

# Historical and Archaeological Society The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda

“Knowledge to be of any Value must be Communicated”

HAS Newsletter No. 156

January, February, March 2022



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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

By Dr. Reginald Murphy

### **Issues and Challenges**

The past two years has been a challenge for us all at the Museum and as a Society.

COVID and the subsequent pro-  
tocols and adaptive strategies  
required as a “National Muse-  
um” was frustrating and at times  
depressing, but we survived with  
flying colours. However, our  
biggest challenge was not  
COVID but our largest artifact,  
our building.



The Museum of Antigua Barbuda dates to the late 1730s. As we all know it suffered serious structural damage from the earthquake of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1974 and was repaired shortly after. The repairs involved the hiding of all the cracks and damages to the limestone structure under a thick layer of Portland cement plaster. Sadly, this was a death sentence as lime mortar and stone will dissolve if moisture trapped within, cannot escape. Today the building is at a crossroad. Moisture/water from the leaky roof, damaged guttering pipes, and cracks in the cement plaster has reduced much of the limestone to a soft crumbling powdery mass. Scabs of the cement plaster is now falling off, injuring staff and making the courtyard unusable. Further to this, our friendly unwanted guests, the indestructible termites/woodworms are back. On top of all this, we are struggling to get the extensive repairs done. In sum, the entire structure requires a complete major and costly restoration.

(Continued on page 2)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*(Continued from page 1)*

All of these issues have become a distraction and is using all of our income, time and ability to grow and develop as a museum. We need to ask ourselves as a non-profit organization, where do we go from here. Do we continue to struggle with the Old Court House, or is it time to look at other options that could provide all our needs, including storage, conservation space, staff space, research space, exhibit halls, and more. Could we find a newer easier to modify structure, or dare we dream of a new purpose built facility. The concept of old buildings recycled as museums is a long standing public vision, yet old repurposed structures are nearly all unsuitable as museum; lacking space, infrastructure and come with a variety of pests and issues.

Another option is a compromise; which is to reduce our operation at the current structure to exhibition, lectures, giftshop, and to seek an Annex building where we can establish a research and collections storage base. A newer facility, hopefully outside of St. John's could permit growth and development that could take us to a much higher level as an organization. This may also stimulate us to return to our roots as an Archaeological Society.

We have to some extent drifted away from our base as a research group to establish and manage the museum and the reality is our membership is aging and not as involved. But on the bright side we have much to be proud of. We now have three archaeologists on Antigua and others volunteers/members with basic skills. We have an enormous collection of artifacts recovered over the past 50 years, and public interest and support remains strong. In addition, we have the best museum database and research library in the region and an amazing network of academic based colleagues, and more importantly a dedicated and creative staff. So, it's not all gloom and doom. We can be proud of what we have achieved in the past 45 years, and despite our aging building we are a great team and can rise to the challenge of repairs and expansion.



Scabs of cement plaster breaking up exposing limestone structure on platform and steps.



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*Continued on page 3*

# PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

*(Continued from page 2)*

Termite infestation of roof in upstairs gallery



Termite infestation in museum office

Pieces of cement plaster have fallen off from the top west side of museum building.



Our President Dr. Reginald Murphy, Chairman Mr. Walter Berridge and the head of our Building Committee Ms. Jan O’Keeffe, was at the museum for an inspection visit. They were able to view the rotation of artifacts in the main exhibits with Curator Mrs. Michele Henry.



# The History behind

## Cornrows

An 'R3 Coaching Elevated' article

By Valerie German

Did you know Cornrows were used to help slaves escape slavery?

Slaves used cornrows to transfer information and create maps to the north.

Since slaves were not allowed to read or write they had to pass information through cornrows.

It is believed to have originated in Colombia, South America where Benkos Bioho, in the late 1500's came up with the idea to have women create maps & deliver messages through their cornrows. They were also called "canerows" to represent the sugarcane fields that slaves worked in.

One style had curved braids, tightly braided on their heads. The curved braids would represent the roads they would use to escape.

