

# North East Slavery & Abolition Group ENewsletter

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Previous issues on [www.tyneandweararchives.org.uk](http://www.tyneandweararchives.org.uk)

**Contents:** Editorial; NESAG Black History Month Events; Psyche, Servant to the Duke of Northumberland; Graffin Prankard, Merchant; News; Locating the Hidden Diaspora: the English in the Anglo-Phone World; Arthur Lewis; The Elusive Ralph Forster.

## EDITORIAL

**NESAG Events 14/15 October.** I am pleased to be able to report that NESAG has been able to organise two events for October's Black History Month aimed at sharing information about the work we have already carried out and setting the scene for the next stage. They are being held at the premises of two of NESAG's members: Tyne & Wear Museums and Northumberland Collections. The details are set out after this Editorial. NESAG is going to be promoted in the Black History Month publication being produced by Intercultural Arts (The North East Cultural Diversity Arts Forum).

**Psyche.** The item on Psyche in this issue tells us about another Black man in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Northumberland. It is extracted from a longer piece by Marika Sherwood in the January 2002 Black & Asian Studies Association (BASA) Newsletter 32. I have to apologise. Despite being a member of the BASA Committee at the time, it passed me by when I was doing my initial work on the Black presence in the North East. As a consequence reference was not made to it in the 2007 work, nor in my article on Black people in the North East in *North East History* 2008. The July issue (No. 54) of the BASA Newsletter carries an article by me on our work on the North East; [www.blackandasianstudies.org](http://www.blackandasianstudies.org). It is available from me £3.30 (inc p&p)

**John Charlton** continues to be invited to give talks on slavery and abolition: 6 October on abolition to Blyth Womens Group; 10 October on John Graham-Clarke at the Association of Northumberland North East Local History Societies AGM/Conference; 19 October on slavery and abolition at Craster Local History Society. These are in addition to talks on his forthcoming book *Don't You Hear The H-Bomb's Thunder* about youth politics on Tyneside 1955-1964 (Merlin Press). John will speak about the book at the Lit & Phil at the North East Labour History Society's AGM on 7 October from 6.30pm: <http://nelh.org/index.php>.

**English Diaspora.** A Conference on the English Diaspora is being organised for July next year at Northumbria University on the English Diaspora (see details below). I think we have generated enough material to be able to offer a paper. What do you think?

**Nineteenth Century Newcastle/Northern Newspapers.** NESAG members with City Library tickets can access 19<sup>th</sup> Century newspapers from home via the Libraries website. [www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/librarieslocalstudies?opendocument#about](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/librarieslocalstudies?opendocument#about). The newspapers include *The Newcastle Courant* (Daily and Weekly), *The Northern Liberator* and the *Northern Echo*. This makes research on slavery and abolition much easier, and we need to discuss how this can be done in a systematic way. Have you any suggestions?

## NESAG BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

**Wednesday 14 October 2-5pm**

**'IN NO PLACE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM HAS THE AMERICAN SLAVE WARMER FRIENDS THAN IN NEWCASTLE.'**

**A Half-Day Workshop** exploring black visitors and residents on Tyneside in the period of slavery and emancipation.

**Ground floor classroom, Discovery Museum, Blandford Square, Newcastle, NE1 4JA**

- 2pm John Charlton: Introduction to the North East's role in the slavery business and abolition
- 2.30pm Peter Livsey: William Fifefield, Newcastle's West Indian Volunteer and boatman 1794-1834
- 3.10pm Sean Creighton: The Quaker Richardsons and Black American Abolitionists
- 3.50pm The Next Steps for work of slavery and abolition and the black presence including Peter Livsey and Sophie Robinson (Lit & Phil) on Slavery & Abolition - A Walk Around Newcastle
- 5pm End

**Thursday 15 October 10.30am-4.30pm**

**EXPLORING SLAVERY AND ABOLITION IN NORTHUMBERLAND & NEWCASTLE**

**A Day Workshop at Northumberland Collections Service, Woodhorn Museum, QEII Country Park, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9YF**

