

The Society of West India Planters and Merchants in the Age of Emancipation, c.1816-35¹ **David Ryden, University of Houston-Downtown**

The London Society of West India Planters and Merchants (hereafter "The Society") has its origins in the second half of the eighteenth century, when prominent absentees, primarily from the island of Jamaica, joined forces with merchants whose businesses turned on the financial and retailing services associated with the muscovado sugar industry. Assisted by paid representatives of the colonial assemblies-- such as the infamous Stephen Fuller--this "West India interest" lobbied government to promote the colonial sector of the imperial economy. During the first two decades of its existence, the *Society's* energies focused on the provision crisis caused by the American Revolution and by the train of hurricanes during the 1780s; the security of the islands from both internal and external threats; and the promotion of a favorable tax regime. These concerns would continue into the 1790s, but the emergence of abolitionism and the subsequent parliamentary investigation into the slave trade and slavery would excite the flurry of *Society* activity from 1787 through the early 1790s and, again, during the half dozen years leading up to the prohibition of British slaving (1807). Led by Jamaica absentee planters--such as Lord Penrhyn and William Chisholme-- and prominent London Jamaica merchants--such as Beeston Long and George Hibbert--the *Society* successfully organized a defense against abolitionist attacks for two decades. Through publications, depositions before parliament, and direct lobbying of government ministers, the London West India interest defended their self-proclaimed right to import African slaves based on constitutional precedent and a right to enjoy the fruits of their fixed property in the colonies. During these early days in the questioning slavery, the *Society's* propaganda arm portrayed abolition as nothing short of an attack on a colonial system that had long privileged the Caribbean islands over British consumers and over other quarters of the Empire.²

With abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 came a sharp decline in the *Society's* activities. The abatement in parliamentary discussion of the treatment of Africans in the sugar colonies

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² This paragraph summarizes some of the broad points made in David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For more on Stephen Fuller, see Bradley Purcell, "Stephen Fuller as Agent for Jamaica," (Chapel Hill: Duke University, Unpublished M.A. Thesis); David Beck Ryden, "Spokesmen for Oppression: Stephen Fuller, the Jamaica Assembly, and the London West India Interest during Popular Abolitionism, 1788-1795," *Jamaican Historical Review* 26 (2013): 5-28, 91-97; J. S. Hodgkinson, "Fuller Family (*per. c.* 1650–1803)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2014 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47494>, accessed 5 Jan 2015]. For more on George Hibbert, see Katie Donington, "Transforming Capital: Slavery, Family, Commerce and the Making of the Hibbert Family," in *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, ed. Catherine Hall et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 203-52.

meant that the *Society's* meetings were less frequent and were limited to quiet lobbying for governmental subsidies. During the period between abolition and Waterloo, this lobby's focus was on the excess supply of sugar in English markets, a problem that had dogged the old-island, high-cost producers since the collapse of the Hamburg commodity bubble of 1799. The *Society* continued to call for lower muscovado duties, enhanced drawbacks, and restrictions on the beverage industry, which would force the production of sugar-based spirits and beers.³ The *Society*, during this period between popular abolitionism and popular anti-slavery, failed to even consider the earliest proposals for slave registration in Trinidad⁴ to be worthy of their attention. By the 1820s, however, the emergence of an organized anti-slavery movement energized this otherwise sleeping *Society*, making it, once again, one of the most vocal business lobby in the United Kingdom.

This paper presents a statistical view of this organization's structure as well as a rudimentary prosopographical description of its most active members during the resurgence of activity in the 1820s. The data for this analysis come from the *Society's* minute books that record 473 meetings between 1816 and 1835. These gatherings included large "general" meetings that sometimes had hundreds of attendees as well as the much more intimate conferences of the Standing Committee, the Acting Committee, and various subcommittees. This meeting data is enhanced by the linking of the most active members in the organization to the slave compensation commission database, which was compiled and made widely available by Nicholas Draper and his colleagues at the UCL Slavery Legacies Project. These records, which document the cash amount given to slaveholders in exchange for Emancipation, have been used to reveal the breadth of slave ownership in Great Britain into the Victorian age.⁵ This paper, however, uses the compensation data to work backward from 1834, using the compensation claim data to identify the *Society's* most active membership and their respective stake in slave holding. The following analysis of these two datasets indicates that heightened calls for emancipation led to a reconfiguration of the lobby that better reflected the financial interests of the entire West India planter class.

A BASIC STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE *SOCIETY*

The *Society's* minute books are presently deposited at the Alma Jordan Library, at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. The collection was moved from London after being purchased by the government of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1970s. For this project, standard information--such as meeting type, location, date, and the names of attendees-- was coded into a machine readable format from meeting minutes found in six different folio-sized volumes.⁶ Unlike what

³ David Beck Ryden, "Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder: the London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15," *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012): 41-64.

