

The Journal of the *Ceylon Society of Australia*

Our apologies for the tardiness of the last edition's production. Everything was in order a month prior to the publishing date, and suddenly we had a mechanical glitch. That's the sort of problem that can occur when amateurs are doing the work and are not sure how to fix things on the computer. We believe this edition will be out on time. Also the repeating of a page about the Tallales. We couldn't understand how there was an extra page!!! Oh well the joys of amateur production!

This will be my last effort as your editor. My health is declining rapidly and I believe there is someone out there, who will enjoy the rewards (and frustrations) of being editor. The time I have spent gathering material, assessing it, and with the help of the production team – mainly Hugh and his son Sumal – seeing come to fruition a worthwhile journal, not too sophisticated, but one everyone can enjoy, has been a great joy to me and I have to thank the many people who have contributed articles, and also the many who have written nice things about the CEYLAN, or made suggestions, or even had a whinge! It is so important we maintain the standard of non-confrontational, non-political, non-racial, and non-sectarian. Those principles must be retained. My best wishes to the Society for its future. I am very proud to have been part of its success.

- SYDNEY MEETING- 8 SEPTEMBER 2001

Bandaranaike, the 35 minute presentation was of the usual high standards that we associate with the work

of Dr Gunetilleke. Several copies of the video were sold after the meeting, with part proceeds going to the Society's funds. Anyone interested in purchasing a copy should contact Sumane Iyer at the address provided

with the list of Office Bearers.

The third presentation for the evening was by Tony and Claire Oxlade on the "Sri Lankan Golf Classic"

Hugh introduced Claire as a fellow Australian and also as the daughter of a well known Sri Lankan sportsman and businessman the late Mark Bostock. Tony who is the Chairman of the Rajawella Produce

Company, and Claire outlined the progress made after the establishment of the new golf course in Digana.

They are at the forefront of efforts to promote tourism to Sri Lanka, and have coordinated several programmes to achieve their objectives. Their presentation evoked an enthusiastic discussion.

The meeting was followed by a delicious supper provided by the ladies of the Society.

#### THE MELBOURNE MEETING 23 September 2001

The meeting commenced with Dr Srilal Fernando in the Chair. He briefly introduced Mr Mahindapala to the

audience, recounting his broad experience with the media as a senior journalist and editor.

Mr Mahindapala then addressed the meeting on the issue of whether the SWRD Bandaranaike's Sinhala Only

policy of 1956 was the main factor for creating Tamil dissent, which has culminated in the current bid for Eelam

by the Tamil Tigers and their supporters. He argued that the movement for Tamil dissent occurred much earlier,

in fact well before independence, during the time of Governor Manning(1920s) when he attempted to create a devolution of legislative power by offering 13 positions in the legislative Council to the Sinhalese and 3 to the Tamils in Northern areas in place of the then existing system of representation by appointment in which the Tamils had near parity with Sinhalese. The Tamils protested and claimed that they had an agreement for an additional seat in the Western Provinces. The Sinhalese then invited Arunachalam to stand for election in the Western Province, but he refused.

Under the existing system, the Sinhalese, Tamil, Moslem, and Burgher communities were united against the

British but the Tamils became resentful that Mannings arrangement gave the Sinhalese a large number of seats though they comprised 75% and the Tamils only 12% of the population. Mahindapala argued that communal conflict started at this point. He also said that Ramanathan, on the basis of caste, opposed the decision of the Donoughmore Constitution(1930s) to grant universal franchise to voters because it would result in "mob rule".

When the Soulbury Commission 1940 gathered evidence before recommending that Ceylon be granted independence, Ponnambalam argued before the Commission that the Tamils were entitled to 50/50 representation

which Mahindapala argued was totally unrealistic in the context of a democratic constitution, with the Tamils comprising only 13% of the population, and that it signaled the centrifugal aspirations of the Tamils. The next step in the move for separation was the formation of the Federal Party by Chelvanayagam in 1949. The Tamil

name for the Party was Ilankai Tamil Arasukathu which translates as the Tamil State Party, which had quite a different connotation from a Federal party, and if the fact was known to the general population it would have created immediate suspicion and resentment. Dr Wilson an academic and Chelvanayagam's son in law, in his

Political Biography of Chelvanayagam quoted him as saying "Little now and more later" regarding his aspirations for the Tamil people. Mahindapala said that this illustrates the secret agenda of the Tamil leaders for separatism.

Mahindapala then pointed out that following the assassination of the moderate Alfred Durriappah by the Tigers

in 1975, there was a meeting at Vadukodai which was held in order to resolve the differences between the methods of the old Tamil political elite and the revolutionary youth. The meeting concluded with the passing

of the Vadukodai Resolution 1976 endorsed by Chelvanayagam which proclaimed the right of a Tamil political

united front including the revolutionary youth to use force to achieve "The Sovereignty and Freedom of The

Tamil Nation". According to Professor Hoole this resolution provided the Licence for the Youth to arm themselves.

Mahindapala used this sequence of events to support his thesis that the movement for Tamil separatism had begun earlier than 1956 and that it culminated in a decision to use force and terrorism to create the separate State of Eelam.

The meeting was well attended by an audience of 55 people, and followed by light refreshments.

Cedric Forster

## NOAH'S ARK

All I need to know I learned from Noah's Ark:

- 1...Don't miss the boat.
- 2...Remember that we are all in the same boat.
- 3...Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
- 4...Stay fit. When you're 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.
- 5...Don't listen to critics, just get on with the job that needs to be done.
- 6...Build your future on high ground.
- 7...For safety's sake travel in pairs.
- 8...Speed isn't everything. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
- 9...When you're stressed, float awhile.
- 10..Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs, the Titanic by professionals.
- 11..No matter the storm, when you are with God there's always a rainbow waiting.

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## NOTES ON GALLE

by.....Joe Simpson

Typhoid was also commonly referred to as “enteric” fever due to the way it attacked with excruciating effect the gastro-intestinal systems of its victims. Typhoid fever and various other “tropical” diseases were an everpresent threat to local inhabitants and foreign residents alike in the time of Joseph Small and his contemporaries. In Christine Wilson’s biography of her father, the great “surgeon of the wilderness”, Richard L. (Dick) Spittel, the author makes mention of Dick’s elder brother, Fred, tragically dying of typhoid as a youngster some time in the later 1880s or early 1890s,

apparently contracted from contaminated water when the two boys went for a swim in the sea just outside the Galle Fort ramparts. At the funeral Dick's mother briefly blamed him for his brother's death, as he had been the instigator of the light-hearted swimming expedition. He never forgot the experience. It may well have been part of the motivating drive that led the future Dr. R. L. Spittel, FRCS to reach the pinnacle of the surgeon's profession. Lyn Ludowyk's childhood memoirs of early 20th century Galle mention how "typhoid, called enteric, was common". Another endemic health hazard described by Ludowyk was the so-called "Galle Leg", or elephantiasis that was "familiar in the town". Ludowyk's book vividly pictures for readers how the juxtaposition of squalor and prosperity within its picturesque confines meant that the 17th century Dutch Fort "with its open drains, its contaminated wells still in use, its odours of night soil taken through the living rooms of houses lacking a back door and collected in carts which trundled at nightfall through its streets, must have been a nursery of disease". The Ludowyk family was fortunate enough to escape the dire effects of "enteric", although he remembered many of his schoolfellows reappearing after long absence from school, with "nearly bald heads on which the suspicion of hair was to be detected". He recalled smallpox and "plague" as being comparatively rare, unless a carrier got through the strict controls of the island's ports; large posters gave warning of the dangers. Rabies was endemic: he recalled how a schoolmate had to be shipped off to Coonoor in South India for special treatment at the Pasteur Institute after being bitten in Fort by a rabid dog that had entered her classroom. Every so often the Municipal Council employed one "Cyrus" to seize and shoot stray dogs (I think I recall similar "sweeps" of stray dogs in Fort happening from time to time in the early 1970s).

In GALLE: As Quiet As Asleep, Norah Roberts (who was born further along the south-west coast at Panadura in 1907, exactly one year after Lyn Ludowyk's birth, and came to live permanently in Galle when her father was appointed District Judge in 1927) provides us with some highly revealing information about the state of health care and various diseases endemic in Southern Province at this time. For instance, until 1899 burials of "native" inhabitants took place in their back gardens or elsewhere on public land inside the municipal limits, there being no regular cemeteries for non-Christians. In that year Council opened the new cemetery at Dadalla, where James Darrell was to be buried in 1906 and where I visited Joseph Small's gravesite in 1988. Burials within municipal boundaries were generally banned from then on, what Norah Roberts calls an important sanitary measure. In 1902 however Galle was still being officially described as the "most insanitary" of municipal towns. It was only in the early 1900s that Galle got its own reservoir for drinking water, when Council bought land in a catchment area just outside the town. Initially potable water was sold from carts at so much a pot, until in about 1910 tap water became available to households. Yet in 1919 "enteric" (typhoid) fever prevailed once more, particularly in Colombo – Norah Roberts sadly informs us in her book that her "dear sister Bell" fatally succumbed to it that year, just after returning from England where she had spent the war years at school. Another victim that year was the 47-year-old Galle proctor (attorney), F. J. de Vos, brother of the eminent Burgher proctor C. E. de Vos who was a Patron of the Richmond National Association's 1915 "Legislative Assembly" event. (His nephew, Charles de Vos, a proctor - and NOH bar habitué - lived at the YWCA in Galle Fort during my time there and died in the later 1970s, the last of the once-prominent, extended de Vos family to reside in Galle). Roberts speculates that even around 1920 "impure" water was the cause in Galle, where typhoid was known to be endemic: the disease was urban rather than rural. Back in 1887 typhoid fever had killed the female Principal of the Methodist-run Southlands College in Galle Fort, just as it was to kill Principal James Darrell at Richmond in 1906 and the wife of Principal Henry Highfield of Wesley College, Colombo in the following year. Roberts tells how in 1889 the family of the (as yet unborn) Lyn Ludowyk was responsible for a ban on pig-rearing inside Galle Fort, after a family member died of typhoid aged only 19. The medical authorities found that pig-rearing in a

neighbour's back yard had caused typhoid to dog adjacent homes for several years. The pong alone must have been fearsome!

In September 1922, around the time that the Smalls had left Richmond to move to Joseph Small's new posting at Peradeniya, rat-borne bubonic plague broke out in the Galle bazaar. A segregation camp was set up at Dadalla, and among other fairly drastic measures part of the town's bazaar was burned down and a corrugated metal fence was erected from sea to sea across the south end of the Esplanade to prevent infected rats from getting into the Fort. Over 4,500 rodents were trapped and destroyed, including about 300 infected rats found inside the Fort. It was at this time that the little-known network of ancient Dutch-brick laid drains that honeycombed the Fort up to 12 feet underground, was discovered; by then these drains were no longer being tidally flushed as in previous centuries, so had become a perfect breeding ground for sewer rats. (The Dutch East India Company (VOC) merchants had actually "farmed" musk rats in the underground drainage system for the profits from their exported fur)!

Roberts tells us that yaws – *Framboesia Tropica* named parangi in Sinhala after the 16th century invading Portuguese "foreigners" whose Mozambique slaves had brought it from eastern Africa to the Ceylonese villagers – was another common affliction. For instance, half the patients at the Matara hospital in around 1900 had been admitted due to parangi. (Somewhat ironically in this context, the Sinhala word for "hospital" is a direct borrowing from the Portuguese *espiritual*). Fortunately, in 1910 the renowned London-trained Italian physician and tropical diseases expert Dr. Aldo Castellani, while treating parangi patients in the seriously afflicted north-central part of the island, discovered the dramatic beneficial effect of a newly available, injected drug called Salvasan. Consequently by the early 1920s, while parangi still existed among in rural villages, it was far less prevalent than before. Castellani, after leaving Colombo and settling down in Harley Street, London, was later knighted by the British for his medical services. During the Italian Fascist period "Sir Aldo" served as Benito Mussolini's medical supremo, combating malaria around the vast swamps that bordered on Rome and inflicted the anopheles mosquito on its suburban populace. This task successfully accomplished, Castellani next turned his attention to newly-conquered Abyssinia and other countries over-run by the Black Shirts, tackling yaws and other African diseases until the War ended and Mussolini was no more.

Other common earlier 20th century diseases mentioned by Roberts include malaria, cholera and (of course) "Galle Leg". Malaria spread by the anopheles mosquito bite, was endemic due to swamps and other larvae-breeding places like plumbago mining pits, particularly immediately after the monsoon rains. In 1887 there had been an extensive outbreak, apparently due to sod-breaking for the new railway extension from Colombo to Galle. Quinine was available at small dispensaries (originally set up under Governor Sir William Gregory along the lines of the 19th century Irish Medical Relief System) and even local post offices in the early 1900s and beyond. In the mid-1940s DDT spraying had a remarkable effect on malaria prevalence in remoter areas, but nowadays (early 2000s) there are alarming reports of new, resistant strains of malaria-bearing mosquito that are causing the disease to recover lost ground.

