

# THE CEYLANKAN

Journal of the Ceylon Society Of Australia Journal Number 13(Vol. IV No.1) January 2001



Editor : David Goodrich

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## EDITORIAL

Our Society is maintaining a steady growth, mainly due, I believe, to the material submitted by members for the CEYLANKAN. In the next issue, hopefully, there will be an index of all the articles so far published. Readers will then be able to refer back to material they may deem interesting but had missed. The index will be listing subject matter by categories: people, wildlife, geography, history, genealogy, etc.

On a personal note, my thanks to the many who sent cards, faxed messages or phoned with best wishes over the past few months during my health problems. They were appreciated. At this stage there has been a large improvement that hopefully will continue. Being editor of this journal gives a real purpose to keep going!

Note the Ad in this edition about entering the Ceylon Society of Australia's emblem competition. The executive would like to make a final decision to enable letterheads etc to be printed.

## OUR LAST MEETING (SYDNEY)

Two interesting presenters, at our last gathering in November, were given a good hearing. Both are writers though their genres are somewhat different. Incidentally, it was our largest meeting so far and there was enthusiastic socializing during the supper period, which as usual was excellent.

Mrs Lalitha Witanachchi spoke of her early life growing up in a household of 6 girls, and life around that time at Bandarewella. She spoke of an upbringing aimed at finding harmony in her surroundings. This influenced her first book "The Wind Blows Over the Hill", first published in 1981. She became a journalist at Lake House, and wrote another book in 1992 which presented some technical problems when getting published.

This proved rather fortuitous, as the book, published the next year, won the Michael Ondaatje prize for short stories which was awarded to books published in 1993 only. Lalitha read an extract from her novel, "King of Hearts".

## 19th Century Images



Kandyan Chieftains

Noel Crusz gave a detailed account of his forthcoming book, "The Cocos Island Mutiny". The many years of research into this little known event, and the subsequent happenings, were detailed, and the book will obviously be sought in January when it is printed. Noel has more than done his homework on this publication, and the years of checking records, both army and governmental, interviews with people who were there at the time, have brought to light a previously unknown event in Sri Lanka's past. His enthusiasm for his work was very obvious in his delivery.

We thank them both for two interesting contributions.

## CSA MEETINGS

Melbourne 11 February 2001 (SUN)

Sydney 24 February 2001 (SAT)

Please see details inside



## THE MELBOURNE CHAPTER MEETING, Oct 2000

The third and final meeting for the year commenced with Dr Srilal Fernando in the Chair. In introducing Victor Melder, the speaker for the evening, Dr Fernando referred to his railway background and connections which gave him unique insights into his subject. Victor's grandfather had worked in the railways and so had his father, who was born in a railway bungalow in Nawalapitiya in 1906. Victor followed in their footsteps and also married into a railway family. It was no surprise therefore that, steeped in railway tradition and lore, Victor fired his audience with his own enthusiasm for, and fascination with, the railways of Sri Lanka.

To begin with he gave us a detailed history of the background to the building of the Colombo-Kandy railway and many significant facts about the actual construction of this important line, from the cutting of the first sod on 3rd August 1858 to the inaugural run of the first passenger train on 1st August 1867. For instance, seventy-five miles of track cost 1,436,127 pounds to build, the human cost being one life lost for every sleeper laid, each sleeper being three feet apart from the other. Accidents during the construction work and malaria, which was always a danger to the workers, were the reasons for this heavy toll of lives.

The second part of the talk was a detailed description of the train journey from Colombo to Badulla. This was an intensely realized journey with a recollection of all the features of the changing landscape, the variety of flora and fauna and different climatic phases that a traveller would experience. We heard about the special characteristics of every town and station that the train passed through: for example, Nanu Oya lying at six degrees from the equator but very cold due to the high elevation and the feral buffaloes who would often seek shelter in the tunnels at Pattipola. All this detail was also enlivened by the humorous anecdotes that Victor related about his own experiences while working on this line. In his thirteen years of being employed in the railways, Victor's favourite stretch of line was Rambukkana to Kadugannawa. If he had the choice, Kadugannawa would be the place in which he would like to live. As he convincingly demonstrated, the rail-

ways did not merely provide a means of employment but a wholly absorbing way of life.

The lecture was illustrated by slides which featured photographs and drawings of all the important elements to which Victor referred. Many of these illustrations had been made available by Dr Clifford Misso, aged 91, a steam train enthusiast himself, who was present in the audience. Of particular interest were the different steam locomotives, one category of engines being named after the different colleges in the country, while another drew its names from Governors of Ceylon. If there is any one 'hero' of the railway story as Victor told it, it was definitely that formidable vehicle the steam engine which sadly, is now supplanted by the diesel engine. As a fitting and moving conclusion to this stirring account of the railways, an audio tape was played of a train taking off from Rambukkanna, the unmistakable sounds of the larger engine pulling in front followed by the equally distinct sounds of the smaller engine pushing from behind. The recording had even captured the sounds of birdsong in a brief section of the track where the engines were comparatively silent.

Fiftyone people were present at this meeting at which books and photographs on the railways were on display. A raffle was conducted, the book prize being won by Mrs Lorraine Anderson. A flyer giving details of Brian Parker's book "The Chinese Camellia" just released, was also distributed. The meeting closed with the usual pleasant tea and general conversation. The Melbourne Chapter is happy to report that its membership is growing at a very satisfactory rate.

Shelagh Goonewardene

## RARE BIRDS ? SRI LANKA HAS THEM TOO!!!

By Rodney St John

Only a bird watcher can understand and appreciate the feeling of tenseness and of being spellbound at the sight of a rare bird. The need to freeze in your stride, being absolutely quiet, and hardly wanting to breathe creates the tenseness. Sighting the bird and focussing on it for as long as it remains in sight, and



hoping it will not disappear, gives that electrifying sensation. Unfortunately in most instances this is short lived, sometimes a matter of seconds, and this is why such birds are rare in the first place. Sri Lanka has its share of rare birds that attract both local and foreign observers, who consider it a challenge and privilege to be able to spot these feathered animals, and to add them to their list of visual 'trophies'. Let us place them in their proper perspective.

The last official checklist of the birds of Sri Lanka, published in 1994 by DP Wijesinghe as part of the Ceylon Bird Club special publication series, listed 425 species. This included 189 species as being migrants, some regular and others vagrants. The rest of the species are classified as breeding residents. It is from amongst the latter that 26 birds are listed as endemic species, and it is from this lot we identify the rare birds. The other resident species are not rare because they can be seen in neighbouring India, and some of them in other parts of Asia and even Europe. The migrant species, especially the vagrants, may be rare to Sri Lankan bird watchers but not so to those of other countries where those species may be found breeding. That is why we identify the rare birds from among the endemic species. My choice of the rarest Sri Lankan birds are:

- 1..The Ceylon Spurfowl (*Galloperdix bicalcarata*)
  - 2..The Green-billed Coucal (*Centropus chlororhynchus*)
  - 3..The Ceylon Warbler (*Bradypterus palliseri*)
- but not necessarily in that order.

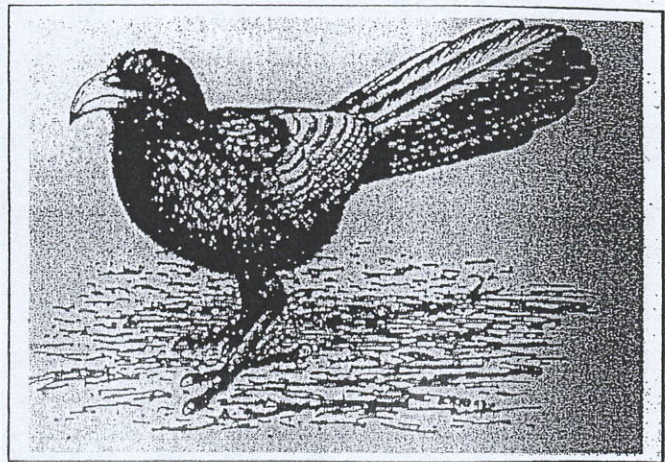
The Ceylon Spurfowl is called *Haban Kukula* in Sinhalese and *Sinna Kattu-Koli* in Tamil. Like the Ceylon Jungle Fowl it belongs to the Order Galliformes and the Family Phasiandae. It is a smaller bird, and the plumage of the male bears no comparison with the



Ceylon Spurfowl (Courtesy :GM Henry, *Birds Of Ceylon* 1955)

beauty of, the male Jungle Fowl. Moreover, whereas the latter is quite likely to be seen and heard, particularly in the National Parks, the former is only heard. Although it is in fact a widely distributed bird in both low and high country, its grey-brown coloration, together with its very shy and cau-

tious behaviour, makes this a very difficult bird to observe. The call is loud and distinctive often making you assume it is very close, and that the bird is likely to appear and be seen. But this is a most un-



Green-billed Coucal (Courtesy GM Henry, *Birds Of Ceylon* 1955)

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# NEXT MEETING!

24 February (Saturday)

Commencing 6.30pm

Willow Park Hall

25 Edgeworth David Avenue  
Hornsby  
Douglas Runmuthugale

will speak on  
'The Story Of Sigiriya'

Followed by a video presentation by  
Dr Harold Gunatilleke  
on  
'Sigiriya'

RSVP to Hugh, Michael or Vama on numbers listed on previous page.

likely scenario. Consider yourself very lucky indeed if you get just a fleeting glimpse of it. Getting a photograph is exceptional.

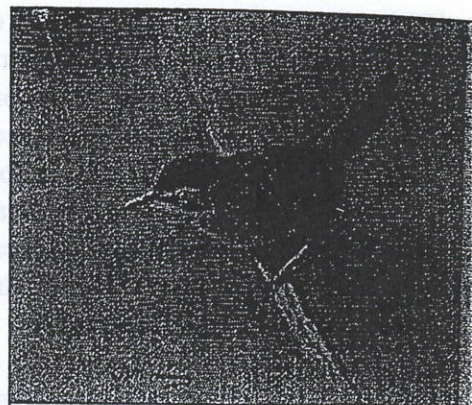
The Greenbilled Coucal and the more often seen Common Coucal or *Ati Kukula*, both belong to the Order Cuculiformes and the Family Cuculidae. The Sinhala name for the former is the same with the prefix 'Wal' added, and the Tamil name is *Chempakam* for both species. The Green-billed Coucal, as the name suggest, has a light green bill which is its distinctive feature. In size it is marginally smaller, and darker in coloration. It is a low country, wet zone bird, and although thus limited in its area, it is very seldom spotted. Often bird watchers on the lookout for this bird wait for its booming call and then move steadily in that direction with binoculars at the ready. But success is minimal. Many an expert bird watcher, local and foreign, has tried, with only the lucky few getting a sighting. As to be expected photographs are rare indeed.

The Ceylon Warbler is the third of the rare

birds but certainly not in that ranking. In fact some may think that this little bird is the rarest of the rare. It belongs to the Order Passeriformes and the Family Sylviidae. A small

brown colored bird, not much larger than a house sparrow, even its call is difficult to anticipate, unlike the previous two species. An alarm call as it scuttles away in the undergrowth is all you can hope for. In the breeding season it does offer a little song, and that is the best chance to set eyes on this bird. Its size, color and shy habit make it extremely difficult to observe. It is a hill country bird and is known to inhabit tea estates as well as adjoining forest. Very privileged is the person who manages to photograph this bird.

There may be varying views as to which of these birds is the rarest. The fact that they are rare birds is amply brought out by the sighting records of the Bird Club. We must hope their habitats will remain intact and that they can continue to provide bird observers with the thrill and excitement of having set eyes on a 'rare bird'.



Ceylon Warbler  
(Courtesy GM Henry, *Birds Of Ceylon* 1955)

## PEARLS

BY  
JAMES MAXWELL

Long has the lustre of the pearl had appeal to the rich and the powerful, the potentates, the monarchs and the maharajahs, etc. And since time immemorial they have been gathered from many places around the world, principally from tropical lands, sea girt, and indeed also freshwater inland sources — as well, as contrary to general knowledge, pearls are not confined to the oceans.

Pearls have provided something of a fillip to the economy of Sri Lanka, noted as they are for their colour and lustre. I have had a fascination for them for many years, having been involved in jewellery making as a hobby, and a few notes about their history, development, etc, may prove interesting to readers.



# NEXT MEETING!

(MELBOURNE CHAPTER)

11 February 2001 (Sunday)

Commencing 5.30pm

Holy Redeemer Church Hall  
Cnr York Street & Mont Albert Rd  
Surrey Hills VIC 3127  
(Melway Ref: 46H10)

Tilak Wijewardene

will speak on  
'The Enigma Of Sigiriya'  
(5th Century Rock Fortress)

Aspects of history, culture, architecture,  
civil engineering. Illustrated by slides

Followed by a video presentation by  
Dr Harold Gunatilleke  
on  
'The Glory Of Sigiriya'

It is difficult to know when pearls became desirable to men (and women). Certainly history refers to them in many ancient writings, including the Bible. Having family links with Ceylon, my interest in the industry caused me to seek information, and I found much has been written. In the Ceylon/Southern India area, the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait have been two of the most highly pearl producing areas in the world and at least 3000 years ago the Tamil kings of Southern India were earning big revenues from their exploitation.

The first recorded item about pearls is in the Mahavamsa, explaining how Vijaya included these jewels in his gifts to his father in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Pliny the Elder, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and Ptolemy in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, both refer to the 'pearl fields' of the Manaar region, even having maps (crude as they might be for the time) with directions as to how reach there. One of

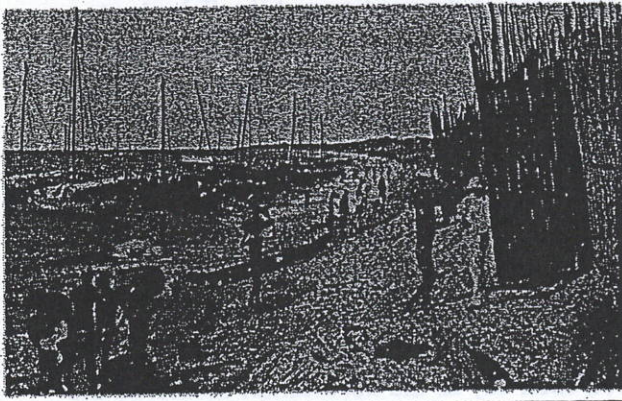
the first precise descriptions of the fisheries is by Marco Polo who visited the Gulf about 1294. He mentioned large numbers of boats stopped there each year April to mid-May at 'Batlelar' (modern Puttalam?), which then sailed about 100 kilometers into the Gulf. Certain regulations were in force at this time including giving 10% of the haul to the king, and 5% to the *abraiaman*, the 'charmer of the great fish', for protection for the divers from watery dangers with his prayers. The prayers had to be renewed each day as the *abraiaman* dissolved the charm at night! Perhaps the standover merchants in our modern society learnt some tricks from history! Obviously a little bit of enterprise!

