

colleton house

PROFESSOR EMERITUS AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
RAVES ABOUT A CLASSIC AND VERY SPECIAL BARBADIAN
PLANTATION GREAT HOUSE AND ITS UNIQUE ART COLLECTION



ABOVE V
RIGHT C

WEALTHY MERCHANT AND SHIP OWNER, COLONIAL ADVENTURER AND VISIONARY COLONISER OF THE CAROLINAS, ROYALIST AND PARLIAMENTARIAN IN TURN—THIS WAS SIR JOHN COLLETON, WHOSE FIRST PLANTATION IN BARBADOS IS NOW THE FABULOUS HOME TO THE EXTRAORDINARY FRANK RICKWOOD ART COLLECTION.

Sir John was the scion of a prominent merchant family in Exeter, and a successful merchant, engaged in the profitable wool trade. He generously supported King Charles I in the English Civil War, to the tune of some 40,000 pounds—many millions in today's currency—and lost a goodly part of his substantial fortune.

By 1647 he saw the possibilities in Barbados, where Sir James Drax's experiments in growing sugar were reaping huge rewards, and he bought, sight unseen, a small plantation called The Ridges, overlooking the West Coast, north of Speightstown and Six Mens Bay, now called Colleton, in St Peter, as distinct from his second purchase of Colleton plantation in St John. By 1650 he took ship to Barbados, and played a huge role in the Barbados branch of the Civil War—changing sides with great political skill. He returned to England in 1660, was knighted, and set about fulfilling his vision of settling the Carolinas, achieved in 1670 with the Anglo-Barbadian founding of Charleston.

By 1807 his descendants sold the St Peter plantation to Charles Cadogan. The original house of 1647 comprised “a hall, two parlours, kitchen and two chambers”—a modest and typical early residence





PRIDE OF PLACE IS OCCUPIED BY THE ENGLISH DOUBLE SCROLL-ENDED REGENCY SOFA, INSPIRATION FOR OUR OWN PRIZED DOUBLE-ENDED MAHOGANY COUCHES

of English plan, most probably of a central hallway and a room on each side. (This is the common design of most 17th-century houses in Barbados and is the basic plan of the present mansion.)

By the 1830s, a substantial mansion was in place, in stately Regency style, with later expanded wings, all with Palladian symmetry: two stories of spacious living space over deep cellars. But the piece de resistance of the property is the splendid Regency period stable complex, a real Treasure of Barbados, now filled with 170 treasures from the other side of the world—Papua New Guinea sculptures.

Entering the gates of Colleton House brings you into another world, a welcoming grove of past times. It's an oasis of majestic trees, ancient architecture, art and sculpture, all overlooking the sea, within the range of a cannon ball from the huge cannon on the edge of the cliff at the back of the lawns.

A splendid statue of Mercury, the Romans' winged messenger of the gods, greets the guest from the front lawn.

This beautiful sculpture was purchased in London and has graced the home of the collector in England, Longridge Deverill, in Australia at his Hunter River mansion Minimbah, and now in Barbados at his final home, Colleton House. It's made of a ceramic material, Coadestone, which closely resembles limestone, but is highly resistant to weathering, unlike our coral limestone. It was modelled in 1824. Mercury, as messenger of the gods and patron saint of commerce and merchants, was thought to be swift and much travelled, and this one has certainly covered the globe.

The traditional circular drive leads to a handsome Palladian portico, with columns and a huge door and overhead fanlight. The house is probably built on the original foundations of central hall and "two parlours," and in the absence of documentation, the generous proportions and perfect symmetry, with parapet roofs suggest an early 19th-century date, supported by the Regency period arches of



ABOVE V
RIGHT C
FAR RIGHT C



FAR LEFT V
LEFT V
BELOW C

SETTING OFF THE LONG DINING TABLE IS A BEAUTIFUL GALLE GLASS CHANDELIER, BUT EVERY OBJECT IN THE ROOM IS AN ABSOLUTELY SPLENDID ART TREASURE. THE GLASS CABINET IN THE REGENCY ARCH ALCOVE DISPLAYS ALMOST 100 PIECES OF FINE ART GLASS—COLLECTOR ITEMS BY TIFFANY, DAUM, LALIQUE AND GALLE



the stables. Expansion at the rear and to the sides to provides extra bedrooms and kitchen on the first floor enhance the Palladian feeling of the house.

