

Jamaica's Unusual Place Names Pt 2

Sometimes place-names tell their own stories. And Jamaica's towns, districts, rivers and streets have some really interesting ones – some are misleading, some are derived from family names, and some don't mean what you think they mean!

There are stories behind most of these names and it's quite interesting to learn how they originated! While many of the reasons for the names have been forgotten generations ago, here are some of them: **IRISH TOWN**, in Saint Andrew, was obviously originally settled by the Irish. **JOES HUT**, in Trelawny, was named after its first settler, a man named Joe Buckle, who built a hut here (apparently in the 18th century) and it became a local landmark, as in "...two miles from Joe's Hut". In time the hut disappeared and so did the apostrophe! Some generations ago it was proposed that the name be changed to "Joe's Town" but this was refused by the inhabitants. **JUDGMENT CLIFF**, in Saint Thomas, is the site of the great 1692 earthquake (which destroyed Port Royal) where part of the cliff fell on the estate of a notoriously wicked Dutchman and buried him alive. (He got his 'judgment'.) **LABOUR-IN-VAIN**, in Saint Elizabeth, is an area where the rain seldom falls. This results in crops of poor quality, if any at all. **LAWRENCE TAVERN**, in Saint Andrew, was named for a tavern that used to be located there. **LLANDOVERY**, in Saint Ann, and **LLANRUMNEY**, in Saint Mary (once owned by Sir Henry Morgan). 'Llan' means a yard in Welsh. Morgan was Welsh and both are place-names found in Wales.

LLANTRISSANT is another Welsh place name and is, in fact, the town where the British Royal Mint is located. It was so named by a former owner whose origins may have been Welsh. According to the history of the town, the name also means the Church of Three Saints. **LOWER TOOTING**, in Saint Ann, is named after a working-class town in Surrey, near London, England. **MADRAS**, in Saint Ann, is a region in India, a reminder of the number of indentured East Indians who came to Jamaica in the mid-19th century to work on the sugar estates.

MAGGOTTY, in Saint Elizabeth, is a small town near the head of the Black River, named for the sugar estate that was located there. Maggoty Estate is now known as Kenilworth and the 17th century ruins of the sugar factory on this estate are considered the best example of old industrial architecture in the island.

MAHOGANY HALL, in Trelawny, apparently gets its name from the house named and built by a British Captain near a Mahogany tree where he found (and fell in love with) a Spanish senorita who was hiding there during the time the British were chasing the Spanish from the island. **MANCHIONEAL**, in Portland, comes from the Spanish Manzanella (little apple) of the Manchineel tree. The large, beautiful but poisonous trees once lined the coast there. The foliage, fruit, trunk and branches ooze a milky sap which causes burning blisters on the skin and kills animals instantly. The Arawak/Tainos used to dip the points of their arrows in the liquid, creating deadly missiles. Legend has it that the British would poison the invading Spaniards who would stop to rest under the shade of the trees. The British cut the tree, letting sap drip on the invaders, which would ultimately lead to their death. There are only one or two trees left in the town and residents identify the trees to visitors to prevent unfortunate mishaps. **MAY PEN**, in Clarendon, was once part of an area of land owned by the Reverend William May, who came to Jamaica as rector of the Kingston Parish Church in the 18th century and was then transferred to Clarendon.

ME-NO-CALL-YOU-NO-COME, in the Cockpit country of Saint Elizabeth, has a pretty clear meaning - 'don't call us, we'll call you! The Maroons in exclusive communities like Accompong were apparently not very welcoming towards unexpected visitors.

MILK RIVER, in Clarendon, was the Rio de Manatines of the Spanish. The mineral baths are situated at the foot of a limestone hill. The water, which is extremely saline, comes from crevices in the rock directly into the baths. **MIRANDA HILL**, in Saint James, was named for former Spanish governor, Alonzo de Miranda.

MOCHO, in Trelawny (there is also a Mocho in Clarendon, Saint Andrew and Saint James). traditionally means "A place symbolic of remoteness - a rough, uncivilized place". To describe someone as coming from Mocho is to describe that person as backward or, in Jamaican terminology, "dark". The usage probably came from tribal rivalry during the days of slavery. Mocho is derived from Mgboko, a place name of Calabar in Eastern Nigeria, and suggests that the Jamaican Mochos may have been persons of the Ibo tribe.

MONTEGO BAY, in Saint James, has two possible origins. One has it named for the fact that the Spanish slaughtered many hogs there and loaded lard in jars to ship to Columbia. The Spanish word for lard is "mantega." The other has it named after Montego de Salamanca, an early Spanish colonizer. **MOSQUITO COVE**, in Hanover, is said to have originated because of the prevalence of mosquitos. Historians insist, however, that the correct name is 'Miskito' Cove, for a tribe of Indians that once inhabited the island. **MOUNT HOREB**, in Saint James, is named for the Biblical Mount Horeb where the Ten Commandments were given to Moses by God.

NUN'S PEN, in Saint Andrew, was also known as 'Islington' and 'Moringa Park'. It was once owned by a Haitian refugee named Henri D'Aquin. Two of his daughters were determined to become nuns even though he wanted them to marry. He decided to give the land to the Roman Catholic Church and since then it has been known as 'Nuns Pen'. **ORACABESSA**, in Saint Mary, comes from the Spanish for 'aura' meaning 'air or breeze' and 'cabeza' meaning head, resulting in a phrase that could be read as 'fanciful' (or 'air headed').

PANTREPANT, in Trelawny, is a Welsh name meaning "house in the hollow".

