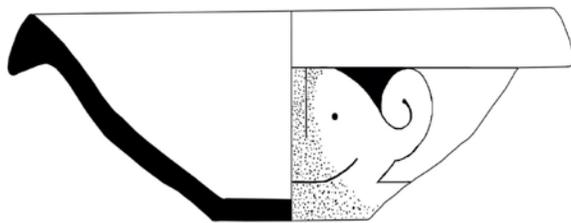


Preliminary Report of the January 2011 Excavations at Highland House, Barbuda, Antigua/Barbuda

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Introduction

This report presents the preliminary results of the excavations at the Highland House site on the island of Barbuda that took place during January of 2011 as part of the Islands of Change REU NSF grant awarded to Dr. Sophia Perdikaris (PI). Barbuda, in the Leeward Islands, is the sister island to Antigua. It has a small population, roughly 1500 people, the great majority of whom live in the village of Codrington. The island itself covers roughly 100 square miles and lies generally to the windward of the rest of the Leeward Islands, being farther out (east) in the Atlantic.

The island was held, by lease, by the Codrington family, from the year 1685 until 1870. It gained independence along with Antigua in 1981.

Highland House was a complex built on the northern edge of the Highlands of Barbuda, Antigua/Barbuda. Following the request of the Barbuda Council a CUNY lead team has been surveying and excavating at this site with the purpose of both investigating the history of the site and clearing it out in such a way that it can be a more interesting and accessible site for Barbudans and tourists alike.

The complex was built sometime during the 1720's at the command of William Codrington, the leaseholder of Barbuda at that time. It seems that the first intention for this complex was for it to be a retirement home for William Codrington as the letter quoted below states.

“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)

William Codrington died in England having never retired on Barbuda. His desire to retire on Barbuda and his death in England reflect the demographic changes that took place in the Caribbean around the turn of the 17th/18th centuries. Increasingly from the last quarter of the 17th century and into the first quarter of the 18th century the European population of the Caribbean shrank while the African population grew significantly (Palmer 1997). At the same time the European property owners became more absentee in character leaving their estates to local managers who often only lived in the region temporarily. This is one of the characteristics that makes Highland House unique. Its initial mission as a retirement house certainly changed throughout its existence. From written sources there are references to the complex being used as a hunting lodge for the Codrington family and friends, there are references to it being used as a managerial center for island activities, there is even a reference to it being used as a 'hospital' and convalescence center for sick enslaved Africans (Tweedy 1981). The written sources emphasize, as one would expect, the European activities that took place at Highland House. Obviously the

staff, and possibly the majority of the total persons involved with Highland House would have been African, Anglo-African and Afro-Caribbean in identity. Archaeology is, as usual, in the best position to investigate the total history of the occupation at Highland House. Beyond the period that is often considered to be the occupation of Highland House (c.1720 – c.1820) one has to consider that even after the European managers and guests had abandoned this complex the Barbudans must have still used the complex, as they do down to the present day. Today Barbudans will occasionally use the site as a spot to barbeque and relax. Hunters often use it as their entrance into the Highlands. The site has the occasional visit from tourists. It was built in a particularly pleasant spot on the island with excellent views of the whole north end of the island and exposure to an almost constant sea breeze. The same reasons that William Codrington decided to have this complex built here are the ones that keep it a draw for Barbudans and the occasional tourist. One goal of the archaeological investigations at Highland House is to not only understand how Europeans used this site but also to investigate how the Barbudans used the site from its building to the present day.

Following the survey work done during the 2009 season (Hambrecht and Look 2009) and the excavations at the Castle site during the 2010 season (Hambrecht and Feeley 2010) it was decided to come back to the Highland House site to specifically look for middens and surviving organic archaeological material. This goal, coupled with the need to make the site more attractive and educational to Barbudans as well as tourists lead to the decision to concentrate our efforts around Structure J.

