

# THE CEYLANKAN

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## CONTENTS

### EDITORIAL P1

### PHOTOGRAPHY IN CEYLON P1

### IN SEARCH OF ARAB SHIPS

S.DEVENDRA P3

### THE OTHER NORTH - R ST JOHN

P7

### BIRDSONG AND FROGS - S. DE-

VENDRA P9

### COLLECTING FOUNTAIN PENS - M

ABAYEKON P11

### NAILHOLES P13

### COLONIAL HANGOVER P14

### NEW MEMBERS P16

### GATEWAY TO SRI LANKA P17

### GENEALOGY EXCHANGE P19

### JEWS IN CEYLON - V.VAMADEVAN

P19

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR P22

### BEGININGS - D.GOODRICH P24

### BOOK REVIEW P25

### TIGER TOPS P27

### MELBOURNE CHAPTER MEETS

P27

## EDITORIAL

Our February meeting saw a large audience enjoy a video, presented by Dr Harold Gunatilleke, entitled **"This is the Beginning"**. It was an excellent production and was extremely well received. The video was about the Island's history and heritage, and is Harold's maiden production in this field. The video takes one first through the pages of the Mahawamsa, and starts with the story of the King of Vanga beautifully portrayed.

The camera then proceeds through the glory that was Polonaruwa during the 13th Century illustrating the struggle between the Cholas of south India, and the Sinhalese Kings. During this period three Kings stand out in bold relief - Vijayabahu I, Parakramabahu the Great, and Nissankamala. The film captures the great monuments and buildings of architectural beauty adorning Polonaruwa that have withstood the ravages of man and the elements.

We are still looking for suggestions for an emblem or letterhead for the Society. Several ideas have been sent in but we believe there are plenty more among readers that have not arrived YET. The next few weeks should decide what our symbol will be, so "keep all them letters comin' in"! This year we should have a few things finalised: Our Constitution and Articles, Emblem and perhaps a cover for our Journal. We need further ideas for the latter.

## PHOTOGRAPHY IN CEYLON FROM PROTOTYPE TO PLATÉ

1839 was a revolution year, the year photography was invented, changing

forever the methods previously used for recording images: painting, drawing, engraving etc, being suddenly and decisively eclipsed by a new imaging medium.

### 19th Century Images



Sinhalese women from southern Ceylon.

The early photographers on the Island were evident from the 1840s, the first being a FJ Barrow, a daguerreotypist, though none of his images have survived. The first photographs existing today were taken in 1852, by Frederick Frieberg. 92 handcoloured salt prints he created have survived. James Parting was another early imagemaker, selling his business in 1860 to S. Slinn & Co, later to become WLH Skeen & Co, the firm that for some forty years left a wonderful record of 19th century Ceylon, and whose images are still able to be found around the world. By the late 1860s they had a catalogue of at least 400 views of everything from landscapes to portraits, city views to animal studies.

Charles Scowen & Co arrived in the early 1870s. He developed a large business displaying great artistic and technical skills. The works of Scowen and



Skeen form the bulk of images existing from the 19th century, but there were many other photographers in the latter part of this period. James Birch and then Lieutenant Warren Stewart of the Royal Engineers photographed Polonnaruwa in the 1860s though the most comprehensive series of images of the ancient sites was by Joseph Lawton in 1870-1, who tragically died of unknown causes in England in 1872, after falling ill subsequent to his photographic visits to the sites.

Of course the work of the wonderful amateur photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, must be mentioned here. She was the subject of a talk by Hugh Karunanayake at our first formal meeting (*and mentioned in another article in this edition*). Julia lived with her husband in Ceylon for only four years, moving there in 1875 to be closer to her sons who worked on the Island. She had had a successful few years as a photographic portraitist in England and continued with some outstanding open air studies of Kalutara women. She died after a short illness and was buried at the church at Bogawantalawa.

Little other amateur photography took place until the 1890s when newly developed equipment put filming within the reach of more people both by price and the availability of the hand held camera. The professional photographer, who had had a monopoly for nearly half a century, was now in competition in some respects with 'everyone'. Many firms, too slow to adapt to the changes occurring, went into gradual decline.

One company which successfully made the transition by adapting to the changing world of photography was Plate & Co. They are still in the forefront of Sri Lankan commercial imagemaking one hundred and ten years later!! Plate & Co commenced business in a small studio in the Bristol Hotel, Colombo, in 1890. AWA Plate and his wife Clara founded the company, at first called Colonial Studio, producing similar views to Skeen and Co. The couple could see that they would have to adapt to changing times and commenced supplying cameras and equipment - films, developing material for processing, etc for customers. They also realised the potential for postcard sales of which, by 1907, they were selling over half a million copies each year.

From the outset, Plate & Co progressed rapidly, and in 1892 the proprietors moved to larger premises in Galle Road, Colpetty, covering some 1 1/2 acres. They were quick to take advantage of the foreigners coming and going at the Colombo Jetty, and

also the cosmopolitan and office clientele of the city. This was a time when Colonials were enjoying the privileges of being the 'rulers' of Ceylon.

In 1917, Mr HH Heinemann, the German born brother-in-law of the founder, took control of the company (incidentally this was the year the current Managing Director Mr Arthur P Fonseka, was born). Heinemann was a good businessman and expanded Plates from just photography to commercial artists, process block makers, printers, importers of photographic material, interior decorators, etc, and he was instrumental in assembling a well-stocked library - PLATE'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY, catering mainly for the planter families. Branches of the company opened at Keyser Street, Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Galle. The Galle Road premises maintained its profile as the Head office, with the rare distinction of owning its own cricket grounds and pavilion on the land at Colpetty.

The company continued to flourish, surviving the depression years and World War II. But Plate hit a bad patch just before Independence when the company had to face a major strike, lasting over 6 months, prompted by a strong union leader. This setback together with other misfortunes and post Independence activities, which had little appeal for the expatriate community, further disadvantaged the company. The result was the forced selling of the Colpetty property due to bank pressure. A 14 year litigation process in the Supreme Court ensued, and thereby a niche in the law annals of the country.

At this point, the managing director's wife, Mrs Edith Heinemann, pleaded with the current MD, Mr Arthur P Fonseka, who was then employed as the firm's accountant, to take control of the company. Restructuring was hard going, and during this time the court judgement was given in favour of the litigant, causing Plate to have to move to its present site, which was the residence of the new managing director. It was converted into a studio in 1974.

It should be mentioned that the Plate 'Vintage Collection' is a treasure valued by many photograph collectors and researchers pursuing visual records of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. So many of these depict the life style of those times, places of worship, important events, trades of the country, as well as images of tea, rubber, coconut, coffee and cinnamon plantations. A visit to the studio is best taken with plenty of time in hand as the photographs are a real treat to sort through. Possession of



Plate's "100 Best Views of Ceylon", should be a must for all exSri Lankans. Images of how things were around a century ago.

# NEXT MEETING!

27 May 2000 (Saturday)

Commencing 6.30pm

Willow Park Hall

25 Edgeworth David Avenue  
Hornsby

1. Presentation On - The Armitage Family  
and Its Connections With 19th Century  
Ceylon - by Mr John Armitage, Former  
Member of The Australian Parliament For  
Chifley and Mitchell

2. Launch Of The Book 'The Story Of The  
Muslims In Sri Lanka -  
By Vama Vamadevan

RSVP to Hugh, Michael or Vama on members listed in ad-  
joining column.

IN SEARCH OF ARAB SHIPS AND  
SAILORS - A PERSONAL ODYSSEY  
By Somasiri Devendra

(Text of a lecture delivered before the Sri Lanka  
Historical Association.)

My personal voyage of discovery began, unbeknow-  
ingly, on a hot afternoon in Trincomalee about thirty  
years ago. Twenty-five years later, when I found my-  
self scrambling among the scaffolding of a traditional  
Arabian Dhow-building shipyard, it was not yet over.  
Even as I stand here tonight, new material,

like the stone anchors we found in Galle, this year,  
constantly turns up: so I doubt if it will ever end.

It began at a time when I was a naval officer who,  
the Dockyard workers, knew was interested in all  
things old and wonderful. A worker attached to the  
Civil Engineer's section rushed up to me, saying  
that while they were clearing the undergrowth in  
their backyard, they had come across a stone slab  
inscribed in unknown letters. I lost no time in going  
there and what I saw was a beautifully engraved  
limestone Arab inscription. This was my introduc-  
tion to Arab gravestones, and I knew nothing about  
them, except that I had to get this one deciphered.  
With my father's help, I sent a rubbing to  
Dr.Z.A.Desai, Superintending Epigraphist for Ara-  
bic and Persian Inscriptions, of the Indian Dept. of  
Archaeology. He identified it as the gravestone of  
"the noble, the pious (and) chaste lady... daughter of  
Amir Badru'd-Din Husain, son of Ah al-Halabi"  
who had died on Monday, 17th. September 729 or  
929 after Hijra (the slab is damaged here) which  
makes it either 12th. September 1329 or 17th.  
September 1523 of the Christian era. The full text  
and details were published in the Journal of the  
Royal Asiatic Society of 1970. Coincidentally, it

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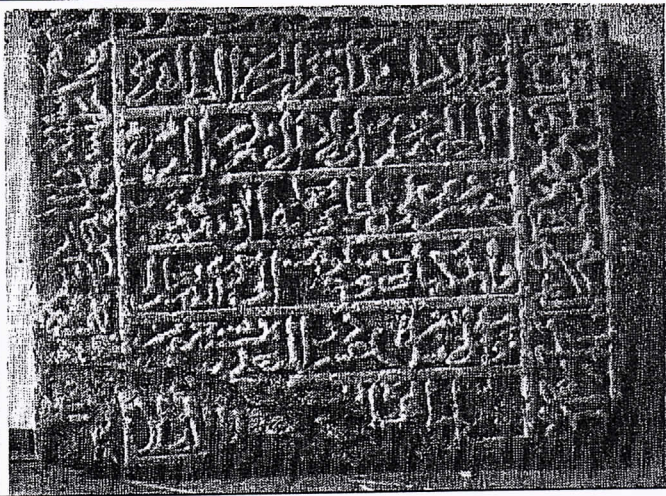
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Arabic Inscription from Trincomalee  
(courtesy Journal Of The Royal Asiatic Society Sri Lanka Branch)

turned out to be the only hard evidence that Arab ladies had come to this country: it was long thought the Arabs left their womenfolk behind at home.

My attempts at writing up that paper opened my eyes to other Arab inscriptions discovered in Sri Lanka. Their contents made sense to me in terms of a line of inquiry that had been taking shape in my mind for some time. In the Navy, if one has an inquiring mind, one becomes very conscious of history, as the seaman's calling is one of great antiquity. I had, meanwhile, already begun to seek historical references to Sri Lankan ships, maritime activities and contacts with foreign seamen, and similar matters. I would watch fishermen going about the business tending to their craft and was able to recognize their very sure and professional approach. In Trincomalee, I found an Islamic community that was very specifically connected to fishing and coastal shipping and the use of a very distinctive craft. All this raised many questions - what kind of ships did we Sri Lankans build and sail? What kind of seamen had we been? What contacts did we have with foreign ships and seamen? Did we have a special relationship with the Arabs who established their communities here, inter-married with our peoples and yet preserved a very specific identity of their own? Did we absorb elements of shipbuilding from them? Did we belong to the same tradition of shipbuilding as they or were we different?

My search for answers was done in fits and starts, with references scribbled on bits of paper and stored till I had enough material to tie all this to-

gether. I had already collected references to other Arabic inscriptions. Since they were few and had been read by epigraphists from many different parts of the world at long intervals of time, there was a lack uniformity in the way they had been studied. To clarify this, I carried on my correspondence with the Indian epigraphists, who were able to correct certain misconceptions that we, in Sri Lanka, had accepted over the years: for example, correcting an incorrectly identified slab in the Colombo Museum. I corresponded with other amateur researchers in the field and collected references, resulting in a paper embodying all my findings, titled "New Light on Arabic Lithic Records" in the 1990 publication: "Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea".

Two points of interest: we have Arabic inscriptions from all major areas that are, even now, connected with shipping: Jaffna, Trincomalee, Galle & Colombo; and in an isolated creek, or cove in the inner harbour of Trincomalee - presently called Nicholson's Cove - we have the site of a very specifically Arab maritime colony which had been continuously occupied for at least 200 years. From a seaman's point of view, this is an ideal spot for sailors to ride out the inter-monsoonal storm period, till the wind changed to enable them to sail the rest of the way across the Bay of Bengal.

