

## **W.S.M. D'Urban and his links to slavery**

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### **Summary**

*William D'Urban (1836-1934), the first curator of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter, had the misfortune of going totally deaf during childhood, due to an outbreak of diphtheria in Canada where he was living with his paternal grandfather. His mother Mary had inherited a plantation in Grenada, and William married Gertrude Porter, whose grandfather Thomas Porter had become extremely wealthy from his ownership of sugar plantations in what later became British Guiana. It would appear that throughout his life William was able to indulge his pleasure for collecting natural history specimens, without worrying about the need to secure an income.*

### **Introduction**

William Stewart Mitchell D'Urban (or WSM for short) was the first curator of Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum, from 1865 to 1884. During his life he was a prolific collector of natural history specimens and ethnographic and archaeological artefacts, many of which have found their way into the RAMM collection.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss his period as curator of RAMM or the items that he collected, but to describe some of the main elements of his life experience, and in particular to highlight his family links to slavery. WSM was born in Ireland on 29 July 1836, not long after the abolition of slavery in the British colonies.

As part of the process of abolition, the British government had been forced to set aside a sum of 20 million pounds, to compensate slave owners; the enslaved people themselves were not paid anything. Compensation payments were made to the British owners of slaves in the mid-1830s. WSM did not 'own' any slaves himself, but several of his relatives did and they received compensation. In addition, some of his ancestors had played a key part in the governance of islands in the Caribbean during the period of slavery, which merits further investigation.

Table 1 shows the names of some of the key relatives of WSM, and we shall look at each of these in turn. We begin with WSM's paternal grandfather Sir Benjamin D'Urban who, as we shall see later, played a key role in WSM's early upbringing.

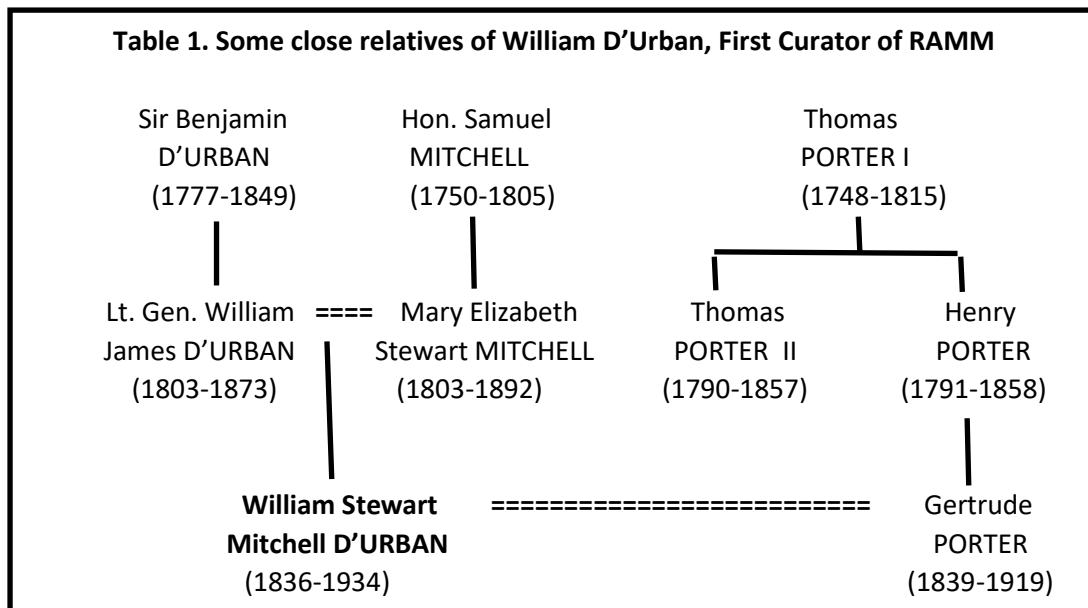
### **Sir Benjamin D'Urban (1777-1849)**

WSM's paternal grandfather, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, had a very distinguished career, first in the army and then in government administration.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1777, he joined a dragoon regiment in 1793 when aged only 15, and was rapidly promoted. He also gained a breadth of experience through service overseas, including spells in central Europe, in Jamaica, and

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography reports that there is a painting of him by Exeter artist Thomas Mogford (1809-1868) in the National Portrait Gallery, but the current NPG catalogue does not mention this portrait. It is reproduced in his entry on p. 389 of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 17, 2004.

