A SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE ON ARTIFACT ASSEMBLAGES

AT THE EDWARD MOULTON-BARRETT HOUSE, FALMOUTH, JAMAICA

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Murray State University conducted an archaeological investigation of the Edward Moulton-Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica, in 2006 and 2008. Falmouth was founded about 1770 and soon became the major port of Trelawney Parish. Barrett was a leading citizen and founder of Falmouth. His house was constructed in 1798-1799. Test excavations, previously reported, uncovered stratified pavements, midden deposits, and portions of two foundations in the yard. The investigators also placed a series of 49 postholes at the nodes of a 3 x 3 m grid throughout the yard area, using a standard two-handled posthole digging tool. The data from the postholes, previously unreported, offer a spatial perspective on artifact assemblages. Comparison to excavated assemblages provides a test of the representativeness of this subsurface testing method.
The archaeology of urban houselots of the American colonial period lends itself to several areas of study, including household and lot organization, the functional segmentation of household and commercial space, and the process of enclosure of already confined spaces (Zierden and Herman 1996). Upper-class urban lots often form the arenas for combinations of commercial as well as elite and serving-class domestic activities, so that teasing out the contributions of any particular members of the household becomes difficult. Cross-cultural investigations into urban servitude encounter similar problems of identifying the living spaces of people who lived in nooks and crannies of elite dwellings or the upper stories of insubstantial outbuildings (Wesler 2008b). Archaeological study of the Edward Moulton-Barrett house in Falmouth, Jamaica, provides an example of the complexity of urban deposits created in the heyday of an early 19th-century Caribbean port, of the complementary nature of test excavations and spatial sampling, and of how continuing analysis may lead to the reevaluation of assumptions regarding who is responsible for the creation of an archaeological deposit.

Murray State University conducted test excavations in the yard of the Barrett house in 2006 and 2008. The project was conducted as a field school hosted by Falmouth Heritage Restoration, Inc., and arranged through the Center for Cooperative Studies Abroad (CCSH), a consortium of U.S. universities. The project consisted of a gridded surface collection, a series of test post holes at the grid nodes designed to probe for subsurface deposits and for spatial analysis of artifact distributions, and a set of test excavation units. The excavations have been reported previously (Wesler 2010, 2011). This paper presents the spatial analysis of the artifacts recovered by the post holes.

Figure 1. Location of Falmouth, Jamaica.
The Barrett house was an impressive structure, a two-story Georgian-style town home. According to R. A. Barrett (2000:26), “It was of dressed stone with a wooden upper part supported by six wooden columns overhanging the street pavement, or side walk, and an external staircase to give access to the reception rooms on the first floor. These had decorated doorways, dentil cornices, and heavy mahogany doors, with large sash windows and wrought iron balconies. The walls were panelled with cedar. The ceilings of both ground and first floors were supported by large polished mahogany columns, and above the main entrance on the ground floor was an ornate fanshaped tracery.”

The keystone over the front door bears the date 1799, when the house was completed. Unfortunately Hurricane Gilbert tore the roof off the house in 1988, and all that remained by 2006 was the shell of the ground floor. Because the house fronted directly on the street, the archaeological project concentrated on the walled back yard.

Falmouth is in Trelawney Parish on the north coast of Jamaica, east of Montego Bay (Figure 1). It was founded in 1769 and became a busy port by the end of the 18th century. In the early 19th century, Falmouth was the third-largest port of Jamaica, with about 10% of the island’s shipping traffic by 1834 (Higman 1991). By the mid-19th century, economic development was ending for Falmouth, as the harbor was too shallow for steam vessels, the railroad bypassed the town, and Kingston became the preeminent shipping center. Because the town did not develop much after 1850, it retains its street plan and many of its structures from the Georgian period (Besson 2002; Binney et al. 1991; Edwards 1798; Jacobs and Concannon 1970; Ogilvie 1954). Falmouth Heritage Renewal is working to restore and preserve the town’s built heritage, and hosted the CCSH crews to begin an archaeological study.

Edward Barrett was one of the leading citizens of early Falmouth (Connelly and Parrent 2005). “The period of their [the Barrett family’s] most rapid expansion was the second half of the eighteenth century, when Edward Barrett and his brothers were buying estates along the western portion of the Northside, in the precincts of St. James and Trelawney, from Montego Bay eastward to Palmetto Point, which later became Falmouth. By the 1790’s Barrett prestige was at its peak…” (Taplin 1957:1). The Barretts owned some 31,000 acres in 1838 (Markus 2005:99).

