

THE BOOK
OF THE
OLD EDINBURGH
CLUB

The Journal for
Edinburgh History



William Irvine Fortescue, 'Black Slaves, Apprentices or Servants in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: Evidence from Edinburgh Newspapers',
Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, New Series 12 (2016), pp. 17–26

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This article is extracted from **The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club**, **The Journal for Edinburgh History** ISSN 2634-2618

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# BLACK SLAVES, APPRENTICES OR SERVANTS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND: EVIDENCE FROM EDINBURGH NEWSPAPERS

WILLIAM IRVINE FORTESCUE

It has long been established that individuals of African and Asian descent lived in eighteenth-century Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The Act of Union of 1707 opened up what became the expanding British Empire to Scottish merchants who soon began importing sugar and tobacco from British colonies in the West Indies and North America to Glasgow, Port Glasgow and Greenock. At the same time Scotland's relatively high educational standards and limited economic and career opportunities encouraged Scots to become managers of West Indian plantations and employees of the Honourable East India Company which had a monopoly of British trade with India.<sup>2</sup> As administrators, doctors, managers, merchants and soldiers Scots could become slave-owners and could acquire black and Asian servants, a small number of whom were brought to Scotland. Precise numbers will never be known but even by the end of the eighteenth century there were probably fewer than two or three hundred people of African or Asian descent living in Scotland. Apart from a few sailors or former sailors, they were nearly all servants or estate workers, often serving the Scots who had brought them to Scotland. This article presents the evidence from Edinburgh newspapers and shows how the status of black people in Scotland changed between the second decade of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century.

The earliest reference to a black person in Scotland in Edinburgh newspapers dates from May 1719:<sup>3</sup>

These are to give Notice that there is run away from a West-country Gentleman, a Black, he is a handsome gentile young Fellow as any of his kind; Any Person or Persons who shall apprehend and secure the said Black, so as that he may be got back to the owner, let them come to Mr. *Colin Mackenzie* Gold-Smith in the *Parliament-Closs* in *Edinburgh*, or to Mr. *Patrick Huston* Merchant in *Glasgow*, and they shall have Three Guineas Reward, and Charges born them, and the Gentleman's Kindness besides.

In contrast to later advertisements, there is no indication of a name or any description of clothing, just a mention that the 'Black' was 'handsome' and 'gentile' (gentle). This was probably because there were so few black people in Scotland at this point that any more details would have been superfluous. The unnamed 'West-country Gentleman' (from the West of Scotland, perhaps somewhere near Glasgow) evidently thought that the man was his property and should not leave his service without his permission. Whether he regarded him as his slave or not is unclear. However, Patrick Huston may have been related to a family called Houston who were sugar merchants in Glasgow and who became substantial landowners in the American colonies and in the island of Grenada where they owned many slaves.<sup>4</sup> The workshops of Edinburgh goldsmiths often acted as lost property offices, usually for lost or stolen articles of silver and items of jewellery, but also occasionally for other forms of property.<sup>5</sup> Colin McKenzie had been admitted a freeman of the Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh on 23 July 1695 and had subsequently become a prominent Edinburgh goldsmith. The collections of National Museums Scotland include silver with his maker's mark.

The next advertisement refers to a black soldier who was wanted as a deserter:<sup>6</sup>

WHEREAS John Burt a Negro Drummer in the honourable Major General Evans's Regiment of Dragoons, aged 26 Years, about five Foot, four inches high, having on a Regimental Green Frock Red Waistcoat and Breeches, did desert from Haddingtoun the 13<sup>th</sup> of this Instant October [1721]: These are to give Notice, that whoever will secure him, and give an Account thereof to the commanding Officer of the Regiment at Haddingtoun aforesaid, shall receive five Guineas Reward; but any person who shall hereafter be known to entertain him, will be sued according to the Clause in the Act of Parliament against harbouring or concealing of Deserters.

The soldier's full name is given, as well as precise details of his age, height and clothing, and an Act of Parliament is confidently invoked, indicating that he was being sought as an army deserter rather than as a slave or servant who had absconded.

Notices or advertisements relating to black women who had absconded are relatively uncommon but one was published in December 1721:<sup>7</sup>

That upon Monday the 18<sup>th</sup>. soon in the Morning, one Katharine Strachan a Servant in St. Andrews, a little black, ill-coloured Woman, who now calls her self Elizabeth Young, run off, and took with her some Bed-Cloaths and Linnens, with a Silver Spoon marked S. and several other Things: If any can catch her, they shall be sufficiently rewarded.

She was described as a servant rather than as a slave with a first name and a surname. She had not just absconded but had also taken with her various stolen items. In contrast, another black woman's slave status was clearly defined by the brass collar she wore (February 1727):<sup>8</sup>

RUN away on the 7<sup>th</sup> Instant from Dr. Gustavus Brown's Lodgings in Glasgow, a Negro Woman, named Ann, being about 18 Years of Age, with a green Gown and a Brass Collar about her Neck, on which are engraved these Words ['Gustavus Brown in Dalkeith his Negro, 1726.'] Whoever apprehends her, so as she may be recovered, shall have two Guineas Reward, and necessary Charges allowed by Laurence Dinwiddie Junior Merchant in Glasgow, by James Mitchelson Jeweller in Edinburgh.

