

HERITAGE DYNAMO

Kit Martin looks at the ripple effect of heritage preservation in Jamaica.

Jamaica is one of the world's favourite holiday destinations. People love the music, the beaches and the sparkling blue sea, not to mention the lush, park-like countryside and the spectacular rivers and waterfalls. But Jamaica's lovely Georgian buildings should also be part of the country's tourist experience. The late Maurice Facey OBE, a prominent Jamaican businessman, realised this. As chairman of Tourism Action Plan in 1991, he wrote that 'Jamaica's built heritage is one of its most valuable resources, a source of much-



Cardiff Hall, St Ann's, from
*A Picturesque Tour of the
Island of Jamaica*, James
Hakewill 1824.

Rose Hall, St James's, from *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica*, James Hakewill 1824.



needed income as a potentially unrivalled tourism product. Until now, this source of revenue has been almost untapped but it could assist in the critical development of the Jamaican economy and yield increasing benefits for our people.

And so Maurice asked John and Eileen Harris, Marcus and Anne Binney and my wife Sally and me to go to Jamaica and prepare a brief report to encourage the idea among policy makers that conservation (to quote Marcus) was 'not a fad or a fetter or a curse but an essential part of developing a good tourism product and should be seen as a stimulating challenge.' The report was published as *Jamaica's Heritage: an Untapped Resource*. The heritage trail from great house to sugar factory, from slave hospital and slave village to raft and wagon to port and

quay: all this, we advised Maurice, should be as much a part of the visitor experience as the beach at Negril or the falls at Dunn's River.

Exploring Jamaica with the aid of an 1888 map identifying all the plantations and cattle pens, as they are still called, we spent long days researching the astonishing architectural invention and variety in those tropical Georgian and Victorian buildings. Many of them are in ruins now, but it is wonderful that some have been saved and are in use.

A number are still private houses. Cardiff Hall and its former classical dower house are both intact and lived in. The Facey family's Bellevue and their daughter Laura's ravishing mid-18th century Mount Plenty are good examples. Rose Hall, Seville and Greenwood on the north coast are major tourist attractions and

Palladian Good Hope, now owned by the Hart family and beautifully restored, is a focal point for cruise ship passengers from nearby Falmouth.

There are many other houses, among them Drax Hall, Roaring River and Bryan's Castle, which ought to form part of a grand tour, but Drax has fallen down, Bryan's Castle is a burnt-out shell and Roaring River is decaying. And what of Minard, in its fine park, its row of Classical busts along the back wall of the verandah and its stately Adamesque ballroom?



Above: Rose Hall today



Left: King's Square, Spanish Town, from *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica*, James Hakewill 1824.

Returning three years ago, we were shocked to find it gutted to the foundations following a nearby 'burning off' exercise that got out of hand.

Another part of Jamaica's heritage experience must be its surviving industrial archaeology. This ranges from modest windmills, water wheels and aqueducts via the occasional steam engine to the vast sugar boiling houses and rum distilleries which were often bigger, better-built and more expensively finished than their attendant great houses. These would make splendid holiday accommodation and are often spectacularly sited, as are the old coffee plantations high in the Blue Mountains.

The cast iron wheel of the ruinous water driven mill and factory at Seville, owned by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust, is one of the largest surviving in the island. Smaller, but now restored to working order, is the one on the Martha Brae river at Good Hope, also open to the public. Sadder is the sugar

factory at Orange Valley, near Brown's Town. Twenty years ago its steam machinery was intact. The fine house there has gone now, burnt to the ground, and the mill lies derelict. By contrast, Spanish Town's Iron Bridge – the oldest such structure outside Britain, built in Yorkshire from castings like its famous Shropshire prototype and shipped out in 1801 for erection over the Rio Cobre – looks magnificent following its recent restoration, funded in part by the Friends of the Georgian Society of Jamaica.

Aside from individual buildings, the quality of urban planning is a highlight. The main square in Spanish Town, for two centuries Jamaica's capital, is one of the noblest Georgian squares in the world. Dominated at one end by the Rodney Memorial in its columned setting, it is flanked by fine administrative buildings of which the best, King's House, survives only as a shell following yet another fire many years ago. This is a key building, the place where the proclama-

tion abolishing slavery was read in 1838. When I revisited Spanish Town quite recently, the taxi driver told me that the magnificent square was no place to linger. My response was that if people went there it would be safe, so we went. It was Boxing Day and there was no one about. I found an open door to the large handsome Georgian building opposite King's House. I explored the rooms, full of filing cabinets and the occasional old portrait. It had not been necessary, I noted, to lock the door. There was no doubt in my mind that if the building was restored and given a viable use, the square itself would once again come to life.

When we first visited Falmouth, for the best part of a century one of Jamaica's busiest sugar ports and still full of fine Colonial Georgian buildings, I had for many years been a member of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland, a proponent of what were known as Town Schemes, by which an historic area of an attractive town or village was earmarked for dedicated conservation. Through quite small grants, owners were encouraged to appreciate the history and quality of their property and to carry out careful conservation, so contributing to the appeal of the whole place and to local pride.

In our report, we proposed this idea for Falmouth, where besides grand buildings there are little Georgian houses of enormous charm, many of them built for freed slaves and their families. We suggested that there should be a local community architect who might be available one day a week to explain features of interest and to encourage owners to take account of traditional construction techniques. We also proposed restoration workshops so that local people could draw on a supply of competent tradesmen to carry out repair and maintenance.

Revisiting quite recently, I was thrilled to find that the old Baptist Manse, belonging to the Hart family, had been restored and served as a busy joinery shop. The Falmouth Historic District had been designated, although I understand that its guardians need a few more teeth to function effectively. Similarly, the Jamaican equivalent of our National Trust (state supported, not a charity like ours) desperately needs funds to sharpen its act. But, with brilliant guidance from Falmouth Heritage Renewal, a tightly-organised little outfit sponsored largely by a private American foundation but with help, nowadays, from

36a Cornwall Street, Falmouth, pre and post its restoration by Falmouth Heritage Renewal



the FGSJ, no fewer than twenty-nine of those tiny cottages had been restored and were lived in once again by their rightful owners.

The restoration work now going on in Falmouth is an excellent first step to urban renewal. The early nineteenth century parish church, courthouse and post office are now real eyecatchers, all restored in recent years with help from the FGSJ. Such work is slowly but surely transforming the townscape, which in turn will encourage traditional skills, employment, tourism and, ultimately, the town's long-term economic prospects. If it continues along this path, Falmouth stands every chance of becoming a tropical Williamsburg.

Kit Martin CBE has rescued from decay a number of important country houses, including Gunton Park (where he now lives), Dingley Hall, Hazells, Cullen House, Burley-on-the-Hill, Maristow and Tynningham.