

The background of the entire page is a traditional marbled paper pattern, often called a 'stone' or 'shell' pattern. It consists of intricate, swirling, and cell-like shapes in shades of dark green, brown, tan, and cream. The pattern is dense and covers the entire surface. In the center, there is a rectangular box with a solid red background and a thin white border. Inside this box, the title and author information are printed in a white, serif font.

SIR JOHN CASS
THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY
AND THE SLAVE TRADE
1705-1718

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FOREWORD

SIR JOHN CASS'S FOUNDATION was established in 1748, some 30 years after its benefactor died. Since that time its trustees have applied its assets to its charitable purpose of enhancing the education of young people in London. Also since those earliest days, the Foundation and originally one and more recently the two schools bearing its name have honoured Sir John at an annual Founder's Day ceremony in February, close to the date of his death.

When written histories of the Foundation have been commissioned, their narratives concentrate on Sir John's inherited wealth from his father, the foundation of the original charity school, labyrinthine politicking within the City of London, factions within the governing body and so forth. However, the Foundation has been aware for some time that Sir John was actively involved in the Royal African Company and that some of the wealth that he accumulated derived from his investing in what in the early 1700s was the growing slave trade. To make his involvement clearer, the Foundation commissioned Clio's Company in 2012 to produce web-based teaching materials to illustrate this as part of a creative examination of the past, present and future of Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School.

We then jump to the start of 2020. Still wanting to know more about origins of the Founder's wealth, the Foundation commissioned Professor Miles Ogborn FBA of Queen Mary, University of London, to probe afresh the possible contribution of Sir John's involvement in the slave trade to the overall personal wealth that provided for his school during his lifetime and later for the charitable endowment.

Covid-19 restrictions meant that Professor Ogborn's research plan for interrogating original documents was interrupted by the closure of the National Archives in Kew and the London Metropolitan Archive. Nonetheless, we are grateful that he has been able to provide a statement of his findings to date for this monograph.

Then, before scholars were able to resume their normal habits, the world was shocked by images of George Perry Floyd Jr dying while under restraint by police in Minneapolis on 25 May. Cries arose across the world that 'Black Lives Matter'. Racial injustice even displaced the global pandemic narrative in media reports here in the UK. In Bristol, a late-nineteenth-century statue to Edward Colston was toppled from its plinth and tipped into the harbour. Institutions of all kinds – schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, art collections and country houses among others – had to face the charge of living off the profits of slavery.

Mindful of the hurt and anger caused by the slavery connection, rarely considered, the two schools of which the Foundation is trustee resolved swiftly to change their names. Slavery stands in direct opposition to the ethos of both schools. Likewise the Foundation itself also resolved to change its own name and to remove all statues of Sir John Cass. This is not done lightly, especially considering the widely appreciated educational and social impact its support over centuries and especially in recent decades has achieved. But the trustees view this as an opportunity to reaffirm that while our commitment to supporting the educational needs of young people is undimmed, we will be more active in addressing continuing injustices and inequalities, especially where these are associated with racial and other forms of prejudice. With our new identity from 2021 onwards our relationship to our partners and potential beneficiaries will demonstrate an interest in their futures and not, as might have been seen as our custom, the veneration of a Founder from a different age.

This monograph is indeed an initial statement. More facts will emerge. Yet in the time available, Professor Ogborn has been able to demonstrate more strongly than before Sir John Cass's role not just in investing in the Royal African Company, but in its active management of the slave trade from its London base.

With many other organisations also probing their historical connections to slavery, whether in our immediate educational outcomes orbit (those whom we have customarily called the 'Cass Family'), geographically close by (especially in the City of London), or further across Greater London (such as by the London Mayor's Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm), we will be better placed to view Sir John's life and legacy as part of a wider picture.

The Foundation's governors and staff are pleased to share Professor Ogborn's findings in this monograph with the 'others' just outlined, starting most obviously with the two schools, The Aldgate School and Stepney All Saints Secondary School, which until a few months ago both featured 'Sir John Cass' in their names. To all readers and researchers, we can say that we are not trying to erase nearly three centuries of custom and practice. But we are trying to use newly-acquired knowledge to ensure that we focus on present injustices as we define our priorities for grant-making and thereby develop further our educational support for institutions and individuals.

