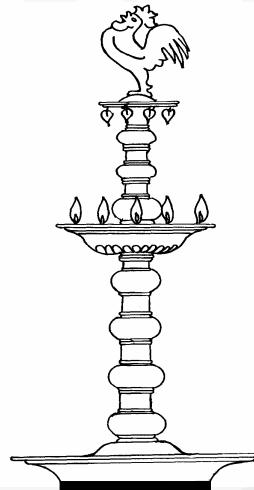


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL



The Ceylankan cannot even begin to express on behalf of the members of The Ceylon Society of Australia in words what the picture captured by Canadian Broadcasting Corporation appearing on the next page did. This is just one of the scenes the Canadian Prime Minister saw on his recent inspection in Sri Lanka. Hundreds more have been aired and printed over the past few weeks, some so distressing that the Editorial team of The Ceylankan decided to pass over as its intention is to reawaken not traumatisise the readers.

Yes we would like to reawaken and refresh memories of the greatest natural disaster in living memory that hit our beloved Sri Lanka, to remind and exhort our members particularly those living outside Sri Lanka that we owe our less fortunate countrymen all the succour we can muster. By the time you read this you would have undoubtedly dug deep in your pockets and given generously, but more needs to be done over the coming months and even years.

Many are the heart-warming reports of selfless services rendered by volunteers. One is that of a doctor in the UK—happily a member of Ceylon Society of Australia, who took leave of absence from his General Practice, loaded his suitcases with medicines and headed off to SL with his wife also a medical practitioner. They did what their head and heart dictated - sans trumpets and fanfare. This kind of individual contribution, at no cost to the community or fundraising NGO's is the need of the hour. Repair of damage to the infrastructure, provision of utilities and bulk food is the responsibility of the government and other organisations specialised to carry out these functions. That is at macro level, but at micro level each and everyone of us can and must help, in cash, kind or sweat & toil. Since most of us have difficulty with the last, and must leave it to those with useful skills applicable on ground zero, others can generate cash & kind. To whom can we direct our help is a difficult decision, and The Ceylankan has a couple of suggestions.

We have had the pleasure of listening to addresses by two eminent Sri Lankans in the recent past, namely Capt Elmo Jayawardene of AFLAC, and Jayantha Jayawardene of the Bio Diversity and Elephant Conservation Trust. Both these organisations are active in the relief operations now in full swing. We carry on the next page contact details to assist those wishing to donate.

On to matters Ceylankan: as we go to print of the 29th issue may I remind readers, articles are required for ensuing issues. The editorial coffers need replenishment. I know there is talent out there so get over that writers' block and add colour to these pages. In this issue, see Geraldine's article on an intriguing subject to set cricket aficionados toes tapping. Appearing on the eve of 126th encounter, you Royalists and Thomians out there will have much to say. I expect my email box will be full with your own pet theories. Go for it!

The Tsunami

Three faces that tell it all - HELPLESSNESS, DESPAIR and AGONY.

The CSA recommends the organisations mentioned below, to those wishing to help



Association for Lighting a Candle

AFLAC helps poor villagers at a very basic level to enable them to improve their lifestyles as well as the future prospects of them & their children. Many of The CSA committee are personally aware of AFLAC's beneficial activities through their own observations & from news coming back via friends & relatives. AFLAC have no elaborate & expensive admin structures so nearly all financial help directed to them finds its way to a variety of excellent causes. Contact details: AFLAC International 11/3 Dharmaratne Avenue Rawatawatte Moratuwa Sri Lanka. Please notify details of donation to dinelli@aflacinternational.com Cheques/drafts/MO should be made payable to "AFLAC Tsunami Fund"

Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust

Donations should be sent to: 'BECT Tsunami Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Trust' Account Number 0111 0000 7235 at the Nations Trust Bank, Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7 Sri Lanka. Bank No. NTBCLKCXV

Visit their web site <http://www.bectbuildingavillage.org/photos.php> for regular updates.

The Royal-Thomian Cricket match it's beginnings and the nine run match

by Geraldine de Saram-Jansz

William Jayatileke, Willie, to all his friends, our cousin, died suddenly as my letter asking whether he would collaborate with me on this article on the Nine Run Match was en route from Canada to Australia. Subsequently, I was overjoyed to find that I had a record of our previous correspondence on this event and more so that he had included a background on the origins of the Royal - Thomian Match itself.

A great Thomian, a great cricketer and according to P.I. Pieris Captain of Cricket STC (1953) perhaps the most unsung and least known of all Big Match heroes – William was a gentleman in the truest sense of that word. In William Boake de Saram who captained the Thomian team the year of the ‘Nine Run Match’ we shared a common maternal grandfather of whom he was the oldest grandchild and so it is fitting that I dedicate this article to William and what immediately follows are his own remarks on these subjects. He writes:

In the beginning

According to the ‘Souvenir’ it was Mr Ashley Walker, Cambridge Blue and Assistant Principal of the Colombo Academy (later Royal College) who was responsible for initiating the series of annual encounters that we know as the Royal-Thomian Match; an idea that was readily accepted by his counterpart at St. Thomas College, Rev. T.F. Falkner, also a Cambridge Blue and Sub-Warden at the time. However, what gave the game its great fillip was that both these gentleman together with members of their respective staffs actually played on the rival teams.

Furthermore F. Stephen, a Cambridge man and one of the finest coaches St. Thomas’ continued to live on the school premises and supervise its

cricket after he had left its staff to join a mercantile firm. A member of the CCC (Colombo Cricket Club) Stephen played on many European teams that represented Ceylon overseas Rev. Moynick yet another member of the staff also played for St Thomas’ while A.Campbell on the staff of the Academy played on that team.

Ashley Walker’s objective in introducing inter-collegiate matches was to establish a true love of sportsmanship that sprang from ‘a public school spirit’. How well he succeeded may now be perceived in the bond of healthy rivalry and mutual regard that this fine spirit has engendered.

The first match was played in 1878 on the Slave Island Green. The players canoed across the Beira Lake carrying their cricket gear and luncheon baskets with them. And while both innings were over in a single afternoon the result, unfortunately, has not been recorded.

In 1879 the match was played on the CCC grounds, then the Galle Face Green., members of the teams arriving either on foot, by hackery or being ferried across the Beira Lake



William “Willie” Jayatileke
1917-2004

The schools were not, as in later years, given time off to watch the match nor was there any prominent display of school colours. No flags waved; no lower school- boys shrieked with delight and no old boys employed the queerest antics in appreciation of the game as they recalled old matches relating these thrills to their admiring sons, nephews and grandchildren.

Scoring on both sides was slow and low! Every hit had to be run to the full as boundaries were not in vogue at the time. The eventual result of the match was that the Academy team won chiefly on account of its good fielding.

1880 marked the first match in which only the students participated. It was played on the old Galle Face Green marking the starting point of the centenary series and score cards. *At this point, William enquires whether J.W. de Silva father of our sister-in-law Flavia (Mrs John de Saram) and her sister Joey was a member of the Royal team of the Nine Run Match. Checking with the family this appeared to be not so but was told that he captained the Royal team in its first two matches both of which the Royal team won.*

Later years saw principals, wardens or members of the staff of the rival colleges act as umpires and so keen was their interest that boys of that vintage record that the former in a desire to maintain the highest standards were known to give decisions against their own school in the event of the slightest doubt. And while this practise did not satisfy the boys it did nothing to diminish their respect for their umpires.

Subsequently famous 'coloursmen' of both schools - . D.L. de Saram (uncle to Derek and Koo de Saram) , Frank Ondaatje, M. Saravananmuttu, C.W Van Geyzel would act as umpires. However, with the appointment of umpires from the Umpires Association any taint of partisanship was removed forever.

The Nine Run Match

The Nine Run match was played on the 12th & 13th March 1885. Not everyone who talks about the Nine Run Match knows the facts. Legend has been busy and many assertions are confidently made which are simply not correct. One such is that the Royal College Eleven disappeared in the course of the match and were later found in Kandy. That is not true. However, something unusual did happen.

The Royal College (though not the Royal College History) reckons that the result of the match is a draw. St Thomas' claims it was a win. Two contemporary written accounts of the match exist, one in the St. Thomas College magazine of March-April 1885 the other in the March 14th 1885 issue of the 'Observer' The writer relies on these two sources for the material here. No Royal College magazine existed at the time

The match was played on Thursday and Friday March 12th & 13th 1885. The ground was the one between Christ Church, Galle Face & the Colombo Club. It then belonged to the Colombo Cricket Club and was later the Sports Club grounds. Times of play are a little difficult to determine. Neither of our sources says at which time play started on the first day and so we are dependent on deduction. There are, however, some interesting and helpful indications of times in the Magazine account of the match.

The total number of runs made on the first day was 147. Of this, the Royal College, going in first made 9; St. Thomas 138 for 4. The Royal College innings, the account tells us, took half an hour of

playing time. But at the fall of the first wicket for one run in the fourth ball of the match, rain came down and interrupted play for 'half-an- hour or more" We conclude that the Royal College innings closed one hour after play started.

The first Thomian wicket fell at 3; the second at 12 the third at 25. Thereafter, states the Magazine 'the score was raised fast and at about half-past-five the 100 went up amidst cheers' so a hundred had been made by fast scoring by 5.30 p.m.

Suppose we say that St. Thomas' made those 100 runs in seventy-five minutes. That gives us one hundred and thirty five minutes after play began. Add ten minutes for the interval between innings and fifteen for a possible tea interval and we have one hundred & sixty minute or two hours and forty minutes between the start of play and 5.30 p.m. We cannot be far wrong if we say play began on the first day at 3 o'clock.

As to when play started on the second day the contemporary accounts supply us with information; the examination of which is highly interesting and illuminating. The Observer account running as follows:

" Play was continued at 2.30 p.m. on the second day but after St. Thomas' had raised their score to 170 for the loss of two more wickets rain again stopped play for about half-an hour" The use of the word 'again' is curious. It must mean that there had been an interruption of play earlier in the day. Very significant are the words 'for about half-an-hour" More on that point later.

An account in the STC Magazine makes the following statement:-

"On Friday play was recommenced at about a quarter-to- three. The score continued to rise until Thomasz was caught at cover. Erskine then came in and played carefully but Foenander was bowled after a few overs having first put together 19 including two fours in good style. At this juncture rains interrupted the game and the match was not concluded under circumstances about what we shall say nothing."

The significant words here are 'recommenced' and the whole of the last sentence

When did play begin on the second day? The Observer states categorically 2.30 p.m.. The school Magazine appears to say ' at about' a quar-

ter- to -three' but does it really? Note the word 'recommenced', it is an odd word to use about the start of a day's play. It would be the right word to use if there had been an interruption of play after the start. Further, could anyone have been so vague about when the day's play started? It would appear, therefore, that play started on the second day at 2.30 p.m. as stated by the Observer and 'recommenced' after an interruption 'at about a quarter-to- three' as stated in the school magazine. This conclusion is supported by the use of the word 'again' in the Observer account.

So the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. Play started on the second day at 2.30 pm was almost immediately interrupted by rain and 'recommenced' at about a quarter to three. It continued till two more wickets had fallen and the score had been raised to 170. Then rain again stopped play for about half-an-hour

The second interruption of the day's play must have occurred between 3.15 & 3.30 pm for only 32 runs were made on the second day and they could not have taken much more than half an hour to make after play 'recommenced' at about quarter-to- three.