Most of the published information about Edward Barrett’s family focuses on his great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, born in 1806 in England, who never saw Jamaica. Most authors treat Jamaica mainly as an exotic but incidental backdrop to her story (Barrett [2000] and Marks [1938] are exceptions). Edward Barrett died in 1798. Barrett’s principle heirs were his daughter Elizabeth Barrett Moulton and her family (Marks 1938; Markus 2005:101). His grandson, Edward Barrett Moulton, whose parents had moved him to England in the winter of 1794-1795, took the name Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett in order to inherit. The Moulton Barretts were absentee landlords until Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett’s brother Samuel returned to Jamaica in 1827 (Barrett 2000; DuQuesnay 2005; Landis 1958; Lupton 1972; Marks 1938; Markus 2005; Radley 1972; Taplin 1957; Wright 2007). At some point in a later generation the Moulton Barretts hyphenated the last names.

Barrett’s wife, Judith Goodin Barrett, was named executrix in his will “during her Widowhood.” She remarried in 1803, and died in England in 1804 (Marks 1938:259, 271-272; Jamaican Archives 1B/11/8/15,
VOL 1, TRELAWNY, Baptisms, Marriages Burials, 1771-1826. Barrett’s will included instructions for the family to keep a wharf and “the land within one hundred feet of high water mark westward from John Tharp’s wharf” (Barrett 2000:42), which would have included the house.

Only Barrett (2000:26, 160) mentions a house in Falmouth. The last Moulton-Barrett owner was Edward R. Moulton-Barrett, who endowed the archaeology program at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, before his death in 1992. G. E. Barrett (personal communication 7/9/2012) writes that the “house in question was given by E.R.M-B to the servants that maintained the property.” However, research into who actually occupied the Barrett house in Falmouth in the 19th century remains to be pursued.

Urban archaeology

Urban archaeology in the British Caribbean Although the British Caribbean has a rich history and historic-archaeological record, synthetic, comprehensive investigation of any particular aspect of that record—particularly in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—is still in its early stages Hamilton (1996) restricted his view to the seventeenth century, and Watters (2001) avoided Jamaica. The archaeology of African descendants has received some attention (Haviser 1999), especially in plantations. Urban archaeology is less well represented in the literature. The most substantive projects have emphasized very early Spanish settlements (Deagan [1995] at Puerto Real and Deagan and Cruxent [2002] at la Isabela). In Jamaica, Woodward (1988) renewed an interest in La Sevilla. Farnsworth (2001) serves best to highlight the lack of systematic and integrative approaches to Caribbean historical archaeology in general and the urban archaeology of the later historical record—the Georgian period and beyond—in particular.


Urban sites are notably complex (O’Keefe and Yamin 2006). Cities can be seen as places of grand theater, where cityscape designers encode theories of power (Leone and Hurry 1998; Miller 1988), and also as places “of hidden performance or covert actions, a place occupied by people who are not ‘on stage’, either by their own choice or by the design of others, and whose buildings and built spaces are concealed and invisible rather than displayed, and which may appear ‘immaterial’” (O’Keefe and Yamin 2006:95). Free and enslaved persons of African descent were among those not on stage in colonial ports, even though they lived and worked throughout the urban environment. Joseph (2000) suggests that African-American communities occupied
city margins or the interiors of urban blocks. In Baltimore, Dantas (2008:159-162) found that white households with free non-white residents were distributed differently from households headed by non-whites. The latter were peripheral, as Joseph suggested, or near the harbor. In Jamaican ports, Higman (1991:137) placed the slave populations near warehouses and wharves, reflecting their employment. According to Rogers (2003), some 3% of the slave population in Jamaica worked as sailors circa 1775, and they too may have concentrated near the harbors.

Unlike in plantation situations where slave villages are discrete settlements, identifying slaves and servants in urban contexts is notably difficult (Wesler 2008b). Servants’ quarters are generally poorly documented in urban settings. Scattered historic references suggest that their quarters were in attics, under stairwells, in upper stories of unpreserved outbuildings, and generally in the nooks and crannies of urban spaces (Herman 2005:135-137). Scholars attempting to identify slaves’ spaces in the northern United States (Gidwitz 2005), in Native American settings on the Northwest Coast (Ames 2001) and in Classical and Near Eastern settings (Brothers 1996; Culbertson 2011; Thompson 2003) face the same issues. Few studies have considered the contribution of servants’ and slaves’ activities and activity areas to the total archaeological record of an urban site, although Hauser (2009) remarks that urban lots such as those investigated in Jamaica represent the “aggregated trash of the whole household—African, Creole and European.”

