BUILDING THE
BRITISH ATLANTIC WORLD

Spaces, Places, and Material Culture, 1600–1850

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TOOLS OF EMPIRE

TRADE, SLAVES, AND THE BRITISH
FORTS OF WEST AFRICA

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The British forts and trade posts of sub-Saharan West Africa afforded Britain the ability to control access to resources—including slaves—and laid the foundation for empire. Between the mid-seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries Britain or British companies established or occupied more than fifty forts and outposts in West Africa stretching from the Senegambia to the Bight of Benin (Fig. 7.1). Their establishment, design, use, and ultimate disuse varied through time, indicating changes in both regional and global political alliances and economic needs. The principal function of the vast majority of these outposts was commercial. They served as bases for trade, providing places to store and gather trade goods, and to exclude other European competitors. The first forts were established to control access to gold, ivory, and raw materials, and trade in these items remained important. However, during the seventeenth century the need for labor on the plantations of the Americas led to an increasing trade in enslaved Africans, and the forts played a key role in this human traffic. With the abolition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century the commercial viability of the forts dramatically decreased and many fell into disuse. Often poorly built, vernacular in plan, and at times ill-suited to the tropics, the British forts and outposts of West Africa nonetheless collectively delineated an expanding sphere of economic influence that ultimately culminated with the imposition of colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. This chapter considers British forts in the wider Atlantic context and how their establishment, construction, and use reflect the varied cultural, political, and economic landscapes of which they were part.
FIGURE 7.1. An eighteenth-century British map of West and Central Africa with flags marking the locations of the forts of different European nations. The inset, dating circa 1773, shows the detail of coastal Ghana. The National Archives UK, Ref. MPK 45.
Europeans in West Africa

Britain was not the first European nation to arrive in sub-Saharan West Africa or the first nation to establish permanent outposts there. European expansion began with the Portuguese, who likely reached coastal Sierra Leone by 1450, the coast of modern-day Ghana by the 1470s, and the Horn of Africa by the end of the century. They subsequently built the first forts on the West African coast.¹ The first and largest of these was Castelo São Jorge da Mina (now known as Elmina Castle) founded in 1482.² Through forts, military action, royal decree, and Papal sanction, the Portuguese attempted to maintain a monopoly on West African trade. However, within fifty years of the founding of Elmina their control had started to wane. French, Dutch, and English vessels were trading on the West African coast by the 1530s. A dozen or so English voyages were recorded during the 1550s and 60s.³ These accounts provide relatively detailed information, in some respects more informative (or perhaps more accessible) than contemporary Portuguese sources.

While the English maintained an early and continuous presence on much of the West African coast, during the first half of the seventeenth century they lagged behind the French and especially the Dutch in the extent of their trading networks and in establishing permanent bases. The possibility of constructing a fort in West Africa was periodically raised in England beginning in the 1550s, but no plans were realized until the founding of a small outpost at Kormantin in coastal Ghana in 1631. In contrast, references to Dutch outposts in the Senegambia begin in the 1590s.⁴ The French were maintaining a small factory on Gorée Island off the coast of Senegal by 1606. The island was purchased by the Dutch in 1617, who subsequently established the forts Nassau and Orange (later occupied by the French). In coastal Ghana, the Dutch founded Fort Nassau at Mori in 1612, and also occupied the former Portuguese forts at Elmina in 1637 and Shama circa 1639.

The British forts of West Africa date between 1631, when the English founded the fort at Kormantin in coastal Ghana, and the 1890s, when the British established a number of outposts in the West African hinterland. Notably, however, these fortifications were—with the exception of a handful of later installations—all “pre-Colonial,” the vast majority having been established between 1660 and 1800. While the arrival of the Europeans on the West African coast in the late fifteenth century enmeshed Africa in an increasingly global economic system dominated by Europe, the political annexation and overt control of West Africa did not begin until the late nineteenth century with the partition of Africa into colonial spheres of influence. The Gold Coast Colony was established in coastal Ghana in 1876; The Gambia became

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a Crown colony in 1889; the Sierra Leone Protectorate was established in 1896; and the annexation of what is now northern Nigeria was completed in 1914.\(^5\)

The period during which the majority of the British forts of West Africa were established was one of dramatic change. Britain emerged as a fully industrialized nation with an economy that was increasingly aimed at and increasingly dependent upon transoceanic trade. Following the Restoration of Charles II and the House of Stuart in 1660, relative political stability and support for trade fostered expansion into widening markets. It is more than coincidental that the establishment of the majority of British outposts, forts, and lodges in West Africa corresponds to a period that witnessed both domestic mercantile expansion and technological advances ranging from coal extraction to textile and brass manufacture, all of which rested on a commercial and middling sector that was more developed than any other European country.\(^6\) This period also witnessed the emergence of the plantation economies of the Americas and the increasing Americanization of the Atlantic world. At the time of the English Civil War the principal English colonies consisted of Barbados, the Leeward Islands of Antigua, Nevis and St. Christopher in the Caribbean, and Virginia, Maryland, and Massachusetts in North America. By 1776 the British Empire in the Americas included a dozen Caribbean colonies, as well as Belize, the thirteen colonies in the nascent United States, and a number of Canadian provinces. The plantations in these colonies were largely dependent on African slave labor and British merchants established far-flung trade networks connecting the Americas, the Caribbean, and West Africa.

