Edward Stirling: Embodiment and beneficiary of slave-ownership

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Introduction

Since the University College London’s database of legacies of British slave-ownership became available online in 2013, Edward Stirling (c. 1808–1873) has been identified as a nineteenth-century colonist whose success in Australia was based on family wealth derived from slavery. Following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, Edward’s father Archibald Stirling (1769–1847) received over £12,500 in compensation for his share of 690 slaves working on the Stirlings of Keir’s Jamaican estates. In 1838 Archibald gave Edward £1,000 to fund his emigration from Scotland to South Australia. The transaction appears to exemplify how families relocated their sons and financial capital from the West Indies to new settler colonies to continue to pursue their imperial ambitions in ways that would be ‘unsullied by connections with slavery’.

However, Edward was illegitimate and of African descent, and the latter was apparent in his physical appearance. By funding his Jamaican-born son’s emigration Archibald removed from his life and the vicinity of his heir, who would come of age in 1839, an embodiment of the family’s slave-owning past. Edward was determined to promote his Scottish identity within colonial society, and such was his emphatic financial success that his African heritage, and the compounding ‘saints’ of slavery and illegitimacy, were never publicly acknowledged. Nevertheless, he remained cognisant of his awkward place in the racial order. So too did his oldest son, Edward Charles Stirling (1848–1919), whose motivations in studying human evolution and racial variation remain obscure but add further, intriguing complexity to the family biography. This article is an opportunity to begin exploring the ways in which Edward’s life story and those of several of his mixed-race relatives contribute to both the financial and familial legacies of slave-ownership.

1 I thank Jane Lydon for inviting me to contribute to this special issue, and the anonymous referees for their thought-provoking comments on an earlier draft.
2 ‘Archibald Stirling the younger’, University College London (UCL) Department of History, Legacies of British Slavery database (hereafter LBS database), accessed 10 October 2021, www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/18902. The same access date applies to other online sources referred to in this article.
Oral tradition

Edward Stirling is my great-great-grandfather. The origin story that passed down through generations of descendants is that he was the oldest of many children born to a Creole woman in Jamaica who was the common-law wife of a plantation owner, or ‘planter’, of the Scottish clan Stirling. His father took him to Scotland to be educated, funded him to come to South Australia, and bailed him out when an initial pastoralist venture failed. He went on to make his fortune in pastoralism and mining, and his children consolidated their father’s success. Edward was of a sentimental disposition. People and places that shaped his life were commemorated in family and property names. However, knowledge of the branch of the Stirling clan to which Edward was connected was not received by later generations.⁴ The matter was clarified in 2007 when family historian Jude Skurray learned of a series of letters in the Stirlings of Keir collection held in the Glasgow City Archives. The letters establish the relationship between Edward and Archibald, and both confirm and complicate the oral tradition about Edward’s emigration.

Edward’s mother remains a figure of mystery. ‘Of course, your three-greats grandmother was black,’ my father’s older cousin and designated family archivist Edward Stirling Booth (1911–1997) told me when I was in my 20s. Her status was usually described in terms more palatable to the late Victorian era in which Edward’s origin story was shaped by his children. She was half French or Spanish, her name might have been ‘Jeanne’ or ‘Jeannie’, and she was in a long-term relationship with the planter. The possibilities that she was enslaved, or that she was the daughter of

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⁴ The Portuguese term ‘Creole’ originally referred to the descendants of European colonists who had been born in the colonies. In the West Indies the term came to mean a person of mixed European and African descent, but, unlike other racial classifications, did not signify particular proportions of parentage.

⁵ Edward Stirling Booth (1911–1997) became convinced that Edward was connected to the Kippendavie branch of clan Stirling. That erroneous version of the family tree is recounted in ‘Interview with E. S. Booth’, interviewer Anna Pope, 1995, State Library of South Australia (SLSA), OH 295.
a slave, or a woman of colour otherwise dependent on Jamaica’s ‘anti-social system of concubinage’ were not entertained. My own and other descendants’ DNA test results indicate that Edward’s mother was the daughter of a woman from the West African region now known as Ghana.

The Stirlings of Keir in Jamaica

Catherine Hall refers to the ‘silences and evasions’ in British national culture that allowed elite families to erase their slave-owning pasts in collective memory. These strategies are apparent in The Stirlings of Keir and their Family Papers by William Fraser, privately printed by the family in 1858. This 750-page work documents seven centuries of the clan Stirling, including two generations of several branches in Jamaica and the North American colonies, without a single reference to slavery. A century later the Stirlings of Keir’s records were deposited in a municipal archive and are now under the aegis of the Glasgow City Archives. The family’s slave-owning past remains veiled; the detailed finding aid has not been made available online by the archives to date. On the other hand, there are no apparent restrictions on use by researchers able to visit the archives or to afford copying fees.

Edward’s Scottish great-grandfather James Stirling (1679–1749) inherited the baronies of Keir and Cawder near Glasgow in central Scotland in 1694. The estates’ debts were rising because the Stirlings of Keir, like many others of their class, were building country houses to replace their ‘tower’ houses or castles. James was an ardent Jacobite and his involvement ‘in all the Risings and plots’ that attempted to restore the House of Stuart to the British throne came at a cost. He was tried for high treason after the 1708 uprising, had his estates forfeited in 1716 (forgoing over £950 in annual rents), and was gaoled for his part in the 1745 uprising.

