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THE ROYAL SOCIETY, SLAVERY
AND THE ISLAND OF JAMAICA: 1660–1700

by

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SUMMARY

This paper presents evidence of the interrelationships that existed between the Royal Society in its early years, the slave colonies, and the West African slave trade, first under the auspices of the Royal Adventurers, and later the Royal African Company (RAC). First, it examines the extent of the overlapping of memberships between the bodies. Second, it chronicles the Society's ownership of shares in the RAC. Third, it investigates involvement by Fellows of the Society in the administration of the (then) slave colony of Jamaica. Finally, it presents a few relevant extracts from the Society's foreign correspondence from outposts of the rising empire, and also extracts from discussions at ordinary meetings concerning the cause of the differences in colour between Europeans and Africans. Following the sale of its shares in the RAC in 1699, no further investments in the slave trade by the Society are known to have occurred.

INTRODUCTION

The Second Charter of the Royal Society, which passed the Great Seal on 22 April 1663, proclaimed Charles II as both Founder and Patron of the Society. 'We have long' it begins, 'and fully resolved with Ourselves to extend not only the boundaries of Empire, but also the very arts and sciences. Therefore We look with favour upon all forms of learning, but with particular grace We encourage philosophical studies, especially those which by actual experiment attempt either to shape out a new philosophy or to perfect the old...'. This essay, as may be gathered from its title, is not concerned with examining the philosophical studies referred to by Charles II, but rather the Empire, its extending boundaries and the relationship of the Royal Society and its Fellows to it.

By 1660, England had acquired the basis of what later became the British Empire. In the colonies of St Kitts, Barbados, Jamaica, Maryland and Virginia the use of slaves imported from Africa had been established to varying degrees, and was growing. It is the core argument of this essay that the Royal Society was part of the social and economic order which chose slavery as the most viable means of generating wealth

via commodity production, and thus was in varying degrees interconnected with slavery. An example of the extent of this interconnection was Charles II's chartering of both the slave monopoly and the Society in the same year.

I chose Jamaica rather than any of the other slave colonies because its connection to the Society in the period under examination is greater. Two of Jamaica's Governors, for instance, were Fellows. One of them, John Vaughan, Earl of Carbery (figure 1), later became President. Then there was the stream of scientific reports and papers from the likes of botanists and Fellows such as Hans Sloane, who himself became President in the 18th century, and Nehemiah Grew.

The question as to the degree to which the Royal Society would have suffered or fallen behind the scientific institutions of rival imperialist nations such as France without these slave colonies is beyond the scope of this short essay. So too is the gargantuan task of sifting through the unindexed Society *Journal Books* in order to gauge the precise extent to which the Society relied upon the slave system for scientific information. What I have done, however, is to make transparent the link between slavery and the Society, both institutionally and scientifically, a link which, in the terms of historiography, has lain dormant for some time. The theoretical purpose of this enquiry is to work towards reorienting the perception of the Society—away from the more academic institutional approach towards an integral approach, that is, examining the Society as being an entity which was a part of a nascent British imperial complex and thus shared and partook in whatever that complex created and destroyed.

THE ENGLISH SLAVE TRADE AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Overlapping memberships

The English slave trade began in 1562 when John Hawkins shipped some 300 slaves from Africa to Hispaniola. It continued in a restrained fashion through the next 100 years as a part of the more general trade to Africa, West Africa in particular, for items such as gold, ivory and hides. This African trade took many and various organized forms, most notably two chartered trade monopolies, the Senegal Adventurers of 1588 and the Ginny Binny Company of 1618. Due to the impossibility of enforcing monopoly on such a vast coastline, amongst other factors, both these endeavours did not prosper. Given it was ships from a rival trading power—Holland—that were satisfying much of the huge demand for slaves in the new colonies, it is unsurprising to see a further attempt at monopoly created on Restoration by the Crown.

