

Archaeological Test Excavations at the Romney Plantation Slave Village, St. Anne's Parish, St. Kitts, West Indies

Brimstone Hill Fortress Archaeological Project Report No. 31

By

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Submitted to the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society, St. Kitts, West Indies

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November 2008

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Introduction

Sugar plantations were established on St. Kitts beginning in the mid 17th century. The number of plantations and the number of enslaved Africans working on them grew rapidly and by the mid 18th century there were over 200 plantations with a work force of more than 20,000 enslaved Africans on St. Kitts (Cox 1984). The slaves living on each plantation occupied small villages usually consisting of 10 or more houses or huts. The Romney Plantation slave village in Saint Anne's Parish near Sandy Point is one of many such locations.

The Romney Plantation slave village is clearly marked on the 1828 McMahon map of St. Kitts (Figure 1). Sandy Point Gut and the road leading to the top of Brimstone Hill are shown to the south and Charles Fort is shown to the west. The map shows 10 "N[egroe] Houses" in two rows of five each. An eleventh structure is shown along the north-northwest property line. As indicated by the boundary line, the village measures approximately 100 meters long and 30 meters wide. Present research has not determined when this village was first established or when it was abandoned. The village is now included in property owned by Larry and Jacqueline Armony.

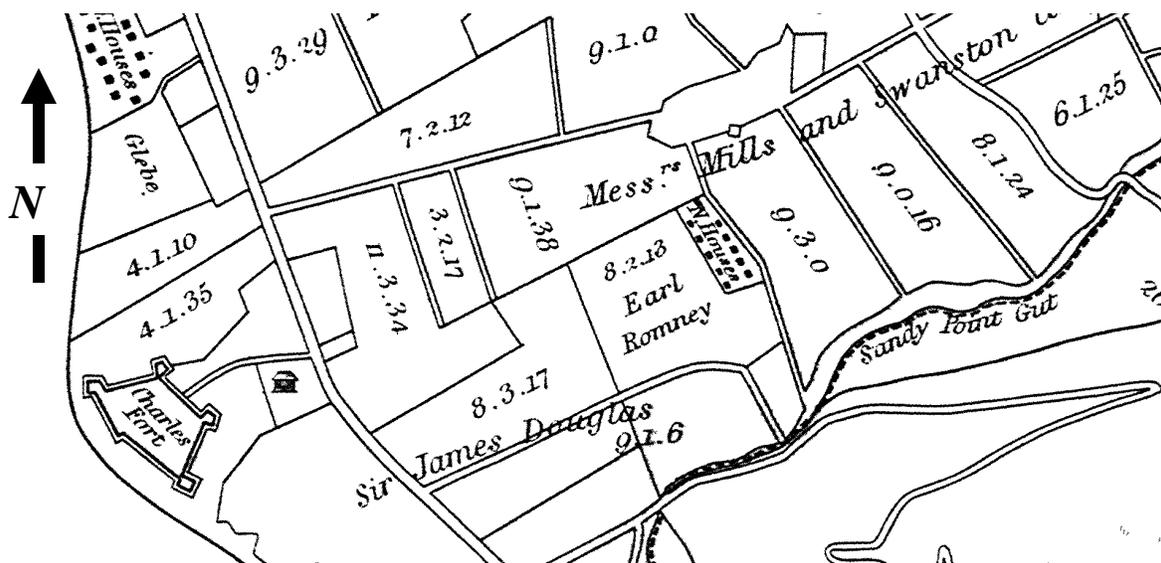


Figure 1. Portion of 1828 St. Kitts McMahon map showing the location of the Earl Romney slave village. One inch equals approximately 1/8 mile

Archaeological test excavations were made at the site on August 11, 2008 first to confirm that this was the location of an early 19th century slave village. The second goal was to obtain a sample of Afro Caribbean ceramics that could be compared to those previously recovered at the Brimstone Fortress and elsewhere on St. Kitts (Ahlman, Schroedl and McKeown 2008).

