

CHAPTER 11

COTTON AND SALT

What sort of persons were the early settlers of Anguilla? What attractions made desperate men abandon the wealthier, if overcrowded, colonies of St Kitts, Barbados and Nevis and prefer this thirty-five square mile, barren, drought-ridden outpost of empire? Were there any advantages that encouraged some of them to opt for Anguilla as an alternative to the new and land-rich settlements in Virginia and Maryland? The answers must be as varied as the different types of persons that arrived to try to make a living here. There can be no one clear-cut explanation. Due to the absence of written records left by our ancestors from those early days, we are left to infer and to speculate. We ask ourselves, what were they doing in Anguilla? What, other than subsistence agriculture, the breeding of small stock for meat and milk and export, and fishing, were they occupying themselves with?

Besides privateering, trading, and smuggling in their sloops between the islands, the main commercial occupations on land were the growing of tobacco and cotton, the reaping of salt, and the raising of food crops and cattle, ie, goats and, in the wetter years, sheep and cows. Tobacco and cotton were small-planter cash crops

that survived in Anguilla long after they were replaced in the larger islands by sugar. It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that a very few Anguillian farmers accumulated sufficient capital to invest in the mills and coppers and slaves necessary at that time to make sugar.¹ Alternating cycles of drought and rain last in the Leeward Islands for up to forty years.² Those islands with mountains have the opportunity to attract rain at least during the rainy seasons. In a flat island such as Anguilla is, during the periods of drought little would live but the goats. It is not for nothing that the children's geography textbooks say dismissively about Anguilla's climate, "*Anguilla participates in passing Atlantic weather systems.*" The keeping of sheep and cows, and the cultivation of cash crops, were limited to the periods when there was enough rainfall to permit their survival.

Tobacco was originally grown in Anguilla by the Amerindians. The industry in all the islands was taken over by the newcomers. It seemed to be an ideal small-farmer cash crop. Apart from its small bulk and its ability when dried to survive the long voyage across the Atlantic, tobacco possessed other advantages to recommend it. Its cultivation could be undertaken on a small scale. It did not need the outlay of much capital. The settlers could grow their crop on a comparatively small area of land.

¹ See Chapter 18: Sugar Arrives.

² The Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation.

They needed only a few helpers, perhaps the members of the family.

West Indian tobacco competed in England unfavourably with Virginia tobacco. It paid a higher duty and fetched a lower price. West Indian tobacco was less mild and less palatable than that of Virginia. Besides, Virginia enjoyed the advantage of being able to produce tobacco in great bulk from a large area of land. Merchants found it more convenient to deal with Virginia. Her supplies came near to meeting the demand of the English market. There was less risk than trading with the scattered islands of the West Indies.

Already, by the year 1639, the price of tobacco on the London market dropped alarmingly. Barbados and the other English islands looked for other crops. The first choice was cotton. In Barbados, this was soon replaced by sugar cane. In Anguilla, tobacco cultivation lasted longer, probably for want of any alternative. The last reference to tobacco being grown in Anguilla in the Colonial Office papers is an unattributed memorandum probably prepared by Under-Secretary Joseph Williamson in 1667.³ He begins with the words, "*From Major Scott's mouth . . .*"⁴ Then, he notes that salt was made on Anguilla and tobacco was grown there.

³ CO.1/21, No 175, folio 348: Unattributed memorandum.

⁴ For Major Scott see Chapter 4: [The First Generation](#).

Subsistence farming was the major effort of many so-called planters. Anguillians then as now grew their food crops in numerous 'bottoms'. The origin of the word is curious. Very early, even before the first arrivals came from St Kitts to Anguilla, the Dutch settled in several nearby islands, namely, St Maarten, Saba, and St Eustatius. They are responsible for naming the relatively stone-free 'bottoms' in all these islands that they cultivated for food crops. This word 'bottom' is one of the few relics that remain of the early Dutch influence on Anguilla. They are so called, according to the Dutch historian of the Netherlands Antilles, Dr Hartog, from the old Zeeland word 'botte', meaning 'bowl'.⁵ The English transformed the strange Zeeland word to the more familiar 'bottom'. So, the main town on the neighbouring Dutch island of Saba sits at the top of the volcano in its eroded bowl-shaped crater and is incongruously named 'The Bottom'.

There are few other remaining signs of Dutch influence on Anguilla. Statia Valley Estate may be named after the early Dutch settlers who moved there after the English captured the islands of St Eustatius (Statia) and Saba in the English-Dutch wars of 1665-1667 and 1672-1674. The present familiar Anguillian surname Hazell is Dutch in origin. It appeared in Saba, according to Dr

⁵ Dr J Hartog, History of Saba (1975).

