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Morden, Map of the western hemisphere (To Captain John Wood . . .), 1688, detail; Barbados in oval

Richard Ligon \_\_\_\_\_ 1657

## A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes . . .

Together with the Ingenio that makes the Sugar, with the Plots of the several Houses, Rooms, and other places, that are used in the whole process of Sugar-making; viz. the Grinding-room, the Boyling-room, the Filling-room, the Curing-house, Still-house, and Furnaces . . . , 1657. Excerpts.

In 1647, twenty years after the first Englishmen landed on the uninhabited island, Richard Ligon arrived in Barbados, intending only to sell cattle, horses, and other goods before heading to Antigua to establish a plantation. When the ships were delayed by a severe epidemic on the island, Ligon and his colleagues decided to purchase half of a functioning sugar plantation. He remained there for three years, writing the *True & Exact History* after returning to England.

[W]e found that it was far better for a man that had money, goods, or Credit, to purchase a Plantation there ready furnished, and frocked with Servants, Slaves, Horses, Cattle, Assinigoes, Camels, etc., with a Sugar work, and an Ingenio [mill]: that to begin upon a place, where land is to be had for nothing but a trivial Rent, and to endure all hardships and a tedious expectation, of what profit or pleasure may arise in many years patience . . . This knowledge was a spur to set on Colonel *Modiford*, who had both goods and credit, to make inquiry for such a purchase, which in very few days he lighted on, making a visit to the Governor Mr. *Phillip Bell*, met there with Major *William Hilliard*, an eminent Planter of the Island, and a Councilor, who had been long there and was now desirous to suck in some of the sweet air of England: and glad to find a man likely to perform with him, took him home to his house, and began to treat with him for half the Plantation upon which he lived; which had in it 500 Acres of Land, with a fair dwelling house, an Ingenio placed in a room of 400 foot square, a boiling house, filling room, Cisterns, and Still-house; with a Carding house of 100 foot long and 40 foot broad; with stables, Smith's forge, and rooms to lay provisions of Corn and Bonavist [hyacinth bean, grown for hay]; Houses for Negroes and Indian slaves, with 96 Negroes, and three Indian women, with their Children; 28 Christians, 45 Cattle for work, 8 Milk Cows, a dozen Horses and Mares, 16 Assinigoes. . . In this

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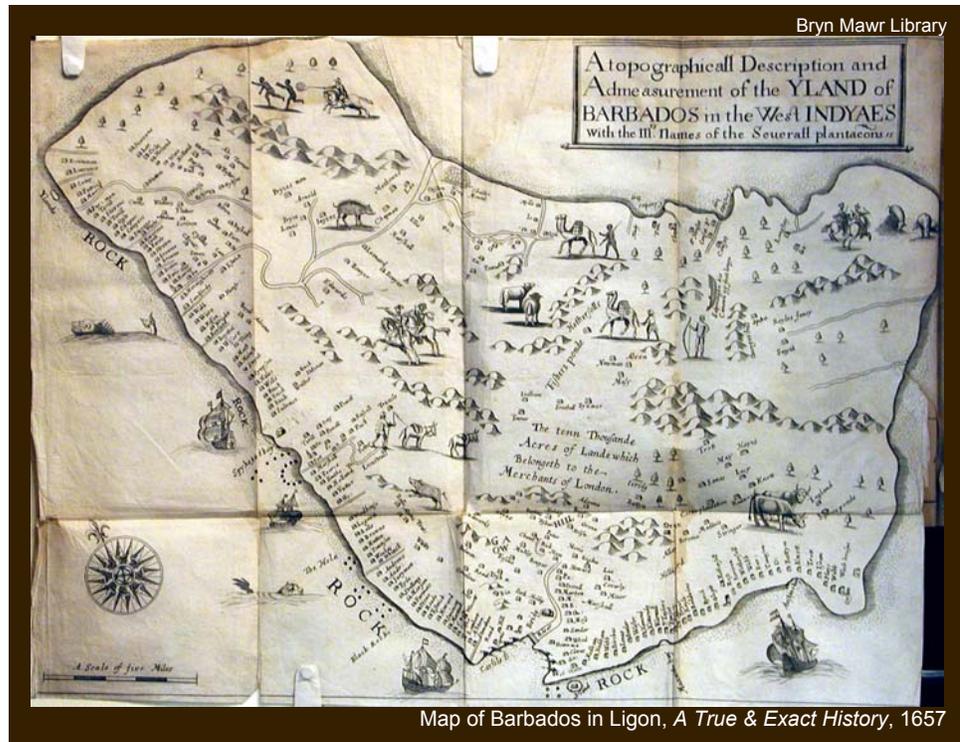


Nicholas Abbey Plantation House, Barbados, built of coral blocks in the 1650s

Excerpted, images added, and some spelling and punctuation modernized by the National Humanities Center, 2006: [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm). In Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, 1657, 2d. ed. 1673; facsimile edition of 1675 edition published by Frank Cass Publishers, London, UK/Portland, Oregon, 1970. Reproduced by permission. Digital images of the Abbey and Drax plantations courtesy of Jerome Handler and the University of Virginia Library, in *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record*, at [hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/slavery/index.html](http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/slavery/index.html). Complete image credits at [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm).