- 10.30am Welcome
- 10.40am John Charlton. Introduction to the Slavery Business and Abolition in Northumberland and Newcastle, inc. discussion
- 11.20am Workshop about relevant archive materials at NCS with a display of some of them; discussion on how to interpret them
- 12.30pm Lunch break
- 2pm Workshop on researching the Black presence in parish registers
- 3.15pm Tea break
- 3.30pm Valerie Glass. A Northumbrian family in Jamaica. The Hendersons and Orchard estate. Talk based on research at NCS inc. discussion
- 4.15pm Outline of work of NESAG and its next steps
- 4.30pm Close

Both events free. Participants at Woodhorn should either bring their own lunch or buy it at the cafe. Organised by North East Slavery & Abolition Group (NESAG) and Northumberland Collections Service. John Charlton is author of *Hidden Chains. The Slavery business and North East England 1600-1865*. (Tyne Bridge Publishing 2008). Peter Livsey and Valerie Glass were volunteers with the 2007 Remembering Slavery project.

To book a place on these events please email NESAG at [sean.creighton@btinternet.com](mailto:sean.creighton@btinternet.com)

**PSYCHE: SERVANT TO THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND**

'This wonderful bust, 'the property of a gentleman', carved by Francis Harwood, signed and dated on the side as 'Fecit 1758', was sold at Christie's on 9 April 1987 to the Paul Getty Museum. The catalogue describes it as 'Thus unusual and impressive bust reputedly depicts 'Psyche', a black athlete in the employ of the Duke of Northumberland. It was presumably carved in Florence and the portrait quality indicates that it is from the life. Harwood...? is first recorded in Italy in 1752/53).' The asking price was from £7,000 to £10,000. Why it would have been carved in Florence in the man was employed by the Duke is not explained.

Naturally I made enquiries. Clare Baxter the Collections Manager at the Estates office at Alnwick Castle wrote me that the bust had first been sold in 1922 for £2. 10s; there was 'no information as to the identity of the sitter'. Ms Baxter also told me that there is a portrait of Algernon Seymour, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset by Jean Baptiste Van Loo, on which a Black page's head 'is seen over the horse's back in the right background.'. (The Duke was created Earl of Northumberland in 1749, presumably for services rendered in the military and then as Governor of Minorca 1737-1742.) A few months later Ms Baxter wrote to tell me of 'two references to the household

accounts of the Earl of Hertford (later Seventh Duke of Somerset, 1784-1750):  
December 30, 1723: Mustapha, 11s 6d  
April 17 1732: Making shirts for Mushapha 18s 10s.'  
(Extract from article by Marika Sherwood in Black & Asian Studies Newsletter January 2002)

### GRAFFIN PRANKARD, MERCHANT

Papers of the 18thC merchant Graffin Prankard are included in the archive of the Dickinson family. The Dickinsons were merchants originally of Bristol and sometimes of Kingweston, Somerset between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The papers include trade with Africa, Amsterdam, St Petersburg, Carolina, Virginia and Calcutta; the sugar and slave trade to the West Indies, including accounts for the Barton Isles plantation in Jamaica and shipping accounts for trade between Bristol and Newcastle, 1729-46, including the coal trade. The papers are listed on [www.microform.co.uk/guides/R96831.pdf](http://www.microform.co.uk/guides/R96831.pdf)

John and Sean have been suggesting that there were likely to be a great many trading interconnections between the slave colonies, Britain and different parts of Europe, including the Baltic. The listing shows that in 1729 and the early 1730s the ship *The Parham* travelled regularly between Carolina and the Baltic. The question arises as to whether it called in at an English port en route or avoided the English customs controls by sailing direct to the Baltic.

