

Codrington family in Antigua & Barbuda

In the late 17th century, Christopher Codrington moved his household from Barbados to Antigua to expand his family's sugar plantations.

He set in motion a chain of events that impacted countless lives, but not all for the better.



How do we know what we know?

We can get a window into the lives of people – enslaved, indentured, and free – by studying collections of estate ledgers, accounts, letters, and other family papers, accessible through Oxford libraries and spanning over 300 years.

Researchers examine these records to ask questions about global systems - of culture, politics, economy, and climate.

*Sir Joseph Banks Bart.
President of the Royal Society*

London

*John de la Motte
May 4 1791
June 16*

What do the records tell us about Antigua?



Photo credit: Antigua Naval Dockyard and Related Archaeological Sites 2014 © Nicola & Reg Murphy

From shipping and export records: Antiguan climate and soils were well-suited for sugar production. The profits from Antiguan sugar plantations created a legacy of great wealth and political influence for the Codrington family that lasted centuries.

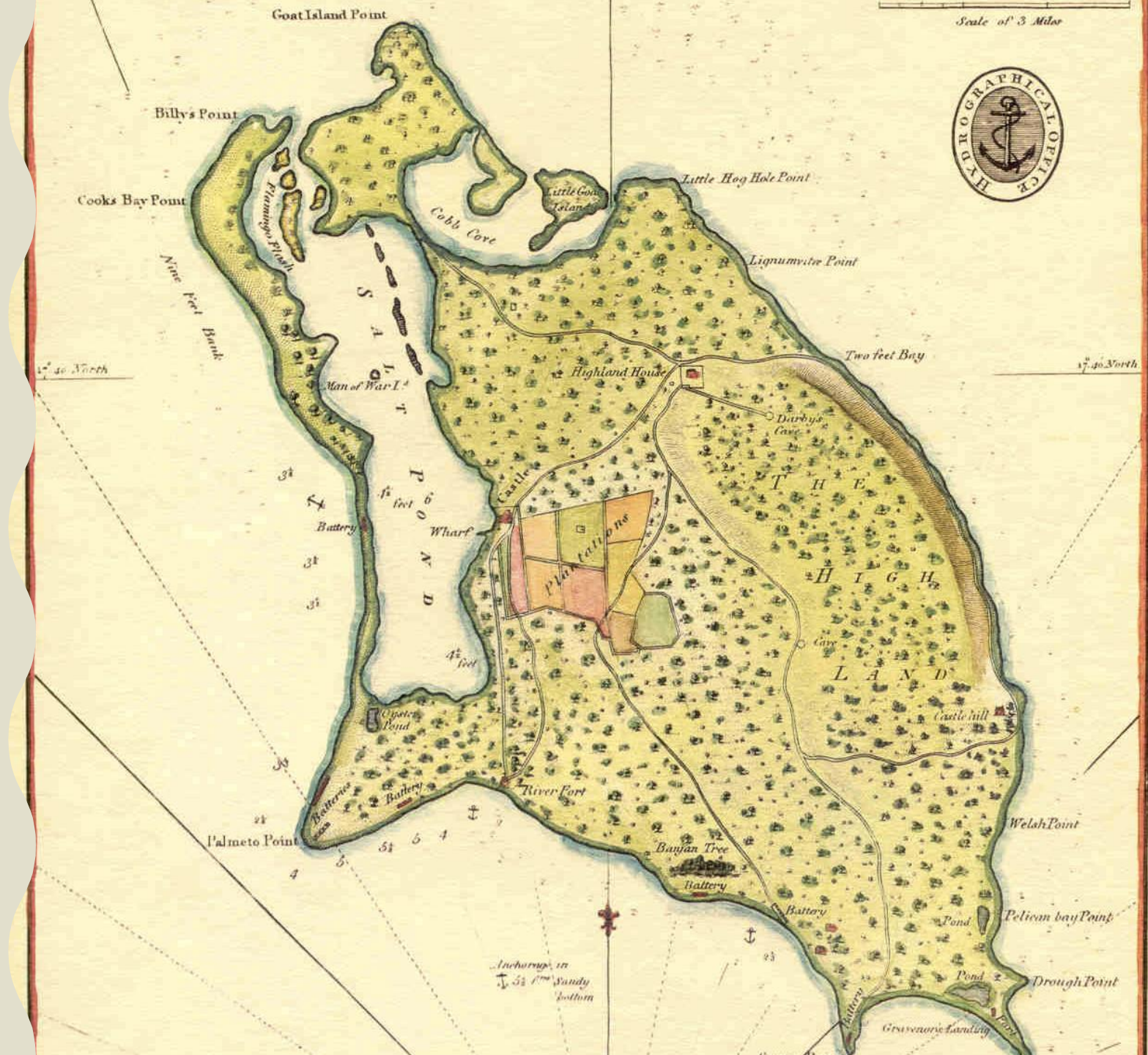
From military records: Antigua's strategic location and deep-water harbours made it a perfect setting for a large naval base, which housed thousands of soldiers and sailors, many conscripted into service.