Laurence Dinwiddie of Germiston was a tobacco merchant who was elected Lord Provost of Glasgow in 1742 and 1743. His brother, Robert Dinwiddie, was appointed Governor of Virginia in 1751.<sup>9</sup> James Mitchelson was an Edinburgh goldsmith (admitted freeman 31 May, 1706 and Deacon of the Goldsmiths 1722-1724). Dr Gustavus Brown was born on 10 April 1679 in Dalkeith, Midlothian, and may have studied medicine at Edinburgh University. In 1708, he landed in Maryland where he practised as a doctor, married well, became a prominent public figure and amassed a considerable fortune. On his death in 1762, he left property in Maryland (including slaves) and in Scotland (in the parish of Melrose). His son by his second wife, Gustavus Richard Brown (1747-1804), studied medicine at Edinburgh University, graduating in 1768. During the American War of Independence he was the surgeon-general of the Continental Army. He

became a friend of George Washington and attended him during his final illness.

Black seamen served in British merchant ships and in the Royal Navy during the eighteenth century. Naval service could provide an escape from slavery but conditions were harsh and desertions occurred, as the following notice from October 1740 illustrates:<sup>10</sup>

RUN away from William Jones Master of the St David of Dysart, a NEGROE named Caesar, about Six Foot high, speaks little English, had, when he went off, a grey Coat, Tartan and red Vest. Whoever shall deliver him to George Richey in South-Leith, shall have half a Guinea Reward, and all necessary Charges pay'd them.

'Caesar's' inability to speak much English would not have been much of a significant handicap in his role as a seaman on the St. David based in Dysart, a port in Fife near Kirkcaldy. Half a guinea seems a modest reward, possibly reflecting William Jones's financial situation rather than 'Caesar's' usefulness. .

The emphasis on Latin literature in eighteenth-century education would have given masters familiarity with Latin names. Slave-owners named personal slaves just as they might name a pet dog or a horse, usually with just one name. Reacting against this, and in an attempt to establish a personal identity, a slave might give himself or herself another name or names. In addition to a 'Caesar' there was also a 'Cato' (June 1748):<sup>11</sup>

CATO, a NEGROE LAD, belonging to Colonel William Macdowall of Castlesempill, run away from the House of Castlesempill on Monday last. Whoever secures him, and sends Notice to Andrew Wallace Writer to the Signet at Edinburgh, or to Alexander Houston Merchant in Glasgow, shall be sufficiently rewarded.

Note. He calls himself sometimes *John Crawford*.

A similar notice had been published in the *Glasgow Journal* on 25 January 1748,<sup>12</sup> which suggests 'Cato' had been on the run for some time. Colonel William McDowall of Castle Semple (near Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire) was a professional army officer. In 1741, he was appointed the commanding officer of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot (the Black Watch), later transferring to the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (the King's Own Scottish Borderers) which he commanded at Culloden. He subsequently commanded the garrison at Aberdeen and died on 27 October, 1748. His son, William McDowall (c.1719-1784), served as MP for

Renfrewshire from 1768 to 1774. Colonel McDowall was also a prominent slave and plantation owner. Having acquired a considerable fortune through his participation in the slave trade and through his marriage to a sugar heiress, he owned plantations in St. Christopher's (St. Kitts) in the West Indies. In 1727, he bought the Castle Semple estate from Hugh, 11<sup>th</sup> Lord Sempill. McDowall and his first wife brought back a number of black servants and estate workers from the West Indies to Scotland. The McDowalls helped to found the important West India House of James Milliken & Co. but the family fortunes drastically declined from the end of the eighteenth century and, in 1818, Castle Semple House, dating from 1735, was sold to another plantation owner, John Harvey of Jamaica. The house burnt down in 1924 and the shell was finally demolished in the 1960s. Part of the former estate is now within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. The firm of Alexander Houston & Co. of Glasgow was the name of the firm from which William McDowall derived his wealth.<sup>13</sup>

Another young man of mixed race, probably a servant judging from the description of his clothes and wig, absconded in May 1757:<sup>14</sup>

THAT on Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> inst. deserted from Neil MacNeil of Bristol, merchant, a MULATTO BOY, named PETER, aged 18 years or thereabout, about five feet, of a good complexion, well built, and speaks good English. He had on when he run away, a grey livery, faced with red, wash'd metal buttons to his coat and waistcoat, a brown cut wig, a hat with a gold loop and button to it. Whoever apprehends the said boy, and brings him to Mr Matthew McAllister merchant in Edinburgh, shall have five guineas reward. – He is supposed to be lurking about Leith or Edinburgh: it is desired that no shipmaster or private family will harbour or give him countenance.

Some three years later two black servants seem to have jumped ship in the Orkney Islands:<sup>15</sup>

#### TWO BLACK SERVANTS;

one named Bristol, the other John Gilles. Bristol is very black, of a tall stature, about 5 feet 10 inches, and wore at the time of his running away a great coat, a blue double breasted waistcoat, wide Osnaburg trousers, blue worsted hose, a good hat, with a pair of large silver buckles in his shoes. – John Gilles is about 18 years of age, 5 feet high, of a tawny yellowish complexion, with black hair, no curl, wore one red waistcoat, and another buff-coloured ditto, with brass buttons, Osnaburg trousers, and yellow mill'd hose. Whoever shall apprehend and deliver the said two blacks to Mr. James Gordon at Stromness, to Mr. Thomas Lindsay at Kirkwall, or to Mr. John Dingwall writer in Edinburgh, shall receive instantly five guineas reward, or for any one of them two guineas and a

half, with all reasonable and necessary charges.  
N.B. The said deserters run off in the ship's long boat.

Osnaburg was a plain coarse fabric woven in Scotland in imitation of cloth imported from the German town of Osnabruck. It was the cloth from which slave garments were often made.

