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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Hon Secretary: Mr. Robert Franco Tel: 637-3603 Bulletin Editor: Mr. Edward Barrow

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Part 2: Trinidad's Pitch Lake at La Brea – the Oil Story and the Stamp Story by Susan Taylor

Trinidad's first oil well was drilled in 1857, by the Merrimac Company, close to the Pitch Lake. Other wells were also dug in the areas by the Pariah Oil Company in 1866. However, the crude was very viscous and difficult to make useful. In addition to that the companies were poorly financed and so the work faltered [1]. The oil business would move to other areas of Trinidad and La Brea would focus on its obvious asset, its pitch.

In 1935 Trinidad and Tobago stamp issues went decimal in line with the Currency Interpretation Ordinance of 1934 (not the Postage Dues, and the coinage in circulation was still British). This meant that dollars and cents replaced pounds, shillings and pence on ordinary postage stamps and in 1934 it was decided to issue new definitive stamps. The stamps would advertise locations and activities of note in the colony. Bradbury Wilkinson were invited to produce designs, and after a competition Mr Leslie E. Gill (who worked for the Land and Surveys Department of the Colonial Government) won a competition to design the frame for the stamps. However, he was asked to re draft his design "in order to emphasize the oil production"[2]. The eventual design for the frames included oil derricks, coconut trees, cocoa and tropical fruits. Also as part of the new series the 6 cent definitive stamp featured the Pitch Lake, an important and well known part of the country's economy. The new series of definitive stamps were issued on 1 February 1935 and the 6c was printed on watermark multiscript sideways CA paper, initially they were perf 12 but later printings were perf 13 x 12.5.



