



# The Ceylanikaum

The Journal of the  
CEYLON SOCIETY  
of AUSTRALIA

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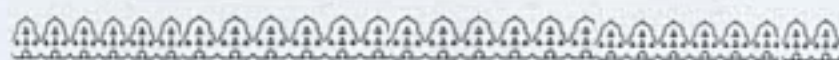
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## The Ceylankam



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## From the Editor...

**T**here can be nothing worse than a computer crash. It happens so suddenly. Everything's going merrily along and then slap bang, it all comes to a grinding halt. Computer glitches happen from time to time, but this time you can tell, this is serious.

Try to restart and it wouldn't accept my password. I am soon informed that I have a corrupt file. The experts tell me the only way to get round it is to revert to the default mode. I fall for that without thinking; they talk me through it. And all hell breaks loose. I lose everything; I mean everything, even my fonts, so God help me!

Getting those lost applications, folders and files back is like walking backwards without knowing where you are heading. I try to reinstall my software applications, but that does not work and the company tells me I cannot install old versions of software. I own them, paid for them outright. They won't budge; buy new versions at their own terms or nothing. As luck would have it there's help around (even if little known). A technical support person hinted about a co-operative forum on the net that can assist with sorting out my mess and kindly provided contact details.

And there began my walk back - of long days and sleepless nights slogging away at my keyboard. All's not back to normal as yet but what I have retrieved is workable enough to see me through for the moment.

Be that as it may, I have put together this issue as originally planned.

We have a new writer to our pages this time in Dennis Cox from Victoria. In an engaging article, Dennis recalls his boyhood days as he pays glowing tribute to his father Thomas, who was first Chief Fire Officer with the Kandy Fire Brigade,

Then from Colombo we have Tony Saldin as he comes to grips with Sinhala Armies of Ancient Sri Lanka.

A prolific contributor without doubt, The Rambler brings his profound knowledge of matters Sri Lanka to play when he pens a most readable work on The Early Years of Dickman's Road and its Environs.

In "Images of World War II and my childhood experiences of Ceylon" E.C.T.Candappa recalls days of balloon barrages, food shortages and the ubiquitous polima - days that are etched in many of our memories. We are looking forward to our readers sending us their recollections of those unforgettable days.

Hats ahoy! to Tissa Devendra for his entertaining article on various headgear worn with dignity or humour, for protection from the elements or out of habit and even just for the heck of it.

Another article that makes interesting reading is CSA President Thiru Arumugam's expert interpretation of the making of Basil Wright's outstanding film Song of Ceylon. This is the script of the well-received presentation the writer made at the CSA general meeting held in Sydney recently.

Samuel Thevabalan Arnold in his customary fashion retraces the history of the unique education for girls at Vincent's Girls High School in Batticaloa.

The other usual fare such as the recipe, synopses of meetings and other notices are all included.

Have a good read!

## About the Ceylon Society of Australia

The CSA is a non-profit organisation, incorporated in Australia. Its main objectives are to foster, promote and develop interest in the cultural heritage of Sri Lanka, especially the post-medieval period when this country was first exposed to, what we now call, globalisation. Apart from publishing the journal - **The Ceylankan** which has attracted much international appreciation - the Society holds meetings quarterly in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo. Most importantly, it is non-political and non-partisan and studiously steers clear of political and similar controversial issues. CSA is not a formal, high profile Society but rather, a gathering of like-minded people, open to receiving and imparting new ideas, who greatly

enjoy a quarterly meeting in reasonably modest and intimate surroundings. While Sydney is home to the parent body and looks after the needs of the society in all of NSW and the ACT, the Melbourne Chapter covers members and others residing in and visitors to Victoria; the Colombo Chapter caters to CSA members in and passing through Sri Lanka, and the Sri Lankan public! Members of the public with an interest in the study of Sri Lankan history, culture and heritage - the young members of the public are especially welcome! - are invited to attend. Admission to these meetings is free, while donations to defray expenses are much appreciated.



## Our Readers Write

### *Great movie night*

We were entranced by the CSA movie night last Sunday (23 February)! What a delightful evening it was watching these two amazing documentaries *Negombo Coast* and *Song of Ceylon* by Basil Wright.

It was particularly moving for us as we visited Sri Lanka last December. We walked the beaches of Negombo seeing the fishing boats that didn't look much different to the ones shown in the doco and saw them bringing the boats in after a fishing trip. We also travelled upcountry on the trains and climbed Sri Pada all of which were so beautifully captured in both documentaries. It was certainly a spiritual journey as mentioned in the introduction.

We had to remind ourselves that these docos were made 80 years ago with all the technological limitations of that time and yet produced with such wonderful results.

Congratulations Thiru on such an informative and interesting introduction you gave us before the screening. Your grasp of all the technical details of production as well as other detailed background/historical information added to our enjoyment of the documentaries immensely. All of that with hardly a look at your notes which was fantastic. What a talent! Well done.

We would love to watch this again and hope that it would be repeated sometime in the future. Our grateful thanks to the CSA for putting this on.  
SHERINE & FREDRICK PRINS (St Clair, NSW)

### *Name them!*

Just a small suggestion. Could you, in future, please have a short caption below each photograph identifying the people featured in the CSA AGM, Annual Dinner and Sing-along (back cover, and pages 32 and 33) in the latest issue of *The Ceylankan*, especially for the benefit of us readers of the Colombo Chapter (and, no doubt, of other Chapter and overseas members) who generally may not know who on earth these people are.

Otherwise *The Ceylankan* continues to be a sterling example of an informative magazine looked forward to by all of us members.

Dr RAVI PEREIRA (Colombo, Sri Lanka).  
(Thank you for your suggestion. We will endeavour to oblige as best we can in future - Ed.)

### *Sri Wikrema's "Cell"*

The illustration on page 7 (*The Ceylankan*, February 2014) perpetuates an old canard first aired by Ceylinco as a sales gimmick. Nobody was ever incarcerated in this dark and airless room. It was an ammunition store of the Dutch!

The deposed king and his entourage were detained, for a year in roomier premises at Whist Bungalow in Mutwal. They were conveyed by carriage to the harbour along a route lined by his saddened former subjects. Interestingly, on arrival in Madras, crowds of Madrasians waded waist deep into the sea to greet the one and only 'Tamil' king they would ever see.

TISSA DEVENDRA (Colombo, Sri Lanka)

### *Peradeniya University article popular*

Congratulations on *The Ceylankan*, the fine magazine sent to us faithfully throughout the year. Apparently the article on Peradeniya University (February 2014 issue by Rex Olegeseckeram) was greatly appreciated by many readers – my cousin Sheila de Saram who was featured in the article said that several people had mentioned this to her.

GERALDINE DE SARAM-JANSZ (Canada)

## Share your views

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

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

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

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

## A nasty!

When your computer corrupts and crashes you can lose everything - even your life's work. It is a pestilence, a modern bubonic plague – only man-made; it is demeaning, demanding, devouring. And a downright insult to human intelligence.

- DJ 16 April 2014



## Chris Lawton receives Order of Australia Medal

CSA member, Chris J. Lawton of Narre Warren South, in Victoria (Australia) was named as a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) from the Governor-General of Australia for his outstanding contribution to the community. At a ceremony held at Government House on 28 March, the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Alex Chernov made the official presentation of the Medal to Chris.

In the Australian honours system, the Medal is one level in the Order of Australia honours scheme to recognise outstanding achievement by an Australian to the community, country or at an International level.

Chris migrated to Australia in 1976 with his wife Yolande Monica, and two sons Christopher and Michael. He commenced working almost immediately, in the Port of Melbourne Authority as a Marine Engineer. He retired in 1992.

Since his arrival in Australia, Chris has served as member of and held various positions as office bearer in several Sri Lankan Associations in Melbourne, namely - Ceylon Society of Australia (Melbourne Chapter), The Australia Ceylon Fellowship, St Thomas' College Old Boys Association, The Ceylon Ex-Servicemen's

Association, The Committee for Sri Lanka, The Ceylon Masons in Australia and the Combined Association of Sri Lankan Organisations. He still continues to serve actively in all but the last two Associations which are now defunct.

Chris, born in Green Hospital Manipay, Jaffna, Sri Lanka, received his primary education at The Marshall Preparatory School in Colpetty, and completed his secondary schooling at St Thomas College, Mount Lavinia. He commenced his working career as an Apprentice in Marine Engineering in the Royal Ceylon Navy. He was trained in the Colombo Harbour Engineer's Workshops and abroad, with the British Royal Navy. He retired prematurely from the Royal Ceylon Navy as an Engineer Officer on the 'language issue'. Thereafter, he held Senior Management positions at Singer Industries, Ratmalana, and later at Walker Sons, Mutwal. He is a Chartered Engineer (Retd.) of the Institute of Chartered Engineers, London. He is also an Honorary Member of the Institute of Marine & Power Engineers (Australia).



• Chris J. Lawton OAM

## SEND US YOUR LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

THE CEYLANKAN is published quarterly and the editor is constantly on the look-out for literary contributions. Your work will be given careful consideration at all times with a view to publication.

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

We look forward to hearing from new writers from among our members. You don't have to be a professional writer - even work from someone who has not previously put pen to paper with a view to publication will be considered and receive our avid attention. Who knows, an enormous treasure of literary talent may lie hidden somewhere and knowledge about Sri Lanka is waiting to be aired. What better vehicle to do so than through your own journal. Write down those hidden memories of life in the motherland; the people, the places, anything that you may remember about Sri Lanka from whatever era, post-colonial to modern. We are certain that you

have a fascinating story waiting to be written, one that may even surprise you.

To facilitate the design/layout, we request that your word processing/typing be unformatted. Where applicable, contributors are also requested, where possible, to annotate bibliographical references for copyright purposes and also to help further research and study by interested members.

While every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, we do not take responsibility for errors. The editor would appreciate if any inaccuracies found be brought to his attention.

## Savour your food

We could not lead a pleasant life,  
And 'twould be finished soon,  
If peas were eaten with the knife,  
And gravy with the spoon.

Eat slowly; only men in rags  
And gluttons old in sin  
Mistake themselves for carpetbags  
And tumble victuals in.

Sir Walter Raleigh - *Laughter from a Cloud* (1923)



# Thomas (Bobby) Harold Cox – Chief Fire Officer of Kandy Fire Brigade (1929 -1961)

**M**y father, affectionately known as “Bobby Cox” and referred to in Sinhala as “Ginthera Mahathaya” was born in Teldeniya on 17 March 1901. His father Edwin Arthur Russell Cox was a pioneer English tea planter and his mother, my father recalled, was a gentle beautiful Tamil lady known lovingly in the locality as “Kali Amma”. My father grew up on a lush tea estate in the Rangala district. The views from the bungalow, his early home which still exists, are breathtaking, with misty mountain ranges in the distance and the crystal clear waters of a river down in the valley below.

As travel was tedious and slow in those days, he was boarded as a young lad in the home of the late L.E.Blaze, the founder of Kingswood College Kandy,



• *First Chief Fire Officer Thomas (Bobby) Harold Cox - Kandy Fire Brigade.*

a Methodist Mission School. The school at this time located in Brownrigg Street, Kandy, was in its infancy, with only a few students, most of them the sons from the planting community. At school, he played in many sports and was a Sergeant of the Senior Cadet Battalion. He always showed a keen interest in and a flair for technical pursuits. On completing his



A tribute to my father  
by Dennis Cox

Elementary School Leaving Examination in 1921, he joined Hutson & Company as an engineering apprentice in Colombo. On completion of his apprenticeship, he joined Walker & Sons, Kandy, in March 1925 as a Workshop Foreman.

During the latter days of his apprenticeship in Colombo, he met and later married my mother Louise Willenberg in 1928 and they set up their first home in Kelaniya.

At this time Kandy did not have a Fire Brigade. However, in June 1929, my father responded to a newspaper advertisement for the post of Officer-in-Charge, Kandy Fire Brigade & Superintendent of Vehicle Maintenance, Kandy Municipal Council. As the successful candidate, he was required to attend training for a period of three months at the already established Colombo Fire Brigade. On completion of his training, he returned to Kandy and set about recruiting and training a new crew of fire fighters and setting up the new Fire Station located in the centre of the town. It was interesting that as part of their training, my father introduced the new recruits to physical fitness routines and sport. They also followed drill procedures similar to the military, and frequently marched in the local area as part of their off duty programme. Also in their spare time, when on duty, the recruits were encouraged to develop and cultivate vegetable and flower gardens on the premises of the Fire Station, resulting in a very attractive display.

## *My early recollections*

I was born in 1936 in Kandy and like many of my vintage, can recall growing up during World War II. I remember my father coming home at all odd hours, having been on fire duty in case of possible attack from the air, as Colombo had already experienced some air attacks. I can still picture this man in his uniform and top boots slumped in a chair, tired, and I would try to help him remove his boots. He would laugh and say “come on...pull harder.” But this was beyond little me. At times when I thought I was not being observed by anyone, I would try on these same boots and find that they would reach up to my crotch! Peals of laughter from my two sisters would indicate that my secret was known to them.



At times, as a treat, dad would take me down to the Bogambara Green near the centre of town to watch the search lights scan the skies for enemy aircraft. Fortunately, we never saw any. I loved seeing those lights shining up to what seemed to me like a million miles into space. As toys were scarce during the war years, I would watch my father use his engineering and wood working skills to turn out toys for us and our extended family. He also made many toys to be distributed to local children at Christmas time by the St Paul's Church Mothers Union, of which my mother was a very active member. I also have a strong memory of a beautifully crafted, working scale model, of a tea factory operated by a water turbine, which showed in detail the various stages of tea making.

The fire station was a wonderful place for an inquisitive young boy to explore. When not busy, a fireman would show me the fire engines, lift me up into the driver's seat and I would pretend that I was racing away to a fire. My favourite fire engine was a "Dennis" Engine imported from England and I believed that I was named after it. It was good to revisit the fire station in 1980 and see this particular engine on display in the station. The Municipal garages were just as interesting for a young boy and I would watch the mechanics at work carrying out maintenance and repairs on the vehicles. To me the trucks appeared so huge and I could stand quite comfortably under the mudguards!

The fire station also had a very powerful siren which could be heard around the small town of Kandy. When a fire call was received, the siren was sounded and the firemen would come scurrying from their quarters and from nearby locations close to the station.

#### ***Fires, floods, films and free food***

As I grew older, I would listen intently to Dad recounting the various experiences he had from day to day. On one occasion, the brigade was called out to the Peradeniya Gardens to a fire near a large military ammunition dump. When they arrived the fire had already reached the ammunition. All they could do was to take cover in a nearby ditch until it was considered safe to extinguish the remains of the fire. On another occasion, while actively involved in a fire, a hose under high pressure got out of control, and struck him in the chest knocking him over into a ditch. He fractured a couple of his ribs as a result.