In addition to young black men approximately eighteen years old there were several boy servants who went missing, including two in September 1765:<sup>16</sup>

#### A MULATTO BOY,

Yellowish colour, with only a short grey coat, vest and breeches of the same colour, without shoes or stockings. The name he went under was Sam, but same time names himself Donald; he has a squeaking voice; made his elopment [sic] from Balnaguard, in Athole [Mid Atholl, now Perth and Kinross], Wednesday the 11<sup>th</sup> September current, in the afternoon, and was seen on his way to Perth, above eight miles above that place, Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> current. Therefore any person apprehending the Said Boy shall be sufficiently rewarded, and may write to Patrick Stewart senior, merchant in Perth, or to the Proprietor Charles Robertson of Balnaguard. Which advertisement is ordered to be published in the Newspapers. All Shipmasters are desired not to carry the boy abroad; if found, may expect to be prosecuted.

Another mixed race boy, he evidently sometimes called himself by a name of his own choice rather than by the one given to him, like some others in his position. His master may have been the Charles Robertson younger of Balnaguard who served in the Atholl Brigade in the army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart during the 1745-46 Rising.<sup>17</sup> He remained a land-owner and may have been the Captain Charles Robertson, of the 101<sup>st</sup> Foot, who died at Balnaguard on 23 December 1790.<sup>18</sup> The other notice, which refers to an Indian boy who had apparently absconded previously, relies on appearance and does not mention a name:

THAT an INDIAN LAD again run from his master on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant. He had upon him a blue Bavarian coat, brown vest and breeches, was bare footed, and bare legged: one of his eyes is white, black hair, and a slit in each ear, about an inch long. It is begged that who ever sees him will keep him safe, till they advise the publisher of this paper, and they shall be paid for all trouble, besides a reward.

There is at least one case involving a native North American (August 1766).<sup>19</sup>

A NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN BOY

A North American Indian Boy, about four foot high, looking to be about 14 years of age, of a very tawny complexion; stout made, broad, fat faced, black eye'd; with bristly black hair in his head, having the hair of one of his eyelids white, his ears bored, a mixture of white hairs in his head freckled like an adder in the neck, knees and other parts of his body, dressed in a hat and red vest, and a red under-vest, black stocking breeches, bare-footed, and speaks English very imperfectly, strayed from his master's house in Glasgow, early on Monday morning the 11<sup>th</sup> of August current. He answers to the name of Bob. Whoever can secure and give account of him to Claud Marshall, writer in Glasgow, will be paid all charges, and thankfully rewarded.

Four foot high and fourteen years old, this boy was surprisingly short and young and his very imperfect English invites speculation as to what services he performed. The phrase 'answers to the name of' was also used during this period in advertisements for lost or strayed dogs. The British enslaved some Native North Americans during the eighteenth century.

Usually 'masters' wanted their servants or slaves back, but there are also instances of 'masters' wanting to dispose of them (August 1766):<sup>20</sup>

To be disposed of

A NEGRO WOMAN, named Peggy, about nineteen years of age, born and brought up in Charleston, in the Province of South Carolina, speaks good English, an excellent good House-wench, and washer and dresser, and is very tender and careful of children. She has a young Child, a Negro boy, about a year old, which will be disposed of with the mother. For particulars inquire at the publisher of this paper.

The port of Charleston in South Carolina was the main North American port used by Glasgow merchants at this time. It is not absolutely clear whether or not the mother and her young son were for sale but another notice is unequivocal (September 1766):<sup>21</sup>

TO BE SOLD

A Smart NEGRO BOY, eleven years old. He was brought over from North Carolina about four months ago. For particulars apply to Mr James Thom vintner, Old Assembly-close, Edinburgh.

It is striking, and disturbing, how many young boys continued to feature in these advertisements, for instance this notice of April 1768:<sup>22</sup>

RUN away from his master, a BLACK BOY, of about 13 years old, long hair, and had on when he went away a thickset coat, and leather breeches. It is intreated, if any person discovers him, they will send information thereof to the publisher of this paper, who will pay all expences.

The boy may have been found and then offered for sale:<sup>23</sup>

A BLACK BOY to sell

TO be sold a BLACK BOY, with long hair, stout made, and well limb'd, is good tempered, can dress hair, and take care of a horse indifferently. He has been in Britain near three years. Any person that inclines to purchase him, may have him for 40l. He belongs to Captain Abercrombie at Broughton. This advertisement not to be repeated.

Forty pounds was a very considerable sum, but the asking price may have been in pounds Scots rather than pounds sterling. Captain Abercrombie of Broughton has not been identified.

Four further advertisements relating to black boys were published in 1768 and 1769:<sup>24</sup>

Muirton, in Perthshire, June 3d, 1768.

RUN AWAY from Captain Oliphant Kinloch, a NEGRO SLAVE, a stout lad, well made, 17 years of age, five feet seven inches high, had on a dark coloured thickset coat and vest, buckskin breeches, a blue collar, and done round the edges with crimson velvet, a black velvet cap, and answers to the name of London. Any person apprehending the said NEGRO SLAVE, and lodging him in any of his Majesty's gaols, by applying to Mr James Smyth, writer to the Signet, Edinburgh, or the proprietor at Muirton, shall receive twenty shillings sterl. besides their expences. He, among other things, carried off a Silver Watch, which, if he offers to sale, it is hoped will be stopt for the proprietor, a fellow servant's behoof. N.B. As every person knows the penalty of harbouring a slave, any person that does will be prosecute in terms of the act of parliament.

TO BE SOLD,

A BLACK BOY, about 16 years of age, healthy, strong, and well made, has had Measles and Small pox, can shave and dress a little, and has been for these several years accustomed to serve a single Gentleman, both abroad and at home. For further particulars inquire at Mr Gordon bookseller in the Parliament-close, Edinburgh, who has full powers to conclude a bargain. This advertisement not to be repeated.

