

## Mrs Carmichael: A Scotswoman in the West Indies, 1820-1826

Karina Williamson

The importance of Scotland in the development of the British West Indian colonies is now widely recognised, thanks to the work of historians and demographers in the thirty years since Richard Sheridan published his seminal paper on 'The Role of the Scots in the Economy and Society of the West Indies'.<sup>[1]</sup> The broad picture which emerges from these three decades of historical study of Scottish emigration and settlement in the Caribbean in the eighteenth to early nineteenth century may be summarised as follows. The overwhelming majority of Scottish emigrants were young, white, single, and male. They did not intend to settle permanently in the Caribbean, but aimed to make enough money to enable them return to a better life in Britain, though not necessarily in Scotland: hence the label 'sojourners', which is used by Alan Karras for Scottish migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake,<sup>[2]</sup> is now applied to Scots in the Caribbean generally. While preserving strong emotional and often financial links with their home areas, they adopted for expediency a British rather than Scottish identity. 'To succeed in the empire, and to make their way in England on their return, Scots had to be British'.<sup>[3]</sup> Nevertheless, supportive networks of Scots, linked by kinship and business ties, developed throughout the Caribbean; in addition to their economic or commercial function these networks served as 'ethnic anchors', making up for the lack of support from Scottish churches, charitable societies, or other ethnic associations, in the West Indies in the eighteenth century.<sup>[4]</sup>

Many aspects of the social and domestic life of Scottish planters, merchants, doctors, public officials and other residents in the pre-emancipation period emerge as by-products of historical studies, but a domestic history of Scots in the Caribbean has yet to be attempted. As Angela McCarthy remarks of Scottish migration generally: 'by and large the experiences of those involved in the processes of relocation and settlement have been astonishingly neglected'.<sup>[5]</sup> Identities, as Douglas Hamilton rightly points out, 'are complex things: they are constructed, imagined, multilayered and, often, refashioned by circumstances. For Scots in the Caribbean, this was certainly true.'<sup>[6]</sup> Yet the criteria used in identifying men and women in the Caribbean as

'Scots' are seldom if ever discussed, while even the basic sociological distinction between *nominal* (attributed) and *virtual* (experienced) social identity has been ignored.

Whether a 'domestic history' would be either feasible or worthwhile is arguable. The working life of a migrant from Scotland in the sugar colonies may not have been significantly different from that of English, Irish or Welsh migrants. Nevertheless, the abundance of literary evidence available, in the shape of first-hand accounts of the West Indian colonies written by Scots – factual and fictional, in prose and in verse – suggests that an approach from a textual, anecdotal, biographical angle might throw fresh light on, or at least raise different questions about, the personal lives as well as the social identities of Scots in the Caribbean.<sup>[7]</sup> For example, to what extent (if at all) did Scots in the West Indies actively seek to maintain the domestic or social customs and practices of their homeland? Did they hope, or were they fearful, that their Scottish identity would be apparent to others? Does their experience show the submergence of Scottish identity under the hegemony of 'English culture'? Or (reversing the binaries) did the disproportionately high number of Scots resident in the Caribbean from the seventeenth century onwards produce a discernibly Scottish-inflected culture generally?

A start has already been made in the use of literary texts for research in this field by Giovanni Covi, Joan Anim-Addo, Velma Pollard, and Carla Sassi in *Caribbean-Scottish Relations: Colonial and Contemporary Inscriptions in History, Language and Literature* (2007).<sup>[8]</sup> Their essays provide a stimulating approach to the kinds of question I have posed, but the texts they draw on (mainly narrative fiction, drama and poetry) are 'literary' by a stricter definition than I am employing here. Meanwhile historians themselves have quarried the writings (published and unpublished) of Scottish migrants and settlers as sources of evidence supplementary to or illustrative of broader economic, social or cultural patterns. My contention is that a 'literary' approach, subjecting text and context to individual scrutiny, may paradoxically yield 'historical' rewards, by exposing the variety and complexity of self-representations and social identities of Scots in the Caribbean. For by no means all of them chose to claim a 'British' identity. The spectrum, as *represented in the texts*, is wide. At one extreme, ethnic identity may be narrowed down to Highland clanship, as exemplified by the Gaelic-speaking attorney in the anonymous novel *Marly* (1828).<sup>[9]</sup> At the opposite end come Scottish writers such as R.C. Dallas who identify themselves as 'English'. Dallas, the author of two works on West Indian subjects,<sup>[10]</sup> was a descendant of the Deputy-Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland, spent his early boyhood on his father's estate in Jamaica, was sent to a school in London run by a Scotsman, and inherited the Jamaican estate at the age of fifteen.

