

The Parish Church of St. George,
Bermuda.



Whosoever thou art that enterest this Church, leave it not
without one prayer for the place whereon thou standest is
holy ground.

Old St. Peter's the Parish Church of St. George

In all the English-speaking world outside the British Isles, this is one of the two or three oldest churches, oldest parliament buildings, oldest law-court-buildings, in existence. Here took root our religion, our constitution, our common law; here is the home and hearth of Bermuda's community institutions; here you return to the very foundations of the New World. In the vast folk-movement which settled North America, this building is a famous land-mark.

All the crises of Anglo-American history have left their foot-prints here. The earliest pioneering days, the colonial period, the War of Independence, the 1812 War and the Civil War, the Monroe Doctrine, the two World Wars, have all of them in this quaint and unpretentious and haphazard old parish church, their authentic memorials, quietly speaking to us. As we feel our way forward into the future with all its problems, may we find inspiration here, to build up the fellowship of the Atlantic peoples, European and American and African, on the sure foundation of faith, of democracy, and of law.

ENTERING BY THE MAIN DOOR, we pass through the newest addition to the building, with the first hint of the Gothic revival in the arched windows. The regimental memorials on the walls remind us that we are in an old garrison town, the Gibraltar of the Western Atlantic, where thousands of British soldiers are buried.

GOING FORWARD under the 18th century chandelier, we enter the 1713 extension. The galleries either side were built in 1833, the Western gallery (now restored) in 1721 — for the slaves. The Rector had a Sunday-school for slaves as far back as 1812, and the British Parliament bought their freedom in 1834; on August 1st, 1834 they all crowded into church to thank God and to hear the Rector explain their new acceptance as fellow-citizens.

APPROACHING THE 17TH CENTURY THREE-DECKER PULPIT we come to the oldest section of the building. Its outlines,—it is not known how much of its fabric,—go back to the first permanent church erected in Bermuda, the oldest continuous Protestant church in the New World. An earlier church was blown down in a storm, but by 1620, when a number of stone buildings were making their appearances in the town, the church shown in the early maps had been completed. The ministry of the Church goes back to 1609, when the Reverend Richard Bucke, who succeeded Robert Hunt at Jamestown, was chaplain to the "Sea Venture".

THE FONT is about 500 years old and was brought out by the early settlers from the West of England.

THE ALTAR is the oldest piece of woodwork in Bermuda and was made under the eye of Richard Moore, our first Governor, a shipwright.

THE BISHOP'S THRONE is of the late 18th century and is reputed to have come from a wreck. The reredos with the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed, and the Angel of the Presence, was brought out from England in 1814 by John Till.

THE QUEEN ANNE BOX-PEWS were for the Governor and the Admiral. Some of the woodwork in the family pews, the flooring, etc. may well be over 200 years old.

The first court of General Assize (1616) and the first Parliament (1620) were held here.

THE MARBLE MONUMENTS on the walls include two famous pieces of sculpture and several literary gems and material enough for shelves of historical novels. The Grecian winged female form is by Sir Richard Westmacott, and the delicately executed bas-relief over the Governor's pew is by the Methodist artist John Bacon. In the epitaphs to the good old family doctor, George Forbes, (who attended Lawrence Washington on his visit here) the lovely young Lady Beresford and the accomplished Governor Allured Popple, a name illustrious in the history of colonial administration, we can savour the cadence, the elegance and the polite satiric touch of the age of Dr. Johnson and Jane Austen. Bridger Goodrich was an adventurous young Virginia loyalist who became one of our most famous privateers; Harriet Wadsworth was the daughter of George Washington's commissary-general; the Tucker family have been prominent all through Bermuda's history and helped to arrange the Gunpowder plot of 1775; John Van Norden was a New Jersey loyalist who became our Mayor and a noted freemason. Here and there are the names of Governors, officers of the Garrison, mayors and doctors and clergymen, a young chorister, and the men who gave their lives for us in these last tragic wars.

IN THE VESTRY you will see one of the most precious collections of sacred vessels this side of the world. A Charles I Chalice sent out by the Bermuda Company in 1625, rarest of the rare: a complete William of Orange Communion Set, 1697, with a coin and two plates of the same period: an Adam period christening-bowl, 1782, presented by a Massachusetts loyalist who became Governor of Bermuda, William Browne of Salem; and a Victorian epergne from the Lough family.

GOING OUT IN THE CHURCHYARD, the oldest in Bermuda, we see the oldest tree, used as a belfry-tree for centuries. Anne Willing (Mrs. William Bingham) lies buried here, the leading hostess of the "Republican Court"

at Philadelphia when that city was the hub of the newly formed U.S.A. Nearby is William Tucker's vault where Tom Moore's far-famed "Nea" lies, mother of Dr. Richard Tucker, Rector 1839-1867. Richard Dale, a victim of the 1812 war despite local generosity (his grave is still remembered on Memorial Day), lies next to the infant son and young wife of Sir John Beresford, the flag-officer of the opposing side. Over the wall is the slaves' graveyard, where decent headstones testify to the mutual affection which often existed between the local families and those bound to them.

On the tower are parts of a weather-vane which once surmounted the London house of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham. Around us lie the bones of generation after generation of all sorts and conditions of men, Bermudian, British, American; Governors, soldiers, sailors, privateers, statesmen, merchants, humble folk, doctors and clergymen; some of whose names are remembered in history, but many of whose lives are now noted only in the Book of the Recording Angel.

BUT THE TOWN-CLOCK is now striking (brought out by John Till from Portsmouth Dockyard in 1815, and paid for by the parishioners in one forenoon), and no doubt you must be getting on. We hope you will love this old town as we do, and thoroughly enjoy your holiday.

We suggest that you leave the churchyard, not by the front steps, but by the back gate, and proceeding a few yards down Church Lane to the right and into Featherbed Alley, look into the Historical Society house, where there is a fine collection of objects of interest very well worth a visit. It is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on week days except Thursdays, when it is usually open in the morning.

We should be delighted if you would care to sign our Visitors' Book. Donations are urgently needed for the Restoration Fund and will be most thankfully received.