PAXTON HOUSE

# Learning Resource 1: History is made in the kitchen, food from the Caribbean.

## Introduction

Have you ever drunk a cup of coffee and paused to think about the history of your chosen drink?

Do you take a spoonful of sugar with your tea, or enjoy a rum based cocktail on a night out? How about a bar of chocolate?

The associations that these food staples have with empire, colonialism, and the transatlantic slavery are often overlooked, or not mentioned. Yet, the importance of food to early empire is incontestable and an important part of British history.

This resource aims to provide some historical context the relationships, forged through food, between Scotland and the Caribbean, using Paxton House as a case study.

## Historical Context

The trade in food was both one of the main drivers of empire and key to its success. Commodities, which were once luxuries, such as sugar and coffee, became staples in British households by the late eighteenth century and continue to form an integral part of our diet. These foods were produced by the labour of enslaved people in the Caribbean. Around 3.4 million people survived being trafficked across the Atlantic in British ships as part of the Transatlantic Slave Tade, but millions suffered terribly and died prior to, during, and after the Middle Passage.

The British government went to great lengths to promote the trade in foods from the Caribbean. This trade created large amounts of wealth for both the British state and a vast array of individuals and tradespersons involved in its many aspects, from plantation owners to naval personnel, from ship owners to office clerks, from carpenters to weavers. Some of this wealth was invested in the infrastructure of British society for improvement and expansion (such as education, urban planning, transportation, and buildings and so on).

The system created during the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries to produce, move, and sell these commodities, shaped landscapes and displaced people; it also continues to have ramifications, especially in terms of inequalities suffered by populations in America and the Caribbean, alongside affecting diets and food cultures in the modern day.

**Ninian Home of Paxton House first became involved in the sugar trade when living in St Kitts in the Caribbean in the 1750s. In 1764 he purchased a plantation in Grenada called Waltham, alongside a 1/3 share in another Grenadian plantation named Paraclete.**

## Sugar

Most significant among the Caribbean food stuffs we enjoy today is sugar. Sugar's historical legacy is long and complex; the growing demand for sugar, and our enduring love of it, are key to understanding Britain's relationship with the Caribbean and its role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Sugar derives from sugarcane, a crop that was brought by both the Spanish (by Columbus) and the Portuguese to Brazil in the 1530s. The cultivation of sugarcane spread across the Caribbean as in the tropical climate, it could be grown all year round.

Britain's involvement in the sugar trade began in the mid-1600s in the English colony of Barbados. Self-sufficient plantations, operating as industrial integrated systems through coercive and violent labour management practice could

William Clark, *Enslaved people cutting sugarcane in Antigua*, 1823

grow, mill, and refine sugar (the whole production process) into three products: molasses, sugar, and rum - all of which were for export and profit.

The efficacy of the plantation system depended upon firstly acquiring significant acres of land (which squeezed out poor farmers who could only afford a few acres for their family's livelihood) and secondly, hundreds of field labourers to cultivate sugarcane. They fed a steady supply of cut cane to the sugar mills, as sugar juice must be processed immediately after the cane is cut. It takes roughly 6-10 pounds (4.5kg) of raw sugarcane to make 1 pound (450g) of refined sugar.

This system was very labour intensive, and it soon became clear that the initial supply of White labour in Barbados, realised from indentured labourers and convicts sent from Britain with limited years of labour contracts (5-7 years) was insufficient to

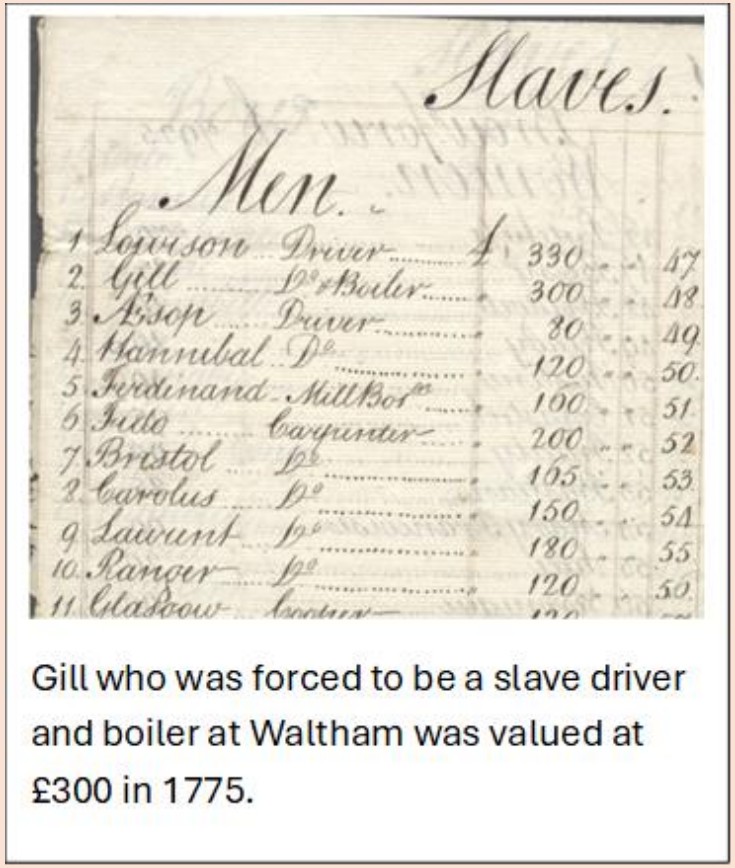
William Clark, *Planting the sugarcane, Antigua*, 1823

expand sugar production. Investments in sugar plantation were long-term and costly, with planters often taking out loans to cover their ventures. A consistent large workforce over many years was necessary since profits would not arrive for several years of initial investment, planting, and sale of products.

Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Danish colonists were already importing enslaved Africans from the regions comprising modern day Ghana, Gold Coast, and Nigeria, and Britain followed suit; thereafter, the enslavement and enforced labour of West Africans was an integral part of the plantation 'machine' which spread across the Caribbean. These were not just farmers trying to provide a meagre livelihood for their families, but this was about greed and the drive to amass significant wealth.

