



The West Indian City: The History of the Caribbean and The Square Mile

BY BLONDEL CLUFF CBE

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A Tale of Three Mothers

The Caribbean is a range of marine mountains known as the Caribbean Andes, whose peaks pierce the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, severing the Caribbean Sea from its parental waters. Of the 7,000 islands and cays, a mere 2% are inhabited by man, initially being the home of the tribes, who, like their mainland cousins, descended from inhabitants of present-day China who had trekked across the Bering Straits into Alaska, distributing themselves throughout North and South America. Migration from the Amazon Delta and Florida peninsula to the islands continued over thousands of years, but ceased abruptly with European colonisation.

By the time the Caribbean had been ‘discovered’ by Columbus in 1492, Henry VIII, the father of the British Navy, had just been born and London was over 1,500 years old. Shortly after, the Portuguese established the African slave trade. This was initially of little interest to the City that was dominated by the mysteries of the church and the liveries that espoused religion and skills with equal rigour. Chastised by plague, earthquakes, fires and rebellions, the City spent much of this era focusing on its own survival. However, the advent of the great Tudor dockyards, commencing in 1512 with Woolwich, followed by Deptford a year later, soon took the City’s focus to distant shores. 1533 marked the birth of Elizabeth I that entrenched her father’s split from the Catholic church that would form the backdrop of generations of animosity between Britain and Europe and a spate of conflicts that would be played out on the other side of the world in the mountains of the Caribbean.

As the City slowly adopted a global outlook, so too the Caribbean was awakening as a centre of international commerce. The Spanish and Portuguese had long agreed to divide the New World between them, the Portuguese contenting themselves with Brazil, whilst the Spanish took on other South American countries, together with the Caribbean

islands, focusing their attention on the Greater Antilles that include Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica and Puerto Rico.

It took the frosty Elizabeth I to finally embrace the potential of the Caribbean through the auspices of a series of what many regarded as ‘chancers’, albeit master mariners of their age. Fuelled by animosity towards the Catholic countries that had tried in vain to herd England back into the Pope’s flock, Elizabeth created the legal instrument, ‘Letters of Marque’, that would allow men such as Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, both residents of the City of London, and Sir Walter Raleigh to take on her foes in the Caribbean Sea, bringing back looted treasures and commodities largely unknown in Britain such as the potato, tobacco, spices and a new source of sugar. The extent of their plunder was gargantuan, and Elizabeth revelled in it, decking herself out in the magnificent pearls that could only be found in the Caribbean at the time.

As you can see from the Pelican Portrait she literally covered herself in Caribbean treasure, and even today three Caribbean pearls, said to have been owned by Elizabeth, are to be found in the Imperial State Crown held in the Tower of London. Had the Queen smiled, we may have seen her teeth, blackened from excessive consumption of sugar that rotted them.



The Caribbean inspired her bard, Shakespeare, to write *The Tempest*, that graced the stages of the Rose, Globe and Swan theatres but a stone’s throw from the City walls in Southwark. Yet, despite all the Caribbean had to offer, little was done to formally claim islands for the British Crown. Instead, the City’s attention turned east, and the East India Company was formed in 1600 in response to a Dutch monopoly over pepper, a position the merchants found untenable at a time when spices could be worth their weight in gold. Indeed, we should note that the Grocers’ Company started life as the Guild of Pepperers!

By the time James I ascended the throne in 1603, the merchants of the City had become more conversant with the concept of global commerce and were prepared to fund permanent expansion, rather than the expeditions that defined the Elizabethan age. The first islands to be taken by the British were St. Christopher (St. Kitts) in 1622, Antigua and Barbados in 1625, all in the Lesser Antilles. This occurred long before the Act of Union in 1707 that joined Scotland constitutionally to England. Merchants such as William Courteen led the charge in the Caribbean, backed by aristocratic patrons that included the Earls of Pembroke and Carlisle, the latter eventually becoming Governor of all of the English islands. More colonies came in quick succession. Much of the nineteen English-speaking Caribbean possessions were fought over for generations, with islands such as St. Lucia changing hands a staggering twenty-two times. Initially, the Greater Antilles eluded Britain's grasp for some time, being much valued and heavily guarded by the Spanish.