On a more tragic note, soon after Dad had left for work in the morning, Mum kept receiving phone messages from her friends and the very active local bush telegraph that the Fire Brigade was in attendance at a house fire in the neighbourhood. The fire had been started by a young servant boy who was said to have become enraged and uncontrollable when he was dismissed for an alleged love affair with the young servant girl in the same home. In the course of



• *Firemen at training in Kandy.*

his rage, he had been able to gain access to a gun owned by his male employer and was out in the front yard threatening to shoot him. In spite of efforts by the Police to calm and disarm him, he was able to fatally shoot his former employer, and turn the gun on himself. It was only then that the Fire Brigade could move in to extinguish the blaze.

In Kandy, an important annual event was the Perahera and carnival. As I grew older and into my teen years, my sisters, cousins and I looked forward to this event held in August. It was a fun time for all of us, especially the carnival on Bogambara Green. We enjoyed the rides on the ocean wave, merry-go-round and many other attractions, including browsing through the stalls. The complex was constructed in a circle with one large main entrance and exit. Also inside was a small auxiliary fire station, especially dedicated to protect the visiting crowds and the carnival stalls which were of bamboo and cadjan construction.

A fire started in one of the stalls one year and rapidly spread to some of the others nearby. The small fire division within the complex soon found the fire getting out of control, especially because of the highly inflammable nature of the bamboo and cadjan. A hurried message was sent to the main brigade which



soon arrived and helped fight the fire from the outside as well. Fortunately, we were not at the carnival that night, but my dad was there in attendance to protect the public and the carnival complex.

Like my father, I too was a student at Kingswood College, Kandy. By then it was a much larger school built on a hillside called Randle's Hill. The school was walking distance from my home on Peradeniya Road so I could walk home for lunch every day. While having lunch one day the phone rang and my father who was also home for lunch, took the call. Overhearing his conversation, I gathered that there had been a light plane crash and that the Fire Brigade had been called to attend. I asked him where it was and he said: "Katugastota, near a girl's school". Naturally I knew exactly where it was! After Dad drove off, I hastily "borrowed" my sister's bike and rode as fast as I could to the scene of the crash! I arrived to see the wreckage among some trees, but the fire had by then been extinguished.

The scene had me so engrossed that I did not realise that Dad had spotted me! All I heard was: "What are you doing here? Get back to school!" The ride home was slow (after all I was "tired" now) and it was too late to return to school. The next morning I was questioned by my teacher about my absence the previous afternoon. However, having been warned by a classmate that someone had "snitched" on me, I decided to come clean and take my punishment like a man. I was pleasantly surprised when my teacher listened to my account of the event with great interest! Later I also heard on the grapevine that the young pilot involved in the incident had been circling above the school, throwing chocolates to his girlfriend below. Sadly he perished in this very romantic venture as he had been flying at a dangerously low altitude and had crashed into a copse of trees in the surrounding area.

As we know, fire fighters not only attend fires but are also involved in all types of rescue, even if it happens to be cat trapped up in a tree! The year was 1947 and Kandy experienced one of the worst floods on record. The area known as Gatembe, located near the Mahaveli Ganga, was completely inundated. My father described seeing roof tops, dead animals and even some human remains floating down the river. Some of the luckier people were rescued by the fire crews. On this occasion, in our home situated in Malabar Street, we were awoken by an unfamiliar sound, when the front doors of the house burst open and a torrent of water rushed in. The street was a fast flowing river of water and as the house was below street level, the water took the easy path through our front door. My father and his fire crew had to quickly drill holes in the brick wall at the rear of the house to allow the water to escape. I have strong memories of the firemen forming a human chain across the street, to get my family and my visiting nine Willenberg cousins to the Kandy Nursing Home which was on

higher ground. The younger kids were carried across. To us, it proved to be quite an exciting adventure!

The many hills of Kandy contribute to the beauty of the historic city. One hill in particular is Hantana which for most of the year is extensively covered with Mana grass. The grass has a beautiful lush green growth most of the year but come the dry season and it would be parched, creating a perfect fuel for a fire. One could see the fires from almost any vantage point around Kandy. The phone at home would ring incessantly, almost off its shelf, at all hours during the dry season. When alerted to a fire at Hantana at night, Dad would hurriedly don his uniform, jump into his car, rushing to take off behind the fire engine with its bell clanging loudly as it passed our home on Peradeniya Road, heading for Hantana.

Interestingly, Hantana was also the venue for the filming of a very dramatic scene in the 1954 movie, "Elephant Walk". The particular scene, a very dramatic climax in the story, had to feature a stampede of wild elephants reclaiming their ancient jungle pathway. In the story the elephants have a grudge against the plantation because the manager's bungalow blocks their traditional migrating pathway. The stampeding elephants in the process of their charge in the destruction of the building also cause a fire. Hence the request by the film studio for the presence of the Kandy Fire Brigade during the filming of this particular scene.

**" I have strong memories of the firemen forming a human chain across the street, to get my family and my visiting nine Willenberg cousins to the Kandy Nursing Home which was on higher ground. The younger kids were carried across. To us, it proved to be quite an exciting adventure! "**

Dad's recollection of this event was very amusing. He recounted how difficult it was for the director and camera crew to keep the mahouts, who were most keen on getting in the picture themselves, from constantly getting in the way of the cameras. They had visions of stardom maybe! This, however, necessitated re-shooting the same scene several times! (A more detailed account of the filming of this scene can be accessed on Google under the title "Film-Elephant Walk".)

There were advantages and disadvantages for me, the son of the Fire Chief in a small town. Most people would know me as "Bobby Cox's son" or "The Fire Chief's son." One of the advantages was when entering the Muslim Hotel in town with a group of friends to enjoy some of the delicacies there I would





• *More drill and training extinguishing fires.*

frequently be recognised by the staff and thus favoured, not exactly flushed with cash resources as teenagers. At other times, some of the fireman, many of whom belonged to the Muslim community, would be in the hotel having their lunch and on recognising me, they would inform the staff that I was the Fire Chief's son and order a meal for us, on their account.

One of the disadvantages of being recognised was that I did not always get away with some of my youthful misdemeanours. On one occasion during Christmas and New Year, I lit a box of 100 crackers called "Ali Dong". I had joined all the wicks together, naively thinking they would explode in sequence. Instead, the crackers exploded with one big bang that rocked the whole neighbourhood. I ran for my life and sheepishly made a quick retreat into the house but not before a gentleman passing our gate, at the time of the explosion, came charging in, very agitated and shaken, shouting and complaining to my father saying, "If he wasn't your son I would have given him a DAMN

GOOD THRASHING!" My poor mother immediately retreated into her darkened bedroom suffering from a severe migraine. To make matters worse, there was dust scattered all over the meal on the dining table. This certainly did not improve my father's temper. I discreetly spent the rest of the day in my room!

#### *Later years*

I left Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) in 1962, leaving behind a man still showing strength and strong leadership qualities as well as a keen interest in his hobbies, especially radio technology. In 1968, when he migrated with my mother, two sisters, nephew and niece to Melbourne, I was sad to observe that he had changed considerably from the strong commanding robust man I remembered from years gone by. As a heavy smoker all his life, he now suffered acutely from emphysema and had become dependent on oxygen. In his new home in Carnegie, Melbourne, in spite of the warnings on the oxygen cylinder about the danger of smoking when the cylinder was in use, he still persisted in smoking his beloved pipe. I had to sternly point out to him that, as an ex-fire fighter, he should have known better than to disregard these warnings and so endanger himself and those around him. He just looked at me, sighed, and made no protest.

I was very pleased during a visit to Kandy in 1980, to know that he was fondly remembered by quite a few of the men still working at the fire station. It was also good to have our photographs taken with the old

Dennis fire engine, now de-commissioned but still standing proudly on display.

My father succumbed to emphysema in 1983 at the age of 82.

#### **Author's note:**

\* In recognition of the role my father played and to fire fighters all over the world, I would like to express my deep appreciation of their invaluable service to the communities they serve and protect.

\* My mother Louise, who had carefully preserved documents and photographs relating to my father's life and career.

\* My wife, Maureen, for her suggestions when I was writing this article, and for typing and editing a copy of this article.

\* My older sister Christine who was very generous with her time in confirming and clarifying information relating to dates and other details when my memory needed help.

\* My nephew, Johann de Alwis for his gift of a beautifully collated and presented album of photographs and copies of original documents, relating to my father, on my 70th birthday and to which I have been able to refer extensively for accurate dates and information relating to my father's working life.





# Sinhala armies of ancient Sri Lanka



by M.D. (TONY) Saldin

**A**part from the established strategies and tactics expounded by Carl von Clausewitz and SunTzu, war, in general, is an organised and often prolonged conflict carried out by states or countries, and usually involves extreme violence followed by death and destruction.

## Foreign occupation

Even though Ceylon faced many invasions from neighboring India and from the Javanese King Chandrabahu from the Malay peninsula during the reign of King Parakramabahu II in the mid-13th Century (Mahavansa part 11, LXXX111); the first European powers to invade Sri Lanka were the Portuguese whose rule of the Maritime Provinces lasted from 1505 to 1656, followed by the Dutch from 1656 to 1796, and the British from 1796 to 1815. The British took control of the Kandyan Kingdom after the capture of King Sri Wickrama Rajasingha in 1815, after which entire Ceylon became a subject of Great Britain until its independence in 1948.

## Local army

The Kandyan kings did everything possible to repel the invaders, by calling out its army and militia when diplomacy failed or war was declared. It was only the State which could afford a permanent army.

## Hierarchy

The army was headed by the Senadhipathy (Commander) with layers of Senpathy (Captains) below him. The other units which formed the army were the Atapattu and Maduwa (who were a hereditary class of uniformed swordsmen) led by an Atapattu or Maduwa Lekam.

## Small arms and light artillery

The light artillery unit or Kodituwakku, also known as gingals or "grasshopper guns" were commanded by a Kodituwakku Nilame. Even though not accurate, it fired an eight to nine ounce lead ball and created a loud noise and much smoke. Vedikkara (musketeers) armed with matchlocks with slow burning fuses, Vadana tuwakku karu (sharp shooters) armed with flintlock muzzle loaders, Dunukaru (Archers), Padikara peruwa (paid levies) who were mainly Malay and Javanese mercenaries armed with their poisoned

Kreese (kris daggers) and muskets captured by a Java Muhandiram,

Malabar in their colorful red turbans, and Kaffirs of African descent, were frontline troops of the Kandyan monarch. The mercenaries were paid in coin for their services, whereas the natives were given Crown land for services rendered. The Kaffirs also had to accomplish the grisly task of serving as executioners for the King.

## Supporting units

There were also specialised supporting units such as the Suduliye-Maruwaliye (Angampora martial arts) gladiators, Aspantiya (stables) lead by an Aspantiya Muhandiram Nilame assisted by Aspantiya Lekams to supply horses to officers, a Gajanayake Nilame to provide for elephants, a Madige Lekam to provide



16. Gingals in the Kandy Museum

pack oxen and bullocks for transport, Auwdege Wannaku Lekam, the armourer to furnish arms and ammunition, Paniwidakaru (field messengers), and Thambuwa Puram Pettukara (trumpeters and drummers), when the King took the field.

## Militia

In addition to the permanent army, the King also called upon his levies (Levaayo) or militia who were made to perform compulsory military service or rajakariya for their monarch in times of war.

The bulk of the army was the militia who were armed with muskets of varying degrees of decrepitude, some owned by themselves and others from armouries maintained by the Dissawa. Many,



especially from the Eastern province, were armed with only bows and arrows. A talipot leaf used for shelter, a small iron cooking pot, fifteen days' rations of rice, kurrakan and a few coconuts to correspond to the 15-days of rajakariya or obligatory service, some gunpowder (*wedibeheth*) and shot, formed the baggage of the lightly armed and quickly moving Sinhala militiaman's supplies.

### **Veddahs**

The King also sometimes employed Veddahs who were hunters and providers of game to the palace, in times of war. Armed with their 6 feet long bows, the shy Veddahs dressed only in loincloths, who were skilled archers, reluctantly did their duty towards their King, by killing the enemy. However, after battle, they vanished deep into the forest, never to be seen again.

### **Dissawas & Ratamahathayas**

The Dissawas (Provincial Governors) and the Ratamahathayas (Lords) also played a crucial role during times of war and peace. They were responsible for civil and judicial administration of their areas, implemented the King's orders, collected gifts and taxes on behalf of the King, provided Royal lodgings when the King visited their Dissawany, promoted agriculture, constructed public roads, wells and other public utilities, provided amenities to the King's army when marching through their Dissawany and entered the battlefield after the Adigar (Prime Minister). No sooner a Dissawa entered an area administered by him, than a round from a Kodituwakku carried by his retinue (*piriwera*) was fired to announce to all and sundry that the Dissawa had entered his Dissawany.

### **Vidanes**

The Vidanes were traditional administrators of villages under them, accepted the King's orders and collected taxes and gifts on behalf of the King.

### **Kankanams and Arachchies**

The Kankanams and Arachchies were Village Headmen who maintained law and order, resolved disputes, did minor punishments to offenders, and enlisted villagers for duty in the King's militia.



### **Dissawanys**

The 12 Dissawanys were Hathara (4) Korale, Hath (7) Korale, Uva, Sabaragamuwa, Matale, Thun (3) Korale, Walapane, Uda Palatha, Nuwara Kalawiya, Vellasa, Bintenne, Tammankaduwa. The eight Ratas were Udunuwara, Yatinuwara, Tumpene, Harispattuwa, Dumbura, Hewaheta, Kotmale, Uda Bulathgama, Patha Bulathgama.

### **References:**

Charts in the Colombo Dutch Museum; The British Army in Ceylon (1796-1815) by Colonel Geoffrey Powell; The Malays of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment by Professor B.A. Hussainmiya

*(The writer is Past President, Sri Lanka-Indonesia Friendship Association, Mabile Malay Association and Honorary Secretary, Ceylon Society of Australia, Colombo Chapter).*



## **WE NEED SPEAKERS**

The CSA welcomes interested persons (both members and non-members) to speak at our meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo.

Our meetings are held quarterly in February, May, August and November of each year. Dates can be arranged to suit the availability of speakers. Overhead projection and PA facilities are also available.

You may know of potential candidates for speakers from among your family members, among

friends or relatives who live in or visit Australia or Sri Lanka.

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



# The early years of Dickman's Road and its environs

by *The Rambler*

**D**ickmans Road in Bambalapitiya was given its name at the end of the 19th century. The road itself connecting Galle Road to Havelock Road (then called Bambalapitiya Road) existed even before the 1880s and at the time, was one of the few roads linking the western seaboard with Colombo's hinterland, but in its early years did not have a name. There is no information available on how the road was named. It was possibly after Cornelius Dickman, a descendant from the Dutch, who compiled and published a Manual of the Ceylon Civil Service. He was appointed to the Civil Service in

the turn of the 20th century this area consisted of coconut and cinnamon estates. Among these was Bambalapitiya Estate, a coconut estate of 42 acres and Bambalapitiya watta a cinnamon estate of 37 acres; both belonging to Mudaliyar Pereira of Kollupitiya. Mrs Jeronis Peiris owned a 14-acre cinnamon estate also called Bambalapitiya. Stuart Peiris owned Richiewatte a 42-acre cinnamon estate which occupied much of the land between Lauries Road and Dickmans Road. Most of today's suburb of Thimbirigasyaya was a 48-acre coconut cum cinnamon estate called Thimbirigasyaya owned by Adrian de Abrew Jayasekera.



