

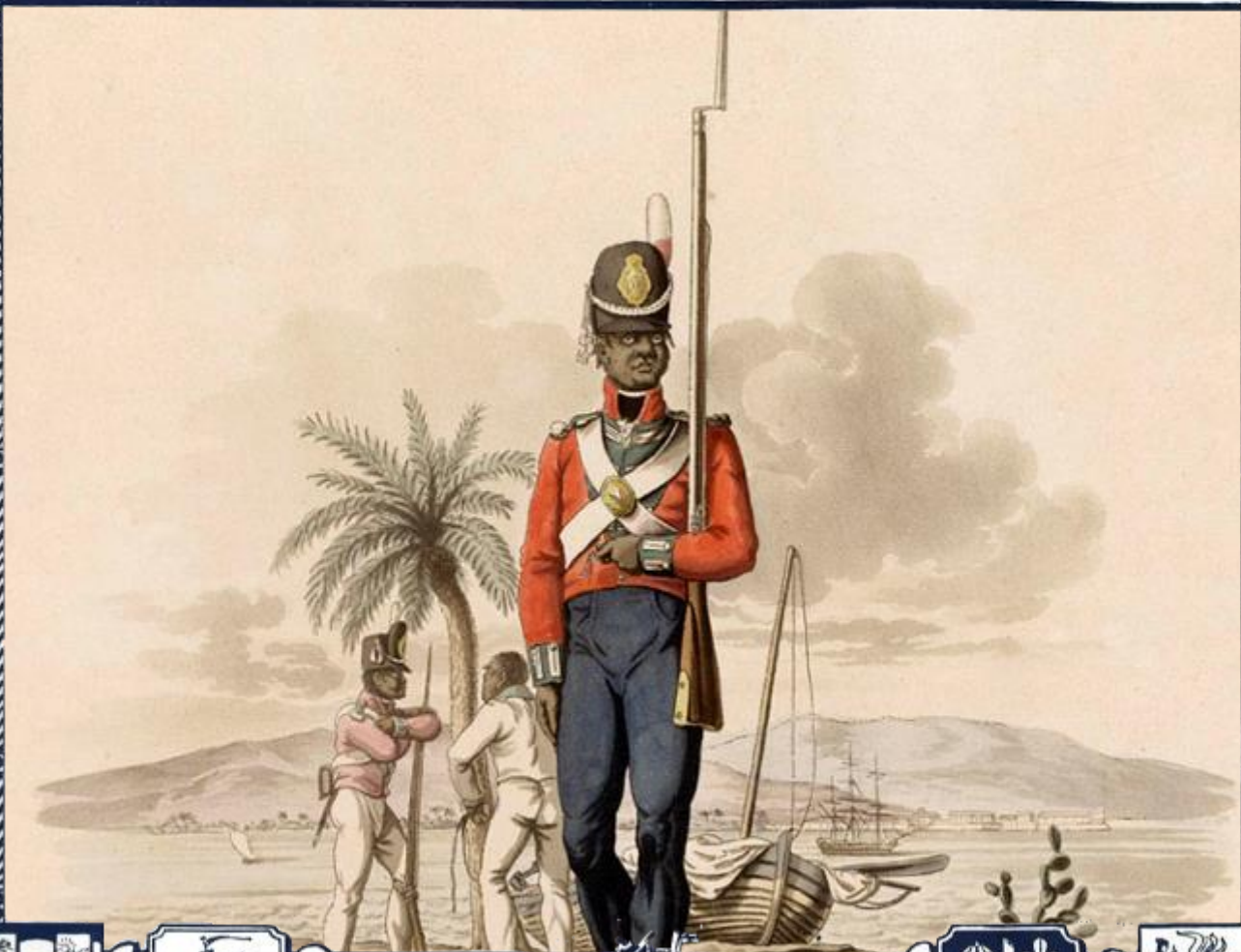


THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE CIRCULAR

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE. ESTAB: CIRCA A.D. 1735

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Border from our historic circulars

