

A Brief History

St. George was established in 1612 and was the centre of commerce and governance for Bermuda until 1815 when the capital was moved to the City of Hamilton. Located on the north shore of the naturally protected St. George’s Harbour, the town’s docks were designated as providing the only official wharfage for all goods in-bound to or exported from Bermuda until 1710.

Over many years strategically located forts were constructed on the St. George’s shoreline to protect the principal channels that allow safe access to within the Island’s fringing reefs. The forts became more refined over time and as cannon design advanced with newer versions mounted at Bermuda forts, many of the old cannons were simply dumped, as shipping for recycling was impractical. This provided Bermuda with a unique collection of obsolete ordnance and fortifications that reflect many stages in the advance of warfare, an asset of substantive interest to certain parties.

During the 1776 American Revolution the town of St. George benefitted economically from the arrival of expats displaced from American soil. Similar economic boosts for the town occurred during the years of the American Civil War when wharfage at St. George was in high demand.

Noting these events along with the stimulus provided to St. George by the construction of the Kindley Airforce Base in the 1940s, and the subsequent presence of American personnel until 1995, a 2010 report of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) concluded that throughout its history, the economic success of the town of St. George was largely driven by external forces, many of which were international conflicts. In latter years these included the rise of tourism with the construction of the St. George Hotel in 1906 and the Furness Whitney liners bringing tourists to land in St. George, for stays at the Mid-Ocean and Castle Harbour Hotels both of which were built in the 1930s.

In recent history, the economic fate of St. George has continued to be driven by external forces. The 1973 – 1989 construction, operation and ultimate closure of the Holiday Inn/Loews/Club Med hotel operations and the closure of the US bases in 1995 highlight the impact of overseas forces, as does the evolution of cruise ships from vessels that could enter St. George’s Harbour to the mega ships that now call at Dockyard. The BEDC report concludes that St. George has been reactionary in its economic development; that good times came when outside forces brought pulses of people to the town. As of this writing the new St. Regis Hotel is being completed with the hope that this externally financed hotel will once again stimulate the town’s economy.

