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Summary of fieldwork

This report presents an outline of the fieldwork and findings of the 2018 field season of the Speightstown Archaeology Research Project, carried out from 10/09/2018 until 21/09/2018. The work was carried out by a team consisting of British, American and Australian archaeology students from University of Winchester, University of Liverpool, University of Southampton, Cambridge University, Goldsmiths University, Flinders University and East Carolina University.

This project is led by University of Winchester PhD student Connor Thompson-Webb, and all work is intended to gather data for his PhD thesis which is focused on the archaeological townscape and seascape of Speightstown, Barbados. This year’s fieldwork was concentrated on continued excavation of the site located on Church Street, which was previously excavated in 2017 and 2016. The site is believed to be located where a merchant’s house was built, active as early as the 17th century.

This year’s excavations revealed extensive evidence for multiple periods of occupation at the site, including potential evidence for a site wide burning event. Moreover, greater evidence of the structure’s internal makeup was revealed as part of the excavations, including a feature believed to be a cooking area or fireplace.

In addition to the Speightstown site, the team worked at Six Men’s fort which is one of the coastal fortifications surrounding Speightstown. They surveyed the 8 preserved cannons and undertook test pitting in order to establish an understanding of the material culture present at this fort.
INTRODUCTION

Between 11th – 21st September 2018 a team headed by University of Winchester PhD candidate, Connor Thompson-Webb began archaeological excavations at two sites within and in the vicinity of Speightstown, St Peter Province, Barbados. The principle site of investigation is located within Speightstown (N 13°15′02.9″ W 059°38′33.4″), on Church Street (Fig. 1). This site has previously been subjected to limited excavation by a University of Winchester team in 2017 & 2016 respectively. This excavation and subsequent recording was carried out entirely by students from aforementioned universities, some of whom recorded their time for reflection in modular coursework. This work was completed under the guidance of Project Director Connor Thompson-Webb and Site Supervisor, University of Southampton PhD student Mike Burgess. Moreover, a second site of Six Men’s Fort, was investigated. Six Men’s Fort is located outside of Speightstown overlooking the Port St Ferdinand Marina (Fig. 2), the team focused on recording the iron guns present at this site, as well as digging exploratory test pits.

The aims of this project, and the PhD associated with it, are to investigate and establish an archaeological profile of Speightstown’s townscape and seascape. This will be achieved by means of:

• Original excavation of sites of interest within the town and historic building survey of standing buildings within the town.
• Maritime archaeology survey and investigation of the waters and subsequent underwater features located off Speightstown’s coast.
• The recording and excavations of the coastal fortifications surrounding Speightstown, originally manned by the island’s militia.

This is intended to give a tripartite view of the town’s archaeological past, in order to greater understand Speightstown’s heritage as a centre for maritime trade, it’s role in the Atlantic sugar trade, and later it’s identity as a hub for whaling industries.

The 2018 season was the most productive yet, revealing a complex sequence of archaeology, particularly at the Church Street site. It is clear that the site has been used as a rubbish tip for some time, particularly in the past century, as indicated by a series of finds in the topsoil that were mixed and unstratified, with some dating from the 18th century through to modern articles. More of the building’s foundation was exposed than in previous seasons, with discoveries including potential evidence of internal walls and a bricked feature potentially used as an oven or cooking pit. The evidence uncovered provided proof that the site was residential in nature, although more data will be required before a definite conclusion can be drawn.

The information from all field seasons over the past four years and from future excavations will be compiled to form part of the data for the author’s PhD thesis, expected to be completed c. 2022. This report represents a summary of the project’s findings and progress at present.
Figure 1: Satellite photo of ST1, Church Street, Speightstown.

Figure 2: Satellite photo of Six Men’s fort location.
METHODOLOGY

The 2018 season of the Speightstown Archaeology Research Project took place over a single 10 day season (11\textsuperscript{th}-21\textsuperscript{st} September, 2018). This year’s fieldwork was participant funded and carried out by a team of 19 archaeology students from the United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia. The excavations were overseen by the Project Director and Site Supervisor, as previously mentioned.

Excavation

Excavation at the church street site, designated ST1, continued and built upon the previous year’s progress. A 6x6 meter trench was established, extending South and East from the previous year’s 3x3 trench with the aim to explore a greater aspect of the site. Once the level of the previous year’s excavation was reached (Fig. 3), a 1x1 meter grid system was established and excavation continued in each square, with the focus placed upon new areas of interest.

Figure 3: ST1 at the culmination of the 2017 season, photo taken facing South.
Trenches were excavated until either rubble remains of the buildings flooring were reached, or by context before recording and continuing excavation. All finds were recovered and stored by context number and trench square number in order to maintain provenance.