Cholera was another recurrent hazard for urban inhabitants, and hence a threat to a school like Richmond College that, while situated in a comparatively "healthy" location away from the town, took pupils from Galle (like young Lyn Ludowyk) who travelled to and from Richmond Hill daily. There had been a serious cholera outbreak in 1871, brought under control largely due to the efforts of Dr. P. D. Anthonisz, in whose honour the famous Galle Fort clock tower was later erected. It was he who pointed out that in Galle the cholera outbreaks always occurred in Magalle and similarly damp, level areas beside the old Dutch canal system, where numerous small, closely-built homes

and a mosque with a burial ground lacked proper drainage to carry away polluted water, and people often used the open ground as a latrine due to lack of public conveniences. In 1873 the 17th century defensive ditch along the front of the Dutch Fort was finally filled in, and in 1875 a cholera hospital was opened at Unawatuna, a picturesque bay just around the corner from Galle; out of 179 cholera cases admitted that year, 129 died. Curiously, Leonard Woolf's tropical wardrobe on his departure for Ceylon as an Eastern Cadet in 1903, included a colonial era standard-issue flannel "cholera belt" – the belief at that time being that, tightly wrapped around the waist, it kept – if not the actual disease – at least various unpleasant intestinal disorders at bay!

The Ankylostomiasis intestinal ova and worm ("Anky") had been introduced to Ceylon in the later 19th century by Malabar coolies brought over from South India as tea plantation workers, among whom it was extremely prevalent at this time. While the death rate was low, it was very debilitating, causing anaemia and low vitality; its spread was due to polluted soil and excreta mixing with drinking water. The cure involved segregation of infected patients while the ova and worm was destroyed, and improved sanitation. A 1919 anti-"Anky" campaign among the estate workers, who by then were almost 100% infected; particular effort was expended to convince the Tamil workers to use estate latrines, with some but not total success according to Roberts. It seems however that this problem was far more rife among the tea estate workers than the general populace.

Norah Roberts, whose sister Marjorie was a hospital Matron in Galle, refers also in her book to what she terms the "scourge" of elephantiasis, "Galle Leg". Apparently a "deplorable number of cases" of this disease came to light during an exemption from road tax survey in the early 1920s. Elephantiasis is a member of the infectious disease group collectively known as filariasis, and is spread by threadlike mosquito-borne nematodes invading subcutaneous tissues and lymphatics, causing acute inflammation and often chronic scarring. Because it inhabits lymph nodes and vessels, and can eventually harden and clog the lymph channels, in extreme, untreated cases the disease causes gross expansion of leg and scrotum tissue: hence the term "Galle Leg". Roberts tells us that a Filaria Survey carried out in the 1930s recorded 645 cases, 80% of which were within a mile of coastline infested with *Pistia* plant on which the filarial mosquito breeds. Control of *Pistia* plants and drug treatment by injection were the main methods used to combat the disease. Still, in the 1950s according to Roberts, despite years of eradication efforts, bancroftian filariasis maintained its hold on urban areas thanks to the house mosquito. She tells us that Dr. Abdul Cader, head of the Filaria Campaign of 1939, believed that the Bancroftian type of filaria common to Galle and Matara, was introduced to Ceylon by the Chinese delegation led by General Cheng-ho that came to Galle in 1409. The visit is commemorated by tri-lingual stone inscription that was discovered in a culvert in Galle in 1911, the Chinese portion of which was translated by Sir Edmund Backhouse (1873-1944), the WWI British secret agent, fraudster and brilliant sinologist known as The Hermit of Peking, who later notoriously sold vast quantities of non-existent rifles to the British Foreign Office and supplied worthless forgeries of "ancient" Chinese manuscripts to the Bodleian Library at Oxford. VOC (Dutch East India Company) records show that in the early 1640s filaria was a major cause of sickness among the 400-odd Dutch garrison in Galle which was fending off the recently-ousted Portuguese forces still surrounding the town.

Another potentially if comparatively rarely fatal, but severely incapacitating mosquito-borne fever prevalent in the Galle area was – and is - dengue, also known as "breakbone" or "dandy" fever. Besides fever, the disease is characterized by stiffness and extreme pain in the joints and behind the eyes. Mosquitoes carrying this virus remain affected for life. There are four types of dengue, and while infection with one type guarantees a person immunity against that type in the future, it does not provide any protection against the other three varieties. This makes its spread particularly

unpredictable. The only “cure” is rest and relief of symptoms. Dengue has spread from Asia to Latin America and the Caribbean in the later 20th century. In late 2000, Windsor Morris, a Sri Lanka-born Burgher correspondent of mine now resident in the UK, had to cut short a visit to his ancestral home of Galle Fort due to an outbreak of dengue fever.

Elsewhere in this article I have mentioned the dreadful influenza epidemic that struck Ceylon like the rest of the world in 1918, probably brought to Colombo by ship in September 1918, just before the Armistice in November. Norah Roberts records that Galle suffered 21,700 cases with 796 deaths. Not a village escaped its impact. In 1920, the death increase over previous years was mainly due to enteric (typhoid), pneumonia, dysentery, “Anky”, and infant mortality; in that year Ceylon had the highest death rate for ten years. (Interestingly, relatively-populous Galle town was the only centre on the island apart from far-more-remote Mannar in the north west, that showed an actual decrease in immigration in the 1921 Census, compared with the previous Census in 1911. In 1901 the population of Southern Province was just over a half million souls, a fraction of today’s numbers).

Something that comes across clearly in Norah Robert’s detailed chapter on Galle’s medical past, is the severe shortage of trained nursing staff in early 20th century Ceylon, notwithstanding the significant progress made in the availability of hospitals and local dispensaries. For instance, the Galle Hospital underwent considerable renovations in 1905, but a proper nurses’ training centre (initially under a European matron and two European nursing sisters) did not open in Galle until 1936. Like teachers, nurses in those days were undervalued and poorly paid. Partly for this reason Principal Darrell personally had to nurse the sick hostel boarders during the 1906 typhoid outbreak, and Thekla Small tended night and day to the Hostel boys with influenza in 1918, in both cases to the point of exhaustion. Nursing resources were stretched at the best of times, and in serious outbreaks of disease they were simply unavailable for many of the sick. Even given the improved medical knowledge of the early 1900s compared with even a generation before, life in “the tropics” was fraught with danger for many, both local inhabitants and foreigners alike. Diseases like typhoid were no respectors of race, caste or social rank, and arguably missionaries like the Smalls, being much closer to the local people than many other Europeans in the colonies, were therefore significantly more at risk. Such factors may help better to explain the concern felt by Rev. Small for his wife’s health that led to their departure from Galle in 1922. Insomnia would have led to a run-down state of health in which a person could be more vulnerable to any one of a number of “tropical” diseases, and Joseph Small must have been mindful of the tragically unexpected death from “enteric” fever in April 1907 of Minnie Highfield, the kindly missionary lady who had been his hostess upon his first arriving in Ceylon early in November 1906, and who was the wife of his older mentor and friend, Principal Henry Highfield of Wesley College in Colombo.

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## THE TANKS OF SRI LANKA

Nothing is more frustrating when researching a subject to find an important aspect, indeed, in some ways, the most important aspect, is missing, no matter where one searches. And so it is so with the fabulous tanks of Ceylon. The architectural masterpieces that identified the engineering genius that produced a system that enabled the country to be hugely self-sufficient in food production for over one thousand years, up to probably the 13th century. The production then, mainly rice, unequalled today, and in an area considered poor for agriculture.

We can be fairly accurate as to the dates, or close to it, when the main tanks (wewas) were constructed. Which king ordered the construction, and when, and if, they were increased in size,



and then perhaps, if and when they were connected to other reservoir systems, increasing the agricultural production areas considerably.

It is all well and good to say king Para baram the Great, built this tank or that one, but in actual fact he only ordered the construction. What is really missing is HOW the massive earth and stones works were put together. How many man/woman hours were required? Was the material for the walls of the dams carried from near the dams, by hundreds, thousands or more of ordinary people. We do know that the labour required was rendered under an organised system of determined co-operative effort for the common good. We also know that the loss of this social fabric, inhibited the co-operation in maintenance of the structures, leading to many tanks \eventually collapsing. Where did the 'engineers' get the expertise to perform such accurate measurements for their surveying? Tanks could be connected many miles apart by channels carrying the overflow from the upper tank to a lower, and on again to yet another reservoir, so there was minimal wastage, when there might only be a fall of perhaps 1:300. This sort of accuracy without the refined surveying and engineering equipment of today is quite stunning. How were some of the huge stones required for the masonry, cut and moved? Then there was the maintenance of these huge reservoirs. All had to be regularly 'serviced' requiring a cooperation from the local people that would be an impossibility today.

We can only deal with what we DO know.

Sri Lankans are considered to have migrated from northeast India around the 6th century BC to the north of Lanka. They brought with them the important staple, rice, and being an agrarian peoples, obviously needed land to grow this grain. It was quickly realised that the crops, in order to be bountiful, required a steady water supply, and that this was not possible with the dry north and northeast of the Island having to rely on the North East monsoon. Only one crop per year was possible in the early days, and during the years of poor monsoonal rain, food provision became a problem.

The new 'migrants' were not ignorant about the damming of streams as in the area of India they had come from, some tanks had been employed. But what quickly developed in Sri Lanka was unprecedented. Around the 5th century BC, the first of the small village tanks were built. These enhanced the area able to be cropped, and of course, helped produce larger crops for a rapidly increasing population. And every village had its own tank.

Most people believe that the north and northeast of the Island is poor land for cropping. What is not realised is the area can be remarkably productive IF WATER IS AVAILABLE ON A CONSISTANT BASIS. The first four or five centuries saw quite an increase in the village tank system, but they still remained small in size. It was not until the 1st Century AD that larger dam building took place. It is fascinating to follow the changes that occurred and to think there was nothing in the West to compare with the ultimate 'super tanks' being constructed by the 11th and 12th Centuries.

The area involved was of course the vast plains of Rajarata, which covers that area north of the Daduru Oya, and the Mahaweli Ganga. Not exactly the most productive area today. A fact probably not realised by many is that the development of the dagobas took place at the same time as the tanks. And as larger tanks were constructed, a correspondingly larger dagoba was usually built beside the tank. So there was seemingly a spiritual importance enhanced by the tank growth, or vice-versa.

In 161BC, Dutthagamini Abhaya united the entire island into one kingdom, and Anuradhapura became the capital until the 10th century when Polonnuruwa became the new capital. But prior to this, in the 3rd C BC, construction of small tanks was well established, and King Devanampiyatissa

built the Tissawewa tank in Anuradhapura. In these early days there were two main methods of irrigation: The small village tank with the fields to be irrigated directly below, and; small permanent stone dams across streams with temporary dams to divert water into channels to convey water to the fields. Most of these early village dams were owned by private people.

Migration to the Rajarata area had increased considerably by the 1st C. BC, necessitating major developments in water conservation. It was during the reign of King Vasabha (65-109AD) that much larger dams were being built, though even these were no where near as big as those constructed centuries later. Vasabha is credited with having built 11 tanks and 12 canals mainly south and southeast of Anuradhapura. He is also credited with building a weir and canal at Elahera, diverting the Amba Ganga water to irrigate a large downstream area. This canal was extended to 25 miles, 2 centuries later, to become the feeder canal of the Minneri tank, built by King Mahasena (275-301). This king is credited with having built some 16 tanks, including the Minneri which covered some 4670 acres, about 39 square km., and also a great canal on the Ganga.

King Dhatusena (459-477AD) had constructed the Kalawewa tank, which he connected by a canal 87km in length, to the Tissa wewa in Anuradhapura, thus providing a reliable and permanent water supply for the fields.

Documentation about what tanks were built during whose reign is fairly well recorded, and for those who wish to follow this in more detail a short bibliography at the conclusion of this article will benefit them.

So by the 10-12th Century AD, the advent of the 'supertanks' had arrived. What modern day Sri Lankans do not seem to realise is the sheer magnitude of size, but more particularly, the numbers of tanks that were built. From the small village through to the huge. Not just hundreds, but thousands of them, and all there for a specific reason, to enable rice to be grown. What also is not realised is that this present day poorly populated area of Rajarata, in all probability supported a population of perhaps at least 10,000,000, a millenium ago. And there had been a social-community fabric enabling the construction and maintence (labour intensive), that had continued for hundreds of years.

So what caused the sudden change, from thriving to collapse?

There are several theories, all of which make sense.

1...The advent of malaria around the 12-14th centuries. Quite possibly the majority of the population died from the disease, the remainder fleeing to the mountains, thus leaving the tanks and temples, villages and paddy fields to almost irretrievable neglect.

2...Perhaps, due to recurring local internal strife, beginning in the 12th century, disrupting the organisation obtaining combined labour of the local community, for the building of, and the maintenance of tanks.

3...Famine. The kings of Ceylon were perpetually at war with each other, and with the Arabs and Malabars, who at that time had invaded the northern districts of Ceylon. If water channels were blocked or diverted from the courses normally keeping the tanks full by sabotage, a whole chain of tanks in sequence, could be affected, from head water to final tank. And of course the community infrastructure to maintain/repair would obviously go down the tube.

So here in the 21st century little thought is give to these monuments from the past. Many tanks have not even been uncovered in the jungles of the north, and as time passes and the archaeological digs find out more, perhaps we will come to realise HOW these massive structures were built.

In this article I have barely touched much detail as to the construction and engineering skills involved. And of course a great deal is already known by studying the tanks still remaining and in reasonable 'health'. It really is an exciting topic and one I believe most Sri Lankans give little thought to.

Bibliography: Ancient Irrigation Works in Ceylon, by RL Brohier, 3 vols, pub 1934

The Springs of Sinhala Civilization, by Anuradha Seneviratna, pub. 1989

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#### DID YOU KNOW?

Ceylon imported opium for many years on either side of 1900. In 1906, 10 tons were officially brought into the country. Custom duty was Rs2 (2sh 8pd) per pound. Regulations for its sale included: prevention of any adulteration; not to be sold to anyone under the age of 15!!; nor could it be consumed on the sellers premises which were restricted to sell only cigars as well. The shops must close at 8pm. An individual buyer may only have at one time 180 grams. Very strict penalties for offenders.

