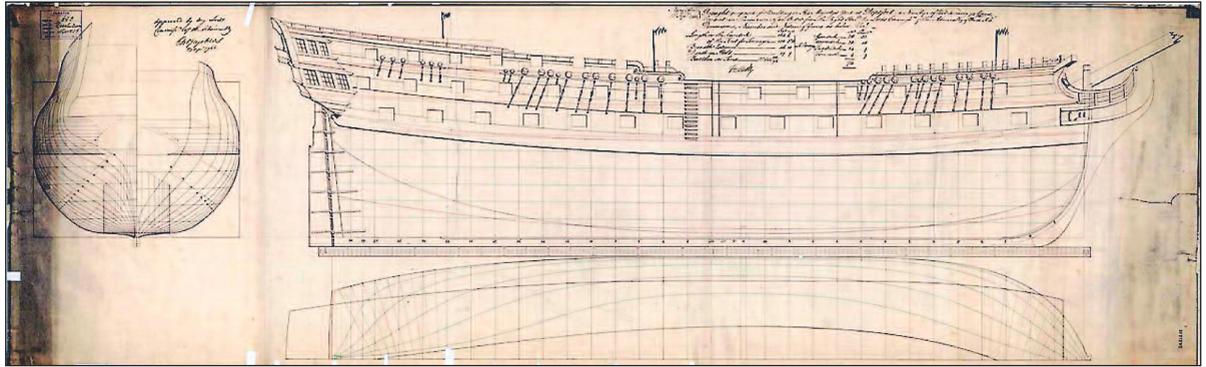


WEEKENDER



By design: HMS Resolution, which Pilot James Darrell brought through the reefs in 1795.

Dr Edward Harris
Heritage Matters

For a decade or so in my wayward youth, the family of "Sewing Machine" Harris lived on Point Finger Road, formerly the more illustrious Springfield Avenue, perhaps one of the first modern subdivision developments in Bermuda. Our old home is now a medical practice, a fate it shares with most houses on that Paget street. Yet the old Pitman Farm, upon the open lands of which and within its cherry and loquat forests we spend much time, has survived, though hemmed in by more recent residential and medical developments.

A couple of doors west of us (where St John Ambulance now is) stood the home of the Godsiffs, brothers Horace and Vincent, who contributed some early photographic albums to the National Museum. One or both worked at Trimmingham's and in pre-BMW days walked to the job each day, which may have contributed to their longevity and peace of mind, although heaven only knows what they would make of the non-Bermudianisation of their street and to whom they would point a finger for its decline in architectural heritage and beauty.

Some of the Godsiff photographs, taken in the last years of Queen Victoria's reign, are of importance as they show the scene around the Dockyard Gate, before much was demolished in order to extend the Dockyard southward to accommodate a larger floating dock and newer warships. The street that formed the boundary of the family's then front yard was "Pender Road", named for one of the earliest officers of the Royal Navy to have an influence upon Bermuda in the decade or so following the independence of a few minor colonies on the continent to the west of the island. Pending further research, we will attempt to give you a little snapshot into the life and times of Bermuda in Captain Francis Pender's day.

The good Captain was dispatched to Bermuda by Vice-Admiral the Hon George Murray and arrived on August 11, 1795, "as a passenger on HMS *Oiseau*" (formerly *Cleopatre*, a Venus class French frigate), his central task being to acquire some of the fast sloops of the island for service in the Royal Navy. Most of the rest of his encounter with the Island and its inhabitants was to oversee pending orders to build such Bermudian vessels, which were renowned for their speed and agility, especially sailing "close to the wind".

Several weeks later, Admiral Murray appeared at Bermuda on HMS *Resolution*, the vessel that Pilot James

ORDERS PENDING

How Bermuda's speedy sloops joined the Royal Navy

The Bermuda-built HMS *Driver* "is the finest Sloop of War I ever saw" - Vice-Admiral George Vandeput, RN, Halifax, 1 November, 1797

Darrell (1749-1815) brought through the reefs into "Murray's Anchorage", for which feat the Royal Navy purchased his freedom and appointed him one of the first of the Island's "King's Pilots". Captain Pender was able to report that he had purchased a local sloop, which he called HMS *Bermuda*, appropriately, which was put under the command of Lt Thomas Hurd, then engaged on a survey of the Bermuda reefs, looking for a channel to allow Royal Navy warships to enter the inner anchorage of the island. That acquisition was followed by that of the *Sir Charles Grey*, a successful privateer, which was renamed HMS *Spencer*.

Contracts for two sloops were given to Claude McCallan and John Outerbridge of Bailey's Bay and to Nathaniel Tynes Sr, whose shipyard was apparently

on the north shore of Devonshire Parish. Those yards produced HMS *Rover* and HMS *Hunter*, to be classed as 16-gun sloops and "supposed to be the swiftest sailers ever built in Bermuda". Pender then ordered two more such vessels, which were launched in 1797 and 1798 as HMS *Driver* and HMS *Dasher*, out of the same shipyards. The latter sloop "is one of those which has been built entirely of Bermuda Cedar ... and it is supposed she will out sail every sloop of war on the North America and West Indies Station of the Royal Navy, of which Bermuda was the centre."

During his period in Bermuda, Pender was the Flag Captain of HMS *Resolution* (1794-96) and thus would have been involved in the freedom of Pilot Darrell and in working with him as a pilot. He later progressed as Rear-Admiral through the Blue, White and Red Squadrons, becoming a Vice-Admiral of the White in his last years.

His Bermuda purchases acquitted themselves well, although several were lost early on. HMS *Driver* remained on the North America and West Indies Station until 1808 and thereafter disappears from the record, pending new archival discoveries. Of that vessel, the late historian and one of the founders of



Pilot James Darrell's house in the historic Town of St George's.

the National Museum, Dr JC (Jack) Arnell, would comment: "Her Bermudian builders could be proud of her performance during the decade that she cruised between Halifax and New Providence, with calls at Bermuda, in search of the French privateers."

While Pender's were the first, Bermudians built some 50 vessels for service in the Royal Navy in the three decades or so after 1795, with great positive effect on the local economy. It is hard to imagine now, given the silence of Bermuda's north coast, how the shores and bays must have rung with the sound of hammer, saw and adze, to say nothing of the aroma of cedar that must pervaded the place, as we produced the fastest vessels afloat for the largest navy in the world.

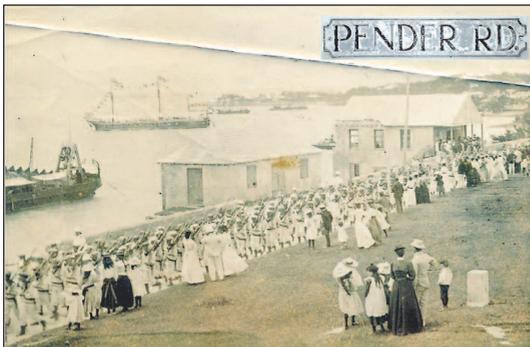
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Portrait of Vice-Admiral Francis Pender, RN.



A commemorative plaque honouring Pilot James Darrell's feat with HMS *Resolution*.



Godsiff photo of Pender Road on Queen's Birthday, 24 May 1900.



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