



# The Ceylanikam

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CEYLON SOCIETY  
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## The Ceylankam

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## From the Editor...

**W**e decided to publish J74 a month earlier than usual. It seemed like a formidable task at first. As luck would have it, we had a selection of excellent articles ready for use. That, however, was not enough to fill all 36 pages. I had to look for fillers from various sources and you will get an idea of those gaping holes of white that had to be filled. I am hoping that our readers can put up with the conglomeration of thoughts, sayings and sundry other two liners, jokes, connotations etc. etc. etc. that now fill the blank spaces. I am seriously tempted here to ask you, our readers, to send us small items, with a Sri Lankan flavour preferably, that we can use as fillers in future journals. I would be delighted to publish them with due credit to you. Only remember, this is a family magazine!

I am pleased to note that we have interesting articles for you in this issue. In my whole period as Editor I never dreamt that, one day, I would receive an "exclusive" in every sense of the word. On page 5 we have the improbable story of "The Role Royal College played in the birth of St Thomas' College in 1857" Author Hugh Karunanayake, a regular contributor to this journal, with immense sources for research on matters Ceylon/Sri Lanka, has incontrovertible evidence to back his findings. We are greatly privileged that he offered sole rights to The Ceylankan to publish his findings. We salute his dedication and passion for history and his love for the journal he was greatly instrumental in initiating.

We also have another great example of good research compiled into a fine piece of writing in the first instalment of Thiru Arumugam's two-part story "A tale of two bridges – the bridge over River Kwai in Thailand and the bridge over River Kelani in

Ceylon." This was the subject of Thiru's interesting talk at Sydney's second General meeting held in February last. Great reading, I assure you.

While S. Nadaraja recollects his days at the University of Ceylon, Tissa Devendra looks evocatively at English poet John Still's classic verses in "Poems in Captivity" written when Still was jailed as a POW in Turkey during WWII. Still came to Ceylon as a tea planter in 1897 and later became an Archeological Surveyor. The author first read John Still as a youth and was greatly impressed by the poetry. His copy of the book was sadly misplaced until a friend recently presented him with a copy which rekindled his passion for John Still's works.

Dr Srilal Fernando paints a personal perspective of the great Sri Lankan painter Richard Gabriel who died on 19 February, aged 92 years. Dr Srilal shares some of Gabriel's paintings from a private collection which are reproduced on the back cover of the journal.

In another previously unpublished article, Somasiri Devendra holds us readers in rapt attention as it were, in *I Surrender*, when he reveals the unknown fact of how an Italian Royal Navy ship Eritrea surrendered to the Sri Lankan Navy during WWII and the CRNVR proudly escorted it, white flag of surrender et al to authorities in Colombo.

There is also the story of the Christian Brother from Sri Lanka who served as a teacher of Indigenous Australian children for 14 years in the scorching outback.

The Melder family of Melbourne achieved 50 years' of life in Australia and Victor Melder makes note of the anniversary in this issue.

And there is more, and yes, the fillers, some of which will hopefully raise a giggle or two.

## About the Ceylon Society of Australia

The Ceylon Society of Australia (CSA) is a non-profit organisation, incorporated in Australia. Its main objectives are to study, foster and promote interest in the cultural heritage of Sri Lanka, especially the post-medieval period when the country was first exposed to globalisation.

It is non-political and non-partisan and endeavours to steer clear of controversial issues. CSA is a gathering of like-minded people, open to receiving and imparting new ideas, who greatly enjoy a quarterly meeting in reasonably modest and intimate surroundings. While Sydney is home to the parent body and looks after the needs of the society in all of NSW and the ACT, the Melbourne Chapter covers members and others residing in Victoria; the Colombo Chapter caters to CSA members and others in Sri Lanka.

The Society holds meetings quarterly in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo. Members of the public with an interest in the study of Sri Lankan history and heritage are invited to attend. Young people are especially welcome! Admission to these meetings is free, while a small donation to defray expenses is appreciated.

*The Ceylankan*, a publication much-looked forward to by members and others here and worldwide is the flagship of CSA. Articles published are from members and those solicited from outside sources. All opinions expressed are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the the editor or the CSA. Articles may be reproduced elsewhere, but must be appropriately credited to *The Ceylankan* and carry suitable acknowledgement thereof. (A note on submitting articles to the journal is on Page 31).



## Our Readers Write

### **Not ethical!**

I look forward to receiving my issue of *The Ceylankan* each quarter and thoroughly enjoy reading it. I would like to thank all involved in its production.

However, I was a little disturbed by something I read in the last issue. I am referring to the following paragraph on page 17 (Educational Advancement in Jaffna) in the above publication of *The Ceylankan*.

"The sad and dark period of communal strife since 1957 brought the Sri Lankan and Indian army occupation of Jaffna. Many schools and infrastructure were damaged, destroyed and Tamil youths were arrested and even killed. The Tamil Nadu government gave places in universities to youth for study. Many youths went to UK, Canada, Australia and other places as refugees and settled there."

It does not comply with the ethics of *The Ceylankan* as stated:

"It is non-political and non-partisan and endeavours to steer clear of controversial issues."

I would appreciate your comments on why this was allowed to be published.

WINDSOR MORRIS, Concord, UK.

### **Editor's note:**

*Thank you for your correspondence and kind words. You also mention that you were 'disturbed' by something in The Ceylankan, Journal 73, Volume XIX, Number 1, February 2016 relating to the article on page 17. I am delighted to receive letters from our discerning readers who voice their constructive criticisms of what appears in the journal. I respect that opinion and your right to make it.*

*The article covered a period in the history of Education in Jaffna and the various factors at play at that time. History records every strain of life and like a chain, each aspect that makes history forms an unbroken series of links. If sometimes one of those links records "a sad dark period of communal strife" that is intrinsically woven into that period in history, even though, one may see that as political and controversial. Now the communal crisis had huge repercussions on the subject under discussion and deleting that would break an important link. To keep secure the link, adopting the lesser evil was better part of valour.*

**Correction:** The second sentence in paragraph 7 of Samuel Thevabalan Arnold's article "Educational Advancement in Jaffna" (Page 13, J73) should have read: "The Batticotta Seminary in Vaddukoddai was established by the American Ceylon Mission (ACM) in 1823 with Rev. Dr. Daniel Poor as its Founder and First Principal." The omission is regretted.

## Share your views

*Readers' letters are an important part of any publication. That is why we warmly invite you to contribute to our letters column. We like to know what you think about the journal, what you would prefer to see published, in keeping with the journal's editorial policy, of course. We value your thoughts, erudite comments and constructive criticism on the articles that appear on these pages, at all times. If through your own research you can shed new light on some subject matter we have published, we will be delighted to learn from you.*

*A publication like The Ceylankan can benefit immensely from your feedback which has the potential to engender life and vigour to these pages. We urge you to keep those letters coming in.*

*However, we urge you to please keep those letters as brief as possible, but we will endeavour to accommodate lengthy missives as long as they are constructive and to the point. If your contribution calls for lengthier treatment, we may consider using it as an article.*

*The editor necessarily reserves the right to edit your letters for reasons of length, clarity and content.*

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## The Ceylankan's

75th issue in August 2016

In August 2016 our 75th issue will come off the press. A fitting tribute is a must to mark this Diamond Anniversary. To recap, we think of our Founding Editor, David Goodrich who launched the first issue in 1998 and along with his editorial board laid the foundation for those who later stepped into his huge shoes. On his passing, Sumane Iyer took over the reins and not only continued the line, but also added a lot of class and style to its contents. He also had the knack of rounding up new writers and naturally, increased membership and thereby readership, of the journal that founding member, the late Mike Udabage proudly called the "Flagship of the Ceylon Society".

We too are proud to continue with that great tradition.

The current Editorial team will, within reason, tailor an appropriate birthday attire for the occasion, I invite all readers to reminisce a little and send us your tributes in 750-1000 words or less - you may go into raptures and make it an entire article if you wish and I will try to accommodate them as space permits. What does the journal mean to you? Has it represented the CSA objectives? Met with your expectations? Here's a great opportunity for you to tell us. Everything you submit for publication will be looked at with care. Please note that the deadline for the August issue is July 10, 2016. Plenty of time, so please give it your best shot.



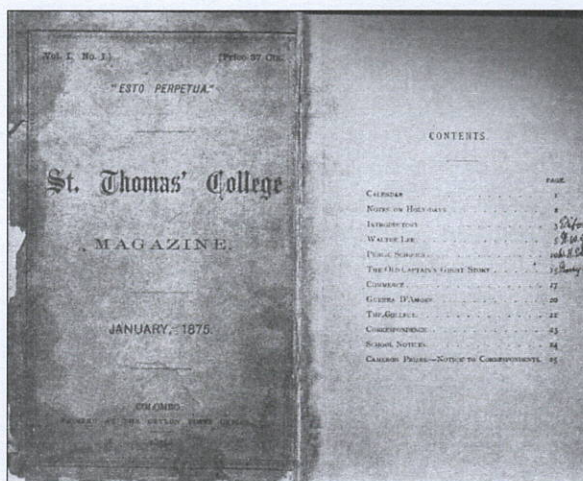
*With some uncanny research on his part, the author has unearthed a unique document that sheds light on an unknown piece of history about two leading Colombo boys' schools that you will find fascinating. Importantly, he has given The Ceylankan sole rights to publish the story for the benefit of our readers. As the title suggests this is an improbable story you won't read about elsewhere.*

## The Role Royal College played in the Birth of St Thomas College in 1851

BY  
**HUGH KARUNANAYAKE**

**S**t Thomas College, Mount Lavinia was established in Mutwal on 3 February 1851. It was then described as a "Collegiate School" which was much akin to what was later to emerge as a secondary school. The intention of its founders was to establish a College and a School. The latter to prepare candidates for admission into the College. The College was to prepare students for entry into tertiary education including Theology and Divinity studies. At the time of establishment it was not possible to

the Academy arose following an increase in school fees, pursuant to a recommendation from the Central School Commission in 1848 which also recommended the closure of the Academy. The old boy lobby of the Academy proved too strong, however, and the former fees were restored following public outcry and



(Courtesy St Thomas College Centenary Number 1951)

• *Cover of the 1875 issue of the St Thomas College Magazine mistakenly alluded to as the "First issue".*

differentiate between School and College, there being 70 students in the whole institution and not enough students to commence the College. One year later, with the arrival of Warden Wood, the College was opened in January 1852 with 20 students, the rest included in the Collegiate School. A little known fact is that of almost the entirety of the first 20 students in the College section, 10 were from the Colombo Academy (now known as Royal College) and most of the others from an institution known as the Colombo Central School, then regarded as a school second only in standard of education to the Colombo Academy. The Colombo Academy was the leading educational establishment in the country and was a fee-levying school for over a century until the introduction of free education in 1944. The influx of students from



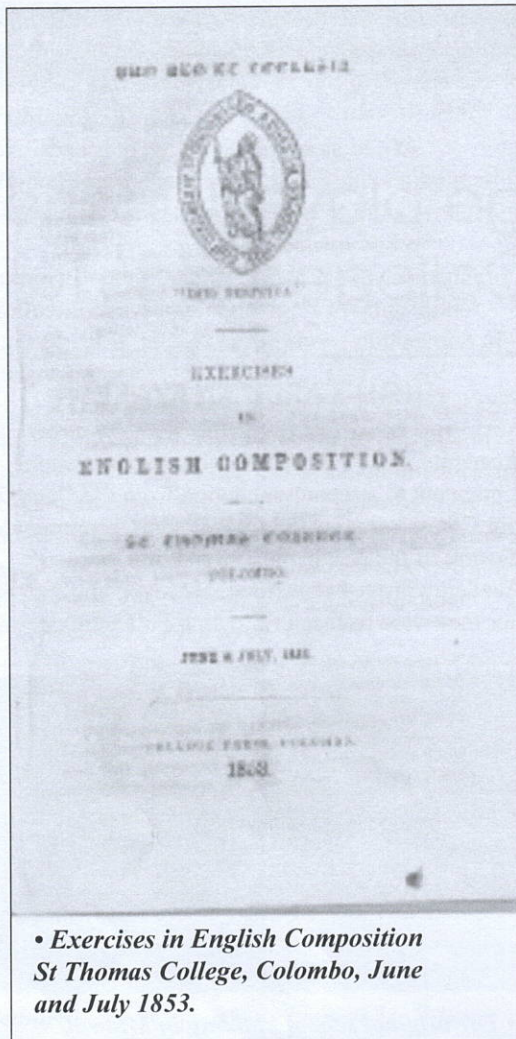
• *The original school building in Mutwal.  
(Courtesy : WT Keble History of St Thomas College 1937.)*

some of the boys from the Academy returned from St Thomas to their former school. The Academy, of course, continued to expand later changing its name to Royal College. The boys who joined from the Academy were outstanding students at St Thomas' during its early years and it could, therefore, verily be said that the successful birth of St Thomas College was in a great measure due to a transfusion from Royal College!

### THE FIRST COLLEGE STUDENTS ENROLLED 1851/52 FROM THE COLOMBO ACADEMY

Charles Silva Wickremasekera  
Frederick Jayetilleke  
Wilmot Horton de Saram  
John Lucious Dassanayake  
Jonathan Silva  
George Fernando  
Simond De Melho Aserappah.  
William Dias Bandaranayake  
John De Melho Aserappah  
Adam Rathna.





• *Exercises in English Composition*  
St Thomas College, Colombo, June  
and July 1853.

FROM THE COLOMBO CENTRAL SCHOOL  
1851/52

Simon Mutukistna  
Peter Daniel  
Edward Orr  
JL Christoffelsz  
Richard Van Buren  
A Weinman  
John Perera

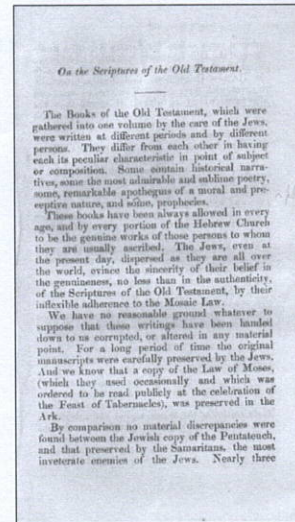
What was to be the first school magazine ever produced by St Thomas College was published in 1853, two years after the establishment of the school. A remarkable achievement. This 36-page booklet (title page reproduced here in *The Ceylankan* for the first time ever since its publication in 1853) whose existence was not only unknown to the school's historians of later years but its contents unrecorded in any of the histories of the school. The first History of St Thomas College by CH Christian David, published in 1894, the Jubilee Number of the School Magazine published in 1901, A History of St Thomas College, Colombo by WT Keble in 1937, and the St Thomas College Centenary Number of 1951 all acknowledge 1875 as the year in which the first issue of the college magazine took place. There

is no recorded instance of the existence of the 1853 journal the title page of which is shown here. In fact, its existence does not appear in any contemporaneous records on the history and progress of the school.

The magazine was titled "Exercises in English Composition St Thomas College, Colombo, June and

July 1853" and published by the College Press, Colombo. The journal consisted of seven essays written by pupils of the school and a listing of the names of all 120 students including the 22 students in the College section (in two classes) deemed as St Thomas College, and the 98 other students spread over four classes in the "collegiate school".

What is significant is that of the 22 students in the College, 10 were from the Colombo Academy. What is even more significant is that of the seven essays in the 1853 magazine, six

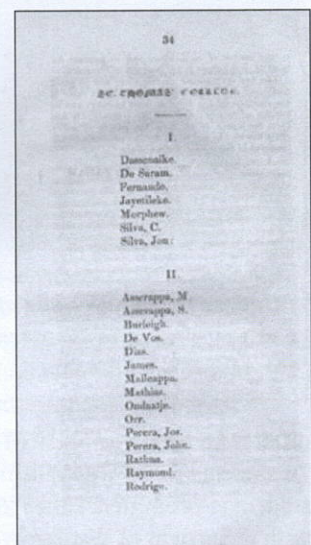


• *First page of Fredrick Jayetilleke's essay.*

were written by students who came from the Colombo Academy! The school archives do not seem to have had a record of these essays. In the history of the school authored by WT Keble mention is made of the titles of the essays but he did not seem to have access to its contents but makes the following comments. One who read these essays says: "We value those prose effusions on a par with the prize poems of Cambridge of early days" and this judgment is confirmed by no less a severe critic than Warden Wood's successor, Warden Baly, who wrote two years later of the same students "were it not that their Latin Composition is deficient, they would be on a level with the average Oxford undergraduate in their second year."

The essays and their authors are:

1. On the scripture of the Old Testament - Frederick Jayetilleke;  
2. The Miracles of Christ - a proof of His Divine Mission - SL Dassanaik;



• *List of names of College students 1853.*



3. Untitled Essay- George Fernando;
4. The character of Christ and His doctrine is proof of His Divine Mission - C Silva Wickremasekera;
5. The fulfillment of prophecy, proof of the Divine Mission of Christ - Joseph Perera;
6. The age and literature of Queen - Frederick Jayetilleke; and
7. Advantages of the study of Geography - WHP de Saram.

The essay by Frederick Jayetilleke on the scriptures of the Old Testament created a furore and was subject to a lot of criticism in the newspapers. Bishop Chapman and Warden Wood were accused of teaching Romanish doctrines in the school. Dr Barcroft Boake, Principal of the Colombo Academy, and Rev. GR Mutukistan carried on in an acrimonious pamphlet campaign and the whole episode was for several decades referred to as the "Jayetilleke controversy". The Bishop had been greatly distressed by the affair as noted by Keble in his history where he quotes the Bishop as stating: "the College is winning its way in spite of maligners, and all looks well at home."

Readers may be interested in the later careers of the founding batch of students at St Thomas'. Here are brief notes on some of them.

