

# A Brief History of the Cayman Islands

by David Wells of the West India Committee  
for the Government of the Cayman Islands

# Preamble

The story told in this volume draws upon the library and archive of The West India Committee, which holds significant primary source material on the history of the Caribbean and its peoples amassed since its foundation. The West India Committee is a Royal Charter institution founded in London in 1735 whose roots lie firmly in the Eighteenth Century, when the relationship between Britain and the Caribbean was dictated by the inhumanity of trade based upon slavery. The West India Committee began as a trade association of planters and sugar merchants that rapidly evolved into one of the most pre-eminent charities of the Caribbean. Its meticulous record-keeping and timely publications throughout the centuries provide us with one of the few surviving contemporary accounts of many little known episodes in the history of this extraordinary region.

The charity's library and archive has been inscribed by UNESCO as a Memory of the World, attesting to its importance and relevance for those who seek to comprehend the Caribbean, a crossroads of world heritage. The West India Committee was itself complicit in many defining moments in Anglo-Caribbean heritage that have positively affected Britain, the Caribbean and the wider world.

Milestones in the history of The West India Committee include the infamous voyage of HMS Bounty in 1767 under the command of the notorious Captain Bligh; founding the Thames River Police in London in 1798, the oldest continuously serving police force in the world, making The West India Committee a forefather of today's Metropolitan Police Service; and opening West India Quay in 1802, marking a step change in London's first purpose-built wet dock and the longest brick building in the world at the time, improving London's proficiency as one of the world's leading ports. Each evinces the important contribution made by this unique institution, and the people of the Caribbean whom they have served for almost three centuries.

*A Brief History of the Cayman Islands* has been produced on behalf of the Government of the Cayman Islands London Office as part of their celebrations surrounding the sixtieth anniversary of the grant of the islands' coat of arms, in the hope that it will help people to understand the heritage of Cayman and the manner in which its people have lived over the last 450 years.

We trust this work will lead you to a better understanding and appreciation of the fine people of the Caribbean, one of the most diverse and fascinating places on Earth.



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# Introduction

The Cayman Islands are unlikely to spring to mind when people think of British involvement in the Caribbean; Jamaica, Barbados and Bermuda are far more likely candidates.

Yet this group of small islands, Cayman Brac, Little Cayman and Grand Cayman, have been a British territory since the middle of the seventeenth century, at the same time as Jamaica came under Crown rule. After the latter opted for independence, they chose to retain their British links.

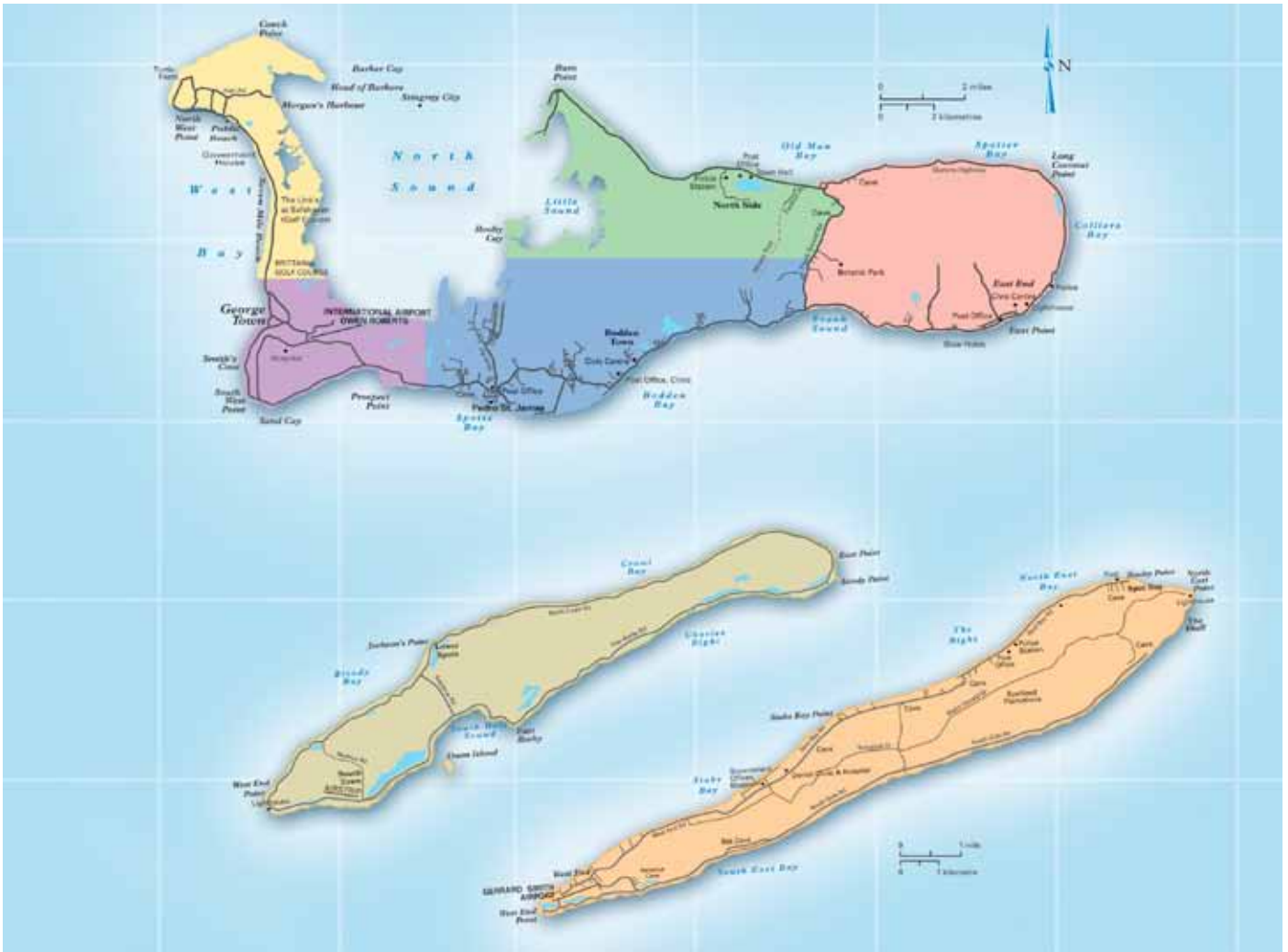
Their role in history seems to have started when human beings first arrived in the area, when they are believed to have formed part of a chain of islands across which people from Central America travelled to settle the Caribbean. They were first encountered by Christopher Columbus and served as a useful place for passing European sailors to stop off and resupply before they were eventually settled permanently by the British. Eventually, they fell under the authority of the Governor of Jamaica.

Never providing the riches or opportunities that other British West Indian possessions offered, for much of their existence they have been ignored or subjected to what has been called 'benign neglect' by Jamaica and Britain. Despite this, they have had links with Britain for over four and a half centuries, not only through economic but cultural and ancestral connections, with many families in Cayman tracing their ancestry back to British soldiers, sailors and settlers seeking adventure, riches or maybe even a new life in the New World.

For most of their settled existence, they have been home to a unique, arduous way of life, with people relying primarily on the sea for their survival, if not their living. This is reflected in the motto of the Caymanian Coat of Arms, granted in 1958, "*He hath founded it upon the seas*". Taken from the 24th Psalm, it also reflects the Cayman Islands' Christian heritage. Their history is one of people trying to exist on the Caribbean frontier, by growing crops, cutting wood, sailing and catching turtle. Traditionally they have been very isolated for much of the time that they have been inhabited and developed a reputation as the "*Islands that Time forgot*".

In the last half century, they have seen a remarkable transformation, making full use of the advantages of the modern world, transitioning from the "*Islands that Time forgot*", to become not only a luxury holiday destination but an important global banking centre, with one of the highest GDPs in the world. However, this transformation has come with the risk that they lose sight of their past and the unique position that they have occupied in Caribbean and British history.

# The geography of the Cayman Islands



*A map of all three Cayman Islands*

It is impossible to appreciate the history of the islands without understanding the geographical features that have shaped their existence.

The Cayman Islands are part of the Cayman Ridge, a submarine mountain chain which stretches from the Sierra Maestra of Cuba to the Gulf of Honduras. They are formed of dense limestone, surrounded by what is locally known as Ironshore, a substance made of consolidated coral, mollusc shells, marl and some limestone, which gives the coastline a rugged appearance and forms a unique, surreal landscape at a place called Hell, so called because of the unearthly appearance of the formation.



*Hell, Grand Cayman*

The porous nature of the rock, as well as the lack of hills and valleys in the islands, means that there is an absence of rivers and streams, so no sediment runs into the sea. Thus, the surrounding seawater is very clear, contributing to the Cayman Islands' status as an excellent diving venue, with many living coral reefs surrounding the coast.

Great storms threaten the entire region but the islands are notable for being the most hurricane-prone islands in the Caribbean. This is because they lie in the path of least

resistance, as there are very few landmasses to interrupt developing hurricanes on their passage through the area. These hurricanes have produced much damage and loss of life and property over the centuries, especially the Hurricane of November 1932 and Hurricane Ivan in 2004. They are also the main cause of the shipwrecks that

**Hurricanes** have been a feature of life in the islands since Europeans first sailed these seas.

These large storms are an unavoidable feature of life in the Caribbean and tend to develop in Summer and Autumn. Wind speeds can reach hundreds of miles an hour and can cause significant damage and loss of life. The modern English word hurricane is derived from the Spanish Huracán which is in turn derived from the name of a deity of the Taíno people, Jurakán. Jurakán was a god of chaos and destruction who was believed by the native peoples of the Caribbean to control the weather and send the great storms that passed through the region.

Although popularly considered to be three islands, Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman (the latter two known collectively as the Sister Islands), there are in fact two more, Owen Island and Little Cayman Brac. Grand Cayman, the largest, is 76 square miles in size, being approximately 22 miles long and, at its widest point, 8 miles across. Its most notable feature is arguably the 35 square miles large lagoon, known as North Sound, which, over the centuries, has proved valuable as a harbour. One of the defining features of the Cayman Islands is that they are relatively flat; the highest point on Grand Cayman is only 60 ft.

The second largest is Cayman Brac, at approximately 14 square miles, being 12 miles long and around a mile wide. It is notable for having the highest feature above sea level of the Cayman Islands. The Bluff is a large, limestone formation, which reaches 140 feet at the eastern end of the island and then falls in a sheer cliff to the sea. The Bluff is the source of Cayman Brac's name, Brac being an old Gaelic word for a bluff. At one point, when the sea levels were higher, a variety of caves were formed in the Bluff, which have provided useful shelter in times of need over the centuries. Off its shore can be found Little Cayman Brac.



*An aerial view of Cayman Brac and its Bluff*

Little Cayman is only 10 miles long and two miles at its widest point. It is the flattest of the three main islands, being no higher than 40 feet at Sparrowhawk Hill, named after *HMS Sparrowhawk*, which carried out a survey of the island in 1882. A channel five miles wide separates Little Cayman from Cayman Brac to the East. Off the coast can be found Owen Island, named after Richard Owen, who carried out the first hydrographic survey of the island in 1831. Blossom Village on Little Cayman is named after *HMS Blossom*, Owen's ship. The Sister Islands lie approximately 90 miles to the east northeast of Grand Cayman.

It has also been suggested that previously there may have been a sixth island. A map, drawn by Robert Morden in 1673, depicted another island, which was not included in his later map of 1693. At the site of this extra island can be found the Cayman Bank, a submarine sea mount. It is theorised that this 'island', never very large, was submerged in the great earthquake of 1692, which famously sunk much of Port Royal in Jamaica beneath the sea.



*Caymanite*

The Cayman Islands are also home to a semiprecious stone, Caymanite, which was first identified in the islands. This dolostone is hard, crystalline, banded and multi-coloured, with primarily whites, reds and blacks and has been noted to bear a resemblance to Tiger's Eye. Originally discovered on Cayman Brac in the 1970s, it is used to create a variety of jewellery and sculptures.

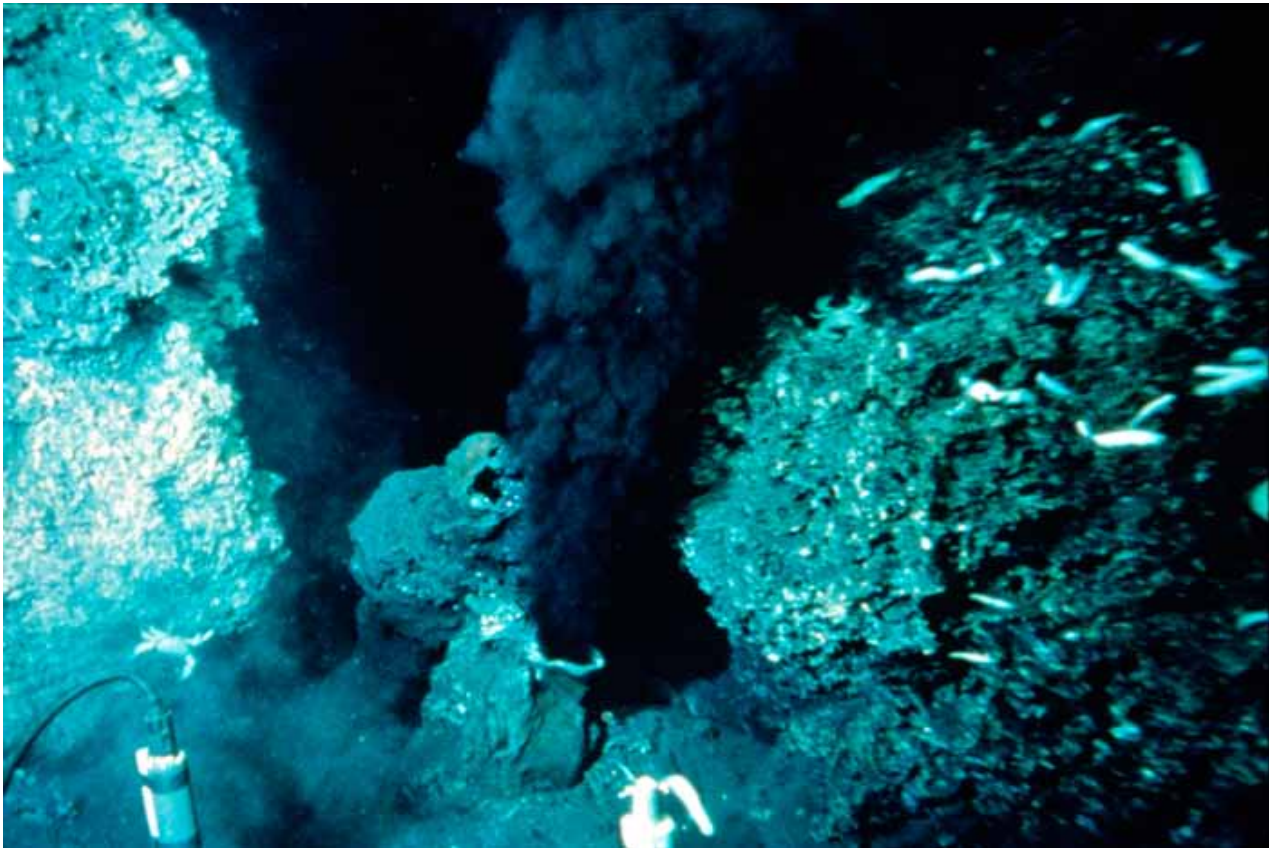
As sea levels have risen and fallen over the millennia, the islands have decreased and increased in size accordingly and have even been submerged. At one point during the Pliocene era, they are believed to have been connected to Jamaica by land and, during one of these last periods of low sea levels, they may have formed part of a larger chain of islands which humans used as stepping stones to leave Central America and enter the Caribbean for the very first time.

However, there is no archaeological evidence that native peoples of the region ever settled on the Cayman Islands though they possibly used them as a stopping point on longer journeys between larger islands. It is possible that such archaeological evidence has been destroyed by several centuries of inhabitation by Europeans and Africans or that changing sea levels have covered a settlement although, given the clear waters surrounding the islands, it is perhaps surprising that it has not been discovered if this is the case.



*The native people of the Caribbean traversed the region in dugout canoes*

Another unique geographical feature of the Cayman Islands is that they are home to the Cayman Trench, also known as the Cayman Trough, Bartlett's Trench or Bartlett's Trough, which is situated between the Islands and Jamaica. At 20,000 feet, 25,216 ft at its lowest point, it is the deepest part of the Caribbean. This is the site where the Caribbean Plate meets the North American plate and is still tectonically active. It is also home to the world's deepest and hottest volcanic vents, known as the Beebe Vent Field, originally discovered by British scientists from the British National Oceanographic Centre. The chimneys, composed of iron and copper ore, are known as black smokers, after the colour of their emissions, which are believed to reach over 450 Centigrade. These vents eject minerals dissolved from the Earth's crust for over half a mile towards the surface of the Caribbean.



*A 'black smoker' volcanic vent*

This extreme environment has resulted in some unique species, such as an eyeless shrimp that utilises a light sensing organ on its back, which it is believed to help them navigate in the dim light produced by the vents. White-tentacled anemones also live in the vent field, in cracks where warm water oozes from the sea bed. Many organisms found around the vents utilise their chemical output to gain energy, with some microbes not requiring oxygen to survive. The high temperature, as well as the pressure, means that the fluid emitted from the vents behaves like both a gas and liquid. The vents of the Cayman Trench are said to be the closest feature on our planet to deep hydrothermal vents that are believed to exist on Jupiter's moon Europa.



# Flora and Fauna

The geographically isolated nature of the Cayman Islands means that they are home to several unique species of both plants and animals. The Blue Iguana is native to Grand Cayman and has become endangered due to people, cars, non-natural predators, such as cats and dogs, and the development of the island. A conservation programme is in place to restore their numbers.