most importantly in Iberia, where he was appointed Colonel and Quartermaster-General to the Portuguese Army.<sup>2</sup>



In 1797, aged only 20, he had married Anna Wilcocks from Norwich, and they subsequently had several children. In 1813 he had been knighted, and in 1819 he was promoted to Major-General. The following year saw the beginning of his government appointments, when he was made Governor of Antigua. Although Antigua had been an important producer of cotton in the eighteenth century, by the first decades of the nineteenth century sugar had taken over as the major crop. The enslaved population numbered about 30,000, while the white population was less than 3,000.<sup>3</sup>

In 1824 Sir Benjamin was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Demerara Essequibo, which had a slave population of about 75,000.<sup>4</sup> His appointment came soon after the Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823. That was an uprising involving more than 10,000 slaves. It took place on 18 August and lasted two days. The largely non-violent rebellion was brutally crushed by the colonists, who killed many slaves. Twenty-seven were executed, and their bodies were displayed in public for months afterwards as a deterrent to others.<sup>5</sup>

When Sir Benjamin first arrived on 3 May 1824, there was some apprehension that another slave uprising was imminent, this time on the east coast, and he felt it necessary to issue a special proclamation.<sup>6</sup> In it he announced, amongst other things:

<sup>2</sup> See for instance *The Peninsular Journal of Major-General Sir Benjamin D'Urban, 1808-1817*, edited with an introduction by I.J. Rousseau. Wagram Press, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834*, Tables S1.2 and S2.1. Press University of the West Indies, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Table S1.2.

<sup>5</sup> Emilia da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: the Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823. (New edition)* Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> London Times, 24 June 1824

I do therefore hereby declare to the slaves, my firm determination to repress every appearance of insurrection; and in the event of any new revolt, I will not fail to put it down, by the immediate and decided operation of the powerful military force now at my disposal.

The proclamation was signed by his youngest son Walter D'Urban, who had been appointed Government Secretary as soon as they arrived in Demerara Essequibo. Unfortunately his appointment did not last very long, because on 1 November he drowned while bathing in the Essequibo River. There is a memorial to him in St George's Cathedral, Georgetown.<sup>7</sup> The position of Government Secretary was subsequently filled by Walter's elder brother William, who became the father of WSM.

Sir Benjamin does not appear to have owned any plantations himself. This was in contrast to his predecessor, Lt. General John Murray, who had been Governor from 1813 to 1824, and who had owned three plantations: two of them were coffee plantations in Berbice (one of them part-owned), and the third was a sugar estate in Essequibo.

In the decade leading up to Abolition, the British Government attempted (through its so-called Amelioration policy) to improve the conditions of the enslaved populations through direct legislation for the Crown Colonies (which had no elected Assemblies) and by encouraging other colonies to introduce appropriate legislation. In particular, the Government had established the position of Protector of Slaves in each Crown Colony, to look after the interests of the enslaved population. Among the changes introduced under Amelioration, the enslaved population were to be given Christian instruction, and Sunday markets were to be abolished to encourage religious worship. Corporal punishment, the core of plantation discipline, was to be limited; the flogging of women was to be absolutely prohibited, and that of men restricted.

In this spirit, D'Urban issued a proclamation on 1 August 1829, to explain and amend certain of the provisions in the ordinance for the religious instruction of slaves in the colony. The original ordinance is not conveniently available, but the amendments enacted in this proclamation included the instruction that, in reference to clause 14 in the ordinance, 'the punishment by bed-stocks shall not exceed six nights'.<sup>8</sup>

On 21 July 1831 Demerara-Essequibo was united with Berbice as British Guiana, and Sir Benjamin D'Urban was appointed as the first Governor.<sup>9</sup> The three constituent parts of Guiana were named after the three great rivers in the country: Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice.

