

St John's Heritage trail Walking tour

Key Buildings

1



Lower Redcliffe Street



Called Ratcliffe Street on maps from the 1700s, lower Redcliffe Street is one of the older areas of St. John's, characterised by its warehouses with stone ground floors and more ornate timberwork above. These buildings were renovated in the 1980s by architect Bill Fraser, keeping as close to the original style as possible, and renamed Redcliffe Quay. Behind are a series of smaller vernacular structures with more subtle detailing and features, cedar shingles on walls and roofs characteristic of simpler vernacular structures.

2



First Catholic Church



This building housed the first Catholic Church in Antigua, with the ground floor used as a chapel and the upstairs as the Presbytery. It is a prominent example of a three storey brick building with stone quoins, an offset stair, and arched basement openings. This building differs from those buildings where the first floor was for business while the family lived upstairs. In this case, the first floor was latticed in for privacy and ventilation. It is a good example of a brick building with stone quoins, an offset stair, and arched basement openings.

3



Old Cistern



Antigua was prone to multi-year droughts and the British constructed an elaborate water system, a combination of connected ponds, dams, reservoirs, and catchments. Cisterns were commonly used to collect rain water—almost every house built in the 18th and 19th centuries has a cistern underneath. This cistern is one of the few remaining traditional brick versions, typical of large cisterns in Antigua at the time.

4



Lower St Mary's Street



The building that now houses Hemingway's was originally owned by Emmanuel Oliver Camacho. The house had rooms for his 12 children and for the maids who looked after them. When Olive Jardine purchased the property, it became known as Jardine's Court. Along this stretch are a number of interesting vernacular buildings, from the stone-built store on the corner to the single-storey raised residence further up the street.

5



Hadeed Store



Market Street was called Scotch Row, or sometimes Scots Row, named for the Scots who came to Antigua in the late 1800s and early 1900s to work as clerks in the stores, and then came to own them. They lived above their stores and eventually sold to up-and-coming Antiguan. It has a masonry ground floor with side stairs with wrought-iron railings, wood shutters, and an ornamental parapet with lintels to the side street.

6



Barclays Bank



The Colonial Bank was established in 1836 in a building on Newgate Street. In 1925, the Colonial Bank was merged and reincorporated into Barclays Bank (Dominion, Colonial and Overseas). The Barclays brand maintained a strong presence on the island until a strategic restructuring in 2002, when Barclays PLC merged its Caribbean retail and commercial operations with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) to establish FirstCaribbean International Bank.

7



The Old Court House/ Museum



The Museum is housed in the old Court House, constructed in 1747 and the oldest building still in use in the city. The building was seriously damaged in the 1843 earthquake and the support of the upper floor was strengthened with the addition of large Victorian cast iron pillars, still visible in the hall today. With a fine tuscan door surround, and generous arched openings across the ground floor, it stands as a fine example of a Georgian classical building.

8



Manuel Diaz Liquor Store



Like other Portuguese, Manuel Dias was born in Madeira but came to Antigua after the end of indentureship. The family operated a general store before specialising in liquor. The building is a typical vernacular building with the residence upstairs and the shop at street level. The lower floor is brick masonry, with thick walls that keep the interior cool. Original shutters on the High Street side survive. Lignum Vitae wooden pegs, or trenails, suggest a date of around 1770.

9



Bayonet Fence



Across Church Street, the Police Station yard has a unique iron railing, composed of old Long pattern Brown Bess muskets and bayonets fixed on musket barrels from the old Brown Bess muskets used by the Antigua militia. These were placed there after the militia surrendered its weapons in 1838, after Emancipation in 1834. The fence is likely the world's only surviving example with bayonets still attached.



10



St. John's Police Station



The St. John's Police Station was situated across Church Street from the Courthouse (now the Museum), making it easy to transport prisoners to court. The building that houses the St. John's Police Station was erected in 1772 and has been modified over the years. From about 1830, the compound was the Police Headquarters, but in 1978 it became the St. John's Police Station when the new Police Headquarters was built on American Road.

11



Church Street from Market Street to the Anglican Cathedral



These smaller buildings are fine examples of simple Antiquan vernacular design, raised on masonry "skirts" with weatherboard "blouses" above. Modest materials were used creatively: shingles saved money on side elevations, while varied weatherboarding, shiplap, window details, and ornament reveal the builder's artistry. The corner of Church and Market Streets, now ACT, was once occupied by well-known merchant Delos J. Martin.

