

A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF ANGUILLA FROM ITS PRE-COLUMBIAN PAST TO THE PRESENT DAY¹

The Pre-Columbian Period

When the first English settlers arrived in Anguilla in 1650, there is no mention of Amerindians being met on the island. These early inhabitants had long since died out. There is plenty of evidence that they once occupied the island. Fragments of their pottery are found at sites around the island. Middens, ancient rubbish heaps of broken conch shells, pottery and other discarded objects, are occasionally revealed on or near the beach, as at Sandy Ground, Rendezvous Bay, Shoal Bay and Island Harbour. The three oldest wells on the island, at The Valley, the Quarter and Statia Valley, date from the time of the Amerindians. The Valley well was used for drawing water until recently. During much of the twentieth century, an electrically operated pump brought the water to the surface and distributed it through the government's main supply system. The Amerindians that lived at Sandy Ground made use of the spring under North Hill, and their artefacts have been recovered from that area.

The Amerindians called the island Malliouhana, the meaning of which is lost. Some thought it might mean "arrow", a reference to the long, narrow shape of the

¹ A presentation to the Anguilla National Youth Council in February 2007 based in large part on the Introduction to the Report of the Constitutional and Electoral Reform Commission, 2006.

island.² My preferred theory is based on Jill Tattersall's analysis of the word lists and dictionaries of aboriginal languages prepared by the early missionaries. The name more likely means The Ritual Strengthening Place of the Men of my Tribe. This might be a reference to be important ceremonial function of the Fountain Cavern at Shoal Bay. This ritual cavern is far too elaborate to have served only the inhabitants of the island. It was probably a ceremonial site for the puberty ritual of the young men from several of the islands around.

Their crops consisted of maize and bulbous plants such as potatoes and cassava. They cultivated tobacco and smoked it in pipes, becoming quite intoxicated from smoking the dried leaves by inserting forked pipes through their nostrils. They also grew cotton, weaving it into 'hamacas' to sleep in, nets, and small aprons or loin cloths. Some of them went naked or clothed themselves with leaves. They protected their bodies from the sun by staining their skins with the dye they called 'roucou'. Their shelters were mere huts thatched with palm leaves. The chieftains, or 'Caciques', wore head-dresses of feathers, occasionally decorated with little pieces of gold and bands of coloured beads and bones. Their religion was a form of nature-worship and their gods, called 'zemis', were represented in the form of heads of lizards,

² Burdon, A Handbook of St Kitts-Nevis, quoting Pere Breton.

snakes or bats made from chalk or baked earth or carved on rocks. They built large canoes of the silk cotton tree and cedar, capable of holding up to one hundred men.

West Indian school children have traditionally³ been taught that the Arawaks occupied the islands of the Greater Antilles: Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. The Caribs were said to have been far less civilized than the Arawaks, and they lived on the southern islands of the Lesser Antilles. The Arawaks were supposedly docile farmers and fishermen. The Caribs were supposedly more warlike and cannibalistic. A form of ritual cannibalism did exist among the Amerindians of the West Indies. This ritual involved chopping up a dead or dying enemy and eating cooked parts of him. The process was intended to be an insult to the dead enemy. They believed it prevented his spirit from taking any kind of revenge once he was dead. If the eyes, tongue, or muscles from the arms and legs were chewed up, the spirit of the dead man would be handicapped from ever seeing, talking and shooting again. It was a waste to simply kill a captured enemy outright. If he were tortured to death and his dying screams of pain, his last breath, inhaled by the victors, the strength of his spirit could be absorbed and used to strengthen the victors' own spirits. The greater the torture, and the more painful the death,

³ See for example: Daniel, West Indian Histories, Vol. 1, p. 35; Parry and Sherlock, Short History of the West Indies, p. 3; Garcia, History of the West Indies, p. 18; Blume, The Caribbean Islands, p. 55.

the greater the strength of the spirit that could be inhaled and absorbed. Hence, their reputation for sitting around their tortured male victims, apparently enjoying watching them die. There was no similar advantage in torturing women or children, and there are no accounts of this activity. That was part of their religion.⁴

By the time of the arrival of the English on Anguilla, the Amerindians had all died out. The cruelty of the Spanish Roman Catholic Conquistadors towards the aboriginal Amerindians, as an explanation for their rapid disappearance from the islands, is an Anglo-Saxon Protestant myth. The real reason is now known to have been their fatal susceptibility to such minor common European diseases as small pox, measles, and the common cold. They had no inherited immunity to these foreign diseases. Far more of them died from these infections than from the guns and swords of the Spaniards.

Settlement

The modern history of Anguilla begins in the year 1650. The first group of English settlers arrived from St Kitts. It was an unauthorised colony. There was no official

⁴ Anthropologists call the practice of contemptuously eating a part of the enemy “exo-cannibalism”. It is to be compared with “endo-cannibalism”. The latter occurs when the fat or some other part of the body of the deceased is lovingly consumed by the grieving relatives. This is believed to preserve the spiritual essence of the loved one within the tribe and family. That is particularly important in the case of a great chief or other dignitary. The belief is not limited to the South American Amerindians. It has been a recurring concept through human civilization. We see traces of it in the Christian ritual of the Eucharist.

encouragement. By contrast, the settlement of St Christopher in 1623, Nevis in 1628, Antigua in 1632, and Montserrat in 1633, had all been covered by commissions from either the King or the Governor-in-Chief. But, not Anguilla. It was unauthorized, and it remained an unwanted step-child for most of its history, right up to just a few years ago.

The early colony was considered by the Governors-in-Chief to be an unmitigated nuisance. It never served any useful imperial purpose. It exported no crops or other primary product to Britain to contribute to the metropole's economy. It did not serve any strategic purpose. It was from the earliest times a forsaken place. The names of the first settlers are lost. They were probably time-out indentured servants, runaway slaves and black freedmen, pirates and buccaneers settling down under one of the many Acts of Amnesty of the period, and desperate small-farmers from other islands, all hungry for land of any sort.