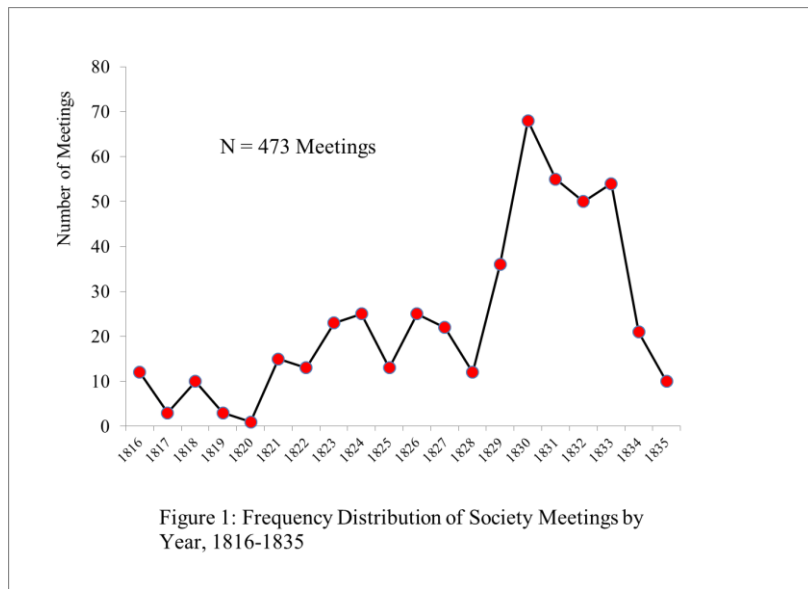
⁴ For an overview of the 1812 orders-in-council concerning the Registration of slaves in the crown colony of Trinidad, see Meredith John, *The Plantation Slaves of Trinidad, 1783-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1, 20-36.

⁵ Catherine Hall et. al. eds., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶ For this quantitative research, the following *Society* minute books were coded at the Alma Jordan Library, University of West Indies, St. Augustine: Acting Committee WIC Box 3 Folder 5; Acting Committee WIC Box 4 Folder 1; Demerara and Berbice Committee WIC Box 6 Folder 4; Literary Committee Box 6 Folder 7; Litterary

is seen in earlier *Society* minute books, the records from the 1820s and 1830s reveal an organization that had a more formalized structure, a wider array of subcommittees, and fewer public meetings.

As was seen in the period between 1780s through the early 1800s, the organization's activities were most intense when the slave system was most actively debated. During the years immediately following the defeat of Napoleon, the absence of a vocal foe engendered a weak West India organization. The viability of the *Society* during these years (1816-1820) must have called into question, given that, on average, there were only six meetings per year. Further, as seen in Figure 1, only three meetings were held in 1817 and 1819 and only one meeting was apparently called in 1820. In 1821, some 15 meetings were held, but these were devoted exclusively to the West India Dock charter. This merchant agenda continued to dominate until



the organized Antislavery movement emerged both outside and inside parliament: in 1823, when an aging William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson established the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions and Thomas Fowell Buxton, MP, delivered his first speech calling for the gradual emancipation of slaves.⁷ The coordinated attacks on the West Indian slave system, in turn, breathed new life into the *Society* and the result is

that nearly half of the recorded meetings in this present study come from the narrow time span of intense organizational activity between 1830 and 1833.

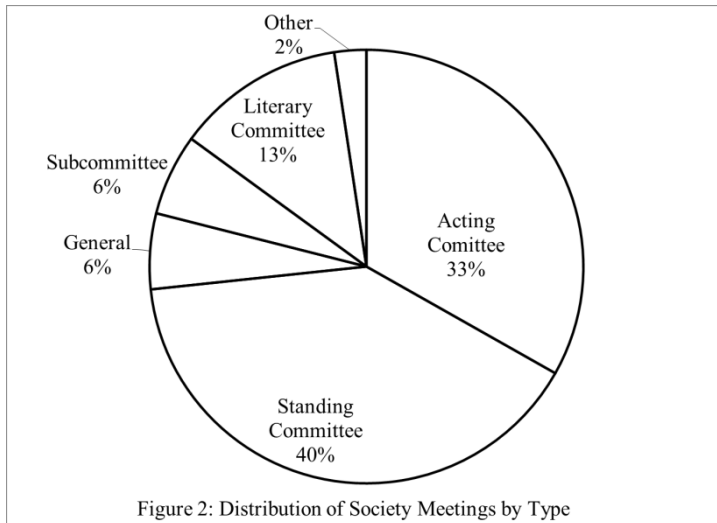
The intensification of *Society* activity was accompanied by a shifting organizational structure. Traditionally, the coordination of the various committees was conducted by the "Standing Committee." This group prepared resolutions, piloted the *Society's* agenda, appointed subcommittees, dispatched lobbyists ("deputations"), and managed the organization's budget, which was funded through the "trade rate" collected on each container of tropical staple imported by London merchants. The Standing Committee, which usually had just over a dozen members in attendance at any one meeting,⁸ held the sole responsibility of guiding the

Committee Box 5 Folder 1; Standing Committee WIC Box 3 folder 2; Standing Committee WIC Box 3 folder 3; Standing Committee WIC Box 3 folder 4; Standing Committee WIC Box 7 folder 1.

⁷ Frank Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England* (Archon books, 1968 [1968]), 182, 194. Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 177-8.

