

An interview with Leonora Carr ...

This interview was made in 1836, when Leonora was about 27 years old. She was sitting in the Orchard next to the Moravian School and Choir-house in East Tytherton, near Chippenham, Wiltshire.



LC. I don't know why you want to talk to me, and write down what I'm saying (giggles). I'm just an ordinary Wiltsher [*sic*] girl, although I'm foreign as well. People say I talk Wiltsher now, although I still say some words different.

Int. There are a lot of good people, and not so good people, who need to hear your story. Perhaps you could tell me about how you came to be here?

LC. Do you mean in the Moravian church, or in England? It's a long story, and I was very little when I came here. About nine years old. I don't really remember very well. But I'll tell you what I can remember, but I might also not be quite right sometimes.

I was born in Antigua. That's a tiny place - an island - a very long way from here - where it's much hotter than it is here. I don't really remember my mother, it's so long since I've seen her. I wish she was here. Why did she send me here? It makes me sad. Very sad. But I do have an older sister and two younger brothers. There're not here in the school or the Moravians. I don't know where they are. I expect they are in England somewhere, I don't know. My older sister is Catherine, and my younger brothers are Edward and Stephen.

The Moravians told me that I was born in August 1808 - that's my birthday., on the 15th. I'm glad I know that. There's some people who don't. My mother was a Moravian. Her name was 'Fanny' - that's short for Frances. When I was little I didn't understand it, but now I do. The Moravians taught me to read, and Mr. Wilberforce has got it in all the newspapers, slavery I mean. Well, my mother was a slave, and according to the law in Antigua, if your mother was a slave, then her children were too. I know now that it is wrong, very wrong for cruel white people to

treat black people like animals. But the Moravians taught me that not all white people are like that.

Did you know that there are other girls from Antigua in the Moravian church in Tetherton [*sic*]? I'm not all on my own. They're like me, what they call 'mostee' in Antigua. That means our mothers were 'mulatto', which means that our mothers were half-white, half black. That's a very silly word 'cause it means a 'mule', and mules can't have children!

I'm told that my mother was very pretty, so that's why I look nice, too [smiles at the interviewer]. I expect that's why my father wanted her. I learned such a lot since I've been here. The Brethren say that he was a general. But he had lots of slaves too. My mother's name was 'Loving', and it's strange that Ann and Sarah's [Leonora means the Antiguan Briggs sisters, also in Tytherton] father knew a Mr. Loving. He printed a newspaper in Antigua, and said that Mr. Briggs was a very cruel man, who beat his slaves. Mr. Briggs had to stop being a magistrate because of this. It's all in a book by Sister Mary Prince, who knew Mr. Briggs.

Int. So how did your being a slave stop? How did you get here, if you were a slave?

As I said, I was very little when I came here. But I now know that my father brought me from a woman called Mrs. Loveatt. She owned lots of slaves, lots more than my father. He paid a lot of money for all of us - that's me and my mother and sister and brother. I'm not sure if my youngest brother was born then. Not long after that he set us all free - that is he did what is called 'manumission' and wrote out papers saying that none of us could be slaves again. I didn't understand any of that, but I expect that Mr. Wilberforce in Parliament in London helped. He made it wrong to buy slaves from the ships just before I was born.

After that I was put on a boat and came to a big port. I'm not sure if it was Bristol or London. I've been to Bristol with Miss Hobb's and other Brethren and their children, so perhaps it was Bristol. A young man and two young women came with me. I'm not sure now who they were, but they came to Tetherton to the school and the Brethren showed me round. I was frightened and didn't want to be there. But now I think that perhaps my father made the best decision. I've heard how cruel and unkind white people were towards girls who were slaves, even when they

were little. I've been very naughty while I've been here [Leonora refers to an incident in which she and other girls were found stealing food], but the Brethren forgave me and they've always looked after me. I'm very grateful for that. Now I'm not very well. Last year I heard that Betsey [Leonora means 19-year old Eliza Briggs, probably Ann & Sarah's younger sister] died in Clevedon, at Bristol. I think perhaps of consumption. I wonder how long I will live.

Int. Since you've been here, you've become a member of the Moravians. Could you tell us something about that?

LC. When I first came to Tetherton, I was put into the School. It was all quite new then, about twenty years old. I was there until the Brethren put me into the Women's Choir-house. Here I lived with single women - some were widows - and we shared together. Sometimes life was very hard, and we didn't have much to eat. I heard that when Napoleon was fighting England that things were 'specially hard. We do things like lace-making to earn some money and people give us food, too. In the school I learned to read better. People are surprised at all the things the Brethren do. They taught us about music and geography and languages. Mr. Bowles - he's the minister of the church in Brimhill [*sic*] - loved Brother West, who was the Brethren's minister and they did music together. Mr. Bowles came to Brother West's funeral ten years ago [Revd Lewis Renatus West died in 1826] - I don't think everyone liked him doing that. I used to know the family very well, and some of the West children used to go to Bristol with me and Sister Hobbs, who looked after us.

