

Appendix 1

Resources and processes

This is the first known longitudinal study of a plantation population resident in the Leeward Islands, and it is therefore necessary to explain in some detail the resources that have been used and the processes that have been applied.

The biographies of the enslaved people are based on slave inventories, accounts, letters and miscellaneous documents in the Pinney Papers which are held in the University of Bristol Special Collections. The information gathered from these sources was supplemented by the 1817 to 1834 Triennial Returns for Nevis, by documents held in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registry in Nevis, such as the Common Records and the Books of Wills, and by Nevis parish registers. David Richardson's *Bristol, Africa and the eighteenth century Slave Trade to America* showed that ships from which John Pretor Pinney (JPP) bought his people could be traced. This work was made much easier once the CD-ROM of transatlantic slave trading voyages by Eltis *et al* became available and easier still once this database went online. Additional information was garnered from a variety of other primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

The managers' and overseers' biographies were, in the first instance, based on details found in the Pinney Papers and supplemented with information from standard genealogical sources.



The Pinney Papers

Over the years various members of the family have contributed to the Pinney Papers - a vast collection of documents which cover a wide range of subjects: business ventures in England, Ireland, the East and West Indies; national and international politics and family history. More than 500 archive boxes and in excess of 200 miscellaneous volumes extend over 30 metres of tightly packed shelves; the West Indies collection of 32 archive boxes with legal, business and personal papers pertaining particularly to Nevis only forms a relatively small part of the overall holding. Some material relevant to the West Indies can also be found among the 'domestic' papers.

When Richard Pares carried out his research for *A West India Fortune*, he gathered together material from various places and went through thousands of individual documents, labelled and organised many of them, and although further work has been done since, until now only part of the collection is indexed. Opening boxes is always exciting: one never knows what surprises they might hold. Some bundles have not been unwrapped since Pares's time, and occasionally one comes across his bookmarks and handwritten notes - his greetings from a past era of scholarship.

The slave inventories

The starting point for researching the biographies of the Mountravers people were the slave lists in the West Indies Papers. About a dozen different owners, managers, and attorneys have created them, for different reasons: they were inventories to take stock when a new manager arrived, they were to keep

absentee owners informed, and on the plantation they were used to keep track of births, purchases and, sometimes, deaths. In some years these lists formed part of a comprehensive inventory of the plantation buildings, their contents, as well as the livestock. 22 complete and eight partial lists, going as far back as 1680/1 and extending up to 1811, provided the basis for the biographies.¹ The majority of lists date from the period of John Pretor Pinney's ownership.

The lists contain varying information. The very early ones generally give the names of men and women, boys and girls. Browne in 1734 sorted males and females roughly, in what appears to have been, descending order of ages, with births and one death added. Coker categorised 'Men', 'Boys', 'Women', 'Girls', 'Children Boys' and 'Children Girls' and, as much for his own as his employer's benefit, he noted the state of health or disposition or some, but not all (1761, 1762 and 1763). In 1765 John Pretor Pinney maintained Coker's categories and methodically updated and completed these lists. Unfortunately, after those initial comments on fitness and temperament he did not remark on their ability or willingness to work anymore. As Pinney lived on the plantation and knew each individual, this was no longer necessary. But he added a new category; it contained the people he purchased and those who came to him by way of mortgages falling due.

Just before he left Nevis in 1783, John Pinney noted each person's value and some of their jobs. He wanted his managers to continue keeping records and reminded Gill that 'Once a year, at the end of the book, you should send me a list of slaves and stock, with an inventory of plantation stores and utensils.'² The lists between 1785 and 1795 tended to follow the model established by Pinney, but, unfortunately, neither Gill nor subsequent managers kept annual registers, or if they did, these did not survive or make it into the collection.

Until John Pretor Pinney's son John Frederick came of age in the 1790s, each manager recorded entailed and purchased people in separate columns, as well as the children born to either group and their birth dates. Over the years, as the entailed and purchased adults died, the columns got shorter while the columns of their offspring grew longer. Although Pinney wanted his managers to continue identifying 'Negroes united by Deed of Covenant' between him and his son - 'using the initials P & B as distinguishing marks'³ (i.e. Purchased and Born) - this was not done, making it, for instance, much harder to establish family relationships. From 1795 onwards John Pinney reserved a number of enslaved people for himself (they were later hired out to Clarke's Estate), and this group was always listed, and sometimes valued, separately from those sold to Huggins.

As others had done before them, Pinney and his managers updated the lists, deleted names, noted some people as 'sold', or marked them with crosses. According to a note in the only plantation diary in the collection, a cross denoted that a person had died. In most years (except for 1790 and 1795) the managers itemised the 'increase' and 'decrease', sometimes noting the name of a new-born baby's mother, or someone's exact date of death and occasionally also the cause of death. Every so often they annotated the lists with comments, and it is possible to deduct when managers updated their records. Bunda, for instance, was added to the list 'Taken the 31st day of December 1806'. As the then manager Joe Stanley recorded Bunda as born on 16 April 1807, the list certainly was updated on or after that date, and almost certainly on, or just before, 3 August 1807 – the day Stanley handed over the plantation. Sometimes details from other sources such as the account books provided pointers when lists were

¹ No evidence has been found that in Nevis slaveholders had to supply lists of whites, enslaved people and livestock to the local vestry, as was required of slaveholders in Jamaica (Trevor Burnard 'Slave Naming Patterns: Onomastics and the Taxonomy of Race in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica' in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol 31 No 3 (Winter 2001) p325).

² PP, LB 6: John Pinney, Bristol, to Joseph Gill, Nevis, 27 July 1784

³ PP, LB 12: John Pinney, Bristol, to James Williams, Nevis, 5 November 1796

updated. In several years (1783, 1785, 1788 and 1789) an additional 'general list' - a simple roll call which included everyone - contained further information, as did supplementary lists of those who were working out (1783), and of those who were 'old & useless' and manumitted (1765, 1769, 1783, 1794 and 1801).

The first task was to track each person through the inventories. This was made more difficult by not having all the lists available in chronological order; some only emerged later during further research. Once the lists were in place, tracing individuals was relatively easy: over the years the order of people and the spelling remained roughly the same and where it varied it provided clues, such as how names might have been pronounced, or how educated or how conscientious the record-keeper was. The task became more difficult when there were long gaps between the lists, such as the one between September 1734 and July 1761. Although at first this seemed too long a period to establish who had and who had not survived the intervening 27 years, it was still possible to track people: at the top end of the 1734 list a clear picture emerged of older individuals who in the early 1700s had probably originally been on Mountain, Proctor's or Charlot's and who then died before 1761, while towards the lower half significantly more names appear of those people who appear to have been alive in 1761. They were, therefore, the younger individuals. This was in line with other inventories where people were listed in order of their ages.

From 1761 onwards the order of names roughly corresponded with the order on the earlier list. In cases where the subsequent descriptions and life stories fitted it has been assumed, therefore, that the people listed by Browne in 1734 were those of the same name listed in the early 1760s. Then, working backwards from 1761, when people were described as 'old', or 'very old', it was possible to estimate their ages based on these descriptions and their position on the 1734 list. Those who were just listed as 'men' or 'women' and not registered in 1734 were probably born – less likely, bought - after 1734. People who were judged to have been 'old' in 1761 but who were not on the plantation in 1734 are assumed to have been bought, as adults, between 1734 and 1761, or fallen due in mortgages. In the Pinney Papers there is evidence of some individuals having been acquired this way.⁴ From the early 1760s the task of tracking people was helped by the separation of entailed and purchased people and the grouping of 'children boys and girls' and 'boys' and 'girls' - even if the categories did not always seem entirely consistent.

Unfortunately there are no lists for the crucial period from the beginning of 1770 to July 1783. These would have revealed the number of deaths during a full five-year period of seasoning for all Africans purchased by John Pretor Pinney, as well as the effect of the American War of Independence when Nevis suffered badly from import restrictions. Pares, in his notes to *A West India Fortune*, mentioned a 1775 list but, frustratingly, this could not be found. Of those people who did not appear on the 1783 list only the entailed individuals can be securely traced to 1772 because they were included in Pinney's marriage settlement. For some of the purchased people entries in the accounts provided clues as to when they were still alive but it has been assumed that most, if not all, of those who were last recorded on the annotated 1769 list, had died by the middle of 1783.

⁴ It is possible that the picture was more complex. As there is evidence that names were re-used, often among unrelated people, in a few instances there may have been additional people of the same name who had either been born or bought between 1734 and 1761. One example illustrates the difficulties in establishing identities: in 1734, there were two women on Mountravers called Affey (prefixed 'Great' and 'Little'). By 1761 only Great Affey had survived, and it is believed that she was the Little Affey from the 1734 list. It is likely that the women listed in 1734 as Great Affey had died, that another Affey had been born or bought who then became known as Little Affey and that the Little Affey from 1734 then became known as Great Affey. If the 'new' Little Affey had also died some time before 1761, Little Affey from 1734 would, therefore, have been the Great Affey listed in 1761. Great Affey was, in 1761, said to have been 'old', and given that, listed as the third woman, Great Affey was likely to have been born towards the end of the seventeenth century, it makes it more likely that the woman recorded as Great Affey in 1761 was Little Affey in 1734. Listed below Great Affey as number 21, Little Affey was a younger woman. Her age fits in with that of other women on the list who might have been born around that time.