⁸ Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, 45

organization's agenda, which was reviewed by the *Society's* constituents during the sometimes very large "General Meetings." These public meetings, which were commonplace in the eighteenth century, continued to be held in large and well-appointed banquet halls, such as London Tavern in Bishopsgate St.⁹ But unlike the eighteenth century, the *Society* limited the number of General Meetings (Figure 2). Instead, a more specialized structure of committees was created, with a permanent propaganda arm in the form of the Literary Committee.¹⁰ This



publishing branch of the *Society* was budgeted funds to hire authors and to pay sympathetic writers and newspaper editors to combat the rising tide of antislavery sentiment.

In addition to the creation of a permanent publishing wing, another institutional change in response in the wake of Buxton's emancipatory agenda was the establishment of a new base-of-operations for the *Society*. As early as the 1780s and 1790s, there had been a division in opinion over where to hold

meetings, with the merchants preferring City venues, near their businesses in the Bishopsgate and Cornhill area, and the planters advocating meeting spots closer to parliament and their fashionable homes in the West End.¹¹ The political imperatives triggered by the rise of emancipationism, however, fired planter participation in the *Society*. Subcommittee meetings, after 1823, were therefore increasingly hosted near Parliament Square and at "the West India Club House in [60] St. James Street," while the "Standing Committee," which was at that time the organization's executive body, met increasingly at meeting places along St. James Street or in the *Crown and Anchor*, located in the Strand. By 1824 the Standing Committee ultimately gave way to the absentee planters, who were most engaged in the new antislavery debate. The *Society*, therefore, moved its home away from the New City Chambers in Bishopsgate Street¹² to the rented rooms in West India Club. This new base-of-operations was just under a mile from Parliament Square, by foot, and only a thirteen-minute walk from the number 2 Audley Square residence of the then chair, Charles Rose Ellis 1771-1845.¹³ The standing committee argued that the new site would prove to be an economy, saving on messenger costs and facilitating more

⁹ Edward Callow, *Old London Taverns, Historical, Descriptive, and Reminiscent* (London: Downey, 1899). 77-81; David Beck Ryden, "Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder: the London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15," *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012): 45, 60.

¹⁰ Douglas Hall, *A Brief History of the West India Committee* (London: West India Committee, 1971), 10.

¹¹ Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, 50.

¹² David Beck Ryden, "Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder: the London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15," *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012): 45; Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, 48-9.

¹³ D. R. Fisher ed., "Charles Rose Ellis (1771-1845)," *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1820-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) reproduced on <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/ellis-charles-1771-1845>> ; Distances and walking times are based on Google Map directions.

effective communication between the chair and the salaried secretary-solicitor, who was expected to “reside either at the Club house or in the Neighborhood.”¹⁴ The *Society’s* documents and its two paid staff members were subsequently moved to the “clubhouse.” On rare

Table 1: Society Meeting Venues by Year, 1816-1835

	YEAR														Total						
	1816	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821	1822	1823	1824	1825	1826	1827	1828	1829		1830	1831	1832	1833	1834	1835
The City																					
123 Fenchurch St	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
City Chambers	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
London Tavern, Bishopsgate Street	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	13
New City Chambers	1	3	7	3	1	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
West India Dock House in Billiter Square	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	10	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	23
City Subtotal	11	3	10	3	1	6	4	2	1	0	9	10	2	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	69
West End																					
West India Club House, 60 St James Street	0	0	0	0	0	9	9	13	17	8	14	10	6	6	11	2	1	0	0	0	106
Crown and Anchor, Strand	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Thach'd House Tavern, St James Street	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	5	0	0	18
Willis's Rooms	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
West End Subtotal	1	0	0	0	0	9	9	19	24	8	14	10	6	6	13	3	3	6	0	0	131
None Listed (likely W. India Clubhou	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	2	2	4	27	51	52	47	48	21	10	271
Total	12	3	10	3	1	15	13	23	25	13	25	22	12	36	68	55	50	54	21	10	471

occasions, after 1824, the *Society* still hosted large General Meetings in the London Tavern, Bishopsgate St., but, for much of the period under study, the West India Club served as the center for *Society* activities.

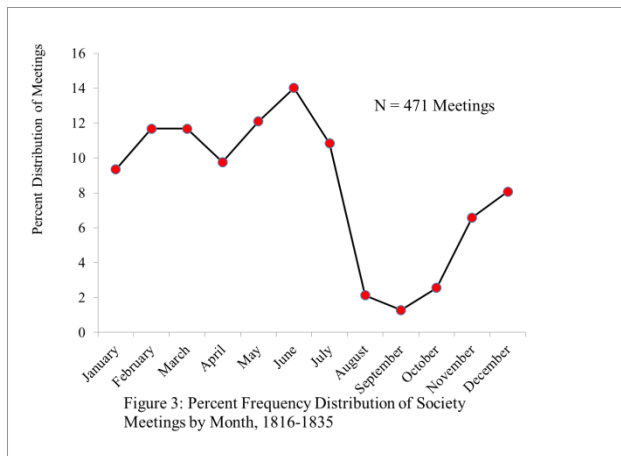
The last major institutional change during this heightened period of British antislavery was the creation of an “Acting Committee,” which was an elected body that carried out the intensive work demanded by the resurgence of Britain’s anti-slavery spirit.¹⁵ Starting in April of 1829, as Douglas Hall outlines, this committee was called upon to meet on a weekly basis, while parliament was in session, and to handle many of the executive tasks previously managed by then Standing Committee. The new Acting Committee directed the Literary Committee and was called upon to form and manage parliamentary deputations.¹⁶ The Standing Committee, meanwhile, began to play more of a "General Meeting" role, with its average attendance increasing from only 22 members per meeting before the creation of the Acting Committee (1829) to over 35. Under a new, formalized constitution, the Standing Committee “would assemble at quarterly intervals on the second Wednesdays in January, April, July and October”

¹⁴ Standing Committee meeting, May 10, 1824, WIC Meeting Minutes, Box 3 Folder 3 f. 1203, Alma Jordan Library.