Among other Scottish authors, James Grainger, Charles Leslie, Janet Schaw, John Stewart, and Mrs Carmichael herself are relatively well known to historians, but there is a list of others who

have seldom or never been consulted by scholars concerned with Scottish-Caribbean relations. They include, for example, James M. Adair, a physician and judge in Antigua, who, in *Unanswerable Arguments against the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, attacks another writer for maligning Scots in the West Indies; Hector Macneill, who published recollections of his life as a merchant in St. Kitts under the guise of fictitious memoirs; Philip Barrington Ainslie, whose *Reminiscences of a Scottish Gentleman* (published under the pseudonym of 'Philo Scotus') contain an extended account of his attempt to become a planter in Jamaica; and Robert Renny, whose *History of Jamaica* draws on personal observation.<sup>[11]</sup> Renny's book supplies an example of the kind of clues to (virtual) identity which texts may offer. No biographical information about the author seems to exist outside his work, and he does not identify himself as a Scot until the end, where he appends a copy of a letter sent by himself from Jamaica to a friend. In it he criticises Jamaican slave society, contrasting it to 'my native land' and quoting a few lines to similar effect from 'a Caledonian poet' (James Beattie). The letter is followed by his own sixteen-line panegyric to Scotland:

Hail, SCOTIA! lovely land! my parent-soil!  
Dearest, though bleakest, half of this bless'd isle!  
More dear to me, thy heath on moss-grown hills,  
Than all the golden ore of Indian rills;  
Thy thatch-clad cots, and homely, healthful fare,  
Than Indian palaces, and all the luxuries there; [...]  
There, man, a slave, oft trembles at the rod,  
Here, men are free, and know, they're sons of God!<sup>[12]</sup>

It is perhaps no coincidence that these lines appeared in 1807, centenary of the Act of Union.

Published accounts cannot be treated as representative of Scottish life in the Caribbean generally, since the social spectrum they reflect is too narrow. The experiences and opinions of Scottish artisans, for example, who formed a high proportion of the white underclass in West Indian society, alongside non-commissioned soldiers, seamen, and others, seldom got into print. A rare exception is Charles Campbell, whose lively narrative (written while he was in prison) of his adventures in the West Indies as a merchant seaman, and briefly as an overseer, has survived because of its interest to students of legal history.<sup>[13]</sup> Campbell relates that he received excellent schooling in Renfrewshire as a young boy but was mainly self-educated, through avid reading and discussion with a group of like-minded 'artisans and mechanics', while earning his living as a cotton-spinner.

Detailed study of all these texts and their contexts would provide a fuller, more nuanced picture of Scottish-Caribbean experience and Scottish identities in the West Indian colonies in the pre-emancipation period than we now possess. The rest of this essay is offered as a speculative case-study of one writer, Mrs Carmichael: not intended to represent her as typical of her nation, class, race or gender, but attempting to discover what kinds of evidence a 'literary' reading may yield.

## I

Mrs Carmichael was the author of two works depicting life in the West Indies: *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833), and a novel, *Tales of a Grandmother* (1841).<sup>[14]</sup> It is apparent from both that she belonged to the upper end of the social spectrum of Scots in the Caribbean. She was evidently a gentlewoman, well educated, even studious, highly class-conscious, and confident to the point of dogmatism of the soundness and rectitude of her opinions. These include a firm belief in the just and humane conduct of plantation owners and managers and a low estimate of the character, morals and intelligence of 'negroes'.

*Domestic Manners* provides detailed if unsystematic descriptions of plantation life in St Vincent and Trinidad, the landscape, architecture, religious institutions, and administration of the islands, as well as the author's perception of the customs and manners of the black, white and coloured peoples. Her prime concern, freely expressed, is to combat what she regards as the false and erroneous picture given by abolitionist writers and politicians of the treatment of slaves in the West Indian colonies, and to show from personal experience the 'true' practices and motives of plantation-owners ('no class of men on earth more calumniated', 1.16). She repeatedly guarantees the authenticity of her facts by assurances that they are grounded on direct observation, insisting that 'I shall not attempt to describe any thing as fact to which I have not been an eye witness' (2.323). This self-imposed embargo is frequently breached, however, by the admission of 'facts' gathered from hearsay. For instance, writing of the gender ratio of imported slaves during the slave-trade, she says, 'I took some pains to inquire into this matter.[...] I was informed, by several gentlemen who could recollect the scenes which then took place, that males greatly predominated. This is one important fact' (2.19). Carmichael would have been dismayed to learn of her reputation in the post-emancipation period as a factual reporter. When an English traveller, Charles Day, was in the West Indies in 1846-50 he tried to get hold of a copy of *Domestic Manners*, having previously read 'Mrs. Carmichael's excellent book' in England and wanting to read it 'on the spot' in order to check its accuracy. He was surprised to discover, wherever he went, that the author was 'grossly and unjustly' vilified:

Throughout the islands that I have as yet visited, she is denounced continually by some mendacious epithet or other, and even her own relations, both in Trinidad and in St. Vincent, disclaim connection with her, asserting that she was notorious in her own family for habitually not speaking the truth. Whenever I endeavoured to borrow her book, some excuse was made to prevent my seeing it—‘It was mislaid,’ or ‘lost,’ or ‘destroyed,’ and never forthcoming.[...] At last I obtained a loan of it from a *nearly* white young man, who, however, did not fail to caution me that it was ‘full of lies.’<sup>[15]</sup>

Since Day himself fully shared Mrs Carmichael’s racist opinions it is not surprising that, apart from ‘a few trifling inaccuracies’, he found the book to be truthful: but ‘the truth did not suit the views of the political parties at home, whilst the coloured races, with their wretched vanity, are furious that people at home should have an idea of the truth.’ Noting that the book had been published nearly twenty years earlier, he adds: ‘it is wonderful how little the character of the black and coloured people has changed.’<sup>[16]</sup> Mrs Carmichael’s views are not associated by Day with her Scottish background (if he was even aware of it), nor can they be so related. Well educated though she appears to be, her writing reflects no familiarity with Scottish Enlightenment ideas on either race or slavery.

