

# Global Lives: Hidden Exeter Histories

This online exhibition displays student work from the 'Global Lives: Multicultural Geographies' module at the University of Exeter, run by Professors Nicola Thomas and Ian Cook. In this course, students researched the involvement of Exeter citizens in the creation, profiting, and resistance to the British Empire. They then produced their own DIY plaques, and temporarily installed them around the city where traces remain of their subjects' lives.

The plaques are the students' own work and are not part of any official blue plaque scheme. The views expressed are those of the students and do not necessarily represent the views of ECC, RAMM, or our partner organisations.

'Guerrilla memorialisation' is a form of playful activism that reworks familiar markers of heritage – like blue plaques – in order to question who is celebrated and what they are celebrated for, and to offer missing and alternative perspectives. This selection of plaques concentrates on the hidden traces of Exeter's connections to the transatlantic slave trade.

Guerrilla memorialisation often includes the names of heritage organisations to encourage them to adopt more critical approaches. However, in this selection, the identities of organisations mentioned on some of the plaques have been redacted.

To find out more about the module and the students' work, follow the links below:

[https://geography.exeter.ac.uk/staff/modules/?mod\\_code=GE02133](https://geography.exeter.ac.uk/staff/modules/?mod_code=GE02133)

<https://guerrillamemorialisationexeter.wordpress.com/>

The creation of this work was informed by the students' collaborative academic research with the [Devon and Exeter Institution](#), [Telling Our Stories Finding Our Roots](#), [Legacies of Devon Slave-ownership Group](#), and RAMM.

Exeter Civic Society welcomes new nominations for blue plaques. To find out more, please follow the link below:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/blue-plaque-listings/who-is-missing/nomination-guidance/>

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## Annabel Gedye – ‘The Davy Family’

Site: Glasshouse Lane, Exeter



Annabel Gedye focused her plaque on the Davy family of Devon, to show how prominent Exeter people played a significant role in the slave trade. Generations of the family owned hundreds of enslaved people across nine plantations in Jamaica, naming their estates after locations in Exeter: Topsham, Countess Wear and Heavitree. The village of Davytown was also named after them, and many people now living there have the Davy name, as descendants of the enslaved people who were given their surname.

The plaque refers to the Glasshouse Lane area, near the old port of the river Exe, where Robert Davy's ship carried cargo produced by enslaved people. Its washed-out blue colour represents the faded histories of enslavement, in contrast to the well-told story of abolition.

## A.K. – ‘Thomas (1785-1862) & Henry Phillpotts (1778-1869)’

Site: Henry Phillpotts’ plaque in the Lady Chapel of Exeter Cathedral

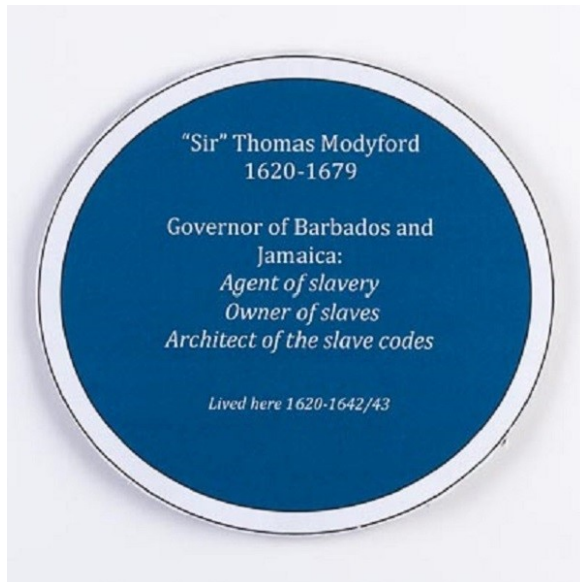


This plaque draws attention to Henry Phillpotts – Bishop of Exeter from 1830 to 1869 – and his younger brother Thomas. Thomas owned 778 enslaved people across nine different Jamaican estates and received direct compensation of around £9,854 (approximately £668,141 today) after abolition.

Henry also received compensation for freed enslaved people. However, the student notes that this was through his position as a legal executor of a will, not directly. Nevertheless, Henry did speak out in support of slavery in 1824, in a letter published in a local newspaper. This plaque was created to highlight the point that not all Christians showed opposition to the slave trade.

## Thomas Buckland – ‘Sir Thomas Modyford, 1620-1679’

Site: Modyford’s childhood home on North Street, Exeter



Thomas Buckland’s plaque marks the life of Thomas Modyford, who was born and lived in central Exeter for 22 years. He was a trader in enslaved African people, governor of Barbados and Jamaica, and was responsible for bringing ‘Slave Codes’ to Jamaica.