African people regularly produced and used such pottery to meet their daily needs of food preparation, cooking, serving and storage. This pottery making tradition is no longer practiced on St. Kitts, having ended sometime in the 19th or early 20th centuries. Making Afro Caribbean pottery nevertheless has persisted on Nevis and several other Caribbean islands where vessels are commonly produced as souvenirs and as decorative items. Because of its long production history, Afro Caribbean pottery commonly occurs in archaeological contexts in St. Kitts. For this reason, it is an important artifact class from which to interpret the economic and social life of enslaved Africans. Studies of Afro Caribbean ceramics from Brimstone Hill using Instrument Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) suggest that vessels were constructed from clay sources found on the Southeast Peninsula of St. Kitts (Ahlman et al. 2008). This means that Afro Caribbean wares, the clay for pottery making, or both were transported to Brimstone Hill. Instrument Neutron Activation Analysis should establish whether the Romney Plantation slave village Afro Caribbean sherds also are made from clay available on the Southeast Peninsula, elsewhere on St. Kitts, or from another island such as Nevis.

Shovel Test Excavations

Finding the Romney Plantation slave village was comparatively easy because the north and east boundaries shown on the McMahon map are still maintained by dirt roads and fence lines (Figure 2). The area is presently heavily overgrown with vegetation so no artifacts are visible on the ground surface.

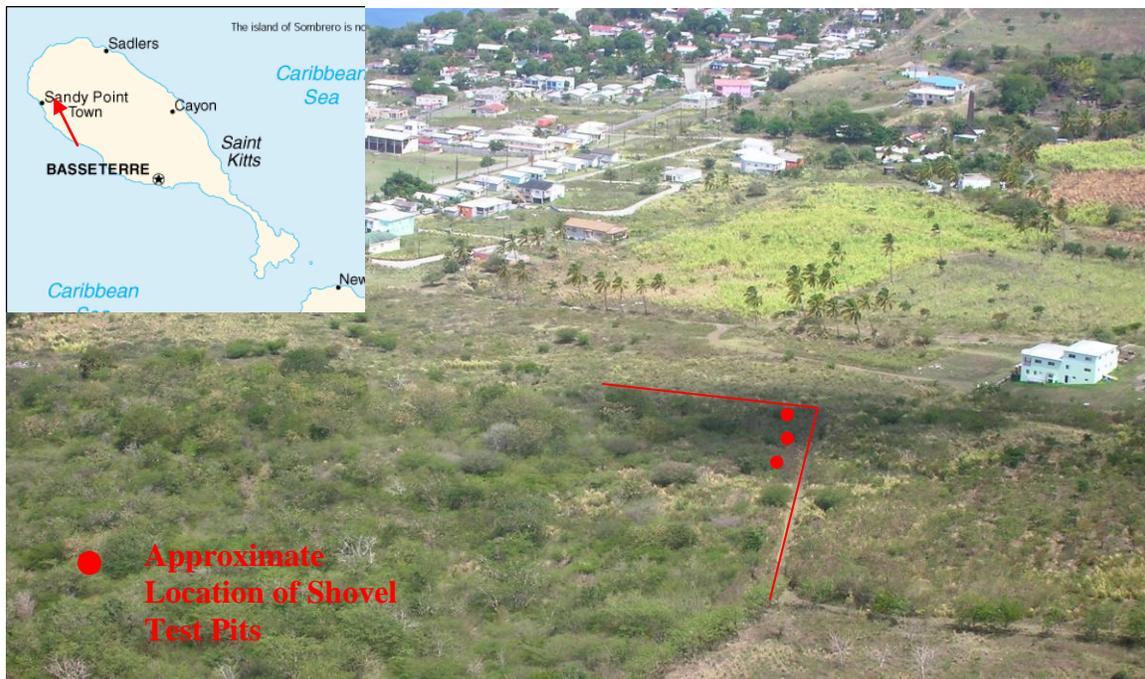


Figure 2. Location of Romney Plantation slave village, looking north toward Sandy Point, St. Kitts. Lines show the north and east site boundaries that correspond to those shown on the McMahon map and to contemporary fence rows and dirt roads.

