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Microform (BRRAM) series*

# The Tudway of Wells Antiguan Estate Papers, 1869-1907

in Somerset Record Office

Introduction to the microfilm collection by  
Kenneth Morgan

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The Tudway of Wells  
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## The Tudway Papers

The Tudway Papers are the most complete surviving private records pertaining to an Antiguan sugar plantation. Both in their chronological coverage and subject matter they provide invaluable historical data on the production of the Caribbean's most significant staple crop and on the workforce that laboured to sustain output during the long generations of slavery and in subsequent times of black freedom. The records are preserved in the Somerset Record Office at Taunton because the Tudway family had long been established in the cathedral city of Wells, with land, property and business interests there. They largely consist of many bundles of loose papers held together by string, though there are also some bound volumes. To date, they have not been reproduced on microfilm or in printed editions. Thus, this new edition of 30 microfilm reels represents a significant addition to the primary material available for reconstructing the social and economic history of the British Caribbean, as well as furnishing information relevant to the study of the West India Interest.

The Tudway plantation in Antigua was called Parham, situated on flat land and relatively stone-free soil in St. Peter parish in the eastern part of the island. Antigua – a small island consisting of 108 square miles in the eastern Caribbean – was settled in 1632 by English colonists. By the reign of Charles II, the rise of the Royal African Company and the adoption of plantations meant that Antigua's economy became centred on sugar estates based on enslaved African labour. The island first experienced a sugar boom by the 1680s and this was to be the source of its rapid economic development.

The annual accounts for Parham plantation (Reel 1) suggest that it was in operation by 1689. It soon flourished along with other similar properties on Antigua. Such was the pace of sugar cultivation, in fact, that over half of Antigua was under sugar cane in 1700 and no unpatented land was left on the island by 1724. Antigua was the largest island in the British Leewards – the others being Nevis, St. Kitts and Montserrat – and invariably accounted for more than half the overall slave population and sugar output among that group. By the last years of slavery (1807-34), Antigua was usually still the largest sugar producer in the British Leeward Islands. The population of Antigua comprised 1,370 people in 1672 (41.6 per cent black), 28,180 in 1734 (86.6 per cent black), 40,398 in 1774 (93.5 per cent black) and 37,031 in 1833 (94.6 per cent). The slaves were freed under the Emancipation Act of 1834. Unusually for the British Caribbean, however, there was no subsequent interim period of apprenticeship for blacks on the island, but a transition to full freedom on 1 August 1834.

The first proprietor of Parham plantation was Clement Tudway, a London merchant. In his will, proved on 8 February 1688, he instructed his brother to manage the estate and receive 12 per cent of the profits until his eldest son came of age. The plantation passed through various members of the Tudway family over succeeding generations. By the mid-eighteenth century, the proprietors were all based at Wells, Somerset. They were absentee owners who rarely visited their West Indian properties, leaving the management of the cane cultivation to resident attorneys and managers. Rather, they stayed at home, pursuing the life of county gentlemen with varied business and political interests; the source of large tranches of their wealth – slave labour in a hot climate – remained conveniently invisible.

Bolstered by the prestige of a coat of arms (ermine, a lion rampant gules between three roses azure) and a crest (a demi-lion rampant gules, holding a rose azure slipped paper), the Tudways were solid, professional, middle-class figures in Somerset society. There were three significant owners of Parham plantation. Clement Tudway, proprietor from 1770 until his death in 1815, was a respectable provincial barrister who was ten times mayor of Wells and M.P. for that seat from 1761 until 1815. His nephew John Payne Tudway, who represented Wells in Parliament from 1815 until 1830, succeeded to the Parham estate at the end of the Napoleonic wars and remained in charge until disposing of it in 1829. The plantation then fell to his son and heir Robert Charles Tudway when he came of age, and he saw the property through the difficult years of transition from slavery to freedom.

