

*British Records Relating to America in
Microform (BRRAM) series*

Jamaica Plantation Records from the Dickinson Papers 1675-1849

in Somerset Record Office and
Wiltshire & Swindon Record Office

Introduction to the microfilm collection by
Walter E. Minchinton

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1 PROVENANCE

The Dickinson papers remained in the possession of the family until 1951. By this date they had found their way into the cellars at Kingweston, near Somerton, Somerset, where adverse storage conditions – in the words of the letter announcing their discovery they were ravaged ‘by worms, mice, rats, boys and other vermin’ – resulted in some being lost or destroyed while others suffered damage. When Captain W F Dickinson found them he recognised their importance and arranged for their deposit in the Somerset Record Office, now at Obridge Road, Taunton. A part of this collection consists of the business papers of a Bristol merchant, Graffin Prankard (and this is reproduced on another film in this series) but the bulk comprises the Dickinson family papers concerned with their estates in Somerset (including the management of the Flat Holm lighthouse) and with their plantations in the West Indies. It is this last section – the papers relating to the West Indian estates – which are reproduced on this film.

At some point, Spackman, Dale & Hood, solicitors of Calne, received some Dickinson papers from another branch of the Dickinson family settled at Bowden Park, Wiltshire and these were deposited in the Wiltshire Record Office in 1954 and 1973. Amongst these papers are some relating to the Dickinson estates in the West Indies and these have been included on this film.

2 THE DICKINSONS

Caleb Dickinson, merchant of Bristol and son of Captain Francis Dickinson who, for his gallant conduct when Jamaica was taken from the Spaniards in 1655 by the forces under Admiral Penn and General Venables, was granted 6000 acres there, had three sons, Ezekiel, Caleb and Vickris. Most of the papers on this film relate to Caleb II who was born in 1716. Nothing is known of his upbringing and education – though it was within a Quaker family – but on 7 January 1733, when he was 16, by which time his father who had retired to Moncks in the parish of Corsham, Wiltshire, had died, Caleb was apprenticed to Graffin Prankard, a Quaker merchant of Bristol, and his wife Sarah for the sum of £200.¹ Following the story book sequence, Caleb Dickinson turned his apprenticeship to personal advantage by marrying Sarah, the daughter of Graffin Prankard, in Bristol on 12 January 1738.²

When his apprenticeship was completed, Caleb Dickinson set up as a merchant and between 1739 and 1748 he shared with his younger brother, Vickris and several Bristol merchants, the ownership of two vessels, the *Union* of 390 tons, mounting 30 guns and with a crew of 70, and the *Jamaica*, a frigate of 290 tons which had 18 guns and a crew of 50, both of which operated during the War of Austrian Succession as privateers. In August 1746 the *Jamaica* was reported lost on the Morant Keys, Jamaica with about 500 hogsheads of sugar on board.³ He was also concerned in other vessels. For a period, together with John Galton, Dickinson seems to have managed his father-in-law's business after the latter's bankruptcy on 2 July 1740. Vickris became a freeman of Bristol through marriage to Martha, daughter of John Reeve, merchant, on 25 October 1741 while Caleb became a freeman under the apprenticeship provision on 11 July 1741. During the 1740s Caleb lived in one of the more wealthy parts of the city of Bristol in Castle Green. Together with his two brothers, Ezekiel and Vickris, Caleb had already inherited from his father his landed property in Jamaica which consisted of farms, sugar plantations and refineries in the parish of Elizabeth. Later they seem to have acquired other interests in the Jamaica estates which derived from their uncle, Jonathan Dickinson. After a period of joint ownership, the brothers made a physical division of the estates; Vickris then ran his share alone but Caleb and Ezekiel continued to run theirs jointly. This state of affairs continued on Caleb's side through his son William, grandson William and great-grandson Francis and on Ezekiel's side through his son Barnard, Barnard's nephew Ezekiel Harman and his son Ezekiel Dickinson Harman until the estates were divided in about 1848. Much of the material on this film – letters, accounts and papers – is concerned with the running of the West Indian properties.