• *Norwood Bungalow the home of F.J. Lucas Fernando (Snr).*

1868 and was Assistant Auditor-General for 18 years before he retired in 1886. He, however, lived most of his life in Dematagoda, so there is a question mark against that possibility. What we know for certain is that the Dickman name was tagged to this road around 1901 and remained so for more than a century until it was changed a few years ago to Lester Peries Mawatha to honour the well-known film director who took up residence on that road in recent years.

The prominent landmark situated at the Galle Road end of the road is the Church of St Paul at Milagiriya built in 1848 on a large plot of land granted by the government. The area from Galle Road right up to Jawatte was called Milagiriya after a Portuguese church dedicated to Our Lady of Miracles which stood on the site of the Jawatte cemetery. At the site of the church was a well which supposedly had healing properties. Thus the name Milagiriya. St Pauls Church, Milagiriya was located in a largely uninhabited area at the time known as Bambalapitiya. St Paul's Girls School which was established as a Parish School attached to the Church in 1887 is a national school today with over 4000 pupils. At



• *Belvoir - the home of Dr E.A. Cooray.*

Havelock Town was opened in 1901 with the creation of Layards Road, Elibank Road, and Skelton Road, all leading off Dickmans Road. Havelock Park was also opened during that time, the name commemorating the gubernatorial work of former Governor of Ceylon, Sir Arthur Havelock. The Havelock Golf Club had its humble origins with a four hole course on the Havelock Park in the early 1900s. The Burgher Recreation Club was for many years known as the Bambalapitiya Recreation Club also found its home on the Havelock Park in 1906. The club itself was established in 1896, its foundation meeting held in the verandah of a house called *Ardgowan* belonging to Mr F.J. Lucas Fernando (Snr) a wealthy land owner who was one of the first to build in the newly established Havelock Town. His property *Norwood* on Layards Road extended into Elibank Road and its large grounds were used by the



• *F.J. Lucas Fernando (Snr). Grand Old Man of Havelock Town.*



Bambalapitiya Recreation Club for its sports activities, including cricket, until it moved to Havelock Park. Mr Fernando's family including his two sons-in-law Dr D.C. de Fonseka and J.B. de Fonseka and extended family were pioneer settlers in the Layards Road – Elibank Road area where successive generations resided for over a 100 years.



DR. E. A. COORAY.

St Paul's Church, Milagiriya, originally stood on extensive lands, part of which were sold to finance the building of a new Church adjoining the site of the old one. The sale of land, which occurred in 1902, realised Rs 44,000 which went towards the construction of the new church. Mr H.J. Peiris, a well known renter and plantation owner, purchased some of the land which was later gifted to his elder daughter Bernice in 1911, who married Dr E.A. Cooray. A few years later, the Coorays built their palatial home *Belvoir* which stood opposite the church across Galle Road. Dr Cooray also gifted to the church the clock and its chiming bells which are in use at the church to this day. They also built two large two storied houses on Dickmans Road, one of which was named *Doniford*, for decades leased to Brown and Co. as residence for its Chairman. Mr W. A. Mudie who was appointed Managing Director of Brown and Co. in 1938 resided in *Doniford* for more than 20 years. Those buildings were later amalgamated to form the Havelock Tour Inn during the 1970s and today, together with *Belvoir*, constitute the Belvoir International School.

By the 1950s, Dickmans Road and its connecting roads Dickmans Lane, Dickmans Path, Bethesda Place, Ebert Place, De Fonseka Place, Anderson Road, together with Layards Road, Elibank Road, and Skelton Road had developed into a tranquil cosmopolitan suburbia with much sought after homes of distinctive character. It is the aim of this article to recall some of the homes and associated personalities which breathed life to this area in mid-20th century Ceylon.

The area was then populated with homes that were spacious and elegant, owned and occupied by professionals and landed proprietors who could afford an establishment usually with three or four domestic aides including cook, houseboy, chauffeur and the ubiquitous "ayah". The average house had neatly tended gardens and in keeping with the trend of that

era, each house had a distinctive name, often an anglicised one also in keeping with the times.

One family that lived on Dickmans Road for more than 100 years is that of Magdon Ismail whose house was called *Noor Mahal* located at the Galle Road end of Dickmans Road, opposite the St Pauls Church. Magdon Ismail was Director of the company called Taylor and Mackay and it was at his home that the inaugural meeting of the Havelock Golf Club took place in 1904 when he was elected its first President. In recent times this house was subject to an armed home invasion which attracted much publicity. A couple of doors away was the home of lawyer Abdul Cader. On the opposite side was *Donegal* the two storied home of Heptula Abdulaly whose father established Eastern Aquaria in the backyard of their home and was a centre for the sale of tropical fish for many years. The Abdulalys continue to live in the house which is a well known landmark on the street. Dickmans Path which ran on the side of this home has been subsumed by the newly constructed Duplication Road running parallel to Galle Road. Among the well known residents of Dickmans Path was Dr C. Amirthalingam, then Director of Fisheries and J.L. Silva for many years General Manager of Ceylon Insurance Co.

Dickmans Lane which was on the opposite side to Dickman's Path has also been obliterated from the map, being swallowed by Duplication Road. Bethesda Place named after Bethesda Hall which



• Bethesda Hall as it is today.

adjoins it, is a small road with about a dozen homes connecting De Fonseka Road. Bethesda Gospel Hall is a large building standing back from the road and carrying a banner permanently encrypted on the front facade of its main entrance porch with the words "The Lord Jesus is coming again. Are you ready?". Hundreds of thousands of passers by would have over the years read these words which could still be seen, 95 years after they were inscribed. The hall was built in April 1919. The land and the hall were gifted to the church by Isabel Amelia Loos, a wealthy lady married to F.C. Loos, a leading attorney of the day. Further



on the same side of Dickmans Road was *Gitanjali* for many years the home of leading criminal lawyer G.G. Ponnambalam. It was from this home that his son Kumar attended school at Royal College. The Ponnambalams later moved to Queens Road taking the name of the house to their new residence. Lester Peries the film director now resides in this property. A few doors away from here was the home of Dr Turab Fazlebas, ENT Surgeon, who moved to his newly built home *Gulistan* from Castle Street where he previously resided. Turab's daughter Sakina was a well-known speech pathologist working from the father's home. Turab was the son-in-law of A. Mamujee, a well known businessman of the day, whose portrait was immortalised with its appearance in the much sought after book on Lionel Wendt published by Lincol Praeger in 1950. Around here was Stubbs Place which had about a dozen homes including that of A.M. Rahim, the first Ceylonese Managing Director of Henderson and Co. Two doors away was lawyer E.G.(Guy) Wikramanayake's home *Sri Mahal* which stood beside Ebert Place. He migrated to Australia in the early 1970s where he passed away a few years later.

There were a few homes in Ebert Place which was a cul-de-sac. A long-resident family was the Seneviratnes headed by Chief Postmaster Seneviratne



• The Havelock Town Post Office on Dickman's Road.

and a large brood of children of whom the boys attended St Peters College. Almost every evening school friends and associates of the Seneviratne boys were to assemble at the turn off to Ebert Place and hang around chatting away even long after evening shadows had fallen. This very informal group was for some years in the 1950s and 1960s a part of social

life in the area and participation extended to other young men from near and far. The inevitable smoke was bought from the *kaddai* (boutique) adjoining Ebert Place which, by itself, was a popular shop in the locality for vegetables and groceries. Next to the *kaddai* was the Havelock Town Post Office, a popular public institution in the area. The home of Dunstan de Silva, the first President of the Aero Club of Ceylon founded in 1928 adjoined De Fonseka Place which led off Dickmans Road. Further down the road lived C.I. Gunasekera famous cricketer and tennis player and vintage car enthusiast. Around here was Anderson Road which is no more a cul-de-sac. Among the more notable residents on Anderson Road was Hildon Sansoni reputed tennis player and ADC to successive Governors. His wife Barbara was equally renowned as a pioneer promoter of handloom fabrics and the founder of Barefoot, the clothing boutique in Kollupitiya. Their home became a sales centre for handloom fabrics in the 1960s. The Dickmans Road-Havelock Road intersection was the site for the second set of traffic lights to be installed in Colombo – the first was at the Turret Road-Galle Road Junction. At the end of Dickmans Road, on the opposite side, were the Bogala Flats built by graphite magnate Sir Ernest (E.P.A.) Fernando who built these apartments in the late 1940s on a site previously owned by a Maldivian and called *Didi Villa*. Sir Ernest opened his private 9-hole golf course in Nawinna in 1958 but died not long after and the property was acquired by the government for the Ayurvedic Institute which still functions there.

Proceeding towards Galle Road on the left hand side of Dickmans Road was the home of A.L. Jayasuriya; later occupied by Dr C.J.C. de Silva. The Jeevanjees lived a few doors away. Around here was *Cliveden*, the home of Dr Leembruggen and *Clovelly* the home of Electrical Engineer G.B. Misso whose son Vincent, a tea planter known to some CSA members may still be resident there. The turn-off to Skelton Road was also here and this road too hosted some well-known families of that era. Among them was Sir Donatus Victoria who owned Victoria Hotel in the Pettah and who ran the railway catering service for many years. He lived in a house called *Alcoque* almost opposite to his brother J.S. Victoria's residence on the same road. Architect Alles was another resident and Dr Thillainathan lived in a home called *Land's End* which was located near the Wellawatte canal which skirted the end of the road.

Between Skelton Road and Elibank Road were a few houses on Dickmans Road. At Elibank Road at its corner with Dickmans Road stood the home of Mudaliyar Silva, a ship chandler. Next door was *Delmar* the home of Dr Leo Peries whose brother Wilfred lived two doors away in his home *Leawood*. Wilfred Peries was Produce Broker at Mackwoods and later Director of the company. His only son



Tony, a former President of our Society, was the first Ceylonese Chairman of the leading mercantile firm of the time, George Steuart and Co. Tony would certainly have pleasant memories growing up in that area. Other well-known residents were the Ebramjees who lived in *Sadikot*, Dr Eric Schockman in *Havelock House* and Dallas Gunasekera, brother of the cricketer C.I., in *Thurlestone*. Former Chief Justice H.H. Basnayake lived in *Elibank House* to which he moved in the 1950s from

his home on Havelock Road. His house had a reputation among legal circles for its well stocked library, mainly of law books.

While the Lucas Fernando property was easily the largest down Layards Road with its sprawling home *Norwood*, it also had a large tract of unbuilt land adjoining

it, which was used as a place for drying laundered clothes by a cluster of washer families who were given access to the property. A couple of years after Lucas Fernando Jnr's death in 1958, his family blocked out the land and was fully built upon. Among those who acquired a sub-division was Kasi Choksy, a well-known lawyer and former Finance Minister. Almost



• A. Mamujee Esq. - a portrait by Lionel Wendt.

opposite *Norwood* was the popular Trevine Gardens run by Ian Oorloff. The property was first owned by Phillip de Silva, a plumbago mine owner from whom the Nagel family acquired it. E.F. Don who was a former Secretary of the Havelock Golf Club during its tenure at Havelock Park, lived down this road in his home named *Myrtles*. Another well known resident was Lyn Ludowyk who had the distinction of being appointed Professor of English at the University of Ceylon at the early age of 30 years. The end of Layards Road connected with Lorenz Road which commenced from Galle Road. Lorenz Road was bordered on one side by the grounds of the Wellawatte kovil and on the other by an uninterrupted row of houses running almost the entire length of the road. Maureen Hingert who was Miss Ceylon in 1956 and became a Miss Universe runner-up, and later starred in Hollywood films, lived with her parents in one of the attached houses. The entire property including the section that abutted Layards Road originally belonged to Bambalapitiya Estate of Mudaliyar Pereira and later by his kinsman Wellawattage William Peiris whose descendants still live in adjoining homes at the end of Layards Road.

The Dickmans Road-Havelock Town area is now part of a bustling metropolis partly blighted by sub-divided housing and commercial buildings that have had an impact on the area's genteel tranquillity. It is only inevitable that the environmental impact of changing land use patterns and sky-rocketing land values will bring in its wake social change. The blight of commercial tide which will eventually overrun this once elegant and fashionable neighbourhood seems inevitable, however, unwelcome. These notes will hopefully help evoke some pleasant memories of a not too distant past especially to those who have known the area.



## Sri Lanka's gems

Throughout history Sri Lanka has been known as a land of gems. King Solomon is said to have procured a great ruby for the Queen of Sheba from Ceylon. Marco Polo wrote of wonderful gems, especially the great ruby that once graced the Ruwanweli Seya Dagoba in Anuradhapura – a “flawless ruby a span long and quite as thick as a man's arm.” He may have been exaggerating a bit, but the gems plucked from the earth here have attained worldwide attention and acclaim.

Today, the ruby is quite rare. But its royal brother, the blue sapphire, is the king of Sri Lankan gems. The 400-carat blue sapphire called “Blue Belle” which adorns the British Crown, is from Sri Lanka. The beautiful star sapphire misnamed the “Star of India” (on permanent display in the Museum of

Natural History in New York) is another Sri Lankan treasure. Besides rubies and sapphires, the illama soil also bears cat's eyes, alexandrites, aquamarines, tourmalines, spinels, topazes, garnets, amethysts, zircons and a variety of other stones.

Sri Lanka is ranked among the top five gem bearing nations of the world. The others are Burma, Brazil, South Africa and Thailand.

(From *Insight Guide to Sri Lanka*. APA Productions, Singapore 1994.)

How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle - *Sign of Four* (1890)



# HATS AH OY!

by TISSA DEVENDRA

**A** long dormant interest in men's headgear was revived when TV news began displaying the unusual hats worn, as official dress, by some African Heads of State. Nigeria's delightfully named President Goodluck Jonathan is never seen without his tall black felt hat, incongruously topping his multicoloured robe. President Museveni of Uganda completes his Saville Row suit with a wide brimmed white hat à la Indiana Jones. The similarly suited President of South Sudan (what's left of it) sports a tall black cowboy Stetson, seemingly unaware of its symbolism as the trademark of comic strip villains. Their First Ladies, as well as the Lady Presidents of Liberia, Malawi and Mali flaunt colourful and towering creations on their noble heads. South Africa's leaders long lost any national robes and as such, we see Mandela's daughters teetering on high heels, their heads crowned with the dainty little hats beloved of British Royalty. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Inca women of South America complete their colourful handloom dresses with the "English" bowler hats once de rigeur for London's gentlemen as their furled umbrellas.