The grand front door opens into a central stair hall, which extends all the way to a veranda at the rear, overlooking the sea. This is the old English house plan and is seen in the older, 17th- and 18th-century plantation houses of Barbados, such as Drax Hall, Canefield House, Wildey House and Ashbury. The original staircase was "in bad shape" when purchased by Robert and Anne Zimmerman around 1960 and was replaced with a modern staircase. On the right of the entrance is a magnificent Italian Renaissance painting by the virtuoso early baroque painter and sculptor Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625), "The disrobing of Christ," and a dramatic 19th-century Italian marble bust.

The reception rooms are typical of Barbadian great houses—large rectangles with high ceilings and large windows and doors for good ventilation. Both rooms are elegantly furnished with a combination of European and Barbadian antiques and occasional

chinoiserie. And both are filled with an eclectic collection of paintings, sculpture, glass and other objets d'art.

The drawing room is splendidly furnished and is a virtual art gallery, filled with European and Oriental art. Pride of place is occupied by the English double scroll-ended Regency sofa, inspiration for our own prized double-ended mahogany couches. On the long wall is French Louis 16th-century style sofa. There is a suite of Russian paintings on the end wall: the central "Autumn village scene" is flanked by paintings of Venice by Russian artist George Lukomski (or Georgij Lukomskij) and the "River scene" on the left is by the famous Father of Russian Futurism, the exuberant Russian-American painter and poet David Burliuk (1882-1967).

The dining room walls are a rich emerald green (and it's said that green is the most conducive colour for enjoying a good meal!)

Setting off the long dining table is a beautiful Galle glass chandelier, but every object in the room is an absolutely splendid art treasure. The glass cabinet in



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 FILLED WITH SO MANY FASCINATING TREASURES,
 IS SIMPLY BLOWN AWAY

the Regency arch alcove displays almost 100 pieces of fine art glass—collector items by Tiffany, Daum, Lalique and Galle. The most arresting painting one sees on entering the room is the beautiful “Portrait of a Negro Retainer,” by a follower of Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723), one of Mr Rickwood’s unique collection of black men and women in European art.

The later portions of the house, probably late 19th century, are the symmetrical extensions to the rear, on all floors, right and left, giving the house a distinctly Palladian footprint. The “newer” part of the building provides for additional bedrooms and a more modern kitchen, as well as a delightful open veranda overlooking the gardens and the sea, the perfect place for a leisurely breakfast.

Upstairs, over the entrance hall, is a charming sitting room, with two beautiful Barbadian single-ended mahogany couches, and a painting of Frank Rickwood with his favourite rottweilers.

Colleton House is set in almost seven acres of gardens, with splendid, mature trees and spectacular views towards the sea, a large swimming pool, romantic garden benches, two massive cannons on the cliff, a comfortable guest cottage (a very early building, extended) and ruined slave quarters. The beautiful stable complex in Regency period style includes a charming arcaded courtyard. The arches are the wide, flattened arches of the 1830s, with jalousied windows and doors (Caribbean Georgian in spirit). A recently added fountain in an old sugar mill

tayche with water lilies adds a touch of romance.

The stable hosts a unique collection of folk sculptures from Papua New Guinea, collected over the years by Frank Rickwood. Many of them were gifts from the people whom he worked with and came to know extremely well. (The Australian oil industry legend died at his home in Barbados in 2009.) Everyone walking into this architectural gem, filled with so many fascinating treasures, is simply blown away.

Colleton House is indeed a place of beauty, filled with beautiful works of art. It will be opened as a visitor attraction later this year, so that this wonderful collection may be shared with as many people as possible.M

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 LEFT V
 ABOVE C