

URBAN CASE STUDY

THE GOVERNMENT YARDS OF TRENCH TOWN

Architect Christopher Whyms-Stone

August 2005.

(1)(Trench Town Family Name)

Introduction

It is a common misconception that Trench Town was named after the many trenches and gullies which criss-cross the area's landscape. The truth is Trench Town was named after a wealthy Irish man who immigrated to Jamaica in the 1700's. Trench Town was originally called Trench Pen. During the colonial period large holdings of family lands were called Pens. The Trench family owned lands all across the island. The 1840 records show William Power Trench owning some 700 acres in Clarendon. The 1866 records of the Jamaica Mutual Life Assurance Company show Daniel Power Trench as a Director. In 1882 Daniel Augustus Trench migrated to Texas. By 1919 there were no remaining members of the Trench family living in Jamaica.

(Right) Joseph Benjamin Higgs, (born 3 June 1940 died 18 December 1999) was a reggae musician from Jamaica. Higgs mentored young singers in his yard and began working with Bob Marley in 1959.[2] In fact, it was at one of the informal music lessons Joe Higgs held in Trench Town, that Bob and Bunny Livingston met Peter Tosh. Marley acknowledged later on that Higgs had been an influential figure for him, while Higgs described their time together: "I am the one who taught the Wailers the craft, who taught them certain voice technique."

(Rural Migrants, Found Materials)

Over the years rural migrants settled on the lands known as Trench Pen and other lands in the area west of Kingston.

The urban to rural migrants formed informal squatter communities. The squatter communities consisted of houses that were largely built from 'found' materials. There may have been pit toilets but generally there were no sewage facilities and running water came from the nearest standpipe.

(3)(Land Bought, Corp. set up to build)

In the 1930's the Colonial Government acquired the land known as Trench Pen.

Alexander Bustamante was Chief Minister of Jamaica at the time.

Subdivision of Trench Town In 1937 the 200 acres that made up Trench Pen was subdivided to facilitate a residential community to be called Trench Town. The Central Housing Authority, CHA, was set up as a government agency to build and manage housing solutions for the rural poor, urban poor and ex-servicemen. The CHA had a team of architects and planners charged with fulfilling this role.

(4)(Infra-structure- residents, schools, clinic, rent)

In 1937 the roads, blocks and other infrastructure were implemented. The subdivision was inclusive of residences, schools, and a clinic. Other social institutions such as the Ambassador Theatre, Boy's Town and the YWCA were also included. Between 1940-1949 the first residences were constructed. These were government owned housing which were occupied by tenants paying twelve shillings a month. The residences, or Government Yards as they would be later called, were built from First Street to Seventh Street between Central Road and West Road. The undeveloped areas were quickly occupied by squatters. The Government Yards provided running water, flush toilets, electricity, and other desirable infrastructure.

(5)(Inspections, regular painting)

The Central Housing Authority would have had a staffed office located within the community with Inspectors to ensure that regulations were being complied with. The Conditions of Tenancy were rigorously enforced. The CHA would provide each resident with paint to paint buildings twice per year. The buildings had to be painted in mandatory colors beige for the walls and green for timber elements. For the service buildings walls were painted grey and the timber a spanish brown.

(6)(Standard housing types-H,S,T,and U shaped for communal living)

There were four standard housing types ('H', 'S', 'T', and 'U') which the CHA were building at that time. The Government Yards were composed of the 'U' and the 'S' models. These models were designed to facilitate and promote a communal type of living.

(7)(Verandas, Courtyards)

The 'U' blocks are composed of 1 or 2 room dwellings with communal sanitary and cooking facilities. Each 10'x 10' room is accessed via a veranda which ran the length of the block. The communal sanitary and cooking block was located at one end of the building. Two 'U' shaped buildings were placed on the land in such a manner so as to form an inner courtyard. The courtyard as well as the verandas provided space for social interaction as well as space to carry out daily activities. The small size of the units required the tenants to spend a lot of time outdoors.

(8)(Description of residential Units)

Each 'U' shaped building consisted of 8 rooms. In some instances two rooms with an interconnecting door made one dwelling. In other cases one room made one dwelling. There were 123 'U' Blocks which provided 984 single room dwellings. All of the dwelling rooms were raised off the ground and had timber floors. The doors and windows were made of cedar. Each room was approximately 10x10 feet and would have had one window to the

external wall and one window opening to the verandah.