Up to and including the point at which Mountravers was sold, managers only made a few minor errors, such as Coker recording a purchase date wrongly, or James Williams confusing Nancy Steward with Nancy Seymour. The mistake over one boy (James Fisher) did, however, have serious consequences for that child and his family.

After Mountravers was sold, the Hugginses completed their own registers; apparently one entered in a plantation book and dated 1 January 1811 existed in Nevis as late as 1903.⁵ However, none of these are available. The only document that relates to the Huggins period is dated December 1816. It transferred ownership from Edward Huggins to his son Peter Thomas and was found in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registry in Nevis. That document made it possible to trace people to the end of 1816. After that the 1817 and subsequent Nevis Triennial Slave Registration Returns could be used to track the survivors to the end of slavery.

In the Pinney Papers are also five additional lists of John Pretor Pinney's reserved people, with their 'issue and increase', and another two lists taken in the 1820s. One is a simple roll call of all enslaved people on Clarke's Estate (which was then mortgaged to John Pinney's son Charles) with his reserved group and some of their offspring identified separately. The other list details each person's allowances and occupation.

Establishing people

One of the aims of this study was to produce a record of all the people who had lived on Mountravers. The starting point were the slave lists although it has to be recognised that not included are those children who were born and then died before the next list was compiled. This is particularly true where there were long gaps: from 1734 to 1761; 1769 to 1783 and 1807 to 1816. In addition, anyone bought after 1734 but who died before 1761 is not included. These individuals simply left no trace.

Under-recording of births is a problem faced by all researchers of slave communities. Ward has argued that recording all births was not in the best interest of managers; it saved clerical work and reduced the risk of awkward questions about their supervision.⁶ Owners may have asked why so many children died but they were less likely to have asked why so few babies were born - particularly as, at the time, enslaved women generally were blamed for low birth rates. Attempts have been made to quantify the problem. Estimates vary. In Jamaica, the figures for children who died before the ninth day of their life is said to have been between a quarter and a half of all live births;⁷ in the Leeward Islands, for children who died in the first year of their lives, the figures were between about one half⁸ to two thirds.⁹ The argument that managers neglected their duties seems reasonable but the inveterate book-keeper and list-maker John Pretor Pinney surely would have noted down each birth. His period of record-keeping therefore would seem the most reliable. His July 1783 list shows that four children had been born since January that year, narrowing down the time span in which young children may have died. While that still leaves as unrecorded miscarriages or dead-born children, as well as those children who died almost immediately after birth, it is reasonable to assume that it does show a period in which all surviving births were noted. Unfortunately that period is too short to draw any firm conclusions.

⁵ Udal, JS 'The Story of the Bettiscombe Skull' in *Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club* Vol 3 (1910) p187 and p188

⁶ Ward, JR *British West Indian Slavery* p130

⁷ Higman, BW *Slave population and economy in Jamaica* p48, quoting various contemporary sources

⁸ Goveia, EV *Slave Society* p124, quoting answers by legislatures and agents of the Leeward Islands in the House of Common Accounts and Papers Vol XXVI

⁹ Dr Robert Thomas's believed that at least two out of three infants died in the first 12 months (Sheila Lambert (Ed) *House of Commons Sessional Papers* Vol 71 p260).

In addition to the slave lists other sources were used to establish who had lived on Mountravers. In the very early days medical accounts yielded up several names and later the account books provided evidence of people who had been purchased or acquired when mortgages fell due, but who were subsequently not listed, or accounted for as sold. They are included and it has been assumed that they had died by the time the next inventory was taken.

Establishing ages

If anyone had asked enslaved people their ages, in all probability they would not have known. Lieutenant Brady, who visited St Croix in the late 1820s, wrote that enslaved women were not aware of their own, or their children's, ages. Brady argued that, because European peasants would have known theirs, the system of slavery was to blame.¹⁰ Condescending as always, Lady Nugent described a similar experience: 'One [coloured lady] told me she was twenty-four years old, and shewed (sic) me her grandchild. I found afterwards that she was fifty-four; but they have no idea of time or distance. They reckon the one by the number of Christmas masquerades they can recollect, and for the other they have no scale.'¹¹ During the 1830 Stapleton Enquiry the woman Lujer used this very method to convey that she had been a sick nurse for 'more than two Christmas'.¹² Lujer in Nevis and Lady Nugent's 'coloured lady' in Jamaica used a different, African way of measuring time that to Europeans was alien and incomprehensible. Memorable events rather than days on a calendar marked the passage of time. This posed a question: if enslaved people measured their ages differently, and considered them meaningless or unimportant, why, then was it essential to determine how old they were? Would the enslaved people themselves have valued this in any way? With such perspective in mind, what was the merit in trying to establish people's ages? It would have been possible to just use the available information, such as known birth and purchase dates. Yet, surely, if the aim of this research was to reconstruct people's lives, their ages during the time they lived on Mountravers had to be taken into account. Knowing people's ages became another piece in the jigsaw puzzle. Even if enslaved people might have seen this as a worthless exercise, for those whose ages were not stated a way had to be found of determining how old they might have been. After all, we exist in time – however it is expressed. In addition, only by knowing how long people lived could some tentative conclusions be drawn as to *how* they lived.

Establishing the ages of inherited people

It is possible to estimate roughly the ages of some of those inherited by the first John Frederick Pinney. A few individuals are likely to have fallen due in mortgages, while others had been listed on Proctor's or Charlot's at the turn of the century. Time elapsed between lists and their previous description, and in the case of mortgaged people, their position in the mortgage documents provided pointers. In 1720, a distinct group was appraised (the Broom people) and each individual's value stated. By comparing these to other known contemporary values, in particular the very detailed compensation claims made in 1708 following the French invasion of Nevis, it is possible to narrow down the ages of several of the children. (This was done on the assumption that values did not change much between 1708 and 1720.) The comments that some children were born after Philip Broom's death (he died in December 1705)¹³ provided an additional piece of evidence. For instance, Little Sarah and her brother Little Jack were valued at £18 and £20 respectively, which suggested they were about 10 or 11 and 11 or 12 years old.¹⁴ For children listed in

¹⁰ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p170

¹¹ Wright, Philip (ed) *Lady Nugent's Journal of her Residence in Jamaica* p60

¹² NHCS, RG 12.10 Indictment of Manager on Stapleton p292

¹³ Oliver, VL *Caribbeana* Vol 5 Helme Pedigree

¹⁴ PP, WI Box B: Bundle 1705-1721

1761 as 'child boys' or child girls' the first indicator came from time elapsed between lists: those listed as 'child boys' in 1761 who were still in the same group six years later were at least six years old.

The age ranges of the entailed people inherited by John Pretor Pinney could be verified, to some extent, if they were alive in 1772 and included in his marriage settlement. This document, too, revealed ranking by age: those said to have been 'very old' in the early 1760s were at the top of the list, followed by 'old' people. Those born last were listed last. The ranking by age was the preferred way of listing people on Mountravers, as can be seen from John Pinney's request to his manager. Prior to selling the estate he asked him to produce a list and to rank people by ages, and if he did not have their dates of birth, to judge as best as he could. On other plantations lists sometimes started with the most able people and descended to those deemed 'weak and useless', or they contained members of work gangs, followed by young children and invalids.¹⁵

But what did 'old' mean? The term is subjective - it is today and it was in Nevis in the 1760s. What did it mean to Coker? When John Pretor Pinney upgraded some people after Coker's initial assessment from 'old' to 'very old', had they merely aged more rapidly owing to Coker's new, perhaps harsher work regime, or had Pinney taken account of the passage of time? Did the 25-year-old Pinney, thirteen years younger than Coker, perceive an elderly person differently? Coker may have wanted to draw his absentee employer's attention to the fact that he had work with an ageing population, smoothing the way for future purchases, but Pinney also used the terms, and he was on the spot and could make his own decisions. Although primarily concerned with determining whether people were fit for work, Coker and Pinney presumably had in mind some kind of age range - their descriptions would otherwise have only indicated people's state of health, or their willingness to work. Instead, a few of the elderly still had tasks allocated and some of those said to have been 'very old' were still productive, while others were 'old & useless'. 'Old', therefore, was not simply shorthand for 'unemployable'.¹⁶ While accepting the fact that there could not be a precise definition, it seemed possible to at least narrow down the terms 'old' and 'very old'.

Coker probably did not have previous plantation records to hand, nor would he have asked people how old they were, or how long they had been in Nevis. It would have meant unravelling many memories of past hurricanes or other landmark events with which he was not familiar.¹⁷ Instead, he would have estimated people's ages. But how able a judge was he as a newcomer to plantation life?

Searching for evidence within the slave lists, it emerged that of all the people classed as 'old' in 1761, the age of one woman could actually be calculated with some certainty: the Creole girl Little Sarah, then called Broom's Sarah. She was known to have been born after Philip Broom's death in December 1705. If the calculation based on her 1720 value was correct, she probably was about 50 or 51 years old; if it was wrong, she could not have been more than 54, or 55. The discrepancy was, at the most, five years. Unfortunately, this was the only example and was not sufficient to provide a definition that could be applied across the board. Coker may well have misjudged Broom's Sarah's age. Worn out from a life of hardship, she could well have looked much older than she actually was.

