



Picton Castle, as it was in the 1770s.

Picton's Progress

Cesar Picton, a native of Senegal, was brought from Africa in 1761 at the age of six. He was presented to Sir John Philipps of Norbiton Place, Kingston, Surrey, by Captain Parr, a British army officer who had been serving there. The reason for the gifts is unknown.

Probably born a Muslim, Cesar was baptised into the Christian faith on 6th December 1761, and was christened Cesar. His original Senegalese name is not known. He was dressed in the servant's attire of the time, including a velvet turban, which cost 10s6d (52½p). It was fashionable then for aristocratic households to have richly dressed black retainers.

It would have been customary for Cesar to become a servant to the male member of the family, but they became so attached to him that he became Lady Philipps's protégé. He seems to have mixed on virtually equal terms with the family, which had a long tradition of supporting education and Christian missionary

work. In 1788, in a letter to a friend, Horace Walpole noted "I was in Kingston with the sisters of Lord Milford; they have a favourite black, who has been with them a great many years and is remarkably sensible".

Sir John and Lady Philipps had one son and three daughters. They also owned Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire, South Wales.

Sir John died in 1764, and his son inherited the title of Lord Milford. Two years later Lady Philipps made her will. This went through several revisions and when she died in 1788 she left £100 to Cesar, a very substantial sum. Their son sold Norbiton Place, and their daughters went to live in Hampton Court.

Cesar, now on his own, spent his legacy on renting a coach house and stables in High Street (then 'West by Thames'), Kingston, known today as Picton House. Giving himself the surname 'Picton' (after Picton Castle), he set up as a coal merchant. He was not a freeman of the Town, so he had to pay Kingston Corporation £10 to trade. By 1795, at 40, he was a much respected businessman having made enough money to buy Picton House and other property, including a wharf and a malthouse. In 1801 one of the Philipps daughters died and left Cesar a further £100, although he was by now wealthy by his own efforts. In 1807, when he



Norbiton Place in the early 19th century.



Picton House in the High Street, Kingston, as it is today.

was 52, Cesar let the Kingston properties and went to live in Tolworth in a rented cottage, and was described in deeds as a 'gentleman'.

In February 1816 he moved again to Thames Ditton, where he bought a property for the then huge sum of £4000. This house was also known as Picton House (or Cottage) but was later renamed Sunnyside House.

Picton lived there for 20 years and his will tells us more about his lifestyle. He had a horse and chaise, two watches with gold chains and seals, brooches, gold rings and shirt pins. There was a tortoiseshell tea chest, silver spoons, and tongs. He had paintings of his friends and his dogs and, intriguingly, a portrait of himself. He left this to a friend, Thomas Bushell, but its present whereabouts are unknown.

When Cesar was living in Thames Ditton, the remaining Philipps daughters died, both in 1820. Joyce left him £100, and Katherine left him £50 plus £30 a year for life. Cesar died in 1836, aged 81. He was buried on 16th June in All Saints' Church, Kingston.

In his will he asked to be "plain but decently buried within the Parish Church,



Picton House, Thames Ditton as it is today.

Kingston", and that mourning rings costing no more than £5 each be distributed to 16 named friends. Nevertheless it was to be a remarkable occasion, as Cesar was then a man of immense bulk, and had to be brought to the church on a four-wheel trolley, and lowered into the vault down an inclined plane of planks on rollers. His last resting place is marked by a floor plaque in the south aisle inscribed "CP 1836". A wall plaque to Cesar was unveiled at Picton House in Kingston in 1998.

Cesar Picton

Picton's signature to a deed dated 1816, reproduced by permission of the Surrey County Archivist.