

REPORT ON 2021 FROM CLEMMIE BUTLER BROWN

Introduction

I really wanted to be a part of the Legacies of Enslavement project at Christ's College in order to uncover the true story of the college and how it benefited from the slave trade, something which has thus far been neglected from the narrative portrayed to both students and tourists alike. Furthermore, as a first-year undergraduate student at Christ's, I also wanted to be involved with the Legacies of Enslavement project to enhance and develop my own research skills. I wanted to actually get first-hand experience looking at primary evidence as opposed to simply reading about them in other historians' articles. I was certainly able to carry out my aim during the month spent on this project and it was an experience which I have relished.

My process

When I first began my research it was evident that I had far less of a clear idea of where I wanted to take my research and what exactly it was that I wanted to focus on during my time, than the other interns (especially given that, having just finished my first year, I had much less prior experience). Having had an initial supervision with Dr Sabine Cadeau in late June I knew that I wanted to do a biographical history of individuals who were connected to Christ's but I had no clue as to who I actually was going to look at or even where to start. A couple of weeks before the project officially started I spoke to Dr Genny Silvanus, the archivist, who explained to me how to work both the Venn and UCL's Legacies of British Slavery databases. Thus, when I first arrived in Cambridge in August, I began by going through both of these databases to find as many people who went to Christ's who were also connected with slavery. Although I was originally planning to only focus on this for the first day as an initial starting point, following the advice of Genny, I decided to explore the Venn database for the first week and I ultimately ended up discovering 51 individuals (all male) who attended Christ's and were in some way connected to slavery (this figure includes four abolitionists). I found these individuals by first going through countries where slavery was prominent (especially those in the Caribbean and Africa) as well as British cities which had strong connections with the slave trade, such as Bristol and Liverpool. I then searched terms which were relevant to the project, for example, plantation, merchant or estate. I also went through a list of notable British slave owners on Wikipedia and entered their surnames into the Venn database to see whether they, or their relatives, attended Christ's. Although it did not always prove successful, often I ended up finding someone who I was not actually looking for who had a link to slavery.

Once I felt like I had done as much as I could on this, I decided to choose a few individuals that I could focus on for the rest of the month. Having gone through my list I ended up selecting five people to carry out further research on. I chose Thomas Nelson Jr. (1738-1789) as he was one of the last people (if not the last) I found on the Venn database who had a direct connection with the slave trade. After carrying out a quick preliminary search on Google I found that he was very involved with the American Revolution and in fact had a biography on Christ's alumni page which did not refer to his links with slavery at all. I found this quite shocking (although perhaps I shouldn't have given the amount of silencing that there has been surrounding slavery), especially given the extent of his involvement with the slave trade, and thus, I wanted to use this project as an opportunity to explore further his connections to slavery and highlight the silencing in the archives of the negative side to Nelson's story. I also researched Peter Matthew Mills (1743-1792) who was born in St Kitts into a prominent slave owning family on the island, and Azariah Pinney (1775-1803), who was similarly born in Nevis

as the son of John Pretor Pinney, a significant slave owner there. I also decided to look at John Scandrett Harford (1787-1866) who, despite being an abolitionist and close friends with two of the leaders of the British abolitionist movement, William Wilberforce and Hannah More, was born into a family in Bristol which did have some connections with slavery. I was very interested in the dichotomy between these two aspects of his life and the emphasis placed on one side of the story at the expense of neglecting the other, more negative, side. Finally, I chose Thomas Thompson (1708-1773) as he was both a student and a Fellow at Christ's before travelling as a missionary to Africa and then, towards the end of his life, publishing the abolitionist pamphlet *The African trade for negro slaves* in 1772.

Once I had decided on the five individuals that I wanted to focus on I began researching them. My primary resource was the internet, especially Ancestry.com and I also found a few wills that were relevant to my research from the National Archives website. The University of Bristol has also published a number of research papers on the slave trade which proved to be very useful for my project, especially with two of the individuals, Azariah Pinney and John Scandrett Harford, having close connections with the city. I also visited the Christ's archive, under the guidance of Genny, and looked at the book of Study Rents between 1741 and 1782 as well as the Book of Silver donations which I found to be an especially interesting experience given the limited amount of primary research there is during the first-year history degree.

