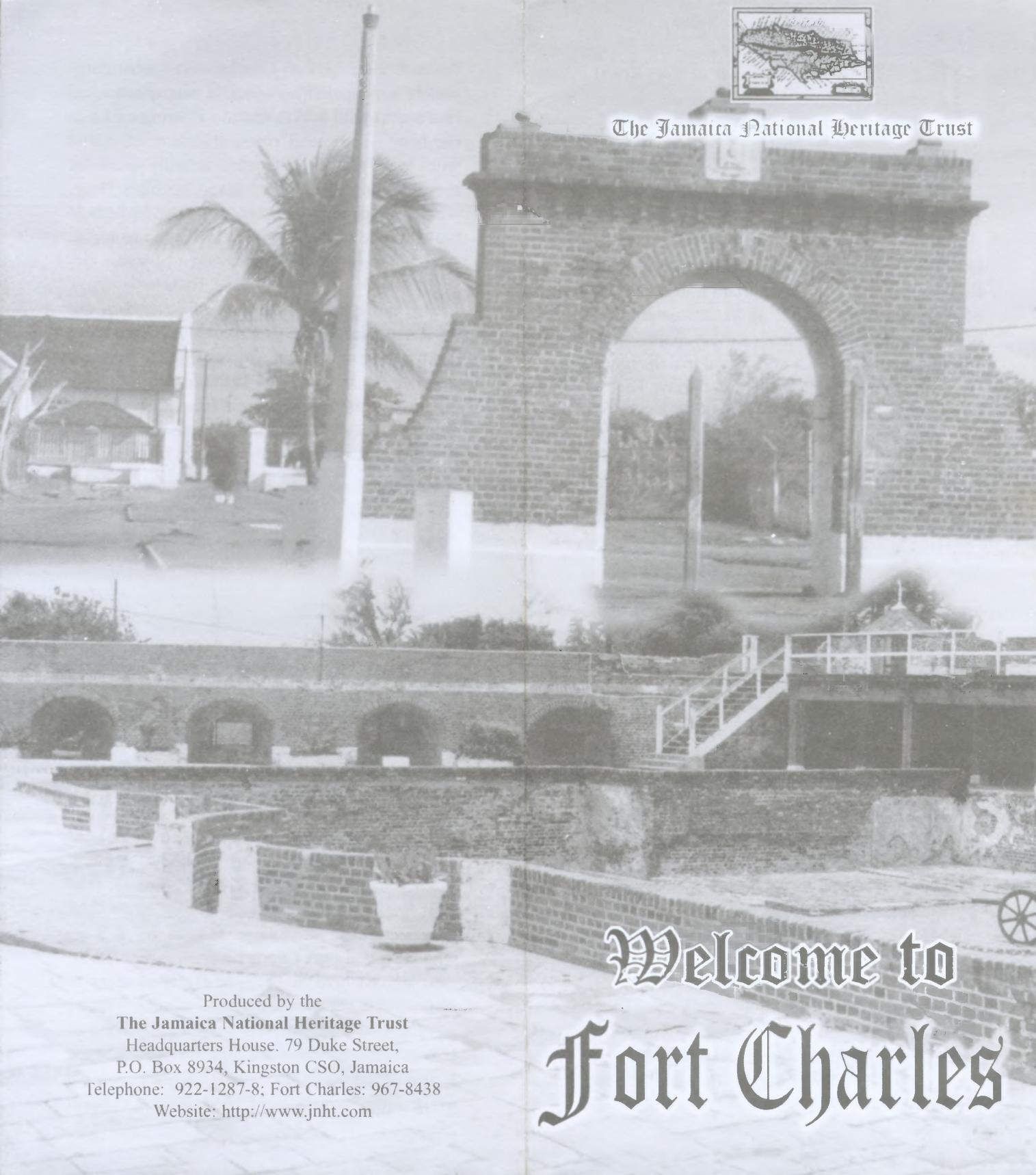




The Jamaica National Heritage Trust



Produced by the
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Welcome to
Fort Charles

Fort Charles and the town of Port Royal are inextricably linked. Their rise and fall were influenced by events such as piracy, trade, international relationships including war, and a myriad of disasters such as hurricanes (1712, 1751); earthquakes (1692, 1907) and fire (1704).