Islands were completely deforested and turned over to a sugar-monoculture that operated in a constant, monotonous, and back breaking cycle of planting, weeding, cutting, boiling, curing, barrelling, and carrying. The production of sugar – extracting sucrose from the plant then clarifying and crystallising are complex chemical processes. Those involved in the processing of the sugarcane were highly knowledgeable but highly exploited people. For example, Gill, was a slave driver and 'boiler' of the sugar on Ninian's Waltham plantation. Gill was valued at £300; more than any other enslaved person forced to labour there, other than Louison who

was a slave driver, valued at £330. The precisely honed skills of enslaved people, like Gill, enabled them to accurately process the juice at the necessary timings and temperatures. This was despite only having the most rudimentary equipment, thus enabling the production of high-quality sugar and rum which was sold to enhance their owner's wealth.

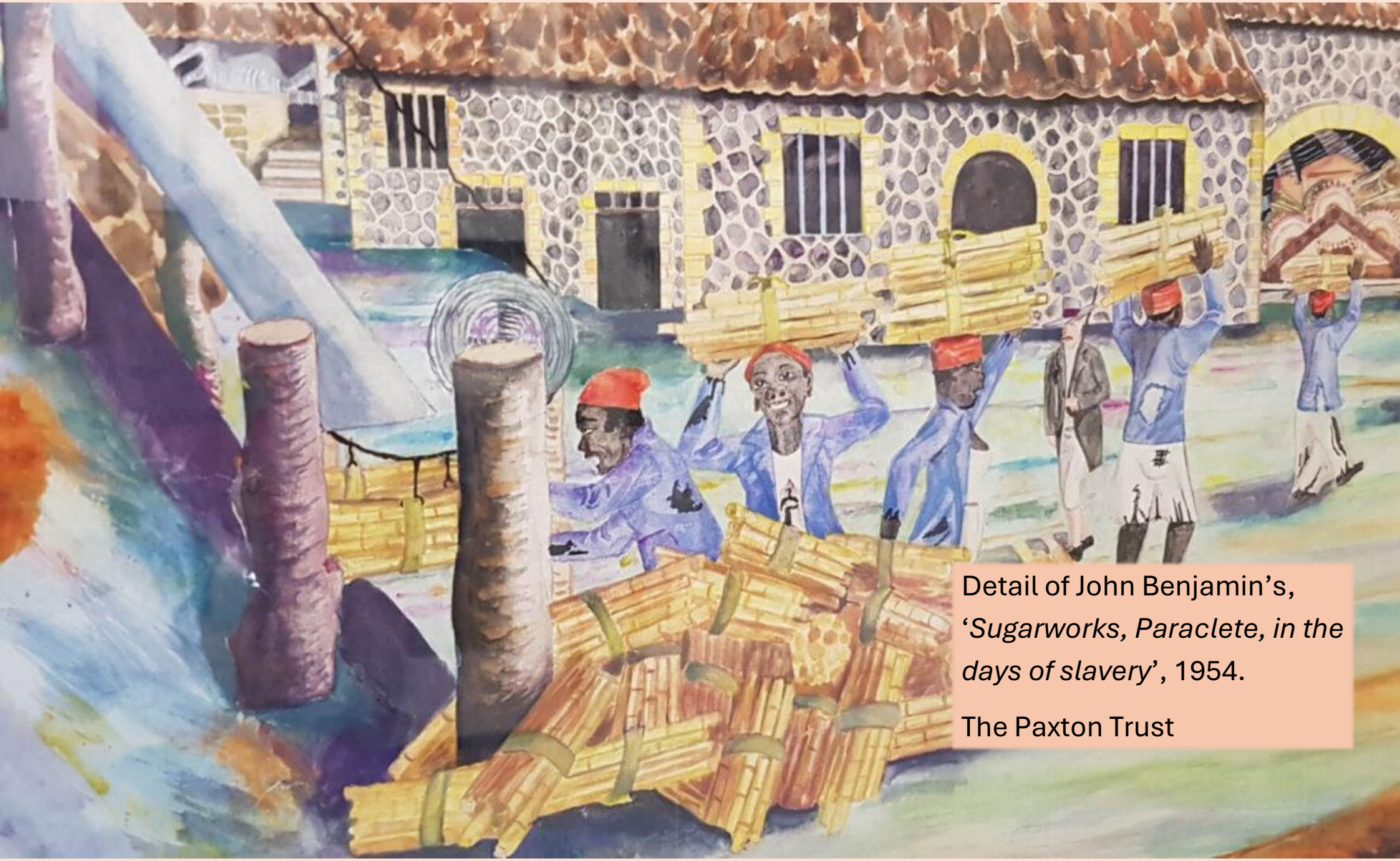


Slaves.

Men.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Squirson | Driver | 1 | 330 | 47 |
| 2 | Gill | Do & Boiler | | 300 | 48 |
| 3 | Aesop | Driver | | 80 | 49 |
| 4 | Hannibal | Do | | 120 | 50 |
| 5 | Ferdinand | Mill Boy | | 100 | 51 |
| 6 | Jute | Carpenter | | 200 | 52 |
| 7 | Bristol | Do | | 165 | 53 |
| 8 | Carolus | Do | | 150 | 54 |
| 9 | Laurent | Do | | 180 | 55 |
| 10 | Ranger | Do | | 120 | 56 |
| 11 | Glasgow | Cooper | | | |

Gill who was forced to be a slave driver and boiler at Waltham was valued at £300 in 1775.



Detail of John Benjamin's, '*Sugarworks, Paraclete, in the days of slavery*', 1954.