*The Blue Iguana*



*The Grand Cayman Parrot*

There are also native subspecies of parrots on both Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac. The Cayman Brac parrot was once found on Little Cayman but became extinct there after the devastating effects of the hurricane of November 1932. A unique sub-species of Brown Bat is found on Grand Cayman. The rarest snail in the world, *Cerion Nanus*, is only found on Little Cayman. First discovered in 1888, it is critically endangered. Cuban and American Crocodiles were once found on the islands. Early settlers and sailors seem to have hunted them into extinction, but even today a crocodile may find its way to the islands on occasion.

Cayman is also home to 26 species of Orchid, including the Wild Banana Orchid, which is the Cayman national flower. The Cayman national tree is the Silver Thatch Palm, unique to the islands, which played an important part in island life until the 1960s through use of its tough leaves and other parts. The name comes from the colour of the underside of the leaves. The timber of the Cayman Ironwood tree is so heavy that it sinks in



*The Wild Banana Orchid*



*The leaf of the Silver Thatch Palm*

water and so tough that it has traditionally been used to make foundations for houses, as termites cannot eat through it. The black mastic tree is also unique to the islands, as are several shrubs and cacti. Some plants that are only to be found on the islands are so rare that, although they have been given scientific names in Latin by botanists, they have never been given a name in common languages.

## Uses of the Silver Thatch Palm

Caymanians have utilised the Silver Thatch Palm for many purposes of the centuries, such as using its leaves to make thatched roofs for houses. Its most notable use was to create a type of rope, made from the unopened central shoots of the tree; this was renowned for its toughness and was much in demand for use on vessels as it was resistant to seawater, making it last longer than other types of rope. It was a major export of the islands, with over a million fathoms exported annually at one point. It was primarily produced by women and children and was an important pillar of support to the poorer families on the islands. The development of ropes made from tougher, artificial fibres brought an end to the industry. The Silver Thatch Palm was also used to create hats with a wide brim and high crown that was useful for protecting people working outside from the sun. Baskets were also woven from the tree and used throughout the islands. Noted for their great strength, they were also exported abroad.



*A coil of Thatch Palm rope*

Mosquitoes have historically been a problem on the Cayman Islands, particularly on Grand Cayman, where mangrove swamps provided the perfect breeding ground. Traditionally people sat near smoke fires, but whilst the smoke repelled insects, it was not a pleasant experience for humans. During the mosquito season everyone tried to keep their work outside to a bare minimum. The mosquitoes also affected animals; cattle were known to have died due to the sheer number of mosquitoes that flew up their noses and impaired their breathing. Mosquito numbers were massively reduced by concerted efforts in the twentieth century, including draining mangrove swamps and spraying large amounts of insecticide. By 1993 it was believed that the mosquito population had been reduced by 95% since 1966. This not only led to an increase in the quality of life for Caymanians but it also assisted the Caymanian economic transformation in the latter half of the twentieth century by making the island a more attractive tourist and business destination.



*The Silver Thatch Palm Tree*



*The Grand Cayman Ghost Orchid*

# The discovery of the Cayman Islands and the sixteenth century



*A portrait of a man believed to be Christopher Columbus*

The first historical record of the Cayman Islands was on 10th May 1503 when they were sighted by Christopher Columbus on his fourth and final voyage to the West Indies. He sailed past the Sister Islands of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Columbus' son, Ferdinand, later described the islands, noting that the seas surrounding them were full of turtles, which looked like little rocks. Thus, the Islands were first named Las Tortugas, 'the turtles' in Spanish.

Early maps of the region frequently placed the islands in the wrong location, due to the limitations of mapping technology of the day. The Turin Map of 1523 was the first to position them in approximately the correct location but they were now called Lagartos, Spanish for 'Lizards', a reference to the native iguanas or crocodiles.

The islands gained renown as an important stopping point for travellers in the region, where they could take on supplies of turtle for food, but no one settled on the islands or indeed lingered for long. Although they were technically claimed by the Spanish as part of their empire in the Americas, they had very little interest in them. The first person to stop for more than a few hours was the great Elizabethan English hero, Sir Francis Drake, during his expedition against the Spanish in the region in 1586. By the time he and his men visited on 22nd April, the islands were known as the Caymanas. They landed in the Sister Islands and encountered crocodiles, iguanas and turtles. Drake's visit would be the first incidence in a long relationship between England and the Cayman Islands.



*Sir Francis Drake*

There is debate about how the islands eventually came to be known as the Cayman Islands. One theory is the name originates from Cayo-Mano, with Grand Cayman looking like an outstretched hand, whilst Cayman Brac, Cayo Braco, looks like a man's arm without the hand. However, no aerial view was possible at this time and any such resemblance is minimal. Another suggestion is that it derives from 'Cay' 'Main', meaning a reef in the sea, which would certainly be an accurate description of the island and its surroundings. However, the accepted view is that it derives from Cayman crocodiles that lived on the islands. Indeed, the singular form of their previous name, Lagarto, was interchangeable with the Carib Indian and African word for crocodile, Caiman.

Captain William King of the *Saloman* wrote about the islands in 1592, and this was included in the next edition of *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* by Richard Hakluyt. He recommended Grand Cayman as an excellent place to obtain food and water, noting that two female turtles laden with eggs could feed a hundred men for a day; additionally, there were plenty of birds that could be killed for food. This influential publication probably encouraged more sailors to stop off at the islands, despite the difficulties caused by surrounding reefs.

Despite being a Spanish possession, the English and Dutch became increasingly familiar with the Islands. Indeed the first people to remain on the island for more than a few days were 122 Dutch sailors, whose ship, the *Dolphijn*, was wrecked on Grand Cayman in 1630. Over the course of sixteen weeks, they constructed a yacht, the first ship built in the islands, out of the remnants of the *Dolphijn*. They named it the *Cayman* and sailed from the islands but abandoned it when they were rescued by Dutch ships near Western Cuba.

By 1643 Cayman had become very well known amongst seafarers, leading Captain William King to comment that, “*The island is much frequented by English, Dutch and French ships that come purposely to salt up the flesh of these tortoises.*” The English familiarity with the islands would prove useful in the great military expedition they sent to the West Indies in the mid seventeenth century.



A map from 1597 which depicts the islands and refers to them as Caiman.

# The Commonwealth of England and the Western Design

Following the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the defeat of the Royalists, England in the early 1650s was ruled by the Commonwealth, under Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. Despite, the fact that England had been engaged in a decade of Civil War, Cromwell decided to attack the Spanish in the West Indies in 1654, a choice that led to the settlement of the Cayman Islands.

There has always been a debate about the exact motivations for Cromwell's Western Design, as this expedition has come to be known. It has been suggested that it was an attempt to break the dominance of the Spanish in the West Indies, which they had enjoyed since Columbus discovered the region and claimed it for Ferdinand and Isabella. Some believe it was an attempt to secure the English colonies and trade already present in the region from Spanish attack, whilst others argue that the primary motivation was one of religion. The Commonwealth in England was characterised by Puritan Protestant beliefs



*King Charles I*

and much of the language surrounding the Design had a religious tone, suggesting that Puritan England was engaging in a holy war against the Catholic Spanish. Yet others theorise that the object was territorial gain, citing the advice of Thomas Gage, a rogue Dominican friar, who claimed that the Spanish colonies could be seized and defended easily by a relatively small force.



*Oliver Cromwell*

Surprisingly, for what was such a monumental undertaking, the plans for the Western Design were created and executed in a short space of time under a veil of secrecy. Volunteers were gathered from existing regiments in England, which the commanders in charge of the expedition, amongst others, viewed as a mistake. They believed that it would have been better to recruit from regiments stationed in Ireland, as they were considered to be of a better quality than those in England. Furthermore, it was later felt that many regimental commanders used the call for men as an excuse to rid themselves of poorly disciplined, incompetent soldiers they felt were detrimental to their regiments.

However, the appeal for soldiers did not result in the number of volunteers, forced or otherwise, that was required to mount the expedition. Thus, to make up numbers, parties of recruiters were dispatched in London to gather 'volunteers'. For most people, life was difficult, with much poverty and recurring famines caused by successive poor harvests.

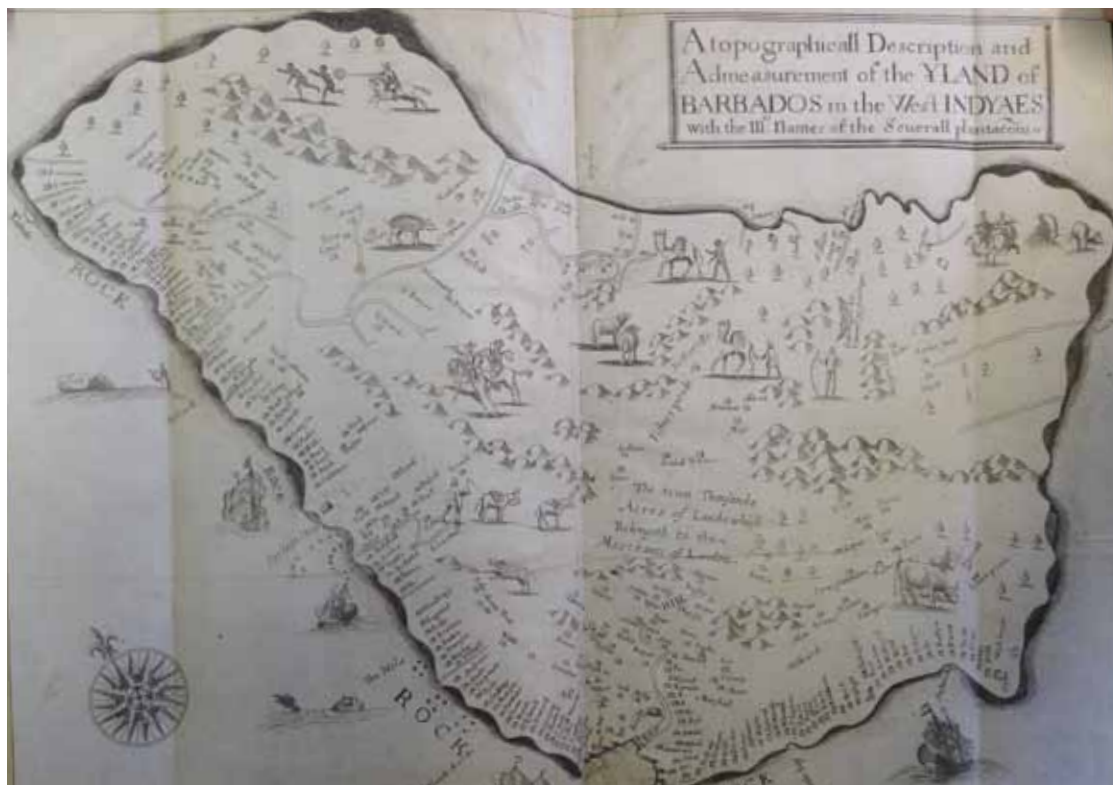
In the aftermath of the war and amidst poor economic conditions, there were a large number of refugees from all parts of the country, many of whom gathered in the capital. Undoubtedly, some 'volunteers' were recruited from amongst these refugees. The authorities still deemed the numbers to be insufficient and it became clear that they would have to recruit more men from the English West Indian colonies - Barbados, Nevis, St. Kitts and Montserrat.



*William Penn*

General Robert Venables and General-at-Sea William Penn were appointed joint commanders. Both were experienced leaders but their lack of a working relationship would severely hinder the force. The expedition left England on Christmas Day 1654 and arrived in Barbados a month later. The upper classes of Barbados were not pleased with having to billet and feed numerous soldiers and the army's recruitment efforts did nothing to improve their disposition. In the days before the African slave trade became entrenched in Caribbean life, many colonies relied on a system of indentured servitude. In this, a person, usually a convict, would be sent to the colonies to serve a term, normally around 5 years, as a servant, a slave in all but name. Cromwell was a particularly prominent practitioner of indentured servitude

and he dispatched not only many convicted criminals, but also Scottish, Welsh and Irish prisoners from his campaigns and Royalist prisoners captured during the Civil War.



*A map of Barbados in the seventeenth century*

To recruit more soldiers, the commanders offered such men freedom from their deeds of indenture if they joined the army. The move infuriated Barbadian planters, as it robbed them of their workforce. Regardless, 3,000 to 4,000 more men from both indentured and free men were raised. With their assembled troops of over 6,000 men, Penn and Venables left Barbados to attack their first target, the island of Hispaniola. However, despite its size, this force was composed of badly disciplined, ill-trained men.

Hispaniola, now home to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, was one of the jewels of the Spanish West Indies and also held special significance for the English as Sir Francis Drake had raided it during his expedition in 1586. Thus, conquering it would have been a major symbolic and practical victory for the English force. However, the planned invasion went wrong from the outset. Sea conditions meant they had to land further west than planned, which necessitated an arduous twenty-five-mile march over three days through difficult jungle terrain to reach their target; this journey resulted in the death of large numbers. By the time the army finally reached Santo Domingo, they were in a very poor condition, suffering from dysentery and dehydration. Two attempts to capture Santo Domingo were unsuccessful and they were forced to retreat.

The failure to capture Hispaniola left the expedition in a very precarious state, with morale really low. It was thus decided to aim for an easier target, Jamaica. Jamaica was at the time a minor Spanish colony with a small Spanish garrison. The English fleet left Hispaniola on 5th May and arrived five days later at what would later become Kingston harbour, landing troops on 11th. The Spanish, realising that they were heavily outnumbered, withdrew from their defences and the English were able to advance and occupy Santiago de la Vega, modern Spanishtown, the main Spanish settlement on the island.

Shortly after Jamaica was taken, a new problem emerged, a lack of food. This, coupled with disease, resulted in thousands of deaths. At the same time, given that they wished Jamaica to become a British colony, the commanders and commissioners forbade the soldiers to live off the land. Many men grew ill and died of the 'bloody flux', dysentery. In an attempt to alleviate the situation, a small group of ships was dispatched to the Cayman Islands, which, as has been previously noted, were famed for their supplies of turtle. They duly brought back turtle meat to aid the situation. Reinforcements were soon sent from Britain but conditions remained poor, with slaves freed by the Spanish attacking English troops, adding to the latter's difficulties. In such dire circumstances, it is not surprising that some soldiers decided to desert.

The Conquest of Jamaica marked the end of the Western Design. Both Penn and Venables decided to return to England shortly afterwards, where both were accused of deserting their posts and were imprisoned in the Tower of London for a while. The reasons for the failure of the expedition are myriad: lack of preparation, poor leadership and poorly disciplined and badly trained soldiers. Those who viewed it through the prism of Puritanism thought that it failed as God did not support the endeavour, owing to the sinfulness of the men.

# Early settlers

There were a number of motives for settling on the Cayman Islands in those early years. The harsh conditions in the newly-acquired English colony of Jamaica drove army deserters to seek refuge but some settlers were genuinely attracted by the turtles and set themselves up as itinerant turtle fishermen, remaining on the islands during the breeding season and going to other islands, when the turtles left. Others set themselves up as planters, or as fishermen or farmers, raising livestock, notably cattle and pigs. It was this latter practice that eventually lent its name to a settlement on the western side of Grand Cayman, Hogsties, where visiting sailors would come to buy supplies.

Tradition holds that the earliest settlers on the Cayman Islands were two men called Bawden, (or Bodden), and Watler, who are believed to have arrived in the islands around 1658. Although the same traditions state that they were deserters, many historians believe that they were respectable turtlers, who eventually decided to settle permanently on the islands. If they were indeed honourably discharged from the army when it was demobilised, it would place their arrival after 1661.

Popular belief is that the original Bawden was from Cornwall, where the surname can still be found today. The question is, was the original Bawden really a Bodden, and the records that indicate otherwise merely a result of the vagaries of seventeenth and eighteenth century spelling? Boddens can certainly be found in Cornwall, where there is still a settlement called Boden, which was recorded as Boten in the Domesday Book of 1086. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, a number of Boddens are also recorded in the Devonshire parish records.

However, the surname may also indicate a link with Somerset, where several people over the centuries named Bodden have originated from a hamlet near Shepton Mallet called Bodden. This is believed to have been founded by Earl Michael Bodden in the 1500s. Many Boddens also live in Dorset. All these possible origins mean it is likely that the family has connections throughout the West Country.



*Bodden, Somerset*

There are a number of possibilities about the manner in which Bawden found his way to the Caribbean. If he was indeed from Cornwall, then he may well have served the Royalist cause during the Civil War, as the county was loyal to the king, and then was sent as an indentured servant to the West Indies. As the commanders of the Western Design offered such men freedom from their deeds of indenture if they joined their force, Bawden may well have taken up the offer. Alternatively, due to the poverty in the West Country at the end of the Civil War, he may have gone to London as a refugee to seek work and been recruited there. Unfortunately, there are no extant records to provide a definitive answer.



Similarly, there are no records about the other original settler, Watler. Previous generations of historians, notably Commissioner George S.S. Hirst who wrote the first history of the Cayman Islands in 1910, have claimed that the name Watler was unknown in England and was a corruption of Walter or Walters, either of which would indicate a link with the region around the Welsh border. Another tradition states that the original Watler/Walters may have come from Scotland. However, Watler does exist as a surname, particularly in Kent, and is believed to derive from the practice of creating wattle and daub buildings.

It is clear, however, that there were many men among the early settlers who either were deserters or undesirable characters. Many were debtors, fleeing their debts on Jamaica. The instructions of 1662 provided to the first governor of Jamaica, Lord Thomas Windsor, authorised him to treat the islands as if they were an integral part of



Sir Henry Morgan

Jamaica, showing that England now claimed them. It was believed to be advantageous to the English to have the islands inhabited to act as a shield against Spanish attacks, protecting the valuable colony of Jamaica, and the Governor was authorised to build forts upon them. Despite this, no defensive structures appear to have been built in this early period and would not be for over a century. The conflict between the Spanish and English still continued, despite official peace treaties, and it was inevitable, given their location, that the Cayman Islands would be involved. In 1667, five ships from Jamaica were seized by the Spanish at the Cayman Islands and the noted English Privateer, Sir Henry Morgan, used the islands as a staging post for his attack on Cuba in January 1668.

