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**BRITISH RECORDS RELATING TO AMERICA IN MICROFORM**

**General Editor: Professor W E Minchinton**

**MATERIAL RELATING TO THE WEST INDIES**

from

**THE SENHOUSE PAPERS**

**1762–1831**

in the

**CARLISLE RECORD OFFICE**

Introduction by

**RICHARD B SHERIDAN**

Professor of Economics

University of Kansas

**1977**

## **1    PROVENANCE**

The material on this film, consisting of approximately 2100 folios of the papers of William Senhouse and his brother Joseph Senhouse, owned by Mr Roger Pocklington-Senhouse, were deposited in the Record Office at Carlisle between 1958 and 1970. The Senhouse Papers contain much material about the history of the Senhouse family of Netherhall, near Maryport, in the county of Cumberland and of the brothers Senhouse who resided many years in the West India islands of Barbados and Dominica. The bulk of the material on this film consists of the records of Joseph (later Sir Joseph) Senhouse in the years from 1764 to 1790. Unfortunately, volume 1 of Joseph Senhouse's 'Memoirs' is missing. Also included on the film are the 'Recollections of William Senhouse', Surveyor General of Barbados and the Leeward Islands, which runs to 363 pages.

## 2 WILLIAM SENHOUSE, SURVEYOR GENERAL OF CUSTOMS

Born at Netherhall, Cumberland, on 16 January 1741, the third son of Humphrey and Mary Senhouse, William Senhouse was educated first at Ellenborough School and then at a school in Cockermouth where he was prepared for the Royal Navy. He was a midshipman in the navy from 1755 to 1769, first seeing service in the French and Indian Wars and then stationed at Boston. He then left the navy as he had little chance of promotion. In 1770 he was appointed to the customs service in the West Indies. From 1771 to 1799 he lived in Barbados except for short visits to other islands and several trips to England. In 1772 he married Mary Samson Wood, daughter and heiress of a well-to-do planter of Barbados. From this union were born eight sons and three daughters.

By the influence of Sir James Lowther, 5th Baronet and Member of Parliament for Carlisle, William Senhouse was appointed Surveyor General of the Customs in Barbados and the Windward and Leeward Islands. Senhouse was in charge of collecting the duties owing to the Crown from the four-and-a-half per cent duty levied on the exports of colonial produce. The establishment which he superintended included seventeen collectors, fifteen comptrollers, eleven searchers, two land and tide surveyors and 43 waiters. The section of his 'Recollections' (item 17 on the film) covering this period of his life begins on 30 May 1770, when he received his appointment as Surveyor General, and continues to the year 1787 when his office was abolished.<sup>1</sup> He wrote that his duties included the appointment and removal of collectors, comptrollers and other officers, the examination of quarterly accounts and the submission of reports to the Commissioners of the Customs in London. For these and other duties he received a salary of £400 per annum, plus travel allowances and the services of a clerk. His office carried weight and consideration among the first inhabitants of the islands and entitled him ex officio to a seat in the Council of Barbados and the other governments named in his commission.

First settled by Englishmen in 1627, Barbados experienced a transformation which made it the leading sugar island of the Caribbean for many decades. Although the meridian of its prosperity had passed by the 1770s, it continued to be an important centre of tropical agriculture, trade, shipping and political and social activity. Here dwelt some 18,500 whites and more than 74,000 black slaves in an island of 166 square miles. That Barbados was conveniently situated as an administrative centre is clearly evident from the 'Recollections' of William Senhouse. Bridgetown, Barbados was commonly the first port of call for merchant vessels and warships which entered the Caribbean from Great Britain, North America and West Africa. The thriving sloop trade gave easy access to neighbouring islands. Moreover, ties of kinship and professional and business relationships bound together the planter societies of the Lesser Antilles. Barbados was pre-eminent among these mini-societies, the mother colony and 'Little England' of the sunny Caribbean.

From Barbados William Senhouse sailed from time to time to the Windward and Leeward Islands to inspect accounts, investigate charges made against his subordinates and fill vacancies in the customs establishment. Besides these administrative duties he waited upon the governor or president, received and paid visits and made excursions into the country. In May 1772, for example, he visited the islands of St Kitts, Nevis and Dominica. In St Kitts he and his brother Joseph took part in the public entertainments that were given by the inhabitants for Sir Ralph Payne, the new governor. In Dominica he was entertained by Governor Sir William Young who lived in the style of a prince and had introduced a spirit of emulation among the inhabitants. Senhouse was a keen observer of the many-faceted life of the islands. On another visit, which included the islands of Antigua, St Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat, he observed that St Kitts was the finest sugar island in proportion to its size in the West Indies.