In 1350, the missionary Friar Jordanus reported the presence of over 8000 boats, under the authority of the King of Kandy, sometimes working for 3 months at a stretch. The Portuguese 'acquired' the region around 1510, and left the fishermen to their own devices with the following provisos: the catch was to be divided into four; one part for the religious leaders, one for the King, one for the soldiers and one for the pearler's own efforts. Seems like a lousy deal for the hard working divers!

In 1524, the Portuguese realised there was conflict between the caste of sea-faring Hindu Tamils, the Parawas, who had always conducted the pearl fisheries under the King of Madura, and the coast Mohamedans, the 'Moormen'. The latter had largely adopted pearl diving as their occupation. The Portuguese entered into a treaty with the Parawas to allow the tribe to work the pearl fisheries in return for protection from the aggressive Moormen. A further stipulation on the Parawas was that they convert to Roman Catholicism. This they did with great zeal and dedication which continues to this day. It seems that the *abraiaman* was not the only shrewd operator in relation to pearls!

The industry had languished for several years before the Dutch assumed control mainly because the Church and State, under the Portuguese, became too greedy and there was little profit for the operators. Of course once the Dutch asserted their presence, more regulations to the industry came into force. The Dutch could see there were many influences in the production of pearls and determined that the industry would be better served by allowing better profits for the fishers. By renting out the management of the fishery to a single individual and not having it run by the Government, was the next big step in improving the industry. This occurred during the Governorship of Baron van Imhoff in 1746.





The Landing Of Pearl Oysters At Mannar Early 20th Century

The British 'takeover' of Ceylon in 1796, brought greater concern for the pearl industry. Too many years would go by when the oyster haul was extremely poor and the Brits actually spent money to research the animal and to draw up new plans for the development of the fisheries. The study (actually there was more than one) took years, and it was not until the first few years of the 1900s that a good understanding of the life-cycle of the oyster was accomplished enabling a constructive financial future to be planned. Of course the Brits only had the welfare of the benign oyster at heart, it had nothing to do with profit!

A Professor Herdman, FRS, was brought to Ceylon in 1902 to investigate everything about the industry, and one of his main discoveries was why, and how, an oyster develops a pearl. It seems hard to believe until this time nobody realised the cause of a pearl's formation was in the majority of cases, the chance deposit of the dead body of a little globular tapeworm larva (less than pinhead size). Sometimes it might be a grain of sand, or something similar, becoming caught up in the flesh of the shellfish and causing an irritation. To combat this aggravation, the oyster covered the foreign body with 'pearl', as a protection. This, of course, grew larger over time as the shellfish put layer upon layer over the original annoyance.

Since then, the industry has changed dramatically; oysters are now cultivated in prepared beds and not at random; and 'irritants' are now placed very scientifically into the oyster at specific times, in specific ways to cause the optimum growth and value of a pearl. No longer is pearl fishing a hit or miss business in which many tonnes of shell might be taken for little return. Today the harvest is far more productive, with most of the very lean years eliminated, though severe seasonal changes – storms etc – can still cause havoc.

The method of 'fishing' the oysters had been unchanged for centuries. Boats would go out into the Strait of Manaar with anywhere from 5 to 10

divers. A typical pearl boat had a master's representative, the *sammatti*; a pilot, referred to as the *tindal*; a *todai*, or water-bailer and provisions man who fed the crew and kept the leaky craft afloat, plus the divers and an equal number of attendants. All these people would come to the designated 'fishing port' after a proclamation had been sent throughout the East in the divers various languages. Usually there was very little as far as accommodation (or anything else as far as I can find out) at this 'port'. These new arrivals, a motley mob at the best of times, pearl merchants, oyster buyers, divers, petty traders, doctors, entertainers, camp followers, coolies and other hangers on by the thousand, would bring their cooking utensils but had to build their own shelter from cadjan – the plaited leaf of the coconut – using local material. Within a week the pearl centre could have a population of 40 to 50,000, totally organised with police, postal, sanitary, medical etc services in place. The centers shifted from place to place depending on where the fishing in any particular year, was being orchestrated.

One of the activities that really intrigued me was, how did the early jewellers actually drill holes in the pearls to enable them to be threaded to make necklaces. I never did find out exactly but believe the jewels were held tightly in a small vice-like clamp – not too hard as that could crush them – and with infinite patience, the drilling process was performed with small hand drills using fine metal bits. My work in this field made me realise the skill of these craftsmen, without having the equipment we have today.

In the old days the diver's day began at sunrise, though the boats left port at midnight in order to reach the beds by daylight, and lasted until midday when rough seas and intense sun shut work down. A diver descended with his catch basket, usually standing on a 40 to 50 pound weight attached by rope to the boat. This took him to the bottom quickly and he made perhaps 7 or 8 descents in about half an hour at which time he would take a break and his partner would do his stint. On each dive they could collect perhaps a dozen oysters in a typical 45 second submersion, mostly holding their breath though a few used breathing tubes. At noon on a signal from the lead boat, diving ceased, and the boats made their way back to shore, usually taking about 3 hours unless the winds were contrary.

Robert Percival's *An Account of the Island of Ceylon* (1803), describes the pearling fleets' tumultuous



return to shore as follows:

*....the multitude of boats returning in the afternoon from the pearl banks, some of them laden with riches; the anxious expecting countenances of the boat-owners while the boats are approaching the shore; the eagerness and avidity with which they run to them when arrived, in hope of a rich cargo; the vast number of jewelers, brokers, merchants of all colour and all descriptions, both natives and foreigners, who are occupied in some way or other with the pearls, some separating and assorting them, others weighing and ascertaining their number and value, while others are hawking them about, or drilling and boring them for future use.....*

It would have been a fun time being around during the fishing seasons during this period. In 1904, pearl-fishing techniques were changed forever with the employment of the world's first pearl-fishing steamships. These could carry 60 or even 100 divers plus heavy, new equipment. Dredges were used to comb the pearl beds harvesting hundreds of oysters in minutes that previously took far longer with the simple diving procedures still being employed. It was also a quick way of destroying large areas of the seabed. Time proved this type of 'reaping the harvest' somewhat suspect.

The size of the pearl banks (there are about 50 in this region) area surprised me. It stretches from the Island of Manaar in the north to the sea between Chilaw and Negombo. Most of the banks (*paars* from the Tamil meaning rocky bottom) are in depths of 5 to 10 fathoms (10 to 20 meters), and the shallow plateau on which they occur, ranges in width from approximately 30 kilometers opposite Arripu in the north, to about 7 kilometers in the south.

Research has shown that pearls produced in oysters under 4 years old are practically worthless, the best developing around 6-7 years. The shellfish generally expires at around 8 years. Most people do not realise there are natural enemies to this animal, particularly around the 10 meter level. Starfish, boring sponges, carnivorous molluscs, hard-toothed fish – rock-fish and trigger-fish among them – octopods and stony-mouthed rays or skates. Also sand, sea-snakes, disease, strong currents, fresh water floods and weeds are all potential influences on the success or non success of a season's oyster fishery. Life wasn't meant to be easy!

Until 1906, when the fishing industry returned to private company control, the Ceylon Government ran the show. The return to the old Dutch and Portuguese control method proved more efficient. Or did it? By 1912 the private company running the Fish-

eries had gone broke and the control reverted to the Government.

Another controversial situation in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was how to market the pearls. It was thought the merchants made too much, but on evaluation it was determined that it really was impossible to estimate the value of the 'crop', and it was left to the market to find its own level, the main reason being the uncertainty of each fishery. Between 1801 and 1926 only 39 fisheries had been conducted. The other years were non-productive.

The future of the industry will always be questionable. With the advent of cultured pearls, the market for the 'real thing' is not as it was, particularly with the cost of labour. And to dredge or dive for oysters to produce millions of shells hoping to find a small percentage containing pearls, versus the cultured type, where the crop can be ascertained fairly accurately with a high returns and totally organised. At this stage (2000) Australia is very well situated. High production in Western Australia is reaping rich rewards. Sri Lanka has not kept pace with the rest of the world in an area they dominated for so many centuries.

There are many books written about the pearl industry, and of course many more with corresponding references. Some of these are listed here:

*The Book of the Pearl*, by Kunz and Stevenson

*Pearls and Pearling Life*, by Edwin Streeter

*The Book of Marco Polo*, by Marco Polo

A typical notice about an impending Pearl Fishing Season:

**THE CEYLON COMPANY OF PEARL  
FISHERS LIMITED  
NOTICE**

It is hereby given that a Pearl Fishery will take place at Marichchukkaddi, in the island of Ceylon, on or about February 20<sup>th</sup> 1907

The banks to be fished are:

(1) The Karativu, Dutch Moderagam and Alanturai Paars, estimated to contain 21,000,000 oysters, sufficient to employ 100 boats for twenty-one days with average loads of 10,000 each per day.

The North-West and Mid-West Cheval, estimated to contain 2,000,000 oysters, sufficient to employ 100 boats for two days with average loads of 10,000 oysters.

The Muttuvaratu Paar, estimated to contain 8,000,000 oysters, sufficient to employ 100 boats for eight days with average loads as before stated:



each boat being fully manned with divers.

(2) It is notified that fishing will begin on the first favourable day after February 19. Conditions governing the employment of divers will be given separately.

(3) Marchchukkaddi is on the mainland, eight miles by sea south of Sillavaturai, and good supplies of water and provisions can be obtained there.

(4) The Fishery will be conducted on account of the Ceylon Company Pearl Fisheries Ltd and the oysters put up to sale in such lots as may be deemed expedient.

## LETTERS



Dear Editor

I am seeking information on EV Lucas.

J.P. de Fonseka of venerable memory and close friend of GK Chesterton was my English teacher at St. Joseph's College, Colombo. One of his erudite English quotations was about the Chatham St. junction lighthouse. E.V. Lucas (1868-1938), he said, saw it as a unique structure for in addition to being a Clock tower at a city cross-roads, it was a Lighthouse as well, and even served as a podium for a traffic policeman. I suspect many of us living in Colombo never realized the uniqueness that Lucas perceived in the building. So struck was E.V. Lucas by this structure that he included a reference to it in one of his writings. I have been unable to track down the reference source in any of the Lucas books I have consulted. I am hoping that the readers of your informative journal might be able to help. I am also interested in the history of this unusual building. When was it built? by whom? I suspect many of us living in Colombo did not look at this structure in the same way EV Lucas did when he visited this city years ago (or so I believe). Its history might help to narrow the chronological search for the E.V. Lucas reference.

E.V. Lucas was an essayist, anthologist, poet, journalist and an authority on Charles Lamb. Some of his books are: *A Book of Verses for Children*... 1897, *The Open Road* (travel book?)... 1899, *A Wanderer in Holland*... 1905, *A Wanderer in London, Roving East & Roving West*... 1919, *Encounters & Diversions*... 1924, *Travellers' Luck*... 1930, etc, etc... many listed in Twentieth Century Authors.

I live in England and my email address is: percy@compuserve.com  
Percy Ratnanather

## IN REPLY

*The clock tower was built in 1857. Apparently the idea of such a building had been mooted as early as 1815, nothing being done then because of the considered more important tasks of building roads and bridges. Most of the construction being done at that time was by the military Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Corps. The site was chosen in 1850 at the intersection of Queens and Chatham Streets, mainly because it was the highest point within the Fort of Colombo. The original design was based on suggestions by the wife of Governor Sir Henry Ward (1797-1860). The revolving light was visible up to 17 miles away, first kerosene, then gas and finally electricity (from the early 1900s) being used as the illuminating agents. The Tower has been the feature on literally hundreds of various postcards over the years. It is approximately 130 feet high. Perhaps other readers can expand the details here – who were the builders? how long did it take to build? what are the details of the interior? But more importantly, can anybody help with the poem or essay by EV Lucas?*

Dear Editor

When watching TV recently, and the welcoming back images to Holland of the Dutch Olympic team, I was reminded of a very common practice at weddings in Sri Lanka, certainly amongst the Burgher community, that had been enacted for generations. The two stars of the Dutch swimming team were both carried by welcomers and tossed into the air a few times (naturally they were caught as well!). When I was married about 20 years ago, this practice was enacted at most weddings with the bride and groom as part of the ritual, to the tune of "For he's a jolly good fellow". (I guess if the bride and groom were in their dotage there would have been some constraints!). The question I pose is: is this a common practice in Holland, and, was my participation in this ritual, something that had been passed down for generations from the early Dutch immigrants (with a little British addition with the song)? Maybe some of the older generations could enlighten me.

Frederick D Prins  
St Clair, 2759

Hello David,

What an excellent publication "The Ceylankan" is! I really look forward to its arrival. Thank you to you for all your hard work. Would it be possible to place



a request for information on The Hill School, Nuwara Eliya? I was a pupil there for a short time between 1942 and 1943, when I was about 6 or 7 years of age. I would like to know about the history of the school and its purpose. I have been told recently, that it was an orphanage and that many of the children were sent from there to Australia.

Thanking you in advance,

*Windsor Morris*

*An article about this school would be printed in these pages if someone would like to write one ....Ed.*

Dear David

I was fascinated by Tissa Devendra's article on Lionel Felsianes. I can remember him very well as the dapper, well groomed lad, who was taught by my father at St Peters College. Lionel's hallmark was a birthmark on his chin; the girls were tantalised by Lionel's charm and I can well imagine the pressures he had in the Theological College in Bangalore. My father, Michael Crusz, liked Lionel very much, and taught him mathematics. Dad had special lessons during holidays for students who were weak in maths. These were given free of charge. Lionel Felsianes was a good cricketer. Here was a man of God who saw speed and sex as God-given!

...Noel Crusz

## DID YOU KNOW ?

There are 5 main varieties of coconuts palms.

The palms appear to grow taller in Sri Lanka than anywhere else in the world particularly along the coast. The word copra, comes from the Sinhalese word *Kop-perah*.

In the 'old' days – the early 1800s or so – most parts of the coconut tree were used for medicinal purposes. Whether they were as efficacious as the practitioners who prescribed them claimed, is not really known. Try the following:

...A powerful oil extracted from the bark was employed as a liniment in cutaneous diseases, provided the principal diet of the green coconut was adhered to closely. An ointment prepared from the kernal was a certain cure for ringworm.

..The root of the coconut was used by native doctors for treating intermittant and remittant fevers. Small pieces were boiled with dried ginger and *jaggery* – a course brown sugar made from toddy, made from the juice produced by the coconut flower – and taken regularly by patients. The same mixture was used as a gargle, mixed with the oil of the nut, and gave relief for pustules of the mouth or glands of

the throat.

