

DIGITISING THE ENDANGERED HISTORIC RECORDS OF NEVIS IN THE LEEWARD ISLANDS

ENDANGERED ARCHIVES PROGRAMME: EAP 794

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes an Endangered Archives Programme project that was undertaken on the Caribbean island of Nevis between January 2016 and September 2017. The project was directed by Andrew Pearson and David Small, Research Associates in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Bristol, in conjunction with three employees of Nevis Island Administration: Delvon Clarke, Shanika Joshua and Devonne Maynard; and with voluntary support from Christine Eickelmann.

The objective of the project was to digitise 18th to 20th century documentary records held in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) Registry, Charlestown, Nevis, to improve their state of storage, and to produce a listing of these records for further cataloguing and preservation (Figure 1).

PROJECT CONTEXT

The present project follows from pilot project EAP 093, undertaken by David Small in 2008. EAP 093 audited the historic records held at various locations, as follows:

- Supreme Court Registry (vault and office), Charlestown;
- Registrar General's Office (vault), Charlestown;
- Methodist Church Office, Charlestown;
- Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS) Archive (particularly Anglican parish registers);
- Edgar Challenger International House Museum, Basseterre, St Kitts.

EAP 794, which began in January 2016, focused on the historic records held by the Supreme Court Registry. The records held elsewhere were not addressed for several reasons. The demographic registers held by the Registrar General's Office were the subject of a separate digitisation project run by the Organisation of American States. In the case of the Methodist collection, it is hoped that their registers will be digitised as part of follow-up collaboration between the Church and the NIA digitisation unit. Similarly, it is hoped that the NHCS will, in future, be able to use the new NIA digitisation facilities to record the Anglican parish registers and other historic records in their collection or they will be able to set up their own facility to carry out the work. It has been suggested that the parishes of St John Figtree and St George Gingerland are negotiating with a commercial contractor to digitise those registers which remain in their hands. The St Kitts-based materials fell outside the logical scope of a Nevisian project.

NEVIS' HISTORICAL RESOURCE

Important Nevisian records exist in the UK National Archives, principally in the CO 84, CO 152, and CO 239 series. Here they are found in combination with the diplomatic and administrative correspondence for St Kitts and Anguilla, and at times also other British Caribbean possessions, notably Antigua, Tortola and the Virgin Islands. The corresponding high-level records (where they survive) are held within the Federation's National Archive in Basseterre, St Kitts. Other material is contained within family paper collections, notably the papers of the Pinney Estate, held by Special Collections in Bristol University Library and the various collections of Stapleton Papers, at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester and elsewhere.

However, below the level of metropolitan governance, the principal sources for Nevis' history are held on the island itself, mainly in the Supreme Court Registry, the Registrar General's Office and, to some degree, in the Archive of the NHCS. These are crucial, endangered documents, and the information they contain is replicated nowhere else.

Nevis' historical resource has diminished over time, due to natural disasters and human actions, as illustrated by the following chronology:

- 1706 French invasion: courthouse burnt down and records burned in the street;
- 1843 Earthquake destroys the Nevis courthouse;
- 1873 Some records burned in a courthouse fire on Nevis;
- 1882 Nevis and St Kitts united in one Presidency: some Nevis records transhipped to St Kitts;
- 1982 Court House fire in St Kitts: Nevis records may have been burnt;
- 2014 Fire in the Nevis Treasury.

The surviving records, including those on which this project focuses, are at risk of similar total or piecemeal destruction. The recent depredations of hurricanes Irma and Maria across the Caribbean reinforce this point.

As described below, the records preserve much micro-historical detail: for example, they commonly list the age, health, monetary value, occupations and family relationships of enslaved people. Similarly, estate plans potentially provide locations for lost slave and post-Emancipation villages; this is not only intrinsically valuable archaeological data, but may also inform planning decisions on an island whose economy is geared to tourism-based development. They encompass a history of the island that is important to people on Nevis for personal as well as political reasons.

In addition, these documents complement other regional collections of similar character, including those for St Vincent and Grenada which have been the subject of EAP projects. Crucially, too, they contain local-level information that was not considered worthy of transmission back to London – and which is therefore absent from UK-held collections (e.g. National Archives CO series).

PROJECT SCOPE AND THE DOCUMENTS’ HISTORICAL CONTENT

PROJECT SCOPE

The project's principal focus was on records dating between 1705 and the end of the 19th century. Several volumes containing 20th-century material were also included, predominantly those which spanned both the 19th and 20th century or which were indexes. All historic documents found in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court building’s vault were digitised, together with three volumes held in the adjacent Registry office.

The exceptions are the following volumes, which were too fragile to be photographed without causing an unacceptable level of damage (see Figure 8). It is also questionable whether there remains enough legible material within these volumes to make either their digitisation or preservation worthwhile. These comprised:

- Common Deed Record Book 1707-1728;
- Kings bench and Common Pleas 1718-1723.

In the project application for EAP 794, a selective early series of volumes from the Registrar General’s Office was within the scope. However, when the project commenced it was found that these materials were already being digitised by an Organisation of American States-sponsored project based in St Kitts: as a result they were omitted from the final project scope.

The following series were digitised:

- Common Deed Record Books, 1707-1956 (49 volumes);
- Court of King’s/Queen’s Bench and Common Pleas, 1705-1873 (39 volumes);
- Supreme Court, 1874-1962 (9 volumes);
- Other Courts, 1815-1943 (8 volumes);
- Wills, 1763-1880 (7 volumes);
- Ships Bonds, 1847-1867 (7 volumes);
- Provost Marshal’s Sales, 1847-1935 (9 volumes);
- Land Title Register Books, 1887-1922 (3 volumes);
- Miscellaneous Records, 1840-1940 (23 volumes);
- Maps and plans, 1888-1974 (205 individual maps/plans, or montages of plans).

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

COMMON DEED RECORD BOOKS

The digitised material comprises documents held in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court building, Charlestown, Nevis. The books, more formally called Common Deed Record Books, run in an almost continuous series from 1707 to 1922. There are 48 historic Common Record books in total to 1905, plus one Entry Book of Deeds, 1884-1956. Other books continue into the later 20th and 21st centuries and are not part of the project. The books are large bound volumes and, because of the continuity and content, provide a comprehensive record of land and property transactions carried out during the period when sugar plantations worked by enslaved populations were the main type of investment and employment on the island. Such a continuous series of records is only replicated sporadically for other islands that were once British possessions in the Caribbean. The land and property details recorded provide the names of investors, along with their occupation and residence, and precise financial details, either in sterling or in the island’s currency. The information on investors includes whites and free blacks, men and women, absentees (resident in other West Indian Islands or in Britain) as well as those living in Nevis. The financial information is wide-ranging. Credit transactions are included. Mortgages, annuities, loans and bonds are all specified, with the names of the parties involved. The language used is often full of legal terms that need to be mastered. The books also contain much material on the sales of enslaved people between individuals connected with Nevis; in addition they have information on slave manumissions. Where sugar plantations are identified the numbers, and sometimes the valuations and names of enslaved people are given. This is particularly useful for researchers because it was not until after the end of the

Napoleonic Wars that slave registration was commonly carried out throughout the British Caribbean. Notes of hand, powers of attorney, wills, writs of enquiry, partition, possession and seizure are also recorded.

