

## Green Castle History Summary

### By Paul Larsen

Green Castle history begins with Jamaica's first inhabitants, the Taino. Their occupation of the island was short-lived for an aboriginal people, from their arrival around 600 AD to their extermination under Spanish conquest around 1520. Our knowledge of the Jamaica Tainos is still far from complete. But numerous recent archaeological explorations have been undertaken. One of the most thorough of these began at Davey Hill on Green Castle Estate. It has revealed a people that lived on a wide variety of animal sources as well as the cassava root known to the Spanish, that occupied, abandoned, and reoccupied favored sites over an extended period, and that thrived on numerous hills along the northern coast at the time of Columbus's landfall.

Spanish settlement of the North Side scarcely outlived the Tainos, from around 1504 to the abandonment of the northern cities around 1520. Very little remains of these earliest traces of European culture. We do know that the Spanish built a coastal road that would have run through Green Castle. But that road had disappeared by the time of English settlement in the 1660s, to be reestablished only with the triumph of sugar culture on the North Side in the 1730s. There has also been speculation that the Spanish town of Melilla, never precisely located, might have enjoyed its short life in the vicinity of Green Castle.

The first place name known to be associated with the Green Castle area was Calabash Bottom. That there was some kind of Spanish settlement there is suggested by several marks on the first survey of the area in 1670/71. At the southeast end of the valley, two features of early Spanish occupancy were noted: a number of citrus trees and the remains of a "polink" or palenque, an enclosure for animals. Either or both could date to the aftermath of the English invasion of 1655, when many of the Spanish fled to the north and held on for another five years. They might also have dated far earlier, to pre-1520 Spanish occupancy of the North Side.

In the latter case, the citrus trees would have been the result of successive self-seeding. The palenque could only have survived, even in fragmentary form, if it had a stone base, most likely of the coral rock which was so abundant along the shore. Both these vestiges of Spanish land use, which have long since disappeared, were located in the midst of what is now a banana grove between Newry settlement and the coast.

Under English occupation, Green Castle carved out a distinguished place in Jamaica history. For two hundred years it was owned by a succession of three of the leading families of the island. The first English name to be attached to it was Sir Thomas Modiford, Jamaica's first civil governor. Immediately upon his arrival from Barbados in 1664, Modiford spearheaded ambitious, island-wide planting

schemes, enlisting the support of the Crown in granting immigrants as many acres as they could put to agricultural use. His own extended family took out patents on nearly 40,000 acres, on which they raised cotton, pimiento, cacao, indigo, and sugar cane, the crops rising to island-wide prominence in that order.

Modyford himself concentrated his energies on the southern and central parts of the island. But in 1670-71 his sons Thomas and Charles began the task of developing cacao culture on the North Side. Prominent among their first patents was Calabash Bottom and the savannas and woodlands to its north. The patent survey identifies three transportation routes leading to neighboring plantations. Most important among them was an already-existing road bisecting the property from east to west along the upper edge of the valley. Beginning at the seashore below Jack's Bay, the road skirted the southern slope of Davey Hill. This road was ultimately replaced by the parochial road running almost parallel to it on the north side of Davey Hill. But the survey also identified two paths meeting along the southwestern edge of Calabash Bottom near where Newry settlement would eventually arise.

Apart from these local routes, all commerce in and out of the plantation was conducted by sea. Another two hundred years passed before viable overland routes connected the North Side to Jamaica's major cities in the south.

Near the intersection of the paths shown in the patent survey, Thomas Modyford the Son established his cacao walk.

Cacao culture would dominate North Side holdings for the next half century. It was considered a superior option to sugar for many reasons: adaptability to the harsher and wetter climate of the northern coast, ease of management once the walk was established, and above all, feasibility as a high-yield cash crop without the expense of purchasing and maintaining a slave population.

In spite of such a grand beginning, the Modyford dynasty barely survived the century. In 1702, Sir Thomas's last male heir died and his baronetcy was extinguished. The major Modyford holdings ended up in the hands of inlaws, while the development of the family's North Side Jamaica properties went into limbo. Then, in a way that could only happen in a British colony, a savior of Modyford's North Side prospects appeared in the person of Robert Nedham, a step-grandson of Sir Thomas. Robert Nedham's father, George Nedham was a friend and neighbor of Sir Thomas. A devoted royalist, he had been stripped of his ancestral properties in England by Cromwell, then rewarded for his loyalty to the Crown with an inland grant of Jamaica plantation lands that rivaled those of Sir Thomas himself.

Green Castle, St. Mary's, grew out of two inheritances: the estate of George Nedham, which left Robert with a thriving plantation on Waters River (Agua Alta) upstream from Calabash Bottoms; and a large holding in northern Ireland that unexpectedly fell into his hands in 1712. The Irish

property included the town of Newry and the remains of a medieval fort known as Green Castle. Suddenly possessed of new financial resources, Nedham set about consolidating his hold on St. Mary lands, purchasing all of the properties between Waters River Plantation and Agua Alta bay. The seaside holding to the south he named Orange Hill after its large citrus grove, while the property to the north took on the name of the romantic ruin of Green Castle in Ireland.