Postscript

We refer above to our decision to change of name of Sir John Cass's Foundation. The Charity Commission has now approved our new name, The Portal Trust. We shall be publicizing this shortly alongside a new visual identity, website and social media channels.

We will also reassure potential beneficiaries that our commitment to furthering the education of young people in London is undimmed.

Meanwhile we salute all those who have served the foundation in this cause over nearly three centuries.

John Hall
Treasurer and Chairman

Richard Foley
Clerk and Chief Executive

Sir John Cass's Foundation
31 Jewry Street, London EC3N 2EY
February 2021

JOHN CASS was a London businessman, a Member of Parliament for the City, and the founder of a charity school in Portsoken ward, Aldgate. He built on the fortune that his father, Thomas Cass, had amassed by operating as a major building contractor to the Ordnance Board, the government body in charge of the defence of the realm and the supply of munitions, and ‘subsequently achieved greater prominence in City circles by becoming in January 1705 an assistant in the Royal African Company.’¹ He was actively engaged in the Company’s trading operations until August 1708, established the school that bears his name in 1711, and pursued a successful career in both City and national politics. He was knighted in 1712 and died in 1718. What follows details John Cass’s role in the transatlantic slave trade through his involvement with the Royal African Company.

I

P. Gauci (2002)

‘John Cass (1661–1718)’,

historyofparliamentonline.org.

The Royal African Company was a joint-stock company established in 1672 to replace its predecessor, the Company of Royal Adventurers, which had been set up in 1660 to trade with Africa. The new company, now run by merchants rather than aristocrats, held a monopoly over trade from Africa to the Americas under a charter granted by King Charles II, and was headed by the Duke of York (Charles II's brother, and later King James II). As such it took its place alongside London's other major companies involved in the expansion of overseas trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Muscovy Company (founded 1555), the Levant Company (1581), the East India Company (1599) and the Hudson's Bay Company (1670). Like those ventures its capital was provided by a large group of stockholders, who were paid dividends from the profits but were also obliged to provide further capital when the company's finances required it. The majority of the stock in the Royal African Company was increasingly held by merchants involved in overseas trade, but investors also included the reigning monarchs and, at times, prominent politicians and well-known figures from the period such as Samuel Pepys, John Locke, John Evelyn and Hans Sloane.² Between 1672 and the early 1720s the Royal African Company transported nearly 150,000 African men, women and children into slavery, mainly in the Caribbean. While this is only a small part of the estimated 12 million Africans taken into slavery in the Atlantic world, the Company 'shipped more enslaved African women, men, and children to the Americas than any other single institution during the entire period of the transatlantic slave trade'.³

INVESTMENT IN THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

John Cass bought £1000 worth of Royal African Company stock on 5th December 1704. This enabled him to be elected as an 'assistant' in January 1705 and, along with twenty-four others, become actively involved in the Company's trading operation, under the oversight of its sub-governor, Thomas Pindar, and deputy governor, John Nicolson.⁴ Cass increased his holding to £6000 worth

²

K.G. Davies (1957) *The Royal African Company* (Longmans, Green and Co., London).

³

W.A. Pettigrew (2013) *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill) p. 11.

⁴

In 1705, the governor, and nominal head of the Company, was Queen Anne's husband, Prince George of Denmark.

of stock in 1705, and sold £1000 of it in 1707 to Thomas Martin, a significant trader in stock, holding £5000 worth until 1708 when he stopped being an assistant. He received a total of £172 10s in dividends between 1705 and 1708, but was required to provide a further £400 of investment between 1707 and 1708. From 1713 to 1716 Cass held £1700 of Royal African Company stock, with £1000 of that held by a trust. He retained a share in the company until his death in 1718.⁵