- Charles Silva Wickremasekera – reached the top of the class. He was aspiring to the bar but died early.
- Frederick Jayetilleke – became Private Secretary to Chief Justice Sir Carpenter Rowe and later joined the Ceylon Civil Service.
- Wilmot Horton de Saram named after Sir Robert Wilmot Horton, Governor of Ceylon who declared open the Colombo Academy in 1835. Enrolled as a lawyer and later retired as Assistant Registrar General.
- John Lucius Dassenaikie enrolled as a Proctor and later served as Atapattu Mudaliyar.
- Jonathan Silva – joined the Matara Bar as a Proctor.
- George Fernando joined the Gampola Bar as Proctor.
- Simon De Melho Aserappah and William Dias Bandaranayake continued their studies in Scotland as Medical Students. On return they joined the Ceylon Medical Service.
- Adam Ratne was the son of Sri Muni Rathne, a Buddhist priest who together with another Buddhist priest, Ven Dharma Rama Therunanse\* went to England in 1829 with Sir Alexander Johnston, Chief Justice of Ceylon. Johnston introduced them to Rev. Adam Clarke a Methodist clergyman who arranged for their conversion and subsequent return to Ceylon as clergymen. Adam was named after his father's mentor and later went to England himself and took to Holy Orders. (\* Ven. Dharma Rama was baptised under the name Alexander Dharmaratne after his sponsor Sir Alexander Johnstone. His great/great grandson Bryan Dharmaratne lives in Sydney and is a long standing member of CSA).

The Ceylankan can now claim to be the first to bring the existence of this very significant

historical document pertaining to St Thomas College to the attention of the public and the College, and trusts that the College can now take note of the long lost magazine –very probably the first ever production from its students during the College's 165 year history.



## Matale

The drive of seventeen miles [from Kandy to Matale] is a very interesting one, and easy with the exception of the steep descent of three or four miles just before the town of Matale is reached. Upon arrival here we find a comfortable rest-house fitted with every convenience for the traveller and well provisioned. Bath and breakfast are the first consideration, after which we walk leisurely through the town which contains one of the largest purely native bazaars in Ceylon, extending for almost a mile in one long street shaded by a fine avenue of rain trees, so called from the circumstance that at night the leaves fold



• Carting produce to Matale Railway Station.

into a kind of sack in which the moisture condenses, and at sunrise when the leaves open is discharged in quite a shower. Here are to be seen the necessities and luxuries for the supply of the native community throughout the large and important planting district of which Matale is the centre. All the shops are after a fashion of open stalls, and the traders, their goods and transactions, from one end of the street to the other, are open to the gaze of passers-by. The barber, the tinker, the merchant of gay-coloured cloths, and the curry-stuff vendor, are all doing a roaring trade. The mellifluous tones of Ramasamy's voice are unceasing, and the stranger will not fail to be struck with surprise at the inordinate amount of talking required by every trifling bargain.

Some quaint workshops are to be found here. Ivory carving, and the elaborate chasing of ceremonial swords, such as were worn in the Kandyan state ceremonies, and are still part of the official uniform of native chiefs holding office under the British Government, are still executed here. There is also a very pretty and delicate industry carried on the weaving of grass matting for the covering couches and chairs.

– Golden Tips, Henry W. Cave November 1901.



# My reminiscences of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya

by S. NADARAJAH

**I**t was fascinating to read the excellent article by Ananda Goonesinghe in the last issue of *The Ceylankan*, (J73 February 2016) about early history of University of Ceylon. I had a brief but traumatic encounter with him in 1976, when he crashed into my car which was parked at Independence Square in Colombo, and fortunately at the time, my family and I were taking a walk on the track! No doubt, he had imbibed Old Stuff more than he could cope with that day to drive a car.

The University of Ceylon was preceded by University College in the early 20th century and is reported to have produced the highest number of graduates in the British Empire, from the University of London in the 1930s. It is interesting to note the description of students and staff at the inception of the University and compare it with the Peradeniya Campus during my time in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some of the names mentioned are familiar to me. Doric de Souza continued to teach English, as did F R Jayasuriya who became Head of the Economics Department and was also my lecturer on Money and Banking. His first degree was English Honours, but as he did not get a Doctorate in Economics, he never held the Chair or Professorship. He was famous for campaigning against any compromise to Sinhala Only legislation in the late 1950s and threatened to fast unto death with orange juice! When H A de S Gunsekera was appointed to the Chair of Economics, F R was devastated, and threatened to go on a hunger strike, which he later abandoned after the appointment was postponed. I D S Weerawardena was my lecturer in Politics in 1959 and died in 1961. One of the guys from Marris Hall overlooking his residence kept singing his nickname "Pol Weera". When he complained about it to the Warden of the Hall, he was told the song was "Come Prima", and the culprit was excused. Basil Mendis who taught Philosophy during my time, was leader of the Flat Earth Society and had a conversion from Communism to Catholicism. Father Ignatius Pinto taught European History during my time and was also Catholic Chaplain of the University.

Among the students at the time, Ronnie de Mel not only excelled as a brilliant scholar, but he was also outstanding as Finance Minister in the UNP government from 1977, and architect of the trade and economic liberalisation strategy, which revived the economy, especially in manufactured exports. Adrian Wijeymanne was Managing Director at Mackwoods Estates before being appointed

Chairman, World Council of Churches in Switzerland. He was very supportive of minorities during the political changes introduced from mid-1950s. Nissanka Wijeyratne was Diyawadene Nilame of Dalada Maligawe and Minister of Education in the JR Jayawardena government from 1977. D K Subramaniam was a Manager at Bank of Ceylon and the Central Bank and gave me my first job soon after I graduated in 1962.

University of Ceylon during my time in Peradeniya in the late 1950s was a very different experience to what happened in the mid-1940s in Colombo. Firstly, majority of undergraduates were from provincial schools, which gave us an opportunity to meet people from all parts of the country and with different social backgrounds. It gave me a fresh insight into Sri Lankan society, which was a refreshing change from the Colombo middle class life. Secondly, it was a residential campus, which gave us maximum opportunities to interact with people, as well as freedom to do several things such as greater access to sporting, social and cultural activities. Facilities in halls of residence were quite adequate at the time and we were provided board and lodging, which sadly, was subsequently limited only to lodging facilities and that too on a restricted scale due to overpopulation in the campus and lack of availability of rooms to cope with an explosion of student population in later years.

The Peradeniya campus is located between the Hantane Mountain range and the Mahaweli river, on an abandoned tea plantation, with a wide expanse of greenery, making it, for a residential university, one of the most beautiful locations in the world. It occupies a broad swathe of land that stretches along the Galaha road from the Kandy-Peradeniya road near the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens to the village of Hindagala renowned for Wilbert Mudalali's Kade with his string hoppers and the wonderful warm freshly baked bread and nose-dripping, tongue scorching finger-sucking-good spicy chilli-licious corned beef, popularly known as dynamite. His offerings are best consumed after a liberal input of arrack or Kassippu imbibed before arriving at the kade since the good Mudalali does not serve any alcoholic drinks. There are many illegal Kassippu joints close by which manufacture illicit brews concocted from an assortment of battery acid, rotten fruit, coconut milk and other mentionable and unmentionable gut corroding poisons that can be consumed before the dynamite is attacked. Wilbert mudalali does, however,



provide one with a hot tear jerking gullet burning "plain tea" after the meal which has the same effect on the eyes as an ardent lover would experience when his heart is broken by an unexpected kick off (popularly known as the boot) from his beloved one. This caters mainly for the lunch time clientele of teetotallers and girls who drop in. (This paragraph is an extract from a novel titled "By the Flagpole—Life at Sarasvi Uyana" when our campus and our hearts were young, to be published shortly.)

Entering the University in Peradeniya was a very interesting and stimulating experience for me in several respects. Firstly, I had the feeling of emancipation from parental control for the first time which also gave me the freedom to do several things like smoking. Living in a hall of residence with students from various parts of the country gave me an insight into the larger society. I also had opportunity to develop close relationships with several people and exchange ideas which was a tremendous incentive for personal development at an important stage of life. There were also greater facilities for sports with good playgrounds and a gymnasium, and I was able to play more sports, especially tennis and table tennis. Finally there was the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex, which few people in the student community did, reflecting the conservative background in our society. I was able to associate with a variety of people of both sexes, and make good friends, some of which lasted long after graduating from university. I remember timely advice given to me by a family friend, that the campus is full of distractions and there is a need not to lose track of the reason for going there. As an undergraduate in the only university in the country at the time, with very good facilities for living, studying and recreation, it was a great privilege for me to be a part of the student community.

As new entrants, we had the usual baptism of fire with the rag when seniors confront "freshers" to make mischief and force them to do unpleasant tasks. It was an opportunity to get to know some of the seniors, and in our year it was a reasonable one where no atrocities were committed, unlike in the previous year, and more importantly in later years, especially recent times when it became life threatening for some entrants. We also had the first year's athletics meet, where some new talent was discovered in those who had not performed previously in school. One of them, a school mate of mine, Neville Puvimanasinghe, who had never competed in any sports before, set the track record for 100 meters sprint, which came close to the Ceylon record. Also, Camillus Fernando who had never done sports in school, became the outstanding boxer in the campus.

It was also a time of much social and political turbulence in the country, after assassination of Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike and a change of government. We had considerable exposure to

politics with several national leaders like Dr N M Perera and Dudley Senanayake visiting the campus and giving talks. We were exposed to various political persuasions and ideas with people canvassing for votes to be elected to Hall councils. One such person was H L (affectionately known as 'High Level' for his command of English) Perera. After being made President of our Hall, standing on the dining table, he gave a very emotional speech in Sinhala. When I met him in Australia in 1985, he said the solution for Sri Lanka's problems is to restore English education, which as we know is easier said than done, and as time has shown, can be like unscrambling a scrambled egg. While politics at the time gave an impetus to ethnic polarisation in society, it did not have an impact on our personal relationships, mainly because most residents at the time spoke the same language and were able to interact effectively with each other.

In terms of cultural activities, university campus during my time was in the forefront of both English and Sinhala theatre. There were the stylised dramas such as *Maname* and *Sinhabahu* produced by Dr Ediriweera Sarathchandra, very good English plays produced by the Dramatic Society, with considerable talent from the student community providing good

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***As new entrants, we had the usual baptism of fire with the rag when seniors confront "freshers" to make mischief and force them to do unpleasant tasks. It was an opportunity to get to know some of the seniors and in our year it was a reasonable one where no atrocities were committed...***

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entertainment. We also had exposure to a wide range of international films such as the trilogies of Satyajit Ray and Andrej Wajda, and very good documentaries. I believe the Peradeniya Campus was in the forefront of cultural activity in the country at the time, especially in English and Sinhala theatre, spearheaded by Professors Ludowyk and Sarathchandra.

We had some outstanding lecturers such as Professor Lyn Ludowyk and Doric de Souza for English, Sinappa Arasaratnam, Sirima Kiurbamune and Kingsley De Silva for History, H A De S Gunasekera for Economics, S. Rajaratnam for Economic History, George Thambyapillai for Climatology, Gananath Obeyesekera and S J Tambiah for Sociology, Professor T. Nadaraja and Raja Gunasekera in Law. Altogether the standard of teaching was very good and could be compared with leading universities in the world. We also had access to an excellent Library which covered an entire building and extended to five levels, with books on a wide variety of subjects, mainly in English. Much of it was sadly gone to waste with change in the medium of instruction in local languages, which occurred in my



final year. There was also a mass exodus of teaching staff to greener pastures overseas with the change in the education system from English to local languages.

While there were several outstanding scholars during my time, and some of them managed to be national leaders in several fields of endeavour, there were several disappointments in this regard, where those who had excelled in studies, were unable to develop successful careers. On the other hand, there were others who had been mediocre in academic pursuits, had achieved considerable success in employment and business. I believe the secret of success in all such cases was the ability to interact effectively with people, based on temperament and confident approach to meeting challenges in the work place and life.

Among outstanding students of my time in Peradeniya were Wickrema Weerasuriya who got a First Class Degree in Law and became Associate Professor at Monash University, Melbourne, and an authority on Banking Law in Australia. Yasmine Gooneratne was Professor of English at Macquarie University, Sydney; Michael Roberts who got a First in History and obtained colours in five sports, which qualified him to be a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford, was Associate Professor of Anthropology at Adelaide University; Savithri Gunasekera who got a First in Law and became Vice-Chancellor, Colombo University; Mark Fernando who also obtained a First in Law with a record average both at University and Law College, was highly acclaimed as an outstanding judge of the Supreme Court. Jayantha Dhanapala was the most outstanding success after leaving Peradeniya, as a very successful diplomat, including Under Secretary General for Disarmament at the United Nations. There were several others like Karthigesu Indrapala who achieved success as a Historian and Anthropologist; late Mark Cooray obtained a First in Law, Doctorate at Oxford and was Associate Professor of Constitutional Law at Macquarie University, Sydney. Yoga Subramaniam who was made Dean of the Faculty of Arts, the late S. Easperathan, a successful Economist at World Bank and Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka; Sriyan de Silva was Secretary, Employers Federation and an authority on Industrial Law in Sri Lanka; Somaratne Ekanayake made a notable contribution to education in South Asia, including authoring several publications on the subject; D.B. Nihalsinghe for the Film industry, especially in Sinhala cinema and film, TV and media in Malaysia; the late Simon Nawagathagama, and Namel Weeramuni were outstanding producers of Sinhala drama; Ernest Macintyre has been a prolific producer of English theatre for several decades both in Sri Lanka and Australia; the late Shelagh Goonewardena was an outstanding dramatist; the late Malsiri Dias who was outstanding in humanitarian work for orphans and destitute people; Sarath

Amunugama who was a successful politician and served as Minister of Finance in Sri Lanka for several years; Wishva Warnapala who had a successful career as Professor of Political Science and Minister of Higher Education under Presidents Chandrika Kumaratunge and Mahinda Rajapakse and Kithsiri Malagoda who obtained a First in Sociology, after having changed from Sinhala to the English medium at university, became a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford and had a successful career as an Anthropologist. John Koch who was the University tennis champion in 1961, migrated to Australia shortly afterwards, and became General Manager, Commonwealth Bank. And several others, too numerous to mention, who obtained doctorates and became heads of Ministries/ Departments in Sri Lanka, as well as excelled in international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations and Asian Development Bank.

Among outstanding sportsmen during my time were D T M Senerath, in athletics with annexing several records in long distance running; Neville Puvimanasinghe was the outstanding sprinter; Rex Olegasegeram in tennis and athletics; Charlie Saram in athletics; Walter Premaratne in soccer and cricket; T. Jothilingam in cricket and tennis; D H de Silva in cricket; the late Malsiri Kurukulasuriya, late Anton Rambukpotha and Merrill Guneratne in cricket; Anton Alfred in table tennis; Alfie David and Vernugopal in rugby; S. Sivalingam and Dharmapala in badminton; Nissanka Warakaulle and Sriyan de Silva in hockey; the late Lal de Alwis, the late Trevor Roosemale Cocque and Ajit Muthucumaraswamy in swimming; the late Anton Rambukpotha, Mervyn Weerasuriya and Michael Roberts in soccer; and the latter excelled in rugby and athletics as well.

Few women took part in sports at the time—Sheila de Saram and Rukmani Kodagoda were tennis champions; Shanthi de Abrew, Rosemary Moonemalle and Nilmini de Alwis were outstanding athletes; Shanthi de Silva excelled in tennis and basketball and Nimal Guneratne (nee Cooray) was a champion in table tennis.

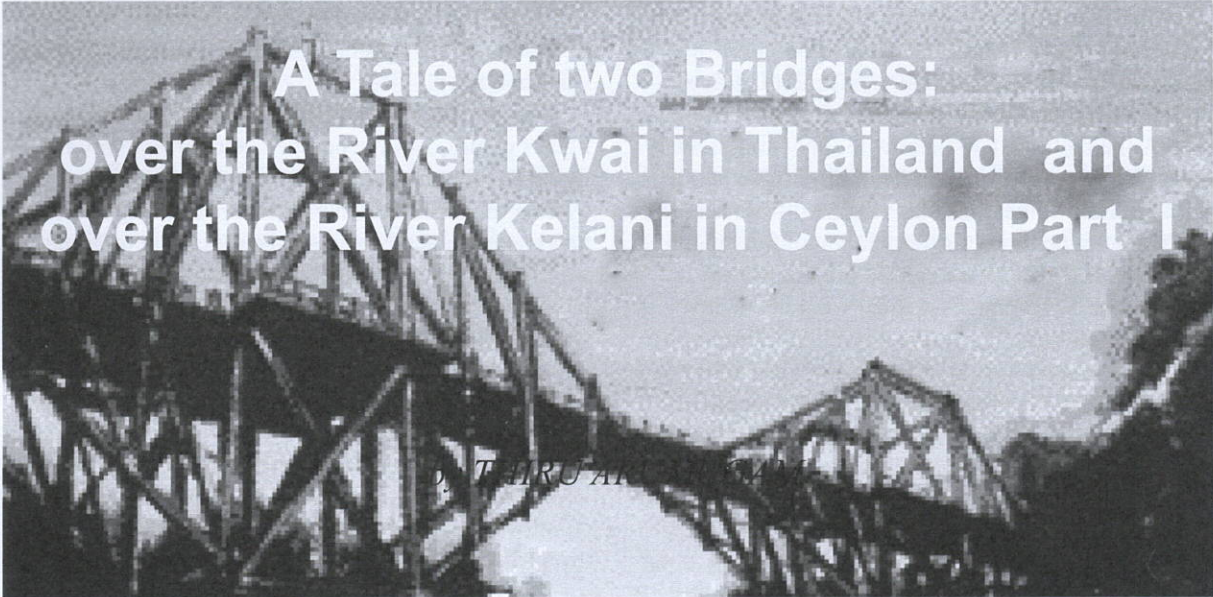
I believe the first six decades of the 20th century was the zenith of English education in Sri Lanka, as reflected in the foregoing achievers, some of them recognised both within the country and overseas, and could be compared favourably with leading professionals in various fields, especially in the developing world. Sadly, I believe the momentum generated during this period was not maintained with the change in the education system from English to the local languages.