First Invasion

Despite the poverty of the islanders, the French in St Martin mounted the first invasion in the year 1666. The Sieur Des Roses with 300 men took the island and carried back to St Martin prisoners and cannon.⁵ The island's defences were built back up and a few cannon supplied, but the poverty of the island precluded any real

⁵ Pere du Tertre.

effort on the part of the colonial authorities to protect the islanders from any future attack.

Abraham Howell

The following year, 1667, the Anguillians took matters into their own hands. They elected a local settler, Abraham Howell, as their deputy governor. Unlike in the other islands, neither he nor any other later deputy governor of Anguilla was ever given any patent or official document of appointment. The Anguillians were uniquely permitted to nominate their own deputy governor right up to the day in 1825 when the island was absorbed into St Kitts. All of Anguilla's governors, until the first British Governor was appointed in 1982, were "unofficial" lieutenant-governors.

Lack of Proper Government.

The failure of the colonial authorities to provide for the proper government of Anguilla was not a matter for self-congratulation. It is evidence of the poverty of, and lack of official interest in, the island. Its settlers were considered of little account. Antigua was the centre of government for the Leeward Islands. London was the centre of government of the metropolitan power. Neither was bothered to make any arrangement during the period of nearly 175 years for its proper administration. The consequence has been a simmering sense in Anguilla of abandonment by all outside authorities. There exists in the people a deep-seated awareness of the need for self-

reliance. This is a characteristic of the Anguillian political psyche to this day. Evidence of Anguilla's abandonment by the authorities abounds in the records.

Henry Lord Willoughby and his son and successor William governed the West Indies from Barbados before the Leeward Islands got its own governor. Neither ever visited Anguilla. This was a trend that was to be followed by successive Governors-in-Chief for the next 200 years. Governor Willoughby knew about Anguilla. In the year 1668, he reported back to London on the state of the island. He described it as being occupied "by some two or three hundred people who had fled there in time of war". At that period the people, he reported, made only tobacco, and were very poor. He opined that, "*T'is not worth keeping.*"⁶

Leeward Islands Government

In 1670, shortly after the Treaty of Breda, the Leeward Islands government was separated from Barbados. The Leeward Islands became a separate colony with its own Governor. This constitutional change was not to be of any benefit or advantage to the Anguillians. Once war returned to the West Indies in 1672, the government of the Leeward Islands decided that the island was not worth defending. The few cannon placed on Anguilla for defence in 1666 were removed to St Kitts. The island

⁶ Governor Willoughby, CO1/23, No 103, folio 212.

was once more left without the means to defend itself. In 1688, the French landed a party of Wild Irish on Anguilla, who “*treated the defenceless inhabitants more barbarously than any of the French pirates who had attacked them before*”.⁷ If the Anguillians had been left their cannon, we can be sure that the Wild Irish would have had a hot reception. But then we would have been deprived of many of the good folk of Island Harbour: the Ruans, Harrigans, and Bryans.

Throughout the Seventeenth Century, Anguilla merits very few dispatches or reports of her own from the Governor-in-Chief back to London. She crops up more often as a mere footnote in a report on conditions in the Leeward Islands generally. A typical example is found in a 1676 report when the deputy governor of Antigua describes Anguilla in the terse words, “*a barren, rocky island, ill-settled by the English, and of small consequence . . .*”⁸

That same year, the Governor-in-Chief advised London that while Anguilla had never been surveyed, there was no need to. It was so small and the land so poor, he said, that it would always be incapable either of holding many people or of defending itself. He recommended that it was fitter for raising livestock than

⁷ Capt Thomas Southey, *A Chronological History of the West Indies*, Vol 2, p. 145.

⁸ CO.153/2, folio 76: Philip Warner to the Council: Account of the Caribbee Islands.

for planting any of the cash crops of the islands at the time.

Four years later, he expressed the usual exasperation at Anguilla's failure to honour the Navigation Acts and to support British Trade. He wrote that, "*It were to be wished that . . . Anguilla were as much under water as above it.*"⁹ In 1683, he wrote disparagingly again of Anguilla, dismissing it with the words, "*T'is fit for little but goats.*"¹⁰

In 1688, the Spaniards from Puerto Rico attacked Anguilla in force. Deputy governor Howell described the outcome.¹¹ On the night of 21 December, the Spaniards landed some 250 men accompanied by some English and Irish renegades. At about 8:00 AM the following morning, Howell with a band of his militia ambushed them and put them to flight. They left so precipitously that they abandoned all their Anguillian prisoners and 10 Frenchmen obtained from other islands. Howell's only request of the Governor in Antigua was for a barrel of gunpowder for his guns. This, he said, he needed to be able to give the Spanish a better welcome if they visited again. But, there is no indication that he ever received so simple and basic a government supply. Anguilla was so poor and insignificant to the Colonial authorities that it

⁹ CO 153/2: William Stapleton to the Council.

¹⁰ CO 1/51: William Stapleton to the Council.

¹¹ CO 152/37: Abraham Howell to Nathaniel Johnson

simply did not count in preparing for the defence of the Leeward Islands.

The following year, 1689, the first and last evacuation of the island took place. The Governor-in-Chief dispatched a fleet of sloops to bring all the inhabitants to Antigua. His hope was that the Anguillians would remain in Antigua where he planned to let them have sufficient land to cultivate not only for their own benefit, but to increase the King's revenue. His plan for the future disposition of the Anguillians were frustrated, for most of them returned to Anguilla. Poor as the land was, and arid as the climate was, the Anguillians persisted in clinging to every inch of it, then as they do now.

