

WE HERITAGE ON DISPLAY



We Gatherin'
2025

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

ST. JOHN

The eastern windswept parish of St. John, Barbados, is one of our main plantation parishes boasting 8,600 acres of land. This seventh largest parish may have been the first to be officially named by Governor Philip Belle in 1641 but may have been previously functioning as a borough of St. Michael, since it is mentioned in a deed as early as 1640. The parish took its name from its parish church which, itself, was named for St. John 'the Divine', Apostle of Christ. It was formed as an administrative unit, out of the established parish of St. Michael.

Topography of St. John

St. John is part of the Scotland District which stretches from Pico Tenerife in the North to Consett Bay - that part of the island which suffers constant erosion after heavy rainfall or rough seas. Most of the landmass is sited above the Second-High Cliff and is thus very fertile clay soil tableland.

The main topographical feature, the Great Limestone Cliff, includes Hackleton's, whereon stands the historic parish church. This area contains two major features which render the parish a most attractive, but also valuable part of the compact, non-mountainous island that is Barbados. Firstly, there is the spectacularly rugged cliff which offers a panoramic view of the entire east coast.

Secondly, there is the secret that the parish contains the largest number of Barbados' springs. The limestone formation of St. John thus provides water-scarce Barbados with its greatest sources of precious potable water. The seven parish fountainheads are at Ben's Spring, College, Sealy Hall, Newcastle, Bath, Pothouse and, of course, Bowmanston - the best known spring, reservoir and pumping station which has become the Bajan synonym for 'a drink of good tasting water.'

History of the Anglican Church

Equally important is the dominant role of two socio-cultural institutions - the Anglican Church and

the tight network of sugar plantations which, until 1960, were the reason Barbados was marked as the most conservative and THE most "British" of Britain's Caribbean colonies.

The monopoly of the English Church in early Barbados is best epitomized in this parish where, by a stroke of fortune in the geography of birth, there resided, per capita, the highest number of Anglican Chapels on the island. St. Margaret's, St. Mark's, St. Julian, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael's, Holy Cross and the Seminary Chapel, all came after the 1640 parish church. The parish church, originally built of local wood, was damaged and rebuilt of stone after being burnt in 1660, then partially destroyed but completely rebuilt after the hurricane of 1675. The current beautiful Gothic structure was built after destruction by the 1831 hurricane that devastated Barbados. There is a body of opinion that the first chapel was built as late as 1645, but this defies all the conventions of early Barbados which point to chapel construction at the naming of the parish in or near 1640.



This chapel's near 200-year-old interior, mostly of Barbados mahogany, provides a quiet sanctuary for meditative visits by locals and visitors alike, but its eastern exterior unfolds to the most awesome and exquisite panorama afforded in any Barbadian churchyard. From its northwestern rampart, one sees the northern point of Pico Tenerife near Cove Bay in St. Lucy. From its eastern sundial, one of only two on the island, one has the entire eastern coastline in view – from beyond Ragged Point in St. Philip, northwards to Pico.

If the former is intriguing, the graveyard is even more esoteric and historic. Consider the tomb of Greco-Italian English Civil War refugee, Ferdinando Paleologus who came to Barbados just before the 1645 Battle of Naseby, Northants, and died in 1670. This descendant of Byzantine Emperors became Churchwarden here and owned two of the largest plantations in the parish. Compare him with David John Howard Thompson, our much beloved sixth Prime Minister and representative of this parish from 1987 until his death, at age 48, on 23rd October 2010. Thompson is buried south of Paleologus – the ancient and the modern gravesites both welcoming the Atlantic breezes.

History of the Plantations

St. John rivals only St. James as the chief bastion of the plantocracy, one of the most precious jewels in the crown of 'King Sugar' who reigned in this island for over 350 years. Out of some 500 plantations, this parish boasted fifty or ten percent of the total. These include 17th century Bath and Bowmanston, College and Society, Newcastle and Wakefield, Guinea and Hothersal, Pool and Todds; as well as the Paleologus owned Ashford and Clifton Hall.

