

## The Prideaux family of Devon

**The Prideauxs were a widespread clan of Devon gentry associated with country houses and with a history of international trading. This article identifies two Prideaux men with definite connections to slavery: Walter, the supercargo on a slave-trading voyage, and Nicholas, slave-trader and Barbados sugar plantation owner. It identifies two issues which may have divided the family: conversion to Quakerism, and monopoly vs free trade in enslaved Africans.**

The Prideaux family is a long-standing Devon family with many branches, associated with houses across the county. Their name has variations ranging from Predys and Prudux to Prediocke and Preddie. They were prominent in trading, including trading with the New World plantations, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, until they became Quakers. One branch of the family was established in Barbados in the formative years of that colony. The Prideauxs were related by marriage to other Devon families with slave-trading or slave-owning connections, such as Dottin and Morice.

### Table of Prideauxs with possible slavery links

Information from Prideaux (1989) has been used to list family members with possible slavery links and these are shown in the table. It includes the houses and branches of the family with which they are associated. Exact family trees have not been attempted but suffice it to say they are at least distant cousins to each other.

Of all the branches of the Prideaux family in Devon, it was only possible to positively connect one family with a house and slavery, that is, Walter Prideaux (1676-1759). The Prideaux with the strongest slavery connection, Hon Nicholas Prideaux (1635- before 1702), does not seem to be connected to a house. While many Prideauxs were traders, only Nicholas appears on [slavevoyages.com](http://slavevoyages.com) as the owner of a slaving vessel. The others may have traded in goods to and from slave plantations, financed voyages or even traded in captive Africans but no evidence of this has been found.

The two family members with positively identified slavery connections are shown in italics. These are *Walter Prideaux* and *Hon Nicholas Prideaux*.

**Table of Prideauxs with possible slavery connections**

<b>Prideaux name</b>	<b>Family relationship</b>	<b>House/town</b>	<b>Slavery connection</b>
<i>Walter (1676-1759)</i>	<i>Grandson of Arthur P.; Mother was from Dottin family, traders and slave-owners in Barbados</i>	<i>Luson, Ermington, nr Ivybridge.</i>	<i>Supercargo on 'Daniel and Henry'; 'captain and East India merchant'</i>
<i>Hon Nicholas (1635-before 1702)</i>	<i>Son of James P., soldier, Plymouth. Had 5 wives and 8 children in Barbados. 1760s-1790s Probably grandson of Richard Predys of Gt Torrington</i>	<i>Of Barbados Of Great Torrington, Braunton, Barnstaple.</i>	<i>Attorney to Blake of Barbados. Acquired land and slaves. RAC agent. Speaker of Barbados Assembly</i>
Sir Edmund (?)	Great nephew of Sir Nicholas of P. Place	Netherton, Farway Sidmouth Manor	Ships in Lyme Regis 1709, slave trader?
Edmund (1644-1706)	Greatgrandson of Sir Nicholas P. of Prideaux Place, Padstow	Of London. From family of Prideaux Place, Padstow, and Churston Manor, West Putford nr Holsworthy.	'Smyrna merchant'
Ann	Possibly wife of Edmond of London		Merchant 1697
William	Probably one of the Holberton and South Hams Ps	Barbados wills 1665, 1669	Probably a merchant
Thomas		Of Devonshire Square?	1703 Plymouth merchant shipping wheat to Barbados
James	Married Susanna, 3 children baptised 1725-43	Of Barbados	Capt in militia
Daniel	Grandson of Richard Predys of Gt Torrington		1701 Barnstaple merchant shipping sugar
Peter	Probably brother of Sir Edmund of Farway	'a merchant of Guernsey'	

**Walter Prideaux (1676-1759)**

The role of Walter Prideaux as supercargo on the slave-trading ship, the Daniel and Henry, is described in detail by Tattersfield (1991). Walter was grandson of Arthur Prideaux of Luson, Ermington near Ivybridge, and his mother came from a wealthy family of slave traders, the Dottins, who owned property in Barbados (see separate article on the Dottin family). However, the family's support for the royalist cause in the English Civil War had led them to fall on hard times, which may

explain why he took this job on the slaving expedition under his uncle, Roger Mathew, as captain. As supercargo, Walter was the second most important person on the ship and was responsible to the owners for managing the cargo and its sale, in this case human beings. The voyage was not a success; there were difficulties recruiting suitable crew in Dartmouth, in buying captured Africans on the Guinea coast, and in buying enough sugar in Jamaica to carry a full cargo home, as well as a high death rate among the sailors and captured Africans. The voyage made a loss and the owners did not repeat the effort. Walter himself went on to become a 'captain and East India merchant' – possibly a disguise for continued slave trading as his name does not appear in the East India Company registers.

### **Nicholas Prideaux (1635-before 1702)**

Another branch of the family was that of Richard Predys of Braunton and Great Torrington. One of his descendants, Nicholas Prideaux born 1635, went to Barbados in his role as attorney to the Blakes of Bridgewater, and settled there, where he thrived due to his enterprising nature, good connections, weak scruples and ability to marry into estates with productive soil. He had five successive marriages on the island, of which the fourth one, to Rebecca, brought him the 230 acre sugar plantation called Friendship in the parish of St Michael. In 1680 he is also listed<sup>1</sup> as owning the 278 acre Clifden aka Prideaux in St Thomas. He had eight children through these marriages. Nicholas became speaker of the Barbados Council in the 1690s and agent for the Royal Africa Company. He did not receive a good report as, on his own admission, he 'opposed all governments', and was accused of making a fortune out of widows' and orphans' estates. Nicholas would have been a contemporary of Peter Colleton in Barbados, coming a generation later than the Devon royalists (John Colleton, Thomas Modyford and Humphrey Walrond – see separate articles) who were prominent among the early settlers who established the slave plantation system and the racist laws governing it (the Barbados Slave Code of 1661).