At the site of Six Men’s Fort, designated SM1, two 1x1 metre test pits were dug nearby the guns with the aim of searching for any remains of the fort architecture or material culture related to the fort.

Cannon Recording

The cannons located at Six Men’s fort were recorded on the final day of the project were recorded concurrently with the test pitting. This was achieved by means of measurements on a recording form and photography. This opportunity was also used as a practical means to introduce some participants to photogrammetry.

Finds recording and storage

All finds from the site(s) were sorted in order by trench and context, with greater attention paid to diagnostic finds of pottery, glass and metal objects. All finds have been temporarily stored at the home of a project collaborator as discussions with the Barbados National Trust for storage and an exhibition in the local museum, Arlington House continue.
LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Barbados is the easternmost island in the chain known as the Lesser Antilles. In a contrast to the other volcanic islands in this chain, Barbados is relatively flat. The local geology is largely comprised of non-volcanic sedimentary rocks such as limestone coral (Fitzpatrick, 2011, 598).

Speightstown, located in St Peter Parish in the north west of Barbados, is the second largest town on Barbados after the capital of Bridgetown. The town is no different structurally or socially to the rest of the island’s settlements, however it is important to note that a major feature of the town historically was a large salt pond, which has since dried and is now reclaimed land. The banks of this pond are still visible located only 300 meters SOUTH from the site on Chapel Street..
ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

PRE-COLOMBIAN

The pre-Columbian colonisation of Barbados is likely to have been established by the Caribbean Archaic age (C. 3000 – 500 BCE), the period in which it is believed humans migrated from the South American mainland into the Lesser Antilles (Fitzpatrick, 2011). This earliest colonisation date is derived from excavations at Heywoods, to the north of Speightstown. This site was later excavated as part of salvage project before the construction of Port St Charles Marina, and yielded a great array of Ceramic age (c. 500 BCE) material, including human burials, food refuse, decorated pottery and preserved wooden posts (Drewett, 2007). This was clearly the site of a large prehistoric settlement, one of the largest found on Barbados (Drewett, 2007).

Despite the majority of finds from the Heywoods site suggesting a ceramic age occupation, $^{14}$C dating undertaken by Fitzpatrick (2011), suggests that this site was occupied as early as the archaic age (Fitzpatrick, 2011, 601).

Pre-Colombian settlement on Barbados was not confined to the North-west, and was spread across the entire island’s coast and inland, as can be seen in the map below (Fig. 4).

Within Speightstown, preliminary surface investigation in 2016 by the author and Niall Finneran around the banks of the aforementioned salt pond have yielded sporadic surface finds of prehistoric ceramic material, suggesting that there could have been a smaller settlement located here.
Figure 4: Map of Barbados highlighting the locations of prehistoric settlements (Drewett, 1993, 115).
Barbados was first colonised by English settlers in 1627, at the site of Holetown. At this point, there was no longer an indigenous population on the island which is in contrast to previous islands such as St Vincent (Beckles, 2006, 5-8). Initially focused on cash crops such as tobacco, planters later switched to the sugar crop, which thrived in Barbados’ environment.

By the 1700’s there were three main settlements on the island, Bridgetown, Holetown and Speightstown. Speightstown was named after William Speight, a merchant whom served on the first parliament of the island in 1639 (Finneran, 2013a, 326). Speightstown, being the second largest settlement on the island, had established key trade links with the south west of England by the 18th century which ended up earning it the nickname of ‘Little Bristol’. However, historical sources regarding Speightstown are scant, despite the importance of the settlement. The sources that do describe Speightstown, describe it as a sizeable town, boasting a cosmopolitan population and being well defended by a network of coastal fortifications. It is often noted that Speightstown is not as large as Bridgetown (Finneran, 2013a, 326).

Speightstown’s population is an intriguing factor in the town’s heritage. The urban population was predominantly made up of merchants, and in particular a significant Sephardic Jewish population that originated from the Dutch colony of Pernambuco, Brazil. By 1710 this Jewish population numbered twenty families, and occupied the area surrounding modern Chapel Street which was then known as ‘Jew Street’. Reference to a synagogue also being present have been found (Finneran, 2013a, 327), however there is little archaeological remains of the Jewish population to date.

Speightstown’s mercantile operations were impressive, with historical sources, including an 1898 map (Fig. 5) attesting to the existence of at least four jetties. Each one was directly linked to separate merchants, and photographs from the 1890’s show that three in particular as being linked to Plantations Ltd, Jordan’s and Challenor’s (Finneran, 2013a, 341). One of the aims of this project is to resume underwater surveys in Speightstown’s bay with the aim of identifying the location of these jetties, and any other underwater archaeology pertaining to Speightstown’s mercantile past.