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8  William Fraser, The Stirlings of Keir and their Family Papers (Edinburgh: privately printed, 1858).
9  Parts of the records related to Australia were microfilmed by the Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) at the Strathclyde Regional Archives in the mid-twentieth century. This only became apparent to the author when the microfilm was digitised by the National Library of Australia (NLA) and added to Trove in 2019: AJCP M2983–M2994, Stirling Family of Keir and Cawder (Fonds T-SK)/Miscellaneous correspondence (Series 13).
10  The author has been supplied with an electronic version of the finding aid by the Glasgow City Archives.
11  The archives was closed for most of 2020 and 2021 due to the global pandemic.
14  Inglis, ‘The Stirlings of Keir’, 86.
15  Fraser, The Stirlings of Keir, 70.
The estates were purchased by relatives and friends and reconveyed to James’s oldest son John (1704–1757) in 1728—leaving the family even more heavily encumbered with debt. James’s wife Marion Stuart (1680–1770) had given birth 22 times between 1704 and 1729, and more than half of their progeny survived to adulthood. James looked abroad to secure his younger sons’ livelihoods and restore the family fortunes.

Most branches of the clan Stirling in the Scottish landed gentry were also engaged in trade, directly or through daughters marrying into merchant families. The Stirlings of Drumpellier were the most involved, being ‘a long and prolific succession of merchants of Glasgow’ in the 1600s and 1700s. The three sons of James Stirling who set sail for Jamaica in the early 1730s established the Stirlings of Keir as colonial merchants and subsequently as planters.

**Sojourners**

While Marion’s fecundity and James’s Jacobitism were particular triggers, the Stirlings of Keir were otherwise typical of the educated Scottish migrants who went to Jamaica in the eighteenth century; “They went to earn a fortune as quickly as possible and return home with it.” The family’s Jamaican interests would span 119 years, from 1733 to 1852, but James Stirling’s three sons and three grandsons who spent time on the island between 1733 to 1815, before leaving their concerns in the hands of managers, were essentially sojourners. None were Jamaican-born and only one married there. Of the three that died in Jamaica, only Robert Stirling (1715–1763) had shown signs of settling. Alan Karras has used the Stirlings of Keir records in his study of the economic activities and networks of Scottish sojourners. He finds that Robert’s older brother Archibald Stirling (1710–1783) was eventually provoked to accuse Robert ‘of renouncing his transient status and becoming a stereotypical planter’.

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16 Fraser, *The Stirlings of Keir*, 75.
17 Fraser, *The Stirlings of Keir*, 72–74.
20 Karras, *Sojourners*, 74.
Figure 2: Stirling family tree depicting relationships discussed in the article.

Source: Author.
Initial profits were gleaned not from Jamaican trade but from West Bengal, now part of India, to which Archibald relocated in 1735. He returned to Scotland with £18,000 in 174821 and lent money to Robert, who was residing in Kingston, Jamaica, to buy the plantation ‘Frontier’ in St Mary parish.22 In 1757 Robert and his brother James Stirling (1714–1773) bought ‘Hampden’ in St James.23 In about 1780 Archibald added a plantation in Trelawney to the family’s Jamaican interests, naming it ‘Keir’.24 The brothers also traded slaves. During the eighteenth century, captains of slave ships grew tired of managing the sale of their human cargoes themselves and ‘came to favour selling wholesale to merchants who then sold on enslaved Africans at retail prices from their merchant houses in [Kingston] town’.25 Andrew Welsby has used the Stirlings of Keir records in his research into the profits of slavery associated with the remodelling of the Pollok Estate after it was joined with the Keir estates in the nineteenth century. A letter from James to Archibald in November 1764 reveals that James was anticipating earning £2,000 from the sale of slaves in Kingston.26

In 1783 the three Jamaican estates, including hundreds of slaves, were bequeathed to the younger sons of William Stirling (1725–1793), the only son of the Jacobite James Stirling with legitimate heirs. Bill Inglis has used the Stirlings of Keir records to calculate the family’s fluctuating wealth during the eighteenth century. It was not until 1778 that the elder Archibald could report a net gain from the plantations. Each subsequent year until his death in 1783 ‘he was able to report a profit from the sale of sugar and rum in Britain of over £22,000 out of which the cost of sending some supplies to Jamaica each year had to be deducted’. Inglis estimates that the first generation of Stirlings of Keir in Jamaica repatriated about £25,000 to Scotland between 1755 and 1783. Their mercantile activities in West Bengal and the East Indies doubled that amount.27

William’s son Archibald was 20 years old when he led the second generation of the Stirlings of Keir to Jamaica in 1789. It was the same year that William Wilberforce first addressed the British House of Commons about the abolition of the slave trade.

22 ‘Archibald Stirling the younger’, LBS database.
27 Inglis, ‘The Stirlings of Keir’, 100.
Temporary connections

Jamaica was ‘a colony in which white men of all ranks indulged their sexual license without censure’. A white American woman living in Kingston in the early 1790s wrote to a friend that men in Jamaica formed ‘temporary connections with females, whom they both estimate and treat as creatures of inferior species; they procreate beings whom they also hold inferior to themselves, but superior to their mothers’. Of the ‘range of possible unions between white men and enslaved and free women of African and mixed descent’, planters typically kept free women of colour. ‘These “housekeepers”, as they were euphemistically known, were expected to perform “all the duties of a wife, except that of presiding at table”.’