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<sup>7</sup> Lena Boyd Brown and Vera Langford Oliver, *More Monumental Inscriptions: Tombstones of the British West Indies*, Borgo Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> There is a good example of bed-stocks at [www.akg-images.com/archive/Bed-stocks-for-intoxication-2UMDHU5OPA\\_U.html](http://www.akg-images.com/archive/Bed-stocks-for-intoxication-2UMDHU5OPA_U.html)

<sup>9</sup>A map of Guiana is at:

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=british+guiana+map&source=Inms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjxjtkPO-TiAHUJmhQKHU2HCNUQ\\_AUIESgC&biw=1088&bih=516#imgrc=QG5zpqyRhq8Y9M](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=british+guiana+map&source=Inms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjxjtkPO-TiAHUJmhQKHU2HCNUQ_AUIESgC&biw=1088&bih=516#imgrc=QG5zpqyRhq8Y9M):

In 1833 Benjamin D'Urban was appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Cape of Good Hope, and took up his post on 16 January 1834. This was a critical time in terms of the move towards the abolition of slavery. The Slavery Abolition Act, which was intended to free some 800,000 enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and South Africa, had received the Royal Assent on 28 August 1833 and was to come into force on 1 August 1834. D'Urban therefore made this issue the first item to be discussed at the first meeting of his Executive Council.

Rather than travelling around the country, he remained in Cape Town and focused his attention initially on the emancipation of slaves and the establishment of the system of apprenticeship. Many of the slaves were employed around Cape Town and Stellenbosch, while others were labourers in the vineyards of the Western Province and as herdsmen in the north and east.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of 1834 there was another outbreak of fighting on the eastern border, where the Xhosa found themselves under increasing land pressure because of settlers (both European and African). D'Urban organised a military expedition which did succeed in containing the situation, but the murder of Paramount-Chief Hintsa in dubious circumstances enflamed Xhosa feeling.

D'Urban appears to have been popular amongst the English colonial community. Back in 1824 a group of colonists had moved up the coast and settled at a place they initially called Port Natal. In 1835 some English colonists renamed the place Durban, in honour of Sir Benjamin D'Urban.

On the other hand, the Dutch colonists in the Eastern Districts were dissatisfied with the effects of British rule, particularly in relation to the abolition of slavery, and with the ending of the Xhosa war they began a mass exodus to the north, in a movement known as the Great Trek.

Whereas D'Urban's predecessors had tried to keep black and white apart, D'Urban's policy was to attempt to stabilise the frontier by controlled interaction between the races. Charles Grant, the new Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (appointed in April 1835 and soon enobled as Baron Glenelg), disagreed strongly with many of D'Urban's policies, particularly his attempts to undermine the chiefly structure of Xhosa society. He also objected to the tone of D'Urban's despatches to London. D'Urban was dismissed on 1 May 1837. Rather than return to London, he retired to Wynberg near Cape Town and stayed on there until 1846. His wife died in 1843, during this period of semi-retirement.

Soon after his return to England, he accepted an assignment as Commander of all British forces in the Caribbean (excluding Jamaica), but he never took up this appointment. Instead, he was appointed as Commander of the Forces in North America. He was based in Canada from January 1847 until his death in May 1849. Only a month before his death, he had brought in reinforcements to put an end to the Elgin Riots in Montreal.

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Charles Swinburne Lancaster, *A Reappraisal of the Governorship of Sir Benjamin D'Urban at the Cape of Good Hope, 1834-1838*, M.A. Thesis, Rhodes University, South Africa, 1980.

### **Lt. Gen. William James D'Urban (1803-1873)**

William D'Urban, the father of WSM, was also a military man, spending over 50 years in the armed services. He signed on as a cornet in the 14<sup>th</sup> Dragoons in 1819. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1823, Captain in 1826, Major in 1835, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel in 1846, and Colonel in 1854. He went on half-pay as Lieutenant-Colonel in 1857, but was then promoted to Major General in 1860, and Lieutenant General in 1870. He died in 1873.

After his service in the 14<sup>th</sup> Dragoons, he served in the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment (King's Own Borderers) and then with the 26<sup>th</sup> (The Cameronian) Regiment of Foot, before finishing service as Colonel of the 107<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Bengal Infantry).

In 1824, at the tender age of 21, he was Government Secretary in Demerara/Essequibo, where his father was the Lieutenant Governor. In 1839 his 25<sup>th</sup> regiment was sent out to deal with the Xhosa Wars in the Cape Colony (where his father was still living in semi-retirement). In 1842 he landed in Durban from Cape Town and was involved in campaigns against the Dutch Boers, and to relieve a detachment of the 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment which was besieged in its entrenched camp in the neighbourhood.

At the end of 1845 he joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and was appointed Deputy Quartermaster General in the Windward and Leeward Islands.<sup>11</sup> Then in 1848, when his father was in Canada as Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in North America, William followed him there, being appointed Deputy Quartermaster General to the Forces serving in North America.<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1860s he was back in South Africa, commanding troops in what was then called British Kaffraria – that is, the south eastern part of the Eastern Cape.

