

# **Quarterly Tours – No. 20**



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**27th November 2011**

**Compiled by Nilan Cooray**

## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

***Quarterly Tours – Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2011.***

### **Programme**

0730 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0800 - 0815 hrs.	Jami-UI-Alfar Mosque, Pettah
0830 - 0900 hrs.	St. Peter's Church, Fort
0930 - 1000 hrs.	St, Thomas Anglican Church at Gintupitiya
1015 - 1045 hrs.	Sri Ponnambalavaneswarar Hindu Temple (Ramanathan Kovil) at Kochchikade
1100 - 1145 hrs.	Wolvendaal Church
1230 - 1300 hrs.	St. James Church, Mutwal
1330 - 1430 hrs.	Lunch at Flag and Whistle, Mutwal
1445 - 1545 hrs.	National Museum Colombo and Andrew Nicholl's water colors of Old Colombo
1600 hrs.	Arrive at the PGIAR

*Compiled by Nilan Cooray  
from the information provided by Prof. Senake Bandaranayake,  
Arch. Ismeth Raheem and Mr. Michael Anthoniez*

## Jami-UI-Alfar Mosque, Pettah



One of the most striking buildings in Colombo, Jami-UI-Alfar Mosque is located at Second Cross Street, in Pettah. It was built originally as a place of worship for the Borah Muslim community of Indian origin living in the Island. Designed by H.L. Saibo Lebbe, the construction of the mosque began in 1908 and completed the following year. The towers with onion shaped domes reflect the Indo-Saracenic influence. The mosque is painted in red and white stripes. The design of the

mosque is reminiscent of another mosque which was also completed in 1909, the Masjid Jamek of Kuala Lumpur.

This is a two storey building with a clock tower, which rises above the surrounding buildings. The decorative wooden ceiling and the valance boards further enhance the building's architectural form. In the front is a pond.

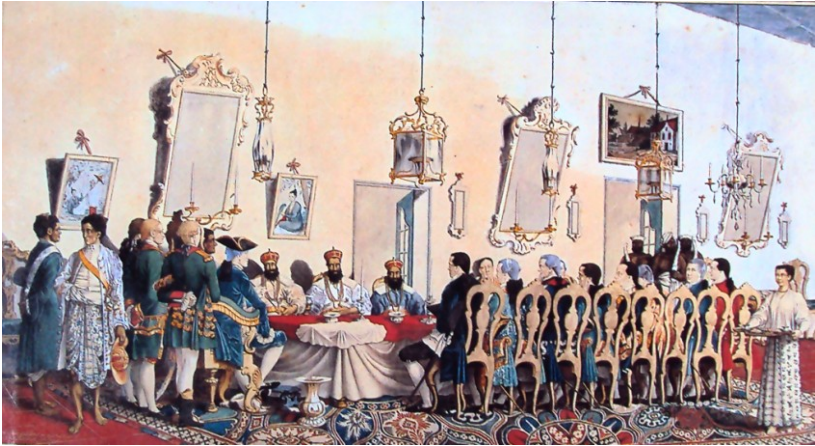


Despite located in one of Colombo's most congested commercial districts, the building's strong architectural form and the unusual color combination make the mosque dominate Pettah's narrow streetscape. The building also displays a clever and astonishing architectural solution in a tight urban site.

## St. Peter's Church in Fort



The original site on which the present church stands was part of an orphanage – the *Miseri Cordia* - of the Portuguese administration during their occupation of the country in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Almost a decade after the capitulation of Colombo in 1656, this structure was altered and enlarged by the Dutch from a religious to a residential building - the official residence of the Dutch Governor. It continued to be used for the same function right throughout their occupation till the British took over the Dutch East India Company's territories including Colombo in 1796. It was in the reception halls of this residence that the Embassies from Kandy were received by the Dutch Governors.



By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the compound of the Governor's Residence was landscaped as a sunken garden with fountains, pavilions and other ancillary buildings. (Later the Dutch were encouraged to lay out the first public Botanic Garden in the early 1750's based on these trial experiments of this landscape gardening). The remnants of this garden were evident up-till 1980's within the premises of the Inland Revenue Headquarters, which is at present a shabby parking lot.

