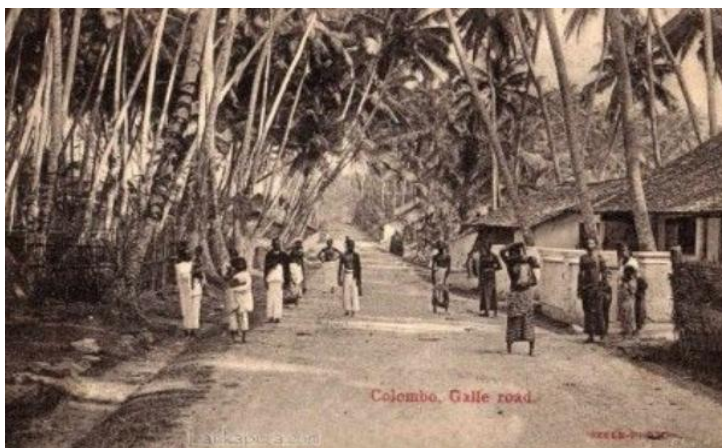




Keeping Our Heritage Alive	THE Ceylankan The Journal of the Ceylon Society of Australia
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President's Message



Jitto Arulampalam

Welcome to our “new” The Ceylankan Journal!

A huge thank you to our editor Dr. Nimal Chandrasena who has done a splendid job given that he only took on the job 2 months ago. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

As discussed at the last AGM in December the new Executive has decided to revive the *Ceylon Society of Australia* to make it more appealing to the next generation of membership without deviating from its core purpose of bringing together everyone passionate about the history and heritage of Sri Lanka.

As such the existing constitution would be updated at a duly constituted members meeting later this year to enable the future growth plans of CSA. Until such time all membership fees would be suspended for existing as well as any new members who may wish to join the Society this year.

The task ahead is enormous and I welcome your suggestion and input at any time in this journey.

Please communicate with me directly on any matter concerning the CSA
(Jitto@arulampalam.com)

A Word From The Editor

Dear Readers

As the *Ceylon Society of Australia* (CSA) makes a new attempt to re-launch *The Ceylankan*, I am keen to remind our members and other interested parties of the original intent of the publication. Given below is an excerpt of what the founding editor (David Goodrich) published in the first-ever Journal, in **1998** (Vol. 1, Issue 1, February).

As Thiru Arumugam reminisces (see Article 1), the Society's name in those days was the *Ceylon Research Society of Australia*. The name change to CSA occurred in the same year (1998).

The Society's publication was titled *The Ceylankan* in 1998. However, it was first considered a “Newsletter” of the CSA. Two years later, in 2000, it became a “Journal” with a scholarly focus and areas of interest in a wide array of topics of Sri Lanka's cultural and social history (see the original ‘Areas of Interest statement below).

Areas of interest

Areas of interest are innumerable. There is so much to enjoy and learn about Lanka and sometimes it is easier for someone who has never even visited the country to perceive a bigger picture - something about ‘if you're in the middle of the trees, you don't see the woods!’. Are there members who can talk about the art of Ceylon, or the wildlife, what about the fishing industry or Sinhala history. For me the primary interests at this stage are the building of the Colombo Breakwater (my grandfather was involved on the engineering of the 3rd stage of the early 1900s and the canals which formed an important communication and means of transportation started by the Sinhalese to a minor extent, continued by the Portuguese and latterly by the Dutch and British. The history of the Kings of Lanka, village life, the politics of the country, coffee and tea, and the development of writing are just a few of the plethora of topics which could be interesting - everything about Lanka is interesting!! Everyone will have something to share with members and guests, a presentation or two at each meeting would be a real boon. So have a go everyone and look forward to hearing the next interesting presentation on Lanka.

Not much has changed since then.

[I thank Thiru for a succinct description of this past and achievements and for painstakingly checking these details and writing a short article, for the benefit of our readers.]

Like most Societies that are run on modest membership fees and volunteers holding office, the CSA has had ups and downs over the years. A look through most of the past journals illustrates that while some issues have invaluable contributions, others have suffered from modest and marginal contributions.

The past editors could only do so much with the contributions they would have received. After a nearly two-year hiatus, a new Committee, energized by a new President, has emerged, with a determination to not let our founders down and keep the CSA flame alive.

So, here we are, with the new-2026 First issue of *The Ceylankan Journal 109, Vol. 28, Issue 1*, produced with a slightly modified “look” inside. I hope this will be enjoyed by our members and other readers.

I am hopeful of maintaining this quality from now on, although an imminent review and potential changes to the CSA Constitution (expected in the latter half of 2026) may see changes to the frequency of the journal issues produced per year. Readers and users should be aware that the information and material, including pictures and photographs, provided in the past, and also herein, by *The Ceylankan*, on [<https://ceylonociety.org/the-ceylankan/>], have been given ‘In Good Faith’. The material contained is for general informational purposes and education only.

All information on the site and the views expressed – scholarly or otherwise - are those of the authors. However, we make no representation or warranty of any kind, express or implied, regarding the accuracy, adequacy, validity, reliability, or completeness of any information on the Journal’s articles.

Anyone seeking more information on any of the topics may contact the Editor or authors directly. The Editor would also appreciate any corrections that readers may want to make concerning the articles. We also welcome constructive criticisms and helpful comments, which will be published under ‘Letters’ or ‘Comments Received’ in a subsequent Issue.

Given that the Journal is purely for educational purposes only and is for free distribution, the Editor and the authors have made every attempt to **not infringe on any items protected by copyright laws.**

We have attributed all items to their rightful owners, giving them the credit, by way of proper and valid citations.

While no Copyright infringement is intended, if any copyright owner feels otherwise, we trust that they will contact the Editor immediately so that any amendments or corrections can be made.

Please enjoy the Journal and engage with us providing any feedback directly to me.



Dr. Nimal Chandrasena
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Thiru Arumugam - History of the Journal “The Ceylankan” from 1998 to 2024

“*The Ceylankan*” is the quarterly literary Journal published by the *Ceylon Society of Australia* (CSA). The CSA was founded in 1998, and the first issue of *The Ceylankan* was dated February 1998. It contained articles about Ceylon and Sri Lanka written by members. That started an unbroken, uninterrupted run of 108 quarterly issues over a period of 27 years until the November 2024 issue, with a total cumulative page count of over 3000 pages.

This is a remarkable achievement considering that it was published by volunteers and never had advertisements in the body of the text as a matter of principle, and only had four Editors in the 27- year period. It became the flag bearer of the CSA.

There was a break in publication in 2025 as the Editor resigned, and a replacement could not be found. That problem has now been resolved, and *The Ceylankan* has a new lease of life and now goes into bat for a second innings. The history of the CSA is described in detail in the article “*Our Story: How we started*”, which appears on the CSA website <https://ceylonsociety.org/about-3/>.

It was written by Hugh Karunanayake, CSA’s Founder President and carries the photograph of what the Galle Road looked like in the 19th Century (see cover page).

Dr. Chris Puttock was a cartophilist who also collected antiquarian picture postcards of Ceylon. Amazingly, his collection amounted to over 15,000 pre-1920 picture postcards of Ceylon scenes. He suggested forming a group of those who were interested in the heritage of Ceylon in matters like antiquarian books, picture postcards, stamps, coins and artworks. A meeting of those interested in these topics was held at the Sydney residence of Hugh Karunanayake on 30th August 1997.

Over the next few months, meetings were held at the residences of those interested until it was considered appropriate to hold a public meeting to establish a Society.

The public meeting was held on 28th of February 1998, and the foundation Office Bearers elected included Hugh Karunanayake (President), Michael (Rohan) Sourjah (Secretary) and David Goodrich (Editor). The first two are still with us. Unfortunately, Chris Puttock was planning to move to Hawaii and was no longer directly involved.

The tentative name of the Organisation, which was subject to review, was “*Ceylon Research Society of Australia*”. At the second meeting, the Committee decided to call the organisation “*Ceylon Society of Australia*” and call its Journal “*The Ceylankan*” which neatly combined Ceylon and Sri Lanka.

David Goodrich

David Goodrich was elected as the first- ever Editor of the CSA. Although his grandmother was a Ceylonese, he had never been to Ceylon at that point in time (**Figure 1**).

The first issue of the Journal was dated February 1998. It consisted of six A4- size photocopied black and white pages. The 2nd issue was dated April 1998 and had expanded to 12 pages and now had the title of “*The Ceylankan*”. It included a plea to members to contribute articles.

With the 6th issue dated May 1999, the format of *The Ceylankan* became more or less standardised with 26 to 28 pages per issue, **A4-size** photocopied pages stapled together. The eighth issue, dated November 1999, gave the full list of the names and addresses of CSA members. It listed 73 members. At a rough count, only about a dozen of them are still CSA members.

In the 9th edition, dated February 2000, the issues which hitherto described themselves as the “**Newsletter**” of the CSA began to describe themselves as the “**Journal**” of the CSA. This issue also stated that a group of enthusiastic Melbourne-based CSA members met at the residence of Dr. Srilal Fernando on 23 January 2000 and planned to start a **Melbourne Chapter of the CSA**.

In the 10th issue, dated May 2000, the Editor, David Goodrich, recorded details of his first-ever visit to Ceylon. He was born in New Zealand, but his maternal grandmother was a Ceylonese from the Prins family. His mother was born in Ceylon. He said that ‘*he did not expect too much and that is a good way to travel, as one does not get disappointed.*’

The 14th issue, dated April 2001, included an Index of all the articles published in *The Ceylankan* up to that date. Also included is a full list of members with addresses, totalling about 200. In the 16th issue, dated November 2001, David Goodrich said that due to his rapidly failing health, this will be the last issue of *The Ceylankan* edited by him.

Starting from scratch, over sixteen issues, David achieved the commendable task of editing a 30- page quarterly *Journal*, which reflects the history of Ceylon/Sri Lanka. Over this period, the Journal achieved an international stature as reflected by the growing membership of CSA. It truly became the standard bearer of CSA. This 2001 issue included a letter from Mervyn Andriesz, which said:

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

Sumane Iyer

The 17th issue, dated February 2002, recorded the passing away of David Goodrich, the founding Editor of *The Ceylankan*. Sumane Iyer took over as the second Editor of

The Ceylankan and continued in this role for the next 29 issues (**Figure 1**).

The 20th issue, dated November 2002, was a major step forward in the format of *The Ceylankan*. In the recent past, it consisted of 15 sheets (30 pages) of A4 paper stapled together without a cover. From then on, it had a proper cover. It was printed on A3 sheets, folded and bound together to give a total of 32 pages.

The 29th issue, dated February 2005, recorded that the founder President, Hugh Karunanayake, had stepped down from his post after six years. He was replaced by Tony Peries. Tony was formerly in Ceylon, the Chairman and CEO of the premier plantation management Company, George Steuart & Co.

In the 36th issue, dated November 2006, it was recorded that the CSA Committee introduced the idea of members giving a friend who is interested in the aims of CSA a one-year gift subscription to *The Ceylankan*. At the end of the year, the friend has the option of joining the CSA as a member. This arrangement continued to be maintained and brought in many new members to the CSA.

Journal 37, dated February 2007, recorded that members of the CSA in Colombo, led by Mike Udabage, held a meeting on 14 January 2007 and decided to launch a **Colombo Chapter of CSA**, to be inaugurated in May 2007. Somasiri Devendra, a frequent contributor to *The Ceylankan*, was elected interim President. This copy of the Journal also records that the CSA now has 325 members.



Figure 1. David Goodrich (L) and Sumane Iyer (R)

The Journal 40, issued in November 2007, was a bumper Collector's Issue of 52 pages with a special binding, compared to the normal issue of 32 pages. This was to commemorate the first 10 years of existence of the CSA. A total of 420 copies of the Journal were printed, and each copy was numbered by hand. The Editor had this comment:

"The Ceylankan, now considered the flagship of the Society, has, from a 'Newsletter' ten years ago, metamorphosed into a rigorous Journal. If history is defined as the collective memories of those who have lived through it, then The Ceylankan can take its rightful place as an authentic record of contemporary times of the writers."

Journal 41 of February 2008 recorded the election of the third President of the CSA. He was Sunil de Silva, a Lawyer by profession who held the position of Attorney

General in Ceylon. Migrating to Sydney, he held the position of New South Wales Crown Prosecutor.

He was a keen actor and took part in many stage productions in Ceylon and Sydney. In Journal 45 of February 2009, the Editor Sumane Iyer said that after seven years of editing *The Ceylankan* through 29 issues, it was time for him to call it a day. He said that he has enjoyed every minute of guiding it through its youth into its maturity. This issue also included a list of **24 Libraries** all over the world that hold copies of *The Ceylankan*.

Doug Jones

Journal 46, dated May 2009, was the first issue edited by Doug Jones, the third Editor of the Journal. Doug had extensive experience as a Journalist in Ceylon and Australia (**Figure 2**). He went on to edit 49 issues of the Journal. Doug Jones was Secretary of the CSA since 2006. Journal 53, dated February 2011, recorded that Harry de Sayrah has taken over as the fourth President of CSA.

Harry was a Director of major Companies in Ceylon and a Zone Chairman of *Lions District 306*. He continued his interest in the Lions Club in Sydney. Journal 64 of November 2013 included an article about how a 15-year-old student of Royal College, Colombo was awarded in 1910, *Royal Patent No. 24199* by the London Patents Office for "*Improvements in Reversing Gear for Steam Engines*".

Journal 65, dated February 2014, recorded that Thiru Arumugam had been appointed as the 5th President of CSA. Thiru was a Chartered Engineer who worked in the Ceylon Electricity Board and later moved to the UK, where he was a Principal Engineer in a leading International Firm of Environmental Consultants. He was a prolific contributor of articles to *The Ceylankan*. The issue dated August 2016 was the 75th issue of *The Ceylankan*, the diamond anniversary issue. In it, the Editor commented as follows:

"Step by step, The Ceylankan has moved up to the 75th rung on the ladder of life. A major milestone for an unpretentious publication sought after worldwide, by devoted members of CSA, many of whom generously contribute their research and knowledge by sharing their findings for publication in a Journal they have come to treasure."

Journal 86, dated November 2016, includes an unexpected article titled "*Ceylankan – A mélange of many minds*". It is a reproduction of an unsolicited review of *The Ceylankan* Journal on 21 February 2003 by Sugathadasa Pathiravithana, Editor of the *Ceylon Daily News*, which originally appeared in the *Ceylon Daily News* of 27 August 2005. In a two-page article, he reviews all the major articles that appeared in that issue. He writes:

"For an expatriate publication, The Ceylankan, which comes all the way from Sydney, has many surprises. For one thing I was under the impression that expatriates are people who are busy making money all the time and as a result, they have no time

left to 'waste' on such cultural enterprises as producing entertaining, informative and valuable Journals like The Ceylankan that is hard to put away once you start on it ... I must say that The Ceylankan provides a good deal of interesting reading, which I think is more than of topical interest".

With Journal 81 of February 2018, CSA celebrated its 20th birthday. *The Ceylankan* celebrated by having the front and back covers in colour for the first time in this and future issues. This issue also records that Thiru Arumugam stepped down from the post of President and handed over to Pauline Gunewardene, CSA's first female President. In Ceylon, Pauline was a Personal Assistant (PA) to Arthur C Clarke and other heads of large mercantile establishments. In Australia, she continued in a similar role at City Mutual, Prudential, Union Shipping and Nestle.

Journal 90, dated May 2020, records the publication of an **Index** of articles in *The Ceylankan* from Journal 1 to Journal 88 (1998 to 2019). The Journal states:

The Ceylankan has been variously described as the standard bearer and flagship of the Society. There is, however, one thing that has so far been missing, and that is a comprehensive Index of the Journal. Hugh Karunanayake took it upon himself to arrange to fill this void. He located a Certified Indexer, Chitra Karunanayake, and she graciously agreed to prepare an Index free of charge. She is a History Graduate and holds a Master's degree in Library Science from Monash University and has qualified as an Indexer with the Institute of Certified Indexing.

The completed Index, running to 64 pages, includes a Subject Index as well as an Author Index. The Index is now available on the CSA website and is an extremely useful tool for tracking down articles. CSA is extremely grateful to Chitra for spending many evenings over several months preparing this Index at no cost to CSA.

Journal 94, dated May 2021, noted that Sunil de Silva, former President of CSA, had passed away. This was the last issue edited by Doug Jones, who gave up because of his failing health. He edited 49 issues of *The Ceylankan* from 2009 to a very high standard without any interruption to the flow of issues and maintained the widespread international recognition of *The Ceylankan*. In recognition of his services, he was elected a Life Member of CSA, being only the second person to achieve this honour.

Adam Raffel

Journal 96, dated November 2021, was the first issue edited by Adam Raffel. He was only the fourth Editor of *The Ceylankan* in the past 24 years. Adam was born in Colombo in 1960 and migrated to Australia in 1975 (**Figure 2**). He graduated from Macquarie University with a degree in History and is a qualified Librarian who worked in Law firms as a Legal Editor.

Journal 100, the 100th edition of *The Ceylankan*, was the 25th anniversary edition of CSA and is dated November

2022. It was a bumper edition of 52 pages compared with the standard editions of 36 pages. In addition, all pages were in full colour, whereas usually only the front and back covers were in colour. It contained many long articles by the regular contributors and included photographs and a description of CSA's 25th anniversary celebrations, which were held on 28 August 2022.