¹⁵ According to Frank Klingberg, the public pressure intensified so that by the end of 1829 there was “a new feeling of hope... in the ranks of the Abolitionists.” *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 247.

¹⁶ Hall, *A Brief History*, 11-2.

or at the pleasure of the Chair of the Society.”¹⁷ It is worthwhile to note, however, that the composition of the much smaller Acting Committee (average size was 13 attendees per meeting) was almost identical to the leading participants of the Standing Committee: with the exception of Andrew Covile and Petty Vaughan, the other ten most active participants in the Standing Committee were also among the ten most active members of the Acting Committee.



Given the directive to the Acting Committee to meet on a weekly basis during parliamentary sessions, it comes as no surprise that the busiest time of year for the *Society* was during the first seven months of the year: in a typical annual cycle, roughly 80 percent of each year's meetings occurred before the end of July, when parliament went into recess (Figure 3). The *Society's* connection to the House of Commons, however, was far deeper than conventional lobbying and included the promotion of *Society* members to political office. The annual average number of MPs-- who at some point were connected to the

Society--was nearly 20 (19.4) for the 1816-35 period, but this aggregate statistic includes even the most tangential society MPs, such as Sir J. R. Reid, who was present at only 3 *Society* meetings during his five years in office. A more narrow rendering of *Society* MPs would focus on the fact that the average number of MPs attending *Society* meetings, in any one year, was only half as many (9.5), with the greatest number of politicians attending meetings during the period between the Buxton's first resolution for Emancipation (1823) and 1831. During this popular surge against slavery, the average number of MPs who attended at least one meeting per year was 14. This small but direct West India influence in parliament was severely eroded on account of the Great Reform Act, which eliminated the rotten borough seats of Lostwithiel, St. Germans, Bramber, Haslemere, and Eye,¹⁸ thus forcing out Edward Cust (Guiana), Charles Rose (Jamaica), John Irving (W. I. Merchant), and William Burge (Jamaica). Further, the Agent for Tobago and active *Society* member, W. R. Keith Douglas, "an arch conservative," was also a casualty of the reformist spirit, given that he chose to bow out rather than losing to the liberal Matthew Sharpe in the 1832 election.¹⁹ By 1833, only 11 MPs affiliated with the *Society* still held their seats, but of these men only seven were still participating in the organization's meetings. Keeping in mind that the critical question of compensation was being debated and modified during 1833, one can only surmise that the loss of these seats, at the very least, was a severe psychological blow to the *Society's* membership.

¹⁷ Hall, *A Brief History*, 11-2.

¹⁸ The Eye constituency was partially disenfranchised. All others listed were fully disenfranchised. See "IX. The English Reform Legislation," *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832*, ed. D.R. Fisher, 2009 <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/survey/ix-english-reform-legislation>>.

¹⁹ "Dumfries Burghs County," *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832*, ed. D.R. Fisher, 2009. , <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/dumfries-burghs>>.

Table 2 illustrates these patterns by listing the MPs who were connected, at some point between 1816 and 1835, with the *Society*. The span of each bar, whose color references island affiliation, indicates the years that each individual held a seat in the commons and the numerals within the bars indicate the attendance count. While there were approximately 20 MPs affiliated with the *Society* at any one time, the average number of MPs who actually appeared at *Society* meetings, in any one year, was nearly 10. The most sustained MP activity in the organization took place between 1829 and 1831, inclusive, when the average number of MPs making their way to St. James Street was nearly 16. The most represented sugar colony within this body of politicians was Jamaica. Of the 34 men listed in the table, at least 20 could be said to be connected to this colony, but this reckoning might be increased, if the “Jamaica” category would be expanded to include those with a diversity of investments that included Jamaica plantations, such as the two Joseph Marryatts, who both owned slaves in Grenada and Trinidad as well as Jamaica, or John Irving, who was an apparent claimant for compensation for the liberation of his Jamaica slaves as well as his former slaves St. Kitts, Trinidad, and the Virgin Islands. This broader definition of the Jamaica interest indicates that seventy percent of *Society* MPs were connected to the island. Prominent Jamaica associates, such as the *Society*’s chair, Charles Ellis; the Jamaica merchant Ralph Bernal; and the absentee Sir Edward Hyde East were at the vanguard of the organization. The only non-Jamaica MPs who were intensively active in the *Society* were Joseph Marryatt, who attended 140 meetings during his eight years as a MP, and Tobago’s W.R. Keith Douglas, who served as MP for Dumfries Burgh (1812-32). As will be elaborated upon, below, Douglas’s role as the second-most active MP in the organization was the consequence of a new *Society* constitution that set the stage for his appointment, by election, as the Acting Committee’s first chairman.²⁰

