

Well-known photo of the early days at the Bath Hotel taken by Jose Anjo of Antigua.

Image taken from <http://buckleysboyz.page.tl/Nevis.htm>

## The Bath House Hotel, Charlestown

Popular histories of the island claim that John Huggins built the 'Bath Hotel' in 1778 and that, as 'the first resort hotel in the Caribbean', it was visited by Horatio Nelson and the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

New research suggests that John Huggins built the Bath House Hotel several decades later than currently thought. Although neither Nelson nor ST Coleridge were visitors, other well-known travellers did stay at the Bath House Hotel. More importantly, though, other stories have emerged:

- the spring which prompted the building of the bath house played a role in Nevis's early history and in colonising voyages to Virginia and Guyana
- for the first time it has been recognised that the bath house and the Bath House Hotel would have been built by enslaved people and stands as a testament to their skill
- an enterprising woman proprietor, Miss Huggins, appears to have been the driving force in trying to attract early overseas visitors to Nevis.

### The hot springs

The building which today is known as the Bath House Hotel owes its existence to the naturally occurring hot springs which flow beneath it.

Thermal springs surface all over the Caribbean; indeed, Nevis is said to have a second spring, with a higher temperature than the 36 ° Centigrade recorded at Bath.<sup>1</sup> The Bath spring is unique because of

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<sup>1</sup> The second hot spring is a quarter of a mile south of Farm Estate; its maximum temperature was measured at 50° Centigrade (Waring, Gerald A; revised by Reginald R Blankenship and Ray Bental 'The Thermal Springs of the United States and Other

its historic connections which go back to the early days of colonial settlement and also because it has been exploited commercially over a long period of time.<sup>2</sup> The spring at Bath led to the building of a bath house which stands on the same property as the hotel. It is not known whether this was erected at the same time as the hotel.

The water of the Bath spring is rich in minerals and said to possess healing properties – both by bathing in it and by drinking it.<sup>3</sup> Over four hundred years ago the first European visitors to the island recognised this although it is, of course, possible that the original inhabitants of Nevis had also enjoyed the water's benefits.

The earliest written reference comes from Captain John Smith who in March 1607 stopped off at Nevis with colonists bound for Virginia:

We came to a bath standing in a valley betwixt two hills (sic) where wee bathed ourselves, and found it to be of the nature of the bathes in England, some places hot, some places colder.

Captain Smith did not identify the exact bathing spot but another writer confirmed the existence of a 'wondrous cold spring' downstream, further towards the sea.<sup>4</sup>

Manchineel trees grow along coastal fringes and Smith recounted that many men suffered what appears to have been burns from this tree. They

... became so tormented with a burning swelling all over their bodies, they seemed like scalded men, and neere mad with paine; Here we found a great Poole, wherein bathing themselves, they found much ease, and finding it fed with a small streame that came from the woods, we found the heade half a mile within the land, distilling from a many of rocks, by which they were well cured in two or three dayes.<sup>5</sup>

In October 1609, two years after Smith and the colonists had stayed at Nevis, Robert Harcourt stopped off on his return journey from his colonising expedition to present-day Guyana. Wanting to take on more water before crossing the Atlantic, he knew what to expect:

In this island there is an hot bath, which, as well for the reports that I have heard, as also for that I have seen and found by experience, I do hold for one of the best and most sovereign of this world.

In England he had learnt of several people having been 'cured of the Leprosy' and Harcourt added further evidence of the water's health-giving powers. He attested to one of his party saving his hand from a severe gunpowder burn by 'twice or thrice washing and bathing it' while it took only a day for other men to heal their swollen legs. As to his own experience, he was 'speedily cured' of 'an extreme cough' 'by bathing in the bath, and drinking from the water'.<sup>6</sup>

Several decades later another traveller, on his voyage to Jamaica, remarked on the hot spring. In 1687 physician and naturalist Hans Sloane found 'a constantly running Rivulet of Water, made use of for all purposes as common Water.' Just as Harcourt knew of the experiences of Smith's party, so did Hans Sloane know of both Smith's and Harcourt's and recounted the curing properties these travellers had ascribed to the hot springs.<sup>7</sup> Sloane, in turn, was quoted by Revd William Smith who

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Countries of the World – A Summary', Geological Survey Professional Paper 492, US Government Printing Office, Washington 1965).

<sup>2</sup> In St Lucia the hot springs and mineral waters of the Soufriere were used as early as 1785 and the baths there 'continued for many years to be the resort for invalids from the neighbouring islands' but they fell into disuse and, it appears, there was no accommodation attached to them (John Davy *The West Indies, Before and Since Slave Emancipation* W & FG Cash, London, 1854 p271).

<sup>3</sup> Algernon E Aspinall *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* ... Ballantyne & Co, London 1914 p328; see also John Davy *The West Indies* pp277-78

<sup>4</sup> Revd William Smith *A Natural History of Nevis, and the Rest of the English Leeward Charibee Islands* ... Cambridge, 1745 p57

<sup>5</sup> Captain John Smith *True Travels, Adventures and Observations* ... 1630, Chapter 27 'The First Plantation of the Ile of Mevis'

<sup>6</sup> Robert Harcourt *A Relation of a Voyage to Gviana* ... London, 1613; reprinted in *The Harleian Miscellany*... London, 1809 Vol 3, pp202-03 See also entry for Robert Harcourt in *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900* Vol 34

<sup>7</sup> Hans Sloane *A Voyage to the islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S Christophers and Jamaica* ... London, 1707 Vol 1, p42 and p45

wrote a detailed study of the natural history of Nevis and other Leeward Islands. He served as minister from 1716 to 1721 at St John Figtree church.<sup>8</sup>

Revd Smith described how the 'hot little River called *the Bath*' was said to have had its origin in the sulphur ground in St John parish, 'which is not above three quarters of a mile higher up in the Country'. He went on to recount the cure of a person who may well have been the first patient to have travelled to Nevis for treatment:

I knew a Negro boy who was sent down from *Barbadoes to Nevis* for that very purpose (after being twice salivated in vain) cured of a very bad Leprosy by using it; and indeed all distempered People both Whites and Blacks find great benefit by it: The Salivations had caused the Boy to break out in running Sores or Ulcers all over from head to foot, and they being added to the Leprosy, made him a sad (rueful) spectacle; however, by drinking and washing three or four times a day, for an hour at least each time, in waters of this River, he went back to his Master sound and clean at two Months end.'