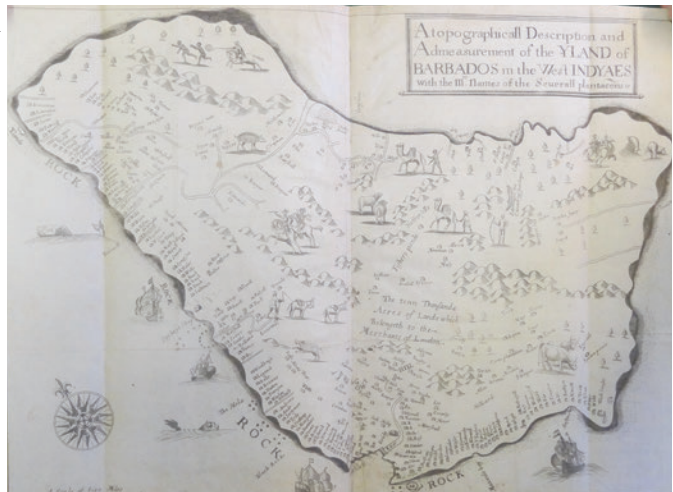
With every passing monarch, interest in the Caribbean increased. This interest was reciprocated and, at the time of the English Civil War, many Royalist refugees fled Britain's shores, swelling the numbers of islanders in Barbados to such an extent that Cromwell sent seven ships to establish proper control of the colony. This was not the only intervention Cromwell made in the Caribbean. Indeed, it could be argued that he did much to shape it, forming the basis for stronger trading links with Britain, and the City. Crafting a professional, classless land force out of the Civil War, the New Model Army, a template for the British Army, Cromwell's initial target in the Caribbean was Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the Greater Antilles; however, a failed invasion attempt, coupled with the desire not to return to the shores of the Thames empty-handed led his commanding officers, Robert Venables and William Penn, to take Jamaica from the Spanish. Their successes and failures were recorded in a first-hand account, held in the West India Committee library, where they were described as arising from the very 'hand of God'. The capture of Jamaica in 1655 created what are to this day effectively two states on that island. Incapable of countering guerrilla warfare, that was unknown to European armies at the time, the British created reservations where their undefeated foe could co-exist

with the colonists in peace. Such settlements also arose in Dominica and St. Vincent, creating places where separate cultures thrived beside the colony, such as that of the African slaves freed by the retreating Spanish in 1655 who became the Maroons of Jamaica, and the yellow and black Caribs of Dominica and St. Vincent, who retained lands that their descendants still occupy today.

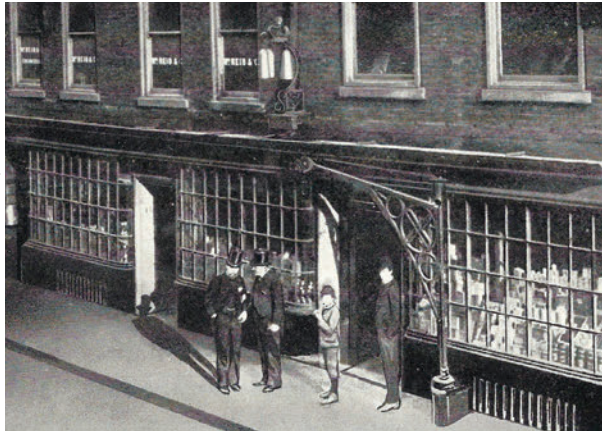
Cromwell also changed the face of the Caribbean by transporting prisoners of war there, that included one third of Ireland's entire population who served as indentured slaves, turning islands such as Montserrat an emerald shade of green, so heady was the Irish Catholic influence. With African slaves being regarded as more suited to the climate, and as such more productive, and given that indentures were generally limited to a maximum of twelve years, these white slaves were not as highly prized as their black counterparts. Indeed, the going rate for an Irishman could be as little as a mere 1,500 pounds of sugar!

As if that were not enough, Cromwell, being unable to afford the return of his troops from the region, made them colonists with grants of land. This was the fate of one of my ancestors, who eventually settled on the island of Anguilla. This strategy brought with it the added advantage of experience in defence that helped to protect British interests from attack.

The merchants of the City not only actively supported colonisation through funding government, but also participated directly, as we note in Ligon's famed map of 1657, the earliest of Barbados.



Here, amongst the horsemen in full armour, camels, escaped Africans and Carib tribesmen you will note *'The tenn Thousande Acres of Lande which Belongeth to the Merchants of London'* in the centre of one of the most productive colonies in British history. In 1650, a few years before Ligon's account of Barbados, the world's oldest greengrocer, Davison, Newman & Company, was founded in the City of London by David Rawlinson, friend of Samuel Pepys, who was a member of the Grocers' Company and father of Alderman Thomas Rawlinson, who went on to become Lord Mayor of London. Based in Creechurch Lane beside one of today's entrances to Leadenhall Market, under the sign of three golden sugar loaves and crown, the firm was a purveyor of West Indian Goods, and was described as the *"Oldest business actually in the City of London"*. Due to the failed attempt to establish the equivalent of the East India Company in the guise of the Royal African Company founded in 1672 - a plethora of small to medium sized enterprises sprang up throughout the City that focused on Caribbean trade, many of which were headed up by City officials.



Nonetheless, the success of the East India Company that went on to form its own army and to establish its very own temple of commerce, East India House in Leadenhall Street, eclipsed the Caribbean in the annals of history, although the Caribbean left an indelible mark on the face of the time, thanks to the cruel trade that underpinned its success.