John Cass's financial engagement with the Royal African Company was significant. The £6000 he had invested in the Company in 1705–1707 is the equivalent of at least £1 million today.⁶ £6000 is also approximately what a cargo of 300 enslaved people would be sold for in early eighteenth-century Jamaica. Examining the structure of Royal African Company stock ownership at the start of 1706 shows that for the 377 investors recorded, the average holding was just over £2900, with a median of £2000. Cass was in the top 15% of stockholders (fifty-four people owning £6000 of stock or more) who, together, held 43% of the stock. This was, however, a highly skewed distribution. The top 5% of investors owned 21% of the stock by value (including seventeen men who owned more than £10,000 worth of stock), while the bottom 50% owned only 16% (including 142 investors with holdings of £1000 or less). There was an active market in these stocks. In the year to January 1706, about a third of the investors who still held stock had either bought or sold, although that included about half of those in the top 25% of investors and only about a quarter in the bottom 25%. Since holding £5000 or more of stock was required to be elected as an assistant or governor, this group of twenty-six men were part of the top 25% of investors (with an average holding for the group of just under £7700). Fourteen of them held between £5000 and £5900 of stock, nine of them (including Cass) held between £6000 and £9900 of stock, and the remaining four held over £10,000 worth. This latter group included Daniel Hays, a London merchant, who was the largest investor in the Royal African Company in 1706 with £20,800 worth of stock.⁷

⁵ See entries in the Royal African Company stock ledgers, The National Archives, Kew (TNA T70/192-197, and 'Sir John Cass', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

⁶ This is based on the commodity purchasing power calculator provided by measuringworth.com.

⁷ Calculations from entries in TNA T70/193 Stock Ledger, 1705–1706.

MANAGING THE ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY

The governors and assistants conducted business through weekly meetings held throughout the year at the Company's building in Leadenhall Street, where the East India Company also had their headquarters. These meetings of the Court of Assistants managed the work of a series of committees. Election as an assistant was virtually unpaid and involved substantial work. Yet it was undertaken by leading figures in the City of London.⁸ John Cass was no exception. He attended around two thirds of the Court of Assistants' meetings held during his time in post, and only once missed more than three meetings in a row before he stopped attending in August 1708. On election as an assistant Cass joined the Committee of Correspondence. He continued on that committee through to 1708, when he was named as its chair and also joined the Committee of Eight, which increasingly oversaw all the company's business. These were two of the five Royal African Company committees – the others being the committees of accounts, of goods and of shipping.⁹

The early eighteenth century was a period of change and substantial difficulty for the Royal African Company. During the late seventeenth century, the Company had used its monopoly position to establish England's place in the transatlantic slave trade, competing with the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French in trading metal goods and cloth for enslaved people with West African merchants and sovereigns. While different regions of the West African coast relied on different forms of trade, the Royal African Company developed the 'castle trade' via coastal 'forts' and 'factories' (or trading stations) organized from Cape Coast Castle in what is now Ghana. The company chartered ships to take cargoes of goods to its West African employees who traded them for women, children and men who were transported in terrible conditions to the Caribbean and North America. Those who survived the voyage were sold, often on credit, to planters who put them to work growing sugar and other crops on plantations. Mortality rates were very high among the

⁸ Davies, *The Royal African Company*, p. 159.

⁹ TNA T70/87 and 88 Court of Assistants Minutes, 1702–1705 and 1705–1713.

enslaved in the Americas, as planters profited by squeezing as much work as possible out of their labour force and buying more enslaved people when they died or were no longer fit for work. As one seventeenth-century enslaved Barbadian was reported to have said, 'the devil was in the Englishman that he makes everything work: he makes the negro work, he makes the horse work, the ass work, the wood work, the water work and the wind work'.¹⁰

