

A Journey down an Archives Rabbit Hole

While participating in the excellent British Library Endangered Archives Zooniverse project [Agents of Enslavement](#), where some 15,000 pages of Barbadian newspapers from 1783 to 1838 were to be scoured by volunteer readers for references to enslaved people, it was somewhat inevitable that the required close scrutiny of the content would lead to being distracted by matters not directly relevant to the task at hand.

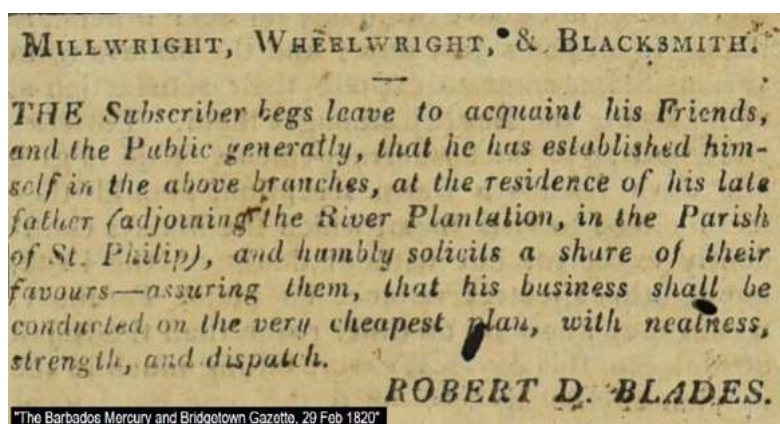
Caribbean windmills are a visible and enduring reminder of the historical horrors of the slave-based sugar plantation economy, but nevertheless also have a purely physical history to explore. Details about their construction and maintenance are scarce. The advertisement below caught the eye.



From "*The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*" of 18th April 1820 in the British Library Endangered Archives project EAP1086/1

There are several things in it that are of interest. Firstly, it was not just mill timber being sold, but named ready-made wooden mill parts. Next, they were imported, and imported from Porto Rico (an anglicised spelling of Spanish island colony Puerto Rico). And what are Cinnamon Posts ?

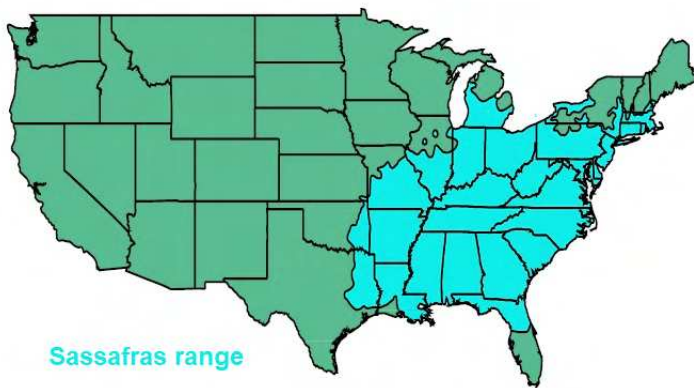
The importing of good timber is unsurprising, Barbados having lost its original tropical forest by 1665. But did the sale of mill parts suggest a shortage of millwrights on Barbados to make them from scratch ?



This one was seeking work; he received compensation for forty-eight enslaved people at Work Hall after 1834.

[Robert Doughty Blades](#)

There was no urgent need for more repairs than usual after a hurricane - between 1780 and 1831 there were none of great intensity. And on further consideration, the parts mentioned are not seriously engineered; arms and points are for the sails; a tailtree is a very long pole, attached to the wooden cap roof structure connecting the sails to the machinery, for turning sails into the wind to function efficiently. The fact they are described as mill timber does suggest they have been sawn to specific sizes for specific purposes. A crown beam is "a transverse beam at the apex of a pair of beams that brace a structure" so not mill specific. The square posts are fashioned by similarly basic wood working. Finally, cinnamon wood in the English speaking Americas refers to the sassafras tree rather than the aromatic Asian spice wood.