To return to the Observer – note that it does not say 'rain stopped play for the rest of the day.' It stopped for half-an-hour. If there was no more play it was not rain that prevented it. Something else did. The time must have been four o'clock or thereabouts.

The reticence of the St. Thomas' College Magazine at this point is intriguing. It merely says, 'the match was not concluded under circumstances about which we shall say nothing.' Dignified, perhaps, but not helpful.

Fortunately the Honorary Secretary of the St. Thomas' College Cricket Club was not so reserved. He wrote to the Observer and the Observer of March 16th 1885 under 'Local and General' has this: 'St. Thomas' College Cricket Club: - The Honorary Secretary of the Club wishes us to state that no matches will in future be arranged with the Royal college Cricket Club in consequence of the latter Club refusing to continue the match played last week'''

And so it was that neither the rain nor the state of the ground stopped the match.
What has been written here is entirely based on

contemporary written accounts. Only one conclusion is possible. Law 2 of the Laws of Cricket is as follows:

The side which scores the greatest number of runs wins the match.

No match is won unless played out or given up

Law 45 is as follows:

When the umpires call 'play' the side refusing to play shall lose the match.

This match was given up by Royal College. The umpires decided that the ground was fit for play. Accordingly the match was won by St. Thomas'

ROYAL - FIRST INNINGS:

* G H de Saram b Orr	0
V .de Silva b Wilkins	1
C.T.Van Geyzel ct Wilkins b Orr	0
E de Kretser b Orr	1
E.H. Ohlmu b Wilkins	1
W. Schokman b Wilkins	2
L. Thomasz b Wilkins	2
E. Weinman not out	1
C.E. Corea b Wilkins	0
S. Van Hoff b Wilkins	0
A. Bevan run out	0
Extras	2
Total	9

* Perhaps an error. G.H. de Saram played on the Thomian team

ST THOMAS -FIRST INNINGS

W.B. de Saram b Schokman	0
C.Orr b Schokman	9
G.H. de Saram b Schokman	6
C. Wilkins b Corea	49
F. Thomas ct. Van Geyzel b Weinman	69
F.V. Foenander b Weinman	19
W Erskine not out	7
Extras	11
Total for 6 wickets	170

Concludes William, as regards my own exposure in the series, I played from 1935-1937. In 1935 after a rapid fire second innings and knock of 107 by M.O. Gooneratne and a brilliant bowling performance by him where he took 7 wickets for 34 in the Royal second innings, STC won.

We had last won in 1927 so it was a particularly great feeling for the Thomians. In 1936 Douglas Bartholomeusz , a brilliant batsman was sent

lower down in the order instead of his usual position of opening bat to avoid Royal's Bunny Thiedeman who was deadly with the new ball. The ploy failed and we lost early wickets. Norman Siebel, however, 151 not out together with Bertie Wijesighne 57 came to the rescue and gave us a reasonable score. Siebel's score set a new record surpassing Royal's D.B. Gunasekera's 148 in 1930. Bertie Wijesinghe's 57 was made on debut and showed the early signs of his class.

During the second innings, Norman Scheffer and I put on 134 for no loss, a record opening partnership for the series for 64 years, until it was finally broken by the Royalist opening pair in this year's match (*no date given*)

When I captained in 1937 we managed to win against the much stronger team.

As I pick up the threads, William did not appear to recall the following tale. It was one that Gerald H de Saram, our grandfather and William's grand-uncle, a member of the Thomian team during the Nine Run Match frequently recounted to my brothers, our Thomian cousin Edward (Gary) and I to our continued Royalist frustrations. And this was that William Boake infuriated by Royal's 'cowardly' behaviour called them poor losers and vowed that St Thomas' would never play them again.

On the following day, however, WB was summoned to the Warden's office who quite naturally wished to know as to what had transpired - and while a still furious WB retold the incident and his response to it, the Warden sent him back to apologise to the Royal captain and say 'of course, they would play Royal again'

The strong partisanship within our family was based on Gerald's decision to send his oldest son, our father Ged to Royal subsequent to his falling out with the Warden of St. Thomas, to create a slender line of Royalist enthusiasts amidst vociferously taunting Thomian relatives. - However as time would show our small Royalist contingent stood up very well...

There would follow many happy years when we accompanied Gerald to these matches and despite the passing years I recall how mortified my brothers and I were when Gerald as soon as we entered the pavilion would unfailingly spot his former Royalist opponent, Spider Abeywardene, and threaten him with the awful thrashing St. Thomas

would wreak on the Royal team that year, all of which Spider took with affectionate amusement.

One particular year, I believe it was 1937 that our little group was locked into a most unusual tension as to who to cheer? Our cousin William or be patriotic Royalists and cheer the other side for very early during William's batting performance the second ball of the over hit the wicket but the bails did not fall leaving William to go on to score a 110 runs not out even as one of the younger members of our Royalist group unable to stand the tension burst into tears.

Then there was the day that Spider was not at the match, and soon Gerald himself, was medically advised against attending it as his unusual state of excitement could precipitate a heart attack.



Chris de Saram

By this time, our two brothers, Willie and Chris were on the Royal team and while Willie was acknowledged as the more elegant bat Chris was recognized for his "poladi" shots (cavalier batting) and so it was that during the match of 1945 Chris

notched up several runs for Royal - and here it is not necessary to recall the excited voice of the radio sports commentator - who kept announcing that Chris de Saram hit a boundary or another six and so on. Gerald, meanwhile sitting at home with his ear glued to the radio was becoming increasingly agitated at Chris' performance to such an extent that our mother was not able to calm him.

We next found Gerald at an upstairs window overlooking Deal Place awaiting Chris's return home - and immediately as he saw Chris on his bicycle he began to shout at him, 'how dare you play so well against your grandfather's old school'. By this time GH was so angry that he refused to

let Chris enter the gate leaving an exhausted Chris to circle our home till his grandfather was safely asleep. The following press announcement makes reference to this victory - .

Chris will be remembered for his outstanding batting performance in the Royal-Thomian Cricket Match (1945) when together with Vimal Wickramasuriya he saved Royal, by his score of 45 runs, turning looming defeat into victory.”.

When we heard the news of William's death in Canada I recalled for our daughter a scene that was vividly impressed in my mind for many years prefacing the account by explaining that in those days men took off their hats when a funeral passed. On this day I was cycling home from the Fort when reaching Kollupitiya -Turret Road junction a funeral was approaching from the other side and I suddenly saw William standing very still on the pavement, his hat over his heart. Our daughter asked - of course he did not know whose funeral it was? And when I replied no, she remarked soberly - we have lost these graces haven't we?

But I would, indeed, be very much out of line if this memorial to such a blithe spirit that was William should end on a sombre note. One day, overflowing with warmth and fun we were with Willie, a great dancer, awaiting our uncle Fred de Saram (Ceylon Police) and aunt at the entrance to the Colombo Town Hall to accompany them to the Police Dance. The orchestras filling the festive Christmas air with strains of the newest hit *I'm Going To Take a Sentimental Journey* when I saw a tall, statuesque figure in a beautiful white dress, her back to us, at the foot of the stairs that led to the dance floor above - I asked William who she and he replied, Louise Van der Zeil, little did I realize that in a few short years Louise would be his bride!

I will conclude this long goodbye to a beloved Thomian cousin by noting that with Chris' stunning Royalist performance in 1945 our family has overcome the illfated Royalist defeat of the Nine Run Match that beleaguered us for years.

References:

Centenary of the Royal Thomian match, extract from the Souvenir 1979 - Canon R. S de SARAM Warden, St. Thomas' College. 1932 – 1958

Remarkable story concerning the life and experiences of Michiel Christiaan Vos [1759-1825] Final part

*Translated from the Dutch
by Hedwig van Coller*

At last I leave Ceylon. Divine Providence led to all the Dutch ministers with the exception of two, at this time being sent from Ceylon to Batavia, where they soon all died. The only ones left were the hypochondriac minister from Punt de Gale, and in Colombo one who had barely been legitimised, who had never had any University training. This last one, (who received a surprisingly large stipend from the Government, surely not for his ability and even less so for his religious fervour) started acting as if he were the “Pope”, all the more because he had the Portuguese solicitor as his adviser.

Soon they found an unforgivable misdeed in me. In my ordinary duties I had come across a bridegroom, a poor man, who asked me to perform his wedding ceremony. I sent him to the “Pope”; however, he said that he could not afford this and because my services were held in the evening, he would prefer to be married by me in the evening. In the 20 years during which I have been a minister of the Reformed church, I have married probably about 500 couples, and I have had every right to do so. Nevertheless, I went to consult the Government minister, who informed me that once the banns had been read, I could freely marry the couple.

The first banns had scarcely been read when the “Pope” and his solicitor went to the Governor to denounce me. I was summoned before the court and treated by the judge, in public, so badly that I did not think it possible that such a thing could happen in a court of law. My defence, that I had already married hundreds of couples, and that I had

never been forbidden to do so by the Government of Ceylon, that I had sought advice wherever I could in the matter (knowing that I was surrounded by enemies), even from the Government minister, who also happened to be a magistrate; that the Roman Catholic pastors could marry anyone who asked them to do so – this all was to no avail. I felt the truth of Solomon's saying, “also in the places of judgment, godlessness can be found”.

Had the poor bridegroom gone to a Roman pastor, the “Pope” would surely not have accused him, and he would also not have been summonsed to appear in court, because they were all good friends.

I was summoned to appear before the Governor and his council (of which the two judges were also members) and just before I was to appear, a petition was handed in from the majority of the Dutch parish, with a request that they be allowed to build a church for me at their own expense so that they could keep me as their minister.

The Roman Catholics in those days were allowed to build churches wherever they wanted, but this reasonable request from the Reformationists was not only cruelly rejected, but I, notwithstanding that I had never set eyes on the petition and did not even know what was in it, was accused of having compiled it myself even if not a single shred of proof could be found for this. I was branded a troublemaker (*skeurmaker*).

I was called in, and in spite of having been badly shaken by the persecution, I had to laugh in private at the misconception of the judges, one making me out to be a *verloopte* Dutch patriot, and the other calling me a “Methodist”.

The decision about me was of course already taken, but to give a semblance of fairness to the proceedings more than one meeting was held on the matter, and only at the third was I condemned: all because I had wanted to marry this one couple (from which course of action I had in any case already withdrawn),

but especially because I was supposed to have compiled and sent the petition (for which there was no proof whatsoever). I was gently told that it would be best for me if I were to leave Ceylon. The Governor promised to pay my passage to England or to the Cape, and would make sure that on the journey I would be treated with the dignity becoming me as minister; during the time I was awaiting a ship at the coast, I would be paid double my stipend – enough proof that I was not being sent away as a criminal, but only because I (God be thanked!) was no friend of the unfortunate Dutch ministers of the time, and also because I was, in the second judge's opinion, a “Methodist”.

I pitied the Council in my heart, and prayed God to forgive them, not only on my account, but also on account of the poor parishioners who were being so shamefully neglected by their ministers.

