



The Centre for the study of the
Legacies of British Slavery



INSIDE THIS SPRING/SUMMER 2025 ISSUE OF *TRACES*, A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

One Big Family
Matthew J. Smith



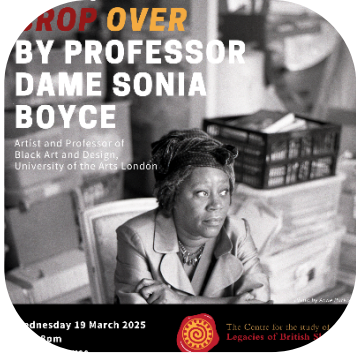
FEATURE PROJECT

Royal Society
Matthew J. Smith



ADVANCED SEARCH

Deep Rivers: A Transatlantic Conversation
Kelly Haggart, Sharon Pope and Vilma Ruddock



REVIEW

Elsa V. Goveia Speaker Series 2025:
Crop Over by Professor Dame Sonia Boyce
Jess Hannah

REVIEW

Launch of Chloe Ireton's Book, *Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic*
Matthew J. Smith

OF THIS AND THAT

CSLBS moments with Jess Hannah

DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

One Big Family

PROFESSOR MATTHEW J. SMITH

Director of CSLBS

Years ago in Port-au-Prince a historian shared with me in passionate Kreyol his firm belief that everyone in Haiti was related. It is a romantic proposition. If we are all kin then we must all share in the triumphs and accept with the same blame the consequences of our modern life. I took a bigger point from what he said. It was important to him that the sense of a nation had to be more than attachment by birth. If we think about it, to some degree that is the chief motivation for genealogical research.

Family history research is today a multi-billion-dollar industry that is projected to triple in revenue over the next decade. Genealogy has as one of its great rewards that tingling sense of surprise when an unknown intersection among lines in a web of family connections is discovered. Researchers in Caribbean family histories form a notable part of this community but are limited for lack of clear resources and breadcrumbs to follow.

Fortunately, independent researcher Vilma Ruddock has addressed this problem in her recent book, *Jamaican Genealogy Research: A Practical Guide to the Best Resources for Tracing Your Ancestry*. Vilma devotes part of her book to how to use our database for searching for family connections. After reading the book, we invited two of our enterprising volunteers, Kelly Haggart and Sharon Pope, both well-versed themselves in doing Jamaican family history, to enter a conversation with Vilma about using records of violence to find and chart intergenerational histories. In this issue's Advanced Search section, we showcase that conversation in the form of responses from Vilma to Kelly and Sharon's questions. It is a fascinating dialogue on the methods and objectives of doing family history research on Caribbean persons.

"I am more than delighted to share with our community that our Digital History project, New World Royalists, has now launched into the world."

There are naturally other definitions of family than biological descent. At the CSLBS we like to think of ourselves in familial terms as committed researchers who rely on one another to realise a common mission. When we get to that point of completion based on joint effort, it is a shared feeling of proud satisfaction. I am having that feeling as I write this as I am more than delighted to share with our community that our Digital History project, New World Royalists, has now

launched into the world. New World Royalists took over three years to complete and over that time our family grew to include a great number of collaborators and designers. You can read all about the whole process in our feature article, *Royal Society*.



Mural on Water Lane, Kingston, JA.

Over the Spring we co-hosted the launch of UCL historian Chloe Ireton’s remarkable monograph, *Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic*. A short review of the launch is included in this issue. We also held our fourth annual Elsa Goveia speaker series. Our feature speaker was Dame Professor Sonia Boyce and the event took place in the impressive Queen’s House at the National Maritime Museum Gardens, Greenwich. Sonia’s presentation took the form of an incredible discussion and screening of her celebrated work, *Crop/Over* on the art and meaning of Barbados’s annual event. We thank our partners at Royal Museums Greenwich and especially Sonia for making it a thrilling evening. The lecture will be shared on our YouTube channel. We have included a review of the event by Jess Hannah.

I end on a bittersweet note that Jess, a key member of our family, this spring left the CSLBS to pursue further studies. Jess has been a tremendously appreciated and subtle shaper of so much of what we do. As Jess had the most public facing role among us, I am sure you will join with me in thanking her for her incredible service and wish her well as she scales new heights.

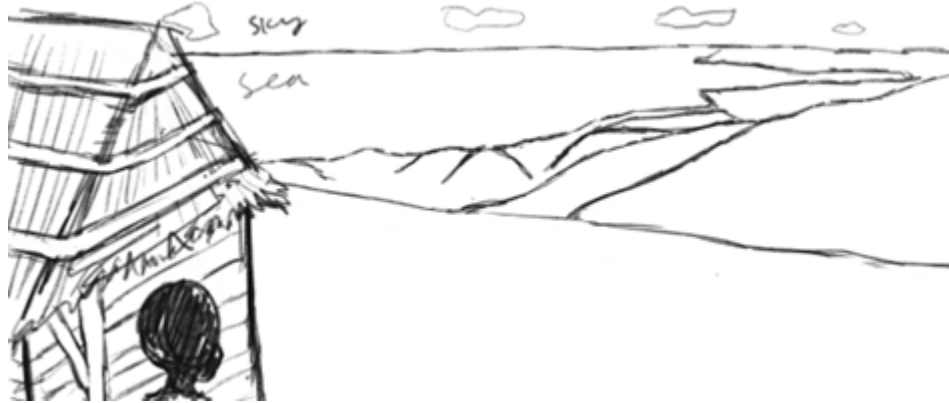
Walk good everyone.

