

3.1 The Harveys of Castle Semple: Part 1: The Early Years (c.1700-1815) Stuart Nisbet

Improvements to the Renfrewshire countryside from the eighteenth century depended greatly on the wealth and experience of incoming colonial merchants. The following two articles trace the origins and careers of the nineteenth century owners of Castle Semple estate in Lochwinnoch parish, and were researched in parallel over several years.

It is often mentioned in passing that prominent merchants or landowners 'went out to the West Indies' or 'made great fortunes abroad'. Such general statements often conceal the fact that, not only their fortunes but most of their experience, also came from careers spent overseas. Without the lucrative income from the cultivation and trading of sugar, the Harvey (and earlier McDowall) families of Castle Semple would most likely have remained obscure. Apart from wealth, both families brought back connections and experience from lives spent mostly in the Caribbean.

Over nearly 200 years the landscape which now forms the core of Castle Semple Country Park was improved and altered thanks to sugar wealth derived directly from the labour of literally thousands of African men, women and children, who were the personal chattels of the Harvey and McDowall families. The families also brought back many Africans, and the McDowalls were among the very first in Scotland to bring back dozens as personal servants. Although these Africans played a crucial part in the development of Castle Semple, today they are forgotten. Yet the Africans at Castle Semple were neither as invisible nor as insignificant as they may seem, as the following report indicates:

"The old Colonel (McDowall) brought home from St Kitts a negro as a flunkie or footman. This blackamore was not suitable to the refined taste of the Jacobitical lady McDowall. She kept a constant war with her husband about this black. She advised the laird to 'put the Negro away'. One day he ordered his carriage to be prepared for a long journey. She asked him what was his business. He replied he would not live without his favourite Negro and he was determined to separate from her. She was obliged to be content with the black colour of the Negro skin"¹.

The origins and careers of the Harveys of Castle Semple in the nineteenth century are remarkably similar to those of the McDowalls of Castle Semple in the eighteenth. Although the Harveys did not acquire Castle Semple until after 1810, their careers commenced in the Leeward sugar islands, barely a generation after the first William McDowall went out to the Leewards in the 1690s. Three Harveys brothers crossed the Atlantic, Alexander (b.1719), John (b.1721) and Robert (b.1732). They were sons of John Harvey, schoolmaster in Midmar, Aberdeenshire, and his wife Elizabeth. The eldest son, Alexander, went out in his twenties and married the daughter of a West Indies administrator, returning to Scotland about ten years later. Our main interest is

¹ Cairn of Lochwinnoch Matters, Paisley Central Library, Vol.19, p.81.

in his younger brothers, John and Robert, who sailed to the Leeward island of Antigua as apprentice overseers, probably on the coat tails of the Gordon dynasty of Aberdeen ².

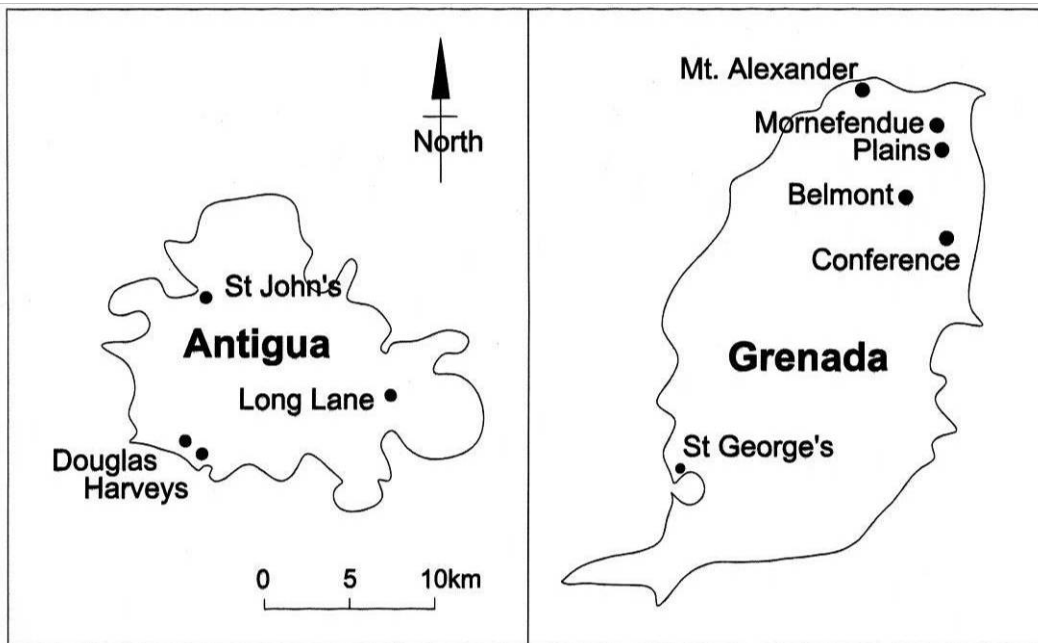


Figure 8: Map of Antigua and Grenada (to same scale).