It was thus in 1660, the year of the Royal Society's own formation, which saw the Charter for the Royal Adventurers into Africa pass the Great Seal. It mentioned gold, wood, etc., but not slaves, though slaves were an important component of the Adventurers' trade. The complete list of the 30 persons named in the Charter is given in Appendix I. The first 11 were members of the Stuart clan. Of the 30, 11 were already associated with the Society and/or became Fellows over the next few years. Of those designated in the Charter to manage the company, three of the six named were already



Figure 1. Portrait of John Vaughan, Third Earl of Carbery.

associated with or later became F.R.S., viz William Coventry, Sir Ellis Leighton and Cornelius Vermuyden.¹

The year 1663 saw the issue of the Second Charters of both the Society and the Royal Adventurers. It was in the latter's Second Charter that the first formal reference to the matter of slave trafficking was formally stated. The company 'could set to sea ships &c with ordnance &c and shall fore ever hereafter have use and enjoy mines of gold and silver which are or shall be found in all or any of those parts for the buying and selling bartering and exchanging of for or with any negroes slaves good wares merchandises whatsoever to be vented or found at or within any of the cities &c...'.² Further, the company could 'arrest and seize all ships negro slaves goods wares &c brought contrary to this grant...'.³ By this time the Royal Adventurers was fully involved in the slave trade, regularly offering slaves for sale in the West Indies for £17 each.⁴ Of the 66 names listed in the new Charter, nine were or became F.R.S., as can be seen in the list in Appendix II.

The matter of overlapping memberships was not simply restricted to the Royal Adventurers, and included memberships of many of the great trading companies of the era. Take for example the First Charter of the Royal Fishing Company of 1664. This sanctified involuntary labour, but not lifelong slavery, on company ships: 'and what ease it will be to our kingdoms to have many of the lazy and idle people set to work and trained up in the fishing trade...'.⁵ From its list of 37 names, 11 were, or became, Fellows of the Society; their names are listed in Appendix III.

To demonstrate more fully that this interconnection between the Society and the slave trade was no mere froth on the surface, I offer some suitable quotations from the era. The first is from the year 1667, and comes from Sir Ellis Leighton, F.R.S., in his position as Secretary of the Royal Adventurers. 'Open marketts and free trade' argues Sir Ellis to the representatives of the West Indian planters and free traders opposed to the slave monopoly in a House of Commons debate, 'are best for those that desire them is certaine, and so it is ... to buy cheape and sell deare and most of all to have their commodities for nothing...'.⁶

A far more telling quote, however, comes from Thomas Sprat (F.R.S. 1663), in his *History of the Royal Society* of 1667, the Society's first authorized history. In his discussion of the changes wrought by intermarriage, social promotion, civil war and education on an English way of life he considered was insular and a class structure he viewed as overly rigid, he makes this comment:

This alteration has bin caus'd in our memory... And still we have reason to expect that this change will proceed further, for the better: if our gentlemen shall more condescend to engage in commerce, and to regard the Philosophy of Nature. The first of these since the King's return, has bin carry'd on with great vigour, by the foundation of the Royal Company: to which as twin sister of the Royal Society, we have reason as we go along to wish all prosperity. In both these institutions begun together, our King has intimated the two most famous works of the wisest of the antient Kings: who at the same time sent to Ophir for gold, and compos'd a Natural History, from the cedar to the shrub...⁷

Following the demise of the Royal Adventurers as a result of problems similar to those encountered by its predecessors, another trade into Africa monopoly with special

28
November 22^o 1682.
Present at Council.

Sir Christopher Wren	M ^r Kill
Sir John Hooke	M ^r Aston
M ^r Henshaw	M ^r Koche.
M ^r Colwall	D ^r Tison.

A Committee for auditing the Treasurers Accounts were Appointed. The President the two Secretaries ^{Mr. Kill} and D^r Tison.