Nicholson's Cove is a narrow inlet, sheltered by parallel hilly ridges from the winds, with a shelving beach where ships could be beached for repairs, and a plentiful supply of sweet water. Unfortunately, during WWII, the availability of water made the British military authorities choose this site for a large camp: there they discovered three gravestones, two readable, one of them being the one mentioned above, and the other of "the martyr Qadi 'Afifu'd-Din 'Abdu'llah son of 'Abdu'r-Rahman son of Muhammed son of Yusuf al-'Alawi" who had died on 16th. August, 1405 AD. The third, also discovered by me, is too defaced to read. The springs of sweet water that had proved the magnet to both Arabs and British, yet exist. Before I pass on from the subject of epigraphy, I must also mention that Dr.M.A.M.Shukri has now discovered 16th.century inscriptions at Talapitiya mosque in Galle, which



are in (I quote) "an ingenious synthesis of the Dravidian script with the Semitic, with the Dravidian element more pronounced. This is further countenanced by the content of this Arabic-Tamil inscription which for the first time refers to the Christian era."

During the following years, my inquiries focussed on the technology of ship-building and methods of navigation. I was able to visualize the type of ships and the life that went on board them; appreciate the difficulties they experienced in sailing them; marvel at their audacity in sailing across the Indian Ocean - from the East African Coast to the Straits of Malacca - with Sri Lanka as their only landfall. At the beginning, they had sailed here after making a landfall in India and sailing coastwise Southwards. Later, they sailed right across to Beruwela using the south-westerly winds, coasted round the island to Trincomalee, and caught the next south-western monsoon to sail eastwards.

Later, they learnt to call only at the southernmost ports and, later still, to by-pass Sri Lanka altogether.

To do all this, they obviously needed maps or charts.

The accepted Euro-centric view is that the Arabs were not great cartographers: they left no maps behind. But, certainly, they were great navigators. How, otherwise, did they find their way across the trackless Indian Ocean? The answer lay, I realized, not in maps, but in the sky. Arab sailors of the day were less interested in the shape of the lands they went to; than in where they were in relation to where they wanted to be. To do this, they had to plot the positions of every place in which they were interested, in relation to a fixed point of reference. And what better point of reference was there than the sun, moon and stars?

Let me try to explain how navigation by the stars is done. The whole exercise involves taking, as a working proposition, the pre-Copernican belief that the Earth was the centre around which the stars revolved. The working assumption is that the Earth (or "Terrestrial sphere") is surrounded by a much larger sphere, which we call the sky (or "Celestial sphere"), on the inside surface of which various points of light, or "stars", were located. This "Celestial sphere", which has its own celestial equator and celestial poles, revolves round the earth, following a pre-ordained pattern, which make stars "rise" and "set" regu-

larly, just like the Sun and the Moon. So if you can determine your position in relation to a particular star at a particular time, you can establish your position on the earth's surface, even if there were no landmarks for miles around. Today, we plot our position in relation to a grid of vertical and horizontal lines, which are the parallels of latitude and the meridians of longitude. Every line of latitude indicates angular distance from the centre of the earth, and is parallel to that imaginary line, the Equator, and shows us how many degrees we are north or south of it. In the case of longitude, the role of the Equator is taken by the prime meridian at Greenwich and all the meridians meet at the North and South poles: the distance East or West of the Prime meridian indicates how many hours and minutes we are away from it. Thus, it is a measurement of position using Time as the unit. In this way, by finding how many degrees north or south of the equator we are (or Latitude) and by finding how far east or west of the prime meridian we are (or Longitude), we can plot our position on a navigational chart, just as we would plot a position on a graph paper, using the "X" and "Y" axes. In fact, the commonest map projection we use is the transverse Mercator's projection, which was evolved largely to help in navigation: any straight line drawn on it, as you know, is really an arc of a great circle.

Even today, in the age of satellite navigation, we treat navigation satellites, as stars. For this type of navigation, there is special equipment but, when we do not have the equipment, we still use the traditional sextant to fix our position in relation to selected stars and planets. The Arabs were only one step behind us: they generally used one star, Polaris (also called the "Pole Star" or "North Star") which was stationary over the North Pole, with all other stars revolving round it; although they did know the regular movements of certain constellations, which they could use when necessary. In the northern hemisphere, Polaris is visible and, in order to find out your latitude, all you have to do is to measure how high Polaris is above the horizon: the lower it is, the nearer you are to the equator. To measure the height of Polaris above the horizon. the Arabs in-



vented a very simple device called the "kamal". It consisted of a square of wood, with a hole at the exact middle, through which a string was passed. To use it, you held the other end of the string between your teeth and held up the square towards Polaris and the horizon. You lengthened or shortened the string till the square fitted the space between Polaris and the horizon. And the length of the string indicated your latitude. If you were taking your reading from a known spot, say Colombo, you tied a knot in the string, and this was Colombo's latitude.

Unlike us today, the Arabs were not interested in longitude, but only in latitude. This was because no prime meridian had been established at that time. (This, incidentally, became necessary only after Pope Alexander VI drew a line dividing the world between the Portuguese and Spanish in the Treaty of Tordesillas. In the Indian astrological works, they had meridians of longitude, and the prime meridian passed over our country. In fact, one of the meanings of the word "Lanka" in Sanskrit, is "meridian"). Anyway, the Arabs only wanted to know how far south they were of Polaris which hovered over the North Pole. By keeping a sharp eye on Polaris, they knew whether they were sailing the desired latitude or not: if not, they changed course north or south, as necessary, till they reached the latitude that would take them to the place they wanted to go. This method of navigation, called "Latitudinizing" or "Sailing the Latitudes", is a very viable technique and used even now, when necessary. So, instead of drawing maps, they noted the latitudes of their ports of call, and also the distances between places. When these notations are superimposed on a transverse mercator's projection the degree of accuracy is very impressive. It is interesting to note that, between Kalutara and Trincomalee, no less than thirty positions along the coast have been plotted: far fewer have been plotted in the area north of the Colombo-Trincomalee axis.

In contrast to this system of plotting position, Mediterranean navigators depended on compass, chart and sailing directions to find their way. Stars were only used to confirm direction, not for finding position.

Thus it was in the Indian Ocean that the

practice of celestial navigation, or navigation by the stars, began. Even today, fishermen in this country follow the movements of constellations. The celebrated Sinhalese ambassadors who Pliny reports as having come to Rome, had been surprised at the different starscape over Rome, remarking that Canopus, which was bright over Sri Lanka, was not to be seen. Even the controversial Marco Polo records, in his own way, the height of Polaris above the horizon at Cape Comorin, Malabar and Gujerat. How did the Arabs know to do this? The Arabs were by no means a backward civilization. Celestial navigation was first applied by them, not at sea, but in the desert where, even today, you navigate by the stars. The shepherds who watched their flocks by night, the sailors who kept a weather-eye on the horizon, and even the Wise Men from the East who sought the Son of God, all followed the movement of stars. The practice was only an exercise in Applied Mathematics: a product of these studies being developed by Arab-Islamic scholars. In the latter part of the ninth century A.D., Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khawarizmi, the "father of Algebra" was summoned to Baghdad by Al-Ma'mun and appointed Court Astronomer. Muslim scholars were taking over the task of preserving and developing the work of earlier Greek and Indian scholars. When the Islamic world spread from Arabia to Al-Andalus, as they called Spain, Sicily was part of the Islamic world, ruled from Palermo. Here scholars concentrated on the translation of Greek writings on Mathematics and Astronomy.

During the "Dark Ages" in Europe, when education descended into the hands of an unenlightened clergy, the pagan Greek learning was decried and the pursuit of science and mathematics were left to the Syrians, the descendants of the Phoenicians, who were not slow to combine abstruse theory with practical application. The Syrians translated the Greek texts to Syriac and developed the art and skill of making and using mathematical instruments. The Syrians had become Nestorian heretics by this time and the disapproving frowns of the churchmen did not worry them. As luck would, Syria was the first of the countries to be conquered by the Arabs and



the conquerors saw the value of their new subjects and their friends, the Jews, in matters of scholarship and application. The Greek works were translated from Syriac to Arabic and an intellectual renaissance took place. Interestingly, these new Arabic works found their way to this island, too. In the "Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland," Vol.1 of 1824, Sir Alexander Johnstone, writing about the first Arabic inscription found here, makes several interesting footnotes, one of which bears repetition here. I quote:

"One of the principal Arabic works on medicine which they introduced into Ceylon was the work of Avicenna; they also introduced Arabic translations of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Galen, and Ptolemy, extracts of which were frequently brought to me while I was on Ceylon by the Mohammedan priests and merchants, who stated that the works themselves had originally been procured from Baghdad by their ancestors and remained for some hundred years in their respective families in Ceylon, but had been subsequently been sold by them, when in distress, for some considerable sums of money to some merchants who traded between Ceylon and the eastern islands."

Before I leave Sir Alexander Johnstone, let me tell you that the footnote I quoted was to a translation of the oldest Arabic inscription yet found. It is the gravestone dated of a learned and pious priest, Khalid Ibn Abu Bakaya, who had been sent here by the Caliph of Baghdad upon hearing that the Mohammedan traders in Colombo were ignorant of and inattentive to the real tenets of their religion. The date of death was 337 after Hijra, that is, mid-10th century, A.D. Johnstone's researches into the origin of these people led him to conclude:

"The first Mohammedans who settled in Ceylon were, according to the traditions that prevail among their descendents, a portion of those Arabs of the house of Hashim who were driven from Arabia in the early part of the 8th. century, by the tyranny of the Caliph Abd al Melek ben Merwan, and who, proceeding from the Euphrates southwards made settlements in the Concan, in the southern parts of the peninsula of India, on the island of Cey-

lon and at Malacca. The division of them that came to Ceylon formed eight considerable settlements in the north-east, north, and western coasts of the island: viz. one at Trincomalee, one at Jaffna, one at Mantotte and Mannar, one at Coodramalle, one at Puttalam, one at Colombo, one at Barbareen and one at Point de Galle".

It is a great pity that Johnstone's collection of texts were lost in a shipwreck and, since we are yet unable to trace the original gravestone, it, too, may have suffered the same fate.

## THE 'OTHER' NORTH

By Rodney St John

Approximately seven decades after Governor Frederick North completed his tenure of office in Ceylon another "North" visited the island with a totally different interest but with a definite purpose. Her name was Marianne North, a scion of the same clan and in fact the grandniece of the former Governor whose career in Ceylon ended in 1805 due to ill health. In his book "British Governors of Ceylon", H.A.J. Hulugalle states "North was born on February 17th, 1766, the third son of the second Earl of Guildford,". Miss North was born in 1830, her father was also a Frederick North, an elected member for Hastings, in the south of England. Her grandfather was Frederick Francis North of the same illustrious North lineage. It could be said that Miss North was a lady of comfortable means as heir to her father's estate, sharing it with her step sister, Janet.

Marianne North first came to Ceylon in 1876. Now why would a Victorian lady, travelling alone, desire to visit the island, particularly in those days of long and tedious travel? The answer lies in the fact that she was an inspired painter of botanical subjects, and determined to capture the beauty of exotic flora. Her interest in painting was no doubt influenced by an artistic environment and her father's friendship with the renowned botanists George Bentham and Sir William Hooker. The former was the author of "Flora Australiensis" and the latter the Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew. Miss North's consuming interest in rare flora was to take her to all continents and several small islands including Seychelles and Ceylon. Her inter-



est in accurate portrayal led to her collecting specimens as well, and these found their way to the Gardens in Kew. As a result she was in regular communication with Sir Joseph Hooker, son of Sir William, who had succeeded his father as Director of the Gardens.

From the book "A Vision of Eden" published in collaboration with the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, we gather that Miss North travelled from Java to Singapore in 1876, and from there aboard the French ship "Amazon" to Galle. She states, "At last a wild Irishman, who had been wandering all over Australia and New Zealand with his eyes and ears open, took compassion on me and landed me and my trunks in Galle".

She spent eight days in that southern port, being driven around in a small horse drawn carriage. The coastal scenery fascinated her and she comments on coconut palms, pandanus, crabs and chameleons. Of course she indulged in her favourite pastime and her painting, "Roadside scene under coconut trees" portrays exquisitely a typical village scene of the past. Her accommodation at Galle was at the New Oriental Hotel which was managed by a Mrs Barker the wife of Thomas Munson Barker. Miss North was quite pleased with the service provided there. From Galle she travelled by coach to Colombo, where she received an invitation from the Governor, Sir William Gregory (1872-1877) to breakfast.

The Governor had a pet mongoose named "Mungo" and he had very kindly shown a fight between his pet and a cobra. Miss North was thrilled by this encounter, which of course was won by the mongoose. Incidentally this animal was presented to a friend, Lady Elphinstone, when the Governor left the island, and it was well looked after until it died of old age.

