

Saving time - Phillip Martin on a mission to maintain 'heritage clocks' across Jamaica

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May Pen town clock.

Dave Lindo, Gleaner Writer

MANDEVILLE, Manchester: AMERICAN PHILLIP Martin has been championing the cause of the need for repairing and preserving the 'heritage clocks' across Jamaica - many of which are in disrepair, having been neglected for years.

A businessman, engineer, horologist, historian and philanthropist, Martin, through his extensive [research](#), has brought to light the deplorable conditions of some of these clocks, many needing urgent attention.

"Through my research, so far, I have identified up to 30 clocks of heritage quality, meaning that they are 50 to 60 years old and more. Some dating back to 150 years," Martin disclosed.

"The condition of some of these clocks is just atrocious, really. There is just scant regards for items which are so important to the heritage of Jamaica," Martin told **The Gleaner**. "The one at the Black River Parish Church, built in 1843, had the correct time but the whole structure is about to fall down. The roofs of the structure have rotted out. At any minute it can come crashing down," he said.

Martin added, "At the Falmouth Parish Church, you have the most beautiful clock structure which was built in 1796, but it's not working."

He pointed out that the mechanical engines of some of the heritage clocks have been replaced with electronically operated ones, about which he is seriously concerned. "If you take a 100-year-old clock and replace the history, you ruin the heritage," he said.

"That was the case with the clock at the St Andrew Parish Church on King Street and the one at Half-Way [Tree](#), they were fitted with electronically run engine. Often, the electronic conversion doesn't last for a long time.

"Such is the case with the clock at the St Andrew Parish Church, which hasn't worked for over a year now. A mechanical movement can last up to 100 years and maintain the original heritage," Martin explained.

Martin has been operating a business in Four Paths, Clarendon, for 11 years, and has been living in Jamaica for two years. He first got involved in the heritage clocks in Jamaica after being disturbed by the state of the one in May Pen, Clarendon.

Having realised that the clock wasn't working, with the help of the May Pen Fire Department he gained entry to the clock when the keys for the lock couldn't be found. He power-washed the inside, fixed the ladder and replaced the hands on the clock that were missing.

"There was no identification, when the clock was made. What was inscribed on it was that it was made in the memory of World War 1," Martin said. "My research showed that it was built in memory of a Dr Robert Glaister Samuel Bell. I made several checks at the local library and couldn't get any information. I went to The Gleaner Company and went through their archives, where I got lots of information on him."

Martin has contacted the Heritage Trust seeking assistance to repair some of these clocks, but he said the agency doesn't have the money to do this. He has set up a website www.jamaicaheritage.wordpress.com where he has information on the heritage clocks across [the island](#) and the present state that they are in. He is currently trying to garner funds to repair and service the clocks. "I would like the Government to sanction aids for these clocks," Martin said. "I believe countries such as USA, China, as well as corporate citizens, would be more than willing to help such a worthy cause."

Martin is also looking at playing a part in restoring heritage sites across the island. "There is so much just lying there and if not preserved will vanish. There, is urgent need to do something about this."



Martin's research showed that Dr Bell was known for his kindness to the poor. It was said that he never turned back a patient, whether or not they had money. He died on May 12, 1904, when he was swept away by the Rio Minho River after he attempted to cross it. "Dr Bell died at the Sevens crossing between May Pen and Longsville after visiting a patient, Christine Coastworth, at Lucky Valley. He was warned not to cross the river because it had overflowed its banks but he insisted, and he and his carriage were washed away on his way back," Martin disclosed. Dr Bell was 49 years old when he died. In 1907, the parish council commissioned the building of the Bell Memorial Clock in May Pen.

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Showing 38 comments



gentle [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Thanks to you Phillip Martin, for educating me on this subject. As a Jamaican I am ashamed to know, that it took an outsider to come in and point out these basic things. Our people(with a few exception) do not care much about our past. No one seem to care about where we are coming from, and the people, and things that brought us to where we are. Just take a stroll through rural Jamaica, and you will find old court houses, churches, schoolhouses, burial grounds, all of which should have been preserved. Many of these things have facinating history to go along with them, but it is very difficult to find any of this in most libraries. The post independent Governments always found money, for their pet projects, regardless of how nonessential they might be. Sorry, if I have offended anyone, but I have had to talk to some people at times, about the importance of these things. The most popular reply I receive, is that these people are dead and gone long ago. As for buildings the young ones think it's time to replace them with modern structure. There is no appreciation for what our ancestors did, and even worst, no resting place for their bones. The desecration of our cemetaries for selfish use, is a perfect example of the kind of society in which we live. It is time for the government to restore these clocks, buildings, and evict trespassers from off the graves of our forefathers.