One of the areas of interest in Caribbean plantation archaeology has been the concept of the house-yard (Armstrong 1990:87-132; Delle 2009; Hauser 2009:92-92, 2011:168-169; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005:158-165; cf. King’s [1994, 2006] concept of the “yardscape”). Much of this discussion is based on Mintz’s (2007, originally 1974) and Davenport’s (1961) observations. However, this work is based on what Mintz called “peasant” households: specifically habitations in dispersed upland settings, usually with one cohabiting couple per house although several may share a yard. Each household usually has a boundary fence or hedge, and the yard may have symbolic, ritual or kinship significance (Mintz 2007:Chapter 9).

With the exception of the boundary, this formulation appears to have little to do with upper-class urban lots such as that of the Barrett house. Some colonial house lots were designed for displays of ideology and status (Leone 1984, 1988, 2005; Matthews 2005). More appropriate comparisons to the Barrett yard would include houselots in Charleston, South Carolina (Herman 2005; Zierden 1999; Zierden and Herman 1996) and New Orleans, Louisiana (Dawdy 2005). These often housed small communities of upper class families and serving personnel, where the yards are the “meeting ground of slave and master” and are “multipurpose spaces” in which it is hard to separate the activities of owner and servant, “shared space used at different times for different purposes” (Dawdy:2005:148), including both domestic and commercial activities. Symbolic, ritual or kinship implications would be equally palimpsestic. Archaeological study of Falmouth, Jamaica, has barely begun. The excavations at the Barrett house are only the first step towards a consideration of the issues raised by the studies mentioned above.

The Barrett house excavations

The project began in 2006 by designating the northwest corner of the lot as the horizontal datum, with grid north oriented along the back (west) wall. After a controlled surface collection, the crew began conducting posthole tests (described below) on grid nodes at three-meter intervals. While this process was ongoing, excavators placed four
test units in locations chosen because of the presence of a pavement or stratified deposits located by the postholes and to answer the question of whether the existing back porch rested on subsoil and therefore was original to the house. In 2008 the second crew expanded two of the 2006 excavations.

Figure 2. Students learning to record posthole tests. Note partial block wall to left.

The rear of the Barrett house lot is partially set off from the front three-quarters by a block wall which stands about 7.5 meters from the rear wall. Ivor Connolley (personal communication 2006), who was making measured drawings of the lot at the time of the project, suggested that the rear yard was actually a later addition to the property, and the partial wall marked the original property boundary. On this assumption, and because it appeared to be especially disturbed by sand crab activity, the excavators avoided the rearmost section of the yard.

The excavations revealed a complex stratigraphy of superimposed pavements comprised of brick or marl (decayed limestone mined from the uplands). The units also exposed a number of architectural features, including stone walls and foundations. The excavators did not reach
culturally sterile underlying soils in any of the units due to the shallow water table (which was raised about 20 cm by heavy rainstorms near the end of each season, making final recording of the units challenging).

The majority of the ceramics were creamwares and pearlwares, with some early whitewares. The majority of the assemblage represents an occupation of the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries, with some later activities including modern trash in the uppermost levels. The predominance of fine ceramics reflects the Barrett family’s position as landowners, merchants and leading citizens, participants in what Bernard Herman calls “elite behaviors … grounded in the material life of acquisitiveness, display, competitiveness, and consumption—all attributes of a larger culture of eighteenth century Atlantic mercantilism where mutual interests in commerce, politics and recreation coalesced around fashionable social rituals” (Herman 2005:37). Less than a dozen yabba (locally-made wares) sherds suggest the presence of African-Jamaican household servants. Although Hauser (2008a:199-2000) notes an instance of East Indians using a yabba in the early 20th century, in the period represented by the Barrett house deposits there was a great “likelihood of their production by people of African descent, and their use and ultimate deposition by enslaved and free laborers” who also were African-Jamaicans (Hauser 2009:92-93, 2011:171).

The excavations were reported in detail to the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (Wesler 2006, 2008a) and the conclusions presented in summary publications (Wesler 2010, 2011). However, the results of the posthole testing have not been published previously.

