

Slavery in South Australia

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Extracted from "Born Free: Wage-slaves and Chattel-slaves," Carolyn Collins and Paul Sendziuk, (eds) *Foundational Fictions in South Australian History*, (Wakefield Press, 2018), 64-78.

The chapter is accessible on www.surplusvalue.org.au/mcqueen

In the new anti-imperialist world which began in the forties {1840s}, emphasis shifted, where empire had to be maintained, from islands to continents, from tropical to temperate climates, from plantations of blacks to settlements of whites.

Eric Williams, 1944.¹

In the entry on George Fife Angas in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* we read:

By 1822, Angas was carrying the main burden of his father's large establishment at Newcastle, with branches in British ports, the West Indies and Spanish America. In 1824 he moved to London to form the shipping business of G.F. Angas & Co. Next year he nearly overreached himself in bubble speculations, but recovered with his father's help.²

Here were foundational facts to interrogate: how could Angas contribute to the South Australian Company? Part of his investment derived from his family's wage-slaves who crafted furniture out of Honduran mahogany harvested by chattel-slaves,³ while a portion came from participating in the

¹ Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966, p.131.

² Anon. (D.H. Pike?), 'Angas, George Fife', Douglas Pike (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Volume I, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1966, p.15; on the heavy losses, Edwin Hodder, *George Fife Angas, Father and Founder of South Australia*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896, p.31, who implies a year or two earlier.

³ Hodder, *Angas*, pp.21-3; Adam Bowett, 'The English Mahogany Trade 1700-1793', Doctoral thesis, Brunel University, 1996, pp.184-92 and 205-8; Craig Stephen Revels, 'Timber, trade, and transformation: a historical geography of mahogany in Honduras' (2002). LUS Doctoral Dissertations. 1285. http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/1285; O. Nigel Bolland, *The Foundation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977, and O.

Atlantic trades that equipped the slave economies, as he could boast in September 1822: ‘...probably we have sent as great a quantity of British goods out during the past year as any of the Bay merchants, one excepted.’⁴ Two years later, he became a ‘shipper’, going deeper into that triangular trade. Because his father had accumulated a hoard from like sources, he was able to rescue George Fife from ruin after 1825.

Like every venture, the invasion of South Australia was weaned on the slave system.⁵ The compensation money flowed to the other colonies.⁶ The Institute of Biography should set a researcher to track through the on-line volumes of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* using keywords such as ‘planter’ and Jamaica to compile a list of names to match against the University College’s listing of recipients. That method will not capture those who inherited from maternal forebears or through marriage.

Erwin Hodder’s praise for Angas’s 1822-3 campaign to free 200-300 Indian slaves along the Mosquito Coast⁷ gives no hint of the Africans for whose emancipation Angas would receive £6,345 6s in compensation after 1833.⁸ Without company files and private papers we can but guess why his concern for the Indians did not preclude his ownership of as many Africans. Did the logging methods of the Indians’ ‘owners’ threaten his profits? Did he expect to convert the Indians more readily than his own chattels? Whatever the reasoning, his conscience did not run to manumission.⁹

Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871*, Kingston, I.S.E.R. University of the West Indies, 1977.

⁴ Hodder, p.30.

⁵ Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery, From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800*, London: Verso, 1997, chapter XII; Catherine Hall et. al. (eds), *Emancipation and the remaking of the British Imperial World*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014.

⁶ For examples see Clinton Fernandes, *Island off the Coast of Asia, Instruments of Statecraft in Australian Foreign Policy*, Clayton: Monash University Press, 2018, pp.13-15.

⁷ Hodder, pp.30-36; David Lambert, ‘“True Lovers of religion”: Methodist persecution and white resistance to anti-slavery in Barbados, 1823-1825’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2002, pp.216-36; A.G.L. Shaw, *Sir George Arthur, 1784-1854*, Carlton: MUP, 1980, makes no mention of Angas although Arthur had been superintendent and commandant in British Honduras from 1814 to 1822. Competing claims over jurisdiction and uncertain borders make it hard to be sure which of Angas’s business and missionary acts were in Belize and which in British Honduras; cf. Doug Tompson, ‘Between Slavery and Freedom on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras’, *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2012, pp.403-16; for the backdrop to imperial conflicts see Karl H. Offen, ‘Creating Mosquitia: mapping Amerindian spatial practices in eastern Central America, 1629-1779’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp.254-82.

⁸ www.UCL.ac.uk/lbs records Angas’s signing claims no. 51 for £685 15s; no. 199 for £1,642 17s; no. 231 for £2,176 17s and no. 244 for £2,439 17s. Newspapers feel obliged to pretend that their total is around £5m. in today’s money; a sounder comparison is with the British budget at the time of £40m.; a seven-storey Arkwright mill for £15,000, and an agricultural labourer at less than ten shillings a week.