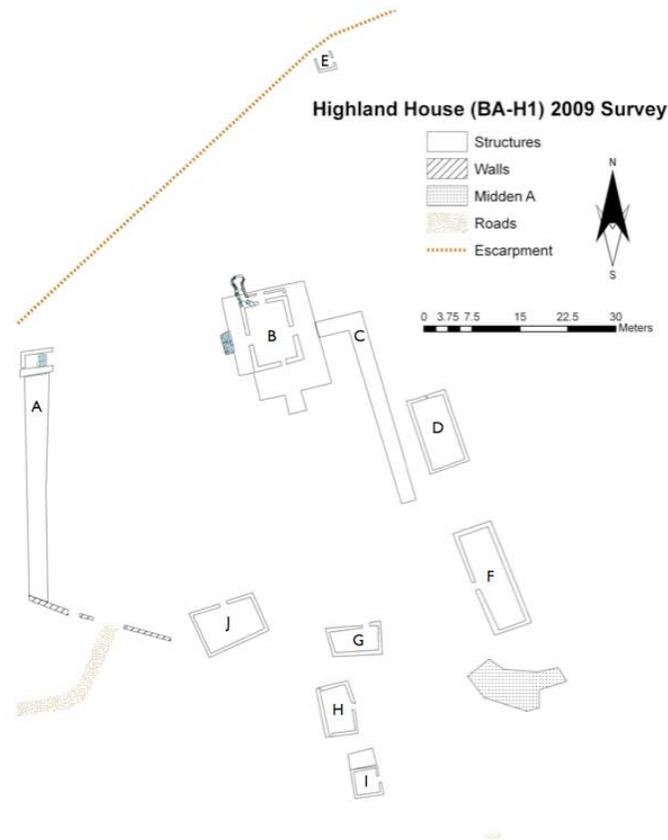


Figure 1 Map of the Highland House complex from the 2009 field report (Hambrecht and Look 2009)

Structure J

Structure J is located among a cluster of buildings to the south of the largest domestic structure at the Highland House estate. The outbuildings, being smaller than the main dwelling are generally assumed to have served a variety of purposes from kitchens to washhouses, stables, extra lodgings or perhaps as administrative and managerial structures (Watters and Nicholson 1982). Structure J was surveyed and labeled Structure 5, in an report by Watters and Nicholson entitled *Highland House, Barbuda: an 18th century retreat* (1982). In addition to mapping Highland House, Watters and Nicholson excavated a test pit nearby to Structure J (Structure 5) measuring 1 x 2 meters. The resulting assemblage heavily influenced the decision for the more extensive investigations described in this report.

It seems that the main approach to the major domestic structure (the main house, Structure B) faces away from these buildings for the most part- a spatial orientation which may reflect their status as “rear” work buildings, not for display or prestige, but for quotidian or messy tasks. Spatial positions of buildings and pathways informed our ideas regarding the likely areas for refuse disposal and promising locations for investigations of middens, such as Group 2 discussed in the next section. To be exact, we reasoned that refuse would be strewn in a place out of site or behind the main domestic structure where possible. This lead to the assumption

that the area to the southwest of Structure J would be a reasonable place to test for historic middens. Very obvious surface scatters of mixed 18th, 19th and 20th century debris quickly confirmed our belief.

Also relating to Structure J was a linear feature made of cut limestone of similar size and shape to Belgian blocks extending southwest of the building, likely emanating from an aperture in the southern wall. This, we believe was a drain fashioned to carry wastewater away from the building that ultimately terminated near the slope where the Group 2 sheet midden investigations were carried out.



Figure 2 - Structure J is at the center of the photo. Note the drain (Structure K and the Group 2 midden excavations above and to the left.

