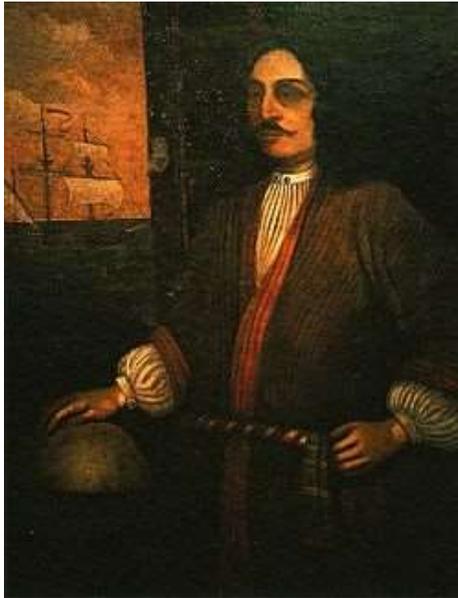




History of The Somers Room

ADMIRAL SIR GEORGE SOMERS,
1554 – 1610



George Somers was born in 1554 in a house in Broad Street, Lyme Regis. He was the fourth of five sons and it was because of him that Bermuda's history and the colonisation of Virginia, USA began. Walter Raleigh was a neighbour and boyhood friend and like Raleigh, he had courage and daring and he was known to be "an adventurer and risk taker at heart." As Lyme Regis was conveniently situated for trade with France and Spain, together with a unique artificial breakwater called The Cobb, Somers soon became a competent mariner.

He first went to sea as a boy in the early 1560's and in 1588 Somers co-ordinated Lyme Regis' defences against the Spanish Armada as it approached the English Coast.

He sent out three ships to join the sea battle that raged off the coast and later joined Sir Francis Drake on some of his voyages. He used his share of the £8,000 prize money, from pillaging the Spanish in the Caribbean, to buy Weybay House near Weymouth.

In 1600 he left privateering and joined the Royal Navy and became a naval associate with Sir Walter Raleigh (he didn't upset Queen Elizabeth I like Raleigh did!!). In 1603 he was knighted and became a Member of Parliament for Lyme Regis, later becoming its Mayor in 1604. He and his wife, Joan, were unable to have children but settled happily at Berne Farm near the village of Whitchurch Canicorum. He bought this, together with a 200 acre estate and Orchard House, a 100 acre farm, for £600.

In 1609 Somers was called out of retirement to organise relief to the Jamestown colony which had settled in North America two years earlier. He set sail from Plymouth on the "Sea Venture" built in Suffolk. It was England's first purpose designed emigrant ship costing £1,500 carrying in the seven ship fleet a total of between five to six hundred colonists, one of whom was John Rolfe who later married Pocahontas. Unfortunately the fleet ran into a strong storm, probably a hurricane, and the ships were separated. Sir George Somers was at the helm throughout the storm and when he spied land he deliberately drove his ship onto the reef of what proved to be Bermuda. They presumed that all the other ships had been destroyed with loss of life but Somers had proved himself to have daring seamanship as he landed with all on board saved.



Somers and his company remained in Bermuda, previously called the "Isle of Dogs", later called Somers Island, for 10 months living on wild hogs, fish etc. They built houses and a church, St. Peter's, to which they attached the bell from the "Sea Venture", thus it became the Bermuda Colony.



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Bermuda's Motto is **Quo Fata Ferunt** from the Latin meaning "Whither the Fate Carries Us" Perhaps this has been derived from Admiral Sir George Somers' original fated landing in what became known as Discovery Bay.



In 1610 in two small ships, which they built with local timber, they set sail for Jamestown with 142 castaways on board taking food and supplies from the island. On arrival they found Jamestown nearly destroyed by famine, disease, Indian attacks and a bitter winter when only 60 settlers survived. With the arrival of these supplies the abandonment of Jamestown was avoided. This was the first Thanksgiving before the later New England version. Sadly, on his way back to Bermuda for more supplies, Somers became ill and died due to "a surfeit in eating of pig."

The islands, for a while, became known as the Somers Islands in his honour. Virginians never got the additional food promised from Bermuda BUT England got its first Bermuda built sea-going vessel, the sight of which aroused much curiosity when it arrived in Lyme Regis. "The Patience," as it was called, became famous in Dorset and beyond although she never sailed back to the New World but continued to sail in British coastal waters.

George Somers asked that when he died, his heart should be buried in Bermuda as he loved the place so much. But the only approximate location where it is buried is a marker in Somers Gardens in St Georges. The remainder of his body was pickled and sent back to England and buried in his home hamlet of Whitchurch Canicorum near Lyme Regis. A modern memorial tablet placed in 1908 can be found in the Church's chancel which shows how the Admiral was.

Be sure to walk to the end of The Cobb and pay your respects to Admiral Sir George Somers. There is



also a newly erected statue to him in Langmoor Gardens in Lyme Regis overlooking the Cobb Harbour. St. Georges, in Bermuda, is Lyme Regis twin town. It is said that when news of Sir George's shipwreck in Bermuda reached England it was the inspiration for "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare who used poetic licence to set it on an island

where Bermuda became Bermoothes. ("The Tempest" Act 1 scene 2 line 230). It is interesting that Bermuda is the only place name in the New World mentioned by Shakespeare.

Later it was recommended to London that Bermuda be colonised permanently and it became the role model for the establishment of all American mainland British Colonies. British laws, religion and language taken to the New World would form the basis of the USA.