Upon Consideration of laying out part of the Stock of the Royal Society to the best Advantage, it was concluded that 200 Original Stock in the African Company should be brought at the rate if now goes at 260 p^{er} cent that is in all 520 & M^r Kill is desired to contract for the same and he it transferred according to the custom in that Company and giving a Declaration to the Society that the said money is in trust for the Society

M^r Kill presented a Proposal from M^r Collins concerning his ^{enterprising} to print a discourse of D^r Wallis intituled a Treatise of Algebra Historical & practical written in the Year 1676 by D^r Wallis and then by him sent to M^r John Collins to be communicated with others of the Royal Society and some enlarged by him so as to contain not only a History but an Institution of Algebra according to his ^{method}

Figure 2. Council Minutes (22/11/1682). The text illustrated concerns the authorization of Mr Hill to purchase shares in the Royal African Company.

provisions regarding slaves as commodities was established in 1672: the Royal African Company. Of the 24 names in the most important first tier, five were or became F.R.S.: Duke of York (F.R.S. 1663); Sir John Banks (F.R.S. 1663); George Lord Berkely (F.R.S. 1663); Sir Richard Ford (F.R.S. 1673); Lord Ashley (F.R.S. 1663). Of note in the second tier are Sir Joseph Williamson (F.R.S. 1663, and later P.R.S. 1677–80); and John Locke (F.R.S. 1668).⁸

Of the Fellows who were actually involved in administering the company during the period 1672 to 1700, four are worthy of mention. The Duke of York occupied the senior position of Governor, an honorary post, until his displacement in 1688. He was, however, able to sell his shares, to his profit, from his exile in France in 1689.⁹ Next is Abraham Hill (F.R.S. 1663) the Society's Treasurer from 1663 to 1665 and again from 1679 to 1700. Hill held the important position of Deputy Governor from 1691 to 1692. He was also one of the Court of Assistants from 1683 to 1685 and again from 1688 to 1690.¹⁰ As Treasurer he was responsible for the Society's purchase of stock in the African Company in 1682 (figure 2). Sir Jeremy Sambrooke (F.R.S. 1681) was Sub-Governor in 1689, and an Assistant from 1685 to 1687.¹¹ Finally there is Sir Joseph Williamson, who was an Assistant in 1673 and again from 1675 to 1677, and also a stock holder.¹²

Ownership of shares

In 1667, Charles II, after much pressure from the Council of the Royal Society for financial assistance, gave to it a grant of highly disputed lands in Chelsea. Following years of financial difficulty, the Council of 1682 successfully petitioned the King to purchase the lands back for the sum of £1300. On gaining the cash, the Council then set about deciding how to invest it. Barring some minor discussion of investment in property, it was carried that the sum be invested in stock of the East India Company (£200 of stock costing £750) and the Royal African Company (£200 of stock costing £520). As the amounts of stock purchased were not significant, and an excellent correspondence to the Americas, West Indies, West Africa, etc., was already in existence, the likely motive for investing in these Companies was the hope of a greater return than property. Below are the complete extracts of mentions of the Royal African Company in the Society's *Council Minute Books*, volume I (1660–1682) and volume II (1682–1727).

19.10.1682: It was farther discoursed whether it were not the best way for the Society to lay out their stock in purchasing actions in the African Company or some other company, if neither of the former ways should be thought fit to proceed with...

(These 'former ways' were in property, the Raleigh Estate, or the Monmouth fee farm rent.)

22.11.1682: Upon the consideration of laying out part of the stock of the Royal Society to the best advantage it was concluded that 200 pounds of original stock in the Royal African Company should be bought at the rate which it then went for, 260%, that is in all 520 pounds. And Mr Hill was desired to contract for the same, and to see it transferred, according to the custom of that company, giving a declaration to the Society that the said money is in

trust for the Society...

28.11.1682: Mr Hill sealed and delivered a declaration of trust for the 200 pounds of stock lately purchased in his name, and transferred to him by Mr Ryder...

06.12.1682: Mr Hill's acknowledgement of a trust of 200 pounds stock in the African Company for the use of the Society was put in the chest...

The next occasion in which the Company's name appears in the Minutes is early in 1699.

04.01.1699: Mr Hill acquainted the Society that the African Company stock belonging in the name of the Society was in the name of himself...