RUN away from his Master, upon Monday last [18 September 1769], an EAST INDIA BLACK BOY, called MERCURY, about 13 years of age, well looked and pretty long featured with long straight hair; had on when he went away a long blue coat, with a red neck of scarlet cloth, and red button holes and waistcoat of the same, with leather breeches, and marled [striped] worsted stockings. – His Master will take it as a particular favour, if any person will give notice of him to the publisher of the Edinburgh Courant; and, if any person or persons shall be found concealing said black boy, after this advertisement, they will be prosecute in terms of law.



ABSENTED himself, a few days ago, from his master, AN AMERICAN BLACK BOY, named *JAMES*, about 15 years of age, with short curled hair, speaks remarkable good English, and is very artful, had on, when he went away, a brown suit of cloaths with white metal buttons, and black stocking breeches. As he also carried off some shirts and silk stockings of his master's, which, in all probability, he may offer to sale; this is therefore to forewarn all persons against harbouring the said boy, or purchasing any of the cloaths from him, and in particular, all masters of vessels are cautioned against employing him, as they may depend on being prosecuted to the utmost rigour of the law. Any person who will give information where he may be found, shall be handsomely rewarded by applying to the publisher; or to Mr. David Findlay, Hairdresser, in Paterson's court, Lawn-market, Edinburgh.  
N.B. It is imagined he is gone for Glasgow, or the Highlands.

The elaborate dress in the first advertisement suggests that the unnamed 'lad' was a footman or domestic servant though he is described as a slave. Captain George Oliphant Kinloch of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot purchased the estate of Kinloch from his cousin. William Kinloch, in 1757.<sup>25</sup> The second advertisement is a reminder that at least attempts were made to sell slaves in Scotland while the third from the description of the clothes also refers to a servant and the fourth is another case of a black person absconding with some of his master's possessions.

Another 'Caesar' went missing in June 1771:<sup>26</sup>

A BLACK SLAVE run away

On the 11<sup>th</sup> current there run away from the house of Col. Munro of Novar, in Rosshire, A BLACK SLAVE, a native of the East Indies, called CAESAR. He is about 25 or 26 years of age, about five feet four or five Inches high, has long black hair, and was bred a cook. – Whoever secures the said Slave within any of his Majesty's gaols in Great Britain, upon notice given to Col. Munro, by Dingwall, or to John Fraser writer to the signet at Edinburgh, shall receive FIVE GUINEAS reward. It is hoped masters of ships, and others, will be careful not to secret or carry off the said Slave, otherwise they shall be prosecuted in terms of law. If the Slave himself shall return to his master's service, his offence shall be forgiven.

Sir Hector Munro (1726-1805), 8<sup>th</sup> laird of Novar, Rosshire, was commissioned in 1747, promoted captain in 1756 and lieutenant-colonel on half-pay in 1765. He went out to India with the 89<sup>th</sup> Highland Regiment of Foot in 1760 and served in India from 1760 to 1765 and from 1778 to 1782. He was the British commander-in-chief in India, 1764-1765.<sup>27</sup> 'Caesar' seems to have been Munro's Indian cook brought back by him from India. It is striking that Munro regarded him as a slave rather than as a servant.

The young age of many of these black slaves or servants, and in some cases the emphasis on their



Silver slave or dog collar, maker's mark for Robert Luke, Glasgow, c1732. (Courtesy of Glasgow Life/Glasgow Museums)

handsome appearance, raise questions as to what services they provided. On the other hand, attractive-looking black boys may have been the equivalent of fashion statements and presumably the younger they were the easier they were to train. That there was a market in Scotland for black boys is suggested by the following notice:<sup>28</sup>

WANTED

A MASTER for a BLACK BOY just arrived from the West Indies. He is about thirteen years old, extremely well made and featured.

Any Gentleman wanting such a boy, may be informed of further particulars by applying to Mr Francis Shand, at Mess. Hamilton and Dalrymple's, Edinburgh.

The above advertisement appeared in November 1771. Shortly afterwards the status of slaves in Britain received its first serious legal challenge. Charles Stewart or Steuart, a Boston customs official, attempted to send to Jamaica to be sold his black slave, James Somerset, because he had absconded. However, Somerset had been baptized and in December, 1771 his three godparents applied to the Court of the King's Bench for a writ of *habeas corpus*. Lord Mansfield granted the writ and after a series of hearings ruled on 22 June, 1772 that Somerset should remain free rather than be sent to Jamaica. A narrow interpretation of the judgement would mean simply that a master could not forcibly remove a slave from England for sale abroad against the slave's will. However, Mansfield described the institution of slavery as 'odious' and unsupported by English common law. Consequently, many interpreted his judgement as meaning that slavery in England was effectively illegal. Both Mansfield and Stewart happened to be Scots but Mansfield was Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, an English court, which did not have jurisdiction over Scotland with its separate legal and judicial systems. Nevertheless, the judgement received widespread publicity in Scotland and influenced attitudes towards slavery.<sup>29</sup>

The Mansfield judgment of 1772 seems to have encouraged black servants in Scotland to desert their masters. Certainly, several notices or advertisements relating to black servants who had absconded appeared in Edinburgh newspapers between 1772 and 1774:<sup>30</sup>

*Edinburgh, May 2. 1772*

RUN AWAY from his MASTER, upon Monday last  
A BLACK SERVANT:

He is about five feet ten or eleven inches high, strong made, short hair, about 23 years of age:- His Name is ANTHONY, had a dark coloured coat on when he went away, and can play a little upon the fiddle.- Whoever will secure him in any jail in Britain, shall be properly rewarded upon giving proper intimation to the Publisher of this paper.