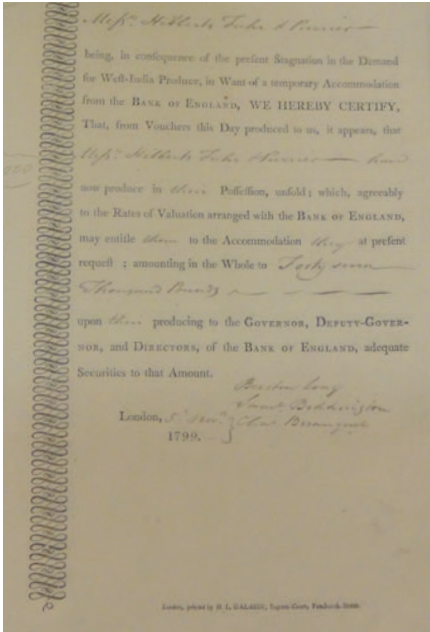
With ever-growing ties with the region, Charles II, on regaining the throne, took such an avid interest in the Caribbean that it is said he personally oversaw the design of the coat of arms of Jamaica by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the original of which is found in the College of Arms

in the City's Queen Victoria Street. During his reign the fashion for coffee, chocolate, and tea raged, with fashion for produce from the East sucking the Caribbean into the vortex of City trade, as sugar was essential to making these bitter beverages palatable. Indeed, Charles' own wife was to make the 'taking of tea' so fashionable that it became an emblem of Britishness despite her Portuguese origins.

Secondary and tertiary markets also thrived in the City, whether textiles to clothe the hundreds of thousands of slaves and labourers in the Caribbean; metal, arms or fripperies to trade with the African tribes who were prepared to capture and sell their own people into purgatory; or the insurance and other financial instruments that funded, facilitated and underwrote the shipping, plantations and equipment critical to the slave trade and related sugar production. So mammoth was the success of sugar at its zenith that many City institutions owe their success and, in some cases, their very existence to it, such as Lloyds, that benefitted from the shipping within the infamous Triangle of Trade, and Barclays, Barings and Schroder's that each openly traded with and, in some instances, in the region. Even the Royal Mint, that was located at the edge of the City, reflected the importance of the Triangle of Trade, by producing the Guinea made of pure African gold, and bearing the name of a region of that continent.



In 1694 the Bank of England was founded with the object of providing a reliable, perpetual source of funds for both government and the Crown. 'Mother', as it is affectionately known, also made her wares available to the planters and sugar merchants, offering mortgages secured against sugar, as we see in this Bank of England cheque book, held in the West India Committee collection, incorporating a cheque in favour of Hibbert, Fuhr and Purrier signed by one Beeston Long, both members of the same trade association, so close were the links between West India interests in the City.



In 1797, of the £6.2 million worth of bills under discount at the Bank, over half were overseas, with the West Indies accounting for the largest overseas trade, far exceeding America, Russia and even our nearest neighbour, Ireland.

Although we hold no evidence of direct colonisation by the Bank of England, its ownership of plantations would have arisen in the event of mortgage foreclosures, effectively making ‘Mother’ a slave owner from time to time as mortgages were over both land and chattels, including the human variety. This would not have been an

unacceptable stance at a time when thousands in Britain benefitted from the trade, both directly and indirectly. Moreover, with the British Army taking on the mantle of the biggest slave owner in history through the acquisition of slaves to serve as soldiers, ‘Mother’ had other, tangential involvement in the trade through the financing of government.

Now firmly entwined in global trade networks, the City became more attuned to foreign politics, leading to a series of interest groups forming. One such was the West India Committee of which I am the current CEO. This first came together in 1735, when sugar merchants and planters, two groups that were not good bed-fellows at the best of times, banded together to defend their interests at times of crisis. This association then became a permanent body in the London Tavern in Bishopsgate circa 1775, when it was forced to address the concerning issue of American independence that threatened essential supplies to the Caribbean. The West India Committee was innovative, and influential, consisting of Aldermen, city officials and Members of Parliament and had the Governor of the Bank of England, Beeston Long, as one of its first chairmen.

Unlike the East India Company, there were other organisations throughout Britain with similar mandates to that of the West India Committee, such as those in the ports of Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, each of which traded on larger scales than London. However, the West India Committee had the distinction of over forty members of parliament in its midst, making it the most influential. In 1787, it exercised its influence by persuading King George III to grant it use of a ship and crew to bring new foodstuffs to the Caribbean. It received *HMS Bounty* and Captain Bligh, leading to the infamous mutiny, the mapping of all thirty-nine islands of Fiji and the colonisation of Pitcairn Island. Again, the City were undeterred by the mutiny, and provided Bligh with a second vessel with which he completed his commission, some fifteen years after it commenced, taking the breadfruit to the Caribbean where it has become a food staple and where some of the original trees may still be found. It is a pity we could not negotiate film rights, as Hollywood's renditions of this tale have generated three Oscars, seven nominations, and a robust secondary market in valuable film posters, like this one! Indeed, with a box office grossing over \$13 million, this could have been the best investment the West India Committee has ever made.



