

Preface

Historians have found that as many as one in every six British country houses is connected to the history of empire.¹ Charlecote Park in Warwickshire is no exception. Ten children from Colmore Primary in Birmingham explored this National Trust house with the historian Kate Donington and the writer SuAndi.

The children found two items of particular interest. The first is a painting of a black page boy wearing a metal collar standing beside Captain Thomas Lucy, by the artist Sir Godfrey Kneller in 1680. We have not yet identified the child, and do not know how he arrived at Charlecote. Captain Thomas Lucy had links with Africa where he was Captain General of HM Forces in Africa and Governor of the garrison and city of Tangier. (See *Black People in Warwickshire's Past*, published by the Educational Development Service, Leamington, 1994, p.20) There were black slaves attached to Warwickshire families at the time and there is evidence of a slave sale in Lichfield in 1771. A contemporary letter also shows that the wife of Thomas Lucy 'had her own...black page to hand her morning chocolate'. This may be the boy in the painting, but we do not know for sure.²

The second item is a sword, which was stolen at the time of the Indian Mutiny, or First War of Indian Independence (1857). Below is an account of five pearls, stolen from Lucknow, the site of anti-colonial struggle and the former home city of one of the ten Colmore children, Xazq. We have included an excerpt from *The Mistress of Charlecote The Memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy 1803-1859*, which tells a story like something out of Wilkie Collins' Victorian novel, *The Moonstone*. Pawlett is the son-in-law of the lady of the house, who fought with the British in Lucknow, and Carry is her daughter:

Pawlett was obliged to join his regiment in India at the beginning of that feared mutiny...He kindly brought me five pearls, they were part of the loot taken at Lucknow. I have had them set in two rings.

The family also received a bejewelled Indian sword as a gift. The sword is described by Mary Elizabeth Lucy as 'loot', and indeed it was stolen alongside many other items which were displayed as a badge of empire in many country houses before, and during this period.³

¹ Stephanie Barczewski, 2014 *Country Houses and the British Empire 1700-1938*, p.3.

² *Whose Story?* Unpublished research paper.

³ *Whose Story?* Unpublished research paper.

About the Colonial Countryside project

Colonial Countryside is a child-led writing and history project in partnership with Peepal Tree Press and the National Trust. The project assembles authors, writers, historians and primary pupils to explore country houses' Caribbean and East India Company connections. National Trust properties reveal a range of colonial links, including slave-produced sugar wealth, East India Company connections, black servants, Indian loot, Francis Drake and African circumnavigators, colonial business interests, holders of colonial office, Chinese wallpaper, Victorian plant hunters and imperial interior design.

100 primary children are visiting 10 National Trust houses to craft fiction and short essays. These will be presented to live, print and digital audiences. The project commissions, resources and publishes new writing. Peepal Tree will publish new books, including an illustrated volume of commissioned writing and historical commentaries. The project takes place between 2018 and 2022. The first year involves country house visits and a children's conference, to be held on 16th November 2018 as part of Literary Leicester. Adults may attend this conference, but panel and keynote speakers will all be children.

Who is involved?

The project is based at the University of Leicester's Centre for New Writing. It involves 100 primary pupils, most of whom are of African, Caribbean and South Asian heritage. Project partners are Colmore Primary (the lead school) Peepal Tree Press, Writing East Midlands and Renaissance One and the National Trust, which has 5 million members. The project is steered by a team of renowned historians of British Imperial History. Additionally, it draws on the expertise of local historians, heritage professionals and activists who have worked on this topic for many years.

Corinne Fowler, project lead

Email: csf11@le.ac.uk

Twitter: [@corinne_fowler](https://twitter.com/corinne_fowler) and [@colonialcountri](https://twitter.com/colonialcountri)

PART ONE

Painting of Captain Thomas
Lucy but who is the black
page boy wearing the metal
collar, standing by his
horse?

The Little Boy

He has no name,

He has no home.

All by himself.

No one sees him in Sir Thomas's painting.

He wears a silver collar

like a pet

from Africa or the Caribbean,

in the picture as a symbol.

Dressed like an ornament,

a lost treasure pushed to the side.

He has no name,

He has no home.

Lana Habeel

The Boy

The boy is lonely and cold,
the boy is sick and sold.
the boy, the one who is poor:
what is his suffering for?

History all too sad to be told,
for this boy was just “sold”,
all his family gone and dead
All of them he misses, all of them dead.