Opium was a very important part of both the Sinhalese and Tamil pharmacopoeia.

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The word assassin comes from the Arabic, hashish. In the early turbulent days of Islam's expansion, the soldiers of Allah, forcefully spreading the word, would have some of the drug in their possession to snort before they engaged in battle. The ensuing drug high would enable them to fight with a fearlessness and frenzy knowing if they were killed they would enter Paradise.

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The following review of Noel Cruz's book is too good to edit and is presented in full. It is much more than review, it is an important statement of the times...Ed

"The Cocos Islands Mutiny" by Noel Cruz

Reviewed by Lt. Cdr. Somasiri Devendra, SLN (Rtd)

"The Island of Fate": the Dream of the Intellectual Soldier

Dreams used to come in the brutal nights,

Dreams crowding and violent:

Dreamt with body and soul

Of going home, of loving, grieving and telling our story.

The girls we loved in the shadows of a cadjan hut,

Until quickly and quietly crept the morn;

And the heart cracked in a bloody quest.

Now we have found our home again

Our hunger is quenched as all the stories have been told,

It is time we shall hear again the alien's command

That you die at dawn.....and who cares to leave the fold?

The writer is Gratien Fernando, leader of the Cocos Island Mutiny, under guard in a makeshift stockade, watching sandbags being piled up for him to face the firing squad at dawn.

Noel Cruz, like Everyman, was on a personal pilgrim's progress. His goal: the truth about the Mutiny. Thirty years on the trail he found no "yellow brick road", but only tortuous paths, cul de sacs, blank walls and blanker record rooms, till it was difficult to tell fact from fiction. Along the way he met many witnesses: some helpful and honest, others grudging, dissembling, greedy, boastful. Some, for the lack of fact, fictionalised and thus devalued the story. Others tried to prise his hard-won material and money, offering for sale dubious material for thirty pieces of silver. But he persisted, seeking facts, shunning the bankrupt's choice of "faction". Finally, the official documentation came his way and he could, at the age of eighty, at last lay down his pen and say: "I am also at journey's end. I have seen the full range of human emotion experienced by the officers and men who were involved...the politics of army factions...the readiness of some to exploit and distort the conflict between authority and expectation...between leaders and those who lose their way...between the Asian dream and the colonial fulfilment...and the deeper quest for enduring values." Some of us, his near contemporaries, patiently awaited this work. I, for one, feel rewarded for my patience and, now, must have my say.

What is it about this Mutiny that reverberates over half a century on? Why does it deserve a book? Many are the reasons, many the questions that had to be explored. Three mutinies in the British Army during the Second World War, but only the three mutineers from Cocos were hanged for Mutiny. "Why?" one is entitled to ask. Consider: in the mass exodus that followed the raid on Trincomalee, the Government Agent (Brevet Colonel D.J.Lanktree), the District Judge and the senior Pilot (Commander Palliser, RNR), abandoned post through cowardice in the face of the enemy. They were handled with kid gloves. Consider: Paymaster Lieutenant Susantha de Fonseka, CRNVR, Member of the State Council for Panadura and Deputy Speaker, who would go straight from the training camp to Council, in uniform. Once he spoke strongly against the low price paid by Britain for our rubber, over which they had a monopoly, and which they re-sold to others at very high rates. For daring to criticise the British Government, wearing the King's uniform, his commission was withdrawn. Yet, three young men, far away from home on a remote mote of dust in the Ocean were hanged. Reason, indeed, for speculating whether discipline depended on colour. Reason, inevitably, for mutiny.

Who were they and why did they mutiny? What, indeed, is the story? The events themselves, what made them happen, and even Cruz's search – all of them. Take your pick. Cruz opts, true to his journalistic discipline, to sift truth from rumour and to record it, leaving material for analysts and the future.

The Mutiny took place, and must be viewed against the background of war and the Asian dreams of Independence. It affected simple individuals, driven by idealism, inadequately trained, with an undertow of colonial prejudice and mistrust. This is a perspective not readily available to students of pure military operations history. Crusz has covered all these angles, showing his awareness and concern with them, yet claiming no definitive status for his work. The story is not complete, he says, the motives yet open to interpretation; fallible human witnesses and incomplete documentary evidence are, alas, not enough. His humility in presentation, his essential humanity and his dogged dedication to his Quest ensures that this book will be the best work written on this subject for many a long day.

The book is structured simply: "Before", "During" and "After". As Somerset Maugham put it, a story must have a beginning, a middle and an end. Crusz takes over 60 pages to cover the background to the events on Cocos, 75 for the central story - of which only 7 describe the incidents of the night - and 65 for the closing scenes and his search for the truth.

Having waited so long for this book, I went through it with a fine-toothed comb. Unsurprisingly, I found lapses in the first part. I cannot fault Crusz, researching the core story and its reverberations, for this failing. But let me dispose of them first:

Some are simple errors like "Hoodstower" for "Hood's Tower", SAGALING for SAGAING, SUTLEG for SUTLEJ. There are factual errors: the CRNVR could not provide assistance in Colombo or anywhere else in 1937, as the first recruits were enlisted only in 1938. Ceylonese leaders in the State Council did not volunteer to join the war. In fact, the matter was out of their hands: the Imperial Defence Conference which met in London in 1932 laid down the principle that all Dominions, Colonies or Protectorates, whether represented at the conference or not, had to assume responsibility for their own defence as soon as possible. The CDF and the CNVF (later CRNVR) were formed in pursuance of that. More serious is the internal contradiction of facts relied on. Dr. N.M. Perera and Colvin R de Silva could not have intervened to speak on behalf of the convicted mutineers. Note 5 to Chapter 1 says that they had been imprisoned on 17.6.40 in Kandy and escaped from there on 5.4.42 during the raid. It is common knowledge that they, thereafter, went underground in India, their whereabouts not known during this time. They were to be arrested if found. Then, the technical errors, such as the description of the SAGAING as a merchant ship when she was really a Henderson (British and Burmese Steam Navigation Company) Passenger Liner requisitioned by the Admiralty. She sustained hits, but the fire was put out before being beached at Malay Cove. EREBUS, too, was neither scuttled nor was she a very old warship. She was a monitor, a heavily armoured and armed vessel, meant mainly to provide heavy artillery support from static or slow-moving positions. She continued to provide logistic and technical assistance to other ships after the raid. The OKAPI was not a 365 ft vessel but a much smaller, converted South African Whaler. The description of HERMES, too, is insufficient and in some ways inaccurate. But these details do not matter; they do not influence the narrative.

I will not try to deal with Crusz's narrative - the book must be read for that - for its fascination for me lies elsewhere. There is the Ceylonese schizophrenia - pride in and dislike of the "Whites" they were fighting for. There is the "Asian Dream" - an admiration for the Japanese (and even the Germans!) they were fighting against. There are the fault lines in Ceylonese society that became deep fissures under the strain of home-sickness, extreme youth, poor training, bad leadership and enforced solitude in a strange land. There is the motley cast of characters that played out this drama. And, this above all: the character of Bdr. Gratien Fernando, "the intellectual soldier who brought with him to Cocos 'not a bagful of clothes but a bagful of books'" and whose "words

spoken...and indomitable courage on the way to the gallows were on everybody's lips for weeks to come both among prisoners and staff". Truly a character out of Joseph Conrad.

Every drama needs a backdrop and Crusz is right in spending much time in describing the background. The political historian will recognise the Ceylonese schizophrenia. The British were looked up to, for they wielded power. They were disliked, because they misused it. They were distrusted, for their perfidy in sacrificing Malaya to lure America into the war. Consequently, in a knee-jerk reaction, the Japanese were looked up to – to put the British in their place. To the credit side of the Japanese was that they were the one Asian nation that cocked a snook at the "whites". So was their vision of an Asian power bloc, and their perception as Buddhists.

On the debit side was that they were the "unknown devil", whose atrocities, ultimately, began to erode their charisma. Within itself, Ceylonese society, too, had many a minor conflict that could erupt under stress, as they did in the Cocos: Buddhist Sinhalese, Hindu Tamils, Christian/Catholic Burghers and Eurasians, each competing for a higher place in the pecking order. The perception that the Services were being monopolised by the Burghers and the Catholics: educated youths from 'good' family backgrounds were favoured. A large percentage came from Catholic schools in and out of Colombo. Of the leaders of mutiny, Gratien was the odd man out as he came from a traditional Sinhala Buddhist home and, though a convert to Christianity at S.Thomas' College, continued to be influenced by his first religion. Crusz comments: "Interestingly.....none of the mutineers were former students of (Ananda and Nalanda)". Echoes of these concerns became rampant cries in the days of the "The Betrayal of Buddhism" and "Catholic Action" in the mid 'fifties. Within the Army context, the Ceylonese (all members of the British Army) considered themselves superior to their Indian counterparts in the Indian Army. Overseas postings in Malaya and the Seychelles opened their eyes to the stark realities: "Black is black and White is white, and never the twain will meet". And all these simmered below the surface at Cocos, waiting for an accident to happen.

The trigger was bad leadership, on the part of the Officers and the NCOs. Gardiner, a Britisher with a Ceylonese commission, seeking an overseas posting to escape a troublesome marriage. 'Cool, composed...calculating while...seething with anger'. With war's end, he erased himself from the records, retreating into nothingness.(Why?) Stephens, a nineteen-year old, opinionated Eurasian with only a planter's experience of handling indentured Indian labour. Ignorant and boastful de Sylva, who pushed Gardiner over the brink, and carried his alleged "secret" to his grave: perhaps that it was he who may have been responsible for many things? The NCOs unable to detect a plot being hatched amongst the handful of men on this speck of an island. (After the executions, Quartermaster Sergeant Perera was discreetly "dishonoured and drummed off"). All Gardiner had to do was follow his predecessor, Lyn Wickramasuriya's sensible and professional parting words. But he was a Britisher, and so he knew better.

The events on Cocos cast long shadows - when the 1962 coup d'état was foiled, a number of CGA officers of that vintage were among the plotters. (Even the Army's official History observes a conspiracy of mealy-mouthed silence on this: five lines about it, "no names – no pack drill", and 40 pages of official reasons why they were not penalised.) But, when the Regiment was disbanded and re-formed, it was entrusted to none other than Lyn Wickramasuriya. "In my beginning is my end."

In 1971, when the Navy was infiltrated by the JVP, I saw elements of the same social dynamic that propelled the Cocos Mutiny. It is there today in the resurgent JVP and the "Sinhala Urumaya" waiting in a wings for a date with Destiny. No, the Cocos Mutiny may not yet be over.

Only seven pages for the act on centre stage. They must be read over and over again. Dare I suggest some answers to Crusz's questions? Yes. Why did both Stephens and Gauder fail to kill the other? About ten shots were exchanged. Stephen missed with five rounds in his revolver (a weapon "for executions and suicides", we used to call it) and limped away with one yet in the chamber. Gauder, who had fired five rounds from his rifle and wounded Stephen twice, had him in his sights, but watched him walk away, in spite of his hatred for his one time schoolmate. Crusz asks – were they, in fact, incapable of really killing each other? I venture to think not: Gauder could have, as Edema, Peries and Patterson had done, inserted only one clip of five rounds into his magazine. If so, when Stephens walked away, Gauder was out of ammunition.

The failure of the Bren to fire was the turning point. Why did de Sylva, the officer, send a NCO, Jayawardena, to check the weapon after a Mutiny? The responsibility was his. Later, he disagreed with the NCO's report. Jayawardena claimed he knew about the Mutiny, and took unilateral steps to foil it by loading blanks. Why did he did not share the information with Sylva? My guess is that Jayawardena was banking on the silence of de Sylva, and that de Sylva had his reasons for not wanting to appear in Court even as an expert witness – for reasons he carried with him to the grave.

And so we come to Gratien. The quintessential loner, the educated soldier, the man with a vision, of integrity, whose only intellectual stimulation came from his 'bagful of books'. Perhaps, in the absence of peers, he fell back on planning in a 'bookish' way – perhaps. He did not divulge the latter part of his plan – how to win over the CLI and the Cable and Wireless civilians on the other island. But there are indications that he had friends there among the CLI troops, and among the Wireless Station staff: how else could he get into his hands, while under imprisonment, coded messages, decoded and handed over to him? He is shown as more competent than his superior officers in strategic planning but, ironically, less competent in the handling of arms. "Yon Casius, has a lean and hungry look. He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous". He was determined to take all the blame himself, to never ask for pardon, to preserve and pass on his dream. Only a man obsessed with honour could say things like: "Everything seems right with me, yet everything is wrong". "It is not in my power to like or hate." "I had not the least grudge against Capt. Gardiner, personally. I would have done the same for any white man." Mervyn de Rooy has made a perspicacious throw-away remark that Gratien was like "Walter Mitty, the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last", the hero of his own escapist illusions. An attractive, plausible possibility but, I think, ultimately untenable. Unlike Mitty, Gratien was a charismatic figure thrown up by the dynamic of his time. He began the mutiny, recognised the moment it failed, unhesitatingly surrendered, to save the Dream for another day. Had he lived, he would have seen the Japanese lose the war, the British lose their Empire, the Japanese win the peace, and the Dream, almost, come true !

