

The Old Labourers' Quarters of Trianon: A Rare National Monument

The Old Labourer's Quarters of Trianon, built during the mid-nineteenth century, was decreed national monument by the Government of Mauritius on 22 July 1974 through Government Notice No.666. It is located behind the Emerald Park, Trianon, some 13 kilometres away from the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site. Despite its abandonment, this structure is one of the rare monuments in Mauritius which has remained intact through time and that offer an insight into how the living conditions of the Indian labourers might have been.

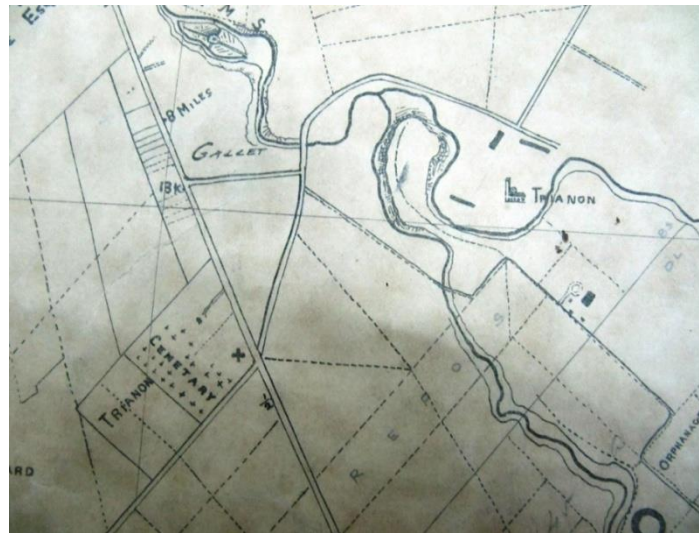


Fig 1. Old Map of Trianon Sugar Estate from 1880 (Source: Mauritius National Archives)



Fig 2. The Old Labourers' Quarters of Trianon in 1950 (Source: Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture)



Fig 3. The Old Labourers' Quarters of Trianon in 2009

Fig 4. Another View of The Old Quarters of Trianon in 2009



Labourer's

Fig 5. Labourers at work on Trianon Sugar Estate in 1950 (Source: Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture)

The Old Labourer's Quarters is a National Monument as it played a vital role in the daily lives of the Indentured labourers and their families who lived on Trianon Sugar Estate during and after the indenture period in Mauritius.

In fact, this structure is the place where indentured labourers lived and developed a lifestyle in Mauritius based on their traditions and knowledge reflective of their natal culture: they continued to speak their homeland languages, cooked traditional meals upon their ancestral gastronomy, continued to worship their gods, sang their traditional songs, and practised traditional religious ceremonies.

Some Historians mentioned that the Old Labourers' Quarters at Trianon might have originally used to house slaves during the early nineteenth century. However, some of the relevant historical documents clearly indicate that, during the nineteenth century, this structure was used primarily to house Indian labourers who worked on Trianon Sugar Estate.

Labourers were housed in camps which consisted of barracks and huts. In the 1870s, the sugar estate had two camps. One of the camps covered an area of 27 acres of land. It comprised of rows of barracks, of which one still exists.

The second camp was temporary. A hindu temple was built few metres away from the first camp. With increasing number of labourers on the estate, more camps were settled.



Fig 6. Trianon Sugar Estate Camp during the 1940s (Source: Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture)

Trianon Today

With centralization of sugar factories in Mauritius, the Trianon mill was no more functioning and was gradually destroyed. The camps were being abandoned and in the 1960s the survived barracks witnessed the last days of human habitation.

Surviving Structures

Two barracks, a chimney and a bridge constitute the only tangible parts of Trianon. The barracks are built of stone and have vaulted roofs. One of the barracks is presently used as a store room. Oral History reveals that this barrack was used as a store room and was called 'Magasin'.

The second barrack consists of 15 chambers. These barracks were used for housing purposes till the 1960s. In the 20th century, kitchen made up of concrete were annexed to eight of the chambers as an adjunct construction.

A bridge, that once linked the two banks of PlaineWilhems River, still survives in ruins. Oral sources revealed that it was wider and served a double purpose: the narrow part of it was used for the tramway and the other part was used by vehicles and pedestrians to cross the river. Half of the bridge was destroyed in the 1960 Carol cyclone. The remaining portion of the bridge is in a dilapidated condition and requires urgent attention.



Fig 7. Trianon Bridge in 2009

The chimney for the sugar plant still stands. It is located within the premises of the margarine factory and is in a better state of preservation than the barracks and the bridges.

The structures are becoming prey of natural and cultural interventions. The chimney, the bridge and the barracks suffer from severe vegetative growth. The roofs of the barracks are crumbling. The remains require immediate care to avoid further degradation

The AGTF will launch the Conservation of the Trianon Barracks in 2011 and restore the barracks as per the best international standards to allow a long term preservation of our heritage.