

Archaeological Excavations at the Wallblake Estate, Anguilla, 2017-18.

As I reported at the 2017 IACA Congress in St. Croix, I undertook a preliminary reconnaissance of former plantation sites on Anguilla in 2016 to assess their potential for historical archaeological research. Based on this research I decided that Wallblake House is the best-preserved plantation house on Anguilla, and the estate has the potential to address a wide range of research questions.

The history of Wallblake Estate begins with a deed from 1708 which states that in 1696 Deputy Governor Abraham Howell had patented the land that had previously been Valentine Blake's plantation. Howell died sometime after 1727 and his Valley Plantation was divided into four parts, one of which was the parcel previously owned by Valentine Blake. By 1750 the land was owned by John Ruan, but there is no indication that a plantation existed at this time. An inscription on the stone-built kitchen at Wallblake reads 1787, but the origin and meaning of the inscription are unknown. The building's style of construction, as well as the stone used, differ from other estate buildings and suggest that it may have been constructed at a different date. Wallblake House features in a well-known legend from the French invasion of Anguilla in November 1796 which resulted in the house being set on fire, so the estate must have been developed by then, if not before. Thomas Hodge Jr. owned the property by October 1797 when his son, Jonathan Harvey Hodge, was born at Wallblake House.

Thomas Hodge Jr. had died by 1819 when his widow, Margaret Hodge, listed 95 enslaved people: 25 men, 29 women, 19 boys and 22 girls on the estate. Her son, Jonathan Harvey Hodge, and her daughter, Mary Procter, inherited Wallblake in 1820. Jonathan Harvey Hodge gave his share of the Wallblake Estate to his sister at this time, but in 1826 after her husband died, he is recorded as repurchasing his half, or 80 acres, for £7,958. Jonathan Harvey Hodge died in 1833 and left the property to his widow, Deborah Susannah Hodge. At

emancipation on the 1st of August 1834, the Wallblake slave compensation claim was the largest for a single estate on the island of Anguilla: £5,565 for 135 enslaved people. Deborah Susannah Hodge owned Wallblake until 1872, when the 100-acre plantation was purchased by James Louis Lake, her son from her second marriage. After his death around 1900, his widow's family grew cotton at Wallblake, and upon her death the plantation passed to her daughter who bequeathed it to the Catholic Church in 1976.

Today the central complex of the estate consists of a wood-frame house built on a large stone cellar. There is an ancillary stone structure attached to the rear corner of the house. It might have been built prior to the main house and may be the oldest standing building on the site. A short distance further south is a small office building. The area behind the house is dominated by a large cistern surrounded by a raised water catchment. At the south corner of the catchment, almost straight behind the house, is the kitchen. The kitchen building has a large stone fireplace and chimney at the northwest end, where, on the exterior, is a large oven.

A wall runs northwest from the kitchen and leads to a modern cemetery. The southeastern part of the cemetery includes some wall foundations that may have been an animal pen, but now contains modern graves. The cemetery is bounded on the southeast and northeast by stone walls, and on the southwest by a modern fence. To the west of the cemetery and the wall to the kitchen, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century artifacts are scattered throughout the area. Based on the domestic nature of the artifacts, and their widespread distribution, in 2016 I hypothesized that this area was the location of the houses occupied by the enslaved laborers.

Northeast of the modern cemetery is a large, animal-powered sugar mill, which is approximately 40 meters northwest of the main house. The mill round is approximately 25

meters in diameter. The remains of a stone-built structure are located within five meters of the animal mill and the location would be consistent with a sugar processing house.

Archaeological survey, mapping and test excavations took place in 2017 and 2018. In total, 6 shovel tests and a 1 x 1-meter unit were excavated at the main house (Locus A), and 4 shovel tests and two 1 x 1-meter units at the kitchen building (Locus B). A 10 x 10-meter shovel test grid with 47 shovel tests was excavated over the proposed village location. Based upon the results of the shovel testing, six 1 x 1-meter excavation units and one 1 x 1.5-meter excavation unit were dug in the village area (Locus H).