With the emergence of the plantation economies of the Americas during the seventeenth century the trade in slaves became increasingly important. Slaves had been traded in the West African savanna and Sahel for centuries, perhaps from the beginnings of the trans-Saharan trade in the first millennium AD. However, historical evidence for a trade in slaves in the coastal regions of West Africa prior to the arrival of the Europeans in the fifteenth century is limited.\(^7\) The trade in enslaved Africans became progressively important, a consequence of the labor needs of the developing plantations of the Americas.\(^8\) By the second half of the seventeenth-century slaves had eclipsed gold as the primary trade item on the Gold Coast — modern-day Ghana.

The period between 1660 and 1800 was also a period of dramatic innovation in terms of military architecture.\(^9\) European fortifications of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were dramatically different from those of earlier periods. Owing to increasingly powerful and sophisticated artillery,
The Protectorate was established in northern Nigeria was completed of the British forts of West Africa during the eighteenth century. Britain emerged as a fully industrialized nation, and was increasingly aimed at and involved in international trade. Following the Restoration of 1660, relative political stability and economic expansion marked the period that witnessed both technological advances ranging from coal mining, all of which rested on a commodity developed in areas that were not clearly identified. As the plantation economy of the English colonies of Antigua, Nevis and St. Kitts, Maryland, and Massachusetts started to succeed, the thirteenth colonies in the New World included a mix of African, American, and Canadian provinces. The plantations were based on African slave labor and British networks connecting the Americas, the economies of the Americas during the eighteenth century. Slaves became increasingly important. As the trans-Saharan trade in the first millennium for a trade in slaves in the coastal areas of the Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries slaves had eclipsed the demand for other goods. The sales were also a period of dramatic innovation. European fortifications of the later were dramatically different from those of the Middle Ages could be reduced to rubble in a matter of days. Fortifications had to be designed to better withstand bombardment with innovations that considered flanking fire, placement of enfilading batteries, and wall construction designed to minimize damage from cannon fire.

Despite these innovations in military architecture, the majority of the British forts and other European outposts in West Africa were typically ill-designed, quickly built, and frequently in disrepair. Often they had small European staffs, for the most part exclusively men, who faced disease, high mortality rates, and poor supply. Some, such as Yannyamacunda, founded on the Gambia River in the 1730s, were little more than small dwellings, simply and expeditiously built of timber and clay in the style of local African buildings (Fig. 7.2). Others, such as Cape Coast in modern Ghana, grew into substantial fortifications, well deserving of their popular appellation “castles” (Fig. 7.3). While some of the forts incorporated new innovations in military construction, the majority were modest in scale and few presented the classic, fully designed defensive features seen in Europe. In West Africa, it was common practice to establish a small lodge or fort first and gradually expand and strengthen it if the trade proved successful. Consequently, the plans of many forts reflect the expansion and redesign of earlier structures. Lawrence suggested that the strongest fortifications of the West African forts generally faced the sea, as defense against the possibility of European naval bombardment, which was the greatest threat. While this is true in many instances, there were certainly exceptions, and in some cases the strongest fortifications were on the landward side. Forts were also frequently captured and recaptured, experiencing multiple episodes of remodeling and reconstruction in the process. In terms of their construction, the forts of West Africa can be contrasted with some of those built in the British colonial spheres of the Americas and even South Africa, where striking, almost textbook, examples of Vauban-style fortifications can be found. The establishment of forts, their roles, and construction also reflected varied interactions with African polities. The majority of British forts, as well as those of other European nations, were located on the coast, with the notable exception of the Senegambia where the Gambia and Senegal Rivers are navigable well into the interior. Forts were not established in most of West Africa, and in many areas trade was conducted directly from ships. In many other cases only small factories or unfortified lodges were built. The major forts were established in the Senegambia, Sierra Leone, Benin, and particularly coastal Ghana. More European forts and outposts—and more
FIGURE 7.2. Francis Moore's 1738 plan of the Royal Africa Company outpost of Yamayamakunda on the Gambia River. The primary structure and the four outbuildings were built of timber and clay in African style. C. R. DeCorse collection.
British forts — were built in coastal Ghana than in any other part of Africa: there are in fact more European forts in coastal Ghana than all of the other pre-nineteenth-century European outposts in West Africa combined. Coastal Ghana initially became important because of the gold trade, but the concentration of forts also reflects the coast’s strategic importance. The relatively stable relations with local African polities in Ghana provided places for established bases that could provide security for both goods and slaves that were often brought from other parts of the West African coast. Forts and outposts were established with the permission, sometimes at the request, of local African states. While African-European relations were sometimes strained and there were conflicts, the need to have African agreement and participation was integral to the commercial success of a fort. In coastal Ghana, European nations often paid ground rent to African rulers in exchange for the use of a fort or at the onset of trade. In reality, while it might have proven difficult for the Africans to oust European traders, it is equally true that Europeans had to maintain cordial relations with local populations as they were the key to maintaining trade.

