



# Headquarters House Gets a Facelift: Preserving Jamaica's Heritage

**Kingston, Jamaica** – One of Jamaica's most iconic national monuments, the Headquarters House, is stepping into a new chapter of its long and storied history. The Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) has begun Phase 1 of a major renovation project, giving the Georgian-era building a refreshed look while safeguarding its structural integrity for future generations.

**A Fresh Look for a Historic Landmark**

The first phase focuses on restoring and repainting the façade, ensuring the exterior reflects both the dignity and grandeur befitting a national treasure. Passersby along Duke Street will notice the renewed curb appeal, with careful attention to period-appropriate colours and finishes that echo the building's 18th-century origins.

JNHT officials have emphasized that the facelift is not merely cosmetic. "This project represents our commitment to preserving Jamaica's built heritage," explained Darrian McGhann, Director of Estate Management and Business Development. "We want both Jamaicans and international visitors to appreciate the historical significance of Headquarters House while enjoying its beauty."

**Inside Phase 1: Careful Restoration in Progress**

Work is now actively underway to preserve and stabilize the roof of Headquarters House. This includes waterproofing and critical repairs that will not only protect the structure but also enhance its overall appearance. The effort is being carried out in collaboration with the Archaeology Division, ensuring every step remains true to the building's Georgian character and historic integrity.

Part of the roof work involves the careful replacement and reconstruction of aged bricks. A special mortar mix, fabricated specifically for this project, is required to ensure authenticity and durability. With the curing process on schedule, the replacement of bricks is set to begin shortly.

To the rear of the house, an undeveloped stretch of loose earth has been transformed into a functional event space. The area was repurposed into a deck designed for small ceremonies and gatherings, with paver stones installed to complement the Georgian architecture of the house. The result is a more attractive, durable, and versatile space that enhances both the building's aesthetics and its usability.

**Other restoration highlights include:**

- The rehabilitation of the front canopies, now 90% complete.
- Custom-fabricated guttering, designed to channel rainwater from the roof to the drains, scheduled for installation by the end of October.
- Repairs to the veranda columns and supports, which, though structurally sound, are showing signs of surface deterioration. These will be sanded, plastered, and prepared for painting to halt further decay.
- Fresh painting of the bathrooms, which remain in good repair, and of the external surfaces of the house, to restore the building's curb appeal.

The process is both slow and costly, requiring meticulous attention to detail and careful financial management. Still, each step brings the national monument closer to renewed glory, balancing the demands of preservation with the realities of conservation funding.



JNHT Headquarters House at 79 Duke Street.



Open area of loose dirt to the rear of Headquarters House before rehabilitation.



The rear of Headquarters House has been transformed from dirt patch to elegant deck, suitable for entertainment and events. Now available for rental.

**What Visitors Can Expect**

During the renovation, the building remains partially accessible to the public, with guided tours continuing in designated areas. Visitors can expect:

- A revitalized exterior, ideal for photography and heritage tours.
- Opportunities to learn about Georgian architecture and conservation techniques.
- A chance to walk the same halls where Jamaica's political history unfolded.

When the entire project is complete, the Headquarters House is expected to offer a more immersive visitor experience, blending restored architecture with engaging exhibitions on colonial history and the fight for freedom.

**A House with a Complex Past**

The Headquarters House was originally built in 1755 by enslaved Africans for Thomas Hibbert, a wealthy English merchant who settled in Jamaica in 1734. Hibbert amassed great fortune as a trader and became one of Kingston's most influential figures. He played a key role in developing the capital city after the devastating 1692 earthquake destroyed Port Royal.

However, Hibbert's wealth was tied to Jamaica's darkest chapter: the transatlantic slave trade. Like many prominent men of his era, he owned enslaved Africans and profited from their labour. His grand residence, completed around 1755, was a symbol of both colonial prosperity and the inequalities of plantation society.

Following Hibbert's death, the building passed into government use. In 1872, when Kingston became the capital, the house was transformed into the official residence of Jamaica's Governors and later served as the headquarters of the Legislature - hence its name, Headquarters House. For nearly a century, it was at the centre of political decision-making in Jamaica until the new Gordon House was constructed in 1960.

**Preserving the Past for the Future**

Today, Headquarters House stands not only as a fine example of Georgian architecture but also as a witness to Jamaica's layered past - colonial wealth, the struggles of enslaved people, and the nation's political evolution.

With this new facelift, JNHT ensures that the building remains both a historic monument and a living classroom for Jamaicans and visitors alike. The restoration reminds us that heritage preservation is about more than old bricks and mortar; it is about keeping our stories alive.

**Looking Ahead: A Museum in the Making**

Phase 1 is just the beginning of a wider vision for Headquarters House and its surrounding heritage site. In the follow-up phases, JNHT plans to establish Headquarters House as a dedicated museum, allowing visitors to explore Jamaica's colonial history, political milestones, and the architectural story of the house itself in greater depth.

Meanwhile, the adjacent Coroner's Court building, which is also to undergo reconstruction, will take on a new role as the future headquarters of the JNHT. Once completed, it will house the Trust's administrative offices, freeing Headquarters House to function fully as a heritage attraction.

This two-pronged development ensures that the site remains both a centre of heritage preservation and a hub for public education, strengthening its role in telling Jamaica's story to the world.

As the fresh coat of paint brightens the façade, it also symbolizes Jamaica's ongoing efforts to honour the past while building a stronger cultural posterity.



## Sites available for Rental



Seville Heritage Park



Royal Naval Hospital



Fort Rocky



Headquarters House



Bustamante Museum



Colbeck Castle

Priory, St. Ann  
Seville Heritage Park

Port Royal  
Fort Rocky  
Royal Naval Hospital Grounds  
Football Field

Kingston  
Headquarters House:  
Legislative Chamber and  
Entertainment Deck  
Bustamante Museum lawns

Old Harbour  
Colbeck Castle

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