On 30 October 1833 William had got married in Topsham church “to **Mary Elizabeth Stewart**, only child of the late Samuel Mitchell Esq. of Newport, Devonshire, and Hope Vale, in the isle of Grenada”.<sup>13</sup> Before looking at the life of Mary Elizabeth Stewart, let's turn to her father, Samuel Mitchell.

### **Hon. Samuel Mitchell (1750-1805)**

Little is known about Samuel Mitchell's early life. He was born in 1750, probably in London, but seems to have lived in Grenada for more than 30 years. Grenada had been fought over by the French and British for many years, and had changed hands several times. The first we hear of Samuel Mitchell in Grenada is in 1790 when he bought the Chemin sugar plantation, and changed its name to Hope Vale. Another person owning estates in Grenada at this time was Sir Alexander Hamilton of the Retreat, Topsham, who had been High Sheriff of Devon in 1786.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [www.devon-mitchells.co.uk](http://www.devon-mitchells.co.uk)

<sup>12</sup> London Gazette, 1 December 1848

<sup>13</sup> Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, Thursday October 31, 1833.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Betteridge, *Samuel Mitchell: From Plantation to Newport House*, Topsham Times, Issue No. 21, pp. 24-35, Topsham Museum Society, 2018.

Control of Grenada rested with the Governor who represented the British Crown, while day-to-day matters were handled by the Island's Council, headed by a President. Samuel Mitchell was appointed President of the Council in 1790, which suggests that by that time he had already been a long-serving member of the Council.

In 1795 the Fedon rebellion against British rule erupted in Grenada. Julien Fedon was of mixed heritage – French father and a black freed slave mother. His family had been living on Guadeloupe, where he had been a general, but they moved to Grenada and purchased a small estate there. The rebels captured British hostages, including the Governor Sir Ninian Home, and took them to their camp in the mountains, where a number of hostages, including the governor, were killed. Another person (Kenneth Francis Mackenzie) took over as Acting Governor, but gave up after a few months. Samuel Mitchell succeeded him as Acting Governor, also in 1795. The rebellion ended in 1796. It is estimated that under Fedon's leadership, half of all the enslaved people on the island joined the revolutionary forces, of whom half perished in the rebellion.

In 1798 Samuel Mitchell's father Thomas died in London, and it is probable that this was the time when Samuel decided to move back to England, in order to attend to his father's affairs. It was also around this time that – perhaps on the advice of Alexander Hamilton – he bought the Newport site in Topsham. The site had previously been owned by Thomas Floud, who was later twice Mayor of Exeter. He had demolished the thatched cottage there (known as Chutes) and built a larger house on the site and called it Newport, probably around 1780.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore perhaps not surprising to find that, on 7 September 1802, Samuel Mitchell got married in Topsham 'to Miss Mary Floud, sister of Thomas Floud, mayor of Exeter'.<sup>16</sup>

When Samuel Mitchell died in 1805, his daughter Mary was the main beneficiary of his estate. His will also included the instruction: 'To Victoire my housekeeper in Grenada having shown me great fidelity and much attention.... and having conducted herself with prudence and the utmost regard to my interest particularly during the rebellion in that island it is my will and desire that she immediately be made free and also her son Frederick.'<sup>17</sup>

It is of interest to note that the current Prime Minister of Grenada, who has served as PM for about 20 years, is named Keith Claudius Mitchell. It is tempting to conjecture how he got his surname. We have not found any evidence that Samuel Mitchell was a married man during his time in Grenada, but children did sometimes result from inter-racial unions, usually involving domestic slaves employed on the estate.

