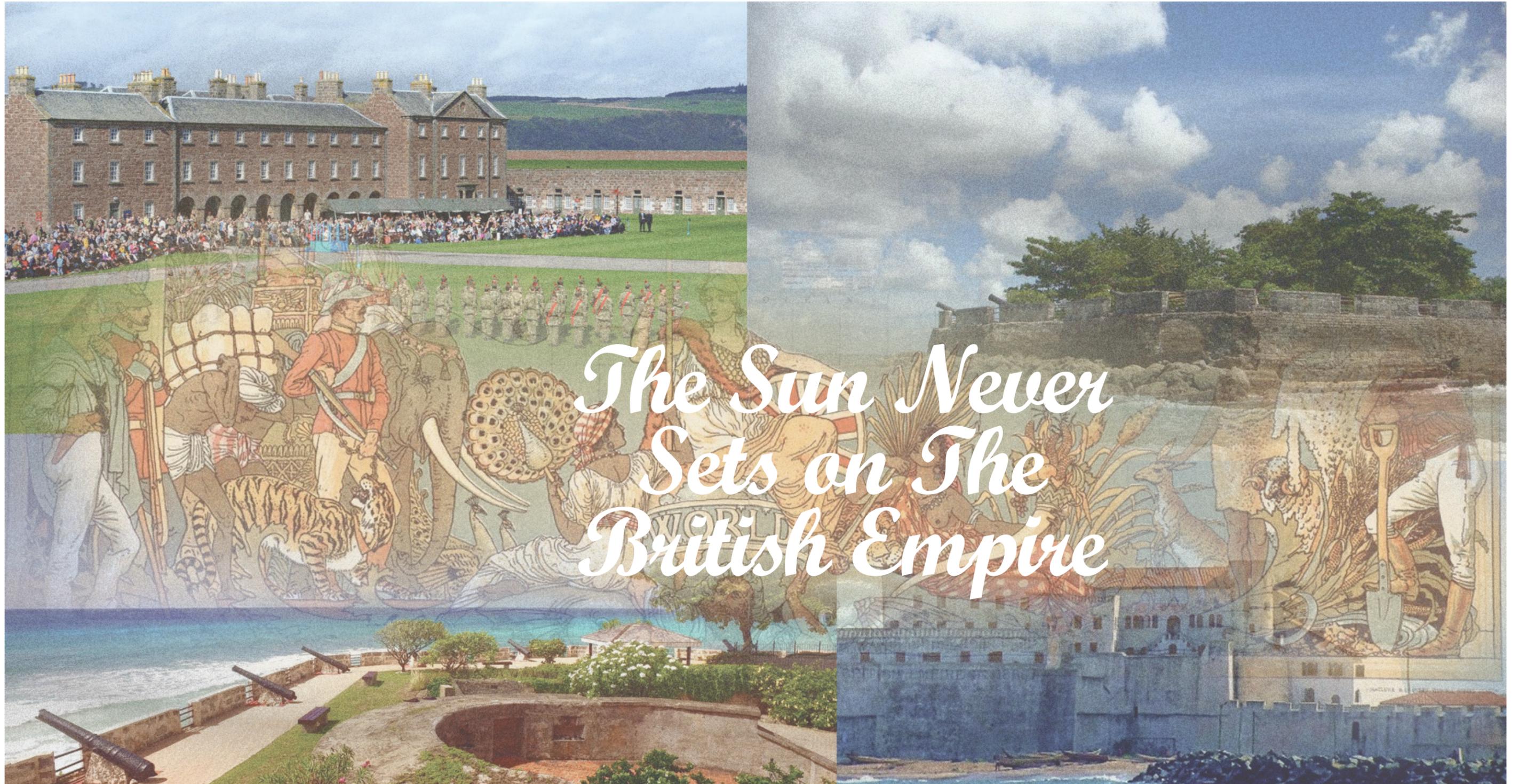


# The Preservation of Forts in Ex-Colonial States



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Figure 1: Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886

## INTRODUCTION

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, ‘Colonialism’ is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another<sup>1</sup>. The keyword here is domination. It is a practice that has grown civilization and tumbled empires. It is a practice that, along with Imperialism, tore global society apart and we are still seeing the effects of it today.