A line of three shovel test excavations were placed 6 meters apart and 10 meters from the east fence row and dirt road. The first shovel test pit was excavated 10 meters from the fence row on the north side of the property Figure 3). Each test pit was excavated with a shovel, small mattock, and trowel. All excavated sediments were screened through quarter-inch hardware cloth mesh screen. Recovered artifacts



Figure 3. Romney Plantation slave village, showing dense vegetation, looking from Shovel Test Pit No. 1 toward Shovel Test Pit No. 3

were bagged by provenience, and subsequently washed, cataloged and identified, following the same protocols used for work conducted at Brimstone Hill (Ahlman and Schroedl 2004a, 2004b).

Shovel Test Pit No. 1 (Figures 4 and 5)

Shovel Test Pit No. 1 was excavated 43 cm in diameter and 40 cm deep. Excavated sediments were brown to yellowish brown silt loam. No distinctive natural strata were observed in the shallow excavation. It was noted, however, that most White Ware sherds, indicating a later occupation date than suggested by Cream Ware or Pearl



Figure 4. Excavation of Shovel Test Pit No. 1 in progress.

Ware sherds, were recovered in the top 2 to 10 cm of this and the other two shovel test pits.

Artifacts recovered from the excavation include 13 European manufactured ceramics, two Afro Caribbean sherd, 27 bottle glass fragments, and three kaolin smoking pipe fragments (Figure 6). A list of artifacts recovered from each test excavation is listed in the Appendix.



Figure 5. Shovel Test Pit No. 1, completed excavation.



Figure 6. Artifacts recovered from Shovel Test Pit 1 at the Romney Plantation slave village site, St. Kitts, West Indies. Pipes and European ceramics are at the top; bottle glass in middle; Afro Caribbean sherd, lower right

Shovel Test Pit No. 2

Shovel Test Pit No. 2 was excavated 45 cm in diameter and 35 cm deep (Figure



Figure 7. Shovel Test Pit No. 2 completed excavation.



Figure 8. Artifacts recovered from Shovel Test Pit 2 at the Romney Plantation slave village site, St. Kitts, West Indies. European ceramics upper two rows, middle center bottle glass, lower left iron nails, brass washer and piece of iron; lower right Afro Caribbean ceramics.

7). Excavated sediments were brown to yellowish brown silt loam. No distinctive natural strata were observed in the shallow excavation. Artifacts recovered from the excavation include 15 European ceramics, seven Afro Caribbean ceramics; 16 bottle glass fragments, one kaolin pipe stem, one piece of iron, one brass washer, and two iron nails (Figure 8).

Shovel Test Pit No. 3

Shovel Test Pit No. 3 was excavated 50 cm in diameter and 50 cm deep (Figure 9). Soil in the upper half of the excavation was brown to yellowish brown silt loam, while the lower half of the excavation included gray and grayish black wood ash. Most artifacts came from the lower half of the excavation. Artifacts recovered from the excavation included 19 European ceramics, two Afro Caribbean sherds, 23 bottle glass fragments, seven nails, 13 pieces of iron, a pair of scissors and two fragments of a large knife or cutlass, a piece of chalk and an unidentified animal phalange (Figure 10). Several artifacts showed evidence of burning.



Figure 9. Shovel Test Pit No. 3 completed excavation.



