

THE CEYLON ASSOCIATION

Bulletin No. 296 – January 2023
The newsletter for members of The Ceylon Association

From John Wakeford, President

We would like to convey our thanks and good wishes to all who sent us kind words and greetings at Christmas – these were much appreciated and are reciprocated.

With Sri Lanka open for tourists, we look forward to more first-hand accounts of travellers' experiences. The severe economic crisis has brought power cuts and shortages of medicines, fuel and food; tragically, nearly a third of the population is reported unable to pay and suffers food insecurity. We understand plenty of food is available, and current exchange rates mean that high rupee prices should present few problems for tourists. Tourism can surely help to provide jobs for those in need.

We hear that where they can, the children of many middle-class families have gone overseas to study or work. Family *walawas*/historic family homes are being sold, leaving the older generation behind and losing the country much young initiative, expertise and ability.

We hope you enjoy the description of a family rail journey to Badulla. The comfort of the modern train impressed us, even compared to the old observation car at the back of the train; how things have changed! Ironically we also note the good condition of the tarmac road in the foreground of diminished St Clair Falls – a vast improvement and far better than our potholed roads.

My thanks to Jacolyn for her hard work in preparing this newsletter and to Jacomina for her technical assistance.

Please continue to send us your anecdotes and stories regarding your association with Ceylon, may 2023 be a good year for all of us.

Date for your Diary

The next **Taunton Ceylon Reunion Lunch** will be held on **Saturday 7th October 2023** at Oake Manor Golf Club, Oake, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1BA, as usual. Those who came in 2022 will be sent an invitation in August. All are welcome, and others who would like to attend should contact: Mrs Vangi Wilson at 8 Windmill Rise, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7BZ. E vangiwilson@gmail.com, T 01460 73208.

Reunion

Vangi Wilson reports that a very successful **Taunton Ceylon Reunion Lunch** was held at Oake Manor Golf Club on Saturday 8th October 2022, with plentiful tender roast beef, roast potatoes, an impressive array of vegetables and a good selection of desserts from the trolley, followed by coffee and mints. This was much enjoyed by the fourteen able to attend, and it is hoped that more will join next year and that the reunion will continue. Those present were: Mary Blair, Peter and Carol Cameron, Peter and Pauline Fryer, Ginny Godwin, David and Moya Ledger, Jackie Munk, Alistair Sharp-Paul (over from Australia), Patrick and Jane White, Bob and Vangi Wilson.

Planters' Benevolent Fund of Ceylon

The Trustees of the Planters' Benevolent Fund of Ceylon are still looking for someone to take over from Marilyn Clark who has acted as Hon Secretary/Treasurer since 1988. The core function of this charity is to pay grants to qualifying individuals. The workload varies during the year but would average out at less than six hours a week and a person would need their own IT equipment. A brief outline of the work involved is as follows:

- Calculate grants for approval by Trustees and process quarterly payments or as required
- Keep financial records up to date (simple manual and computer accounts)
- Prepare annual Report & Accounts and arrange independent inspection
- Provide quarterly financial statements to the Trustees and as required
- Ensure Trustees are kept fully informed of all matters relevant to the charity
- Promptly reply to all enquiries/applications
- Ensure all legal deadlines are complied with
- Arrange and prepare for annual meeting (currently on Zoom)
- Any other admin and financial paperwork as required

The annual honorarium is £3,000 and if you are interested and would like more information, please contact: Marilyn Clark at 'Kirkwood', 6 Blofield Corner Road, Blofield Heath, Norwich, Norfolk NR13 4RT. T 07749 221751, E pbf@acurita.com

Members Contributions

From **Elizabeth Baxter**

A lovely and very interesting obituary by Marion Carswell's daughter, we met them one evening when we were staying with Charles and Rosemary Brooke Smith, and they were collecting apples for their apple press juice.

So glad to have news of Mark Spurrier, not that I have ever met him, but we were on Ndu Tea Estate, in Cameroon for 3 years, and he had been there about 10 years before us when they started to open it up.

From **Rohantha Gunaratne**

Sri Lankan restaurant **Copper Ceylon** in Bromley won the Best Restaurant award in the London Suburb category, at the British Curry Awards held in Battersea on 28th November 2022.

Copper Ceylon also became the first Sri Lankan restaurant to win an award in the history of the ceremony which was attended by shortlisted restaurants from across the country.

The restaurant brings both fun and authentic Sri Lankan cuisine to its diners alongside a menu of cocktails.

From **Julia Evans (née Burroughs)**

As the younger daughter of David and Kay Burroughs, I am fascinated by the old bungalow pictured in the last CA Bulletin (295). Has anyone recognised it yet and if so where is it?

I wondered if it was Poonagalla which was a rambling old place, owned by the Coombe family for 80 years until they sold it to Carsons and Tony Gottelier took over. Goreton Coombe was the last of the family to run it, Tamby Coombe may have been PD prior to Goreton?

I found a fascinating biography written by Joan Gottelier on the internet, giving some interesting snippets of information.

I would be so interested to know which bungalow it is.

From **Pamela Harvey** (née Humphreys)

I just felt I had to let you know how much I appreciated the latest Bulletin 295. I was completely riveted and felt so nostalgic reading names of people and places that I remember so well. I really liked all the photos and recognised Neil Wishart and John Bousfield in the rugby photo. I was at the Hill School with them and later saw Neil and his wife Wendy when visiting my parents in Cape Town.

I was 13 when I left Ceylon and my memories are all of the Hill School, Colombo Swimming Club, holidays and my friends.