Matthew J. Smith

FEATURE PROJECT

The Story of Our Digital Story of Jamaican Slavery

MATTHEW J. SMITH
DIRECTOR OF CSLBS



Sketch of Port Royal from the hills by Holly French

British-Jamaican anti-slavery advocate Richard Hill wrote eloquently of his visit to Port Royal, Jamaica in 1855. In his opening lines of A Week in Port Royal he called the old town “a place for the memory.” He elaborated that “in the history of places reckoned among the great and famous of the Earth, she stands remembered as a terrible example.” Hill had in mind the levelling earthquake of 1692 which in his own age was considered as the first of several blights on one of the most recognisable names of the Caribbean. But Hill the naturalist who was at pains to take close observation of every bird call and bright hibiscus he passed (“the place was a perfect zoological garden”) as well as the history, knew that the Port Royal he was seeing in 1855 was not just the wide seaside harbour town but the vast stretch of interlocking mountains behind. Much of that vista was the parish of Port Royal, settled first by the Spanish then firmly established by the English.

The history of the parish is misunderstood. Popular imagination has projected it as a place of piracy and sunken treasure, a tale told in nineteenth-century novellas and retold in modern-day video games. For most of its life until emancipation it was defined by slavery and that larger part of the reality of the generations who lived there is often subsumed by recitals of vice and divine retribution.

It is that more profound chapter of Port Royal’s life that drew us at the CSLBS to develop a project on the enslaved population of Port Royal using the registers of the “Returns of Slaves” filed every three years from 1817 to 1832. As we started to work on the Port Royal registers and looked closely at the incredible findings of our Research Associate Matt Stallard, we became more aware of the complexity of Black life in the parish. In that work we digitised, transcribed, and linked the registers into a massive database that elevated their functionality from being spreadsheets of data to six separate censuses of the last generation of Africans brought to Jamaica. We published a scholarly article on that pilot project but wanted to do more with the material. It seemed appropriate that we develop a digital history project that uses the instruments of modern storytelling to vividly present the experiences of Port Royal’s enslaved population.

“Lives are not lived in rows and columns and so we had to find a way to make of that evidence something more.”

Our working question seemed straightforward: *how can we make a digital narrative that represents these lives beyond a presentation of large-scale quantitative data?* Lives are not lived in rows and columns and so we had to find a way to make of that evidence something more.

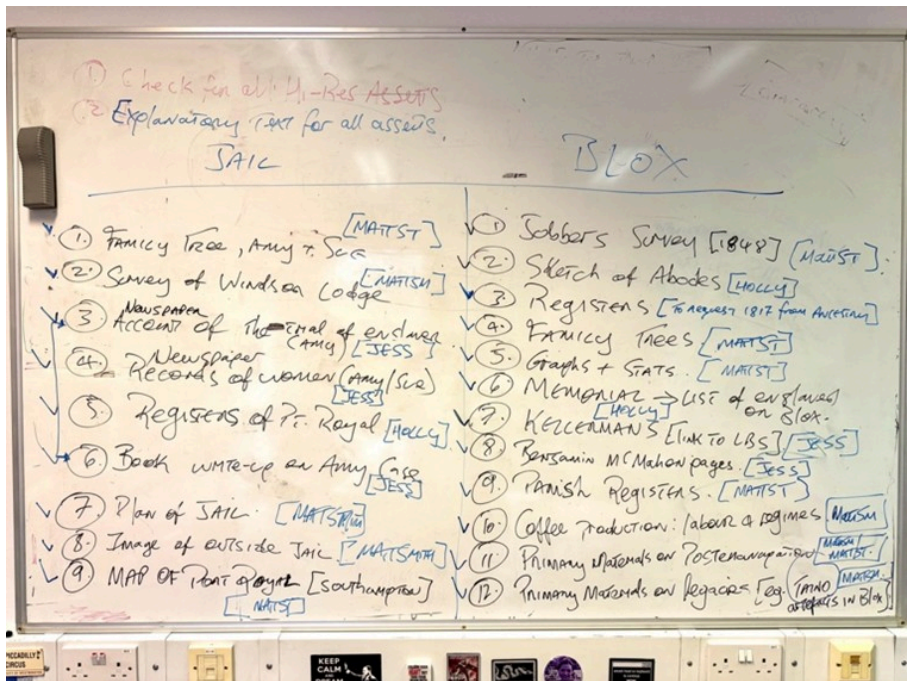
That was three years ago. We immediately set about searching through our findings for stories that we could develop, flashes of lives that we could follow just a little bit further down the archival path. In that time our project evolved considerably and was shaped and fashioned by a large team of collaborators each of whose intellectual and creative fingerprints are on the final output.

One key element came quite early in the process. It was the title. People from Port Royal take great pride in calling themselves Royalists much the same way people from London refer to themselves as Londoners. There is no esteeming of European monarchism in the term. Quite the opposite. Royalists see themselves as courageous survivors of Port Royal’s misfortunes and slavery’s brutality. They have claimed not just the name of their area but a knowing sense that they are ascribing to their ancestors and themselves a title that was seen as unimaginable for Africans in the Caribbean. Jamaican writer Marguerite Curtin put it well: “The history of Port Royal deserves to be put in its true context, and in all fairness to the citizens of Port Royal (Port Royalists as they prefer to be called).” It was this spirit that inspired us to name our project ***New World Royalists***.

In 2022 we had a name and a focus. In April of that year I began Jamaican field research for the project. Because the parish boundaries of the island changed in 1867, it was first necessary to physically trace the older outline of the parish. After checking in with Geographic Information System (GIS) specialists in Kingston, I overlayed eighteenth and nineteenth century maps on the modern map of Jamaica and outlined the older boundaries. With copies of this map in hand I drove the entire area which took me from walking the famous port then plunging into the deep mountain range of the Port Royal and St. Andrew mountains that overlook it. From Bull Bay I went all the way up to Bito and beyond and then went down to Papine and Tavern to get a full sense of the wide reach of the parish, taking photographs of turns and scenes I encountered and adding notes to our working map. This visceral sense of geography matched the hard work our team in England had been doing on the fine

details of the thousands of unfree workers in Port Royal.