Archibald lived in Jamaica for 25 years, primarily at Hampden. Like his uncles before him he did not marry on the island. He fathered at least six illegitimate children: Edward, two other ‘reputed’ sons and three ‘reputed’ daughters are named in his will, as well as the mother of two of the daughters.

In his study of mixed-race children sired by British men in Jamaica, Daniel Livesay finds that ‘Although most fathers—likely 80 percent—offered no support to [their] illegitimate offspring . . . a not insignificant number chose to take care of their children’. Examples from the extended Stirling family suggest that some discriminated, taking care of the illegitimate children born later in their lives. Archibald’s uncle Robert Stirling’s only known illegitimate child, Charlotte Stirling (b. 1759), was born to Sarah Morris four years before Robert’s death in 1763 aged 48. Sarah, who lived in Kingston, was racially classified as a free quadroon. Charles Stirling (1742–1795) of the Stirlings of Ardoch acknowledged only three sons ‘begotten by me on the body of Rebecca Ash’, born in the four years before his death at the age of 53. Rebecca was Charles’s young housekeeper on the Ardoch Penn in St Ann parish. Archibald’s
recognition of six illegitimate children appears generous by comparison, but Edward’s estimated year of birth is 1808, when Archibald had been in Jamaica for 20 years. The relative ages of Edward’s half-siblings have not been established but three can be inferred to be the same age or younger than Edward. Archibald also acknowledged two illegitimate sons of his younger brother Robert Stirling (1772–1808) to one or two unidentified women of colour: Charles (d. 1858) and John. Robert, ‘one of the few Stirlings to marry in the island’, 38 wed Scottish-born Sarah Steel (c. 1790–1823), 18 years his junior, in 1805.

Men of property who were concerned about their illegitimate progeny’s prospects, removed them from their mothers and sent them abroad. ‘Jamaica was a place to make money; it was not a site for education’. 39 As the mixed-race proportion of the population increased during the eighteenth century their educational and financial prospects worsened. The money was to be made by white colonists and their metropolitan connections. In the early nineteenth century, mixed-race children were barred admittance to the few schools in the colony, legislation constrained their legal standing, and racial prejudice stunted their employment opportunities. 40

In 1815, at the age of 46, Archibald returned to Scotland and made an advantageous marriage to 22-year-old Elizabeth Maxwell (c. 1793–1822), daughter of Sir John Maxwell, 7th Baronet of Pollok. At about the same time, two of his Jamaican sons, including Edward, and both of Robert’s sons were sent to Scotland. 41 There is no apparent reference to this development in the finding aid to the Stirlings of Keir’s records, which is also silent on the movements of other mixed-race Stirlings of Keir between Jamaica and Britain. Charlotte, illegitimate daughter of the elder Robert Stirling, had been transferred to Britain in the 1760s. She already has some prominence in studies of the familial legacies of slavery due to the agency demonstrated by her mother, Sarah Morris. Sarah appears to have been of independent means prior to her liaison with Robert and was relatively wealthy after his death, although under an Act of the Jamaican Assembly in December 1761, ‘mulattoes, and the offspring of mulattoes, not being in their own issue born in lawful wedlock’ could not inherit real or personal property valued above £2,000 from a white person. 42 Sarah petitioned the Assembly in December 1763 to confer on herself and her daughter the legal rights that whites possessed so that she could provide Charlotte with an education ‘as might qualify her to enjoy the privileges and immunities of a white woman in this

38 Stirling, Gang Forward, 122.
39 Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, 96.
40 Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, 308.
41 This is established from the subsequent lives of Edward and his cousin Charles, and from Archibald’s will, which left annuities of pounds Sterling to Edward’s brother William and Charles’s brother Robert. Archibald’s annuities to his illegitimate daughters are in Jamaican currency.
Edward Stirling in Scotland

In arranging for the education of their mixed-race children in Britain, Livesay has identified that families’ actions ‘reflected a general desire to care for kin but also demonstrated a simultaneous reluctance to have relations of color too close, both physically and economically’. Whether Edward’s father Archibald grew up with Charlotte as his acknowledged older mixed-race cousin is not established, but Edward did not live at ‘Kenmure House’ near Glasgow with his father’s legitimate family. Edward aged about eight, his brother and two cousins were installed at the parochial school in St Vigeans near Arbroath, 100 miles (160 km) north-east of Glasgow. They lived with the schoolmaster John Bowman, who is identified in Edward’s origin story, and attended school with local children. Edward maintained contact with schoolmates for the rest of his life. An account of his ‘disinterested generosity’ towards an old scholar in 1863 suggests that he enjoyed the status of a young gentleman at the school. They are recalled as ‘two young men much alike in years, but very different so far as regarded worldly [sic] circumstances and family connections. The more fortunate of the two was a native of Jamaica, the other was the son of a working man belonging to this neighbourhood’. An exercise book in Edward’s hand shows that he was educated, at least in part, to be a clerk or small business owner—indeed, the kind of education required of a plantation bookkeeper or a clerk in a trading company. When Edward finished school at St Vigeans, ‘a stout lad of seventeen or eighteen’, he was employed by associates of his father, the merchant Dennistoun brothers of Glasgow.