In addition to the external drain Labeled Structure K in the 2010 site report, other specialized structures were noted *inside* of structure J. The building consists of two rooms separated by a wall in the center of the rectangular building. The wall has a door in it, allowing for passage between the two rooms during the structure's use. The center wall may have been added at a time later than the first building phase, as it is thinner than the exterior walls and its limestone blocks do not interlace with those of the southern external structural wall to which it is adjoined. The walls separate two rooms which can be conceived of as a westerly room (side A) and an easterly room (side B). Efforts were focused on removing the deposits in the westerly room (side A) during the January 2011 field season.

Within side A, several significant features were already exposed. A carved stone basin or trough rests on rectangular limestone blocks at approximately waist height within the southeast corner. A broken fragment of a gutter, or perhaps a narrower portion of the same trough lay nearby on the southern wall as part of the surface debris. These features used for containing or controlling the flow of water re-enforce the notion that this buildings function was perhaps a washhouse or kitchen (Watters and Nicholson 1982, Hambrecht and Look 2009).



Figure 3 The interior of Structure J before excavation. The photograph was taken from the southeast corner of Side A. (photograph faces west).



Figure 4 A carved stone basin was propped on limestone blocks in the south east corner of Structure J, side A.



Figure 5 Overhead of Structure J after excavation. Note the drain (Structure K) at the top left of the picture.

Deposits in Structure J are the result of continuous tumble of the exterior limestone blocks into the interior of the building, with contemporaneous blowing of sand and silt into the roofless and doorless interior. The wall tumble was probably both gradual and punctuated by episodes of multiple blocks falling. Up to the present, it is possible to observe large plants such as agave growing atop the structures and in the limestone and mortar walls. This has obviously played a significant part in the deterioration of all of the buildings that make up the Highland House site. Plants also grew inside of the ruins, and as they died and decayed, created lenses of more humic soil among the silt/sand windblown deposits and large stone tumble.

Because the stone block tumble and the windblown silt/sand interlace at various levels, it is difficult to separate them into discrete layers. However for the purpose of systematic excavation, we proceeded by removal of the soils by trowel to expose the tumbled blocks down to the soil level on which they collapsed. We then documented and removed the tumble, and removed the next level of soil.

Sparse quantities of artifacts were found in all contexts. These included metal fragments, large metal furniture (e.g. hinges and plates), ceramics, bone (notably of caprines and fish), shell, glass, charcoal, and construction debris such as plaster fragments and bricks.

Several deposits removed from structure J we noted as truncated or disturbed by a modern footpath. Upon our arrival, we noted a depression in the ground surface extending from the north-eastern door to the southern "window". It is likely that this is a path etched by the feet of modern visitors to the site and that they may have even slightly shifted a small amount of rubble at times to clear the way. This S shaped path lay roughly north to south and truncated depositional contexts into easterly and westerly portions of the building that were visibly discontinuous.

There was significant root disturbance within all of the deposits. It was especially significant towards the west wall of the building where the roots of a large tree had completely penetrated all of the soils on the western side of the side A. We expect to see significant mixing of contexts (probably resulting in artifact re-fits between contexts of that side of the building. These were already noted during post excavation sorting between context 004 and 011). Significant root action was encountered on the southern side of the structure immediately to the west of the stone basin where a large acacia tree's roots penetrated all the way up to and through the original plaster floor or the structure.

Buildings are often regularly cleaned during their use, and they often are not the location of dense deposits of refuse. As such, the artifacts and ecofacts found in the structure were less plentiful than those found behind the structure, where users may have tossed their garbage. The most significant find within the Structure J was the collection of intact brick and stone functional features. These included a trapezoidal carved limestone basin and along the southern wall. The basin was likely broken on the southern end and its position atop a pedestal on the southern wall is possible a revised or secondary usage. Beside it lay a fragment of a carved limestone basin/trough/or gutter. These two items may have once been the same solid block. Both indicate regular activity taking place within the structure that required the containment and disposal of water.



Figure 6 Rectangular stone feature in the NW corner of Structure J, adjacent to hearth now visible as the low brick platform to the left.