RUN AWAY,

From ROSEND-HOUSE, near Burntisland, 23d Nov. 1772, A NEGRO LAD called CAESAR, belonging to Murdoch Campbell of Rosend, and carried off several things belonging to his Master.- It is hoped no person will harbour or employ him, and that no shipmaster will carry him off the country, as his master is resolved to prosecute in terms of law. The above Negro (called Caesar) is about five feet eight inches high, and eighteen years of age.

RUN OFF FROM GREENOCK

A MULATTO, who was serving his time there as a joiner; supposed to be gone to Borrowstounness [Bo'ness], Carron or Leith, to ship for London – His name SYLVESTER. He had on him, when he went off, a blue cloth coat with clear buttons, a black cloth waistcoat, black pluth breeches, about five feet six inches high, a good deal pitted with the small-pox, about eighteen years old, clean made. – SEVEN GUINEAS REWARD will be given on securing and giving an account of him to the Publisher of this paper, to Mr Robert Ramsay at Leith, or to Mr James King at Port Glasgow.

RUN OFF

A BLACK NEGRO MAN, who passes by the name of WILLIAM NORTHUMBERLAND, the property of a gentleman lately from South Carolina.- He had on when he went away a brown short coat, turned up and lined with green, with green and white livry-lace. He is of a stout make, middle sized, flat faced, and a good deal pitted with the small pox. He is supposed to have gone to Leith in order to secure a passage for London, and will probably offer to work his passage, being a bred sailor.- It is therefore requested, that no gentleman will take him into his service, nor no Captain of vessels, ship-masters or others will take him on board their ship. A reward of TWO GUINEAS is hereby offered to any person who shall give information of him to Mr. John Graham wine cooper in Leith, or to William Sands at Mr William McDonald's writer to the signet, which will be paid upon his being secured.

A NEGRO RUN AWAY

THAT ON Wednesday the 10<sup>th</sup> current [10 March 1773], an EAST INDIA NEGRO LAD eloped from a family of distinction, residing in the Canongate of Edinburgh, and is supposed to have gone towards Newcastle. He is of the Molatto colour, and between 16 and 17 years, about five feet high, having long black hair, slender made, and long limbed: he had on, when he went off, a brown cloth short coat, with brass buttons, mounted with black and yellow button holes, breeches of the same, and a yellow vest with black and yellow lace, with a brown duffle fur out coat, with yellow lining and metal buttons, grey and white marled stockings, a fine English hat with yellow lining, having a gold loop and tassel, and double gilded button. As this Negro lad has carried

off sundry articles of value, whoever shall secure him, so as he may be restored to the owner, on sending notice thereof to Patrick McDougal writer in Edinburgh, shall be handsomely rewarded.

DESERTED from his Master's house in Glasgow, on the morning of Saturday the 3d current [3April 1773]

A NEGROE MAN.

He is about 35 years of age, and 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, pretty broad and stout made, broad faced, and somewhat yellowish complexioned; the white of his eyes are remarkably tinged with black, and he has a surly gloomy aspect; his dress, when he ran off, was an olive coloured thickset coat, jacket and breeches, a black wig tied behind, and silver buckles in his shoes; but as these were all good, tis probable he would exchange them for worse, and thereby supply himself with cash. There is reason to think he intended to go to London, and to take his road by Dumfries or Edinburgh. – His name is TOM, but sometimes he assumes the name of *Thomas Diddy*.

A reward of FIVE GUINEAS, and payment of all reasonable charges, is hereby offered to secure the said Negroe in any jail in Scotland, so as he may be kept safe, and delivered to his master's order: The money to be paid by Mr John Alston merchant in Glasgow, or James Marshall writer to the signet, Edinburgh, upon notice being sent to either of them, of the Negroe's being secured.

All shipmasters are hereby cautioned against carrying the said negroe abroad; and if any person harbours him, or assists him in making his escape, they will be prosecute.

#### ELOPED

From Service of Mr NAESMITH of STRANRAER, in the county of Wigtoun,

A BLACK BOY, to appearance of about fifteen or sixteen years of age. He is a good-looking lad, tall and well made, and answers to the name of MARSHALL; had on, when he went away, a raven-blue coloured coat, a vest of coarse black cloth, and wore a round hat or cap. He speaks broad Scotch, but not very plain, owing to a defect in his throat which makes him snivel thro' his nose. He is suspected to have taken the Carlisle road.

Mr Naesmith hereby offers a reward of TWO GUINEAS (besides paying all charges) to any person who shall apprehend or give information of the said Black Boy, so as he may be apprehended and brought back to his service; and it is intreated that any gentleman, or others into whose presence he may come, will detain him, and give notice thereof to the said Mr Naesmith at Stranraer, or Mr Thomas Naesmith writer in Edinburgh, either of whom will most thankfully pay all expences.

The word 'slave' does not appear in any of these notices though William Northumberland was claimed to be 'the property of a gentleman'. The only individuals who have been identified are Murdoch Campbell and John Alston. Murdoch Campbell, a merchant and lawyer from Thurso, owned Rossend Castle (near Burntisland in Fife) by 1765. He does not seem to have had any connection with slave plantations or the slave trade. John Alston (1743-1818), on the other

hand, at least had ties with British North America. He emigrated there in 1759 and settled in Maryland until 1770 when he returned to Scotland and became the manager of the Thistle Bank in Glasgow.