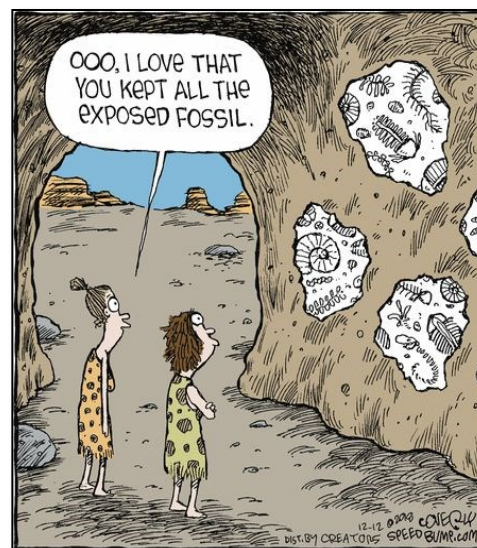
Also in their braids they kept gold and hid seeds which helped them survive after they escaped. They would use the seeds to plant crops once they were liberated.

Cornrows was the best way to not give back any suspicion to the owner. He would never figure out such a hairstyle would mean they would escape or the route they would take.

Very interesting fact about the history behind African American cornrows. Very intelligent people. Our ancestors were amazing and very creative. Thank you for paving the way. Thank you for the sacrifices you made. Thank you for your willingness, courage and determination to change the trajectory of history as we know it today. Thank you for your economic contributions. Thank you for the movements. Thank you for solid foundational principles that some of us live by today. You are greatly cherished and we will never forget all that you had to endure for your kind to be where we are today.



### Museum Humour



## Crab Torching

Excerpt from the publication '*The Boy from Popes head*' by Leon H. Matthias

When I was boy growing up in Cedar Grove, torching for crabs was a popular activity. Nearly every boy in the village had some experience catching crabs.

You began at a very early age. A five or six year old would catch the "reshenke" or red back crab near the sea shore. These never grew to any great size. But a pot boiling with six or eight of these crabs indicated that the catcher was perfecting his skills.

I remember my first torching expedition. After school was dismissed one day, I hurried to Royal's Estate to secure our animals for the evening. The cows and sheep were taken to Royal Pond to have their thirst quenched. They were brought home and tied in our yard. The rest of the afternoon was used for get ready for the evening's activity. I asked my mother to spare a half bottle of kerosene. She consented with some reservations. She reminded me of the high cost of kerosene oil. After a stern lecture, she asked me to pour the oil from the gallon she had bought from the grocery shop. I prepared a wick from an old crocus bag, It was cut to a spe-cific size and rolled neatly, enabling it to be inserted into the bottle with the kerosene oil. I also had a medium sized crocus bag.

While hunting for crabs was done in the rainy season between September and December, a very heavy shower at anytime in the year would fill the crab holes, thus forcing them to wander around. Flambeau lights could be seen in different directions punctuating the darkness as crab hunters searched for a good catch.



The famous crab hunting area was located north of the Antigua Beach Hotel. This was an area where the mangrove trees grew in abundance.

These trees, because of their vinelike roots, provided a habitat for several species of living creatures. The crabs move around found in large numbers after a heavy shower of rain.

After a ten minute walk from the village, we approached the hunting area.

It was now very dark. The leader of the group assigned to each person specific duties. I was asked to be the "bagman". The flambeau I brought was given to a bigger boy. I wanted to protest, but I knew that I could not do so on my first outing. I responded that if I protested, I would not be invited to join that group again. Secondly, I ran the risk of getting a small part of the night's catch even to the point of getting the smallest crabs that were caught. Silently, I accepted the bag and pledged to make the best of it.

The leader scratched the first match and there was a large flame. The other members of the team lighted their flambeaux from the first one. We were now ready to spread out. Members began to move in different directions. At first it seemed as if I was given a manageable task. It was also true that I was on my first crab-catching expedition. Only time would tell if I did the job properly.

As the team moved out, the first crab was sighted. There was a loud shout "bag ya". I moved as quickly as I could to the direction from which the sound came. I would take the bag so that the crab could be placed inside. As I approached the first caller a sound came from the opposite direction. "bag ya". I had to get through the thicket to the other callers to receive their catch. I soon realized that with many crabs moving about, this was going to be a challenging night.

There was another call from a distance, "bag ya, bag ya. Ah wah happen to dat bagman, he just like the slow coach to China." I moved quickly in his direction and shouted. "Tek it easy man ah coming to you soon." As I came close to him. I learnt the source of his excitement. He had a "spara" in his hand. This was a crab with very large pinching claws often referred to as "gundi". My friend was elated. This was the largest crab he had ever caught.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Crab Torching

(Continued from page 5)

But while I shared his joy, I made the one mistake that every bagman dreaded. I placed the crocus bag over my shoulder letting it rest on my back. Within seconds, one of the crabs pierced the bag with its claws and pinched the flesh on my back. I screamed and dropped the bag. My friend was full of laughter, but he warned me that if any of the crabs came out of the bag, I would have to recapture it. I was surely learning the duties of a bagman the hard way.