During the second half of the 17th century, Port Royal became the most important transshipment point in the New World. It was also a cultural Mecca, surpassing Boston and other major New World cities. By 1692, Port Royal had the ignoble distinction of being the richest and wickedest city in the world.



Take a step back into

History... At Fort Charles, you can take a step back into history. As you stand in this famous Fort, imagine it in its former glory.

Fort Charles, originally called Fort Cromwell, was built by the English in 1655 after they invaded and captured Jamaica from the Spaniards. Five years later in 1660, the name was changed when Charles II came to the throne.

In the beginning, Fort Charles was almost completely surrounded by water. It was constructed like a ship with a 17th century floating castle at the bow. The metal rings, still secured in the front wall of the Fort, were actually used for mooring ships that sailed into Chocolate Hole, where the parade ground now is. The anchors at the entrance of the Fort were salvaged from the sea and are from 18th century men-of-war.

In the earthquake of 1692 the Fort sank some 31/2 feet into the ground. Only partially destroyed, it was rebuilt in very much the form that we know today. The number of guns mounted at the Fort increased from 26 in 1667 to 104 by 1765. By the middle of this century Fort Charles had a garrison of 500 men.



Among the outstanding naval men associated with the fort's history are Benbow, Vernon, Rodney and Parker. All of these admirals flew their flags at Fort Charles at one time or another. But undoubtedly the most famous naval hero who served at Fort Charles was Horatio Nelson, who arrived here in 1777, at eighteen years of age.

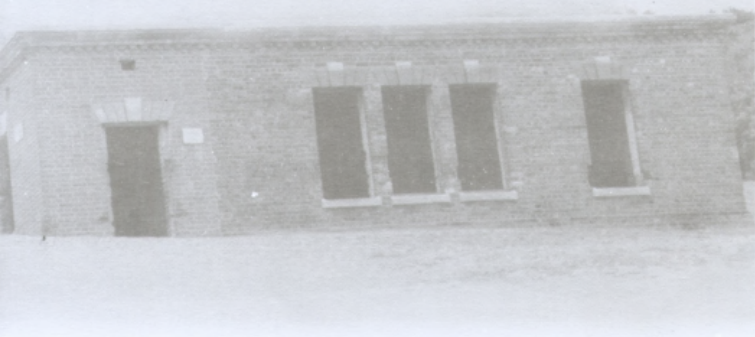
It was Nelson's success against the French at the Battle of Trafalgar (October 21, 1805) some 25 years later, which confirmed Britain's naval

supremacy and turned the balance of power in Britain's favour. The marble plaque fixed to the wall of the Fort commemorates his association with Fort Charles.

*“In this place dwelt Horatio Nelson
You who tread his footprints
remember his glory.”*

Nelson's coat of arms, once affixed over the sally port at the western end of the Fort, is on display inside the museum. The three crosses on the front of the Fort's northwest corner are said to be the final resting places of three women associated with Nelson. It is believed that these women died of yellow fever. Above them is the lookout tower that was used to keep watch on the channel to Kingston Harbour.

THE GIDDY HOUSE



A stone's throw from Fort Charles to the east is The Giddy House. It was erected by the Royal Engineers in 1888 during Queen Victoria's reign, and is the old Royal Artillery Store for the Victoria Battery.

The earthquake of 1907 shifted the structure to its present angle. On entering the building, people often experience giddiness caused by the building's angle - hence its name, The Giddy House.



THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT BATTERY COMPLEX

During the closing years of the 19th century, it became obvious that the existing fortifications at Fort Charles could not adequately defend the naval base at Port Royal. The Victoria and Albert battery complex was installed in 1888, to the east of Fort Charles to protect the harbour. Guns were placed in a set of bunkers but these were destroyed by the 1907 earthquake, and sunk some 8ft.-10ft. below the surface. One gun was later retrieved and is in functional condition. The complex also contains a boiler house and a subterranean armoury as well as interconnecting tunnel system to the Giddy House and periscope point. This type of embattlement is one of the earliest of its kind constructed anywhere in the world.

A hurricane of 1951 destroyed its slate roof and that of the ancillary buildings. The main structure was undamaged. Only buildings of 100 years and older were left standing in Port Royal after this devastation and it was on the grounds of the Old Naval Hospital that the people of Port Royal took shelter for several years.

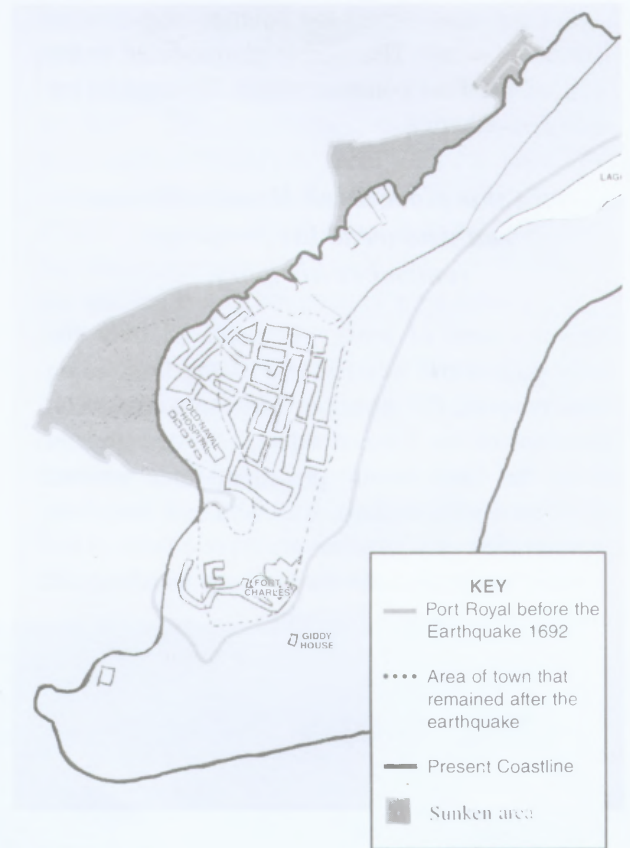
The brass benchmark inside Fort Charles is the main point for measuring longitude and latitude in Jamaica, and is used as a point for measuring the distance to other countries. The original marker at the Fort's southwest corner was a flag pole which was damaged in the 1907 earthquake.

The Old Naval Hospital



The present Old Naval Hospital is an impressive two-storey structure built in 1819 by the Royal Engineer for the British Navy. It replaced an earlier one built in 1742 that was destroyed in the 1815 fire of Port Royal.

Pre-fabricated cast iron units imported from Bradford, England, were used in its construction. It was built on a raft foundation, all supporting iron columns being linked beneath the massive structure on one base. This gave it additional strength to withstand natural disaster. It has survived numerous catastrophes including hurricanes and the earthquake of 1907.



Port Royal's importance to heritage education and tourism is undeniable. The town is an archaeological treasure trove with tremendous potential and importance for marine and historical archaeology. A catastrophic earthquake in 1692 destroyed the town, sending over 13 acres of land underwater with its occupants and structures. The tragedy makes the area a 'time capsule' of human behaviour in the 17th century, which is sealed below the ocean floor and beneath present day modern buildings.

The Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) has designated the town Protected National Heritage. The Trust is responsible for declaring/designating places and objects of historical value as national monuments or protected national heritage, so as to protect, preserve and manage them for the benefit of the Jamaican people.