

SHA 2018 Paper

Professor Paul Farnsworth

Temple University

In June 2016, I undertook a preliminary reconnaissance of former plantation sites on Anguilla to assess their potential for historical archaeological research. This was a reconnaissance of sites that I had learned of from various publications and knowledgeable Anguillans. I surveyed 7 sites, and recorded artifacts, ruined structures and evidence of foundations.

Six sites had considerable archaeological potential. However, Wallblake House is the best-preserved plantation house on Anguilla, and the estate has the potential to address a wider range of research questions than the others. The current research is focused on understanding the development of African-Anguillan culture from its origins in the boom and bust plantation economies of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.

One fundamental question about Wallblake Estate is when it was developed. In modern accounts of the history of Anguilla the date of construction of Wallblake House is based on an inscription on the kitchen

building that reads 1787, although it is in poor condition and some believe it reads 1797. Either way, the origin and meaning of the inscription are subject to multiple interpretations. Wallblake House also features in a well-known legend from the French invasion of Anguilla in November 1796 which, among other events, resulted in the house being set on fire. If true, the house must have been built prior to that date, and presumably the estate developed by that time.

The documented history of Wallblake Estate begins with a deed from 1708. In this document Deputy Governor Abraham Howell states that in 1696 he had patented the land that had previously been Valentine Blake's plantation. Howell appears to have still owned the property in 1724, but he died sometime after 1727. Howell's Valley Plantation was divided into four parts, one of which was the parcel previously owned by Valentine Blake. By 1750 the plantation was owned by John Ruan as he sued Richard Richardson for encroachment "on a parcel of land known by the name of Valentine Blake's." However, there is no indication that his parcel of land was developed at this time.

The next documented owner of Wallblake was Thomas Hodge Jr. who owned the property by October 1797 when his son, Jonathan Harvey Hodge,

was born at Wallblake Estate. The estate must have been developed by then, if not before, as also indicated by the legend from the French invasion of 1796. So far we have no record of how Thomas Hodge Jr. came to own Wallblake, but it is possible that he was given it by his father. Thomas Hodge was a major sugar planter on Anguilla and was shipping rum and sugar to Virginia and Great Britain from his plantation in the Valley Division in 1765. The Valley Division plantation could be the Wallblake Estate indicating that it had been developed by 1765.

Thomas Hodge Jr. had died by 1819, when on the census his widow, Margaret Hodge, listed 95 enslaved people: 25 men, 29 women, 19 boys and 22 girls, for what was now her estate in The Valley. Her son, Jonathan Harvey Hodge, and his sister, Mary Procter, inherited Wallblake from Margaret Hodge 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 for £7,958 his half, or 80 acres, of the “Sugar Estate called Wall Blake.” 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 in the early 20th century, and upon her death the plantation passed to her daughter who bequeathed it to the Catholic Church in 1976.

The central complex of the estate consists of a wood-frame house built on a large stone cellar. The house has undergone several restorations, and was undergoing additional restoration last year until Hurricane Irma devastated Anguilla. There is an ancillary stone structure attached to the rear, southeast corner of the house. It may 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 smaller office or storage building. The rear compound is dominated by a large cistern surrounded by a raised water catchment.

At the south corner of the catchment and almost straight behind the house is the kitchen. The kitchen building has a large fireplace and chimney at the northwest end, while on the exterior is a large oven. As noted previously, an inscription appears on the kitchen building that probably reads 1787.

The modern Catholic Church and Conference Center have been built to the northeast of the main house complex, and there is little archaeological evidence in that area. The area to the southeast of the main house complex has been bladed, but there is a widespread scatter of artifacts. Creamware, pearlware and whiteware were observed in this area. To the south of the main house is a dry-stone wall running southeast to northwest that connects to the kitchen. Behind the kitchen and on the southwest side of this wall there was a scatter of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century artifacts. Further away from the kitchen to the southeast there was a concentration of late nineteenth and early twentieth century artifacts.

Another wall runs northwest from the kitchen and leads to the modern cemetery. The southeastern part of the cemetery includes some wall foundations that may be an animal pen, but now contains three modern graves. The cemetery is bounded on the southeast and northeast by old stone walls, and on the southwest by a modern fence that continues the line of the old wall from the kitchen. To the west of the cemetery and the wall that connects to the kitchen, there is a low, limestone ridge that also runs southeast to northwest. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century artifacts were visible throughout

this area. These included bottle glass, creamware, pearlware, whiteware, stoneware, and Chinese porcelain, as well as various redwares. The artifacts covered approximately 80 meters southeast to northwest and 40 meters northeast to southwest. Based on the domestic nature of the artifacts, and their widespread distribution, I hypothesized that this area might be the location of the houses occupied by 135 enslaved laborers of the Wallblake Estate.

A wall extending from the northeast side of the modern cemetery leads to 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 and the well-preserved walls stand approximately 2 meters high on the north side.

Reconnaissance further northwest and north from the cemetery area found little in the way of historic materials or evidence of any structures. However, a standing stone-built structure was located approximately 15 meters north of the animal round. Heavily overgrown, the original building has been largely destroyed by a bulldozer that left a large pile of earth and rubble next to it, but the structure still has walls standing over two meters high at the north end, and there were traces of additional walls in the bulldozer cut within five

meters of the animal mill. The location so close to the animal mill would be consistent with a sugar processing house.

