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THE DISCOVERY & FIRST SETTLEMENT OF BARBADOS

The following is a letter received from Father Jesse of St. Lucia, who is well known to readers of our Journal for his articles on the archaeology and history of St. Lucia.

ST. LUCIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 126

The Presbytery,
Castries, St. Lucia,
West Indies.

14th December, 1966

The Editor,
Barbados Museum & Historical
Society Journal,
Barbados.

Dear Sir,

I would be glad to know what authority there is for the story of the "Oliph Blossome" crew landing on the leeward coast of Barbados in 1605, erecting a cross there, and inscribing on a tree: "*James K. of E. and of this Island.*"

In the account of the landing of 67 of the "Oliph Blossome" passengers in St. Lucia that same year which "CARIBBEAN QUARTERLY" has just published (Vol. 12, No. 1 — March 1966), John Nicholl (one of the 67) does not mention the vessel stopping at Barbados.

In the account of this voyage of the "Oliph Blossome" which is found in "PURCHAS HIS PILGRIMES" (a collection of travel stories published in 1625), there is a mention of a stop at "the Isle of Barbudos", but no mention of erecting a cross and putting an inscription on a tree: "...we were faine to touch first at the Isle of Barbudos, and

then at Santa Luzia..." In the margin one finds "*Saint Barbudos.*"

I understand that "PURCHAS HIS PILGRIMES" also has stories from the pens of *William Turner* and *John Wilson*, both of whom are believed to have been on the "Oliph Blossome" in 1605. Maybe one of these mentions the "taking possession of Barbados".

Yours faithfully,

C. Jesse F.M.I.

Rev. C. Jesse.

In reply to Father Jesse's letter, the full facts so far as these are known are recounted, not only of the discovery of Barbados, but also of the first settlement. Even today in recently published books we come across the error that Barbados was discovered in 1605. Certainly this was once believed in Barbados to be the date of its discovery and celebrations to mark the tercentenary of this fact were held, prematurely, in 1905. Then monuments were erected at Holetown and Indian River, and the most beautiful of all Barbadian stamps was issued bearing a picture of the *Olive Blossom*, designed by Lady Carter, the wife of the then Governor, to celebrate this occasion. As the authorities quoted in the following account are out of print and not readily available, in replying to Father Jesse's letter, the discovery as well as the settlement of Barbados are once again reviewed.

In the light of our present knowledge, Barbados was discovered by the Spaniards or Portuguese prior to 1511. On 23rd December, 1511, King Ferdinand of Spain addressed a Cedula to Don Diego Colon, a son of Christopher Columbus, the Admiral and Governor of the Indies, concerning the treatment of the Indian inhabitants of the West Indies.

Express permission was given to wage war on the Caribs and to sell them as slaves, but only in respect of the islands named which included 'la isla de los Barbudos.'¹ Although Barbados was later to be confused with the island of Barbuda, there is no confusion here of its geographical position.

Barbados appears on the Egerton Chart of 1512—13 as 'la barbarata'.² In the year 1518, the Emperor Charles V issued Instructions about the treatment of Indians in the West Indies in which Barbados is again described as 'la Isla de los Barbudos'.³ These Instructions contradict the Cedula of 1511 in that the Indians who had been taken from Barbados to Hispaniola were to be treated as natives of Hispaniola, who were Arawak Indians.

On the Maggiola Chart of 1519 Barbados is marked as 'barbuda'⁴ and on a globe in the Vatican Library of 1520 as 'Barbudos'.⁵ On the Turin Spanish map of 1523—5 the island is named 'de los bazbados'.⁴ On a French map in the British Museum prior to 1536, Barbados is marked as 'Bernados'⁶; and so under various names Barbados continued to be marked on 16th. century maps and charts — Barnodo, S. Barduda, S. Barbudos, Barnodos, etc. Since Barbados occupies such a prominent easterly position, it is not surprising that it is marked on such early charts and maps.