Prankard has been written up by Joseph Harold Bettey in 'Graffin Prankard, an 18th-century Bristol merchant'. *Southern History*, 12 (1990). He is also mentioned in Kenneth Morgan's *Bristol and the Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century*. His iron ore trading is discussed in [www.data-archive.ac.uk/doc/4424%5Cmrdoc%5Cpdf%5Cguide.pdf](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/doc/4424%5Cmrdoc%5Cpdf%5Cguide.pdf)

The links between Sweden and the Atlantic economy are discussed in *Swedish Industrial and Trade History and the 'New Atlantic Economy'*. Prankard is at the very centre of all the activities analysed. ([www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/conference2006/Assets/IIDRyden.doc](http://www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/conference2006/Assets/IIDRyden.doc)). Both Prankard and John Crowley's roles in supplying hoes to Carolina is discussed at: [www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-01/evans](http://www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-01/evans). Prankard did go bankrupt: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=143-ms3101\\_2&cid=-1&Gsm=2008-06-18#-1](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=143-ms3101_2&cid=-1&Gsm=2008-06-18#-1)

There is more on the Baltic and the Atlantic economies in Chris Evan and Goran Ryden's *Baltic Iron in The Atlantic World: Europe, Africa and the Americas, 1500 - 1830* (BRILL 2007)

In his article in *History* (June 2005) *Continental Connections: Britain and Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, Stephen Conway attempts to encourage greater appreciation of Britain's multifarious connections with continental Europe in this period, and seeks to establish that empire and Europe were seen by many Britons as complementary rather than competing areas of interest and engagement. ([www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118644540/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118644540/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0))

### NEWS

**Anti-Slavery Campaigning 1787-1807.** NELHS's new issue of its Journal *North East History* contains an article *Anti-Slavery in the North East: a study of the early campaigning years, 1787-1807* by Ruth Blower on her analysis of the abolition movement using local newspapers. It was undertaken as a special summer project in 2008 supervised by NESAG member Diana Paton at Newcastle University. The issue is available from late September [see details on NELHS web site at [www.nelh.org](http://www.nelh.org)]

**Charles Duncan O'Neal.** Following mention at a Conference, Diana Paton has drawn attention to a Black Barbadian doctor Charles Duncan O'Neal who studied at Edinburgh University, and lived and practiced in the Tyne & Wear area in the period 1905-10, before returning to Barbados. Sean and Peter Freshwater, an Edinburgh based BASA member, are putting together a detailed note about his time in Britain, which will appear in a future issue of the NESAG newsletter.

**Charles James Harrington and Uncle Tom's Cabin.** Newcastle born actor Charles James Harrington has come to Sean's attention having seen an advertisement in the London Battersea newspaper *The South Western Star* of 6 July 1900, about his production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* involving 'The largest Troupe of REAL NEGROES now travelling this country.' He also specialised in performing 'Oronokoo'. There is very little information about Harrington. I am working with others to try and piece together what is already known and what more can be found out about him. Why did this English actor specialise with these two plays? Had he grown up in a pro-American Emancipation household in Newcastle? Who were the black (American?) members of his company?

**Newcastle City Library Special Collections.** The new Library was opened in June. The special collections it holds can be explored on its website: [www.newcastle.gov.uk/newcastlecollection](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/newcastlecollection). The Library staff can be congratulated on producing a superb web based catalogue, with some of the pages of each item having been scanned in so they can be read. [The Mackey Collection](#) includes a pamphlet on the trial of Chaloner Ogle in Jamaica. [The Thomlinson Collection](#) includes: the 1705 tract by William Bosman *Description the Coast of Guinea*; George Berkeley's proposal to establish a church in the Bermudas to convert 'the savages' (1725); Gabriel Dellon's 1698 *A voyage to the East Indies*; Morgan Godwyn's 1680 *The Negros & Indians Advocate*; Peter Kolb's 1731 *The Present State of the Cape of Good-Hope*; Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's 1717 *An account of the religion, Manners, and Learning of the People of Malabar in the East-Indies*; John Ovington's 1696 *Voyage to Suratt in the year 1689*; Francis Moore's 1738 *Travels into the Inland parts of Africa*; William Robertson's 1792 *The History of America*; Malachy Postlethwayt's 1746 *The national and private advantages of the African trade considered*; Guy Tachard's 1688 *A relation of the voyage to Siam*; Lionel Wafer's 1699 *A New Voyage & Description of the Isthmus of America*; Jerónimo Lobo's 1699 *A short relation of the river Nile*; Robert Knox's 1681 *An historical relation of the island Ceylon, in the East-Indies*; the 1725 *The laws of the British plantations in America*; Richard Ligon's 1673 *A true & exact history of the island of Barbadoes*; Thomas Shaw's 1738 *Travels, or observations relating to several parts of Barbary and the Levant*; and the 1677 *The six voyages of John Baptista Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne* (Turkey, Persia, East Indies).