It was chance really that brought my mother and me to Ceylon. My father was a foreign correspondent and we tried to follow him around, often one country behind. We actually travelled to Ceylon from India. My father was from London and my mother from an old colonial family in Singapore where I was born. Nevertheless Ceylon was a wonderful and never to be forgotten time.

From **Selva Kanagasabai**

Please pass my salaams to Clive Haines. He took me out for a curry dinner in London when I was there on furlough in 1967. Also, in case he is unaware of it, he is in two 1963 Dimbula rugby team photos.

A history of Radella Club, and many other photos can be seen on:

<https://www.historyofceylontea.com/>

→ Photos and Videos → Clubs → Radella Club

Incidentally, the reference to Darly ALLDAY who retired from Delmar Estate in 1954 brought back another old memory - my father was the District Medical Officer in Udupussellawa during the early 1950s and owned a black Austin 16 sedan. Although I was only about 8 to 10 years of age at the time, I remember that there were only two such models in the Nuwara Eliya/Udupussellawa districts. The owner of the second 'Big Austin' was the Manager of Delmar, Mr Allday.

From **Patricia Proctor**

I should have said that the BOAC photo (in Bulletin 295) had Mark Spurrier's older brother, Julien, at the front with a planter's daughter next to him (Joanna? not sure) and Anthea Rowan behind her. I believe Anthea did a great deal for the Ceylon Association from her home in Australia. We must all be in our 80s now so not sure how they are. Ian and I are also somewhere in the photo. I have no idea who was on the Qantas flight back, or who instigated the pillow fight. I do know I had my cushion removed!

The photo of the Queen walking with a vicar must have been taken either by my parents or one of their friends as it was in the family album. The church was near Nuwara Eliya and the Hill School Choir sang there on Sundays. Ian told me to join the choir regardless of merit because we had the most wonderful choir day out to Ambawela Dam every term. I recall some of the older boys swimming across the Dam and I am sure I heard a leopard coughing in the surrounding jungle - just magical.

From **Shirley White** (formerly **Campbell**)

The people I'm still in touch with (in other words alive) call each other the last of the Mohicans - which we are. I was also at the Hill School and remember with fondness Miss Cliffe, who later married a planter whose name I've forgotten. Paul Spurrier was a great headmaster with a lovely wife. I have been back, with both my children, and enjoyed seeing it again so much. It will always be 'Home' in a way.

I'm in touch from time to time with Sam Rajiah's daughter, Angela. They are having such a tough time.

From **Mark Spurrier**

The Ceylon Association Bulletin 295 brings up many memories. I get confused with many of the names and places. Please forgive me for any inaccuracies in the following ramblings.

Hill School Reading through the latest Ceylon Newsletter I am surprised at how many people have had contact with the school in some way. Parents, pupils, teachers etc. Some have been very complimentary, however I am sure that there are many kids that must have hated the place.

All I can say is that when I went back to school in England what I hated most were the school clothes, long trousers, jackets, and especially ties, taking me hours to dress. Such a change from shorts and shirts usually covered in school jam or marmalade.

School meals in England if I remember correctly were not much better, less gristle on the meat and better corn flakes. At the Hill School we were rationed to only two butter balls each for breakfast I remember that the cook Banda had to roll 220 butter balls with butter pats before breakfast every day. Why butter balls and not small squares I will never know but that's what it was!

Patricia Proctor I remember Patricia Norman and being very flattered when Miss Redhouse asked me to help her, the pleasure was completely mine helping a tall dark haired damsel in distress. She was much taller than me if I remember correctly.

I am no longer able to do fractions with any confidence thank God for decimals.

England Scotland Rugby Teams Bean, Parker, Wishart, Banks, Waring, Doudney, Bousfield, were all ex Hill School boys, all very good rugby players and could have won just by themselves if they had taken on the rest of the other two teams.

David Parker When I was about 6 years old before I had started at the Hill School David Parker came up to me one break time and asked me to cut up my father's bamboo canes used for corporal punishment (tut tut).

I didn't cut them up but I did hide them, behind the stationery cupboard at the bottom of the stairs going to the senior girls bedroom, found only when next required.

David was quite familiar with the canes!

Many, many years later at a posh cocktail party in Malawi and we had not met for a long time, David shouted across the room. 'Hallo Mark' and then told everyone present that my father had seen more of his bottom than nearly any one else!! (actually all beatings were done with shorts well up around our waists. I know.)

Haines There were two Haines at the Hill School. Everyone was called by their surname then, with the same surname differentiated as major or minor. I remember that on Saturdays boys were allowed to learn carpentry with Velu the school carpenter.

One Saturday in the middle of school lunch there was a banging on the door from the passage to the dining room. The door finally opened and in came Haines (major or minor?) with a box stuck completely over his head, legs, body, arms and wooden box. A box he had made in the carpentry lesson.

The whole dining room erupted into laughter seeing this walking box. To this day I do not know if the box was really stuck on his head or whether it was a well contrived prank.

Miss Evelyn Redhouse Miss Redhouse as we all knew her had been a Wren in the British Navy (she had played hockey for England). During the war she was stationed at Trincomalee. Towards the end of the war she was the officer in charge of the convalescent home for wounded soldiers called Nicholson's Lodge in Trinco.

She then came to teach Maths at the Hill School and was one of the best teachers.

We the Spurrier family, plus the Adams family (Dick, Helen, Joanna and Gillian) and Rosemary Dickson spent a wonderful holiday at Nicholson's Lodge.

Things become a bit confused now, I think Miss Redhouse married Mr Weeks who lived in Kandy, but there was a Miss Weeks teaching at the Hill School who married Walter Ogilvie, a friend of the Carswells.