Yet the Royal African Company could not meet the demand for enslaved labour from the planters of the British sugar islands, particularly the largest of them, Jamaica, prompting calls for its monopoly to be removed so that supply would increase. The chartered companies were also under attack from merchants whom they had locked out of these particularly lucrative overseas trades, and prosecuted as interlopers. As a result, after considerable political pressure from a coalition of independent slave traders, planters and suppliers of trade goods, the slave trade from England was opened to other merchants (the so-called 'separate traders') in 1698, on payment by them to the Company of a 10% duty on exported goods. The Royal African Company's share of the slave trade from England fell from 97% in 1687 to 8% in 1701. As a result of irrecoverable debts owed by slaveholders in the Caribbean, large stocks of unsaleable goods in its West African forts, and its unsustainable borrowing, the Company engaged in modes of financing which were 'a more serious hindrance to its prosperity than the losses of the war [of 1701–1714] or the competition of the separate traders'.¹¹ Attempts at reorganization of the capital and petitions to Queen Anne and to Parliament in 1707 for political support had little effect, and the company's monopoly effectively ended in late 1708, with the slave trade formally being opened to all British merchants with the demise of the 1698 act in 1712.¹² This dramatically increased the involvement of merchants and investors from ports other than London, particularly Bristol and Liverpool, and significantly expanded the trade in enslaved people across the Atlantic.

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Quoted in M. Ogborn (2008) *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) p. 237.

11

W.R. Scott (1902) 'The constitution and finance of the Royal African Company of England from its foundation to 1720', *American Historical Review*, 8:2 p. 253.

12

Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt* and T. Burnard (2020) "'A pack of knaves": The Royal African Company, the development of the Jamaican plantation economy and the benefits of monopoly, 1672–1708', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 21:2.

MANAGING THE SLAVE TRADE

Despite competition from separate traders and an unfavourable political climate, the Royal African Company continued its trade in people throughout the early eighteenth century. During the years that Cass was an assistant (1705–1708) there are fifty-five voyages recorded as undertaken for the company, mostly from London, which embarked over 14,000 enslaved Africans for the Americas, divided roughly equally between men, women and children. On average, each ship held just under 300 people, although the smallest held 78 and the biggest 675. The vast majority were bound for the sugar plantations of the Caribbean, especially Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua. Of those taken onto the company's ships, 11,794 are recorded as having survived the Middle Passage. The other 2347 died at the Company's hands. Those imprisoned on the ships did attempt to rescue themselves from enslavement. Uprisings are reported on five of the voyages – the *Sherbrow* (1707), the *Whidah Merchant* (1708), the *Dorothy* (1708), the *Pindar Galley* (1708), and the *Mary* (1708) – although none succeeded.¹³ It is impossible to trace the lives of the individuals transported once they were sold in the Americas.

As an assistant and a member of the Committee of Correspondence, John Cass was involved in organizing the most significant aspects of the Royal African Company's slave trading business. In November 1707 he was one of a committee of ten who were appointed to 'Sollicit the Company's affairs to be laid before the Parliament', petitioning for the Company's monopoly to be supported by the legislature.¹⁴ Prior to that he had worked since early 1705 with others reading and writing letters to ships' captains, and to the Company's servants, merchants and agents engaged in its business in West Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁵ Examining the letters to which Cass was a signatory shows the Royal African Company's operations in the early eighteenth century.

Letters of instruction to ships' captains set out where they were to sail to on the African coast, what cargo they were to take on board – most

13
This information is gathered from the Slave Voyages database (slavevoyages.com). See also D. Richardson (2001) 'Shipboard revolts, African authority, and the Atlantic slave trade', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 58:1 pp. 69-92.

14
TNA T70/88 20th November 1707.

15
Seventy-two letters signed by John Cass have been identified in the TNA T70 series.

were slave ships bound for the Americas, but others were engaged to return directly to England with cargoes of ivory, beeswax, gold and dyewood – and how they were to proceed. They were instructed to conform to the Navigation Acts which regulated English shipping, to avoid pirates and French privateers, to keep their ships and crew well provisioned and well prepared, and to regularly report back from all their ports of call. Captains were also supplied with ‘prayers and pious Instructions’ and encouraged to ensure ‘that the worship of God be religiously observed aboard your Ship’ so ‘that God may bless you with good Success’. The letters sought to ensure that the trade in enslaved Africans worked profitably for the Company by giving detailed instructions to captains on buying, transporting and accounting for their human cargoes. The extent and longevity of the Company’s trade by this point is reflected in the standardization of these letters which repeated in each case instructions such as that ‘To prevent the mortality of the Negroes you must frequently wash your Decks with Vinegar & divert them as much as you can with some sort of musick & play’, or that any of the human cargo who died must be accounted for daily in writing and on oath by the captain, chief mate and surgeon. Indeed, it is plain from the letters that the lives of these women, men and children were only of concern as a matter of profit and loss, either through what the Company’s committee saw as preventable mortality or corrupt practice by those whom they employed. To counter this the Company appealed to calculating self-interest, and made the provision, for ‘incouragement’ of the captains, that they would be rewarded with four out of every 104 enslaved people that they delivered alive to the Americas.¹⁶

