

Chapter 19 – Conclusion

Now that we have come to the end of our analysis of the surviving Anguillian archival documents from the period 1650-1776 that I have been able to locate,¹ and a consideration of what those documents tell us about the first Anguillians, what have we learned about the people who today call themselves Anguillians? The story of our people's relationship with the early colonial authorities in the years after 1650 resemble nothing more than a child with a cold and unfeeling stepmother. The hand-over to St Kitts of the island in 1825 did not improve our relationship with the new administering power. The resulting psychological trauma on the national consciousness, I suggest, has lasted down to the present time. Anguillians are a wily and contrary people, nimble to discover their advantage and to seize it, especially when dealing with outsiders. Unique among West Indians, Anguillians have always insisted on doing things our own way. We don't take advice or direction easily especially in matters of governance. The authorities in London must feel sometimes that they have met their match in dealing with us. It is not likely that they understand some of the strange and unreasonable stands that we take, or the directions that we select. The

¹ Whether at Kew Gardens or in the local Anguillian archives.

Anguillian way of doing things must be baffling to outsiders.

The modern-day Anguilla House of Assembly has been known to pass a law apparently for the sole purpose of the debate quieting a public concern, without any intention of having the law enforced or improving the situation being dealt with. Some of our taxes are half-humorously described as voluntary or optional taxes, no effort being made to enforce payment by imposing the penalty. Typically, an enactment is passed to appear to meet a crisis that has arisen. It is then allowed to fall dormant when the controversy has quieted down. Two recent examples illustrate this.

A few years ago two babies were mauled by pit bull terriers. There was a public outcry against pit bulls. People demanded to know why such dangerous dogs were not banned. Under pressure from politicians the Attorney-General's Chambers sprang into action. Within days a Dangerous Dogs Bill was before the House of Assembly. A few days later the House of Assembly met and unanimously passed the Act. It became a serious offence to keep a pit bull or a Rottweiler without a special licence from the Dogs Inspector. They were all required to be immediately neutered under penalty of a fine or imprisonment. It was a serious offence to breed them. Yet, pit bull and Rottweiler keeping and breeding continue

unlicensed to this day, and without a single prosecution having been brought.

One possible explanation may lie in the amount of money involved in the breeding and keeping of pit bulls. Few of them are treated as pets or watch dogs. They are kept for the main part as fighting dogs. Some of the owners of these fighting dogs are very important persons in the community. Large sums of money change hands at semi-clandestine dog pits. When I last heard, it cost US\$5,000.00 to put your dog in the pit. That was before the betting started. Many tens of thousands of dollars change hands on the outcome of the ensuing dog fight. Gambling in public is a serious criminal offence. Not a single person has ever been charged far less convicted in Anguilla for public gambling over a dog fight.

Besides, the Act provides that a prosecution can only be brought by the Dogs Inspector. No Dogs Inspector has ever been appointed under the law. In the absence of a Dogs Inspector, the law can never be enforced. So, we can say it has become dormant. During the debate on the Bill, politicians took the opportunity to utter pious remarks about the sanctity of the family and the need to safeguard the little ones. Merely passing the law enabled government to show it was responsive to public pressure. Omitting to enforce the law met with no public disapproval. The omission

ensured that that no unpopular prosecution of any important person took place.

This type of cruelty to animals has long been associated with psychologically adverse effects on the participants in the game and its witnesses, never mind the damage to the dogs. Dog fighting remains a popular sporting activity among a certain sector of the community, particularly young males. The average man on the street in Anguilla will assure you that he finds nothing reprehensible in attending and betting on dog fights. No person has ever been charged with the offence of animal cruelty over an organised dog fight. If Deputy Governors Abraham Howell, Arthur Hodge and Benjamin Gumbs came to visit the Anguilla of today, they would feel perfectly at home. For much of our population, little has changed in our culture and aesthetics from their day.