The November 2023 Journal 104 recorded the passing away of Harry de Sayrah, who was President of CSA from 2011 to 2013. He was also an active member of the Lions Club in Bankstown. This Journal also recorded that on 27 August 2023, the guest speaker at the CSA meeting was Her Excellency, Mrs. Chitrangane Wagiswara, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Australia.



Figure 2. Doug Jones (L) and Adam Raffel (R)

Journal 105, dated February 2024, carries the exciting news that a CSA website has been created by Adam Raffel, the Editor (<https://ceylon-society.com>). The website includes information about CSA, its history and details of past and future meetings. Also uploaded were copies of past issues of *The Ceylankan* and a Subject and Author Index of articles in the journal from 1998 to 2022, all with free access.

Journal 108 is dated November 2024. It turned out to be the last issue edited by Adam Raffel because he resigned shortly afterwards due to work commitments. It is important for readers to take note - The 108 issues were created, printed and dispatched over the period from 1998 to 2024 (27 years) without any interruption or breaks. This is a very creditable achievement considering that this was done entirely by volunteers.

Also, there has never been any advertisement in the text of the Journal, and it has always been a pristine scholarly Journal with an international reputation, funded entirely by members' subscriptions and donations. As mentioned before, during the period of 27 years, *The Ceylankan* Journal has had only four editors: David Goodrich (16 issues, 1998-2001), followed by Sumane Iyer (29 issues, 2002-2009), Doug Jones (49 issues, 2009-2021) and Adam Raffel (14 issues, 2021-2024). We owe a deep debt of gratitude to all of them.

Articles in *The Ceylankan* were, with rare exceptions, written by CSA members. The most prolific contributor by far was the founding President, Hugh Karunayake. Almost every issue of *The Ceylankan* had a contribution from him, either under his own name or the pen name of '*The Rambler*' (now it can be revealed!). The writer of this

article has also contributed more than 50 articles to *The Ceylankan* over the years.

Thus ended the first innings century of *The Ceylankan* with 108 issues. It was not issued in 2025 as a replacement Editor could not be found. That problem has now been resolved with the appointment of Dr. Nimal Chandrasena as the new Editor. He is a distinguished botanist, an ecologist and a leading specialist in *Weed Science*. Nimal also serves

as the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *WEEDS*, the official journal of the *Asian-Pacific Weed Science Society*. His extensive academic background and editorial expertise will enable him to make a substantial contribution to the future of *The Ceylankan*, which now goes into bat for the second innings, and it is hoped will score another century.

Asiff Hussein -

Early Chinese Influence on the Sri Lankan Society and Culture Through the Ages

China has been no stranger to Sri Lanka. *Sino-Sri Lankan* relations have existed since the medieval period, if not earlier. This is borne out by place names found in various parts of the country, articles of dress and food items, martial arts and the medical tradition of acupuncture, which the Chinese introduced to our island, beginning from a very early period. In fact, the Chinese influence on the society and culture of my country may have been more profound and pervasive than previously believed.

Sri Lankan tea is well known all over the world thanks to the British colonialists who promoted it overseas as 'Ceylon Tea'. However, there is evidence to show that the tea plant may have been grown here long before it was introduced in Ceylon on a commercial scale by the Scotsman James Taylor, who successfully produced and processed tea in Loolcondra Estate, using imported Assam leaf ('Assam Jat') in 1867¹. Captain Robert Percival, in his *Account of the Island of Ceylon* (1805), wrote that:

"The tea plant has also been discovered native in the forests of this island. It grows spontaneously in the neighbourhood of Trincomale and other northern parts of Ceylon. General Champagne informed me that the soldiers of the garrison frequently use it. They cut the branches and twigs and hang them in the sun to dry; they then take off the leaves and boil them to extract the juice, which has all the properties of that of the China leaf. I have in my possession a letter from an officer in the 80th regiment, in which he states, he had found the real tea plant in the woods of Ceylon, of a quality equal to any that ever grew in China".

It is therefore very possible that the Chinese visited our shores a long time ago and introduced tea to Ceylon long before the British planters did. But when exactly was such Chinese tea introduced to the island?

That a powerful Chinese force visited the island is proven by the Trilingual Stone inscription, written in Chinese,

Persian and Tamil, discovered in the early 1900s in Cripps Road, Galle. The stone inscription, erected in 1409 or 1410, commemorated the visit by the Chinese eunuch Cheng-Ho (also known as **General Zheng He**), who served as ambassador of the **Ming Emperor Yung Lo**. It also recorded that Cheng Ho bestowed upon a Buddhist temple in the mountain on the island a thousand pieces of gold, five thousand pieces of silver and fifty rolls of embroidered silks in many colours, among other things.

This was no doubt the much celebrated expedition westward of the Chinese admiral Cheng Ho in the early 1400s, with a fleet of over three hundred ships and over twenty thousand troops who arrived at Pich-lo-li, which has been identified as Beruwala on the southwestern coast. It is possible that the admiral's fleet had the tea plant, which they could have grown in their huge ships, since tea was even then a national beverage of the Chinese nation.

Indeed, fleets such as this carrying tens of thousands of personnel had to be self-sufficient for months on end. Some ships in the fleet were floating producers of food, breeding pigs and dogs for food and rat control. They were also familiar with scurvy and the benefits of consuming fresh vegetables grown on board ship. In fact, we are told that the famed admiral's fleet carried a number of specialists to identify plants and transfer them from one continent to another².

Thus, it is very possible that it was the Chinese who introduced the tea plant here long before Western colonialism made inroads on the island. In fact, Chinese influence in Sri Lanka has been longer and more pervasive than we are likely to suppose. A cargo of Chinese ware was discovered some time ago in Velanai Island off the Jaffna peninsula and dated to the 12th century³. Curiously enough, John Still, in his fascinating book *Jungle Tide*, published in 1930⁴, had this to say of the environs of Adam's Peak:

"We climbed along ledges and hunted for caves, and some of the many we found had been inhabited by

¹ Ukers, W. H. (1935). *All About Tea, Vol. 1*. The Tea and Coffee Journal Company, New York. p. 587.

² An Ancient Connection with China. Rohan Wickramasinghe in *Maritime Heritage of Sri Lanka*. Ed. Sarala Fernando (2013).

³ Early Settlements in Jaffna. Ponnampalam Ragupathy (1987)

⁴ Still, J. (1947). *Jungle Tide*. W. Blackwood & Sons, p. 237.

man, though more were the homes of nothing but bats or porcupines. Some caves we found could only be reached by the notches their former users had cut in the trunks of ancient rhododendrons which grew against the cliff, and in several of these there were inscriptions in Chinese characters cut into the rock and gilded”.

This is something certainly worth inquiring into. The Chinese influence on our beautiful island may have been more pronounced than previously thought.

How Old is the Chinese Presence in Sri Lanka? The Evidence from Place-Names

A consideration of place names suggests significant Chinese settlement in times past. *Seenigama* (literally, ‘Chinese village’) in the South Western coast, *China Fort* in Beruwala’s Moor area and *China Garden* in Galle may well be vestiges of such past Chinese settlement, not to mention *Seenimodara Oya* near Tangalle in southern Sri Lanka, which suggests an old Chinese settlement near the mouth of a river. Interestingly, there is a shrine by the side of the Gongavela mosque in Matale town dedicated to Zainul Abidin Waliullah, who was referred to by locals as *Seenattu Raja Awliya* (Chinese Royal Saint) and numerous miracles attributed to him ⁵.

Numismatic Evidence for Chinese Presence and Trade

Numismatics also suggest considerable Chinese influence here, especially in the commercial sphere. Chinese coins of the *Song Dynasty* (970-1279 AD) have been found in the ancient capitals of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Yapahuwa, the earliest dating from 995-998 AC and the latest from 1201-1205 AC, as well as at Kurunegala in the Western hinterland, Alutwewa in the Kandapalle Korale of Matale in the central highlands and Kalmunai, Nindavur and Kurukkalmadam in the Eastern Province. A find of such coins was also made at Talaimannar in the northern region of the island ⁶. The diversity of sites where such coins have been found suggests the great distances covered by Chinese merchants trading on the island at different periods.

Chinese goods, probably by way of Chinese trading vessels, also found their way here quite early on. This included Chinese silks and possibly other material of Chinese origin. In an eighth-century graffiti found in the *Lion Rock* of Sigiriya, we come across a reference to a golden-hued damsel attired in Chinese silk (*sina-pata*).

Chinese Culinary Influences on Sri Lanka

The Sinhala word for white sugar, *Seeni*, literally means ‘Chinese’, and would have referred to refined sugar whose provenance must have been Chinese. There is evidence to

show that Chinese ships from Macao arrived in Colombo bringing such sugar to the island.

Another notable Chinese introduction was *Sanja*, a jelly made of seaweeds, such as *kaḍalpasi*, also known as Jaffna or Ceylon moss (*Gracilaria lichenoides*) and agar agar or China moss (*Gelidium amansii*), commonly found in the coastal areas of the Indian ocean which is well known among the local community of Muslims known as the Moors. The jelly is formed by boiling the dried seaweed in water before adding sugar and some colouring (in case it has not been previously coloured) to it. Milk is also sometimes added to it.

We find in an article by S.C.C. on ‘Ceylon Moss’ published in the Ceylon Magazine of February 1841, the statement that whatever Ceylon Moss was prepared by the inhabitants of Calpenty (Kalpitiya, in the northwestern part of the island) was disposed of to the Jaffna Moormen who exported it to Colombo under the guise of ‘Jaffna Moss’. He notes that the Chinese called it ‘Sanchou’.

More interesting is the notice of P. E. P. Deraniyagala ⁷, who refers to Ceylon moss being called *chan-chow parsi* locally, a name which he believes to be of Chinese origin. He adds that it is to be obtained in the markets of most towns and that hawkers of cool drinks prepare a jelly from it known as *chan-chow*, which sets without the aid of ice.

It would appear that it is this *chan-chow* that eventually became our *Sanja*. It is a well-attested fact that the initial voiceless palatal *c* tends to undergo *sibilization* (become *s*) in the refined Tamil of the Moors, while the palatal *c* following a nasal is softened to *j*. Thus, it is not unlikely that a term like *chan-chow* could have become *Sanja* with time. The term *chan-chow* itself likely had its origins in the Chinese *chin-chow* or ‘grass jelly’, which is prepared very much like our *Sanja*, although it is often drunk as well.

We also had fruits supposed to be of Chinese origin, although they could have been of an altogether different origin, but introduced by Chinese merchants. A Septuagenarian in *Memories, Grave and Gay* ⁸ says of his days in Kandy:

“There was a hill quite close to our house, which we named “The Guava Hill” because it abounded in trees which bore delicious guavas of every variety. There was also another jungle nearby where we plucked what we called “China Guavas”.

We had to creep through a great deal of undergrowth to get at them. It is surprising that we were not bitten by the snakes, which were quite numerous there. These China Guavas were in great request in the household to be converted into jelly”

⁵ History of the Muslims of the Matale District. S. H. A. Wadood in Historic Matale (1996)

⁶ Ceylon Coins and Currency. H. W. Codrington (1924)

⁷ Cured Marine Products of Ceylon. Ceylon Journal of Science (1933)

⁸ Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon Vol. 39(3), July 1949. p. 80.

Chinese Influences on Sri Lanka's Medical Traditions and Martial Arts

Another possible area where Chinese influence was felt may have been the age-old Sapuvida medical tradition of Matala, which involved acupuncture with pins of gold, silver, copper, iron and steel for curing diseases ⁹. It is possible that the local tradition of tattooing for certain medical conditions that prevailed not very long ago evolved from this medical system of Chinese origin.

The Chinese are well known for their age-old martial art traditions. Interestingly, the Muslims of Sri Lanka's Eastern Province were once experts in martial arts, which they called *Seenadi* (Chinese hit), although it had come to assume a very local character, so much so that it has been described by one writer as "*a well-known local martial art by which one uses one's hands and legs to fight enemies or escape from them*" ¹⁰. This form of martial art is thought to have been introduced by a group originating from the Far East that had settled down in the Eastern Moor town of Kinniya during the Dutch colonial period.

In fact, this martial art was so well known in Kinniya that it was said: "*Chinese hit was soaked in the blood of the Kinniya people*". Indeed, it was given so much importance that the teacher of the martial art came to be known as Annavi or Master. It is said that in the good old days, *Seenadi* functions were frequently held throughout the night in Kinniya. Youth would undergo training under the guidance of the Annavis either in the moonlight or under the light of Petromax and Hurricane lamps. This martial art tradition later spread to other Muslim towns of the East, such as Oddamawadi and Pottuvil, but has all but vanished in later times as enthusiasm for it declined over the years ¹¹.

Chinese Businesses in Sri Lanka

Although not much is known, the Chinese of old had great business acumen, which explains why ethnic Chinese have done so well in business in countries like Malaysia and Singapore. The Peranakan or Straits Chinese, found widely in South East Asia, have been traders perhaps for centuries. Likewise, we have a small Chinese business community in Sri Lanka, who arrived on the island during the inter-war years and during *World War II*.

Those Chinese who arrived in Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was known during British colonial times) must have done so for fear of foreign invasion after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in the early 1930s and political turbulence at a time when Communism was making inroads under Mao Zedong. It is interesting to note that all those who arrived here did so before the revolution of 1949 that led to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Being business people used to free enterprise, they must have seen

the writing on the wall and decided the time had come to look for greener pastures elsewhere.

Most migrants who arrived here seem to have come from Shandong and Hubei provinces in the Chinese Mainland. Those who came from Shandong were mostly textile merchants, while those who hailed from Hubei generally made a living as dental mechanics (**Figure 1**). Most seem to have arrived here during the inter-war years of the 1930s and in the World War II years and immediately afterwards, at any rate before the country achieved independence in 1948 ¹².

These Chinese migrants settled in various parts of the island, including in Colombo and even Jaffna, where they peddled their wares or practised their trade. Many of them, especially those who had their origins in Shandong, married local women, especially Sinhalese women, giving rise to a mixed *Sino-Sinhalese* community who adopted Sinhala in place of their native Chinese and successfully integrated into local society.

In Colombo, these folk settled in areas like Slave Island and Maradana, with a good many going on to establish textile stores selling Chinese silks and other oriental finery before sourcing their merchandise from other parts of Asia. Others started hotels and restaurants, especially in Colombo Fort.



Figure 1. Shiek Yei Cheng, a Chinese dental mechanic of Pettah, as a young boy, with his family.

There were in the early 2000s as many as thirteen textile retailing businesses in Colombo's Maradana area alone that were owned and managed by ethnic Chinese, among the more popular ones being *Lucky Textile Emporium*, *Chinese Lucky Stores*, *Chinese Modern Stores*, *Chinese Nanking Stores*, *Chinese Kung Fu Stores*, *Chinese North End*, *One Price Store*, *Shantung Textiles* and *Chinto Stores* ¹³.

Several such shops were also found in Chatham Street in Colombo Fort. I came across one that still survived a couple of years ago, although I am not sure if it is still there. It was called *The New Chinese Shop*, and despite its name, it was

⁹ Family Traditions and Schools of Specialization in Indigenous Medicine in the Matala District. S. S. Wijesuriya in *Historic Matala* (1996).

¹⁰ Arts and Crafts. Dr. M. S. M. Anes In: *The Muslim Heritage of Eastern Sri Lanka*. Ed. S. H. M. Jameel and Asiff Hussein (2011)

¹¹ Ibid (2011).

¹² The Silk Road They Travelled. Asiff Hussein. *Sunday Observer*. 3 September, 2000.

¹³ Ibid (2000)

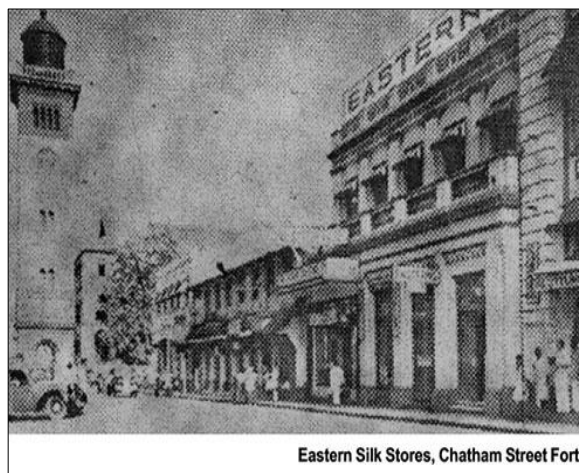
actually quite old. It had been around since the early 1940s, or according to some accounts, the early 1950s.

The shop was set up by the Chang family as a tailoring and curio shop, but later became best known for its school uniforms, having given up selling traditional Chinese ornaments some time ago.

Further down, towards York Street and housed in the York Building, I found the *Vogue Corner*, which was started in the 1950s, if not earlier. It dealt with a variety of garments. Midway between these two and on the same side of the

street was *China Silk Stores*, which flourished in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s before closing shop around the 1980s. Shanghai Silk Stores on the other side of the street, near the De Mel Building, met a similar fate as did the *Eastern Silk Store* further down towards Queen's Road (**Figure 2**).

Figure 3 shows a prominent advertisement of the *China Trading Company* that appeared in *The Times of Ceylon* in 1955. This store would have also dealt with various merchandise, as shown in the advertisement.