The crew completed 46 test postholes (tphs) on grid nodes at 3 meter intervals (Figure 3). There were several areas that had to be avoided because of large piles of rubble or some solid blockage just under the surface, but the sample covered most of the area of the yard.

One concern that South and Widmer (1977) investigated was whether the postholing technique provides a representative sample of the artifact assemblage from the deposits tested. The Barrett data offer another trial. Figure 4 (top) presents the major categories of the ceramics recovered from the entire project (surface collection, tphs, and excavations), while Figure 4 (bottom) presents the ceramics from the tphs. In both assemblages, whiteware is the largest category, followed by creamware, pearlware and porcelain. The proportions are quite similar, suggesting that the tphs provide a reasonable sample of the site’s ceramics. Small finds) recovered from the tphs. The major concentration appears to be in the rear...
of the yard, farthest from the house (and behind the partial divider wall). There is also a concentration in the front of the yard, close to the porch. At first glance, the concentration in the front resembles Stanley South’s Brunswick Artifact Pattern (South 1977), in which British colonial households just threw a lot of trash out the back door. However, investigation of the patterns of different classes of artifacts suggests otherwise.

The distribution of the ceramics appears in Figure 6. The concentration in the rear yard is similar to the distribution of all artifacts (Figure 5), but the peak near the house is not evident.

Many of the surface artifacts in the Barrett yard accumulated recently through over-the-wall trash disposal. To test whether recent whiteware is over-represented in the tph sample, ceramics from Level 1 of the excavations may be separated from the assemblage recovered in deeper levels and also compared to the ceramic assemblage from the surface collection (Figure 7). The proportion of whiteware is far greater in the surface and Level 1 collections than in the deeper deposits. Whiteware does appear in deeper levels, but in order to explore whether earlier ceramics might be distributed differently from later specimens, whiteware may be mapped separately from earlier wares.

Figure 3. Distribution of test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica

Journal of Caribbean Archaeology 13, 2013
Figure 4. Major categories of ceramics recovered from project (top) and test postholes (bottom).
Figure 5. Distribution of artifacts in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of artifacts from test postholes

Figure 6. Distribution of ceramics in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of ceramics
Figure 7. Ceramics from surface collection (top), excavations Level 1 (center), and excavation deposits below Level 1 (bottom).
In Figure 8, whiteware is distributed similarly to the overall ceramic pattern (Figure 6). However, the map for creamware, pearlware and porcelain shows differences (Figure 9). The center of distribution in the rear yard shifts slightly, and the secondary concentration in the southeast corner disappears. There appears to be some bias towards later activities and perhaps modern trash when whiteware is included in the map.

For comparison, Figure 10 presents the distribution of curved glass, which represents mostly serving vessels and bottles. The marked concentration of artifacts visible near the house in the total artifacts distribution (Figure 5) seems to be made up largely of glass.

From observation while on site, bottle glass is even more likely than ceramics to include modern trash thrown over the wall from the street. Comparing the glass frequencies from the excavations, clear glass is a noticeably higher proportion of the surficial levels (Level 1, Figure 11 top) than the deeper levels (Figure 11, bottom), suggesting that the analysis does need to account for modern trash among the glass (although olive green glass is the majority group in both assemblages).

Thus, the distributions of clear (Figure 12) and non-clear (Figure 13) curved glass may be compared. The concentration of glass near the house is almost entirely made up of clear glass. It may represent mostly one smashed bottle. The other curved glass concentrates in the rear yard, mirroring the ceramic pattern. Distributions of architectural artifacts show two distinct patterns. Flat glass (mostly window glass, although rarely belonging to other artifacts such as framed pictures) concentrates near the house, where the windows were (Figure 14). Nails, however, are distributed in the rear yard (Figure 15), much like ceramics and non-clear curved glass.

Small finds from the tphs included one bead, eight buttons, two coins, four pipe fragments, and two fragments of a bone toothbrush handle. Their distribution resembles those of the major artifact categories: a scattering in the main yard, but most in the rear yard (Figure 16).

Finally, the tphs recovered 150 faunal remains (of 721 from the entire project; Allgood 2008). The distribution of faunal remains, presumably reflecting food preparation activities, fits the general pattern (Figure 17).