The numerous engravings of the Dutch Governor's Residence published during the century-and-half years of occupation of the Dutch East India Company in Sri Lanka which ended in 1796 clearly illustrates the evolution of the structure from a small Portuguese chapel to an extensive Dutch residence and the manner in which the Dutch readily adopted the architectural elements of the Indo-Portuguese style they flourished in Sri Lanka in the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. One of the earliest bird's eye views of the fortified town of Colombo during Dutch occupation which is included as an engraving in the account by Herport (Berne 1669) shows that the main focus of the walled fortified

township was the Governor's Residence and ancillary buildings that housed the Political Council's offices. This engraving also clearly shows the central tower - which still retains the cross still in position on its front gable. Its position might indicate that the Portuguese Dominican monastery was still not wholly transformed. The long arcaded front, sunken gardens and the raised building are indicated clearly in this interesting engraving.

Even at present these prominent diagnostic features of Dutch building style are still evident in the remnant structure presently known as the St. Peter's Church. All one has to look for are such features as the raised verandah podium, sunken-garden area and the small clear story windows and the prominent gable walls.

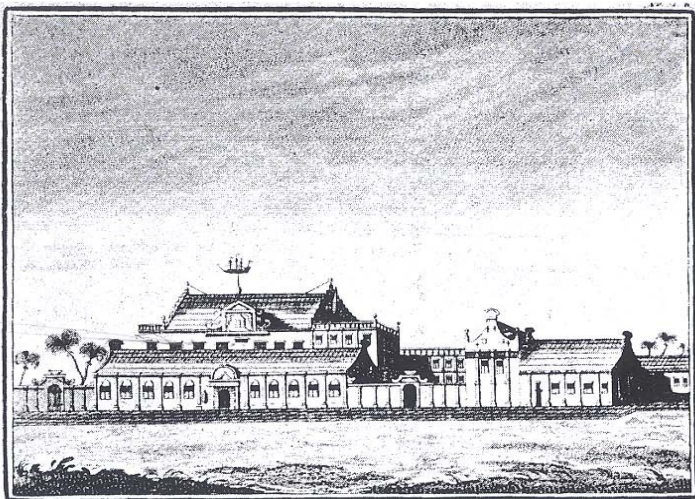


Fig. 2. The Governor's house  
(Valentijn V. 1, facing p. 24, No. 12D)

The facade of Governor's Residence shown in great detail in Valentijn's engravings is remarkable for its accuracy. It also shows how a religious building of the previous Portuguese administration was converted and re-modelled to form the Dutch Governor's Residence. The attached balconies on the north and south gables indicate Portuguese influence. The sunken garden which was laid out on the grounds attached to the building at a subsequent period shows an influence of both Eastern and Western style of landscape gardening which was prevalent in Asia during the Dutch Colonial Period.



By the arrival of the British, the Dutch Governor's residence became Government House during the first years of their rule under Governor North. It was occupied by General Macdowall, the Military Commander under North's administration but was in a state of neglect and disrepair. In 1804, the extensive hall (as shown in the engravings) were altered and put in to use as the main garrison church. It remained so until it was consecrated



on 22 May 1821. The ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Calcutta, Dr. Thomas Franchise Middleton. Until that date it was referred to as the Fort Church, but from the time of its consecration, it was called St. Peters.

Between 1810–1820, part of the residence which remained unoccupied was also used as a Court. The Jury scene commemorating Sir Alexander Johnston's tenure of Chief Justice illustrates the interior of the building when it was temporarily used for judicial purposes as court house. It was originally intended that the scene of the painting is the nave of the present St. Peter's Church.



It was during the repairs in 1832 that the present portico and verandahs supported by tall masonry classical columns, so typical of the buildings of the British colonial period were added. Also a substantial part of the original Dutch Governor's residence was torn down and demolished.

