

Quaker Burial Ground

Fat Hog Bay, Tortola, British Virgin Islands

Introduction

At the east end of Tortola lies the remnants of the Quaker Burial Ground, a 1.3 acre site in a plot of land possibly to be designated as a National Park. The site was examined during a brief visit on 21st July 23, 2004 by archaeologists, Drs. Marley Brown III and Edward Harris, professors from the College of William and Mary.

The Site

The burial ground lies at the southern end of Fat Hog Bay and begins, on the evidence of the remains surviving above ground, a dozen yards from a stand of mangroves on the edge of the water. From there, the land rises slowly to the present main road and appears currently and for some time as a pasture, which has prevented the growth of trees over most of the ground. A recent survey notes the burial ground as comprising 1.3 acres, but as there are few indications above ground, it is possible that it may be larger.

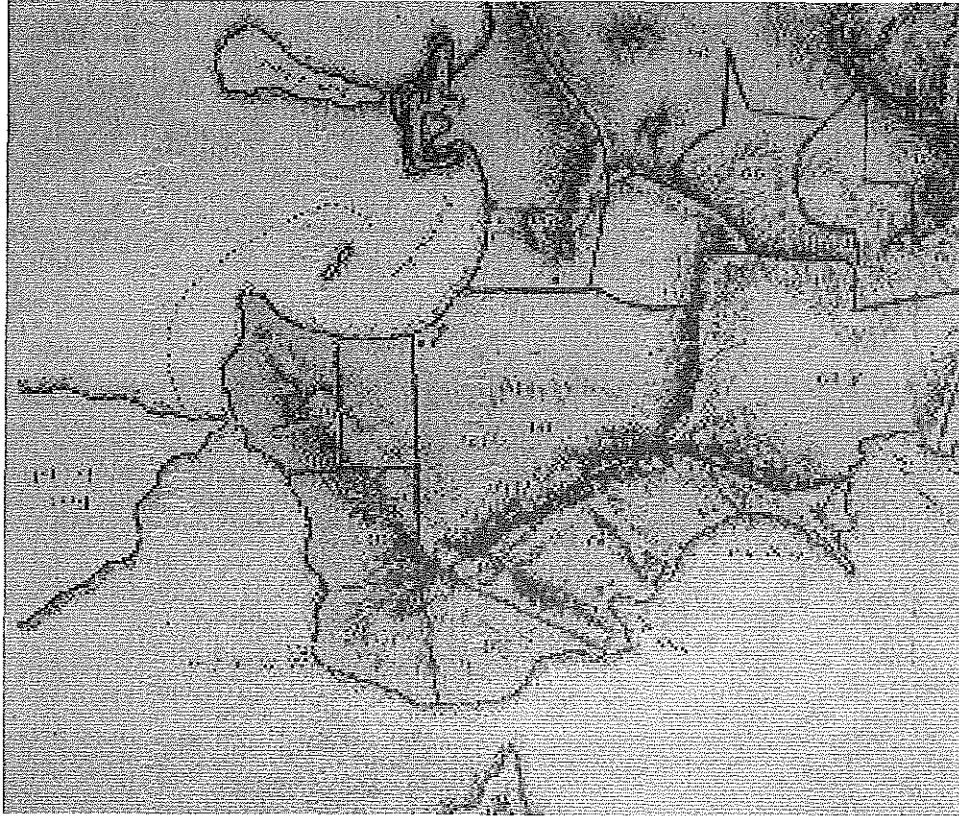
Standing Remains

There are two pieces of monumental stonework on the site. These once formed the capping of two graves or masonry vaults, several feet of which would have been above ground. Placed over the vaults, these "table top" gravestones are related to the Pickering and the Lettsoms, two of the major Quaker families of the British Virgin Islands in the eighteenth century. The Pickering stone is inscribed with the names of John Pickering and Ann Paisea, both of whom died in late 1779. The other stone was for Ruth Lettsom, who passed away in 1809 at the age of 47. The stones are marble and granite and the surviving inscriptions are appended to this report. The Lettsom stone indicates that the graveyard was in use into the nineteenth century, although Quaker meetings had ceased some 40 years before that time, according to some sources. A lithograph, appended hereto, shows other monumental graves and it is possible that the graveyard could contain upwards of several hundred burials, if it was in use for almost a century.