28.02.1699: It was proposed and balloted whether now the African stocks belonging to the Society should be sold, seeing they were lately risen high in their price, it was carried in the affirmative and that Mr Torriano should sell them and Mr Pittfield and Mr Hill were ordered to transfer them. The same was ordered for the East India stocks...

The full details as to the purchase of stock and the dividends paid to the Society by the Royal African Company as contained in the Society *Account Book*, volume II (1676–1723), are as follows.

1682: Paid for 200 stock in ye Royall African Company assigned to the Royall Society by Tho. Rider Esq.

1685: To money received for a dividend on ye Royall Society's stock of 200 in ye Royall African Comp 20 guiney.

1687: To money of the Royall African Comp: a dividend for 200 L stock – 21.00.00.

1688: To money received of the Royall African Comp by 2 dividends at 20 guineas per cent each to September 1688.

1693: Rec'd a dividend on 200 L stock in African Company – 21.00.00 ... 1692 November, rec'd for a dividend in the African Comp – 25.16.00.

The total dividend from 1682 to 1700 on the £200 of African Company stock costing £520 was £132.04.00. By contrast, the total dividend on the 200 of East India Company stock costing £750 was £567.07.09.

THE ROYAL SOCIETY AND THE ISLAND OF JAMAICA

One of the first recorded cases of English interest in Jamaica (figure 3) took place in 1596, when a small fleet led by Sir Anthony Shirley sacked and then burnt to the ground the existing capital of this minor Spanish possession, St Jago. A series of similar incursions finally led to the so-called Western Design of Cromwell in which Jamaica was prised from the small Spanish garrison in 1655. Apart from its strategic value, the island was also far larger than any of the other English Caribbean colonies. This latter point soon led to the influx of planters, indentured servants and, ultimately, huge numbers of African slaves to work the sugar.

It was the era of the Brethren of the Coast, Crown-approved—for a 5% cut of the booty—attacks on Spanish shipping, and colourful characters such as the noted pirate Henry Morgan and the slave-trafficking planter and sometime Governor of Jamaica Sir Thomas Modyford. It was in the company of these two men, Morgan having

recently been rewarded for the famous sack of Panama by Charles II with a knighthood as well as a position as the island's Deputy Governor, Modyford having recently been released from two comfortable years in the Tower of London for his part in that escapade—knowingly breaking a peace treaty with the Spanish whilst Governor—that John Lord Vaughan, Third Earl of Carbery (F.R.S. 1684, P.R.S. 1686–89) set out to take up his appointment as the new Governor early in 1675.

Below is part of a transcript of the first page of a Royal African Company account of the sale of a ship full of its slaves. The date of the sale is 5 June 1675, but three months after Lord Vaughan had arrived. The page is entitled 'Account of sale and disposall of three hundred and fifty one negroes received out of the ship Dilligence, Captain Thomas Arnold, for the accounts and risque of the Royal African Company of England'.

John Lord Vaughan – 6 males – £132; Sir Henry Morgan – 8 males, 4 females – £288; Sir Thomas Modyford – 16 males, 5 females – £462; Sir Henry Morgan – 1 male, 1 female – £48; Charles Atkinson – 5 males, 2 females – £132 ; Robert Melops – 4 males, 2 females – £144; William Whaley – 8 males, 4 females – £247 16 shillings; Nicholas Alexander – 8 males, 4 females – £288; William Beeston – 6 males – £150...¹³

The total number of slaves sold was 203, and the total amount of monies received was £4705.16.00.

Beyond the names of the future President of the Society, and Morgan and Modyford, lies that of William Beeston. In 1692, Beeston became simultaneously Governor of Jamaica and Factor (Agent) for the Royal African Company there. He occupied both positions until an Act preventing this was passed in 1698. It is worth noting that another future Governor, Hender Molesworth, though not in the above list, was appointed Company Factor in 1677 prior to his appointment as Governor in 1684. Vaughan attended the slave markets more than once. In fact he 'made the first purchases at three of the nine sales held in 1675–76. In three of the others, this distinction went to the Buccaneer, Sir Henry Morgan, the colony's Lieutenant Governor...'.¹⁴

The replacement for Vaughan as Governor was another F.R.S., the Earl of Carlisle. I quote extensively from a letter sent to Carlisle from an informant in Jamaica giving him advance intelligence as it provides a useful picture of the governorship of Vaughan.

