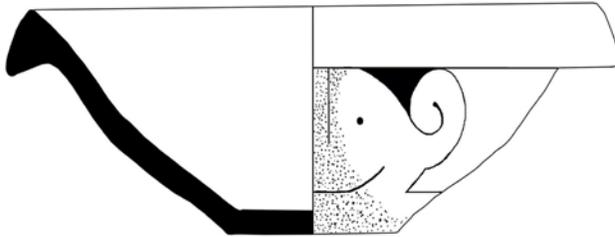


2009 Highland House Survey Report for the Barbuda Historical Ecology Project

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Highland House was an 18th century complex built by the Codrington family of England, the leaseholders of Barbuda from 1685 until 1870. At least some of the compound was also built by sub-leasees, William Byam and Samuel Martin 1746-1761 (Watters and Nicholson 1982). William Byam was said to have died and been buried on Barbuda in 1755 (Debrett 1824) but it is unlikely that any of the Codrington family ever lived on the island for any great length of time. Highland House was built as a country house, possibly a hunting lodge, for the Codringtons. William Codrington, son of John Codrington, one of the original signers of the Barbuda/Codrington lease, wrote a letter to (presumably) one of his managers on Barbuda asking him to plant a wide variety of trees and fruit on the island, as well as to preserve the game. In this letter he says that he intended to build a house on the highlands and to retire there (Watters and Nicholson 1982). He died in England in 1738, but the letter does give some idea of what the Highland House estate might have originally been intended for.

“I beg yt youll have a good orange Orchard planted at Barbuda Sappordillers, grapes of all Sorts, plantings, Bonanahs Lime hedges, Lemons, Tammarins, Coccoe nuts for I design to end my days there, next to the highlands where [?whene] I designe a house one time or other – so pray pserve all y deere feasants & Partridges & and suffer none to be killed on any ptence wtever, nor no gentlem’ to there shooting.....” (Watters and Nicholson 1982)

The site would have been a lovely retreat. The site is on one of the highest points on the island and is exposed to an almost constant east wind that keeps the area cool and the air fresh. All the buildings seemed to have been built with this ocean air in mind as they all have a number of doors and windows open to the east in order to catch this breeze. The main house commands a view of the whole of the north section of the island, and possibly with its original height much of the southwest area of the island as well. It could certainly have seen the village of Codrington. The site had a cistern and spillway for fresh water and had a wall around at least part of the complex. It is made up of a main house in a clearing on the edge of the Barbudan highlands. A number of stone out-buildings lie to the south of the main house in an area sheltered by trees.

The first task set for the survey of Highland House in January of 2009 was to walk the site in detail with the map of the site created by Watters that was published in 1982. Watter’s map proved very accurate considering the conditions he was working under. In his report he often mentions that the site was overgrown with dense scrub. Barbudan scrub is a particularly hostile landscape of sharp thorns, cactus, and the skin irritating hog bush, so it is admirable that he was able to map it as well as he did. That being said the conditions for survey during the January 2009 season were much better. The site was largely cleared of scrub during 2008 at the behest of the Barbuda Council. This was done to facilitate tourism to the site but it also had the effect of making our survey much easier. This clearing of the site also revealed a number of structures that

were not mapped (though many were noted in his survey) by Watters. The site was mapped by total station (figure 1). Due to issues around ease of coding Watters numeral structure codes were not used but instead the structures were given letter codes. Table 1 gives codes used for this survey as well as Watters' codes for structures he mapped.