Carlton Reynolds [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

The politicians and so called Intellectuals have popularised the view that our colonial past is evil and therefore to be rejected. DO you think it is just happenstance that we are the murder capital of the world? It is not only the buildings that have suffered, he whole culture has been damaged.



D. Plummer [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Congratulations!!! Just by having the thought to do someting as wonderful as this is impressive. I which you well on this great idea. I hope this project materializes and our young people will see that Jamaica is a wonderful place to live and they themselves will want to do something for their country.

Congratulations again Mr. Martin!! GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS JAMAICA!!!



criticalmind1 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Sad story about Dr. Bell , but thank you Philip. You should open an account to which persons like myself can make a small donation. On another related matter, I am profoundly annoyed by the bell-tower at St. Andrew Parish Church; a 20th century design made part of a 17th century building! How stupid of the architect who designed it and the church administration that accepted it. Is Father Thompsen still there? Put some brick on it man!



Johnnyringo42 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Very uplifting to our beautiful historical sites. Why can't the politicians think like this and instead of robbing the country's purse, use the taxpayers dollars wisely and invest in our people and country. \$100 million to refurbish an office and nobody is accountable???? While the entire island is in need of repair. Mike Henry deserves to be in jail but Peter Philips nor anyone in the PNP should not speak because no-one has ever robbed and raped this country as they have.



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Solid points - the age of the dinosaurs MUST come to an end if Jamaica is move into the 21st century.



Whitemarion [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

It has to take a foreigner to teach us the importance of preservation. What a shame! Jamaican governments(past and present) do not value our history. In a major community in Westmoreland, the post office was one of the oldest buildings. The government did absolutely nothing to refurbish it until it was of no use. They built a new post office and tore down the old one. Why do so many people go to Europe for a holiday? I'm sure it's not for the weather but to see the architecture of the buildings hundreds of years old.



clintonR [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Mr Martin, Please keep up the good work and please set up a web site ,so we can help in whatever way we can . It is truly shameful to see this important part of our history disappear. Where is the UDC in all of this....



eg [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

I would like to for us to make this gentleman Prime Minister, imagine he cares about things Jamaican more than our government and its agencies does. keep up the good work sir and let us know how we can donate



Jawatchdog [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Well done mate I love that, if I did have the money I would donate some to help. Look at that it take a white man to look after Jamaica interest.



Selassie I [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

He is not a white man. He is man and a brother. God said 'let us make man,' Not white or black man



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Men look to further dividing a nation INTO green and orange - the more divided we become the more likely we'll fall.



Jawatchdog [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

He's what he is. Mate, bate whatever.



clintonR [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

What is shameful is that it took a Foreigner...to look after Jamaica's interest..not a whiteman as you put it...s



Knatty1 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

It's a common problem in Jamaica with the younger and some older people, showing the lack of appreciation for heritage



Makimbo [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Mr. Martin's generous work of keeping our tangible, architectural heritage from the past and restoring it for the future should be recognized as a great act of preservation. Cultural heritage is often unique and irreplaceable, which places the responsibility of preservation on the current generation.

Mr. Martin is a generous visionary, humanitarian, and I think a big philanthropist. He needs appreciation for seeing our historic architecture in disrepair. Everyone on the street can see the clocks not working, but who helps in their repair?

Obviously he is a humanitarian to take on the repair of the tower clock that is so simple but important is just our daily lives. Historically it was a big community tradition and honor to have a tower clock awarded, now we need to preserve this cultural heritage for our future. Our children need to know our history

It does not say it in The Gleaner, but this man must be a big philanthropist. Besides all of the obvious time and work Mr. Martin preforms, I am sure he is spending a lot of money. Everything here costs money and to repair a tower clock must be very expensive task. Everyone knows he will not get any financial help from the parish. As a minimum token of our appreciation Mr. Martin needs our help, encouragement and commendations.



Dennis Higgins [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

This effort is remarkable. The Jamaica National Heritage Trust is the Govt. entity responsible for the protection of historical sites. Here in St. Ann some effort was made by private citizens to get the townclock working again but it is heavily indebted to the person who did the work. Our St. Ann Heritage Foundation uses this clock on the brochure of a heritage tour of the town we developed. This is not earning now but tells a concise history of the town. I personally thank Mr. Philip Martin in his interest in the protection of our historical clocks and know that many well thinking Jamaicans will join in with our appreciation



Dennis Higgins [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Every effort to preserve our past especially the clocks of Jamaica should be encouraged. Whenever things like these are in the making there is too much Govt. obstacles. Looking forward to have you as a part of our St. Ann Heritage Foundation. There is an advertisement on tv by Digicel featuring the town clock in St. Ann's Bay. It needs some sprucing up. Any recommendations ?