The real Gratien would only have emerged from the book he was writing: "The Island of Fate". It had been seen by some, but has vanished from the face of the earth. Nothing found in his locker. Did he carry his 'notes' about on his person that night and destroy them, just as he tore up the list of conspirators' names and the 'Savings Books'? (Incredibly, the guards did not 'bother' to look at, or pick up the pieces!). Perhaps, he wanted to 'erase' himself after his failure?

The last word has to be in praise of Noel Crusz, not only for his tenacity but for having put into this book all the elements that the average Sri Lankan writer, writing about Sri Lanka, would avoid for political correctness. The book is now receiving the recognition it deserves as an exercise in military research and reportage. And so, he emerges as the other hero of the Cocos Island Mutiny.

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## THE MAL MADARA AND OTHER HISTORIC TREES

by Rodney St John

. There were five trees that were regarded as being of "Historical" significance during the time of British rule in

Sri Lanka, and those that survive today continue to have that same status. Some of these were proclaimed by gazette notification to be protected. By sheer coincidence three of these were Tamarind trees, known as Siyambala in Sinhalese and Puli in Tamil, and in botanic parlance *adansonia digitata* respectively. The last, but from my point of view, the most important was the Mal Madara, the Tamil name for which I have not come across, but botanically classified as *cleistanthus collinus*. The latter name may need clarification from botanists in the light of what follows. Of the tamarind trees, one was referred to as Baldaeus Tree being that under the shade of which he taught whilst in Jaffna. Brohier in *Loris Vol 10* states "The Dutch historian Phillip Baldaeus in 1672 wrote of it "I taught under its shade so as to avoid the heat and the consequent weariness of the people."

Knox's Tree was another of the tamarind trees, being that under which he, his father and others were captured and kept prisoners by King Rajasinghe II. This was located in Muttur, south of Kodyar Bay in the Trincomalee district, and like the former tree is no longer in existence, both having been blown down by cyclonic weather. The last of the Tamarinds was referred to as "Oru bendi Siyambala" being the tree to which a Sinhalese king had his boat tethered. This is near the village of Bakamuna, which is to the north of Elahera and I believe is still in existence. The Baobab tree is on the island of Mannar and was significant because of its immense size, and is still in existence. The Mal madara tree was located on the right bank of the Walawe not far and across the river

from the village of Kongahamankada. This tree is also no more having, as stated by R.L. Brohier, fallen to the axe of a vandal in the mid fifties. Although protected, it was still not spared.

When the topographic survey of the island was initially undertaken, the surveyors had instructions to indicate significant and historical landmarks. Carrying out these instructions may not have as simple as it seems, still, the decisions were made, and of the trees mentioned above, the location of three only were shown on the maps. They were Knox's Tree on the Trincomalee sheet. Oru bendi Siyambala on the Elahara sheet, and the Mal Madara on the Haputale sheet. The question must be asked as to why the Mal Madara Tree was indicated as a historical

tree in the first place? Whilst the other two had some historical event associated with them, the same cannot be said of the Mal Madara tree. Its importance, it appears was purely due to the magical attributes associated with it. Not much appears to have been written about this tree and the reason for its protection. R.L. Brohier writing in the *Loris Vol 10 No 6* expresses this aspect in his own inimitable style as follows "The supernatural qualities claimed for the Mal madara are quite entrancing. The most popular superstition locally, is that, if a small scrap of the bark or the wood of the tree is carried in one's person, it is a sure charm against attack by an elephant, a talisman rendering immunity from snake bite poisoning. The elephant kraaling chieftains of Sabaragamuwa are reported to have always carried an amulet containing the bark or twig of the Mal Madura on their person, and the great chieftain Maduwanwela was seen always carrying a singular staff whenever he appeared at an elephant kraal. Holding it up he used to boldly enter the stockade and



walk up to an enraged captive, who instead of charging him invariably turned tail". Gamini Punchihewa in his interesting book "Vignettes of far off things" quotes this as well.

However this author refers to the tree as "*Bauhinia purpurea*" which is incorrect and the reason why he made that mistake will be explained later. The question that needs to be asked is whether the magical properties were the only reason for this tree to be noted as a historical tree, for it to be given protected status, and for it to be marked on the topographical map. Surely there was much folklore about many types of trees and shrubs, just as there were lots with recognised medicinal uses much sought after by the Ayurvedic practitioners even to this day. Could there have been another reason? Is it possible that this was the only tree of its species? In his article, Brohier is very careful to make the point that the villager who showed him the site of the tree, informed him that there were in fact two types of Madara trees, one that bears flowers which is called the Mal Madara and the other that bears fruit which is called Gedi madara. Now botanists will attempt to easily explain this by stating that the Madara tree is dioecious which means that it carried male and female flowers on separate trees, and therefore only the trees with female flowers bore fruit, hence the name gedi madara. This would then establish that Mal Madara and Gedi Madara were simply the same same species. Unfortunately, for those of us who would prefer to accept this explanation, the villager very cleverly went on to describe clear variation in the shape and coloration of the leaves as well. So we have some doubt already, but that's not all. In 1976, while on one of my own excursions, I made inquiries and was informed that there was a Mal Madara tree in the premises of the Vikiliya Temple which was located about 4 miles from Balangoda. The priest very kindly showed me the tree, which was then about 6 feet high. When the question was put to him as to whether this was a Mal Madara tree, which was also located near the Walawe Ganga and about 6 to 7 kilometres as the crow flies from where the historic tree stood. Once again the question arises, that if there were other Mal Madara trees to be found, why was this one historic? The 1974 issue of the Sri Lanka Forester is devoted to a glossary of Sinhala and Tamil names of the plant species of the island. According to this there are three different plant species named Madara. One is botanically *Bauhinia purpurea*, which is probably where Punchihewa got the name. This plant is classified under the family Leguminosae and the description of the Mal Madara tree does not fit the requirements of this family. Another species name is *Cleistanthus collinus* which is classified under the family Euphorbiaceae. This is the correct name I believe simply because most Euphorbiaceae are mildly poisonous and this could be why animals shy away from it. The other species name *Erythrina variegata* also belongs to the family Leguminosae. This is a good example of how reliance on village or local names can cause much confusion. There is no reference at all to the name Mal Madara although there are numerous other species of trees whose common name begins with the prefix "Mal". Well, if other local can be referred to, why not the more significant one? Could the reason be that in 1974, there was in fact no more Mal Madara trees to be found? At this point the reader can feel, quite rightly too, utterly confused.

Getting back to Brohier's article, he gives us a description of the Gedi Madara tree as given to him by the villager. "They were a short type of tree with spreading branches and put on small petalled flowers in the month of May. The fruit three lobed, both smooth and pithy, contained spherical seeds. Significantly, there are no unique or magical properties attributed to the Gedi Madara tree. The Mal Madara tree was different even in the coloration of the leaf and he states that the magical properties of the historic Mal Madara tree were known for centuries in the area. "The popular tradition is that elephants worshipped the tree, making constant perambulations around but never

Unfortunately this article must conclude with a question. Was the historic Mal Madar tree the only one of its kind? Has Sri Lanka lost an unique species? If not, why was that particular tree declared historic and proclaimed a protected tree ?

The Fisher family has a long-time burial plot at Packington Church, Warwickshire. A Sir Clement Fisher (d. 1683) was married to Jane Lambe, who rescued the fleeing King Charles I by disguising him as her groom and riding behind him on a pillion to Bristol. The baronetcy lapsed when his successor could not afford to pay the Pds. 500 fee to take it up. Another Fisher ancestor contributed a wing to Balliol College, Oxford. Four generations of Reverend John Fishers were rectors in Bodmin, Cornwall, beginning with the first John Fisher in this particular line, born 1708. Lord Fisher's own grandfather was Rector of Wavenden, Bucks. where there is a tablet in the Church commemorating his brother who died close to the Duke of Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo (1814); Lord Fisher owned a watch with a dent caused by the fatal bullet, that the Iron Duke had ordered to be returned to the Fisher family after the victory. Lord Fisher's uncle, also John Fisher, was a Fellow of Magdalen College, Cambridge for over 60 years.

\*\*\*\*\*histle Camps. To quote “ With this change many of the married quarters occupied by the British came into Ceylonese hands in Diyatalawala. Amongst them was ‘Steps’ a house which was occupied by the author John Buchan of the book ‘ 39 Steps’. A film based on this book was also made in Hollywood. He had written this book whilst holidaying in that house, which had 39 steps ascending to its entrance from the driveway .... ‘ Steps’ became the official residence of the Commandant Army Training Centre in 1969 and later the Commandant of the Sri Lanka Military Academy”.

I realise that this seems to give the impression that these quarters were first occupied by the Ceylon Army personnel, when really after the British occupation of them was relinquished it was the Royal Ceylon Navy who occupied them and then the Ceylon Army. This was very true of “Steps” which was the house occupied by the Navy Commander of both Uva and Ella Camps. Navy officers of the time will be more accurate in the history of these quarters than I am.

What really is of more interest is whether the “John Buchan story “ is accurate. Or whether the existence of 39 steps in this house created a myth. John Buchan (1875-1940) in his autobiography “Memory Hold-the-Door (1940)” makes no reference to any visit to India or Ceylon. Admittedly, Buchan in his Foreword warns that he has not intended to record every detail of his life .I queried the accuracy of this claim from one of the team of officers who compiled this Sri Lanka Army history, but never got a reply on this particular issue.

My own feeling is that it is a myth, based merely on the existence of a house with 39 steps, that has over the years acquired an authenticity by being repeated often enough. Buchan held a staff appointment during World War 1 and in 1917 became director of information for the British Government. If he occupied “Steps “ it had to be during this period of his life as the book was first published in 1915. But this house would have been built, I am pretty certain, during World War 11 when the British Armed Services had a large presence in Diyatalawala. It is also arguable that if there was a connection between the 39 steps of this house and the title of his book it would have been recorded by Buchan in his autobiography.

Any attempt to solve this puzzle will be welcomed by the Editor, and very much by me on email: dsdesl@hotmail.com. I see that the Society has a few ex- Royal Ceylon Navy members who no doubt will be interested in the history of this house and could contribute of their knowledge.

Darnley de Souza , Melbourne

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#### THE STORY OF JOHN KEELLS LIMITED

...By BH Spencer Roberts

JOHN KEELLS: the name implies largeness, strength, confidence and success in Sri Lanka today; for the parent company and its subsidiaries form an industrial and commercial giant. The John Keells group at present covers most areas of commercial activity, however, this conglomerate had a small beginning in 1878.

A Britisher, named Edwin John, went to Ceylon from England in 1870 to join his brother George, who was a produce and exchange broker. The brothers formed a partnership in 1876, and operated a business called John Brothers & Company, in Baille Street, Colombo. A branch office was opened in Kandy, Edwin managed the Colombo office, and George took charge of the Kandy operation. Soon after, WG John, a nephew, arrived from England to assist in the business.

However, in 1878, John Brothers & Co. dissolved, and Edwin John began another business called E. John, Produce & Exchange Broker, from an office at 19 Upper Chatham Street, Colombo. Ceylon's climate did not agree with WG John, and he left the island in 1884 to settle in Australia.

E John had a lean period in its first decade of business. A writer by the name of Villiers had this to say about the period: “Business in Colombo was at a very low ebb during the years 1878 to 1888. Most of the brokers, if not all, lived in their offices in the Fort, and it was difficult to make a living sufficient to provide adequate education for the family at home, and many a Ceylon lad missed the opportunity of education which would have been an asset for him in life. The business in those days was very limited, coffee had all but gone, tea had not arrived and the little business there was in cinchona was not enough to go around.”

During those difficult years, Edwin John's second son, Reginald Marshall John, came from England to join his father's business. Around 1890, however, the business community in Colombo, looked

towards the tea industry hopefully. Tea was stirring the commercial stagnation of a decade and everyone was clamouring for a share in the fledgling industry, including E John. The business employed Herbert Tarrant to assist with the setting up of the tea department of the firm.

Tarrant arrived in Ceylon in 1890 from England. He had been a tea taster with Charles Hope & Company, a well-known Mincing Lane (London) establishment. His arrival in the island, however, was not the result of an employment contract. Instead, he had come on "spec" with a letter of introduction to William Anderson of George Steuart & Company. Anderson referred him to E John, where he gained employment. Herbert Tarrant worked for E John till 1894, and then began his own tea buying business, which did very well for many years.

In 1892 E John recruited a new assistant from England for the Tea Department. His name was A C Rogers. Then in 1895, Reginald John was made a partner in the business, and in that same year E John took in Lionel Ottley Leefe, a former employee of Hawes & Herty, Mincing Lane, London.

By 1895, E John's business was growing quite rapidly in tea, shares, oil, exchange and other areas of activity, and a larger staff became necessary. In 1896, Charles Edwin Haslop joined the business as an assistant and took charge of the Share Department. Under his management the share-broking side of the business increased to be the most profitable part of the firm.

Robert J M Meaden joined E John in 1897 as an assistant to Haslop. Both of them had come from George Armitage & Company, a firm which ceased operations in Ceylon when George Armitage left the island suddenly.

By 1901, Edwin John had virtually retired from the firm and lived in England, with occasional visits to Ceylon.

On 1st January 1901 Haslop and Leefe were made partners and the title of the business changed to E John & Company, Produce, Exchange and Share Brokers. The partners at the time were Edwin John, Reginald John, Charles Haslop and Lionel Leefe.

Edwin John died in England in 1902, and in 1905 HE Guimaraens, a Mincing Lane tea expert, who visited Ceylon for health reasons, joined the Company. At this time E John & Company acted as correspondents for the following London firms: Russell, Grant & Hammerton Ltd, AA Bendon company, Shaw & Company, and Zoete & Gordon.