A sketchy time-scheme of Mrs Carmichael’s residence in the West Indies can be constructed from references in the text. She arrived on 31 December 1820: ‘I beheld the West Indies for the first time when, at sun-rise, on the last day of December 1820, we anchored in the lovely bay of Calliaqua, in the island of St. Vincent.’ ‘We’ evidently included her husband, two children, and perhaps others, for she notes that they were unable to get hold of horses that day ‘for so large a party as ours’, and so stayed on board (1.3).<sup>[17]</sup> There ‘we were speedily visited by several of our own people’ (enslaved workers from the estate) who ‘seemed overjoyed to see their own master, telling him that if he had not come they could not have lived much longer’ (1.5). The Carmichaels stayed ‘nearly three years in St. Vincent’ (2.19), before moving to Laurel Hill estate in Trinidad for a further period, adding up to ‘five years and six months altogether’ in the West Indies (2.37). At the end of that time the family returned to England, not Scotland (1.193-4).

Scattered throughout the text are hints of the author’s residence before and after she lived in the West Indies. To support a comparison between the living conditions of ‘the labouring classes in Britain’ and the ‘superior comforts hitherto enjoyed by the slaves’ she explains that before going abroad she ‘had lived a good deal in the country, and was pretty accurately acquainted with the comforts enjoyed by ploughmen and their families, in counties nearly adjoining Edinburgh, and also by the lower classes in that city’ (1.193). Later she is more specific about her familiarity with the ‘lower orders’ in Britain (‘I have seen country servants in the county of Mid Lothian’, 1.255-6),

and in order to prove her familiarity with the 'habits and mode of life' of the 'working classes and labourers' of Scotland she refers again to 'living, as I had done in my early years, very much in the country – in the counties of Mid Lothian and Fife' (2.162-3). The most open reference comes when she is pleased to discover that the stone used for building the handsome gaol in Port of Spain came from 'my father's quarry in Callilou in Fifeshire' (2.70). References to places in England and the south are equally frequent, however. From these it appears that by 1833 she had lived in or at least visited places in Worcestershire, Dorset, Devonshire, 'the West of England', and the Channel Islands.

Who, then, was 'Mrs Carmichael'? Until very recently, she was a shadowy figure, of whom nothing was known beyond what could be gathered from her books. The fortunate discovery recently of a letter from the Scottish travel writer, Henry David Inglis, to the London publishers of *Domestic Manners*, enables us to identify her as a Scotswoman from an aristocratic family. Inglis writes from Jersey on 5 August 1833 to advise the publishers on ways in which sales of *Domestic Manners* might be increased. He suggests the following statements for use as promotion material:

Mrs. Carmichaels book, on the domestic manners, & state of society in the West Indies, is not merely a well turned book, politically; its sketches of manners and character are most novel & interesting to all classes of readers; and certainly the Public is as much indebted to Mrs Carmichael for her "Domestic Manners of the West Indies", as to her brother for his "Three Years in North America".

Much as we have all heard of the West Indies, little or nothing has been told the Public till now, of the State of society in these Colonies. Mrs Carmichaels work on the domestic manners of the population of the West Indies supplies this desideratum; & adds, to important & grave details, a world of amusing and interesting minutiae respecting the many coloured classes of our colonial population.<sup>[18]</sup>

The author of *Three Years in North America*, which was published in Edinburgh in 1833 (the same year as Carmichael's *Domestic Manners*), was James Stuart of Dunearn, in Fife, better known in his time for his trial and acquittal for the murder of Sir Alexander Boswell, whom he killed in a duel.<sup>[19]</sup> Through him Mrs Carmichael can be identified as Alison Charles Stewart (so spelt in the Edinburgh parish register), daughter of Dr Charles Stewart and Mary Erskine Stewart. She married John Wilson Carmichael in Edinburgh in 1815, lived until 1885,<sup>[20]</sup> and must therefore have been born sometime in the 1790s. Her father, owner of the prosperous Cullalo quarry, near Aberdour in Fife, was a younger son of the fourth earl of Moray; on her mother's side she was a granddaughter of Dr John Erskine of Edinburgh, an eminent Church of Scotland

minister and author. By 1820, when Alison Carmichael went out to the West Indies, parish registers show that she had two small daughters: Mary Erskine and Alison Johanna, both born in Edinburgh, in November 1816 and April 1819 respectively. They are mentioned several times, though not by name, in *Domestic Manners*. From other biographical clues in *Domestic Manners* and external sources it is evident that after her return from Trinidad, Alison Carmichael spent the remainder of her long life as an expatriate Scot in England or the Channel Islands.

