

George Henry Ames

Fact File: George Henry Ames

Claim Number	Compensation	Number of Enslaved in Claim	Estate	Parish	Parliamentary Papers
312	£89 8s 11d	3			P. 312
591	£4,210 16s 8d	168	Revolution Hall	St John	P. 312
690	£2,759 1s 0d	94	Levara	St Patrick	P. 99
701	£4,030 4s 3d	149	Hermitage	St Patrick	P. 312

Family

George Henry Ames (30 October 1786 – 20 July 1873) was the youngest son of **Levi Ames of Clifton Wood** (1739–1820), one of the founding partners of **Cave, Ames & Cave**, later the Bristol Bank, shipowner and civic leader whose wealth was rooted in the city’s long involvement in Atlantic commerce and the legacies of slavery. Like his father **Jeremiah Ames** before him, Levi was a committed **Unitarian** and served as **Mayor of Bristol in 1789**, becoming the longest-serving member of the city corporation.

Through his mother, George was connected to the **Lyde family**, whose wealth derived largely from the tobacco trade and West Indian interests arising from the slave trade. These maternal connections proved decisive for later inheritances within the family, including Ayot House in Hertfordshire.

By the time George was born in 1786, the Ames family had risen from Somerset yeoman farmers to become part of Bristol’s commercial elite, often described as among the city’s “merchant princes” with extensive interests in banking, shipping, and the West Indies from the slave trade.



George grew up at **Clifton Wood House**, Bristol, in a household of considerable comfort, one of **ten children**, and benefited from the financial security created by his father's fortune from the slave trade, estimated at **£120,000** at Levi Ames's death in 1820.

Marriage

George Henry Ames married in the early nineteenth century. While his wife's name is less prominently recorded in surviving accounts than those of the merchant Ames men, the marriage was clearly socially respectable and productive, aligning George with the expectations of a country gentleman rather than a commercial entrepreneur. Their union reflected a broader pattern among the Ames family in this generation: marriages that consolidated social standing rather than expanded commercial networks.

Children

George Henry Ames had a large family of sons, whose lives illustrate the diversification of elite opportunities available to the descendants of slavery-derived wealth in the nineteenth century.

George's eldest son married the daughter of a German count, signalling the family's entry into international aristocratic circles. He predeceased his father, however, and left no lasting impact on the inheritance of Ames properties.

His second son pursued a career in the Indian Civil Service, a prestigious pathway for the sons of Britain's upper middle and gentry classes. With the wealth he accumulated, he later built a country house at Remenham in Berkshire, further embedding the family within imperial administrative and landed networks.

George's third son became the beneficiary of collateral inheritance when he succeeded his uncle **John Ames (1784–1867)**, inheriting Clevelands (formerly Pinhay House) near Lyme Regis. This inheritance again demonstrates how Ames wealth circulated laterally among nephews and nieces rather than passing strictly down a single line.



Henry St Vincent Ames (1833–1901): The fourth son ultimately inherited **Cote House**, the Gothick villa near Bristol purchased by George around 1825. Henry led a notably unconventional early life, spending part of his youth working as a photographer in Canada, before returning to England. Although he married, he died without issue, and following the death of his widow in 1917, Cote House was sold and later demolished.

George Henry Ames died in 1873, having outlived most of his siblings and witnessed the dissipation of the family's commercial dominance into fragmented branches of the landed and professional classes. Because George Henry Ames's surviving sons either died childless or inherited property through other lines, his own direct line did not retain long-term ownership of the family's principal estates. In his will, he chose to pass Ayot House to a great-nephew, **Lionel Neville Frederick Ames-Lyde**, who already held nearby property. This decision underscores a recurring pattern in the Ames family history: substantial wealth enabled entry into elite social circles, but estates rarely remained within the family for more than two or three generations.