After about three hours, we decided to return home. We had a large catch to divide amongst ourselves. I reasoned that my share would be a reasonable one. Little did I know that the leader of the group had a special plan for the sharing of the crabs.

He informed the group that he would be taking two crabs as rental for the bag. He also wanted two crabs for each flambeaux he loaned to the group. He provided three flambeaux. The crabs that remained were to be divided equally among the group members.

For my efforts I took home six crabs. These included two “spares”. I placed them in a clean oil drum. They would stay there for four days. During this time I fed them with bread soaked in some sugar water. This process is called “purging”. On the fifth day, the crabs would be cooked and provide meat for one of Antigua’s favorite delicacies, “fungi and crab”.

My first experience at crab torching was not a bad one. However, I also learned that it was not a bed of roses, especially when you were assigned to be the “bagman” in the village where I grew up as a boy.

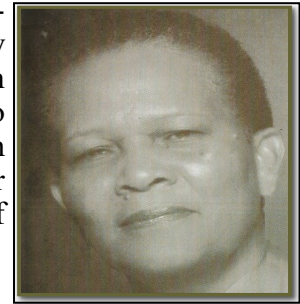
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## Pioneers of Antigua & Barbuda

Excerpts from ‘*Inspirational Pioneers of Antigua and Barbuda*’ Calendar by The Silston Library

### HANNAH THOMAS

Hannah Thomas (1877-24 June 1959) was probably sent by her father Mr. Hudson to study midwifery at Holberton Hospital. She returned to Barbuda in 1900 and in the year began her career with the delivery of Samuel Beazer.



She was the sole health practitioner in Barbuda. Her only assistant was her young son, Manthroap Joseph, who acted as her administrative assistant, taking birth records to the post office so they could be sent to Antigua. Thus, Manthroap Joseph, who acted as her administrative assistant, taking birth records to the post office so they could be sent to Antigua. Thus, Manthroap became the recipient of Hannah Thomas medical knowledge. According to Lucinda Joseph, Manthroap’s daughter, her father had a ‘good knowledge of biology.’

The only ‘hospital’ Hannah Thomas worked in was her home. She also took on the responsibility of accompanying the sick who had to travel for treatment. For her services, she was usually rewarded, not with cash, but with food items such as ground provision, vegetables or rice.

In 1945, Forter Hopkins would be the the last baby Hannah Thomas delivered. She retired in that year, but eventually went blind due to glaucoma. Manthroap Joseph continued as his mother’s right hand, even at this most challenging time in her life. He took care of her until her death in 1959.

Ironically, the hospital that was built in Barbuda in 1984 was named Spring View Hospital.

(Continued on page 7)

## Pioneers of Antigua & Barbuda

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In 1998 a committee, chaired by Hartford John, sought to remedy that oversight. They proposed that the hospital be renamed after the woman who sacrificed her home and family to pioneer the health system in Barbuda.



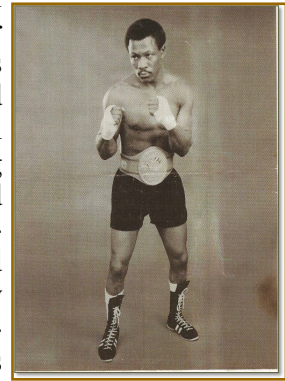
The Hannah Thomas Hospital

The committee's recommendation was accepted and in 1998 Barbuda's hospital was renamed Hannah Thomas Hospital.

### MAURICE HOPE

Maurice Hope (born 6 December 1951) confesses he was the softest of his siblings. 'If you even spoke to me, I would begin to cry: and so his big brother, Denzil, the most aggressive, and the one who protected all of them, decided to toughen him up. Denzil's strategy was to drag him from village to village pushing him into fights.

'Denzil would ask me if I could beat a particular boy, and because I was scared of him I would answer yes!' Denzil then arranged a boxing match with said boy and Maurice Hope discovered, as he was dragged from fight to fight by his 'manager and trainer', Denzil, that he was strong and persistent. 'I never started a fight, but I realized how strong I was.'