Of the three islands, it is clear that Cayman Brac and Little Cayman were settled first. The English established a turtling camp on Little Cayman that would prove to be a target for the Spanish. In 1670, a Spanish privateer called Manuel Rivero Pardal, attacked this settlement, bringing his vessels in under false colours; several of his men came ashore, burnt dwellings and turtling ships and captured five boats as prizes. Although it was not clear who was responsible at the time, he claimed responsibility in a note he left in a later raid, asserting that the attack was in response to Sir Henry Morgan's actions against the Spanish at Porto Bello and Maracaibo.

Eventually the Cayman Islands were recognised as English territory with the passing of the Treaty of Madrid later in 1670, which not only ceded Jamaica, but all other territories that the English claimed at that time. The nature of the Cayman Islands, with its collection of debtors, deserters and other nefarious types is demonstrated by the amnesty which was offered to the "*soldiers, planters, privateers and others living in the Caymanas*" by the Governor of Jamaica in 1671. If they were indeed deserters, then this amnesty would also have been granted to Bawden and Watler.

Over the centuries the Cayman Islands have developed a reputation for being a pirates' lair during this early period, for which, despite the stories and the occasional find of buried coins, there is very little supporting evidence. The Islands were a quiet place, with very little on which pirates could spend their ill-gotten gains and indeed with very little to steal on the islands themselves. Furthermore, their proximity to Jamaica meant that it was not necessarily the best place for a wanted pirate to hide due to the near-constant presence of the Royal Navy. That being said, it is likely that pirates stopped off, as other sailors did, to resupply. There are records of pirates operating in Caymanian waters, even though they may not have used the islands as an actual base of operations, but even these are few in number.

The most famous of all pirates, Edward Teach, Blackbeard, apparently captured a small turtler off the shores of Grand Cayman in 1717. Edward 'Ned' Low began his career of piracy at Grand Cayman, sailing there shortly after raising the black flag for the first



*Edward Teach, also known as Blackbeard*

time. When he arrived, he met and established a partnership with another pirate, George Lowther. Pirates, captained by John Fenn, but under the overall command of Thomas Anstis, ran their ship, the *Morning Star*, aground on Grand Cayman in 1722 during the night. The following day, forty pirates were captured by the Royal Navy, whilst others hid in the woods. Anstis himself escaped with some crewmembers of the *Morning Star*, including Fenn, aboard

his other ship, the *Good Fortune*. Some men, who had hidden in the woods, later surrendered. The last known pirate to have operated in the Cayman Islands during the Golden Age of Piracy was Neal Walker in 1730, by which time it was nigh impossible for a pirate in Caymanian waters to escape the notice of the Royal Navy. Regardless of the presence of pirates, Cayman developed a reputation as a dangerous and lawless place, one that would endure for over a century.

It is not until the 1730s that we have the first documentary evidence of settlers on Grand Cayman. This records the marriage on 9th November 1735 in Port Royal, Jamaica of Isaac Bawden, who is believed to be the grandson of the original Bawden, to Sarah Lamar, a widow also living on Grand Cayman. The birth of their two sons, Benjamin Lock Bawden and William Price Bawden, is also recorded. The presence of Bawden and Lamar indicates that by this time a community was thriving on Grand Cayman, although one without a priest or any real system of government, hence why they had to go to Port Royal to marry. This lack of a priest would be an issue for Caymanians for some time to come; in 1774 Edward Long noted in his *History of Jamaica* that

Caymanians came to Jamaica to wed and sell their turtle at the same time. By the time that we learn of Isaac Bawden, the Sister Islands appear to have been depopulated, despite being home to the earliest settlements. This is likely due to issues concerning adequate supplies of food and water and, as shown by Pardal's incursion, threat of attack. Some historians believe that the 1671 offer of amnesty may also have contributed to their abandonment. By the time Sir Hans Sloane passed the Sister Islands in March 1688, he made no mention of any settlement. As the first recorded settler, Isaac lent his name to Old Isaac's, the old name for the district of East End on Grand Cayman and the oldest settlement on the island.

### Religion on the Islands

Cayman has a strong Christian heritage but the presence of religious organisations in the islands has been a mixed affair. It was not until the early nineteenth century that the Anglican Bishop of Jamaica answered a long held desire of the settlers to send a priest to the islands. Two Churches were built, but they were destroyed by hurricanes in 1838, and after this the Anglican presence in the islands faded away when the clergyman returned to Jamaica the following year. For a time the Wesleyan Church operated on Grand Cayman, but a hurricane in 1846

ended their time on the island. They were followed by the Presbyterian Church which has historically been the largest denomination on the island. The Sister Islands, by comparison, were predominantly Baptist. As communication and travel to the islands has become easier over time, different denominations of Christianity and other religions have begun to be practised on the island. It was not until 1964 that the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian denomination, established itself on the islands.



*Elmslie Memorial Church in Georgetown*

It was around this time that people began to take a greater interest in Grand Cayman and lodged claims for land on the island. These were registered at the Office of Enrolments



*An eighteenth century mahogany sideboard*

in Spanish Town, Jamaica, and the terms of the patent reveal much about these early settlers. The first land grant was registered in September 1734 to David Campbell, Mary Campbell and John Middleton for a sizeable 3,000 acres. The purpose of this grant is unclear but might have a connection with the Jamaican mahogany industry, as a map of the grant sets out where timber could be found. Mahogany was much in demand, particularly to make luxury furniture. It is much clearer that some later grants were linked to mahogany, as woodcutters and merchants anticipated

problems caused by excessive logging on Jamaica. Samuel Spofforth registered a 1,000-acre estate on Grand Cayman and established a regular shipping route between the island and Jamaica using his sloop, the *Experiment*, to transport Mahogany, not

all of which may have been from his own estate. The *Experiment* was the first ship to be registered as trading between Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Spofforth did not settle permanently on the island and thus no descendants of his remain. Murray Crymble, a Jamaican merchant, also took out a land patent, although he too did not settle on the island.

The most complete picture we have of the mahogany trade on Grand Cayman is that of the joint business venture of William Foster and Benjamin Battersby, primarily through the legal dispute that ended their partnership. After securing their grant in 1734, they sent a group of eight slaves to the island to cut mahogany, under the supervision of a local overseer, John Bodden, who may have been a brother of Isaac Bawden. Neither man seems to have wished personally to relocate to the island. Although like Spofforth they traded through Jamaica, they also chartered a sloop to ship mahogany directly to England. Problems started in 1736 when Foster decided to expand the venture, by sending twenty more slaves and an experienced sawyer from Jamaica. However, despite Foster himself exploring the island's interior for new sources of mahogany, the claim was quickly exhausted and the two partners fell out over running costs and allegations of conspiracy to defraud. The problem with Foster and Battersby's partnership demonstrates the wider issues with a mahogany industry on Grand Cayman. Like that on Jamaica, it was simply unsustainable and settlers on Grand Cayman had to look for a new industry to support themselves.

The final grant of land of 1,000 acres was to one Mary Bodden in 1742. It is believed that she was a member of the already established Bawden family on the island, the inconsistent literacy of the time morphing the name to Bodden, although it has already been noted that the latter surname is not unknown in England. There has been a belief over the centuries that her land was in the area of Bodden Town on the south coast of Grand Cayman, and that the settlement is named after her. However, the grant specifically states that her property was



*Bodden Town on the south coast*

surrounded by 'King's land' on all sides and thus cannot have been by the sea. Bodden Town is far more likely to be named after Boddens in general, and the large number of Boddens to be found on the Cayman Islands may well be her descendants. All the land patents granted in this period allowed for slaves to be brought to the islands on the condition that sufficient white servants, free or indentured, were proportionally employed. It was common practice for slaves and indentured servants to adopt their master's surname and thus the Bodden name seems to have spread amongst them. Those that adopted the name may have founded Bodden Town.

The settlers that were not involved in the mahogany trade at this time seem to have engaged in small amounts of agriculture, raising pigs and cutting logwood and fustic, woods that were used in the dyeing trade.

# Colonists

As stated previously, the earliest settlers are believed to have come from the West Country (probably Cornwall) and possibly Kent. A lack of definitive first names for the early settlers, as well as a lack of information about their birth and death dates, makes it very difficult to determine their exact roots. As time progresses and written records become more available, it becomes easier to determine settlers' origins but much still relies on oral traditions that have become muddled over time and are frequently incomplete. The practice of giving slaves new names, often their masters' surnames, means that it is especially difficult to trace ancestry through the male line back to the original settlers.

Many families descended from the early settlers, such as the Hunters, Hinds, Rivers, Tatums and Jennetts suffer from similar issues to the Boddens and the Watlers in that their origins are unclear. According to tradition, the original Hunter was a shipwrecked mariner, possibly the first of many that settled on Grand Cayman. The surname is attested throughout England, Scotland and Northern Island. The surname Ebanks is believed to come from a slave owner or merchant, who may have given his first initial and surname, E. Banks, to his slaves.

The Boddens/Bawdens were not the only people to come from southern England. John Shearer Jackson originally came from Chatham, Kent and arrived in Grand Cayman around 1770 when he was about 40 years old. The Eden family can trace their roots to Devizes in Wiltshire, where William Eden was said to have lived before he arrived on Grand Cayman in 1765. Indeed many Edens have lived in Wiltshire over the centuries. Following William's death, his widow Elizabeth married Thomas Thompson, who came from Penicuik in Scotland, sometime after 1760. On a trip to London to sell cotton, he brought back his cousin, William Thompson, who started another branch of the family.

James Goodchild Coe is one of the few early settlers for whom we have significant information about his origins. He was born in Ipswich in the county of Suffolk, England on 15th February 1769. At the age of 12 he emigrated to Jamaica and from there eventually came to Grand Cayman. He moved to Beaufort in the American Colonies for a time but, following the American Revolution, he returned to Grand Cayman where he became one of the island's magistrates. James Arch was said to have originally come from Stratford-Upon-Avon in Warwickshire, the home of William Shakespeare, and was shipwrecked off Cuba in 1853. He was saved by the Caymanian Schooner *Star*, which brought him back to Georgetown, where he settled. One tradition states that he was the younger brother of Joseph Arch, the Liberal M.P., but this is demonstrably untrue, as Joseph Arch only had an elder brother who died when he was young. However, there are many branches of the Arch family in Warwickshire.



Warwickshire in the mid-nineteenth century

William Parsons came either directly from Jamaica or England via Jamaica. The name Parsons is found throughout England. Other families have come from further north in the U.K. The Yates family came originally from Manchester. Thomas John Yates emigrated from England to Jamaica and then to Grand Cayman. John Merren was a shipwrecked sailor from Liverpool, who stayed on Grand Cayman and married. Merren himself left the island in 1815, only two years after he wed, but his son remained to found the Merren family. In the U.K., Merrens have traditionally been found primarily in both Lancashire and Nottinghamshire.

The Bush family are believed to be descended from Charles Christopher, a deserter from the British Army, who, after being stationed at Fort Augustus, Jamaica, jumped ship at Grand Cayman and hid in the bushes on the south side of the island at some point in the 1750s. He started a family, which came to be known as the 'bushers' by the Caymanians; his eldest son adopted Bush as his surname. It is unclear where Charles Christopher originated as he left few records and seemingly hid his true name to avoid being identified by the authorities.

The Ritch and Scott Families are both believed to have first arrived in the islands in the early nineteenth century. The Ritch family possibly came from southern England, whilst the Scotts probably came from further north. One tradition holds that the first Ritch and Scott were half-brothers. Another states that William Robert Scott from Scotland was the founder of the Scott family. The Foster family were once thought to descend from William Foster, who had a land patent in the 1700s, but more recent scholarship believes that they are descended from Stephen Taylor Foster who was born in Brighton, England in 1805. He is said to have come to Cayman as a cabin boy, after being shipwrecked off Cuba.



*Brighton in the nineteenth century*

There were also colonists, whose families probably had British origins, but had settled in the New World. The Miller family came from Montreal in Canada in 1858, when John Miller was shipwrecked off Cuba and brought by a Caymanian Schooner to Grand Cayman. Some came from Jamaica, such as the McTaggarts and the Pantons. Pantons ultimately came from a village of the same name in Lincolnshire, England and many branches of the family have lived in that county. Caymanians carrying the name McTaggart may well be descended from Clan MacTaggart, a branch of Clan Ross, from the lowlands of Scotland. Family members may have come via Ireland, as many members of the clan emigrated from Ireland, presumably to the Americas.

Many families appear to have Scottish origins. The McLaughlins are not recorded on the census of 1802 but seem to have arrived before the mid-1830s. The family name is attested in both Scotland and Ireland but is believed to have originated in the latter. The name is thought to be an alternate spelling of Clan MacLachlan. Alexander McKeith was born in Glasgow in 1822 and arrived in Cayman in 1850. He

was presumably a descendent of Clan Keith who held lands in East Lothian. John Chisholm was the son of a veteran from the Battle of Waterloo, William Chisholm. He was born in Aberdeenshire in 1823 and eventually became a mariner. In 1846 he was on a ship bound for Mexico when he was shipwrecked south of Cuba and rescued by Caymanian sailors, who took him to Grand Cayman. From there he went to Jamaica but he was persuaded to return to Cayman, where he enjoyed a career as a Master of several vessels belonging to islanders. Clan Chisholm originally came from southern Scotland. The Caymanian families with Scottish surnames such as these have stronger links to the UK than most, as they are eligible to be recognised as members of their respective clans. These links go beyond the U.K., and many Scottish clans have thriving associations and societies around the world.



*A member of Clan Chisholm*



Some families can trace their roots to Ireland. William Wallace Ryan was apparently born somewhere in the vicinity of Dublin around 1812. He eventually made his way to Cayman Brac at some point before 1837, after time in New York, Cartagena in Columbia and Jamaica. George Wood from Sligo was born around 1774 and arrived on Grand Cayman after being rescued from a shipwreck off the Cuban coast and elected to remain and start a family. Around the same time a man by the name of McCoy arrived from Ireland.

*An eighteenth century map of Ireland with Sligo marked as Slego*

### **Cayman speech**

English has always been the main language on the islands since they were settled. The traditional Caymanian dialect preserved many aspects of earlier forms of English due to the isolation of the islands. It has frequently been described as holding characteristics of Elizabethan English, with the most distinctive aspect being the pronunciation of V as W, which was a characteristic of Elizabethan Cockney. Such a sound could still be heard in Cockney Speech until 1870 and its presence in Caymanian indicates that some of the early settlers may very well have come from that part of Cromwell's army that was recruited in London for the Western Design. Some influences can also be traced from the Cornish dialect, and there is also evidence that some of the settlers from Scotland and Yorkshire have brought expressions with them that became part of local speech. There are also aspects that arrived from Africa with the slaves and also from Spanish and American English as a result of the islands' interaction with Cuba and the USA.

# The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

The middle of the eighteenth century saw the beginnings of formal government in the Cayman Islands, with the appointment of Magistrates, in theory by the Governor of Jamaica, to enforce laws. These were headed by a chief magistrate; the first was William Cartwright, who served for 25 years approximately between 1750 and 1775, although no official record survives of his appointment. He had a reputation for severity that lasted for a long time in the memories of the islands' inhabitants. He gave particularly harsh and cruel punishments to slaves, authorising both severe lashings and public executions.

Cartwright was followed by William Bodden, one of the most significant figures in Caymanian history, who served as chief magistrate from 1776. Originally from Bodden Town, his tenure would see many changes in Caymanian society and he would become known as 'Governor' Bodden, although he never held the title officially. Although it has been previously thought that there was only one 'Governor' William Bodden, it is now believed that there were two. The first William Bodden seems to have died in April 1789 and his position taken up by a successor who bore the same name, possibly his son, who held the office until 1823. Regardless of whether there was one Governor Bodden or two, his appointment as chief magistrate was not made official until 13th January 1798, when he received a commission from the Governor of Jamaica, the Earl of Balcarres, as did his brothers James and Joseph and two others. It had already been noted by Edward Long in his 1774 history of the West Indies that the Caymanians, uniquely amongst British territories in the region, were in the habit of selecting their own 'chief' or 'governor'.



*Alexander Lindsay,  
the Earl of Balcarres*

It was in the late eighteenth century that Georgetown, the capital of the Cayman Islands, began truly to take shape when it was renamed in honour of the King. There have been conflicting thoughts about which King it was named after, George II or George III. As it is still referred to on George Gauld's map of 1773 and in Captain John Lawford's reports of 1794 as Hogsties, it is unlikely to be named after George II, as his reign ended in 1760. In the first ever census of the Cayman Islands in 1802, it is referred to as Georgetown (formerly Hogsties), which suggests that the change had only occurred in recent years, thus placing it firmly in the reign of George III.

The Caribbean was still dangerous in the late eighteenth century; although the threat of piracy had largely vanished, there were still tensions between the various colonial powers of the region. Certainly the Spanish living on Cuba did not have a favourable view of the inhabitants of the Cayman Islands, believing them to be sea robbers posing



as fishermen. During the American Revolution, the Spanish took the opportunity to attack Grand Cayman. The war at sea did spill into Caymanian waters and the Royal Navy ship *HMS Janus* succeeded in capturing the American ship *Hibernia* off the coast of Grand Cayman near Hogsties.

Like many islands in the region, the inhabitants of Grand Cayman established a militia, which was first officially raised in 1788. Likewise, without any help from experienced engineers, they built two forts to protect themselves from Spanish raiders from Cuba, one at Georgetown and the other at Prospect. The walls were built of coral rock, with a core of limestone rubble, and followed the design of most contemporary English gun batteries. The island's poverty appears to have influenced the equipment of these forts. Although the fort at George Town was designed with eight cannon emplacements, records indicate that, by early in the following century, only three guns were installed. These forts indeed proved useful when they were subject to attacks from Spanish ships into the nineteenth century. The late eighteenth century also saw the creation of a new mansion-type house on the island, Pedro St. James, near Bodden Town. It was built by the wealthy planter William Eden, using slave labour.