Antigua is the largest of the Leeward group of islands, which includes Nevis and St Kitts, where the McDowalls initially operated. Antigua was settled by the British in 1632, slightly later than Nevis and St Kitts. The Harveys started out in a Scottish enclave in Old Road parish, in Cades Bay, near the original landing point of the first settlers. Like the McDowalls, they flourished through mutual planter support in an intensive, and often violent, frontier plantation society.

By the time John Harvey arrived in Antigua as a young man in the late 1730s, sugar was the dominant crop. Each plantation was worked by the enforced labour of several hundred Africans. As well as plantation management, Robert Harvey practised as a doctor on the island, a common occupation for Scots in the Caribbean. By the 1750s Robert was leasing Douglas Plantation, owned by the former Governor of the island. Robert then expanded to take in the neighbouring 356 acre 'Yeomans' plantation, later known as 'Old Road' or 'Harveys', and the 469 acre Long Lane or 'Delaps' Plantation in St Paul's Parish to the east ³. By the late 1760s, John and Robert Harvey's wealth came from the enforced labour of more than 1,000 enslaved Africans whom they personally owned on three plantations. By his death in London in 1770, John Harvey's estate consisted mainly of his 'houses and Negros in Cades Bay, Antigua'.

² Indeed in Langford's History of Antigua most of the Harvey documents are located within the Gordon family section.

³ Antigua Hist, Vol.2 p.24-5, 126.

In the interim, the brothers had expanded southwards to the Windward island of Grenada. Although Grenada was one of the original group of islands granted to the British pioneer James Hay of Kinglassie in the 1620s, early British settlement had been prevented by a French presence. Following more than a century of French rule, Grenada was one of the 'Ceded Islands' acquired by Britain in 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War. As on St Kitts half a century earlier, British planters bid for former French plantations. Scots, including the second generation of the McDowalls of Castle Semple, and the Harveys took a major share of the sugar plantations.

It is an old saying that the fortunes of very rich and powerful men came from the labour of countless smaller men, who worked extremely hard for minimal return. This usually refers to entrepreneurs such as mill owners, who profit from the labour of their employees. It reaches a different dimension when men, women and children were purchased by the entrepreneur, underfed, and even worked to death. Such is the case with the source of fortune of the owners of estates such as Castle Semple, but today this dimension is seemingly distant and barely recognised. To try to restore the balance, the writer decided to travel to the Leeward and Windward Islands, to locate the estates and infrastructure of Castle Semple's owners⁴. Initial background research in Scotland uncovered hints of the locations of the Harvey and McDowall Plantations. The Harveys' income to purchase and maintain Castle Semple came from five main estates on Grenada.

Visiting Grenada today, the first port of call is the capital, St George's. The town is centred on an idyllic bay, dominated by a ring of volcanic hills, each topped by ruined forts. The mixture of local and colonial architecture is badly frayed at the edges, following Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Most of the public buildings and churches were wrecked then, and lost their traditional tiled roofs. The result is a bright, modern, show of tin roofs of every colour of the rainbow, a more fitting reflection of Caribbean vitality than colonial tradition.

Despite the tropical location, hints of Scottish influence quickly came to light on Grenada. This is not only from maps and records, but also from Victorian military hardware and decorative ironwork, which is cast with the names of Scottish foundries. A further hint of the historical strength of the Scots on Grenada is the 'Scots Kirk', which still dominates access to the traditional seat of power, the Fort George peninsula. Today the popular mode of transport around Grenada is alongside the local population in the minibuses, which reach all parts of the island at breakneck speed. Most exhilarating is the journey from St. George's to the eastern port of Grenville, another Scots enclave in the late eighteenth century. The trip involves climbing almost to the top of the central volcano, then hurtling back down the far side on narrow twisting roads, with an unguarded precipice to one side.

