

History of Jinja

The town of Jinja is the second largest in Uganda, capital of Busoga Kingdom and administrative seat Jinja District. Retrospectively, whereas Iganga had been the first headquarters of the defunct Central Province of Uganda in 1900, Jinja moved on to assume surpassing administrative and cultural roles for greater Busoga landscape.

The word name 'Jinja' means a stone and the Ripon Falls, that were corporately called 'Mayinja' – Stones (singular – Jinja) were the origin of the name. In another version, oral tradition holds that the central hill, where the District Commissioner's residence was stationed in the colonial times, acquired the local name Jinja be reason of the outcrop of rocks and stones still to be seen under today, where past epochs of Busoga Kyabazingaship placated the spirit of the hill by sacrificing goats and chicken.

For background, while Jinja had merely been a fishing village in pre-colonial times, it gained much recognition as the source of the Nile following the visit by John H. Speke. The impressive development of the Uganda Railway on reaching Kisumu in 1901 triggered the opening of administrative transportation headquarters in Jinja that same year. This opening of port services was another value added achievement for Jinja which culminated into firm establishment of the town in 1907. With its rich agricultural hinterland, coffee processing and cotton ginning enterprises stimulated the development of Jinja into a medium size trading centre.

In 1910 another line was built from Jinja on Lake Victoria to Namasagali, which connected up the Lakes of Victoria and Kioga, which helped to consolidate Busoga as a cotton-growing and –ginning area; this railway connected Jinja with the Lake Kyoga steamer services at Namasagali and thus provided a link in the chain of north-south communications with Sudan.

The significance of Jinja as a transportation focus was further emphasized by the completion in 1928 of a direct railway connection with Kenya and the coast. In 1931 this line was continued westward to Kampala and northward from Tororo to Soroti, and became a basic factor in the subsequent economic expansion of the country holistically.

Thereafter, the natural endowments for hydroelectric power production were explored, which led to the opening of Owen Falls Dam in 1954. Driven by Euro-Asiatic enterprise, the opening of Owen Falls Dam was a major landmark which transformed Jinja into Uganda's top industrial town throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, the main pre- and post-colonial pattern of urban development got characterized as "...the Entebbe/Kampala Administrative and Commercial dichotomy with a prime mover at Jinja developing natural resources at Tororo. This triangle was supplemented by secondary agro-processing, marketing, and administrative centres including Mbale, Soroti, Lira, Gulu, Moyo and Arua to the East, North and North-East and Masaka, Mbarara, Kabaale, Kasese, Fort Portal, Hoima and Masindi to the South-West and West of Uganda.

The industrial fame only declined in the past couple of decades following a major pull on the industries by Kampala City. It is therefore apparent that the influence of the prime mover extended far beyond boundaries of Jinja industrial complex by catalyzing parallel proliferation of significant built heritage.

Given the above-mentioned background, Jinja's built heritage is as a result of the triple heritage interaction: Asian, European, and African. However, in spite the exceptional base of affluence explained above, Jinja fell into sharp decline, which was triggered by the exodus of Asians following Idi Amin's declaration of an 'economic war' in Uganda in 1972 and post-Amin civil wars. The same infrastructure that served Jinja in the 1950s together with its holistic built heritage and environs have come under further pressure with intentions of some of its leaders preferring to raze any old building. Most surviving historic structures have been neglected or altered, a number of them set for demolition and quite many have already been demolished. The architectural style is mixed East African colonial architecture juxtaposed with spectacular art deco palaces as seen in the following set of photographic literature.



What used to be the Governor's residence in colonial times on Circular Rd., Jinja.



View from the North



View from the West



1914 Residence of the Vicar, St. Andrew's Church, Jinja



The Two-in-One complex of administrative offices of Jinja District,
a view from the South-West, built in 1930



Central administrative offices of Jinja District,
a view from the North West.



Detail of two walkway
Detail of pillar of Block 2 of
connecting the two blocks
2



Detail of entrance to
Block
the Complex



Owen Fall Dam, the structure that brought a lot of prosperity to Jinja and the rest of Uganda from 1954. Out of it comes Uganda's hydro electric power. Photographing of this structure is currently restricted. (The photo is by curtsy of Tanya, 2008).

Ensuing photos below represent mostly what ICOMOS describes as the East African shared colonial architecture.



Streetscape of Jinja Main Street:
A view from intersection of Bell Ave. West and the Main St.



Bank of Africa occupies one of these commercial historic buildings where Bell Ave. meets Main St.



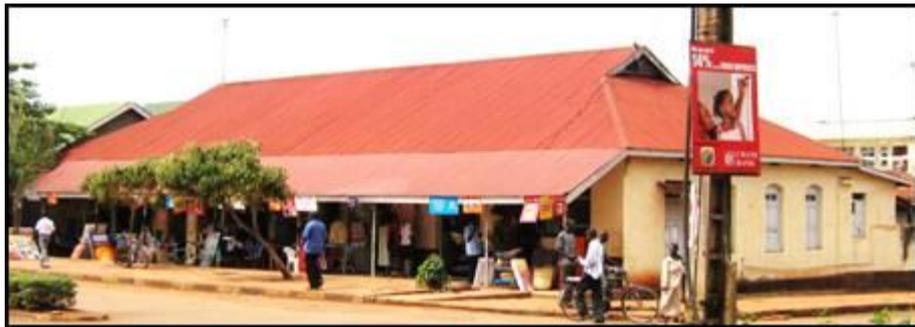
Plot 4/6 built in 1928 comprises one long commercial structure belonging to Madhvani with several business outlets.