*The remains of Fort George in downtown George Town*

The issue of wrecking became more prominent in the late eighteenth century. Wrecking did not necessarily mean that the Caymanians lured ships onto the rocks, although this was an accusation that was levelled against them periodically. It did, however, involve boarding ships that had run aground and been wrecked on the reefs that surrounded the island and 'salvaging' the goods and supplies on board.

The most famous wrecking incident in Caymanian history is the Wreck of the Ten Sail, when nine ships and their military escort that formed part of a convoy of fifty-eight travelling to Britain were wrecked at the East End of Grand Cayman during the early morning hours of 8th February 1794. Upon learning of the wreck, the inhabitants of

## Cayman Houses

Caymanians traditionally built three types of houses: the cottage, the cabin and the bungalow. The cottage type originated in southern England, showing the roots of the early settlers, and was low, rectangular with doors on the longer side of the house and a hip roof. The cabin type by contrast had its doors on the short side of the house and had a gable roof. Both the cabin and bungalow types seem to have come from



*A Caymanian Cottage*

the U.S.A. The foundations of houses were usually built out of Cayman Iron tree wood, as it was hard and durable and particularly notable in that it could not easily be damaged by termites. The houses themselves were either made out of wood or the traditional method of wattle and daub. People tended to build their own houses, with their friends and neighbours gladly lending their assistance. The sturdy design of traditional houses made them normally resistant to high wind speeds, although this did not make them indestructible in the face of hurricanes.

East End did their utmost to aid the survivors and, remarkably, only eight lives were lost. The sheer number of survivors caused difficulty on Grand Cayman, as the island had recently suffered from a hurricane and food supplies were slim, even before the additional arrivals. The significance of this event in Caymanian History is demonstrated by the legends that it produced. An enduring belief arose that on one of the wrecked ships was a Royal Prince and that King George III, impressed by and grateful for Caymanian efforts in aiding his son, granted them immunity forever from both taxation



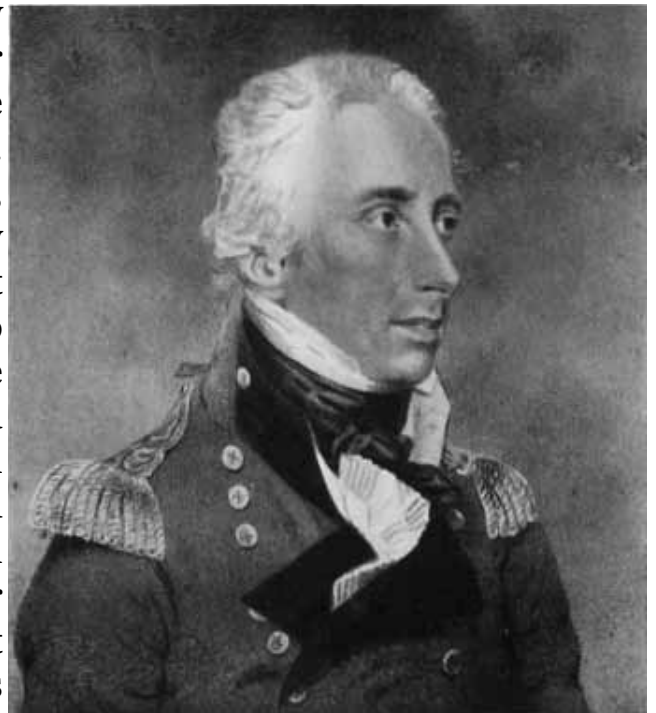
*The memorial to the Wreck of the Ten Sail*

and military conscription. This story is of course false. Prince William Henry, later William IV, had indeed served in the West Indies, but by the time of the incident he had retired from active service. Nor is there a record of any other prince aboard the wrecked ships. This story's enduring popularity, however, reflects the traditional Caymanian opposition to direct taxation. For much of their existence, Cayman's only form of direct taxation was a poll tax of 6 shillings a year on men between 18 and 60 years of age.

The amount of rescued people was apparently greater than the actual population of Grand Cayman. This naturally caused problems, and Caymanians appealed to Jamaica for help, as they were unable to feed the large number of people that were suddenly residing on the islands. Wrecking was regarded as one of the mainstays of the Caymanian economy at the time, bringing not only vital goods, but also new inhabitants as well. Caymanians looked after those that they rescued and many

shipwrecked sailors decided to remain, bringing not only new skills and levels of education to an island with no schools, but also genetic diversity for a small community with a great deal of consanguinity. Amongst the Cuban Spanish, the Caymanians gained a poor reputation because of their wrecking activities. Caymanian ships operating outside Caymanian waters, near the Isle of Pines, the Jardines and close to Cuba, also rescued sailors and salvaged goods from nearby wrecked vessels; this contributed to the Spanish perception of Caymanians as pirates. Don Juan Tirri, a Spanish Cuban, wrote in 1797 that the inhabitants of Cayman were lawless and, although they posed as fishermen, were really thieves. He recommended that the Spanish government wipe out what he described as a nest of pirates, a view that goes some way to explaining Spanish attacks on Cayman in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw a new Governor of Jamaica, one who for the first time took a greater interest in the Cayman Islands, Governor George Nugent. The Napoleonic Wars were in progress so, at least partly in response to French activity in the West Indies, Governor Nugent sent Edward Corbet to Grand Cayman in 1802 to make a report. Corbet's efforts included the first ever census of the island, giving us a firm insight into the nature of the population at that time. A correspondence developed between Governors Nugent and Bodden, with the latter frequently asking for the advice or permission of the former. Nugent also sent a selection of vegetable seeds and fruit trees from Jamaica to Cayman, resulting in many varieties being grown in the islands for the first time. The reports described the island as generally tranquil, despite the inhabitants being of a turbulent disposition, and stated that matters were settled usually by arbitration, instead of violence. Although matters were described as generally peaceful, Cayman retained its reputation for violence, as shown in Sir Walter Scott's 1822 publication *The Pirates*, in which he describes the islands as a place "where a brace or two of fellows may be shot in the morning and no more heard of or asked about them than if they were so many wood pigeons". Despite paying more attention to the islands than any of his predecessors, Nugent still never visited the islands, only passing by them in 1805, as recorded by his wife in her Journal. She described Grand Cayman as being reliant upon turtling and wrecking and that it appeared "a very low miserable place".



Sir George Nugent



Lady Maria Nugent

In addition to the main industries of turtling and wrecking, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century also saw the great cotton boom in the Caribbean. The British textiles industry had developed with the Industrial Revolution and sea-island cotton was in great demand to supply British mills. In contrast to other parts of the Caribbean, Cayman had never developed an economy based on sugar for a variety of reasons; this was mainly due to a lack of land for the large plantations that sugar cultivation required, although what little sugar was grown on Grand Cayman for local consumption was noted to be of good quality.

Cotton production did not require such large areas of land and offered Caymanians the opportunity to develop their economy. For around thirty years, cotton dominated the Caymanian economy and was exported to England under the protectionist trade laws of the time. The same trade laws meant that textiles and articles of clothing, such as hats, produced with this cotton in England, were shipped back to the West Indies. The need for workers to develop this new industry led to a large expansion in the slave population on Grand Cayman. However, ultimately the cotton industry in the islands failed, being unable to compete with the southern states of the U.S.A., particularly after the invention of the mechanical Cotton Gin by Eli Whitney that allowed for the easier separation of cotton fibres from the seed. With the demise of the cotton industry, Caymanians had to fall back on subsistence farming to survive. This resulted in some Caymanian slave owners being so poor that, it is claimed, their slaves had to provide their own soap in order to do their master's laundry; this situation, if true, was unknown elsewhere in the slave-owning Caribbean, highlighting the poverty that existed on the Cayman Islands.

In 1831, a new form of authority came to the Islands with the creation of their own Legislative Assembly, modelled on the Jamaican legislature and composed of two houses, much like the British Parliament. One was known as the Vestry, which was elected by the people, the other was the Justices, composed of magistrates and justices of the peace appointed by the Governor of Jamaica. Pedro St. James, was rented from William Eden to use for government business, including a meeting place for the Assembly, a court house and gaol. With the creation of the legislature, Caymanians were able to pass their own laws for the first time. The establishment of the Assembly meant that the role of Chief Magistrate was renamed to that of Custos.

*Pedro St. James  
as it looks today  
following reconstruction*



# The abolition of slavery

The next major shift in Caymanian life came with the abolition of slavery in 1835. Poor communications meant that Caymanian slaveholders learnt about abolition much later than other parts of the Caribbean, which resulted in a scramble to register their slaves in order to secure compensation. As Cayman never developed the large sugar plantations of other Caribbean slave economies, some have argued that Caymanian slave society was in some way more relaxed than that of the larger islands. Nathaniel Glover, who emigrated to the Cayman Islands in the early nineteenth century from the U.S.A., went so far as to say that 'slavery only existed here by name'. In truth, slave society in the Cayman Islands was simply different; a slave

court did exist and harsh punishments were still meted out to those slaves who broke the law. On occasion, these punishments were harsher than elsewhere; for example, a slave was sentenced to more lashes than was permitted by Imperial Law. The slave-owners of Cayman did much to ensure that the Obeah religion was suppressed, feeling, as many others did in the Caribbean, that its practice led to slave revolts. Those who practised it were harshly punished and, as a result, Cayman society has always been characterised by its lack of Obeah. Even today, the practice of Obeah is outlawed in the Cayman Islands and people have been prosecuted in the twenty-first century.

With the passing of the Abolition Act by the Imperial Parliament in Britain in 1833, slavery was declared to be illegal throughout the British Empire from midnight on 31st July 1834. Slaves would serve their former masters as apprentices for a period of six



*Constantine Phipps,  
The 2nd Earl of Mulgrave*



*The official seal for the Society for the  
Abolition of Slavery*

years in a transitional phase towards freedom. In addition, there would be compensation for officially registered slaves. This immediately presented a problem for slave-owners on the Cayman Islands as their slaves had never been registered. Thus, Caymanian slave-holders drew up a petition, sent to the colonial authorities in Britain via Lord Mulgrave, the Governor of Jamaica, explaining their situation and requesting both compensation and slave registration. The Secretary of State for the Colonies approved the latter request in November 1833 and the former the following February. The registration was carried out in 1834 by James Minot. The petition also asked for a visit to Grand Cayman by the Governor of Jamaica, the first visit of its kind to the territory.

Howe Peter Browne, Marquess of Sligo and Lord Mulgrave's successor as Governor of Jamaica, came to Grand Cayman in September 1834, with a detachment of thirty men from the West India Regiments to keep the peace on the island at this difficult time. This was probably inspired by concerns expressed by the slave-holders for their safety, and for that of their families, in the petition they had sent the previous year, although they had asked for muskets for the local militia rather than a detachment of soldiers. Before his arrival, Sligo had already appointed two new magistrates to protect the rights of the apprentices, Dr. Hulme and the Reverend Thomas Sharpe, the resident Anglican clergyman on the island. Sligo was only present on the island for a few hours but used the time to draw his conclusions about the land and the people, to learn what local laws had recently been passed by the legislature and to appoint two local Justices of the Peace to act as valuers for slave compensation. The decision to station soldiers on Grand Cayman caused problems.



*A soldier of the West India Regiments from the early nineteenth century*

Firstly, there was the issue of race; in that day and age, the upper, white classes of Caymanian society were uncomfortable with the black soldiers of the West India Regiments keeping the peace, especially given the recent end of slavery. Secondly, there was the issue of authority. Caymanian society had thus far existed with minimal interference from outside authorities and the presence of the West India Regiment can only have come as a shock to the Caymanian mind-set. There would be various clashes between the locals and the soldiers in the coming months and Sharpe and Hulme also reported that there were great difficulties between former slaves and masters.

The situation on the island resulted in the Marquess of Sligo returning to Grand Cayman aboard *HMS Forte*, accompanied by *HMS Serpent* with twenty-five men belonging to the 84th Regiment. As a result of the reported difficulties that had reached both him and London, his purpose was to make a declaration. When he arrived on 2nd May 1835, the Governor invited the Custos, Dr. Hulme's successor as Magistrate and twenty-five leading citizens of Grand Cayman into the great cabin aboard his ship to announce that he had decided to end the apprenticeship system early, only ten months into the six year period. This decision made the Cayman Islands one of the earliest societies in the Caribbean to abolish slavery in its entirety. The move caused great consternation amongst the wealthier Caymanians, with one Bodden commenting that he had come aboard "*a wealthy man possessing all I desired, and I am at this moment a beggar, without knowing where to turn for a crust of bread.*" The news of the proclamation soon spread throughout the Cayman Islands. Detachments of soldiers remained for some time to ensure that the decree was enforced and to keep the peace. Naturally, there were still difficulties between former masters and former slaves.

The Marquess of Sligo also had several other concerns but these were found to be false. Firstly, he thought that Caymanians were continuing to support the slave trade, which, although it had been outlawed by Britain was still carried out by other European nations operating in the region. The Caymanians were able to convince him that, whilst ships from other nations did stop at the island for supplies, no slaves were actually landed. Sligo was also concerned about accusations that the Caymanians were deliberately wrecking ships in order to salvage their cargo and effects. He did not find evidence that this was the case, although he still had misgivings and felt that it was another reason why a garrison should be deployed on the island. His unconfirmed suspicions reflect the fact that Caymanians, perhaps because of their isolation, did not enjoy an admirable reputation in the wider world. He did, however, note that the Caymanians were naturally tall with good physiques, an observation that would be repeated by many over the next two centuries.

In an attempt to resolve the issues that surrounded the effective government of the Islands, their relationship to Jamaica and the recent abolition of slavery, the Marquess proposed a union between the two legislatures of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. However, neither side supported this idea, with the Jamaican House of Assembly expressing concerns that such a union would prove costly and adversely affect the amount of compensation that they received from the abolition of slavery, compensation being limited to twenty million pounds for the whole of the Empire. The Jamaicans, in a pointed reference to Sligo's actions as Governor, also said that they did not wish to interfere with the legislative matters of others as they had always opposed others interfering in their own affairs. They also stated that it was not their fault that the political and social situation in Cayman was in its current state.



	I.R. (b. 1807)	J.M. (b. 1811)	C.S. (b. 1811)	M.C. (b. 1832)
E.C. (b. 1839)	T.B. (b. 1866)	J.S. (b. 1811)	J.C. (b. 1811)	

The end of slavery saw former slaves move into the less inhabited regions to the north and east of Grand Cayman and claim land there for their own use, becoming subsistence farmers. The 1830s saw the re-colonisation of the Sister Islands. Three families from Grand Cayman, the Riches, the Fosters, and Scotts, travelled to Cayman Brac, probably in search of fertile, farming land. Legend has it that, when these settlers arrived, they discovered some escaped slaves from Grand Cayman that had managed to traverse the miles of open ocean to reach the Sister Islands and who then adopted the surnames of the Scotts and Riches. Later the Ryan and Hunter families also came. Like the early settlers in the 1670s, the new settlers also hunted turtle, the hawksbill turtle becoming their preferred quarry. The agriculture of the Sister Islands primarily focused on growing coconuts.

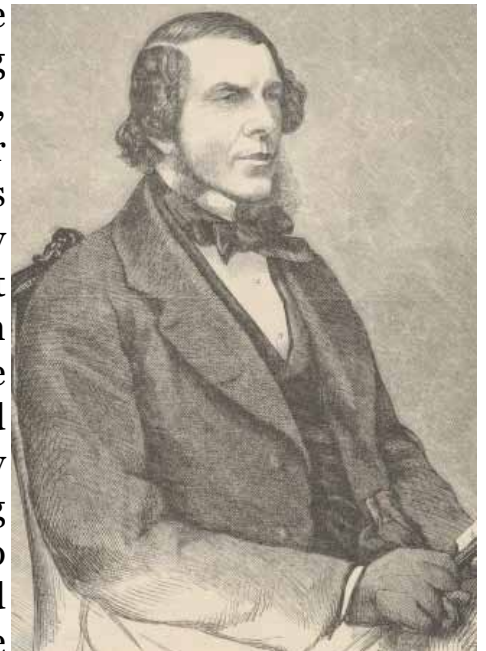
*A photo from 1910 of some of the last Caymanians to have been born as slaves*

# The second half of the nineteenth century

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the Cayman Islands become even more isolated, particularly due to changing modes of transport. With the advent of steamship travel and improved methods of storing food, namely refrigeration, ships no longer needed to replenish their food and water supplies as frequently, meaning that they had less of a reason to stop at the Islands. The Islands' position on the Windward Passage had made them an important stopping point in the age of sail but steamships were able to sail via a direct course. The isolation and the lack of development would lead to a nickname for Cayman in the early twentieth century, the "*Islands that time forgot.*" Despite this reputation, there were nevertheless a few notable events.

Although visitors to the islands became even fewer in number, this did not deter Caymanians venturing out into the world, with Caymanian sailors travelling far and wide. Records reveal Caymanians joined the Royal Navy; for example, Richard Jones, who was born on Grand Cayman of mixed race on 5th May 1835, volunteered in 1862 for continuous service in the Royal Navy and began his career as an Able Seaman. He served on at least eight ships over a period of 19 years and 345 days, with his conduct described as either very good or exemplary.

In 1854, the islanders, motivated at least in part by the increasing isolation of the islands, attempted to bring their issues to the attention of the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Henry Barkly. They outlined the nature of their current status and called attention to the lack of schools since the closure of those operated by the Mico Charity in 1841. They requested that a resident superintendent be appointed, funded by the British Government, in addition to the establishment of a light tax suited to the conditions on the island. The tax revenue raised would be used to help build roads and schools. Finally, they asked for a postal service, using the steamships travelling between Jamaica and Belize that still passed close by. To further their cause, they pointed out that the islands had never been a drain on Britain's finances, unlike some other colonies, and that their loyalty to Queen Victoria



Sir Henry Barkly

was unquestionable. Sir Henry, after consulting the Colonial Office in London, replied, saying that a resident superintendent would be useful but it would unreasonable if Cayman expected Britain to pay without contributing themselves. He felt that taxation was a matter for the Jamaican Assembly, despite the relationship between Jamaica and the Cayman Islands still being unclear during this period. He promised to consult the Bishop of Jamaica about schooling and apparently had passed the request for a postal service to the Postmaster-General. In short, he addressed none of the Caymanian concerns, a clear example of the benign neglect that the islands suffered during this period.