These laws characterised enslaved humans as ‘chattels’ (property to be bought and sold without human rights) who could be violently punished and controlled without consequence. The Codes were in place for over 200 years.

## Jasmine Jump – ‘Sir John Colleton, 1679-1754’

Site: Colleton Crescent, Exeter



Jasmine Jump created this plaque for Exmouth-born Sir John Colleton, who was celebrated for bringing Magnolia plants to England from South Carolina. His family owned plantations there, on land seized from the Yemassee indigenous people and worked by enslaved African people.

Jasmine aimed to highlight that Colleton was only able to introduce the Magnolia flower because of his colonial endeavours. In her design, the flower is held by shackled hands to acknowledge the Colleton family's participation in the slave trade. A number of places, locations and streets in Exeter are named after him and his family.

## Megan Wilkinson – ‘William Kellitt Hewitt, 1756-1812’

Site: Hewitt’s wall memorial in the Cloisters of Exeter Cathedral



William Kellitt Hewitt owned enslaved people across three plantations in St. Elizabeth in Jamaica, which were inherited by his wife and children in 1812. Megan Wilkinson was inspired by his memorial in Exeter cathedral, which is written in Latin.

By providing an English translation, Megan aimed to demystify who Hewitt is, and show that the original made no reference to his colonial connections. She has added the information that he was a ‘slave owner’ in order to rewrite his ‘authorised’ history in this iconic Exeter location and to make hidden links visible.



## **Rosanna Ormandy – ‘Frederick Douglass, 1817-1895’**

**Site: The site of the Royal Subscription Rooms (now Boots),  
Exeter High Street**



Frederick Douglass – the formerly enslaved American abolitionist, social reformer, writer and statesman – completed a two-year tour of Britain and Ireland in 1845-6 to seek support for the abolition of slavery in America.

Created by Rosanna Ormandy, this plaque commemorates his visit to Exeter in 1846. She placed it on the site of the Royal Subscription Rooms, where Douglass gave an eloquent and rousing anti-slavery speech. The Western Times reported that 'The room was densely crowded in every part...' and the audience responded with 'vehement cheering'.

Rosanna's plaque draws attention to the essential role that Black activists played in informing and inspiring the anti-slavery movement in Britain.

## Julia Wolfle – ‘The Baring Dynasty’

Site: The Baring’s childhood home on Holloway Street, Exeter



Julia Wolfle’s plaque marks the local Baring family’s connections to Exeter, the transatlantic slave trade and the East India Company.

Their internationally-renowned Barings Bank (which collapsed in 1995) was partly built on profits from these connections, as the family created and benefitted from the financial and political infrastructure of trade across the British Empire. This included providing credit, underwriting insurance, arranging shipping for slave voyages, and trading commodities produced by enslaved workers.

Julia’s plaque recognises that, as bankers, merchants, and politicians, the family and its colonial connections left numerous physical, economic and cultural traces across Exeter.

## Edward Beynon-Davies – ‘Dahlia Graham, 1761-1854’

Site: Dahlia Graham’s former place of work on Pennsylvania Road, Exeter



By designing a plaque to commemorate the life of Dahlia Graham, Edward Beynon-Davies aimed to give voice to a marginalised figure, making her important historical narrative and contribution to British society visible. Dahlia was a Senegalese woman who survived the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade and lived the rest of her life in Exeter. She worked as a domestic servant for Mrs Harriet Louis Wardrobe between the 1830s and 1850s, and died in Exeter’s workhouse aged 93 in 1854.

Edward chose Dahlia Graham as the subject of his plaque to highlight that, in 19th century Exeter, there was a black population with first-hand experience of slavery. The lack of available information about her shows that the lives of domestic labourers and black communities were not documented with the same attention as those of their wealthy white owners.

## George Wooldridge, 'Sir John Hawkins, 1532-1595'

Site: The Ship Inn, Martins Lane, Exeter



George Wooldridge's plaque focuses on Sir John Hawkins, a Plymouth-born naval commander and privateer for Queen Elizabeth I.

In 1562, Hawkins first broke the Spanish monopoly on importing enslaved people to the Caribbean, pioneering the English slave trade. The plaque's triangular shape represents Hawkins' role in establishing the Triangle Trade, selling his captives to Spanish colonies in the West Indies and bringing back goods for sale.