Plantation of 500 acres of land, there was employed for sugar somewhat more than 200 acres; above 80 acres for pasture, 120 for wood, 30 for Tobacco, 5 for Ginger, as many for Cotton wool, and 70 acres for provisions. . . .

I only speak thus much that you may perceive I had time enough to improve myself in the knowledge of the management of a Plantation of this bulk; and therefore you may give the more credit in what I am to say concerning the profit and value of this Plantation, which I intend as a Scale for those that go upon the like. . . .



It were somewhat difficult to give you an exact account of the number of persons upon the Island; there being such store of shipping that brings passengers daily to the place, but it has been conjectured, by those that are long acquainted and best seen in the knowledge of the Island, that there are not less than 50 thousand souls, besides *Negroes*, and some of them, who began upon small fortunes, are now risen to very great and vast estates.

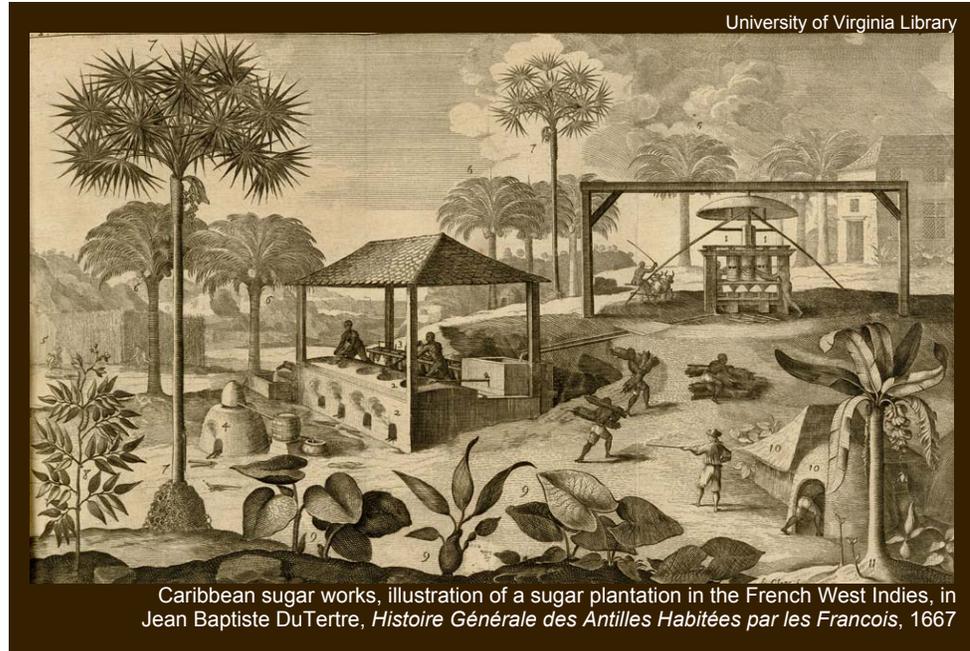
[The masters] are men of great abilities and parts, otherwise they could not go through with such great works as they undertake, the managing of one of their Plantations, being a work of such a latitude as will require a very good head-piece to put in order and continue it so. . . .

This I say to stop those men's mouths that lie here at home [England] and expect great profit in their adventures and never consider through what difficulty, industry, and pains it is acquired. And thus much I thought good to say of the abilities of the Planters.

The next thing is of their natures and dispositions, which I found compliable in a high degree to all virtues, that those of the best sort of Gentlemen call Excellent; as, Civilly entreating of Strangers, with communicating to them anything within the compass of their knowledge that might be beneficial to them, in any undertaking amongst them, and assisting them in it, giving them harbor for themselves and servants. . . . Loving, friendly, and hospitable one to another, and though they are of several Persuasions, yet their discretions ordered everything so well, as there never were any fallings out between them . . .

At the time of our arrival there [September 1647], we found many Sugar-works set up, and at work; but yet the Sugars they made were but bare Muscavadoes [brown less-refined sugar], and few of them Merchantable commodities; so moist, and full of molasses, and so ill cured, as they were hardly worth the bringing home for *England*. But about the time I left the Island, which was in 1650, they were much bettered; for then they had the skill to know when the Canes were ripe, which was not, till they were fifteen months old; and before, they gathered them at twelve, which was a main disadvantage to the making of good Sugar . . . .