By 1798, over 1,700 ships from the four corners of the world could be found at any one time in the Pool of London, that commenced beside the shores of the City of London, a sight once described as a 'forest of masts'. This gave rise to specialist crimes that would empty the coffers of West India Merchants to the tune of £27 million each year in today's money. Challenged by the obscenely high crime rate on the river, deteriorating cargo that spent weeks, if not months, on the Thames, and staunch competition from more established ports elsewhere in the British Isles, the West India Committee, that fast became the City's main interface with Caribbean trade, addressed the issue by funding the introduction of marine policing at a time when there was scarcely any law enforcement in Britain to speak of. Moreover, that which was on offer only came into play once a crime had actually been committed. Thus,

from a commercial perspective, the concept of 'preventative policing' introduced by Patrick Colquhoun, a magistrate based in Westminster, and merchant-adventurer John Harriott, was welcomed. The West India Committee joined forces with the future Prime Minister, the Duke of Portland, paying the princely sum of £4,500 for its implementation within the Pool of London, and based its new force at a site in Wapping which is still in use today. As with much of the major milestones in the history of the West India Committee, its efforts to support policing in London nearly caused its demise, due to the vast expense of paying the force.

Many of the practices of the Committee's Marine Police were copied on land by one Robert Peel, who allegedly visited our police office in Wapping on the orders of the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington. The subsequently formed 'Peelers' then merged with the River Police in 1839, to create the Metropolitan Police Service that we know today, the Committee's Thames River Police becoming the oldest continuously serving force in the world. The appeasement of the Watermen and Lightermen of the City of London, who regarded this patch of the Thames as their own, was also critical to this endeavour.

It could be argued that the City also influenced religion in the Caribbean; the Wesley chapel, situated in the north of the square mile, was built on a site granted to the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, by the City of London in 1776. From here missionaries were dispatched to the region, targeting slaves for conversion. This cohort included my father's ancestor, Dr. John Hodge, who founded the Methodist Church in Anguilla in 1813. This went against the edict of the Church of England that was pro-slavery, against the religious instruction of slaves and may well have invested in slavery in one guise or another. The Caribbean also influenced religion in the City, being home to the oldest Jewish settlement in the western hemisphere, many fleeing there during the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions. Many migrated to England when Cromwell opened its doors to the Jewish community. This led to the building of Bevis Marks Synagogue in the city by West Indian Jews, which opened its doors in 1701 and is now the oldest synagogue in Britain.

The links between the City and the Caribbean were strongest during the eighteenth century, declining as the nation's moral compass took on a new direction, and the institution of slavery faltered, gasped and staggered head-long towards its end in 1834, a generation after abolition legislation was originally introduced in 1807. Up until that point, the role of the capital in the slave trade had declined to rank third after the leaders in the sector, Liverpool, and the less prolific Bristol. However, London eventually regained the lead, having made a concerted effort to profit from the Caribbean in the years immediately prior to abolition.

Whilst one cannot claim that slavery made London, as it had the Industrial Revolution, Liverpool and Bristol, it did, however, change London's very persona from an inadequate port situated miles away from the sea to a city with purpose-built, state of the art facilities that went on to define the capital for years to come. This occurred when members of the West India Committee formed the West India Dock Company in which Guildhall officials were prominent subscribers, including the City Remembrancer, Timothy Tyrell, the City Comptroller, Philip Wyatt, and Henry Woodthorpe and James Woodcomb, both of the Town Clerk's Office. A handful of retailers also invested in the West India Docks, such as one Dolland of the present-day High Street stalwart, Dolland and Aitchison, Opticians.

The West India Dock Company built London's first purpose built wet docks, located on a peninsula to the east of the City known as the Isle of Dogs, due to the howling of the monarch's hounds in their kennels near Greenwich being audible there. 24 million bricks were made on site to form what was the longest brick building in the world at the time of its opening in 1802 by the Prime Minister, William Pitt. For this, the City of London dug deep into its pockets and into the soil, severing the peninsula from the mainland by means of the City Canal that added to the efficiency of the dock, thereby effectively manufacturing a West Indian island in the very heart of the capital. A twenty-one year monopoly over West Indian goods in favour of the West India Dock Company brought strong returns on investments that more than paid for the docks, spawning a plethora of speculative dock developments, from St. Katherine's to the



East India Docks and beyond, each beautifully captured by Daniels in his famed series. But this brought the stinking slave trade even closer to the City's walls where hypothetical sugar merchants pandered to the political sensibilities of their clients, many of whom were adopting a less tolerant attitude to how their money was being spent. The stench of slave ships, more romantically referred to as West Indiamen, could be discerned long before the vessel came into view, the ships timbers being literally steeped in the detritus of human misery. The docks not only became the focal point for abolitionists, but also the target of discontentment within the City itself, as the Watermen and Lightermen experienced a dramatic drop in the demand for their services as a direct result of this new-fangled means of dealing with cargo. As such, a permanent military presence was factored into the design of the docks, including an armoury, guard houses and a twelve-foot high perimeter wall, together with a permanent police presence.

Although the West India Committee and its affiliated companies did not conduct themselves on the scale or with the grandeur of the East Indian trading interests, it was as much a part of the establishment, eventually gaining its own Royal Charter in 1904. Its network was as extensive as the City's personal and commercial West Indian connections and extended to the Royal Household when Viscount Lascelles, himself from a family of West Indian planters that held interests there from 1648 to as recently

as 1975, who was the son-in-law of King George V and the uncle of our present Queen, took the helm of the West India Committee as chairman.

