Philatelic Society of Trinidad & Tobago

(Founded May 1942)

P.O. Box 596, Port of Spain, Trinidad, W.I.

Bulletin

Meetings: Second Wednesday of every month, 6:00 - 7:30pm
St. Mary's College, Frederick St., Port of Spain

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Figure 1- Early Postcard of the Pitch Lake (Used 1912)

The Pitch Lake at La Brea— Pt.1 the Geology and the History **By Susan Taylor**

The story of Trinidad's Pitch Lake lays bare the oil history of the country. It is where oil was first discovered and is the focus for this series of articles, the first of which covers the geology and history of the Pitch Lake.

Geology

It has been said that "Trinidad is very oily. Everything that can hold oil does so and the overflow leaks to the surface". The origin of the Pitch Lake is related to the intersection of two underground faults, which allow oil from a deep deposit to be forced up to the surface. Over many years after lighter hydrocarbons in the oil evaporate under the hot tropical sun, heavier asphalt is left behind.

The oil theme miniature sheet below (SG 550) has geological designs and was produced by Format International Security Printers in 1979 to mark the 4th Latin American Geological Congress. Format International Security Printers existed between 1967 and 1989, and printed

many Caribbean stamp issues. There is some controversy surrounding the company as it is alleged that is was in the business of manufacturing errors and printing excess quantities of stamps. It was also associated with Clive Harold Feigenbaum (1937-2007) the British businessman who was involved in a number of philatelic scandals. Thankfully there is no evidence that Trinidad & Tobago stamp issues were affected. Those interested in this can visit J.Lowe's website, where he details some of these claims:
http://golowesstamps.com/reference/formatprinters/FormatInternationalSecurityPrinters.htm



Figure 2- 4th Latin American Geological Congress Minisheet

The Discovery of the Pitch Lake

The local inhabitants of Trinidad obviously knew of the pitch lake long before the Spanish arrived. And the Spanish were dismissive of it; on 18th January 1776, the Governor of Trinidad reported "There is nothing of importance in these islands to record".

However something had taken place, some 182 years earlier that would eventually lead to Trinidad and Tobago being one of the richest countries in the Caribbean. In 1595 Sir Walter Raleigh while exploring the region landed on Trinidad, besides arresting the Spanish Governor, and burning the then capital St Joseph, he visited the Pitch Lake being told of its location by the native Amerindians. Raleigh found an immediate use for the asphalt to caulk his ship. He referred to the pitch as "most excellent...It melteth not with the sun as the pitch of Norway".



Figure 3- 1935 Definitive showing Sir Walter Raleigh at the Pitch Lake

The Exploitation of the Pitch Lake

It would be another 250 years after Raleigh's visit before the economic exploitation of the lake would begin in earnest. In 1851 Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald, who knew a bit about how bitumen deposits could be used to make lamp oil , gained a patent to extract asphalt from the Pitch Lake. He purchased all of the land in

the Pitch Lake area and provided monies to develop the field. At an early stage he was joined by Conrad Frederick Stollmeyer, who managed the field, and was able to produce kerosene by distilling the pitch.



Figure 4- Cochrane cover to Pall Mall, London

Thomas Cochrane had a second son, Admiral Sir Arthur Auckland Leopold Pedro Cochrane, of the Royal Navy. Arthur's home in London (as far as correspondence was concerned) was the Junior United Services Club in Pall Mall. He too was an early investor in the Pitch Lake Company and much of his correspondence from Trinidad was no doubt concerning that. Between August 1873 and 1876 letters were addressed specifically to the HMS Repulse at Valparaiso, Chile and at Panama.



Figure 5- Cochrane cover to HMS Repulse, Chile

The above cover is an example of the correspondence to the HMS Repulse at Chile. It is postmarked "paid" in red from Trinidad on 24 April 1874 and carries two Britannia 1d Reds, and two 1/- Chromes cancelled with black double arc handstamps. An expensive rate at the time.