Elsewhere on the West African coast, states closely restricted the European presence. The most dramatic examples of this are provided by the kingdoms of Hueda and Dahomey in coastal Benin, which closely regulated and
manipulated the Europeans powers with which they interacted. European traders were not granted exclusive trading rights, but rather representatives of different nations were dealt with at the same time. At Savi, the Hueda capital, the unfortified factories of the British, French, and Portuguese were attached to the royal court (Fig. 7.4). Following the defeat of Hueda by Dahomey in 1727, the Europeans relocated to Glewhe (modern Ouidah) some three kilometers from the coast. Here they built separate fortifications, but were isolated in factories three hundred meters from one another and forbidden to visit the Dahomean capital.

THE FIRST ENGLISH FORTS
Beginning in 1618, English trade in West Africa was, by royal charter, placed in the hands of the Company of Guynney and Binney. The company was not particularly successful or profitable. The outpost at Kormantin (Abanzi) in Ghana was established in 1631 with the help of Arent Goote, a former Dutch
West India Company employee, and with the permission of a local chief. This outpost—the first English fort in West Africa—began as a fortified lodge that was gradually expanded, serving as the English headquarters on the coast. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1640, possibly having been sabotaged by the Dutch. The English subsequently built a more substantial fort at Kormantin, the construction of which may have been completed by 1647. The bastion located at the southwestern corner of the fort was hollow and was used to hold slaves, access having been gained through the ceiling—a trap door in the bastion’s platform. This may have been the first slave dungeon built on the African coast. Although enslaved Africans made up an increasing portion of the trade in the mid-seventeenth century, facilities built specifically to house them were still not typical. Indeed, many slaves continued to be accommodated in areas outside of the forts throughout the eighteenth century. The Kormantin fort remained the English headquarters until 1665 when it was captured by the Dutch (and renamed Fort Amsterdam) and the English headquarters was moved to Cape Coast.

The Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 witnessed an expansion of English interests in West Africa. The origins of most of the more substantial English or British (following Acts of Union in 1707) forts in West Africa can be traced to this period. The earlier Company of Guynnery and Binney was replaced by the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading to Africa, which would in turn be replaced by the Royal Africa Company in 1672. The British were not, however, alone in their quest for West African trade. During the second half of the seventeenth century an expanding Atlantic economy fueled increasing competition among European powers and a scramble for West African outposts. Forts provided a means of securing trade interests from rival nations. By the end of the seventeenth century the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Courlanders, Swedes, Danes, Brandenburgers, and English had all established fortified outposts in West Africa with varying success.

A series of European conflicts punctuated the second half of the seventeenth century, including the first (1652–54) and second Anglo-Dutch Wars (1665–67), which were specifically aimed at securing dominance in trade. In West Africa, a number of forts were captured and recaptured. An English fleet under Admiral Holmes sailed along the coast taking in succession the Dutch forts and outposts at Goreé in Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Takoradi, Shama, Mori, Anomabu, Carolusburg, and Egyaa in coastal Ghana. This success was, however, short-lived as a Dutch fleet under Admiral de Ruyter sacked a number of English forts and retook the Dutch outposts in Goreé, Sierra Leone, and Takoradi, and also captured Kormantin. In accordance

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with the Peace of Breda in 1667, the Dutch and English retained their various conquests. These conflicts made the need for strong fortifications clear, and English fortifications, as well as those of other European nationalities, became increasingly sophisticated, at least in comparison to those found before.

The most notable addition to the English forts during this period was Swedish Fort Carolusburg, located on the headland known to the Portuguese as Cabo Corso. Taken from the Swedes in 1664 it was expanded into Cape Coast Castle, which after the loss of Kormantin in 1665 served as the British headquarters on the coast until 1876, briefly functioning as the capital of the nascent Gold Coast Colony. The castle’s massive walls and dungeons have become emblematic of a trade that brought millions of enslaved Africans to the Americas.\textsuperscript{22} The castle, however, began as a small Swedish fort in 1653, after which it underwent a turbulent decade changing hands several times including a brief (1661–1664) occupation by the Dey (King) of Futa.\textsuperscript{23} It was taken and retained by the English following its capture from the Dutch in 1664.

In the 1670s, the newly formed Royal Africa Company dramatically expanded the rectangular Swedish structure to the south and southeast making Cape Coast one of the largest forts in West Africa. This gave the fort its present triangular layout on its eastern side, though features of the castle would continue to be redesigned and modified during the following century.\textsuperscript{24} In the second half of the century the British also established or occupied a dozen or so smaller forts and lodges on the Ghanaian coast, of which few if any traces survive. The Royal Africa Company was also busy on other parts of the coast. A number of other forts or fortified lodges were established by the end of the seventeenth century, including outposts in coastal Sierra Leone and The Gambia; areas that would later become Crown colonies.\textsuperscript{25}

An example of what some of these small, unfortified outposts may have looked like is illustrated by a site at Egyaa, east of Cape Coast, which was the site of both English and Dutch lodges.\textsuperscript{26} Foundations, perhaps relating to an early British lodge, indicate a small structure, consisting of six rooms surrounding a central hall (Fig. 7.5).\textsuperscript{27} The northern side of the building may have had two additional rooms or a veranda. It was built of well-laid, but un-mortared stone, with a standing stone arch on the northern side that probably marks the location of the main entrance.