J. R. Ward's *British West Indian Slavery: The Process of Amelioration, 1750-1834* (1988) helpfully summarises the chief features of Parham plantation during the slavery era. The Tudways increased the size of Parham by buying up additional land tracts from time to time. The estate consisted of c.800 acres for most of the eighteenth century. The land under sugar cane on the estate was 530 acres in 1800, with 40 acres of food crops. Twenty years later a small addition had been made to the land under cane, which then comprised 560 acres; but the provision lands had grown to 280 acres by that date. Thus in the years either side of the abolition of the British slave trade there was a marked attempt by the Tudways to make their estate more self-sufficient in terms of food resources, something paralleled elsewhere in the British Caribbean.

Such a trend partly reflected planters' amelioration policies that allowed slaves more time to cultivate their provision grounds and thus to gain some measure of autonomy; it also stemmed from a desire to increase productivity gains on the estate. Yet even though a greater proportion of the estate's land was given over to provision crops, sugar output increased by generating greater yields per acre and per slave. This was achieved by effective use of ploughing the soil, better

manuring with compost, and improvements in cane cutting and processing. Parham estate benefited from later additions of land. It covered 1,096 acres in 1829 and, under the proprietorship of C.C. Tudway, was enlarged to 1,819 acres by 1921.

Parham was split around 1750 into an old and a new works, each with its own windmill and boiling house. An indenture of 1829 indicates that the property was then divided into three plantations called Parham Old Work, Parham New Work, and Parham Lodge. The number of slaves at Parham increased from 140 in 1719 to 533 in 1776; on average, there were 574 slaves on the plantation by the 1820s, fairly equally divided between the three parts of the property. By that time the plantation had few recorded slave runaways, suggesting that the control of slaves was relatively benign. Ward notes that in the 1820s some 52 per cent of the slaves at Parham were “ineffective” (including 15 per cent who were invalids, 28 per cent who were children aged under twelve, and 9 per cent who were pregnant or nursing mothers). Only 31 per cent of the workforce in that decade were regular field workers.

Between 1700 and 1830 Parham plantation made profits in most years. The biggest losses came in 1779-80 when shipping lanes for dispatching sugar to Britain were interrupted by enemy privateers during the American revolutionary war and when a tenth of the estate’s slaves died through a dysentery epidemic caused by a scarcity of food and drinking water (Reels 3 and 16). Far more rapid annual fluctuations occurred in profits in the half century leading up to slave emancipation, largely owing to volatile production and marketing conditions in the French Revolutionary war years. None the less Parham plantation was still a viable economic venture by the 1830s.

The records of Parham plantation contained on these thirty reels of microfilm cover over three centuries in the history of sugar cultivation in Antigua, from the time of the Glorious Revolution until the end of the First World War. They provide full details on all the operating aspects of sugar plantations – the planting and cutting of cane, the capital invested in the property, profit and loss accounts, the work regimes, health conditions among labourers, the management practices of attorneys, managers and overseers, the connections with merchants in the sugar trade, and so forth. There are also plenty of details in extant correspondence relating to the social and economic attitudes of the Tudways as absentee proprietors, to major legislation affecting the Caribbean, and to the metropolitan context of the sugar business. These facets of sugar cultivation could be studied for various purposes: to trace this particular plantation as a case study of an Antiguan estate; to place Parham within the context of other Antiguan plantations such as those owned by the Codringtons; to situate the estate within the development of staple crop agriculture in the



Leeward islands; or to dovetail parts of the material contained in the collection into broader studies of the economic, social and demographic development of the British Caribbean.

The first fifteen reels comprise a virtually complete set of annual accounts for Parham plantation from 1689 until 1920. The main gaps are for 1735 to 1740, 1797, 1878, 1883 and 1884, and 1894 to 1901. Annual profit and loss figures can be worked out from these accounts. There are exact details on the amount of sugar and rum shipped back to Britain, with sales figures. From these, indexes of sugar and rum prices in the British market could be compiled. The goods received from English vessels for use on Parham plantation are listed. There is a cooperage account in most years. For the eighteenth century, there are sometimes lists called "new negro accounts" (see Reels 1 and 2) that list the number of newly-imported slaves arriving at Parham and the prices they fetched. These data would be useful for anyone constructing an index of slave prices for the eighteenth-century British Caribbean. Valuable information exists about the slaves on the plantation. There are regular lists of slave names, with details on slave births and deaths for many years in the eighteenth century.

