

Rachel Tudway (1656-1730)

Rachel Tudway was born to Richard and Elizabeth Cloudesley (nee Clarke) on 5th October 1656 being the second eldest of seven childrenⁱ. In 1663 her father, Richard was recorded as being a 'Captain'ⁱⁱ and by 1669, when he died, he was known as Major Cloudesleyⁱⁱⁱ. He was a vintner and church warden living in London. Her mother, Elizabeth died in 1679. Richard Cloudesley was the owner of the Swan Inn in Olde Fish Street which he passed down to his daughter Rachel and son-in-law, Clement Tudway.

Rachel was literate and numerate and soon proved she had a head for business. It was not uncommon for women of the merchant classes to be educated as this would have been seen as desirable by an intended suitor who would have found it helpful have his wife take care of the business at home while he was away. Neither was it unusual for women to have their own businesses in London where they traded as printers, fan-makers, goldsmiths, mantua makers or milliners. Some owned and ran drinking establishments such as taverns or inns where travellers could stay.

Rachel was then eminently suitable as an educated and competent wife for an up and coming merchant and gentleman; thus Clement 1 Tudway chose to marry her in c1675, and his choice proved to be sound. Their first daughter, Elizabeth, was born 1676; Rachel then followed in 1678 and after her, Sarah, who was born 1679. Her only son, Clement 2 was born 1684. They were all baptised in St Margaret Moses Church in Bread Street, City of London. In 1679, her husband had accrued enough money as a sugar merchant to purchase the Parham Plantation in Antigua along with a piece of land known as Long Island. As we shall see later in the story, there is evidence that she went to Antigua with her husband in the early days of setting up the plantation, so her involvement, was from the outset. In 1688/9, after less than ten years of progress of this business venture, Clement died, leaving Rachel, as a relatively young widow at age 33, to manage the sugar plantations as an absentee owner in order to support herself and her children, then aged 12,10,9 and 5.

In his will^{iv}, Clement 1 left 1/3 of the profits of the plantations, including Parham Hill and Long Island, plus his 1/3 share in the '*Swan Taverne in Old Fish Street*' to Rachel, his wife. The residue was to be held by his executors for the education and maintenance of his children until they were 21 when all residue and profits were to be divided equally between them, making each share up to £1000 (£200,000 in today's money). It is of note that he made no distinction regarding the education of his daughters and his son nor of the sum of money bequeathed to each. The plantations themselves were to be made over to Clement 2, his only son when he reached the age of 21 in 1705.

There were leases drawn up to rent out parts of the plantation to close friends or family, thus taking some of the pressure off Rachel from direct management but at the same time allowing her an income. The leases seemed to take a good while before they become operational, with that to the Turneys not taking place until 1701^v when Peter Ffloyer was part of the arrangement along with his wife Sarah, who was also Rachel's sister, and again in 1708 when it appeared they had transferred the lease to Nathaniel Carpenter.^{vi} There are no plantation records accounting for how this arrangement worked, but the intention was to help Clement 1's long-time friend and partner George Turney to provide for his wife and sons as well as ensure that his own wife had an income from the rent for the land. These arrangements ensured that the absentee owner of both the land, and the enslaved persons thereon, received an annual rental income as well as a share of profits from the sugar, without having to have the responsibility of being 'hands on'. For Rachel, having some of the Parham estate leased out and some under her own control via managers ensured a long term guaranteed income for her of greater value than selling the land, and all that was on it, including

those enslaved. Rachel also retained her 1/3 of the plantation to manage as she saw fit until she died, but it was not plain sailing, as can be seen from her letter-book from 1717 until 1729.

Her husband, Clement 1 said in his will that all of the plantation should pass to his son Clement 2 when he attained the age of 21, but we can see that this did not happen, as Rachel remained in control of the plantation until she died. This perhaps was a mutually beneficial arrangement, affording Rachel a life-long independent income, leaving Clement 2 free to pursue his own interests.

There is a surviving letter-book by Rachel Tudway^{vii} lodged in the Somerset Heritage Centre along with accounts records. The Letterbook has possibly not been given the consideration owed to it. It is digitalised on the British Online Archives but classed as 'letters from the estates owners in England' which obscures the true author of these letters. They are of significant interest for two reasons. Firstly that Rachel Tudway was an educated, literate and numerate woman who in the late 17thc until just before her death was – almost 40 years – was an absentee slave plantation owner, actively overseeing the affairs of her estate. Secondly, because there are few letters *from* any of the Tudways, only ones received *by* them, that have survived, these surviving letters have given some insight into Rachel Tudway, her demeanour as a manager, the issues she faced and more importantly her attitude towards the enslaved Africans on her plantations.

