

Protecting Bermuda's Built Heritage

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Bermuda's architecture is often referred to as the Island's only indigenous art form. Having evolved over hundreds of years, the architecture's style and history can only be compared to architectural icons around the world such as the Opera House in Sydney, the Empire State Building in New York, Big Ben in London and the Taj Mahal in India.

Some may question this statement, since there is no one building that particularly stands out on the international scene as representative of Bermuda. However, as a collective, most people around the world can clearly identify Bermuda's uniqueness when shown an image of pastel coloured buildings with white roofs set in lush, subtropical vegetation.

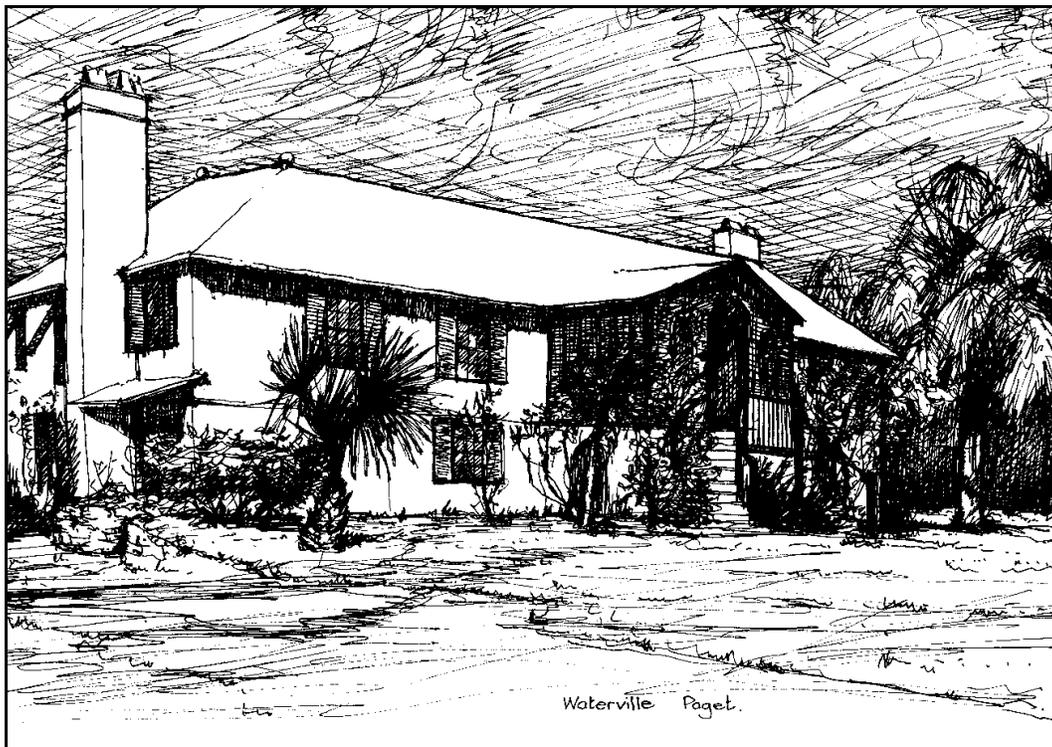


Such instant recognition and identification of our Island by foreigners is something Bermudians should be proud of. It means that many people have somehow taken the time, either consciously or subconsciously, to register an image and store it in their memory. It also means that Bermuda's architecture, its landscape, its location, its people, and its history are not mundane, ordinary or typical as some would have us believe because typical and mundane things are easily forgotten!

Past surveys undertaken by the Department of Planning have shown that visitors place a high value on the contribution that traditional architecture makes to their enjoyment of the Island. What is surprising is that these same surveys show that Bermudians also place a high value on the contribution that traditional architecture makes to the Island. This is clearly an important factor in retaining Bermuda's distinctiveness and attractiveness, first and foremost, as a place to live and second, as a place to visit.

In an effort to actively protect the Island's built heritage, the Minister of the Environment decided in 1991 to begin to compile a list of buildings of special architectural or historical interest that would identify and protect the best examples. The purpose of the list was to place a 'mark' against important buildings to ensure that their special architectural or historical interest would be taken fully into account in decisions affecting their future. This was a bold move for the Ministry at that time, since the legislation giving it power to do so had been on the books since 1974 but rarely been used.