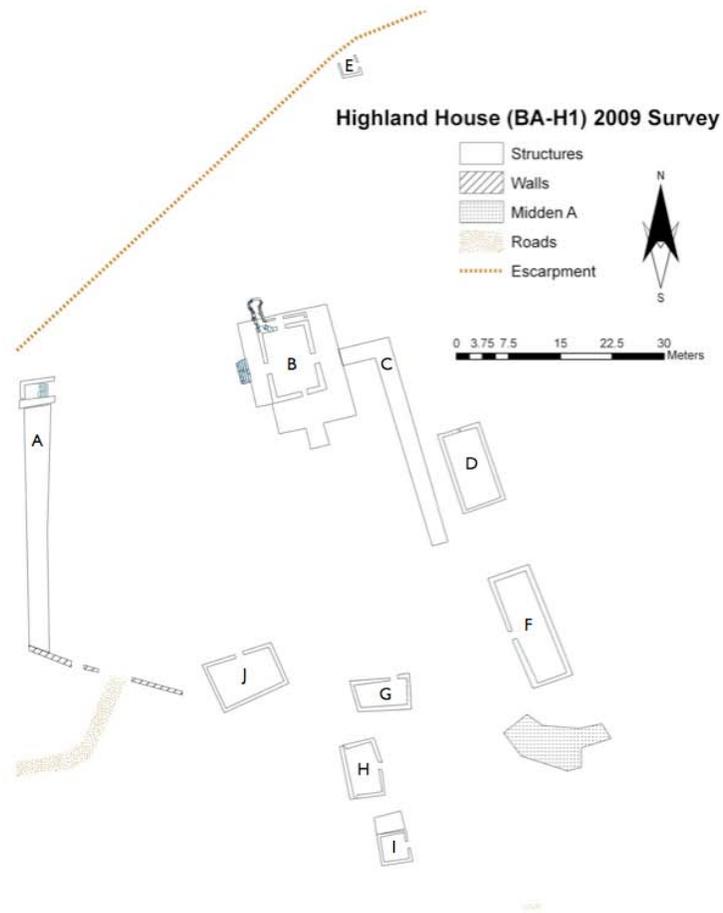


Figure 1 – Map of the Highland House complex.

Description	Watters 1982 Map Code	Hambrecht 2009 Map Code
Cistern and Spillway	2	A
Main House	1	B
Walkway to Main House	-	C
"Garden" House	-	D
Structure at edge of escarpment	-	E
Structure	9	F
Structure	7	G
Structure	6	H
Structure	8	I
Structure	5	J
Stone Drain	4	K
Wall	-	L
Homefield	-	M

Table 1

Two transects (north-south and east-west) were staked out through the complex. A surface survey of two square meters every two meters on each transect was carried out. No significant artifact concentrations were found. After this it was decided to walk the whole site within the confines of the surrounding bush. Two possible midden concentrations were found- midden A to the south of structure F and midden B, downhill from structure K. There is a sparse but consistent spread of 18th century artifacts on the surface of the whole site.

Main House

The main house, structure B, is surrounded by an outer platform/patio area on the west and part of the south side. A more substantial reinforced platform surrounds most of the house structure itself. Stairs, of a large even formal character enter the house from the west, and southern side. The north side of the building might have stairs as well but the rubble from the collapsed walls obscures them if they exist. This rubble seems to have been rearranged sometime after collapse in a fashion suggestive of stairs making this side of the building difficult to interpret. The eastern side of the house has no stairs but does have a walkway (structure C) leading to it from the south.



Figure 2. Main House (Structure B) – western stairs.

The whole house structure itself is very strongly built with walls in excess of a foot and half thick. The quality of the masonry in some cases is high as can be evidenced from the pictures of the western stairs (figure 2). The walls of the Main House itself seem to be of a rougher quality.

Historic documents suggest the structure had two stories (Watters and Nicholson 1982). Whether this was the case could not be determined. It is likely that at least some of the stone from the structure might have been removed for use elsewhere as building materials. This also might be the case for the surrounding wall and other structures (Calvin Gore, personal communication).

The House lies on an axis roughly following the cardinal points. The ease of airflow from east to west of all the buildings at Highland House would have been even more effective in the Main House as it is on a raised platform that catches the breeze that constantly flows from the Atlantic.

There is a pathway lined with stone (structure C) that starts in the southern part of the field around the Main House that proceeds north and then turns 90 degrees to the west meeting the platform around the Main House at a point where a doorway allows access into the building. Structure C seems on first observation to be a formal landscaping element directing people from the area of the outbuildings as well as the general area of the main entrance to the south into the Main House.

A curious element of the Main House is on the northwest corner of the building. A passage leads from the northern “foyer” to the north ending in an octagonal stone structure. There is a tree growing out of this structure whose roots have furthered the erosion of the structure and warped its original shape. This structure has been informally dubbed the “turret” as that was what it suggested when first observed. Calvin Gore pointed out that on the inside of this structure there is a reddish deposit that he usually associated with standing water. He suggested that this structure was a small cistern or even fish tank. Another possibility is that it is the base of what was a tower for observing the northern end of the island. A further possibility is that it is a decorative feature. It has also been suggested that this might have been a dovecote.