Keeping tabs on lessees and estate managers in Antigua from her London home became Rachel Tudway's constant headache. She employed a salaried manager to keep an eye on the leaseholders and her own portion of the plantation. In late 1717 Mr Thomas Fenton took over the running of the plantation from Mr Thomas Grigg. Rachel Tudway's agreement with Thomas Fenton, as an apothecary by trade, commanded him to the care of all '*sick and wounded Negroes on the plantation*'. It also states that he '*shall not employ any Negroes in Breeding*'^{viii} meaning that she did not approve of the kind of 'stud farming' that went on to enable planters to increase the numbers of enslaved through the birth rate. This practice inevitably led to the rape and ill-treatment of black women by fellow black men at the instigation of white owners and overseers and undoubtedly, too, by the white overseers themselves. It wasn't plain sailing so Rachel also kept in communication with the island's governor, Colonel Edward Byams, to ensure that the manager did what she had bid. The tone of her letters reflected her position in relation to these men. To the manager she was clear and authoritative, to Byams she was more a humble supplicant. She often mentioned her deceased husband, clearly known to Byams, and leant on his sense of respectful duty to her, as the vulnerable widow and mother. She would also have been reliant on informal sources of information coming from friends and neighbours with the London – Antigua connection and a shared interest in plantation life. These were plentiful in the City of London where she would have been in the centre of a very active grapevine. The letters to and from Antigua would have taken at least six weeks to have arrived on the packet ships either way, so news would always be stale and instructions untimely. But manage she did, quite successfully too, given the mostly healthy profits. For a woman of her era, this was an achievement, yet the praises due on one hand must be tempered by the fact of the barbaric business she was in.

At that time in Antigua, the Barbados Slave Codes were in operation. These were introduced as early as 1661 with some amendments made. They were adopted throughout the Caribbean as well as in the state of Carolina in America. Basically, the Codes set out the relationships between the slave owner and the enslaved and enabled a strict demarcation of plantation life based on colour and servitude. The Code was supposed to set a basic standard for the treatment of enslaved people but in reality were heavily weighted in favour of their white masters. Rachel Tudway would have expected her managers to comply with these Codes and her letters showed she had no problem at all

with the idea of buying and selling enslaved people. However, there are also indications that she did not view Africans as without humanity. She knew many by name, who their parents were and their children. At the time of great hardship to the plantation caused by the drought in 1717 she was diligent in ensuring sufficient food – in the form of oats, rice and dried broad beans – were sent *'for the poore Negroes'* with regularity until such time as the rains came and they could have tended their provision grounds again. It was uncommon for enslaved people to be encouraged to grow food for themselves in the early plantation years as all their hours of labour were to be spent working for the master.

Rachel, despite evidence of a more humane attitude, was, every inch, a shrewd plantation owner and keen to ensure a steady supply of enslaved labour, both in 'New Negroes' i.e. those recently transported from Africa, and those already in both her possession as well as people such as her outgoing manager, Mr Grigg. In a letter to Thomas Fenton, dated 29th October 1718, she says,

'Mr Grigg is very earnest with me to order Rebecca, the daughter of Henretta, and the boy Cuffee (alias Ceasar Grigg) to live with them, or exchanging them for two others, but if they will be of service to him they may be so to you, therefore I would have you keep them'.^{ix}

But in a further letter of 22nd November 1718^x to Fenton she has changed her position.

'You may remember before you left there was a Mulatto in the house, a very good workwoman, the daughter of Henerato Who died some years ago and there is also a Negro boy of about 11-12 years of age both these Mr Grigg had agreed to chaing (change) for two others...'

We can deduce from the information here that Rebecca and Cuffee, 'alias' Caesar Grigg, that he is likely Grigg's son by Henretta so possibly the mixed race Rebecca is also. As we know from the Slave Codes, paternity counts for nothing – only 'ownership' is recognised as legitimate. So while Grigg would like to have his children with him, to serve him, they belong to Rachel Tudway so he has no claim on them. She also does not want to undermine Fenton if he would find Rebecca and Cuffee useful to him.