By 2002, after years of extensive surveys, research, consultation and negotiation, the Minister decided to list nearly 800 buildings spanning the length of the Island. These wonderful buildings, standing testaments to the Island's varied and colourful past, ranged in size, style, age and condition, from very small vernacular wooden and stone cottages to larger, more refined, Georgian and Victorian mansions in the Bermudian context. There are currently 785 Listed Buildings spread across Bermuda's 21 square miles allocated to 4 categories. 122 of these are designated as Grade 1; 244 as Grade 2; 370 as Grade 3; and 49 as Grade HM (Historic Monuments).

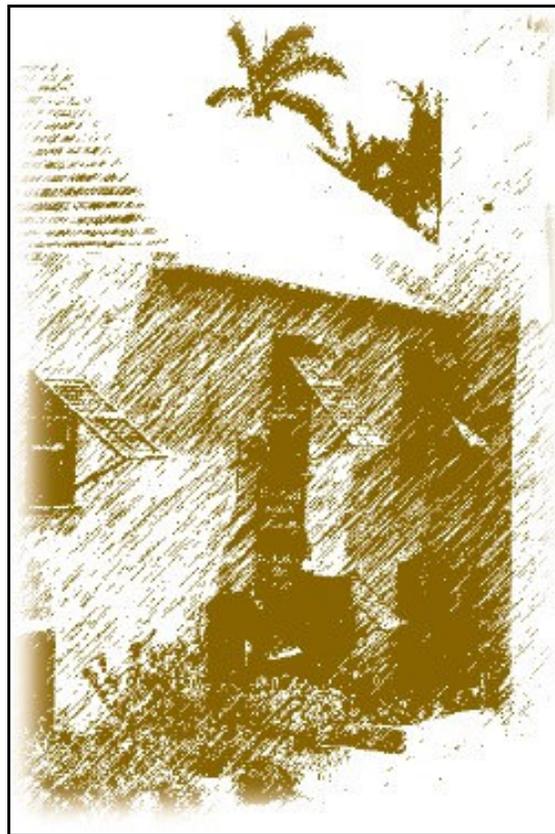


Grade 1 buildings, such as *Waterville*, *The Lane*, *Paget* have survived in essentially their original condition and are of such **exceptional** interest and architectural or historical value that they should largely be preserved in their present form. Minor alterations or additions should normally be carried out in the same materials and in the same structural and decorative style as the original.

Grade 2 buildings, include examples like *Denbigh, Paget* and are buildings that have survived in such condition and are of such **special** interest and architectural or historical value that alterations and additions should be limited to works that do not impinge on those parts of the building to be protected and preserved. Such works should normally be carried out in the structural and decorative style of the existing buildings.

Grade 3 buildings, like *Wistowe, Hamilton Parish* serve Bermuda as important visual amenities and are of such architectural or historical value that alterations or additions should normally be carried out in sympathy with the structural and decorative style dominant in the existing structure.

Finally Grade HM buildings, like *The Unfinished Church, Town of St. George* are buildings, structures or groups of buildings not originally intended for residential, commercial or administrative purposes, but built as defensive structures, monuments, outbuildings or other ancillary structures. This category also includes buildings that have become significant ruins.