Edward could have remained in this position—employed but unmarried, excluded from the society of his father and separated from the society of his birth—but after about 12 years, at about 30 years of age, he took his future into his own hands. His father Archibald had succeeded his brother James in the family estates in 1831

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43 Newman, A Dark Inheritance, 121.
44 Newman, A Dark Inheritance, 124.
45 ‘Stockbridge School Annexe’, Dean Bank Lane Project, n.d., www.deanbanklaneproject.co.uk/stockbridge-primary-nursery.
46 Livesay, Children of Uncertain Fortune, 231.
47 Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser, 8 August 1863, 2. The author stated, ‘We forbear giving names’ but 10 years later Edward’s obituary in another local newspaper repeated this and other accounts of his generosity, noting ‘It is no breach of confidence now’. Dundee Courier, 10 February 1873, 4.
48 SLSA, Stirling Family papers, PRG 388, Box 1.
49 Dundee Courier, 10 February 1873, 4.
and resided at Keir House outside Stirling. Between November 1835 and October 1838, he received over £12,500 in government compensation for his share of 690 Jamaican slaves. It appears that Archibald, who had been widowed since 1822, chose this time to advise Edward that he was to have an inheritance. A co-signed note survives in the Stirlings of Keir records:

Glasgow 6th November 1838

Dear Sir, [writes Edward]

As you had intended to leave me at your death as you told me One Thousand Pounds, but in consequence of my having a wish to proceed to Australia, you now agree to give the above sum which I have this day received.

Archibald signs under the phrase ‘Receipt in full of all Demands’.

The accelerated inheritance coincides with the imminent coming of age of Archibald’s legitimate heir William Stirling, later Sir William Stirling Maxwell (1818–1878), 10th Baronet of Pollok. Archibald’s will of 1840 directs his heir to continue to pay annuities to his reputed children. This conscientious accounting shows that his brother Robert’s son John had died (Archibald was paying his widow an annuity of £35) and suggests that Edward’s brother William was ill and probably unemployed. With the emigration of Edward and his cousin Charles, Archibald removed from his life and the vicinity of his heir the two potent embodiments of his sexual proclivities in Jamaica and the family’s slave-owning past.

Edward Stirling in South Australia

Edward and Charles sailed onboard the Lady Bute on 29 January 1839, arriving in Adelaide on Kaurna land five months later, on 18 June. They had brought out material for a wooden house, which was erected in Hutt Street. They were the first of the Stirlings of Keir to venture to Australia. Captain James Stirling (1791–1865) the first governor of Western Australia in 1829, was of the Drumpellier branch of clan Stirling. John Stirling (1813–1894), of the closer Kippendavie branch, did

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50 ‘Archibald Stirling the younger’, LBS database.
51 ‘E.S. (Glasgow) on receipt of £1000 to go to Australia’, T-SK/13/13 Item 1: 1, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see National Library of Australia (NLA) Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1447864962/view.
52 William Stirling of Keir succeeded to the Maxwell baronetcy on the death of his uncle in 1865 and became Sir William Stirling Maxwell. He is referred to as Sir William in the remainder of this article.
53 Archibald’s heir is directed to pay ‘£75 Sterling or such other sum less or more as you may judge necessary to provide proper board and lodging medicine treatment clothes and other necessaries for the said William Stirling at such terms and in such proportions as you think fit’.
not land in New South Wales until 1841. The Stirling cousins were not the first men of African descent to reach South Australian waters. The transatlantic slave trade generated a black Atlantic seafaring tradition that was well established by the end of the eighteenth century.\(^5^5\) It is likely that African seamen were among the crews of Matthew Flinders’s and Nicolas Baudin’s expeditions. Certainly, when the *Naturaliste* left France in October 1800 one of the assistant-gardeners onboard was Merlot, a young African slave owned by botanist André Michaux.\(^5^6\) American whaling ships in southern Australian waters from 1803 had ethnically diverse crews in which Africans—enslaves and free—often comprised over one-third.\(^5^7\) African Americans were also among the Kangaroo Islander sealers in the pre-colonial era.\(^5^8\) Court reports in early newspapers reveal several ‘men of colour’, also referred to as ‘negroes’ and ‘American blacks’, living in Adelaide. Their occupations were typically seafaring (ship’s cook) and labouring (lime burner), and they are indicative of a larger population.\(^5^9\) John Harvey (1823–1899), who arrived in South Australia four months after Edward and Charles, was the illegitimate son of a local woman of the northern Scottish harbour town of Wick and a transient African seafarer.\(^6^0\)

Edward identified himself not as a Jamaican Creole but as a Scotsman. In 1839 the number of South Australian colonists grew past 10,000.\(^6^1\) About 15 per cent of the immigrants were Scots.\(^6^2\) Thanks to Edward’s accelerated inheritance he and Charles joined other Scotsmen as the 10 ‘proprietors’ who paid for the Angas Special Survey.\(^6^3\) The land was described as:

A compact district of 15,000 acres on the margin of Lake Alexandrina, running generally in a W. and N.W. direction, on both sides of the spot where the river Angas disgorges itself, and on the banks of that river.\(^6^4\)


\(^{5^6}\) See ‘The Baudin Legacy Project’, University of Sydney, n.d., baudin.sydney.edu.au/. Merlot left the expedition at the Île de France (Mauritius).