COURT OF KING'S/QUEEN'S BENCH AND COMMON PLEAS

The Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas on Nevis was at the time considered to have been regulated by Acts of Parliament passed prior to 1732. In, or from, 1732 the Court was regulated by Court Act No. 100 of Nevis. The Court blended the separate jurisdictions of the courts of King's/Queen's Bench and Common Pleas in England. The records in this series cover both civil and criminal cases. There are 39 volumes or items covering the period 1705–1873. There are significant gaps in the first half of the 18th century but there is more comprehensive coverage after that. The series includes Minute Books, Cause Lists and Entries for Judgement. The first volume comprises probably the earliest known set of records on Nevis dating from 1705-1716. In civil cases the Minute Books list the plaintiff and the defendant and give some limited details of the cases together with outcomes. The criminal case Minute books include cases in the difficult period straddling Emancipation. The volume for 1831-1834 includes a Court of Criminal Slaves. Volumes listing Entries for Judgement in the 1700s are particularly useful since they can sometimes provide plantation names, acreages and lists of enslaved people – information which may not be available elsewhere.

SUPREME COURT

The early records of the Supreme Court in Nevis stem from the passage in 1871 of the Leeward Islands Act. This created the Federal Colony of the Leeward Islands, under a single Governor, in which Nevis was one of six Presidencies with its own Administrator. One of the expressions of the Federal structure was the creation of a single Supreme Court for the colony with a Chief Justice, originally sitting in Antigua. This court sat in circuit around the Presidencies. Its remit included serious criminal cases, appeals from Magistrates' courts and civil cases. It was a matter of some debate whether acting as a circuit court created an unhealthy dependence on planters on whom the judges relied for accommodation. This organisation was enlarged by the addition of a circuit Court of Appeal in 1885. The records in this series include Proceedings, Minutes and Cause Lists. Some of the volumes include records of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction. Further research will establish how comprehensive the overall coverage is. One additional revelation during the reorganisation of the courthouse vault in 2017 was the finding of a wooden box full of the notebooks of the Supreme Court judges from the 1970s, though these lay beyond the scope of the present EAP project.

OTHER COURTS

This series includes the records of those courts which could not sensibly be included in other series. It includes one volume of a Court of Complaints. This was essentially a court for the recovery of small debts and was established as a result of discussions in the local Nevis legislature in, or around, 1830 as an attempt to process more easily claims for relatively small amounts of money which had been clogging up the Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas. It is particularly interesting for the way slave owners attempted to pursue formerly enslaved people for small sums of money after the end of the apprenticeship system. There are five volumes of records of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction dating from 1869 onwards. It would seem that there was no such court on Nevis in the 1820s and it was only established later than that. The court made it possible for a judge to deal with more minor criminal cases, often for assault or wounding, without the aid of a jury. The records give an indication of the state of justice on Nevis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As well as a volume for the Court of General Sessions, there is one single volume for the controversial Court of Commissioners for the Sale of Encumbered Estates. This is a very important volume for understanding the later stages of the failing system of sugar production on plantations in the late 19th century. The court was established throughout the British West Indies to help sort out speedily the affairs of failing estates burdened by debt. Many plantations on Nevis were sold under its auspices in the 1870s and early 1880s. The volume records the claims on various estates, and their owners, and the process of resolving the situation. After some protest by local planters and owners, who claimed that all the money from sales was going to banks and commercial firms in the UK, the powers of the Court were transferred to the Supreme Court sitting locally. The process required outline mapping of the various estates. Many of these maps are to be found among the estate plans in the courthouse vault, listed elsewhere. Often they are the only record of the names, boundaries and, occasionally, essential features of those estates in that period. Missing from this series are the records of Court of Vice-Admiralty in Nevis; this court may have sat infrequently. In the 1820s it was noted that

there had been a register of its proceedings, but for many years the papers had been filed in separate bundles.

WILLS

The books of wills are held in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) Registry vault. They record the copies made of the originals. In this series there are six volumes which run from 1763 to 1864 continuously when there is a gap during 1865. One further volume runs from 1866 to 1880. Each of the books has an index, some more complete and in better condition than others. They cover both the middle and end of the period of slavery as well as the early part of the post-Emancipation era. The books include wills, grants of probate, administrations, appraisements of property and inventories. In the wills of white planters there is a great deal of information about family relationships, often the only way of getting this information in the absence of family trees. This extends to relationships between enslaved women (and their children) and planters with whom they had relationships, who were freed as a result of the will or otherwise recorded in it. This provides important information about the growth of the mixed-race population and will also, increasingly, be of genealogical interest to the people of Nevis. For those planters who remained in Nevis and who did not have property in Britain, the only copy of their will may be in Nevis. The same clearly applies to all free people on the island, white or black, including poorer white planters and skilled tradesmen, a group largely unrecorded so far. In the post-Emancipation period, the wills record not only the development of a black middle class of property owners but also the struggles and condition of a poorer section of the population.

SHIPS' BONDS

The books of Ships' Bonds cover a twenty year period for Nevis from 1847 to 1867. There are two gaps, one in 1852 and another from 1861 to 1863. They comprise pre-printed forms which were then filled in with the name of the vessel, the Master and the agents or owners and the relevant date. The parties either signed or made their mark in the presence of the island Secretary who countersigned. The Master and the agents or owners bound themselves in a sum, for instance £1,500, neither to carry away any person in debt nor to leave behind anyone who was likely to become a charge on any parish or to the public purse on the island. The bonds were in response to planters, merchants and others avoiding their creditors by escaping off the island, particularly at a time when the island's economy was under strain. The bonds also prevented ships from dumping crew or people from other islands who would then become a burden on the public purse. Given the prevalence of Masters making their mark, it would seem that much of the shipping was local and the volumes will be useful to those interested in such inter-island traffic. The National Archive in St Kitts has similar shipping bond books from 1789 to 1853. Their earliest bonds provide against slaves being carried away from the island without the owner's consent. This suggests that similar pre-Emancipation books for Nevis are missing.

PROVOST MARSHAL'S SALES

The series is comprised of nine volumes which run from 1847-1935. There is considerable overlap in the dates of volumes but there is a gap for the years 1862-1865. The Provost Marshal on Nevis had his own office at the opposite end of the courthouse to the Secretary or Registrar. His duties seem to have been carried out on Nevis by a Deputy Provost Marshal (DPM), supported by bailiffs, and could include summoning juries, supervising the gaol and access to the courthouse when the courts were in session. Largely, however, the duties consisted of carrying out the writs of execution of the various courts. Mostly these involved civil cases where money was owed, a levy required or fines imposed. The role of the DPM was to seize land, goods, furniture and personal possessions and conduct a sale or auction to resolve the matter. A sale could be a household full of possessions or a single item. Prior to Emancipation the DPM could, and did, seize and auction whole estates with their slaves. There were complaints that the sales sometimes involved collusion between the sellers or the bidders and the DPM and were therefore fixed in advance. These Provost Marshal's Sales Books kept a record of such auctions in the second half of the 19th century and show detailed inventories of possessions, the rules under which the auction was conducted, the names of the successful bidders and those attending. An auction could be postponed a number of times because there were not enough bidders to make it legal. Through the inventories we have a glimpse of the standard of living of different groups of people at a time when the economy of Nevis was struggling and sugar planters and ordinary Nevisians alike were falling into debt.