By 1701, the little colony was over 50 years old. The second generation of Anguillians had come of age. Yet, the authorities showed no greater concern than they had earlier for the protection of the inhabitants. The Governor-in-Chief in Antigua made a military evaluation of each of the islands. Anguilla, he said, "*hath so few inhabitants, and most of them so poor, that whosoever hath, or will have it, will be very little the better for it.*"¹² Later that year, the Governor-in-Chief went a step farther when he referred to the propensity for smuggling that even then characterized the most enterprising of

¹² CO 152/4: Fox to the Council

Anguilla's sons, and remarked that, "*The men of Anguilla are perfect outlaws.*"

A few years later, in 1708, an English historian wrote how the lives of the Anguillians had not improved from the earliest days of settlement. Of the early settlers he wrote,¹³

Their business . . . was to plant corn, and breed tame cattle, for which purpose they brought stock with them. They were poor and continue so to this day, being perhaps the laziest creatures in the world. Some people have gone from Barbados, and the other English Charibbee Islands, thither, and there they live like the first race of men, without government or religion, having no minister nor governor, no magistrates, no law, and no property worth keeping. If a French author is to be believed . . . 'The island is not thought worth the trouble of defending or cultivating it'. In which perhaps the Frenchman is out, for the soil being good, if an industrious people were in possession of it, they would soon make it worth defending.

To recapitulate, a principal reason for the virtual abandonment of Anguilla by the colonial authorities from the earliest days of settlement was that the island contributed nothing to the colonial coffers. The result was

¹³ John Oldmixon, The British Empire in America (1708), Vol 2, p.264.

that the Governors-in-Chief throughout the Seventeenth Century continually maligned the island and its people.

In a dispatch of 1709, the Governor-in-Chief described conditions in Anguilla. The life he described was one of extreme poverty and hardship. There was, he said, a deputy governor, but he had no authority:

The people lived there like savages, without order or government. They had neither lawyer nor parson among them. They gave themselves in marriage to each other. They only thought themselves Christians because they were descended from Christians.

The life he described was hardly to improve for the next 250 years.

First Council

A Governor-in-Chief first visited Anguilla in 1724. He claimed that he found it to be a poor and barren place. The inhabitants bore all the signs of poverty in the quality of their houses, clothing and food. He did not see any chance of improvement in their condition. He had made enquiry how such a miserable island came to be settled. He had found two principal sources for the original settlers:

First, there were those that had fled Barbados and others of the bigger islands to escape prosecution

for debts or crimes. In addition to these fugitives, there were also pirates who had been amnestied under various enactments passed by the Leeward Islands Assembly. They had married into the local community and had settled down. There, they and their progeny lived in ignorance of the rest of the world. They scratched the ground for a miserable subsistence.

And, yet, he was astonished to find among them such a fierce contention over property. As they had no formal system for settling disputes, he had appointed one of them a Justice of the Peace, to sit on the local Council with the deputy governor. He also appointed a Secretary to the Council to keep records, and a Provost Marshal to enforce its orders.

If later Governors-in-Chief had shown half as much interest in the welfare of the Anguillians, the development of the island might well have progressed differently to the way it in fact did. But, no other Governor-in-Chief was to visit the island again in the period before the American Revolution of 1776.

In the absence of a legislature to enact laws for good government as in the other islands, a deputy governor of Anguilla was obliged to rely for his authority on his personal standing in the community, not to mention his physical prowess. As the Governor-in-Chief said of

the governor of Anguilla in his 1724 dispatch, *“If his cudgel happens to be one whit less than a sturdy subject’s, good night, governor!”* Anguillians lived, worked and died here during the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries without any legal system. This was only altered in 1825 when Anguilla became a part of St Kitts and Anguilla had the laws of St Kitts extended to her. Before that date, laws made by other islands did not apply to Anguilla. With no laws of her own, and none from anywhere else, Anguilla remained a lawless frontier settlement well into the eighteenth century.¹⁴ The Executive Council of Anguilla, when it was eventually established in the Eighteenth Century, acted as legislature, executive, and judiciary, a situation to the advantage of the most powerful planters and merchants and no one else.

In the 1730s, Anguilla’s reputation was at its lowest point. In 1734, the Governor-in-Chief remarked on the lack of law and a properly constituted method for its enforcement in Anguilla. He complained that he did not know what to do with the inhabitants. They lived, he said, *“like so many bandits, in open defiance of the laws of God and men.”*

¹⁴ An essential institution of government is an Assembly to make laws. No form of Assembly was ever established for Anguilla until 1976. Contrast this with another West Indian territory of Bermuda. Bermuda’s Assembly is famous as being the oldest continuously sitting Assembly in the Commonwealth. Britain’s was interrupted by the Civil War of the 1640s. Bermuda’s Assembly has had unbroken service since 1620. Anguilla had none until the 1976 Constitution.

The Anguillians of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries reciprocated the abandonment the authorities extended to them. They countered by ignoring the laws and regulations of other countries. From the earliest days of settlement, Anguillians depended on inter-island trading in their sloops and schooners, a little salt picking and growing of tobacco and cotton, and the growing and export of vegetables and small-stock to St Kitts and other near-by islands as cash crops. They moved freely between the Dutch, French and Danish territories as if they were mere extensions of Anguilla. Anguillian sloops connected Anguilla with St Martin and St Croix where so many of the local families had family and business connections. In the beginning, her sloops brought valuable dye woods and building timbers from the forests of Crab Island and St Croix to the merchants of the Leewards. Later in the Eighteenth Century, they ventured as far as New York and London. Anguillian sloops traded from one island to the other, regardless of the Navigation Acts and customs duties. The Anguillians made their own laws and elected their own governors. They were polite enough, but they did not blindly obey the instructions of a distant governor. When those instructions ran contrary to their vital interests, they ignored them without hesitation. These early settlers built the foundation of the present tradition of complete irreverence for all national

boundaries and customs barriers that characterize the best Anguillian merchants of today.

