



Shadwell Great House

ART & WELLNESS CENTRE

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As well as being the oldest 'great house' on St Kitts, it served as the English governor's residence during its life, and reflects the most significant political and social events of the island. This site remains very important, and is thought to be the best example of a Great House on the island. The property has been owned by only three families, and sold only twice, in the past 300 years.



Shadwell played an intricate roll in the history of St. Kitts. The basement was built before Brimstone Hill by the French in the 1600s. In the 1700s, the property served as an important diplomatic residence for Governor Gilbert Fleming, who threw lavish parties there, entertaining dignitaries from around the world. When Horacio Nelson married Fanny Nisbett in Nevis, Prince William (who would later become King), stayed in the house before he sailed over to Nevis to give Fanny away.

When Gilbert Fleming built the Great House in the second quarter of the 1700s he was one of three commissioners appointed by the British Government to distribute the lands acquired from the French by the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. In 1733 Fleming became Lieutenant General of the Leeward Caribbean and Lieutenant Governor of St. Christopher. He is reputed to have taken advantage of his official position to acquire a large estate (160 acres at that time), most of which was bequeathed to his son, Gilbert Fane Fleming. He owned many other properties on the island, including most of the area around the Great Salt Pond, at the end of the Southeast Peninsula.



[National Archives of St Kitts]

Shadwell was used as the marriage settlement when Gilbert Fane Fleming's daughter Carolina married John Brisco. Fleming later bequeathed the property to Lady Brisco, to be passed on to her first son and his heirs. When slavery was abolished in the British Empire, the Flemings were registered to have 207 slaves at Shadwell, and their adjoining property, Westhope Estate.

During the 1830s, the estate had a school which included students from the Greenland estate. The school had 23 boys and 25 girls enrolled in it. In 1843 an earthquake caused considerable damage to the buildings on the estate. The estimated repair bill would be \$3231. In 1848, the Barnett map of the islands identified the estate as having an old style wind mill.



By 1873 Shadwell was owned by Thomas Berkeley Hardtman Berkeley, a leading planter and politician who became President of the Federal Council of the Leeward Islands a few days before his death in 1881. The Circus Clock in Basseterre was built in his honour. The property was bequeathed to his son John. By the early twentieth century the Bromleys, descendants of John Berkeley's sister, controlled it.



In 1965, Eric & Agnes Skerritt, prominent local pharmacists, purchased the house and lived in it with their family until his death in 1994. The family is restoring it in honour of his memory, and in memory of the slaves bought and sold here in the 18th and 19th centuries.

As Shadwell Great House transforms into its most recent incarnation, we invite you to tour the property, and witness the restoration process.

Photo: Sonny Skerritt