• *Uganda's President Museveni in his hallmark Saville Row suit and wide brimmed white hat.*  
Photo courtesy Google.com.

Coming closer home, we in Sri Lanka, have had quite a history of head gear. Casually tied turbans were the common man's head cover. In the days of the Kandyan kingdom, large circular flat-topped hats of white cloth were the dress of minor officials - aratchis, korala-mahattayas - and yet remain official dress for those officiating at Dalada and Devala ceremonies.

The padded head dress of rich brocade, worn by high-ranking Nilames, seems to be a distant relative of the European tricorne. In my heretical opinion, I feel it was designed by the Iberian-bred Queen of Kandy Dona Catherina - as there is no pictorial representation of this 'hat' before her arrival in the Kandyan Court. Strangely, during the reign of her son Rajasinghe II, that most famous English

'hostage' in the kingdom earned his living not only by rearing hogs, but also by knitting caps for sale to fellow peasants. Many years ago I met an English planter's wife who roamed the Kandyan countryside searching for any old Knox cap. She had no luck. I wonder what they looked like. I have a hunch they would have been similar to the pointed cloth caps with ear flaps worn by the Thai king's attendants in period costume on ceremonial occasions.

Many Sinhalese of the 'low country', colonised by Europeans since 1505, adopted with alacrity their masters' names, faiths and elements of costume. Probably the sole remnant of Portuguese influenced headgear was the long conical 'helmet' of the Lascorreen guard that escorted the Maldivian Tribute to the British Governor. The Dutch seemed to have eschewed both miscegenation and encouraging natives to wear Dutch pantaloons and doublets.

The Brits, on the other hand, seem to have relished seeing natives in their various travesties and interpretations of tie-coat. Felt hats were popular. 'Native Chiefs' such as Mudaliyars were entitled to solar helmets - as worn by the President's cavalry



• *South American Inca woman.*



escort. As time passed the 'solar topee' (introduced from India) became the most popular hat – a light flat-topped item in khaki or white. It had a long innings before it gave way to the 'hatlessness' of today. The topee came to be immortalised by cartoonist Collette whose shabby 'Citizen Per-r-a' always sported a battered topee.

The variegated headgear of our Muslim compatriots is an interesting study. The one thing in common was that their hats should have no brim so that their forehead could touch the ground when praying. (The top-hatted Aga Khan at Ascot was a tolerated exception). Way back in the 1940s when I was a schoolboy in Kandy, Moor gentleman wore tallish maroon fezzes – as favoured by Sir Razeek Fareed. Humble vendors of eggs and thrombol karayas wore neatly knotted handkerchiefs on their heads. The fez was the favoured headgear of the Ottoman Turks, admired and copied by their co-religionists here. It now seems to be prevalent only in Morocco. Our Malay men wore 'songkos' of batik cloth as their forebears in Java did. This colourful variety seems to have been swamped by the now universal white pill-box cloth caps.

I will now deviate towards my own encounters with hats. More than 70 years ago, my boyhood self fell down a steep slope on Kandy's Dharmaraja Hill and fractured my skull on unforgiving stone. After several weeks of convalescence, under the care of young Dr Daniel de Silva, I was pronounced fit for school. But on two conditions – never to venture out without a hat (to protect my delicate skull) and never to play hardball cricket (for the same reason). Being thoroughly unsportsmanlike, the latter prohibition gave me a legitimate excuse to avoid playing cricket. But wearing a hat to school meant resigning myself to being a figure of fun and providing a football to my class mates.

Aunty Enid, Mother's friend in Cross Street, was a hat-maker for the good Catholic Burgher ladies who frequented St Anthony's Church round the corner. Fascinated, we watched her snipping buckram, lace, wax flowers and berries and model them on a wooden head. Later we tried to identify these creations on the ladies walking to church.

My first hat was a round topped felt hat purchased from the little Scout Shop on a corner of Galle Face Green. It was tough enough to withstand years of much battering and monsoon showers. During ceremonial parades, I sported a similar hat sporting the black and yellow logo of the Junior Cadet Battalion.

My proudest headgear, however, was my badge of authority as the Head of the 'Cross Street Home Fire Brigade'. It was the white steel helmet emblazoned with a large red 'F'. The Japanese never bombed Kandy and we left for Nawalapitiya, where my mother converted it into a flower pot! A few

years later, my scout hat found itself in 'the dustbin of history' and was replaced by a topee – keeping company with tie/coat gents trudging to work. At long last, after ten years or so, when I moved into Colombo schools, I gave up hats for good.

Or so I thought... But hats caught up

with me. Another decade or so

later, I got my first job as a

District Land Officer in the

Trincomalee Kachcheri.

The burning sun called

for head cover. Luckily,

post-war Ceylon was

awash with headgear of

various shapes and colours.

I chose a floppy hat of khaki

cloth which did me great

service as I trod the sandy wastes and green hills of the many districts I worked in.

Men's hats in Sri Lanka are no longer a badge of distinction. With some trepidation I venture to suggest that the most popular seem to be the floppy, wide brimmed white hats of our cricketers and the baseball caps of young swingers.



## Subscriptions – staying up-to-date

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

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

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



*The writer, throughout his journalistic career spanning more than 50 years, is well-known for a prodigious memory which he puts into good use again as he recalls images and childhood experiences of World War II. No doubt, a great number of our readers can remember vividly what life in Ceylon was like and how they were affected by this war. Readers are invited to share your own memories of the war and your experiences of it in future issues of the journal.*

## Images of World War II – my childhood experiences in Ceylon

by E.C.T.Candappa

• Balloon barrages on steel cables high in the air.

**I**t is now 70 years since World War II ended. In the interim there has been a veritable tsunami of words and images on the subject, even from the point of view of the experience in Ceylon/Sri Lanka.

There is the myopic view that apart from a couple of air raids in Colombo and Trincomalee and a few bombs falling in some suburbs, Ceylon was untouched.

The purpose of this article is to correct that impression for historical and archival purposes and to refer to other numerous ways in which the country and its people were affected.

Of course, part of these observations are from the subjective viewpoint of the author, who was nine-years old when that war began and 14 when it ended. But they are vivid enough through the exceptionally fruitful memory of the writer.

My first recollection that there was a war going on in Europe was from talk among adults in our home. There was some mobilisation, but I believe, largely voluntary. (I shall be beholden to any readers who can correct me on this, or any other matter following, or add to any matter whatsoever).

In my home there was the fear, mostly held by my mother, that my father, then 39-years old, might be called up for active service. Her hope was that because his right arm was susceptible to dislocation, he would be overlooked, as indeed he was.

But I recall many of our neighbouring men joining various branches of the armed, dressed in uniform, of which they were proud. In a time of severe food shortages and rationing, among the perks these men received were hard to get supplies of food, beverages and cigarettes.

In the British firms in Ceylon and on the plantations, Englishmen of fighting age were routinely sent to one theatre of war or another, as and when they were required. In the firm where my father worked, Carson & Co. as it was known then, the names of those sent and died were posted in a roll of honour.

I distinctly recall those of our neighbourhood who went off to fight in the Middle East and later defend Singapore.

As referred to earlier, food was scarce during this war. Among the food items in acute shortage were rice, sugar and chillies. These items were contraband and fetched high prices in the blackmarket. People were issued with ration books on the presentation of which rice and other food items were issued accordingly. Poor people sold their rations at higher prices, sometimes pawned or even sold their ration books to the rich.

It was during this time that the queue came into being. Until then, whenever something in short supply was being sold, it was always push and shove. Now people were required to form a queue, to fall in line. Thus came a new word in the Sinhala language, the *polima*.



• British anti-aircraft defences in Ceylon, 1943

Ingenuity of people was endless. I recall an incident, when, on a tip, a funeral procession was halted by the police, who opened the coffin and found it loaded with rice. The "Mourners" fled and the rice was confiscated.

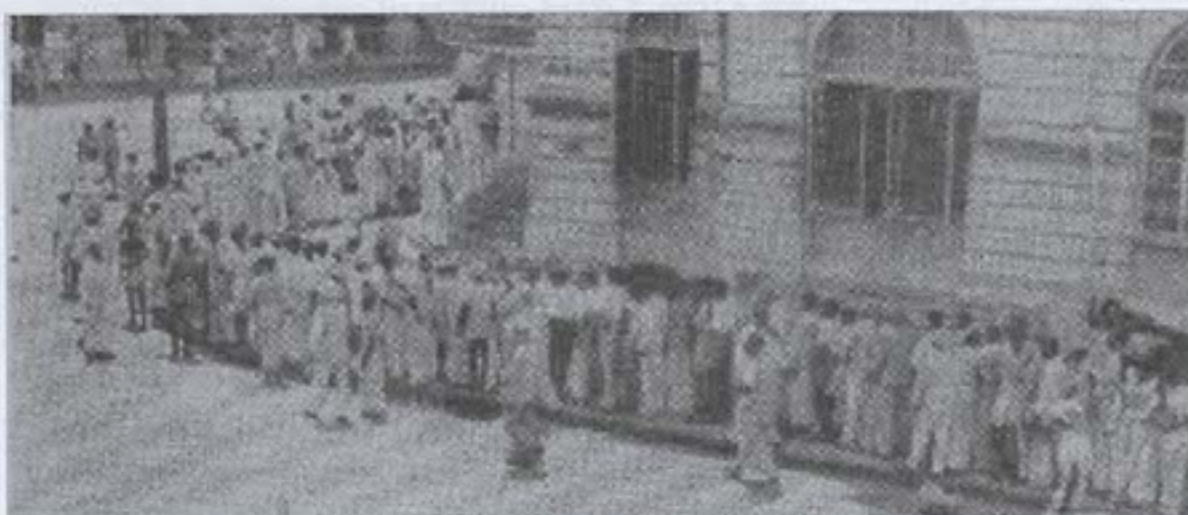
In the shortage of sugar, jaggery was used to drink tea, or a pinch of sugar was licked off the



palm to sweeten the tea. In the shortage of chillies, pepper was used to spice curries. When after five years chillies were introduced into curries, unaccustomed palates reacted and tears flowed copiously.

It must be recorded for the sagacity and generosity of the colonial British rulers that despite a life or death war struggle being waged in various parts of the world, they did not fail to govern the colonies, and govern well.

They ensured that despite severe food shortages no one would starve. Notwithstanding



• *The polima winds on. People queuing for the Times of Ceylon newspaper outside the Times building in the Fort during WW II.*

(Airflow, RAF magazine published in Ceylon in June 1945).

supply ships being torpedoed, they dared these risks to keep the colonies supplied. They also initiated huge local substitute food growing programs, such as manioc, wheat and bajri (which was mixed with rice and boiled). The walls outside the Port of Colombo were painted with slogans such as: DO NOT WAIT, CULTIVATE, DIG HARDER FOR YOUR LARDER.

The British also ensured that law and order would be maintained.

The other impact of the war was in the sartorial field. We must remember that we were, at the time, under British colonial rule. The British were sticklers for discipline in many matters, including dress. Uniforms tended to demarcate places in society.

With stringent shortages of textiles, insistence on standard dress slackened. In offices where coat and tie were normal, both were exempted, much to the relief of sweating clerks. In schools, too, the rules were slackened.

On other levels, enormous social dislocation was taking place, sometimes patent, sometimes subtly. It was caused mainly by the military taking over. Everything had to yield to the needs of war, of the armed forces. Any building that was deemed necessary for the maintenance of the military presence, for the progress of the war effort, was commandeered after some discussion regarding alternative accommodation, but generally without any choice.

Many schools, especially in Colombo, were taken over, either to billet service personnel or to store stocks. The school where I was studying, St Benedict's

College, in Kotahena, was taken over by the Royal Air Force.

It was right next to St Lucia's Cathedral, perhaps one of the largest identifiable targets for a Japanese bomber, also next to the RAF quarters.

So then transpired another phenomenon of the war – the balloon barrages. They were large and elongated bags of some tough canvas which were inflated and sent up high into the air at different heights on steel cables. They served to deter Japanese bombers, as they were "invisible" at night and could

snare a low flying plane. They worked up to a point, for there were the suicide (kamikaze) pilots. We had a couple of these balloon barrages in our school.

Of course, because our school had by then been commandeered, we had to evacuate to a neighbouring village and were housed in makeshift cadjan huts. Many schools were thus accommodated either for the duration of the war or until it was deemed safe to return to Colombo.

The dislocation in schools occurred in another way. Up until then, all schools were two session schools, with an almost hour-long lunch interval in-between. But with many students being relocated further and further away from their schools, schools converted to a single session school, so students could go home without having to return for a second session. It required their carrying a snack or purchasing one to assuage their hunger till they returned home.

Meanwhile fear was literally in the air. We lived with the ever present danger of air raids. So air raid precautions were taken. The government caused trenches to be dug and encouraged householders to do the same. School likewise had such trenches and there were frequent drills. Mock raids were simulated with air raid sirens sounding when all had to seek shelter until ALL CLEAR siren sounded. All windows had to be masked with black cartridge paper to prevent light from escaping to the street. They also had to be crossed with thick paper to prevent cracking during a raid.

ARP (Air Raid Precaution) wardens patrolled the streets at night to ensure precautions were taken. People were cautioned to wear white at night, not to bang into other people in the pitch dark – street lights were forbidden, and all vehicles had to mask their lights with blue paper.

All public building had sand palisades. Ah, yes, air raids and bombs were an ever present danger. People, especially children, had to suffer the social



dislocation of having to move and live in a strange environment for a few months or longer. Not many people took kindly to living in a rural milieu, having come from urban towns. They did not take kindly to village ways.

Another phenomenon of this time was the proliferation in the use of paper money. Every item of currency, from a hundred rupee note to five cents was in the form of paper. The chaos this caused is better imagined. The five cent note could be torn into three and two cent segments to pay for an item. Pockets bulged with paper, often soiled beyond recognition. One can imagine how ludicrous this can be. In 1942, at the feast of St Sebastian in Kandana, the grounds were decorated in the usual manner – balloons and bunting. On either side of the street were literally money trees – bamboo trees stuck with hundreds of those paper notes.

I must say that in the five years of war, though our involvement was minimal, in many ways we lost our innocence. It is a price everyone pays in a war, be it global or local. The presence of so many foreigners with scant regard for the mores and cultural values of the people had to have a harmful effect on the people.

When that war ended, it was believed that the war to end all wars had ended. Forlorn hope. If the years that followed have proved anything, it is the bottomless stupidity of humankind that is incapable of solving anything without resorting to violence.



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

Who can become a member of the CSA? Any person with a common interest relating to the historical heritage of Ceylon/Sri Lanka and wishes to share that interest with like-minded people worldwide is welcome to seek membership. Younger members of the community are specially welcome.