..Haemorrhoids were treated with the expressed juice of the leaves, mixed with fresh oil of the nut and taken internally.

..For ophthalmic complaints, the external application of the expressed juice of the nut, mixed with new milk from cow or goat, mitigates and sometimes removes inflammation.

..The juice of the flower, being extremely astringent, acts like alum on the inside of the mouth, and mixed with new milk was used to relief Lues Gonorrhea. Sometimes it was claimed to cure the complaint.

Ceylon was often confused in the early 1800s in common parlance, with the West African country of Sierra Leone because of a neglect to correctly enunciate the last syllable of the latter country.

On 12-7-1797 occurred Ceylon's first fatal traffic accident. Colonel Peter Bonneraux, Commander of the Garrison of Colombo, was killed when his curricule overturned when driving through a gate of the Fort. A curricule was a 2 wheeled vehicle with a pole and crossbar, generally pulled by two horses abreast.

A palauquin was a carriage that required 13 bearers. Four at a time carried the passenger for a quarter of an hour, then were relieved. The thirteenth, was there to carry the utensils.

Cholera appeared in Ceylon for the first time in 1818.

## AND NOW THE INTERESTING FACTS!

Elephants cannot jump. Every other mammal can. *Just what you wanted to know!*

The most common name in the world is Mohammed. More people are killed annually by donkeys than die in air crashes. *How many donkeys are killed in air crashes?*

The very first bomb dropped by the Allies on Berlin in World War II killed the only elephant in the Berlin Zoo.

A 'jiffy' is an actual unit of time for 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second.

An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain. *Humans sometimes have eyes bigger than their stomachs!*

Humans are the only primates that don't have pigment in the palms of their hands.



## AN ELEGY FOR SIRIMAVO

*Fast tracking backward in the realm of Time  
Some three quarters of a century and more,  
A new, big and sturdy girl comes to mind,  
Dwarfing a rather slight six year old  
Three years older, much taller and hair longer,  
But a smiling face, kindly and bright,  
Was not so intimidating as to make me falter,  
Hence, becoming friends seemed just right.*

*Jumping classes together, year after enjoyable year,  
From lowly Second Standard to "Cambridge Junior"  
For some time we shared life in school as boarders.  
We were the first Girl Guides - brave pioneers  
Of our school's Twenty-first Colombo, Company,  
Of which she was the flag bearer at Jamboree,  
I, her Second in the first Kingfisher Patrol,  
Later, guiltily deserting her with study no goal*

*While the academic path successfully I did plod,  
In the field of womanly arts, zealously she trod.  
Though at school, like Churchill, she won no medals of gold,  
What the stars portended at her birth, 'twas told.  
And surely in the aura of her countenance as she smiled,  
That she would leave her mark in history, signified.  
As usual at that time for both of us came marriages,  
Blurring for a while school-time friendship's edges.*

*Her brilliant marriage was but the first stepping-stone  
For her meteoric rise to the halls of glory and fame  
No Sri Lankan woman ever reached before, just she alone,  
The world's first woman Prime Minister of acclaim,  
Who single-mindedly achieved the zenith twice more  
And mighty proud were we of our old mate from school,  
From those dizzy heights she never forgot her friends of yore,  
Often joining us in snatched time from a tight schedule*

*Goodbye, my friend, doughty politician no doubt,  
But always true to what friendship is all about.  
For Sri Lanka's political fortunes so tumultuous  
You did your best, as you saw fit, despite fears,  
Which left your once robust health in such a state  
Seeing its cruel ravages brought us near to tears  
Freed from this incorrigible, nigh unsolvable blather  
Enjoy now Nirvana's bliss and peace forever*

*Decima Perera*

*E. Ringwood, Victoria*

*(Written on behalf of our still lingering Bridgetian  
classmates and boardingmates)*

## A SUBALTERN'S LIFE IN THE INTERIOR OF CEYLON IN THE 1820's

*This appeared on the internet recently, and as it pertained to the history of Ceylon and is a rare insight into the early days, it seemed appropriate to include it in our Journal. The article reads as follows:*

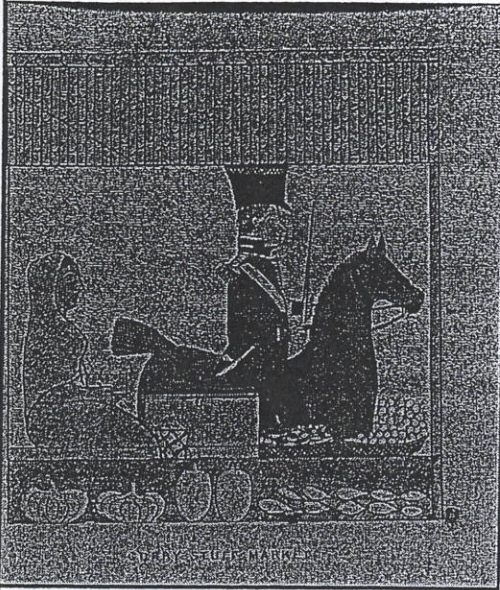
"About a week ago I mentioned stumbling across an over-priced book which I claimed reproduced extracts from the "journal" of a young regular British army officer who was posted to the garrison at Kandy (in south/ central Ceylon) in the mid-19th century. I went back the other day, and had another look at the book -- and bought it, despite the outrageous price. In fact, it was not his journal, but a paraphrasing of a letter he wrote to a fellow officer, describing his life in Kandy. Nevertheless, it does, I believe, provide an interesting insight into what peacetime garrisoning life involved for a junior officer, in a remote station like Kandy. Because of this, (and because I need an excuse to try out my new optical recognition software ;-)) I have reproduced it in toto, below. The bibliographic data is:"

Lieut-Colonel James Campbell, "Excursions, Adventures, and Field-Sports in Ceylon; Its Commercial and Military Importance; and Numerous Advantages to the British Emigrant", Volume I, (T. & W. Boone, 29 New Bond Street, London: 1843), pp.116-20.

Note: Lt-Col Campbell is described in the preface as: "Formerly of the 48<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Regiments, and for several years Commandant of the Districts of Galle and the Seven Korales, and Judicial Agent for the Government of Ceylon". The "Seven Korales" is the district to the north-east of Colombo, very roughly corresponding with modern SL's "North-West Province".

The theme which runs through the following extract is perhaps best summed up in one of its concluding sentences: "he (the subaltern officer) has plenty of time for contemplation". The lifestyle described as prevailing in this isolated out-post of Empire seems far from arduous, although perhaps a bit tedious (or even boring), by modern standards. The reference near the end to "Robinson Crusoe", is in itself, I believe, instructive. I would also highlight the fact that the lifestyle relayed via the letter contains very few overt references to what I think most





A Subaltern At The Market In The  
19th Century

of us would describe as a "military" existence.

The following terms appear in the extract.

Caffre = black African

Parsee = follower of the Zoroastrian religion

calico = a form of cotton  
Sir Edward Barnes =

and drinking he is not by any means to be pitied.

He is obliged to deny himself the pleasure of reading much at a time, lest he should get too fast through his very limited supply of books; and as everything has to be carried up the country to him, a distance of about eighty miles, by coolies, the weight of books becomes a serious matter.

His principal amusement, as he is but little of a sportsman, is the cultivation of his garden, in which he grows potatoes, and various kinds of vegetables but what he chiefly prides himself upon is that he can sometimes treat himself to a well-rounded cabbage, raised from Cape or English seed. He represents the scenery around him to be both wild and beautiful, and he has plenty of time for contemplation. Some of his amusements are even boyish and laughable; such as pelting sticks and stones at the large bearded monkeys that often stare at him in surprise from the tops of lofty trees.

While he thus impertinently contrives to irritate them, which it is not difficult to do, they, in revenge for the insult, throw down at him cocoa-nuts, by which means he can usually command a supply. Those mischievous and determined plunderers, the jungle-crows, also amuse and plague him, as they boldly enter his room, stare and caw at him; and then, before he can prevent them, snatch away any thing on which they can lay hold. Their plunder they often carry to the tops of trees, to which he, or a Kandyan, has to ascend, to recover the articles which the barefaced thieves have stolen.

Though he always takes good care to be provided with loaded fire-arms, and to be fully prepared for whatever may happen, he is constantly at night roused and really seriously alarmed by the wild elephants, which have the presumption to come even to the door, and attempt to pull down the cocoa-nut trees, which grow around and even hang over his sylvan abode; thus threatening him and his people with instant destruction. But, besides the tops of the cocoa-nut palms, another strong temptation, which they cannot withstand, is the produce of his garden, especially his cabbages and lettuces. Of these they are so fond, that he is sometimes literally besieged by the animals; and they can seldom be beaten off, before they have eaten, or trampled under their enormous feet, almost every thing in his neatly kept garden. Upon such occasions, he and all his detachment have to get up, and put them to flight, by firing at them, lighting large fires (the materials for which they have always ready), shouting, and making all kinds of noises. He concludes the account of his situ-

Lieut-Governor of Ceylon 1820-22; Governor 1824-31

Despite the date of publication for the book, this section is entitled: "A Subaltern's Life in the Interior in 1820".

In order further to illustrate the ways or doings of, as well as the life led by, some Europeans in this interesting country, I must treat the reader with a few extracts from a letter, which I have just received from a worthy subaltern, a friend of mine, who commands a post in the interior, where he has been stationed for some time past.

The soldiers he has under him are all Caffres, of the 2nd Ceylon Regiment, except one European, his servant. He tells me he cannot spend money, as nothing can be procured for it from the Kandyans, who seem scarcely to know its use or value. The only expense he incurs, is in purchasing wine, brandy, tea, and sugar, which are sent up to him from Colombo, by a Parsee merchant, every two months. What he gets as rations, and the presents he receives from the kind and obliging people, amply supply his table; and a few minutes walk with his gun, attended by a pariah dog, which he has tamed, enables him to bring home pea and jungle fowl; but if he is at any time very particular, he can without much difficulty, shoot a deer or elk in the forest. The only returns he can make the Kandyans are presents of long pieces of white calico, of which he occasionally gets up several webs from Colombo, parts of which form complete dresses for both ladies and gentlemen, by being simply rolled round their waists, and allowed to hang down to their knees. Yet, without being influenced by such presents, they almost daily bring him plenty of fowls for curries, etc., and eggs, and buffalo milk; so that in point of eating



ation and avocations, by saying, that the attacks of his nocturnal visitors are becoming so frequent, that he fears he must give up his garden; the produce of which is so enticing to them as to be irresistible.

Some subalterns are kept at such stations for perhaps two or three years: indeed, many of them, like Robinson Crusoe, become such "rurals," that when relieved, they greatly regret leaving the solitudes and occupations to which they have become habituated. My friend, however, liked his isolated retreat from the first; but, fortunately for him, he is not without mental resources; and he has now the prospect of being immediately employed by Sir Edward Barnes, as a superintendent of the Kandyan road-makers; and, in order that he may be able to act efficiently and usefully in that capacity, he is busily engaged in studying their language. At present, a narrow, and in many places very wet, foot-path through extensive rice fields and thick jungle, is the only approach to his bungalow; and during the rainy seasons all communication with the head-quarters of the district is frequently cut off by swamps, and a deep and rapid river. To this very country, however, many parts of which are so admirably adapted for agricultural purposes, I may hereafter call the attention of persons wishing to become settlers in Ceylon.

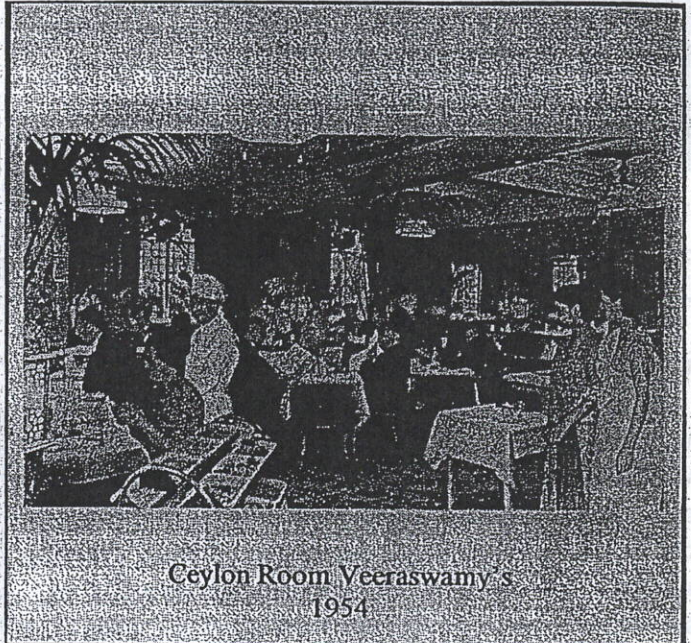
## CURRY GOING DOWN A TREAT IN BRITAIN by Malcolm Abayekoon

When I arrived in London 47 years ago there were about ten Asian restaurants downtown, four of these were Indian. Today there must be well over a hundred in that area. In 1953 there were two Ceylonese owned restaurants in the whole of London and perhaps none outside of the capital. They were hole-in-the-wall places in run down areas. However the food was as authentic as possible considering that the availability of spices was very limited. I remember having to go to drugstores to buy chilli powder which came in containers not much bigger than a thimble! Any Sri Lankan knows it takes a lot more than a thimbleful of the fiery condiment to prepare the sort of curries that we like.

In those days the decor of Indian restaurants was bog standard floral carpet, flock wallpaper, cheap chandelier and a few potted plants. The tablecloths and napkins were usually yellow - I guess that did not show up curry stains as much as white damask would

have done! Most of the waiters were ex merchant navy Lascars from what is now Bangladesh. There were also a few Goanese who had served as stewards on British liners such as those owned by the Peninsular & Orient Line. On the P&O ship on which I travelled the salon staff except the Chief Steward were all from Goa with names like Fernandez or Rozario.

Most of the restaurants had what are now considered boring names, there was the Star of India, Ko-



Ceylon Room Veeraswamy's  
1954

hinoor and of course Taj Mahal. Some restaurant owners still favour those names but now you also find The Last Days of the Raj, The Red Fort, The Bengal Lancer, The Rajput Officers Mess and Clive's Kitchen. The menus no longer consist of just Madras Chicken, Bombay Potatoes and a few other dishes. Now there is so much to choose from including Balti, which apparently is not known on the Indian sub-continent as it is a Birmingham recipe. Brum has come a long way from its stodgy, insipid former grub.

