

## Barbados Shortwave Redux

by

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If you were a shortwave broadcast DXer 60 or 70 years ago, Barbados was probably on your want list. Adrian Peterson tells about Barbados shortwave in Wavescan No. N274, May 25, 2014, "[The Voice of the Eastern Caribbean on Shortwave: The Barbados Story.](#)" In this article we add some graphics and some additional facts.

**Further Broadcasts  
Of Cricket Results.**

There will be further broadcasts of the result of the cricket test matches in Barbados by Amateur Radio Station VP6YB, operated by Mr. Thomas Archer.

Play yesterday was broadcast in four transmissions, as on the first occasion, and will also be put on the air to-day, Thursday and Friday in a similar way. The times will be 10.30 a.m., 12.15 p.m., 3.00 p.m., and 4.45 p.m. (local time).

The station will operate on a frequency of 7022 Kilocycles (approximately 40 metres).

The first broadcast by VP6YB of this cricket series, took place on December 29. The early transmissions could not be heard but there was some improvement in the afternoon and the final transmission at 4.45 p.m. came over with great strength. There was however morse interference due to the fact that Mr. Archer could only operate in the Amateur band.

Signal strength of these transmissions varies and sometimes will be found better than at others, but there is a strong likelihood of radio owners in Jamaica picking up the transmission at 4.45 p.m. to-day, Thursday and Friday clearly enough to be able to get, at all events, the substance of the information broadcast.

As announced before, VP6YB will be glad to get reports from Jamaica as to signal strength, quality of transmissions and any information listeners may care to send.

THE PIONEER AMATEUR RADIO TELEGRAPHY AND TELEPHONY STATION IN

# BARBADOS VP6YB

*Owner & Operator:* THOS. A. ARCHER,  
"Craigston"  
Aquatic Gardens, Barbados, B.W.I.

*Transmitter:* Crystal Controlled on 7090, 14180, & 14312 k/cs.  
Frequency generally used: 14312 k/cs.  
Input to Final Class C Power Amplifier 75 Watts.  
Modulation by Class B system 100%.

*Antenna:* 66-foot Hertz, voltage feed.

*Remarks:* Your report has been checked with my Station Log and found to be correct. Thank you for your co-operation. 73.

"Claradon", Pine Road, Barbados.

To WLEET your Telephony CW Sigs wkd

W  
A  
C

# VP6YB

1735 Gmt 21, 21937..... on 14 MC  
QSA 5, R...7 QSB to R...7 QRM  
Receiver  
8 tube Super

W  
A  
C

TRANSMITTER.  
CO—FD—Buffer—P.P./P.A.  
with pair 35Ts in final.  
Frequency: 14050 kc.  
Modulator: Class B. 800's.  
Antennae 2-½ waves in phase

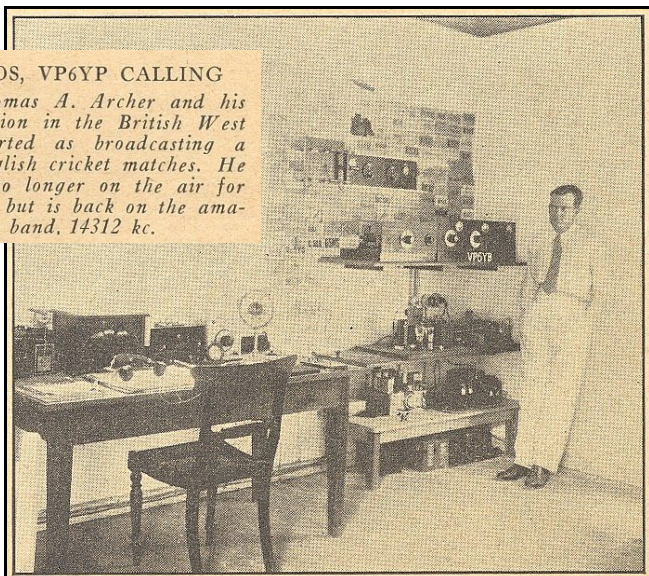
73. THOS. A. ARCHER  
ARRL ASSOC. I.R.E.