BOAC Flight to Ceylon I recognise some of the people on the flight. My brother Tim and Joanna Adams at the bottom of the stairs, Rosemary Dickson, Anthea Rowan very tall I believe she represented England at swimming in the Olympics. Patricia Norman, Ewan Cameron others I don't recognise but probably Hill School boys and girls but before my time.

I wish air travel was as pleasant now as then, Patricia's pillow fight sounds fun! I wonder what happened to the Italian Boxer.

Christopher Hooper Mr Hooper a teacher at the Hill School took us camping once a year at a beautiful camp site with a river running around on three sides.

Mr Hooper was quite new to Ceylon and we would tell him about the dangerous snakes such as the *tic polonga*, a small adder.

At the camp we put a key chain in his sleeping bag. When he had got nicely settled in we asked him if he had remembered to shake out his sleeping bag before going to bed. Five minutes later there was a great shout we have never seen anyone get out of a sleeping bag so quickly. Maybe he was a good actor?

When they left Ceylon, Christopher Hooper and another teacher Jimmy Crouch decided to motorcycle up through India, Pakistan etc to the UK (could not do it now). Hooper had to give up in Pakistan when his motorcycle was washed away in a flash flood, they had camped in a dry wadi. (Not something a good boy scout should do). Jimmy Crouch went on and a long time later he was interviewed by the BBC about his trip. He mentioned how good his Norton motorcycle was and I believe Norton Motorcycle Company gave him a new bike.

Peter Chapman - Allday Family Gilly Allday was a pupil at the Hill School I don't know how she fitted in with the rest of the Allday family.

If Peter wants to get some background on early tea planting days a book called *Golden Tips* by T W Cave might help. The script is rather boring but the photos are fantastic. 235 photos, the book was first printed in 1900 so some photos not as sharp as those taken today. Anyone interested in Ceylon should try and get a copy if available last edition was printed in 1904 by Cassel & Company Ltd, London.

Forward 100 years - David Ebbels' book *Round the Tea Totum*. shows how the tea industry has changed or NOT in a 100 years.

Roy Moxham's book *Tea* has an interesting chapter on early Ceylon tea.

Tom Jackson 'The great dare' I cannot remember a lot about this except wandering around in the dark near the Nuwara Eliya railway station, now the Nuwara Eliya bus station.

Although Tom's father helped my father with the school accounts, I think that my influence, being the son of the headmaster, had more significance as to why we were not expelled. The drinks are on Tom.

General News

Hunger is keeping children away from school because of the economic crisis; many families have started to struggle for basics such as food, fuel and medicine.

A report in December by the World Food Programme (WFP) states that 36% of Sri Lankan families are food insecure, while last June, UNICEF stated that 56,000 children had severe acute malnutrition.

It is reported that some advanced-level students have not come to school for months because they are working to support their families; many come without breakfast or lunch most days, and students often faint.

The Chinese-built and majority-funded **Lotus Tower Nelum Kulana** is situated on Beira Lake alongside St Joseph's College; at 350m, it is South Asia's tallest self-supporting structure and the 19th tallest tower in the world.

Having been completed in 2019, it finally opened on 15th September 2022, with 3,200 visitors on the first day. The building currently has an observation deck and houses telecommunications equipment; a revolving restaurant, hotel, conference centre and museum are promised. Local tickets are LKR 500; tourist tickets are US\$20 for 20 minutes on the observation deck.



Tourism and Hotels

Jetwing Hotels have reintroduced native rice varieties to reduce dependency on imports. They are meeting up to 80% of their resorts' energy needs by using biomass, solar and biogas from kitchen waste.

Ceylon Tea Trails is the first Sri Lankan hotel brand to be placed on the Condé Nast Traveler's 'Gold List' of the best hotels in the world.

2022 tourist review 719,978 tourists visited Sri Lanka (2021: 194,495), a recovery to 31% of 2018's pre-pandemic levels. Indians remain the top visitors (17.1%), followed by Russians (12.7%), Britains (11.8%), Germans (7.7%) and French (4.9%); the majority of these visitors arrived on holiday, whereas those from Canada and Australia had travelled to visit friends and relatives. The average tourist expenditure is reportedly US\$164.4 per day, and the average stay is 9.34 days. Russia, Poland and Israel have shown the highest recovery rates towards their pre-Covid levels. A fifth of those arriving by air came from Dubai, with Doha and Chennai also playing key roles. Sri Lankan Airlines transported a third of passengers, followed by Qatar and Emirates; combined, these two Airlines also transported a third of air passengers.

At the end of 2022, 48,120 rooms across 3,829 establishments are registered with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. It is suggested that the increase in Guest House registrations follows the requirement to be registered to hold a soft liquor licence. Room numbers increased in Matara, Galle and Nuwara Eliya but fell in Mannar, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa and Vavuniya districts. Registered restaurants increased by 18.7% to 639; the increase is attributed to licencing conditions.

Norway will shut its embassy from July 2023 under measures to reform diplomatic measures abroad. Colombo is among 5 embassies being closed. Consular services in Sri Lanka will be provided by another Norwegian Embassy in the Asian region; visa applications are already processed at a hub in New Delhi.

Former British Prime Minister David Cameron and his wife Samantha visited on a fortnight's holiday at New Year. Cameron also met with President Ranil Wickremesinghe and visited the Port City Colombo development project.

South Korea has agreed to fund the entire community-based tourism development project in **Kuchchaveli, Trincomalee**, with KRW 2.172bn; the first grant will be KRW 400m for plan preparation, including the implementation and pilot training programme. 386 acres have been allocated for a mega-scale tourist resort; focussing on sustainable development and ecotourism.