George placed the plaque on the historic The Ship Inn in Exeter, a pub said to be frequented by Hawkins' cousin, Sir Francis Drake. Drake joined Hawkins on his later voyages and together they helped pave the way for British imperial expansion in the West Indies.

## Andrew Noble – ‘John Codrington Bampfylde, 1754-1797’

Site: Bampfylde Street, Exeter



Andrew Noble’s plaque marks the contribution of Devon-born romantic poet, John Bampfylde, to the anti-slavery movement. After reading the translation of a French Enlightenment text on the inhumanity of slavery and colonial policy, Bampfylde published a sonnet supporting its arguments in 1778. Text from this poem features around the edge of this plaque.

His mother, however, came from a wealthy family of Caribbean sugar barons whose land was worked by enslaved people. Andrew’s plaque highlights that, even within families enriched by profits from the slave trade, there were still disagreements about its morality.

## Rhys Joseph – ‘Thomas Maxwell Adams, 1771-1806’

Site: Adams’ former house on Lower Argyll Road, Exeter (now Reed Hall, University of Exeter)



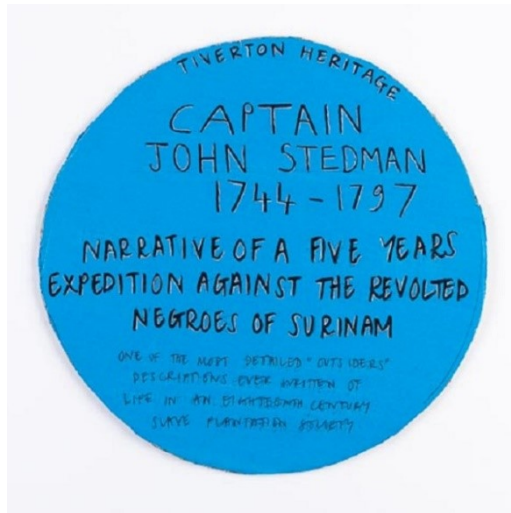
By making a plaque for Thomas Maxwell Adams, Rhys Joseph aimed to highlight the ways in which slavery-generated wealth passed through generations and helped form the the fabric of Exeter.

Adams inherited the Adams Castle estate in Barbados from his father. Also named Thomas, he was a pro-slavery advocate in the time of abolition, and believed in the natural inferiority of African people.

The younger Adams spent the final years of his life living in Exeter at Duryard Lodge. After abolition, his widow received £4,400, 8 shillings and 7 pence (approximately £300,000 today) for the loss of 216 enslaved people who had worked at the Adams estate.

## Daniel Kelly – ‘Captain John Stedman, 1744-1797’

Site: Stedman’s former school in Tiverton

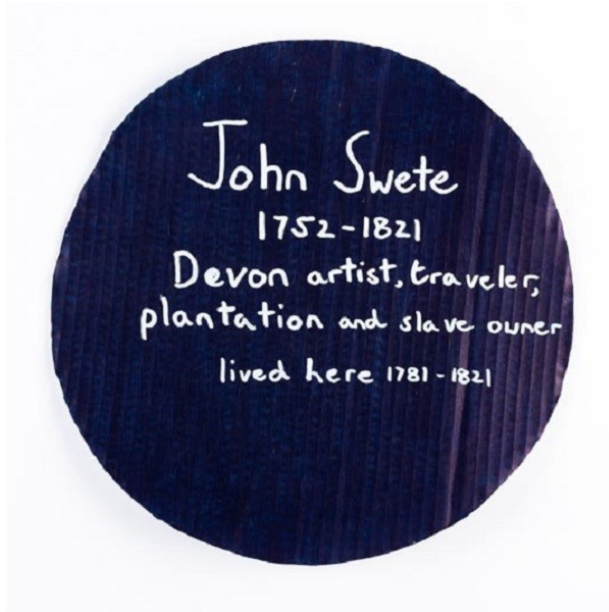


Daniel Kelly focused his plaque on Captain John Stedman, a Dutch-born colonial soldier from Tiverton who wrote *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. The book played a part in early abolitionist movements due to its detailed descriptions of the violence experienced by enslaved workers.

The plaque highlights the complexity of this story. Stedman was involved in fighting those who had revolted, but his writing also exposed the horrors that enslaved people faced. Stedman married an enslaved woman, Joanna, and their son Johnny was born into slavery. But, following his mother's death, Stedman paid for his freedom and he went to school in Tiverton.