Hartog, as early as 1677. In the same year, the name Van der Poll also appeared in Saba. This was later anglicised in Anguilla to Vanterpool. In Saba, the name Zeegars also appeared at an early date. This later became Sagars or Zagers.⁶ These were all well-known names in Anguilla in later years.

In Anguilla, within a few years cotton replaced tobacco as the planters' cash crop, certainly within the first generation of settlers. It proved to be more successful than tobacco ever was. Cotton too was originally grown on Anguilla by the Amerindians. Cotton was in some ways, like tobacco, an ideal cash crop for the settlers. It too required little capital outlay. It could be reaped by the settler and his family with a few helpers. It did not spoil once kept dry. Cotton continued as the main cash crop of the islanders until the middle of the eighteenth century, a run of nearly a hundred years. But it was never very profitable since Europe received adequate supplies from elsewhere.

⁶ Ralph Hodge, then the Accountant General in the Government of Anguilla, told me that when as a schoolboy he assisted an English mapping team in the 1960s, it was he who provided the unusual spelling to the surveyors who asked him how Zagers' land at South Valley was spelled. There was no written document available in Anguilla at that time that provided any clue to the spelling. He suggested that it must be 'Sachassas'. His odd spelling stuck.



1. *Gossypium* 'anguillense' growing wild at Corito in Anguilla
(by the author).

The demand for cotton was comparatively small. Wool was more popular in Europe for the manufacture of clothing. The need for cotton in Europe did not increase substantially until the late eighteenth century when the Industrial Revolution produced the automated ginning and spinning mills that made it more economic than wool.



2. Close-up of a cotton boll of *Gossypium* 'anguillense' growing at Corito in Anguilla (by the author).

The strain of cotton that is native to Anguilla possesses an unusually long strand or staple. It was from Anguilla that cotton seed was exported in the eighteenth century to the Bahamas. There, its superior quality was first recognized. After the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the British government provided loyalists and partisans of Great Britain homes and land in the Bahamas. An 1835 anonymously written article in The Farmer's Register explains how the new settlers in the Bahamas procured cotton seed

from Anguilla.⁷ In 1785 they successfully introduced the culture of cotton on several of the Bahama Islands, particularly on Long island and Exuma. The anonymous author relates how in the winter of 1785 his Georgia cotton farmer father received a bag of cotton seed from Col Roger Kellsall, then a planter on Exuma. Several other Georgian cotton planters received at the same time cotton seed from their old associates or friends now exiled to the Bahamas. Among the planters who received cotton seed was Josiah Tattnall of Savannah, from his father then the Surveyor General of the Bahamas islands. The Anguilla cotton seed was eventually found to flourish best in the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, from which islands that strain of cotton now takes its name. From there, its cultivation spread to the coast of South Carolina, and thence to Alabama and Mississippi, thereby beginning the cotton belt in the United States.

The Vick family, after whom the city of Vicksburg in Mississippi is named, took up planting the Anguilla cotton seed which they got from South Carolina. They named their Mississippi cotton farm 'the Anguilla Plantation'. The

⁷ Cotton: Its Introduction and Progress of its Culture in the United States, from the Southern Planter. In **Edmund Ruffin, ed** - The Farmer's Register, A Monthly Publication Devoted to the Improvement of the Practice and Support of the Interests of Agriculture. (Shellbanks, Va: Published by the proprietor, 1835) Volume 2, pages 354-355.

railroad was later given a right of way through the plantation on condition that they named the depot, which they planned to build at the nearby town of McKinneyville, 'Anguilla'. The town for a while carried both names, McKinneyville and Anguilla. To avoid the resulting confusion, the US Postal Department agreed to the change of name to Anguilla. The town of Anguilla, Mississippi, has now sprawled out into the area that used to be the Anguilla Plantation (see illus 3).⁸ Anguilla Cotton is not now cultivated in Anguilla for export but grows wild throughout the island. It lives for several years and can grow into a tree some 20 feet high. The botanical name for Sea Island cotton is *Gossypium barbadense*, but as Dr Jones ruefully remarked in his Annals of Anguilla, it ought properly to be *Gossypium anguillense*.



⁸ Personal correspondence in 1996 with Billy C Fields, Tom Greer, and Henry Kline of Anguilla, Mississippi, following a visit of a scout troupe from their town to take part in a scouting jamboree organised by the scouts of Anguilla.