Family Significance

The family history of George Henry Ames illustrates the second and third generations of slavery-derived wealth: removed from direct commercial exploitation, yet entirely sustained by its proceeds. His children entered imperial administration, aristocratic marriage, and genteel leisure rather than trade. At the same time, the dispersal of estates among sons, nephews, and widows meant that, despite immense nineteenth-century wealth, the Ames family left no enduring landed dynasty, only a series of briefly held houses and fragmented inheritances.

Taken as a whole, George Henry Ames's life encapsulates the long afterlife of slavery-generated wealth in Britain. Although he himself was removed by several generations from the gunpowder manufacture, shipowning, and West Indies trade that underpinned the family fortune, his ability to live as a country gentleman, to purchase and inherit



significant properties, and to provide his children with careers in the imperial and professional elite all rested on capital accumulated during Britain's age of slavery. By the early twentieth century, however, that wealth had been dispersed, the houses sold or demolished, leaving behind influence and memory rather than enduring estates.

Compensation claims

Revolution Hall Estate Claim (Grenada Claim No. 591)

George Henry Ames was one of several assignees connected to Claim No. 591, relating to the Revolution Hall Estate in Grenada. The claim was registered on 9 May 1836 and concerned the compensation for 168 enslaved people, valued at £4,210 16s 8d.

The original owner-in-fee of the estate was **Richard Oliver Smith**, whose claim was ultimately unsuccessful. The compensation process became complex and contested, reflecting the heavily mortgaged and encumbered nature of many Grenadian estates by the 1830s. Multiple counterclaims were submitted by creditors and trustees who held legal and financial interests in the estate rather than direct ownership.

The principal award, £4,105, was paid to **Edmund Broderip of Weymouth, Dorset**, and **Thomas Strangways Horner of Wells Park, Somerset**, acting as trustees and first mortgagees under a marriage settlement made by Richard Oliver Smith in 1819, valued at over £11,000. The remaining balance of the compensation was awarded to the **Baillie family**, who were assignees of a substantial legacy attached to the estate.

George Henry Ames appears in the claim as a third claimant and assignee, indicating that he held a financial interest in the compensation rather than day-to-day control of the plantation. His involvement reflects a wider pattern among British elites of the period: investment in enslaved labour through mortgages, trusts, and assigned interests, often at several removes from the Caribbean itself. Although Ames was not the resident planter, his entitlement to compensation demonstrates how slavery-



derived wealth circulated through Britain's financial and familial networks, benefiting individuals whose lives and estates were otherwise centred in England.

Hermitage Estate Claim (Grenada Claim No. 701)

George Henry Ames was listed as a third claimant in Claim No. 701, relating to the Hermitage Estate in Grenada. The claim was registered on 23 January 1836 and concerned compensation for 149 enslaved people, valued at £4,030 4s 3d.

The claim was made on behalf of the estate's proprietors by **Evan Baillie**, acting as trustee, with **J.H. Forbes** serving as agent for the Baillie interests. The Baillie family were major absentee proprietors in Grenada, holding enslaved people through layered financial and legal arrangements rather than direct residence.

The claim was contested, notably by **Rowland Ryley of Red Lion Square, London**, who submitted a counterclaim as the grantee of an annuity secured against a legacy under the will of **James Baillie MP**, a former owner of the estate. Ryley's claim was ultimately unsuccessful, while the Baillie trustees were awarded the compensation.

Levera Estate Claim (Grenada Claim No. 690)

George Henry Ames appeared as a third claimant and assignee in Claim No. 690, relating to the Levera Estate in Grenada. The claim was registered on 9 November 1835 and concerned compensation for 94 enslaved people, valued at £2,759 1s 0d.

The original claim was submitted by **Alexander Fraser of Inchcoulter, Ross-shire**, who was recorded as **owner-in-fee** of the estate. However, the compensation was subject to a counterclaim by **Hugh Duncan Baillie**, **James Evan Baillie**, and **George Henry Ames**, all described as being of the City of Bristol, acting as "assignees for the whole compensation money." Fraser's claim was therefore treated as consensually unsuccessful, with the compensation redirected to the assignees.