It was a remarkable mix of experiences of slavery – from unfree urban labour in the town to sugar and coffee and mountain slavery. The CSLBS team and our excellent research assistants and volunteers ploughed through parish records, the registers, newspapers, travellers accounts, leading monographs on the area (such as Kathleen Monteith’s *Plantation Coffee in Jamaica*), nineteenth-century books on coffee cultivation, even adventure and romance novels set in Port Royal, to get a collective sense of the character of the parish and its people over time. We received great support from Jonathan Greenland of the National Museum of Jamaica and his team which was deep in their own research for the development of a museum in Port Royal. We avoided looking in the usual places so we could access the lesser-known details of the Black lives in the parish. Matt Stallard’s meticulous work on the registers gave us depth and a trail from which we could find individual stories. One that came early from this work was of two sisters, Amy and Sue, who were attached to Windsor Lodge plantation and tried to escape their enslavement. Mention of Sue’s capture in Port Royal opened a lane for further investigation.

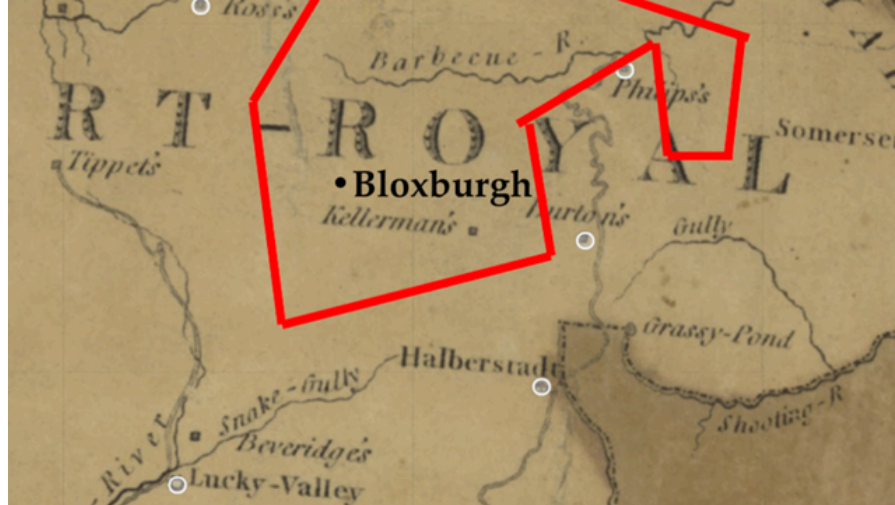


Working Board of CSLBS Team meeting for New World Royalists

Meanwhile, at the National Library of Jamaica, I researched the various surveys, maps, and manuscript collections on areas in Port Royal and St. Andrew which incorporated much of the parish after the new boundaries were effectuated in 1867. It was among these records that I came upon an important document that cracked another door for us. It was an 1848 survey commissioned for a coffee estate called Bloxburgh. This “jobbers survey” was crucial because it included a detailed map of the plantation identifying abodes and land usage and more importantly, a list of names. Since the Jamaica Registers of Returns of enslaved ends in 1832, it presents a challenge for researchers to successfully track and connect names in the years after full freedom in 1838 into the 1840s. This gap was significantly closed for some of the residents of Bloxburgh with this find. We took the names on that list and began to immediately track them through the registers and civil and parish records to build family and social connections. One of the standout features of *New World Royalists* is a remarkable multigenerational family tree that begins in Africa in the eighteenth century and goes all the way up to the twentieth century. We were so moved by this material that we contracted calligrapher Fiona Mitchell to draw the family tree with an elegant script seldom found in family trees of enslaved persons and their descendants.

"The heart of New World Royalists is Bloxburgh and our details give indication of how people survived against the odds and made a heritage of belonging claimed by the descendants of eighteenth-century Africans who came there in chains."

In Jamaica I trekked high up the mountains in search of Bloxburgh which finally came into view near the summit. Over the next three years we came to know not just the place and history of Bloxburgh but of its incredible community of farmers thanks to the help of community member and activist, Rosemarie Chung.



Early mapping idea for Bloxburgh section

After gathering the initial research, it was time to design **New World Royalists**. We determined that we had to tell more than one story to better reflect the complexities of the lives of the people we found. Our three stories had emerged quite clearly to us in research and fieldwork. The first would be of the two sisters, Amy and Sue. The third and largest would be the story of Bloxburgh as a living place; not just specific individuals but the full story of a once thriving coffee plantation that had survived slavery and colonialism and was now a small, disconnected and ageing farming community that does not appear on most maps of Jamaica. It was a tale of the profits and disavowals of slavery. Our second, bridging story is of the geography of the mountain where a different environment of slavery existed. We aim to take visitors to **New World Royalists** through the same terrain that the individuals we met in the records had to navigate. It was a peculiar experience of mountain slavery; an experience held tightly by the land in which incredible views of the majestic beauty of Jamaica were juxtaposed against the routine of everyday violence. The heart of **New World Royalists** is Bloxburgh and our details give indication of how people survived against the odds and made a heritage of belonging claimed by the descendants of eighteenth-century Africans who came there in chains.

We prepared detailed notes for the design and worked out the shape and look we wanted for the site. Sean Cham, a Birkbeck doctoral student in Art History worked with us on the early stages and made a visual model from these notes. This was modified later through a detailed storyboard drawn by Holly French, Research Assistant at CSLBS and doctoral student in Caribbean History at UCL. Holly's sketches included directional instructions in cursive that inspired us to use her handwriting for the title and textual motifs of the site.