The 1860s finally saw clarification from Great Britain on the relationship between Cayman and Jamaica. The Imperial Parliament in London passed The Act for the Government of the Cayman Islands, which became law on 22nd June 1863. This stated that all British laws that were valid in Jamaica also applied to the Islands. The local legislature and the laws it passed finally received official recognition, but certain powers were reserved for the Jamaican Assembly, which had the right to enact legislation for the peace, order and good governance of Cayman, as well as the ability to alter and repeal laws that had already been made. The Supreme Court of Jamaica would also have jurisdiction over the Caymanian legal system for any issue that was either referred to it or which could not lawfully be tried in the Islands. In addition, the Governor of Jamaica was to exercise authority in the Cayman Islands as if it was part of Jamaica, finally giving legal authorisation to the instructions that had been given to Lord Thomas Windsor in 1662.



During the American Civil War of 1860-1865 ships from both the Union and Confederate Navies visited the islands and records from those vessels suggest that Caymanian sailors may actually have been recruited by one or both sides.

*USS San Jacinto which visited the islands during the American Civil War*

Issues with the Cubans finally came to a head during the Ten-Years War of 1868-1878, when the Captain-General of Cuba issued a decree which authorised the Spanish Navy to seize any ships that violated Cuban territorial waters. An absolute ban was issued on fishing, and, by extension, wrecking off the Cuban coast, following the seizure of the *Star*, a Caymanian turtling schooner. Many did not heed this ban and there were several more incidents. Nevertheless, the ban remained in place throughout the war and for some time afterwards. Turtling and wrecking in Cuban waters would never regain their former importance. Another ban was put in place after the Spanish-American War in 1898, which was the end for Caymanian turtling near Cuba.

Hurricanes in 1876 and 1877 were particularly severe and the 1877 one sunk nine of the twenty boats from the Caymanian fleet that was catching turtles at the Miskito Cays, resulting in the death of sixty-four sailors. Nevertheless, Caymanians continued with the two mainstays of their economy: turtling and wrecking. There does appear to be an example of deliberate sabotage during this period. The *Iphigenia*, carrying coffee from Rio de Janeiro, was run aground on a reef near Bodden Town. A local pilot, employed to guide the ship safely around Grand Cayman, allegedly did this intentionally as the inhabitants were in desperate need of both provisions and fresh wood. Local salvagers quickly descended upon the vessel, in complete defiance of two local magistrates who had prohibited them from doing so. A third magistrate, William Webster, was actually seen to take part in the banned salvage.

In 1885, wild bee colonies were collected from hollow trees on the islands and began to be used in hives, thus giving the Cayman Islands another minor source of income through the export of honey in the early twentieth century. Some Caymanian honey is still produced today. The end of the nineteenth century saw the creation of another Caymanian institution that would prove to be a major support for the economy, the Post Office.

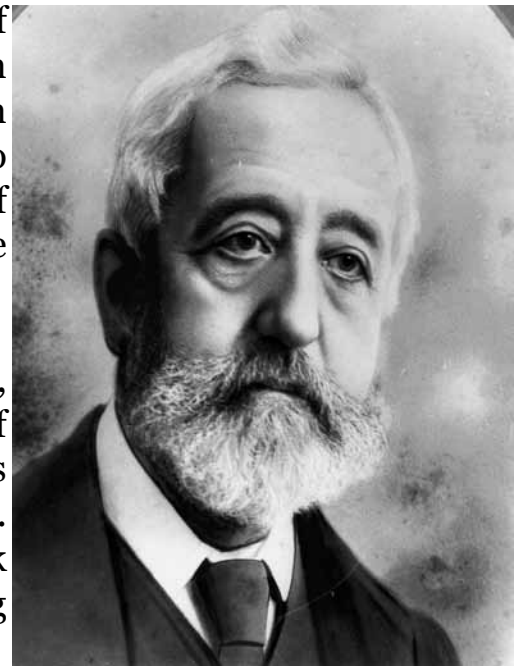


*The first Post Office in the Cayman Islands is now home to the National Museum*

Towards the end of the century yet another short-lived Caymanian industry, phosphate fertiliser, developed. Made from calcium carbonate and bird guano, this was in high demand in the agricultural sector. In 1883, rock samples from land belonging to William Eden in Georgetown were discovered to have “*high grade fertilising properties*” and the following year the Grand Cayman Phosphate Company began operations on the phosphate beds. These were quickly exhausted, but new beds were discovered in West Bay and the Western End of Cayman Brac. In 1885, an American company, the Carib Guano Company, also began operations on Grand Cayman and at the western end of Little Cayman. Over the next five years the phosphate industry on the Cayman Islands provided much-needed stable jobs and income until, like the Caymanian cotton industry before it, it became commercially unviable. Both companies closed in the early 1890s due to newly discovered rich phosphate deposits in Florida and the cost of transporting the mined phosphate from the islands.

Despite their increased isolation, there was some outside interest in the Islands. In 1880 and 1881, led by Lieutenant Carpenter, *HMS Sparrowhawk* conducted a mapping survey, which led to the first chart of all three islands in 1882.

In the closing years of the century, the governors of Jamaica once again began to exhibit greater concern for the Islands, with Governor Sir Henry Wylie Norman dispatching Lawrence Fyfe to Cayman in 1887 to compile a report. Sir Henry was the first Governor of Jamaica to visit all three islands in May 1884, a feat he repeated in 1888.



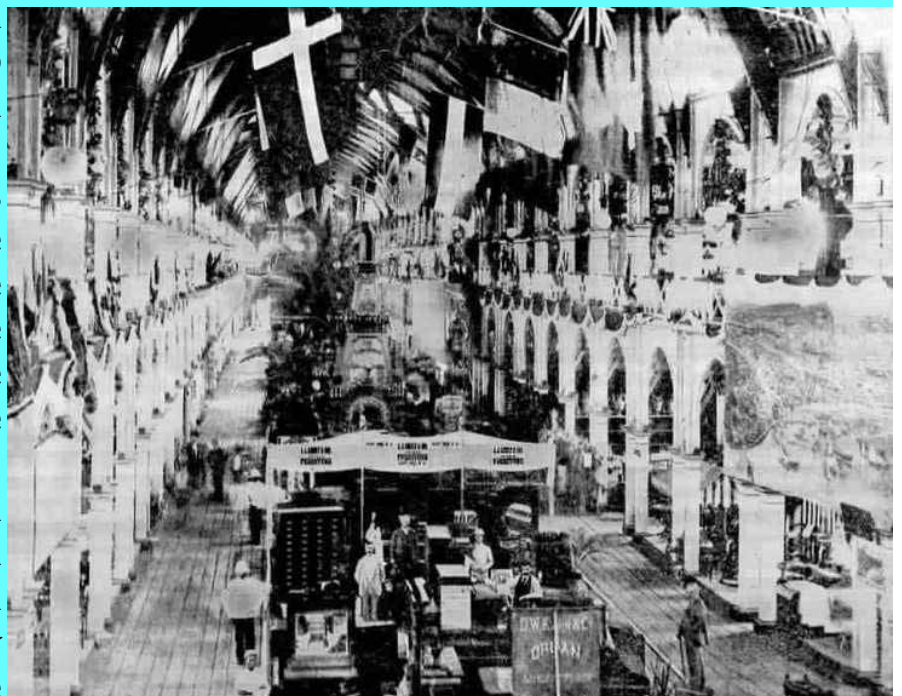
*Sir Henry Wylie Norman*

Thanks to the work of Custos Edmund Parsons, Caymanians took part in the Jamaican Exhibition of 1891. This was the first opportunity that the islanders had to present themselves to the outside world. Some Caymanians also began to emigrate to seek new opportunities beyond their shores, establishing communities in Nicaragua and Honduras.

The end of the century saw the introduction of what the islanders had requested in 1854, a full time resident administrator. When Edmund Parsons retired as Custos in 1898, he was replaced with the first Commissioner, Frederick Shedden Sanguinetti, an English colonial official with much experience. The presence of a full-time Commissioner led to many developments in the islands and in the coming years different commissioners would leave their mark.

### **Cayman at the Jamaica Exhibition**

The Caymanian section was the first opportunity that Caymanians had to draw the eye of the world to them, demonstrate what goods that they produced and hopefully encourage greater interest in the islands. There were displays of the different types of woods that could be found on the islands, local products such as hats, baskets, rope and bulrush starch, a type of starch made with a plant unique to the islands. Space was given to sea produce such as conch, sponges and turtles. Models of Caymanian schooners were also displayed to stimulate interest in shipbuilding. The publicity gained from the exhibition did see a rise in the export of Caymanian products, particularly of thatch palm goods. The catalogue written by William Eden and E. Noel McLaughlin to accompany the Caymanian display is the first publication known to be written by a Caymanian.



*The Jamaica Exhibition*

# Stamps

The first Post Office in the Cayman Islands was naturally opened in the capital of Georgetown in 1889 and by 1906 Grand Cayman had four, with offices opened on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman around the same time. The earliest stamps used by the postal service were Jamaican, with 'Cayman Islands' printed over them, but it would not be long until the first Caymanian Stamp was issued in 1901, bearing the head of Queen Victoria, despite her recent death. As has been the case in many small countries and territories, the sale of stamps to collectors became an important source of government revenue. In the case of the Cayman Islands, it sharply increased in the early years of the twentieth century. In the financial year 1913-1914, £2,750, over 53% of the government's total revenue, came from the sale of stamps.

It is not just the stamps that have proved popular amongst collectors but the unusual name of a Caymanian village. With its own local post office, posting a letter has amusingly provided a postmark indicating that it has come from Hell.

Due to the nature of life on the Cayman Islands, it was not uncommon for public servants to have multiple roles and until the Second World War the main role of policemen was in fact handling and delivering mail around the islands, as there was a lack of crime. It was carried on horseback, wagon bicycle and boat until motor cars became common in the islands.

Like many other British Territories in the Caribbean during the First World War, the Cayman Islands followed Jamaica's lead in imposing a war tax. Following a proposal from E.N. McLaughlin, a local schoolteacher who was a member of the Justices, the Justices and Vestrymen passed a law that created a special War Tax of half a penny on letters sent to Britain or other parts of the British Empire. Although McLaughlin had proposed that the extra revenue was to be put into a special fund to support the war effort, Commissioner A.C. Robinson and the Governor of Jamaica preferred that the money be put in a general fund to be used for the benefit of the islands as a whole. The stamps proved to be wildly popular, with demand far outstripping the initial supply. In the end over a million of the war tax stamps were sold, over twenty-five times initial estimates, providing a revenue of £5,021; 80% of these went to stamp dealers and collectors.

The 1930s saw the introduction of commemorative stamps, the first being in 1932 to celebrate the centenary of the Justice and the Vestry and was notable for having the heads of two kings who began and ended that century, William IV and George V. Later special editions have featured images of local animals and plants, pictures of local landmarks, scenes from island life, Christmas, special events as well as Royal occasions, such as births and weddings, again reflecting the Caymanian connection with Britain. Indeed, the Caymanian Postal service still issues stamps today bearing the head of the British Monarch.

Over time, the popularity of Caymanian Stamps has decreased and the government revenue is no longer dependent on them thanks to the development of new industries. 35



*A selection of Caymanian stamps  
War tax stamps originally published in 'War Tax Stamps of the British Empire First World War The West Indies' by John G M Davis, Royal Philatelic Society London 2009.*



*A Caymanian Postmark*



*A Cayman post box*



*Hell Post Office*

# The early twentieth century

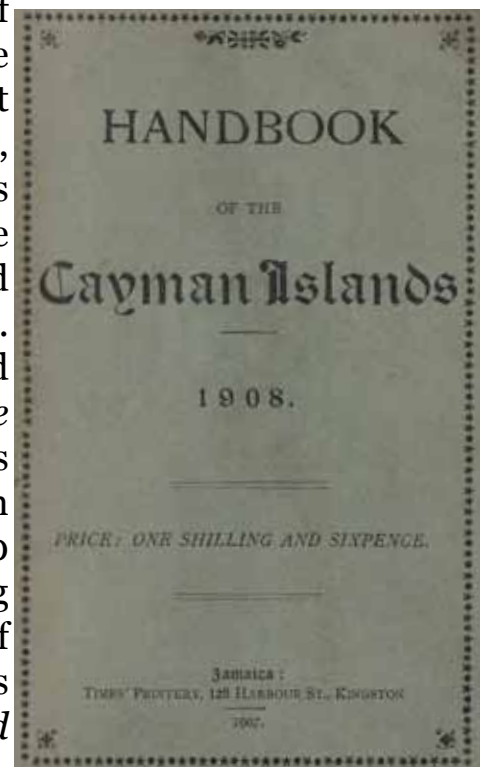
Commissioner Sanguinetti worked hard to diversify the Caymanian economy, which was still very reliant on turtling and thatch palm products, but he encountered many difficulties. The phosphate industry could not be restarted as the phosphate beds had become depleted. Similarly, the cotton industry could not be restored as the cotton plants that still grew in the islands had not been properly cultivated for decades and the product was now not suitable for the market. In 1906 Commissioner Sanguinetti was afflicted with tongue cancer and had to return to England for treatment. He



*Government House in the early twentieth century*

unfortunately did not survive his ordeal and died in 1907. His replacement, George S.S. Hirst, proved to be a controversial character, frequently clashing with the local population and the Assembly of Justices and the Vestry, but, nevertheless, contributed to the continuing development of the islands, particularly the preservation of their heritage.

Hirst, a trained doctor, also served as the islands' Chief Medical Officer and noted that the people were, for the most part, very healthy and disease resistant. Amongst Hirst's contributions was the Islands' very first history, *Notes on the History of the Cayman Islands*, which was published in 1910. He also intended to write a complete history of the islands but he died before this was finished and unfortunately the draft manuscript has vanished. In order to better inform people in the outside world about the islands, he also produced *Handbook of the Cayman Islands* in 1907 and 1908. The detailed census he conducted in 1911 provides an insight into Caymanian society at the time. The population had risen to 6,200 and remained very racially mixed, with Blacks making up 18.5% of the population, Whites 41.7% and those of Mixed Race 39.7%. Hirst's impression of the people was that they were "a fairly well-to-do, a self-reliant and loyal community."



*Hirst's Handbook for 1908*

It is clear that the poor reputation that had dogged the Cayman Islands for most of their existence had faded by the early twentieth century and been replaced by a positive one. T.H. Dermot, writing in the *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute, United Empire*, in 1927 said that, "The Caymanian is of sterling stuff, self-reliant, not easily giving himself away, sober, dependable in any work he undertakes, and industrious."

*He is a home-lover and an excellent family man. As a sailor, he ranks with the men of Newfoundland and Bermuda” and that “It can safely be said that wherever he has gone the Caymanian has made a good citizen.”* By the standards of the day, they were viewed as being a very moral people, with people commenting on the very little amount of alcohol that was drunk on the islands and the religiousness of the inhabitants. A report given to the British Parliament in 1907 noted that *“The low percentage of illegitimacy in the Cayman Islands, when compared with the rates obtaining in Jamaica and other West Indian colonies, is indicative of the character of the people, and their enterprise is displayed by the increase in the number of turtle which they*



*Edward Street, Bodden Town in the early twentieth century*

*have exported in spite of the difficulties which have beset the fishers in recent years.”*

Crime on the islands was very low, with any prisoner, who was normally a visitor to the islands, held in the small gaol in Georgetown. Even then, they were only imprisoned for a couple days at the most. Any criminals sentenced to more than six months imprisonment were transferred to Jamaica to serve their time.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought new difficulties. Many Caymanian men signed up to participate in the war effort, 300 of them in the Merchant Marine. Serving in the Merchant Marine was a vital part of the British War Effort, bringing raw materials and food supplies to Britain, which supported not only the men fighting on the Western Front and other theatres of war, but also life on the British Home Front. Being in the Merchant Marine was dangerous, being a prime target for enemy submarines owing to their cargoes. Over 90% of Merchant Marine vessels were attacked by enemy submarines during the war, resulting in heavy casualties; thousands of men serving in the Merchant Marine lost their lives, along with 6,924 ships and over 13 million tons of Allied cargo. Caymanian men, such as Robert Thompson, Charles Banks and Blucher Bodden survived the war and were issued with the Mercantile Marine Medal and the British Medal with their accompanying ribbons. After the war, King George V recognised the sacrifices and effort made by merchant seamen and granted the merchant service the title of the Merchant Navy. Although the islands did not send a contingent of men to join the British West Indies Regiment when it was formed in 1915, Caymanians living abroad in Jamaica, Canada and the U.S.A. did join the armed forces.



*The badge of the Merchant Navy*

The difficulties of the First World War encouraged many Caymanians to emigrate during the Roaring Twenties, continuing the trend that had begun in the late nineteenth century. They went, as they had before, to Central America but also to the U.S.A. Many settled in Florida to work in citrus orchards or on the East Coast Railroad, whilst some sought jobs in ports along the U.S. coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Other Caymanian expatriates settled closer to home, many choosing to settle on the Isle of Pines near Cuba, now known as Isla de la Juventud. As many as 3,500 Caymanians are estimated to have emigrated in the period between 1891 and 1931, two thirds of whom are believed to have gone to the U.S.A. The remittances sent home by these emigrants formed a vital part of the Caymanian economy. At home in



*The Isle of Pines to the south of Cuba*

the islands, the 1920s saw an improvement in living standards, assisted in part by America's implementation of prohibition. Spirits were exported from Cayman. 1923 and 1924 were particularly profitable years for this trade but it had ceased completely by 1927. The rise in the Spirits trade marked a noticeable rise in crime for the otherwise peaceful islands.

