

1700-1900 Short People Biographies



Wahunsenacawh, Matoaka (Pocahontas) and the Shedden/Goodrich family of East Cowes

These people are connected by the story of a tobacco plant. The Nansemond people were members of the Indigenous Powhatan alliance in Virginia when the English colonists arrived in Jamestown from 1607. Wahunsenacawh was their leader, and Matoaka his daughter. Their descendants were displaced from their land so that tobacco could be grown in plantations for European consumption. The Shedden and Goodrich families became plantation owners and tobacco merchants.



Mary Sweatman and William Arnold

Smuggling was a very common way of earning an income at this time, despite being illegal. The Island's remote coastlines allowed fishermen and other sailors to land contraband from passing trade ships heading for Southampton and Cowes. Tobacco, brandy, gin and tea were popular cargos which women re-packed for selling on. In the late C18th William Arnold was appointed to chase down these smugglers, with some success. But he didn't manage to stop it - in 1830 Mary Sweatman of Ryde was convicted of smuggling and fined £50.



J.S. White and Blanche Thornycroft

Blanche Coules Thornycroft was the daughter of the shipbuilder, J.S. White. The two White shipyards, one on either side of the Medina River, were major employers in the towns of East Cowes and West Cowes. They became renowned for reliably built, fast small and large ships. Blanche worked with her father from a young age testing for the most efficient hull shapes. They used a (large) lily pond in their garden at home and wooden hull models. Later they built a test tank as big as a swimming pool to experiment.

1700-1900 Short People Biographies



Lady Elizabeth Butler (Thompson)

Elizabeth lived in Bonchurch and Ventnor on the Isle of Wight in the 1860s and 1870s. She became a well-known artist painting military subjects, and one of her paintings (The Roll Call) was purchased by Queen Victoria. Elizabeth had West African ancestry. Her grandfather, Thomas, was born in Jamaica to a mother of West African descent and a father who was a sugar plantation owner. Wealth from this plantation business was left to her grandfather.

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/405915/the-roll-call>



Captain John Urry

The son of a naval officer who came from an old Isle of Wight family. Captain Urry commanded the British Royal Navy ship, HMS *Viper*, during the Seven Years War. This war was fought between France, Britain and Spain over dominance in the Caribbean. Over which empire had control of the valuable trade in sugar, rum and enslaved people from Africa. Urry took part in the siege and capture of the Spanish naval base at Havana in Cuba in August 1762. He later retired to the Isle of Wight and lived in a large house in Yarmouth.



Olaudah Equiano

Enslaved as a child in Africa and taken from the Eboe region of the Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria) to the Caribbean and sold into slavery. Equiano purchased his freedom and by the 1780s was living in Britain. He became an active leader of the anti-slavery movement. He described the inhumanity of slavery in his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. In this book, he tells of staying at Cowes on the Isle of Wight; where he was struck by a chance encounter with a fellow African living as a servant on the Island.