With this detailed blueprint, our graphics for each scene, and hundreds of pages of notes and documents we approached Zoë Gumbs, a gifted web developer based in Manchester, UK. Zoë immediately got the meaning of what we were doing and helped us think through the technical possibilities. Zoë also put us in touch with the brilliant web design team Bearded Fellows. This talented group of animators and design specialists worked closely with us over the next two years on each aspect of the project. It was a remarkably creative collaboration. We shared a Google drive of our archival evidence with Samson Owolabi, Hollie Charnock, Matthew Stanners and the rest of the team at Bearded Fellows and they read through all of it to get a full sense of a history that was first unknown to them but which they came to appreciate well. And in return they taught us at CSLBS a great deal on the rubrics, skills and opportunities of digital storytelling.



CSLBS team members with the Bearded Fellows team at their office in Manchester

As we worked through the flow and pacing of **New World Royalists**, we decided there had to be space for users to see exactly how we were able to construct these stories from the fragmentary records. The site features two interactive sections at which our bundle of clues is presented for users to review and do their own research. The functionality of these sections is due to the extraordinary innovation of Zoë Gumbs. Zoë's bespoke design enables the CSLBS team to modify and expand those sections even after the site goes live. Since **New World Royalists** is above all a powerful statement on how we can use the loose leaves and sterile volumes of the archives to give sharper glimpses of unfree Black labourers in the British Caribbean, this is a remarkable feature.

Along our journey we presented works-in-progress drafts of our design for feedback to various audiences. We are grateful for all of the audiences we met and who offered impressions and thoughts, from students in my MA seminar at UCL, to those who interacted with us at presentations at Yale, Brown, and Oxford universities, University of Toronto, UWI-Mona, and University of Virginia. We also give thanks to Alex Gil, a leading Caribbean digital humanist at Yale who offered critical peer review of the project in its near final state.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to our funders at the Next Economy Trust who believed in the project when it was nothing more than an idea mentioned in a meeting and UCL's Grand Challenges for much needed funding once we got underway.

"The Royalists are valued as are all the other carriers of histories in the Caribbean who silently pay tribute to their ancestral past every single day when they put their hands in the same earth and make space for their own freedom in the present."

As we have proudly arrived at this moment of sharing ***New World Royalists*** with you, I remain ever grateful to my intrepid band of seekers of past truths at the CSLBS. We worked as one at all levels of production on this project which will stand as a reflection of the quality of our combined energies.



Matt Smith premieres New World Royalists in Bloxburgh, Jamaica

This spring we wrapped the project and got ready to go live with the site. In May I travelled to Jamaica and made my way back up the mountain and crossed narrow and collapsing roads to Bloxburgh. The farmers honoured me with an invitation to present our work to them at their monthly meeting. In a classroom of Bloxburgh Primary where the meeting begins with devotionals and ends with members singing the farmer's anthem, *We Plough The Fields*, I came face to face with the great weight of what we had accomplished. For every hour we spent over three years reading documents and every idea discussed, dismissed and then partially resurrected, we were transmitting despatches of a history that ultimately belongs to the Royalists who listened keenly to every word I said and studied every frame of our work. Their approval of what we have done is the greatest blessing New World Royalists could receive. One farmer remarked that we were sharing "hidden histories of a hidden place." Another said in a quiet voice, "I didn't know we were so valued."

The Royalists *are* valued as are all the other carriers of histories in the Caribbean who silently pay tribute to their ancestral past every single day when they put their hands in the same earth and make space for their own freedom in the present.



OUT NOW!

New World Royalists

A BREAKTHROUGH
INTERACTIVE DIGITAL
HUMANITIES PROJECT ON
ENSLAVED LIVES AND
COMMUNITIES IN PORT
ROYAL JAMAICA

Totals of enslaved persons on Bloombury 1817-1832	
Births	Deaths
1817-1818	27
1818-1819	25
1819-1820	24
1820-1821	26
1821-1822	24
1822-1823	20



WWW.NEW-WORLD-ROYALISTS.UCL.AC.UK

ADVANCED SEARCH

Deep Rivers: A Transatlantic Conversation

VILMA RUDDOCK, KELLY HAGGART AND SHARON POPE

Vilma Ruddock's new book, Jamaican Genealogy Research, is a much-needed guide for researchers working their way through the thickets of digitally available sources. In this piece, Vilma (VR) responds to questions posed by two members of the CSLBS team, Sharon Pope (SP) and Kelly Haggart (KH).

KH: How much interest do you see among Jamaicans in tracing their family histories back to the slavery era?

VR: Interest in tracing Jamaican family histories has steadily increased over the past 20 years, Kelly—among people at home and throughout the Jamaican diaspora. One evidence of this is the growing worldwide membership in our online Jamaican genealogy groups. Accompanying this trend is a deepening desire to identify our earliest enslaved ancestors. Many members of our genealogy community have expressed frustration over the challenges involved in pursuing their African ancestry, but they remain determined to uncover what is possible. The scarcity of records, the fragmentation of family lines, and the legacy of slavery all complicate the process, yet these obstacles make every breakthrough deeply meaningful.

KH: Do interest, comfort levels or approaches vary across generations and communities?

VR: I have not observed any stratification of interest or comfort level based solely on age groups. What I do see is that Jamaicans across generations and communities are increasingly motivated to explore their family histories. Some are driven by a desire to reconnect with lost heritage and find living relatives; others are curious about Jamaica's complex history and the diverse cultures that shaped their ancestors' lives.

Familiarity with the sources of Jamaica genealogy documents and digital tools also defines each person's comfort level with the research. Supporting this learning is a goal of our genealogy groups

and one of the motivations for writing my book, *Jamaican Genealogy Research: A Practical Guide to the Best Resources for Tracing your Ancestry*.

Above all, people are increasingly aware of the historical and structural barriers to tracing Jamaican African ancestry. Despite these challenges, members of our genealogy groups are eager to reclaim and reconstruct what they can.