Revd Smith attributed his own 'Health and Vivacity' largely to bathing in the river. Once a fortnight he would go down at night and remain in the water until he sweated but when he lived in Charlestown he reversed this routine and every morning went to the river to drink a pint of its water. This the clergyman said 'operated both [his] Stool and Urine but, having 'an aversion to puking', he did not agree with some of his acquaintances who 'would drink of it till they puked, and say they found great benefit by so doing'.<sup>9</sup>

Those who bathed in the water claimed it offered 'one of the greatest luxuries to be had for love or money in the West Indies. The water is soft and soothing in its effect – warm enough to cause one to set foot in it gingerly; it is remarkably clear, holds in solution a little sulphur, possesses a property that renders the use of soap unnecessary, and it is very mollifying to the skin.'<sup>10</sup>

Revd Smith mentioned that the island's black inhabitants also enjoyed the benefits of the hot springs. One such person was known to have been Placy, an enslaved man from Morning Star/Pembroke plantation. The owners of the estate paid the rent on a room while he remained in Charlestown 'when using the warm bath'. The room hire, accounted for on 30 September 1788, amounted to 16s 6d Nevis currency.<sup>11</sup> From Mills's estate in St John Figtree comes further evidence that the baths were used by enslaved people.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from bathing in the river, people also took advantage of the hot water to wash clothes and household linens. This would have been done entirely by women, either enslaved servants or free black and coloured women who earned a living as laundresses. They did the laundry naked; one day a passing sailor made it his business to count the females – 79 in total - who, on spotting him, quickly got dressed.<sup>13</sup>

Those who drank the water may have been well advised to follow Revd Smith's example. He let the water from 'the hot little river' get cold to make it more palatable; he claimed it did then not have 'a very sulphurous Taste'.<sup>14</sup> The early colonists who on their way to Virginia had taken on water at Nevis, however, found that it 'stank so, that they could not drink it' and had to replenish their supplies at Puerto Rico.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that it had been stored badly because Harcourt, who knew of their experiences, was not deterred and stopped off at Nevis especially to take on fresh water. James Granger, a Scottish doctor who practised on St Kitts, found that the water 'being properly bottled, keeps well at sea, and is no less agreeable to the palate'. Bottled Bath water may even have been

<sup>8</sup> Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS), RG16.13 St John Figtree - List of Incumbents

<sup>9</sup> Revd William Smith *A Natural History of Nevis* pp55-8

<sup>10</sup> William Agnew Paton *Down the Islands – A Voyage to the Caribbees* Scribner's, New York, 1890 p289

<sup>11</sup> University of Bristol Special Collections (UoBSC), Pinney Papers (PP), WI Box O-1

16s 6d in Nevis currency is roughly equivalent to £50 sterling at 2005 values (UK National Archives (UKNA) Currency converter).

<sup>12</sup> Museum of London Docklands, Sainsbury Studies Centre, Mills Papers, 2006.178/10, Vol 4 (18 October 1776)

<sup>13</sup> *Aaron Thomas's Journal* p52

Aaron Thomas, a seaman in the Royal Navy, was stationed off Nevis in 1798. His Journal was researched and transcribed by Elizabeth H Locke (Copyright 2006 University of Miami).

<sup>14</sup> Revd William Smith *A Natural History of Nevis* p219

<sup>15</sup> Captain Thomas Southey *Chronological Histories of the West Indies* First ed. 1827, taking as his source John Smith *A Description of New England* 1616

given as presents, the way wealthy folk used to give bottled water taken from the Hotwell (then a thriving spa in Bristol, England).<sup>16</sup> During Granger's time half a dozen bottles of Hotwell water sold for a shilling and sixpence<sup>17</sup> and it is easy to imagine how someone in Nevis might have grasped this business opportunity.<sup>18</sup> Bottled Bath water may have been an early export article.

Dr Granger also confirmed the water's health-giving properties and likened the Nevis product to that of the Hotwell: 'Its warm waters possess all the medical properties of the hot well at Bristol ... ' He thought it so important that he immortalised it in his poem *The Sugar Cane*:

...Chief Nevis, justly for its hot baths fam'd ..<sup>19</sup>

## The 'Bath House'

The building which today is known as the Bath House Hotel was in its early days known as the Bath House. The first known use of the term 'hotel' is from an advertisement of October 1823.<sup>20</sup> In the 1840s it was advertised as the 'Bath House'; in the late 1850s it was described as the Bath-house Hotel, while in the 1880s a visitor called it a 'hostlery' and a 'hotel' and the smaller, two-storey building below it the 'bathhouse'.