The Paxton Trust

## A description of Sugar Production in the Plantations:

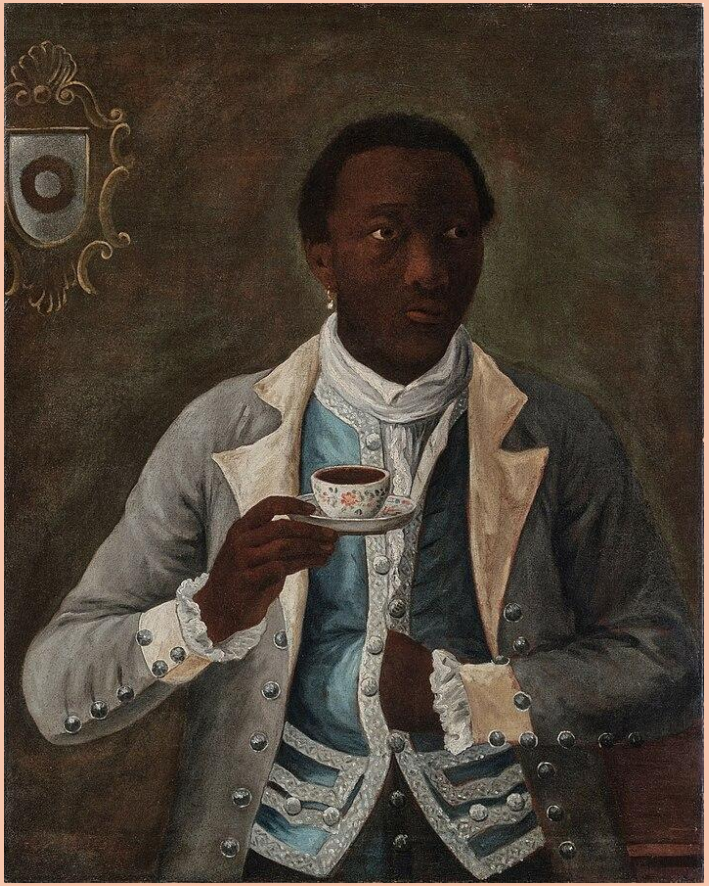
*The cane was transported from the fields to the factory either by mules or on the heads of the labourers. Then slaves fed the lengths of cane through the vertical rollers of the mills, while others cleared away the desiccated trash. Meanwhile, the sweet grayish liquid poured through the gutters straight into the boiling house. In this humid inferno, the cane juice was crystallized by evaporation. After being allowed to stand in several large receivers, the juice was initially heated into shallow pans called clarifiers where it was tempered with lime. The calcium carbonate acted as a catalyst, prompting the sediment to sink to the bottom and the impurities to rise to the surface. Slaves continuously skimmed this 'crust' off the liquid until it was tempered. Then the juice was boiled in a series of progressively smaller 'coppers' until it was ready to enter the 'tache' in which it was finally crystallized or 'struck'.*

Source: Andrea Stuart, *Sugar in the Blood: a family's story of slavery and empire* (2012).

## Sugar in Britain

The sugar from the Caribbean plantations arrived in Britain packed into large wooden barrels. The sugar, stored at the docks in London and Glasgow, was sold gradually as the market demanded. The brown sugar, imported from the Caribbean, could subsequently be refined in British factories being bleached into white sugar; this was then formed into conical sugar loaves or cones (such as that seen in the Georgian Kitchen at Paxton) before being sold to shops or individual consumers.

Thanks to imports from the plantations in the Caribbean, sugar, which had once been a luxury foodstuff enjoyed by the wealthy, quickly became a common part of the diet of all social classes in Britain and even to be considered as a necessity. Black treacle and molasses (primarily used in the production of rum) were some of the other products that became increasingly popular.



Venetian School, *Portrait of a man with a porcelain cup and saucer* (Sotheby's, New York, 1/2/2024, lot 511).

Sugar's popularity was linked to a growing taste for other colonial products such as coffee, chocolate, and above all, tea; these were all naturally bitter-tasting and British consumers found they were made more palatable by the addition of sugar.[1] Now, refined sugar is to be found in nearly all processed foods.

By the late eighteenth century, as calls for the abolition of the slave trade began to grow, abolitionists in Britain recognised that individual purchasers of sugar bore some responsibility for what was happening many miles away in the Caribbean. Following the failure of the bill for the abolition of the slave trade to gain parliamentary assent in 1791 (Patrick Home, the first owner of Paxton House and MP for Berwickshire, 1784-96, was one of those who voted against it), an M.P. named William Fox, wrote the following about sugar:

> *If we purchase the commodity we participate in the crime. The slave dealer, the slave holder, and the slave driver, are virtually agents of the consumer, and may be considered*

[1] Many portraits of families drinking tea, coffee, or hot chocolate were made in the 18th century showing 'polite' and genteel refinement, as well as wealth and status. An example of this portraiture is in the V&A Museum where a silver sugar shaker and other silver and porcelain dishes are on display: A Family of Three at Tea | Unknown | Richard Collins | V&A Explore The Collections (vam.ac.uk)

*as employed and hired by him to procure the commodity … In every pound of sugar used we may be considered as consuming two ounces of human flesh.*

In response to these sentiments, and the failure of the bill, there was a mass boycott of sugar led by women such as Elizabeth Heyrick; consumers had the power to directly influence the sugar market. 400,000 people gave up West Indian sugar in the years following 1792, sugar sales dropped by 1/3 during the first months of the boycott. Another boycott followed in the 1820s to put pressure on the owners of enslaved people in the Caribbean; by this period, facing increasing competition from elsewhere, the West Indian sugar trade was in steep decline.

Slavery on the plantations in the British Caribbean colonies ended in 1834, however, the newly emancipated people were designated as ‘apprentices’ and had to work for a pittance for a further four years, until 1 August 1838, when they finally gained their full freedom.

**Grenada is a small island in the eastern Caribbean. It became a British colony in 1763 when it was ceded by the French.**

**Grenada's total area is 120 square miles, with a span of 21 miles north to south and 11 miles east to west. Carriacou and Petite Martinique are part of the tri-island state.**

**Grenada gained independence in 1974.**

Adam Callander, *Paraclete Plantation, Grenada* (detail), 1789

The Paxton Trust

# Paxton House and the Sugar Trade.

## Paxton, Sugar and Slavery

The second owners of Paxton House, Ninian and Penelope Home, owned plantations in Grenada and Mustique in the Caribbean. At their peak, c.1790, 275 enslaved African people were forced to labour upon them. These plantations were primarily devoted to the production of sugar, alongside some small bits of land used to grow cocoa and coffee, whilst cotton was grown on the Mustique plantation.

Ninian's Waltham plantation of 554 acres required around 200 enslaved people to operate. In its most productive years, upwards of 200 hogshead barrels of sugar (one hogshead is equivalent to 250 litres), along with rum, were shipped to the British market, either aboard Ninian's own vessels, or one belonging to one of the London trading houses used by Ninian.