Now, as to the discovery of Barbados by the English. As Father Jesse points out in his letter, John Nicholl in his book *An Houre Glasse of Indian Newes*, printed in London, in 1607, makes no mention of the ship the *Olive Branch* calling at Barbados. This vessel sailed from London on 12 April 1605, with 67 English passengers to reinforce a settlement on the River Wiapoco in Guiana. The ship was carried to leeward of the River Wiapoco and spent some time in trying to reach its goal. As food was becoming short, it was decided to obtain supplies in the Lesser Antilles and the vessel called at St. Lucia, where food was obtained from the Caribs. Owing to shortage of supplies, sickness and ill feeling between the passengers and seamen, the former were landed at St. Lucia on 23rd August 1605. The Caribs soon after attacked the settlers and 19 survivors fled

by boat to the Spanish Main, of whom four eventually reached Europe.

Nicholl, who was one of the passengers in the *Olive Branch* makes no mention of Barbados. Dr. Williamson has conclusively proved that in *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, Purchas gives an inaccurate account of what Nicholl wrote, with abridgements and interpolations, including that of the English discovery of Barbados in the year 1605. A second account of this voyage by William Turner, a member of the ship's company, Dr. Williamson says: "is also avowedly mutilated by the Editor, but as the original is not now traceable its probable inaccuracies cannot be checked." Further, Purchas makes Turner responsible for a statement to the effect that Barbados was sighted on 14th. August and that it was only inhabited by hogs, pigeons and parrots. Turner does not state that a landing was made at Barbados, "although his local details imply it."⁷

Nearly 200 years later we find in Bryan Edwards's *History of the West Indies* the story of the discovery of Barbados as given by Purchas in an enlarged version. "Of the English, the first who are known to have landed in this island, were the crew of a ship called the *Olive Blossom* bound from London to Surinam, in 1605, and fitted out at the expense of Sir Olive Leigh, whom Purchas styles 'a worshipful knight of Kent'. Finding it without inhabitants, they took possession of the country, by fixing up a cross on the spot where *James-Town* was afterwards built, with this inscription, "James King of England and this island;" but they began no settlement, nor made any considerable stay in a country entirely inhabited and overgrown with woods; yet it furnished them with fresh provisions. They found pigs, pigeons, and parrots, and the sea abounded with fish"⁸

Bryan Edwards clearly gives Purchas as his source for the *Olive Blossom* story. The source for the erection of a cross and the inscription is probably *Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados* published in Barbados anonymously in 1741. Here is the first appearance of this story and it varies slightly from Bryan Edwards's account in that the inscription is here on a tree.

1. *The Island of Grenada 1650—1950*, by R. P. Devas, 1965, Apx. I, pp. 187—9.
2. "The Early History of the Caribbee Islands 1493—1530," by Thos. W. Cameron., *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 50, 1934, p. 98.
3. *The History of Barbados* by Sir Robert Schomburgk, 1847, p. 255—6.
4. Cameron, p. 98.
5. Personal observation.
6. Schomburgk, plate following p. 251.
7. *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, by Samuel Purchas, 1625—26. *The Caribbee Islands under the Proprietary Patents* by James A. Williamson, 1926, pp. 13—15.
8. *History of the West Indies* by Bryan Edwards, Vol. I, p. 322, 1794 edn.

"1605 An *English* vessel call'd the *Olive* in her Return from a Voyage to Guiney [Guiana], touch'd at this Island of *Barbados*. and landing some men, they set up a Cross in or about St. James's Town, now call'd the Hole, and inscrib'd on a Tree adjoining *James K: of E: and this Island*. Having thus done, they came along-shore to the Indian River, and left there also some marks of their Possession for the Crown of England. This ship went from *Barbados* to *St. Christopher's*, where they found twenty-eight *English* Men and Five Women, all the Inhabitants of that Island, who would have persuaded the Captain of the Ship to leave some of his Men or to have stayed with them for their better Security, until another Ship arriv'd, which they expected in three Months, but cou'd not prevail on him to do either."⁹

