

Final Act in the Tragedy of Victoria Row, built 1846 in Bermuda Dockyard ... demolished 2016. What hope for Bermuda Dockyard's historic buildings?

As highlighted by the NDS in 2012 ('Going. Going. Gone! Obliteration of Bermuda Dockyard Heritage: Victoria and Albert Rows and Ship Crest Paintings', and 'The Vanishing Dockyard Houses of Bermuda', *Dockyards*, vol. 17, no. 2, November 2012, pp. 12–20), these 170-year old dockyard workers' houses in Victoria Row were destined for demolition by the West End Development Corporation ('Wedco'), the Government quango responsible for managing the Bermuda Dockyard estate.

Victoria Row's three blocks of eight houses, built in 1846 and 1858, were a unique Bermudian solution to house essential dockyard workers, a blend of British dockyard officers' houses, with kitchens and toilets separated from the main house, and the 'Bermuda Image'. Dockyard architectural historian Jonathan Coad characterized them in January 2016:

This group of buildings at Bermuda is extremely rare. The buildings as a whole form an important element in the architectural, economic and social history of Bermuda. They are almost the last survivors of very limited examples of housing built for dockyard workers – skilled tradespeople and others – as distinct from housing for dockyard officers. The island location of Haulbowline in Cork Harbour forced the Admiralty to construct workers' single-storey housing there, some of which still exists (Fig. 1). Later, Bermuda was clearly even more of a problem, with the base developing as the fleet changed over from sail to steam which led to a growing need for skilled workers in the dockyards. Ireland Island was also a distance from the main settlements, but the major problem was the very high cost of living on these islands—this seems to have forced the Admiralty to provide this housing. The 1909 TNA plan of the dockyard (Fig. 3) shows a quite extraordinary amount of housing outside the yard for the workforce. It would be interesting to know exactly who was living in these terraces. It would seem that workers' housing was provided only in very limited circumstances and only survives today at Haulbowline and at Bermuda. In short, Albert Row has considerable rarity value.

However, although Wedco has the financial and professional duty of care for the estate, this NGO has not reinvested revenue in its upkeep. No maintenance of these houses has been carried out since 2009 and they were vacated in 2014.¹ Built of hard limestone and Bermuda cedar, the buildings require lime-washing every two years to keep them weathertight. No evidence of an objective condition survey or valuation reflecting international heritage property values has been presented by Wedco. Wedco rejected the Habitat for Humanity scheme, which included both Victoria and Albert Rows, in 2006 and 2008, because it would not agree to give existing tenants priority or not raise the rents after refurbishment. The rows are shown on the 1863 map (Fig. 2) as 'Dwelling Houses' and 'Workmens Cottages', and named in the 1909 map (Fig. 3). Because they are adjacent and similar in appearance, they are frequently coupled together, but Albert Row was listed Grade II in 2000:² Reference SY

¹ Wilson, 'Govt rejected Habitat for Humanity proposal for Victoria and Albert Row', *Royal Gazette*, 8 June 2012, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20120608/NEWS/706089994>; Bell, 'Habitat "offered" to save historic buildings', *Royal Gazette*, 29 April 2016, <http://www.royalgazette.com/news/article/20160429/habitat-offered-to-save-historic-buildings>

² 'Grade 2 refers to buildings, structures or groups of buildings that have survived in such condition and are of such special interest and architectural or historical value that alterations and additions should be limited to works that do not impinge on those parts of the building to be protected and preserved. Such works should

092, Albert Row, 6–14 Malabar Road Sandys,³ whereas Victoria Row was not, hence the latter could be demolished. Their condition in 2013–14 was revealed in the report that seventeen properties of 1,200 square feet each were condemned: Albert Row Nos 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and Victoria Row Nos 2, 4, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21.⁴



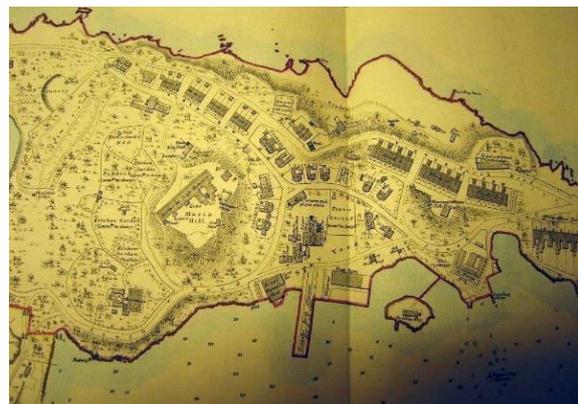
Fig. 1. Dockyard houses at Haulbowline in Cork Harbour. (J. Coad)