Now Satan was joyful along with his loyal servants! Some of the members of the Church Council openly celebrated their victory on the streets, yea, even held parties and dances to show their joy!

My poor friends were terrorised and mocked. Many sat in corners and grieved, and they scarcely dared come to my house to bring us their last tokens of love, because the Council in their wisdom had also forbidden me to hold religious meetings and often at night my enemies would send spies to my house to see who was visiting me and to try and find out what we were discussing.

Poor persecutors! And poor judges, who aided such people!

Before my departure from Ceylon, my friend, I had to undergo one more trial of a different kind. With my first wife, to whom I had been married for 25 years, I had had no children; but after having been wed to my present wife for 16 months, we had the most wonderful perfect son. How welcome he was, any sympathetic parent will understand. But this boy, my only son, after so many

years of waiting, God took away from me already on the 8th day.

As soon as I had brought my affairs in order, I left Ceylon. I received a notice from the Governor before my departure, (he had apparently started to regret his promise to me), that if I had to await a ship at the coast for longer than three months, his promise [*of three times his stipend*] would fall away, but that he would honour it until such time, which he did. I shook the dust of Ceylon from my feet, and departed.

....and who was Vos?, and why did the editor carry this article in The Ceylankan? Following extracts reveal not only an Asian connection but a very Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) one ...Ed

Michiel Christiaan Vos: the first black writer in South Africa.

by Siegfried Huigens [Tydskrif vir Nederlands en Afrikaans – 4:2 1997]

Abstract:

The neglect of South African literature written in Dutch means that many important texts escape the notice of South African literary history. The first book to be written by a black South African author (the *Merkwaardig Verhaal* [1824] by Michiel Christiaan Vos) is one example of this neglect. In this article , I will concentrate upon the way in which slavery is treated in the *Merkwaardig Verhaal*.

[...] As far as I have been able to ascertain, the *Merkwaardig verhaal aangaande het leven en de lotgevallen van Michiel Christiaan Vos* (completed in 1819, published in 1824) was the first book to be written by a black author in South Africa. Who was this Vos? Vos was a prominent Cape minister ("predikant") at the beginning of the 19thC and the author of an autobiography. In his *Merkwaardig verhaal* Michiel Christiaan Vos (1759-1825) writes that he is descended from "Christian parents, who were descended from European and Asian forefathers" (Vos 1824:1). This information seems to imply that he was not completely European from both sides, i.e. that of his father as well as his mother. After some genealogical investigation this appears indeed to have been the case.

His grandmother from his mother's side was Anna

Groothenning of Bengal. On the basis of the toponym we may assume that she was a (freed) slave, because emigration from Bengal to the Cape was inevitably forcible in the time of the VOC. On his father's side Vos descends from a German grandfather who was married in Batavia to a Batavian woman, Christina Baumann. Possibly she was a Eurasian. Pure-blooded European women were after all in the minority in 18thC Batavia.

In his *Merkwaardig Verhaal*, which is mainly a report of his career as preacher or "dominee", Vos says that he was a sickly child who, as a child, already felt drawn to religion. He was a furious "pray-er" who regularly at night sought the solitude of the "Lion's Rump" [a sizeable hill at the foot of Table Mountain,] to pray aloud (Vos 1824:11). This activity eventually led to a calling for the ministry, especially in order to improve the lot of the poor slaves, but mainly by ensuring their eternal salvation. [...]

Vos eventually succeeded in reaching Holland to study theology in Utrecht under the Pietist Bonnet. He finished his studies very quickly in order to be able to return to the Cape as soon as possible. This was however continually prevented by the authorities of the Church in Amsterdam. So he served for a few years as minister in Holland, at Woudenberg, Pynakker and Woerden. At last in 1794 he received permission to return to the Cape. He became minister in Roodezand, today Tulbagh. After rumours of adultery with a maid-servant [*probably spread by a rival who wanted the job - the maid-servant was one who had accompanied him and his wife from Holland at her own insistence, she was very religious and married a local missionary in Tulbagh where she lived until her death. Also, after Vos's retirement from his parish at Caledon due to ill health, he went back to Tulbagh with his Sinhalese wife, Johanna van Geyzel, where he lived until his death – unlikely if he was forced to leave Roodezand because of adultery. Hr C]*] Vos left the Cape Colony, which had since come under British rule, in 1802, and travelled via England to Ceylon to work in Dutch parishes there. After many wanderings via Dutch settlements in India and Ceylon, he eventually returned to South Africa [*to another parish, today known as Caledon*], where he retired in 1819 and wrote his *Merkwaardig verhaal*.

[...] In 1794 after his return to South Africa, Vos was one of the first to advocate missionary work amongst the slaves in the Cape churches. The reformed church had never given any attention to this in the whole of the VOC period. Other churches like the Moravians (Herrnhutters) were only active among the indigenous population.

Already in his first sermon in his new congregation in Roodezand he announced his planswhich created quite a furore amongst the parishioners, who were for the most part all slave owners. This was chiefly because the slave owners were afraid they would lose their capital investment. Since 1770 in the Cape there had been a regulation that forbade slave owners to sell a baptised slave. This was meant to protect baptised slaves, but in practice became an obstacle to the conversion of slaves to Christianity because after their baptism they lost their trade value. Slave owners were therefore always very much opposed to mission work.

Vos recognised the problem and sent letters to the Governor concerning this. At Vos's instigation the law of 1770 was rescinded in 1812 by the English governor, with the ironic result that trade in baptised slaves could now take place unhindered.

[...] I have not brought up the *Merkwaardig verhaal* here because it is a forgotten masterpiece, but because it had a fair amount of popularity in its time: until 1911 it was printed five times in Dutch and once in German. Besides this, it is the first work by a black author in South Africa. Added to this I must also say that this fact would be more striking in our own time than it would have been for the contemporaries of Vos. The question of race was given far less importance around 1800 than was the case later. Then, questions of class were more important, for instance being a free burgher or freed slave or a slave. For this reason too, skin colour was not a preoccupation of Vos in his *Merkwaardig verhaal*, but slavery was. Vos belonged, as "predikant", to the colonial elite and had no reason to try and hide the fact that he was a descendant "of European and Asian forefathers".

RECIPE CORNER

Plum Topping

Here's an easy to make, yet delicious topping for Ice Cream or Custard.

Take one kilo of blood plums

(Frontier), cut and de-stone. Place in microwavable glass dish add 250 gm brown sugar. Grind to fine powder, seeds from three cardamom pods, three cloves, quarter stick cinnamon: add to plums, cover the dish and cook for 10 minutes on high. Lift cover and allow to cool. Add 75ml brandy, use a food processor to reduce the larger remaining pieces. *Voila* your topping is ready. Process time 25 minutes, but enjoy it at leisure, this batch can last 3 months or more in the fridge.



MEET THE NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The President

Tony Peries was elected President of the Society at the AGM held on 27 November 2004. He takes over from Hugh Karunananayake our founding President. Tony has an outstanding record of service in the corporate world that makes him eminently suitable to be



at the helm of our Society. He migrated to Australia in 1973 after a trail blazing spell at George Steuart and Co which he joined in 1955 as an executive. He reached the top of the ladder as Chairman and CEO in 1968 and steered the destinies of the company at a time when it was the leading plantation management company in Sri Lanka. His career with George Steuarts has been legendary; the staff there still talks of his extraordinary tea tasting skills and management acumen. Till his retirement in 1999, Tony has held senior appointments in the mercantile sector in Melbourne, and Sydney, culminating as the State Manager for New South Wales in a leading sales and marketing company.

A keen student of contemporary affairs both national and international, Tony keeps abreast of developments around the world through a wide network of personal contacts that he has assiduously maintained over the years.

A man of wide interests and accomplishments that could only be described as unique, Tony has been a volunteer officer with the Artillery Regiment of the Sri Lanka Army, a qualified pilot, and an accomplished yachtsman. He represented the Otter Aquatic Club in swimming and water polo, and to this day remains a keen swimmer who rarely misses his daily morning swim. He is an unabashed lover of good food and wine with a great reputation for having tastebuds of a classical gourmand! In these pursuits his wife Srini is a comrade in arms, with a similarly eclectic array of interests. A former captain of the ladies team at the Royal Colombo Golf Club, Srini now devotes much of her time to writing. Her first book is due to be launched shortly. With such enterprise at the helm, our Society can look forward to very productive years ahead.

The Secretary

Gerard Velayuthen migrated to Australia from Sri Lanka nearly 22 years ago, having spent five years in Zambia. Gerard and Drupathi have been married for 27 years and have three children aged 26, 23 and 16. The two older “kids” are like their parents, professional and the eldest works in New York, and the second, a daughter is pursuing Medical studies, in Sydney. The ‘baby’ is in her final year at school.

Gerard's main interests are travel, lots of it - and cars, faster the better. Having qualified as a Chartered Accountant and Chartered Management Accountant, UK, Gerard has held senior finance roles in various industries. He was the Chief Financial Officer CFO and Chief Operating Officer COO for the Boeing Company in Brisbane. Gerard relocated to Sydney and has been involved in General Management and Corporate restructuring.

Whilst rice and curry top the list he leans towards lean meals like Sushi and Sashimi with the occasional Tempura washed down with Sake. With rather catholic tastes he loves his Italian foods as well. He is a Jazz fan and enjoys the occasional movie, the last being Entrapment (2000) starring Catherine Zeta Jones and Sean Connery. Next to The Ceylankan, he has placed Da Vinci Code as his the best book he has read recently. To quote “the book was very thrilling to the end but was an anti climax as the truth is not revealed.”

Drupathi enjoys theatre and shopping of course! She worked at Sydney Uni for nearly 14 years until they moved to Brisbane. Now manages the household, building renovations, travel bookings and finance.

The family prefers Sydney to Brisbane, “simply because we are used to the Sydney lifestyle and could not come to terms with the Brisbane lifestyle which is too slow” he adds. Well, Brisbane's loss is our gain.



Public Relations

Harry de Sayrah



Harry is a product of St Josephs College Colombo and continued to serve his “Alma Mater” as the Vice President of the OBU for many years and as President of The Old Josephians' Sports Club. During his student years he was a proactive member of the Film Society, Music Art & Drama Society and the Senior Literary Union and co produced the Film Society production of “Little Bike Lost”, directed by the late Noel Cruz.

He is a very keen ‘Turfite’. He recounts with a sense of achievement, how he started his lifelong association with horse racing by attending races at the “Ghandhi Side” (the enclosure in the middle of the Havelock race course meant for the ordinary folk) ending up years later at the Queen's Box in the members' enclosure. By then he owned horses that brought him valuable trophies. He continues his interest as part owner of four horses in Sydney.

Whilst in Sri Lanka, his speciality was motor finance in which he was engaged for over 25 years. He was on the Board of Rowlands Ltd and managed the oldest finance company in Sri Lanka. Harry migrated to Australia in 1988 and worked at Orix Australia as Commercial Lending Manager and is presently the Credit Controller of Chubb Security Services.

He and his wife Imelda a doctor have two children - Dilhara and Shehan, both are professionals. His favourite food – Chillie Crab and he wends his way to “Harry's Singapore Chillie Crab” in downtown Sydney frequently to enjoy this. He loves British comedies and reads both fiction and non fiction on a wide range of subjects. But he says “Race Form Guide on a Saturday is a must”!!