Hall, whose majority lands lie in St. George, but whose proximity to each other engendered the Bajan proverb of "owning Drax Hall and Kendal", meaning the lion's share of anything considered.

Planter families such as the early Draxes, Colletons, Hothersalls, Consetts, Walronds, and the later Hayneses, Pemberton, Todds, Rouses, Carters, Dottins, Estwicks, Sealys and neighboring Piles formed the closely-knit Sugar-Baron Barbadian elites who occupied the foremost positions in the island's Councils of State and the Militia. So lofty was this aristocracy that an old saying recalls that **"the Piles spoke only to the Sealys; and the Sealys spoke only to God!"**

The Codringtons of Barbados

One aristocratic family name not mentioned previously was "Codrington". They first arrived in Barbados when Christopher II, son of Christopher Codrington of Gloucestershire, settled in Antigua and in Barbados where he acquired two St. John plantations, Consett and Codrington, now called College and Society. His son Christopher III, born here in 1668, was educated at Oxford before joining King William's Coldstream Guards. He returned to Barbados to develop his father's eastern plantations but was soon, on his father's death, inheriting them and his father's post as Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward Islands.

Religiously inspired, Christopher III died in 1710 at Consett. Unsurprisingly his will bequeathed his estates to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to be converted to the teaching of medicine and divinity, and it instructed that his then 300 slaves be perpetually retained, treated with kindness and instructed into Christianity. Trustees the Anglican Church obliged and, by 1745, had established the College which was completed in 1743, a boys Grammar School (the Lodge, 1745) the Society Chapel, now Holy Cross, circa 1743, and a sanitarium for sick slaves. When in 1830 the College began exclusively training theologians, it became the first such institution in the entire Anglican communion and the first institution of tertiary study in the British Caribbean.

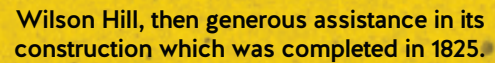
Barbados' second largest acreage was Kendal Plantation, contiguous to the island's largest, Drax



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In 1948, Mrs. Norman Simpson, doyenne of the D. M. Simpson family of engineers (grandmother of Sir Kyffin), converted a carpenter's woodshed into a small chapel. In 1954, she donated land and major funds for the erection of Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel, the second Catholic chapel in Barbados. She then bequeathed Verdun Great House and lands for the erection of a boarding school which the Presentation Brothers opened in 1958. It is now home to Marian Retreat Centre.

Other non-conformists have now spread across the parish, these include Rastafari who, in 1975 held its Inauguration Convention at Mt. Carmel, literally on the grounds of Codrington College.

The Codringtons of Barbados (Continued)

Come Emancipation in 1838, the enslaved on the Codrington estates, after centuries of subhuman treatment, were the first in Barbados to receive their freedom, on 30th May, fully two months before the general release. In 1830 the College produced the first ordinands for the Diocese of the West Indies. In 1875 Codrington was affiliated to Durham University and its graduates received their degrees from Durham until the 1955 affiliation to University of the West Indies.

In 1912, the Rawle Institute at Codrington commenced teacher training. In 1917 a Grammar School for Girls was founded on the grounds of Holy Cross, 122 years after the contiguous 1795 Society Elementary School was opened to cater to the children of the enslaved, the first such institution in Barbados. Both buildings are now devoted to the use of offshore educational institutions.

Briefly mentioned previously among the plantocracy, generations of the Haynes family acquired massive holdings in the eastern parishes. By the nineteenth century J. A. Edmund Haynes owned Guinea, Cliff, Bath, Newcastle, Haynes Hill, Clifton Hall and Wakefield plantations in this parish alone. He gave generously to all denominations extant: to St. Margaret's Chapel and especially to the Mount Tabor Moravian Chapel whose land was first donated near his home at

The Anglo Barbadian elites were not the first to occupy these fertile lands. There are two groups whose histories must be included in any study of Barbados. First the Amerindian people such as the Taino and Kalinago who spread across Central and South America and inhabited Barbados perhaps as late as the year 1500 (or even later). The Lokono (People) left their handiwork all over Barbados – especially in St. John where extensive deposits of archaeological material are still being discovered and which point to substantial settlements at Newcastle, Kendal, Malvern and Glenburnie. Today's descendants of the Lokono are regularly visiting the coastal areas of Consetts and College in search of artifacts left by their ancestors.