### Aspirations

The young have aspirations that never come to pass, the old have reminiscences of what never happened. Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) in 'Reginald at the 'Carlton'.





# A Tale of two Bridges: over the River Kwai in Thailand and over the River Kelani in Ceylon Part I

*This article is about two bridges. The first bridge was over the River Kwai in Thailand and was part of the railway line built by the Japanese in 1942 during World War Two, linking the railway networks of Thailand and Burma. The second bridge was over the River Kelani at Kitulgala and was built by Columbia Pictures in 1957 as a set for the film The Bridge on the River Kwai. It was the largest film set ever built up to that time.*

## The Bridge over the River Kwai, Thailand, Malaya, and Singapore's fall to Japan

**O**n 7 December 1941, Japan declared war on the United States, Britain and the Netherlands. By this date, Japan had already occupied Manchuria, Korea, Formosa, the coastal regions of China and French Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). Thailand was not a European colony and claimed neutrality but Japan told Thailand that unless it collaborated with the Japanese, Bangkok would be carpet bombed, and Thailand reluctantly agreed to collaborate with the Japanese. The Japanese troops immediately landed in Bangkok and started moving rapidly southwards, invading Malaya on 8 December 1941.

Meanwhile, Winston Churchill had already ordered the 30,000 ton battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* together with the aircraft carrier *Indomitable* to proceed to Singapore. However, the latter ran aground in the West Indies and only the two battleships arrived in Singapore. When Admiral Phillips heard about the Japanese invasion of Thailand, he proceeded in the two battleships, without air cover, towards Bangkok but the battleships were spotted by the Japanese and were attacked by 34 bombers and 51 torpedo carriers operating from Saigon. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were quickly sunk with the loss of 840 British lives. This sinking now gave Japan virtually total command of the seas around Malaya and Singapore, with devastating consequences for British morale.

As regards air cover, the original request was for 582 aircraft for the defence of Malaya and Singapore but the Chiefs of Staff in London had cut

this down to 336 aircraft because priority was given to the Battle of Britain and the Western Front. In the event, when the Japanese invasion of Malaya took place, only 158 RAF aircraft were in Malaya, and the fighter aircraft were not Hurricanes and Spitfires but the obsolete American Brewster Buffalo fighter planes. These were no match for the Japanese Mitsubishi Zero and Nakajima Ki-43 planes and 60 Buffaloes were shot down, 40 were destroyed on the ground and 20 destroyed in accidents. The net result was that within two weeks of the Japanese invasion there was virtually no air cover left for the Allied forces in Malaya.

On the ground, the Japanese had a total of 190 tanks whereas the Allied forces had hardly any tanks, only Bren-gun carriers and armoured cars. The net result of all this was that the Allied forces had to retreat southwards in the face of the Japanese advance. It took only five weeks for the Japanese to occupy the whole of northern and central Malaya. Finally the Allied troops retreated to the Johore Bharu causeway which links Malaya and Singapore. After all the Allied troops had crossed over into Singapore on 31 January 1942 the causeway was blown up to hinder the Japanese advance. But in so doing, the Allies had shot themselves in the foot. 50,000 Allied troops had been killed or captured in Malaya.

Singapore does not have any rivers. The bulk of its fresh water supply came from Johore, Malaya, via a massive pipeline which crossed over to Singapore under the causeway. When the causeway was blown up by the Allies the pipeline was also blown up and Singapore's water supply was cut off. The Japanese troops invaded Singapore on 7 February 1942 and intense artillery battles took



place in Singapore for a week. On 15 February, the Japanese General Yamashita called upon the Allies to surrender. General Percival, the General Officer Commanding, was faced with a quandary. Due to the pipeline being blown up there was only enough fresh water in Singapore for a couple of days. Also about half a million Chinese civilians had fled from Malaya to Singapore, doubling the population of Singapore overnight. If the Japanese carried out their threat to carpet bomb Singapore City there would be many civilian casualties.

Percival had no option but to surrender and 80,000 more Allied troops became prisoners of war, in addition to those who had surrendered in Malaya. Churchill described the fall of Fortress Singapore as "*the worst disaster and the largest capitulation in British history*". On the other hand, General Yamashita has written in his diaries that his call to the Allies to surrender was the biggest successful bluff of his military career as he had only 30,000 men and was outnumbered three to one by the Allies and street fighting would have ended in disaster for the Japanese. Furthermore he had ammunition left for only one day.

The Allied forces surrender gave a new unforeseen problem to the Japanese. They now had about 130,000 prisoners of war whom they had to house and feed. The Bushido code of conduct for a Japanese Samurai (warrior) expects him to fight unto death and not surrender "*One's main purpose in throwing away his life is to do so either for the sake of the Emperor or in some great undertaking of a military general. It is that exactly that will be the great fame of one's descendants*". Following this code, there were only about six Japanese soldiers who surrendered in Malaya, whereas the Japanese were now responsible for 130,000 Allied prisoners.

#### Japan invades Burma and bombs Ceylon

Japan's next target was Burma because of her oilfields and rice surplus. Burma was invaded in January 1942 by the Japanese following jungle tracks through North Thailand and also from the south. The Allies retreated and the Japanese attacked and captured Rangoon in March. The Japanese continued their northward thrust and Mandalay soon fell into their hands. By May, the whole of Burma was under Japanese control and the Allied forces had retreated across the Indian border to Imphal.

On 04 April 1942, Squadron Leader Leonard Birchall was flying a PBY Catalina flying boat from his base in Koggala on a routine reconnaissance flight in the seas surrounding Ceylon. He was about 400 miles south-east of Koggala when he saw something that made his eyes pop out. A Japanese fleet of six aircraft carriers (carrying a total of 300 planes), four battleships, three cruisers and three destroyers were steaming at full speed towards Ceylon. This was the same fleet that had previously attacked Pearl Harbour, with the same fleet commander, Admiral Nagumo.

Birchall's Radio Officer quickly sent a message back to base about the approaching fleet before the Catalina was shot down.

On the next day, Easter Sunday, 36 Japanese fighter planes, 54 dive bombers and 90 level bombers flying in formation attacked Colombo. They were led by Commander Fuchida who had previously led the first wave of attacks on Pearl Harbour. Their target was the Eastern Fleet of ships based in Ceylon including the 23,000 ton aircraft carriers *Formidable* and *Indomitable*, but expecting a Japanese attack

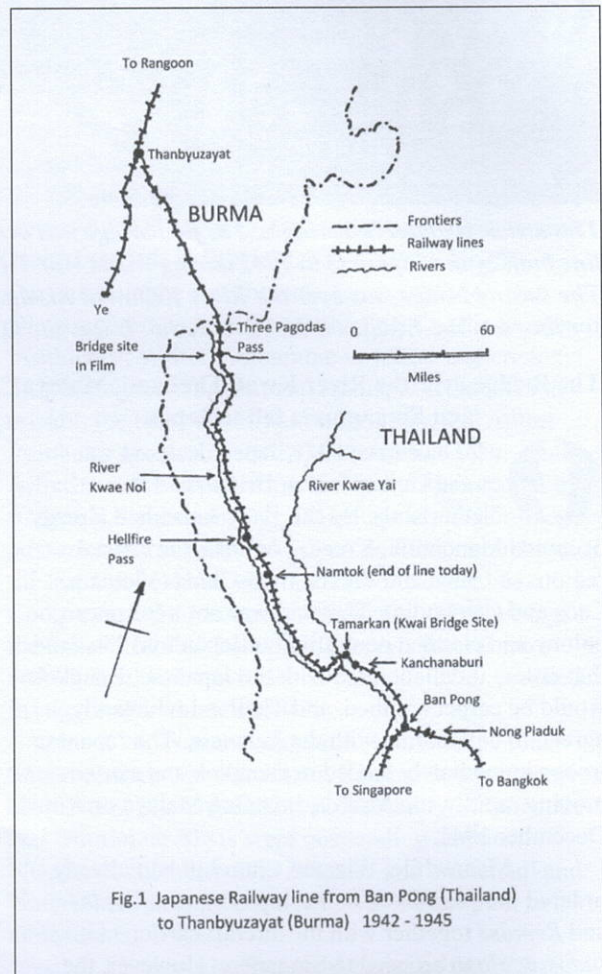


Fig.1 Japanese Railway line from Ban Pong (Thailand) to Thanbyuzayat (Burma) 1942 - 1945

Admiral Somerville, Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Fleet, had ordered his fleet a few days earlier to set sail for Addu Atoll in the Maldives. The only naval ships left in Colombo harbour were the cruiser *Hector* and the destroyer *Tenedos* which were promptly bombed and sunk. The Japanese planes also spotted the 10,000 ton heavy cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire* about 200 miles south-west of Ceylon and sank them with the loss of 424 lives.

On 09 April the Japanese attacked Trincomalee. One of the Japanese pilots in a kamikaze suicide flight dived his plane straight into one of the massive oil storage tanks which burned for days. The Japanese also spotted the 10,000 ton aircraft carrier



*Hermes* off Batticaloa and sank it with the loss of 307 lives. This was the only aircraft carrier lost by the British in World War Two. The Australian destroyer *Vampire* which was accompanying the *Hermes* was also bombed and sunk.

The Japanese fleet then turned round and returned to Singapore. Although the Japanese air raids were partially successful, they had failed in their main mission which was to seek and destroy the Eastern Fleet. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Japanese decided not to invade India via Ceylon but to invade India through Burma.

#### ***Construction of the Thailand-Burma Railway***

To invade India through Burma, the Japanese would have to move thousands of tons of military hardware and tens of thousands of their troops into Burma. The easiest method would be to move this by sea to Rangoon but Japan was already short of merchant ships and American submarines were already taking a heavy toll of Japanese ships. Furthermore the distance from Bangkok to Rangoon by sea was about 2000 km. There were no roads between Thailand and Burma capable of carrying this amount of traffic, therefore the only alternative was to construct a railway between the two countries, linking the existing railway systems. Fortunately the railway systems of Singapore, Malaya, Thailand and Burma all used the same metre gauge for the rail tracks and the same train could run through all these countries. The route of the railway line (see Figure 1) would start from Ban Pong in Thailand and go over relatively flat land for the first 50 km to Tamarkan where it would have to cross the River Kwae Yai.

A note about nomenclature. The word 'Kwai' in the Thai language means 'River'. There was no such thing as 'River Kwai' since this means 'River River'. Pierre Boulle wrote a book and gave it the title of 'The Bridge on the River Kwai' presumably because it sounded nice, and the film of the book also had the same title. After the war, thousands of tourists came to Tamarkan to see the 'River Kwai' and the bridge referred to in the book and the film and so the Thai Government renamed the river as 'Kwai'. Furthermore, the book and the film describe Allied commandos being parachuted into Burma and trekking over the Thai border to blow up a wooden bridge. Tamarkan is very far from the Burmese border and so the bridge referred to in the book and the film must be the bridge at Songkurai which is about 250 km further up the railway line. This part of the railway line has been abandoned since the war and is now covered by the jungle tide.

There are two rivers in this region flowing roughly from north to south. On the west there is the Kwae Noi (which means Little River) and on the east there is the Kwae Yai (which means Big River). The confluence of the two rivers is at Kanchanaburi, about five km south of Tamarkan. The route selected for

the railway was to cross the Kwae Yai north of the confluence and then follow the banks of the Kwae Noi all the way to its origin near the Burmese border, then cross the border at the Three Pagodas Pass and join the existing Burma railway system at Thanbyuzayat. The total length of the line was 415 km of which about 350 km was through thick tropical rain forest with a total of 688 bridges, big and small. 63 of the bridges were more than 50 metres long. Of these bridges, all but eight bridges were made of timber, which was plentiful in the surrounding forests. Most of the Japanese railway engineers had qualified in USA and they used as a guide the American Merriman-Wiggin standard for timber bridges. However the American engines were much heavier than the Japanese engines that were used on this line, so the timber bridges were over-designed.

Two Japanese Railway Regiments with a total of 12,000 Japanese were entrusted with the task of completing the railway in just over a year. In mid-1942 the 5th Regiment started work at the Burma end and the 9th Regiment started work at the Thai end. They were faced with a problem in that the Japanese military could not spare any machinery for the project such as bull-dozer, excavators, cranes etc., therefore the entire job had to be done by manual labour using hand tools. They therefore decided to use the Allied prisoners-of-war in Singapore to work on the railway, and in addition conscript labourers from Burma and Malaya. The latter were mainly Indian Tamils who had worked in the rubber estates. It is possible that a few Ceylonese were also included.

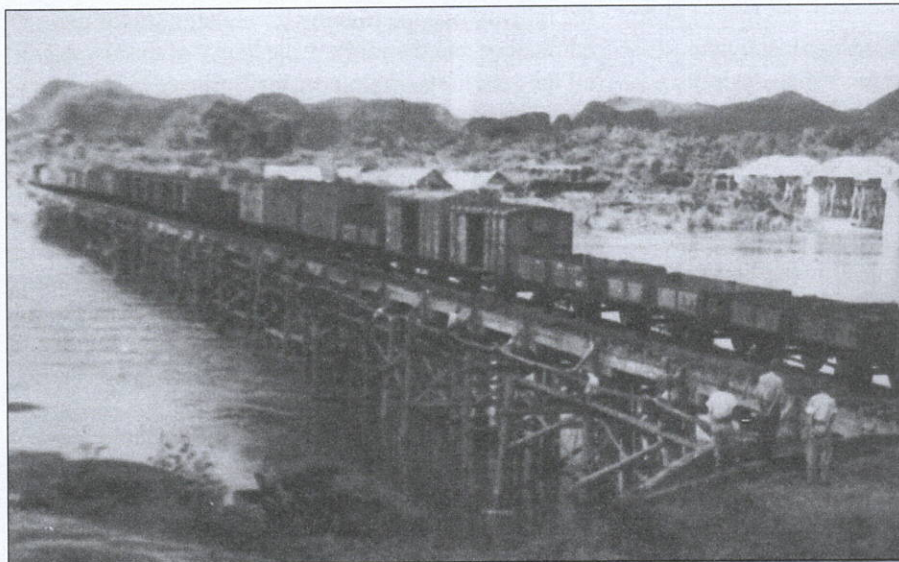
The Japanese Government had sent low-level delegates to the Geneva Convention held in 1929. These delegates signed the Convention but the Japanese Government never formally ratified the Convention and therefore they did not consider themselves bound by it. According to the Convention, prisoners-of-war cannot be used to do work that directly helps the war effort of their captors. Also, Officers cannot be asked to do manual labour. The Japanese disregarded these conditions and in any case they thought that they would win the war and there would not be War Crimes Trials after the war.

#### ***Construction of the Bridges at Tamarkan***

The Kwae Yai is about 350 metres wide at Tamarkan and the river rises to high levels during the monsoonal rains. This meant that a permanent timber bridge could not be built here and the permanent bridge would have to be built with concrete piers and steel trusses. The Japanese found some steel trusses at the site of a proposed bridge in Java and these were brought here. These trusses were sufficient for eleven 20 metre spans of the concrete bridge. At the northern end, where the river is shallow, the bridge was completed with 19 five-metre timber spans.

The major engineering difficulty was the construction of the concrete piers. The bed rock in





• **Fig 2. The wooden bridge at Tamarkan. Two spans of the steel bridge are in the background. (Courtesy: Australian War Memorial).**

the river here was underneath two to three metres of soft over-burden in a fast flowing river. The piers were built by first constructing a temporary circular earth coffer dam. A concrete ring was then lowered into the river bed. Divers would then remove the earth under the ring which gradually sank to the bed-rock. Successive rings would then be slotted on top as the concrete structure went down. The building of the approach works was undertaken simultaneously with the concrete works and the whole bridge was completed by May 1943, taking about ten months in all.

However, as there was no road access to the route of the railway up-river, the Japanese could not wait for the concrete bridge to be completed to transport rails up-river. Therefore they decided to construct a temporary timber bridge also at Tamarkan so that trains could start transporting rails up-river. Construction of the temporary timber bridge, which was about 100 metres away from the concrete bridge, commenced in August 1942 and it was completed by January 1943. Light trains were able to start crossing the Kwae Yai four months before the concrete bridge was completed. This wooden bridge was constructed by driving vertical wood piles into the river bed. As there was no pile driving equipment, ropes were tied on to a concrete block or a heavy piece of timber and passed over a pulley overhead. Scores of POWs would then slowly haul the ropes so that the weight moved upward. When it had reached a given height, the ropes would be released and the weight would freefall on to the cap of the pile driving it down inch by inch. Figure 2 (above) shows a train passing over the temporary wooden bridge at Tamarkan. Two spans of the concrete and steel bridge can be seen in the background.

With the completion of the Tamarkan wooden

bridge, work on the line up-river progressed faster and by May 1943 the railway was operational up to 130 km from the starting point. The monsoon broke in May and there were torrential daily showers which then slowed down the pace of work. By October the line had passed Konkuita which is 263 km from the starting point and was ready to join up with the line being constructed southwards from the Burmese end. On 17 October 1943 the two lines were linked up and the 415 km long Thailand-Burma

railway was fully operational.

It is generally accepted that this railway was one of the great engineering achievements of World War Two. But it was achieved at a great human cost. About 61,000 Allied POWs, including 13,000 Australians worked on the railway. Physical beatings and torture by the Japanese soldiers and Korean guards were commonplace forms of punishment. The POWs were not provided with hats, boots or clothes as required under the Geneva Convention. They were only given a piece of cloth about two feet square which they wore like a span cloth around their waists. That is all they wore when they worked on the line, in rain or sun. As regards food, they were given some rice porridge for breakfast, a ball of rice for lunch and another ball of rice for dinner which would sometimes have a few beans and leafy vegetables. The daily diet had a calorie content of about 1000, whereas a man doing manual labour requires well over 2500 calories. The net result was that a POW who started off weighing 150 lbs at the beginning of the war, weighed about 90 lbs at the end of the war, literally skin and bone.

