

WE HERITAGE ON DISPLAY



We Gatherin'
2025

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We Gatherin' in Barbados... to Celebrate who we are!

ST. THOMAS

St. Thomas is the only landlocked parish selected among the First Six Barbadian parishes by Governor Sir William Tufton in 1629. Carved out of the original landmass of St. James and St. Michael, it ended being larger than its mother parish, St. James. The parish name honours **Thomas Didymus**, the Apostle of Christ, and it sits almost in the middle of the island.

Topography of St. Thomas

Consisting mostly of fertile, red-soiled, undulating table land, the parish of 8,500 acres has lofty peaks and deep valleys which render it one of the most eco-diverse spaces in the region and also a mesmerising place to visit in the heart of Barbados: There are in excess of fifty-five plantations and estates in the parish which peaks at Mount Misery, then continues along the slope leading to the summit of Mount Hillaby, but in between are shallow gullies, deep ravines, and caves the likes of which are not seen in any other parish.

History of St. Thomas

Diversity within the parish is the bedrock of its history, for its topography demanded a different approach which, historically, kept the pristine nature of the parish intact and away from the human degradation which has affected some beachfront parishes.

It is located generally east of the old trail that became the Highway 2A road, it stretches northward from Warrens, St. Michael, close to the Lancaster Gully in St. James. Most of the leeward side of the current road from Portvale Sugar Factory and Hutson Sugar Museum is in St James parish. A rudimentary raft of steps (really a primitive road) through Trents Gully from Holetown, would have made early exploration and discovery of St. Thomas a relatively easy task. The Parish Church is now in its fourth iteration. The 1628 timber original and subsequent stone structures were destroyed by hurricanes in 1675, 1780 and 1831. The current quaint, neo-gothic chapel was consecrated 1836. Under Rector **Coleridge Darlington**, it now boasts an online capacity and ministry second to none in Barbados.

Special Feature

Alderman, **Thomas Harrison** endowed the Harrison Free School which later became the famous Harrison College. He also owned the lands, in this parish, under which or through which, the most exquisite limestone cave had been, for eons, naturally established. Strangely, until two generations ago, only residents nearby knew of this cave, but exploration by **Ole Sorenson, Tony Mason** and **Alison Thornhill**, and sensitive and careful excavation after 1974, lead to the official opening in 1981 of this spectacular underground phenomenon we now know as Harrison's Cave.

Cole's Cave

Two centuries ago, Sir **Robert Schomburgk** extolled the virtues of Cole's Cave whose partly concealed entrance is located very close to the famous Jack-in-the-box Gully. He gave it a splendid review and described it as the most celebrated cavern in Barbados: Jack-in-the-box gully is located south of Ayshford and north of Hopewell through whose lands it disappears as it goes underground, then through Vauclose towards the west coast.



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Gullies & Other Features

Some other spectacles reside in the Heart of Barbados. Welsh born **General Williams'** mansion may no longer be available to the public, but the grand ravine - a former cave whose roof fell in - which he had planted with beautiful and interesting fruit and forest trees, still exists as the Welshman Hall Gully, linked underground to Harrison's Cave, mere metres away.

The back door of this gully leads uphill to the spectacular Richmond Hill Flower Forest or opens directly on Carrington's Village which is the southern adjacent to towering Mount Misery - one of Barbados' three highest peaks. Between Misery and Mount Hillaby is an underground stream which surfaces downhill as Porey Spring and which, to this day is still one of the Wonders of Barbados.

There are more: The Apes Hill/Farmers Gully leads to the well known and formerly Lancaster Gully; the Dunscombe Fork leads to the Ridgeway and Portvale Gully which joins Lancaster on its way to the Hole. A smaller gully from Content, immediately south of the Parish Church, finds its way to the Hometown Police Station stream via Bennetts and Molyneaux.



Early & Recent Politics

The political history of the parish is just as exciting. In 1645, **Lord Francis, Fifth Baron Willoughby** of Parham, was a Cromwell supporter. In 1648 he switched allegiance and joined the Royalist Forces and, in 1650 was appointed Lord Proprietor and Governor of Barbados. He was Commander in Chief of the local forces against the attempted invasion of Cromwell's **Admiral Ayscue**. After the Appeasement and the Declaration of Oistins in 1652, **Lord Willoughby** relinquished the Governorship until the 1660 Restoration of Royalty. He died in a storm in July 1666 when his ship "Hope" sank off St. Kitts during his attempt to recapture the French owned Islands for Britain.

His house, now the Bagatelle Great House, was reportedly built in 1645. It leads a group of Heritage buildings in the parish which include Warrens 1682 House, Fisher Pond Great House, Prior Park and Welches, as well as the 1833 rebuilt Sharon Moravian and the 1836 Parish Church.