Nedham's plantations in St. Catherine's continued to be the center of his attention as well as his residence until around 1728, when he began to expand his slave holdings, apparently to initiate sugar plantations at Green Castle and Orange Hill. As the Modyfords had with cacao, Nedham led the way in the conversion of great tracts of St. Mary's land to sugar cane fields. When he began his operations at Orange Hill and Green Castle, the parish's English population was still sparse, and its number of slaves was probably under 2,000. All of this changed very rapidly with the influx of resident plantation owners and the development of a North Side slave economy in the 1730s. A map of ca. 1733 shows Nedham's great house at Green Castle, which he would occupy until his death in 1738. Unfortunately, remains of the original great house have so far escaped discovery, in spite of concerted attempts to locate its foundations on the basis of early maps and geophysical investigation.

The coral-stone tower for Nedham's landmark windmill still survives, and carbon dating has established that one of its largest timbers dates from a tree felled in the 15th century, suggesting salvage from a Spanish ship or some Spanish building in the vicinity. Apart from its great age and rugged appearance, the tower is remarkable for its many wall piercings, the residue of an ancient construction technique. Lacking the means of winching stones to the top as the tower arose, the masons relied on a scaffold built of put-logs lying across the structure at three to five foot intervals. When these logs were removed, their large pockets were allowed to remain. Close to the mill tower are foundations for an animal mill and associated sugar production buildings and storage buildings.

Several fragments of a cluster of warehouses and a wharf at Jack's Bay also survive. These date at least to 1750, with the possibility that the complex was begun under Nedham's ownership. Near the end of his life Newry gave the northern part of Orange Hill (which lay within the Modyford Calabash Bottom patent) to his nephew, George Ellis. This became a third sugar plantation, named after the seat of Nedham's Irish lands at Newry. During Nedham's lifetime, a house later dubbed "Ellis's" was built on the north border of Green Castle; perhaps this was built for Nedham's favorite nephew before the bequest. The fireplace and chimney have miraculously survived, encased in the lower growth of an old tree.

Nedham's son, also named Robert, took little interest in Jamaican life, choosing instead to manage the family's Irish properties. As a result, Green Castle and its associated properties passed to George Ellis on the elder Robert Nedham's

death in 1738. Thus Green Castle became associated with a third illustrious Jamaica family, the descendants of Captain John Ellis. The extended Ellis family was just coming into its own in Jamaica. They would be a dominant force in local politics as well as sugar cultivation until the middle of the next century.

The Ellis era at Green Castle began with turmoil. Slave insurrection was commonplace in St. Mary's parish in the 1740s and 1750s. George Ellis's estate inventory, taken in 1840, listed twenty-four carbines and a trunk of flints and cutlasses, indicating that Green Castle was embroiled in the troubles. Sometime in the following decade, a stone barracks would be built on the inland side of the coastal road at Jack's Bay, one of four in St. Mary's. The Jack's Bay barracks still survive as a picturesque ruin.

Ellis's will severed the three estates, bequeathing Green Castle to his principal heir, George Ellis, Jr., and the remaining estates to his second and third sons. Numerous boundary disputes between the sons and with other property owners added to the turmoil of the estates; they also resulted in a flurry of maps of Green Castle and its vicinity. As a side effect beneficial to historians, the development of Green Castle between 1740 and 1783, when the three plantations were reunited, is better documented than at any other time in the estate's early history.

In spite of the conflicts within the estates and among property owners, sugar culture flourished. When Green Castle passed to the second son, John Ellis, in 1753, it was already one of the leading plantations in St. Mary; one map of the island singles out only Green Castle and Water Valley.

In 1759, John Ellis purchased a large parcel of land to the north, initiating a period of shifting boundaries of all three estates. Green Castle expanded to the north, Orange Hill was stripped back to the parcel lying north of Waters River, and Newry flexed in between. During this period, a second sugar works arose at Green Castle, including a windmill, two animal mills, and a sugar-production complex.

The animal mills were powered by a rotating work force of twelve horses and one hundred steers instead of the aged mules that worked the lower mill. It arose well inland, between the parish road and Calabash Bottom just south of Ellis's new great house. In contrast to the original works centered on the coastal savannas, the new complex occupied land that had to be cleared of dense forest.

For a brief period in the 1770s, both Upper and Lower Green Castle flourished. An inventory of 1882 lists 336 slaves at Green Castle, probably its apogee as a sugar plantation.

Eleven rooms of the upper great house are inventoried in detail. But the reason for the inventory was a disaster that precipitated Green Castle's gradual fall as a sugar plantation. John Ellis and his wife were lost at sea. The sugar plantation would never again enjoy resident ownership.