Comparison of *Domestic Manners* with James Stuart's *Three Years in North America* indicates that Carmichael's opinions on slavery were not the product of her upbringing, for her robust support of the practice of plantation owners and overseers in the West Indian colonies stands in stark contrast to her brother's condemnation of the treatment of slaves on plantations in the southern states of America. The contrast is revealing in another way too. Where Stuart criticises American practices from the standpoint of an outside observer, Carmichael claims the privilege of her position within West Indian slave society as guarantee of the authority of her views on slave-owners and the enslaved. Such 'insider' claims are common in writings of this period,<sup>[21]</sup> and were used by authors on either side of the abolition debate. The interest to Caribbean scholars of personal accounts of West Indian 'domestic manners', however, is dependent on their descriptive and anecdotal value, not on the social or moral opinions they support, although those must be taken into account in assessing the trustworthiness of the author's perceptions. Carmichael herself is highly selective in her reportage, failing to 'see' aspects of society which would contradict her view of the benevolence of plantation-owners, as Ragatz points out,<sup>[22]</sup> and she is an unreliable *interpreter* of some of the things she does see. Nevertheless she is an acute observer of the behaviour of all classes, and her lively, individualised descriptions of enslaved children on the plantations in particular are unparalleled in Caribbean writings. In addition, she had a keen ear for the speech habits of the 'negroes', and took pains to reproduce their words and comments accurately.

Facts about Alison Carmichael's husband, John Wilson Carmichael, are harder to establish. His connection, if any, with the Clan Carmichael in Lanarkshire remains unknown, and although coincidence of names suggests that he was related to the painter, John Wilson Carmichael (1799-1868), I have not managed to trace any link.<sup>[23]</sup> From references in *Domestic Manners* it can be inferred that John Carmichael was considerably older than Alison, that he had two daughters from a previous marriage, <sup>[24]</sup> and that he was serving in Trinidad as a lieutenant in the 53rd regiment at the time when the Spanish governor capitulated in 1797.

External sources confirm and expand these references. St. Vincent's genealogical website shows that Carmichael died in 1850 at the age of seventy-five, and thus must have been born in 1775/6. In 1797 he married Margaret Ann Falside (in St George's Anglican Cathedral, St Vincent), who

died in London in 1814.<sup>[25]</sup> Baptisms of a son, Stephen (1799), and a daughter, Margaretta Jane (1807), are recorded in St Vincent. An elder daughter, Isabella Anne, was born in about 1801. Also recorded is Margaretta's marriage in St Vincent in 1821 to Pemberton Hobson, later attorney-general of St. Vincent, a fact which is mentioned with perceptible pride in *Domestic Manners* (2.40). Isabella, too, married well: her husband, Charles Warner, became Solicitor-General for Trinidad in 1840 and a leading figure in the colony, though she herself did not live to enjoy his years of eminence, dying in London in 1841.<sup>[26]</sup> The Warners were one of the most powerful families in Trinidad: this distinguished connection features in *Domestic Manners* when, after arriving in Trinidad in 1823, the Carmichaels stay for some time at Belmont, the residence of the Chief Justice, who at that time would have been Ashton Warner, an older member of the Warner family.<sup>[27]</sup> Alison Carmichael explains that she had formerly known Mrs Warner in Edinburgh (2.50). From all this we get a picture of white creole dynasty-building, which challenges the standard image of Scottish 'sojourners' but was certainly not unique: Philip Barrington Ainslie's reminiscences show the existence in Jamaica of a similar cluster of successful Scots related by blood or marriage.

John Carmichael's army career is somewhat thinly documented. He was commissioned as Ensign in the 53rd Regt. in 1794 and promoted to Lieutenant in 1795. The 53rd Regiment of Foot (also named the Shropshire Regiment from 1782) served in St Lucia, Trinidad and St Vincent from 1795 to 1805. Carmichael was wounded during the action at Morne Chabot in St. Lucia in 1796, and apparently returned to Britain with the regiment in 1805. Later references show that he attained the rank of captain, but the date at which he left the army is obscure.<sup>[28]</sup>

Information about Carmichael's other activities in St. Vincent can be recovered from other sources. He appears to have returned to the island by May 1807, when his second daughter was born. He may have bought an estate at that time, or was perhaps managing one belonging to his wife's family: 'John W. Carmichael' is on record as debtor to Philip Monoux Lucas, Esq. in St Vincent on 1 July 1810, to the tune of £733.11s.7d.<sup>[29]</sup> He and his first wife must still have been in St Vincent two years later, for according to *Domestic Manners* their elder daughter had witnessed as a child 'the awful irruption of the volcano [La Souffrière] in 1812' (2.37-8). By 24 June 1813 the debt to Lucas appears to have been discharged, probably in readiness for the family's return to Britain where, as we've seen, Margaret died in 1814.

In 1817, according to official returns, Carmichael was registered as possessor of an estate called Mousebank in St George's parish, St Vincent, formerly the property of Lady Bolton. The return was submitted by Thomas Abbott, suggesting that Carmichael was an absentee owner at that stage,<sup>[30]</sup> which is consistent with other evidence indicating that he returned to Britain in 1812/13. Mousebank was presumably the estate to which Alison Carmichael migrated in 1820. It occupied



about 250 acres and in 1817 had an enslaved population of ninety-three, all but one of whom are classified as 'negro'. Sixty-five are listed as 'labourer' (thirteen of them aged between eight and twelve years); of the remainder, other than infants or a few designated as 'invalid', eleven were listed by trade (carpenters, masons, a cooper and a midwife), only two are designated as 'domestic' (house servants): seventeen-year-old Will and thirteen-year-old Betsy, the sole 'mulatto' in the list.