The Main House has a number of places where plaster is still clinging to the walls. In most cases this plaster has been scratched in a cross-hatched pattern, most likely to facilitate the addition of another layer of plaster on top of the one on the masonry wall itself.

Structure L – the Wall

The wall around the complex is an interesting element. It does not completely encompass the complex. The wall ends at its western terminus abruptly, and in ruins. Calvin Gore has suggested that this was due to the stonework being removed for other buildings. This would be odd in that the western end is farthest away from the village of Codrington. It could be that the wall was deconstructed for buildings on the western side of the island, though these are few and far between. Another possibility is that the wall just stopped being built at this point.

At the point where the wall ends near Structure J there might be indication of some sort of structural work between the Wall and Structure J. This could have possibly been a gate or door. Strangely though, the wall does not continue to the south (figure 1).

This brings up the question of what purpose the wall served. Protection, from other colonial powers and their own slaves, would not have been served through a non-contiguous wall. Nor would animals have been kept out of the property. The wall might have served as a ‘legal’ border between the Codrington’s area of leisure and sport and the rest of the island and its farming and animal husbandry.

The southern gate of Highland House seems to have been the main entrance to the complex. The current approach from the west is modern and the opening in the wall one that was broken through, not an original gate.

Outbuildings

Structure J showed indications of being a wash-house/kitchen. A stone tub, and a stone gutter leading away from the building down slope outside of the wall at then end of which lies Midden B all lead to this interpretation.

The other structures are all in various levels of preservation. It is impossible at this time to say much more about their uses. Please consult the full Highland House Survey Report for details on each building.

Midden A

Just to the south of Structure F there was a fairly dense spread of historic midden material. A surface collection was taken. This area, like the rest of the site, has variable top soil, going from exposed limestone substrate to hollows in the limestone filled with an ochre colored soil. The surface collection has not been analyzed yet, but a casual survey revealed ceramics (mainly delft, some German stoneware, some Staffordshire Slipwares) bottle glass, shell, lead spall, small amounts of charcoal, and no mammal bones at all. The pH was 6.9-7.

Discussion

Nothing that we observed countered Watters and Nicholson's timeline for Highland House starting in the early 18th century with abandonment by the early 19th century at the latest (Watters and Nicholson 1982).

Yet the question of how this complex was used still stands. We know from the historical documents that the complex was at least in part intended as a 'vacationing' spot for the Codrington family and their friends and colleagues. We can also reasonably assume that the no one in the Codrington family ever permanently resided in Barbuda, let alone Highland House, with the possible exception of the first generation of Codrington lessees, Christopher and his son William. What exactly Byam and Martin were doing on Barbuda is not clear. There is one reference in Debrett's 'The baronetage of England' that states that what wealth the Codringtons enjoyed from Barbuda came from the "capital and exertions" of the sub-leasees Byam and Martin (Debrett 1824). The scale and investment behind this complex might suggest that it was used for more than just a country retreat, regardless of first intentions. The viewshed from the site is magnificent. We were also informed by Calvin Gore that there is a platform on a piece of higher ground in the bush to the southeast from which you can see the whole of the

east side of the island down to its southern tip. Such a placement would be an ideal place from which to observe shipping either in transit or in the process of foundering on the reefs of the east coast. Salvage was a source of income for the Codringtons. It has even been suggested that the Codringtons 'encouraged' shipwrecks on their reefs through false lighthouses. Highland House would have been an excellent place from which to manage such efforts.

Highland House has great potential for both the interdependent possibilities of making the site a better heritage tourism site and a scholarly historical archaeological project. The site is a novel one for the 18th century Caribbean. It is not a plantation, and how it was utilized is not well understood. Highland House could be an important place to study a number of issues regarding the early modern British colonial system in the Caribbean in a context not directly within the sugar plantation system. It might also be a productive place to study the idea of leisure in the early modern period in an imperial context. As a pure landscape study it would be an important addition to the already substantial body of studies of early modern landscapes throughout the Atlantic and wider world.

Acknowledgements

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