

**Nomination form  
International Memory of the World Register**

**An African Song or Chant from Barbados**

ID Code [2016-07]

**1.0 Summary (max 200 words)**

*Give a brief description of the documentary heritage being nominated and the reasons for proposing it.*

*This is the “shop window” of your nomination and is best written **last!** It should contain all the essential points you want to make, so that anyone reading it can understand your case even if they do not read the rest of your nomination.*

The song, **An African Song or Chant from Barbados**, dates from the time of enslavement (mid-seventeenth-century to 1824). This song text is the only known manuscript of an African work song that was chanted in the sugar fields of Barbados (see Appendix I). Written in a minor key, it is quite unlike other Barbadian folk songs which privilege the major key. The song does not have a time signature. The song was first heard by Dr. William Dickson, when he was Secretary to Edward Hay who governed Barbadoes (now spelt Barbados), during the period, 1772-1779. The song was transcribed by Granville Sharpe, a founder of the anti-slavery movement in Great Britain. The song represents a part of the Barbadian documentary heritage (song) of which there are no other known examples. It is a unique voice which represents how the enslaved saw their lot and how they commented on their lived experience. It also represents one of the tools that the oppressed used in their resistance and as a strategy for surviving the foul regime of enslavement. All of these contribute to the world significance of this document.

**2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)**

1. Roger P. Gibbs
2. Julie Courtenay, Gloucestershire Archives

**2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage**

1. Barbadian-born musician and ethnomusicologist specializing in Eastern Caribbean folk music
2. Head Archives Service, Gloucestershire County Council

**2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)**

1. Roger P. Gibbs
2. Julie Courtenay

**2.4 Contact details**

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|--------------------|---|
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### 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

#### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

**If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given**

*In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.*

**An African Song or Chant from Barbados** is a single page manuscript containing the melody and words to an African-type work song chanted by the enslaved in the sugar fields of Barbados. It is a unique part of the historical record of enslaved life in the former British West Indies. The song was transcribed by Granville Sharp, one of the founders of the British anti-slavery movement from first-hand information provided by Dr. William Dickson, a resident of Barbados for 13 years in the 1770s and 1780s. The entire document is attached as Appendix I.

#### 3.4 History/provenance

*Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.*

Scotsman, Dr. William Dickson lived in Barbados for about 13 years, starting in 1772. He served as Secretary to Governor Edward Hay in the 1780's and later became a leading member of the anti-slavery movement in Great Britain. Dickson came by this song, presumably by observing enslaved field workers while he lived in Barbados. The song was transcribed Granville Sharp, a founder of the British abolitionist movement. The document was first described in Jerome Handler, *A Guide to Source Materials for the Study of Barbados History, 1627-1834*. Granville Sharp's transcription was preserved amongst his other papers by the Sharp family, coming into the possession of the Lloyd-Baker family of Hardwicke Court, Gloucestershire, through the marriage in 1800 of Mary Sharp, heiress of Granville's elder brother William Sharp, to Thomas J Lloyd-Baker. The Lloyd-Baker family deposited its archive in the care of Gloucestershire Archives in 1977.

### 4.0 Legal information

#### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address
Henry Lloyd-Baker	Hardwicke Court, Hardwicke, Gloucestershire GL2 6RS

Telephone	Facsimile	Email
Via+44 1452 425295		Contact via <a href="mailto:archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk">archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a>

#### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address
Gloucestershire Archives	Clarence Row, Gloucester GL1 3DW, United Kingdom

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Telephone  
+44 1452 425295

Facsimile

Email  
archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk

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#### 4.3 Legal status

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Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The document is being preserved at Gloucestershire Archives as part of a long-term deposit agreement with the Lloyd-Baker estate (a copy of the Terms of Deposit can be downloaded from <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/policies>)

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#### 4.4 Accessibility

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Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

Gloucestershire Archives has digitised the object and placed it and information about it online at <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/105814/Song-of-slaves-in-Barbados>

The original document may be accessed by visiting Gloucestershire Archives. Visitors must register (showing proof of identity) before entering the Archives' research room and using original archive material. Gloucestershire Archives provides full details about access arrangements at

<http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/107703/Archives-Homepage>

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#### 4.5 Copyright status

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Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

Under British law the item Song (music and lyrics) is no longer in copyright being older than 100 years but the Trust that represents the original document's owner reserves reproduction rights in any images, reproductions and facsimiles of the original document. Requests for permission must be sought from the Trustees of the Lloyd-Baker Settled Estates, c/o WSP Solicitors, 26 Long Street, Dursley, GL11 4JA, United Kingdom. Tel. +44 01453 541940  
Email: [johnpenley@wspolicitors.com](mailto:johnpenley@wspolicitors.com)

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## 5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

### 5.1 Authenticity.

*Is the documentary heritage what it appears to be? Have identity and provenance been reliably established?*

Yes, provenance has been confirmed by the Gloucestershire Archives.