LAND TITLE REGISTER BOOKS

This series of Land Title Register Books comprises three books from 1887 to 1922. The Land Title Register Books are roughly A3 sized volumes, with anything up to 100 pages, plus numerous attachments which fill them to bursting point. The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) Registry office also acts as a Land Registry and is in frequent use by Nevisians transferring or selling land. Until 1886 the transfer of land or property had been recorded in the Common Deed Record Books. The 'Title by Registration Act' of 1886 introduced a second method by which ownership of land could be registered, namely by Certificates of Title. These are held in the Land Title Register Books and listed in a series of Indexes. Each Certificate of Title is required to show a survey of the land in question and is supported by a Memorandum of Transfer which holds the documentation. The Certificates of Title also note whether there is a previous mortgage or encumbrance on the land. At present this system is an alternative to registering the transfer of land by Deeds of Conveyance in the Common Deed Record Books. However, there are plans to centralise the system on Certificates of Title. These Land Title Register Books are vital for anyone who owns property in Nevis, particularly in times of rapid development. Clearly they are also important to the governments of Nevis and the Federation. They are also vital to anyone interested in the history of an estate or parish. The surveys of property which accompany the certificates are almost the only historic plans of estates which exist for the island. Nevis is very short of pre-1834 sugar estate plans, although they did exist. Pre-1834 plans of only two or three out of around 100 estates are known to exist. The most comprehensive, post-Emancipation, mapping of individual estates took place in the 1870s and 1880s under the Court of the Commissioners for the Sale of Encumbered Estates in the West Indies (Nevis). The UK National Archives has only two of these estate plans. However, the Land Title Register Books on Nevis hold many of the plans produced for this court, or copies of them used as surveys for the Certificates of Title from 1886. Since the late 1990s, it has been shown that archaeologists and historians can successfully use these plans to investigate the histories of pre-Emancipation sugar estates, to locate features such as pre or post-Emancipation villages and to help in negotiations about the preservation of other historic sites on the estate. Beyond those recorded for EAP 794, the Land Title Register Books continue into the 21st century. Some have been digitised under a separate programme and others will be digitised by the new Nevis Digital Archiving unit established as a result of EAP 794.

MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

This series of Miscellaneous Records encompasses anything from a single book of prescriptions, formerly the Infirmary Book, to a volume of commissions to various public appointees by the Lieutenant Governor of the Leeward Islands between 1863 and 1919 and two surveyor's field notebooks. There are several volumes of Registrar's correspondence between 1883 and 1913. A volume of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure from 1912 to 1913 includes Nevis and Anguilla and includes wages for posts such as matron or janitor. There are a number of handwritten volumes of Nevis Acts between 1776 and 1869, the completeness and accuracy of which may be open to question. Along with several other miscellaneous volumes, there are five volumes of Jurors Lists between 1873 and 1903.

MAPS AND PLANS

The loose, digitised estate plans are comprised of two groups. The large plans date between 1888 and 1929. They consist of individual plans of large estates on Nevis of several hundred up to one thousand acres or more. The largest plans can measure 650 x 530 mm, the smaller ones 370 x 330 mm. It is unclear how they came to be sitting loose in the ECSC Registry vault but they are probably copies of plans included in the Land Title Register Books or have become detached from recorded land titles. Judging by the dates, they are likely to be the outcomes of surveys carried out during the process of land registration introduced by the Title to Land by Registration Act (1886) of the Leeward Islands colony. Most, but not all, include the signature of the surveyor and a date. The plans vary a lot in detail but are drawn to scale. They show boundaries, often but not always indicate the owner of the land, include detached pieces of the estate, usually identify the acreage and occasionally give the names and acreages of individual plots of land within the estate and what crops were grown. Significant features like current works and sometimes old works are identified; where there are villages they are shown – though not the previous, pre-Emancipation villages of enslaved workers. Sometimes the surveyor's bearings and distances are included and significant boundary markers like gum trees or stones. Usefully, on some plans, the ownership of small plots of land either within, or outwith, the boundaries of the estate are shown. Some of the larger estates may include previously separate, historic plantations. The plans are essential in building up title to large estates but also to smaller plots of land. They underpin the system of land ownership and as such are vital to the island economy. They can also reveal important historical clues to

the location of past villages, both pre and post-Emancipation, public roads, transport infrastructure and water management features. They need to be used in conjunction with the Land Title Register Books and the Common Deed Record Books, the latter of which occasionally provide estate plans and, more commonly, details of land ownership. Another document sub-set within the Maps and Plans series are a group of multiple plans of small plots of land of a few acres, owned by smallholders; these are held in the same location in the vault. Some of the dates run to after the Second World War. These show acreages, boundaries and usually ownership. Sometimes, though not always, they are dated.

DIGITISATION

WORKFLOW

The workflow was divided between Nevis and the UK. Photography was undertaken by Nevisian staff, who transmitted the data to the project management in the UK. Checking and export was undertaken in the UK.

DIGITISED MATERIALS

The project digitised 154 bound volumes and 205 flat maps and plans (for examples, see Figures 7-14). The latter were either photographed individually, or as montages on backing paper, depending on their existing state of storage.

In total, the project generated 53,358 digital photographs in RAW format, from which a parallel set of images were exported in TIFF format. The total data generated in TIFF format was 1563gb (1.563tb).

DEPOSITION OF DATA

The data generated by this project have been deposited at the following locations:

- Endangered Archives Programme, British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, UK;
- Nevis Island Administration, Premier's Ministry, Social Security Building, Pinney's Industrial Site, Nevis, West Indies;
- Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, Registry, Nevis Court House, Charlestown, Nevis, West Indies.
- Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, Alexander Hamilton Museum, P.O. Box 563, Charlestown, Nevis, West Indies;
- Bristol University Arts and Social Sciences Library (Special Collections), Tyndall Avenue, Bristol, BS8 1TJ, UK.

EQUIPMENT SPECIFICATION

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography was undertaken using two separate camera/computer setups. These utilised a Canon EOS 100D and EOS 700D, both in combination with an 18-55 IS II lens. While these models sit below the semi-professional bracket for DSLRs this is largely on the basis of a less robust build quality, which is not a factor for a studio-based project of EAP 794's nature. The expected shutter lifespan of 100,000 images for each camera was more than double the requirement for EAP 794.

Image quality using these camera/lens combinations was perfectly adequate, though the photography of the montage-mounted maps and plans (which required a greater separation between camera and subject) was closer to the limit than perhaps desirable.

The cameras were mounted on Kaiser copy stands (EOS 700D paired with RS1 model, 1m column height; EOS 100D paired with RS2 model, 75cm column height, used for smaller documents). A ball and socket tripod head was used to rotate the camera through 90°, so as to align it in portrait format with the books below.

Lighting was provided by two lamps with daylight fluorescent bulbs.

The EOS 700D was used in conjunction with a custom-built table with a sliding top. This enabled photography of facing pages of a book to be undertaken without moving either the camera or the actual book (Figure 6).

The EOS 100D setup initially attempted a methodology whereby bound volumes were photographed on a static book support. All odd pages were photographed first, followed by all even pages, then the two digital sequences were combined to recreate the original order of the book. This is a practice used at the British Library and the theory is sound, but in our EAP scenario it proved impractical. The critical problem lay in the fact that pages could not be foliated (numbered) prior to photography. The most basic outcome was that this limited the number of books for which this method could be used. Furthermore, even where books had been numbered at the time of their production they were sometimes found to be mis-numbered (i.e. the author missing or repeating a page number). Re-combining the sequences was at

best complex and, at worst, when the photographer had accidentally missed a page, next to impossible. The method was abandoned at an early stage of the project. It is not recommended for future EAP projects, except where there can be total confidence in the foliation and in the team's technical ability to recombine the image sequence.

Each camera was tethered to the computer via a micro-USB2 cable. Canon EOS Utility camera control software was used for all photography. Images were transferred directly to external hard drive (as opposed to being placed on the camera's memory card).

SOFTWARE

The following software was used:

- Camera control: EOS Utility;
- Image processing and export: Adobe Lightroom 6;
- Image browsing: IrfanView;
- Checksums: Checksum for Windows (corz.org);
- File renaming: Rename Expert;
- Backing up and file synchronisation: Syncback SE;
- Anti-virus: AVG Antivirus.

IMAGE FORMATS

Photographs were taken in Canon native RAW format (CR2) and exported via Lightroom as uncompressed TIFFs with minimal processing applied. Each RAW file was of the order of 25MB. The TIFFs were exported at 30Mb total file size.