Lionel Leefe in 1943, and RJM Meaden, who had been promoted to Partner earlier, became the Senior Partners of E John & Company. Incidentally, two employees of E John & Company fought with distinction in World War II. They were LCF Leefe (Lionel Leefe's son) and Tommy Cuming. Leefe was awarded the DSC and Cuming the Military Cross. 1946 saw the retirement of RJM Meaden and the appointment of LCF Leefe as the Senior Partner of E John & Company. In that year too, EF Don was promoted from Assistant to Partner, and W MP Lloyd recruited as an assistant.

In 1947 all the European assistants were made partners, and two Ceylonese made assistants: HD Walter De Silva and DE Martenstyn. At the end of the year, EF Don retired and went back to England. The following year E John & Co. amalgamated with two London tea broking firms: WM Jas and HY Thompson & Co., and Geo White & Co., of Fenchurch Street, to become E John, Thompson, White & Company Ltd. The two English firms in the amalgamation were represented by their nominees, WJ Thompson (Senior) and AB Yuille.

1953 saw the beginning of a Freight Department at E John, Thompson, White & Co. Ltd, headed by JO Moss, formerly of Keell & Waldock Ltd. SH De Silva (Walter De Silva's son) was transferred from the Rubber Department in 1954 to assist Moss.

DFH Armitage, who had worked for the firm earlier, rejoined as a Director in 1955 after leaving Carson Cumberbatch & Co. In that year too, LNJ Leefe (grandson of Lionel, and son of LCA Leefe) joined the firm.

LCA Leefe retired in 1957, and Paterson was made Chairman. In the 1950s Walter De Silva became the first Sinhalese Director of the Board. He died in 1958 and his place on the board was taken by CDH Leitan. Paterson retired in 1959 and Christie-Miller became Chairman.

In 1960 E John, Thompson, White & Company Ltd amalgamated with Keell & Waldock Ltd and became John, Keell, Thompson, White Ltd. The new Company had their offices at the National Mutual Insurance Company Building in Chatham Street. Initially, the total staff of the firm numbered 126 inclusive of a labour force of 18, and the volume of business generated by the Company was the largest in its field. Douglas Armitage of the previous firm of E John, Thompson, White & Company Ltd was the first Chairman of the Board.

John, Keell, Thompson, White Ltd followed a vigorous policy of diversification. It also purchased a large warehouse in Glennie Street from Dodwell & Company, an import and export establishment, which wound up its business in Ceylon.

In the 1975-1976 period, John, Keell, Thompson, White Ltd began to form subsidiary companies. These enterprises included Mackinnons Exports Ltd, Facets Ltd, Extracts Ltd and Habarana Walk Inn Ltd. John, Keell, Thompson, White Ltd, continued to expand and diversified further into coconut oil and dessicated coconut milling, mica and graphite mining, and the production of treacle and jaggery. However, these ventures were discontinued later.

In 1976, the Company became a public company and changed its name to John Keells Ltd.

By 1978, one hundred years after Edwin John began his business, John Keells Ltd and its associate companies employed over one hundred executive staff and had the largest turnover in broking of Sri Lankan produce. It was also the largest private sector tour operator and owned the largest fleet of tourist vehicles.

Today John Keells Ltd is a colossus in manufacturing, retailing, food packaging, tourism, hospitality, broking, export and many other areas of business activity. The group of companies was very efficiently managed by the previous Chairman, Ken Bala, a man dubbed by his peers as a "commercial genius." The current Chairman is Vivendra Lintotawela.

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## A SHORT HISTORY OF GRAND OPERA IN SRI LANKA

...By Manel Fonseka, 1995

On 26th March 1995, the following announcement appeared in the press: "For the very first time in Sri Lanka's 2500 plus years, a fully staged production of a grand opera is to take place"!

This extravagant statement (first in 2500 years! – opera has only been around for about 400 years) heralded a production of Rigoletto in April of that year. A very welcome and commendable enterprise, enjoyed by many including the present writer, but was it really the first time that Colombo had experienced such an event?

## An Opening Night

Nearly eighty years ago, after a performance of *Il Trovatore*, the Ceylon Independent music critic wrote:

“Votaries of classical music had their fill of delight last night at Public Hall....This being the first time that a grand opera company has visited Ceylon, the first night was availed of by a large number of theatre-goers to listen to the melodious music of one of the great masterpieces....though operatic stars of the first magnitude have graced a Ceylon stage, individually, there has never been presented to music lovers of Ceylon such a performance as that which we were privileged to listen to last night.”

Equally enthusiastic, though more cautious than his colleague, was the Times correspondent: “The opening night will leave no doubt in the minds of the many music lovers who were present that Colombo may look forward to a period of enjoyment such as is seldom its luck to experience. The visit of a high-class Italian Opera Company...provides a treat for the music-loving public of Ceylon which we do not remember to have ever had before”.

This was the Italian Grand Opera Company, directed by the Gonzalez Brothers and brought to this part of the world in 1916 by impresario Signor A Carpi. It seems to have had a big reputation in Italy and toured Russia “with great success” in 1914, “playing to crowded houses at Petrograd, Moscow, Warsaw and other large cities”.

“The outbreak of war brought their tour to an abrupt end and they were held up in Russia a considerable time unable to cross the frontier. Subsequently they traversed Siberia, and from Vladivostok went to Japan.... attracting unprecedented crowds at a season in Yokohama....the Company is proud of the tribute to the skill of the artists implied in the appreciation of the plays by a people differing essentially in language, tradition and habit from western nations”.

Then on to Hong Kong and Shanghai for five weeks, the Philippines, and Shanghai again for three weeks, Singapore, Rangoon, Calcutta and Bombay. The advertisement for a short season at the Public Hall (on the site of the present Empire Cinema), commencing 9 May 1916, announced “40 artistes”, an orchestra of 25, and a “Change of Opera Daily”, Tickets were priced at RS 5, 3 and 1.

The operas were extremely popular, Colombo showing “its appreciation of its good fortune by turning up in large numbers each evening. “There was high praise for the “exquisite singing”, “histrionic talents”, “interpretation” and “excellent mounting”. That local music-lovers were not uncritical, however, may be seen in a review of a (requested) repeat performance of *Il Trovatore*, comparing it unfavourably with the opening night two weeks earlier.

## Public Hall

Not that Public Hall was an ideal opera house. One person declared (1919) that it was the “most unsatisfactory place that has been invented and I would be glad to see it burnt down to ashes”. On 15 May 1916, when *Rigoletto* was staged here, it was a wet night, “which did not improve acoustics.” One critic wondered whether that was why Gilda and the Duke “did not appear to be in good voice.” But though the bad weather persisted, the next night a “brilliant performance” of *Faust* was hailed as one of the best the Company had given up to then. Despite the slight cutting of one act, when the curtain finally fell it was 12.40 am. In those days, despite being in a world at war, Colombo theatre-goers dined heartily and went to the opera for 9 or 9.30!

That not everyone went for the music is satirized in a piece in the Times soon after the opening night. The writer meets an old friend. P Hilistine, at Public Hall after many months. "It was rather awkward as no less than three seats intervened," but his didn't deter "an exchange of wit and gossip. "P H audibly remarks that he couldn't make "head or tale" of this d----d Grand Opera, but it seemed the thing to do. So that's why he came."

Of course, Public Hall isn't Covent Garden; it is in fact much more homely. One feels so much more free. At Covent Garden, for example, the audience is always tensely silent, and as is frequently remarked, one can hear a pin drop. Why this should be so is difficult to understand as after dinner is such a pleasant time for an exchange of wit and gossip. Dear old P.H. made quite a hit on Tuesday night by gently inserting an obligato into, as he put it, the depressing Miserere...He is wonderfully clever at seizing the moment when Verdi thought a pause was necessary to say, as he did last night: "Great scott what a face!" ...It made quite a lot of other fellows laugh.

He does, however, appreciate the intervals: "It enabled one to get away from business in hand for a while and to have a drink."

Be that as it may, the Company must have been gratified by the crowded houses and enthusiastic acclaim. The delay of their ship allowed several more performances in Colombo, and fifteen operas altogether were staged in this season: *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*, *Lucia de Lammermoor*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto*, *Faust*, *Madame Butterfly*, *La Favorita*, *La Boheme*, *Carmen*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Mignon* and *Otello*. A return visit after their Australian tour, was announced. Three years later, the Humphrey Bishop Comedy and operatic Company presented *Il Trovatore*, *Pagliacci*, *Rigoletto*, *Carmen*, *Les Cloches de Corneville* and *Faust*, again at Public Hall.

#### Grand Opera in Twenties

In 1921, a Grand Opera Company of 76 members managed by J M Padovani and "including several eminent singers from La Scala," performed *Il Trovatore*, *Carmen*, *Mme Butterfly*, *La Boheme*, *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Once more there were full houses, this time at the Palace Theatre (a zinc structure on the site of the present Elphinstone).

In 1924, on the eve of another visit by the Gonsalez Company, a journalist in the Ceylon Independent (probably S P Foenander), observed:

Opera on a big enough scale to be historic comes to Ceylon in cycles far apart; and considering the fact that we do not yet possess a opera house worthy of the name, Ceylon has indeed been fortunate in having heard in the past ten years some of the famous grand operas that draw packed house in Europe, America and Australia

Recalling the Company's first visit he said they "provided the music-starved public of Ceylon with a real surfeit of good music", and "since those happy days... we have been favoured with visits by many Italian singers."

Perhaps the first Sri Lankan to appear (with touring company) in Grand Opera was little Rosemary van Langenberg, in the role of 'Trouble', the child of Butterfly and Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*.

A largely attended meeting of "prominent citizens", presided over by Mr Harry Creasey, to discuss the establishment of a theatre in Colombo (at that time the tenth largest city in the East, Singapore having 4 and Penang and Kingston, Jamaica, 2 theatres each), was held at the Grand Oriental Hotel in Colombo on 25 March 1919.

"Electrical Recording"

The 1927 season coincided with the local broadcast of the “first complete electrical recording of an opera,” on Sunday 9 October. Produced by the Columbia Gramophone Company, the thirteen double-sided discs recorded a performance of *Pagliacci* by the British National Opera Company in the Scala Theatre, London. And the next night opera-lovers were back at the Public Hall to listen to “the wonderful music of one the biggest orchestras ever heard in Colombo” in *Il Trovatore*.

It was a splendid opening night and the many hundreds who were fortunate enough to obtain seats on the first night were full of praise for the marvelous singing. Seating accommodation was taxed to its utmost....many extra seats had to be provided just before the rise of the curtain owing to the unprecedented rush for them...It would have been difficult to find a more appreciative or sympathetic audience....Exquisite voices, gorgeous scenery and flawless music....Applause was rapturous...An encore was demanded and given, a circumstance which somewhat disturbed the continuity of the action”

The *Barber of Seville* was in the repertoire this time and on the Company’s return in 1928, four months later, *Aida*, *Lohengrin* and *Manon* were added. The Ceylon Morning Leader correspondent, S P Foenander, wrote:

“Grand Opera has proved exceptionally popular in Ceylon and the reason is not difficult to seek. Musical comedy, ballad concerts, piano and violin recitals may have their votaries and they may be extremely attractive in their own way, but it is grand opera that provides the strong beacon lights. Other musical memories fade and become confused when we recall with keenness those periods in which we have enjoyed great operatic experiences...The Madan Theatres deserve well of opera lovers for having made it possible for them to hear fairly frequently such splendid presentations of grand opera..”

Despite the great popularity of the opera, in 1932 journalist Tori de Souza notes that “touring operas have not in recent years come out to Ceylon, though, whenever even a fourth rate company came along the seats were always sold out.”

The Gonsalez Company did not come back until February 1937, after a successful season in Bombay and Calcutta. Opening with *La Traviata* they gave fifteen performances at the Tower Hall, Maradana, three at the Empire Theatre, Kandy (*Il Trovatore*, *Madame Butterfly* and *The Barber of Seville*), and two (*Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Carmen*) at the Regal Theatre, Colombo. Here, for the first time, they were able to use their full scenery, as the stage of the Regal was apparently “almost as big in volume as the auditorium and stage put together of any other permanent theatre in Ceylon”.

Many of the talented principals had personal triumphs, but it was the young coloratura soprano Nunu Sanchioni (whose affinity with Galli-Curci was “immediately noticed by all who heard her”) who “had the house at her feet,” as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. This triumph was repeated in Bellini’s *La Sonnambula* (staged here for the first time), but her “liquid, sparkling voice” was “never heard to better advantage”, then in the mad scene in *Lucia*. “How she was ever allowed to leave Italy is a mystery”, mused a reviewer. The Company had been “strengthened by several other notable artistes”.

#### Local Productions

Perhaps the first local production of serious Western opera (excerpts, apart) went on the boards at Ladies’ College Hall on 18 September 1956—Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, produced for St Thomas’s College by Arthur Van Langenburg. A chamber work, composed for performance (1689) at a school for young ladies, it is none the less considered one of the masterpieces of early opera. “It lasted only



an hour,” said one modern opera-goer (quoted in a well-known Musical Companion), “but I felt as if I had been through all the emotions of Gotterdammerung”.

Musical direction was by the school chaplain Rev. Bowyer Yin, the principals were “seasoned” guest artists and décor was by David Paynter. Daily News reviewer “R.S. records an “outstanding performance by Christobel Brechman-Toussaint as Belinda” who sang

“with a perfect sense of style with a controlled verve which is thoroughly Purcellian....Having lived for some years with more than one recorded version of the opera, I have no hesitation in saying that I prefer this Belinda to any I have heard on disc.