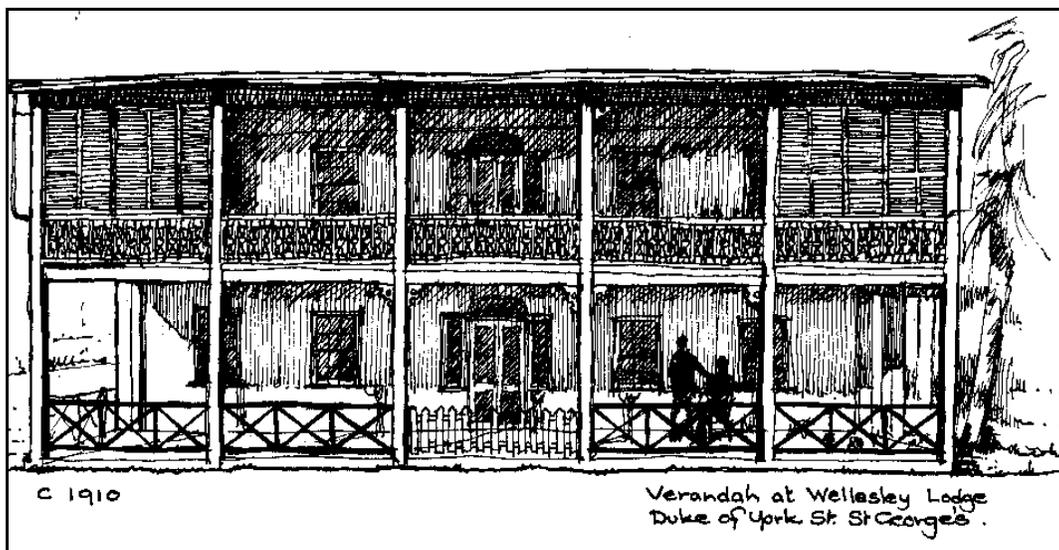


In addition to listing buildings, there are 58 designated Historic Protection Areas across the Island ranging from the Royal Naval Dockyard in the west to the World Heritage Site of the Historic Town of St. George in the east. Most of the historic protection areas surround historic fortifications, encompass sites of significant archaeological value or comprise districts with heavy concentrations of buildings and structures of special historical and architectural value which emit a certain characteristic reflective of that particular area. For instance, there are 176

listed buildings located within the Historic Town of St. George (WHS), comprising 22% of the total number of listed structures on the Island. The Royal Naval Dockyard in Sandys houses a total of 47 listed buildings. Within the City of Hamilton, there are also four distinct areas designated as Historic Protection Areas which are Front Street; Par-La-Ville Park; Princess Street; and The Cabinet Office/House of Assembly.

Although many Bermudians place a high value on the contribution that traditional architecture makes to the Island, many others have questioned why there is a need to list buildings and protect areas as many of these structures have stood the test of time without regulations and policies protecting them. Quite simply there is a legal responsibility to do so as defined in the 1974 Development and Planning Act. But even without this legal responsibility, the current demands of the real estate market with its pressures to develop open spaces and redevelop existing areas, make it wise to protect these often unappreciated treasures.

More specifically, the pace of change in Bermuda in the 1980's accelerated so greatly that the Government decided it was time to implement the formal protection afforded by the Development and Planning Act 1974. Without some form of protection there would have always been the potential threat to these buildings being subjected to redevelopment, causing significant loss to the Island's architectural history and consequently part of its culture.

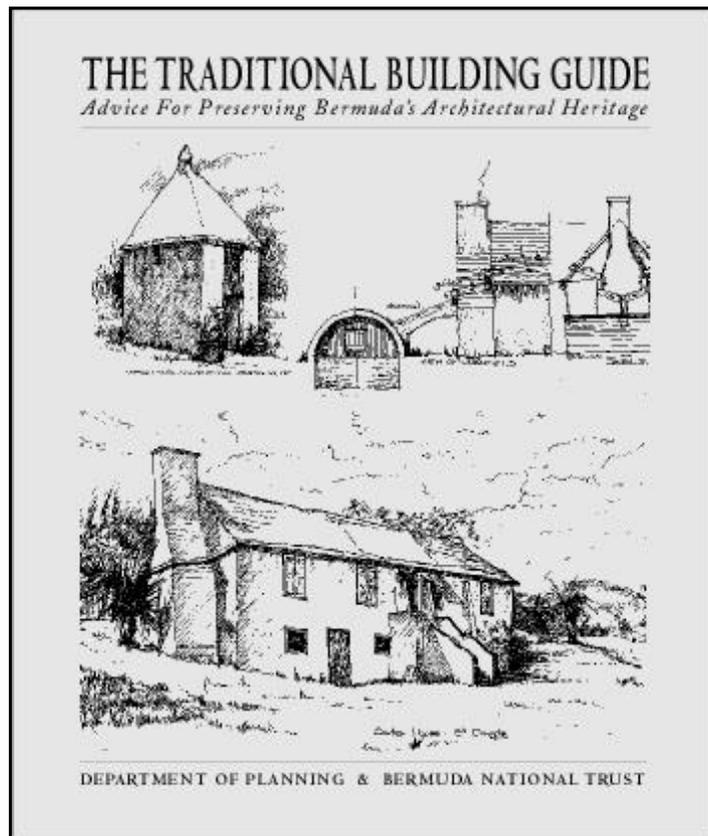
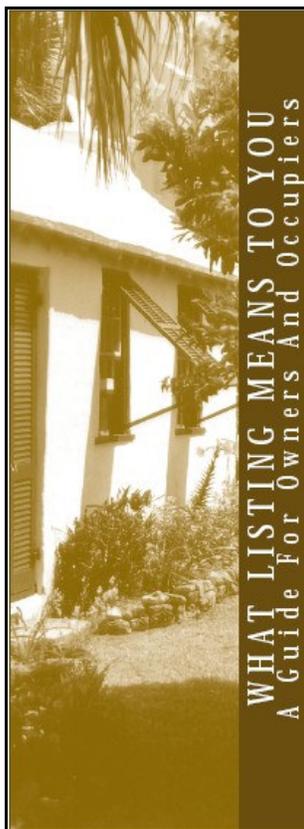