In more recent times the parish gave succour, quite unsurprisingly, to the growing social development of Barbados by completely embracing the post 1937 Labour Movement. Icons such as **Dr. H. G. Cummins** and **Sir. Ronald Mapp** embraced and supported the leadership of Sir Grantley Adams, and lead the way which is now being travelled by **Hon. Cynthia Forde**, a product of this Parish. She is the first female parliamentary representative for St. Thomas.



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Only in this Parish

One will find the remains of "Old Sharon", the first permanent settlement of the Moravians after they arrived in 1765 with their mission to the Enslaved. They built and moved to New Sharon at Jackson in 1799 but left behind their well organised and immaculately stone bordered graveyard known as "Bunker Hill", located west of the Shop Hill Road at Grand View.

This cemetery which contained the tomb of "**Sara**" the first Moravian Convert of Colour in Barbados, was unconscionably bulldozed one sad Saturday in 2007.

Only in this parish will one find "**Freedom Village**" which celebrates one of the first widespread, non-family bequeathed settlements of enslaved or newly freed Afro-Barbadians. Around the time of Emancipation, **Reynold Alleyne Elcock**, owner of Mount Wilton Plantation, endowed a bequest to his slaves and former slaves, but he had to die for that bequest to be activated. He died; violently! That bequest, after some time in the judicial system, was allowed, and most of the legatees bought land in the marginally arable Rock Hall area. It might have been all they could get, but it was land and they bought it. The yet unfinished Freedom Village with the Statue of the Nuclear African Family, aback of Rock Hall's Parish Rectory is, even in its unfinished state, an important Historic site.

On the other side of the Parish Rectory, the St. Thomas District Hospital was established to remove patients from the individual parish almshouses. It now caters mainly to senior citizens who have been the bedrock of Barbados but have now reached their age of 'alternate care' away from home.





Schools were established near the chapels of the two early denominations, Anglican and Moravian: Arch Hall, Holy Innocents, then Welches by the former; Sharon and Clifton Hall by the latter. Now Hillaby-Turners Hall Amalgamated resides at Farmers. At the 400 year old Canfield House in the Highlands of St. Thomas, there is the Challenor School for the island's mentally challenged children and adults.

In 2007 the St. Thomas Secondary School opened at Cane Garden. It was later renamed to honour the revered educator who penned our National Pledge. **Lester Vaughan** was a stand-out among educators who served in the parish. His brother **Elbert**, along with others including venerable **Lawrence T. Gay**, **Rev Frank Barker**, **Herbert Downes**, **Guinness Lewis**, **Frank Watson**, **Millicent Wilkinson**, **Gladys Daniel**, **Evelyn Ramsay**, **Myra Wallace**, **Judy Roach**, and **Hon Cynthia Forde** before she opted to serve at State level.

These titans of education prepared the sons and daughters of the parish for higher service and produced citizens who have contributed at high levels to the development of State. Count among them **Vestryman Kenneth Sandiford**, Senior Civil Servant **Courtenay Richards** and his brother **Ralph Richards**, audio technician; Insurance executive **Dennis Hope** and WIBISCO CEO **Carl Downes**, his brother **Timothy**, now Barbados' Honorary Consul in Boston, and sister **Marion**, long serving teacher in St James; educator **George Pilgrim**, business families including

Wilbert Thorne, the **Arthurs**, **Burkes**, **Bruces**, **Fosters**, **Morrisses**, **Murrays** and **Robinsons**.

St. Thomas is one of the six judicial districts of Barbados. District D originally resided at Rock Hall near Content, but was recently removed to Canewood. The Rock Hall complex included Courthouse, Police Station and, later, a Social Centre which regularly hosted a weekend social hop or dance. No wonder then, that the area produced entertainers and groups such as the highly successful **Escorts** of the 1960's, and **AJA**, son of **Courtenay Richards**, who are products of Rock Hall.

Proximity to the Courthouse and police station may have also inspired the likes of newly appointed Supreme Court Judge, **Carlisle Greaves**; Policeman and jurist, the late **Dorian Taylor**; Senior Policemen including **Barton Pilgrim**, **Byron Clarke**, **Jedder Robinson**, **Henderson Harris**, as well as past and current Directors of Music, **Keith Ellis** and **Andrew Lynch**.

These and others inherited a great legacy and have passed on an even greater heritage through the likes of long serving Postmistress **Ms. Dean Hutchinson** and our revered and celebrated centenarians including **Oliver Alleyne-Williams**, **Edna Lynch** and **Maude Hutchinson**.

These and countless others gone before are 'the true Heart of Barbados: They will continue to inspire us to aspire to be its Soul as well.

