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'My Two Lassies:' Enslaved Children and the Creation of Family Narratives in British East Florida and Aberdeenshire

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In 1783 Margaret and Sophia Ross were transportedby their father John Ross from the short-lived colony of British East Florida to live with relatives in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Born into slavery like their mother Bella, the girls were manumitted before being sent to live with their grandfather, the Laird of Arnage. Their experiences, and their relationships with their Aberdonian relatives have until now remained conspicuously concealed in the archives in the Special Collections Library at the University of Aberdeen. Personal letters, journals, and testaments – in addition to records found in other archives in the United Kingdom, United States and the Caribbean – reveal the worlds of two among the many hundreds of marginalised 'natural or reputed' children lost to both memory and the historical record. Does their absence from official published history suggest an intentional and calculated deletion of their presence from the family story?

'[T]ell him to hasten home' are the only known words on record spoken by either Margaret Ross or her younger sister Sophia, two mixed-heritage children born of an enslaved African mother and a Scottish father in British East Florida who lived with family in Scotland.[1] The 'him' they spoke of was their father, John Ross, heir to his father's estate in Aberdeenshire. At the end of the War for American Independence he and their mother Bella emigrated from the failed colony where he managed and later owned plantations for over

1. My thanks to Lisa Williams, Director of the Edinburgh Caribbean Association, for reading an early draft of this and for her recommendations on using the term 'mixed-heritage' instead of 'mixed-race'.

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fifteen years to the island of Dominica. In 1782, a year before the colony was returned to Spain, John manumitted the girls and sent them alone across the Atlantic to Arnage Castle in Ellon to be cared for by his father, the second Laird of Arnage and his unmarried sister Christian Ross, the recorder of Margaret's words in a letter dated 1785. Spending the rest of their lives in Scotland, Sophia (Sophy) and Margaret (Pegie) were transported into a world surrounded by close relatives who hesitantly and begrudgingly acknowledged their kinship. Resourcing documents found in archives and official records, this paper will seek to explore the nature and complexities of those relationships.

Until now the narrative of Sophia and Margaret's lives remained conspicuously concealed in the boxes and folders of the Leith and Leith-Ross archives in the Special Collections Library at the University of Aberdeen. Alexander Johnston's 1860 publication for the University Press at Aberdeen titled *A Short Memoir of James Young, Merchant Burgess of Aberdeen, and Rachel Cruickshank, His Spouse, and of Their Descendants,* which was expanded on 34 years later by his nephew William Johnston into *A Genealogical Account of the Descendants of James Young and Rachel Cruickshank His Wife, 1697–1893* are the official published family histories where the story of the Rosses of Arnage unfold. Johnston, married to the fourth Laird's daughter Christian Martha, included extensive notes about their lives in his handwritten drafts for his *Short Memoir*, yet neither the girls nor their mother materialises in either book.[2] Their removal from official and published historical records are the result of an intentional and calculated deletion of their presence from the family story. So, while traces of their presence remain, the reason for their stories' incompleteness is deliberate. Private letters, journals, wills and testaments that mention or refer to Margaret and Sophia offer insight into the worlds of the many hundreds of 'natural' or 'reputed' mixed-heritage children born in the Americas and living in Scotland who were lost to memory and history. For the girls and their mother, the idea of family became a negotiation between kinship and identity, of reconciling African-ness and Scottish-ness created through acts of sexual violence, economic precarity, legitimized injustice, and domestic aggression.

It is my hope that this paper contributes to the ongoing research into Scotland's role in slavery and colonialism.[3] Importantly, this study also adds to an already expansive body of research that explores the lives of the enslaved

2. Alexander Johnston, *A Short Memoir of James Young, Merchant Burgess of Aberdeen and Rachel Cruickshank His Spouse, and of Their Descendants* (Aberdeen: James Craighead, 1860); William Johnston, *A Genealogical Account of the Descendants of James Young and Rachel Cruickshank His Wife, 1697–1893* (Aberdeen: University Press, 1894).

3. A bibliography of the major studies is included in the introduction of this volume. This article is also indebted to Daniel Livesay's *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733–1833*, Williamsburg, 2018.

women and children affected by the mass movements of European men (including Scots) into colonised spaces.[4] In this way the work of Black women historians, literary scholars and social scientists take precedence in shaping my methodologies and narrative style that seeks to foreground and recuperate the lives of women, men and children whose descendants continue to struggle to tell their stories with dignity and care. My research into Sophia and Margaret Ross expands from my research into the networks of Scottish men in the ceded islands and territories of East and West Florida, and the women and children enslaved and 'begotten' from their movements.[5] Sometimes those women and children found their way to Scotland. I hope to revisit here the task outlined by Saidiya Hartman in 'Venus in Two Acts': to fashion a narrative based on archival research that enables 'a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history' in order to 'both tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling'.[6]

John Christian Ross was born on the 6th of May 1730 in Ellon, Aberdeenshire; he was the second child out of eleven and first son to John Ross, second Laird of Arnage, then labelled the 'deaf and dumb laird', and Elizabeth Turner of Turnerhall.[7] With the exception of one sister, Martha, John and his nine siblings were baptised with the surname 'Rose' due to the family's direct ancestry from John Ros of Auchlossin and his descendants from Auchlee, Clochan, and later Arnage.[8] John's grandfather John Ross, third of Clochan and first of Arnage (1665–1714) belonged to a family who established themselves as wealthy merchants in Aberdeen exporting goods like salmon, tobacco, wool and stockings to Amsterdam.[9] From 1710 to 1712 the first laird was Lord Provost of Aberdeen; in

4. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, 2007); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016); Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, 17, 2 (1987), 64–81; Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello, an American Family* (New York, 2008); Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, 2020); Henrice Altinck, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780–1838* (New York, 2007); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, North Carolina, 2021); Brenda E. Stevenson, 'What's Love Got to Do with It? Concubinage and Enslaved Women and Girls in the Antebellum South', in Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris (eds), *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas* (Athens, Georgia, 2018), 159–88; Gretchen H. Gerzina, 'The Georgian Life and Modern Afterlife of Dido Elizabeth Belle', in Gretchen H. Gerzina (ed.), *Britain's Black Past* (Liverpool, 2020), 161–78; Vincent Brown, 'Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery', *The American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 1231–49.

5. This study is forthcoming in a book titled *The Men Who Killed Chatoyer: Scots in St Vincent, 1763–1834* published by the Edinburgh University Press.

6. Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 11.

7. Old Parish Registers Births 192/ 10 253 Ellon.

8. Aberdeen University Library MS 3346/4/2

9. Victoria E. Clark, *The Port of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1921), 67–8.

1702 he acquired the lands and barony of Arnage in Ellon at the price of £40,000 Scots. The family moved from their home, now known as Provost Ross's House, which forms part of the present site of the Aberdeen Maritime Museum, to Arnage Castle (Figure 1). Throughout the eighteenth century the Arnage estate included over 2,000 acres of agricultural land.[10]

Figure 1: Arnage Castle, 1841 watercolour by James Giles. National Trust for Scotland, Fyvie Castle.

Like many Scots from this period, John and his brothers Robert and George left Aberdeenshire to join merchant, trading and enslaving companies throughout the expanding British empire. John appears to have been trained as a merchant and left for London as early as 1750. Robert (1737–1761) moved to Boston in 1759 where he worked as a merchant for a year; George (1738–1769) joined John in London for some time before becoming a Factor for the East India Company at Fort Marlborough in Sumatra from 1766 until his early death.[11] According to a Memorial written regarding the financial status of his father found in the Leith-Ross archive, John was unsuccessful in nearly all his pursuits. The Laird of Arnage borrowed £1300 against the estate in early 1767 to help his son which was lost. In June of that year John borrowed a further £762 from his mother's brother Robert Turner of Turnerhall to finance his move to the colonies

10. My thanks to Suzanne and Gareth Jones, the present owners of Arnage Castle, for meeting with me and sharing information about the Castle and the Ross family.

