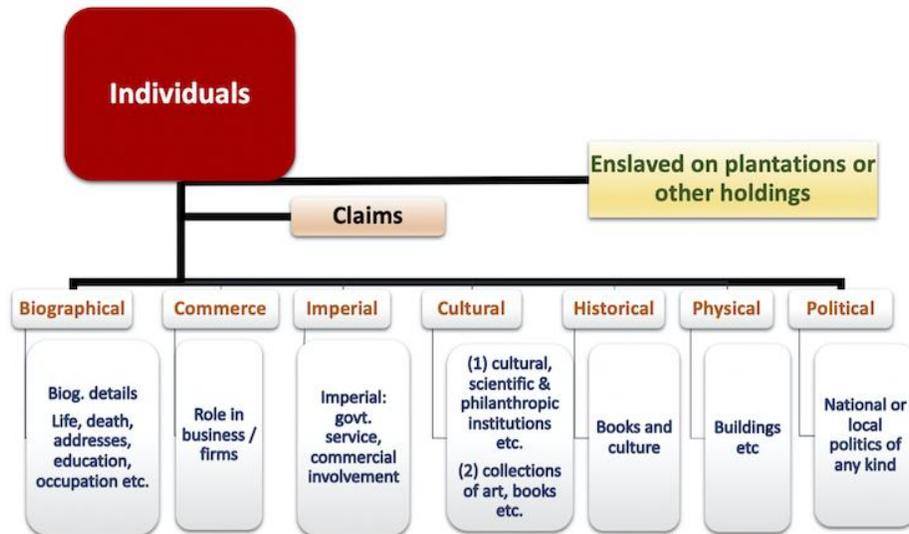
The major challenge was to build a relational database, and subsequently a website, to pull together data from the major sections of the database (illustrated in the accompanying diagram). The database has been built in MySQL and the website front ends (both administrative and publicly accessible) using PHP. Full documentation of the processes involved cannot be done here; however, some broad processes and principles can be indicated.

First, it was necessary to make decisions about which tables needed to be created and which fields (and their data types) should belong to each. The LBS database is complex: there are currently 99 tables and 861 fields. The database was built primarily around individuals, but there are many other related tables. They can be divided into twelve broad groupings: Addresses, Claims, Commercial, Cultural, Estates, General, Historical legacies/bibliography, Imperial, Individuals, Inventories, Physical, Political.

Second, it was essential to maintain data integrity and standardization. This was accomplished, for example, by recording names (of persons or of estates or other objects) as given in the original sources while also noting variations of spelling. We also had to eliminate duplicate records, such as where research showed that three separate entries for a person with the same name were, in fact, records of one person.

Third, and this was perhaps the most challenging intellectual problem, it was essential to be able to track individual persons through the whole database. In this regard the single most important field in the whole database is the PersonID unique identifier held in the primary table of individuals. Through joining this ID to corresponding ID fields in other tables (often using junction tables), it is possible to link records of individuals to, for example, compensation claims and claimants or political activities or any other section of the database.²

² More details of the processes involved can be found in Keith McClelland, "Appendix 3: A note on the database," in Catherine Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* (2014), 284-7.



Legacies of British Slave-ownership: a rough diagram of the structure of the database and website.

Date of Publication

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Data Links

Dataset Repository: UK Data Service <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-852209>

Linked Data Representation: *Enslaved.org* [Summary Visualization](#)

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