Sir Thomas Modyford's people are to be avoided most, not that he has many there, being a man so universally hated, that coming back, in full cry with my Lord Vaughan to that island, a supposed triumpher over the court here, and their Governor's undoubted prime councillor, if not governor, yet he could not upon his attempting it, get himself elected assembly man in any one precinct, so much are his immoralities known and dreaded by the islanders...

Sir Thomas Modyford's advice has been the cause of all or most of the dislikes and hatred that have attended my Lord Vaughan both here and there... He put him on mercenary tricks of selling his own servants and his own honour together, then of running to Cape de Verde and employing a sloop of His Majesty to interlope for negroes in contrary to his solemn promises to His Royal Highness and the African Company; and his underhand joining with others to interlope from Holland to the advantage of Sir Thomas Modyford, and not himself, who by such insinuations and advices as he thought properest for my Lord's nature, got into



Figure 3. Map of Jamaica.

him, pretending to furnish him with house room, meat, drink and fruit; but when he gained his point thereby and found my Lord hated there and flighted here, then he charged him with a bill of some thousands of pounds for such petty inconveniences, at most excessive rates, having got his money beforehand into the custody of his son Charles Modyford, whom, by false pretences and promises, he had procured to be made by my Lord his sole agent, trustee and factor there...¹⁵

One of Charles II's main directions to Vaughan was to make some headway into the piracy directed against the Spanish shipping in the region, its original justification—failure of the Spanish to accept the status of the English invasion of 1655—having been removed. Vaughan's replies to London on this issue are worth mentioning. 'These Indies are so vast and rich and this kind of rapine so sweet that it is one of the hardest things in the world to draw those from it who have used it for so long... Let His Matie send what Orders he will about Privateering, there are almost none to execute them but who are in one way or another interested...'.¹⁶ He ultimately came into conflict with the King over this matter when Morgan openly became involved with supplying French pirates with men and ships, at a commission to himself, though not to the Governor. Vaughan dismissed him both from his post as Deputy Governor and member of the Jamaica Council. However, the King intervened on behalf of Morgan, completely reinstating him.

Vaughan's successor as Governor, the Earl of Carlisle, was sent out with an even more difficult task, that of imposing rule from London, where previously there had been a situation of the colonial Assembly making their own laws, then sending them to London for ratification or refusal. The slave-owning plantocracy who controlled the Assembly rejected this new system outright, leading Carlisle to arrest and deport his main opponents, including future Governor William Beeston, back to England for trial. Once more the King found in favour of his Governor's opponents, leading to the preservation of the old system. As with Vaughan, Carlisle made little headway against the privateers.¹⁷ There is no doubt that he, like his successors and predecessors, was part and party to the slave system he had been sent to preside over.

One of the primary duties of the Governor of Jamaica is best summed up by the victor of the revolution of 1688, William of Orange, in his 'Instructions to the Earl of Inchiquin', the new Governor, in 1689.

You are to give all due encouragement to merchants who shall bring trade unto Our said island, or in any way contribute to the advantage thereof and especially to the Royal African Company: and as We are willing to recommend unto the same Company that the said island may have a constant and sufficient supply of merchantable negroes, at moderate prices, in money or commodities, so you are to take care that payment be duly made... And We do hereby strictly charge and require you that, upon due information exhibited before you ... against any interloping ship, or in any negroes or goods imported contrary to Our Charter granted to the Royal African Company ... or shall in any manner whatsoever bring any negroes into any part of your government, or purchase any other than such as are imported and brought in by Our Royal African Company ... you do, in all such cases take especially care that such condemners of Our Royal Charter ... be severely punished by fine, imprisonment, or other such penalties...¹⁸

SCIENCE, SLAVERY AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY

One of the features of the Society's scientific work from 1660 to 1700 was the worldwide net of correspondence begun by its first Secretary Henry Oldenburg (F.R.S. 1663). Oldenburg created an elaborate series of questionnaires which he sent to as many respondents as he could get in touch with, in as many parts of the known world as European ships then sailed.