**Durham Iron Works, Pennsylvania.** It would be interesting if someone could carry out research to see why the Pennsylvania Quaker Durham Iron Works was called Durham. A London based Quaker merchant Robert Plumsted had a connection with the Works. He traded guns, anchors, nails, and other items for American logwood, furs, and corn. ([www.libraries.psu.edu/do/digitalbookshelf/28988632/28988632\\_part\\_04.pdf](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/do/digitalbookshelf/28988632/28988632_part_04.pdf)). His letter book 1756-1758 is in the University Library at Cambridge. He has just been written up in *English Historical Review* this year: Smith S.D. and Wheele T.R. 'Requisites of a Considerable Trade': The Letters of Robert Plumsted, Atlantic Merchant, 1752-58 (Vol.CXXIV. No. 507. 2009) This mentions the North East's Robert Carr.

**World War II Crew Losses.** Tyne and Wear Archives has a World War II Moor Line Roll of Remembrance which lists hundreds of crew members, including Muslims, lost in 21 ships. (From BASA Newsletter 34, September 2002)

**Rokeby Park and Barbados.** John Charlton has found out that the early 18thC owner of Rokeby Park, near Barnard Castle, Sir Thomas Robinson (1695-1770) was made a Baronet in 1730 and Governor of Barbados 1742-47. Robinson's portrait can be seen on [www.npg.org.uk/collections](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections). A poem was written about him by a Mr Weekes, *Barbados a poem. To Sir Thomas Robinson, Bart.* (London: printed by J. and J. Lewis, for R. and J. Dodsley: and sold by M. Cooper, 1754). Robinson became major owner, Manager and Master of Ceremonies at Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens up the Thames from London. This drained him financially requiring him to put Rokeby up for sale in 1765. Details of his financial problems have been analysed by Giles Worsley in 'The financial problems of Sir Thomas Robinson' (*The Georgian Group Journal*, 10. 2000.) Rokeby was purchased in 1769 by J. Morrill, and remains in the ownership of the Morrill family. Details about Rokeby Park can be seen on [www.rokebypark.com](http://www.rokebypark.com)

**Remainder Books.** Postscript Books is offering another batch of books which provide useful background reading to the on-going work, including:

Marcus Rediker. *The Slave Ship*  
Michale Jordan. *The Great Abolition Sham*  
Stanley Engerman and others. *Slavery*  
John Kent. *Wesley and the Wesleyans*  
*Africana. The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*  
Marcus Wood (ed). *The Poetry of Slavery*  
Max Adams. *Admiral Collingwood*  
Jane Robinson. *Mary Seacole*  
Victoria Coules. *The Trade. Bristol and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*  
If you search key words 'like 'slave', slavery, 'black', 'Africa', etc, you will find lots of other books not highlighted in Postscript's current catalogue. [www.psbooks.co.uk](http://www.psbooks.co.uk).

## LOCATING THE HIDDEN DIASPORA: THE ENGLISH IN THE ANGLO-PHONE WORLD

One of the important themes in the work on the North East on slavery and abolition was the emigration of North Eastners to the the Americas, their role in the development of the colonies and the slavery business, and in respect of Quakers in particular, the development of the cross-Atlantic abolition movement. Connections often remained back with family and friends in England.

Americans in particular are fascinated by their English, Irish, Scots and Welsh. It is therefore a surprise to read the particular way in which the notification is couched of a Conference to be held on 8-10 July at the University of Northumbria about the English Diaspora.