As Miss North was understandably keen to visit the Botanical Gardens at Peradeniya, she was provided with, through the good offices of the Governor, a reserved railway carriage to Kandy. She lost no time in taking a carriage to the gardens where she met the Director Dr G.H.K. Thwaites, who was in charge of the gardens from 1849 to 1880. Marianne North was thoroughly impressed with the gardens and its superb location and refers to it as "one of the choicest spots on earth". She enjoyed her conversation with Dr Thwaites and writes "He is one of the most perfect gentlemen I have ever known". Whilst in Kandy Miss North stayed at probably the Queen's Hotel, then owned by a Miss Piachaud. She also stayed for a few days at the residence of a Judge L, whom I have failed to identify, but whose residence was located close to the gardens. She was also privileged to dine and stay one

night at the King's Pavilion, on an invitation by the Governor. This superb building was constructed by Governor Barnes on the site of what was previously the Walauve of Pilimatawa Adigar. Miss North was thrilled with its excellent layout and its location with the Dumbara hills rising behind.

From Kandy, Miss North returned to Colombo, travelling with the Governor in his special express train, and stayed at Queen's House for the next few days. She was however, not a person who enjoyed city life, and therefore moved on to Kalutara accepting an invitation by her friend Mrs Julia Cameron. This lady being a reputed photographer was quite adamant that Marianne should pose for her, "She made up her mind at once that she would photograph me". Unfortunately Mrs Cameron's efforts were not particularly successful and only one plate was used in later publications. Julia Cameron was the wife of Charles Hay Cameron, one of the Commissioners of the Colebrooke & Cameron Commission which in 1830 reported on the Judicial establishments and procedures of the island. Mrs Cameron had earned her reputation as a photographer whilst living in the Isle of Wight. The Camerons had investments in coffee and decided to migrate to Ceylon even though advanced in years.

They died in Ceylon in 1879 & 1881, and were buried at Kandy. Their home in Kalutara was located near the present Temple and had a large garden with many fruit trees and tame animals and lots of bird life all of which gave Miss North ample scope for painting.

She left Kalutara by coach for Galle on the 21st Jan and departed Ceylon on 24th Jan 1876 by a French steamer "Scindh" and finally reached her home on the



Marianne North from a photograph taken by Julia Cameron at her residence in Kalutara in 1876.

25th Feb having visited Naples, Rome and Cannes en route.

The following year whilst travelling to India, she decided to spend a few days in Ceylon, "Visiting old friends in the Island". She spent two days at Panadura and stated: "Everywhere I looked I saw subjects for painting and the sunset was as red as fire with the palm trees all black against it". Her



friend Julia Cameron, however, had other ideas and insisted on her coming to their home in Kalutara. The Botanic gardens beckoned and she went to Peradeniya and spent a day with her friend the Director. She states "I had a long stroll with the dear old man who looked much aged and so delicate that a touch might have knocked him down". The day after this visit, heavy rains caused her to miss her steamer to Tuticorin. This gave her another unexpected week in Colombo which she utilised gainfully.

Miss North had arrived in Galle on the 15th Nov 1877 and left the island two weeks later. This was to be her last journey to Ceylon although she did subsequently make two more journeys to the East visiting Borneo, Australia and New Zealand. Her last excursion abroad was to Chile in 1884-85.

Marianne North was a remarkable woman and particularly so for those times. One cannot help but admire the determination and courage of this spinster, attired in ankle length Victorian style dresses, travelling by herself to distant and difficult destinations by steamer and at times by sailing ship. Thereafter devoting herself to capture on canvas as many botanic species as well as scenic subjects. We cannot overlook the fact that she took great care that her paintings and specimens were carefully stored, packed and shipped. There was no reason to wonder that she was well recognised and respected by those in Botanical circles including Charles Darwin who advised and encouraged her. In her final years she immersed herself in three ventures. Miss North rented a lovely cottage in Gloucestershire, superbly located in the scenic Cotswold hills and gradually turned it into a botanical paradise with help from her Kew garden friends. This attracted many prominent local visitors and from abroad. She also began to record the tales of her life and travels. These were still in manuscript form when she died and were subsequently published in 1893 titled "*Recollections of a Happy Life*" and in a later volume titled "*Further Recollections of a Happy Life*". Finally, and perhaps the greatest and most lasting tribute to her memory is the Marianne North Gallery in the Kew gardens. In this gallery designed and funded by this gracious lady, are housed 832 of her paintings, arranged by her having a unique surround and consisting of 246 panels of different types of wood she had collected.

Whilst Governor Frederick North has an assured place in Sri Lankan history and may be remembered when we travel along Guildford Crescent in Colombo 7, his grand niece Marianne North must be remembered as a great artist, an indefatigable trav-

eller who captured and preserved valuable and lasting images of the island. She died on 30th Aug 1890.

## BIRDSONG AND FROGS CROAK AND EARLY MORNING MIST - A SHORT STORY By Somasiri Devendra

*For Menaka, who left us 8th February, 1996.*

1955

When we were a group of boys and girls in our middle 'teens, in that neither-here-nor-there age, we would go out walking, very early every morning. We were from two families, our ages running the entire gamut of the 'teens and our interests varying as widely. We would be up at about five and meet at some place between our homes and walk, generally, to the Race Course which was close by. There was a certain piquancy about being abroad at a time when the city had not got out of bed, to be walking about our usual haunts at such an unusual hour; to be dressed in the most informal sort of clothes. It was the exciting violation of all norms - time, clothes, everything - which stimulated us. The Racecourse was our usual haunt, since it took us away from the all-too-familiar houses and roads or, rather, gave us a different, distanced view of those same roads and houses. It was a little like playing truant, but without the worrying sense of guilt. Exhilarating, too, it was, wading through the dew-heavy grass, splashing up to the knees, with shoes a-dangle in our hands. It took us away from reality - at least, for a little while.

Later we became more adventurous. We discovered a new place for the walks, somewhere where the illusion of unreality was even greater. It was along the boundary of a Rugger field, a sandy path carpeted with Cassuarina needles and very country-like with the wind making cosy rain-on-the-roof noises in the trees towering above us. Farther down, the path became stonier and more rugged and the scene gave way from the tansured green of the Rugger field to a wilderness of shrubs and bushes. Still further, the land became marshy and the road lost itself in the mud. If we felt equal to it, we could wade through the mire and emerge at the next major road. For this



was a marsh, in the process of reclamation.

It was a delightful place, without a house in sight, but with a gurgling stream and trees and bushes which had grown by themselves. There were birds and frogs and little unidentifiable animal noises that made the illusion of the countryside very real.

The years passed by and the early morning walks stopped on their own, and we lost touch with this backwater, though we would glimpse its progress from time to time. And, as we progressed up the 'teens and beyond we scattered, and even lost sight of each other. Then our own family lived closer to this site and its growth became, to me, a thing to wonder at. The marsh was gradually filled up and became a spreading patch of reddish earth churned by caterpillar tracks, which turned to clinging mud after the first shower of rain. The trees and bushes were cleared away. When, I wondered later, did the first house come to be built there? For here and there, along the edges, a few shanties appeared. No one took any notice, till suddenly, there was a full-grown shanty town!

## II - 1960

*"As I pass by shanty town now, I peer through the 'bus windows and marvel at its complexity. It is quite some years old now, and is fully fledged. No longer is it bare land glaring back the noonday sun. Every few square feet has a house on it: a house built up of planks, cadjans, flattened kerosene oil tins, tar-paper, leftover bits of Vesak pandals -all the bits and pieces the builder could lay his hands on. There are little gardens fenced and planted with flowering shrubs. Little paths run between the houses and are lost to sight in the vegetation, for the trees and bushes have come back with the houses. It's true: plants do love human company and thrive nearest them. The stream still runs, but its banks are now encrusted with trees and it seems to have changed character and been subdued by responsibility.*

*"Shanty town is now a village, a village within a city; a village, I suppose, with its own traditions and legends and meeting-places. And a history of incidents - like the big fire that blazed there one Christmas night.. Many shanties were burned down then, but the scars healed quickly with shanty town's amazing powers of rejuvenation. Growth, I think, is its secret and its strength.*

*"I look from the windows of the passing bus, at the women and girls clustering*

*around the street taps, villager-like, talking of things that concern them. What legends linger I wonder, and what ghosts now people those twisting lanes, for undoubtedly they must do so.*

*"I am, of course, the outsider, and the view - though the bus window - is symbolic"*

*"During the day the women and girls cluster round the street taps and villager-like, talk of things that concern them. I, of course, am the outsider, and the view - through a 'bus window - is symbolic.*

*"I am the outsider and only the memory of the past binds me to the scene. Yet, what I knew was the bare land, and the song of a bird heard in the mist. That is not the village. The village is a living thing, and the land is only where it lives. It has tamed the land and used it; and even if it is wiped out someday, the land will never become what it was before. It may even revert to birdsong and frogs' croak and early-morning mist; but never again will it be a childhood fantasy to me. Something very different.*

*"The City, it seems to me, is a 'many-layered flame'; the city we speak of, 'a face to meet the faces that we meet'; itself an illusion. Was the illusion we succumbed to in childhood, after all, not an aspect of reality? I wonder. Isn't the city but a group of villages in which live villagers? And every village, like shanty town, living out its life within the confines of the city? Is the city the aggregate of the villages, or is it a village itself?*

*"I wish I knew."*

## III - 1989

*".....even if it is wiped out someday..."* It was, in fact; in the name of Urban Development.

Decades later, events brought me back to this piece of land. Shanty town was no more: a market place had been built where it had been. The land had been tamed by administration.

But further back, in part of the same land, had arisen an International Conference Hall - yet another unreal something. Beautiful, impressive, and a nation's pride set in acres of landscaped garden, it now became mine, to look after and maintain. I had been away from all this so long, the city had changed so much, and I, myself become so jaded that it took weeks for me to recognize the land. But as I roamed the acres of garden, searching an escape from a depressing experience, the features of the land quietly reemerged from the remote byways of



memory. I came to recognize specific images through layers of change. The stream, it was, that triggered the rush of recognition: seeing it from outside the garden, from the former Cassuarina-needle-covered sandy path, now my perimeter. Recognition brought about affection, a love for the land which stripped away layers of insensitivity deposited over the years. Work became pleasure. The gardens, a spring of creativity. I began to notice the birds that walked the lawns and nested in the trees. The 'Star-class' prisoners who worked the gardens with love and tenderness, growing little plots of manioc and vegetables and miniature paddy-fields, building little shacks for themselves in amongst the trees, to blank out the reality of the prison cells that awaited them, at night. The flowering trees that bloomed in rotation, the bees that built their hives high up in the eaves of the Hall, the closely-trimmed lawns and the smell of fresh-cut grass. The yet undisturbed wild trees and arshier wetlands behind the Hall.

The link with childhood cleansed the mind. Working early or late, I could return to the world of bird-song and frogs' croak and early-morning-mist. The images of shanty town receded. A richer and stranger fantasy than that of childhood began to emerge.

#### IV - 1995

*"But fantasies are only that, no more. Reality is people, not land. What happened to the people who walked the paths of this enchanted land? Some discovered happiness, all became familiar with sorrow; some died, others sought refuge in anonymity; some achieved creativity, some roamed the world. Almost all lost touch with each other*

*"And then from the one of us, we heard a cry of agony from across the sea. A much loved child was suffering from a serious illness. I, who thought I had found a peace of sorts, tried my own therapy of healing through fantasy, writing to the child legends of the days when happiness ruled our own childhood world: for I thought I had found that fantasy could heal.*

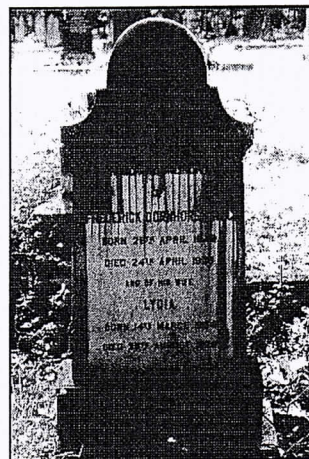
*Painfully she wrote back, "Your letters and stories are great to read .... I am getting better day by day. I find that the 'illness' is not so disturbing... Please continue to hold me close in your thoughts". But did it, really, help her? I don't know. She survived, and still does, and now even has her own child; but the trauma of her experience still reverberates within her family. It did, however, gently as a spider's web, string a tenuous thread re-linking some of the scattered group*

*of our young days. Her mother writes: 'That time of youth, when everything seemed promising and exotic, was a time to relish. So much has happened since....*

*"I still visit the Hall, which gives me peace. Consciously, I try to keep alive a fantasy. It is so lovely and comforting a thing: it can even keep unhappiness at bay. But how long can I spin it out, I wonder? For as long as I live, maybe: Life, after all, is illusion."*

END

## FREDERICK DORNHORST A CORRECTION



In the last edition of the CEYLONKAN in the article about Frederick Dornhorst, it was stated that he died in 1930. Having just found his memorial stone in Kanatte cemetery, Borella (pictured) the record should read that he died on the 24th April 1926, with his wife Lydia departing this world 28th August 1920. They are

buried in the Prins plot with their grandson, Francis de Saram, son of daughter Freda and son-in-law, Shelton de Saram. Dornhorst was brother-in-law to two Prins brothers, John Ferdinand & Edward Hussey Prins.