The Mansfield judgement in England was followed by the case of Knight v Wedderburn in Scotland. Joseph Knight was a black slave who had been transported from Africa to Jamaica and there bought by a Jacobite exile, John Wedderburn of Bandean or Ballendean in Perthshire. Subsequently, Wedderburn brought Knight as a house slave to Scotland where Knight formed a relationship with Annie Thompson, one of Wedderburn's female servants, and fathered a child by her. When Wedderburn refused Knight's demand to set up house with Annie, Knight absconded. Wedderburn then initiated legal action to compel Knight to return to his service but the sheriff depute of Perth ruled in favour of Knight on the grounds that Scots law did not recognize slavery. Wedderburn then appealed to the Court of Sessions in Edinburgh. Before a panel of fourteen law lords Wedderburn's lawyer argued that even if Knight were no longer a slave he was still obliged to provide Wedderburn with perpetual service like an indentured servant or an apprenticed artisan. Rejecting this argument in January, 1778 the law lords dismissed Wedderburn's appeal by a majority of ten to four and confirmed that slavery was illegal in Scotland.

Despite this ruling, the following newspaper advertisement appeared in December 1779:<sup>31</sup>

#### FIVE GUINEAS REWARD.

RUN AWAY from his master on the 22d November last [22 November 1779], a NEGRO LAD, about fifteen years of age, a stout lusty fellow, has been several voyages at sea, called NEPTUNE. When he eloped from his master at Greenock he was dressed in a new gray duffle coat, and breeches of the same, a red vest, and plated buckles. He is a good barber, and shaves well, and is supposed to be lurking somewhere about Edinburgh or Leith. He is under indentures to Mr. Roger Stewart merchant in Greenock, for seven years, from the 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1778.

Any person who can give information so as the said Neptune may be reprehended for the breach of his indentures, will receive FIVE GUINEAS of reward, by applying to Mr Roger Stewart of Greenock, or to John Logan, at Robert Sym's junior, writer to the signet.

Roger Stewart of Ronachan, Argyllshire, was a Greenock merchant and shipowner. He settled in Portsmouth, Virginia, before 1776 and then returned to Greenock, probably because of the American War of Independence during which he lent the British government his thirty-



two gun ship 'Defiance'. In 1786, he became one of the directors of the Clyde Marine Society, a charitable society 'for the relief of sick, worn-out, and decayed ship masters, officers, and mariners', and their widows and dependants, from Glasgow, Port Glasgow, Greenock and Crawford's Dyke. Subsequently, he served as chief magistrate of Greenock from 1795 to 1797. It is striking that 'Neptune' is described not as a slave or as a servant but as someone who was indentured to Roger Stewart for seven years. Various categories of people in Scotland were indentured, which meant that they were not supposed to leave their master's employment without their master's consent. For example, an apprentice to a master goldsmith was usually 'bound' to his master for seven years. Soldiers, of course, were not allowed to desert from their regiments and Scottish coal miners and salt workers were similarly tied to their jobs until the law was changed in 1799. Various forms of indentured labour also existed in British colonies in the West Indies and North America.

In this context, comparisons between advertisements for the return of runaway blacks may be compared with advertisements relating to a soldier who had deserted (June 1768) and to coal miners who had left their jobs without their employer's permission (April 1773):<sup>32</sup>

DESERTED from the Sixth Regiment of Foot, at Inverness, on Sunday the 22nd May 1768, JOHN BEATON five feet seven inches high, twenty four years of age, swarthy complexion, round vizedged, black eyes, black hair, born in the parish of Urquhart, in the shire of Murray, by trade a labourer, has a stoop in his walk. Whoever apprehends the above deserter, so as he may be secured in any of his Majesty's gaols in Great Britain, shall receive twenty shillings reward, over and above the allowance by Act of Parliament for apprehending deserters.

#### BOUND COLLIERS DESERTED.

WHEREAS JOHN RUSSELL, JAMES and ALEXANDER LOVES, bound colliers to Quarole colliery, have run off or deserted their service, *Intimation* is hereby made to all coalmasters, tacksmen of coalworks and others, who may harbour or employ them, that Carron Company, tacksmen of the above colliery, are determined to prosecute them for the penalties due by statute and Common law, for harbouring or employing bound colliers. - - It is therefore requested that any Gentlemen to whom they may have applied for employment, will give notice thereof to Carron Company.

John Beaton's age and place of birth are given with more precision than in the case of a black slave or servant. On the other hand, no details besides their names, are provided for the coal miners. Presumably the managers of Carron Company assumed that the coal miners would

have to seek employment in another coal mine. Carron Company was an important ironworks founded in 1759 near Falkirk. It used coke or coal rather than wood or charcoal in its smelting process and presumably leased Quarole coal mine to secure its supply of coal.

By the 1780s black servants seem to have been regarded by their masters as possessing the status of apprentices, 'bound' to their masters for a period of seven years. A notice published in November, 1784, relating to yet another 'Caesar; makes this assumption:<sup>33</sup>

#### A BLACK SERVANT STRAYED.

DESERTED from the service of a Gentleman in Ross-shire, a Black Servant Lad, named CAESAR. He first went from his master's house to Fortrose upon Monday the 1<sup>st</sup> current, and it is supposed he took his route from thence to Edinburgh. As he is bound to his master, it is expected that no gentleman will take him into service; and a proper reward shall be given to any person who can inform the publisher where he is to be found so as he may be returned to his master.