Late nineteenth-century Jamaican family

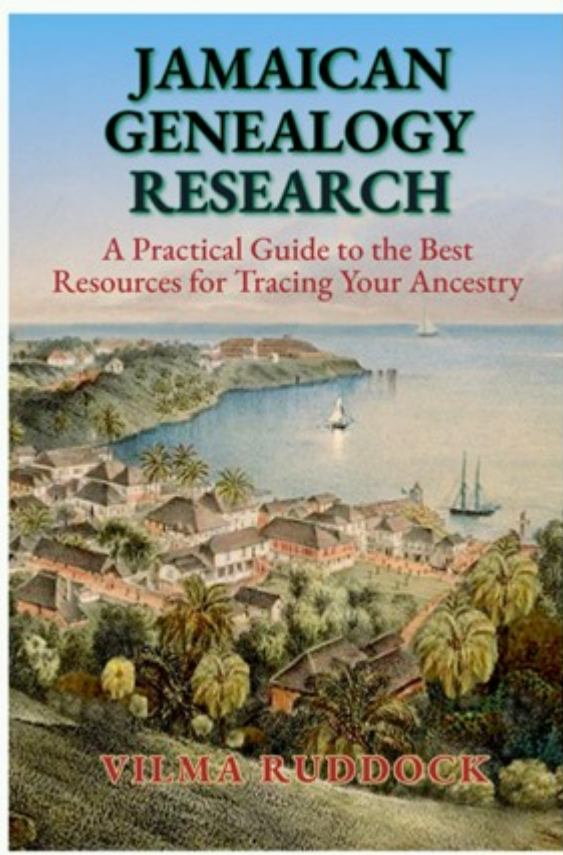
KH: Beyond the slave registers and parish records, which less well-known or under-used sources do you find particularly valuable?

VR: There are several valuable, underutilized, or lesser-known sources, although they remain difficult to access. In our Jamaican genealogy research community, we emphasize the importance of looking beyond the triennial Slave Registers, the parish baptism, marriage, and burial (BMD) records, and the Legacies of British Slave-ownership (LBS) database when trying to trace African ancestors, both free and enslaved.

This includes the value of enslavers' and property owners' records, such as the slave inventories included in each estate's annual accounts at the Jamaica Archives. Family papers and correspondence are often overlooked due to the challenges in locating and accessing these scattered sources. Many of these resources are housed in international archives, libraries, and private family collections—especially in Britain. Absentee enslavers left behind wills and personal papers that might reference enslaved individuals by name, including those taken to Britain in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. For example, a member of our Jamaican Genealogy Resources (JGR) group travelled to the National Library of Scotland to access the only available copy of an enslaver's papers, which included an estate record that contained details about his African-descended ancestor.

I have found wills to be a powerful yet under-utilized resource—not only for tracing our colonial European ancestors but also for those who were enslaved. They are covered in a chapter of my book. In one case, for instance, wills helped me confirm the Scottish progenitor of a mixed-race family line that, over generations, became increasingly “African” in ancestry.

Books and unpublished manuscripts can also provide invaluable information about our African, as well as our European, ancestors. Many of these sources are now digitized and accessible online, while others are in library collections or available on the antiquarian market. I devote a chapter in my book to these “substitute” resources, also summarized in the genealogy research guides section of our JGR group. I discovered, for example, valuable information about the Riddoch/Ruddock family of Westmoreland, Jamaica, and their connection to Scotland in *With the Sound of the Steam Korchie* by Jamaican author and school inspector, Lennie C. Ruddock. Other JGR members have posted similar successes with books.



"Many key collections of major value to our amateur Jamaican genealogy community and the LBS projects—such as wills and probate; deeds, patents, and land records; manumissions; and estate records with their slave inventories—remain undigitized or inaccessible online. There's growing interest in digitization and preservation, but challenges in staffing and funding remain."

KH: What progress is being made toward digitization of genealogically rich collections in Jamaica that remain undigitized?

VR: I don't have any information about projects to digitize the invaluable genealogical collections in Jamaica's repositories. From my genealogy research and writing my book, I learned that much historical material remains buried in the archives, inaccessible to researchers worldwide.

There appears to have been little progress beyond the BMD parish registers (1664-1880) and civil registrations (1880-1999), microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and now digitized on the FamilySearch website. Kudos to the select group of experienced members of our online Jamaican Genealogy Resources group who helped complete the indexing of the parish registers about two years ago. There is also the limited digitization work of the Endangered Archives Program at the Jamaica Archives, the National Library of Jamaica, the University of the West Indies, Mona, and the Roman Catholic Archives—available on the British Library's website.

As you know, many key collections of major value to our amateur Jamaican genealogy community and the LBS projects—such as wills and probate; deeds, patents, and land records; manumissions; and estate records with their slave inventories—remain undigitized or inaccessible online. There's growing interest in digitization and preservation, but challenges in staffing and funding remain.

KH: Could you comment on the strengths and limitations of DNA testing for Jamaicans hoping to trace ancestral origins in Africa?

VR: Strengths of DNA Testing:

Given the scarcity of records for Jamaica's early African ancestors and the difficulty of accessing those that exist, DNA testing (genetic genealogy) is a key resource:

1. The *DNA Match List* can help Jamaicans connect with unknown relatives worldwide, overcome their brick walls, and grow their family tree.
2. The *Ethnicity Estimates (DNA Origins)* might assist some Jamaicans in their research to find their African ancestors' regional origins and perhaps even their ethnic (tribal) origins.