## **St. Thomas Church at Gintupitiya**

Dedicated to St. Thomas and patronized by the Anglican community lead by the Ondaatji family and the Colombo Chitty population, this church crowns the hill at Gintupitiya, one of Colombo's most degraded suburbs at present. This was a revered site of one of the oldest Portuguese Churches in Colombo. It appears that a portion of this ground had been used from the time of the Portuguese occupation of Colombo as a small burial yard. Portuguese tomb stones are still to be seen within the interior of this church and outside.

During the Dutch occupation of the Maritime Provinces between 1656-1796, the majority of the three important sects that dominated the dissemination of the Catholic religion - Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian sects were forced to be abandoned their religious services. The churches were under severe restriction to conduct prayers not only in Colombo but in most of the territories under the Dutch East India Company's administrative rule. By the time of the arrival of the British, the church was abandoned and in a state of disrepair. The present church was built on the existing site of the ruins of the Roman Catholic Church, which was totally demolished before the foundation of this Anglican Church was laid. Sir Robert Brownrigg is due the chief credit for the erection of the present Anglican Church, the foundation of which was laid in 1815.

The descriptions by the great Portuguese historian De Queroz provide a glimpse of Portuguese religious activities in these suburbs - which continues to have a strong

Catholic presence. De Couto also records the details of this locality which is further substantiated by the *Rajavaliya*

De Queyroz has recorded the fact that the revenues of Dunugaha in the Alut Kuruwa Korale and Horana in Rayigam Korale, were set apart for the maintenance of the orphans, and beggars and destitute who were looked after by the Rector of St. Thome, which was then in the suburbs of Colombo – just outside the walls of the Portuguese Fort. Adjoining it was the *campo* (*Anglice*, “plain,” *Sin.* “Pitiya”) of Sao Thome, which is mentioned by De Couto. There was the belief that St. Thomas had been in Sri Lanka and died in India. As the *Rajavaliya* (English edition p. 91) says, “Adirippu Palliya stands on Baralugada hill and in the lower Baralugada lies *San tum pitiya*.” Moreover Gintumpitiya Street still runs from St. Thomas Church to *Adirippu Palliya*, or Wolvendahl.

The exact origin of the name of the place Gintupitya is still mired in controversy. According to Paul E. Pieris who quotes a source from the *Monthly Literary Register* (*A Brief Sketch of the History of St Thomas Church by* “Clevid, 1893) suggest this explanation: ‘The apostle of the East, has degenerated through *San tum* to *Gin tun*, thence the fall to *Gintu* is but natural; and what is *Gintu* but *Gentoo*, the Portuguese *Gentio*, the heathen? And so the local philologist, with easy lore, has dragged the name of the locality from the lofty origin of the converting apostle to that of the unconverted Gentile. *Facilis descensus AveI'no.*’

Many an interesting sight has that hillock witnessed Raja Singha's great hosts dashing themselves to pieces against the walls of Colombo, behind which stood the bravest warriors of Europe; Gaspar de Figueyra, the one figure which justified the Portuguese policy of intermarriage with the Eastern races - for was not his mother a Sinhalese? - leading the mutinous Portuguese army from Tanque Salgado. Where now is the dockyard; Gerard Hulft planting his batteries when for the last time Colombo was laid under siege; and the Sinhalese Disava consecrating the spot where soon after the brave Dutchman lay prone in death-never more, they declared, was foot of man to tread on that awful spot?

It is a sad commentary that this part of Colombo redolent with very rich history is being torn apart by urban renewal of the worst type.

One of the interesting tombstones dating from 1691 and still extant here has an interesting engraved inscription and image. The text translated reads as follows-

*“Here is buried the virtuous Anna Piris wife of the Patangatin Francisco Piris. She died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1691, being 38 years”*



*Patangatin* is a word which is of frequent occurrence in the early Portuguese and Dutch writers and is the former version of the Tamil word *pattankatti*. It signifies a headman among the Paravas and Tamil Karayar, and is a word that often recurs in the letters of St. Francis Xavier in connection with South India. In Sri Lanka the word signifying such a headman is used among the Tamils and Sinhalese. The word *Patabendi* which was in use among the later hardly occurs in any Portuguese official documents or by a Portuguese writer of the period.

