

SUMMARY REPORT ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE SOUTHAMPTON COTTAGE

REPORT SUBMITTED BY: B. FORTENBERRY, BOSTON UNIVERSITY



SUMMARY

- Excavations at the Southampton Cottage identified late 17th as well as 18th century domestic occupational layers associated with enslaved Bermudians living on the site.
- The cellar was occupied in two phases from 1680 to roughly 1700 and then after 1760 to 1830.
- The cellar contained an oven with an associated “ash pit”.
- A north-south partition separated the space for mixed use of storage and occupation.
- The archaeological material will be exported to Virginia once the export permit is approved.
- The proposed preservation of portions of the building’s timber framing by the National Museum is supported.

EXCAVATION SUMMARY

Brent Fortenberry investigated the Southampton Cottage cellar in August 2013 in conjunction with Edward Chappell’s architectural investigation. The findings from the initial testing provided strong evidence that the household’s enslaved Bermudians occupied the building’s cellar during the 17th and 18th centuries. Supported by the Bermuda National Trust Brent Fortenberry, Lecturer of Archaeology at Boston University, and Hayden Bassett, a PhD candidate from The College of William and Mary, returned to the site in early March 2014, for a full investigation of the cellar’s archaeological deposits as a prelude to the building’s proposed de-listing and subsequent demolition.

Edward Chappell's architectural work on the island has demonstrated that for much of the 17th and 18th centuries, enslaved Bermudians lived in close proximity to their masters. At sites such as the President Henry Tucker House in St. George's and Stanley House in Flatts, Chappell has successfully argued that African-Bermudians were living in cellar spaces under the main houses. At the Southampton Cottage, the cellar space was cut directly into bedrock under the rear chamber of the house. Given the site's 17th-century construction date, and its sustained occupation throughout the historic period, an archaeological study of the cellar would yield important material evidence for the lives of enslaved African-Bermudians.

Over 85% of the archaeological deposits of the cellar were excavated and pushed through 1/8-inch mesh. The archaeological material recovered indicates two major phases of occupation. The first dates from the initial construction of the house, sometime before 1680 and ends at the turn of the 18th century. There is then a gap in occupation roughly from 1700–1760; this interpretation is supported by a gap in the material culture, primarily ceramics from this period. By 1760, occupation in the cellar began again, and based on ceramic data ends sometime around 1840.

Two post holes and a structural pier suggest that the cellar contained a partition running north to south in the western third of the space. This partition created two spaces; the first was likely used for storage, and the second for occupation. Such segmentation has also been seen in cellars in Virginia during the historic period.

In the eastern wall an oven feature was identified during the initial survey in 2013. Excavation in the area around the oven revealed an "ash pit", into which coals and ash from the oven were raked for cooling. Similar ash pit features have been found in Virginia at Jamestown and Flowerdew Hundred.

Bedrock cut ovens were also identified on Smith's Island.



Figure 1: Line of Postholes and support pier.

These initial findings will be supplemented by a detailed study of the excavated material culture which will allow us to understand what kinds of artefacts the enslaved members of the household had access to, what they ate, and how they lived within the social world of the Southampton Cottage and Bermuda's past. The archaeological deposits will also be studied in light of the architectural evidence recorded by Edward Chappell, and archival evidence compiled by Linda Abend.

CONTINUED STUDY

The artefacts from the cellar are currently being washed and re-bagged at the National Museum, in preparation for export to the College of William and Mary. Dr Edward Harris has provided laboratory resources for this task given Fortenberry and Bassett's departure this week. The export permit application will be submitted to Jennifer Gray for approval this week and submission to Government. Once approved the



Figure 2: Oven and Ash Pit. Left, oven and pit relationship, right ash pit planview

artefacts will be flown to Virginia for study over the next twenty-four months. Three specialist studies will be conducted. First, Jenna Carlson, a PhD Candidate at William and Mary, will undertake an analysis of the faunal remains; she successfully studied the faunal assemblage from the State House several years ago. Second, Jessica Herlich, also a PhD Candidate at William and Mary, will conduct the first botanical study of archaeological material from Bermuda, which will aim to understand the flora that were both present in the West End during this period, and identify domestic plants that were a part of the diet of the cellar inhabitants. Third, Madeleine Gunter, a PhD Candidate at the College of William and Mary, will conduct a geoarchaeological analysis of several soil columns that were extracted from the site. This will be the first geoarchaeological study completed on a historic site (after AD 1500) in the world. Her work will identify the composition of the soils in the cellar and their formation processes. She will also be able to identify the cellar's living surfaces to determine if they were often swept clean for daily use. In all, these specialist studies will provide a level of historic detail unparalleled for any archaeological project completed to date on the island, and will enrich our understanding of the enslaved Bermudian lifeways during the 17th and 18th centuries. Continued study of the remainder of the artefacts will take place at the College of William and Mary over the next twenty-four months by Fortenberry and Bassett.

PRESERVATION OF THE BUILDING

With archaeological study completed this spring, and Edward Chappell's architectural field work completed last summer, the building has now been fully examined. With the recent application for de-listing put forward by the Fairmont Southampton Resort, and the proposed plan by the National Museum to remove portions of the cedar timber-framing, I fully support the application to de-list and save portions of the building before primary demolition. Given the building's current state, roof collapsing and walls falling in, the structure is too far gone to save on a wholesale basis and is a safety hazard. While the purposeful neglect of a Grade-One (now Two) listed building by the resort is reprehensible, and in my opinion should be addressed by the Department of Planning and the preservation stakeholders on the island given the similar situation that has befallen Queen of the East, at this point the building is in such a state of disrepair it is beyond saving.



Figure 3: Current state of the entry porch.

PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

The Southampton Cottage cellar archaeological deposits are the earliest found to date that can be associated with enslaved Bermudians. The study of the site's material culture will shed new light on enslaved lifeways during the 17th and 18th centuries, and will serve as a vital comparative case study for our understanding of the Atlantic African Diaspora. Methodologically, the study of the Southampton Cottage is a rare example of archaeologists and architectural historians working together to understand the varying material lines of evidence on historic sites. Most importantly, this project will hopefully serve as a case study for archaeological and architectural investigation of important sites that should be used in conjunction with best preservation practices.