Sugar

By 1725, sugarcane agriculture had come to Anguilla. The sugar industry of Anguilla was short-lived, lasting only until the American Revolution of 1776, a mere 50 years. The industry was never as successful as it was in the wetter, more prosperous islands. The absence of windmills bear testimony to the lack of capital invested in the industry. The animal-round was the normal source of power for crushing the canes. The boiling houses and curing houses were small, and few of their ruins remain at this time.

Slavery

From the earliest days of settlement there were slaves present on the island. The system of slavery existed in Anguilla in all its gory detail until its final abolition throughout the Empire in 1839. Many examples of the brutality of the system, and of the times, can be found in the records. It is a sentimental myth that slavery in Anguilla was never as savage as in the other plantation islands. The unique point about it is that the sugar industry which brought out the worse characteristics of slavery was short-lived.

Collapse of the Economy

The American Revolution of 1776 brought an end to any hope of prosperity for Anguilla. The Revolution resulted in war in the West Indies. The Royal Navy blockaded all trade between the loyal southern colonies of the Caribbean and the rebelling northern colonies. Then as now, Anguilla survived by trade. Anguilla's economy was devastated by the blockade. While before 1776 law suits for hundreds of pounds local currency were common, after that date the records show mainly debts of a few shillings being squabbled over in court. Most of the planters emigrated. Anguilla could no longer maintain a pretence of a Council.

In 1820, Anguilla was devastated by a hurricane and this was followed by famine. The Secretary of State suggested to the Governor-in-Chief that Anguilla should be allowed to send one representative to sit on the St Kitts Assembly, which would then make laws for Anguilla. St Kitts was not interested. The Lieutenant Governor of that island replied that instead Anguilla would be better ruled direct from London.

Absorption by St Kitts

Under pressure from both London and the Governor-in-Chief, in 1825 the inhabitants of Anguilla consented to the abolition of their Council. They agreed to be absorbed by St Kitts and for the Assembly of St Kitts to make laws to apply in Anguilla. The motive of the Secretary of State for

pressing this development was simple. The tide in Britain in favour of “*the great enterprise*” of the abolition of slavery was rising unmistakably. Any colonial law reform would not be effective in Anguilla unless there was a law-making institution governing the island. Union with St Kitts would allow abolition to extend to Anguilla without the need to create another expensive colonial apparatus.

The Anguilla Act of 1825 of the St Kitts Assembly gave the freeholders of Anguilla the right to send up a representative. The colony was now known as St Christopher and Anguilla. No law affecting Anguilla could be passed except in the presence of the Anguilla representative. We gave up the right to our own deputy governor. Our officials were to be appointed from St Kitts from then on. The St Kitts Assembly took on responsibility for Anguilla very reluctantly and only under pressure from the Colonial authorities. They made it clear to the Governor-in-Chief in repeated resolutions that no part of the cost of administering Anguilla would be borne by the St Kitts population.

First Petition for Separation

It did not take long for the people of Anguilla to become dissatisfied with government from St Kitts. On 10 March 1825, they sent an address to the Governor-in-Chief complaining about an Act of the St Kitts Assembly that had reduced the power of the Vestry. They wrote:

Can we indulge a hope that laws enacted for this community, can and will be made with much regard to its interests; when they are passed by a body of men living in a distinct and remote island, possessing no property of any kind here and having no connection or relation whatever?

This time they were not ignored. They got back the Vestry in 1827.

Second Petition

In 1871, the Leeward Islands were federated. Anguillians realised that they would be combined in the Presidency of St Christopher and Anguilla. They submitted a memorandum opposing the plan. They complained among other things that:

We watch with the greatest apprehension what appears to be the imminent decadence of an Island which for many years past has held a prominent position among the Islands of this Government for prosperity, good order and self-reliance . . .

They proposed that:

. . . we may be allowed to revert to our former system namely a lieutenant governor . . . with an Administrative Committee, a form of government that gave satisfaction to all classes of the

community, and under which we enjoyed the greatest amount of prosperity.

There is no indication in the records that the Anguillians ever received any response to this petition. Certainly no attention was paid to their concerns, as Anguilla duly entered the new Federation attached to St Kitts.

Third Petition

The Anguillians continued to complain about the remoteness of, and unsatisfactory nature of government from, St Kitts. On 23 August 1872 they petitioned the Colonial Office:

The interest of Anguilla, its resources and capabilities of development are not understood . . . by the legislative body of St Christopher who are utter strangers to us, ignorant of the community, careless of their wants, and therefore unequal to discharge . . . the important duties of legislation for us . . . This legislative dependence on St Kitts can in no sense be called a legislative union, it has operated and continues to operate most injuriously against us, and is mutually disliked.

By 1882 the economy of Nevis had disintegrated. Its Council was dissolved and the island was merged with St Kitts and Anguilla. The Presidency was now known as St Christopher and Nevis. The name of Anguilla was

dropped from the name of the enlarged Presidency. The Anguilla Vestry was abolished, and the Magistrate was appointed to oversee the day-to-day running of the island. Local government in Anguilla had disappeared.

Fourth Petition

The situation remained unaltered throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. In 1958 the Anguillians continued to suffer under a very low standard of living. Discontent with government from St Kitts peaked again. The result was another petition to the Governor of the Leeward Islands requesting him to,

. . . make every exertion which lies in your power to bring about the dissolution of the present political and administrative association of Anguilla with St Kitts.

They warned,

A people cannot live without hope for long without erupting socially; and it is because the people of Anguilla prefer petition to eruption that we now implore Your Excellency to use your best endeavours with the Secretary of State for the Colonies . . . to have Anguilla created a grant-aided colony, emancipated from the dead hand of the political leaders of St Kitts . . . We know that Anguilla must have at least an economic horizon to

bolster a petition of this sort, but paradoxically such a horizon can never, never appear unless the island is free of St Kitts politics whose avowed intent it is to withhold from Anguilla even the ordinary amenities of modern civilised life.”