A further idea of the appearance of an early factory is provided by Barbot’s description of the English fort built at Anomabu in 1679. Barbot notes, “The external walls of this castle are of little importance, consisting merely of a turf circle, 7–8 feet high. Inside it are various lodgings built of the same material, for the paid blacks and the slaves. The English garrison and the commandant
French and English retained their various fortifications for strong fortifications clear, and all of other European nationalities, begin in comparison to those found before. English forts during this period was the headland known to the Portuguese and Spanish in 1664; it was expanded into Cape Gormantin in 1665 served as the British briefly functioning as the capital of the East India Company. Massive walls and dungeons have been built millions of enslaved Africans to the castle as a small Swedish fort in 1652, after changing hands several times including the Dey (King) of Focu. It was taken and capture from the Dutch in 1664.

The Royal Africa Company dramatically expanded in the south and southeast making most of East Africa. This gave the fort its present function as the strategic location of the castle during the following century. In the 17th century established or occupied a dozen or more seacoast of the Gambia, of which few if any traces also busy on other parts of the coast. Outposts were established by the end of the 17th century in coastal Sierra Leone and The Crown colonies. Small, unfortified outposts may have been Egyaa, east of Cape Coast, which was the early factory is provided by Barbot's description in 1679. Barbot notes, "The outposts, consisting merely of a turf lodgings, built of the same material, English garrison and the commandant occupy the large dwelling-house, and it is here that all the merchandise and provisions are kept." This description is reminiscent of Moore's 1738 account of Yamyamakunda on the Gambia River (Fig. 7.2). Smaller structures such as those at Egyaa, Anomabu, and Yamyamakunda likely represent the plan and construction of many of the smaller forts and lodges of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that, indeed, were more common than the larger forts. Small and insubstantial, however, they were short-lived and have largely vanished from the landscape. Consequently, it is the larger European outposts that have received the majority of modern-day attention.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The eighteenth century was characterized by consolidation, with nations seeking to secure their trading enclaves. Many old forts were rebuilt, redesigned, and expanded. Cape Coast was expanded and other lodges in coastal...
Ghana were substantially enlarged. The case of British Komenda is interesting as it illustrates a rather unique means of expanding a fort. The English established a short-lived lodge at Komenda in 1663, but a lasting outpost was not begun until 1686. This was a small stone fort with four corner bastions. In 1708 plans for new fortifications were prepared. However, rather than demolish the earlier structure, the old fort was completely enclosed within a new fort of much greater size. Lawrence suggests that the practice of enclosing an older fort within a new fortification was unique to the British, this having been done in the case of Cape Coast Castle (as noted above) and also a few years later at Sekondi. It may also have been done in the case of Bunce Island, Sierra Leone.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the slave trade had become the major focus of trade, and provision had to be made to hold enslaved Africans. Slaves sometimes were held on the coast for months until a ship arrived or, alternatively, had to be kept until a sufficient number had been gathered for a ship’s cargo. Slaves were housed in a variety of ways. However, the information on slave housing has not been thoroughly examined, and some of the data are unclear. Many plans of European forts provide little indication of where slaves were housed. There are also instances of enslaved Africans being held in enclosures outside of forts throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Notably, however, in these cases the areas around the forts were relatively secure, including examples located on islands and another positioned at the end of a narrow peninsula. It is also possible, perhaps likely, that these areas outside of the forts are referring to housing for castle slaves who worked on the coast, rather than enslaved Africans awaiting shipment to the Americas.

Forts, in some cases initially constructed as places to store goods and to provide housing for garrison staff, were modified to accommodate slaves. The use of the bastion interiors to house slaves, such as in the case of the early Kormantin fort, is also seen in other fortifications. For example, plans of the British forts at Dixcove and Komenda dating to 1756 show slave rooms beneath corner bastions, though these were apparently accessed through doors at the same level as the cell floors rather than through the ceiling. These areas are clearly differentiated from rooms occupied by soldiers and the castle slaves. These slave dungeons were relatively small; the area identified as the “slave hole” in a 1756 plan of the Komenda fort only measures a few square meters. This is of note as at the time Komenda was the largest Royal Africa Company fort on the Gold Coast after Cape Coast Castle.