While Ezekiel, the eldest brother, made his home at Bowden Park in Wiltshire, Caleb Dickinson built himself a mansion at Kingweston, Somerton (near Glastonbury) in Somerset. He also devoted some of his energies and wealth to building up his estates, purchasing land at East Lydford in 1747–9 and 1761, at Baltonsborough in 1759, at Lympsham in 1766, at Butleigh in 1772 and at Glastonbury in 1779 and 1782. On 29 September 1743 he acquired an interest in the island of Flat Holm in the Bristol Channel and consequently the lighthouse on the island came into his hands in 1744.⁴ As a result of protracted negotiations, the lighthouse and the lease of the island passed entirely into his ownership on 24 March 1755.

When Caleb Dickinson died on 6 April 1783 he was buried in the parish church of Kingweston. He bequeathed his estate to his only son, William, who had been born on 13 July 1745. William Dickinson did not follow his father's mercantile concerns, except those arising from his West Indian plantations, and his interest turned to politics. He was a student at Edinburgh and then at the age of 23 he became Member of Parliament for Great Marlow (Buckinghamshire) which he represented until he was defeated in 1774. Three years later he returned to Parliament as the member for Rye (East Sussex), succeeding Rose Fuller whose niece, Philippa, he had married in January 1771. She bore him a son also named William later that year. He represented Rye until 1790 when he again lost his seat. In 1796 he returned to Parliament a third time, on this occasion for his home county of Somerset which he represented until his death. William Dickinson consistently supported the North administration. His only recorded speech was on a bill concerning the West Indies on 2 February 1773; he voted against Shelburn's peace preliminaries on 18 February 1783 and for Fox's East India bill on 27 November 1783. Early in January 1784 John Sinclair wrote of him, 'Voted for the late bill, but *could* be converted' and in the survey of political allegiances made by John Robinson for Pitt before the general election of 1784 he is classed as 'very hopeful', presumably on the basis of Sinclair's information. But this proved misleading as Dickinson went against Pitt and remained in opposition in the Parliament of 1784. He voted for Pitt's parliamentary reform proposals of 13 May 1785.⁵ He continued his family's connection with the West Indies, adding to his interests there through his wife's family, and he also appears to have had connections in the East Indies. William Dickinson I died on 26 May 1806.

The bulk of the material on this film concerns the Dickinsons' estates in Jamaica, including accounts of the Barton, Barton Isles, Appleton and Pepper plantations, correspondence relating to their management, lists of negroes and livestock, details of shipments out of sugar and rum and other papers. As well as the Jamaica records, the film also contains accounts relating to Caleb Dickinson's trading ventures, the ownership of the Flat Holm lighthouse and the Kingweston estate and details of his personal expenditure, including the expenses of travel and information about his illnesses. William Dickinson's accounts deal, in addition to the Jamaica properties, with his Somerset estates and with his personal affairs including the cost of his elections.

3 CONTENTS OF THE FILM

(Note: the material from the Somerset Record Office (reels 1–3) was filmed before it had been completely catalogued, therefore it does not appear on the film in the present archive order. Further, in most cases the catalogue number is not given on the film)

Reel 1

- DD/DN 465 Plantation accounts, 1742–1751 1 volume
Waste book for the Barton Plantation in the parish of St Elizabeth, Jamaica, with details of shipments out of sugar and rum.
- DD/DN 468 Jamaica letter book, 1792–1794 1 volume
Letter book kept by William Dickinson writing from Kingweston for himself and his cousin, Barnard Dickinson, to their attorneys (agents) in Jamaica about the management of estates. A number of pages are torn out at the end of the book; an additional letter for 1801 is to be found in the back cover.
- DD/DN 405 Caleb Dickinson ledger A, 1737–1756 1 volume
Containing business, estate and personal accounts; shares and trading ventures, proprietorship of the Flat Holm lighthouse, Jamaica and Kingweston estates, some personal expenditure, servants' wages. Ships are named in relevant accounts. Index at front.
- DD/DN 406 Caleb Dickinson journal B, 1756–1770 1 volume
Bristol accounts including Jamaica estates, Flat Holm lighthouse, personal and travelling expenses, household goods and Somerset estate expenditure.
- DD/DN 408 Caleb Dickinson journal C, 1771–1779 1 volume
A continuation of Journal B and the Kingweston journal (DD/DN 407 – not filmed). Includes over 3 pages of household goods etc supplied to his son William and his wife on setting them up in January 1771.