Living accommodation consisted of huts made of bamboo with leaky thatched roofs. Inside the hut there was a raised bamboo sleeping platform with a space of only 18 inches width allocated per person. Toilets consisted of deep open pits across which bamboos were laid. One had to use these toilets squatting in the open air with no privacy. Separate huts were provided for the sick, but for those who were sick the food ration was reduced to half. Doctors were available, there were about 100 Australian Doctor POWs, but no medical equipment or medicines were provided. As a result there were many casualties due to sickness and malnutrition. The common diseases were cholera, cerebral malaria, dysentery and beri-



beri. About 13,000 POWs, including about 2700 Australians, died in the construction of the railway. This was about 21 per cent of the POWs who worked on the railway.

The Japanese also used about 200,000 conscripted Asian labourers as part of the workforce. They were mainly Indian Tamil labourers from the rubber plantations in Malaya and also Burmese nationals. Their living conditions were worse than the POWs. There were no sick bays or medical personnel. No toilets were provided. They had to go into the bush to ease themselves. As a result, when it rained all the streams which provided the camp's water supply got polluted and cholera was rampant. It is estimated that about 80,000 or 40 per cent of the Asian labourers died in the construction of the railway. At the War Crimes Trials held after the war, 111 Japanese and Korean soldiers were convicted for war crimes committed on the Thai-Burma railway and 32 were executed.

#### **Operation of the Railway**

The railway was operational from October 1943 to mid-1945 and during this period about 300,000 tons of military supplies and tens of



• **Fig. 3 The Steel Bridge at Tamarkan destroyed by RAF Liberator Bombers in June 1945.**  
(Courtesy: Australian War Memorial)

thousands of Japanese troops were transported to Burma from Thailand. About two or three trains ran daily, usually at night to avoid being bombed by the Allies. By early 1945 the Allied Eastern Air Command based in eastern India used B-24 Liberator Bombers to attack the Burma-Thailand railway. The wooden bridges were regularly bombed but the Japanese were able to repair them fairly quickly. On 24 June 1945 B-24 Liberator Bombers flown by 159th and 356th Squadrons of the RAF were designated with the task of permanently destroying the steel and wooden bridges at Tamarkan. When the aircraft left the bridge sites they reported that three spans of the steel bridges had been broken (see Figure 3) and that the wooden bridge had been breached in two places. This air raid marked the end of the wartime careers of the two bridges across the Kwa Yai at Tamarkan. On 6 August 1945 the atom bomb was dropped on

Hiroshima and nine days later, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's formal surrender.

Immediately after the war the Japanese Government was asked, under war reparations, to provide replacement steel trusses for the damaged trusses in the concrete bridge. The concrete bridge was repaired, but the wooden bridge was abandoned and hardly any trace of it remains today. The railway line is still operational up to Namtok which is about 125 km from the starting point of the line. The rest of the line, nearly 300 km, was abandoned after removing the steel rails. The jungle tide has now overgrown this part of the line. Nowadays Tamarkan and the nearby town of Kanchanaburi are visited by about four million tourists annually who come to see the site of the bridge made famous by the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

*Part 2 of this article which will describe the building of a wooden bridge in 1957 over the River Kelani at Kitulgala, Ceylon, as the set for the film Bridge on the River Kwai, will be featured in the next issue.*



## Where can you buy the best McDonalds in the world?

American, James McGowan has visited McDonald's restaurants in 53 countries and has written more than 340 reviews about the food he's tried on each trip. He's tried tuna pies in Thailand, in Serbia, chicken-sausage burgers in Malaysia, acrab-croquette burger in Okinawa, Japan, and sweet potato fries in Singapore. Of all the McDonald's locations he's tried, McGowan says Sri Lanka does it best.

He said his favourite item on the menu is the seeni sambol sandwich, which features a folded egg and melted cheese on a hamburger bun topped with seeni sambol — a relish made with spicy onion and cured tuna. It costs about \$2.15.

The first bite of the sandwich is spicy. "Immediately after the spice, you were hit with strong but very pleasant dried fish taste," McGowan says. "The seeni sambol burger was also heavy on the red onions, which are traditionally cooked in coconut oil with garlic, sugar and tamarind. The onions were fried just enough where they were still crunchy, but not raw. The sugar gave the sauce a required stickiness, but not enough to make it sweet at all."

McGowan said he's also a fan of McDonald's Sri Lanka's omelette burger, which features a vegetable-stuffed omelette inside a kids' meal hamburger bun.

[www.businessinsider.com/best-mcdonalds-in-the-world-2016-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/best-mcdonalds-in-the-world-2016-2)



# John Still's *Poems in Captivity*

by  
Tissa Devendra

France never commemorates its defeat at Waterloo but for some strange reason, Australia and New Zealand honour as 'Anzac Day' the occasion of their bloodiest defeat by the Turkish Army at Gallipoli in WW I. Last year 2015, marked the centenary of this defeat. It then struck me that the little Crown Colony of Ceylon, too, played a part in this debacle. As a loyal Colony, Ceylon sent a contingent to join the British Army. This consisted of British planters and cadets from missionary public schools. As they were too few to constitute a regiment, they were combined with the Anzac forces and fought alongside them in Gallipoli. After their defeat some were taken prisoner by the victorious Turks. Among these POWs was John Still, who, some years later, achieved fame as the author



• John Still

of the incomparable *Jungle Tide*. It was during his long imprisonment ("eleven hundred and seventy-nine days") that he sought solace in writing his "Poems in Captivity".

These moving poems, published by The Bodley Head in London in 1919, were never as well known in Ceylon as his *Jungle Tide*. However, as a schoolboy in Colonial Kandy a copy came my way and left a lasting impression.

I never saw it again. When the Anzac Day centenary came along in 2015, I wrote a brief Letter to the Editor about John Still's imprisonment in Turkey and his "Poems in Captivity" now lost beyond recall. But, I was mistaken. My friend W. Panditharatne wrote from Kandy that he had a copy. And so did K. L. F. Wijedasa. Best of all, was a totally unexpected visit from Kumara Semage, who gifted me a spanking new reprint of these poems that he had ordered from London, after reading my Letter! Thanks to Kumara's generosity I am now able to savour John Still's poems. and write about them.

Although a contemporary of the War Poets Rupert Brooke and Wilfrid Owen, John Still's *Poems in Captivity* never earned the fame they richly deserve. This may be because both Brooke and Owen died in battle and in nearby France. Unlike these precocious geniuses, John Still survived the war and the battle where he fell was a defeat by a 'lesser breed' in a strange and distant land. Furthermore, only some of his poems deal with battle as such. They also speak of captivity, hope, nostalgia for the jungles and Ceylon's fabled history.

His poem 'Christmas Day' is a poignant expression of his lonely captivity:  
"Christmas day, Christmas day,

Across the yard with footsteps slow  
The sentries pace the mud below :  
The wind is cold, the sky is grey :  
Christmas day in a prison camp,  
With freedom dead as a burnt-out lamp.  
The lions eat and the lions rage,  
Three steps and a turn in a narrow cage,  
And I am as free as they "  
Physical confinement cannot shackle his spirit  
" Yet freedom is and ever will remain  
Moral, not physical, and those are free  
Who can rise morally above their pain,  
Their minds uncrippled by their captivity.  
More free by far than any bird that flies,  
My mind is free to climb among the stars,  
My soul is free is free to wander o'er the skies,  
Only my body lies behind the bars."  
The captive's dreams recall the jungles he loved  
"Could I hear the monkeys calling  
In the forest, all alone:  
Could I see the torrent falling,  
Mist and thunder, on the stone:  
Could I hear the jungle calling,  
Where storm-torn boughs are tossed,  
I would soon forget the galling  
Of the years that I have lost."

He writes with sharp observation of his many places of confinement – old forts, abandoned churches, ruined castles – and the poppy fields and free flying birds he envies. Although Still's poetry evokes the metre, rhythm and emotions that characterise early 20th Century English poetry, these poems are not conventional in any sense. No English poet wrote with such brilliant evocation of the sights, scents and sounds of the pristine Vanni jungles the poet had wandered in the kingdom of the jungle god Ayanar:

"Low grumbling thunder grumbles all the morn  
The trees by fitful circling gusts are torn  
A grey wet veil of shadow  
And all at once the miracle is done.

Sweet fragrance rises steaming from the grass.  
Down all the tree trunks little trickles run ...."  
"Out in the glade the grass is waving high,  
All lined by lanes where elephants have trod ;

The fragrance of ehala fills the air,  
Its blossoms glowing golden in the glare,  
Down from a flowering tree-top in the sky..."



"All was silent save for the rustling breeze  
And the cicadas faint eternal buzz,  
Noises so endless in monotony  
As to remain unnoticed till they stop.."

His emotions flow from lived experience - "  
"Alone upon a wooded hill I lay  
Beneath a pale blue sky where swifts did fly,  
And listened while the voices of the day

Rose from the rustling woods and mounted high.  
The talk of monkeys, and a whistling bird,  
The tireless tolling of the barbet's call,  
The singing of the insects that I heard..."

He sees a leopard -  
"down the shady tunnel of the trees  
A thirsty leopard came on silent tread,  
The monkeys hooted, and the squirrels shrilled,

The spotted deer were belling in the glade:  
But in the sand beneath that marbled shade  
He dug a hole and waited while it filled

\*\*\*

This lovely terror of the jungle ways  
Stood waiting there without a single sound  
Until the water filtered through at last  
Then, still in silence, to the shades he passed."

The recent news about vandals robbing  
tunnels for swallow's nests for Chinese gourmets,  
reminds me of Still's poem of these birds swirling out  
of their cliff side caves

\*\*\*

"O! Fly swift swallows!  
Speed on the wings of light !  
Swift your wings and the feathers roar,  
As down from the upper caves you pour  
Scream! Scream in your wild delight !...."  
Many are the jungle birds he recalls such as the  
hornbill, the long-tailed robin but I am pretty sure no  
other poet has written of jackals  
"I can hear the jackals crying.  
Full misery in their haunting tone

\*\*\*

A dreary, melancholy long-drawn moan,  
Growing in volume while it swells,  
In wild cacophony of yells,  
Burst from a hundred hells,  
Calling, howling, clamouring ..."  
Nor has any poet written so hauntingly about the  
elusive Loris from personal experience -

"In the forest in the moonlight,  
When the boughs are lacing black against the sky,  
And all the stirrings of a tropic night  
Encompass me with magic out of sight,  
I hear your thin weird cry:  
I sense you passing by,  
Softly and silently your tiny palms  
Cleave to the bosses of your secret way  
On where bearded moss hangs thick and grey,  
Up where the silver moonlight glints and charms,  
You slowly creep ...  
Good night, my little kinsman. I must sleep."

It never ceases to amaze me that John  
Still who first come to Ceylon in 1897 had not only  
explored our wilderness, but also acquired a deep  
knowledge of our ancient myths and history in the  
short fifteen years or so before he answered the call  
to fight for King and Country. His poems have a  
section 'Tales of the Mahavansa' where he lets his  
imagination roam without, in any way, straying too  
far from the great chronicle of the Sinhalese. They  
also show the surprising depth of his understanding of  
Buddhist thought. This is shown in his long narrative  
poem The Unveiling of Dhatusena:

"Long meditation in a lonely cave  
Had shaken off the shackles of the world,  
And freed old Mahanama from the wheel,  
Certain that Karma's bonds were loosed at last,

Men called him Rahat, meaning one whose lives,  
Lived in the form of beasts or god or man,  
Had been so selfless, so sincere and pure,  
That all desire had been purged right out

Until rebirth no longer claimed his soul ;  
So that when this life ended he would merge  
One with the infinite for evermore."

In the climax of the poem Kasyapa condemns  
his father, the great Dhatusena, to death:

"Take this man out, and build him in a wall,  
Standing him there to face the rising sun  
Which he shall wait to see for evermore'.  
Then to Migara turned King Dhatusen,  
And to him said 'Friend, I forgive you all.'  
And Prince Migara uttered not a word,  
But turned his head and left that place in shame.  
The soldiers led King Dhatusen away;  
But Kasyapa sat on immovable,  
While horror harboured in his haunted eyes,  
To leave them never more."

The heroic poem 'Kasyapa' ends in truly dramatic  
style:

"His elephant was wounded, and his shield  
Was dented over with the stabs of spears



Then from his weary hand there fell his sword  
 From out his belt he drew a dagger forth  
 And plunged it fiercely deep into his throat,  
 Slowly he sank upon the elephant,  
 Bowing his head upon its reeking neck.  
 And so he died: unconquered to the end.  
 They took the diadem from off the dead  
 And placed it on his brother's living brow,  
 Who gazed upon his corpse, and turned and said,  
 'His death was worthy of his royal blood.  
 Carry him out with honour to the place  
 Where the kings of Lanka from the mists of time  
 Have all been burned upon their funeral pyres,  
 And there perform the rites of ancient days."

Quite apart from his nostalgia for the forests of Ceylon and the island's dramatic legends, Still gave frequent expression to deeper thoughts and the meaning of life. One group of poems he calls "Paths".

I quote from one:

"He saw that all was one great soul  
 And that a man when he was dead  
 Became united to the whole,  
 Whatever path he chose to tread;  
 Just as the lightning flash is Is reabsorbed into the

earth, Just as the waters as they crash  
 Flow to the sea that gave them birth,  
 Just as the trees that dry and rot  
 Make soil where others are begot."

The war ended and John Still was freed - free to see his baby Eileen of whom he wrote while a prisoner:

"O Baby, my baby I have never seen  
 Don't grow too fast till I come home.  
 When the birds make love and the hedges are green,  
 My ship will race through the roaring foam  
 So wait a while till I come home."

John Still came back to Ceylon, to wander our jungles, delve into our storied past and write that wonderful prose poem "Jungle Tide." He had also written of his experiences in captivity in "A Prisoner in Turkey" also published by The Bodley Head. He died in Port Alfred, South Africa in 1941

(Published in The Island newspaper 12 February 2016)



## Kurunegala (circa 1921)

This place (called Kornegalle by the English) is a little town of 2000 or 3000 inhabitants, fifty miles from Colombo and eleven miles by coach from Polgahawella, the nearest railway station. It lies just at the foot of the mountain region of Ceylon, and takes its name, Kurunegala or Elephant rock, from a huge Gibraltar-like rock, 600 feet high, but at the base of which it nestles—and whose rounded dark granite structure, wrinkled with weather and largely bare of trees or any herbage, certainly bears a remarkable resemblance, both in form and colour, to a couchant elephant. Ascending its steep sides, on which the sun strikes with fierce heat during midday, one obtains from the summit a fine view—westward over low plains, eastward over mountain ranges rising higher and higher towards the centre of the island. The prevailing impression of the landscape here, as elsewhere in Ceylon, is its uniform green. There is no change of summer or winter. (Though this is the coolest time of the year the daily temperature ranges from 85° to 90° in the shade.) The trees do not cast their leaves at any stated time, though individual trees will sleep at intervals, resting so. In every direction the same colour meets the eye—tracts of green scrub, green expanses of forest, green rice fields, and the massed green of bananas and coco-palms.

A little monotonous this in the general, landscape, though it is plentifully compensated on a near view by the detailed colour of insect

and flower life. One curious feature is that though the country is well populated, hardly a trace of habitation is to be seen from any high point such as this. Even Kurunegala, which lies at our feet, is only distinguishable by its court-house and prison and one or two other emblems of civilisation; the native cabins, and even in many cases the European houses—which are of one storey only—are entirely hidden by trees. Those clumps, however, of coco-palms which you see standing like oases in the general woods or breaking the levels of the rice-fields, with occasional traces of blue smoke curling up through them, are indications of little native hamlets clustered beneath—often far from any road, and accessible only by natural footpaths worn by naked feet.

From the top of the rock one gets a good view of the tank which supplies irrigation water for the town and neighbourhood. It is about three-quarters of a mile long and half-a-mile broad, and forms a pretty little lake, over which kites hover and kingfishers skim and in which people daily bathe. These tanks and irrigation channels are matters of the utmost importance, to which I think Government can hardly give too much attention. Their importance was well understood in past times as indeed the remains and ruins of immense works of this kind, over thousand years old in various parts of the island fully testify.

(From *Adam's Peak to Elephantia* by Edward Carpenter 1921)



# Richard Gabriel – a personal perspective

by Dr Srilal Fernando

**R**ichard Don Gabriel died peacefully surrounded by his extended family on his 92nd birthday. He was the last of the original group of Artists called the 43 Group. Thus ended an era of profound importance in the Art of Sri Lanka. This article is neither an exhaustive exercise about the Group or of Richard Gabriel's Art. I shall leave that to more capable and knowledgeable writers. Mine is a personal perspective.

My earliest memories of Richard was when he was the Art Teacher at St Joseph's College, Colombo. A brand new art studio was built by the Beira Lake and this is where the students attended their art classes. The art lesson was lost on us little kids then. However, Richard could with a few strokes of his brush bring an animal to life.