## COLLECTING FOUNTAIN PENS

By Malcolm Abayekoon

My interest in fountain pens started in about 1945 when Mr Roeloffsz a neighbour showed me his collection. He must have been one of a very few in Ceylon who collected writing instruments. A few years later my father took me to Hamer Brothers, Baillie Street Colombo, where he bought me my first fountain pen, which cost 5 rupees. It was a



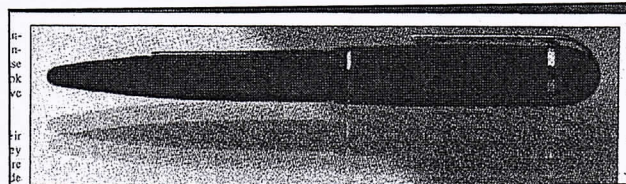
black Platignum. His pen was a red-black marbled effect Parker Duofold that he had purchased during a visit to Australia in 1937. By comparison with that, mine was quite dull looking, but today it would be worth about £20. My next pen was an Atlas, a brand that is hardly known except to collectors. I bought it for about 12 rupees in 1951 from a shop in the Pettah. It was in pale green candystripe pearl and like most fountain pens of that time the nib was of 14-carat gold with iridium tip. Thirty something years later I went back to that shop and inquired if they had any old pens lying around. They did not but from a cupboard the proprietor retrieved an A4 size enamelled Stehen's Ink advertising sign which he let me have.

The origins of what came to be known as the fountain pen can be traced back to ancient Egypt. A hollow reed with pointed tip was discovered by archaeologists who came to the conclusion that it must have held some sort of writing fluid for there were traces of dense black liquid made it was thought by soot and gum being mixed with water. The Romans also appear to have used ink-holding pens and Pepys had a pen with an ink holding reservoir. In 1809 Joseph Bramah patented the Compound Fountain Pen which had an ink reservoir but the flow wasn't automatic. To keep a steady run of ink the vulcanite barrel had to be pressed from time to time. Mr Bramah became better known for mass-producing water closets! Many other creative people contributed towards the development of the fountain pen, one of which was the 1819 Penographic.

The fountain pen as we know it, was invented in 1883 by Lewis Waterman, an American insurance salesman. Legend has it that he got fed up with ink holding pens that leaked. He invented the pen with controlled ink flow, but that did not stop leakage from where the nib section was screwed onto the barrel. The fluid into his pen still had to be filled with an eyedropper. To prevent leakage from where the two sections met a rubber sac was fitted. To draw in ink from a bottle this had to be pressed several times. Later on came capillary action, Parker's plunger, Watermans lever and Sheaffer's snorkel. In the early 1960s the Parker 61 was introduced, it had a fully automatic ink filler. All one had to do was place the nib in a bottle of ink, auto suction did the rest. Until around 1935 only a

few fountain pens came complete with a clip fitted to the cap. The rest did not have this as it was an extra. It had a flexible metal band, which fitted around the pen cap.

My fountain pen collecting started in the mid 1950s. At that time it was possible to buy pre WW2 pens for as little as five shillings from London pawn shops. One of the first I purchased was a brown-black, herringbone striped, Sheaffer with gold-filled cap and with banded barrel trim of the same colour



The Skyliner Fountain Pen - designed by Henry Dreyfuss  
a bestseller in the 1940's.

metal. Since then I have built up a collection much of which I have obtained at car trunk sales.

Some years ago when I was on a visit to Sri Lanka I placed an advertisement in the Daily News wanting to purchase old pens. I was amazed by the response. One old man travelled from Kandy to Colombo with two 1930s Parker Vacuomatics. Most often with those pens, repairs were needed. It was usually the ink sac that had perished. To have this work done professionally in England can now cost serious money, and in this country spares are no longer easily available. However bits and pieces for fountain pen repairs can still be found in Sri Lanka. Mr Saheed of the Lanka Pen Company, 2nd Cross Street, Pettah is most helpful. Also in that area is a pen repairer whose workshop is a table parked on a verandah of a Keyser Street wholesaler. That old man can fix almost any broken pen. He is even able to expertly patch up cracked Bakelite and vulcanite, the materials used for most pen caps and barrels until plastic came on the scene.

Contrary to general belief it was John Loud an American who invented the ballpoint in 1887 and not the Hungarian Lazlo Biro. It is not known why Loud's invention was of no interest whilst Biro's became so popular that it almost brought to an end the manufacture of fountain pens. It is said that it was American GI's during World War 2 who intro-



duced Biro's to the masses by handing them around as freely as they did chewing gum. If that is true, GI Joe can be held responsible for the decline of fine handwriting.

With a fountain pen one has to be careful, too much haste easily results in the nib being damaged, that of course does not happen with a ballpoint. People started to be careless with their handwriting, what appeared on paper was anything but copperplate. All is not lost, however, since of late the fountain pen has made a comeback, and it is even fashionable to be seen using a born-again pen. Some schools in England have banned pupils from using ballpoints. Lloyds of London demands even better than a fountain pen, to this day some of its important documents are written with a quill!

Pen collectors also accumulate all that goes with pens such as ink bottles, preferably complete with the original label, roller & rocker blotters, boxes that pens were sold in and advertising material. To finance my pen collecting I need to occasionally sell pens, but only if I have another matching one. There is certainly big money in vintage pens, at a recent London auction a Belgian collector paid £23,000 for a Dunhill Namiki, only 50 of which were manufactured in the 1930s, but even now if you are lucky you can pick up bargains as I did last year when I bought a 1927 Parker Duofold Lucky Curve for £27. An upmarket dealer would have wanted over a hundred pounds for it. My advice to anyone wishing to start a pen collection is don't go to specialist dealers, search at pawn shops, jumble and car trunk sales. Look for Blackbird, Conway Stewart, Eagle, Easterbrook Relief, Mentmore, Swan, pre-war Parker, Sheaffer and Waterman. If you spot an Aurora, Conklin, Pelican piston filler or Wahl Eversharp grab it. If you come across a Mont Blanc Hemingway or Kaweko going cheap you have struck gold. If you have loads of money get yourself a current model Mont Blanc Solitaire Royale encrusted with 4,810 diamonds, it costs thousand of dollars, but just think what that would be worth if your grandchildren wanted to sell it.

Perhaps you may get lucky like a friend of mine did on a flight from Colombo to London. Somewhere in the Gulf an Arab boarded and sat next to him. Nearing Heathrow my friend needed to fill in a form

and not having a pen asked the Arab if he would lend him his and commented on what a fine looking pen it was. The generous and probably oil rich Arab insisted that my friend keep it. Turned out to be gold filled Parker Aerometric worth about £200. He got lucky, you could also get unlucky as I did when I bought a so-called Parker in Aden. If you are curious about that, read my book *Sinhala-Burger*. If you want to know more about vintage writing instruments read Andreas Lambrou's book *Fountain Pens of the World* and visit:

[www.pensence@aol.com](mailto:www.pensence@aol.com) where David Nishimura, in particular, shows many fountains of elegance.

## NAILHOLES

There was once a young boy living in Colombo, named Dillip, who had a very bad temper. When in his verbal tantrums he would often break things, throw things around the home and generally cause total disruption to the household. Nothing his parents did seemed to make him want to change his disposition and his parents were at their wits end.

One of his favourite destructive methods was smash things with a hammer. Dillip knew he was doing wrong but just could not control himself. He was one cranky little boy. One day in a fit of desperation, his father gave Dillip a bag of big nails and told him that every time he lost his temper he must drive a nail into a post in the back fence. On the first day, the boy had driven 37 nails into the wood, and he was tired as the timber was hard and the nails large. He slept well that night. The next day the exercise was repeated and a few less nails used. Dillip seemed to be getting some satisfaction out of the pounding.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, although occasionally there would be a flare-up, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He learned it was much easier to control his temper than to drive the large nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when Dillip did not lose his temper at all. He told his father about it, and naturally the father was extremely proud of his son's efforts. Now he suggested that the boy pull out one nail for each day that he was able to control his



anger. This was going to be a real test of his son's endeavour for the nails were well driven.

Time passed and many weeks went by, then one day the lad was able to tell his father that all the nails had been extracted. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the post. He said, "You have done well my son, but

look at the holes in the wood. The timber can never be the same again. When you say or do things in anger,

they leave a scar just like these holes. You can yell and carry on and break things, and it won't matter how many

times you say you are sorry, the hurts are still there."

Dillip heard his father's words, and even at his young age had learned things about himself, and that how he related to others, determined how they reacted to him.

A verbal wound can be as bad as a physical one. True friends are rare jewels indeed as they can make one smile or encourage one to do better or succeed. They lend an ear, share words of praise, and they always want to open their hearts to their friend.

Dillip's father became his son's friend and fortunately was able to open the trapdoor to enable the boy to see a better way of living. May we all be forgiven if we have left holes in another's post.

## THE COLONIAL HANGOVER - THE ROYAL THOMIAN CRICKET MATCH\* AND ITS GLOBAL IMPACT.

By Hugh Karunanayake

Cricket analysts have noted a striking change in the manner of spectator participation in international cricket games held recently. The dance, the sing song, and the brass band have become a virtual necessity for effective spectator participation, the trend having commenced with the Sri Lankan world cup victory in 1996. Other cricketing nations seem to have cottoned on to this trend, and now we have the usually introverted Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladesh spectators, breaking into song and dance with a fall of a wicket, or a hit over the boundary. Zimbabwe has introduced an official brass band element to their interna-

tional games, and New Zealand spectators too have brought in their version of a jazzy beat.

The Sri Lankan celebratory ritual has its origins with the Royal Thomian cricket match, where brass bands became part of the cheering squads in the Royal College boys tents in the nineteen forties. This trend rapidly spread to the other big school matches in Sri Lanka, and it is now firmly entrenched in the cultural ethos around all school 'big matches'.

Emma Levine is an internationally well known British cricket writer and photographer. She is the author of two books "Wills cricket mania. A kind of pilgrimage" and "Into the

passionate soul of sub-continental cricket." She had heard about the Royal Thomian cricket match and was determined to taste the feel of spectator participation. Her experience is best described in her own words which follow, and are extracted from her book "Into the Passionate Soul of Sub-continental Cricket."

".....If I were to be asked what I thought was the best example of audience participation in sports, it would be a close run finish between a Calcutta Test Match (an occasion I had the pleasure of witnessing in 1993, and provided the nearest feeling to a religious experience I have had) and school cricket in Sri Lanka. Two years ago I had the good fortune to learn of the unique and mad world of the Royal-Thomian (the most notorious and best known match in the country) and during England's tour of Sri Lanka I broke off from their test match to go and see it. It was beyond my wildest expectations, and I made sure that the next time I went I would be better prepared for the game. It was one of the high-



Restrained revelry at the Royal Thomian cricket match 1911.



lights when I returned for a grand tour of Sri Lanka's end of year big matches.

It was a tour that took me to many of the school matches, which were usually between rival colleges placing a highly competitive and celebrated two or three day match. My first taste of these matches was at the Royal Thomian, which is the most famous cricket match in the country. For this reason it is also the match responsible for the greatest number of hangovers that a cricket match could ever be responsible for. This is because the whole occasion is one great drunken tradition, which should come as no surprise, as the very nature of cricket is conducive to tradition, whichever country it is played in. However, for me its ambience had been more in the nature of a genteel summer's afternoon relaxation, nibbling on cucumber sandwiches and sipping warm beer, with a polite round of applause to mark a rather splendid boundary, and an embarrassed silence to accompany the batsmen to the pavilion after they were out first ball. Or maybe I was being too English.

In Sri Lanka, tradition demanded that the annual matches be enjoyed in the form of riotous celebration. School cricket, I learned extremely quickly, was a different sporting experience in this country, one which bore no relation at all to the game in the land of its origin. The main way of integrating oneself into the melee was to unashamedly consume as much alcohol as possible, and preferably a mix of arrack (a potent spirit made from palm toddy and positively addictive with ginger ale) vodka, beer, and whisky. Start in the late morning as the first ball is being delivered and progress throughout the day, increasing meanwhile the vocal support, dancing, and frequency of pitch invasions.