'After 1600, English emigration became one of Europe's most significant population movements. Yet compared to what has been written about the migration of Scots and Irish from the same islands, relatively little energy has been expended on the numerically more significant English flows. Whilst the Scottish, Irish, German, Italian, Jewish and Black Diasporas are well known and much studied, there is virtual silence on the English.

Why, then, is there no English Diaspora? Why has little been said about the English other than to map their main emigration flows? Did the English simply disappear into the host population? Or were they so fundamental, and foundational, to the Anglo-phone, Protestant cultures of the evolving British World that they could not be distinguished in the way Catholic Irish or continental Europeans were?'

The Conference will explore these and other issues about the nature and character of English identity during the creation of the cultures of the British World. The organisers are requesting papers which examine:

- Patterns of English Emigration
- The formation of English communities
- Protestantism and Englishness
- The relationship between Englishness and colonial values
- The relationship between English and non-English cultures in North America
- Colonial Identity and Imperial Identity
- Canadian and American Loyalisms
- English Sports in North America
- English Culture and Pastimes
- Englishness, Ethnicity and Civic Identity

Those wishing to offer a paper should send a title, a 200 word abstract and a brief CV by 31 January 2010 to: [az.englishdiaspora@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:az.englishdiaspora@northumbria.ac.uk)

## ALBERT LEWIS

Valerie Glass writes:

In NESAG Newsletter 5 (February 2009) Patricia Hix drew attention to a man by the name of Albert Lewis, admitted to Belford Workhouse in 1889, described as 'a coloured man' in Jane

Bowen's book *A Poor Little House*. She wondered about his origins and whether he might be a former slave. When I had read this same book I had also noted Albert Lewis. A man from overseas would have been an unusual occurrence at that time in a small rural village such as Belford in North Northumberland. I happen to live just a few yards from the site of the Belford Workhouse which was demolished in 2003. Whilst working on the Remembering Slavery Project I had already learnt of a petition for the Abolition of the Slave Trade signed by over 400 signatories from Belford and forwarded to Parliament in 1792. This petition was unusual because of the high number of women signatories when women were normally not included on petitions. Could Albert Lewis be another link between Belford and the subject of slavery?

Jane Bowen kindly supplied further information on Albert Lewis. He had been admitted to Belford Workhouse after suffering an epileptic fit but quickly discharged himself in order to attend the Hiring Fair at Berwick. Hiring Fairs were held annually in market towns in this region for the purpose of recruiting farm workers and they were usually accompanied by much socialising and merry-making. It would have been a good opportunity for both spending and making money.

The Medical Officer who examined Lewis and ordered hospital supervision within the Workhouse went on to make a formal complaint against the Master of the Workhouse for discharging him without authorisation. The Master, Mr Treble, however, had been informed by a tramp that Lewis was well known locally as a quack who regularly sold medicines at fairs and had recently been turned out of Wooler Workhouse.

Letter from Mr. Treble to Local Government Board

March 18th 1889

*Dear Sir*

*Re Albert Lewis, a Vagrant*

*As I know you will be very busy on Thursday I will give you a little more information about the above man. When I wrote to you on the 14th instant I knew he was an imposter. - A tramp told me. "That he had been at that there game afore, and was turned out of Wooler Workhouse the day before he was admitted here, also that he was a Quack and attended local Fairs selling medicine." I wanted however to verify this statement, which the accompanying letter will do. The man who was drunk when admitted here told me a tissue of falsehoods - he said he never was in a workhouse before, also that he had been a Gentleman's butler. He played his part well during his apparent insanity, ordered his Servants, spake of the Matron as My Lady Lowther, and took a great dislike to myself, so much so, that he would not have me in his presence, he was very polite to the Doctor, who thought he was a great man, and cautioned us not to offend his "Caste". Now the facts seem to be that the man is well known in this district as a drunken imposter, he was a Slush (?) in the Chillingham Stables about 14 years ago. When he left Wooler on the 25th February, he said he called at Fowberry where Mrs. Leather gave him ten shillings, he came to Belford, and was drunk in Curven's Lodging House the same afternoon, where a man named Patrick Green, who is now in this Workhouse states that he saw nine shillings in his possession - Lewis then appears to have given annoyance to several people in the Town, including Laing's, the Inn, and Gibson's, the latter told him to go away as he looked too much like the Devil for him. He slept at Curven's on Monday night, took a turn round the Town on Tuesday morning, took occasional fits, and would have hurt himself only someone was always near to save him, he managed until dinner time, when he was brought in here, and took his last fit at 10 OC the same night. Doctor Burman need not have the slightest apprehension about the man, as Inspector Spratt passed him on the Berwick Road, the same morning as he left this workhouse, he was there alive and apparently in good health. I may mention that altho' the man left on the 1st of March, Doctor Burman did not speak to me about him until the 6th and not then until I asked him to make his remarks on his own side of the Medical Book - If Doctor Burman only had a tithe of the trouble with the Tramps, that we have, I am sure he would facilitate their removal from this workhouse, instead of trying to retard it.*