(9)(In-situ concrete, kitchen)

The floors of the verandas and service buildings were cast with in-situ concrete. Each kitchen had a horizontal concrete shelf which acted as a firewall, on which residents would put their coal stoves, with a chimney above for ventilation.

**(10)(S units on 1st street, 3 buildings surround a courtyard)
(Behind Sunshines)**

The 'S' units were unique in the Government Yards. These units only occurred on the block between First Street and Second Street. These units are clustered in groups of threes also forming a courtyard for communal and social activity. Each 2 story, block is composed of four, 2-roomed flats each with its own kitchen but sharing toilet facilities. The two ground floor units share a toilet and the two first floor units share a toilet. There were twelve 'S' blocks providing 48 dwellings.

(11)(Knog construction, 9 years, in filled with mortar)

The method of construction used was predominantly 'Knog'. This very labour intensive and time consuming method was the reason it took almost nine years to construct the Government Yards. The knog method consisted of hand hewn bullet wood framing, in filled with mortar, rubble, aggregate and in some cases brick covered with wire mesh, and a lime plaster finish. One of the benefits of knog construction is that unlike concrete block or in-situ walls knog walls do not store heat, rendering the buildings cooler. The original roofs were concrete tiles which were made on site. While the entire 'U' buildings were built from knog, the service core of the 'S' buildings was made using concrete blocks.

(12)(Similar architecture to rural sites)

The communal cooking and sanitary block for the 'U' buildings were also made from concrete block. The language of the buildings are of a rural vernacular. For eg. all of a modest scale with typical elements of verandahs, hip and gable roofs, timber columns, and use of natural ventilation; elements most found in rural areas. The relationship of the building to the ground and the designed communal activity fostered communal living much like rural living.

(13)(Contribution to Jamaican Culture)

.....
Role of Government Yards in Trench Town in the development of Jamaican Culture

The six urban blocks which make up the Government Yards have contributed immeasurably to Jamaican and international culture. From these yards important elements of music, sports, politics and religion were born and/or developed. It is no coincidence that for many, the Government Yards of Trench Town are seen as the Hollywood of Jamaica.

(14)(Names of those from Trench Town)

Consider the following personalities that were connected to, were born or lived in the Government Yards in Trench Town. Alexander Bustamante, Norman Manley, Rev Hugh Sherlock, St. William Grant, Mortimer Planno, Collie Smith, Alton Ellis, Delroy Wilson, Joe Higgs, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, Tony Spaulding, Leroy Sibbles, Adina Edwards, Bunny and Scully, Theophilus Beckford, The Abyssinians, Hortense Ellis, Lascelles Perkins, Wailing Soul, Rita Marley, Vincent 'Tarta' Ford, Ernie Ranglin, Wilton Hill, Dean Fraser, Junior Braithwaite, Bongo Herman, Jimmy Tucker, Junior Tucker, Massive Dread, Beverly Kesslo, Carl Brown, Shepherd Levi etc.

(15)(Mortimer Planno TT)

One needs only to look at Fifth Street to understand Trench Town's famous status. Mortimer Planno was the Rastafarian elder who met His Imperial Majesty, Emperor of Ethiopia when he visited Jamaica in 1966. Planno later visited HIM's palace in Ethiopia as a guest of the Emperor. Planno's yard on Fifth Street was a mecca for Rastafari.

(16)(William Grant TT)

St. William Grant was the Trade Unionist, Labour Activist, Black Nationalist and Garveyite who taught Bustamante how to relate to the grass roots masses. He was a famous public orator who held public forums in Victoria Park, downtown Kingston. St.

William Grant and Bustamante were arrested and locked up on at least one occasion. Victoria park was later officially renamed St. William Grant Park.

(17)(Alton Ellis TT)

Alton Ellis is known as the Godfather of rocksteady, the precursor to reggae. Alton reigned on the airwaves and stage shows across the island. Along with his sister Hortense they defined a music that reflected the mood of the era.

(18)(Collie Smith)

The energy created on Fifth Street by these four famous residents can be reciprocated on any of the other six streets where other famous personalities lived. Central Road, the main road in the community was later renamed Collie Smith Drive after the internationally famous cricketer who

was a resident and student at Boys Town.