Please contact any of the following for further details: In **Sydney**: Contact: Treasurer Deepak Pritamdas 13/14 First Avenue, Blacktown NSW 2148 Phone: 0434 860 188 Email: deepakpsl@yahoo.com

In **Melbourne**: Contact: Convenor Hemal Gurusinhe Phone: 0427 725 740 Email: hemguru@hotmail.com

In **Colombo**: Until further notice members are requested to deposit subscription money/cheques at a HSBC ATM machine or transfer to the HSBC electronically. The information you require is for ATMs: Account Name: Ceylon Society of Australia, CSA Account Number- 008-044109-001 - e Transfer above plus: HSBC Swift Code- HSBCLKLX

Annual subs: LKR3000.00 Contact: Treasurer M.Asoka T.de Silva Phone 2822933 (Mob.) 775097517 Email: matdes@sltnet.lk

Annual subscription is A\$30  
(Pensioners & Students in Australia A\$20).

### QUOTES

I believe man will not merely endure, he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he, alone among creatures, has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

*(William Faulkner - Nobel Prize speech 1950)*

History is more or less bunk. It's tradition and we don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today.

*(Henry Ford - Chicago Tribune 1916)*

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man.

*(E.M.Forster - Howard's End 1910)*

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## OBITUARY

LALITH DE SOYSA 13.06.1928 – 15.03.2014

It is with regret that we record the death of Lalith de Soysa a member of CSA for many years. He passed away in Melbourne where he lived since 1974.

Lalith had his early education at Royal Preparatory School and later at Royal College, Colombo, where he was appointed school prefect in 1946. Among his colleagues as prefects in Royal were the prodigious Upali Amerasinghe and M Kasipillai, Cricket Captain of Royal in 1947. They were also later his contemporaries at Cambridge University from where he obtained his degree in Economics.

Born to a wealthy Colombo family, he was the youngest son of Sir Wifred and Lady Evelyn de Soysa and was the last surviving grandson of the legendary 19th century philanthropist Sir Charles Henry de Soysa. His friends were surprised when in 1974 he chose to migrate to Australia leaving behind a life of luxury in Sri Lanka which he said was the price to pay for a sound education and a safe and secure future for his family.

From his early days Lalith was a motor car enthusiast, the passion possibly arising from his University days in Cambridge where his parents bought him a new MG Magnette for his use while attending University from the home they owned in Belsize Park, London.

On returning to Sri Lanka, he founded the Mahajana Insurance Co which was later subsumed under the De Soysa Group of Companies. He later joined John Keels & Co as Company Secretary and was Director of the company for many years before

migrating to Australia where he worked at National Mutual Insurance until his retirement.

Lalith married Irene Williams in 1956 - she was a champion sprinter in the 1950s, and their 60th wedding anniversary was only two years away at the time of his demise.

Lalith de Soysa is remembered as the quintessential "gentleman" a product of a refined upbringing from an age long gone. In the words of his close friend and fellow school prefect at

Royal College, Charitha P de Silva (former Chairman of Aitken Spence and Co) "the de Soysas were a very gentle lot, and Lalith was possibly the gentlest of them all. He was kind and generous to a fault. He brought up his children lovingly and they loved him in return. He and his wife Irene were blissfully happy. In fact theirs was a wonderful happy household. He was the most considerate and obliging person I have ever known."

Lalith is survived by his wife Irene, sons Niranjana, Harin, and Ravi, daughter Shantha and their partners.



## Baker, textile merchant and optician...

**Victory Silk Store** was established in 1947 and is the oldest Textileshop in Kollupitiya. The founder, C Parsram, was a highly honored and respected Sindhi who had come to settle permanently in Ceylon from India in 1914. Parsram was the founder of member of the Sindhi Merchants Association of Ceylon and also held the prestigious position of its Presidency many times. He was also responsible for the establishment of the Ceylon Sindhi Community Center at Kollupitiya.

**Perera & Sons** originated with K. A. Charles Perera who came to Colombo from a village called Kodagoda near Galle. He arrived in Colombo in 1888, with only 50 cents. He began his career as a cook in colonial mansions and then joined the Grand Oriental Hotel as a kitchen helper where subsequently he took up the responsibility of the hotel's bakery. Perera commenced his own bakery in 1902 by renting two houses at Steuart Place, Kollupitiya. Today Perera & Sons, are perhaps the largest bakers in the country.

**Albert Edirisinghe Opticians** is the very first optical firm dealing in eye testing and manufacture of spectacles in Kollupitiya, established in 1949. Albert Edirisinghe, hailed from Galle and originally joined the business of **William Pedris & Company** in 1936 where he worked in the optical section of the firm gaining valuable experience. After serving for almost 13 years, he started his own enterprise, which is today a very successful optical company in the country.

## ... and a Private Hospital

**Durdans Hospital** established in 1945 at Alfred Place, Kollupitiya, is one of the oldest private sector hospitals in the country. This was the home of Charles Pieris. It was begun as the Principal British Military Hospital in Sri Lanka.

(All from *Colonial Kollupitiya and its environs* by H.M.M. Herath).

Victory has a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan.

(Count Galeazzo Ciano - Diary 1942)



(This article is the text of an introductory talk given at the screening of two films at the 23 February 2014 meeting of the Ceylon Society of Australia, Sydney).

## Basil Wright and the film *Song of Ceylon* (1934) by Thiru Arumugam

**T**he program consists of two documentary films about Ceylon, directed and filmed by the Englishman, Basil Wright in 1934. The first film is *Negombo Coast* which runs for about 10 minutes and the second is *Song of Ceylon* about 37 minutes in length. Who was this Basil Wright and what were the circumstances under which these films were made? He was born in Dorset in 1907 and came from a well-to-do family. He was educated in a private school and entered Cambridge University in 1926 where he studied classics and economics. He intended to become a creative writer and published a book of his poems while he was still a student. However, he became interested in films and when his parents asked him what he would like to have as a 21st birthday present, he had no hesitation in asking for a 16 mm movie camera.

In 1926 the British Government created the Empire Marketing Board. This was the time of the great depression and the prices and sales of primary products from the Colonies were falling, creating financial hardship. The function of the Board was to promote intra-Empire trade and as part of this promotion, it had a Film Unit to make documentary films. John Grierson was appointed head of this film unit. He is considered to be the "father" of the British documentary and in fact he coined the word 'documentary' which he defined as "the creative treatment of actuality". In 1929 Grierson made the documentary film *Drifters*, about herring fishing in the North Sea. This film kicked off the British documentary film movement.

Basil Wright saw *Drifters* and was very impressed and submitted some of his amateur films to Grierson who recognised his talent and immediately hired him as a trainee film director on a salary of £8 a week. Both Grierson and Wright were fans of the avant-garde Russian film movement, particularly Sergei Eisenstein who had made the feature film *Battleship Potemkin* in 1925. This film was named in the Brussels World Fair of 1958 as the greatest film of all time. This film has a scene in which the Tsar's

Cossack soldiers march in unison down a flight of steps called the Odessa steps in Ukraine, firing at a crowd of unarmed civilian demonstrators. This scene has been described as one of the most influential scenes in the history of cinema.

In 1933, the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board asked the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit to produce a four part film to promote Ceylon tea and about Ceylon in general, and were prepared to fund it up to £2 500. Basil Wright was asked to proceed to

Ceylon and shoot this film. He was accompanied by 19-year old John Taylor who was Grierson's brother-in-law. When Wright asked Grierson what his guidelines were in the shooting of the film, he was simply told to make something exceptional.

They arrived in Colombo on 1 January 1934. The Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board office in Colombo was responsible for all the local arrangements. The two of them were accommodated in the Grand Oriental Hotel and were provided with a chauffeur driven luxury Belgian Minerva car. They were also provided with a bus-caravan to carry their film equipment and six helpers. The Board had six of these vehicles which were used to go round the country distributing cups of plain tea to popularise tea drinking.

The Tea Board also engaged the services of a link-man with an extensive knowledge of Ceylon to accompany them and act as a guide and translator. That man was none other than Lionel Wendt who was born in 1900 and went to Cambridge and the Inner Temple in London to study law. When he was in London he also studied the piano in the Royal Academy of Music. On his return to Colombo he did practise law for a short while but spent more time giving piano recitals and also established himself as the leading still photographer in Ceylon. He died in 1944 at the age of 44 years and his memory lives on in the Lionel Wendt Arts Centre.

Although Wright had read up all he could about Ceylon and Buddhism, he decided to spend his first month travelling around Ceylon with Lionel Wendt without doing any filming. The intention was



• Outrigger canoes on sea shore.



to select sites for future filming. After doing that he decided to start shooting, which took about two months. Filming took place mainly at a tea plantation and factory, of Kandyan dancing, fishermen in Negombo, village life, Colombo Harbour, Gal Vihara in Polannaruwa and Adams Peak. For the Adams Peak shooting he hired 50 extras including elderly men and women, to play the part of pilgrims ascending the mountain. The journey up and down took 36 hours because of the pauses for filming and because he wanted to film the shadow of Adams Peak which is visible for about 20 minutes at dawn on a clear day.

The cine camera that Wright used was a British made Newman-Sinclair.

This was a relatively light weight camera designed for field use, not studio use, because it could only take 200 feet of film which would run out in two minutes at 24 frames per second. It had a clockwork spring wound drive mechanism and had interchangeable lenses. The zoom lens for movie cameras had yet to be invented. The light

weight of the camera did, however, enable Wright to take the camera off the heavy wooden tripod and film shots from ground level and this was a new development in documentary film production.

Some of the problems that Wright had when filming were: (1) Magnetic sound recording was invented about ten years later and there was no way he could record sounds in the field. Therefore all field shooting was on silent film and the sound track was added later in the studios in London. (2) If Wright had been shooting in the UK, at the end of the day he could send his films to the laboratory for overnight processing and see the rushes the next day and re-shoot if necessary. There were, however, no cine film processing facilities in Ceylon at that time. As a substitute, John Taylor took the same shots that Wright filmed, but with his Leica still camera, using the same film, filters, apertures and shutter speeds that Wright used and every few days John Taylor went to an English tea planter who had in his bungalow a dark room, and processed the still prints there. This gave Wright some idea of the movie shots that he had taken. (3) He had no portable generators or floodlights. He was thus totally dependent on sunlight and used a large number of aluminium reflectors to enhance the

light level. (4) He did not have a dolly to move the camera while shooting. The only moving camera shots in the film were taken from the observation car of the Kandy train.

When the field shooting was completed, Wright and Taylor prepared to return to London. But as the sound track had to be recorded in London, they took with them to London the Kandyan dancer Ukkuwa and the drummer Suramba. Lionel Wendt also went with them as their chaperone.

By the time Wright returned to London the Government had closed down the Empire Marketing Board feeling that it had outlived its usefulness. It was replaced by a system in which all the countries of the British Empire adopted a system of preferential customs duty rates for goods imported from other British Empire countries and this arrangement continued until long after World War II.

It was during the process of editing of the film, when the 23,000 feet of shot film was edited down to about 3500 feet, that Wright began to have a clearer idea of the structure of the film. Technically, the edited film made significant advances in the use of combined dissolves and superimposition of images and was far ahead of its time.

The edited film consists of four parts. The first part was titled "The Buddha" and consists mainly of the ascent of Adams Peak. Part two is titled "The Virgin Island" and shows village life. The third part was called "The Voices of Commerce" and shows commercial activity, including the harvesting, processing and shipping of tea. This part showed the impact of colonialism on Ceylon. The final part was titled "The Apparel of a God" and consists of extensive shots of the three huge Buddha statues carved out of an existing rock outcrop in Gal Vihara in Polannaruwa, and of Kandyan dancing.

In an article in the Summer 1934 edition of Cinema Quarterly, Basil Wright wrote: *"But in all the shooting our idea, apart from the production of certain one-reelers, was to achieve a co-ordination of all the primary elements of Ceylon into a construction which should carry a conviction, not merely of what Ceylon now superficially is, but of what Ceylon stands for in the line of that vital history which is measured in terms of statues, monuments, religion, and of human activity. It can easily be seen how the inter-relation of our three high spots forms the controlling factor of all the material."*

The three high spots referred to are Kandyan dancing, Adams Peak and the stone images of Buddha in Gal Vihara, Polannaruwa. Ceylon postage stamps of that era and a photograph of the seated Buddha in Gal Vihara are reproduced in the figures.

The structure of the film is circular in keeping with the Buddhist mandala, and in the final part we come back to the start of the film and life in pre-





colonial Ceylon. In the end is the beginning and in the beginning is the end. Wright was a socialist and an anti-colonialist. However, in deference to the colonial capitalism sponsorship of the film, he did not offer any overt criticism of colonialism. Instead, he presented the situation as it stood in Ceylon at that time and leaves the viewer to make up his or her mind.

Having edited the film, it now remained to add the sound track. Sound in films was relatively new at that time. The first feature film to have synchronised sound was the 1927 film "The Jazz Singer" with six songs sung by Al Jolson. Although cinemas soon installed sound systems



• Statue at Gal Vihare, Polonnaruwa.

because of their popularity with audiences, Film Societies and schools were slow to install them because of the high cost of sound projectors. The system used was optical. A variable density track corresponding to the sound signal was etched on the edge of the film. In the projector, a beam of light was focussed on to this strip and picked up by a photo-cell. This signal was amplified and converted to sound by loudspeakers.

The sound systems used by the feature film studios such as those at Ealing, Elstree and Shepperton used American systems made by RCA and Western Electric. These were expensive systems beyond the budget of the GPO Film Unit. Therefore a cheap British system called Marconi Visatone was purchased for £3000. This was an optical system but had the limitation that it could handle only two or three tracks simultaneously.

However, E. A. Pawley who handled the audio recording for *Song of Ceylon* needed to record up to eight tracks which included the narration, background music, chanting, drumming and the various sound effects, all of which were synthesised in the studio, such as dogs barking, bird calls, elephant trumpeting, train sounds, ship's sirens, gongs etc. This required repeated overlaid recording which led to problems of synchronising sound effects.

Basil Wright had wanted to do something unique and decided that it would be an avant-garde narration. He decided that the narration would not be

a conventional commentary on the visual image, but that it would be contrapuntal to the visual image, with the two combining to form a pleasing montage. The sound track of *Song of Ceylon* should be compared with the sound track of *Negombo Coast* which has a conventional running commentary type of sound track.

Wright's original idea was to ask his friend from University days, the poet W. H. Auden to write poetry for the narration, but this arrangement did not materialise. Two years later, this arrangement was done for another great documentary by Wright titled *Mail Train* in which the rhythm of Auden's poetry matches the clickety-clack noise of the train.

One evening when Wright was walking home from the British Museum down Tottenham Court Road, he saw in the window of a second hand bookshop a book titled *A Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* by Robert Knox, which was originally published in 1681. He had never heard of this book and he bought it and when he read it he decided that that the sound track for Parts One, Two and Four of the film would be a narration of excerpts from this book. For the Third Part of the film "Voices of Commerce" the narration would be clips from business letters, stock market reports etc. When he found that British voices were inappropriate for the narration of the Robert Knox excerpts, the task of narrator was given to Lionel Wendt. Later on Basil Wright described the part played by Lionel Wendt in the making of the film and said that without Lionel Wendt there would have been no *Song of Ceylon*, and that he was one of the greatest still photographers in the world at that time.

