

Danielle Delon
The Bridges of Trinidad and Tobago

On 18th February 1797 Spanish rule ended in Trinidad with little development of the island. When the British gained control agricultural development showed great promise. Successful established sugar and cacao estates, showed the island's potential as a source of great revenue. Initially, inhospitable swamps, mountains, rivers and flood plains challenged development and in order to facilitate better movement of goods from far-flung places to distribution houses, building bridges became a priority. Servicing these isolated estates in such a diverse terrain required an imaginative response and various forms of connection. Thus ferries, concrete and iron bridges, suspension bridges, railway tunnels and overhead bridges were constructed in Trinidad. Tobago, which changed hands thirty-three times before being ceded to Britain in 1814, once had a viaduct and a system of small aqueducts, some used as sewers supporting river crossings remain in use. Trinidad and Tobago administratively combined, became a single crown colony in 1889. In tracing the story behind these bridges we see how the British Colonial Office succeeded in making both islands sources of immense wealth to the Crown coffers. Amerindian and Venezuelan peons, French planters, African slaves Chinese and East Indian labourers together with immigrants from England, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Germany, Syria, and Lebanon were all drawn to the island.

As trade increased villages developed, and the bridge became a nucleus of socio economic growth. I was fortunate to meet people who willingly shared their local stories. I feel compelled to recognise the evolution of the technology of bridge making. With the explosion of vehicular traffic, modern technology has been applied to the provision of additional road space in many countries. Trinidad has also kept pace with the times, as evidenced by a growing number of roadways arching over various parts of the island taking our bridge building into the future.