We may thence take occasion' he states in one of his addresses on this matter, 'to invite all ingenious men, and such as consider the importance of cementing philosophical spirits, and of assembling together ingenuities, observations, experiments and inventions, scattered up and down in the world; that they would be pleased partly to recommend themselves, as they have occasion, these kinds of inquiries to their ingenious acquaintance, either living upon, or traailing into such places, as are concerned; partly to joyn their symbols, and send in their proposals, and whatever shall occur to them worthy to desire information about...'¹⁹

As would be expected, letters and reports to and from the English colonies in North America and the West Indies, and to a lesser extent their factories and forts and trading settlements in places as diverse as West Africa, Sumatra, India and China, dominate such a correspondence. The following is a detail from a questionnaire sent to Sir Thomas Lynch, as the new Governor of Jamaica in 1672, by Oldenburg. It includes questions such as:

...whether in Jamaica every night it blows off the island every way at once, so that no ship can come in by night, nor goe but early in the morning, before the seabrise come in ... whether at the point in Jamaica wherever you dig five or six feet, the water that appears does ebb and flow ... whether in some ground in Jamaica that is full of salt petre, the tobacco flasheth as it smoketh ... to observe whether the shining of fire flies can contract or expand their light as they fly ... whether the sugar in Jamaica cures faster in ten days than that at Barbados in six months...²⁰

Lynch, as did many others, took his correspondence with the Society seriously as this letter, Number 13, from the Society's *Classified Papers*, volume 10(1), 'Botany', reveals.

An Account of ye Cacao tree by Sr Thos. Lynch from Jamaica March 2nd, 1672 sent by C. Cullen ... I send you on this ship Capt Cullen Commander a box markt that has a cacao tree painted to the like.... We formerly might have made here 2 or 300,000 pounds per annum, but these last years hardly 5,000; yet are not people at all discouraged but plant it faster than ever, especially to the eastward where are divers young walks that have not one blasted tree... Cacao was originally of these Indies, and wilde; towards Maracaio are divers spots of it in the mountains, a little of it I have gott by accident, which I send for the King... nothing, mee thinks, commends itt, so much as that it should pass by detaile for money in North Spain and the silver Countries...

Apart from being Governor of Jamaica twice, from 1671 to 1675 and 1682 to 1684, Lynch was himself also a large planter, hence a slave owner. It is likely that a slave ship bore the letter.

A further letter, Number 32, from *Classified Papers*, volume 10(1), 'Botany', makes explicit the social structure of Jamaica at this time. It is from Dr Nehemiah

Grew (F.R.S. 1671) and though undated was most likely written around 1672.

The Description of the American Potato... The American Potato is a root which grows in all the Caribee Islands... The vines of those potatoes they give to the hoggs which feed very greedily upon them and they thrive much and produceth very good pork... Also it serves for both bread and meat to the vulgar; and it would be thought something hard for the poorest sort of people in this land to make 2 or 3 meals of bread only, yet this root is so pleasant and savoury that many of the poorest sort eat not anything else for many weeks without repairing, and the negroes have little else...

The majority of the questionnaires sent by Oldenburg and others were composed of a standard set of general enquiries to gain information on climate, fauna, flora, variations of the needle, geography, etc. In some instances enquiries relevant to this paper were introduced. Take for instance letter Number 55, from *Classified Papers*, volume 19, 'Questions and Answers', being a correspondence from the Society to a trading post of the Royal Adventurers. It is undated, though most likely *circa* 1670. It is entitled 'Inquiries for Guinea, recommended by Henry Oldenburg to Mr Floyd, Minister to ye English Factory there...' Beyond the standard questions are:

14. Whether it be true yt newly born children of ye blacks are not black but of a whiteish colour, inclining to yellowish, with yet in a month to change black?
15. What wood it is ye blacks use to keep their teeth clean and white? To send some of it over to us...
21. Whether they relish their fish best when stinking? And whether they eat elephant's flesh, a great delicacy even after it has been dead many days and stinks carrion like?
24. Whether it be true yt ye commodities bought of ye Europeans by ye people of Fetu in Guiny and by their neighbours in Acania are carried to Assingrad in ye Sam Acania, and from there through Alance to Accabel, and yt this Accabel lying 12 days behind Acania is yt very country wherein are those gold mines out of which comes ye most and best gold for which ye European commodities are bought by ye blacks?
26. Whether in Guiny they know of such a kingdom as is called Tairure, 300 or 400 leagues from ye Guiny shore said to be governed by an Emperor rich in gold...

This correspondence appears in volume 7 (1674–77) of the *Letter Books* (pp. 383–385), and is from Dr Martin Lister (F.R.S. 1671). Dated 1675, it is entitled 'An extract of M. Lister's letter to Mr Oldenburg containing some observations made by Dr Townes in the Barbadoes'.

It will not be unwellcome to you if I tell you that the blood of negroes is almost as black as their skin. I have seen the blood of at least 20 both sick and in health drawn forth and the superficies of it all is as dark as the bottom of any European blood after standing a while in a dish so that the blackness of negroes is likely to be inherent in them and not caused (as some imagine) by the scorching of the skin especially when other creatures here that live in the same clime and heat with them have as florid blood as those that are in cold latitudes via England. Though much further to the north there are people who cannot brag of much cleaner skins than Ethiopians so that the complexions are no less cold burnt (if I may so phrase it) than sunburnt.

Another relevant letter appears in *Letter Book*, volume 9 (1683–84), page 200. It contains a series of astronomical observations on the motions of the moon and stars sent to John Flamsteed, Royal Astronomer and F.R.S., from a correspondent at one of the major forts of the Royal African Company in West Africa. It is entitled 'A letter

from Mr Heathcote to Mr Flamsteed being some observations on the coast of Guiny Cabo Cors Castle’.

As with most Societies who meet regularly to discuss or debate various matters, the Royal Society was party to ‘cycles’ or discussions on particular matters which ranged over a series of meetings. One such cycle, in the late 17th century, concerned itself with speculations as to the causes and nature of the black skin of Africans, as the following extracts from the Society’s weekly meetings attest. This first cycle comes from Thomas Birch, *History of the Royal Society*, volume 4.

12.04.1682 It was likewise urged ... that Europeans by continuing to inhabit in Africa have been found to turn black, and that blacks in England after a few generations become white, and that wild asparagus which is very small and sticky, being planted in gardens and heightened with dung, become very large and soft...

19.04.1682 Mr Hill said that he had been told by Mr Colwell that a black who had the small pox in England grew afterwards white...

This cycle comes from *Journal Book*, volume 7:

05.03.1690 This [a discussion about the ability of the partridge bird to change colour in summer] occasioned a discourse about the colour of animals, particularly of the negroes, whether it was the product of the climate or that they were a distinct race of men... The same [Hans Sloane] said that in Jamaica he had seen a white woman born of a black father and mother with fair woolly hair...

26.03.1690 The same [Sir Robert Southwell] related that negroes are born reddish like other children but grow black soon after birth and begin to do so at the scrotum first...

02.04.1690 Mr Henshaw observed that in Africa and in those countries where the people are perfectly black, the skins of the monkeys are the same colour, perfectly black, for which reason he argued colour to proceed from climate...

And finally this cycle from *Journal Book*, volume 8:

02.12.1696 Dr Cockburn related he saw a negro opened whose gall was very black coloured...

09.12.1696 Dr Tyson said that Dechlinus had given an account the black colour in negro skins comes from vessels in a particular body between the skin and the epidermis which were full of black liquor...

