

## Royal Museums Greenwich Research Guide V5

### African Caribbean Family History

Updated June 2023

#### **Introduction**

This guide informs how records in the Caird Library and Archive at the National Maritime Museum can be used to support African Caribbean family history research.

Although maritime records are not usually a starting point for compiling a genealogy, the archive at the National Maritime Museum will enable you to better understand the cultural context of this period, allow you to validate research you may have already carried out and supplement your knowledge.

The formative research for this guide was centred on former British colonies in the Caribbean. The records in the collection of the Caird Library and Archive at the National Maritime Museum as they relate to the Caribbean are strongest in relation to the 1700s and 1800s. The collection does feature documents relating to former Dutch and French colonies, but these are fewer in number in comparison to material relating to former British colonies. Similarly, although the collection contains crew lists from 1915, material relating to the migrations of people from the Caribbean to Britain between the 1940s and 1970s is not held at the National Maritime Museum and may instead be found at The National Archives. Because of this, the collection of the Caird Library and Archive may be more useful to researchers who have already traced their family ancestry back to a location in the Caribbean within this time period.

This is a working document that may change as further research is carried out. In compiling this guide, we have consulted with researchers and experts from the African Caribbean community. If you wish to suggest an amendment or addition to the guide, we would be delighted to hear from you.

We would like to thank our core group of contributors and researchers:

Cecilia Bramble  
Andrea Burris  
Paul Crooks

Marguerita Ekemezuma  
 Leonia Modeste  
 Elsa Pascal  
 Kim Reid  
 Pamela Robotham  
 Lennox Salmon  
 Pauline Thomas  
 Marcia Williams

### Context of period

The majority of the material from the 1700s and 1800s relating to the Caribbean in the Caird Library and Archive is linked to the transatlantic slave trade.

Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade between the 1500s and 1800s saw the kidnapping and trafficking of millions of African people to the Americas and the Caribbean. People were sold into slavery, mainly to carry out unpaid labour on plantations in brutal conditions.

Chattel slavery, as adopted in Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean, meant that enslaved people were treated as commodities that could be traded, sold and renamed according to the wishes of their owners across generations.

Due to the lack of recorded information about exactly who these people were, where they came from and where they went, it can be challenging for people of African Caribbean heritage to trace their family history and ancestry back from the Caribbean to a particular location in Africa.

This timeline offers a summary of events and British legislation from the late 1600s through to the mid-1800s relating to the transatlantic slave trade. It can be used to offer context to records that you may come across in the Caird Library and Archive.

<b>1672</b>	The Royal African Company is formed to set up military forts and monopolise trade along the West African coast. James, Duke of York (later King James II), is the largest shareholder.	<b>1600–1700</b> Records suggest that approximately 1.9 million Africans are kidnapped and forced aboard ships to European colonies in the Caribbean, North and South America.
<b>1697</b>	The Trade with Africa Act officially ends the Royal African Company's monopoly over the trade of enslaved peoples. The right of free trade in enslaved peoples is recognised as a fundamental and natural right of Englishmen.	