This little book carries on its title page the following: "Extracted from Ancient Records, Papers and Accounts taken from Mr. *William Arnold*, Mr. *Samuel Bulkly* and Mr. *John Summers*, some of the first settlers the last of whom was alive in 1688, aged 82."¹⁰

As Dr. Williamson points out, this then is the source of the story of the 1605 landing by the English. But, when the above account is studied, it is impossible for it to have taken place in 1605. For in 1605 there were "no English at St. Christopher, there was no Earl of Carlisle and Sir William Courteen so far as is known had no interests in South America or the West Indies. In 1624—5, on the other hand, all the facts fit neatly together." By then, Thomas Warner's settlement had taken place at St. Kitts, Courteen had a ship which had visited Barbados and the Earl of Carlisle was to receive his grants shortly afterwards — the first Letters Patent to Carlisle are dated 25th February 1628 and the second, 7th. April 1628, whereby he received a grant of the Caribbee Islands.¹¹

Dr. Williamson opines that either the ancient planters gave the date 1624 or 1625 and that the compiler of *Memoirs of the First Settlement of Barbados* altered this, having read the Purchas story to 1605; or, that the compiler misread the date as 1605 instead of 1624 or 1625. With this view the late Professor Vincent Harlow and the late Sir Charles P. Clarke agreed.¹²

Bryan Edwards's *History of the West Indies*¹³ has long been accepted as an authority and the date which he gives for the discovery of Barbados by the English has been followed by writers on Barbados as 1605. This date as we have noted above he took from Purchas. Even so scholarly a writer as Sir Robert Schomburgk has also erred in this respect. He quotes Purchas as his authority and gives the references to Purchas. Schomburgk gives the expanded version of the story of the discovery of Barbados by the English as set out in *Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados*. Further, Schomburgk states that in the *Memoirs of the First Settlement* it is stated that "the *Olive* was returning from a voyage to Guinea when she touched at Barbados: this is unconfirmed by any contemporary historian. . ." *The Memoirs of the First Settlement* does state "the *Olive*, in her Return from a Voyage to Guiney touch'd at this island of Barbados. . ."¹⁴ This is now accepted to read Guiana.

Now, let us turn to our earliest historian, Richard Ligon, whose *History of Barbados* appeared first in 1657, and thus antedates the *Memoirs of the First Settlement*.

Ligon, a Royalist refugee, lived in Barbados from 1647 to 1650. He prefaces his account of the discovery of Barbados as follows: "But before I come to say anything of the Island, as it was when I arrived there, I will beg leave, to deliver you a word or two, what hath been told me by the most ancient Planters, that we found there, and what they had by tradition from their Predecessors. For, few or none of them that first set foot there, were now living.

"About the year a ship of Sir *William Courteens*, returning from *Fernambork* [Pernambuco] in *Brasil*, being driven by foul weather upon this coast, chanced to fall upon this Island, which is not far out of the way being the most windwardly Island of all the *Carribbies* (*Tobago* only excepted;) and Anchoring before it, stayed some time, to inform themselves of the nature of the place; which they found by tryals in several parts, to be so overgrown with wood, as there could be found no *Champions* or *Savannas* for men to dwell in; nor found they any

9. *Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados*, London, 1742, p. 2. Another edition of this work was printed at Barbados in 1891. Williamson, pp. 16-17.

10. *Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados*, title page.

11. Williamson, p. 17.

12. *A History of Barbados 1625-1685* by Vincent T. Harlow, 1926, p. 3; "The Tercentenary of the First Settlement of Barbados February 1927" by Sir Charles Pitcher Clarke, *Tercentenary Christmas Number of the Barbados Advocate* 1926, pp. 1-2.