Post emancipation in 1838, the sugar trade no longer made the profits once enjoyed by the plantation owners. Coastal towns such as Speightstown shifted in emphasis from mercantile activity related to the sugar trade, to becoming a centre for shore based whaling industry, helped in thanks to its location nearby to whale migration routes (Finneran, 2016, 392).

Overall, even this concise historical background of Barbados and Speightstown shows that there is a rich and unique heritage at play in Speightstown’s history, therefore this project aims to build upon this
heritage by means of an archaeological biography of the townscape and seascape.

**Previous Archaeological work in Speightstown**

Apart from the aforementioned excavations at Heywoods conducted by Peter Drewett, Speightstown has seen very little previous academic research. The exception being the Speightstown Community Archaeology Project (SCAP) set up by Dr Niall Finneran, which this current project stems from. The SCAP has involved archaeological excavations at the site of St Peters Church in 2013. These excavations uncovered the foundations of a Georgian merchant’s house with associated residential material culture, mostly indicative of drinking (Finneran, 2013, 341). Moreover, this project began work of underwater surveys, having potentially identified Jordan’s jetty (Finneran, 2013, 341 – 343).

![Figure 5: Two maps of Speightstown, 2012 (left) and 1898 (right) (Finneran, 2016, 394).](image-url)
RESULTS

Overview

The results presented below will be presented by each of the two sites separately, results will be presented sequentially as the excavation progressed, with a separate discussion of special finds.

At ST1, a single 6x6 trench was dug, encompassing the area of the previous year’s trench. This was with the aim of further exploring the site, and potentially discovering the building’s dimensions. All excavation was completed by hand, including backfilling the site post-excavation.

At Six Men’s fort, designated SM 1, the team recorded the preserved cannon and dug two 1x1 metre test pits in order to find any remains of this fort. All work was completed by hand in one day.

ST1

This is the third year that this site has been investigated. In 2016 excavations were focused upon the eastern part of the site, guided by the exposed area of wall. This involved a 1x4 metre trench exploring this feature (Fig. 6). In 2014, this excavation was expanded westwards, digging a 3x4 metre trench in order to explore the immediate interior of this building, a secondary ‘arm’ was dug to explore the northern wall running east-west, as previously seen in Figure 3.

Figure 6: 2016 Excavation area, facing North.
This year, a larger team returned to ST1, excavating a 6x6 metre trench, exposing previously un-explored areas of the site. All features and deposits were exposed until the building’s rubble layer or further stratigraphic layers were reached, the results of this excavation will focus primarily on the newly excavated sections of the site.

In the NW corner of the site, the excavation uncovered a plastered surface, most likely preserved plastered flooring in grids 505 & 506 (Fig. 7). This is likely an area of later occupation. Grid 505 was excavated to a level that shows a clear stratigraphy (Fig. 8). Across much of the site, in between contexts (001) & (002) a layer of interspersed charcoal can be observed.

In the southern side of the site, a unique context (003) was reached. In this area there was no presence of any building rubble, and a higher concentration of ferrous concreted objects were found. This context was much sandier and less compacted than earlier contexts, making removal by trowel much easier. The entire southern side of this site was photographed to show this context, and the relationship with adjoining contexts.

Moreover, the SW of the site yielded an interesting brick feature, and the potential of an internal wall.
Figure 7: Plastered flooring in grids 505 & 506.

Figure 8: Grid 505 stratigraphy – facing South.
Feature 1

Feature 1 was located in the SW of the site (Fig. 9), intersecting between grids 526, 525, 531 & 532. This feature is defined by a red brick structure, lined with plaster on the interior. The fill of this feature was noticeably different, at first a grey ashen fill, leading to heavily charcoaled fill. This feature was carefully excavated until a stone flooring was reached, including a unique ferrous object lying in situ at the base of the feature. The charcoal fill was kept with the aim to float this material in order to conduct radio carbon dating later. The process of excavating this feature was documented and photographed with the results visible in Fig. 9.

Figure 9: A: view of Feature one after initial unearthing. B: Feature 1 excavated to charcoal layer.
Figure 9: C: Feature 1 excavated to bottom, revealing the Fe object. D: Feature 1’s stratigraphy.
Figure 9: E: Feature 1 fully cleared with Fe object in situ. F: Feature 1 cleared with Fe object removed.
Finds

Across the site, finds were discovered and stored in bags labelled with the site, grid number and context of provenance. In general, most finds pertained to residential activity, including a mixture of imported ceramics originating from Western Europe and England. There were some potential porcelain from China, fragmented glass objects in abundance, with a variety of colours and types of glass ranging from drinking vessels to thinner window glass, and a large amount of clay pipe was also recovered, with a mixture of different bore diameters however no pipe bowls were found.

