

60 Years of the British West Indies Study Circle

By George Dunbar

In the first of a collection of articles appearing in this month's *GSM* to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the British West Indies Study Circle, Secretary, George Dunbar, gives a brief history of the Circle, reveals some of the planned anniversary celebrations and highlights a few of the many advantages membership has to offer.

The British West Indies Study Circle was founded in 1954. Its members collect and study the stamps and postal history of the Caribbean islands that were once colonies of Britain. Since its inception, members have met regularly to share displays of these treasures, to exchange postal material, and, perhaps above all, to exchange knowledge. Over time, the range of topics covered by the Circle has extended to include everything from revenues to Latin American offices. In 2014, the Circle celebrates its 60th anniversary, which will be marked with a special auction in April and what promises to be an exceptional display at the Royal Philatelic Society London in November. We are delighted now to be able to share a series of articles through the pages of *GSM* that highlight a few of the diverse topics this fascinating region has to offer.

High quality publications

In April 1954, the Circle published the first issue of the *Bulletin*, the Circle's official journal. Today, the *Bulletin*, now in colour, is published quarterly and is provided free to members. Early on, the *Bulletin* became a journal of record and much more than just a newsletter recording meetings. Articles report on new discoveries, new revelations from the archives, as well as ground-breaking new philatelic research. For anyone interested in Caribbean stamps or postal history, or for those requiring the most up to date specialised findings, the *Bulletin* is essential reading.

The Circle also publishes a variety of handbooks and study papers written by leading specialists, which provide a deeper and sustained examination of a particular subject. Peter Ford, the Circle Chairman, oversees this programme, seducing authors into the commitment required, supporting them as they write, and turning final manuscripts into beautiful editions. The update of Sir John Marriott's *Trinidad*, published jointly with the British Caribbean Philatelic Study Group, won a Gold award at Chicagopex 2010.

Annual auctions

Simon Goldblatt, with Nigel Chandler, produces an auction of extraordinary quality each year. In 2013, there are more than 650 lots, described in a 60-page catalogue. Simon makes a conscious effort to keep the auction accessible to all levels of collector, with lots ranging from specialist items so rare you

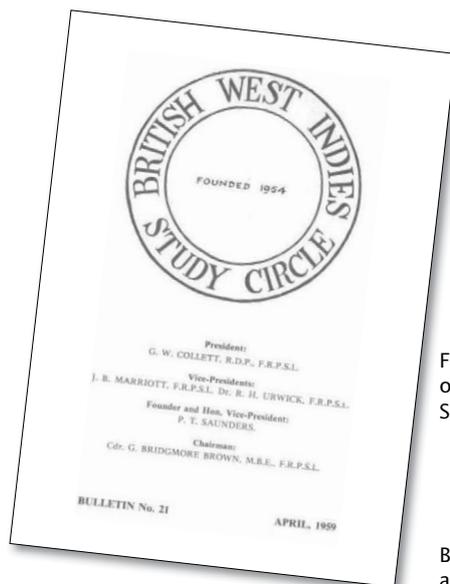


Fig 1 The front cover of the April 1959 Study Circle *Bulletin*

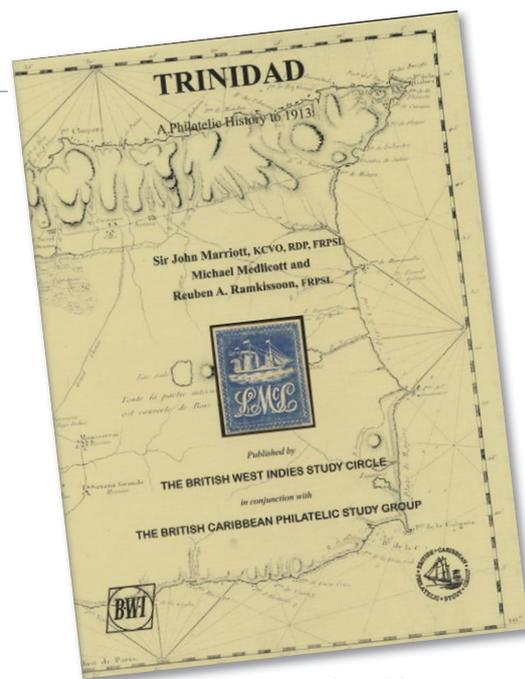


Fig 2 The gold medal winning handbook on Trinidad philatelic history to 1913

Below: Starred items from BWISC anniversary auction which takes place in April



Fig 3

Fig 4

Fig 5



might not see them on the market again for ten years, to many others that are available for a few pounds. His lot descriptions are sweet but acute, and are a treat to read.

The 60th anniversary auction, which will take place in late April, will include starred items of particular quality. Normally you must be a member to bid in Circle auctions, but in this special year everyone can bid for the 'starred' items. Among the most desirable lots already confirmed will be the Dominica 'One Penny' surcharge with thin line (SG 18) (Fig 3), the Tobago bisect with manuscript 1d. on the right half of a 6d. orange stamp (SG 6) (Fig 4), and the Cayman Islands hand-stamped 2½d. on 4d. (SG 35) (Fig 5). These beautiful rarities illustrate the local innovation needed to keep the postal service running smoothly through times of shortage, when any source of new supply was distant.

A special anniversary display

Charles Freeland, Circle President, is organising an anniversary display at the Royal Philatelic Society London (RPSL) on 6 November 2014, which will feature some of the greatest current collections. With the Circle team, he is curating one of the finest assemblies of West Indies philatelic material seen. Not to be missed, if you can make it to Marylebone in November.

The Circle's very first AGM was in January 1955 at the RPSL in London, and was followed by a dinner at the Devonshire Arms nearby. Always the atmosphere at meetings has been welcoming. In even numbered years we meet at Autumn Stampex for informal displays, and in odd numbered years we hold a two-day convention, with displays, a bourse, and a good dinner. Every year we have an AGM, auction, and gossip over coffee. Come along and join us, you will be very welcome.

To find out more about the Circle, visit our website (www.bwisc.org) where you will find issues of the *Bulletin* prior to 2010, information about specialist study groups, and galleries of some wonderful displays given at recent meetings. Circle publications are distributed by Pennymead Books (www.pennymead.com, 01423 865 962). If you are interested in joining the Circle you can find the relevant forms on the website. Alternatively, you can email secretary@bwisc.org (phone 01926 315 793) for more information.