23.12.1696 Some amendment made which gave occasion to discoursing further about the cause of blackness of negroes, Sir John Hoskins conceived it was occasioned by glands lying immediately under the skin...

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from this small selection of extracts from the huge collection of letters and journal entries available, as well as from the shareholdings and overlapping memberships, the Society as a scientific institution benefited from the wide distribution of forts, ports and colonies of the nascent English imperial complex. Hence to state, or pretend, that the Society was not a part of the England, and London, of its time, sharing in and of each and every aspect of the process of imperial growth is not in any way realistic. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of space, I have been unable to do justice to the matter of other colonial involvements of the Society and its Fellows, just as I have been unable to do justice in analysing, in particular, 17th-century

Society views on the matter of colour, and placing this in context. If this paper has achieved nothing apart from making a small contribution to expanding the horizons of historical research into the Society, it has achieved a great deal.

APPENDIX I

Complete list of 30 persons named in the 1660 Charter of the Royal Adventurers Company.

Duke of York (F.R.S. 1664); Princess Maria; Princess Henrietta; Prince Rupert (F.R.S. 1664); Duke of Buckingham (F.R.S. 1663); Duke of Ablemarle (F.R.S. 1664); Marquess of Ormond; Earl of Permbroke; Earl of St Albans; Earl of Sandwich (F.R.S. 1663); Earl of Bath; Earl of Ossery; George Lord Berkeley (F.R.S. 1663); Lord Craven; Charles Lord Brandon; Sir George Carterett; Charles Howard (F.R.S. 1663); William Coventry (F.R.S. but not an original Fellow); Sir Charles Sidley; Sir John Warner; Sir Charles Berkeley; Henry Jermyn; William Legg; John Denham (F.R.S. 1663); Sir Anthony De Martes; Sir Ellis Leighton (F.R.S. 1663); Sir Edward Turner; Edward Gregory; Richard Nichols; Cornelius Vermuyden (F.R.S. 1663).²¹

APPENDIX II

List of the nine Fellows who were part of the 66 persons named in the Second Charter of the Royal Adventurers in 1663.

Duke of York; Prince Rupert; George Duke of Buckingham; Charles Earl of Carlisle; Edward Earl of Sandwich; George Lord Berkeley; Sir Ellis Leighton; Thomas Povey (F.R.S. 1663); Mathew Wren (F.R.S. 1663).²²

APPENDIX III

List of the 11 Fellows who were part of the 37 persons named in the First Charter of the Royal Fishing Company of 1664.

Duke of York; Prince Rupert; Duke of Ablemarle (F.R.S. 1664); Earl of Peterborough (F.R.S. 1663); Earl of Sandwich; William Coventry; John Denham; Sir John Talbot (F.R.S. 1663); Silas Titus (F.R.S. 1668); Mathew Wren; Samuel Pepys (F.R.S. 1664).²³

NOTES

- 1 C. Carr, *Selected charters of trading*, p. 175 (Seldon Society, London, 1913).
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 4 *Ibid.*, note 4, p. 180.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 6 D. Galenson, *Traders, planters and slaves: market behaviour in early English America*, p. 14 (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 7 T. Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, pp. 407, 408 (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).
- 8 Carr, *op. cit.* note 1, pp. 187, 188.
- 9 K. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, p. 71 (Longman's Green and Company, London, 1957).
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 387.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 390.
- 13 Galenson, *op. cit.* note 6, p. 160.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 15 *Interesting tracts relating to Jamaica*, p. 111 (St Jago de la Vega, 1702).
- 16 A.P. Thornton, *West India policy under the Restoration*, p. 222 (Oxford University Press, 1956).
- 17 C. Black, *History of Jamaica*, p. 69 (Collins, London, 1958).
- 18 *Interesting tracts relating to Jamaica*, *op. cit.* note 15, p. 225.
- 19 *Philosophical Transactions*, Number 23, p. 414 (London, 11 March 1666).
- 20 Thornton, *op. cit.* note 13, pp. 148, 149.
- 21 Carr, *op. cit.* note 1, pp. 173, 174.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 179.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183.