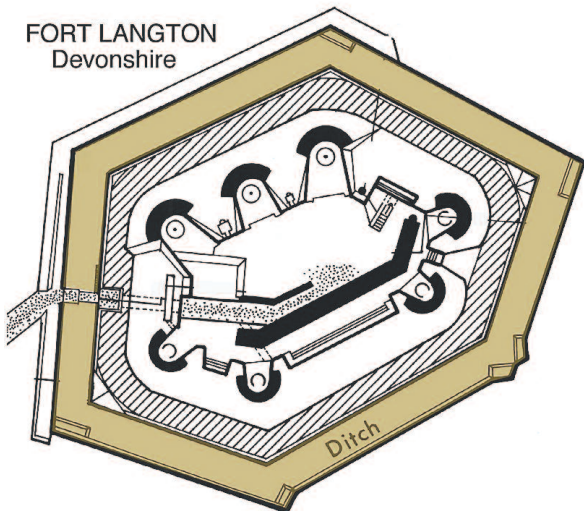


WEEKENDER

FORT LANGTON
Devonshire



Fort Langton of the Jerovis period of the 1870s was unfortunately demolished in the early 1980s.

A plan and photo of Scaur Hill fort of the 1870s; its ditch cut Somerset Island in two.

A Bastion in the “Ramparts of Empire”

A few evenings ago, some 60 Bermudians took a tour of the Casemate Barracks as a part of the 2012 ‘Historical Heartbeats’ programme of the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, organised by Folklife Officer, Dr. Kim Dismont Robinson.

Leaving the Casemates area and traversing the ‘Northwest Rampart’ to the ‘Keep’, the largest fort in Bermuda and the headquarters of the National Museum, no one became hysterical at being on the heights of the Rampart; indeed most seemed high after the tour of the wonderful three buildings that compose the Casemate Barracks complex, now part of the Museum.

The interest generated by the tour and the hike along the high rampart overlooking the Dockyard to the east was intensified by the ecstatic viewing of the new exhibit ‘Shipwreck Island’ in the great Queen’s Exhibition Hall in the Keppoyard, if one may so describe the reaction to the new displays by many members of the tour, whose hearts might be said to have been beating overtime at the sight of such wonderful shipwreck heritage so beautifully exhibited in one of Bermuda’s most magnificent legacy buildings.

If you love this island, your heart should beat faster when considering any aspect of our heritage that has survived into present times: this Bermuda is an extraordinary place and the heritage we still have despite the looters and destroyers of the Past is worth a fortune for our own sense of place and well-being, as well as being the assets of what should be primarily a Cultural Heritage Tourism Economy, would but people of power and influence understand. Getting off that high, it is back to man the ramparts against the enemies of heritage, by land, sea or air.

‘Ramparts’, of course, have been with mankind, almost from time immemorial, and take many forms from African corals for livestock, made from thorny acacia and other nasty bushes, to the vast bulwarks of the European fortifications of Vauban, the

“ That evening [2 November 1863], Jerovis had dinner at the British Legation where he met a Captain Wyse, US Navy, who brought up the subject of Bermuda and told him, “Colonel, we must have that place some day. —Timothy Crick, *Ramparts of Empire*, 2012. ”



The iron-fronted Fort Cunningham, modified in the 1870s on the original 1820s base.

great German works of the ‘Atlantic Wall’, or the imaginary line of ramparts presented by a ‘missile shield’. Once people took up a more settled existence and had material things that could be stolen, ramparts took their place on the human horizon, exemplified in the epic tale of Troy or the supposedly impenetrable Maginot Line in France of the Second World War.

In a wider sense, the defence of British Dominions of the second half of the nineteenth century have been laid out for us in a new book by

Dr. Timothy Crick, entitled “Ramparts of Empire: the fortifications of Sir William Jerovis Royal Engineer, 1821–1897”. As THE bastion of that global rampart in the North Atlantic, Bermuda figures prominently in the volume, which contains one error still repeated by many here who hopefully will now know better. The author should have a crick in his neck for parts of the following statement.

“The construction of fortifications in Bermuda in the years following 1867 typifies the problems of working in a remote

colony. Compared to the conditions enjoyed by fort builders at Halifax or Gibraltar, Bermuda was a hell on earth. Every piece of “hard stone” had to be imported either from the United Kingdom or Canada as the local limestone was too soft for military purposes.”

Getting up at dawn to rid the crick in my neck, resting in the wrong position worrying that those statements would be taken as gospel truth here and elsewhere in the Empire, I repeat what I told the Historical Heartbeats tour. The Bermuda Dock-

yard and many aspects of the fortifications of the island are built of the ‘hard stone’, or ‘limestone’ as we call it, found in amounts that could be quarried only on the Dockyard lands. There was NO limestone sent to Bermuda from Britain, Canada or any outpost of the Empire. Years ago, I sent samples of this stone to the Geological Museum in London for identification, only to be asked why I was “sending coals to Newcastle”, as the stone could not be matched to any United Kingdom source, but was identical to Bermuda rocks they al-

ready had in their collections: another crick in my neck, I can tell you. Furthermore, the new forts built upon the recommendations of Colonel Jerovis, RE, were largely works of concrete and soft Bermuda stone. Those forts were Alexandra, Langton, Prospect, Hamilton, Whale Bay and Scaur Hill; others modified in the 1860-70s were Catherine, Victoria, Albert, George, Cunningham and the defences of the Dockyard.

None of these remarks detract from Dr. Crick’s superb volume; “Ramparts of Empire” should be in the library of every Bermuda resident who is fascinated by the 90-odd works of defence that were erected here between 1612 and 1945. Until the unfortunate revolt on the East Coast of America, those forts formed our ramparts primarily against the Spanish; after the revolution, they served indeed as part of the global rampart for the protection of British interests around the world, from Bermuda in the West to Singapore and Hong Kong in the East.

As yet, the wishes of the wise Captain Wyse has yet to be fulfilled, although we were ‘invaded’ in 1941 by the American Forces, who ‘occupied’ Bermuda for 54 years until the closure of their bases in 1995, pursuant to the end of the Cold War. It was apparently they, not the British, who rubbed salt into their mortars and concrete, wounding it as regards future preservation, though I am not certain that that admixture of non-fresh water matters in mortars, except as regards the presence of iron reinforcing bars.

In an enlightened age, Bermuda’s historic fortifications should be used to defend the ‘Ramparts of Tourism’. Perhaps one sees a bit of dawn in the new National Tourism Plan for Bermuda, though one has no intentions of disarming the defences of the Dockyard.

Eduard Cecil Harris, MBE, JP, PH.D, FSA is Executive Director of the National Museum at Dockyard. Comments may be made to director@bmm.bm or 704-5480.



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