As in many countries, early broadcasting in Barbados was a product of experimentation by an amateur operator. In this case it was Thomas A. Archer, VP6YB, who transmitted live commentary on cricket matches for the benefit of people on the island and

beyond. The broadcasts were made on behalf of the Barbados Radio Association, presumably the local ham organization. The frequency usually reported was 7070 kHz. The article on p. 1, from the January 9, 1935 edition of the Kingston, Jamaica *Daily Gleaner*, suggests that these broadcasts started in 1934. (A ham broadcaster was also active in Trinidad.)

**BARBADOS, VP6YP CALLING**

Here is Thomas A. Archer and his amateur station in the British West Indies, reported as broadcasting a series of English cricket matches. He says he is no longer on the air for broadcasting but is back on the amateur band, 14312 kc.



**BARBADOS**  
**B. W. I.**

**VP6YB**      THOS. A. ARCHER  
"Claradon"  
Pine Road.

**Xmtr:** Crystal Controlled on 7025, 14050 K/cs  
Input to Power Amplifier 100/200 watts  
Modulation Class B System.

**Antenna** Two half-waves IN-Phase.  
8 JKB beam.

Your report of 3.23.38 greatly appreciated      73

**VP6YB**

VP6YB is undoubtedly one of the DX 'phone stations best known to W hams. With Tom Archer, the OM and Mrs. Archer (better known as Nancy), both ardent hams, the station is probably the most active of any in the West Indies.

Tom started out in 1930 with a 10 Hartley which was soon converted into an m.o.p.a. rig. A year or so later, Tom married. Although she had shown little previous interest, Mrs. Archer soon became as enthusiastic as the OM himself. A crystal-controlled rig was soon built and a short time later a modulator was added. Since then, VP6YB has been operated on 'phone almost exclusively, although Tom swears that he has a key in the circuit.

The present transmitter covers the 7-, 14- and 28-Mc. bands. The 802 Tri-tet drives an 807 buffer-doubler which provides sufficient excitation on all bands for the p.p. 35T final. Normal input is 175 watts. On the audio side, a Brush B-1 mike feeds into a 57 pentode-57 triode-2A3's speech-amplifier driver unit. Type 800's are used in the modulator.

The main antenna is a 2-section 8JK affair directed towards U. S. A. The feeders are tuned so that it may be operated on any of the bands. There is also a pair of half-waves in phase fed by two single-wire m.i. lines directed towards Europe. A doublet is used for Australia and the Far East. The most popular antenna, however, is the 3-element rotatable antenna for 28 Mc. elevated 40 feet above the ground.

The receiver is a ten-tube superhet made by Philips.

Tom is a technical assistant in the Submarine Cable Division of Cable and Wireless, Ltd. Both he and Nancy are yachting enthusiasts. Nancy's flawless operating was one of the high lights of the last DX 'phone contest.

The tracks of the VP6YB broadcasts after their startup are unclear. The photo above appeared in the July 1935 issue of *Radio News* (p. 21), where it was said that VP6YB was no longer broadcasting. Thereafter, some reports on transmissions from Archer appear to have been for regular ham operations, on 20 meters. In December 1939, *RADEX* (p. 27) carried a report from another Barbados amateur that ham radio had been banned on Barbados as of September 1, 1939, but that the government was using VP6YB as a local broadcasting station. Whatever the exact duration of the VP6YB broadcasts in the 1930s, they were surely over by the end of the decade. An interesting report on VP6YB in *QST* of September 1939 (p. 112, above) makes no mention of them.