**Discussion**

In sum, the test postholes provided an interesting view of the distribution of artifacts, and presumably activities, in the Barrett house yard. Most of the artifacts clearly concentrate in the rear yard. The apparently Brunswick Pattern hot spot close to the house actually reflects only two groups of artifacts: clear bottle glass, perhaps a single shattered bottle, and flat glass, probably from nearby broken windows. Removing those from the various maps, the evident predominance of the assemblage came from the rear of the yard.
Figure 8. Distribution of whiteware in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of whiteware

Figure 9. Distribution of creamware, pearlware and porcelain in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of creamware, pearlware and porcelain
Figure 10. Distribution of curved glass in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of curved glass
Figure 11. Curved glass from excavations Level 1 (top) and excavation deposits below Level 1 (bottom).
One inference from this pattern is that the rear yard is not a late addition to the property, but was the focus of activities from the time the house was built. The partial wall was a later addition, perhaps to screen the back area from view of the house.

As noted earlier, historical research into who comprised the Barrett house’s inhabitants in the 19th century has not been completed. It is clear that the Barrett family was intimately involved with African-Jamaicans in various capacities (Barrett 2000; Markus 2005:94-97, 100-101). Given the substantial nature of the house and lot, as well as the lavish ceramics which clearly denote a household involved in “a larger Atlantic culture steeped in acquisition, display and exchange” (Herman 2005:59; Wesler 2010, 2011), the inhabitants likely included an upper-class owner and, pre-Emancipation, a staff who would likely have been or included enslaved African-Jamaicans. In previous reports (Wesler 2010, 2011), the discussion suggested that only the yabba wares reflected the presence of these members of the household.

Instead, it is likely that most of the assemblage does. Many wealthy Jamaicans of the period were plantation owners, and may have stayed in their town houses only part of the year for business and social occasions. When the owner was not here, there may have been only a few caretakers. When the owner was here, who did most the work of supplying and supporting the household? They were the same people who left most of the artifacts in the archaeological record, who likely were African-Jamaican servants. As Hauser (2009) says more generally about urban deposits, they are a record “created by the refuse of the servants.” Yabba sherds are hints about who they were, but their effect on the creation of the archaeological record was far more substantial than the few yabba pieces that were recovered.

It appears that most of the support activities that produced an artifactual record occurred in the rear of the yard, the area farthest from the house. The excavation units were placed in the center and front of the yard, to test complex deposits revealed by the tphs. The excavators neglected the rear section in part because the deposits appeared to be very disturbed by sand crab activity, and in part because of an assumption that the area was a late addition to the lot. An unfortunate consequence was that the excavations missed the locations most productive of artifacts (Figure 18).

The archaeological record of this town lot is very complex, with numerous outbuildings and frequent re-surfacing episodes using brick and marl. Previous reports (Wesler 2010, 2011) emphasized the architectural complexity, which corroborates historic descriptions of urban town lots, especially those owned by elites. Urban lots contained living quarters for the owner’s family, plus for household servants, and also facilities and work spaces for the various functions that supported such a small community. As Herman (2005) wrote of Charleston, South Carolina urban households, there could have been any combination of kitchen, pantry, privy, laundry, bath house, smokehouse, storehouses, well, garden, carriage house, stable, sheds and servants’ and slaves’ quarters, not to mention the commercial activities of a plantation owner. The organization of these activities would have changed, perhaps seasonally.
Figure 12. Distribution of clear glass in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of clear curved glass

Figure 13. Distribution of non-clear glass in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of non-clear curved glass
Figure 14. Distribution of flat glass in test postholes.

**Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica**

**Distribution of flat glass**

![Distribution of flat glass](image)

Figure 15. Distribution of nails in test postholes.

**Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica**

**Distribution of nails**

![Distribution of nails](image)
Figure 16. Distribution of small finds in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of small finds

Figure 17. Distribution of faunal remains in test postholes.

Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica
Distribution of faunal remains
The posthole testing extends this analysis, showing that the excavations missed areas of intensive activity. Further work in this yard is needed, closer to the house but especially in the rear yard, to get a fairer representation of all of the deposits. Royal Caribbean cruise lines recently began docking in Falmouth, which is expected to set off a spate of tourism-related development, and we may only hope that the archaeological resources of the Barrett yard and the rest of the historic town survive long enough to allow further study.

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Barrett House, Falmouth, Jamaica

Distribution of artifacts from test

Figure 18. Locations of text excavations compared to artifacts distribution from postholes.
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*Journal of Caribbean Archaeology* 13, 2013


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