11. IOR/G/35/152 – Sumatra: Fort Marlborough Wills, Commissions, Courts-martial; Register 10 January 1766 to 27 March 1779, ff 116–17. MS 3346/4/2.

in America.[12] Later that month John departed for British East Florida. East and West Florida were part of the British acquisition made in the Treaty of Paris signed at the end of the Seven Years' War, along with several islands in the Eastern Caribbean (St Lucia, Dominica, St Vincent, the Grenadines, Grenada and Tobago). The Florida colonies included parts of former Spanish and French territories and incorporated the land between the Chattahoochee and Mississippi Rivers in what is now Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida.

Attracted by the appointment of Colonel James Grant of Ballindaloch in historic Banffshire as Governor of East Florida, several Scots in both London and at home petitioned for land grants in the new colony. William Eliott (alternately spelled Elliot), a Scottish merchant based in London and son of Sir Gilbert Eliott, third Baronet of Stobs, purchased a grant for 20,000 acres in St Augustine in June 1766, the same day that Sir William Duncan, Lord Adam Gordon and Dr Andrew Turnbull (founder of New Smyrna) also made purchases.[13] Contracted to be Eliott's agent through his association with the East Florida Society of London, John and five artificiers and servants 'owned' by Eliott boarded the *Aurora* to travel with Dr William Stork; George Frederick Rolfes; the agents and servants of Thomas Kennedy, the Earl of Cassillis and about thirty others to St Augustine in June 1767 to continue the settlement of territories acquired in 1763.[14] John was one of the hundreds of men who filled posts as agents, traders, merchants, planters, carpenters, surveyors, overseers, managers, blacksmiths, attorneys, soldiers, and, most significantly, enslavers who settled in the Floridas from the Northeast of Scotland and made profit from planting indigo, sugar, rice, cotton, coffee, and spices. Describing the settlement of the neighbouring colonies Georgia and the Carolinas with men from Aberdeenshire in a letter to Sir Archibald Grant, John Farquharson emphasises the particular benefit of hiring his countrymen as agents and managers: 'Scotsmen will not do at first 'till the place is well settled; there is a great difference between the temperate banks of the Don and the hot sands of St John's River.'[15] While under Eliott's employment, John located 1000 acres along the Musquito River 85 miles south of St Augustine and organised the building and management of the plantations named Stobs Farm and another called the Eliott Sugar Plantation Experiment.[16]

12. MS 3346/10, Memorial to John Ross.

13. George C. Rogers, 'The East Florida Society of London, 1766–1767', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 54, 4 (1976), 481.

14. GD494/1/19, *James Grant Papers* 'Names of the Passengers, Artificers & Servants on Board the Aurora', and 'Letter from Sir Alexander Grant to James Grant, June 1967'. Dr Stork also brought with him four 'reformed' young women from the Magdalen Society in London chosen by Sir Alexander Grant to travel with him on the *Aurora*. *Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia, 1968), 74.

15. GD1/32/38/12

16. Daniel Schafer, 'William Elliot, Stobs Farm at Mosquito Lagoon, and the Elliot Sugar Plantation at Indian River', in *Canaveral National Seashore Historic Resource Study* (Atlanta, 2008), 30–3.

One of John's first duties was to spend £3,000 sterling of Eliott's money toward the purchase of 'seasoned', people of African descent (meaning both skilled at planting and assumed to be accustomed to the everyday brutality of life in the American south) from Georgia to break ground on the new plantations in the inhospitable coastal and tropical areas of swamp land in Florida.[17] There is no known information about Bella before her arrival in Georgia or purchase by John. His description of Bella as a 'Negro woman' provides some indication as to who she was and where she originated from according to the strict racial classification system in place in the Americas. Research into the early colonial history of Georgia (founded in 1732 with a ban on slavery) in relation to the Carolinas by James McMillin show that when legal slavery began in Georgia in 1751, the first Africans were sold and transhipped first from Charles Town by way of the Gold Coast – an estimated 4,129 between 1751 and 1776.[18] Sixty enslaved people arrived from 'St. Kitts in 1763; seventy from Montserrat fifty from Jamaica in 1765; and seventy-three from St. Kitts in 1767'.[19] In 1766 a total 565 Africans were captured and trafficked from Senegambia, while in 1767 close to 600 enslaved people were sold from the West Indies to Georgia; less than one percent would have been considered 'seasoned'.[20]

Given the early date for the births of the girls, Bella and her young son Davie would have likely been part of John Ross's purchase and traffic of the 'seasoned' enslaved people to labour on Eliott's sugar plantations during his trip to Georgia in 1768 or 1769. Margaret was born soon after, followed by Sophia in 1773. It appears from the letters exchanged that Margaret and Sophia were accepted by John as his children. While Margaret shares a name with John's older sister who died as a young child, Sophia was possibly named after Sophia McGillivray, daughter of neighbouring Florida trader and enslaver Lachlan McGillivray of Inverness and a Creek mother named Sehoy Marchand. The older Sophia, born sometime in the late 1740s, was the elder sister of the well-known trader, planter and enslaver Alexander McGillivray (1750–1793) known as 'Hoboi-Hili-Miko' the 'half-breed chieftan of the Creek nation' whose children Alleck and Mary were sent to Scotland in the 1790s to be educated.[21]

According to letters from planters to Governor Grant, the sugar plantations under John's management were returning under profit. Letters between other

17. Schafer, 'Stobs Farm', 31.

18. James A. McMillin, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade Comes to Georgia', in Leslie M. Harris, and Daina Ramey Berry (eds), *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* (Athens, Georgia, 2014), 21–8.

19. Ibid., 29.

20. Ibid., 31–2.

21. Michael Gannon, *Florida, A Short History* (Gainesville, Florida, 2003), 26.

Florida planters like Dr Turnbull and John Gordon to Governor Grant reveal that he also struggled to successfully cultivate his indigo crop.[22] John's tenure with Eliott ended around 1775, a result of a dispute between the two over improper spending of Eliott's accounts. In a letter to his father dated 22 March 1776 from St Augustine, John says that he left Eliott's employment after nine years and was working with Alexander Gray, a planter dealing with mounting economic and legal troubles.[23] Those troubled ended a year later when Gray slit his own throat while awaiting trial in a jail in St Augustine. He then continues to discuss the situation with Bella and the girls:

> I wrote you that I intend purchasing a Negro woman & her children from Mr Eliott, which I have accordingly don at £70 ins. I wonder you should suspect me of any other connexion with such a wench, than that of having got some children by her. I am not yet old enough to dotage, altho my head & beard are become pretty gray. My salary has not yet enabled me to pay this sum otherways than by borrowing. […] In the mean time, if you could with out pinching yourself advance me that sum. It would be very desireable, not because I would choose, if it were in my power, to give either the mother or children their freedom at present – but only because I would wish to have that in my power as soon as possible, for fear of accidents. I mean to myself. If this can be don, the mony must be remitted to London in order that I may be able to draw for it there.
>
> […]
>
> I am perfectly well in health – God preserve you in yours – give my affectionate respects to my sisters &
>
> I ever am,
>
> Dear Father
>
> Your Dutiful and Obedient Son[24]
>
> John Ross

22. GD494, *James Grant Papers*. Letter from Andrew Turnbull to Grant, Smyrnéa, 15 February 1770: 'I have already lent a little corn to Ross's people to prevent their being starved, and shall supply him with more till he gets his five hundred bushels.' Letter from John Gordon to Governor James Grant, Charlestown, 1 September 1770: 'Mr. Ross had lost his crop entirely, which I am sorry for.'