Figure 10. Artifacts recovered from Shovel Test Pit 3 at the Romney Plantation slave village site, St. Kitts, West Indies. European ceramics upper two rows; bottle glass middle two rows; large knife lower middle; iron fragments upper right; Afro Caribbean sherds, scissors and chalk lower right; nails lower left

Summary and Conclusion

The Romney Plantation slave village is clearly identified on the 1828 McMahon map of St. Kitts. The map shows 11 structures. The village is comparatively easy to locate because the 19th century property lines shown on the McMahon map are still maintained and artifacts from three shovel test pit excavations confirmed the location of the village. Besides European made artifacts attesting to a 19th century occupation, excavations recovered ten pieces of Afro Caribbean ceramics. It is planned to run Interactive Neutron Activation Analysis on these sherds in order to determine if they, like most sherds recovered at Brimstone Hill, were made from clay found in the Southeastern Peninsula. Once analysis of Afro Caribbean ceramics from many different locations on St. Kitts is accomplished, it should be possible to identify the economic, social, and cultural patterns of Afro Caribbean pottery production and use.

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Acknowledgements

We thank Larry and Jackie Armony for their great interest in St. Kitts cultural heritage and for letting us conduct our excavations at the Romney Plantation slave village. We appreciate the support of the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society in the conduct of this research.

Appendix—Artifacts from Shovel Test Pits

All artifacts recovered from the Romney Plantation slave village shovel test pit excavations are curated at the Brimstone Hill Fortress artifact storage room at Fort George. They are in Box No. 160-08.

Shovel Test Pit No. 1

Ceramics

- 1 Lead glazed stoneware body sherd*
- 3 Unglazed stoneware body sherds*
- 3 Cream Ware sherds*
- 2 White Ware body sherds*
- 1 White Ware rim sherd*
- 2 Pearl Ware body sherds*
- 1 Pearl ware blue shell edge rim sherd*
- 2 Afro Caribbean Ware body sherds*

Glass

- 20 Dark green bottle glass body fragments*
- 3 Dark green bottle glass shoulder fragments*
- 2 Dark green bottle glass neck fragments*
- 1 Dark green bottle glass finish fragment*
- 1 Dark green bottle glass resting point fragment*

Pipes and Pipestems

- 1 Bowl fragment*
- 1 Pipestem*
- 1 Pipestem/halfstem*

Shovel Test Pit No. 2

Ceramics

- 1 White Ware foot ring*
- 1 Yellow Ware lead glazed body sherd*
- 2 Banded Cream Ware body sherds*
- 1 Cream Ware rim sherd*
- 2 Cream Ware body sherds*
- 1 Pearl Ware blue shell edge rim sherd*
- 1 Pearl Ware foot ring*
- 1 Pearl Ware blue transfer printed body sherd*
- 5 Pearl Ware body sherds*
- 7 Afro Caribbean Ware body sherds*

Glass

- 10 Dark green bottle body fragments*
- 2 Dark green bottle neck fragments*

- 1 Dark green bottle neck/shoulder fragment*
- 2 Dark green bottle fragments, undetermined vessel portion*
- 1 Aqua bottle fragment*

Pipes and Pipestems

- 1 bowl fragment*

Nails

- 2 wrought iron nails*

Iron

- 1 Unidentified iron fragment*

Miscellaneous

- 1 Brass washer fragment*

Shovel Test Pit No. 3

Ceramics

- 1 White Ware blue transfer printed rim sherd*
- 4 White Ware body sherds*
- 3 Cream Ware rim sherds*
- 4 Cream Ware body sherds*
- 1 Annular (Earthworm pattern) Cream Ware body sherd*
- 3 Pearl Ware blue shell edge rim sherds*
- 1 Pearl Ware green shell edge rim sherd*
- 1 Pearl Ware painted polychrome over glaze body sherd*
- 1 Pearl Ware foot ring*
- 2 Afro Caribbean Ware body sherds*

Glass

- 14 Dark green bottle glass body fragments*
- 3 Dark green bottle glass shoulder fragments*
- 3 Dark green bottle glass base fragments*
- 3 Dark green bottle glass fragments, undetermined vessel portion*

Nails

- 7 Wrought iron nails*

Iron

- 13 Unidentified iron fragments*

Miscellaneous

- 1 Complete scissors*
- 1 Piece of chalk*
- 1 Large knife or cutlass (two pieces)*
- 1 unidentified animal phalange*