



FORMER PARKS DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS, BOTANICAL GARDENS



Above: The Director's residence when it was photographed in 1990.

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This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Surely, in the 21st century, a solution can be found to the problem of old buildings affected by mould and mildew. Rather than simply abandoning and subsequently demolishing them, they should be revitalised and made useful again. A good example is the Parks Department headquarters in the Botanical Gardens – a Grade 3 Listed Building – formerly the Director of Agriculture’s residence.

Under the Public Garden Act 1896, ten acres in Paget East were purchased for the purpose of establishing and maintaining an experimental station to assist farmers in the development of agriculture and horticulture. Responsibility for its supervision and control was handed over to the Board of Agriculture and George Arthur Bishop, recommended by the Director of the Royal Gardens at Kew, arrived in May 1898 to take up his position as its first superintendent. A notice for tenders to build a cottage within the grounds had only been advertised a few weeks earlier so it is not surprising that Bishop and his family were obliged to live temporarily at nearby Seabright.

The Colonial Surveyor, W Cardy Hallett, submitted plans for a cottage with the Board of Works stipulating a two-storey kitchen wing. Hallett’s original plans were presumably later enhanced and the entire house made two storeys with enclosed eaves and heavy mouldings. There is an attractive wooden corner verandah. The string course or horizontal band between floor levels is visually appealing but more importantly also deflects rain off the lower windows. The three chimneys are typical of the late 19th century. Later additions were minor.

Alfred Wellrose Smith’s tender for £460 required him to complete the project within four months. The superintendent took up residence on 10 October 1898. Bishop would later request and receive reimbursement for expenses incurred, such as the warehousing of his furniture, during the five months since his arrival.

George Bishop’s first assignment was to report on the diseases that affected the lily, their cause, treatment and prevention. He was succeeded in 1904 by Thomas James Harris who came from Jamaica’s Hope Royal Botanic Gardens where he had devised the first successful method of budding avocado pears. Harris is also credited with importing to Bermuda the attractive Jamaican Anole lizard (*Anolis Grahami*) in an effort to control the Mediterranean fruit fly.

Harris’ resignation in 1912 caused the Board of Agriculture to

reflect on the fact that the Public Garden had proved a disappointment and had failed to obtain the confidence of the farming population. It was also acknowledged that the “wind-swept and sterile” site was less than ideal. In order to attract a suitably qualified candidate the position was raised to Director and the Public Garden became known as the Agricultural Station.

The grounds were enlarged by eight acres in 1921 when the neighbouring property was purchased. Discussions followed as to whether the director should move into the larger but older Montrose (now Agape House). Eventually it was decided that Montrose would better suit the new medical superintendent of the just-completed King Edward VII Memorial Hospital.

Ernest Albert McCallan was the first Bermudian Director of Agriculture and he lived in the house from 1920 until his retirement in 1934. McCallan would later write *Life on Old St. David's* and *Bermuda Vegetable Garden*. In April 1958 the name of Agricultural Station was officially changed to the Bermuda Botanical Gardens.

Dr Idwal Wyn Hughes and his family were the last residents of the house during his term as director from 1975 until 1990. Despite the fact that the grounds were and still are open to the public every day during daylight hours, Dr Hughes does not recall this being an inconvenience although he does remember the many times they had to rescue those who had climbed up and got stuck in the large Banyan tree.

Upon Dr Hughes' retirement as director in 1990, the house was turned into offices for the Parks Department staff. Because of the mould issue it has been vacant since 2018 and since then has become increasingly derelict. This is undesirable on several counts. It is visible to all who visit the Botanical Gardens and should enhance not detract from the grounds of our national park. Also taxpayer money is being spent on other offices for the Parks Department when this building stands empty. That it was soundly built is evidenced by its 120-year existence and if properly ventilated should not have been affected by mould. For eight months of the year windows can be left open most of the time and a building with functional shutters can have them closed at night so that the glass panes can be open and the air allowed to circulate. This building proves that air conditioning is a very mixed blessing and a danger to old buildings.



Above: The former Parks Department headquarters today.

Sources: Bermuda Almanack 1904, Beautiful Bermuda Guide Book 5th, 8th & 10th editions, numerous articles in The Royal Gazette 1896-present. Many thanks to Dr Walwyn Hughes.