23. MS 3346/4, Paper of the Leith-Ross Family.

24. The reply from John's father was not found in the archive.

Keenly aware of their situation, John hastily borrowed the £70 necessary to purchase his two daughters, their mother, and Davie from Eliott, facilitating a follow-up letter to his father requesting support to make up for the money he borrowed. The financial difficulty he put himself in to remove them from Eliott's ownership – and not their own freedom per se – suggests a complex emotional connection that existed between John and the two girls that is exposed in later exchanges with his father and sister. John's muddled attempt to hide his desperation is exposed in the letter; he made it clear that he wanted to own them because of his personal dispute with Eliott who would have still claimed ownership of them – and allegedly not out of concern for them. He uses the word 'power' more than once in the letter to strengthen his true intentions. In addition, duty to care and affection for illegitimate children (regardless of race or enslaved status), what Katie Barclay calls 'natural affection', which she describes as 'parental love as an innate human instinct, but one that was practised as a form of duty displayed in provisioning, education and physical care of the child' seems to be underlying John's behaviours.[25] Barclay goes on to add that love during this period was shown and regulated by 'social, cultural and temporal positioning'. Nevertheless, his jocular remarks denying any affection for them remains unconvincing, as he put himself in debt beyond his earnings to keep them close to him in an age when enslaved women and children were often unsympathetically discarded.

For centuries the Atlantic colonies have been populated with accounts of African and African descended women both free and enslaved who are sexually assaulted, abused and exploited, then discarded after children are born. In many predicaments,[26] the mother and children are sold, or left in the bondage. What grew into the preferred custom of men owning the enslaved family of their 'begetting' was not unusual in the ceded islands and Florida colonies. Despite his assertion of a friendly relationship with Eliott, John frames his departure from Eliott's estates as a 'dangerous' situation for Bella and their two daughters. Colonial laws instituted in Virginia during the early 1660s established the rule of *partus sequitur ventrem*, meaning an individual's enslaved status was determined by the status of their mother. Barclay's body of work on 'natural affection', shown by Scots both home and abroad in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is exposed here in violent tension with what Jennifer Morgan identifies as the destabilising effect kinship poses to capital and wealth accumulated

25. Katie Barclay, 'Love, Care and The Illegitimate Child in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (2019), 108–9.

26. Vincent Brown uses the term 'predicament' to conceptualize the lives of enslaved people as counter to Orlando Patterson's theory of social death. Vincent Brown, 'Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery', *The American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 1248.

rooted in enslavement of people (including one's own children).[27] John's status in colonial American society meant nothing for the futures of the two girls. As Jennifer Morgan explains, '[i]f a child fathered by a free white man with an enslaved African woman became a slave, that child was transformed from kin to property.'[28] Moreover, regardless of whether John Ross quit or was let go of his position as plantation manager, Bella, Davie, Margaret and Sophia were the property of William Eliott. The question of John's singular affection for the girls is inconsequential within a society that legally and materially substituted 'a thing for a child' according to Morgan: 'no white man's *child* could be enslaved, while all black women's *issue* could'.[29] At this point it is necessary to consider the language employed to describe Margaret and Sophia in relation to others in their family. For John to speak of having 'got' (and its cognate 'beget') the two girls from an enslaved woman embeds the language of the market within what is ultimately a domestic crisis about the future of his children who are also the property of a man he worked for. To 'get' or 'beget' The girls' enslaved status tied them to their mother, which, according to Morgan, 'convey[ed] lineagelessness' because enslaved Black women like Bella's maternity existed purely within the marketplace with the effect that they were regarded as kinless reproducers.[30]

While managing Eliott's sugar plantations, John purchased for himself over 500 acres of the Great Cypress Swamp in St Augustine with the intention of growing indigo. Making indigo the key crop of British East Florida was the idea of Governor Grant, likely on account of its success in South Carolina in the mid-eighteenth century when the colony gradually made the switch to rice as its main crop. Where rice was planted on the coastal floodplains where the swamps were cleared, indigo was planted in the fields adjacent.[31] Indigo was the perfect crop to grow in the sandy, swampy tropical land in East Florida, and Grant was the most successful planter.[32] In a letter to the Governor in 1769, John's friend and neighbour Dr Andrew Turnbull, infamous for his failed colony of New Smyrna begun with 1400 Southern European labourers located a few miles from St Augustine, states that as Eliott's manager, John was producing 50 pounds of indigo per acre, slightly less than what Governor Grant was pro-

27. Barclay, 'Love, Care and the Illegitimate Child', 109; Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 5.

28. Jennifer L. Morgan, 'Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery', *Small Axe*, 55 (2018), 5–6.

29. Ibid., 5.

30. Ibid., 12–14.

31. John J. Winberry, 'Indigo in South Carolina: A Historical Geography', *Southeasten Geographer*, 19, 2 (1979), 91–102.

32. Andrea Feeser, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life* (Athens, Georgia, 2013), 91.

ducing.[33] Given that Bella was skilled at planting either sugar and, more likely, indigo, she would have also been important to his new life as a planter over his own estate. During his later years in the British East-Florida colony, John worked for Governor Patrick Tonyn (who took over for Grant in 1774), Admiral Edward Hawke, and on the Padonaram, Streachy, Jacob and John Wilkinson plantations. Toyn granted him 500 acres at Sweet Water Branch and Julington Creek in early 1782.[34] John also served as Justice of the Peace and was a member of the Commons House of Assembly, which was established by Governor Patrick Tonyn in 1781.[35]

In the final years of the war for American Independence, John, who served as Captain in the East Florida militia, began making plans to abandon his settlements and plantations for Dominica, one of the Caribbean islands ceded to Britain in 1763. After the signing of the 1783 Treaty of Paris both East and West Florida were ceded to Spain, and all subjects who wished to leave were given eighteen months to prepare and transportation was provided. In 1781 at aged 51 John made a will. Dated 17 June, he left his entire estate to his father the Laird of Arnage, whom he requests to sell 'all my Negros, Books, Clothes & Effects', except for 'a certain Negro slave wench named Bella belonging to me, and also one Negro Boy her son named Davie And two mulatto girls her daughters – The eldest named Peggy & the youngest Sophy which said two mulatto girls I have reason to believe are my begetting.' He also asks that 'none of these four slaves be put up for sale amongst the others', and that

> […] until such orders shall be by him received, my said executors is further quested to cause the said Negro woman Bella & her Three Children to be taken care of according as he in his discretion shall judge to be most suitable to the situation & circumstances, & any Expence attending the same he shall be allowed my residuary legatee change to the Estate, it being my Intention that neither the Mother, nor her Daughters shall be led into bad courses of life, by being in Want whilst any part of my estate remains to prevent it. […][36]

In early 1782 he started preparation to leave his Great Cypress Swamp plantation and to take all that he claimed ownership of: Bella, the two girls, Davie, and at least two men named Yorke and Bob. Thomas Rainy's valuation of John's

33. Carita Doggett, *Dr Andrew Turnbull and The New Smyrna Colony of Florida* (Durham, North Carolina, 2012).

34. Daniel Schafer, 'Sweet Water Branch and Julington Creek', *Florida History Online*, https://history.domains.unf.edu/floridahistoryonline/projects-proj-b-p-html/projects-plantations-html/hierarchy-of-plantation-pages/sweetwater-branch-and-julington-creek/ [Last accessed 19 November 2024].

35. William S. Coker, *Florida: From the Beginning to 1992* (Houston, Texas, 1991), 12.

36. MS 3346, Last Will and Testament of John Ross.

estate shows that he did not have access to all his capital by the time of his death in 1786.[37] He appears to have been waiting on money owed him by other East Florida planters and merchants, including Governor Toyn. Instead of setting up his own household on his arrival to Dominica, John boarded at James Claphams Tavern and hired out the four enslaved people he brought with him to support them and himself – work that brought £4.5 from hiring them out and £251.5s for their sale to his estate at his death.