A ‘Lifer’ in Lions International he served with distinction as President of clubs in Colombo 3 and Bankstown. Currently he is active in a very laudable project of exporting used spectacles for needy people in Sri Lanka. Through his efforts over 500,000 persons have benefited so far, and in recognition of this he was awarded the highest honour within the Lions movement – the Melvin Jones Fellowship Award. Says Harry, “I value this medal most among a bucketful I have gained in 30 years with Lions”. What better credentials for our new Public Relations portfolio?

APPRECIATION

Dr Medduma B Kappagoda 1932-2004

Dr M.B. Kappagoda who died on 10 November 2004 after a valiant struggle with a virulent cancer of the thyroid, was a founder member of our Society. Members in Sydney will recall his quiet presence at our quarterly meetings, invariably making the near three hour trip all the way from Bungar in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. He was one of the first names that came to mind when the idea of forming a society was mooted nine years ago. When the subject was broached to him, he responded with typical enthusiasm and support, and those who were present in his beautiful home in Bungar will remember the delicious lunch that he laid out to the founding Committee, and the many hours spent discussing the various issues relating to the formation of the Society.

Kappa, as he was known to his friends, was a man of great intellect and big heart. He joined Royal College in Colombo after his primary education in Kegalle on winning a government scholarship. He completed his secondary education at Royal with consummate ease, and joined the Medical College in Colombo which he whizzed through with equal comfort. It was there that he met Nalini, one of the most brilliant products of the Medical College who later became his life's partner.

Kappa migrated to Sydney in 1970 after qualifying as an eye surgeon in England, and soon established himself as a leading ophthalmologist. He was the first and only full time staff specialist in ophthalmology at the Concord Repatriation Hospital where he worked for 31 years, mainly as Head of the Department of Ophthalmology. He was an outstanding teacher and examiner for over 20 years for the Part 1 and Part 2

examinations of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists. A leading ophthalmologist in Sydney, Dr Ian Francis in his eulogy described him as "literally a one man institution of academic and caring excellence. It explained why he could assess and diagnose brilliantly; his



Dr M B Kappagoda
1932-2004

intellect was simply superb". A few weeks prior to his death, Kappa was honoured with an award of Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, at a function attended by over 100 ophthalmologists. The President of the College Dr Peter Henderson presented him with the award, which was followed by tributes from 31 ophthalmologists. The Honorary Fellowship is a prestigious award given previously to only 5 other people including Sir Gustav Nossal and Dr Marijan Filipic. A few months earlier, the Directors and staff of the Concord Hospital honoured him by naming the laser room in the hospital as the Medduma Kappagoda Laser Room.

Kappa wore his eminent professional skills and well endowed intellect lightly. Of a self effacing and modest disposition, he was pleasant company not only because of his genial nature. His sincerity and absolute commitment to distributive justice made him one of a rare breed of non avaricious

eye surgeons. The large gathering at his funeral was eloquent testimony to the inherent nature of a man of utmost care and compassion who gave of his time and skills liberally. Nalini his devoted wife was more than a soul mate; they shared a similar view of the world. In retirement, Kappa and Nalini who were both keen artists built their studio in Bundanoon where Kappa worked with acrylics and Nalini used water colours to produce some magnificent botanical paintings which won several awards. Life in retirement in Bundanoon gave him the opportunity to reflect on life in general, and perhaps nostalgically on the country he left several decades ago. The result was a series of short stories on rural life in Sri Lanka, evoking images which appear to have been indelibly etched in his mind from the days of his childhood.

His home in Bundanoon was a centre of hospitality for friends dropping in on their way to or from Melbourne or to spend a few days with them. Although a teetotaller all his life, he was a magnanimous host with a canny knowledge of the merits of the various single malt whiskies which he stocked for friends with a penchant for a good drop! Conversation often wove around his favourite interests of cricket, rugby and politics. He studiously eschewed gossip, and if comment was required, was more than charitable in his assessment of people. With his passing, I have lost a close personal friend, someone whose friendship I was privileged to share since we first met over 50 years ago as fellow students at Royal College.

Kappa is survived by Nalini, son Astika, son-in-law Dr Craig Winter and 4 grandchildren Daniel, Sarena, Lara, and Blake. His only daughter Chamari who was a well known paediatrician in Melbourne, pre-deceased him in February last year. He will be sorely missed.

*Hugh Karunananayake
Immediate Past President CSA*

...and another appreciation

Dr M B Kappagoda

I have had the pleasure and distinctive privilege of knowing Dr M.B. Kappagoda for a period spanning the proverbial three score years, as I first got to know him at the age of 12 when we joined our *alma mater* Royal College. Kappa was more the diligent, studious type, and the playing grounds of Royal were not for him, but rather found himself drawn more to the labs and lecture theatres. In fact of the 80 odd batch of twelve year old hopefuls (of whom Kappa was one) who entered Royal in 1945, no less than 15 became doctors, and Kappa was certainly one of those who distinguished himself in his chosen field. At school he stood out tall because of his temperament – quiet, mild-mannered, and gentle, and being so, he endeared himself so much to all of us.

Kappa and I spent about eight wonderful years together at school, and our friendship was truly cemented in those years. Our paths diverged when we joined the University, Kappa going on to the Medical Faculty in Colombo and me to the Peradeniya Campus. Our friendship got somewhat distanced possibly because of the geographical factor, but in later years after we both finished our academic and professional studies, it blossomed out once again. Kappa passed out with his MBBS Degree, joined Government Service, and started work at the Colombo Eye Hospital. There, under the discerning eye of Drs Deva Adithiya, Dadabhoy, and Sri Skandarajah, all ophthalmologists of great repute, he began his training. In the mid sixties Kappa decided to go to the UK for further studies. There he worked in the Mayday Eye Hospital in Croydon under the renowned Dr Dormont Pierce, a leading figure in the world of Ophthalmology. In due course he obtained his FRCS and specialised in cataract and corneal surgery. He returned to Sri Lanka and worked for a few years and then decided to migrate to Australia. Sri Lanka's loss was truly Australia's gain. Kappa got his first appointment at the Concord Hospital in Sydney, and served there

continuously for over 30 years, and established himself as a much sought after Ophthalmologist. He was involved in work and lectures until recently when he took retirement. He moved to a small homely town called Bundanoon about 200 miles away from Sydney, only paying a weekly visit to Sydney where he worked as a consultant. I recall with pleasure the good fortune I had of spending a few days with him and his wife Nalini. My entire holiday there was spent going down memory lane, reminiscing on our youthful halcyon days at Royal, the student pranks we played on our pedagogues, and talking of the future of both Sri Lanka and Australia, and how we could adjust to changing standards and values in both countries.

It was only while staying with him at his home did I realise the immense talent and capabilities both Kappa and his dear wife Nalini had in painting. In their retirement they had totally immersed themselves in art and found so much comfort and relaxation in that. In fact Kappa and Nalini had even built a studio in their home where they could relax and indulge in painting. To keep up with Kappa's hidden talents, Nalini had even obtained a Diploma in Botanical drawing from the University of Sydney. My suggestion to them to hold an exhibition in Sri Lanka (as they had between them over 200 canvasses) was accepted with their typical modesty and shyness saying that they would let me know.

Kappa and Nalini were blessed with two brilliant children, a son and daughter, both doctors. It was a cruel blow of fate that they had to face their daughter's untimely death just a few months before Kappa's own demise. His sudden illness I feel was aggravated by this tragic loss, which shattered them both, that within a few months he succumbed to it. By a strange quirk of fate it happened to be at the self same hospital where he had spent the best part of his professional life. Kappa had been able to happily participate and been greatly moved by a felicitation ceremony held in his honour by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmolo-

gists shortly before he passed away. Many are the young medical students and doctors, especially in Sydney who benefited so much from his training and lectures. He had been so readily available to all of them, and gave freely of his time to further their ophthalmological knowledge and training.

Kappa, with your loss, we have lost a close and devoted friend. To Nalini and Astika, the loss of such a loving, compassionate and devoted husband and father seems irreparable. You were indeed a "Genteel Knight". Good night sweet prince! May you attain Nibbana.

Nihal Seneviratne

(The writer was Secretary General of the Parliament of Sri Lanka for many years Ed..)

...and we farewell a gentle lady

Marlene Senaratne

1932-2005

A representative gathering of friends, relatives, and members of the Society bade last farewell to Marlene Senaratne at her funeral on 25 January 2005 at the Northern Suburbs Cemetery in Sydney. Marlene the devoted wife of our Social Convenor Chandra Senaratne was a scion of the well known De Soysa family of Sri Lanka. Her paternal grandfather AJR de Soysa was the second son of the philanthropist Sir Charles Henry de Soysa and became famous among other things for the ornate urban mansion "Lakshmigiri" in Thurstan Road, Colombo, which he built in 1912.

We remember Marlene as a gentle lady, quiet and unassuming in manner, but a source of inspiration to the ebullient and gregarious Chandra. They were the inseparable duo always at hand to assist at Committee meetings and in particular at the Annual General Meeting where Chandra plays a significant role. One of Marlene's passions was doing the crossword puzzles everyday, and this would certainly have helped her retain a sharp and incisive mind to the very end. She was also a keen cricket fan, who never missed an opportunity to watch a game.

She is survived by Chandra, daughter Sharmini and son in law Michael to whom we offer our deepest condolences.

BOOK REVIEW

Sons of the Rebel by Gaston Perera
Published by Vijita Yapa Publications

Reviewed by Priya David



“History has many passages, contrived corridors and issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, guides by vanities.” (Gerontion – T.S. Eliot)

Yes, history is a dangerous mistress when courted by the false lover, the historical adventurer whose real passion is his personal agenda. According to his wish, she lets him misdirect himself into the “cunning passages” and “contrived corridors” of her archives to emerge with spurious issues that serve primarily to feed his “vanities” or “ambitions”.

To the genuine student, however, she reveals her heart. Enriched by the insights afforded by the experience, he discharges the proper role of the writer of historical fiction. This is, of course, to render in imaginative terms the lessons of the past so that the present can, if it so wishes, avoid learning them the hard way.

Being previously unacquainted with Perera as a writer, I wondered whether this novel might be one of those “ambitious” undertakings to “forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” – the Joycean aspiration that can be, and has been, sadly misapplied in the context of a modern, interdependently multi-racial Sri Lanka. What I found, however, was a work of historical fiction that is as balanced and objective as it is sensitive and passionate. As such it succeeds in convincing the unbiased reader of the universal relevance of the issues at stake in a period so seemingly remote from our own.

The background of the novel is the Kandyan resistance to the Portuguese at a climactic phase of the latter’s campaign for island wide domination. Its subject is the struggle for proper leadership on either side of the conflict. From this context emerges the central theme of the sad incompatibility of high-mindedness with greatness in a world that is governed by Realpolitik. It is a measure of the writer’s breadth of sympathetic vision that this conflict is perceived in the case of the Portuguese General de Saa as well as in that of the rightful heir to that Kandyan throne, Ku-

marasinghe. A counter-pointed sub-theme is the relative success that greets both the Machiavellian scheming and outright power-abuse on the part of the Regent and the perfidious expediency of the “lascorin” commanders.