The completed film was handed over to the sponsors, the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board. They immediately pointed out that there must have been some misunderstanding because what they wanted was not one film of four chapters, but four separate one reel films, each with a running time of about ten minutes. So Wright had to go back to the cutting floor and edit four separate one reel films from the remaining footage. He titled them *Dance of the Harvest*, *Villages of Lanka*, *Monsoon Island* and *Negombo Coast*. Of these, only the last one has been released to the public by the British Film Institute. The others seem to have gone into oblivion.

*Song of Ceylon* premiered in late 1934 as the second film in a program at the Curzon Cinema in the West End of London. The main film was *The Dark Angel* starring Merle Oberon whose mother was of Ceylonese origin. Graham Greene was a prolific author and screenplay writer who wrote *The Third Man* and *Our Man in Havana* and many more novels. He was also the vitriolic film critic of the *Spectator* magazine and in his review of the evening's program he wrote that *The Dark Angel* was "one of the worst films of the year". However, Merle Oberon went on to win an Oscar for best actress for her role in this film.



As regards *Song of Ceylon*, Graham Greene wrote "it is an example to all directors of perfect construction and the perfect application of montage. Perfection is not a word one cares to use, but from the opening sequence of the Ceylon forest, the great revolving fans of palm which fill the screen, this film moves with the air of absolute certainty in its object and assurance in its method..... Mr Wright uses one of the loveliest visual metaphors I have ever seen on a screen. The sounding of a bell startles a small bird from its branch and the camera follows the bird's flight....."

The documentary film producer Martin Sheldon wrote "Beautifully photographed with an unorthodox and poetic sound track blending with an original score and an imaginative narrative, *Song of Ceylon* is a remarkably sensitive film that captures the beauty and remoteness of Ceylon and the Ceylonese heritage. It is the hallmark documentary that set the standard and by and large, solidified the documentary film as a recognised and accepted genre."

Robert Gardner, the Harvard documentary film maker spoke of the "spirituality that he evoked..... in the beginning of *Song of Ceylon* where stone, birds and water are joined to create an overwhelming atmosphere of holiness..... the effect is transfiguring. We are in his grip and we are changed forever."

Roger Manvell in his popular Pelican book titled *Film* says that "*Song of Ceylon* is possibly the greatest British produced film in any category up to 1935" and John Grierson the Producer of the film wrote that "Wright is now, I believe, the greatest lyrical documentary director in the country." *Time* magazine said that "Basil Wright's extraordinarily beautiful *Song of Ceylon* ..... bears about the same relation to ordinary travelogues that Keats *Ode to a Grecian Urn* bears to a cheap pottery catalogue."

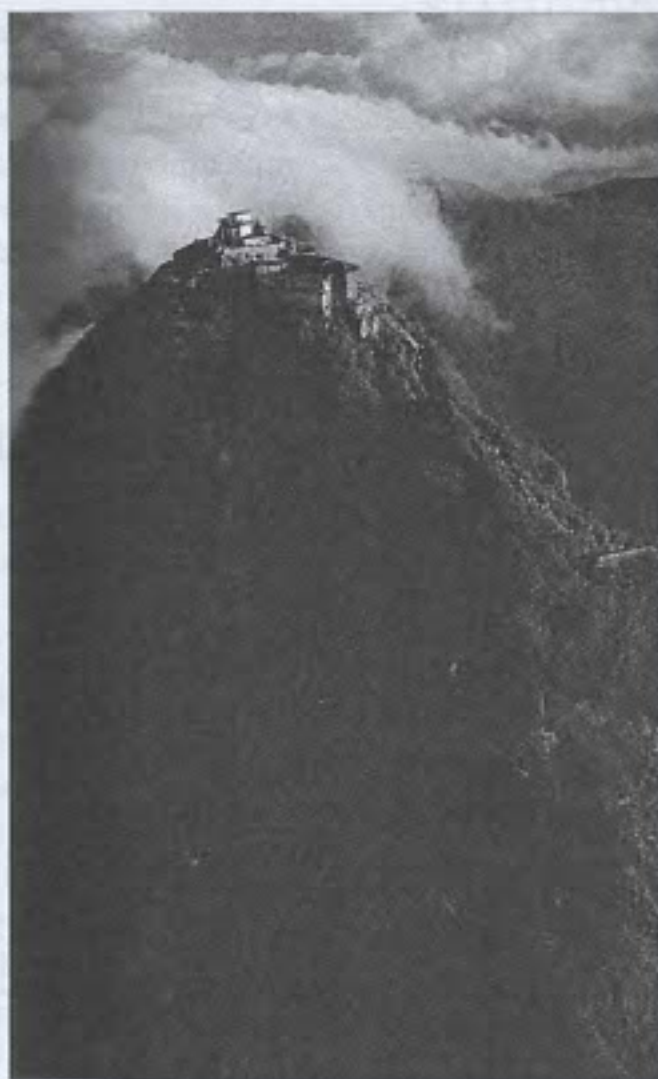
*Song of Ceylon* was submitted to the International Film Festival in Brussels in 1935 where it won the award for the best documentary. The feature film *The Informer* which won four Academy Awards and was directed by John Ford, won the award for the best feature film in Brussels. John Ford was described by Orson Welles as the greatest director of all time. John Ford went on to direct films like *How*

*green was my valley*, *The grapes of wrath*, and *The man who shot Liberty Valance*. It was expected that *The Informer* would win the award for best film in all classes in Brussels, but to everybody's surprise the

Jury awarded this to *Song of Ceylon*. Unfortunately there were no Academy Awards at that time for Best Documentary Film, this category only started in 1941.

Winning these awards by *Song of Ceylon* had a tremendous impact on the documentary film movement in Britain. This resulted in the heyday of the British documentary over the next twenty years or so when British documentaries were world leaders.

We will give the last word to Basil Wright. In an interview in 1969 shortly after re-visiting Ceylon he said "*Song of Ceylon* was an experiment ... It's the only film I've made that I really loved, and it was in fact a religious experience... it has the curious validity of being loved and admired and delighted in by the Ceylonese of today... Well this was a magical film, you see."



• *Aerial view of Adams' Peak.*

(Courtesy Insight Guide to Sri Lanka. APA Productions, Singapore 1988.)

Notes: Photographs on pages 22 to 24 are from Lionel Wendt's *CEYLON* published by Lincoln-Praeger, London 1950. Photos by Lionel Wendt.

The two films can be viewed by following these two internet links:

Negombo Coast (10 minute): <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/730>

*Song of Ceylon* (37 minutes): <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/486>



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

Chandrika Kotagama, West Pennant Hills, NSW.

Sunil & Chitra Perera, Greenvale, VIC

Kenneth Abeywickreme, MD, USA

Mrs Dilki Pereira, St Ives, NSW.

Ms. Chandani Lokuge, Camberwell, VIC







## Meals Ammi Made

PRAWN BADUNG  
by Geraldine de Saram-Jansz

### INGREDIENTS

25 large prawns  
1 tblsp roasted chilly powder  
¼ tsp turmeric powder  
1 tsp roasted coriander powder  
½ tsp roasted cumin powder  
¼ tsp roasted anise powder  
¼ tsp fenugreek  
1 tblsp sliced onions  
4 cloves garlic chopped  
2 slices green ginger chopped  
2 inch piece cinnamon  
2 inch piece rampe  
¼ stem lemon grass  
A sprig of curry leaves  
1 ½ cups coconut milk

Juice of 2 lemons  
Oil

### METHOD

Shell & wash prawns, turmeric & lime juice. Place in pan with all ground ingredients – garlic, ginger, half of the onions, cinnamon, rampe, lemon grass, curry leaves, fenugreek, salt & coconut milk to cover. When prawns are nearly cooked, add more milk to thicken. Allow curry to cook a few minutes longer. Remove gravy and let prawns fry in oil together with rest of the onions. Pour back gravy adding lemon juice to taste. Let all simmer till gravy is thick.

## Send us your recipes

Readers are invited to submit their favourite recipes for publication in this column. Preferably your recipes will be simple and easy to prepare. They must be of Sri Lankan origin and as this is a family-orientated column, we suggest that your recipes be of meals you learnt to prepare from your Ammi or Achchi.

So why wait? Send those mouth-watering recipes to the editor without delay.

## "The Mount"

When Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Maitland became Governor of Ceylon in 1805, he asked the Colonial Office in London that he be given a country home in keeping with his status in the new country. The Colonial Office obliged by building a mansion on top of a promontory right in front of the sea, with waves lapping constantly at its doorstep as it were.

Replete with white columns, polished timber floors and ceilings with intricately ornate designs, the building was described at the time as "handsomely built, laid out in mahogany and calamander wood" with its large windows inviting the cool sea breezes blowing through on steaming hot days and sultry nights.

When he assumed duties as Governor, Maitland, still unmarried at the age 46, fell in love with a beautiful dancer named Lovina Aponsuwa. It seemed there was a secret tunnel from a well in Lovina's garden that led to the wine cellar of the Governor's house – an idyllic situation for a lovelorn couple.

Though there are numerous stories about how Mount Lavinia originally got its name, it is said that Maitland's clandestine affair resulted in the building being named after Lovinia. It is accepted that the town received official recognition because Governor



Maitland used the mailing address Mount Lavinia, Ceylon, in 1805 when writing to Lord Castlereagh, the then British Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The love affair had lasted seven years when the Governor completed his tour of duty in 1811 but not before he endowed Lovinia with a gift of a large acreage of land.

Lovina to Lavinia to Mount Lavinia and the Governor's country residence as we know it, was turned a hotel that is still popular with both local and foreign tourists to this day.

Its association with love and romance has by no means disappeared. Today 'The Mount', as the hotel is fondly known, is the venue for wedding receptions and many newlyweds spend their honeymoons there. What is more, the rocks outside the hotel gates, sheltered under palm trees, is the site for many a trysting place for young lovers.



# Unique Education of Girls in Batticaloa (1820) – Vincent Girls High School

**B**atticaloa is a major city in Sri Lanka situated in the Eastern Province, and the former capital of the same province. It is also the administrative capital of the Batticaloa District. Today the town of Batticaloa is very active with development in fields in Education, Business, Transport, Health, Fishing Tourism etc.

## *Puliyantivu*

This article is confined to the island of PULIYANTIVU where the Old Dutch Fort housing the Kachcheri, reputed schools, teaching hospital, prison, municipality, government departments, Weber sports stadium, churches, mosque, Hindu temple are situated.

This sunny little island is surrounded by a peaceful lake, whose shores are skirted by groves of beautiful palms. The island is connected by the white bridge (Koddamunai Bridge) to the mainland called Koddamunai, leading to Trincomalee to the north of Batticaloa. Kalladi Bridge (built in 1928 by the British) leads to Kalmunai which is 22 miles to the south of Batticaloa. Koddamunai is connected to Colombo through Polonnaruwa by a wide road constructed with Japanese aid. The new Kalladi Bridge alongside the old one, also built with Japanese aid, was opened in May 2013.

## *Schools in Puliyantivu*

Puliyantivu is blessed with two boys schools – Methodist Central College and St Michael's College and two girls schools - Vincent Girls High School and St Cecilia Convent, all situated within a radius of a kilometre. The alumni from these schools serve the country and overseas nations in various fields. The Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries have toiled in Batticaloa district since the early 19th century.

## *Genesis of Girls Education*

The first Methodist missionary to Batticaloa was Rev. William Ault who founded the Batticaloa Methodist Central College in 1814. This was the first English School in Sri Lanka. Rev. Ault died after nine months. Vincent Girls High School had its beginnings in 1820, when the wives of the Methodist Missionaries in Batticaloa ran a school mainly in English. The girls were children of Burghers, English administrative officers and planters. The absence of Tamil children in the school was conspicuous.

## *Mary Joshua Swaminader Girls School (1838)*

Mudaliyar Daniel Somanader was the Patriarch of

by Samuel Thevabalan Arnold

the Somanaders of Batticaloa. He was one of the five students of the Batticaloa Methodist Central College founded in 1814. He was 15-years old when he



• *Vincent Girls High School.*

joined this school, probably had education earlier in Tamil. His father was Anthony Ramanader, Kachcheri Mudaliyar under the British regime. 'Mudaliyar' in Tamil means 'First' or 'Chief' of the Kachcheri. Mudaliyar is the top local administrator, functioning directly under the Government Agent who was British.

Daniel later became Chief Mudaliyar of the Batticaloa Kachcheri. Daniel Somanader and his wife Angelina Amarapathy had a passion for education of girls. At that time girls education was considerably unsocial and there was great prejudice to education of girls. The Somanaders had ten children (six girls and four boys). Daniel took great pains to instruct his wife and children, so that they, unlike their relatives and friends, were able to read and write.

Mary, the eldest of the Daniel Somanader family was born in 1820, and at the age of 16 was given in marriage to Joshua Swaminader. The father's house and compound were given to her as dowry. Mary Joshua formed a project for opening a school in her home. At first, parents were not willing to send their daughters to school. At length, this school was started on 5 April 1838 with eight girls including two girls from Mudaliyar's own family. At first, it was necessary to offer sundry inducements to the girls such as food, clothing and books to get them to attend.

The Methodist missionaries Rev. and Mrs Stott took interest in the school, assisted by Mrs Atherton who taught needle work to the students. More students were added. To overcome caste prejudices, Mary made her sisters sit along with the so-called lower caste girls segregated from the high caste



children. Eventually the caste barriers were broken.

#### ***Becomes a Methodist Girls School***

On the invitation of Rev. J. Gillings, Mary's School was taken over by the Methodist Mission in 1849. Mary Swaminader became head teacher along with an assistant. English and singing formed part of the curriculum and the missionaries helped develop the school. In the space of 36 years about 500 girls were educated in this school. Since its commencement, other schools too have developed. A Girls' boarding school was opened by the mission. This enabled girls to reside and enjoy quality education.

#### ***Vincent Girls High School (VGHS)***

##### ***Principal - Miss Amy Vincent***

This reputed Girls school had its roots in 1820. The Mary Swaminader School of 1838 functioned firstly in Tamil and later in Tamil – English. Thus Mary became a woman of destiny in the field of female education in Batticaloa.

On the arrival of the Methodist Missionaries, Amy Vincent, in 1895, opened a new chapter in the history of the school. She started English education with 16 girls. She worked hard for the development of the school until 1902 when she returned home and died in 1905. This school was named Vincent Girls High School to commemorate the memory of Miss Vincent. Other Methodist missionaries, namely Misses: Hall, Mabel Duckering, Edith Church and Florence Fuller served as Principals of VGHS during the period 1902-1922.

##### ***Principal - Miss Gladys Croft***

In the year 1921, the Tamil Boarding School was elevated as an English school. Gladys Croft became Principal in 1922 and did outstanding service until 1946. A two storey building was constructed.