12



St John's Cathedral



St John's Cathedral occupies an Anglican site used since 1681, with earlier timber and brick churches preceding it. After the 1843 earthquake, Governor Sir Charles Augustus Fitzroy laid the cornerstone for the present freestone building, opened in 1847 and consecrated in 1848. Designed by J. Fuller of Bath, its pitch-pine interior, twin towers and 1789 iron gates frame statues of St. John the Divine and St. John the Baptist, captured from a French ship bound for Martinique in 1756.

13



Upper Church Street: Bishop's Lodge



This large house was originally owned by John Joseph Camacho. When his widow died in 1971, she willed the property to the Catholic Bishop, who resided there until the early 2000s. The story is that although the house has 100 windows, by law only 99 can be opened at one time. Many of the properties nearby were also owned by John Joseph, who in 1890 was selected to represent the Portuguese interests in the Legislative Council.

14



St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and Holy Family school



Built in 1909 to accommodate the growing Portuguese congregation, St. Joseph's was badly damaged in the 1974 earthquake but was restored and was in use until 1987. The roof and steeple were repaired in the early 2000s, but the rest of the property awaits renovation. The building beside it, built in 1870, housed a school and Convent until 1903, then the Presbytery, and finally the Holy Family School. Devastated by Hurricane Luis in 1995, it was repaired but now stands vacant.

15



Government House



Government House became the official residence of the Governor in 1801. Like so many historic public buildings, it has grown organically over time as subsequent generations have added to it. In 1841 it was described as "a genteel West Indian residence, possessing some good apartments and having its stabling and outbuildings upon a respectable scale." Beginning in 1996, several attempts were made to restore the building. The work was finally completed in April 2026.

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Antigua & Barbuda
Museum logo



Additional must see sites



1
War Memorial



2
Spanish Main



3
Country Pond



4
Antigua Girls' High School



5
Antigua Recreation Ground



6
Antigua and Barbuda Civil Registry
(Convent School)



7
Ebenezer Methodist Church



8
Fibrey



9
Her Majesty's Prison (1735)



10
Westerby Memorial and
Lower High Street



11
Quin Farara



This 1788 map below shows the street grid much as it is today, although some of the names have changed slightly.

The north-south streets ran from South Street to Dickenson Bay Street, with Tanner, Nevis, Ratcliffe (later Redcliffe), St. Mary's, High, Long, Church, Newgate, Bishopgate, St. John's, and St. George's in between. The east-west streets ran from Thames Street on the west to East Street (now Independence Avenue) on the east, with Market Street, Corn Alley, Temple Street, and Cross Street in between. There are also numerous alleys, such as Friendly Alley, Bank Alley, Gutter Lane, and Mariner's Lane.

In his book on architectural development in Antigua, Paul Cloyd breaks Caribbean development into four periods: (1) Colonization and development, from the first settlement in 1632 to the peace of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1748. (2) Maturity and wealth, as 1748 ushers in a period of peace, which allows for commercial and agricultural development without threat of war. (3) Decline, beginning in 1848 when sugar from cane begins to lose out to beet sugar and free trade is introduced in England. (4) Political independence and tourism, from the end of World War II into the present.

In the first period, few buildings of prestigious architectural design were erected in Antigua, and none remain within central St. John's. It was during the second period that many of the most impressive structures were built. After the 1841 fire and the 1843 earthquake, many of the buildings were reconstructed as they originally appeared, thus dating them from the mid to late 19th century. After that, the simplified Georgian style declined and the Victorian and Romantic styles grew. The Victorian style was most strongly seen in residential and commercial structures, while the Georgian influence was still seen in government structures.