13. There are various editions of this book.

14. Schomburgk, p. 258; *Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados* 1743, at p. 2. Schomburgk also errs in dating the English settlement of Barbados in the year 1625 instead of 1627. He does not give the important fact that Captain Powell, after landing the settlers went to South America for economic plants and brought back Arawak Indians to teach the settlers how to grow these,

beasts to inhabit there, only Hogs, and those in abundance; the Portugals [Portuguese] having long before, put ashore for breed, in case they should at any time be driven by foul weather, to be cast upon the Island, they might there find fresh meat, to serve them upon such an extremity: And the fruits and roots that grew there, afforded them so great plenty of food, as they multiplied abundantly. So that the Natives of the leeward Islands [Caribs] that were at the distance of sight, coming hither in their *Cannoas* and *Peria-gos* [Canoes and Pirogues]; and finding such Game to hunt, as these hogs, and the flesh so sweet and excellent in taste, they came often hither a hunting, and stayed sometimes a month together, and so returned again at pleasure, leaving behind them certain tokens of their being here, which were, Pots, of several sizes, in which they boiled their meat, made of clay, so finely tempered, and turned with such art, as I have not seen any like them for fineness of mettle, and curiosity of turning, in *England*. This information I received from the Planters in *Barbados*.¹⁵

Ligon, it will be noted, leaves the year of the island's discovery blank. The hunting expeditions of the Caribs were from the Windward Islands although these can be said to be to the Leeward of Barbados. It is doubtful if Barbados, owing to its lack of mountains can be seen from any islands but St. Vincent and possibly St. Lucia. The abundance of Carib pottery found in Barbados leads to the conclusion that there were settlements of Caribs here for some time.¹⁵

There is then the evidence of Captain Simon Gordan who visited Barbados about 1620 although his dating is rather vague. On 25th July, 1660, Captain Simon Gordan, who was then about 60, gave evidence before a Master of Chancery that "about 40 years past sayleing in the West Indias he did land upon the Island now called the Barbadas, where he with others did hunt and take Hogs without discovery or hearing of any people upon the said Island." Later, Gordan asserts that in 1626 he was a member of the first party of colonists who landed at Barbados under Captain Henry Powell. Dr. Williamson comments that he was evidently uncertain of the date of his first visit to Barbados and that it was possibly that of the landing of 1624—5.¹⁶

Major John Scott, Geographer of King Charles II, writing about the year 1668, says of Barbados: "This island was never the habitation of any natives and unknown to the

Europeans, otherwise than by sight, until one Pedro a Compos in a voyage to Margaretha, 1563, being in great want of water, fortun'd to fall with Barbados, and being becalmed went ashore near the river formerly called the Indian River, but in the map, Fontabelle, and upon search finding the Island stored with excellent water, judg'd it worth a name, and particular notice. The name he gave it, it bears. He likewise left Hogs to breed upon it, which the Indians of St. Vincent's coming to know, they did some years after often visit it for hunting.

"In the year 1624 a ship of Sir William Courteen, a merchant of London, in her voyage from Brazil, put into the road since called Austines (Oistins) and after short stay sayled from thence, visiting all the bays on the west and southern parts of the Island, and finding the land to promise much of the nature of Brazils, and adorned with curious prospects rather than mountains, and stored with wild Hogs judg'd it worth especial notice"¹⁷

Scott's account was written after Ligon's *History*, which he had possibly seen, but the importance to us is that he gives a year for the discovery of Barbados by the English. He also gives the name of the Captain of the ship as Thomas Powell, but according to Chancery Proceedings, it was John Powell that "was the first person (as these defendants were informed) that did discover the same Island and did set up his Majesty's standard. . ."¹⁷ Scott gives the year of the discovery of Barbados by the English as 1624 and according to the old style calendar this may well be 1625 according to modern reckoning.

According to the old calendar, the New Year did not begin until 25th. March. So, any date between 31st December and 25th. March, fell in what is today the previous year. Thus, if Sir William Courteen's ship touched at Barbados on any day between 31st December and 25th. March in the year 1624, according to modern reckoning this would be the year 1625. Today, the accepted year for the discovery of Barbados is 1625, but, owing to the difference between the old and the new calendar this year is sometimes written 1624/5.

The difference between the old calendar and the new has in the past caused some confusion owing to the fact that certain writers have paid no attention to this difference.

15. *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* by Richard Ligon, 1657, p.23; "Barbados and the Archaeology of the Caribbean" by Professor Ripley P. Bullen, *B.M. & H.S. Journal*, Vol. XXXI pp. 16—19.