With the thickening of the plot come several related issues. These too are found on both the Kandyan and the Portuguese sides of the experience. They include the destructive effects of disunity, the corruption bred by the lust for power, the victimization of women, the complicity of established religion in rulers’ abuse of power and the cynical manipulation of human beings for personal ends. On the positive side are the progress made possible by good leadership, the admirable valour of the common soldier and the need for mutual respect in marital love. This complex of issues convincingly presented indicates the extent of the writer’s imaginative meditation on his material.

In his introductory talk on the occasion of the launching of the book, Perera stated that once the writer of historical fiction has assembled his historical facts and his store of period lore, it is up to him to tell his story with all the resources of language at his command. We are obviously interested in this aspect, since the effective use of language is vital to the success of the serious work of fiction, whether historical or not.

One finds oneself in the hands of a refreshingly educated author. More than the agreeable fluency and the expressiveness of the writing, this refers to the highly civilized tenor of Perera’s commentary. There is no didacticism or sentimentality, neither partiality nor design on the reader’s reactions. An objective humanness, all too rare today, pervades the writing.

Perera is at his expressive best in the episodes involving action. The fury of battle, the excitement of a perilous journey by sea, the tensions of a covert operation are skillfully conveyed without losing sight of the plight of the individual participants. The insights into the all-too-brief man and wife relationship are moving. The researched background material is well employed to provide the necessary depth of social context for the plot.

The danger for the historical novelist lies in the very advantages he enjoys, namely the generous supply of historical donees by way of dramatis personae, story-line setting, and sundry period information. He could be led unwittingly into treating the personality and psychology of his key

characters, too, as donees rather than exploring and revealing these through creative process. This becomes evident in the characterization of the protagonists, Kumarasinghe and de Saa. We are not sufficiently shown how their uncompromising idealism proceeds from their mental and emotional make-up. Hence their largely self-defeating decisions do not carry the degree of conviction needed for the reader to be able fully to empathise with them. Dialogue and interior monologue, so useful for probing the mind and heart, tend to be hemmed in by narrative comment, and to be illustrative rather than actually generative of consciousness. This is also the case of the symbolism employed at critical points, which seem to be excessively studied. Thus the human tragedy implicit in the fate of these two men does not affect as powerfully as it might, its emotional impact being insufficient.

That the appeal of this book is thus, ultimately, at an intellectual more than at an emotional level is a point that has to be made in its assessment as a creative work. But this in no way takes away from one's appreciation of its stimulating effect and of its distinctive contribution to the realm of authentic historical fiction. Through the serious and imaginative contemplation of his historical material Gaston Perera has, to borrow a phrase from "The Four Quartets" enabled us to take that necessary "backward look behind the assurance of recorded history". It is a look we can ill afford to neglect taking with him, if we genuinely want to learn from the past to better understand the present and better anticipate the future.



19th Century Images

Ratemahattaya

Tales of WW II HMS *Rajaliya*: British Naval Air Base at Puttalam

by Douglas Ranmuthugala

Puttalam, 130 km to the north of Colombo on the West Coast of Sri Lanka, is a sleepy little town. During the Portuguese, Dutch and British periods, the area housed small military establishments. At Kalpitiya, across the lagoon from the town of Puttalam, the remnants of an old 17th Century fort, originally built by the Portuguese and rebuilt by the Dutch, can still be seen. On 5 November 1795, the Dutch surrendered it to the British, who maintained a garrison there for 30 years. One could sympathise with the British soldiers condemned to garrison duty in that remote outpost, hot, dusty and dry, cut off from most comforts of 19th century Europe. The local pub was several thousand miles away across the sea. Today, the Sri Lankan Navy has a Base at Kalpitiya. So, despite its remoteness, it always had some military significance.

Even prior to the advent of the Europeans, Puttalam may have played a significant military role in Sinhala history. During the period when neighbouring Panduwasnuwara was the Royal capital, Puttalam must have been a port of importance, especially due to constant internal warfare where mercenary armies from nearby South India played a part.

During World War II, the British had a Naval Air Arm Base at Puttalam. Following the Royal Navy habit of naming its Air Arm Bases after birds, Puttalam hosted HMS *Rajaliya* (Eagle). To the best my knowledge, there were two other Naval Air Arm Bases in Ceylon at the time, one at Trincomalee in the North-East and the other in Colombo. There was also an airbase at Koggala in the South-West, operated by the Royal Air Force. Koggala was also known as a port of call for the Qantas Catalina sea-based air-

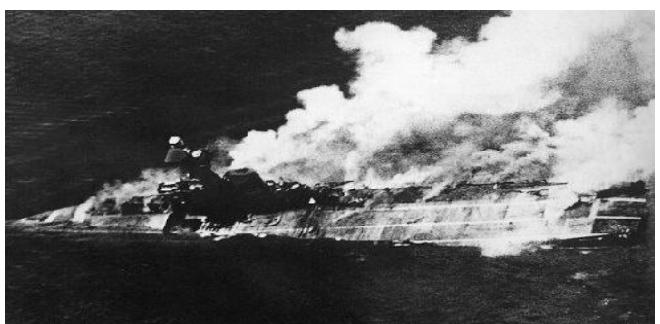
craft that flew from Australia to UK.

During the early days of WW II following Pearl Harbour and the entry of Japan in to hostilities, HMS *Rajaliya* operated Barracuda fighter aircraft from its airstrip. This particular aircraft was not a great success, and the sight of one going into the drink just outside the base was not uncommon.

There was no way they could stand up to the Mitsubishi Zero flown by Jap pilots from carriers in the Indian Ocean. By this time, British control of the Indian Ocean was tenuous, to say the least. On 8 December 1941, the spanking new Battleship, *Prince of Wales* and the elderly Battle Cruiser *Renown* had been sunk in South East Asian waters by Jap aircraft flying from Indo China, both going down within two and a half hours. True to British Naval tradition, the Admiral in command, Sir Thomas Phillips, went down with his ship. The two ships had no fighter cover, and the curtain of anti-aircraft fire from ships that came in to vogue later, especially in American warships, had not yet made its debut. The *Prince of Wales* was capable of holding her own against other surface craft and in her short career, had even seen action against the German battleship, *Bismarck*. But without air cover, she was vulnerable to attack from above. The Japanese, in a rare show of mercy, allowed the escort Destroyers to pick up survivors, and in fact, on the following day, dropped a wreath at the scene of the sinking. One of the Destroyers was the Australian ship *Vampire* which had only four months left before being sunk off Batticaloa.

Colombo and Trincomalee had been bombed on 5 April 1942 by carrier based aircraft from the Task Force led by Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo. Aircraft carrier *Akagi*, Nagumo's flagship, had performed the same task for Admiral Yamamoto during the attack on Pearl Harbour. The fleet had four other fast carriers, the *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, mustering among them 300 aircraft. They were supported by

four Battleships, two Heavy Cruisers, one Light Cruiser and eleven Destroyers. Twelve Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers that took off from Colombo were all shot down by Japanese Zeros from that Task Force. Heavy Cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire* were sunk by Japanese naval fighter/bombers. The attack was done with 80 aircraft, and the Japanese pilots scored an incredible 90 percent hits with bombs on the unlucky ships. These cruisers had been a prime target of the Japanese, but had left Colombo harbour on the evening of 4 December following the alert raised when the Jap fleet heading towards Ceylon, 350 miles away to the South East, was detected by the Canadian Sqd.Ldr. Birchall of Number 413 (RCAF) Squadron. Birchall, who saw the Japanese fleet after eight hours of flying, was shot down and spent the rest of war as a POW. But he managed to radio Colombo before the Japanese Zeros got to him, enabling the British to alert their defences. The ageing carrier *Hermes*, built in 1919, was attacked by aircraft off Batticaloa on 9 April and sank, together with the Australian Destroyer, *Vampire*. Defiant to the last, one of her 4 inch guns was still firing when she went under. The *Hermes* had no aircraft on board, except for one unserviceable Swordfish. It is possible that the twelve Swordfish referred to earlier as shot down by the Japs were in fact her aircraft. The *Hermes* lies within easy reach off Batticaloa in about 40 metres of water and is today a popular attraction for scuba divers. Built in 1919 and



Japanese pilot's view of the end of *Hermes*

commissioned in 1923, she was the first purpose built aircraft carrier in the Royal

Navy, and had performed well in the European theatre. Her complement of aircraft was limited to 12 Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers, known in the Navy as *Stringbags*, slow biplanes (140mph), armed with two .303 machine guns with a crew of three. They



Fairey Swordfish (Stringbags) torpedo bombers

were sitting ducks for fighters like a Zero or a ME 109. Nineteen officers and 283 ratings out of a total complement of 664 went down with the ship. The Australian Destroyer *Vampire* too fought to the bitter end, shooting down one aircraft. She broke in two and went down with her Commander and eight ratings. Others were rescued by local craft and the Hospital Ship *Vita*.

Singapore had fallen on 15 February 1942. On 27 February 1942, a combined Allied fleet under the Dutch Admiral Karel Doorman met a Japanese fleet under Rear Admiral Nishimura in the battle of the Java Sea and came off second

best. The Allies had more ships, but the Japanese fleet could boast of 20 eight inch guns against the 12 the Allies could muster, and in an action fought from over 13 miles, these swung the balance. Not to be outdone by the British, Doorman went down with his ship. British control over the Indian Ocean was indeed under grave threat. The Admiral in command, Sir James Somerville, realising the vulnerability of the fleet without adequate air cover, decided to move the slower ships to East Africa. He was fortunate that he did not

meet Nagumo head-on.

The Royal Navy had not yet come to terms with the threat from the air and had very few aircraft carriers that could effectively take on the Japs. The Eastern Fleet had two British built carriers, the *Indomitable* and the *Formidable* in addition to the *Hermes*, but their crews were untried and the aircraft they carried were no match for the Zero flown by highly trained pilots. The few carriers that they were to receive a little later from the US were not very efficient, and carried mostly obsolete fighters. It says a lot for the ability of British pilots for them to have been able to destroy a number of German and Japanese ships with such obsolete sea planes like the Swordfish. Most of the very effective Hurricanes being produced in UK went to the Air Force to fight in the European theatre. The brilliant Seafire – the naval version of the Spitfire, came into service much later.

It was during this period that Capt. Kuroshima, Head of Operations at Japanese Combined Fleet Headquarters, planned a move to destroy the British Fleet in the Indian Ocean, capture Ceylon, and advance into the Persian Gulf where they could meet the Axis powers (hopefully) sweeping down the

Caucasus. Fortunately for the Allies, and more so for Ceylon, the plan was rejected. The Japanese Fleet had already strayed beyond the limits set beforehand and was withdrawn on 12 April 1942 for battles elsewhere.

They never returned to the Indian Ocean. *Akagi*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* went down at the Battle of Midway in June the same year. That battle was fought by carrier-based aircraft, without the two opposing fleets sighting each other. *Akagi* and *Hiryu*, damaged beyond redemption, were sunk by their own destroyers. In a poignant footnote, Admiral Yamaguchi, (Commander of *Hiryu*) and the Captain of the ship said goodbye to the surviving crew and lashed themselves to the bridge of the ship as she went down.