3. Map of the city of Anguilla, Mississippi

There are several salt ponds in Anguilla. These were created millennia ago when coves and bays became cut off from the sea by sand bars forming across their mouths. As with similar sea-level salt ponds in other islands, they never completely dry out. Their bottoms are a few inches below the level of the nearby sea. As the brine becomes concentrated by evaporation, the salt precipitates out on the bottom of the pond. It forms a crust on the bed a few inches below the surface of the pond (see illus 4). This underwater salt deposit was reaped by the workers bending over, breaking off and lifting bits of the slab of salt. These were thrown into the small salt barges, or 'flats', floating alongside the pickers. It was back-breaking work.

Several ponds in Anguilla were originally picked in this way. The more important salt works were at the Road, Long Path, Rendezvous, Cove, Maundays Bay, Savannah Bay and West End Ponds. Most were abandoned years ago. Until recently, when Hurricane Klaus in 1984 forced Anguilla's principal market in Trinidad to seek salt elsewhere, only the Road Salt Pond and the West End Salt Pond produced salt for export.

The Dutch were responsible for developing the salt industry of the West Indies.⁹ Since the sixteenth century, they were the major traders in salt in Europe. Their principal source was the salt flats of Portugal. They used large quantities of it for curing their herring. Salt herring was and still is an important Dutch industry, both for local use and for export. Spain was earnestly Roman Catholic, while the Netherlands became adamantly Protestant. In 1580, Portugal came under Spanish rule. The Protestant Dutch were already at war with Roman Catholic Spain. The Spanish barred their entry to the Portuguese salt flats. Dutch salt traders were forced to look elsewhere for supplies. This was one reason the Dutch originally came to the Caribbean. They were far more interested in reaping salt, and in trading with the English, French, and Spanish settlements, than in planting cash crops. Dutch ships would sail to the West Indies filled with trading goods and return to the Netherlands filled with salt. That explains why they were content to occupy islands that were all unsuitable for agriculture. St Eustatius (Statia), Saba, St Maarten, Curacao, Aruba, and Bonaire were notable principally for their salt ponds. These islands were also strategically placed for trade with their neighbours. Neither the French nor

⁹ Dr J Hartog, A Short History of Bonaire (1975) p.14.

the English settlers were interested in trade in dry goods. This was a niche the Dutch were happy to fill.



4. The Road Salt Pond, July 2009, with tufts of salt deposits visible (by the author).

The industry was carried on in Anguilla from the earliest days of settlement. As we have seen earlier, in 1624 Anguilla was described by a Dutch sea captain as having “*no fresh water, but a salt pan with enough salt for two to three ships a year.*”¹⁰ This refers to the Road Salt Pond, the most productive of all the salt works in Anguilla. The early references that we find in the records give us an indication of how the salt industry was operated in

¹⁰ Chapter 3: [The First Settlers and the Carib Raid.](#)

Anguilla. Originally, the ponds were communal property. Each man owned only the salt that he reaped. He heaped it up under palm-frond shelters on the beach. There he stored it, awaiting ships that would visit the island for the sole purpose of purchasing it, since there was little else of value that Anguilla produced.

There are few references in the Archives to this ancient salt industry. Vere Langford Oliver records a grant of the Road Salt Pond made by Governor Daniel Parke in 1708 to one John Brady (see illus 5).¹¹ Brady appears to have done nothing with his prize. He promptly transferred the pond to one Martin French of Antigua and Montserrat. What use Martin French made of it is not recorded. His name does not reappear in the Anguilla records.

John Brady, Esq., was granted salt ponds in Anguilla 24 Jan. 1708 by Governor Parke, which he assigned to Martin French 21 April 1709.

5. Extract from VL Oliver, History of Antigua, p.275.

Another early reference is met in 1769 when Jehabed Clark swore a formal protest. A 'protest' is a notarized report of loss or damage to a ship or its cargo for insurance and other purposes. Clark's protest relates to the sinking of his brigantine Elizabeth. From this document, it appears that the Elizabeth was wrecked on Sandy Island. This is the name of a small sandy shoal

¹¹ Vere Langford Oliver, History of Antigua, (3 vols, 1894-1897) p.275.

enclosed by a little reef just outside of Road Bay in Anguilla. The protest reads as follows,¹²

Anguilla. I, John Payne, Deputy Secretary and Notary Public for the Island aforesaid, do by this Public Instrument of Writing make known to all people to whom the same may or shall come that on this twenty ninth day of April one thousand seven hundred and sixty nine, Jehabed Clark, Master, David Cullam, Mate, and Benjamin Welch, Mariner of and belonging to the late Brigantine Elizabeth owned at Piscataga [. . .] personally appeared before me and being duly examined and sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God deposeth and says that

On Sunday the 23rd day of this instant sailed from the island of Grenada bound for this island aforesaid for a load of salt; on the 28th day instant turning up that shore, there being a small sandy key off the harbour being enclosed with a parcel of shoals and shallow ground and not being acquainted, the Brigantine miss-stayed and sailed on the reef, who immediately bilged and found it was impossible to get her off, in a short time after some people from this island came to our assistance and saved all they could having on board four casks of coffee, one hogshead of rum and two bales of cotton.