Indeed, just a few yards from this very church is another testament to the strength of the connections between the City and the West Indies. For there stands the life size statue of Alderman William Beckford who was Lord Mayor of London in 1762 and again in 1769, Sheriff of London, Member of Parliament for the City of London for three terms and Master of Ironmongers. He is believed to be the first commoner in Britain to die a millionaire. He was a third generation Jamaican who had been sent



Image by Pat Langford

to school in London at Westminster, enduring a practice that was to become common-place among wealthy planters, with three quarters of British creole children being educated in the Mother Country by 1770; many of these boasted aristocratic connections, no doubt, due in part to their considerable fortunes, although, like the American heiresses that later succeeded them, West Indians were generally frowned upon socially. Similarly, Beckford suffered much prejudice in Britain on account of his brash colonial ways and broad Jamaican accent that he retained throughout his life. Ironically, the Lord Mayor's coach that Beckford would have rode around in bears a little West Indian of its own, an allegory of the Americas.

Beckford's wealth and ostentation did not endear him to many of his peers, although his generous hospitality assisted his social aspirations, so much so that, on one occasion, six dukes, two marquises, twenty-three earls and fourteen barons joined a procession in his honour before sitting down to a famed Beckford banquet. The directness for which Jamaicans remain known, led to a clash between Beckford and King George III on the question of the prorogation of parliament – something that seems to have come back into fashion recently. The City's support for Beckford led to his monument in the Guildhall, where two women sit at his feet – one a West Indian tribeswoman holding the shield and sword of the Corporation of London, depicting the trade upon which his fortune was founded.

Another member of the City's elite was one Alderman George Hibbert, who was the Member of Parliament for Seaford and chaired both the West India Committee and the West India Dock Company from the late 1700's onwards.



The Caribbean ran through the very veins of Hibbert's family, his uncle Thomas being one of the leading planters in Jamaica who chose a mulatto slave, Charity Harry, as his common-law wife, leaving her and their two surviving daughters three plantations that at one time were staffed with over 900 slaves. It is said that Thomas spared no expense on his children, sending them to England to be educated, retaining the services of one Sir Joshua Reynolds to tutor his daughter, Jane, in art, resulting in a gold medal award for her work. All the while, her City-based first cousin strove to maintain the slave trade upon which their family's fortunes depended, despite the composition of his family. The family firm, Hibbert, Purrier and Horton of 9 Mincing Lane, later Hibbert, Fuhr and Purrier, was regarded as one of the foremost in the City and is noted for sending a young Horatio Nelson on his first ever voyage that took him to the Caribbean as a merchant seaman. The West India Committee was to write to Nelson in August 1805, congratulating him on protecting their Caribbean investments through the sagacity of his pursuit of the French back and forth across the Atlantic

that was to end months later with the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson's remains were brought home to be buried in the City's St. Paul's Cathedral with Barbados erecting the first ever Trafalgar Square in his honour, 27 years before London. Like his nemesis Napoleon, Nelson was to marry into a West Indian family. The Empress Josephine was a creole, said to have been born in St. Lucia, a fact disputed by Martinique who claim her as their own, whilst Fanny Nesbitt was born in Nevis and as such was also a creole. Her uncle governed Nevis when she married Nelson there in the presence of the future King William IV, as was a partner in Nesbitts based in Bishopsgate where their West Indian trade was conducted.



From this small roll call, we see the complex nature of Britain's deep-seated relationship with the Caribbean, albeit largely driven by the simple pursuit of profit. So attractive were the spoils of the Caribbean, that City firms constantly vied for supremacy in the market, with Drake and Long, the oldest and most respected of the City firms in the trade, headed by Beeston Long, in fierce competition with what became known as the 'first House of Jamaica' – Hibbert, Purrier and Horton. Along with competition in the City, George Hibbert also faced his own personal and familial challenges in reconciling the lifestyle of his prominent Jamaican uncle and trading partner with his own pro-slavery outlook that was confused all the more by the fact that he went on to found the RNLI, originally named the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck, perhaps inspired by the fact that countless African slaves died at sea as a consequence of the infamous trade from which his philanthropy profited, and which also funded the Bishopsgate institute.

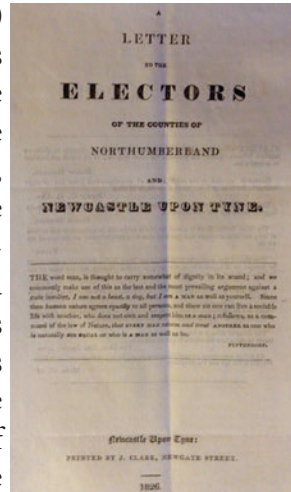
The lower classes also developed their own familial ties with the Caribbean, thanks to the endless consignment of 'transported' convicts from the City's court rooms and prisons, such as Newgate, long before the penal colony of Australia was established, ensuring that, when the supply of prisoners of

war had long since depleted, indentured slaves remained available. This was initially key to colonisation, as Britain originally sought to maintain racial balance in the colonies. After a period of indenture, these convicts had little incentive to return to the cold prospect of poverty and deprivation at home in the Mother Country and were encouraged to remain in the Caribbean with grants of land, albeit in the absence of social elevation. Ironically, the position of the freed white peasants of Barbados was such that many were forced to work for black slaves as laundresses and domestic labour in order to make ends meet, being discouraged from working side by side with black slaves in the fields in order to ostensibly maintain the hierarchy of the Plantocracy and perceived supremacy of the Europeans.

