

The Fanny Grieg Memorial

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Located on the West Wall of St Andrew's Church in Farlington, Portsmouth, is a wall plaque to a woman by the name of Fanny Greig. It states she died in Purbrook in 1833 aged 83 years and was the widow of William Greig who served for many years in His Majesty's Council on the Island of St Vincent. In many ways the memorial is unremarkable. It was made by E Gaffin of Regent Street in London, a company well known for the production of simple white on black memorial panels, but Fanny herself has a very remarkable background for she has a village named after her.

Greiggs is a small village in the parish of Charlotte on the Island of St. Vincent. It lies nestled in the foothills of several small mountains and although being only 6 miles from the island's capital, Kingstown, it takes a good while to reach due to the steep winding roads. It is by tradition, a Carib village, and there are a number of legends about how Greiggs got its name but all of them revolve around a woman named Fanny Greig.

In brief, there are 3 main myths; 1) that Fanny was a Carib baby kidnapped by a Captain William Grieg, a British Soldier 2) that a Carib woman named Fanny Greig stood up to the invading British forces (with her baby in tow) and demanded they leave her land alone, they agreed and allowed Fanny to mark out her own territory, and 3) that a Carib woman named Fanny rescued a Carib baby stolen by Captain Grieg and was given land by the British for her bravery. I will come back to these legends because first some historical context is required, especially who are the Caribs, and what were the British doing on St Vincent.

In brief, St Vincent is a small windward island located in the Southern Caribbean Sea. It was occupied initially by the French who settled in 1719, but was ceded to the British in the treaty that ended the Seven Years War; the Treaty of Paris (1763). Prior to its colonisation, the land was inhabited by various Amerindian groups, lastly the Island Caribs; known as the yellow Caribs after European colonisation.

These were different from the Black Caribs who also inhabited the island. Black Caribs were a mixed-race group descended from the intermixing of the yellow Caribs with enslaved Africans who had either escaped from neighbouring islands such as Barbados, which is some 100 miles away, or had survived shipwrecks and washed ashore.

The Caribs, under the leadership of the Black Carib chief Joseph Chatoyer fought the British in two wars; the first Carib War (1769-1773) was over British attempts to survey and extend into Black Carib territories, and the Second Carib War (1795-1797) was over grievances with the British colonial administration stoked by French Revolutionary ideology; between the 2 wars the French regained control of the island (1779-1783), and many of the Caribs aligned themselves with the French over the British even once the island was back in British hands.

In 1797 Chatoyer was killed and the Caribs defeated. Over 4,000 Black Carib men, women and children were deported from St Vincent to the nearby barren island of Balliceaux. Here around 2,000 of them died before the survivors were transported to the island of Roatan off the coast of Honduras; ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide do not fall too short by way of descriptions for this now largely forgotten act of British colonialism.

The Black Caribs that survived, and indeed to some extent thrived in exile, are now known as the Garifuna, or Garinagu and are an Afro-Indigenous peoples, and Fanny Grieg, according to the legends, is believed to be one of them. And here I shall return to one of the legends I mentioned previously.

In a version of a myth by John Nero, a descendant of the last Carib chief of the Grieggs Village, it is claimed that Fanny, proper name Frances, was the daughter of Jean Baptiste, the chief of an area known as Massarica. In this legend, Fanny was taken as an infant by Captain William Grieg to force her father to allow the British to conduct a survey of the lands (this possibly relates to the First Carib war). Chief Baptiste successfully negotiated the retrieval of his daughter and gave permission for her to take the surname Grieg. The child was also given 2 flags and the area between where she placed them became her village.

So, in St Vincent according to legend we have a village named after a Garifuna female called Fanny Grieg, who is connected to a British man named William Greig. And in Farlington we have a memorial to a Fanny Greig who was married to a William Grieg who spent time in St Vincent. Now this could of course all be co-incidence but a William Grieg served in the island militia and was killed during the Second Carib War in 1797. He is named as a Captain in the Southern Regiment in the listing for 1787. And from records, it seems that William Grieg was a merchant and plantation owner from Scotland; he names a brother David of Moffatt in Dumfries and had many dealings with Scots on the island. In exploring the official deeds it is clear William was hugely trusted, acting as an attorney and executor in numerous land deals and other official transactions.

He makes his will in 1796 and leaves land (430 acres in the Parish of Charlotte) to his wife Fanny and his executors trusting it will be sold as a single lot if ever it is sold. He also sets aside funds for their daughter also called Fanny 'to be educated in England in a genteel manner', and to be provided for until she is 21 years old or married. He further ensures there is enough money for their safe passage to England if Fanny senior wishes to go there.