Readthea [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Awesome job Mr. Martin. Thank you very much. After visiting Barbadoes and seeing the pride that the government takes in restoring and maintaining all their historical sites, even the churches, I became even more concerned just how much many many of our heritage sites here are allowed to go to ruins. The beauty of these old structures as is seen on your site is just so captivating. My in Clarendon community through which the old Spanish road leading from Port Esquivel to St. Ann ran has a rich heritage which we have been on a drive to restore, compile and release through a website (in the building process) and archiving it at the National Library. I hope you will also archive your work with the library and possibly write a book as you continue your work. We have a book on the parish of Clarendon but I cant recall at the moment if there was specific information on the May Pen clock or Dr. Bell. Good job on 'saving time' and possibly we will meet again.



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Imagine that! National treasures NOT appreciated for what they are...



Sharon [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

When I was a little girl in primary school, my dad who was a police officer, used to direct traffic right by the May Pen clock. Seeing the clock after 27 years bring back many fond memories. We all have a responsibility to preserve what our ancestors left behind as markers of their history and ours.



Makimbo [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

To say this you have a big heart and mind. God Bless You.



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

All beautiful heritage spots - just waiting to face lifted! Bring back Jamaica to its glory days... instead 'we' get this comrade bs... this green and orange conflicts...



Bradshaw Singh (St. Thomas) [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Thanks Martin for the decision to spearhead this initiative. I hope the government and private sector appreciate the importance of what you are trying to achieve. Martin, did you know that St. Thomas is the only parish I without a parish clock? More than that. some parishes have more than one.

It is because St. thomas staged the Paul Bogle rebellion why the Morant Bay clock was withheld by the Colonial government. Martin, please be kind enough to ask the government also to give Morant Bay its overdue clock and place St. Thomas on par with the other parishes.

Sorry, you will have to do this for me as I currently live in the UK, but one day will return to Jamaica to join you in restoring our priceless heritage



Francis Nation [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

The clock is just a device. A contrivance of perpetual motion. winding-up our lives. Out of all proportion. We are over-rawed by its presence. Guided by its chimes. Misplacing our sense of devotion. From time to time. The clock is just a device. A mere aid to our lives

F. A. Nation



Errol807 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

you are a fool francis heritage whats it all about



Trelawny1965 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Why is this news? They're remnants of a brutal colonial past and should be allowed to disappear along with other such elements. Are there no old clocks in his country? After living in America for the past 15yrs, I'm yet to see any effort to maintain their colonial relics, what you see are gleaming architectural masterpieces of "American ingenuity". It's due time for our Jamaican architecture to be exhibited.....let the evolution continue.



clintonR [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

sir you are knuckle dragging a fool !



Carlton Reynolds [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

HA hA! I never heard this one before, but if you mean he is a damn eeydat I agree wholeheartedly! He must be working 24/7 in some coal mine in Pennsylvania! Coal dust has blinded his eyes!



eg [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

you are such a fool



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Strange! Some people keep these things around - like shackles and barbed whips - others want to get rid of time pieces of how far 'we' have left to go. Distance to go = Rate X Time.



Johnnyringo42 [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

You do not know America one bit, they preserve every bit of history but the unappreciative minds won't notice these things.



capisty [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

After living 15 years in America you are still ignorant as ever.I guess there is no fool like an old fool.



Savejamaica [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

My gosh, it took this man to come all the way from America to do something that should have been so obvious to our brilliant business men and women?

Anyway, thank you Mr Martin. You were obviously raised to appreciate your country of which you consider to be a stakeholder. We on the other hand have been blessed by pirates and absentee owners who view Jamaica just somewhere they unfortunately work!!!



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

You should take FULL notice! Americans have been uplifting Jamaica in many ways for decades... while the politicians have been sitting back taking all the glory.

o [in reply to Savejamaica](#)



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Another SAD day in Jamaican history...



Glenn Smith [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

More signs of declines...

Strange! The people should take FULL notice! TIME is now telling...



Hanah Okinoba [Collapse](#) [Expand](#)

Interesting story but some huge errors here. St Andrew Parish Church is not on King Street