From the port of Grenville, the road leads north to Sauteurs, and the north west portion of the island, the flatter lands which were the heart of sugar cultivation. The names of the Harvey's plantations, Mornefendue, Chambord, Plains, and their base

⁴ See Castle Semple Rediscovered (RLHF 2009).

at Upper and Lower Conference, hint at the French tradition on the island. Climbing up from the road, the hill at Conference is still dominated by the circular stone tower of the Harvey's sugar crushing windmill. (Figure 9) Strewn down the tiers below are the ruins of their boiling works. Looking out from the windmill, most of the surrounding area belonged to the Harveys, stretching all the way to the sea. This included a group of islands off the coast, 'Pearls' and the 'High and Middle Islands'. Further north at Plains, is another of their windmills.



Figure 9: Entrance to Harvey's Windmill, Conference, Grenada

By the 1770s, Robert Harvey had retired to Britain. Unlike the McDowalls, he chose to settle in the south of England, with homes in St. Martins in the Fields, London, and Bath. At his death in 1791, Robert Harvey was interred in Exeter Cathedral ⁵. The Gentleman's Magazine stated that his income from his plantations exceeded £8,000 per year, a vast sum at today's value. His assets were split between numerous relatives back in Aberdeen. All the residue went to his nephew John Rae, planter of Grenada, on condition that John Rae took the Harvey surname, becoming John Rae Harvey. This tradition of surname changing would create confusion over the next few generations, as they sought to retain the influence of the Harvey sugar plantocracy. As we will see below, it was John Rae Harvey who had purchased Castle Semple from the McDowalls by 1815. The Harveys persisted on Grenada, and a nephew, John Harvey, served twice as Governor between 1807 and 1813 ⁶.

⁵ A. Jenkins, History of Exeter (1841), p.299 quoted in Vere Oliver Antigua Vol.2 p.28.

⁶ '1820, Aug. 23. At Castle Semple House, aged 67, John Harvey, esq., of Castle Semple, formerly President of the Council of the Island of Grenada and its Dependencies'.

The McDowalls of Castle Semple, Grenada and Walkinshaw

As we saw above, the McDowalls of Castle Semple had also expanded their sugar interests to Grenada in the 1760s, from their base in St Kitts. The McDowall's main Grenada estate was at Mount Alexander, west of the settlement of Sauteurs, and two miles north west from the Harvey's holdings. The great windmill tower and ruined sugar works at Mount Alexander still survive.

Back home in Scotland, William McDowall III had a successful career in business and politics. He succeeded to Castle Semple on the death of his father William II in 1786. The McDowall family reached their peak in the early 1790s, when William III was Lord Lieutenant of Renfrewshire and MP for Glasgow, Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. He was considered to be one of the most important figures in Scottish politics, second only in influence to Dundas, and his younger brother James was provost of Glasgow in the 1790s.

The younger brother of William and James McDowall had the unusual Christian names of 'Day Hort'. These came from cousins, the Days and Horts, leading merchants and slavers in Bristol. Day Hort purchased Walkinshaw, another traditional Renfrewshire estate, lying at the foot of the Black Cart Water. By the 1790s, many of the leading Renfrewshire landholding families were sugar merchants, sugar planters, or had served time as slave overseers. These included the Cunninghams of Craigends (in Jamaica), the Maxwells of Pollok (in St Kitts), and Millikens of Milliken (also in St Kitts). The traditional Walkinshaw family were no different, being descendants of the Walkinshaws of Barrowfield, leading West Indies merchants since the 1680s, who operated in the sugar markets from London, Bristol and Liverpool. In 1769 their Walkinshaw estate was sold to William Miller, a physician and fellow planter with the Harveys on Antigua. A decade or so later, Walkinshaw was acquired by Day Hort McDowall.

In 1791 Day Hort employed Robert Adam to build Walkinshaw House on his estate ⁷. The mansion was perhaps the most bizarre of all of Adam's designs, being triangular in plan. Soon after it was built, the McDowall family firm, Alexander Houston and Company, descended from its position as Glasgow's leading mercantile house, into bankruptcy. By the early 1800s William McDowall III was forced to put all his holdings, including Castle Semple, the old family seat of Garthland in Wigtonshire, and the St Kitts plantations, on the market. His brother Day Hort of Walkinshaw temporarily saved the family honour, by purchasing Castle Semple, but didn't have sufficient means to sustain two estates. Day Hort drowned himself in the fish ponds at Castle Semple in 1809, an ironic end to the seafaring family. James, the former Glasgow provost, had died in St. Lucia in the West Indies the previous year, on yet another of the family plantations. His brother Laurence retained the Grenada plantations.