⁹ Although Britain abolished the trade in slaves out of Africa in 1807, dealing in the already enslaved and their offspring continued around the Americas, officially until the mid-1830s, to be winked at for

Angas was not the only beneficiary from dealing in 'living tools' to promote the Company. Two Montefiore brothers involved themselves with the early years of the Province: Jamaica-born Jacob (1801-95) and Joseph Barrow (1803-93).¹⁰ The surviving third of the Barbados Naval Office Records between 1781 and 1806 show that their father, Eliezer, had traded 211 slaves to Demerara and Belize.¹¹ The brothers signed compensation claims as trustees for three children of a tenant in tail; No. 2374 for £386 was granted but no. 2029 for £514 12s was not. (Sir) Moses Montefiore, recorded in his diary on 7 May 1835, that he had

called at Downing Street on the Right Hon. Spring-Rice, Chancellor of the Exchequer. I was immediately admitted and received by him in a most friendly manner. I thanked him for having, at my request, appointed Jacob Montefiore one of Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Colonisation of South Australia. The Chancellor spoke of the many new schemes now afloat of Companies of small capital, and said he would always be glad to see me.¹²

As he was on 23 August 1835 when Montefiore returned with his regular partner and in-law, Nathan Rothschild,¹³ to contract for the £15m. loan, equivalent to forty percent of the British budget, which the government needed to compensate the slave-owners.¹⁴ Jacob visited Adelaide in June 1843 and again in 1854.¹⁵ Joseph spent thirteen years in New South Wales until his

decades thereafter by Whitehall to get cheap sugar from Cuba and Brazil. Eric Williams, 'The British West Indian Slave Trade After Its Abolition', *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 27, no 2, 1942, pp.175-91; D. Eltis, 'The Traffic in Slaves between the British West Indian Colonies, 1807-1833', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 25, no. 1, 1972, pp.55-64.

¹⁰ Israel Getzler, 'Joseph Barrow Montefiore', *ADB*, vol. 2, Carlton: MUP, pp.250-1.

¹¹ Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade, Setting the Record Straight*, New York: New York University Press, 1998, p.130.

¹² L. Loewe (ed.) *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, volume I, Chicago: Belford-Clarke, 1890, p.94.

¹³ In partnership with Rothschild, Baring and Gurney, Montefiore formed the Alliance Assurance in 1824 with capital of £5m. for its worldwide operations, including marine insurance, after the London Assurance and the Royal Exchange lost their 100-year duopoly over Bottomry, William Schooling, *Alliance Assurance (1824-1924)*, London: Alliance Assurance, 1924, pp.1-2 and 10-13; for the Marine Insurance Act, pp.76-7.

¹⁴ For the terms see Loewe (ed.) *Diaries*, pp.98-99; the government had to borrow a total of £20m., and to pass an Act late in 1837 to restructure the debt, J.H. Clapham, *The Bank of England: A History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 944 pp.148-50; David Kynaston makes no mention of the loan in either of his books covering the period, *The City of London. Volume I: A World of Its Own*, London: Pimlico, 1995, *Till Time's Last Sand: A History of the Bank of England 1694-2013*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016,. No mention of these dealings appears in the *DNB* entry for Moses Montefiore, or in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, volume VIII, New York: Funk & Wagnells, 1904, pp.668-71.

¹⁵ Hirsch Munz, *Jews in South Australia*, Adelaide, n.p., 1936, pp.12-14, reprints an extract from *The Observer*, 1 January 1887.

1841 bankruptcy, which saw his return to London, before taking up residence in Adelaide between 1846 and 1860.¹⁶

Following the Company's money trail leads to the retired financier and Dissenter, Samuel Mills, who had put up most of the £23,000 contributed by early November 1835, and who could offer £120,000 in 1841 to take over the Company debt. Mills had made his millions from the London Assurance Co.,¹⁷ which flourished on marine insurance for slave goods and against fire in the sugar refineries along the West India Dock.¹⁸

