

Oxford DNB: June 2021

Welcome to the seventy-fifth update of the *Oxford DNB*, which adds four new lives, revisits seventeen others, and adds a reference group article linking a further thirty-nine biographies connected with British slave-ownership. The update is also accompanied by a survey of over 300 lives connected with Coventry, UK City of Culture in 2021.

From June 2021, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*) offers biographies of 64, 119 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 61,787 articles. 11,802 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Most public libraries across the UK subscribe to the *Oxford DNB*, which means that you can access the complete dictionary for free via your local library. Libraries offer 'remote access' that enables you to log in at any time at home (or anywhere you have internet access). Elsewhere, the *Oxford DNB* is available online in schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions worldwide. Full details of participating British public libraries, and how to gain access to the complete dictionary, are available [here](#).

June 2021: summary of newly-added content

A reference group article on the **West India interest (act. 1823-1834)** links thirty-nine of those figures who represented British slave-owners in parliament and in the contemporary public debates surrounding slavery between 1823, when the movement for abolition revived, and 1834, when slavery was abolished following legislation in the previous year. Seventeen lives connected with the slave economy in the period preceding abolition are also revisited in this update. Among them is **Charles Rose Ellis, first Baron Seaford (1771-1845)**, an absentee slave-owner in Jamaica and a leader of the West India interest in parliament. Another revisited life is that of the Norfolk landowner, **Edward Harbord, third Baron Suffield (1781-1835)** who, influenced by neighbouring abolitionists in his county, became a leading advocate of abolition in the House of Lords, where he was often a lone abolitionist voice as well a critic of the compensation paid to those who owned enslaved people.

Details of the distribution of the £20 million awarded to slave-owners were published in March 1838 in a House of Commons paper which listed, by parish, the number of enslaved people, the name of the party to whom compensation for ownership of them was awarded, and the amount of compensation paid. The Parliamentary Paper represented a census of slave-ownership in the colonies of British Empire where slavery existed up to abolition: the British West Indies (Jamaica, Antigua, Honduras, St Christopher, Grenada, Dominica, Nevis, Virgin Islands, St Lucia, British Guiana, Montserrat, Bermuda,

Bahamas, Tobago, St Vincent, Trinidad, Barbados), Mauritius, and Cape of Good Hope. The names of those listed as claimants and recipients of compensation were collated with other biographical data, and were made identifiable, discoverable, and searchable on the database created by the Legacies of the British Slave-ownership project from 2009. ODNB (which was originally published in 2004) has been taking account of these findings, and over 180 articles have been updated to incorporate information from the online record of British Slave-ownership. The current release is a further instalment in that process, and part of ODNB's continuous updating of articles in the light both of fresh research and of recently-digitized and newly-accessible sources.

New lives have also been added to ODNB to represent slave-ownership in the national past. Thirty lives on that theme were released in October 2016. The current release includes a further example, the **Booker family (act. 1793-1961)** of merchants, who were founders of a succession of businesses which traded successfully into the late twentieth century. The firm originated in links between plantations in Demerara (later British Guiana, then Guyana), worked by enslaved and subsequently indentured labour, where coffee, sugar, raw cotton, and timber were grown and shipped to north-west England. **Josias [i] Booker (1793-1865)**, born in Carnforth, Lancashire, was the first of the family to go to Demerara, in 1815, before returning to Liverpool where he was a prominent businessman, active in civic affairs. His younger brother, **George Booker (1799-1866)** oversaw the business in Guiana, which

concentrated on sugar production. **Josias [ii] Booker (1828-1881)**, born in Liverpool, carried on the business in partnership with **John McConnell (1829-1890)**, born in Ulverston, a non-family member who had started in the firm's Liverpool office, and who, following the death in 1881 of Josias [ii] Booker, bought out the remaining Booker share of the partnership. The business, comprising retailing, merchanting, and shipping, became the preserve of the McConnell family into the twentieth century, when the West Indies sugar industry went into decline. The last McConnell family member of the firm died in 1961.