The elevation of Douglas, in 1829, to lead the *Society*’s weekly business is significant for it marked the first time that a non-Jamaica planter or merchant would hold a leadership position within the organization. While it was not unheard of for non-Jamaicans to “take the chair,” in individual meetings, the core leaders of the organization had always been in the hands of men associated with Britain’s largest sugar island. From the formation of the *Society* down to its constitutional re-configuration in 1829, Jamaica affiliates—including the merchant George Hibbert, planter Richard Pennnat (Lord Penrhyn), and the colonial agent Stephen Fuller—steered the organization down to the abolition of the British slave trade and beyond. The chairmanship position, after the illness and death of Penrhyn, in 1808, went to fellow Jamaica grandee, Philip Dehany, who served as pro-tem chair until 1810, at which point Charles Rose Ellis, Jamaica absentee and good friend of George Canning,²¹ was made “perpetual chairman of the West India

²⁰ Douglas elected Chair of the Acting Committee on 30 May 1829. Acting Committee WIC Box 3 Folder 5, Alma Jordan Library.

²¹ “Charles Rose Ellis (1771-1845),” *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1790-1820*, ed. R. Thorne, (1986) <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/ellis-charles-rose-1771-1845>>

Table 2: Attendance Count of Society-Affiliated MPs by Year and Island Affiliation, 1816-1835

Colonial Affiliation and Rank	Year																	Total			
	1816	1817	1818	1819	1820	1821	1822	1823	1824	1825	1826	1827	1828	1829	1830	1831	1832		1833	1834	1835
ANTIGUA																					
21 Browne, Anthony, MP*	8	1	5																		14
DEMERARA &/or GUIANA																					
12 Blair, J[ames]							8	6	5	6	8										33
24 Cust, Hon Capt [Ed] MP							6	2	1	2			1	1	1						14
28 Gladstone, J MP								4													4
28 Holmes, W MP								1					1	1	1						4
JAMAICA																					
25 Arcedeckne, A[ndrew]													2	3	3						8
25 Barham, Joseph Foster	1				3	4															8
3 Bernal, Ralph							5	2	8	8	6	5	17	39	7	6	10	2			115
25 Birch, Joseph		1						2		1	1	1	2	2							10
12 Bright, Henry							4		8	3	3	3	4	8							33
7 Burge, William																31	18				49
18 Dawson, James Hewitt Massy					4	2	5	6	2	2	1			1							23
18 Dickinson, William							2	3	1		2	1	5	2	7						23
4 East, Sir Edward Hyde									12	15	6	7	3	2	16	15	22				98
5 Ellis, Charles							13	13	17	26	12	11									92
20 Gordon, Robert	1									1				8	8	1		1	1		21
19 Grossett, John R.							2		5	8	7										22
11 Malcolm, Nil Jr.												1	2	1	11	19	8				42
6 Manning, William	3		3	2	1	1	5	10	11	3				2	13	18					72
15 Mitchell, John			2	2		3	7	8	4	1											27
8 Pallmer, Charles Nicholas	11	3											16	10	6	2					48
22 Pennant, George Hay Dawkins								7						1		6					14
14 Plummer, John							2	3	10	7	3	4									29
21 Taylor, George Watson	3		3			2	3		1						2	1					15
27 Wildman, James B				1		3	1														5
TOBAGO																					
2 Douglas, W R Keith										4	4	8		34	53	16	20				139
16 Stewart, Patrick Maxwell																5	7	13	1		26
MISCELLANEOUS																					
10 Baillie, James E	3		5													3	25	1	6		43
17 Innes, John							1	4	5	14											24
26 Irving, John										1				1	3	1	1				7
9 Marryatt, Joseph	5	2		4	3		4	9	17	3											47
1 Marryatt, Joseph II													2	4	20	36	28	16	18	16	140
29 Reid, Sir J R																	3				3
22 Ross, Charles								3	2	3	3										11
NO KNOWN AFFILIATION																					
30 Sandon, Lord																				4	4
Total MP Attendances	27	5	18	8	1	35	52	98	96	62	87	32	30	133	222	148	69	55	20	0	
Total Number of Society MPs in Attendance	8	3	7	4	1	9	12	13	20	14	16	11	10	16	17	14	7	7	4	0	
Total Number of Society Connected MPs	16	17	20	20	24	24	25	25	25	24	26	22	21	21	22	19	15	11	11	9	
Percent of Society-Connected MPs who were active.	50%	18%	35%	20%	4%	38%	48%	52%	80%	58%	62%	50%	48%	76%	77%	74%	47%	64%	36%	0%	

body.”²² Ellis would hold this post for nearly as long as Penrhyn did, but in the midst of an emancipationist spirit in 1829, Ellis, now Lord Seaford,²³ would lodge his discontent with the new organizational structure by resigning his chairmanship of the Standing Committee and by limiting his participation in the organization.²⁴