When a nation colonized another, they often set up settlements and forts in the conquered territory. This pertains more to Western colonial nations and the forts they set up were placed there to flex the power they held in the region. Forts stood as representations of colonial subjugation and are considered Architectures of Oppression. In this paper, we will be analyzing how the preservation of these forts reflects the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer in each region. We will be delving into Fort George in Scotland, Charles Fort in Barbados, and Elmina Castle in Ghana. These forts are all touristed structures but in different ways.

At the end of this paper, we will have a clearer understanding on how they are touristed, whether they should be at all, and what this says about how far we have come from the era of colonialism.

## SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

All the noted examples have one thing in common: their colonizer, England. In the case of Barbados and Ghana, it is the United Kingdom that includes the subject of this section, however, this was not always the case.

Scotland has a long and bloody history filled with hatred towards England. The rivalry goes as far back as 122 AD when the Roman Emperor Hadrian erected Hadrian’s Wall, separating the conquered Britannica from the Caledonian tribes to the north<sup>2</sup>. After the Norman Invasion of 1066, England became a united nation under William the Conqueror and in 1072, the Scottish King Malcolm III was defeated and the country came under English control for the first time. Then came a series of uprisings,

wars, and power switches that culminated in King James VI of Scotland being crowned James I of England upon the death of the childless Queen Elizabeth I and the Act of Union in 1707. After the line of succession passed from the heirless Scottish Stuarts to the German Hanovers, Scotland was left with few direct ties to the government of England. Today, with the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, Scotland is edging closer and closer towards declaring themselves a republic.

In terms of demographics, visitors from the wider UK represent a significant portion of tourists to the country<sup>3</sup>. In 2019, there were over 150 million visits to Scotland with 1 in every 10 coming from England<sup>4</sup>.

## BARBADOS AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Barbados has had an interesting and entwined relationship with the United Kingdom that has only recently taken on a new form. First contact with the English occurred in 1625 when Captain John Powell landed on the island and claimed it on behalf of King James I<sup>5</sup>. The island was incorporated into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and became a leader in the Caribbean sugar industry. Slaves were taken from West African countries like present-day Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. These countries were also under British rule. The 19th century came with the abolishment of slavery and an apprenticeship period that saw free Black men working for their previous owners for little pay. Internal autonomy was only granted in 1961 with the British monarch still acting as the head of state. This all changed in 2021 when Barbados officially became a republic and elected its first ever president.

In terms of demographics, 34% of arrivals to Barbados come from the UK and its citizens do not require visas to enter the country<sup>6</sup>. Due to Barbados’ increasing trade ties to the rest of the Caribbean and the USA, they have been drifting further and further away from relations with the UK though they will still remain in the Commonwealth.

## GHANA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Ghana was the first African nation to gain independence from the United Kingdom in 1957. At that point, the British had



Figure 2: Charles Fort

occupied the country since the 17th century. Their interests stemmed from trade as did the Dutch and Swedish, however, the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade brought a need for the UK to cement their rule. This resulted in the wars with the Ashanti Kingdom and involvement in local disputes like the Ashanti-Fante War. The latter saw the British capturing and holding the Fante chief in one of their forts before handing him over to the Ashanti and deciding the fate of the war. Occupation by the British was filled with a series of wars and negotiations that put the local forts to use. Things calmed down by the early 20th century but then, the country was united in the goal of independence.

Today, Ghana remains part of the British Commonwealth with almost 100,000 Ghanaians living in Britain. British citizens are required to apply for visas for entry into the country and 16.62% of Ghana's tourist population come from the United Kingdom with a large number being of African descent<sup>7</sup>.

