

The Rich Family on St Helena

The data here was extracted from the St Helena Ancestor's Database. This was compiled mainly from the Anglican Church Registers which have some timescale limitations.

- Records for the earliest church – St James – baptisms date from 1680, marriages date from 1681, but burials only from 1767 – suggesting that almost 100 years of records have been mislaid.
- Records for other churches may be more complete, and in any case were established considerably later.

With the above in mind, the available Rich family data can be summarised as follows:

- The earliest birth record is in 1815 (this date is not always recorded at baptism).
- The earliest record for the name is a baptism in 1803.
- The earliest marriage is in 1807.
- The earliest burial is in 1809.

The earliest record was the baptism in 1803 of Sara Abigail Rich on 26 June, daughter of Jacob and Sophia Rich (née Scott). There was also a daughter Leah born to Scott (surname only) a Serjeant (in the St Helena Regiment one presumes) and Lucky ("*a black*") bpt. 18 Oct 1795.

Does this link in any way with Sophia Rich (née Scott) in the family tree below? John Turner mentions that Clara was assisted in her school by a Mrs Rich, assumed to be a sister in law, then by Leah, then by Emma.

However, in the early days of the records, slaves were recorded with no surname, but often their owner or proprietor was named.

Thus, the earliest record through complex derivation, can be detected back to "*Mr Wrangham's Jacob*" which from experience refers to Mr Wrangham's slave called Jacob.

The tree appended at the end is the result of many hours examination of all the records for which there were no surnames given, piecing together the evidence to provide this putative family tree. This original version was done at the request of the BBC programme "*Who Do You Think You Are?*" with respect to an actress who apparently had St Helena Rich family ancestors.

This suggests that the earliest Rich in this family – Mr Wrangham's Jacob - could have been born as early as 1764 if he was at least 20 years of age when his daughter Clara was born in 1784.

Although there is some evidence that some slaves took on, or were known by the names of their owners (forename or surname) when surnames became commonplace amongst the slaves, others were named for other reasons – these included the ship that brought them to the island (Richmond, Conquest), fanciful names from Greek Mythology (Hercules, Scipio, etc), or in the case of the Liberated Africans in the 19th century, the surname of their sponsor at baptism.

