

Address to the National AGM of the Georgian Society Chapters at the Hibiscus Lodge, Ocho Rios on Sunday, June 9, 2013 by Ainsley Henriques, Chair, Jamaica National Heritage Trust

Good morning all:

If you think I am going to congratulate you for the wonderful job that you think that you are doing, think again.

Now that is a lot of thought to be charged with so early on this Sunday morning so let me assure you that all I will be speaking about is marriage. Marriage is a far more exciting topic, full of variety of relationships but in essence if carefully constructed and managed, has many virtues and excitements. Actually what is marriage when we look back, is that an underlying reason for the institution is that its origin is in the preservation of property as contract between two people.

So let us get straight to the point. Marriages are made between partners. You may call one dominant and the other subservient but that is not a marriage. Marriages that last have partners who may have different attributes but yet are able to exercise mutual respect for each other. Each has the capacity in coming together to enhance the values of the other, in fact it can significantly increase the values of each.

Each of us has a range of values, a range of likes and dislikes. One of the partners in a marriage will attract you more to one than to the other but objectively we will look at the two and can recognize their synergy, their strengths that emerge from coming together.

I could go on defining what many of us have had the privilege to appreciate, if not for ourselves but certainly for others, what is a good marriage. But then I am not defining marriage and its attributes for its social values as they apply to any of you but for what you represent, adherents of the built environment of yesterday, of the past. I am speaking of the two individuals without partners that I want to identify this morning, one named History and the other named Past. These two individuals need partners if they are to survive. Without a good marriage neither will remain. They will not flourish on their own. These are the History and the Past whom you represent, which is why you are here today. So let us see if we can find their partners, let us see how we can get them to survive.

Over the years I have listened to many cries of frustration from many of you on losing a lovely building, the death of another, the degradation of yet another, these are collectively named History and Past. And how many have I seen disappear that are clearly their cousins, those from the family named History and the family named Past. So the questions that have to be asked are why, how and with whom can we create a marriage that will ensure the preservation of our history and the future of our past. The answer that I have come to conclude lies in the marriage of History with those who bring the values of Sustainability, or in the case of Past bring values of the Future of the Past.

Now we have two reluctant individuals, no not virgins, but in many cases are unlikely individuals to attract partners. How do we marry an abandoned church or court house, a plantation great house highlighting one side of the period of enslavement with those who can bring to some sustainability and to others who bring a future to the past? And yes I think by now you are get the picture of what I wish to share but it will not be easy. I am now sure that without partners those

of the built historic environment will pass away. There are less and less rich uncles willing to step forward to provide the funds for single individual to be sustainable without a partner.

Let me use the example that I am most familiar with, yes one should always start at home and Headquarters House is home. It is History, it is Past. It needed a good partner. It has indeed had a number, some better than other and if not may have become a multi storied concrete office building. That is the evidence that what we call today when history and past have died as pushing up the daisies. The house is one of, if not the most significant of the oldest buildings in downtown Kingston.

By the way remind me to speak to the idea of downtown as that too needs a potential partner.

Back to the house and in seeking a partner who or what are we looking for? Interestingly the Jamaican god parents so far have not examined, in my view, the attributes of this individual god child to find a suitable partner. The house is often described by its age and why it was built. Now I would argue that these are the two worst attributes to promote in seeking a mate. No one goes around saying that the mate is suitable simply because it is old nor just why it was conceived. Really!

Headquarters House, like so many others in the built environment, displays the skills of those who built it, the quality shelter that it gave to the many who passed through its doors and so forth, who were they? Ask these questions and the answers are interesting. Look at the design, the brickwork, the carpentry and the materials used, speak to them and highlight the skills of the long forgotten craftsmen and women who created the building. Their skills also are highlighted by the hurricanes, fires and earthquakes that the building has survived, wonderful, unbelievable!.

Then we come to those who passed through its doors. These names are legion in the evolution of our history from being a colonial managed country to become an independent one. These names represent the major achievements for any people, independence, especially as no blood was spilled in that struggle. The building needs to have a partner that works with it to show how so civilized, so persuasive, so mature, were our leaders. Today the house is living with a partner who tries to do justice to these attributes and still has a way to go to become the partner to the History and the Past enrolled as one in this lovely individual. The least we can boast of is that it is not a single individual even though the relationship is not at a level that the partner deserves. Does this sound familiar in our still broken society, where one or the other of the partners are taken for granted?

So how do we do justice to this partner? We must look at the type of partner that is deserved. I hold the view that there must be multiple partners. Shame on you for thinking of prostitution, no, neither polygamy. This individual can be treated not as one but as a family of individuals of history and past connected in one environment. Partners can be attracted to each. They must come in the guise that one part of the building, the part that was in the public domain, the legislative assembly room and those adjacent on the ground floor must once again be open to the public. The stories that is must tell are fascinating, at least to me. The legislative assembly room is where all of us must have the opportunity to sit for a few minutes and listen and indeed watch the documentary highlighting the images and the voices of those who gave us self government and independence. A room must trace the evolution by say copies of the constitutions that led us to independence. Another room must speak to the history of the downtown Kingston, a city without which the building would never have been built and yet another to the material cultural

remains of the people of the past who may or even would have lived and worked within these walls. The partner should then be that of a museum and its exhibitions and tour guides.

Upstairs and the basement can be used as they presently are, for the purposes of housing the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. Its partner here are its tenants. We are now speaking to the future of our past and the sustainability of this partner.

Let me give you two more examples. The first plane flew in Jamaica in c. 1912. One of the oldest international airport buildings in the world has languished in disrepair in our island home, yes at Harbour Head, by the Harbour View roundabout. Last Friday I convened a meeting to restore it, to convert it into the museum to aviation history, indeed our history of aviation, and then the question arose as to whom should be the partner. The answer is to open it to the public on two fronts, as a museum, which as we all know does not really make money, and another who we can call a tenant who will pay the bills needed for sustainability. Again I have I have introduced the word sustainability, perhaps the most important word in the lexicon of my remit at the JNHT.

Actually before Friday we canvassed for expressions of interest from restaurateurs who both claimed it to be the most exciting site in Kingston for just that opportunity. What is the message? To call for expressions of interest. We have just done that for 8 of the sites vested in us and have had 12 applications, in other words multiple applications for more than one site. So expressions of interest is another phrase that has entered our lexicon, a great and transparent way to find a partner for the individuals in the families of History and Past.

The last is the aspect of downtown Kingston, it so badly needs partners. If not bulldozers will bury what is left by the so called wisdom of the developers. You see that one of the worst enemies of History and Past is so called progress. Concrete daisies will sprout like beanstalks on the 320 year old streets of the downtown. Kingston needs partners. So first to understand Kingston we approached the Tourism Enhancement Fund. The wonderful experience is that they seemed to have been waiting for us to turn up. It was the easiest grant that I have ever had committed.. We engaged Dr. Patricia Green and now have a comprehensive review of the history of downtown Kingston and Port Royal. We now know who we are seeking partners for. And we think we have found not just a partner but partners, both in the guise of Sustainability and the Future of the Past. It is exciting and there is now a lot of work in front of us.

Let us take these examples and transfer the questions to each and every Georgian building which you cherish so passionately. Who can we find as partners to - remember - in the guise of Sustainability or the Future of the Past? This is where, in my view, the challenge is today. Perhaps this is what we can review in the question period after this discourse on marriage. So in closing, our heritage, our history, our past, our understanding of who we are, from whence we have come, even to where we can go, are based on creating solid and lasting marriages between the past and the future. It is our job to marry history to those who bring sustainability and the past to those who bring the future for the past.