

# Historical and Archaeological Society The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda

“Knowledge to be of any Value must be Communicated”

HAS Newsletter No. 151    October, November, December 2020



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## ABS Good Morning Antigua Visit's The Museum

ABS @ the museum this morning. We spoke about " On the Battlefield of Merit," by D. Coquillette and Bruce A. Kimball, Harvard Law School, The First Century. Isaac Royal and his contribution from the sale of his Royalls estate, to start the Harvard Law School. Gifts from the Harvard Law School. Dr. Reg Murphy, Museums becoming dependent on digital programs to boost their existence, .Michele Henry and The importance of Archaeology ,by board member, Desley Gardner.



## Excerpt from ‘The crucifixion of Prince Klaas: Antigua’s disputed slave rebellion of 1736’

28 DECEMBER 2012 / MIKE DASH

According to David Barry Gaspar, who has written in more detail on the subject than anybody else, Klaas was one of the masterminds behind an elaborate plot, hatched late in 1735, to overthrow white rule on Antigua. The conspiracy allegedly involved slaves on a number of large plantations, and was built around an audacious effort to destroy the island’s planters in a single spectacular explosion. Taking advantage of a large ball due to be held in St. John’s in October 1736, the slaves planned to smuggle a 10-gallon barrel of gunpowder into the building and blow it up. The detonation was to be the signal for slaves on the surrounding plantations to rise, murder their masters and march on the capital from four directions. A general massacre would follow, and Prince Klaas himself would be enthroned as leader of a new black kingdom on the island.

The planters on Antigua had no difficulty believing the details of this conspiracy—which, as they themselves would have been well aware, bore a striking resemblance to the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Court records dating to the time state that the conspiracy was discovered only by chance, after the ball was postponed by nearly three weeks and several slaves who knew of the plan could not resist hinting that things were about to change. Their “insolence” increased “to a very Dangerous Pitch,” Justice of the Peace Roberth Arbuthnot observed; a British constable reported that when he had tried to break up a crowd of slaves, one had shouted to him: “Damn you, boy, it’s your turn now, but it will be mine by and by, and soon too!”

Arbuthnot was sufficiently alarmed to make inquiries, which soon turned into a full-blown criminal investigation. One slave gave sufficient details for him to begin making arrests, and under interrogation (and occasionally torture), a total of 32 slaves confessed to having some stake in the scheme. In all, 132 were convicted of participating in it. Of this number, five, including Klaas, were broken on the wheel. Six were gibbeted (hung in irons until they died of hunger and thirst) and 77 others were burned at the stake.

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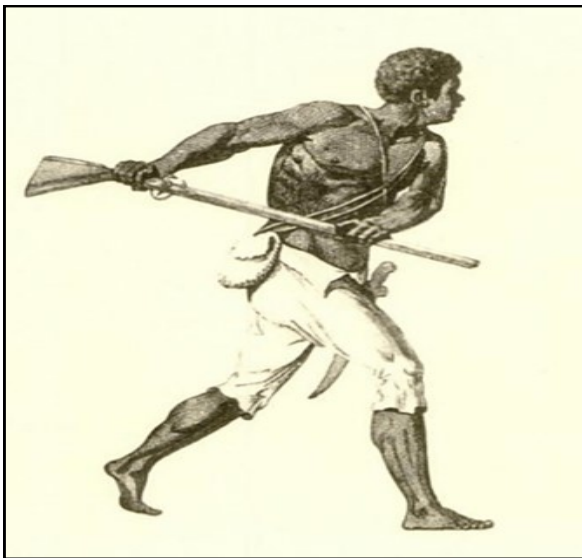
Alex Stewart

*Digital Collection*

*Management Technicians*

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The planter's nightmare, an armed slave, was a potent figure of menace; the governments of several Caribbean islands have been accused of seeing slave rebellions where there were. In the eyes of the Antiguan government, Prince Klaas's planned rebellion was well evidenced. A stream of witnesses testified that the plot existed; Klaas himself, together with his chief lieutenant—a creole (that is, a slave born on the island) known as Tomboy, whose job it would have been to plant the powder—eventually confessed to it.