## James Martyr, 'John Swete, 1752-1821'

Site: Swete's former house, Kenton, Exeter



Created by James Martyr, this plaque draws attention to the celebrated artist, traveller and clergyman John Swete, who inherited a plantation in Antigua. He lived in Kenton, Exeter for 40 years, in a house bought and rebuilt using plantation wealth in 1781.

Swete's watercolours are widely considered to be part of Devon's heritage. However, this plaque demonstrates that he would not have been able to pursue his passion for painting without the inherited wealth generated by 88 enslaved people working in his plantation.



## Natalie Cleverly, 'Heavitree'

Site: 'The Voices of Heavitree' information board, opposite the Heavitree Arch, Exeter



Created by Natalie Cleverly, this plaque explores the life of James Davy whose son John founded Heavitree, a Jamaican plantation named after Davy's childhood home in Exeter. Titled 'Heavitree', this plaque draws attention to the links between the Exeter suburb and its Jamaican namesake.

The use of pink on this plaque recalls the colour used to show British colonies on global maps from the era.

## **Transcribed plaque captions**

### **Annabel Gedye – The Davy Family**

‘Heavitree Heritage

The Davy Family

Conquerors of Jamaica 1790.

Slave owners, plantation masters, colonial savages.

The Davy family used shops built here by Robert Davy to transport goods farmed by slaves on their plantations in Jamaica.’

### **A.K. – Thomas and Henry Phillpotts**

‘Thomas & Henry Phillpotts

1785-1862      1778-1869

One brother a SLAVE OWNER, the other an outspoken bishop of Exeter who FAILED to speak out against the most abhorrent issue of his time.’

### **Thomas Buckland – Sir Thomas Modyford**

“Sir” Thomas Modyford 1620-1679

Governor of Barbados and Jamaica:

*Agent of slavery*

*Owner of Slaves*

*Architect of the slave codes*

Lived here 1620-1642/43’

### **Jasmine Jump – Sir John Colleton**

‘Sir John Colleton 1679-1754

Commemorated for introducing magnolias to Devon.

The Colleton family owned over 400 slaves.’

### **Megan Wilkinson – William Kellitt Hewitt**

‘H.S.E.

Here lies William Kellitt Hewitt of Cashoo in the parish of St Elizabeth in the island of Jamaica.

Knight and also keeper of the King’s Peace at Druryard adjacent to this city.

SLAVE OWNER

He died mourned by his wife, children, friends, servants, relatives 11th June 1812 AD aged 55.’

### **Rosanna Ormandy – Frederick Douglass**

‘Frederick Douglass 1846

Escapee slave and advocate for American freedom.’

### **Julia Wolfe – The Baring Dynasty**

‘The BARING DYNASTY

Founders of Barings Bank 1762-1995

Profiteers of slave trade and human misery, opponents of abolition.

Lived here in the now demolished Great Larkbeare House 1737-1819’

### **Edward Beynon-Davies – Dahlia Graham**

‘Dahlia Graham 1761-1854

Captured and enslaved as a young girl from her place of birth in Senegal, Dahlia was transported thousands of miles across the world with the transatlantic slave trade. Dahlia displayed immense courage and strength of will to live through the perils

of such an oppressive and dehumanising time and in around 1833 was moved to Exeter upon the abolition of slavery. It is here in Rose Cottage where she worked for over 20 years, establishing herself as a longstanding member of the Exeter community.'

### **George Wooldridge – Sir John Hawkins**

'Sir John Hawkins 1532-1595

- i) Admiral, naval commander, accomplice of Sir Francis Drake.
- ii) Slave trafficker, pirate, stole 300 Africans by sword.'

### **Andrew Noble – John Codrington Bampfylde**

'John Codrington Bampfylde (1754-1797)

Rejected his ancestry and promoted the freedom of slaves that his family stole.'

### **Rhys Joseph – Thomas Maxwell Adams**

'Thomas Maxwell Adams 1771-1806

Plantation owner and person of Religious Significance.'

### **Daniel Kelly – Captain John Stedman**

'Tiverton Heritage

Captain John Stedman 1744-1797

Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam.

One of the most detailed 'outsiders' descriptions ever written of life in an eighteenth century slave plantation society.'

## **James Martyr – John Swete**

‘John Swete 1752-1821

Devon artist, traveller, plantation and slave owner lived here  
1781-1821’

## **Natalie Cleverly – Heavitree**

‘HEAVITREE

James Davy left Exeter in the 1790’s.

His son founded Heavitree, Jamaica. His family returned to  
England, rich as a result of slavery, theft and colonial  
oppression.’