Some animal bones were found, ranging from chicken bones, cow shins and potentially pigs teeth. Some of these bore butchery marks, although deterioration of some samples made identification beyond “bone” impossible.

In regards to metals, a number of concreted ferrous objects were found, although most were unidentifiable. A large quantity of iron nails were recovered, with round headed nails appearing in earlier contexts, and square headed nails in later contexts. Some copper nails and other objects were also recovered, particularly copper brooches, pins and buckles. Some of these were recorded separately as special finds and will be included in this report due to their unique diagnostic capabilities.

Special finds

Ten special finds were recovered as part of this field season, these were singled out due to being diagnostic in nature (non-fragmented glass, identifiable metal object, different from the other finds in material etc). These are as follows and pictures will be included in Annexe A.

A1: Fe object – potentially the blade of a cut throat razor.
A2: Cu buckle.
A3: Glass bottle stopper – possibly for a small perfume or medicine bottle.
A4: Glass bottle stopper – found in the same grid as A3, this bottle stopper is larger and is clearly for a larger bottle.
A5: Cu buckle.
A6: Glass bottle muzzle – consequently, the glass stopper A3 fits perfectly within this bottle.
A7: Fe object – Potentially forming part of a hinge or embossment for a door, this object has an elaborate design.
A8: Potential Au bead – This is a very tiny, potentially gold bead. (Mislabeled as A6 in picture).
A9: Fe object – This object was found at the bottom of feature 1, it features a long shaft leading to a rounded end.
A10: Carved bone with Cu wire – This carved piece of bone features a copper wire adjoining it, potentially part of a piece of jewellery.

SM1

The site of Six Men’s fort, (located at N 13 16’04.9” – W 059 38’26.5”) had previously been unexplored, except for a brief mention in Niall Finneran’s 2013 report which mentions the presence of cannons at this site (Finneran, 2013b).

The main aim of the work at this site was to record the cannons present at this fort, with a secondary aim of excavating 1x1 metre test pits in order to discover any archaeological remains of this fort.

Cannon recording

Overall, 8 cannons were observed at this site, cast into concrete holdings bearing the date ‘1944’. The guns were in a good state of preservation and still had identifying markings (Fig. 10). The team identified 3 different types of gun present at this site, designated A, B & C.

Due to the gun’s casting in concrete, some measurements were not possible, in particular measurements of the diameter and offset of trunnions were impossible to obtain. Overall, while these guns were mostly similar in dimensions, with an overall length of around 3 metres, the bore diameters are all different, ranging from 10 cm to 15 cm.

All guns were marked with the broad arrow, denoting them as British in origin.

Guns 1, 2 & 3 were photographed, and their relevant recording forms have also been included in this report.
Types of gun

All guns bore British military markings (i.e. naval arrow) and a range of other British government insignia.

Type A

The identifiable markings on this gun read 49-2-8 along with the broad arrow and the insignia GR2 all suggest that this type of gun was a 24 pounder dating to the reign of George II (1727 -1760). Most likely cast in the Weald, SE England. These guns were originally naval cannons but may have been moved to Barbados in later years (Ruth Brown, pers comm). (Annexe B).

Type B

The identifiable markings on this gun read 14-4-12, again with a broad arrow, this time the insignia on the cannon is that of the English rose and crown. This gun was cast as part of John Browne’s first series of cannon, dating it c. 1690 – 1700 (Ruth Brown, pers comm). The gun’s overall length at just over 3 metres, with a bore diameter of 10 cm, the gun is likely either a 12 pounder or demi-culverin. Again, this was likely cast in the Weald. (Annexe C).

Type C

This gun suffered from the most wear, and markings were harder to identify. the markings read, 4100 indicating a 12 pounder gun. There is a broad arrow once again denoting British origin along with the rose and crown once again. This is the earliest of the three types, dating c. 1666/7 (Ruth Brown, pers comm).

The dimensions of this gun include an overall length of 2.9 metres with a bore diameter of 13 cm. (Annexe D).

Test Pits

The team excavated 2 1x1 metre test pits with the aim of discovering any further evidence of the fort’s architecture, or material culture associated with the fort. However nothing of interest was noted. It is expected that another location will be test pitted next season. Some unstratified surface finds indicate the potential for test pitting to uncover further material culture, such as a fragment of Frechen stoneware.
DISCUSSION

Summary

Overall, the 2018 season of this project has been a great success. With the largest team to date involving participants from the UK, and as far afield as the USA and Australia, more work has been completed than previous seasons. It is thanks to this team that the archaeological work has been so successful. The site of ST1 has been excavated to an extent not achieved before, with interesting features being unearthed and recorded.