It is difficult to explain the phenomenon of a match like the Royal-Thomian. This annual three day match is played by two of the premier institutions in Colombo, Royal and St Thomas colleges. It has the significance of being the second longest continuous school's cricket match in the world, and is beaten only by an annual Adelaide College match which bowled its first delivery in 1878. That is between Prince Alfred's where the Chappell brothers were educated, and St Peter's. The Eton-Harrow encounter, which

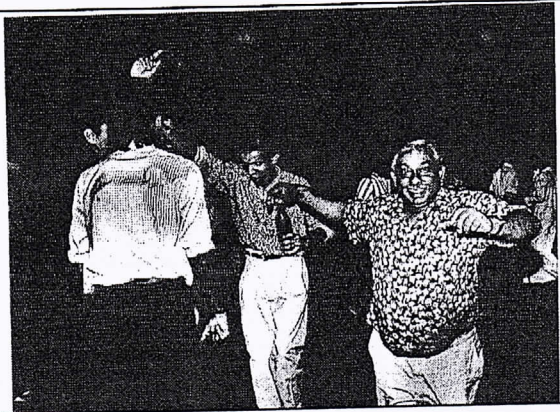
is the only schools' event remotely comparable in England, was interrupted during World War 1.

There is something absurdly incongruous about the main reason for these celebrations. After all, the reason for the Royal Thomian match is to celebrate the rivalry between the two most respected and prestigious schools in the country, and yet the behaviour displayed by most of the crowd is anything but respectable. But there is much more to the event than the cricket. The match is really a vehicle for an annual reunion and celebration where all ages of people, from 20 to 95, can act like schoolboys again. People return year after year to see the match, and I spoke to many ex-pupils now living overseas, who make it a great excuse to come back to visit.

Even the most prestigious gathering of the Sri Lankan elite (MPs, company directors, lawyers, and what were considered to be 'respectable professionals') revealed their true souls to be nothing more than that of a rumbustious schoolboy's. There was a constant background of music coming from small brass bands playing funky tunes that got everyone on their feet. Most of the chairs were discarded as people danced in the aisles, swigging out of bottles and spilling food down their shirts as the sweat poured down their faces. The people I felt the most sympathy for were the food and drink sellers, who, in spite of the congestion of the stands, had to spend the entire day winding their way through the throng, precariously balancing crates of soft drinks bottles on their heads, or trays of sandwiches and snacks. It was not a job I would have undertaken.

I wandered around the boundary and sampled the music being played by the bands. The best way of enjoying that was undoubtedly to join the assembled ranks on chairs, on benches and on walls, and dance. Discarding the camera bag in a safe place, I joined the revellers and we partied continuously, which of course delighted everyone since I was entering into the swing of things. I had to reluctantly avoid the plentiful and insistent offers of vodka, arrack, and in fact most varieties of alcohol that came from all directions. It was tempting to accept, but there was no way I would be able to focus the camera adequately after a few drinks, especially in such





'Big Match' revelry in 1989  
(Courtesy Stephen Champion 'Lanka 1989')

over-  
bearing  
heat.  
Still, as  
the  
adage  
goes,  
you  
don't  
need al-  
cohol to  
have a

good time, and I was certainly enjoying every second. A cricketing fiesta such as this is my idea of nirvana, and it seems that the Sri Lankans have combined play with pleasure to perfection. For that they have my deepest respect. I just wish that they could teach the 'old dog' a trick or two and bring a little more partying into the staid English scene.

I joined the prestigious and exclusive Mustangs tent, which is a members only club consisting of the higher echelons of Sri Lankan society. It is a traditional male only enclave, and special permission had to be obtained from the Tent Secretary. That decision received some highly disapproving looks, and remarks such as 'If we let her come in, they'll all want to'.

The members were as bucolic as the rest of the crowd. I danced with a distinguished company director to a Latin American tune, and my sobriety was definitely more conducive to keeping my feet than his swaying efforts to remain vertical. He confided that he had given his 16 year old son, a pupil of Royal College, strict instructions to 'get drunk, tease the girls, and behave badly'. 'Why do you encourage your son to do that?' I asked with surprise as he attempted to swing me round. He gave a long and hearty chuckle. 'Because I did when I was his age' he replied.

*Extracted from the book - Into the passionate soul of sub-continental cricket - by Emma Levine*

\*...The first Royal-Thomian match was played over 3 evenings, 15th, 16th and 17th July 1879 commencing at 4pm each day, at Colpetty Green (Galle Face). More about this, and the origins of cricket in Ceylon, in the next edition of the CEYLANKAN!!

## NEW MEMBERS

### A warm welcome to our new members.

Dr. Michael Powell TASMANIA, 7261.  
Dr. Sarath Gunatunga DEEPDENE, VIC 3103

Mr. Edmund Kerner BLACKBURN SOUTH, VIC 3130  
L.Ranjit Jayawardene NORTH DANDENONG, VIC 3175

Mr. Lasath Wijeyasinghe MERRYLANDS, NSW 2160

Mr. Allan Schumacher BEROWRA HEIGHTS, NSW 2082

Mrs. B.R.Schokman BENTLEIGH, VIC 3204  
Edward I. Gray MT.WAVERLEY, VIC 3149

Mr. Chris J.Lawton OAKLEIGH, VIC 3166.  
Mr. Nath Kannangara EAST LINDFIELD, NSW 2070  
Mr. W.G.J.Morris Surrey, UK.  
Mr. Allen L Thurairatnam GLEN WAVERLEY, VIC 3150

Mr. Philip Muller STRATHFIELD, NSW 2135  
Mr. Ravi Karunanayake KINGS PARK, NSW 2148  
Mr. Gamini Goonesena MAROUBRA, NSW 2035  
Mrs.Ruth Pinto (& Melvin) ENDEAVOUR HILLS, VIC 3902  
Mr. Sri Bawan ENDEAVOUR HILLS, VIC 3902

Mrs M.A. Jackson GLEN WAVERLEY, VIC 3150.  
Mr. Nihal de Zoysa GLEN WAVERLEY, VIC 3150

Ms. Ayoma Perera WHEELERS HILL, VIC 3150  
Mr. Bill Van Rye KEYSBOROUGH, VIC 3173  
Ms. G.M.Marsh MT. WAVERLEY, VIC 3149  
Mr. Nat Prins (& Margo) SPRINGVALE, VIC 3171  
Mr. Nihal Fonseka Moratuwa, SRI LANKA.  
Ms. Ehrlich Methsili NEW YORK, USA.

Mr. C.Binojan Visvalingam GLEN ALPINE, NSW 2560

Mr. Haneef Badurudeen NOBLE PARK, VIC 3174



Mr. Harry de Sayrah THORNLEIGH, NSW 2120

Mr. C. Alan de Saram PUNCH BOWL NSW 2196  
 Mr. Gordon Cooray MURRUMBEENA, VIC 3163  
 Mr. Edward Tapping CHELTENHAM, VIC 3192  
 Mr. Ashley De Silva EAST ROSANNA, VIC 3084  
 Mr. Brian De Kretser ANULA, NT 0812  
 Mr. Maithri Panagoda ST IVES, NSW 2075

Mr. Eardley Lieversz MT COLAH NSW 2079

Mr. Maurice Foster DONCSTER EAST, VIC 3109  
 Mr. E.C.T. Candappa CLARINDA VIC 3169  
 Mr. Noel C. De Silva HUNTINGDALE, VIC 3166  
 Mr. Varnon M. Abeyasekera BURWOOD, VIC 3125.  
 Mr. Nihal Gunawardene NORTH DANDENONG VIC 3175

Mr. Camil Geris CHERRYBROOK NSW 2126

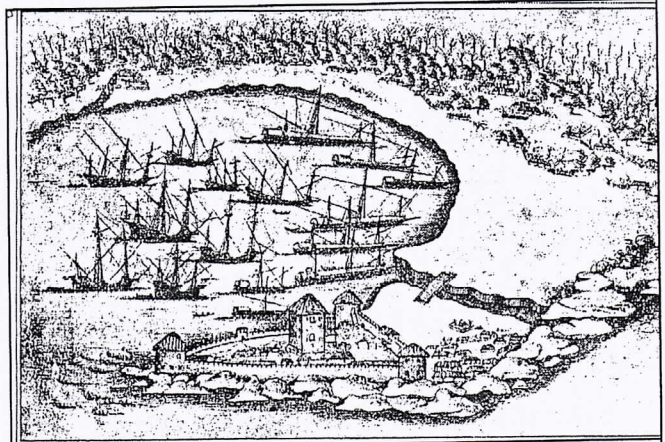
## THE GATEWAY TO SRI LANKA

It is amazing how little one thinks about the seemingly commonplace. That which has been part of everyday life is often taken for granted, and the how and why it may have developed is never even contemplated. And so it is with the Port of Colombo, at one time the 7th busiest harbour in the world and today still a very important commercial enterprise. Yet how many know much about the growth and the changes that occurred over the years? And how many Colombo residents have enjoyed walking along the breakwater particularly in a South west monsoon (though not in the last few years with the current security), without a thought as to its construction?

The history of Colombo harbour is interesting as it was not always the premier port on the Island, though it has been used for commerce probably since times immemorial. The Portuguese and the Dutch, when occupying Ceylon, used Galle and Jaffna, and to a lesser extent Colombo and Trincomalee as their main trading harbours. Trincomalee had a fine harbour but was really too far from the trading areas to be of great advantage to merchants. Jaffna was limiting in its depth, and again accessibility to the real trade was a problem.

Galle for many years, after its landfall by the Portuguese in 1505, became the principle com-

mercial port, as there was a reasonable draft for vessels, it was on the trade route to the east, and the position of the Fort after its construction, made protection for ships in port an important factor for its position as number one trading harbour. But it could only be used for a few months of the year due to the exposure to the seasonal South east storms, and it



The Port Of Colombo from a 16th Century map.

could not cope with more than four vessels at a time. Colombo too had its problems, the Southwest monsoon could create havoc and the port had its fair share of shipwrecks over the years.

But times change and so do the trading ventures. The population increased and shipping became more plentiful, especially after the British took control of the Island, and particularly after the advent of steamers. By 1860, both Galle and Colombo were becoming unsatisfactory as trading ports because of increased tonnages. Galle was fine if the steamers were small and few, but in 1860 the opposite was true, ships were too big and too many. Galle Bay was 955 acres, but only a small part of that was usable. A reef from Gibbet Island to a rock known as 'Matamadna' was an obstruction that had to be always reckoned with. The Western area known as Galle Harbour was 447 acres, but this was further diminished by large boulders with only a small part having a depth of 5 fathoms (30 feet).

At times during the NE monsoon, up to 16 ships might be waiting in the 'roads' (*the area outside the harbour. This was a commonly used term for the waiting vessels as they were often in a line. In some countries it was called the 'stream'*), and during the SW monsoon it was unsafe for ships to anchor in the roads. There were no piers to berth at Galle for coaling the steamers (Colombo was in a similar state) and all coaling had to be done by lighters (*small barges loaded on shore and then towed out*



to the waiting vessel.), it was a slow process.

In the SW monsoon, between 1866-8, 21 ships were delayed an average of 52 days. P & O directors petitioned Earl Carnarvon on the subject of the "unprotected harbour of Point de Galle, and the peril the Company's mail packets were placed". Carnarvon conceived an artificial harbour in Ceylon in 1866, and local interests in Colombo pressed claims for that city to become the premier port, especially with the anticipated opening of the Suez canal for steamers in 1869. Costs for 2 breakwaters at Galle of 3930 feet and 600 feet were estimated at 326,000 to 425,000 pounds, and there was a suspicion that the breakwaters might not function efficiently. There was also the problem of having to transship much of the trading commodities long distances from within the Island to Galle.

In 1869, tonnage dues paid in the unimproved port of Colombo were 2213 pounds, with very favourable treatment of non-native vessels. The port's Master Attendant, Captain James Donnan, proposed major charge changes and estimated revenues would now be 32,000 pounds. With these revenue figures the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, persuaded the Colonial Office to choose Colombo for a major breakwater, the cost of which was to be 650,000 pounds. In 1875-6, a preliminary loan totalling 450,000 pounds was raised (250,000 pounds for public works), and the foundation stone to commence construction was laid by the Prince of Wales in 1875.

The Suez Canal opened in 1869, and by the late 1870s over 80% of shipping tonnages was by steamer. This caused a rethink about the breakwater. Originally it was to be a straight 4210 feet long. The new plan envisaged a north arm of 3600 feet from the two mile post on the Mutwal road in addition to the 4210 feet southern wall. Col. Fyres (Surveyor General) suggested bending the southern breakwater 600 feet from the end and postponing the northern arm. The cost of the north arm and 2 jetties was estimated at 360,000 pounds. What was very necessary in the port was still water, and the new plan could provide that. With still water, ships could be moored together and the transference of cargoes between vessels could take place, and ships in the harbour (roadstead) could be discharged or loaded both sides at the same time.