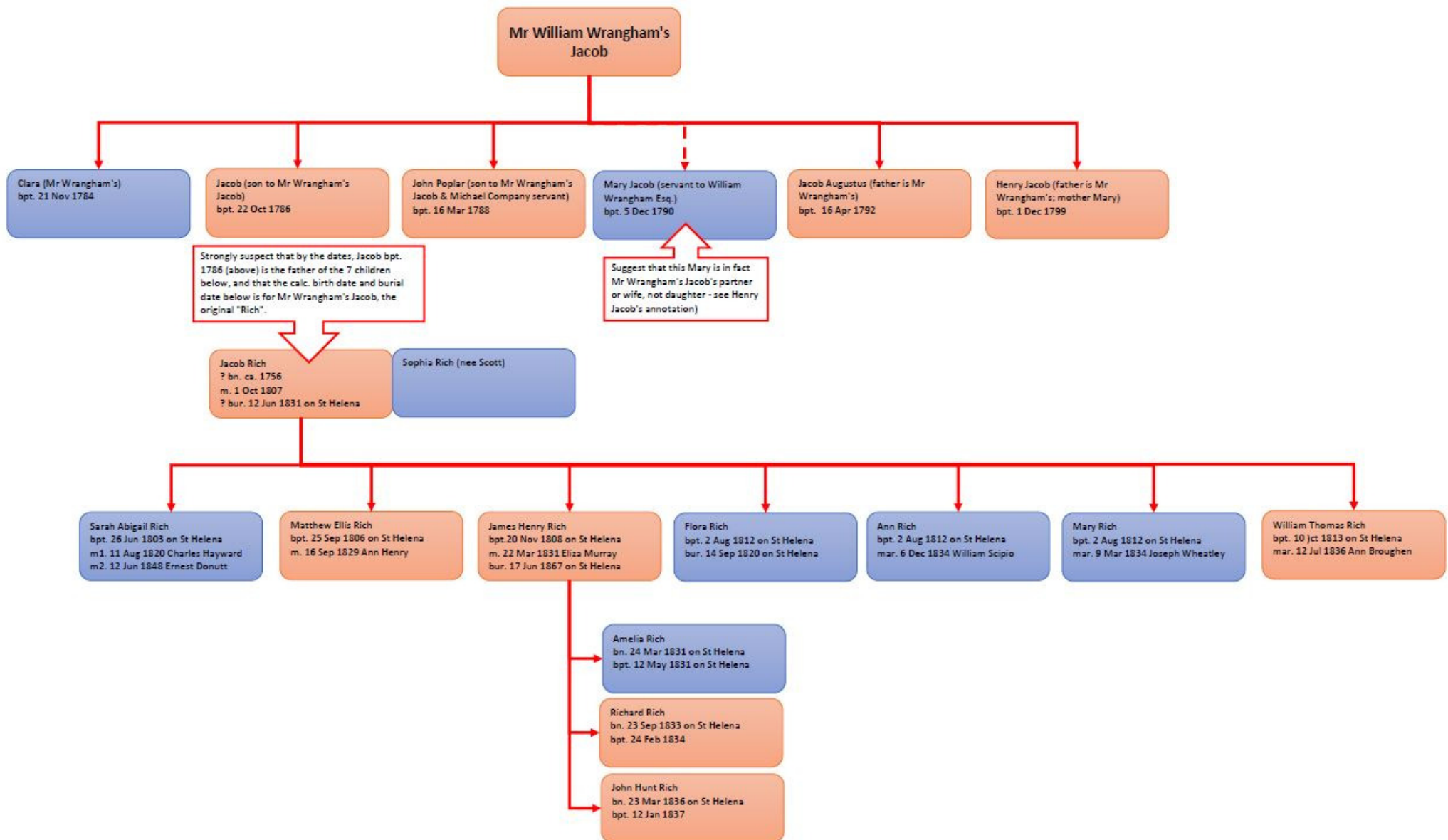
There is no record that I am aware of for the name Rich as a surname amongst the earliest HEIC officials or “*Planters*”, which might have been taken on by their slaves. There was a “*Wrich*” in the St Helena Regiment with no evident connections. He was born in 1777 and died in 1843. Therefore he would only have been 7 years old when Clara Rich was born in 1784.

Aside from the slaves associated with the Wrangham family, it is evident there may have been other Rich slaves on the island, and that the name may have been brought to the island by slaves with an origin in the HEIC Far Eastern holdings, or Madagascar which was another source of slaves.

The name Jacob Rich for a slave appears in an 1804 document relating to the slaves of Lieut. Col. Laneⁱ. The names Robert Rich and Jacob Rich are both mentioned. It is not evident how these might be related to the Rich family with the Wranghams- if at all?

The surname Rich could also be as John Turner points out, a diminution of Richard used for an earlier (slave) ancestor of Jacob, the earliest known member of the family here.

Further research has been done related to the Rich family in South Africa and of a St Helena origin, which I carried out for WDYTYA. It might shed further light?



¹ 1804 Letter to the Hon. Court of Directors of the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies. P.46-48, 66-68.

John Rich, married in Cape Town in 1858

The information here was extracted from the St Helena Ancestors Database (originally researched in 2018). The original query concerned:

1. **John Henry Rich married Mary Elizabeth Otto**, 7 Jun 1858, in Cape Town, South Africa.

He was of Bachelor Full Age, she was a Spinster, a Minor.

He was a Carpenter and Joiner. He made his mark. i.e. could not write.

One witness was Jas. Page Chippendale.

2. Although there were 48 **John Henry** Baptisms in the database, none had the surname Rich.

Similarly, there were only 4 **Henry John** forenames at Baptisms, none was a Rich.

I included the Richards Baptisms as well, but none seems a likely candidate.

