

St George (United Kingdom)

No 983

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Town of St George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda
<i>Location</i>	Corporation of St George, Bermuda
<i>State Party</i>	United Kingdom
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1999

Justification by State Party

St George, Bermuda, is the first English town of the British Empire following the beginning of overseas settlement in the early 1600s. Predating the conversion of James Fort, Virginia, to Jamestown by seven years, St George has retained much of its early street plan and many of its masonry buildings. It has remained a living town, and has not had to be rebuilt, along the lines of, say, Williamsburg, Virginia. Thus in its present form, the Town's built heritage is without equal as an example of the early stages of English expansion throughout the world in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The fortifications associated with the Town of St George are also without parallel and represent almost the complete range of British coastal fortifications and artillery overseas from the early 17th century until the end of coastal defence in 1956. The surviving forts on Castle and Southampton Islands were the first English masonry fortifications in the New World - indeed, in the overseas empire. They also mark the beginning of the coastal defence of the British Empire overseas. Several 18th century forts are among the earliest examples of strategic works after the loss of the American colonies in 1783, while some of the Victorian forts are unique as well, notably Fort Cunningham with its iron frontages. One of the few Martello Towers built outside the United Kingdom of the classic English South Coast design stands in singular form on St George's Island. The end of British coastal defence is illustrated in the unique work of St David's Island, a single battery of two 6-inch and two 9.2-inch breech-loading guns erected in the first decade of the 20th century, and not found elsewhere with the guns still emplaced.

Criterion iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Discovered in 1505 by the Spanish captain Juan Bermudéz, Bermuda was later stocked by the Spanish as a place of refuge in cases of shipwreck. The permanent settlement of St George (which had been claimed for the English Crown in 1609) began in August 1612 with the arrival of a governor, a clergyman, and 60 settlers, to be joined a few months later by 600 more people. A watchtower was built on Fort George Hill and the foundations of several forts were laid to guard the entrances to St George's Harbour and Castle Harbour.

By 1615 the population had shrunk to 150 as most of the colonists moved to the main island when administration of the colony passed from the Virginia Company to the Somers Island Company. The Crown assumed responsibility for the colony in 1684, of which St George remained the capital until the mid 19th century. During this period African and Indians were brought to Bermuda; their descendants make up the majority of the multi-racial society of the present day. For the next century the economy of the island was centred on the cedar tree, which was used for ship construction.

Land was granted to the Town's inhabitants in 1693, and the haphazard way in which they built their houses is reflected in the present-day layout of streets and lanes. Encouragement was given to proprietors to build in stone in the early 18th century. It was at this time that wharves and warehouses were built on the waterfront.

The mid 18th century was a period of economic stagnation for the Town, but military activities during the American Revolution (1776-83) saw the beginning of a boom. St George was to remain a strategic military location for the next two centuries until the US naval base closed in 1995. The Corporation of St George was formed in 1797 and, despite of the loss of capital status, the Town continued to prosper. Free black Bermudans took on an increasingly important role: at the time of emancipation in 1834, 45% of the population were free blacks.

The four years of the American War between the States turned St George once again into a boom town. Fortunes were made when blockade runners supplied arms and ammunition to the Confederate ports, notably Wilmington (South Carolina) in exchange for cotton, for transshipment to England. The economy picked up again with the development of the tourist industry in the latter half of the 19th century. However, the Town and its Corporation were conscious of the threats that tourism offered to its heritage, and efforts to save historic buildings began as early as 1920.

St George was a garrison town from its earliest days, and military installations developed on the eastern side of the Town. The first of many barracks were built on Barrack Hill in 1780, and ancillary buildings, such as residences for senior officers, officers' messes, hospitals, a garrison chapel, etc, followed during the course of the 19th century. These were constructed in the standard British military style but using local materials.

The related fortifications began in the early 17th century, with forts on Paget, Governor's, Charles, and Castle Islands. These were repeatedly reconstructed and strengthened during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. At the end of the American Revolution, Britain made St George's Island its

main naval base, to replace those lost in the Thirteen Colonies. Detachments of the Corps of Royal Engineers radically redesigned and rebuilt the existing fortifications in the 1780s and 1790s. Work began on the dockyard at the turn of the century, necessitating further drastic changes in the system of fortifications, with the construction of Forts George, Victoria, St Catherine, Albert, and Cunningham (on Paget Island).

The advent of rifled artillery in the 1850s led to yet further modifications and strengthening. Fort Cunningham became the most heavily armed and defended fort in Bermuda. Further modifications were necessary in the 1880s to take account of the advent of gun steel, which made possible the manufacture of more efficient and reliable artillery. These continued to serve until the coastal defence came to an end in 1956. They thus span the entire range of British coastal defences over a period of three and a half centuries.