Eastern Silk Stores, Chatham Street Fort

Figure 2. An old picture of *Eastern Silk Stores*, Chatham Street, Fort,

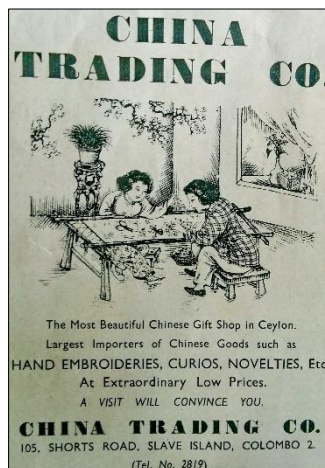


Figure 3. China Trading Company Advertisement – *The Times of Ceylon*, 1955



Figure 4. Free China Hotel Advertisement –

Chinese Hotels in Colombo

There were several Chinese restaurants locally called “Hotels”, mostly to be found in Chatham Street and York Street in Colombo Fort. These restaurants seem to have sprung up beginning from about the WW II years or not long afterwards.

Free China Hotel was one such restaurant. It stood on York Street and must have taken its name as a protest against communism that was then making inroads in mainland China, or possibly as a rallying cry against the Japanese invasions of the time. It was known from about the mid-1940s or maybe even earlier and seems to have had its heyday in the 1960s (**Figure 4**).

It was most popular for its noodles served with sliced green chillies. Surprisingly, it offered as many as 500 dishes and ice creams, “*Ceylon's Best*” coming in as many as five flavours. It even hosted weddings, including those of local Chinese couples, when it would serve traditional Chinese fare such as pork and pumpkin soup.

Another somewhat popular restaurant on York Street, well known in the 1970s, was the *Chinese Victory Cafe*. It suffered a fire in 1963 but seems to have survived for a long time afterwards. Interestingly, this restaurant too had a name with political undertones. “Victory” is not a name a hotel usually bears. The *Nectar Cafe* at the corner of York Street and Bailey Street thrived in the 1960s and 1970s. It served a variety of good food, including occidental fare like

sandwiches, cakes, puddings and ice creams offered with fruit salad. It was basically a self-serving restaurant where customers would pick their choice and form a line to the billing counter to pay for it, before taking their seats placed around half a dozen tables or so to enjoy their meals.

It was, however, Chatham Street that had most of the Chinese restaurants in Fort (**Figure 5**). These included *Nanking Hotel*, which was the most popular of the lot, *Peiping Restaurant*, *Peony Hotel*, later called *Orchid Restaurant* and the *Mandarin Tea Rooms*. They all seem to have had their best days in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nanking Hotel was placed at the corner of Chatham Street and Queen Street. Nanking was named after the Chinese city of Nanjing, which is alternatively rendered as Nanking, and is still best remembered for the infamous massacre by the Imperial Japanese army that invaded China. Who knows, perhaps it was named in memory of its victims.

The hotel was most famous for its prawn-mixed fried rice, but also served Chinese fare like noodles and soups. It was run by the family of Yu. Foreigners frequently patronised the spot, particularly sailors and passengers of ships that used to call at the Colombo harbour.

And then there was the *Peiping Hotel* on the other side of Chatham Street, closer to York Street. It was best known for its delectable crab dishes. It was run by the Kao family. I was told it had a jukebox where diners could insert a coin and select their songs from a list. A mechanical arm would

then spring into action to get the record out and play the song.

Travelling Chinese Merchants

In the good old days, many Chinese itinerant traders travelled to remote and even isolated villages, taking with them their wares to sell. In fact, they were a familiar sight in the Sri Lanka of the 1940s-1960s, as many accounts testify.



Figure 5. Chatham Street in the 1950s.

Kulasena Kirivalagama, in his book about a village on the edge of the Sinharaja forest,¹⁴ speaks about his childhood during or around the time of *World War II*, which the visits of these Chinese merchants made a most memorable one.

He refers to these merchants bringing with them some wonderful merchandise, including silks, unicorn horn and musk from one of whom his father purchased a ball of musk (*kasturi buriyak*), which was supposed to have been obtained from a variety of deer that lived in the highlands of the Himalayas and China.

The musk is said to have hung out from their bodies in a sack the size or shape of a Rambutan fruit, surrounded all over by fur. His father, having purchased one from a Chinese merchant, made a hole in it and took out some mustard-like *Kasturi Aeta* (seeds), which gave out a most delightful fragrance, which the little boy, when holding it to his nose, felt as if the doors to the world of deities (*Dev lova*) were near at hand.

Then we have Jinadasa Jayawardena (2004), who, in his childhood autobiography,¹⁵ has this to say of the Chinaman who resorted to his natal village of Telangapata:

“The Chinaman who came to the village was brave. He carried a yardstick, which he used for two purposes. One was to measure cloth, and the other was to keep stray dogs who followed him at bay, and to threaten the boys who teased him.

No sooner we spotted the Chinaman coming in our direction with a bundle on his head, we shouted “China buku buku sansare, Colombata yanne koi pare” (Chinaman, oh Chinaman, life is endless. Will you tell us the way to Colombo?).

We also have Daya De Silva, who, in her childhood autobiography, said the following concerning the Chinaman who came to their village¹⁶:

“A Chinese vendor named Ling visited our village regularly every month. He came on a bicycle carrying a large bundle of material wrapped in thick khaki cloth and fastened with black leather belts into the rear carrier. He unbuckled the belts and carried the bundle with somebody’s help to our back verandah, sweating profusely.

Every time I saw him, I thought that Ling must have used a whole jar of Brill (hair) cream on his hair to keep it so shiny and firm on his head. He wore a pair of khaki trousers and a long-sleeved shirt of the same material, and a pair of heavy black ankle boots.

Only his face and his two hands were exposed, and they were transparently yellow with no blemishes whatsoever. We all gathered around Ling to see him open his bundle. There were silks and taffetas, sarees and dress material of beautiful design and colors”.

And finally, we have Vimala Ganeshanathan (2013)¹⁷, who says of the Chinamen who visited Jaffna in the northernmost part of the country during her young days:

“We had only the Chinese traders in Jaffna. They carried bundles of material ranging from cotton to gorgeous silks, neatly arranged and wrapped in brown khaki clothes and carried on their shoulders. The trader unwrapped the bundle on the verandah of our home and painstakingly displayed every material he had. Invariably, we did buy something from him. Quite a few Chinese families lived in a particular interior village in Jaffna”.

In conclusion, one could say that the Chinese influence on Sri Lanka has been quite significant and has been felt in many areas of local society and culture.

That a land so far away influenced our nation without any known history of colonialism is indeed remarkable and goes on to show how warmly they must have been received by both the monarchs and the people of all ethnicities on the island.

¹⁴ Sinharaja Nim Tera (2003)

¹⁵ Ma Dutu Sundara Gama Telangapata (2004) in Sinhala.

¹⁶ Daya De Silva (1997). *Fading Traditions: Memories of Rural Sri Lanka*. Sarvodaya Wishwa Lekha Press.

¹⁷ Vimala Ganeshanathan (2013). *The Yaal Players. Memories of Old Jaffna*. Kumaran Book House, Colombo,

Dr. Srilal Fernando- Early 17th and 18th Century Dutch Botanists in Ceylon

A common plant often seen by the wayside or climbing up fences in Sri Lanka is *Thunbergia grandiflora* with its beautiful blue flowers. How did it get its genus name, Thunbergia? The name Thunberg is familiar to many people due to the prominence of Greta Thunberg, the Swedish climate change activist, but the plant genus is named after another Swede, **Carl Peter Thunberg**, one of the many naturalists who had an interest in plants growing in Ceylon during the Dutch period (1650s to 1796).

Local plants and herbs were well known to Sri Lanka's local physicians, who were practitioners of *Ayurveda*. Many herbs have been used for both medicinal and culinary 'dual' purposes for millennia in Sri Lanka. Historical documents prove that the Europeans, who arrived on the island during the colonial era (beginning around 1505 with the Portuguese), had an interest in the flora and fauna of the island. There are hardly any records during the Portuguese era. The only exception was a Portuguese physician in Goa, Garcia Da Ora, who wrote a treatise on medicinal plants of India in 1563. There is a passing reference to plants from Ceylon.

It is interesting to note that the study of plants was closely connected to the study of Medicine and most of the naturalists at that time were also physicians. Botany and chemistry were a major part of the curriculum in the study of medicine, especially in Britain and Western Europe.

The *Dutch East India Company* (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) was not too interested in the study of plants or nature except for the study of cinnamon, from which they knew they could make money. There is hardly any mention of herbs and other trees in the voluminous memoirs of the Dutch Governors. The available information on plants in Ceylon in the Dutch period comes mainly from the studies of private individuals, some of whom were employed in the VOC as physicians.

Dr. Paul Hermann

The first detailed study of plants in Ceylon was by Dr. Paul Hermann (b. 30 June 1646, Halle; d. 29 January 1695, Leiden), a German-born physician and botanist who for 15 years was director of the *Hortus Botanicus Leiden*. Born in Germany, Hermann studied Medicine at the University of Padua, graduating in 1670. He found employment with the Dutch East India Company and was appointed the first Physician to the island of Ceylon and served from 1672 to 1679.

On his way to Ceylon, Hermann stopped at the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) and was able to study the flora

in Africa. In Ceylon, in the latter part of the 17th Century, he studied plants in detail and made drawings of over 400 specimens.

In evaluating Hermann's Ceylon Herbarium, in an article for the Linnaean Society of London, Henry Trimen gave an authoritative explanation of Hermann's collections in 1877, explaining how the 'lost' material was discovered and preserved by another botanist, William Sherard, upon his wife's request. Trimen (1887)¹⁸ wrote:

"The collection of dried plants and the drawings of living ones made in Ceylon by Paul Hermann in the latter half of the 17th Century was indeed the first important contribution of plant material towards a knowledge of the botany of the East Indies".

These would be some of the earliest scientific collections of plant specimens from Ceylon. They most likely came from the area around Colombo and include a number of foreign introductions that had already taken place. Nevertheless, Hermann's collections are of great significance in Ceylon's botanical history (Van Alden and Barth, 2018).

Trimen (1877) also said Hermann was not able to publish his own work:

"Premature death, in 1695, prevented this 'excellent botanist' from making his collection available to the scientific world of his time. Indeed, beyond the publication of his 'Hortus Acad. Ludg. Bat. Catalogus', in 1687, with brief descriptions and a few of the drawings, Hermann himself printed nothing on Ceylon botany".

However, some of Hermann's drawings and descriptions were published in '*Paradisus Batavus*' in 1698 (see Figure 1) under his name. This volume was sponsored by Hermann's widow, Anne Gerdrude Strompius, who was the daughter of a pastor in Colombo. The editor and publisher was likely to be William Sherard, whom Trimen (1877) described as 'the illustrious botanist'.

Two decades later, the second book credited to Paul Hermann - *Musaeum Zeylanicum* (Figure 2) was published in 1717 in Leyden. Trimen (1877) said: "*This was an anonymous tract of 71 pages, a Catalogue of the Herbarium of Ceylon plants under their Singhalese names, no doubt, printed from Hermann's own MSS*".

This publication, too, was commissioned by Hermann's wife. She had entrusted Hermann's materials and manuscripts to William Sherard for editing and publication. "*In the brief preface, it stated that the plants enumerated were collected either wild or growing in the gardens of the*

¹⁸ Henry Trimen (1843-1896), the Director of the Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya (from 1886 to 1896), wrote the most comprehensive botanical treatise of Ceylon's Flora – *Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*, Volumes 1-5.

natives, and pasted into three volumes without any order, and probably just as they came to hand". Sherard also indicated that a fourth volume would be made up and gives at the end of the Catalogue a large number of additional names.

Every year, Hermann is known to have sent seeds and plant specimens to the botanical gardens in Amsterdam. In addition to his work in botany, he also traced Sinhalese lettering and compiled a vocabulary of Sinhala words, especially the names of parts of the body, and honorary titles of people. He sent these to Dr. Thomas Hyde at Oxford. His observations and notes show a man with a keen interest in local folklore. He notes that the Sinhalese claim that there is a cave in *Kukul Korale* in which lions were bred, but the cave is enclosed with great boulders, which prevent them from venturing into it. He could also read and write Sinhala.

Hermann's knowledge is apparent from the notes of his book *Museum Zeylanicum*, where, in addition to the botanical descriptions, the local name and the local uses of the plant were given by Hermann. An example of this is the plant *Waelmendiya* (Valmadiya, *Vitis lanceolaria*), which had been used to make bows, as the creeper's stems cannot be broken easily. Around the same time, another Doctor, Nicholas Grimm, was in Ceylon but left the island before Hermann. He published a book called *Insulae Zeyloniae Thesaurus Medicus vel Laboratorium* in 1679.

Hermann's Herbarium, of which the *Musaeum Zeylanicum* was the Catalogue, appeared to have been completely 'lost sight of' until the year 1744, when Augustus Gunther, Apothecary-Royal at Copenhagen, discovered it. Gunther, then, sent the five-volume collection (the fifth was a volume of drawings) to Carl Linnaeus at Upsala to be named a collection of Indian plants in five volumes.

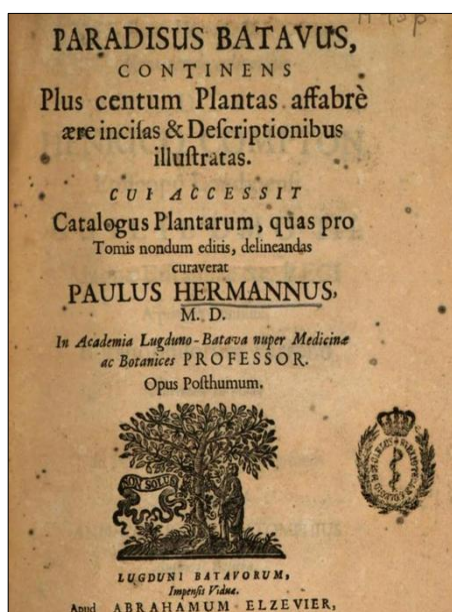


Figure 1. The cover of *Paradisus Batavus* (Published in 1698)

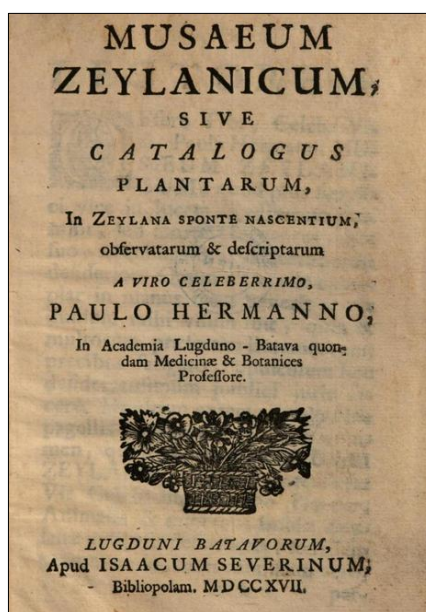


Figure 2. The cover of *Musaeum Zeylanicum* (Published in 1717)

Trimen (1877) said: "The great botanist was not long in discovering what a treasure he had in his hands – no other than Hermann's own herbarium of Ceylon plants just as enumerated in the 'Museum'.

After studying the plants carefully, in 1747, Linnaeus published a landmark botanical work, a book titled *Flora Zeylanica*, describing plants Hermann had accumulated between 1672 and 1679 (Figure 3). It is likely that Linnaeus may have added other plants that he had studied also into *Flora Zeylanica* from the collections he had from Ceylon.



Figure 3. The cover of *Flora Zeylanica* (1747)

["Zeylanica" Epithet: Numerous species described in this work bear the species name *zeylanica* or *zeylanicum* (e.g., *Plumbago zeylanica*, *Smilax zeylanica*), indicating their origin from Ceylon.]

[Carl Linnaeus, the famous Swedish botanist, is often called 'The Father of Botany'. It was Linnaeus who devised the binomial plant nomenclature for the world and a classification system of the plant kingdom in his monumental treatise, *Species Plantarum*, written in 1753.]

While *Flora Zeylanica* laid the groundwork, many species within it were later formally assigned their two-part names (binomial nomenclature) in Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum* (1753).

Hermann's collections were eventually purchased by Sir Joseph Banks, the first botanist who travelled to Australia on the *Endeavour* in 1768-1771 with Captain James Cook. The specimens are now kept as part of the *Sloane Herbarium* at the *Natural History Museum* in London. There is also Sri Lankan material at the *Rijksherbarium* in Leiden and further Hermann collections at *Erfurt* and the *Institut de France*.

Governor Gideon Loten

Ceylon even had a Governor, Gideon Loten (1752-1757), who was interested in natural history. He made drawings, mainly of birds of Ceylon. Loten also encouraged talented young artists to record the flora and fauna and compiled a large portfolio of works (Raaijmakers, 2010).

One of the more talented artists was Peter Cornelius de Beye, who was born in Colombo to a Dutch father and a mother of mixed blood. After leaving Ceylon, both were in Batavia, where they added drawings of animals and plants. Loten left his collection to the *Holland Society of Sciences*. This was split, and part of it was sold years later. It was then acquired by the Natural History Museum in London. Of the 154 watercolours paintings, 16 were of plants and fruits. Sydney Parkinson (1745-1771) had the job of copying these works. However, he could not complete his task as he joined Joseph Banks on his voyage on the

Endeavour to Australia. Parkinson had a client, James Lee, who acquired some of his work on Ceylon's flora and fauna. These were subsequently gifted to the National Library in Canberra.

Dr. John Burmann

Another keen botanist was Dr. John Burmann (Johannes Burmanni), later the Professor of Botany at the Medical Gardens in Amsterdam. He studied Ceylon plants with Carl Linnaeus and published a book, *Thesaurus Zeylanicus*, in 1737. I was lucky to purchase an original copy, and this has detailed drawings of 110 plants found in Ceylon (see **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**). Burmann was a physician and botanist who had access to the collections of Paul Hermann and Jan Hartog. Burmann was helped by Carl Linnaeus, who was living at Burmann's house at the time.