On the menu of one of the present day better class and very expensive places, the extra hot Mysore chicken curry is described as being Tipu Sultans revenge! No doubt after a few mouthfuls of that mouth burner, a liquid coolant is required. I think readers who know about curry would agree that the drink that goes best with it is water, but it might be advisable not to drink it straight from the tap. After a meal at an eatery in Kandv I went down with Rajasinha's revenge, the doctor who treated me put it down to untreated water. Europeans seem to think that wine or beer is a must with spicy food, I am not so sure about that, the mixture can be lethal. I have



heard about people drinking far too much lager with their vindaloo and then misbehaving! Popodoms take to the air like flying saucers, land on other diners and a fight can be the result.

The 1970s saw the British beginning to understand that there is more to a curry than curry powder. By then a number of what has come to be known as Paki restaurants had opened up, very few of these belonged to Pakistanis. Several were owned by people with whom I had worked at Veeraswamy's, John Silva was one of them. A Galle man he had served as a deck hand on ships flying various flags. He told me having been to various ports in America he wanted to jump ship there, but he chose the wrong time to do so. Early December 1941, his ship was heading for Galveston, Texas. Late on December 6th it tied up in the port. The following day we know what happened at Pearl Harbour. As a result of that attack no foreign sailors were allowed ashore. I guess the thinking was that they could be enemy agents. So John sailed away, there was going to be no American Dream for him. In 1944 his ship was torpedoed in the English Channel, he was one of the few survivors, minus part of one finger. Picked up by the Coast Guard he was put ashore in England where he stayed until the 1980s after which he returned to his roots and opened a restaurant. His restaurant in Earl's Court, London, was called the Sri Lanka. That district was also known as Kangaroo Valley on account of the large number of Australians who lived there, most of whom were doing their European journey in Volkswagen campers. By the time John opened his buth kade, spices were easily available, the food he served up was just like what was available in the old country, and there was arrack. I hadn't had a shot of the stuff for many years, and it did not taste the same in London as it did in Wellawatte. Perhaps arrack does not travel well.

It's all very different now. There is a vast variety of oriental food easily available even here in the sticks where I live. In places like Bradford and Southall, you will find streets lined with Asian grocery stores, they sell chilli powder by the sack! It is estimated that there are almost 9000 Indian restaurants from John o' Groats to Lands End, the majority owned by Bangladeshis from the district of Sylhet.

According to a press report, the best Indian restaurant in the world is probably here. The best curry cook certainly is. Earlier this year, Seyd, the head chef of a London tandoori restaurant, beat off competition from all over the world to be crowned 'King Curry'! It is reckoned that 180 million curry meals are served up here each year, and the curry industry em-

ploy more people in Britain than coal mining, ship building and steel manufacture combined.

When beef on the bone was banned due to mad cow disease, someone said there would be a revolution if the government tried to apply the same to rice. They have, however, banned the importation of Bombay Duck, the European Commission having declared the fish unfit for human consumption. Those who know about what this fish thrives on, may agree with the EC, others will pay no attention and continue to eat bombeli.

Tandoori ovens used to be imported from far away places, now they are being manufactured here by, among others, an Irishman. At least two well known brands of Indian beer is brewed here, Indian champagne is available, Asian vegetables are grown under acres of glass and with global warming, there could be paddy fields in Britain in the not too distant future. The Paki restaurant is now as popular as the fish and chip shop or pub.

There is ample evidence to show that ere long there might be more curry eaten here than roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Queen Victoria is said to have been rather partial to curry after having been introduced to this wonderful food by Abdul Karim, her Munshi (interpreter-teacher of languages) and personal servant. If she was still alive, I am sure she would have been pleased to see so many of her subjects enjoying the food of her beloved India.

## TOURING SRI LANKA THE HARD WAY 27 YEARS AGO

by Joe Simpson

*The following diary record was contributed by Joe Simpson, a new member, who taught at Richmond College in Galle, in 1973-4. He and a friend, Dai Churcher, travelled from Galle to Jaffna and back, riding a small motorcycle. Their journey is so descriptive excerpts from the diary warrant inclusion here.*

**Sunday, December 9, 1973 - 11:55 p.m., Amparai, Eastern Province (Dry Zone).**

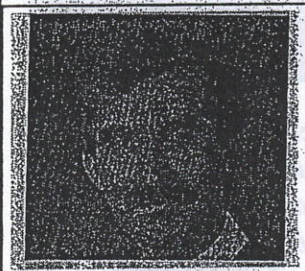
The journey here today has been about 250 miles upcountry, the two of us (Dai and I) on the back of a Honda 90cc. motorbike with one rucksack between Dai's knees as he drove the bike, and the other on my back as I perched on the pillion seat, a precarious arrangement due to the many bumps and pot-holes in the road.



holes in the road.

The coastal part of the route from Galle took us through Tangalle and Hambantota, and then up north through Wellawaya and Monaragala to Amparai, a place which Dai refers to as "the Siberia of Ceylon" as it is so dry, hot and remote. The route however proved beautiful and, owing to the novelty it held for both of us, the hot and dusty journey seemed light. We passed through some especially lovely country along the Wirawila Wewa, where the road runs across shallow inland lakes in which water buffalo soak themselves in the midday heat. Here we stopped to eat a pineapple, while a family from a nearby gama (village) gathered to enjoy the spectacle and I had the thrill of throwing at them the little Sinhala that I've learned, and getting replies that I could understand. (Good humoured threats to "maranawa" and "kanawa" – kill and eat – "punchi lamay" – small boys – won a good reaction from these villagers, who seemed less acquisitive and more "natural" than many of the people one came across in similar circumstances along the much more populous south coast). Later we passed some farmers, fine-looking people hard at work in the sramadan tradition, with even the children up to their shoulders in the water, pushing piles of paddy. Beautiful country, full of colour and very open, with a remoteness that took me back at times to East Africa. Some distance further on we crossed over more lakes at a place called Welliwaya, from where we could see the fringes of the Kandyan mountain ranges in the distance to the north west of the road.

Our adventures during the daytime, such as the time we bit the dust beside a pineapple bazaar in Hambantota and the time we ran out of petrol in the middle of nowhere and I got a lift to the nearest petrol station from a passing English agricultural officer, were nothing compared to our adventures after it got dark. Not only did colliding bugs make motorcycling difficult, but also the road was treacherous. An hour or so after darkness fell, we rode at about 40 m.p.h. round a sharp bend and across a wooden bridge which turned out still to be under repair, but with no warning sign to alert us beforehand; the motor bike wheels only just missed sliding into a six-inch wide gap which ran all the way up the centre between what looked like temporary planks. This near-miss, and the thought of what could have happened to us in such a remote spot



Joe Simpson

had the Honda done a somersault and sent us hurtling off the bridge and into the river rushing below, shook us both badly enough to warrant an unscheduled stop for a cigarette; even Dai, normally a non-smoker, lit up! Soon afterwards we hit some sand on the road at a similar speed, which nearly threw us both off the bike. Again, the local villagers were friendly and helpful.

After eating at the Rest House at Moneragala, we came into elephant country, where the tarmac road ran through dense scrub or "dry" jungle occasionally interspersed with open fields of paddy. At about 8:00 p.m. we caught sight of a single elephant in the beam of the headlight in otherwise pitch-blackness, standing facing us across the middle of the road ahead where it skirted the eastern side of the vast Senanayake Samudra irrigation scheme. This caused us to turn back and retrace our route for about three miles, until eventually the realization that we simply had to continue north towards Amparai made us stop and turn around again. On the way back we met a lorry coming the other way, and were warned by the occupants to be very careful, as this was probably a rogue, separated from the rest of the herd. Soon enough we came upon him again, standing right across the road, chewing grass and apparently quite unconcerned by the beam of the motorcycle headlight. So there we stopped, switched off the engine and stood beside the bike and waited, completely alone except for this formidable creature and a small cluster of buffalo grazing audibly some distance from the roadside, both of us feeling very vulnerable indeed in the lonely silence of the night, with the jungle darkness surrounding us. Shouting at the elephant and bleeping on the horn proved useless, even though we crept forward to within about 30 yards of the beast, me in a state of great nervousness and Dai ready to turn the bike around and make a run for it at any moment – both of us silently praying that the engine wouldn't stall. Dai chose this moment to inform me that some weeks before, a rogue elephant had killed a woman in one of the villages in this area!

After a half hour of mounting tension, with no sign of any departure by the grazing elephant, a local game warden by the name of Christy Wickramasinghe arrived in his jeep, stopped his engine, beamed a powerful searchlight on the beast – and joined me in a cigarette. All attempts to persuade the elephant to move failed, until a C.T.B. bus arrived on the scene from the opposite direction. This proved too great a rival for our friend, who disap-



peared back into the jungle with much angry trumpeting and sounds of crashing through the undergrowth. Christie seized the moment and drove quickly past the spot where the elephant had been standing, while Dai and I rode alongside the jeep on the opposite side to where the beast had plunged into the trees! This accomplished, we gratefully wished our friendly game warden good night and reached Dai's Amparai bungalow without further incident or mishap, at 9:30 that same night.

#### Monday, December 10<sup>th</sup>.

Today we rode to Batticaloa, along the coast road from Kalmunai, and thence on to Chris Owen's project at Chenkaladi. Chris had gone off to Kandy, doubtless in pursuit of the delectable Frances Bill. The Amparai-Batticaloa road ran through some beautiful open country – paddy fields and lagoons. The coastal stretch was particularly entrancing, coming back at night when the full moon was reflected in the waters. The Kalmunai-Batticaloa stretch was treacherous at times because of the small villages where the inhabitants wandered thoughtlessly across the road right in our path. The Rest House keeper at Kalkudah, who was a sleepy-looking, brawny sort of fellow with a friendly way about him, offered us "girls" at 50 rupees each; we told him some cock and bull nonsense story about the "girls" in galle charging only 20 rupees each – "Bohoma lassanay, bohoma honday!" – most lovely, very good! – I informed him in my pidgin Sinhala, much to his immense glee.

#### Tuesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>.

We have just returned from a hike on foot some couple of miles into the jungle behind the bungalow. This was quite an experience, as the scenery was the most beautiful and wildest that I have seen since Kilimanjaro. The jungle – brilliantly coloured in rich, dark greens which are highlighted in lighter shades of green which are almost luminous – bordering on gently sloping banks of light brown mud and sand which run down to the Amparai *kulam* or irrigation 'tank', a giant artificial lake built by the ancient kings of Lanka. For a backdrop there were the western hills, stretching hazy-blue into the far distance. The bund of the lake was covered with the tracks of crocodiles, buffalo and the occasional footprint of a villager. Further on we came across some elephant tracks and fresh spoor (dung), and derived some comfort from the Man Friday-like footprints on top of those of the great elephant! We also saw monkeys seated in a ring on the fringe of the jungle (which led to some sardonic remarks about CTB bus drivers holding a strike meeting), several deer, which immediately skipped

back into the jungle when they spotted us, beautifully coloured birds and butterflies, and a large crocodile at least 14 feet in length which rapidly slid back into the water as the cormorants warned it of our approach.

#### Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.

At approximately 5 am, The Elephant revisited us. This time we got one hell of a fright! He was right up beside the bungalow, and I crept round the corner to attempt a flash photograph...he must have caught my scent because he lumbered about 20 yards away into the dry paddy field next door, then wheeled around suddenly and came after me! A horrible moment, to see the great dark gray shape approaching so close. Around we turned and raced for the front of the bungalow, Dai keeping slightly ahead of me. Just before reaching the front entrance, I slipped in my bare feet on the dewy-damp grass, dropped my camera and broke the camera flash. Perhaps our reactions were exaggerated. Certainly by the time we re-emerged armed with kerosene and firecrackers to scare him off, he had crossed the fence and was munching away noisily among the scrub bushes on the other side.

#### Trincomalee, North Eastern Province, Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Yesterday took us from Amparai to an out-of-the-way place called Muttur, a hard journey owing to the driving north east monsoon rain after we had passed through the small town of Vakarai. We decided nevertheless, to continue along the coast road instead of taking the longer diversion route inland via Polonnaruwa. The last 20 or 30 miles before Muttur were over village roads running through paddy fields and *chenas*, with buffalo frequently blocking our way. Another frequent hazard for the mechanized traveller on the roads here takes the form of villagers and their dogs, who both delight to sit on the tarmac (which retains the heat of the day) to keep their bottoms warm in the relative cool of the evenings.

Eventually, we gave up all hope of crossing China Bay to Trincomalee by launch, as the bike proved too cumbersome to take with us. Instead, we stayed the night at the Muttur Rest House, where we chanced upon one Anura Nilaweera of Koslanda, an alumnus of Richmond College Hostel. After drying off and wrapping ourselves in "space" blankets to stop the shivering, we had a rice meal and conversed with Anura, his cousin Asoka, and another chap who was with them, about the recent Middle East (Yom Kippur) war. They were astonishingly



well-informed, more so than I was, and commented intelligently as Churcher held court! The total cost for the meal and board was 15 rupees.

This morning we set out from the remoteness of Muttur for the even greater remoteness of the "road" to Trincomalee. We had to abandon the idea of going by sea round to China Bay from Muttur when the "ferry" turned out to be nothing more than a dugout canoe! Instead, we took the land route through Kantalai, another very small town some 30 miles from Muttur. This is real peasant country, with hardly a soul to be seen apart from the occasional scrawny village dog or cow and the odd rural villager plodding along on top of his ox-cart, or every so often a village woman soaping herself by a river, modestly clinging onto a sarong cloth wrapped tightly just above her bosoms. The road itself was muddy and covered with potholes after the rains of the last 24 hours, which made for very difficult going, particularly along the jungle strip beyond the junction leading to Kantalai.

The several river ferries that we used were ingenious, each consisting of a flat rail which used the natural current to drive it across. We had a little light-hearted fun with the occasional ferryman, making as if to try for a quick getaway at the far side when they wanted to charge us rupees for the crossing. At one point we virtually had to lift and carry the motorbike up a muddy riverbank, which acted as a ferry "landing stage".

----- We finally reached "Trinco" at noon, and had lunch at the "Chinese Guest House" on Dyke Street, run by -----an elderly Chinese man who had been a refugee from Shantung Province and who had come to Ceylon in 1935, after the Japanese invasion of mainland China. The Guest House (5 rupees a night) has what might be described as a homely atmosphere - the dining room being a ramshackle affair with piled-up chairs, curtains, a large table, and family photographs on the walls - and as it happens has a certain 'reputation' among the locals.

This place is down a dingy and very Moorish-looking side street some distance from the old Dutch Port. The Fort itself is rather like the one in Galle, although much smaller and more dank owing to the presence of several large trees apparently only distantly related to the Bogaha. Its buildings are low, yellow in tone and covered with dampness stains, and the doors are generally oxide-red. A cyclone is forecast for tonight, further out in the Bay of Bengal. Already strong winds are coming in from the sea immediately behind the Guest House.