Events on the Danish island of St. John showed that slaves were capable of executing conspiracies, and there were other parallels as well. In Barbados, in 1675 and in 1692, the authorities uncovered plots to massacre the white community that had apparently been kept secret for as long as three years.

In each of these cases, the leaders of the planned rebellions were said to have been “Coromantees”—slaves from what is now Ghana, the same part of West Africa from which Prince Klaas had come.

Klaas is a figure of compelling interest to historians. Gaspar and others argue that his influence over his fellow slaves went further than the Antiguan planters of the day realized, since, according to the official report on the planned uprising, “it was fully proved that he had for many

Years covertly assumed among his Countrymen, the Title of King, and had been by them address'd, and treated as such.” They further identify him as an Ashanti, a member of a tribal confederation renowned for discipline and courage, not to mention abundant use of human sacrifice.

The most intriguing evidence relating to Prince Klaas concerns a public ceremony held a week before the planned rebellion. In the course of this ritual, Gaspar says, Klaas was enthroned by an “obey man”—an obeah-man, that is; a priest, shaman or sorcerer who practiced the West African folk religion known as voodoo or santeria. In other Caribbean risings, it was the obeah-man who administered oaths of loyalty to would-be rebels with a mixture made of gunpowder, grave dirt and cock's blood; strong belief in his supernatural powers helped cement loyalty. Michael Craton is not alone in arguing that the ceremony Antigua's obeah-man presided over was actually a war dance,

*“set up by Tackey [Klaas] and Tomboy ‘in Mrs Dunbar Parkes’ Pasture, near the Town,’ [and] viewed by many unsuspecting whites and creole slaves... as simply a picturesque entertainment. But for many slaves it held a binding significance, for it was an authentic Ikem [shield] dance performed by an Ashanti king in front of his captains once he had decided on war.”*

*(Continued on page 4)*

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An American slave displays the marks of severe lashing, one of the punishments most commonly used in the sugar plantations of Antigua.

Other evidence that Prince Klaas was really planning an uprising comes from Arbuthnot's inquiry, which concluded that there had been warning signs of rebellion. Slaves had been seen congregating after midnight and heard blowing conch shells to announce their meetings. Yet—confessions aside little physical evidence of a conspiracy was ever produced. The “10-gallon barrel of powder” that Tomboy was to have used to blow up the ball was not recovered; nor, despite extensive searches, were any weapons caches found.

All this has led researchers such as Jason Sharples and Kwasi Konadu to direct renewed attention to the slaves' own testimonies. And here, it must be acknowledged, there is good reason to doubt that the confessions obtained by Arbuthnot were wholly reliable. Konadu persuasively argues that Klaas's “dance” was probably a familiar Ashanti ceremony acclaiming a newly chosen leader, and not a declaration of war. Sharples demonstrates that Arbuthnot's prisoners would have found it easy to exchange information and discuss what the captors wished to hear, and adds that they must have known that a confession—and the betrayal of as many of their fellow Africans as possible—was their one hope of saving themselves.

He also supplies an especially revealing detail: that one slave, known as “Langford's Billy,” who “escaped with his life by furnishing evidence against at least fourteen suspects” and was merely banished in consequence, turned up in New York four years later, heavily implicated in another suspected slave plot that many researchers now concede was merely a product of hysteria. Thrown into prison, Billy confided to a fellow inmate that he “understood these affairs very well” as a result of his experiences on Antigua, and that “unless he...did confess and bring in two or three, he would either be hanged or burnt.” He even offered, Sharples says, likely names “as proper ones to be accused.”

## **‘1735’ Was Built In 1755 The History of Her Majesty's Prison**

By Christopher Waters

Her Majesty's Prison, sitting across from the Antigua Recreation Grounds and infamously known as “1735,” is housed inside an old British Army barracks. Antigua had a continuous presence of British soldiers from 1707 until 1854. Before that, the men were quartered in rented private homes in St. John's. The first barracks were built in the 1740s as part of an agreement between the Colonial government in Antigua and the British Crown to have a permanent garrison of 400 men. One of the conditions was that the Antigua government had to build a permanent barracks, which they did...on Rat Island in 1742.