Although the politics of Britain gained an appetite for abolition, it should be noted that even the much-lauded Wilberforce, whom the City had been at great pains to undermine, did not seek the abolition of slavery per se, but, albeit commendably, the end of trafficking people from Africa in inhumane conditions. Indeed, some claim that Wilberforce was not personally attuned to people of colour, allegedly refusing, on one occasion, to have one sit at his own table. This may well have reflected the fact that his wife's family's bank, Smith & Payne, founded in Lothbury in 1758, that went on to become NatWest, were deeply invested in the West India Dock Company, acting as the receiving bank for its subscriptions.

So, contrary to popular belief, William Wilberforce did not abolish slavery. Instead its demise was secured due to the nature of commercial competition, pursued through the auspices of the City's own West India Committee, and the moral arguments of a shy, but effective young MP, the third Duke of Northumberland, who together helped to instigate the end of the inhumane practice. Much like the cut of cane, it took two strokes. A downward commercial cut by the burghers of the City and an upward political stroke by parliamentarians, such as Northumberland, to finally end slavery, making the City's West India Committee a classic example of poacher turned game keeper. As you would expect, their motive was purely commercial, as the City did not want to be undercut by other countries that were permitted to access slave labour for cheap sugar production. Hence, having successfully

participated in securing the settlement of £20 million in compensation for all British planters throughout the empire, the West India Committee once again lobbied for the deployment of the British Navy to police the west African coastline, ultimately forcing all nations to abandon the practice. As for Northumberland, the shy twenty-six year old took on Wilberforce in debate, and was only consigned to the shadows of history as there was not a quorum in the House of Commons to support his motion that slavery, and not just the trade in slaves, should be abolished if the likes of Wilberforce were genuinely concerned with the welfare of its victims. He was to refer to this debate ten years later in his campaign to retain the seat for Newcastle, likening the plight of slaves to the struggle of the British working man.



The abolition that the City, through the auspices of the West India Committee, helped to secure fuelled another domestic struggle; one that was to last 121 years and that would ultimately liberate half of the British population. At the time, much was made of the work of the avid abolitionist, Josiah Wedgwood, who wrote the classic slogan: “Am I not a man and a brother?”, accompanied by an image of a kneeling slave. This soon evolved into “Am I not a woman and a sister?”, shining the spotlight on the plight of British women who lost their independence upon marriage, including the entitlement to own property in their own right, even if it had belonged to them or their family prior to matrimony. Moreover, British women had no place or voice in the institutions that governed their lives.



It was not until 1928 that all British women gained the vote, preceded by the liberated slaves of Sierra Leone, a British colony in Africa, where property owning women gained the vote in 1792, 136 years earlier!

British female suffrage was instigated shortly after the First World War in 1918 at a time when the Caribbean was still suffering from economic disarray brought about by the war, competition with European sugar beet and insecure sources of labour. This was further aggravated by the fact that Jamaica, the largest of the British islands, was still rebuilding its capital after the 1907 earthquake, one of the worst on record. Yet, West Indians wanted to help their Mother Country in her time of distress. But Kitchener, Britain's Chief of Staff, flatly refused to countenance black men fighting Europeans, even if those Europeans were enemies of the state and, despite accepting aid comprising £4 million in cash and over £54 million in goods from the Caribbean, including state of the art equipment such as ambulances and aeroplanes, totalling over 321 billion pounds in today's money. However, King George V personally intervened. At the time the Royal Household faced its own bout of



prejudice, the King swiftly changing his family name from the Germanic: Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, adopting the name of a Royal residence, thereby creating the House of Windsor in 1917. Eventually the King won his dispute with Kitchener, and the British West India Regiment was formed that year, bearing a cap badge with a crown personally granted by the King to show his connection with the regiment.

The City played its part too, and at the 1916 Lord Mayor's Show one of the first cohorts of the 16,000 Caribbean volunteers attended as guests of honour and were sworn into the British Army by the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House. One Private Lambert remarked in the press that "*I was proud to be cheered by the people of London*".



The City's West India Committee went on to administer to the pastoral needs of both the West India Regiment, founded in 1795, and the newly established British West India Regiment from its City offices in Seething Lane, being visited there by Queen Mary, who took an interest in the provision of warm clothing for these tropical troops, many of whom had been lost through frostbite, colds and flu due to poor uniforms and camp facilities long before they had even reached a theatre of war.

