
Introduction

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The advertisement quietly appeared in the *West India Committee Circular* of April 1942. An old sugar plantation and its surrounding properties were up for sale on the Caribbean island of Antigua, now a British outpost in a region that shouted “backwater,” a land characterized by pith-helmeted colonials, decrepit old buildings, and seemingly pliant locals. The ad touted a sugar plantation “containing about 1,400 acres as going concern. Good buildings, growing crops, live and dead stock, appliances, etc.” (NAAB Codrington Papers:C67). The problem was that no one wanted it.

Letters flew back and forth between managers and lawyers. The owner, comfortably ensconced in his palatial Gloucester estate at Dodington, had high hopes that were dashed again and again. This rollercoaster continued for some time, even as far back as 1927—as the thick bundles of letters in the archives testify—chronicling the mounting frustrations of Sir Christopher William G. H. Codrington, who was ready to be done with this albatross of a property. Relief finally came in 1944, as the Betty’s Hope Plantation and adjacent Codrington-owned lands were finally unloaded by the British-owned Antigua Syndicate Estates, Ltd. A legacy of almost 300 years had finally ended.

Since the publication of Sidney Mintz’s powerful and seminal book, *Sweetness and Power*, in 1985, the topics of sugar plantations and slavery have grown and expanded through the collective research of historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers, and other scholars. This book addresses these topics by taking a holistic anthropological approach to the study of one British Caribbean plantation, Betty’s Hope, located on the Caribbean island of Antigua, through multiple lines of research as demonstrated in this edited volume.

Although Barry Higman (1984:3) rightly cautioned against focusing on one plantation as representative of a society at large, individual plantation studies can add to the comparative body of knowledge in Caribbean plantation research and how the plantations fit within the broader picture of colonialism and its aftermath in the Americas and the Atlantic World. New avenues of enquiry, approaches in archaeological field methodology, and a greater comparative body of data from which to draw have all contributed to an increased understanding of the sugar plantation and its many facets. By taking a multifaceted approach to the study of one plantation site, we hope to add our insights and research to the existing literature, building on new directions and ideas about a critical period in history that changed the direction of global powers, influences, and economy, as well as the human consumption of commodities that revolutionized and instigated new patterns of behavior.

Although Betty's Hope's history can be generally divided into pre- and post-Emancipation periods, its phases are not always clear cut; the plantation existed with the context of cultural continuums, operating in a dynamic cultural milieu in which various actors adapted and changed, forged new identities, and often resisted imposed structures, long after August 1, 1834, the day of the liberation of enslaved Africans. Time and again, the story of Betty's Hope and places like it are stories of dichotomies—of pain and joy, despair and hope. Above all, they are stories of resilience and survival in the face of the crushing realities of slavery.

Theoretical Perspectives

A number of theoretical frameworks have been applied to our work at Betty's Hope. One that has been particularly useful is Ian Hodder's entanglement theory, derived from quantum mechanics and adopted by social scientists in explaining networks and their inherent dependencies. As societies evolve and change, they are not isolated, orderly, cohesive things, but rather operate in more chaotic, open-ended processes that are embroiled in uncertainty and contingency (Hodder 2012:5). Dependency therefore creates a dialectical struggle within the various entanglements. In the case of Antigua and the British sugar plantocracy, the entire system of animals, plants, and people was based on an accepted premise of economic success and the deep dependency on enslaved labor, making for acute vulnerabilities in the system as a whole.

The entangled mess of cane agriculture in all its manifestations exacted a huge toll in resources and human lives. Overreliance on an untenable lifestyle, combined with the dependency on water availability, unpredictable markets, and armed conflict, created a collective tipping point. If one link in the system failed, others would follow. The archaeological and documentary evidence suggest that in the long term, the system was unsustainable, leading to eventual collapse as the sugar market bottomed out and formerly enslaved peoples found new freedom.

Archaeology at Betty's Hope

The road leading up to Betty's Hope today is striking; two iconic windmills, one of which has been painstakingly restored, greet visitors on their way to the former plantation. The restored mill has served as the backdrop for innumerable field school group photos and is the safe haven in which to duck for cover during the intermittent summer rain showers. The site is located in the central-eastern part of Antigua, which is itself located in the Leeward Islands (figure 1.1).

The Betty's Hope Archaeological Project officially began in the summer of 2007 as a small field school consisting of seven students. The project has since grown to include a wide array of researchers. Working at Betty's Hope has been instructive, surprising, and always rewarding. The project began after an initial visit to Antigua in 2004 to meet with Reginald Murphy, Antigua and Barbuda's chief archaeologist and director of the Nelson's Dockyard Museum, which is now part of a UNESCO World Heritage site. A return trip in 2005 to locate potential sites followed, with the official establishment of the project in 2007. The project continues, but after nine years of archaeological investigations, it is time to share our findings to showcase the variety and extent of the work being conducted at the site and in related projects on Antigua.

