



THE BERMUDA NATIONAL TRUST

To protect and promote Bermuda's unique natural and cultural heritage forever.

SKITTLE ALLEY, DOCKYARD



BUILT HERITAGE | MARCH 2021

By Linda Abend and Margie Lloyd, the Bermuda National Trust

This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Skittle Alley is a Grade 2 Listed Building yet very few of us know of its existence. It is located on a small island and is connected to the mainland by a footbridge leading from the former residence of the Captain-in-Charge, the most senior officer at the Dockyard. The captain's residence, known as The Cottage, was built in 1827 for the Naval Storekeeper who in 1837 became the Dockyard Superintendent. When Joseph Balingall retired in 1857 this post was abolished and Captain Frederick Hutton became the first Captain-in-Charge of HM Dockyard.

Skittle Alley was built as the bowling alley for Captain John Moresby RN who arrived in April 1878. It was during Moresby's tenure that the Sailors' Home, now demolished, was built. It too would boast of a bowling alley. Although Captain Moresby spent only three years in Bermuda, that he was highly respected is clear from the fact that his name survives to this day with Moresby House, built in 1899 for the Officer-in-Charge of Works, and Moresby Plain, the naval recreation and parade ground, today used by the public for large events.

So, why Skittle Alley? Skittles was a game from which bowling originated played with wooden targets or skittles, typically nine in number, set up at the end of an alley to be bowled down by a wooden ball. It was popular in Britain and would have appealed to Captain Moresby who was a keen sportsman.



Unfortunately the condition of Skittle Alley is now very poor. It has not been used since April 1995 when HMS Malabar closed and the last Commanding Officer, Robin Bawtree, departed and has been attacked by invasive plants. Roger Sherratt was fortunate to have been one of the last to play a game of skittles and to write his name on the wall alongside others. According to Mr Sherratt: "It had an old wooden floor with grooves from extended use, much worn small wooden bowls and wooden skittles. It had been used so often that the grooves guided your bowl in the right direction. The interior walls were white-washed and VIPs including members of the Royal Family had signed their name on the walls. The alley itself was maybe 30 feet in length and the wooden balls were much smaller than regular ten-pin bowls." Many Bermudians who were in official positions at the time will remember dinner parties at the Cottage followed by entertaining games of skittles in the alley.

The little bridge that connected it to the mainland has since fallen into serious disrepair. The current Cottage was built in 1937 replacing the 1827 building on the site. Since 2013 it has been the Nelson Bascome Centre for Substance Abuse Treatment. Restoration of the Skittle Alley building would be an ideal project for residents of the Centre if once a small amount of funds was made available to repair the bridge and once restored the building could take on a new life and give a great deal of pleasure and useful therapy to the residents of the Centre.



Sources: Bermuda Growth of a Naval Base, William Brockman RN edited by William R Cooke; The Andrew and the Onions, Ian Stranack; articles on Captain Moresby in The Royal Gazette; and many thanks to Roger Sherratt.