Much more modern residents of the parish were and are descendants of the early British arrivals who, for various reasons came upon hard times and were forced to migrate to these eastern parts of the island. British indentured servants, political prisoners and rebels, religious exiles and captive English boys who were 'intoxicated before being incarcerated' on ships in the Channel, found themselves "Barbadosed" and some were subjected to the most inhuman treatment by their Anglo-Barbadian overlords. Only the arrival of African slave labour eased their lot when many were elevated to the Militia in which they were allocated relatively good housing and some arable land. However, come Emancipation and the end of the Militia, their woes reappeared, and they became stuck between rocks and

Hated by blacks and despised by white owner patrons, they could not wait to be rid of their masters and sought to escape the island at the end of their periods of service. Some who could neither pay their way out nor manage to stowaway back to the UK, migrated in numbers to the rock-strewn east coast parishes, most of them arriving as late as Emancipation. Here they lived - mostly in contained villages - as desperately poor scabble farmers and as fishermen.

As this island became a modern society, many of them, by dint of hard work, grit and guts, and some, embracing improved avenues of education, have become iconic citizens whose contributions to this and other societies are now invaluable.

The severely guarded franchise limited only the planters, then reluctantly, the merchants, to the early fruits of governance, but gradually, poor whites, mulattoes, then freed blacks, in that order, gained access to the vote, to positions of eminence, then to seats at the table of Parliament, through the acquisition of lands, great and small. The **Goddard** and **Williams** families are foremost among the first group. These families, mainly through business enterprises, have become titans in the Caribbean and beyond, serving in government, some becoming Knights of the Realm.

His Lordship Rt. Rev. Peter Fenty heads the second group. This 1951 St. John born priest is an “Old Cod” graduate of 1975. After serving at home, he migrated to Canada where, as Archdeacon of York in 2013, he was elected Suffragan Bishop, Diocese of Toronto, the first of African descent in the Church of Canada. This cousin of our beloved national hero and global icon ‘Rihanna’ retired in December 2020.

Among the blacks, the **Most Reverend Dr. John W. D. Holder**, Bishop of Barbados (2000-18) and Archbishop of the West Indies, also an “Old Cod”, has spent most of his working life in the parish, from curacies in St. John Chapels to lecturing at Codrington College. The Bishops are here mentioned since, in the old order, they would have sat in the upper Houses of Government.

Also consider these three who joined the planter class: Just after Emancipation, **James Bowen Mapp** purchased Cherry Grove (1848), a small estate. Within five years he had subdivided and established its start as a major Free Village in the parish. Around 1890, **Charles Miller Austin**, a smithy, bought Eastmont, then the much larger Malvern, and established himself as a major landowner. His grandson **Sir Harold Bernard St. John** became our third Prime Minister. **Bernard Leslie Barrow** bought several plots of land across the parish and was eventually elected, in the mid-1940s, to represent the parish in the House of Assembly.

Several international scientists have emerged from St. John. Among them, **Dr. William M. H. Greaves** (1897-1955) has a lunar crater named after him. This Lodge boy, Barbados Scholar of 1915 and “Old Cod” 1915-17, graduated Cambridge in 1925 with double firsts in Astronomy and Mathematics, and later became Astronomer Royal of Scotland and Professor of Astronomy at Edinburgh University from 1938 until his death.

In the same field, **Herbert Skeete**, also of The Lodge and Barbados Scholar of 1970, became a U. S. Nuclear Physicist and publisher for Reuters Computers Division on Wall Street. Preceding him at The Lodge by ten years was Dr. Ken Harewood G. C. M. of College Land, schoolboy footballer extraordinaire and later research scientist for Pfizer Inc. He was appointed Distinguished Professor at the Biomedical/Biotechnological Institute of the University of North Carolina. Apart from his FDA approved work on bovine calf rennin, used in the making of cheese, he is best known for his contribution to the discovery of the first human leukaemia virus and the virus that causes AIDS.