His self discharge from Wooler Workhouse was subsequently verified by the Master at Wooler:

Glendale Union Workhouse  
Wooler,  
Northumberland

March 16th 1889

Dear Sir,

With regard to your enquiry about Albert Lewis, I have to state that a coloured man giving that name was admitted into this Workhouse on 14th Feby 1889, as he had been taking fits in the streets of Wooler. He was under treatment in our Hospital until his recovery, when he was discharged (at his own notice) on Feby 25th.

Yours truly

T A Robson  
Master

I was curious to find out more about Albert Lewis. I attempted to do so by searching the census. A search of the 1881 census did not provide any possibilities. The census for subsequent years brought up the following entries:

#### 1891 census Poplar (London) Workhouse

Albert Lewis	Pauper widower 52	chemist	born East Indies,	British Subject
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#### 1901 census Kidderminster Workhouse

Albert Lewis	Married 61	Baker	Worker	Worcester
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Going back to the **1871 census** I found an Albert *Smith* of the right age. I was not too surprised to find him in **Manchester Workhouse**.

Albert Smith	Unmarried 31	labourer (general)	born East Indies - Calcutta	
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Could he have given a false surname?

Of course this is not inconclusive proof that the same man is referred to in each case. Information provided for the census by Heads of Institutions is often inaccurate. However, for the most part the name and age agree and it is not inconceivable that a man used to mixing potions might turn his hand to both chemistry and baking! And if he could travel from Belford to Poplar within 2 years perhaps he could make the journey from Poplar to Kidderminster - and no doubt to several other places en route- within 10 years!

I have not found him on the 1911 census nor have I found a death registration.

The term "East Indies" usually refers to India and all of SE Asia. The Doctor had made reference to "caste". So the likelihood is that Lewis was of Asian origin. There is no evidence that he originated from the Caribbean or from the USA. It seems unlikely that he was a former slave and there are no further clues as to how he came to be in England at that time.

Like Patricia Hix, I am now helping on the National Archives Workhouses Project where volunteers are transcribing correspondence between the Poor Law Commission and individual Workhouses. I plan to place a request in the Project's next newsletter for further information on Albert Lewis, just in case he has put in an appearance at any other Workhouses!

## THE ELUSIVE RALPH FORSTER (or research by Google!)

Valerie Glass writes:

This is the story of how a very amateur historian embarked on a search for a man who acquired a black servant in the 1760s. The hunt has become something of an obsession! The research is very much in the exploratory stage and much of the information remains to be verified. Google has provided some helpful and interesting leads, taking me in directions I would not otherwise have known about.

Some years ago whilst I was researching my family history in North Northumberland, I would occasionally come across an entry in parish registers referring to the baptism of a child described as black or African. Intrigued by the fact that individual black people had found themselves in this rural, and then, sparsely populated and wild part of the country in the 18th century, I made a note of names and dates.

Much later I became a volunteer on the Remembering Slavery project and the notes I had made earlier sprang to mind. One such was the following: Baptism of George Sylla an African servant to Mr Ralph Forster merchant in Berwick on 4 March 1767 at Carham Church. The age of George Sylla was not given. Berwick is about 10 miles from Carham.