Several of the prominent and notable Tamil Colombo Chetty families of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century like the Mutukrishna and Ondatjie are well represented by their over decorated tombstones. The present congregation is almost wholly Tamil.

## Sri Ponnambalavaneswarar Hindu Temple (Ramanathan Kovil)



Located at Kochchikade, Sri Ponnambalavaneswarar Hindu temple (Ramanathan Kovil) was established by the family members of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. This Hindu shrine has always been referred to as the ‘Gal Kovila’ (literal translation: ‘Stone Kovil’) due to the granite which is the primary material used in its construction. The granite exterior is matched by the restrained exquisite stonework inside which gives the feeling of an ancient yet timeless structure. Constructed following the traditional *silpa* texts by the stone masons brought down from India, the present building stands on an old site of a Hindu shrine.

## Wolvendaal Church



The name Wolvendaal is a Dutch translation of the Portuguese "Agoa de Loupe" meaning "The dale of the wolves". The hill on which the Church stands took its name from the low lying marshy swamp, which was infested with jackals and not wolves (a species not represented in Sri Lanka). The site is a commanding one and overlooks the town, harbour and the sea.

The Church was built in 1749 or even earlier as claimed by Wolfgang Heydt in his interesting work on Batavia and Ceylon published in 1744. As in most cases, the site of this church was also that of an earlier Portuguese Church. It was

originally intended for converts and Sri Lankan adherents of the Dutch Reformed Church but later this notion was changed and it became the official Church of the Dutch East India Company. The church was dedicated on March 6, 1757 and the service was attended by Governor Gideon Loten, his successor Schredeur and other high Dutch Officials. About this time it was open for public worship.

The plan of the church is that of a Greek cross with walls more than 1.5 meters thick, over which the gables have been raised. The transepts were originally roofed with brick barrel vaults and the nave with a brick dome, which was surmounted with a gilt weather-cock. A stroke of lightning in 1856 destroyed this weather-cock and so disturbed the dome, to the extent that the brickwork had to be removed and replaced with a wooden roof, covered with blue Bangor slates, somewhat detrimental to the acoustic effects. The slates were again replaced with corrugated galvanized iron sheeting, somewhat later at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1877, Leopold Ludovici authored and published a book titled *Lapidarium Zeylanicum*, which featured coloured engravings of the crests and heraldry of the early Dutch settlers and their families as found in the Dutch Reformed Church, Wolvendaal, together with drawings of the inscriptions on the tombstones in the churchyard. These drawings were the work of the artist Richard Henricus, whose initials appear on all of them. Van Dort, another versatile and talented Ceylonese Artist supervised the lithographic portion of this book and also contributed the frontispiece, an engraving showing the interior of the church. Today, visitors to the Dutch Reformed Church, Wolvendaal can still see the church and these same monuments almost as they were, when drawn by Henricus and van Dort.





In 1870 (during the tenure of office of the British Governor Sir William Gregory) the stained glass windows replaced the original plain glass windows.



To those who admire Dutch furniture, the Church was a veritable mine of treasure. There was a remarkable collection of ebony chairs dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that fascinated and capture the admiration of the visitor. The pulpit, lectern, Governor's and Elder's pews are as those were originally constructed, including the old pews along the walls for the members of the public.

When the Dutch Reformed Church at Gordon Gardens was dismantled in 1813, the remains and tomb stones of prominent Dutchmen and their families were exhumed and re-interred at the Wolvendaal Church. The remains included those of five Dutch Governors. The older tombstones bear the date 1607 and thereabout. Another note worthy memorial at the church is that to the memory of General Hulft, who commanded the Dutch forces at the siege of Colombo in 1656.