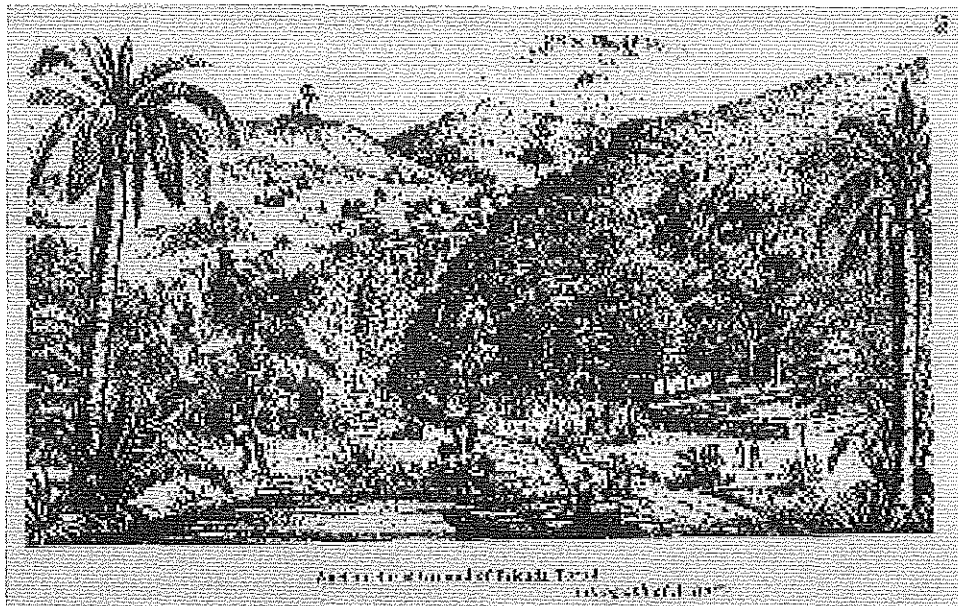
Conclusions

This graveyard represents the last resting place of one of the most important international communities of the Society of Friends of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Any disturbance of such a significant historical site without due respect to the persons there interned and what remains of their memorials would be inappropriate and may have negative ramifications within and without the British Virgin Islands.

If development was inevitable, the appropriate course of action, in active consultation with the Society of Friends in London and Philadelphia, would be an archaeological investigation of the graveyard, including the recovery and preservation of all found memorials and the possible examination by bioarchaeologists of any human remains that would need to be relocated. Such an approach complies with internationally recognized standards for the treatment of such human remains and memorials.

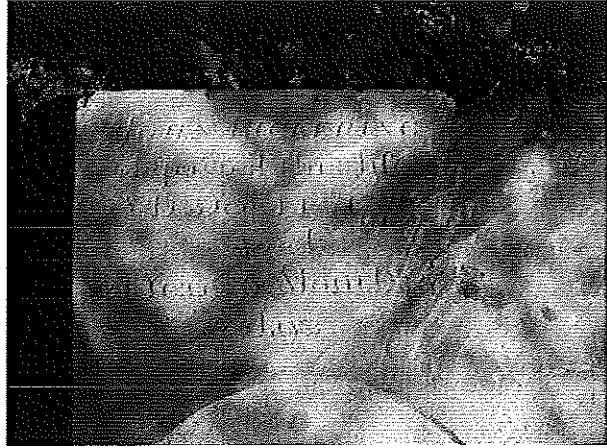


A map of Fat Hog Bay in 1798.

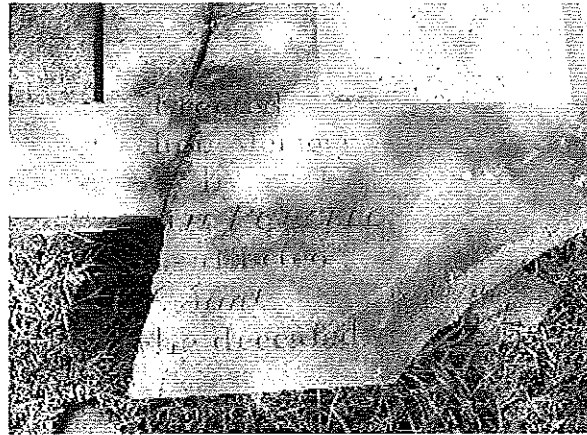
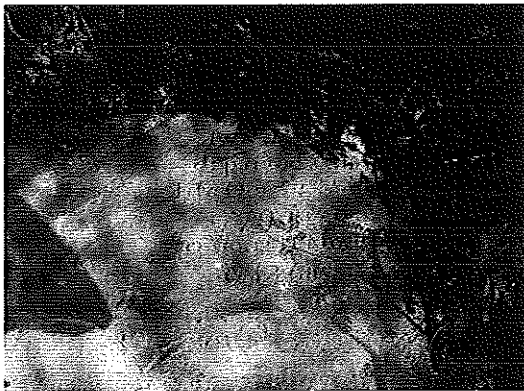


A lithograph of the Quaker Burial Ground in the 1890s.

The Surviving Memorials at the Quaker Burial Ground, Tortola, 2004



The Pickering table top memorial, 2004. The inscription for John Pickering, died 1779.



The inscription for Ann Pasea, died 1779. The memorial erected by Sarah Purcell.



The Latin inscription for Ruth Lettsom, who died in 1809.



The site of the Pickering and Lettsom memorials in July 2004.

Quaker Burial Ground, Tortola, 2004

Tablet of Pickering

JOHN PICKERING
departed this life
A. D. Dec^r 14th 1779
Aged
21 Years 6 Months &
2 Days

ANN PASEA
departed this
life Oct^r: 24th A. D.
1779 Aged
40 Years 11 Months
& 18 Days

Erected
to their Memory
by

S[ar]ah Purcell
[th]e afflicted

AUNT
[of] the deceased

& DAU[GHTER]

Tablet of Lettsom

Hic jacet
RUTH LETTSOM
Quae obiit Janr An. Dom. 1809
An. aet. 47.

Si charitas inopes pascens, medicans que cubante
Consequitur laudes, justa que ferri rogi
Hanc merito celebrant praes sons et postera secla
Praebentem haec oculis conspicienda suis
Nunc linquit mundum immundum caelosque potitu
Viva et virtutes gloria morte caret.