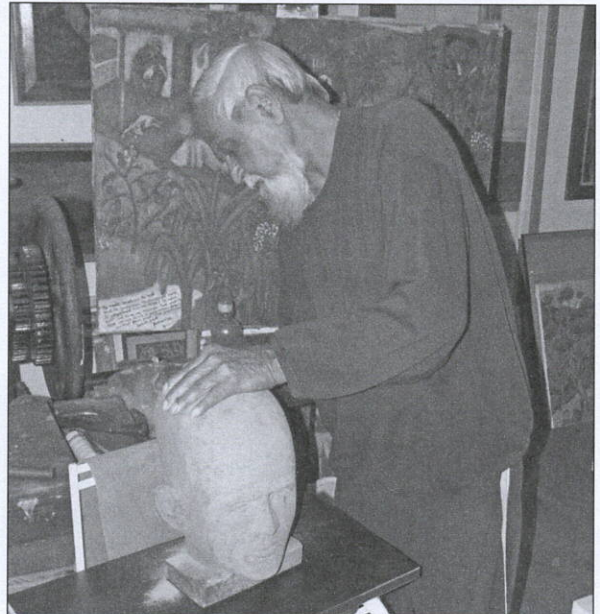
Many years passed and it was only after migrating to Australia that I developed an interest in collecting and studying Sri Lankan Art. Visits to Sri Lanka would be incomplete without a visit to the Gabriel residence in Pannipitiya. We would be served with a glass of Thambili wine. As with limited means my purchases were restricted to woodcuts. After the death of his wife, Richard moved to Melbourne, Australia. His daughter Rene and son-in-law Hiran, both architects, built a little studio for him in an annex of their house. Richard continued his painting and the occasional wood sculpture there.

His residence was not very far from my consulting rooms. This gave me the time to visit him once every two or three months. This continued for over ten years. His calm temperament, peaceful manner and his knowledge about painting and the 43 Group made my visits knowledgeable and enjoyable.

Richard had the highest regard for Ivan Peries and Harry Pieris. Ivan had recognised his talent and introduced him to Harry Pieris. Harry took him in as a pupil but waived the fees as Richard could not afford them.

Another story he related was that Fr. Peter Pillai, the Rector at St. Joseph's College, Colombo wanted Richard to teach art at St. Joseph's. However, as St Joseph's was a fee-assisted school, the teachers had to have the Government requirements to be on the payroll. Richard did not have a pass in Sinhala which was one of the requirements. Fr. Pillai paid his wage from his own funds till Richard had the necessary requirements to be on the school payroll.

Many years later, I was given a block of wood by one of my sculptor friends. I gave this to Richard as I was very unlikely to have a go at



• *Richard Gabriel working on the head of Fr Peter Pillai and the likeness of the finished sculpture was remarkable.*

sculpting. Richard kept it for a few years and I did not ask him about it knowing that an artist would have to do it in his own time. One day he said that he would sculpt the head of Fr. Peter Pillai. He sawed off part of the block to use as a platform for the head. He shaped this platform in the form of a book thus alluding to the scholarly aspect of Fr. Peter Pillai. The likeness of the finished product was remarkable. I was lucky to see the head at every stage and Hiran has a photograph of Richard working on it. The head was sent to Fr. Kuriacose and I believe it is at Aquinas College, Colombo.

When the book on Justin Deraniyagala's paintings came out, Richard and I went through some of the paintings and he was able to interpret the meaning and significance of some of the paintings. He remarked that Justin was widely read and most of his paintings had various symbols which were apparent only to the discerning eye. Justin had done a painting of Anais Nin, a famous feminist author of the time. It is said that she was an artist model for Picasso and Matisse. The painting was in bad condition with the canvas at the bottom virtually in tatters. Richard was asked to restore it. He repaired the canvas and matched the colour to the original colour of the painting.

Richard was not a portrait painter. However, he painted Fr. Peter Pillai, his benefactor, and later Christopher Ondaatje. His portrait was used as the front cover of Christopher Ondaatje's book *The Man Eater of Punani* and appears with a leopard next to him.

I, in a fit of vanity, asked whether Richard would paint me. He readily agreed. He painted me in



a sarong and shirt holding the reins of a magnificent, ferocious-looking horse, almost being dragged away by the horse. Not knowing the symbolism in the painting, I exchanged it for another painting of two women with pots on their heads on their way to and from the well. Only later that I realised that the fierce horse was the powerful subconscious forces at play and me the psychiatrist trying to control them but being almost blown away in the process.

His simplicity was legendary. He once was invited to a function at the Indian High Commission and the invitation stated "Dress – Lounge". He responded saying that he had no suit or even a tie. Some years later he was invited again, but it was written "Dress – Casual". He still did not attend. It was not his scene.

Once the British High Commission sent him a visitor, a distinguished looking tall gentleman who purchased his paintings. He later found out that it was the cricketer Ted Dexter known as Lord Ted. He was sorry he did not recognise this former MCC cricket captain and would have loved to talk cricket with him.

Though the last years of his life were spent in Australia, his paintings were all based on memories of Sri Lanka.

He painted rural scenes such as women bathing by a stream, beach scenes and of ordinary country folk such as a fisherman and a farmer tending his animals. He related so much to this time of his childhood. When I requested a painting to adorn the cover of the souvenir for the Sri Lankan doctors in Australia get-together, he provided a painting of a Vedarala examining a patient in the veranda of his house.

He lived a simple life with no opulence. He died peaceful and content. When I visited him two days before he died to say goodbye he was very lucid in his mind. He had accepted death and waited for the right moment for it to happen. What a great man, what a great life!

*Back Cover - Four of Richard Gabriel's exquisite paintings are reproduced on the back cover. The paintings are the property of the author.*



## COLLECTIVES of NOUNS

### Australian politics

- A lie of Politicians;
- A laziness of Senators;
- An odium of Representatives;
- An entitlement of Members;
- A deceit of Liberals;
- A dreary of Labour;
- An irrelevance of Nationals;
- A frustration of Greens;
- A paucity of Palmers;
- A confusion of Independents;
- A disappointment of Failures;
- A conniption of Speakers;
- A leakage of Ministers,
- A proliferation of Prime Ministers;
- A procrastination of Turnbills.

### The Bureaucracy

- A bellyful of Eurocrats;
- A dithering of Diplomats;
- A scattering of Apparatchiks;
- An ego of Ministers;
- A privy of Private Secretaries;
- A lurking of Lobbyists;
- An equivocation of Committees.

### Media

- A mediocrity of Media;
- A confusion of Commentators;
- An irrelevance of Press Galleries;
- An inaccuracy of Internet-Feeds;

- A solemnity of Newsreaders;
- A prattle of Weather Forecasters;
- A celebration of Cartoonists.

### Medical

- A virtue of Patients;
- A caring of Nurses;
- A profit of Doctors;
- A slash of Surgeons;
- A boob of Plastic Surgeons;
- A pong of Podiatrists;
- A clicking of Chiropractors;
- A referral of Specialists;
- A waiting of Hospitals;
- A body of Pathologists;
- A spectacle of Optometrists;
- An evaluation of Psychologists;

### Professions

- A leaf of Landscapers;
- A capsule of Spacemen.

### Academia

- A tick of Teachers;
- A haughty of Headmasters;
- An epidemic of Academics;
- A profit of Child-Carers;
- A confusion of Home Educators;
- A wordplay of Lexicographers;

### Games We Play

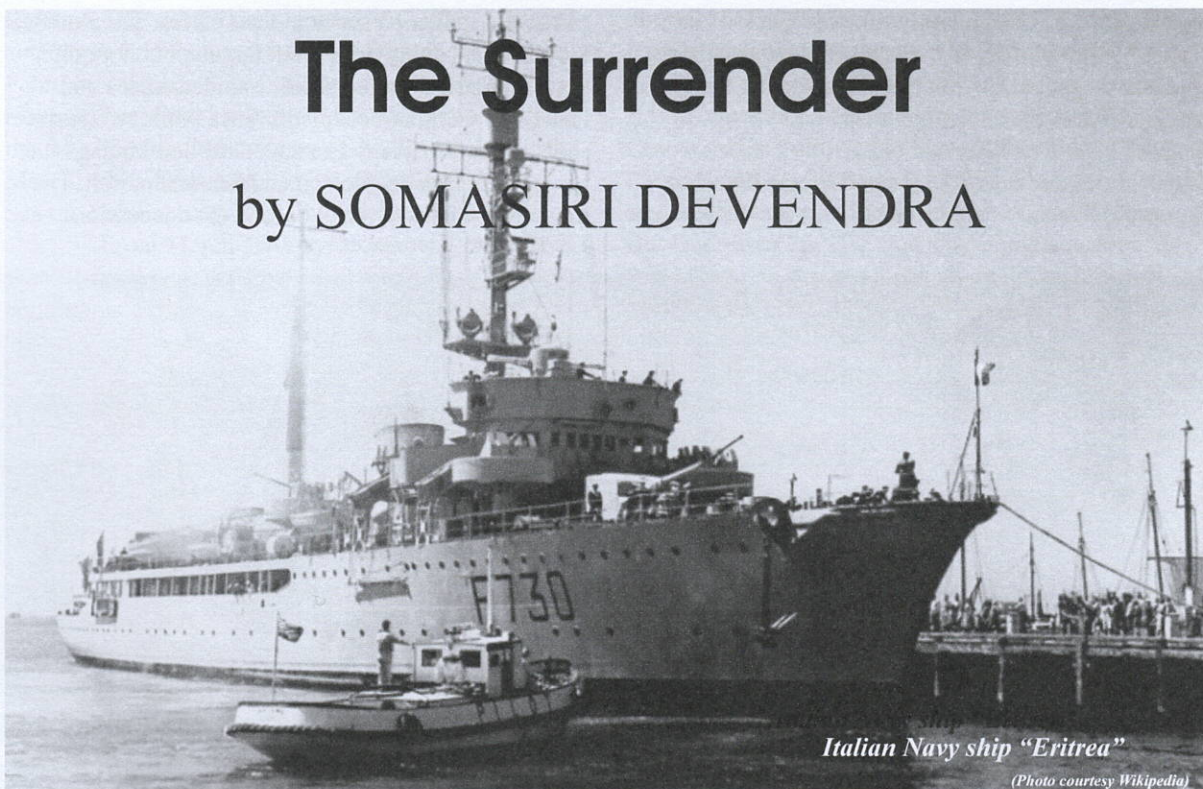
- A stud of Poker Players;
- A clunking of Croquet Players.

(Michael Leunig.)



# The Surrender

by SOMASIRI DEVENDRA



*Italian Navy ship "Eritrea"*

(Photo courtesy Wikipedia)

*"Do you know how an Italian Navy ship surrendered to the CRNVR?"*

It was around the middle 1970s. I was collecting first-hand accounts of incidents involving the Ceylon Naval Volunteer Force (CNVF) which had been mobilised by the Royal Navy as the "Ceylon Royal Naval Volunteer Regiment" (CRNVR) during the Second World War. The question was put to me by Commander E.P. Wickremasinghe, a veteran of that war. "Surprised?" he went on, "but it happened. I was there!"

## ***'High Noon' on the high seas***

HMS Overdale Wyke, FY 338, ("OW") of the CNVF/CRNVR was on patrol off Colombo. It was September 1943. "OW" was the first ship purchased by the Government of Ceylon for the CNVF; 136 ft. in length overall and displacing 764 tons under load, she was a trawler fitted out as a minesweeper. The sea was calm and her (coal fired triple-expansion steam reciprocating) engines were turning her single screw over at comfortable cruising speed. Still, extra look-outs had been posted because of a message received: Italy had surrendered on September 8th and Italian naval units all over the world had been ordered to surrender to the nearest Allied unit. "OW" was to keep a sharp lookout for Italian ships and submarines which may appear. Signalman Wickremasinghe was on duty on the bridge as yeoman to the Captain, Lieutenant Commander AHH Boyns, a Mackwoods employee before mobilisation. Suddenly, a look-out spotted a large vessel on the horizon, apparently making for Colombo. Altering course, Lt.Cdr.

Boyns set out to intercept her. The other ship, too, changed course and headed towards "OW". As the distance between the two ships diminished it became alarmingly obvious that the newcomer was very much larger than "OW", leading to much trepidation!

But duty had to be done. Being in home waters, flying the White Ensign of the Royal Navy, "OW" challenged the unknown ship to identify herself and state her intentions. Pat came the reply: "Royal Italian Navy Ship *Eritrea* surrendering to you!" Lt. Cdr. Boyns had rehearsed the drill. Acknowledging the signal, he instructed *Eritrea* to stop engines, fly the white flag of surrender, muster all hands on deck and prepare to be boarded. A prize crew from the CNVF vessel then boarded the ship, accepted the surrender, assumed command and *Overdale Wyke* proudly escorted *Eritrea* to Colombo.

A significant moment for the CNVF, but totally unrecorded anywhere – save in the memory of one sailor. I used his story, of course, attributing it to him, but I failed to find any corroboration by a third party. Even the internet did not help me till when, very recently, trawling the net yet again I chanced upon a site [http://military.wikia.com/wiki/Italian\\_sloop\\_Eritrea](http://military.wikia.com/wiki/Italian_sloop_Eritrea) which finally gave me the clue: "As soon as the Reuters message about the surrender of Italy was picked up by the crew of *Eritrea*, the vessel changed course at once and headed at full speed to Colombo in Ceylon to surrender when it was intercepted and escorted to Colombo by units of the Ceylon Naval Volunteer Force"

And with that, it became possible to recreate the circumstances under which this historic event



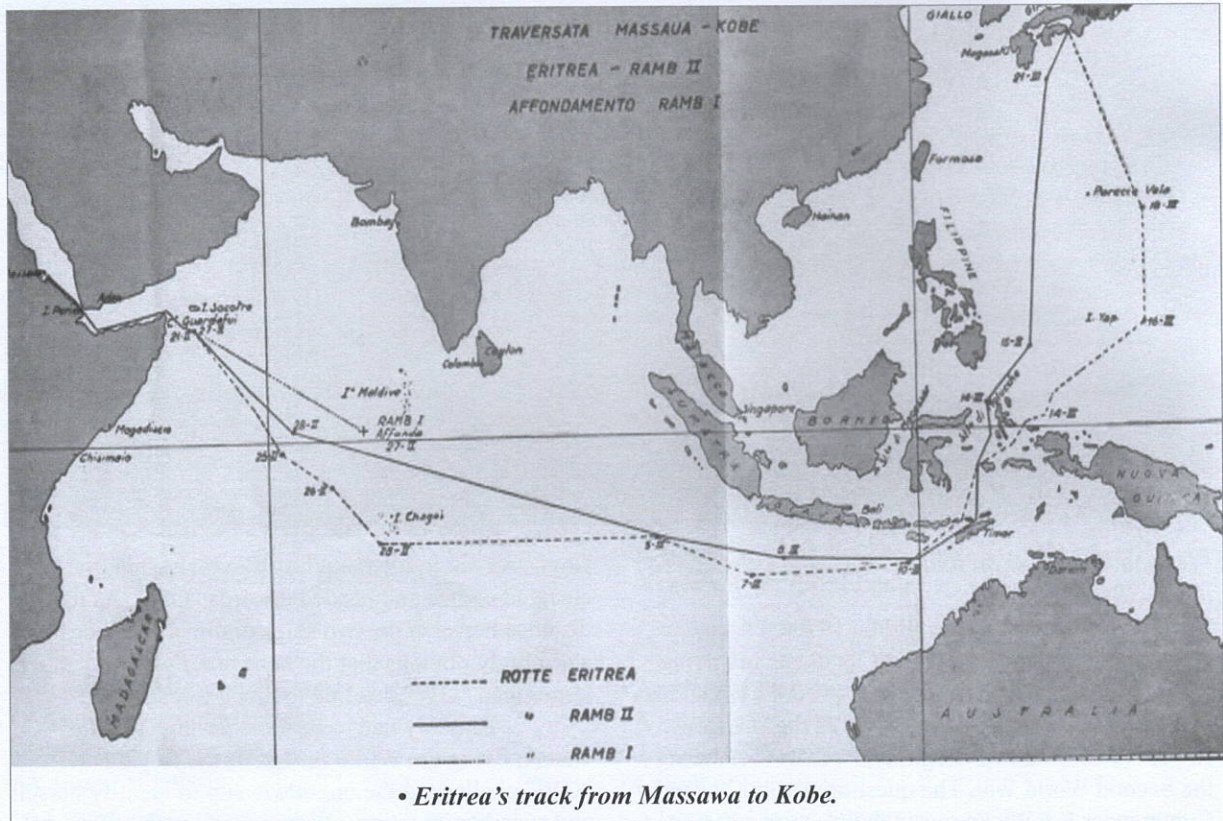
took place – the one and only time the Ceylon Navy secured a ‘prize’. It is an event worth memorialising: an event the Royal Ceylon Navy and the Sri Lanka Navy have not been able to match.

#### *Eritrea in the Red Sea*

The commencement of the Second World War in Europe, is formally dated from 1939, but the Axis

end to the Italian presence in East Africa. The Red Sea Flotilla was largely destroyed: largely, but not quite. Four submarines sailed south, rounded Africa and made it to German-occupied France while two surface ships made it to Vichy French controlled Madagascar.

*Eritrea* decided on another destination. The Regia Marina had a naval base in the concession



(Germany and Italy) and Allied Powers (led by Britain) had been preparing for a possible war for some years. Italy's Regia Marina ("Royal Navy") was a respectable naval force in the Mediterranean: Ethiopia and Eritrea in East Africa, on the southern end of the Red Sea were under Italian control. This gave Italy access to the Red Sea and a formidable port had been built up at Massawa. It was here that *Eritrea* was based. Displacing 2,170 tons she was constructed as a typical "colonial ship" and fitted with diesel-electric propulsion designed to maximize range. She was sometimes referred to as a "sloop." ["In modern usage, a sloop refers to a warship between a corvette and a frigate in size"]. With Italy officially entering the war in June, 1940, *Eritrea* was absorbed into the Regia Marina as part of the Red Sea Flotilla based at Massawa on the Red Sea. Initially the East African Campaign went in Italy's favour and, with the capture of British Somaliland soon after, Italy gained access to the former British port of Berbera, on the horn of Africa, and posed a threat to Allied shipping in the Red Sea. But this was a short-lived phase as the British counter-attacked a few months later and put an

territory of Tientsin in China. During World War II, Italian supply ships, auxiliary cruisers and submarines operated in the Far East, often in disguise, even utilizing Japanese-controlled port facilities such as those at Shanghai, China, and Kobe, Japan." *Eritrea* and two 'auxiliary cruisers' (newly-built, converted cargo ships) *Ramb I* and *Ramb II* slipped through a British blockade, opting to make a run for Kobe and to carry on the fight in another theatre of war. *Eritrea* and *Ramb 2* successfully reached Kobe, but *Ramb I* was not so lucky, having been intercepted and sunk off the Maldives by the New Zealand cruiser HMZS *Leander*.