There were foreseen problems with the discharge of drains from the Pettah district, at that time still a residential area of 350 acres, with 3 main drains into the harbour, the north arm would obviously cause sanitation problems. The northern arm was postponed. It is interesting as we review massive construction works of the past how complex the total

works can really become.

There are two types of breakwater:

1...Rubble mound which is cheaper and can use unskilled labour in much of its construction. In this method rubble is deposited pellmell, and needs constant replenishing.

2...Wall-type, which is expensive initially with the building of concrete blocks on land and then floating them to their required position, these are then sunk and filled with concrete. Maintenance is low. The scheme became a Government project and cheap convict labour - 9d/day - passed to the Prison Department (*now there's a good idea that could be employed in these times!! Ed*). Normal free labour would have cost 1/9d per day, and that type of labour was hard to find.

Once construction started, it was restricted to 6 months of the year because of rough seas. 400 convicts per day worked between 1874-80. Between 1880 and 1884 about 5-600 were employed on all parts of the works, the majority building and setting the concrete blocks which weighed between 14 and 32 tons. During the fine weather the blocks were set in position.

The first 1326 feet of the sea and harbour walls were built 50 feet apart, the space then filled with rubble. At this point a single wall, 34 feet wide built of 4-5 courses of 9656 blocks (124984 cubic yards) was constructed. A landing pier projected from the end 120 feet long and 21 feet wide. A circular tower 36 feet high carried the 2nd order light, was completed by 1885. The harbour was then dredged to give 329 acres a draft of 18 feet or more, 242 acres 26 feet and 90 acres 30 feet or more. In 1884 Colombo harbour could moor 25 steamers in water 26-40 feet deep.

In the early 1890s, the proposed 1100 foot North arm from Mutwal point, and the 2600 foot North-west breakwater island were commenced. There was a gap between the two of 800 feet, and a temporary viaduct was built to access the North west breakwater, the latter was constructed of concrete blocks. After 37 years, years the harbour was completed on 1-5-1912, having cost 2.9 million pounds. There were now 43 berths, and coaling facilities meant good bunkering (*refueling a vessel, in this case, coal*) for steamers. Interestingly, in the early days, most of the coal came from Cardiff in Wales. By 1910 Colombo was the 7th busiest port in the world!!

The main fishing boat docking area for Colombo had been in the Mutwal area and as this was now



## THE GENEALOGY EXCHANGE

enclosed within the Colombo harbour, a new fishing 'port' was created to the north of the Northern breakwater providing a safe haven for these essential craft. A graving dock was built near the Northern breakwater in Mutwal, enabling vessels of considerable size to use this facility. It had dimensions of 694 feet long by 85 feet with a depth of 30 feet.

....to be continued...

On 28-August 1893, at the Wolfendaal Church, Colombo, **John Merritt**, a gunner in the Royal Artillery at Colombo, married **Isabella Phillips, nee Modder**, widow, of Colombo. A witness was her father, **Alexander Modder**, of Colombo. Can anyone help with information on Isabella and Alexander Modder please.

June Sissows, (nee Merritt)  
11A Hall Road,  
Bournemouth  
Dorset, BH11 8HU  
England.

**Beryl Bromley** has let us know she has had considerable help in tracing various members of her family and is really appreciative of the help given. Also **Anne Higham** has gained information in her family history endeavors, through our Society.

We are getting good feedback from the genealogy 'trees' being researched by Kyle Joustra. His data base is expanding at a rapid rate and at last count he only had another 63 'trees' to 'feed' into his computer programme. Once this is accomplished the Island's recorded family histories will be well documented - though there will always be ongoing additions. We are fortunate that the Island kept good records. What is important now is to make sure these are permanently saved on disc where the white ants and general decay will not have the opportunity to destroy material as they have done in the past. Our thanks go to Kyle for this very worthwhile endeavour.

## WERE THERE JEWS IN MEDIEVAL CEYLON?

BY VAMA VAMADEVAN

Did the lost tribes of Israel arrive in Medieval Ceylon, after the Jewish Diaspora that scattered them to various corners of the globe? They did arrive in the Malabar Coast of India barely a few kilometers away. Could Ceylon have missed out or was there a reason why there is no trace of them? This question has puzzled many a Sri Lanka historian and remains an unanswered question.

It is a historical fact that there has been a sizeable Jewish community on the Malabar (modern Kerala) coast of South India for many centuries. These Jews are also referred to as Cochin Jews because Kerala was also called the Cochin. Having come thus far to the doorstep of Ceylon, one wonders why there is no authentic record about them arriving in sufficient numbers to impact on our historical records. The arrival of the Cochin Jews has been placed in two main disputed periods. One school of thought is that they arrived during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, in modern day Iraq, and were shipwrecked off the coast of Malabar in 175 BC. The other school of thought is that they arrived in the 11th and 12th Centuries. There are still others who think that the arrival of the Jews in Malabar was as recent as the 18th century AD.

Whatever the time of the arrival of the Jews in the Malabar state, it is known that there was close intercourse between the Malabars and Ceylon from very early times. It is therefore very surprising if they did not come in noticeable numbers with the different waves of Malabars who arrived in Ceylon. If they did arrive in sufficient numbers, it is still stranger there are no noticeable traces. The Jews, the world over, are well known to cling tenaciously to their religious beliefs and observances. The early Kings of Ceylon were well known for their religious tolerance of other faiths, and the Jews, like the other communities, would have been able to practice their



faith without let or hindrance. In these circumstances no evidence of their presence is inexplicable.

Another factor that should be borne in mind is that the Jews had trading facilities in China, mainly Canton, Ningpo and Hanchow. A memorial stone at Kaifungtu in the Yang-tse river valley dated 1488 CE, speaks of 70 clans of Jewish immigrants during the Sung dynasty (960- 1126 CE). The presumption is that on these voyages to China, Ceylon would naturally have been a port of call for victuals, just as much as the Arabs arrived in similar circumstances in Ceylon. It is also accepted that the Jews of China made their way there from Jewish settlements in India. If India was the source of trans-migrations to China it is difficult to presume that Ceylon too would not have been a beneficiary.

One will have to also look at the Bible for any reference that will throw light on the subject. It is recorded in the Old Testament that a thousand years before the Christian era the fleets of King Solomon piloted by the adventurous seaman of Phoenicia (modern Israel) touched the ports of Ceylon and India in search of materials for the building of the great Temple of Jerusalem. It is said that the King's ships came to the country of the Ophir every three years. It is speculated Ophir is derived from the word 'Orphis' (the Greek Word for Serpent) and Ophir is thought to be the land of the Nagas. And, the Nagas were the early inhabitants of the island of Ceylon.

Though there is a paucity of information about Jews in medieval Ceylon, there are however few references made by mostly Middle Eastern travelers. These are very sketchy and inaccurate references but albeit worthy of examination. There are three writers who throw some light on the subject:

1. Abu Zeid al Hassan of Siraf (911 CE)
2. Edirisi (1154 CE)
3. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (1170 CE).

**Abu Zaid** speaks of 'a great multitude of Jews as well as of many other sects', and underscores the fact the King allowed the free exercise of every religion. Edirisi says the Jews had their corporate centre at Aghna and Sir Emmerson Tennant identifies Aghna as Anuradhapura, the then capital of Ceylon. Edirisi also speaks of foreign sects having their internal

page 20

jurisdiction to manage their affairs and goes further to say that there was also a council of 16 Vizirs, 4 each from the foreign groups representing Christians, Muslims and Jews along with native representatives blended into one consultative council.

**Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela** was a Spanish Jew from Navarre. He traveled through Europe to Persia. He did not visit Ceylon but probably came into contact with people who had, and he speaks of 300 or 23,000 (exact figure is not clear) Jews.

H.G.Reissner who has done considerable research on the subject too is of the opinion that even the lower of the two figures is widely off the mark. He concedes that it would be more reasonable to suggest that the medieval community of Jews in Ceylon has never exceeded a few hundred at the most.

If there were Jewish communities, even in small numbers, the question arises as to what happened to them. Reissner is of the view that these Jewish communities, depending on foreign trade, were liquidated with time as the foreign trade faded away, and the only communities that survived were those finding roots in local trade. Ethnic groups fading away is nothing new. In our own life time, in the 1940s, the Afghans were an identifiable ethnic group in Sri Lanka, but today, they have all left and the few remaining have been assimilated into the general fabric of our population.

When the Portuguese arrived in the 16th Century there was no sizeable community of Jews on the Island, and after the arrival of the other Western colonial powers no large groups of Jews ventured out to Ceylon, only a few individual Jews. A small band of such entrepreneurial brothers came in 1841 and established the 'Rothschild Estate' in the Pusselawa district of Kandy in the early days of coffee planting.

It is also significant that a keen observer like Robert Knox makes no mention of a Jewish community identifiable in the local population. The only presumption is that if there was any sizeable Jewish community at all during his time on the Island, they had ceased to be of any significance.

*Reference: The Ceylon Historical Journal, Vol:3  
Number 2,3 & 4 (Oct'53 & Jan-Apr.'54)*



## AT LAST.....

.....Yasmin and Brendon Gooneratnes' book, *"This Inscrutable Englishman"*, is available in the bookshops Australia-wide. Inquiries can go to Carolyn Crowther at Allen & Unwin. PO Box 8500, St Leonard's, NSW, 2065. email: carolyne@allen-unwin.com.au

## THE VEDDAHS

Dr. R.L.Spittel's love for the Veddas is legendary, and he worked tirelessly for the upliftment of these people. His poem entitled 'The Veddas' shows his love of this vanishing tribe.

### THE VEDDAS.

They came with the leopard and langur  
Ere this isle from her mother was weaned.\*  
The ocean rolled round her in anger,  
But over the waters she queened.

Deep in her silvan cages,  
Their haven the hunters found;  
They lived here alone through the ages,  
While the planet went spinning around.

They homed with the beast in his fastness,  
And roamed with the roaring streams,  
The sinew and soul of the vastness  
Pervaded the calm of their dreams.

And they, while their aeons abided  
Remained as at their dawn;  
They came ere the lands were divided  
And now with the gales they are gone.

\* Ceylon was once part of India.

### AN ASIDE for a nice place to stay in Kandy.....

Normally we do not run advertisements in the CEY-LANKAN, but having had a good experience when staying in Kandy on my visit there in

January, I feel compelled to give the **MONTFORT LODGE** a plug!! The Lodge is situated at 258 Bowalawatte, Kandy, just about next door to Le Kandyan Hotel. Ariyapala Perera is the proprietor, and a charming host (incidentally he worked with Vama, our CSA treasurer, years ago in both Galle and Colombo). The rooms are comfortable and the meals great, and the views wonderful. At US\$10 per day it is certainly a very reasonable place to stay. The grounds are well cared for, and because the lodge is in the hills above Kandy (only a few minutes away) there is a pleasant and refreshing breeze pervading the slopes. The lodge has safe parking and all amenities. Tel: 94 74 471103 The Lodge is a very pleasant place to stay.

## MORE ON THE WELLAWATTA INSCRIPTIONS

J Pendry Lewis refers to this inscription in his book, "Colombo in Early British times", and he also writes about it in his "Tombstones and Monuments in Ceylon": "Who the lady guardian of this tree was I have not been able to discover. Possibly it was Mrs Marshall. Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell refers in his "Excursions" to Mr and Mrs Marshall's "charming abode situated on the seashore about 3 miles from Colombo". This was in 1821 or 1822, and the distance would make Wellawatte their residence, but I do not know Mrs Henry Augustus Marshall's Christian name. Mrs MJ Smyth's name was Sophia, but her husband was Collector, Galle, in 1817-20, and on leave in 1820-1. Mr and Mrs Smyth came up to Colombo from Galle in the ship *Laura*, December 15, 1818, and he died at Colombo, August 20, 1824.

Lady Brownrigg was also "Sophia", but she left with Sir R. Brownrigg for England by the ship *Eclipse* on February 1, 1820."

and another.....from Henry Brownrigg, London, UK

I was delighted to read Somasiri Devendra's article about the stone tablet in Wellawatte, with a now illegible poem commemorating Sophia's care for a shady banyan tree which provided rest for travellers. But who was Sophia? The candidate in poll posi-



tion is Sophia Marshall, wife of Henry Marshall, Auditor-General of Ceylon from 1823 to 1841. However, the author mentions that there is a rival candidate. According to the father of Mr Justice Walter Pereira, the tablet was erected at the behest of either the wife or sister of Sir Robert Brownrigg, Governor of the Island, from 1812 to 1820.