Rat Island was pitched as a high hill with gentle breezes and a healthy disposition. Additionally, the barracks would be on an island, meaning that the soldiers could not easily desert.

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Only Major Lucas, a planter and Assemblyman who held a commission in the 38th Regiment, objected. He thought the location was sickly, too close to a swamp, and downwind from the town and burial ground. His concerns were overridden.

It quickly became apparent that Major Lucas' assessment of the sickliness of Rat Island was correct. In fact, it was so bad that the government gave up and in 1755 built a new barracks complex on the northeastern edge of St. John's.

This complex included separate enlisted and officers' barracks, stables, gardens, a small farm, a cemetery, and a hospital.

After the soldiers moved out in the 19th century, the complex was broken up. The barracks became the prison, while the hospital complex eventually formed the start of Antigua Grammar School.

Somewhere, in this long history, the first "5" in the keystone at the prison was changed to a "3," altering the foundation date from 1755 to 1735



## DID YOU KNOW?



### ABOUT HYNDMAN'S VILLAGE by Susan Lowes

In 1914, a dispatch from the Governor of the Leeward Islands reported on the removal of a "slum" called Hyndman's Village. In the dispatch, the Governor said that the plan was to create a small village at Clare Hall. However, he admitted that this had not been done by the time the village was "removed" and so it is not clear where the residents went.

By the 1920s, the only house left was owned by the Piggott family, who lived directly across from the top of Dickenson Bay Street and refused to move when the villagers were ousted. A member of the family who grew up in that house was outraged that it anyone could have called the area a "slum." The name was still in use in the 1950s, when Alfred Powell McDonald received a Certificate of Title to half an acre that was described as a portion of Hyndman's Village.

So although we know where Hyndman's Village was, it probably did not look like this photo and it does not seem that it was a "slum" after all.

*Preserving The Past Enrich  
The Future.*

## Royall House and Slave Quarters

October is Massachusetts Archaeology Month. This small artifact, on display in the Slave Quarters, tells a global story.

This delicate porcelain chocolate cup unearthed on our site indicates the Royall's wealth in two ways: not only could they afford imported porcelain dedicated to a very specific use, but they could afford chocolate itself, an expensive luxury imported primarily from Central and South America and the English colony of Jamaica.

Increased consumption of chocolate and tea in the 18th century was linked to the increased availability of sugar, grown and processed under brutal conditions by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean.

In August 1737, two months after moving to Ten Hills Farm in Massachusetts from their sugar plantation on the West Indies island of Antigua, the Royall's purchased a chocolate grinding mill and paid £12 for a quarter pound of chocolate.



## Bridgetown in Antigua

By Arik Bord

Nestled along the calm waters of Willoughby Bay lies the remains of a small Antiguan settlement, Bridgetown. Though most of the original records have been lost, a book from 1899 lists a number of land patents which were issued in the vicinity of Willoughby Bay as early as 1649. Assessment survey from 1675 list two larger

tracts of land “near Willoughby Bay” which were divided into 24 parcels “for a town.”

The same assessment scrolls list the parcels’ location as “Bridge Town” while the 1747 map shown here has “Bridgetown.”

One of the first documented mentions of Bridgetown was in a law enacted by the Antigua Assembly in 1675. The law directed all imports, exports, and other island trade to be conducted in one of six “trade-towns” so taxes could be properly assessed and commerce accounted. The six trade towns named in the law were St. John’s, Parham, Carlisle Road (now Old Road), Falmouth, Bridgetown, and Bermudian Valley.

At its height of population in the early to mid-1700s, Bridgetown would have been roughly the same size as Falmouth, possibly slightly smaller. But over the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries, Bridgetown seemed to lose popularity. In the 1830s, after several years of decline, all that remained of Bridgetown was the church and attached schoolhouse. The town was abandoned in 1843 after a major earthquake centered off the coast of Guadeloupe destroyed the village church. A new church was later rebuilt in St. Philip village in 1850, and is now used as the present Anglican church.



