

How were plantations
organised to
maximise self
sufficiency



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How were plantations organised to maximise self-sufficiency? On a typical 18th-century sugar plantation, self-sufficiency was promoted by the workers, fuel, water source, sugar works yard and sugar being on the plantation. The plantation was divided into three. One division was Cane Field and Cash Crops. Another was for Woodlands to provide timber for fuel to heat the boilers and for construction. The third was for farming to produce as much as possible for all who lived on the plantation or estate, half been set aside for producing food for the slaves. Persons living on the plantations mainly consisted of African Slaves and Whites. The Slaves were far and away the biggest group on the estate. Their houses were set apart from the estate buildings of the plantation in close proximity to fields to enable easier access to work. "As you enter the gates, there is along range of slave houses, like thatched cottages and a row of coconut trees and clumps of cotton trees. "[Lady Nugent p. 28]. Their houses were made of wattle, mud or timber. The planter or his attorney in his absence would occupy the Great House. The other whites, overseers, bookkeepers etc. houses were located in close proximity to the Great House, which better enable them to supervise the slaves. The sugar works yard was located at the center of the plantation, a considerable walking distance away from the Great House. The sugar works yard consisted of the mill, the boiling house, the curing house, the distillery, the trash house and the workshops for skilled craftsmen like blacksmith and carpenters. These factory buildings were closely positioned so they did not have to travel far to get from one place to another. Each had its own function; the Mill was the place where the cane was crushed by huge rollers to extract the juice fed by the slaves using their hands. After the juice was

extracted it was sent to the Boiling House and the trash sent to the Trash
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House to be used for fuel or to make a bagasse. In the Boiling House the cane juice was clarified in a copper clarifier by heating it with white lime, constantly tested by the boiler man between his fingers as it was passed through a series of boilers which gradually got smaller and hotter. The smallest was known as the Teache. After the cane juice evaporated, leaving a mixture of sugar crystals and molasses which was stored in barrels called hogsheads, in the Curing House. Molasses drained from holes in the hogshead. Some plantations had a Distillery or the Still house where the molasses, mixed with scum, was converted into rum. The holes in hogsheads were plugged and the unrefined sugar was ready for export. The Workshops were areas from which skilled craftsmen had to maintain the buildings and the machinery on the estates, to make barrels to store sugar, to construct carts and wagons.