**Jaffna, Northern Province, 3:00p.m. Wednesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>.**

I have been violently sick here since Monday, some sort of food poisoning after eating a fish meal in an eating house at the northern tip of the Jaffna Peninsula, though I am now almost recovered I have managed to lose 40 rupees, possibly accidentally taken by Chris when he left for Batticaloa, or possibly lost or stolen elsewhere. Paul's bungalow is fine, but our initial reactions to Jaffna are unfavourable, perhaps due to these various misfortunes combined with the N.E. Monsoon weather, which has brought leaden, overcast skies and is lashing the grey sea to a fury up at K.K.S. The food in this area tastes bad, the water is peculiar, and there is a faint, omnipresent smell of decay. We had intended moving south today via Anuradhapura towards Colombo, but weather does not permit.

The Trincomalee-Jaffna road proved interesting, at least as far as the Jaffna Peninsula. After leaving Trinco, we travelled along jungle roads (motorable!) for some 30 miles, stopping on the way to see the Trinco hot springs. These springs have seven different water temperatures in one small area! Further on we stopped again to photograph a small lake surrounded by jungle, which made for a lovely scene, as it reflected the blueness of the sky, with blackened tree stumps protruding from the still, glass-like surface. While I was busily setting up my photograph, Dai said to me very quietly. "Don't panic, just move slowly back to the bike... There's a leopard about 15 feet behind you" Sure enough, there it was, sitting upright in the scrub jungle just off the road, purring audibly. Keeping as calm as possible, we strapped up the rucksack, got on the hike, and cleared off. For the rest of this jungle stretch we passed only fresh elephant spoor on the road, then, some miles from the turn-off to Vavuniya, the motorbike ran out of petrol.... fortunately not in a patch of dense jungle, but in an area of paddy fields and chenas. Eventually, a young boy came along on his bicycle, but at my suggestion made to him in pidgin Sinhala, "*Mama Lanka piri genawa, gihilla enawa*" - "I will go for gasoline and having gone I am coming back". The obviously startled youngster took fright and peddled off to his village as quickly as his wretched contraption would take him! Eventually a passing leather merchant took pity on us and sold us a gallon of gasoline.

*Chena clearing in NE Province Dry Zone jungle - the cadjan-roofed, open-sided hut provides basic shelter for the barely subsisting jungle village farmer trying to protect his crop from birds and wild animals, especially elephants! Leonard*



Woolf's 1912 novel, *The Village in the Jungle*, vividly describes the travails of such jungle dwellers in an earlier era.

Chenas appear to be characteristic of this area. Often you will see a clearing in the jungle, where paddy has been planted among the tree stumps, and a rather wretched looking cadjan (palm) leaf shelter or watch-hut (often without sides) huddles in the middle. I also notice that the Tamil people here in the north differ from the southern Sinhalese in several respects. Of course, the obvious difference is that generally they are darker-skinned and their Dravidian (South Indian) features are sharper and more defined than the softer-contoured, rounder features of the Sinhalese, who originate from northern India. Tamil men, women and children frequently adorn their foreheads with white ash, topped with a spot of paint between the eyes and sometimes on the centre parting of the hair. The lower-caste Tamil women tend to wear sarongs wrapped tightly and very low around their breasts. Often the womenfolk pierce their right nostrils and insert an ornament, and the men sometimes tuck a yellow lotus or similar flower behind one ear. The people here seem to be as fond of hanging around "boutiques" (small shops and cafeterias) as in the south, so perhaps the perception of Tamils as being more "hard working" applies more aptly to those living in predominantly Sinhalese areas such as the Gal Oya.

## SOME MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY NOTES

by Somasiri Devendra

The following might find a place in your columns. It is regarding the VOC shipping, and the "Batavia". As you know, we have been, and are doing important maritime archaeology work in Galle harbour. I have been SL Coordinator since the beginning in 1991-2, and our overseas collaborators have been the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle, led by Jeremy Green, the man who excavated the "Batavia" (Yes, I've seen her twice). We have published several things about the work, namely:

1. Maritime Archaeology in Sri Lanka. The Galle Harbour Project -1992. (Eds. Jeremy Green & Somasiri Devendra) The Central Cultural Fund, The Archaeology Department, Western Australian Maritime Museum & the Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology. Colombo, 1995. ISBN 955-9044-09-5

2. Interim Report on the Joint Sri Lanka-Australian maritime archaeology training and research programme, 1992-3 (Jeremy Green and Somasiri Devendra) The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology. The Nautical Archaeology Society, London (1993) 22.4. pp 331-3

3. Maritime Archaeology in Sri Lanka. The Galle Harbour Project 1993. (Eds. Jeremy Green, Somasiri Devendra & Karen Millar) Report of the Dept. of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum. No. 65. 1993.

4. Report for the Sri Lanka Department of Archaeology on the joint Sri Lanka-Australia-Netherlands Galle Harbour Project 1996-1997. (Eds. Jeremy Green, Somasiri Devendra and Robert Parthesius), Australian National Centre of Excellence for Maritime Archaeology Special Publication No.4. Fremantle, 1998. ISBN 1 876465 06 9

The project is now a tri-nation collaboration, with the Dutch coming in. We have located five Dutch East Indiamen, and about seven 19th century iron wrecks, in addition to Indo-Arab and Mediterranean anchors (one with a possible Carbon 14 date of 1310 AD), Chinese Celadon bowls (matching the dates of Zheng He's visit), clay pipes covering a 2 1/2 century period and even a statue of a Hindu god which someone had been trying to remove from the island (his catalogue no. is scratched on the shoulder!). Much more work to do. I'll send you the stories of the five VOC ships and how they came to be wrecked. Farther east, in the Great Basses (which is being vandalised by various people) we rescued a gun with the marking BATAVIA!

## HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CEYLON SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

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THE CEYLANKAN is printed quarterly. Every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, but we do not take responsibility for errors. The editorial committee would appreciate being informed of inaccuracies. Original material is sought, preferably of an anecdotal, historical nature, but anything is considered provided it equates with the Society's ideals - of being of a non-racist, non-political, non-religious and non-confrontational format.



## EDWARD BLAZÉ OF KINGSWOOD COLLEGE

By J. van Sanden

Edward Blaze was born on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1861. He was educated at Trinity College, Kandy, and received his higher education in India at Calcutta University. From 1885 to 1890, he taught at the Boy's School in Lahor.

In January 1891, he returned to Sri Lanka with a keen desire to start a school of his own and to run it in his own way. On May 4<sup>th</sup> 1891, he founded the Boy's High School with eleven students, which later came to be known as Kingswood College. No such private school existed anywhere in Sri Lanka at that time and he had to labour under the heaviest handicaps to make his dream come true. But his determination and enthusiasm overcame every difficulty.

Blaze would be exceptional in any period. He was extremely versatile and accomplished in many fields. He was an educator with a broad vision, a renowned schoolteacher, an accomplished poet and a pioneer historian. In 1900, he wrote the first comprehensive school textbook on the history of Sri Lanka. For many decades it was the standard history text, and ran into several editions. His most famous literary friend was John Still of "The Jungle Tide" fame.

After serving Kingswood as Principal for 32 years, he retired on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1923. In his retirement he devoted much of his time to literary work, writing articles of historical and biographical interest for the journal of the Dutch Burgher Union, and for newspapers. He died on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1951. The Reverend AG Frazer, a former principal of Trinity College, in assessing the great qualities of his friend and fellow educator wrote: "He was not only one of Ceylon's great men, but a man great by any real standard, one of the Earth's great men".



Edward Blaze

## SOME LESSER KNOWN COMMUNITIES OF SRI LANKA - THE COLOMBO CHETTIES

By V Vamadevan

The Colombo Chetties are part of an ethnic community that forms an integral part of the ethnic fabric of

Sri Lanka. There are references to the Chetties in early history. Desabandhu Reggie Candappa draws attention to Prof Ellawella's *Social History of Ceylon* (1969) and speaks of the Chetties first coming on the scene just after the arrival of Vijaya and his followers. These were, according to him, the maidens Vijaya brought down from Madura. The Chetties were referred to as 'Sethis' in early legends. In later times, Sethis had a role to play in the Royal Courts as Bankers. The term 'Sethi' means a chief of a guild, treasurer, banker or wealthy merchant.

The early history of Ceylon records the names of some Chetties who served King and country with fervour and dedication no less than the other inhabitants of the island. For example one of the Generals who fought against King Rajasinghe was a chief called Sethinatha (Chief of the Sethis). Similarly an important functionary in the court of the Sinhala King in Gampola (1312- 1326) was Nagaram Sithu.

The present day term Chetty in Tamil and English, and 'Hetti' in Sinhala, refers to Chetties. The core community of Chetties in India are from a sleepy village in the heart of Pasumpon Methuramaliya Thevar District close to Madura. In the 3rd Century BC, the Chetties were a respected community and amassed wealth as gem merchants of Sathiyapuri, and lived in and around Kanchipuram. When heavy taxes were imposed on wealth, they moved into the Chola Kingdom. By this time they were so wealthy and influential that the Chola Kings accorded them a red carpet welcome and bestowed the privilege of placing the Crown on the Chola King's head at times of consecration.

The centre of Chola power was Kaveripoompattinam, the Chola Port City, and this is where the Chetties prospered and amassed wealth. The story goes that a Chola King abducted a young Chetty girl. This angered the Chetty community to such an extent that they proceeded to commit mass suicide rather than face the ignominy. This catastrophe left only 502 men who had to marry into the Vellala community. Thereafter they moved into the Pandiya Kingdom and prospered there in what is now called Chettinad. Chettinad comprised 72 villages South of Trichi. After they settled in Chettinad, the Chetties



Colombo Chetty in the 19th Century



were referred to as Nattukottai Chettiers and their Merchant Banking skills are well described in the book *Nattukottai Chettiar -- Merchant Bankers in Ceylon (1973)*, by W.S. Weerasooria.

From traders they became money-lenders and astute businessmen culminating in the success story in India of Annamalai Chettiar, the Raja of Chettinad and the founder of Annamalai University, a citadel of Education in South India. They repeated the same success story when they arrived in Ceylon in larger numbers. In Ceylon, they referred to their business houses as 'Kittangis'.

When the Chetties arrived in Ceylon, they did so at different times. Some of them merged with the Sinhalese and moved into the Sinhala heartland. Names such as Hettiarachchi, Hettigoda, Adhahetty and place names such as Hettimulla, Hettipola, Hettiyamulla are reminiscent of their ancestry and spatial distribution. Many of those who may have changed names subsequent to marriage will find the suffix or prefix 'Hetti', 'Seti' etc in their 'Ge' names. The present day Trincomalee Street fast by the Maligawa in the middle of Kandy, was known in olden times as Hetti Veediya. The reason being this road housed the Chettiers who carried on the trade in Indian silks and supplied the Kandyan Royal Palace. They also received land grants on *Sanasas* for their services to the King. Similarly in the Pettah in Colombo, there is Chetty Street which was the hub of their trading activities.

Of the many who migrated southwards and embraced Buddhism, some have adorned the Buddhist Sangha. Well known among them is The Venerable Soma Thero of Vajiraramaya, Bambalpitiya, who was a Colombo Chetty by the name of Victor Pulle before he was ordained. He was the first to carry the Dhamma to Germany. The Chetty community were all Tamils by race when they arrived from India, and originally devout Hindus by religion. Their benevolence and liberal funding built many of the Hindu Temples in Colombo, Galle, Kandy and Negombo. Many of the charitable institutions like the Vimukthi Niwasa were inaugurated by them, and they are benefactors of several charitable institutions. The orthodox Chetties are strict vegetarians and the mention of meat in their household is as risky as taking Darrel Hair to a Sri Lankan party! (*For those who are NOT cricket fans, Darrel Hair (an Australian) is persona non grata with the Sri Lankan Cricket Board for his determinations when umpiring some S/L matches, particularly those against Australia!*)

Another stream moved to the north and merged with the Tamil residents of Jaffna. This group retained their Hindu faith. Here too they enriched the Peninsula and built many Hindu Temples. A third group remained in Colombo, and, either married into mainly the Burgher community, or took jobs under the colonial masters and converted to Catholicism. Many of them rose to eminence in different fields. The Ondaatjes, Asarappas, Mutukrishnas, Cassie Chetties, Candappas, Anadappas, Babapulles are a few that come to mind.

Besides going to Sri Lanka, the Chetties also went to other destinations such as Burma, Singapore, Indo-China, Mauritius, South Africa and Indonesia. Wherever they went they prospered and contributed to the economy of the host country. By nature they are very frugal and astute businessmen, but when it comes to ceremony and entertainment, they go overboard and their extravagance knows no bounds.

Until the 20s of the twentieth century they prospered and amassed wealth. After the depression of the 1930s they hit hard times. Many of their clients were condemned to paupery and this is when they acquired coconut estates from insolvent debtors. From then on many of them became proprietary planters, while a few acquired rice and coconut mills. Their numbers cannot be properly obtained from the Census Reports because the enumeration does not provide for a separate classification, but their numbers have been estimated at 150,000.

## BOOK REVIEW

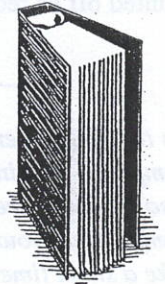
### THE CHINESE CAMELLIA

By: Brian Parker.

Email: <greatunpublished.com> (Title No. 28) 2000

ISBN: 1-58898-027-8

Pages 351. Price: US \$15.00 (Plus Postage).



The author is a founder member of The Ceylon Society of Australia, and those of us who know him consider him a very humorous man. His book, however, shows he can be hilarious beyond bounds. It is about the life and times of a Sri Lankan planter woven into a novel.

The story is about a young man (Rowley) leaving England to take up a posting as a tea planter in Ceylon. To the young creeper (trainee), the PD (Periya Dorai, Superintendent) is like waving a red flag at a bull. The undercurrent attitude of the PD makes his innovative skills as futile as trying to nail jelly on a tree!

The indiscretions and escapades of the creeper punctuate the story. It brings him face to face with the establishment, and he is singled out for rocking the boat. Brian is writing about our times, our country, our people and our familiar haunts and places — the Ceylon we knew. He captures and lays bare vividly, or should I say explicitly, all the sexploitation, exploitation and victimisation of estate labour, those hapless Indians brought by Kanaganis (labour contractors) from South India, on whose sweat of the brow they thrived. In an indirect way Brian has woven the landscape of Estate life, its traditions, the subservience of the estate labour, the snobism of the planters and the sexual antics that makes the book look like its pages have been torn from the Kama



Sutra. There is also mystery, intrigue, treachery and suspense when he sets out to solve the mysterious death of Henry B Blackwell of Dunedin Estate.

