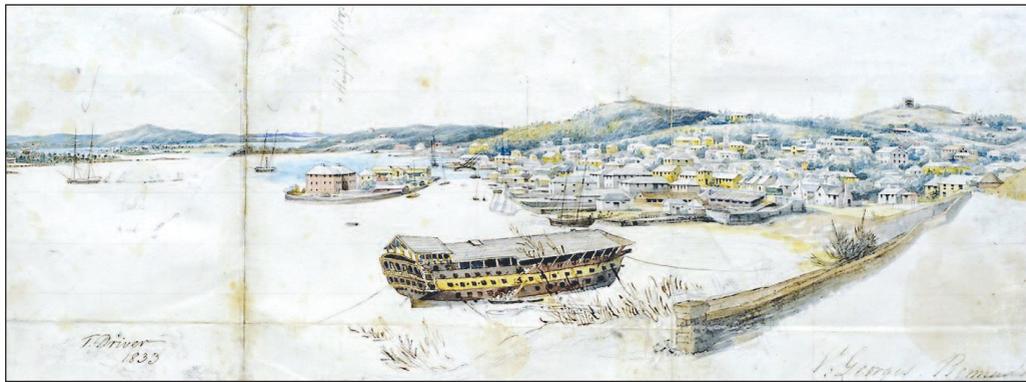


WEEKENDER

HERITAGE & TOURISM St George's



Fay and Geoffrey Elliott Collection, Bermuda Archives
Bermuda's first town: The Town of St George, as captured by artist Thomas Driver in 1833

In the beginning ... was St George's

In the beginning there was the Word...and the Word was God, or so it is written in 'The Gospel according to John', in the King James version of the Holy Bible, first published in 1611, when there was no thought of the beginning of the first town in Bermuda. That English text has been described as 'the most influential version of the world, in what is now its most influential language', but in 1611, the 'Three Kings' of Bermuda, Christopher Carter, Edward Waters and Edward Chard felt not its influence, lolling about as the unemployed monarchs of the second most isolated place on Earth, having been left behind perhaps to hold the island against a Spanish takeover, when Matthew Somers beat his way back to England in the Deliverance early in 1611 to deliver his uncle's body for burial at Lyme Regis. Of course, 1611 was otherwise a good year for propaganda about Bermuda, as the venerable bard, W. S., wrote 'The last play, The Tempest, about the travails and deliverances of the 150 souls wrecked at Bermuda on the *Sea Venture* in July 1609.

When it comes to the beginnings of Bermuda, we can present the following chronology, culminating in the beginning of the Town of St. George, originally referred to by some as 'New London'. It is not certain exactly when the saint assumed the appellation over the secular, but by



HERITAGE MATTERS

DR EDWARD HARRIS

Tourism is Bermuda's second largest industry...The island attracts tourists through advertisements, word-of-mouth, and creating an environment that suits both citizens and visitors.' — **Ashley Bento**, Berkeley Institute, The Bermuda Sun, 2 March 2012

I could go on and on about the small things that make my country distinctively peculiar... Bermuda is extremely unique. Bermuda is the oldest British colony, has the oldest church in the Western Hemisphere, has the third oldest continuously run parliament in the world and boasts the town of St George - the first continuously inhabited English town in the New World. — **Ryan Robinson**, Berkeley Institute, The Bermuda Sun, 2 March 2012

the time that Governor Butler (1619-22) wrote his history, about 1623, St. George's it was, and so remains. For some the first stage in the chronology, in time without memory, was God. That period was followed some many millions of years when a 'hot spot' hole opened in the

crust of the Earth, under the sea possibly near where the Atlantic Ridge of volcanic mountains bubbles to this day. Over millions of years, that furnace spewed out blobs of basalt and other geological materials, until Mount Bermuda was formed, topping out at around 15,000 feet, or three miles from the ocean floor, when the hot spot ceased its creative process (Thank the Lord, for a blown-up Montserrat we are grateful not to be).