Sister Ormond looks after us in the Choir-house. She's from Wales and speaks Welsh, which I don't understand. But she's not well. She had a paralytic seizure, and now she finds being the housekeeper in the Choir-house very difficult. But we help to look after each other. That's why so many Brothers and Sisters live to be so old. We're taught to be careful and prudent, like the Bible says. That's why our conscience was bad when we stole that food.

So why did I become a Moravian? Well, I'd been with the Moravians, that we call Brethren, since I was in Antigua. When I was little, I just went to the meetings. I didn't understand about the Lord Jesus, how He died for me, and how His Blood washed me from my sins. Now I know that the

Lord Jesus was wounded for me and that my sins are forgiven. It is nice that He wants me to be like a little child, just being childlike. Praying and singing, childlike. This makes me feel special and loved by the Saviour. Yes, things are still difficult and I do lots of wrong things, but the Saviour still loves me and because of His blood being shed for me, I'm forgiven. I know that lots of people find this hard to understand. The Brothers and Sisters went out to Antigua because they believed that the Lord Jesus wanted them to. They wanted to show His love to people, and that's why I'm a Christian and want to be with the Brothers and Sisters here. The Saviour loves me.

Int. Does being an ex-slave affect you at all?

LC. I know I look a bit foreign, and that I'm darker than a lot of people, especially the women, around here. My hair's black and curly, more than theirs. But I'm not the only one, cos there's Ann and Sarah, too. I've been here since I was set free, about twenty years now. I get on with most people, and they don't treat me like I'm different. We're just all together in the church and Sisters' House. The Saviour loves all of us. One day all these differences will be wiped away [Leonora is citing Revelation 21.4] and we'll all be together with the Saviour. We'll be happy and at peace.

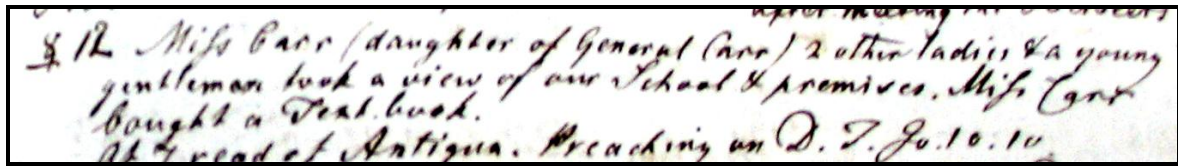


Ed. Leonora died a year after this, perhaps of consumption or a fever. Unfortunately the Minister's Diary is missing for the year she died. Leonora very likely is buried next to housekeeper Diana Ormond, who died about six weeks before her. As Leonora's gravestone was removed in 1951 in a 'tidying up' exercise, we cannot be absolutely sure that she is buried where her gravestone was recently placed (by the East Tytherton Heritage Project, with the physical help of the Transformations Black Archive group, so it was significant that an African-Caribbean person helped to re-lay Leonora's gravestone). Only a DNA test could provide absolute proof of identification.



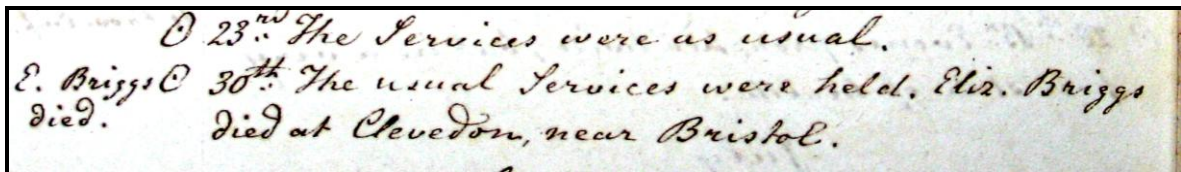
Pictures of documentary sources:

1. 'General Carr' extract



after meeting the directors
§ 12 Miss Carr (daughter of General Carr) & other ladies & a young gentleman took a view of our School & premises. Miss Carr bought a Text book.
At 4 read at Antigua. Preaching on D. T. Jo. 10. 10.

2. Eliz. Briggs dies (on or in the week before Sunday, 30th August, 1835) at Clevedon, and is buried:



© 23rd The Services were as usual.
E. Briggs © 30th The usual Services were held. Eliz. Briggs died.
died at Clevedon, near Bristol.