Once on the African coast, the ships were to deliver their cargoes to the Company’s merchants and the factors who traded for them, and to reload their holds with enslaved people supplied from the Company’s forts and factories. The Committee of Correspondence wrote at length to those employed to manage the trade in Africa. They told them which ships were coming, what cargoes they would bring and require, and instructed them on how to keep their records and accounts, and

16

Letter to Captain Brown of the Fame, 31st May 1705, in TNA T70/63 Instructions to Captains (4), 1704–1719, pp. 55 and 57.

how to report to the Company, as well as insisting that when it came to the enslaved that they ‘take Care that none sickly diseased or maimed nor above 30 years of age or under 14 be purchased or put on board our shippes ... & that during your having them by you, you are to see that they be well fed, well lodged & well secured’. Since the trade depended upon good relationships with African political leaders, the agents were also instructed to ‘hold frequent Palavers’ and ‘keep a friendly Correspondence’ with ‘ye King’ and ‘other great men’, and to speak and act ‘in the mode that is allowed respectfull in that place, not lessening your owne nor their Character’.¹⁷ The Company was always concerned that it depended upon, but could not adequately control, the activities of their distant ‘servants’. Stipulations to purchase enslaved men, and not too many women and children under fourteen, were routinely ignored, and relationships with African polities were often fractious. The Company also had an eye to potential losses through corruption, and the committee’s letters repeatedly told those in Africa not to trade on their own account, or with interlopers and separate traders, and always to act in the Company’s best interests. They also developed contractual and other mechanisms to try to ensure that such orders would be heeded.¹⁸ Indeed, the ships’ captains were instructed both to gather letters from Company servants on the coast reporting on their own superiors and to inform the Company ‘as you find them Negligent or acting Contrary to the Companies Interest’.¹⁹

Once loaded, and encouraged by the Company to weigh the benefits to them of gathering a full cargo of enslaved people against the likelihood that those on board would die there, the ships were consigned to American ports. The captive Africans were branded and then shackled below decks, with the men separated from the women and children. Crammed onto specially constructed wooden platforms they were surrounded by the stench of disease and the sounds of the dying, and constantly exposed to the threat of violence from the crew.²⁰ Those who survived the Middle Passage were delivered to the Company’s agents on each island for sale to the planters, with returns coming either in cash or in sugar when the credit the Company had extended was repaid. The

17
Letter to Captain John Tozer, Agent at Gambia, 4th April 1706, TNA T70/52 Letters Sent to Africa, 1703–1715, pp. 125–127.

18
A.M. Carlos (1994) ‘Bonding and the agency problem: Evidence from the Royal African Company, 1672–1691’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 31:3 pp. 313–335.

19
Letter to Captain John Goodsole of the *Union*, 14th June 1705, TNA T70/63, p. 64.

20
S.E. Smallwood (2007) *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA).

committee's letters to those agents reported which ships had been consigned to them, and asserted the need for these cargoes to find the best market, and gain the best prices.²¹ Once again the calculus was a stark and brutal one. As Edward Chester, agent on Antigua, was instructed in March 1705, 'When ye Prince of Orange or Royall Affrica arrive with you Wee recomend it to you that ye weakest of ye Negroes be disposed on first & if you apprehend or be advised ... that Negroes will sell to a greater advantage at Mountserrat and Nevis, you take care to dispatch a proportion thither with all Expedition & that ye Negroes you send thither may be such as wee may have no Complaints thereof hereafter'.²² The committee also relayed information about the market for sugar in Europe (particularly in a context of falling prices), the need to recover debts from the planters, and the ways in which the Company in England was acting in the interests of the sugar islands. As with ships' captains and agents in Africa, they insisted on seeing proper records, accounts and correspondence, concerned that agents in the Caribbean might also be working for themselves. In the context of war with France in the early eighteenth century, they reported on the losses incurred by enemy action, warned of the need to defend against privateers in the Caribbean, and tried to discover and mitigate the damage caused by the enemy attacks on Nevis and St. Christopher in 1706, 'in wch we fear we Shall have a Share'.²³ As ever, the committee's eyes were on the bottom line, and their discussions and letters sought to minimize their financial losses.