Maurice Hope's parents left for England, leaving him with his grandmother, Mrs. Eva Andrew. They sent for Denzil, first, and he was happy because he did not have to fight anymore. This happiness was short-lived because Maurice and his sister, Novella, were next to go. He arrived in Hackney at age nine and by age ten, Denzil had taken over his life once again, this time taking him to the famous Repton Gym to train as a boxer.

After leaving school, Maurice Hope reasoned that because he did not have a trade, boxing would become his profession. He began to 'buckle down and the rest is history.' He won the British Junior Middleweight, the European Boxing Union's Jr. Middleweight and the World Boxing Council Junior Middleweight titles. 'I won these titles because of my brother Denzil, my dedication and belief in God.'

Maurice Hope was the first Antiguan and Barbudan to attain a world championship in any sporting discipline; the first Antiguan and Barbudan to compete in the Olympic Games and the first immigrant to win any title in England. For this last achievement he was awarded the Member of the British Empire (MBE). Maurice Hope retired and returned to Antigua and Barbuda in 1983, because 'a deh mi come from.' As coach of the Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Boxing Association since 1987 he has guided the team in winning several GECS and Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA) titles.

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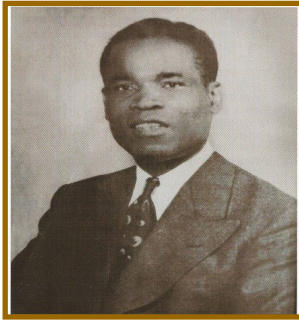
## Pioneers of Antigua & Barbuda

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He hopes that Antigua and Barbuda will receive a medal in the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

### ALVAN SILSTON

Alvan Silston (3 April 1894-8 **August 1898**) loved quoting long sections from the bible and Shakespeare, because he enjoyed challenging himself intellectually. He also had a talent for bringing out the best in people. It was said that to 'be in the company of Alvan Silston, is a learning experience.'



He migrated to New York in 1914, and was drafted in 1917 to fight in France during World War I. This experience left him with an erect military posture which he never lost. Along with other ambitious West Indian men of his era, he attended Harlem Evening High School and worked and studied part-time at New York and Howard Universities aspiring to become a doctor.



Children utilizing the Silston library resources to complete research /homework etc...

The economic depression of the 1930s forced him to give up his dream and join his brother, Clement and sister, Vineta in selling cosmetics for J. R. Watkins Company. By 1936, Alvan Silston was the first black manager ever hired by this company, one of the largest cosmetic firms in America. As manager he established many branches of Watkins across the United States.

His other accomplishment was his contribution to the establishment of the Silston Library in Antigua and Barbuda in 1949. In 1970 he retired and devoted his time to writing poetry and visiting the sick and shut-ins until confined by illness.

A large crowd comprising 'several generations' attended his funeral.

He was laid to rest at the Veterans National Cemetery in Long Island.

### COXIE EMANUEL COATES

Coxie Emanuel Coates (c. 1900-1982) was a master craftsman, manufacturer and innovator.

One of his properties, Coates Cottage, is still standing on Lower Nevis Street, next to Redcliffe



Quay. This section of Nevis

Mr. Coxie Coates (Center)

Street was once a part of a community called Fibrey. There is a door on the right that leads into a brick courtyard, with small cells or barracoons which held the enslaved until they were ready to be paraded before buyers.

The iron rings and chains on the wall which shackled the enslaved are no longer there, but the cottage, which is closed to the port, was part of the evil infrastructure of slavery.

Coates Cottage was named after the Antiguan Actor Robert Coates, born in 1774.

*(Continued on page 9)*



## Pioneers of Antigua & Barbuda

*(Continued from page 8)*

Robert's father was Alexander Coates, a merchant and wealthy owner of the Coates Plantation, who loaned king George III, £10,000 to protect Antigua from Spanish and French Raiders

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Coates Cottage was named after the Antiguan Actor Robert Coates, born in 1774. Robert's father was Alexander Coates, a merchant and wealthy owner of the Coates Plantation, who loaned king George III, £10,000 to protect Antigua from Spanish and French Raiders.



**Coates Cottage**  
**Lower Nevis Street**

During World War II, when Germany ceased exporting its sturdy toys to the Caribbean, Coxie Coates rose to the occasion and filled the breach. He used the machines that he created— chain saws, band saws, drills and other massive equipment, to create wooden toys such as tops, and the Suzie Michael which was a wooden puppet that could move in all directions once its strings were pulled.