A set of old breeze sails in the inventory suggests that the lower mill had already fallen into disuse. The last map to show Lower Green Castle was published in 1785. Presumably, the earlier complex was taken apart for its stone, leaving only foundations and the “breeze tower” that would remain one of the North Side’s most enduring and picturesque landmarks.

After John Ellis’s death his son, also named John, tied the estate to an annuity and dowry for his wife, Antonetta, creating a mare’s nest of legal issues that would haunt the title to the land through the 1840s. Disputes about boundary issues also continued, culminating in a decision severing Orange Hill from its last remaining component outside of the Modyford patent of 1871. Green Castle was resurveyed in 1800, showing an expanse of 1260 acres. Unfortunately this survey map, which would have precisely located such key sites as the upper millworks and the slave village, has been lost.

Apart from absentee ownership, Green Castle suffered the woes of all Jamaica sugar estates in the early 1800s.

Depressed sugar prices and the mandated end of slavery (to take effect in 1834) pushed all but the most successful plantations to the brink of bankruptcy. To make matters worse, in 1823 John Ellis the son mortgaged his St. Mary holdings to the English merchants Timperon and Dobinson, assigning all of the sugar produced by the three plantations directly to them. His son dug the hole deeper yet by consigning all other products of the estates to the same merchants.

Timperon’s death in 1846 brought matters to a head. After a long period of disputation, the mortgages on Green Castle and Newry were foreclosed in 1853. At that time, Green Castle still had 63 acres planted to sugar cane, but it was a fraction of the 374 acres of land once set aside for cultivation. The buildings were in serious need of repair, and there were serious shortages of both labor and stock.

Newry fared somewhat better, with boiling, curing, and still houses in good repair and a steam engine to run the old windmill. But the mill itself needed replacement, and the animal mill was derelict.

In 1854, all three St. Mary Ellis estates were put on auction. Two years later, Dobinson filed an affidavit claiming that he could not sell Greencastle for £1000, yet the combined debt of the three estates approached £100,000. As a result, the estates were broken up and abandoned, leaving the land to be settled by squatters.

Joseph Bravo, a London merchant, put the Green Castle parcel back together in 1871, with a new emphasis on pimiento production. At the same time, the legal status of the property remained in doubt, as the Colonial Secretary claimed the land for Jamaica and leased it out. A new survey displayed boundaries very similar to those of the John Ellis inheritance with the contested additions of 1759, comprising 280 acres in all.

With the death of Bravo in 1881, the land passed through several hands before clear title was finally achieved by John Pringle in 1887. Pringle was in the process of purchasing numerous North Side lands and converting them to banana plantations. According to some estimates, by the turn of the twentieth century St. Mary parish became the leading banana producer in the world. For the next fifty years Green Castle thrived as a banana plantation, passing successively to the United States-based Atlantic Fruit Company and the Banana Company of Jamaica, Ltd. With the onset of the Great Depression, the financial affairs of the estate and its owners once more began to crumble. Along with hundreds of Jamaica properties it defaulted to a mortgager, in this case the Manhattan Company of New York.

In 1937, Green Castle Estate was sold to its manager, Joseph Ray Johnson, and Newry became the property of John Pringle's grandson, Charles Mackenzie Pringle. Johnson soon sold several parts of Green Castle, some to Newry and some to the Jamaican government, reducing its size to 957 acres. The oldest functioning buildings on both estates, including the great houses, probably date to the period of Johnson and Pringle ownership, though there is an old stone building on the Newry side of Calabash Bottom that may date back to the elder Pringle's days.

A visit by John H. Macmillan, Jr., in 1950 led to a lease and purchase of Green Castle Estate by an American with deep roots in the agricultural industry. Macmillan immediately set about reintroducing diversity to the plantation economy.

Bananas, coconut, and pimiento were paramount. An effort to begin coffee culture was squelched by the Jamaican government. In the meantime the savannas, abandoned as agricultural lands for 160 years, became grazing grounds for beef cattle.

On Macmillan's death in 1960, Green Castle passed to three heirs before settling into the hands of the one most interested in the property, Duncan Macmillan. After pursuing and abandoning ambitious plans to build on top of Davey Hill, Duncan remodeled the great house built by Johnson. He also repurchased most of Newry, along with the northern part of Orange Hill and a parcel of land on the north. This returned the estate to an approximation of its configuration during its climactic period at the end of the 18th century, less triangular pieces at the northwest and southwest corners. In recent years, cattle production has tapered off, and repeated efforts have been made to establish a blight-resistant papaya culture. In 1997, a dam was constructed to control the seasonal flooding of Calabash Bottom, opening the way to initiation of a large-scale orchid operation. This added a final, light touch to Green Castle's extraordinarily diverse agricultural base.

After Duncan McMillan's death in 2006 the Estate was purchased by a Family Trust in 2007 the Beneficiaries of which live in the United Kingdom.