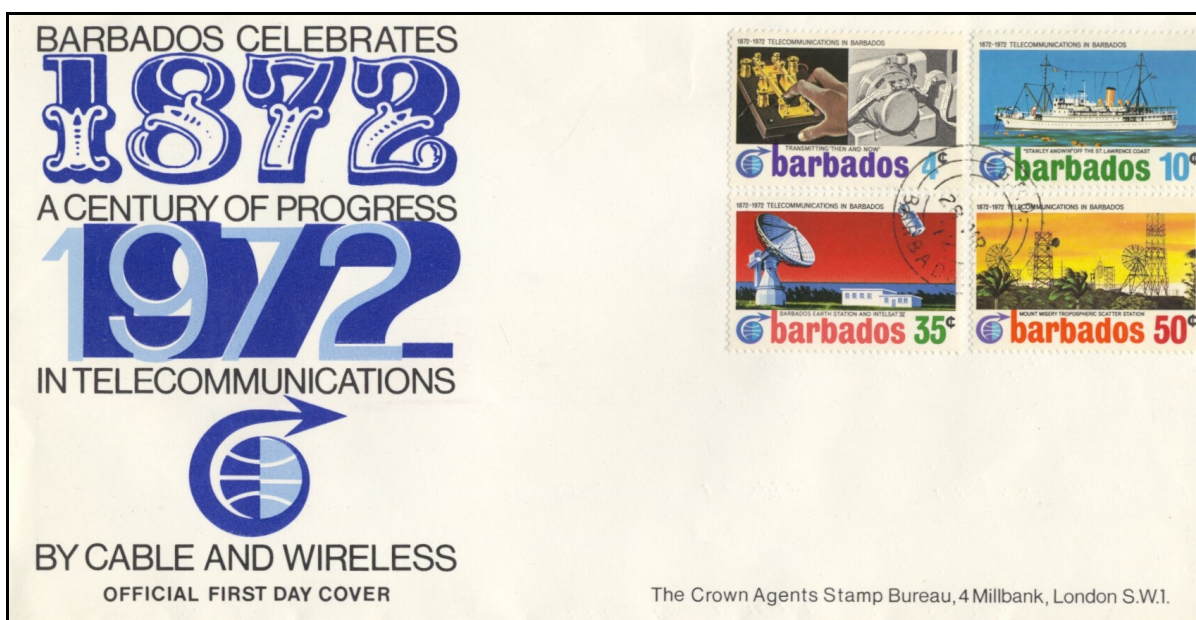
In Barbados the principal vehicle for reaching the general public by "radio" was not

terrestrial broadcasting but rather rediffusion, or wired broadcasting—what we would call cable radio. It began on the island in 1935 in the form of Radio Distribution (Barbados) Ltd., and it lasted for over half a century, until 1997. Distribution was over telephone lines at first, then over the company’s own lines. Radio Distribution had no studio until 1947, but relayed the BBC and North American shortwave broadcasters. In 1951 the company was acquired by a British firm, and Barbados Rediffusion Service Ltd. was born. The history of the Barbados wired network, and its technical side, are recounted at the [Rediffusion Barbados](#) website. Over the years a standard broadcasting capability grew up on the island as well, in the form of government-owned Radio Barbados (founded in 1963), and Rediffusion-owned Voice of Barbados (1981).

The history of traditional albeit non-broadcast, radio in Barbados goes back to 1914, when ship-to-shore spark equipment was installed under callsign VPO. In 1924 RCA replaced this facility with a new one, and 20 years later it was replaced again, this time by a Marconi installation which was still called VPO. In 1949 it became ZNX.

The big player in Barbados non-broadcast radio was the worldwide British company, Cable & Wireless. In London, in 1929, the Marconi wireless system—originally long wave but by then well along in the development of shortwave—was combined with various private cable companies to form Cables [plural] & Wireless Ltd. Further combination led to the formation of Cable [singular] & Wireless Ltd. in 1934. Nominally a private company, “C&W” was government created and government regulated. It brought together the two systems of long distance communication which had theretofore largely developed separately—radio and cable.

