

Historical and Archaeological Society The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda

“Knowledge to be of any Value must be Communicated”

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The Antigua Burrowing Owl

This article is extracted from book '*Bethesda and Christian Hill Our History and Culture*' by Joy Lawrence

The Antigua Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia amauro*) is somewhat of an enigma unknown to science until the 1870s. Locals in the Bethesda/Christian Hill area occasionally saw some.

While most owls are nocturnal, the burrowing owl is mostly active during the daytime and nests in the underground burrows. The Antigua burrowing owl was also active at night. Locals usually encountered it in its burrows along road cuts, in ruins, old sugar mills and cliffs. These long-legged owls hunted while running across grass, farmlands or open dry spaces with low vegetation. They might also swoop down from a perch to catch insects in the air. They tended to avoid the mid-day heat, hunting at dusk and dawn when their night vision and hearing could be used to their advantage. Fringe-like feathers allowed them to glide silently to better pounce on prey.



In some West African cultures, owls are seen as symbols of wisdom and intelligence. In other West African cultures, they are messengers of bad luck or omens of death. Fear caused people to kill them whenever they got a chance. Imagine the fear felt by people of African descent working their grounds in the Bethesda/Christian Hill area if any owl suddenly flew by with piercing, deadly eyes.

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The Antigua Borrowing Owl

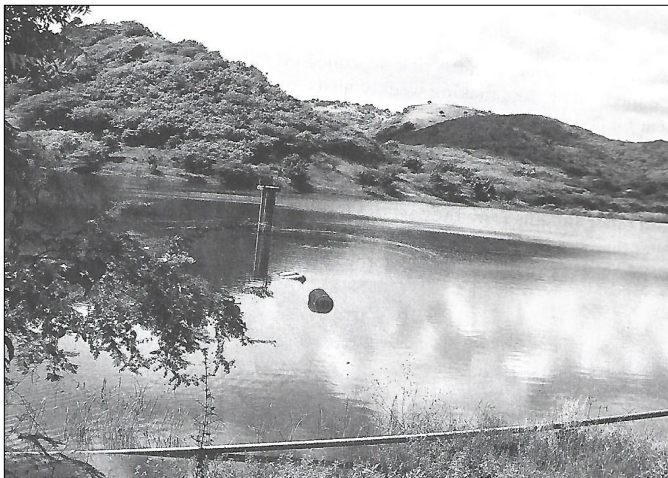
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American Frederick A. Ober (b.1849), while yet a boy developed a fondness for natural history, especially the study of birds. He learned that the burrowing owl existed in the Caribbean, especially in the Bethesda/Christian Hill area. In 1877, he made his way to Antigua. A local fellow, working to procure these birds for Mr. Ober, captured about three of them in the cliffs near Christian Hill. In 1890, two more were secured, possibly from this same area. No more sightings of the burrowing owl were reported in this area thereafter. By the end of the century it was deemed extinct throughout the whole of Antigua. It does still exist on other Caribbean islands.



Did you know..

The Bethesda dam and reservoir was established as an important source of water for the village, farms and eventually, Antigua in general. It's also an important key biodiversity area. It is recognized internationally for its water birds such as Gallings, Guttersnipes, and migratory ducks. This reservoir attracts birdwatchers from around the world.



Bethesda Dam showing irrigation pipes in 2007

This information was taken from book 'Bethesda and Christian Hill Our History and Culture' by Joy Lawrence.

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The Barbuda Estate Manager's Wife: Elizabeth Wingfield - Part 2

This article is based on an extract from Sue Appleby's forthcoming book *'Wives - Mothers - Daughters - Widows: Cornish Women in the Caribbean,'* to be published by Troubador under their Matador imprint later on.

In addition to his responsibilities on Barbuda, in 1822 John was made manager of Clare Hall sugar estate on Antigua, a property recently bought by Sir Christopher. The Clare Hall Great House was an elegant building surrounded by mature trees which one visitor - a Mrs Carmichael, who had been entertained at the house some years earlier - found to be *'superb [with grounds] laid out with groves and delightful walks of tamarind trees, which give the finest shade you can imagine'*.¹² Given the living conditions on Barbuda, Elizabeth and her daughters unsurprisingly now made their principal home at Clare Hall, a residence which would have been more to their liking than the barn-like house in Codrington and, as opportunities for socialising improved, Elizabeth, perhaps remembering the privileged life she had lived as a young girl at Clowance Manor and St Michael's Mount, began to renovate the house and entertain on a grand scale.

