

VISIT TO THE JAMAICA NATIONAL HERITAGE TRUST (JNHT)

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**A Report by Oliver Maurice,
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Introduction

The tour was arranged by Laleta Davis-Mattis, CEO of JNHT following my offer to travel to Jamaica from the UKOTCF conference on Grand Cayman. Three nights were spent in Kingston and one in Ocho Rios on the north coast. A total of 5 properties were visited including Falmouth Heritage Renewal, not part of JNHT, and on the final day I was invited to join the Staff tour to the Appleton Rum Factory.

This report gives brief details of each property and a few recommendations as to a possible way forward in each case. It assumes that resources are generally available, either from the Jamaican government or from sponsorship.

The main caveat is that as each visit was relatively brief, there may be issues relating to each property of which I am not aware.

General Recommendations

- It is important to decide for each property what is its unique selling point (USP), and what is especially significant about it. A Statement of Significance should then be prepared before writing the Management Plan. In the Plan, the Aims and Objectives should relate back to the Statement so that nothing is done that will erode the significances.
- It is well worthwhile involving the community local to each property in the process and, in particular, to establish what they consider are the significances. You may also wish to consult them over the aims and objectives. To have them on board from the outset will pay dividends in the long run. The same applies to the local schools.
- I was not aware of a charge being made for visiting any of the properties. Serious consideration should be given to doing so in every case, with the ticket price depending on size and quality of visit.
- In terms of marketing the properties, fliers should be produced for each and circulated to all adjacent visitor outlets and particularly hotels, showing a location map, opening hours, entrance fee, available facilities etc.
- In due course, a comprehensive guidebook of all the JNHT properties open to the public should be produced in one leaflet
- It is worth considering the potential funding sources from overseas visitors and from the hotels or guest houses where they stay. Too often hoteliers do not appreciate that the reason for their success is because many of their visitors come to see the cultural sites in their area as part of the visit. The simple expedient of a visitor payback system, with a matching

donation from the hotel itself, provides an opportunity to raise large sums towards the conservation of the heritage. For more details of this scheme, visit www.ourstolookafter.org.uk. Thought should also be given to exploiting the potential from cruise ship companies and their passengers as well as the national and international airlines

Port Royal – 5 June

This property, situated at the southern tip of the peninsula which forms the natural harbour of Kingston, has a long history. It, together with the nearby old hospital site, has a great deal of potential. It is on the tentative list for World Heritage Site inscription as a cultural heritage site, partly for its association with Christopher Columbus, the English defeat of the Spanish in the 17th century and two earthquakes, the last of which, in 1907, has left two of the fort's sites, the gun emplacement and the artillery store, at interesting angles! Because of its historical interest, the educational potential of the site should be exploited.

The fort itself is in good condition for the most part and is already interpreted through guided tours and two small museums. The museums themselves and the structure of the fort is maintained by a separate government department as I understand it. This seems slightly unsatisfactory as it is easier from a management point of view, to keep it under one 'roof'. (I was a little surprised to see the lime rendering on the castellation being painted a brick colour!)

The old hospital and the associated buildings are in a very poor state of repair but have enormous potential, given sufficient resources. Their location so close to the sea is spectacular and their proximity to the ancient archaeological site of the submarine city could provide further benefits.

The buildings should all be restored, sooner rather than later since some may not otherwise survive. The hospital itself, an enormous two storey building, should be used as the main focus for a visit and the following options could be explored:

- A full scale interpretation centre on the top floor, showing the various chapters in the history of the site, using multi-media presentations.
- A shop, restaurant, cinema (extant?), offices, education room and toilets on the ground floor.
- Interpretation of the other buildings in situ based on previous use.
- A film should be made of any underwater excavations that may take place in the old city which could then be shown in the cinema.
- The site, and that of the fort, could be advertised as potential film locations in the USA and Great Britain
- The sites could be used as venues for weddings and other events.
- It might be worth linking up with, for example, the Morgan Harbour Hotel to see if they might sponsor some of the work, possibly through a visitor payback scheme (see General Recommendations above), since they are likely to become direct beneficiaries of any increase in visitor attractions in the area.

Edinburgh Castle - 7 June

The castle, in the mountains and about an hour or so from Ocho Rios where I spent the previous

night, is a hilltop ruin . The site has very recently been almost entirely cleared of vegetation so exposing the ruins and the hill itself. This in itself was impressive as the work had been carried out by a team of volunteers over only seven weekends.

The entrance is through a field gate from the road. There is an old track leading up to the castle. I was unable to establish the history of the castle but assume the archives department has the necessary information; I estimated it was built in the 18th or 19th century.

As I reached the summit with my guide, Ferdie Wright, I immediately noticed a game of cricket was about to start on the pitch adjacent and below, and at the same time heard the wonderful strains of Gospel music emanating from the village church nearby – quintessential Jamaica, I thought!

When we reached our vehicle again we were met by local councillor Mrs Richards, and a local man who is using part of the land for growing vegetables.

My recommendations for this site are as follows:

- Keep the vegetation off the ruins completely, using Roundup to kill off any stumps, or digging out the roots altogether. Elsewhere, on the limestone outcrops, keep them exposed either by grazing with goats or the judicious use of weedkiller and then plant some exotic fruit trees (Mrs Richards idea) or low ground cover (vegetables)
- Consolidate the ruins so that the little that remains upstanding is not lost.
- Formalise the track to the summit either by 'pitching' (laying flat stones all the way up) or by weedkilling the pathway.
- Carry out some minor excavations on the foundations which are appearing as the vegetation is removed, and consolidate
- Interpret the site using panels similar to those at the Seville estate; one at the entrance and two or three at the summit.
- Re-landscape the entrance to allow space for the parking of a few cars. Further thought will need to be given to coach parking in the event that the property is properly marketed. Maybe the entrance to the cricket pitch could be used although I did not inspect this. An alternative would be to drop visitors off at the entrance and then the coach driver take the coach up to the village and wait for say half an hour before returning to pick up his passengers.
- In discussion with Mrs Richards, she informed us of the sad demise of one of the West Indian cricket team's batsmen, Laurie Williams, in a car accident 2 year's previously. He came from the village and they are planning to build a memorial to him. I suggested that it might be appropriate to put some seats on the hill overlooking the cricket pitch and calling it the Laurie Williams stand.