Here is another example of a law falling dormant in Anguilla. Some years ago, the tourism sector complained about the amount of litter on the sides of our public roads. They lobbied for something to be done about the young men who dispose of their Styrofoam fast-food containers, beer bottles and soda tins when they are finished with them by throwing them out of their car windows. It was agreed that the solution was to make such littering illegal. The Litter Act sailed through the House of Assembly. It became an offence to throw litter out of one's car window

onto the side of the road. The uproar diminished at this demonstration by Anguilla's political elite of their social conscience.

The problem was that the Act provided that it could be enforced only by Litter Wardens. By neglecting to make any provision in the budget for the appointment and payment of Litter Wardens, prosecutions under the Act were and are impossible. The administration collected the kudos for taking swift legislative action while ensuring that there would be no political backlash from the prosecution of the young men of our society, each of whom has a vote and family members who might be upset. As one political leader remarked when questioned about this type of hypocrisy, "*We can't go about making criminals of innocent young Anguillians!*"

Eventually, provision was made in the budget to appoint road cleaners whose job is periodically to walk the streets bagging the litter that has accumulated. In this way useful employment is given to persons who might otherwise be unemployable. Further kudos to government flowed. The Litter Act like the Dangerous Dogs Act has been in deep hibernation since the day it was passed into law. Those two examples should suffice, so that I do not need to go into the Noise Abatement Act, or the Roads Act, or any of the other many examples of dormant laws of Anguilla.

The Anguilla of today may fairly be described as still being a frontier society. Our early experience of the absence of the institutions of government and of respect for law, for decade after decade, even centuries, has resulted in a present-day aversion to the enforcement of laws and regulations. A modern Planning Act has proven difficult to introduce because Anguillians take the maxim, “*A person’s house is his castle*” to the extreme, and vigorously object every time an effort is made. A century and a half of sheltering our smugglers from the St Kitts customs and excise authorities have made modern smuggling and the non-payment of taxes endemic. This history also explains the low standard of ethics or propriety shown by those in public life.

A social or cultural anthropologist knowing something of Anguilla can explain some of the reasons why the Anguillian society of today may be structured as it is. Anthropologists recognise at least four categories of human society. In an ascending order of social development, there is the band, the tribe, the chiefdom, and the state. Let us look at each of them, and consider where Anguilla fits.

The band was the earliest and tiniest society known to humankind. The band consisted typically of less than 100 people, mostly related by birth or marriage. It lacked a permanent, single place of residence. All able-bodied

persons in the band foraged for food. There were no laws, police or treaties. With all members of the band related to both of any two quarrelling individuals, any fight was soon ended by the mediation of concerned onlookers.

In time, the band evolved into the tribe. The tribe differed from the band mainly in being larger. It typically consisted of hundreds rather than mere dozens of people. Like the band, the tribe usually had no fixed place of settlement. It lacked a bureaucracy, police force, and taxes. Every able-bodied adult in the tribe, including the 'big man', participated in growing, gathering or hunting for food. Full-time craft specialists were lacking. While they were not all closely related to each other, they shared a system of beliefs, practices and loyalties.

The third stage of human political, social and cultural development is the chiefdom. Chiefdoms first emerged in about 5,500 BCE. The chiefdom consisted typically of several thousand people. One person, the head-chief, exercised a monopoly on the right to use force within the community. The food surplus generated by the commoners went to feed various sub-chiefs, their families, bureaucrats and the craft specialists who made the canoes or adzes, or worked as bird-catchers or tattooists. While tribes and bands relied on reciprocal exchanges of gifts, chiefdoms developed a redistributive

economy. The head-chief would receive surplus food from every farmer, and then he would either throw a feast for everybody, or else give it out again gradually in the months between harvests. Most chiefdoms have now evolved into the modern state. A twisted version of the chiefdom persists where there is a dictatorship. Anguillians can sometimes be fooled by our leaders, but we would not tolerate a dictatorship.