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<sup>15</sup> R.W. Mitchell, *The History of Newport House, Topsham, Devon 1798-1980*, handwritten script, West Country Studies Library, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter, 1991

<sup>16</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1802, p. 876.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.devon-mitchells.co.uk/getperson.php?personID=11&tree=2ndDurban>

### **Mary Elizabeth Stewart Mitchell (1803-1892)**

Mary Mitchell, the mother of WSM, was born at Newport, Topsham in 1803, and baptised in Exeter Cathedral. She was given the middle name Stewart after her godfather John Stewart, friend of her father, who was a major commanding the St Patrick's regiment in Grenada at the time of the rebellion, and who attended the baptism. His illegitimate son, also called John Stewart, was briefly a member of parliament in Britain, and has been described as the first 'coloured' Member of Parliament. He was awarded more than £22,000 (equivalent to almost two million pounds in today's money) for the 433 enslaved people on his Annandale plantation in British Guiana.<sup>18</sup>

The 1829 slave registers show her as the owner of the Hope Vale estate in Grenada, which had previously been owned by her father. When slavery was abolished, compensation of over £3,000 (perhaps ¼ million pounds in today's money) in respect of the 113 enslaved people on her estate was paid to three people (John Stewart, Samuel Trehawke Kekewich, and Samuel Parr), who were the trustees for her marriage settlement.

It was not until 1838 that work started on the construction of a new Newport House in Topsham, under the supervision of Mary, the widow of Samuel Mitchell. The foundation stone for the house was laid by her grandson WSM, who was two years old. She is subsequently shown in the 1841 and 1851 censuses as living there, along with Charlotte Floud (daughter of Thomas and Ann Floud).

By the time of the 1861 Census Newport House had a tenant, Sir Charles Fitzroy Maclean. He was the son of Sir Fitzroy Jeffreys Grafton Maclean and Elizabeth Bishop (née Kyd), and had been born in Barbados. In 1836 he had received compensation of £3,676 1s 8d (perhaps the equivalent to a quarter of a million pounds today) for 185 people enslaved on his Six Mens estate in Barbados.

By the time of the 1871 Census Lt General William D'Urban and his wife Mary were in residence at Newport House, along with their granddaughter Emily Louisa Drake (who was the daughter of WSM's elder sister, also called Emily). He died in 1873, and his wife moved out soon after, presumably turning over the house to her son WSM and his wife Gertrude. Mary moved to Littleham in Exmouth, where she was enumerated in the 1881 and 1891 censuses. She died in 1892.

### **Thomas Porter I (1748-1815)**

WSM was married to Gertrude Porter. Her paternal grandfather was Thomas Porter I. Thomas was born in Demerara in 1748. He appears to have spent time in Tobago. Coming back to Demerara in 1782, he bought up several cotton plantations on the coast. Later he switched to producing sugar, as did many other plantation owners in Demerara and Essequibo.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/8816>

He returned to England in May 1796. We know this because George Pinckard produced a three-volume report that mentions Porter: *Notes on the West Indies, written during the expedition under the command of the late General Sir Ralph Abercromby*, published by Longman et al. in 1806. Pinckard was Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals to His Majesty's Forces, and wrote as follows:

Being now released, the *Grenada* proceeds to take in a cargo of cotton or sugar, in order to return with all speed to England. Her cabin is already engaged by a Mr Porter, who is about to quit the fatigues of a tropical world, and to return to Europe with his family. This gentleman was one of the earliest planters who ventured to direct his labours to the cultivation of the sea coast, instead of the banks of the river, and who has turned his industry to a profitable account; his well-merited success enabling him to return to England possessed of a very large fortune.<sup>19</sup>

In the very next paragraphs George Pinckard gives a graphic description of his reaction after attending a slave market.

Sometime after his return to England, Thomas Porter purchased Rockbeare House, a few miles east of Exeter. It is now a Grade I listed building. The house received manorial rights in 1815, and was subsequently known as Rockbeare Manor. It was originally built about 1760 for Sir John Duntze, a rich Exeter wool merchant and MP for Tiverton from 1768 until his death in 1795. His widow, Dame Frances 'of Rockbeare House', died in 1802.

It is unclear whether the present building contains part of the original building. One report from 1822 says that 'it was purchased of the present baronet by Mr Porter, who pulled down the old house, and has built on its site a handsome mansion for his own residence'.<sup>20</sup> The website of Historic England tells a rather different story. They suggest that the property was purchased by Thomas Porter in 1815, and that he made significant alterations to the house in 1820, including the addition of an upper storey.<sup>21</sup> That reference would presumably be to Thomas Porter II, since Thomas Porter I died in 1815. The manor is still standing, and is now used as a wedding and events venue.<sup>22</sup>

In 1804 Thomas Porter I 'of Rockbear' was made High Sheriff of Devonshire. At his death in 1815, his estate was valued at £120,000 (equivalent to perhaps £10 million in today's money). One of his three executors was Alexander Hamilton Hamilton of the Retreat, Topsham, who had inherited the Retreat from his maternal uncle, the aforementioned Sir Alexander Hamilton. The will of Thomas Porter I mentions the estates that he owned: Paradise, Good Faith, Adventure, Hope and Enmore in Demerara, and an estate known as Perry Wood, located near to Bloody Bay in Tobago (lately the property of Henry Fowke). These estates he left to his three sons, Thomas, William and Henry.