Praise, indeed. R.S. seems to regret the Ruth Thornton’s Dido “was, to be sure, not cast in the grand proportions of a Flagstad,” but Noel Crusz in the Times thought her “excellently cast” and sang with “verve and vigour”. “Sagittarius”, a young Thomian reviewing the production in the college magazine, also gave the palm to Belinda, “so versatile, expressive and clear”. Of Dido’s aria, “When I am laid in earth”, he writes: “She handled the poignant emotion of this beautiful piece of music very capably and gave it a depth of feeling one would not have expected of the Dido of the first act”. This young viewer is quite critical about certain elements in the production but overall a sense of pride and pleasure dominates and he found “a refreshing change from the interminable series of Gilbert and Sullivan’s ....in the past few years”.

#### Amahl and the Night Visitors

In 1974, Averill Greet directed the Paynter House Choir and several guest artists in Menotti’s Amahl and the Night Visitors. Kevin Brohier, a 14 year old boy soprano, sang Amahl, and Terrie Kelly, his mother. Crosby de Kretser, Lylie Godridge and Eric Bartolomeusz, played the Three Kings, and Chris Greet the Page. Earle de Fonseka conducted a section of the Ceylon Symphony Orchestra. Choreography was by Oosha Saravanamuttu. The original intention was to perform it in the new Colombo Cathedral but owing to many set-backs only excerpts were sung there, without the dramatization. The complete opera was presented at the Lionel Wendt on 26 and 27 January 1974. The Paynter Home Annual Report records the production with a note of sadness: “All who saw and heard the opera thought it was most beautiful and moving ...but it was not a financial success, unfortunately. Maybe a few more nights would have paid off – but the theatre was not available; and the singers and players, all busy working people...were not free”.

Twenty years later, Grand Opera has graced the Colombo stage again, this time with a Sri Lankan impresario in an ambitious production of Rigoletto. Madam Butterfly was scheduled for November but La Traviata will be performed instead. Will this be the beginning of a tradition of operatic production which wins the support and enthusiasm of audiences here as it did so many years ago?

Note: This was published in The Sunday Observer, 28 January 1996, p.11. The title given by the newspaper was “Some Thoughts on the (sic) Grand Opera in Sri Lanka”. Quotations were not sourced as this was originally written as a newspaper article.

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EARLY POSTAL HISTORY OF CEYLON,

AND THE P&O STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY

....By Dr Srilal Fernando

In these days of instant communication, it is difficult to conceive the difficulties that existed 200 years ago.

When a letter was mailed to Europe from Ceylon, a response could, with luck, be expected one year later. The sailing ships carrying the mail would have to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, and they depended on the monsoons.

There is evidence of a mail service established in 1789 by the Dutch between Holland and Batavia, with connection to Ceylon from the Cape of Good Hope. However there is no example of a private letter carried by this service.

In 1795, the Dutch were expelled by the British, and the Maritime Provinces were initially administered by the British East India Company. Two years later Ceylon became a crown Colony.

The first Postmaster General under the British was Antonio Bertolucci, who was appointed in 1802. A soldier's letter, dated 1809, to the UK, marked Colombo/Post Free was illustrated in Robson Stamps and Encyclopedia of British Stamps, and is one of the earliest letters discovered.

The postage rates to the British Colonies were in a period of slow evolution. Most of the mail was still official and in 1812, regulations regarding such use were adopted. Some governmental officials were entitled to send and receive public and private letters, while others were limited to public correspondence. In 1813 new postage rates to specific places, and weight categories were listed. The heavier letters were called packets, and the ships which carried them, were generally known as Packet Boats.

Mail to the East was carried by ships of the East India Company, called East Indiamen, HM Ships and privately owned vessels. A uniform rate was introduced in 1815. A letter posted in London, took about 5 months to reach Ceylon. A sailing ship moving out to sea from London, could be delayed as it required a westerly wind to get it down the Thames to the Channel, and then an easterly wind. London to Falmouth could take up to 10 day. As such mail was collected and deposited at Falmouth.

The packet service was abolished in 1819 and replaced by the India letter service. The letters were charged internal postage to the port of exit, sea postage, and then United Kingdom postage from the port of entry to the destination.

Developments inside Ceylon were progressing and Post Offices were established in the Provinces. In 1832, a Mail Coach Service was established between Colombo and Kandy, and between Colombo and Galle in 1838. In 1836, there were 12 Post Offices with a clerk and 30 with Post holders. The Galle Royal Mail Coach Service was started on 2 July 1838. The proprietors were Mrs Johanna Morris, Dr PD Anthonisz, Henry Andree, and Manager WF Jansz. The booking office was No 44 Pedlar Street, where the manager lived.

The two-horse coach left Galle at 6.00am, reached Colombo at 4.30pm. There was a night mail Coach each way starting at 6.30pm. The coach was ferried across three rivers at Gintota, Bentota and Kalutara, and each time the coach had to be unharnessed. There are accounts of the coach ride in books on Ceylon, eg Ceylon Beaten Track, by WT Keble (1940).

#### Peninsular & Steam Navigation Company

There were rapid changes in the United Kingdom in the 1830s and 40s. These changes were closely tied in with the development of the above company, later known as the Peninsular & Oriental Navigation Company.

The history of this company commences with two individuals, Brodie McGhie Wilcox and Arthur Anderson. They concentrated on trade with Portugal and Spain (thus the name Peninsular from the Iberian Peninsular). They ran guns and ammunition in support of Queen Maria II of Portugal and the Spanish Crown, when they faced civil unrest. They received the right to fly the Royal Colours of these two countries. Thus the Blue and White of the House of Braganza and the red and gold of the Spanish Bourbon rulers are used as the company colours in their flag up to this day.

In 1834, they along with others formed the Peninsular Steam navigation Company. They ran a regular service to Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon and Cadiz. They extended the service to Gibraltar. Unlike the sailing ships, the steam ships no longer had to depend on the vagaries of the weather. Thus a regular timetable for sailing was available for the first time. In the past the sailing ships could not guarantee a sailing date let alone the arrival date, and all dates carried the qualification, "wind and tide permitting".

In 1836, an important development took place. The responsibility for sea mail was transferred from the Post Office to the Admiralty. The Admiralty called for tenders to transport the mail, as the mail carried so far by the packet ships, run by the Post Office, were unreliable sailing ships. Merchants wanted a good commercial carrier for regular mail. The PSNCo won the contract in 1837 amounting to 29,000pds, and provided it with financial stability. The signing of this contract is recognised as the founding of what became the P&O Company. This was made possible by joining forces with Richard Bourne, whose family already had a contract to distribute overland mail by coach in Ireland, and ran a steam ship line called the Dublin & London Steam Packet Company.

The first ship of the new P&O line, the Don Juan, was wrecked off Tarifa (Spain), on its maiden voyage. The passengers and mail were saved.

The mail to the East was carried by East Indiamen around the Cape of Good Hope, now however, a new route was available. It was taken by steamship to Gibraltar, and from there by His Majesty's steam packets to Alexandria, in Egypt, till 1839. In 1839, an arrangement with the French Government, provided for letters to be taken to Marseilles overland, and from there to Alexandria.

However, the British Government did not trust the French with its diplomatic mail. It wanted a service that would take the mail in British ships, stopping only at British ports. The Company now accepted the challenge but had to grow very rapidly both in ships and capital. This it did by setting up a limited company incorporated by Royal Charter in December 1840.

From Alexandria, the mail to the East was, up till now, in the hands of the Honourable East India Company, as they had a monopoly on the route between Suez and Bombay.

The route between Alexandria to Suez at the Gulf of Suez, which opened to the Red Sea, was developed by Thomas Waghorn. There were 2 routes available: from Alexandria to Cairo, partly by canal, and from Cairo across the desert to Suez. The mail was taken by this route with camels used to carry the burden. Passengers, however, took the route along the Nile from Cairo to Luxor, and from there across the desert to a small Red Sea port of Quseir. This allowed them to enjoy the pleasures of seeing the ruins at Luxor.

P&O was interested in expanding their service to cover the Eastern mail route. This was to run a service from Suez to Calcutta through Point de Galle in Ceylon. The Hindustan was the first ship on the Calcutta/Suez route, sailing in 1843. The Bentinck followed 11 months later. It was named after Lord William Bentinck, a former Governor General of India. And a third ship, the Precursor was acquired for the service.

Thus at this time the P&O had two halves, each serving either end of what would in future be the Suez Canal.

The mail contract was still controlled by the Admiralty, and being still in charge, it sent a retired naval officer on every ship to look after it. This man had supreme authority, even to overrule the captain. He could order the ship to sail the moment the mail was on board. And sometimes across the overland part of the route, the mail arrived before the passengers, causing the latter to have to wait for the next ship. The responsibility for mail contracts was handed back from the Admiralty to the Post Office in 1861.

For philatelic buffs, it would be of interest to note that in 1870 mails that had gone overland to Marseilles were diverted to Brindisi, in Italy, because of the Franco-Prussian war. From Brindisi the mail was carried to Egypt by the Adriatic & Oriental Company of Italy. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, there was an accelerated mail service to Europe from the East via Brindisi. This allowed the two parts of the P&O service to be connected but required new ships which could now travel from London to the East. It also meant that ships could be based and operated from the UK. From 1841, P&O had been using Southampton as a port for its mail and passengers. By 1881, mail was going overland via Brindisi, and the passenger terminus moved to London, and Southampton ceased to be a port of call.

A new word was added to the English language – POSH – which stood for “Port Out, Starboard Home”. The letters POSH were stamped on the tickets of those who could afford to select their cabins on the Port side on the outward voyage, so they would be in the shade on the hottest part of the journey down the Red Sea, and on the Starboard side on the voyage home.

The Eastern route between Pointe de Galle and Singapore/Hong Kong had already commenced in 1845. It used two ships initially, the Lady Mary Wood, which incidentally was used to ferry troops from India to control the 1848 rebellion in Ceylon, and the Braganza.

P&O ships took part in freighting opium to China, and transporting silk out. The route was connected to Shanghai in 1846, and Bombay in 1847. In 1852, P&O was granted a contract for mail service from Singapore to Sydney using the ships Chusan and Formosa. P&O also had regular contracts to transport Government troops. It was used to transport prisoners from South Africa during the Boer War (1899-1902), many of whom were camped at Diyatalawa and Ragama.

Several P&O ships were named Ceylon, the first, a passenger liner (1858-1881), was sold to the Ocean Steam Yachting Company, and became the first vessel to cruise around the world. Ceylon II, a general cargo liner (1894-1913), was sold off, ending up with the French Government and being renamed Depute Pierre Gouzon. In 1917, it was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U103 in the Bay of Biscay.

An Iron Screw Steamer, Colombo, (1853-62), was sunk in the Laccadive Islands while on a voyage from Galle to Aden.

#### Connection with Galle

The connection of P&O lines with Galle was established very early. Steam ships depended on coal, and coal had to be brought in coaling vessels, and coaling stations established at different points on the route. Provisions had to be organised and commerce flourished in Galle, and this brought with it a generation of entrepreneurs, and much wealth.

P&O's first agent in Galle was Thomas Twynam, and on his retirement in 1850, a Captain Francis Bailey took over and served until the P&O office shifted to Colombo in the early 1880s.

Norah Roberts in her book, "Galle as Quiet as Asleep", gives an account of the house built by Francis Bailey. Clovenberg or Cliff Citadel, dates back to 1719 when the Dutch built a small fortalice on the promontory. In 1861, Francis Bailey built a house and called it 'Villa Marina' after his wife. The tops of the doors were embellished with the P&O crest of the rising sun carved in English oak. An extra large ornate oak crest tops the heavy beam across the fernery in the back verandah. Bailey sold this house to the P&O Company but continued to live there as their agent until the headquarters moved to Colombo. A summer house was built at the end of the promontory, and here a flagstaff was used to fly the P&O flags.

The well known painting by Capt. Charles O'Brien of COB's Gap fame, shows the Fort of Galle from the P&O station on Clovenberg Island.

In 1889 the house was bought by Simon Perera of the famous Perera-Abeywardena family. Pat Williams, an authority on Galle, has kindly given me the following information on the Perera-Abeywardena family, which was strongly linked to the P&O Company from its inception. He has provided the photographs of the family Coat of Arms and pictures of the house. The Coat of Arms carried emblems such as the pearl umbrellas handed down to members of the clan by the Sinhala Kings.

Emmanuel Perera-Abeywarden or Manuel, is the first recorded ancestor. His son Christopher married Dona Gimara Silva, whose family owned a fleet of fishing and other vessels. Christopher obtained a contract with P&O Steamship Co. to handle cargo, especially coal and rice. His sons continued the business, and one, Simon, bought 'Villa Marina' and the house was renamed Clovenberg.

Another connection with Galle and Postal History, was the pigeon post between 1850 and 1858, established by the 'Ceylon Observer'. The mail ships brought the latest news despatches and these were sent to Colombo via pigeon post. The pigeons were housed in the Galle lighthouse, and each could carry enough manuscript to fill one small typed page of the newspaper. It is said that they could fly, in good weather conditions, from Galle to Colombo, about 72 miles, in 45 minutes, ie 96 miles per hour.

Other shipping lines carrying mail

The complete the story there were other shipping lines that carried mail.

British India Steam Navigation Company ran a daily service between Tuticorin and Colombo, carrying Calcutta mails to Colombo, and this service extended to Mauritius.