But the sassafras is not a tree from tropical Puerto Rico, so the posts were not made from wood from there, but imported from the Eastern United States.¹ Nor were there many windmills in Puerto Rico in 1820. Despite efforts to modernise sugar production, the lack of enslaved labour and capital, and small land holdings by peasant farmers - in contrast to nearby Cuba - meant such sugar-cane as was processed was by using cattle-mills or an occasional water-mill.² This would make the large-scale manufacture of wind-mill parts for export unlikely, though as the

wood-working was merely sawing lumber to size there were plenty of hardwood trees still standing in the island from which this could be done.³ As the sassafras was imported from the USA perhaps these were also; maybe imported by a merchant for a Puerto Rican client who cancelled or could not pay. "A very *reduced price*" for cash purchasers suggests something of a 'fire sale'.

Prompted by these advertisements a thorough search of the other 1820 papers⁴ revealed some others more or less similar.

Feb. 15—3n JOHN S. GASKIN.
Who offers for sale a small lot of excellent mill timber, consisting of nuts, arms, shafts, tail trees, crown and half crown beams, and a parcel of cinnamon posts; also a quantity of first quality Quebec white oak puncheon staves and heading; 200 London,

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 26 Feb 1820"

MILL TIMBER.
Parcel Arms, Tail Trees, Crown Beams, and Cinnamon Posts, &c.
T. I. PEIRCE.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 5 Sep 1820"

Bullet tree shafts—arms, tailtrees, points—foot-timber and mill laths—locust of large dimensions—bow wood, hackia, purple-heart and gomorrow. Cinnamon posts, mahogany in logs and boards, Gomorrow plank, Gregory nuts and rollers.
Oct. 21—if. T. LAW.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 21 Oct 1820"

press and cedar shingles, mill timber, consisting of shafts, arms, points, and foot timber, bully tree cart spokes; Jan. 20—4n PHILIP L. HINDS.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 30 Jan 1821"

HARD WOOD, &c. &c.
NOW Landing from the schooner Rapid, a choice assortment of Mill Timber, consisting of bully-tree, purple-heart, locust, moro cackerally, gomoro, and bow-wood, of all dimensions, for arms, points, tail-trees, crown beams, &c. &c. Also a lot of square cedar, bully-tree plank and scantling, cart spokes, and fire-wood.—The above will be sold at a reduced price for cash on delivery.
Oct 3—2n KNIGHT & SAGE.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 3 Oct 1820"

SALE OF MILL TIMBER AND OTHER HARD WOOD.
ON Friday next, at the long store of Messrs. Grant & Elliott, near the Pier-head, will be exposed for sale without limitation,
A parcel of Locust, Bully-tree, Crab-wood, and Cedar, of various dimensions; also a parcel Surinam Hard-wood, called brunsheart and Cathaldart. Terms, cash or approved Bills, on being laid off.
Oct 7—2n T. I. PEIRCE.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 7 Oct 1820"

Most of the timber advertised above comes from N.E. South America - except the cinnamon of course.

¹ Daniel L. Cassens, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, Purdue University - [Sassafras info sheets](#)
² See eg. [An Account of the Present State of the Island of Puerto Rico. by Colonel Flinter 1834](#)
³ Small early 19thC Puerto Rican woodwork factories mentioned in this paper by Lidio Cruz Monclova [here](#) p.8
⁴ [EAP1086/1 The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette Newspaper Collection \(1783-1848\)](#)

Feb 29—3n M. CAVAN & Co.
Who are now receiving the cargo of *Hardwood* from
the brig *Frances*, referred to in the advertisement of
the 26th inst. ; and, in addition to which, they are re-
ceiving forty-one *Cinnamon Posts*.

DRAFT OXEN.

PART of a choice Cargo will be landed at our *Penns*
this day, ex schooner *Waterloo*, from *Porto Rico*, af-
ter a short passage.

Feb 26—3n M. CAVAN & Co.
Who daily expect the brig *Francis*, from *Porto Rico*,
with a fine cargo of hard wood, consisting as follows :
—76 Crown beams, 24 to 27 feet in length ; 14 half
ditto ditto, 12 to 14 ; 3 pieces *Gregory* ; and 196
plank, from 3 to 4 inches thick, 14 to 18 inches wide,

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 4 Mar 1820" Feb. 26 3n

"Draft oxen" appear regularly, as the most common imports from Puerto Rico, usually advertising the fact of "a short passage" so the animals could be expected to be in good condition. The second ship is bringing in "a fine cargo of hardwood" from there. "Gregory" is from the tree *Terminalia buceras* aka *Bullet- or Bully-tree*, which grows throughout the Caribbean. Most of the other South American woods mentioned above are comparatively well-known while some - like "gomorrow" - are hard to trace in the modern record.⁵ The dimensions of some of the timber are interesting detail.