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<sup>19</sup> Vol II, p. 216. These volumes are available online at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009348827>, but a hard copy is also available for inspection in the Special Collections library at the University of Exeter.

<sup>20</sup> *Magna Britannica*, Volume 6, Devonshire. Published by T. Cadell and W. Davies, London, 1822. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/magna-britannia/vol6/pp425-430>

<sup>21</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000193>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rockbearemanor.co.uk/>



Following the death of his father, William was initially joint owner of Paradise with Thomas II, and of Enmore with Henry, but the shares appear to have passed to his brothers when he died in 1820.<sup>23</sup> The brothers appear to have sold off the other three plantations in British Guiana (Good Faith, Adventure and Hope) or else absorbed them into Paradise and Enmore.

### **Thomas Porter II (1790-1857)**

Thomas Porter II lived at Rockbeare after the death of his father. As mentioned above, he made significant alterations to the house in the 1820s, including the addition of an upper storey. It is also likely that the walled garden to the south-east of the house was built around this time. (In 1987 the park and garden received a Grade II listing from Historic England.) Following his death in 1857, his son Thomas III (who had been living in British Guiana) sold the house in 1859.

In 1835 Thomas II had received a compensation payment of over £19,000 (equivalent to perhaps 1½ million pounds today) for the 385 people enslaved on his Paradise sugar plantation.

### **Henry Porter (1791-1858)**

Henry Porter, the second son of Thomas Porter I and the father-in-law of WSM, was born in Demerara. He entered Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1811, and graduated in 1815, obtaining his M.A. in 1819.

In 1820 Henry got married to Rose Aylmer Russell (while she was still a minor) at St Marylebone. Her childhood had been spent in Calcutta. The couple went on to have ten children together.

In 1835 he was awarded compensation of almost £36,000 (or nearly 3 million pounds in today's money) for the 709 people enslaved on his Enmore sugar plantation.

At some point, probably in the 1820s, he bought Winslade House and Park in Clyst St Mary, Devon. Up to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century the Spicer family had lived at Winslade, but their original house was demolished.<sup>24</sup> A new mansion was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century for an East India Merchant, Edward Cotsford, who was High Sheriff of Devon in 1792. He died in 1810. The house was then lived in by the Porcher family. Josias du Pre Porcher, who had been a member of parliament for nearly 20 years, died at Winslade in 1820.

White's Directory of 1850 reported that Winslade Manor is 'a large stone mansion, on an eminence, with tasteful grounds, and has been greatly improved during the last seven years at a cost of £10,000. It has three beautiful terraces in front.' Historic England now shows Winslade as a Grade II\* listed building.

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<sup>23</sup> National Archives PROB 11/1639/121. His will dated 4 November 1816 was proved on 5 February 1821.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret J.M. Ezell (ed.), *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, p.xix, Oxford University Press, 1993.

The building is still standing. In the 1970s it was purchased by the London and Manchester Assurance Company as their new headquarters. They greatly expanded the amount of office space available by adding on various other buildings in 1977, designed by Powell and Moya. London and Manchester was taken over by Friends Provident in 1998, which in turn was taken over by Resolution Ltd in 2008, but they later abandoned the buildings. The future of this site was uncertain for several years, but in 2019 Burrington Estates revealed 'an 80 million-pound vision to redevelop the 86-acre estate and stately home at Winslade Park in Clyst St Mary'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Gertrude Porter (1839-1919)**

Gertrude, born in 1839, was the eighth of ten children of Henry Porter. She was brought up at Winslade House. On 29 July 1863 she got married in the church of St Andrew's, Kenn, to WSM D'Urban, soon to become the first curator of the RAMM. They appear to have had three children, two boys (William Henry and Henry Ludovic) and one daughter (Rose Mary). Sadly, both sons died before reaching full maturity, William at 25 and Henry at 22. Rose lived on to the age of 80, and died in 1960. Gertrude herself died in 1919.