DATA STORAGE AND TRANSMISSION

Data were stored on external hard drives. The original dataset (of RAW files only) was kept on Nevis, using a 'Primary' hard drive, backed up to an on-site drive (daily) and off-site drive (weekly).

Datasets were posted to the UK on portable hard drive, usually in sets of approximately 20 volumes. This was not ideal, because of the lag between photography and the UK-based checking, which could be several weeks. However, internet speeds were not adequate to allow data transmission via Dropbox (as for example used in EAP 688 St Vincent), which would have enabled a far quicker quality control process.

COURT HOUSE VAULT

ORIGINAL SITUATION

At the time of EAP 093 (in 2008), the historic records were held in a disordered state inside a small vault within the courthouse building (see Figures 2-3). Wooden shelves were present, but were not adequate for all the volumes, meaning that many were jammed into any available space, or stacked on top of each other. The historic records shared space with modern legal records, again kept on shelves or on the floor in disorganized cardboard boxes and sometimes loose in piles. Environmental conditions of storage (dusty, humid) were poor.

The severe lack of space within the vault, combined with the regular searches for modern documents by court staff, caused a continual shuffling of the vault's contents. Over time there has been appreciable accidental damage to the historic volumes, while any ordering of the collection was nearly impossible and public access was impractical.

The situation observed in 2008, and reported on in EAP 093, remained the same when the vault was inspected in 2013 (by Andrew Pearson) and when EAP 794 commenced in 2016.

ACTIONS TAKEN

The situation reported on in 2008 was brought to the attention of the Assistant Registrar, Melissa Flemming, and, with the help and enthusiasm of Wakely Daniel and Kevin Barrett of the Premier's Ministry, assistance was sought from the Prison Farm. Prisoners were brought in and in two days they completely transformed conditions in the vault (see Figures 4-5).

Over the course of the EAP project, the situation relating to the vault has changed as follows:

- With the amount of space available in the vault, boxing volumes was impractical and, before the prison team arrived, all the historic volumes had been rewrapped and tied up;
- Where possible, to save space, smaller volumes were placed in banker's boxes;
- Some of the fragile volumes were placed in a tin box for safe keeping;
- A more accurate handlist of the records was drawn up;
- The prisoners then completely re-organized the vault, removing many of the modern records for storage elsewhere, recreating a system of storage for a much-reduced number of loose bundles of papers and cleaning the space. In the process, a number of volumes or items were re-discovered which had been lost for twenty years.

The Assistant Registrar has now taken full charge of the vault.

OTHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES

TRAINING

Formal training was provided to the three NIA staff members who undertook the digitisation process.

A small number of workshops were also held, the aim being to explain the equipment set-up and to show it in use. Attendees included staff members from the NIA and the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society.

PUBLICITY

A news article was filmed during the running of the project, and broadcast by the local television network. The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society published an article on the project in their April 2017 issue of the society's newsletter 'The Gathering'.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT SCOPE

With the exception of a small number of extremely fragile volumes, plus the documents in the Registrar General's Office (digitised under a separate scheme), EAP 794 has met its brief.

The fragile volumes represent an unsolved problem, since they cannot be read in their current state, while photography was judged likely to have caused unacceptable damage. Obtaining finance for conservation seems improbable, so at the present time the only option appears to be do-nothing. It is possible that members of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society could be encouraged to undertake a conservation project, there being at least one ex-member of staff with some training and practical experience on the island. However, and as noted above, it is unclear how much legible material exists within either volume, or whether the fragmentary pages could provide any meaningful historical information.

THE DOCUMENTS' FUTURE

The reorganisation of the vault and the re-wrapping of the volumes have improved the documents' state of storage, and thus their prospects for survival in the short- and mid- term. Furthermore, with their content available locally via hard drive or the NIA server, and remotely via the EAP website, the need for the original books to be consulted should diminish or cease entirely.

However, while the vault is now less cramped and less regularly accessed, many of its drawbacks remain; for instance, there is no temperature or humidity control. Fundamentally, the future of the original documents depends on several issues: supervision of the vault; and the wider decisions about the management of government and island records generally.

In the past there had not been much supervision of the vault and the historic records within it. In practice, any care of the volumes was carried out by the Court Messenger who knew the location of most of the material. After his retirement the vault was almost entirely unsupervised and fell into serious disorganisation. Now that the Assistant Registrar has taken specific charge of the vault the future looks better. However, that future depends on regular inspection, and whether the supervision of the vault is handed on as an explicit responsibility to any new appointee.

Secondly, there is a storage problem even within the court system. Immediate needs for storage were met in the last decade by organising filing cabinets in a shipping container outside the rear of the courthouse. Although the container has reached capacity in 2017 it has proved to be a reliable system and it could be added to with another container for new material. That would remove the temptation to return to the system of filing current material haphazardly in cardboard boxes on the floor of the vault.

In addition, Nevis has no government archive, nor archivist, and seems to have no retention and disposal policies and disaster evacuation plan for records. In separate NIA departments or work processes, for instance Physical Planning, Land Registration and one or two others, work has recently begun digitising some of the past or current records but a longer term strategy for all these issues needs to be co-ordinated across the NIA.

Ideally – and with due recognition of budgetary constraints – a decision needs to be made, and finance found, for a properly resourced archive with a trained professional archivist. One possibility is that a radical expansion of the NHCS archive could be carried out, with the help of funding from the NIA, on condition that it becomes the island archive and takes control of the historic court records. An alternative option is for the NHCS archive to remain the archive for the voluntary/NGO sector and for the NIA to expand its use of digital technology alongside developing its own purpose-built archive (and policies) for government records.

EQUIPMENT

All equipment purchased for the project will remain on Nevis, becoming the property of NIA. Thus, with the exception of 'consumable' items and data storage media, NIA is in possession of a complete (albeit basic) digitisation setup.

STAFF

The skills to use this equipment for historic document digitisation will also be present, but it will be important to broaden the number of trained personnel: one of the NIA staff members has already left Nevis to live on St Kitts, and over time the risk is that the remaining two also depart, or move on to other jobs. The project's technical workflow has been designed in such a way as to make cascade training a relatively easy prospect, with detailed process notes that give a step-by-step guide to the process of photography and data export. However, while the operation of the camera and IT is relatively formulaic, the handling of the documents themselves is a more gradually learned skill that requires experienced supervision.

POTENTIAL EXTENSION PROJECTS

The NIA has established a government Digital Archiving Unit and provided funding for its existence post-EAP 794 in the current year. It will inherit the equipment, remain in the current office and the NIA will fund the staff. During a visit to Nevis in February 2017 discussions were had between interested parties, including the Premier's Ministry and other NIA departments, the Court and the NHCS, about what projects could be undertaken by the new unit. Protocols for the work will need to be established and supervised by the Premier's Ministry.

The NIA has agreed, in principle, that the Digital Archiving Unit can be used to work on projects for the NHCS and voluntary organisations depending on priorities established, after discussion, by the NIA – in other words, if time and space permit. In the event of difficulties, an alternative has been discussed informally. The NHCS could raise money to fund the relevant equipment, have volunteers trained by the Digital Archiving Unit and become themselves a unit for the NGO and voluntary sector on Nevis. A potential route to such funding has been identified.

The following specific work was discussed:

COURT RECORDS

- Land Transfer Register Books 4-17 (negotiation to be had with NIA about whether or not to include the associated Memoranda of Transfer);
- Books of Wills: EAP 794 has digitised up to 1880; the number of later volumes to be done to be negotiated between the Court and NIA;
- 15-20 loose miscellaneous 20th century volumes or items.

GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Various government departments, as follows, have indicated a wish for their historic records to be digitally photographed:

- Treasury/Inland Revenue: smoke-damaged Inland Revenue tax-related items;
- Public Works Department: plans and other documents;
- Library: fragile copies of the early post-independence papers *Democrat* and *Labour Spokesman*;
- Deputy-Governor General's Office: the office staff have indicated that there is material which it would be useful to copy.