PORTO RICO MILL TIMBER.

FOR Sale by the subscribers, a choice cargo of *Bully-
tree Timber*, carefully selected, and landed ex brig
Governor Woodford, consisting of *Shafts, Spindles,
Arms, Points, Grafts, crown and half crown Beams,
and Foot Timber* of various dimensions. The whole
will be sold on terms advantageous to purchasers

April 29—2 WM. & P. L. HINDS.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 29 Apr 1820"

This is another Puerto Rico consignment of mill timber on a different ship⁶ being sold by different merchants, suggesting there is a regular trade rather than a one-off opportunistic purchase. There are shafts, spindles and grafts among the list of mill parts.

It is possible that these mill parts were being bought in Puerto Rico having been arranged to be exported there from the United States, to bypass the law. The restrictions imposed on Britain's colonies' trading options varied over time, but in 1820 were essentially still protectionist both for exports and imports. Perhaps as manufactured items they were subject to an embargo coming from the USA while simple shingles and boards were not. Steam powered mills were in their infancy in 1820 and would not have been driving U.S. manufactured windmill parts abroad as the home market shrank.

Who were the named merchants? The Hinds above were part of a large family who were generously compensated for enormous numbers of enslaved persons after 1834; for details search 'Hinds' in 'Barbados' at The Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery [here](#). The Gaskins too. White & Petrie are more elusive, perhaps they are the same James M White and William Petrie mentioned to have a property interest in Jackson Mississippi in 1838⁷ - curiously, situated in Hinds County (no Barbados family connection has been discovered, though further in the past one is entirely possible).

⁵ A source of information on these trees is [here](#)

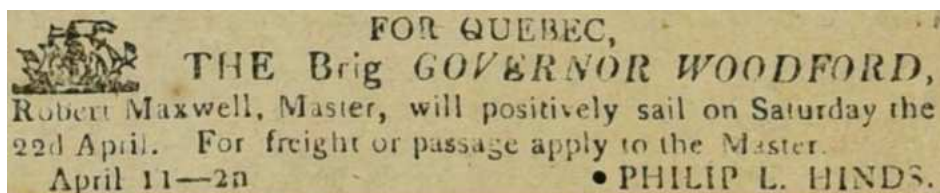
⁶ Presumably named after the at the time Governor of Trinidad [Sir Ralph James Woodford](#)

⁷ [An Act for the Relief of James M White and William Petrie](#)

The ships mentioned above are the schooners "Rapid" and "Waterloo", the brigs "Governor Woodford" and "Frances", and the ketch "Blackbird".⁸ The arrivals and departures of ships appeared regularly in the newspapers' Maritime News, and their cargos in merchants' advertisements; "Rapid", "Waterloo", and "Frances" often voyaged to South America, Canada and the USA while the smaller "Blackbird" plied between the islands up as far as Puerto Rico.

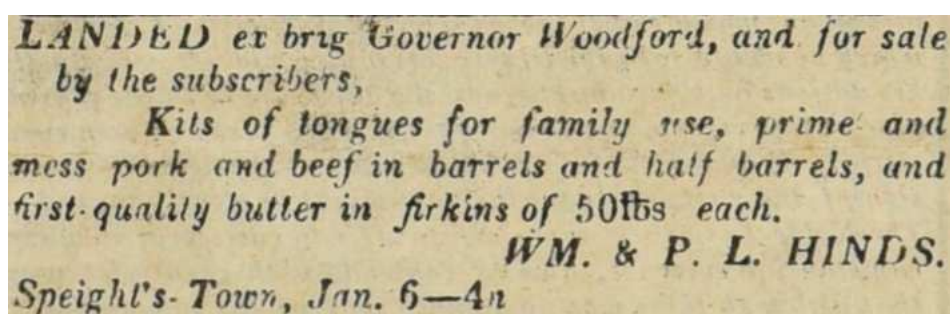
The "Governor Woodford" is recorded⁹ as arriving in the port of Quebec from Barbados on June 8th 1820 with a cargo of sugar after a journey of 39 days. meaning she left on about April 30th, which suggests a

delay in loading the cargo as the intended departure date was 22nd April (left). There are also earlier trips recorded. There was another 1820 trip to Quebec, arriving November 3rd after a 44 day voyage.¹⁰



FOR QUEBEC,
THE Brig GOVERNOR WOODFORD,
 Robert Maxwell, Master, will positively sail on Saturday the
 22d April. For freight or passage apply to the Master.
 April 11—2n • PHILIP L. HINDS.

