

GHANA

Fort Prinzenstein in Keta

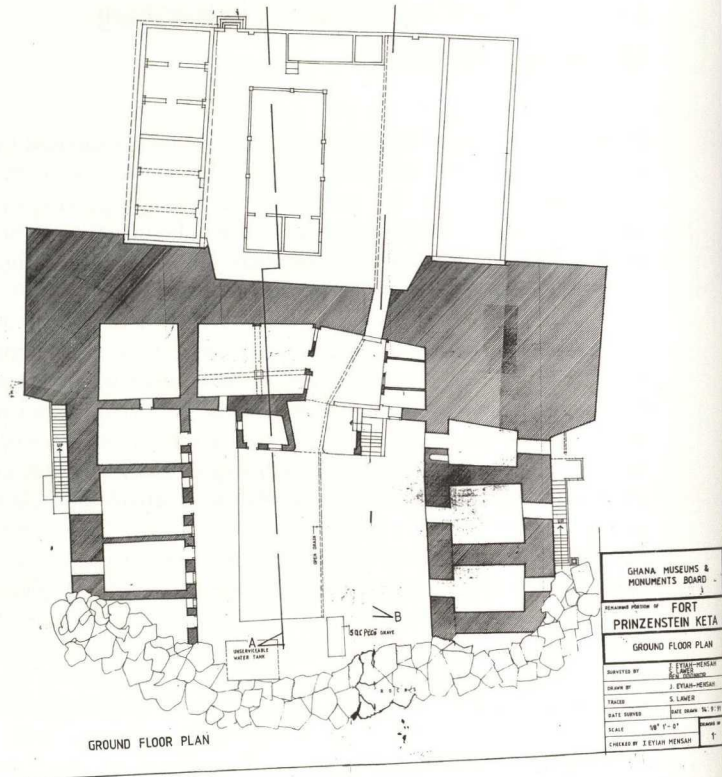
Fort Prinzenstein is the easternmost of a group of forts along the Atlantic coast of Ghana that has been designated as World Heritage Property. Fort Prinzenstein first started as a Danish post in 1714 at Keta in the Volta Region. In 1719, the Danish post was taken over by the Dutch who were later sacked by the Akwamus in 1731. After this war, the post was shortly abandoned only to be re-established as a small Dutch fort in 1734. The year 1737 witnessed another attack on the fort, this time not within but outside – namely by the Dahomeans. The Dutch in response blew up the fort and left. That very year, the Danes re-established a trade post, which was later to be converted into a fort in 1784.

It must be pointed out that before the Danes re-established themselves at Keta in 1784, they made a victorious campaign against the neighbouring Anlo, which finally led to the signing of a formal peace treaty in that year giving power to the Danes to put up a Fort. The Danes were to remain in possession and occupation of the fort until 1850 when they sold it out to the British. The fort was again besieged by the Awunas in 1878 but was prevented by the British. And when the British left, the Ghanaian authorities used it for various purposes e.g. prison and offices and it was even used to accommodate the chief of Keta when his house was taken by the sea. And by 1993, nobody was occupying the fort due to its poor condition. In fact, in 1993 more than half of the fort was washed off by the sea.

With the fort an active export/import trade was carried out in slaves, gold, ivory in exchange for muskets, brandy, iron rods, textiles, cowries shells etc. The slaves were transported over the Atlantic Ocean and most of them were sold in the Danish-Norwegian Islands in the Caribbean, St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. As trade grew, other forts and lodges were built and in the course of the 18th century Denmark-Norway under various companies built Fort Fredensborg at Old Ningo from 1735–41, Fort Kongesten at Ada in 1783, Fort Augustaborg at Teshie also in 1783 and lastly Fort Prinzenstein at Keta in 1784. Today, only a few traces remain of these forts.

Most of the materials, especially the stone used for the building of Fort Prinzenstein came from Accra. This is because the local stones around Keta were unsuitable. However, lime for the mortar was obtained on the spot by burning shells. From contemporary drawings it is known that the fort was lavishly equipped with firearms along the curtains and bastions – eight slits and three

Fort Prinzenstein in Keta



Ground-floor plan of the fort

arched-gun-posts open enclosures. The fort stands between the seas and a huge lagoon on a reef of soft rock, joined northward by a sand bar.

In February 1966, the sea erosion in Keta assumed an alarming proportion as the section of the main Accra – Keta road around the Shell station was completely washed away. The sea gradually began devouring the seaward section of Fort Prinzenstein.

In August 1991, ICOMOS Ghana in conjunction with the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board as well as the Danish Embassy made some efforts towards safeguarding what was left of the fort. Meanwhile, the effect of the sea on the fort continued.

In November 1993, the Geological Survey Department visited Fort Prinzenstein to investigate a reported case of digging for a metal suspected to be mercury under the basement of the fort. This action weakened a sizeable portion of the fort. The occurrence of mercury in the fort might have had military application in the past, when a mercury fulminate might have been used in defence of the fort in connection with priming the mortar guns, one of which still decorates the fort.

At its 19th Session in 1995, The World Heritage Committee approved the implementation of technical co-operation with the sum of 20,000 US \$ for the protection, stabilisation, repair and partial reconstruction of Fort Prinzenstein. However, this had to be postponed until the government of Ghana had taken the needed steps to put in place a sea defence system for the whole town of Keta, since any stable protection and correction programme for safeguarding the fort would ultimately follow from the successful implementation of the Sea Defence project.

Irrespective of the fact that a large portion of the historic fort has been eaten away by the sea, a number of visitors from Ghana, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, USA, Benin, Germany, France, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark and Finland are visiting the fort.

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