On the plateau, or mesa, of the mountain, the northernmost corals established their residency and along with the fish of the surrounding sea qualify as the first Bermudians. Over time, ground-up corals formed beaches and a hinterland of sand dunes, which later consolidated through the action of rainwater to make the limestone that was vital to the creation of the island's unique vernacular architecture, a heritage peculiarity of our first town. On the dry land of the eastern side of Mount Bermuda, stretching from St. George's to 'God's Country' in the west at Sandys Parish, and from Great Turtle Bay to North Rock, with a few lagoons between, avian occupants invaded and settled, along with the seeds of what would become the first Bermuda plant life that evolved into our endemic species, such as the Cedar, palmetto and the wee but beautiful Bermudians.

For some million years, these first Bermudians lived in harmony, until death, pestilence, plagues and some extinctions were visited upon the place, a few years after Native Americans discovered Columbus on a beach in The Bahamas, a few months out of Europe, bent on finding a way to the Indies. The endemic Cahows, much to their considerable and almost immediate loss, discovered Juan de Bermudez, on his way home in the autumn of 1505. Swine, sent ashore by later passing ships accounted in short order in the extinction of those ground-nesting birds on the Main Island and in 1609, the team from the Sea Venture clubbed their way through the species for some Peking duck dinners, here and in Jamestown:



St. George's (World Heritage Site) from a helicopter a few years ago.



Landmark: The St George Hotel, once an icon of Bermuda tourism, now but a distant memory and historic postcard memento.

was that 'The Way of the Lord?' you might well ask.

The crescendo of the contact between the first Bermudians and humans came on 11 July 1612, 400 years ago, when the Plough entered the eastern harbour and established the Town of St. George, or possessively, St. George's, without the town prefix. That event was a disaster for natural heritage but proved to be a positive first for cultural heritage in Bermuda.

It may thus be said that tourism began in earnest that summer day at St. George's, although there had been some shipwrecked visitors in the previous century, but they came and went and no archaeological evidence of their sojourn ashore has ever been found, though Bermuda's shipwreck heritage numbers in the hundreds of sites.

For a number of decades, St. George's was most a village of timbered houses, thatched with palmetto, with the exception of Warwick Castle overlooking the town and the State House of 1621. As the 1600s progressed towards the demise of the Bermuda Company in 1684, houses of stone began to appear and the town slowly developed in the next two centuries, along narrow lanes radiating out from the Town Square on the harbour.

The collection of historic homes, shops and official buildings, plus the oldest Anglican Church in the Americas, eventually formed a corpus of architecture wonders that were deemed by UNESCO in the year 2000 to be 'World Heritage', along with all of the fortifications of St. George's Parish.

We cannot gauge what Bermuda's first tourists were like, but we refer to modern ones from UNESCO's Site Manager's Handbook' for World Heritage Sites, which notes that "Cultural tourists", or niche travelers themselves are a particular kind of people.

They tend to be environmentally conscious, politically opinionated and appreciative of cultural differences. They probably travel frequently, are highly educated and bring a sharp intellectual and friendly energy to their encounters with foreigners ...

They also aren't reluctant to spend money as long as they get value in return. They are refined customers with a love of excellence, a taste for the authentic, and they do not tolerate mediocrity.

Tourism began at our urban World Heritage site, but over recent decades, 'Ye Olde Towne' has declined, while millions have

been spent on other types of sites, some for the enjoyment of a select society (mostly male) that loves to chase little white balls about green Elysium fields. Now don't put me wrong, some of my best friends are iron- and wedge-persons, but fair is fair and more investment is needed in St. George's, which should be able to attract more refined spenders than all of our 'golf heritage sites' combined.

Cultural heritage is no different than any other business and its assets needs re-tooling, re-inventing, reinvestment and continual restoration and renewal. It is hoped that the enduring economic value of a World Heritage Site like St. George's will figure high in a national tourism plan and that the beleaguered town, now in its 400th year, will be revitalized so that it can take its rightful position in Bermuda's tourism agenda for the next four hundred years, as being of some of the first and finest cultural heritage in this hemisphere, to paraphrase one of the student above.

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Water Street in the old town, about 1900, looking towards the present Post Office on the right centre.



On a lane in St George's, around 1900, a lady carries a plate of food and sports a great hat.