The final stage of development, the state, began to arise in about 3,700 BC in Mesopotamia. In West Africa the date was about 1,000 BCE, while in Mesoamerica it was about 300 BCE. Typically, the population of a state exceeds 50,000 persons. Initially, the paramount chief's location became the state's capital city. A city differs from a village in its monumental public works, palaces, and government buildings, accumulation of capital from tribute or taxes paid, and concentrations of people other than food-gatherers. Economic specialization is more extreme in the state. Food is produced by specialist groups of farmers, herdsman, fishermen, and gardeners, instead of by generalists as in bands and tribes.

Even small states have more complex bureaucracies than large chiefdoms. In a state, internal conflict resolution is formalized by the establishment of laws, a judiciary and police. With such a large population, the onlookers to a quarrel or fight are unlikely to be

related to both parties. They are, therefore, unlikely to mediate to prevent violence. Binding rules of conduct, or laws, were developed to settle disputes. In a state, the laws are written down. Many early states had literate societies. In both Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica writing was developed at about the same time as the formation of states. By contrast, no chiefdom developed writing. The state is organised on political and territorial lines. Bands, tribes and simple chiefdoms are defined by kinship, not politics or territory. State bureaucrats by contrast are selected at least partly on the basis of training and merit, not on the basis of kinship, as in a chiefdom.

Applying the above analysis, we note that in Anguilla almost everyone is related. A second-generation US- or UK-born of Anguillian ancestry is welcomed back as "*one of us*". The highest compliment that can be paid to one of us is to call us a son or daughter of the soil. An unrelated resident, no matter how long he or she has lived in Anguilla, will always be a foreigner. Kinship, not citizenship, is the determinant for acceptance into the Anguillian community and for appointment to and promotion in the public service.

The ability to read, write and be numerate is not considered an important achievement among the Anguillians of today. Outside of the several families that make up the social and political elite, few of our big chiefs

or even sub-chiefs will have completed a secondary education and be qualified to be described as literate. Few public servants below the level of permanent secretary can write a sentence without making a mistake or two of grammar, spelling or punctuation. A familiar jibe frequently made by one previous Chief Minister, only half-jokingly, was that *“No one in Anguilla reads.”* He also famously said that, *“If you want to keep something secret from an Anguillian, all that is required is for you to write it down and place the paper in front of him.”* A Bill may be debated for days in the House of Assembly despite few of the members having read the document. Anguillians are good at talking but weak at developing the skills of reading and writing. This is the behaviour typical of the members of a tribe but not of a modern state.

One by-product of this lack of literacy, as we have seen, is that laws and regulations, characteristic of a modern state, are regularly ignored by us even if strictly enforced on the foreigner living among us. So, building regulations and planning rules are applied selectively and mainly to foreigners. Planning laws and regulations are seldom imposed on Anguillians and never on the chiefs. Indeed if you were to request of the Building Board a copy of the 30-year Building Code they claim to apply you would notice that it is still marked *“Draft”*. It may not yet have been made law but it is binding on the foreigner

under penalty of having his land-holding licence taken away. These are the familiar characteristics of a tribe or band as compared to a modern state claiming to be governed by the rule of law.

Hunter-gathering is another characteristic shared by the band and the tribe. Until recently Anguillians at home depended on the remittances of bands of Anguillians pursuing hunter-gathering-type activities in the modern-day version of the forests and savannahs of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and Slough, Bucks, England for a few years prior to returning home. This activity still persists today in the Anguillian economy as an important source of domestic revenue.

A foreign hotelier in Anguilla some years ago discovered a member of his kitchen staff in the process of stealing a ham. He immediately dismissed her. His problem was that she lived in the same village as the then Chief Minister and was one of his constituents. This Chief lost no time in visiting the hotel and explaining to management that unless the employee was immediately reinstated there would be problems with renewing work-permits for the essential foreign staff needed to run a five-star hotel. The employee was soon back on the job, and, to general hilarity amongst many of us Anguillians, in receipt of a fulsome apology for the misunderstanding. We can say that in Anguilla today hunter-gathering

activities are carried out in the freezers and store-rooms of foreign owned restaurants and hotels.