1927 saw the advent of improved communications between Cayman and Jamaica, when a regular steam boat service was established to carry mail, passengers and cargo. Created under a joint contract between the Caymanian and Jamaican Governments, there were fifteen round trips annually between Georgetown and Kingston, calling at Cayman Brac on both the outward and return trips. This service did much to reduce Cayman's traditional isolation, although a previous steamboat service had been established in 1908, this was a considerable improvement. A service was established between Tampa in Florida and Georgetown as well.

The end of the 1920s, however, also saw the advent of the Great Depression. As in other countries, this led to harsher times for Caymanians, sharply reducing employment opportunities in the wider world. Caymanians who had planned on emigrating were impeded by increased immigration restrictions in the U.S.A. and a lack of jobs. Many Caymanian expatriates decided to return to the islands. The depression also affected the industries in the islands, as the sole market for Caymanian turtle at this time was in Key West in Florida. The early 1930s would lead to even more difficult times for the islands.



*Turtles at Key West, Florida*



# The 1932 hurricane

The worst disaster to befall the Cayman Islands in the twentieth century was the hurricane of 1932. The hurricane season in the Caribbean normally extends from June to October but occasionally a hurricane will develop outside this period. The 1932 hurricane was remarkable in many respects, but particularly in two aspects; firstly it occurred in November and, secondly, came from an unexpected direction. As previously noted, the Cayman Islands lie in the path of least resistance for hurricanes, which normally follow the regular southwest wind direction. The hurricane of 1932 came from the southeast. Thus, when it came from a different direction and at an unexpected time, it took the inhabitants completely by surprise.



*The path of the hurricane through the region*

The hurricane took around fifty-two hours to pass over the islands. It first hit Grand Cayman at 6 a.m. on Monday, 7th November. The winds destroyed ships, crops and trees, resulting in great economic hardship. Many were also left homeless. Although the damage to Grand Cayman was extensive, it only resulted in one death, that of a man called Captain Jim who lived near Prospect. The greater tragedy occurred on the Sister Islands. Whilst Grand Cayman had experienced only the edge of the storm, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman lay directly in its path.

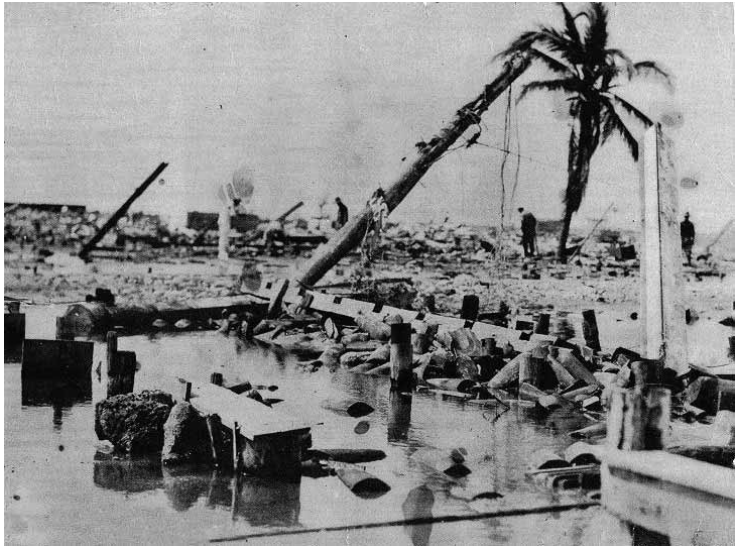
People on Cayman Brac had the advantage of the limestone bluff that is the island's central feature, being able to take shelter in its caves. However, reaching these caves proved difficult for many. There were some miraculous escapes, such as the family of Jewel Scott, who was only seven years old at the time. The sea washed a catboat up to their house, and they were able to use it to escape to the bluff. Some dashed to the bluff when the eye of the storm, the calm zone at the very centre of the hurricane, passed over the island. Others though, thinking that the period of calm meant that the storm was



*The exterior of Skull Cave on Cayman Brac*

over, emerged from their shelters and were killed when the eye passed. The other issue facing Cayman Brac was that many of its menfolk were away at sea, where they were exposed to the hurricane without cover. Forty men died at sea, adding to the sixty-nine that died on the island itself. Many more were injured.

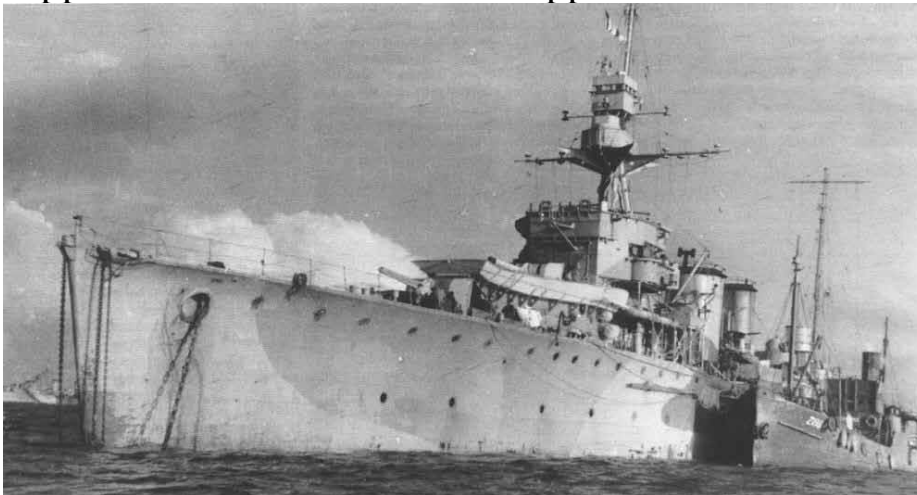
Fortunately no one was killed on Little Cayman. The devastation was severe, with the vast majority of houses destroyed. The powerful tidal surge also washed away the island's cemetery, resulting in the grisly sight of the coffins and bodies of deceased loved ones strewn across the island. The island's food supplies were destroyed whilst the water supplies, the wells and cisterns, had been contaminated by sea water or worse, a human body. Despite the destruction that the hurricane wrought on the Sister Islands, worse was yet to come. When the hurricane hit Cuba, it resulted in 2,500 deaths, including the death of eight Cayman Brackers who had been working at Santa Cruz. This meant that the total death toll from Cayman Brac was 117, out of a total population of 1,200.



*The devastation in Cuba*

The aftermath was naturally difficult and traumatic for the people of the Sister Islands. The water had left a changed landscape, with dead trees and vegetation and an altered shoreline. To make matters worse, the bodies of those that had died were strewn across the landscape, as had been the inhabitants of the cemetery on Little Cayman, some in trees and holes. Aston Rutty, the senior government officer of Cayman Brac, took charge and began to organise a relief response. Men from Little Cayman rowed across to Cayman Brac to seek aid but, seeing the situation on the island, they returned home, realising that the Brackers were in even greater need of help than they were.

It took a while for news of the disaster to reach Jamaica but relief began to arrive at the Sister Islands; various ships brought food supplies, tents to provide shelter for those who had lost their homes and a much-needed medical officer to address the injured. *H.M.S. Dragon* was dispatched from *H.M.D. Bermuda*, the major British Naval base in the region, which itself was having to deal with the aftermath of the hurricane. The *Dragon* arrived at Cayman Brac on the morning of 17th November and its crew landed supplies and medical teams to support the work of the Medical Officer from Jamaica.



*H.M.S. Dragon*

They repaired the damage to cisterns and wells and, using the ship's on-board desalination plant, converted sea water into much-needed drinkable water. They left just after midnight on the morning of 19th with the medical and water situation greatly improved, with more supplies being due to arrive shortly.

The Captain of H.M.S. Dragon later commented about the people of Cayman Brac:

*“All who have come in contact with them have been much struck by the fortitude, courage and cheerfulness displayed by the inhabitants, many of whom have seen their homes and belongings completely washed away. This island has been reduced to a desert. The road is a slope of loose coral, not a tree carries a leaf, the cultivated land is salted, many boats have been lost, of twenty motor cars one remains and about 70 people have been killed.”*

*Mr Rutty, the collector, appears to have taken charge ably, and has done well in a difficult situation. He has not spared himself, and was worn out with his exertions.”*

Mr Rutty was later awarded an M.B.E. for his actions. On Grand Cayman, Inspector Watler was awarded the King’s Policing Medal for his conspicuous bravery during the disaster.

Messages of sympathy flooded in, some being sent from the King, the Duke and Duchess of York and the Colonial Office in London. *The Gleaner* newspaper in Jamaica established a relief fund and the West India Committee in London accepted donations to be forwarded to this fund. Other funds were established in Belize and Trinidad. The British government also gave a grant of £1,000.

The effects of the hurricane would be felt for a long while to come; exposure to the elements, poor nutrition from limited food supplies and contaminated water resulted in many illnesses. The economic effect of the devastation would also have far reaching consequences; Little Cayman’s economy never truly recovered. In the 1990s the Cayman National Archive in their Memory Bank Programme recorded the testimony of many who had lived through the 1932 storm, so that the impact of this hurricane can be remembered by future generations. It was clear that many of the survivors were still suffering post-traumatic stress from the disaster.



*Cayman Brac’s shore today  
Before the 1932 hurricane it had white sand beaches*

# The 1930s

In 1934 a new Commissioner arrived in the Cayman Islands, Allen Wolsey Cardinall, later to be remembered as the greatest of all the Commissioners and a man who helped lay the groundwork for the development of the islands.

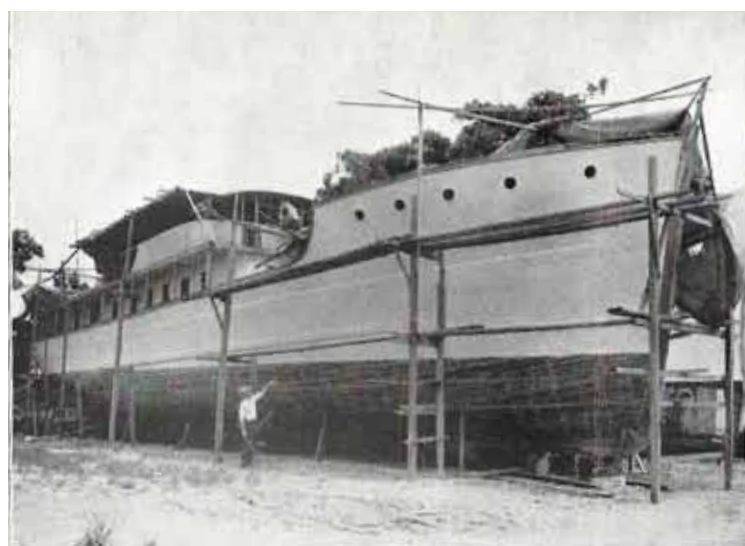
Cardinall oversaw the creation of many new public buildings, working with local Caymanian shipwright and architect, Royal B. Bodden, to create a new Post Office in 1939, which also housed the government departments of the Treasury and Customs. Together, they also created several new town halls across the islands, which could also be used as schools and shelters in hurricanes. Cardinall's tenure also saw the creation of the islands' first hospital in 1937. Equipped with an operating theatre, dispensary, consulting room and four beds, it was a major advancement for a society which had traditionally suffered from a lack of healthcare. In addition, he worked to build several new roads around Grand Cayman, vastly improving internal communications on the islands.



*Commissioner Cardinall  
from The Cayman Islands National  
Archive Historical Collections*

Cardinall successfully campaigned for the installation of a radio link, which was installed in 1935, with an additional station being opened on Cayman Brac. Not content with improving the quality of life in the islands, Cardinall used the new radios to make broadcasts to the wider world, telling his listeners about Cayman and inviting them to visit. He recognised the islands' potential as a tourist destination, frequently informing people that Grand Cayman had what was probably the best bathing beach in the world and worked hard to encourage travellers, organising in 1937 the visit of *SS Atlantis*, the very first cruise ship to visit the islands.

Cardinall recognised the Caymanians' deep feelings of loyalty to Britain and made 21st October, Trafalgar Day, the anniversary of Lord Nelson's famous sea victory at Cape



*Caymanian shipwrights constructing a motor vessel*

Trafalgar in 1805, a national holiday. He also created the Cayman Island Yacht and Sailing Club and organised the annual Cayman Islands regatta, held for the first time in January 1935 and which over time would encourage visitors from all over the world, including ships from the Royal Navy. The high quality of Caymanian-made boats on display at the regatta resulted in inquiries from as far away as Kenya, but unfortunately Caymanian ship builders received very few orders to build new vessels.

## Ship building

As a seafaring nation, with a traditionally limited amount of money, it is not surprising that over time the Cayman Islands became home to master shipbuilders. Building vessels formed part of Caymanian life for over 200 years, with the first vessels being built in the 1770s. Caymanians used the local hardwoods to create the hull of the vessel. Other necessary items were imported; the planking necessary to create the decks came from the U.S.A., whilst anchors and cables normally came from Britain. Caymanian ships were handmade with traditional tools, which meant that the process was both slow and labour intensive and not many vessels could be produced a year. For example, between 1905 and 1906 eight vessels were launched. It was generally considered to be worth the wait for the high quality of workmanship.



*A shipwright at work*

The launch of a ship was an opportunity for a major social event; on Grand Cayman the whole island was invited. Usually an ox was killed to provide meat and people brought a selection of food with them, from vegetables to cakes. When the time came for the launch everyone, men, women and children, took a rope to help pull the ship down into the sea. Whilst doing so it was traditional to sing sea shanties, 'Whiskey is the life of man, whiskey, oh, my Johnny' being a particular favourite.

When Cardinal's time in the Cayman Islands ended in 1940, hundreds of people gathered at the wharf in George Town to say goodbye. He departed for Kingston where he transmitted a farewell message to the Cayman Islands. They in turn replied, saying, "*Grateful for your kind message and good wishes. Thanks once again for what you did for Cayman. We shall always remember and God bless you. Bon Voyage.*" Cardinal went on to become Colonial Secretary for the Falkland Islands and was eventually awarded a knighthood for his long career of public service.

The strong relationship between Caymanians and the sea is best reflected in the 1934 census, which revealed that over 50% of men between 18 and 60 were involved in seafaring. It is estimated that over 200 men were absent at sea for the census, which would have put the population at approximately 6,209, a notable increase on the 5,235 in 1921. 1934 also saw an interesting incident in which 26 Greeks were marooned on Little Cayman. These Greeks had paid the captain of a schooner for passage between Belize, now British Honduras, and Cuba. The Captain had not taken enough supplies on board and the passengers soon become underfed and dehydrated. The Captain forced the passengers to disembark at Little Cayman, with the threat that he would throw them overboard if they refused. The Greeks were thus marooned without food, water or knowledge of where to go. Fortunately, they were discovered at Rocky Point by Mr Joseph Bodden and his son, who took them to South Town on Little Cayman. The Greeks remained on the islands for several months before they were evacuated with the assistance of the Greek Government. The time that it took to resolve the situation was used as an argument for the islands' need of a radio link; better communications would have expedited the process.

# The Second World War

The Second World War provided another illustration of the link between the Caymanian people and the sea and allowed them to demonstrate both their nautical skill and the loyalty that they felt towards the King and Britain. As they had done in the First World War, approximately 800 Caymanian sailors served in the Merchant Navy, which again proved to be a hazardous undertaking. Many Caymanian merchant sailors, such as Desmond Ebanks of Grand Cayman and Albert Scott of Cayman Brac, died during the



*A Merchant Navy Poster*

conflict and are commemorated on a variety of war memorials, including the Merchant Navy memorial at Tower Hill in London. A number made their way to Britain to enlist in the Royal Navy, some mortgaging land or selling cattle in order to pay for their passage; they were inspired by the prestige and significance of the Royal Navy, as well as wishing to make an active contribution to the fight against the Axis powers, even though better wages were to be had in the merchant service.

Despite people's concerns over German attacks in the Caribbean in the First World War proving to be largely unfounded, the threat was very real during the Second World War. German U-Boats prowled the sea, threatening and sinking Allied shipping. In order to protect vital supplies of oil from Trinidad to Britain, the Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was formed. Many British colonies formed their own naval forces into order to relieve pressure on the Royal Navy. Due to a lack of Trinidadian volunteers, an application was made to the Acting Commissioner of the Cayman Islands, Albert C. Panton, for people to enlist. Over 200 signed up to serve when the force was formed in 1941. The first group left Grand Cayman in early May 1941 and arrived in Trinidad a little over a week afterwards. Two more groups would go to Trinidad over the next few months, where they would train at the military base at Staubles Bay.

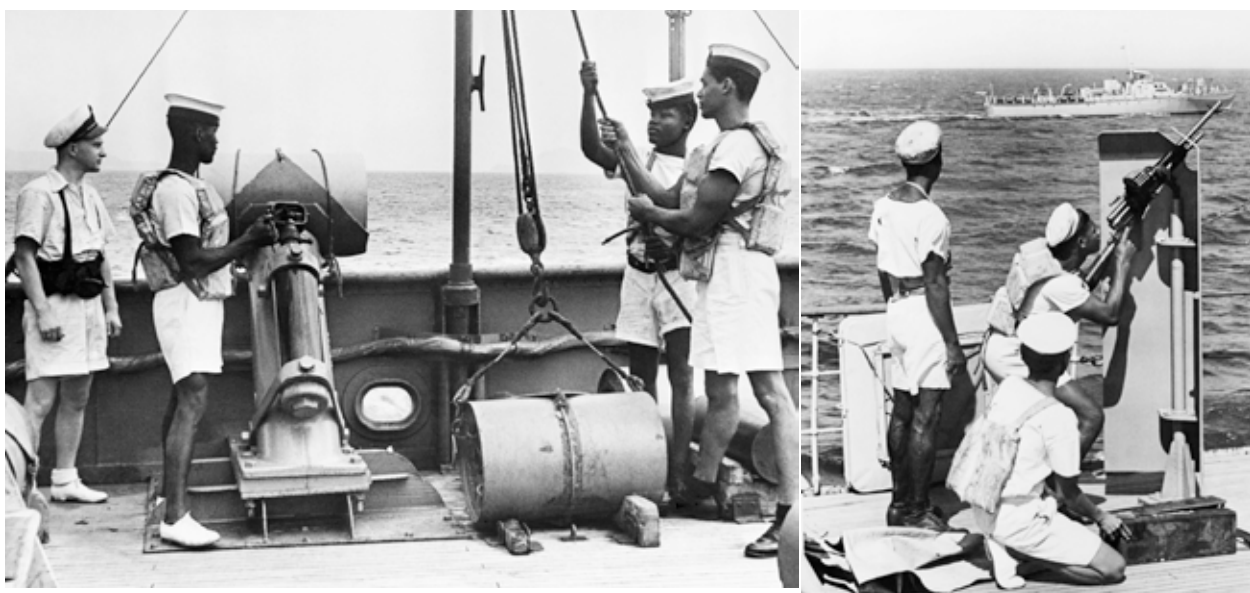


*The Staubles Bay Camp*

Conditions in the camp were poor, with rain making the ground very muddy and difficult to traverse as a result. This, coupled with a lack of uniforms (the men being for the most part in their own clothing), resulted in many developing influenza or pneumonia. There was also a lack of suitable medical care, which resulted in the death of two Caymanians, Seaman Johnson and Udine Eden, from pneumonia.