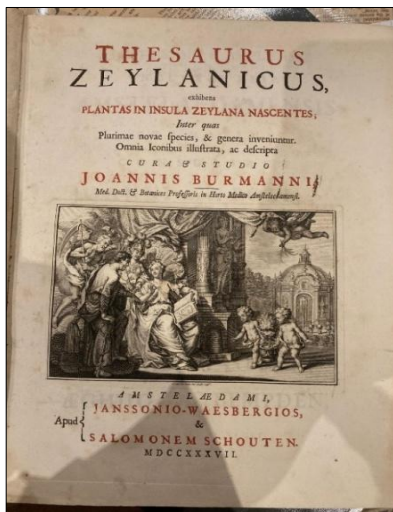


Figure 4. The cover of *Thesaurus Zeylanicus* (Published in 1737, pre-dating Linnaeus' *Magnum Opus*)



Figure 5. *Mussaenda zeylanica* depicted in *Thesaurus Zeylanicus*



Figure 6. *Mussaenda zeylanica* is a historical taxonomic name that is commonly treated as a synonym for *Mussaenda frondosa* L. (1753), a scrambling, evergreen tropical shrub native to India and South-East Asia

Dr. Carl Peter Thunberg

Carl Linnaeus sent his pupils out into the world to study flora, and one such was Dr. Carl Peter Thunberg (also known as **Karl Peter von Thunberg** (Carl Pehr Thunberg, or Carl Per Thunberg; 1743-1828). He was one of Carl Linnaeus' students at Uppsala. Burmann arranged for him to find employment as a surgeon on a Dutch sailing vessel. Thunberg (picture below) stayed in the Cape of Good Hope for two years, making several trips to study the African Flora. He also visited Java and Japan. On his return, he visited Ceylon, arriving in July 1777 and leaving in February 1778.

Thunberg became friendly with the Governor of Ceylon, Iman Falck, a learned man and also Peter Sluysken. Sluysken was known as "*Captain Cinnamon*". Incidentally, Sluysken's house was the site where the present Cargills/

Millers building stands in the Colombo Fort. Thunberg made daily excursions with his local aide to collect and study plants.

There were no established botanical gardens, but Governor Falck had a private villa near the Kelani River in Grandpass, where he had grown Cinnamon. At that time, cinnamon was so precious that it was a punishable offence to destroy a cinnamon plant. Thunberg covered the seacoast from Negombo to Matara. He made friends with Count Van Rantzow, the Comptroller of Matara. He gathered information not only about plants in Ceylon, but also about minerals, the capturing of elephants, local food and food preparation methods.

On his return to Sweden, he was appointed lecturer in Botany at the University of Uppsala. Later, he was appointed as Professor of Medicine and Botany (Wikipedia, 2026). Thunberg wrote an extensive account of his visits in

a book called *Travel in Europe, Africa, and Asia* and described many plant species. One well-known species is *Gardenia thunbergia* Thunb., which he described from East Africa (Mozambique) in 1780. Thunberg was knighted in the order of the Vasa, established by King Gustav the 111. He wrote a book about his travels, which included Ceylon, in addition to many scientific papers. Carl Thunberg died in

Uppsala in 1822 but had his name perpetuated by the genus name *Thunbergia* (Figure 8 and Figure 9).

The genus name in his honour – *Thunbergia* Retz. was first published in *Physiographica Sällskapet Handlingar*, 1: 163 (1780) by Anders Jahan Retzius (1742-1821), a Swedish botanist. Globally, there are now 150 species under the genus *Thunbergia* (Kew Plant List, 2026).



Figure 8. *Thunbergia grandiflora* Roxb. [First published in Botanical Register, 6: 6 (1820)]



Figure 9. *Thunbergia grandiflora*. [Page 495, The Bot. Register, Vol. 6 (1820)]

The species was named in Thunberg's honour by Dr. William Roxburgh (1751-1815), the Superintendent of the Dutch-East India Company's Calcutta Botanic Gardens. The native range of *Thunbergia grandiflora*, one of the best known species, is Central Nepal, parts of India and Sri Lanka, eastwards to Southern China and Peninsula Malaysia.

It is a liana and grows primarily in the wet tropical biome. It has uses, as animal food and occasionally, as a medicinal plant. In urban situations, grown for its beautiful flowers, it can grow very fast as a woody climber and become an aggressive vine.

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Figure 8 – Credit: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thunbergia_grandiflora_Bot_Reg_6_94_1820.jpg

Editor's Note:

The following four Essays from Cassim ('Bunchy') Rahuman provide some interesting reflections and reminiscences of Galle, perhaps the most crucial Southern City of Sri Lanka. Essay 1 and Essay 2 have already been published in Michael Roberts' blog site(<https://thuppahis.com/>) but are republished herein with some additional comments, adding contextual value to Essays 3 and 4.

Cassim Rahuman -

Essay 1 – Growing up within Galle Fort in the 1950s ¹⁹

'Twas 1948, I was born one morn when the sun didn't shine – At an hour past midnight, how could it? ["yakku guss nagina welave"] Sinhala for: *When demons return to their tree-top abodes*. Midwife had me out at 1.00 a.m. at No. 1, Parawa Street, a stone's throw [smallish stone lobbed by a strong arm] from the sea, in my beloved sea encircled Fort, in the ancient sea-farer town of Galle.

As three sides of the Fort faced the sea, by excavation of the front area, and letting in the sea from both flanks, the

Dutch builders made the Fort a tiny island, enclosed within a seawater-filled moat.

Well before my birth, the moat created by the Dutch builders of the fort had been filled out by their British successors, and the term encircled by sea did not apply at the time when I was born! Mea culpa - I am a tweaker of facts, for effect or to overcome gaps in information and in other exigencies, *but without misleading falsehoods!*



Figure 1. The Galle Fort sits on a squarish, rocky promontory jutting out assertively into the sea as west end of the Bay of Galle (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

Figure 2 shows the magnificent Galle Harbour, which pre-dated Colombo Harbour by more than a century.

The Galle Harbour area was seized by the Portuguese from the Sinhala kings in 1587. They then built a Fort in 1588. In the 17th Century (around 1640), when the Dutch captured the maritime provinces from the Portuguese, they fortified and expanded the size of the Fort around the city, largely to protect both the citizens and their maritime commercial interests.

[The evidence of the Portuguese Fort may not have been preserved]. The Harbour and the Fort made the historic city of Galle the most important port and international trading post in Ceylon for centuries.

During all of my childhood and schooldays, I lived on **Lighthouse Street - a sort of 'Y' axis line for the Fort**. Most Fort lads and I studied at St Aloysius' College, as also did Michael Roberts, mental + physical power-house son of

a British Civil Servant of West Indian roots. Michael and his high achiever sisters lived on Middle Street.

The year Michael had captaincy of Murphy house in our school was the year I joined [at Grade 1].

My house was also Murphy – [common to all who resided at Fort]. Under the stewardship of Michael, our house won the highest all-round points for the year in both sports and academic studies.

¹⁹ Bunchy Rahuman (2024). 'Growing up within the Galle Fort in the 1950s'. First published on 1 December (<https://thuppahis.com/2024/12/01/86619/>).

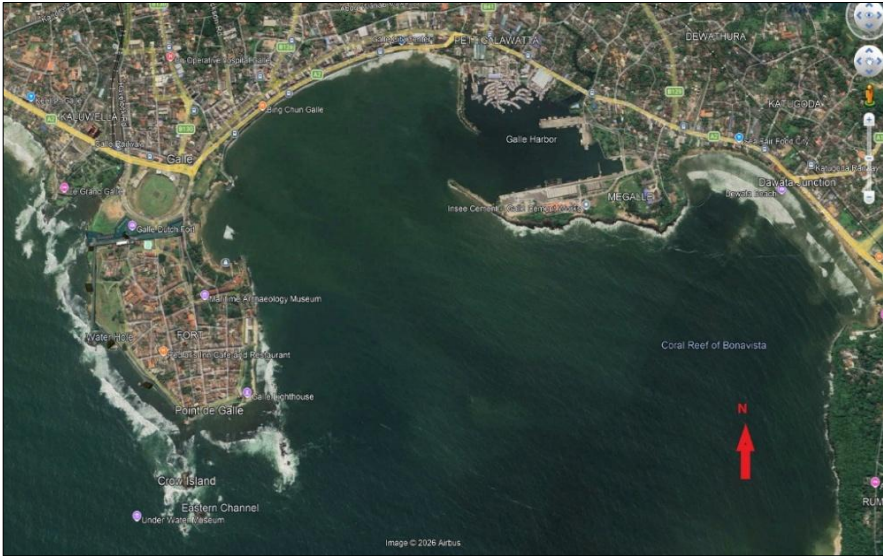


Figure 2. The Galle Harbour. (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

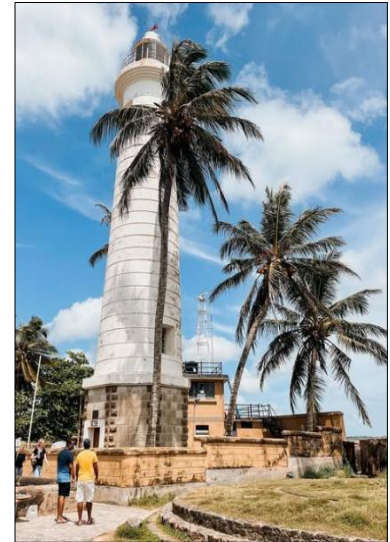


Figure 3. The Lighthouse at Galle

Note: The Galle Lighthouse was first constructed by the British in 1848 and then rebuilt in 1939 after a fire destroyed the first structure – see Galle Lighthouse. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. (Retrieved 27 May 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Galle_Lighthouse&oldid=1328334987)

Michael Roberts organised a *Murphy House Day* and oversaw the entire event, ensuring that each and every Murphy-ite joined in to enjoy themselves. I wasn't left out, although I was aged just six and had barely completed one year at school. My prize that day on winning the *Lime Race* was a 'trophy' [I still have it, engraved with my name, date and title: *Lime Race*]. The *Murphy House Day* was

enormous fun - among other amusements, watching a [to me] weird, novel, three-legged race and a hilarious fancy dress exchange race by the seniors [some in female garb]. It was a whole day of fun and great joy for us kids, no less than for the seniors.

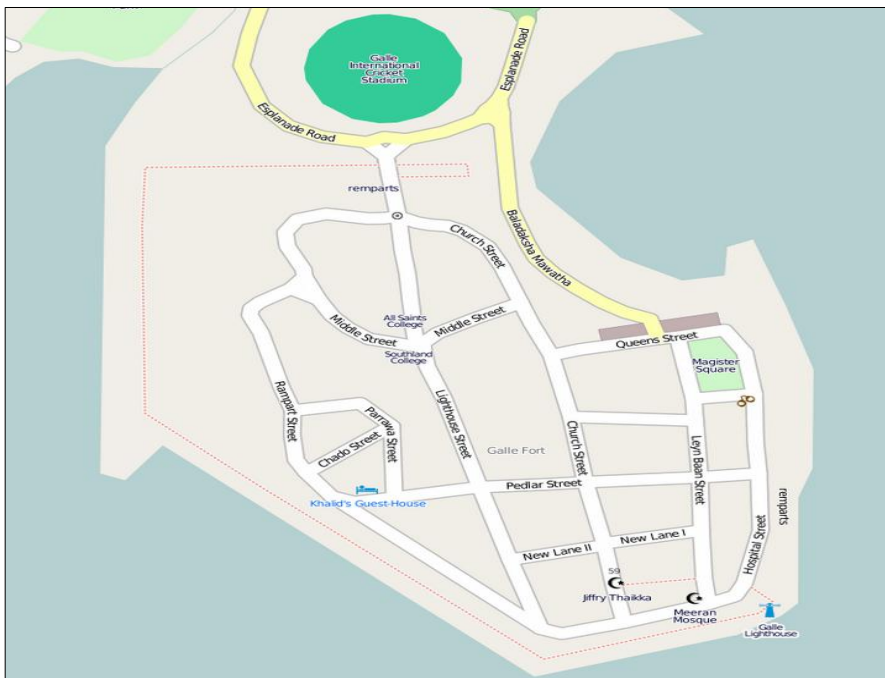


Figure 4. A map of the Fort's layout, showing the Lighthouse street running North-South through the centre. The Lighthouse is in the South-East corner.

Michael, a steadfast Fort-“Gallean”, possibly sees me as (admittedly, a flyweight) flag carrier, to prod me on toward writing essays on *Relevantiae* of the Fort and of Galle. Michael preceded me to Peradeniya by 10 years or so, distinguished himself there with peak achievements in Academia, Sports and Athletics and proceeded on scholarship to England for Higher studies to return and teach History at Peradeniya.

After many years, he emigrated to Australia and is now retired and lives in Adelaide.

With his great commitment as a historian, Michael presumably expects me to access information and histories on events and artifacts that only older ‘Fort-born’ codgers could ferret out and record for posterity.

Of course, being a maverick, my submissions can be expected to be a willy nilly record of impressions, thoughts, experiences, anecdotes and wild digressions as well!

This is the first of my essays with Galle Fort as the focal point and source of anecdote. I presume by now readers will have gathered that terms such as *focal point* and *source of anecdote* will be as clay in my hands - but I do venture that every essay I pen will relate to some little nut, bolt, church, cobblestone, catacomb, dungeon, rickshaw or whatever connected with Fort. In a sense, it will be biographical, but alas! I 'emigrated' at age nineteen to Colombo via Peradeniya [that's another story] but was

prudent enough to retain 'dual constituent status' by making regular visits to Galle.

Forthcoming essays will be on: The Old Lighthouse that gave Lighthouse Street its name; Gun carriage, center post and rails on the Bastions during the World Wars; Breadfruit tree adjoining the pilot's bungalow; Zero salinity well by Muslim Saint's grave at Bathiri cove; Butterfly bridge and another work of genius – two canals built by the Dutch; First Dutch church in the island built at the highest point [Acropolis?] in Fort. Wild Card – Morris Minor Taxi and the Accountant who should have become Auditor General.

Essay 2 - Galle Fort, New York City and the Cartesian Legacy²⁰

Do I exceed myself? *Cartesian? The Big Apple?* – surely not! But I insist, I am here, not to tweak the truth. In *Essay One*, I said, the street in which I lived [most of] my Galle Fort life was on Lighthouse Street. Discerning readers would note that I said the **Lighthouse Street formed a 'Y' axis line for the [Galle] Fort.**

Now even those who are allergic to Mathematics have heard of the *X-axis* and *Y-axis* as [perpendicular] lines that cross at right angles and sit in the middle of paper sheets populated by tiny squares arranged 10 x 10, within larger squares, all sitting above, below and at each other's sides in sheets known as graph paper.

With the *Y-axis* deemed in *Essay one* as Lighthouse Street, [See map in *Essay 1*], even the shunners of Mathematics can agree that the *X-axis* for the Fort would then be Pedlar Street, which cuts Lighthouse Street [the *Y-axis*] at right angles or orthogonally [never mind the big word]. Alors! to define a point in the Fort with ease, one needs only say how far east or west it was from Lighthouse Street and how far north or south from Pedlar Street [where the juvenile miscreant was hiding at]. Voila!

Galle Fort had its own version of a GPS! Long before cellphones were endowed with it. Folks, it strikes me that a grid-wise perspective of the layout of Galle Fort makes for a very clear picture to store in one's memory when touring the Fort.

The *Cartesian legacy* is the clever feature of Dutch-adopted Cartesian [orthogonal] grids in road laying in their colonies of south east India, coastal Sri Lanka, Indonesia and proximate territories. The basic grid was an offshoot of the surveying practice of setting out a straight line or baseline composed of fixed and measured sections in a continuing dead straight line [Giving Baseline Road in Colombo its name].

All points and formations of interest would be located by offsets measured at 90 degrees from this baseline. This is a standard technique used in land surveying - one of the earliest exercises in defining and securing the bounds of any acquired tract of land within a district [or colony].

In New York City, around Times Square, a Google Map would show one set of 'parallel' roads named in order, as 1st Street, 2nd Street, etc., up to 193rd Street, and another set of 'parallel' roads intersecting the earlier set at 90 degrees and named 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue, etc., up to 11th Avenue.

This pattern exists in Colombo as well, in the Pettah with 1st Cross Street, 2nd Cross Street, 3rd Cross Street and 4th Cross Street, up to 5th Cross Street, and crossed at '90 degrees' by Bankshall Street, Main Street, Keyzer Street, Prince Street and Maliban Street (see **Figure 1**).

New York City's grid, having one set of roads intersecting another set at 90 degrees, is also replicated in Galle and other forts, albeit as far as compatible with the lay of the land, contours, structures and their specific formations. Roya-pettah, in the once Dutch-ruled city of Chennai and other Dutch colonies, presumably, show the same grid layout, lending itself also to uniflow and smooth passage of traffic.

Now, to a crucial issue: To show that my imagination is not running riot in claiming an intimate link between Galle Fort and New York City. Also, to eliminate a loose end in this essay, by validating my digression into the meaning of *Cartesian*; Readers might well ask why I brought this Cartesian business into this essay in the first place – *no problemo* – it's their right and I counter contend: it's my wrong – I mean *right* [sorry for the Freudian slip] to get into an aside beside – nice vibe! Aside-Beside.