Wherefore, I the said John Payne, Deputy Secretary and Notary Public, do at the special instance and request of the said Jehabed Clark, David Cullam and Benjamin Welsh, master mate and mariner of the said Brigantine Elizabeth, and to and for the benefit and advantage of all and every the person or persons that now are or shall or may be any ways interested in or entitled to either said Brigantine Elizabeth and her

¹² Anguilla Archives: Jehabed Clarke's 1769 Protest.

lading on board or any part thereof, protest against the vessel's mis-staying and all accidents herein mentioned and for and in respect of all costs, charges, losses, damages and expenses whatsoever that already have or at anytime hereafter shall or may happen to be sustained for touching and concerning the aforesaid Brigantine Elizabeth and her lading being run on shore or any ways however suffered.

In Faith and Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and date first above written.

(sd) Jehabed Clark

(sd) Benjamin Welch

(sd) David Cullam

(sd) John Payne

Notary Public and Deputy Secretary

In his protest, Clark relates that on 28 March 1769, he and his crew were on their way to Anguilla from Grenada for a load of salt. Their brigantine Elizabeth was registered at Piscataga (now Portsmouth) in the colony of New Hampshire. The Elizabeth's trade in salt in the West Indies was lawful under the Navigation Acts, as New Hampshire was a British colony. The brig rounded the little islet of Anguillita at the western tip of Anguilla. It sailed eastwards up the northern coast of Anguilla. It was heading to Road Bay to collect the required salt. The crew was not acquainted with Road Bay. Clark accidentally sailed his brig onto the reef at Sandy Island. There, it immediately bilged and took in water. Shortly after, people arrived from Sandy Ground Village. They

saved all they could of his ship's simple cargo. This amounted to four casks of coffee, one hogshead of rum and two bales of cotton. Of interest is the additional fact that he seems to have employed an Anguillian, Benjamin Welch, among his crew.

Not all the ponds in Anguilla are salt ponds. There are also three brackish-water ponds situated away from the coast. These are Cauls Pond, Bad Cox Pond and East End Pond. They each have a limestone outcrop at the water's edge on the northern, more elevated shore. Fresh-water springs feed into the ponds from fissures in the limestone outcrops. Besides the Fountain Cavern and the several Indian Wells, these springs were the only sources of fresh, if brackish, water on the island available to the settlers. There are no rivers flowing on the island, even in the wettest years.¹³

The springs supplying the three ponds are not the only source of potable water. There are in all fourteen springs in the island. Most of them are saline. The degree of salinity depends to a large extent on the amount of rain falling in that period. The settlers found water, too, in the wells that the Amerindians left behind. The settlers eventually dug some twenty-five others scattered over the island.

¹³ Sir William Halcrow & Partners, Water Resources of St Kitts, Nevis & Anguilla (1964) p.18.

A few comments on the vegetation of the island at the time of the earliest arrivals may be useful. When the island was first settled by the Europeans and Africans, the surface was covered in considerably more soil and vegetation than there is today. Once the forest cover was removed for agriculture, the topsoil began to erode down into the 'bottoms' or out to sea. Only low-lying scrub can now grow on the higher ridges. The lack of tall trees is unfortunate. Forests, besides conserving the soil cover, encouraged more rain to fall from passing clouds than falls today. The three inland ponds were fresher than they are today. No trace of alligator remains were ever found around any of these ponds, as suggested by de Rochefort. If, as was likely, the island was wetter than it now is, we can well understand that tobacco and corn were easily raised, and that the cattle multiplied very fast as he wrote.

The trees were cut down very early. Land needed to be cleared for cultivation. There were also valuable dyewoods to be cut for export to England. Dyewood is today a forgotten, almost unknown product. At one time, fortunes were made in the Caribbean by merchants who traded in it. Dyewood used to be called by a variety of names. The old Portuguese word 'brazil' is the source of the English word brazen. 'Brazil wood' was one of the names for dyewood, a reference to its ruddy colour.