Figure 6- Cochrane cover to HMS Repulse, Panama

The Cochrane grants were voided as mineral rights were the under the purview of the colonial government. They then set about to lease these rights and in 1883 the Trinidad Asphalt Company was born. It was granted exclusive right to mine and export asphalt from the lake and owned the freehold of upwards of 2600 acres of land bordering on or adjacent to the Pitch Lake. The excavations provided a royalty income to the government. The predicted amount was £10,000 per annum, but averaged £26,000 pa in the late 1800's, a considerable amount of money.

Over time the company's ownership changed, some notable dates include:

- 1885- J.W. Previle and A.L. Barber took up a 21 year concession for exploiting the Trinidad Pitch Lake.
- 1916- The Limmer & Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company was formed by the merger of Limmer Asphalt which excavated pitch in Germany, and Trinidad Asphalt, with the intention of using the pitch to surface London's roads.
- 1928- A local woman, Done Fie, made a legal claim that she owned the Pitch Lake, having inherited it from her Carib grandparents. However her claim failed when the paperwork supporting her claim was destroyed in a fire.
- 1971- Tarmac acquired Limmer & Trinidad Lake Asphalt, but by this time road surface manufacture was switching to coal tar.
- 1978- Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago became a wholly owned state enterprise based in Brighton, La Brea; mining and refining, manufacturing and distributing asphalt and related products.
- 2011- The T&T Government announced a 3 year contract with the China Railway Construction (Caribbean) Company affecting the Pitch Lake. There is currently a plan for construction of an industrial park and a dry dock in La Brea, funded by the Chinese, but there are concerns about the potential debt burden.

TELEGRAMS:- LIMMER, VIC, LONDON.

TELEPHONE:- VICTORIA 8315 (3 LINES).

THE
LIMMER & TRINIDAD LAKE ASPHALT COMPANY,
LIMITED.

BRANCHES:- GLASGOW. EDINBURGH. LIVERPOOL. MANCHESTER. BIRMINGHAM. BRISTOL. BELFAST. HULL. NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE. CARDIFF. SOUTHAMPTON. SWANSEA. PLYMOUTH. OXFORD.

YOUR REF.
OUR REF. AF/MF.

REGISTERED.

CHIEF OFFICE:
34, VICTORIA STREET,
WESTMINSTER, S.W. 1.

April 7th, 1922.

Dear Sirs,

WILLIAM LIDDLE.(DECEASED).

I am in receipt of your letter of the 6th inst., the contents of

the following :-

(1)

(2)

(3)

Messrs. Wright, Brown

SOLICITORS,

CARLISL



Figure 7- 1922 Stationery from the Limmer & Trinidad Lake Asphalt Co. The letter concerns shares in the company left in a will. (above)
Advert for its products (right)

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 10th March 2021 at 6:00pm'. Nominations are required for the 2021/2022 session. Please respond and nominate any member whom you believe could serve well, but please have your nominee sanction their acceptance.

AGENDA

1. Election of officers for the 2021/2022 session.
2. Election of the Board of Trustees.

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, St. Mary's College is unavailable for meetings. Therefore, an alternative location will be used which is at 75 Ana St., Woodbrook, Port of Spain. The two story building is located at the corner of Ana and Warren Streets, opposite Ronnie and Caro mas camp. The meeting will be on the ground floor.

If you are driving on Ariapita Avenue, turn North on Petra St., this takes you to Warren St., then turn right and the building is before the traffic lights. There is parking on the compound.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

All ordinary members are reminded that the 2021 dues were due by the 31st December 2020. The 2021 dues for local members are adults $30.00 and juniors $20.00. Please send early. Your dues can be paid either at the meetings (when they resume) or mail it to P.O. Box 596, Port of Spain. For overseas members, the dues are UK £6.00 and all others US$10.00. Please make cheques payable to the Philatelic Society of Trinidad & Tobago. Ordinary members can pay two or more years at a time based on the annual given above. Life membership is TT$500.00 for local members and US$150.00 for overseas members. Due to bank charges in T&T, we ask our overseas members to send payment via a bank money order (bank manager's cheque) or personal cheque drawn on a USA bank. Please do not make any payment using a Postal Order.

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FREE STAMPS AVAILABLE AT OUR MEETINGS