Associated Statehood

The independence of India in 1947 brought an end to the Empire. The King ceased to call himself “Emperor”. Britain began to shed her no longer profitable colonies. The islands of the West Indies were ushered into a pre-independence state as the West Indies Federation. This was short-lived. With its dissolution in 1962, the islands reverted to colonial status for a short period. Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados went into independence as separate states. Britain kept the pressure up on the smaller islands to go into independence. She agreed with the Leeward and Windward Islands to the creation of Statehood in Association with Britain, envisaged as a first step to independence. This relationship gave the Associated States full internal self-government, with Britain reserving only defence and external affairs.

During 1966, a new Constitution for the creation of the Associated State of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla was discussed in London. Against the background of Anguilla’s persistent demand for a break from St Kitts, one of the proposals discussed was the establishment of

local government in Anguilla. It agreed that the 1967 Constitution should contain a provision for Anguilla, and Nevis, to enjoy a degree of local government. The experiment was not to succeed. The St Kitts government never had any intention of permitting the Anguillians any real degree of internal self-government. This failure led to the mounting of a campaign against Statehood. It was led by such men as Ronald Webster, Atlin Harrigan, and John Rogers.

Anguilla Revolution

Despite the objections of the Anguillians, on 26 February 1967 St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla became an Associated State. On 27 February 1967, the Constitution of the Associated State came into effect. Anguilla refused to go into this status, and the Anguilla Revolution of 1967 commenced. On 8 March the Government House was burned to the ground and the Warden fled to St Kitts the next day. On 29 May at a meeting in the Park, the crowd voted by a show of hands to expel the St Kitts policemen from the island. The crowd left the Park in procession and marched to Police Headquarters where they ordered the police to leave Anguilla by 10:00 am the following day. The following morning the policemen were advised that a plane was ready to take them to St Kitts, and by noon they were all disarmed and expelled from Anguilla.

The Peace-keeping Committee

On 31 May 1967, a Peace-keeping Committee¹⁵ was established to manage the island's affairs. The same day, a delegation¹⁶ was sent to St Kitts to search for a peaceful solution. They presented a memorandum to the Governor which read in part:

Anguillians do not want to be a part of the State of St Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla. The time when they might have accepted this is past. What they now want is separation from St Kitts. They want a process set in motion now which will give them separation and self-determination within twelve months. By the end of this time they want to be a State in Association with Britain.

Attack on St Kitts

The response of the St Kitts government was immediate. A state of emergency was declared and regional governments were requested to send military assistance to put down the rebellion. The Anguilla Revolution was well under way. The Anguillians took the view that the best form of defence was attack. In the early hours of the morning of 10 June, a party of armed Anguillians¹⁷ landed in St Kitts and attacked the Police Headquarters, the

¹⁵ Comprising Walter Hodge as Chairman, Peter Adams, Atlin Harrigan, Alfred Webster, James Baird, John Rogers, Clifford Rogers, Ronald Webster, Wallace Rey, Camile Connor, Phillip Lloyd, Charles Fleming, Wallace Richardson, Mac Connor, and Emile Gumbs.

¹⁶ Comprising Rev Leonard Carty, Rev Martin Roberts, Peter Adams, and Conrad Walton Fleming.

¹⁷ Among the brave men were Todville Harrigan, Mitchell Harrigan, Collins Hodge, and Lemuel Phillip.

Defence Force Headquarters, and the power station. The attack was a failure due to the small size of the Anguillian force, and the non-occurrence of the promised uprising by Kittitians against their own government. Nonetheless, the attack served Anguilla well in that the St Kitts Defence Forces concentrated on the defence of St Kitts, and never mounted an attack on Anguilla in response.

Referendum on Secession

The St Kitts government insisted that the Anguilla Revolution had no legitimacy and was not supported by the majority of residents. The response of the Peace-keeping Committee was to hold a referendum on secession from St Kitts on 11 July 1967. The result was an overwhelming vote (1,813 to 5) in favour of secession.

First Anguilla Constitution

A further step towards legitimising the Revolution was the preparation of a Constitution. Dr Roger Fisher, a professor of law at Harvard University, agreed to help. He drafted an eleven-section Constitution which provided for the creation of an Anguilla Council with full legislative and executive powers. There were to be five elected and two nominated members.

First Anguilla Council

The Fisher Constitution appointed the first members of the Council who were to hold office until elections could

be held not later than July 1968. They were Ronald Webster, Rev Leonard Carty, John Webster, John Rogers, Peter Adams, Walter Hodge, Emile Gumbs, and John Hodge.

Second Anguilla Council

While the Caribbean governments fussed and disagreed among themselves on the best way to resolve the Anguilla crisis, the Anguillians went about preparing for the first elections under their new Constitution. The Beacon Newspaper¹⁸ of 7 October 1967 published a notice advising the electorate that nomination day was fixed for 17 October and that elections were scheduled for 25 October. All Anguillians holding foreign passports were specifically allowed to vote, and civil servants were allowed to contest a seat. When nominations closed on 17 October, five of Ronald Webster's candidates stood unopposed. Camile Connor and Charles Fleming withdrew from the contest. The five remaining candidates were declared to be duly elected Councilors. They were Ronald Webster, Wallace Rey, Hugo Rey, Collins Hodge, and John Hodge.

When the new Council met on 21 October, Ronald Webster was elected Chairman and Campbell Fleming and John Rogers were named as Nominated Members. At a meeting at the Park the following day, Mr Webster

¹⁸ Published by Atlin Harrigan.

told the crowd that Anguilla was looking for some sort of associated status with Britain or some other Commonwealth country. He emphasised that, *“Total independence is only a last resort if all negotiations fail.”*

United Nations

The Anguillian leaders were also interested in some form of relationship with the United Nations. Professor Fisher wrote a letter of 24 October to the Secretary General appealing for an administrator, an expert in telecommunications, and a financial adviser for Anguilla. His letter was followed up with a meeting between him and Jeremiah Gumbs and the UN Special Committee on Colonialism. The British Government took the view that the Committee of Twenty-four was incompetent to discuss the affairs of an Associated State and refused to participate in the discussions. The Committee decided to send a mission to Anguilla to investigate, but it was unable to visit because the British Government withheld consent.

