

Chapter 3.09

THE MOLINEUXS OF MONTSERRAT

1657 - 1820



Plymouth, Montserrat 1995. Plymouth was Montserrat's main town but has been partially buried in ash from the Soufriere Hills volcano which in 1995 started its most violent eruption since the seventeenth century. Fifteen years later volcanic activity had not stopped and parts of Plymouth remain closed to the public.

Chapter 3.09. The Molineuxs of Montserrat.

The Molineuxs were a prominent family on the island of Montserrat, a British island colony in the Leeward Islands approximately 40 miles south east of St. Kitts. Montserrat was settled largely by the Irish in the seventeenth century, many of them fleeing civil strife in Ireland caused by James I's policy of giving Catholic-owned land to Protestant immigrants. This resulted in many disaffected Catholics emigrating, often to the West Indies where they found work as indentured domestic servants, day labourers or small tenant farmers. Some of the emigrants had been substantial landowners in Ireland and they formed an influential and wealthy Catholic establishment with strong representation in Montserrat's Assembly (lower house) and Council (upper house). As the majority of the population of Montserrat was Catholic, the island was always considered insecure, since the Irish were inclined to support the French in disputes with England. There had been a Catholic rebellion in 1641 (as there had been in Ireland in that year) and another following a French invasion in 1667. The 1667 invasion, in which many people were killed and all the island's civil records were destroyed, had been openly supported by the Irish. Montserrat's weaknesses were exploited by pirates and Carib Indians whose raiding parties, in addition to those of the French, had to be endured by the islanders. Additional hazards were hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The island suffered a major earthquake in 1672, devastating hurricanes in 1707 and 1733 which destroyed most of the buildings on the island, major seismic activity in 1897-98, 1933-37 and 1966-67, culminating in a violent eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano in 1995 which has continued intermittently ever since. This eruption was the first since the seventeenth century; the main town of Plymouth has had to be abandoned and Montserrat's tourist industry is still trying to recover. Following the eruption, amid controversy surrounding the British Government's tardy and inadequate provision of aid, the population dropped by about two thirds to its seventeenth century level (about 4500) and has not recovered.

The interest in the Molineux family arises from Elizabeth Molineux (1742–1820) who was a great-great-grandmother of Elinor Semple. I have reconstructed a family tree tracing the origins of the Montserrat branch of the family to the Revd. Richard Molineux I, of Garsington, a village near Oxford, in the mid-seventeenth century. Claims that Richard was the Rector of Garsington¹ are an exaggeration since the living of St. Mary's Church in Garsington was in the patronage of Trinity College, Oxford, and throughout the seventeenth century successive presidents of Trinity College claimed their entitlement to the position of Rector. It is likely that Richard was a junior cleric who undertook the parish duties on behalf of an absentee Rector. Such arrangements were legal and clergymen were not prevented from having two benefices until 1871. The family tree is shown in Chapter 3.09a Appendix A (Molineux).

Richard's son, Revd. Richard Molineux II, the founder of the Molineux family of Montserrat, was born in 1657 and entered Trinity College, Oxford, on 25 October 1672 at age 15, graduating with his B.A. in 1676. In the mid-seventeenth century two Anglican churches had been built on Montserrat for use by visiting priests, but both were wrecked in the French raid of 1667. They were rebuilt in 1668 on the orders of William Stapleton on his appointment as governor of the island. Stapleton was an Irish Catholic who was



St. Mary's, Garsington, near Oxford, where Richard Molineux I was priest-in-charge while his son Richard Molineux II was at Trinity College from 1672 to 1676.

adept at displaying allegiance to the British monarchy since his position depended upon it. Also in 1668, Stapleton introduced a law allowing for the appointment of a resident cleric of the Church of England to the island, to be paid a stipend of 14,000 lbs. (more than 6 tons!) of muscovado sugar per annum, or the equivalent value in indigo, wool or cotton. Unusually, this stipend was to be funded from the island's general taxation, i.e. by Catholics, Protestants and unbelievers alike, rather than by the parishioners. Both of Montserrat's churches were flattened by the 1672 earthquake, before a priest had been appointed, but Stapleton had both of them rebuilt. At this time there was no Catholic church, or even priest, on the island, which meant that all marriages and baptisms had to take place in the Church of England. Many Catholics declined to do this and Catholicism continued in clandestine ways in private houses, as it did in England at that time. Many Catholic children were thus of doubtful legitimacy, making the inheritance of property from their parents open to legal challenge. In 1671 William Stapleton was made governor of the Leeward Islands and his place as governor of Montserrat was taken by his brother, Edmund. However, in 1678 William Stapleton had appointed 21-year old Revd. Richard Molineux II as Rector of Montserrat and sponsored a new law which legitimized the children of Catholic parents who had been married on the island by a Justice of the Peace. Although presented to the authorities in London as a necessary law due to the lack of clergy on the island, this all took place just as the new Rector was about to arrive and effectively protected Catholic property rights. The new law prevented the new Rector from introducing some of the anti-Catholic practices which were lawful in England at that time.