And now, since I have put myself upon this Discovery, I think it fit to let you know the nature of the Plant, the right way of Planting it, the manner of growth, the time of growing to ripeness, the manner of cutting, bringing home, the place where to lay them, being brought home, the time they may lie there without spoil, the manner of grinding or squeezing them, the conveyance of the liquor to the Cisterns, how long it may stay there without harm, the manner of boiling and skimming, with the conveyance of the skimmings into the Cisterns, in the Still-house, the manner of distilling it, which makes the strongest Spirits that men can drink, with the temper to be put in; what the temper is, the time of coloring the Sugar before it be put into the Pots; the time it stays in the Curing house, before it be good Muscavado Sugar. And last, the making of it into Whites, which we call Lump-Sugar. . . .



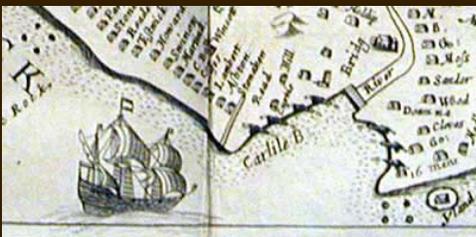
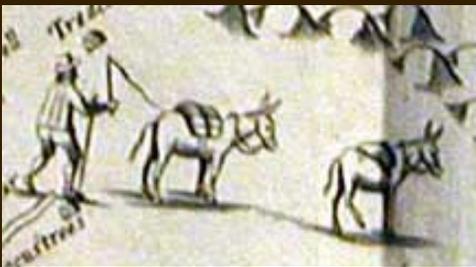
Caribbean sugar works, illustration of a sugar plantation in the French West Indies, in Jean Baptiste DuTertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les Francois*, 1667



Drax Hall Plantation Yard, Barbados, 1650s (photograph ca. 1971)

Colonel *James Drax*, whose beginning upon that Island, was founded upon a stock not exceeding 300£ sterling, has raised his fortune to such a height, as I have heard him say, that he would not look towards England, with a purpose to remain there, the rest of his life, till he were able to purchase an estate of ten thousand pound land yearly; which he hoped in few years to accomplish, with what he was then owner of; and all by this plant of Sugar. . . .

And now I have as near as I can, delivered the sum of all I know of the Island of *Barbadoes*, both for Pleasures and Profits, Commodities and Incommodities, Sicknesses and Healthfulness. So that it may be expected what I can say to persuade or dissuade any that have a desire to go and live there. But before I give a full answer to that, I must inquire and be informed of what disposition the party is that hath this design; If it be such a one as loves the pleasures of *Europe*, (or particularly of *England*) and the great varieties of those, let him never come there, for they are things he shall be sure to miss. But, if he can find in himself a willingness to change the pleasures which he enjoyed in a Temperate, for such as he shall find in a Torrid Zone, he may light upon some that will give him an exchange, with some advantage. . . .



Map of Barbados, details, in Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, 1657

'Tis a known truth there, that no man hath attained to such a fortune as this, upon a small beginning, that hath not met with many rubs and obstacles in his way, and sometimes callings back, let his pains and industry be what it will: I call those fallings back, when either by fire, which often happens there, or death of Cattle, which is as frequent as the other; or by losses at Sea, which sometimes will happen, of which I can bring lively instances: If either of these misfortunes fall, it stands in an equal balance, whether ever that man recover, upon whom these misfortunes fall: But, if two of these happen together, or one in the neck of another, there is great odds to be laid, that he never shall be able to redeem himself, from an inevitable ruin; For, if fire happen, his stock is consumed, and sometimes his house; if his Cattle die, the work stands still, and with either of these his credit calls; so as, if he be not well friended, he never can entertain a hope to rise again.

These toils of body and mind, and these misfortunes together, will depress and wear out the best spirits in the world, and will cause them to think, what a happy thing it is, to spend the remainder of their lives in rest and quiet in their own Countries. And I do believe, there are few of them, whose minds are not over-balanced with avarice and lucre, that would not be glad to fell good penni-worths, to settle themselves quietly in *England*. Besides the casualties which I have named, there is yet one of nearer concern than all the rest, and that, their own healths, than which nothing is more to be valued; for, sicknesses are there more grievous, and mortality greater by far than in *England* . . . But I speak not this to discourage any man, that hath a mind to improve his Estate, by adventuring upon such a Purchase; for, though the Planter, by long and tedious pain and industry, have worn out his life, in the acquist of his fortunes; yet the Buyer, by his purchase, is so well and happily seated, as he need endure no such hardships, but may go on in the managing his business, with much ease, and some pleasure; and in a dozen years, return back with a very very plentiful fortune, and may carry with him from *England*, better remedies for his health, then they, who for a long time had neither means to provide, nor money to purchase it.