It is currently claimed in popular histories of the island that John Huggins built the grand 'Bath Hotel' in 1778 at a cost of £40,000 Nevis currency and that it was 'the first resort hotel in the Caribbean'. According to some sources, it was 'visited by Lord Nelson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Prince William Henry, Duke of Clarence, among others.'<sup>21</sup>

It appears that the basis for this claim is from *A Pocket Guide to the West Indies*, first published in 1907. The 'new and revised edition' of 1914 stated:

The Bath House was erected by John Huggins, a merchant of Charlestown, whose remains lie in a vault in St Paul's Church (...), late in the eighteenth century. The actual date of its construction is not known, but on a stone the numbers 17— are still clearly decipherable, and the others might be 87 or 89. It is stated to have cost £40,000, and there is no reason to doubt this, for it is very solidly built of stone—so solidly, indeed, that it has withstood the earthquakes and hurricanes of over a century.<sup>22</sup>

The writer, and subsequent readers, have concluded that the stones were evidence for the century of construction (ie the 1700s), and at some stage the '87 or 89' became '78', ie 1778.<sup>23</sup> There is, however, no evidence which confirms that these were date stones which belonged to the building; it is quite possible that they had been re-used from other, earlier buildings. The writer also did not state who had informed him that the building had cost £40,000 (presumably Sterling).<sup>24</sup> Was it idle gossip, or did someone actually happen to know the cost but not know the date of construction?

So far no documentary evidence has come to light which supports the claim that the Bath House Hotel was built in 1778. Further research suggests, however, that John Huggins built the Bath House Hotel several decades later than currently thought. Evidence for this comes from a memorial in St Paul's church in Charlestown which commemorates his death. The inscription on a well-preserved marble slab by the entrance reads:

<sup>16</sup> UoBSC, Letterbook (LB) 3 John Pinney, London, to Peter Eaton, December 1774

<sup>17</sup> LM Griffith 'The Reputation of the Hotwells (Bristol) as a Health Resort' in *The Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal* (March 1902) p14

<sup>18</sup> Joyce Gordon stated that in 1920 the Bath Hotel sold bottled spring water (*Nevis, Queen of the Caribees* Macmillan, London and Oxford, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1998 p48).

<sup>19</sup> James Granger *The Sugar Cane: a Poem ...* London, 1764 Book 1 p15

<sup>20</sup> Archive of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, Nevis Council Minutes, 1823-1827 (meeting 8 October 1823), courtesy of the Hamilton College's Lesser Antilles (Beinicke) Collection

<sup>21</sup> VK Hubbard *Swords, Ships and Sugar* Premiere Editions, Corvallis, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, 2002 p151 and 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1996 p117

<sup>22</sup> Algernon E Aspinall *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* p327

<sup>23</sup> At least two alternative dates exist; they put the constructions at 1787 and 1804

(<http://www.sharrisLtd.com/Projects/Individual%20Project%20Pages/Nevis%20-%20Bath%20Hotel.html> Undated project brief by S Harris Ltd, Philadelphia; and Gertrude Artherton's Introduction to her novel *The Gorgeous Isle: A Romance* on <https://archive.org/details/gorgeousisle00athegoog>) (Both accessed 9 June 2017).

<sup>24</sup> If the building of the Bath House did cost £40,000 Sterling in the 1810s, this would translate into about £1.3 to £1.6 million at 2005 values (UKNA Currency Converter).

Here lies the body of John Huggins Esq who died on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of December 1821 aged 58 years. He began a career of usefulness as a Merchant in this Town. In private life he was a firm friend, an affectionate husband & sincere Christian. In public life he gave universal satisfaction as Clerk of the Assembly & Deputy Treasurer of the Island. Not many years before his death he became proprietor of the neighbouring Hot Springs, over which out of goodwill towards his fellow creatures & not for any advantage of his own he erected convenient baths & at a short distance a large & expensive stone edifice for the accommodation of invalids....’.

On this memorial Huggins’s year of death is erroneously given as 1821; several sources have established that he died on 6 December 1824.<sup>25</sup>

The wording - ‘*not many years before his death*’ - suggests that Huggins acquired the Hot Springs close to 1824. While it is possible that another John Huggins had in 1778 (when this John Huggins would have been about 12 years old) acquired the land around the hot springs, the wording on the memorial implies that the buildings were erected later - perhaps in the 1810s, or in the very early 1820s. Certainly by March 1822 Huggins had completed his project; he was living ‘at the Bath’.<sup>26</sup>

An additional factor speaks against the Bath House Hotel having been erected in 1778. It was a time of dire economic conditions in the island. The American War of Independence had shut off the major supply route for plantation necessities, such as timber and food stuffs, and by the spring of 1778 about three or four hundred enslaved people had died from hunger in Nevis and many more in the other Leeward Islands.<sup>27</sup> Planters suffered from debilitating debts<sup>28</sup> and it was said that ‘a man capable and willing to pay his debts [had] become almost a prodigy’.<sup>29</sup> In the midst of war travelling by sea was dangerous and visitors stayed away. It was the wrong time to invest in such a fancy building.

The text on Huggins’s memorial mentions that he erected two structures: ‘convenient baths’ and a ‘large & expensive stone edifice for the accommodation of invalids....’ The latter certainly refers to the Bath House Hotel while the ‘convenient baths’ may have described the smaller, two-storey building which can be seen in a print published in 1843.