But Mr. Grigg has made an offer to exchange them for two others. This is more to Rachel's liking. She had expressed to Grigg that she would like to buy Mr Griggs 'Negroes' for the Parham plantation before he left. These were:

'A Negro man, a good mason and carpenter which he has had on the plantation about nine years, and his wife and childe belongs to us, he is about 24 year of age . Also a Negro woman in the house with two children she is wife of Quashy's son, Sam, which he said belongs to him also to him both of which he offers me first refusal...'

However, Rachel had no income that year from sugar due to the drought and was in a bad way financially, so she hoped that Mr Grigg would swap these two for the ones she wanted as they were skilled men. It may also have been the case that she knew this deal would keep them together as families and perhaps she was afraid that Mr Grigg would sell them off separately. At a time when enslaved people were not allowed to marry and had no rights over their children we see that she used the word 'wife' in the case of two families and is familiar with the names generationally of the men referred to. Even though there were many letters to Grigg, Fenton and Colonel Byams pressing for this to go ahead, it is unclear how it turned out. In the letter (above) to Thomas Grigg^{xi} she remarked that he had encouraged the baptism of the enslaved children of the family that she wished to purchase or exchange from him, which was also frowned upon by the islands white population. We also read in the same letter to Grigg these were children whom he had baptised, where Rachel

commented that they should also receive education as was fitting for a Christian, saying he *'would do well to give them the education as Christians ought to do'*^{xii} a measure banned by the Slave Codes. So it seems possible that Rachel Tudway had a different view of Africans that diverged from the principles of the Slave Codes which regarded them as without humanity.

Rachel said that she wanted to purchase 'more Negroes', presumably to replace those who may have died during the droughts. However she did not have the money, but a few years later the accounts show 'New Negroes' had been purchased. These would have been those enslaved Africans recently trafficked from Africa to the Caribbean.

The letters tell a lot about Rachel Tudway's attitude towards the treatment of the enslaved. In one letter she told her new manager, Thomas Fenton in a letter dated 18 April 1719, that he must not be severe with the enslaved labourers or they will not work well for the plantation.

'Be very kind and careful to the poore Negroes and let them not want, neither for food (and when you have gained their good opinion of you, you may leade them but I sincerely believe they will not be driven, I should be glad to hear how they stand Affected towards you, and whether they run away or keep at home. I fear they will not want for ill advise therefore would have you be surcumspect in your management of them.'^{xiii}

It appeared that Rachel felt she needed to ensure this as she wrote to Byams and Bayer saying that she had heard from Mr Grigg that Fenton was *'treating the Negroes unkindly'*. She asks if this is true that they talk to Fenton and ask him *'not to be too severe on the poore slaves.'*^{xiv}

She is furious to hear, some months later, that 40-50 enslaved people had run away from the plantation, especially at a time when they were needed to bring in the crop.

'Tis Reported here that in the midst of our Cropp 40 or 50 of our Negros ran away, which I am very much concerned to hear, I never before heard of a quarter of (....) to goe away together, I feere you have been too seviere with them which has caused them to Run away. This must needs be a very great hinderance to our Cropp & will prove is not fortunate yet of very serious consequence to your interest for without our Negros you are (incapable?) , the Land cannot be improved or managed. I should be sorrey if you have forgotten what I said to you when you went to Antigua, I then gave you strict charge to be careful of and kinde to the poore Negros & not to be too harsh or sevier with them, when you had gained there good opinion you might Leade them, but they will not be Drone (driven?) to the EffectI am very desireous to be satisfied of the truth of it which I shall expect of you by the first opportunity.'^{xv}

In her next letter of 23rd July 1719 there was no further mention of this incident, but it can be seen how on the ball she is over a wide range of matters and how particular she is regarding treatment of the enslaved. In this letter, typical of many, Fenton was asked to chase the bad debts of one Mr Richard Cochrane and that he should not allow anyone to sublet and take advantage of the land without benefit to her. Mr Grigg also appeared to be falling under Rachel's sharp eye regarding items that should be in the house that he is vacating. Then she took account of the money paid to Titus Neve, and indentured blacksmith from England, who, it appeared, had been overpaid. It can also be seen how much she knew about the growing of sugar cane as well as the quality of the sugar produced, the right conditions for transporting it to England and the price it should fetch. This level of scrutiny to detail is characteristic of Rachel Tudway's diligent supervision of her plantation manager and her ability to ensure the plantation was as profitable as possible.