From the outset, the goal of the project was to create multiple lines of research that could be integrated into a more holistic study, situated within the Caribbean region and the broader context of the Atlantic World. Work at Betty's Hope has not been without its challenges. After abandonment of the site, vandalism and theft of carved building stone have left gaps where formidable structures once stood. Dense thickets of thorny acacia have taken over the site, and climbing vines grow on the old still house. Site deterioration has been exacerbated by both extreme weather events and



Figure 1.1. Location of Antigua and Betty's Hope. Created by Peter Hansen.

free-roaming herds of sheep and goats—and more recently, donkeys—and by the errant hog and occasional cow. The vegetation and the uneven ground prohibit traditional remote sensing techniques involving ground-penetrating radar, but drone technology has been helpful in identifying hidden structures. The greatest impact, however, has been from human activity, which in recent years has included a group of young tourists who thoughtlessly race their rental ATVs around the historic property.

The site has seen worse, however. The enormity of the site's dark past is never lost on us as we delve into its secrets. Situated on 50 acres and under the aegis of the Betty's Hope Trust, the site comprises a number of extant buildings in various states of disrepair, including the still house, the two windmills, and four deep cisterns. Ruins of the former manager's house, which burned down in 1986, are still visible among the other ruins scattered throughout the property. A small restored visitors center, once the site of a former stable, provides small exhibits for the site's frequent year-round visitors, and interpretive signage dots the landscape near key landmarks like the still house. The boiling house is long gone, as is the great house, which served as the seat of the English Leeward Islands government under Christopher Codrington II and III (see chapter 2).

It is here that the first five years of excavations began. Employing 2 m² excavation units, eighteenth-century stone foundations were first revealed at the end of the 2007 field season. For the next nine years, numerous pedestrian surveys were conducted utilizing total stations and GPS units and applying georeferencing utilizing a geographic information system with satellite imagery and old maps, as well as photogrammetry via drone technology. Excavations of the great house and adjoining kitchen took place from 2007 to 2012. A portion of the still house was excavated beginning in 2013, and from 2014 to 2015, excavations were conducted by Charlotte Goudge as part of her doctoral research. Beginning in 2014, the long-awaited excavations began in the area of the slave quarters, previously hampered by the uncertainty of its location. Work continued in the heart of this area in 2015. The 2014–2016 field seasons comprised more surveys and soil sampling, the results of which are discussed in this volume.

One of the challenges of working at Betty's Hope is grasping an understanding of its stratigraphy. Because of the long-term occupation of the site, well into the early 1970s, there exists site disturbance mostly from fill, particularly in the still house area. Yet natural stratigraphic profiles have

been clearly identified and delineated, and the artifact assemblages clearly represent all three excavated areas of the site, even with the fill in the still house area. The reuse of carved limestone blocks has also posed some interpretive challenges. Yet building additions and repairs have been identified, particularly in the survey work of Geneviève Godbout, as discussed in chapter 5.

Although the physical challenges presented at the site are mostly surmountable, another aspect of the project—archival research—has not been without its own trials. Until recently, access to the original Codrington Papers in the National Archives of Antigua and Barbuda had been closed off to researchers. The saga of the Codrington Papers has been published elsewhere (Barber 2012). In place of consulting the original papers, researchers utilized microfilm copies that revealed their own limitations. This was made especially apparent when permission was finally granted to study the original papers in the spring of 2016.

Whole sections of the 1710 and 1755 maps that have been critical to our research had either been cut off or were not included in the microfilm versions. Discovering features on the 1710 map in particular was both revelatory and surprising, as multiple versions of the original maps were discovered in almost pristine condition. One of the most important features on the original 1710 map was the location of an early kiln site for the Codrington estates, which we were able to survey after examining the map. One of the reasons Betty's Hope was chosen for long-term research was the copious archive comprising almost 300 years of correspondence, accounts, estate papers, and other materials related to the Codrington landholdings in Antigua and Barbuda.

Relevancy and Contribution

British sugar plantations are complex entities, worlds unto themselves, and they have been dedicated places of study because they “represent a microcosm of broader society” (Wilkie 2004:110). As landscapes deeply imbued with multiple meanings, plantations offer researchers opportunities to view a deeply intertwined world of contested power relations, slavery, environmental change, and a variety of human endeavors occurring over a span of several hundred years (Wilkie 2004:111). Twenty-first-century historical archaeology is moving in exciting directions to tackle commonly held assumptions about plantation life, such as the domination/