More research needs to be pursued in this area, but at this point one might speculate that the creation the Acting Committee, which was an elected body, was created to manage the planter political positioning during the compensation and emancipation debate and to give a greater voice to the new colonies that were acquired during the Anglo-French and Napoleonic wars. The effect of the creation of this body, no matter what underlying motivation for its creation, was an erosion of the Jamaica merchant-planter dominance of the organization’s leadership. In the years immediately prior to Baron Seaford’s resignation, 70 percent of the men who held the chair at any point were connected to Jamaica and over 90 percent of the *Society* meetings were led by either a Jamaica planter or merchant. Seaford, himself, wielded considerable power in the *Society* between 1816 and 1828, inclusive, given that 80 percent of the meetings were either presided-over by either himself or by his cousin-in-law and fellow Jamaica planter, Nicholas Pallmer.²⁵ In the years that followed Seaford’s chairmanship, the concentration of Jamaica chairs as a proportion of all chairs had fallen to 58 percent and the share of meetings led by Jamaica affiliates had fallen to just over two-thirds (65 percent of meetings). Jamaica-connected members continued to have disproportionate influence as leaders of the *Society*, but the creation of two additional committees--the Literary Committee and the Acting committee--and the establishment of formal electoral process made the leadership less one-dimensional than in any previous point in the *Society*’s history.²⁶

In the era of British emancipation, Jamaica’s merchants and planters continued to make up a plurality of the rank-and-file membership of the organization, but just as with the leadership, this class of investor was not nearly as prominent as it had been in the eighteenth century. By the 1820s, Jamaica’s share of aggregate British West India sugar output had fallen from about 50 percent, in the late-eighteenth century, to 39 percent.²⁷ soils on that island engendered a high cost structure that simply could not sustain the production levels seen at the end of the eighteenth, when sugar prices were unusually high. The scale of total sugar production began to tip toward the more productive soils found in the conquered colonies of Trinidad and British Guiana and the trend in the share of Jamaica participants in the *Society* followed the downward economic path of the island. Yet, despite this decline, Jamaica’s planters and merchants still held a

²² Ryden, “Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder,” 44.

²³ Nicholas Draper uses the lack of criticism of Ellis’s slaveholding, on the eve of receiving a peerage in 1826, as evidence of the tolerance and tacit endorsement of slaveholding by Britain’s elite in 1826. Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*, 19

²⁴ Lord Seaford resigned in a letter read at the Standing Committee meeting of 8 May 1829. He wrote that the new *Society* constitutions was at “variance with a sound sense of Interests of the West India Body.” WIC Box 3 Folder 4, ff. 10-19. Seaford attended only 3 meetings between 1829 and 1832, inclusive.

²⁵ Pallmer is likely to have been equally perturbed by the *Society*’s new constitution, only attending 3 meetings in the years following 1829.

²⁶ For the period between May 1785 and May 1807, 85 percent of the meetings were presided by a member of the Jamaica interest. Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, 62-6; 68.

²⁷ J.R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1988]), 242.

disproportionate share of influence in the organization, accounting for 49 out of the top 100 most-attending members. Thus, we can say that the *Society* was no longer dominated by Jamaica planters and merchants even though investors in this island continued to have a presence in the organization that was disproportionate to Jamaica's economic value.

COMPENSATION-AWARD REPRESENTATION

Another avenue for considering the extent to which the *Society* represented the interest of the sugar colonies, as a whole, is to compare the colonial distribution in compensation awards among these top-100 attending members. Of this group, 85 were either sole claimant or among a group of claimants who vied for nearly £2 million of compensation money in exchange for the freeing of more than 68,000 enslaved people.²⁸ In the end, the actual, total value of the awards received by these rank-and-file members (and their partners) was approximately £1.6 million. The total number of slaves liberated under these compensation packages was 56,000. While some of these *Society* members may have shared their claims with non-*Society* members, it is nonetheless astonishing that these 65 *Society* slaveholders could successfully collect--either by themselves or in partnership with fellow investors, creditors, and families--roughly 9.7 percent of the entire £16,356,668 paid to former West India slaveholders.²⁹ Participation in this organization was considered worth the trouble for some of the richest men in Britain.

There were 85 members who were among this universe of petitioners, but the composition of those who were part of the £1.6 million awarded does not include unsuccessful petitions and those indirect claimants ("executors," "other association," or, even, "beneficiary deceased"). The average value of the sum-of-claims that each of these men were connected to was £24,612, but this measure of central tendency is skewed by a handful of very large investors, such as Henry Davidson, who held an interest in over two dozen awards that totaled £166,292. In this case, this total payout compensated Davidson and his partners for the liberation of over 4,000 slaves who were spread across seven different sugar colonies. A similarly large investor Charles McGarel³⁰ -- who was the seventh most active *Society* participant in the *Society* -- was party to nearly as much compensation (£129,468) as Davidson, but in exchange for the freedom of half as many slaves (2,065). This anomaly was related to the fact that McGarel's investments in colonial slavery centered solely on Guiana, where the high labor productivity justified higher compensation. Davidson, McGarel, and the other fourteen men who formed the top quarter of this universe of *Society* awardees were party to an enormous payout of £1,066,899, which represents 70 percent of the £1.6 million.