As indicated on the first day cover below, Cable & Wireless traces its history in Barbados back to 1872. That was the year the undersea telegraph cable first reached the island. This was under the auspices of the West India and Panama Telegraph Co. Ltd., a C&W predecessor



company. West India was part of a grand plan for the provision of telegraph services throughout the West Indies and the Caribbean. West India was an innovator; in addition to traditional telegraph messaging services, it also provided a daily news bulletin. These started in 1872 and became regularized a few years later.

In 1938, C&W operations in the region became known as Cable & Wireless (West Indies) Ltd. Barbados had become the hub of cable operations in the area, and its technical and other capabilities were the most advanced. During the inter-war years, most of the staff at C&W outposts throughout the British West Indies were Barbadians. And during World War II, Barbados provided a critical link in communications between London and Australia. Cable remained dominant within C&W through the war years, in part due to the need for security in wartime communications.<sup>1</sup>

Early in 1940 there were reports of a daily government news broadcast on 3950 kHz. at 2330-2400 UTC from VPO. Beginning in 1944, Cable & Wireless commenced shortwave relays of certain cricket and tennis matches, and horse races, from the rediffusion company. The target audiences were the other British dependencies in the Caribbean, e.g. Trinidad and Jamaica. At first the call letters were still VPO, and frequencies included 10605 and 11475 kHz. In the January 1948 issue of *Radio and Hobbies in Australia* (p. 84), an Australian listener reported hearing this announcement at the close of a horse race:

*We would remind listeners that you are listening to station VPO3 in Bridgetown, Barbados, transmitting on 10605 kc., 28.29 meters. This station is owned and operated by Cable and Wireless (West Indies) Ltd. We shall be on the air again on Saturday, when we will transmit the first race at 5:30 p.m. Hello Trinidad. We hope you received this broadcast okay and wish you all a good evening.*

The call letters changed to ZNX in 1949, and the frequency reported most often after that was ZNX32, 7547 kHz. The Cable & Wireless station on Barbados, when it was operating in a utility-format, was reported often in the DX press during the 1950s, typically with good signals. The broadcast transmissions were heard less often, but this was because they were on the air only a few months a year, and then only a few days in the month. Without advance information you could spend a lot of time tuning around without result. But when they were heard, signals in North America were good, as would be expected of 5 kw.

Both Cable and Wireless and Barbados Rediffusion were good verifiers of reports on these broadcasts. On the next page you can see a QSL letter that was received from Barbados Rediffusion by Roger Legge in 1952. It contains some interesting details about the C&W relays.

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<sup>1</sup>These details are from Hugh Barty-King, *Girdle Round the Earth* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1979).

BARBADOS **REDIFFUSION** SERVICE LTD.

DIRECTORS:

A. S. BRYDEN (CHAIRMAN)  
J. H. WILKINSON  
C. A. L. GALE  
K. T. MURRAY

TRAFALGAR STREET, BRIDGETOWN,  
BARBADOS, B.W.I.

TELEPHONES: 3641

5019

CABLES: DISTRIBUTION  
BARBADOS

Mr. Roger Legge Jr.  
To:- 85 Lee Road,  
Scarsdale,  
New York, U.S.A.

Date... 3rd March.....1952.

We confirm your reception report and we thank you for your information.

This station is a Wired Broadcasting System, but special events of interest to other islands in the Caribbean Area are broadcast over a Cable & Wireless (West Indies) Ltd., transmitter.

Since most of these programmes originate during daylight hours, Cable & Wireless Ltd., choose the frequency 7.547 K/cs, a wavelength of 39.76 metres, on a directional aerial designed to give a good signal in Trinidad, British Guiana, and Jamaica.

The transmitter used is of 5 KW power.

Our station comprises a remote reception station for short wave programmes, Central Control desk with two studios, transcription, turntables, modern tape recorder, and telephone lines permanently connected to distant Outside Broadcast points which are frequently used.

