

WHAT'S IN THE NAME OF MY STREET?

Camden connections

Adrian Clark presents a study of the many different places named after Charles Pratt, 1st earl Camden, one-time lord chancellor of Great Britain, including two Caribbean slave plantations – something that may not have pleased this friend of civil liberties



What links a London borough, a grand house in Kent, over 20 towns, cities and counties in the United States, two Caribbean slavery plantations and a street in a small town in the Scottish highlands? The answer is a constitutional lawyer and a leading proponent of civil liberties who became a darling of American colonists and possibly of Caribbean slavery plantation owners.

That man is Charles Pratt, 1st earl Camden, lord chancellor of Great Britain. In July 1765, Charles Pratt was created baron Camden of Camden Place in Chislehurst, Kent. Thereby, most unusually, he took as his title the surname of another person – William Camden (1551–1623), antiquarian, grammarian, headmaster, author of *Britannia* (1586) and of a history of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England. In 1607 he had a house built at Chislehurst, which was subsequently rebuilt and came to be known as Camden Place (from 1871 to 1873, the house became the residence of exiled Emperor Napoleon III, Empress Eugénie and the Prince

Charles Pratt, 1st earl Camden, after Joshua Reynolds (1766)

Imperial and has since long housed the Chislehurst Golf Club).

The American crisis

In 1757 Charles Pratt, through the influence of William Pitt the Elder (earl of Chatham), became attorney general. In February 1775, he (as Baron Camden) made his major speech on the American crisis, strongly opposing the New England Trade and Fishery Bill, one of the two Restraining Acts which sought to limit trade between New England and other nations. Camden adopted John Locke's line that resistance to tyranny was justified and called the Bill:

... a bill of war... it draws the sword, and plunges the empire into civil and unnatural war... My lords, it is evident that England must one day lose the dominion of America. It is impossible that this petty island can continue in dependence that mighty continent... To protract the time of separation to a distant day is all that can be hoped.

In 1776 he became Lord Chancellor and served both the Grafton and Lord North administrations, but,

despite his success in his cases, the government removed him because of his uncompromising opposition on the big issues of the day: the treatment of the American colonies and the proceedings against radical journalist and MP John Wilkes for seditious libel. Thereafter, he continued steadfastly to oppose the taxation of the American colonists, as indeed did John Wilkes; 'Wilkes and Liberty' became a battle cry in America.

The name begins to spread

Little wonder, then, that the earl of Camden was considered highly by American colonists or that Camden became a relatively common name for new and newly-renamed towns in the United States. The town of Camden, Maine, was named after him in 1791. It had previously been called Megunticook – 'great swells of the sea' – by the Penibscot nation (the name continues for the nearby lake and river). Others include those in South Carolina (previously Pine Tree Hill), North Carolina and New Jersey, as well as Camden Counties in New Jersey, Missouri and Georgia. The earl of Camden is referred in US

sources as a 'friend of the colonists'.

Camden Street (Sráid Camden), Dublin, appears in the records from 1778. It is probable that it has the same derivation and possibly similar rationale. Local politicians held little power prior to when Henry Grattan declared sovereignty of the Irish parliament a few years later (1782-83), but maybe they had some sway over the naming of streets and might indeed have regarded Camden as 'a good egg'. By contrast, his son John, who became lord lieutenant of Ireland in 1795, touched off a major rebellion against British rule by his repressive actions.

Soon thereafter the name began to appear in the Caribbean. In 1813, following the failure of the Boldero banking concern (in which William and Henry Lushington were partners), Alexander Fraser and John Stewart, both of Crossing Square London, purchased the Camden sugar plantation/estate in Trinidad. Its former name was Concordia (the Roman goddess of harmony and peace), a cruel caricature of the prevalent conditions. It would be a reasonable assumption that it too was re-named after Charles Pratt, earl of Camden. However, a coincidental and 'inconvenient fact' emerges at this stage in the investigation. A deed of 1812 between the aforementioned

William Lushington and a John Browne regarding the assignment to Browne of the island of Mustique along with 85 enslaved people, refers to 'William Lushington formerly of Portland Place, now of Camden Place'. It is not clear when precisely the plantation was re-named Camden, however it is realistic to infer that Lushington named it after his home, let to him by the 2nd earl Camden during his absence in Ireland as lord lieutenant. This would break the direct link with Charles Pratt, unless, of course, Lushington had in mind the both the 1st earl of Camden, possibly his son and his (rented) home simultaneously. One can at least conclude that the name Camden had positive connotations for Lushington the plantation owner, who is said to have damaged his fortune by over-ambitious investment in West Indian trade and, as an MP, presented petitions from the West Indian interest, including, in March 1796, against the abolition of the slave trade.