²⁸ All compensation figures are taken from "Legacies of British Slave-ownership" database.
<<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>>

²⁹ The value for the entire payout to West India slaveholders is taken from Nicholas Draper's *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138.

³⁰ According to the "Legacies of British Slave-ownership" website, the enormously rich merchant, Charles McGarel's firm (Hall McGarel) was located at 7 Austin Friars, in the City. The database authors further tell us that McGarel's slave-based fortune was the basis for further wealth accumulation through financial, transportation, and manufacturing investments in the British economy. He died leaving a fortune of £500,000.
<<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/691>> (accessed 27 February 2015).

Tables 3 and 4 present an overview of the 384 separate awards, expressed in terms of value paid and expressed in terms of slaves freed, spread among the 65 most active *Society* members. Each schedule breaks down the basic descriptive statistics awards by island. What is first apparent is that every sugar colony was represented in the collective portfolio of *Society*-member investment, with only the peripheral outposts of Anguilla, Honduras, and the Virgin Islands holding no significant representation in the organization. Second, a deeper look into the data reveals that the percent distribution of the awards made to *Society* members was roughly aligned with the percentage distribution of awards made to *all* West India slaveholders: the correlation coefficient between the island distribution of *Society* awards and that of the entire £16 million payout was 0.93 and the correlation between the island distribution of the *Society*'s slaves was that of all British West India slaves was 0.96. Thus, the distribution of investments indicates a more representative lobby than suggested by the dominance of Jamaica investors among the *Society* MPs and the *Society*'s chairs.

While the *Society* members' ownership in slaves was generally representative of the greater British Caribbean, there is some variation that is worth noting. First, the concentration of Barbadian investments by *Society* members (3.4 percent) was far weaker than the share of the total value of investments in Barbadian slaves (10.5 percent). This thin participation could simply be the consequence of a lower rate of absenteeism: relative to the smaller islands, or even Jamaica, the Barbados' elite more frequently formed stable white families and were less inclined to bolt for England upon first striking riches. Contrasted with this weak showing of Barbados investors at *Society* meetings was a comparatively large presence of British Guiana investments. These slaveholders were connected to a 39 percent share (in terms of value) of the 384 awards paid out to this group of active *Society* members. Similar to the above-mentioned McGarel, these Guiana investors were high-stake players, being partners or sole proprietor in individual claims that were nearly £10,000, each, roughly double the next-largest median claim measure, in Table 2, made by those who were connected to slave investments in St Vincent. Guiana's late development and extremely rich soils attracted large metropolitan investors, which likely explains its disproportionate share, in terms of value and in terms of slaves, among this London-based organization: while the Guiana planters, in total, received 26 percent of the total money allotted to West India slaveholders for the liberation of 12 percent of British West India slaves, Guiana investors claimed nearly 40 percent of 1.6 million awarded to the most active *Society* members and their partners (for the liberation of 21 percent of the slaves connected with this universe of *Society* members).

The under-representation of Barbadian investments and the over-representation of Guiana investments on the *Society* members' collective ledger is, perhaps, expected, given *a priori* assumptions about differences in rates of absenteeism. But the share of the *Society*-related investment devoted to Jamaica (31.9 percent) might be viewed as surprising, given large number of Jamaica men affiliated with the organization; the composition of the *Society*'s Chairs; and the fact that the organization's origins are rooted in Jamaica planters and merchants. However, scrutinizing table 4 will show that the number of Jamaican slaves linked to these compensation awards was proportionally aligned with the number of active members affiliated with Jamaica (approximately 49 percent of the claimed-slaves were in Jamaica and approximately 49 percent of the top 100 most active members were closely tied to Jamaica). Thus, the proportionately lower payout to the Jamaica wing of the lobby was due to the compensation process, which paid

former slaveholders 45 percent of the *market* value of slaves. Jamaica's investors--whose slaves were less valuable than in British Guiana or Trinidad--had objected to this market-value compensation scheme, hoping for a per capita pay out, instead.³¹ Perhaps it was the loss of their absolute dominance of the *Society*, that can explain this less-than ideal (from the Jamaica planters' perspective) program for compensation.

TABLE 3: Summary Statistics of Compensation Awards (£) Made to 65 of the Top 100-Most Active Society Members (and Their Partners) by Colony

ISLAND	Mean £	Median £	Total £ Awards	Percent distribution	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	N
Anguilla	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Antigua	2,136.9	1,751.3	19,232	1	32.8	4,454.1	1,341	9
Barbados	2,559.1	1,042.5	53,741	3	1.9	8,558.1	2,698	21
British Guiana	12,168.3	9,919.3	620,582	39	63.0	83,530.4	12,512	51
Dominica	1,992.2	231.8	5,976	0	98.5	5,646.2	3,165	3
Grenada	2,913.4	2,538.9	75,749	5	27.5	10,914.1	2,857	26
Honduras	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Jamaica	2,742.0	2,632.5	510,003	32	17.5	8,429.9	1,975	186
Montserrat	2,199.6	2,003.8	8,798	1	793.5	3,997.3	1,334	4
Nevis	2,380.3	2,038.4	7,141	0	1,941.0	3,161.3	678	3
St Kitts	2,247.0	2,756.0	20,223	1	48.4	4,298.2	1,458	9
St Lucia	2,541.4	2,833.1	27,955	2	678.9	4,149.1	1,459	11
St Vincent	5,927.9	3,794.7	142,270	9	93.8	46,544.2	9,059	24
Tobago	2,711.2	2,199.4	16,267	1	1,398.0	5,883.6	1,642	6
Trinidad	2,963.4	2,442.3	91,864	6	150.1	12,064.9	2,845	31
Virgin Islands	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	4,166.2	2,836.1	1,599,802	100	1.9	83,530.4	6,285	384

NOTE: Currency is decimalized.