The stance taken by the King, Lord Mayor and the West India Committee was a brave one, as neither the War Office nor the Foreign and Colonial Office wanted to upset the social order of colonialism and feared the experiences of the Caribbean servicemen would undermine its very existence, once the black man witnessed the realities of life in Britain that were far from superior to his own. Indeed, one of the most commented on issues in the press at the time was the healthy demeanour of the West Indians that benefitted from easy access to abundant sources of fresh food and an accommodating climate. Much was also made of the bravery of men, many of whom were mere teenagers, in volunteering to travel half-way across the world into the unknown, with many funding their own passage. In addition, a great deal was also made of their fantastic teeth!

As we can see, Caribbean society is interwoven with complex relationships, much like those within the Hibbert family, linking many West Indians with prominent families and companies in Britain, whether acknowledged or not. Indeed, if we are to believe 'you are what you eat', the tendency of the Lord Mayors to serve up to 200 tureens of Caribbean turtle soup in one sitting at Mansion House banquets adds a culinary dimension to the relationship.



Although much of what we understand of the Caribbean today is shaped by the edicts of political correctness, this recruitment poster from the Great War sets out a truth we have chosen to forget today, namely that

**YOUNG MEN
OF THE BAHAMAS**

The British Empire is engaged in a Life and Death Struggle. Never in the History of England, never since the Misty Distant Past of 2,000 years ago, has our beloved Country been engaged in such a conflict as she is engaged in to-day.

To bring to nothing this mighty attack by an unscrupulous and well prepared foe, HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY KING GEORGE has called on the men of his Empire, MEN OF EVERY CLASS, CREED AND COLOUR, to

COME FORWARD TO FIGHT
that the Empire may be saved and the foe may be well beaten.

This call is to YOU, young man; not your neighbour, not your brother, not your cousin, but just YOU. SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF YOUR MATES HAVE COME UP, HAVE BEEN MEDICALLY EXAMINED AND HAVE BEEN PASSED AS "FIT."

What is the matter with YOU?
Put yourself right with your King; put yourself right with your fellowmen; put yourself right with yourself and your conscience.

ENLIST TO-DAY

West Indians are people of every class, creed and colour. This was evident from those that served during both world wars and echoed the heady social mix that was evident in the City over a century before the first such conflict. West Indians are a mix of people from the four corners of the world, from the indigenous tribesmen whose marksmanship with modern weaponry was applauded by the popular press in 1918, as was their ability to fire ten arrows in the time it took to fire one bullet and reload; to the aristocratic creole officers born in the region. Indeed, I recall coming home from school one

afternoon, dejected from yet another bout of bullying to complain to my own mother that this time I had been called 'half caste', a term which, like 'mulatto' that we did not, and still do not, regard as offensive in our family, although today we are all encouraged to do so. No, the problem was not the semantics, but that they had questioned the very blackness of my family that for the teenage me was synonymous with being West Indian! Well my mother looked at me and said, "*You are definitely not half-caste, my child.*" I was relieved by the support, not regarding my 24-carat West Indian father, albeit somewhat pale around the gills, as being anything other than West Indian, and so I stopped crying instantly, that is, until she continued: "*You are, of course a tri-racial hybrid like many of us from Home!*" Stunned into silence and after much thought, I realised for the first time how truly mixed my own family was, and decided this was rather cool and not a bad state of affairs, as it made me literally a woman of the world, something I am proud of to this very day!

In the aftermath of the two world conflicts, cries for help went out again, with Commonwealth citizens being invited by the likes of the great statesman, Churchill, to come and rebuild the Mother Country. Sadly, what was unknown to the thousands of West Indians that responded to this third plea for help, including my dear parents, was that there was an unwritten, official policy that they were to be discouraged from settling in Britain

permanently. The signs in the windows stating '*no blacks, no dogs, no Irish*' did little to portray the extent of this government policy, and it was not until a few years ago when the Windrush Scandal broke that the '*poison pill*' in immigration legislation was laid bare for all to see, decades after public transport, the NHS and countless other menial jobs had been undertaken by the Windrush generation and their descendants, often stifling their own aspirations, in many instances robbing them of opportunities to fulfil their potential.

I recall when I first came to the City in 1985 as a young solicitor to join the Company Secretary's office at Lazard's in Moorfields, feeling proud as I walked past the majestic doors of Brown and Shipley on Cheapside each morning, my late mother having told me that she had worked for the firm in the 1950's when she first came to Britain. She would never tell me exactly what she did there and having secured her diploma in banking years later when she was 50, I know it was not at the dealing desk. I fancy it was something menial, and forgettable for someone whose favourite book was Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, whose operatic repertoire included Puccini and Mendelssohn, and whose favourite poet was Thomas Gray. You may therefore only imagine the pride of my parents when my brother, who had trained as a solicitor in the City, specialising in shipping with a firm at Sugar Dock, and I moved our solicitor's practice to the City where my Stock Exchange Money-broking clients, that included my erstwhile employer, Lazards, together with Investec, Barclays de Zoete Wedd, Philips and Drew, Rowe and Pitman, King and Shaxson, Laurie Millbank, Cazenove and Cater Allen were based. The BBC, on hearing of our little practice above Sweetings, commented that it was now the only West Indian firm in the City. A situation that was, arguably, far from the truth.