Limitations of DNA Testing:

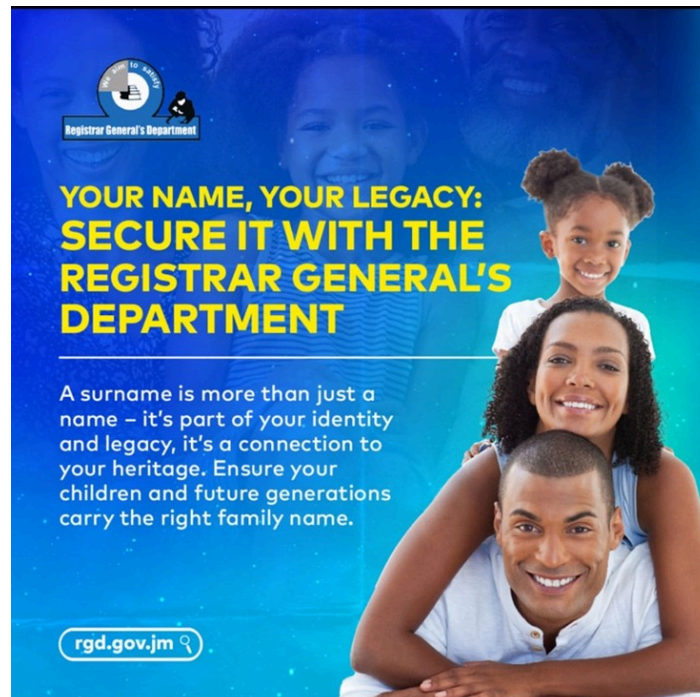
(These are some insights I did not include in my first book, due to size considerations):

1. The *DNA Match List*: Your Match List is limited by whether your relatives (close or distant) have also taken a DNA test. If only a few have tested, your list will be small and may limit its usefulness.
2. *Ethnicity Estimates*: Jamaicans should be cautious not to over-interpret their African Ethnicity Estimates. The limitations here include:
 - The current DNA testing and analytical tools lack precision and are still being refined.
 - The testing companies have a relatively small (although growing) number of Africans and ethnic (tribal) groups in their population reference panels.
 - Your estimated African location and tribal assignments are based on DNA tests of the people living in African regions today. However, country borders and names, and the

distribution of ethnic groups have changed in Africa since the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

- Additionally, during the slave trade, a single tribe could be dispersed across multiple regions, or there could be various tribes within a single region.
- The challenge is to try to integrate your family history research and DNA Ethnicity Estimates with knowledge of:
 - The complex population and the numerous and diverse tribes of Africa
 - The history of tribal wars, migrations, and the intermingling of tribes
 - The history and dynamics of the slave trade
 - The effects of the trade on the African population and culture
 - Africa's geography and the land boundaries and tribes that existed during the slave trade, and how the modern African country designations were decided in the “scramble for Africa” by the European powers in 1884-1885.

In summary, for Jamaicans tracing their African ancestral origins, DNA testing is most effective when combined with traditional paper documents and historical context.



Advert for Jamaica's Registrar General's Department

"Over the years, with the growth of online resources, I have “collected” descendants from around the globe and helped them expand their family trees, just as they have helped me expand mine. One offshoot of this line of my research was my contribution of thirteen biographies to the LBS database."

KH: Could you share a memorable success story of your own or an example of when you helped someone uncover a key piece of their Jamaican family history? What particular challenges did the research present, and which sources or methods proved crucial to the breakthrough?

VR: I've assisted many people in connecting their family dots, making breakthroughs, and building or expanding their family tree. One memorable story involved Rod, a Canadian descendant of Riddochs/Ruddachs of Rothiemay and Grange, Banffshire, Scotland. He spent years trying to figure out his family's connection to Jamaica. This story is one of several where I set out to help someone, which, in turn, helped me. Collaboration is a key element in our Jamaican genealogy community.

Rod discovered my postings on Ancestry.com's Message Boards, where I had been sharing my research findings on John Riddoch and the Riddochs/Ruddocks of Westmoreland, James Riddoch of Mirandahill, Montego Bay, St. James, and Margaret Riddoch Huie of Trelawny, Jamaica. Among key information, I shared two wills from Jamaica; BMD records from FamilySearch and ScotlandsPeople; death notices and other articles in European publications; and a monumental inscription from Marnoch, Scotland. These critical resources helped him establish the link between his Scottish and Jamaican ancestry. A publication by Stephen Mullen of Glasgow, based on his research at the Jamaica Archives, also provided valuable context about James Riddoch. Rod, in turn, shared his own discoveries, including a packet of old family letters from his Riddoch ancestor who had emigrated from Scotland to Canada.

The crucial breakthrough that helped me connect the branches and their origins in Scotland was James Riddoch's will, where he had named his sisters (including Margaret Riddoch Huie) as legatees. The will helped me trace Riddoch/Ruddach lines from Jamaica back to 1655 Scotland. I had been collaborating with Margianna, another cousin who had also found me through Ancestry's Message Board. Because of our collaboration, she went to Jamaica and retrieved James's and two other Riddoch wills from the Registrar General's Department (RGD) in Twickenham Park. I also learned from Margianna that her Riddoch/Ruddock branch had emigrated from Jamaica to Panama and Cuba, and then to New York, in the early 1900s. This was one of my brick walls, so the information was a major breakthrough. Through hours of phone calls and emails and sharing documents and family lore, I helped my newly-found cousin trace her family branch back to their origins in Westmoreland, Jamaica,

and Scotland. The research and collaboration continue.

The biggest challenge was how little we knew about the lives in Jamaica of these early Riddochs/Ruddachs/Riddocks, who arrived on the island in the 1770s; we still don't know much. Initially, all I had (from my now-deceased father) was that the Ruddocks of Westmoreland descended from John Riddoch (? Riddock) of Scotland and lived in Strawberry, Westmoreland. A breakthrough about John Riddoch came from articles in the online Gleaner Archive.

Over the years, with the growth of online resources, I have "collected" descendants from around the globe and helped them expand their family trees, just as they have helped me expand mine. One offshoot of this line of my research was my contribution of thirteen biographies to the LBS database.

SP: Do you know of any repositories or collections of oral histories, or any projects that are currently undertaking this work?

