

The Historic Town of St George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda (C943) Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Date of inscription: 2000

Criterion: iv

Date of draft SOUV: 2012

Brief Synthesis

The Town of St. George is of outstanding cultural value as an authentic and earliest example of the English colonial town 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. Some of these are unique as surviving examples of the first defensive works built by early European colonists, few examples of which now remain intact. The later associated forts represent an excellent example of a continuum of British coastal fortifications.

The permanent settlement of St. George began in August 1612. The inscribed area consists of the Town of St. George on St. George Island as well as fortifications on the Island and on a number of small islands commanding access to the Town and to the anchorage of Castle Harbour, at the eastern end of the Bermuda Islands in the North Atlantic. The layout of the Town is one that has grown organically over nearly four centuries. At its heart is King's Square (or Market Square), adjacent to the harbour, and providing the link between the harbour and the two main east–west roads that connect the Town with the rest of Bermuda: Water Street, giving access to the quays, and York Street to the north, the main street of the Town. The streets to the north provide a network of what began as narrow, winding lanes and alleys. The architecture of Bermuda is unique, and has changed little in its basic elements since the end of the 17th century.

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 and a garrison chapel 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 New World naval base. The existing fortifications were radically redesigned and rebuilt 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.

Criterion

Criterion (iv):

Be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technical ensemble of landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history

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.

Integrity (2012)

The inscribed property contains all the elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value and is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features which convey its significance. ICOMOS noted that to make the continuum of fortifications in Bermuda complete, consideration should be given at a future date to adding the remaining fortifications to the list, especially the major fort at the Dockyard. At the time of inscription, ICOMOS considered the town to be of high integrity but noted that work was needed on the maintenance of some of the forts.

The care and conservation of the forts is currently undertaken by the Government Parks Department and the Department of Conservation Services, which includes the enhancement and upgrading of a number of fortifications located within the WHS. Forts which have recently undergone restorative works include the Martello Tower in Ferry Reach, St David's Battery, Fort George, Alexandra Battery, and Fort St. Catherine as well as Fort Scaur (located outside of the Heritage site). These works range from structural repairs, interpretive signage, development of exhibits, the restoration of cannons, culling of invasive vegetation, graffiti removal and general site improvements. Additional maintenance measures involve the review of fortifications after every major storm event to ensure the structural integrity of the forts remain intact.

Authenticity (2012)

The ICOMOS mission found the town to be of high authenticity, as were some of the fortifications, especially those built early in the 17th century.

The Historic Town of St George is picturesque and distinct, typifying what is characteristic of Bermuda both in form and design and in its materials and substance. 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. 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, retaining its use and function to the present day.

Of the forts on the isolated islands, Southampton Fort dating from 1621, stands for the most part, unaltered, though a ruin. 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 nearby. 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. It will be important to ensure that further forts are not adapted for re-use in ways which damage their authenticity as has happened at Fort Victoria through its conversion to a hotel recreation facility.

Protection and Management Requirements (2012)

As 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. There are currently 176 listed buildings in the inscribed area.

In June 2008 the Draft Bermuda Plan 2008 replaced the previous development plan for the Island, the Bermuda Plan 1992. The Draft Bermuda Plan 2008 greatly expanded the policies relating to the Island’s historic environment. The Bermuda Plan 2008 was given final approval by the Legislature in June 2010. Historic Protection Areas were added to four sites within the World Heritage Site: St. David's Battery, Paget Fort, Smith's Fort and Fort Cunningham, to ensure that all parts of the WHS were protected. In addition, policies relating to listed buildings, archaeological sites and the World Heritage Site were added to the Bermuda Plan 2008 Planning Statement, which also included design policies specific to the Town of St. George and the World Heritage Site Buffer Zone (WHSBZ). To coincide with the publication of the Bermuda Plan 2008, planning policy guidance notes were also prepared including guidance notes on the submission of Archaeological Assessments, Alterations or Additions to Listed Buildings and/or buildings located within Historic Areas and Development in the Town of St. George.

The Development and Planning Act 1974 and the Bermuda Plan 2008 therefore provide effective control over the development of land and buildings within the World Heritage Site. The Development Applications Board makes decisions on planning applications and is advised by the Historic Buildings Advisory Committee. The Development Applications Board must be satisfied that any development proposal located within the WHS or the WHS buffer zone will not adversely impact the WHS. In addition, the St. George’s Preservation Authority is consulted on all planning applications within the historic area under the jurisdiction of the St. George’s Corporation including any property located in the WHS or the WHS Buffer Zone.

In 2010, the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986 was amended to include additional national parks and to offer more protection to the historic terrestrial environment by regulating activities, such as metal detecting and treasure seeking within historically designated areas.

Management

The property has a Management Plan, agreed in 2000, which provides the framework for managing change in a way that preserves and enhances the integrity of the World Heritage Site. The Plan has been divided into nine specific task areas which range from managing the forts, town, traffic, and preservation and enhancement. Each task has a set of objectives which provides a broad work plan for each relevant stakeholder where proposed actions are outlined.

Since designation the Government has made it a priority to conserve and promote the historic fortifications within the World Heritage Site. A strategic management plan with conservation management guidelines for the forts and historically significant sites within the National Park System has been developed. This plan includes all of the main fortifications within the WHS, with the exception of Fort Albert, William and Victoria, which is under lease. Developed in two parts the First section of Management Plan sets out the vision, management, guidelines and priorities for restoration. The second part sets out guidelines for treatment and maintenance procedures for historic sites.

Additionally management plans are prepared for significant fortifications to provide detailed guidance and direction. As examples a comprehensive design brief was completed for the restoration of the Martello Tower and a phased management plan for Fort St Catherine was developed in 2009. These were followed by major restorations carried out between 2008-10 which included restoration of Seawalls, roof and window restorations, the restoration of the artillery collection, new exhibits including the Carronade Room, Artillery Exhibit, Magazine Exhibits and Victorian Soldier Room. Management Plans are currently being developed for Castle Island, Southampton Island as vulnerable to storm damage and invasive plant species.

In order to oversee and effectively manage the World Heritage Site and related fortifications, the World Heritage Site Committee was formed in 2000 which is made up of a selection of technical officers from various Governmental departments and representatives from the Corporation of St. George's, the Bermuda National Trust, the St. George's Foundation and other such relevant organizations. During its monthly meetings, the WHS Committee reviews a standard order of business and addresses various matters. Given the multitude of stakeholders that are involved, the Bermuda Government appointed a Heritage Officer in 2005 to provide the necessary coordination. Further, this officer is mandated to ensure that the Management Plan is implemented and specific projects are on track.