Senior British Official

On 8 January 1968, direct participation of Britain in the administration of Anguilla began with the consent of the St Kitts Government and the Anguilla Council with the arrival of Mr Tony Lee as the Senior British Official in Anguilla. This was intended to be for what was described as the Interim Period of twelve months.

Advisory Board

In March the Anguilla Council set up an Advisory Board of fourteen members to assist with the running of the island's affairs.¹⁹

Third Anguilla Council

On 30 July 1968 new elections were held. There were seven candidates, although the Constitution provided for only five.²⁰ Negotiations continued between the Anguilla Council and the British and St Kitts governments. They all failed to resolve the crisis because the Anguillians were adamant that they would accept nothing short of complete separation from St Kitts. The British government insisted that under the West Indies Act 1967 they could not change the status of any part of an Associated State without the request and consent of the State legislature.

1. **End of Interim Period.** As the end of the Interim Period approached, the Anguilla leaders were split. One faction led by Atlin Harrigan favoured retaining an association with Britain. Another led by Ronald Webster and Wallace Rey favoured a unilateral declaration of independence. The Anguilla Council appealed to the British to extend the Interim Period, but the British refused and on 9 January

¹⁹ The Advisory Board comprised Tony Lee, John Webster, Calvin Hodge, Emile Gumbs, Alfred Webster, Atlin Harrigan, Walter Hodge, Lucas Wilson, Camile Connor, Lewis Haskins, Joseph A Webster, Clement Daniels, Wallace Richardson, and Charles Fleming.

²⁰ Those elected were Ronald Webster, Atlin Harrigan, Kenneth Hazel, Collins Hodge, John Hodge, Wallace Rey, and Emile Gumbs.

1969 Mr Lee departed. The St Kitts government responded to the intransigence of the Anguillians by suspending air and postal services and banning all trade save for food-stuffs and drugs.

Unilateral Declaration of Independence

In the perceived face of rejection by the British Government, the Anguilla Council prepared to hold a referendum on independence. Jack Holcomb, a CIA agent and something of a con-man, stationed at the time in Anguilla and advising the Council, came up with a new constitution. It was duly approved by the Council and put to the people on 6 February 1969. The result was 1,739 votes in favour of independence and 4 against.

Second Anguilla Constitution

Jack Holcomb's Republican Constitution provided for the island to be divided into three constituencies each of which would elect two candidates, and five candidates at large. The President and Vice-President were to be elected in a national election. Elections for the Legislature were to be held on 25 March 1969, while those for the President and Vice President were to be on 3 April.

Republic of Anguilla

When nominations closed on 21 February, Ronald Webster was unopposed and was declared President of

the Republic of Anguilla. He chose as his Vice-President Mr Campbell Fleming. Webster's Cabinet was to include John Webster (a former Secretary of Defence) as Secretary of State for Domestic Affairs and Jeremiah Gumbs as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. On nomination day only six candidates were nominated and they were similarly declared elected unopposed.²¹

William Whitlock's Expulsion

On 11 March 1969, a British envoy, Mr William Whitlock, arrived in Anguilla with proposals for a solution to the Anguilla crisis. His visit was spurred by a resolution passed in Trinidad at the just concluded Fifth Conference of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth Caribbean Countries. This called on Britain to take all necessary steps to confirm the territorial integrity of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. The British proposal brought by Whitlock was that Anguilla should be administered by Tony Lee as Commissioner to serve for so long as the present difficult situation continued. He would appoint an Advisory Committee to assist him in his capacity as Her Majesty's Commissioner. These proposals were unacceptable to the Anguillian leaders, and Whitlock was expelled from the island.

British Invasion

²¹ They were Winston Harrigan, Lucas Wilson, Uriel Sasso, James Woods, Charles Fleming, and Mac Connor.

During the early hours of 19 March 1969 some three hundred British paratroopers landed, followed by Royal Engineers and London bobbies. The local defence force had handed in their arms the evening before as it had been realised that resistance would be futile and would lead to unnecessary loss of blood. The rebellion was crushed without either side firing a shot. The invading forces distributed a leaflet that contained the fateful line, *“It is not our purpose to force you to return to an Administration you do not want.”*

Third Anguilla Constitution

Tony Lee was appointed the first Commissioner, and Britain’s direct administration of the island began. He was appointed under an Order in Council of 18 March which authorised him to make by regulation provision for securing and maintaining public safety and public order in Anguilla as part of the Associated State. It gave him sweeping powers to amend, suspend or revoke any law in Anguilla other than the Constitution or the Courts Order. This 1969 Order was the first British Constitutional document that related specifically to Anguilla since the first day of settlement in 1650. It was Anguilla’s third modern constitution.

Caradon Declaration

Tony Lee’s administration was not without opposition. There were several large demonstrations on the island

demanding the withdrawal of British forces. Webster and the other leaders refused to cooperate with Lee. Representations were made to the United Nations. In an effort to defuse a highly explosive situation, the British Government dispatched its Ambassador to the United Nations, Lord Caradon,²² to Anguilla to work out an arrangement with the Anguilla Council. The result was the Caradon Declaration which was agreed upon by the Council. It provided for the administration of the island to be conducted by the Commissioner in full consultation and co-operation with the representatives of the people of Anguilla. The results of the 1969 elections were abandoned. The members of the 1968 Third Anguilla Council were recognised as the elected representatives and were to serve as members of the Council. The Declaration repeated that it was no part of the purpose of the British Government to put the Anguillians under an Administration under which they did not want to live. After initial difficulties with establishing working relationships, Tony Lee left Anguilla on 20 April to be replaced by John Cumber who took the important step of recognising Ronald Webster as the leader of the Council.