Whenever the buildings were erected, it would have been enslaved people who did most, if not all, of the work. John Huggins had a ready labour force; in 1817 he had in his possession seven males and seven females and a share in another 17 whom he jointly owned with his brother Frederick. In his younger years Frederick Huggins had been a blacksmith<sup>30</sup> but went into business as a merchant with his brother John.<sup>31</sup> Of the 17 individuals the brothers owned, 16 were men and, with an average age of about 38 years, they would have represented an effective gang of workers.<sup>32</sup>

Further confirmation that the John Huggins who died in 1824 was involved in the ‘Hot Baths’ comes from minutes of a meeting of the Legislature. About two years before his death, on 28 March 1822, it was noted that John Huggins senior purchased two acres of land to the Eastward of his Establishment belonging to the Trust Estate of John Ward dec’d, as an ‘Assemblage of Strangers ... desirous of using the Hot Baths’.<sup>33</sup> In his will, dated 20 November 1824, John Huggins left to his wife Grace ‘...the dwelling house and lot of land and premises at Bath’, as well as other land. John also willed to his wife two carriages and three horses, ten head of cattle, £550 Nevis currency and everything in the dwelling house – furniture, household goods, pictures, china, etc. The remainder of

<sup>25</sup> In Vol 1 VL Oliver gave John Huggins’s correct date of death; in Vol 2 he printed the full text of Huggins’s memorial, including the date of 1821, and stated that a mistake must have been made in copying (VL Oliver *Caribbeana* Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, London, 1914 Vol 1, p133 and Vol 2, pp170-71).

The correct date of death was also recorded in a letter sent from Nevis, as well as in a diary (UoBSC, PP, LB 58: JC Mills to Pinney, Ames & Co, 12 December 1824, and Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford (RHL) Box MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b) Typed Manuscript).

<sup>26</sup> UoBSC, PP LB 56: John Huggins to Charles Pinney, 6 March 1822

<sup>27</sup> EV Goveia *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1965 p6, quoting CO 152/57 Burt in a private dispatch, 17 March 1778; also found in UKNA, CO 153/23: Gov Burt to Nevis Assembly/Council, 17 March 1778

<sup>28</sup> UoBSC, PP, LB 4: John Pinney to Nathaniel Martin, 14 June 1777

<sup>29</sup> UoBSC, PP, LB 4: John Pinney to William Coker, [no day] June 1778

<sup>30</sup> UoBSC, PP, Account Book (AB) 39 ‘Frederick Huggins Blacksmith’ a/c, AB 47 ‘Blacksmith & Merchant’ a/c/ and AB 54 ‘Blacksmith & Merchant in Charlestown’ a/c/

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registry, Nevis (ECSCRN), Common Records (CR) 1790-1792 f563 and CR 1805-08 ff9-10, and CR 1823-1828 ff228-29

<sup>32</sup> UKNA, T 71/364 Slave Register Nevis, 1817 ff232-33

<sup>33</sup> UKNA, CO 186/12 Council Minutes, 28 March 1822

his possessions he left to his brother Frederick. From this will it is apparent that the Hugginses did not have any children.<sup>34</sup>

In the year following Huggins's death Henry Nelson Coleridge, the nephew of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, visited Nevis with his uncle William Hart Coleridge, the Lord Bishop of Barbados and the Leeward Islands. One of the Bishop's tasks was to consecrate the Cottle chapel at Round Hill estate and while the two visitors enjoyed lunch with its proprietor, they stayed neither with him nor at the Bath House Hotel, as is currently claimed.<sup>35</sup> Instead, according to Coleridge, they lodged and dined at Government House.<sup>36</sup> During their stay two women, Mrs Bligh and Mary Gardner, organised entertainment for the visitors.<sup>37</sup>

According to Coleridge, the Bath House Hotel was then not much used:

To the south of the town, at half a mile's distance, are situated the mineral baths on a rising ground near the margin of the sea. The establishment is very large, and can afford, as I was told, accommodations for forty or fifty boarders. An invalid with a good servant might take up his quarters here with more comfort than in any other house of public reception in the West Indies. At present the thing does not answer, the building being in fact too large and the depreciation of colonial produce rendering it difficult to afford a mineral spring illness. There are three spacious plunge baths on terraces one above the other and varying in their temperature from 50 to 100 Fahrenheit. The lowest and largest is now given up to boarders and the others as a turtle crawl. There the poor flat creatures flounce about ...<sup>38</sup>

It appears from what he wrote (and from what is inscribed on Huggins's memorial) that the building was in fact an early spa for treating invalids, rather than just a hotel accommodating travellers, and that it was aimed at people from other Caribbean islands or those with connections to the West India trade. The 'depreciation of colonial produce' Coleridge referred to was the price of sugar which in the previous decade had dropped by a quarter, while the cost of imported goods such as timber and foodstuffs had increased considerably.<sup>39</sup>

John Huggins's memorial in St Paul's church had been erected by his widow, Grace. Presumably she ran, or was at least involved in managing, her husband's project until she died at the age of 65. Mrs Huggins was buried on 16 October 1834 in St Paul's cemetery.<sup>40</sup> Her niece Ann Sophia Huggins acted as her executrix<sup>41</sup> and in that role claimed Grace Huggins's compensation for 36 enslaved people.<sup>42</sup> Ann Sophia Huggins also claimed compensation for the five people she owned,<sup>43</sup> and with another aunt, Frederick Huggins's widow Maria, set in motion the recovery of money owed to the Huggins brothers. Within months of John Huggins dying, his brother and business partner Frederick had also died, leaving three sons and three daughters. One daughter was married already but two

<sup>34</sup> Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Reviderede regnskaber, Vestindiske regnskaber, Overformynderiregnskaber 1805-1917, Box 78.6, St Croix 1825-1827 Schedule B (Courtesy of George Tyson)

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, VK Hubbard *Swords, Ships and Sugar* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. p151 in which it is even claimed incorrectly that the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge had 'sailed from England to bathe in the thermal waters of Bath Spring, and spent months' in Nevis.

<sup>36</sup> The 'Government House' Coleridge referred to was a private residence which the Nevis Legislature rented to accommodate visiting government officials (UKNA, CO 186/12 Council Minutes, 7 January 1822; CO 186/13 Council and Assembly Minutes, 15 February 1827)

<sup>37</sup> When Mrs Bligh and Mary Gardner presented the bill of £45 Nevis currency to the island's Assembly, it turned out that this had not been approved. They were, however, fully re-imbursed (UKNA, CO 186/12 Council Minutes: 21 July 1825).