Public procurement contracts in Anguilla in the recent past offered a rich field for foraging and hunter-gathering. A building contractor friend explained once how he got his contracts from a previous Tenders Board of Anguilla. It was simple, he said: he had a “*mole*” on the Board. Once he kept his mole happy he landed the contracts he wanted.

Some time ago one of government’s procurement officers retired from his position. As his successor told me his outgoing senior called him into his office on his final day and gave him some advice. “*Young man, this is your time to make it. You must remember that the cow has to feed where she is tied.*” With that instruction to follow the previous practice of adding a personal commission to every contract for public materials or services he offered ringing in his ears, he assumed office. Fortunately, he was cut from a different cloth than his predecessor and did not follow the advice. From these instances it is evident that Governor Benjamin Gumbs with his forged bills of lading and privateering letters of marque issued to his son in law has sunk his DNA deep into Anguillian genes.

We also see signs of the island being a chieftainship. Certainly, the size of the population at

10,000 to 15,000, depending on the time of the year the count is made, makes it difficult for us to aspire to be a successful state. In such a small community, the big-chief syndrome replaces the rule of law. Decisions of the Executive Council, the Courts and the Legislature are frustrated with impunity by the will of any strong chief. To obtain a licence obeisance must be paid and tribute laid at the feet of one or more sub-chiefs to personally placate him and acknowledge his authority. Gifts for licences and permits ensure their swift processing.

Until recent years, the work permit for every foreign hotel worker had to be personally approved by the Minister. Traditionally, in Anguilla such work permits have not been granted on the basis of any regulation, principle or policy, despite assurances to the contrary, but arbitrarily on the basis of the Minister's favour and personal whim. Once granted, the permit must be renewed annually through a solicitation procedure seemingly designed to debase and degrade the less-fortunate applicant. Rules and regulations are applied not on the basis of law but on the basis of kinship or personal instructions from an important chief. Certificates that should be issued as of right are sometimes inexplicably held up until word comes from above perhaps after a suitable gift has been made.

These sad tales of Anguillian contempt for the principles of public service should remind us of the story of Arthur Hodge and the powder money. Where he led we follow. They also demonstrate the power of the kith and kin relationship characteristic of a band or tribe, as compared to the code of ethics and attention to high standards of conduct required in a state.

For hundreds of years until the last seventy years Anguillians survived with none of the normal institutions of government. We banded together on the basis of kinship and friendship to ensure we survived any attempt to impose laws and regulations on our activities. This essentially lawless nature of Anguillian society can be dated back to the abandonment of the islanders by the colonial power. The piratical blood of Abraham Howell, George Leonard, Arthur Hodge and Benjamin Gumbs runs barely diluted in the veins and arteries of the Anguillians of today. The result is that we may fairly be described as a tribal society or chiefdom rather than a modern state.

On the other hand, hundreds of years of self-reliance have ensured that the modern Anguillian is noted for his and her resilience in the face of adversity. When recently Hurricane Irma did a billion dollars' worth of damage to private homes and public infrastructure, the shell-shocked men and women of Anguilla got up, dusted

themselves off, and within days began the herculean task of rebuilding their island. It took over a year and a great deal of money but our economy and our homes were rebuilt long before any of our neighbouring islands that had been hit with the same hurricane. The strong and healthy voluntarily assisted the elderly neighbour to repair and rebuild with no expectation of remuneration. Abraham Howell and George Leonard did not wait for assistance from outside to fight off the marauders of their day. Nor do today's Anguillians. That self-reliance, we may say, is a positive aspect of the genetic inheritance of the first generations of Anguillians passed down to the Anguillians of today.

The End