NHCS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

NHCS is keen to have copied: Nevis Council Minutes; Laws and Acts of Nevis from 1664 onwards; Blue Books; and copies of the Leeward Island Gazette from 1899. In addition, NHCS holds originals or copies of many of the extant Anglican Parish Registers (for details see the Final Report for EAP 093). Some have been digitally scanned, where they are single sheets, but others are in bound volumes which need to be photographed. It would be a useful project for a volunteer to audit the existing original parish registers and copies, and organise a systematic programme of digital photography for preservation purposes. It could also assist with the progress of a completely separate project that would digitally record the registers of St John Figtree and St George Gingerland.

The Methodist Church has agreed to have copied about 26 volumes of historic registers.

Other possible sources of material, as yet unexplored, include:

- Registers of other churches, for example the Wesleyan Holiness Church;
- Other NIA departments;

- Parallel government departments on St Kitts, which may still retain historic documents or plans relating to Nevisian history or heritage;
- Private Families. It was suggested to members of the EAP 093 team in 2008 that a number of private families, particularly those with political connections, may hold important collections of papers.

CONCLUSION

From the original Pilot project grant application, to final completion, the Endangered Archives Programme initiative for Nevis has taken nearly a decade. It has taken significant effort by numerous people and organisations, and once again we take the opportunity to acknowledge the essential funding from Arcadia and the equally critical local support given to the project by Nevisians.

Nevertheless, we feel that the effort has been justified. In terms of outcomes, a core element of Nevis's historical record has been digitally preserved: the recent depredations of hurricanes Irma and Maria across the Caribbean remind us of the vulnerabilities of such documentary resources. Meanwhile, the project has left a legacy of equipment and digitisation skills, while also contributing to an increased awareness of the value and usefulness of these records.

Clearly, as the discussion section of this report makes clear, there remains much to do. Despite improvements to the conditions of storage, the Court-based documents remain vulnerable. And, while the information they contain is now safeguarded, these volumes have intrinsic importance as physical artefacts and are worthy of preservation. In the wider Nevisian context, efforts need to continue to digitise and safeguard other documentary collections. Finally, there is a need to actually utilise the information within the documents. Some – most obviously the Land Title Registers – have an obvious and immediate usefulness. The majority, however, will require detailed study in order to realise their potential. It would nevertheless be a worthwhile exercise, for within these volumes lies an intricate portrait of Nevis's history, and of the Nevisians themselves.

IMAGES



Figure 1. Nevis Court House.



Figure 2. Court House Vault.



Figure 3. Court House Vault, January 2016.



Figure 4. Reorganised vault, January 2017.



Figure 5. Reorganised vault, January 2017.



Figure 6. Digitisation setup.

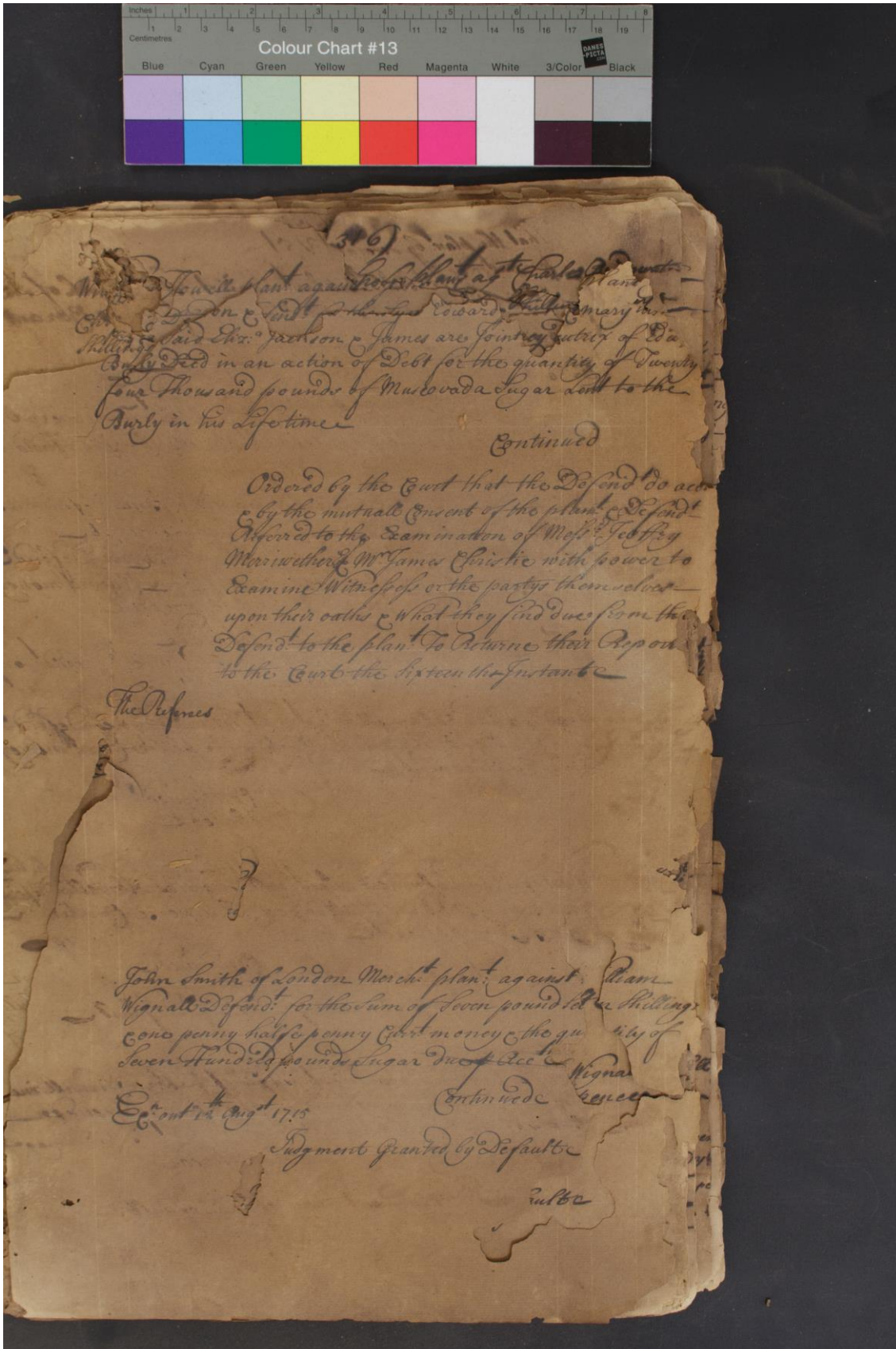


Figure 7. Kings Bench and Common Pleas, 1705-1716.

This is the oldest known surviving document on Nevis.