During the eighteenth century, Cape Coast Castle was further expanded
and renovated. Van Dantzig notes that the late eighteenth-century reconstructed dungeons of Cape Coast Castle, as horrible as they were, nevertheless were an improvement over earlier structures that were located beneath the parade ground and accessed through the ceiling (as in the case of the Kormantin fort discussed above). These openings consequently had to be closed when it rained, leaving the slaves in a dark, airless, below-ground enclosure. The renovated castle was a structure specifically designed for the needs of the slave trade. Vaulted dungeons were placed beneath the massive gun platform against the sea wall, providing space to accommodate hundreds of slaves for shipment to the Americas, primarily the British plantations of the Caribbean (Fig. 7.3).

In The Gambia, the principal British fortification was established some twenty miles up the Gambia River on James Island. Control of this site, located much further in the interior than most European forts, theoretically allowed the occupiers to control trade with the hinterland. While ideally situated in this respect, the tiny island, barely above the river’s surface, was plagued with problems of maintenance and poor supply. The first fortifications were built on the island (then called St. André) in 1652 by the trading company of the Duke of Courland, now the area occupied by Latvia. However, the fort traded hands numerous times. The English first occupied the island in 1661 and renamed it in honor of the heir to the throne, James II. Barbot describes James Fort as the “next best” Royal African Company fortification on the West African coast after Cape Coast Castle. Through the early 1690s the island’s fortifications apparently remained much the same as they were in Barbot’s time. Despite the supposedly impressive fortifications, the fort was lost to the French—who spiked the cannon and breached the walls—in 1695 and again in 1702. Captured, sacked a number of times, and accidentally blown up in 1725, Fort James was again recaptured and reconstructed by the Royal Africa Company in 1726. Although it now approximated its final form—a small square fort with triangular bastions at each corner—it was still somewhat eclectic in plan. A plan dating to 1755 shows bastions and curtain walls that were still ill-designed to provide covering fire. Notably, many of the activity areas were located outside of the fort.

A gun platform with seven twelve-pound cannon flanked by two half-moon bastions, each with five guns, was positioned on the western side of the fort facing downriver. This unusual plan is similar to that seen at Bunce Island, Sierra Leone. The remaining portions of the small island, at times protected by a palisade, were occupied by the slave house, various service buildings, and the huts of the castle slaves.

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By the end of the eighteenth century all of the major European forts of West Africa had been established. The nineteenth century was a period of reevaluation, consolidation, and abandonment. In The Gambia, James Fort was not reoccupied after its destruction by the French in 1778. Bunce Island in the Sierra Leone Estuary fell into disuse following Britain’s abolition of the slave trade in 1808. On the Gold Coast, only three nations continued to maintain outposts in the nineteenth century: Britain, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Only Britain would remain on the coast by 1872.

The abolition of the slave trade was a major precipitator of these changes. The moral and economic rationale for slavery was debated throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. After 1772, slaves reaching England were progressively deemed to have free status. Denmark outlawed the importation of slaves in 1803. Other European nations and finally the United States (in 1865) and Brazil (1888) followed suit. New areas of commercial opportunity were seized, and it was Britain that was in the best position to do this. By the nineteenth century Britain had developed as the economic nexus of Europe. Birmingham brass, Manchester cotton, and Staffordshire pottery increasingly dominated markets on a worldwide scale. During the nineteenth century the gross tonnage of British shipping to West Africa burgeoned, climbing from about 57,000 tons in 1854 to over 500,000 tons in 1874. Even as a crude measure such figures illustrate the increasing volume of trade and commercial growth.

Economic competition was never more intense and the rationale for West African outposts never more carefully scrutinized. Forts were no longer needed to secure trade from other European nations. Their economic value increasingly unclear, many European companies abandoned their outposts. Treaties between European nations sought to consolidate holdings as a means of securing revenue through tariffs and duties on goods traded within spheres of influence. There were increasing claims for territorial rights beyond the confines of the small coastal enclaves where European powers had previously operated. These initial efforts to regulate exchange were largely unsuccessful. Perceptions of political authority and economic gain nonetheless became the rationale for European territorial claims that would typify the end of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the commercial value of the West African trade would be important in justifying colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century. Yet in the preceding decades the economic worth of the West African outposts was far from obvious.

With the increasing imposition of British political authority over por-
of the major European forts of West Africa, slavery was debated throughout the eighteenth century. In 1772, slaves reaching England were outlawed by England and Denmark. Finally, the United States (in the areas where commercial opportunity was the best position to do so. By the early nineteenth century, as the economic nexus of Europe, Staffordshire pottery increased in scale. During the late eighteenth century, to West Africa burgeoned, climbing over 500,000 tons in 1874. Even as the increasing volume of trade and the intense and the rationale for West African Portuguese nations. Their economic value as commodities abandoned their outposts. Outposts had to consolidate holdings as a result of increased taxes and duties on goods traded within the empire claims for territorial rights before the British allowed slaves where European powers had done. Attempts to regulate exchange were largely unsuccessful. Authority and economic gain nonetheless triumphed, and the commercial value of the West African coast grew. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the economic worth of the region grew, and British political authority over parts of the West African coastal hinterland during the nineteenth century. The surviving forts increasingly took on administrative functions, as well as providing housing for military garrisons—protection from African polities who challenged European territorial claims. A series of conflicts punctuated the nineteenth century, including conflicts with the Asante and, in the late nineteenth century, the Samori State. The small, outlying defensive works of forts William, McCarthy, and Victoria surrounding Cape Coast, Ghana date to this period. During the 1890s and the early twentieth century, the British also established a number of small, unfortified—lightly fortified—outposts in the West African hinterland, including West African Frontier Force outposts in The Gambia, northern Sierra Leone, northern Ghana, and in Nigeria. More police posts than forts, these structures were likely built of local timber and clay. They are, however, poorly described and no traces survive. To these may be added a few new, smaller fortifications, such as those on the Banana Islands in coastal Sierra Leone established in connection with the West Africa Squadron during the nineteenth century. Created in 1808 to suppress the slave trade, the squadron liberated some 150,000 enslaved Africans between its inception and 1860. The squadron’s success can at least partly be attributed to the existence of effective bases for refitting and resupply, some of which included former slave forts on the African coast.