<sup>38</sup> Henry Nelson Coleridge *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825* John Murray, London, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 1832 p186, p185, and p182

<sup>39</sup> The historian JR Ward has stated that by the 1820s plantation expenditure had doubled since the 1750s while the price of sugar had remained at the same level (*British West Indian Slavery 1750-1834* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988 p45). See also UoBSC, WI catalogue 3 index III.ii Domestic: Letters Coleman & Lucas, 13 November 1759 and William Withers, 26 September 1761 and PP, LBs 51, 56 and 59, Pinney & Ames, Bristol, letters 15 December 1814; 2 October 1822, 2 August 1825 and 7 November 1825.

<sup>40</sup> NHCS, St Paul's Burials 1825-1837 No 594

<sup>41</sup> Ann Sophia Huggins was the daughter of Josiah Huggins of Nevis, brother of John and Frederick Huggins (Pers. comm. George Tyson, 18 May 2005, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Reviderede regnskaber, Vestindiske regnskaber, Overformynderiregnskaber 1805-1917, Box 78.6, St Croix 1825-1827 Schedule B and C)

<sup>42</sup> UKNA, T71/1038 Nevis Claims and Certificates Claim No 2

The British government made available £20 million sterling to compensate slave holders for the loss of any people they owned at the time the apprenticeship system replaced slavery in August 1834.

<sup>43</sup> UKNA, T 71/366-9 Slave Registers Nevis, 1825 f184, 1828 f72, 1831 f97 and 1834 f25 and f175

others were not,<sup>44</sup> and almost certainly either Fanny, Ann, or their cousin Ann Sophia was the 'Miss Huggins' who in 1843 was named as the proprietor of 'Bath House'.

From the advertisement below it would seem that Bath House was promoted as a place where invalids could recuperate in comfort and style, and it is apparent that efforts at improvements had been made: 'The proprietor ... has procured, with much trouble and expense, every convenience and accommodation ...' It is possible that the enhancements were financed by the slave compensation money that in the mid-1830s had come to the various members of the Huggins family.<sup>45</sup>

MINERAL SPA, BATH HOUSE, NEVIS

The extraordinary powers and unfailing efficacy of the NEVIS BATHS have been long well known in the medical world, and have been celebrated in every Treatise descriptive of the Colonies.

The Proprietor of this large Establishment is actuated by a wish to afford to the debilitated Invalid a ready access to the means of restoring health, and has procured, with much trouble and expense, every convenience and accommodation which experience has pointed out as most suitable for this purpose.

Families may be accommodated with a suite of Rooms consisting of four Bed Rooms, a Dining Room, and Out-offices at 24 dollars per week.

Board, Lodging, and the use of the Baths to Individuals, 3 dollars per day.

Further information may be obtained by addressing a letter (post paid) to Miss Huggins, Bath House, Nevis.

☞ Vide Edwards History of the West Indies Thomas' Practice of Physic; &c.; &c.

The enterprising Miss Huggins placed the advertisement in a guide published in Britain by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. The first steamship reached St Kitts in 1835<sup>46</sup> and six years later this company began operating a regular service. Twice a month one of its 14 newly-built steamers left Southampton for Falmouth and a string of West Indian islands, delivering mail as well as passengers. The steamers also facilitated transport between the islands. In trying to attract new customers, the Steam Packet Company's publication addressed all the travellers' requirements, listing banks, religious institutions and sights worth seeing. It introduced each destination, island by island and, following a brief description of Nevis's geography, the guide published in 1843 singled out Miss Huggins's establishment and its special functions:

Nevis is celebrated for its mineral springs. The principal hotel is the Bath-House, kept by Miss Huggins. It is situated on a rising ground and commands a view of the town, the adjacent country, and the sea. It may be considered one of the most salubrious localities in the island. The house is distant from the landing-place about a quarter of a mile. Appertaining to this establishment are hot and tepid baths possessing most valuable medicinal properties. Sir Hans Sloane says, he mastered a severe cough by bathing and drinking the water during a few days' stay on the island. At one part of the stream which supplies the baths, there are two

<sup>44</sup> RHL, Box MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b) Typed Manuscript; Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Reviderede regnskaber, Vestindiske regnskaber, Overformynderiregnskaber 1805-1917, Box 78.6, St Croix 1825-1827 Schedule C (Courtesy of George Tyson); and ECSCRN, Book of Wills 1837-1864 f243

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> Legacies of British Slave-ownership by University College London

<sup>46</sup> The first steamer, *Flamer*, arrived at St Kitts from England via Barbados, Jamaica and St Thomas on 19 February 1835 (UoBSC, PP, Dom Box R-6).

springs: one so intensely cold as to produce a chill through the whole frame, and the other too hot to be borne by the naked foot.