Without wishing to take sides in this contest of philanthropic ladies, may I perhaps say that Sir Robert's wife was indeed called Sophia. The date of the tablet, 1820, is within his term of office. Also, the project would have been in keeping with her character since she had already arranged for the construction of a rest house for travellers climbing Adam's Peak. However, I doubt if the poem is her own work, since there is no evidence that either Brownrigg had a poetic streak. This contrasts with a later Governor, Sir Robert Horton, who was in the habit of issuing and replying to invitations in verse:

"...Just let me add we really tiffin  
Tomorrow half-past three, and if in  
The Council you can give advice,  
And make distinctions shrewd and nice,  
Though dined - (our meal must be a short one)  
Pray come and join us; yours, R. Horton

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



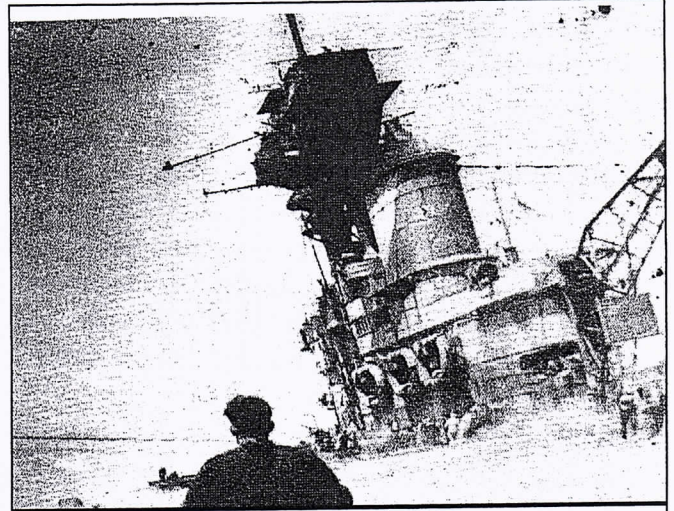
Dear Editor,

Greatly have I enjoyed copies of the CEYLANKAN, which enabled me to find information regarding a relative, namely, JJ Grinlinton, who according to my mother (now deceased) served some role in the Government of Ceylon. The dates and character of his service were of the haziest recollections, but through the database your organisation appears to be gathering, I have been able to fill in some of the genealogical gaps. If anyone has information about any Grinlintons in Ceylon, could they let me know. "Merci un mille fais". James Grinlinton Maxwell. Pymble, 2073  
(Interesting French here!!...Ed)

*JJ Grinlinton was Surveyor-General in Ceylon in the mid 1860s, he was a Member of the Legislative Council in 1900. His wife's name was Emily, her grave is in Kanatte, having died 25.3.1894. Their daughter, also Emily, is buried beside her mother, having died on 24.8.1873, aged 17 and briefly married.*

## AND ANOTHER.....

Recently I was reading an early edition of the CEYLANKAN when I came across an article about the



The Hermes minutes before it sank.  
(Courtesy Rex Morgan - The Hermes Adventure)

bombing of Colombo. Can I add my experience of the event as a person directly involved.....

At the onset of the 2nd World War in September 1939, I was conscripted into the Royal Navy, in Portsmouth, England, for 7 years active service. At that time there was "Hostilities Service". After about 12 months service at sea, I was drafted ashore in Colombo in 1940, to supervise a new Royal Navy Division called "Port W/T Office". The duties being repairs to wireless transmitters, receivers and associated electronic equipment in Royal navy ships and Armed Merchant ship Cruisers - AMCs.

On the Saturday before Easter Sunday in 1942, I had to investigate equipment on an AMC - HMS HECTOR - in Colombo harbour. The repairs caused me to work so late at night, that passing ferry boats, working between ships and the passenger jetty, had stopped operating. I therefore had to sleep on board until the next day - Easter Sunday (my birthday!). At about 8am while on deck waiting to stop any passing ferry boat, the civilian air raid siren sounded loud and clear. I assumed this was just another practice run, especially as some aircraft were casually flying high above Colombo harbour. As I watched them, assuming they were RAF airplanes, they assembled and began an in-line swoop down towards the harbour.

"A practice run", I thought, until I heard the "ping, ping, ping", coming from the rigging of the HEC-



TOR and saw flashes from the wing frontal guns of the aircraft. I ran for protection below decks, but unfortunately for me, a bomb dropped by one of the enemy aircraft (yes they were Japanese) entered the single funnel of the HECTOR, blowing the engineroom apart and a hole in the ships hull. This caused the ship to commence sinking. But due to low tide and high sides, the ship just settled in an upright position with the upper decks well above water. I suffered a split eyeball and doctors operated and inserted two gold stitches behind the eye. Recovery was 100%.

Three days after the air raid, aircraft from HMS HERMES - based in Trincomalee - sighted the Japanese fleet sailing south of Colombo. The result was an immediate attack on the HERMES by Japanese aircraft and the subsequent sinking of the ship.

During my stay in Ceylon I had a few trips away on active duty. One was to Chittagong to take and set up a transmitter there close to the Japanese lines. The trip was eventful, with great secrecy in our leaving because of some of the Japanese sympathisers in Colombo. We left late at night and had to stay in Trincomalee for 3 days as our boat had become stuck in the harbour there. We took another craft to Calcutta and then by train to Chittagong. Another trip was to Bombay to set up equipment. During my stay in Colombo, I was paid Rs187 per month living allowance, and I stayed in upstairs rooms at Alfred House just off Galle Face Road.

Finally, the normal period for overseas service in the Royal Navy is about 2 years. I was fortunate to be allowed to stay ashore in Colombo for 4 1/2 years, and during that period, I was accepted by the GEORGE WILLIAM DIGBY PRINS family and allowed to marry LENA EMMELINE LOUISE in January 1943. We are still happily greeting every dawn. One final point: the Francois Prins who wrote the previous article about the Colombo bombing, turns out to be my wife's 2nd cousin!

Ed Tapping (christened John)  
Melbourne.

Dear Editor,

I came across CEYLONIAN 8 recently and read the article on "The Rock of God", and I would like to make comment on part of the story. The last paragraph mentions the Dutch Governor's daughter seeing her lover sail away throwing herself in anguish from the top of the rock. This well-known story is "romance" to quote a authoritative source! "The facts disclosed by the records and other authentic authorities do not support the story in any way" The

facts are: Francina van Rheede appears to have been the daughter of Hendricke Adriaan van Rheede, she did not die as stated, because she lived long after the construction of the monument. She was twice married. The story is correct to the extent she was at one time engaged to a captain, for she married one! Possibly her father had the monument erected to mark her sailing away with the captain as his bride, and the date is not the date of her death, but of the completion of the monument. It was a good story though! Hope you don't mind this correction. I fond your magazine very readable. Ah l'amour!

Sarah Brell

Dear Editor

I am seeking information about some distant relatives who lived in Ceylon in the early 1800s.

Richard FORSTER an officer in the 83rd Foot Regt; HILLEBRAND; and DE JONG. Any information would be appreciated.

Jennifer Forster, c/o P.D.C., Maungatapere, Northland, New Zealand

## SOME SINHALESE PROVERBS....

*"Do not wear a Wallah\* in your native place, nor carry a large stick in another" -*

Which means, Be not too proud at home, nor display more power than belongs to you elsewhere.

\* Wallah, a cloth worn by the Singhalese, in which one end hangs lower than the other - a mark of ostentation.

*"Although a man with large teeth dies, no one will believe it".*

No one will believe a man, who is known to be rich, when he talks of his poverty.

*"Scraps of chunan are found in everyone's betel box".*

The best of men have faults.

*"Buying a house for five hundred dollars, and selling it at half-price".*

A person reduced from riches to comparative poverty.



## A TRIP TO FIND SOME BEGININGS

### By David Goodrich

It probably seems strange that as editor of the CEYLON LANKAN, I am not Sri Lankan, - though my mother was born there in 1908, and is still alive and kicking in New Zealand - and that I had never visited the Island until recently.

My mother's family were Prinses and as a youngster I was constantly assailed by stories about the Island by my grandmother 'Queenie' Prins. So there had to come a time for me to visit the place that was always called at home, Ceylon.

In January this year I went on my pilgrimage to search for family roots and to fulfill an urge to see for myself the land of my forbears. It was different. I did not expect too much and that is a good way to travel as one does not get disappointed. Readers of this article will know the advantages and short comings of life in the Island, and for an 'outsider' to criticise I believe is not my prerogative. But let me dwell on some of the positives I encountered.

The most obvious for me was the children going to school - and always the hope for the future. I never saw a student without a sense of pride in both attending school and also in their appearance. No shirts hanging out, no slouching along the roads, and the white uniforms looked as good at the end of the day as at the beginning.

The buses, while they appeared chaotic and somewhat grubby, nevertheless ran frequently, and were so cheap, admittedly they were not the fastest!! I travelled from Nuwara Eliya to Colombo to Galle at one hit -9 hours - and it cost less than \$A4! And the scenery was great. Some Sri Lankans here in Australia told me I was brave! I did not think so, it was a pleasant experience.

People were friendly and helpful, but English was difficult. It can be daunting to try and be understood in many areas other than the tourist haunts. But that was no big deal.! Usually one can get understood if patient.

Food was great and cheap. The fruit in particular quite wonderful. I have never liked pawpaw before, it was delicious, and the pineapples and very small bananas mouthwatering.

I felt very comfortable in the Island - though the touts were a bit annoying until you know how to handle them. I spent time in the National Archives - very helpful; Kanatte cemetery, many of my rela-

tives are there and I found tombstones to match (photographed them), and the cemetery was mostly surprisingly well cared for. Spending quite a few hours there was very rewarding research wise.

Through a Ceylon Society member, I had an introduction to the normally out-of-bounds port facilities, and was escorted over the entire area. This was a particular interest for me as my grandfather had been a mason engineer during the construction of the North and Northwest breakwaters in the first few years of the 1900s.

The walls around many of the tea plantations' steep slopes were impressive. I'm quite sure most people never even notice them, but if you travel into the high country, have a good look. They, along with the accompanying drains to carry the rains away down the hillsides quickly without taking all the topsoil, are really standing the test of time and the construction of them must have been in the hands of true tradesmen and engineers.

The pace of life is slower in the Island. I can understand why with the climate tending to cause languidness!. I walked almost everywhere around Colombo, and 6 to 10 kilometers a day was certainly the norm. I enjoyed that, particularly in the morning. And I mastered the "challenge of the roads"! the confidence one requires in order to cross the road with the traffic almost daring one to make to attempt. The traffic was not as chaotic as I was led to believe. The tuktuk drivers know what they are doing though I had been assured they were like kamikaze drivers (if you are nervous, it might not pay to look where you are going when using their services!).

It would be very easy to criticise where one travels to, but I believe the object of travel is to enjoy, to experience something different and perhaps to realise how well off we are in Australia, and to look for the positive aspects of the new environs. And Sri Lanka has much to entice people to visit, not the least of course, the scenery.

'Will I go back again'. Yes, hopefully within the next 12 months. Much family history still requires researching and then there are the places I did not see, Anuradhapura, Polonaruwa etc. Perhaps my Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan's English may have improved by then! What was my main impression? A profound feeling of non-urgency, not laissez faire, but simply today is today is today. It was a good feeling.....Ed.



## IN MEMORIAM

Francois Prins, a contributor to the CEYLANKAN, passed away Sunday 26th March in his sleep in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. Francois emigrated to England from Colombo in 1958, but never left his Sri Lankan roots far behind. On a personal note I will miss the vibrant letter exchange we had over the last 3-4 years, and the help in building up the Prins family history.

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE REBEL OF KANDY BY GASTON PERERA

ANCL Publication. (Colombo) 1999.  
664 Pages. ISBN 955-903444-8.

In an age when historical studies have lost their enchantment for the student, when the historian himself, like the Sri Lankan elephant has become an endangered species almost at the point of extinction, it is refreshing to find historical fiction being published - the more so when it is by an author, who, as we are told, has graduated in Western Classics and whose official career has been in taxation. Historical fiction itself has been rare in the 'Sri Lankan literary firmament. In English there was A.T.Amarasingha's gripping story of the last Sinhala queen, the counterpart of Gaston Perera's hero Wimaladharmasuriya, while Martin Wickremasinghe and W.A.de Silva have authored a few historical novels in Sinhala.

Gaston Perera is completely at home with the essential norms of writing historical fiction. He has not distorted historical fact to suit his story or his prejudices. The primary sources relating to this period - Queyroz, de Couto, Ribeiro and Baldaeus as well as recent works and articles form the underpinning of the historical accuracy of his novel. It is where history is silent that he brings his imagination into play - the poignant romance with Sampala for instance - but without transgressing historical probability.