FORT THORNTON AND THE PROVINCE OF FREEDOM

Ironically, the first purely military and specifically colonial British fort in West Africa was Fort Thornton, built in Freetown, Sierra Leone as protection for the settlement of liberated Africans, initially founded by Granville Sharp in 1787. Sharp’s vision was of a perfect society in West Africa that would be based on reason. This Province of Freedom was to be independent but under the protection of Britain. Beginning in 1790, the development of the settlement moved forward under the direction of the St. George’s Bay Association, which the following year was chartered as the Sierra Leone Company. Although maintained Sharp’s original vision, the chairman of the new company was businessman Henry Thornton. While the resettlement of free Africans remained the colony’s supposed rationale, the development of commercial enterprises and economic return were primary concerns. Several groups of formerly enslaved Africans were resettled. These included the original settlers of London’s “black poor” in 1787, the Nova Scotians who arrived in 1792, and resettled Maroons from Jamaica in 1800. Added during the nineteenth century were sixty to seventy thousand liberated Africans saved by Britain’s West Africa Squadron who were settled in Sierra Leone.

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The plans for a lush paradise established for freed slaves went far from smoothly, and the newly arrived settlers faced a variety of vicissitudes, including conflict with the local African population, European ship captains, and the French. The original settlement at Granville Town was destroyed by the Temne chief King Jimmy in 1789. It was reestablished and renamed Free Town [Freetown] in 1792. The main settlement was again entirely destroyed in 1794, this time by French warships. From a commercial standpoint the Sierra Leone Company was a dismal failure. The slave trade was prohibited from the onset and little income came from other sources. The company subsequently requested that Parliament assume responsibility, and Sierra Leone (then solely consisting of the Western peninsula) became a Crown colony on January 1, 1808. A settlement established for freed slaves thus became the first British colony in West Africa.

Following its destruction by the French in 1794, Freetown was rebuilt following a plan more consistent with American or European settlements of the nineteenth century. The houses, positioned on regular lots, were of wood-frame construction, the architectural design showing similarities to the houses of New England. There were also new efforts to protect the settlement. The establishment of a fort was apparently intended to be undertaken as early as 1791, but plans were not drawn up until 1793, and the fort was not built until the following year. A plan of Thornton Hill dated October 6, 1796 shows a fort of unique, rectangular design, enclosing a series of buildings (Fig. 7.6). The front of the fort is shown with a curtain wall without gun embrasures, flanked by triangular bastions. The side curtain walls are parallel and extend back to matching bastions. The backsides of these bastions form exterior walls that enclose a triangular area at the rear of the fort. These back walls are broken by two matching, triangular salients. The fort would eventually become the seat of government and the state house of an independent Sierra Leone.

CONCLUSION
The establishment, expansion, and success of the European forts of West Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must be viewed as essential parts of an expanding global trade network. The forts were first and foremost business ventures; their function commercial. Their establishment was necessitated by the drive to obtain resources in increasing amounts and across ever-expanding territories. The role of British West African outposts in securing trade, including markets that brought slaves to the plantations of the Americas, laid the foundation for British dominance in world markets.
needed for freed slaves went far from Africa, and faced a variety of vicissitudes, including a gold population, European ship captains, and the slave trade. The settlement at Granville Town was destroyed in 1793.

It was reestablished and renamed Freetown, but the settlement was again entirely dependent on trade. From a commercial standpoint, it became a Crown colony and was not established for freed slaves thus did not have established for freed slaves thus

... which in 1794, Freetown was rebuilt as a model settlement. The American and European settlements, positioned on regular lots, were of similar design showing similarities to the plan. New efforts to protect the settlement apparently intended to be undertaken up to 1793, and the fort was not completed. Thornton Hill dated October 6, 1796, the design, enclosing a series of buildings with a curtain wall without gun bastions. The side curtain walls are parallel to the inside of these bastions form a gun bea at the rear of the fort. These back regular salients. The fort would eventually be the state house of an independent state.