3. Leonora stealing food

1828
March 28th

The Conference met, and Sr Jarrett reported that Ann Elizth Gardner who left the Choir-house 3 24th to return to her mother, had disclosed before she went, the dishonest practices of herself and other inhabitants of the house in stealing Meat, Pickles and Apples from the Stores.

Hannah Parsons, Overseer of the Girl's Room; L. C. Carr; J. C. Manners, S. S. and the Girl Eliza Bull had all been implicated. They had all acknowledged their guilt, when informed of the charge. Gardner had declared herself to be the worst.

The Conference deemed it their bounden duty to put a check to such practices if possible, for which purpose they resolved that — Hannah Parsons be sent from the Choir-house, her guilt being of a deeper dye than that of the others.

B^r. Edwards was requested to speak with Bull, Manners & Carr, which was done in the presence of Sr Jarrett.

* B. When spoken with, they all showed signs of penitence, and promised due amendment.

5. Leonora's background?

(Below): The Manumission (passport to freedom) document issued to Fanny Loving and her children:

absolutely discharged And by these presents Do manumit enfranchise set free and from all Slavery and Servitude whatsoever for ever absolutely discharge as Mulatto Woman named Fanny Loving and her four Mestee Children named Catherine Carr, Leonora. Casey Carr, Stephen Carr and Edward Colston Carr and each and every of them and the future issue or

(Below) George Carr's slaves, as listed in the Slave Register for 1824 St. George Parish, Antigua : Fanny Loving and the Carr children have since left by 1817.

George Carr Dipinto	Frank	Male Black	Sl. by app. 1815	Five	(None)	(None)
	Pierre	Male Black	Freehand			
	Tommy	Male Black	Freehand			
	Delany	Female Black	Sl. by app.			
	Hannah	Female Black	Sl. by app.			
	Total	Five				
<p><i>I George Carr do hereby certify that the Return now by me delivered to be registered contains a true list of my Free Negroes and being a true, full, and accurate account and description of all the Slaves belonging to me and being within this Island and that there has been no Increase or Decrease since making my last preceding return. And also further certify that none of the said Slaves has been by me Manumitted or set at Liberty since the 25th day of Oct. last 1824. I do hereby certify that I have signed the same before me this 25th day of Oct. last 1824. St. George.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>George Carr</i></p>						



The absolutely fascinating question now arises. What is the connection if any, between the Carrs and Colstons, as suggested by the name of Leonora's brother, 'Edward Colston Carr'? We have yet to research this connection thoroughly, but it seems highly likely. It will be ironic indeed if it can be shown that Edward Colston (d. 1721), who was one of the foremost Merchant Venturers in Bristol, and a leading slavery investor, had Black people in his family tree. Research into the papers of Edward Colston shows that the executor of his Will was a Robert Carr, and that beneficiaries included two Carr women, both of which were Robert Carr's sisters. Nepotism was regarded as normal at this time, and this makes it even more likely that there might be a family connection. There is also a reference to a Frances (probably 'Francis' is intended) who was also an executor of Edward Colston's Will. But there is proof positive in the Will: for Robert Carr is described as a 'kinsman' and a 'cousin'. The Carrs and Colstons were indeed closely related!

6. Who were the Loving family?

Year	Name & Surname	Number	by whom	Name
1779. Aug 9.	Pisilla Whitworth	16716	Miss P. Whitworth	
	Ann Whitworth	16717	Miss Ann Whitworth	
	Lucy Hall	16718	Mr. Blarney	
	Mary Binfield	16719	Miss Whitworth	
	Ann Hulme	16720		
	I do certify that I Baptized the parents eighteen Children. Witness my hand. S. Harper			
1779. Apr 6.	John Gordon	16721		
	Elizabeth Orent	16722		
	Francis Loving	16723		

It is entirely speculative, but in the MS (above), the baptism MS of a Fanny Loving from the Foundling Hospital, is not beyond the bounds of possibility. The name 'Loving' was not particularly common, and while the name 'Fanny' was in common use, its combination with 'Loving' was not, as an examination of birth and marriage records shows. The birth date is not beyond the bounds of possibility. By 1807 when Fanny was pregnant with Leonora she would have probably been in her mid thirties. As a mixed race child, Fanny might well have been more likely to have been passed on to the Foundling Hospital, perhaps the outcome of an illicit liaison with a seaman. Thereafter she was 'conveniently' packed off to the Caribbean, where she 'belonged'. Then to meet the real or supposed 'general' Carr, who purchased her. But this is all speculation.

That Loving is genuine name in Antigua, there is no doubt. Indeed, one of the most famous black people of the time, was the journalist, Henry Loving. Could there be a connection here? This seems entirely probable, given the relatively small size of Antigua and its population.