Ward's *British West Indian Slavery* (table 11, pp. 134-35) has calculated age-specific mortality rates for Parham plantation between 1737 and 1803. For selected years (e.g. on Reel 3), information on the causes of mortality is given. Such demographic and medical details for the slave population are invaluable because there was no comprehensive data collected on these facets of slave life before the end of the British slave trade and the coming of slave registration in the British Caribbean a decade thereafter. The individual details on slaves continue after 1834. The annual accounts now include daily pay lists itemising the wages paid to individual black labourers (e.g. Reels 6 to 9). So far untouched by historians, these lists could be analysed, in conjunction with material in the collection's correspondence, to present a precise portrait of the labouring conditions of free blacks in Antigua.

Reels 16 to 30 largely consist of correspondence stretching the whole time span of the collection. Here one gleans information about the proprietors' management practices, their liaison with merchants in the sugar trade, and descriptions of work and social affairs at Parham. The letters are particularly useful in being written both from Britain (most correspondence being sent from London, Wells, and, to a lesser extent, Bristol) and from Antigua. Thus one often has a complete chain of correspondence from both the British and Caribbean ends of the business, helping one to trace the evolution of the Parham sugar works over time in close detail. Most of the sugar from the estate was shipped back to London and so there is, in particular, an extended sequence of letters covering the business relationship between the plantation's managers and metropolitan

commission merchants. Some letterbooks are included in the collection, primarily eighteenth-century volumes (Reel 16), but for the most part the letters are loose ones. Interspersed among this large corpus of correspondence are other, miscellaneous items. Thus one can locate a memorial of the House of Assembly of Antigua plus accounts of sugar sales for 1824 and a list of stores for 1826 (Reel 25) and London price currents for Antiguan sugar for 1863 (Reel 24).

By using the collection as a whole, specialists in slavery and the history of the British Caribbean will find material useful to their investigations. Ward's *British West Indian Slavery* is a fine example of how Parham's records for the slavery era can be analysed effectively. But perhaps the best opportunity afforded by the collection for historical analysis lies in the post-1834 material, which has been under-exploited by historians.

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- viii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1844-Dec 1844
- ix. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1845-Oct 1845

**REEL 29:**

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**PAY LISTS AND MONTHLY JOURNALS OF WORKS RETURNS AND TRANSACTIONS OF THE OLD WORKS, NEW WORKS AND PARHAM LODGE, 1846-1875**

- i. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1846-Dec 1846
- ii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1847-Dec 1847
- iii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, 1848
- iv. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Feb 1849-Nov 1850
- v. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Nov 1850-Oct 1851
- vi. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Dec 1851-Dec 1852
- vii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1853-Dec 1853
- viii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, March 1854-Nov 1854
- ix. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Feb 1855-June 1855
- x. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1855-Feb 1856
- xi. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1875-Oct 1875

- xii. Pay Lists of Parham Lodge, Feb 1875-Nov 1875
- xiii. Pay Lists of New Works, Jan 1875-Oct 1875

**REEL 30:**

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**PAY LISTS AND MONTHLY JOURNALS OF WORKS RETURNS AND TRANSACTIONS OF THE OLD WORKS, NEW WORKS AND PARHAM LODGE, 1875-1877**

- i. Pay Lists of Old Works, Jan 1875-Nov 1875
- ii. Pay Lists of Antiguan Estate, Dec 1875-Jan 1876
- iii. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Aug & Dec 1875; Jan 1876-Dec 1876
- iv. Monthly Journals of Works Returns of Antiguan Estate, Jan 1877-Dec 1877

**MISCELLANEOUS, 1748-1907**

- i. List of Negroes, 1748-1767
- ii. Register of Slaves belonging to Parham Plantation on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1817, and Accounts of Deaths/Births of Negroes, 1820-1826
- iii. Sugar Cane Experiments in the Leeward Islands... Report on Experiments conducted at Antigua and St. Kitts in the Season 1905-1906. Issued by the Imperial Commissioner of Agriculture for the West Indies. 1907
  - Part I: Experiments with Varieties of Sugar Cane
  - Part II: Manorial Experiments



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