The West India

Committee Circular



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Leading articles

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean

Almost no country in the world has been left untouched by the scourge of COVID-19, which originated in Wuhan, China, with the disease spreading to many nations in the Caribbean, that have adopted measures to try to prevent the spread of the virus. Trinidad & Tobago, with 49 cases of the disease, decided to close its borders as of midnight on 22nd March. The Government of Trinidad & Tobago has been reluctant to declare a state of emergency or impose curfew restrictions, but has ordered people to stay at home. The police have been using roadblocks to reduce non-essential traffic, which has raised the ire of some who argue that such measures infringe their civil liberties. Police Commissioner Gary Griffith has countered by saying that, whilst the police would not infringe people's rights, neither would he allow people to expose themselves or others to the virus. At the time of writing, Trinidad & Tobago had 116 confirmed cases and eight deaths due to the virus.

Also on 23rd March, the Cayman Islands closed its borders to international flights for an initial period of three weeks, with the possibility of extending the ban beyond that. This is in addition to the ban on cruise ships and private boats that were prohibited from docking on 16th March for a period of sixty days. Cayman announced that such establishments as playgrounds, restaurants, bars, swimming pools and tourist attractions would be

closed for an initial two-week period starting on 23rd March, which developed into a full 24-hour a day curfew, commencing on 25th March until the 28th. From that time, Cayman has adopted a curfew system with a 'soft' curfew during the day between 5am to 7pm, when people can go out for exercise and essential services, such as shopping, whilst a 'hard' curfew is in place from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. Those allowed to go out for essential services are rotated alphabetically, with residents whose surnames are named A-K allowed to go food shopping, visit the doctor or the like, on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays, whilst those who surnames start with letters L-Z are allowed out on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Everyone is under full lockdown on Sundays, and the days not allocated for their surname. At the time of writing, Cayman has had seventy-three confirmed cases and one death, but, due to encouraging test results, a phased reopening of the economy is planned starting 4th May.

Anguilla reported its first three cases on 26th March, having closed its borders six days earlier. These individuals, as with all entering the island, were quarantined and, as of the time of writing, there have been no deaths or further cases and there are no active cases on the island. A lockdown was initiated the next day, and later extended on 16th April to 12th May. However, on 22nd April, some relaxations were permitted, with Government Offices, child-care facilities and some non-essential businesses reopening, such as legal, financial and insurance firms. The UK Government has agreed to provide Anguilla with EC\$2.5 million to help prevent illegal boat landings from breaching the lockdown and another grant of US\$ 1 million to help better equip the Princess Alexandra Hospital, where the West India Committee built a new maternity wing which opened in November 2018, to deal with the current situation, as well as sending additional medical equipment and promising to meet the costs of any additional medical staff that may be required. On 28th April, an oxygen generating station was installed in the Princess Alexandra Hospital, allowing Anguilla to generate its own oxygen, saving recurrent costs and providing additional resilience to hospital supplies.

The Turks and Caicos Islands also closed its borders and enacted a lockdown, with a nationwide curfew on March 26th, for an initial period which was extended until 4th May. Essential businesses, such as supermarkets, are

now currently closed every Wednesday and Sunday. The public are only allowed to travel outside if absolutely necessary. The islands, at time of writing, have twelve confirmed cases and one death.

Montserrat also imposed a lockdown, described as a 24-hour curfew, from 28th March to 14th April. An extension was decided upon until 30th April but this included a seven day total shutdown, with the populace divided into four alphabetical groups by surname with each group allowed, in turn, to shop at the supermarkets between 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on the 11th and 12th April in preparation for this seven day period. An extension to the shutdown lasting to 1st May was decided upon, but a three-day relaxation of the rule between 20th and 22nd April, when supermarkets, banks and money transfer services, petrol stations and bakeries were allowed to open, within specified hours, was granted. Montserrat, at the time of writing has had eleven confirmed cases of the virus and one death.