The attorney for the Codrington estates on Antigua, Mr Osborn, wrote to Sir Christopher about Elizabeth's extravagant behaviour: *'Mrs James has eighteen people waiting on her besides one of the head carpenters constantly at the house and a stout woman every day out of the field to wash the house'*.¹³ Osborn also noted that Mrs James kept between five and seven horses, which had to be cared for and fed four quarts of corn each per day, and that she held regular large parties for *'eighty able people'*.

¹¹ Confirmed in email message from Kyle Scott dated 15 March 2022, based on his research for *The Letters of John James Esq.: A Collection of Letters Written by the Estate Manager of Barbuda and Clare Hall, Antigua 1804-1826* - http://johnjamesesq.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_2030.html and his search of the 1817 Slave Register for Barbuda, which provides names of the enslaved people living on Barbuda and did not show any slave with the James surname.

¹² Carmichael, A.C. *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies*. 2 vols. London: Whittaker Treacher and Co., 1833, p.83.

¹³ *Letters from Christopher Bethel Codrington to John James [and family]*. Gloucestershire Records Office, D1610 C24. Accessed 29 August 2022, <https://digital.lib.sfu.ca/cwc-97/letters-christopher-bethel-codrington-john-james?search=John%2520James>

As Sir Christopher was responsible for paying any debts incurred by the James family he was understandably displeased with the amount of money they were now spending, and he writes:

*I have to observe that until Mrs James took up her abode in the W. Indies, my property under her husband's management was set to give me a handsome annual income. From that period it would have been better for me to have had no such property. I have at this moment in my hands debts contracted by him or her amounting to £4000 and upward for the payment of which I have accepted bills.*¹⁵

Now usually to be found with his wife and daughters at Clare Hall, John James, who had been in poor health for some time, was unable to manage the Codrington affairs as he once had. During the earlier part of 1826 his health continued to decline, and at the end of July of that year he died at Clare Hall, leaving his business affairs unsettled. He is buried in the churchyard of St John the Divine Cathedral in St John's, Antigua.

Elizabeth and her daughters returned to England after John's death, and on arriving in London, Elizabeth began to correspond with Sir Christopher.

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The Barbuda Estate Manager's Wife: Elizabeth Wingfield

(Continued from page 3)

While Sir Christopher was concerned with the money she had spent, Elizabeth wanted the settlement of outstanding payments relating to her husband's employment. She was not intimidated by Sir Christopher, and her letter was business like in tone. She wrote:

I have the honour of enclosing a memorandum of Mr James last year superintendence [sic] of Barbuda. I have left that island totally unencumbered of debt up to my melancholy loss, and flatter myself you will find it correct. I beg leave to inform you that Mr James has ... never received his commissions on wool, cotton and turtle shell that has been sent to England for sale from time to time.¹⁶

Leaving London, Elizabeth returned to Cornwall. But she became unwell in the early months of 1828, and in late May, before she was able to bring her correspondence with Sir Christopher to a satisfactory conclusion, she died at the house in Marazion. Her body was placed in the Wingfield family mausoleum in Crowan churchyard, a high status interment which would surely have pleased her. Unfortunately, this was not to be her final resting place; the Wingfield mausoleum was subsequently demolished, and the current burial site of the bodies it contained, including that of Elizabeth Wingfield, is now unmarked.¹⁷

Elizabeth must have been aware that her health was deteriorating because preparing for the future as she had done when she had drawn up the pre-nuptial agreement with her husband, she wrote her will two months before her death. If she had not been pre-

deceased by her husband, under the law of coverture, she would not have been able to write her own will, nor dispose of her property as she pleased but, as a widow, she was free to act as she wished.