Tertiary Education has been well represented by parishioners. Headed by **Dr. Sir Keith Hunte**, former Principal of Cave Hill Campus of UWI, the list includes **Andrew Lewis**, former Registrar at Cave Hill; **Trevor G. Marshall**, former head of History at BCC; **Nigel Bradshaw**, Deputy Principal of BCC and **Rev. Dr. Von Watson**, Senior Cleric and Lecturer at Codrington College. **Esme Lewis Bascombe** and **Mabel Greaves** are remembered, among others, for their successes in primary education.



Entertainment

St. John is well served in cultural circles: Pride of place goes to the well-established duo of St. John Folk Group and the Pride of Wilson Hill, closely followed by artistes **Adrian Clarke**, **Wendy Alleyne** and **Mike Grosvenor**. Among many others past and present, **Pearson Bellamy** and **Trevor Marshall** contributed their organizational and research skills. Artist **Ras Ishi Butcher** and dancer **Jennifer Sealy** are also proud progeny of the parish.

Sports in the Parish

Codrington provided the earliest cricket ground in this parish which later produced several notables including **Colin Blades**, **Tony Mayers**, **Ellis Brathwaite** and **Livvy Puckering**. Athletics nurtured Barbados Scholar **Washington Jordan**, **Henderson Bascombe**, Consul General **Earl Glasgow**, **Debbie Cobbler** and **Rashida Belgrave** and seniors **Roland Waithe** and **Anthony Headley**.

Beauty Spots and Exotic Place Names

Apart from the spectacular high vantage points which offer such vistas of Barbados' eastern parts, St. John is home to famous beach and excursion spots such as



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Bath, Martin's Bay, Broadley Beach, and Codrington, as well as great houses including Malvern, Colleton and Villa Nova.

Most parish names are derived from families but exotica such as Featherbed Lane, Below the Cliff, Gall Hill, Pot House, Easy Hall and Zoares, give way to Yarico's Pond which excels as an indigenous place-name in Barbados, known for its melancholy lore.

Yarico is said to have befriended a British sailor when all his shipmates were ambushed and killed by natives as soon as they landed on the Spanish Main (probably Venezuela). She hid and cared for this lone survivor and when he later stealthily returned to a ship, she followed him on board and they eventually arrived at Barbados where he soon sold her into slavery. Some stories say she gave birth to his child in the pond; others, that she eventually drowned herself therein, next to the house (presumably Kendal) at which the object of her unrequited attention lived.

The Dangerous Side of St. John was exposed in June 1896 when a bag of manjak which was being hoisted to the surface of the mine, fell back into the pit and overturned a lamp which in turn ignited the tar coal. A severely injured miner was hoisted upwards, but on reaching the surface, he too fell back into the fiery mine and had to be helped again. He fell a second time to his instant death. His main helper was also seriously injured and had to be sent by train to hospital.



Prominent Families include the **Pilgrims** of Mount Tabor, the **Mayers** clan of Newcastle, the **Grahams** of Stewarts Hill and the **Jordans**, led by now deceased **Dr. Oscar**. Individual accomplishments are recorded in the lives of **Sir Geoffrey Cave**; **Sir Fred Gollop**, former

President of Senate; **Professor Sir Henry Fraser**; **Horatio Cooke**, Unionist; **Garvey Husbands** and **Ms. Shirley Belle**, Jurists and Senior Civil Servants including **Dr. Lorna Inniss**, **Major Sam Headley** and **Owen Estwick**.

OUR CENTENARIANS, however, are elevated to our most proud place of honour and we hold them in highest regard. Count among them Etherline Puckerin, George Toppin, Helen Hutchinson, Icilma Marsh, Ruby Brewster and Vida Grace.

*These loyal sons
and daughters
all... do hereby
make us proud!*



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