\(^{5^9}\) For example, ‘Session of Gaol Delivery’, *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register* (Adelaide), 8 July 1837, 4.

\(^{6^0}\) Beth M. Robertson, ‘Meet the Old Colonists: Descendants of Slavery’, *History SA, Newsletter of The Historical Society of South Australia Incorporated*, no. 260 (2020).


\(^{6^3}\) Lester, Firth & Murton Pty Ltd, *Strathalbyn Conservation Study* ([Adelaide]: Dept. for the Environment, [1980]), 4; notes by Edward Stirling Booth, SLSA, PRG 388, Box 1.

\(^{6^4}\) *South Australian Record*, 1 November 1839, 9.
Figure 3: ‘Plan of the Angas Special Survey’, 1839, showing selected and unselected sections, 1842.
Source: State Library of South Australia (C 1003).
These were the well-resourced lands of the Peramangk people. By August 1839 the area was being referred to as Strath-Albyn, soon standardised as Strathalbyn, 34 miles (55 km) south-east of Adelaide and 12 miles (20 km) from Lake Alexandrina. Peramangk country extends from the Barossa Valley in the north, south to Myponga, east to Mannum and west to the Mount Lofty Ranges. Its entirety was subject to special surveys and settlement in a few short years.

By 1845 the cousins owned four Strathalbyn sections north-west of the town and were also grazing their flocks over adjacent ‘unoccupied’ land. Edward had named the property ‘Hampden’, after the place of his birth, and become engaged to Harriett Taylor (1818–1879), the sister of another nascent pastoralist, John Taylor (1821–1865). The Taylors—four siblings of whom John was the youngest and only male—had emigrated from Herefordshire, England, to South Australia via Sydney in 1838. Their parents were deceased, and they had travelled under the protection of the oldest sister’s husband who died within a year of their arrival. Edward was a mature man of means and apparently accepted as such in Adelaide’s relatively egalitarian society. He was able to make a respectable match with Harriett and look forward to a marriage that had not been possible in Scotland.

In mid-1845 the Stirlings joined with neighbouring sheep farmers and the South Australian Company in taking up occupation licences at Rivoli Bay on Boandik land for their burgeoning flocks. The cousins moved nearly 3,000 sheep 180 miles (290 km) south-east, at a cost of over £500. Within a few months two-thirds of the flock had died of a ‘grievous scourge’. It later became known as ‘coast disease’; identified in the 1930s as a deficiency of cobalt and copper. The cousins were in debt and their earning capacity was severely depleted.

The avoidance of all communication

Since emigrating, Edward and Charles had written letters to Archibald to keep him informed of their progress but received no replies. Edward now wrote two desperate letters, on 29 December 1845 and on 3 February 1846, explaining the financial crisis, the prospect of having to ‘sacrifice’ their land to pay their debts, his fears of being unable to marry for want of income, and being in breach of promise. Edward had arranged for a previous letter to be hand-delivered to his father by a fellow

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65 *South Australian Register*, 31 August 1839, 5.
66 *South Australian*, 8 April 1845, 3.
67 ‘E.S. (Strath Albyn, SA), 29 December 1845’, T-SK/13/13 Item 2: 1, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see NLA Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2381771598/view.
68 ‘E.S. (Strathalbyn), 3 February 1846’, T-SK/13/13 Item 4: 1, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see NLA Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2381773154/view.
69 ‘E.S. (Strathalbyn), 3 February 1846’, T-SK/13/13 Item 4: 3, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see NLA Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2381773418/view.
Angas Special Survey proprietor William Mein, scion of a Scottish military family, ‘who writes to me that he had waited on you by invitation at Keir’. He characterised his father’s silence as ‘the avoidance of all communication with us which you are I am afraid anxious to maintain’.70 Far from representing the interests of Stirlings of Keir in South Australia, Edward was in no doubt that Archibald wanted nothing to do with him. His counter-strategy was to inform Archibald that Adelaide merchant Robert MacGeorge was covering their debts in return for a bill of exchange for £600 that had been sent to Campbell & Co. of Glasgow, for payment on Archibald’s account. He let his father know that he had forwarded a second draft to Campbell & Co. for £400, ‘which I have drawn intended to meet expenses connected with my contemplated marriage’. This amount, ‘I candidly admit that I have not negotiated’; there were as yet no debts beyond ‘all my future prospects of happiness and … the hopes of an amiable confiding young woman’.71

Campbell & Co. forwarded the bills of exchange to Archibald on 9 May 1846, recommending acceptance of the one for £600. Archibald was furious. On 28 June, having ‘confided in my Man’ [sic] of Business who was most decidedly of my own mind’, he drafted a letter that told Edward in no uncertain terms, ‘you had no right’. No right to ask for more money, no right to involve third parties in the matter, and no right to have contemplated marriage. ‘I shall only add you had not expect another bean from me.’72 But Edward’s strategy worked. It is certain that Archibald honoured the bill for £600 and likely, given Edward’s subsequent wedding, that the £400 was paid as well. Archibald died in April the following year, four months before Edward, aged about 39, married Harriett, 26, in August 1847. Their first child, Edward Charles, was born at Hampden in September 1848.