From family papers: The island's culture was rooted in a system of transatlantic slavery in which the Codrington family actively participated. They traded slaves, held captive and enslaved labourers on their estates, and applied political pressure to resist efforts to abolish slavery.

How was the land of Barbuda used?

Barbuda was never a sugar island.

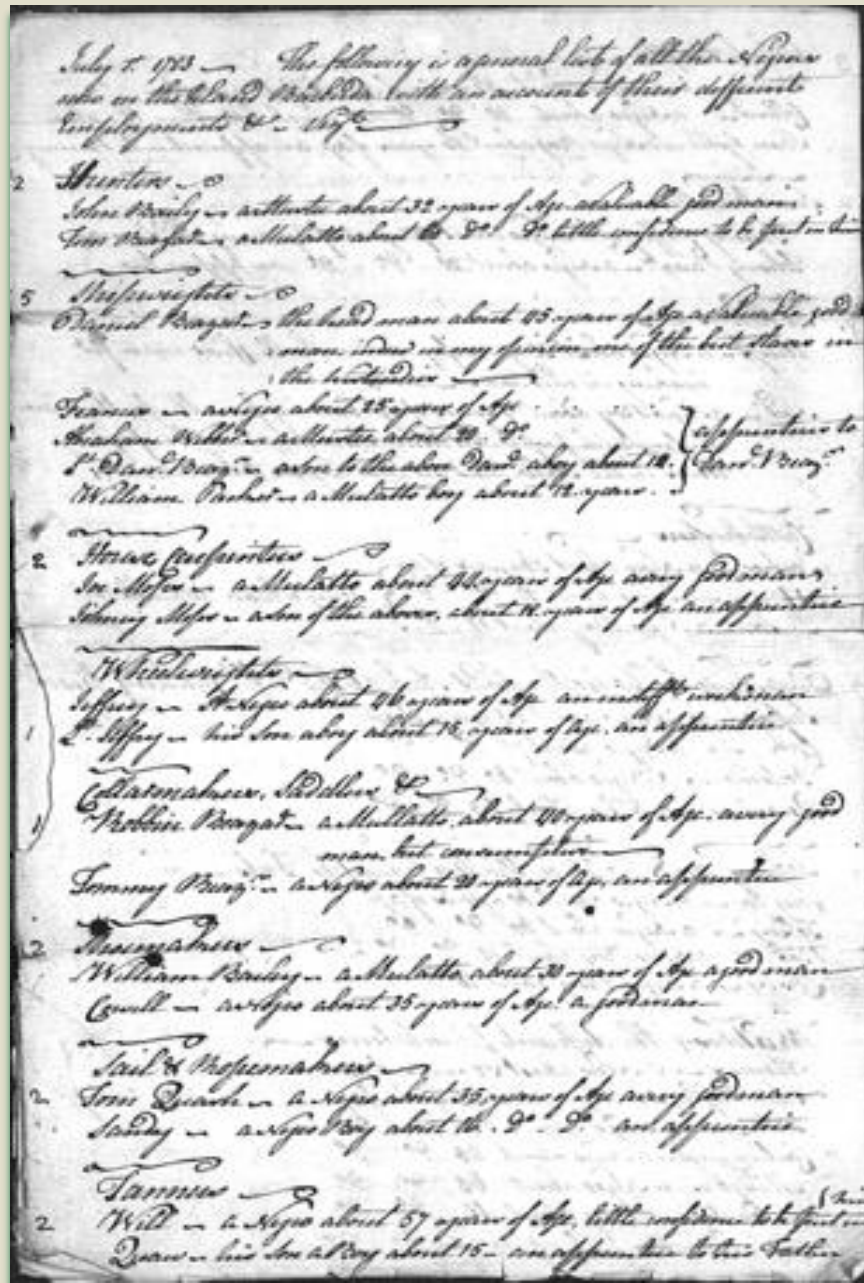
- It supplied provisions and water to the people of Antigua and other West Indian islands.
- It became an agricultural laboratory to study tropical plants for production and sale to world markets.



What have we learned about the people?

On registries, we can identify individuals who were enslaved and indentured on the estates. We learn details such as their **ages, names, and occupations**. Knowing a person's age allows researchers to trace them through time by comparing later registries. This can lead to discoveries of family relationships

In this list from 1783, **surnames of the enslaved** are recorded in some cases. Several, like Beazer and Bailey, are common surnames in Barbuda today. Occupations are listed as hunters, shipwrights, carpenters, wheelwrights, sail and rope makers, and blacksmiths.



Barbudans were also cattle ranchers and farmers with deep ecological knowledge, testing crops for cultivation across the empire.

More than a list of occupations, the documents show the craft and skill of the people of Barbuda.

Names and occupations were handed down through generations. Barbudan ties to their land link them with their ancestors.





What's happening in Antigua & Barbuda today?



Today, most Barbudans and many Antiguanans, are descendant from the enslaved people forced to settle there in the 1600s.

The islands are facing the devastating effects of climate change but are looking for solutions based in the traditional ecological knowledge of their ancestors, and in partnership with researchers and scientists from around the world.