Already in ill health on arrival, John understood that he could no longer offer protection to the two girls and changed his mind about keeping them enslaved until the end of his life.

> 8 January 1782:
>
> St Augustine, East Florida
>
> I John Ross of the province aforesaid Esq. send greeting. Know ye that for and in consideration of the faithful services of my negro woman slave named Bella, formerly the property of William Eliot of London Esq. deceased,[38] and for other good causes me thereunto moving. I the said John Ross have manumitted enfranchised and set at liberty the mulatto child of the said Bella named Sophia aged about nine years. […][39]

Sophia's freedom document makes no mention of her being John's daughter, meaning she and Margaret enter Scotland as the former property and not the kin of their father. Not long after manumitting them, John paid £40.13s to his attorneys Charles and Robert Herries and Co. in London ('I thank you for the trouble you have taken about my two mulatto girls') for passage from St Augustine to Aberdeen where they arrived at Arnage Castle live with his father and sister in the summer of 1782.[40]

John's motivations for sending the girls to Scotland are not clear, but one reason might be an attempt to avoid a future for them that involved the well-known institution that was for a time called 'mulatto concubinage', fundamental to the establishment of enslaved societies in the Americas. The population of Dominica during this period included 1,574 Europeans, mostly French; 574 free Black and people of mixed African and European heritage, and 14,309 enslaved persons.[41] The type of first-hand accounts of visitors to the West Indies in the

37. MS 3346, The Estate of John Ross deceased, in Account with Thomas Rainy.
38. Eliott died in 1779.
39. MS 3346/4/1.
40. MS 3346, Letter from John Ross to Messrs Herries and Co. 6 June 1783.
41. Lennox Honeychurch, *The Dominica Story: A History of the Island* (London, 1995), 87.

nineteenth century like Henry Nelson Coleridge, A. C. Carmichael, and Special Magistrate John Anderson all condemn the practice of 'concubinage' between black and mixed African-European women and white men.[42] Ayrshire sailor Samuel Robinson adds to this in his autobiography that:

> female children born to these liaisons invariably followed the same path into concubinage [as their mothers] to escape labouring in the fields as so gained the social promotion that came with being 'lighter' skinned. […] Their common aim was to reach the classification of *octoroon* (less than one eighth African) at which point basic rights, such as taking a surname and owning property, were extended to them on most British islands.[43]

The term concubinage is insufficient here because it hints more at negotiation and less at unavailing predicament, leaving little room for doubt that what was occurring between enslaved and free African-descended women and white men in these encounters ever involved *equity* in the ability to reject or initiate sexual relationships. The common practice of plaçage where mostly mixed-heritage women were targeted for long-term sexual exposure to their white enslavers, often resulting in multiple pregnancies, is what Brenda Stevenson calls 'part of the publicly acknowledged circum-Caribbean legacy of interracial sex'.[44] The majority of these women were either forced or 'lured' into these relationships not long after reaching puberty.[45] Chief Justice Thomas Atwood, writing about the state of Dominica during the time he lived there from about 1766 to 1773, wrote that

> Mothers will dispose of their virgin daughters to white men for a moderate sum, nor do they look upon it as any crime, but an honour to the damsel, who is thereby better qualified for being afterwards taked to wife by one of her own colour.[46]

While John's circle in East Florida included other Scottish men who had several children with enslaved and Indigenous women, similar practices in Caribbean islands like Dominica plaçage were scrutinised for its openness. For

42. Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825* (3rd ed. London, 1832); A. C. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies*, 2 vols (London, 1834); John Anderson. [MS 602] 'A Magistrate's Recollections in St Vincent's': 1836–1838. Published as Roderick McDonald (ed.), *Between Slavery and Freedom: Special Magistrate John Anderson's Journal of St. Vincent during the Apprenticeship* (Kingston, 2001).

43. Eric Graham, *Burns and the Sugar Plantocracy of Ayrshire* (Ayr, 2009), 16–17. Quoted from Samuel Robinson's *The Experiences of a Boy Sailor aboard a Slave Ship* (1867).

44. Stevenson, 'What's Love Got to Do with It?', 161.

45. Ibid., 166.

46. Thomas, *The History of the Island of Dominica* (London, 1791), 272–4.

example, Thomas Rainy, the sole executor in John's revised will, supported an enslaved family in Dominica. He was born in the 1730s in Borgue, in the stewartry of Kirkcudbright; he and his relative David Rainy purchased several lots in the island in the 1760s; he was also deputy receiver of money arising from the sale of lots in 1774. In his will from 1811, Rainy left an enslaved woman named Grace Sword, who lived with him for several decades, a legacy of £750; their children William, David, John and Sally were left £1500, £750, £800 and £1200 respectively; while Sally's 'mestiff' son John Rainy (meaning Sword was his only African grandparent) was left £500. Jeannette, Mary and Lucinda Gordon were three sisters born to Lucretia Seaburn the free coloured housekeeper of Anthony Gordon of Troquhain (d. 1802), brother of Robert Gordon (1738–1829), who owned land in Dominica, St Vincent, Montserrat, and Prince Edward Island. Robert and Anthony arrived in Dominica also from Kirkcudbright in 1765 as original land purchasers. Lucretia and her daughters inherited £50 each in Robert's will and his lot of land in Virgin Lane in Roseau; in the 1840s they later sued their Irish cousins the Thomsons for slave compensation.[47] Lennox Honeychurch explains that although Dominica had a 'coloured plantocracy' that included those called 'Afranchis', the same levels of maltreatment of enslaved people and violence and sexual exploitation of free and enslaved women occurred.[48]

Little evidence of Margaret and Sophia life in Arnage Castle remains. The girls were baptised on 16 September 1782 at home by ministers from the Scottish Episcopal chapel of Bairnie and Tillydesk.[49] The Scottish Episcopalian congregation was persecuted in the years following the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion; the church at Ellon disbursed into smaller chapels first at Bairnie then at Tillydesk located on the lands of Turnerhall belonging to John Turner, John's first cousin.

Other traces of the girls' presence are found in letters exchanged between John, 55 years old, living precariously in Dominica with chronic illness and waiting to recover before making the nearly month-long journey back to Aberdeenshire, his father, and sister Christian Ross, who seems to have been in charge of the girls. By this time John's only other adult sibling Martha had married Alexander Leith second of Freefield and Glenkindie (1717–1803), only to die in childbirth, leaving one son Ross John Leith (who later renamed himself John Leith-Ross). The first letter, dated 4 July 1785 is from the Laird of Arnage to John in Dominica, first sharing with his son his fears that the supposed compensation from the British government to loyal citizens who lost property and land during

47. *The Statistical Account for Scotland* (1799), 62–3; SRO.RD3.231.898; *British Library Endangered Archives Project*, EAP688/1/1/65, 204; PROB11/1764/342; J. M. Bulloch, *The Making of the West Indies: The Gordons as Colonists* (Aberdeen, 1915), 42.