Figure 1: The 1935 6c Definitive

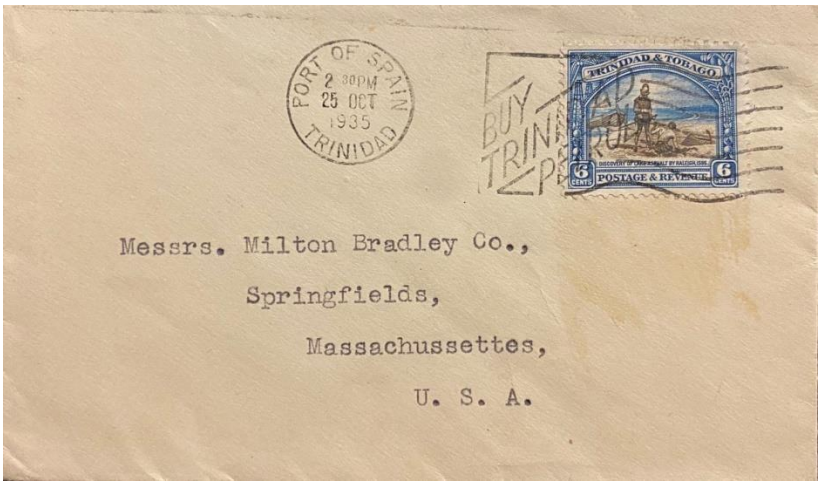
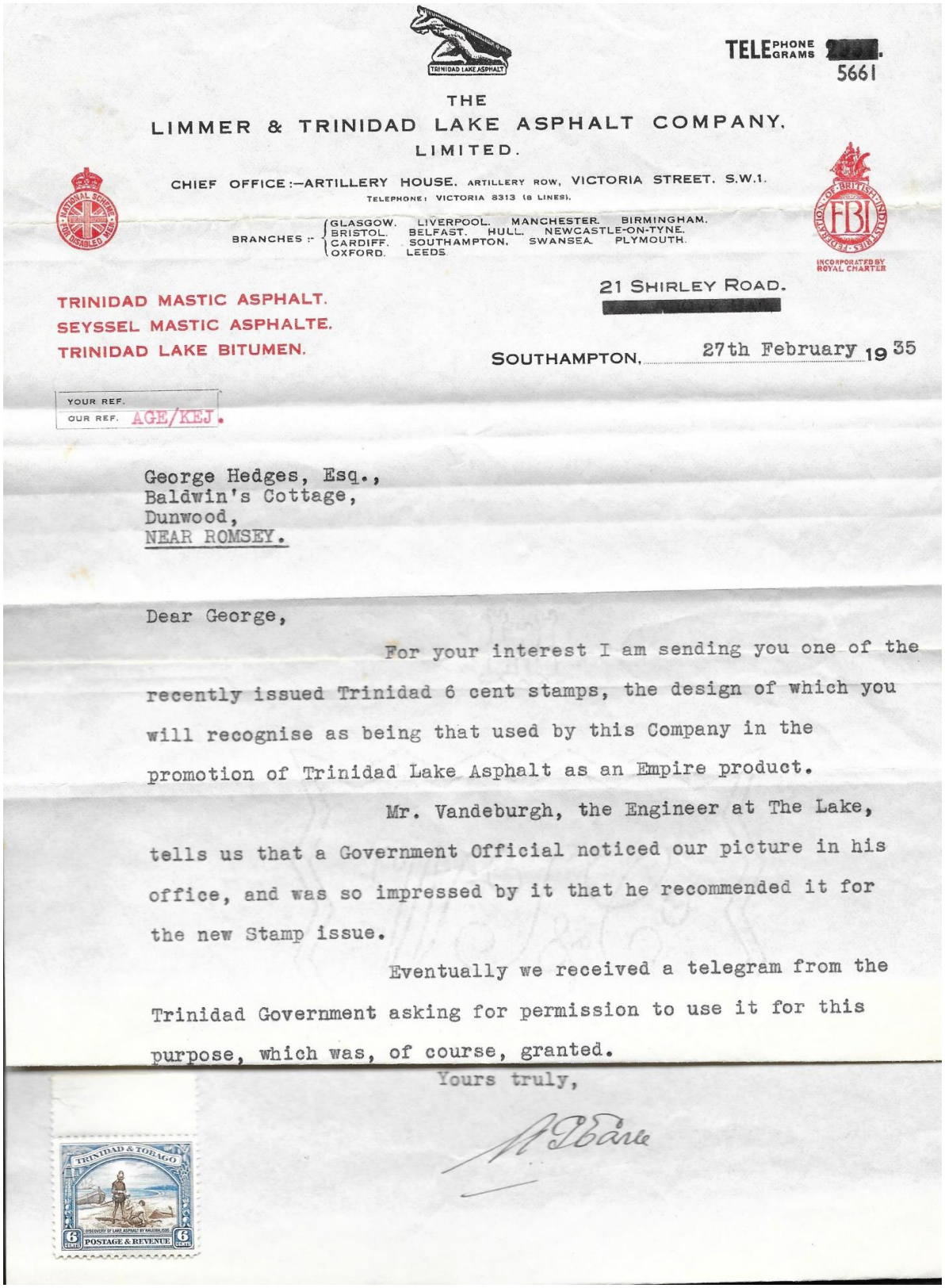


Figure 2: The 6c stamp with a Petroleum slogan cancel

How this image came to be used on the stamp is detailed in the letter from a Mr Earle of Limmer and Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company Limited to a George Hedges (figure 4). It would seem that the original painting was obtained by the Publicity Department in 1929. I have tracked the image in an effort to ascertain who painted it. If you visit https://www.neuchatel.co.nz/tag/australia/ that's where the trail leads. I've written to Neuchatel twice asking if they might send details – to no avail. The image was again used in the KGVI 6c definitive issue dated 2 May 1938 (SG250). (a version of this stamp exists with a frame break), and the QEII 6c definitive released on the 20 April 1953 (SG 272).



Figure 3: The painting on which the stamp design was based.



TELEPHONE [redacted]
TELEGRAMS 5661

THE
LIMMER & TRINIDAD LAKE ASPHALT COMPANY,
LIMITED.

CHIEF OFFICE:—ARTILLERY HOUSE, ARTILLERY ROW, VICTORIA STREET, S.W.1.
TELEPHONE: VICTORIA 8313 (8 LINES).

