

PICTON, CESAR (c. 1755 - 1836), coal merchant

Name: Cesar Picton
Date of birth: c. 1755
Date of death: 1836
Gender: Male
Occupation: coal merchant
Area of activity: Business and Industry
Author: Katie Barrett

Cesar Picton was born c. 1755 in West Africa, possibly Senegal, and was brought to Britain in 1761 at the age of around six. The earliest reference to him is a note made on 8 November 1761 in the journal of Sir John Philipps of Picton (**Philipps Family**), sixth baronet (1701-1764), who represented Pembrokeshire in Parliament with the residence Norbiton Place in Kingston upon Thames: 'Went to Norbiton with Capt. Parr and Lieut. Rees, taking with me a Black Boy from Senegal given me by Capt. Parr, also a Paraquet and foreign Duck.'

Captain John Parr (1725-1791) was a British army officer who had been serving in West Africa. We do not know the date of birth and birth name of this 'Black boy', and one could assume he had been purchased by Capt. Parr from slavers. He was probably born into a family of Muslim faith; however, Sir John had him baptised on 6 December 1761. He was thereafter known as Cesar. The procurement of young Black boys to train to become servants was not uncommon amongst the upper classes at this time, and it was customary to give these boys classical names such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato or, as is the case here, Cesar. Intriguingly, Cesar was not given a surname when baptised.

The young Cesar was given three godparents, all upper servants in the Philipps household, Thomas Davies, Thomas Lewis, and Elizabeth Cooper. Thomas Davies was the butler and would have been greatly respected in the household. On Sunday 6 December 1761 Sir John wrote in his Journal: 'Dr. Philipps christen'd my black Boy, Cesar, gave Eliz. Cooper, Tho. Davies and Thomas Lewis his Gossips 7s.6d.' Records show that Sir John bought 'a velvet turbet for black boy' shortly after Cesar's arrival. Dressing African servants in exotic attire was a fashionable custom of the time.

In June 1762 Cesar travelled to Picton Castle, Pembrokeshire with the entire Philipps family, Sir John, Lady Elizabeth and their four children, Richard, Katherine, Joyce and Mary, along with the servants from Norbiton Place. In 1762 Sir John held the parliamentary seat for Pembrokeshire, so the family divided their time between Norbiton Place and Picton Castle. Cesar was bought a pair of breeches before the journey which suggests he travelled on horseback, an uncomfortable journey that would have taken around nine days. Cesar did not return to Norbiton Place in the October of 1762, unlike the family and other servants, including his godparents. We do not know why he stayed in Pembrokeshire but one could assume the castle's resident servants were tasked with his education and training.

Sir John was a philanthropist and supported the charity-school movement pioneered by his father. He was clearly an advocate of education and it appears he treated Cesar benevolently. His son Richard already had a servant, named John Rothero, so there may not have been an official servant role for Cesar within the family. Sir John died in 1764, when Cesar would have been roughly nine years old. It appears that the ladies of the household had great affection for Cesar after this time. Sir John did not name Cesar in his will, but the will made by his wife, Lady Elizabeth, in 1766 included a sum of money to be paid to Cesar at the age of twenty-one and expressed the hope that 'my children will take some care of him and not let him want'. This would have been highly unusual practice at the time. Lady Elizabeth lived another twenty years and made several alterations to her will, all including Cesar.

There is no evidence that Cesar was involved in the abolitionist movement. However, limited evidence suggests that he may have played a part in changing opinions amongst the elite. There was a Philipps family connection with Horace Walpole, who described the slave trade as 'horrid traffic', and he wrote of Cesar in a letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory dated October 1788:

'As you allow me to fill my letters with any scraps I can amass, I will tell your Ladyship how I was struck lately by a sentence of a negro. I was in Kingston, with the sisters of Lord Milford, who are my relations, and who have lately lost their very aged mother. They have a favourite black who has lived with them a great many years and is remarkably sensible. To amuse Lady Philipps under a long illness, they had read to her the account of the Pelew Islands. Somebody happened to say we are sending, or have just sent, a ship thither; the black, who was in the room, exclaimed, "Then there is an end of their happiness!" What a satire on Europe.'

In this account it appears that Cesar could speak freely with Lady Philipps and her guests, suggesting a level of intimacy that is noteworthy. Cesar appeared to have been respected by the family, less as a servant and more as an equal.