F4U Corsair

Fortunately for the British, the Americans weighed in with good fighters. Very soon, HMS *Rajaliya* was flying the American F4U Corsair, gull-winged fighters with British Merlin engines that could meet the Zero on equal terms. Japanese Zero fighter ace Saburo Sakai (64 confirmed kills) says in his autobiography "*Samurai!*" that the Corsair was "a powerful gull-winged American Navy fighter which operated mostly from land bases.much faster than the Zero and had tremendous diving speeds". Commander 'Mike' Crossley, DSC, RN, a British naval fighter pilot who operated in the Indian Ocean theatre at one time claims in his book "*They gave me a Seafire*" that the Corsair with its heavy forward body mass could out-dive the Seafire, but the latter was faster and could manoeuvre better. Incidentally, Crossley visited Puttalam and HMS *Bambara* at Trincomalee (*bambara* - wasp, which does fly but is *apis*, not *avis*. Perhaps a linguistic *faux pas* by a local counterpart). He remembers Trincomalee as a place where a friend, Lt.Cdr. R.Cork, DSO, DSC, RN, was killed while flying a Corsair, and was buried in the local cemetery. Cork "lies (s) there still, guarded during the day and night by the crocodiles in the nearby Mahaweli River." He also remembers buying, for the princely sum of one pound, a topaz, one inch long and half an inch broad, and was of the opinion that the country was an "absolute paradise of a place". Flying to Colombo from HMS *Rajaliya* at Puttalam, "...was odd, flying over miles and miles of forest with hardly a road or river and then suddenly catching sight of the white stone architecture of Colombo itself, sticking out of the greenery". A far cry indeed from today's urban sprawl and deforestation. What he did not like in the camp huts they were accommodated in was that "Everything you looked at walked, hopped, flew or stung, sometimes all four together."

At the Base, on occasions, they used an elephant to tow the aircraft to the runway from the dispersal points. A friend of mine who served with the British Naval Air Arm at the base still has a photograph of the elephant ambling along with a Corsair in tow. Among

other photographs in his collection are several of the local scene and one group photograph where a young Lieut. Basil Henricus, in uniform, is seated in the middle. Basil, who died about two years ago in Melbourne, was in charge of the administration at the Base. The Henricus family was well known in Service circles in Colombo. One brother, A.W. (Barney), now in the States, served with me in the Police. Barney once won a medal at Empire Games in boxing (Featherweight, 1938?) (*Another brother Allan former Lieut. Commander of Sri Lanka as well as Australian Navy, is a member of the Society and a regular participant at meetings ..Ed.*)

My friend also remembers the country with affection. All the travel he could do under wartime conditions was limited to trips to the Navy establishment at Trincomalee, the military base at Diyatalawa and the capital Colombo by train. He remembers well the tea estates, and the colourful dresses of the local women. There was one trip to Kandy, where he visited the Dalada Maligawa, known then as the Temple of the Tooth. One quaint memory of the place was of a monk who inscribed little rectangles of *ola* leaf – a parchment made of a palm leaf used for writing, like papyri. What made an impression on my friend (as well as on the palm leaf) was the extra long thumb nail of the monk which he used like a stylus to do the writing. He had kept the palm leaf as a souvenir but it did not survive the ravages of time and humidity.

While serving as police Divisional Commander, Chilaw, in 1971, I made several visits to Puttalam and the Naval Base at Kalpitiya. Puttalam had a large police station covering a wide area while a small police post had been established in Kalpitiya to deal with what ever little crime that may occur in such a sparsely populated spot. Kalpitiya was still a dusty outpost, far away from the beaten track. Notable among the remnants of the Dutch Fort is a well preserved door of the outer wall. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the abortive insurrection of 1971 prevented me from exercising my usual interest in historical sites in the area, limiting my explorations. I cannot

remember tracing the old airstrip which had not been far from the present town. Most likely, it would have been built over or overgrown with trees. Out at sea, it is quite possible that wrecked military aircraft must lie on the ocean floor in the vicinity, slowly undergoing a sea change. But with a little imagination, one could visualise Puttalam as a busy WW II Naval Air Base, with the continuous roar of low flying aircraft and visions of brawny sailors toiling in the tropical heat, dreaming of home, far, far away.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I was elected President at the AGM/Xmas party which was well attended in Sydney. Unfortunately a number of members could not be present, especially those interstate and overseas, so I thought a brief New Year message might be appropriate.

Firstly, I must say I am really honoured to accept the office as the President of the Ceylon Society of Australia which has had a short but remarkable history. It is a matter of record the Society has an impressive membership spread across many countries. It is going from strength to strength with impressive speakers at every meeting and publishes a quarterly Journal which improves with every issue.

Hugh Karunananayake the Founding President and his committee have done a marvellous job of getting the Society up and running very effectively. Hugh is deserving of all our thanks and we are happy he is to remain on the committee. To the retiring committee members, our grateful thanks for your services. As 2005 starts, it seems possible we may have a Brisbane Chapter before long. I look forward to a year in which we hope and shall endeavour to scale new heights. Sadly, 2005 dawned with a major disaster around our native shores. Elsewhere in the Journal we make a suggestion as to how anyone wishing to help materially can contribute.

I wish you all a Happy, Healthy & Prosperous 2005

Tony Peries

The Landed Proprietors

by *The Raconteurs*

The term “landed proprietor” would almost certainly mean nothing to young Sri Lankans today, and one of the authors of this article recalls asking a schoolmate, as one does, around the year 1940, what his father did for an occupation, and being perplexed at the reply “he is a landed proprietor”!. Whether this term was a purely Ceylonese one we know not, but it described a person not in employment as such but deriving his income mainly from land, which in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries meant plantations.

Kumari Jayawardene in her authoritative treatise “From Nobodies to Somebodies”, dealing with the rise of the colonial bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, has described how arrack renting was the basis of many of the great fortunes of the late 19th and 20th centuries, much of which disappeared with the “nationalisation” of plantation holdings exceeding 50 acres, in 1975. Michael Roberts in his book on “Caste, conflict and Elite formation” also dealt exhaustively with wealth accumulation of that period, and readers who wish to pursue details of acreages held and family names can find the information therein. We propose briefly to set out some of the lore and legends associated with those families.

In the years 1900 -1970, a coconut estate of about 100 acres brought a handsome income with no great effort, unlike say tea, or rubber which needed to be plucked or tapped daily by a large resident labour force. In periods of financial stringency, a coconut estate could be run with little or no input, and some owners did not even fertilise their properties regularly, in preference tethering estate cattle under individual trees at night, on a rotational basis. An owner of 250 acres was independently wealthy and needed no regular employment. The Chilaw Bar was replete with “briefless barristers”, proctors,

and advocates who lived on their acreages out of town, and existed comfortably on estate income, but visited the courts or more accurately their immediate surrounds, almost daily to meet their friends of like background, lunch with them (after a drink or two) and even pick up a little occasional



Sir James Peries with sons Leonard (seated) and Herbert later to be singer Devar Surya Sena

work.

The founding fathers of very wealthy families like Jacob de Mel, C.H. de Soysa and their contemporaries led very active lives as they were always looking to buy or sell land, plant additional acreages, explore new business opportunities and the like. Their daughters generally married professional men who having several income streams, expanded their wealth, lived in palatial Colombo residencies but in most respects did not parade their wealth. Their homes were in the elite residential areas of Cinnamon Gardens, Kollupitiya, and Havelock Town. They would have domestic staff usually consisting of a driver, cook, houseboy, gar-

dener, and in some instances a butler with assistants. The gardener was usually a man of Indian Tamil descent who had acquired his gardening skills previously maintaining gardens of estate bungalows then occupied by British planters. In an average home in the Cinnamon Gardens domestic staff usually outnumbered the residents in the home. Leftist ideologues of the 1950s saw a situation there which they thought could be cleverly exploited. In the 1956 election to the Cinnamon Gardens ward of the Colombo Municipal Council, the Lanka Samsamaj Party (LSSP) nominated prominent trade unionist Bala Tampoe as their candidate against the sitting member George Jayasuriya a "landed proprietor". The LSSP was coolly confident of winning the seat on the rationale that if at least half the domestic staff in each home voted for them, the seat was safely in their hands. They did not count on the fact that "landed proprietors" had a paternalist interest in their domestic staff, often providing support and protection when the need arose. They in turn looked on to their masters for guidance and advice. So when it came to an election they would naturally seek direction from their masters as to whom they should vote. Needless to say, Bala Tampoe was subject to a resounding defeat.

It was the children of the founding fathers who were more often than not, the landed proprietors. Many such as R.A. de Mel, Leonard Peiris, J.L.D. and Watson Peiris, Stanley Dias, etc had offices at home or outside, specific to their plantation and other interest, wherein small numbers of clerks carried out the day to day business with minimum supervision. The typical landed proprietor (l.p for short), rose late, spent a couple of hours in his office (opening and reading "the tappal" or mail was almost ceremonial), had a short afternoon nap and spent the evening at golf or tennis, often followed by bridge or poker. Occasional visits to the estates interrupted the routine of Colombo and a few l.ps bred

cattle or poultry in the lordly fashion beloved of the British “squirearchy” and displayed livestock at competitive shows, a popular pastime of the colonialists. Many l.ps were closely associated with church activities, and were responsible for sizeable endowments. These liaisons have in at least two notable instances viz Bishops Lakdasa de Mel and Harold de Soysa led to sons of wealthy houses taking to the priesthood. Others such as J.L.D.Peiris who served in the Anglican Diocesan Council have supported the church in an advisory or key support role. L.ps have also been at the forefront of voluntary community service bodies that were the precursor to today’s NGO. Leonard Peiris was for instance an enthusiastic President of the Ceylon Social Service League founded by his father Sir James Peiris.

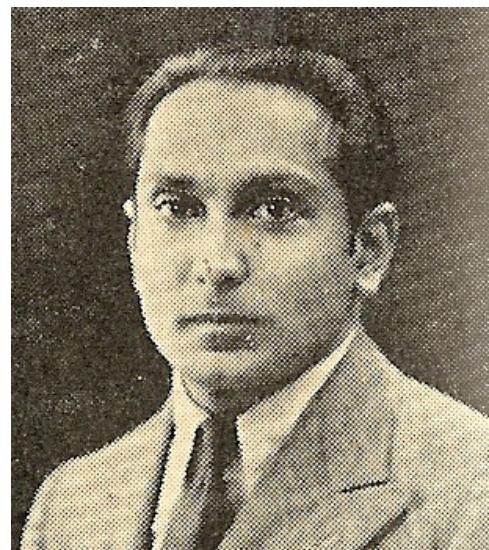
Not all however were benign and benevolent, some not requiring much persuasion to cut the odd corner or even to do a dodgy deal despite their wealth. One l.p is said to have bred a magnificent hen, a sure fire prize winner but for the colour of her legs, which he rectified with heavy applications of “*kaba*” (turmeric) thus ensuring that the bird won prizes both for breed as well as in the open competition. Unfortunately for our l.p, the Governor at the time was a poultry fancier

himself and a judge at the show, where he insisted on handling the winner whose dyed legs soiled the imperial hands! It has been said that this particular l.ps sons were followed through their school days by taunts of “*kukul saayang*”(poultry dye) a call that



E L F de Soysa whose horses won the Governor's cup on several occasions

was guaranteed to arouse their ire. The same l.p was, it is said, given to forcing his attention on young women of his estate worker’s families, mostly in no position to complain for fear of eviction. Jobs for minor supervisors (often known as conductor) were much prized, as they included a house (cadjan roofed and cow dung floored on



Another singing landed proprietor
Hubert Rajapakse

small properties) with free coconuts, milk from estate cattle, space for growing vegetables and for keeping poultry. Our l.p so angered one family that despite the consequences that awaited them, covered him and his expensive car with the contents of their cess pits.