48. Honeychurch, *The Dominica Story*, 54

49. John Macgregor, *Register of Baptisms, Chapels at Bairnie and Tillydesk, 1763–1801* (Edinburgh, 1908), 8.

the War for American Independence will likely never come (Figure 2). He then apprised him about the wellbeing of Margaret and Sophia, ending with the state of the crops at Arnage:

> Arnadge July 4 1785
>
> My Dear Son,
>
> […] I truly depend upon your resolution of not felling any where but at house where may you find you safe and sound – as to my own health I cannot complain my time of life ___ – this has been a severe winter and spring – and a short __. Now lines me as to your two girls the oldest is far from well – her sister is in Aberdeen at Schools and in perfect health – which Peg poor thing I am afraid has small chance for – last crope was a fine crope and of hope the lines will turn better again and tenants be able to pay their rents – you may judge of last crope by the [indecipherable] but we expect some demand for it before harvest I have lately for the L__ge teacher of Dovecourt sett again with very little red__ of ___
>
> […] I am every post-day in hopes of hearing from you again which has meant the delay writing from week to week
>
> May God bless and preserve My Dear Son I remain
>
> Your affectionate Father
>
> John Ross

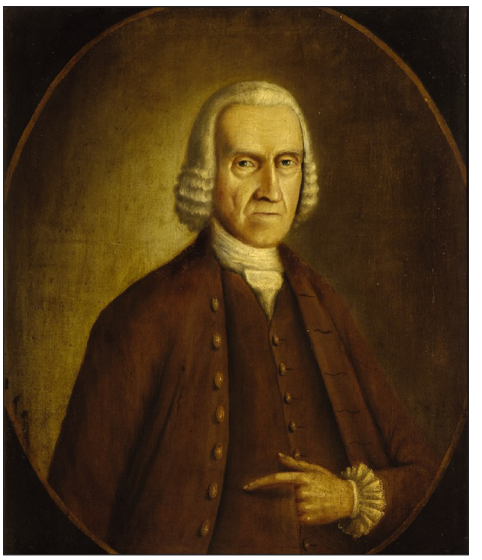

Figure 2: John Ross, second of Arnage (1707–1789), National Trust for Scotland, Fyvie Castle.

John's sister Christian managed to report on the young girls in more detailed and emotive terms than her father. In her letter to her brother attached to the end of her father's, Christian documented her mysterious illness and that their concern was so great that they brought in Dr Peter Smith of Aldie in Cruden, personal physician to George Hay, sixteenth Earl of Erroll who lived at Slains Castle near Peterhead.[50] Christian also said that while the girls are incapable of writing their father a letter – on account of only being able to copy words into their lesson book (Margaret's illness prevented her from joining Sophia in Mrs Ramsay and Burnett's school in Aberdeen), they beg him to return to them.

> I am very sorry that I cannot give my dear brother a better account of my Two Lassies – Poor Pegie since the beginning of this year has been often very diseased – her [indecipherable] are running sores in one leg – one finger and her cheeks attended with palsie – [...] I had great hope the warm weather would have been of use to her but it has ben otherwise however she is sleeping p[eacefully] well at present. I know you will be glad to hear that My Father has really been kind to her in Every respect. Sophy is a fine [indecipherable]
>
> […] Pegie can read very distinctly […] she just Now said to me tell him to hasten home – God grant that May soon be the case and that good health may Longe attend My Dear brother whom we have much Need of – Ross Leith is turning fine scholar and at short I hear his Father is very proudly have on all

Christian Ross's use of the phrase 'my two lassies' does a fair amount of work to upend Scottish colonial domestic relationships. The semantic voyage from the 'got' in John's letter to his father; through to his describing the girls as 'of my begetting', and the coded reference to 'my negro woman slave named Bella' in Sophia's manumission document that culminates in Christian declaring the girls to be *her* lassies shows how the language of ownership – the movement from property to kin – becomes forever intertwined with that of familial relations that also occur spatially between Florida/the Caribbean and Scotland. Saidiya Hartman engages with Hortense Spillers's attempt to collapse the language of fatherhood/ownership when she declares that it had always been 'a fiction that masters could be fathers and wayward lovers more than the "begetters of children"'.[51] While John's words reflect this categorising of kin-property

50. James Hay, fifteenth Earl of Erroll (1726–8) was the son of the Earl of Kilmarnock who was executed in 1745. He paid for Peter Smith's education. *The Life and Times of Thomas Smith 1745–1809*, 1.

51. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 81.

to his 'mulatto' girls where his use of 'my' fails to distinguish in what manner they belong to him, his sister's assertion – made to him – that they are *her* lassies is a relationship articulated without the qualifications of race or relationship to Blackness that words like 'mulatto' work to govern and regulate love. Bella's qualification as 'Negro wench' or 'Negro woman' by John is, according to the evidence in the family archive, grounds for her remaining unloved and dispossessed. The rest of the letter that follows in which Christian worryingly details Margaret's declining health and Sophia's progress coupled with the girls' need to be with their father ('tell him to hasten home') further exacerbates the unpredicted dangers of intimacy that leads to the attempts at erasing Sophia and Margaret from the family story years later.

John never returned to Arnage. He died the same month that the so-called First Maroon War of 1785–1786 ended with the public execution by gibbetting of the charismatic leader Balla and a month after the similar execution of Cicero.[52] John's death provides one last clue to the tragic circumstances of Bella's life before she disappears from the record.

> Dominica
>
> > It is my particular Will & Desire that my two Slaves named Yorke & Bella be sold by Mr Rainy my Executor to such masters as they themselves shall choose. Even if the Price offered for them should be Considerably under their real value – It is also my wish that my said Executor shall bestow on my said two slaves such articles of any wearing apparel as he shall think fit
> >
> > John Ross
> >
> > Witness my Hand & Seal
> >
> > this 21 April 1786
> >
> > James Clarke[53]

Yorke's and Bella's fates were the last thing on John's mind hours before his death. If she is the same Bella – and it is likely as John only brought four enslaved people with him from East Florida to Dominica on account of his diminished finances – why didn't he arrange to free her in his will, as so many Scots in his circle had done with the enslaved mothers of their children? John's claim for

52. Lennox Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica* (Jackson, MS, 2019).

53. 'Codicil to John Ross's will', MS 3346.

compensation could provide an answer. The valuation of his real and personal estate made before 1785 lists 'One Negro Woman named Bella with 2 male children one 5 years old and the Other 2 Valued at £70.0.0'.[54] It remains unclear whether these two boys are a fabrication by John to financially account for loss caused by the manumission of Margaret and Sophia (Bella and the two children are worth the same £70 he paid William Eliott for them in 1775), or two boys that Bella gave birth to sometime between 1781 and 1783. If the latter possibility is true, then these are children that John did not 'beget'.

It isn't clear what happened to Bella after his death or who Thomas Rainy sold her and Yorke to, but the cruelty radiating from the short codicil emotes feelings of anger, precipitousness and a final show of that *power* John sought to gain over the lives of the people he kept enslaved. It can only be imagined what Yorke and Bella could have done to afford this further indignity of being sold for whatever price with whatever clothes Thomas Rainy decided they should have. The real or perceived transgression of Bella against John results in her being re-bonded into chattel slavery and disappearance from any of the family records hours before his death. The question of her being with or without clothes symbolises the loss of her presumed protected status. Lennox Honeychurch describes how modes of dress in eighteenth-century Dominica used clothing to signal social standing amongst free and enslaved people. In what can be seen in the works of Roman artist Agostinio Brunias, free people of colour integrated brightly coloured patterns with elaborately designed turbans were combined with European fashion: 'the "jupe" and the beautiful "robe douiette," [wob dwi-yet] along with the use of family treasures such as the extravagant "graise d'or" and the "zanneau chenille"'.[55] Meanwhile, enslaved people were made to wear, as in other islands, a simple denim and chambray (dyed using indigo, ironically, the material that brought Bella into John's life and her skill at cropping kept her there). The illusion of control that she and Yorke appear to be given in choosing who owns them is lifted.

For the girls, the loss of their father intrinsically meant the loss of their mother and brother(s) as well. Bella's life in and beyond the archive is a reminder of the unstable, uncertain and often terrifying lives all enslaved women faced. Diana Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris ask the question whether relationships between enslaved people and enslavers can ever entail non-abusive emotional intimacy.[56] A partial answer is found in the realisation that tracking the events of Bella's life is only possible so long as she remains

54. T 77/15/16, ff279-300, 'Schedule and Valuation of the Real and Personal Estate of John Ross in the Province of East Florida.' This document was found in the National Archives, Kew, not in the Leith-Ross family documents.

55. Honeychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 80–1.

56. Ramey Berry and Harris (eds), *Sexuality and Slavery*.

useful to John. Her daughters Sophia and Margaret were made to face those realities as well, even after their manumission. Bella's failure to capitalise on intimacy, reproduction and the girls' kinship with John, key strategies outlined by Jessica Marie Johnson that Black women used to negotiate their freedom, provides the postscript to her presence in the official record.[57] It is reasonable to assume that Sophia and Margaret never saw or heard from their mother again. Davie's fate is also unclear. The final mention of him appears in John's will dated 1781, which is the same year the first of the two boys Bella had were likely born. It can be assumed that he either died that year or was sold in an act of retaliation. If the two boys listed in Ross's claim really existed and survived the journey to Dominica, it means that Margaret and Sophia had three brothers and a mother who remained enslaved in the Caribbean. Bella's place in this family's story ends with John's death and her re-entry into the marketplace.

Sometime between the death of her father in 1786 and that of her grandfather in 1789, Margaret died, not older than twenty. In the absence of burial records for her at Arnage or the Episcopal church in Ellon,[58] the only evidence for Margaret's death at the time are the notes left by Alexander Johnston, who writes of Margaret that '[o]ne of these girls luckily died when young – she was a poor, diseased creature & never enjoyed good health'.[59]

Speaking about Sophia, taking care to avoid writing her name or just omitting it by using a blank space, Johnston says that she, 'so unecesarily sent to Scotland lived to marry and be the mother of children'. On 9 December 1788, aged around 15, Sophia married Turner Donaldson (b. 1767), the son of William Donaldson and Margaret Davidson, crofters on the Ellon estate and distant relations to the Turners of Turnerhall and the Ross family. By 1680 the Donaldson family lost or left Hilton, which was then renamed 'Rosehill' in 1683 because it was owned by the Roses of Kilravock, then in 1696 by Robert Turner, who named it Turnerhall. Birth records for their first child, Christian (1788–1838), disclose that she was born in July 1788, five months before Sophia and Turner's wedding. Sophia and Turner had at least 12 more children born between 1788 and 1811: William (1789); John (1791); George (1793); Elizabeth (1795); Thomas (1797); James (1799); Robert (1802); Martha (1804); twins Ann and Alexander (1806); Mary (1808); and Turner (1810–1886).[60]

With John's death in 1786 and the Laird's death three years later, Christian Ross and her young nephew, Sophia's only Scottish first cousin and closest rela-

57. Johnson, *Wicked Flesh*, 2.

58. In 1777 the new church at Ellon opened, but the tablet in the older churchyard no longer identifies where the Rosses of Arnage were buried before 1839. James Godsman, *A History of the Burgh and Parish of Ellon* (Aberdeen, 1958), 248–50; 261.

59. MS 2088. Alexander Johnston, W. S., *Account of the Family of Ross, in Aberdeenshire.*

60. Old Parish Records, Aberdeen: 168/2 /366; 168/2 /349).

tive, became co-heirs of the Arnage estate. John Leith-Ross was born in 1777 and raised in Glenkindie Castle, before studying law at the University of Edinburgh and working in the city as a Writer to the Signet. The family archives include a letter written to him from David Hume, Baron Hume of Ninewells and Professor of the Law of Scotland in the University of Edinburgh certifying that he attended three courses of his lectures in November 1796, November 1797, and November 1799.[61] While it cannot be determined which exact lectures Leith-Ross attended, a number of Baron Hume's lectures dealt with the issues of parental (the father explicitly) obligation toward lawful and illegitimate children: 'The father's obligation to them is to aliment them suitably to their lower condition, some regard being always had, however, to the rank and condition of the parents'.[62] Hume then goes on to estimate that the fixed sum of between £4 to £6 a year should be adequate for common artisans and tradesmen.

While John Leith-Ross did not grow up around Sophia or Margaret, he was not unfamiliar with formerly enslaved mixed African-Scottish children in his family. His first cousin Alexander Leith, formerly of Allathan, emigrated to St Vincent in 1771. Like John Ross, Leith joined hundreds of North East Scots after 1763 to exploit opportunities and use forced labour to build wealth in the ceded islands. On land purchased in St Vincent during the 1780s, Alexander Leith enslaved dozens of people, including Roseline, who gave birth to his two sons, John Munro Leith (b. 1784) and Patrick (or Peter) Haffey Leith (b. 1790). Although John and Peter were enslaved with their mother until the execution of Alexander's will in 1799, the two boys lived in Aberdeen during the 1790s. As early as 1795, the year that Leith was celebrated for allegedly killing the Garifuna chief Joseph Chatoyer in single combat, John Munro Leith was sent to Aberdeen to be educated, first under the tutelage of his uncle Reverend James Ross, D. D., minister of the East kirk before matriculating to the Aberdeen Grammar School. When Leith died in 1798, they were manumitted and given a combined inheritance of nearly £1000. The Leiths of Allathan, Leiths of Glenkindie and Freefield and Rosses of Arnage maintained close connection, as shown in a letter from May 1778 – included in the Leith-Ross family archive and published in *A Short Memoir* – from Alexander Leith's mother Margaret Gordon to Christian Ross asking about the health of the infant Leith Ross and thanking her for financial help in the care of her younger daughters.[63] This extended Leith and Ross family included the presence of at least four African Scottish children living in Aberdeenshire at the end of the eighteenth century.

61. MS 3346/10. Baron Hume was the nephew of the philosopher David Hume.

62. G. Campbell H. Paton (ed.), *Baron David Hume's Lectures* (Edinburgh, 1939), 235.

63. Two of Alexander Leith of St Vincent's younger sisters lived at Arnage for an undisclosed amount of time in the 1770s. Alexander Johnston, *A Short Memoir of James Young, Merchant Burgess of Aberdeen, and Rachel Cruickshank, His Spouse, and of Their Descendants*, 222–3.

When Sophia's grandfather died on the 4th of May 1789, her young family appear to have moved out of Arnage Castle and resided as tenants in the croft house in the 86-acre Waulkmill of Arnage as early as the 28th of May 1789.[64] Valuations of her grandfather's expenses a month following his death shows that even after her marriage to Turner, Sophia was being cared for: a line in this indicated 'Sophia's Necessities'. Yet from the time Sophia and Margaret arrived in Scotland in 1782 until the Laird's death in 1789, they existed as members of the family without a clear definition of their place in the family structure.

On Christian's death in 1803 John Leith-Ross became the sole Laird of Arnage and later Bourtie. This might have been the time when the new Laird and his family permanently moved into the Castle. That year, when their daughter Martha was born, Sophia and Turner became liferenters on the Waulkmill of Arnage. Liferent guaranteed the person given the property a right to receive its revenue – but not the right to dispose of it – until their death.[65] Christian also left Sophia an annuity (annual payments) of £30 in her will and her first four children £30 each – which she arranged to be administered by Mr John Cruickshank and Thomas Fidler – but was ultimately administered by her younger cousin the new Laird. At this time £30 would have been equal to about 200 days wages for a skilled tradesman, but just below the £40 that Leah Leneman estimates would have been at the lower end of middle-class income.[66]

A letter written by Christian to Sophia a year before her death provides a portentous clue regarding Sophia and her family's purposeful exclusion from the family. After explaining her instructions to not give it to Sophia until after her death, Christian writes:

> I begin earnestly intreating Turner and you – both my instruction and example as an indispensable duty to bring up your young family in true Christian faith and practice – […] I hope you will all beheave so as to keep Mr Ross [John Leith-Ross's] kindness and countenance and give No truble either to Mr Cruikshank or Thomas [Fidler] in managing your Little Matters – heartily willing to your self husband and children both temporal and eternal well [indecipherable] and with affection
>
> I remain Dear Sophy
>
> Yours,
>
> Christian Ross

64. MS 3346/4/2.

65. William Jardine Dobie, *Manual of the Law of Liferent and Fee in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1941).