Jamaica was growing increasingly concerned, not only about the economic impacts of the Coronavirus shutdown, but also as to the potential for a crimewave, with business owners in downtown Kingston worried that the closure of their businesses at night, during which time they would normally be open, left them exposed to criminals seeking to break in. Prime Minister Andrew Holness, addressing Parliament on 21st April, disclosed that criminals had concocted a plan to profit from the crisis by inciting instability saying that, *“There are organised criminal gangs who are seeking to create hysteria, who are seeking to target distribution and retail chains, who are seeking to put people in lines to [cause] chaos and to start fights.”* Prime Minister Holness’ comments were voiced at the opening of a debate concerning the granting of an extension to the states of emergency and the related powers. These are now in force across almost half of Jamaica’s police divisions, many in place since April last year. Questions have been raised over the effectiveness of these states of emergency. Like other countries around the world, crime rates in Jamaica have declined during the current crisis due to the restrictions that have been put in place on movement etc. At the time of writing, Jamaica has had 396 confirmed cases of the virus and seven deaths and the House of Representatives had voted to extend the states of emergency.

Like Montserrat, Barbados has also adopted a 24-

hour curfew, after initial measures failed to prevent large groups of people from congregating. Originally intended to last from 3rd March until 15th April, this was again extended. With the extension came the news that people, again divided by surname, were given two days a week where they could shop. Barbados has suffered from eighty confirmed cases of the virus and seven deaths. The Government eased some of the restrictions on 20th April and Barbadians are only allowed out for medical or dental purposes, to purchase petroleum products or to shop or visit the bank under the alphabetic system. A strict curfew between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. is maintained.

The crisis has hit the vital Caribbean tourism industry badly, with many cruise ships being prevented from docking at certain islands in an attempt to avoid the spread of the disease. The close quarters and closed systems of cruise ships have made them hotbeds for the disease. Whilst many islands were not prepared to accept cruise ships due to the restrictions they put in place to prevent the spread of the virus, Barbados offered a place to dock until suitable arrangements could be made. The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association has pointed to the industry’s ability to deal with crises and disasters, such as Zika-virus and hurricanes, and cited the growth of the industry over the last two decades to predict that Caribbean Tourism will bounce back from this situation stronger than ever. All the signs currently point to a slow and steady recovery over the next few years, with one expert saying that it could take between twenty-four and thirty months, although quite possibly longer, for numbers of visitors to return to pre-crisis levels, magnifying the need for economic diversification.

The UK government has continued to work with the medical services of the British Overseas Territories in the region to ensure a robust response to the crisis, providing medical equipment and support for each.

Covid-19 and West Indian heritage

It has been noted in the press in recent weeks that people of African descent seem to be disproportionately vulnerable to the disease’s lethal effects, a matter of great concern to the vast majority of the West Indian community and its global diaspora. There are undoubtedly many factors that contribute to this vulnerability, and studies have commenced to determine why this is

the case. Yet, as research for the West India Committee's current heritage project, *The West Indian Soldier* shows, this is not the first time that such a vulnerability to respiratory diseases amongst the black community has been noted.

The medical minds of the eighteenth century noted the propensity of European soldiers serving in the West Indies to suffer from a variety of diseases, most notably fevers, that caused widespread fatalities amongst the Regiments. With that issue in mind, amongst others, the army adopted the strategy of retaining the service of troops of African origin, causing the British Army to fast become one of the biggest slave owners in the region. Whilst these new troops did indeed prove to be resistant to the fevers that decimated European troops, the medics noted that troops of African origin were far more likely to suffer death due to respiratory ailments.

The West India Regiments, a corps of the British Army, was founded in 1795, being composed largely of troops of African origin. In 1810 the medical officer in Gibraltar noted that whilst stationed there, of the 14 deaths from pulmonary disease that occurred between January and June 1810, 10 were black soldiers of the 4th West India Regiment, with a further 14 black soldiers losing their lives to pulmonary disease later that year.