Reel 2

DD/DN 408 continued

- DD/DN 409 Caleb Dickinson journal D, 1779—1783 1 volume
A continuation of Journal C possibly giving greater emphasis to the management of estates in Somerset and Jamaica.
The entries in these journals, although brief, are fairly informative; eg work done is briefly described and goods supplied are itemised.
- DD/DN 417 William Dickinson ledger C, 1794—1805 1 volume
Expenditure on estate business in Somerset and Jamaica and personal affairs including election expenses. Individual entries brief and uninformative; index at front.
- DD/DN 513 Jamaican affairs, c 1752 1 volume
Paper back volume containing numbers of negroes and cattle by parishes, 1734, 1740 and 1745; annual numbers of negroes imported and exported, 1702—52; exports, 1737—49; calculation of exports, 1752; official expenditure on defence, settling new immigrants; and answers to Board of Trade queries.
This item probably originally belonged to Rose Fuller.
- DD/DN 481 Deeds and settlements, 1764—1849 15 documents
Dickinson family settlements etc relating to the Barton and Pepper plantations etc in St Elizabeth, Jamaica. Copy wills of Ezekiel and Barnard Dickinson, both of Bowden in Laycock, Wiltshire, 1787 and 1813 and of Ezekiel Harman of Bowden and of Cheshunt, Herfordshire, 1844, codicils, 1845. Brief pedigree of family from Francis Dickinson. Diagrams of parts of plantation preparatory to division, 1845.
- DD/DN 469 Plantation accounts, 1764—1775 14 documents
Accounts for the Barton, Barton Isles, Appleton and Pepper Plantations, 1764 and 1767—75, with lists of negroes and livestock, 1764 and 1771.
- DD/DN 479 Plantation lists, 1827 4 documents
Lists of slaves and livestock.

DD/DN 480 General estate management, 1827—1830 26 papers
Invoices of goods shipped out; accounts of sales;
plantation accounts; accounts with London shipping agents;
two letters from the Jamaica agent, John Salmon, jr, one
having reference to the provision of education by the
Moravian church.

DD/DN 471 Miscellaneous papers, 1692, 1757—1805 27 documents
Assignment of a burgage in North Street, Somerton, to
Robert Prankard, maltster.
Miscellaneous papers found together, largely 1804—5,
including correspondence from attorneys, sugar shipments,
lists of negroes and livestock and plantation accounts but
with a few earlier documents: abstract of title to
Montpellier plantation in St James, 1774; copy conveyance
of shares in plantations by John Gale, 1757; numbers of
slaves 'exported' from the Gold Coast, 1758—68; lists of
slaves on Dickinson plantation, 1768; and copy petition of
the free coloured people to the Assembly of Jamaica, 1792
(an item deriving from the Fuller family).

Reel 3

DD/DN 471 continued

DD/DN 470 Miscellaneous papers, 1716—1798 21 documents
Three separate small bundles containing: 1) papers relating
to the Dickinsons claims on the Gale family in respect of
their interests in Jamaican property arising originally from
the will of Jonathan Dickinson, 1716—60; 2) estimates of
the valuation of the Dickinson estates, 1760, 1764 and 1766
and invoices of goods shipped out, 1798; 3) accounts
rendered between the Dickinson brothers, 1757—71 (giving
little detail and no trading accounts).

DD/DN 472* Plantation lists, 1803 8 documents
Lists of negroes and livestock.