Cruise ships returned in November after a 2-year break. From Colombo Port excursions are to the City, Pinnawala, Sigiriya, Galle or Ingiriya Tea Plantation at Nambapana. At Hambantota Port disembarking passengers can visit Mukirigala Temple, Kataragama Devalaya, Udawalawe National Park, Yala National Park and a bird park in Hambantota. 17 cruise ships are due in 2023, 3 of which visited Hambantota Port in January.

Domestic carrier **Cinnamon Air** has resumed its domestic water-taxi flights which cover the entire island from their Colombo and Kandy hubs; flights were suspended during the Coronavirus pandemic. **FitsAir** are still to resume domestic flights.

A Train Journey to Badulla

Steam and Stones and Tea and Flows – Wheels and Steel and Greens and Breeze

I find it amusing that we often have access to things and experiences which bring us tremendous joy and satisfaction, but seem to keep chasing the 'other stuff' which is costlier, more difficult to obtain and elusive. The Badulla train ride which has become one of the most sought-after

experiences for tourists in Sri Lanka, was always within easy reach for us, but somehow, I myself had last done it three decades ago and many in our extended family had never got round to it. The ride in essence is a trip through 'Old Ceylon' rather than Sri Lanka, with all its beauty, history and folk tales woven together. One almost leaves the present disastrous economic and social strife behind as one boards this train. Our extended family took an exhilarating journey simply riding trains over a weekend and it was certainly among our top memorable and extremely enjoyable trips, ever! But what makes this particular train ride so special?



My childhood recollection of the words of R L Stevenson's poem *From a Railway Carriage* served me well as we threaded through some of the best views in Sri Lanka. But there was one important difference. Much of the hype is linked with the sheer beauty of what you see, but also can be brought to life by matching that view with some insight into history. Each scene then becomes a magical story with more excitement around the corner. We had opted to be on the relatively new train called the 'Ella Odyssey' which has been fitted out with better viewing locations and also takes some breather stops at a few scenic spots (the stops ideally could be longer in a few places). The 5.30 am departure meant we were hustling along in the early hours and after a few chaotic minutes of boarding where everyone seemed to be running all over the place, things quickly settled into good order and structure. Having managed to get first class tickets, the seating was great, with a good recline, and we later found to our joy that seats could be turned around to allow different groups to face each other - a wonderful feature when traveling with a big group.

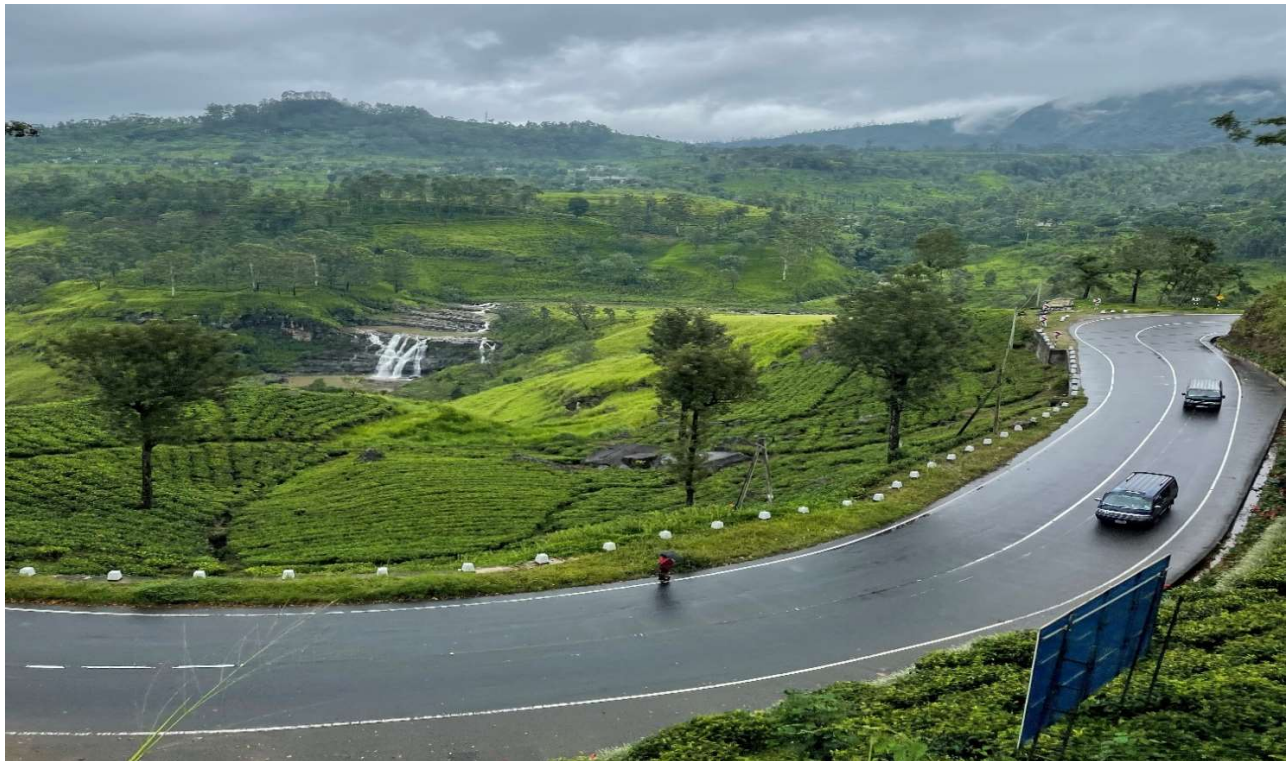


Obtaining tickets is a massive drama especially for a larger group so we had hung out at the Fort Station in the 4 am queues, since tickets can only be bought so many days ahead, when the bookings open for that respective day. Online booking is also a hit and miss game for this, but easily manageable for smaller groups if done early. I would recommend that people plan their train trips in advance, target the day and time on which the ticket bookings open up, and have 2-3 folks all try simultaneously online right at the inception to book a ticket. Each person gets only five tickets, and you have to be one of the travelers making the booking. As with

many things, unscrupulous agents and middlemen had ganged up to pre-buy chunks of tickets and then resell them for a fortune, while depriving the citizens of access to tickets - hence these restrictions came into force.