£5000 gross profit was realised from such a shipment at the height of the sugar market [about £670,000 in 2026]; however, this later dropped sharply. Despite this huge apparent profit, Ninian Home racked up enormous debts during his lifetime, owing around £38,000 at the time of his death [about £4,058,000 in 2026]. Hurricanes and other weather events sometimes destroyed the crops and damaged buildings and homes which took time to rebuild.

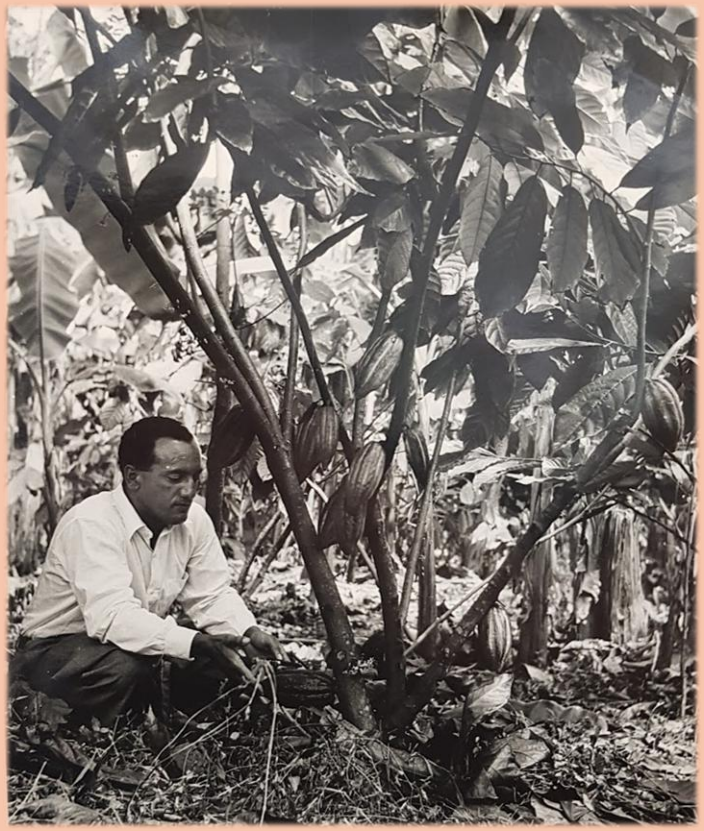
A smaller barrel of sugar, known as a tierce, along with a supply of rum, was usually separated from the main consignment from the Waltham plantation and dispatched from the London docks directly to Berwick upon Tweed by a boat called a ‘Berwick smack’ and thence to Paxton by cart and horse for the use of the house.

**E**ach full barrel of sugar weighed about 812 kilogrammes including the wood and metal bands it was made from, and contained around 225 litres of sugar. See: English wine cask units - Hogshead - Wikipedia

## Coffee and Cocoa

In 1764, when Ninian purchased Waltham plantation in Grenada, the agreement included the sale of a neighbouring cacao and coffee plantation of 115 acres. At this point, Grenada was the largest exporter of cocoa (produced from cacao) in the world and was a leading exporter of coffee, both produced by the forced labour of enslaved Africans.

The cacao tree was introduced to Grenada in 1714 by the French colonists who were then in control of the island. Grenada became especially associated with cocoa following the end of slavery as small farms growing cacao replaced the sugar monoculture which had dominated the island's agriculture; Grenada continues to be famed for its cacao, cocoa, and chocolate.



Cacao tree at Waltham, Grenada, in the early 1950s with the yet unnamed man who was cultivating the plantation. The Paxton Trust

Ripe cacao pods in the Cook Islands. Photo by Mike Bowie.
https://www.inaturalist.org/photos/397219026

Cacao beans in the cacao pods are removed, dried, and roasted. The raw beans inside the cacao pod are called cacao.

Cocoa is made from these beans once they have been roasted at high temperatures and ground into powder for chocolate products.

Coffee was introduced to Grenada shortly after cocoa and was the third most important product in Grenada (after sugar and rum) throughout Ninian's time there, with around 1 million cwt (50,800,000 kg) of coffee beans being produced in the island by the late 1780s.[2]

Demand and prices for coffee were so high in the Caribbean by this point in time, that in some years no coffee was exported from Grenada. For instance, in 1787 Ninian replied to a request for coffee from a Maryland merchant that it could not be obtained in Grenada for export as it was all sold locally.

Coffee and cocoa are often discussed together as both were associated historically with coffee houses in Britain; it was through these establishments that they were first made available to the British public. Besides serving these drinks, coffee houses were recognised as forums for discussion and places to do business.

[2] One cwt (hundredweight) is equivalent to 50.8kg.

Fittingly, much colonial business involving the Home family took place in coffee houses in London. For instance, the sale of the Dougalston plantation, owned by Patrick Home's father-in-law, John Graham, (Patrick was a trustee of Graham's estate), took place at Lloyd's Coffee House in 1791. A year later, in 1792, Patrick Home was invited to a meeting to discuss opposition to the abolition of the slave trade at the St Albans coffee house in London.

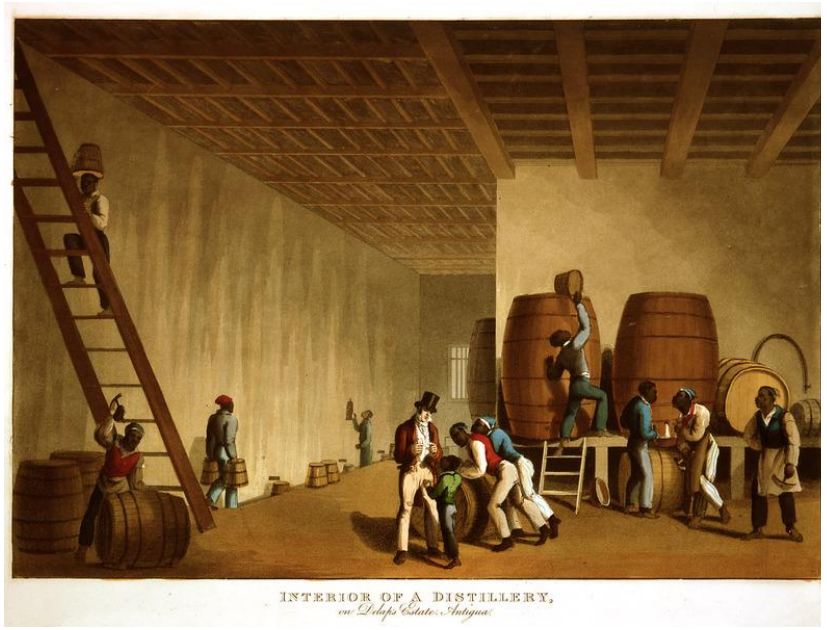
By courtesy of Lloy

LLOYD'S COFFEE HOUSE, LONDON

## Rum

Rum has seen a resurgence in popularity in recent years and has come to be regarded as a cultural symbol of the Caribbean; however, rum's history, rooted in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, is often not discussed. It was enslaved people and indigenous communities who realised that molasses could be distilled into tafia – a crude spirit. That was the predecessor of rum. Rum is distilled from molasses, a thick sweet syrup, which is a by-product of sugarcane refining.