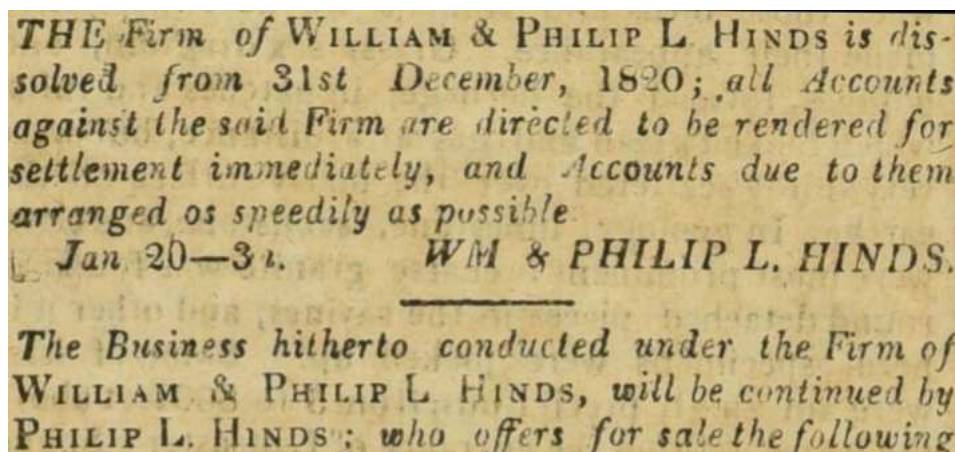
"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 15 Apr 1820"



*LANDED ex brig Governor Woodford, and for sale
 by the subscribers,
 Kits of tongues for family use, prime and
 mess pork and beef in barrels and half barrels, and
 first-quality butter in firkins of 50lbs each.
 WM. & P. L. HINDS.
 Speight's-Town, Jan. 6—4n*

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 6 Jan 1821"

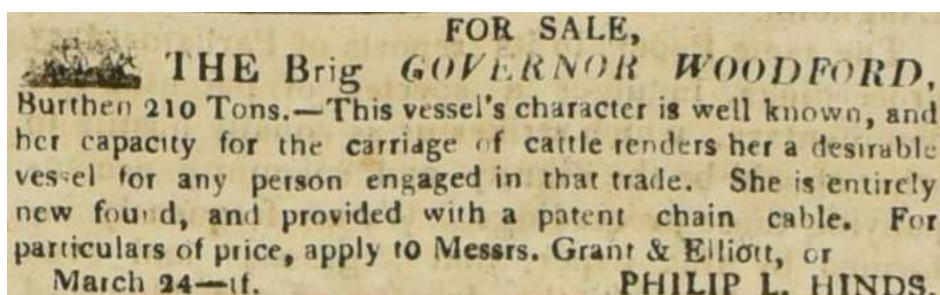
The newspapers in the archive are missing between the 28th October and 6th January 1821, but the ship had returned by the latter date with a cargo of food from North America, or just possibly from Ireland.



*THE Firm of WILLIAM & PHILIP L. HINDS is dis-
 solved from 31st December, 1820; all Accounts
 against the said Firm are directed to be rendered for
 settlement immediately, and Accounts due to them
 arranged as speedily as possible.
 Jan 20—3n. WM & PHILIP L. HINDS.
 The Business hitherto conducted under the Firm of
 WILLIAM & PHILIP L. HINDS, will be continued by
 PHILIP L. HINDS; who offers for sale the following*

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 3 Feb 1821"

This was the last cargo that was imported by the firm which was dissolved at the end of 1820; Philip continued on his own. William was probably his uncle.¹¹



FOR SALE,
THE Brig GOVERNOR WOODFORD,
 Burthen 210 Tons.—This vessel's character is well known, and
 her capacity for the carriage of cattle renders her a desirable
 vessel for any person engaged in that trade. She is entirely
 new found, and provided with a patent chain cable. For
 particulars of price, apply to Messrs. Grant & Elliott, or
 March 24—1f. PHILIP L. HINDS.