Bibby line, owned by Messrs Bibby of Liverpool, ran a service outward from Liverpool to Marseilles, and hence to Colombo and Rangoon. They also carried mail. The local agents were Carson & Company.

Thus the overseas mail service from Ceylon to London and also to the East, was closely tied up with the great shipping companies of the time, especially that of the P&O Steam Navigation Company.

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ABOUT SOME LESSER KNOWN COMMUNITIES OF SRI LANKA – PART 4

THE KAFFIRS....Dreaded by our forefathers.

....by Vama Vamadevan

The European practice of supplementing their Armies with foreign troops was responsible for a Kaffir element developing within the population of Ceylon. The Kaffirs are like the lost tribes of Israel, they have gone into oblivion, unwept and unsung. Though only a small ethnic group, they were a recognisable strand in the social fabric of Ceylon. Racially, they added a picturesque side to the multi-cultural milieu of the island.

The word Kaffir (Arabic for infidel) is mostly used to designate the African, and by usage it connotes a large group of African Negroes of South East Africa. The Portuguese are the first on record to have brought them to Ceylon, followed by the Dutch and finally by the British, each in turn to augment their fighting forces.

It is believed by some that before the Portuguese, the Arabs were the first to bring Kaffirs to Ceylon. They are said to have brought them, along with Somalis from the East Coast of Africa, to work in the Pearl Fisheries in the Gulf of Mannar.

The Portuguese brought Kaffir soldiers mainly from Mozambique to bolster the dwindling number of Portuguese soldiers in their army. They are also said to have 'imported' some Kaffirs from Goa, also one of their possessions in Western India. The Portuguese had a far flung Empire several times bigger than Portugal itself. It was by no means easy to find Portuguese soldiers, who would travel half-way around the world, with the attendant dangers of disease or death, etc, while in transit, to serve the Portuguese Empire. The simple expedient therefore, was to bolster their numbers by taking soldiers from one colony to another, and to use them against the indigenous people.

It is on record that Don Philip Mascarenhas, as early as 1623, brought 1,200 Kaffirs to use on his march on Colombo. As the fortunes of war changed, some of them switched their loyalties to the local rulers and served them in many a campaign. It is recorded that a Kaffir, Joseph Fernando who came to Ceylon during Dutch times lived in Kandy for 50 years. He reached Kandy with some Moor merchants during the time of Rajadhi Raja Singha, the King of Kandy. The King had a Kaffir and Malay Regiment to which Joseph was appointed. He apparently took part in the attack on Major Davy's detachment and was responsible for some of the atrocities committed in that battle.

The Dutch brought Negro slaves to Ceylon from their other Colonies in Asia, such as Indonesia. The British brought some from India through the Indian Regiment. Like the Portuguese and the Dutch, the British also utilised their services in their wars.

The Portuguese and Dutch usually used the Kaffirs for menial jobs. They had to hold the umbrella made of large talipot leaves over the heads of dignitaries to shade them from the sun, or be responsible for the slaughter of animals for feasts. They were used as tools for some of the atrocities the powers perpetrated, to strike terror into the local population. It is said one Portuguese General delivered a villager to the Kaffirs, to cut him up and eat him, in the presence of his wife and children. Needless to say it had the desired effect and the people dreaded the Kaffir troops. The mention of their name was sufficient to disperse a crowd.

Consequently, when battles were lost by the colonial powers much of the fury was turned on the Kaffir Prisoners of war, and the Kaffirs were at the receiving end of humiliation before they were put to death. One account says "the worthless Kaffirs, like mountain-cats fattened on the beef and steeped in drink, are cast upon the ground on every side and beaten".

The British continued the practice of bringing Kaffir soldiers from their African colonies, and maintained Kaffir Regiments. Governor Maitland admired the Kaffirs for their relentless and

dauntless fighting capability, so much so, that at the tail end of his tenure he raised a second Kaffir Battalion, the 4th Ceylon Regiment. But such impressions were not shared by all. Many writers of the time did not credit them with good discipline or alertness in their work. As one wag put it '...if they are not drunk, they are asleep...'. The Kaffirs brought to Ceylon were in fact slaves used here as mercenaries. They worked for wages, unlike the Malay soldiers, who were given land grants. When slavery was abolished, the arrival of the Kaffirs ceased, giving credence to the belief that Kaffirs were in fact slaves brought in under the guise of mercenaries.

When the Kaffir Regiment in Ceylon was disbanded, like the Malays, many of the ex-soldiers were absorbed into the Police. They married into the Singhalese and Tamil families and merged with the local population. To the discerning observer it is not difficult to observe traces of Kaffir features among some of the local population. They can be distinguished by their broad shoulders relative to their hips. They are of very dark complexion and have frizzy or woolly hair, with thick and everted lips (see picture). S.E.N. Nicholas in his book *Ceylon the Wonderland of the East* (1939), talks of some Kaffirs, not only marrying the local inhabitants, but many of their female members serving as housemaids to Dutch civil and military officials and producing off-spring of a Aryan Negroid strain who also merged with the local population.

A Kaffir Regiment which was stationed in Puttalam district during the last century lived in a colony off the Puttalam – Anuradhapura Road. When one proceeds about 20 miles on this road, there is a dirt road to the left some way down this track a settlement in its last stages of assimilation can be seen. The people in this colony have distinctly black skin and woolly hair very similar to the African people.

Deraniyagalle in the *Ethnographic Survey* series No. 2 (1962) describes this ethnic group as follows:- The few descendants of the African Kaffirs found in Ceylon are primarily general labourers. In their social structure they had no caste system. Their breeding habits knew no inhibitions. They intermarried with the Singhalese and Tamils mainly in and around Puttalam. Most of the Kaffirs because of their Portuguese link profess Roman Catholicism.

The Kaffirs are numerically a very small group as such they have not been enumerated in any of the census as a separate group. They have merely gone into the census statistics under the category of 'others'. This is most unfortunate and impedes any serious research on this ethnic group. In the census of 1901 however, 318 persons have been enumerated as "Kaffirs". Of this number 166 were males and 152 females.

A few place names in Ceylon still stand testimony to the Kaffir links in Ceylon. Cafferman's Lane and Kaffir Lane in the Pettah were probably haunts of the Kaffirs. Kaffir lane in the days gone by even had a Cock-fighting centre to cater to the amusement of this ethnic group. It is said that Slave Island got its name from the numerous Kaffirs (mainly slaves) who were quartered there. Kaffirs worked as domestic servants in the houses of Dutch masters, several of whom lived in the present Pettah. Some of them were said to be such a nuisance in the households, that in the evenings they were sent off from Kayman's Gate to an island in the Beira Lake which came to be known in the course of time as Slave Island.

The most significant and recognisable contribution made by this ethnic group to the Sri Lankan scene is the introduction to Sri Lanka's music of the Kafringhoe and the Baila. Both have the advantage of being played with make shift instruments like the 'Chikotti' producing rhythmic notes. They are adaptable to both western and eastern music. They are associated with vigorous and hilarious gyrations and dancing. Though popularised in Ceylon by the Kaffirs it may have a

Portuguese and Spanish origin. No party in a Sri Lankan gathering anywhere in the world is complete without this exhilarating dance to climax the day's events.

Editors Note: In this series SOME LESSER KNOWN COMMUNITIES OF SRI LANKA articles appeared on:-

1. Colombo Chetties – Jan 2001. 2. Bharatha Community – Apr. 2001. 3 The Parsis – August 2001 issue.

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#### Interesting Observations !!

Somewhere in the 1950s, Sir Richard Aluvihare (then the Inspector General of Police) was given the task of "Ceylonising" the Armed Services uniforms (I rather think he invented the job and sold it to the politicians!). Anyway, on the day in question, my informant (retd. Lt.Cdr.Pius Alles who was a seaman then, and a Gunner by specialization) was in full No.1 white regalia to be inspected. Tall, without an ounce of fat, he did justice to the sailors' "square rig" complete with duck cap. He had to stand with a straight face while Sir Richard and the Britisher who was Captain of the Navy, walked round him, looking him up and down. Sir R. asked the C.of N. the significance of one of the badges he was wearing: as a Gunner, he was wearing a badge of crossed RML (Rifled Muzzle Loading) cannon barrels with the appropriate star below it to denote that he was a Gunner, 1st Class. The C.of N. explained. "Hm." Said Sir R, "We can substitute crossed Coconut Trees". This was too much for the C.of N. "Blurry 'ell!" he burst out, forgetting all protocol, "I will NOT let you make my first class Gunner into a First Class Toddy Tapper!". The insignia (cannon, not coconut trees) is still in use today!

\* \* \* \*

Then, in the 1970's era, when we became a Republic, the "Buddhist Wheel" symbol that is on the national crest was replacing the Kandyan King's Crown everywhere. It even, for a short while, appeared on the cap badge of naval officers. I was one of a group that mounted a campaign against it and finally got it replaced with the Lion symbol which is in use even today.

\* \* \* \*

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The ASIATIC SOCIETY OF CEYLON was inaugurated in 1845 and was incorporated with the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1846 as the ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, CEYLON BRANCH. It became the ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, SRI LANKA BRANCH in 1972 and was incorporated under this name of the ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF SRI LANKA by Act of Parliament in 1992. Being a hundred and fifty-six years old, it is probably the oldest Society in the country and has always had the Head of State as Patron, who would chair a meeting if he/she was present: the present incumbent chaired the 150th Anniversary session of the Society, as was the practice, in 1995.

That's all for now. I'll send you a brief note on the visit to Galle (last week) of the "Duyfken" - the Australian-built replica of a VOC jacht. It made the headlines in all the papers and I had a whale of a time!

Somasiri



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## LETTERS

Dear David

By way of introduction: I recently joined the Ceylon Society of Australia and was so enthralled by the content of the April issue that I immediately applied for all back copies that are available and Hugh had these mailed to me very promptly (indicative of the dedication of your office bearers)

The article written by Allan de Saram about the Ceylon Fishing Club was fascinating and gave me an insight into another facet of a bygone era in our country. Please give me Allan's address and preferably his e.mail

address so I may communicate and perhaps you would kindly forward this message to him.

I am the Sri Lanka representative of the International Game Fishing Association which is virtually the governing body of Game (Sport) fishing activities in the world. Although activity here is mainly ocean fishing,

Trout is included as a sport or gamefish. I have fished the Streams at Horton Plains, up to about ten years ago, and caught and released several small Rainbow Trout mostly by casting small lures because my prowess as a fly fisherman leaves much to be desired having hooked the back of my shirt or hat more often than I care to remember!

Horton Plains is now a Nature Reserve and fishing is prohibited but recent information I have, (hearsay) says that the Game Wardens are enjoying the fishing. The good news is that the trout have grown and should provide opportunities for fishing some of the streams downstream from Horton Plains which Allen mentions. I will investigate. Sadly, as Allan says, the Ceylon Fishing Club is no more and neither is the trout fishing facility at Portwood Dam at Kandapola which has also closed. The Trout Hatchery in Nuwara Eliya run by the Fisheries Department closed several years ago. Various proposals to set up commercial trout farms have not taken off and the trout are left to 'self generate' and having survived here for a very long time hopefully they will do that successfully I will, if it is of interest, update you on the other Angling activities here including fishing for Barramundi (a.k.a Koddawa. Modha).

Warm regards, Mervyn Anderiesz

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Dear David

As a member of The Friends of Sri Lanka Association I was reading the latest Autumn Newsletter and mentioned under Association News was a paragraph for those going 'down under' which caught my attention since I'm in the process of applying for a business visa, hoping to settle in NSW. There was an email address for Michael Sourjah, also mention of The Ceylankan with your name and that of Brian Parker.

I always share the Newsletter with my mother, Lynn Hands, and she straight away recognised Brian Parker's name! She and my father, John (who sadly died three years ago), used to see him when they went to Talawakelle Club in the early 1950's. Our very good friend, Dennis Norrie, also remembers him well. I'm sure there must be many others who knew my parents during the 1950/60's and now living in Australia....

If all goes according to plan my son and I may well end up in Australia too.

Regards, Shirley

\* \* \* \*

Dear David

Just a short note to say how much I appreciate the content, style and attitude of the Ceylankan. My cousin, Rodney de Saram, made me a member of the CSA and I do appreciate receiving the Bulletin in Sri Lanka, where I live. Keep up the good work.

Ravi

\* \* \* \*

Dear David,

The most recent Ceylankan included a letter by M.B. Seal (p.7) that refers to my article on the Easter Sunday raid on Colombo in which Wing Commander Birchall is mentioned.. My article tried to present the extreme tension that existed in Colombo during that time - and towards its end I mention that because there was no food in the city - my husband had to exist on dog biscuits... editing has altered it to read - the dog had to exist on dog biscuits. I would much appreciate it if this can be corrected.

I have also quite recently sent you the address of June Thomasz one of the Beryl Bromley's far-flung relatives - I hope you received this and was able to forward it to her.

Geraldine de Saram-Jansz.

Humble apologies Geraldine. I think the above sorts it out!...Ed

\* \* \*

David

I am working on putting together my grandmother's cookbook. For part of that I want to include as much information as I can about how Burgher women ran their households. I was hoping readers of the Ceylankan could help by forwarding to me their recollections of their parents and grandparents generations and household workings.

I am interested particularly in how much involvement the women had in running the kitchen; the relationship they had with their cooks and other house servants; the kinds of meals that were eaten and whether the Burgher women were responsible for different meals to those for which the cook was responsible and so on.

If there is anyone who can help, they can email me at [Error! Bookmark not defined.](mailto:Error! Bookmark not defined.) or they can write to me via PO Box 221 Petersham 2049.