The ceramics recovered from the excavation unit behind the main house include types that span the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The presence of a few sherds suggests a date between 1740-1775 at the earliest end of the range, which accords with the one pipe stem recovered. However, there were significant quantities of late creamware sherds that date between about 1775 and 1820, and in the deepest level, only pearlware that usually dates after 1780, was recovered. I think the older materials were curated and that the main house was constructed around 1780. The artifacts show occupation through to the mid-twentieth century, in accordance with the known history of the building. The artifacts and food remains indicate a certain amount of wealth, as would be expected.

The kitchen building has the 1787 date carved into the wall but the results from Unit 1 excavated in 2017 suggested that the kitchen may have been constructed as late as the 1840s or 1850s. In 2018, an additional 1 x 1-meter excavation unit (Unit 2) was dug behind the kitchen. Modern materials were mixed with historic artifacts in the upper 30 cm, but from 30 – 70 cm appeared to be relatively undisturbed. Significant quantities of pearlware that would date from 1780-1830 were recovered throughout all levels of Unit 2. The other ceramics span the late

eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning from approximately 1780. The bottom 20 cm contained no ceramics that would date after 1830. The ceramics seem to support the 1787 inscription for its initial construction. The glass also appears to support this, although the nails recovered still suggest a later construction date with cut nails that must date after 1790 in the lower levels.

The presence in both units of large quantities of porcelain, large ceramic serving vessels, as well as large amounts of glass, including cut glass, lamp glass, as well as bottles of many types and contents, all indicate the significant wealth of the estate owners. However, it is doubtful that they spent much time in the kitchen, and little in the way of personal items indicates their presence there. A porcelain doll's foot, one black glass bead, some small buttons and fasteners, a shell gaming piece or token, and a calcite crystal were the only personal items recovered, and these are as likely to have belonged to the enslaved people who worked in the kitchen. Sixty-two sherds of Afro-Caribbean wares were also found at the kitchen. Only two such sherds have been previously reported from Anguilla.

The plantation owners' and managers' diet was quite varied in terms of protein, although we know nothing of the vegetable portion of the diet. Sheep/goat were the most represented in the mammal bone recovered, with a few cattle and pig bones also present. West Indian Topshell was the most commonly represented shellfish, and the large size of many, as well as the numbers, stands in contrast to the village. Large amounts of fish bones were recovered, and, in some cases, they represented quite large fish, possibly groupers and large parrotfish. Bird bone, probably chicken, was also present in small quantities. The large quantity of animal and fish bone recovered from the two units at the kitchen compared to the seven units excavated in the

village, says a great deal about the quantities of food available to those living in the main house versus the more numerous residents of the village.

In the 2017 and 2018 field seasons, a grid of shovel tests was excavated over the village area as far southeast as the kitchen building. The shovel tests confirm that there is a deposit of artifacts extending over 90 meters from behind the kitchen northwest to the northern corner of the property, and 50 to 60 meters southwest to northeast. The deposit is composed of domestic refuse and virtually every shovel test recovered ceramics, glass and shell.

Six concentrations of artifacts were identified by the shovel tests, and three have been sampled with a total of six 1 x 1-meter units and one 1 x 1.5-meter unit (Unit 4/4A). There was very little modern material found, typically just a few sherds of glass from modern bottles on the surface and in level 1. Most of the glass recovered was olive or black hand-blown or dip-molded bottle glass sherds that generally date before the second half of the nineteenth century. It is unlikely that the villagers consumed the original contents of the bottles (wine and beer), but more likely were reusing them to store water and other home-made beverages.

The ceramics from the units were primarily pearlwares, dating between 1780 and 1830, although late creamwares with a similar date range were recovered in almost equal quantities. Some ceramics may again hint at an earlier occupation date, but they could also be curated vessels brought to the site in the 1780s. Only a few sherds of whiteware were recovered from the units, and all with early decorative styles suggesting a date range of 1820-1840. No later decorative styles were recovered, or later ceramic wares. The ceramics from the units suggest an occupation between 1780 and 1840.

Chinese porcelain was recovered in very small quantities, but the units generally indicate little access to expensive ceramics. A few sherds of redware and coarse earthenware were recovered from each of the units. These are kitchen wares used in food storage, preparation, and cooking. A total of 15 sherds of Afro-Caribbean ware were also recovered, some from each of the units, and this was also typically used in cooking. The units also featured fragments of cast-iron cooking pots, and there is an inverse relationship between their frequency and the frequency of ceramic cook wares, perhaps reflecting differences in household preferences.