In June and July 2017 archaeological survey, mapping and test excavations took place. In total 33 shovel tests were excavated, 6 around the main house, 4 around the kitchen building and 23 in the wooded area west of the cemetery where I believe the enslaved African's village to have been located. Based upon the results of the shovel testing, three 1 x 1-meter units were excavated, one in each Locus.

The ceramics recovered from the excavation unit behind the main house include delftware, white salt-glazed stoneware, creamware, pearlware, whiteware, porcelains, redwares, and coarse earthenwares. These ceramics span the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The presence of a few sherds of delftware and a sherd of white salt-gazed stoneware suggests a date between 1740-1775 at the earliest end of the range, which accords well 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 and Chinese porcelain were recovered. Pearlware dates no earlier than 1775, and usually after 1780. I think that the older materials were curated artifacts and

that the main house was constructed around 1780. The artifacts show occupation through the early-mid twentieth century, in accordance with the known history of the building. The artifacts and food remains indicate a certain amount of wealth during this time, as would be expected.

The kitchen building presents something of a conundrum. While the structure has the date 1787 carved into the wall, the archaeological lines of evidence suggest that the kitchen may have been constructed as late as the 1840s or 1850s. The ceramics recovered from the excavation unit include large quantities of whiteware, semi-vitreous earthenwares, porcelains, yellow wares, redwares, and coarse earthenwares. These ceramics span from approximately 1820 to the twentieth century, but semi-vitreous earthenware was the most common ceramic and indicates an occupation from the mid-nineteenth century. The presence of a small number of sherds of pearlware, together with a few sherds of late creamware, among almost a thousand ceramic sherds recovered, may hint at an earlier occupation going back to 1780, which is supported by the 5 tobacco pipe stems recovered that usually date between 1750-1800. However, there was no delftware, white salt-gazed stoneware or darker yellow creamware that would date before 1780.

Wrought nails were found throughout the excavation unit, but large quantities of cut nails were also found in all levels. In Britain the transition to cut nails occurred between 1840 and 1860. Wire nails were also found in significant numbers just above the deepest levels of the deposit. Wire nails were produced in significant quantities in Britain between the 1860s-1870s. The wrought nails could indicate construction around 1780, but the large quantity of cut nails might suggest initial construction of the building in the 1840s-1860s.

The presence 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 from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. West Indian Topshell were the most commonly represented food source, and the large size of many, as well as the numbers, stands in stark contrast to those recovered at the main house and the African village area. Sheep or goat were the most represented mammal bones recovered, with a few cattle or possibly pig bones also present. 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, but less than might be expected. Clearly the estate owners' diet was quite varied, at least in terms of protein.

It was not possible in the 2017 field season to excavate a grid of shovel tests over the entire village area. Therefore, we have not been able to identify all the possible house locations within the village, or properly define those that have been identified. So far approximately five areas in the village appear to have higher artifact concentrations, but much remains to be tested. Of these five, time only allowed us to excavate a 1 by 1-meter unit in one of them.

The ceramics are dominated by pearlwares, dating between 1780 and 1830, although late creamwares with a slightly earlier date range were also common. A few sherds of delftware and white salt-glazed stoneware that date earlier were also recovered. While these hint at an earlier occupation date, they could also be curated vessels brought to the site in the 1780s. Some whiteware sherds were recovered but all with early decorative styles suggesting a date range of 1820-1840. No later decorative styles were recovered, or any later ceramic wares such as semi-vitreous earthenware. The glass recovered from the village is largely from hand blown and dip molded bottles that are typical of the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. The evidence suggests that the village

was abandoned after emancipation in 1834, either because the enslavers evicted the formerly enslaved people, or, more likely, the formerly enslaved people chose to leave and take up residence on lands abandoned by the many planters who left Anguilla.

The original date of the village is more ambiguous. Five tobacco pipe stems recovered probably date between 1710-1750, although it should be noted that they were produced as late as 1800, while two usually date between 1680 and 1710, but they too can rarely be found as late as 1800. Thus, the pipe stems and a few of the ceramics hint at an occupation beginning perhaps in the early 1700s, but most of the evidence points to an occupation between 1780 and 1840.

A French, 2 Sous coin dated 1789 was recovered from one shovel test. While it is tempting to associate this coin with the 1796 French invasion and the burning of the main house, coinage was scarce throughout the Lesser Antilles, and especially on Anguilla, where coins of various nations were used. Three similar coins have previously been found at the Hughes Estate and one in The Valley. The few nails recovered from the village area were all hand wrought and would indicate an occupation prior to the 1840s. The presence of

very little brick, mortar or nails indicates that the houses were probably of wattle and daub, and wood and thatch.

Almost a dozen cast iron cooking pot fragments typical of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century African villages were found, but only a limited range of food remains were recovered. Two sheep or goat bones were found, while the jaw of a medium to large-size fish, perhaps a parrot fish, was the only other bone recovered. West Indian Topshell, however, was found in almost every shovel test unit and was a staple food in the village.

No buttons or clothing fasteners were recovered from the village, but one spherical, wire-wound, clear-glass bead was found. A thin piece of slate is also interesting as it hints, perhaps, at literacy, while a calcite crystal may relate to African-based religious beliefs.

The data recovered from the excavations at Wallblake Estate have only just begun to be analyzed, and the interpretations presented here should be viewed as preliminary. The project has produced some interesting results, begun to provide a significant picture of the chronology and activities of the people living at Wallblake, raised new questions to be answered in future field seasons,

and demonstrated the significant archaeological potential that exists at the Wallblake Estate.