²⁰ Bunchy Rahuman (2025). 'Cartesian Commonalities: New Amsterdam & Galle Fort, II' First published on 25 September (<https://thuppahis.com/2025/09/13/cartesian-commonalities-new-amsterdam-galle-fort-ii/>).

New York is a newer name replacing the original name of *New Amsterdam*, which was part of Dutch-owned North America, [protected by Fort Amsterdam, at the tip of Manhattan Island].

Our Trincomalee Fort, very similar to Galle Fort, was also built by the Dutch. It was once captured by the British from Dutch forces, who regrouped and won it back. Ironically, it had to be handed back almost immediately, as the British

and Dutch, who were at war in Europe at this time, resolved their quarrels and adopted a treaty requiring New Amsterdam and all Dutch forts in Ceylon to be given back to the British. *New Amsterdam* thenceforth was renamed by the British as *New York*.



Figure 1. A Google Earth Image of Pettah showing the layout of the streets in a grid-wise pattern. Note Bankshall, Main, Keyzer, Prince and Maliban Streets running in East-West direction. The Cross Streets are running North-South.

Now to explain *Cartesian* - a term derived from the name of French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (see picture below). Descartes famously said *I think, therefore I am* in five words, being no shorter than his own French version: *Je pense, donc je suis*. In neat, brief Latin, it is *Cogito ergo sum* – just three words. Man! Latin is a great language!



Figure 2. René Descartes

The entire world [and especially of the surveyor] is greatly indebted to him for evolving the use of orthogonal = 90 degree, grids. The **X and Y axes** of mathematics can be conveniently adapted to define bounds for land extents of houses, farms and commercial buildings. It would have logically suggested itself and led to evolving of a grid-type

Thanks to Descartes, we identify locations or points by measuring and recording their distances in two perpendicular directions from two X & Y axis lines at 90 degrees.

of road network to provide access to these same buildings and homesteads, etc.

Finally, a connected but brilliant feature of Dutch ingenuity, a sewer network built right below the roads in the Galle Fort to collect effluent from the buildings on either side of the roads. The ground floor levels were elevated to yield sufficient gradient for waste water to discharge into the sewers, cleverly designed to discharge into the sea at low tide by nightfall and to be flushed by the tides at high tide by day. [Await my Essay 3 on the wastewater discharge system in Galle Fort].

This waste and storm water discharge feature of elevated ground [floor] levels seen at Galle, Fort, might also be seen in the remaining few older parts of New York City. The newer areas all have tall buildings that have displaced in numbers the old structures and old systems that are gradually fading out.

Many owners of older buildings, however, are fighting valiantly, perhaps supported by protective laws [as in Sri Lanka] that do not allow the acquiring of buildings where occupancy and ownership have passed down uninterrupted over multiple generations!

Essay 3 – The Sea, Intimate Handmaiden of the Charming Fort of Galle ²¹

The Fort of Galle, with its scenic façade, lies inseparable as a *Yin* to a *Yang* of surging, effervescent brine. Imposing and assertive on its peninsular base, the Fort is skirted by a silky, blue-green scarf of sea.

The embracing swirl of the pulsating waters sets awash the majestic, granite, sentinel structure, imprinting its throbbing ebb and flow to adorn the mute sentinel with a cyclic repetition akin to the breath of life.

To casual observers and residents, this paradise for strollers that is the Fort is a marvel of seascapes, pleasant ramparts, undulating terrain and myriad appendages in a magical confluence. Of an evening, it is a grandstand to view sunset in a backdrop of clouds forming ethereal landscapes on a vast canvas of many hues.



Figure 1. A view of the ramparts and the Lighthouse looking towards the south-east and of course, the sea!



Figure 2. A well-maintained street inside the Fort. Note the cobblestone-lined street.

Quaint houses brooding over their centuries of existence, cobblestone paved roads, and churches alluring in their layouts, features and artifacts add a unique charm to the fort.

As an inimitable counterpart to this masterpiece is a brilliant innovation of Dutch Engineering, which I shall describe forthwith: Lying below all roads in the Fort, is a labyrinth of tunnels that exit to sea at strategically spaced points around the Fort's perimeter. This tunnel network links with each house or building on either side of the road via submerged drains.

The drains from each abode carry away wastewater and stormwater for discharge to sea via the tunnels. More than two centuries ago, Dutch builders had incorporated features and provisions that we even today refer to as modern conveniences. Dutch engineers appear to have set drain discharge levels flawlessly, and there is no evidence or record of fouling, ever in the sewer network. Blockages were said to have occurred after the Boxing Day Tsunami

of 2004, and windmill-aided seawater pumps were installed [and abandoned on being found to be of no use]. The misguided idea was to supplement inflows from seasonal rains [thought to be able to flush/clear the sewers]. As the system had worked smoothly without ever a hiccup, competent verification of the actual causes of blockage should have been the basis for attempting rectification.

²¹ The article was written on 10 January 2025) but remained unpublished (Cassim Rahuman – *Pers. comm.*)

This attempted corrective arose due to the inability to appreciate the innovative genius of the faultless Dutch sewer system. I will now digress into a detour, *en passant*, to an albeit convoluted explanation. Yet before starting on this detour, I must point to an inexorable *second law of circumstance* termed ‘the law of multiple digressions’ which says: “*Where there is one detour, others are bound to arise*”. Accordingly, I set out below the second detour [the first detour following soon thereafter]

SECOND DETOUR: The sea around the fort affords three safe bathing spots for adults and children to frolic and learn to swim with no fear of drowning. It is a snorkeler’s paradise with much fauna and flora and *Bi*-organisms such as corals [being both fauna and flora? As well as in-between both??]

Readers confused as regards the aforementioned *laws of circumstance* may refer to the *first law of circumstance* [that I could not state till now, for obvious reasons]. This law says: “*In all binary sequences, second shall precede first*”. This oft-neglected law [by parents mostly] is amply validated within this short essay, as obviously, my second detour had to come first!

FIRST DETOUR: [Part 2] A singular attribute of the sea is the cycle of variance of sea level! The Dutch builders of the fort - more than a quarter of whose native land of Holland, also known as the Netherlands, lies below sea level - were masters at putting the ebb and the flow of tides to work. The Galle Fort gave them an opportunity to realise optimal use of the tides when they set up the Fort and its structures.

FIRST DETOUR: [Part 1] Very many times have I surveyed the sea below its surface, over almost the entire part of the fort’s perimeter, skirted by sea. However, to collect exquisite shells, I had to be upon the exposed shelf of the reef, come low tide, at dawn [4.30 am] to traverse the reef on foot to spot and pick shells.

I found during these forays that the low tide water level of the sea was around one meter below the daytime sunrise to sunset mean sea level.

Now, thankfully, I have finished with digressions; no more detours and will revert to the main body of the essay to

Essay 4 – Dutch Engineering Skills - Moving Outward from Galle Fort ²²

As promised in my *Essay 3*, I will probe a few more unique contributions of Dutch Engineering Skills employed to enhance operational systems in the country. Fine-tuning by employing Mother Nature’s tidal action created a marvel of a sewerage disposal system for the Galle Fort, as I set out in *Essay 3*.

Opposite the Fort (on the front and Northern side of it) had been a moat filled in by sea water streaming in from both western and eastern flanks of the Fort, which itself was a built-up fortification jutting southward into the sea at the

explain the exploitation of a locally unique significance of the *tidal variation of sea level*, to wit: The superb self-sustaining sewer system of the fort. May I add that I had an *Eureka* moment one day that enlightened and led me to the following understanding and explanation.

The rising tide pushes fresh seawater into the sewer network and keeps it filled up to a meter depth throughout the day, allowing household effluents to mix in, get diluted and leach into the seawater mass during the day. Come nightfall and low tide, water levels drop, and the up to one meter high stock of seawater in the sewer empties back into the sea. What the tides thus create is a discharge system actively slow flushing on a daily basis: no human intervention, no overtime payment, no work week limited to 40-hours!

Furthermore, the South West Monsoon stamps a strong wave imprint on the sea from May to July, forcing vigorous inflow of sea water into the network of tunnels. Turbulence within the tunnels is high enough to impart a strong surface cleaning action above and beyond that of the exiting wastewater in the daily tidal cycle. The monsoon thus carries out an annual spring cleaning for three months over each operating year for the sewer system to keep it clean, flushed and free of sludge.

Clever exploitation by the Dutch Engineers of tidal and monsoonal variations resulted in a near-genius achievement: A self-sustaining sewer system designed to function with near-zero human intervention. In a subsequent essay, I will revisit another kindred feat of the Dutch Engineers in hydraulics and associated works of these master builders from the Netherlands – a country with a lower population and smaller land area than our own Sri Lanka!

Note: Picking shells and corals off the reef is not a practice I continued beyond my schooldays and did feel guilty about in a vague way. Such activity should be prohibited or strictly regulated.

rear, sitting upon a natural outcrop of rock forming a peninsula. A canal constructed by the Hollanders, starting 10 miles inward, in the vicinity of elevated ground areas and hillocks in the interior of Galle town, conveyed run-off into the western flank of the moat from which excess water was discharged into the sea. The canal thus functioned to collect and convey to the sea all rainwater run-off from poorly drained areas of the ‘greater’ Galle (interior) area.

The canal outfall was short, served its purpose and flushed itself using tidal sea level variations mimicking and relying

²² The article was written on 15 January 2025 but remained unpublished (Cassim Rahuman – *Pers. comm.*)

on the same feature of tidal action employed in the sewers in the fort [as set out in essay 3]. Even after British successors filled out the moat, the canal was retained and to this day, continues in silence to play its vital role.

With their completeness of approach, the Dutch builders went the extra mile and constructed yet another and much longer canal. They had found that for complete flood control, another wider and longer easterly canal was required to handle other areas within the Greater Galle perimeter that were prone to being inundated due to having poor drainage characteristics, but were too remote to access the canal that ran alongside the protective moat of the Fort.

Dutch engineers constructed this long canal too, to discharge into the sea at an outfall a distance of around four miles eastward from the Fort. This canal [or Ela = canal] bore the name *Moragoda Ela*. Unfortunately, it earned the sobriquet of *Moda Ela*, which can be derived from the name *Moragoda Ela* by the ‘cheeky’ device of taking out the four middle letters in the name *Moragoda*.

Now, “Moda” [pronounced *mow da*] means Stupid, so *Moda Ela* means Stupid Canal. This name stuck as people would see it [only] at daytime, taking in a heavy inflow of sea water [unaware of the flushing that was taking place]. They’d laugh and ask: Who built this stupid canal to allow sea water in when it should discharge inland water into the sea, as in any properly routed Ela or rivulet.

In the dark of the night, the tide would reverse. The contents of the canal would empty out into the sea. Still, the contents of the canal would empty out into the sea, but this vital function was destined to remain forever unobserved by the slumbering populace ensconced blissfully in the land of nod. The Genius of Dutch Ingenuity, one notes, prevails

oblivious and in compassionate tolerance of the fanciful suppositions of ignorant minds. These two canals, no doubt very useful, are lesser works in comparison with the very many canals the Dutch colonists built all over the island for flood control and for transportation through waterways as an indispensable and inexpensive means of travel, as well as for the conveyance of goods.

While commercial considerations would without doubt have been predominant, it is difficult not to ascribe a degree of beneficence as part of the motivation of the Dutch builders for introducing a technology of creating canals totally borrowed and translated from their homeland of Holland.

I now plead to be excused to meander away from my ‘self-constraining perimeter’. In *Essay 1*, it is true, I undertook to stay with Galle connected issues as: ‘now, what were those words of mine?’ – “Galle Fort as focal point and source of anecdote”- we stray, we stray, *Default*, I begin to discover - over and above the *Variety* of Shakespeare – is the truer spice of life!

There is a ‘one of a kind’ project that few Sri Lankans would know of or have heard of. It evidences a very beneficial act by our erstwhile colonisers from the Netherlands that we could very well equate with that of the ancient Kings of Sri Lanka who developed our agriculture – no, not in my words, but in the words of a very high-profile Sri Lankan historian who said of this unique project conceived and brought to fruition as a brilliant innovation in irrigation: “the first new irrigation project in the island since the days of the Polonnaruwa kings” - circa 1,000 CE. A gap of more than a thousand years!



Figure 1. One of the main canals that runs through the Galle suburbs and discharges to the ocean west of the Fort

In south Sri Lanka, midway between Deniyaya and Panamure, is a mountain range - Rammeli Kanda [Kanda = Mountain]. Mother Nature, whilst endowing in a spirit of abundance, on its westerly side a perennial river to sustain agriculture, perhaps in a moment of parsimony or a spirit of 'I'm leaving you a bit of homework', bestowed upon the easterly side only a non-perennial river that ran dry over half the year and was subject to droughts that made cultivation risky, if not at all infeasible.

A huge triumph would result if the large area on the "wrong side of the mountain range" could also be made cultivatable. Eureka! It occurred to Dutch engineers to transfer part of the water fed to the perennial river to the non-perennial one on the other side of the mountain range to make it perennial too. *Facile dictu, difficile factu* is a

Latin saying translating word for word as: *Easily said, difficultly done.*

Dutch engineers resolutely addressed themselves to this formidable project. It would have been novel, daunting and demanding, with a willingness to meet any challenge in the local environment. Water had to be impounded at higher elevations in difficult terrain to channel part of the run-off "round the mountain" at the higher reaches of the non-perennial river on the other side.

A Dam was built at Urubokke (**Figure 2** and **Figure 3**), the optimum identified location, where water was impounded and routed across. Assurance of water availability was attained, allowing many thousands of acres on the barren side of Rammeli Kanda to be brought under paddy cultivation! Bravo!

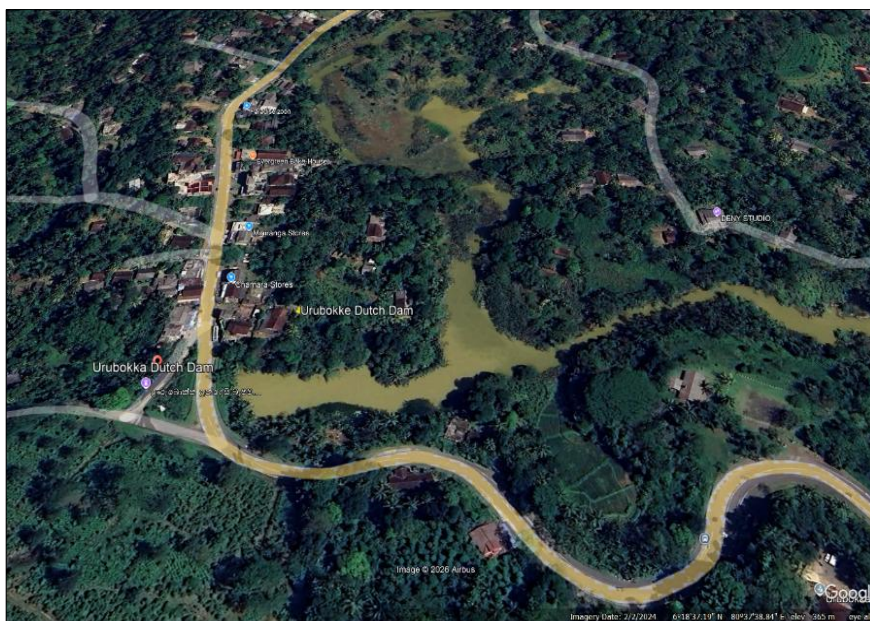


Figure 2. Urubokke Dutch Dam on the Kotapola-Mulatiana road (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

I may also draw attention to the following details concerning the Dam:

"The original weir was constructed by the Dutch rulers 238 years ago, in 1787. Through a system of anicuts, it supplied water from the augmented flow of the Urubokke Oya to approximately 5,000 acres of paddy fields."

This huge achievement of Dutch Engineers, no doubt deploying the local population also, affirms the foresight and willingness of the Dutch rulers of the time, to also upgrade the livelihoods of the natives.



Figure 3. Urubokke Dam and walkway bridge as seen today on the Kotapola-Mulatiana Road.

A recent article said as follows:

"Due to the neglect of maintenance, following the removal of the Rajakariya system by the British rulers in 1832, the weir fractured and failed in 1837. It was subsequently reconstructed in 1861. Therefore, the present polished granite weir could be considered a blend of Dutch and British technology"

[Kamaladasa, B. (undated). 'Urubokka Dutch Dam That Connected Two Rivers' - <https://amazinglanka.com/wp/urubokka-dam-en/>].

Dr. Nimal Chandrasena -

A Unique Cricketing Event In Ceylon: 1901 - The Boer POWs vs. the Colts Game

This article highlights a unique sporting event in the World of Cricket, which took place in Ceylon in 1901. It was a cricket match in which the **Boer Prisoners-of-War** (POWs) on the island played a game in Colombo against the champion team at that time, the *Ceylonese* team, the Colts.

An authentic account of the Boer prisoners in Ceylon comes from articles by E. H. Van der Wall (1929), who had actually witnessed the arrival of the Boers in Ceylon.

Ceylon's famous surveyor, R. L. Brohier (1946; 1947), also provided information about the lives of the prisoners and their achievements at the Diyatalawa Camp. Van der Wall's and Brohier's accounts were published in the *Journal of the Dutch Burger Union of Ceylon*, Volumes 18 (1929), 46 (1946) and 47 (1947), respectively.