Description

The nominated area consists of the Town of St George on St George Island and fortifications on the Island and on a number of small islands commanding access to the Town and to the anchorage of Castle Harbour.

The layout of the *Town of St George* is one that has grown organically over nearly four centuries. At its heart is King's Square (or Market Square), adjacent to the harbour. It provides the link between the harbour and the two main east-west roads that connect the Town with the rest of Bermuda: Water Street, which gives access to the wharves and warehouses on the quays, and Duke of York Street to the north, the main street of the Town. The streets to the north are a network of what began as narrow, winding lanes and alleys. There are many fine buildings of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries in the historic core of the Town.

The architecture of Bermuda is unique, and has changed little in its basic elements since the end of the 17th century. The simple, well proportioned houses, of one or two storeys, are constructed with load-bearing masonry walls, rendered and painted in pastel colours, and roofs of stone slabs painted white. The local limestone is soft and easily worked, but porous and so needing to be rendered. Chimneys are common features, and remain popular in modern buildings. The sash windows are protected by wooden shutters or blinds.

The absence of rivers means that Bermuda has no supply of fresh surface water. As a result, the roofs of the houses are equipped with gutters that feed rainwater into underground water tanks. The roofs themselves are heavy, to provide strength and stability in a region where hurricanes are frequent.

The houses are built directly on the streets or lanes, and often have high boundary walls around the small yards or gardens. One characteristic feature is the flared "welcoming arms" steps, giving access to the upper storey. Some of the houses, such as Bridge House, the Hunter Building, or Whitehall, are impressive mansions, dating in their present form from the 19th century and embellished with imposing balconies and verandahs. There is also a number of warehouses with living accommodation above them, notably the Long House in Penno's Drive, from the late 18th century.

There are several churches, the most important of which is St Peter's Church, the oldest Anglican church site in continuous

use in the Western Hemisphere. It is a stone structure, built in 1713 to replace an earlier wooden building; a tower was added in 1815. The Ebenezer Methodist Church of 1840 is a fine building in Neo-Classical style.

The *related fortifications*, which are for the most part now either ruined or exist as no more than archaeological sites, are summarized in what follows, starting in the south and travelling anti-clockwise around the groups of islands at the eastern end of Bermuda.

There are three 17th century forts which make up the King's Castle surviving on *Castle Island*. The Seaward Fort is a masonry fort fronting the sea, built in 1612. The Captain's House, built in 1621, may be the oldest standing English house in the New World. The Devonshire Redoubt was built on high ground to the north of the island to protect the anchorage in Castle Harbour. The Landward Fort, from the 1650s, protects a narrow passage between the island and the mainland. All the forts are built in Bermuda limestone. There are many other vestiges of defensive features all over the island, which is a National Park.

Close by is the small *Southampton Island*, with a single fort built in 1621. It has a magazine cut into the bedrock. The island is a National Park and a National Nature Reserve.

The fortifications on *St David's Island* are situated at the eastern end. The tiny Fort Popple (1638) was cut into the bedrock, to defend the entrance to St George's Harbour. St David's Battery was the last major fort to be built in this area, in 1910. It is an indefensible concrete structure with its heavy guns still *in situ*.

Governor's Island formed the southern side of the original entrance to St George's Harbour, and it was here that Smith's Fort was constructed in 1613. The original stone structure was largely destroyed by a large parapet for four cannon built in the 1790s.

Opposite, on *Paget's Island*, are the archaeological remains of the first military work, Paget's Fort, built in 1612. The island is crowned by the massive works of Cunningham's Fort, built in the 1820s of hard Bermuda stone and surmounted by the massive iron facade built in the 1870s as protection for seven heavy cannon. Further modifications in the form of concrete gun emplacement were made in 1900 to accommodate new artillery pieces. Peniston's Redoubt (1614) was a small watchtower of 1614 which has not yet been excavated.

Gate's Fort is on the south-eastern tip of *St George's Island*. The earliest structure (not yet examined) of the 1620s was rebuilt in 1700 as a parapet for four guns, with a small blockhouse to the rear. A little further along the coast is the Alexandra Battery. It was originally built in the 1840s, but largely reconstructed in the 1870s. In its present form it dates to 1900, when it was again reconstructed as concrete emplacements for 6-inch guns. Part is now open to the public. Next along the coast comes Fort Albert, built in the 1830s and modified in the 1870s to house four heavy artillery pieces.

One of the most complicated forts in the group is Fort St Catherine, on the northern tip of St George's Island. It was founded in 1612, rebuilt in the early 1700s, and again in the 1790s, the 1840s, and the 1890s. It is still well preserved and is now a museum, located in a National Park. Fort Victoria is one of the few land forts at Bermuda. Built in the 1820s and

modified in the 1870s and 1890s to adapt to developments in artillery, most of it is relatively intact, though some of its quality has been lost as a result of its having been made available to an adjacent hotel.