## To Shoot Hard Labor

By Agnes Meeker

According to Agnes, “When you think of it, nearly every place name on Antigua stems from these estates, as do many of our surnames. Nowhere has this ever been recorded in one place, so this became my objective.”

Agnes paid tribute to the invaluable support from Don Dery who helped to unravel all the information and steered her through the publishing maze.

She also learned on the work of other authors including *To Shoot Hard Labor* by Sir Kethlyn Smith and Fernando Smith the farmer who was a dear friend. Vere Oliver’s *History of the island of Antigua* and others were also invaluable to her research .

The internet was another important source. In the last five years, a lot of information started to surface on the internet, and this continues to grow. In this regard, Ms. Meeker said genealogical sites were helpful. Using the internet as a resource, she has been able to assist many visitor’s to Antigua whom the Museum referred to her who were trying to research their ancestry.

Agnes views her publications as merely one side of the complex history of Antigua and Barbuda.

There are always two, three or more sides to a story. Hopefully this work will help flush out a bygone era. Antigua’s history is extremely rich and diversified and I firmly believe that more of this history needs to be taught in the schools. We also need to be preserving the windmills which are crumbling annually and which we are losing rapidly, like everything else historical on this island to include the forts.”

Agnes proudly added, “Antigua is so beautiful, as many of you who are now into hiking during these Covid times, are discovering. As you walk, imagine all those who have trod this soil before us, all with tales to tell. It’s fascinating, it gives me goosebumps.

*Plantations of Antigua Volume 3* is available on Amazon and a limited number of copies are also available at the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda.

Agnes meeker has completed a labour of love and a 25 year project investment with the publishing of plantations of Antigua volume III, the final book in the series.

The series presents a brief history of more than 200 plantations that once dotted this island. For Ms. Meeker the series represents part of her fence love for Antigua and Barbuda.

“this island Antigua my love and my birthright being a 6th generation Antiguan born on my mothers side,” said Meeker describing her passion for her country.

Having resided abroad for a period, Agnes returned home 25 years ago and became fascinated with the island’s 110 sugar mills.

“there was a terrible drought at the time making moving through the bush a lot easier than today, when the island is as green as I have ever seen it.

I then set out to find out the story behind each mill, but then, why stop there when there were twice as many mills originally, most of which were damaged during the 1834 earthquake and were never rebuilt due to the advent of steam. It was exciting and exhilarating walking in the steps of people past, finding and documenting their stories” said in an interview with point Xpress.

After 20 years of collecting information on every estate she could find, she built on a map at the museum that Desmond Nicholson Devised based on a CVE mill study in 1997 to make the publication manageable, Ms. Meeker then compiled according to parish.

Volume I covers St. John’s Volume II, St. George’s and St. Peter’s and volume III St. Philip’s , St. Paul’s and St. Mary’s.

The books are very detailed and includes information pertaining to each estate from vast and varied sources, Data on the owners of each estate, stories of slavery, ghosts stories, personal memories, statistics, maps, prints and photographs are included.

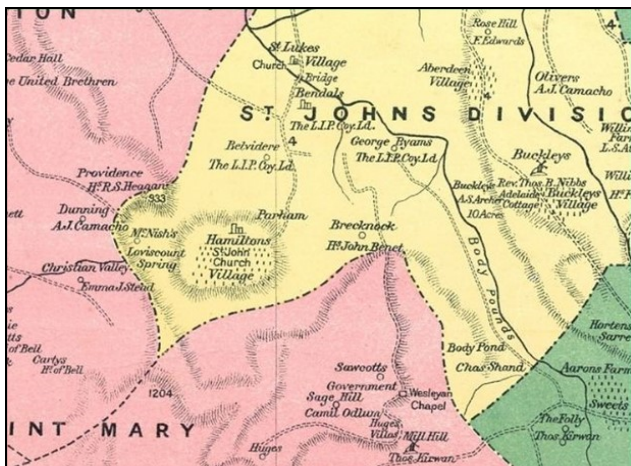
# Did You Know About Our Ghost Villages?