Others have felt that by listing these structures it has added another bureaucratic layer to the development and planning process. As a responsible Government who is charged with the protection and enhancement of both the natural and built environment, as well as, the promotion of social and economic opportunities, the Department of Planning and the Ministry of the Environment must use international best practice in achieving these goals. The Department of Planning has taken strides to ensure that decisions affecting development on Listed Buildings happen as expeditiously as possible. As such, the Minister's advisory body, the Historic Buildings Advisory Committee, offers pre-application consultations on all proposed developments on Listed Buildings to assist in making the planning approval process smoother and quicker.

The Department has also been proactive in informing and educating the public on issues relating to Listed Buildings and historic structures through the creation of a series of publications and documents. Documents available from the Department of Planning are as follows:

- “What Listing Means to You – A Guide for Owners and Occupiers”;
- “Interest-Free Loan Scheme for Listed Building Owners”;
- “The Traditional Building Guide – Advice for Preserving Bermuda’s Architectural Heritage”;
- “The World Heritage Site”;
- “Development Control Guidance Note #14 - Alterations or additions to Listed Buildings and/or buildings located within Historic Areas”.

The Department also provides information to the public on heritage matters in digital form via email.



Some property owners have expressed concern that instituting listing will devalue their property value. Since the listing initiative started in 1991, property values in Bermuda, including historic properties, have risen considerably. There has been no conclusive data to suggest that listing has affected property values negatively. In fact, based on research done on overseas jurisdictions such as the UK, Canada and the US, listing has caused property values to rise and over time

these properties have become more coveted. There has been no data to suggest that this is not also the case in Bermuda.

Many owners of these wonderful buildings have communicated that there should be some incentive or compensation for owning a listed building as the cost for maintaining and preserving these structures can outweigh the cost of using modern construction techniques. The Bermuda Government recognized that this would be an issue and were innovative in introducing the Interest-Free Loan Scheme for owners of listed buildings. From the programme's inception in December 2000, the Department of Planning has approved and issued 10 loan certificates totaling nearly \$725,000.00. This has resulted in close to \$38,000.00 in interest paid by the Government to the Bank of N.T. Butterfield & Son Limited to date on loans issued for restoration and repair of Listed Buildings.



In order to offer further support and assistance, the Department of Planning does not currently charge the owners of Listed Buildings any planning or building fees when applications are made for development to these buildings. For some applications, the savings to owners has been significant. The Department is currently exploring the feasibility of other incentive and financial assistance schemes which will reduce the financial burden on the property owner.

Although legislation was enacted with the Development and Planning Act in 1974, it took nearly 20 years to actively preserve Bermuda's architectural heritage. The current report card on historic preservation is far better than a decade ago. A great deal has been accomplished since the momentous start in 1991, as the Island has made tremendous strides in addressing the issue. This has included designating areas as Historic Protection Areas, listing buildings, establishing World Heritage, providing financial incentives to property owners and educating the public. The establishment of a Heritage Officer post in the Department of Planning has also highlighted the Government's commitment to heritage preservation.



In closing, all of us must take care not to lose the ground we have made since 1991. Although taken for granted, the sight of the Island's traditional architecture, evident around every bend, invokes subconscious emotions in most Bermudians. These buildings are important to the outside world as architectural icons of the Island, but they are more important to us as symbols of pride. The loss of these beautiful symbols of our past would leave a scar on our idyllic landscape that would not be able to be healed. In addition, key segments of our colourful history would be lost forever. As such it is the responsibility of each and everyone of us to preserve Bermuda's traditional architecture and historic environment for our future generations. As such, the work

that is being done to achieve this goal by the Ministry of the Environment and the Department of Planning is work to be supported and encouraged.