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

INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER

TRINIDAD MASTIC ASPHALT.
SEYSSEL MASTIC ASPHALTE.
TRINIDAD LAKE BITUMEN.

21 SHIRLEY ROAD.
[redacted]

SOUTHAMPTON, 27th February 1935

YOUR REF.
OUR REF. AGE/KEJ.

George Hedges, Esq.,
Baldwin's Cottage,
Dunwood,
NEAR ROMSEY.

Dear George,

For your interest I am sending you one of the recently issued Trinidad 6 cent stamps, the design of which you will recognise as being that used by this Company in the promotion of Trinidad Lake Asphalt as an Empire product.

Mr. Vandeburgh, the Engineer at The Lake, tells us that a Government Official noticed our picture in his office, and was so impressed by it that he recommended it for the new Stamp issue.

Eventually we received a telegram from the Trinidad Government asking for permission to use it for this purpose, which was, of course, granted.

Yours truly,

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
POSTAGE & REVENUE

Figure 4: Letter from the Limmer Trinidad Lake Asphalt Co. explaining the 6c design.



The Pitch Lake once again featured on the 35c value of the new definitive series released on 24 September 1960, but this time with an illustration that shows workers digging the pitch (SG293). An amusing example of the use of the 35c stamp is illustrated below, postmarked with a text encouraging the public to address their letters correctly.

Figure 5:
The 1960 35c Definitive



Figure 6:
The 35c definitive cancelled with slogan cancel.

La Brea Post Office

La Brea is located northeast of Point Fortin southwest of San Fernando. La Brea (Spanish for "the tar" or "the pitch") is the local post office closest to the site of the Pitch Lake and many of the original oil wells. Trinidadians call this place "La Bray."

Extract from "The Postal History of Trinidad and Tobago" by Joe Chin Aleong & Edward B. Proud [3]. "On 30 April 1888 the (La Brea post) office was transferred from the police station to the house of Mr Pawan. It became a money order office on 1 June 1895. The population in 1921 was 2,616 and in 1960 4,868. Situated 10 miles east of San Fernando county St Patrick on Old Road. In 1899 the Sub-Postmaster was H Belfield , paid £60 pa until 1912".

Illustrated below are stamps postmarked with the La Brea "T20" (KD5) are a SG101x (1d rosy carmine CC Crown watermark reversed) and an SG107 (1d carmine CA Crown watermark) both quite scarce. Also illustrated are the 2c (SG 247) and 3c (SG 248) stamps of the 1938 definitives, both postmarked La Brea (D9).