66. Leah Leneman, '"No Unsuitable Match": Defining Rank in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland', *Journal of Social History*, 33, 3 (2000), 665.

Christian's letter noticeably lacks the word 'aunt'. Unlike her brother writing about his daughters in the 1770s and 1780s, Christian didn't seem to back away from the complicated dilemma of care, love and acknowledgment of illegitimate mixed-heritage children. In place of 'aunt', standing alone as the last word between Christian and Sophia is 'Yours'. It mirrors the 'my' in her letter to John 18 years before – strangely defiant of the paternalism that dictated a duty to basic care and acknowledgment set forth by John and likely continued by his father.

Christian's hopes for Sophia's care were unfulfilled. The Special Collections archive includes attempts by John Leith-Ross to block or hinder Sophia from receiving her £30 annuity – including delays to administering the money in smaller increments throughout the year and at one time suing her after allowing her and Turner to borrow against it then charging interest. Christian's intention to leave Sophia's annuity in the control of a non-family member suggests a lack of trust in her nephew or his father Alexander Leith of Freefield and Glenkindie. In the years following her death, Courts of Session reports include a possible act of retaliation against Thomas Fidler by John Leith Ross in the form of a lawsuit against Fidler in the amount of £30 that was allegedly lent to him in 1807.[67]

Sophia, Turner, and their children struggled considerably despite Sophia's promised annuity and her familial connection to Arnage Castle. In the twenty years following her aunt's death she appears intermittently in the family archive, but mostly as the recipient of a receipt or a bill. As the archives, edited and cultivated by Leith-Ross and his son-in-law, contains no information about their everyday life, it can only be speculated how Sophia and her family were treated by those around them. There is no denying that people of African descent in Scotland during this time were subject to racist abuse. Ian Whyte speculates that the population of enslaved Black people in Scotland was around 70, and most were either living in Glasgow or Leith; while John W. Cairns places that number around 100.[68] Yet these numbers do not fully account for those African-descended people brought to live with families, like Sophia or those who arrived in the regiments. The most famous case of the latter in Aberdeen is found in the life and death of John Sampson, named 'The Black Drummer'. Born in Barbados in 1782, Sampson enlisted to the 29th Worcestershire Regiment of Foot, famous for its incorporation of young Black men as drummers. At the start of the Peninsular War, the 29th were stationed in Aberdeen recruiting under the leadership of General Gordon Forbes. According to the initial report published in

67. *The Scots Revised Reports*, No. 145, 242.

68. Ian Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756–1838* (Edinburgh, 2006), 74; John W. Cairns, 'After Somerset: The Scottish Experience', *Journal of Legal History*, 33, 3 (2012), 302. See also Dolly MacKinnon, 'Slave Children: Scotland's Children as Chattels at Home and Abroad in the Eighteenth Century' in Janay Nugent and Elzabeth Ewan (eds), *Children and Youth in Premodern Scotland* (Suffolk, 2015), 120–35.

the *Aberdeen Journal*, Sampson was 'cruelly murdered'; his 'head and face were dreadfully cut, and the scull nearly perforated in two places'; he died, apparently, from a bayonet that ran through his back and pierced his heart.[69] Donald MacCallum, Daniel Macpherson and James Graham, soldiers in the Argyllshire Militia were the three men accused and indicted for Sampson's violent murder. They pled not guilty and though it was clear they committed the crime, were released on a technicality.[70] A week after Sampson's murder the *Aberdeen Journal* records that another black drummer was 'accosted in the Strand lately with "Well Blackie, what news from the devil?" The drummer reportedly 'knocked the fellow down who asked the question, with this laconic and appropriate answer, "He send you dat; how you like it?"'.[71]

In 1823, two of Sophia's children, Thomas and Alexander Donaldson, were arrested and convicted of theft. Since he was 16 at the time of his arrest and conviction for house breaking in Aberdeen with his brother Thomas on 10 April 1823, Alexander was sentenced to transportation to Australia. He was one of 172 convicts transported to New South Wales on 16 March 1824 on the ship *Countess of Harcourt* on a life sentence. He lived in Sutton Forest, Sydney where he worked as a wheelwright; in 1830 he married Jane Holland, the daughter of a fellow convict. On 1 November 1838, he was officially pardoned but never returned to Scotland, instead buying land in Melbourne that December 1838. He died in July 1857.

Thomas met a more severe judgement. While working as a coal carrier in Aberdeen, he was convicted in 1821 for housebreaking and theft, for which he pleaded guilty and sentenced to 18 months in Bridewell prison built in 1809.[72] It seems that not long after his release, he was caught in the same act. James Bruce writes in *The Black Kalendar of Aberdeen* that while working as a tacksman for a quarry in Peterhead Thomas and William Buchanan had become 'acquainted with one more vicious than themselves', William McLeod, 'who initiated them into every species of crime, and made them the terror of the district in which they resided'. The three were convicted of stouthrief, a form of robbery that included violence inside a home and sentenced to death by hanging.[73] Following an attempt at escape, they were recaptured in February 1823. The *Aberdeen Journal* for 5 March advertised a reward for their capture reveals that Sophia's heritage was not a secret:

> Thomas Donaldson, aged about 27; in height 5 feet 9 inches; very dark complexioned, approaching to that of a Mulatto, his mother being a

69. *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 September 1807.
70. *The Black Kalendar of Aberdeen*, 199–201.
71. *Aberdeen Journal*, 16 September 1807.
72. *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 April 1821; JC26/1821/110.
73. AD14/23/210; JC26/1823/221.

> Mulatto; dark hair and short; very slightly pock pitted, blue large eyes; speaks slow; […] He is a native of the parish of Ellon, and resided for some time in Aberdeen, working as a labourer.

Their sentence, Aberdeen's only triple execution, occurred outside the Tolbooth on 23 May 1823.

In his handwritten account of the family, Johnston uses Thomas and Alexander's crimes to justify his previous comment that comes close to chastising John Ross for 'unnecessarily' bringing Margaret and Sophia to Arnage in the first place. Johnston uses the lives of two of Sophia's children as proof that the introduction of the two girls into the family at Arnage was a disgrace that could have been avoided if they were left in either Florida or Dominica. Johnston doesn't include in this account the final words of Thomas given on the scaffold outside of the Tolbooth. The *Aberdeen Journal* of 28 May includes a likely entirely fictional version of his and Buchanan's final words, documented 'to the following effect' no doubt in an attempt at mid-nineteenth-century moralising *pour encourager les autres*. Thomas's words, however, do provide insight into what his family life was expected to be:

> I attribute my sins to disobedience to my parents: They taught me to read and to write a little; but I never looked into the Bible, or went to Church, but laughed at those who did so.

A year after Thomas's execution and a few months before Alexander's transportation to Australia, Sophia and Turner borrowed £25 from John Leith-Ross. One of her final appearances in the Leith-Ross family archives is when the Laird of Arnage sues them in 1827. On 7 March that year he officially evicts them from their house in the Waulkmill of Arnage and cancels their liferent on the property. Sophia appears, however, to continue receiving her annuity in instalments until at least June 1830 when there are no more receipts stored in the file. There are no death or burial records extant for Sophia or her husband, although the marriage registration of their daughter Elizabeth indicated that Turner died sometime before 1837.[74] By the time of Scotland's first census in 1841, Sophia was not registered as living on her own or with one of her children or relatives. Her possible cause of death would have been the cholera epidemic that killed many people in the Arnage estates in 1831 and 1832.