In Bruce Murray and Goolam Vahed's 2009 book *Empire & Cricket: The South African Experience, 1884-1914*, Heinrich Schulze (2009) provides vivid details of the 1901 cricket match that was played in Ceylon by the Boer prisoners-of-war. The chapter titled, *The Boer Prisoners-of-War in Ceylon and the 'Great and Grand Old Manly Game of Cricket'*, explains the uniqueness of the contest from a global perspective and its significance in Ceylon at the start of the new century.

The *Boer War* took place in South Africa from 1899 to 1902, as a result of an armed uprising by Boers (Afrikaner farmers of Dutch origin) who rebelled against British rule. As the war progressed, more than 5000 Boers were sent to Ceylon and imprisoned at Diyatalawa²³.



Figure 1. Boer POWs at 'Sunday Service' at Diyatalawa

[Photo published with permission from AngloBoerWar.com, a website dedicated to providing information on the Boer POWs, owned by David Biggins²⁴.

The first prisoners arrived in Ceylon in 1900. The prison camp at Diyatalawa opened on 8 January 1901. When the war ended in 1902, the prisoners went back to South Africa. However, while at Diyatalawa, a team of prisoners who were keen on cricket came by train to Colombo, on parole, for a cricket match.

The prisoners may look a bit forlorn in the picture (**Figure 1**). But, by all accounts, the POWs were well looked after at the Camp and took part in various sports and recreational activities. **Figure 2 and Figure 3** show pictures of the Diyatalawa campsite. As E. H. van Der Wall (1929)

explained, Diyatalawa was a creation of the Great Boer War.

Before that period, it was geographically known but not discovered. Smiling in the sunshine of the rolling patanas, it was the Happy Valley that lay beneath the Industrial Home, conducted by the Rev. Mr. Langdon of the Wesleyan Mission.

It was just a glorious bit of landscape, only that and nothing more. And then the opportunity came. Where were the thousands of Boer prisoners to be interned? The fertile brain of Sir West Ridgeway,

²³ Schulze (2009) said that one primary reference he used was J. N. Brink's 1904 book, which mentions 4735 POW at Diyatalawa, and also described day-to-day life in the camp at Diyatalawa [J. N. Brink, *Recollections of a Boer Prisoner-of-War at Ceylon*, Amsterdam and Cape Town: Hollandsch-Afrikaansche Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 117 ff]

²⁴ Additional, miscellaneous information on the Diyatalawa Camp, including the names of the POWs, including those of the cricketers at the Diyatalawa Camp can be found on AngloBoerwar.com (<https://www.angloboerwar.com/other-information/89-prisoner-of-war-camps/1839-camp-for-boers-ceylon-sri-lanka>).

Governor of Ceylon, supplied the answer; At Diyatalawa, of course.

Some of the huts (**Figure 2** and **Figure 3**) still exist inside the Institute of Surveying & Mapping (Survey Department). They are structures made out of corrugated, tin sheets, hued in green and numbered. These abodes of the POWs offer a glimpse of the way of life at the Diyatalawa Camp.

Van der Wall (1929) also noted that not all POWs returned home at the end of the war, although they were well looked after at Diyatalawa. Some 140 died at the Camp.

About a hundred yards to the North East of the Survey Camp is the Boer Cemetery. It is sad to think that 140 Boers who had survived the dreadful tragedy of war and had arrived as prisoners of war

in Ceylon did not live to return home when peace was declared. There are 133 Boer graves marked by plain wooden crosses. Seven are unmarked as the great stone monument erected by the Government of South Africa in 1913 bears 140 names.

The Cricket Match

At the time of the event, the British magazine, *Cricket* (1901: 330-332), republished extracts from a pamphlet published by *The Ceylon Independent*, providing insight into how the match came about. The magazine called it a 'unique event' and 'an interesting chapter in the in the History of Cricket'.

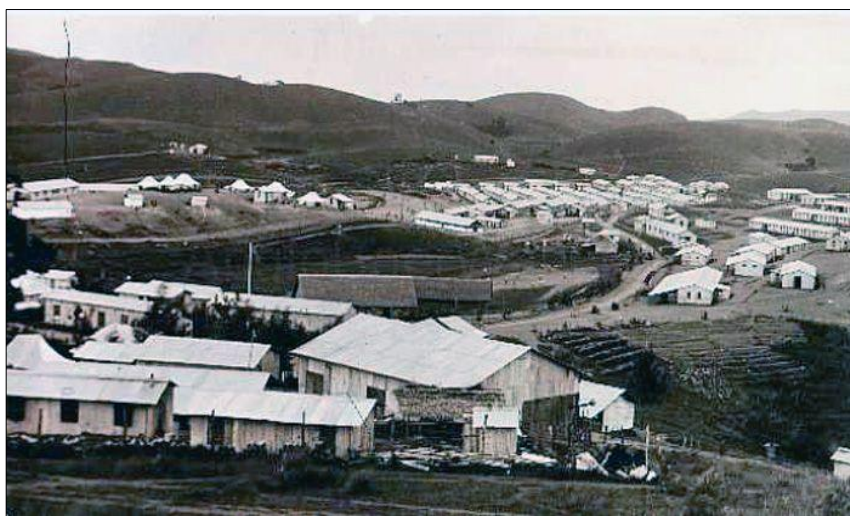


Figure 2. Boer POWs Camp site at Diyatalawa. This photo is titled military guard huts and Engineers huts. [Published with permission from AngloBoerWar.com]

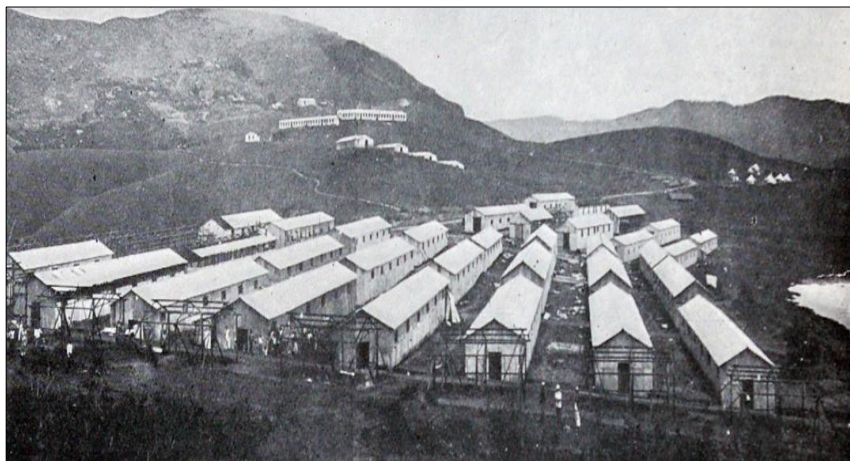


Figure 3. An early picture of the Boer POWs Camp site, rows of long sheds of corrugated iron, at Diyatalawa. This photo is titled 'Camp Site'. Each house accommodated 40-50 POWs. [Published with permission from AngloBoerWar.com].

The following is a summary of information from *Cricket* (1901), Perera (1999: 83-84) and Schulze (2009). It was the Boer prisoners who had asked to meet the champion Ceylonese Club, the *Colts*. *A challenge was made and accepted in the right spirit of sports!* Approval was required and duly obtained in the same spirit. The authorities agreed to release the cricketers for the match on parole with minimal fuss. After some pledges, permission for the game was granted. From all accounts, the fact that the prisoners were 'All White' played a part here. It appeared to be a case of white privilege!

The prisoners were transported by train from Diyatalawa to Maradana, overseen by a non-commissioned officer, whose responsibilities, never at any time very serious, ended as soon as the train reached Maradana. It was a 9-hour journey, much like today's train ride. While on parole, prisoners were ordered not to discuss any controversial subjects with bystanders, especially newspaper reporters. The Boer Commandant Coert Van Zyl was already on extended parole and had been staying in Colombo before undertaking the novel duties of a 'chaperone' of the team.

Born in 1873, he was only 28 years old when he was taken prisoner and sent to Ceylon as a POW. He was also a well-built man of powerful physique and a very popular Boer. Once the prisoners reached Maradana, Van Zyl took charge. The prisoners were billeted at the *Mount Lavinia Hotel*, which was an infirmary for the Garrison's sick in those

days. Arnold Wright's *Compendium*, only a few years later (Wright, 1907: 478) described how lavish and opulent the *Mount Lavinia Grand Hotel* was with all types of high-quality recreational facilities. It catered for both normal visitors and travelers and also disabled people, who were recuperating from debilitating illness.

The prisoners were transported each day, most likely on horse-drawn carriages, to and fro Mount Lavinia to the cricket grounds at Victoria Park. Fast-moving, horse-drawn Carriages, which were plentifully available in Colombo at that time, would have been used. But imagine the scene of the prisoners and their chaperones dashing each day, up and down the Galle Road! The locals around the Mount Lavinia location would have been bewildered and confused!

The Colts also spared no effort in accommodating the prisoners with support from the rulers. For instance, Schulze (2009) noted that the hospitality extended to the prisoners, who were taken all the way to the *Galle Face Hotel* for lunch. They were then returned to the ground by horse-drawn, fast-moving carriages.

Originally, the idea was to play the match on the more central ground of the Colombo Sports Club at Galle Face, which had been newly renovated and improved by George Vanderspar, its owner of Dutch descent. However, the Colts, who organised the event, and the Sports Club could not agree on this for some unknown reason. The match was, therefore, played at the Nondescript Cricket Club (NCC) grounds at Victoria Park (a part of present-day Vihara Maha Devi Park). It was played on 5-6 July 1901.

Brohier (1946) wrote that:

The match between the Boers and the pioneer local club, the Colombo Colts, justly claims a place in cricket history. When the Boer eleven, which travelled down from Diyatalawa arrived on the cricket grounds in the Cinnamon Gardens, their reception was described as "most cordial", for few crowds had been previously witnessed at any cricket match played in Colombo.

It was reported that a carnival atmosphere existed at the grounds. People were allowed to enter for free. The committee of the Colts Club had 'sanctioned the expenditure of 600 rupees in the provision of suitable accommodation for all classes of spectators who might be attracted to the (game)'. There were four large stands and a specially constructed pavilion to accommodate His Excellency the Governor. It had been carpeted and artistically decorated with foliage from a nearby Colombo nursery. A special marquee was erected for the players, while the owner of the *Globe Hotel* ran a public bar. The Boers got a very friendly reception from the local Europeans and the Ceylonese. The Governor, Sir West Ridgeway, Major General Hobson, the Commanding Officer of the British Army in Ceylon, and other dignitaries were present throughout the match on both days and chatted with the prisoners during the breaks.

* * *

Pieter Hendrik de Villiers, a well-known cricketer (Schulze, 2009), was captain of the Boers and the driving force behind the Boers' cricket club and team. Allan Raffel

captained the Colts. It is worth noting that Boers were, for the most part, South Africans of Dutch descent. Ten of the Colts' players were also Burghers of Dutch descent (except C. E. Perera). This fact also may have played a role in the camaraderie extended to the prisoners' cricket team.

Peiter de Villiers and Gert Kotze were well-known South African cricketers. P. H. de Villiers, in particular, was a prominent player from the Western Province CC and somewhat of a household name in South Africa. For Western Province, de Villiers had played many games in the late 1880s and early 1890s before moving to Transvaal. He had also played in international matches against visiting teams (Lord Hawke's team, Major Wharton's teams— 1889, 1892). De Villiers became a Boer commandant in the early battles in Natal and was wounded at the *Battle of Spion Kop* (January 1900) and also at the *Pieter's Hill* battle (February 1900), where he was taken prisoner by a *Lancashire Regiment* (Murray and Vahed, 2009).

Gert Kotze was also a respected wicket-keeper who had played against Lord Hawke's teams. A third well-known player was the bowler, Cornelius Otto, who had played club cricket in Johannesburg (Schulze, 2009) ²⁵.

In the match, played at the NCC grounds at Victoria Park, the Colts made 146 on the back of C. E. Perera's brilliant 90* (*Cricket Archives*, 1901/02), and 114 in the second innings. The Boers managed only 53 and 66, handing the Colts an easy victory by 141 runs. The following is an excerpt from Schulze (2009):

The ground had been well prepared with four large stands and a specially constructed, beautifully decorated pavilion for the distinguished guests, including the Governor. After some consideration of paid entry, the idea was abandoned, and people were allowed to enter gratis with no expenses. The weather was hot and steamy, with both sunshine and intermittent rain. Heavy rain at the interval between the first innings meant an extended break, and the Boers, being driven to the Galle Face Hotel for lunch, hosted by the Colts!

The size and extent of the crowd exceeded expectations. Such was the interest. The open spaces were filled five or six deep, and the majority stayed in their places through the sweltering heat and heavy rain rather than move, forming a dense, compact mass. The covered stands were also largely filled. The reception given to the Boers was the most cordial, and for once, it seemed as if the Colts had to take second place. The Boers were the "lions" of the day! Easily distinguishable by their green and orange puggarees. The match was attended by His Excellencies the Governor (Sir West Ridgeway), the Major General and Hon. Mr. H. H. Cameron. Commandant Van Zyl called for three cheers for the

²⁵ The [AngloBoerWar.com](https://www.angloboerwar.com/) Website (<https://www.angloboerwar.com/>) indicates that this "Kotze" was Gerhardus Petrus Kotze and not Gert Kotze, as has been reported even recently by Schulze (2009). A correction is warranted for this error.

victors after the over-enthusiastic native crowd was controlled with the use of the cane by police officers! The Colts also returned the compliment with loud cheering by the players and the crowd.

* * *

At Diyatalawa, the Boers built a pitch similar in most respects to the grounds they were accustomed to in South Africa, i.e., a pitch practically *devoid of grass*, rendering coir matting indispensable (see later). Their introduction from playing on a coir matting to a grass turf (in Colombo)

was recorded as a fresh experience and accounted for the poor defence they showed. But the Boers were enamoured with the NCC grounds (*Cricket*, 1901: 330-331).

The scorecard of the match is given below. Colts won the toss and elected to bat and finally won by 141 runs. C. E. Perera's was an outstanding innings, which included several sixes. The star performers were: C. E. Perera (90*), C. Otto (match bag of 10 for 75), de Villiers (match bag of 7 for 97), E. A. Joseph (match bag of 10 for 63).

The Boer Prisoners of War XI vs. Colts XII, 5-6 July 1901

Colts First Inning		Runs	Second Inning	Runs
J.C. McHeyzer	Run out	2	c. Smuts b. de Villiers	36
A.T. Pollocks	c. Du Toit b. Otto	1	b. Otto	7
J. Ludovici	c. Coetzer b. de Villiers	19	c. Kotze b. de Villiers	1
C. E. Perera	Not out	90	c. Kotze b. de Villiers	0
L. Thomasz	c. and b. Otto	6	c. Du Plessis b. Scheeper	20
J. Kelaart	c. Hilder b. Otto	2	St. Sennet b. de Villiers	2
A. Raffel (captain)	b. Otto	0	c. Kotze b. Otto	4
W. de Fransch	c. Sennet b Coetzer	2	c. Kotze b de Villiers	19
E.A. Joseph	b. Otto	3	b. Otto	7
T. Kelaart	b. Otto	1	c. Scheeper b. de Villiers	11
J. Forsyth	c. Van Zyl b. Otto	8	Not out	0
Total	All Out (Extras 12)	146	All Out (Extras 7)	114

Boer's XI Bowling First Innings: C. Otto, 7/50; P. H. de Villiers, 1/33; C. Van Zyl, 1/22. **Second Innings:** de Villiers, 6/64; C. Otto, 3/25; J. Scheeper, 1/18.

Boer's XI First Inning		Runs	Second Inning	Runs
G. P. C. Kotzé	Lbw. Ludovici	1	b. Perera	23
C. Van Zyl	c. De Fransch b. Ludovici	10	c. De Fransch b. Joseph	0
T. M. Hilder	c. Ludovici b. Kelaart	0	b. Joseph	5
J. Scheeper	Run out	4	c. T. Kelaart b. Joseph	6
G. S. Sennett	b. Ludovici	0	c. and b. Joseph	3
A. Smuts	b. Thomasz	0	b. Joseph	4
D. du Toit	c. De Fransch b. Joseph	0	b. Joseph	0
P. H. de Villers (captain)	b Thomasz	7	c. and b. Perera	8
P. du Plessis	c. J. Kelaart b. Joseph	25	c. McHeyzer b. Joseph	4
J. Coetzer	Not out	3	Not out	6
C. Otto	b Thomasz	0	b. Joseph	1
Total	All Out (Extras 3)	53	All Out (Extras 6)	66

Colts Bowling First Innings: J. Ludovici, 3/8; L. Thomasz, 3/7; E. A. Joseph, 2/32; T. Kelaart, 1/3. **Second Innings:** E. A. Joseph, 8/31; C. E. Perera, 2/18.

How well the native crowd got involved in the game can be understood by the account published by the *Ceylon Independent* newspaper:

"A native crowd is always interesting, but chiefly so when the event is over, and necessity no longer

exists in the opinion of the native himself for placing a restraint upon his action. He then prepares himself for a skurry and stampede, and enjoys the fun all the more if it brings him into collision with his natural enemy, the policeman.

Before the players were off the field, the crowd broke its bounds and came surging round the players, and it was with difficulty, and a fierce application of the cane that a semicircle was kept in front of the players' tent. Here, after a brief interval, Commandant Van Zyl collected his men, and when he had them together, called for three cheers for the victorious eleven. These were heartily given, with a great waving of hats and a display of utmost cordiality. The Colts returned the compliment with equal enthusiasm, and then, not to be outdone, the crowd cheered both..."