		Britain traffics almost half a million captive Africans across the Atlantic.*
<b>1713</b>	The Treaty of Utrecht is signed between Spain and Britain. Britain wins control of the Asiento, the contract for trafficking enslaved people from West Africa to Spanish south American and Caribbean colonies, for 30 years.	<b>1701-1800</b> Records suggest that approximately 5.8 million Africans are kidnapped and forced aboard ships to European colonies in the Caribbean, North and South America.  Britain traffics approximately 2.3 million captive Africans across the Atlantic.*
<b>1729</b>	Bristol overtakes London as Britain's main slave port, with 48 recorded voyages in comparison to London's 29. Ships from Bristol are responsible for trafficking over 15,000 people, just over 53 per cent of the total number of people that Britain as a nation is responsible for in 1729. Liverpool has 15 ships involved in the slave trade.	
<b>1739</b>	After years of fighting, a peace treaty is signed with the Maroons, a community of Africans who had escaped from slavers in Jamaica. The treaty acknowledges their freedom and right to self-govern. In return, the Maroons agree to capture runaways and support the British government in Jamaica.	
<b>1771</b>	The James Somerset case ruling declares that enslaved people in England cannot be forcibly sent to the Caribbean.	
<b>1772</b>	The opening of the Bridgewater Canal sees Manchester's previously negligible export trade in cotton goods rise inexorably. A third of its business goes to Africa to be exchanged for enslaved people, the rest to the West Indies and North American colonies.	
<b>1783</b>	British Quakers present a petition in Parliament signed by 300 people for a 'bill for the regulation of the African trade' that aims to stop the transatlantic slave trade.	
<b>1786</b>	The French increase their share of trade in Africa and are perceived as encroaching on British interests. By 1800, France will be second only to Britain as the largest trafficker of enslaved people.	
<b>1787</b>	The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade is formed in London.	
<b>1790</b>	British slavery registers record 250,000 people enslaved in Jamaica, a country that produces 60,000 tonnes of sugar for Britain.	
<b>1793</b>	Toussaint Louverture leads the Haitian Revolution in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Britain attempts to invade Saint-Domingue during the revolution but fails. Saint-Domingue is now the principal supplier of sugar to Continental Europe.	
<b>1796</b>	Liverpool now controls 70 per cent of the British slave trade and 40 per cent of the whole European slave trade.	

<b>1797</b>	Britain slavery registers record 300,000 people enslaved in Jamaica.	
<b>1800</b>	The British economy is now dependent on goods, such as sugar, tobacco and cotton, produced by enslaved peoples. 60 per cent of all British exports are sent to Africa and America to further support and fuel transatlantic slavery. British ships, with 400,000 enslaved Africans on board, make approximately 1,340 voyages to the Americas.	
<b>1806</b>	The population of enslaved peoples in the Caribbean has increased by 25 per cent since 1790. White people in the Caribbean are outnumbered by Black people 1:7.	<b>1801-1900</b> Records suggest that approximately 3.2 million Africans are kidnapped and forced aboard ships to European colonies in the Caribbean, North and South America.  Britain traffics approximately 280,000 captive Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.
<b>1807</b>	The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act makes it illegal to engage in the trade of enslaved peoples throughout British colonies. A Royal Navy squadron is stationed off the West African coast to intercept and capture slaving vessels. A majority of the captive Africans found on board these vessels are taken to, and left in, Sierra Leone.	
<b>1813</b>	Trinidad, a British colony, introduces a slave register as an experiment. The slave registration order states that any enslaved person not registered is to be considered free.	
<b>1815</b>	Saint Lucia and Mauritius also introduce slave registers. William Wilberforce, abolitionist campaigner and MP, introduces a bill to impose the registration system on all the colonies.	
<b>1817</b>	Slave registers are introduced to the majority of British colonies.	
<b>1823</b>	Following the failure of the Demerara Uprising in British Guiana, 200 resistance fighters are beheaded as a warning and deterrent to enslaved people.	
<b>1831</b>	Samuel Sharpe, an enslaved Baptist deacon, leads an uprising in Jamaica. Over 200 plantations are attacked causing more than £1 million (approximately £124 million in today's money) worth of damage.	
<b>1833</b>	A reformed parliament votes for the Slave Emancipation Act, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.	
<b>1834</b>	The Slave Emancipation Act comes into effect. Although legally 'free', people are made to work as apprentices on the lands of European owners for little or no money.	
<b>1838</b>	On 1 August, apprenticeships are abolished. Enslaved people in British colonies are freed from enslavement.  Asian migration to the Caribbean rises as indentured workers are brought to the region, predominantly from India and, in lesser numbers, from China and Indonesia.	
<b>1848</b>	Slavery is abolished in all French territories including Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana.	

	Denmark ends slavery in all its territories including the Virgin Islands (Saint Croix, Saint Thomas and Saint John)	
<b>1863</b>	The Netherlands ends slavery in all its territories.	

\*Data from the Trans-Atlantic Slavery Database.