Wooding Commission

On 18 December 1969 the British Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir

²² Formerly the British politician, Sir Hugh Foot.

Hugh Wooding, Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, to make recommendations for a satisfactory and durable solution to the Anguilla Crisis. By its terms of reference, The Commission was expressly required to find a solution that would “preserve the integrity of the State and prevent further fragmentation of the Caribbean”. Not surprisingly, the Commission’s Report concluded that while reversion to colonial status was out of the question, independence for such a small community was equally unrealistic. The only solution that could be recommended was the preservation of the State under an arrangement which gave the Anguillians a large measure of control over their own affairs. The Anguilla Council immediately passed a resolution rejecting the Report. They would accept nothing less than a complete break with St Kitts.

Godber Proposals

With a change in government in London in 1971, the British Government gradually became more sympathetic to the Anguillian cause, and the Wooding Report became a dead letter. In July 1971, Joseph Godber, the new Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, put to the St Kitts Government a proposal that the State Government delegate to HMG powers which would enable the Commissioner to administer the island for a period of years. The St Kitts Government insisted that the Anguillians were rebels and the British must force them

back into the fold of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. Gun-boats should be sent to do this and measures should be taken to starve the islanders into submission. On the other hand, the Anguillians were prepared to accept nothing short of complete separation from the Associated State. The British were forced to act unilaterally. Their proposals for an interim settlement were accepted by the Anguilla Council. In the words of Ronald Webster, *“Anguillians have just accepted Britain to be their partner to work together from now onwards . . . let us move forward together to develop Anguilla.”*

Reversion to British Administration

Purporting to act under the authority of the West Indies Act 1967, the British Parliament passed the Anguilla Act 1971 to allow it to administer Anguilla. The Act took effect on 27 July 1971. It permitted the Queen in Council to make detailed provision for the administration of Anguilla. HMG was to appoint a Commissioner in Anguilla. The island would cease to be a part of the Associated State in the event of the introduction into the State's legislature of a Bill for a law terminating the status of association with the UK. The St Kitts Government never accepted that this was a legitimate use of section 3 of the West Indies Act.

The decision of the British Government to proceed unilaterally in this way met with strong condemnation from

Caribbean Governments and newspapers. Their reaction prompted the leader of the Anguilla Council, Ronald Webster, to publish a letter in The Times urging the “*Commonwealth Caribbean countries not to interfere in a situation which does not concern them and towards the solution of which they have made no worthwhile contribution.*”

Fourth Anguilla Constitution

Anguilla’s fourth modern Constitution was the Anguilla (Administration) Order 1971. It made provision for the Commissioner to work in consultation with the Anguilla Council. This was to consist of seven elected members and up to six nominated members. The role of the Council was not spelled out in the Order, and the Commissioner was vested with complete legal control of the island. Mr Godber gave the Anguillians the assurance that the constitutional arrangements would be reviewed after three years. Anguillians accepted the Order as a temporary settlement even though it was within the framework of the Associated State. They recognised that it was setting the stage for the eventual separation of Anguilla from the rest of the State.

The Anguilla Council of 1972

The first general elections under the Administration Order took place on 24 July 1972. The result was the election

of the fourth and last Anguilla Council.²³ Their complete lack of power caused them to go on strike against the Commissioner. The situation was diffused by introducing a committee system whereby certain members of the Council became chairmen of departmental committees. However, when after three years the promised constitutional review did not take place, the Council went on strike again (for a period of fourteen months). Only when the British Government agreed to constitutional concessions did the Council resume work.

Fifth Anguilla Constitution

In 1976 Anguilla was given a new Constitution. It had been negotiated by the Anguilla Council with representatives of the British Government during the “strike” of the previous year. It came into effect on 10 February 1976, and was Anguilla’s fifth Constitution of the modern era. It provided for the first time for a Ministerial form of government. The Executive Council comprised a Chief Minister and two other ministers and two ex-officio members, the Attorney-General and the Financial Secretary. It was chaired by the Commissioner. There was provision for a Legislative Assembly comprising the Commissioner as Speaker, three ex-officio members, namely the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary, and the Attorney-General, and not less than seven elected

²³ Those elected to the fourth Anguilla Council were Ronald Webster, Evans Harrigan, Reuben Hodge, Wallace Rey, Emile Gumbs, Camile Connor, and John Hodge.

and two nominated members. The Commissioner was to consult with Executive Council in the formulation of policy and the exercise of all powers conferred upon him by the Constitution. However, he was not obliged to consult with respect to external affairs or internal security, nor on matters relating to the public service. This system extended to the local representatives some of the forms of power while ensuring that the British official retained the substance of power. As Petty puts it in his Where There's a Will There's a Way, "*The Anguillians had fought for direct British Colonialism and they got it in heavy doses.*" The 1976 Constitution recognised Anguilla to be still a part of the Associated State of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. However, it was to be separately administered by Britain until such time as the constitutional crisis between Anguilla and the rest of the State could be resolved.