She would have been expected to leave the bulk of her wealth to the only male heir, her son John Wingfield, but he only received a bequest of £300. Did mother and son fall out? It cannot be that he married into a wealthy family and so had no need of funds, as he is recorded as having worked as a customs officer in London after his marriage.¹⁸

In her will, Elizabeth gives clear instructions that the sum of her capital investments totalling a considerable £7,700 is to be divided equally between her two daughters, who also inherited her freehold lands and everything on them, as well as her furniture and other household possessions. Thanks to her successful circumvention of the constraints of coverture, Elizabeth succeeded in keeping control of her financial capital and in passing it on to her daughters who would be able to live comfortably on the dividends.

¹⁷Symons, Maxine. 'Bring up the Bodies: Digging up the Truth in the Lost Mausoleum at Crowan.' *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, pp.10–33 (2021).

Although she lived in a society which generally believed that men belonged in the public sphere of government, politics, and business, and woman's place was in the private, home-based domestic sphere, by pursuing her own interests with a self confidence that was very different from the subservient behaviour which was then expected of a woman, Elizabeth managed to become financially independent, and to retain that independence throughout her life.

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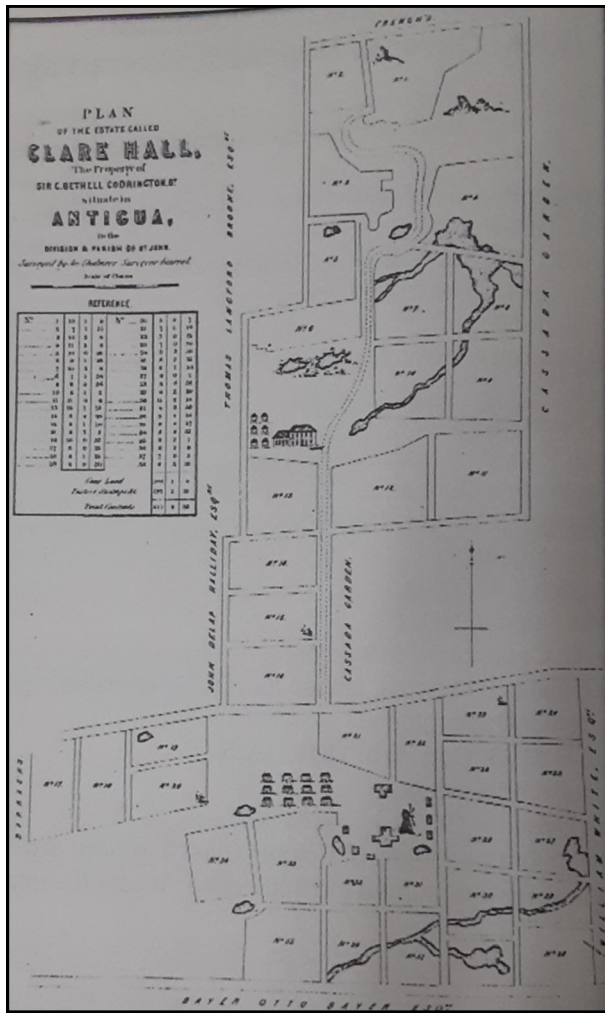
The Barbuda Estate Manager’s Wife: Elizabeth Wingfield

(Continued from page 4)

This article is based on an extract from Sue Appleby’s forthcoming book *Wives - Mothers - Daughters - Widows: Cornish Women in the Caribbean*, to be published by Troubador under their Matador imprint later this year.



Two views of the old Clare Hall main house barely standing in 1999. Photo by Agnes Mecker.



Detailed plan of the original plantation’s 500 acre layout. Codrington Estates

**“A visit to the Museum is a search for beauty, truth, and meaning in our lives.
Go to the Museum as often as you can.”**

Maira Kalman

Trials and Disasters

Deliverance Will Come

Extract from novel *'Symbol of Courage'* by Keithlyn B. Smith

This is the account of Mary Lewis of Breaknock Antigua, also known as Mary Peterson who's family called her Aunt Dood. In this book Mrs Peterson gives her story of her life in Antigua between the year 1877-1982.

Little children are generally innocent of the happenings around them. They don't know and so they are happy. The most they would do are to play and cry for food. They would also cry when they want to be in their mother's arms, and may groan when in pain. They are not sensitive to pain as big people tend to be, and some of them would keep quiet when they are suffering. As a mother, I felt their pain and agony more than they. When a child begins to understand life it is a completely different story. In 1922, I was eight years old, and it was at that time I began to understand how hard the time was.