The 1838 Statistical Report on the Sickness, Mortality, and Invaliding Among the troops in the West Indies by Henry Marshall and Alexander Tulloch for the Secretary of State for War on sickness amongst troops in the West Indies noted that "*Disease of the lungs [among black troops] is not confined to this Command [Windward/Leeward] alone, but, as we shall afterwards show, it extends to every climate in which they [black troops] have been employed; thus inducing the supposition that there must be in the constitution of the negro some peculiarity which predisposes him to affections of the lungs. Upwards of two fifths of all deaths among these troops have arisen from this class of disease, and more have died annually by it alone in this Command than among the same number of troops in the United Kingdom by all diseases together – a sufficient evidence how suited the climate is to their constitutions.*"

Marshall and Tulloch's report was able to provide several statistics for the number of soldiers that died over a period of twenty years between 1817-1836, including the information about the lethality of diseases of the lungs. Using the

information collated in their report, it appears that in the Caribbean 11.15/1,000 black troops died annually on average from diseases of the lungs. For whites, the figure is 8.95/1,000, although this will not be totally accurate due the lack of ratios of white troops for British Honduras and the Bahamas.' Some modern scholars have claimed that this high death rate amongst black troops was due to the quality of their accommodation. Yet white soldiers also lived in similarly poorly constructed barracks, so this explanation is not totally satisfactory.

During the First World War, approximately 15,000 West Indian volunteered to serve in the newly formed British West Indies Regiment, founded in 1915, with many amongst those taken ill suffering from some form of respiratory ailment. A large number of cases of pneumonia and similar illnesses also occurred at the training camp at Seaford Camp in the UK before many soldiers reached theatres of war, with many dying as a result. Nineteen victims are buried there. It should be noted that, although accommodation and medical facilities at the camp in Seaford were not regarded as adequate, they had been improved before the West Indians arrived as a result of complaints by Welsh troops. The West Indian troops were well received locally, and were even invited by the locals to join the local Working Men's club. Frank Cundall, a leading authority on the region, who collaborated with the West India Committee for many years, describes the scene at the camp where he said: "*the medical officers had their hands full and had to work heroically all day and most of the night.*"

When the First Battalion was inspected at Mex camp in Egypt on 25th March 1916, their health was found to be 'not very satisfactory', chiefly due to lung and bronchial troubles. From the First Battalion War diary for the Middle Eastern campaign held by the West India Committee, it appears that there were many more deaths from pneumonia than there were from malaria, although the latter is known to have been widespread in the region. However, records listed the cause of death for those West Indians who died during the First World War are scant, and thus we have an incomplete picture.

Although this research presents a historical perspective on the topic, such records may be of use to modern medics in determining why the Covid-19 virus is proving disproportionately fatal to those of African ancestry today.

Notes of Interest

In the Cabinet reshuffle in February, a new Minister for the Overseas Territories has been appointed, Baroness Elizabeth Sugg. Baroness Sugg has already met with representatives and political leaders from many of the UK's Overseas Territories, including those from the Caribbean. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Joint Ministerial Council had to be cancelled in March.

The end of February saw the Haitian police carry out a protest on the first day of Carnival, over pay and conditions, redundancies and a lack of benefits. The protesters complained that there was "*No money for police officers but enough money for Carnival.*" The protests turned violent, with tear gas released and gun shots fired near the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince. Haiti is in the midst of an ongoing economic and political crisis, with President Jovenel Moise ruling by decree since January. Several cities were paralysed by riots in February and there is currently no functioning legislature, with no set date for new elections.

In light of the Covid-19 outbreak, which threatens England's test matches at home against the West Indies, the Caribbean Cricket Board has offered to host the series itself, with the English Cricket Board retaining all the commercial and broadcasting rights. At the time of writing, no decision has been made on the future of the tour, nor on the tours of the South African or New Zealand Cricket teams to the Caribbean.

In preparation for hurricane season, the British Navy has sent *HMS Medway* and *RFA Argus* to the Caribbean to provide support. These vessels, which are also equipped with helicopters, are currently carrying out practice landings in locations in the Overseas Territories to prepare effectively for the eventuality that a British territory is struck by a hurricane this year.