Not only have the project’s aims been met this season, conditions favourable for these objectives to be developed further in subsequent seasons have been laid in to place.

ST1

The site of ST1 remains an intriguing site. The site is most definitely residential in nature, that is clear from the finds, mostly that of a home. The potential for the site to be a merchant’s house, active from the early 17th century remains a possibility.

The site itself has clearly been used as a refuse dump by the people of Speightstown for some time. Whereas the archaeological stratigraphy at the site does suggest multiple periods of occupation, with the likely hood of a burning event across the site occurring at some point. The brick feature, in the SW corner of the site was most likely used for cooking or as an oven. Rather than a fireplace, as why would one need a fireplace in the heat of Barbados? The larger plantation houses on Barbados used to have fireplaces in order to mimic house styles from home, however these often were unused and were purely built for the aesthetic. The potential for the fire place being used as a foundry or forge were discussed, however this was determined to be highly unlikely looking at the size of the feature.

Further excavation at this site, extending the area to the south and west, and excavating deeper to go below the rubble flooring will be necessary to greater understand this site.

SM1

Despite the lack of archaeological material determined by the test pits, the main aim of recording the cannons present at Six Men’s fort was a success.

Overall, the mixture of 3 different types of guns, being different calibres and of different dates is a reflection of previous archaeological excavations at Maycock’s fort by Niall Finneran (2013, 343). The findings from Maycock’s showed the militia to be a force lacking uniformity, utilising non-standard calibre small arms – in the case at Maycock’s, sporting guns.

Given this data from another site, along with the longevity of use a cannon will provide, if properly maintained, the idea of the guns at Six Men’s being a mixture of dates and calibres does make sense. Rather than spend a lot of money on a large consignment of identical guns, it is more economically viable to gradually acquire different guns and build up an arsenal. However
from a logistical standpoint of different caliber shot and powder requirements, this is counterproductive to an effective defence of the island.

In all likelihood, given the fort’s commanding position further in land on top of a hill, it is likely the fort was much larger than previously thought.

It is projected that Six Men’s fort will be revisited for further test pitting, with the aims of discovering material culture associated with the fort, and any potential architectural remains.

Conclusions

The 2018 season of the Speightstown Archaeology Research Project has been a success, with investigations at two key sites. The continued work at ST1 has shown a site of occupation, potentially dating from the town’s origin. This site has been an intriguing one. The work at Six Men’s fort has also made progress in establishing a survey of the forts surrounding Speightstown.

Regarding public engagement, the project has moved to new strengths. Through the use of social media and the project’s website and blog, the project has reached a much wider audience across the world with extensive views in Barbados, The United Kingdom, Australia, the USA etc. Through conversations on site with local police, the project aims to involve the local community of Speightstown to a much greater extent in subsequent seasons. Although no official open day on site was held, visitors were welcomed and were granted an opportunity to talk to archaeologists on site about the work going on.

Aims for the 2019 season

The 2019 season, currently projected for July 2019, in order to coincide with the International Association of Caribbean Archaeologists conference in Bridgetown, will aim to build upon the success of this season in the following instances:

• Further survey of the forts surrounding Speightstown, particularly Denmark fort, Halfmoon fort and the yet unidentified fort located at 13.25’87.78” N -59.63’91.6” that is potentially Heywood’s fort. This will include recording of cannons if present.
• Continued excavation at ST1, with the prospect of including more sites within Speightstown, potentially in the vicinity of Chapel Street.
• Underwater survey of Speightstown’s bay, including further work with the local dive community in order to begin a series of underwater surveys of any potential shipwrecks in the area.


Finneran, N. (2013a) ‘“This islande is inhabited by all sortes”: The Archaeology of Creolisation in Speightstown, Barbados and Beyond, AD 1650 – 1900’ *The Antiquaries Journal*, 93, pp. 319 – 51.


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I would also like to thank the landowner for allowing us to excavate in Speightstown once again.
APPENDIX A – SPECIAL FINDS

Photo: Liam Joelson
Photos: Liam Joelson
Photos: Liam Joelson
Photos: Liam Joelson
Photos: Top - Liam Joelson. Bottom - Author
The glass object from 2017 excavation, found in a test pit to the immediate west of ST1. Photo: Liam Joelson.
APPENDIX C – CANNON TYPE B
All cannon photos in Appendices B, C & D were taken by Howard Boyle.