St. John's
HERITAGE TRAIL





1 Lower Redcliffe Street

Called Ratcliff Street on maps from the 1700s, lower Redcliffe Street is one of the older areas of St. John's, characterised by 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, including the cedar shingles on walls and roofs that are characteristic of simpler vernacular structures.



2 1st Catholic Church (c.1850)

In the 1850s, this three-storey brick building housed the first Catholic Church, serving the newly arrived Portuguese, some of whom were formerly indentured workers. The ground floor was used as a chapel and the upstairs as the Presbytery. Since then it has had several owners, including the Mendes family; Bill Fraser and Eric Smith, architects of Heritage Quay; and the Antigua Public Utilities Authority. The building has stone quoins, an offset stair, a bipartite gable roof, and arched basement openings.



3 Old Water Cistern

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



4 Lower St. Mary's Street

The building that now houses Hemingway's was originally owned by Emmanuel Oliver (E.O.) 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 of lower St Mary's Street are a number of interesting buildings, including the stone-built store on the corner, the single-storey raised residence further up the street, and several tripartite roofs.



5 Market Street (Scotch Row)

Market Street, originally called Scotch Row, was named for the Scots who arrived to clerk in the stores in St. John's in the 1800s and came to own most of the larger ones. After World War I, they sold to the Antiguans who had worked for them. One example is this store on the corner of St. Mary and Market streets. The building has a masonry ground floor, side stairs with elaborate wrought-iron railings leading up to the living quarters, wood shutters and an ornamental parapet.



6 Barclays Bank

The Colonial Bank was established in 1836 in a building on Newgate Street. In 1925, the Colonial Bank was merged with the Anglo-Egyptian Bank and the National Bank of South Africa 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. The support of the upper floor was then 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 Dias Liquor Store

Manuel Dias was one of several Portuguese who migrated to Antigua before and after World War I to work for relatives who were already here. He bought this building in 1917, operating a general store before specialising in liquor. It 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 from the Museum, the Police Station yard has a unique iron railing, composed of Long Land Pattern Brown Bess muskets and bayonets, weapons used by the Antigua militia during slavery. These were placed there after the militia surrendered its weapons in 1838, four years after Emancipation in 1834. The fence is believed to be the world's only surviving example of an intact musket and bayonet fence. It is being restored with the support of the Commonwealth Heritage Skills Training Program.



10 St. John's Police Station

The St. John's Police Station is situated across Church Street from the old Courthouse (now the Museum), making it easy to transport prisoners from the building's jail to court. The building 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. It has recently been renovated.



11 Church Street from Market Street to the Anglican Cathedral

The smaller buildings along upper Church Street are fine examples of Antiguan vernacular design. These buildings were built on raised 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.



12 St. John's Cathedral

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



13 Upper Church Street: Bishop's Lodge

This large house was originally owned by John Joseph (J.J.) Camacho, the elder brother of Emmanuel Oliver (E.O.) Camacho. When John Joseph's 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 J.J. Camacho, a wealthy man 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

St. Joseph's was built in 1909 to accommodate the growing Portuguese congregation. It was badly damaged in the 1974 earthquake but was restored and in use until 1987. The roof and steeple were repaired in the early 2000s, but the rest of the property awaits renovation. The wooden 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. Under the leadership of the Governor General, Sir Rodney Williams, GCMG, KGN, KStJ, the work was finally completed in April 2026.

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

This heritage trail explores the rich and layered history of St. John's, revealing how centuries of cultural exchange, commerce, enterprise, architecture, and urban development have shaped Antigua and Barbuda's capital into the vibrant metropolis it is today. Moving beyond the plantation narrative, the trail uncovers the city's evolution as the nation's political, economic, and cultural heart, where African, European, and Caribbean influences converge to create a distinctive urban identity.

There is no certain date for when St. John's was first inhabited but It has been the administrative centre of Antigua since the islands were first colonized in 1632. 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.) As sugar began to replace tobacco and indigo as Antigua's main export, St. John's overtook Falmouth and Parham in number of inhabitants and by 1701 it had become the island's main trading town. The harbour was large, and though shallow, it was ideal for loading the English colony's exports into small boats, which were sailed out to merchant ships anchored offshore.

With the establishment of a Cathedral and a resident bishop, in 1842 the town became the city of St. John's. The city covered an area of about 150 acres, less than a quarter of a square mile. The boundaries were North Street, East Street (now Independence Avenue), South Street and the harbour. The grid street layout, with broad parallel avenues running east to west and narrower cross streets running north to south, was completed by the early 1700s, when a public market was established and many wharfs were constructed.