Dawn is greeted on the flat terrains and although we are moving through largely urbanised areas, the rail tracks still weave through lovely paddy fields and lush green - a far cry from taking the road over these areas. The highlight of the first segment up to Kandy is clearly the Kadugannawa Pass and the Bible Rock view. One can almost visualise the manner in which the hill capital fended off the foreign armies in the good old days when one sees the layers of thick green and the narrow passes which would have made ambush and assault that much easier. Bible Rock glistens in the distant morning light. A large flat-topped rocky outcrop that beckons adventurous folks who love the outdoors with a bit of low risk climbing, if willing to go off the beaten track. I can share from experience that the view from the top is indeed something special. Dark tunnels begin to engulf the train, accompanied by the hoots of the enthralled travellers - reminders of great British engineering skills brought to play as the track took precarious paths along the edges of many hills, through solid rock.

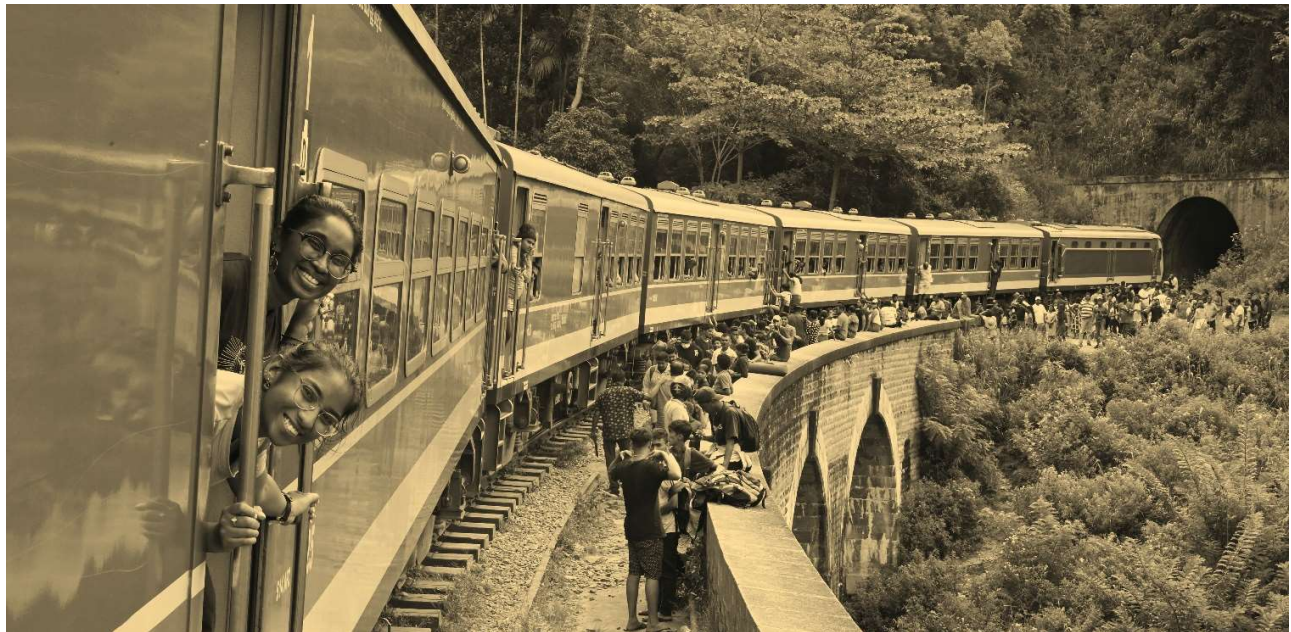
Knowledgeable viewers kept a sharp eye for the craggy distinct peak of 'Uthuwana Kanda', a hillside which was the famed refuge of the local Robin Hood, Saradiel, during the British era. Not too much has changed on this timeless track, unlike the road to Kandy which has become a parade of commercial establishments, at times even taking over the best of views that the route had to offer. Imagine the elephants bearing the brunt of the heavy loads, along with the many labourers used, as the tracks took shape once upon a time? The train does a detour to Kandy since the mainline to Badulla passes through Peradeniya. One ends up swapping views as a result, since the train goes into Kandy, and then gets taken 'backwards' by its other engine for the rest of the trip.



Peradeniya to Nanu-Oya includes the best of the hills and the pristine tea country. Although Ceylon Tea no longer holds sway as strongly as before, it is still an amazingly strong global brand. These hills are a reminder of just what went into building that brand and the quality of tea we produce - green carpets with perfectly manicured bushes, dotted with large white factories and nurtured with a fine art which has been handed down over generations. The colourful sarees of the tea pluckers, and the equally colourful small towns dotted with their temples and little buildings are images from a 'land that time forgot'. Water somehow continues to mesmerise the traveller and eagle-eyed spotters keep looking out for the first glimpse of some of the country's best waterfalls.