At Christmas time Mr. Coates was a busy man , supplying the demand for his well-crafted toys.



This is the Lathe that was designed by the late Coxie Emanuel Coates, which was used to help create various styles and patterns in/with woods

According to the late Selvyn Walter, Mr. Coates belonged to that gifted group of tradesmen who supported sports and arts and who formed the backbone of Antigua and Barbuda during the first half of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Did You Know this about our African heritage?**

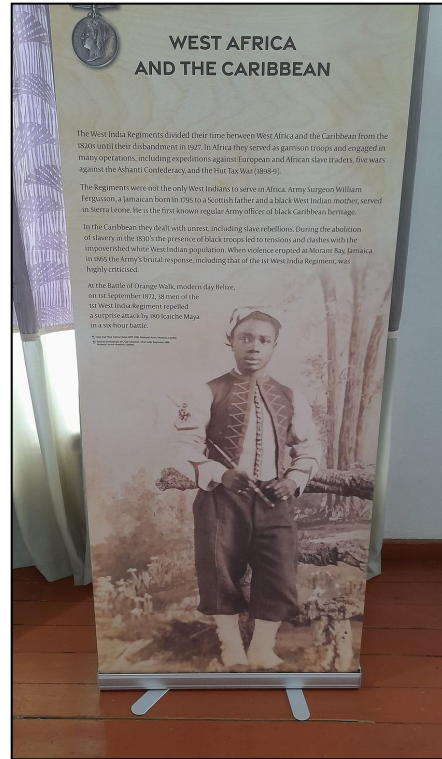
- Village life was different from estate life in that music could be played loud with an African rhythm.
- Our carnival attire is probably derived from the African Yoruba and Asante and others, as masked costumes were a feature of their celebrations.
- The Akan people have a spider hero called Anansi. Ntikuma (Tacooma) was his son.
- The methods and shapes of pottery at Seaview Farm village have African origins. The decorative punctuations are also African.
- Emporor Halie Selassie of Ethiopia became a Messiah in spirit to the Rastafaris. Some words of broken English must have derived from the African language 'Gullah'.

# Muse News

## Acquisitions

Launch of the traveling "West Indian Soldier" Exhibition. Special thanks to the West India Committee from London who made this donation.

The history of the West Indian Soldier spans nearly 400 years, and in that time the people of the Caribbean have made great contributions to the British Army.



**West Africa and the Caribbean Panel** This panel pays tribute to the many Caribbean's who volunteered for service, including the many women who joined the ATS.



Dr. Reginald Murphy opens with a speech for the launch of the traveling 'West Indian Soldier' Exhibition.



Presentation by Mr. David Wells, Research Officer (left) and Mrs. Blondel Cluff (right), CEO of the West India Committee.



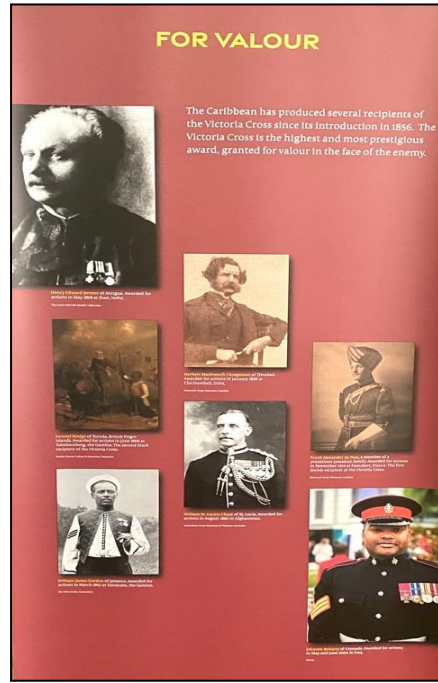
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# Muse News