(19)(Other housing schemes, soviet style, etc.)

.....
Violence in Trench Town

Up to the 1970's and presently, subsequent governments have built various types of housing schemes and housing solutions within the subdivision called Trench Town. These dwellings range from prefabricated concrete soviet style multi story monoliths to low scale pedestrian oriented communities.

(20)(Beginning of political violence up to 1979)

In the 1970's all hell broke loose in Jamaica. Politics turned violent. Party supporters formed militia, some purported to be supported by the political parties themselves. In the three years prior to the 1979 elections PNP communities and JLP communities clashed.

(21)(Arnette Gardens built separating TT)

The Government Yards of Trench Town were at that time a predominantly JLP community, Seventh Street formed the boundary between the original Government Yards and the recently constructed community called Arnette Gardens [built from Seventh Street to Fourteenth Street]. The builders of this development for various reasons built several dwellings in the middle of West Road between Seventh and Ninth Streets making West Road impassable. This gesture further defined the already developing tribal divide between Trench Town north and Trench Town south.

(22)(Areas demolished by violence)

During these years of political conflict the two blocks of Government Yards between Fifth and Seventh Streets were razed with bullets, molatov cocktails and bulldozers. Mortimer Planno and St. William Grant's dwellings were demolished.

(23)(Culture Yard 1)

.....
Trench Town Culture Yard

The yard located at 6 & 8 Lower First Street had always served as a community yard. This is the yard where community leader Vincient 'Tarta' Ford lived. It is here community members and outsiders would hang out and eat, gamble, listen and rehearse music. Tarta was the host for much of this activity. Trench Town's most famous ambassador, Bob Marley would later become a resident of this yard.

(24)(Culture Yard 2)

Bob and his mother, Mrs. Booker, had lived at #19 Second Street up until they migrated to America. On his return from America Bob moved into the yard with his good friend and mentor Tarta. While living in the yard Tarta not only taught Bob how to play the guitar but also wrote the song 'No Woman No Cry' which was written about their life in the yard. Bob Marley would later sing the song and along with other songs become Jamaica's and Trench Town's international icon.

(25)(Natty Dread journey)

Bob Marley's famous song 'Natty Dread' retraces his steps as he walks from his dwelling on First Street up to the end of the Government Yards on Seventh Street. It was while living at 6 & 8 First Street that the Wailers were formed and Bob Marley and the Wailers' first album 'Catch a Fire' was recorded.

B(26)(Culture Yard 3-first Heritage Tourism product)

uilding on the vision of the community, with assistance from the Tourist Product Development Company and British, German, Canadian and American Embassy donations the yards have been restored to their original elegance and have become Jamaica's First Inner City Heritage Tourism product. A quote from author David Howard in "Kingston" summarizes the project to date:

"News stories , readily plucked from the pages of the The Gleaner, highlight the terrain of fear and physical violence that has shaped some parts of downtown Kingston for much of the last thirty years. But among these hard-hitting tales, are many brighter instances of a rejuvenating downtown. The former home of Bob Marley in Trench Town at 6, 8, 10 Lower First Street has been transformed into a Culture Yard, creating a cultural and entrepreneurial space for local residents. Cliches notwithstanding, it is impossible not to visit and talk with those involved in the project and find yourself sitting in a landscape of hope.

For many, the Culture Yard is a spiritual place, focusing an emotional attachment to Bob Marley on hopes for a revived community presence in the neighborhood and beyond. In practical terms, the project is a direct attempt to open up access to "the ghetto" to create a space of music and cultural celebration in an environment scarred by violence."

(27)(Bob Marley did not make TT, TT made Bob Marley)

Reggae and Bob Marley are Jamaica's most widely recognized ambassadors. It is without apology and with sincere respect and appreciation that Trench Town residents say, ' Bob Marley did not make Trench Town, but rather Trench Town made Bob Marley'.

(28)(Culture Yard 4- Museum)

The Trench Town Culture Yard Museum will be the vehicle through which the story of Trench Town will be presented to residents as well as domestic and foreign tourists. The aim of the Trench Town Culture Yard is also to bring into focus to Architects, Planners, Preservationists and those in the faculties of Heritage and Culture the importance of recognizing, preserving and restoring the Government Yards of Trench Town.