How did a Berwick merchant come to acquire an African servant? Possibly brought back from plantations (if he ever owned any) in the Caribbean or America? Or from travels in Africa? I began to search local and online archives for further references in that context but found nothing. However, I did come across a Ralph Forster who set up a boatyard at Tweedmouth which adjoins Berwick.

On the Berwick side of the river, there was another yard, owned by Davis Cockerill from 1766 until 1774. This same period saw the opening of the Ralph Forster yard at Tweedmouth [www.berwickshipyard.com/Early%20Years.html](http://www.berwickshipyard.com/Early%20Years.html).

### The Forsters

The name Forster is very common in Northumberland and so searching amongst the Forsters proved a long and complicated task. Many of the published pedigrees have the same forenames cropping up time and time again, e.g. Matthew, Ralph, and Thomas. The most well-known ones are associated with locations like Adderstone, Bamburgh, Warenford, and Berwick. I spent a long time trying to make sense of the various pedigrees in an attempt to link various Forster families.

I found various references to Ralph Forster in Berwick, using Freeman's records, gravestones, parish records, census records, etc. There were several different men of this name including one 1722-1804 (father = Ralph, mother = .....Gregson). He married Mary Grieve from a prominent Berwick family in 1770. Children were Frances, Ralph, James, William, Anthony, Robert, John, George, Octavius and Mary. I learnt from David Brenchley's excellent book on Berwick in the 18th century, "A Place by Itself" that the Ralph Forster I was chasing was a seaman before becoming a timber merchant, so it was sounding hopeful. Perhaps he had acquired George Sylla on his travels? He later became Postmaster of Berwick. Ralph's mother was the daughter of Antony Gregson of Sunnilaws, Carham.

Of the sons listed above:

Ralph became a farmer at Downham not far from Carham, was unmarried, lived at Sanson Seal, Berwick, landed proprietor in 1851.

James also became Postmaster, was a Colonel and Major in the army.

George became a timber merchant, lived in Ravensdown, Berwick, and listed as "independent means" in 1841.

Tony Barrow, a local maritime historian, gave me some notes on Berwick Harbour Records listing

John, James and Antony Forster as owning several ships at Berwick carrying cargoes of cereals in the very early 1800's. These could well be Ralph's sons or grandsons.

There was another Ralph Forster about this time who appears on the Adderstone and Bamburgh Forsters pedigree. He was baptised 15-4-1703 at Bamburgh son of Thomas and Mary but he died before 1735.

I found further references to the particular Ralph in question. One in *The London Gazette* of 1757 requested creditors of the late Ralph Forster of Carham to attend court. This was too early for the man I was seeking.

### **The Matthew Forsters**

Then through the Remembering Slavery Project I learnt about two men called Matthew Forster. The first became the Commissary General to Forces in West Indies born 1730 died 1798. His eldest son, also Matthew was baptised at Warenford (a tiny village about 20 miles south of Berwick, long associated with Forsters). Matthew senior was also a captain in the army in 1762, went to America, was Collector of HM Customs in 1776, Mayor of Berwick for 5 times (last in 1795), owned New Water Fishery on Holy Island, was friend of Sir John Vaughan, Governor of Berwick, who gave him an estate on St Eustatius in the Caribbean. He also lived at Sanson Seal at some point. Surely this links him to Ralph Forster, son of the same name, farmer at Downham? Downham is a hamlet between Berwick and Carham.

Based on information in Marika Sherwood's book *After Abolition* Sean Creighton alerted me to a third Matthew Forster who was MP for Berwick between 1841 and 1853. He wondered if Matthew could be Ralph's son. He was the Head of Forster and Smith. He traded in palm oil in West Africa. In the 1840's he had 14 ships. Brother William was based in Senegal and Gambia. "Berwick in Parliament" states that his family had roots in Berwick but does not explain how. This is the Matthew of Belsize in London. His son John (1817-1878) was in Cuba in 1839 and from 1853-7 was himself MP for Berwick. He inherited his father's business interests in London and also South Hetton Colliery in Co. Durham.