The guide went on to quote 'Mr Coleridge' and then stated that 'Families may also be accommodated with a suite of rooms, and out-offices, on moderate terms.' It is not clear whether the last item of advice that 'Gigs and saddle horses may be had on hire at moderate charges' applied to the services Miss Huggins provided, or whether this applied to Nevis in general.<sup>47</sup>

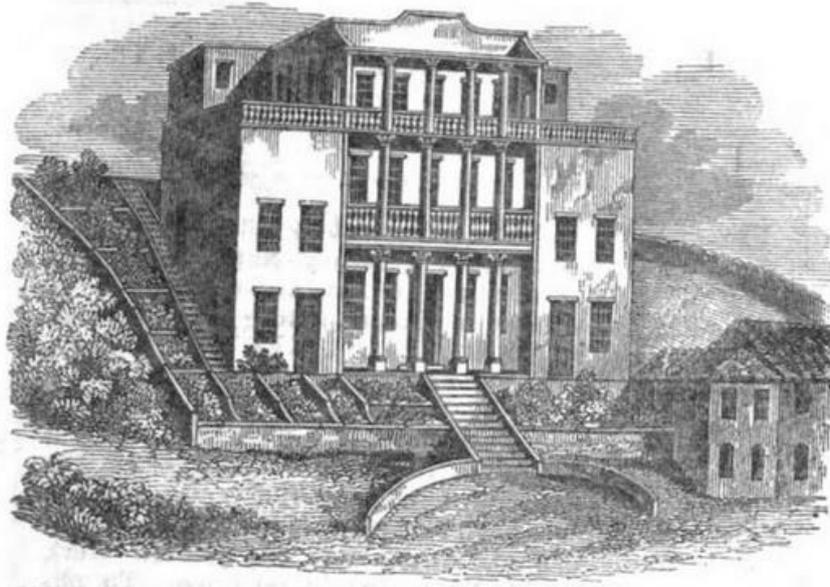


Image of Bath House in Nevis published in the *Guide to the Madeiras, Azores, British and Foreign West Indies, Mexico, and Northern South-America*, published 1843

The guide was aimed at a new kind of international traveller. The end of the Napoleonic period, marked by the peace treaty of 1815, saw the emergence of modern, early mass tourism. While in the eighteenth century the very wealthy could expect invitations to stay for extended periods from their network of equally wealthy friends, in the nineteenth century the demographics, as well as the social conditions, changed and less affluent people could afford to travel. Europe remained a popular destination but travellers sought to expand their horizons and, as one commentator has put it, 'increasingly visited the newly independent countries of North America and the colonies of the West Indies for pleasure'. Steamships which crossed the Atlantic facilitated travellers' desire for safe and speedy passage and, as more and more people travelled, a tourist infrastructure began to establish itself in the destinations: hotels and guest houses, currency exchanges, porters and transport for hire.<sup>48</sup> As is evident from Miss Huggins's advertisement and that of another woman's in the same guide – Mrs Edward promoting her 'private lodging house' in Kingston, Jamaica - these women were at the forefront of trying to widen their markets by attracting overseas tourists.

No doubt Miss Huggins was hoping that the guide would increase the number of visitors to the island and guests at her mineral spa. But then disaster struck. On 8 February 1843 a devastating earthquake hit Nevis and other islands.

Captain William Hemsley of the Royal Mail Steam Packet *Dee* was in the West Indies at the time. He reported '... Bath house much damaged. ...'<sup>49</sup> Another eye witness wrote that 'The Bath house yet

<sup>47</sup> John Osborne *Guide to the Madeiras, Azores, British and Foreign West Indies* ... London, 1843 Unnumbered page, p3, p202, and pp156-158

<sup>48</sup> Velvet Nelson *An Introduction to the Geography of Tourism* Rowman & Littlefield, 1979 pp79-81

<sup>49</sup> Captain William Hemsley of the Steam Packet *Dee* to Sir Charles Grey, Governor of Barbados, 13 February 1843, reported in the *Barbadian*, 15 February 1843 and the *Morning Chronicle*, 9 March 1843

stands, but it is cracked in several places, and it cannot survive another shock.’<sup>50</sup> The President sent further details to Governor Fitz Roy:

...The Bath House, in which your Excellency resided when here, is in the most precarious state, the massy walls and arched roofs, although nearly four feet thick, are rent in every direction, leaving the fissures large enough to admit a man’s hand.’<sup>51</sup>

A London newspaper reported that ‘The bath-house of Miss Huggins, much resorted to by invalids, and a very extensive building, is completely ruined’,<sup>52</sup> while *The Times* carried an eye witness account which gave more details:

The first part which we visited, in company with a gentleman who was kind enough to act as *cicerone*, was the bath-house of Miss Huggins. This establishment, to which invalids have been accustomed to resort from all parts of the West Indies, has long been celebrated for the efficacy of its mineral waters in various diseases they are of a chalybeate and saline nature, and spring out of the earth at the respective temperature of 90 and 105 degrees of Fahrenheit. We had frequently heard of the urbanity, kindness, and attention of Miss Huggins to her guests, and had now an opportunity of verifying those favorable reports. The building itself is an immense pile of the strongest description, erected upon the face of a rising ground, and formed of walls about two feet thick, built with square blocks of cut stone yet such was the tremendous force of the disturbing cause, that these walls, especially at the south-west wing, are split and cracked in various places, keystones dropping from the arches, and some of the blocks of stone actually riven in two.’<sup>53</sup>

Following the earthquake the British government made funds available for reconstruction. However, many public buildings and plantation structures had been damaged or destroyed and Miss Huggins would have had to compete for limited resources if she lacked the necessary finance.<sup>54</sup> Either she managed to repair some of the damage, or the destruction was not as comprehensive as the reports suggested because part of the building continued to function as a hotel – albeit at a much reduced capacity, accommodating only about a third of the number of guests.

John Davy, the Inspector General of Army Hospitals, was in Nevis just a few years after the earthquake but did not mention any damage:

A building well constructed of stone, of three stories with a spacious verandah or open gallery in front, erected by a philanthropist, a Mr Huggins, for the use of invalids, adjoins the baths. The middle story alone is now open as an hotel. It is capable of accommodating about 15 persons, has 11 bed rooms, a large common room, and a drawing room.’<sup>55</sup>

When the writer and artist Charles William Day visited Nevis around 1850, he considered ‘the Bath-house’ ‘a curious-looking edifice’ but instead of commenting on the state of the structure, he concentrated on its history and told a version which seems at odds with the known facts:

It was built of granite, at a vast expense, by the late Mr John Huggins, for himself and married sons, so that each family, though under the same roof, might have a distinct house, offices, etc, consequently there are ... three flats. This arrangement turned out to be a failure, and after many vicissitudes ruinous to its occupants, part of it (the centre) became an hotel. Its arrangements are *bizarre*, but comfortable.

