

Colbeck Castle, St Catherine

Colbeck Castle - a beautiful and well preserved heritage site in Jamaica.

But who constructed it and when, is still being debated by historians and archaeologists. What we do know however is that this magnificent structure has withstood the ravages of time, and the onslaught of nature in the form of earthquakes and hurricanes.

It is over 300 years old, and is one of the largest and most well constructed of the old buildings to have survived in Jamaica. Colbeck Castle is situated about three miles northwest of Old Harbour, in the parish of St. Catherine.

There is little or no reference to Colbeck Castle in the early historical records of Jamaica. However, later records indicate that it was named after a Colonel John Colbeck the original owner of the land. He was said to be a man of great influence who came to the island in 1655 with Admiral Penn and Venables. Colbeck had a distinguished career serving as a soldier, member of the Assembly and was Speaker of the House for a time. His black marble tombstone lies near the south door of the historic Cathedral in Spanish Town. Calling the building a castle was a misnomer for it was in fact a palatial residence, but its architecture differs greatly from that of great houses of a later date. To a large extent, it copies the lines of a 17th century Italian mansion. It is said that the castle itself was apparently intended to be a key point in the defence of the island. From its towers the greater part of the coast around Old Harbour Bay can be seen. Ownership of Colbeck Castle changed hands several times. But deprived of proper care, the building has fallen into disrepair over the years. In 1961, Colbeck Castle and a small area of adjoining land was given to the nation and is now property of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. It was declared a national monument in 1990.

Photos courtesy of Jamaica National Heritage Trust

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