I remember that very little rain fell in 1921. The dry spell continued into 1922, through 1923 and into the greater part of 1924. Except for Body Pond there were two main water sources in the area near to where we lived. Those were Diamond Hole and Garden Spring. No drought had ever dried up Diamond Hole, and it was the same thing with Garden Spring. The saying was Garden Spring had no bottom. Some people called it the Well Spring of Life. Both water sources saved the people of this land from total disaster in time of prolonged dry periods. I remember the many processions going to and from, for water when the drought became extremely severe on the land. Some carried the water in buckets on their heads others would put them in donkey boxes or in the horse and cart.



(Top) children in donkey box,
(Bottom) Man on donkey box

Most times, it would be a barrel or two in the cart. We put bushes in the water to prevent it from spilling out during the journey. Anyone would understand that when there was no rain there would be little or no food, and there would be set backs on almost everything. The sugar crop that nearly everyone depended on for a livelihood would be extremely light. That meant no work for the vast portion of working people.

My father was a person that the estates needed a little more regularly than some others. At times, they would hire his horse and cart to transport goods of all kinds. Sugar cane cuttings, ground provisions, goods from the stores in town, manure and stones were some of the things he would be hired to carry from place to place.



A woman carrying a bucket of water on her head

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Trials and Disasters

Deliverance Will Come

(Continued from page 6)

Now and again, he would be given a job to transport stones and repair certain parts of the road at the same time. Back then, the roads were made of all stones. I remember that so often there was no work for him, and for weeks running into months he would be home sitting on his bottom. The planters would intermittently break the sit down spell by calling him out for a half-a-day's work or so.

Generally, the most work was during the reaping of the sugar crop. If my memory serves me right, I think that the reaping of the 1921 sugar crop lasted for less than seven weeks and that of 1922 was not much different. The drought caused the sugarcane to have bunto joints. As usual, some light showers fell on and off in the dry season. A good portion fell too often at the wrong time and weakened the sugar contents of the cane. This was the situation in 1921 and 1922. The bakkra gave the people no work after the crop of those years. Planters of estates and sugar factories did not carry out any meaningful repairs to the machines and other facilities after the reaping of the 1922 sugar crop. The land was at a stand still.

During that time John Public announced that there were some work to do but there was no money to pay anyone. Some people worked without pay so that they would be granted a piece of land to work and plant food. At one period, most schools opened only in the mornings for two or three days a week.

John Public was forced to ration food. The lines were long, and cries in and out of the lines were loud. Fighting would break out from time to time between those who were willing to wait their turn and those who were not. Starvation forced the people to do anything for a living.

Large portion of the masses searched out the guts and ponds for fish and prawn can't forget the flambeau that was in use by so many people night after night in search of crabs. It was the only light to be seen anywhere at nights then.

Crabs would hide in their holes by day and walk by night, but hungry people could not wait to catch nocturnal crab only in



Crab

the dark. They found a way to pluck them out of their holes by day. We put some cattle tongue bush in their holes and left for a while, that would certainly get them drunk. We would then put our hands in the hole and take them. Starving people were forced to invade the seashores day after day in search of cockles, mussels and other sea foods. Hard times also made fishermen out of many people who otherwise would be afraid of the sea.

Timely showers fell in 1922 but not enough to break the drought. The rain brightened up the land, and the agricultural condition was greatly improved. The rain was a saviour to a number of animals, particularly cattle. In as much as particular care was taken of them, some died. The story was that while there was enough food for them, lack of water was the reason why some perished. They were the prime animals for the upkeep of the sugar industry.

I remember the Christmas season of 1922. The rain that fell gave people the belief that the Christmas season of that year would be brighter and better than those of 1920 and 1921. There were more food in the land food in the land and that meant more in the market but there was no money to buy anything. The situation was, who planted the vegetables and fruits had to use them or give them away.