The 1813 indenture of release of the Camden estate states: After payment, John Stewart and Alexander Fraser received a 'Certificate of the Negroes and other Slaves' on the Camden estate dated 31 March, 1813. The certification of the number of enslaved people on the Camden

plantation was noted to be 210, dated 'Trinidad 16 March 1814' by Henry Murray, registrar of slaves. The certification stated each person's name, surname, employment, colour ('Negro' or 'mulatto'), age, stature, country of origin, tribal marks (if any) and relations (or otherwise). Included in this list were 25 'Negroes' brought from the Endeavour estate, Mustique island, and attached to the Camden estate. By 1834 there were 139 enslaved people on Camden estate.

In 1818 the schedule of inventory of enslaved people included, for example, Antonia Thatcher, age 23, 'Negro Labourer, 4'11', lbo country marks on her face'; Mary Dillon, aged 36, 'labourer, 5'3 1/2', Mandingo country marks on her breast'. One Charlotte Grandance, 37 is noted as a 'Negro Deserter, a Creole of Grenada'. Enslaved males included Adolphus O'Fagan, 24, 5'5'; 'Negro labourer, African Mandingo, with no marks'; Frederick O'Donnell, 34, 5'5'; cooper, with 'Moco county marks on his face' and Collingwood O'Shea, 29, a 'deserter, originally from Calabar'. John Baptiste St. Cyr, aged eight, was a member of the 'grass gang'. Maria Prevost,

The town of Camden in Maine, USA, one of several places named after Charles Pratt, earl of Camden





aged seven, a Creole, was a servant. Cockrane Johnstone, age eleven, a 'Mandingo', was a 'mule boy'.

Alexander Fraser was of highlands stock, born in 1759 to Margaret Chisholm and Hugh Fraser of Newton and Dunballoch, near Beaulieu. In the late 1790s he was in Grenada and was a partner with James Evan Baillie in J.E. Baillie & Co. of London until its dissolution in 1820. He was instrumental in raising money for the Royal Northern Infirmary in Inverness, which opened in 1804. In 1806 he was made aware of the offer for sale of a small estate called Inchcoulter (also known as Balconie) on the northern shore of the Cromarty Firth. Evan Baillie of Dochfour (Inverness), merchant, slave trader and member of parliament for Bristol, who went on to lead opposition to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and who was the uncle of his wife Emilia Duff of Muirton, advanced £4,500 towards the sale. Fraser created a village, initially referred to as New Drummond and, soon thereafter, as Evanton – their son, born in 1800-01, having been named Evan Baillie (Fraser), in continuation of the family naming tradition.

Fraser proceeded to name the streets of Evanton. The lower

Evanton village in Easter Ross has several streets, including Camden, named after slave plantations

street he named after the estate, Balconie. Next up is Camden Street, then Livera Street, followed by Hermitage Street – all three named after plantations with which he had close associations. The latter two were on Grenada: Levera (sic) with 94 enslaved people in 1835, Hermitage, a common name for plantations, with 142 in 1836. Evan Baillie, James Evan Baillie, Hugh Duncan Baillie and George Henry Ames were the successful claimants for compensation for both Levera and Hermitage estate; Alexander Fraser was the unsuccessful claimant for Levera – possibly signifying a family fall-out or a belated familial arrangement.

It is common to find placenames, particularly in Glasgow, referencing those who made their fortune in trade with the New World (e.g. tobacco lords Buchanan and Ingram) and places in the Caribbean (Jamaica, Tobago, Antigua). It is not known whether any streets in Scotland, or elsewhere, have been named after actual slave plantations in the Caribbean, other than in Evanton.

The links between some highland-based families and the slave plantations of the Caribbean have been well publicised in recent times, notably by David Alston, through his website www.spanglefish.com/

slaves and highlanders/ and recent book, *Slaves and Highlanders, Silenced Histories of Scotland and the Caribbean*. There are an extraordinary number of placenames from the Easter Ross area that feature along the coast of Guyana in particular – this being a place that saw many sons of highland landowning families seek their own fortune. It is likely that most people today are, however, more likely to associate Camden Street, Evanton directly with Camden Town, London, rather than by the circuitous route that takes in American colonists' admiration of the earl, possible similar admiration by slave plantation owners and the repatriation of the name to this island by one such plantation owner. Camden Town was indeed named after Charles Pratt, 1st earl Camden, who started its development in 1791 with a handful of buildings beside a main road. The land in question had been purchased by his wife Elizabeth Jeffreys's ancestor, who had made his fortune from the early days of the slave trade.

Charles Pratt died in April 1794, a few years after the initial use of the Camden name in the new United States. He may have welcomed this, but might he, friend of civil liberties that he was, have been rather less keen on the homonymous naming of two slave plantations? At that time, of course, the concept of civil liberties as applicable to all would have been an emerging and contested one.

After an initial ten-year career in a range of African countries, Adrian Clark settled in Easter Ross and established the Evanton Oral History project which, 30 years on, is ongoing: <http://evantonhistory.com/>. The discipline of studying history and social anthropology at Cambridge and museum studies at Leicester may have been of benefit. He has for over 10 years been a leading figure in Evanton Community Wood: <https://www.evantonwood.com/>. He lives on Camden Street, Evanton.

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