Prior to Ceylon’s independence, and before World War 2, employment opportunities for young men of means from wealthy homes were surprisingly limited. The professions for those wanting quick progress were beset with problems, albeit minor: government medical practitioners or engineers had the prospect of serving long periods in the “outstations”, and the bar, for a legal fledgling meant years of toil to gain recognition. One well known lawyer in his early days at the bar moonlighted as a sub editor of the Ceylon Daily News! The accounting profession was dominated by two big British firms who had no Ceylonese arti-

ced clerks pre 1939. The executives of mercantile houses and banks were exclusively European.

Quite a few of the early entrants into politics, at both municipal and national (State Council) levels were men of wealthy background like R.A. de Mel, C.H.Z. Fernando, who had business interests (eg a lighterage company) apart from agriculture. They were active in bodies like the Low Country Products Association; the less well recognised local cousin of the British dominated Planters Association. Entrepreneurs were few, trade was largely European run with a few Indians and local firms (not Sinhalese or Tamil) like M.S. Heptulab-hoy, significant in the minor league. Richard Peiris, the founder of the firm of that name, was a rare example of a Sinhalese businessman launching a new venture pre 1939. Interestingly some of his brothers (Alex and Eustace) depended almost entirely on family estates for their income though Harry, who ran their interests in later years, was well known in art circles as a painter and founder of the '43 Group. Deva Surya Sena (born Herbert Peiris) and Hubert Rajapakse were sons of wealthy houses and well known dabblers in music. It was the latter we believe who first set a short lived trend for Sinhalese songs set to western tunes such "Song of the Kelani Boatmen" and "Hodi Helai".

The wealthier elements of pre 1939 Ceylonese society largely led comfortable, unimaginative lives with a few pursuing exciting if expensive hobbies like horse racing. World War 2 and the advent of independence began a period of change which was completed by the nationalisation of plantation agriculture, thus ending the dependence of a fair few families on unearned income. A very small

number of these families also had huge, potentially vastly valuable real estate in Colombo; the family of Richard Peiris owned the Hyde Park Corner site of that business, and another family member held the land on which Rowlands in Turret Road (now Dharmapala Mawata) once had their showrooms and garage. De Soysa descendants owned the de Soysa and Co land at one end of Union Place, as well as in Foster Lane at the other end of Union Place. Many of these holding were liquidated in the 80s and 90s.

The war brought a flood of new opportunities as plumbago (graphite) mines for instance, which had been marginally profitable or closed were brought back into full production as their material was vital to the war effort, being a component of refractories (very high temperature furnace linings for metals used in air frames). Cadjan was suddenly in huge demand for temporary buildings springing up everywhere, as also shell charcoal for gas masks. One unscrupulous mine owner and exporter is said, in the darkest days of the war, when many ships were being sunk, to have sent out 3 cargoes of stones, his perfidy coming to light only when the 4th consignment got through! Some funny aspects are still remembered such as the l.p

who, when the small display of wild animals at the Colombo museum was auctioned off at the outbreak of war, purchased a bear (an aged inoffensive animal), went home for his gun and shot the poor thing as he had never shot a bear! Another l.p ran a small sideline at the rear of his house in Colombo selling petrol in the black market until he was raided by the police, thus acquiring the nickname "petrol xxx"! It is said that the war led to a relaxation of moral standards – or perhaps those who offended were more easily ex-



R F S de Mel in his Mayoral Garb



R A de Mel also a Mayor

posed. The Choksy Commission of 1949 into corruption at the Colombo Municipal Council implicated some big names.

Kumari Jayawardene concludes in her book that capital accumulation within the colonial context was of a “rentier” kind, deriving outlets for profit in land acquisition on a large scale, plantation cultivation, graphite production, and the export of primary commodities rather than in industrial activity. She does however concede that indigenous capitalist in the colonial period were stifled by lack of easy credit, tariff barriers, and competition from European and Indian traders. We have in the foregoing, enlarged on her statement to show that landed proprietors were to a degree the victims, albeit willing ones, of circumstances that prevailed in their heyday.

References:

- Jayawardene, Kumari - “From Nobodies to Somebodies”
Roberts, Michael - “Caste, conflict and Elite formation”

BOOKSHOP AND WEB RESOURCES

BOOKS/MAPS/COLLECTIBLES

This column is a regular feature for the benefit of members who publish works, and others who wish the Society to sell material on their behalf. No charges apply to members but donations will be gratefully received. Others pay a handling charge of 10%. Please email the editor if you wish to take up this offer.

Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait, Editors A Shnukal, G Ramsay & Y Nagata. Contains chapter entitled *The Sri Lankan Settlers of Thursday Island* co-authored by Stanley Sparkes & Dr Anna Shnukal. Pandanus Books, available from Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University Canberra. Paperback 330 pp. Price A\$ 55 inclusive of p&h.

'Now in reprint! 'Tea, Tytlers and Tribes - An Australian woman's memories of tea planting in Ceylon' - By Beryl T. Mitchell. 166 pp and 60 photographs. An autobiography you will enjoy. \$30 plus \$5 P&H within Australia. Ph Beryl at (02)97453763 email:berylmitchell@bigpond.com

Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590 s to 1815 by Michael Roberts - Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2004 ISBN 955-8095-53-2 and 955-8095-1-1—270 pages in A 4 size, with 31 Images, 7 Maps and 4 Charts: to order visit www.vijithayapa.com . Paperback Rs 1,499—Hard cover Rs 2,499.

Through my Asian Eyes—S Pathiravita—Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd , 2003 paperback xii + 400 pp, \$ 15.00 + P&H. Contact Sumane Iyer (02) 9456 4737 or email: sumane@pacific.net.au

Armageddon or Brave New World?

By Christie Weeramantry. Published by Sarvodaya Visva Lekha, 173pp, AU\$ 12.50 + \$ 2.50 P&H. Contact Jay Fernando 03 9841 0192.

Please note P&H is within Australia only, overseas postage quoted on request.

WEB SITES WORTH VISITING

- www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/menu.html
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www.travel-net.com www.lankalibrary.com
www.asiancollectibles.com www.eshop.lk
www.militaria.co.uk/s_lists/bk-ceylon.htm
www.thakshana.nsf.ac.lk www.wht.org
www.lanka.pair.com
www.rootsweb.com [Genealogy]

SYNOPSIS OF MEETINGS

Melbourne -7th November 2004

The Chairman, Dr Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker Mr Rex De Silva, a field biologist from Sri Lanka, whose subject for the day was "Some Aspects of Sri Lanka's Ornithology", and referred to his impressive background of achievements in this field.

Rex, who is a Past President of the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Astronomical Association and Sri Lanka Natural History Society, has thirty-five years of experience in observing and studying birds in the country. He has about eighty publications to his credit and has done collaborative work on this subject with Dr Sarath Kotagama, Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Colombo.

Before Rex began his presentation Dr Fernando dedicated the meeting to the memory of Rodney St John who had been an outstanding lover of birds and had in fact spoken on the subject of the birds of Sri Lanka and Australia at one of the earliest meetings held by the Melbourne Chapter. Victor Melder followed with a short tribute to Rodney who he said had possessed the special talent of being able to connect with people and draw out their knowledge of subjects in which they specialised which were of considerable interest and value to all.

Rex stated at the outset of his illustrated lecture that he was giving his personal views on certain aspects relating to the vast field of knowledge currently available on the subject of ornithology. He said that the greater advances which had been made in recent times were due to more active biologists, excellent field guides and the availability of more sophisticated equipment which was relatively inexpensive. He referred to the work done with Dr Kotagama. Together they have recorded 470 species of birds in the latest list which was compiled by them. This was 70 species more than was recorded twenty-five to thirty years ago.

Of the 470 species about 220 are residents of which 24 are endemic to the country. Examples of these were the Sri Lankan blue magpie and the new owl which had been recently discovered. A further 9 species are also proposed as endemic but to date have not been subject to DNA analy-

sis. Most of the endemic varieties lived in the wet zone and in the hills. There were very few in the dry zone.

Mr De Silva's work had mainly been on the migrants, vagrants and others who visited the country at certain seasons, usually when winter in the northern hemisphere reduced the supplies of food available. The migrant birds flew into Sri Lanka by certain routes. There was the Great Central Asian migratory route starting in Russia, the end point of which was southern Sri Lanka. Australian birds fly in from the East Asian flyway through Japan. There are also the routes which move through the Western and Eastern coasts of India. Flycatchers seem to take the eastern route while waders use the western route. A third route has been traced through the Andaman Islands. Interesting examples were given of birds from Australia and the Southern seas who were found in Sri Lanka. One recorded for the first time in 1994 was the Australian stilt. Another, the Brown skua, was first recorded in 1996 as a trans-equatorial migrant in the Indian Ocean. Many of these examples were drawn from a thirteen years study on the migration of seabirds. The west coast of Sri Lanka is a major migratory route for seabirds. It is estimated that between half million and two million seabirds pass along this coast each year during the migratory season.

The main threat that birds are faced with currently is the destruction of the habitat which began initially with the clearing of land by the British for the planting of coffee, tea and rubber. Deforestation is a continuing problem in the dry zone, wet zone and the hills making many endemic species suffer. Mr De Silva gave an example of habitat destruction which was recorded in

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Dr Thomas & Nirmalie Silva
Coogee NSW



Mrs Shihan Peiris
Colombo 3 Sri Lanka

...who have joined since publication of
Journal 28

an University of Stockholm study. In a particular lake area of Puttalam in 1990 the extensive mangroves and mud flats provided an ideal haven for a rich bird life. However it was decided to cut down the mangroves and bulldoze the mud flats to clear the area for the purpose of establishing prawn farms. These were not particularly successful and only about 20% of the farms are in existence today. In the meantime, a very large area of land was rendered waste and waterlogged. This area which should have been a protected environment for birds since they were thriving there has now become a breeding ground for mosquitoes. It would take about two hundred years to restore this land to its initial status.

Other threats to birds are pollution and industrial waste. There are also the problems posed by an excess of commercialisation of wild life and Nature. Sri Lanka contains what are considered eco tourism hot spots. Not all the practices in these places which target tourists are in the best interests of the birds. The increased use of sound recorders has been shown to have adverse effects on the breeding practices of some species of birds. A study suggests that blue magpies become agitated and try to eject their babies from their nests when certain recordings are played. The use of bright spotlights on nocturnal birds such as the owls could possibly adversely affect their sight. All these threats and possible threats should be evaluated and restrictions introduced where necessary.

Mr De Silva concluded his talk by showing about thirty-five slides of birds in the wild, naming them and describing their characteristics and patterns of behaviour. Among these were the green bee-eater in the dry zone, the grey hornbill, flamingos from North West India, a brown shrike who was a winter visitor, the red wattle lapwing and the Sri Lankan jungle cock.