Nothing in John Carmichael's documented history reveals that he was Scottish, but Alison Carmichael refers to him as such in the one unambiguous reference to her own nominal identity to be found in *Domestic Manners*. It occurs in the course of a conversation quoted to show the opinion of Scots held by the enslaved. 'Generally speaking,' she asserts, 'negroes do not regard England and Scotland in the same light': the reason, she suggests, is that 'Scotchmen are more generally strict, and are proverbially active and economical, [...] and perhaps there are not two qualities which the majority of negroes dislike more thoroughly.' She cites an occasion when she sent a house-servant to Kingstown harbour in St Vincent to inquire about passengers on board a newly-arrived ship:

he returned saying, there was no one except one Buckra man. "And who is he?" "Me no know—me no tink it worth while to ask he name; he one Cotchman." "And why is it not worth while to ask a Scotchman's name?" "Cause they all mean, hold-purse fellows; dey go so," said he, walking some paces, holding down his head, and with a slouching gait; "dey go mean—me no like dem." Yet B. was addressing himself to his master and mistress, both Scotch; a tolerably good proof, that negro domestics speak with little restraint what they really think. (1.321-2)

Interestingly, Carmichael does not protest, or even imply, that B's description of Scots as 'mean' is false, since she herself labels them, with apparent complacency, as 'economical'. It is only noteworthy that a black servant should dare to speak derogatively of Scotsmen in front of his Scottish master and mistress.

Apart from this seemingly fortuitous moment of self-identification, Carmichael's authorial position is normally unlocalised. She adopts the common strategy of travel writers in describing foreign places, manners or things by analogy with those familiar to readers at home. Her referents in such comparisons are normally 'English', 'British', or 'European', less often 'Scottish'; for economic comparisons (of prices, kinds of produce, and so on) the referents are English throughout. Since *Domestic Manners* was published in London, this may well have been a deliberate policy, designed to ensure the marketability of the book in England. But in comparisons

of places, scenery, buildings or natural history, Carmichael chooses examples from England or Scotland almost indiscriminately. A ford on a river in Trinidad is compared with 'the river Teme, at the village of Bransford, in Worcestershire' (2.110), and 'negro houses' on Laurel-Hill estate are said to be 'very similar in external appearance to cottages in Devonshire' (2.116). On the other hand, the landscape of Laurel-Hill generally is described as resembling 'some of the lovely wild scenery of Hawthorn-den, near the village of Roslyn, in Scotland' (2.117), while Port of Spain is said to be 'as regularly built as the new town of Edinburgh' (2.49). In a variation of this analogical method, Carmichael takes her example not from nature but from its representation in art. Seeking to convey the beauty of the Gulf of Paria, she writes: 'those who have ever looked at the print of Loch Lomond, in Dr. Garnett's tour through Scotland, may form some idea of the *toute ensemble* in miniature of the Gulf of Paria' (2.48). By focusing on Loch Lomond as viewed through the lens of a well known English travel book<sup>[31]</sup> Carmichael places Scottish landscape within the frame of a generalised British aesthetics, without laying claim to a specifically Scottish understanding of it.

Other references are less impersonal. Noting for example the disappointing lack of 'melodious song' from birds in the West Indies, she exclaims 'how one's heart would have bounded, could one have heard the note of a blackbird, or a sweet Scotch mavis' (2.122), and on seeing huge quantities of limes lying ungathered on an estate in Trinidad, she 'could not help thinking what the good folks of Glasgow' would have thought if they had seen the waste of fruits which they would have cherished for making 'their favourite punch' (2.111). Again, during a description of cane-processing, she comments that 'the boiling-house, after regular work was over, reminded me of a blacksmith's shop in a Scotch village, where all the gossip of the day was sure to be retailed.' (2.264).

## II

The clues to Carmichael's social identity from documentary and literary evidence so far seem to aggregate to confirm Douglas Hamilton's observation that Scots in the Caribbean developed a 'flexible and multi-layered' notion of identity. A more complicated impression emerges from Carmichael's second book. If, as seems probable, the title of her first was suggested by Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (published a year earlier, by the same publisher), the title of the second may have been suggested by Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828), although it bears no other resemblance to his phenomenally successful work. *Tales of a Grandmother* is a moral and didactic novel, seemingly aimed at a younger audience, in which the lives and experiences of the Carmichaels are refashioned in the shape of a fictional autobiography. The only contemporary notice of the book I have traced is a backhanded compliment printed as an advertisement for the book in 1845:

"This work has decided claims from its own merits, and from being highly approved and warmly recommended by Miss Edgeworth. There is in this little volume more knowledge conveyed than usually is spread over those of the same size and pretensions. A better work for the purposes of school prizes is not perhaps extant." *Naval and Military Gazette*.[\[32\]](#)