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Trials and Disasters

Deliverance Will Come

(Continued from page 7)

Those that were not consumed were left to perish. However, we did not allow hard times to prevent us from enjoying ourselves. While there was breath breathing through the nostrils, only sickness could stop us from enjoying ourselves. Back then the poor made merry at Christmas time. The Johnbulls would still go from place to place and perform. So too would be the Highlanders, the Mocco Jumbies, the Clowns and the Masquerades. The Christmas merry makers would start to prepare from the end of October each year.



Johnbull performance

There would be no hard time that could stop the singing round, rich or poor would set up and wait for the singers to get to their houses. After the Christmas celebration, people looked towards the start of the grinding season in the New Year to get work.

Antigua and Barbuda had a saying, this was it. ***"Dog say, crop time better than Christmas, because crop time food last longer than Christmas food"***. What people had in mind and wanted to say they would say, "dog say".

They were right. The crop time food were accustomed to go on for a longer time than those of the Christmas season, but the shortness of the reaping operations in 1921 and 1922 almost caused the people to reverse the saying.

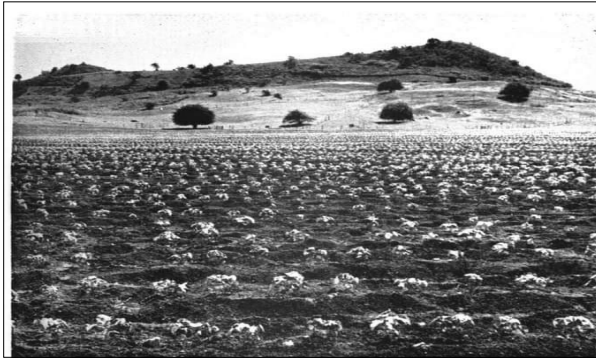
The showers that fell in 1922 brought some hope. The people looked forward to more work in 1923. It was seen that there would be an improvement in the work situation over previous years. The planters began repairs of machines and other facilities of the sugar industry in mid January 1923. At the start of the repairs, the authorities announced that the reaping of the 1923 sugar crop would begin during the first week in March. The fact was the repairs that the bosses refused to do for nine to ten months of 1922 would have to be done in a matter of weeks in 1923, and my father was hurriedly called out.

He had very little time to get the job done to meet the deadline; therefore, he had to hire a helper. Over the years, he would hire Jim Brown of Green Castle whenever the need arose. Others would plea for the job but his preference was Jim. My father regarded Jim as a close family friend.

Museum Humour



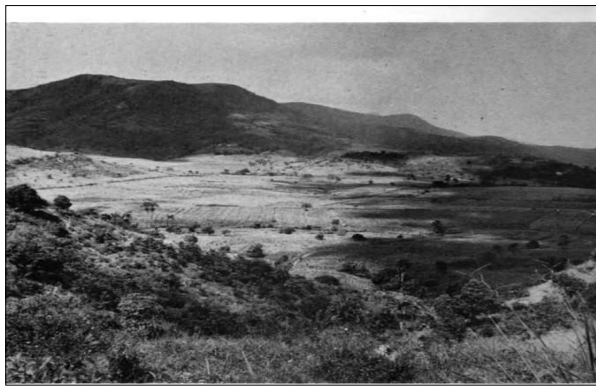
Antigua Then 1960 - 1964



Sea Island Cotton Central Experimental Station 1960



HRH Princess Margaret and
Mr. Antony Armstrong-Jones leaving the St. John's
Cathedral 1960



Peasant cane cultivation in Bendals Valley 1960



New Corn Storage Facility and Feed Mixing Unit .
Built with United States aid funds by the
Public Works Department 1961



Construction work on extension of St. John's wharf
1960's



View of St. John's city 1962

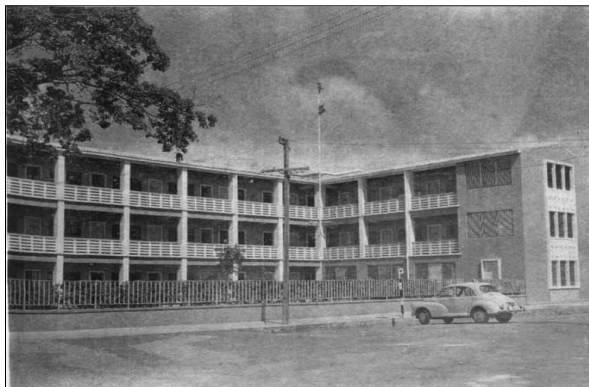
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Antigua Then 1960-1964