Fig. 2. 1863 Bermuda Royal Naval Hospital, Admiralty Library, Da.02. (Reproduced with the kind permission of the MoD Admiralty Library, Naval Historical Branch, Portsmouth, J. Coad)



Fig. 4. Victoria Row 2007. (A. Coats)

Fig. 3. 1909 plan of Bermuda Dockyard, hospital etc. plans. (Reproduced with the kind permission of The National Archives, Kew, J. Coad)



normally be carried out in the structural and decorative style of the existing buildings.’ Government of Bermuda, Department of Planning, Alterations or Additions to Listed Buildings and/or Buildings Located Within Historic Areas (Ref. GN203, October 2012), p. 8. <http://www.planning.gov.bm/Documents/Final%20Bermuda%20Plan%202008/Guidance%20Notes/GN203%20Listed%20Buildings%20Restoration.pdf>.

³ <http://www.planning.gov.bm/documents/Historic%20Environment/Listed%20Buildings%20Register.pdf>

⁴ Official House Minutes, Bermuda Parliament 14 February 2014, http://parliament.bm/uploadedFiles/Content/House_Business/Minutes/Minutes%20to%20the%20House%20Feb%202014th%202014%281%29.pdf

In 2013 the situation seemed hopeful when Trevor Moniz, Minister for Public Works, made an undertaking to preserve Victoria and Albert Rows: 'Although there is no currently defined plan or time-line, it is our intention to restore both Albert and Victoria Row properties in due course'.⁵ Moniz concluded: 'As a government, I just wanted to say that we have listened to the people of Bermuda in taking this decision which now ensures two significant Historical sites will be preserved'.

Nevertheless, twenty new prefabricated houses, reportedly costing \$24.7m, were erected by Wedco in November 2013 to house tenants from Victoria and Albert Rows (Bell, 'Wedco prefabs installation delayed due to weather', *Royal Gazette*, 6 November 2013). In 2014 Wedco chairman Ray Charlton 'still hoped the historic buildings could be renovated should a viable option be found', adding 'It was always my position that I was advocating for the majority of the tenants, who wanted to see the buildings renovated rather than destroyed.' Mr Charlton noted that in 2006 Habitat for Humanity's estimated cost to renovate Victoria and Albert Rows was around \$87,000 per unit'.⁶ However, these intentions were not implemented by Wedco.

It is Wedco's responsibility to fund estate maintenance from rental receipts. As the NDS argued to the Planning Department in 2014:

Sustainable renovation of Albert and Victoria Rows will create tradesmen's jobs and train young people in essential crafts such as applying lime mortar, which will be transferable else-where in Bermuda. A set percentage of WedCo's rental income should be invested and ring fenced for refurbishment, ongoing repairs and maintenance expenditure of its listed buildings. That would address the issue of no capital available to protect built heritage assets.⁷

The NDS proposed to Wedco and Bermuda Planning Department in 2014 and 2016 that a Victoria and Albert Rows Building Trust should be established, transferring the freehold to new owners. In its view, only a Buildings Preservation Trust, which could apply for interest-free government loans to make renovations or restorations and link to such organizations as Habitat for Humanity, which would also train craftspeople, could provide a long term solution. Such collaboration among many small stake-holders can work.

The NDS also argued that Wedco should create a Dockyard Conservation Management Plan, funded by rental income, to conserve and find appropriate uses for its historic buildings. Seeking sustainable value is crucial, representing both future commercial rental/resale value and retention of the embodied energy of these houses, built by manual labour from locally quarried limestone.

Bermuda National Trust was also approached to refurbish the properties, but Wedco offered an unrealistic lease which would not enable BNT's investment to be recouped. BNT Executive Director Jennifer Gray was quoted in the *Royal Gazette*.⁸ 'The Trust is keenly interested in the preservation of buildings which make up the historic fabric of the Dockyard,' she said, continuing: 'We are always saddened when they are allowed to fall into disrepair

⁵ Bell, 'Dockyard housing project scaled back', *Royal Gazette*, 24 January 2013, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20130124/NEWS/701249891>

⁶ Johnston-Barnes, 'Wedco boss hopeful Victoria and Albert Rows can be renovated', 22 March 2014, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20140322/NEWS/140329897>

⁷ Coats and Hyde, 'New solutions for Victoria and Albert Rows, Bermuda Dockyard?' *Dockyards*, vol. 19, no. 1, June 2014, pp. 11-14

⁸ Jones, 'Trust regrets end of Victoria Row', 10 October 2015, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20151010/NEWS/151019988>

and believe it is better to repair and reuse what is there than to knock buildings down. These buildings are very much a part of the ambience of Dockyard and a part of Bermuda's heritage.' Victoria Row is part of the old Dockyard 'town' that included schools, a hospital, theatre, stores and a post office and supplied the technical expertise and labour to run the giant industrial complex. Today, only a few buildings survive in usable condition to represent that thriving community.