Today, long after the East India Company has gone, and Caribbean sugar, bananas, and other produce no longer grace our tables, the West India Committee is 285 years old and I have had the honour of leading its recovery during the past ten years from being two hours off being wound up to becoming a Consulting NGO to UNESCO whose work has been adopted by the UN. It is the only Royal Charter institution that actively promotes the general welfare of the peoples of the Caribbean,

whether in response to natural, climate change driven disasters such as Hurricane Irma, where in 2018 the Committee, with the help of a donation from a City firm, built the only maternity hospital on the British Overseas Territory of Anguilla; undertook a training programme for Metropolitan Police recruits from minority groups, successfully lobbying for the abolition of its prohibitive £1,000 examination fee; raised awareness within the UK government of the impact of Brexit on a British Caribbean island with direct borders with the EU in the region; and continue our on-going mission to maintain, develop and make publicly accessible the West India Committee library and collection, one of the most important collections on the Caribbean in the world that is now inscribed as a UNESCO Memory of the World, second only to a World Heritage Site, that attracts visitors from around the world. The West India Committee is also one of the key advisers to the Home Secretary on the resolution of the Windrush Scandal whereby West Indians, many of whom are now elderly and infirm, many of whom have dedicated their entire working lives to their mother country, are being wrongfully denied access to employment, housing, driving licences and the NHS, with many still forced to live in fear of incarceration and deportation due to legislation the government now fully accepts as morally flawed.

May I close by reminding you all of three things:

Firstly, that the West India Committee is and has always been an intrinsic part of the City of London;

Secondly, that our charity's extensive, constructive work is a legacy of the City, vividly demonstrating that it is possible to turn from poacher to gamekeeper, provided good truly eclipses genuine evil, even in the context of commerce; and

Thirdly, that the City of London has always been, to use my mother's term: a multinational hybrid that, through the auspices of institutions such as the West India Committee, has and may continue to change London and the wider world for the better, having learnt lessons from the mistakes of its past. I hope the City will embrace its West Indian heritage with open

arms and will once again work with the West India Committee at a time when a market place that is home to over 44 million people from the four corners of the world may prove an attractive prospect for agriculture, manufacturing, trade, industry for the benefit of us all.

Thank you.
Mrs Blondel Cluff CBE



The West India Committee Rooms,
Suite 53, 4 Whitehall Court, London, SW1A 2EL

<http://westindiacommittee.org/>

THE HISTORY OF THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE

1735
The West India Committee meets to protest to King George II about Jamaican trading practices



1798
The Committee founds the Thames River Police, London's first preventative police force that later merged with subsequently formed Peelers to form today's Metropolitan Police



A Royal Navy ship capturing a slaving vessel



An Appeal Poster

2014-2016
WIC runs a Heritage Lottery funded project to highlight the involvement of the Caribbean and her people in WWI. A temporary exhibition is held at the Museum of London Docklands, extended to one year by popular demand



1700

1775
The West India Committee becomes a permanent body after a meeting at the London Tavern in Bishopsgate on 18th January

1800

1836
The Committee coordinates fundraising to end slave ownership and slave labour. After emancipation in the British West Indies, the Committee reaches out to slaves from Portuguese and Spanish colonies and assists them in being granted asylum in declared safe havens

1847
The Committee secures a continental security force for Africa to protect against slave-trading and deter would-be slave traders

1900

1904
King Edward VII grants the West India Committee a Royal Charter of Incorporation

1975
The West India Committee holds its 250th Anniversary Banquet, with the Duke of Edinburgh as Guest of Honour

2000

2016
WIC's library and archive is inscribed as a UNESCO Memory of the World

2019
The Committee advises the Home Office on the ongoing Windrush Affair

1735-1775
The West India Planters and Merchants band together at various points to defend their interests

1802
Committee members form the West India Dock Company and build West India Docks, London's first Wet Docks, containing the longest brick building in the world



West India Quay today - Home of the Museum of London Docklands

1875-1900
WIC campaigns against the Sugar Bounty System which gave an unfair commercial advantage to sugar producers in Europe

1787
The West India Committee successfully petitions King George III to send Captain Bligh and *HMS Bounty* to Polynesia to take breadfruit and mangoes to the Caribbean



The Mutiny on the Bounty

1844
The Committee convinces the Government to encourage immigration to the West Indies from India, China and Africa to build a labour force

1915
WIC becomes the secretariat of the West Indian Contingent Committee administering to the needs of the 16,000 volunteers that formed the British West Indies Regiment during the First World War. Princess Mary is patron of the Ladies' Committee and frequently visited the Committee Rooms

The Regimental badge of the B.W.I.R.



1921
The Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, is Guest of Honour at a West India Committee Banquet

2012
The Committee organises Prince Harry's highly successful Diamond Jubilee Tour of the Caribbean and was commended by HM Queen Elizabeth II. The Committee also arranges for Prince Edward and the Countess of Wessex to visit Montserrat and Anguilla



2015-2017
WIC runs a Bursary Scheme to help people from disadvantaged backgrounds to become police officers

2017
WIC raises EC\$1,075,140 (almost £300,000) during Anguilla's recovery from Hurricane Irma to build the island's only Maternity Ward