The food remains are dominated by West Indian Topshell, and only few Queen Conch shell fragments were found in each of the units. The few other shell fragments recovered came from small species that would not have contributed significantly to the diet, just a little variety or flavor. A small number of fish and sheep/goat bones were recovered.

Tobacco pipe fragments were found in all of the units, but the majority were pipe bowl fragments that could not be dated. One bowl fragment from Unit 4 had the letters "TD" stamped on it which has been correlated with a London pipe maker between the mid-1750s until about 1780. The tobacco pipe stems recovered from the units had bore diameters that might indicate an earlier occupation date, but they could also be contemporary with the ceramics. The absence of pipe stems dating between 1750 -1800 which would correlate with the TD pipe bowl, and the ceramics, is surprising, especially given their presence at the kitchen. Regardless, smoking was clearly a popular activity in the village as tobacco pipe fragments were found in all the units.

Very few personal items were recovered from the units in the village. Only 2 beads were recovered and given their scarcity, they must have been highly prized items. Buttons are frequently recovered from estate villages, but again there were very few from the village at

Wallblake. Unit 6 had a plain, flat disc copper alloy button. It had been attached by a metal loop on the back and probably came from a man's jacket. A small, spherical, black glass button was recovered in Unit 4A. The sphere does not have a hole through it, but instead it had a wire shank to attach it to the cloth.

A notable artifact from Unit 4A was a large piece of a bayonet. The blade of the bayonet had a triangular cross section, and while the shank is intact, the socket is almost entirely rusted away. Nonetheless, the bayonet has the distinguishing characteristics of the one used on the Brown Bess and India Pattern muskets that were used by the British from 1722 to 1838. It seems unlikely that it was being used for its original purpose when lost or discarded, and there is no sign of the missing section of the blade. It would, however, have made a useful digging tool, being about the size of a small trowel.

Another artifact relating to activities was a lump of lead from casting in Unit 4. However, as no other lead objects were recovered from the unit we can only speculate as to what was being made. An irregular sheet of lead was also recovered from Unit 1, and it seems lead working was an occasional activity in the village. There were relatively few other metal artifacts recovered from the units in the village, and most of them were fragments of cast iron cooking pots.

There was very little evidence for the structures themselves. Very few nails were recovered, and all but one were hand wrought. The largest number was 20 nail fragments from Unit 4, and 21 from Unit 4A. While this seems a large number compared to the other units in the village, it is low for a wood frame structure. A wattle and thatch structure that used limited wood-frame construction, perhaps just for doors or windows is indicated. The only structural

feature was also found in Units 4 and 4A. At 26 cm below surface, an ashy feature was observed. Excavation revealed it to be an ashy posthole extending to a depth of 46 cm into a hole in the bedrock. A large wrought spike was recovered from the ashy fill. The recovery of only 4 brick and 8 mortar fragments from these units may suggest that a nearby hearth used some discarded bricks, but there is nothing to indicate that there was any brick in the structure. The same can be said from the other units in the village, with very small quantities of brick, mortar and plaster fragments being recovered, suggesting that wattle and thatch structures were the norm.

The ashy post hole and the number of burnt artifacts in Units 4 and 4A suggest that the structure burned. The presence of at least one burnt whiteware sherd suggests that this took place after 1820. There may be others, but the burning prevented accurate ware-type identifications for a number of sherds. The absence of ceramic types common in the mid-nineteenth century indicates that it took place before that time. It is tempting to suggest that the structure burned when the village was abandoned, at or shortly after emancipation in 1834.

It appears that the materials excavated at the main house and kitchen were first deposited around 1780 and show occupation through the early-mid twentieth century, in accordance with the known history of the estate. The artifacts and food remains indicate a certain amount of wealth as would be expected.

In contrast, the area occupied by the village has extensive deposits containing no historic materials that date later than about 1840, which suggests that the village was abandoned after emancipation in 1834. Was this because the enslavers evicted the formerly enslaved people, or, as seems more likely, the formerly enslaved people chose to leave and take up residence on lands

abandoned by the planters who left Anguilla after emancipation? At least one house in the village appears to have burned down around the same time, was it deliberate or accidental?

Overall the project has produced some exciting results, raised new questions to be answered in future field seasons, and demonstrates the significant archaeological potential that exists on the Wallblake property.