By Susan Lowes

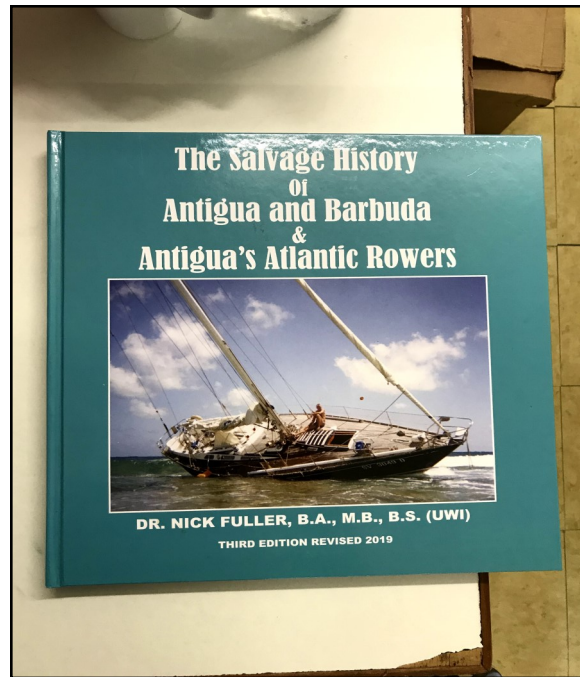
Did you know that there are a number of villages in Antigua that no longer exist? They are sometimes called "ghost villages." Hamilton's is one of them.

According to Desmond Nicholson, the village was established by freed slaves immediately after Emancipation in 1834. The name comes from the 250 acres granted in 1679 to Captain John Hamilton. A map from 1775 shows a single windmill and a set of houses. An 1891 map (below) shows a large village—in fact, the largest village in that part of the island, much larger than All Saints was at the time. The map also shows a church called St. John.

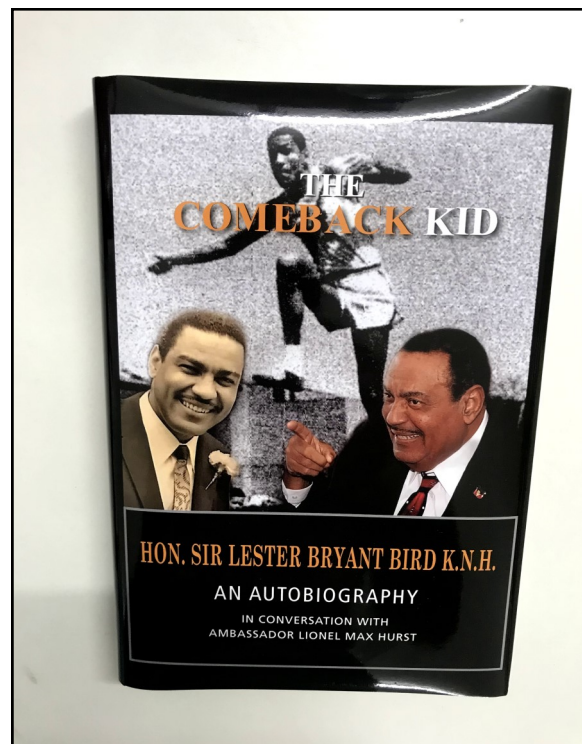
In 1950 Antigua was hit by two successive hurricanes, Baker and Dog (called locally Cat and Dog) and the village was completely destroyed. Dog was the equivalent of a Cat 5 and was the strongest hurricane to have ever hit Antigua. The villagers were relocated to Emmanuel. Soon thereafter, a dam and a reservoir were built where the village had been. As the map shows, the village was surrounded by hills, which made it an excellent spot for catching water and the reservoir was one of largest in Antigua at the time. The remnants still be seen if you hike up from the road that runs from John Hughes to Bendals.