In his grudging capitulation Archibald protested about his prior ‘unprecedented liberality towards you both’ and ‘the unprecedented Bounty’ that Edward and Charles had received. But Edward’s needs were paltry compared to Archibald’s wealth and he had no intention of risking his new-found status in South Australia, where financial success was apparently the only qualification required of him. There is no hint in their correspondence of the familial relationship between Edward and Archibald, or of Edward’s racial heritage. Nevertheless, the potential embarrassment (perhaps fortuitously underscored by William Mein’s call to Keir House) gave Edward the upper hand, and he did not hesitate to use it.

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70 ‘E.S. (Strathalbyn), 3 February 1846’, T-SK/13/13 Item 4: 3.
71 ‘E.S. (Strathalbyn), 3 February 1846’, T-SK/13/13 Item 4: 4, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see NLA Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2381773736/view.
72 Archibald Stirling to [Edward], 28 June 1846’, T-SK/13/13 Item 6: 2, from collections held by the Strathclyde Regional Archives, as filmed by the AJCP, see NLA Trove, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2381774778/view.
Crisis averted; Edward’s social standing continued to rise. In 1846 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace, and in 1849 he was made a district commissioner for Macclesfield. Edward and Charles continued to enlarge their pastoralist holdings. In March 1853 they purchased from the government for £694 the last three sections that made up Hampden at its largest extent (approximately 1,129 acres). They also established a second property nearby, naming it ‘Highland Valley’.

The years 1855 and 1856 were pivotal in Edward’s career. Charles had travelled to and from London in 1852 and then returned to England to stay. Edward relocated his family from Strathalbyn to a leased property, ‘Urrbrae’, only 3 miles (5 km) south of Adelaide, and diversified his business interests by setting up as a wool broker and produce merchant in Gilbert Place, Adelaide. While initially unsuccessful as an elected candidate, he was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1856 and subsequently remained in parliament as an elected member until 1865. In 1856 Edward and his brother-in-law John Taylor entered a mercantile business partnership with Scotsmen Thomas Elder (1818–1897) and Robert Barr Smith (1824–1915). Both were newly arrived in South Australia, although two of Elder’s brothers were well-established and well-acquainted with Edward. The scope of this article does not allow a detailed accounting of Elder, Stirling & Co. Suffice to say that while the partnership involved conflict, all four made their fortunes financing the Wallaroo and Moonta copper mines established in 1859 and 1861 respectively.

**London and Cambridge**

When Harriett and Edward moved to Urrbrae in 1855 their family comprised Edward Charles, known as Ted, aged six; John Lancelot, known as Lance, five; Mary Eliza Collingwood, three; and Harriet Hannah, one. Ted and Lance were enrolled in St Peter’s Collegiate School, Hackney. St Peter’s had been founded in 1847 as an exclusive school: ‘which could offer [the leading Anglicans’] sons and the sons of others of their class an education at least as good as the one they had … received in the British Isles’. At the end of Form 6 in 1863 Ted was awarded the Westminster scholarship, the college’s most prestigious prize. The following Christmas Edward relocated the family to England for his oldest sons’ further education. Edward and Harriett’s family was now complete: Ted aged 16; Lance, 15; Mary, 13; Harriet, Charles Stirling married in November 1855 and died on 9 March 1858 in Taunton, Somerset, with probate valuing his estate at £3,000.

73 Charles Stirling married in November 1855 and died on 9 March 1858 in Taunton, Somerset, with probate valuing his estate at £3,000.


76 *South Australian Register*, 18 December 1863, 3.
10; James Archibald, nine; Edith Ellen, seven; Norman William, three; and Alice Dennistoun (her second name commemorating Edward’s Glasgow employer), one. Edward maintained his pastoral holdings in South Australia and, having been a director of the South Australian Banking Company since 1859, joined its London Court of Directors.

The finding aid to the Stirlings of Keir’s records describes an apparently one-sided correspondence from Edward to his half-brother Sir William about his sons’ education. This too survived in family oral tradition:

Dad told the story that, when the family went to England for the boys’ university education, an attempt was made to contact the Stirlings in Scotland, but that they got the cold shoulder. [Cousin] David always laughed about this, as Edward was by then rich enough to buy them out lock stock and barrel.

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Figure 4: Stirling family at Urrbrae, c. 1864. Left to right: Lance, James, Edward, Harriett, Norman, Harriet, Ted, Edith and Mary.
Source: Family collection, Australia.