After John Pretor Pinney inherited the plantation it became easier to establish people's ages with greater accuracy: he noted the children's dates of birth and more slave inventories were produced that provided information. For instance, during his period of ownership, a total of twenty women and eleven men had

¹⁵ Higman, BW *Slave population and economy in Jamaica* p1

¹⁶ On Lady Stapleton's plantation 27 people were said to have been 60 or over. The two 60-year-olds were healthy; the remaining people were all infirm, or very infirm.

¹⁷ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p85

the prefix 'Old' added to their names,¹⁸ while others of similar, or possibly even more advanced, years had not. Although there were some people of the same name, this was not necessarily done to distinguish them from each other. Friday, for instance, was the only woman of that name on Mountravers. She was called 'Old Friday' when she was only 41 years old, while Old Bridget was 51 and Old Jack 62. Theirs are the only ages that can be verified with precise birth dates but when the prefix 'Old' was first used cannot be established. It is likely that the term implied declining fitness and strength but it may possibly have been added as a mark of respect, almost an honorary title. In today's Western cultures the term 'old' usually attracts negative connotations but enslaved people lived in a society that valued age and experience. As one visitor observed in the late 1820s: they paid 'attention ... to aged persons generally', and showed 'affectionate kindness ... to their aged relatives'.¹⁹ The prefix 'Young' was not used on Mountravers.

There is no statistical data that might shed light on what people would have considered as 'old' in mid-eighteenth century Nevis when it is said that, world-wide, the average human life expectancy hardly exceeded forty years.²⁰ But average life expectancy was just that: it was average. As Michael Craton pointed out, over a fifth of all enslaved people on Worthy Park in Jamaica died of, what was perceived as, natural causes (i.e. old age). Craton stated that this 'surely runs counter to the impression given by the average survival rates, which suggest life expectancy at birth of less than thirty years for Creoles, and for new Africans an average expectation of no more than a dozen years after arrival.'²¹ On Mountravers few causes of death were recorded and none were 'natural causes', or 'old age'. In only two known instances did managers in Nevis cite this as the cause of death: on Lady Stapleton's plantation Old Doll was eighty when she died in 1778, but on Stoney Grove, in the 1820s, people as young as sixty years were said to have died of 'old age'.

Clearly, there was a link between increasing age, declining health, and the ability to work. On Lady Stapleton's plantation most of those aged between 40 and 49 were healthy, the majority in the 50 to 59 age group were 'infirm', as were all but two of the 27 over-sixty-year-olds. A similar picture was true of Clarke's Estate: except for a midwife, all those said to have been aged sixty or over were 'infirm' and did not work anymore.

Modern research, based mostly on Jamaican estates, has revealed that many elements influenced people's state of health, length of working life, and age at death. Among the complex factors were the composition of plantation populations, the labour regimes and the geographical location. Conditions varied in each category for males and females, Africans and Creoles, blacks and mixed-race, field hands and domestics, as well as rural and urban populations. Generally, though, field hands worked the hardest and had the highest mortality rate, women lived longer than men, and plantation-born people had easier access to the more responsible and varied jobs. On Mesopotamia plantation in Jamaica about a third of these became supervisors, domestics, craft or stock workers, while mixed-race people worked exclusively as domestics or in trades. They had physically less demanding - and therefore healthier - jobs than fieldworkers but mixed-race people, surprisingly, died earlier than some other groups. The arguments are complex, and bearing in mind the many variables, the question "what was meant by 'old' in Nevis in the 1760s?" had to turn into "what was meant by 'old' in this particular individual's case?" Coker and the other managers had no reason to take the different factors into account and fine-tune their classification of people accordingly. They would not have thought that 'for a mulatto he is rather old', or, 'given that she is a woman, she is 'old' rather than 'very old' – it was simply a matter how old people looked and whether

¹⁸ The term also applied to white people (see, for instance, PP, Dom Box P: JF Pinney, Nevis, to John Pinney, 21 February 1804).

¹⁹ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p170

²⁰ <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v387/n6633/full/387565a0.html>

²¹ Craton, Michael *Searching for the Invisible Man* p123

they were still productive. Those deemed 'old' but not 'infirm' were moved on to jobs other than fieldwork. When this happened would not have just depended on a person's physical condition but also on whether field workers could be replaced and whether alternative employment was available.²² In the 1820s on Clarke's Estate, only two women and one man in their forties were in the number one gang; most others in that age group had been moved to lighter work, such as minding animals or children. This estate had a relatively young population and had to rely mostly on young women to do the heaviest fieldwork. An analysis of the 1822 Triennial Returns and other documents showed, however, that Clarke's was suffering particularly badly from adverse economic conditions and organisational problems which would have affected people's health and ability to work. The sample was also too small to reach definite conclusions but a similar picture emerged from an analysis of occupational patterns on Old Montpelier in Jamaica where people tended to shift into physically less demanding jobs, such as watchmen, stock keepers, and gardeners, generally either between the ages of 40 to 49, or from 50 years and upwards.²³ This was roughly in line with an analysis of occupations in five different island colonies in the early nineteenth century, which suggests that the percentage of field workers declined rapidly between the ages of 50 or 55.²⁴ One exception to this pattern was that of males in specialist jobs, such as drivers, boilers, and tradesmen. They tended to work and live longer.²⁵

There were demographic differences between different islands and even between different plantations in the same island but a consensus began to emerge: most enslaved people were past the prime of their working lives when they were about 50 years old. Women generally worked ²⁶ and lived longer, and it seemed therefore not unreasonable to define men as 'old' from the age of about 50, and women from the age of 55. Indeed, this is borne out by at least one man. Aged about 50, Wiltshire was said to have been an 'old driver'.

If a 50-year-old was 'old', what might have constituted a 'very old' person? At about the time Coker was drawing up his first slave list, in Danish St Croix the missionary GCA Oldendorp observed: 'In spite of all the hard work and the poor life of negroes in the West Indies, it is not uncommon that they attain a ripe old age. I have known several of them who had reached ninety, one hundred, and one hundred and twenty years of age.'²⁷ In the 1840s there certainly is evidence in the Nevis parish registers of people reaching very advanced ages. William Davis from Figtree, for instance, died when he was 103 years old²⁸ and John Wells or Wills from Charlestown was 115.²⁹ However, even by today's standards, these men were exceptionally old, and although they had died in Nevis, they might never have been enslaved in their lives. In the debate over the abolition of slavery and compensation payments, it was suggested to exclude people over the age of 70 altogether.³⁰ This, of course, is the biblical age of three-score ten but it probably was the age at which the majority were deemed to have completely ended their useful working lives. They were of no economic value any more. Gregory Lewis's observations confirm that this age group was considered beyond productive labour and very 'old'. When visiting his Jamaican estates in the early nineteenth century he seemed surprised and thought it worth the comment that many enslaved

²² Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' p796, p809, p814, p804 and p805

²³ Higman, BW *Montpelier, Jamaica* p43 Table 2.5

²⁴ Higman, BW *Slave Populations in the British Caribbean* pp190-98: Rural Trinidad (1813), St John, Barbados (1817), rural St Lucia and St Lucia (1815), Anguilla (1827), Berbice (1819). There are no figures for Nevis as occupations were not stated in the Triennial Returns

²⁵ Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' p810

²⁶ Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' p811

²⁷ Tyson, George F and Arnold R Highfield (eds) *The Kamina Folk* p85

²⁸ NHCS, St Paul's Burials 1838-1965

²⁹ NHCS, St Paul's Burials 1838-1965 No 402

These ages may well have rested on original over-estimates but still show that some people reached an exceptional age.

³⁰ Pers. comm., Brian Littlewood, 16 November 2003

people born on the estate, 'though turned of sixty and seventy, were still strong, healthy and cheerful'.³¹ In 1817, only 2.6 % of the enslaved population in Nevis was aged over 70³² but the figures for one Jamaican plantation, Worthy Park, show that over a forty-year period the average ages of unemployed people classified as 'aged' increased by 13 years: in 1793 it was 57.7 years, in 1821 this rose to 64.5 and in 1834 to 70.8 years. According to Craton, for Creoles the average life expectancy had, by the end of slavery, risen to 'not far short of forty years'.³³ There are no comparable figures for any estates in Nevis but assuming a similar improvement in people's longevity (at least among the Creoles), this, surely, would have shifted people's perception as to what was meant by a 'very old' person. Towards the end of slavery it seems reasonably certain that anyone over 70 would have been classed as such but this is likely to have been lower in the 1760s. Therefore, taking the 13-year increase in average ages of those classified as 'aged' between 1793 and 1834 on Worthy Park as guidance, it would appear reasonable to suggest that in the 1760s men aged about 60 or over and women aged 65 or over were considered to have been 'very old'.

