

Legacies of Enslavement

This Green Gathering Charity project aims to examine and acknowledge the impact of slave-produced wealth on the formation of the grounds of Piercefield House, which has been our festival site since 2011

Following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, which outlawed the ownership of enslaved people in most regions across the British colonies, the government granted £20 million (£2.3 billion today) in compensation to slave owners as recompense for the loss of their 'property'.

Approximately half of the compensation paid remained in Britain, meaning slave-based wealth continued to enrich British society through investment in industry, property, infrastructure, and education long after the practice of enslavement had officially ended.

Here in Monmouthshire, 15 individuals were recorded as receiving compensation under the Slave Compensation Act 1837. Most of these individuals were absentee plantation owners, living in Britain but profiting from the labour of enslaved people on plantations in the Caribbean that produced sugarcane, tobacco and cotton.



Piercefield Mansion and Park, G. Eyre Brooks, c. 1840



Piercefield House, Ackermann's Repository of Arts, 1825

1802 – c.1845

William Wells (1730 - 1794) emigrated from Cardiff to the Caribbean in 1749 and eventually acquired three sugarcane plantations on St Kitts, the largest of which was Vambells.

Like many men in his position, Wells fathered children by women enslaved in his household. At least three enslaved women living in his house bore at least six children by him. More unusually, Wells acknowledged that they were his children and had them christened.

In 1783, Wells manumitted ('freed') his only surviving son, Nathaniel, whose mother was an enslaved woman known as Juggy (____ - 1811). When Nathaniel was ten years old, his father sent him to school in London, England.

Wells died in 1794, leaving his son Nathaniel the three plantations on St Kitts and most of his slave-produced fortune, estimated between £120,000 and £200,000 (£14m-£23m today). In his will, Wells manumitted Juggy and left her some of his estate; she took the name Joardine Wells and moved into her own house on St Kitts. When Nathaniel came of age in 1800, he sold one of the plantations and manumitted several of his enslaved relatives. He retained the other two plantations and the enslaved people working on them.

In 1802, Nathaniel Wells bought Piercefield for £90,000 (£10 million today). He later expanded the grounds until the parkland surrounding the house reached almost 3,000 acres.

Women.	Cotto	Molly Douglas	
Aruote	Diana Little	Molly Creole	e
Best	Hanny	Mimba Munro	e
Betty, Big	Grace	Molly Creole	e
Belinda	Ester	Minnie	e
Della, Creole	Stamata	Marty	e
Best, Tereoude	Jenny Creole	Mira	e
Della Point	Jenny Munro	Molly	e
Barbary	Juggy	Mimba Little	e
Betty, Little	Grace	Marty	e
Dameeba	Betty, Big	Molly	e
Enoba	Betty, Little	Minnie	e
Creole	Liddy	Mimo Perival	e
Cotto Little	Jury	Molly	e

Left: a section of a list of women enslaved on Wells' plantations in 1804, created as part of an assessment of his property for his first marriage. The full marriage settlement details the names of the 146 men, women and children enslaved on one of his plantations.

We know very little of the lives and experiences of these women and girls whose given names appear in his records as part of his property.

Sometimes their names are followed by descriptors like 'Big' or 'Little'; likely, this was used to help enslavers distinguish individuals given the same names.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Piercefield Estate was maintained by wealth derived from the profits of Caribbean plantations worked with the labour of enslaved people from West and Central Africa.

Between the 1740s and the 1840s, Piercefield was owned successively by two unconnected families who made their fortunes from the ownership of enslaved people. During this period, Piercefield's parkland was redesigned, expanded and maintained with slave-produced wealth.



Portrait of Valentine Morris (1727 - 1789), Allan Ramsay, c. 1765

1740 – 1785

In 1740, Piercefield was bought for £8,250 by Colonel Valentine Morris (c.1678 - 1743), who owned several sugarcane plantations on the Caribbean island of Antigua. In 1743, the Colonel died, and his son, also named Valentine Morris (1727 - 1789), inherited the Piercefield estate, substantial plantations across Antigua, and his father's vast slave-produced fortune. These plantations included Looby's, Crabb's, and Martin's in St Paul Parish in southern Antigua and Jolly's in St Mary Parish in western Antigua. By 1776, Morris owned 1,004 acres on the island, and 284 enslaved people worked on his land, including three enslaved men he called 'Piercefield', 'Beaufort' and 'Chepstow'.

Morris began living at Piercefield with his family in 1753. He developed the estate by landscaping the grounds of the house and the surrounding parkland, laying paths through the woodland and designing viewing points from the clifftop over the River Wye.

Morris was a strong proponent of road improvement to facilitate travel throughout Monmouthshire. He drew on his slave-produced wealth to establish the Chepstow Turnpike Trust in 1758, which collected tolls to pay for the maintenance of roads around his estate. Both the new landscaping of the gardens and the improved roads that allowed tourists to visit helped put Piercefield at the forefront of the first wave of picturesque tourism in the late 18th century.

Our Apology

British colonialism in the Caribbean was based on the legal determination that enslaved Africans were non-human.

The Green Gathering recognises the actions of the Morris and Wells families on the Caribbean islands of Antigua and St Kitts as Crimes against Humanity and acknowledges the continuing harms and suffering that remain as legacies of those actions.

We agree with the view expressed in 2022 by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that the vulnerability of ecosystems and people in the Caribbean to climate change has its roots in chattel enslavement and environmental degradation from plantation construction. We recognise that the crimes committed by the Morris' and the Wells' contributed to contemporary vulnerabilities in the Caribbean to climate change.

Both Morris and Wells relied on enslaved people for their fortunes, and we benefit from how they chose to use those fortunes to develop and maintain the land we gather on.

'Creole', 'Muno' and 'Carabee' are likely designations of ethnicity or origin as assigned by the enslavers. From this, we can assume that those with 'Creole' after their given names had been born in the Caribbean rather than Africa.