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### 5.2 World significance

*Is the heritage unique and irreplaceable? Would its disappearance constitute and harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity? Has it created great impact over time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world? Has it had great influence (positive or negative) on the course of history?*

This score (music and lyrics) of **An African Song or Chant from Barbados** is the only known object of this type. While it is predated by about 100 years by another transcription of three African songs in Jamaica by Dr. Hans Sloane in 1688 in his *A Voyage in the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher and Jamaica, vol 1.*, this submission stands apart as an unaccompanied work song and not a song performed in a festival or celebration setting with musicians and dancers. Unlike Sloane's transcriptions which appear incomplete, **An African Song or Chant from Barbados** is complete in its rendering of words and music. It is also, unlike the printed Sloane work, a hand-written, one-of-a kind document, making it unique.

While there was considerable cultural distance between the singer/s, hearer/s and transcriber and much time between when the song text was popular and today, the document conveys sufficient detail to allow it to be deconstructed in several ways.

The world significance of this nomination rests on several factors. Most early writings on colonial Barbados concentrated on the natural history of the island. The lot of the enslaved did not engage the concern of colonial travellers. The enslaved were the silent and silenced majority and were not deemed to be people by colonialists. Mention of the enslaved in such writings was mainly directed to enslavement as a commercial undertaking. What the enslaved did in the fields, what their upkeep costed e.g., rations, clothing distributed, etc. and a variety of management issues with regard to the enterprise of enslavement. European cultural hegemony determined that the culture of the enslaved, including song, was not considered worthy of notice so safeguarding the culture of the enslaved was inconsequential. The reality is that throughout enslavement, deliberate efforts were made to stamp out the culture of the enslaved (e.g., Barbados. *An Act for the Good...* 1688). The culture of the enslaved was often referred to as "rude". All of which contribute to the rarity of this song text (music and lyrics).

The culture of the enslaved was oral. Thus, this song, although presented by a third party, provides insights into the way that the enslaved reflected on their life in music and words. The enslaved were often forbidden to talk while working. On the other hand, many colonial plantation managers felt that the enslaved were more productive when they sang while they worked. Thus, singing was permitted. The preservation of this song text by a member of the colonial class is itself significant, since as a rule that group of people paid little attention to the culture of the enslaved who they felt unworthy of notice. Further, on the pain of death, the enslaved were denied opportunities to acquire the literary skills which would have enabled them to score their songs and music (Gilroy,. 74).

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Permission to sing gave the enslaved a tool of communication and means of recording their history because as Southern writes “ . . . though they could bring no materials with them, they retained memories of the rich cultural traditions they had left behind . . . an passed these traditions down to their children [through song] (*The Music*, 23). As a consequence, during enslavement the arts became a site of resistance and a mechanism for survival. This song provides insights into how the enslaved hoped for a better life while at the same time recognising that their lot was entirely at the mercy of their owner (massa). The enslaved were denied opportunities to acquire the literary skills which would have enabled them to score their songs and music (Gilroy, 74). Therefore, the uncovering of this transcription of an African-inspired work song as it was rendered in Barbados is a remarkable find and of world significance.

To locate a musical document on Barbados is very rare – up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there are few writings about Barbadian music and generally the island was not considered a musical space. In modern writings on the music of the Caribbean, comment on Barbados is extremely rare. In *Black Music of Two Worlds*, John Roberts’ sole reference to Barbados’ music states: “Barbados’ music, like its history, is firmly connected with Britain” (118) which captures the perception of Barbados’ musical heritage.

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### 5.3 Comparative criteria:

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

#### 1 Time

*Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change)? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the “first of its kind”?*

The manuscript is a written transcription of the oldest known work song sung in Barbadian Creole (see Rickford and Handler) by enslaved Africans in Barbados. Its date of transcription is sometime between 1770 and 1780 when the slave trade was at its zenith. The lyrics, in Barbadian Creole, would have been written to represent what Dickson heard and how Sharpe thought they should be signified.

During enslavement, the enslaved had no control over any aspect of their lives. This is conveyed in the song text. It evokes tremendous pathos and suffering at the hands of a brutal colonial system and demonstrates the strength of spirit and resistance against overwhelming odds.

#### 2 Place

*Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?*

The song text is known to have come from a Barbadian sugar plantation. It was heard by Dr. William Dickson who was Secretary to Governor Edward Hay. The system of enslavement in Barbados was particularly harsh, and options for freedom including running away, very restricted. (Unlike Jamaica and other islands there were no hills and gullies far removed from plantations where those striving for their freedom could find refuge.) The song text is therefore extremely representative of life of the enslaved in a Barbadian plantation context.

#### 3 People

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*Does the cultural context of the document's creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?*

Dr. William Dickson lived in Barbados for several years. Dickson served as Secretary to Governor Edward Hay of Barbadoes (now spelt Barbados), who governed the island during the period, 1772-1779. Dickson was an avid supporter of the anti-slavery movement and so his interest in the enslaved was not superficial or driven by commercial gain. Dickson authored the book **Letters on Slavery** (1866) which is an expansive treatise (in the form of several letters) on the unfortunate lot of the enslaved. His writings were highly unusual because very few Europeans commented with concern about the enslaved. Europeans did not see the enslaved as people and so excluded them from their comments/observations on *homo sapiens*. In his quest to abolish enslavement, Dickson worked with persons such as Granville Sharpe, one of the founders of the anti-slavery movement.