Working back to the 1734 list with the assumption that a 'very old' person in the early 1760s would have been born around 1700 (60/65+ years old) and an 'old' person in the early 1700s (50+ years old), this then roughly confirmed the original estimates based on the age ranking on the 1734 list. Among the 63 males, for instance, those said to have been 'very old' in the 1760s were numbers 3, 11, 23 and 24, those said to have been 'old' were numbers 15, 35, 37, 39, 40, 43 and 50, while those alive in 1761 but classed as neither, were numbers 32, 45, 47, 53, 56, 58, 62 and 63. While there were overlaps within the categories (numbers 15, 50 and 32), this nevertheless largely confirmed not only the original pattern of ranking by age, but also the subsequent calculations of people's ages. Given that managers would have struggled to judge people's age accurately, a discrepancy in three cases out of 19 seemed sufficiently low to be acceptable, and it seemed reasonable to work with these figures.

Can any meaningful conclusions be drawn from this? Generally, as their strength deteriorated, enslaved people were moved from field to lighter work. In some cases this happened when they were still young but probably in the majority of cases at around the age of 50, or 55. This depended on factors such as gender and origin, composition of the workforce and availability of alternative types of work. At the stage when their work allocation changed they were likely to have been deemed 'old'. When their useful working lives came to a complete end owing to their advanced years, rather than a sudden illness or accident that rendered them infirm, they were deemed 'very old'.

Establishing the ages of children, inherited by John Pretor Pinney and plantation-born

Defining the ages of children - based on Coker's categories - posed similar problems. He grouped 'Men' and 'Women', 'Boys', 'Girls', 'Children Boys' and 'Children Girls'. But how did Coker group the youngest, and at what stage did they move up to the next band? The basis for establishing, or at least estimating, their ages, were the divisions used on other plantations and an analysis of evidence from later Mountravers records, when the ages of plantation-born children are known.

In 1765 John Pinney added birth dates to some, but not all, children said to have been born in the 1750s. These probably were based on notes he had found on the plantation, or may just have been his estimates. In that case, however, the question remains: why did he not allocate arbitrary birth dates to all children, and why was there such a pronounced cluster in July 1755? Their names suggest that they may

³¹ Lewis, MG *Journal of a Residence Among the Negroes in the West Indies* p45

³² Higman, BW *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* pp477-80 Tables S4.4

³³ Craton, Michael *Searching for the Invisible Man* p187 Table 50 and p94

have been offspring of enslaved people who were on Mountravers in 1734 but it is also possible that they were African children who had been given the same name of previous Mountravers inhabitants.

On other plantations in Nevis enslaved people were usually divided into men, boys, women and girls (in that order). Only occasionally were all adults grouped before children.³⁴ Secondary sources from other Caribbean islands showed that there was no uniform way of recording people: the lists Michael Craton used generally consisted just of males and females, of old before young people. In the Bahamas families and households were the most convenient criteria, and when they lived together, children were listed after their parents.³⁵ On Old Montpelier children aged up to nine and those from ten to nineteen were grouped according to occupations, while their entitlements to various items of clothing and sewing equipment revealed an array of apparently unrelated age bands: for instance females under the age of ten years received check material, males over ten got caps, females over nine scissors and thimbles, children up to the age of four received three needles, while children aged five to fourteen got four needles each and all those aged fifteen or over were allocated six needles.³⁶ On several 1820s St Croix plantations children under the age of ten were known as 'Little People',³⁷ Pares distinguished between boys and girls over and under nine years old.³⁸ Moreover, different age bands were used in legal, or formal, contexts. For instance, the Leeward Island Melioration Act stipulated that sudden deaths of anyone aged six years or over required investigation while in 1834 children aged six years or under were automatically free.

It was possible that Coker's division was based on the Christian notion that deems children under the age of eight as 'innocent'. While this may have been the underlying original motive, it is not possible to verify his groupings, and in the hands of John Pretor Pinney this certainly led to a more fluid interpretation. He applied his own, varying yardsticks, which could change over time: Pinney included in 1765 two 10 and 12-year-olds as 'children'; in 1772 the oldest were eight and a half to nine years old. In 1767/8 the youngest 'girl' (Nancy Jones) was ten years old, in 1783 seven years and nine months (Leena).

Another possible key to understanding the categories was the children's physical development that came with the onset of puberty. When the boys' voices deepened and the girls filled out and grew breasts, perhaps this might have entailed a shift to another group but the ages of the children did not bear out this theory. When analysing later slave inventories and work gangs lists, it appeared that the three categories first used by Coker roughly matched the composition of the three field gangs: children from a certain age worked in the grass gang, boys and girls in the small, or second, gang and adults in the great, or number one, gang. The ages overlapped; the categories, therefore, were based more on strength and state of health than actual age. In the grass gang, otherwise known as the sheepmeat gang, were boys aged from 9 ½ to 16 and girls aged from 10 to 14. In the small gang the boys' ages ranged from 13 to 17, and one possibly was as old as 20. The girls were between 16 and perhaps 20, or 21 years old. In Thomas Pym Weekes's days the youngest fieldworker was five and a half, in James Williams's time nine and a half years old. In the 1820s on Clarke's estate children as young as four were in the sheepmeat gang, while others of the same age had no tasks allocated to them. The oldest member of the sheepmeat gang was a boy of ten, while the youngest in the second gang were two girls aged eight and nine. Although the ages at which children were put to work and moved up to the next gang were somewhat fluid, the groupings seemed a good indicator of a child's health and strength.

³⁴ For example, 'List of Negroes belonging to the Estate of Edward Jesup Esq taken this 17th June 1748' (SCRO, Moberley and Wharton Collection, D/MW 35/4), and 'Inventory of the Negroes on the Nevis Estate of the late Richard Oliver, 29 January 1785' (ECSCRN, Nevis Book of Wills 1763-1787 ff613-14 and ff618-19).

³⁵ Craton, Michael *Empire Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* p214

³⁶ Higman, BW *Montpelier, Jamaica* p43 Table 2.5 and p232

³⁷ PP, LB 44 Misc Documents: Guysbert Behagen's Mount Pleasant, also Petersrest and Catharines Rest, 2 July 1827

³⁸ Pares, R A *West India Fortune* p125 Table IVc

Coker himself wrote that children were '... so young that they are incapable of doing anything except picking a little grass, & most of them (sic) not able to do that - '. When he wrote this, there were 22 children out of a total population of 136, and he appeared to draw the owner's attention to the high number of largely unproductive individuals. Separating the younger from the older children therefore seems to have been done for practical purposes: once promoted to 'boys' and 'girls', they were old enough to withstand more demanding work.

The term 'boy children' and 'girl children' was not used on Mountravers after 1801. In the final inventory drawn up by Joe Stanley he listed only 'men' and 'women' and 'boys' and 'girls', and in the document in which Edward Huggins transferred ownership to his son Peter Thomas Huggins children were grouped as 'infants', or 'boys' and 'girls'. Again, inconsistencies occurred. One girl, Martha, at the age of three years and one month was an 'infant', while Charlotte, younger by almost two months, was a 'girl'.³⁹ This probably was due to Charlotte's more rapid physical development but may also point towards Huggins expecting strong and healthy three-year-olds to start their productive working lives.

At what age were boys and girls grouped as adults? Richard Dunn wrote that on Mesopotamia in Jamaica, at the age of 16 boys and girls were generally promoted to men and women. However, as he pointed out, they were not adults yet in the physical sense: research into the stature of Caribbean blacks in the early nineteenth century has revealed that adolescent growth spurts appeared noticeably later than in modern Western black populations. Girls would grow another inch or so to achieve mature stature, while boys would grow an average of four inches until they reached the age of 22.⁴⁰ On Mountravers this may have been taken into account: boys and girls were generally upgraded to men and women once they reached the age of 20 or 21 years. Again, some inconsistencies occurred even in the same list, compiled by the same person: in 1806, Dorinda (aged 18), was listed as a woman while the 20-year-old Clarissa was still a girl. In 1816 Betsey Saunders (aged 18) was a 'woman', while Phoenia (aged 20 ½) and Betsey Arthurton (aged 19) were among the category of 'girls'. It appears that all girls, and possibly also boys, were promoted to adults once they had become parents. The only conclusive evidence is Black Polly's case. When pregnant, aged about 13, she was listed as a 'woman' while Johntong and Nomore, who were about the same age as her, were classed as 'girls'. Generally, however, categorising people as adults may, again, have had more to do with physical strength and the point at which they were able to undertake the most arduous of plantation work.

From 1763 onwards, lists contained the birth dates of all children born on the plantation. These, at first sight, appear to have been the exact date of birth, and generally can be read as such. However, some evidence points to these dates as not having been entirely accurate: the plantation diary, for instance, states that Mary Path was delivered of a child on 6 February 1800, yet in the following list her son's date of birth is two days earlier. Supposedly kept on a daily basis, the plantation diary would appear to be the more accurate source but it has to be remembered that at that particular time the diary was maintained by a manager who was losing interest in his job.

Another instance may also point to inaccuracies arising from women who had children while being hired out. According to the 1790 list, three children were born on Thursday, 23 October 1788. Was this just a coincidence? At least one of the women was definitely hired out at that time, the other two may have been, and it seems likely that this was the day the women came to the plantation to deliver their wages and, at the same time, report the births of their new babies.