DECORSE

The construction of the European forts of West Africa in the eighteenth centuries must be viewed as part of a broader network. The forts were first and foremost commercial. Their establishment reflected the need for trade and the increasing demand for slaves in increasing amounts and the desire of British West African outposts to control the trade between the plantations of West Africa. British dominance in world markets and economic ascendency. While these enterprises included forts built by private traders, companies with Royal charters, and the British government, they all shared the objective of securing trade and the promise of economic return. In contrast to British colonial ventures in other world areas that were characterized by European settlement, immigration, and the development of associated plantations and industries, the West African forts were staffed by
small numbers of men who remained largely dependent on the support of African labor. Castle gardens and industries, such as brick and lime mortar production, were developed. These activities were, however, relatively small-scale.\textsuperscript{55} To a large extent, the agricultural production that did take place was dependent on slave labor, and so was also curtailed with abolition.\textsuperscript{56}

The changing functions, disuse, and eventual abandonment of the forts during the nineteenth century reflect changes in economic needs. Following abolition, trade in gold, ivory, foodstuffs, and wood was still conducted at the forts, which offered security.\textsuperscript{57} There were, however, new markets for British manufactured goods in the vast African hinterlands. The interior trade, far from the old coastal trading centers, became increasingly important.\textsuperscript{58} The few military outposts built during the nineteenth century secured authority over hinterland populations and set the stage for much more direct European involvement in African societies. These were small and insubstantial compared to the forts of the preceding centuries. European-style dwellings were also built, but the earliest surviving examples date to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period when the era of the trade castles and forts had waned.

The majority of the forts and pre-nineteenth-century European outposts that once dotted the West African coast have now disappeared from the landscape. Those that survive were extensively remodeled and repurposed, serving as government buildings, prisons, post offices, lighthouses, schools, and rest houses. Nonetheless, the European forts and castles of West Africa are the oldest, most numerous, and best preserved European structures in sub-Saharan West Africa. Collectively, the forts stand as the most permanent architectural survivals of Africa's intersection with the expanding Atlantic world. As such, they remain as iconic symbols of the trade that created them.

\textbf{NOTES}


11. A clear example is the Brandenburg Fort Dorothea in coastal Ghana, which is protected on the landward side by a curtain wall flanked by two bastions, while the seaward side was surrounded by a wooden or earthen palisade.

12. In addition to lacking well-planned bastions and well-sighted lines of fire, the British forts of West Africa often lacked glacis and ditches, which were key aspects of many other contemporary defensive works. In contrast, many of the late colonial, pre-Revolutionary War forts built in North America incorporated many Vauban-style concepts.


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15. Kelly, “Indigenous Responses,” 109–11. Traders stored their goods in tents on shore and then transported them to the forts. Today, only the Portuguese fort at Ouidah survives. This, however, has been extensively reconstructed in the past fifty years, and it is unclear to what extent the current structure represents the plan of the original fort. In 1726, William Smith described the English fort at Whydah [Ouidah] as a strong fort with mud walls located a musket shot from the French outpost. He also noted that the fort was surrounded by a deep moat, a feature not frequently noted of other British forts in West Africa. A plan of the English fort at Whydah [Ouidah] dated 1749 shows a square fort roughly 350 feet on a side, with three triangular bastions and one circular tower at the northwest corner. The plan was done “According to a Survey made by the Order of Tho’s Pye Esq: commander of his Majesty’s Ship Humber the 27th Day of February 1749.” The plan further notes that “This fort is gone to decay in every part, and is falling down, and must be rebuilt.” See William Smith, A New Voyage to Guinea (London: Frank Cass, 1967).


18. Van Dantzig, Forts and Castles, 22.

19. In 1646 a ship’s captain arriving at Elmina with forty slaves from Ardra requested that a barracoon for slaves be constructed, apparently no space being available in the massive castle (ibid.).

20. Ibid., 33–34.


25. Barbot, Barbot on Guinea, 144, 235.
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Traders stored their goods in tents on the day, only the Portuguese fort at Ouidah constructed in the past fifty years, and it presents the plan of the original fort. In 1849 [Ouidah] as a strong fort with each outpost. He also noted that the fort frequently noted of other British forts in 1949 [Ouidah] dated 1749 shows a square circular bastions and one circular tower at a Survey made by the Order Ship Humber the 27th Day of February gone to decay in every part, and is fall 1749, A New Voyage to Guinea (London: Van Dantzic, Forts and Castles of Ghana Correspondence see Margaret Makepeace, Correspondence of the English East India Company of Wisconsin—Madison African Primary 1994).

A party with forty slaves from Ardra requested apparently no space being available in the

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26. Ibid., 417, 422, note 12; Willem Bosman, A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 57; Tilleman, A Short and Simple Account, 24. Egya is variously referred to as Adja, Agga, Agga, or Egya.

27. These foundations were cleared and planned in 1993 and resurveyed in 2012. Surface artifacts at the site included material from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries. A few red bricks were also present, with none of the ubiquitous yellow bricks found on most Dutch sites. This may suggest the Egya site is an English rather than a Dutch lodge, but this requires more evaluation.