# Preserving the past, Enrich the Future



ON SALE AT THE GIFT SHOP



DONATION TO THE MUSEUM



## Muse News

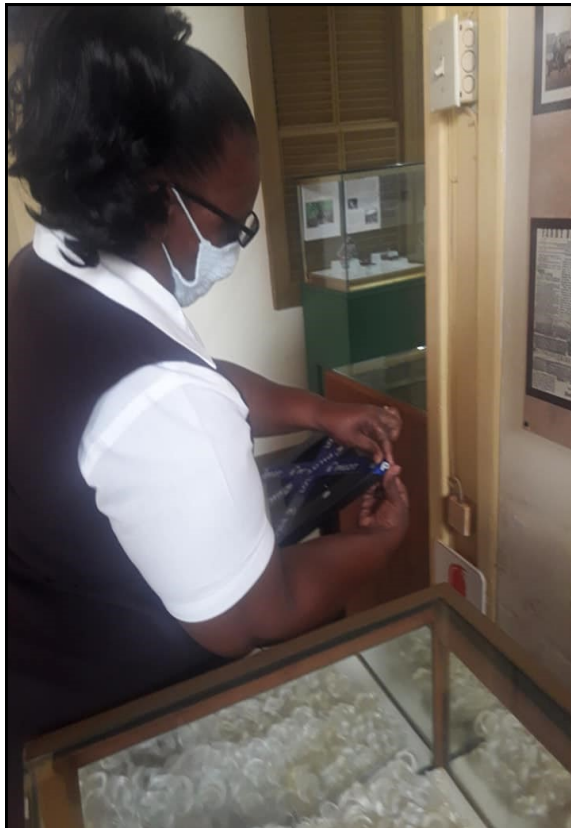
### Reviewing the past events at the Museum



Betty's Hope Great House Artifacts.  
Donated by Dr. Georgia Fox



Conservation of Artifacts for STEAM Project



Welcome to the New Normal.  
Exhibits being adjusted to eliminate  
Touching.





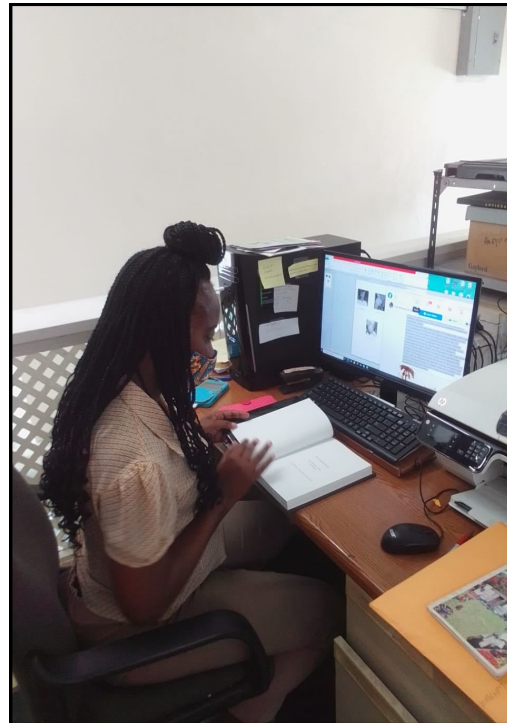
Local residents on reopening of museum



Independence decorations go up



First overseas visitor on reopening of museum



Librarian/Researcher engrossed in the donated copy of "Comeback Kid" written by Sir. Lester Bryant Bird K.N.H.



Trans Atlantic rowers donate an oar from their historic journey.

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

Tel/Fax: 268-462-1469, 462-4930 E-mail: [museum@candw.ag](mailto:museum@candw.ag) Website: [www.antiguamuseums.net](http://www.antiguamuseums.net)

# Historical and Archaeological Society

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER HAS NEWSLETTER, No. 151

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### NEW AND EXCITING VIRTUAL EVENTS COMING IN 2021

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) to update your membership and make donations. Thank you for your membership and donations.

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

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