Plot. No. 13, Main Street, Jinja



Plot No. 14/A, Main Street, Jinja.



Plot No. 18, Main Street, Jinja.



Plot. No. 19, Main Street: Pitamba Motibhai Building, 1932.



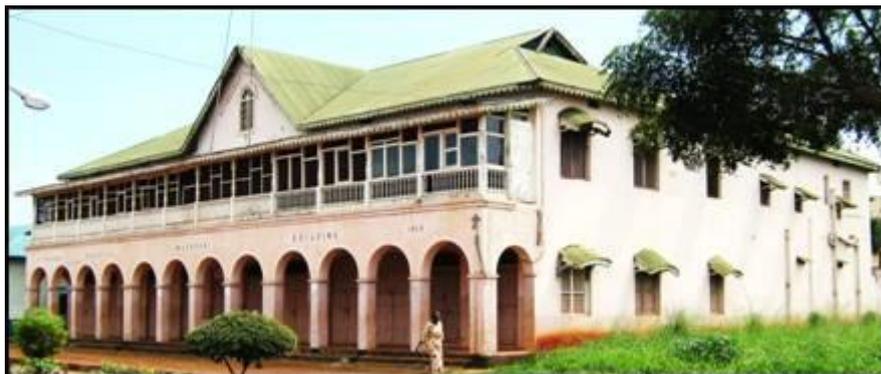
Plot No. 20, Main Street, built in 1924.



Part of Main Street, Jinja



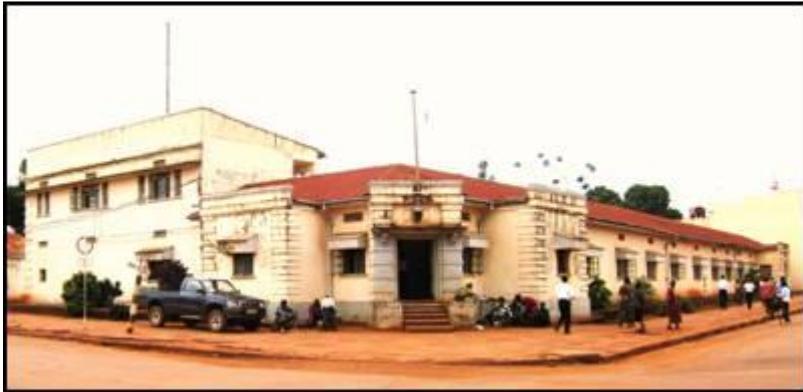
Part of Main Street, Jinja



Vithaldas Haridas & Co Madhivani Building,
constructed in 1919, Main Street, Jinja.



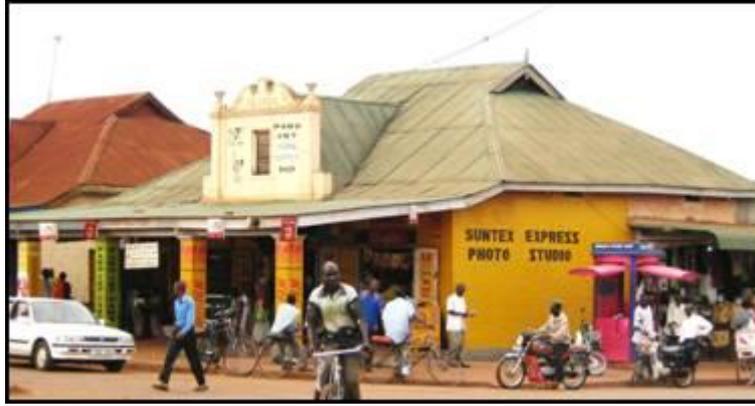
Plot No. 38, Main Street, Jinja, built in 1930.



Central Police Station, Jinja, constructed in 1928.



Plot No. 64, Main Street: Venezes Building 1937.



Plot. No. 76, Main Street, Jinja: VH & G Ltd. Building, 1937.



Plot No. 84, Main Street, Jinja, 1928.



Plot No. 56, Gabula Rd.: Mitha House, 1949.



Plot No. 25, Nile Crescent, built in 1928.



Plot No. 10, Grant Rd, Jinja.



Plot No. 46, Kiira Rd.



Plot No. 47, Kiira Rd., Jinja.



Plot No. 4, Wakoli Place: Nile Acor Palace.



Plot. No. 13, Nalufenya Rd.



Plot No. 14, Grant Rd.



The once prestigious colonial era Ripon Falls Hotel, built in 1950 in preparation for the Visit of the Queen of England to open Owen Falls Dam. It overlooks the submerged Ripon Falls where River Nile exits from Lake Victoria. The structure on the right contained the stage for a residential orchestra, which Idi Amin often joined to play music while he was still in power in the 1970s.
