

Family Background

The Stirlings of Keir and Cawder were an old gentry family who owned estates in Stirlingshire, central Scotland. According to family biographer William Fraser, the family traced their lineage to the 12th century. The connection with Jamaica, however, began in 1734. James Stirling of Keir (1693-1749) had twenty-two children and his younger sons were sent to Jamaica in pursuit of wealth. In 1734, his seventh son James (1714-1773) travelled with his younger brother Robert Stirling (1715-1760) to the island. Both brothers started as merchants in Kingston and eventually rose to the plantocracy with the acquisition of sugar estates and enslaved people. Frontier, in the parish of St Mary on the northern coast of Jamaica, was purchased with the assistance of the Stirling family in 1748. Nine years later, Robert and James purchased Hampden estate in St James (later known as Trelawny) in the north-east of the island. Hampden and Frontier were said to have been unprofitable in the mid-eighteenth century. However, by the later period, Frontier was said to have generated annual profits of £5000 and the estates remained in the hands of the family for at least one hundred years.