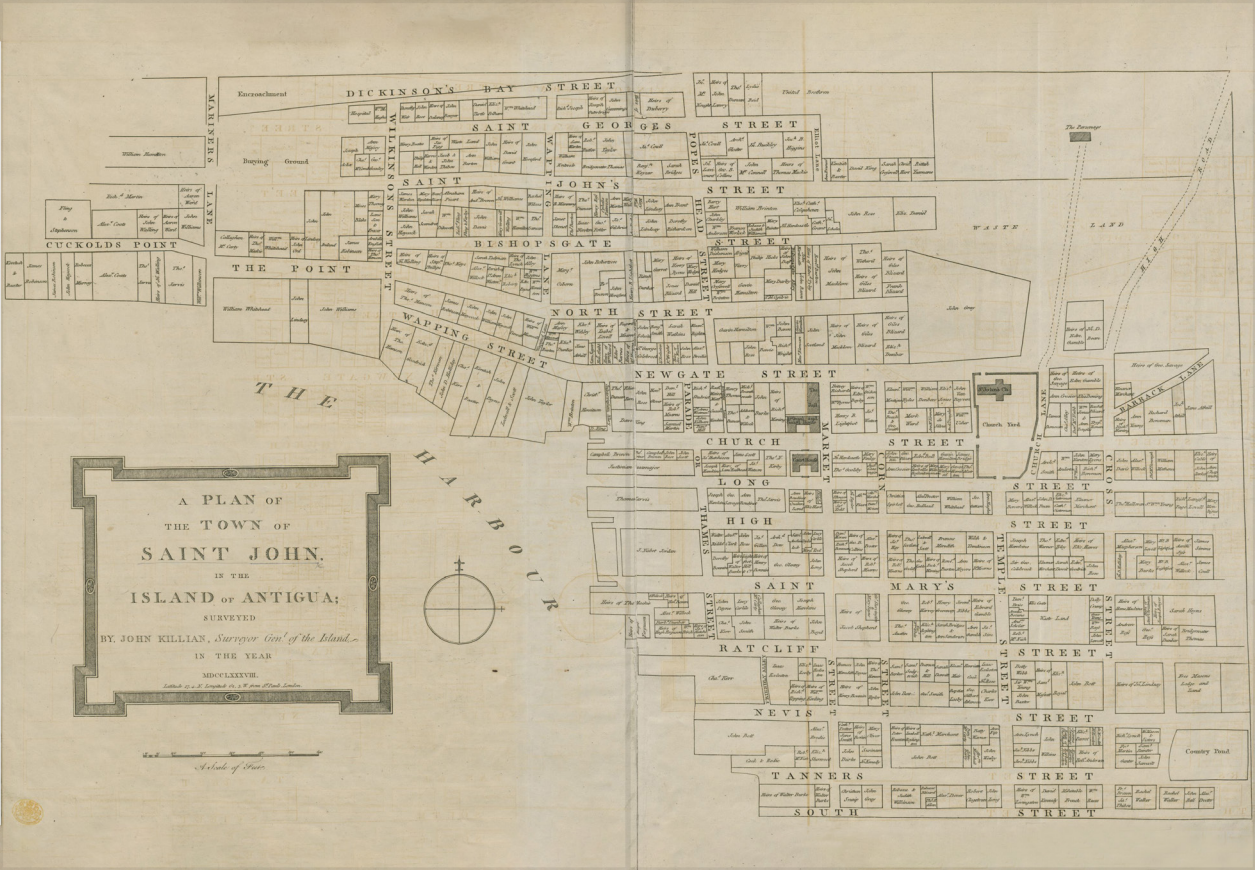
History of St. John's City and how to use this guide

There is no certain date for when St. John's was first inhabited but it was one of six "trade towns" listed in a 1675 law regarding tax collection in Antigua. (The other trade towns were Parham, Carlisle Road, now Old Road, Falmouth, Bridgetown, and Bermudian Valley.) The grid street layout was done in the early 1700s, with broad parallel avenues running east to west and narrower cross streets running north to south.

Many of the structures in St. John's were built after the great fire of 1666. These early buildings were constructed of brick, limestone, and wood. St. John's suffered from two more fires, one in 1769 and one in 1841. Serious earthquakes, in 1745 and 1843, caused additional damage. However, the wood and masonry were easily repaired and many have therefore retained their original designs.

As you walk through the town, keep an eye out for the different architectural styles. There are Georgian buildings, marked by simplicity of form and strong symmetry. There are buildings in the Romantic style, which includes buildings with Classical, Gothic, and Renaissance elements. There are Victorian buildings, characterized by an abundance of ornament. And finally there are buildings in the Vernacular style, using regional forms and materials.

Many of the commercial buildings had a lower floor of masonry that contained storerooms and cellars, with living quarters upstairs. Others were two-storey frame structures, painted white, while still others had a projecting upper floor giving protection to the arcade below. Many buildings had verandahs, some open and some closed. Another distinctive feature is the use of tripartite or bipartite gable roofs.



St John's
Heritage trail
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