Figure 4 shows the two teams and most likely the tent at the grounds that had been erected for the visitors.

N.B. The Editor of *The Ceylon Independent* was the Colts' cricketer, Lieut. Col. E. H. Joseph, who was one of the earliest movers who pushed the Ceylonese to unite and form an association, a single body that would represent the whole island. The *Ceylon Cricket Association* (CCA) came into being in 1922.

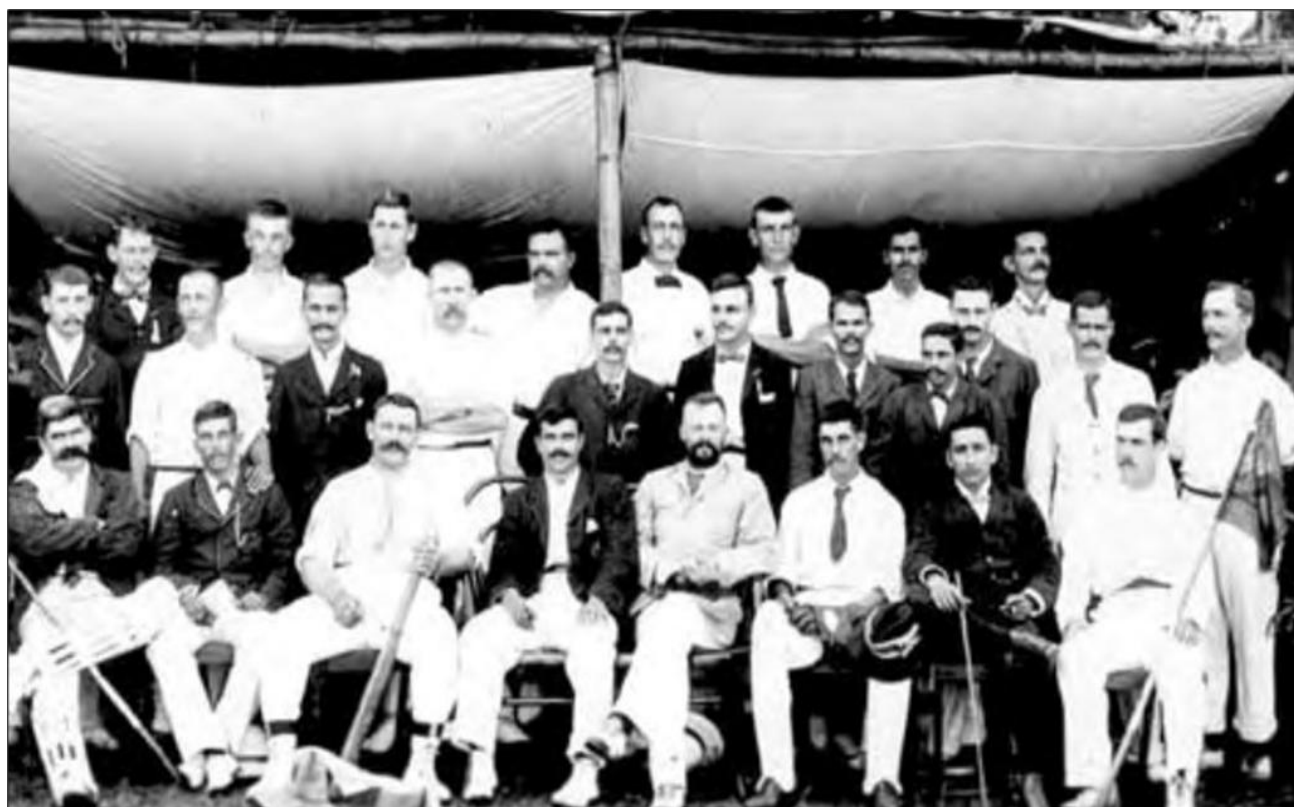


Figure 4. Back row (L-R). Phillipus Oosthuizen (Scorer - Boers), Gert Kotzé, J. Coetzer, W. de Fransz, Piet du Plessis, ---, C. E. Perera, Sydney Tennant (Umpire - Boers), A. C. Solomonsz (Umpire - Colts). [**Note** the possible error in the player's name here. As far as I can discern from other known photographs, C. E. Perera is the person second from right.]

Middle row: Jim Ludovici, Cornelius Otto, S. P. Joseph (Scorer - Colts), Alexis Smuts, Tommy Kelaart, R. C. Dunn, E. A. Joseph, A. T. Pollocks, J. Forsyth, Tommy Hilder. **Front row:** J. C. Heyzer, James (Banda) Kelaart, Commandant Coert van Zijl, Dr Allan Raffel (Captain - Colts), Pieter de Villiers (captain - Boers), George Senne, L. Thomasz, Johannes Scheepers.

Appreciating the uniqueness of the match, Brohier (1946) wrote as follows:

The proverbial uncertainties of cricket turned a comparatively poor display of the Boer batsmen on the first day into a game of spectacular cricket on the second. The Colombo Colts won the match by 141 runs, but of more import and greater interest than the scores were the extraordinary assurances of mutual good-will which the event kindled, and which the local and several leading London newspapers used to diplomatic advantage.

At Diyatalawa, the Boers played football, rugby, table tennis, and other sports in addition to cricket (Brohier, 1947; van Der Merwe, 1998). The cricket club that de

Villiers formed had some 70 members who played cricket with great keenness. The fact that he had some notable cricketers in the POW camp, as described by Schulze (2009), would have helped this task. Occasionally, the POWs played in teams representing the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and other regions of South Africa. It was also known that the POWs played rugby with the same interest and intensity.

Schulze (2009) revealed that there were some notable cricketers in the Boers' team, apart from P. H. de Villiers. They were: Gerhardus Petrus Christiaan' Kotzé, Alexis Smuts, Cornelius Johannes Otto, Thomas Minter Hilder and George Simon Sennett. All had played competitive cricket in their home territories before the War.

The visiting team also had the two secretaries of their *Sports Club* at Diyatalawa - Sidney Dennison Tennant, who didn't play but went as the Boers' umpire; Phillipus Oosthuizen, who also didn't play but went as the Scorer for the Boers (see **Figure 4**). Both were known as good cricketers.

Another significant observation Schulze (2009) made was that there were four English- and nine Dutch-speaking cricketers in the Boer team that travelled to Colombo. For most of the twentieth century, the official South African provincial and national cricket teams and administrators were dominated by white English-speakers, while Dutch-speakers took a back seat.

The team represented people from different backgrounds, occupations and geographical regions. Despite any differences of political opinions they may have had in those difficult times in South Africa, in the sports arena, these men were well united (Schulze, 2009). The Boers returned to Mount Lavinia after the game, which they lost, and left for Diyatalawa the following day.

By all accounts, the POWs enjoyed their outing, their game, and the reception they received from all classes of the community. It was noted that the prisoners did well in the game, given that they had had little opportunity for practice over the previous two years.

Schulze (2009: 204) explained that shortly after the Boers arrived at Diyatalawa, de Villiers arranged for the English and Afrikaners to forge a *new nation*, which in 1910 would



Figure 5. The pitch is believed to have been made with compacted, rolled and hardened mud by the Boers, devoid of grass. It would have had a matting in those days (June 2025)

Cricket (1901: 473) highlighted an exceptional performance by A. Smuts, a Transvaal cricketer, while he was at Diyatalawa. This was in a practice match between the Boers *First XI* and the *Next 18*. The second team of 18 players must have been like a second XI. Smuts claimed 13/11 and 7/9 wickets in the first and second innings, respectively. He also clean-bowled 16 of his victims.

We all know that cricket is a quintessential English game that was introduced throughout the Empire. On this unique occasion, cricket served as a common denominator and leveller between the British captor and the Boer captive.

become the *Union of South Africa*, with the motto '*Ex Unitate Vires*' ('from unity, strength'). 'Unity' referred only to *white unity* rather than any unity with the native South African black population.

The aspiration of black-and-white unity remained the preserve of a derided minority of idealists (Schulze, 2009: 205). It was a bridge too far to cross in those days. Cricket aside, the world knows that South Africa is still struggling to overcome the colour divide that poisoned their country for centuries. It was also reported that the Boers *were very anxious to play a return match on their own ground at Diyatalawa* (*Cricket*, 1901: 330-332). Such an event, however, did not happen.

Figure 5 shows a recent photo of the pitch that is believed to have been made by the Boers, which is located inside the present-day Survey Camp. Hardly any cricket is played there nowadays, which is unfortunate. However, as a youngster, way back in 1962-65, I used to sit on the terraces of the old pavilion (**Figure 6**) and watch the Diyatalawa Camp's Army or Air Force team play against each other or visitors. The pavilion has been newly built and is dedicated to a late Survey General, B. J. P. Mendis (2001-2008). The dedication plaque says that it was opened on 29 January 2014. Recalling my memories, I have no doubt that it was exactly at the same location that my siblings and I sat and watched cricket in the early 1960s.



Figure 6. The "new" pavilion, named after B. J. P. Mendis, erected where the old structure was (June 2025)

Notably, cricket also served as the common denominator between the oppressed Ceylonese and the Boer POWs. By winning against the Boers, the Ceylonese would have sent a silent and strong message to the European rulers that *we are as good as you -if not better!*

It is also possible to imagine that the locals may have harboured sympathies for the Boers as POWs. Both were 'oppressed' parties under British rule and might have felt a degree of camaraderie. Reports indicate that the support that Boers enjoyed from locals and the cordial hospitality they received from the Colts far exceeded their expectations.

Schulze (2009) noted that during the nearly two years that the Boers spent in Ceylon, contact was proscribed between them and the indigenous Ceylonese.

The cricket match provided a rare opportunity to interact socially. Cricket was probably seen by the British as a safe forum to allow such interaction.

In the end, the *Boers vs. Colts* game became **more than a game**. While it was a game not intended to have any special significance, it gained a huge symbolic significance. It is, therefore, justifiable to call it a 'unique event' and one of symbolic significance. Most POWs who returned to South Africa later joined the British Army. Some might have continued playing cricket for the different States, but that information is not easy to track (also see **Figure 7** below).

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Figure 7. Another early picture of the Boer POWs Camp site at Diyatalawa, rows of long sheds of corrugated iron, at Diyatalawa. [Published with permission from AngloBoerWar.com].

<https://www.angloboerwar.com/forum/boerpow/26216-diyatalawa-boer-pow-camp-ceylon>

Jeremy De Lima - Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka – RASSL – Some Reflections

“A light under the bushel” is my own summary of the oldest Academic Institute in Sri Lanka - *The Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* (RASSL). It was never loquacious in promoting its image, sedately providing valuable information for students and scholars for 181 long years ²⁶.

The RASSL was inaugurated in Colombo in 1845 by a group of resident Englishmen as ‘*The Ceylon branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*’, which itself was founded on 15 March 1823 by the eminent Sanskrit scholar, **Henry Thomas Colebrooke** (Royal Asiatic Society, 2026).

It received its Royal Charter from **King George IV** on 11 August 1824, ‘*for the investigation of subjects connected with and for the encouragement of science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia*’.¹

This institute is now termed The Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka and is referred to by renowned international research organisations, such as JSTOR (2026). Being true to its heritage, the RASSL(2026) has not moved from its original foundation aim, stated in 1845 as follows:

The first objective on 1st May 1845, stated in the address from the first-ever RASSL President, Justice Start: “*To institute and promote enquiries into the history, religion, literature, arts and social condition of the present and former inhabitants of this Island*”(RASSL, 2026).

2026 PRESENT OBJECTIVE

1. The present objective of the Corporation states:” (a) to institute and promote inquiries into the history, religions, languages, literature, arts, sciences and social conditions of the present and former peoples of Sri Lanka and connected culture” (RASSL, 2026).

The only changes have been the addition of Science and languages. Science now has a direct daily connection to modern life from the internet, while language development is consequential to human evolution. This proves that the RASSL is moving with the times.

Sociology is defined as the study of the social life of humans. *To examine the present, you must know what occurred in the past*. While these are naturally differing periods in time, they are not diametrically opposed; in fact, they are directly related. This is where the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka best serves its objective in providing precise facts, which are double-peer reviewed, prior to publication.

While several organisations presently operate in Sri Lanka to research this information, none other than the RASSL has

been more successful in disseminating the tenets of human existence on this island of paradise.

Soon after its inauguration by overseas-born individuals, Sri Lankan-born scholars joined the RASSL and began participating in the society's activities. At the first meeting in 1845, under the auspices of the then-Governor of Ceylon, there were 34 members present. Five years later, in 1850, membership had doubled to 74.

This steep increase continued, and in 1897 grew to just over 202. (The current unverified RASSL total membership count now appears to fluctuate between several hundred and a few thousand.) It is nostalgic to record verbatim the minutes of the General Meeting held at the Colombo Museum on 17 November 1887 (see **Figure 1**), where it states:

“Never before has the Museum, which Ceylon owes to Sir William Gregory, looked so bright and attractive as it did on Saturday evening, when the building which the Sinhalese are accustomed to designate by the charnel-house-sounding term of ‘bone house’ was thronged with a gay and brilliant throng in response to invitations, which had been issued by the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.” (RASSL, 2026).

[A **charnel house** is a building where human skeletal remains are stored. They are often built near churches for depositing bones that are unearthed while digging graves. The term can also be used more generally for a place filled with death (*Wikipedia*, 2026)].



Figure 1. The National Museum in Colombo

The first meeting was held in Colombo Council Chambers with interim locations, the Home Minister’s office down 5th Lane, Kollupitiya, Vishaka Vidyalaya, Thurstan College, The University of Ceylon and even the abandoned

²⁶ RASSL, No. 96, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka (<https://royalasiaticsociety.lk/>)

Havelock Race Course, adding insult to injury, in the ignoble dilapidated liquor bar!

From its inception, the society has been endowed with valuable books and journals. (It now has almost 11,000 volumes, including rare and valuable books, and 117 titles of Journals). However, time passed with the society not having a permanent abode but continuing its operation with a nomadic existence for a prolonged period of 140 years (RASSL, 2026).

Finally, in 1985, primarily due to the donation from the UK to the Mahaweli fund, the present location of the *Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* was opened by statesmen, as pictured below (**Figure 2**). This is at No. 96, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Colombo 7. (For older generations, this was previously known as *Green Path*, which runs alongside Vihara Mahadevi Park) (**Figure 3**).



Figure 2. April 1985. British Prime Minister, Hon. Margaret Thatcher, with Sri Lanka's President, Hon. J.R. Jayewardene and Mahaweli Minister Hon. Gamini Dissanayake, at the RASSL.



Figure 3. The RASSL building at 96, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha

The RASSL's valuable assets include the building and a superb library with a vast collection of books, journals and articles that people can browse and study (**Figure 4**).

The first Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) president of the RASSL was Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam. He took office in 1916, taking over from the British colonial administrators who had previously held the position (RASSL, 2026).

Fifty presidents later and the 3rd woman to hold that position, the present president, Shereen Amendra, is

certainly a skilful holder of this office. Professionally qualified as a Chartered Architect and a Chartered Landscape Architect, she is a member of many professional institutes and associations, as well as a senior consultant to the University of Moratuwa.



Figure 4. A picture of the RASSL Library

As Shereen states in her current address during the RASSL 182nd Annual General Meeting in March 2026: *"We stand at a critical juncture; one may ask - are we too old and archaic, or should we bring the fascination of the past forward in new innovative ways. Moreover, the social media and groups within the cloud are numerous. We have to step up to the technology of the here and now, but in a judicious manner"* (Amendra, 2026).

This statement is very relevant now, because like every human endeavour formed before the digital age, the RASSL (and even the *Ceylon Society of Australia*!) has to digitally reinvent itself.

With all the knowledge, experience and education that previous generations possess, the "Generation Gap" is more evident now than ever before in the constantly changing digital world. According to McKinsey & Company (2026), a global management consulting firm that helps other organisations to become smarter and more prosperous (much like KPMG & PWC), Generation Z, born 1997–2010, is the most suitable in digital transformation using **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, which is now leading the digital world. AI is seen as the most efficient method of studying historical data, identifying patterns, and making predictions, which is what the study of sociology is really all about.

It thus seems naturally logical that the immediate action of any "*analogue organisation*" (my phrase!) is to recruit youth from **Generation Z**. This does not mean putting previous generations "out to pasture" but rather welcoming all into the digital herd.

While it may first seem opposite to my last suggestion, I agree totally with Shereen's final statement below, as this is the only way that pre-digital organisations can become ubiquitous in modern media. *"Consolidate rather than diversify should be our aim for the time being"* (Amendra, 2026).

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Endnote:

As a non-academic and insatiable addict of fiction while growing up in Sri Lanka, I had never heard of the RASSL. My only book supplier was the *British High Commission Library* in Kollupitiya.

Even the *National Library* was not suitable for me due to its academic criteria and book collections. However, on hearing that our President, Jitto Arulampalam, had in March 2026 made the *Ceylon Society of Australia* (CSA) an Institutional member of RASSL, I had to investigate what the RASSL really is and what it stands for.

Imagine my consternation when I could not find a single reference to the RASSL anywhere in the archives of the CSA or The Ceylankan! I, therefore, decided to rectify this minor anomaly by preparing the short article above.

I have had invaluable help from many whom I won't enumerate for fear of omission. Of course, all errors, omissions and exceptions are non-intentional and are mine alone. I am hoping that our members will benefit from knowing something about the RASSL. Further details can be obtained from their Website, cited above.

Figure 5 below shows the RASSL's logo, which states that it is the oldest academic organization in the country.