3. There were 8 **John Rich** Baptisms, all of which were included.

One baptised in 1816, too young, was fathered by a Piplo, so would have been more likely in my experience to have taken his father's, not his mother's, surname.

The others, born in 1822, 1833, and 1843, would have been 36, 25 and 15 years old respectively in 1858 when the John Henry in which we have an interest, was married of full age. The remainder were born after 1858.

4. **John Hunt Rich** was born in 1836, so would have been 22 years old in 1858, thus of full age (i.e. over 21 years old – I think at that period of history in British “eyes” this was full age?)
5. His father was **James Henry Rich**. Saints changed their names very easily and much use was and still is made of nicknames, which became more entrenched than the real registered name. It is plausible that John Hunt used John Henry, his father's second name, once in a new context, country and community (South Africa)? It is also the possible case that the Minister, or his clerk, recorded the name wrong, and there are many instances of the Minister then going back into the register to correct this and sign it at the family's request. Most ordinary people at this time could not read or write, so the Minister or Clerk recorded a name as they heard it and as spoken by the parents. In over 30,000 Baptism records, this is the only use of Hunt as a forename. There are three “*Hunter*”s in addition. The church register was the civil register until the legal requirement for a Civil Register was ordained. However, you can see from the clip of the Register entry that John Hunt was clearly “*Hunt*” at his Baptism.
6. If **John Hunt Rich**, son of James Henry Rich, is “*our*” man, then his parents were James Henry (a tailor) and Eliza Rich (née Murray). A James Henry was baptised in 1808 – then considered “*Free*”. There is only his father's surname – Rich – on the record. No mother nor father's forename. This tells of a humble origin, probably freed slaves. Baptisms did not necessarily occur soon after birth, sometimes many years later. This was often the result of no minister being available, or an arduous minister, new to the Island, rounding up unbaptised souls, perhaps to add to his “*count*”. These were often slaves, or illegitimate children of which there were many.
7. There is a **James and Mary Rich** family, he was a carpenter, but their five children were all born on Island in the period 1868-1877.
8. **James Rich**, no middle name, died in 1867 on the Island, aged 63, thus calculated birth year was 1804.
9. The surname **Otto** does not occur in the Island records I have, suggesting she was of South African origin.

-
10. **James Chippendale**– the surname is an Island family, there is a James (no Page 2nd name) born 1831, so a few years older than John Hunt was. Saint communities stuck together in the Cape, Natal and Port Nolloth, so if “our” John Henry was of Saint origin, to have a witness from the same source was not unusual. I have several other instances.
 11. Finally, there was a **James Rich** slave to Mr Richard Torbett, who was 29 years old at the 1827 Manumission listing, but 38 at the 1839 listing, thus calculated birth years of 1798 or 1801. This could have been James Henry Rich, but if he was still a slave in 1827, he would not have been “Free” as James Henry was when baptised in 1808. Unlikely therefore to be part of the scenario.
 12. There is only one instance of a possible **Hunt** father, a stoker on HMS “*Hermoire*” (sic), who was buried on the island in 1907 aged 29, so born ca.1878 which is too late.
 13. The **earliest Rich records** are as follows – Baptism 1803, Marriage 1807 and Burial 1809. The slave records suggest an earlier date with James Rich calculated birth year of 1798 or 1801. While there was a **Col. Wrich** in the St Helena Regiment, no records of any marriage or progeny exist and he died in 1843 on the Island. This strongly suggests the name on the Island is of slave origin, evolving as a surname at the turn of that century, around 1800 before manumission. There are no Rich forenames without a surname, so no records of a slave called Rich with no surname being baptised before this time.

In conclusion, I believe there is a strong likelihood that John Henry Rich, married in Cape Town in 1858, was John Hunt Rich, born on St Helena in 1836, either wrongly recorded as Hunt at Baptism, or took on his father’s middle name for some reason at the time of his marriage. He would have been unable to show a Baptismal or Birth Certificate at his marriage since these were not in use on the Island in 1836/7. The presence of another plausible Island name – James Chippendale – as a witness is further support of this strong possibility.