St Clair's Falls almost cries for help, as a mega project has reduced its mighty water flow over the years, although it still looks majestic. On the surface, the joyful views from the train make it seem as if it is just the Europeans, the horses, and the older cars which have gone and all else remains. But, beneath the surface, the industry and the country no longer outshine the world as brightly as they did many decades ago, and badly need a big overhaul. Independence has come at a price to this beautiful land. But we had more joyful thoughts and views on our minds.

Many travellers have Nuwara Eliya as their destination and Nanu-Oya becomes the disembarking point. Although the ride until then delivers much, I believe the best is that last segment which should not be missed. Having done our homework on the route, in order to benefit from it, we were riding all the way to Badulla, and had decided to take a hired vehicle back to Nuwara Eliya. Meanwhile we were having great fun together. Having convinced some other travellers to swap a few seats with some of our folks, we now had almost an entire carriage among us. Naturally the noise levels were high, with word games and banter being readily exchanged along with the many varieties of food which each family had brought along for breakfast and lunch. Food choices from the train canteen are not too exciting and have room for improvement. We loved grabbing some tea or coffee from the vendor who walked the train, providing an energy boost and warming the soul. Train food by street vendors somehow tastes special, especially with their unique callouts of the specific food type, provided one has a strong stomach for that kind of stuff. Casual conversations with other fellow travellers often provide glimmers of the many facets of Sri Lanka and its population diversity.



With moderate risk and very high return and an adrenalin rush to match, many of us would for intermittent periods, be crowded at the open doors between carriages, during this segment. The open doorways provide the thrills of misty air rushing past your face at high speed, and the uncut bushes smacking you now and then if you don't keep a forward lookout, not to mention the close proximity rocky passes and the dark tunnels. But please don't forget to hang on for dear life as the sudden jerk of the carriage can be pretty strong. The train goes over waterfall pathways, through the forests that lead up to Horton Plains, gorgeous valleys and hillsides, climbs to Pattipola the highest station, and makes a long stop at Idalgashinna, which is a valley in the hills of the Haputale/Namunukula ranges. A major rush takes place for pictures and selfies with the 'stop-clock' ticking. The Portuguese tried hard to leverage this entrance during their wars to capture the Kandyan kingdom. How much blood have those hills seen over time? The air has already become chilly, moist, and the nip greets you everywhere. I made sure the kids watched how the 'tablets' (a

large leather-bound ring with a brass tablet in the pouch which is specific to a segment of the track and marked accordingly) change hands among trains and station masters at each stop while on the move. The tablet drop and pick up is the failsafe used for over a century on our train lines to prevent collisions.

The Nine Arches Bridge was the next highlight on the trip and is a viaduct bridge which was built in the early 20th century out of rocks, bricks and cement but without any steel. Locally called the ‘nine skies bridge’ since one can see nine great skies when standing underneath, as per some reports it was built by a Ceylonese builder P K Appuhami, in collaboration with the British engineers, and is one of the best examples of the colonial-era railway construction which the hill country presents. A long stop makes for many lovely pictures (and take pictures we did) but fair warning that the best nostalgic views of the steam train chugging over this location are indeed from afar where one sees this train going over this bridge in its entirety. One can easily double back to Ella from Badulla after the train ride, to take that in, if an overnight stay is planned in the vicinity. If the train journey is terminated in Ella, one has to forego the train stop experience over the bridge.

I had been around Ella in my youth and explored places like the Ravana Caves when they were merely jungle treks with hardly any markings to find our way around. Ella has since transformed significantly and become the new touristic hotspot. Unfortunately, the green mountain landscape around the bridge is rapidly being cleared by small touristic view spots and guest houses. One hopes that some sanity will prevail to keep a balance and retain the charm which binds the heart to this location. Similarly, the next stop is another engineering marvel - the Demodara Loop, where the track does an ‘over and under’, snaking beneath itself to continue the journey. Once again, not much is experienced while on the train, and it is an aerial view which gives the best of that structure.

Although we sometimes hear of delays, our particular ride was on schedule. We had an enchanting overnight stay at the Golf Club in Nuwara Eliya, which is another location rich in British heritage and history. Fireside chats, dressed up dining and timeless pictures on the walls made impressions with each passing moment there. The next afternoon, after some stolen time in the Nuwara Eliya markets where the ladies ensured their trip was extra memorable, we boarded in Nanu-Oya and got another chance to take in any parts of the scenery that we missed on the way up. Each town looked different on the way down, quaint, and utterly enjoyable. We rode into the sunset, and descended into chaos, as we gradually reached Colombo in the early hours of the night. One would think that two days on trains would be a bit much, but actually the ride brought back not just childhood memories, but also brought the family together. A highly recommended easily doable adventure for all. Old Ceylon may still be the hidden soul of Mother Lanka.



Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Environmental and Wildlife News

Human-elephant conflict With a growing population of humans, and a shrinking habitat for elephants, the HEC problem has continued to deteriorate, making 2022 the worst year yet, with a toll of 433 elephant and 145 human lives.

In the past, electric fences trying to contain elephants within administrative boundaries were unsuccessful as the elephants do not recognise them.

Fitting radio collars for research into elephant movements may help as the most practical solution appears to be community fences around villages and cultivated plots, but the current economic crisis means that only pilot projects in two of the worst affected districts will go ahead for now.

When an elephant kills a breadwinner, the whole household suffers economic distress, and deaths in agricultural districts devastate bereaved families and cause a wide range of socioeconomic impacts in the region.

Standard compensation is about 1 million rupees (\$2,750), with different rates for damage to property such as homes and crops, although there is an attempt to reduce the amount of compensation paid to families affected by elephant attacks, especially for the death of a family member.