16. Sloane MSS. 3662, British Museum. For the reliability of Major John Scott as an historian see *Colonising Expeditions to the West West Indies & Guiana 1623—1667*, Hakluyt Society, Series II, Vol. LVI, 1924, ed. V. Harlow, note 1 at p. xxx.

17. Williamson, 33p., footnote 2.

This fact has been responsible for different dates being given for the settlement of Barbados by the English. This date varies between 1624 and 1627. As the result of an increased interest in historical research and accuracy the date of the English settlement of Barbados has been settled as February 1627 according to the modern calendar. In February 1927, Barbados celebrated the Tercentenary of its settlement by the English.¹⁸

The earliest account in which we have the date of the settlement of Barbados given was written between June 1650 and the spring of 1651. This states that "The English first planted a colony here, Anno Domini 1627."¹⁹ The next evidence is the statements made by Captain Henry Powell, his nephew John Powell the younger and others who took part in the settlement. This evidence was given on the question of the validity of the Earl of Carlisle's Patent. To sum up the evidence: Captain John Powell, the elder, sailed for Barbados in a ship equipped by Sir William Courteen in 1625 called the *William & John*.²⁰ An "accident at sea" — possibly the capture of a prize — caused this ship to return to England. The ship was refitted and under the command of Captain Henry Powell reached Barbados in February 1627 according to the modern calendar.

On 17th. February, 80 settlers²¹ were landed with equipment provided by the Courteen syndicate — "to plant possess and inhabit the island for him", as one witness expressed the settlers indebtedness to Sir William Courteen. Captain Henry Powell then sailed to the Dutch settlement on the coast of Guiana, where he obtained a collection of economic plants and about 40 Indians to teach the settlers at Barbados how to cultivate these. Included among these plants was the sugar cane, which was grown for the purpose of making rum only. "And returning from there again to the said Island, 1627 in May, they found the ship *Peter* and the pinnace *Thomasine* there arrived (Capt. John Powell Senior aforesaid Commander), who had landed about 80 men and women more upon the said Island for the said William Courteen, our very worthy & vigorous employer and provider Supplier and paymaster. And having begun several plantations there

we left the said Island and went to the Leeward Islands."²²

On the outward voyage of the *William & John* to Barbados with the first settlers a prize was captured from which was taken 10 negro slaves. Darnell Davis says of them, these "were the first slaves brought to Barbados."²³

Apart from the evidence given on behalf of Sir William Courteen as to the year of the settlement of Barbados there is further confirmation. These authorities were collected by the late N. Darnell Davis, the author of *Cavaliers and Roundheads in Barbados* (1887), a historian of repute, who had access to sources unknown to the compiler of the *Memoirs of the First Settlement*, Bryan Edwards or Poyer. Darnell Davis says: "As regards the statement of date given in *Memoirs of the first Settlement*, published in 1742, it should be noted that in publications of earlier date the correct year 1627 is given.

The following are instances:—

Speed's *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, London, 1676. It is herein said (p. 48) "The first Colony planted in this island was in the year 1627, and that by the English, who have all along kept continual and undisturbed possession".

Chronological Observations of America, from the year of the World to the year of Christ 1673 (London, 1674). 1627 "A colony of English planted upon the Island of Barbados which in a short time increased to 20,000 besides negroes."

Ogilby's *America*, London 1671. In this book it is stated that "the island was planted by the English; Anno 1627" (Section XXIII, p. 377).

America painted to the life (by Ferdinando Gorges) London 1650 (p. 4). "On the East side of St. Jean, Porto Rico, lys the Islands called *Canibales* or Caribs, which are also severally named by the above mentioned Author, the last of which towards the East called Barbados, was possessed by a colony of Englishmen in the year 1627."²⁴

A further error into which some historians have fallen is that the first settlement at Barbados at the place which is today known as Hometown was originally called Jamestown in honour of King James I, in whose reign the Island was first discovered or settled. The

18. Williamson, Chap. II., *The Tercentenary of the First Settlement of Barbados, February 1627* by Sir C. P. Clarke, Tercentenary Christmas Number of *The Barbados Advocate*, 1926.