³¹ Stanley L. Engerman, "Economic Change and Contract Labor in the British Caribbean: The End of Slavery and the Adjustment to Emancipation," *Explorations in Economic History* 21 (1984): 137-40.

TABLE 4: Summary Statistics of Number of Slaves Claimed on Successful Compensation Awards Made to 65 of the Top-100-Most Active Society Members (and Their Partners) by Colony

ISLAND	Mean	Median	Sum	Percent Distribution	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	N
Anguilla	-----	-----	-----		-----	-----	-----	-----
Antigua	143.0	129.0	1,144.0	2.1	2	319	95.0	8
Barbados	121.1	47.0	2,544.0	4.6	1	410	127.3	21
British Guiana	228.0	189.0	11,627.0	20.9	1	1,598	240.2	51
Dominica	90.7	9.0	272.0	0.5	5	258	144.9	3
Grenada	111.7	91.0	2,905.0	5.2	1	437	112.1	26
Honduras	-----	-----	-----		-----	-----	-----	-----
Jamaica	145.7	140.0	27,109.0	48.8	1	483	110.8	186
Montserrat	122.8	112.0	491.0	0.9	46	221	72.8	4
Nevis	131.7	117.0	395.0	0.7	112	166	29.8	3
St Kitts	138.2	160.0	1,244.0	2.2	4	263	89.9	9
St Lucia	102.4	116.0	1,126.0	2.0	27	165	57.5	11
St Vincent	167.8	147.5	4,027.0	7.2	3	339	107.6	24
Tobago	134.5	103.5	807.0	1.5	70	310	90.3	6
Trinidad	60.6	49.0	1,878.0	3.4	3	234	59.1	31
Virgin Islands	-----	-----	-----		-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	145.1	135.0	55,569.0	100.0	1	1,598	136.2	383

NOTE: The variance between the percent distribution by colony in table 3 and 4 is due to different award amounts given, per slave. Awardees who owned enslaved people in high productivity colonies received greater compensation, per freed slave, than awardees in low productivity islands.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This statistical overview, coupled with previous research, shows how important the antislavery movement was to the structure, size, and the intensity of work pursued by the London *Society* of Planters and Merchants. The number of meetings and the level of participation in those meetings was directly related to the cycle in popular hostility toward the slave trade and slavery, itself. In the wake of Buxton's famous 1823 parliamentary pronouncement against the slave trade, the organization (1) restructured itself; (2) created a propaganda wing (the literary committee); (3) moved its base of operations; and (4) became a more inclusive and more formally organized lobby.

The data also show that during this restructuring period, Jamaica planters and merchants continued to play a prominent role in this West India organization and, indeed, continued to preside as chairs over a disproportionate number of *Society* meetings. Further, Jamaica planters continued to numerically dominate the *Society's* coalition of MPs in the 1820s. But on the eve of emancipation, non-Jamaica members, most notably Tobago's W. R. Keith Douglas, also joined the *Society's* vanguard. In Douglas's case, he served as the newly created Acting Committee's chair and, in turn, became one of the top 11 most attending members in the *Society* (present for 158 meetings). This hyperactivity by non-Jamaican men in the organization is also seen in the roster of the top-ten attending members. In this population, five had no connection at all to Jamaica and one diversified slaveholder who happened to have a small portion of his capital

invested in Jamaica.³² The concentration of only four Jamaica affiliates among this core group of members is half of that found in a similarly compiled list for 1785-07 period, which identifies a total of 8 out of the top 10 attending members as being aligned solely with Jamaica.³³ Thus, the story is a simple one, of a once dominant Jamaica coalition forced to make room for other colonial interests: the widespread West India concern over the emancipation-compensation debate motivated a more diverse body of participants who, in turn, forced the reform of the organization's constitution.

³² Anthony Browne, 250 meetings (Antigua); James Colquhoun, 236 meetings (St Vincent, St Kitts, Dominica, Nevis, and the Virgin Islands); John Pollard Mayers, 212 meetings (Barbados); Joseph Marryatt II, 188 meetings (Grenada, Jamaica; St Lucia; Trinidad); Sir Henry William Martin, 181 meetings (Antigua & Montserrat); and Charles McGarel 179 meetings (British Guiana). The Jamaica members in this list of top-ten attendees are Sir Alexander Grant, 309 meetings, and George Hibbert, 174 meetings; William Burge 166 meetings; and Andrew Colvile, 165 meetings.

³³ Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, 53-4.