This Nicholas is shown on [slavevoyages.com](http://slavevoyages.com) (which claims 85% coverage of all slave-trading voyages) as part-owning two ships which made slaving voyages. The Tryall sailed from Barbados to Africa and back in 1700-1701, initially with 91 captives but landing with only 73 of them. In the same year the Neptune made the same journey, setting out with 243 captives but landing with only 195. It is clear that Nicholas was deeply involved in promoting the slavery economy of the island.

Nicholas' son, Daniel Prideaux, was recorded in 1701 as being a merchant of Barnstaple shipping sugar. Another Prideaux, William, probably from the South Hams branch of the family, appeared in Barbados wills of 1665 and 1669, indicating a connection with the slavery economy of that island.

### **Quakers (Society of Friends)**

An interesting aspect of the Prideaux slavery connections is their conversion to the Society of Friends (Quakers). Several of the family, as listed above, were possibly involved in slave-trading, or traded with slave plantations, and one was a slave-owner. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they saw nothing wrong with it. But at this time the Quakers were increasingly coming in from the margins of society and challenging the establishment by their application of moral principles to everyday life and business. They were, however, slow to challenge the morality of slavery. It was not until 1761 that London Yearly Meeting condemned the trade and forbade Friends from participating in it. Quakers eventually became prominent in the Abolition campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> [creolelinks.com/Barbados-plantation-history](http://creolelinks.com/Barbados-plantation-history)

Walter Prideaux of the 'Daniel and Henry' was an Anglican but his sons became Quakers. He must have seen a complete change in attitude to slavery over his lifetime, from 1676 to 1759, and it is likely that there was conflict between himself and his sons over this issue. One of these sons, George, a solicitor of Kingsbridge, took this momentous step of conversion at a time when dissenters were badly treated and had limited social opportunities. His large group of descendants formed the nucleus of South Devon Quarterly Meeting. Quakers questioned the morality of many business practices in which the Prideauxs may have been involved, such as salvaging from wrecks, smuggling, privateering, and of course, slave-trading and slave-owning. They either gave up these activities or perhaps disguised them under false descriptions such as 'East India merchant'. The sons are buried in the Friends' burial ground at Kingsbridge, next to the meeting house built in 1697.

### **Royal Africa Company vs Ten percenters**

Another issue which would have caused conflict between members of the Prideaux family was that of monopoly versus free trade. There was an on-going conflict in the slave-trading business between the interests of the Royal African Company (RAC), which was established in 1672 to hold a royal monopoly on slave-trading, and the independent business people who were excluded and who wanted to be able to participate in the profits of the trade. On the one hand, the RAC provided rather better conditions on its ships for the captives, due to the organisation and predictability of the business, but on the other it could not satisfy the demand for the quantity of cheap labour required on the burgeoning sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Nicholas Prideaux of Barbados, as agent for the RAC, vociferously defended its monopoly in the 1680s and 1690s

However, under pressure from merchants, the monopoly was broken in 1698 and free trade was instituted on payment of a 10% tax to the RAC. This would have allowed businessmen such as the Prideauxs to try their hand at slave-trading. One such 'ten percenter' venture was that of the Daniel and Henry on which Walter Prideaux was employed. While it seems likely that Nicholas Prideaux would not have been happy with the independent 'interlopers' within his extended family, it seems that he soon relented when the opportunity to share in the two slaving ships mentioned above came his way.

### **What happened to the Barbados Prideauxs?**

There are lots of Prideauxs listed in Barbados baptisms and deaths during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but by the end of slavery, at the 1835 compensation, only one Prideaux (Anne) received compensation and that was for one enslaved person. What happened to the Barbados Prideauxs? Did they emigrate to Carolina? Did they change their name to Preddie – there are lots of Preddies in nineteenth century Barbados? (as noted in the introduction, Preddie is an alternative version of Prideaux). Did they convert to Quakerism and sell off their plantations through conscience? It would be interesting to find the answer to this question!

This table shows number of Barbados records listed by Familysearch.com when the exact surnames are entered for the following date ranges. Results include baptisms, marriages and burials in Barbados.

Date range	Prideaux	Preddie
1600-1700	80	0
1700-1800	121	5
1800-1900	103	127
1900-2000	12	126

Bearing in mind that these results are approximate, as exact dates could not be seen due to internet limitations, this still shows that the Prideaux family (and perhaps their enslaved Africans?) arrived in the 1600s and multiplied during the 1700s and 1800s, but practically disappeared in the 1900s. By contrast, the Preddie family arrived after 1800 and continues to this day. But are they related to the Prideauxs or a completely different family?

In conclusion, the Devon Prideaux family were involved in the early days of slavery as traders from Devon ports, as slave-owners and slave-traders in Barbados, and as holding positions in the government of that island. The conversion of some family members to the Quaker religion in the eighteenth century may account for their lesser involvement by the nineteenth century. Although many Devon country houses were owned by Prideauxs at various times, it does not appear that they were acquired with the proceeds of slavery.

### **References**

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