The narrator (never named) recounts to her grandchildren the story of her life down to the age of twenty: her early years in Edinburgh living with her mother, younger sister, and brother, while her father is 'on the continent with his regiment, which soon after was sent to the West Indies'(2), their migration to the West Indies, nine years' residence on a plantation in St Vincent, and eventual resettlement in England. The narrative is regularly interrupted by detailed accounts of the natural history of the West Indies, and by lectures on the value and importance of a good education (for girls as well as boys), precepts which are reinforced by the story itself. The plot is manifestly designed to provide a model of good practice for plantation owners, emphasising the virtues of honesty, uprightness, justice, industry, thrift and self-reliance, as practised and taught by the narrator's parents and emulated by the children. The family's conduct in running their estate and managing their 'negroes' is contrasted with that of their profligate English neighbours, 'Mr. Harris' and his family. Similarly, the story contains specimens of good and bad lawyers and merchants, both in St Vincent and in their role as West Indian agents in London. Good and bad families alike suffer dire economic catastrophes in the course of the plot: the former through lack of business experience and naïve trust in the honesty of others, the latter as a result of their own vices and failings. The final moral is that poverty and misfortune, accompanied by a clear conscience and trust in God, is better than worldly success achieved through greed, selfishness and dishonesty.

The autobiographical frame of *Tales of a Grandmother*, the link by authorial name with Carmichael's earlier work, the location of the narrative on a plantation in St Vincent, and the manifold similarities between the fictitious family and the Carmichaels' plantation life as it is depicted in *Domestic Manners*, all invite a biographical reading of the text. But chronology and family relationships make a straightforward mapping of the 'real' Carmichaels on to the family at the centre of the novel impossible. The author was too young in 1841 to have had grandchildren of the ages given in the novel, and *a fortiori* far too young to be identified with the narrator's mother, whose life in certain other respects resembles what we know of Alison Carmichael's own. What she seems to have done is to graft her own experience at Mousebank on to what she had learnt from John Carmichael of his first marriage and his previous experiences as soldier and planter in the West Indies, adding elements of pure invention to enliven the story and enhance its moral.

This composite narrative is nevertheless interesting as a representation of Scottish-Caribbean experience and subjectivity. The plot involves the purchase of uncleared land on St Vincent and its successful development over a period of nine years into a thriving sugar plantation by the narrator's father, assisted by the thrift, enterprise, and hard work of his wife and children. Douglas Hamilton notes that Scots were prominent among those who settled in the West Indies after the acquisition of the Windward Islands in 1763. In St Vincent especially, 'in 1765, over a third of the allotments [...] were acquired by Scots', and that 'Scots in St Vincent [...] bought more uncleared than cleared land'.<sup>[33]</sup> So far, then, the family conforms almost parodically to the contemporary stereotype of hard-working Scots in the Caribbean. Although the label 'Scottish' or 'Scotch' is never directly applied to their behaviour, other elements in the text reinforce the Scottish image. The most overtly Scottish character in the novel is McIntosh, 'an honest Scotch lad, a carpenter', who (on the father's instructions), is hired by the mother and accompanies her and the children on the voyage out (13). McIntosh plays an important role both in events and in the moral pattern of story, displaying exemplary courage, integrity, loyalty, and commercial enterprise. The routine references to him as 'Scotch' or a 'Scotchman' firmly associates these virtues with Scottish ethnicity.<sup>[34]</sup>

The pattern is not so simple, however. When the narrator's brother is nearly thirteen his father announces his intention to send the boy 'home' to acquire kinds of knowledge which would be 'useful to him as a planter, and for the want of which my father felt great disadvantage', especially 'some general knowledge of law and also of chemistry [...] as well as the study of botany and natural history' (113). The father's stress on practical and scientific knowledge as preparation for a career in the West Indies is consistent with contemporary Scottish ideas. Hector Macneill's *Memoirs* (1800), for example, include a lengthy debate between the hero's Scottish father and the boy's tutor, in which the father insists on the importance of a practical education for a person seeking success in the sugar colonies, while David Dobson's research shows that 'a number of Scottish residents of the West Indies sent their sons back to Scotland to be educated or serve an apprenticeship'.<sup>[35]</sup> The most influential proponent of 'practical education' was also a Scotsman, Dr Andrew Bell (1753-1832), famous in Carmichael's lifetime as creator of the 'Madras system' for the education of children which he developed and put into practice in India, expounded in *An Experiment in Education* (1797), and tirelessly promoted after his return to Britain. Carmichael was clearly a disciple, for in *Domestic Manners* she lays out her own 'plan of negro instruction', based on 'Dr. Bell's system' (2.249-50).<sup>[36]</sup>

In *Tales of a Grandmother*, however, the father has *English* ambitions for his son: he wants him to spend 'some time in a mercantile house in England, to see the way in which West Indian affairs were conducted by English West India merchants' (113). In his thinking he appears thus to match Hamilton's profile of Scots who 'had to be British' in order to 'succeed in the empire and make

their way in England on their return'.<sup>[37]</sup> But the fictitious father is *not* a Scotsman: he is the son of a wealthy but improvident landowner from Northumberland. The narrator relates that her English grandfather was found on his death to have squandered both 'an ample fortune of his own' and 'the greater part of the patrimony, that belonged by right to my father', who at that time was serving in the West Indies as a soldier (like John Carmichael). Deprived of his patrimony, the narrator's father decides to leave the army, buy a property in the West Indies, and settle down on it with his family (10).