A lot can be learned from her letters about the behaviour of men who are lessees, managers or overseers. She railed to Fenton and Colonel Byams against Mr Grigg keeping a woman who was not his wife to live with him. She was aware of those who would try to cheat her and could take decisive legal action when necessary. Throughout the planter class there were elements who gave no thought to adhering to the morays of decent living; drunkenness, gambling and debauchery were commonplace. Rachel promoted a more moral way of living on her plantation in line with her Christian principles.

There was one Mr Jno Sheffield, son of her apothecary who was well known to her in London, who intended to seek his fortune in Antigua. Rachel wasted no time in warning Mr Fenton and Col Byams about Mr Sheffield and how she wanted him nowhere near her plantation. First in a letter dated 26th August 1726 she warned Fenton that Sheffield's 'prodigal son' would soon be arriving in Antigua saying it is her 'positive orders' that he should not be received in any way on the plantation as he has been a 'great villain' to his father. In a further letter dated 17th December 1726, it appeared that Fenton was not doing as asked and she clearly instructed him that he would be in breach of his Articles (contract) for him to

'entertane any persons on the plantation that is not a servant to it...I assure you I never will consent he should have anything to do with anything that belongs to me or where I am concerned. I know so much of him (&you know much more)he has ruend his father and gone away from his wife and two children, he has set no bounds to his extravagance where the laws of God and Nature oblige him to take care and will not act with more honesty for strangers.'^{xvi}

Rachel went on to say that Fenton's pleading of obligations to Mr Sheffield Snr did not impress her as Fenton was obliged to her first under his contract. She reminded him *'I am under no obligation either to father, mother or son'* and then because *'sending him in such a private manner is imposing on me because I am a woman and at great distance ...'*^{xvii}

Rachel went on to make her position crystal clear with a hint that her instruction to Fenton should be sufficient without her going to her attorney. However, on 23rd January a letter to Colonel Edward Byams (Governor of Antigua), his nephew George Byams and Nathaniel Crump reveals that she has heard that Mr Jno Sheffield had arrived on Parham plantation, contrary to her instructions. She asked them to *'order Mr Fenton to discharge him immediately'* and that she would never have given consent for him to *'live on the plantation, be employed or entrusted with any business in relation to it nor in anything where she is concerned.'*^{xviii}

There were a number of further letters both to Fenton and Byams over the next few months where Rachel's patience was running thin as Mr Jno Sheffield was still on the Parham plantation. Neither was Fenton answering her letters nor ensuring rents were being collected. A year later, in a letter dated April 29th 1727^{xix}, she told Fenton she was glad to hear Sheffield had now left the Island. She had also concerned that he might *'corrupt the Negroes'* with his *'evil practices'* which can only be taken to mean sexual misconduct.

The point made by Rachel of her being a woman and far away gave a sense of her awareness of her lesser social position even though she was the owner and should be obeyed by her manager. The matter clearly ran on for a good few months and suggests that she was not always given respect or instructions carried out because of her sex and the fact of being so far away. In other words, they knew they could get away with ignoring her on this and other matters. Fenton sometimes did not reply to letters promptly and was sometimes remiss in chasing up rents. However, accounts were kept by Fenton which showed the profitability of the estate overall.

Very rarely was Rachel Tudway's son, Clement 2, mentioned in her letters although it was apparent that he had visited, including just before she died. There was a letter which revealed more information about her relationship to the Plantation and her intimate knowledge of it. Her letter dated 11th July 1726^{xx} to Thomas Fenton gave him background to a lease issue in which she explained that she remembered that there were deeds and other papers that were left in Antigua when she and her husband came back to England. These had been left in the charge of her brother-in-law, Charles (1) Tudway. She would now be obliged to seek a court judgement to clarify matters. She recalled a book keeper who lived with Mr Tudway before they returned from Antigua who remained in service of Charles 1 for a while after. Here is evidence that Rachel and Clement 1 lived in Antigua presumably between the time of the birth of Clement 2 (1684) and the death of Clement 1 (1688/9). In the previous story of Clement 1 Tudway reference was made to the advertisement in the London Gazette regarding a missing trunk with items initialled CT and RT. It was assumed, perhaps wrongly as this evidence suggests, that the RT stood for Richard Tudway. It is now highly likely that it stood for Rachel Tudway. The possibility that she and Clement 1 lived on Parham for a while explains how she showed intimate knowledge of the house, its contents, names of enslaved persons, as well as details of the cultivation of sugar.