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In early eighteenth-century Jamaica enslaved men were sold for about £20, women for about £18, boys for about £10 and girls for about £8, see T. Burnard (2007) 'Evaluating gender in early Jamaica, 1674–1784', *The History of the Family*, 12 pp. 81–91.

22

Letter to Edward Chester, Agent at Antigua, 1st March 1705, TNA T70/58 Plantations (4), 1701–1715, pp.168–169.

23

Letter to Madam Christian Broome and Phineas Andrews, Nevis, 27th June 1706, TNA T70/58, p. 234.

24

Scott, 'The constitution and finance of the Royal African Company', p. 258.

BENEFITTING FROM SLAVERY

Yet there were losses to the Company in the early eighteenth century. The Company's stock price more than halved between 1705 and 1708 (when it effectively lost its monopoly), falling particularly sharply after 1707.²⁴ This raises the question of why men like Cass invested money and effort in the Royal African Company at this time. As Kenneth Davies has argued, there was always the possibility that, with political support from Parliament, the Company's fortunes might change. Indeed, the price of its stock seems to have risen or been relative stable

between 1702 and 1705 when Cass first invested, and he was actively involved in making the case for the Company to Parliament in 1707. There may have been other reasons too. As Davies notes, the ‘company in its day was one of the leading corporations in the City of London: service to it was as honourable as, and not less profitable than, office-holding in a livery company’.²⁵ It also increasingly presented itself as a public-spirited corporation operating in the national interest against what it represented as the self-interested claims of the separate traders.²⁶ The Company was, moreover, strongly associated with the Tory politics that Cass espoused, making investment in it into a political statement.²⁷ The Company’s politics may also have meant that it provided useful social, economic and political connections as Cass was elected to Parliament in 1710, and as Deputy Lieutenant of Tower Hamlets and Master of the Carpenters and Skinners livery companies. For example, one of the executors of Cass’s will in 1718 was Sir William Withers, who had served as governor of the Royal African Company from 1707 to 1709, as an East India Company director (1698–1700 and 1709–1710), as mayor of London (1707–1708), and as a Tory MP for the City (1707–1715).²⁸

John Cass’s involvement with the Royal African Company was significant in terms of the capital, time and effort he committed to it. The amount he had invested in the Company in the 1710s roughly matches the £1000 he committed to set up a charity school in Hackney in his 1709 will.²⁹ When he died in 1718 he passed on extensive property holdings in East London and Essex, the value of which cannot be determined, and over £3900 in goods, chattels and debts owing to him, including six ‘Africa Bonds’ worth £700 in total.³⁰ There was also £2743 in government debentures that Sir John had inherited from his father, who had been issued them in lieu of payment for Ordnance Board work, including for the slave colony of Virginia.³¹ Although these debentures were not finally paid to Cass’s widow until 1720, taking them into account means that his moveable property at death was worth about the same as the face value of his RAC stocks had been at their high-point in 1705–1707. These inherited and

25
Davies, *The Royal African Company*, p. 162.

26
Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt*.

27
A.L. Swingen (2015) *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (Yale University Press, New Haven).

28
TNA PROB 11/566/82 Will of Sir John Cass, 8th November 1718 and S. Handley (2002) ‘Sir William Withers (c.1654–1721)’, historyofparliamentonline.org.