A similar notice appeared in March 1786:<sup>34</sup>

#### A Black Boy Deserted his Service.

WHEREAS an Asiatic BLACK BOY, about 13 years of age, deserted from the service of a gentleman residing in George's Square, Edinburgh, on Thursday the 9<sup>th</sup> instant, seduced, as is supposed, by some interested person. - This is to give notice, That as the Boy was placed under the immediate care of the gentleman whom he served, and is his indentured apprentice for a term of years not yet expired, whoever harbours him after this intimation will be prosecuted in terms of law.

A further change in the status of black servants in Scotland was beginning. By the late 1780s Edinburgh newspapers were publishing details of meetings, petitions and resolutions relating to the abolition of the African slave trade rather than notices for the return of runaway blacks. At the same time, black people in Scotland were becoming more integrated. For instance, baptisms of black servants were becoming more common and were sometimes reported in the newspaper press, as in this case from May 1789:<sup>35</sup>

Wednesday evening, a gentleman's black male servant was baptized in the Chapel of Ease, Glasgow, by the Rev. Mr McLeod. His answers to the Interrogations put to him respecting his faith in the doctrines of Christianity gave much satisfaction to the minister and audience.

The campaign to abolish the African slave trade gained momentum in Scotland between 1790 and 1792. However, the increasingly radical character of

the French Revolution from 1792, and the declaration of war by the French Republic against Great Britain in February, 1793, encouraged the association of reform with sedition and support for the enemy. It was not until March, 1807 that an Act of Parliament finally made the transportation of slaves in British ships from Africa to the West Indies and the Americas illegal. Attitudes towards black servants in Scotland were also changing as this newspaper report from November 1809 indicates:<sup>36</sup>

We some time ago inserted a copy of an address from a number of Africans in Edinburgh, which was presented to the Lord Provost of the city, by the Earl of Moira, on the occasion of the jubilee, and we stated that an institution was about to be established for the purpose of procuring the means of education to this description of them.

An institution has accordingly been formed in this city, under the name of '*The Society for the Education of Africans*', of which the Right Hon. Lord CALTHORPE has been chosen President.

The general objects of the institution are to promote the instruction of Africans, residing in Edinburgh, in reading, writing, and the common use of figures, to make them acquainted with the principles of religion, and to encourage them in the faithful discharge of their duties, so as, in all respects, to render them useful members of society.

With this view, Mr ROBERT MACDONALD has been appointed teacher of a School, which was opened on Monday last, in Warriston's Close, High Street, and which is to be under the immediate superintendence and direction of the Society. As a considerable number of Africans are in the situation of domestic servants, it has been considered as probably most consistent with the convenience of families, which the Society are, in every case, anxious to consult, that the school should be open for three hours every evening, during which the Africans may come to it at any time that shall be found most convenient for their masters, and return home the moment their task is performed. The school will, therefore, be open every evening from six to nine o'clock.

A subscription book lies at the counting-house of Mess. RAMSAYS, BONARS, & Co. bankers, Royal Exchange, where the contributions of those will be received who are disposed to support the objects of the institution.

George III had ascended the throne on 25 October, 1760, nevertheless his golden jubilee was celebrated a year early on 25 October, 1809. There were religious services, peels of bells, military parades, gun salutes, official banquets, loyal addresses, street illuminations and firework displays, but also initiatives of a humanitarian nature. In many places the poor were fed, debtors and Danish prisoners of war were released from prison and army deserters were amnestied.<sup>37</sup> Establishing a Society for the Education of Africans, with a view to setting up a night school for Africans in Edinburgh, was a surprising but therefore not wholly atypical way of

commemorating the royal jubilee. 'A number of Africans in Edinburgh' may have petitioned for such an institution but the petition was presented to the Lord Provost by the Earl of Moira. He was a prominent military and political figure having served in the British army in the American War of Independence and having pursued an important career in British and Irish politics. He had been appointed Commander-in-Chief Scotland with the rank of General in 1803 and had occupied the post of Master-General of the Ordnance from 1806 to 1807. A friend of the Prince of Wales he was a future Governor-General of India. The British offer of freedom to black slaves who volunteered to fight on the British side in the American War of Independence may have influenced him, especially as some of these freed slaves ended up in Britain. It is not clear why the relatively undistinguished Lord Calthorpe should have been chosen President of the Society. Teaching reading, writing, arithmetic and the principles of religion to Africans chimed with Scottish Enlightenment assumptions regarding the value of education and human perfectability. The objective was not wholly philanthropic since the aim was to 'encourage them [the Africans] in the faithful discharge of their duties' and to make them 'useful members of society.' Also considerable concern was shown that attendance at the night school should not interfere with their duties as domestic servants or inconvenience the families who employed them.

The final notice from an Edinburgh newspaper indicates that, by 1812, a black servant, in this case probably an African from Africa rather than from the colonies, could advertise his services just like anybody else:<sup>38</sup>

#### WANTS A PLACE,

AN AFRICAN MAN SERVANT, of the Ebo cast, qualified for the domestic work of a genteel family, or for the service of a single gentleman with a pair of horses. He has served in very respectable families in the country, and can produce an excellent character for abilities, sobriety, honesty, and goodness of temper.

Apply to Mr Robert Ross, grocer, foot of Caltonhill.

Whether any of these runaway blacks were returned to their masters or not is unknown. Yet, with little or no money, and only the clothes they stood up in plus in some cases a few stolen articles, it is difficult to imagine how they could have disappeared easily, particularly as there were so few black people in Scotland and the nearest significant black community was in Liverpool.