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77 In 1857 Edward added an outstation ‘Nalpa’ on Ngarrindjeri land on the shores of Lake Alexandrina.
78 Edward Heysen Stirling Booth (1942--), personal communication, 10 May 2019.
Edward Stirling

Ted received instruction for 18 months in Germany and France before embarking on his university education at Trinity College, Cambridge, where his uncle Sir William had graduated Master of Arts in 1843. A letter to Ted from his mother survives from this period, written in August 1866 when Ted was almost 18 years old. His parents were staying at Ramsgate for the benefits to Edward of ‘the sea bathes’ and the ‘bracing sea air’:

*Did you go to the Ball I hope you did. I think you should take every opportunity of going into good society, it will do you good & shake off a little of your diffidence.*

Ted’s lack of self-confidence as a young man is surprising from the perspective of his lifetime achievements as a public figure. However, he had inherited versions of his father’s characteristics of woolly hair, dark complexion and full lips. These features and South Australian society’s knowledge of his father’s racial heritage meant that he ‘was known to some friends as “The Nigger”’. This derogatory nickname survived in the oral tradition of the township of Stirling, named for his father, in which Ted spent the last 35 years of his life. It was communicated to historian Robert Martin in the 1980s during his research for *Under Mount Lofty: A History of the Stirling District in South Australia* but not used in the book. It is likely that the term dated from Ted’s schooldays at St Peter’s. Those years coincided with renewed focus on slavery through the American Civil War, and contemporary South Australian newspapers made frequent use of the term ‘nigger’ in that and other contexts.

Burdened with the stigma of ‘the other’, Ted’s first course of study at Cambridge was a bachelor of arts with natural science honours. It was a period of unprecedented ferment in the biological sciences. Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* had been published in 1859. For many scholars the work confirmed the racial hierarchy and supported the sacred ethnology that Africans were the accursed sons of Ham providentially ordained for slavery. Ted would have been immersed in racially denigrating theories and, like his father before him, probably internalised the rationalisation that it was his white blood that defined his abilities. As expressed by James Hunt, a contemporary Darwinian critic promoting the classification of Europeans and Africans as separate species:

*The many assumed cases of civilised Negroes generally are not those of pure African blood … It is assumed that great improvement has taken place in the intellect of the Negro by education, but we believe such not to be the fact. It is simply the European blood in their veins which renders them fit for places of power.*

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79 SLSA, PRG 388, Box 1. Emphasis in the original. Harriett Stirling closed with: ‘N. B. do not leave my letters about but burn them’.
80 Robert Martin, personal communication, 15 November 2020.
Figure 5: Edward Charles Stirling (Ted), c. 1868.
Source: State Library of South Australia (B 62978).
During the 1870s, when Ted was in his 20s, he designed the book plate that would adorn his library. It features a Negroid head. For many years I assumed that this was an extraordinary acknowledgment of his slave forebears. It is a variation of crests used by several branches of the clan Stirling and described as a Moor’s or Saracen’s head. Its adoption by the Stirlings of Keir pre-dated their involvement in Jamaica by about 100 years and is thought to commemorate a Crusader Stirling.\textsuperscript{83} I have come to believe that Ted used the crest and the clan Stirling motto ‘Gang Forward’

\textsuperscript{83} Stirling, \textit{Gang Forward}, 37.
(go forward) to identify with his white Scottish forebears. It is, nonetheless, an astonishing choice. There were other Stirlings of Keir devices to choose from, and Sir William certainly broke with tradition and eschewed the Saracen’s head with its connotations of slavery.

Edward died on 2 February 1873 at his London home, 34 Queen’s Gardens, Hyde Park. The same year Ted was awarded Master of Arts and embarked on his medical training. There is no indication in the finding aid to the Stirlings of Keir records that Edward’s passing was noted at Keir House. Publicly, he was fondly remembered as a former boarder at St Vigeans and benefactor of the Arbroath district. South Australian newspapers published obituaries recording his achievements and noting that since leaving the colony he had ‘aided in various movements of a public and private character for the benefit of South Australia’. His pastoral holdings remained intact in the settlement of his estate. However, the value of his shares in the Moonta Mining Company were realised, revealing that ‘as the total amount of the purchase-money is said to have been close upon £50,000, there is no doubt that this is the largest single transaction yet reported in our share market’.

A cousin in Calabar

Having married Jane Gilbert (1848–1936) in Adelaide in 1877, Ted returned permanently to South Australia in 1881, joining his brother Lance, who had taken charge of the pastoral stations, and their youngest sister Alice. He became consulting surgeon to the Adelaide Hospital and lecturer and later first professor of physiology at the University of Adelaide. As an anatomist, his interests in human evolution and racial variation had not waned, and ‘the South Australian Museum became his major life’s work’. He was chairman of the Museum Committee from 1882 before his formal appointment as director, 1889–1912. Philip Jones has documented how Ted’s interests transformed the museum’s holdings of Aboriginal material culture, and Paul Turnbull has revealed Ted’s equally energetic efforts in obtaining the skeletal remains of Aboriginal and other racial types. Ted’s career is a fascinating coda to Edward’s story, but elements had been prefigured in the life of a Jamaican-born relative: Archibald Hewan (1832–1883), the son of Edward’s

84 Dundee Courier, 10 February 1873, 4.
85 Border Watch, 12 February 1873, 2.
86 South Australian Register, 22 April 1873, 7.
89 Philip G. Jones, ‘“A Box of Native Things”: Ethnographic Collectors and the South Australian Museum, 1830s–1930s’ (PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Adelaide, 1996), hdl.handle.net/2440/18923.
90 Turnbull, Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead.
half-sister Ann and her husband John Hewan (1769–1847). John was a man of
colour and an overseer on the Hampden plantation. Unlike previous generations
of enslaved and free children at Hampden, Archibald was able to go to school. As
an absentee planter his grandfather Archibald Stirling had become a board
member of the Scottish Missionary Society. Under his patronage the Presbyterian
Reverend George Blyth established a church at Hampden in 1828 and a school in
1831. Archibald Stirling’s actions were consistent with the ameliorative initiatives
of the British Parliament, Jamaican Assembly and slave-owners in response to the
mounting pressure from abolitionists.