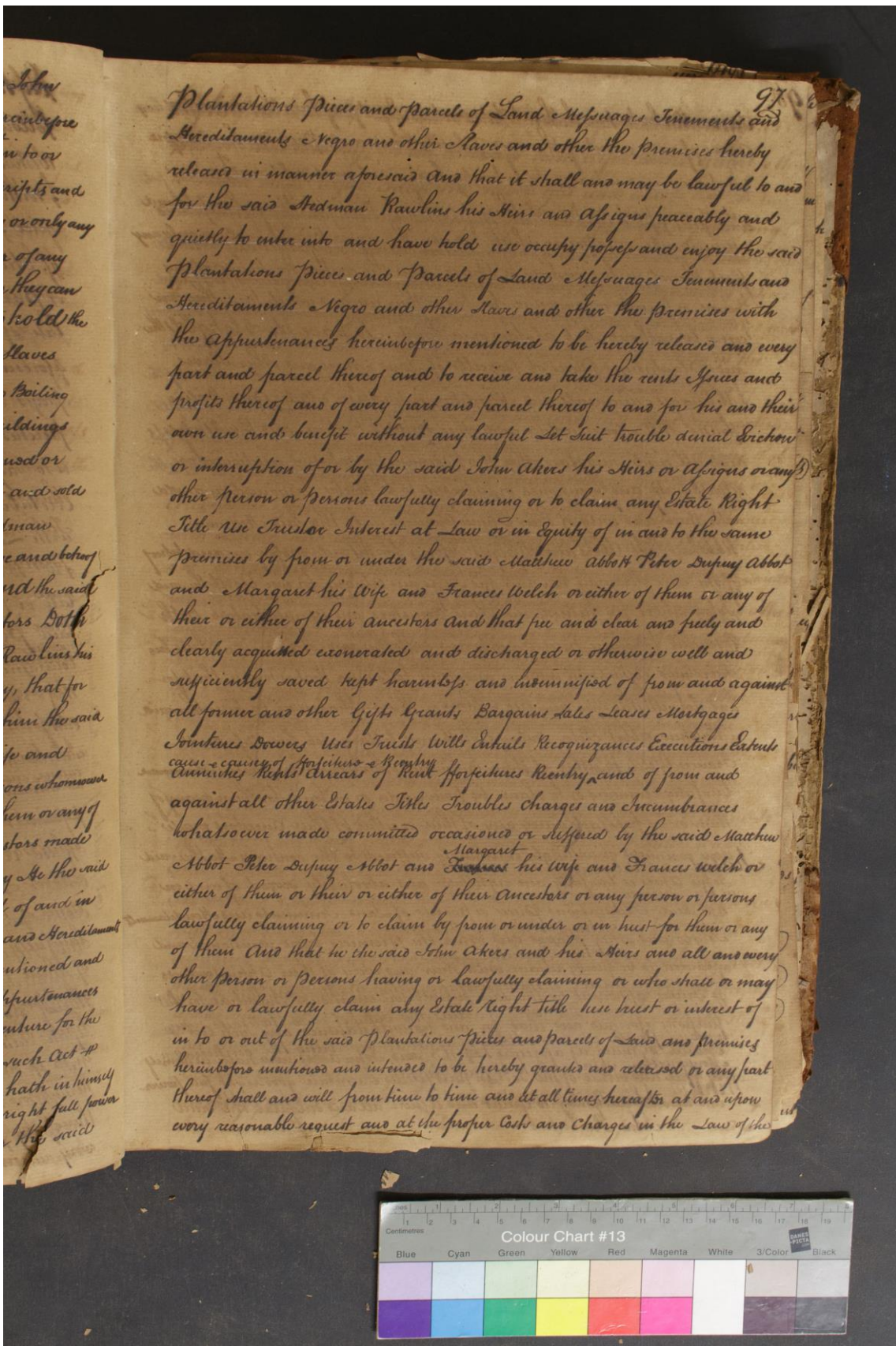


Figure 9. Common Deed Record Book, 1792-1794.

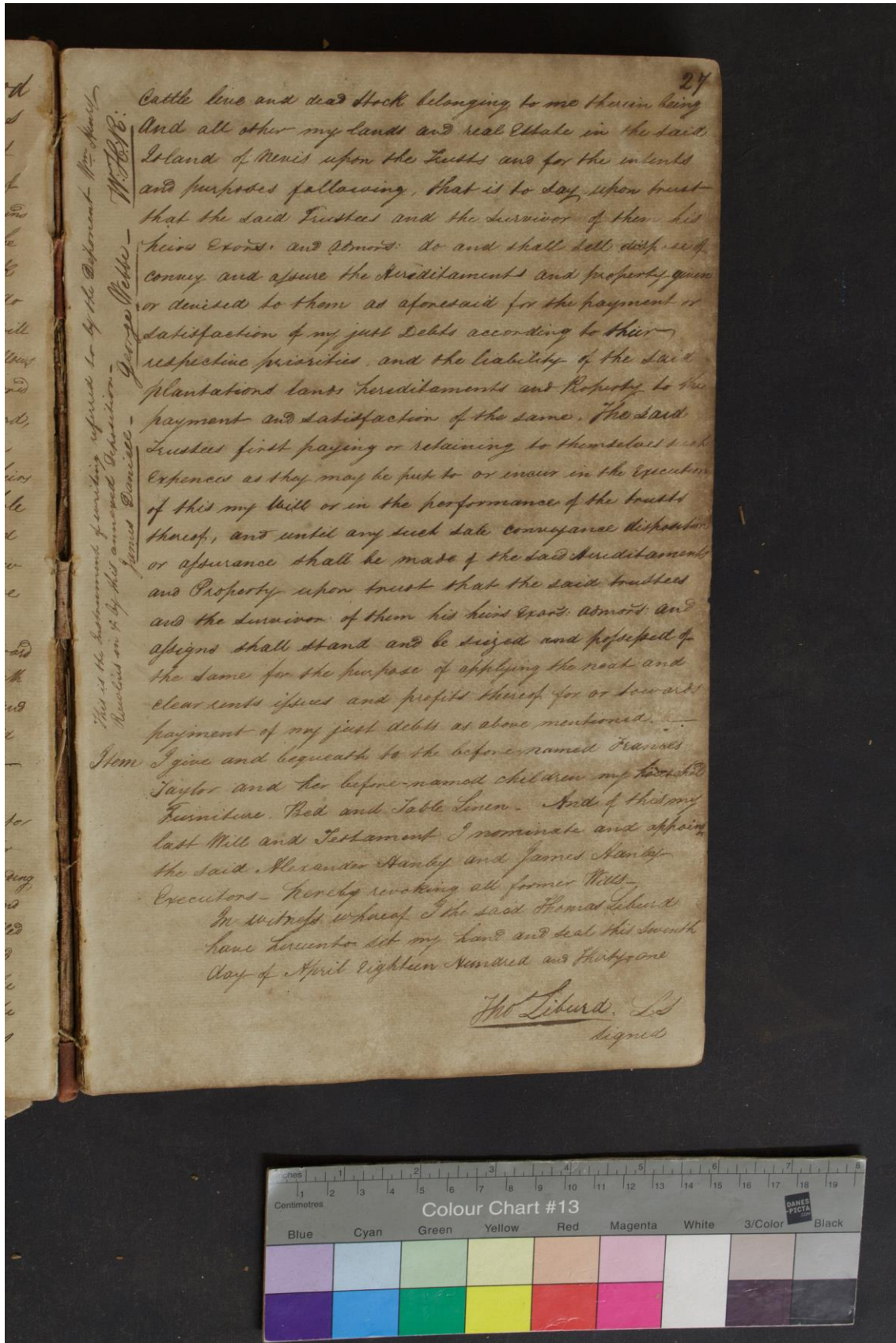


Figure 10. Book of Wills, 1830-1836.

6870

Nevis

In the Court of the Commissioners for Sale of Encumbered Estates in the West Indies (Nevis)
 In the matter of the Estate of Thomas Huggins deceased
 Executors Humphrey Esq. and Humphrey Esq. being the younger of Glasgow & Thomas

The said Helen Huggins claims the sum of eighty pounds Sterling per annum being the amount of an annuity reserved by her late husband Thomas Huggins which said annuity was charged on the estate of the said Thomas Huggins deceased and was secured by a term of five hundred years vested in trustees to secure the payment thereof with a power of Sale or Mortgage in case of non-payment thereof the said annuity to be paid half yearly on the fourth day of August and the fourth day of February in every year and the said Helen Huggins claims the sum of Forty pounds Sterling for the half years annuity due on the fourth day of August last.