Another was 'campeachy wood.' This name comes from the Gulf of Campeche in Mexico, where it grew profusely. Near to the Gulf of Campeche was the territory where woodcutters would eventually establish the British colony of Belize, a rich source of logwood and brazil-wood. Depending on which salts it was mixed with, campeachy could produce a red, blue or black dye. Logwood produced a red dye when processed in an acidic medium, and blue in an alkali solution. Nicaragua or peach-wood, also called by the Dutch 'stockfish-wood', produced an inferior red dye. All these dyes were obtained from the wood by rasping or grinding it fine, and then boiling it. These dyewood trees grew on Anguilla in the seventeenth century, as they did on all the neighbouring islands.

Old Fustic or Dyers' Mulberry is made from the heartwood of the member of the mulberry family originally found in the forests of Brazil and the West Indies. This tree is also known as *Chlorophora* or *Morus tinctoria* in the older texts. It survives in forested valleys in Anguilla such as the Katouche Valley. It was used to produce the khaki colour much favoured among army and school uniforms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Wood was also useful as fuel. Until the 1970s, Anguillian trees were also cut down to make charcoal, then the staple fuel available to the islanders. If you turned your back for a moment on your orange or soursop

tree, you might find it cut down and removed. All the primeval trees were soon destroyed by this combination of bad husbandry and the need for fuel. The first cylinders of propane gas for cooking began to be imported as recently as the early 1970's. At first these cylinders were inconvenient as, until the early 1990's, it was not possible to refill empty gas bottles locally. They had to be shipped to Puerto Rico for refilling. Today, charcoal is a luxury fuel for barbecues, and the trees have begun to recover.

There was also a ready market among the planters of the bigger, sugar cane-growing islands for building timber. West Indian mahogany was much in demand from the seventeenth century for furniture and panelling in the homes of the wealthy in England. The largest trees on Anguilla were soon cut down and exported. Anguillian sloops began roaming the Virgin Islands of St Croix, St Thomas, Tortola and Crab Island in search of timber for the markets of the Caribbean and Europe. The mahogany trees that presently dot the island are not true West Indian mahogany. They are the smaller Honduran mahogany, imported into Anguilla and others of the West Indies by the Imperial Department of Tropical Agriculture in the early decades of the twentieth century. This was the period when the colonial authorities tried to help the dryer and poorer islands diversify their agricultural

industries by importing from Honduras new varieties of sisal for rope making, lumber for construction, paw-paw for the then new papain or meat tenderiser industry, and shade trees such as the Saman (*albiza saman*) for the cattle industry.

The Anguillians in their sloops continued throughout our period to trade in dyewood and building timber from one end of the Caribbean to the other. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, there are several references in the Colonial Office records to this Anguilla trade. One such is a 1719 dispatch by George Lillington of Barbados, shortly after the Anguillian settlement on Crab Island was destroyed.¹⁴ He reported that the Spaniards burned a large quantity of dyewood that the settlers collected before the destruction of the settlement. The dye-wood industry was eventually replaced by the cochineal beetle of Mexico, and it fades from the scene.¹⁵

Climatically, Anguilla is described by geographers as a seasonal forest island. In this it resembles Antigua, Barbados, St Barts, Statia and St Martin. In all these islands, long-lasting changes have taken place in the natural vegetation and wildlife. There is presently more rain falling in Anguilla than would fall in a true desert. Yet parched barrenness generally pervades the island, save

¹⁴ CO.28/15, No 56, folio 358: Lillington to the Committee on 31 October 1719.

¹⁵ The cochineal beetle was in its turn made obsolete in the 1850s by the discovery of synthetic aniline dyes.

for exceptional years of heavy rainfall.¹⁶ It is the livestock that reduced Anguilla to the scrubby state that it is in since the eighteenth century. Goats played the most important role here. They denuded the land. Where they roam, all is picked bare. Much of the soil has, as a result, eroded away. Until the goat is recognized as the dangerous vermin it is and completely banned from the island, it will always be difficult to grow anything successfully in Anguilla.

All these ancient industries are now closed. The occasional tobacco plant may survive in someone's grandfather's hedge. Sea Island cotton shrubs are hardy plants and grow wild all over the island. The birds scatter their seeds and ensure their survival while using the lint to make their nests. A few surviving grandmothers can recount stories of the hardships involved in picking salt. Sugar cane grows in a few back gardens, for the enjoyment of the children, but will flourish only if it is watered from time to time. The best agricultural lands are planted over now with houses, offices and hotels. No longer is the young Anguillian boy presented at his seventh birthday with a goat kid to look after, so that when it is grown, he can sell it for pocket money. Instead, both he and his sister have the latest electronic gadgets and toys to play with. The Anguillians of the twenty-first

¹⁶ C and A Carlozzi, Conservation and Caribbean Regional Progress (1968) p.84.

century find more productive crops to reap than their ancestors ever enjoyed. Some of these new crops, such as tourism, even flourish in long periods of drought.