In addition to the support sent in preparation for the hurricane season, small British military teams have been sent to the Cayman and the Turks & Caicos Islands. The objective of these teams is to help provide not only support and contingency planning for the hurricane season but also aid

with the situation stemming from the current pandemic crisis, including supporting the coordination of medical personnel, as well as assisting with matters of law and order should the situation deteriorate, although this is not anticipated. In the Cayman Islands, the military team will also provide advice to the territory's newly-formed regiment.

The West India Committee Report

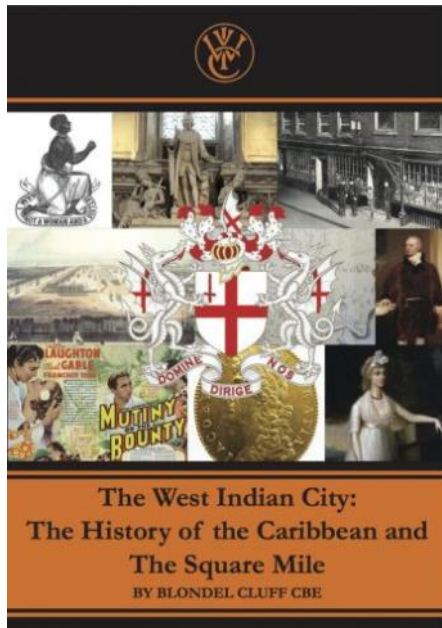
Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the West India Committee have been working remotely since mid-March. This has also resulted in the Library and Archive being closed to visitors until further notice. We apologise for the inconvenience that this may cause and shall respond to enquiries relating to the library or otherwise, via an email to enquiries@westindiacommittee.org

In response to the global lockdown, The West India Committee is publishing a series of articles through the Twitter account of our CEO Mrs Blondel Cluff. (<https://twitter.com/BlondelCluff>) in order to continue our mission of eliciting a better understanding of the Caribbean.

As part of our recent fundraising campaign, The West India Committee has been given a grant by the Lund Trust, a charitable trust of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, to support the Committee's work over the next four years. We are very grateful for the Trust's support.

As mentioned in the last circular, Mrs Blondel Cluff, the West India Committee's CEO gave the City of London Guides' annual Muellish Lecture on Monday 2nd March at the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry, near the Guildhall. The lecture, entitled *The West Indian City: The History of the Caribbean and the Square Mile*, explored the connection between the Caribbean and the City of London over the course of the last few hundred years, including the role of Caribbean goods and the slave trade in the economic development of London, the prominent positions held by West Indians in the City in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and the welcome given to Caribbean volunteers of the British West Indies Regiment at the Lord Mayor's show in 1916. The lecture, delivered to a full house, was very well

received, with many attendees commenting how they had been unaware of much of this shared heritage. Each guest was given an accompanying booklet, including a transcript of the lecture as a memento of the evening, a version of which can now be read on the West India Committee's website: <http://westindiacommittee.org/the-west-indian-city-the-history-of-the-caribbean-and-the-square-mile/>



The West India Committee has recently been awarded a grant by the National Lottery Community Fund, formerly the Big Lottery Fund, in support of our ongoing work surrounding the Windrush debacle. The Committee will use the funds to conduct a feasibility study on the creation of a Caribbean Chamber of Britain (CCB), to act as a representative body for the West Indian Community, in the manner of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. It is intended that this new, permanent body will provide the Caribbean Community with a level of representation that they have previously lacked in the UK, allowing them to bring the issues affecting the community to the attention of government.

The Chamber, that will reside under the umbrella of the West India Committee, benefiting from its Royal Charter, UNESCO ranking and Charitable status, will approach issues that affect the Caribbean community on an informed basis, undertaking research and canvassing views of as wide a cross-section of the Caribbean community as is reasonably possible, together with those of relevant institutions, government and third parties. WIC will lead on the work of the Chamber, using its expertise and networks to

support the community in addressing issues that adversely affect its people. In addition, opportunities for work experience within the Chamber for 16 to 25 years olds will become an intrinsic element of all of its undertakings, with an emphasis on personal and leadership development, adding to the sustainability of the forum.