These figures only indicate the number of captive Africans that were forced aboard slaving vessels and do not take into account the people that were smuggled aboard illicitly or those that died during the journey. Similarly, these figures do not highlight those who died in, or on their way to, slave forts along the coast of Africa.

### **Research parameters and constraints**

This section will inform you of some of the constraints you should be aware of when carrying out family history research using the records in the Caird Library and Archive.

Individuals looking to carry out family history research often begin with the following information:

- Geographical location
- Name of a person
- Specified time period

### Geographical locations and forced migration

Enslaved, as well as free people of African descent, often lived and worked on plantations in their own designated areas. Plantations are large estates or areas of land where crops are grown or harvested for the purpose of trade and business. It was here that community ties and relationships were often established and maintained.

Enslaved peoples were considered property and were sold according to the wishes of their owners. When this happened, families were split up and uprooted. The person who was sold was forcibly moved to another plantation. Newspaper cuttings have shown that, in some cases, entire families were put up for sale together, but we do not necessarily have bills of sale relating to these cases and it is not certain whether these families remained together or were split up.

Bills of sale do not indicate whether or not an enslaved person had a family but do indicate the location/address of the buyer and their respective plantation.

The names of plantations and estates may also have changed over time, although this can be cross-referenced via the UCL Legacies of British Slavery Ownership database online (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search>).

Researchers should be aware of these factors in case they do not find an ancestor or person of interest in a geographical location they had initially expected.

## Names

In the case of African Caribbean family history research, surnames can offer an insight into the location and status of an individual, as well as the complexities of life on plantations during the period of transatlantic slavery.

Enslaved or free people of African descent on a plantation would not necessarily have had the same surname across a plantation (that of the slave owner). Some individuals may have kept a name from their previous plantation, adopted their spouse's surname, adopted a new name upon emancipation or kept the surname of their mother or father.

Upon the introduction of slave registers, people who did not already have a surname would have been given the surname of the slave owner.

The spelling of names may also have undergone change over time for a variety of reasons. For instance: there may have been an error in documentation, the phonetic spelling of a name may have been given or a choice may have been made by the person to disassociate themselves from their former owners. Because of this, researchers should be aware that a family name may not be found in its current form.

A majority of the slave registers are digitised and can be accessed on Ancestry.com via the Caird Library and Archive's institutional account.

To better understand which documents in the Caird Library and Archive can be used to support your research, please see the collections document.

## Time periods represented in the collection

The majority of the documents within the collection that can be applied to research into African Caribbean family heritage are from the 1700s and 1800s.

The collection also contains 1915 crew lists that show the names of individuals that served on merchant navy vessels during the period 1914–15.

The Museum does not currently hold many records relating to the migration of peoples from the Caribbean between 1940 and 1970.

Passenger lists and information about the individuals that arrived in the UK during this period can be found in The National Archives.

## **Further research and reading lists**

### Publications

Mandy Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801–1968: A Guide to the Records of the Colonial Office in the National Archives of the UK*, 2008. Available free of charge via the Humanities Digital Library: <https://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/administering-the-empire-1801-1968>.

Kenyatta D. Berry, *The Family Tree Toolkit: A Comprehensive Guide to Uncovering Your Ancestry and Researching Genealogy*, 2018

Paul Crooks, *A Tree Without Roots: The Guide to Tracing British, African and Asian Caribbean Ancestry*, 2008

Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, 1984

Guy Grannum, *Tracing your Caribbean Ancestors: A National Archives Guide* (3rd edition), 2012

Guy Grannum, *Tracing your West Indian Ancestors* (2nd edition), 2002

Madeleine E. Mitchell, *Jamaican Ancestry: How to Find Out More*, 2008

David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, 2016

Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1972

John Titford, *My Ancestor Settled in The British West Indies (With Bermuda, British Guiana and British Honduras): A Guide to Sources for Family Historians*, 2011

### Useful websites

The National Archives

- Family history research: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/start-here/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/start-here/)
- Caribbean research guide: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/individuals-from-the-caribbean-an-overview/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/individuals-from-the-caribbean-an-overview/)

Tracing Your Caribbean Family – Southwark Council:

[www.southwark.gov.uk/libraries/southwark-archives/tracing-your-caribbean-family](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/libraries/southwark-archives/tracing-your-caribbean-family)

Researching African-Caribbean Family History – BBC:

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/next\\_steps/genealogy\\_article\\_01.shtml#:~:text=Most%20Caribbean%20people%20have%20African,the%20plantations%20and%20in%20households](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/next_steps/genealogy_article_01.shtml#:~:text=Most%20Caribbean%20people%20have%20African,the%20plantations%20and%20in%20households)

UCL Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery Ownership:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs)

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database: [www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database](http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database)

Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813–1834:

[www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1129/#:~:text=In%201819%20the%20Office%20or,when%20slavery%20was%20officially%20abolished](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1129/#:~:text=In%201819%20the%20Office%20or,when%20slavery%20was%20officially%20abolished)

The Caribbean Family History Group: <https://caribbeanfamilyhistorygroup.org/>

## **Collections**

The following are some of the key collections within the Caird Library and Archive for the purpose of carrying out research into African Caribbean history.

### Michael Graham-Stewart Collection

The Michael Graham-Stewart Collection was purchased by the National Maritime Museum in 2002, having been assembled by Graham-Stewart over a period of 14 years. The collection explores aspects of the West African, transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades from the mid-eighteenth to the early-twentieth centuries and includes material relating to the abolition of slavery. The archive catalogued at the Caird Library and Archive incorporates manuscripts, printed books and pamphlets, maps and photographs.

Many of the documents featured in this guide are from this collection and can be identified by their 'MGS' code.

### Newspaper cuttings

Newspaper cuttings offer an insight into the lifestyles of Europeans in the Caribbean. They were printed for European settlers in the Caribbean and reported life in their respective nations in relation to ongoing events in Europe. The import of goods features heavily in newspapers, informing people about what had come into the country and when they were available for purchase.

Advertisements for the sale of enslaved peoples on plantations also featured in newspaper articles; many advertise a location and a very brief physical description of the peoples or person that the slave owner was attempting to sell. They usually include the name of the slave owner as well as their legal representatives.

Newspaper cuttings also provide an insight into 'runaways'; enslaved individuals who escaped from their plantations. 'Runaway' articles often include a name and some will include a surname.


Almost all articles relating to 'runaways' provide a physical description of the person being sought. Some include a suspected whereabouts for the individual, offering an insight into family life, relationships and the support networks enslaved people may have had across and outside plantations.

## **Examples in the collection**

The Caird Library and Archive is searchable online, alongside the rest of the collections of the National Maritime Museum: [www.rmg.co.uk/collections](http://www.rmg.co.uk/collections)



14. t f. St. Ann's, July 20, 1779.



**RUN AWAY**  
 from the Subscriber,  
 About five weeks ago,  
 A NEGRO BOY, named  
**J A C K,**  
 Of the Congo Country,

About 15 or 16 years of age, and has no Brand Mark. — He speaks tolerable good English, and it is supposed that he has taken the Clarendon road, being well acquainted in that parish.

TWO POUNDS FIFTEEN SHILLINGS Reward will be given for taking him up, and lodging him in any of the Gaols of this Island, giving information thereof.

ANDREW BYRNE.

*The Jamaica Mercury & Kingston Weekly Advertiser*, Vol. 1 No. 32, Sat 27 Nov–Sat 4 Dec 1779, with 'Supplement to the Jamaica Mercury', (MGS/45).

Includes references to slavery and advertisements for 'runaways', many with engraved vignettes.