This piece of fate
sets the record straight.
He peers into your soul,
always in pure stealth.

Ara

Pedro

A lost boy,
alone in the world,
standing, waiting,
taken away from his home,
kept for show.
Alone,
alone,
no way to escape,
doing the deeds he was forced to do,
watching the world go by.

Pedro,
a lost boy,
his story must be told.
Treated like a thing not a person.
Africa his home,
a place of safety,
of hope.
A subtle change at first,
Not only one,
many after,
stolen.

Esmée Kerbrat-Pringle

A boy at the edge

Pushed aside,
forced to work from an early age.

On the deck he saw people die.

Stolen from his family and friends,
now made to work ceaselessly.

He eats crumbs of stale bread.

Rafael Lugo-Fowler

Why did this happen?

Abandoned:

he escaped the fierce house

Unsure where to go.

Losing family and friends,

he's never, ever recognised

in the painting of Captain Thomas Lucy.

He wonders if he will be found,

wonders if he will survive.

Why did he run away?

Should he go back?

Abandoned,

always on his own,

will he survive?

Suhaib Qaiser

PART TWO

Indian loot

Five pearls

Lost, hidden
stolen, found:
five pearls transformed
into mystery jewellery.

Waiting to be found,
subtle as can be.
Who wore them?
Passed through generations,
hidden in a house
no one remembers where.

Lost, hidden
where can they be?
Charlecote Park hides a mystery.
Maybe they are ornaments,
a necklace,
or rings.

Lost, hidden
Where can they be?

Halimah Khan

Garnets in a Glittering Sword

Sitting in its polished scabbard
Bright like moonlight.
Suddenly a scrape
as it is taken out to fight.

Sunlight glints through the silver,
proudly battling for all to admire
A weathered hand drops,
the owner, running from open fire.

Fighting for its country's freedom,
foes sneak and grab its leather grip.
Unwanted by its own,
Strapped to an enemy's hip.

Hasty retreat from India's brave rebellion
Fleeing home, for safety of their own.
Arriving in their native land
like a bird, having flown,

Maria Edwards

A Freedom Sword

Stolen by the English;
a freedom sword,
a stolen freedom sword.

Who is to blame for this crime of theft?

Well the answer is:
nobody knows.

The sword is jewelled,
the sword is stolen, but from who?
The answer is: the Indians.

This strong sword was used to fight for freedom,
the freedom sword,
the freedom sword.

Many ask a certain question:
where is it now?
At Charlecote Park.
Why is it there?
Nobody quite knows,
freedom sword,
freedom sword.

Xazq

The Freedom Sword

The shining sword fought for freedom,
for people and their rights:
everyone is different so everyone is equal.

Stolen, then given as a present
from India to England in the middle of a war,
silver reflects the blinding sun
as the sword stabs a heart.

In India fighting.

In England gleaming.

Sam Wilson

Myrtilla

St Lawrence Church Oxhill, 1705

Six men shoulder your pall,
servants of your complexion.
The coffin scrapes a buttress:
your knuckle raps the casket base.

Mr. Beauchamp's arm shoots up.
The procession halts.

Beauchamp's called a gentleman,
you, his cargo (Myrtilla, evergreen
with showers of gold) shipped
from Nevis Island to Queen's Square.

You saw everything. Said nothing.
Gave away the tenderness you craved,
raised the Masters Beauchamp,
cradled and nursed waifs of a life unlived.

Your tomb cold-shoulders the family plot

Myrtilla

Black Girl

Negro Slave

Lichens grow. Earth breathes. Grasses weave.

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How to get involved with the Colonial Countryside project

Writers and literature professionals: Tell us about existing work or apply for one of our creative writing commissions. Visit our resource website to research and write about the topic independently (the website will be ready in mid 2018 – see weblink below). Visit our Youtube Channel

Teachers: Enquire about our kids' conference on November 16th at the University of Leicester.

Pupils and parents: Tell a teacher you'd like to be involved. Volunteer for the project.

Historians: Join our team of historians or advise us on any aspect of the project. We need support with schools resources to accompany this project. Help us to advise the National Trust on its Challenging Histories programme, planned for 2022.

Black History organisations: Invite us to speak at one of your events.

Journalists: cover our project on your show.

Contact and digital platforms:

Dr. Corinne Fowler csf11@le.ac.uk @corinne-fowler 07791989672.

www.le.ac.uk/colonial-countryside. Facebook: Colonial Countryside