³⁹ ECSCRN, CR 1814-1817 ff761-74

⁴⁰ Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' p802, quoting BW Higman *Slave Populations* pp280-82, pp534-35, pp542-46 and 'Growth of Afro-Caribbean Slave Populations' in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* Vol 1 (1979) pp377-82 and Gerald C Friedman 'The Heights of Slaves in Trinidad' in *Social Science History* Vol 6 No 4 (Autumn 1982) pp493-501

Even in other official sources the dates were not always accurate because the records may not necessarily have been kept on a daily basis. Additional errors may have crept in when the documents were transcribed. This also happened with white people's records. One example is Reverend William Jones's date of death. According to the Cayon Diary, he died at the end of February 1800 and was buried on 18 March 1800⁴¹ but in the inventory detailing his estate, drawn up on 20 June 1800, his date of death was given as 27 March 1800.⁴²

Establishing the ages of purchased or mortgaged people

John Pretor Pinney bought 61 newly imported Africans directly from ships or from slave trading companies, and a few from private individuals or plantations. Creoles he acquired from private owners or plantations - some through outright purchases but most through mortgages.

The ages of the newly imported Africans were estimated and probably also those of some Creoles, particularly if purchased at public auction. Until 1770 John Pretor Pinney entered the supposed ages of all people he bought but it is not possible to verify these; later lists do not show how old people were. In the case of those who lived until 1817, the age then recorded provided some further evidence but no absolute proof. Pinney recognised the potential for errors by carefully heading the relevant column 'supposed ages'.

For young people the discrepancy in ages would not have been as pronounced as for adults, and it has been assumed that the younger the person, the more accurate the supposed age was. A child's physical development provided relatively reliable, age-related evidence and, in the case of Creoles, memories were fresher as to when a child was born. According to Richard Dunn, the ages of newly imported young Africans may have been 'persistently underestimated'. He stated, however, that 'teenagers can be tracked with some accuracy by the presence or absence of pubertal developments – the height spurt, voice change in boys, breast development in girls – that even a bookkeeper might notice. African pre-adolescents might also be missing the body scars or country marks that were commonly administered to boys and girls during pubertal initiation rites.'⁴³ It is possible that some African girls, perhaps earmarked as mistresses (Black Polly and Judy), were claimed to have been twelve years old (then the legal age of consent for girls) when in fact they were younger.

In the case of adults, it is reasonable to assume that their supposed ages at the time of purchase (even if they have been misjudged by a few years) were more accurate than those given in the Triennial Returns. Adults who did not work in the field may have been judged younger: domestics, for instance, may have looked healthier, were less worn out than field workers. Few (if any) private owners would have based their information on carefully kept records but would instead have relied on memory. People acquired from other plantations did not necessarily come with accurate ages, either: on the 1778 list of 'Negroes belonging to the heirs of Lady Catherine Stapleton' the birth dates of children born that year were noted but for other individuals only their ages were given. Subsequently, managers would update these by adding years, and – as the Triennial Returns demonstrate - often this was done inconsistently or inaccurately.

John Pretor Pinney acquired the majority of mortgaged individuals in the early 1780s. They tended to arrive in small groups, of unknown age. Some mortgages went back to the 1770s. Generally people were

⁴¹ Oliver, VL *Caribbeana* Vol 3 (Cayon Diary) and Vol 2 p356

⁴² ECSCRN, Nevis Book of Wills 1787-1805 ff357-66

⁴³ Dunn, Richard S "Dreadful Idlers" in the Cane Fields' p801

listed in the following order: males first, followed by females, then boys and girls; all probably ranked by age. When trying to calculate how old people were, the following factors were considered: the date when they were first mortgaged, their placing within the group, their description (e.g. 'boy'), their purchase price and contemporary values. In the case of females, pointers came from their children's estimated ages, or the fact that they gave birth after Pinney acquired them. Some females were said to have been wenches, which was taken to have meant that they were between the ages of about 15 to 25. The only known age of a wench is that of Duck's Leah, bought when she was 15.

It was more difficult, and in some cases impossible, to gauge the ages of males. Sometimes there were pointers from other sources: John, mortgaged by William Burt Weekes, was a 'young negro boy' listed in an appraisal of 13 people, made in September 1769 by independent assessors. He was then valued at N£35.⁴⁴ On Mountravers, Pinney did not buy any boys at that time so there were no other boys of a known age with whom John's value could be compared. In 1767, on Jesup's plantation, the average value of 44 boys was just over N£55; John, valued at N£35, therefore was likely to have been a young child. However, several boys had particularly high or low values (due to illnesses) and as they were listed without any apparent hierarchy,⁴⁵ this made it difficult to use as a comparator. Lady Stapleton's 1766 appraisal provided more accessible information: 32 boys were valued at between £3 and £45 Sterling.⁴⁶ These boys could then be tracked to the January 1778 Stapleton list, which contains their ages.⁴⁷ Like John, two boys, Sadenda and Little Lawrie, were also assessed at S£20 (the equivalent to N£35). They were then said to have been 18 and 14 years old.⁴⁸ At the time of their appraisal, Sadenda was, therefore, about six or seven years old, Little Lawrie aged three or four. And so it became possible to conclude from this information that, when William Burt Weekes's John was valued at N£35 in 1769, he was then at least three, at the most about seven years old.

Wherever possible, the estimated ages were then cross-checked with their grouping - whether, for instance, individuals were classified as children or as adults, and whether their ages corresponded to the known values of Mountravers people. Unlike the 1766 Stapleton valuation, which showed a less marked progression among children, John Pretor Pinney's 1783 appraisal followed an almost arithmetic calculation:

Values of children according to their age

Ages in months	Values in N£/July 1783
1	6.00
3 – 7	10.00
17	12.00
18	13.00

⁴⁴ PP, WI Box D

⁴⁵ SCRO, Moberley and Wharton Collection, D/MW 35/18

⁴⁶ Jesup's list was in currency; Lady Stapleton's of July 1766 in Sterling. In July 1766 the exchange rate was 170%, and using this, the average value of the 32 boys on Stapleton at N£54.03 worked out almost exactly the same as on Jesup's.

⁴⁷ Valued at S£40 and S£45, the oldest were Dorset and James, in January 1778 said to have been 37 and 36 years old. According to their supposed 1778 ages, in July 1766 they would have been about 24 or 25 years old. It is likely that their 1778 ages were overestimates but others may well have under-estimated.

⁴⁸ In 1778 they were listed as Cadenda and Laurey.

Ages in months	Values in N£/July 1783
22 – 29	15.00
30 – 34	20.00 ⁴⁹
35	22.00
33 – 39	25.00
37 – 53	30.00
64	33.00
70	35.00
74	38.00
74 – 77	40.00

50

For those people where no ages were given at point of purchase, their 'reputed' ages were used, as stated in the first Triennial Return of 1817.

The process of establishing people's ages was lengthy and, at times, convoluted. One had to be ever mindful of the danger of using other people's estimated ages – either figures at which other historians have arrived, or calculations made by owners or managers. This could create double-estimates. Once estimates become facts on which, in turn, subsequent calculations are based, the reasoning becomes circular and meaningless. It was therefore important to take into account as many variables as possible. When there was no supporting evidence it was only possible to establish an approximate age range but in other instances a fairly accurate calculation could be made. This could then be confirmed by consulting other records, such as the Triennial Returns or burial records. The error rate cannot be quantified exactly but, in a few cases, may be up to ten years.

Working out estimated ages was a process of constantly modifying and adjusting dates, and it is hoped that the end result is as close to the truth as possible. This cannot be an exact science but has to remain an interpretation, based on the available facts.

Family relationships

Once the identity of an individual was established, one of the aims of this study was to establish family relationships and thereby, in a sense, re-connect each person with those to whom he or she was related.

In one year, the manager on John Stanley's Morning Star and Pembroke estates listed children after their mothers and identified all siblings.⁵¹ This was unusual for Nevis and if the same pattern had been

⁴⁹ Exceptions were the 23-months old mulatto Tommy Fisher and Kitty, aged 33 months

⁵⁰ This information is based on thirty children with known birth dates. 17 of these were born to entailed and 13 to purchased women

followed on Mountravers it would have been an easy task to at least establish all mother-child relationships. Brothers and sisters would, therefore, also have been known. But even then it would only have centred the families on the mothers and the siblings; fathers were rarely identified in slave lists. As Michael Craton wrote, this makes it ‘impossible to trace patrilineal descent’.⁵²

The methods of establishing mother-child relationships varied from simply transcribing the ‘increase’ section at the end of some slave lists to rather complex calculations which will be described in more detail below. One consideration was whether internal evidence within the slave lists, such as the order of names, might reveal something about family relationships. Unfortunately, only the last list from the time when Mountravers was sold proved rewarding in this regard. Containing five sets of mothers and daughters, this list backed up earlier speculation on mother-daughter relationships. However, trying to find links between people who were listed close together proved futile; there was no supporting documentary evidence that could shed light on their relationships.

In some of the lists and also a few letters children were identified as belonging to particular mothers. Especially useful were 14 separate lists of people reserved by John Pretor Pinney, which from 1795 to the 1820s contained eight women and over twenty of their offspring and an account of four women and their nine children.

Questions arose, however, as soon as other methods were employed. In the case of a child being linked to, usually, a woman’s name (e.g. Philley’s Hetty) was it safe to assume that Philley was Hetty’s mother? The possibility that Hetty was an adopted child had to be considered but could be dismissed not just in Hetty’s case but in all instances: either there was confirmation in the accounts that a particular woman had given birth, or that no women of child-bearing age had died around the time a particular child was born – thereby necessitating another woman adopting that child.