In 1810 William McDowall III also died, leaving a rumour that he had also drowned himself. He is commemorated by the largest of all the Victorian memorials in Paisley

⁷ F.A. Walker, Robert Adam at Walkinshaw in I. Gow and A. Rowan (eds), *Scottish Country Houses 1600-1914* (Edinburgh University Press 1995).

Abbey. After his death in 1810, his title succeeded to his nephew, William IV, son of the former Glasgow provost. William IV purchased the modest estates of Barr and Garpel, building Garthland House in Lochwinnoch. The McDowall family retained some influence in Lochwinnoch throughout the nineteenth century and still have a presence around the village.

The McDowalls were succeeded at Castle Semple by the Harveys, whose story continues in the next article.

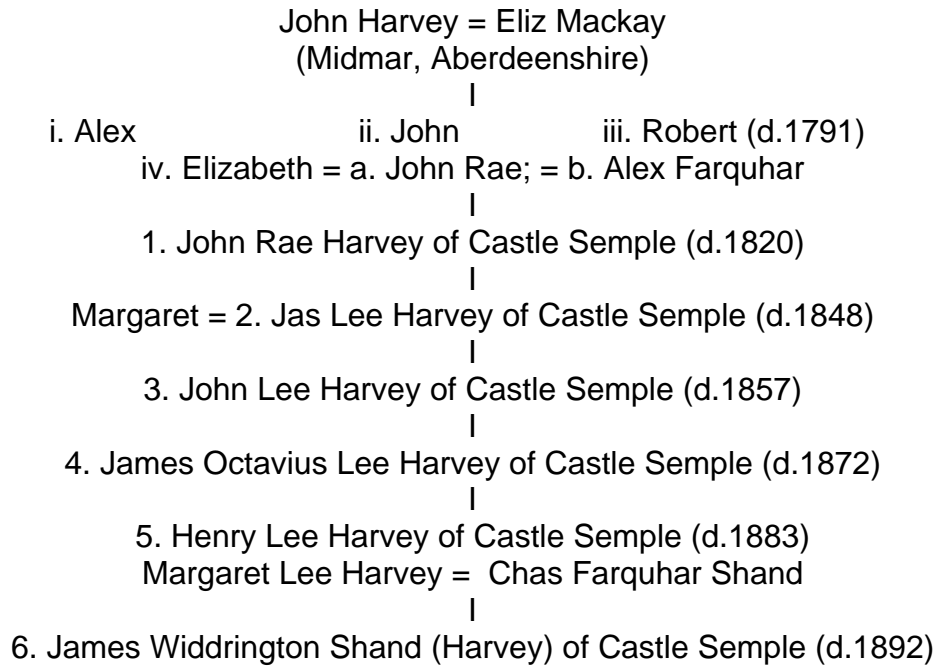
Note on Sources

To avoid extensive footnotes, the main sources for the Harveys are as follows:

1. Oliver V.L., *History of Antigua* (3 Vols. 1896): Vol.2: p.23 (Testament of John Harvey 1769), p.24 (Testament of Robert Harvey 1790), p.68 (Harvey of Castle Semple Family tree), p.126 Vol.3, p.275, 392: (Yeomans or Harveys Estate 1759-88), p.392 'Yemans' or Harveys Plantation - Alex & Robt Harvey, 1788, Robert Farquhar (399 slaves 1829), Lady Shaw Stewart, 1852).
2. Oliver V.L., *Caribeanna* (5 Vols. 1909-19): Vol.1, p.196, 207, 211, 351; Vol.2 p.52, 352; Vol.4: p.40,124, 240.
3. Alex Dingwall Fordyce, *The Family of Rae of Dingwall, Fordyce*, especially p.82 (No.318), p.161 (No.561), p.163 (No. 573), p.164 (Nos. 586,587), p.222, (Nos.807, 810, 811).
4. Grenada Land Registry, Church Street, St George's: Deeds for John & Robert Harvey (from 1765).
5. Ingram K.E., 'Manuscript sources for West Indies', No.2123: Shand-Harvey of Castle Semple Family of Conference Estate, Grenada 1850-59 (NAS Keepers report 1964 p.20).

Figure 10: Abridged Harvey Family Tree

The history of the Harveys of Castle Semple is confusing, not least because various branches of the family took the Harvey name. The following simplified family tree illustrates the main line, to assist the reader in following the generations. The numbers correspond to their period at Castle Semple:



Additional Photos



St George's and Scots Kirk



Grenville, Grenada



Sauteurs, Grenada



Datestone on Windmill, Conference, Grenada



Windmill Tower, Plains, Grenada



Sugar Boiling Copper, Plains, Grenada