Work continues on the West India Committee's project with the National Army Museum on the *West Indian Soldier*. Subject to any later changes brought about as a result of the Coronavirus situation, the exhibition will now begin on 9th March 2021 and conclude there at the end of October, with a view to it travelling throughout the UK afterwards. During the course of the exhibition, the Committee and the Museum will be carrying out a series of public workshops and lectures on the subject, as well as publishing a book on the topic. The restrictions made necessary by Coronavirus have unfortunately restricted the opportunities for volunteers to take part in the project, but a small team is ably assisting the Project Manager by remote researching, who is in turn leading online workshops to support the volunteers' development.

Caribbean Cooking

This quarter we present a recipe for the National Dish of Antigua and Barbuda, Fungee and Pepperpot, the latter being a type of spicy meat soup/stew which is often served as a meal by itself. It originates from when the slave population needed a combination of carbohydrates and protein after a hard day's work.

Fungee (pronounced foon-gee), bears some similarity to dishes served in Western Africa and seemingly traces its ancestry to that continent. Pepperpot is served with salted fish in Antigua, often eaten for breakfast. Pepperpot originated in Guyana, where it is also the national dish, but has spread to the islands of the Caribbean, which each have their own variation. Traditionally Pepperpot is made with whatever meat is available, another nod to its humble origins. However, traditional Pepperpot's key ingredient is Cassareep, which is obtained from the roots of the Cassava plant, one of the staple foodstuffs of the Caribbean. The use of Cassava originated in the Americas amongst

indigenous tribes. It was introduced to Africa during the infamous slave trade that fuelled European prosperity for over three centuries, also becoming a stalwart of Caribbean plantations, when slaves were anxious to conserve leftovers, particularly meat, long before refrigeration was invented, when there were few means of preserving food. Like several other Caribbean culinary classics, Cassava is poisonous unless prepared properly, requiring an in-depth knowledge of the plant to avoid death. Indeed, the juice of the plant was also a means of capturing other food sources, being used as the poison (cyanide) in which tribesmen would dip the arrows they used for hunting.

Cassava, once rendered safe through the extraction of its venomous juice, may be consumed in various forms: as a root vegetable, ground into a flour from which many traditional breads are still made to this day or, in the case of the Caribbean classic, Pepperpot, as a preservative of meat. So effective is this potion that stews made with it are said to last in perpetuity without putrefying, that is provided no fish, lamb or fresh onions or garlic are included in the 'free for all' that composes its ingredients. You see Pepperpot is more pot than pepper, in that the ingredients of this magical stew may comprise anything that comes to hand, all held together and preserved by the humble cassava. In fact, it is the poisonous juice of the root that is boiled down to produce a thick black, treacle-like residue known as 'Cassareep' that holds the key to this unique recipe. Fresh meat is immersed in this preservative, with other ingredients, including more meat, being added as and when ingredients become available, together with sugar, cinnamon, cloves and the hot peppers that give this unique casserole its name, meaning no two Pepperpots are ever the same; thus, with many additions, the feast would evolve over time with the one basic pot providing meal after meal.

In addition to its popularity across the Caribbean, Pepperpot also graced tables in England in the guise of an interpretation, the recipe of which was first published in 1775 by Charlotte Mason in her book, *The Lady's Assistant*. Her recipe broke many rules, including lobster and dumplings with Cayenne Pepper, known as Guinea Pepper at the time. The English version was no doubt consumed in one sitting; however, claims have been made in Grenada of a single Pepperpot lasting a staggering twenty years. There are also stories of one that

lasted for over a century in Antigua.

Due to the difficulty in acquiring Cassava outside of the Caribbean, as well as the other dangers of its use by the inexperienced, most modern recipes, including the one provided, are adapted so that Cassareep is not required. However, should you wish to try it for the authentic taste, then Cassareep can be bought in specialist stores selling Caribbean products.