Towards the end of my second week in Cambridge, I found the Pinney Collection at the University of Bristol Archives and after emailing them and arranging a visit, I travelled to Bristol to visit the collection at the university's Special Collections room. This was a really amazing opportunity as the collection has 245 archive boxes of documents donated by the Pinney family. Whilst I was there I looked at Azariah Pinney's 1794 account book from his time at Cambridge; the 1793 account book of John Pretor Pinney; the paper declaring that he died intestate; the document confirming Azariah's partnership in his father's business; and a letter book of Tobin & Pinney during Azariah's time working there. The next day, I also visited the Bristol Archives which holds documents relating to John Scandrett Harford. I examined Harford's journal from 1825; his father's will; a scrapbook/journal from 1824; and his own will. These visits were both really useful for my project and provided me with a lot of interesting information which I would have been unable to find online. For instance, after looking at some of the Pinney Collection, I realised that Azariah Pinney was much more involved in the running of his father's business, the firm Tobin & Pinney which was involved in the importation and selling of sugar from the West Indies (thus, directly profiting from slave labour), than I had previously thought and in 1789, he actually became a senior partner in the firm.

Limitations of my project

Although I believe that this project has been successful in highlighting Christ's connections to slavery, there were some challenges I faced which could potentially be improved on for next year. I think the main limitation with this project was simply the timing. There is still plenty to be researched within my own project, let alone within all the other avenues still to be explored. Timing especially played a part in the fact that I did not end up fully researching Thomas Thompson, who I think would have been particularly interesting to look at in terms of the intellectual legacy of slavery at Christ's. I would suggest that next year the project could potentially run for longer than a month and I would also like to suggest that this should not only take place for two years but rather it should be a permanent project for the future. There

is still so much to be investigated and much more than simply another month is needed to take on the challenge successfully.

Furthermore, I faced a fair few limitations with my initial research into individuals who went to Christ's, mainly with the Venn database. For example, a lot of individuals came up who I am certain were somewhat involved with the slave trade (for example, they were born in the West Indies) but I could find no clear evidence online (with just a quick search) of their connection with the slave trade. This is potentially something that could be explored as part of a project next year as I did not have enough time to pursue the leads during my research. I can also imagine that there are still a number of individuals on the Venn database who I have omitted from my own list simply because they did not appear under the obvious searches. This in itself was another limitation, the fact that slavery has been erased from the archives and the databases, making it very difficult to find clear evidence of individuals connected to slavery. However, ultimately, this is what makes the project so important - we need to rewrite the narrative of history with slavery included in the story.

I also was not as focused in my research as I should have been in the Bristol archives (when I was looking at documents relating to John Scandrett Harford) which meant that I do not think I took full advantage of the documents they had to offer - especially those relating to his support of abolition. A lot of the research I did on John Scandrett Harford was primarily about his family's connections with slavery. Whilst this is a very important aspect of his life to look at, and one which is excluded from many biographies of his life, further research would be needed to properly examine his abolitionist beliefs.

Conclusion

Overall, I have found the Legacies of Enslavement project a very rewarding and engaging experience. Whilst there is certainly a lot more to be found out about the individuals I have researched as well as further connections Christ's has with slavery, this has proven to be a good start in uncovering the hidden truths of the college's (and the university as a whole's) associations with this shameful past. However, it should not stop with simply the unraveling of the truth; changes need to be made by the college in order to make the most out of the work that has already been done. For instance, I believe that the biography of Thomas Nelson Jr. on the Christ's alumni page needs to be updated to reflect his true colours and include information I have found about him. Furthermore, the Venn database would also benefit with information being updated to match many of Cambridge's students' involvement in slavery. Repairing the damage of the past is not a 'quick fix' and will require a lot of effort beyond the projects we have just completed - making actual, visible changes would be a good first step.