<u>MGS/45</u>	See description with image above.
<u>MGS/51</u>	<i>Barbados Mercury and Bridge-Town Gazette</i> , 1818. Containing articles for sale; ships arriving and departing; descriptions of runaways; plantations for sale including slaves; services wanted for hire; services offered for hire; no trespassing notice.
<u>MGS/55</u>	<i>The Royal Gazette</i> , Jamaica. Containing articles for sale: 1811 plantations, settlements and lands; descriptions of runaways and absconders; rewards offered; the appointment of a new Lieutenant-governor; workhouses' inmates to be sold by public auction.
<u>MGS/50</u>	<i>Bell's Weekly Messenger</i> , No. 911, London, Sun 12 Sep 1813. Containing an account of the high mortality rates among captive peoples in Charlestown due to poor conditions and treatment; a Lloyd's List of ships affected in the Caribbean following a great hurricane; prices of sugar, coffee, cocoa and ginger, and importations of arrowroot and castor oil.
<u>MGS/46</u>	<i>The Cornwall Chronicle and Jamaica General Advertiser</i> , Montego-Bay, Jamaica, Sat 19 and Sat 26 Feb 1785. Contains references to slaves for sale, escaped slaves, etc.

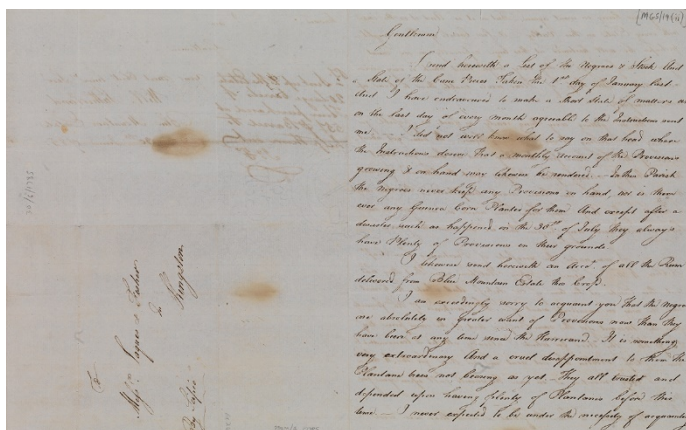
## Correspondences

Written by Europeans in relation to events, business and general affairs on plantations, correspondences can be used to place plantations within the wider context of the economy of enslaved labour.

As letters were often written to owners and stakeholders that did not live in the Caribbean, we are able to read a summary of a plantation's financial situation, its upcoming ventures and any business concerns.

These types of correspondences very rarely name or identify any particular individuals beyond those in leadership positions on plantations. We do not often have entire conversation chains so researchers may not be able to track the response, or what preceded the correspondence.

## **Examples in the collection**



Slave-carried letter (with two original enclosures), Kingston, Jamaica, 30 Jun 1785 (MGS/19).

<u>MGS/19</u>	See description with image above.
<u>MGS/20</u>	Letter to William Atkinson of Sheffield, addressed from Augusta, Georgia, 23 Mar 1821.

## Inventories

As slave owners considered enslaved people to be property, we are able to find information about people included in inventory reports.

Plantation inventory records provide an insight into the business of plantations, their production and crops, as well as the communities of enslaved and free people within them.

They can be useful in verifying knowledge or building a stronger contextual narrative of the wider community and the plantation during research.

The format of these reports differs from one plantation to the next, but the information may include the following:

Name (first)

Gender

Role/job

Location on plantation

### Examples in the collection

*A List of Slaves on Waterhouse & Tunbridge*  
1st Jan 1797.

Men	Women	Children	Boys
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28
31	32	33	34
35	36	37	38
39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46
47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58
59	60	61	62
63	64	65	66
67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74
75	76	77	78
79	80	81	82
83	84	85	86
87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94
95	96	97	98
99	100	101	102

'A list of slaves on Waterhouse & Tunbridge', a plantation slave inventory of the Waterhouse & Tunbridge Plantation, British West Indies, taken on 1 January 1797. Inventory including 62 men, 65 women, 10 boys, 8 girls, 6 male invalids, 9 female invalids, 13 male children, 25 female children, and increase/decrease in slave numbers for 1796. The plantation was in St Andrew, Jamaica (MGS/23).

<u>MGS/23</u>	See description with image above.
<u>MGS/24</u>	'Inventory of Plantation Mon Repos, the property of Joseph Hamer Esquire, deceased, situated on the East Coast of Demerary, taken on 1 July 1816'. Lists of plantation acreage and buildings, followed by a list of the names (under 'Negroes') of 85 men, 70 women, 43 male children and 46 female children, total of 244 individuals.