Entries in a journal kept by Thomas Pym Weekes and in the plantation diary noted certain women as being ‘with child’. Taking into account for how long they were recorded as pregnant and the spacing between births, some mothers could be matched with some of the children. Other children could be traced by comparing their recorded birth dates with the dates the midwife, Agnes Adams, was paid. The account book entries usually stated the mother’s names but, unfortunately, as far as this exercise is concerned, from the mid-1770s until the early 1880s Patty, the plantation midwife, aided women giving birth and for that period there are no written records of her deliveries. During the period Agnes Adams was employed, women also give birth to children without her assistance. This may have resulted in wrongly attributing a very small number of children to the wrong women but, again, the fact that until 1795 the offspring of entailed and purchased people was listed separately, minimised this risk. For a brief period, when enslaved people were divided between the Lowland and the Gingerland estates, suggestions for possible mothers could be verified from the two separate lists: because very young children were kept with their mothers, this, for instance, established that Peggy was Toa’s mother and Rose’s Jenny was Foe’s. Peggy and Toa were on Mountravers, Rose’s Jenny and Foe on the Gingerland estate. Equally, the midwife’s account showed that the entailed woman Tusey had been delivered of a child. On the day the midwife was paid two boys were born, Little Nero and Little Robin - one to an entailed woman, the other to a purchased woman. This meant that Little Nero could be identified as Tusey’s son. For Little Robin, however, there was no independent evidence which might have suggested who his mother was.

⁵¹ PP, AB 48 1795

⁵² Craton, M *Sinews of Empire* p214

Delays in payment and gaps in the lists could create uncertainties, as this example shows: on 18 May 1774 Agnes Adams was paid for delivering Fanny Frederick, a woman John Pretor Pinney had purchased. The only child born before that date who survived until the next listing in 1783 was Mary Path. According to the slave lists, Mary Path was the child of a purchased woman and born two months earlier, in March 1774. Evidence from other, verified, births shows that payments to plantation suppliers could be delayed, and based on that evidence alone Mary Path may well have been Fanny Frederick's daughter. Alternatively, of course, Fanny Frederick's child could have died some time before 1783 and Mary Path may have been another woman's daughter, but the fact that Mary Path's own daughter was called Fanny Frederick strengthened the case for saying that Mary Path was the daughter of the purchased woman, Fanny Frederick. On Mountravers there is evidence from other women that they had children named after their own mothers (e.g. Lucy and Cuba). Naming children after aunts appeared to have been common, too, but in this case Fanny Frederick was bought singly and therefore one can exclude the possibility that she had a sister on the plantation after whom she named her daughter.

Some historians have assumed that individuals with the same name and children with the prefixes 'Little' were always father and son, or mother and daughter. While in some cases this was true on Mountravers, in several instances this evidently was not so. For instance, Omah, born in 1765 to an entailed woman, was not the mother of Little Omah who came from Woodland; Molly, an entailed slave, was not the mother of Little Molly (born in 1787, known to have been the daughter of Black Polly, a purchased African); and Little Harriett, born in December 1782, was not the daughter of the African woman Harriott but of another purchased woman, Maria.

In the case of men and women with the prefix 'Great' and 'Little' it is therefore only suggested that they may have been the parents, or other relatives, of some of the children. Among the males documentary proof exists in only one case; a letter written by John Pinney confirmed that Great Essex was Little Essex's father. It is likely, though, that among the plantation-born children this pattern of naming children after their parents, especially fathers, was followed. When asked to name his first grandchild, John Pretor Pinney himself said that 'I see no name so proper as his father's.'

From the 1820s onwards children were baptised and their baptisms recorded in parish registers, together with the names of their mothers and, if known, their fathers. One pattern in particular began to emerge: several children were named after aunts and uncles. According to Handler and Jacoby owners had 'little interest in formally recognizing slave kin ties or the emotional or social value that slaves placed on those ties',⁵³ and this might then suggest that the naming after kin was done by the enslaved people themselves. The same conclusion might be drawn where daughters carried their mothers' names. Certainly among the females there is evidence that one name spanned three generations. Again, this might indicate that the name-giver knew of their relationship and wanted to keep the link intact: Little Sarah's mother was Old Sarah', a woman who had belonged to Philip Brome. Old Sarah died and Little Sarah then became known as Broom's Sarah while her daughter was called Little Broom's Sarah. Broom's Sarah in later life became Old Broom's Sarah and after her death, the 'Little' was dropped from her daughter's name and she became known as Broom's Sarah. This is one instance where the records bear out the passing on of names over several generations; a pattern which other historians of enslaved populations have also observed.⁵⁴

⁵³ Handler, Jerome S and JoAnn Jacoby *Slave Names and Naming in Barbados* p694

⁵⁴ Handler, Jerome S and JoAnn Jacoby *Slave Names and Naming in Barbados* p687, quoting Cheryl Ann Cody 'Naming, Kinship, and Estate Dispersal: Notes on Slave Family Life on a South Carolina Plantation., 1786-1833' in *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol 39 No 3 (1982) pp192-211

From the time that parish registers are available, records of marriages and baptisms proved very fruitful. Other family relationships could then be arrived at through a process of deduction: if X was Y's daughter and her mother had a son called Z, then X was Z's brother. Unless there were particular reasons for doing otherwise, in this study half-brothers and half-sisters are treated as if they were full siblings.

By cross-referencing the baptismal records with the slave lists, parish registers could also be used to dismiss, instead of establishing, relationships. The example here is of a woman called Jenny and her son and daughter, William and Cooba. The children were baptised on 10 February 1828 and they and their mother were said to have lived on Clarke's Estate.⁵⁵ In other instances it had already been established (from evidence in the parish registers) that Peter Thomas Huggins moved people between his estates but that he recorded their births and deaths in the slave registers of the plantations to which they had originally belonged. Although living on Clarke's, Jenny could therefore have been the woman originally from Mountravers (No 522) and William the boy William John who was born on Mountravers in 1821 (No 707). However, on Mountravers there was no girl called Cooba while on Clarke's there were not only a 33-year-old Jenny Wilkins and two boys called William but also a girl called Cuba – the children baptised in 1828 therefore belonged to the woman who had originally lived on Clarke's and not to Jenny (No 522) who may have moved there from Mountravers.

Estimated date of death

In some instances the exact date of death was noted in the slave list, in others the month and year, sometimes just the year. Where people were not recorded in the following list, crosses next to names, as well as when lists were updated, provided clues in which period of time people might have died. For instance, the 1765 list almost certainly was updated in July 1774 when John Pretor Pinney left for a visit to England and the 1795 list was updated on, or soon after, 1 May 1803 – the date of the last annotation. That date made sense once it became apparent that the manager James Williams had just died and his brother Henry was succeeding him.

Some of the people deemed 'useless' who were manumitted were later recorded as living on the estate. It has been assumed that others who were not listed had died in the meantime and that none of them had started a new life away from the plantation. They would not have been able to support themselves. Being useless meant they could not work, and outside the plantation they had no families who could support them. And having been set free from work, they already were in a poor state of health and could be expected to die within a few years.

As Barry Higman found, an additional problem in establishing who had died was that runaways were included in the inventories so long as there was hope that they would return.⁵⁶ To what extent runaways were kept on and finally dropped off the lists is not entirely clear but it appears that during the period from 1761 to 1806 in total no more than six, possibly seven, people freed themselves. Most of the evidence for this comes from letters. Only one man, Polydore, was noted in the lists as having 'left the island'.

Wherever possible, other evidence was taken into account, such as the number of people on whom tax was paid at any one time and the kind of medical treatment they received before disappearing from the lists.

⁵⁵ NHCS, St Thomas Lowland Baptismal Records 1827-1873

⁵⁶ Higman, *BW Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica* p179

The account books

By the time the slave inventories had been exhausted, the basic facts for over 600 men, women and children had been established, along with dates of birth or purchase for some, estimated ages for others. It became possible to extract statistical data of the kind used in other studies of plantation populations but for this project the aim was to go beyond this bare framework. From the slave lists a picture had already begun to emerge that men and women who possessed skills were hired out, or worked for themselves. Not everyone worked in the field or the boiling house. New questions arose from annotations in the slave lists. Pero 'was to go to England'? What happened to him once he left Nevis? Why was Jack Steward 'sent to Jamaica'? Why was Mulatto Polly manumitted? Questions also remained about the fate of those who did not show up in subsequent registers. It was time to fill in the gaps by turning to the account books.

The Pinney Papers contain more than a hundred account and ledger books which cover business and private activities, both in the West Indies and in Britain. As far as this study went about half of them were relevant. Some are no more than slim volumes, others very substantial, hard-back, calf-bound books. The ledgers are mostly entries copied from the plantation accounts. Unfortunately there are no surviving financial records for Mountravers for the period from 1803 to when the plantation changed hands.