M. T. Johnston
 Sol^r for Thomas & Helen Huggins
 (Charleston)

Nevis

In the Court of the Commissioners for Sale of Encumbered Estates in the West Indies (Nevis)
 In the matter of the Estate of Thomas Huggins deceased
 Executors Humphrey Esq. and Humphrey Esq. being the younger of Glasgow & Thomas

The Claims of Claud Neilson and Boyd Alexander Neilson both of No. 12 Great St. Helen in the City of London Merchants.

The said Claud Neilson and Boyd Alexander Neilson claim the sum of £5602. 0/6 to be due to them or to their late joint of Claud Neilson & Sons as Comptrolers of the estate of the said Thomas Huggins deceased and as Comptrolers appointed by the executor under the Will of the said Thomas Huggins deceased as per account hereto annexed and attested & duly proved

M. Johnston
 Charleston Sol^r for the above named
 Claud Neilson and Boyd Alexander Neilson

Justly

Securably



Figure 11. Court of the Commissioners for the Sale of Encumbered Estates, 1872-1885.

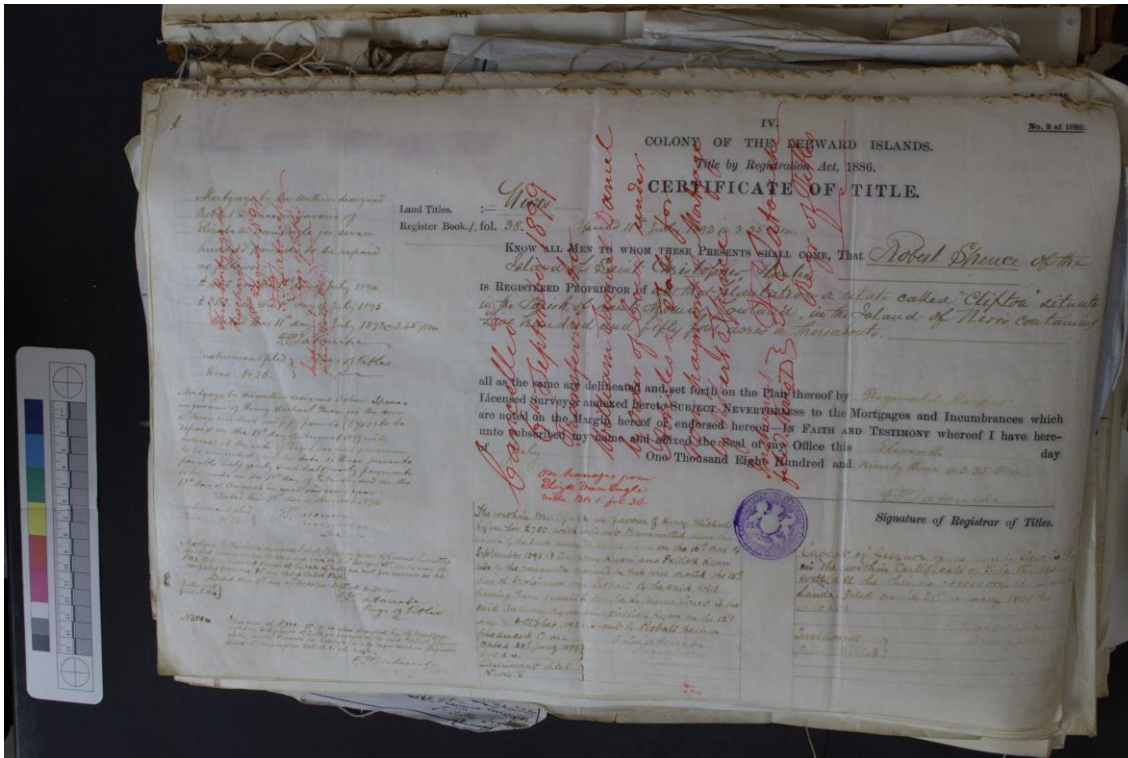


Figure 12. Land Title Register, 1887-1904.

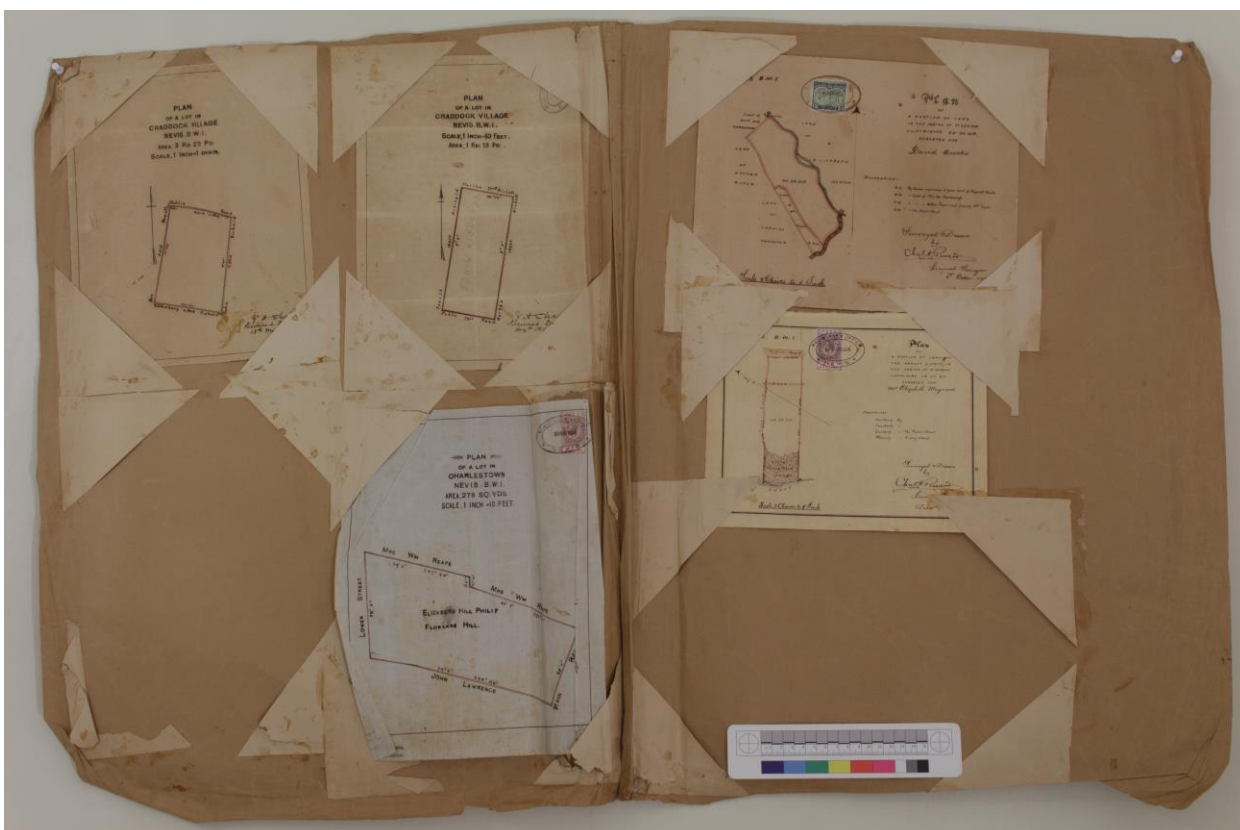


Figure 13. 20th-century land plans, mounted as a montage.