VR: These are the sources for collections of Jamaican oral histories that I am aware of, Sharon:

- **The National Library of Jamaica:** The NLJ's oral history archives feature interviews with elders, Maroons, ordinary Jamaicans from various parishes, cultural figures, and political leaders.
Website: <https://nlj.gov.jm>
Email: nljreference@nlj.gov.jm
- **The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB):** A branch of the Institute of Jamaica. Established to document and preserve oral histories of descendants of Africans in Jamaica. Includes family genealogy, cultural traditions, Maroon history, and the use of herbal medicines. You can request field recordings.
Website: <https://acij-ioj.org.jm/>
- **The Oral History Project:** The Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment, and Sport, the Hon. Olivia ("Babsy") Grange, launched the project in 2024 as part of the work of the ACIJ/JMB, "to document Jamaica's heritage by recording the memories of senior citizens for future generations."
Link to the Announcement: <https://jis.gov.jm/culture-ministry-launches-oral-history-project/>
- **The University of the West Indies Library – Mona:** UWI has collections of interviews by faculty and students. These collections feature oral histories from Jamaican elders, individuals, and families in parish communities, sugar estate workers, labor movement leaders, and survivors of significant historical events. They are used for social studies projects, masters and doctoral theses, and reconstructing genealogies. Audio and transcript collections are held in the library's West Indies and Special Collections: <https://www.mona.uwi.edu/library/special-collections-1>
- **Dr. Laura Tanna,** Jamaican Folk Tales and Oral Histories (Florida: DLT Associates Inc., 2000)
- **The Chinese Jamaican Oral History Project (CJOHP.org):** "...The Chinese Jamaican Oral History Project (CJOHP.org) is an initiative that aims to record and preserve memories and stories from the Chinese Jamaican community in Toronto. It includes (among other things) audio-recorded oral history interviews, narrator portraits, an interactive timeline, archival materials, and links to additional resources."
Link: <https://cjohp.wordpress.com/>
- **Community-based Projects:** Such as those by schools, churches, and community leaders.
- **The British Library – Caribbean Voices/Oral History Collections:** Includes oral histories of Jamaican immigrants of the Windrush era (The Windrush Voices) and after.
Link: <https://soundcloud.com/the-british-library/sets/windrush-voices>
- **The George Padmore Institute:** Oral histories of Caribbean immigrants (including Jamaicans) in the UK. Jamaican immigrants likely shared stories, photos, and family histories with their descendants.
Website: <https://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org>
- **YouTube Videos:** You might find videos of elders recording Jamaican family histories on YouTube. For example, there is a nine-part oral history of the Patterson, Ruddock, and related families of Strawberry and Mount Pleasant, Westmoreland, and nearby areas, narrated by 92-year-old Rev. Hustin E. Patterson.
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbdR3vPBhng&list=PLJsO_Ktod60NXrh0ROX3t9Ok_FtM3DZ7H&ab_channel=DonaldPatterson
- **FamilySearch:** Has collections of oral histories, but none for Jamaica. Here is a link to information on African oral genealogy and others:
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Oral_Genealogies
- **Facebook Jamaican Groups:** Several Jamaican genealogy, cultural, and history groups share family stories and genealogy, but they are not yet compiled into albums. I will investigate.
- **Court Records:** Consider researching court records as a potential substitute source for the "voice" of the free or enslaved black and free "people of colour", after they were allowed to give evidence in court. Historical records of the early courts are at the Jamaica Archives and the Island Record Office. Thanks to the activism of Robert Osbourn, Edward Jordan, Robert Hill, and others, in 1830, the government granted free people of color the right to vote and hold office, albeit with restrictions. This likely aided in the fight to improve conditions for enslaved people.

SP: The Watchman and Jamaica Free Press served the free and freed black population from 1829 to 1833. This could be helpful for the Valuable Lives Project but is hard to access from the UK. Do you

know of any digitization projects or online extracts available?

VR: Edward Jordan and Robert Osborn, two young men of color, founded the Watchman and Jamaica Free Press during the waning years of slavery. It was the first anti-slavery newspaper published in Jamaica. I review online newspapers in a chapter of my book, *Jamaican Genealogy Research: A Practical Guide to the Best Resources for Tracing Your Ancestry*. I am only aware of the following resources to access this newspaper online:

1. Caribbean Newspapers, Series 1 (1718–1876)

This collection includes digitized issues of The Watchman from December 8, 1830, to August 21, 1833. Access is possible via the following:

- Institutions such as Princeton University Library, which may require a subscription or institutional login.
Link: Princeton University Library Catalog:
<https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/99125255819706421>
- Readex: <https://www.readex.com/products/caribbean-newspapers-series-1-1718-1876-american-antiquarian-society>.
You can log in via your library or library card.

The Caribbean Newspapers Collection, 1832-1833, is part of America's Historical Newspapers database. Access via the University of Illinois Library might be restricted.

Website link: https://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/newspapers/results_full.php?bib_id=18760

2. The Watchman Project – Huron University College (London, Ontario, Canada)

This project focuses on the September 12, 1829, issue of The Watchman and Jamaican Free Press. The project offers transcriptions, annotations, and analyses.

Link: <https://www.huronresearch.ca/the-watchman/transcribed-pages/>

Other access (not online) to the Watchman includes:

- The National Archives, Kew, UK, not digitized but can order copies.
 - Link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2726946>
- The National Library of Jamaica: The Watchman might be one of the newspapers on microfilm at the NLJ. I have not investigated.

SP: If you could interview any historical figure from Jamaica, who would it be and what would be your topic of discussion?

VR: I would choose to interview Dr Cicely Delphine Williams, OM, CMG (1893-1992)—a pioneering Jamaican physician who has inspired me since childhood. She is best known for identifying and treating the kwashiorkor syndrome in Ghana and for her lifelong devotion to improving child nutrition and maternal and child health worldwide.