Most sugar plantations, including those owned by Ninian Home in Grenada, had their own rum distillery. Highly skilled enslaved men were trained as distillers to operate the stills and were among the most valuable enslaved people on the plantations.




Interior of a Distillery, on Delaps Estate, Antigua.

**Source:** William Clark, *Ten Views In the Island of Antigua*, in Which are Represented the Process of Sugar Making. . . From Drawings Made by William Clark, During a Residence of Three Years in the West Indies (London, 1823).

www.slaveryimages.org

Rum was usually used as ready money in the Caribbean; it could be used to buy plantation stores, pay wages, and, significantly, it was often traded to purchase more enslaved Africans. The preference was to dispose of rum in the Caribbean as a form of currency; however, when demand for rum in Britain, America, or Europe was high, it was a significant export from the West Indies and an important source of income for plantation owners.

Punch Bowl, c.1760, porcelain, Lowestoft Porcelain Factory. Punch Bowl | V&A Explore The Collections

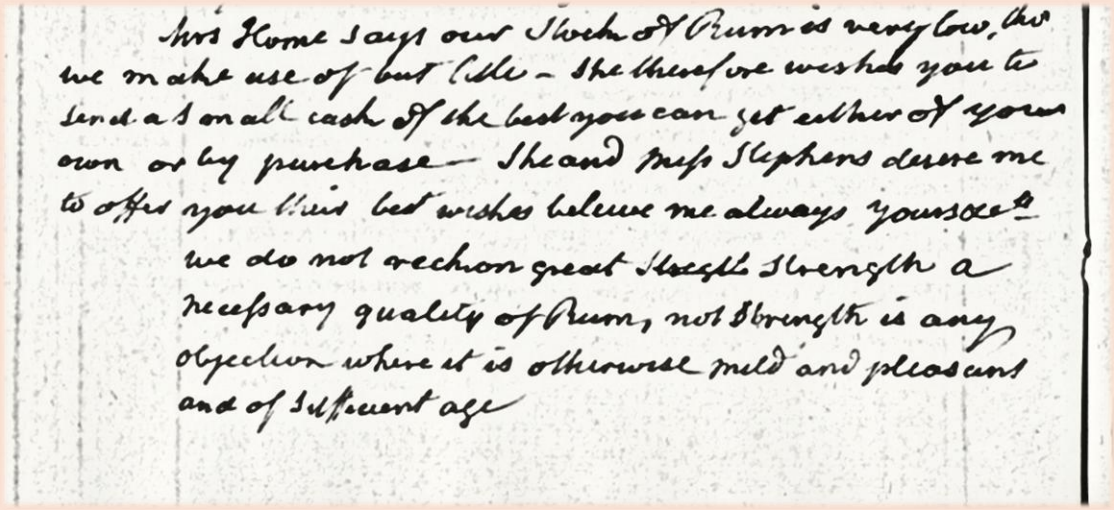
Rum was a key ingredient in punch, a drink that evolved in India in the 17th century and which was brought to Britian by sailors. The drink was so popular that a large market was created not only for the rum and other ingredients but also punch bowls.

Enslaved people sometimes grew a very small area of sugarcane on their 'provision' grounds to enable them to have some sugarcane. They could then boil the juice to make small batches molasses and, from that, make tafia. If, however, they were caught taking any of the enslaver's sugarcane they would have been severely punished. Punishments included whipping, body disfigurement, and other forms of torture which would have been carried out in front of other enslaved people to warn and terrify them.

Rum from Waltham plantation was shipped from Grenada to Cork, Bristol, London, and Glasgow, along with Maryland, and Ostend. Ongoing periods of warfare created high prices for rum as it became a staple part of the daily rations in both the navy and army. One of Ninian and Patrick Home's closest friends, Sir James Cockburn of Langton (1729-1804), a landowner from near Duns (a few miles from Paxton House), was awarded a contract to supply 100,000 gallons of Grenada rum to the troops in America in 1776 during the revolutionary war. The rum took up less space on board ship and unlike wine or beer, did not spoil on the long voyages.

A regular supply of rum from Grenada was sent to Paxton via London and thence by smack to Berwick, as can be seen in the following extract from the Home family archives (dated 19 January 1812):

*'Mrs Home says our stock of rum is very low, tho we make use of but little – she therefore wishes you to send a small cask of the best you can get...'*


Mrs Home says our Stock of Rum is very low, tho
we make use of but little – She therefore wishes you to
send a Small cask of the best you can get either of your
own or by purchase – She and Miss Stephens desire me
to offer you their best wishes believe me always yours &c
we do not reckon great Hoogly Strength a
necessary quality of Rum, not Strength is any
objection where it is otherwise mild and pleasant
and of sufficient age


Sugar Candy
Moist Sugar
Malaga Raisins

## The Eighteenth Century Kitchen and the Caribbean Influence

Food from Britain's Caribbean colonies had a huge impact upon the British diet. The Georgian Kitchen at Paxton House displays some of the foods and spices sent to Scotland from Grenada. These include arrowroot, sugar, rum, chocolate, limes, pineapple jam, vanilla, sweetmeats (preserved fruits and nuts), and tonka beans. The spices on display include several of the exceptionally high-quality spices produced in Grenada now such as, nutmeg, mace, and cinnamon. Although nutmeg is originally from the Banda islands of the Indonesia's Maluku region, it was introduced in 1849 and is the largest and most famous spice export, which earned Grenada the nickname, Spice Isle.

