

Preface

Historians have found that as many as one in every six British country houses is connected to the history of empire.¹ Charlecote Park in Warwickshire is no exception. Ten children from Colmore Primary in Birmingham explored this National Trust house with volunteer guide and researcher Ruth Longoni and the writer Sarala Estruch.

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

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

Pawlett was obliged to join his regiment in India at the beginning of that feared mutiny...He kindly brought me five pearls, they

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

² *Whose Story?* Unpublished research paper.

were part of the loot taken at Lucknow. I have had them set in two rings.

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

The third item is a miniature of Tipu Sultan (1749-99), the Sultan of Mysore who was killed at Seringapatam while fighting East India Company troops. Tipu Sultan was a far-sighted leader who developed farming methods as well as trade with Europe and the Middle East. He improved transport networks too. During his rule, industrial technology was imported from France and used water power to drive industrial development. Tipu Sultan established Mysore’s silk industry using silk worms from China.

British forces were amazed by the treasures in his palace, which was filled with the symbolism of tigers. There was widespread looting, and items from the palace can be seen at Powis Castle.¹

About the Colonial Countryside project

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

100 primary children are visiting 10 National Trust houses to craft fiction and short essays. These will be presented to live, print and digital audiences. The project commissions, resources and publishes

³ *Whose Story?* Unpublished research paper.

new writing. Peepal Tree will publish new books, including an illustrated volume of commissioned writing and historical commentaries. The project takes place between 2018 and 2022. Children will participate in conferences and give public talks. Child advisory boards will reverse-mentor National Trust staff to ensure that British imperial history is fully represented in the organisation's country houses.

Who is involved?

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

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Painting of Captain Lucy by Godfrey Kneller, 1680

Who is the black page wearing a metal collar with the horse?

The Horse

I am a horse. This is not a great animal to be when you are painted on a canvas. To begin with, it was just me and a setting sun behind me. Gradually my artist progressed and other objects appeared. A red curtain, for instance, and a turquoise carpet. Eventually a grand head appeared. I recognised him as the owner of the house. He had been in the Dutch War and fought bravely. Slowly his body produced a fine brown coat and a luxurious hat. With him came an enslaved boy. His metal collar glinted in the light. Wouldn't that collar hurt? I wondered why he wasn't fully showing. Maybe the artist thought that I, a black majestic war horse, was far more important than an enslaved boy. Why was he treated so badly? I scanned the entrance hall and saw all the riches there. And I thought "what is the point in being rich when you treat people badly?"

Theo

Curiosity of the country

I stood still trying to hold the horse, my master in front of me, looking towards the painter. I wondered what was happening but I did not ask. My master was cruel and most likely would not answer, or tighten the metal collar round my neck, stating my name and where I came from. The family had me dressed in finery, a dark blue coat and orange tights.

Charlecote was a beautiful place, with its many bedrooms and long winding staircases, but despite its beauty life was not enjoyable. I was treated like a thing not a person. It began when the English came to my town. My family had no choice but to send me away. I was packed onto a ship with other children my age. In England the sky was grey and cold, like the life I was given.

My master signalled for me to leave. I took the horse and went back to the stalls.

Esmee Kerbrat-Pringle

The Colonial Conundrum

My name is Hugh, now. I'm Jamaican-born and I work as a page for Sir Thomas Lucy. I was taken from my home just as my dad was teaching me to play the drum. I didn't ask what was going on because a man appeared with a whip. It was a petrifying moment.

Now, in Charlecote, the temperature is low. I'm frozen. When I arrived at the beautiful house I was set to work in the stables. Captain Lucy was really happy with my work. As a reward, I was painted into his picture. I am a mystery to some. An inspiration to others. But I miss the beating of that drum.

Tom

Miniature of Tipu Sultan (1749-99)

Who was he, and why did the family have his picture in the house?

Tipu Sultan

Tipu Sultan was a man of great knowledge. He lived in a huge palace with lots of gold and jewellery. He was a very rich man. He had a supply of valuable things.

Tipu Sultan developed many factories. He was about to make more roads, too, when he was killed by the English whilst fighting at to take back his city of Seringapatam.

Tipu Sultan had black eyes with long eyebrows and a curved moustache. He wore an orange, tiger-like turban on his head. He once said that he would rather live a day as a tiger than a lifetime as a sheep. His palace had lots of artwork inspired by majestic tigers.

Rafael

Tipu Sultan

I have fought for my country's liberty. I was named the Tiger of Mysore. My immense palace was adorned with orange, black and white. I planned for India's future, making silk and brick factories. I tried hard to make successful trade routes with the outside world. I set up the famous silk trade with China. Even though I was rich and dressed splendidly, I wanted the best for my country and spent not on myself but what others needed. I fought tirelessly for my country, led armies against the East India Company. The British came to conquer quickly. But their plans were soon delayed. Their armies battled against mighty warriors and less talented fighters. The battlefield was tarnished red with blood from the enemy. I fought as a tiger. My house was filled to the brim with tigers; the lion of my world. I famously said "It is better to live one day as a tiger than your whole life as a sheep".