Our Audio Frequency Power Output to feed about 5500 subscribers is  $1\frac{1}{4}$  KW. We estimate 30,000 listeners.

The only regular features broadcast over Cable & Wireless are Intercolonial Cricket, Tennis and Turf Club Race meetings. Of these, we can only give you approximate times for the Race Meetings, which are 12.30 to 17.30 (Barbados time) or 16.30 to 21.30 G.M.T. on a Saturday and a Thursday at the beginning of March, and August, and mid-November each year.

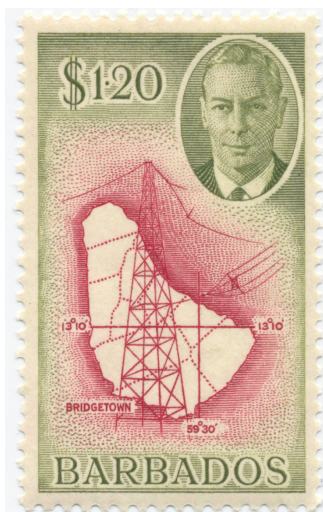
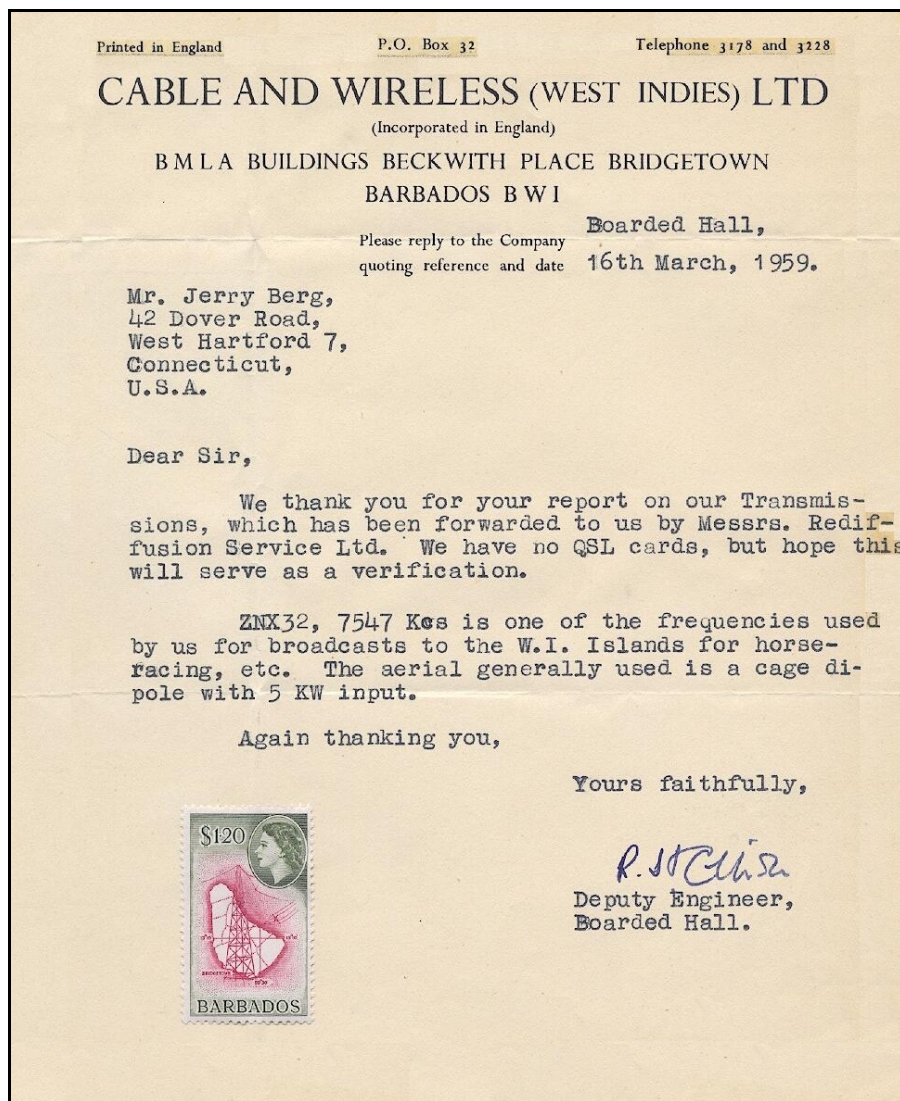
Yours sincerely,