Figure 7 Western wall of Structure J with extensive stone features including a low arched hearth and a central platform which was likely the floor of a large open stove with a chimney.

Along the western wall were three discreet features, with at least two being associated with evidence for burning. The southernmost is a low brick hearth reaching from floor level to knee level, atop were the remains of a stone structure, which could have been a chimney, or a related chamber like a bake-oven. To the north of that was a brick and limestone platform, the entirety of which most likely was beneath a large chimney. Plentiful brick fall was found amongst the rubble removed from structure J and it is reasonable that these bricks may have composed interior chimneys.

Overlying both the corner hearth and the brick platform was a thick, white deposit of ash with charcoal inclusions [context 024]. This provided us with a bulk soil sample that will be particularly interesting as it can be related in-situ to the structures and will help us describe their function in further detail.

In the northwestern corner of Structure J was a rectangular arrangement of mortared limestone, but what remained only suggested a platform. It was obvious that mortared stone as missing from the top and its function could not be discerned with any certainty. No burnt remains were visible near this northern feature, and it's possible that the rectangular base of stones merely supported a large chimney that likely capped the central hearth.



Figure 8 The hearth or oven in the southwest corner of the structure. The intact hearth is very low and there is significant intact masonry above it suggesting either a substantial chimney or possibly a specialized oven above.



Figure 9 A closer view of the low arched hearth



Figure 10 The interior southern wall of Structure J. Showing the relationship between the carved basin and the hearth. It is possible the carved basin once sat in the aperture in the back of the building, as this is where structure K, the drain feature originates



Figure 11. 18th Century oven complex in a cookhouse in Nelson's dockyard, Antigua. The arrangement of the hearths may resemble that of the original arrangement at Highland House in that there appear to be three sections with the largest section in the middle.



Figure 12. 18th century oven complex in a cookhouse in Nelson's Dockyard, Antigua. Depicts oven section furthest to the right in a series of three stove/ovens.



Figure 13. A 1760 engraving (Diderot) showing a bake oven with an arched brick hearth at its base. Depictions like the one above may suggest that the very low arched hearth in structure J could have been part of a larger and more complex structure.

This central hearth would have probably been referred to as a stove; a term which is also used for the entire room that contained it before the word was transferred to our modern use of the term as in a small unit used to contain fire and cook (OED 2009). One clear pattern that emerges when one surveys 18th century European stoves, is that if they are constructed in multiple parts, a large rectangular hearth is frequently at the center. It often has a high arch before the chimney begins, somewhere near head-height, in order to allow space for leaning and working within. The smaller ovens flank the central hearth and this is what we observe at Structure J of Highland House.

Metal racks and hooks function to hold pots or food in proximity to the fire and it's likely that much of the large iron furniture found within the collapse of structure J was of this origin. This included substantial plate-like forms, large hooks, and a substantial iron rod that lays in situ parallel along the rear of the central platform.

It's significant to note that the oven complex shown in the photographs above, taken at Nelson's dockyard, Antigua, which was meant to serve a community, could be similar in size to that at Highland House. This might suggest that if this structure was a kitchen, then it at times was producing food for a large group of people, or even for provisioning large groups of people elsewhere.

It is recommended for subsequent field seasons that a more detailed plan be made of the remains of the stoves so that more precise comparisons can be made to other similar structures. Equally important will be the analysis of the soils, artifacts and ecofacts (i.e. plant remains) found in association with the hearth contexts.

Group 2



Figure 14 – Overhead of Structure’s J, K and the Group 2 excavation area. Group 2 is above and left of Structure J. This picture was taken after Group 2 had been filled with rubble to protect it for further excavation. Note that both Structure K and Group 2 are down slope from Structure J.

Group 2, a 3X5 meter trench, was opened up due to its location down slope from Structure K. We presumed that any waste that was poured into Structure K would travel down the drain and be deposited on the slope below. Surface finds of

ceramics from the early 20th century into the 18th century along with remains of West Indian topshell (*Cittarium pica*) and Conch shell (*Strombus gigas*) reinforced this assumption . It seemed like an obvious place to look for midden deposit.