The invention of an English father allows the narrator to speak of 'our English blood' (98), and 'good old England' (224), while yet feeling homesick for 'dear Scotland' (36), 'our native country' (108), and finally reflecting, as the family prepares to leave St Vincent, that England will be 'a new country to my sister and myself, for we had only once left Scotland, before sailing for the West Indies' (192). This stratagem enables the author to create a plausible Anglo-Scottish identity for her narrator, yet at the same time to promote the mother's Scottish ethos.

A final example shows a further level of complexity in the process of identity-construction which goes on in this text. The narrator's mother takes the personal care of her three children into her own hands, training them to be independent instead of relying on the help of servants (possibly a reflection of the author's own situation: as already noted, only two house-servants were listed for Mousebank estate in 1817, an economy which the second Mrs Carmichael may have continued to observe). One episode involves the visit of the neighbours' little girl, Elizabeth Harris, who arrives escorted by 'a young negro girl, her usual attendant'. When shown to her bedroom Elizabeth says,

"Hannah can sleep here on the floor." My mother told her she did not like servants sleeping in our room, that we always helped each other, and never required the assistance of any one. Elizabeth was astonished; she had much to learn, for she had never put on her own stockings. (93)

The narrator's mother then shows her how to arrange her hair and manage her wardrobe, and also teaches her 'writing, arithmetic and several other things' (93). This training in self-reliance and useful knowledge leads the narrator to reflect complacently on the difference between her own upbringing and that of other West Indian families: 'we could not help feeling how much we owed to the care of our parents, when we heard every one remark, how unlike we were to children brought up in the West Indies' (100). The distinction made here is not between English and Scottish cultural practices, but between those of white Creoles and of her own Anglo-Scottish family. Thus in her self-positioning as Scottish-bred, English-fathered, and West-Indian-domiciled,

the narrator constructs an even more elaborately layered version of identity, apparently in preference to adopting an amorphous British one (the term 'British' is seldom used in *Tales*).

To conclude: Carmichael's two texts are of value for the study of Scots in the Caribbean because, rather than in spite, of their untypical character. They provide rare insights into the experiences of a Scotswoman who (unlike her better known compatriot, Janet Schaw) was resident in the West Indies in the pre-emancipation era as a mother and householder; the shift from documentary mode in *Domestic Manners* to autobiographical fiction in *Tales of a Grandmother* enables the author to move from a gender-neutral representation of 'domestic manners' to an intimate, gendered account of family life in a West Indian household. Her texts offer a range of perspectives on Scottish identity: her own characterisation of Scots as strict taskmasters; the 'proverbial' thriftiness of Scots, transmuted into meanness from the enslaved man's contemptuous viewpoint; up to the idealised image of 'McIntosh' as a brave, honest, hardworking and loyal Scottish artisan. Finally, at the opposite end of the social scale, Carmichael's references in *Domestic Manners* to the marriages of her step-daughters into powerful West Indian families provide a glimpse of Scottish participation in the recently explored processes of British 'imperial careering'.[\[38\]](#)

## NOTES

[\[1\]](#) *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 292 (1977), 94-106.

[\[2\]](#) Alan L. Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740-1800* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992). Another important source of information on Scottish emigrants in the Caribbean is David Dobson's slightly misleadingly titled *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785* (Athens, GA; University of Georgia Press, 1994).

[\[3\]](#) Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 50.

[\[4\]](#) Hamilton, 49-50: the phrase 'ethnic anchors' was coined by the editors of *Scotland and the Americas, c.1650-c.1939: A Documentary Source Book*, eds. Allan I. Macinnes, Marjory-Ann D. Harper and Linda G. Fryer (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2001), p. 252.

[\[5\]](#) Angela McCarthy, ed., *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), p. 2.

[\[6\]](#) Douglas Hamilton, 'Transatlantic Ties: Scottish Migration Networks in the Caribbean, 1750-1800', in *A Global Clan* (see McCarthy, above), pp. 48-66 (p. 60).

[7] A full investigation would also require study of the abundance of unpublished letters, journals and other private writings of Scots in the West Indies to be found in libraries and archives on both sides of the Atlantic.

[8] *Caribbean-Scottish Relations: Colonial and Contemporary Inscriptions in History, Language and Literature* (London: Mango, 2007).

[9] See *Marly; or, A Planter's Life in Jamaica*, ed. Karina Williamson (Oxford: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 7-9.

[10] (1) *A Short Journey in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: n.p., 1790): published anonymously, but Dallas's authorship was established by Michael Ashcroft, in 'Robert Charles Dallas', *Jamaica Journal* 44 (1980), 94–101. (2) *The History of the Maroons, from their origin to the establishment of their chief tribe at Sierra Leone*, 2 vols. (London: T. Longman and O. Rees, 1803).

[11] James M. Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments against the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: J.P. Bateman, 1790); [Hector Macneill], *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of the late Charles Macpherson, Esq. ... with a particular investigation of the nature, treatment, and possible improvement, of the negro in the British and French West India islands* (Edinburgh: Arch. Constable, 1800); Philo Scotus [Philip Barrington Ainslie], *Reminiscences of a Scottish Gentleman, Commencing in 1787* (London: A. Hall, Virtue, 1861); Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica: with observations on the climate, scenery, ... customs, manners, and dispositions of the inhabitants* (London: J. Cawthorn, 1807).

