... steeped in Jamaican history

The Frome Sugar Estate, in Westmoreland, has been the lifeline of the parish's economy for over three centuries; leaving an indelible imprint in Jamaica's history, especially with regard to the trade union movement and the protection of workers' rights.

Based on a research of the estate's history, it was learnt that the first owner of the estate was British national Christopher Morris, who came to Jamaica with the English army in 1655. The factory was resuscitated in the 1930s when the preference prices for sugar produced in Jamaica ignited renewed interest in the industry, offering attractive business prospects to the British firm, Tate and Lyle. Tate and Lyle bought seven small factories in the parishes of Westmoreland and Hanover. The acquisition included Frome, which they merged with the other factories to create the central Frome factory, which was built in 1938. The creation of a central Frome Sugar Estate resulted in much dislocation as many sugar workers were left without their jobs in the period of transition. This upheaval is believed to have been one of the sparks which triggered the 1938 riots at Frome, which resulted in the deaths of 14 and the injury of hundreds more. The disturbances, which spread to other areas of Jamaica, ultimately resulted in the formation of trade unions followed by the political parties, which subsequently built their reputation as advocates for the rights of the sugar workers. At the period of unrest, the Frome central factory, which was built at an estimated cost of £500,000, began operations on January 14, 1939. It was considered the most modern sugar factory in the Caribbean at the time. Ownership of Frome Estate changed hands last year (2011) when the Chinese-owned Pan Caribbean Sugar Company (PCSC) took over under a government divestment initiative. Jamaica Gleaner