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The Dockyard, English Harbour “reopened” on 14th November 1961



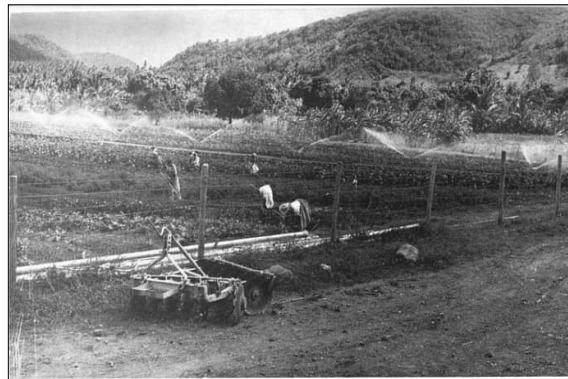
The Administration Building in St. John's 1962



Reconstruction and widening of St. John's All Saints Highway 1964



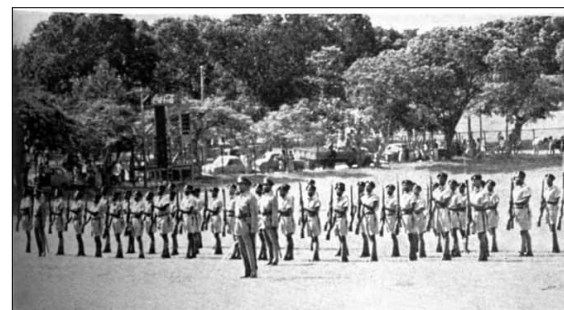
Oil Refinery Storage Tanks for bunker fuel, industrial fuel and diesel oil 1964



Irrigated vegetable production plot at Claremont's in Southern District 1964



Picking sea island cotton at Crosby's Estate 1964



Antigua Defense Force
The Queen's Birthday Parade 1964

Muse News

UNESCO Transcultural Event

In the month of May, Dr. Chris Waters had the privilege of attending the UNESCO program Transcultural Event on Coastal Defense Systems in Europe and the Caribbean in Havana, Cuba. This workshop brought fortification site managers from the Caribbean and Europe together to discuss sustainable heritage practice, community engagement, challenges and solutions. Dr. Waters expresses special thanks to the UNESCO Office in Havana for organizing the program and to all his colleagues who made this workshop memorable and exciting.



(Continued on page 12)

Muse News *(Cont. from page 11)*

Museum Staff Participation In SIDS4 CSO Expo 2024

The staff of the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda participated in the Small Islands Developing States 2024 (SIDS4) CSO Expo, held at the Botanical Gardens on Saturday 25th May 2024. This was an opportunity where we were able to share the purpose of ‘Unlock the Museum’, and connect with other local and international CSOs who participated.



(L-R) Alex Stewart (Digital Collection Management Technician), Myra Dyer Piper (Research Officer), Debbie Joseph Punter (Heritage Educator) and Mark Philip (Digital Collection Management Technician).



Some Of The Other Participants for SIDS4 CSO Expo



What's Happening at the Museum

Museum Collections Management by Staff Member Debbie Joseph



Summer Camp Visits



High Road Daycare Summer Camp



TJ Summer Camp



New Members

The Historical and Archaeological Society & Museum of Antigua & Barbuda would like to welcome our newest members:

- Ms. Betsy Way of **Antigua**
- Ms. Carla Martin of the **USA**
- Mr. Aabid Allibhai of the **USA**

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.

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Historical and Archaeological Society

APRIL, MAY, JUNE 2024 No. 165



Imagine St. John's in the year 1897. Your own vintage tour of then and now. Walk the streets as you compare the buildings of then and now, where was Gutter Lane and Crow Lane? Did you know that the Public Market was situated at the bottom of Long Street? There are so many secrets to reveal. Coming soon in 2024, QR friendly codes. Staff are presently researching street names and building for the exhibit. Stay connected for further information by visiting our Facebook page, *The Museum of Antigua and Barbuda*. Also visit our website www.antiguamuseums.net

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

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