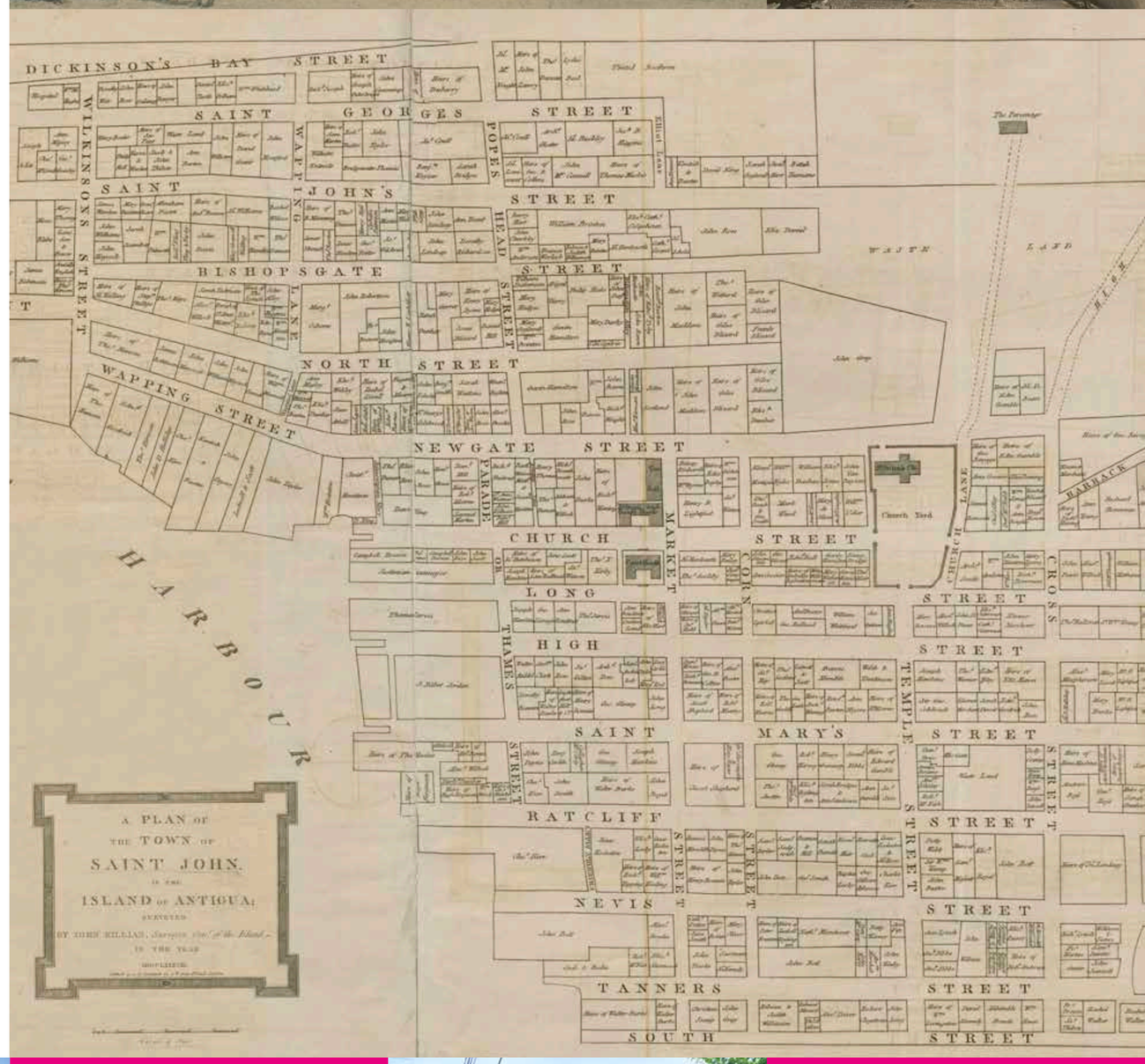


The 1788 map on the right, known as the Killian map, shows the street grid much as it is today, although some of the names have changed slightly. The north-south streets ran from South Street to Dickenson Bay Street, with Tanner, Nevis, Ratcliff (later Redcliffe), St. Mary's, High, Long, Church, Newgate, 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.

St. John's remains the commercial hub of the island, a working city, with the wharfs, stores, and houses built by skilled enslaved labour, or after emancipation in 1834, by skilled carpenters, bricklayers, and masons.

Many of the structures were built after the great fire of 1666. These 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.





Most 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 an arcade below. Many buildings had verandahs, some open and some closed. Another distinctive feature was the use of tripartite or bipartite gable roofs. And in between were the houses of the population, small one- or two-room structures that can still be seen on many streets.

Through its streets, public spaces, historic buildings, and everyday landmarks, you will discover the many stories that define St. John's. Stories of resilience, entrepreneurship, migration, faith, creativity, and community. Together, these layers of history showcase St. John's as the epicentre of Antiguan and Barbudan cultural heritage.

For further info scan this QR code:

St. John's
HERITAGE TRAIL



Explore the historic streets of St. John's, where contemporary city life meets centuries of architectural heritage. Discover the landmarks and stories that shaped the social, cultural and economic development of Antigua's capital.

1 Fibrey

2 Westerby Memorial and Lower High Street

3 Quin Farara

4 Antigua Girls' High School



5 Antigua Recreation Ground

6 His Majesty's Prison

7 War Memorial

8 Spanish Main



9 Convent School (Antigua and Barbuda Civil Registry)

10 Ebenezer Methodist Church

11 Country Pond

12 Upper St. Mary's Street