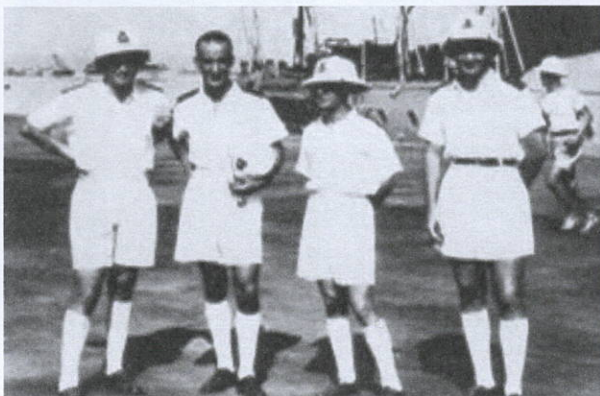
#### *HMS 'Overdale Wyke'*

Coincidentally, *Overdale Wyke* was also in the vicinity of the Red Sea about this time. Built as a Trawler in 1924, she had been commissioned into RN service as a Minesweeping Trawler in 1937 and sold to the Government of Ceylon, fitted out with minesweeping gear and armament and sailed to Port Said by a RN runner crew to await a Ceylonese crew there. The CNVF/CRNVR crew including Lt. PJB Oakley (C.O.), Lt. AHH Boyns, Lt. BA Ohlson, Lt. A Smith (Engineer), P/O Stanislaus, P/O (Tel)



Rankine, P/O (SM) Bastiampillai, P/O (CK) Marshall and Stwd. Eric Perera left Ceylon by ship on 20th February (as Eritrea was sailing out of Massawa) reaching Port Said 3rd March. CRNVR records show the date of commissioning as a CNVF vessel as 15th March, 1941. Eritrea had sailed away from the Red Sea on 20th February, just two weeks earlier.

From March 1941 to December 1944 "OW", with a complement of four officers and 40 sailors, was continuously used for a variety of duties involving



• *Colonial Ship Eritrea with Capt. Seculin, Simeoni, Lt. Gian Formaggio and Capt. Zampini*

patrolling, minesweeping, providing escort services, search-and-rescue work and anti-submarine attacks which have been recorded. Along with other CNVF ships Hoxa, Balta (also trawlers but larger than her) Okapi, Semla and Sambur (all converted Antarctic whalers) and supported by tugs Samson, Goliath and C-405, she was part of the Ceylon Escort Group, later designated the ABCD (Arabia-Bangala-Ceylon-Dutch East Indies) group, carrying out patrol, escort, search-and-rescue, guard-ship and sundry other duties off Ceylon, Bay of Bengal and as far west as Addu Atoll and Diego Garcia. She also served as Guard ship at Addu Atoll, a secret RN port called "Port T". She is credited with the rescue of several persons from sunken ships and of carrying out depth charge attacks on enemy submarines, although she has not been credited with any "kills". She seems to have been a happy ship: Lt.Cdr.BA Ohlson has commented that "The Overdale Wyke at all times proved a very satisfactory vessel for such operations, in which regard this vessel may be considered superior to any other vessel which the Ceylon RNVR has manned." Lt.DG Simpson has concurred: "This has always been a grand ship with which to be associated and one in which there was plenty of scope for seamanship." *Eritrea in the Far East*

*Eritrea* completed the hazardous Indian Ocean crossing and ultimately reached Kobe, Japan. She had planned to operate as a commerce raider in the Pacific Ocean. But, even though allied with Italy, the authorities of then neutral Japan took a

dim view of the idea of an Italian raider operating from neutral Japanese ports. The Japanese refused to comply with the Italian plans and, because of the strong opposition presented by the Japanese Navy, Eritrea was not allowed to leave Kobe and both the Ramb II and the Eritrea were confined to port to avoid any confrontation with the USA and Great Britain. But December 7th 1941, the day of the attack on Pearl Harbour, marked a change in policy. After the official declaration of war, the Japanese Government allowed Eritrea freedom of movement and to specifically provide assistance to the cross-oceanic transport submarines, which were arriving in Penang and Singapore from Bordeaux, in occupied France, carrying rare goods.

Some Italian Merchant Marine ships succeeded in transporting to Europe such hard-to-come-by goods, such as rubber, tin and quinine. The Italian Navy, like the German Navy, attempted to use submarines for transport of goods to Japan despite the high losses and small advantages. Seven Italian submarines operating from France were converted by the Italians into "transport submarines" in order to exchange rare or irreplaceable trade goods with Japan. They were converted for service with the Monsun Gruppe ("Monsoon Group"). Servicing and providing these with escort became Eritrea's major activity till 1943.

#### *The surrender*

On September 8th, 1943 at 2:00 AM (local time), Eritrea was transferring from Singapore to Sabang in support of the submarine Comandante Cappellini which had just arrived after a long and difficult journey transporting strategically important material to Tokyo. Having received a Reuter communiqué of the Italian surrender, submarine Comandante Cappellini decided to disregard the call to surrender to the Allies and to fight along the Germans and the Japanese. But, once escorted to Singapore, the Japanese captured her as an enemy ship. Despite the pledge of allegiance of the Captain, Commander Auconi, Admiral Hiroaka interned the ship and imprisoned the crew. Eritrea, on the other hand, had no illusions about Japanese reactions to the surrender. Upon receiving the communiqué she realised her hazardous position and immediately changed course for Colombo (Ceylon) through the Strait of Sumatra avoiding the tenacious hunt by Japanese naval and aerial forces that was bound to commence. And so was enacted the drama of the surrender off Colombo.

#### *Eritrea repays a debt*

On arrival at Colombo, "OW" handed over her prize to the RN authorities and, presumably resumed her work. The Italian surrender resulted from a revolt against Benito Mussolini who was deposed, although he had a hold over northern Italy. The new Government signed an Armistice with the Allies in terms of which the Regia Marina had to sail its



ships to Allied ports. Those which eventually did were grouped into the "Italian Co-Belligerent Navy" fight on the side of the Allies. "Eritrea" fell into this category and was absorbed into the East Indies Fleet assembled to carry the war into Japanese-controlled Burma. In a list of "British, Commonwealth and Allied warships serving in the Far East January to August 1945" she is shown as a "submarine escort (sloop)" attached to the 2nd Flotilla, Submarines.

During this time she had a bitter-sweet reunion with "OW". Let Wickremasingha narrate the story: "Eritrea" was later used by RN in Colombo and Addu Atoll. "OW", on an escort mission to Diego Garcia, developed engine trouble S W of Colombo and drifted for 4 days. Food and water ran out, and there was no defence against any submarines. On the morning of 5th day, a warship was sighted heading directly on the "OW". Anxious moments later she was identified as the "Eritrea" which had picked up her signal and was coming to her rescue."

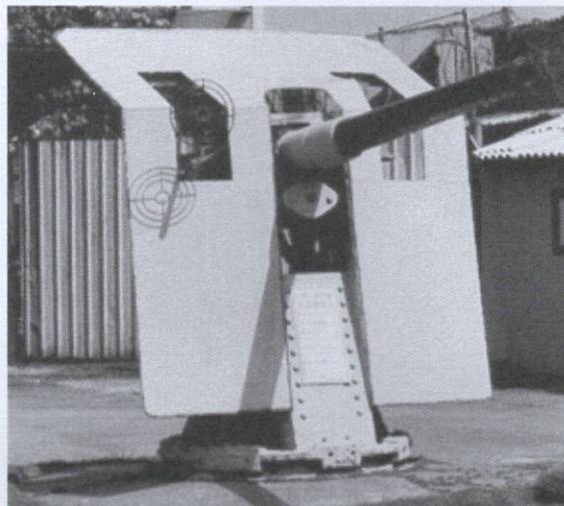
In her own way, "Eritrea" was repaying "OW" for saving her from the Japanese!

#### ***When the guns fell silent***

After the war, "Eritrea" was turned over to France. The French Navy used "Eritrea" in colonial service with the name 'Francis Garnier' until 1965. 'Francis Garnier' was then declassified to become a target ship. She was sunk during a nuclear test in the Pacific Ocean in 1966.

And the OW? The CNVF was returned to the Ceylon Government by the RN and demobilisation was commenced. The Government had no funds to run

ships, nor was there any reason for any. "OW" was de-commissioned on 15 December 1944 and handed over to the Port Commission for care and maintenance pending final disposal by Government. On 16 March 1946 she was sold off, unsung and forgotten. Not even a photograph of her can be found.



Except for her 12-pounder gun which still stands at the entrance to SLNS Rangalla, in the Port of Colombo: the gun she would have had to depend on should "Eritrea" have decided to fight on.



Meals  
Ammi  
made

#### **JAGGERY CAKE**

by TEEKAY

- 400 gm semolina
- 400 gm sugar
- 400 gm scraped jaggery
- 200 gm cashew nut - chopped
- 1 tin coconut milk
- 6 eggs
- 400 gm butter
- 3 tsp vanilla
- 3 tsp rosewater
- 1 tsp mixed spices

#### **Method**

Beat eggs and sugar thoroughly, adding in butter. Then beat in jaggery, cashew, adding Coconut milk. Finally add flavouring and spices. Pour mixture into baking tins lined with glad bake. Bake in moderate oven - 150° C for 1 ½ hours.



#### ***Congratulations & a Warm Welcome to our New Members***

J.K. LIYANASURIYA, Colombo, Sri Lanka.  
DR STEPHEN ASEERVATHAM, Valentine, NSW  
2280.  
DR DONALD & JANAKI CHANDRARATNE,  
Mount Claremont, WA6010.  
JAMES & RUVANI MENDIS, Bellevue Hill NSW  
2023.  
ARJUN & SWARNA DELGODA, Colombo 6,  
Sri Lanka.



#### **Parkinson's Law**

Expenditure rises to meet income. Just as work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.

— Northcote Parkinson (1958)

Law is a reflection and a source of prejudice. It both enforces and suggests forms of bias.  
(Diane B. Shulder, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970))



## 50 years in Australia BY VICTOR MELDER

**T**he patriarchs of the Melder family Randolph Joseph Churchill Melder and Phyllis Dagmar Bulner arrived in Australia in December 1965. To mark the occasion of their arrival and adoption of Australia as their home, in December 2015, their descendants celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Melder family's arrival and life in Australia with a gathering of the clan at Woodlands Park, Essendon, on Sunday 6 December of last year.

The celebration was well attended and included all the children and grand children. One member of the family, Kevin and his daughter Hannah flew in from Perth for the day.



• *Taken at Nugegoda, Sri Lanka, mid-July 1965, prior to departing for Australia. Back Row: L to R – Tony, Kevin, Patrick, Derrick, Hilton. Middle Row: L to R – Victor, Mum (Phyllis), Gerard (standing), Dad (Rando) and Sharlie. Front Row: L to R – Trudy, Philomena (Phil) and Geralyn.*

The first two members of the family (the second and third of the Melder children) Tony and Hilton, arrived in Melbourne, Australia, on board the *SS Orsova* on 23 September 1965. They first lived with a paternal aunt, Mrs Tera Phillips in the Melbourne suburb of Thornbury. Both Tony and Hilton, who were employed by the Ceylon Government Railway (CGR) in Sri Lanka, found employment with the Victorian Railways.

They later rented a house at 219 Raleigh Street, Thornbury, in the vicinity of their aunt's house. This was in preparation for the arrival of their parents and other members of the family, who arrived in Melbourne on 17 December 1965, on board the *SS Himalaya*. Those who arrived this time were: Dad, Mum, Kevin, Derrick, Sharlie, Gerard, Philomena, Geralyn and Trudy.

The family lived at Thornbury until December 1966, when they moved to

new accommodation at 499 Barry Road, Broadmeadows. Meanwhile, the elder members of the family were employed in Melbourne and travelled to work and back daily, either by train or motor vehicle.

At the age of 57 years, Dad, who who had retired from the CGR in December 1963 after 40 years' of service as a 'Special Class Engine Driver', was now employed by the Victorian State Public Service and like many members of the Burgher community in Melbourne at the time, worked at the Motor Registration Branch. Tony and Hilton had by then also left the Victorian Railways and joined the Victorian Public Service.

Derrick completed a Plumbing & Gas Fitters Course, being awarded the 'Apprentice of the Year' at that time. He worked for the Federal Government Department of Housing & Construction. During his tenure there, he led two teams in successive years to Antarctica and was responsible for the construction of two power stations and other facilities at the Mawson and Davis Stations.

The two other members of the family, myself and Patrick (who were married) were still in Sri Lanka. Patrick, his wife and daughter were the next to arrive in Melbourne. They too lived at Barry Road, Broadmeadows until they moved to rented premises at Thornbury.

Finally, the eldest member of the family, myself, my wife and our two children arrived in Melbourne, flying into Essendon airport on 13 March 1968. We too lived at Barry Road, Broadmeadows until we rented premises, also at Thornbury.

I was also an Engine Driver with the CGR in Sri Lanka, and on arrival in Australia, I soon obtained employment in the Victorian State Public Service, beginning a 25-year career at the Fisheries & Wildlife Department. I retired in April 1993 from the Department of Conservation & Environment. During my tenure in the State Public Service, I served at various times at the National Parks Service, Forrest Commission and the Environment Protection Authority.

With the passage of time, all members of the family, but one, were married and moved to their own homes, finally leaving Dad and Mum on their own. Soon they both moved to live with my sister Philomena and her family at Alfred Road in Essendon.

Dad passed away in December 1989 at the age of 83. Mum continued living with Philomena and when she moved elsewhere, mum then moved to live with Derrick, the bachelor in the family, a few doors away, on the same street. Mum passed away in December 2008, six months after celebrating her 90th birthday.





**Brother Justinian Thompson FSC, a member of the De La Salle teaching order of Christian Brothers came to Australia in 1953 and began teaching in schools in NSW, Victoria and New Zealand. He is, however, remembered for his 14-year stint as a teacher in the Balgo Hills in outback Australia. This is the story of a ...**

## ...Sri Lankan teacher's life in the Australian outback

by DOUGLAS JONES

**A**s a schoolboy at St Benedict's College in the early 1930s, Justinian Thompson loved to play soccer even on scorching sunny Kotahena afternoons on the College quadrangle. The effects of the heat he endured were more than evident, mostly on his light-coloured face and soaking, perspiration-wet shirt and shorts much to the vexation of his teachers. It is not surprising, therefore, that he embraced the opportunity that came his way four decades later, to teach children in an Australian Indigenous (Aborigine) community in the burning heat of the Sandy Desert of Western Australia, where even big air-conditioners could not cope with the often unbearably high temperatures.

Justinian was born in Sri Lanka on 5th February 1921 and began schooling at St Benedict's College in 1932, at the age of 11 years. Two years later, he had the Divine calling to join the De La Salle Christian Brothers Order of teachers and enrolled at the De La Salle Juniorate in Mutwal. On making his final vows, Bro. Justinian Thompson FSC commenced his teaching profession with De La Salle communities at De Mazenod College, Kandana and later, St Mary's College in Chilaw.

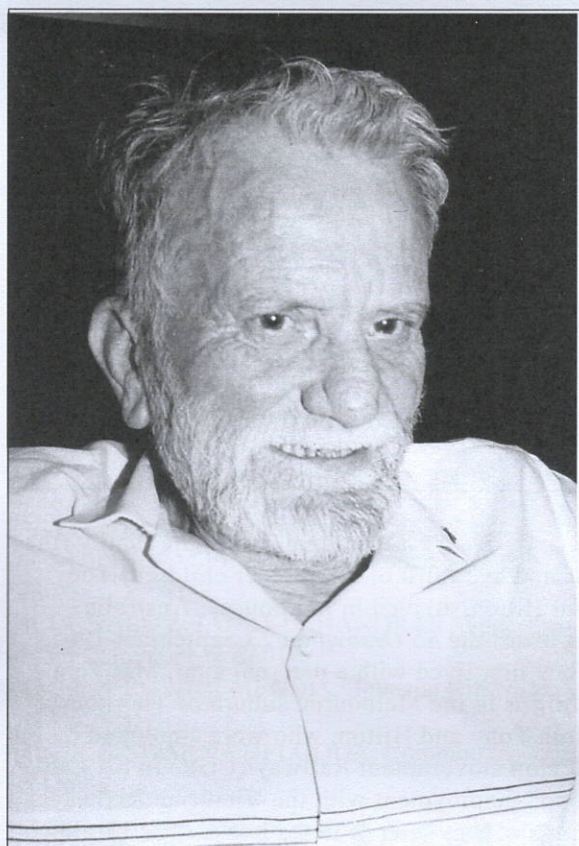


**• The other normal means of travel was the 4-wheel drive vehicle. Here Bro. Justinian about to leave on a 12-hour journey to Alice Springs.**

Bro. Justinian (or *Justy*, as he preferred to be called) came to Australia in 1953. Here, he worked for three years in Bathurst, a flourishing town in central west New South Wales and then accepted a teaching position in New Zealand where he served with the De La Salle Brother's community in Blenheim (1957); the Mangere East community (1958 -1959) and the Francis Douglas Memorial College in New Plymouth (1960-1965). On his return to Australia, he resumed

teaching in the Brothers' communities of Dandenong (1966-1974) and East Bentleigh, both in Victoria (1975-1981). On 2 February 1981, he took up service at Beverley /Henley Beach community in South Australia and his departure date from there is uncertain.