Fungee for 6 (adjust quantities as appropriate)

Cornmeal: 450g

Okras: 2

Salt

Butter/olive oil

Add enough water to the corn-meal to create a wet paste. Ensure that the paste is wet all the way through, leaving no dry corn-meal. Chop the okras finely or grate them and stir them into the corn-meal. Place over a medium heat and continue to stir to avoid lumps forming. Add water occasionally to prevent the mixture from becoming too thick. When the mixture becomes stiff, turn off the heat and then place a pat of butter or a teaspoon of olive oil into a bowl. Take some of the cooked Fungee and place it in the bowl, swirling it until it forms a ball. Remove the ball and set it aside, repeating the process with the remaining Fungee.

Antiguan Pepperpot for 6 (adjust quantities as appropriate)

Corned or salted Beef: 1 pound/500g

Ham: ½ pound/250g (Optional)

Vegetable Oil: 2 tablespoons

large Onion: 1

Spring onions: 4

garlic cloves: 2

Chilli Pepper, preferably a Scotch Bonnet Chilli: 1
(you may want to vary this depending on your tastes)

Chives, fresh or dried: ½-1 teaspoon

dried thyme: ½ teaspoon

can of chopped tomatoes: 1

Tomato paste

Pigeon Peas or Butter Beans: ½ pound/250g

Eggplant: 1

Calabaza/West Indian Pumpkin (If unable to source, Butternut Squash can substitute nicely): 1

White yam or sweet potato: 1

Spinach: ¾ pound/375g

Ground black pepper to taste

Cut the meat into small pieces, boil over a high heat and then simmer on a low heat until the meat is tender. In the meantime, prepare the vegetables. The eggplant, yam and calabaza should all be chopped up into roughly equal sized chunks, whilst the onion, spring onion and spinach should also be chopped, although not too finely in the case of the latter. The garlic should be minced, as should the pepper after it has been seeded. Drain the meat, keeping the liquid for future use. If using cooked corn beef, prepare some beef stock.

Heat the oil in a large pan, adding the onion, garlic and spring onions. Cook until the onion has softened. Then add the tomatoes, tomato paste and thyme and stir together. Add the vegetables, including the pigeon peas/butter beans and chilli and cook for five minutes, stirring frequently. Then add the meat and the liquid from earlier, or the beef stock, depending on the method used. Bring to the boil and then simmer on a low heat, stirring frequently, for around 20 minutes, by which time the veg should have softened. Stir in the spinach and cook until the spinach wilts. Season with pepper if desired and serve immediately with fungee.



From the Library

This quarter we look at one of the Committee's artefacts from the First World War, namely a Cigarette case that belonged to a soldier of the British West Indies Regiment. In the days before the dangers of smoking were publicly recognised, cigarettes were an important luxury item for the men who fought in the army.

This case was given as a gift for Christmas and New Year in 1917 by the West India Contingent

Committee, a sub-committee of the West India Committee, established during the First World War, that campaigned for the welfare of the men of the British West Indies Regiment. This included providing the men with a variety of pastimes, such as games, footballs and articles such as handkerchiefs, extra warm clothing (as West Indians were not used to the colder weather in Europe), together with useful articles, such as soap, with luxuries, such as chocolate, cakes, sweets, cigarettes and other forms of tobacco. The latter were in particular demand, and the West India Contingent Committee secured several thousand of these regularly to keep the men in good supply, often at the request of the commanding officers.

Constructed out of a sturdy metal, claimed to be able to withstand fragments from a high explosive shell or shrapnel, the case measures 5 ¾ inches by 3 ½ inches and originally came with a present of Jamaica cigarettes, as well as a Christmas card. Each bears the regimental badge on the front, along with the date in raised lettering. Thousands of these were produced and sent to every member of the British West Indies Regiment, regardless of rank or where they were serving, be it in France, Egypt or British East Africa. The Contingent Committee did not forget those West Indians who were serving in other regiments and sent them the gift of a leather wallet. Altogether, the Christmas presents cost a little over £979, around £68,430 today, reflecting the generosity of those who donated to the Contingent Committee Fund.



This artefact is a reminder that, during the war, small pleasures were vital distractions and that the men of the British West Indies Regiment had many people hoping for their safe return and supporting them from afar.