Relying solely on Johnston's partial presentation of Sophia and her children's lives would mean that story of their lives in Scotland ends with the humiliating public execution of Thomas, Alexander's transportation and the termination of her liferent – the final severance of any family connection to the

74. John Ross and Elizabeth Donaldson, Old Parish Registers Marriages 168/A 290 250 Aberdeen.

Leith-Rosses. In addition to the £30 to Sophia, Christian Ross's will bequeathed £30 to Sophia and Turner's first four children Christian, William, John and George as they 'arrive at the age of twentie one years', on the condition that if the sons take up country trades, they will get their money upfront to pay their 'prentice fees' (Figure 3).[75] The Laird of Arnage did not honour his aunt's wish, so Sophia's children were born into uncertainty with the only possible guarantee being a life of greater poverty than Sophia and Margaret experienced. Their first child Christian moved to Edinburgh. She lived at 9 Couls Close in the Canongate, and married her neighbour John Cairinie, officer of police in December 1827.[76] The next few months would have been important for Cairnie and his fellow officers as this was the year that William Burke and William Hare committed 16 murders and sold the bodies to University of Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox.

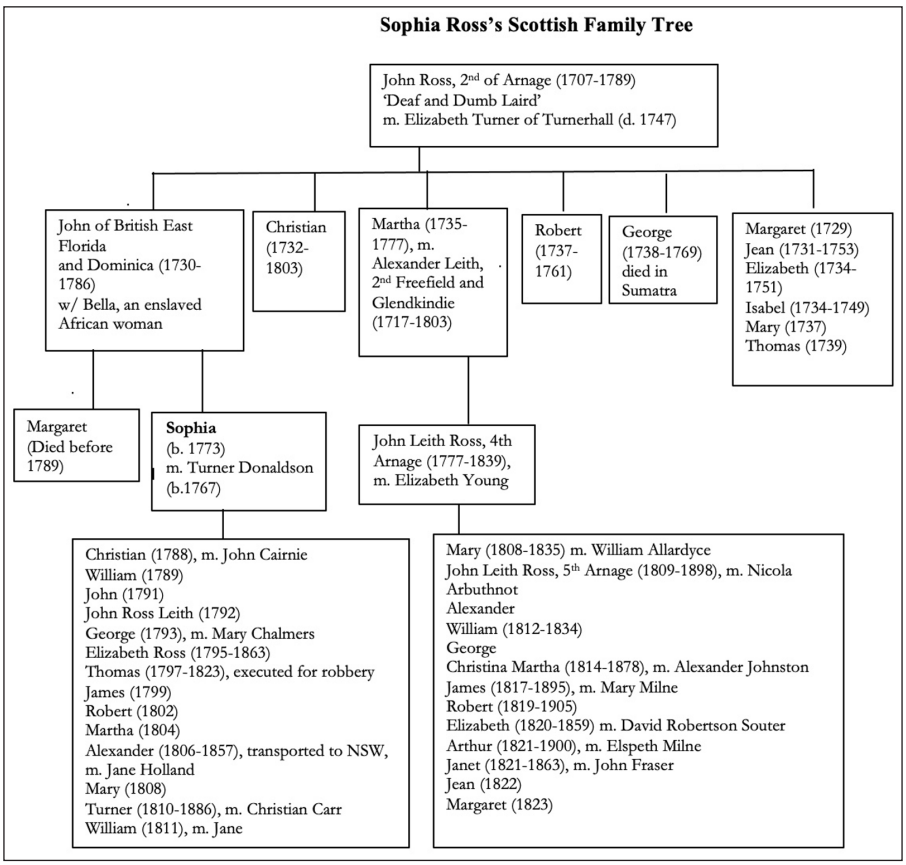

Figure 3: Sophia Ross's Family Tree.

75. Christian Ross's Will MS 3346.

76. John Cairnie and Christian Donaldson, Old Parish Registers Marriages 685/3 280 0 Canongate.

William Donaldson joined his father working on the farm but died in 1810 at aged 20.[77] With no prospect of receiving the money promised in Christian's will, John Ross Leith Donaldson, Sophia and Turner's third child, enlisted in the 72nd Regiment of Foot, later known as the Duke of Albany's Own Highlanders, at the age of 14 in 1807. He spent 30 years in the non-commissioned service moving from private to corporal; twelve years were spent stationed at the Cape of Good Hope and the rest of the years at home.[78] The 72nd were based at Wineberg following the capture of the Cape from the Dutch in 1806 and later headquartered at Simon's Town with detachments at Muisenberg, Hout's Bay, Oliphant's Bay, and Cape Town. In 1810 he was part of the expedition that captured Mauritius. After three more occupations, the regiment took part in the Xhosa War in 1834.[79] According to his service record, John, who dropped the 'Ross Leith' from his name, was described as having dark hair, eyes and complexion. He maintained a good character throughout his service until his discharge in 1837 at the age of 44 on account of suffering from both asthma and rheumatism.

George Donaldson, born a year after John, enlisted at age 14 in 1808 into the 92nd Regiment or Gordon's Highlanders, where his thirty years of service included fighting during the Peninsular Wars, two years at Waterloo and over six years in Jamaica from 1819 to 1826. He lost a finger at the Battle of Maya in the Pyrenees on 25 July 1813 when the 92nd lost sixty percent of its men. He was severely injured at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, being shot in both thighs and his ankles. His discharge record states that he was worn out from long and faithful services and his name appeared on the Good Conduct Book three times.[80]

Elizabeth, whose testimony helped save her brother Alexander, married a seaman named John Ross. She died in 1863 from heart disease. Robert, like his father and brother, lived his whole life as a labourer in the Waulkmill of Strichen. He married Isabella Dalgano in 1831 and had six children. Martha moved to Edinburgh and lived in Grassmarket with her husband Sproul Hall; she died in 1843 aged 38 of dropsy. Mary died of chronic bronchitis in 1865 at age 57, an unmarried housekeeper living with her paternal cousin Alexander Emslie for nearly three decades. Sophia and Turner's youngest child Turner married Christian, daughter of tailor John Carr of Aberdeen in 1840 and was the father of Helen (1841), Mary (1843), Christina (1846), Charlotte (1853), Sophia Ross (1854/55), Turner and James Christian. He died in 1886. Their daughter Charlotte married the shipwright William Cowie and were the parents of seven children including two sons, Charles Donaldson Cowie (1888–1951) and John Dow Stuart

77. OPR Deaths 192/30/328 Ellon.
78. WO 97/840/120.
79. Richard Cannon, *Historical Record of the Seventy-Second Regiment* (London, 1848), 38–55.
80. WO 97/1007/86.

Cowie (1890–1970) who fought in France in the First World War, returned home and were awarded both the Victory and British War medals.[81]

Marisa Fuentes asks the important question of how narratives of slavery are affected by the persistent historical silences in archives produced by enslavers – and in the case of Bella, Sophia, and Margaret, the families of those enslavers.[82] John Leith-Ross's feelings for Sophia Ross and her family were expressed in his son-in-law's writing by. Relying on the Leith-Ross archive to tell these women's stories forces us to begin with Bella's purchase and end with Thomas Donaldson's execution. Their personal downfall is purposefully preserved in the Leith-Ross archives as Sophia's legacy for the same reason that they serve as a reminder to the family of the shame inherent in considering mixed-heritage people like Sophia family. The 'end' of the stories of Christian Ross's two lassies' is supposed to be met with absence: Margaret's death from an unknown or undocumented illness and her body missing; and Sophia, dispossessed and broken into silence.

81. UK WWI Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914–1923, 049/0185; 2/MC/4494; 004/0011.
82. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 5.