According to Day, ‘the late and present landlords have been negroes’.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Extract from a letter, dated Nevis, 9 February 1843 on [http://uwiseismic.com/Downloads/EqEC\\_1843\\_document.pdf](http://uwiseismic.com/Downloads/EqEC_1843_document.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> *Parliamentary Papers: Accounts and Papers – Colonies Vol 33 (1843) Further papers relative to the earthquake in the West Indies* p7: L Graeme, President Administering the Government, to Sir Charles Fitz Roy, 8 February 1843

<sup>52</sup> *The Fire-Side Journal* London (No 15) 25 March 1843

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, re-printed in *The Southern Australian*, 22 August 1843

<sup>54</sup> *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* ... published in 1914 claimed that the hotel closed in 1870 but the text is unreliable. For instance, the writer stated that the Bath House ‘withstood the earthquakes and hurricanes of over a century’ and attributed the hotel’s demise to ‘the days of depression after the abolition of slavery’ when it ‘fell into disrepair’ (p327).

<sup>55</sup> John Davy *The West Indies* ... p478

<sup>56</sup> Charles William Day *Five Years’ Residence in the West Indies* Colburn and Co, London, 1852, Vol 2, p209

In the late 1850s the Bishop of Antigua on his visit to Nevis did not comment on the state of the building, either – only that he and the governor walked ‘to the Bath-house Hotel’ where, it appears, they ‘found breakfast prepared’ for them.<sup>57</sup>

By 1885 the ‘massive piece of architecture’ was ‘almost in ruins’. Thomas Elkington, an American visitor, described the property:

The old mansion or hotel is on the side of a hill, with terraced approaches of heavy masonry and wide stone flights of steps, and with rear entrances to the third floor from the ground. The building is about 150x60, constructed like a castle, and with broad halls and large rooms commanding exquisite views from nearly every window; cooking rooms were on every floor in outside towers or parapets.

Elkington found the roofs intact and ‘in good condition’ and judged that, ‘if the woodwork had not been torn out, the place would no doubt have remained sound to this day, excepting, perhaps, the piazzas in the front’.

He noted that ‘An ancient colored man presides with his family over the place, has a few rooms in fair condition, and furnishes good meals’. As to the building’s history, he was told ‘that it was originally built as a palatial residence at a cost of £30,000 and on the death of the owner was purchased and used for an invalid resort because of the sulphur, hot and tepid baths, and had gradually gone into decay’. He learnt that ‘the present owner bought it for £50 ... and rebuilt the little house over the hot spring, the only thing in order’.<sup>58</sup> Another American, William Agnew Paton, who visited Nevis around the same time as Elkington, found that this small two-storey building ‘was still used with great benefit by a few visitors’.

In Paton’s description the Bath House Hotel and the area around it appear more desolate and in worse condition. This is what he and his friends found:

The land falls northward to the edge of the burn we had crossed; a girdle of brushwood, a hedge of prickly pears and aloes, overgrown with jasmine-vines, encloses a forsaken garden. ....

On the left hand, on a bank overlooking the garden, there stands a massive ruin, of fair proportions; the thick and well jointed walls have resisted the shock of earthquakes, but the roof has fallen, save in places where it has been clumsily propped up to delay, for a few years, its ultimate destruction. On the tops of the masonry, in chinks and crevices, and on the window-sills are air-plants; here and there the stones are colored by bright mosses and lichens, and the whole pile has a vulnerable, weather-beaten appearance which is most picturesque and legend-inspiring. ...

...The hotel, squarely and solidly built, two hundred feet in length by one hundred in width, was several stories high, and was surrounded, on each floor, by verandahs upon which gave wide windows. The ceilings were more than twenty feet in height, and the chambers approached grandeur in proportions; a wide hall opened through the middle of it, and flights of easy stairs led from story to story. The glory of it has departed – its verandahs have fallen, its windows and casements have long since been used as firewood, the stairs are broken, the roof admits the rain in many an opening chink. ....

Paton and his party wandered around and came across the same ‘very ancient colored man’ whom he called the janitor. The old gentleman told them that much wood had been stolen but the owner had stopped the place being gutted and with some pride he pointed out to the visitors the billiard-room, the coach-houses and the cistern, the ball room, the dining hall and ‘the old tumble-down out-building’ that had been the kitchen. According to the old man the house was built when he was a three-year-old child, in 1807.

The janitor went on to explain that

<sup>57</sup> ‘Journal of the Bishop of Antigua’ in *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal* London, 1860, Vol 13, p188

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Elkington *A Cruise Among the Windward Islands - Being Ten Letters Published in the Friend* Philadelphia, 1885 pp55-6

Down the bank in front of the main structure had been an Italian garden, with its rose and flower beds, its ferneries and stucco statuary. Yonder was the dry and cracked basin of a pond once swarming with gold-fish – near the wind cellar were the ruins of a turtle crawl – at the side door was a moss-grown stone block where the young ladies mounted their ponies, and gayly rode away.