Brian was a tea planter in Ceylon for many years and can write with authority because he is on home ground. The book is written in a masterful style. He joins a pantheon of ever growing ex-patriate writers on their homeland. The book has been printed electronically and can be ordered electronically by e-mail to the address: - *greatunpublished.com*

To those not familiar about electronic publications, this web site exists to serve writers and readers free of commercial barriers. The book is printed as a paper back volume only on receipt of the order. Delivery is assured in 9 days in any part of the world. Electronic publication revolutionises the publishing industry for the benefit of writers and readers. Downloading the manuscript on the computer is also possible and costs half the price of the paperback. It can be downloaded onto a computer and then printed off as required.

VAMA

*To the inexperienced, this method of ordering seems very complex – it is in some ways but it is very efficient. Your visa numbers are encrypted, and you have confirmation immediately your order is successfully completed. It might take a short time working out exactly what to do to order, but if I can do it anyone can!!...Ed*

## PROFILE

### OUR MOST SENIOR MEMBER MR. JACK VAN SANDEN

Mr Jack Van Sanden is the most senior member of our association. He turned 88 recently. He is a quiet and modest man and lives unobtrusively in the Melbourne suburb of East Doncaster. But behind this quiet personality is a hard-boiled policeman with over 40 years service in what was then, the Ceylon Police. He has been behind some of the sensational investigations and arrests in his career.

He started his education in the prestigious Kingswood College in Kandy in 1921 and studied there until 1931. He excelled at school in soccer and was Company QuarterMaster in the Ceylon Cadet Battalion, Prefect and school Captain. It is not surprising he was selected into the Police as Sub-Inspector, a very coveted position in the good old days.



Jack van Sanden

He quickly rose to the rank of Superintendent of Police and finally Deputy Inspector General of Police and during his career figured in some of the sensational cases of the time. The case of 'Yakadaya' (iron man) will be familiar to many. Yakadaya was on the most wanted list for the gruesome murder of the Post Master of Maradankadawella, a sleepy town in the NCP. The net was cast far and wide for this fugitive's arrest. As one can imagine, going after a desperado like Yakadaya is like playing Russian roulette with three bullets in the chamber. Jack, tough as boot in his young days, went after him like a hound and nabbed him. Jack was met by Mr John Kotelawella, the Prime Minister of the time and presented to the Governor-General Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, who highly commended and decorated him.

Even earlier, as Assistant Superintendent of Police at Ratnapura, he smashed the activities of a murderous gang that had terrorised and rampaged the whole village of Palkelele. The leader was an ex-soldier and a crack shot. Jack, a master at disguise, took him completely by surprise, all by himself, at a lonely rendez vous. These are but a few of his exploits in a long and exemplary career in the Police Force.

In recognition of his services he was selected in 1959 to proceed to Ryton Police College in the UK to follow Special Police Courses. He acquired glowing reports and later served as Commissioner of Police for the City of Colombo, a responsibility he discharged in those rough and tumble days of the 1970s with great ability and acceptance. He also served in highly sensitive areas such as Jaffna and Trincomalee where he is still remembered with great affection by the people. It is no secret that in the Police one can be a leader or a ladder. Jack always led. He liked to be at the front, where a leader should be positioned. In recognition of his services he was specially assigned to be the Deputy Inspector General in charge of the General Elections of 1976.

He retired as a Deputy Inspector General of Police and migrated to Australia and now lives with his wife Helen in Melbourne.

## COLOMBO PLACE NAMES

By Wesley Casinader

Over the past few years we have witnessed the replacement of some of the historic place-names of Colombo with names of a local flavour. But before more of these old names fade into oblivion it would be interesting to trace the links these names have with Lanka's remarkable past.



Many of us would have noticed the regal ring in some of the names that still indicate various localities in Colombo. Queen street, Prince Street and Edinburgh Crescent remind us of our country's colonial era during which period, naming places after Royalty was the done thing.

Dealing briefly with these Royal sounding names first, we learn that the bridge which leads into Colombo North, now



Some British Governors

called Kelani Bridge, was earlier known as Victoria Bridge being named after Britain's most famous Queen. Her Consort, Prince Albert, gave his name to Albert Crescent in Colombo 7, while Edinburgh Crescent was named, not after the present Duke of Edinburgh, but after the First Duke of Edinburgh, who also lent his name to Edinburgh market. Queen Street was so named because the Queen's representative has always lived there.

The Dutch too, have named places in Colombo after their Royalty. Keyzer Street in the Pettah for example was named after their Emperor who was known in Dutch as the 'Kaiser'.

Even more numerous than Royal names are those that relate to various past Governors of Ceylon. In Colombo 7, Maitland Crescent was named after Governor Maitland. Paget Road after General Sir Robert Paget, and Barnes Place after Governor Sir Edward Barnes. Some of the other Governors who had localities named after them were Sir Colin Campbell (Campbell Place, Maradana), Sir Henry Ward (Ward Place, Colombo), and Sir Charles Macarthy, (Macarthy Road, Colombo).

It might be puzzling to be told that Guildford Crescent in Colombo was also named after a Governor because we know there was no Governor by that name. The explanation is that this road was earlier named Fredrick North road after the first Governor of Ceylon. When Governor North later became the Earl of Guildford, the road was also re-named accordingly. Similarly, Rosmead place was originally called Robinson Street -- after Governor Sir Hercules Robinson. When he later became Lord Rosmead, Robinson Street became Rosmead Place.

In the same way, Sir Henry Blake had a comparatively quiet street in Borella named after him, though in his case, a railway steam engine and a residential area in

Nuwara Eliya were also later named after him.

Chalmers' granaries links us with Sir Robert Chalmers, while Manning Town, Manning Place and Manning market all remind us of Governor Sir William Manning.

Another category of men remembered by street names are, very appropriately, some of our famous road builders. Dawson Street in Slave Island is named after Captain Dawson after whom is also named the Dawson Tower at Kaduganawa. Another road builder - Major Skinner - has the road past the technical college named after him, while a 3rd road builder Captain William Gregory, is remembered by Gregory's Road in Colombo 7.

We come now to localities in Colombo with most intriguing names which take us back to Dutch times. Wolvendhal Street in Colombo is a Dutch name that means 'Dale of Wolves'. It is quite possible that (unlike wolves) jackals really prowled about in this area. So the Dutch gave it a similar name by calling it 'Wolvendhal' - Wolves dale.

Messenger Street in the Pettah is another misleading name. We generally take it for granted that it was named after the messenger boys who were employed in large numbers by the commercial firms in the area in those days. Actually, the name Messenger Street originated in this way. The Dutch had a particular penchant for planting trees along the streets. These not only beautified the street but also gave welcome shade from the broiling heat to passersby. The Dutch called this street 'Rue de Massang trees street'. It is not surprising that in time this was corrupted to Messenger Street. In the case of Korteboom Street, here too the name has some connection with trees they planted in this area. The trees were stunted probably because of the excessive heat and salinity in the air, therefore they named the street 'Korteboom' which in Dutch means short trees.

Bloemendhal Road in Mutwal was in Dutch times a fashionable place to live. Almost all the houses boasted beautiful gardens, which were constantly in bloom and made the place literally a 'vale of Flowers'. The Dutch equivalent of 'Vale of Flowers' was Bloemendhal and hence the name Bloemendhal Road.

There is an interesting story about Vystwyk Road in Modera. The Dutch Governor Vyst was a ferocious man who ruled Ceylon with an iron hand from 1726 to 1729. He was both a firebrand and a fire-eater. He was dismayed that he was given such a small charge, and used to cover one eye with a handkerchief declaring one eye was sufficient for him to overlook a small place Ceylon. He built himself a country home in the road that is now called Vystwyk Road.

Grandpass, believe it or not, got its name from a causeway that once existed in that area over the river. It was built by the Dutch. They called it 'Pas Grande', and by usage it evolved into Grandpass. Dam Street on the other hand does not owe its existence to any dam. It is a corruption of 'Daniba' trees that grew in abundance in



that place and got abbreviated to Dam Street

The Portuguese who preceded the Dutch to Ceylon have also left behind street names of their own. For example Mattakuliya is a Portuguese name meaning 'where the coolie was killed'. The death of the coolie must have been in unusual circumstances. The Beira Lake is a Dutch name and there are two versions. One is that there was a Pier and the Dutch called it 'De Bere'. The other theory is that the Dutch Engineer Johann de Beer built it. The later is more probable because there is a slab inscribed 'De Beir - AD 1700 discovered near the spillway.

Hultsdorf was once the military camp of the Dutch Governor Huft who fought the Portuguese. This was the scene of many a bloody battle, but today as we all know another sort of battle is fought there by the legal fraternity.

What's in a name? People ask. Well at least where some of our place names are concerned, there is history in them.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP THE REMAINING ELEPHANTS IN SRI LANKA

Over the past 10 years, 1270 elephants have been killed, mainly by colonists who have settled in traditional elephant areas, by expedient, ignorant and unscrupulous planners and politicians. This has resulted in an elephant-human conflict which is now an established on-going situation. Such a loss of elephants – amounting to nearly 30-35% of our total elephant population, coming on top of two centuries of slaughter by the Europeans, in particular the British, has now placed these magnificent and lovable creatures on the endangered list. The prediction is that if this destruction continues at its present rate, Sri Lankans will have to go elsewhere to even see an elephant in 20 years time.

To help alleviate this tragedy and give these elephants and Sri Lanka some hope in preserving these magnificent mammals, a few of us have decided to help treat injured elephants.

The help will come in the form of funding the following:

- 1...A kitchen to prepare and administer the milk and other food specially prepared for these injured animals and orphans.
- 2...A small operating theatre and dispensary for treating and dressing of wounds usually caused by gunshot and landmine injuries, which often lead to complications resulting in their deaths.
- 3...A small room for a veterinary surgeon.

These facilities will be based in Udawalawe National Park, near the entrance, where there are already 27 elephants being treated and looked after. When feasible, they will be released in batches of 4 or 5 into the surrounding jungles.

The entire facility is being costed at Rs2.5 mil-

lion and already some monies have been donated for this noble and essential project. We are hoping for swift and substantial donations to quickly meet the target so that we are able to fulfill our responsibility in preventing further decimation of these beautiful animals. They have graced our land, participated in our festivals, worked for us and who have given us such joy and pleasure both in the wild and in captivity.

Besides, they too have a right to life, as they have had for hundreds of thousands of years in Sri Lanka.

Please help this worthwhile appeal – generously and swiftly. Thank you.

### ELEPHANT TRANSIT HOME & TREATMENT CENTRE

Please send cheques to:

#### WILDLIFE PRESERVATION FUND

And post to:

The Director,  
Mr APA Gunasekera  
Department of Wildlife Conservation  
18 Gregory's Road  
Colombo 7

Cheques could be hand delivered or sent by Registered Post

In Australia, please send your cheques, made out as above, to:

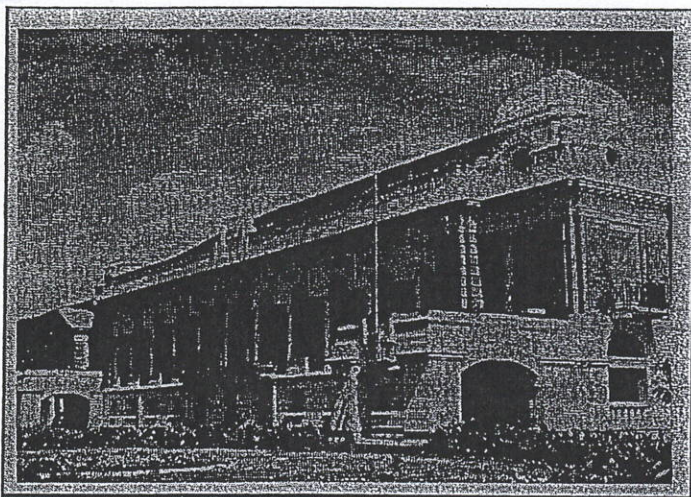
Dr Brendon Gooneratne  
PO Box 328  
Epping, NSW 2121

## CAN WE SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT?

An event took place at Royal College at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that is recorded in the History of Royal College (1835-1985), and which appears to be in conflict with the personally recorded details at the time, of one of the chief participants. Both articles are copied verbatim, the first starts on page 131 of the Royal College History, the other obviously commences on the day of the happening from an original diary!

"Principal Hartley cancelled the usual half holiday allotted for the Wesley Match (1897) and the entire school-lead by the V1th Form went off to the match in spite of the Principal's orders to the contrary. On the next day the whole school was given "lines" to write – barring the 6<sup>th</sup> Form who were all to be caned. They protested that no 6<sup>th</sup> Form had ever been caned. For days the College worked without the 6<sup>th</sup> Form, but still returned to be caned. One by one they returned and took a "licking". (1) GW Prins, (the diary writer) was the first to come back. (2) Donald Obeyesekere, (3) FHB Koch, (4) RL Pereira, (5) AA Per-





Royal College

era, (6) AP Savundranayagam, (7) VM Fernando, (8) MT Akbar, (9) AM de Silva, (10) K Balasingham, (11) CE van Reyk, (12) TF Garvin. In later life 4 were Puisne Judges (3,7,8,12), 3 were well known lawyers (2,4,6) (*actually 4 as (1) was also a well known lawyer*), one a famous physician (9), and one was a Legislative Councilor (10). Donald Obeyesekera, RL Pereira, MT Akbar, AM de Silva, outstanding Royalists in later years, have their Portraits hung in the College Hall. TF Garvin was Acting Chief Justice."

The above material was contributed to the History by "X traman", and was taken from an article he wrote in the Royal College magazine in 1927.

In contrast to the above, the following is extracted from the Prins diaries, and written by the chief conspirator of the 'rebellion', GW Prins. The year is 1898 NOT 1897!

"Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March... Wesley College match vs RCCC yesterday. Mr Hartley didn't give a half-holiday so some of us from the sixth went to the match without leave; there were 13 of us, viz Koch, van Eyck, C Barr, AP Savundranayagam, MH Jayetilleke Sameresinghe, VM Fernando, A Wiskremesinghe, RL Pereira, D Obeyesekere, MT Akbar, E Peries, T Garvin & myself. After dinner yesterday went & heard the Moonlight Band at the Park with Q & B (*Queenie & Birdie, his sisters*) in the cart. Today after morning prayers at school H(artley) asked all those members of the sixth who were away yesterday without leave to go into the Armoury; we, however, instead of doing so walked out into the compound; H followed us and asked us either to go into the armoury or to leave the school; I, to whom he put the question, asked him why he wanted us to go into the armoury, & on his answering "to be caned", I told him I would choose the other alternative & leave the school; all the others except VM Fernando & AP Savundranayagam chose the same alternative & so all eleven (for E Peries was absent) walked off the premises after going round the school & wishing goodbye to the masters. We went to the Stationers' Co & there discussed the affair till 1; H gave a half-holiday to the rest of the school except those who followed us yesterday to the match & who were kept in till 4.15. VM F & AP S were caned.