Residents of Paxton such as Agnes (known as Nancy) Stephens and Ninian Home clearly developed a taste for Caribbean foods beyond the popular sugar, rum, coffee, and chocolate. Nancy, in particular, regularly asked for West-Indian food stuffs to be sent to Paxton. She was born at Diamond plantation, next to Waltham, in Grenada in 1778 and was then sent to live as part of George and Jeanie Home's household in Edinburgh in 1783 for her education.

Yams at a market, courtesy of Topman Jnr. Alawari Cookey-Gam, Wikimedia Commons.

Of particular significance are her requests for yams to be sent from Grenada to Paxton. Yams were not considered to be a luxury in Grenada; they were a food associated with the enslaved population. This suggests that Nancy was influenced by the food cultures of the enslaved people, probably in thanks to the ministrations of her nanny, an enslaved woman named Kate Stephens who was freed by Nancy in 1802.

**Leatherback turtles** grow to 140-160cm long and migrate widely in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. They nest at Levara beach, north-west Grenada.

Among the more unusual foods that arrived at Paxton via the Home family's Caribbean contacts were live turtles for Ninian. Besides being considered a delicacy, turtles satisfied the eighteenth-century desire for the exotic; it was difficult to source, ship, and prepare. The turtles were probably caught by enslaved people who were used as fishermen. Jean Pierre was listed in the late 1780s as the enslaved fisherman at Waltham and it is likely he caught the turtles sent to London and Scotland for the Home family and their friends. Jean Pierre was killed by the rebels during the Fédon Uprising in 1795-6.

Timing the dispatch of this delicacy, so that the turtles did not perish in the cold Scottish spring or autumn proved tricky. Being fashionable, turtles were often sent as gifts and in 1790 Ninian had one sent to Paxton to impress a party of guests visiting for the Berwick races.

Hawksbill turtle.

Grenada also has nesting, foraging and developmental habitats for hawksbill, green, and loggerhead turtles.

Nonetheless, by the time that Ninian was arranging for turtles to be sent to Paxton, recipes for 'turtle dressed the West Indian way' had appeared in cookery books published in Britain.

These books demonstrate that there was sufficient demand and awareness of such dishes that a cook in a 'middling' household, of the sort that these cookbooks targeted, might feasibly attempt to prepare them for their master and mistress. Thus, dishes and cuisines which had once been the exclusive preserve of the wealthy, were becoming more accessible, and show the wider influence that the West Indies were having on British cuisine. Consider the following taken from 18th century recipe books:

# ADDITIONS.

### *To dreſs a Turtle, the Weſt-India Way.*

TAKE the turtle out of the water the night before you intend to dreſs it, and lay it on its back in the morning, cut its throat or the head off, and let it bleed well; then cut off the fins, ſcald, ſcale and trim them with the head, then raiſe the callepy (which is the belly or under ſhell) clean off, leaving to it as much meat as you conveniently can; then take from the back ſhell all the meat and intrails, except the monſieur, which is the fat and looks green, that muſt be baked to and with the ſhell; waſh all clean with ſalt and water, and cut it in pieces of a moderate ſize, taking from it the bones, and put them with the fins and head in a ſoup-pot, with a gallon of water, ſome ſalt, and two blades of mace. When it boils, ſcum it clean, then put in a bunch of thyme, parſley, ſavoury and young onions, and your veal part, except about one pound and a half, which muſt be made force-meat of, as for Scotch collops, adding a little Cayan pepper; when the veal has boiled in the ſoup about an hour, take it out and cut it in pieces, and put to the other part. The guts (which is reckoned the beſt part) muſt be ſplit open, ſcraped and made clean, and cut in pieces about two inches long. The paunch or maw muſt be ſcalded and ſkinned, and cut as the other parts, the ſize you think proper; then put them with the guts and other parts, except the liver, with half a pound of good freſh butter, a few ſhalots, a bunch of thyme, parſley, and a little ſavoury, ſeaſon'd with ſalt, white pepper, mace, three or four cloves beaten, a little Cayan pepper, and take care not to put too much; then let it ſtew about half an hour over a good charcoal fire, and put in a pint and a half of Madeira wine and as much of the broth as will cover it, and let it ſtew till tender. It will take four or five hours doing. When almoſt enough, ſcum it, and thicken it with flour, mixt with ſome veal broth, about the thickneſs of a fricaſey. Let your force-meat balls be fry'd about the ſize of a walnut, and be ſtew'd about half an hour with the reſt; if any eggs, let them be boiled and cleaned as you do knots of pullets eggs, and if none, get twelve or fourteen yolks of hard eggs, then put the ſtew (which is called the callepaſh) into the back-ſhell, with the eggs all over, and put it in the oven to brown, or do it with a ſalamander.

The callepy muſt be ſlaſhed in ſeveral places, and moderately ſeaſon'd, with pieces of butter, mixt with chopp'd thyme, parſley and young onions, with ſalt, white pepper and mace beaten, and a little Cayan pepper; put a piece in each ſlaſh, and then ſome over, and a duſt of flour; then bake it in a tin or iron dripping pan, in a briſk oven.





The back ſhell (which is called the callepaſh) muſt be ſeaſoned as the callepy, and baked in a dripping-pan, ſet upright, with four brickbats or any thing elſe. An hour and a half will bake it, which muſt be done before the ſtew is put in.

The fins, when boiled very tender, to be taken out of the ſoup, and put in a ſtew-pan, with ſome good veal gravy, not high coloured, a little Madeira wine, ſeaſoned and thickened as the callepaſh, and ſerved in a diſh by itſelf.

The lights, heart and liver may be done the ſame way, only a little higher ſeaſoned; or the lights and hearts may be ſtewed with the callepaſh, and taken out before you put it in the ſhell, with a little of the ſauce, adding a little more ſeaſoning, and diſh it by itſelf.

The veal part may be made friandos, or Scotch collops of. The liver ſhould never be ſtewed with the callepaſh, but always dreſt by itſelf, after any manner you like; except you ſeparate the lights and hearts from the callepaſh, and then always ſerve them together in one diſh. Take care to ſtrain the ſoup, and ſerve it in a tureen, or clean china bowl.

*Diſhes.*

A callepy.
Lights, &c.—ſoup—fins.
Callepaſh.