Stewart Castle – 7 June

The castle, also ruinous, lies close to the north coast and the estate extends for about a mile to the north and includes a beach. I met the volunteer group who were clearing the jungle around the castle; the same group who had worked at Edinburgh Castle. The speed at which they work using only machetes was very impressive; nonetheless I felt that investment in a chain saw would show quick returns, particularly as the stumps could be cut off at ground level, obviating the need for the

roots to be dug up.

By comparison to Edinburgh, this castle, of the same period, is vast and will need considerable sums spending on it to consolidate it once the trees and vegetation within the precincts have been cleared.

The potential of the property is much greater than Edinburgh on account of its location close to the north coast highway and with its own beach. It lies between the tourist resorts of Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, and close to Falmouth Harbour.

My recommendations are as follows:

- Continue to clear the immediate vicinity of the castle from the point where the property starts as one drives to it, but leaving any standard and mature trees, except those within 5 metres of the castle walls.
- Create a car parking area out of sight of the castle and close to the point at which one enters the property.
- Open up an access track to the beach from the castle and consider putting in picnic tables at an appropriate location
- Interpretation by the use of panels as for Edinburgh, but consider also a guidebook for sale at the car park giving the history of the property. In this context, consider any links with Falmouth.

Falmouth Heritage Renewal

It was a bonus being able to visit this town and meet Dr James Parrent and three members of his Board. What they have achieved in terms of getting the historical centre back on its feet, both in terms of the properties and also the people, is remarkable and inspirational. There are a number of 'best practice' initiatives, including the scheme itself, that I became aware of during my conversations with James and his team which need to be promulgated to our INTO members.

Seville Estate

This old plantation owner's estate is a wonderful property, again with unexplored potential, albeit there is much that has already been achieved. It is another on the tentative list for World Heritage Site inscription.

Sadly I arrived too late for a guided tour but did see most of the buildings and sites on the south side of the coast road. Basic facilities are available in the main house although I did not see inside. I understand there is a museum and shop there. I enjoyed seeing the African-Jamaican slave dwellings and associated kitchen garden, and to learn about the Tainos' culture.

The remnants of the sugar factory, including the wheel, the copra kiln and other industrial archaeological artefacts provide an impressive insight into the workings of a sugar plantation estate.

I understand that on the coast side of the road lie the ruins of a castle and an old sugar mill although I did not see either.

Interpretation is through guided tours though informative panels at each site allow for self-guided

trails.

I make the following recommendations without the benefit of a full tour: it may well be that some of these are already in the pipeline or have already been implemented:

- There is clearly so much history attached to the property that a guidebook should be produced and put on sale in the shop.
- Consideration could be given to installing a topographical display on the lawn in front of the main house, showing where each element on the estate is located
- As the estate is so large it would be worth considering obtaining one or two minibuses to ferry people from site to site, when or if there are enough visitors to warrant it.
- A full scale interpretation centre should be installed, as for Port Royal, with a video showing the estate in working order, as it would have been in the 18th/19th century
- In view of the potential attraction for school parties, an education room should be located in the main house if space allows
- The Manager's House should be rebuilt and either used as accommodation for staff or for the above interpretation centre though this might be better located within the main house depending on space.
- Some of the rooms in the main house could be opened to the public showing how the building was used. This would require the necessary furniture and effects to be acquired (perhaps working in conjunction with the training programme at Falmouth)
- A restaurant or tea room should be located in the main house, perhaps in the old kitchen (not seen)
- Some of the interpretation panels are looking faded and should be replaced: a large panel at the entrance to the property with the JNHT logo and the name of the property should be installed
- the use of the property for a film location and for events should be considered, as for Port Royal
- Access to the beach should be made available if it does not already exist and possibly a kiosk located near the beach for the sale of ice cream and other refreshments.

Appleton Rum Tour

It was a great treat to be invited to join the staff tour to the rum factory. After an excellent breakfast on arrival we were shown around the site by the very engaging tour guide, Norman, who explained in detail the history of the processes for the manufacture of rum and the current methodology. Following the tour we sat in the Academy and were instructed on the virtues and varying tastes of Appleton rum according to age, colour etc. This was followed by a brief tasting, the award of certificates and a sample bottle to take home, and finally lunch!

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to thank Laleta Davis-Mattis for agreeing to my visit, for all the arrangements she put in place to make it so enjoyable and for keeping in touch with me throughout to ensure that all was going to plan. There was not a lot of time for our breakfast debrief on the morning of my departure (9 June) and I promised to send this report giving a fuller account of my thoughts and recommendations.

My thanks too to Jonathan Greenland who accompanied me to Port Royal; to Ferdie Wright who collected me from the Ocho Rios bus station on 6 June and took me to my hotel, then drove me and acted as a guide all the next day before delivering me back to Kingston in one piece! I would also thank Dorrick Gray for keeping an eye on me during the staff tour and to all the staff that I met for their kindness and affability.

I hope that the above report and recommendations will be of some help and look forward to keeping in touch in the future and to hear what develops.

Oliver Maurice
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