It was just about 1984 that Bro. Justinian was asked by his good friend Bro. Leo Scollen FSC to play a pioneering role by joining the Lasallian community at the \*Luurnpa Catholic School in Balgo Hills of Western Australia, when the school was handed over to the De La Salle Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy. Originally, the school was State-run but the local



**• In his later Balgo days, Bro. 'Justi' with his unkempt silver hair and beard.**

indigenous people petitioned their bishop that the Balgo School be changed to a Catholic school. The apostolate was initiated by Bro. Leo who realised that the De La Salle Brothers, renowned for their educational accomplishments all over the world, had



not, since their arrival in Australia in 1904, opened up a school for Australian indigenous children, grabbed the opportunity without any hesitation. Bro. Leo was the first Principal of the Luurnpa Catholic School in Balgo.

Balgo, where daily temperatures nudging 50 degrees Celsius is normal, is a remote and isolated area, 270 kilometres south of the nearest town in outback Halls Creek in the Sandy Desert, and at the other end via Tanami Road (a desert road) is Alice Springs, a 12-hour drive from Balgo. The "people here were nomadic with each family group walking about on their own country. The fundamental unit was the family, a man, his wives and children. Their attachment to country is strong." <sup>1</sup> The Luurnpa Catholic school was bilingual with 120 children on



• *With the nearest town 12 -hours and 270 kilometres away from Balgo, the small single engine plane was a form of normal means of transport.*

roll at the time and Religion was taught in all primary and secondary classes up to Grade 10.

This was the unforgiving locale that Bro. Justinian embraced when he accepted his ministry in this school. The forbidding conditions did not dampen his determination to serve these tribal children. Firstly, he undertook an intensive course in Western Desert Language - a wise choice because the Western Desert Language shares many of the numerous languages spoken by the various Indigenous groups in Australia. Kukatja was the language of the people he served. Bro Justinian mastered this language which enabled him to chat to the people, many of whom could not speak English. This way he built lasting relationships with the local people.

Even though fully aware of these inhospitable, conditions why did he undertake this mission? "I took up teaching there to work with people I've come to love," he confided. "My early upbringing has enabled me to take on what seems to be a life of sacrifice, but a pleasurable work of mercy...". He then went on to relate his early soccer playing days as a schoolboy in Kotahena and the novitiate in Mutwal. "Bathed in sweat, shirt drenched in perspiration, my face was all red like a jambu...

class teacher got so irritated I was sent out to dry under the Banyan tree. Balgo was a lot hotter. You get used to it," he told me.

It was no surprise therefore for Justinian to take on the challenge to teach children in the scorching desert of outback Australia. Characteristically, he soon became immersed in the indigenous culture and before long was fluent in Kukatja and other tribal languages. In return he taught these people his own Sinhala language. While teaching in the school, in his free time, he also did general work indoors and out around the property.

In Balgo, the only connection with the outside world was by radio. His sister Gwen who lived in Alice Springs, established the radio base for the Brothers and she relayed messages from and to the school. He was also known to do this arduous 12-hour drive several times to visit Gwen.

He served in Balgo till the end of 1990. From there he moved to Derby in Western Australia where he taught from 1991 till 1992. But he hankered after the Balgo Hills and soon returned there in 1993 and served the desert community again till 1997.

He was so devoted to the needs and welfare of the Balgo people that they made him Godfather to their children and revered him like a leader. Wherever Bro. Justinian travelled in the outback, he was



• *His gravesite in the De La Salle Brothers' private cemetery in Castle Hill.*

welcomed like a "long lost brother" and honoured accordingly.

He then moved to Scarborough in Queensland and on May 14, 1998 he celebrated his jubilee of 60 years as a De La Salle Brother. He was feted with celebrations in Queensland as well as at Oakhill College, Castle Hill. On his retirement from the teaching ministry, he settled at the La Villa Salle



Village in Queensland. Latterly, he developed bowel cancer and was on morphine treatment due to the great pain he suffered during his final days; but was never known to complain.

Bro. Justinian Thompson, the slim De La Salle Christian Brother with his unkempt silver hair and beard, was unique, intrepid and a dedicated man, who placed the Benedictine spirit of doing unto others in a new perspective with his selfless service to all those he served, especially the Australian Indigenous community in the very harsh Australian outback. It may well be said that he was truly a holy and courageous man.

Bro. Justinian received last rites a week before he passed away on 16 September 2004 and his remains were interred at the Brothers' private cemetery at Oakhill College in Castle Hill here in Sydney in the presence many of his past pupils, members of the De La Salle Brothers' community and a host of Bro. Justinian's friends.

**Notes:** \*Luurnpa is the name of the Dreamtime Being who brought the people to their home in the

desert. It is an ancestral Kingfisher. There are still many kingfishers around Balgo.

<sup>1</sup> Luurnpa Catholic School in Balgo Hills of Western Australia records.

The writer is grateful for the assistance with information and photographs in updating this article to:

- Rev. Bro. William (Bill) Shaw FSC – Archivist, Oakhill College, Castle Hill, NSW, Australia.
- Rev. Bro. Martin Plattman FSC – Luurnpa Catholic School in Balgo Hills of Western Australia.
- Graveside, Brothers' Private cemetery at Oakhill College, Castle Hill, NSW.
- Bro. Justi near the jeep at Tanami desert Road.
- Small single engine planes were normal means of transport apart from 4-wheel drive vehicles.



## A blissful boyhood in Kandy

The Kandy of my boyhood, in the early 1940s, was a friendly little town which enjoyed a sense of intimacy and neighbourliness. Cars were few and found only in the upmarket vicinity of Queen's Hotel, Elephant House and Cargills. Everybody walked. Each morning Father and I walked to school up Dharmaraja Hill from our home in Cross Street. Domestic chores sent me to Elephant House on Ward Street to buy butter, inhaling 'en route' the deliciously pungent smell of the 'karavala kadays' and watching sturdy coolies (as they were called) of the ice store hefting huge slabs of sawdust powdered ice on their gunny covered backs. I yet remember my first trip to the Bank of Ceylon on Ward Street to cash Father's cheque, stuffing the enormous sum of One Hundred Rupees into the pocket of my shorts, firmly clutching it in a sweaty fist till I reached home, greatly relieved at not being waylaid. On a weekend our family, two parents and four children, walked to Rahula College, Katugastota for lunch and conversation with Father's good friend the Principal Arlin Perera. On holidays, with my Trinitian friends Bruno and Roger Rodrigue, I ambled round the Lake doing the usual boy things of skimming flat stones on the water or bouncing pebbles off the shells of peacefully coupling tortoises. Rare visits to the Empire or Wembley cinemas inspired our pavement games. Honouring Robin Hood, flexible twigs from Udawattekelle were strung with twine into bows and blunt arrows. And Tarzan's fearsome yodel had many of us boys trying to out yell each other – only to have our ears boxed by irritated parents. An occasional treat was at the Muslim Hotel to gorge on godamba roti, 'fowl' curry and incredibly sweet watalappan. We enjoyed a sense of ownership

as the splendour of the Perahera passed majestically right before our home, watching it crowded shoulder to shoulder with families from faraway hamlets, our blood throbbing to the rhythm of the drums...

Bliss it was then, to be a boy – and in wondrous Kandy.

*(With permission from Quest for Shangri-la by Tissa Devendra; Vijitha Yapa Publications 2011.)*

## Staying financial

A Treasurer's job can be a thankless task at the best of times. Nothing can cause more trepidation to the person managing our money as reminding us members our fees are now due, or worse still, overdue.

It is within our ambit to ensure that we stay ahead of our subscription obligations. The Treasurer is only too aware that payments can be overlooked at the best of times. Unwittingly falling behind on our subscriptions is one of the easiest things that can happen to us. It is never done deliberately or on purpose. It happens to all of us everywhere, and can at anytime.

The CSA's sole income is from member's subscriptions and if we are to maintain a healthy financial status, it is important we ensure the the flow of finances is not interrupted in anyway. So please have a word with your treasurer and give yourself an idea if you are up-to-date.



## POINT OF VIEW

### ***Blood Ivory destroyed***

by Jayantha Jayawardene

In May 2012 the Sri Lanka Customs confiscated a container with 359 tusks weighing 1.5 tons, coming from Tanzania and Mozambique. This container was on its way to Dubai which is one of the hubs of the illegal ivory trade. Tusks are perceived as symbols of wealth and class, and are used to create religious and cultural objects that continue to drive the illegal trade. Many requests were made to the Sri Lanka Government by those who tried to get their hands on this ivory, temples, persons in high places, wealthy individuals, the authorities of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy were amongst them. The Customs Department, however, held fast and did not allow the government to release this ivory. Now, almost three years later, the Minister of Wildlife Hon Jayawickrema Perera persuaded the President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to destroy the ivory, and they both agreed. Sri Lanka is the first South Asian country to destroy confiscated ivory. The ivory was crushed on the Galle Face green, on 27th January 2016, watched by a large crowd including children.

On the 18th of July 1989 Richard Leaky, the Director of Wildlife in Kenya, set fire to a stockpile of African elephant ivory, which was 20 feet high. Since then, 16 countries have destroyed confiscated stockpiles of blood ivory, most of which were confiscated whilst in transit to another destination.

It is crucial to destroy illegal ivory; otherwise it slips back into the black market. The destruction also symbolically demonstrates a commitment to breaking up the illegal trade in ivory.

At the crushing at Galle Face, there was a religious ceremony and the Venerable Omalpe Sobitha Thero, the Buddhist priest who led the service, said "We have to apologise. Those elephants were victimized by the cruelty of certain people, but all of human society is responsible. We destroyed those innocent lives to take those tusks. We have to ask for pardon from them."

The ritual was similar to what is done for departed relatives to honor them and help them reach a better place in their next life. Hindu, Christian, and Muslim religious dignitaries also said prayers.

Iain Douglas Hamilton, the leading expert on African elephants, in a message said that "With this action Sri Lanka is sending a strong message to the world that ivory should be without worth; elephants have value when alive. This is a critical message to send particularly to the religious world, as they are sensitized about the threat religious ivory poses to elephant populations in Africa. Sri Lanka's destruction of this ivory stands against this heedless destruction of the sentient beings I have studied for 50 years."

Both the males and females of the African elephant carry tusks. In comparison, only male Asian elephant have tusks and that to in varying percentages in different countries. In Sri Lanka only 7% of the males carry tusks whereas, just across the Palk Straights, in South India 98% of the males have tusks. In North India tuskers are much less at 27%. The percentages of male tuskers vary in the other eleven countries where the Asian elephant ranges.

Reflecting on the ivory crushing event, journalist Sadhana Senanayake says "I felt immensely proud that we were making such a statement, especially as many ministers and religious leaders were encouraging the ethical treatment of animals and explaining why this was important. I was reminded of Arahata Mahinda's conversation with King Devanampiyatissa when he tells him that, "Oh! Great King, the birds of the air and the beasts have an equal right to live and move about in any part of this land as thou. The land belongs to the people and all other beings and thou art only the guardian of it."

She continues "As a country that prides itself on the proper practice of Buddhist principles and values it is still saddening to see that we don't really practice what we preach. Since Sri Lanka has taken such a firm stance against the killing of elephants worldwide, maybe it's time that we start to looking into the protection and ethical treatment of our own elephants, as Arahata Mahinda said, "The beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath – for what is man without beast".

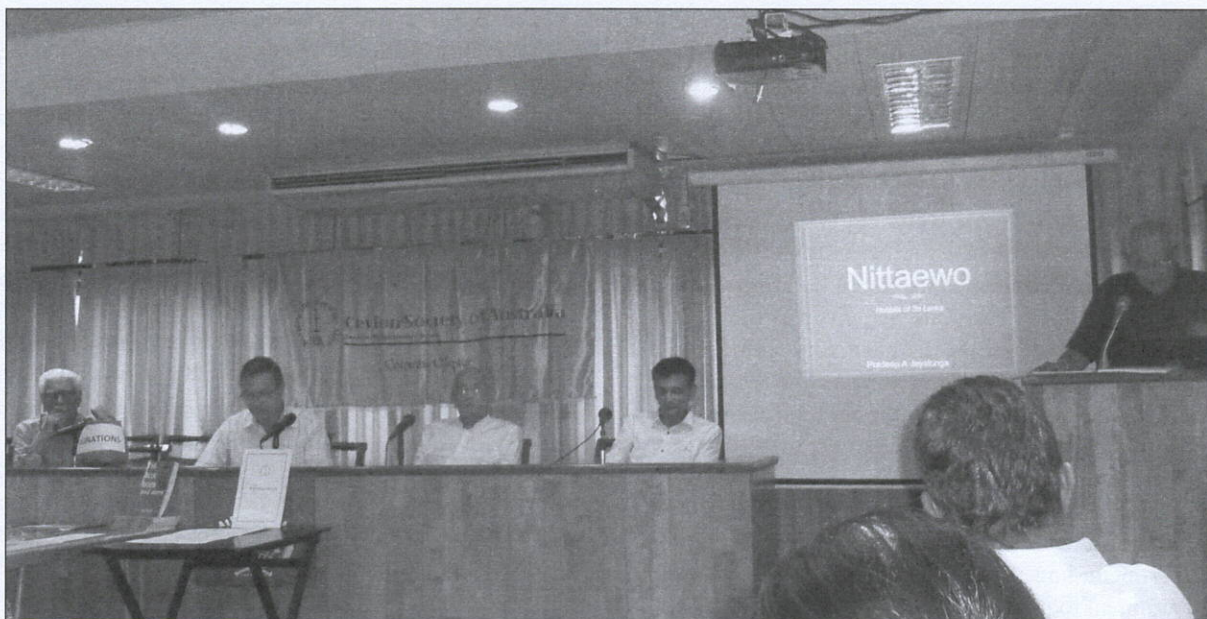
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## **How to become a Member of the CSA...**

Who can become a member of the CSA? Any person with an interest in the history and heritage of Ceylon/Sri Lanka and wishes to share that interest with like-minded people worldwide is welcome to seek membership. Younger members of the community are specially welcome. **Annual subscription is A\$30 (Pensioners & Students in Australia A\$20).**

Please contact any of the following for further details: In **Sydney**: Contact: Treasurer Deepak Pritamdas P.O. Box 489, Blacktown NSW 2148 Phone: 0434 860 188 Email: deepakpsl@yahoo.com In **Melbourne**: Contact: Convenor Hemal Gurusinhe Phone: 0427 725 740 Email: hemguru@hotmail.com. In **Colombo**: Until further notice members are requested to deposit subscription money/cheques at a HSBC ATM machine or transfer to the HSBC electronically. The information you require is for ATMs: Account Name: Ceylon Society of Australia, CSA Account Number- 008-044109-001 - e Transfer above plus: HSBC Swift Code- HSBCLKLX Annual subs: LKR3000.00 Contact: Treasurer M.Asoka T.de Silva Phone 2822933 (Mob.) 775097517 Email: matdes@sltnet.lk





• Above from left: Asoka de Silva, Tony Saldin, Tissa Devendra, Pradeep Jayatunge and Somasiri Devendra at the podium.

#### SYNOPSIS OF MEETING

##### Colombo Chapter

4 March 2016

##### Mr Pradeep Jayatunge, Attorney-at-Law

The welcome address was given by President Mr. Tissa Devendra and Past President Lt. Cmdr Somasiri Devendra introduced the Chief Guest Mr. Pradeep Jayatunga as an Attorney-at-Law who holds a Diploma in Archaeological heritage and who has written papers on “Nittaevo - the Hobbits of Sri Lanka”, “The Leopards of Lenama, the man-eaters of Sri Lanka” and “Wolvendhal” – an etymological study.

Pradeep Jayatunga narrated that Hugh Nevill, a British civil servant and an extraordinarily versatile scholar, was the first to publish an account of Nittaevo in the journal *The Taprobanian* in 1886. His first informant was a Mudaliar De Zylva and subsequently Nevill mounted his own expedition in search of the legend. A villager told Nevill that Nittaevo were bipedal, half-beast half-human creatures covered with long red hair and having long sharp nails which were used as weapons against Veddhas. They had no language and were enemies of the Veddhas who subsequently exterminated them by trapping them in a cave and setting fire to the mouth of the cave. However, another group, including two Veddhas told Nevill that Nittaevo were a savage cruel dark race of men speaking a language similar to Telegu. They lived in tree houses and were exterminated in the same manner as the earlier account.

Mudaliar De Zylva says Nittaevo had bear-like fur and long nails, big heads and bull like faces. They had a leader, were adept at climbing, and their language was understood by some Veddhas. According to him there were similar legends in Yakkure, Pomparippu and Thanthirimala.

Frederick Lewis investigated the legend in 1914 and he was told that Nittaevo had monkey-like hairy legs, eagle-like sharp talons, bird chatter like language understood by Veddhas and feared dogs, buffalos, bows and arrows. The extermination story was similar to the previous one and Lewis was told it happened 150 years ago.

R.L.Spittel, S.J.Kadiragamar and A.Rambukwelle who investigated the legend heard similar stories. Most of the writers analysed the previously published material and put forward theories.

Ven. Thambugala Anandasiri who lived in the area for over 25 years, found some new material. According to what he had been told, Nittaevo were 3-4 feet tall, were bipedal, had bear-like long nails and black fur and they feared dogs and buffalos, used nails as weapons, killed and ate Veddhas and stole their food. The extermination story is more elaborate. Veddhas used decoys to find the lair of Nittaevo, attacked them, trapped six survivors in a cave and burnt most to death and killed two escapees subsequently.

There were a few reported sightings of alleged Nittaevo in 1970s, 1980s and 2010. However, people tend to use the term Nittaevo for any short mysterious humanoid, some of them supernatural in nature – in various legends prevalent in most parts of the country. What is unique about the Nittaevo legend is that it is very matter of fact and entirely free of supernatural elements.