[12] Renny, 333. The lines are said to be part of an unfinished poem.

[13] *Memoirs of Charles Campbell, at present prisoner in the jail of Glasgow. Including his adventures as a seaman, and as an overseer in the West Indies. Written by himself. To which is appended, an account of his trial* (Glasgow: James Duncan & Co., 1828). In Edinburgh, the only copy of this rare work belongs to the Advocates Library. There are copies also in Glasgow University Library and the British Library.

[14] *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies. By Mrs. Carmichael, Five years a resident in St. Vincent and Trinidad*. 2 vols. (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co., 1833); *Tales of a Grandmother. By Mrs. A.C. Carmichael* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841). Page references to quotations from these editions are supplied in brackets in the text.

[15] Charles William Day, *Five Years' Residence in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: Colburn and Co., 1852), I, p. 129.

[16] Day, II, p. 130.

[17] In *Tales of a Grandmother*, the family travel out with a nanny, servants, and a Scottish carpenter.

[18] Letter to Mr. How, Messrs. Whittaker & Co., 5 August 1833. MSS collections, National Library of Scotland (not yet catalogued). 'Mr James Stuart' is inserted in pencil in the margin opposite

'her brother'. The letter was sent from Jersey, where Mrs Carmichael herself was probably living: according to the genealogical source quoted in note 25 below, her husband died in Jersey in 1750, and her stepdaughter was married in St Helier's in 1839. She shows her familiarity with the Channel Islands earlier still when she compares the fish market in Trinidad to that of 'Peters Port, in the island of Guernsey' (*Domestic Manners*, II, p. 59). I am greatly indebted to Gemma Robinson for drawing my attention to the letter from Inglis. I am grateful also to Michael S. Moss for information about the Stuart family.

[19] See Michael S. Moss, *ODNB*, s.v. Stuart, James.

[20] Register of marriages for the parish of St Cuthbert's; *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, 1899.

[21] See, for example, John Stewart, preface to *An Account of Jamaica, and its Inhabitants* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1823), pp. x-xi.

[22] See L.J. Ragatz, *A Guide for the Study of British Caribbean History, 1763-1834* (Washington: US Govt Printing Office, 1932), p. 221.

[23] Although the painter was the son of a shipwright from Tyneside, according to his modern biographer his grandfather was Lord Carmichael, of the Scottish earldom of Hyndford: see Diana Villar, *John Wilson Carmichael 1799-1868* (Portsmouth: Carmichael and Sweet, 1995), p. 1.

[24] His daughters are mentioned on a number of occasions as 'my husband's', whereas children of his second marriage are referred to as 'my children'. For reference to Carmichael's army service, see *Domestic Manners*, II, p. 109.

[25] <http://svgancestry.com/index.php/john-wilson-carmichael-soldier-and-planter-in-st-vincent>, accessed 28/02/2008 (hereafter referred to as SVG Ancestry). The date of Margaret's death is erroneously given as '1774' in the text but correctly recorded in the footnotes, citing the *Gentleman's Magazine* 84 (July-Dec 1814), 198.

[26] SVG Ancestry, n.12. For Charles Warner, see Michael Anthony, *Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), pp. 601-3.

[27] I am grateful to Bridget Brereton for this information.

[28] He was still listed in the 53rd in 1800, but not in January 1811, which could mean that he had been posted to another regiment. By 1817 a 'John Carmichael' is listed as captain in the 6th Regt of Dragoon Guards, with army captaincy dating from 1813. The obituary notice for Margaret Carmichael refers to her husband simply as 'J. Wilson Carmichael, esq. of the Island of St. Vincent', which suggests that he had left the army by 1814. I am grateful to Peter Duckers, Curator of the Shropshire Regimental Museum, for help in tracing records of Carmichael's army service.

[29] Cambridge University Library, Add MS 8,369, Lucas family papers. I am greatly indebted to Professor Simon D. Smith for information in this and the following paragraph about John Wilson Carmichael's dealings on St Vincent.



[30] Registration returns, NA: PRO, T71/493.

[31] Thomas Garnett, *Observations on a Tour through the Highlands and Part of the Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1800).

[32] 'Mr. Bentley's New Publications, May, 1845', endpapers of *Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds d'Ewes*, vol. 2 (London, 1845). The *Tales* are reportedly discussed in a letter in the Maria Edgeworth Collection in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, but I have not seen it. Carmichael was an admirer of Edgeworth's own books (see *Domestic Manners*, I, pp. 40 and 250).

[33] Hamilton, *Scotland*, pp. 62-3.

[34] It is significant also that a lawyer with a Scottish name ('Mr. Fraser') is distinguished in the narrative by his honesty and kindness from other agents and attorneys.

[35] Macneill, pp. 18-49; Dobson, p.173.

[36] The strong pragmatic emphasis in the novel generally may reflect the influence of Alison Carmichael's grandfather, the Rev. John Erskine (1721-1803), transmitted through her mother, Mary Erskine Carmichael. Erskine was renowned for his practical Christianity: see Ned C. Landsman's entry in *ODNB*.

[37] Hamilton, *Scotland*, p. 50.

[38] See David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).