N. B. In the Weſt-Indies they generally ſouſe the fins, and eat them cold; omit the liver, and only ſend to table the callepy, callepaſh and ſoup. This is for a turtle, about ſixty pounds weight.

### *To make Ice Cream.*

TAKE two pewter baſons, one larger than the other; the inward one muſt have a cloſe cover, into which you are to put your cream, and mix it with raſberries or whatever you like beſt, to give it a flavour and a colour. Sweeten it to your palate; then cover it cloſe, and ſet it into the large baſon. Fill it with ice, and a handful of ſalt; let it ſtand in this ice three quarters of an hour, then uncover it, and ſtir the cream well together; cover it cloſe again, and let it ſtand half an hour longer, after that turn it into your plate. Theſe things are made at the pewterers.

### *A Turkey, &c. in Jelly.*

BOIL a turkey or fowl as white as you can, let it ſtand till cold, and have ready a jelly made thus: take a fowl, ſkin it, take off all the fat, don't cut it to pieces, nor break the bones; take four pounds of leg of veal, without any fat or ſkin, put it into a well tinned ſauce-pan, put to it full three quarts of water, ſet it on a very clear fire till it begins to ſimmer; be ſure to ſkim it well, but take great care it don't boil. When it is well ſkimmed, ſet it ſo as it will but juſt ſeem to ſimmer, put to it two large blades of mace, half a nutmeg, and twenty corns of white pepper, a little bit of lemon-peel as big as a ſix-pence. This will take ſix or ſeven hours doing. When you think it is a ſtiff jelly, which you will

veal, ſpices, and herbs, and put the ſoup and the ingredients into a tureen, with criſpt bread in a plate.

### *A Weſt-India Pepper Pot.*

TAKE two pounds of lean veal, the ſame of mutton, cut them ſmall, with a pound of lean ham, put them in a ſtew-pan, and about four pounds of briſket of beef cut in ſquare pieces, with ſix onions, two carrots, four heads of cellery, four leeks, two turneps, well waſhed, a bundle of ſweet herbs, ſome all-ſpice, cloves, and mace, and half a pint of water; ſweat them well for half an hour, then pour four quarts of boiling water into it, and ſkim it well; boil it gently for three hours, then ſtrain it off, take out the pieces of beef; then put a quarter of a pound of butter in the ſtew-pan and melt it, put two ſpoonfuls of flour, and ſtir it about till it is ſmooth; then by degrees pour your ſoup in, and ſtir it about to keep it from lumping, put the pieces of beef in; have ready two large carrots cut in quarters, and four turneps in quarters, boiled till tender, take the ſpawn of a large lobſter and bruiſe it fine, and put it in to colour it, with a dozen heads of greens boiled tender; make ſome flour and water into a paſte, and make it in balls as big as a walnut, boil them well in water, and put them in; boil it up gently for fifteen minutes, and ſeaſon it very hot with Cayan pepper and ſalt; put it in a ſoup-diſh and ſend it up hot, garniſhed with ſprigs of cauliflowers round the diſh, or carrots, or any thing elſe you fancy.

## The enduring influence of ‘Slave Cuisine’

Whilst commodities produced by enslaved labour have formed a significant part of our foodways since the seventeenth century, the food eaten by the enslaved people has also had a lasting legacy on food cultures in the Caribbean and internationally.

Taking Ninian Home’s plantation at Waltham as an example, the enslaved people forced to labour there were supplied with food from two different sources, both of which have had an enduring influence on food in the Caribbean and further afield.

A one-pot vegetable stew in the process of being made by food historian and archaeologist, Dr Peggy Brunache, at Paxton House, 2025.

The first source was food imported to the Caribbean colonies from elsewhere in the British Empire. For the enslaved people, the principal imported foodstuff was salt fish (typically dried salted codfish from Newfoundland) and barrelled beef or corned beef from Scotland and Ireland. If the preferred type of salt fish was too expensive, then these were substituted with Scottish herrings.

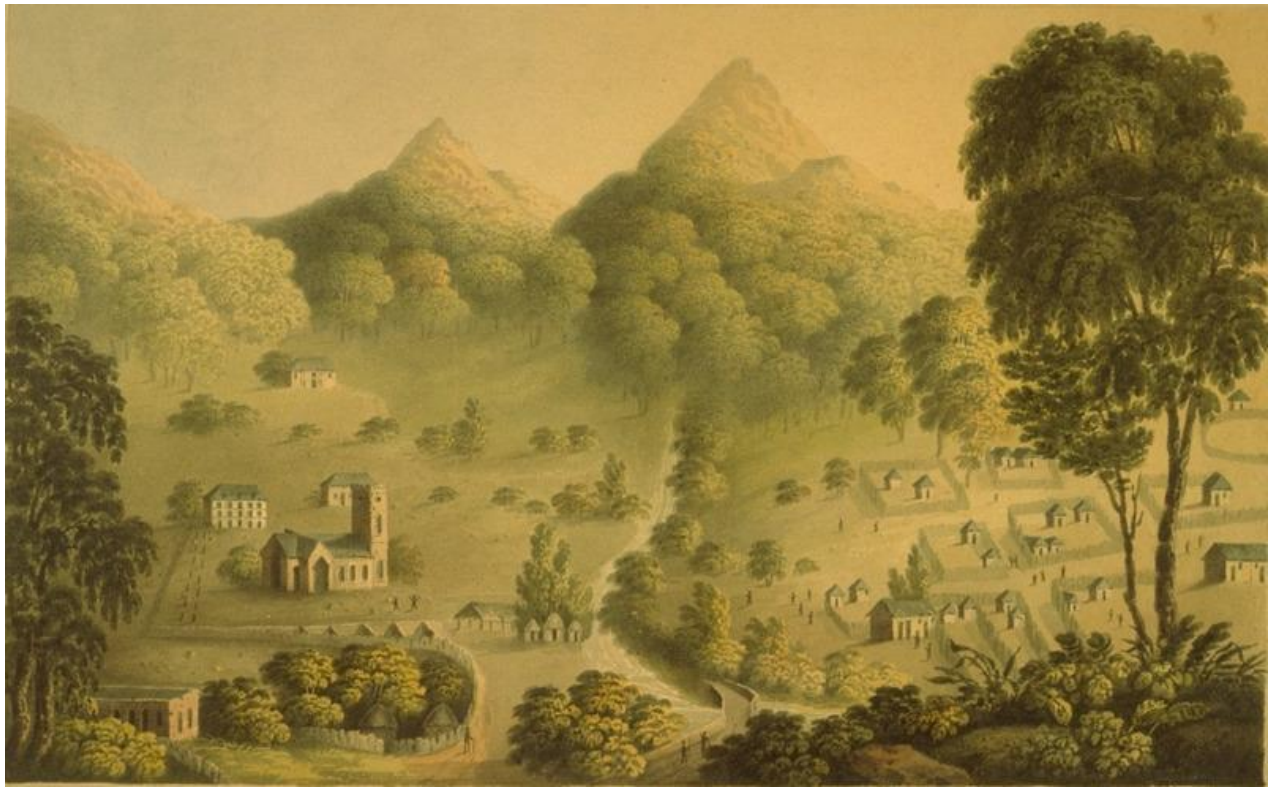
Salted meat continues as a staple in the Caribbean alongside several historically African-based one-pot stew dishes including callaloo, pepper pot, and gumbo.