This situation was similar to that faced by the men of the British West Indies Regiment in their journey to Britain in the Halifax or *Verdala* incident during the First World War. The food was terrible and the accommodation uncomfortable, as they had been provided with only cots in the barracks instead of proper beds. Furthermore, the men felt that the behaviour of the camp's first lieutenant towards them was unacceptable: threatening, screaming and passing sarcastic remarks. They protested to the base commander and conditions did indeed improve; they were issued with proper bunkbeds before sunset the next day. News about their poor conditions had reached the Cayman Islands and there was a public uproar, with the Commissioner being asked to intervene.

Many ships were converted by the British in Bermuda for use by the Trinidad Reserve, 96% of which were at least partially crewed by Caymanian sailors. The Reserve patrolled the main shipping lanes into Trinidad to make sure that they were kept open, despite the threat from U-boats; they operated some minesweepers, and were called upon to rescue people from vessels that were sunk by the Germans. Their role was very similar to other British Colonial Naval forces, and allowed the Royal Navy to be deployed in more direct conflict against the Axis powers.



*The Trinidad Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve*

Caymanian waters themselves were not free from the U-Boat threat, with the islands' position on the shipping lanes in-between Panama and Nova Scotia making them a target. This danger had a major effect on the sea-reliant Caymanian economy, bringing the turtle industry to its knees. Several ships were sunk, such as the *Comayagua*, which was only 14 miles southwest of George Town when she was attacked by *U-125* on 14th May 1942 and struck by two torpedoes. Although there were accusations that U-boat crews attacked surviving crew members, on this occasion Captain Folkers of *U-125* surfaced to advise Captain Larsen of the *Comayagua* that he was only 10 miles away from land. The ship's survivors were spotted by an American Navy plane which alerted the Commissioner of the Cayman Islands, John Jones, by dropping a note down to him. Jones lost no time in sending the *Cimboco*, captained by Eugene Thompson, to rescue the remaining crew of the *Comayagua*.

The U-boat threat in the Caribbean reached its zenith in 1942 and it was decided that the Cayman Islands should have their own branch of the Jamaican Home Guard, with Police Inspector Joseph ‘Roddy’ Watler, who had distinguished himself during the hurricane of 1932, appointed as the Officer-in-Charge, when it was formed in the June. He was assisted by Captain Craig from the Jamaica Defence Force, in charge of 42 men. The Cayman Islands Company carried out coastal observation duties 24 hours a day, continuously watching for signs of German activity from 6 lookout posts around Grand Cayman. The Home Guard was a full-time job, with regular officers training for 8 hours a day and then standing guard around the island during the night.



*A replica of a Caymanian Home Guard watch post*

Despite Caymanians’ reputation for being excellent sailors, one that was recognised by the British during the war, not all Caymanians who served in the conflict did so in a



*Captain Rayal Bodden (center)  
from The Cayman Islands National Archive  
Historical Collections*

nautical capacity. At least one Caymanian, Dalkeith Ruel Bodden, joined the Royal Air Force. Caymanian shipbuilding skills were also employed to aid the war effort, with two 120 ft. long minesweepers being built by Captain Rayal Bodden, an expert ship builder who had also designed many public buildings on the islands. Caymanians who remained at home assisted the war effort by salvaging useful materials, such as scrap metal from the shipwrecks that surrounded the islands, as well as from the old cannons of the

forts. These materials were made into new armaments for the war. Donations were also made of used postage stamps and shells. In addition, Caymanians made financial donations to the British Empire’s war effort; these were divided amongst such causes as the Red Cross Fund, King George’s Fund for sailors and even the Girl Guide Lifeboat fund. Donations were also made of Caymanian goods, with Green turtles being given to provide food for hospitals and ships of the Royal Navy.

Caymanians were also involved with the American military campaigns. Many Caymanians sailed with the American Merchant Navy before the war and continued to do so throughout the conflict. Some also joined during the combat, such as William Warren Conolly, who would later become an important figure in Caymanian politics and the development of the islands. In 1943 George Town became the site of a U.S. Naval base, which housed seaplanes that were used to search for U-boats. In 1945, the U.S. Coastguard took over the base from the Navy for the purpose of operating a short-wave relay radio station.



It is worth noting that of all Allied countries to fight in the Second World War, the Cayman Islands had the highest number of servicemen per capita, amounting to two-thirds of the adult male population. This highlights the significant contribution that they made to the Allied war effort. The experience that Caymanian sailors gained during the war proved useful in the post-war period, and many Caymanian sailors that joined American shipping lines found themselves promoted to important positions as engineers and captains of super-tankers and bulk carriers. The end of the Second World War did not mark the end of Caymanian service in the British Armed forces and servicemen from the islands have served in more recent conflicts, such as the campaign in Bosnia, the first Gulf War and the Falklands War. Some Caymanian citizens have served in the American armed forces as well, reflecting the bond that the islands have developed with the United States.

*The War Memorial at Elmslie Memorial Church in Georgetown, Grand Cayman*



*The Second World War Merchant Navy Memorial at Tower Hill, London*



*The names of Caymanian merchant sailors on the Tower Hill War Memorial*

# The post-war years

The period after the Second World War was in many ways the beginning of the Caymanian economic boom, despite the demise of traditional industries. Whilst the skills of Caymanian sailors had long been recognised, increasingly they began to find employment with shipping lines and oil firms, many of them American but flying under flags of convenience, such as Liberia or Panama. By 1970, over 2,000 Caymanians were sailing on foreign-owned vessels.

The wages that these sailors received sparked the incredible transformation of the Caymanian economy and society and indeed the remittances from American firms meant that the Islands became useful dollar earners for the Commonwealth. A financial institution was needed to handle the increasing money sent home by sailors working abroad and thus in 1953 the first public bank was opened in the Cayman Islands, a branch of Barclays.

The aftermath of the Second World War saw the attempt to establish the West Indies Federation out of British colonies in the region, in the hope that they would become a unified, independent state. As a dependency of Jamaica, the Cayman Islands were enthusiastic to make their individual voice heard in these difficult negotiations, being particularly keen to preserve the internal autonomy that they had essentially enjoyed since the Islands were first inhabited. The Caymanian Assembly had three main aims: to retain the right to control entry to the islands, to retain the right to decide what taxes should be imposed and to retain the right to maintain the channels of trade and employment overseas that were vital to their economy.



*The inauguration of the West Indies Federation*



*Ormond Panton*

A delegation from the Caymanian Legislative Assembly, consisting of Thomas Farrington, Ormond Panton and Ernest Panton led by Mr E.D. Merren was sent to Jamaica to represent the islands. It became clear that the position of Cayman within the Federation would be largely defined by its relationship with Jamaica, which represented the islands in the negotiations, and some issues proved impossible to overcome within the status quo. Thus, in 1959 the Cayman Islands received their first constitution by a Royal Order-in-Council. This had previously been proposed in 1956 by Sir Hugh Foot, the Governor of Jamaica.

The Constitution renamed the office of Commissioner to that of Administrator and replaced the old system of the Justices and the Vestry with a new Legislative Assembly and Executive Council, the former of which had voted to end its existence. The new Assembly was composed of eighteen members, of whom three were officials, three

were nominated by the Administrator and the remaining twelve elected. From the legislature, an executive Council was drawn, consisting of two official, one nominated and two elected members. The constitution gave the vote to all adult Caymanians, marking the right of women to vote and stand in elections for the first time. As a result of this new constitution, the Cayman Islands functionally ceased to be a dependency of Jamaica on 4th July 1959, although the Governor of Jamaica still continued to wield authority over the islands. With the new constitution in place, the Cayman Islands decided in 1961 that they would join the West Indies Federation, yet the fragile Federation would soon crumble. The same year Jamaica decided in a referendum that they would withdraw from the Federation, a move that signalled the end of the project.

Jamaican independence from Britain in 1962 saw the end of the authority of the Governor of Jamaica in Cayman. To fill this void in the governance of the islands, the Administrator was granted the powers that had been wielded by the Governor. Caymanians were left with a decision: did they wish to retain a close relationship with Jamaica, did they want to become an independent nation or did they want to remain as part of Britain? Sir Hugh Foot had earlier noted in discussions concerning the West Indies Federation that *“The people of the Caymans are loyal British subjects and proud of their British traditions.”* In the end, following a public meeting, the Legislative Assembly unanimously voted to remain British. The Islands decided that, whilst they wanted to retain their historic links with Britain, they also wished to maintain their internal self-government.

The title of the Administrator was eventually changed in 1971 to that of Governor and the last Administrator, Athelstan Charles Ethelwulf Long, became the first Governor. The Cayman Islands still have a Governor today who is responsible for the islands’ external affairs, internal security and police force. The Governor also serves as the British Monarch’s representative in the Islands and fulfils constitutional functions on her behalf, such as granting assent to bills passed by the Caymanian Legislative

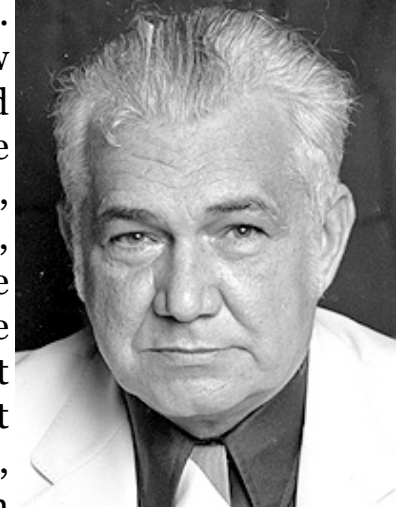


*Government House, the Governor's residence*

Assembly before they become law and officially appointing the Premier of the Islands from the democratically elected Assembly. The Governor also oversees the Islands’ civil service. The Constitution was further revised in 1972, with alterations including the lowering of the voting age to eighteen and the period in-between elections for the Legislative Assembly extended from three years to four years. The system of nominated members was discontinued and the Executive Committee was composed of four members elected by the legislature, three officials and the Governor.

It is generally agreed that the decision to remain British is one that has been beneficial to the Cayman Islands and has allowed them to develop their economy into the financial powerhouse that it is today. The British link has provided a reputation for stability to the Islands, which has encouraged foreign businesses to invest and work there, including many UK citizens. It has also lent Cayman the benefits of British military and diplomatic protection.

The 1970s were a period of great transformation for the islands. As the traditional industries, such as turtling, died out, new ones took their place. Tourism, which had been encouraged as far back as the earliest commissioners, became far more important and steps were taken by Caymanian Legislators, such as James 'Jim' Bodden, to encourage and develop this, which for a time became the predominant industry in the islands. It was replaced in the middle of the 1980s by the burgeoning financial services market, which remains the most pre-eminent Caymanian industry today. The development of financial services was primarily led by a Civil Servant, Vassel Johnson, who in 1994 became the first Caymanian



*James Bodden*



*The Caymanian dollar*

to be knighted. 1972 saw the implementation of the third Caymanian constitution and the creation of the Caymanian dollar, which ultimately provided a strong and stable currency that has assisted Cayman's financial sector.

Caymanian support for the British during wartime was again demonstrated during the conflict between Argentina and Britain in 1982 when General Galtieri's forces invaded the Falkland Islands. The islands donated half a million pounds to support the British military's response.

### **Caymanian festivals**

Pirates Week was founded in 1977, primarily thanks to the efforts of Caymanian legislator James, 'Jim', Bodden. The name derives from the enduring belief that Cayman was a pirates' nest, although, as previously mentioned there is little evidence to support this. Originally it was hoped that the piratical theme would encourage tourism but over time the festival has evolved into a national cultural festival but still celebrates the pirate legends of Cayman's past. One of the highlights is a 'pirate invasion' from the sea. It is celebrated in early November. The national carnival, Cayman Carnival Batabano, is held in the first week of May and was first celebrated in 1983. Since 2002 there has also been a junior carnival for children.



*Pirates Week*

A Caymanian National Identity developed in the last decade of the Twentieth Century, with the Silver Thatch Palm being made the national tree, the wild Banana Orchid the national flower and the Caymanian Parrot the national bird. In 1993, *Beloved Isle Cayman* was adopted as the national song. Originally composed in 1930 by Leila Ross-Shier, it is used alongside the official National Anthem of the Cayman Islands, the British *God Save the Queen*. In 1990s there were greater attempts to preserve Cayman heritage, an example of which being the restoration of Pedro St. James, the oldest existing building on the islands, after many years of ruin and neglect. The booming economy meant that many people were coming to live and work in Cayman and by the end of the millennium only 41% of the population had been born in the islands, compared to over 95% in 1943. The early 1990s also saw some amendments made to the constitution, with the number of elected members of the legislature increased from twelve to fifteen. In 1993, the number of elected members on the legislature was increased from four to five.



*The Cayman Legislative Assembly*

### **Beloved Isle Cayman**

O land of soft, fresh breezes,  
Of verdant trees so fair  
With the Creator's glory reflected  
ev'rywhere.

O sea of palest em'rald,  
Merging to darkest blue,  
When 'ere my thoughts fly Godward,  
I always think of you.

**Chorus:** Dear, verdant island, set  
In blue Caribbean sea,  
I'm coming, coming very soon,  
O beauteous isle, to thee.

Although I've wandered far,  
My heart enshrines thee yet.  
Homeland! Fair Cayman Isle  
I cannot thee forget

Away from noise of cities,  
Their fret and carking care,  
With moonbeams' soft caresses,  
Unchecked by garish glare,  
Thy fruit and rarest juices,  
Abundant, rich and free,  
When sweet church bells are chiming,  
My fond heart yearns for thee.

### **Chorus**

When tired of all excitement,  
And glam'rous worldly care,  
How sweet thy shores to reach,  
And find a welcome there,  
And when comes on the season,  
Of peace, good will to man,  
'Tis then I love thee best of all,  
Beloved Isle, Cayman!

### **Chorus**



*The Cayman Legislative Assembly in session*

# Coat of Arms

A Coat of Arms is a heraldic badge that originally developed out of the practice of medieval knights painting their shields in various colours and patterns to identify themselves on the battlefield. In the U.K., they are issued by the Royal College of Arms in London and are used to identify individuals, families, towns, counties and countries.

The Legislative Assembly approved Commissioner Alan Donald's proposal to request the grant of a Coat of Arms in 1957 and therefore work began on its design, with some public input. The initial scheme was for a golden shield, bearing blue and white wavy lines, with a chevron representing the rafters of a house; together they portrayed the idea that the sea is the home of the Caymanians. Three escutcheons represented the three islands, with a symbol placed on each one to indicate an important characteristic of the islands: a rope representing the thatch palm rope-making industry, an anchor representing Caymanian sailing tradition and a conch shell, which is widespread in the islands. All three were coloured gold to depict their worth and dignity. At the top of the shield, the 'chief' was the English Lion, symbolising the islanders' connections with Britain; this was to be flanked by both a pineapple of Jamaica and a Castilian castle, which featured on the arms of Christopher Columbus; these were intended to represent their links to Jamaica and the role of Columbus in the discovery of the islands. The motto "*He hath founded it upon the seas*" was chosen. Taken from Psalm 24 of the Bible, it reflected not only the Christian heritage of the islands but also their maritime connection.

The Caymanians, who felt a greater connection to Britain than to either Jamaica or Columbus, wished for the design to be amended to reflect this. In addition, the conch is an indigenous mollusc of many Caribbean islands and felt not to be distinctively Caymanian. The Caymanians wished to emphasise three particular aspects of their heritage: their link with Britain, the importance of the sea as their home environment and the unity of the three islands.

Thus, some new designs were created. The Royal College of Arms sent all three designs to the Cayman Islands in December 1957 and on 5th February 1958 the Assembly of Justices and Vestry chose design 'A'. This featured three stars, edged with gold, on wavy lines of blue and white to represent the three islands in their marine environment. The English Lion was retained, crouched in a protective stance, as was a pineapple, which was used as part of the crest. In front of the pineapple was placed a green turtle, symbolising not only the islands' historic turtling trade but also the original name of the islands, Las Tortugas.

Properly described in heraldic language, the arms are: "Barry wavy Argent and Azure, three Mulletts Vert fimbriated Or on a Chief wavy Gules, a Lion passant guardant Gold, And for the Crest On a Wreath of the Colours In front of a Pine-apple plant leaved and fructed Or, a Green Turtle Vert, together with this Motto: He hath founded it upon the Seas."

The Royal Warrant permitting use of this Coat of Arms was granted on 14th May 1958 and it became a focus of pride for the people of the islands. It is used frequently to represent the Cayman Islands and their government and holds pride of place on the Caymanian Flag. Written permission is required for non-governmental use of the Coat of Arms.