General elections under the 1976 Constitution were held on 15 March 1976.²⁴ Mr Webster was named Chief Minister, with Emile Gumbs and Albena Lake-Hodge his two ministers. Hubert Hughes was the lone opposition member. By early 1977 Mr Webster had lost the confidence of his government, and when at a 1 February 1977 meeting of the Legislative Assembly Mr Hughes introduced a motion of no confidence only Mr Webster did

²⁴ Elected to the first Legislative Assembly were Ronald Webster, Campbell Fleming, Idalia Gumbs, Albena Lake-Hodge, Emile Gumbs, Hubert Hughes, and John Hodge.

not support it. The Commissioner revoked Mr Webster's appointment. Due to the short period that had passed since the previous elections, and because the majority of the Assembly supported the appointment of Emile Gumbs, the Commissioner did not call new elections, but instead appointed Emile Gumbs to be the new Chief Minister. This government lasted until the general elections of 28 May 1980 when Mr Webster and his supporters won six of the seven seats, only Emile Gumbs of the previous administration retaining his seat.²⁵

The Anguilla Act 1980

In February 1980 the St Kitts Labour Party administration of Premier Lee Moore was defeated at the polls by the People's Action Movement. The new premier, Dr Kennedy Simmonds, made it clear that his administration would put no obstacle in the way of change in Anguilla and the Anguillians should be free to decide their own constitutional future. The result was the Anguilla Act 1980 which empowered Her Majesty to separate Anguilla from the State on a day appointed by Order in Council. The Anguilla (Appointed Day) Order duly appointed 19 December 1980 as the day on which Anguilla ceased to be a part of the territory of the Associated State of St Christopher, Nevis and Anguilla.

²⁵ Elected to the second Legislative Assembly were Ronald Webster, Nashville Webster, Watkins Hodge, Claudius M Roberts, Emile Gumbs, Hubert Hughes, and Albert Hughes. Those nominated were Euton Smith and Connell Harrigan.

Mr Webster's government of May 1980 lasted for barely a year before internal dissension brought it down. After a short period of political instability, he advised the Commissioner to dissolve the Assembly and to hold general elections on 22 June 1981.²⁶ Mr Webster won his seat and had the support of four of the newly elected representatives. The Commissioner asked him to form the new government. One of the objectives of the new government was to negotiate with the British Government for constitutional advance. Mr Webster was particularly concerned to ensure that the Constitution said that in the event of another vote of no confidence the Commissioner could not appoint a new Chief Minister but must call general elections.

The possibility of constitutional advance was limited in view of the position of the British Government that if a territory aspired to autonomy it must call for independence and set a timetable. It was made clear that Associated Statehood was out of the question, and that any aspiration to such a status would be considered only in the framework of a call for independence.

Sixth Anguilla Constitution

There was no public consultation on revising the 1976 Constitution. The new Constitution came into effect on 1

²⁶ Those elected to the third Legislative Assembly were Nashville Webster, Osborne Fleming, Victor Banks, Ronald Webster, Emile Gumbs, Maurice Connor, and John Hodge.

April 1982 shortly after it was first seen by the public. It is Anguilla's sixth modern Constitution. By one view it contains only minor changes to the 1976 Constitution. Others criticize it as the abandonment of full internal self-government and a craven submission, without consultation with the Anguillian public, to naked colonial administration. The position of Commissioner was renamed "Governor" and the Legislative Assembly now became the "House of Assembly". Additionally, the Commissioner (Governor) ceased to sit as a member of the House of Assembly, and the Speaker of the House was chosen by the House and not by the Governor.

The 1982 Constitution left the Governor's reserved powers virtually intact, though he was now required to consult the Chief Minister on matters relating to internal security and the public service. The Governor also had reserve power to legislate and to administer in case public order has broken down and a state of emergency exists.

Anguilla Constitution (Amendment) Order 1990

In line with local demands for increased autonomy, and after the new 1982 Constitution had been working for only three years, on 2 August 1985 the House of Assembly passed a motion for the Governor to set up a Constitution Review Committee. This Committee was appointed by

the Governor in October 1985.²⁷ The result was the Anguilla Constitution (Amendment) Order 1990. These included new provisions for the creation of the office of Leader of the Opposition and alteration of the definition of Belonger Status. This is the Constitution under which Anguilla is governed to this day.

Anguillians are by and large satisfied that the 1982 Constitution gives them what they want: a large degree of autonomy, with external forces at hand (in the form of a British warship) for the defence of the island, and its representation overseas by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The utility of a British passport to facilitate international travel, study, and work is generally appreciated. Interest in discussing reform is limited to politicians, lawyers and a few others who take a special interest in these matters.

Partnership for Progress

In 1992, the new Labour administration in London set about making new proposals for the relationship with the Overseas Territories. In March 1999, the British Government published its Partnership for Progress Report. This was a major policy document that set out the parameters of the relationship. The Secretary of

²⁷ Its members were Attorney-General Richard Whitehead, Speaker Atlin Harrigan, Clement Daniels, Rev Leonard Carty, and Miriam Gumbs.

State reiterated the four principles that underlie the partnership as:

First, our partnership must be founded on self-determination . . .

Second, the partnership creates responsibilities on both sides . . .

Third, the people of the Overseas Territories must exercise the greatest possible control over their own lives . . .

Fourth, Britain will continue to provide help to the Overseas Territories that need it . . .

One of the principal outcomes of the Report was the replacement of BDT citizenship with full British citizenship. The Territories were renamed British Overseas Territories. The Report makes it clear that Britain's links to the Territories should be based on a partnership, with obligations and responsibilities on both sides.

Chapter 2 of the Partnership for Progress Report sets out the rationale for constitutional review at this time:

The governance of the territories must have a firm basis. Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are all as relevant in the Overseas Territories as elsewhere. The principles which should underlie modern constitutions are clear. There must be a

balance of obligations and expectations, and both should be clearly and explicitly set out.

In March of 2000, there were general elections in Anguilla. The party that came to power was the United Front. In its manifesto it had made a number of promises that involved constitutional reform. These included abolishing the nominated members, increasing the number of ministers, reviewing the provisions for the exercise of responsible government and ministerial authority by elected members, reviewing the policy and law relating to “belongership”, developing codes of conduct for politicians, ministers and members of the Assembly, creating the office of Ombudsman, etc. All these matters involved some sort of constitutional review.

Conclusion

In January 2006, a Constitutional and Electoral Reform Commission was set up by the Governor in Council. The Commission produced a Report in August recommending a number of changes and modernizations to the Constitution. That Report is presently being considered by the members of the Executive Council and the House of Assembly. As always in Anguilla, exciting times lie ahead.

Dated 5 February 2007