Group 2 is located on a slope that is part of the edge of the highlands and is a very active area in terms of erosion. Large limestone boulders are strewn around the area and Group 2 was in part located where it was due to the presence of large unmovable limestone boulders to the south.

Group 2 did not go down onto natural. There were increasing amounts of limestone fragments as the trench got deeper. The top, meaning the northeast corner of the trench did seem to possibly come down onto the fragmented face of the limestone substrate. We intend to bring this group down to natural in January 2012.



Figure 15 - The surface of Group 2 before excavation.



Figure 16 - The surface of context [006] Group 2.

Group 2 had significant root disturbance throughout the trench. A number of major root systems were found, especially in the top three contexts. This coupled with the inherently unstable nature of the soils at the edge of the limestone escarpment created a fair amount of mixing and some of the borders between contexts were not clean or abrupt. Despite this there was a consistently tighter resolution in the cultural artifacts as we went deeper (table 1).



Figure 17 - Surface of context [021] Group 2.

There was cultural material in every excavated context. This material got older as we got deeper (see table 1). There was also faunal material in every context excavated. This faunal material was overwhelmingly dominated by *Cittarium pica*, though *Strombus gigas* fragments were found as well.

The material culture recovered was dominated by fairly typical modern and early modern materials. Bottle glass, metal fragments, structural debris and ceramic fragments were all present. Analysis of this assemblage will take place later in 2011.

Group 2 also contained a large amount of faunal material though this was dominated by *Cittarium pica* fragments. Context [006] contained the greatest amount of faunal material, again overwhelmingly dominated by shell and that by *Cittarium pica*. Mammal bone was present, though not in large numbers, and these were spread throughout all contexts.

Overall Group 2 shows great promise in terms of finding midden material at Highland House. We suspect that the middens at this site will have the character of sheet middens rather than that of deep stratified middens. Shallow topsoils coupled with a relatively tight occupation period (c.1720 – c.1820?) suggest that this would be the case. Group 2 shows the character of a sheet midden (meaning thin spreads

of 'two dimensional' midden material) though thankfully it is stratified and there is in situ historic material in the lower contexts.

Table 1 - Group 2

Contexts	Color	Ceramics	Faunal	Other
[003]	Dark Grey	20th to 18th century	Cittarium pica and Strombus gigas	Plaster, bottle glass, metal and stone structural debris
[006]	Dark Brown	20th to 18th century	Same as above + fragments of mammal bone	nails, metal and glass fragments
[007]	Medium Brown	19th to 18th century	same as [006]	nails, iron, lead fragments
[012]	Dark Brown	19th to 18th century	same as [007]	lots of fragmented limestone
[013]	Grey	early 19th to 18th century	lots of Cittarium pica	blue glass bead
[015]	Dark Brown	early 19th to 18th century	same as [015]	lots of fragmented limestone
[021]	Medium Brown	--	--	brick fragments sticking out from context surface

Future seasons will be focused on finishing Group 2 and either expanding it and/or opening up other trenches elsewhere on this slope.

Discussion

While Watters and Nicholson focused mostly on dating the occupation of Highland house by the Codringtons (owners), the Byams (leaseholders) and other wealthy English visitors, the advantage of investigating the out-buildings is that we can shed light on laborers and other Barbudans present on the estate in addition to the activities of the elite residents.

We will continue to focus our activities at Highland House on the dual goals of making more of the structures more visitor friendly while also looking for evidence of the past lifeways of the different groups of people who used this site from its construction down to the present day.

Highland House can be described as a semi-fortified Georgian recreational complex, managerial complex and even at times as a hospital complex. This is a fairly unique set of circumstances for the early modern period in the Caribbean and future seasons will continue to see activity from the Barbuda Archaeology Center focusing on this site.

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