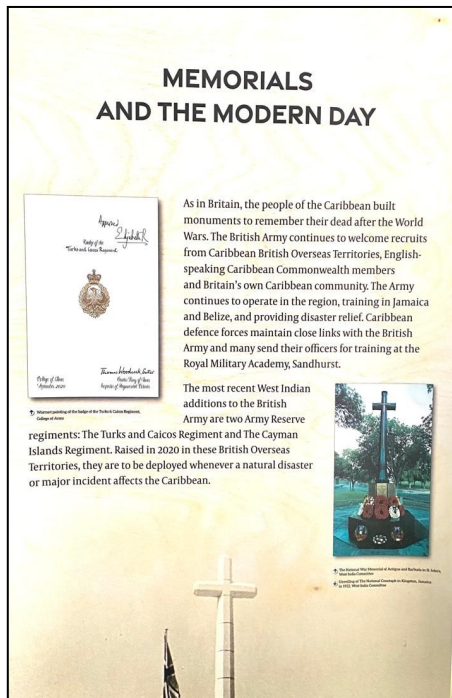
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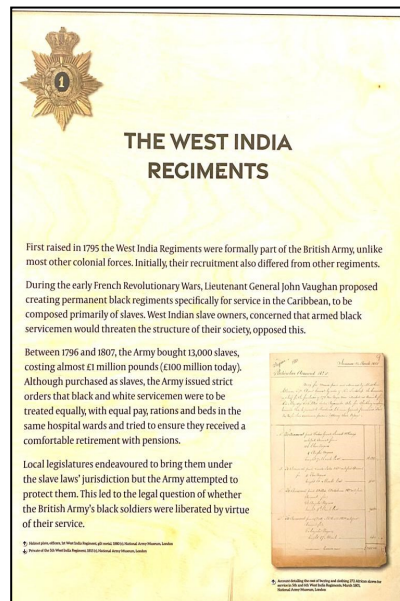
**Second World War Panel.** This panel pays tribute to the many Caribbean's who volunteered for service, including the many women who joined the ATS.



**Valour Panel.** This panel commemorates Caribbean soldiers who have won the highest medal for bravery, the Victoria Cross.



**Memorials & Modern Day Panel.** States the role of the Army in training Caribbean forces today.



**West India Regiments Panel.** How and why the West India Regiments were formed in 1795.

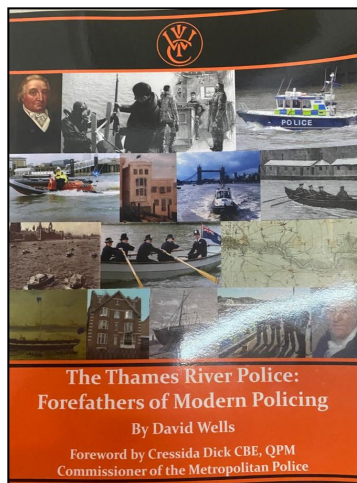
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# Muse News

*(Continued from page 11)*



Publications by the West India committee were also donated to the museum. They are entitled, *The West Indian Soldier: The British Army and Caribbean* and *'The Thames River Police: Forefathers of Modern Policing'*



David Wells Research Officer and Blondel Cluff, CEO of the West India Committee conducted an impromptu workshop on Research, digital and documentation for museums, after their presentations. Thank you ABS for covering this historic event.



Antigua Broadcasting Station (ABS) team

*(Continued on page 13)*

# Muse News

*(Continued from page 12)*

## Special Visit

Professor Bill Hunter of Lehigh University and Bethlehem Pennsylvania are in Antigua to embark on their tenth year service trip. They enjoyed their visit which is always a highlight, and helps ground the students in the rich history of the island. Thank you Lehigh for your gift of data sticks.



Mr. Lehigh presents data sticks to staff member Mrs. Debbie Joseph who accepts on behalf of the museum.



## Preservation

Our research library staff preparing archival boxes to store important documents after scanning.



*(Continued on page 14)*

# Muse News

*(Continued from page 13)*

## Special Visit

### Ambassador to the Peoples Republic of China visits the museum

Dr. Reginald Murphy gives them a tour of the Museum

### New Exhibit of Antigua and Barbuda Shipwrecks



On behalf of the museum, Mr. Walter Berridge (chairman) presents a gift of publications by Desmond V. Nicholson to the Ambassador to the Peoples Republic of China , H.E. MME Zhang Yanling

The Historical & Archaeological Society Newsletter is published at the Museum quarterly in January, April, July and October. HAS encourages contribution of material relevant to the Society from the membership or Other interested individuals

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# Historical and Archaeological Society

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH No. 156

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Stay connected for further information, by visiting our Facebook page, *The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda*. Also visit our website [www.antiguamuseums.net](http://www.antiguamuseums.net)

Join HAS! Discover & Preserve Antigua & Barbuda's Heritage

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