Having seen the ruins of the old hotel, the visitors explored the lower reaches:

Down the ravine through which flows the little stream, concealed in a thicket of tamarind- and mango trees, was the bath-house, a substantial building, two stories in height – the upper floor a toilet-room, clean, but bare of furniture; in the lower story was the hot bath – a great tank, twenty by thirty feet in size, filled with crystal clear water of a temperature of about 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

According to Paton, who enjoyed a good soaking in the old bath house, the waters were 'said to be good for rheumatism, gouty complaints, and cutaneous disorders ....'<sup>59</sup>

At the time of Paton's visit Sir Thomas Graham Briggs owned the Bath House Hotel. He had come to Nevis from Barbados in the 1850s, bringing much-needed capital to the island and acquiring several sugar plantations.<sup>60</sup> After his death in 1887 his nephew Joseph Briggs unsuccessfully managed these estates until they were taken over by the London-based Gillespie Brothers & Co.<sup>61</sup> Around 1900 this company also owned the Bath House Hotel. Their attorney in Nevis was James Spencer Hollings, a British civil engineer who had lived on Montserrat where his wife's family had an estate. Hollings, by then widowed, worked on restoring the Bath House Hotel. It was he who added two galleries to the building.<sup>62</sup> Lady Katherine Janet Burdon, the wife of the Administrator of St Kitts, noted the renovations and the additions of two steel framed balconies measuring 52 feet by 10 feet in her *Handbook of St Kitts and Nevis*.<sup>63</sup> The hotel re-opened in 1910.<sup>64</sup>

Under Hollings 'the Bath' had also been restored which, as *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* noted, was 'once more well patronised'. The guide described the layout: 'Immediately above it a cooling lounge with open verandah is provided, which adds to the comfort of bathers'.<sup>65</sup> This rather differed from the picture in the guide published in 1843 by the Steam Packet Company which shows a covered two-storey building, as well as Paton's account and the layout of the current two-storey building, and may suggest an altogether different structure.

*The Pocket Guide* recommended to its readers the 'Bath House Hotel, recently reopened', in preference to two cheaper hotels. At the Bath House Hotel board and lodging, including use of the baths, came to 12s 6d and, apart from bathing, it offered additional activities: the proprietors had laid out a nine-hole golf course and 'also provided lawn-tennis courts for the amusements of their guests'.<sup>66</sup>

One of these guests was Vere Langford Oliver, the editor of *Caribbeana* and other genealogical volumes. He seemed to have enjoyed his stay, writing that he spent 'a most agreeable fortnight in the Bath House ...'<sup>67</sup>

<sup>59</sup> William Agnew Paton *Down the Islands – A Voyage to the Caribbees* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1890 p289, p284, pp286-288

<sup>60</sup> AJB Iles *An Account Descriptive of the Island of Nevis, West Indies* 1871

<sup>61</sup> Handwritten notes in the back of a copy of Bucke's diary (RHL, Mss W.Ind. S.24; see also ECSRN, LB 1 f37 and f38).

<sup>62</sup> Norman Maynard 'Nevis at the turn of the century' in *NHCS Newsletter*, November 1987

<sup>63</sup> <https://buckleysboyz.page.tl/Nevis.htm> Website by Livingston Adolton Huggins, using as his source Lady Katherine Janet Burdon's *A Handbook of St Kitts-Nevis* West India Committee, London 1920 (accessed 16 June 2017).

<sup>64</sup> VK Hubbard *Swords, Ships & Sugar* 5<sup>th</sup> ed, p197

<sup>65</sup> *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* p327

<sup>66</sup> *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* p327 and p326

The claim that 'There is reason to believe that a nine-hole golf course was built there in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by a Scotsman' (*Swords, Ships & Sugar* 5<sup>th</sup> ed, p151) has to be seen in the light of the new evidence from the *Pocket Guide*. This suggests the golf course was established during Hollings' renovations in the early 1900s.

<sup>67</sup> VL Oliver *More Monumental Inscriptions* Borgo Press, 1993 p70

At the outbreak of the First World War the government took over the building to accommodate the West Indies Regiment but after the war it continued to be run as a hotel. It appears that on Friday nights its dining room was a popular destination; meals could be had for two shillings and sixpence.<sup>68</sup>

The building finally closed as a hotel in the 1930s but during the Second World War troops were housed in it once more.<sup>69</sup>

The last known private owner was the American Norman Fowler who came to Nevis in 1968. Once a lover of the wealthy British art collector Peter Watson who had died in 1956, Fowler had inherited most of Watson's fortune and invested part of it in purchasing the Bath Hotel. He began restoring it while living in one of its suites. Tragically, he 'lost consciousness while bathing in the hot bathhouse and drowned.' Norman Fowler died on 23 March 1971 at the age of 44. According to Watson's biographers, the Coroner recorded an open verdict: 'death by drowning in hot water bath.'<sup>70</sup>

In more recent times, following a fire at Charlestown Police Station in 1995, the building was refurbished and the Police Department and the Magistrates Court used it until the Police Station in Charlestown was re-opened in 1999.<sup>71</sup> The Bath Hotel lay vacant and then became the temporary headquarters of the Nevis Island Administration (NIA). Recognising its historic importance, between 2004 and 2009 the NIA spent considerable sums on the 'Renovation of Historic Bath Hotel' and 'upgrade to Bath House'.<sup>72</sup>

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July 2017, partially revised June 2021 and August 2023

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<sup>68</sup> Gordon, Joyce *Nevis, Queen of the Caribees* 4<sup>th</sup> ed, p48

<sup>69</sup> Hubbard, VK *Swords, Ships & Sugar* 5<sup>th</sup> ed, p151 and p197

<sup>70</sup> Clark, Adrian and Jeremy Dronfield *Queer Saint – The Cultured Life of Peter Watson* John Blake, 2015

<sup>71</sup> Hubbard, VK *Swords, Ships and Sugar* 5<sup>th</sup> ed, pp197-198

<sup>72</sup> NIA Prospectus, June 2010 Appendix XI: NIA Capital Projects