Like numerous other public officials, William Senhouse purchased a sugar plantation and combined his customs office with the rural life of a gentleman planter. He also received a power of attorney to superintend Sir James Lowther's plantation in Barbados.<sup>2</sup> Senhouse paid £18,000 for 'The Grove' plantation in St Philip's Parish. From a run-down condition, he improved the plantation until it became a productive property with a comfortable house for his growing family. That he encountered formidable obstacles is evident from his 'Recollections'. He wrote of the unlucky succession of bad crops which were caused by drought and heat, together with the yellow blast, black blast, ants and innumerable host of vermin. Far more spectacular in its destructive power was the hurricane of 1780 which he described in minute detail. Senhouse himself lost six negro slaves and numerous head of livestock besides buildings and growing crops. In the whole island of Barbados the hurricane reportedly killed 2033 slaves and 6817 horses and cattle and destroyed other property to a total value of about £1 million sterling.

When his customs office was abolished in 1787, Senhouse devoted much time and effort to making his plantation more profitable and physically attractive. The measure of his success was recorded both in words and figures by Humphrey Fleming Senhouse who continued the biography of his father. The son extracted from the plantation accounts for the years from 1774 to 1799 the annual produce, together with expenses, losses and gains. He considered it providential that a general excess of profits over expenditures began nearly at the time his father lost his office.<sup>3</sup> William Senhouse died in 1800.

### 3 SIR JOSEPH SENHOUSE, CUSTOMS COLLECTOR AND MAYOR OF CARLISLE

After attending a boarding school at Whitehaven with his brother William, Joseph Senhouse spent some years at sea. Through the influence of his father's kinsman who commanded an East Indiaman, Joseph joined the ship *Stormont* in early 1759 and sailed from London to Madras, India. In the autumn of 1766 he passed his examination for second mate and began his fourth voyage to India. He returned to Netherhall in October 1768 and was without employment until William's appointment as Surveyor General. On their way to London and Barbados the brothers visited Sir James Lowther who desired William to put Joseph into the first good office in the customs service that might fall vacant. On 21 July 1771 Joseph left his brother in Barbados and took passage to Roseau, Dominica, where he took up his new appointment as Collector of Customs. Two years later he wrote to a kinsman that none of his family had experienced a more uncommon reverse of fortune 'than myself who 5 years ago was pushing my fortune in the East an *arrant Smugler*; now, I'm a *Custom House Officer* in the Western World'.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Senhouse was appointed Comptroller of Customs at Roseau, Dominica in 1774. After a year's leave of absence in England, he returned to the West Indies in 1776 and was appointed by his brother William to the Collectorship at Bridgetown, Barbados. This was apparently a temporary post during the period of the American Revolution when the island of Dominica was conquered by the French. Joseph went to England again in August 1779, this time to stay. After 1782 he became Sir James Lowther's political manager at Carlisle, was elected mayor of the city and through Lowther's influence received a knighthood. Writing to his brother Humphrey Senhouse on 11 March 1786, Sir Joseph said that the Commissioners of the Customs had suspended him as Comptroller for not repairing to Dominica. He explained that while the Comptrollership may have been above his deserts, it was nevertheless much beneath his present rank in life.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4 THE SENHOUSE PAPERS

The microfilm of Joseph Senhouse's Papers consists of memoirs, observations, letter books, memorandum books, plantation estimates, marriage settlement, maps, leases, and numerous waste books and account books under such categories as private trade, cash books, plantation journals and ledgers, and custom accounts. His 'Memoirs of Dominica' contains sections on the discovery and history of the island, its soil and produce, ports, and details of the dimensions of the island and distances in miles between landmarks. Beginning at the other end of the volume containing the 'Memoirs' is an account 'Of the cultivation and manufacture of indigo' which is printed in Appendix D of Edward Hughes's *North Country life in the eighteenth century*. As with his brother William, Joseph Senhouse recorded in some detail his experiences as a customs officer and planter. He was a keen observer of the natural history and social and economic life of the islands. Ships and seamen, planters and slaves, sugar and rum, doctors and patients, mortgages and bills of exchange, salt fish and ground provisions, cane land and woodland — these and other components of the Caribbean world in the prosperous era of sugar and slavery are recorded in the papers of Joseph Senhouse.