Archibald Hewan ‘was brought up in the Hampden congregation’ and at about 20
years of age made his way to Britain to train as a medical missionary. The finding aid
to the Stirlings of Keir’s records shows that in 1852 both Archibald, writing from
Middlesex, England, and Ann, writing from Jamaica, attempted to communicate
with Archibald Stirling’s heir Sir William. Such are the evasions about slavery and
illegitimacy in the family history that the letter from Ann to her half-brother is
dismissed as an ‘Appeal for charity from the widow of a former employee of the
Stirlings in Jamaica’. Archibald’s is described as a ‘Begging letter from the son of the
above’. There is no record that Sir William responded.

In 1854 Archibald Hewan was examined by the Royal College of Surgeons
of Edinburgh and awarded a licentiate. The education for this basic medical
qualification was typically obtained by apprenticeship with practical tuition under
a doctor’s supervision in voluntary hospitals. Archibald proceeded to the United
Presbyterian mission in Calabar in the West African region now known as Nigeria.
While his first responsibility was the health of the missionaries, he also built up
a practice and in 1863 ‘prescribed for between 1,400 and 1,500 out-patients’. The
following year he was invalided to Scotland. In 1866 he passed the examination to
qualify as a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians. Two years later he obtained
his Doctor of Medicine degree at Edinburgh University.

While Archibald’s education did not have the depth of his cousin Ted’s, there are
similarities in the breadth of their interests. Archibald collected biological specimens
in Africa that he donated to collecting institutions in Britain. He wrote and spoke

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91 Archibald Stirling’s will identified ‘John Hewan Overseer on the said Estate of Hampden’ as the husband of
his reputed daughter Ann.
92 George Blyth, Reminiscences of Missionary Life, with Suggestions to Churches and Missionaries (Edinburgh:
95 C. J. Cummins, A History of Medical Administration in NSW 1788–1973 (North Sydney: NSW Department
of Health, 2003), 4.
96 Geoffrey Johnston, Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846–1966 (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid
97 For example, George J. Allman, ‘On the Characters and Affinities of Potamogale, a Genus of Insectivorous
about his anthropological observations of the people of Calabar,\footnote{For example, Archibald Hewan, ‘On Some Customs of the People of Old Calabar Relative to Pregnancy and Parturition’, \textit{Edinburgh Medical Journal} 10, no. 3 (1864): 220–24.} and he was a member not only of medical associations but also the Society of Arts, London, the city in which he lived the remainder of his life. It is likely that Archibald and Ted were sometimes present at the same occasions; whether they met or recognised their common heritage has not been established.

\section*{Conclusion}

\textit{The Stirlings of Keir and their Family Papers} completed by William Fraser for Sir William Stirling in 1858 was the first of over 25 works compiled by him to document families of the Scottish nobility and landed gentry. Fraser was a solicitor as well as a historian. He and the families he represented in print were primarily concerned about preserving their muniments—the documents by which inherited property rights had been maintained and defended for centuries, debarring ‘the illegitimate, or any others, from unlawfull [sic] intrusions into their inheritances’\footnote{Fraser, \textit{The Stirlings of Keir}, 160. The quotation is from a Patent of Arms to Sir Robert Stirling, 1649.}. Some ‘natural’ children are recorded over the centuries, but none are admitted in the last two generations of Sir William’s descent. His Jamaican relatives do not exist.

Edward Stirling had understood this aversion when he reasserted his moral claim on his father in 1846 to resolve a financial crisis that threatened to dismantle his presentation as a Scots-identified South Australian settler. Beyond his own family, Edward was silent about his Jamaican birth, allowing contemporaries and later chroniclers to refer to him as Scottish.\footnote{See biographical entries about, or referring to, Edward Stirling in \textit{Pastoral Pioneers}, vol. 1, 68–69; Mincham, ‘Stirling, Sir Edward Charles (Ted)’; Howard Coxon, John Playford and Robert Reid, \textit{Biographical Register of the South Australian Parliament 1857–1957} (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1985).} As long as he maintained success in business, he could rely on the proprieties of the colonial and London elites to remain publicly silent about his evident racial heritage. Within his own family, Edward told his story. His father’s Christian name, however, and the identification of the Keir branch of the clan Stirling are striking omissions, reflecting, no doubt, Edward’s own scruples.

By these strategies Edward was complicit in the processes of avoidance and evasion that allowed the Stirlings of Keir and many other British families to distance their patrimony and wealth from slave-ownership and miscegenation. The Legacies of British Slave-ownership database in conjunction with the Stirlings of Keir’s records and Edward Stirling’s family oral tradition have combined to breach the silence and decode the evasions. This convergence has revealed previously disconnected stories of other mixed-race children and their descendants sired by two generations of the Stirlings of Keir in Jamaica. The dislocated lives of Edward and his relatives can now contribute a cohesive new chapter in the scholarship about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mixed-race Jamaicans of African and British heritage.