It is also recorded that the remains of King Dharmapala of Kotte (1542-1581), who was converted to the Roman Catholic faith in 1550 and died in 1607 were also interred in the old church at Gordon Gardens and his tombstone was among those removed to the church at Wolvendaal. It is a matter for regret that this stone bearing 'an inscription in pure Portuguese' is not to be found here at present, although it was there in 1766.

### **St. James Church, Mutwal**

Patronized by the Roman Catholics, the construction work of the present church commenced in 1866 and was completed in 1872. It is believed that there was a small church at the site originally before the erection of the present church. A massive structure of imposing pillars, this majestic church is located on an elevated site in the suburbs of Colombo and can even be seen as an imposing edifice in the distant horizon of Colombo when viewed from the sea. The belfry was constructed in 1887, along with a clock tower. There are four bells hung up in this tower where the main bell was originally brought from Spain. This belfry which is the tallest of its kind in Sri Lanka was constructed in the true style of Italian Baroque.



The grand interior of the church has a high, curved, boarded ceiling where painting compositions of Richard Henricus' genius could still be seen. High above the nave leading to the altar is a magnificent painting of the Crucifixion. At the opposite end of this wooden ceiling, over the choristers' balcony that spans the entrance is an equally awe-inspiring painting of the Transfiguration of Christ.

Borrowing heavily from the paintings of the Italian Renaissance, the dramatic Crucifixion scene in particular, with its heavily muscled supra-contorted figures appears to owe much for its inspiration to the work of Michelangelo. The Transfiguration scene on the other hand conveys a sense of tranquility, its subtlety in marked contrast to the dramatic effects at the other end. The face of the transfigured Christ in particular, is exceptional.



Unfortunately due to its exposed location, the church roof has had to weather years of high monsoon winds and rains and the paintings are much the worse for wear from rainwater that has seeped in through the tiles and damaged the wooden boards. Attempts at partial restoration have not helped. The abrupt edges of the paintings leads one to wonder whether there could have been very much more of the ceiling that was originally painted before well meant color-washing obliterated parts. Henricus is also said to have painted the walls and the side panels below the ceiling, on which scenes from Christ's life are depicted. The walls bear no trace of his work and all but one of the panels has now been repainted. The only panel that retains his original work has a painting of the Last Supper, in which a young waiter in the background is believed to be a self-portrait of the artist.

### **National Museum Colombo and Andrew Nicholl's water colors of Old Colombo**

Among many important buildings designed by James J. Smither, the Colombo Museum stands prominently forward in all its graceful beauty as a monument of his great architectural skill and ability. Smither was the Architect to the Ceylon Government for eighteen years from 1865 to 1883, who is also famous for the monumental publication *Architectural Remains Anuradhapura*, which includes his exhaustive measured drawings and detail descriptions of major stupas and other historical monuments at Anuradhapura. This building is also the home of a permanent Andrew Nicholl exhibition.

Andrew Nicholl (1804 – 1886) was an Irish painter. He found patronage under Sir James Emerson Tennent, who later became the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon. Tennent funded a trip to London in 1830-1832, and Nicholl exhibited his work at the RHA in Dublin and at the Royal Academy, London. Soon after arriving on the Island and taking up the appointment as the Colonial Secretary, Tennent arranged for his friend Nicholl back in London, to come over to the Island. Nicholl left England for Ceylon in August 1846, crossing the Egyptian desert by camel to the Red Sea, as Orient-bound travelers did in those days before the Suez Canal. After his arrival to the Island, Tennent made him an art teacher at the government-run Colombo Academy (later Royal College, Colombo). During his stay in the Island, Nicholl made several water colours of early colonial Ceylon including old Colombo. He rewarded Tennent, his patron, by illustrating parts of the latter's descriptive book about the Island, *Ceylon: An account of the Island; Physical, Historical and Topographical*.

Nicholl's water colors that were languishing for years in tropical humidity at the National Museum Colombo, had been painstakingly restored in London by British Museum experts and in February 1998, HRH the Prince of Wales opened the Andrew Nicholl Exhibition at the National Museum Colombo.