DD/DN 473* Agent's papers, 1803 15 documents
Letters from John White, the agent in Jamaica; lists of
supplies (including medical) required; his accounts with the
plantations and with Barnard and William Dickinson; lists of
negroes and livestock.

- DD/DN 474 * Agent's papers, 1803–1804 34 documents
Letters from John White, plantation accounts, details of crops, certificates of shipments etc.
- DD/DN 475 * Trade accounts, 1803–1804 approximately 25 papers
Proceeds from sales of sugar and rum and invoice of stores shipped out to Jamaica.
- DD/DN 476 * Trade accounts, c 1760, 1805 7 documents
As DD/DN 475; undated survey and plan of Appleton plantation, c 1760.

* These bundles were not arranged before filming so the items are intermixed.

- DD/DN 477 General estate management, 1818–1819 approximately 80 papers
Correspondence from Jamaica, London, Bristol, Glasgow; plantation accounts; lists of slaves and livestock; sales of sugar and rum; invoices of stores shipped out.
- DD/DN 478 General estate management, 1821–1822 32 papers
Plantation accounts; lists of slaves and livestock; sales accounts; invoices of goods shipped out; accounts with London shipping agents.
- DD/DN 482 Miscellaneous papers, 1744–1837 18 documents
Miscellaneous papers found together including copy case with abstract of correspondence and other transactions on behalf of Ezekiel and Caleb Dickinson relating to fraudulent lease of plantations; notes of lands sold, 1778; outstanding debts, 1794–1800; invoices of goods shipped out, 1798; lists of slaves and livestock, 1827 and 1828; plantation and sales accounts, 1833; draft power of attorney to set certain slaves free, nd, c 1810.

NOTE: Bundles 466 and 467, Jamaican correspondence, 1763–66 and 1794; 483, Miscellaneous papers, 1676–c 1848; 484, Deeds etc, 1675–1765; and 485, Jamaica papers, 1719–57 are in very poor condition and could not be filmed.

Reel 4

Wiltshire Record Office

282/1

Account book, 1745–1801 1 volume

Volume containing fair copy accounts of Ezekiel and Caleb Dickinson with the managers of their plantations in Jamaica and with other business houses.

282/2

Letter book, 1777–1788 1 volume

Letter book of Ezekiel Dickinson of Bowden House, Chippenham, Wiltshire. Most of the letters are concerned with his business in general but they also refer to his slave plantations in Jamaica and to his sugar and rum trade. Endorsed 'Copys Jamaica Letters etc. 1777 to'.

282/3

Account book, 1780–1788 1 volume

Relates to Bowden Park estate and estates in Jamaica and to business arising out of these. Endorsed 'Jour! C'.

1171/

Account book, 1732–1759 1 volume

Relates to Bowden Park estate and estates in Jamaica and to business arising out of these. Endorsed 'Jour! A'.

1171/

Cash account book, 1745–1750 1 volume

Contains monthly cash receipts and payments including some Jamaica transactions.

4 BIBLIOGRAPHY

So far there has been no study of the Dickinson family but some information about the Dickinsons is to be found in the following:

Burke's genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry

(Burke's Peerage Ltd, 6th ed. 1882; 13th ed. 1921 etc)