Victoria and Albert Rows are the last remaining examples of the housing built for Dockyard trades-men or artisans and their families. Other, similar rows — Portland Place, Princess Louise Terrace, Clarence Terrace, and Marine Terrace at Lodge Point — have all been demolished.

With no evidence of a condition survey, in 2016 the NDS forwarded to Wedco an independent proposal for an historic building survey, cost plan, and development and investment analysis, to establish options for developers to refurbish Albert and Victoria Rows. This was rejected by Wedco on 13 April 2016. NDS also wrote to the Bermuda Planning Department in January 2016, urging that:

1. Wedco should enable a Victoria and Albert Rows Building Trust to be set up
2. Wedco follow the provisions of the Bermuda Plan Planning Statement 2008
3. No interventions are allowed on the fabric/context of Albert and Victoria Rows which will detract from their character
4. Wedco create a Conservation Management Plan for Bermuda Dockyard, funded through its rental income, which specifies a conservation programme for all the buildings in the Dockyard estate according to best international heritage practice and finds appropriate uses to conserve their integrity and ensure their future security.

As a result, in March 2016, following a brainstorming session with a number of stakeholders including the Bermuda National Trust, the National Museum of Bermuda and the Historic Buildings Advisory Committee, the Planning Department insisted that Wedco draw up a comprehensive plan for the dockyard historic buildings so that the Planning Department would not have to deal *ad hoc* with individual sites. The demolition of Victoria Row was put on hold until discussions were completed and the Director of Planning created a sub-committee to discuss possible solutions including a Heritage Preservation Trust.

However, on 27 April 2016 it was reported in the press that 'Reluctant' demolition starts at Victoria Row',⁹ despite the case that the NDS and others had advanced to have the houses refurbished. NDS submitted an emergency listing application on 18 May 2016, to halt demolition and give Victoria Row a fresh chance. Questions were asked in the House of Assembly on 28 May. Nevertheless, demolition proceeded. Local residents and visiting relatives of former Victoria Row residents sent images of the demolition.

⁹ *Royal Gazette*, <http://www.royalgazette.com/news/article/20160427/reluctant-demolition-starts-at-victoria-row>



Above: Victoria Row, 17 May 2016



Right: Victoria Row demolition 25 May 2016



Finally, on 27 May, the total cost of demolishing the Victoria Row units was reported as \$331,400 by Minister of Public Works Craig Cannonier in the House of Assembly, in reply to a question from Shadow Public Works Minister Dennis Lister. The report noted:

According to WEDCo, surveys indicate it would take approximately \$11 million to renovate Victoria Row which would mean that the interest alone on the renovation for each unit would be \$2,500.00 per month which far exceeds any rental return they may be able to earn.

However, no evidence of these surveys was ever presented. A video of the demolition may be seen at <http://bernews.com/2016/05/minister-cannonier-cost-demolition>.

This tragedy *must* mark the end of unprofessional neglect of unique dockyard heritage. As Gray highlighted, all the workers' housing has now been demolished apart from Albert Row. Many other dockyard structures have been allowed to decay or have been demolished (such as the Parsonage and the naval crest paintings). On a positive note, it is reported that funds are now in hand to restore HMS *Malabar* (Moresby House) and Prince Alfred Terrace is undergoing a complete refurbishment, following 2014 hurricane damage. Also, three of the big buildings in the north yard of the Dockyard have now been re-roofed and made watertight, from funds related to the America's Cup (2017). The NDS charges Bermuda Planning Department to enforce a Wedco Conservation Management Plan for Bermuda Dockyard. This should be funded through its rental income, specify a conservation programme for all the buildings in the Dockyard estate according to best international heritage practice, and find appropriate uses, including setting up an Historic Building Preservation Trust to conserve their integrity and ensure their future security. We shall request a timetable for this Plan.

The NDS is very grateful to *Royal Gazette* editors and reporters Jeremy Deacon, Jonathan Bell, Owain Johnston-Barnes, Simon Jones and Ceola Wilson, who have published our arguments and kept the issue of dockyard housing alive for their readers. We are equally indebted to Jennifer Gray, former Executive Director of Bermuda National Trust, for her tireless efforts to preserve dockyard buildings and wish her successor Bill Zuill all our support and good wishes. Jonathan Coad, Brian Hyde and local supporters are thanked for their information and suggestions during these attempts to save Victoria Row.

Dr Ann Coats

Dockyards, December 2016, 21/2, pp. 23-27