Dickson was also responsible for publishing the two part monograph **Mitigation of Slavery**. This monograph presents letters and papers authored by Joshua Steele a Barbadian writer and letters to Thomas Clarkson, both of whom were well-known abolitionists.

With respect to the manuscript being nominated, the other named individual was British abolitionist Grenville Sharpe. The manuscript was created from information that Dickson shared with Sharpe, who signed his name as G.S. (see Appendix I) In keeping with the times, no name was provided for the leader who sang the verse. The chorus would have been sung by anyone in the field at the time—so no names are available for these as well. Sharpe does say that the (male) leader sang the verse and the members of the (work) gang in the field sang the chorus.

#### **4 Subject and theme**

*Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?*

The lyrics tell of the harsh treatment meted out to the enslaved and how patently aware they were of their tenuous existence. The wistful expression “massa buy me, he won’t kill me” captures a reality in the life of the enslaved. Black life was of little moral value to the enslavers (replacements were easy to come by). This meant that the enslaved were easily expendable. However, because he was bought, in the eyes of the enslaved, killing him would not be a good commercial decision.

This lack of stability in living conditions and life are also expressed in the song through the words “he ship me regular”. Enslavers treated the enslaved as commodities and so they were bought and sold (shipped) with frequency either to the highest bidder or in order to acquire better “stock”. The reference to the riverside captures the role that the sea and other waterways played in the slave trade and life of the enslaved.

The cruelty of enslavement is lined out through the words “for I live with a bad man”. The despair felt by enslaved people in Barbados is very palpable in the song text. It also comments on the conditions of enslavement and expresses the hope that death (at the hands of their master) will not be how their fate is sealed.

The subject and themes of this song text are extremely representative of how the enslaved would have felt about their situation.

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## 5 Form and style

*Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?*

The use of a minor key (E is suggested) and style of composition is unique to Barbadian folk music as most of the folk songs heard in Barbados today are in major keys (Marshall, McGeary and Thompson **Folk Songs of Barbados**, 1996). The minor key gives it a very plaintive air and haunting melody which communicates the pain, despair and melancholy that the enslaved would have felt and experienced.

The song demonstrates a strong African retention, unlike the majority of modern Barbadian folk music which is more creolized and syncretic. This song is unique in that the traditional call and response uses a 2 bar template whereas **An African Song or Chant from Barbados** has 13 bars for the call and a similar number for the response. This is highly unusual.

Rex Nettleford contends that creativity helped to alleviate the harshness of enslavement when he writes “[b]y its very nature the creative imagination, lies beyond the reach of the vilest oppressor . . .” (*Dance Jamaica*, 15). Clinton Hutton comments likewise when he states that “. . . Africans coped, survived and resisted enslavement and colonial subjection by drawing from the creative stream and ethos of the African diaspora and . . . for the inner courage, endurance and culture required to cope with and resist the forces of enslavement and colonial subjugation.”

The ability to access this manuscript today facilitates a keen understanding and appreciation of a musical style and form of the past which serves as the foundation for one of the music forms (call-and-response) that is very popular among Caribbean peoples.

## 6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

*Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?*

*(Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.)*

Although abolition occurred in 1834 in Barbados, like in many other colonial spaces, the effects of enslavement are still seen and felt up to the present time. While the song is a powerful musical incarnation of a very painful part of Barbadian history its sentiments are deeply rooted. While physical death is no longer practised the majority (Blacks) are still disenfranchised and do not have access to the privileges that the descendants of the colonial masters enjoy.

The use of music via work songs such as this, gave enslaved peoples tools which helped them to survive and cope with their physical and psychological debasement. The song's second verse expresses a note of condemnation of the perpetrators of the regime under which the enslaved suffered. Through song, the enslaved commented on their lot and shared information about their owners. This purposing of song is recognised in the literature (Gilroy, 74, 75).

This song was created by the enslaved to comment on their lot. Its call-and-response feature is the precursor of calypsos that are created and sung throughout the Caribbean and its Diaspora. Calypsos have become part of world music. This genre became popularized when Harry Belafonte sang **Day-Oh** in the 1950s. Thus, this song has considerable social, spiritual and community significance for Barbados. It is also one of the foundational texts of an art form (calypso) that is practiced and enjoyed up to the present time. This song text would also be of interest to any community where enslavement was the practice and norm. This song gives voice to the powerless.

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## **6.0 Contextual information**

### **6.1 Rarity**

This is the only known manuscript of a Barbadian song of the 1770s-1780s. It is the only known transcription of an African work song. It is a unique legacy of the African heritage in Barbados.

### **6.2 Integrity**

The item is complete.

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