*David Robinson*

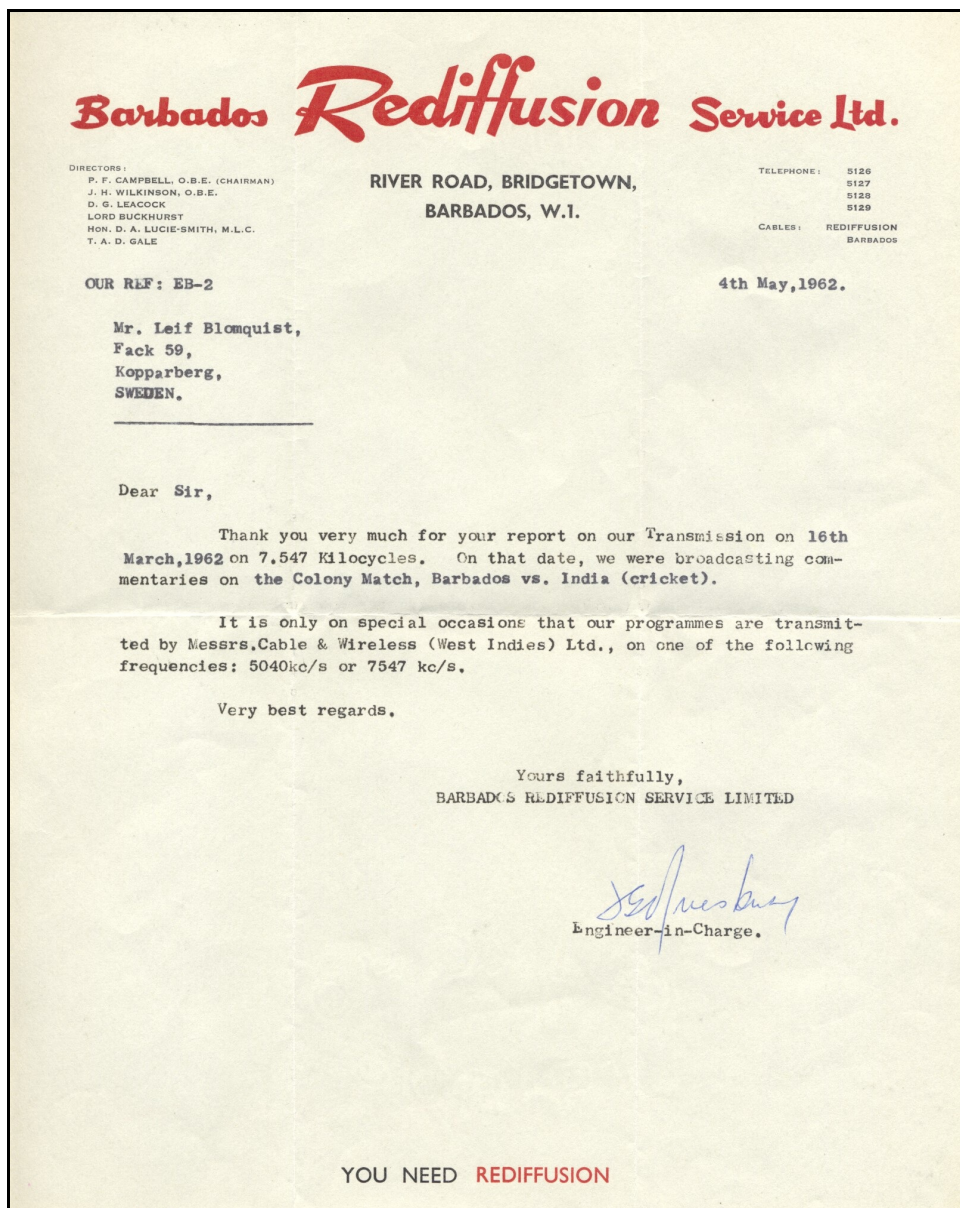
General Manager.