## FORT GEORGE

There were three main forts built in the Scottish Highlands: Fort William, Fort Augustus and Fort George. These forts were built to tackle the issue of the Highland clans who were historically difficult to control and rebelled after the crown passed on to the Hanovarian line. They did not see the point in Scotland still being under English control if the monarch was no longer Scottish. Following the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, the government ordered the construction of the massive Fort George<sup>8</sup>. It was the last of the forts to be built though by the time of its completion the Highland clans had been thoroughly subjugated. After the Battle of Culloden, which dealt the fate of the Jacobite rebellion, the wearing of clan tartans were banned and bearing arms deemed illegal<sup>9</sup>. The clans lost all land and power and the system suffered irreparable harm that has lasted to this day. The very fabric of Scotland was altered by these events. The three forts in the region saw the torture and execution of many Highlanders and Fort George stood as a reminder of the might of the English army.

Today, Fort George is the only one still standing as the others were demolished in place of railways and developments. It functions as Europe's biggest military base. Inside visitors can see various tokens from British military conquests such as a captured Japanese flag from WWII and a box that once belonged to Adolf Hitler<sup>10</sup>. In 2016, the Ministry of Defence declared that it would be closed by 2032 with the Minister of Defence, Sir Michael Fallon declaring that it was no longer needed as the Highland rebellions are long gone.

In delving into the history of Fort George and its current state of preservation, it became clear that the British government is not apologetic over the damage that these forts and their presence in the Highlands have caused. To say that the fort is no longer needed because the rebellions are over and the clans defeated feels extremely uncaring. A better use would have been to turn it into a museum or learning center dedicated to the clan system it helped dismantle. The closing of this fort seems almost like a closing of this chapter in Scottish history without respect being paid to the offended parties.

## CHARLES FORT

Charles Fort is located in Needham's Point in the Southwest of Barbados. It was constructed in 1650 and was built to defend the island from the other colonial powers in the region. It was constructed to protect the assets of the British. These assets included: sugar, rum, and slaves. Not much on the relation of the fort to slavery can be found online. This has to do with the fact that it is currently an event space on the grounds of the Hilton Resort and Hotel in Bridgetown. The fort was instrumental in quelling slave rebellions and unrest but that history is not as readily available as the saturated images of the fort decked out with flowers and park benches.

In delving into the published history, or lack thereof, of Charles Fort, the erasure of history is abundantly clear. This was done not just for the sake of pleasure tourism but for the sake of the British Monarch who was the figurehead of the country up until 2021. A similar erasure is seen in Scotland where the ties to England are much stronger. There is a sense of whitewashing seen throughout.

## ELMINA CASTLE

The contrary is seen in the ironically white painted Elmina Castle in Cape Coast, Ghana. It was built in 1482 by the Portuguese before being handed over to the British. The fort served as a meeting point for slave traders sending enslaved people out into the middle passage. They were held in unsanitary dungeons all over the site and sent through the eponymous 'Door of No Return' to slave plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. By the 18th century, just before the abolishment of slavery by the British, 30,000 slaves passed through the door each year<sup>11</sup>.

Today, the Castle is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is an extremely popular destination for African American tourists seeking to connect with their heritage. It was an incremental part of the 'Year of Return' scheme of 2019 which marked 400 years since the first enslaved people landed on American shores.



Figure 3: Elmina Castle

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the preservation of these three forts illustrates the relationship they share with their ex-colonizer. In one instance, history has been essentially wiped away. In another, it has been glossed over and turned into an insulting pastiche. In another, a magnifying glass has been concentrated on history and the rays of the past are excruciatingly bright.

In these three examples, the healing of each nation can be seen. The processing of the past is somewhat made clear and what the future holds for these forts and each country's relations to its ex-colonizer is also made crystal clear.

## ENDNOTES

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Figure 4: The Door of No Return