The claim was uncontested, indicating that the financial arrangements underpinning the estate were already clearly established by the time compensation was awarded. Ames's role was not that of a resident proprietor or plantation manager, but of a financial beneficiary, whose entitlement arose through assignment rather than ownership.

Grenada Claim No. 312

George Henry Ames was listed as a third claimant in Claim No. 312, registered on 23 January 1836. The claim related to compensation for three enslaved people, valued at £89 8s 11d.

The claim was **contested** and was submitted jointly with **Hugh Duncan Baillie** and **James Evan Baillie**, both of whom appear alongside Ames in several Grenadian compensation claims. Although the small number of enslaved people involved suggests a minor holding when compared with larger estate claims, the dispute indicates that even very small numbers of enslaved individuals could be subject to complex financial interests and competing claims.

As with his other Grenada claims, George Henry Ames's role appears to have been that of a financial participant rather than a resident owner, operating within a network of Bristol-based associates who held assigned or shared interests in enslaved people and the compensation payable for them. This claim reinforces the cumulative picture of Ames as a beneficiary of slavery through fragmented and distributed investments, extending across multiple claims and estates in Grenada.

Claims beyond Grenada

Beyond his Grenadian interests, George Henry Ames was a significant recipient of slavery compensation across British Guyana, St Kitts, St Vincent, and Trinidad, illustrating the breadth of his financial exposure to enslaved labour across the British Caribbean.

His largest awards were in British Guiana, where he was an awardee for two substantial estates: Hampton Court (Claim 2289), for which he



received £23,024 6s 5d in compensation for 456 enslaved people, and Peter's Hall (Claim 629), yielding £9,256 18s 4d for 188 enslaved people. These claims alone placed Ames among the more heavily compensated absentee beneficiaries in the colony.

In St Kitts, Ames received compensation for two smaller claims: Mornes Estate (Claim 48), involving 125 enslaved people and an award of £2,043 19s 6d, and a further minor claim (Claim 576) for 9 enslaved people, amounting to £147 4s 10d.

His St Vincent interests were extensive and complex, spanning multiple estates and legal roles. As an awardee, he received compensation for enslaved people at Harmony Hall, Cane Hall, Liberty Lodge, and several small holdings, together accounting for over 300 enslaved people. In addition, Ames appeared as a trustee in Chancery/List E cases relating to Jambou Vale and Marriaqua Estate, involving a further 214 enslaved people. These trustee claims underline his role not merely as a proprietor but as a financial intermediary within layered ownership and mortgage arrangements.

Finally, Ames was compensated in Trinidad for the Camden estate (Claim 1641), receiving £6,042 8s 3d for 135 enslaved people.

Taken together, excluding Grenada, George Henry Ames received in excess of £55,000 in compensation for the loss of approximately 1,430 enslaved people across the British Caribbean. The scale and geographic spread of these claims demonstrate that his wealth was not tied to a single colony or estate, but embedded in a regional system of slavery sustained through ownership, trusteeship, and assigned interests. This cumulative picture places Ames firmly among the class of British absentee beneficiaries whose nineteenth-century fortunes were substantially shaped by the compensation paid at the abolition of slavery.



The Enslaved

George Henry Ames does not appear in the Grenada Slave Registers because he was not the registered owner or on-island manager of enslaved people. The Slave Registers recorded those who were legally responsible for enslaved people in the colony such as resident owners, estate attorneys, or managers but not British-based investors, trustees, or assignees.

Ames's involvement in Grenada slavery was primarily financial rather than residential. He held assigned interests, mortgages, and trustee roles in estates whose enslaved people were registered under other names. His entitlement to compensation at emancipation demonstrates that he benefited directly from enslaved labour, even though the enslaved individuals themselves were not recorded under his name in the registers.

This absence highlights how slavery operated through complex financial networks that extended deep into Britain, often leaving little trace in colonial registers, as well as through plantation ownership.

Acknowledgements

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