Paul van Reyk

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CSA Members

You will be pleased to know that:

1. The name "Ceylon Society of Australia" is now registered with the Department of Fair Trading (Reservation No. 1584209400)

2. The Society is now incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1984 as the "Ceylon Society of Australia Incorporated" (Incorporation No INC9876685 dated 3 October 2001).

...Michael Sourjah

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## THE NORTHWAYS OF SRI LANKA AND THE BRITISH COLONIAL ERA

The British occupation and administration of Ceylon lasted almost 150 years. The early period of British

colonial rule was characterised by the development of the island's physical infrastructure, notably the road,

rail, and communication systems. Associated with these developments was the establishment of the coffee plantations, later to be replaced by tea, rubber, and coconut plantations. Plantations formed the backbone of the country's economy, and were to be described as its "commanding heights" in later years, long after British rule ended. These plantations were established on land which were mostly lush tropical forests mainly in the wet zone of Ceylon, comprising the central, south western, and north western areas of the country. The areas were largely uninhabited by humans, and were teeming with wild life, notably elephants. Clearing of forest land was associated with the widespread decimation of wild life including elephant, leopard, sambhur, and deer. Stories of the large number of animals killed by British 'sportsmen' who were mainly colonial administrators or planters, abound in the literature of the period. The hundreds of elephants killed by the notorious Major Rogers, and the scores shot down by Sir Samuel Baker, and others are well documented in a number of books written at the time. One family that epitomised the life and times of British rule in Ceylon is that of the Northways who having arrived in Ceylon in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, continued to live through several generations until the death of the last of the Ceylon Northways in 1998. The Northways lived and worked in the island, developing and managing tea and rubber estates through four generations. During the years of British rule, they, like most British planters, reflected most aspects of colonial social values, but were resilient enough to adapt to the changes that followed the transfer of political power.

The story of the Northways and their role in plantation management makes interesting reading.

Sir Edward Barnes was the Governor of Ceylon during the period 1824 to 1831 at a time when the country's economic future was still to be mapped out. He was of the belief that sugar production could be a potential money spinner for the country, and even experimented with a sugar cane crop on his own property at Gannoruwa. Part of the governor's property was later acquired for the Royal Botanical Gardens in Peradeniya. He was instrumental in getting down some twenty sugar cane planters from Mauritius, to set up plantations in Ceylon. Among these planters was Samuel Northway who was placed in charge of the Governor's sugar plantation. He later took to coffee planting on his own, but fell a victim to the coffee crash in which he lost his investments. He died at the age of 47 at Gannoruwa on July 29 1850. Samuel Northway had two sons William who was a planter on Bowlana estate, Deltota, and Charles who was employed as a planter on an estate in Rakwana. He also had three daughters all educated at the female seminary in Colombo. One of his

daughters Maria Catherine together with Lucy Roosmalecocq and Emma Piachaud passed in the first class from the seminary in 1845. She married Lieut Thomas Dawson of the Ceylon Rifles in 1849. Another daughter Mary Emily married E.C. Waring, a planter, in Kandy in 1862. The eldest daughter was Rebecca who married Herbert Towgood also a tea planter, in 1858.

Charles Northway opened Deviturai Estate, Elpitiya in 1892. Norah Roberts in her book "Galle, as quiet as asleep", writes of Charles riding his bicycle all the way from Rakwana to Galle with his Tamil servant

running beside him carrying Charles' trunk on his head! Charles expanded Deviturai from its original 50 acres to 2150 acres at the time of his retirement in 1933. His son Fred who was born in Deviturai in 1902 and educated in England, returned in 1924 to Ceylon and learnt planting under his father. Charles' second son Cyril managed Hulanduwa Estate in Akuressa, which was owned by the family. Charles in the meantime had purchased 400 acres of land in the South bordering the Wirawila tank, and was looking forward to spending his life in retirement there. In 1934, however, within one year of his retirement, Charles died of cancer. His wife Marie, who outlived him, lived in Upper Dickson Road, Galle where she was a prominent and popular resident. She was one of the first to own a motor car in the Galle District. Fred Northway succeeded his father as Superintendent of Deviturai where he worked until his retirement in 1958. The Northways were all reputed big game hunters. Fred's bungalow on Deviturai Estate was full of big game trophies, acquired through years of shooting in Ceylon, India, and Africa. It was no surprise therefore, when Fred's son Michael, who was born in Ceylon in 1941, and partly educated in Australia, took to the family tradition. He started out as a tea planter in the Passara District, but before long was at Wirawila where the family was by then well settled. Michael was an excellent marksman and an intrepid visitor to the jungles and nature reserves in Southern Sri Lanka. In later life he was an ardent conservationist and a great admirer of the land of his birth. He was the last of the Northways in Sri Lanka. He married Daphne Lover also a descendant of one of the pioneer British families in Ceylon.

Michael often described as the last great white hunter in Ceylon, fell a victim to cancer and died in 1995. Daphne too died of cancer three years later. Their ashes were interred in a grave under a kohomba tree beside the house in Wirawila in which they lived out their last years. Thus ended the line of Northways in Sri Lanka, a dynasty which, through four generations, was closely associated with the rise and decline of British interests in the country.

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## THE ESSENCE OF GENEALOGY

...By Kyle Joustra...(adapted from a talk to the Sydney branch)

### A Brief Window Of Historic Events

Gaining knowledge of historic events, either globally or specifically to a country, can also enhance reasons for events that took place within your family and ancestors. You may find that a relative played a significant role in an historic event or a minor role; it may just be the case that the event or subsequent events affected them. The interesting follow on from Genealogy is that you can obtain knowledge of several subjects, one of these being History:

- 1505-1656 Portuguese Rule
- Influx of Portuguese many of whom marry locals

Singhalese in many cases converted to Christianity to acquire work under the Portuguese and took on the names of the masters or Priests of the Church. Examples like de Fonseka, de Silva, Dias, Fernando, Ferdinandus, Mendis, Perera, Peirera, Rodrigues

Jewish people also arrived in via Portugal under Portuguese names

- 1656-1796 Dutch Rule

1640 Dutch gained control of Galle

VOC (Dutch East India Company) influx of personal of Dutch, German, Belgian, French, Swiss, Swedish and even Hungarian backgrounds. Names like Altendorff, Blaze, Conderlag, Caspersz, Demmer, Dornhorst, de Kretser, de Vos, Drieberg, Ebert, Foenander, Gauder, Hepponstall, Leembruggen, Maartensz, Prins, Potger, van Ranzow, Stork, Toussaint, vander Smagt, Wambeek to name but a few.

- 1788 De Meuron Regiment arrives in Ceylon comprising of a mixture of a Swiss, French and other mercenaries.
- 1795 De Meuron Regiment transfer to British control. De Meuron regiment moved to British Colombia some stay like de Breard, de Meuron, de la Harpe, Raymond, Joseph, Piachaud and Senn families
- 1796-1948 British Rule

While some of the Dutch Burghers chose to go to Batavia, the majority chose to stay in Ceylon.

English, Scottish, Irish and the other British colonies enter into Ceylon taking on various roles including planting, administrative, engineering, law, etc, with names such as: Armitage, Barnes, Davidson, Eaton, Forbes, Garvin, Green, Lyford, Mc Carthy, Perkins, Rowlands, Tytler, Walbeoff, Winter.

British colonisation creates work opportunities in many of its possessions: Malaysia and Indonesia, West Indies, Australia to name a few. In about 1898 Siam now Thailand had work opportunities for the people of Ceylon, later in 1919 for people to stay and work there Siam they were asked to revoke their British passports and become Siamese citizens.

Colombo becomes part of the main shipping route to Australia, and to many Eastern ports.

1865 Introduction of Trains

- 1865 Coffee Industry collapses

Some people went bankrupt and left the country going to England or Australia to start new ventures or better prospects.

- 1884 Tea industry developing. New methods ensured rapid growth.

1900 Boer War Prisoners sent to Ceylon totaling some 5,000 people. Some declined repatriation and stayed on the Island: names like Engelbrecht, van Rooyen, de Rooy, Sauer

- 1914-1918 World War I

Many go off to fight in the war and either are killed or are greatly affected, some remained overseas.

- 1939-1945 World War II

A general move to self rule builds in momentum

As Ceylon moved towards independence some decided to move on, while others seek new opportunities created by the post war era.

- 1948 Independence of Ceylon

Nationalism takes hold with some Sinhalese reverting back to their original family names

Exodus from Ceylon builds its momentum, particularly among Burghers

- 1958 Sinhala only policy introduced

Surname Changes

Jongklaas \* Jonklaas

Kelaar \* Kelaart

Ferdinandus \* Ferdinando or \* Ferdinand or \* Ferdinands

Lawrence Joseph \* Joseph Lawrence

De Silva \* D'Silva \* Silva

(There are also distinct branches of these same names)

Von Drieberg \* Anjou \* Von Drieberg \* Drieberg

Parbe-->Parber \* Barber

Meijer \* Meyer and could also be linked to the family Meier

One of the things I have learnt is to be aware of name/surname changes so as not to discount somebody who you think may not be of your line, these occur in instances like: -

Better pronunciation/ fewer errors in spelling, The name Jongklaas less a G became Jonklaas, probably due to pronunciation reasons in the country of Ceylon. In Holland the surname can still be found in its original form.

1. Assumed names (running away from trouble/family name was disgraced) Anjou-Von Drieberg, Shultz-Van Ranzow
2. Anglicized Parbe-Barber, Smits-Smith, Johannes Henricus-John Henry
3. To create less confusion with another family Kellar and the name Kelaart which at one stage was Kelaar. Researching this name, I have found that Joost Kelaar the originator of the Kelaart line to be actually Joost Kesselaer which goes back to my first reason of Surname Changes for better pronunciation. It is interesting to note that the first name is more of Dutch Origin while the original surname is of German Origin. Perhaps he came from Holland while the past generations came from Germany or near the Border, by looking at your options you can start to look in the right areas.
4. Developments of a name over a period of time
5. Surname change for no apparent reason Landsberger-Borger, Speldewinde-de Boer, Heyzer-McHeyzer

6. Error by the person who logged entry into a book Joustra-Gaustra, Prins-Prinz
7. Marriage Union Male de Zilva & Female van Twest becoming de Zilva-van Twest and later back to van Twest
8. Abbreviated names Percival-Percy, William Edward-Bill, Robert Ian Collin -RIC
9. AKA names Elizabeth-Lizzy, Beth, Bep, Liza, and Bee etc.

## Names & Surnames -Tracing their History

### Origins of the Surname.

- ☐ Use of the father's given name as a surname
- ☐ Occupations
- ☐ Using localities
- ☐ Physical/ nickname/ personality
- ☐ Emblem & Icons

The use of the father's given name as a surname and can generally recognized by the termination "son" e.g. Johnson being the son of John. Other countries using "son" are the Danes and Norwegians – sen; or the Dutch zoon which became s z as in Jansz the son of Jan. Prefixes denoting "son" like Fitz derives from the French for "son of" as in John Fitzpatrick was the son of Patrick. Further examples using a "son" prefix are the Scottish and Irish – Mac or Mc. The use of the modern German used "ing" to represent young man of. In the name Jongklaas as in young Claas or Nicolaas the position of the adjective was placed in front of the name

### Occupations

This type of surname might tell you how an ancestor earned a living if we applied the same principle today, a surname might be Peter Bytes (a computer technician). In medieval times all villages had its own blacksmith who made iron objects and for this obvious reason it is not surprising that in England, Scotland and America the surname Smith is extremely common. Other derivatives such as Faber (Latin), Farrier (French), Schmidt (German), and Smid & Naesmyth (Dutch).

Other surnames need some knowledge of other languages: Koch (Cook-German); Schumacher (Shoemaker-German) or by the referring to "tools of the Trade": Canneel (Cinnamon=Grocer-Dutch).

While Other Surnames can relate to position: Freeborn & de Fry (a person not a slave); Kemp (a warrior or athlete); Lord & de Heer (landowner); de Koning (King). It would be worth mentioning that the Dutch use of 'van' is not like the German 'von' which designates nobility.

### Sources of Information

#### Reliability-- Source

- 95% Church Records
- 95% Directories – Planters Association, Depart. Records
- 95% Newspapers- Obituaries, Funerals, Weddings, Births, Articles on particular people

95% Tombo's

90% Government Records - Births, Deaths and Marriages, Immigration, Census, Civil Lists, Departmental Reports.

95% Association or Club- Schools, Sports

80% Dutch Burgher Union Journals

80% Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon/ Tombstones and Monuments

75% Who's Who

70%-95% Family Bibles

40%-90% Books

0%-90% Later Day Saint Records for Ceylon/ Asia/ Europe

80%-95% Later Day Saint Records for England/ America

0%-90% Personal Recollections

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#### FUN ONES!

- 1..It's possible to lead a cow upstairs...but not downstairs.
- 2..Pound for pound, hamburgers (the ones that went upstairs) cost more than new cars.
- 3..On average, 100 people choke to death on ballpoint pens every year.
- 4..Average age of top GM executives in 1994: 49.8 years.
- 5..The name Wendy was made up for the book "Peter Pan".
- 6..The average person falls asleep in 7 minutes.
- 7..Why isn't 11 pronounced onety one?
- 8..You never really learn to swear until you learn to drive.
- 9..A closed mouth gathers no foot!
- 10..There are 2 theories to arguing with women. Neither works!
- 11..It is impossible to sneeze with your eyes open!
- 12..Dreamt is the only English word that ends in the letters 'mt'.

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