19. Trinity College Dublin MSS. (G.4, 15) No. 736, pp. 44, 46, printed in *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies & Guiana, 1623-1667*. p. 39.

20. "William alias John alias William & John," per John Powell the younger, *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies & Guiana*, 1623-1667, p. 38.

21. Harlow, p.4. The number varies: "about 80 men and women", "40 men or more" "about 50 men", "40 or 50 people", "30 or 40 men or more", in the accounts given by witnesses on behalf of Sir William Courteen. *Colonising Expeditions the West Indies & Guiana, 1623-1667*, p. 29 et seq.

22. *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies & Guiana, 1623-1667*.

23. *Cavaliers & Roundheads in Barbados* by N. Darnell Davis, 1887, p. 28; Harlow, p. 4.

24. Letter of N. Darnell Davis dated 26 November, 1906, printed in *The Barbados Advocate*, 10 December 1906.

compiler of the *Memoirs of the First Settlement of Barbados* makes reference to this town in the expanded version of the story of the island's first discovery by the English. This account says: "...they set up a cross in, or about *St. James's Town*, now call'd the *Hole*, and inscrib'd on a Tree adjoining James K: of E: and this Island..."²⁵ The apostrophe of *St. James's Town* is of considerable importance. When the account of the discovery of the island is told by Bryan Edwards in his *History of the West Indies* he says: "...they took possession of the country, by fixing up a cross where *James Town* was afterwards built..." Describing the settlement Bryan Edwards says: "They arrived safe in the latter end of the year 1624, and laid the foundations of a town, which, in honour of the Sovereign, they denominated JAMESTOWN..."²⁶ Schomburgk's account is very similar: "The colonists fortified themselves in the neighbourhood of the spot which had been taken possession of nearly twenty years previously by the crew of the *Olive Blossom*, and laid the foundation of a town which, *in honour of their sovereign, they called Jamestown.*" Schomburgk is here writing as if the discovery of Barbados had taken place in 1605 and its settlement in 1625 which we now know to be incorrect.²⁷

The transition of "St. James Town" to "James-Town" and then "Jamestown" is important. When the settlers arrived at Barbados in 1627, King James I had been dead for more than a year. It is not very likely that the settlers would have named their

settlement after a king who had been dead for more than a year, even if this island had been discovered during his reign. The choice of Saints' names for the parishes of this island, except Christ Church, is curious. If the parish of St. James was the first so named, possibly this choice may have been the association of the name with that of the late King James I. The name of St. James the Great is closely linked with pilgrims or travellers and it may well be a reason for naming the church near the first settlement St. James's Church, after which the parish is said to have taken its name. The loyal colonists, however, never saw fit to name a parish after the reigning King Charles I, although Oistins is said by Bryan Edwards to have been called Charles Town.

The depositions of Captain Powell and his men are silent on the name of the first settlement. Nor does Ligon mention the name in his text, but on his map "The Hole" is clearly marked (1657). Sir Richard Dutton's sketch map (1684) marks "The Hole Towne". Philip Lea's map of 1685 marks it as "The Hale Toun als James Toun" and on Moll's map of 1717 it is marked as "Hole Town." It appears to have been some time after the settlement that it was called St. James's Town or St. James Town, since it was the town of St. James's parish. In Oldmixon's History he writes of the Hole: "It has a regular and handsome Church dedicated to St. James from whence it is sometimes called James Town."²⁸

NEVILLE CONNELL.

25. Williamson, p. 16. The 1891 Edition of this book gives "...James, King of England and this Island..."

26. 1794 Edition, Vol. I, p. 323, 324, 348.

27. Schomburgk, p. 260, my italics.

28. History of North America, Vol. II, 1741, p. 100. N. Darnell Davis Letter dated 26th November 1906, *The Barbados Advocate*, 10 December, 1906.