Pares described John Pretor Pinney as 'a man who made his accounts the vehicle for his feelings'.⁵⁷ This somewhat exaggerates John Pretor Pinney's relationship with his accounts but he certainly had the odd stab at humour, did express himself freely and sentimentally when his first daughter got married, and displayed much irritation, anger and downright fury at his managers' neglect or wastefulness. In 'memos' and red ink remarks John Pretor Pinney revealed small details about his personality and his relationships with those around him. His double-entry book-keeping was meticulous, the accounts were very neat and detailed, and from his managers he demanded the same painstaking accuracy. Although they may not have reached his tough standards, they, too, more or less carefully itemised the plantation expenses, such as food, tools and equipment. They recorded purchase prices, the rewards they paid for catching runaways, and the cash the men and women handed over when they were hired out. The managers detailed the sums paid to Molly Richens for treating Hector's gunshot wounds and the cash they gave Peter so that he could go and fetch medical supplies from St Kitts. With these details, in the accounts individuals now began to reveal themselves as people instead of just being names in columns or people who worked on the plantation: they sold their own produce to John Pretor Pinney and bought rum from him; had medical treatment for accidents and illnesses; ran away; underwent apprenticeships; stole hogs, fowls or money; went out on errands, and were hired, or sold, to various people. The accounts also showed that some individuals recorded as purchased were in fact acquired through sometimes very complicated mortgages falling due and that very few of John Pretor Pinney's workers were properly manumitted. Most importantly, the detailed financial records demonstrate that the enslaved people were not isolated individuals on a plantation but were members of a wider community. Apart from contact they had on Mountravers, in town they interacted with ships' crews, doctors, free people, tradesmen, merchants, planters, and enslaved people from other plantations. Although these interactions were mostly between those with power and those without, between those with freedom and those without, they nevertheless showed that there were relationships that, although still within the framework of plantation slavery, went beyond the confines of Mountravers and, for some, even beyond Nevis.

Given the details contained in the accounts, it should have been possible, for instance, to work out exactly what every person was allowed by way of food, and therefore how much nutritional value they received. It became clear, however, that any calculation would be inaccurate because the population

⁵⁷ Pares, R *A West India Fortune* p67

fluctuated throughout the year and because some food was sold, stolen or used for feeding livestock. Any surplus was carried over into next year. In addition, what was grown by workers for the plantation, to be given out as allowances, would have to be added, as well as what they harvested directly for their own use. But none of that was quantifiable. The accounts did provide good pointers, though, as to what type of food was purchased, where it came from, what it cost and, roughly, how much was consumed - herrings, for instance, were ordered annually. There was also one detailed allowance list which dated from 1790, as well as details of clothing and food rations on Clarke's Estate in the mid-1820s. Other interesting facts relating to food came from the accounts: what types of animals the enslaved people possessed and who possessed them, and that some had sufficient surplus to sell and how much money they could earn from these transactions.

The accounts even answered some, but not all, of the questions about the fates of those who had disappeared from the lists. Jack Steward, it turned out, had not just 'been sent to Jamaica' but was sold there. Others had also been sold, manumitted, or given away. This then opened up further avenues of enquiry: what happened to these individuals after they left the plantation, and who were their new owners? In those cases where there is no record of a transaction the conclusion was drawn that they had died. Had they run away, it is likely that this fact would have emerged from correspondence.

After perusing the account books further information could be added to the basic outlines gleaned from the slave lists, and many people's life stories were beginning to take shape. Personal details from the accounts had added another layer. The accounts also touched on issues that went beyond an individual's life story and shed light on life on the plantation. John Pretor Pinney paid money to an unnamed negro musician – perhaps there were other performers. But what kind of music did they play? John Pretor Pinney paid Pero for dung baskets - did the Mountravers people weave, carve, and make pottery? John Pretor Pinney gambled – did they, too, play cards, oware and throw dice? What kind of leisure time did people have and how did they spend it? Did they sing, dance, and tell stories? This then raised the question: to what extent was their culture African? Had it become creolised? What ceremonies did people perform, what did they believe in? How did they bury their dead? And, something that is important in trying to form a mental image of someone: what did the people actually look like? Did they sport intricate country marks, beautiful tattoos? Did anyone braid their hair? What sort of clothes did they wear? The letterbooks in the Pinney Papers, surely, would answer those questions.

The letterbooks and other documents in the Pinney Papers

Over sixty bound volumes of family and business letterbooks were found to be relevant to this research, as well as additional letters tied into bundles and kept in boxes. Most are copies of letters which were sent; there are few in-letters in the Pinney Papers. Generally the paper is in good condition and the writing very legible. However, as stated in the introduction, as far as descriptions of the people and their lives went, the Pinney correspondence proved utterly disappointing. At the most some faint hints about cultural practices could be gleaned. It is possible, though, that there may have been some private, un-copied correspondence.

The only letters to and from an enslaved person are those written by John Pretor Pinney to Billey Jones and by the freed woman Mulatto Polly to Charles Pinney.

One plantation diary exists for Mountravers. For a period of about three and half years it provides a daily account of the work done on the plantation and some of the particular tasks individuals performed, as well as a record of pregnant women and the number of sick people. Although much valuable information can be gleaned from the plantation diary it has to be borne in mind that it was not necessarily representative

for the whole period: sizes of gangs would have changed under various managers, and the ages at which children were put to light and then to heavier work.⁵⁸

When the notes for this study were taken, the plantation diary in the Pinney Papers was in a poor state, had holes in strategic places and the too sharply drawn lines that marked the columns had loosened or even separated some of the pages. It has since been restored but, unfortunately, some of the columns appear to have been misaligned.

This diary did not form part of the original collection of papers in the possession of the Pinney family but was purchased at auction by the University of Bristol. This raises the possibility that elsewhere more plantation diaries may exist, or other related material. Allowance and punishment books, such as those kept on some other plantations, were not mentioned in the correspondence between England and Nevis. They may not have existed but, equally, the absence of a punishment book could point towards the collection having been edited at some point in time. Certainly, according to Charles Pinney, all the 'ships papers, warehousing books etc. have been put aside and treated as useless'; they had been destroyed before the 1850s.⁵⁹ Lost is also the colour-coded cultivation plan to which John Pretor Pinney referred, as is his plan of his 'houses and lots of land in town'.

Among the 'Miscellaneous Documents' is a copy of a 'Leeward Island' calendar with Thomas Pym Weekes's annotations. In it are lists of names which appear to have been work gangs. Other useful sources of information were the notebooks kept by Anna Maria Pinney, John Pretor Pinney's granddaughter and a Victorian polymath.

The voices of the enslaved people are not heard in the Pinney Papers but such is the nature of the collection.

Documents in the UK National Archives: the Triennial Returns of Slaves, 1817-1834

Following the abolition of the British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the British government required its colonies to establish regular slave inventories, the so-called 'Triennial Returns'. Intended to detect illegal slave trading, they were never fully utilised for that purpose. Today they form the basis for major demographic studies.⁶⁰

Each island instituted its own format. In Nevis the registers contained six columns: Number - Names - Sex - Country - Colour - Reputed Age. Other colonies extended the categories and also listed occupations (e.g. St Kitts), physical characteristics (Trinidad), height (St Lucia), or causes of death (Grenada, etc).

Of the registers taken in Nevis in 1817, the one for Mountravers stands out. It alone stated the dates of birth of all plantation-born children, except for three girls who were born during the brief period John

⁵⁸ Useful additions to the Mountravers plantation diary were the journals kept by the managers on the Mills's estates in Nevis in 1776 and 1777. One of these contained pre-printed columns with headings such as 'Cane pieces' ('Names' and 'Gallons of Liquor'); 'Sugar made' ('Hhds', 'Tierces', 'Pots'); 'Account of Working Negroes' ('Field and Works'; 'Tradesmen'; 'In the Hothouse'; 'Runways'), etc (MLD, Mills Papers, 2006.178/8 Vol 2 and 2006.178/10 Vol 4).

⁵⁹ PP, LB 33: Charles Pinney to Commissioners of the Board of Customs, London, April 1851

⁶⁰ See, in particular, BW Higman *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean*

As today's demographic studies rely on the data provided in the slave registers, they may not be entirely accurate. For instance, the 141 people on Clarke's estate were in 1828 registered by Charles Pinney but the same 141 people were in 1828 claimed by John Henry Clarke and Frederick W Clarke to have belonged to Steward's estate. It is only possible to spot these potential pitfalls by closely analysing each individual register.

Henry Clarke was in possession of Mountravers. Peter Thomas Huggins used the lists given to him by John Pretor Pinney and carried on the tradition of entering children's birth dates, which makes it uniquely possible to identify each individual with absolute certainty.⁶¹ But the lists were also flawed. For instance in the column headed 'country' mistakes were made regarding two women's African origin: Hannah's was left blank and Monimia was wrongly described as a Creole.

On Clarke's Estate different people completed the registers and errors crept in. For instance, Edward Fisher's colour was recorded as black in 1817 and as sambo in 1828, while both Frank Fisher and his brother Tom Fisher were in the same list described as 32-year-old mulattos (i.e. born in 1784/5); Frank was in fact born in 1784, Tom in 1781. Some of the ages were carried over inaccurately: for example, Rebecca was aged two years in 1825 and in 1828, while Celinda's age in 1817 was given as 32 and in 1828 as 35 years.