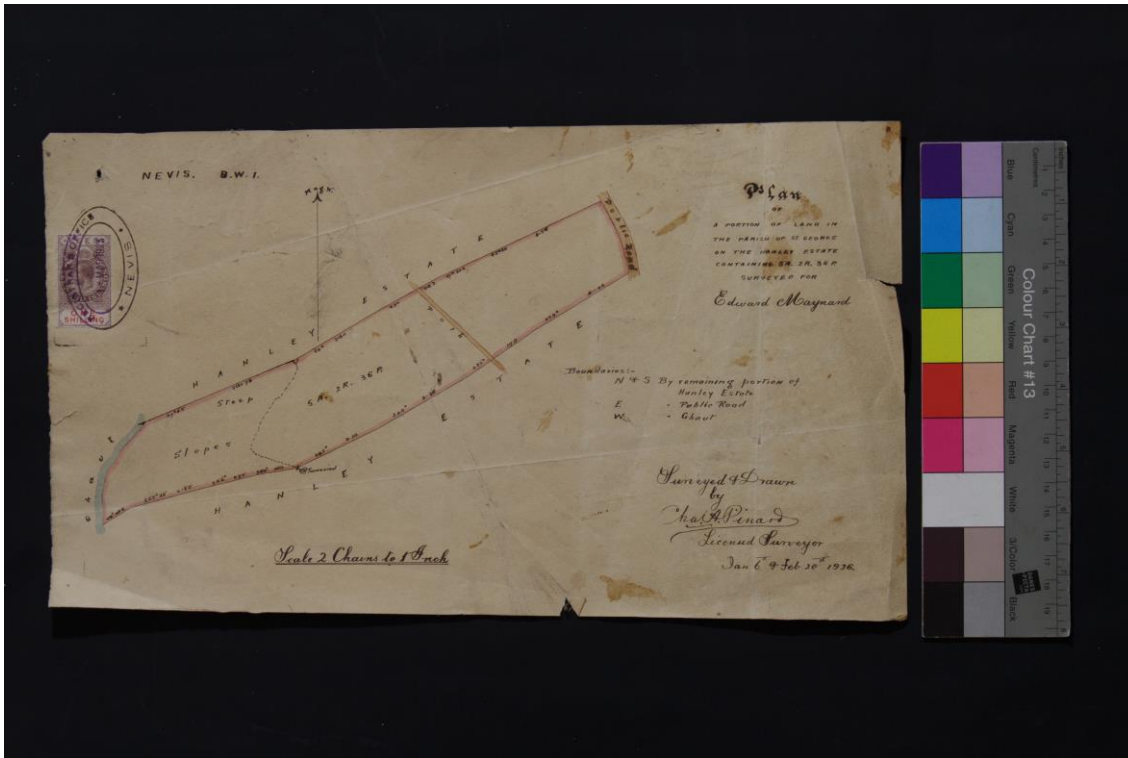


Figure 14. Plan of land in St George's Parish, 1926

APPENDIX 1. CATALOGUE OF DIGITISED MATERIALS

COMMON DEED RECORD BOOKS 1707-1956

Common Records 1707-1728 (not photographed)

Common Records 1718-1745

Common Records 1728-1746

Common Records 1741-1749

Common Records 1750-1754

Common Records 1752-1754

Common Records 1754-1758

Common Records 1757-1762

Common Records 1763-1764

Common Records 1764-1769

Common Records 1767-1769

Common Records 1769-1771

Common Records 1771-1773

Common Records 1773-1774

Common Records 1773-1775

Common Records 1775-1776

Common Records 1776-1777

Common Records 1777-1778

Common Records 1778-1783

Common Records 1783-1785

Common Records 1784-1789

Common Records 1785-1787

Common Records 1789-1790

Common Records 1790-1792

Common Records 1792-1794

Common Records 1794-1797

Common Records 1797-1799

Common Records 1799-1801

Common Records 1801-1803

Common Records 1803-1805

Common Records 1805-1808

Common Records 1808-1810

Common Records 1810-1814

Common Records 1814-1817

Common Records 1817-1819
Common Records 1819-1823
Common Records 1823-1829
Common Records 1829-1830 Volume 1
Common Records 1829-1830 Volume 2
Common Records 1831-1835
Common Records 1835-1838
Common Records 1838-1847
Common Records 1847-1858
Common Records 1858-1859
Common Records 1859-1866
Common Records 1870-1879
Common Records 1877-1899
Common Records 1900-1905
Common Records Entry Book of Deeds 1884-1956

COURT OF KING'S/QUEEN'S BENCH AND COMMON PLEAS

Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1705-1716
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1710
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1712-1716
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1714-1716 (1749)
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1718-1723 (not photographed)
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1725-1726
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1734-1737
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1750-1754
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1756-1760
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1760-1762
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1762-1764
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1764-1767
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1767-1769
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1769-1771
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1771-1774
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1774-1776
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1776-1779
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1776-1812
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1779-1792
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1785-1822
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1789-1796
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1802-1805
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1805-1813

Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1811
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1814-1827
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1822-1841
Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas 1827-1836
Court of King's Bench and Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1831-1844
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1836-1843
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1843-1851
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1849-1856
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1853-1857
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1854-1858
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1858-1874
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1861-1866
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1869-1874
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1869-1960
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1870-1873
Court of Queen's Bench and Common Pleas 1872-1873

SUPREME COURT

Supreme Court 1874-1955
Supreme Court 1875-1879
Supreme Court 1875-1882 Volume A
Supreme Court 1875-1882 Volume B
Supreme Court 1886-1904
Supreme Court 1879-1891
Supreme Court 1891-1910
Supreme Court 1911-1938
Supreme Court 1938-1962

OTHER COURTS

Court of General Sessions 1815-1850
Court of Complaints 1830-1846
Court of Summary Jurisdiction 1880-1887
Court of Summary Jurisdiction 1895-1914
Court of Summary Jurisdiction 1888-1896
Court of Summary Jurisdiction 1914-1943
Court of the Commissioners for the Sale of Encumbered Estates 1872-1885
Miscellaneous Court Records 1841-1885

WILLS 1763-1880

Wills 1763-1787

Wills 1787-1805

Wills 1805-1818

Wills 1819-1830

Wills 1830-1837

Wills 1837-1864

Wills 1866-1880

SHIPS BONDS

Ships' Bonds 1847-1849

Ships' Bonds 1849-1851

Ships' Bonds 1853-1855

Ships' Bonds 1855-1856

Ships' Bonds 1856-1858

Ships' Bonds 1858-1860

Ships' Bonds 1864-1867

PROVOST MARSHAL'S SALES

Provost Marshal's Sales 1847-1861

Provost Marshal's Sales 1854-1861

Provost Marshal's Sales 1866-1872

Provost Marshal's Sales 1872-1879

Provost Marshal's Sales 1874-1891

Provost Marshal's Sales 1879-1881

Provost Marshal's Sales 1879-1881

Provost Marshal's Sales 1880-1894

Provost Marshal's Sales 1894-1935

LAND TITLE REGISTER

Land Title Register 1887-1904

Land Title Register 1905-1912

Land Title Register 1912-1922

MISCELLANEOUS

Book of Prescriptions 1880-1882

Commissions 1863-1919

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 1912-1913

Jurors' lists 1873

Jurors' lists 1877-1885

Jurors' lists 1878-1885

Jurors' lists 1887-1903

Jurors' lists 1897-1898

Nevis Acts 1840-1848

Nevis Acts 1854-1858

Nevis Acts 1859-1862

Nevis Acts 1859-1869

Nevis Acts 1876-1877

Registrar's Correspondence Book 1883-1894

Registrar's Correspondence Book 1905-1907

Registrar's Correspondence Book 1909-1913

Royal Warrants 1845-1863

Public Officer's Bonds 1866-1868

Charlestown Cemetery Register 1906-1924

Election Writs 1859-1873

Surveyor's Field Notebook 1, 1939-1940

Surveyor's Field Notebook 1, 1939-1940, Book 2

Charlestown and Bath Cemetery Register 1924-1938

PLANS AND MAPS

205 maps, 1878-1974