My medical career and specialty in Women's Health, and my passion for Jamaican genealogy and history, would compel me to explore three main topics in our conversation:

1. Her Medical Training in England:

I would ask Dr. Williams about her experience as a Jamaican woman training in medicine in 1920s England—when the field was male-dominated. By this, to compare my own medical training in 1980s Boston under a similar challenge, and consider what progress may or may not have been made since then.

2. Her Work and Life in Africa:

I would explore how her early experience helping young mothers in rural Bethel Town, Westmoreland, Jamaica, influenced her medical work in the Gold Coast (now Ghana)—the origin of many of Jamaica's ancestors. Did her early exposure in Jamaica to maternal and child health assist her in diagnosing kwashiorkor in African children—a syndrome of malnutrition?

3. The Genealogy of the Williams Family of Bethel Town:

Exploring our family trees to verify a common ancestor would be intriguing. My family oral history suggests I am related to Dr. Williams through my paternal great-great-grandmother, Grace Williams (c1820-), of (or near) Bethel Town, Westmoreland. One of Dr. Cicely Williams' ancestors was William Williams. I suspect Grace was born in slavery and, based on family naming patterns, that her father was a William Williams (but which one, among the many in the Church of England parish records?). I have not yet found Grace's baptismal record or verified her parents' names. Perhaps DNA testing will help establish a connection.

Speaking with Dr. Williams would be an invaluable opportunity to connect our professional and personal histories—linking our experiences as women in medicine with our shared Jamaican roots—and to express gratitude for her enduring legacy. I named my daughter Cecily after her and my grandmother.

REVIEW

Elsa V. Goveia Speaker Series 2025:

Crop Over

by Professor Dame Sonia Boyce

JESS HANNAH

CUSTODIAN OF THE CSLBS DATABASE

In March 2025, the UCL Centre for the Study of Legacies of British Slavery held the fourth instalment in its Speaker Series honouring one of UCL History's most distinguished graduates, the Guyanese historian Elsa V. Goveia. In collaboration with Royal Museums Greenwich, our special guest speaker was Professor Dame Sonia Boyce, interdisciplinary artist and academic. Sonia's talk, titled 'CROP OVER,' was held on a sunny March evening in an ornate room in the Queen's House, National Maritime Museum Gardens in Greenwich, London.

The event began with opening words by Paddy Rogers, Director of Royal Museums Greenwich (RMG), who spoke about the collaborative connections between RMG and CSLBS. CSLBS Director Matthew Smith then introduced the audience to the life of Elsa Goveia, the pioneering Guyanese historian and UCL graduate after whom the speaker series is named. It then fell to Catherine Hall, Sonia Boyce's close friend and Chair of CSLBS, to introduce Sonia and her work before Sonia took the stage.

In her talk, Sonia described the origins of the Crop Over carnival in Barbados, a carnivalesque harvest festival born from the conditions of slavery, plantation life and sugar production in the Caribbean. Sonia reflected on her research into Harewood House in Leeds, the Lascelles family, and their relationship to the transatlantic slave trade in the English-speaking Caribbean. She described the making of her split-screen film of the same title *Crop Over*, made in 2007 as part of an exhibition marking the Bicentenary of the British abolition of the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.

Shot partly at Harewood House and partly at the Crop Over festival itself, the film also includes a series of interviews with historians and cultural critics, historical archival footage, and Barbadian folk including Mother Sally, Donkey Man, and Shaggy Bear. Sonia concluded the lecture with a full screening of *Crop Over* that illuminated the Caribbean persistence of a folk and carnivalesque culture of resistance.



Sonia Boyce presents at RMG

Sonia's talk was followed by a lively Q&A about the project and its contexts and then a reception in the lobby of the Queen's House, generously supported by Royal Museums Greenwich. As ever, we were delighted to speak to many members of the wider CSLBS community at Sonia's reception (including several guests who told us they had attended all four of the Goveia lectures over the years!) Particular thanks this year go to Sonia Boyce's studio team, Victoria Lane and Tim Tong at RMG, and Trishauna Stewart for making this event possible. We look forward to seeing you for the next iteration in 2026.



REVIEW

Launch of Chloe Ireton's Book, Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic

MATTHEW J. SMITH
DIRECTOR OF CSLBS

On May 8th Chloe Ireton's first monograph, Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic (Cambridge, 2025), was launched to a packed room at UCL. The audience came to celebrate with Chloe the remarkable achievement of her scholarship which presents a vital and fresh perspective on early Iberian slavery. It is a brilliant study that draws together hundreds of archival findings to give a visceral sense of how Africans in the earliest decades of New World Slavery redefined what property and autonomy meant through their committed actions to have greater control of their lives.

The launch included a robust discussion on the book and its arguments that was chaired by Matthew J. Smith of the CSLBS, and included Julie Hardwick (UT-Austin), Toby Green (KCL), Miles Ogborn (Queen Mary), Danielle Terrazas Williams (Leeds). More information on Chloe's book can be found [here](#).

Below are some photographs of the launch.



OF THIS AND THAT
CSLBS Moments with Jess Hannah



CSLBS Digital Humanities Workshop,
 UCL 2024



Jess Hannah at CSLBS tour of the
 Gladstone Library, 2025



Jess Hannah presents on CSLBS work,
2022



Matt Smith, Matt Stallard and Jess
Hannah at Yale University The Caribbean
Digital Conference, 2023



Matt Smith presents a document on the History of Bloxburgh, JA to Rozi Chung of the
community of Bloxburgh, Kingston, 2025



Matt Stallard, Jess Hannah, and Matt
Smith with James Dawkins at a 2023
conference



Matt Stallard, Zanté Johnson-Hylton, Holly
French and Jess Hannah in a CSLBS
planning meeting, 2024