Richard Molineux II was the first permanently resident clergyman on Montserrat. The Catholic Church did not appoint a resident cleric until 1759, nearly a century later. Considering the reputation of Montserrat as an insecure island of doubtful loyalty to the Crown, inhabited by disaffected Irish Catholics bearing grudges against England for the ill-treatment they had received in Ireland, William Stapleton had effectively picked his own man for an appointment which was officially in the gift of the Bishop of London. To quote from ref.1 *“considering that a living on Montserrat must have been one of the least desirable preferments in the entire Anglican world, Stapleton did well”*.

Montserrat had an overall Irish majority and Richard Molineux, being below the canonical age for ordination, was expected by the Stapleton brothers to be a compliant minister for their purposes. When under pressure from London to ensure that Catholics were disenfranchised and that members of Montserrat’s Council and Assembly took oaths of allegiance to the Crown, Stapleton assured the Lords of Trade and Plantation in London that Montserrat had passed laws ensuring that the island was being run entirely in conformance with the requirements of the Church of England. What he did not tell them was that a majority of the Council were Catholics or covert Catholics; in effect the island was being run in their own interests by an elite of wealthy Irish, mainly Catholic, planters. Three years later William Stapleton was to receive a letter² from London saying *“...we have been informed for some time past that the ministers sent by the Bishop of London to the Leeward Islands have not been so well used there as they ought, especially in Montserrat”*. No further action was taken by their Lordships.

Richard and his family appear to have fitted in well with the Montserrat establishment. He married Agnes Irish, the daughter of William Irish, a wealthy Irish (by ethnicity) Protestant plantation owner, from whom he received a large legacy in 1699, enabling him to take on a junior cleric to do most of his parish work. When William Stapleton died in 1686, however, Sir Nathaniel Johnson, a staunch English Royalist, was made governor of the Leeward Islands. To make matters worse, when King James II, a Catholic, was deposed in 1688, Johnson supported the Jacobite cause against William of Orange, as did Montserrat’s Irish population. Johnson introduced several measures which favoured the Catholics, including a new law requiring the Rector of Montserrat’s stipend to be paid by his parishioners. This must have caused Richard great concern, since this would have made him reliant upon the charity of his parishioners, many of whom were closet Catholics paying only lip service to the Church of England. However, William of Orange became King William III in 1689, whereupon Johnson resigned and the source of the Rector of Montserrat’s stipend remained within the taxation system; Richard would have breathed a sigh of relief, and Montserrat carried on as before.

Richard Molineux II and Agnes Irish had three children, Charles Laval, John and Elizabeth:-

Charles Laval Molineux was born in 1683 and followed his father to Trinity College, Oxford, in 1699 at age 16. He married twice, firstly to Margaret Crisp and, after she died, to Mary Willett. Margaret Crisp was an English heiress from St. Kitts and presumably the source of Charles' fortune. They settled on St. Kitts, living in the parish of Christ Church, Nichola Town.

Charles and Margaret's son, Crisp Molineux (1730-1792) married Catherine Montgomerie (1740-1793), returned to England and settled at Garboldsham Hall in Norfolk, became a pro-slavery M.P. for Castle Rising and Kings Lynn, inheriting from his father the plantation on St. Kitts where he died (of gout) aged 62.

John Molineux (shown as an Honorary Colonel in ref.2, on account of his position in the Montserrat militia) was born in 1684 in the parish of St. Peter's, Montserrat, and followed his brother and father to Trinity College, Oxford, in 1700-1 at age 17 or 18. He became Chief Justice of the island of Montserrat, owned a plantation there and married Mary Buncombe, the daughter of Edward Buncombe, the Speaker of the Montserrat Assembly and one of the biggest slave owners on the island.

Elizabeth Molineux I, married a gentleman by the name of Anthony Fahie. The Fahies were a prominent family on St. Kitts and by a strange coincidence Anthony and Elizabeth's grandson, Vice-Admiral Sir William Fahie K.C.B., R.N., was to marry into the Heyliger family of St. Eustatius in 1786 (see Chapter 3.10).

Richard died in 1721 and was buried in his old churchyard of St. Peter's on 8th October that year; sadly both of Montserrat's churches were destroyed in the 1733 hurricane and only St. Anthony's in Plymouth was rebuilt. The location of St. Peter's is not known. Agnes, his widow, is believed to have died in 1741 or 1742 and in her will dated 16th November 1741, she left £100 to her granddaughter Anne (Fahie?) and her "*dower on plantation in the parish of St. Peter, Montserrat, now in possession of grandson John Davis Molineux*". The name and location of this plantation is not clear since the Waterwork estate owned by John Davis Molineux was in Plymouth, which was in the parish of St. Anthony's. Richard and Agnes's eldest son, Charles Laval Molineux, was the executor of her estate.