There was a lively question and answer session at the conclusion of this lecture with its useful insights into the world of birds as they exist in Sri Lanka.

Dr Fernando called on Mrs Punnya De Silva to draw the winning raffle ticket which was won by Hemal Gurusinghe.

Shelagh Goonewardene

Annual General Meeting held in Sydney 27th November 2004

The list of new office bearers elected at the meeting appear on page 30. The meeting was followed by a dinner and singalong organised by Charmaine & Vama Vamadevan, with energetic vocal contributions by the talented members. The Raffle Draw conducted by Brian Parker netted a record \$ 221 for the coffers. A great time was had by all. Below are some of the members who were caught by our roving cameraman.

Sumane Iyer



A Christmas Letter

The Editor received this Christmas Letter from Prof Yasminne Gooneratne AO and wishes to share it with the readers. It offers a personal perspective of the great tragedy by one who had a close enough encounter with the tsunami. More importantly, she personifies the type of real contribution in a meaningful way as referred to in the Editorial. May many others among our membership and those associated with them, take a leaf from her book and that of the doctor who with his wife took the next plane out of London and provided volunteer service on ground zero.

Ed

Dear Friends,

This letter comes to thank you for remembering us at Christmas, and to wish you and your family a peaceful and safe New Year. I have not sent Christmas letters out until now, but I think you will agree that this Christmas has been a special occasion: indeed it's an occasion that most people in our region must fervently hope will not recur for centuries to come.

The tsunami found Devika and me on the "wrong" (i.e., sea) side of Galle Road, calling on my friends and former teachers, Pauline and Dick Hensman, now in their 80s and very frail in health. We were informed that we had arrived 'between waves', as it were, one wave having just retreated, and the next being expected to arrive at any moment. We had had no prior experience of a tsunami, nor any warning that one was expected, so I thought for a moment that this was a playful practical joke devised by Pauline and Dick's grandchildren. However, it was soon clear that this was no joke but a ghastly reality, and I'm glad to say we dealt with it satisfactorily. Looking back, I'm very thankful we arrived when we did, because we were able to ferry the Hensmans and their family (children, grandchildren, and a baby great-grandson who were paying a Christmas visit) to safer ground. None of us quite realized the gravity/danger of our situation while we were all living through it, and I should add that, even though we were in Colombo when the tsunami struck, and also during its aftermath, it was not until I returned to Sydney and read the international coverage of the event that I have come close to understanding the full horror of what happened in the rest of Asia, especially Indonesia and Thailand. There is a photograph in TIME (taken in Galle) of a father weeping over his dead child that will haunt my dreams.

I was glad that we were in Sri Lanka at the time when bottled water, powdered milk and medical equipment were the primary needs of the refugee centres. That kind of immediate help was easy enough to give. Now that we're back in Sydney (Brendon joins Devika and me in February) we can contribute on a long-term basis. Oxfam is organizing a fund-raising reading in which I've been asked to participate, and I have asked my publishers in Britain to donate my share of income from sales of the new edition of *The Village in the Jungle* to Tsunami relief in the district of Hambantota, now completely devastated. Since that was the district in which Leonard Woolf served longest as Assistant Government Agent in the first decade of the last century, it seems an appropriate way of helping. Other opportunities are certain to arise as people become more concerned (and inventive!). We are proud that several enlightened house-building projects are getting off the ground in Sri Lanka, to match the marvellously generous contributions of money from overseas. If you would like their addresses and contact numbers, please let me know so that I can send them on.

All, by the way, is not gloom and doom. In the midst of this crisis, Sri Lankans have retained their sense of humour ... though maybe it's a bit grimmer than usual. Like the story about the top official who, alerted by telephone to the fact that a "Tsunami was due to arrive in two hours' time" told his secretary: "Oh ... well, I don't need to go to the airport myself, do I? Let us send a garland and an air-conditioned vehicle." ... Or the one about the European surfer who had spent his life looking for "the big one", and while peacefully surfing beyond the reef in the calm blue waters of Arugam Bay, found himself suddenly riding a swell that turned into the biggest wave ever: the tsunami carried him over the reef, up the beach, and into the shattered hotel ... Or the 75-year-old grandfather who was snoozing tranquilly on Boxing Day in his armchair on the back verandah of his home on the bank of the Kalu Ganga, when he was awakened by the cries of his grandchildren who ran towards him shrieking that a wave was after them. He managed to get the children up on to the floor above, but was swept away himself, and went helplessly with the flood, grasping at floating furniture as he went, until he discovered that what he was holding on to was not a sideboard but a crocodile. Upon which he fainted (well, wouldn't you?) and woke up in a hospital bed, having been rescued from the river bank where he'd been dumped by his new-found friend ... There is a post-script to this tale. This particular survivor is a breeder of pedigree dogs, in

which for some time the river crocodiles had been showing a marked interest. Whenever one of them appeared in the offing, the old gentleman would go out on to the bank, and stand there clapping his hands and calling out to shoo it away. He believes he might, in this way, have unwittingly established a rapport with his rescuer...

I'll end this letter with a 'story' of my own. I went to Sri Lanka last November in the hope of completing the manuscript of my third novel, which was three-quarters written, and titled (believe it or not) "Tsunami". You'd better believe it! The proof is in print: seven chapters featuring the novel's heroine, Tsunami Wijesinha, were published in 2002 as short stories in my collection "Masterpiece & Other Stories" by Indialog in Delhi. My novel is not about a great wave, but uses 'tsunami' as a metaphor for the destructive effects of a family break-up in the 1940s. However, I am no longer in the mood to work on it. When one has just experienced such a torrent of misery as Nature has visited on our region, what space is left for fiction?

Fortunately, not many people will think that way: we may be sure that pens and computers are already busily at work, as merchants of 'beautiful writing' fabricate the next sensational novel to be set in 'exotic' Sri Lanka. There have been a number of such productions in recent years, but what a thrilling combination as been provided on this occasion, and by Nature herself! A jewel-like tropical island! The oceans enraged! The screams of drowning people! The stench of decomposing bodies! The shock of mass graves! Broken lives! Lost hopes! Looters feeding on the dead, and paedophiles preying on the orphaned and dispossessed! What a setting! What a subject! What a theme! What a gift to ambitious authors! One longs to read the book ... and to see the movie that will inevitably follow close on its heels. But not to worry: we shall not have to wait very long, for the formula is a tried and tested one, its success already proven many times over. Let's just hope that some small part of the prizes and profits will be donated to Tsunami relief.

We all send you our affectionate greetings. May 2005 bring peace and prosperity to you and to us all, good health and happiness. "God bless us, everyone".

Yasmine

Holy Humour ...only in America

"People are like tea bags -- you have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are."

"Fight truth decay -- study the Bible daily."

"How will you spend eternity - Smoking or Non smoking?"

"It is unlikely there'll be a reduction in the wages of sin."

"Do not wait for the hearse to take you to church."

"If you're headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-turns."

"If you don't like the way you were born, try being born again"

"This is a ch_ _ ch. What is missing?" (U R)

"Running low on faith? Step in for a fill-up."

"If you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd."

"Free Trip to heaven - Details Inside!"

"Try our Sundays - They are better than Baskin Robbins."

"Searching for a new look? Have your faith lifted here!"

"Come work for the Lord. The work is hard, the hours are long and the pay is low. **But the retirement benefits are out of this world.**"

By energy and heedfulness,
by taming and by self-control ,
one who's wise should make an isle
no flood can overwhelm.

The Dhammapada - Appamada Vagga Verse 25

In Honour of Stupid People

In case you needed further proof that the human race is doomed through stupidity, here are some actual label instructions on consumer goods.

A bag of Fritos -- You could be a winner! No purchase necessary. Details inside. (the shoplifter special?)

On some Swanson frozen dinners -- "Serving suggestion: Defrost." (but it's "just" a suggestion).

Tesco's Tiramisu dessert (printed on bottom) -- "Do not turn upside down." (well...duh, a bit late, huh!)

Marks & Spencer Bread Pudding -- "Product will be hot after heating." (...and you thought????...)

Nytol Sleep Aid -- "Warning: May cause drowsiness." (and...I'm taking this because??....)

Japanese food processor -- "Not to be used for the other use." (now, somebody out there, help me on this. I'm a bit curious.)

American Airlines packet of nuts -- "Instructions: Open packet, eat nuts." (Step 3: maybe, uh...fly Delta?)

On a Swedish chainsaw -- "Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands or genitals."

(Oh my God...was there a lot of this happening somewhere?)

Enclosed in this issue is a membership application form. Members who may wish to introduce a relative or friend to the Society are requested to have the form completed and mailed to the Treasurer whose address appears below.

REMINDER MEMBERSHIP DUES

2005 subscriptions are now due. Kindly draw your cheque/MO in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia and mail to Rienzie Fonseka—25 Clanwilliam Street—Eastwood NSW 2122 Please note subscriptions are for a calendar year.

Annual subscriptions are:

All Members	AU\$ 30.00
Pensioners	AU\$ 20.00

If in doubt of your subscription status please contact Rienzie on
9637 0888 (bh) OR 9874 0146 (ah)
OR Email: winston@secura.com.au

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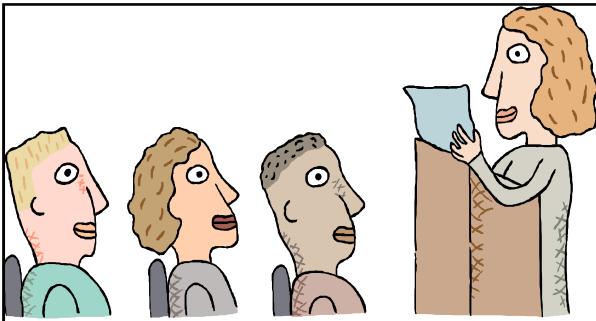
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NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 27th February 2005 at 6.30 p.m

Dr Nihal Kuruppu

“The life and times of
Martin Wickremesinghe”

Followed by

Srikantha Nadarajah

“Historical antecedents of problems in post
independent Sri Lanka”

Hornsby Bowling Club

22, Waitara Avenue access only from Alexandria Parade
Meeting will be followed by a light supper. Volunteers
offering plates please contact Social Convenor Chandra
on 9872 6826
RSVP Tony on 9674 7515

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

To be advised

Venue: Holy Redeemer Church Hall
Cnr of York Street and Mont Albert Road
Surrey Hills VIC 3127
(Melways Ref: 46 H10)
For further information please contact
Shelagh –AH 9808 4962

How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

Contact Rienzie Fonseka
25 Clanwilliam Street Eastwood NSW 2122
Ph: Int +61 2 9874 0146
E-mail: winston@secura.com.au
and request an application form

In search of speakers

The committee would welcome nominations of knowledgeable and academic persons to speak at our regular meetings, both in Sydney and Melbourne. You may have friends, relations who live in or visit Australia. Our calendar for the year is - April/May, September/October and November/December. Dates can be arranged to suit availability of eminent speakers. Please contact President Tony Peries on 02 9674 7515
E-mail: srini.p@bigpond.com

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Where applicable, contributors are requested to annotate bibliographical references to facilitate further research & study by interested members.

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