

THE TRADITIONAL BUILDING GUIDE

Advice For Preserving Bermuda's Architectural Heritage



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & BERMUDA NATIONAL TRUST



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In addition to Tony Short's drawings, the book is illustrated with photographs. We are grateful to Alfred Aguiar, the Bermuda Maritime Museum, Chris Grimes, Dr. and Mrs. A.C. Hollis Hallett, Robin Judah, Charles Lloyd, and Roland Skinner for permission to reproduce theirs.



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This guide is intended for anyone who owns an old house and for anyone who is interested in Bermuda's architecture. Its aim is to show you why our traditional buildings developed in such a distinctive way, how they have changed over the centuries, and what we can do to preserve them so that they enrich the lives of future generations.

In a way, the book is a field guide. If you own an old building, it tells you what you might look for if you want to find out more about its age and its style. But the book goes further. It describes the things we know about Bermuda's traditional building methods. And then it suggests practical and appropriate ways to give new life to old houses, so that they can continue to live useful lives.

The information in the book is arranged by building materials: lime, stone and wood. There is also a chapter on paint, and one on installing modern services. An illustrated glossary at the end will help you to identify the parts of a building, and the chapter on the history of style periods in Bermuda will help you put your house into historical context. There is a list of professional organisations that can give further advice, and a list of books for further reading. The series of books on Bermuda's architectural heritage published by the Bermuda National Trust is particularly helpful.

Many buildings in Bermuda, large and small, are in danger of being lost forever. Sometimes this is because they are not

properly maintained. The roof cracks, water gets into the walls, and they slowly crumble. But sometimes buildings are destroyed for exactly the opposite reason - they have far too much work done to them. Certain kinds of alteration can spell destruction, robbing a building of all the subtle traces of its original character such





as the soft lines of the walls and roof, that odd-shaped window unlike any other, those worn brick steps with a seat at the top.

Small houses from the 19th century are a particularly vulnerable part of our heritage. Building materials and technologies move relentlessly forward and, whether we mean to or not, it is all too easy to change the appearance of an interesting old house and make it look ordinary.

This book offers to help solve both problems. It explains traditional methods of building; many of which have never been documented before. Until recently there had been no need to do so. People knew them in their bones, and they passed them on by word of mouth to apprentices and assistants, to sons and nephews. But now we are in an age of rapid change. When older craftsmen die, the methods that they painstakingly learned from previous generations are in danger of being lost forever. The book aims to keep practical knowledge of our built heritage alive.

Owners of old houses will be able to use it to better understand how to

reproduce traditional building technologies. The book also tries to assess new building materials, and makes suggestions on how to think about substituting modern materials for old ones, now hard to find. We hope it will provide information to help you judge which new materials might work and which will ultimately fail when used on a traditional building.

Commercial enterprise, finance and tourism are the mainstays of our livelihood in Bermuda. The natural beauty of the Island draws visitors from all around the world. Bermuda's culture, which developed slowly over 400 years and which shows itself most plainly in the built environment, is admired by everyone who comes here. Some of the oldest buildings in the Western Atlantic are in St. George's, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These buildings are our history built in stone, and to destroy them will alter Bermuda forever. But if you follow the suggestions in this book, even on the smallest building on your property, you will help make sure our history is kept alive.

The Traditional Building Guide is by no means complete. It is a first edition, a first attempt to record information about our traditional building, and it will need to be revised when new facts come to light. There is always plenty more to learn. The book is not a history of architecture and it certainly is not a list of dos and don'ts. Rather, it is a guide to building practices, and we hope it will interest you in learning more.

The Guide celebrates the unknown craftsmen, both slaves and freemen, who built Bermuda's first houses. The book is dedicated to them.