In his inventories John Pretor Pinney had not listed the ages of the entailed people or those whom he had acquired, and in 1817 significant mistakes were made in terms of estimating their ages. In particular women's ages were over-estimated: Old Nelly's age was given as 90 years when she was probably only about 57 years old (an error of 33 years). Phillis, said to have been '90 or 100', in fact was no more than about 62 years old (an error of 28 years). Old Phibba was probably 70 rather than 85 years old (15 years), Nancy Jones 61 rather than 70 (9 years), Monimiah 64 rather than 70 (6 years), and Old Lucy 85 rather than 90 (5 years). In total, these six women's ages were over-estimated by 96 years.

In addition, three mistakes were made with birth dates which meant women were said to have been older by 10 years (Hetty Salmon), 8 years (Old Bridget) and 5 years (Betsey Dredge). These mistakes add up to 23 years.

These over-estimates of 96 and 23 years were not off-set by the under-estimated ages: Molly's was under-estimated by 12 years; PAREN's and Violet's by 6 years each; Leah's by 5; Caroline's by 3 and Silvia's by 2 years. In addition, one mistake was made: Little Polly's date of birth was wrong. In total, these seven women's ages were miscalculated by about 36 years.

In themselves these errors are minor and do not matter, but if one wants to establish, for instance, an age profile of everyone on Mountravers, then the differences do become important. Among the 83 females on the plantation, these figures would have skewed their ages by one year per female ($96 + 23 - 36 = 83$ years : 83 females on Mountravers = 1 year per female).

Among the men, the mistakes were less significant. The ages of six men almost certainly under-estimated: Billy Stewart's by 9 years, Almond's by 5, John French's probably by 5, and Othello's, Charge's and Old Jack's by about 2 years each. Compared to their estimated ages at the point of purchase this meant that altogether their ages were under-estimated by about 25 years.

Only one man's age was over-estimated, Wiltshire's, by about 13 years.

Overall, these figures would have skewed the men's ages by less than a month.⁶²

⁶¹ With passage of time errors had crept into the Mountravers register: Barbai was said to have been born 'about' 1747 when her exact birth year was known to have been 1755; Hetty Salmon's date of birth was not 1781 but 1791, Betsey Dredge's was recorded as January 1781 when it should have been January 1786, Polly Neal's was given as 8 May 1787 (the day Little Molly was born) when it should have stated 2 August 1784. There were other minor errors: Little Peter's date of birth was not 26 July but 27 January 1783, Peter Cooper's birth date was not 18 but 8 August 1784, and Yanneky's was not 29 but 28 February 1779. In the case of Range's Will, who was listed as Jack Will, his date of purchase, 12 February 1770, was wrongly given as his date of birth.

⁶² [12 years (25 minus 13 years): a total of 76 males = 0.157 year]

Through the triennial returns it was possible to establish the identity of another 102 people who were born or had lived on Mountravers. The island-wide slave registers were not only a rich source of information about the enslaved people but also about the slaveholders. They submitted their returns parish by parish so that their registers provided pointers as to where they lived. Often family members registered the people they owned together, and this internal evidence yielded additional information - particularly about former Mountravers people or their descendants who had become slaveholders themselves.

The triennial returns formed the basis for slave compensation payments. The claims made by the slaveholders provided further information about some inhabitants, such as who had got married in the preceding years, or who owed money and had made over their compensation to someone else to cover their debts. These claims were completed after August 1834 and included any births and deaths since the last register had been taken at the beginning of the year. This updating provided the crucial evidence as to who was alive on Mountravers on 1 August 1834. Ideally, everyone's lives would have been followed through to Emancipation Day on 1 August 1838 but unfortunately that was not possible because with the introduction of the apprenticeship period the official registrations ceased.

Documents in Nevis: the Parish Registers

Originally it was intended to include only those enslaved people actually owned by the Pinneys up to the time Mountravers was sold, but with the discovery of the triennial returns and the parish registers it became possible to include individuals from Clarke's, Scarborough's and Parris's.

Nevis, like Barbados but unlike some other West Indian colonies, did not require candidates for baptism to have surnames⁶³ but increasingly they did acquire surnames. It was easier, and more certain, to trace those with the surnames Pinney and Clarke than those called Huggins because the wider Huggins family owned several plantations in the island. Consequently, only those people were taken into consideration who were said to have lived on Pinney's, Penny's, Mount Travers (or Montravers, as it was often spelt), Huggins's (only in the St Thomas Lowland and St Paul's parish registers), or on those estates which belonged to Peter Thomas Huggins: Clarke's, Scarborough's and Parris's. Later many people moved to Charlestown and the surrounding independent villages, and while those with the surnames Pinney and Huggins (or Clarke, in the case of those people originally reserved by John Pretor Pinney) may well have previously lived on Mountravers, their identity could not always be established with some degree of certainty.

During slavery days enslaved people who wanted to get married had to obtain their owners' consent. This was noted in a section of the pre-printed parish registers and provided good evidence as to the couple's identity but, of course, after Emancipation the requirement ceased and, without this added information, it became more difficult to establish people's identity with certainty. After Emancipation many workers also moved away from Peter Thomas Huggins's plantations and they became harder to trace. In addition, if several generations had the same first name, often it was difficult to disentangle their relationships. This problem was compounded by cousin and multiple marriages.

No register has been found of marriages which were conducted in the Methodist chapel. In any case, they were deemed to be invalid until the Legislature passed an Act in 1842 which set Methodist marriages on an equal footing with those undertaken in the Church of England. Apparently between 1828 and 1842

⁶³ Handler, Jerome S and JoAnn Jacoby *Slave Names and Naming in Barbados* p720

some people who had married in the Methodist chapel got married for a second time in a church - sometimes to different people.⁶⁴

Up to the abolition of slavery all the deaths recorded in the slave lists could be matched with certainty with the parish registers (if the deceased had a Christian funeral) but, of course, after 1834 this was no longer possible.

As far as the parish registers went, this research suffered from the gaps in the records relating to the Methodist congregation, and, if transcribed versions of the Anglican registers were used, from transcription errors. A complete database containing all the records in the parish registers would have enabled a more systematic study of the Mountravers inhabitants but, this being a self-funded project, it was not possible to compile such a record.

The records in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registry, Nevis

In a vault in the Nevis Court House are immensely valuable documents relating to the island's history: property transactions recorded in the Common Deed record books, volumes of books of wills and assorted court records. Many are very fragile and decaying as a result of shockingly inadequate storage and improper handling. In 2008 the collection was subject to an extensive survey by David Small, then a Research Associate at the University of Bristol, with assistance from the author.⁶⁵ Following his assessment, David Small made an urgent plea for action by the Nevis Island Administration. In 2016 work began on digitising the collection of historic volumes, led jointly by Dr Andrew Pearson and David Small. The work was carried out in Nevis by Delvon Clarke and Devonne Maynard. The British Library Endangered Archives Programme funded both the pilot project and the digitising. Undoubtedly, without help from the British Library much of the important material held in the Court House would have been lost forever to future generations of researchers. The records went online in 2020.

In the Common Deed record books, also called the Common Records, are documents relating to the buying and selling as well as the mortgaging of property, including enslaved people. The wording in these indentures is such that one cannot distinguish between loans or mortgages and sales, and it was therefore not always apparent what kind of transactions had taken place - unless a document was clearly indexed as a 'Bill of Sale'. Because John Pretor Pinney did not distinguish in the accounts between those individuals he bought outright and those he acquired through mortgages, it was only possible to determine how he acquired particular people by linking them with the actual mortgage documents in the Pinney Papers.

The Common Records were also vital for finding out who had been manumitted, and whether a person had been freed for faithful service or whether they had bought their freedom from the slaveholder.

Several Common Records books are very brittle, with pages torn or lost, and incomplete or missing indexes. Volumes relating to some crucial years which cover the periods of John Pretor Pinney's visits to Nevis, as well as the years just prior to the abolition of slavery, could not be fully consulted, in some

⁶⁴ Olwig, Karen Fog *Global Culture, Island Identity* p82

⁶⁵ Small, David *A Survey of the Endangered Court Records of Nevis, West Indies: A Pilot Project* EAP 093 (October 2008) and Andrew Pearson and David Small *Digitising the Endangered Historic Records of Nevis in the Leeward Islands* EAP 094 (October 2017).

instances not consulted at all, or only once the digitised versions appeared online (1788-1789, 1790-1792, 1792-1794 and 1831-1835). Some volumes were renumbered in 2004 and again in 2016/7.

The Books of Wills also proved extremely useful, as did the assorted court records. Unfortunately most of the early volumes of the King's Bench and Common Pleas Cause Lists and Minutes were too fragile to handle.

Conclusion

By closely studying a variety of sources it was possible to document the existence of previously unrecorded people and to provide insights into their public, working lives as well as some aspects of their private spheres. Shortcomings in the documents themselves, or missing documents, has made the task harder and at times impossible. Given the limitations, this study has nevertheless partly answered the question posed at the beginning: who lived and worked on Mountravers during the period of plantation slavery?

Researching the lives of enslaved people is not an exact science. Despite carefully weighing up all the available evidence, mistakes will have been made which future researchers may be able to correct once more documents come to light.

To read the chapters of 'The Mountravers Plantation Community', please copy this link and paste it into your search engine: <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountraversplantationcommunity.html>

February 2025

Copyright © Christine Eickelmann 2016-2025