Other South Australians to receive compensation included the poet Fidelia Hill, who inherited an estate in Jamaica where she lived with her husband, Robert, between 1830 and 1835, from whence, flush with compensation, they moved to Adelaide 'on the understanding that [he] would be given a position.' The Creole Edward Stirling (1804-73) arrived with a remittance of £1,000 in 1838 to cut a huge figure in mining and pastoral endeavours, serve in the Legislative Council, take a hand in the colony's constitution, father Sir John Lancelot and Sir Edward Charles, and have a small municipality named after him in the Adelaide Hills. With compensation funds, the two sons of Neill Malcolm set up Poltalloch cattle station after 1838, expecting to resettle tenants cleared off the Clan estates in Argyllshire.¹⁹ Sir Robert Dalrymple Ross (1828-87), an inheritor from his father's slaves in St Vincent, became treasurer and Speaker in the House of Assembly from 1881 until his death. The sixth governor, Sir James Fergusson, inherited from absentee slave-owners.²⁰ By way of contrast, a West Indian seaman, James Gordon, convicted at Port Adelaide in 1837 of stealing a watch, was

¹⁶ Munz, pp.11-17; A. Fabian, 'Early Days of South Australian Jewry', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, vol. II, Part ??, 1944-48, pp.140-2; D.J. Benjamin, 'The First Montefiore in Australia', vol. II, Part IX, 1944-48, pp.467-71.

¹⁷ Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2nd edition, 1967, pp.122 and 187.

¹⁸ A.H. John, 'The London Assurance Company and the Marine Insurance Market of the Eighteenth Century', *Economica*, New Series, vol. 25, no. 98, 1958, pp.126-41; Clive Trebilcock, *Phoenix Assurance*, Volume I, Cambridge: CUP, 1985, pp.96-112; Robin Pearson and David Richardson, 'Business Networking in the Industrial Revolution', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 54, no. 4, 2001, pp.657-79; for the Montefiore involvements see Nicholas Draper, 'Helping to make Britain great', Catherine Hall *et al.* (eds), *Legacies of British Slave Ownership*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.107.

¹⁹ Rodney Cockburn, *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*, Blackwood: Lynton, 1974, volume I, pp.80-1 and volume II, pp.192-3.

²⁰ Nicholas Draper is mistaken about the Montefiore brothers' receiving compensation, 'Helping to Make Britain Great', in Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper and Keith McClelland (eds), *Legacies of British Slave Ownership*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.63.

transported from the free colony to serve his seven-year sentence in the penal one across the border.²¹

Less directly, but more pervasively, financing the trade in slave-produced goods, more than the slave trade itself, called forth the regime of credit pivotal for the revolution inside capital.²² For like the Tobacco Lords of Glasgow before 1778,²³ and like Jane Austin's Reverend father, gentlemen did not need to trade in human cargoes or to own slaves – as did the Gladstones and the Barings - in order to benefit from the system.²⁴ That bloodline explains why the free-trade British cotton-millers had to support the slaveholders revolt in the early 1860s.

The Faustian bargain struck by capitalists between indulgence and accumulation²⁵ allowed space for slave-based fortunes to endow the theological *Hibbert Journal* and the Codrington Library, All Souls College, Oxford, as well as many a stately home besides Fontill Abbey and Bromley Hill Place. Inheritor of wealth from the West Indies along with the Lascelles peerage, the seventh Earl of Harewood directed the 1988 Adelaide Festival of the Arts.²⁶ As Walter Benjamin remarks: 'There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'²⁷ 'The glory that was Greece/ And the grandeur that was Rome' were paid for out of dehumanising toil, from which the Athens of the South was not to be exempt.

²¹ Ian Duffield, 'From Slave Colonies to Penal Colonies: The West Indian Convict Transportees to Australia', *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1986, p.31; cf. Clare Anderson, 2009.

²² R.B. Sheridan, 'The Commercial and Financial Organisation of the British Slave Trade, 1750-1807', *Economic History Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1958, pp.249-63; Joseph E. Inikori, 'The Credit Needs of the African Trade and the Development of the Credit Economy in England', *Explorations in Economic History*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1990, pp.197-31.

²³ T.M. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords; a study of the tobacco merchants of Glasgow and their trading activities, 1740-1790*, Edinburgh: Donald, 1975; Carol Hill, 'Galloway Shipping and Regional Development, 1750-1850', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1999, pp.95-116.

²⁴ Brian Southam, 'The silence of the Bertrams, Slavery and the chronology of *Mansfield Park*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 February 1995, pp.13-14; Edward W. Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, pp.69-70 and 110-16; more to the liking of the Jane-ites is Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the war of ideas*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975, which ignores slavery more thoroughly than did its subject.

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, I, London: Penguin, 1976, p.741.

²⁶ Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, pp.88-90 and 94.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, London: Fontana, 1973, p.259; see my 'Barbarisms and civilisations', *Temper Democratic*, Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1998, pp.217-26. The Earl of Chatham thought it 'barbarism' not to 'consider the sugar colonies as the landed interest of this kingdom', quoted Williams, p.95; for an exemplar of civilized barbarity see Trevor Burnard, *Master, Tyranny and Desire, Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.