There was a large market for British produce in the Caribbean colonies; cornmeal, beef hearts and beef skirts (the poorest quality cuts of meat) were also imported from Britain specifically to feed the enslaved people on the plantations.

The British colonial government specifically stipulated salted meat and significant amounts of starch-laden carbohydrates were to be the foodstuffs for the enslaved people. To save the plantation owner's money on importing food, and to ensure a supply of cheap / free food, the enslaved people were allocated provision grounds (where the soils were often nutrient deprived) to grow yams, manioc, sweet potatoes, and so on. The enslaved took matters into their own hands to have kitchen gardens to diversify their culinary tastes and dietary needs (growing spices, herbs, fruits, and other vegetables). At Waltham the enslaved were allowed to tend to their own crops on a mid-week afternoon out of harvest time and a Sunday morning.

The allocated provision grounds were usually areas of the poorest quality soil where the enslaver's cash crops would not grow well. The fact that the enslaved people managed to grow sufficient and surplus food on these, demonstrates their skills and knowledge of how to

improve the soil and fertilise it to grow crops. Their gardens were checked several times per week by the plantation overseers and manager and roll calls taken to check who was attending to the cultivation of their plots.



Plantation and Slave Settlement, St. Lucia, West Indies, c. 1830 – note the enclosed gardens next to the houses for the enslaved people.

**Source:** Original in Beinecke Lesser Antilles Collection, Hamilton College Library (Clinton, NY). www.slaveryimages.org

In April 1818, George Home of Paxton (who inherited Paxton House and Waltham estate from his brother Ninian) encouraged his manager at Waltham, John Fairbairn, to assist the enslaved people to put their gardens in order. George wrote that his motivation for doing so was that 'whatever is advantageous

to them is in effect a profit to me'. As a further inducement, the enslaved people were allowed to sell any surplus produce and keep the profit for themselves. Sometimes this policy had unintended consequences; George Home wrote about these to his London agent Thomson Hankey:

> *'…many of them [the enslaved people] have a great deal to carry to market and they are so fond of money, that lately when provisions were very dear, he [John Fairbairn, estate manager] was obliged to establish a night watch to prevent their carrying all to market and not leave enough to maintain themselves.'*

Through selling their produce and their cooked street food, the enslaved people participated in and supported the internal economy of Grenada and other colonies. Their foods became part of the way of life of both the enslaved and free people and were particularly important during times of war, blockades, or poor weather when external supplies could be cut off.

Indeed, the entire colony: free people of colour, the enslaved community, and White colonists, depended upon the food grown, sold, and cooked by enslaved people.

Agostino Brunias (1728–1796) *A Linen Market with a Linen-stall and Vegetable Seller in the West Indies*, ca. 1780, Oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B2009.12.3. All the enslaved women, by law, had to wear a head covering.

A

The Home archives also record that enslaved people and free people formed partnerships so that they could support each other through life-saving food supplies. The estate manager, John Fairbairn, at Waltham described this in 1815:

> *" …the number of free coullered and Blacks now in this island,… many of them is supported intirely by slaves upon estates in this way the men takes slave women for there wifes the free women takes the slave men for there husbands and in that way is those free pipole keep allive or from starving…"*[3]

The principal foods grown by the enslaved in their gardens were plantains, manioc, sweet potatoes (indigenous foods of South America and the Caribbean), yams, and green vegetables. Breadfruit was introduced to the Caribbean from Africa in 1795 to add to the locally grown foods that the enslaved people could survive upon rather than rely on costly imports that would dent the enslaver's profits. Enslaved people were also usually given poultry to rear and, in the areas next to their homes, they grew herbs, spices, mangoes, and some citrus trees to enhance the flavours and variety of their food.

---

[3] Home of Wedderburn Papers, National Records of Scotland, GD267/5/7/1 John Fairbairn to George Home, 14 Oct. 1815 (original spelling retained).

Those living at Waltham had direct access to the sea and would have fished and foraged along the shoreline, and as well as hunted and gathered edible foods and animals in the areas surrounding the plantation.

As the enslaved people were responsible for what they grew, it afforded them an important element of agency, culinary ingenuity and creativity, and cultural distinctiveness born from their heritage as part of the African diaspora. Food became a crucial way to maintain their identity and way to provide some relative, if minor, economic independence, if not enough to buy their way out of slavery.

In this way traditions and links with West Africa endured. When these traditions were combined with the foods provided for them by their enslavers, such as salt fish, these West African style dishes assumed a unique Caribbean identity, and they remain a proud part of the region’s foodways and cultural identity to the present-day.

For further information please see:

www.paxtonhouse.co.uk

History - Paxton House Paxton House

Paxton House | eHive

History of Slavery in the Caribbean - Online History Course - FutureLearn

Legacies of British Slavery (ucl.ac.uk)

This resource was first written by Dr Charles Fletcher and Dr Fiona Salvesen Murrell in 2024. It was revised by Dr Peggy Brunache and Dr Fiona Salvesen Murrell in 2026. A Museums Galleries Scotland grant supported the production of this resource.



Supported by funding from Museums Galleries Scotland
Supporting Scotland's Museums

PAXTON HOUSE