Figure 5. The Logo of the RASSL

Editor's Note:

Readers would be interested to learn that CSA's President, Jitto Arulampalam, visited the RASSL in November 2025. See photo below.



A recent meeting of our President, Jitto Arulampalam, with the RASSL officials. From L-R: Dilini Walisundara (Hon. Secretary), Shereen Amendra (President), Jitto and Ashley de Vos (Immediate Past President). Note the magnificent display board with the names of past office bearers of the RASSL.

Editor's Note:

*The following Memories of Geoff Weinman, a brilliant rugby player who passed away in 2024, were written by a rugby player, U. L. Kaluarachchi, who had been coached by Geoff. This account was originally published in **The Island** on 2 February 2024 (<https://island.lk/memories-of-geoff-weinman/>).*

Hugh Karunanayake recalled that Geoff was a member of the CSA for many years during the early days of our Society and was a regular attendee at our quarterly meetings, held in those days, at the Willow Park Hall, Hornsby.

Re-submitted by Hugh Karunanayake, the account is published below [with a few editorial corrections] so that Sri Lankans who knew Geoff would appreciate his unique contribution to Sri Lanka's rugby. Geoff Weinman was the first schoolboy rugby player to represent the Ceylon National team in 1949.

Hugh has informed us that Lakshman Kaluarachchi was a barrister and a well-known rugby footballer who represented his school, Royal College, which he captained in his final year. U. L. also captained the CR&FC Rugby team, which he represented for many years.

U. L. Kaluarachchi - Memories of Geoff Weinman

The news of the recent demise of Geoff Weinman after a long span of 93 years did not come as a surprise to me. I am saddened, nevertheless, as over the years, beginning from around 1957, I had enjoyed a very rewarding relationship with him.

Geoff spent his last years in an Elders' Home, well cared for by its professional staff. I was in constant touch with him on a regular basis, even after he emigrated to Australia, until unfortunate circumstances made him incommunicado. Thereafter, it was a case of obtaining regular updates on his health from the professional staff of the Elders Home. Perhaps, the last Sri Lankans to visit him there were two of my former teammates, long-time residents in Sydney, Dr. Shivantha Arudpragasam and Rex Perera, inseparable second-row forwards of my time!

Geoff was my first rugby mentor at Royal College, way back in 1957. As a youngster of barely 15 years, I was overwhelmed by his commanding presence. So were the others present at practice. With a Jeff Chandler look about him, and oozing with geniality, he made his presence a mesmerizing experience indeed! And so began my journey with him, as many others did, who were moulded by him into more than competent rugby players.

In school and thereafter, Geoff had been a superlative sportsman. To be specific, he first played rugby for Royal in 1948 under the indefatigable Ashley Cader. It was a memorable year because Royal won the coveted Bradby Shield for the first time after it was awarded in 1945, with 14 freshers, Ashley Cader being the only coloursman.

In an airmail communication to me, way back in the late '90s, Geoff related how disappointed he was that he could not make it to the Royal team in 1947, due to a misunderstanding or an indiscretion on his part.

His name had been included as a selectee and posted on the College Notice Board, a fact that was conveyed to him by his elder brother John, who was also playing in the team at that time. Unfortunately, Geoff had to forfeit his place because he had not attended the last day of practice.

So, when he played in that winning team of 1948 as Ashley Cader's deputy, "it was with the pent-up fury of an unleashed tornado, which probably had something to do with the success of the 14 freshers and the fact that I received a Ceylon Cap a year later" – (this was an email communication to me in 1999) (see **Figure 1**).

A year later, i.e. 1949, Geoff captained the team and his superlative performances as a wing forward (flanker in today's parlance) enabled him to earn his first National Jersey in the *All-India Tournament* of that year. Thus, he became the first Sri Lankan to represent the National Team as a schoolboy (**Figure 2**).

This was, indeed, a great achievement considering the fact that rugby in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was dominated by Europeans and only a few outstanding locals, so to speak, were able to gain national selection. Being one of them as a schoolboy was an outstanding accomplishment indeed! The other Ceylonese who played with him in that Tournament for Ceylon, captained by L. E. F. Simpson, were Ray de Zilva, William Molegoda, Summa Navaratnam, Fred Aldons and Mahesa Rodrigo. In an airmail letter, dated 19 July 2001, Geoff described his approach to sports, thus:

"...Talent alone does not by itself succeed. What eventually does is the hunger to be better than the best. This enhances your natural ability to an extent that when the 'opportunity' comes, as it eventually does to everyone, you are more than ready to make the most of it..."

Hunger to be better than the best was what he attempted to instill into us.

It was not only Rugby Football that Geoff excelled in school. Apart from captaining the rugby team in 1949, as aforesaid, he had also captained the College Athletics team that year and won his Boxing Colours as well.

So, he belongs to a special class of sportsmen, a Triple Coloursman, in Rugby, Athletics and Boxing, and the captain of two of the sports he represented at Royal, in addition to being a Lance Sergeant in the College Cadet Contingent as well.



Figure 1. Old buddies. Ashley Cader and Geoff Weinman.

On leaving school, Geoff represented the Ceylonese Rugby and Football Club (CR) as a wing forward (flanker) between 1950 and 1961. There had been four players at the CR vying to play in the Third Row, of whom Geoff was one. Others were Ashley Cader, H. Numan and Norman Gunawardene, Ashley Cader at No. 08 being the constant factor. Geoff had played in the company of his elder brother John in the CR Third Row as well.

It was a treat to watch Geoff Weinman, Ashley Cader and Norman Gunawardene working zealously together not only for CR but for Colombo Clubs (or Low Country) vs. Up-Country in the annual Capper encounters and for All-Ceylon, as well.

He captained the CR first in 1957 but had to give up due to a bugging knee injury for Ashley Cader to take over for the rest of the season. Geoff captained CR again in 1961 before hanging up his boots for good. He was also the President of the CR&FC in 1970 and was elected an Honorary Life Member in 1974.

It was in 1957, when he was temporarily compelled to stop playing due to injury, that he began coaching his Alma Mater for four consecutive years (1957-1960). There is no doubt that he was responsible in no small measure (ably supported by that indefatigable and highly respected rugby Master-in-Charge, Mt. M. T. Thambapillai) in rekindling the embers of Royal rugby at that time, flickering with uncertainty.

The 1957 side he coached (led by the star flanker, Ratna Sivaratnam) marked the turning of the tide, so to speak, of Royal rugby, while the 1958 team (led by Dudley Fernando) progressed from the previous year to beat arch rivals, Trinity, to regain the coveted Bradby Shield after a lapse of seven years.

Space will not permit me to set out in detail how it was achieved. Suffice it to say that Geoff paid constant attention to building confidence in his charges and developing strategies designed to get the better of our opponents. His pre-match talks to the teams just before his charges got on the field were masterpieces of motivation.

The fact that in 1958 and 1959, the Royal line was crossed only once is a measure not only of the pool of talent available but also the remarkable ability of the supremo to hone and harness that talent.

In his second coaching stint at Royal in 1968/69, this writer had the privilege and pleasure of assisting him. More than anything else, it was a terrific learning experience; in particular, to get invaluable insights into how his strategic rugby mind worked.

When he took over in 1968 as coach of Royal Rugby for the second time, he had just returned from the UK, having been sent for further management exposure by his employer, the Ceylon Oxygen Company, where he worked as the Sales Manager. He had used his stay in the UK to learn more and more about rugby as well.

The knowledge he gained abroad was more than evident in the manner he shaped the two very talented teams of 1968 and 1969, ably led by Chitta Ranjan 'Bulla' de Silva and Harin Malwatte, respectively.

Before Geoff emigrated to Australia, after serving the Ceylon Oxygens, he had been in employment with the Canadian Aerial Survey; Shaw Wallace & Hedges, where my teammate Nihal de Run had played mercantile 'Sevens' with him; and at Associated Motor Ways (AMW). Though living and working in Sydney as an accountant, his heart was in Sri Lanka.

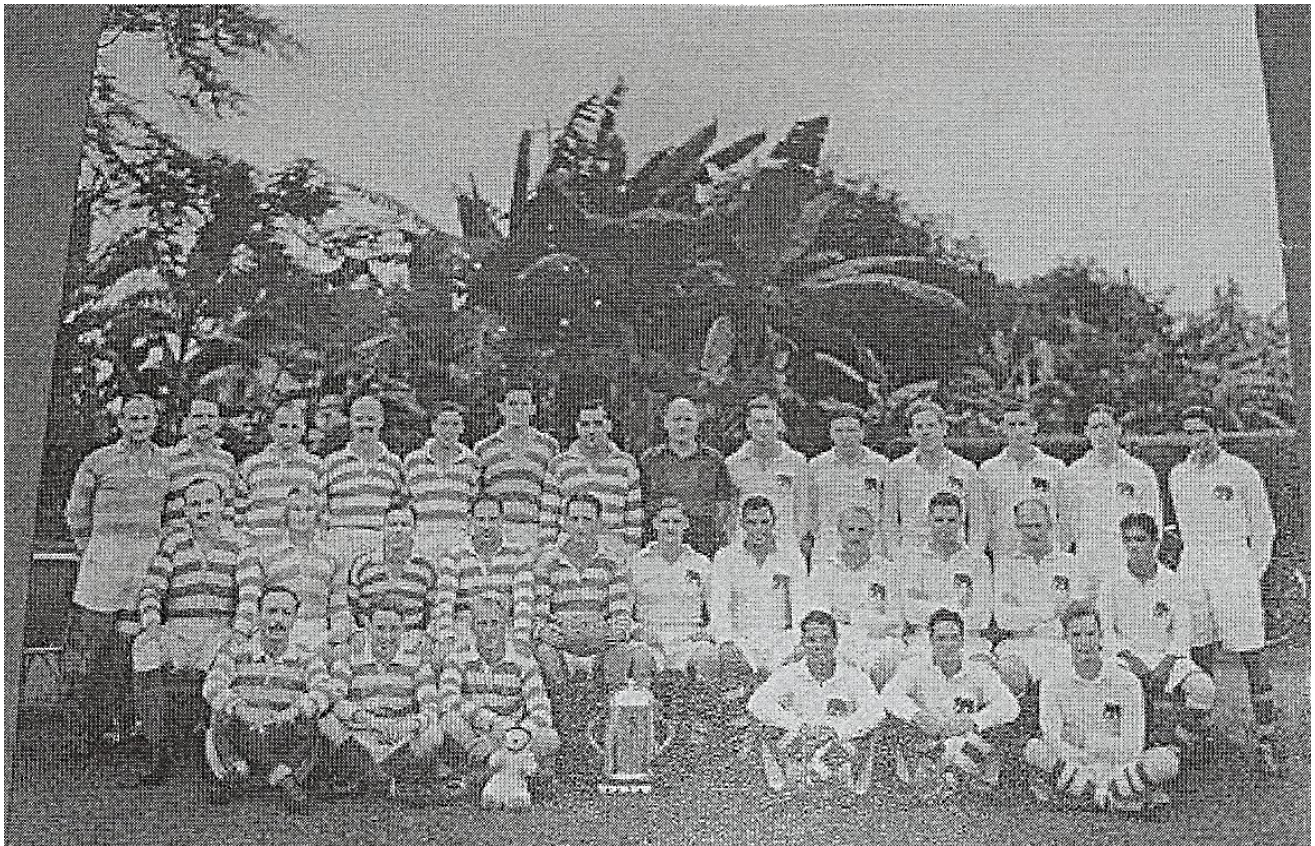


Figure 1. A rare picture of Geoff Weinman, a schoolboy, standing on the extreme right, in 1949. Other details are not available.



UP COUNTRY vs COLOMBO 1955

Standing (L-R) R.J. Willett (Touch Judge), J. Bell, M. Perera, H.K. Anderson, R.P. Wilson, D. MacRae, L. Blazé, M.B. Horsfall (Referee), P. Mahendran, D. Rodrigo, T. Anghie, H.N. Gunawardena, I. Dias & L.N.J. Leefe

Seated (L-R) D. Parker, F.C. Roelofs, C. Gibson, H.K. MacPherson, B. Cameron, M. Wright (Capt.), M. Rodrigo (Capt.), N.W. Dewing, A. Cader, G. Weinman, M. Wickers & A. Paiva

On Ground (L-R) K. Ariarajah, T. Gordon, J.O.M. Stewart, A.K. Doray, F. Kreltszheim & R. Rayner-Lever

Figure 3. The Up-Country vs. Colombo Teams, 1955. Photo source: Freddy Kreltszheim. Photographer: Unknown; Note Geoff Weinman, seated to the left of Ashley Cader (circled in Red). [available at: <https://www.historyofceylonteasports.com/media-archive/freddy-kreltszheim--187/hoct-upcountry-colombo1955-01--8286.html>].



Figure 4. A Up-Country vs. Colombo game for the Capper Cup, 1958. Geoff Weinman is in the centre of the picture, wearing a thigh bandage, looking to support his teammate, Neville Leafe (No. 7), who is about to receive the ball. [Available at: <https://www.historyofceylontea.com/media-archive/freddy-kreltszheim--187/hoct-freddykreltszheim-07--8282.html>]. Copyright by: www.historyofceylontea.com. Contributed Photo Albums. Contributed by **Freddy Kreltszheim** (<https://www.historyofceylontea.com/media-archive/freddy-kreltszheim--187>).

He never forsook his roots. He kept coming back to witness his Alma Mater at rugby and to catch up with his former team mates at the CR and in the Ceylon teams, such as Mahesa Rodrigo, Devaka Rodrigo, Summa Navaratnam, Kavan Rambukwella, et al., and of course, his former charges of the teams he served as coach, too numerous to mention here. They simply adored his company and showered him in ample measure reciprocal care and concern they themselves experienced when coached by him.

The writer had the good fortune of visiting Geoff in 1996 along with teammate Rex Perera. He entertained us to drinks in his apartment at Ithaca Road, Elizabeth Bay, before taking us across to Charing Cross for a sumptuous dinner and for a joyous time recalling our good old rugby days. In September/October 2017, I visited him twice. But this time to the Elders' Home, where he was being professionally cared for. The first of these visits was in the company of Jayawardene brothers, Sunil and Indrakumar, who were coached by him and a former colleague of his at AMW, Lakshman Tilakaratna.

On the second visit, I went alone, the very next day, hoping to draw him out of his silence, which we experienced the previous day. I sat with him for nearly an hour, striving to draw out something from him by jogging his memory with matters, events and people familiar and of interest to him, such as the teams and players he

coached at Royal, friends and teams he played with and against, etc.

All to no avail. When I got up to bid goodbye, he stood up, too. I asked him why. His firm response to me was, verbatim, *"I want to say a proper goodbye to you!"* while at the same time attempting to walk with me to the exit. I was, of course, cautioned by the nurse not to allow him to reach the exit. It was indeed a proper goodbye, touching my shoulder, his voice firm and powerful and still ringing in my ear!

Geoff Weinman, the superlative sportsman, genial personality, and mentor par excellence, has moved on, having played his part and touched our lives. His memory will surely be treasured by those whose lives he touched. Thank you, Geoff, for being a part of a rewarding and unforgettable relationship! For the goodness of you, may you find just repose in your new Abode.

We Need Speakers

As in the past, the CSA welcomes professionals and others who are interested in speaking at our General Meetings on topics of relevance to our mandate and stated objectives.

- Meetings and Events are expected once again to be held in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo.
- If you know of anyone interested in speaking at one of our forums, please contact:
- Our President, Jitto Arulampalam (Jitto@arulampalam.com);
- Secretary, Presenji Jayawickrema (presenji@tpg.com.au);
- Melbourne Chapter Convenor – Jeremy De Lima (delima@bigpond.net.au) or
- Colombo Chapter Secretary: Insiyah Davoodbhoy (insiyah.davoodbhoy@gmail.com)

We Welcome Your Literary Contributions

In this ‘interim’ review period, until further notice, *The Ceylankan* will be published twice per year (30 June and 30 December). Nevertheless, the Editor is on the lookout for your literary contributions. Be assured that your work will be given careful consideration with a view to publication at all times.

Original, previously unpublished, articles relating to the history, culture and heritage of Sri Lanka are sought, while any material of an anecdotal nature will also be considered, provided they conform to the CSA’s ideals of being non-racial, non-political, non-religious and non-controversial.

While every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, the Editor can't take responsibility for all of the errors that an author might have made.

Nevertheless, the Editor would appreciate any inaccuracies being brought to his notice without delay. To facilitate the design/layout of the publication, we request that your word processing be **unformatted**. Where applicable, contributors are also requested to annotate bibliographical references for copyright reasons and to help further research and study by interested members.



Some old photographs from the CSA’s inaugural meeting in 1998 (from the Hugh Karunanayake collection).

Our Stories ...These and others...



The picture on the left, from the cited original scholarly article by Geoff Wade, a Historian on South-East Asia, is reused for educational purposes.

It is a reconstruction of an image of the types of ships that the Chinese **Admiral Zheng He** used in the 15th Century.

Read Asiff Hussein's historical account about the early Chinese influence in Ceylon in our Journal.



Seashells from the Southern Beaches of Sri Lanka (Editor: purchased in Sri Lanka, in July 2025).
Read in our Journal Cassim Rahuman's Essays (musings) on our magnificent Southern City, Galle.



A rare picture of money paid to the Boer POWs at Diyatalawa for various construction activities they did.
Read inside Nimal Chandrasena's Essay on the unique cricket match that the Boers played against Colombo Colts in 1901. Cricket history records that nowhere else in the world has such an event taken place!