Returned home about 1.30 gave the news to the

Page 23

house folks; Ma sent for Pa from his office and he got me to write a letter of apology to H & wrote to him himself.

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>...Hartley sent Pa an answer to his letter in which he said that he said, inter alia, that he had decided not to receive any of us without a caning; so Pa sent me in the afternoon with a letter to H, who took me to his room and gave me 6 cuts on my back. Edward (*eldest brother*) accompanied me to College.

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>...Tom Garvin came home this morning; I told him my fate and he went with me to the College to receive likewise from H, who however told him to come tomorrow.

Monday 14<sup>th</sup>...TF G, MH J, RL P, Wickreme, & Sameresinghe came this morning to school & too got their cuts & then received a holiday. ECE van Eyck was caned after school.

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup>...D O & CLA de Saram received their punishment this morning & then went home.

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>...MT Akbar took his cuts. School closed at 1.30 to enable us to go & see the Intercollegiate cricket match RCCC vs STCCC"

Has any reader information regarding this event that can confirm or refute or even enlarge upon, either of the above? One very obvious discrepancy is the difference in the years of the happening!! 1897 or 1898? And there are some differences in the names of those actually punished!

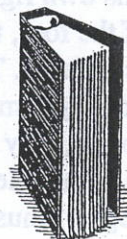
## BOOK REVIEW

### THE WILLOW QUARTETTE

by Channa Gunasekara .

pp xiv and 88

Sumathi Publishers, Sri Lanka (1996)



Sri Lanka is now amongst the foremost cricket playing nations in the world. For my part, I should rate it within the top three, and in terms of attractiveness, the premier. I would rather watch Sri Lanka play than any other national team. The Sri Lankan approach embodies the best traditions of this beautiful game. Its rise to prominence in the 1990s has been one of the miracles of the history of cricket.

And yet, the literature on Sri Lankan cricket is very sparse. This is unfortunate. For its present eminence is explicable only by an understanding of its history. Essentially, the strength of Sri Lankan cricket has lain in the importance attached to it in the private schools. Even today, a match between Royal College and St Thomas' College is a social event likely to attract more spectators than a Test Match. To that extent, Sri Lankan cricket has rather an elitist pedigree. It is significant; however, that this is changing in the 1990s as international success has captivated the imagination of the whole country. Now, following the example of the likes of Jayasuriya and Wickremesinghe both humbly born in the Matara area, cricket has swept through the country. It is to be seen in paddy fields, in children's



and orphanages, in shantytowns and even on part of the Galle Road sealed off for security reasons.

Another contributing factor to its popularity even after independence, has been the good fortune that Colombo was a regular stopping-place for ships to and from the Antipodes. Matches against touring teams were, for many years, a regular feature of the gracious era of ocean liners.

And, thirdly, international competitiveness was sharpened by regular tours of India and, indeed, by an annual contest known as the Gopalan Trophy between Sri Lanka and the Indian State of Madras (subsequently known as Tamil Nadu).

"The Willow Quartette" is claimed in the preface to be the first book ever written on Sri Lankan cricket (vii). This is perhaps an exaggeration but certainly it is the first to present vignettes of distinguished Sri Lankans who laid the foundations for the present pre-eminence of their country long before it achieved Test status. Their names are likely to be unknown by the generality of cricket lovers: S.S. Jayawickrama, F.C. de Saram, M Sathasivam and C.I. Gunasekara. Mr Channa Gunasekara, the author of this book, is a nephew of the last named and a distinguished cricketer in his own right.

Of the four, three were Sinhalese, but Sathasivam was a Tamil. They were all products of this private school system and all led their country. But in other respects, they were different in personality and style. The author cleverly categorises the four in this terminology of musical tempi: Allegro, Allegretto, Minuetto and Presto.

Mr Gunasekara's charming style of description produces some memorable euphemisms. He writes of Jayawickrama's "marginal rotundity in the mid regions" and designates him as a "typical Sinhala gentleman - self-effacing and reticent." Of de Saram he is less coy. He was "not of athletic proportions" and apparently lost favour because of his liability in the field: "due to his heavy feet, fielding was a sore point." And yet Mr Gunasekara analyses de Saram's batting technique in a dispassionate compliment. De Saram had a "watertight technique, a sharpness of eye and strength of wrist, which suggested early judgment to get his feet to the optimum position well in advance, allied to a facile brain". This is manifestly the assessment of a seasoned observer. De Saram could not have been too handicapped by ponderous footwork, for he managed to score a century against the travelling Australians in 1934, and, perhaps even more meritoriously, 43 against the mighty Statham and Tyson 20

years later. But Mr Gunasekara's typically Sri Lankan *politesse* leaves the reader tantalisingly intrigued to learn the details of why De Saram was remanded in prison for "allegedly master-minding a coup" and for a most precise delineation of the "somewhat intemperate ways" that caused him to succumb to a heart attack.

Sathasivam is rather wickedly allotted the epithets, "pigeon-toed" and "knock-kneed". Unlike the other three masters, "power was never his forte" - his style was not "in the sculpturing of stroke but in the fragile economy of movement and effort". But stylist or not, he managed to spend two years in gaol on a capital charge! Again, Mr Gunasekara spares the reader further details and, no doubt, spares the heirs of the hero further embarrassment.

C.I. Gunasekara was a late developer. Unlike the other three, he did not shine at school cricket. But he must have been the most spectacular of the four, for his nephew, the author, labels him the "Jessop" of Sri Lankan cricket. On one occasion, he was batting with Keith Miller for a Commonwealth XI against the M.C.C. They were both chasing centuries. The author tells how Miller, ever the "magnanimous showman", permitted the local hero to get there first. Gunasekara became the oldest captain of Sri Lanka at the age of 40, and scored his final century at the age of 51 when he was roped into playing against Thurstan College as he was spotted driving past the ground in a vintage car!

This delightful, literate book is far more than a catalogue of the achievements of four heroes. It tells the perceptive reader much about the ethos of cricket in the beautiful country of Sri Lanka. In its modesty, its generosity, its grace and precision of prose, it bespeaks the values prized by the archetypal Sri Lankan cricketer and gentleman. They are those to which cricketers throughout the world would do well to aspire!

J. Neville Turner, L.L.B., B.A.,  
President, Australian Cricket Society.

Copies are available from Neville above at PO Box 376, Warburton, VIC 3799 (Tel 03 5966 5919) at \$8.00 each plus postage \$1.50 within Australia - Michael Berman



## LESTER AND IVAN - THE GREEN YEARS

By Noel Cruz

If Lester James Peries is too well known in the film world, it is an experience to tell the story of Lester and Ivan and the green years. We all grew up together in Colombo South where the Galle Road was hardly widened and where trams ran, and schoolboys collected bus tickets to play marbles. As a student Lester always had his eyes on films.

At St Peter's College they were prolific readers: the Peries brothers, and Dr Jim Peries and his wife Winifred spared no pains to give the boys all the latitude they wanted to do their own thing.

In the school library whilst the librarian Angelo Rajakarier was typing his Radio Ceylon talks for *Great Contemporaries*, Lester poured over the film reviews and literature. Ivan, Lester's famous artist brother was in my class, where Fr Hugo Fernando the Mathematician taught us. Ivan was caught reading *Great Expectations* without doing his sums, so Fr Hugo gave off his threat to dub him with "B.I". We dreaded that distinction of 'Blithering Idiot', which was done in a gentle sort of way and Ivan with his wavy hair, burst into laughter.

Both Lester and Ivan had a crack at the Classics, and it was Noel Phoebus, that brilliant Classics scholar from St Joseph's who taught us. How we crammed *Mensa* and *Mensas*, and suppressed our laughter.

Phoebus attacked pupils if they missed the Latin declensions. The Greek classes were also a martyrdom. But Ivan always paid a tribute to Mr Phoebus, who in later years was to die, after being knocked down by a bus on Galle Road.

The Peries brothers, like most of us, owed a debt to the classics and to the Latin and Greek we

learnt at school. Lester confessed that Greek drama gave him the stability to translate action and mood and theme on films.

Yet it was in those green years that we were attracted to what the film had to offer. The Peries Brothers were sent by car from Dehiwela to St Peters for Sunday school, and after Sunday school, Fr Gregory Goonewardena had film shows in

the science auditorium. Fr Gunda, as he was popularly known, had a Pathe Baby 9.5 film projector which Fr Maurice LeGoc had given him, along with a dozen 9.5 films. We enjoyed the free film shows.

We were often invited to Lester's home in Dehiwela where we were treated to short eats and tea and Lester would speak of films. At the time Ivan was showing an interest in painting and later was to follow classes from Harry Peiris and David Paynter... But it was the Cinema that attracted us, and Lester and Ivan would join us to come to the Plaza Theatre with the De Nieses and other school mates.

The early thirties reminded us of the part that Madan Theatres Circuit in the Plaza gave us. CV De Silva and the Cadars were the men who kept the celluloid rolling. In the Plaza we saw silent films on the Gaumont Kalee 21 35mm projector. These were run by illumination from carbon lamps. It explained the fires that took place in the early cinemas when inflammable film was used.

Lester can remember the early silent films that the Plaza screened. The music was provided by Papa Menzies or George de Niese at the organ or piano. He matched music improvisation to the action on the screen. But all the excitement came when as schoolboys we gathered at the pigeon hole of the Plaza ticket booth. There were no queues at that time. Many hands were in the ticket counter hole, and when we bought our tickets, we almost had our shorts torn off.

Most of our tickets took us to the gallery. They were 25 cents, and we braved the bug infested hard benches at the Plaza, with our heads held up high to



A Young Ivan Peiris



Lester James Peiris - An Early Portrait



see the film, a good part of it was distorted! The problem was often solved when students jumped over the barrier to the 3<sup>rd</sup> class seats, when there were dark portions on the screen. The genial CV de Silva turned a blind eye to our pranks!

It was a memorable day when sound films invaded the cinemas and the Plaza Theatre got an overhaul. There were colour posters of the new sound films displayed outside the cinemas. It was a dimension that enthralled us. I remember well the Tarzan films that came. One was with Herman Brix on *The New Adventures of Tarzan*. Satyrs like Bela Lugosi were to come. The films we saw gave us all the grist for our discussions in Lester's home. He always liked dissecting films, an art he was to perfect as a film critic, and later as a producer.

Lester's green years were part of our transition too. It was then that Ivan showed us what his future held. Painting was his forte and George de Niese at St Peter's saw this in no time. In the family home at Dehiwela, Ivan set his easel and took to oil painting. From a post card he painted a large portrait of GK Chesterton, which J P De Fonseka bought, and exhibited.

Lester meanwhile produced his first book *The Cathedral and a Star*, a volume of poems on various themes. Lester was already writing for the Daily News Blue page, which was edited by Hilda Roversi and later Betty Hunsworth. At that time we had Tarzie Vittachi, Francis Ashborn, Harrison Peries, Wendy de Kretser, Annette Swan, Alfreda de Silva, Rex Rabot, Andrew G de Silva, Sujata Udugama, other new writers, who got a start in journalism. We were also writing for the Young Timers Page, and I had many short stories published in the Sunday Times.

However, the green years saw us cycling to all the cinemas to see the new releases. Many were our trips to the old Regal, the Majestic, Empire and Olympia. It was Lester who joined us (as my old diaries show) for *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. That film ushered in Tyrone Power.

Lester may recall his desire to see Clark Gable and Jeanette MacDonald in *San Francisco*, a romantic tale of the San Francisco earthquake. My brother Hilary and I were pretty broke, so we talked our good Aunt Ada (of revered memory) to take us to the Regal to see *San Francisco*. We told her it was the story of St Francis Xavier. The good aunt bought our tickets and came with us to expensive seats. As the film unfolded, our aunt took out her rosary, and Clark Gable at that moment on the screen asked Jeannette MacDonald to raise her skirt and show her legs!

My dear Aunt nearly collapsed in her seat. We had to explain that St Francis never appeared.

Those were the years when films were real entertainment. Lester on his part got all the encouragement he needed to find his place as one of Sri Lanka's great film producers. Ivan went his way and painted as he went.

Lester did confess that Ivan for forty years never painted an English scene. He got all his inspirations from the Dehiwela beach and the fishermen, the coconut trees and the sunsets that provided a riot of colour. Lester admitted that Ivan went to England and really died a pauper. I remember Ivan coming back to Ceylon in the fifties, when he did the sets for Arthur Van Langenberg's production of *The Song of Bernadette* at St Peter's College Hall. Today an Ivan Peries painting is worth a fortune and hard to buy. Anton Wickremasinghe bought many of Ivan's paintings.

Lester saw the future of films. When the green years saw the autumn leaves, Lester began to reminisce. I can recall his visit to Sydney, when we met him at Paddington, the scene of Art lovers. It was the early years that gave Lester the break he needed. He learnt a part of the mechanics of films at the GFU, and with the doyen of the cinema, George Wickremasinghe, gave us some valuable films. But Lester had to find new fields. As a creative artiste the world was his oyster. He knew how to go beyond plot and theme and action, and yet blend the culture of a nation to the way he interprets his visual and story. He can take all the encomiums for redeeming the Sinhala film from the 'South Indian song and dance patterns'.

Yet there were times when Lester gave the old Sinhala films and producers their due. He saw the work of B A W Jayamanne, and Eddie Jayamanne, and stars like Rukmani Devi and Mabel Blyth as milestones. In a sense Lester gave credit to Aloy Jayamanne for exploiting the film commercially, and for providing Eddie Jayamanne the space he needed. The comedy that Mabel Blyth projected on the screen had hardly been equalled on stage and screen and her contribution to cinema entertainment in the green years deserves recognition.

However, it was always an experience to recall the perpetuity of Lester's commitment. No awards can do away with his simple outlook on what a film has to offer. He knows his craft, and he is the first to admit that it takes almost a lifetime to understand it, let alone produce films that matter.



I always liked Lester's film *Sandesaya*, where Arthur van Langenberg played the Portuguese Captain. Lester said that the film was shot at the feet of a vast range of mountains at Belie-hul-Oya. Arthur was on the streets of Pettah learning his Sinhala script, and now and again shouting "*Para balli*". This fascinated the street urchins who followed Arthur for free entertainment. Lester admitted that Arthur showed unusual strength for his age in the fight sequences with Gamini Fonseka. But there was a hitch which only Lester recognised.

Lester was a perfectionist. In *Sandesaya* Ananda Jayaratne and Gamini Fonseka acted. Ananda was a beloved character whose days ended in tragedy. Gamini has gone ahead. Lester as a film man felt that Arthur's interpretation was not a success. Arthur could not read just his stage outlook for the cinema. "He was inclined to posture, to strike an attitude rather than deploy his body and his movements to the building up of the character".