I heard ZNX32 on February 28, 1959, from 2116 to 2200 UTC. It was a Saturday, and I was 15 years old. I sent off a report to Barbados Rediffusion Service, which sent it on to Cable & Wireless (I'm not sure if at my request or not), and C&W responded by letter dated March 16 (below). They must have enclosed a stamp, which I then attached to the letter. Below is an enlarged view of the stamp, which was issued in 1956 and shows a profile of Queen Elizabeth II, whose reign began in 1952. The stamp was a reissue of the 1950 version, also shown below, which pictured the Queen's predecessor, King George VI.

The stamp depicts a tower, whose character as a radio tower rather than an electrical transmission tower is suggested by what appears to be an antenna hanging off the right side. It looks like a cage dipole, which is the kind of antenna C&W was using, according to their letter.



The Cable & Wireless relays continued into the 1960s. They were referenced in the World Radio Handbook in the years 1952-1957 (except 1953), and 1962-1965. Below is another QSL from Barbados Rediffusion, this one from 1962.

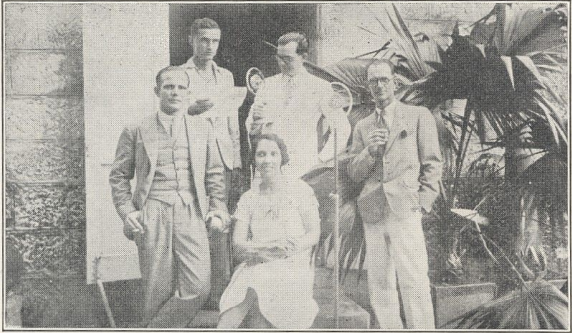


It is interesting that these relays of sports events started out as a ham initiative, and were taken up by Cable & Wireless after Thomas Archer had ended his broadcasts, whenever exactly that was. But the 1939 *QST* report (p. 2 above) says that Archer was a Technical Assistant in the Sub-marine Cable Division of C&W. It is hard not to believe that he was personally involved in getting his employer to pick up these broadcasts where he left off.

## ADDENDUM

Here is another brief reference to Thomas Archer and VP6YB, this one from the May 1935 issue of the bulletin of the International Short Wave Club. (The reference to VP6YW is probably a typo.)

10      ALWAYS MENTION THE CLUB WHEN BUYING



**First Broadcast From Barbados**

Short Wave listeners a few weeks ago had the opportunity of listening to a very unique broadcast. It was the first broadcast ever made from the Island of Barbados. This broadcast came over station VP6YB at Bridgetown, a regular amateur station which was turned into a broadcast station for this one broadcast. This station is operated by club-member Mr. T. Aubrey Archer and is now heard on the 20 meter amateur band. Above we see the operating personnel of VP6YB, all of whom are or have been I. S.W.C. members. Left to right they are: T. W. Bowen, J. Collin Bellamy, Miss L. Bascom, T. Aubrey Archer and H. C. Rose. We would like to see VP6YW become a regular broadcast station.

VOL. VI      MAY, 1935      NO. 8

# INTERNATIONAL



# SHORT WAVE

# RADIO

- Short Wave News.
- Accurate Station List.
- Hourly Tuning Guide.
- Police Stations.
- Aircraft Stations.
- And Other Features.

THE VOICE OF THE  
**INTERNATIONAL SHORT WAVE CLUB**  
EAST LIVERPOOL, OHIO, U. S. A.