Plastic found in fishing cat scats Recently, the journal *Environmental Pollution* reported that plastics had been found in scat samples of fishing cats *Prionailurus viverrinus* living in urban areas near Colombo. Fishing cats eat a varied diet of fish, birds and small rodents, and as they are not known to forage in, or eat rubbish, it is believed that the cats have ingested plastics of all sizes via their prey. Possible health effects are currently unknown, but from the study of other species, conservationists feel that there is cause for concern.

Endemic Sri Lankan dragonfly 70 years ago, a beautiful iridescent green and yellow Sri Lankan dragonfly was recorded from a single male specimen. It was named *Macromia flinti* and, not having been seen since, was thought to be extinct. Recently researchers on surveys in Sri Lanka's central foothills discovered a live female and saw other males of the species. Observations suggest that the species has a wider range than previously thought, but further research is required.

Mahaweli pollution Villagers claim that wastewater from the sewage system of the Dumbara Prison is being released into the Mahaweli, polluting the water supply of hundreds of villagers and making life difficult for those living beside the river; prison officials deny that there is any problem.

Geneva-based Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), one of the world's biggest container carriers, has voluntarily adjusted its routes around Sri Lanka to reduce the risk of accidents involving **whales, dolphins and porpoises** by as much as 95%. It has also ordered smaller feeder vessels to slow to 10 knots in blue whale habitats. Waters off the southern coast have an unusually high density of blue whales, classed as endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Wildlife Ministry Secretary Dharma Wanninyake suspended 7 **Yala National Park tour guides** allegedly involved in allowing jeeps to drive recklessly and 'drift' in the Park's open space. The vehicles had entered the Park via the Main Entrance, and identified participants have been banned from entering any national park for 3 years.

A pilot project in Yala National Park will allow tourists to pay in dollars; 2 resting bungalows available from 12 – 2 pm are also being prepared for traveller use. On 30th November, cruise ship tourists generated a record-breaking LKR 6.2m in revenue in a single day.

The Sri Lanka Coastguard reported **Loggerhead and Leatherback sea turtles** had been seen laying eggs at the Galle Face beach near Port City for the first time; the nests are being protected until the eggs have hatched.

Business, Economy and Agriculture

On 31st January 2023, the **exchange rate** was LKR 367.45 to the US dollar and LKR 452.79 to the pound sterling.

The United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organisation is administering **US\$40m of financial assistance from USAID** to be used for the purchase of fertiliser and other agricultural inputs in time for the Maha cultivation season. In response to fears of food shortages, paddy cultivation in the 2022 Yala season saw a record 512,000ha (2021: 400,000ha) cultivated, resulting in an abundance of rice.

Paddy farmers will be allocated **free Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) fertiliser** for the next Yala season based on their Maha paddy area; this follows continued funding from USAID.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was helping procure 200t of **maize seed** for the Maha cultivation season. Partially from an increase in paddy cultivation, the maize area dropped by 60% in the Yala season.

The shortage of home-produced maize led to a **collapse in egg production**, as maize is mainly used for poultry feed. Broken rice imports are being permitted to provide chicken feed, and hatching eggs are being imported to rebuild the country's chicken population.

The Ministry of Agriculture has launched a **green chillies cultivation drive** in Anuradhapura; in the 1970s Sri Lanka was entirely self-sufficient in green chillies; now, 99% are imported; the intention is to reduce imports by a fifth.

Noyon Lanka has developed *Planetones*, a **plant extract-based, biodegradable dye**, at their research and development labs in Sri Lanka. Initially, dyeing is being used for lace; it is being commercialised in French and Italian markets under the *Etam* and *Yamamay* brands. The firm claim using the dye reduces water use in the manufacturing washing cycle by 30% and energy by 15%.

The Sri Lanka National Gem and Jewellery Authority have introduced an **online system for businesses to export gems and jewellery worth up to US\$3,000**; launched in September 2022, the system allows gem and jewellery trades; it is intended as a strategy to increase forex income.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe **banned beef and mutton transport between districts** in December on public health grounds. Unusually cold weather, strong winds and air pollution from tropical Cyclone Mandous in early December led to the deaths in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of hundreds of cattle, buffalo and goats from suspected hypothermic shock. Veterinary officials said the animals had died from exposure to the weather (temperatures had dropped to below 20°C), and more could have been saved had medical supplies not been limited.

Tuktuk drivers have had their weekly fuel quota increased from 5 litres to 10 litres from November 2022; drivers say they need 30 litres to enable a typical running of 100km per day.

Airlines are now permitted to import their own aviation fuel as the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) cannot import enough due to forex shortages. This intention is to avoid airlines topping up at neighbouring countries or planes carrying extra fuel, both of which increase ticket prices. The airlines use existing CPC storage tanks and facilities. There has also been a move to importing finished petroleum products as the Sapugaskanda refinery was temporarily shut due to a shortage of foreign exchange to pay for crude oil.

Dredging for the Colombo West International Terminal has started; this is a joint venture between India's Adani group and John Keels Holdings. Phase 1 will add a capacity of 1.5m 20-foot containers to Colombo Port and is expected to be completed in 2024.

Hambantota International Port has established a hub for Ro-Ro (roll-on/roll-off) vehicle shipment; over 550,000 cars pass through the port during export from Asia to Africa and the Middle East. Managers are now looking to set up a repair facility; repairs are currently undertaken in Dubai. The port has also opened a privately-funded US\$2.2m bonded warehouse for fertiliser storage and has a US\$3m warehouse under construction to store cement raw materials. Cement raw materials are already unloaded for a factory in Mirijawila and transported there via a covered conveyor.