"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 27 Mar 1821"

It may also have been the last cargo imported by the "Governor Woodford" under Hinds ownership. Was it being sold to afford to buy out his uncle, or was Hinds abandoning the shipping side of the business?

⁸ A clear explanation of the different sizes and riggings of various sailing ships can be found [here](#)

⁹ [From the newspaper 'Quebec Mercury' of 1820](#) (May - June)

¹⁰ [From the newspaper 'Quebec Mercury' of 1820](#) (July - November)

¹¹ [William Hinds](#) [Philip Lytcott Hinds](#)

Ships, besides the hazards of nature, faced the possibility of interception by so-called 'privateers' commissioned by the newly independent South American states to attack Spanish interests, and a resurgence of out and out pirates operating in the murk generated by privateers' state sanction; "this combination of legal and illegal predatory activity, which was evident throughout the period 1810-1830, amounted to 'maritime mayhem'".¹²

Looking for online references to "ketch Blackbird" returned a spreadsheet¹³ (one of several) of numerous such attacked vessels compiled by a researcher for his PhD Dissertation,¹⁴ which included the "Blackbird". According to the March 1819 Lloyd's Register of Ships a boarding party from a predator ship, described as an "Insurgent Cruizer", relieved the Blackbird's captain of the dollars he was carrying from Barbados to effect purchases in Puerto Rico. The unconfirmed date recorded of the incident was 6th February 1819.

NOTICE.

I, the undersigned, Wm. R. Man, Master of the ketch Blackbird, of Barbados, do hereby certify, that on or about the 18th December, 1818, my vessel was boarded by the Venezuelian brig of war Oronoko, Vincent Dubouil Commander; and on my informing him I was consigned to Porto-Rico, to a Mr Noumandy, and having on board money to purchase my cargo, the said Captain Dubouil demanded the money, under the impression it was the property of Mr. Noumandy, a Spanish subject—which sum, to the amount of 996 dollars, I was then obliged to give him — On the 26th July, 1820, I fell in with an acquaintance of Captain Dubouils, and demanded the above sum as British property. He shewed me his instructions from Capt. Dubouil, to repay any sum which may have been taken by him as enemy's property, when proved to the contrary. The sum of 996 dollars was then honorably returned, which I do hereby acknowledge the receipt of,—relinquishing, by these presents, all claim against the said Captain Dubouil.

Aug. 1—3a **WM. R. MAN**

Examining the newspapers revealed many more details of the encounter, and a surprising outcome. It is unclear if the dollars were U.S. or Spanish, but they were worth about the same; the Spanish coin was legal tender in the USA and widely used throughout the Caribbean.



"The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 1 Aug 1820"

Entered at the Custom-House—Ketch Blackbird, from Porto Rico; and sloop Eliza Pratt, Cayenne.

The "Blackbird" continued trading with Puerto Rico shortly after, as this 23rd February 1819 report shows.

¹² Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (London: Methuen, 2004) p.211
¹³ [Supporting Documentation: Privateering and Piracy in the Spanish American Revolutions](#)
¹⁴ ['A Sure Defence against the Foe'? Maritime Predation & British Commercial Policy during the Spanish American Wars of Independence, 1810-1830](#)

Captain Dubrouil, formerly serving under Napoleon in Europe,¹⁵ was a French mercenary given licence by revolutionary leader Simon Bolivar,¹⁶ though most foreign volunteers in Bolivar's armed forces were Irish or English.¹⁷ Of Mr. Noumandy in Puerto Rico there is no trace, though his name too sounds French and there were many immigrants to that island at that time with French roots.¹⁸

Time to get back to the Agents of Enslavement project whence this journey started. But it reinforces the fact that these recently available digitised newspapers are a source of many new historical details - including about windmills - that are invaluable.

CHARLES GRIMES,
Sail-Maker,
Purposes making MILL-SAILS
for Six Dollars & set,—the Proprietor or Agent for the
Estate furnishing materials. Dec. 18—3n.

The Barbadian, 21 Dec 1822



¹⁵ [Soldats de Napoléon aux Amériques](#)
¹⁶ [Documento 2741: Patente De Corso Expedida Por Bolívar En Favor Del Bergantín De Guerra "Orinoco"](#)
¹⁷ [Mercenaries, Honour and Patriotism in the Wars of Independence in Gran Colombia](#) p.202
¹⁸ [French immigration to Puerto Rico](#)