By the 1780s, though, notices relating to runaway blacks had ceased to appear in Edinburgh newspapers. Changes in public attitudes as well as legal judgements meant that it was no longer acceptable for masters to treat black or Asian servants as their property or even as

their indentured employees. This change in legal status was followed by at least some evidence of successful assimilation.<sup>39</sup>

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 The secondary literature on the subject includes Thomas (Tom) M. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords: a study of the tobacco merchants of Glasgow and their trading activities, c1740-90* (Edinburgh 1975), and *Scotland's Empire* (London 2003); David Dobson, *Scottish trade with Colonial Charleston, 1683-1783* (Glasgow 2009); Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (East Linton 2001); Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester 2005); Alan Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740-1800* (New York and London 1990); Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh 2006). For earlier evidence of black people in Scotland see Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: the history of black people in Britain* (London 1984), pp. 2-5.
- 2 See George K. McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: the Scottish elite and politics in the eighteenth century* (London & New York, 2008).
- 3 *Edinburgh Evening Courant (EEC)*, 18-19 May 1719, p. 402; *Scots Courant (SC)*, 15-18 May 1719, p. 11.
- 4 See Douglas Hamilton, 'Scottish Trading in the Caribbean: the rise and fall of Houston & Co.', in Ned C. Landsman (ed.), *Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800* (Lewisburg 2001), pp. 94-126.
- 5 For examples featuring Colin McKenzie see *EEC*, 11-14 November 1709, p. 2, and *SC*, 6-9 November 1713, p. 2.
- 6 *EEC*, 16-17 November 1709, p. 2, and *SC*, 6-9 November 1713, p. 2.
- 7 *EEC*, 26-28 December 1721, p. 4439.
- 8 *EEC*, 9-13 February 1727, p. 1026.
- 9 Horace E. Hayden, *Virginia Genealogies* (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1891, reprinted 1979), pp. 151-153.
- 10 *EEC*, 27 October 1740, p. 3.
- 11 *Caledonian Mercury (CM)*, 2 June 1748, p. 3. Caesar is the name of a pet dog in 'The Twa Dogs' by Robert Burns. Similarly Juba is the name given to both a black servant and a pet dog in *Belinda* (1801), a novel by Maria Edgeworth.
- 12 'Run away from Colonel McDowell of Castle-Sempill upon 30<sup>th</sup> January, a Negro man, named CATO: he is middle aged, pretty tall, ill-legs, with squat broad feet. Any person who apprehends him, or gives any information of him to Colonel McDowell, shall have a sufficient reward.'
- 13 See Douglas Hamilton, 'Scottish Trading in the Caribbean: the rise and fall of Houston & Co.', in Landsman, *Nation and Province in the First British Empire*, pp. 94-120, and Stuart M. Nisbet, 'Clearing the Smokescreen of Early Scottish Mercantile Identity: from Leeward sugar plantations to Scottish country estates c. 1680-1730', in Allan I. Macinnes and Douglas J. Hamilton (eds.), *Jacobitism, Enlightenment and Empire, 1680-1820* (London 2014), pp. 109-122.
- 14 *EEC*, 28 May 1757, p. 3.
- 15 *EEC*, 23 July 1760, p. 3.
- 16 *EEC*, 14 September 1765, p. 3.
- 17 Alastair Livingstone, Christian W.H. Aikman and Betty Stuart Hart (eds.), *No Quarter Given: the Muster Roll of Prince Charles Edward Stuart's army* (Glasgow 2001), p. 22 and p. 279.
- 18 *Scots Magazine*, 52 (1790), p. 623.
- 19 *EEC*, 13 August 1766, p. 3.
- 20 *EEC*, 30 August 1766, p. 3.
- 21 *EEC*, 27 September 1766, p. 3.
- 22 *EEC*, 4 April 1768, p. 3.
- 23 *EEC*, 18 April 1768, p. 3. See also James Johnson, *The Scottish Musical Museum; consisting of upwards of six hundred songs* (Edinburgh 1839), vol. 4, p. 391, with reference to 'The Slave's Lament' by Robert Burns.
- 24 *EEC*, 8 June 1768, p. 3; *EEC*, 28 January 1769, p. 3; *Edinburgh Advertiser (EA)*, 19-22 September 1769, p. 190; *EA*, 17-21 November 1769, p. 326.
- 25 See *Answers for Captain George Oliphant-Kinloch, purchaser of the lands of Lochblair* (Edinburgh 1767).
- 26 *EEC*, 22 June 1771, p. 3.
- 27 See McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State*, pp. 181-182.
- 28 *EEC*, 16 November 1771, p. 1.
- 29 See John W. Cairns, 'After Somerset: the Scottish experience,' *Journal of Legal History*, 33 (2012), pp. 291-312.
- 30 *EEC*, 2 May 1772, p. 3; *EEC*, 25 November 1772, p. 3; *EEC*, 9 January 1773, p. 1; *EEC*, 6 February 1773, p. 1; *EEC*, 15 March 1773, p. 3; *EEC*, 5 April 1773, p. 3; *EEC*, 14 February 1774, p. 3.
- 31 *EA*, 7-10 December 1779, p. 373.
- 32 *EEC*, 4 June 1768, p. 3; *EEC*, 28 April 1773, p. 3.
- 33 *EEC*, 13 November 1784, p. 3.
- 34 *CM*, 18 March 1786, p. 1.
- 35 *EEC*, 9 May 1789, p. 3.
- 36 *EEC*, 25 November 1809, p. 3.
- 37 See Jenny Uglow, *In These Times: living in Britain through Napoleon's wars, 1793-1815* (London 2014), pp. 490-491.
- 38 *EEC*, 2 May 1812, p. 1.
- 39 I would like to thank Professor Lyn Innes, Professor Bob Morris and Professor Clare Ungerson for their helpful comments and suggestions.