### **William Stewart Mitchell D'Urban (1836-1934)**

The parents of WSM seem to have played little part in his early upbringing. While a small child, he lived with his paternal grandparents, Sir Benjamin and Lady D'Urban in South Africa.<sup>26</sup> Sir Benjamin had been dismissed from his post as Governor of the Cape Colony in May 1837, soon after WSM's birth, and would have had time on his hands, so it would have been convenient for him and his wife to look after WSM in his early years. In contrast, WSM's father was receiving various postings in the army, which would have made it difficult for him to see much of his son. With Lady D'Urban's death in 1843, WSM may have moved to living with his natural mother for a while.

Sir Benjamin returned to England in 1846, and was soon appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Canada. WSM accompanied him there, and was there up until Sir Benjamin's death in 1849. A tragedy befell WSM while he was out in Canada. There was an outbreak of diphtheria among Irish immigrants, and WSM became infected. His speech and hearing were severely affected. A cure was attempted, by injecting tar or pitch into his ears, but his eardrums were penetrated and he became totally deaf. This disability meant that he had no hope of following his father and grandfather into the army.

Undeterred, he became a keen naturalist, no doubt inspired by the exotic fauna and flora of the Cape that he had experienced as a young child. In 1860-61 he had the opportunity to return there, when he spent a year in and around King William's Town, while his father commanded troops in the Ciskei. This gave him the chance to collect plants from British Kaffraria, including several rare species. But years later, in 1926, when writing to a friend, he said that "...collecting was difficult and dangerous on account of the Kaffirs". He also

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<sup>25</sup> Express and Echo, Thursday October 17, 2019, p. 17. Further information is available at [www.winsladepark.com](http://www.winsladepark.com) (accessed 16 February 2020)

<sup>26</sup> Obituary in The Times, 30 January 1934, p. 19.

collected butterflies and ferns. A butterfly in South Africa is even named Durbania after him.

In 1863, as mentioned above, he got married to Gertrude Porter, daughter of Henry Porter, and in 1865 he accepted the post of first curator of RAMM.

At the time of the 1871 Census, WSM and his wife were living at 3 Queen's Terrace, St Leonards, along with their two boys, William and Henry, aged 6 and 5 respectively. There was a final question on the census form, asking each person whether they were deaf and dumb, blind, imbecile or idiotic, or lunatic. WSM did not respond to this question, presumably because he was not 'deaf and dumb' but only 'deaf'.

At the time of the 1881 Census he and his wife were living at Albuera, Lower St Leonards. His occupation is listed as 'Secretary and Curator, Albert Museum, Exeter, biologist and botanist'. Also there were their elder son William, aged 16, who is described as an art student, and their daughter Rose, who is under 12 months. There is no sign of the younger son Henry, who would have been 15 at that time.

In 1884 WSM resigned from his post at RAMM, and moved to California with his son Henry, hoping that the climate there would improve his son's health. It is not known whether Gertrude and William went as well. While there, he continued to collect natural history specimens and other artefacts, which he subsequently donated to RAMM. Unfortunately Henry died in 1888, aged only 22, and WSM returned to Devon soon after. Sadly, their eldest son William died in the following year, aged only 25. The causes of the two deaths are not known. Emily, William's elder sister, also died young, at the age of 34.

In the 1891 Census WSM and his wife and their daughter Rose are shown living with his mother at Moorlands, Littleham, Exmouth.

In 1892 he published a book entitled *The Birds of Devon*, co-authored with Rev. Murray Mathew, and published by R.H. Porter.

By the time of the 1901 Census WSM was living at Newport House 'on his own means'. Also there were his wife Gertrude, their daughter Rose now aged 20, and his grandniece Grace Burrows, granddaughter of his elder sister Emily, plus five resident servants. He continued living at Newport House for more than 30 years, until his death in 1934.

On the 1911 census form WSM and his wife are again shown as living at Newport House, but this time not only is their daughter Rose present, but also her husband Major John Unett Coates and their three young daughters. The 1911 Census form also included a question about infirmity. For himself WSM has written: 'Totally deaf – deaf from the age of 12'. Some idea of the style in which well-to-do people lived in those days is given by the fact that there were six servants also present (a nursery governess, gardener, cook, parlour maid, nursery maid, and scullery maid).

The fact that WSM appears not to have had any permanent employment, apart from his spell at RAMM, suggests that he had private means. This paper has helped to shed light on his life and the lives of his close relatives, and on the probable source of his funds.

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