Unfortunately, 10,000 of my people died. I died. We died fighting for independence.

Xazq

The Indian dress sword

Who stole it? Which battles did it see?

The sword

I am a majestic sword with beautiful turquoise gems and a unique, silver grip. I always think people are interested in my extraordinary and assorted stories that made my journey hasten. I'm placed in a transparent jail, so the public can view me from a distance. However, many decades ago, an army corporal smashed my cage and clasped my fragile handle. Delicate as I was, blood drooled from my tip as men fought for life. After being thrashed at the enemy, I was worn out and as dirty as a blood pool. After many days of rest, I was relieved not to be obliterated into miniscule pieces. Now I have a comfortable home.

Ara

Wounded Sword

I'm a beautiful weapon made with turquoise jewels. I felt something move me from where I belong, I was being madly swung around at English soldiers like they had no control of me. Something touched me and I heard a blood-curdling scream. Liquid dripped off my blade. My handle got warmer by the second, until I dropped to the floor with a dash. My diamonds fell off. I woke up and couldn't see a thing, only the outline of a running human.

Without warning I was put in a glass prison so people could view me in England. It felt like a matter of seconds from bright India to dull England. Will I ever be used again?

Suhaib

The Stolen Sword

I come from a faraway country where I've been tarnished with blood. I have been placed in a glass case, put on show, where people can look at my majestic turquoise and intricate silver patterns. I've fought in battles and someone unknown has transported me to an unfamiliar place. On the journey to Britain I felt the chill, tried to fight back the wind. I heard the loud splashes of whales below me and the forceful waves crashing into the sides of the deck. I lost some of my garnets, which gently sank to the velvet sea floor.

Lana

The Battle

It was all dark once. Then I was revealed.

We charged into battle slashing at victims, gleaming like diamonds in a field of disaster. I waited and listened to the petrified whispering of the soldiers as they staggered on. We were almost done fighting for our country's independence. I was thrown about. Blood dripped mercilessly off my tip. Just as I thought we were winning, I heard a cry of pain. I fell to the floor. Alone. Bodies grew on the bloody battlefield as the devastated survivors longed for their lost ones.

Without warning, a clammy palm ripped me off a belt and stuffed me into a musty bag with some other ornaments. Crimson blood oozed from my scabbard and congealed onto my garnet armour.

Halima

Majestic Sword

The sword of wonders and jewels was stolen in 1857, the same year that the beloved Nana Sahib fought. No-one knows where I was stolen or why I was stolen in the first war of Indian independence. I'm made of turquoise with small pieces of ruby and lapis lazuli. Snatching, rustling, jumping. I was smuggled across the sea. The stares I received on the long, menacing ship! I travelled many seas, many wars. It's unknown who stole me. It's presumed to be an English soldier. I'm known, though, for my beauty and my glistening jewels. After weeks, or even months, of travelling we arrived at a port. I was taken on a horse and set off to Charlecote Park. Once we arrived I was preserved in a glass case for hundreds of years. Thousands stare at me through the glass.

Sam

The Sword

Finally, at last, I feel properly for the first time. Beneath me is a roughly hewn surface, probably the blacksmith's table on which I was made. I hear a gasp, a low whistle of admiration. I'm guessing that my sleek blade was not an easy task.

Without warning the ground underneath me seems to disintegrate and I hear a shrill scrape, feel a clumsy bump along my spine. Everything is dark. Suddenly I realise that I have been sheathed in my twin-shaped scabbard. The reality of where I am going fills me with a fiery pride, like a captain into battle. Now I can do what I was made for. Now I can fight for glory and my master's freedom.

Waking unexpectedly, harsher sounds surround me. I hear explosions, and the desperate scratching of a dying man, dragging a blade down a metal wall as he is cruelly beaten. I am flung into blazing sunlight and utter devastation meets my eyes. Piles of bodies. A carpet of blood. Yet still, the courageous soldiers battle onwards for their cause. Speeding swiftly through the humid atmosphere, my steel blade connects with something warm and sticky. I am drawn jerkily from the treacle-like substance. Blood. British blood. More enraged than I have ever been before, I twitch angrily in my holder's hand. But it isn't there.

Maria

The Sword

I was awoken by the shout of a human and there were people all around me. Angry people. They were shouting. I was taken by a tall Englishman. This tragic battle lasted for hours and hours until I was snatched and shipped to England. The climate was better than India but it was very cold and I shivered. My master was covered in blood. Again I was taken, this time to a place which looked like a small castle. I felt happier here than being in the middle of all the destruction in India. I was taken to a room and placed in a glass cage. After this day, hundreds of people came to see me. I am famous. People like me because I am made of silver with turquoise jewels.

Haider

Myrtilla

St Lawrence Church Oxhill, 1705

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

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

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

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

Your tomb cold-shoulders the family plot

Myrtilla

Black Girl

Negro Slave

Lichens grow. Earth breathes. Grasses weave.

How to get involved with the Colonial Countryside project

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

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

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

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

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

Journalists: cover our project on your show.

Contact and digital platforms:

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