29
‘Sir John Cass’, *ODNB*. £1000 in 1709 is the equivalent of £136,800 today. However, by the time he died Cass no longer held the land committed for the Hackney school, so this provision could not be acted upon, see *An Act for Making the Will of Sir John Cass, Knight, Deceased, Effectual*, London Metropolitan Archive [LMA] CLS/215/MS31039.

accumulated assets were more than enough to generate the £360 per annum in perpetuity that was committed from his estate to the charity school in Aldgate when his 1718 will was finally put into effect.³² Beyond his financial involvement with the slave trade, Cass's involvement in petitioning Parliament in 1707 suggests that he concurred with the Company's idea of itself as operating in the national or public interest, as well as it serving his own ends. As a result, his political career and his philanthropic activities demonstrate continuity with his involvement in the slave trade rather being separate from it. Yet this understanding of slave trading as serving the national or public interest depended on Cass and the Royal African Company treating enslaved Africans as nothing more than commodities whose lives and deaths only mattered as items in their accounts.

Professor Miles Ogborn
Queen Mary University of London

February 2021

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An Account of the Estate late of Sir John Cass Knight and Alderman of London deceased, LMA CLC/215/MS31042 shows that his wife, Elizabeth, received £5241 8s 4d, but had to discharge £1321 5s 5d of debts from her husband's estate.

31

List of Debentures, Petition and Warrant for Payment of Debentures Issued by the Board of Ordnance to Thomas Cass, LMA CLC/215/MS31280. In 1710 Ordnance Board creditors like Cass petitioned unsuccessfully to get their long-standing debentures transformed into equity in the newly-formed South Sea Company along with other government debt. The new company's expected value was predicated on its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

32

An Act for Making the Will of Sir John Cass, Knight, Deceased, Effectual, LMA CLC/215/MS31039.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



MILES OGBORN is Professor of Geography at Queen Mary University of London, where he has worked since 1994. He is an historical geographer whose research investigates Britain's involvement in early modern trade and empire. His books include studies of England's largest joint stock corporation (*Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company*, Chicago, 2007), slavery in the Caribbean (*The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World*, Chicago, 2019) and how trade and empire shaped and was shaped by the lives of individuals (*Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800*, Cambridge, 2008).

This report was commissioned in early March 2020. Restrictions on archival access due to Covid-19 lockdown measures meant that its production was delayed until November 2020, and it had initially only been possible to use manuscript sources from The National Archives, and not those relating to Sir John Cass in the London Metropolitan Archives.

FRONT ENDPAPER

WEST AFRICA (detail)

Part of 'A new & accurate map of Negroland and the adjacent countries also upper Guinea, showing the principle European settlements & distinguishing wch. belong to England, Denmark, Holland & c: the sea of the rivers being drawn from surveys & the best modern maps and charts, & regulated by astron. observns.' Drawn by Emanuel Bowen, c.1747.

West Africa was a highly differentiated region which European traders such as the Royal African Company had to try to understand in order to profit from the slave trade. This map shows a mid-eighteenth-century British understanding of the region's environment, economy and politics, where knowledge evidently decreases from the coast inland. It demonstrates a broad understanding of ecological

zones, and of the trade routes across them. It indicates the European forts and factories on the coast (marked E, F, D and Dk for the different European states), and the trading regions as named by the British ('Tooth Coast, Gold Coast, Slave Coast'). As well as broad geographical designations that would have meant little to West Africans (such as 'Negroland'), the map attempts to name and locate the African polities with which slave traders had to deal, including the Akan and Asante kingdoms.

PAGE 4 & BACK ENDPAPER

THE WEST INDIES (detail)

Part of 'A topographicall Description and Admesurement of the YLAND of BARBADOS in the West INDYAES. With the Mrs Names of the Severell plantacons'. From Richard Ligon (1657) *True and Exact Historie of the Island of Barbados* (London).

Barbados was the first Caribbean island to be transformed into a plantation economy based on the production of sugar by enslaved labour largely supplied by the Royal African Company. It was a crucial part of England's Atlantic empire, only surpassed by Jamaica in the early eighteenth century. This mid-seventeenth-century map emphasizes the ownership of land by English planters, including ten thousand acres belonging to the merchants of London. By 1667 80% of the island was planted with sugar. As a result, both food and lumber for construction had to be imported from New England. In 1645 there were 5,580 enslaved people on Barbados. By 1698 there were 42,000, making up over two-thirds of the island's population. Ligon's map also indicates the violence used to keep this labour force captive.

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