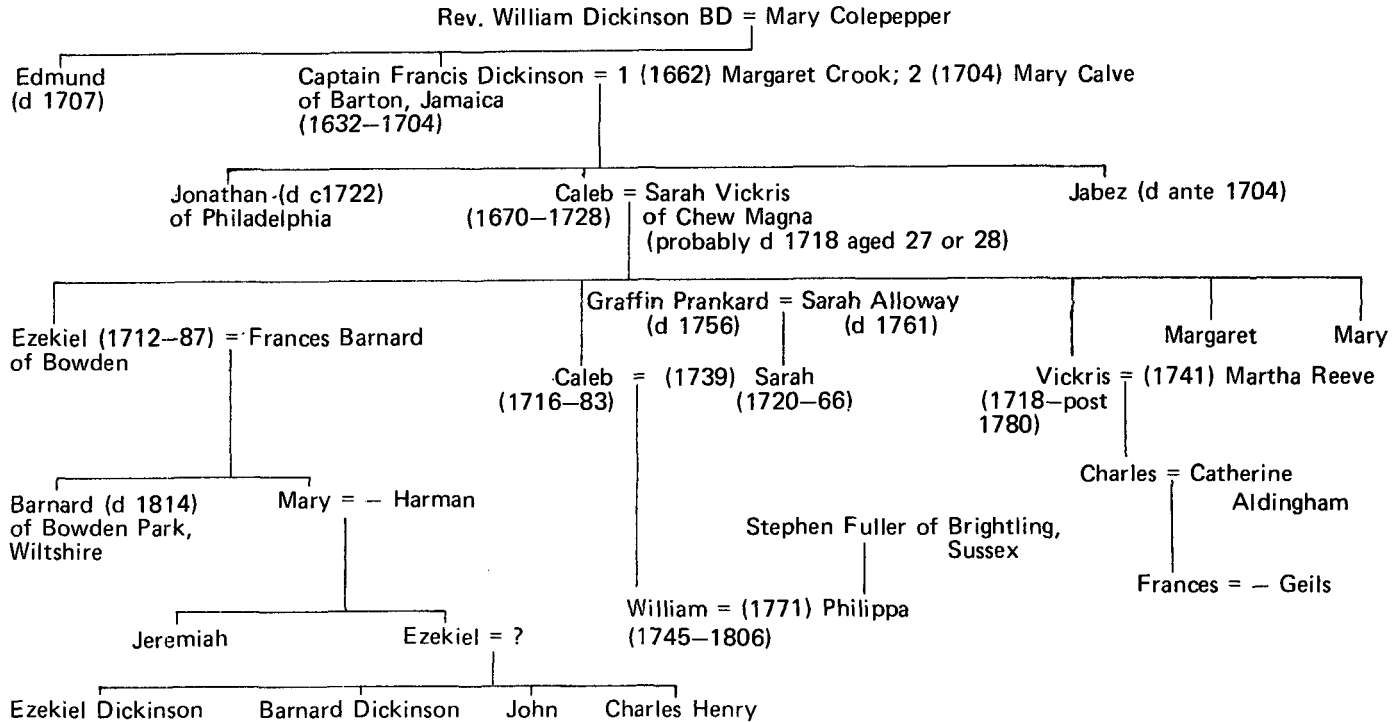
William R Chaplin, 'The history of Flat Holm lighthouse', *American Neptune*, XX (1960) 5-43

John Collinson, *The history and antiquities of the county of Somerset* (Bath, 1791) II, 417-18

Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The history of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1745-1790, II. Members A-J* (HMSO, 1964)

- 1 For more details about Graffin Prankard, see Walter Minchinton, *The papers of Graffin Prankard, 1726-1757* (microfilm and introduction, Wakefield: EP Microform Ltd. 1977).
- 2 The elder daughter Sarah was born on 8 January 1719/20 when the Prankard's address was given as Old Market (I am indebted to the Librarian, Friends' House, London for this information).
- 3 John W Damer Powell, *Bristol privateers and ships of war* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1930) pp. 150, 183.
- 4 See William R Chapman, 'The history of Flat Holm lighthouse', *American Neptune*, XX (1960) 5-43.
- 5 Sir Lewis Namier and John Brook, *The history of parliament: the House of Commons, 1754-1790, II. Members A-J* (HMSO, 1964) p. 322.

DICKINSON FAMILY TREE



Acknowledgements

Section 3, part 1, the contents of the film from the Somerset Record Office, is based on the handlist produced by D M M Shorrocks, Assistant Somerset County Archivist, for the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts and published as *Report on the muniments of the Dickinson Family of Kingweston, Somerset, and Jamaica, 16th–20th century* (Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 1972).