### Receipts/Bills of Sale/Auction Records

Bills of sale provide an insight into the price that was paid for enslaved or captive peoples. Bills of sale vary in format. They often show transactions of groups of people being sold at once and feature no descriptions of the people in question. Very few

contain the names of the enslaved or captive people being sold; this will most often be the case if only one person is being sold as part of the sale.

From the pricing and format of the receipt, researchers can attempt to ascertain the importance of the individual being sold.

Very rarely will it say what the individual is being sold for as this will largely be the decision of the slave-owner.

### Examples in the collection



Shipping bill certifying the loading of 'one slave boy', valued at £6 sterling, shipped by Alexander Young on the ship *Loretta* (Robert Poulney, Master), on the River Sierra Leone, bound for Jamaica, dated 3 Jan 1763 (MGS/14).

<u>MGS/2</u>	Slave registration certificate, Slave Registry Office, Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, 15 Aug 1826, detailing the registration of a male infant, named Japi, born 4 Aug 1826, whose mother was named Theresia, housemaid, property of Mr Daniel Krynauw Senior.
<u>MGS/8</u>	Receipt for 26 'new Negroe men' from the ship <i>Ann</i> from Cape Mount, Kingston, Jamaica, 9 May 1804, bought by HM Government from George Kinghorn as recruits for HM's Second West India Regiment at Fort Augusta for £2,340 (at £90 per head).
<u>MGS/9</u>	Receipt (with tax blind stamp) for the purchase of a slave by Miss Maria Potinger from John Hinde & Co. in Kingston, Jamaica, 30 May 1807, for one new Negro woman from the <i>Bedford</i> (Capt. Newman) for £110.
<u>MGS/14</u>	See description with image above.

### Lloyd's List

From 1734 to the present day, the Lloyd's List has provided regular updates about shipping news. Between 1500 and 1800, over 35,000 slave voyages carried millions of Africans to the Americas (including North America, the Caribbean and Brazil) and the Lloyd's List provided a reliable and concise source of information for the merchants' agents and insurance underwriters to negotiate insurance coverage for trading vessels.

From a research perspective the list provides us with insight into the movement of a particular vessel, where it was coming from and going to.

The database has been largely digitised for this purpose on the [Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database](#) (see Useful websites, p. 7 in this guide) but the paper records can be ordered and accessed at the National Maritime Museum.

We recommend consulting the Lloyd's List research guide before ordering any of the records:

A brief history and introduction to the Lloyd's List:

[www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides/research-guide-h1-lloyds-lloyds-list-brief-history](http://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides/research-guide-h1-lloyds-lloyds-list-brief-history)

Index List:

[www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides/research-guide-h4-lloyds-lloyds-list-indexes](http://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides/research-guide-h4-lloyds-lloyds-list-indexes)

### Crew lists

The 1915 British Merchant Navy crew lists (RSS/CL/1915, <https://1915crewlists.rmg.co.uk/>) are a valuable resource for family historians searching for people who may have served on board a British merchant navy vessel during this period. References to Caribbean locations are largely in relation to the birthplace of the crew member. Researchers can search through these lists by surname or place of birth. Please be aware of potential spelling errors or variations in the surname.

The following locations are among those mentioned in these documents: Anguilla (Anguila), Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Barbuda, Tortola (Virgin Islands (British)), Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago.

(Please note that both 'St' and 'Saint' (for example, Saint Lucia/St Lucia) produce different search results depending on the original records.)

### **Visiting the Caird Library and Archive**

For further information about visiting and ordering items from the Caird Library and Archive collection, please consult this page: [www.rmg.co.uk/collections/caird-library](http://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/caird-library).

A full list of research guides can be found here: [www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides](http://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/research-guides).

The Caird Library and Archive is open to the public (registration required) from Tuesday to Friday, 10.00–16.45. Alternatively, please email [library@rmg.co.uk](mailto:library@rmg.co.uk).