John Molineux and Mary Buncombe had four children, John Davis, Charles, Laval and Mary:-

1. **John Davis Molineux I (1707-1770)** entered Wadham College, Oxford, in 1725, aged 18, later becoming Speaker of the Montserrat Assembly. John appeared in the Register of Admissions to the Middle Temple in London in 1733-4 as "*son and heir of John Molineux esq., Chief Justice of the island of Montserrat*". He owned the Waterwork plantation, in Plymouth which had previously been owned by William Stapleton.
2. **Charles Molineux (-)**
3. **Laval Molineux (-1770)**
4. **Mary Molineux (-)** Married Charles Daly at St. Peter's, Montserrat, in 1724.

Charles Laval Molineux died some time after 1748 and in his will³ (dated 30 June 1748) he left £50 each to his three nephews, John Davis, Charles and Laval, being the sons of his younger brother Col. John Molineux. In addition to the bequests to his three nephews, he left £30 to his "*neice*" Ann Molineux, Laval's wife, and £50 each to Laval's children, with Richard, Laval's eldest son, receiving £30 per year until reaching the age of 24. Whether this means Laval and his wife Ann were cousins is not clear.

The will of John Davis Molineux I is held in the National Archives under reference PROB.11/957 and is dated 1761 but was not proved until 1770, suggesting that he died in that year. He left his wife an income of £120 p.a. and his house on Montserrat together with its servants. He left his daughter Margaret an income of £100 p.a. until she reached age 21, whereupon she was to receive a legacy of £2500. However to qualify for the legacy she was required "*to be kept in Great Britain and taught to speak and write French and play upon the harpsichord or spinnett and likewise dancing*". The Waterwork plantation and house in Plymouth, with sitting tenant, were left to the eldest son John Davis Molineux II for his lifetime, to be passed to Margaret, in the event of John's decease, for her lifetime and, upon Margaret's decease, to be passed to brother Charles "*for ever*". I confess that I have some difficulty in understanding how this arrangement would work, considering the ages of the parties concerned. However, John Davis Molineux I clearly had good intentions, leaving £50 in local currency for the poor of the parish (land cost less than £1 per acre at the time).

Among the children of Laval and Ann Molineux who received a £50 legacy from their uncle Charles Laval Molineux was Elizabeth Molineux II who was born on the island of St. Kitts in 1742⁴. The Molineux name can still be seen in St. Kitts to this day, there being a village called Molineux, the old family estate of Charles Laval Molineux and Margaret Crisp, some eight miles outside the island's main town of Basseterre, in the English section of the island.

Laval Molineux returned to England (or was on a visit there) when he died in 1770. The records of deaths in the parish of St. Peter's, Great Haseley, Oxfordshire, for 1770 show as an endorsement against the entry for Laval Molineux "*In Rycote Chapel yard*" referring to the chapel of St. Michael and all the Angels, Rycote, which was built as a chantry chapel on a long-established religious site by the owners of the nearby fifteenth

century mansion, Rycote Palace. It was intended for the owners' use and for the use of the nearby villages. The palace burned down in 1745, leaving only the chapel, but was later rebuilt as the country home of the Earls of Abingdon. The chapel is now an historic site, owned by English Heritage. Significantly, perhaps, it is only about four miles from Garsington, the village where Laval's great-grandfather, the Revd. Richard Molineux I, had been the curate a century earlier. The chapel churchyard has been cleared and no traces of Laval Molineux can now be found there.

In 1760, Laval and Ann's daughter, Elizabeth, married Johannes Heyliger, a member of a prominent Dutch colonial family from the island of St. Eustatius in the Netherlands Antilles. Johannes died prematurely in 1776 and in 1780 Elizabeth married a second time to Charles Hagart of Bantaskine, a merchant on St. Eustatius. They eventually returned to Scotland, living on the Hagart family estate at Bantaskine, near Falkirk, not far from her married granddaughters: Elizabeth (MacInroy) in Blair Athol, Jane (McBean) and Anne (Hagart) in Glasgow, and Adriana (Semple) in Liverpool. The Bantaskine Estate was partly sold off by her son to the Union Canal Company and the remainder of the estate now forms a public park, Bantaskine Park, on the edge of Falkirk. Elizabeth died in 1820, aged 78, at her then home in Polmont a few miles from Falkirk. Johannes and Elizabeth Heyliger are described in more detail in Chapter 3.11.



Rycote Chapel, near Thame in Oxfordshire. Laval Molineux was buried here in 1770, but the churchyard has been cleared and only five gravestones are left; Laval Molineux's is not one of them.

References

- ¹ Caribbeana. V. Langford Oliver. Vol.3. pp.1, 381, 382.
- ² Lords of Trade and Plantations to William Stapleton, 12th March 1681. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series 1681-85.
- ³ Caribbeana. V. Langford Oliver. Vol.3. pp.1, 381, 382.
- ⁴ Het geslacht Heyliger: planters, reders en regenten op de Bovenwindische Antillen. M.R.H. Calmeyer 1973
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