Plantation and slave records comprise a considerable portion of the Joseph Senhouse Papers. On 2 January 1772 Senhouse purchased 293 acres of woodland in Dominica for £984 12s. The following month he purchased ten acres adjoining this woodland, of which six acres were cleared and planted with coffee and ground provisions. He called the plantation 'Lowther Hall' in honour of Sir James Lowther, his family's benefactor. By 1 January 1776, Lowther Hall had ten seasoned negroes and a slave boy of Malayan birth. Fifty acres had been cleared and partly planted with coffee and ground provisions and the appraised value of the plantation amounted to £11,607 15s Dominican currency. From the plantation journals and ledgers one can observe the numerous elements of cost, including land, slaves, livestock, foodstuffs, clothing, lumber, salaries, taxes; and the revenues which accrued from the sale of coffee, cotton and ground provisions. Expenses so far exceeded income by the end of the year 1777 that Senhouse was tempted to dispose of or abandon his plantation. Yet he wrote to a friend that he was a well-wisher to the island of Dominica and was entertaining thoughts of growing indigo. By 1782 the appraised value of Lowther Hall had been reduced to £3312 in Dominican currency. One of Senhouse's memorandum books concerns his lands in the island of Tobago, together with estimates for settling plantations of cacao, cotton, coffee and sugar.

Since African slaves attended whites from birth to death, in sickness and health, in house and field and on their travels, it is not surprising that the Senhouse Papers should contain substantial information on the peculiar institution. From time to time Joseph Senhouse purchased slaves and food and clothing for their maintenance. For example, he paid £62 14s 6d sterling



each for nine negroes on 13 November 1772. In June of the following year he purchased four negroes for £257 6s 5d Dominican currency. Though his own slaves were apparently well-treated, the same could not always be said of those belonging to others of his acquaintance. During his stay in Barbados he wrote of a negro man, who, upon being threatened with severe punishment for running away, 'threw himself head long into a copper full of boiling Cane Liquor, and was instantly scalded to death'. On another occasion two women slaves who were chained together caught their fingers between the rollers of the sugar mill and were crushed to death.

Planters had so much capital invested in negro slaves that they took measures to prevent accidents and preserve their workers in health and strength. Joseph Senhouse told of an ingenious machine to prevent such dreadful accidents as happened to the two women who were crushed to death between the mill rollers. He also recorded instances of slave sickness and the measures taken to restore them to health. For example, he visited the slave hospital on one plantation in Dominica which struck him as being a better and more roomy building than the owner's dwelling house. Both of the brothers Senhouse were on terms of friendship with numerous doctors who treated slaves in the West Indies. Both brothers employed doctors to visit their plantations at least once a week and treat all of their slaves on an annual contract basis. Moreover, doctors commonly charged extra fees for surgical and midwife services and for inoculating slaves against smallpox. In 1781, for example, William Senhouse had 84 of his own slaves and 54 of Sir James Lowther's negroes inoculated against smallpox for a charge of five shillings each.

- 1 This section of these 'Recollections' is printed under the title 'The autobiographical manuscript of William Senhouse, Surveyor General of His Majesty's Customs — Barbados and the Windward and Leeward Islands from 1770 until 1787' in *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, II (1934–5) 61–79, 115–34, 191–209; III (1935–6) 3–19, 87–99.
- 2 Plantation accounts sent to Sir James Lowther (later Lord Lonsdale) and his son, the Duke of Cleveland, can be found among the Papers of the Duke of Cleveland in the British Museum (Add Ms 43507).
- 3 For a graphical portrayal of the profit and loss statistics for Grove plantation from 1774 to 1799, see Otis P Starkey, *The economic geography of Barbados: a study of the relationships between environmental variations and economic development* (Westport, Conn: Negro Universities Press, 1971) p.102
- 4 Edward Hughes, *North Country life in the eighteenth century, II. Cumberland and Westmorland 1700–1830* (Oxford University Press, 1965) pp. 104–9.
- 5 Hughes, *North Country life*, pp. 347–8.