This building housed a Chapel, Boarding facility and the Biology laboratory. Teaching of Science became part of the curriculum. Starting with 84 girls, there were 365 on roll when Miss Croft retired. Following her retirement in 1945, she continued to function as the Manager of the school and supervisor of the 140 girls in the Boarding department. She was awarded an M.B.E by the British Royal Family in 1949 for her services to education and the Girl Guide movement in the Eastern Province.

##### ***First National Principal - Miss Annammah Padman***

1 October 1945 was a unique day in the history of Sri Lanka when the FREE EDUCATION scheme took effect. This enabled all students in the country to have education without charge from Grade 1 to the university. All schools in Batticaloa joined this scheme.

Miss Padman became the first National Principal of VGHS from 1945 until retirement in 1959. She hailed from Kerala, India, and served as

a dedicated teacher for 12 years before she became Principal. The school had classes from grades 1 to 10 inclusive of Science and Humanities. Boys were allowed to be in years 1 to 3. A majestic two storey building named PADMAN BLOCK was erected which included classrooms, an assembly hall and Physics – Chemistry laboratories. Hundreds of girls from the Eastern Province studied at Vincent's.

During Miss Padman's tenure, Miss Rosalind Canagaretna was her young and energetic Deputy. Her contribution to the Girl Guide movement in Batticaloa was noteworthy. She was the first lady in Batticaloa to ride a bicycle. The school continued to



• *St Vincent's Croft Hall.*

excel in academic, eastern and western music, sport and community service. The Old Girls Association extended assistance to the development of the school. Students from VGHS joined the University for higher education in varied fields including of Medicine. In 1954, when Miss Padman was away overseas for one year, Miss Canagaretna acted as the Principal.

##### ***Principal - Mrs R. Chinniah***

On 1 January 1961, Denominational Schools in the country were taken over by the Government of Mrs Srimavo Bandaranaike. VGHS became a state school with Miss R S Canagaretna as Principal. From 1 May 1961, Mrs R. Chinniah was appointed as Principal and Miss Canagaretna as her Deputy. Mrs Chinniah was a reputed teacher at Batticaloa Methodist Central and later at Kalmunai Wesley High School before becoming Principal.

During the tenure of Chinniah-Canagaretna, the school was upgraded to Grade 1 position. GCE Advanced level classes in Science were started and many girls entered university. For the first time, a school band was formed which earned the praise of the community. Both Mrs Chinniah and Miss Canagaretna retired in 1973 after long and dedicated service for education of girls in Batticaloa.

##### ***Later Principals***

In 1974, Mrs Pushpam Vythianathan, a distinguished alumnus and teacher of Vincent was appointed as Principal and Mrs M. M. Aruliah as her Deputy.



Later the following continued effective leadership of the school: Mrs P. Pakkiarajah as Principal and Mrs I. Paramsothy as her Deputy; Mrs Pavalakanthan as Principal and Mrs Perinpanayagam as her Deputy; Mrs S. Chakkaravarthy as Principal and Mrs Nagaratnam as her Deputy. The present Principal is Mrs Sujatha Kulendren and her Deputy Mrs Rajakumari Kanagasingham.

The school was elevated to the top position as a National School. The Croft Hall has been extended to accommodate more people at assemblies. A new hostel with modern facilities has been constructed. A new chapel was built with contributions from past pupils. Computer education is provided for students from Grade 6.

The unique education of girls in Batticaloa continues and Vincent's shines as a towering light house in Puliyanivu!

The seed of education sown by the early Methodist missionaries has borne abundant fruit.



## Paraprosdokians

(Submitted by REX OLEGESEKERAM)

Paraprosdokians – Winston Churchill loved them it seems – are figures of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected and is frequently humorous.

1. Where there's a will, I want to be in it.
2. The last thing I want to do is hurt you ... But it's still on my list.
3. Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
4. If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong.
5. We never really grow up – we only learn how to act in public.
6. War does not determine who is right, only who is left.
7. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
8. To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research.



## Colombo Race Course

This is a 19th century photograph of the Colombo Race Course before the age of motor cars. Assembled in a row in the foreground are horse carriages. The area on the right is where Royal College was built a couple of decades later. The road running from right to left was then known as Serpentine Road and later named Reid Avenue.



### Synopses of Meetings

Colombo Chapter - 29 November 2013

In his presentation entitled: "Changing nature of International Law; Challenges and Opportunities for Developing Countries," Dr. Rohan Perera sought to underline the importance of injecting an Asian contribution, based on its own value system, into the on-going debate on the challenges posed to the global community and to developing countries in particular, consequent to the radical changes that International Law has undergone and is undergoing in contemporary international life.

Outlining the historical evolution of Public International Law, Dr Perera stated that the body of principles referred to in the present day as 'Public International Law' emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries, to regulate the conduct of a limited community of European States. Accordingly, the principal function of classical International Law was to provide a framework to govern the diplomatic, commercial, military and other aspects of inter-State conduct among this limited number of States, which then constituted the 'international community' and which shared common religious values and cultural traditions.

In the context of the religious wars then raging across European borders, classical International Law sought to make it possible for these States to co-exist by keeping them peacefully apart, rather than bringing States together, to work towards common interests and objectives. In that sense, classical International Law imposed obligations of a negative character.

Outlining the changing nature of the scope and content of International Law consequent to the expansion of the international community, Dr. Perera outlined the far-reaching changes that took place in the international landscape in the 19th and 20th centuries, which had a profound impact on the nature and the underlying objectives of International Law. The emergence of non-European, non-Christian States, particularly, China, India, Japan and Turkey, followed by the decolonisation process, brought onto the world stage, varied group of actors with different civilisational backgrounds and legal systems, as distinct from those belonging to the European civilisation who had hitherto influenced the development of International Law. This development made it necessary for International Law to play a more proactive and interventionist role in responding to the needs and aspirations of those States that had now joined an expanded international community.

The newly independent Asian and African States viewed the European-centric classical International Law with deep suspicion, as a regime that had provided an element of legitimacy to colonialism. Traditional concepts like *Mare Liberum*

and the unequal treaties imposed upon China, only served to heighten such suspicion.

Dr. Perera explained that these countries therefore sought a law that was positive in character, which took into account the real conditions of States; their political, economic and social imperatives. They called for a law that provided for active international co-operation for their political and economic advancement. The call for a New International Economic Order, and the call for the recognition of the 'global commons' the oceans, the environment and outer space as the 'Common Heritage of Mankind' were the major planks to reformulate the classical International Law.

Dr. Perera then pointed to several landmark developments that characterise the changing nature of contemporary International Law.

The emergence of the International Organisation as a key actor alongside the State provided a forum for sovereign States to engage in the international norm-creating process. The Treaty became the instrument of change, through which binding rules were formulated relating to the new frontiers into which International Law was expanding; the oceans, the environment and outer space. It was through global negotiating fora such as UNCLOS III that International Law transformed itself into a body of principles, sensitive to the political and economic needs and aspirations of newly independent States. The role that countries such as Sri Lanka and Australia played in this process of formulating a new legal order for the oceans, resulting in the emergence of concepts such as the Exclusive Economic Zone and the principles for the determination of the extended Continental Shelf, is a matter of record.

One of the most far-reaching changes which occurred in the post-World War order was with regard to the scope of application of International Law. Traditionally, International Law was regarded as a law for the regulation of conduct of States, exclusively. This notion, however, underwent radical change with the growth of the international movement for the protection of human rights, consequent to the horrors experienced in the Second World War. Gradually, International Law began to concern itself, not only with inter-State relations but also the relations between the individual and the State. Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights followed by the key Human Rights Instruments, collectively resulted in the protection of a State's own nationals within its borders, becoming a matter of international concern.

Dr. Perera then explained that as the human rights movement developed, certain tensions between the established concept of State sovereignty and the notion of protection of human rights had surfaced. States from the western hemisphere advocated the universality of human rights values inspired by the norms in the key human rights



instruments, while those of the eastern hemisphere, viewed the rights enjoyed by individuals, being directly linked to the specific socio-cultural context of the particular society in which the individual is a member.

In the context of the challenges posed by this tension that had arisen, Dr. Perera referred to the possible policy options available to developing States in the changing political and legal order. In this regard, he stressed the importance of the developing countries of Asia in particular, re-positioning themselves in the Human Rights discourse and seeking to find space for a constructive approach and reach middle ground, moving away from an approach dictated in antagonistic terms. This could be through a process of identifying points of convergence of shared values within the diversity of the rich cultural values and traditions of Asia.

Recalling the constructive role played by key Asian States at the time of the adoption of the UDHR, Dr Perera stressed that time has come for the developing world to regain this lost ground and adopt a pragmatic and positive approach to key issues on the human rights agenda. One way to restore the equilibrium could be by shifting the focus of the debate to the core value of human dignity which is the fountain and source of all human rights.

Dr. Perera expressed the view that the notion of human dignity provides the natural entry point for a cross-cultural value based approach to the human rights discourse. He stressed the fact that the Asian value system is reflected in the great religions that sprang up in the eastern hemisphere and cited examples where the Buddhist discourse emphasises the aspect of human dignity and underlines some of the core human rights of contemporary times such as freedom of conscience, thought and expression as contained in the ancient texts.

In conclusion, Dr. Perera advocated a possible via media approach which recognised that human dignity could be achieved through the pursuit of a broader approach, than the mere assertion of rights. It could be achieved through broader 'social processes, such as education, material benefits, political leadership and the like'. This would involve an effort on the part of the international community to move away from a narrow and exclusive rights-oriented approach to an approach where equal attention is paid to the realisation of the economic, social and cultural rights of people in their own socio-cultural context, based on the growing notion of international co-operation and solidarity. The challenges and opportunities of the new politico-legal order also calls upon the developing countries to adopt pragmatic and carefully calibrated approaches. Sovereignty presupposes responsibility to ensure the effective organisation and functioning of political and legal institutions within the State with full adherence

to the Rule of Law and good governance, which protects the rights of its own people. This is vital for the preservation of the very concept of sovereignty, amid the challenges of the changing global and legal order.

– Tony Saldin

#### Colombo Chapter 7 March 2014

The quarterly meeting was chaired by Mr. Tissa Devendra, who introduced guest speaker Mr. Stefan D'Silva, a past pupil of St Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia, who migrated to Australia in 1977 at the age of 21. Stefan was fascinated with the diversity of Sri Lankan wild life from the age of five. He dabbled in videotaping wildlife in the jungles of Sri Lanka over the next seven years. He returned to still photography in earnest in 1998. Commenting on his passion for wildlife, Stefan asserts: "I am certainly not in the league of the professional photographer; I am just an amateur enthusiast, with a lot to learn, who enjoys photographing wildlife in a beautiful, complex and exotic land". In his book "Sri Lanka – A way of Life" Stefan states "I have chosen to travel and photograph in places that fill my soul as opposed to places that merely fill my vision..."

*Places Once Denied*, Stefan's third book, is a photographic tale on areas that were once deemed 'no go' areas for a generation of Sri Lankans. Stefan maintained a yearning to visit all those areas for almost 30 years. Not long after the conflict ended in 2009, plans were made to visit all, if not most of the areas and photograph the physical beauty and daily life of the North, North West and the greater eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka. Stefan designs and produces his own books.

The stark contrast to the lush tropical vegetation of the other parts of the country beckoned. The people, the customs, the age old fishing methods and water craft, the 'flavour' of those areas had to be experienced. His childhood friends Ananda Welikala and Ali Moheed subsequently made several trips with him to try, in some small way, to capture life in areas once denied. They made a deliberate decision not to emulate the thousands of others who merely photographed war relics and gawked at a disfigured piece of steel or some piece of rubble. Ancient Buddhist sites, ancient churches, ancient mosques and ancient Hindu Kovils added to the complex social fabric that is there for the smart observer. A curious mind will discover old traditions and a way of life that defines those areas and inhabitants. It is better to be a traveller than a tourist when one takes the journey. Being observant of the various festivals, the costumes, the cuisine, local commerce and trade, new roads and new bridges 'educates' an open mind to this moment of social change in the history of Sri Lanka.



Another key motive to visiting and recording daily life as they saw it was the shrill rhetoric that circulates in cyber world today. The hi-tech mouse can be as destructive as the mighty sword! It is a well-known human weakness to make up a story when one does not know the truth or all the facts and any criticism not properly constructed, is merely 'noise'.

All three friends who crafted the introduction and foreword to the book *Places Once Denied* are enriched by the experience and now have great hope for the future of this complex, exotic land.

After the discussion, Mr Tony Saldin, Honorary Secretary, CSA CC proposed the vote of thanks complimenting the speaker for making a fascinating presentation which was very much appreciated by the audience.

-Tony Saldin

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#### Melbourne Chapter 23 March 2012

Mr. Srilal Miththapala spoke on "**Conservation of the Sri Lankan Elephant**". Srilal who holds a BSc (Engineering) degree is also a Chartered Electrical Engineer. He has worked for almost 25 years in the Tourism industry and had been a guest lecturer at University of Plymouth (UK). He has made presentations on 'Sri Lankan Tourism and Sustainability' at various international forums. Srilal has conducted field research on Asian Elephant Conservation in Sri Lanka and has published a book titled: *Tranquil Footsteps* which tells the story of a herd of elephants in the Uda Walawe National Park, through the eyes of the matriarch elephant.

His talk, illustrated with a slide show, covered an introduction to the elephant species in the world, the current status of the Sri Lankan sub-species and the threat and challenges the elephant faces in the wild today.

There are two types of elephant species in the world, namely Asian and African. The African variety has two sub-species and the Asian type includes four sub-species. *Elephas Maximus Maximus* is found in Sri Lanka. There are characteristics such as the size, shape and color that distinguish between Asian and African elephants. The population of wild elephants in Sri Lanka is estimated 6,000 to 6,500. At the turn of the century, elephants roamed all over the country, but with development in the south they were dispersed to the dry zone.

The first wave of elephant destruction occurred during the British rule when elephant killers were rewarded with money. Today 200 elephants die per year and due to altercations with elephants, 50 people get killed during the same period. Human-elephant conflicts exist in the North East, Anuradhapura and down South of the country.

The Sri Lankan elephant is entwined with the island's religious and cultural background, yet

enormous numbers of elephant deaths are reported. It is endangered but not critically so. The largest population of elephants existing in the smallest habitat is unique to Sri Lanka. In the island, 60 per cent of the elephants live outside the protected area and maintain a very close knit society. Families are led by a matriarch and elephants are considered high in the intelligence strata. The males lead a nomadic life only entering the family to reproduce. *Thun Path Rala* includes a baby, mother and an aunt. Baby elephants are very mischievous and are lovely to watch. "Gatherings" of about 300 elephants at Minneriya in September each year is rated by *Lonely Planet* as the sixth (wild life) wonder of the world and it continues to attract tourists to the island.