From mid-January, 30 short-distance **trains were to be cancelled** every day to cut operational costs and fuel consumption, the cancelled trains are mainly on the Colombo-Badulla route, and all have public buses available as an alternative.

The French government and French Michelin group have pledged €726,700 to support 6,000 **rubber farmers** in the Moneragala district to improve their capacity and supply chain efficiency. Rubber output in 2022 was down 40% due to the fertiliser ban and disease.

Tea output fell to a 26-year low of 251.5m kg in 2022. The fertiliser ban saw yields drop versus 2021 by 9m kg at high elevations, 51m kg at medium elevations and 28m kg at low elevations; low-grown tea contributed to 50% of the overall drop. Exports were 13% down on 2021, but higher prices following the depreciation of the rupee gave earnings of LKR 411.09bn, an increase of 56%. Loyal international buyers paid up to 9% more despite high freight rates and disrupted shipping schedules.

Smile Zone

I went to the body shop today, and I asked them if I could exchange my aching, breaking body for a new one; well, not brand new, about 25 years old, non-smoker, low mileage, male, two legs and two arms preferred.

An unopened pack of Polos for sale. Mint condition.

Banks should do a better job of keeping their ATMs filled. This is the fifth one I've been to that says Insufficient Funds.

They say we learn from our mistakes. That's why I'm making as many as possible. I'll be a genius soon.

I'm on a light diet: I eat by daylight, I eat by moonlight, and sometimes I eat by fridge light.

Books

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida won the 2022 Booker Prize, with its Sri Lankan author Shehan Karunatilaka claiming the £50,000 prize. The satirical novel is set in 1990 Colombo, against the backdrop of the civil war.

Deaths and Obituaries

HOBSON, Andrew 1936 - 2022

Andrew died on 15th September 2022, aged 86. He was born in Colombo in 1936 and christened at Loolecondera estate. His parents were Philip Hobson, tea planter 1928–1962, and Mary Hobson (née Cathcart) who was Chief Commissioner of the Ceylon Girl Guides. Philip and Mary retired from Craigie Lea, near Dimbula, in 1962. Andrew was the nephew of Alan Cathcart, who with his wife Daphne, retired from Haputale Estate in 1964.

In 1939 Andrew and his parents had returned to Great Britain on leave. After war was declared they travelled by train across Europe and returned to Ceylon by ship from Venice. During the war, his father served in the Ceylon Garrison Artillery in Colombo, and Andrew attended Bishop's College School. After the war the family returned to Coombe Wood estate, before moving to Darawella, and subsequently Stellenberg, Nilomaly, and back to Loolecondera.



Andrew was educated at the Hill School, Nuwara Eliya from 1946 – 1950, before travelling to Edinburgh to study at Fettes College, near Scottish family and friends. After National Service in Ayr, Andrew read history at Christ Church, Oxford, and this was the foundation of his life-long interest in history. He then moved to London and joined the Civil Service. He became an Inspector of Taxes and a specialist in Corporation Tax, working for the Inland Revenue until his retirement. He volunteered actively in his local community for many years, especially after retirement.

Andrew married Sarah Porter in 1970, which is when he made Wimbledon his home. He had one child, his daughter Jane, and was always highly committed to family life. More recently, he was delighted to become a grandfather to Blessing.

Andrew enjoyed art, making the most of all London has to offer as well as painting his own watercolours. A keen walker, he knew all corners of Wimbledon Common, explored the City of London on foot and enjoyed regular Alpine holidays. His love of travel took him on many archaeological and historical tours as well as visits to his daughter while she lived and worked overseas.

Andrew held a lifelong affection and respect for Sri Lanka, the country of his birth and childhood. In 1996 he returned to Sri Lanka with Sarah and Jane to revisit his childhood homes. Jane has set up a fundraising page in memory of her father to support people living and working on tea

plantations in Sri Lanka. For anyone who would like to contribute, this can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/AndrewHobson>

From his daughter Jane Hobson

KANE, Anthony Thomas 16th May 1942 - 9th October 2022

Tony and his sister Nicky (Upton) were born in Ceylon. Their father Toby was a partner in Forbes and Walker, tea brokers in Colombo, and their mother Phoebe a keen golfer and bridge player.

At the age of 7, Tony was sent to prep school in the UK, continuing his education at Haileybury and Trinity College Dublin. He met his wife Wendy (née Mayne) whilst working in Ceylon, where her father was Chairman of ICI Ceylon. Their son Robert was born in the Fraser Nursing Home, he is married to Justine (née Webb) and they have two children, Oliver and Libby.



Tony spent his working life in the tea trade. He was with Brooke Bond Ceylon for eight years from 1963, followed by Booker McConnell in Malawi, returning to the UK to Wilson Smithett, tea brokers in London.

Tony became a trustee of the Planters' Benevolent Fund of Ceylon in 2002 and during his 20 years of service, 17 of those as Chairman, he contributed enormously to the administration of the charity, quietly helping many retired expatriate Ceylon planters and their widows round the world.

Tony spent many hours working in our garden and although I say it myself, we were always pestered to open to the public, but always refused & instead potted up plants from the garden to sell and the proceeds would go to the RNLI. When the garden was put to bed for the winter we would take off on a long cruise where he was really able to enjoy his other hobby of painting in water colours and we have them all stuck up in the kitchen where we see and enjoy them. He was very modest but actually very good.

He was always warm-hearted, caring, and considerate in his dealings with others, a most charming and engaging person.

*From his wife Wendy Kane,
with contributions from David McCall and Marilyn Clark*

PARAZZI, Giovanni husband of Nicky (née Boyd Moss), died of Covid complications in March 2022.

From Anna Boyd Moss