A further set of documents exist that cover the years that Rachel was in charge of Parham. These are the account records that run from 1689, when Clement 1 died, until the death of his brother, who had been charged to take care of the plantation, in 1693. Thereafter they cover the period from 1693 to 1731 in which Rachel managed the plantation and its leases, only taken over by her son Clement 2 after her death in 1730. Over the years 1714 to 1720, covering the period of the 1717/18 drought, it can be seen how badly this affected her income and how the profit balance fell dramatically. The balance of her accounts fell from £1553.16.2d in 1714 to £146.6.0 in 1718, although this rose again in 1720 to £898.15.5. By the end of her life, and her management of Parham she was making a healthy profit, thanks to the unpaid labour of her 'poore Negroes'.

Rachel Tudway accepted the inevitability of her situation as an owner of enslaved Africans, as her income and livelihood for her family was derived from the sugar they produced and thought nothing of regularly purchasing enslaved people either as 'New Negroes' or from other plantation owners. However, while she seemed to have a regard for their humanity unusual for the time, she may have subscribed to the view that enslavement was fitting for Africans in order to 'civilise' (sic) them. But what inspired her to reject the prevailing culture of violent enforcement that the Slave Codes enabled and have a more liberal view towards their treatment and management? What might have influenced her to believe this so insistently in the face of a prevailing culture of dehumanisation of Africans? Rachel had, as seen above, spent time in Antigua with her husband before he died and perhaps had her own views as to how a model plantation should be run. She seemed to be swayed by the 'civilising' mission supporting Grigg's Christianisation of some and possibly their education. In the story of Richard Tudway, her brother-in-law, we saw how he was a slave trader and how that it was inevitable that he would have likely been of a brutal disposition towards Africans. Quamy,^{xxi} a ten year old enslaved African boy living in Richard's household in London, ran away, perhaps because of Richard's harsh treatment of him. Could it have been that Rachel was a disapproving witness to this? Could it also have been that Quamy was returned to her, whereupon she set about proving her point, treating him kindly, maybe even having him baptised and educated. There are no records to prove this, but some experience in her life may well have shaped Rachel's views and wishes that she wished to be followed by her managers. A final question then would be would Rachel Tudway have been persuaded against the slave trade and eventually against slavery itself or would self-interest have won out?

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- ⁱ Find My Past [Record Transcription: England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975 | findmypast.co.uk](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/record-transcription/england-births-baptisms-1538-1975)
- ⁱⁱ Boyd's London Burials [Record Transcription: Boyd's London Burials | findmypast.co.uk](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/record-transcription/boyd-london-burials)
- ⁱⁱⁱ
- ^{iv} Oliver, V.L (1895) Pedigree of Tudway in History of Antigua Vol 3 Mitchell and Hughes. London
- ^v Lease 1701 DD/FS/2/2/1 15-161 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{vi} Lease 1708 DD/FS/2/2/2 18-161 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{vii} Tudway, Rachel Letter book of covering the period 1717-1729. Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{viii} Tudway, R. Copy of agreement for Fenton's employment on Parham, undated. Box DD/TD/14/11 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{ix} Tudway, Rachel Letter to Thomas Fenton 29 October 1718 Letterbook of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^x Tudway, Rachel Letter to T. Fenton 22nd November 1717 Letterbook of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xi} Tudway, Rachel Letter to Thomas Grigg 29th October 1718 Letterbook of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xii} Tudway, Rachel Letter to Thomas Grigg 29/10/1718 Letterbook of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xiii} Tudway Rachel Letter to Thomas Fenton 18 April 1719 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xiv} Rachel Tudway letter to Byams and Bayer 18 April 1719 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xii} Tudway, Rachel Letter to T. Fenton 23rd June 1719 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xiii} Tudway Rachel Letter to T. Fenton 17th December 1726 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xvii} *ibid*
- ^{xiv} Tudway Rachel Letter to T. Fenton 23rd January 1727 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xix} Rachel Tudway Letter to Thomas Fenton 29 April 1727 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xx} Rachel Tudway Letter to Thomas Fenton Letter 26th August 1726 Letter book of Rachel Tudway Box DD/TD/8 Somerset Heritage Centre
- ^{xxi} Newman, S (2021) Freedom Seekers in Restoration London