But how can we be sure that William Grieg's wife Fanny it is THE Fanny Grieg of legend. Well, there are two clues. Firstly, in a book about the Island, published in 1831, we find that William Grieg had his plantation in an area called Marriagua; this area of land is a fertile valley also known as Mesopotamia and the road that runs through it is known as Greigs Road. And secondly in Fanny Greig's power of attorney document dating to 1817, the 430 acres willed by William Grieg to Fanny, is stated as the land known as Greigs. From this we can be sure that Fanny Greig and Greigs village are connected, although there is nothing beyond the local oral traditions that place Fanny as a Garifuna/Black Carib woman.

So, what else do we know about Fanny; the woman buried in the church and who has a village in St Vincent named after her. We know that in March 1810 she was witnessed to the marriage of her daughter to a Lieutenant John White of the 80th of Foot Regiment. This took place at St Mary's church on Portsea. He was 21 years old and she still a minor, that is under 21.

It would seem that straight after their marriage they headed to South India, Kerala, where they had 2 children, a boy baptised Thomas William White in October 1811, and a girl, Caroline Susanne White baptised in September 1814. John however, dies in October 1815 (his brief will of August that year leaves everything to Fanny; who in due course remarries becoming Fanny Alderson, but she, like her children disappear from records). Sadly, we do know that Fanny Jnr died before her mother and that Fanny Grieg leaves her grandchildren a considerable sum of money, £2,000 each which in today's money is around £250,000 per child. This means that not only was Fanny Grieg buried in a prestigious and costly place in the church, but that she was careful to ensure she passed on the wealth that came from her husband's financial dealings to his grandchildren.

Her will also names her well-connected trustees; Fanny Grieg was a woman of some substance, financially yes, but also it seems socially. Her trustees included a Charles Cotton Butterfield from Buriton near Petersfield. Of interest is that Charles was the son of rear-admiral William Butterfield, who in 1799 had married in Portsea; mostly likely he married his wife Eliza White in the same church Fanny Grieg Jnr married John White. I have no idea if there is any connection between these two individuals who share the same surname, but rear-admiral Butterfield, who died in Portsea in 1842, rented property in the new town of Waterlooville, close to Purbrook. They must have known each other.

Another trustee was Henry James Ross who was a barrister of West Indian ancestry born in St Vincent. He was admitted to Middle Temple bar in 1820, and in 1842 wrote a pamphlet that dealt with the issues of land production in the wake of the ending of slavery; slavery in the British Empire ended the year Fanny Grieg died.

And this brings me to some of the more trickier bits of Fanny Grieg's history, who in one official document notes her names as Frances. Firstly, from William Greigs will, it appears he had a son out of wedlock, William Jnr, and further from Fanny Greigs power of attorney document, that she was a widow when she married William Greig; this marriage appears to have brought about no children and I can find little of her first husband, John Atkinson, in extant documentation in St Vincent, but in his will of 1780 he left her everything after the payment of his debts, so when William married Fanny she was not the young village girl of

St Vincent legend, let alone a baby. It seems John died shortly after making his will as in April 1781 Fanny buys a negro sailor named Friday and is noted as a widow; notably after William's death Fanny also does land and slave deals as a single woman; she clearly had a head for business.

Interestingly in William's will no provision is made to secure his estate should Fanny's remarry and bear subsequent children. But if she was born in 1750 as the memorial claims, then in 1796 when the will was made Fanny was 46 years old. If in 1810 at the marriage of Fanny Jnr, she was not yet 21 years of age, we can assume Fanny Grieg had her child relatively late in life; around 39-40 years of age 40s. It can be assumed therefore that William knew she would not have any further children even if she remarried after his death, hence this usual statement not going into his will.

However, there is another explanation. This revolves around Fanny being a Garifuna or Black Carib woman. If Fanny was indeed a Garifuna, then they are a matriarchal peoples and property would be automatically passed to the eldest daughter; William's only legitimate child Fanny. This seems somewhat tenuous, but there are two other clues that suggest this is a possibility.

William was informed by a neighbouring Carib to take his family and leave the island just days before the Carib attack in which he was killed, and Fanny's first husband is very clear in his will that there should be no dispute that Fanny is his sole heir and executor, and inherits everything forever. This is an odd phrase and suggests that some dispute was likely, although of course as with the Carib warning, there are many reasons why this statement would be made in the will. But regardless of whether she was Garifuna or not, the village believe she was, and she has been made Prime Matriarch; a huge honour. And for you here in Farlington, you have a fascinating story that whilst linking the church to some very dark parts of British history (notably the ethnic cleansing of the Black Caribs after the Second Carib War, and the Atlantic Slave Trade), is a history of a strong woman, widowed twice who conducted business in her own name in the Caribbean Island of St Vincent, where she was, and indeed is, far more than just the relict of William.

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