The Town itself is defended by two forts, the Western Redoubt and Fort St George (on the western side). The latter is the older of the two, being on the site of a watchtower erected in 1615. It went through several stages of rebuilding and modification in the 1790s, 1820s, and 1870s. Much of the structure is intact. The keep houses the Bermuda Harbour Radio, continuing the tradition of a signal station at this point. The Western Redoubt in form is almost identical with Fort St George in its final phase. It was reconstructed so as to serve as an enormous gunpowder magazine.

At the other end of St George's Island is the group consisting of the Martello Tower, magazine, and lime-kiln built in the 1820s and identical in form to the many defensive structures of this kind to be found in the British Isles, notably along the south coast of England. Burns Point is a half-moon battery for five to seven guns built in the later 1600s and modified in the 1790s. It is one of the most complete military installations at Bermuda.

Just off the coast is the small fort on *Ferry Island*, the predecessor of the Martello Tower. The installations are completed with the lime-kiln on *Coney Island*, a fine and intact example, constructed by the military in the 1830s.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Having its own legislature and being a self-governing colony of the United Kingdom, Bermuda has enacted laws protecting historic and cultural properties throughout the islands. As early as 1950, the Bermuda legislature enacted legislation for the protection of buildings of "Special Interest" and in 1974 passed the Development and Planning Act, as revised, that called for the listing of buildings of "special architectural or historical interest," and for the appointment of "historic areas" in which controls were implemented for development. Since then the government has prepared a planning statement in 1992, that was approved by the legislature in 1994, outlining a comprehensive approach to the protection of the Historic Town of St George and other land areas of importance. Through this legislation there is effective jurisdictional control over the development of land areas affecting the proposed World Heritage site. Within this legislation was created an Historic Buildings Advisory Committee as an advisor to the Development Applications Board. The Board can refuse development that would adversely affect the "historic, architectural, or cultural character of the area." In addition, there is established a St George's Preservation Authority which is a consultant on all planning applications within the historic area under the jurisdiction of the St. George's Corporation.

Management

With these government mechanisms in place, guidelines are now being produced for use by local homeowners to upgrade and preserve their historic structures. With such guidelines standards are also needed as part of the site management. Standards set what changes to listed

buildings are permissible and are a means of maintaining the historical character and authentic appearance of buildings within the historic area. However, of great concern is the management of the fortification sites owned by the government. A Management Plan Committee is being established to formulate a plan and it is important that the plan should not only include standards and guidelines, but should also assign responsibility for the care and conservation of the various forts. At the present time there does not seem to be any single department, or organization that owns and has control over the use and maintenance of all the fortifications. Yet stabilization is needed to preserve the rare examples of early New World fortifications as well as those of the later centuries. Some of these forts are on islands not easily accessed and as such are not often visited. However, this is not a reason for allowing them to deteriorate.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Location also has had much to do with Bermuda's conservation of its past. Lying some 960km off the coast of North America, Bermuda is one of the more isolated islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Always a maritime and trading centre, it is now a centre for the tourism that has become one of Bermuda's major industries. Although always a stopping place for cruise ships during the early part of the 20th century, with the advent of aviation after World War II Bermuda became a tourist Mecca. Considering the impact that tourism has had during the last half of the century, Bermuda has maintained a control over growth that is commendable. As an example, the private automobile was introduced to the island in about 1950, and from the start has been limited to one car per household or living unit. Today only residents are allowed to drive on the island, thus reducing the number of cars supporting tourism. Similar restrictions have been applied to the purchase of property so that it is not easy for those outside Bermuda to develop land on the island.

It is this type of restriction that has helped to maintain and preserve the character of buildings that is distinct to Bermuda. Different from other European founded cities of the New World, St George has maintained the individually separated house for habitations, so typical of the English settlements in North America. Because of the nature of the soft limestone that continues to be used for construction, walls, including roofs, are coated with the traditional stucco and whitewashed. Buildings rarely exceed two storeys and many are only one storey in height. Since sources of water are scarce on the island, water was collected into cisterns through gutters and other conduits. These systems are still in use in Saint George providing the major source of water for the town.

Being on an island, Saint George is located on the water in a protected harbour. Today many of the warehouses remain, some having been converted into shops or other supporting elements of tourism. In-fill buildings have kept the scale of the town, being limited to one or two storeys in height. Even with the in-fill, about 60% of the buildings in the waterfront area were built prior to 1900. In the number of old buildings retained, St George is comparable to

Quebec City, in which 45% of its buildings are prior to 1850.