When Lady Elizabeth died in 1788, Cesar received £100 from her estate, a substantial sum and again evidence of the special position he held. Her son, Richard Philipps (then Lord Milford) sold Norbiton Place, where the Philipps ladies and Cesar often resided, but he kept Picton Castle and began an extensive renovation of the Welsh property. Cesar would have been around thirty-three at this time and he did not move with the Philipps daughters to Hampton Court. These ladies were all unmarried so it would have been improper for Cesar to remain with them. By this time Cesar had sizable wealth and began living independently. He moved into a fine house with stables on the High Street in Kingston. On the rental agreement Cesar is named 'Cesar Pickton'. This is the first time a surname is shown in any records. It could be assumed that he chose this surname himself which suggests that the Philipps family seat in Pembrokeshire held a special place in his heart.

From this rental property Cesar set up business as a coal merchant. The wharf and yard at the back of the property were vitally important for this operation. The Philipps family money principally came from coal. One can assume it was Lord Milford who traded coal with Cesar, bringing it from rural Pembrokeshire to industrial Kingston.

Within a few years Cesar was wealthy enough to purchase this property and renamed it 'Picton House'. He also purchased other properties nearby, including a malthouse. He became a freeholder, and in 1801 he appears in the Surrey freeholders list as 'Caesar Picton, Coal Merchant'.

Another notable event happened in September 1801. Cesar appeared before a Justice of the Peace in Kingston accused of contravening game laws. He was convicted of poaching with an unlicensed gun and fined £5. Notably his ethnicity was not mentioned in a newspaper report discussing the case or in the court records. This case raises many questions as the game laws of the time were strict. It is arguable that he was granted a lenient sentence due to his high social standing. Those of lower social standing would likely have received a more severe punishment for committing the same crime.

In 1807 Cesar let his Kingston properties and moved to a rented cottage in nearby Tolworth. Being in his fifties at the time, one can assume that he had retired from the coal business and taken the opportunity to earn from his properties. In 1816 he bought a second substantial property in Thames Ditton for £400, consisting of two messuages, two cottages, two barns, two stables, two outhouses, two curtilages and two gardens. There is no record of a mortgage being taken out, and he had not sold his other Kingston properties, which is an indication of the large wealth he had amassed. Again, he renamed this property 'Picton House'.

Cesar received additional generous legacies from the Philipps family. Miss Mary died in 1801 and left him £100; she left much smaller sums to her servants, her cook, housemaid and footman for example receiving only £10. This again indicates that Cesar was not regarded as a servant but more akin to a family member. In 1820 Miss Joyce left him £100 and Miss Katherine £50, with an additional £30 to be given to him yearly for the rest of his life.

Further evidence of the family's close relationship with Cesar came when Lord Milford died in 1823. His will contained two codicils signed 'Milford' but not witnessed. So 'Cesar Picton of Thames Ditton in the County of Surrey, gentleman' appeared before the probate officials to 'swear that he knew and was well acquainted with' Lord Milford 'for several years before his death and having often seen him write and subscribe his name' could say that the name Milford on the codicils was written by Lord Milford himself.

Cesar Picton died in 1836, at the age of approximately 81. His will reveals a lot about his life. He never married and had no heirs, but his main bequest was to his goddaughter, Sarah Lock Pamphilon (née Penner). She was married to William Pamphilon who became the mayor of Kingston in 1850. Cesar left her a substantial amount,

including his properties, a horse and chaise, a tortoiseshell tea-chest with a silver caddy spoon, two watches, gold chains, rings and brooches. He left several paintings, including a portrait of himself, to his friend Thomas Bushell, who was a 'dealer in wines and spirits'. This portrait is now, unfortunately lost, but the fact that he had a portrait of himself painted is emblematic of the wealth and important social status he attained. His will also indicates that his links with Pembrokeshire continued into his old age. A codicil in his will, dated 1828, shows he was given a half-pint silver mug with a coat of arms on it by a Miss Trevor of Haverfordwest.

Cesar lived a long life, suggesting good health. He was obviously a large man, at his funeral a four-wheeled trolley was needed to carry him into the church with planks and rollers to lower him into the vault in All Saints Church, Kingston upon Thames. Throughout official documents he is repeatedly referred to as a 'gentleman' and he was clearly an intelligent businessman, accumulating substantial wealth throughout his career.

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Further reading

People's Collection Wales: [Cesar Picton \(c.1755-c.1836\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Cesar Picton](#)

Additional Links

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