29. The main enclosure of the original fort only measures about twenty by fifty feet. This may have been the initial size of the smaller English forts: the extant ruins of the English fort at Tamumquary (Ouam) in coastal Ghana suggest it was similarly compact.

30. Lawrence, Trade Castles, 288.

31. This was the case at James Island in The Gambia discussed below, circa 1708–9 (Ibid., 253–56, 266). For non-British examples of slave housing located outside of the forts, see Fort Vermandois, Gorée circa 1680 (Lawrence, Trade Castles, 79) and Gross-Frederichsburg 1708 (Lawrence, Trade Castles, Plate 52). In the case of Gross-Frederichsburg, the 1708 plan also indicates a “prison” under the eastern bastion. It is possible that this indicates storage for slaves awaiting shipment.

32. Ibid., 289, 306.


34. Van Dantzig, Forts and Castles, 60; Lawrence, Trade Castles, 190–91. Barbot (Barbot on Guinea, 392, 404 note 11) noted that the subterranean dungeons made for good security against insurrections. In the nineteenth century, the original Cape Coast Castle dungeons were converted into cisterns (Lawrence, Trade Castles, 196).


36. Barbot, Barbot on Guinea, 152. Barbot never visited James Fort and this assessment possibly relies on a 1698 account by Froger (see comments by the editors in Barbot 1992: 176–77 notes 7, 13).

37. Lawrence, Trade Castles, 252.

38. Ibid., 257–61; William Smith, A New Voyage, 32–33.

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39. A plan "According to a Survey made by the Ordele of Tho’s Pye Esq: commander of his Majesty’s Ship Humber the 19th Day of October 1749" shows a square fort roughly one hundred feet on a side, with triangular bastions at each corner. The specific details of the interior of the fort shown in the 1749 plan and the 1755 plan reproduced by Lawrence (Trade Castles, 258) are difficult to reconcile, and the former is probably inaccurate with regard to the shape of the bastions. For more recent work on the site see Flordejuz Bugarin, “James Island: Reflections of a Gambian Slave Trading Site through GIS and 3D Modeling” (Paper presented for the Society for Historical Archaeology Conference, Williamsburg, Va., 2007).

40. The fort also had a four-storied tower similar to Bunce Island.


42. Coombs notes that by the mid-nineteenth century neither the Dutch nor the British possessions on the Gold Coast were self-supporting. See Douglas Coombs, The Gold Coast, Britain and the Netherlands, 1850–1874 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

43. Ibid., 14–49.


45. One of the major colonial outposts in northern Ghana, the fort at Wa, remained in use as a government office until the 1980s when it was demolished, sadly without being documented. See Benjamin W. Kankpeyeng and Christopher R. DeCorse, “Ghana’s Vanishing Past: Development, Antiquities and the Destruction of the Archaeological Record,” African Archaeological Review 21 (2004): 89–128.


48. Ibid., 35–36; Anna Maria Falconbridge, Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone, during the Years, 1791–2–3 (London), 152, 165, 168. Although many settlers arrived with promises of having necessary tools provided for them, they were forced to buy inferior tools from the company store (Falconbridge, Narrative, 184, 213–15).

49. Peterson, Province, 27.

50. Ibid., 26. The site of Granville Town was supposedly on the low hill later occupied by Fort Thornton. See Alexander Peter Kup, A History of Sierra Leone, 1400–1787 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 119.

51. Falconbridge, Narrative, 137.

52. Peterson, Province, 36.
the Order of Tho’s Pye Esq: commander in October 1729 shows a square fort roughly 200 feet on each side. The specific details of Tho and the 1755 plan reproduced by Law- dere, and the former is probably inaccurate. For more recent work on the site see Forderiz Slave Trading Site through GIS and for Historical Archaeology Conference, similar to Bunce Island.

Change on the Gold Coast, 1804–1874

In the 19th century neither the Dutch nor the British were the only European players; see Douglas Coombs, The Gold Coast, 1804–1874 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).


Trade in Gold (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1928); The Old Block (London: Grant and Griffith, 1948); and The History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870 (Evans,

53. Ibid., 32; Also see Falconbridge, Narrative, 184.
54. In fact, the company planned to establish a fort in 1791 and sent out six cannon, but they were sent without carriages (Falconbridge, Narrative, 68). The fort had not been started by January 1793, as it was only then that a palisade was begun as a temporary defensive measure. The fort was apparently still not completed by the time Anna Maria Falconbridge left the coast in October 1793 (Falconbridge, Narrative, 190, 202). However, a stylized plan of Fort Thornton and Freetown appears in Wadström. See Carl Bernhard Wadström, An Essay on Colonization Particularly Applied to the Western Coast of Africa with Some Free Thoughts on Cultivation and Commerce (London: Darton and Harvey, 1794). It is presently unknown if the 1796 plan reproduced here is the same plan as drawn up in 1793 by the company’s surveyor (Falconbridge, Narrative, 188). It is possible that portions of the fort and some of the interior buildings existed earlier and were enclosed by later construction.

56. Ibid., 46.
57. Ibid., 53.