When I last met Lester at his home in Bambalapi-tiya I thought of those early years of the silent cinema. Why were we so enthralled in our teens? There was a time when we dug into the Plaza dustbins to collect the discarded footage of the orange coloured 35mm film strips that had been spliced in the Plaza projection room. The big projectors with their carbon rods and massive reels were an institution. I can recall silent films running with large discs rotating to provide sound.

Lester would admit that after all, there was a point in our enjoying *Sign of the Cross* and *Ben Hur* from the silent days. For Lester and Ivan, Ceylon provided the cultural milieu to explore new themes. Today the Golden era of Hollywood is gone. All we get is violence, sex and noise.

## REMINDER

Members who have not paid subscriptions for the current year (2001) are requested to make their payments to the Treasurer Mr V Vamadevan.

3 Collic Court

Wattle Grove NSW 2173

Please note: subs are for the calendar year

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In our cinema adventures with the Peries boys we can remember the charm of *The Citadel* or the stunning performance of Paul Muni in *The Good Earth* or the heart rending moments of *Bicycle Thieves*. For Lester James Peries the critics are always there. They find fault with him for going on his groove. They feel that the commercial world of Television has grabbed him. This is short sighted. Lester as a pioneer has helped the Sinhala film industry expand. He has given young film makers that spirit of adventure and creativity that film direction needs.

It is good to look back, to see the young Lester in shorts, going up to the stage to receive prizes. As a writer his style was vibrant, and as a film conversationalist he has few equals. Lester can recall the days of Carol Reed or Hereward Jansz. With Willy Blake, Lester forged new dimensions in the cinema. It was a long way from the 9.5 films we saw on Fr Gregory Goonewadena's Pathe Baby projector. As for Ivan, his memory is still alive in the sunsets on the Dehiwela beach, and on the canvas of oils that preserve his testament.

## THAT JAPANESE RAID

1942

By Ivo Kelaart

*The CEYLONKANKAN has had the privilege of publishing several articles about the Japanese raid on Colombo. The following is another personal account by Melbourne member Ivo Kelaart*

1942 – and the War comes to us on Easter Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> April

### PRIOR TO THE ATTACK

For two days prior to the attack the "fifth column" (the enemy spies) were very active and at night were cutting telephone wires making communications difficult, if not impossible. Extra sentries were posted all along the seafront to protect against further enemy activity, with concrete 'pill boxes' hastily erected so machine guns could be sited therein.

These times were very nervous for all inhabitants, with sentries having orders to "fire" on anyone and anything suspicious. As young boys who used to visit soldiers in their barracks, we were told not to venture out at night, but, as boys will be boys, we thought it daring to try them out until the night



I got caught and was detained at the "Guard-house". An angry father called to collect his errant son and led him home by the ear with promises of all sorts of punishment.

#### THE DAY DAWNS.

Easter Sunday morning – 10 am

Mum wakes the family early and dresses the children in their best Sunday clothes. We are to attend Easter Sunday services at the Dutch Church at Wolvendaal – the central church of the Dutch Reformed Church. This was the day of Derrick's confirmation and he was also dressed in his best.

"Hurry up you children or you'll miss the bus"

Mum frantically trying to see that all of us were ready to go with her to the local church (the pick up point). Time passes and Mum is getting hot and bothered, but Granny keeps quiet and helps the younger ones dress.

Whilst all the commotion is going on inside the house, the servant boy races in calling;

"Master Ivo, Master Ivo – come outside and count the number of English planes flying overhead". We count wave after wave of Hurricanes and Spitfires, 30, 40, 50, 60, 80, 100 – all in tight formation – all with RAF markings, no one at that time realised that they were flown by Japanese pilots.

Suddenly the air-raid sirens wail, anti-aircraft guns of the 65<sup>th</sup> Heavy Battalion of the Royal Artillery start blazing away. They are encamped at the end of the next street and the sound of fire is deafening.

The tiles in the roof shake with each salvo and Mum complains bitterly that the old house would leak some more. She herds the girls (two sisters) and granny under our make shift air-raid shelter – the oak dining table sandbagged for such an emergency. The ironical part of this is that if a bomb struck nearby, that whole table would have collapsed from the weight of the sandbags placed on top of it.

She comes out to get Ivo and the servant boy but she can't find us, until Dennis spots us up the mango tree. In a commanding voice she shouts at us.

"Come down this minute the both of you".

But at that moment two planes chase each other at roof top level and this scares her inside. Dennis sees his chance and climbs the tree with us. To the top of the branches I shout to him "We can see the best fireworks from here"

What a show the Japanese and the English put on that day. There were dog-fights happening all around us one moment and then the next minute they had flown out to sea or towards the harbour. It was

nerve tingling, thrilling stuff for the next two hours or so.

"Look Boy, Boy, Dennis, Dennis – look over there": a thrill to sight a plane in flames going down, followed closely by another plane firing away as it as it went down- making certain of the kill. Bullets were flying everywhere and the noise at times was deafening. Colombo harbour was bombed and a few ships sunk at anchor, but the English fleet the Japanese came looking for was long gone.

And then suddenly it was all over. The Japanese headed out to their aircraft carriers, which many people believed to be their invasion

fleet. Had the Royal Navy fleet been in port at Trincomalee and many ships sunk, the invasion would most likely have been on.

The "all clear" sounded and slowly we climbed down only to confront a very angry mother who said in her harshest voice... "Wait till your father hears about this".

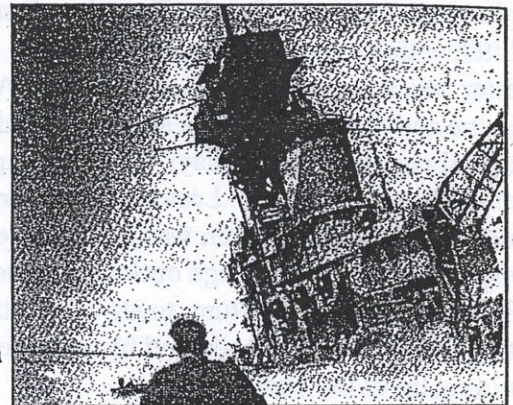
With tails between our legs we go inside but I was stirred by what had gone on and later on asked----- "Mum, do you think I can join up? I want to go and fight".

"Don't be silly, you foolish boy, you're far too young".

With that I informed my grandmother that I was going to "join the enemy"! The poor old lady was aghast. I was reprimanded some time later by a very angry father who told me to "watch your tongue or it will land you in a heap of trouble".

Discipline was strict and I was in bed early, but I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking that I would miss the sites where the planes had crashed. I made plans hoping to take the servant boy along with me the next day, but he was having none of it, as ----- "The big master said he would send me back to the village if I did that sort of thing again" and that's something the boy dreaded!

So Denis and I sneaked out next morning quite early on our bicycles for Mount Lavinia where we



The Hermes Sinking After The Jap Raid



knew a plane had come down. To our disappointment we were turned away from the crash site as the Army had cordoned off the wreck because souvenir hunters had already taken parts of the plane away. When we came home we were questioned as to where we had been but we gave an excuse to avoid any trouble.

All of us were then warned by Dad when he came home a few days later that we were living in dangerous times and that we should now all take care.

#### THE AFTERMATH

Folklore has it later the British Admiral commanding the troops, Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, made the freakish decision to transmit to the fleet, in plain language, that Colombo was under enemy attack, knowing full well that the Japanese would pick up his signal. He called for the fleet in port at Trincomalee (on the other side of the island) and a non-existent fleet off Aden, to come to the rescue immediately. The ruse worked and the Japs headed back to Singapore from whence they came.

Less than a month later, many of the Japanese warships in this squadron took part in the Battle of the Coral Sea, only to be sunk by American carrier planes. Huge Japanese carrier losses made the Coral Sea battle the turning point of the Pacific War and Australia was safe.

Almost from the next day, bullock carts started arriving in our street as most of the native population had decided to load their belongings and take off for the hills. They too were fearful of an imminent Japanese invasion. Apart from a few Burgher families who stayed on because they had nowhere else to go, the street emptied quickly. By the end of the week there were only about five houses occupied out of a total of close to fifty. This allowed the army to commandeer the empty houses and to use our street as their barracks. The first troops to march in were Indian Army infantrymen...

A young subaltern was soon in a fierce argument with my father as he believed all the houses were empty and that we had just occupied ours. Dad demanded to see the Colonel, who was a British Army regular, and the two sorted it out quite amicably. We could remain in our houses but had to remember we were civilian guests inside an Indian Army camp and that we had to obey every order made. Father was also advised to keep a close eye on his wife and daughters, even though the Colonel had given strict orders that none of the civilians were to be molested. The orders included the summary execution (the

firing squad) for "rape".

Young boys being what they are, soon made friends with the troops. I learnt their language (Hindi) quickly and for that my mother never went without essential provisions like bully beef, rice, flour, sugar and other tinned foods. In fact it got so embarrassing and scary for Mum, that she had to hide most of the stuff we brought home in the ceiling. During those war years strict rationing amongst the civilian population was the norm and anyone caught "hoarding" was dealt with severely. Father fared well too, as alcohol and cigarettes were plentiful.

Once the Indians moved on, an English brigade followed, then, in rotation, a few Aussies on their way home from the Middle East and finally the "Caffirs" from South Africa. Towards the end of the war, most of the troops were on their way to or returning from the Burma front. This was also the time that Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander in the South-East Asian sector, had his General headquarters at Kandy.

## SRI LANKAN (CEYLON) GENEALOGIES UP-DATE

By Kyle Joustra

Since beginning my search for information about my grandmother and my Sri Lankan connection, and subsequently expanding this to include a database on families in Ceylon, it might be of interest to relate how my research is progressing and how the information supplied by many has helped develop the database.

My genealogical databank has now accumulated 40,000 names, 520 separate family listings and is growing continually.

I am able to update all of the genealogies that have appeared in the Dutch Burgher Union Journals, since that publication's inception in 1908. Also I have incorporated 90% of the Dutch Reformed Church of Wolvendaal Baptism and Marriage Registers as well as numerous references made in books about families and people. Further to add to this information is the extensive and continuing help from people sending in information either helping to log the information for all time or to add to the reports I send them.

The type of reports I can supply are Ancestor re



reports (showing all information leading back), Descendant reports (showing the earliest member and all family members following) and finally a Kinship report (reflecting how and who you are related to all the people in the database, some of these run to hundreds of pages!). There is a moderate charge for these reports and I can give an indication of costs once I have ascertained how and where you fit into the jigsaw puzzle (information supplied is taken into account). The charge is a one-off fee (within reason), and you may obtain future updates as the database grows, however if it is a small bit of information there is no charge.

Samples of the information I supply can be found on my web site [www.users.bigpond.com/kijoustra/](http://www.users.bigpond.com/kijoustra/).

My aim is to help family researchers - with the information they have - link new information or update what they have accumulated. As this is a time consuming process, it means the material someone is looking for now may be unavailable at this time, but quite possibly it might turn up at a later date. There is an urgency to acquire as much family information as possible, as the links with Sri Lanka (Ceylon) are fading and the records and information may be lost for all time. It is expensive to keep records and Sri Lanka has little surplus money to spend on preservation. Termites, and the tropical climate etc, are deteriorating many of the records.

I have principally 'Dutch Burgher' information, but have been steadily obtaining other family records, including Sinhalese, Tamil, Portuguese, English etc, with names like Fernando, Peries, de Fonseka, de Soysa, Wijesinghe, Dias, de Mel, Goonetilleke to name a few. Many families did not record information or have found it is scattered, so by acting as a conduit I can often 'mix and match' and stitch it together. Eventually I aim to release a CD to all libraries interested so future generations can access their own personal family history.

Those wishing to contact me may do so, by writing to: P. O. Box 9200, Middle Camberwell, Vic 3124. (Tel: 0413 628 009 or by e-mail to: <

[kj.genealogy@bigpond.com](mailto:kj.genealogy@bigpond.com) >

*...In my own family history endeavors I found the assistance given by Kyle invaluable. We had family records, photos, letters, etc going back to the early 1700s. The additional information from Kyle compounded my accumulated material at least 3-400%....Ed*

## LOGO COMPETITION

YOUR LAST CHANCE TO  
DESIGN A LOGO FOR OUR  
SOCIETY. ENTRIES CLOSE  
MARCH 31<sup>ST</sup>, 2001. FINAL  
CHOICE ANNOUNCED IN  
JULY EDITION OF THE  
CEYLANKAN.

We have had several entries, but more  
Would be welcome. Just let your  
imagination take over. Submissions  
so far have included flags, elephants,  
maps, a kangaroo, etc  
Send your ideas to: PO Box 3020,  
Bilpin, NSW, 2758

## NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to the following new members :

Mr. Grant Edgecombe MT. WAVERLEY, VIC 3149  
Mr. Roger L. Raymond Mc KINNON, VIC 3204  
Mr. Pat Williams RINGWOOD, VIC 3134  
Mr. Maurice Fernando RINGWOOD, VIC 3134  
Mr. Maurice Barsenbach CHADSTONE, VIC 3148  
Mr. Clair Herft MULGRAVE, VIC 3170  
Mr. Douglas Perera HORNSBY, NSW 2077  
Mr. Eliel Homer Titus TURRAMURRA, NSW 2074  
Mr. Thomas J. Simpson CANADA, V9L 5W4  
Mr. David Kreltszheim BLACKBURN, VIC 3130  
Mr. Wesley Casinader HOMEBUSH, NSW 2140  
Col Derrick Nugawela KANDY, SRI LANKA.  
Dr. Ravi Pereira COLOMBO 5, SRI LANKA  
Dr. Graham Woods HURSTBRIDGE, VIC 3099  
Ms. Jennifer A. van der Gref Kfar Saba, ISRAEL.  
Ms. Janette M. Koelmeyer CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW 2050  
Mr. Asanga Weerakoon AUSTIN, TEXAS, USA  
Mr. Clive Meares MOORABBIN, VIC 3189  
Dr Channa P Wijesinghe, STRATHMORE, VIC 3041

Noel Cruz's book "The Cocos Island Mutiny" is available in the major bookshops. Cost \$24.95. It is a really absorbing read, and certainly gives one second thoughts about any judicial system's right to recommend capital punishment. Noel will be present at the next meeting to sign copies. By post add \$5.00 p&p, contact Noel at (02) 9764 1668

### WANTED

THE MELBOURNE CHAPTER needs a slide projector in good working order. Please contact Dr Srilal Fernando on (03) 9809 1004(AH) or Shelagh Goonewardene on (03) 9808 4962,(AH) if you can be of assistance.