

UPDATE FROM MORAY HOUSE TRUST: NOVEMBER 2015

A few months ago, in September, Moray House Trust inaugurated a new series of **Lunchtime Sessions** to try to engage smaller audiences on topics that remain taboo in Guyana such as alcoholism, domestic abuse, child abuse and cruelty to animals. We invited a member of Al-Anon to speak about her experience of living with an alcoholic in the family. Al-Anon is an international network of support groups set up to provide understanding, strength and hope to families and friends of problem drinkers.

At the end of September the Trust organised a seminar on **The Sugar Industry in Guyana** where a panel of four experts presented their views on the sugar industry.

For *Highlights: The Sugar Industry in Guyana*

See You Tube Link: <https://youtu.be/OWZBLDqjjCI>



One striking aspect of the event was how convincing a case could be made both for and against the continuation of sugar. Dr Allyson Stoll showed that, in the nineteenth century, the industry faced equally daunting challenges (for example in terms of labour shortages and access to markets). She provided fascinating insights into the quality and depth of scientific research and development that took place and how these underpinned progress: engineers on plantations in British Guiana designed and pioneered new tools and machinery in their cane fields and factories which were subsequently patented and adopted elsewhere.

Others, after diligent trials and research, successfully bred new strains of cane that were exported to many other countries. Dr Stoll highlighted the absence of a cane-breeding programme and indeed any formal structure for research and development as a signal omission at present.

Highlights: Not for want of 'go-aheadism' in field and factory: sugar and technology in C19 Guyana

Dr Allyson Stoll

You Tube Link: <https://youtu.be/uGrjxV9pumo>

Rawle Lucas presented a sober assessment of the sugar industry and highlighted the importance of fiscal prudence and public accountability in charting a course for GuySuCo, a public enterprise. He pointed out that Guyana is a marginal player in the international sugar market, a market characterised by increasingly competitive pricing at a time when Guyana's production costs are spiralling. In his presentation, entitled, '*Sugar and Guyana, An Exasperating Relationship*', Mr Lucas identified several areas of concern: the structure of ownership of the components of the industry, the element of risk involved at all levels and the size of the debt incurred by GuySuCo. He cited statistics to show that, of approximately 1700 strike actions since 1986, 95% occurred in the sugar industry and he reminded the audience that employment represents two-thirds of industry costs at present.

Highlights: Sugar and Guyana: an exasperating relationship

Rawle Lucas

You Tube Link: https://youtu.be/GuCS_Uf7WOs

Barry Newton, whose familiarity with the sugar industry in Guyana extends over a period of 50 years, presented a paper (read by the moderator) on the markets for Guyana sugar. In it, he echoed Mr Lucas's bleak assessment of Guyana's prospects for assured sales in Europe and spoke of a 'seismic shift' in traditional arrangements when the second phase of the reform to the Common Agricultural Policy and Sugar Regime Reform takes effect in October 2017. He highlighted the need to refocus on markets closer to home, principally within Caricom, and the failure of Caricom and Cariforum to seriously address this. Mr Newton pointed to the potential for a substantial expansion into North Caribbean markets, particularly Haiti, a 'key potential consumer with no production facilities and a fast growing population of about 10 million'.

The Markets for Guyana Sugar

Barry Newton

You Tube Link: <https://youtu.be/R0AMZOsYd-A>

Vic Oditt, who chaired the Board of GuySuCo for a decade, made a spirited case for '*Restoring GuySuCo to Profitability*' in the final presentation of the evening. He contextualised some of the statistics being repeated in the media and queried the disposal of significant land assets belonging to GuySuCo for which the entity has never received payment. Echoing Barry Newton, Mr Oditt spoke of the need for a completely new approach to growing sugar where the possibilities of co-generation, ethanol production and added value (e.g rum production) are fully exploited and sugar itself is a 'byproduct'.



Restoring GuySuCo to Profitability

Vic Oditt

You Tube Link: <https://youtu.be/axeDQucyozy>

One area of absolute consensus among all of the presenters was that yields must be improved. Mr Oditt described a trial scheme at Uitvlugt in 2001-2002 where gangs of workers were given plots to self-manage and were paid incentives if yields increased. The success of this system of 'incentive-based husbandry' was such that one would have expected it to be repeated and extended to other plantations. This was not the case.

In mid-October the Trust welcomed Bert Carter (civil engineer, amateur astronomer and an aspiring authority on Georgetown) to conduct **A Walk around Olde Georgetowne.**

Bert is that rare creature who, though steeped in knowledge and academic qualifications, can convey ideas simply, clearly and without condescension. He combines an endlessly enquiring mind with humility. In his own words: "...always keep a small mouth but have a big ear and you are bound to learn. Failing to ask a question is to remain a fool for a lifetime, ask a question and be a fool only for five minutes."

Bert's contribution to Guyana extends well beyond his tenure in various posts and committees, though these, in themselves, form an impressive list. Beginning with the David Rose Centre for Boys in East Ruimveldt in 1970, he has guided the construction of many of our educational, cultural and social institutions. In 2000 alone, he oversaw the extension of the National Library, the refurbishment of Camp Street Avenue (with David de Caires, Albert Rodrigues and others), the re-building of the GSPCA building at Robb Street and Orange Walk and the design and construction of the Cheddi Jagan lecture rooms at the university campus.



He was also involved in the rehabilitation of the Theatre Guild and continues to take a strong interest in this as well as the long-discussed rehabilitation of City Hall.

The first clip from this talk: *Walk with Me: Peters Hall to Lombard Street* can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/LrQgKQ-M07w>