PORUS is a town in Manchester. There are three reasons given for this name: first, that Porus is possibly a confusion

between Las Pocas (the pits) and should be called Pocos, or second, that since Porus was referred to by the Spaniards as "the district of Porras", they must have named it after the brothers who were marooned with Christopher Columbus at St. Ann's Bay for over a year. The Porras brothers finally mutinied against Columbus. The third, and most well-known, explanation is that market vendors, traveling before the days of cars, rested under a guinep tree in the village, remarking 'poor us' as they removed the loads from their heads.

PUTOGETHER CORNER, near Mandeville, is the spot where market women stopped to put their goods and themselves in order before proceeding to town. QUICK STEP, in Trelawny, comes from the 18th century when British soldiers were fighting with Maroons. ROSE HALL, in Saint James, was named for Rose Kelly, the first mistress of the infamous estate. SANGUINETTI, in Clarendon, is named for its first landowner, Jacob Sanguinetti, an Italian Jew. SAVANNA-LA-MAR, in Westmoreland, was the Sabana-de-la-mar ("the plain by the sea") of the Spanish. During English occupation of the island, the "de" was dropped, and the name became Savanna-la-mar, sometimes abbreviated Sav-la-mar. SAVE RENT, in Westmoreland, is not a spot for living cheap; the name is actually a corruption of the name of a French colonist, M. Saverent. SEE ME NO MORE, in Portland, is an area named for a deep wooded gully there, where water caused a deep valley to form. Before a road was built in the area, anyone crossing the gully could not be seen from the other side, thus the name. SEVILLE, in Saint Ann, was the Sevilla Nueva (New Seville) or Sevilla de ora (Golden Seville) of the Spanish. SHAKE-HAND MARKET, in Portland, is a square named for its use as a meeting place. SHERWOOD CONTENT, in Trelawny, probably has some connection with Sherwood Forest in England. The name "Content" is related to "container" and, similarly to "Pen", which was an area where cattle were kept. SHOE MYSELF GATE, in Saint Elizabeth, derives from the fact that, when someone in town who was not accustomed to wearing shoes got a new pair, they would carry the shoes over their shoulders until they reached their destination. At the gate, they would "shoe themselves". SHOTOVER, in Portland, is a corrupted version of the French "Chateau Vert".

SPANISH TOWN, in Saint Catherine, was founded about 1534 and was once known as Santiago, the name given by Christopher Columbus to the whole island. The English, however, called the city St. Jago de la Vega, or "St. James of the Plain", and that name remained in popular use for some years. Now it is known as Spanish Town.

STETTIN, in Trelawny, was named by Dr. William Lemonius after the city in Pomerania, Germany, from which his family came. Dr. Lemonius was responsible for about 1,000 North German immigrants who arrived in Jamaica between 1834 and 1838.

STONEHENGE, in Trelawny, is undoubtedly a word-play on the owner's name, Reverend Joseph Stoney. It was located near Campbells on the Barbecue Bottom road.

TAN-AN-SEE, in Trelawny, means "stand and see"; referring to the view of the beautiful open land. There is a cliff here overlooking the landscape.

TEMPLE HALL, in Saint Andrew, is named for its first landowner, Thomas Temple. Temple Hall is where Sir Nicholas Lawes, Governor of Jamaica from 1718-22, who married Temple's daughter in 1698, introduced the cultivation of coffee to the island in the 1700s.

TIME AND PATIENCE, in Saint Catherine, could be named for the type of crops past residents chose to grow.

TOMMY BUSH, in Westmoreland, is named after Tommy Sinclair who owned the plantation there. TOM REDCAM AVENUE is named after Tom McDermot, an Irish campaigner against colonialism and slavery, Redcam is sort of a backwards spelling of McDermot.

TRY SEE, in Saint Ann, is a post-emancipation name inspired by the idea of having former slaves who received land "try and see" what they could do with it. TYRE, in Trelawny, probably comes from the ancient Phoenician word for "rock", which would certainly fit the geology of the area. It should probably be pronounced "Ty-ree". UNITY, in Saint James, got its name from the story of two brothers. The younger of the two asked the elder to borrow £1000 in order to purchase land, the elder refused and their relationship deteriorated. Sunday came and the two went to church, encountering a sermon on the importance of unity. The elder brother felt it was a sign and raised a loan to help his younger brother purchase the land. They named the place Unity. VAUXHALL, in Saint Elizabeth, was named for a popular London tavern. VICTORIA TOWN, in Manchester, was named after Queen Victoria.

VINEGAR HILL, in Westmoreland, was probably originally settled by Irish landowners and named after the Battle of Vinegar Hill, near Enniscorthy, Ireland, during the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

WAI RUA, in Saint Andrew, comes from New Zealand and means 'place by the river.'

WAIT A BIT, in Trelawny, derives its name from the Wait-a-bit thorn, believed to have been brought to Jamaica by African slaves.

WHITE SHOP, in Clarendon, just across the Manchester border, may have been so named because the shop that dominates the village square had once been painted white.

Y.S. ESTATE, in Saint Elizabeth, lies near a bridge over the river of the same name. Some say that the curious name of the river comes from a Welsh word meaning "winding" (on early maps it is written "Wyess") and possibly the form Y.S. was first adopted as the mark stamped on hogs heads of the Wyess Sugar plantation.

YALLAHS, in Saint Thomas, was most likely named for Captain Yallahs, a Dutch pirate who frequented the area in the 1670s. YTHANSIDE, a village in Portland, is named after a place in Wales. Its first owner, William Espeut, also owned Spring Garden Estate in Portland where he was believed to have bred mongooses (imported from India) to kill rats on sugar plantations. Source: keepitjiggy.com