The forts that are included in the nomination cover a broad range of periods and conservation. Those on the uninhabited islands are, for the most part, in ruins and have been that way for this century and most of the last. The more accessible forts, such as Fort St Catherine or Fort Alexandra, appear to have had recent maintenance but others are in need of considerable work if the structures and remaining guns are to be preserved. Of concern is Fort Cunningham on Paget Island, unique in the Americas with its iron-armoured walls, now needing much conservation work. In addition, after archaeology has been done at fort sites, funds need to be provided for backfill and vegetation control. Obviously, a greater effort on the part of the government is needed if this fine collection of forts is to be preserved.

Authenticity

The Historic Town of St George is picturesque, typifying what is characteristic of Bermuda. Today about 65% of the buildings in the town date from before 1900. Of these early structures, about 40% were built prior to 1800. Many of the significant buildings fall into this last category. As the oldest English city, or town, in North America (1612), St George is followed closely by Boston (1630) and preceded by French Québec City (1608), Spanish Santa Fe (1598) and Saint Augustine (1565). In comparison, St George is one of the few founding cities of a colony that has remained small, containing a high percentage of its early structures, while maintaining a continuity in its character.

Of the forts on the isolated islands, Southampton Fort dating from 1621 stands, for the most part, unaltered, though a ruin. There are few remains of any New World masonry fortification dating from this period that are as complete and as intact. By comparison, the Castillo de la Real Fuerza in Havana dates from 1558, but has had much done to it over the years. In the 19th century the British built new fortifications on the earlier French works at Québec, and in San Juan, Havana, and elsewhere, much of the early Spanish construction lies buried within later work. In comparable condition on Castle Island are the impressive remains of King's Castle and the Devonshire Redoubt, built by 1621. Much of the early masonry construction of these forts remains, with only additional 18th century batteries added near by.

With the exception of the Landward Fort on Castle Island, dating from the later part of the 17th century, and the 1612 archaeological remains of Paget Fort, the other forts in the nomination are mostly 19th century and many are accessible to the public. Of these, the major attraction is Fort St Catherine, now operated as a museum. Though not individually unique, seen as a group these forts constitute the best collection of British coastal fortifications spanning the three centuries from settlement to the early 20th century to be found outside Britain. However, to be truly representative of this category the remaining fortifications on the islands would need to be added, especially the major fort at the Dockyard. In addition, the integrity of Fort Victoria has been compromised by its conversion to a hotel recreation facility so that it no longer retains the authenticity necessary for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the town of St. George and most of the related fortifications in January 2000.

Qualities

The Historic Town of St. George is of outstanding cultural value as an authentic and earliest example of an English colonial town in the New World. Some of the associated forts are also of high value as authentic examples of the first defensive works built by these early European colonists, few examples of which now remain intact.

Comparative analysis

St George is comparable with other World Heritage cities in age and integrity. It is the oldest English town in the New World and has remained a small community throughout its history, now only containing about 2500 inhabitants. Of the fortifications, few examples exist of the earliest forts of a settlement, most having been incorporated into or buried within later work. Several of the forts associated with the Town of St George are unique as surviving examples of this category. The later associated forts represent an excellent example of a continuum of British coastal fortifications.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS mission found the town to be of high integrity and authenticity, as were some of the fortifications, especially those built early in the 17th century. However, concern was expressed for the management of the government-owned fortifications and the need for a definitive Management Plan, delineating responsibility for the maintenance of these sites.

There are two situations for which technical assistance should be sought. First is for developing procedures to care for the fortifications and their cannon; this relates to the conservation of various materials. The second is for the training of crafts people to provide the needed elements and materials to maintain the integrity of the listed buildings as well as for identifying sources for other manufactured items to be used on these historic structures.

In addition, to make the continuum of fortifications in Bermuda complete if the nomination is inscribed, consideration should be given at a future date to adding the remaining fortifications to the list, especially the Dockyard.

At the June 2000 meeting of the Bureau this nomination was referred back to the State Party, requesting a management plan that reflected responsibility for the care and maintenance of the government-owned properties in the nomination, detailing a conservation programme as to how this responsibility will be carried out and funded, and including standards for the retention of features that define the historic character of the town and related fortifications.

The draft management plan has been prepared and submitted to ICOMOS, which has studied it and finds that it meets all the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. It still awaits ratification by the Bermuda Government.

Brief description

The Town of St George is an outstanding example of the earliest English urban settlement in the New World. Its associated fortifications graphically illustrate the development of English military engineering from the 17th to the 20th century, being adapted to take account of the development of artillery over this period.

Recommendation

In the event that the State Party can provide assurances that the draft management plan will be approved and implemented by the Bermuda Government, ICOMOS recommends that the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iv and vi*:

Criterion iv The Historic Town of St George with its related fortifications is an outstanding example of a continuously occupied, fortified, colonial town dating from the early 17th century and the oldest English town in the New World.

Criterion vi St George represents the beginning of the English colonization of the New World, a step in the European settlement of North America that has resulted in developments of outstanding universal significance.

ICOMOS, September 2000