## 5 CONTENTS OF THE FILM

### Reel 1

- 1 Account book of private trade shipped on a voyage of the *Earl of Middlesex* to the East Indies, 1766–8. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in
- 2 Book containing estimates and other memoranda concerning Joseph Senhouse's plantations in Tobago and the Ellenborough Estate, 1772, coast guard vessels in the West Indies; duties collected at Roseau, Dominica, under the Freeport Act, 6 George II c 49; accounts for the sloop *Polly*; etc, 1768–74. Soft-backed notebook, 7½in x 12in
- 3 Joseph Senhouse's summary account book for Dominica, 1771–3. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in
- 4 Lease for 40 years of 10 acres of land in St David's parish, Dominica by the Commissioners of the King to Bartholemew Rosseau, 18 May 1772. 3 sheets, 12<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in x 14½in. Also two letters relating to grant attached
- 5 Memoirs of Dominica by Joseph Senhouse. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in  
Includes sections on the discovery and history of the island, climate, soil and produce, Roseau, Prince Rupert's Bay, Portsmouth, dimensions of the island, distances between landmarks etc. At the end of the volume is an account 'Of the cultivation and manufacture of indigo'
- 6 Joseph Senhouse's account book relating to the West Indies and Cumberland transactions, 1772–3. Hardbound notebook, 8¼in x 13in  
Includes cash accounts, duties accounts, stock accounts, incidentals, expenses, bills of exchange, accounts for William Senhouse, the Ellenborough estate, Bartholemew Rosseau and the sloop *Polly*, profits and losses, officers and searchers & waiters accounts and various individual accounts
- 7 Joseph Senhouse's letters and general memorandum book for Dominica and Barbados, 1772–7. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12in  
Copies of letters written from Barbados together with memoranda on past and future correspondence; letters and memoranda from London and Dominica; accounts from Barbados
- 8 Joseph Senhouse's waste book accounts and memoranda for Barbados, Dominica, London and Cumberland, 1772–88. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in

- 9 Joseph Senhouse's cash journal for Barbados and Dominica, 1776–7. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in  
Also includes accounts of William Senhouse and other individuals and cash account current in England for 1773–5 etc
- 10 Joseph Senhouse's cash account book for Barbados, Dominica and London, 1778–80. Soft-backed notebook, 8½in x 12½in
- 11 Joseph Senhouse's waste book accounts for London and Cumberland including Arkelby Hall farming accounts, 1789–90. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 13¼in
- 12 Lowther Hall cash account books, 1772–6. 4 vols. Soft-backed notebooks, 8in x 12½in
  - a) Ledger: plantation accounts and accounts of individuals on the estate
  - b) Journal: purchase of land, plantation accounts etc. At the end is a valuation of Lowther Hall estate
  - c) Cash book: cash accounts for the plantation and various individuals on the estate
  - d) Memoranda of purchase of property and accounts of purchase of miscellaneous items relating to the estate
- 13 Account book of remittances made by Joseph Senhouse as Collector of HM Customs at Roseau, Dominica, 1772. Soft-backed notebook, 7½in x 9½in  
Beginning from the other end of the book are several copy letters written in Barbados concerning bills of exchange
- 14 Account book of fees etc received by Joseph Senhouse as Comptroller of HM Customs at Roseau, Dominica, 1774–6. Soft-backed notebook, 8in x 12½in
- 15 Settlement upon the marriage of Sir Joseph Senhouse with Mary Ashley of Ashby St Ledgers, 29 October 1787. Document 19in x 27in.  
Also newspaper cutting reporting marriage.
- 16 Memoirs of Joseph Senhouse, volume 3, commencing in Barbados, 1 January 1779. 6½in x 8in  
At the end are instructions on signals for ships under convoy.
- 17 Recollections of William Senhouse (1741–1800), Surveyor General of Barbados and the Leeward Island. 6½in x 8in  
At the beginning of the volume are some genealogical notes on the Senhouse family; at the end of the 'Recollections' are some notes by Humphrey Fleming Senhouse, fifth son of William, on his father's life

- 18 'Observations of Barbados' by Joseph Senhouse, 1780. 6½in x 8in  
At the end are typescript notes on 'An unsolved Barbados mystery' by Sir Algernon Aspinall, twentieth century
- 19 Printed copy of a letter on Graham Island, near Sicily, written on 5 August 1831 by Captain Humphrey Fleming Senhouse. 4in x 5½in
- 20 Joseph Senhouse's cash account book, 1762–6. Hard-backed notebook, 6½in x 8in  
Accounts of transactions in Calcutta, Madras, Bengal, Falmouth, St Helena etc. Also list of children of Joseph Senhouse and Mary Ashley and other genealogical lists.

## Reel 2

- 20 Joseph Senhouse's account book, 1762–6 continued.
- 21 Memoirs of Joseph Senhouse, volume 2, commencing in Barbados, 2 June 1776. 6½in x 8in
- 22 Notes on Joseph Senhouse's lands in Dominica, 1771–6. 2 sheets, 7½in x 4½in and 9in x 5½in
- 23 Plans and notes on woodlands purchased, 1772. 2 sheets, 16in x 9½in
- 24 Grant of land by George III to Joseph Senhouse, 7 April 1772 (top section of document missing) 10in x 15in
- 25 Two letters, 1826–7. 10in x 8in and 9in x 7½in
- 26 Map of Lowther Hall, Barbados, nd. 17in x 13in

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### b) secondary

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