# Turtles

It is impossible to talk about the Cayman Islands without discussing their unique relationship with sea turtles. As noted elsewhere, Columbus originally called the islands Las Tortugas, owing to the large numbers of turtles present on land and in the sea. The geography of the Islands is particularly suited for turtles' breeding habits; the low sandy beaches are ideal for turtles to lay their eggs, whilst, in the local lagoons, there is plenty of undersea turtle grass upon which the herbivorous Green Turtle feeds. Although turtles are found throughout the Caribbean, the Cayman Islands were soon recognised as their most frequented breeding and feeding ground. The volume of turtles was such that it was possible to use them as a navigation aid when they made their annual migration across the region from Central America to the Cayman Islands. Even in poor visibility, sailors were able to use the sound of the turtles swimming to find their way.



*The Green Turtle*

Although it proved a major draw for later European settlers, the presence of turtles did not seem to have encouraged the native peoples of the Caribbean to settle in the islands. This is probably linked to their belief that eating turtle meat inhibited mental acuity, although no such belief was attached to turtle eggs, which were a favoured delicacy.



*The Hawksbill Turtle*

When the Europeans came to the region, they attached no such stigma to turtle meat and it became regarded as a good source of food, indeed one that could importantly be preserved by salting for long voyages or even kept alive to provide fresh meat with the proper use of seawater. The presence of turtles became one of the major reasons that people stopped at the Cayman Islands and was undoubtedly one of the prime reasons that they were eventually settled by the English. Turtle was viewed as the superfood of the time, supposedly very good for a person's health, nutritious and able to cure a wide variety of diseases, such as skin conditions and even syphilis. Thus, turtles were caught over the region by people from various islands and mainland countries, such as Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua.

There are a number of different types of sea turtle but the most common in Caymanian waters have been the Green and Hawksbill turtles. The Green turtle has long been a popular source of food, but the Hawksbill was not regarded as being as tasty as the



Green. Indeed, it was regarded as being inedible (perhaps because it feeds on toxic sea sponges), but it seems to have become more palatable over the centuries as the shrinking population has had easier access to non-toxic food sources. Traditionally, the fishermen of Grand Cayman hunted for Green Turtle and those of the Sister Islands for Hawksbill.

The products of both types of turtle were treated as luxury goods, with Green turtles being shipped abroad, including to Britain, where they were primarily sold to gourmet restaurants, with turtle soup being a particular favourite at the Lord Mayor of London's annual banquet. The value of the Hawksbill is in its shell, which is known as tortoiseshell despite coming from a turtle. It has been prized since the ancient world, and can be made into a variety of goods such as combs, boxes, jewellery and even inlaid decoration or marquetry for furniture.



*A tortoiseshell comb*

It was not just Caymanian sailors who sought turtles in Caymanian waters and many arrived from further afield. At one time, there were around 40 ships that came from Kingston to catch turtle during the breeding season. The popularity of turtle inevitably led to overfishing and by the end of the eighteenth century, it became increasingly difficult to find turtle near the Cayman Islands. This meant that the turtlers had to sail to more distant waters for their catch, to near the southern coast of Cuba. This also led to overfishing problems in that area and Caymanians catching turtles in Cuban territorial waters did not endear the former to the Spanish colonists; this may very well have contributed to the Spanish perception of Caymanians as sea-robbers and pirates.

The situation with the Spanish eventually forced Caymanian turtlers to seek their prizes around the Mosquito Cays, off the coast of Nicaragua, where they had to compete with Nicaraguan fishermen. A similar situation to the one that had existed with Spanish Cuba began to develop and government intervention was required in the early twentieth century after Caymanian ships were seized and their crew imprisoned. A treaty was established between Britain and Nicaragua, whereby Caymanian turtlers paid for a yearly turtling licence as well as a fee for every turtle caught, thus allowing the industry to continue.

Normally caught using nets, captured turtles would be brought aboard the Caymanian schooners and taken back to the Cayman Islands, where they were held in 'crawls', holding pens in seawater, until such time as the turtles were either slaughtered or shipped to other countries. Most turtle that came to Britain from the Cayman Islands came via Jamaica.



*Turtles awaiting shipment*

The Caymanian relationship with turtles led to the creation of a type of boat unique to the Cayman Islands, the Catboat. It was originally developed on Cayman Brac in 1904 by Captain Daniel Jervis, so that the turtlers of the Brac could better pursue their traditional prey, the Hawksbill turtle. Since the settlement of the Cayman Islands, the turtlers had used canoes, which the early European settlers in the region had learned to make from the traditional designs of the native people. Adapted from the canoe, the Catboat was shorter and wider than these vessels, which made it more manoeuvrable and thus better suited to pursuing the Hawksbill, which is a very agile swimmer. Around 16ft long and 4ft wide with a prow at both ends, it was designed to hold two men and was equipped with both oars and sails for the pursuit of its prey, with rigging made out of the local thatch palm rope. They were painted a distinctively bright blue colour, which served as camouflage in the surrounding water and thus allowed them to approach turtles undetected. The same colour was applied to the oar blades and other articles of the boat's equipment that were used in the water. They would be carried on the decks of the larger schooners and deployed when they reached the fishing grounds. Unfortunately, the first Catboat built by Captain Jervis, the *Terror*, was lost onboard a schooner, along with all hands, during the hurricane of 1932.



*A model of a Catboat*



*A Catboat full of turtle*

Despite the Caymanian turtling industry contributing to the worldwide decline of turtle populations, the knowledge gathered by generations of Caymanian turtling captains allowed scientists to learn about the life cycle of these marine reptiles. Professor Archie Carr, known as the man who saved sea turtles, visited the Cayman Islands in the 1950s and interviewed Caymanian turtling captains to acquire such information as adult turtles remarkable homing abilities. Caymanian turtlers had discovered that when a turtle was released from the Cayman Islands, it would travel back over hundreds of miles of open sea to the Cays from where it had been captured. What is also equally impressive is the speed with which they did so, being able to cover up to 30 miles a day.

Like other industries in the Cayman Islands, the trade in turtles declined, the demand for Hawksbill goods being particularly affected by the development of plastics which meant that many of the goods once made of tortoiseshell could be produced much more cheaply. Eventually turtles were declared an endangered species, ending the international legal trade in turtle-based goods.

As the amount of turtles had been reduced to critical numbers by the turtling industry, attempts were made to restore the population. To this end, the Turtle Farm was opened at West Bay on the North-western tip of Grand Cayman in 1968, in an effort to restore turtle numbers, whilst simultaneously producing turtle that could be used for commercial purposes so that the enterprise would be financially viable. However, this proved to be difficult and the farm struggled for many years, changing owners, who similarly struggled, before the whole operation was bought by the Caymanian government who now operate it as a tourist attraction.



*The Turtle Farm in the 1970s*



*The Turtle Farm today*

However, the Turtle Farm has not been without its controversies. Conservationists, including Archie Carr, initially feared that producing turtle for commercial ends would stimulate demand for the product and lead to people hunting wild turtle. In more recent years, concerns have been expressed about the conditions in which the turtles are kept and the manner in

which breeding programmes are destroying the divisions between what were once genetically distinct groups of turtle. Nevertheless, the Turtle Farm has released over 31,000 turtles back into the wild.

Although 1949 saw an excellent profit from turtling of £12,507, the decline of the industry began in the 1950s. By 1965, the industry brought in only £2,240 in exports. The early 1970s marked the end of the turtling industry, when the Government of Nicaragua severely limited the number of permits that they issued for fishing in their territorial waters and in 1970 no schooners left for Nicaraguan waters. Although the shell of the Hawksbill was still sold, competition from cheaper plastics made it a limited market and the ban on the international trade on turtle goods brought it to an end. Tourism replaced turtling as the main industry before the Cayman Islands made their name in international finance.

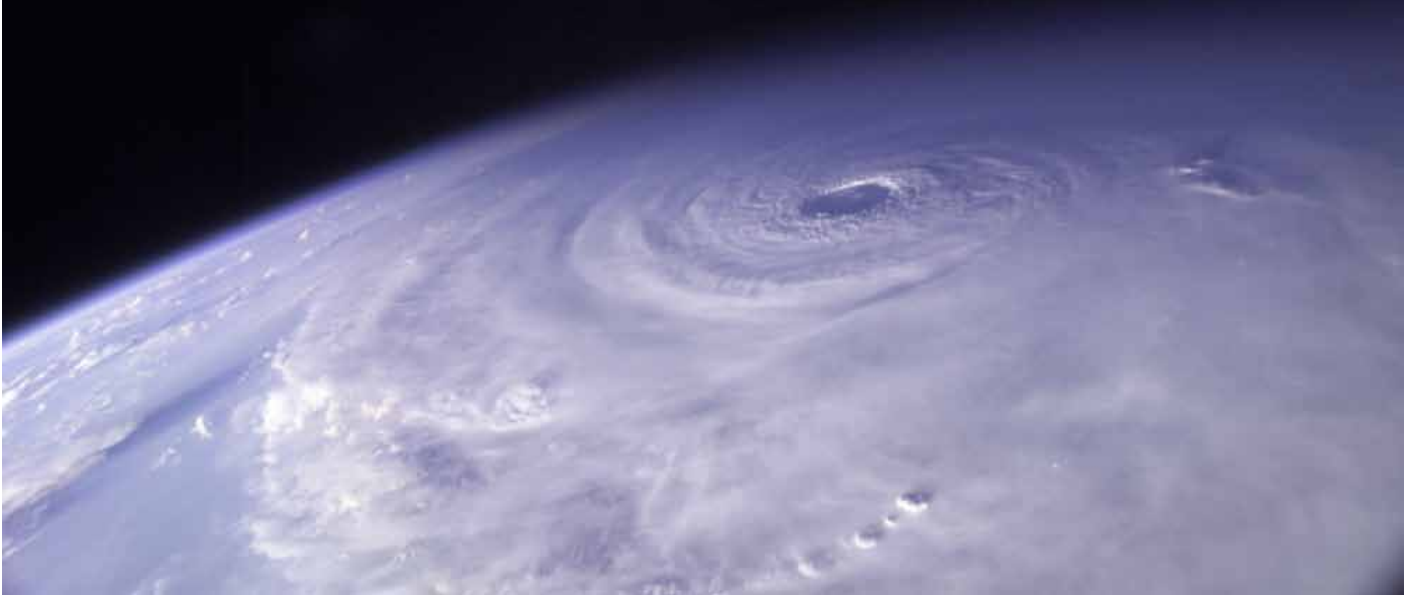
Although the industry has mainly vanished, there are still some licences to hunt and catch turtles active around the islands. The Caymanian relationship with turtles is reflected in other aspects of Caymanian life, with the turtle being prominent on the Caymanian Coat of Arms, present on their bank notes and in Sir Turtle, the mascot of the Caymanian tourist industry. Cayman Carnival Batabano also recalls the islands' turtling heritage. Batabano is a traditional term for the marks that turtles leave in the sand when they come ashore to nest, and finding them was a reason to celebrate.



*Sir Turtle*

# The twenty first century

One of the worst storms to hit the Caribbean in recent years was Hurricane Ivan in 2004, which passed over Grand Cayman between 11th and 12th of September causing considerable damage. It had already passed over Grenada where it had damaged 90% of homes and killed sixteen people. At its peak, Ivan was a Category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale, the strongest category requiring sustained wind speeds over 157 miles per hour. Ivan's maximum sustained wind speed was 165 miles per hour, making it one of the strongest storms ever in this region.



*Hurricane Ivan as seen from space*

The winds began to affect the islands on the 11th, with Governor Bruce Dinwiddie declaring a State of Emergency at 5 p.m. By 10 p.m., Grand Cayman was experiencing 100 miles per hour winds. It was not until the following day that the worst effects of the storm were felt. Storm surges began to affect the island, with the North Sound experiencing waters ten feet above the norm by 5 a.m. At 10 a.m. the eye of the hurricane passed twenty miles to the southwest of Grand Cayman, its closest point, causing sustained winds of 150 miles per hour and gusts reaching up to an incredible 220 miles per hour. The Storm Surge was believed to be around 10 feet and waves were estimated to have reached between 20 and 30ft high. To make matters worse, Ivan was a slow-moving storm, which ultimately increased the length of time that Grand Cayman was exposed to the elements.

In the aftermath of the storm, it was discovered that 83% of homes of Grand Cayman had suffered damage, most of it severe; over 50% of trees and cars had been destroyed and 25% of the island had been flooded. 402 people had to be treated for injuries and two people had been killed. With such devastation to homes, many people were displaced and electricity and water supplies were disrupted. It would take many months for



*Damage from Hurricane Ivan*

these to be restored. Telecommunications were seriously affected, although some lines remained open. Food supplies were limited and, as is often the case in the aftermath of such disasters, there was some looting.

The total economic damage to the islands was estimated by the United Nations to be \$3.4 billion. There was a significant effect on tourism, commerce and agriculture. However, the important Caymanian Financial Services sector avoided any direct damage and was able to resume operations quickly, remarkably in some cases when the hurricane was still over the islands.

The Sister Islands were also affected but not to the extent of Grand Cayman. However, many people from the Sister Islands travelled to Grand Cayman in the not unreasonable belief that they would be safer on the larger island and were thus caught in the storm. On Cayman Brac, the island's two hurricane shelters were filled. Others took refuge in the traditional shelter of the caves in the bluff. All tourists were evacuated from Little Cayman.

The National Hurricane Committee had been well prepared for Ivan, although the sheer force of the storm was unexpected. However, shelters had been provided and basic supplies available. Local businesses also rose to the occasion, donating supplies and the hotels that were still functioning opened their doors to relief workers and provided fresh water and bathroom facilities for the hardest hit.

The first external aid came from the British Royal Navy, who dispatched *HMS Richmond* and *RFA Wave Ruler*, which were able to provide critical assistance in the first four days after the disaster. The British Government sent more aid in the following days: 40 tonnes of bottled water and enough water purification tablets to last 7,000 people for a month, 500 cots for children to sleep on, and 50 chainsaws to help clear the debris. An airlift to Grand Cayman on 16th September provided 5,000 tarpaulins and telecommunication equipment to help the authorities co-ordinate operations. A help line was also established for concerned relatives and friends outside the islands. In wider efforts to help the region, the U.K. contributed money to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and to the Pan American Health Organisation. Such international aid agencies sent relief supplies, emergency personnel and health kits. Family and friends of those affected, who lived abroad, also sent planes with supplies.

Since Hurricane Ivan, the Cayman Islands have worked to improve their hurricane response and in 2007 launched Hazard Management Cayman Islands, a new office to oversee disaster risk management. Shelters have been refitted and strengthened and given better signage, infrastructure is better protected and there has been investment in new technologies and equipment for response teams to use. A national hurricane plan and various contingency plans have also been developed. *Hazard Management Cayman Islands' logo*



A major test of these systems came in 2008 with Hurricane Paloma, a powerful category 4 storm. Whilst Grand Cayman was only minimally affected by Paloma, wind speeds of up to 140 miles per hour caused massive devastation on the Sister Islands, particularly Cayman Brac, leaving over 1,000 people homeless and \$50 million dollars' worth of damage. Only 195 buildings out of 1,207 were not affected in some way by the hurricane; 56 were totally destroyed. Paloma had struck the islands on 8th November, one day before the anniversary of the 1932 storm. Fortunately, this time no one was killed. *RFA Wave Ruler* was once again sent to provide assistance and many boats set forth carrying emergency supplies from Grand Cayman. In the aftermath of the disaster Prince Edward visited the islands, where he met people who had survived not only Paloma but the Hurricane of 1932. District Commissioner Ernie Scott later estimated it took 18 months for Cayman Brac to recover, with the islands tourism industry suffering greatly from the storm. Paloma went on to cause significant damage on Cuba as well.

In 2009, the Constitution was amended again, allowing for an increase in the number of members of the Legislative Assembly from fifteen to eighteen and the cabinet from five members to six as well. The Attorney General and Deputy Governor still sit in both the Legislative Assembly and the Cabinet. It also made important changes to the way that the Premier, Deputy Premier, Deputy Governor and Minister of Finance are appointed. Most noticeably, for the first time it included a Bill of Rights, setting out the fundamental rights and freedoms that Caymanians enjoy. By 2010 there were 300,000 tourists arriving per year along with 1.5 million cruise ship passengers. The financial sector was also growing rapidly with 371 banks and trust funds registered in the islands and over 91,000 registered companies. As was the case in the early twentieth century, imports into the Cayman Islands far outstrip exports, although the imbalance has now reached a ratio of over 100:1. Whereas previously the imbalance was offset by the remittances of Caymanians working on ships or overseas, today it is through the earnings of the financial and tourism sectors.



*The seafront at Georgetown today*

# Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that despite their geographic isolation and historically poor communications with the outside world, the Cayman Islands have always had a strong affinity for their British roots, with their ancestors originating in the U.K. and Ireland, but particularly in southern England. This affinity has stood the test of time, despite centuries of isolation and neglect from Britain. A reflection of this connection is their decision to remain as a British Overseas Territory in the aftermath of Jamaican independence and the collapse of the West Indian Federation in the 1960s. Over the course of several centuries, they have contributed to Britain with their exports of turtle, mahogany and, most importantly, their sailors who have served Britain in both peace and war.

What is particularly striking about the Caymanian story is the great hardship and poverty that they have endured for most of their existence. The Caymanian economy has been characterised by long periods of subsistence, interspersed with brief periods of accelerated activity in the mahogany, cotton and phosphate industries. Caymanian sailing expertise eventually generated currency that helped the islands develop in the twentieth century from the “Islands that time forgot” to a more modern society which laid the foundations for greater prosperity.

In the last fifty years the Cayman Islands have undergone an incredible economic and social transformation to become one of the world’s greatest financial centres and a luxury tourist destination. Their distinctive geographical features, their clear waters and rare flora and fauna are now appreciated by the visitors that flock to their shores. Despite the immense benefits that this progress has brought, it inevitably means that many traditional practices have lost their former importance; Caymanian seafarers, once the envy of the world, are now very few in number and society has undergone a huge change with an influx of people from overseas. Therefore, to retain a feeling of Caymanian identity, it is important for the islanders to look to their past as well as their future and to take pride in their unique heritage, realising that it is indeed founded “upon the seas”.