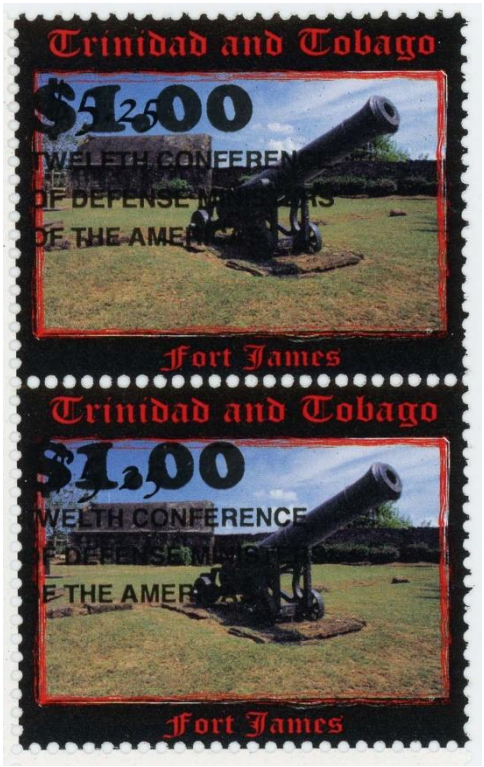


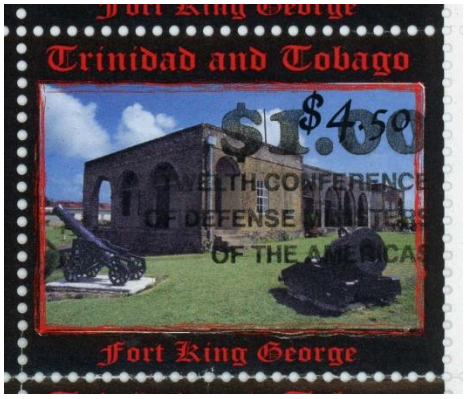
Figure 7:
Examples of La Brea Cancels

References
1. Trinidad's Oil – An illustrated survey of the oil industry in Trinidad published by the Petroleum Association of Trinidad
2. Trinidad and Tobago – The stamps and postal history – Peter Ford, Edward Barrow, David Druett
3. The Postal History of Trinidad and Tobago – Joe Chin Aleong and Edward B Proud

Newly Discovered Overprint Varieties

New member Martin Horsley has discovered some important flaws of the TWELFTH CONFERENCE OF DEFENSE MINISTERS OF THE AMERICA overprints (Type 14). The first is the miss-spelt TWELTH (missing an F) which occurs in position R5/C4 and R5/C5 on sheets of both types of Fort George overprints. A similar miss-spelt TWELTH (missing an F) occurs on the Fort James overprints but at position R10/C1.



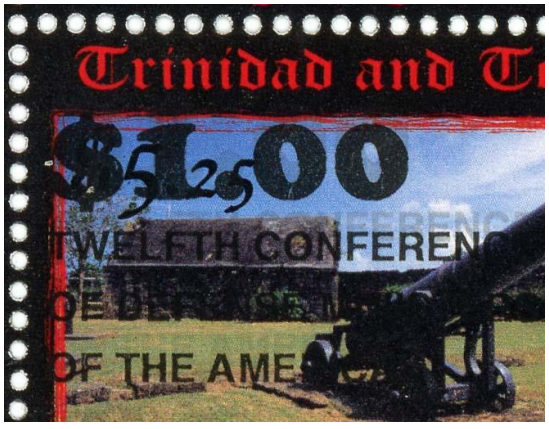


^ An example of the Missing F Variety on the Fort King George Overprints.

< A pair with the lower stamp showing the Missing F Variety on the Fort James Overprints.

ᵛ Stamp showing ghosting effect.

He also pointed out that there are cases of strong ghosting; here a faint version of the overprint can be seen offset from the main one. It is not a true double print but a faint 'ghost' print probably caused by ink left on the offset plate from a previous print. These flaws are not the easiest to spot given that these overprints are in black ink on an already very dark stamp. Turn on all the lights and get the magnifying glasses out!





Blind Institute Cinderella Label

Member Roger Ramoutar shared this recent find. At first glance it seems to be a cinderella label printed for the Institute For the Blind, which is still in the same location today on Duke Street, in Port of Spain. Wikipedia defines a cinderella stamp as "virtually anything resembling a postage stamp, but not issued for postal purposes by a government postal administration". It is not known when this was made, if it was sold and if so for how much. If anyone has any further information please email the editor.

Reuben Ramkissoon (1929-2021)



It is with sadness that we have to mark the passing of leading Trinidad & Tobago philatelist Reuben (Ben) Ramkissoon. Ben was a life-member of the PSTT, but he was more than a Trinidad & Tobago collector; his other passions included Astrophilately and the Indian Independence leader Mahatma Gandhi. In these areas he built world class collections and became a leading authority. But his first love and his pride and joy was his Trinidad & Tobago collection, sections of which he regularly exhibited and won major awards.

Ben was born in Trinidad and attended the Caribbean Union College of Seventh Day Adventists in Maracas, St Joseph before leaving to finish his studies in the US and becoming a doctor and pathologist He settled in the Chicago area, but in his later years moved to the more amenable climate of California given his on-going struggle with Parkinson's disease.

Ben was in his element at Stamp Shows and Exhibitions where he often exhibited and volunteered. He was always engaging, generous and his enthusiasm was infectious. He was known personally to some members and will be missed by those who knew him.