All over the world there are legends of mysterious humanoids – Bigfoot or Sasquatch of America, Yeti or Abominable Snowman of Himalayas, Alma of Central Asia and many more. Because of hoaxes and sensationalism of these stories, serious scientists are wary of the subject. In addition to



these, there are supernatural legends as well – fairies, leprechauns, wamanas, mittos etc.

Orang – Pendek of Sumatra and Ebu Gogo of Flores seem to be the closest to Nittawo in description. In 1980s, Gregory Forth, a Canadian anthropologist, researched Ebu Gogo in the Indonesian island of Flores. According to the legend, Ebu Gogo were neither monkeys nor men, bipedal, long armed, short and enemies of villagers. Villagers tricked them and burned them to death in a cave.

In 1984, Forth wrote that the legend may have a basis in fact. In 2003, remains of a 3 foot tall humanoid were discovered in a cave in Flores. *Homo Floresiensis* had unusually long arms, blunt teeth and sharply sloping forehead. Stone tools too were discovered.

Conjectures about them vary: island/insular dwarfism, genetic disorder, new homo species, different genus etc. In any event the discovery gave credibility.

If Nittaewo were a little more human-like, they would have been very similar to Ebu Gogo. In the legend Nittaewo had red/black long shaggy hair and talon-like long sharp nails. However, the second set of informants, consisting of Veddas and a Sinhalese close to Veddas, told Nevill that Nittaewos were a savage cruel race of MEN. When inquired about long hair and nails they said the ignorant villagers had confused the legend of Nittaewo with stories about the rare brown bear, both of which had not been seen by the villagers.

A skin and a skull of a brown bear found near Trincomalee in 1855 is in the Paris Natural History Museum. Hugh Nevill (1855) and Henry Parker (1887) mentions it to have been reported from Kumbukkan Oya, Menik Ganga and Padawiya respectively while C.W. Nicholas (1952) says it had been seen in Yala North.

The researchers/scholars have speculated that Nittaewo were -

- monkeys/apes, sloth/brown bears Neanderthals / Pithecanthropus/Austrolopithecus or any other similar species

- Homo Floresiensis, Homo Sapiens – primitive/outcast/mutant/pygmy/Negrito

- a case of mistaken identity or a figment of imagination.

However, if Nittaewo were simply a race of savage men, as Nevill's Veddas clearly told him with a plausible explanation for the strange part of the legend, they would have been –

- a primitive clan

- an outcast group

- a different member of the genus Homo or probably a different genus.

In any event, they would have been human or similar to human and not some fantastic monkey-bear-human creature. However, the legend becomes sensational with those fantastic characteristics. If

Nittaewo were merely human, the story would not have spread and gained popularity. So, in time, the half beast - half human legend would have made the real or plausible explanation disappear. Even the later generations of Veddas, either intentionally or unintentionally, would have adopted the more popular legend.

Finally, the legend of Nittaewo seems to be quite localised and not a widespread phenomenon despite the fact that people tend to use the name Nittaewo for various legends of short humanoids. It was most probably the story of a conflict between a clan of Veddas and a savage tribe competing for same hunting grounds which ended with the Veddas finding a lasting solution.

A lively question and answer session followed after which Hon'y Secretary Tony Saldin proposed the vote of thanks.

– Tony Saldin



## Conversations between pilot and control tower

**A Pan Am 727 flight, waiting for start clearance in Munich, overheard the following:**  
**Lufthansa (in GERMAN):** “Ground, what is our start clearance time?”

**Ground (in ENGLISH):** “If you want an answer you must speak in English.”

**Lufthansa (in ENGLISH):** “I am a German, flying a German airplane, in Germany. Why must I speak English?”

**Unknown voice from another plane (in a beautiful BRITISH accent):** “Because you lost the bloody war!”

.....

**Tower:** “Eastern 702, cleared for take-off, contact Departure on frequency 124.7”

**Eastern 702:** “Tower, Eastern 702 switching to Departure. By the way, after we lifted off we saw some kind of dead animal on the far end of the runway.”

**Tower:** “Continental 635, cleared for take-off behind Eastern 702, contact Departure on frequency 124.7. Did you copy that report from Eastern 702?”

**Continental 635:** “Continental 635, cleared for take-off, roger; and yes, we copied Eastern... we’ve already notified our caterers.”

.....

**A student became lost during a solo cross-country flight. While attempting to locate the aircraft on radar, ATC asked, “What was your last known position?”**

**Student:** “When I was number one for take-off.”





**SYDNEY  
May 2016**

The second CSA general meeting for 2016 will take place on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May at the Pennant Hills Community Centre, Ramsay Road, Pennant Hills NSW 2120. Please note the venue: Ramsay Road is off Yarrara Road and the Community Centre is opposite the Pennant Hills Railway Station. The entrance to the building is from the car park at the back of the building. Members and guests are welcome.

The guest speaker of the evening is  
**Dr. Palitha Ganewatta** who will speak on

***'Dr R. L. Spittel, the Surgeon of the Veddas'***

Dr. R. L. Spittel, the surgeon, anthropologist, wildlife conservationist and author as well as a foremost authority on the indigenous people, Veddahs in Ceylon.

Dr. R.L. Spittel was to be their champion and through his unstinting efforts did much to help them.

His greatest works of healing were probably in the jungles, earning him the tag "surgeon of the wilderness." Often he would perform emergency operations under the most difficult of conditions. His intensive treatment was almost completely to cure the people of the Vanni of venereal disease and malaria. In every corner of Ceylon he became famous for helping the Veddas and other remote village communities.

His interest in wildlife led him to crusade tirelessly for the conservation of the fauna and flora of then Ceylon.

He was as proficient with his pen as with his scalpel. His vast knowledge of Ceylon, gathered from his exhaustive travel and voracious reading, found expression in a number of excellent anthropological books and historical novels, which gained him an international reputation as an author.

Dr. Palitha Ganewatta, an old boy of Richmond College, Galle, has obtained his Master's degree & PhD from Moscow Friendship University & worked in horticultural sector in Sri Lanka until his migration to Australia in 1992. Palitha has been working as Broadcaster/Journalist at SBS Radio (Special Broadcasting Service of Australia) since 1992 & was the Executive Producer of Sinhalese Program until 2013.

He has published 10 books to his credit; among them were two translations of short stories of Anton Chekov, the Great Russian writer.

He is actively involved in Sri Lankan community activities in Sydney & was appointed a JP for NSW since 1999.

He is a full time employee of the Federal Department of Agriculture.

The usual discussion and question time will be followed by a social.

**COLOMBO CHAPTER  
3 June 2016**

**Mr. Ravibandu Vidyapathy**  
will speak on

**"The Evolution of Sri  
Lankan Dance costumes  
and Somabandu  
Vidayapathy"**

Commencing at 5.30pm

Venue: Organisation of Professional  
Associations (OPA)

275/75, Prof. Stanley Wijesundera Mawatha,  
off Bauddhaloka Mw, Colombo 7

Contact: Tissa Devendra, (President) e-mail:  
tisdev@sltnet.lk 011 250 1489

M.D. (Tony) Saldin (Hony. Secretary  
e-mail: saldinclan@sltnet.lk +94 777

363366/2931315 (Res), 2936402 (O)  
Asoka de Silva (Hony. Treasurer) email:  
matdes@sltnet.lk 011 2822933/ +94 775  
097517



Books from the CSA library are available for borrowing by members. Some of these books have been donated by members and friends out of their goodwill and kindness, while some others are donations from authors who have held book launches to promote their books at CSA general meetings. While a complete list will be published for the information of members from time to time, please note that only new additions will be listed on a regular basis as and when books are received.



## Important notice to our contributors!

*The Ceylankan* is a quarterly publication that is much-looked forward to both here in Australia and worldwide. The Editor is constantly on the look-out for literary contributions from our members and others. Contributions are given careful consideration with a view to publication at all times.

While original, previously unpublished articles are preferable, submissions relating to the culture and history of Ceylon/Sri Lanka in keeping with the ideals of the CSA and are of a non-racial, non-political, non-religious and non-controversial nature are always welcome.

We look forward to hearing from new writers with a passion for the study of Sri Lankan culture and heritage. You do not need to be a professional writer – even work from someone who has not previously put pen to paper with a view to publication will receive careful attention. Who knows, an enormous treasure of hidden literary talent with a vast knowledge of Sri Lanka may be waiting to be aired. What better vehicle to do so than through your own journal. Write down those hidden memories of life in the motherland; the people, the places, anything that you may fondly recall, from whatever era, post-colonial to modern. Your fascinating story, waiting to be written, may well be something our avid readers will lap up with immense pleasure and maybe inspire another aspiring writer.

To facilitate the design/layout, leave your articles with as **little formatting as possible – no indents or double spacing of lines; only single space after fullstops, percent or per cent, not %.** Mere trifles, but adhering to them can save hours of an Editor's time. Where applicable, contributors are also requested to annotate bibliographical references, both for copyright purposes and to help further research and study by interested members.

While every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, we cannot take responsibility for errors. The Editor would appreciate it if any inaccuracies found are brought to his attention as early as possible.

## Books & other publications FOR SALE

This is a regular column for the benefit of members (& others) who author books or have books, maps & other collectibles and would like the Society to promote these materials on their behalf. No charges apply to members, **but donations are encouraged from all using this service.** Regrettably, items can be listed only in three (3) consecutive issues. Please contact the editor for further details.

## JOURNAL REPRINTS

Wish to bring your collection of THE CEYLANKAN up-to-date? Yes you can! Reprints and some back issues of the Journal are available in limited quantities. The cost to members is \$7.50 per copy. Non-members pay \$10.00 per issue. This does not include postage and handling. P&H within Australia is \$5.00; Asia/Pacific \$10.00; rest of the world \$15.00 per package of up to 5 issues. Contact Hugh Karunanayake Int. + 61 2 9402 6342 or [hkaru@internode.net.au](mailto:hkaru@internode.net.au)

All politics, however, are based on the indifference of the majority.

– James Reston, in *New York Times* (12 June 1968.)

## CHANGED YOUR ADDRESS LATELY?

Have you recently changed your contact details – home address, email, telephone number and so on? If so, Treasurer Deepak Pritamdas would like to hear from you so he can update his mailing list and other records. This will help ensure you receive the Journal without interruption.

Contact Deepak on (Mob) 0434 860 188  
Email: [deepakpsl@yahoo.com](mailto:deepakpsl@yahoo.com)

## WE NEED SPEAKERS

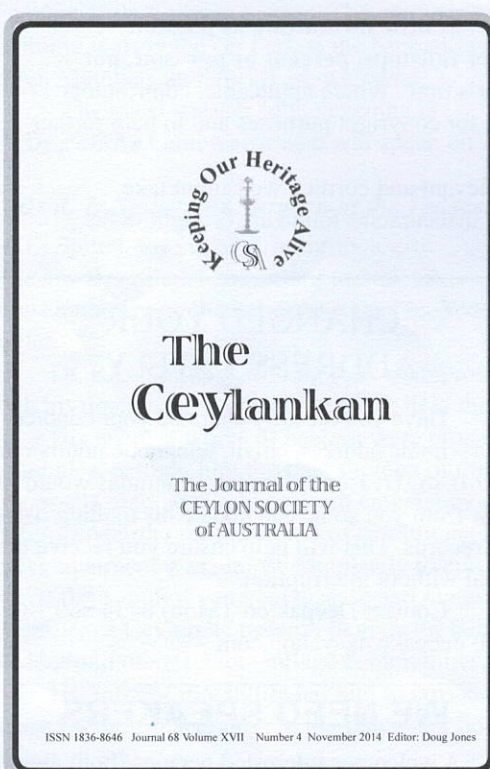
The CSA welcomes interested persons (both members and non-members) to speak at our meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo. Our meetings are held quarterly in February, May, August and November of each year. Dates can be arranged to suit the availability of speakers. Overhead projection and PA facilities are also available.

You may know of potential candidates for speakers from among your family members, among friends or relatives who live in or visit Australia or Sri Lanka.

If you would like to share your knowledge and expertise among a group of like-minded people, please contact our President Thiru Arumugam on (02) 8850 4798 or Hemal Gurusinghe (Mob) 0427 725 740 (Melbourne) or M.D. (Tony) Saldin 22936402 (Colombo) and they will be delighted to forward you with details about forthcoming meetings envisaged and any other information you may require.



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Your nominee will have four quarterly issues mailed to his/her home. Please contact the Treasurer Deepak on 0434 860 188 or email: [deepakpsl@yahoo.com](mailto:deepakpsl@yahoo.com)  
PO Box 489 Blacktown NSW 2148.

A little laughter!

GOALIE

Sandy began a job as an elementary school counsellor and she was eager to help. One day during recess she noticed a girl standing by herself on one side of a playing field while the rest of the children enjoyed a game of soccer at the other.

Sandy approached and asked if she was all right.

The girl said she was.

A little while later, however, Sandy noticed the girl was in the same spot, still by herself.

Approaching again, Sandy offered, "Would you like me to be your friend?" The girl hesitated, then said, "Okay," looking at the woman suspiciously.

Feeling she was making progress, Sandy then asked, "Why are you standing here all alone?" "Because," the little girl said with great exasperation, "I'm the goalie!"

PICKING ON A LATE STUDENT

A college business professor could not help but notice that one of his students was late to class for the third time that week. Before class ended he went around the room asking students some questions about the day's lecture. Of course, he made sure to pick on his tardy pupil.

"And who was it that developed the theories behind communism?" the professor asked.

"I don't know," the student said.

"Perhaps if you came to class on time, Mr. Reebbs, you would know," said the professor.

"That's not true," the student replied. "I never pay attention anyway!"

ANYTHING TO PASS!

A student comes to a young professor during office hours. She glances down the hall, closes his door, kneels pleadingly.

"I would do anything to pass this exam." She leans closer to him, flips back her hair, gazes meaningfully into his eyes. "I mean..." she whispers, "...I would do...anything." He returns her gaze. "Anything?" "Anything." His voice softens. "Anything?"

"Absolutely anything."

His voice turns to a whisper. "Would you...study?"

... Complicated concept! One day our professor was discussing a particularly complicated concept. A pre-med student rudely interrupted to ask, "Why do we have to learn this pointless information" "To save lives," the professor responded quickly and continued the lecture.

A few minutes later, the same student spoke up again. "So how does physics save lives?" he persisted.

"It keeps the ignorant people like you out of medical school," replied the professor.

-Google



## Ammi's gym

This may sound like idle banter, but have we stopped to think how, in those days, when implements such as electric blenders and grinders were unheard of, our mothers and grandmothers toiled daily in the kitchens, pulverising condiments like dried chillies,



coriander, mustard, for making those tempting curries for the enjoyment of loved ones? One minute they worked on the heavy *mol gaha* (pestle) and *vangediya* (mortar) making curry powders and another minute, they would be seen labouring over the *kurahan gala* (grinding stone) pounding rice or millet flour. Then on the *miris gala* (chillie stone) rolling down a chillie paste for a sambol. Perhaps without realising it, maybe, it was such loving labour that gave them the inner strength they always seemed to exude. Didn't need to workout with dumbbells and other irons in some gym. Preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner for their families and loved ones was all the reward they sought.

That's how ammi had her own gym for a workout from time immemorial!

## Signs of the times

### A sign in a shoe repair shop:

We will heel you; We will save your sole; We will even dye for you.

### Sign over a Gynecologist's Office:

"Dr. Jones, at your cervix.";

### In a Podiatrist's Office:

"Time wounds all heels.";

### At an Optometrist's Office:

"If you don't see what you're looking for, You've come to the right place.";

### On a Plumber's truck :

"We repair what your husband fixed."

### On another Plumber's truck:

"Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber.";

### At a Tyre Shop in Milwaukee :

"Invite us to your next blowout."

### On an Electrician's truck:

"Let us remove your shorts."

### In a Non-smoking Area:

"If we see smoke, we will assume you are on fire and will take appropriate action."

### On a Maternity Room door:

"Push. Push. Push."

### At a Car Dealership:

"The best way to get back on your feet - miss a car payment.";

### Outside a Muffler Shop:

"No appointment necessary. We hear you coming.";

### In a Veterinarian's waiting room:

"Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!";

### At the Electric Company:

"We would be delighted if you send in your payment on time. However, if you don't, YOU will be delighted."

### In a Restaurant window:

"Don't stand there and be hungry; come on in and get fed up.";

### In the front yard of a Funeral Home:

"Drive carefully. We'll wait.";

### At a Propane Filling Station:

"Thank Heaven for little grills.";

### In a Chicago Radiator Shop:

"Best place in town to take a leak.";

And the best one for last...;

### Sign on the back of a Septic Tank Truck:

"Caution - This Truck is full of Political Promises"

## The National Emblem of Sri Lanka



The National Emblem of Sri Lanka is used by the Sri Lankan Government in connection with the Administration and Government of the country. The current emblem came into use in 1972.

The emblem features a gold lion passant, holding a sword in its right paw (it is the same Lion that is featured on the flag of Sri Lanka). The lion is in the centre on a maroon background surrounded by golden petals of a blue lotus, regarded as the National Flower of the country. This is placed on top of a traditional grain vase that sprouts sheaves of rice grains that circle the border to denote prosperity.

The crest is the Dharmasakra, symbolic of the highest place given to Buddhism and just rule in the country. Holding up the emblem from below are the traditional Sinhalese heraldic symbols for the sun and the moon.

(exploresrilanka.lk)



## Exquisite Richard Gabriel masterpieces

*“He painted rural scenes such as women bathing by a stream, beach scenes and of ordinary country folk such as fisherman and a farmer tending his animals. He related so much to this time of his childhood.”*

*– Dr Srilal Fernando (See page 19)*



• Two Deer.



• Women carrying pots.



• Thrikkal race – a woodcut.



• The Blue Horse.

(from the book  
“The art of Richard Gabriel”  
by Neville Weeraratne 1999. It is an oil on  
canvas and is from a private collection  
in Colombo.)