Villagers have encountered conflicts with elephants because large numbers roam in a small area. Rapid deforestation, changing land usage, people encroaching national parks and fragmentation of the elephant habitat has caused the elephant-human conflict. Frequently, elephants fall into wells which the villagers dig and the speaker once had to seek assistance from the Air Force to rescue two elephants at Sigiriya. Furthermore, villagers use buck shot and *hakka patas* to chase away the elephants.

Chasing elephants utilising *ali vedi*, sky rockets, crop guarding, elephant drives, capture and translocation, electric fencing, capture and domestication, compensation and insurance schemes, awareness programs, more effective management of parks, legislation against elephant killings are methods to deter human-elephant conflict.

The issues that inhibit these approaches are non-enforcement of rules, haphazard quick fixes, lack of leadership from Wild Life Department and succumbing to political pressure. Not interacting with the scientific community, not adhering to long term plans, non-participation by the private sector and lack of transparency are also considered inhibitive.

So the way forward is for more transparency, the involvement of the private sector, a consultative approach and the discovering a new design that will implement human-elephant co-existence instead of conflict.

The speaker stated that when conflicts encompassing the elephant are settled, half of Sri Lanka's wild life and nature complexities will disappear. Elephants are a super keystone species and an entire ecosystem can change if these animals are taken out of the landscape.

A video clip was shown on '*Gamunu*', the elephant at Yala demanding food from visitors. Mr. Miththapala recommends that if you are patient and respect the wild life, you can have the most wonderful experiences but always remember that these are wild animals and be on your guard because you are trespassing in their territory.

- Dilhani Kumbukkage



## Books & other publications FOR SALE

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

### • Benjamin Bailey's Poetical Sketches of the Island of Ceylon 1841 - Dr Rajpal K de Silva.

A few new copies of this book released in 2011 are available for sale. It is a 348-page hard bound book consisting of the poems published by Benjamin Bailey with notes and a critique by Dr de Silva.

Price A\$40 plus mailing charges calculated at cost. Inquiries from Hugh on karu@internode.net.au  
Phone: 02 94026342

### Not Our War by Dr Sanjiva Wijesinha

The paperback edition of this new book, published by Vijitha Yapa in December 2013, are now available at \$14.95 in Melbourne bookshops (Dymocks, Readings etc) and on amazon.com Read the review at <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/131229/plus/a-piece-of-authentic-fiction-77759.html>.

A few copies are available at \$14.95 (postage free) directly from the author. Contact Sanjiva on: sanjiva.wijesinghe@med.monash.edu.au

## FORTHCOMING RELEASE

### Rare pictorial impressions of Sri Lanka of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries

A set of six prestigious volumes as Collector's items Dr Rajpal de Silva in association with the Central Cultural Fund Press in Sri Lanka is currently engaged in compiling a set of six volumes focussing on art before the photographic era in Ceylon. They will be ready for sale from September 2014.

The volumes are: 1. People and their dress - Rajpal de Silva 2. Peoples customs and Occupations - Rajpal de Silva and Kumari Jayawardene 3. Cities and Antiquities - Rajpal de Silva and Nilan Cooray 4. Religions and Rituals- Rajpal de Silva and Albert Dharmasiri 5. Travel - Rajpal de Silva and Ranjan Gooneratne 6. Fauna and Flora - Rajpal de Silva and Kumari Abeyagunawardena

The six volumes are expected to be of the same very high standard of production which (as CSA members are well aware) marked Dr de Silva's previous books such as Early Prints of Ceylon, Dutch Views of Ceylon etc. Collectors are advised to make early reservations upon release of these volumes which we will endeavour to bring to the notice of CSA members through The Ceylankan as and when we receive information from the author.



This is the complete list of books in the CSA library as of now, along with numerous other newsletters and pamphlets relating to Ceylon/Sri Lanka. Some of these books have been donated by members and friends out of their goodwill and kindness, while many are donations from authors who have held book launches to promote their books at CSA general meetings.

While we will publish a full list from time to time, only new additions will be listed in future issues.

- ALIYA Stories of the Elephants of Sri Lanka - Teresa Cannon & Peter Davis
- The story of the Sri Lankan Muslims - Vama Vamadevan; 1999
- The Ceylon We Knew (A Journey into the Recent Past) - Vama Vamadevan; 1995
- Wild Life Coservation in Sri Lanka - C.G. Urugoda; 1994
- Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka Vol. XLI Sesquicentennial Number 1995-1996
- Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka Vol. XLV Sesquicentennial Number
- Journal of South East Asian Studies Special Issue Volume XX 1997 (Conflict & Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka)
- Echoes in the Memory - Lloyd Oscar de Silva 1992
- Guide to Ceylon - H.A.J. Hulugalle (Third Edition) 1981
- Post Guide to Sri Lanka - South China Morning Post 1983
- A Tree in a Forest - A collection of Ajahn Chal's Similes 199• The Spectrum of Buddhism - Writings of Priadasse 1991
- The Fauna of British India, Birds (including Ceylon & Burma) - E.C.Stuart Baker; Volumes II to VIII
- Savage Sanctuary by R.L.Spittel
- F.L.Woodward - Out of his life & thought by D.H. Panditha Gunawardene
- Sirimavo Bandaranaike by Maureen Seneviratne
- Colonial Kollupitiya & Its Environs by H.M.Mervyn Herath
- Monarchs of Sri Lanka by H.M.Mervyn Herath
- The Netherlands-Ceylon Heritage by E.Jongens
- History of the Nugegoda Methodist Church by Shirley Somanader
- Headlines & Deadlines - Jottings of a Journo by E.C.T.Candappa
- Banking & Business in Sri Lanka by V.S.Nadaraja
- Nineteenth century American Medical Missionaries in Jaffna, Ceylon with special reference to Samuel Fisk Green by Thiru Arumugam.





#### SYDNEY 25 May 2014

The Second General Meeting of the Ceylon Society of Australia for 2014 will take place on Sunday, 25 May 2014 commencing at 6.30 pm at the Pennant Hills Community Centre, Ramsay Road, Pennant Hills, NSW 2120. Please note the venue. Ramsay Road is off Yarrara Road and the venue is opposite the Pennant Hills Railway Station. The entrance to the building is from the car park at the back of the building. Members and their Guests are welcome.

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Professor Michael Roberts presents  
**"A Bird's Eye View of Sri Lankan History:  
 1232 – 1948"**

Professor Michael Roberts was educated in the discipline of History at the University of Peradeniya and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar in 1962. Michael Roberts taught at Peradeniya from 1966 to 1976 before moving sideways into Anthropology at the University of Adelaide in 1977.

His many publications encompass social mobility, social history, agrarian issues, peasant protest, popular culture, urban history, caste in South Asia, practices of cultural domination and nationalism. His main focus has been Sri Lanka, but there have been ventures into Indian socio-political history, Australian myth making and the sociology of cricket; while his present concern is a comparative study of martyrdom. Dr Roberts lives in Adelaide and is a CSA member for many years.



**A Bird's Eye-View of Sri Lankan History:  
 1232-1948** – Historical sketches in summary can be organised with a stress on chronology and/or strands of development with emphasis on significant milestones on the way. Dr Robert's journey here will mix both with the chronology being organised as (1)

the Middle Period 1232 -1796/1818 and (2) the British Period 1818-1948.

Brief attention will be devoted to the marginal area of the sparsely inhabited dry zone, however, the main focus will be on the Sinhala and Tamil kingdoms and thence on the colonial incursions of the Portugese, Dutch and British in succession. The Sinhala kingdoms resisted these colonial forces for quite some time and thereby sustained the older belief in their sway over Sihaladivipa.

Dr Roberts would assert that we cannot deploy 20th century notions in comprehending state systems of that era and must be guided by the mandala concept. He conceptualises this as "tributary overlordship" so graphically embodied in rites of dakum or panduru pakkudam. All this changed in the new capitalist order and bureaucratised regime introduced by the British within a changing and modernising world dispensation. It follows that we cannot extend the notions of Sinhalaness in the pre-British era to the 20th and 21st centuries. We must not extend a linear model of history rooted in the past with its primordialist rigidity or what one can call the appeal of uramaya in a simple axiomatic manner, to present day politics.

**Social:** After a brief discussion period, the usual Social will be the next item on the agenda. Those who are able to are please requested to bring a plate of non-sweet savoury finger-food. Please avoid cakes with icing as the general preference is for plain cakes, sandwiches and savoury pastries. To avoid duplication of items, please contact our Social Convener Chandra Senaratne on (02) 9872 6826. A donation to CSA to help defray meeting costs, which could be made at the meeting, is an alternative.

– Les Perera, Hony. Secretary, CSA

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## Probabilities

If an elderly but distinguished scientist says that something is possible he is almost certainly is right, but if he says that it is impossible he is very probably wrong.

Arthur C. Clarke – *New Yorker* (1969).



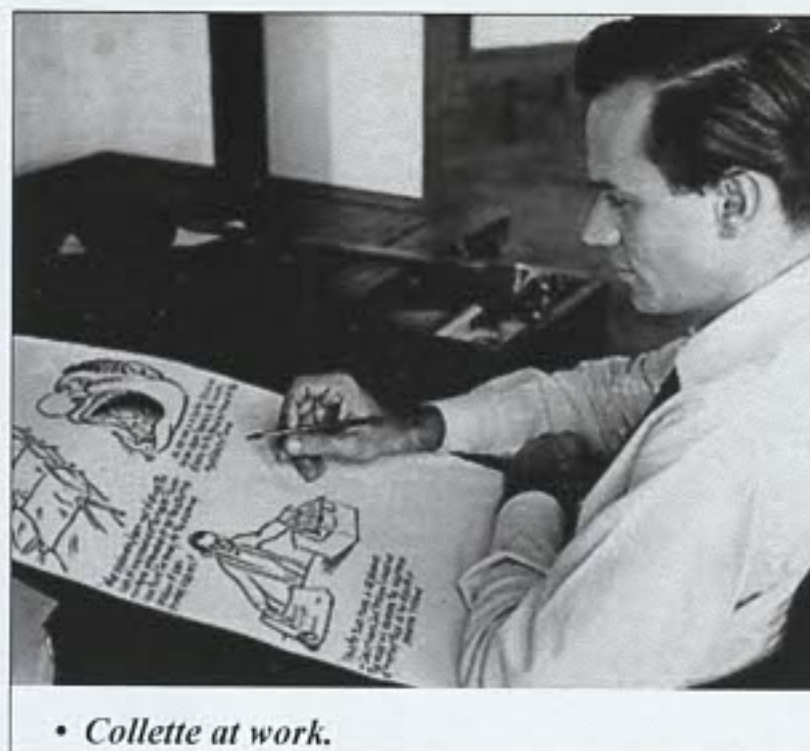
# Let's have a drink!

(1950 vintage)



WHISKY		Per Glass	With Soda
		Rs. c.	Rs. c.
All Leading Brands		1 65	1 75
Johnnie Walker Black Label		1 85	1 95
Highland Queen "15 years old"		1 85	1 95
GIN			
Coates' Plymouth		1 70	
Tanqueray's		1 70	
Gordon's		1 70	
Boards		1 70	
Holloway's		1 60	
Hiram Walker		1 60	
Melrose Drover		1 60	
Curtis		1 60	
BRANDIES			
Lucien Foucauld		1 75	
Martell		1 75	
Hennessey		1 75	
Exshaw's		1 75	
Otard		1 65	
Rouyer Guillet		1 65	
Reynella		1 65	
Constantino		1 65	
BEER			
Beer Bottles		2 75	
Beer Pints		1 60	
Beer " (Allsops)		1 70	
Beer " (Bass)		1 70	
Stout "		1 75	
" (Nips)		1 25	
MADEIRAS			
Dry Reserve		2 00	
Marsala Florio (Sweet)		2 00	
SHERRIES			
Dry Sack		2 50	
Sandeman's Amontillado		2 00	
Sandeman's Brown		2 00	
Sandeman's Dry		2 00	

The above prices are subject to alteration without notice and.



• Collette at work.

## Aubrey Collette – cartoonist par excellence

These caricatures of prominent Sri Lankans of his time (see back cover) are classic examples of Aubrey Collette's uncanny accuracy in capturing the true likenesses of his subjects. Art teacher turned Ceylon's most famous political cartoonist, Collette was born in Colombo to Dutch Burgher parents on 5 September 1920 and was educated at Royal College. It is on record that four of the country's post-Independence Prime Ministers not only put up with his caricatures, but also enjoyed his impressions of them immensely.

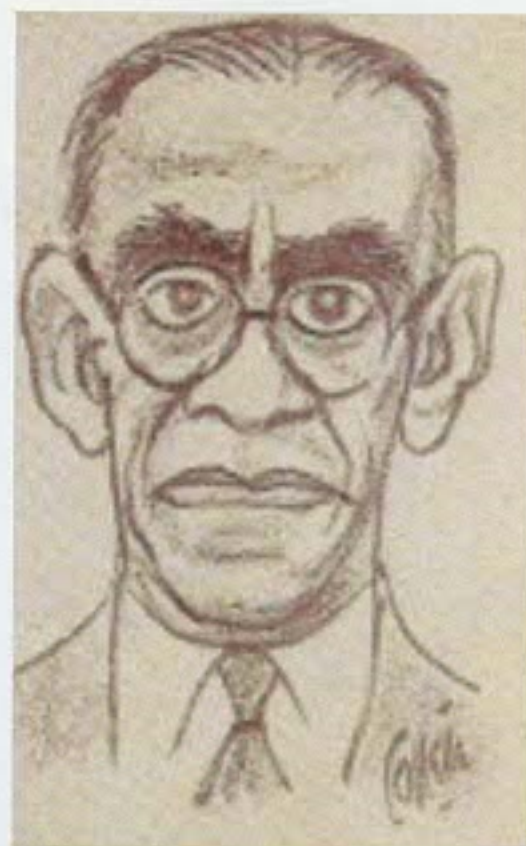
Collette was one of the founder members of the 43rd group in Sri Lanka. For many years, he was cartoonist/illustrator with the Lake House group of newspapers and was a household name among daily readers of the Ceylon Observer with his satirical cartoons recording the socio-economic and political events of the country and, more especially, his illustrations to the renowned Flybynight and Sooty Banda columns in that newspaper. He is best remembered for his creation of the common man in the much-loved Citizen Perera epitomised caricature at its best.

On migration to Australia in 1961, Collette continued his artistry on The Australian and (later) the Melbourne Herald newspapers. He won the prestigious Walkley Award in 1972 which brought him international fame.

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## Classic caricatures of Aubrey Collette

(Further details see page 35)



(Clockwise, from top left)

- Sir John Kotalawela, Third Prime Minister of Ceylon,
- Sir Alan Rose - Chief Justice,
- Sir Ernest de Silva - First Chairman Bank of Ceylon,
- Sir Kandiah Vaithianathan,
- Sir Richard Aluvihare - First Ceylonese IGP,
- Sir Ivor Jennings - First Vice-Chancellor University of Ceylon.
- Sir Donatus Victoria - Hotelier.