The same book also states that Matthew's father John (not Ralph) was the son of Roger Forster 1703c -1782). Roger was a farmer and owned land at Raylees, Elsdon, within Northumberland but some distance from Berwick) and coal mines in South Durham. He had a brother, Ralph. His father was Thomas born 1677 Elsdon and his mother was Sarah Hall. The possibility of a link between Ralph Forster, timber merchant, 1722-1804 (who could have been the man who had George Sylla baptised at Carham) and Matthew Forster of Smith and Forster who had links with West Africa led me to investigate this particular Matthew. However the latter's dates were too late for him to have been responsible for bringing George Sylla to Carham! Still, one clutches at straws.....Maybe grandfather Roger had trading interests which have not yet come to light!

I did make contact with a descendant of Matthew Forster MP who provided some evidence of the Elsdon connection in that Matthew's brother Percival was baptised at Elsdon.

But all this research has not yet helped me work out how Ralph Forster acquired his African servant!

### **An American Ralph?**

Meanwhile I continued to search all avenues. A search on Google brought up a reference in a publication dated 1780 in Annapolis, Maryland. It told of a runaway slave, presumably belonging to Ralph Forster.

My next discovery was a letter from Robert Morris (known as The Financier of the American Revolution) on Google Book Search to a recipient believed by the editors to be Ralph Forster III of Berwick 1722-1804, sea-captain and timber merchant. A footnote explained that this had been confirmed by an archivist at Northumberland Record Office. Apparently Forster had

travelled to Philadelphia in the 1760s where he dealt with Robert Morris a partner of Willing and Morris one of the best known trading companies in the colonies of America, with mercantile links with Great Britain and the West Indies. This sounded promising!

Further Googling brought up numerous references to Willing and Morris and I learnt that they had engaged in the slave trade, owned a plantation in Louisiana and that Morris had owned slaves. At last here was the lead I had been looking for! I discovered that Ralph Forster had captained the ship *Hero* in 1764 from Rotterdam to Pennsylvania for Willing and Morris and also the schooner *Batchelor* in 1762 for Robert Morris. Also an advertisement in another publication from Annapolis described a sale of a neat assortment of European and East India goods suitable for the season. It mentions his store at Indian Landing. Is it possible that Ralph owned a store as well as being a sea captain? Unfortunately the date on this publication is not visible.

### Next Steps

This is the stage I have now reached. I have two leads waiting to be followed up. The first is a file at Northumberland Collections containing various Forster pedigrees which may contain something I have not yet seen. The second is to dig further on the visits Ralph made to America. I hope I will find more information on his dealings over there which might provide more evidence on the origins of George Sylla.

I have not found any further entries in parish records for George, for example, a marriage or burial at Carham but these events may have taken place elsewhere. I have searched various genealogical websites for references to the surname Sylla but not found any likely leads. However, the search continues.....

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*To be Sold at the Printing-Office,*  
**L A W S**  
**M A R Y L A N D,**  
**Passed last SESSION of ASSEMBLY**

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Forest of Prince George's, August 17, 1780.  
**R**AN away this morning from the subscriber, near the Brick Church, a negro man named **CÆSAR**, about 25 years of age, five feet 6 inches high, or thereabouts, a likely lively black fellow, an imported negro, but speaks very good English, boasts much of his family in his own country, it being a common saying with him, that he is no common negro, and is a very remarkable mimic; he has been accustomed to go by water, and will perhaps endeavour to get on board some vessel; has nothing on but a jacket and breeches of country cloth kersey wove, very much wore, the breeches particularly almost rags, no hat nor shirt that I know of. Any person bringing the said negro to the subscriber, or securing him so that I get him again, shall be handsomely rewarded for their trouble. All masters of vessels are requested to stop him if he offers himself to them.

**RALPH FORSTER.**  
He has short pinched up feet, as if his toes had been cramped by wearing shoes too small, and steps short, as if he was a little lamed thereby.

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