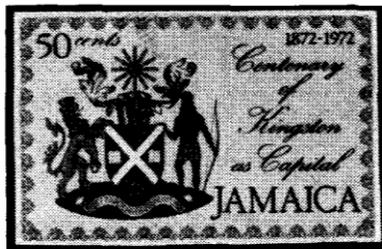# "A City Which Hath Foundations

By Thomas Foster

Old Kingston

House of Assembly

The earliest references to Kingston occur in 1673, when writers mention the "little village of Kingston" but these reports are entirely imaginative although "The Present State of Jamaica", published in 1683, does record that "At Liguanea, the inside of the harbour opposite to Port Royal, about two leagues, is several houses some of them very handsome and well built, which place is likely to become a pretty town", the accompanying map marking the site as Beeston. It was common practice in those days to refer to estates by their owners names and in this instance, the land was owned by Sir William Beeston who had purchased it from Colonel Samuel Barry in 1660.

On June 24th, 1692, following the Port Royal disaster, the Legislative Council ordered a survey of this area and resolved "that there be laid out two hundred acres of land owned by Colonel William Beeston in the Parish of St. Andrews, where the President and the rest of the Gentlemen of their Majesty's Council have appointed for building a new Towne". Four days later, the land was acquired for £1,000 and on July 21st, building regulations were drawn up when it was decided that each purchaser should build a house worth £50 within three years or forfeit that sum, the forfeitures going to the founding of a hospital.

Plans of the town were officially the work of Colonel Lilly, Her Majesty's Engineer-General but it is now thought that a local man, John Goffe, was responsible. He adopted the fashion so common to many of the Spanish cities in the Western World, of a parallelogram one mile in length from north to south and half a mile in breadth, regularly traversed by streets and lanes crossing at right angles, a lay-out still remaining in downtown Kingston.

In 1695, an act "For Making Kingston a Parish" was passed, defining the city as being bounded "southerly by the harbour, westerly and northerly by … the land of Sir William Beeston, and to continue from a calabash … by a straight line to the foot of the Long Mountain … and from thence towards three rivers … until it meets with the bounds of the parish of Port Royal, and also all that part of the harbour which lies in the north-easterly part of the middle ground … this shall be called by the name of the town and parish of Kingston".

In 1703, the city was declared to be the chief trading centre and main port of entry in the island with Harbour Street, as its nerve centre, offering wharves and facilities "wherein inhabitants might ship of and land their goods at all time to come". In 1758, Kingston became the county town of the newly-formed county of Surrey, comprising the seven easternmost parishes of the island and in 1802, the city was granted a Corporation under the style of "The Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council of the City and Parish of Kingston". By 1812, the population had risen to 33,000, comprising 10,000 whites, 18,000 slaves, 2,500 free people and 2,500 free negroes.

In 1867, Port Royal was incorporated within its boundaries and from 1870 onwards, the Legislature met at Headquarters House, (illustrated in the 1964 Parliamentary Issue), originally owned by Thomas Hibbert, a wealthy Jamaican merchant whose family were instrumental in founding the West India Docks in London. Two years later, the entire seat of government was transferred from Spanish Town, the main reasons for this being the declining power of the plantation industry, the easier facilities for trade and commerce and the long-standing unhealthiness of the old capital.

In its two-and-three-quarter centuries of existence, Kingston has many times been ravaged by hurricane and fire, those events of 1780, 1782, 1843, 1862 and 1882 being particularly remembered, as they completely devastated the commercial division. Following the equally ruinous earthquake and subsequent conflagration of 1907, the city was largely rebuilt and most of its older residences and the main public buildings date from that period.

In 1923, the contiguous parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew were merged for the purposes of local government, forming the Corporate Area of Kingston and Lower St. Andrew and, today, Kingston is an agglomeration of small villages and modern housing surrounding the old city, covering some 40 square miles including a two-mile waterfront on the north shore of a great landlocked harbour, and with a population of 483,000. Since the last war, the whole of the postal system within this area has been reorganised into 18 postal districts comprising and numbered respectively as Port Royal, Windward Road, Vineyard Town, Allman Town, Cross Roads, Liguanea, Mona, Constant Spring, Stony Hill, Halfway Tree, Hagley Park, Jones Town, Whitfield Town, Denham Town, Myers Wharf, Franklin Town, Harbour View and Mercury House.

To commemorate the centenary of Kingston as capital of the island, three stamps were released on December 4th, 1972, showing the arms of the city in full colour, inscribed with the motto forming the title of this tale, and accompanied by an attractive cover printed in the national colours.