In the earliest years of settlement our island was apportioned amongst the investors in relation to the extent of their holdings in the Bermuda Company. In each portion (or tribe, now Parish) provision was made for a parish church. The affairs of the parish church were administered by a church vestry. In addition to those matters that were of a religious nature, the church vestries also had responsibilities that were of a civic nature. Meetings were held to discuss matters, such as: garbage collection, road lighting and providing for the poor within the Parish.

In the latter half of the 19thth Century, there was a division of responsibilities with the Church vestries retaining their role relating to ecclesiastical (or church) matters and newly created Parish Vestries assuming a role dealing with temporal (or civic) affairs.

Parish Vestries were responsible for street lighting, garbage collection, and each parish appointed one or two Overseers of the Poor (financial assistance). Some parishes established Poor Houses (subsequently used as Rest Homes) and some provided cemeteries.

As an example, in the Parish of Pembroke near St. John’s Church, there are two cemeteries. The burial ground east of the Church is the Parish Cemetery administered by the Parish Council (successor of the Parish Vestry). The burial grounds north and south of the Church is administered by the Church Vestry.

Funds for the aforesaid purposes were derived by taxes levied on the assessed values of properties within the Parish. All attorneys who transferred property were required to inform the Vestry Clerk of the Parish. The value of the property was assessed by a Parish official, and the consequences of that assessment were far-reaching. It was the means by which the eligibility of a voter was determined. If a person owned property in more than one parish, he/she was entitled to vote in a General election in each of the Parishes where the property was owned. On the other hand, if a person was college-educated, gainfully employed, owned shares in an economic enterprise, but did not own property at the required assessed value, that person could not vote. In addition, the parish vestries had the responsibility of submitting names to the Supreme Court for jury selection from amongst their property owning taxpayers.

Pembroke Parish was divided into 34 tracts of land that ran in a North to South direction. Each tract was divided in lots, which were numbered. When transferred, the attorney would provide the name and biographical data of the acquirer; the name of the disposer; a legal description of the property with a plot plan attached; and the Tract and lot numbers (e.g. Tract 5 lot 3). In cases where the disposer was only selling a portion of his lot, the plot would be designated Tract 5 Lot 3(B). A plan of the entire Parish measuring approximately 5ft x 7ft was kept so that upon viewing the transfer notice, one can readily see where the property is located. Records included the assessment books and the Tract Book identifying the owner of each lot.

The Vestries were required to have an Annual General Meeting of taxpayers at which time members of the Vestry were elected. Service on the Vestries was often an initial step for persons seeking membership in the House of Assembly.

The Parish Councils Act 1971 came into effect on January 1,1972. That Act abolished the Parish Vestries and replaced them with appointed bodies. All moveable and immovable property vested in the Parish Vestries together with any monies held by or liabilities chargeable against a Parish Vestry was thereby held by and chargeable against the Parish Council of the Parish concerned. The churches; however, were supported by congregational offerings, the rental of pews, and the income derived from glebe lands. Glebe Lands were transferred by an Act of the Legislature at a time when the total population was relatively sparse and unable to support the rector of the Church.

St. George’s was the capital, the commercial centre and had a relatively large population. Little additional support was required so there was a smaller glebe land allotted. Hamilton and Smith’s Parishes shared a rector and their Glebe land was on the left hand side of the road leading from Tucker’s Town to the entrance of the old Castle Harbour Hotel. To this day, the area is known as Glebe Hill.

Pembroke and Devonshire shared a rector. Their Glebe land stretched from the waters of the North Shore to St. Augustine’s Hill. It explains why the road which bounds the former glebe land on its eastern side was named Glebe Road. Also why until at least 1965 the houses on the property were made of wood since the occupant were on land rented from the Church on an annual basis.They did not risk putting permanent structures thereon. These lands were purchased in 1965 by Government and vested in the Public Works Department then subsequently to the Bermuda Housing Corporation, which subsequently sold the lots to the occupying tenants.

Paget and Warwick shared one rector. Their Glebe went along Chapel Road from Middle Road to Harbour Road Paget. It is where Bishop Spencer built Paget Glebe School in 1839.

Southampton and Sandys shared one rector. A portion of their allotment was used by Bishop Spencer in 1839 for Southampton Glebe School (now Dalton Tucker School) the balance is still owned by the Church and was leased for the proposed Morgan’s Point project.

I find no evidence to support the assertion that funds were raised to provide land for slaves in “Bermuda or indeed any part of the British Colonies”. In fact, the U.K. Government borrowed 20 million Pounds from Nathan Rothschild “to compensate the owners” and it was not until 181 years later (2015) that the debt was finally repaid.

The proceeds of the loan went to slave owners in the Colonies and absentee owners living in the U.K. ONLY.

Blacks were deemed to have received “the gift of emancipation”. This was acknowledged by a letter sent to the rector on Tuesday, 5th August, 1834 after a Thanksgiving Service at St. Paul’s Church, Paget on Sunday, 3rd August, 1834. The letter was signed by several members of the Colored Friendly Union Society of the Parish of Paget. Emancipation was observed annually by the various Friendly Societies by holding services at the Parish Churches followed by dinners at their halls. The practice evolved into Cup Match, which was initiated by two of the Friendly Societies 68 years after Emancipation.

I know of no credible source for what Dr. Pauulu suggests. I do know his home was about 30 yards east of Glebe Road and he daily passed the wooden houses en route to Central School. I would imagine if he asked about the Glebe land, the response might well be speculation, which he regarded as fact. If there is any documentation available concerning this incomplete research I would be pleased to see it.

In 1834, the Friendly Societies were not philanthropic organizations, they were mutual aid societies and provided benefits to their members only. Those members were obliged to a specified amount periodically (weekly or monthly) and would be entitled to benefit in case of illness, death or other distress. The Government made Regulations to ensure the members were not victimized. They enacted the Poor Law of 1834, which enabled it to tax the populace to provide shelter, food and tools to enable those capable of work to be employed.

It is noteworthy that in June and October of 1850, several young children from St. Pancras Workhouse (popularized in Charles Dickens “Oliver Twist”) were shipped to Bermuda to work as house servants.