The author could not have selected a more

significant period or hero for his novel. The background to his story is the Portuguese occupation regarding which it was Emerson Tennent who writes -

"There is no page in the story of European colonialisation more gloomy and repulsive than that which recounts the proceedings 'of the Portuguese in Ceylon".

This was the first encounter that the Sinhala people had with the West and the author recounts in vivid detail the sordid saga of rapacity, cruelty and bigotry that ensued. Against this backdrop of blood and tears, the author has skillfully woven the heroic story of Wimaladharmasuriya, the saviour of Kandy, adding flesh and blood to the dry bones of history making it readable, fascinating even scintillating. With a fluency of language and in vivid detail he presents a colorful fabric portraying most of the personalities of the 16th century Sri Lanka fighting tooth and nail against the invader but never able to unite against him, the fatal tragedy of the Sinhala people to this day. Towering above all others is Wimaladharmasuriya, although alas, History has not accorded to him that place.

The grand finale of the novel is the Battle of Dantare, where the triumphant Wimaladharmasuriya became the undisputed ruler of Kande Uda Rata. The Battle of Dantere is certainly the most decisive one in Sri Lankan history. Had the Portuguese army won the day the whole of Sri Lanka would from 1594 be a Portuguese possession. Like the doddering Dharmapala in Kotte, and the Portuguese puppet in Jaffna, Dona Catherina would have been made the nominal ruler of Kandy with a Portuguese fidalgo for husband, and a Portuguese army to maintain him in power. Sri Lanka would have ended up like the Philippines, which lost all traces of its indigenous culture after 150 years of Spanish rule. In that sense Wimaladharmasuriya should be known as the saviour of the Sinhala people.

This is the point that Gaston Perera's novel makes. When the island's freedom, religion and culture were facing a threat of complete annihilation, an obscure son of a Kandyan chief rose to the occasion



and with courage coupled with duplicity and Machiavellian tactics secured the Kanda Uda Rata as a refuge for the Sinhala people and a safe haven for Buddhism and preserved Sri Lankan independence at least for another two centuries.

The plot that Gaston Perera spins has to do with these turbulent and complicated events. With great dexterity he deals with the various metamorphoses Wimaladhar-masuriya passed through as the occasion demanded from Konappu Bandara to Don Juan to Wimaladhar-masuriya. Into this main plot, unique in itself the author has integrated supporting actors like the mendicant fakir Arittha Kivendu Perumal who ingratiated himself into Rajasinha's favour, the sagacious Devan-gala Thero, mentor to Wimaladhar-masuriya and other lesser known historical figures. He describes life at St. Anthony's college where Konappu Bandara, turned Don Juan, received his Christian training and learnt Portuguese and Latin. He writes of the ubiquitous Moormen in their tavalam, part and parcel of the Kandyan landscape as they were travelling to the high-lands with their merchandise of salt, cloth and dried fish, which the Kandyans relished, and returning with betel, arecanut and rice.

On the military side Rajasinha's great assault on Colombo and the Kandyan defense of Balana are described in vivid detail, as if by an eyewitness portraying how the Kandyans made strategic use of their terrain. Juxtaposed with these warlike scenes one gets an idyllic glimpse of the rural Kanda Uda Rata - the paddy fields ready for harvest, the peasantry pre-occupied, when not polishing, with the pomp and ceremony of their temples.

Gaston Perera should he commented for this worthy effort, not merely for writing a historical novel of this calibre but for doing justice to the hero he has chosen - the man, who, more than anyone else, ensured that the Sinhala people were spared the calamity that befell the Mayas, Incas and Aztecs of Central America.

**Reviewed by Lorna Dewaraja**

Copies from: Gaston Perera, 111, Issipatana Mawatte, Colombo.5.

**OR** if sufficient orders are received Vama

(Treasurer) will arrange to obtain copies.

## BOOK LAUNCH

*The Story of the Muslims of Sri Lanka by Vama Vamadevan will be launched at the next meeting of The Ceylon Society Of Australia on 27 May 2000.*

*The Foreward is by Dr Husainmiya, Professor OF History, University Of Brunei.*

*The Book deals with the contribution of the Muslim community to Sri Lankan society. It is priced at \$AUD25 and will be available at the launch.*

## SMART SRI LANKAN!!!!

One top recruitment company in Sydney fields some highly complex questions to test candidates. Until recently these included a couple of trick questions. - the kind that could not be answered. You proved you had brains by not answering them. But then comes along this Sri Lankan graduate who answers them both, much to the consternation of the company psychologist. Here are the questions and answers.

"How long is a piece of string?"

"A piece of string" said the bright lad from Sri Lanka, "is twice the length between the centre and either end"

"How far can a dog run into the woods?"

"A dog can run only half way into the woods, after that he is running out of the woods".

The resident psychologist was sacked and the lad was hired!!

A new book, which is in effect though not in title, PEOPLE INBETWEEN Vol. II, has been published.

## IMAGES OF BRITISH CEYLON

**Nineteenth Century Photography of Sri Lanka**

...by Ismeth Raheem & Percy Colin-Thome

Singapore: Times Editions, 2000 160 pages

109 Pictures in large-medium scale, 63 minute pictures

ISBN 98 204 7786

Price: \$US70, plus \$15 postage, approx. \$A110

Rs3950 SL

Contact: Michael Roberts, 08 8278 5773



## TIGER TOPS - CEYLON

### By John Banks

The proposal to build a 'Tiger Tops' lodge at Gal Oya National Park is not widely known today. This concept was based on the successful 'Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge' established in the Royal Chitwan National Park, situated 75 air miles south west of Kathmandu. The lodge is situated deep in the heart of the park and consists of treehouses and bungalows with rooms having solar showers, fans and lighting.

The 'Tiger Tops' proposal was submitted to the Government in the mid-1970s. Earlier, many miles were walked through jungles, escorted by Wildlife Department trackers, before an ideal site was found at Gal Oya National Park. After a long period of negotiation, the Wildlife Department agreed that a lodge could be built at the chosen site on the understanding that the lodge would belong to the Department but the cost of building and ongoing management would be the responsibility of the developers.

The idea was to establish an up-market lodge of 20 rooms within the National Park with buried and soundless electric motors. All tourists would have to leave their vehicles and drivers at another lodge built at the entry to the National Park. They would then proceed by transport provided by the Lodge. Most of the game viewing was to be from boats on the Gal Oya reservoir.

The proposal envisioned that poachers and illicit gem diggers would be given employment at the main Lodge, either as shikaris to take the visitors around or to grow vegetables for the Lodge. The idea was to

vation and tourism.

The concept eventually was abandoned after opposition was encountered from the Wildlife Conservation Society. The main reason provided for vetoing the proposal was that the Lodge might have interfered with the migration of elephants. However, the developers maintained that their prime reason for the concept was to protect the elephants and to stop illicit gemming and poaching in the area.

The developers also believed that further reasons for this opposition stemmed from the fact that the Wildlife Conservation Society's advice was not sought (negotiations involved the Wildlife Department) and that discounted rates were not planned to be offered to members of the Society.

The other snag in the proposal was that the architect employed by 'Tiger Tops' in Nepal wanted to build a five star lodge at the outset. The developers could not afford the architect's designs which in their view should have been 'rustic', at any rate until the Lodge became established. The location where the Lodge was to be established is now within LTTE territory and it was probably fortunate that the proposal never got going.

*(John Banks lived in Ceylon from 1927 to 1987 and travelled all over the island playing rugby for many clubs, including Dickoya, Dimbulla, Darawella, CH&FC, Presidents XV, Ceylon, and even England. He was a referee for about 5 years after the game 'became too hard for his old middle-aged body'.*

*He was involved with tea, rubber and coconut plantations for about 50 years, first as a creeper and finally as an Agent. His father managed Hatton Bank Ltd until 1946 when the partners sold out to Brown & Co. Ltd and the bank was renamed Hatton National Bank.*

*John and his wife Judy are co-authors of three delightful little guidebooks published in 1990, all of which have colour plates, and titled:*

- *A Selection of the Animals of Sri Lanka*
- *A Selection of the Butterflies of Sri Lanka*
- *A Selection of the Birds of Sri Lanka*

## REMINDER

Members who have not paid subscriptions for the current year(2000) are requested to make their payments to the Treasurer Mr V Vamadevan

3 Collie Court  
Wattle Grove NSW 2173

**Annual subscriptions are :**

**Members SAU25**

**Overseas Members SAU20**

**Seniors SAU10**

involve these people in wildlife conservation and to enable them to earn money from conser-

## MELBOURNE CHAPTER MEETS

The presence of about sixty people at the meeting held on 19th March at Rentoul Hall in Burwood signalled a promising start to the Melbourne Chapter. Dr Srilal Fernando introduced the Society's Chairman, Hugh Karunanayake, who came from Sydney



to attend this event. Treasurer, Vama Vamadevan and the Editor of the CEYLANKAN, David Goodrich, were also on hand, adding to the sense of encouragement and support Melburnians experienced.

In his address, Hugh gave us a comprehensive survey on the Society's activities and interests over the three years of its existence to date. He emphasized their inclusive, non-divisive and non-controversial nature and the Society's genuine interest in providing opportunities for fruitful interaction between people which included contributing to the Journal, publicising books they have written and engaging in serious discussion and research. Printed copies of the Chairman's Report were distributed to all present.

Hugh then introduced the speaker of the evening, Teresa Cannon who together with Peter Davies, co-authored the book "Aliya". Teresa and Peter made a joint presentation on the subject "Elephants in Sri Lanka". This was illustrated with slides of photographs taken in Sri Lanka while researching the book. The pictures were an excellent and expressive accompaniment to the detailed portrait they drew of the elephant, his habitat in nature and in man's society, his place in religion and ritual, his relationship with his mahout, his likes and dislikes and man's treatment of him which governed both his predictable and unpredictable behaviour.

Both Teresa and Peter spoke of elephants with a warmth which clearly conveyed their respect, affection and understanding of these magnificent beasts who not only possessed the capacity to demonstrate massive strength, but also gentleness. Peter suggested that the Society would do well to adopt an elephant as its logo. In conclusion they graciously presented a copy of their book to the library of the Society. Their talk generated a number of questions which continued long after the official question time was over. The meeting ended with a social interlude and refreshments.

The Melbourne Chapter gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Kit Abeywardene of Travel Talk who made a donation towards the expenses of this first meeting. The meeting was further enlivened by the informal exhibition of books on the elephant which Victor Melder thoughtfully brought along from his library. Quite a number stayed back for an informal chat and a cup of tea after the meeting.

Many took advantage of the forms which were available with Vama and became members that evening.

*Shelagh Goonawardene*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR....CONT'D

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the article "Penny Post" under the column 'Did you know' in the CEYLANKAN of February 1999 (Vol 2 No 1). I have since unearthed some interesting facts about the early records of the Postal System in Ceylon (then called the Penny Post System)

The Postal service in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) was probably introduced on the lines of the English system. Inland Postage rates were calculated by distances not exceeding 10 miles at the rate of 1 d. This was the reason for the service to be called the 'Penny Post System'. The inland Postal rates according to the Ordinance No 8 of 1836 was charged according to distances starting from 10 miles at the rate of 1 d, increasing progressively by 1d up to 12d for 210 miles. (See Ceylon Calendar 1819)

In Colombo, the Post Office was established earlier, around 1819. This was probably to receive and dispatch letters to England by sea, which is referred to in official documents as 'Sea Letters'. The Postmaster General was Louis Sansoni and PB Anandappa, was Clerk (see Ceylon Calendar of 1819). In 1839, the position of Postmaster-General was held by Mr George Lee and the Head Clerk was Mr RC Roosmale Cocq, while JA Christoffelsz was Second Clerk.

As trade and commerce developed, the need was felt to extend the Postal System to the Provinces and Districts. It was at this stage that the Ordinance referred to earlier was enacted. The service was called 'Tappal' service, and the parcel service called 'Parcel Tappal Service'. Tappal was dispatched twice every week on Tuesdays and Fridays from Colombo, and similarly, Tappel left the Provinces twice every week. In early times runners were used in relays. Runners carried 'chulu' torches in the night to scare away elephants. In due course horse drawn carriages replaced the runners to take Tappal to the provinces.

EXPRESS SERVICE CHARGES - 1838 (According to the notice of May 14, 1839)

The charges were as follows for up to 8ozs:

Colombo to Kandy & vice versa L.0-12-0

" " Galle " " " 0-13-6

" " Jaffna " " " 3-4-6

" " Point Pedro " " " 3-9-0

" " Trincomalle " " " 2-10-0

The Officer-in-Charge of a Provincial Postal facility was called a Post-holder.

Doug. Mortier,  
3/24 Stapleton Street  
Wentworthville.

NSW 2145